

“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.

Roy Buxton
March 14, 1988

Mary Kasamatsu
Interviewer

- MK I'm with Mr. Roy Buxton and this is the 14th of March, 1988. This is an interview for the Green Mountain Chronicles. Let's just begin with the 1927 flood. Now you were working in Mechanicsville, New York.
- RB That's right. Yes. And the season was about done and we'd been home previous and we'd borrowed a family car, so we did have an automobile and on the Thursday, the 3rd, the 3rd of November, we, work was outdoors and we were unable to work but we were getting information about the storm and in Vermont in particular, so we arranged on the Friday morning to get paid off for our work with some delay and left for home with a Dodge touring car about 10 o'clock.
- MK Could I interrupt you just a moment. Where was home at that point?
- RB Marshfield. Hollister Hill in Marshfield.
- MK Okay and what kind of work, what kind of a place was it where you were employed?
- RB I worked at Torry Hill Sand and Gravel Company.
- MK Okay.
- RB And that was quite seasonal and they were closing down so we begged off and headed for home Friday. We knew the road fairly well but as we got farther North toward Vermont it was evident that it was getting worse and worse and rumors were plentiful and somewhere around Wallingford, we got into Vermont, Bennington and up to Wallingford and we were conscious that there was quite a storm. There were detours and when we oh asked for information one thing and another and I remember one little incident that kind of presented just how serious it might be. I've forgotten what the town was, but it was near Wallingford and the teenager had gone that evening before, that would be Thursday evening to get the family cow and no one knew what happened to the cow, but he spent the night on a little island in the middle of a stream. Well that began to prepare us for the worse you might say. We had to leave Route 7 at Wallingford and we had road map I believe. Anyway we went possibly Route 22A and we did get into Burlington about 3 o'clock just after the bridge had gone out between Burlington and Winooski. And of course that was a big item and we did go over and there was a crowd on both sides of the river, and it was hard to describe just what the river looked like. The falls below the, below the bridge there was almost round right down

through there. It's unbelievable how that looked and they dynamited the building, the gristmill near it to try to enlarge the channel. And, but we it was no thought of going much farther of course and information was very short.

MK Did you try at that point to contact your family? Did the family have a phone at that time?

RB There was no telephone. Burlington was pretty well isolated from the east yea and all around that way. And the thing again that was that concerned us quite a bit. The Chamber of Commerce in Burlington was being becoming the center of for information for people coming there and there was quite a line of course of people in their similar situation but in 1926 the Marshfield reservoir dam was constructed and in '27, sometime in the early summer, they started filling the dam. It was, it was, people knew that. It was an item that everyone was familiar with, but the Chamber of Commerce informed us and we told them where we were, Plainfield and Marshfield and we had folks in both cities there and we were told that if we had relatives in Plainfield and Marshfield to forget them that the dam had burst and that was the cause of the water in the Winooski Valley and it had gullied out the towns and there was little left. Now how they got that information no one seems to know but you can imagine that how we felt when, now our folks were on the farm on the hill but we did have relatives in both villages. We spent the night, Friday night, because it was getting dark, by that time. Saturday of course word of mouth, there was quite a lot of talk going on and they again rumors were pretty wild and it proved later that the only bridge between Montpelier and Lake Champlain was the bridge that the lime kiln was St. Michael's College. Of course that was quite, that was the only connection between North and South for quite a bit of the country and we spent the day Saturday trying to work our way first up the Winooski Valley and then a thing that was very noticeable and thought a lot about a little bit how helpful the people were. Everyone was doing the best they could for you. And the hill roads were not as bad as the valley roads, of course. We worked it for awhile, we must have been in Jericho quite a bit. I do remember one case of a double team loaded with milk, they were trying to get to Jonesville. I really don't know just what roads we were on, but they were in the road in the brook nearby were one in the same and they had the horses down and they was trying to get through down into the Jonesville and Richmond area was what it was. So that would make you think it was in some part of Jericho or in

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Nashville and that area. We ended up right back to into Burlington, we just couldn't get very far.

MK Now were they trying, were authorities or the National Guard or anything like that, were they trying to sort of restrict travel at all?

RB Not, yes, but not at this particular point, and we did come back before dark. We got probably to Pleasant Valley going up toward Cambridge. [Cough, excuse me] But we came back anyway and I was, my younger brother was in UVM and I bunked in with him, and my older brother, who was with me on this trip, he stayed at the YMCA. And he come, he left and he come back later in the evening stating that someone had found a route over Smugglers Notch, then they could get into Waterbury, and they were going to start out the next morning at 6 o'clock and with a caravan of ten or twelve cars and we'd each help the other and we'd see if we could get over the Notch and get farther up the Valley toward home. Well, we were there at the appointed time. It might have been a little late anyway, there was no one there. They had all taken off by twos and threes so this caravan didn't work out. But we enough of the idea where, some help from where they'd made out and we reached Cambridge without too much trouble. We'd already explored some of that area and we'd began to notice then that the farmers were taking their dead cows, things from their barns. And a pair of horses they were just going out of one of the big barns, we were in between Cambridge and Jeffersonville. I think we were able to use the main road, if, with possibly with some detours. But there must have been 50 cows that they had already dragged out into the fields and he was going out with another one and the water had receded enough. And somewhere, somewhere between Jeffersonville and the mountain, we had to cross quite a sizable brook, small culverts, things of that nature, they would improvise. You could bump and jump and get across them a little bit. But this one brook it was quite a, and we again we were alone with nobody, no one seemed to be following us and we didn't catch up with people ahead of us and you could see the tracks and could see evidence of where they had gone through door yards you might say and various places to keep going. But this one, they'd left, they had taken down the fence and gone into a pasture and there was a place where the cow paths, where the cows had crossed the brook and they forded it. Well, it was kind of a one way deal. If we went across there was little chance of getting back. But there were, were tracks of other cars perhaps eight or ten of them had gone through without too much difficulty and so we finally decided that we would try it. And we did, we got across

