Wilmot Historical Society September 3, 1993

#23 Disk 1 Interview with Mildred Howard by George Peterson 54:51

This is an interview with Mildred Sawyer Howard, an 88-year-old woman who has lived in Wilmot since May 3, 1908. This interview was conducted on Friday, September 3, 1993 at Mrs. Howard's home on Kearsarge Valley Road in Wilmot Flat. The interviewer was George Peterson, representing the Wilmot Historical Society.

George (henceforth G:) Mildred, I like to have you tell us where you were born and when.

Mildred (henceforth M:) I was born in Manchester, New Hampshire on December 16, 1904.

G: And, who were your parents?

M: My father was Leon Eugene Sawyer, who was born in Manchester, and my mother was Bessie May Bell, who was born in North Range, Nova Scotia. [Near St. Mary's Bay on the west coast, south of Digby]

G: And, how long have you lived in Wilmot?

M: I have lived in Wilmot since May 3, 1908.

G: So you were about 3 ½ or 4 years old when you came to Wilmot?

M: Yes.

G: Did you come to Wilmot from Manchester?

M: Yes. My father saw an ad in the *Boston Globe* for a place called the Trussell place in North Wilmot, for sale in September 1907. And he came up by train,

hired a horse and buggy at the livery stable in Potter Place, went to North Wilmot and bought the place that day for $700.

G: Now, where exactly is that. It's in North Wilmot. It's called Sawyer Road now, about 3 ½ miles from [Route] 4A in Wilmot Center. Is there a structure there now?

M: Yes, the same building that he bought, plus an additional barn that he built.

G: And did you have any brothers or sisters?

M: My oldest brother, Leon, who was then just about a year old, came with us from Manchester. My three sisters, Lois, Arlene, and Janice and my three brothers Curtis, Henry, and Channing, were born at the place, which my father named "Hidden Acres."

G: Hidden Acres. Now, this was up in North Wilmot.

M: Formerly known as the Trussell place.

G: And so, your father was a farmer?

M: He was not when he came here. My father worked in the shoe mills and the silk mills in Manchester, but he was told by his physician that if he wanted to live, he had to get out into the country. So, he boarded the train and came up and bought the place. They did not move until May 1908, so my mother had never seen it. So, they loaded their goods—furniture, including my mother's upright piano—on a freight car from Manchester and followed by train the next day. And Sam Morey, who lived in Wilmot Flat, had a hay rack and a pair of horses, and he loaded the belongings on that and proceeded to North Wilmot in mud season—Everyone that lived here then knew what it was. They arrived after dark. They just set up a bed. My mother had never seen the interior of the place. When she got up the next morning, she decided she

didn't want to stay. The wallpaper was hanging off the walls—[it] hadn't been lived in. But she stayed, and we all stayed until we had to sell the place in 1982.

G: So, your father pretty much learned how to become a farmer basically overnight?

M: Right. He bought a horse and a buggy. That was our transportation. The neighbor, John Stearns, had a pair of oxen, so they swapped back and forth, and he literally learned farming from doing.

G: Now, what kinds of crops?

M: The Trussells had established a good orchard—[an] apple orchard—and so, we had that. My father immediately planted a garden and learned as he went along. And we had beautiful blueberry bushes on the place. And that was basically our income.

G: What kind of farm animals did you have? Did you have any?

M: At the beginning, no. We bought one cow and eventually we had two beef cattle and pigs and poultry for our own subsistence, really. Not much for sale.

G: What was it like growing up as a child here in this area?

M: Well, to me it was fun. I have very fond memories. I remember—life was so different than it is now—I remember the beautiful white potatoes that I used to pick up after they were dug out. Not a blemish on them. No spraying. And it wasn't many years before I had to pick potato bugs and knock the bugs off the plants with shingles and then cremate them like that. And then, one thing that was hard was weeding the onions. We didn't have onion sets then. We planted onion seeds. My father planted them on a 6-inch board on both sides, and you had to stand in that small area to weed the onions, but I still

like onions. And the apples—we hand-picked the apples and put them in barrels and shipped them to Manchester—a place called McQuestons Wholesalers.

G: Now, would your father or either of your brothers or sisters, take the vegetables and the fruit and put them on a cart and bring them down to the Potter Place train station or how did they get . . .

M: [They went to] South Danbury. We had three trains up and three trains down then and big freight trains all the time. And, we used to take them down—the apples and the berries basically—[and] all the rest of the stuff we raised, we ate just for ourselves. The apples eventually, [tape not clear] like everything does now, Dad only got 50 cents a barrel, and then he had to pay freight on them, so he said 'I'll feed 'em to the pigs.' And then, the other livelihood we had was he cut and chopped cordwood for his own use and to sell. And I remember his starting from the farm, going across to 4A, which is now across to where Stearns Road is, and going through the woods to the head of Pleasant Street in New London [at the north end of Pleasant Lake] and chopping wood over there for a dollar and a quarter a cord. He walked over and walked back. At that time, the good cordwood choppers claimed that they could chop a cord a day. Now, I don't know if they walked, too, or not, but anyway . . .

