

“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.

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Merritt E. Carpenter
June 21, 1988

Mary Kasamatsu
Interviewer

MK Let's start with a little bit of background and I can also set up your level as we are doing that.

MC Yea.

MK Are you a native of this part of the...

MC Yea, I was born and brought up in Charlotte which is twelve miles south of here.

MK Okay. And did you start right off working with the Lake Champlain Transportation Company or...?

MC No, I, I went to college, then I went to war. Well I went into the, after college I went into the machine tool industry in Springfield, Vermont until the war got well underway and the deferments gave out and then I went to war. When I came back from the war, I went to work for National Lead, National Lead Company over in Tahawus, New York which is in the heart of the Adirondacks and I worked there for I guess two and a half years. Then I got, I got some construction work for the Ferry Company and that put me on the lake and I stayed there until I retired.

MK When, when were you in Springfield, do you recall what years you worked there?

MC I couldn't by now.

MK Would it have still been during the depression?

MC No, I would say, I think I graduated from college in '41 so it would have been from then through until...I got in the army in time for, to give to France on the 4th of July which wasn't long after D-Day if that gives you any clue, I can't remember dates.

MK I had been wondering what Springfield, the reason I asked, I was wondering what Springfield was like in terms of how vigorous the machine tool industry had become since the Depression.

MC Oh, it was extremely vigorous because you see the depression was, had already been over for some time and the war effort even before the United States got into the war, the war effort internationally had begun hence the demand for the type of tools they made there. They don't make, they don't produce weapons or anything like that. What they do down there is produce tools for doing that

work. So there was a great demand for their equipment; their lathes and grinders and things like that.

MK Which one of the companies were you with?

MC Jones and Lamson.

MK Oh.

MC I was in the thread grinder division.

MK And they had a lot of orders for parts?

MC Oh, they were making full machines and shipping them out to the companies that were going to produce the war effort stuff you know, like build trucks or build guns or build whatever they did for the war. They were building the machines to do it with. That's what was going out of there then. That was probably the, the highest point in that village's commercial effort since probably World War I.

MK Yea, it's really had periods, sort of boom and bust history in Springfield.

MC Yea.

MK Okay, well let's talk about what got you actually into the boat dock on Lake Champlain, into the Ferry business.

MC Well I was asked if I would, the Ferry Company had just been formed. The new owners were Evans, Watems and Wolcott. And they had a small amount of equipment with which to maintain their docks and they thought that they could get in some additional revenue if they did something else with it when it wasn't building docks. And they got a job to build a oil dock and they asked me if I would come and be the engineer on the job. And National Ed was just winding down that operation over there and I had finally become safety engineer because everything else I was doing was done. And they were going to give that job to the chief mechanical engineer of which there was only one once I left. It was time to get out of there. It was time to do something else. So I took the job for the Ferry Company and that's what got me in down here.

MK You worked how many years for the Ferry Company?

MC Oh I don't remember. In excess of 35.

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MK Uh huh. How did you get interested in prohibition? You lived through that time, but you were pretty young when that was going on?

MC Yea I was. Well my father was a state highway commissioner and he was given Franklin and Grand Isle counties because he didn't drink. They were border counties you see. Others would spend half the time up in Quebec. And in the summertime when school didn't keep, I frequently went with him for a week at a time. I would stay at the old American House in St. Albans and he had his office in the City Hall. And we would go out from there all over the county to the various bridge jobs and road jobs and things that were going on. And of course, St. Albans was a hub of activity for bootleggers. They had their automobiles repaired there. They did quite a few deals there. So you were aware of them. And of course, it was a somewhat colorful activity which is, always leads the inquiring mind to observe it and I had a friend whose father was in the garage business, founder of the repair shop and he generally knew whose cars were in and what for and why. And also they held a government auction there for the cars they caught bootlegging and we would go down to the auctions because it was fun to see the bootleggers buy their cars back. They bid them off you know. If anyone outside started bidding, there were raised eyebrows all around. And of course there were some boats involved in it. And St. Albans Bay and along George's Shore was, was the headquarters of the Lake patrol under Commodore Jack Kendrick and he had never less than two or more than five boats at his disposal. Usually they were some they'd caught, the better ones were the ones they'd caught. And he kept them down there, worked them out of his summer home landing there on the George's Shore and my friends garage, my friend's father's garage also took care of their engines which meant you could get down there and see them you know. All this was very interesting to watch for anyone who was ten or twelve years old or whatever. Sterling Weed had the best orchestra in the region and they practiced in the City Hall every afternoon. My they made beautiful music. And it's amazing he's still going. He still has his orchestra.

