Wilmot Historical Society

#23_2_Interview of Mildred Howard by George Peterson 9_3_1993

Disk 2 of 2 51:34 minutes Transcribed by Kim White, 2/13/2021

. . . She was a very, very good teacher. She was an outstanding disciplinarian, and she didn't let anything go over in her school. So when the school board said they were going to let her stay there and if they didn't repeat the Lord's Prayer, they were going to stand and be quiet, and if they didn't salute the flag, they had to stand and pay respect. And she went along with it, and that ended it as far as she was concerned.

G: Now, what years are we talking about here when you served on the school board?

M: Well, I ended up in '53. I would say the last five or six years and somewhere in there. As far as the vaccination it was on and off all the time every year. All they had to do is get a certificate.

G: But, I mean, so, you served on the school board primarily in the . . .

M: From '32 to '53, and the term was seven years. We were definitely under the State Board of Education at the time and the State Board of Education sometimes was simply crazy in their rulings. For instance, we had had a teacher here that was a very poor disciplinarian and we had a problem in the Flat school. And we got another teacher in, who came with a certificate from the State of Maine, but she didn't have a New Hampshire certificate. She has years of experience in Maine, and we had to hire her almost the day school started to get somebody. And she went in there and straightened the school out, and in nine weeks it was fine. We got permission from the Commissioner's secretary because he was on vacation, and she okayed it. And when he got back, he said she had to go. We had to get . . . what are we going to do. We'll have to get substitutes. And we said, "Substitutes? Nine weeks, they are?"

G: And this was someone from the State?

M: Yes, this was the State Commissioner of Education. I said, "What's that going to do. It didn't make any difference. They had to have a New Hampshire certificate. So, we even

got the teachers and those parents to go down for a hearing before. And the person that had been very upset the year before was a former teacher herself, and she had thought this teacher was so good and just what we needed. But she got up at the hearing and spoke openly, and she asked him what he wanted if he wouldn't [count] Alicia's experience from Maine when they had a certificate. And his words were, "I don't care whether she can read and write or not so long as she goes through the doors of either Keene or Plymouth. That was from the State Board of Education. So, we had to let that teacher . . . she even offered, this teacher even offered to go the next year and go to school to get her New Hampshire certificate. He wouldn't even let her teach the year out for that.

G: What was her name, Mildred?

M: Well, it was Helen Caldwell, was the teacher involved and so, that's when Annie Thompson came in as a substitute because she had small children. My sister, Janice, went and babysat for her so she could come in and do some substituting. When we got through that year, and Helen went on, and she went and got her certificate So, she came back, and she taught in school, not only here at the Flat, but at Wilmot Center. She was a very successful teacher. So, we were fighting the Board of Education all the time.

G: What other issues or topics involving education are of note?

M: Well, then the other thing . . . well, you go on now. So, the Supreme Court has said you don't have to have prayer, and we don't have to have [a] flag salute. And the thing is they've given in to this . . . and my point was that when we didn't give in, we got part of it, anyway.

G: Tell me as briefly as you can, how the school system went from a local system to a regional system?

M: Well, that . . . don't get me on the band box.

G: That's why I say, tell me as briefly as possible.

M: I was very, very, very much against it.

G: What time frame would this be now?

M: This was when they were having the hearings and planning to . . .

G: But what year basically?

M: Well, it goes back '67.

G: Isn't it when Kearsarge opened up.

M: It's whenever Kearsarge opened up. But the two years prior to that when they were having what they were going to do, enticing the different Towns to come in, giving them incentives to get them in, and anybody in their right mind that would sit at those hearings and hear the things the meetings towns offered the Town of Wilmot to get them to join would know that we'd see ????? They offered us a beautiful brand-new building down in the field, which is across from what used to be the Campground, Clark's field, all grades. And we knew very well that they were never going to do that. With the money that was involved, we couldn't. Then they had another hearing and then they ended up and they told us they would not take anybody . . . only those above the sixth grade. So, we could have two schools—one of 4 grades each. And that seemed about the best that we were going to get out of it. But then, we voted to have a cooperative school. Unfortunately, the school board members had wanted it very badly. I always thought that one of them wanted the bus to run so she'd have a babysitter for her children because they were starting school. At least they weren't working, but then that was probably personal. But then, we were offered to keep the two schools, and that was fine. We had three grades in one school and three in the other.

G: Okay. Which two schools were these?