G: Who were some of your closest friends when you were growing up as a little girl?

M: Basically, the Stearns[es] and the people I went to school with ... that went to the same school. We eventually were eight children, and they [the Stearns family] were eight children, so, that's about all, and the other few children we had in the school.

G: How many were in your school?

M: Well, eight, nine, ten at the most, at a time. And, then the other children I met in Sunday school came from the other part of town over in the North Road part.

G: Now, you attended church at the North Wilmot Church?

M: Yes, as a child, and we walked across to church. We had a Sunday School. My dad was the superintendent of Sunday School, and I had perfect attendance. I still have a New Testament—a leather-bound New Testament—that I won for perfect attendance. And we had Christmases, which were a joy. We didn't have much for entertainment, living there, but we always had a Christmas party. We had a women's organization at the church called the Nimble Thimble Club, and they were really the support of the church [and] had their suppers. They raised money for it, they did Christmas parties. And then that was one reason why the church was changed in 1916 or '17 to a community house, so that we could have the suppers and entertainment, you know. I remember Mary Tewksbury, for instance, well for the plays and her parts in the plays and her always singing in the quartets we had. We had a quartet in church there.

G: What were—besides going to the church for dinners and plays and that sort of thing—what did you do for fun growing up?

M: We made our own fun. School was different then, we had parties in school. We had entertainment for every holiday. Every Memorial Day we had a party at school and all the parents came. We made a wreath. We went out in the woods and gathered the evergreen and made wreaths for every soldier's grave in North Wilmot, and we had one for the brook to put on for the sailors. And then Christmas parties; we had a Christmas tree in school, and in summertime—for quite a while, a good many years—we had community festivities at Fourth of July. And we took up a collection there, and we had

fireworks, and we had the ballgame over at White[s] Pond and the ice cream for everybody . . .

G: Your life pretty much was centered in North Wilmot then, wasn't it?

M: I was never in Wilmot Flat but once, until I met Clarence Howard in 1919. I was then 15 years old.

G: Oh, oh my word!

M: Well, we had nothing but that one horse. We did … my father would try to get transportation for us, so that we could come to Old Home Day, which was at the Camp Ground here.

G: Campground Road?

M: Campground Road. And we'd come down for that for the day and go back.

G: Now, were the summer revivals still being held at that time on Campground Road?

M: Yes, the Methodists had the campground, it was, and they had the camps there—some of them did—and they came for a whole week, you know. Then it would be your . . .

G: Did other denominations in town join them at all or was it pretty much the Methodists?

M: Pretty much the Methodists, I think, because I remember as a child. But Old Home Day, everybody came for that.

G: What did you do—given the fact that you were so isolated—what would you do if a family member got sick, for example, or had an accident? Was there a doctor here in the area?

M: Your parents became doctors themselves. If they panicked, you never knew it. I can remember, we went barefoot a lot of the time—in the summer especially—and of course, there was a whole barn and nails around, and we'd step on a nail, but my mother'd go down, or my dad would go down, to the cellar and get a slab of salt pork, and put that on, and that was the remedy for tetanus, I mean to keep it from getting infected. And that happened many and many a time. And my brother Curtis was out splitting wood one day, and he cut the end of his thumb off at the first joint, and that necessitated getting him to the doctor in Andover, which was 10 miles distant. And when he got there, the doctor was away, so we had to go get somebody to get to Franklin, and by that time there wasn't anything he could do anyway. That was it. Dr. Woodman finished it out. So, he has his thumb, but beyond that first joint ... One lady, a friend of mine, who was, I shouldn't say this probably, Christian Scientist, said that if we'd taken the thumb down, why, and just put it on, why that would have taken care of it. But anyway . . . But, that's the only real accident . . .

G: I assume when women were pregnant and set to deliver, they delivered at home? [12:53]

M: Well, my six brothers and sisters were born right there in the bedroom.

G: Now, who helped your mom?

M: Well, in the beginning, there was a midwife who lived in Fowlertown—Lillian LaJoie.

G: Now, maybe for those who don't know, you could describe where Fowlertown is.

M: Well, it's . . . I've forgotten just exactly how many miles—several—north of the North Wilmot Church near the Springfield line [northwest of Breezy Hill

Road and north of Piper Pond Road]. And I can remember one day that … I don't know who stayed with my mother, probably my neighbor, Blanche Stearns, while my dad went up to get Caroline LaJoie's mother, Lillian, to come down to take care of my mother. I remember that trip. It was the only trip I made to Fowlertown that I remember. Then I remember when my brother Channing was born, my father never got anybody, but my neighbor Blanche. I had to go up and get Blanche Stearns to come down and stay with my mother until Channing was born.

