

“Green Mountain Chronicles”
Oral History Transcriptions, 1981-1989 (bulk: 1987-1988)
MSA 199 & 200

Introduction

This transcription is one of approximately 42 transcriptions of interviews with individuals conducted primarily in 1987 and 1988 in preparation for a radio program sponsored by the Vermont Historical Society entitled “Green Mountain Chronicles.”

Scope and Content

The transcriptions in this collection represent interviews of approximately 42 individuals conducted primarily in 1987 and 1988 by Mark Greenberg, Mary Kasamatsu, Eleanor Ott, and Tom Davis in preparation for a radio series entitled “Green Mountain Chronicles.” The series of 52 five-minute programs was broadcast by commercial and public radio stations throughout the state in late 1988 and early 1989. The earliest interview in the collection was conducted in 1981; the latest was in 1989.

The interviewers spoke with well known Vermonters such as Governors Philip Hoff, Deane Davis, and Madeleine Kunin; lesser known personalities such as Catherine Robbins Clifford, one of the first women to hike the entire length of the Long Trail; and historians such as Weston Cate. The following inventory of the collection highlights the major theme(s) of each interview. The following list of program tapes gives the title of each radio program.

The goal of the radio series was to tell the history of Vermont in the twentieth century using archival sound recordings and recent interviews. The project was undertaken by the VHS in celebration of its 150th anniversary in 1988 and was funded by a \$14,000 grant from the Vermont Council on the Humanities and Public Issues with additional support from New England Telephone Company.

MSA 199, Folder 0 contains background information on the project. The VHS website at www.vermonthistory.org/gmchronicles contains a list of the Green Mountain Chronicles radio broadcasts and audio files of those broadcasts.

Kenneth Bessett, Sr.
October 21, 1987

Interviewer
Mary Kasamatsu

MK I am with Mr. Kenneth Bessett in Williston. Did I pronounce your name correctly?

KB Yea.

MK This is a Green Mountain Chronicles interview. And we are going to talk about automobiles, street cars and maybe buses and all kinds of things. You have a wonderful story about your first encounter with an automobile.

KB The first time I remember seeing a car of course I didn't know what it was. We lived on a farm down in Shelburne, right on the lake shore right where the beach is now. I was out playing in the barnyard there around the watering trough. We had all kinds of animals on the farm there; horses, cows and sheep. They all made different noises but I looked up and I could hear an animal coming down the road there and there was a man riding him. It was making a funnier noise than any that we had on the farm. I didn't know what the animal was and when he got down to our driveway, he turned in. Well it scared me, so I ran to the barn and looked out the window and to see what was going on and this man road the animal right up to the watering trough and he hollered for my dad to get a milk pail. So my dad went running out with a milk pail and they started dipping water out of the watering trough and pouring it down this animal's throat. I thought it was a pretty stubborn animal. They had it right up to the watering trough but it wouldn't drink. They had to pour it down its' throat. I found out some time later that animal is called an automobile. Of course that was the first time I had ever seen one.

MK How old were you?

KB I was probably between 2 and 4. It was around 1909 probably. It may have been 1910, somewhere along in there. But that was my first encounter with a car.

MK That's great. That is a powerful memory for a little kid too.

KB Well it's funny you know how some things you can remember. Now the house that we lived in at that time was on the lake side of the road. They moved the L part over to the other side. Now they moved it with one mule and two men. Now it is a big building; a two story building. That's all they had there was those two men and a mule. They had one of these; they used to call them niggerhead winches where the mule gets on a long pole and goes around and around. They had long pieces of trees that they cut you know probably 4" in diameter and they put those under the building and just

kept moving it slowly until they moved it upon the foundation. It seems funny how today they have so much equipment when they move a building like that. In those days they had hardly anything, yet they moved it. But on that house where we lived, as I said it was on the lake shore side. We had what they called a bay window which is what we call picture windows today where we looked right out onto the lake. Anytime of day or night there was steamships going up and down the lake. Of course the railroads were already in. The railroads came in around 1840. But the steamboats were on the lake long before that. And probably you know that Champlain Transportation is the oldest steamship company in the world. They are still running. It used to be interesting to watch the tugboats go down. Of course Burlington was a great lumber port. There used to be these tugboats going down, but I noticed on the Mississippi they push them. But up on this lake, they used to pull the barges. When I was a little kid, I remember looking out on the lake and see like a woman doing her washing out there on one of the tugs. She had lines hung up and kids running all over. I used to think what a great life that was. Just sittin on those boats riding around the lake.

MK Did you ever get a tugboat ride?