MK Every afternoon they practiced?

MC Well I don't know if they did every afternoon, but most weekday afternoons. There was somebody before him for whom he played and when that man went down to Bethel I think it was or Randolph, I think it was Bethel, why Sterling took over the orchestra and after that it was

Weeds Imperial Orchestra. I remember they had big touring cars and these big touring cars were equipped to carry a spare tire on the side right back of the front fender you see and what they carried there was the base drum.

MK ^{It was the}
right shape.

MC Yea, it fitted right there. They carried the tire on the other, opposite side or the base drum I don't know which. All I do is remember seeing them to get ready to go on a job up in Franklin or some place in the late afternoons just before father would leave his office and the cars would be wheeled out of the garage and the instruments would all be piled into them and strapped to the buggies racks in the back and the whole bit and they'd all get into these big touring cars you know and away they would go. It was quite a sight. There were a lot of dance halls in those days. Every town of any consequence had one. It wasn't anything more than a, than a rude roof such as you'd see over a portable sawmill, but with a good level dance floor. That was the important thing. And they all had names and they were colorful names and I can't even remember any of them anymore. Rose Land, there that was one of the names.

MK Rose Land was up around...

MC There was one alright. I think it was up, oh you know about it, eh?

MK No I know, I've heard of a Rose Land.

MC Where do you think it was?

MK I thought it was in New York some place.

MC Well, there may have been one there, but there was one in Franklin County. I'm trying to see if I can remember somewhere near where it was, but I, it seems to me, no, can't, it wasn't Fairfax. I think it was somewhere around Enosburg Falls, but not at the falls, you know, somewhere in that region. But there were many of them, several of them. Any town of any consequence had one. And the bands would rotate. They'd play one night at one place and another night at another you know and that sort of thing. And of course, the bootlegging in that Franklin County region was largely an individual's endeavor. There were a few who ran larger quantities further away like down to Barre and Montpelier and even further away. But take a dance hall like Rose Land, there would be some local bootlegger who would supply the stuff that night out of

his car, out parked in the field amongst all the other cars and the patrons would stalk out there very dignified and after awhile they'd come stumbling back. It wasn't, it was a pleasant evening indeed when they didn't have a fight at the end of the affair you know. Out of Fairfield came a lot of Irishmen and they're singularly hard nosed and violent tempered. And the other mix was French. There were a lot of French farmers. So it was indeed a good evening when they, when it ended peacefully. The commercial bootleggers if you want to call them, the ones who would for example supply the men's clubs in the various cities you know, those were good patrons. They were all male and they and the leading people and so forth, John Conway was a leading big operator out of this city. I don't know how far his cars went. They certainly went as far as Rutland, perhaps further you know, Montpelier and Barre you know. Clyde Irwin was another one. He supplied a larger area. I think his cars went even further, but I'm not sure. Out of the St. Albans area, Erick Rashaw was a big operator. He supplied the clubs and so forth. And the hotels and cigar stores, you know any place where they could pedal the stuff and get away with it. But then there were a lot of individuals like Pete Hanlon and others too numerous to mention that I can't even remember the names of now. The wealthy people of a region usually had a sole supplier and they tried to keep that as quiet as they could which of course impossible because everybody knew when that car went up the street, where it was going and why.

MK That's the thing that amazes me. When you hear these stories, everybody knew.

MC Yea.

MK Everybody knew and yet, there's someone I was talking to yesterday said for some reason here in town you know, everybody knew who was doing it, but they never got caught. (LAUGHING) _____ was that, it was because the fellow who was the sheriff there knew he had to put up a show of looking for these guys, but he still had to live there. I mean ^{these} ~~were~~ local people for the most part and ^{he lived} there. She said she didn't think he looked too hard.

MC Not only that, but he had birthdays and he had holidays and there were occasions when he might get cold feet or something. It was always nice to have something left to his place.

MK But people did help the bootleggers, didn't they?

MC Oh yes. The islands, the Champlain Islands were famous for the farmers up there. They, you know what a hay barn looks like and you've got the mows up on each side, the old type, old type hay barn and they'd have them full of hay. And if a bootlegger drove in, in a terrible hurry, they'd shut the doors, pitch the hay down on the car and then open the doors and everything was quiet and peaceful there and Harry Whitehill could drive by with his posse and look right and left and all he saw was the barn looking about as it had except more hay had been brought down you know. And as soon as the heat was off, why they'd take the hay off from it and the bootlegger would leave a little token of his esteem, and motor off down the road. This kept them all sort of, well, something less than, I can't think of the right word. Something less than hostile toward the trade you know.