G: What are some of the memories that stick out the most about your life as a little girl growing up on the farm?

M: Well, part of it was my schooling—beginning in the schools. I started school in the Stearns school, which was called District 5, when I was four years old, September 1908.

G: Who was your teacher?

M: Martha Dodge Howard. Martha Dodge was the daughter of the Dodges who lived on [Route] 4A and had the Dodge Mill that you hear about in Wilmot history. And she was married ... and married a man, Howard. And Martha was [the] teacher, and she had one pupil in the first grade, so if I went, I'd be the second. The other thing was that I lived near enough to the school so I could go home for lunch, and I felt punished because I couldn't stay with the others. And once in a while for a reward, my mother would let me … my mother would let me take my lunch, which would be in a little red lunchbox, which would hold one sandwich. And the lunchbox is now over in the Historical Room [of the historical society in the town offices]—I took it over there.

G: Now how long of a walk did you have to school?

M: Oh, 15 minutes. I went across the field. I didn't even go around the road.

G: Tell me about life during the winter months.

M: Well, life during the winter months was snow, snow, snow, ice. The roads were rolled, and when they iced over, you could [go outside] and the sliding was out of this world. We used to go up the hill to Stearns home, which they had a beautiful double runner, and we'd start on that and we could go … sometimes we could go clear out to the end of Sawyer Road where it joined North Wilmot Road and go clear on down. Once in a while we had to push it up there.

G: What did your dad do during the winter months?

M: During the winter months he cut the cordwood and also the other money-making thing that he had was cutting pulpwood. They cut pulpwood and that had to be taken to the station in South Danbury, and that went to the paper mills. And basically all we had for income … all he had for income is just what he did there. He served in the legislature—three terms: '21, '27, and '53, so he got the per diem that you got for that, just the same as they got now, as far as the salary's concerned.

G: Do you remember your family's first car?

M: Oh, yes, I do! I was away. It was in 1922, and I was in school—I didn't graduate until June of '22—and my dad went to an auction, and he bought a Model T touring car. Why I mention I was away, because I don't know how they got it home, but they got it home. Of course, my brother was 15 years old, so he took it out on the … we had the big four- or five-acre field there … and drove it around till he learned how. You know what Model Ts were? They had three bands: high, low, and reverse. And you burned 'em out, and the only way you'd get going again was if you knew how to go to a garage and

have 'em put in or if you knew how to put 'em in. It wasn't long before my brother Leon found how to put 'em in. And that meant that he had transportation to Proctor Academy, as well as my sister. Before that he had a problem getting to school, you see. So, he'd go, and it didn't take long to burn up the bands—they just wore out. You could burn 'em out if you just stepped on 'em quick but, I mean, so, sometimes you couldn't go on high, but you could turn the car around and go in reverse quite a while and burn out the rest of 'em, and then you couldn't move. So, it was the big, long hill going to North Wilmot—Teel Hill, as some would call it. We called it Morrison Hill, too, because the Morrisons lived there at the top of the hill. The car would eventually get halfway up the hill, and all the bands were gone. So, then, they—my brother—would walk home and get the oxen and come back with a chain and hitch it on and pull the thing home, and put the bands in. Well, it got so he'd go up and get the oxen, they'd go out, turn around, back up, and, most [times he] would say, 'Well, why don't you do something? Get started!' Yet, they would back up to that car every single time, it was funny.

G: Now let me ask you. You mentioned Proctor. Okay, you went to school at the Stearns school.

M: I finished the work there in June of '16. They kept you eight years for the program that they had. It wasn't graded, but what they had offered . . .

G: So, you were somewhere around 12 years old.

M: Yes, and my mother thought . . . well, to go to school then you had to get to South Danbury by horse three and a half miles and go to Franklin ...

G: You mean high school.

M: … that's high school. And come back the same way at night.

G: Wow! That's quite a ways, even in today's time.

M: My father couldn't take the time away from home for to do that every day. Well, then, the other thing you could do was go take the train and go to Andover on Monday morning. Take your food, and they gave you a place there where you had kitchen privileges and a bedroom. The girls did, you see. They could go down, so, and then you'd come back Friday. See?

G: And this was in Andover?

M: Andover. That was 10 miles from home.

G: Where in Andover was the school?

M: Proctor Academy.

G: Oh, okay, okay.