M: The Flat and Wilmot Center. And we provided transportation. But they voted at a district meeting to have a cooperative study to see if a cooperative school would be a regional school, and you know at the district meeting, the cooperative committee never reported they had gotten off. And by that time Andover had dropped out and so, seven towns were going to have to assume the eighth town. So, I got up and asked where the report was for the cooperative school—weren't we entitled to that? And they said it wasn't necessary. It was a regional school is what it was, and so I was voted down on that. And so, we opened up with our two schools, and then, the regional school decided they'd take the fifth and sixth grades. Well, that left us with Grades 1, 2, 3, and 4.

G: So, the one school remaining was . . .

M: That left us with five pupils. We just didn't have any. Then, we just decided we'd have to go call Kearsarge then. I don't think we kept, as I remember it, even two schools. I was off the board by that time.

G: So, what was the last school here in town?

M: I think the Flat was the last school. Hulda Currier taught, and I don't remember any teacher up at the Center. I was just sick over it all along, and I still am because it was the worst bill of goods that ever was sold in town. And I told them, every meeting we went to—and I went to every hearing no matter what it was—and another chairman from Newbury went with me and we fought. I said the last one they voted, I said I hoped I would never live in a town where they didn't have a school, and they're going to live to regret it. And they do regret it now. I mean, some phases of it.

G: Let me change the topic here on you. We touched a little bit on the Grange, but I happen to know that you have one more year to serve in the Grange until you get your seventy-fifth-year pin. I'd like you to tell me a little bit about your involvement with the Grange, including some of the offices you may have held, and including some of the highlights of the Grange during those many years.

M: Well, I served 25 years as Master—not continuously. I would take it as Master and then somebody would come along that wanted to be Master. Annie took it for three years. Betty Patton M[o]ore took it for two or three years. Nancy Stevens Johnson wanted her term in—she was the youngest. She went in as the Master at 15. She joined Wilmot as Master at 15 and had a wonderful time. And so, but with them in and out, I had to go back because nobody else wanted it. And those years were lots of fun. We did a lot of work. We had people that contributed and wanted to contribute so that you had committees. And sometimes you wouldn't be on a committee more than once a year. We had social times, and back then, during gas rationing the Grange was about all we had. Church and that because you didn't have gas to go anywhere. So, we danced after our Grange meetings. We had good programs. We had state officers that came almost every meeting to add something to us and keep the momentum going and the interest going. I just can't begin to tell you what we did.

G: Now, your husband was active in the Grange?

M: Yes. My husband belonged to Kearsarge Grange, down here. And so, he transferred to Wilmot Grange afterwards. And, he never attended Wilmot Grange too much. He used to go up to take all my things and be there to come back. My husband had a nervous breakdown just before we were married, so, the first years of our married life, he couldn't stand to go inside. So, we coped with that. He finally got treatment for that. He got it from all of the study when he was a freshman in high school at Proctor Academy. He had a very bad breakdown when he was in his teens. So, he was happy to have me go, but it was a long time before we could go to a movie or to vaudeville, you know, he seemed to like that. And finally, he'd say, "Well, I'll go," and we'd sit in the back row so if I have to go out. So, we made our money and a lot of the money that for the last four or five years that we've been spending, we made with suppers at the Grange and we charged 25 cents a supper. Beans and ham.

G: Now, were these open to the public?

M: Yes. When we worked our degrees we always had a supper instead of the table feast that we have now. We always retired and had a full supper. We were known for our oyster stews. We had oyster stew. We had one man there at the Grange who always made the oyster stews. One year we had an oyster stew supper for 100. And the oysters needed for the thing cost, cost, what, one gallon of oysters did, last year, or something like that. And the milk we got for 5 cents a gallon over where Donald Hall lives—his grandparents. And it was fun. Now Grange is work. Work, work, . . . you know, I mean, you don't get much fun out of it because you're just working all the time. And it's changed so. It's just the times—it's just the world as it is. We didn't have television. The Grange was our fun. And during the war it was all we had.

G: What are some of the things that you miss about the old Wilmot?

M: Well, part of my missing is the people that I miss that are gone. You know, that's part of it. And part of it because of my family. I mean that was a big part of my life. I feel very sad that I don't know the people in Wilmot now—a lot of them. I don't even know where some of them live. Maybe that's my fault. I belong to most of the organizations that most of them belong to and try to stay active in those

G: I guess what you're saying then is that years ago there was a, perhaps, greater sense of community?