alright. We had an old set of chains that we'd put on many times. We got, and the day before, we'd go to exploring these country roads. You'd go to the end and you'd turn around. And this business of turning around wasn't always so easy and we got set several times. We didn't want to, we didn't want to risk the chains too much. We didn't know how much we had ahead of us so when it was good going, we'd take them off which wasn't too difficult on the old cars. But anyway when we got into high ground over Smugglers Notch, it wasn't too bad. But we reached Waterbury ~~two o'clock~~. So that was from 6 to 2, getting

MK This was Saturday then?

RB This was Saturday right. And we knew, had friends there in Waterbury and of course that was where the flood was really bad was up that river. So we left the car and decided

MK You found a place to park the car that was not

RB One on Stowe Street on the high part in Waterbury and my brother had worked in Waterbury the year before that, or sometime before that and we didn't know people who left it, but Dr. Steels house there and, or near Dr. Steel's now I'm not sure. It doesn't matter really. But we, I don't know where, I don't remember where, how they'd got there, but there were two reporters from the Knickerbocker Press from New York City that had come to see what they could do. And they were unsure just what to do but we were determined we was going to keep working for home and they asked if they could come along with us, and, of course. So the four of us started out afoot and the bridge, of course, in Waterbury was out right on the south end of Waterbury there and there was no thought of taking the main roads anyway, that's pretty muddy and you could see the evidence of broken houses. Waterbury of course was quite a quite a site. We took the railroad and which wasn't too bad. In many areas, little culverts was washed out. But one, it must have been near Middlesex, that is just east of Middlesex I think would be the largest stream it was completely washed out. The rails held and most of the ties so you had what amounted to a just sort of a big ladder and it did quite a bit and but it was at the low point still eight or ten feet above the water. It was a little questionable whether those ties would all hold or not. But they were boot tracks and I don't think there was any case where you had to hop too far but one at a time we risked going acrossed it and did make of course. But Slip Hill, that's a big place where the railroad was,

we lost a lot of it then, just west of Middlesex. We had to take to the woods there for about a quarter of a mile, but we had quite a few boot tracks where other people had been so that wasn't too much of a trial and error. And now was the National Guard. We got into Montpelier, just after, it was just getting dark and the roads were all torn up, but lo and behold there was a car came along right near the Green Mountain Cemetery there in Montpelier and it was a doctor and he was using what roads were available and streets in Montpelier a little bit and he stopped to-again how helpful people were-and he wanted to know who we were and what we were doing a little bit and he said Montpelier is on the marshall law and do you have passes? Well, of course the Knickerbocker boys there, Knickerbocker Press, they had their passes a little bit. We knew nothing about any passes. But he said I think I can vouch for you and get you into Montpelier but I don't know where you'll be getting out. And of course we were a little desperate. We were doing what we could. Sure enough we were stopped right there at the Green Mountain Cemetery and going into Montpelier, and when you would meet people like that of course you'd pump them for information and well from Waterbury again in Middlesex, we talked with people and there was no mention of Marshfield dam, so we began to discount that as imagination and things weren't quite as bad as they might have been. But this National Guard fellow there that we stopped there told us quite a bit and he didn't know how we might get out of Montpelier. We didn't either. But the, the two fellows from the press stopped at the Pavillion Hotel and we kept on going and it's hard to describe what the city was. It was, there was an earthy damp smell. It's hard to describe. The, just a few lights. All lamps and candles, of course, and we went up East State Street naturally to get to high ground as soon as we could and we were stopped and a little bit of good luck there. This fellow stopped us and it was getting quite dark, but you could see where to walk reasonably well. The rain had pretty much stopped. This would be Sunday now. I don't know as it rained at all Sunday. I think Sunday was a fairly reasonable day. But it was cloudy and dark anyway. And there was a fellow in the middle of the street there and he stopped us and wanted to see out pass. We had no pass. And we'd been previously told at the where you'd get them was closed for the night. We recognized the fellows voice. And after talking with him, and it was considerable talking, too, because we told him who we were and where we'd be going and what the purpose was, but he had his orders and nothing doing. Well he wouldn't, even when we told him who he was and he of course it was putting him on the spot a little bit, and he didn't, he denied knowing us and we simply

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didn't have a pass we wasn't going to go. Well we told him all we had to do was go back down the street a few houses and jump over the fences and we'd circle right by him. But eventually we went out and he told us to get going and we did. And from there we came into again keeping to the hill roads which we were quite well acquainted with.