M: So, my mother was just . . . wouldn't let me go away at 12. Proctor was a boys' school, too, you know. No supervision—you just were there. So, she didn't want to turn me loose, I guess. So, anyway, we had a teacher there [at the Stearns school]—an Olive Currier, who was an 18-year-old graduate of Colby-Sawyer College—which was Colby Academy then. And she didn't have too many [students], and she was an energetic person—a good teacher, she turned out to be—and ready to whip the world and everything, you know. So, she said she would take me on her own—I'd go to school every day—and give me other courses than what the school offered, if the school board okayed it. And they okayed it. And God bless Olive Currier. I took English literature, algebra, French, and single-entry bookkeeping under her tutoring for one year.

G: At Proctor?

M: At the school—the Stearns school.

G: Oh, at Stearns school.

M: She was the teacher for the other kids. She was the teacher there. The school board gave her permission [for it] to be a one-to-one thing. When it came time in June of 1918, I had to do something. My mother still felt she didn't want me to go to Franklin or Proctor, so, my aunt said, if I'd go down where she lived in Webster, Mass. and work for my board and room, I could go to school down there, and that's where I ended up.

G: Now, where is Webster, Mass?

M: Twelve miles below Worcester.

G: Right. Yeah. Okay. So, central Massachusetts.

M: Yes. It's that place where that lake, with a big long name: 'Cha-gog-a-gog-man-chog-a-gog- cha-bunga-gum-ga-mog' [Chaubunagungamaug], you've heard of that? So, anyway, that's where I went. I worked for my board and room, and when I got there . . .

G: Well, what did you do for your board and room, how did you work?

M: Just cooking and washing clothes and getting meals and things like that. And, when I got there to enroll—I intended to take a secretarial course, a business course—I had all the English they gave in the freshman course literature. I had all the algebra up until May of that year, way beyond factoring. I had half a year of French, what they were giving college-board French, and single-entry bookkeeping, and they had double entry bookkeeping. So, with a secretarial course, and that much of the high school work done, I was able to take four years of college mathematics and four years of French.

G: How often did you return home?

M: I came home Christmas vacation and summer vacations.

G: Did you miss your family a lot?

M: Yes, very much. And I didn't realize then what I was missing, because I missed those four years that [my brother] Curtis talks about and tells the things that happened and that, and I have no memory of them.

G: Now, did you have much of a social life at all down in Massachusetts?

M: I had fun. I had good friends. It was a wonderful place. I made good friends, but I worked. That's been my life—work. I had to earn my own spending money.

G: Did you have any boyfriends?

M: A couple. One actually came up here one summer to call on me in North Wilmot.

G: Really?!

M: That's right. I met him at the South Danbury Station with the horse and buggy, and we had lunch at the farm, and we went for a ride, and I took him back in the afternoon. He was vacationing over at Newfound Lake in Bristol. That's how he happened to come up. And so, about as soon as I started in, by the way, in typing and stenography, and so just as soon as I had managed enough of that, I went to work in a lawyer's office . . .

G: Where?

M: In Webster, Mass. [I worked there] after school and the vacations that I didn't come home. And so that when I got graduated, he offered me a job to go to

California with him. He was going to go to California and set up his practice out there. Well, it was an awful decision. I was torn between, and I wanted to go so much. My mother wanted me to stay, so I made the choice. I don't know what would have happened if I hadn't made the choice, but I came back here.

G: To Wilmot.

M: To Wilmot. I was enrolled at the Burdette Business College in Worcester—intended to go there—and then, after I got my diploma the principal said, "You're crazy! What you need is experience. Go get a job and forget [Burdette]." So, that's why I never went to college.

G: So, you would have been somewhere around 17 or 18 when you returned back here to Wilmot?

M: I graduated in 1922, and I came back here in June. So, I would have been 18. And I immediately . . . my father ...

G: What was it like to have been away all that time and to have had a taste of freedom and then you returned home?

M: I didn't mind that, probably because I had met Clarence in the meantime.

G: Oh, you did.

M: Yes, in the meantime. I met him the first summer I came back in 1919. That was my freshman year in high school. I met him at a dance in Potter Place.

G: Now, was Clarence a native?

M: Clarence was the brother of Lida Rose Howard Gross, her second brother. She had an older brother. But we didn't correspond or never said nothing until I

came back the next summer, and then we picked up from there. And we went together seven years before we finally got married. Because we decided we were gonna get married and then we worked, and we put dollar for dollar in the bank to provide a furniture fund, and there was no place to rent much then and most people lived in with their parents, and you couldn't buy. So, unfortunately, the bank we put [our money] in failed in the Depression. We did get our basic bedroom/kitchen furniture, but kept the rest of it, the washing machine and all those other luxuries at that time. And so the bank failed, and we lost a third of it. We eventually got back two thirds of it.

G: Was that maybe behind your decision not to go out to California—that at that time you were serious with Clarence?