M: And part of that goes right back basically as part of the lack of the schools, because when you had the schools, the parents always came for the children. You saw them. That's where you met them and socialized with them. The parents and the kids were at anything the library had. How many children come to your library things now, unless it's made just for the children? You know, you don't have children much at libraries. Back when I was on the school board, the teachers took their whole classes to the library, and they did a whole unit there. And so, if it was for a program for some particular unit, the parents would come for the program at school and you were getting in. As chairman of the board, I went. And now, basically, I am not physically able to. I can't go to square dances. I promised Mary Kay Huntoon I'd go up and listen some night, and then I got sick and I haven't been. But we went to square dances. We loved to. I could do square dances because I couldn't do the foxtrot. And so, I think it's just a change in things and time—there isn't time enough. I miss meeting the kids—the children of the parents. That's part of why I miss working, because they used to come in there, and I could talk to them, and they got to know me at Cricenti's.

G: Speaking of Cricenti's, which, of course, is located in New London, but speaking of businesses, that is, what are your memories of the different businesses here in town growing up, besides the store that you may have already mentioned.

M: Well, of course, R.P. Johnson has been in my life all along with the grain man and lumber man down here. Preston? Johnson, the oldest one in that firm that I remember, was a distant cousin.

G: Well, what do you remember about some of the mills?

M: I remember Clough's mill up there that went out in the flood—the time right up here near the town beach that was the big mill there, Clough's mill—not the grain . . .

G: Now what flood in particular are you talking about?

M: Probably the hurricane of '38 or '36 or somewhere around there.

G: Now, what do you remember about the hurricane of '38?

M: Oh, [during] the hurricane of ’38 we were living right here in this building. We’d been over to that next house. We had very close neighbors and very, very good friends.

G: Now, you’re speaking of that house next door to you?

M: Yes, the house right over there. The house next to the bridge. And we came home from dinner and just so far as we knew, it was just a high wind. And I don’t know why we didn’t have our head’s cut off because we came in the house and heard the wind blowing and went to bed. And at that time, the pine trees up here on the top of the hill—the tops of ‘em were coming off and blowing around cutting everything to pieces, and they were all laid out over here and everywhere. And in the hurricane of ’38, my father had a lumber—a pine lot—that probably was worth seven or eight thousand dollars, just ready to harvest. It mowed that right down. Absolutely mowed it down, so, that the program that the government had to get the logs quick into water—we got it in—and he got a thousand dollars out of it. It took one barn down at the farm down completely. Beautiful barn. Much better—the timbers in the support of the barn was much better than the one that we were using. And mowed it right down. My father was sorry afterwards because he said, he went and opened up the windows—it was one of those you drive in and drive right through—the doors, I mean—and if he hadn’t done that maybe it would have been much better and gone right through. And one that we had a tin roof on the barn—the hay barn—and that [wind] took a piece of that tin roof off and cut off the top of a tree over on the Stearns lot, which was about six inches through—cut it right off. And it took out the road up in Morrison [Teel] Hill there. I have a picture of my husband and my sister-in-law standing in there and the gully is so deep it’s way over their head.

The ’36 flood, I was at Proctor and that’s a story in itself. We were closing for vacation and we flooded the lot of the power plant. And we were having a big banquet in Cambridge [Mass.] where the parents were going to meet the boys down there. And we were supposed to get the boys down by car, and we couldn’t get through the water at Webster Lake. So, they went out and found a way we could go down enough. We got through and went up by Alden and across Farmington down over on the Turnpike down to Exeter because it hadn’t got down there. So, they commandeered my car, and I still could get over the Cilleyville Bridge—I came up and got clothes to go—and started. I put a teacher in my car with all the boys I could get in, and I drove them there and got down to the Hotel

Commander in Cambridge, because I had the tickets and all the reservations and the whole thing. We got down there. We had the banquet, and they had a room for me and for one other teacher who was coming back to Bristol with me. And so, it started to pour down there at 10 o'clock. And we started back the next morning. I was the last car over the Newburyport Bridge. They didn't want to let me through, but I got through. I got up into Farmington and the water was over the road up there for 400 feet. And so, they had somebody at one end of it and put a blanket over the car, and a guy stood on the running board watching for holes in the road, and I can't remember his name, but he was a comedian in one of those silent movies—one of those funny movies—a great big tummy. We got through alright. When he stepped off, he stuck that great big horrible head of his in the window and said, "Come up and see me sometime." Well, I went around the next curve and I had no brakes. But we got along and we got by, and I left the woman off in Bristol, the teacher, and I came on to Sulloway Mills?? because on Sulloway Mills there was a gas tank open and I needed gas, and I got gas. Of course, I got more water than I did gas. I [was] supposed to come to Tara House in Andover and stay overnight because we had left one teacher and one boy there from Vermont who couldn't get out. When I got there, the teacher had found a way to get the kid to Vermont, so Kerry House had no electricity and no heat, and I couldn't get home. That's the '36 flood. The town was the same way up at the North ???? [Road]. It was flooded everywhere.