KB No I never got a tugboat. Dad had what they used to call them launches in those days. It is a one cylinder boat. We used to ride on that quite a bit and well I fell off a milk wagon one time with a scar on the side of my face and a bunch came out there. Of course that was the horse and buggy days. It was pretty good ride from Shelburne into Burlington. I had to come up to the doctors a couple times a week. So when the weather was good, dad would take the launch and we'd come up that night. We would land at the foot of King St. It used to be Shiot's Boat Palace at that time. Shiot's is still in business today. Although they are not down on the lake front where they were. The doctor was where well almost where the Raddison Hotel is today. I remember it was a big brown house. It was dark in there. I still remember where we would have to go up there. Once in awhile we would get up there and the wind would come up or a storm and dad would have to call the hired man to...well he didn't call our house, because we didn't have a phone, but the next neighbor did and tell the hired man to go up to Shelburne to meet us and we would go back on the train and a few days later, they would come up and get the boat.

MK What's the first kind you remember having in your family?

KB Well dad had a around 1913, I think it was a 1913 Ford Model T of course. That had the big brass rods that come down near the headlights up to the top. That was the first one that dad had. The first one I had was a Saxon. It was a fairly small car. It had a cloth top of course. That was back before they had sedans anyways. It had a cloth top on it and the top looked bigger than the car did. I was working at a creamery down in Vergennes at that time and this farmer had it. Gee I wanted it but he wanted to trade it for a cow and I didn't have a cow. He didn't want the cash, he wanted a cow. I had an uncle who lived up in North Ferrisburg. He knew of a guy who had a kid that wanted a bicycle and I had a bicycle and this guy had a cow. So my uncle took my bicycle and swapped it for the cow and I went up North Ferrisburg and I led the cow from North Ferrisburg down to Panton where the car was and traded it for the car and drove it home. As I said, it was quite a small car and it had two speeds, slow and slower. They didn't make to many of them. I was out in Michigan a couple of years ago when I saw one in the museum out there. And I think it was 16,000 was all they built of those. When I saw that one out there, it looked exactly like the one I had. But that was my first car.

MK That's great. You couldn't buy a car that way now, could you?

KB No. I don't know, cows are pretty high too.

MK Certainly not the price of a bicycle anyway. That's great.

KB Back during the war, World War II, of course they needed the metal and lots of those old antique cars, they just junked them you know. It cleaned them up of course. It made the antique cars more expensive because there were so few of them left. But boy I remember some of those old cars. Boy they were real nice. I made a list the other morning when I went on that program. I could recall about 50 some odd cars that were sold in Burlington when I was a kid. All the car dealers were within probably a block or so of Church Street. Of course they didn't take in used cars at that time. When you bought a car, it was yours. That was it. You got rid of it any way you could. You never took it and traded it back in. The agents at that time; they sold out of a catalog. They'd get a catalog from we will say like the Cadillac Company and they would show you a picture of it. They had one car that they would take you out and give you a ride in it. You could see how it went and then if you wanted one, you'd look through the catalog and pick

out the car you'd like and you ordered it. Then in a few months you'd get it. So they didn't have used car lots or anything like that. But after World War II everybody seemed to be into building cars. If you run a bicycle shop or blacksmith shop or whatever it was, you went into business of trying to build a car. As I said I could count about around 50 cars around Burlington. Different makes of cars at that time were made by different companies. There was one made here in Vermont. The Wasp was made down in Bennington. Probably you have heard of that one. They didn't only make a few of those. They were sold to the actors and actresses. Douglas Fairbanks the old Senior and Mary Pickford and those used to have Wasps. The Vermonters that didn't have money enough to buy them, were jealous of them, they all had these little sayings at that time like "When Better Cars are Built, Buick Will Build Them". When Packard asks the man who owns one and the Vermonters who didn't have enough money to buy one of these Wasps you see "Buy A Wasp and Get Stung". Then there was another car made over in Plattsburgh. A Lauzon I think was the name of that one. There was only a few of those made.

MK They were luxury cars then?

KB Yea, yea.

MK You said after World War II.

KB World War II. No no no, I'm sorry, I'm sorry World War I.

MK Okay, okay.

KB Yea, World War I. Before that, there weren't to many cars around. But after World War I, then everybody seemed to be making cars. Then they began to get real plentiful.

MK It must have also depended on getting more paved roads before they could have...

KB Yea.

MK ...before they could really use cars.

KB Yea, see when I first started driving bus, they didn't plow the roads then and what little plowing was down, we had to do our own. The Bus Company had to plow their own roads if they wanted any plowed. And Mr. Jewett was telling me that; I got some pictures of it I could show you one if you wanted to see them. They took one of the buses and put a plow on the front of the bus and then they hooked

another bus to it like a trailer hitch and the back bus would push the front bus and with the two of them they could push through the roads and they'd clear the roads. But then, I think it was Middlesex, they put up a kick because the sleds couldn't run on the roads with the teams because he plowed the snow down so close that farmers were having trouble driving their sleds over the roads so they stopped him from plowing. But that don't seem like very far back to me, but...

