

“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.

Anna Fenton
June 2, 1987

Mary Kasamatsu
Interviewer

MK I am with Mrs. Anna Fenton in Middletown Springs on the 2nd of June, 1987. Let's tell a little background about you first and get that down. Can you tell me where and when you were born?

AF Right here in this house in 1906 in Middletown Springs.

MK So your family was a farm family?

AF That's right.

MK How many brothers and sisters do you have?

AF Not, well I had a sister but she died at 18 and I've been alone.

MK So you, did you know that you were going to continue in farming?

AF One never knows.

MK Did you want to when you grew up or what did you want to do?

AF Oh yes, I wanted 4H work. I went on to Keene, New Hampshire and studied Home Economics for 4H work.

MK Tell me how you got started with 4H?

AF In 1919 there was a club organized, we first were in boys' and girls' club before it was 4H. My husband and I both were doing garden work because it was World War II.* And then it came on 1919* was a county agent and she came down for a couple meetings and Idle-Not Canning Club was organized and named. But it was sort of dropped until May of 1920 when D. E. Bergstrom came into the county and from then on we were working with him. (* means ww I.)

MK Now you said the boys' and girls' clubs?

AF That's right.

MK Was this the Camp Vail — ?

AF No.

MK No?

AF That's before all this was taken, it was the very first. If you get hold of one of these books. It's 4H all through.

It was called 4H, not 4H, "Boys and Girls Club". And I found, I can't think what year they changed it to 4H. It was before 1919.

MK Now were you also at Camp Vail?

AF I was at Camp Vail.

MK Tell me about that? How did that come about?

AF We had to demonstrate at our local level and then had to go to our State to demonstrate and had to win in order to go Camp Vail and that was in 1923 we were down there in Camp Vail. We were demonstrating making breads.

MK So this was as a reward?

AF We were there a week. Uh huh.

MK But you were not there during the war years?

AF No, no no.

MK I see. Now what, I didn't realize that Camp Vail continued beyond as a, did it continue as a farm training program beyond World War I?

AF It did for there. I can look it up and tell you.

MK Okay.

AF Because I just found what year it stopped.

MK Okay, go ahead, that's fine. So after World War I then it continued?

AF Yes.

MK As a organized training program for...

AF Then the young people went for demonstration down there and they were like that. The same as they are doing now each fall from the different counties, so many can go with their demonstrations.

MK Okay, gee I didn't realize that it continued.

AF Uh huh.

MK I see. Now let's shift back now to your beginnings in 4H. How old were you when you started in with the Boys and Girls Clubs?

AF I don't understand.

MK How old were you when you started in the Boys and Girls Club? Were they separate, a boys and a girls' club?

AF Yes separate. They were separate. Well you see that was in 1920 that would be 1906. 1906 to 1920 would be...

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AF About that. Uh huh. We canned, our first four years was in canning because that's when it was coming canning for the gardens that boys and girls were putting out. Our first quota was 25 quarts and then the next year it was 50 quarts. The third year it was 100 quarts and the fourth year we had to do 200 quarts to finish our year's work. And after that we branched out into sewing and foods.

MK Now what kinds of projects were the boys working on?

AF Potato growing, livestock and I think they did some handy work like working with tools.

MK Now as you say canning as a process, home canning process was just coming into being?

AF Yes, it was about the first.

MK So was the idea that this would be a way of teaching?

AF You see during the war everything was so high, and they wanted the food to go through into all the year, and that brought the canning in before the public.

MK I was just wondering how, how the 4H, the idea of 4H was presented to the public when it was new? Do you remember? Was there a recruitment effort to get kids to join?

AF We had a home dem group and at that time ^[it] was called Farm Bureau Group and the mothers wanted their daughters and sons to be getting into a club to be doing things. And the agent came down, as I say she was here only just, oh only just a few months. She'd finished out her retiring and then Mr. Bergstrom came in in May of that 1920.

MK The reason I was asking was, 4H was well established by the time I was old enough to be able to join. For me it was

partly a social club as well as a chance to learn to do some things I needed to know how to do. Other kids in my community joined so I joined.

AF Uh huh. We had a very outgoing club too. We didn't have time for many plays, playing around because we were always working. It took a while to sew, can and cook, and that was my big interest.

MK How did you decide that you wanted to go beyond being a 4H member and eventually become a 4H leader?

AF I was so interested in home economics and I knew it had to be that type of schooling in order to become a country agent. And I wanted to be a 4H county agent and I got it through home economics. And when I went to Keene, New Hampshire that was my whole interest was to be one, but all I did was on a local level because my folks weren't too well, and I worked two summers with Mr. Bergstrom in the county doing extension work with the 4H people.

