

“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.

Gov. Madeline Kunin
Women's History Day
March 30, 1987

I would like you to welcome Governor Madeline Kunin.

Applause

MK Thank you. Thank you. Thank you very much Lynn. I confess this is the kind of conference I really would like to attend and not just stop and say a few words and then have to leave. I hate leaving because history in women's history has always been a great interest to me, so I am delighted that this occurring and that we are joining forces here with the Vermont Historical Society, Commissioner on the Status of Women and various academic and other institutions in the state. It is hard to know where they intersect with a subject like this. I think that it was my discovery of part of women's history that led to my desire to want mix-up. I think there is a real connection between our ability to know our own history and our ability to act in our own time. The process of discovery is a really significant one. I think one of the books that influenced me most (I think I read it in the '60's, late 60's, early 70's) was "Century of Struggle" which is a very good compilation of the suffrages movement. And it was in that book that I discovered a Vermonter who is just mentioned in about a couple of paragraphs and her name is Larina Howard Nichols. You may know of her in this group, I am sure. Well having seen her alluded as one of the early pioneers in fighting for both women's suffrage and education incidently, she actually gave her first speech in the Vermont Legislature, not as a member, but it must have been the custom in those days for citizens to come and address the legislature. And she was the first woman to do so. And it was on behalf of the bill for women to have the right to vote in school board meetings and school affairs. It was considered a very radical idea indeed. I then did some research on her and wrote an article for Vermont Life and also on the suffrages movement in Vermont at that time which was very brave and very advanced and unfortunately not very successful. But we had all the stars here that came through the state. All the great women of that time. And I think I have always somehow vicariously identified with it. I very much felt with them. Certainly when you read about a woman like Larina Howard Nichols and you realize how courageous and brave she and others like her must have been in terms of the ridicule that they suffered. I mean they were really considered very bizarre indeed. And when it was announced that she would give her speech, it was also announced that the dam editor of the Rutland Herald would present her with a pair of mans trousers. That was supposed to be the joke of the day. But she handled this very well and somehow retorted you know, we will be happy to give the men their trousers, if they give us possession of our old petticoats and...

Laughing

because they are coming back in style. But because women then had absolutely no property rights and no inheritance

rights and Vermont was one of the first states to pass this kind of legislation. It also said in "Century of Struggle" that she suffered from heart palpitations during her speech and had to be given smelling salts because of the great emotion of the moment. I don't know whether that was editorialized or whether it was really true, whether they anticipated that emotion or not. But you can understand you know what it meant to be the first to stand up to that audience and be taken seriously and to the context to that time. I also in that process discovered a woman named Edna Beard who I point out to the children who come to visit the state house. Her portrait hangs in the state house and not very much is known about her but she was the first woman who was elected to the legislature in 1921 from the Town of Orange. I remember trying to do some research and it is sparse. But the Burlington Free Press decided not to make a major event out of the election of the first woman. It had the list of the new legislatures and there was a little asterisk next to Edna Beard and if you followed the asterisk, it said underneath woman.

Laughter

The Rutland Herald had an editorial at the time that had took...it was sort of before computers, but it could have been done with a computer where it projected what the women's vote would mean for elections. In terms you know that if so many thousands of men voted, how many thousands of women would vote. Would they all vote one way. And if they did, what would happen. But nothing about you know that this was a historical event only how would women affect a political party in power. It was kind of interesting. But what happened with Edna Beard again even though I don't know, never knew the woman, her great niece is in Vermont State Government, Elsie Beard. One of the vignettes was when they chose seats for the legislatures, a newly elected legislature, there is a ritual that continues to this day. Where if you have ever been a member of the legislature before you take your seat, if you were a legislature at any previous incarnation, that group next takes their seats and then the new legislatures one by one are called in. When Edna Beard was called in to take her seat, it was a major thing. She did take her seat, but then it was noted in the paper that nobody wished to sit next to her. When someone finally did; I haven't reread my own article to find that members name, but there was great laughter and applause that he had the courage to sit next to Edna Beard who was subsequently called the "Lady from Orange". You can see that these women who enabled us to take our seats in a much more perfunctory way really have paved the way in every sense. And I am deeply indebted to them. There undoubtedly many more whose names we do not know. That is what is so fascinating about the field of women's history. That we are constantly discovering ourselves in the process of writing that history. That is why a conference like this is so important. You know people do need a sense of history in order to envision themselves in the present. We call that role models in one way, but it goes much deeper than that. I think when classes of children come to the state house and they look at all the

portraits on the walls. It is so important for them to see those women portraits and I always point them out. Sometimes I'd say now I have an assignment for you. I want you to know who these women are and why they were there. The other woman as you might surmise is Consuelo Northrup Bailey whose portrait hangs in the state house. But the idea of finding ourselves in history books, finding ourselves on the walls of the major institutions of the times in which we live is I guess is a psychological term now called imaging. But we do need that. We need that in the present and we need that in the past. I think we also need it in a sense to pay homage to those women who have been silent and invisible for so long. You think of some of the diaries of some of the pioneer women, farm women and the people who created the fabric of this state in ways we cannot fully understand until we know more about them and they should be recorded and they should be understood. So it's an exciting process that you are undergoing and I think there always has been a women's history, it simply has not always been considered worthy of record. Just as black history and immigrant and other kinds of history have been ignored. I think historians bring to their time and place; those of you who are in historiography or it's just a logical conclusion. Each generation who records history attaches the values and priorities of its time. In that selection process, what is worthy of record? What is worthy of being written down? And we in a sense are compensating for some of the emissions of the past as we bring to it our new sense of what is worthy of record and what is considered to be a significant event and a significant person in shaping that event. In that sense we cannot be angry with the past because the past historians simply reflected the values of their times. We can of course try to make up for some of those emissions. But it is clear that it is our responsibility in our time to resurrect some of those women who we still do not know who were not known in their time and deserve to be known in our time. In that process of discovery, we will also discover a great deal about ourselves and hopefully continue to make history in our time in the way that we understand and that is necessary. So necessary in the times in which we live that we can bring that sense of equality of justice to the history as we live it and write it. Thank you.

Applause