

**“Green Mountain Chronicles”
Oral History Transcriptions, 1981-1989 (bulk: 1987-1988)
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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.”

**Deane C. Davis
Part 2**

Deane C. Davis
June 23, 1988

Mary Kasamatsu
Interviewer

MK Oh, let's make a stab at getting started here. This is the 23rd of June and I guess we'll continue the interview well not exactly where we left off, we'll go back to the beginning I guess today.

DD Okay.

MK Okay, you were born in East Barre?

DD Yes.

MK In 1900, latter part of 1900?

DD I was born there in November 7, 1900 and I'm sorry that I didn't get around fast enough to begin the century, because I want to live the century out and be the only person that has done exactly that in Vermont, but I'm not sure it's going to work.

MK You didn't get there quite early enough to begin it anyway.

DD Yea.

MK Now you were saying last week that you spent some time on, was it your grandfather's farm?

DD Yes. This was over in the Town of Corinth, but it happens to be about 2 1/2 miles from up the hill, and I mean up the hill, right straight up like that to what are called the Pike Hill Mines. Copper was discovered there some time in the late 1800's and it was, this mine was worked intermittently whenever the price of copper was high enough to justify it economically. It used to draw the copper ore without its being refined very much. So they drew an awful lot of material for a little bit of copper from Pike Hill to Bradford which is about 12 miles where it could be transported by train. And this had to be done transportation from Pike Hill Mine to Bradford was done by 12 horse teams. Great big Belgian-type horses with hitched to these tremendous wagons and tremendous weight on them so they were constantly rebuilding the road where they gouged it out whenever there was any moisture you know enough to, to make bit ruts in the road. Back in those days, there wasn't any gravel on the road. It was all just dirt. Gravel came along after the horses, more or less went away and cars began to come and the back roads were covered with this few inches of gravel and made it much better for, much less mud, much less moisture for automobiles. Yea, I went over there, I was five years old when I went over there and actually only lived there

during the summers and part of the spring for two years because my grandfather and grandmother died within a week while I was still there when I was seven years old. But I, they were a great, they were a great influence on my life because they both were, were superior people and of course everybody's grandfather and grandmother is a superior person, but they truly were for the time. He was a, had been a school teacher and she had been a school teacher also. This was his second marriage back in the days you know they worked, those days, they worked women hard enough so that they died earlier than men. Now the women got it all changed around and they live longer than the men. But my own grandmother, my grandfather's second wife had previously been married to a Dr. Evans in Marshfield, Vermont, and had learned from him and from his practice a great deal about medicine which of course a pretty elementary kind of science back in those days compared to what it is now. And since this countryside over there in the early 1900's was you might say devoid of any nearby medical services, she was in constant demand whenever anybody was sick, they'd send for her.

MK Did she deliver babies too?

DD Beg pardon.

MK Did she deliver babies?

DD She delivered babies and she always would respond whatever the nature of the illness was. So she was away from home a good deal and she did this all for no pay at all. This was done as a Christian act in her mind. I remember one, one night when I was there during the month of early March, before I had gone to school, started school, I woke up and heard noises in the kitchen downstairs and being somewhat curious, I gradually got up courage to go down and investigate. And I found that this, there was a man who had driven through tremendous blizzard that was in process and a blizzard out on these country roads is no, no joke, then or now and particularly then when they were being transported by horse and sleigh. Anyway, he had driven five miles because his wife was extremely ill with pneumonia seeking help from my grandmother. And the horse was exhausted and my grandfather had taken the horse and put him down in the barn and rubbed him down and hitched up another one of his horses to his sleigh and they were just in the act of putting the free stone in the sleigh when I got down. Do you know what a free stone is? They heated it in the oven and put it in the sleigh, wrapped it up in rags and my grandmother had a bear skin coat, just like my grandfather did and meant plenty fur robes and she

got into the sleigh with this man and they went back through this raging blizzard thinking nothing of it. We didn't see her for a week. I can't tell you what happened to the patient, because I don't remember.

MK But that was, they didn't think anything at all...

DD No.

MK ...out of the ordinary of doing that?