MK Now was it daylight at this point?

RB Oh this was after dark.

MK After dark.

RB Oh yes.

MK So when you were talking with him you couldn't really see him and he couldn't really see you.

RB No, it was by voice, but we did know him, enough to know who he was. And he admitted it finally, of course, and it had him a bit on the spot. We recognized that, but we got home somewhere around 9 o'clock. The folks had gone to bed as country folks did in them times and mother had, had a habit when we were out late at night and we hadn't got home that she'd put an oil lamp in the window and turn it low. This would be oil lamps, it would light up the steps and a little bit and there was this hall lamp waiting for us and (silence)(clock ticking). We were kind of glad to get home. We got local information. We had the small telephone line, Mollys Falls telephone company, and enough of that was left so we got the neighborhood gossip and we of course we talked quite a bit that night. But then there was the follow-up after that. Word went out of course the Railroad, the Montpelier and Wells River railroad was badly hit. Are you familiar with the Sleeping Lucy place, Montpelier and Barre and around. Well there was word that went out for all the help that they could get working on the railroad. You wish to keep on?

MK Sure.

RB So we before the day was done, we went to Plainfield and of course Plainfield and Marshfield were hurt very little. They'd lost bridges of course, things of that nature. We lost an awful lot of covered bridges, but so we got, we hired out on the railroad, \$4.00 a day and that was pretty good pay. And one night, there was this Sleeping Lucy place where the big washout was and they took everybody that would come and it made you think a little bit of the Chinese coolie or the where they work in places in

Africa and India a little bit. The, we had push carts, but a single line. You couldn't going and coming, it was most quite inefficient. And we just took from the local dirt and where it was to fill this washout. Oh it would be 100 yards across it perhaps and quite deep too. And, but we worked, daylight, well nine hours. That was standard. It had to be about daylight to dark at that time of the year, but all the people would come. If they had a shovel that was all that was about necessary. Some of them went by foot. Some drove the car a little bit. We had two of the old hand cars. The old up-and-down jobs and about six people is what they're made for and we'd double that a little bit and race down to the, of course they kept the foreman and people, wanted to get us to work, racing was encouraged a little bit, but the last of it. We'd been about I don't know something like ten days and they finally got a work train up from Montpelier but for the last two or three days it was like the bucket brigade. You'd take a shovel full of dirt and walk down and throw it in the hole and walk back again. Oh several hundred feet where we could find it in the banks. And that was the type of work we were doing and everybody worked. There was quite, quite a... Another thing that was noticed. Everybody done their best in times of that nature. But when they got the work train through, they laid 40 of us off, I remember that figure, and that was the last day of deer season. Of course, no one had thought much about hunting. Well, I thought, gee whiz, I was hunting quite a bit. I took that last day off of deer season and didn't I get my first deer. So after that point then we went to work for farmers one thing and another. Everyone worked.

MK Everyone, worked on cleaning up, you mean on clean-up efforts or?

RB Yes, well yes and fixing roads a little bit. But I, it wasn't long after that before I went to work for the neighbors and doing more or less normal work. But it was froze up and at that time it was wintertime you most construction things did go right back like that. It wasn't long we left our car there in Waterbury and it was about two weeks we got, we learned that we could get down. Well, the bridge went out in Waterbury and they had a little ferry there and they'd ferry single cars across. I don't remember [clock chiming], I was thinking just how long that lasted anyway, but we went down. You had to have a pass. You had to have pass to travel quite a bit. But if you had a real good reason and for instance family people, the farmers came in from the countryside to, with supplies and food for the cities and villages and there was a lot

of that being done. Again how helpful people were. And my wife's folks, I took a load for different families in Montpelier and they wanted to know what you were doing, why you were there. But we ferried across the river there in Waterbury and brought the car home. Oh something like two or three weeks after that. And I don't, I wish I do or could remember how long that ferry lasted, but they picked the bridge right up and put it back on the foundation so it's the bridge that we have there today.

MK That iron bridge as you go.

RB Yes, as you go into Waterbury.

MK Oh, okay.

