

Albert Spaulding
June 28, 1988

Mary Kasamatsu
Interviewer

MK I'm with Mr. Albert Spaulding here in Burlington. It's the 28th of June, 1988 and this is an interview for the Green Mountain Chronicles. Let's see, which should we do first, Dewey Day or trolleys?

AS Trolleys.

MK Trolleys okay. Let's begin then. Do you have memories of cars and trolleys?

AS Very vague. I have ridden cars of the Burlington Traction Company which was the original street railway in the State of Vermont. I have memories of riding that. For example, trolley cars left from downtown Burlington and went out as far as the municipal bathing beach which is called North Beach. They didn't go exactly that far. They went to a point where the road branched off and went down to the beach and I think my earliest recollection probably was riding what they called the open cars which were wonderful things in the summertime because they are wide open and very, very comfortable, very nice to have the breeze blow through. And I also rode cars a little bit other than that too, but my recollection is very poor of those.

MK Did your parents tell you stories about riding trolleys?

AS Unfortunately, I don't remember too much about my parents riding the trolleys. I really have no memory so I don't want to ad-lib here and say that they did when I don't recall any stories that they told me now.

MK Was, I'm interested in your interest in it, where did that develop?

AS It's a funny story. I like transportation, I like the lake boats, I like railroads, I like trolley cars. I haven't gotten into the air yet, but these things, the ground transportation, the water transportation I like very much and strangely enough the way I got interested in trolley cars was because I have a good friend named Ralph Nadine Hill and he used to be a senior editor of Vermont Life and they used to do more stories past tense than they do now. They used to do historical articles. So I said Ralph, one day I said, "You've never done anything on trolleys and I think you should do something." And he said, "Well that's not a bad idea, why don't you do it." I said, "Why me?" He says, "Well I think you probably know as much about trolleys, you've mentioned it to me, so why don't you go ahead and do an article and we'll see what we can do." So with the collaboration of Ralph and also with Walter Hard, Jr., I did do this

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particular article that appeared in Vermont Life. That was really my first interest in trolleys other than the fact that I like them personally, but not to do research on them.

MK That's interesting. So the research came first?

AS The research came first, right, right. And I was very surprised to find out that there's more than one trolley car line in Vermont. There were actually ten in all which opened my eyes. It didn't occur to me that they were, but it's very logical that there would be other transit companies, traction companies around the state. So...

MK And did they all operate pretty much inside a particular city? Did they go from city to city?

AS City to city operation generally out in the midwest would be called an inter-urban line, fast speed stuff right straight across the prairies. In New England, ~~now~~ basically they were the main part of town and the suburbs, for example the Burlington Traction Company operated from Burlington to Winooski to Essex Junction and also around Burlington Proper and also into South Burlington down on Shelburne Road, but that was it. The Company in the State of Vermont that had the longest lines was the Rutland Company. Proper name evades me right now, Rutland Transit, Rutland something or other, but anyway they had a line that ran all the way from Rutland to Fair Haven, Vermont which is really quite a haul. And they even extended that I believe to Whitehall, but I'm not exactly sure, but Fair Haven anyway because that is a bit of a haul. And they did have more mileage than any other traction company in the State when they operated.

MK Now when was the real grand period of the trolley?

AS The grand period of the trolleys would have been probably the 1910's to the 1920's I would say and there were faced of course with competition from the automobiles which were then called jitneys. Jitneys are a little funny little, little truck bodies with seats, bench seats facing each other like a pick up truck with two bench seats facing each other. And these son-of-a-guns, these guys that operated the Jitneys, would go to where the trolley car was about to be and pick up all the passengers at a much cheaper fare. So the trolley cars around the state competed with these jitneys and they lost ground completely because these jitneys as I say charged so much less. And then of course, finally people started buying automobiles, the Model T and other cars and of course once

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they started to have their own personal transportation, trolley cars just couldn't compete anymore. So one by one they died out. Most of them were gone by...

MK He's on route to another location. (LAUGH)

AS Did he stop?

MK I can't tell whether he's going to stop or he's just turning a corner.

AS No, have you stopped?

MK Have I stopped? Turn it back on.

AS Okay, I'd say most of the street railways were gone by, oh the late '20's, the early '30's. You could almost peg the ending of the Burlington Traction Company by the flood of '27. In fact that caused the, the stoppage of more than one trolley line in the country because it washed out so much of the road bed and bridges and so forth that they didn't have enough money to put it back in business anyway. They were losing money anyway when the flood came so they said enough is enough. But the Burlington Traction Company operated across a bridge from Burlington to Winooski, you know the lower road bridge there by the woolen mills, and the flood came along and took the bridge out. So for a period of time the trolleys obviously couldn't get across the river. But when they put the bridge in which is in existence today, there were trolley tracks laid across it, so cars did run for maybe a couple of years beyond 1927. I'm not going to check into dates, because that's kind of boring anyway, but let's say cars ran basically let's say up until, in Burlington anyway, until 1928, 1929, sometime, sometime around that area. But other traction companies in the state, some had stopped way before the flood, but a lot of them used the excuse of the flood to say that's it. So there's only one traffic line, one traffic, one trolley line that ran into more or less the present, it was called the Springfield Terminal Railroad and that was down in Springfield, Vermont. It just ran from Springfield across the Connecticut River over to Charleston and that operated up until recent times. Yea.