G: We digressed and talked a little bit about the weather there, but we originally were on the subject of businesses and stores in town. What are your memories of the different places where people worked here?

M: Well, we had a good store here in the Flat right out here where the apartment building is now [corner of Kearsarge Valley and Village roads]. My husband worked there and was there when it closed.

G: The General Store?

M: Yes. And we had a big store down where the post office is now—two active stores. The store over here during World War II was run by a couple who had two daughters. And they were in the Navy—both of the daughters. And they both had children. So, the parents came here, and they all lived there in the building and ran the store. And so, when the war was over, they came back—the Navy men. And the other store, in the meantime, had

closed down there, for some reason. So, they sold to a man by the name of Currier. And he signed an agreement that they wouldn't open up another store in town. Well, the people who owned the store didn't, but the sons in the Navy did, so, he had the competition right in town. And my husband worked for Ted Currier over in the store and stayed with him until he finally sold out. And so that was that. There was a store at Potter Place most of the time—some of the time—they would come and go. The big store down there had burned earlier in the '20s or the '30s.

G: Now, when you were a child, you and your family would have shopped at the General Store?

M: The store in Wilmot Center, the Marcus Grace store, and the store that . . .

G: Okay, what was that Mildred?

M: The Marcus' store—Marcus Grace owned the grocery store.

G: Okay, the Marcus Grace store.

M: It was a small store. They had staples. They didn't have any grain. So, we had to go to South Danbury to the store over in South Danbury. They had grain. Oh, and there was a much larger store in Potter Place. When we were married there was a big store—something like Colburn's would be up in New London. It has dishes and glassware. Most of the things from our shower came from that store down there. They had lots of nice things.

G: Now, were you married here, did you say?

M: I was married at home at Hidden Acres.

G: How big of a wedding did you have?

M: Well, I had quite a family, you know. And at that time, my husband's family—which is quite depleted now—it wasn't a large family, like ours anyway, but we had 40 or 50 there—my poor mother. We didn't have water except for the pump in the sink until 1938, and we didn't have electricity. I grew up with kerosene lights and lanterns in the barn. I don't know what . . . my brothers down there, 10, 11 years old in the hay barn with lanterns—us taking the lamps upstairs . . . but we didn't. We survived, but in 1938, I just got tired of it, and I happened to have a few pennies extra. So, I bought a second-hand Delco plant? so my mother would have something—a washing machine. We got 32 volts—you know what that

is? And then in 1940 the REA [rural electrification] went through. So, we had electricity and everything that went with it.

G: Do you remember your first phone?

M: My first phone—yes, I remember because our nearest phone was over where Robert Stewart lives now, used to be the White's Pond schoolhouse. And then they bought the schoolhouse right there [White's Pond] just before you get to Camp Wilmot—that was our nearest phone. There was a private phone [that] came in from South Danbury that the man that lived up above where Bob Minard lives, Mr. Kimball, had a private phone put in—from [the trunk] line—from there to get his. And [to] the building where Bob lives and down where the building at the corner there that's no longer in use, and over to Camp Wilmot and all that area—the Atwood's—all that area. They had a loop back to South Danbury tied into the New London Telephone. So, we used to have to walk over to Stewarts's to call the doctor. That was the year my father died. After the REA went through, I tried to get a phone in our home, but they had to put in the lines, and it was just so expensive we couldn't afford it. But after he died, we went through what we went through with that, I said we're gonna have a phone, but for $1,500 from the corner into the farm . . . so, we had a phone in '53 after that.

G: Tell me a little bit more about some of the memories of your family. How often would the entire family get together for dinner?

M: Regularly. Almost every week until after WWII, and there were gaps then. And the other thing is that, it wasn't just the brothers and sisters, it was all the nieces and nephews and the grandchildren were just as crazy to come over to the farm. My older sister always brought her grandchildren up there. Her oldest daughter lost her husband quite tragically and left her with six small children. And she used to bring those six children up there Sunday summers. And they'd be there at the farm, and so to them [the] farm was home and vacation. I used to take them to the White Mountains up to Storyland or any places there were parks where they could have fun.