MK It must be.

KB The first few winters that we drove as I said, the roads weren't plowed. The towns were supposed to plow the roads not the state at that time. The towns didn't have money enough and didn't have the equipment so they just didn't plow them. And like coming from Burlington down here at Tafts Corners, it used to drift heavy right in where that horse farm is and we used to go from Tafts Corners we'd go north into that field and we would follow that field down till they come to where that ledge was and then we'd come back into the road. There is a number of places like down in Middlebury, out of Vergennes on the New Haven Road, we used to go out of the road down there and you would follow it way up until you see some woods over on it would be the east side of the road, quite a ways back into the field. We used to follow those woods down in the wintertime because the road would be drifted so much you couldn't go down through the road. Of course they didn't have snow fences either at that time, so the road, so the snow would drift into the roads.

MK So you would use the...get off the roads and go...

KB In through the fields. We would follow the drifts around wherever there was the least amount of snow. They used to send, we call them shovelers, along with us. Like if we got a heavy snow storm, they would put three or four men on with shovels to go along with us to help us shovel to break roads through. It was funny, you never cancelled a trip then. It didn't make any difference how bad the storm. They would say the road is all blocked between Williston and Burlington. That didn't make any difference. You put ??? and start out just the same. Of course we had a big advantage then because people weren't insurance conscious. If a bus slid off in a ditch, instead of suing you, everybody would get out and help me push the bus back in the road. But of course, they can't do that today. Now it is a little slipperier and the conditions are bad. They just leave the buses in the

garage. They can't take them out on the account of the insurance on them.

MK As I hear stories like that, it makes me think that in many ways perhaps we have lost something in this modern way of living.

KB Oh yea. Everybody was much friendlier then. You didn't have to fear anybody. Everybody seemed like they were your friends. If you got in trouble, they were going to help you, they weren't going to hurt you. But of course when people get more people around, why they get where they are not so friendly.

MK Do you think that is why? That...

KB I think so. I think there is more people around and you don't have that closeness that you had when there was only a few people around. Everybody knew everybody and you didn't want to do anything bad, because everybody would know about it. Back in the early '20's, I was working down in North Carolina one winter and they got the first snowstorm down there they had had in 18 years or something like that. The first time they had seen snow. It was a pretty good storm. They probably got a couple of inches. So they closed all the stores and the schools and everything. At night when the train; I forgot the name of the fast train that ran from New York to Florida, everybody got down to the railroad station and made snowballs. Threw snowballs at the train when it went through. It was a big deal to them.

MK Snow can do that for you.

KB Yea.

MK That's great. You also had another really interesting story about the first time you drove.

KB Oh yea. My dad has this Samson truck. That is a powerful name, but it wasn't a very powerful truck. He used to haul milk for the; there used to be a company A. R. White & Son on Battery St., an ice cream company and he had a deli store up on Church St. They had to bring the milk in from Shelburne. So dad used to go down to Shelburne in the morning to get the milk and his truck would hold, it seemed big at that time, but it would only hold probably 5 or 6 cans of milk. We used to start out of Burlington and down where the Sears store is now, that used to be a long grade going down through there. It has all been filled in now. Down at the foot was Potash Brook.

There is a little wooden bridge across that brook. On the south side of the hill was quite steep. It was quite a climb to get up that other side of the hill. It was short but steep. Then when we got to Shelburne Village, there used to be an old covered bridge there. We would go through the covered bridge and that hill wasn't to bad. It was quite similar to the way it is today. Then when we'd get down to the farm where we used to get the milk, it was the first farm the other side of where that vegetable stand is today. That road is level through there now, but it wasn't at that time. There is a little brook, if you look when you go by there, you will see there is a brook down in there. We used to go down the hill to the brook. And that was the same way up the other side was short, but real steep. Of course the car, the truck had solid rubber tires on, so if it rained just a little, you couldn't get anywhere with it. If it was raining, the farmer would come down with his horse and hook on to the truck and drag it up into the yard, put the milk in and then turn us around in the barnyard and start us back out for Burlington. But coming back it wasn't to bad. The hills coming north were fairly easy to get over. Then he used to deliver for the Vermont Fruit Company too which was right next door to White's. Like we would start out of here in the morning and well when we would get over near Waterbury, dad would stop for a lunch. There was a lunch cart there. It wasn't a diner, it was a lunch cart. It was a building built on a wagon. You had quite a long stop, it seemed like long in those days because the wagons are quite high. You'd walk up the steps into this wagon and it would hold probably 4 people. You could have any kind of sandwich you wanted as long as it was egg. That's all they had. We would get an egg sandwich and a bottle of moxie. Of course Coke hadn't come in yet and we would drink our Coke, our Moxie and eat our egg sandwich and that would hold us until we got to Montpelier. And coming back, I had an aunt and uncle who lived in Richmond and quite often we'd stop there for supper at night. We stayed there a little late and it was dark. The car had presto lights on it or carbon lights. It was a little square box on the running board and it looked like white rocks in it. You'd pour a glass of water on the carbon and it would form a gas. Put the cover down and clamp the cover on and this gas would come through the pipeline up to the headlights and then you'd light them with a match like a candle and it would give not much more light than a candle would and that's what we had to come into Burlington. This hill here, French Hill, the