MK How recent?

AS Well, there still, no they aren't handling freight anymore, but I would say up until and here again I'm not _____ dates, so I don't know, I would say up until maybe 15 years ago which is fairly recent, yea.

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MK I interviewed a fellow who, you may know him because of your interest in transportation, Kenneth Bessett?

AS Oh yes, yea. I know him very well.

MK Oh he's back now. Just keep going I can edit around it and if it's a steady drone, as long as it's not...

AS I think they're out of their mind mowing today, but...

MK It's crazy, yea they should give the grass a little recovery. Oh, the reason I brought up Mr. Bessett's name was he tells a story about the end of the trolley company in Burlington and his interest being in buses, the beginning of, what was interesting to me was that I had imagined before hearing his story the bus company as a villain and the trolley company as the romantic idealized, the wonderful old trolley and I had another _____ after I heard his story. He talked about the fellow who wanted to open up the bus line and you know couldn't get a franchise because the tight hours that would be in the city, the trolley company wouldn't, wouldn't give in and let him a legitimate franchise so that he would go around and as you say pick up, pick up and also pick up passengers on streets where the trolleys weren't running and he wasn't allowed to charge fares, but he would carry them anyway. And of course that created a demand for bus service that didn't officially exists.

AS Right, that's right, that's putting it very well, yea.

MK It's a...

AS Of course, the days of the Burlington Traction Company were, were marked anyway for elimination. I mean they simply couldn't compete with the cars and the buses, you know and the private cars and jitneys and what not, so it was just a question of time anyway before they, before they were done. Did Ken tell you about the last, the last hurrah, the burning of the car down at City Hall Park? Yea, that's quite a story.

MK Yea it is, yea amazing. I said that also that it really marked the end of an era because the first one, the first electric car to come on that had a, it was draped in bunting and had a big ceremony for that one.

AS So they draped another car in bunting for the closing ceremonies right, right. You knew of course that the, the fore runner of the Burlington Traction Company was a horse drawn trolley. You probably knew that. In fact that was

the start of at least, at least two I guess if not three trolley car systems in the State of Vermont. But the horse cars ran for, I don't know, five to nine years something like that before they were electrified. Old Dobbin. They were kind of chilly in the wintertime, kind of chilly. They didn't have any heat, so the traction company, it was called the Burlington, never mind, Burlington horse something, Burlington Horse Transit System or whatever it is, sorry, but they furnished huge blankets, bear rugs to keep the passengers warm. You can just see them huddled inside these cars pulled by Old Dobbin.

MK That's interesting. A few years ago I read a little item I guess in the Times Argus that someone in Rutland and I have no idea whether the man is still continuing this, but someone in Rutland was trying to bring back a little horse drawn operation to get around town. It's interesting to see. The motorized trolley, the show of the trolley that's tooling around "Wally the Trolley" around Montpelier now and...

AS They are around Burlington now too. Have you seen those yea?

MK I did see one the other day.

AS And apparently they're going to buy more. They're going to purchase more of those things. They've become very popular I think just from a aesthetic point of view. People like the looks of these things much better than a old ordinary bus, yea.

MK Yea, as public transportation, did everybody take the trolley? I mean, was it, was it viable during ~~the~~ its heyday day to use it?

AS Definitely, definitely. The labor force of course, Burlington was a cotton and a woolen town basically. You know their plant is down where General Electric is now, there was a Burlington Cotton Company I believe it was called and the woolen mills in Winooski. And all of the people who worked in the mills relied strictly on the, on the trolley cars. Excuse me. So it was viable, very definitely viable for those people, definitely, yea.

MK When the bus company came in, did it effectively take up that slack there for all those commuters.

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AS I would say yes, yes I would think so because about that time a lot of people, you might call them even the laboring class owned a car of some type, some kind of a vehicle. So I would say that the bus certainly handled the work force as it was required to do so. I don't think they, the people who worked there lost anything by the elimination of the trolley cars, I don't think so.

MK Have the trolley, I think Ken Bessett was the one to have suggested that the operation of the trolley had declined prior to its official demise. The schedules weren't as tightly adhered to and so on. Is there anything that you could add to that?