M: No, no. Not at that time. No, I just loved the work. I even got so … he was a civil lawyer, not a criminal lawyer. And I was taking his dictation in court and everything, but then I got through.

G: So, where did you go to work when you returned?

M: Well, my father would have been a politician—I mean, he was interested. My father was ahead of his time. He was very well read. He was a graduate of the Manchester High School. He played football in Manchester—way ahead of his time—and he saw things ahead. I often wonder what he'd think if he was living [in] this day and age with some of the . . . well this health care program. He'd'a been interested in that. He wasn't always popular in town. He became [a] selectman for many years, but because he would start things up before the townspeople, citizens were ready for it. For instance, plowing the roads. He knew plowing the roads was gonna come, but everybody in town was sledding, drawing wood on the sled in the roads and [they said] 'No way' and everything. So, he got so excited about it that he got enough people to have a special town meeting. And of course, the people who were using

the roads with the sleds voted "No." He lost, but he got 'em interested enough that before that winter was over, the town built two wooden plows—one for each end of the town, to be drawn by horses. So, that was the beginning of snow plowing in Wilmot, which my father was responsible for.

G: Was he Republican?

M: He was a Republican to the core. And as I say, he served three terms, and he ran for senator. He wanted so much to be a senator but, unfortunately, the person who also filed was a sheriff in Merrimack County with a long standing in the core [electorate]. And I remember the day that—his name was Arthur Clarke—I remember the day he came up to the house and tried to get my father to take his name off the ballot, but he didn't move him one bit. 'Course, my father lost, but he was friendly with all the governors and knew them all, and they would welcome him home, and he visited in their homes, and he kept up his interest in everything with his community and state.

G: Okay so what did you do for work when you came back to Wilmot?

M: When I came back, because of him, and his interest there in Concord, he had a job waiting for me.

G: Doing what?

M: In the state highway department. Fred Everett lived in Elkins; his home was in Elkins and he was the highway commissioner. So, I was just supposed to report just as soon as I got home. I stayed that summer down there [to Concord]. I didn't come back. And so I went to work down there on the 22nd day of October, and I worked for a man by the name of Harrington—I don't recall his first name now—who was the man in the department who tested the tensile strength of all the material used on the road, which then was

basically cement. And I had to type the reports. He'd go to the site and take the test.

G: What was Clarence doing at this point?

M: Clarence was working in Nashua in a sash-and-blind place making sash[es] and blinds.

G: And you were continuing to see him from time to time?

M: Yes, he was down there working.

G: And at this time were you living in Concord?

M: Yes. I went down there, and I worked for two men. The other man I worked for was Fred Gardner, who was the first person that started advertising for the State of New Hampshire. There was a bureau. He was head of the bureau, which is a big job that advertises all of the skiing and all that. So, I worked for those two and the first piece of road that was tried out was the Main Street in Boscawen. We tested the cement for that, and that was the first piece of cement road they put up. It was also the first piece of road that the state plowed while I was there. Well, I went down to [Nashua]—I used to go down by bus or train for the weekend—there'd be a dance or something—so I went down for a dance with Clarence, and he picked up the paper, and there was an ad for someone that was wanted in Granite Overall office. The thing was, when I came back, the State Law of New Hampshire said, 'You had to have three years' experience to get in," the state law said so much: $600 for three years' experience. I lacked 3 months—with my vacation time—of being there. So, I had to start at $50 a month.

G: Okay, for doing what now?

M: Secretary for these two men in the highway department. And I lived in a room down in the south end of Concord for $3.50 a week and walked clear up to the building next to the State House, and ate on the street. Well, I got by—just by—except for the month that had five weeks. I couldn't keep food in my bedroom, so I was hungry. So, when I got down there and I saw this ad, Clarence persuaded me to stay over and apply.

G: How often did you get back to Wilmot?

M: Only occasionally. I didn't have the train fare, you see. I didn't have the car fare.

G: You and Clarence married in what year?

M: We married on the 26th day of June, 1926. That's the date in my wedding ring: 6/26/26.

G: And, where did you get married?

M: We got married in the parlor at Hidden Acres.

G: Who married you?

M: The Reverend Daniel M. Cleveland, who had been the pastor here at Wilmot Flat and then … was then retired.

G: At the Baptist Church?

M: At the Baptist Church. And he was really a wonderful guy, but he was an old, old man by that time. And he lived in Swanzey and in his retirement he upholstered chairs. That's what he did in his retirement. So, he came all the way over and the family gathered up there.

G: And where did you live once you were married?

M: Well, before that when I came to Proctor—after I got back from Granite Overall and got the job down there; I worked there until November 1924—and then I came back here. So, when I went to Proctor, my job included $800 [~$12,000 in 2021 dollars]—which is what I got in Nashua—when I lived in the dormitory and had board and room and helped with the chaperoning of the girls.