big bugaboo there. That was real steep and right down in low gear, it was just nick and tuck whether we were going to get over it or not. That little house over there used to be a log cabin. It's mine now. Dad used to lean on his steering wheel trying to help the truck up the hill and he'd keep saying "If we can make it to the log cabin, we'll be alright". But we always did get over it alright.

MK That must have been a slow trip coming back, virtually by candlelight.

KB Yea, you couldn't see very far ahead of you. I know there used to be a guy down just this side of the bridge, he's retarded. He used to take his wheelbarrow and there is daisies all around his place. Where the cabins are now; you look right back of the cabins, you'll see a ledge. His house used to set up on the ledge there. He lived with his mother. He used to take a wheelbarrow and he would go way out to Bolton and he'd pick one daisy and put it in his wheelbarrow and he would come way back here and sit up on that ledge and he'd say "She Loves Me, She Loves Me Not, She Loves Me, She Loves Not." The next day, he would go back and get another one. Quite often it would be dark when we'd get near there and we'd pick him up somewhere before he got home and give him a ride back in. Dad would put the wheelbarrow in the back end of the truck. I remember one night Dad says the truck would probably go 12 - 14 mph, probably about the same as a garden tractor would today. He was saying how fast we were going this fellow. Dad said "I could go faster if I had somebody to watch the road for me". This guy says "I'll watch the road" and he got down on his knees and hung onto dad because there is no windshield on it. He hung onto to dad and would say "Let her go, let her go, hold up, hold up. Let her go, let her go, hold up". Of course dad wasn't paying any attention to him. He would guide dad all the way back home from Bolton.

MK Oh it's amazing. How old were you the first time you drove a vehicle?

KB Oh it would be probably 1912. I was born in 1906, so I was 6 years old.

MK How did that come about?

KB Well, I got in trouble on that one. On that Samson truck dad had, he used to let me sit on his lap and steer it. The shifting lever was a long, looked like a crow bar on

the outside of the seat and by sitting on his lap I could steer it and I could reach the pedals. I could shift it. It was a street bar shift. So I used to sit on his lap and drive it down and drive it back. This particular day the truck was in the yard. Well it was quite a curiosity in those days because there wasn't too many trucks around and a bunch of kids came in the yard looking it over and they said, "Can you drive it". I said, "Oh sure". They said, "Well take us for a ride". I said, "I can't, I can't start it". Of course you had to crank it in those days. They started with a mag then. They didn't have batteries in them. So the switch was always on. When you stopped it, you would push in and ground it and ground your motor out and it would stop. But the minute you take your finger off the button, the switch is on again. So one of the bigger kids there, he says, "Well I can crank it". So he pulled up on it and it started. So the kids piled in and I put it in gear. I started across our lawn, but of course I didn't have dad to lean back against and I couldn't reach the pedals and it got out of control with me and went across our back yard, through our garden. And we had a neighbor. She had a beautiful garden, but a miserable temper. I plowed through her garden and tore that all up and it finally stalled. That was my first attempt to drive it alone.

MK What happened to you after that?

KB I was grounded for quite awhile.

MK How many 6 years olds attempt to drive?

KB But the first time I drove on the highway alone, it was oh I must have been oh I don't know probably 8 or 10 years old; 10 probably 10 years old. There was a funeral and they had a Rickinbacher. There wasn't anybody that knew how to drive. They wanted a car in the funeral so I knew how to drive so they asked me. I was just a little kid, but they asked me if I would drive it so I drove it alone. That was the first time I drove alone on the road. Of course they didn't bother much with licenses in those days. I remember that Saxon that I had. I used to take it to Vergennes on Saturday night and the motor vehicle man was John Harrington. He always called me Johnny. He would say "Johnny if you are going to drive that in, you got to get it registered". I didn't have any plates on it. I would say, "No I just had to come in today and I don't drive it only once in awhile". Well he said, "If you are going to drive it in" he says, "you will have to get it registered." He'd say the same thing

to me about every Saturday night. I never did at that time get it registered at that time.