MK So he was the Rutland agent.

AF Uh huh.

MK And you were the agent for...

AF I was the assistant and I was called into Burlington to work especially with the girls to bring up the standard of sewing. Now it has gone way down.

MK Why is that do you suppose?

AF Because we had to do so many more things and had to be just so. Now they don't have to. It kind of, I don't like it so well.

MK I know the program did change through the years.

AF Oh, it has changed. Oh...

MK Tell me how it changed some?

AF Oh there's awful changes. It's more for a good time and get things done quickly. If it isn't just perfect, it's alright. But I think it's going back a little bit to that, from what I observed at some meetings. I have been on some judging groups, and I really think that maybe they're being more careful in training the youngsters to do more as they should.

- MK Why do you think the changes came about in the first place?
- AF Speed. Get things done quickly. As long as it looks good on the outside, it's alright. Now I know they are looking for better quality.
- MK Do you think, I'm interested in that because one thing that I was reading that surprised me was that it was something like one out four 4H members today comes from a town with a population 1 in 10,000.
- AF Well, I know that it's more town there because it's not the rural group now. See we've only got a few farmers now and we have no dairy group now in town. We used to have 30 boys and girls in our club. We had the boys. My husband and I had the boys for quite awhile. There was 30 of them in there. Now we haven't enough for a dairy meeting. We've got more horses now. That's coming in. They've just had a horse clinic just last weekend. See my daughter-in-law is a county agent, as you know. I asked, she was in here the other night and I says do you know of this person. I says I knew you were the one.
- MK She volunteered you then? Is that how we found out about you? Okay.
- AF I knew she was the one. I knew it.
- MK I see. I'm interested in looking at some of the changes in 4H as they reflect changes in the farm economy in the communities too. As you say you don't have farm, dairy farms, in the area anymore.
- AF No, I can't think where they would be, three or, dairy group that could get together in town now. The children are 4H age. I can't think. No.
- MK Now when you and your husband were doing the dairy group you were both the agents for that group or they...
- AF We worked with the, uh huh.
- MK How long were you a volunteer for the dairy group then.
- AF Well, we started in working when Page was 9 years old and in 4H. Chet Norton had to leave town and teach over in Poultney and he couldn't carry on the club work so he asked Paul to do it. And Page was just starting 4H work. So we got the boys together and kept on. Then our grandsons went on with it. We've just been right along.

Our daughter-in-law and husband have been working, this is a 4H family right straight through.

MK How many children do you have?

AF We have one son. He has three sons. So it's, and they've all been through to Washington and Chicago. So I think you can call us a 4H family.

MK I think so. If you were to describe now for someone who, oh, say a kid growing up in Montpelier who's not going to have any interest probably in, probably wouldn't see the need for 4H for themselves. (I don't know whether it is available to kids growing up in Montpelier now.) But what would you say that 4H offers to young people?

AF It helps them to understand life and working with their parents, because that is one of the best places that they work together. And sometimes the 4H can even teach the parents some things which is not too difficult in some lines. And just bring in, it isn't all just work but you have a chance to travel. If you put your time and energy into it and there's is working with other people and it's getting along with people which I think is one of the best of 4H.

MK In terms of the way the projects have changed, are there group projects that clubs do now?

AF What do you mean?

MK Well I don't know. I'm just trying to guess. When I went through 4H, it was primarily sewing and cooking, and since then I've heard about other groups that have formed like babysitting co-ops and things like that.

AF Oh sure, sure.

MK Where the kids are actually working together as we... - -.

AF Oh there's the dog clinic, the horse clinic, the babysitting group, handicraft, sheep projects, rabbit groups, you speak of it, you can have a, start a club. We are going to start one in knitting here in this group which we have not had one in the county. Whatever you can get a group together and interested, you can start in and work out your own projects and records.

MK You mean keeping records of...

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AF It is very important for records because that trains you for life as you get older.

MK Let's talk about that a little bit more. What kinds of records do kids keep?

AF They have to keep track of everything they have done in their project and others concerning to the project. Also they have to keep track of their school projects. They can tell they've got two schools, this and that, and the church, it brings the church in and it teaches them to write down each meeting, each night that they've done something special, so at the end of the year these records go in they are checked and so that they get a mark on them and the top records give a chance to get to Chicago trips after three years.

MK What distinguishes the outstanding records?

AF Quality. It's the way it is put into shape, the handwriting, the spelling of course and the years that's in it, telling it year by year. This is getting ready for Chicago records. And it keeps them, keeping them up in date which is good for training.

MK I can certainly see how for the agricultural production, that's an awfully important thing for the kids to know.

AF Uh huh.