MK Did you begin to get to know some of the individual bootleggers personally as you were a kid?

MC No. My father didn't have anything to do with them. You might see a few at breakfast time, at the American House at the counter. They would have come in after a night on the run and they'd be having their breakfast and somebody might quietly point out who that was or who that was you know and you'd have some idea who it was, then you'd watch to see when they left what they drove off in you know and that sort of thing. If I was down at the shop with my friend and he'd say that's so and so's car. Pretty quick somebody would come in and begin to look around, that's him you know. That's all I ever saw of them except at the auctions. They'd come to the auctions to bid back their cars. The ones on the lake I didn't see much of because I wasn't on the lake much. I saw a few of them because they also had their engines fixed there. But they pulled into a different dock. You know, you might wish to shut it off. Eleanor was very thorough about this. She learned about everyone that I knew of and went and interviewed them taking me with her so that we could get in there you know.

MK Okay, well let's talk about some of the, some of the, if I can say characters that you did get to know. When did you actually get to know them? Was this as _____?

MC Well I never got, really got to know them. As I told you, I'm simply saw them and then I was able to see them at a closer proximity like the distance across the room.

MK Yea.

MC And, but before them, they'd been pointed out to me as to who they were you see. So then you'd get up close enough so you can hear them talk and know what they sound like you know. They weren't characters that would compel young children to follow them. They were somewhat less than the, their mode of operation was colorful. If you were far enough away from them, they seemed colorful. When you got up closer to them, they sounded somewhat crude.

MK Some of were really pretty rough?

MC Very rough. I remember one boatman they called horse and by gosh I guess that name was a good one for him.

MK Describe him. What was he like?

MC Well he was a big burly fellow. He didn't talk a great deal, but when he did, it was mostly profanity.

MK Were there great fortunes made in the bootlegging business in this area?

MC Well the individual runners who didn't dissipate it all away, did quite well for themselves.

MK The individual small time?

MC That's right. Who simply were working for one rich man or one club, or one hotel, or one restaurant or whatever you know. But by that I mean, they might have amassed as much as \$10,000 which back then was a lot of money. The bigger operators, the ones that had fleets of cars did much better than that. The trouble with most of them was that they were compulsive gamblers. They couldn't wait to, after they had done very well, to sit down with some more of their kind and play cards or something and lose it all. Easy come, easy go you know. They would store up enough cash to buy a fleet of cars cold, just like that you know. You go out and walk in the sales room and say, well I want six of those. I want them on so and so's back yard such a date. No money passed. And the cars would be there and still no money passed and then maybe a month later, the guy would walk into the place and take out the proverbial roll, big enough to choke a horse you know in \$100 bills and took care of the matter. No record or anything anywhere. The dealer must have had a record, I don't know what he claimed he did with the cars, but bookkeeping was beyond me then. But that's the way they functioned. When they had it, they spent it. In the end, most of them didn't have it. One exception was Brick Rashaw. He must have been a Frenchman by the name Rashaw. I think his

father was a railroad man, but I'm not sure. He had red hair and he was stocky build you know. And he got his, I guess they called him Brick because of his red hair and his build. Probably dated back to when he was in high school. But he was smarter than most of them. For example, he could see the end of prohibition coming and he liquidated everything just like that. And he turned around and he got hold of a design for an oil burner. That was just the time that oil was coming in as a heat source for individual houses. Coal was going out. And he made oil burners up there in St. Albans in what had been part of the old foundry. Very successfully he filled Franklin County with oil burners of his design. He didn't design them, but his build you know. They worked reasonably well. Some of them are probably still working today believe it or not. Ask a plumber when you're up there, he'll tell you. Anyway, so he did very well at that and then he saw the end of that coming, not because oil was no longer a source of heat, but because the major appliance builders had realized there was a fortune to be made in making oil burners and they had come out with standardized designs and were beginning to flood the country with burners you could go to the store and buy you know. So Rashaw simply liquidated that. And he built a motel, the first one anybody had seen, right there on the sound end of St. Albans and did extremely well with that. And then when motels began to proliferate all over the place, he sold that rather than purely liquidating it and he went down to Florida to raise chickens and the last I heard he was still down there doing it. He used to come up in the summer for a few weeks, but when Eleanor started looking for him, he apparently had quit coming up because we never found out that he was around. He was colorful. The height of his bootlegging career, he bought a Hudson Super Six touring car and it was a beautiful car. It had a deck between the front and back seat. Two windshields, one, the front one of course and another on the deck for the back seat you know and there was side glasses that went with that and two spare tires up on the front fender wells. The whole bit and a big trunk on the back. Well you know and it was painted yellow with appropriate trim. I forgot what the trim was, some darker green or something. Everyone turned their heads and looked when he drove by in that you know and nobody thought for a minute he'd be foolish enough to run a load with it. I mean that was his toy. Damned if he didn't go up over the border and coming back he got caught. And he had to go to the auction and buy back his beautiful toy. There was a whole group of people there to laugh at him that day.