AS No, but I think it was basically the, the loss of revenue. I can't, I can't see any other reason except the competition of the car and the bus that would cause the demise and the fact that people were buying cars as fast as they could buy them back in those days too. They didn't go out to the beach in their car, in the trolley anymore, they went by their own car. One thing is of interest I think for all the street car lines in the State of Vermont, every area that I can think of right now had a park, a park and the park was the big drawing card as far as the people in these towns were concerned. Burlington, just as much as any other town. Bellows Falls had its park, Montpelier had its park, Fort Ethan Allen, the great, great show place out there for the when the cavalry and the artillery were out there, they had huge, huge events particular on Sunday, they had polo matches out there. How do you get out there, you get out there by trolley car. So the parks were the big revenue makers for the traction companies in the State of Vermont, very obviously because they used to pack um. And ball games, sporting events were very popular. Like Sentinel Field up in Colchester Avenue here, University of Vermont's athletic field, they had baseball there going way back, way back, not necessarily the University of Vermont ball teams, but other teams, they had summer baseball leagues and they would have three and four and five cars parked in the spur out there that would bring the people in and take them back downtown again. The same was true with, this is something else again. Railroad in Essex Junction gave the Burlington Traction Company a lot of business for the trolley cars. But parks was the big thing. Every town that had a trolley car system also had a park and the park was the big money maker. The reason for the money making.

MK That's interesting.

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AS Even though it was only a summer operation, you know, there's nothing in the wintertime particularly except people had to get from Point A to Point B and they'd have to ride a trolley car if they had no other way of doing it.

MK That's very interesting.

AS But parks in the summertime were just, just the drawing card, it's where people went so, something to do on a summer day.

MK Now, I'm interested in that aspect of the parks, did that continue even after the cars came in? Did people still flock to the parks in their cars now?

[MK] AS I'd say so, I'd say so, uh huh. But of course when cars came in people had other destinations they wanted to go to, they could go to. Before, before they had cars, they had to go where the trolley cars went, thus the success of the parks. There were lots of different types of trolley cars. Burlington for example had probably as great a selection of cars as any traction company. They had closed cars for the winter and they had open cars for the summer. And they also had work cars when, when one or another different types like a sweeper would go and sweep after a heavy wind had deposited a lot of branches on the tracks or a lot of snow, sweeper would go and clear the tracks. Some towns however couldn't afford these, these having two different types of cars, a closed and a open, so they even had some of them had convertible cars where they could take the sides off in the summertime and slap them back on again in the wintertime. And other types of cars of course were little four wheelers and then there were some that had eight wheelers, like a railroad passenger car where you have four trucks, four wheels on a truck in the rear and four wheels on a truck in the front to enable it to get around curves obviously because a little four wheel job, sometimes it left the track going around corners. But Burlington was lucky in that yes they did start with a little four wheelers, but then they graduated up to bigger cars because the demand was such for them. But my own personal recollection of trolley cars in Burlington was the fun of riding an open car. It was a great, great deal of fun and you never got on an open car from the front or the back as you would a closed car. A closed car you had doors. You had to get in front or back, walk in the front, leave in the back. The summer cars, the open cars were, were seats continuous seats across, you know perpendicular to the, to the car with running boards along the side so people could get on

anywhere. They could just hope on the running board. I don't mean on the fly. They'd have to wait until the car stopped supposedly, then the motorman always kept his position up in front. But the conductor could move along the side of the car and collect fares. So it was very difficult to escape paying a fare if you can understand it.

MK Didn't the conductor also have to pretty much keep an eye out for who had gotten on?

AS Oh yes.

MK I mean, he would really pretty busy?

AS Oh yes, he was a busy guy, sure, sure, absolutely, definitely. And it's a funny thing, he'd try to keep them on and a lot of people had the urge to jump off wherever they wanted to and it was kind of funny because I pointed out in this article I remember one of these funny things where the men tended to go off, jump off a trolley car forward in a running pose. Women tend to get off backwards because of their method of clothing or whatever. It was easier for them they thought to get off backwards. But if the car is in motion quite frequently they do a back somersault when they hit the ground. So it's quite a visible experience just thinking about those. (LAUGHING)

MK As the trolley began to have to compete with cars, what kinds of traffic regulations were in place, I mean who had the right of way down a street? Did the trolley always have the right of way?

AS I would say the trolley always had the right of way because the trolley, the trolley car could not perform defensively as far as moving from left to right. It could stop and go forward, but if an accident was foreordained, nothing they could do about it. There are a lot of cases where cars sideswipe trolley cars trying to pass them on narrow roads and this sort of thing. An awful lot of sideswipes. But the trolley cars had to have the right of way because they were not maneuverable the way a private car was.

MK I can imagine there must have been some very unusual early traffic regulations as well as early traffic cases.

AS Of course the fare for riding a trolley car, usually if I recall correctly, in most cases was about \$.10 a ride which was most reasonable as you can understand.

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MK Great. Did it, were there frequent increases in fares like?