DD No, they were living in that kind of situation and had adjusted to it. It was a common part of life in, you might call it pioneer days. It wasn't quite that, but very nearly. It was a sort of an example I think the farm was of the first so called family farms as they existed in Vermont in so many places where there would be ten or a dozen milking cows and small herd of sheep, pigs. They'd raise the calves and my grandfather was raising Morgan Horses too, a few at that time. But it was an all around kind of, of a production. It wasn't like our farm, our dairy farms of today when the whole focus is on producing milk and a family farm couldn't exist in Vermont today with probably less than 50 to 60 cows at the very minimum and many so called family farms have 100 cows now and production many, many times in both quarts and weight and butter fat what were being produced back in those days. But they lived off the farm. And bought very little. I've heard my father tell several times about the fact that one year in his growing up days, my grandfather had received a total of \$900 gross from stuff that was sold off the farm which included a Morgan colt. That was the biggest. That was usually was around \$500 because they didn't buy much. They, they made many of their own clothes. My grandmother was a, loved to do that sort of thing and so she used to card the wool and prepare the wool from their own sheep and take it through to the stages where she'd make a suit of clothes.

MK She did her own weaving then?

DD She what?

MK She did her own weaving too?

DD Yes. Yup. I can remember those machines. They looked very, they looked quite scientific to me back at that time.

MK That's wonderful. I was thinking as you were talking about the size of their farm. The farm right down the road here has 140 cows now.

DD Yes, yes. Well they have to now since they do concentrate and they buy everything. See back in those days, they even harvested their own grain and they had very primitive kinds of machinery to thr sh the oats. But they raised mostly oats, although sometimes barley. But the cattle lived pretty largely on roughage with a small like just hay and in the summer of course the grasses in the pasture. But they were fed small quantities of grain, but they didn't buy much of any grain. I don't recall there being any grain store in Waits River which was the place where they always, which was sort of the center for that area. You've been through Waits River of course. They would, there was a country store there at Waits River and the same place that it is now. That's a lot of years ago. But and there still is no, I don't know whether there is a grain store there in, I guess not, I guess grain has to be brought from Bradford anybody that's for the cattle that's anybody that's buying grain up in that area. There's very little dairy farming left up around Pike Hill. The farms are too hilly for using the kind of modern machinery we have, big tractors and big implements to hitch to the tractors. They're just unsafe and almost impossible to use them. So those, those places are, many of them have been bought by people from out of the state of Vermont. Land values over there have done the same thing that they have everywhere else, just gone right through the roof. There's a little small farm over there about 200 acres of very poor land. The house on it was built in the early 1800's. It was sold here about a year ago for over \$225,000 and s a farm that from my point of view, I wouldn't have been willing to pay \$5,000 for it because it was not a good, there's nothing about it as far as the farm is concerned and the person that has bought it must have put in another \$100,000 in remodeling this old, old house and building outbuildings and that sort of thing. He's not farming, he's just living there for fun.

MK It's incredible. Now this was your father's parents, our paternal grandparents who had the farm there?

DD Yes, my, my, that farm was settled in 1801. My great, great, great, great grandfather was John Davis from, who was born somewhere in the area of New Durham, New Hampshire and as was the custom in those days, Vermont land was very cheap. You could buy it I guess cheaper than even New Hampshire land because it was slower in being settled I assume. And then of course the Indians

were still around and occasionally making raids in the late 1700's so that it was, people didn't want to get too far away from civilization for that reason. But in 1801, my progenitor, John Davis, who settled that farm came over there before he was married, I guess he would be about 21 at that time. And he put up a what they used to call a pitch. And a pitch was a slanted sort of a slanted little house like. It wasn't much of a house. It was big enough to sleep in and big enough to have a stove in or a fireplace is what he had and they built a fireplace out of stone and they just, they lived there alone and sawed down the trees, roll them down the hill, burn them up in order to make some land that would be suitable for growing something on. And he stayed there about a year and while he was there he built a log house and then he went back to New Durham, New Hampshire and married his childhood sweetheart and they came over there and lived all the rest of their lives there and raised a family of five children I think and my line of succession goes back to that, to the Davis'. My grandmother however, my paternal grandmother was a Glantia Chandler who was a decedent of the Mayflower Chandler's and a fairly well educated woman. She was better educated than my grandfather, but they were both considered for the times. You didn't have to be very educated back at that time to have a reputation for being educated and they were staunch adherents to the, the little white church in Waits River Village which then was a Methodist Church and has been now for many years a Union Church. A number of interesting stories about that, but I won't bore you with those.