MK Was that unusual for sort of the boss to run a load himself?

MC No so unusual, but they didn't usually take out...

MK Their special car...

MC ...a toy. I mean it was a beautiful car and it could go, but painted yellow, how you going to hide that thing you know. The minute it went up over the border, the customs knew about it. They were betting on where it would come back across you see. Probably all the ones who were off duty, probably showed up.

MK Was your father ever in on any of the...

MC No, he was a highway commissioner. All he had to do was build roads and bridges.

MK Oh, he didn't have to, he was never called in to be part of the stake out ring?

MC Oh, no, no. Most he ever had to do was in the winter time if they got short handed, he'd plow snow.

MK Uh huh.

MC Sometimes in the winter time you get a, everybody catches a bad cold and you know, and suddenly you haven't got anybody left to work for you.

MK What about some of the other guys, the smaller operators or the local types?

MC Well, they always had a good car, not one that stood out, that you know, not yellow by any means. And the car was always up in perfect shape and they only ran when they felt they were going to have a pretty good chance of making it. And if you wanted something from them, and you thought you were going to get it Monday, well you might just well get used to the idea you might not get it until Friday you know. Or, it might appear, it just depended on, they wouldn't run if they thought there was a chance of getting caught. That's probably why they survived so well. The cars that were caught usually belonged to the big operators and they'd send them out in fleets of six at a time. There would be a Model A Roadster come down the road all by itself with the driver and that's a lead car. There's no sense in stopping it, it won't be carrying anything. About half an hour later, the six cars will come down, one right after the other (Choo, choo, choo)

just like that. And then little while after, another Model A. Well you see the lead car if he saw anything that looked like a trap setting up, he'd promptly phone somebody back up the road and they stopped the six cars and sent them some other way. They had their plans. Some of them are quite elaborate. I mean if you get a stop at this point you use that road. If you get a stop at that point, use this road. You see, and all these were of course designed to get the cars down as quick as possible and to avoid getting caught. But every now and then, some of them would get caught. Or the, the customs patrol would catch on to the fact that they were going through and start chasing them. Well they might get the last car of the six. They couldn't get any more. They couldn't get by the last car you know. And of course what happened then was if the tail car knew it was happening quick enough, he would catch up to the six and block you see. Just drive all over the road so they couldn't get by him, slow down you know. But they'd catch cars all the time. Very seldom caught the individual operators. There's one individual operator alive whom I could take you to see this afternoon if you wanted to. That's Pete Hanlon.

MK Yea, Eleanor mentioned him.

MC I'm sure that Eleanor's told you about him. He called me up just the other day. Isn't that amazing and wished somebody would come see him. He'd broken his hip. So I said, well it just happens that on Tuesday there's someone coming to see me who might be happy to see you. So if you feel like it or have the time, we'll go see him. He's right here in town.

MK Sure. I need to be leaving Burlington by 4:00, but I can manage that.

MC In that case, I would say...

MK Or I could come back another time if that...

MC Well, you will exhaust me presently. What we could do is if you want all your gear and equipment is we could go in two cars. You could follow me, because I know where I'm going, then you'd have everything you wanted.

MK Uh huh, sure.

MC Then we would go see him after you had finished here you see.

MK Sure.

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MC And from that point, you could go home.

MK Okay.

MC Or where your next destination is.

MK Back to babysitters.

MC Oh yes. And he's the only one that I know of that's still alive, unless Brick, well Brick was a big operator.

MK He's now doing chickens huh.