G: Now, how did you go about getting your job at Proctor?

M: I went down and saw the headmaster when I was home for Thanksgiving, and his secretary had left him, so he hired me then and there because he didn't have anybody.

G: Now, you had a little story to tell to me earlier about why his secretary had left.

M: She was straight from New York City, and this was the days of [the] Charleston, shingled hair, and the flapper—typical New York City fodder of that age—and she got poison ivy on the campus which was the blow, the final blow. So, she walked out. So, when I walked in on that Thanksgiving dinner, he didn't have anybody. So, he hired me then and there. So, just before I was married . . . .

G: On Thanksgiving Day?

M: Thanksgiving Day, right at dinner. He got up from the table when I rang the bell. And so, I lived in the dormitory until I got married. And then, after I got married, I couldn't live there, so after June of 1926 we didn't have any place to go. By that time, Clarence had come back. It was just like he was unemployed: the Nashua business ran out. So, he had come back, and he was working for a mason in Andover, and the mason said that if Clarence wanted to help him, he would build a small cottage for us if we'd buy the material and

put up the money for that, and they'd do the labor, and we could take it off in rent. So, in June of '26 we moved to a small cottage there in Andover, which was beside a man-made lake that had been put in just beyond in the dip of the road there, just beyond the garage that was Clyde and Dickie's garage. And so, we went there and we stayed there and we had a big flood in November of 1927. And when I got up that next morning, the man-made dam was gone and the brook, which came down off of Ragged Mountain, was going through as whitecaps. That's what greeted me out of my kitchen window. We stayed through the winter and into spring, but the brook was in a valley between two fields and that rotting hay and the fish they put in the pond wasn't very pleasant. So, in May of 1928, Clarence's father came down with the horse and the hay rack and moved our furniture up on Kearsarge Mountain here and we rented a place—the Phelps place up here, until we had to get out.

G: The Phelps'?

M: The Phelps—Eugene Phelps' place.

G: Okay. Spell that.

M: P-h-e-l-p-s, Phelps. He had lived up there all his life and had a farm. And then his wife wasn't too well for some reason, and he had a chance to come down here. And her family gave them the house where Van Rayno used to live in. So, they stayed here, but he kept his dairy cattle in the farm up there. So, when we were up there renting it, he came up every day to get his milk and deliver it, you see.

G: When did you join the Grange?

M: I joined the Grange July 15th, 1919. It was summer. I was back from high school.

G: Now, did you attend Grange when you lived down in Concord?

M: No. Not much. I attended Grange every time I came to town and any time after we were married, we came up from Andover.

G: Now, which Grange was this?

M: Wilmot Grange, #309. It's the only Grange that I belonged in.

G: Was the Grange a big part of your social life?

M: Yes! It was—very definitely. As I say, my husband was back up here. He worked long hours. You didn't have the week you have now. He worked long, and I worked 8 to 5 every day and Saturdays, too. So, we worked and the Grange was our social life, and the church was such. My husband loved to dance. I didn't have any rhythm in my bones at all, but we managed to develop a good waltz. I couldn't do the Charleston or the Foxtrot to save my soul. So, my husband was a very, very patient . . . I never saw him lose his temper. A very kind person. He loved children. We didn't have any, but he was very happy. Anything I wanted to do, he was glad that I did it, and if he couldn't join me, it was fine. My mother went with me. We had many happy trips, and we had very happy lives. We planned to travel when he retired, but he was a little bit "Scotch." Maybe he wasn't gonna retire. So, he could keep all his earnings under Social Security, which then was at 72, and he died of a heart attack at 71. So, we never traveled, and I haven't felt like traveling since because I'm a loner now, and I was a loner then, because Proctor Academy was my life—it took all my time—and my family was the other. Well, at Proctor, you met the students, the kids. I would handle their allowance; I babysat for them; I made them go take baths and everything. But only a few lasted and the teachers came and went. I still have about a dozen friends who are far away that keep in touch.

G: Now you grew up during several world wars, other conflicts. Tell me a little bit about what kind of impact the wars had on you here.

M: Well, I remember the basic one. The first one that I remember most was WWI, and by that time I was able to read and hear, and hear the arguments in the family over whether we should get in or not get in and all that. I have an uncle who was so much for not getting in, and my father, well there again, his insider head knew that eventually it was coming. So, they argued a lot about that, but they lived right nearby. And, the rationing we had on that which was really rationing almost as much as it was in WWII.

G: Tell me a little bit about that.