MK When did they start being strict about registration laws and traffic laws?

KB After, god I don't know. They started testing them in the late teens early '20's when you had to take a test to get a license. Before that I guess just somebody, my ??? did, just recommended I guess then you got your license. You just tell them you could drive.

MK You didn't have to prove it. You didn't have to show them you really did. Interesting. What about, do you remember ever using any early road maps or guidebooks or...

KB No. See there wasn't any marks on the road in those days. If you were going from here to well we will say to Bennington, you'd go from Burlington to Shelburne. Take the Shelburne Road and when you got down there, you'd take the road from Shelburne to Vergennes. Then when you got to Vergennes, you'd take the road to Middlebury. From Middlebury you would take the road to Brandon or wherever it was. That's the way you...there was no numbers on the roads and no markings. The open road wasn't to bad like if you started from Burlington going to Vergennes. Once you started, all you had to do was watch out for your towns. Most of the towns are small, so you go straight through them. But you hit a city and there was no markings in the city. You would ask one guy how to go and he'd send you one way and then you ask the next one and he'd send you back the other way. It was quite a job getting through cities. But it wasn't even in the early '20's, the cities didn't have any markers.

MK So other than when you got to a city, it was pretty obvious that it was like the only way to go. That's interesting. Someone was telling me that there were no road maps as such. They didn't really exist.

KB No they didn't have any. The gas companies first started out with road maps. Of course there used to be lots of filling stations back in those days. Lots more than there is today. Now one station serves quite a territory. But back in those days, it seems that every little ways there was a gas station.

MK Did you need one every little ways? Did you have to fill up very often?

KB No, but probably cars didn't run that far. Most of the ones that sold gas were a garage or a blacksmith shop or something

like that where you might need some help. They used to I imagine some of those old cars used to get 10 to 12 miles on a gallon which in those days... Of course another thing you would travel slow. It seems like the Model T's were the last then would go probably 35 mph. Ever on a good downhill swing you probably would get a little more than that but the average speed was probably only around 20 - 25 mph. I was driving for the telephone company and the governor on that truck was set at 17 mph. We were over in Montpelier working one time and we were coming back into Burlington and the boss said set the governor up a little so we can see if we can make better time going back into Burlington. So we set it up to 19 mph and the motor burned out before we got to Burlington. So they just didn't really travel very fast. So when we kick about the 55 mph speed limit, it didn't bother in those days. Well even during the war, during World War II, the buses were only allowed 35 mph. That's not too long ago. I took Burlington High, well we had 5 buses. They were invited, the Burlington High Band was invited to play at the World's Fair in 1939 - 1940. This was in '40. As I said we had 5 buses. They didn't want us to drive over 35 mph, so the State of Vermont sent two troopers to escort us all the way down through Vermont. When we got into Massachusetts we had some troopers down there to escort us through Connecticut. But the Connecticut guys they opened us right up. They didn't quite hold us at 35. They made us run about as fast as we could drive. But up here, they held us right at 35 mph.

MK How long did that take to go 35 mph all the way down?

KB We left early in the morning. We got in there. Oh no we didn't. We went through Boston first. Then we went from Boston into New York. It wasn't straight through. So it took us two days.

MK When did you begin working for the bus company?

KB I started in December 1929. I started in, it was a big snow storm that night. I woke up in the morning long before daylight and I could hear a motor humming outside on the street in front of our house. I looked out and there was a bus in the ditch. I lived on Flynn Avenue down in Burlington at that time. Of course it wasn't Flynn Avenue at that time. It was, I forgot the name of the street now, but the name was changed later. Anyway this bus was in the ditch. Somebody rapped on the door and they said they want you right up to the bus company. Well the guy that was superintendent of the bus company used to demonstrate the Dodge trucks. My dad was foreman for the real people and I used to go out and demonstrate

the real truck. So he knew I could drive. So he called me up and had me come up. So I went up and he just asked me if I knew the route around the north end loop, that local line here and I said no. So he sent one of the drivers with me to show me where to go and that's all the breaking in I had. About 20 minutes and I was on my own. Then from then on, this Mr. Hasloff was superintendent of the company. The one that I used to demonstrate trucks with. Of course he knew I could drive and I was a mechanic as well as a driver so he used to keep me around with him most of the time. Sometimes I was in the shop working. Sometimes I was doing carpenter work. Sometimes I was on the buses, but he kept me jumping around all the time. In fact the whole 50 years that I was with the company, I was jumping around. The last 8 years I was on tours. I was a tour guide and escort. The tours run from Nova Scotia to Florida. So I never was on just one job and stayed there.