MC Yea. The big operators as a rule did not run. I mean they had enough cars out, why take a chance. I don't know what ever got into Rashaw that time. Nobody else could figure it out either. Conrad LaBelle was another big operator. He was a Canadian from up Iberville I think it's called, across the river from St. Johns. But he ran big fleets of cars. Eleanor's got all this, didn't she turn it all over to you?

MK Not all of it, no, not all of it. But again, even if, even if she had, what I still need is the actual sound, you know. Your voice, rather than her written material.

MC Well Conrad ran big fleets and he, his greatest claim to fame was one time in the winter. There was a note worthy person living in St. Johns I think it was, someone who had ascended the political scale to great heights and was — and all that stuff, so he died and his wish was to be buried in Champlain, New York, from whence he had come. And there had been a tremendous storm and the road between Canada and the United States was blocked. And so the civil authorities in Quebec decided this great man must have his wish and they phoned up probably Montreal or some place and got some huge snow breaking vehicle perhaps from the airport, I don't know you know, came to St. Johns and it started out and it went to Champlain. And behind it, there were six cars that belonged to Conrad LaBelle followed by the hearse, followed by the precession and when they got to the customs office you know at the border, immigration and everything, they all knew this convoy was coming through. They didn't stop them, they just waived them right through. So here come six cars loaded with booze you know behind the plow, followed by the hearse, followed by the mourners, you know, all the way into Champlain.

MK Never stopped them.

MC That was his, probably his most notable feat. Clyde Irwin, I don't know if you've been down Shelburne Road, there's a, there's a place called the Windmill Cabins. That's very old you know. That goes back to Prohibition. Clyde Irwin bought the mills at Shelburne Falls and dismantled them as they outlived their usefulness. And with the timbers, planking and all, he built the windmill and the cabins which are still there. He was a big operator, a big bootlegger. Had several cars, but and he probably lost some cars during the course of it, but he made money. As, and he, but the damned fool, he got into funny money, just as Prohibition was ending, he figured he had to have something else to do and they picked him up on counterfeiting and put him in jail for many years. He only got out about fifteen years ago and I don't think he's alive now. But he'd done so well and had somebody conduct his affairs while he was in the prison. He sent to England for a new, brand new, Rolls Royce. At that time, they cost an astronomical figure of \$30,000. Of course, that's nothing of what they cost today. But back then, that was a hell of a lot of money you know. And at first he drove it himself, but then he had a few old companions from his bootlegging days that were still alive and they, they used to like to get in their cups. So then they'd appoint the one they knew didn't drink to drive it. The rest of them sat in the back and whooped it up as they were wheeled around the country in a sparkling Rolls Royce brand new you know. It was quite a sight. John Conroy, Conway not Conroy, he had a boat on the lake as well as his fleet of cars. I remember his last fleet of cars was quite impressive. There were I think six Chrysler '77 Roadsters with aluminum bodies and four speed transmissions. They were quite something. Model A's for lead and follow.

MK Now why did they standardize it so much? I mean if people knew that, why didn't they deviate from those kinds of patterns?

MC I don't know. The big operators? Well I suppose because they like to go into a show room and just say you know I mean, imagine if you were in there scratching your head and wondering how you could afford, possibly afford that car and it was the cheapest in the line you know and yet your own was falling apart out there, something had to be done and in comes this guy, looks around you know, what do you got here that's good you know. Up to the top of the line you know, well get me six of those. Bah, wouldn't you have been impressed? They seemed to like that because they always did it. They didn't stick to anyone line. A lot of them bought Packards, way back Packard Twin Sixes.

In fact, Clyde Irwin started out with Packards. I mean as soon as he was wealthy enough to have something besides a good second hand car, then he bought Packards by the half dozens. Some of the others did. Then they went to the Cadillac V8 touring. These were all touring cars and they bought them just like that you see. And then after those cars, when, well they also bought other cars whose names have long since faded out but were good fast cars you know. I can't even think of the names of them now. What to hell, there was one that was particularly good. But they bought like that and then when the newer cars came in, like the Chrysler '77's, they bought those you see. The Model A's, they always bought like that. And the small time operators, the ones who ran alone, always bought second hand cars, never new ones you know. They'd look around and see if Judge so-and-so was about to part with his Lincoln, well buy that Lincoln second hand or so-and-so that owned the, the big clothing store was about to get a new car, Graham Page, well they'd buy that you know. So they always had a good car, because these people they bought, whose cars they bought were people of position in the community and never drove them very far you know. No one ever heard of driving as far as Saratoga Springs in those days you know. You just drove to Church on Sunday. And if you had any debts to collect as far away as Sheldon or Richford, you might go up there and take us all day to get up and back you know. So the cars they'd get would be 20,000 or 30,000 miles on them, well broke in, perfect running order and they'd get, they'd get their moneys worth out of them. But the big operators will buy new cars.