M: Well, the basic thing I remember: we had to go three miles and a half to a store. And, of course, at that time the stores didn't have bread. My mother made all the bread of all kinds, and of course, she [used] white flour. She baked every other day—had to—and we couldn't get only a pound of white flour at a time, and you had to buy two pounds of dark flour to get one of white. And the store usually only had rye flour. Well, it did something to my stomach somewhere or something, and I developed a very bad rash and had to get to the doctor 10 miles away, and found out I had scurvy, which shocked my mother, because she knew what scurvy was in the military—especially the Navy people who were on board like that. But, they gave me something for it. But that's what I remember about that.

G: Let me ask you. Where did you do your shopping when you lived in North Wilmot.

M: It was at Wilmot Center. Marcus Grace had a store there—a grocery store and the post office was there—or there was a store at South Danbury.

G: Where in relation to the [Congregationalist] church was the store?

M: Not too far. It was on 4A, it was right on 4A. The building is gone now, but this would be … you would look out the Congregational Church at Wilmot Center, back to the side, and you could look right across the meadow to the store. And I worked there the summer of 1917.

G: So, it was north of the intersection of 4A and North Wilmot Road.

M: It was on the right-hand side going towards Springfield, yes, north.

G: How far up past the old Szilagyi house?

M: Oh, it was just this side. There's a big house sitting right on it. I think it's the first house on the right-hand side there as you go up. The big house there—that's the first one. It's about on the site of the old Grace place, and I worked the summer of 1917 for them in the store and stayed with them nights—Monday night through Thursday night in the store there in 1917 before I went away to school. They were the salt of the earth; they were two of the nicest people that I've ever met, and they did so much to help so many people. I remember they had a sale on sugar: 20 pounds for a dollar, 5 cents a pound. I don't know how I got it home because I walked home, back and forth. But I toted 20 pounds of sugar to North Wilmot. When I went through the door I said to Dad, "I spent some of my pay for sugar—20 pounds for a dollar." And he said, "Mildred, you'll never buy it again for that, and I never have. So then, after WWII—there was a lot of things happened in WWII.

G: Okay. Now what, we're 30 years, 25 years after that. We're approaching the 1940s. Now where did you do your shopping then?

M: Well, in 1940 we lived right here in this house. We bought this house in May of 1932. We lived right here. So we did, basically, most of our shopping in Franklin, because that's where my husband was and that's where I was going for the school, because I had to go to the bank to get the payroll and

everything back and forth. So we did, basically, our shopping in Franklin. There were some good clothing stores there—two fine men's stores—my husband got his suits there. And there was a women's Homes and Notions dressmaker and a Solomon's—plenty of opportunity in Franklin—and the grocery A & P. And in WWII we were active. And I was on the registration board for the rationing of gas and fuel oil here, and we did everything we could for the community in any way. I had to have stamps to get to work—just the "A" stamps. I was just five miles from my door to my office, so that's all I could get. We had to go to Franklin to get any extra stamps for that. You could get any, if you needed more. Fortunately, I had a couple members of my family that didn't use theirs, so I sometimes had a little extra.

Three of my brothers were frozen, as far as the draft was concerned and as far as enlistment was concerned, because they were involved in government and Channing was in agriculture. He had 10 dairy cows, and if you had over 10 dairy cows you were part of the plan, so he was deferred. My brother Curtis, by that time, was working for Pratt and Whitney in Hartford, and my brother Leon was in the government from 1930 in the Department of Interior and the water department out there in the west. So, they were automatically deferred in the beginning, but my brother Henry—who graduated from [University of] New Hampshire in 1935 at a time when you couldn't find work anywhere—he was a general business major at that time. But, of course, he came out a 2nd lieutenant in the ROTC Program, so he managed a CC camp for 15 months up in Vermont under the FDR business. Then, after that all he found was work on a hen farm or at a Woolworth's in West Warwick, RI. And they called for a volunteer for one year at Fort McKinley to train officers, and the year was up in July 1940, and then they released him. And from July 1940 he was on maneuvers down off the coast of Puerto Rico, practicing landing, which is what they later did on Normandy Beach. We found this out after we got home. He was under fire by a German submarine. If he'd been under fire

15 minutes more, he'd have got a pay raise, but he didn't. So, from there he went around—he was infantry, so he went back to Fort Benning—and he was shipped out on the Queen Mary, second day of August, 1942, unescorted to England, and from there he went to the African campaign, the Sicilian campaign; all of the French campaigns; Germany and ended up in the War of Occupation. And he came home in November 1945. And he was awarded the French Corps de Guerre and the same corresponding award from Belgium, plus a whole cluster of Silver Stars and everything else that went along with it. He stayed in the Army Reserve until 1963.

G: Now how was life here different during the war?