MK That's probably why you liked it enough to stay 50 years.

KB Yea. How they put up with me, I don't know. I used to tell them because I just didn't fit in anywhere. They kept shoving me other places to try to find some job that I would fit into that I never did.

MK That's interesting though. You said you demonstrated cars for awhile.

KB Trucks.

MK Trucks

KB Yea. See my dad always had trucks and when I was a little kid I used to drive his trucks. So like when the real people were selling trucks, I wasn't working for them. But if they had somebody wanted a demonstration on a truck they didn't want to send a salesman out because I had had more experience to send me out. Of course back in those days, they used to put them in the mud holes you know and see if they could pull them out of the mud. So it would take somebody that has had a little experience. So they used to send me out with it. Yea.

MK Did you ever get involved in having to teach people how to drive.

KB Well for about 5 years I was chief dispatcher for the bus company at that time. I did the hiring. Then I had to break the drivers in. Of course most of them know how to drive. But you had to break them in on the buses. But that's the only...

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MK Driving a bus must be a lot different than...

KB No it isn't.

MK Really.

KB Very simple.

MK Does it have a lot more gears?

KB Yea, you got more gears. But whether you got 3, 4, or 5, you just go from one to the other anyways. The length of a bus after you get used to it, it isn't any different than a car. You get used to where a car is. It is the same way with women. Women can drive a bus just as well as a man can. ??? they got power steering on them now. So they steer easy. Your brake is an air brake. All you do when you push a pedal down is this, opening a valve. There is no pressure there or anything. You just push. All you got is the pressure of the spring that is holding the pedal. When I was driving, I weighed only 118. One time there was 4 days between Montpelier and Barre. I was the only one that got through and yet we had guys that weighed over 200. They were driving opposite me and couldn't get through. So it didn't take strength. It was just knowing how. So a woman can drive a bus just as well as a man can.

MK Quite a few do now.

KB Oh yea yea. Vermont Transit hired a few women. But they thought all they had to do was drive. But you see you come out of Albany in the morning. You probably have a ton of papers on there to deliver. You come and juggle those papers all the way from there to Burlington. You have to be pretty rugged to do it. Of course school buses now all you have is the kids to contend with. You don't have any physical.

MK You just have to have your nerves intact for the school buses.

KB I got a daughter. She has been driving school bus for 12 - 15 years I guess. She drove here for 7 or 8 years. She is driving down in Florida now.

MK So it runs in the family.

KB Yea.

MK Before we turn the tape on we talked just a little bit. You said you were there when they celebrated I guess, if that is the word, celebrated the end of the era with the trolleys.

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KP Yea, yea.

MK Tell me about that? I only read a very sketchy account. It sounds like it must have been a phenomena' thing to see. Why did the trolleys come to an end first of all?

KB The trolleys, well to begin with of course they had the horse cars first because they found out the smoother the surface was the easier it was for a vehicle to run. So when they had the horse it always seemed funny to me they say, trying to say that man has been on earth for millions of years and yet right up until my grandfather's time, foot power was the only way of transportation over land. Over water of course they ???, but on land everything was foot power. Either yours or that of an animal like a horse or donkey, camel or something like that. So when they started putting rails down and they were running wagons on the rails in the bigger cities they could haul bigger loads. They could haul more people, so they started with the horse cars. Then of course it was a Vermonter that invented the electric motor of course, Thomas Davenport there. Probably you know the story on that.

MK Yes I do, but go ahead tell me anyway.

KB He went over to a fair at Port Henry, New York and they just discovered how the magnet would work if they wound a piece of wire around a piece of metal and run current through it, it would attract another piece of metal to it. It would stick to it. They had no use for it except it was a great curiosity. Davenport went back to his blacksmith shop in Forestdale. He was working for a guy named Warren Smalley. Smalley was the one that owned the Blacksmith shop. He got a piece of wire, but he didn't have any insulation, so he took his wife's wedding gown and stripped that down and made the covering for his wire and he figured that if a magnet would draw one piece of metal, if they set it off center, one would draw the other and the first thing you knew it would revolve and you would have a motor. So he tried it out and it did work. So he got the patent on it. So that's where the electric motor came from. We would be pretty tough today without the electric motor. Everything in our house, our refrigerator, furnace, everything runs on electric motor today. Well electric street cars they shifted from horses onto electric motors. Burlington put in the electric motors in electric cars. So the first cars electric cars they had...they had a big celebration when they put the electric cars on. So they came down Church Street. They had people marching along side of the new street car and they had flowers draped all over it. Then they had this bunting you know that colored cloth there wrapped all around the car. Everything