MK Were there any people around in Burlington who were making any kind of whiskey?

MC Not to any extent. That was done in Barre.

MK Oh!

MC Where grappa was made. They used to get grapes in by the carload, by the railway carload and they claimed it was for home consumption wine, but everybody knew they were making grappa. Conway had a boat, it was a fast boat. It was named Princess Pat and it never got caught. And it moved an awful lot of stuff.

MK How did they run to avoid getting caught? Would they run with no lights or?

MC Yea. Up on the north end of the lake, there were two railway tressels across the lake. One across the east lake from Hog Island to East Alburg and the other across the west lake from Alburg to Rouses Point. So the customs put a officer, a patrolman on each one of those tressels every night. All he had to do was walk back and forth on the tressel. And if he heard anything coming, see if he could what it was and notify the patrol boat which would then go out and chase it. Well, they got around that. The boats like the Princess Pat that were very powerful, on a really dark night, they would come right down close to the tressel without being detected. And when they were pretty sure there was nobody in the way which was their belief was fortified by the fact that there was some farmer on one side or the other who was being paid to supply a light and as soon as he knew the way was clear, he'd put this lantern out on the tressel, just pointing north you know, a bulls eye lantern but you have to be almost head on to see and then they would come down real cautious like and then open them up and roar right through and be gone down the lake before they could even get into the patrol boat and decide which way to go you know. But they had another way and that was, they'd get the local farmers to, well say load up six row boats with bags of bottles and the row boats would come down single file a little distance between them and they would watch and try to figure out where the patrolman was on the tressel and just quietly roll through the tressel anywhere with those. They didn't draw any water you know. From one end to the other they could go through and they would go through and down the lake a little ways and they'd meet the big boat laying out there and they'd unload all six of the row boats into it and away it went with its load you see. That was one way of getting through. Launches, the cruisers of which many were used, especially launches, they weren't fast, but they were quiet. They did like the row boats did, just came down as close as they dared get without being observed. Of course the tressels were so close to the Canadian border that, that they were safe. Just a little ways above the tressel you see. And when they could see that the patrolman was at the other end of the tressel, they would sneak through and go on down. And of course on bad nights, the patrolman was apt to be in the draw tenders shack and there wasn't anybody watching you see. Oh, they, that's why you couldn't depend on any delivery schedule because it would all depend on how long it took them to cross the border. Conway lost his life on his boat. He had a mistress and it was said afterwards that she was linked to Horse the driver in some emotional manner. And he wanted to go one day to Plattsburgh, I think that's where he thought he was going. So he had

Horse get the boat ready and he and his mistress went down and they got in the boat and away they went and the wind was from the north, so it was calm at the sight of the Apple Tree Point, they climbed up on the engine hatch and sat there with their feet down in the seat and enjoying the ride and when they got out past Apple Tree Point, they ran into the big seas and the boat began to leap and bound and in any event Conway fell off the boat and was never recovered. The ferry, at the time it was the Ferry ? - Shatagay, was out there on its run to Port Kent and he was never found. [side ends]

MK Half a mile is quite a distance when you're...

MC Well it was rough. You couldn't just turn right there you know. Had to look for a chance. But you can read that one both ways.

MK I can imagine that...

MC Now you realize there were a lot of other bootleggers. The Barre-Montpelier area had some. I don't know anything about them.

MK Sure. Newport?

MC Yup. And some of them sent their cars as far down as into Massachusetts and Albany, New York and so forth. I know that on the New York side of the lake, what we might refer to as organized crime ran not only cars, but trucks down through from Rouses Point to Albany and New York City. Dutch Schultz was reported to have had the biggest operation on the New York side. His stuff came down into New Jersey and of course it's long before your time, but if you've been reading up on it, you will recall that he didn't get into trouble until he started to penetrate the Manhattan Islands side of the river. Conrad LaBelle got into it because his family had always been bakers even since way back when they came from France which is a long, long time ago. And the family is still in bakery business down in Massachusetts. Anyway his father had a bakery there and I don't remember whether it was Iberville or St. Johns. It was that region. And it was a big bakery and he had a big business and one of his routes was into Champlain, New York with bread you know and bakery products. That's back in the days of the horse and wagon and Conrad would start out, two trips a week was all he could manage to make the round trip. He'd start out with a whole wagon load of baked goods and go down to Champlain you know and distribute them and come back and then down in Champlain they kept saying after Prohibition came

along, "Why don't you stick a few bottles under that stuff. I mean we get thirsty down here, you know." So Conrad, being the naive callow youth that he was back then, "Well, alright, I will," and he did, and that was the beginning of his great bootlegging empire.