RB And I have pictures of that and of course if anyone looks up in researches on the flood you'll see pictures of that bridge. And uh,

MK It must have been just an incredible thing to look at. You know, as you were traveling, things were probably not at all familiar anymore where the water had

RB It is hard to, the whole area of the people and the countryside a little bit. Without, there were radios but a few people had them, and for such a thing, for instance, a little flashlight. We had no flashlights were there but they were uncommon. Now these two, the two National Guardsman, they were furnished with a flashlight. But we had none, we walked in the dark and that was customary a little bit, but how people reacted and how information flowed is hard to put it onto today's situation. But at night, when they did get roads going quite fast, the communities, or even a neighbors helped one another to fix up the small bridges one thing or another and there was quite a lot of improvisation about it. For instance, I told about getting this deer. There was a covered bridge washed out and then there was a little farm and another dwelling, well they somehow got a boat and you'd just shout and they'd come over and get you without compensation for that and that's how we crossed that river until I don't know how long at least another year perhaps before they got that bridge put in. But, the people, you'd meet people at night and they'd turn out, turn their lights off and let you pass them because the roads weren't very good. It was very muddy even before that and all that winter it was pretty rough and of course they froze, the ruts froze and it was, travelling was terrible. I had had, in this Torry Hill Sand and Gravel Company where I had worked, I had run an old antiquated clam shell derrick and

so the state put out information that they were buying small power shovels and they wanted operators. Of course they had, they had two I think ~~we~~ termed steam shovels at that time. They weren't steam but that was the, that's what we called them. And no operators hardly at all, just two or three men. So I put in an application and in time I got the job. I went to White River Junction and took it off from the flat car and spent the summer repairing roads and they got some — I changed shovels during the summer. One of my shovels I had was #22 so it gives you an idea of how many. I think there's 26 or 7 that they bought and during the summer as fast as they could get them but that was the effort and the struggles to put the roads back into use. And they fell trees, full length trees and bridge after bridge and when you'd come to cross one of them you didn't know whether it was going to hold you or not but you aimed the old shovel, then go straight. If you aim them across the bridge and walk behind it in case it, and one fellow went into, did go into the river but I was lucky I didn't have any such trouble. But it's hard to picture the, what the whole countryside was like.

MK As I hear you talking about it, I just can't imagine what it must have looked like and do you remember whether it was a moonlit night when you were walking from

RB No.

MK on the last stretch.

RB No, it was quite dark.

MK How did you do that? How did you find the way?

RB You could see where to walk. You'd step in a mud puddle now and then and no you could see where you were walking but no it was not, it was pretty dark. We didn't see that fellow for instance in East State Street until he was nearest to you to me of him. He stepped out in front of us, and "halt." He was quite a pompous fellow anyway.

MK Enjoyed his role there uh?

RB Yes, yes and he was and, but we did have a bit of little word battle. See, I believe they lost one person in Montpelier, and two or three in Barre. But Montpelier of course flooded and swamped out, but there wasn't current there. But it was in the area, hard to describe, the feeling of it was and the business blocks were nearly all dark. Of course people were living on the upper floors more than they do now. The upper floors would be lighted

a little bit. But Montpelier was hard to describe. You could see the debris and things on lamp posts and telephone poles and things a little bit, but no it was quite dark. But we were familiar with the road. We knew the road very well. We were a little apprehensive about the Kingsbury Branch in North Montpelier whether that bridge went out or not, but it was an iron bridge at that time and it was quite substantial and we felt that we could, I don't remember whether we had asked questions and had reports on it or not, but we didn't hit the main road. You avoided main roads. The water was still fairly high in the Winooski River but we made it home and was pretty glad to get there.

MK Amazing story. Just incredible.

RB But it was

MK Your family must have been overcome with, it must have been a very emotional homecoming.

RB Well, yes of course, see I don't know they, just remember what they got for information, but it, the flood was pretty much confined to Vermont and we didn't have in New York and I don't remember when we come through Bennington or not, but up in that area, it was just simply high water. It wasn't too bad. But you begin to hear these stories, and the farther north we went, the more you got. We got, we forded a few, where the water would be flowing right across the road. That would be on the Friday morning. But we got a little idea of just what the power of flood water was when we saw the bridge between Burlington and Winooski.

MK Incredible.

RB ^{The various rumors} my goodness. Yes, if we'd had any, that Plainfield and Marshfield was just washed off the map. You wonder how that story originated. But having all that water coming down the Winooski River and the dam filling, and from time to time the papers reported on how it was coming, had it broken, you see it would be very bad, but it was quite the opposite. The dam, the dam didn't fill until sometime over the weekend when the highest water there was Thursday night and Friday morning when Burlington of course it was Friday forenoon or Friday during, well all day Friday I guess. But the dam didn't fill until later that weekend. So it helped the whole flood rather than it being harmful. But when we reached Waterbury there was no talk of a broken dam, but someone

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wanted to be dramatic or something I guess there in Burlington.

MK . The people that I have talked with especially from the Waterbury area have all talked about just how incredible isolated they were and how it was impossible to...

RB Every place was.

MK Oh.

RB There were a few short wave radio hams and there was one fellow in particular and I'm sure you've read about it and I can't name him. I don't remember just where he was but he was the outside contact and he done quite a bit. And then even on this Saturday, pardon me Sunday when we were, when we were coming home, when we left Waterbury there were airplanes flying up and down. We saw ~~the~~ someone two three times or there was two three different ones and they were flying over and by Saturday and Sunday but Sunday is when we noticed it. They were coming right up the valley. Well they could look around, but they couldn't get any real information you see. But there was isolation, and how people helped one another was wonderful.

MK Did your parents farm suffer a large loss?