G: Your mom must have worked hard.

M: My mother was a saint. She worked hard and she never complained. That's my mother at 40 there in that picture. She was a saint. I don't think I've ever met anybody that . . . she

lived to be almost 85, and I never heard her say one single word against anybody or anything in the way of character or anything like that. If she couldn't say something good, she didn't say anything. She was a beautiful housekeeper. She had all the hardships that you could bring. She washed on the scrub board; she carried the water for it, cut wheat from the hill—never complained.

G: Now there were eight of you?

M: Eight of us.

G: What was the age difference between all of you? For example, how old was the oldest and how young was the youngest?

M: I was the oldest, and I was 1904. And my younger sister was born in 1921. So, I was 16 and I remember sitting down crying when she was born, and she [my mother] said, "What are you crying for?" And I said, "When she's 16, I'm gonna be 32." And the boys—they did everything, they really did. My brothers were wonderful. I'm not prejudiced either. They were. And the whole thing in the family is the home we had with my mother and father. Because you can see it in the homes that they had. My brother Henry had four children. He was overseas in the service. He never saw his son until he was almost four years old. [His son] was born the day he sailed, and he had two boys and a girl after that. And they never did anything but that he was there with them. He'd go to their football games and sit there in the cold with their mother, too. He got on the school board so he'd be involved with their school. They all took public speaking, and they never said anything poorly. And at the school board he was there. And they worshipped him, and he worshipped them.

G: Was there an undertaker here in Wilmot?

M: Yes. Fred Goodhue. That's Connie Forsham's grandfather.

G: Goodhue.

M: Goodhue. I just had something given to the historical society . . .

G: Now what you just showed me, Mildred, was a poster advertising Fred Goodhue's . . . an auction of his household goods. So, when someone passed away here in town, they usually . . .

M: He was the only undertaker around.

G: Now, I understand that one of the houses there at the corner of Bunker Hill Road and 4A is known as the "Coffin House." Why is that?

M: Well, there used to be a hearse house there. But I don't think the hearse house itself is there anymore. But the Fred Goodhue home was at the corner there, but that burned. And the building that used to be next to the Congregational Church has been taken down. There was a building in there and that's where we used to store the caskets at one time, and then after that, people lived there, too. But I remember him, and I remember his wife, Josie Goodhue.

G: Now, where are your Mom and Dad buried?

M: My mother and dad are buried right up here in Pine Hill Cemetery. At the time they died, we were living here, and it was either Wilmot Center or here and it seemed better to have it here. So, we got the lot. My dad died in '53, and we also bought our lots at the same time. So my husband is buried up here and my brother Leon is buried up here. My sister, Arlene is to be eventually. See, the cemeteries in North Wilmot are filled or Tewksbury Cemetery. So, it was either one or the other. My mother's family and my father's family are both buried in the Pine Grove Cemetery in Manchester. Last year—a year ago this year—my nephew and my brother took me down to see them. I hadn't been there since I was a child. It's a beautiful spot—it's a real park. And I found that my grandfather's lot is a huge thing—eighteen feet by twenty—it's a great big lot so there's a place for six more adults in it. My sister is buried all by herself in Pennsylvania, which breaks my heart.

G: What would you like to share with someone that may be listening to this tape that perhaps we haven't talked about yet? What would you like to tell someone 50 years from now who may be listening to this tape?

M: Well, I would say, I have enjoyed every minute of my life to the moment. I don't think of any spot that can compare with it myself. I have been to the West Coast, and I have lived in the city. I've traveled to Colorado, Idaho, Indiana, also clear across the country. And I've never seen a spot anywhere I thought compared with New Hampshire. Lots of other things we don't have, but . . . and we've always been friendly, and I've steadily been thinking of others, and practicing the Golden Rule [with] basically anybody that I have had in contact

with, "Do unto others as you'd want to be done unto you." And I think that's basically what I would pass on to anybody.

G: As we bring this interview to an end, Mildred, I know there are several things that you meant to work into the interview earlier that you are recalling now. Earlier I asked you about health and medicine back in the early days, saying, you had a story to share about the flu epidemic. This would have been when?