MK This, this was your grandmother who was also sort of a local doctor?

DD She was the, she was the widow of, of Dr. Evans.

MK Right, okay.

DD Yea.

MK Okay.

DD I don't, I've searched, and searched to try to find how they met because she was living in Marshfield of course that's where his, where her first husband was practicing medicine. And Pike Hill in those days, that's like going to Africa you know. But I have no records anywhere that I can find that have furnished any clue as to how they ever, how they met in the first place.

MK That would be so interesting to know.

DD Yes it would, yup. But I had the same, searching also to find how my own father and my own mother met and I never, you know, when you're young, you don't ask them. You just never think of it. But after they're gone you begin to center interest in them and then it becomes a lot harder to find those things and I've about given up on that. Of course I did know that, that my father and my mother actually did meet at Montpelier Seminary which is now Vermont College here. They were both going to school there and my mother was the daughter of the cook and as the daughter of the cook, she was also given a job waiting on table at the school, at the Seminary for which she received \$.10 a day and her board. She had to pay for her room, but she got her board and \$.10 a day. And my father came there at the same time. They were not in the same class. He, he graduated first, a year or two ahead of her and went on to University of Vermont. But two, three years ago, I had the strangest experience after giving up on finding out how they happened to meet other than being in the same school. I received a letter from a man in North Randolph who was a very advanced age and he told me that, he told me the story because it seemed that he and, he and my father were good friends and my mother and some other gal that was there, that later became his wife had decided to invite a couple of males to dinner which was permitted back at that time. You had to go to the office and you know the whole thing had to be done on the permit, very good supervision, so on I mean of supervision of who they are and how they are, but in several of those rooming houses, the girls had cooking privileges and the cooking facilities too. And they were both, the two girls invited my father and this Mr., well I can't speak his name right at the moment, man who wrote me the letter anyway and he said that they put on a great dinner which proved that the way to a man's heart was through his stomach, he said. I don't hold to that theory completely, but it helps. And, but they had a great evening apparently and there was somebody, one of the couples was making candy in the kitchen and so apparently it took so long to make the candy that there was not a foursome present all the time, it was the two and two arrangement and that's how they met.

MK So after all that time you finally, without expecting to, got the story?

DD Yea. I never expected to get the story on it. I have the letter now and cherish it very much.

MK Now is the farm that your father grew up on still in your family?

DD It was until a short time before his death and he sold it and he sold it under peculiar circumstances. He had, had a heart attack, very severe one and when he had recuperated from this heart attack, his doctor told me that he couldn't drive a car anymore. And this just about crushed him. And he had over, he still owned the farm at that time and rented it to different people, sometimes on what they call "the halves" and sometimes for certain stipulated rent, nothing very much. But he had built a little camp on it. It was not very luxurious camp, but it was sufficient for his needs. And he used to spend in the summertime, he used to spend his weekends over there and he just loved the place so much the thought that he couldn't now drive his car over there every week when he wanted to, it just broke his heart. So in defiance of the doctor's orders, he drove over there immediately one day and sold it. 500 acres and it had a little small cape cod type of house on it which was the third structure to be built over there. There was this pitch that I told you about, then the log cabin that he built for his wife and then I, somewhere along in the family, this frame house was built. So he went over and sold the whole thing for \$800 and within two or three weeks, the house burned on the place and the, there was a \$1,000 life insurance, I mean a property insurance, fire insurance policy on the, on the house, so this man was now \$200 better off and had the whole farm 500 acres in addition really for nothing you see. But he never said a word to me or anybody else. If he had mentioned it to me, I would have just bought it instantly, but it's still a place that has tremendous memories for me even though the house is gone and somebody in New York owns the farm and built a very expensive house up there on the property. It doesn't look the same and I go over at least once a year and spend two, three hours over there. I can't really decide whether it makes me sad or it makes me glad because you know it looks so different and yet I can see the hills. I can see Mt. Mooselock in New Hampshire that I used to think so much of and recapture some of the memories of growing up there but my dad, my grandfather being a teacher, obviously had that skill of how to interest children. And I spent all of my time, practically all my time following him around. You know and he would make jobs for me to do which made me feel important and just while he's doing these things, he would be telling me something about farm life, why you did this and why you did that and well he was a great educator. I mean that's, it wasn't only me, my Uncle Will owned the adjoining farm which was out of sight of the house there approximately a half of a mile, half three-quarters of a mile away. There were five children in that family and they've all had the same memories of my