AS No, very infrequent. The motorman and the engineers, the people who operate the trolley cars always wanted more money the way everybody does today and frequently they would ask, they would strike. The Burlington Transit Company was struck a couple of times. I remember reading about it, I don't recall it. But they, the men didn't win. It went back to the old fare again, but I think there's maybe one or two increases, but not a great number of increases like you see today in everything.

MK I remember when I lived in Washington, D.C. several years, well I went there for college and at the time I got there, the local news that was the big item was that the bus company was raising its fares from \$.27 to \$.30 or something.

AS Big news.

MK Big news.

AS Big news right.

MK Awful big news.

AS Sure.

MK ..._____.

AS Another drawing card I remember now for the trolley cars of course were the lake steamers, the Lake Champlain Transportation Company, particularly in St. Albans. St. Albans probably did more in a street car related promotional type thing than any other town did because of the fact that the boats would dock at the end of the road that goes from St. Albans, downtown St. Albans out to the Bay itself. Then there was a pier and train loads of people would come to board the steamers at St. Albans and when they'd get off the train in St. Albans, they got on the street cars and the street cars literally went right out onto the pier where the boat was, so there's very little difficulty in a person from Wells River, Vermont for example taking a train to Essex Junction and onto St. Albans and then taking a trolley car right out to the boat. He'd have to walk a very short distance, so it was very handy. So the trolley cars did very well in that particular instance too. In Burlington, the cars, the trolley cars never went down to the lake front for one reason or another. I think they did briefly, they went

down to the Union Station at the foot of Main Street. But here again for some reason rather they, the tracks were torn up while the Transit Traction Company was still in existence. So I don't think the ferry boat helped the Traction Company. I should say the Traction Company probably didn't make a great deal of money out of promotional services with the lake boats I don't think. But in St. Albans they certainly did and I believe they did, no I'm not going to go any further than that. St. Albans was the place as far as the boat service being an attraction for people all over the state.

MK It's certainly a colorful era and as you say there's a lot of nostalgia.

AS Oh yes, oh indeed.

MK Were the trolley cars painted, I mean were they kept painted up?

AS In Burlington they were, my recollection was they were immaculate yes. They were painted and cleaned and some towns I think without mentioning any, I think toward the end they became rather raggedly and unkept, just were not a benefit to the town at all. But Burlington they were kept up to snuff right straight through. That I do remember, yes. [MK] Of course like airplane pilots or heros to the kids today and at one point I guess railroad engineers, the guys who drove the locomotives were the heros. The motormen on street cars were heros too for the kids. They looked up to these guys you know and the motormen were always dressed very, very sharply my recollection was. They always wore a uniform. They always wore their jackets. They were, but they always wore visor caps. And the cars as I said were spic and span and so were the employees of the company and I don't think you can necessarily say that about drivers for bus companies today. I think they sort of wear what they would like to wear. But back in those days it was a real honor. And these guys were, were considered to be pillars of the community, these conductors and engineers. They had a top notch job. They were the elite, they really were.

MK That's interesting.

AS There were a lot of famous Burlington men. I say famous because they were merchants, they were industrialists, they were doctors, they were lawyers, just as today. These were the guys that were on the Board of, on the Board of Directors for the Traction Company. And one

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interesting thing was, why did the trolley cars come up Main Street and go down South Union Street to get out on Shelburne Road when they could have more easily have gone down Winooski Avenue or St. Paul Street, one of the lower down streets without climbing a hill? Well the reason which has been suggested for the fact that the street car line did lay tracks up Main Street which is very steep you know for a period there and then take a right on South Union Street was because a lot of the directors had houses on South Union Street. But here again, do you think they road the trolley cars very often, not necessarily. We have no record, but most of these people had very, very nice little carriages and horses you know that they would go to their daily business activities in a horse drawn carriage rather than ride the street car. Perhaps I'm guessing that, but I think that was the reason why the street car line was put in like that, because the directors lived right along there. The directors could sit out on their porch and watch the trolley cars go by and probably time them with their watches.

MK Perhaps they had people who came to clean their houses, needed to take the trolley.

AS That's right, that's right, very likely. (LAUGHING) I wish that I had lived in the day really where I had ridden these things to a greater extent than I have, but I was just a little tot and I unfortunately don't have many memories of my own but what have been told.

MK That must have been so exciting though as a child. The noise that it would make when it started up?

AS Yes, and the smell. I can still smell, I can smell the way a trolley car smell has a smell all of its own. Wonderful situation.

MK My children are five years old and three and a half and two little boys and on Saturday in the down pour, left before the down pour started, took them to Ben and Jerry's to the anniversary celebration with hoards of people. Well the highlight of the day for them was not so much the free ice cream and not so much the balloons, those were nice, but it was the bus ride on the Harwood Union High School bus from the field where we parked our car, the two and a half miles down the road to the Ben and Jerry's plant. (LAUGH)

AS That's interesting.