M: Very different. We had rationing of all kinds, we had fuel rationing, sugar, and the whole thing. Everybody was patriotic. The Grange had pictures and did everything. We met regularly to send boxes to all the soldiers. We had pictures of all the soldiers in the Grange framed on the wall in the Town Hall. Matter of fact, George Gove was here the other day looking for the picture because it had been there every year until this time that he came back, but I took it down because I thought nobody was interested afterwards, but there was one that was. And we met regularly to pack packages—every week almost. We started accounts for all the babies born. We worked with the WPA. That Town Hall floor was filled with horses or tables where we made mattresses. My mother and I made mattress layers—we pounded and pounded on the cotton to make them fill up the mattresses and things.

G: Now, was this done under the Grange or . . . ?

M: This was done under the WPA, the program under FDR. That was that big thing. They had a building there in Wilmot Center, where they had mica from the mica mines, and they sorted that. It was a real project and that was under FDR's program. But the Grange was behind everything that went along. But

we met regularly over here. I don't know how many times I went over here on rationing over time. It just was different—life was. But everybody seemed worried over the war, but happy to be doing everything that they could. It was great cooperation.

G: One particular area that I'd like us to return to for a while is the area of education. And you went to school in basically a one-room schoolhouse until you were 12 years old. How many other schools were in town at that time, do you remember?

M: Way, way back there was the Kearsarge School of Practice right there in Wilmot Center, which money was funded by a trust and a Board of Trustees. And the education in that building ... and when the Trustees no longer saw a chance to carry on the basic requirements of the will, my father went before the Probate Court to see what could be done, and they were able to get the funds—the income from the funds—transferred so that we opened up a two-year high school there, which required a special Town Meeting for the district to vote in.

G: Your father occupied what position at that time?

M: Well, he was moderator of the school at the time and a citizen interested in seeing something done, basically. And so, he got the permission, but the District did not vote to have every high school student attend high school in that building. Some had already started in Franklin, some had gone to live outside the state with relatives, and it was natural that they didn't want to attend, so that only those that had transportation could get nearby.

G: Now this would have been what year?

M: I'm not positive of those dates looking back. But my brother graduated in '24, so he went on to Proctor and graduated from there in '26. My sister

graduated in ’25, and she went on to Proctor and graduated in ’27. So they both had their first two years of high school right there at Wilmot Center, so that didn’t create any transportation for them. My sister, actually, and Ruth Stearns, who was her close friend, walked every day, and in the winter, they skied down every day and never missed a day and never were late the time they went there.

G: Did many children from this area go to Proctor?

M: Most of them did. There was no high school in Andover and there was no high school in New London.

G: Now, did the town pay?

M: The town paid the tuition. You had to get there the best way you could and some of them were able to arrange transportation with people who were going. Some of them went into work and stayed with families in Andover and my brothers, Curtis and Henry, lived with us from Monday through Friday when we got married and went to live in Andover. They went down on the train on Monday morning and then came back after school on Friday. That’s how they got there. Then, when they got the car, why that took care of them. Other people found their transportation or they went by train to Franklin and then later they opened the Andover High School.

G: Tell me about your involvement in the area of education.

M: Well, for some reason after I got married and came back here, I guess everybody else did, but I seemed to get elected to town office. And I was elected to the school board in 1932, and I was re-elected for seven terms until 1953 and was chairman seven years. And at that time we had the North Road School, the Stearns School, which was later closed, and opened the Pond School. We had Center School, the Wilmot Flat School, and during my term

we opened up the Mountain School. And we had the usual problems: a large enrollment in all schools and basically, we were having problems with the vaccination law, which all you had to do was get a certificate from a doctor that it was against your health to be vaccinated. But we had a religious group in town that didn't believe in it, so they made life miserable even for getting a flu doctor in town to sign a paper.

G: What group was this?

M: Want me to name them?

G: Yeah.

M: Jehovah's Witness.

G: Oh. Okay, okay. So they've actually been a presence in the town for quite a while, then?

M: They were much more active then than they are now, or maybe vociferous. They may be just as active now, but they're quiet about it. But the group is just like all groups, you have a group that like to make . . . be sound and heard. And so one particular family liked to torment and see what they could get away with. This family had a 16-year-old girl, and she wasn't ill any more than I was, you know, at the time, and he couldn't get the local doctors to do it. So, a new doctor came to town in Potter Place. So, he—I used to have to go to the football games on Saturday afternoons to support the team when I worked at Proctor—so at the football game, he came over during the half with this paper and waved it in my face and shouted it, so here it was. Well, the new doctor was watching the game and he went up to him, and he had no idea until he'd signed the paper. So, he publicly made a big thing of that, but they moved out of town, so that vaccination disappeared.

G: What other issues . . . ?

M: Other issues . . . the same group were against The Lord's Prayer, and the same group were against, definitely against, saluting the flag. And the school board decided they were going to stand their ground. Basically, it was only the Flat school involved, and we had a good teacher there.

AT END