grandfather that I do because I corresponded with them for a long time. And my grandmother had that same skill also, but was in a different way. She was ministering more to my physical needs or desires. She was showing me a lot of affection which I can remember with considerable nostalgia. But it wasn't til last, it seems a long time you know, it seems like half a lifetime just those two years because they are so important which I think sort of proves what we read now and then that you learn more in the earlier parts of your life that stay with you longer than, than you ^{learn} at anytime later provided you're subjected to the right kind of things to learn. But anyway, one day I remember my grandfather was going up into the woods to cut fence posts to repair the fences where the cattle were getting out and he hitched up a pair of horses and went up there and took me along with him. Of course I was being very important and being helpful in throwing the brush into a pile and that sort of thing and he cut the stakes and put them on the wagon. He worked until about, oh a short time before noon and then he drove the horses back to the barn and I noticed he acted differently. He didn't say much of anything, but he put the horses up in the barn and went up to the house and suppose to eat lunch and he wouldn't eat any lunch, and went immediately to bed. And within the next day, before the end of the next day, they did have a doctor that was persuaded to come from Bradford which is twelve miles away to examine him, but he ~~didn't have the remotest~~ idea what was the matter with him then. He died that second day afterwards and within a week, my grandmother died. So it was, to me the world kind of ended right, right then and there.

MK Now were you alone with them?

DD Beg your pardon.

MK Were you alone with them there at the farm? Was it just the three of you?

DD Well no, there was my grandmother used to take in people that, younger girls that sometimes that loved not wisely, but too well and had a child or so. There was almost always somebody like that, that would function as sort of a hired gal until her condition in life could improve enough and they would help her get replaced in some situation where she could earn her living or get married or what have you. I don't know how many of them there were, but just during the time that I was there, I remember two different ones and my grandfather never had a hired man except when he, somebody was out of a job and no, no place to go, no home, or anything, he'd take them

in so there were, it wasn't a lonely place by any means. But there was a lot of coming and going, but my grandmother she took the responsibility of teaching the kids something about religion because she was strong and adherent to the Church. My grandfather was also. We used to have, we used to have prayers at, at mealtime, always. And at night and after things had quieted down and supper as we called it in those days which we would call dinner now was over, they'd sit around the table with, if there was a hired girl there or wasn't, be the same thing, be a discussion about the last sermon that they'd heard in the Church. And of course I didn't participate in those, but I sat there bug-eyed or ear-eyed and listening to those discussions. Tell you another story about my grandfather which shows a little about his character and belief. They had a practice in Uncle Will of, of taking the cream to the, see they separated their own cream, separated the milk and the cream. Fed the skim milk to the pigs or the calves or whatever they happened to have at the time and then the cream, they made into butter, when every farm including this one back at that time used to have what they called a buttery, a place where you kept the cream for two, three days to let it season a little bit and then they would churn it. I can remember turning a hand churn there as a child between, in those two years. But Uncle Will would carry the butter, they took the butter to the creamery twice a week and on specific days, but they'd swap. One week, one day of the week, my grandfather would take it. Other day, Uncle Will would take it. And on this, this was the occasion when, my grandfather was supposed to take the butter and there was some reason why he couldn't. I cannot recall the reason but he gave me the responsibility of walking half a mile or three-quarters of a mile to my Uncle Will's to tell him that he would have to take it on that day. And of course there was no telephone at that time. So I, I felt, that was a big deal as far as I'm concerned. This is the first big assignment in my life and I set out on this trip to Uncle Will's with a good deal of pride and a good deal of self-importance too, but it didn't last long. When I got almost around the last curve to the farm house, my Uncle Will's farm house, they had one of these farm dogs you know which are of doubtless origin, but they all look about alike, fuzzy kind of things. They are kind of part shepherds and mixed with something else, but they make great watch dogs. They are very belligerent and most of them, would never hurt anybody, but they make you feel that they are going to. So when I rounded the curve, this dog faced me in the road and said no, no, you can't go any further. So I tried my best to go down to the left around and the dog would get around in front of me the same way