MK And the beginning of his rise to crime.

MC Yea, I think at one time, he had thirty cars. Can you...

MK Thirty cars!

MC Yea.

MK Geel

MC Yea, it's a big operation.

MK Now did he operate...

MC He operated solely out of Canada.

MK Uh huh.

MC But he did go down into Massachusetts. He didn't fool with the New York side any further than Plattsburgh because when he got down to Albany, he was in trouble with the Dutch Schultz group you know. But he did go down to the central Massachusetts cities you know like Framingham and Worcester, just anywhere you want to think of you know.

MK It's quite a lifestyle (LAUGHING) to think about now.

MC They invariably of course turned to wine, women and song you might say. Flashy women, big wads of money and but gambling is what did most of them in. They could not meet without getting into a game you know. You might go over there prepared to cut somebody's throat because you thought his cars were getting into your territory and before you left you'd been skinned or you skinned him you know.

MK If an individual was not going to need a large supply of liquor by any means, but just wanted to buy a bottle or two from time to time, where would they go?

MC Oh, to the cigar store or to the hotel or to a good restaurant. The clubs didn't sell anything out. They had all they could to keep their members supplied you know. And they wouldn't supply their members outside of the

club. In other words, if you want something at home, you'll have to deal with some individual bootlegger you know. But I never heard of, there may have been some, well I don't, I'm not an authority in it but anyway, it seems like the individuals, they only, when they'd make a run, it would be for one source, one person or one club or one whatever. They never came down with a mixed run, you know. Like, well, I got so much on for you and so much on for you and that sort of thing. They would come down with whatever they had for that one and if there were half a dozen others around there saying they wanted to buy something off from it, well then they might talk up another run, you know. It was a very simple operation from the financial point of view. Well, it had to be, because supposing you got caught.

MK And they paid when it was delivered?

MC Yup, it was always cash. Nothing else would do. You never kept any records as you can well imagine. And they never brought anything on, it was always cash. So they didn't have anybody owing them anything.

MK If you went into a good restaurant and you wanted to buy two bottles, was there sort of a secret code arrangement that you'd go through to -

MC You wouldn't get anywhere at all unless you were known there to begin with you see. Like if you were the vicar of St. Stephens or some such thing and you came down and said "Oh dear, I really should have something you know", they'd make an exception and sell you something. If you were one of the well-to-do men in the region and you came down and said you wanted something, well they'd say, "What's the matter with your supplier?" you know. But if they thought that it was legit, that you weren't just trying to mooch the system, they'd sell you one or two, but you see if you came down and said, "I need six bottles of this," well, "deal for it." If they thought they were helping you out, well you're lunch ~~on~~ trade might be worth it you know. I don't know much about that. It's all hearsay. It, all I really know because I was too young at that time to have taken part in any of that sort of thing. This Pete that I would take you to see if you wanted to go, Pete Hanlon, he was an individual bootlegger and he worked by the deal, each deal was a deal by itself you know. And he had boat and he did most of it by boat. As a matter of fact, I don't know whether he ever ran, yea I think he did some by car, he may have gotten into trouble with that once. There's something about him we don't know. But he never got caught with the boat. And he had a source up near

Plattsburgh which was his brother actually who was running a hotel over there then and his brother had a source to feed the hotel and stock piled it there near Plattsburgh out in the country by the lake. So by getting word to his brother that he needed such and such a load, he would then arrive in this little bay and go up on the shore and they'd have it ready for him. Money would change hands and he would go back to Burlington. He was fairly safe because he wasn't crossing the border, but he wasn't altogether safe because they ran the patrol boats up and down the lake sometimes. Because he knew there was something else going on somewhere all the while. He escaped one time by running over a shoal. His boat didn't draw much water and he knew a low place in the shoal and they were catching up fast and he ran over the shoal and they hit it with an awful crash and he just kept right on going of course.

MK So he knew the lake really well to be able to know just where to go?