M: 1917-1918. Along in there. I came home from school for the Christmas vacation. This would be 1918. And not knowing I had been exposed to the flu, and I brought the flu home to my family. And it was a very trying experience. I was the first to come down with it. I had had some clipper? blue cloth given [to] me for a dress. My mother had taken me to the neighbor who is a dressmaker, and I was standing having the dress hemmed, when I fainted dead away and they carried me home. And I had the flu. And then, my cousin had come up from Manchester for Christmas, and my father had to take him to South Danbury to the train by sleigh and he [my father] came down with the flu on the way home, so the horse brought him home. He was so sick, he didn't even . . . the horse drove into the barn. He was the next one. And then he went to bed. Well, we had cows to milk and everything, and everybody was scared to death of the flu. It was a real epidemic, and you couldn't get a doctor if you wanted one because they were worn ragged with all the trips. So, John Stearns, our neighbor, would come down and milk the cows and put the pail of milk outside the shed door and bring the wood to the woodshed and then, we'd go in and do it. Well, my mother came down [with the flu], and my brother Channing was born in April 1918, and he was a nursing baby, and he was desperately ill because he nursed from her. And so I got up after three days, just to keep the wood there and get the fire going, because I had it the least of anybody. And one morning I went in and there was Channing. I picked him up, and he was smiling so happy and then I realized what was happening. He was having a convulsion from the flu, and my mother said, "You've got to keep him hot and cold." So, it was a nightmare trying to keep that old iron stove with hot water. And he had seven convulsions in my arms that one day. But anyway, the neighbor brought in the wood and stuff like that. One by one they did—my sister Lois came down, and she was in one room. My brother Leon was in another room, and he was out of his head. He was so crazy he was trying to climb the side of the wall. This is what we all . . . all in the same house. So, it finally got so that we could get out and Mr. Stearns got the wood in, and a doctor came;

and we were all on the mend then. But Channing was never strong afterwards. And Leon got over the terrible fever without any help. Apparently, it was the good old farm constitution is what did it. I don't know what else. My brother Channing would say, our time hadn't come. That was his philosophy. But from that time on, if he ate anything just wrong, his stomach would be upset. Until he was 24, he might go into convulsion. The doctor said he'd outgrow it. But he craved peanuts. We used to have to hide them. Christmastime we'd have candy and peanuts. If he got one peanut, he'd go right on and end up with convulsions. So, when he got through school and got to be a freshman at Proctor, he played football. And one day, out at practice he was kicked in the groin. And of course, he had swelling and everything, and the next day he didn't come to school, and so—this was before the telephone—I went up home and he was very, very sick, and my mother was very concerned. And he had started to be sick to his stomach. So, we tried to get hold of a doctor and we couldn't get hold of anybody. This was after the flu epidemic and all. And so, we finally got hold of Dr. Woodman, who was over in Danbury calling on another patient, and he came over, and he had a ruptured appendix. The kick in the groin had ruptured his appendix, which accounted for his hemorrhaging in the stomach. Dr. Woodman put him in his car. He wouldn't even call an ambulance. And they took him over [to the hospital] and they operated for the ruptured appendix, and they found a twist in his intestine. And every time the peanut got there and lodged, that's why he had his convulsions. He never had a convulsion after that, and he was out of his head and everything. And they brought him back to the room afterwards—he had two nurses, Florence and Marie—and he was still under the—they didn't have a recovery. This was the old, old hospital.

G: Now, this was where?

M: New London. He was in Proctor. He graduated in '35. And he was a freshman. So, it would have been about '31 or '32. So, they brought him back to the regular room for the recovery, and he was completely still out. So, they went down to get a cup of coffee and when they came back, he was out of his head. He had gotten up out of the bed and pulled the big chest of drawers up against the door and got it under the doorknob. And here he was. Florence and Marie said they never thought they'd ever find that he'd be wide open when they got in. But he was. And so, he went home and got well, and he named his two

cats, Florence and Marie. And that was our epidemic that started out with that flu. We all made it though.

G: Tell me about the parties you used to have up at the North Wilmot Church.

M: We always had a Christmas party for years and years and years. We always had that Christmas party—the community party. And we all went over there and had the tree and had a dinner and everything.

G: Now, this was for the whole town?

M: No, the whole North Wilmot area. You see, we were very isolated. Like I told you, I was only once here until 1919. That was 14 years in town, and it was a large group up there, a lot of children. Stearns had had eight children. The Davenports had eight children. And all the other families—there were one or two around. And they all visited back and forth, you know, good friends. Basically because of the church women's organization, the Nimble Thimble Club. Those suppers that we gave, we had a very, very small kitchen with the black stove and no electricity. And then finally had electricity put in an entrance, so we could have plugs. They didn't want to wire the chandeliers and lights, some of the older members. So, we had plugs around, so we used to bring floor lamps and table lamps and put the tables around. There would be about six women—20 or 30 pots and pies. They came once a year, though. They came from everywhere around to those. No dumb waiter either. We had to run up and down the stairs.