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MK That's what they had to call up Grandma and Grandpa and tell them about.

AS That was even more than the treat of having the ice cream and the balloons was the bus ride, boy these kids put up with an awful lot in these buses now don't they?

MK I guess it's going to be special for these guys because they won't ride a school bus. We live just, well there aren't enough kids on our road for the bus to run and I've already began to prepare them for the idea that the bus will not be coming on our road unless more people move there with children. So I think my five year old especially was prepared to relish every second of it. (LAUGHING) Oh wow, this is really fun. Here we were soaked and cold and the little guy was just blue and he was shivering you know and he said, "This was really fun, Mom, this was really fun."

AS I'll be darn. Oh my. I just thought of something else of some interest and that is where did all the trolley cars go? You know, what happened to them? Did they just fall down? Did they die and they were left where they were? Did somebody dig a whole and put them in? Some of them, no they all basically were put to use. A lot of people, I don't know if they had to pay for them or just pay for the hauling away of these things, but a lot of them became diners. There's one specific one that was in existence not too long ago in Bellows Falls I remember for the Bellows Falls and Saxton River Street Car Line became a well known diner in the Main Street of Bellows Falls. Some of them became chicken coops; I know that. And some of them became homes for people, like mobile homes today. They were just hauled out somewhere and deposited in a field. But little by little, they've all disappeared and I think I'm safe in saying there is not a single trolley car of all the trolley cars in the State of Vermont that you can find anywhere, I mean in any kind of condition at all. They just don't exist. If there is such an animal, I'd like to know about it. One car I know of had a happy ending. That was the car from the Springfield operation, Springfield, Vermont. And that went to a street car museum. I believe the town is Kennebunk, Kennebunk, Maine or Kennebunk Port where they have a very elaborate street car working museum where cars actually working on a regular line for a manufactured line. So I know there's a car that's there, very well preserved, very well taken care of. But as far as I know, that is the only car that can be seen today and you have to go out of the State of Vermont to see it. There used to be one down on North Avenue in Burlington, down at the place called

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Farringtons. There's a florist down there and there used to be a street car there, but it's not there anymore. But they just up and left, I don't know where they went. I think most of them probably were bought by other more successful traction companies around the east. I think most of them were just shipped out, put on a flat railroad flat car and went to other towns because obviously there, a lot of them were in excellent shape. There's no point in just destroying these things if they still had some mileage left in them. So I think that basically is where all street cars went. They just didn't die. (LAUGH)

MK Didn't just fade away.

AS They're fading away somewhere now probably, but no, no.

MK It's interesting to think about. As you say the good ones would still have some life left in them.

AS That's right, that's right, sure. They say about buses you know, that Vermont Transit buses don't have any idea how many miles they put on them, but they go somewhere else. I mean a bus might have two million miles on it literally. Two million miles is a lot of miles. But some buses I know do have that kind of mileage. They were bought new and when they have two million miles on them they go somewhere else. Where do they go? Some other bus line in the country that's not quite as affluent as a major bus line but they need well maintained buses, so they get them. Then there's a third home for buses and that's down in Central America, in Mexico. That's where all buses really go.

MK Still to run as buses or, oh gee.

AS But we aren't talking about buses are we? But I do think the street cars do have an after life. I mean I'm sure they do. Good street cars I'm sure had a place to go when they had exhausted their potential in the State of Vermont.

MK Before we go on to Dewey Day, I wanted to ask you knowing that your interest in railroads, whether you were aware of and had any information on the Merci Train?

AS On the what train?

MK The Merci Train.

AS M E R C I? French?

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MK Yes, it was train.

AS 40 horses and a man, that?

MK Yes.

AS No, I do not. I do know that, I don't even know when it happened. Was it after World War II, after World War I?

MK Well it was after World War, it was sent after World War II.

AS Yea, and as a friendly gesture the government of France sent what 48 cars to the United States, one for each, each state and they went to the capitals I presume. And I know that one was in Montpelier. I never saw it. I never saw it. Is it still there? I don't know.

MK It's now up in St. Albans actually.

AS Among other things, to get back to the street cars just one instance in St. Albans. The street car in St. Albans ran down the Main Street of town and at some celebration and I don't think it had anything to do with Dewey Day, probably just an ordinary 4th of July celebration, since the street car tracks are the same distance apart as a railroad track, they actually ran a railroad train right down the middle of St. Albans and lots of bunting and flags and people in costume and this sort of thing. I don't know the reason for the thing, but I've seen a picture of this operation you know. And where else did, oh, at the time of the great flood of '27, the street car line in Barre helped the restoration of the CV Railroad area tracks I think by permitting dump cars of the railroad to go down the Main Street of Barre if you can visualize a steam locomotive hauling, hauling a train down, right down the Main Street of Barre, but it happened. I have pictures of that somewhere too. I think that was to help restore not only the CV lines, but probably to restore their own trolley car lines further down the road I would imagine, but also probably to restore, help restore city streets that have been washed out too. But there again, the train went right down the Main Street of St. Albans and Barre. I keep thinking of these things don't I?