MC He knew it pretty well, yea. He almost got caught going into Burlington one time. They were waiting for him. He veered off and went back out to Juniper Island and hung around there for a day and came back in the next night and made it. Another time he was coming into Burlington, he usually came in what they call a canal down there which is the subject of considerable discussion nowadays. In those days it was navigable but his boat would go under the bridge and he would come in there. But he was warned off again, and this time he went over to the harbor, Shelburne Harbor and laid over for the night, for the next day. If he can still remember, he's an interesting person. But when he called me up the other day, I figured he was pretty close to the outside of the limit. He couldn't seem to remember anything. I mean he couldn't even remember Eleanor. Don't tell her that. (LAUGHING)

MK Now would he operate with, you know assisted by somebody with a lantern?

MC He didn't have, I don't think he had anybody paid to do anything for him, but he did have friends apparently because each time he was warned off, it was somebody who was fishing there you know and fishing at night you say, well people do fish at night you know. And I never heard of him cooperating with anybody about anything, perhaps his wife, I don't know. So I have a feeling he did everything all by himself.

MK How did you get to know him?

MC Oh, I heard, he was pointed out to me a long time ago. And I'd heard that he'd worked, worked the racket. So when Eleanor started grilling me to look under every burdock leaf and pull somebody out, I naturally turned to him.

MK So you got acquainted with him then fairly recently in a personal way?

MC No, I'd known him before that because he used to like to race boats. He didn't own any fast boats himself, but he was considered a good driver because of his experience when he was bootlegging. And so there were certain parties who had fast boats that would like to have them raced, they'd get him to drive them. And I had a fast boat back then, used to race. So I raced against him and that's how I got on speaking terms with him you know. I guess probably it's back then that I first really heard much about him. That time there were one or two others alive. But they are all dead now.

MK Were most of the bootleggers around here? I mean did they carry guns, did they —

MC I don't think so. And the last thing they wanted was a shoot out. This was no high noon affair you know. They weren't noted for courage. They were noted for being able to slink by.

MK So did the patrols, would they go after them with guns or was —

MC Yea, but because they knew they weren't carrying any guns, they never, the first shots were to make them stop which they never did. The next shots were at the tires. The Feds got real good at shooting tires and gas tanks you know. Gas tanks were all in the rear of the cars, but it took quite awhile for the gas to run down out of a bullet hole far enough to stop the car. It was better to hit a tire, that would slow them down so that they could be caught. As soon as the, as the, oh I can't even think of any words today, as soon as the car that was being pursued had a flat tire, the driver knew he was doomed and there was usually only one person in the car. On rare occasions there might be another who was being shown away so that he could be broken in as a driver, but mostly there were, at no time was there anybody on the individual's cars. But I mean in the fleet cars, you might find one with two people on it. Anyway, the driver would know the jig was up. He immediately started looking for a place where he could get the car as close to the forest as possible, jump out of

it, and run into the forest before the Feds had a chance to get stopped and get out and pursue him you know. And they didn't have dogs in those days. So once he melted into the dark forest, he was as good as gone. And...

MK And they didn't travel with lights then?

MC Well, yea, but they didn't have, they didn't stand a chance of finding him, they knew it. Gosh, those guys were nameless you know. The individuals, that was something else. They were doing it solely on their own and they didn't go and gamble along with the rest of them. They meant to make a buck at it you know and they didn't mean to be caught. And so they weren't very flamboyant because that would raise their profile too high and bring them under scrutiny. But the fleet cars were something else. In the fleet cars, the owner is looking for the same young buck you see cutting up around here at night you know. Somebody with more brass than brains who will do the job and do it cheap. So they didn't last very long. You know, they'd last a few trips and there was a big turnover in them.

MK The turnover because they'd caught or they'd move on?

MC Well sometimes they got caught and sometimes they began to feel used and moved on. I mean when you risk your neck driving somebody else's car down over the border with the customs in hot pursuit and all that stuff, and you get \$25.00 for the job and you brought down \$500.00 worth of hootch, it gives you something to think about. Unless most of them were too dumb to know the difference you know.

MK So after you do that a few times, it dawns on you how much money the other guy has made *from your* —

MC So then you start asking for more money. If he thinks you're good enough, you'll get it. And if he doesn't, you won't, then you're out you see. And you go around and try to get some other bootlegger with a fleet of cars to hire you. But word has already got ahead of you, so.

MK So the bootleggers themselves kind of had a network of...

MC Well the owners did. I mean they passed so many of these young punks through, that they knew who was good and who wasn't.

MK So were they in competition with each other? Did they see it that way or?