G: And your mom used to make … ?

M: Beans—my mother and Lu Atwood—beans.

G: But she used to make bags of candy for the children?

M: Yes, the Christmas party.

G: And ornaments made from oranges.

M: Yes, they'd take a new orange—a brand new native orange—and put a piece of yarn in it with a darning needle and hang them on the tree.

G: Now, I guess I should interrupt here and just point out to our listeners how valuable an orange would have been to you back in those days.

M: That's right. We had an orange in our stocking and that's the only orange we ever had. We had turkey at Thanksgiving. Unless we raised turkeys, we never had turkey at Thanksgiving. We never had strawberries—only when we had wild strawberries to pick. And then eventually my mother had turkeys—she raised turkeys for her pin money. And that was something, too, because my dad would dress them—and that ended there—and pick them, take the feathers off, kill them, I mean. My mother would dress them and then get them ready. My father would package them, and they were sent by parcel post to [a] clientele in [the] Boston and Worcester area down there, delivered by horse and buggy or car when we had gotten a car.

G: Well, how were they kept cold?

M: This is the thing of it. We had just a cellar then. But what we did, he killed them, like the day they were gonna be delivered, and then we'd meet the four o'clock train out of Potter Place and send them on their way by parcel post. How they ever got there, he packaged them very well, but as far as I know, the freight cars, at that time, had no . . .

G: Refrigeration . . .

M: … refrigeration of any kind. We never lost but one all those years, and it was a good many years. It didn't stop till one year after my father died. My brother wouldn't kill any. He did it one year and he said, "Never again!" This was '54. The one that went to my aunt in Webster didn't get there. So, she had to go buy one out there, and she wasn't very happy about that. But it wasn't too long after that where the post office in Webster found something that didn't smell too good, and there was the turkey that had been put in back and they didn't know it till then. So, it wasn't in the shipping. Now, all those turkeys, John Carr of Andover used to buy five that were sent to Boston every year. I used to have to help to dress them and clean them. And you know, nowadays, you would think of sending the heart and liver and things with them—I don't even know, but never in all those years . . . Sometimes we had our own turkeys and so they'd lay eggs and she hatched their own eggs, and sometimes she'd buy poults, and she had a small, uh, what do they call it, the thing . . . lamps . . .

G: Incubator.

M: Incubator, yeah, to keep them in. So, she'd raise 75 to 100 each year.

G: Now, this was ...?

M: Prior to '53, basically.

G: Okay, so this was your mom?

M: Well, yeah, she did basically the . . . it was her money that she did extra things with. That was the idea. I don't know if she ever made very much, really. When you think that the turkeys were very much harder . . . the small ones would die so easy. We used to have to cook the eggs. Hard boil them and chop them for them for their first food.

G: You know, something which I meant to ask you earlier . . . how does North Wilmot look differently today than what it did when you were a child? Was it more cleared?

M: I was just gonna say, it's all forest now. I've got a picture—I haven't got it here to show you now—but if you haven't seen it, it's unbelievable the cleared fields that were there when I was a child. It's unbelievable. And even with as much as my brother did and my father did, they'd keep the area cleared and was cultivating all the time. It would get in, you know, and it's absolutely unbelievable how it's come along—the areas that you go now. Even round the church—that used to be fields there, the left going in, the right going in, and up on the hill to the left where you go straight across to go back out 4A, there was a big farm up there. It was part of the outfit, the unit that Kimball had, the same one that Bob Minard—his caretaker lived there. And later a family by the name of McAuliffe lived there. And that burned down there [1935], by the big fields there, all the way up through till you get to the Tewksbury place. They were all fields. Matter of fact, when they brought the church down in 1849, they went out through the field because it was easier than to come across where the bridge is. The one place that's the same way—Don Lucas has done a lot. That's one thing, he's kept it out as much as Channing did. [Channing owned the farm until 1982.]He used to have to go around every year or every other year, to the stone walls and just chop it out or it would grow in on you. It's unbelievable.

G: Any memorable fires that you remember?