MK (LAUGHING) It's quite alright. Well I find these interviews again all over the place and many other topics other than what I specifically want to talk about.

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AS I'm sure they do. Circus trains don't come into this, no.
(LAUGHING) That's another subject entirely.

MK That's a wonderful subject.

AS But speaking of parks, I mean, here again the circus grounds in Burlington were down on Shelburne Road and the street cars made hay you know carrying passengers down to the, going to the circus because lots of circuses came to town. They used to have about two or three I guess a year back in the good ole days. The circus trains would come by rail of course. But the, the people that went to the circus went by street car, that's what they did. So any attraction like that helped street car lines, circuses, parks, band concerts, whatever you can think of, any big, big affair, that was a money maker for the traction companies. Ball games, in winter though it must have been tough I would think. Not much going on in the wintertime except people going to work.

MK Would they vary the number of cars they had on the line from one day to another day?

AS Oh yes, oh yea, oh sure. And like, like buses, they had sections you know. If on a particular busy day like the baseball games up at Sentinel Field, they had plenty of cars they could throw into the, into the void that was necessitated by all these people wanting to get on one car and then getting on the car that followed and the car that followed, sure. Of course trolley cars had to go where the tracks were, where buses could go most anywhere, yea. There's an exciting trolley car line-up, up in Stowe that ran between Waterbury and Stowe that was very very interesting because of the fact that it took a great deal of electric power to get this car from Waterbury up the slope and back down the other side into the village of Stowe and people that relied upon the power company to furnish lights and power for their homes could tell where the trolley car was by the way the electricity fluctuated in their lights because when the little car tried to climb I think it was called Shutesville Hill, tried to climb this hill between Waterbury and Stowe, it took a lot more electricity than when it went down the other side. So the lights would flucture like this all over town you know in Stowe, then they'd come on bright again when the car went over the hump. (LAUGH) Fun and games. But it's a funny thing, people could always tell where the car was by the way the lights performed in their houses. ~~Oh, to live back in those days, huh.~~ [MK]

MK That would be interesting.

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AS I have friends who are so ingrained in the past that they almost cry when they think of the things that they missed, you know, really. I have one very good friend that really should have been born fifty to a hundred years ago, not fifty, a hundred years ago because there was so much going on back in those days.

MK So many, I'm so amazed when I meet an older person who has lived through all of these changes and maybe someday I will have lived through any number of changes.

AS Sure, but it's hard to...

MK It's hard to visual and somehow it doesn't seem as dramatic as _____.

AS No, and you figure the, you can't think of anything today that hasn't been done already. I mean, how do you, how do you, can you think of anything that hasn't been invented yet you know. Is there anything that can't be, that can still be improved upon. You know, can transportation be improved upon? I suppose so, by making the tracks straighter and making trains faster and street cars faster whatever. I suppose those things can happen, but it's awful hard to visualize now because your centers of population now are so dense that to put high speed trains through a place that never had high speed trains means billions of dollars you know.

MK The changes I, what I came up thinking is that there's always, someone will always come up with a new gimmick, but how many things of importance or of need can, are still, can be developed.

AS Out there somewhere. Well look at computers.

MK Yea.

AS Isn't that amazing. I mean that's the big thing in our, our age isn't it?

MK It is.

AS It's got to be.

MK It's true.

AS Because even, even probably you have a computer in your house. I don't have one in mine, but...

MK I don't.

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AS But think of all the people that do. I mean you know people that have them. I know people that have them too.

MK Now the folks that don't now are in the minority, most of the time.

AS I think so. Yea, like it used to be with the automobile.

MK Yes.

AS Radio, television. What else can make your life more happy and smoother that hasn't been invented already? (LAUGHING) Boy, oh young, yes, yes. I think people who call and get an answering machine are basically unhappy. I mean, they hate them, but there's a need for them certainly there's a purpose, but I hate it when I get some canned voice on the other end, I just hate it.

MK Yea, I do too, yea.

AS Leave a message and we'll return your call. Well when? I want an answer right now you know. Yea. (TAPE OFF) I think most of my research actually came from the Burlington Free Press, you know, go back to their microfilm library up at Bailey, microfilm films. I've been very lucky up there with a lot of things looking up information on railroads and trolley cars and so forth using microfilms of the Free Press. Excuse me. So I think basically that's where I got most of my information on this, but the track _____, I like big movements.

MK Yes.