was swankey. They got it down the foot of Church Street over in front of where the Flynn Theater is now in front of City Hall Park and the whole city turned out to see the new street car. They had the Burlington Military Band there that was playing for the big celebration. And all the big politicians were making speeches while the band played there. But at the end, the street cars got awful sloppy and the help got awful well they were very arrogant. They seemed to enjoy telling people off. The cars were dirty. So Appleyard, Mr. Appleyard was the one that started the bus lines. He applied for a franchise to run a couple loops around the city and the street cars running north and south. Well they turned him down. They wouldn't let him have a franchise because John J. Flynn who owned the street cars was a big politician and whatever he said went. So Appleyard couldn't get a franchise, but he bought the buses just the same. He bought two buses. The first one; there is a little story about that first bus. The bus terminal where the buses used to come in was right across from his garage. The first station is on Winooski Avenue today. He saw all these dilapidated buses over there. Most of them were all homemade. There were some where they would take a car and build a wooden body on it so it could carry more passengers. He had the Dodge Agency so he figured if he could get one of those brand new Dodge buses that just came out, that the men would jump for it. But he wasn't familiar with the Vermonters. They were interested in making money not driving new buses. So he had the bus stuck on his hands. He couldn't sell it. He met John J. Flynn on the street and he said to Flynn, "Why don't you do away with some of those old racketty street cars you got and put a nice new bus on", and Flynn said "If you think so damned much of those buses, why don't you put them on". He said "Well I think I will". So he applied for the franchise. Of course they turned him down because Flynn went against him. He bought another one. He had two. He put them right on the runs he applied for and they wouldn't give him the franchise. Now he couldn't carry passengers for hire, but there wasn't any law this side of hell that said he couldn't carry passengers if he wanted to. It was his bus and he was putting the gas in them. So he bought uniforms for the drivers. He made them run right on a strict schedule all the time. The big argument the street cars had of course they had a conductor and motorman on the street cars and they couldn't keep on time. They said if a man had to collect fares and drive a bus too, that he never could keep on time. So Appleyard made those drivers keep right on the split second all the time on the schedules. They would go by a peoples house up on the hill where of course there wasn't any service and the people would see them

downstreet and would come and say well isn't this the bus that goes by my house up on Prospect Street. The driver would say yes. They would say how much is the fair. Well I am sorry the public service don't allow us to carry passengers, but I will give you a free ride home if you would like. After a few months of that, people got so stirred up over it that they demanded that public service give him a franchise. So they finally gave him a franchise to run. But it was a temporary franchise because they still figured that he couldn't keep on schedule. Well just before the temporary franchise was over with, a guy named Ray Borrow was driving one of them and it was a Dodge, a 4 cylinder Dodge and the coil was on the dash and the water was running down. It was raining that night, the water ran down the dash and got on the coil and shorted it out. The bus stopped right on the tracks. This was around midnight. The motorman hollered back to the conductor and said gee there is one of Appleyard's buses right on the rails. The conductor said ram it. He said no I wouldn't dare. The conductor said let me take it, I just as soon hit it. So the motorman stepped back and the conductor took it. He began to ring the bell and ??? one side. There wasn't any passengers on the bus. They rammed it right broad side. Then the old street cars and then of course came on the buses afterwards. It tickled me to hear them tell about the big celebration they had the night that they hit the bus. They figured they put Appleyard out of business because they crippled the street car and the bus both. But Appleyard got all the cabinet makers and men that he could get down to the garage at night. At that time it was on St. Paul's Street right where the high rise is. He got all the men he could get down there and they tore the body apart and rebuilt the body. Of course they were wooden frames in those days. They rebuilt it and put the seats back in it. At 5:00 that morning they put it right back on the line. Then he came out with a big add in the paper that through the carelessness of the street car operator, although they could see the bus a long ways ahead, he couldn't keep the car under control. He ran the street car into the bus. Anybody that was interested and in just a few hours they had the bus back in service for anybody that was interested go up and take a look and see what the street car looked like. It really didn't hurt him any. It helped him. But I now I forgot what I started to tell you. I get off on the...side tracked here.

AK So that's really the...

KB That's when the street cars as I said began to get pretty shabby. Before they got through, Appleyard bought the street cars out. Then he took them off and he put buses on. So

the last street car to run in Burlington. He did the same thing as the first street car. He came down Church Street with it all decked up with flowers like a funeral. It was draped in black instead of all this colored bunting. Then the people instead of ??? were all dressed in black while marching along side of the car like a funeral procession. The street car came down the same route, down Church Street, down in front of the Flynn Theater. When they got there, they had a big crowd was waiting. I have got some pictures. I can show you the pictures of it. They had the big crowd waiting there and then instead of the Burlington Band playing they had a bugler from Ft. Ethan Allen, way up the far end of the park he blew taps while they set the street car on fire and burned it. That was the end of the street cars in Burlington.