M: That's one of the things that I can't . . . it's hard to believe that eight kids lived there all that time and we didn't have anything major. We were fire conscious. We were brought up fire conscious, but when you have eight kids going to bed with lamps, and the boys working in the barn when they got 13, 14 years old, they used to get out to the barn with the lanterns, and of course, the winter hay right there. Tip a lantern over . . . but we didn't. We had one basic fire. It was in a closet off a room that we used for a dining room which was adjacent to the kitchen. It was just a closet—a walk-in closet—and it had hooks in there on a bar. And the boys, when they were teenagers—14, 15, something like that—had sheepskin coats. My father did, too. And the sheepskin coats were hung in there for the end of the season. And nobody thought much about it. We went home—the sap season—we had two washtubs of sap on the porch for making maple syrup, and we'd gone home from Grange, and my mother and father walked in and there was smoke in that room. We found it and opened up that door, and it just burst into flames spontaneous combustion from the wool.

G: From the wool?

M: From the fat in the wool shut in that tight closet—no air, whatever. The minute you opened it up, it got smoking, but it didn't burst into flames. We had a pump in the kitchen sink, so one ran for the pump and we weren't getting ahead of it. So, my father went out and grabbed the pails and threw that sap on it and put it out. If we hadn't come in, ten minutes more the house would have been on fire. Or, if we hadn't smelled the smoke and gone to bed. We were upstairs with one closed-in stairway to get out.

G: What a mess to clean up . . . using maple syrup [actually watery sap] as a fire extinguisher!

M: But the two washtubs of sap saved the place.

G: What about uh, . . . you know, I was interviewing someone here back several months ago that made the comment that there is much more wildlife today than there was back at the turn of the century.

M: Yes. I don't remember as a child much of anything in wildlife—rabbits, things like that. But this was even, since I've been married probably—just before '82—we had barn cats. So, one time we had 16 barn cats. And my mother was getting a little bit perturbed about that, but they were doing their job as far as that goes. And then all of a sudden, after one winter, we didn't have the barn cats. We just had the one house cat. The coyotes got them. That's

the first sign of the coyotes being around. As a youngster—well, teenage youngster, not a real child—we used to hear bear up in across from where the Atwoods used to live, up in there up across from Minard's where you can look across at that farm—they called it 'Eagle Cliff' [Eagles Nest] or something like that. And you could hear the bears up there. There's a den up in there. But it wasn't until the summer of 1982 because I actually saw a bear up there. We were trying to get ready for the auction, and one of the things that we were doing was out in the barn scaffold and my sister and her husband was there and we were loading the old stuff on the scaffolds—a lot of it was chaff and stuff like that—loading it in the truck, and we were taking it, at that time, to the Andover dump. There was an Andover dump—we didn't have one. And when they went across the Flat where you get out to the corner of Sawyer Road, there was a mother bear and two bears went across and I saw them there. And then, two summers ago, when I went up to church just after I turned beyond Sawyer Road in that Flat, a cub went across. So, I've seen them, and Ralph Stevens . . .

G: But as a child?

M: No, not as a child. I don't remember anything . . .

G: What about deer and moose?

M: Deer, yes. No, moose up in there. We used to have deer. None of my brothers hunted here. My brother Leon got to hunt out in Idaho—different things. But they never hunted. Channing never posted his land, but the deer were welcome anytime they were around there. And he had one great big buck, for years and years it used to be around after hunting season because we have an apple tree right near the lawn and Channing would watch for him to see if he had escaped. And it was just a few years before Channing died that he come back and he says, " Well, 'Bloody Ass' is out there!" He'd been hit, and he was all bleeding from his rear end, but he was out there eating the apples. But he recovered and so the next year Channing said, "Old Bloody Ass is out there again." So, he came, and he came right up to the house and ate. The deer never bothered our crops. We used to have a lot of trouble with racoons. We used to have people who could hunt racoons come in.

G: Of course, one of the reasons why you probably didn't have as much wildlife is that there was much more land that was cleared.

M: Yes, that's true. We always had a dog. Sometimes they were good dogs and sometimes they weren't good dogs. But I mean, basically, most of these dogs were good. We had one dog that always went and got the cows. We had one dog that never stayed home, and she was a big collie, too. But she had a boyfriend over at Camp Wilmot, and they'd go off together, and she was killed over in South Danbury by the train.

G: Well, it's time to bring this interview to a final close. And I want to thank you very much for your time, Mildred.

M: Well, I don't know if I've added anything, but then, it's fun to think about it, anyway.

G: Well, thank you very much.

M: Okay.