AS I like big things. I like big boats, I like big trains, I like big circuses. Big events and this was certainly a big event because it was probably the biggest, biggest day in railroading history in Vermont. I mean here is an event that had all the trappings of gees a war hero, you know, he's going to be here in Montpelier and by golly, I'm going to get up there somehow and see this guy you know. So they put on this tremendous show. I mean by show, I mean railroads primarily. They had special trains that came from all over the State of Vermont to Montpelier and where were they going to park all these trains. They had to make a special, a special area, a special, not a depot, but they have this field which was nothing more than a, a cow grazing pasture and they put all of these _____ tracks in, I think probably about twenty tracks to hold a full train because obviously the trains that came in had to be parked to make room for other trains coming in and they also had to be available

for the mad rush of people going back home again. So this was an incredible experience as you can imagine. In a little town like Vermont, where you have all of these trains heading for the same destination. And many of them, over and over again from the same town. Like for example, Burlington sent a lot of trains there. Winooski had their own trains because there wasn't enough room on the Burlington trains to put the Winooski people on. They came from Wells River and Bennington, Rutland, all over the place. It was just an incredible experience that's all. I guess I'm getting a little bit ahead of the thing.

MK No, that's okay. We'll just keep going, let's just chat about it. So people, the towns basically closed down didn't they?

AS Absolutely. It was a holiday. Absolutely, it was just as big a day as the 4th of July would have been or Armistice Day or anything. Towns closed down. I'm sure that there are a lot of people that even if they had to work didn't work. They said by golly you know this happens once in a lifetime, I'm going up to Montpelier and see the admiral you know, I don't care you know.

MK I'm trying to think of anything in our lifetime that compares to having, to having an event like this and I can't think of anything. (LAUGH)

AS Nor can I, nor can I.

MK People now, I think even if the President came, business would go on as usual.

AS Of course, of course.

MK What was it about that time that made this such a big event?

AS Because I think people's lives then were pretty drab all in all. There wasn't much, much to do. There were no movies, no television, no radio. What do you do with yourself? How do you amuse yourself for heavens sakes outside of your own home and your own family, what do you do. Even if you wanted to climb a mountain, how are you going to get to the mountain? So here is something that people could sink their teeth into. It was a thing to do. Not only was he a war hero by golly, I think a lot of people just went for, just because it was something to do obviously and of course it had received a great deal of publicity in the papers in advance. So people knew about it and all your railroad companies publicized schedules

and said there will be plenty of trains you know. I don't know if in your article or not, but there's one funny incident or two funny incidents that I can think of about Dewey Day and the first one was back about then at the turn of the century, even before then, and to some extent afterward, everybody that went by train from Burlington via the Central Vermont Railroad had to change trains in Essex Junction, because there's no trains, through trains to Burlington. Your major trains from Boston would drop people at Essex Junction and then they had to get off that and hot a train for Burlington and vice versa. Burlington had no trough trains in the Central Vermont Railway. The CV didn't like Burlington very much because another railroad beat them here. You know the Rutland Railroad got here first. But the CV was a bigger line, it served more destinations, so it made Burlington sort of a backwash of their own line. So anyway, this particular story was true that there was trains that left Burlington on a regular basis for Essex Junction, just the way buses did later than that. They had about twelve trains. I'm not talking about Dewey Day now. I'm talking about regular service. You got to Essex Junction by train. You came back by train. They had probably a dozen trains a day between Burlington and Essex until the buses came. And so when people got on the trains in Burlington, which were definitely marked Dewey, Dewey Day Celebration - Montpelier, they automatically assumed they would have to change trains in Essex Junction. So one particular train I know of, not because I was there, but they all hopped on this train in Burlington. The train was absolutely full of people. They got to Essex Junction, everybody poured off and got on to another train. And when the train started up, they realized they weren't going to Montpelier, there are heading for Underhill and Cambridge, and Johnson, Vermont because it was the Burlington Lamoille Railroad train they got on. Got on the wrong train completely.

MK Did they ever get there?

AS Oh yea, they got there eventually. I guess, the Burlington Lamoille Railroad train I'm sure never had such an influx of passengers in their existence, so they probably backed all the way into Essex Junction again. (LAUGHING) I think that's kind of funny. The other funny thing was the tag end of the, of the, of the ceremony. Of course, like you say, we're skipping around here like crazy. Let's see if I can find this area, I hate to stop right in the middle of something. It's the final event of this Dewey Day Celebration was a huge bonfire that's probably in your thing too. It was a huge thing. They

burned 100 cords of wood, 600 empty barrels and two adjacent houses. (LAUGH) Can't you just see this.

MK Obviously they didn't leave themselves in a clear space a bonfire. Oh. It's incredible. I guess the fireworks were really quite amazing.

AS They must have been that's right. Well you know basically the reason for the celebration is you know Admiral Dewey is a war hero of the Spanish American war and he was a native son, sure. So boy this is a big day and it wasn't only the special trains that carried people, you and me to the ceremony, but also they had to carry the National Guard there. I guess they had to have protection for the admiral and the crowds there. So the National Guard also had to have their own train to get there. But anyway it's interesting that they found a lot, a pasture close enough to downtown Montpelier back in 1899 or whatever it was to make all these new tracks, this dozen or twenty tracks whatever they had to do. Then the next day of course they ripped all the tracks up again and I guess the farmer put his cows out to pasture again in the same place. So you're looking at a field that had all this activity one day and the next day no activity at all.