RB We had no trouble at all. The hill places, other than culvert washed out, very little damage in the high, in the high ground. No, no and been, people, of course, many of the dairies lost their cattle. Well all in the low country. The Lamoille Valley was I guess didn't suffer the total damage that the Winooski did, but they had high water pretty much the same. Of course, it wasn't, not populated quite so much. But the we had no difficulty when we got into high ground going over Smugglers Notch. And I don't remember, we were, we were 8 hours going from Burlington to Waterbury so I've kind of forgotten where we spent quite a bit of that time but for instances where we forded the brook, we studied it quite awhile. The near bank was much higher than the other side. Going across it was, it would be bad enough but I don't think we'd ever come the other direction. Did we want to take the car and head into the unknown at Smuggler's Notch or but other cars had gone through and to our interpretation there was all one way and no one and it was where they pushed and worked a little bit on the further bank and we put on chains and got through without difficulty, but we spent quite a little time wondering whether we should go or not.

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MK Did you ever have any substantial problems with the car or the chains got you through?

RB No they were, it was a touring car and it was very good for such travel, yup.

MK They built cars to take some punishing in those days.

RB Well you had lots more clearance.

MK Oh.

RB When the, I can remember the Model A Ford I believe it was, someone had eight inches clearance and gosh that's getting down kind of low. Could you go over ruts and things with that. Well of course, today it's a matter of three four inches in some cars. So you have to see how they were designed. That's the way, larger wheels. No, had no, and we had well, of course, we didn't travel too far, but I don't recall any trouble getting gasoline. We tanked up in Burlington and I think that was all there was to it. But the scars were left. Another one, how people, how people improvised and working on the state road. I took, I unloaded the shovel at White River Junction and the first job was near Taftsville, near Woodstock and I was not familiar with that particular machine and I was wondering just how I would make out, of course. I wanted to get to, we, I thought that, that evening that I would play with it and get more acquainted with it, but I got in just before 5 o'clock into the pit where they were working there in Taftsville and when they heard me coming, it was evident that they were shoveling by hand of course and they were small trucks and Model T pickups most of them were or similar. Well, when they saw me coming in the pit a little bit, they all through their shovels and put out quite a little reception there. And I had to work for another hour or so. If I'd thought better of it, I'd waited a little bit farther down the road. But I was able to do a little bit of work, but of course when they closed down, well then I did practice with the machine after that. But to see their reaction when I come in to replace place that hand shovels and we kept working from job to job. You had no surveyors, nobody was around to help you very much like they do today. No drawing up the blue prints and so^{of} of the job, but it ended up at Sherburne, into Mendon Mountain and then turned North to Stockbridge, and they did go ahead and arrange for board and room for me, and everybody was nice. And it was quite an experience. But between the river, the branch of the White River had done quite a lot of work in Stockbridge, Gaysville, and of course, Gaysville is one of the villages

perhaps you are familiar with, the center was taken right out. Like they said and told us that Plainfield and Marshfield would have been, but there was a stretch of road, the bridge had gone out, they called it Drake Bridge as I recall, and they had a crew working on that. And then they were trying to rebuild and resurrect the railroad. There was a crew working on the railroad right in the same in Stockbridge there. And we were most of us were staying and eating right there in the Village of Stockbridge. Well the main road between Gaysville and Stockbridge had gone into the river in several places and someone had arranged for the right of way to go across two or three farmers fields to avoid their river bank and they held us, *and...* We were patching up bridges and washouts and things of that nature, but we'd done all that was kind of scheduled for us there in the Stockbridge and up the road toward Roxbury and Pittsfield there and they kept holding us quite a bit to get this new road from Gaysville to Stockbridge ~~to~~ laid out so we could work on that and they didn't show up and they were busy elsewhere. So finally we were told to go ahead and eyeball it, you might say. So the road boss, that was over the trucks and he was the Bill Robinson by name, he and I just looked the situation over. Of course I was running the power shovel there a little bit. But we laid that road out by eye across these two farms and put in one culvert and cut down the high places and filled the other ones, just as you naturally would a little bit and brought in gravel to make a passable road a little bit, but the funny part of it the road is right there today. We laid that thing out by eye, never with a stake driven and never was a piece of paper was it drawn out on it at all. We wondered afterwards if, where they would put the road. Well heck, they put it right where we put it. So there's nearly a mile well I guess I should say nearer more about a half of mile, that still exists right in the same place. I'm sure they improved it a lot, but. So that's how things were done.

MK One thing I wanted to pick up on and digress a little bit away from the flood. You said that your mother had lit an oil lamp in the window. Did the farm have electricity at that point?

RB Oh no, no, no.

MK When did electricity come to your parents farm?

RB Well when mother, we never had it there. And now our particular house until I've got to guess a little bit on that. The REA, the Washington Electric eventually took

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over the hill, huh, oh late '30's. The late '30's would be war time.

BB In '30 we didn't have it. In '30 we didn't have it.

RB But I mean, no that's right. It would be into the '40's wouldn't it?

BB Yea, I think so.

RB Yea, yea.

MK Was that just the Hollister Hill area that didn't have electricity or was it sort of that whole Plainfield-Marshfield?