MK Do you find any resistance on the part of the young women in the club who are doing things other than crop and livestock projects? Do they ever say well I don't see why I have to keep track of this and that?

AF Oh they always try to slip through if they can. Well it's up to the leaders to see that they don't. After they've been in a couple of years, three years, and they see some advantage, you have little trouble, very little. Because now they are looking for a chance to a trip.

MK Do they go to local fairs or field days?

AF Oh yes. Last Sunday was a horse clinic. That was for the horses. They had just had their dairy judging group where they, I read in the paper today the ones that was going for Eastern States this fall. They will be training this summer. And we have had a group go to Wisconsin, right straight through there. One of our, the last grandson went.

- MK Let's talk a little bit about the demonstrations. Since this is for radio and for audience, some may have been 4H members, others may not know anything about 4H, what is a demonstration? What's behind that idea?
- AF A demonstration is whereby you are putting the material out and doing it before the public and so that they can see the easiest way to do them and correct way of handling measurings and things like that if it's foods. Also it is bringing in of food, the nutrition value of your demonstration because they have to tell what nutrition is in the foods and what's good for us. Then they also not only demonstrations, they have public speaking. And that, they have to talk over the mic at the fair and when you first start in they don't want to do it. Before the fair is over they are clamoring, "Who's going to talk about what's coming next?" Then all their demonstration and public speaking and that's all done over the mic at the fair.
- MK Do they do demonstrations in the regular club meetings as well?
- AF Yes, everyone is suppose to do a demonstration. And that is they have to tell what they are doing. That gets them on their feet and talking.
- MK For many kids, is that the first time they've ever done something like that?
- AF Beg your pardon.
- MK I said, for many of the 4H members, is that the first time?
- AF Oh sure, about the first time and the next year you can see such a growth in them. It's fun.
- MK You must have gained a tremendous amount, being involved with it for as many years as you have?
- AF I love it. I like youngsters. And I never had any trouble with them disciplining them either because I wouldn't allow any fooling, not unless it was for fooling.
- MK What would you say you gained by the whole experience?
- AF What?

MK What did you gain through the 4H experience?

AF Working with other people and seeing their point of view. Maybe I didn't always think it's just right, but I had a chance to see what they thought. And I think anyone is much better to be able to do that.

MK Where do you see 4H going now?

AF Where is it?

MK Uh huh.

AF Well, it's larger in this county than it has been for quite a little while. There's more members. There is one club that we have that's got 30 members in it.

MK What kind of club is that?

AF I'm not sure whether it's horse or not, but it might be. That I couldn't tell you. But I know that my daughter-in-law's daughter said that there was 30 in that group. I kind of check on her once in awhile.

MK When did you actually retire? Or have you retired?

AF Haven't, haven't, don't know enough to. As long as I'm able to talk 4H.

MK I thought you hadn't and then you said you were looking for someone else that...

AF Oh well, what I mean, I'm willing to direct and let them go ahead and meet with the girls. I can direct them. And I may do some directing with the boys too. We are working, because I know what their work is supposed to be. So, I like 4H.

MK Had you ever worked as a county agent? Actually you worked as the assistant to?

AF That's all.

MK Did you work in Rutland during that time?

AF Rutland County, all over the county.

MK Travelling all over?

AF Uh huh.

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MK Do you have any interesting stories to share from that?

AF Well that's quite a little while ago.

MK When would that have been?

AF That was back in, let's see, '30, '31, '32, somewhere in there. We used to go to camps. I know the big highlight is the watermelon feast at the camps. I learned ~~to~~ love a lot of the other counties I wouldn't have known otherwise.

MK Sure. How were the road maps then?

AF Well, we went by the word of mouth a good deal.

MK I wondered because I'd been talking with a woman who described a green book. This would have been earlier. I guess she was saying in early, probably early 1920.

AF They used to have a blue book too.

MK Oh, I thought she said they were nothing like maps. You know you'd drive down...

AF The blue book was.

MK first big tree next to the stone wall and then you make a right turn here, then you go so far until you come to the white house...

AF Well, the blue books had the maps.

MK Oh.

AF Mine, I mostly travelled was from our county agent bringing it and directing me. I knew some of the places and then inquiring.

MK Sure. Well thank you very much.

AF Well. It would be interesting ^[for you.] to read that book.

MK Okay, that's "The 4H Story" by Franklin M. Wreck, okay.

AF And there's another one out that I'm going to look into because and our group is in it. The Idle-Not is in it. _____ should have been too, but I guess nobody wrote it up. I knew I had to write up an article of the Idle-Not group and that's probably what it is. But I haven't seen the book.

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MK I will again thank you very much.

AF Well it's been fun.

MK Good.

AF I like talking about 4H.