MK A lot of mud, but...

AS A lot of mud. I don't know what the weather was actually, what the weather was in that particular time. But that Dewey Day celebration certainly was one of the, the big days in Vermont's history. I mean any way you look at it, it was big.

MK Just incredible.

AS Just...

MK I can't imagine. Some place had something like an estimated 40,000 people in Montpelier.

AS My figure is 40,000 too. I don't know if your figure came from mine or if mine came from yours, but yes 40,000 people. I think that's just an estimate. I can't imagine that anybody really could definitely come out and say how many people were there. I mean it's just too big, too big. I show 40,000 yes.

MK That's what this is, it doesn't say where this came from, but it's 40,000 people in downtown Montpelier.

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AS And of course as you know, we haven't mentioned it here, but of course Admiral Dewey was a Montpelier boy.

MK Yes.

AS Yea, so that made it all the more interesting from not only from the Montpelier point of view, but the State of Vermont because everybody likes heros. I think if General Eisenhower had been a Vermont boy, I'm sure he would have come back to a homecoming that would have probably might have exceeded Admiral Dewey's little party, possibly huh? Or McCarther, could you imagine. If McCarther was a Vermont boy, can you imagine it. I think he was more revered than, than Eisenhower I think, but I don't know. But anyway either one of them, any General came back after World War II, they probably would have got the same thing. But nothing has happened since that time to even touch it I don't think. Do you know of anything?

MK No I don't. I'm thinking now it would have to be, I can't imagine what the event would be that would cause everything to come to a stop so that people could go and see this person or persons who had been involved in this.

AS Nothing.

MK _____.

AS Nothing that's right.

MK Yea, just amazing.

AS Wish I'd been there.

MK Yes, really.

AS I can imagine a lot of alcohol went down the certain mouths too at this certain thing. I mean it was just an occasion where the celebration, that's what it was. Of course the governor of Vermont was there and a lot of other dignitaries. Dr. and Mrs. Webb entertained the Admiral. Did you know that also down at their Shelburne House. They call it Shelburne House now. So there were a lot of people in town, a lot of notables were in town for the occasion.

MK Probably again would have been the only event like that to have drawn so many of those notable figures of the time together.

AS That's right, that's right. Of course there have been presidents in Burlington. I remember as a school boy standing on Main Street and watching Calvin Coolidge proceed by in an open car, he and Mrs. Coolidge. And I remember that all the schools in Burlington were let out for that, but that was simply meant to stand out in front of their school and see this procession go by. In my case it was, well it was at Main Street. Why was I there? I don't know. But it was a school function. They let the schools out just to see the president, wherever there was the most convenient place along his route and that's my only recollection of schools being let out to greet somebody. I mean that's a similar situation of Dewey Day but a little different because I don't think, I think Cal Coolidge was, was here and there about the State many times so people could see him in their own home town probably, but not Admiral Dewey. No sir, he came to Montpelier. That's where you had to go to see the Admiral, yea. But it would have been fun to be there. There were no accidents, no reported accidents. All this traffic is just incredible. Really incredible to think that all of these trains coming from all over the State, that there was not a great disruption of the regular railroad service you know, because rail service had to continue. The passenger trains, the freight trains, the milk trains, all of this still had to function. So you can imagine that whoever was at the controls, whoever was dispatching trains over the State of Vermont boy had to be on the ball to handle this sort of thing. You get all of these special trains mixed up with your regular service and all the tracks in Vermont are one track, one track, there not two tracks. You can't go zipping by something in the opposite direction. You could try, but you wouldn't be very, very smart to do so I don't think.

MK _____ . (LAUGHING) That's amazing. Now I guess I had somewhere in the back of my mind, a image that there must have been a certain amount of kayos somewhere, but evidently not.

AS Evidently not. The story doesn't indicate any, any chaotic situation at all. God there must have been somehow.

MK Other than perhaps a few more passengers than we know about that got on the wrong train.

AS That's right. (LAUGHING) I think that's the best kind of funny, got on the wrong train.

MK And so easy to do.

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AS Sure.

MK _____.

AS These trains came from all over the State too. You know, it just wasn't local. They had special trains from every hamlet and village in the whole State. I think they came up from Bennington. They came up from Brattleboro. What a day.

MK Oh my. Well thank you very much.

AS You're very welcome. I wish that I had personal recollections of these things, but like you said it's hard to find them, them kind of people anymore.

MK It certainly is.

AS So I think this oral taping that you're doing is an excellent idea. Oral history, right?

MK Yes, yes.

AS It's a wonderful idea.