RB Oh no, Plainfield and Marshfield, in fact you are getting into my area there. I worked with the Green Mountain Power most of my, most of my working life.

MK Ah.

RB Marshfield when I was a kid, able to go down onto the so-called river road between Marshfield and Plainfield and we were told never to throw stones at the insulators on the power line because electricity would come right back and hit us. I remember that when I was quite young. You know 8 to 10 years old. So, yes, they had lights in the villages way, way back. Well in the 1890's in Montpelier and Barre, of course, Burlington, and so, yes, the turn of the century most of the villages.

MK But the farmers got it quite a bit later.

RB Oh, much later, much later. Well, that's when during the depression and that's when the REA started during the '30's with the Roosevelt administration. That's when they begun to frankly the power companies took the cream, they took the villages where it is concentrated and of course that was different then, then it tis now. And the cost of building lines and all, they didn't feel for many, many years and they were hoping for criticism among some of us a little bit. Why didn't we pick up, why didn't we go into the farm area? The future, they wanted the concentrated customer, and it was the REA in the '30's during the depression that moved into the country. In fact I was promoted from, I was in the meter department and I was promoted from, to a meter foreman and was transferred to Burlington and almost at the same time I was, they were looking for a superintendent, which sounds good perhaps, but it wouldn't be, in those early days, it

didn't mean too much, but I was offered the job. I had to make a decision between the two and considerable more money in East Montpelier in the start and the build up of the REA in Washington County Electric and that would be 1939 so that tells us when they begin to go into the country. Because that's what they were for to serve the country. And they was able to borrow money at 2% interest and I think later on I think it did get up to 4, well most of the time when they were developing it was 2% interest, government money. They used to talk about the comparing the two utilities, one had a longer yardstick than the other.

MK You weren't on the farm then obviously when electricity came to the farm.

RB No.

MK You weren't living there, but generally, if you can generalize, how did that change the average farm life, the farmer's life and the farm families' lives?

RB Well my wife could tell on that too a little bit. One thing you stop washing lamp chimneys every morning. And well, the radio was coming in you see and that brought in the radio, give a big boost to radios. The milking machine become much more common. They had milking machines but they would be gasoline operated and

BB We did have the radio because they were run by batteries.

RB Yes, but when electricity came, it increased that considerable.

BB Yes, oh yes.

RB Better reception and the battery didn't run, didn't low on you when you was listening to a prize fight or something. And oh yes, yes, electricity made a big difference when you talk about, I talk too much here a little bit but what made it change in the rural area was the automobile. Far more than anything, far more than anything of other than transportation, moving around. — trip on Hollister Hill, are you familiar with it and do you know where the Scottish fellow has his weave, weaving operation, that's the home farm, that's where we went. But a trip to Barre and Montpelier would equal a trip to Boston and New York today. Of course electricity was a big help and better lighting, but the automobiles made the real change.

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MK Did they take people off the farms do you think to the...

RB The automobile?

MK Yea.

RB Well indirectly. It simply made you more mobile and you reached out. Yes, the early automobile how the automobiles changed and it has in all of our time of course, but we of course there were more and more people got them, but I remember one statement that was made all the way to the White Mountains and back without a flat tire and that was something to crow about and what they've done with tires and what they used to be. You carried quite a tool kit with you, spare spark plugs and blow-out patches and what not and now we balance our tire quite accurately for our speed that we drive today. Well, the blow-out patches and things you used to patch your tires with you know would tear a car to pieces at the speed we drive now. No thought was ever heard of balancing a tire. If you had a blow out, put in a patch. And of course back when the cars were coming in, in the hill people put their cars up. But I worked in a garage in 1926 and that was seasonal. At the end, along about Christmas time, even before that I guess, that I was laid off so called, but you put your car up and you went back to the horse and horse and pung or sleigh. But when that caused people to leave, the overall economy, the price for your product and so on and so forth and when, well one statement that tells quite a little bit about those times was before the automobile, this would be in our locality Marshfield-Plainfield anyway there that, a neighbor of ours used to quote that, 80% of the people owned their farms, but after the automobile came, it was only 20% that owned their farm. In other words, they mortgaged the farm to buy the automobile. And to an extent that was true. And we bought a car, the first car we had was a 1914 Model T with the brass radiator, you've seen them in museums I'm sure, and we bought that late, well, 1920 probably. Something like that, but Dad sold a couple of cows or so to buy the car and used it when, didn't use it too much, well my older brother was going to Spaulding and that was one of things that we used it. And of course then you begun to do your shopping in Barre and Montpelier much more and. No what the automobile has done really has changed things by mobility. And look at what it is today. What would we do without an automobile. I wonder when fuel gets scarce what we'll come up with. They hold the price of gasoline down pretty good. But you go into a grocery store and by spring water, you pay anywhere from

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\$.89 to \$1.25 and you are buying the gasoline cheaper than you are buying the drinking water.

BB It kind of got crazy.

MK It's true.

BB Figure that out.

MK [interruption]
Don't worry. The only other think that I wanted to ask you about, and I was just curious, where were you living and working during the depression or during the worst of the depression. Is that at the part when you began working?...