and make menacing growls and jumps at me and then I went up around to the right and he did the same thing. And I tried this for quite awhile. Finally it became evident that nobody was able to hear at the farm house, the commotion that was going on come to my rescue, so I went back to, to the farm. And of course I was very ashamed of my lack of courage to continue the assignment and so I, when my grandfather asked me if I delivered the message, I said yes I had. And that was of course a combination of stupidity and courage and everything else but I knew I would get caught at it because you could help it. Even a five-year-old could, could figure that out. And the next day, when nobody showed up at the proper time to take the cream as my grandfather expected, he hitched up one of his horses to ~~the~~ buggy to drive over there. Of course I knew that was going to be the, the, that was going to be my, the end of my, well anyway I was going to be caught. So I ran to him in the buggy and burst out crying and told him the story. And he listened to it very interesting, interestedly and he got down out of the buggy and led the horse over to the, the barnyard fence and hitched the horse there and took me by the hand and took me to the woodshed. And explained to me as I was going what was happening, and there wasn't any doubt in my mind anyway, and he gave me a real good lickin and I've had a few in my lifetime and so I know one when I feel it. And of course the world had just crashed and as far as I'm concerned, I ran into the house sobbing and my grandmother immediately picked me up and took me in her arms and sat in the kitchen there and I can feel that shirtwaist of hers, that rough one she had, as she was cuddling me there. My grandfather had said to me, "Now," he said, he said, "it really doesn't matter," he said "that, that you came back and couldn't deliver the message." He said, "what matters is that you lied to me." And he said, "I'm going to have to show you that it never pays to tell a lie." That was what he had to say. Well, my grandmother in comforting me, she had a lot more to say and she was saying it from I thought a little more sympathetic point of view and a little more sympathetic way. She, I can't remember the exact words of course, but I can remember the substance of what she was trying to get across to me was that, that God was a forgiving God and that just if I didn't do this anymore, consciously tried to make sure that I never told a lie again, that God would forgive me and I believed that all my life and I won't say I've never told a lie you know all my life. I don't recall ever doing it, but I've fudged the truth a little bit once in awhile I'm afraid as most people have, but nevertheless as I thought of it in my old age, what a way to teach. I mean it is to me I think that what they did and how they did it is just a tremendous

example of what can be done with kids. Not just about lies but about everything. Well I'm getting pretty detailed, pretty wordy.

MK But that's certainly obviously those two years really were an important part of your early development

DD They were, they were. Every time I go by the, my, my own parents and my grandparents and some other relatives too are buried in that cemetery just as you go through Waits River, just a little bit beyond on the left, every time I come by there, if I have any time at all, just stop long enough to go in and look at the grave stones and every time I go through Waits River I, some part of those two years comes back to me, driving to the church with my grandfather and his big stallion. We had a lot of people like a hired girl and a hired man and Grandpa and Grammy and myself had a guest, somebody that was there visiting all at the same time I remember that driving to the farm, it took three conveyances to get them all transported. See there was, I guess some other children there too, but I remember they had a big pair of work horses hitched to a lumber wagon and they had a single horse hitched to an express wagon and they had a single horse hitched to a buggy. Now all three of those conveyances going from Pike Hill to Waits River for Church and back to transport the occupants of one house was quite an experience but I'd love to drive with him in the buggy. He'd go to Waits River once in awhile and occasionally I would go with him in the express wagon with the butter to the creamery. The creamery used to be oh a mile or two this side of Waits River toward West Topsham and the more recent years it's still, building stills there, it's now owned by the Grange. It is the Grange Hall, but it isn't much bigger than, well say twice the size of this room.

MK Well then after your time spent on the farm, your parents were living in Barre during this time?

DD Yea that's right.

MK Yea.

DD See my, the illness in the family was a brother Raymond and he eventually died of this illness and when that was over, I came back there to live even before the two years was up, but I insisted on being taken over every chance I could get, so I was there, I was there both summers you see too. And from, well actually from the spring, spring and summer and fall of those two years and then of course they died at the end of the, when I was seven and we were

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living at that time in on Allen Street up in Barre which is on the west side of town. It's a street that intersects Prospect Street. So that's what I always call home is my Allen Street home.

MK Yea. So you would have memories of trolley...