MK I would love to see those pictures. Sure go ahead.

KB It will take a few minutes.

MK Sure I will turn this off.

KB ...trip they had. Pastor started asking me questions about this. I thought I knew that territory good. But I was able to answer about one out of every ten questions they asked me. So I decided I didn't know so much as I thought I did. I had quite a long layover down in Rutland, so I used to run up to the library and look up questions they would stick me on. The only trouble is they never asked me that one again. They always asked me a different one. So when I began to link the towns together, then it began to get interesting. From then on I ran a sightseeing trip around the lake at one time. ??? that time was mostly teachers. Because they are the only ones that had time off in the summertime. So before I went on the trip, I took my car and went over there and went through all the towns that I was going through with the bus and every name that looked a little odd or something, I would try to find out where the name came from and I would try to get all the history I could. So the first morning I started out with passengers boy did they pin my ears back. Everything I said, they said I was wrong. Like the Battle of Plattsburgh, I set there with a history book and a picture of each ship where they were so I would have it down clear you know where the different boats were located. When I tried to tell them, the teachers said oh gee I was all wrong. God I go back and read it over and hang I was right. After awhile I see historians don't agree with each other. After awhile ??? to the history they were reading was different than the one I was reading and after a few months I could tell the minute they would start giving me an argument

I could tell them which history they were reading. I would say you are reading Hemingway and I'm talking Tompson or whatever it was. It got pretty interesting then.

MK I guess it would. That's great. That's fascinating. It is amazing I know when I first went over to the Shelburne Museum and saw some of the old...I guess they had a snow roller. That's the first time I had seen a snow roller. It made me think about transportation in a whole new light. It just never occurred to me the first time someone said to me we packed down the snow. We didn't plow it, we packed it down.

KB Those rollers were awful though in the spring when it began to thaw. Because you would have probably 16 - 18 inches of packed snow and it would soften up and your wheels would go right down through it. It was awful.

MK What did the people do? Did you just basically stop for period of few weeks until it dried up?

KB Of course with cars, you couldn't get through with cars. If you had a team, why you a team could get through. My dad when we were on the farm...what they used to do was take regular ??? board plow. The same as you plow the ground with. We would put that in front of what they call a pung. It is just a single sled with two runners on it. They would put that plow right in front of the pung. The horse would draw that and they would push ??? over. They would turn and come back the other way. Then you had a place for each horse to walk in. I wrote an article for the I think it was the Chittenden County Historical Society. They wanted to know if anybody could remember what a kitchen tunk was. It is funny I just wrote an article on that for the bus story I was writing. So I gave it to them. They printed it.

Talking

FB You know when I retired I had lots of things I was going to do.

MK I have been interviewing some people about the 1927 flood and I have been particularly been talking to people in Waterbury.

KB Oh yea, they hit it bad there.

MK Yea. Do you remember...were you involved in any driving that went on going between Burlington and Waterbury after the flood.

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KB No. I worked on the telephone line right after the flood when we tried to put the line back through, but I wasn't driving at that time.

MK I just wondered because they had I guess at Christmas time, Thanksgiving and Christmas time they had meals brought in from Burlington to feed everybody.

KB Yea, yea. We started out, but we couldn't really use the trucks or anything. We had to carry the wire on our backs. And all our tools we had to carry. We had two guys from Newfoundland. When they first came down here, they had never seen a car before. They lived in some fishing village up in Newfoundland somewhere. I gave them their first ride. This house down the foot of the hill here, there were some people in there trying to get out. I wasn't with them at that time. They were trying to get out and two or three boats tried to get to them, but the current was so swift and when they would get near the house, the current would wash the boat right around. One of these guys from up in Newfoundland there he said let me take that bloody boat and get it up there. He road it right up there. He said there was nothing to it. Of course they have always spent all their life on water you know. But they wouldn't eat donuts. One of them wouldn't. When we got over near Bolton; we were walking all the time because there were no roads and bridges were all out and there was a Red Cross Station set up along the way. They had donuts and coffee. He wouldn't eat a donut. The boys would tell him, well stick them in your pocket, we will eat them. But I noticed we would be walking along and Gideon his name was, he would drop back of us and you would see him reach in his pocket and break off a piece and start eating it.

MK He discovered they weren't so bad.

KB If you get hungry enough, they taste alright.

MK Thank you so much.

KB Well your welcome.

MK Thank you for your time to talk with me. I know that there are a lot more things that you could talk about. It has been really ...

KB Yea, my wife says I talk too much.

MK Oh heh! I have enjoyed it. No I am really glad to have had a chance to meet you.

KB I am awful glad to have met you.