RB Well again I was a little fortunate. I worked in '28 for the State on the power job and really enjoyed it and I was looking forward to it for the years to come. I thought I might buy a shovel of my own so on and so forth, but previous to that I'd, quite a few of my friends was working for the Green Mountain Power. It was Kent Tenny Company back then. And about New Years, that would be New Years in '29, I got a call from one of my friends and wanted to know if I still wanted to work for the company, which I'd thought of for quite some years, and this was an employee, not one of the, not one of the officers. He said they were thinking of buying another man and hiring another man in Barre, so I went to Montpelier and talked to, with some of the people there and low and behold I was hired the 11th of February 1929 and well before the crash. And I survived the crash for some reason or another. Well, I guess my wife and first child were a little bit responsible because single people were laid off and there was about a dozen in my group and five of them were laid off. I was the youngest employee but I somehow survived. So yes I worked for the Green Mountain Power for the company all through the depression and was quite lucky, real lucky. My older brother had got a job about the same time that I did with the telephone people and their practice was a little bit different. They laid off anyone less than five years experience and he'd worked longer for them than I had with the company, a little bit. He'd worked four years I believe wasn't it Bea, yea he had worked for four years plus and he got the axe and it was pretty tough. He had a child too and at one time he was working in three different places part-time. He was time keeper on a road job, night-watchman at the State Garage and when in the daytime when he could he was working on the farm, on different farms to keep scratching to, we didn't have welfare then.

MK So people did whatever they had to do.

RB Uh huh. I got up to, we worked 54 hours, 6 days and I got up to \$24.00 a week and they cut us back to \$20.00, \$20.20 as I recall for a few years there. Lived, well you take a five dollar bill and go over to Street. We were living in Plainfield at that particular time in the village. You take a five dollar bill and you couldn't lug your groceries home. But an hour's work compared to what an hours work and what you could buy with it, it's not much different. My annual salary would have bought two automobiles and at that time and I wonder if the person beginning now isn't given a wage, an annual salary that would about buy two of the smaller cars. It balances up fairly well.

MK I guess it does if you think of it that way. But it has changed a lot.

RB Not that we'd done it but

MK Well I want to thank you very much for taking the time.

RB Well I haven't done a very good job.

MK Oh, you certainly have. It's quite an incredible story you have to tell in terms of your experiences.

RB Yes, when we come into Middlesex, one reason why and you could pick up information, of course we asked for all we could get. Well you didn't see too many people. They seemed to be busy. They weren't out around. But these two reporters there from the Knickerbocker Press we heard something and I've forgotten what it was, something of some interest down in the Waitsfield Valley and one of them wanted, the older one wanted to go down and explore that and the younger one-no, the capital of Vermont was where he wanted to go and they had a bit of an argument, pretty good one. We threatened or did start to go along toward Montpelier, they decided they'd come along with us. How they got into Waterbury, I don't think I ever knew. I don't know how they got there. Whether they got into Burlington, now they could have gotten into Burlington reasonably well, whether they tied in with this so-called caravan and went over the Mansfield, we never knew, if we did, I've completely forgotten. But they were there in Waterbury and getting what information they could. It was kind of interesting to see the kind of questions they were asking but when we headed for Montpelier, they thought that was a good tie in with us because we were locals but

- MK It's a good thing that they were able to find their way. They must have traveled with some local people however they got to Waterbury originally.
- RB Oh yes, they were afoot. Well again I can't tell you whether I don't think they had an automobile, I feel quite sure they didn't.
- MK How many miles is it from Waterbury to your parents farm that you walked?
- RB I believe it was 24 miles. It seems so we called it 25, and when we come to measure it was 24 or something. Later on you know, years later.
- MK Of course you were traveling a different route than the road went to some extent.
- RB When we went afoot quite straight. Pretty straight. Pretty straight. Of course the railroad track would be straight from Waterbury to Montpelier as straight as you could get and then up State Street and up by Clay Hill over through Montpelier Center, a fairly direct. we didn't have much baggage with us anyway. We left things there at I think I'm wrong in saying Dr., well it doesn't matter anyway, but it was right near Dr. Steels there. You know Stowe Street in Montpelier, well just beyond that on Main Street
- MK Waterbury?
- RB Waterbury, of course. Just beyond that on the right, right in, the high point right in Waterbury there on the main road and we left a few things there. I think they took them in. I'm sure they took them in the house because you didn't lock cars then and we carried almost nothing. We knew we had to walk and...
- MK I've talked with a couple of people who were living in Waterbury at the time of the flood and they said that after it was all over that people really dated events for years to come. As I understood it you'd say to someone, well when did such and such happen and the person would say oh, well before the flood or after the flood.
- RB Oh, you bet. Oh, you bet. Yea because Waterbury was hit. There is a book and perhaps you've read that it must be in the historical society "When Water Came to Waterbury". It does a good job.
- MK Amazing pictures in that too.

RB Uh huh.

MK There's really incredible pictures. But did you, around your community was that the case also, that people dated events.

RB Oh yes. I think of only I don't know when it might have petered out of course it hasn't totally petered out yet for the old people and oh no, the covered bridges, there were four of them lost between Plainfield and Marshfield and thinking of it, we were talking of that the other day, the one nearest Plainfield, this covered bridge, what we call the power road, we lost that bridge, but not at the flood. They had a freak wind storm a month or two before that and it ~~was~~ tipped the old bridge into the river so that was, many people remember the covered bridges that we used to have them through there. It was, went out in '27, but not the flood. I'd forgotten I was and I think we were talking of that no too long ago, how many covered bridges we lost in the state. Do you know that in your research work?

MK I am sure I could come across it. I have not seen actual numbers. I've read a number of places a reference to them.

RB There were four, that I've read, there would be five, but they're minus one between Plainfield and Marshfield and see many of them. The one there at the Spencers where I told about the or did I when I got my deer, they took people across the river there and had a single boat. You just call out and they'd come and get you. I'm sure they were compensated. But it was done as a favor mostly but and I can't remember how long before they got a bridge. I'm sure...

MK Had there been a covered bridge there?

RB There was a covered bridge yes. We used to go down and play with the family. They were our age, and that was a job for the children-to snow the bridges during the wintertime so that the sleighs would go through, you know, better and, golly right now, for instance, when it was so hard to get snow it was a little bit of a job. Paid them next to nothing, but it seemed pretty good. And we used to go down and help them. Well there's a covered bridge with just serving just two houses. Was the state going to put in that bridge before they would put in some on the main road, so they waited quite awhile for them. And I don't know just how long but it would be a year or more.

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I think before the second winter that the Spencers got a bridge.

BB Must have, must have.

MK Okay the clean up after it afterwards just must have been an amazing thing.

RB Well yes in some ways they, in Gaysville, see I worked in that area, and I've got pictures, well I've got pictures afterwards, but I got poster cards before and, of course, you never really clean-up things of that nature. Cavendish, that was the greatest excavation I believe, more actually cubic yards of earth moved. But Gaysville perhaps suffered the most loss percentage-wise, and, of course, Duxbury and in that area, I've read different figures, they lost 18 in a dormitory there, well in a rooming house rather. And I think it was 18. My figures may be wrong. In fact they differ. You read different articles.

MK Well that's true.

RB Well when you have calamities and it's like war time, I suppose there was nothing like the bombarding of London and those places. What the tragedy we went through was mild according to wartime.

MK Yea.

RB '38 hurricane was bad, but compared to the flood it was ^{ok} so less. They lost power and well yes of course the forest, we lost in the home farm area we lost our sugar ~~place~~ pretty much complete and so did many others. But the damage was so less than the flood, and ~~the~~ we were living in Plainfield then and working for the company, of course, they called everyone out to help. I remember my first job when I got into Barre that morning was to go to the Averills Hardware Store and buy all the axes they had. And a few other things. Well I wasn't the first one there but I did get quite a load of them but everybody was well instructed to go out and help the linemen of course. We went without power in Plainfield for nearly a week. We spent all the daylight hours and into the night quite a bit helping, ~~My~~ work was all in Barre City, but the wives began to sputter a little bit in Plainfield, ~~Working~~ all day helping somebody else out, lets have a little service here at home.

BB The whole village was ? it.

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RB That's where I learned to climb. As a lineman my work was in the meter department, testing meters and repairing them and I was converted to a climber a little bit. But you enjoyed ~~the~~ ^{the} few things ⁱⁿ normal life like that ^{more} of a sense of accomplishment than to work well into an evening or into the early morning one thing and another and finally get your work done, then close your switches and see the village light up. You really have feel that you've accomplished something. You've helped people and 99% of the people react that way. They are very appreciative of what you've done for them. We used to form ~~there's~~ an elderly lineman and an fellow that had, had some experience, ~~he~~ was really a district agent really, read meters and everything, but we combined to make a line crew in trouble and we used to enjoy it.

MK So you'd get to do that kind of work whenever there was a bad storm or..

RB Whenever there was an emergency. That was an understanding that you'd give all the help you could. They had quite a hurricane in the Champlain Valley in 1950. It didn't bother up here too much. People were out for a number of days. In fact they just had it in the Bennington area here this last fall, didn't they, an ice storm. No nearly everyone, there's always the exception. One that we got scolded quite a bit and criticized in Essex Junction but that was very much the exception. To have people complain. This particular case, his neighbors got current and he didn't. He wasn't really overlooked, his particular area required much more work. You do what you can do the quickest, to put the most people to help them out and you can readily see how someone's going to feel left out. This fellow took exception to it. I happened to be the brunt of it.

MK How long did you work for the power company?

RB 42 years and I enjoyed that. During the depression you was pretty happy to have a job. And by the time that, that was over with well through the war, they saw fit to move me up a little bit and so the work got more and more pleasant. I ended up as division manager and you are dealing with people and contacting business and things of that nature. I just enjoyed ~~the~~ business.

MK Again thank you very much for taking the time. I hope I haven't taken too much of your afternoon here but...

RB Being retired, I have the time.