

Morris Maxfield
February 25, 1988

Mary Kasamatsu
Interviewer

MK This is an interview with Morris Maxfield of Barre. Mr. Maxfield will talk about having attended ~~Chataqua~~ ^{Chautauqua} as a boy growing up in Barre.

MM You've interviewed people who...

MK Who attended.

MM ...Yea, attended ~~Shataqua~~ ^{Chautauqua} in other States?

MK No, just in Vermont.

MM In Vermont heh. There was a, anybody told you about the inter-urban trolleys?

MK No.

MM Well there was an inter-urban trolley line from 1899 until the flood. You heard about the flood? '27, well that washed it out. But it was very easy to get back and forth between the, the two communities see. Not only was the inter-urban trolley running every half hour, these two railroads, two railroads mind you between the two communities hauling passengers. What in the devil did Whitney say? How many times a day could you get back and forth? In the prior to World War I or during World War I there was an astronomical number of times you could shuttle back and forth between the two towns. And then he got into the '20's and they cut the trains out. The M & W went first. You know what I mean by the M & W?

MK I hadn't heard it.

MM Montpelier and Wells River. The main line was from Montpelier to Wells River over Groton Heights see. But they had a spur running into Barre and they connected, that connected with the railroad onto the hill which was the Barre and the Chelsea in the first place and they went through a lot of mutations, now you got the, now you got the Washington County Railroad which is, which is the trail off of both the M & W and the Central Vermont see. Because the Central Vermont had a spur that ran from Montpelier Junction up here to Barre and onto Williamstown. See. Do you want to find out something about the railroad in Central Vermont, you read this book of our son's here.

MK Oh your son?

MM Well he's one of the three coordinators on it.

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LM Robert Jones, Whitney and Gove.

MM Gove, named Gove, out of Randolph.

LM I was looking here. It doesn't say...

MM No, but there was, there was 25 times a day you could get back and forth using one of the three means of transportation.

LM What was the other thing they called it. You said inter-urban trolley.

MM Traction Company, Montpelier-Barre Traction Company.

LM I couldn't think of it.

MM I think it was Montpelier came first. Yea, oh yea, we were a real thriving. You know, in the 30 years between 1885 and 1915, nothing was impossible in Barre. All the public buildings were built, except of course the brand new high school off of Ayer Street. Before the 1885, the universalists had built Goddard Seminary. You heard about Goddard Seminary? You seen a picture of it with the twin bell towers? They built that, but and Spaulding High School, the core of it, 1891, yea it came in that 30 year period. The one on the hill behind Bobby Burns, you know the school I mean? So, they had, they had a Barre Entertainment Association early on see and we got a membership card of the season '97-'98 see. And on the, on the back of the, wait a minute, you want to see it?

MK Sure.

MM That was a season ticket see. The reserved seat waiting for you. And on the back of it is the program see.

MK For the whole year.

MM And you see that date there, January 18?

MK Uh huh.

MM That doesn't mean anything to you does it?

LM No it wouldn't.

MM Well that was the date, the original building burned. Somebody, somebody must have tucked a cigar but in the wrong place that night.

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MK After that concert?

MM What?

MK After that concert?

MM Oh I presume so. Or else the base player got ushered out in a hurry. No it was the middle of the night the fire was. It was after the program. Obviously, that's why I say they tucked a cigar but in the wrong place. (LAUGHING) They used, lots of cigars in those days and not cigarettes so frequently. But now that's a case in point. That burned down in January of '98. In August of '99, they opened the present building. 19 months, they wanted a theater in this town. They got together, put it on a, I never have found out whether the original building was, was built by the town or who built it. They called it the Opera House Block. And it had three stories on the ground floor facing Main Street see. One of them had the Post Office in it and then there were two stores in it.

LM She wants to hear about the...

MM Well, we'll get around there. You haven't got a deadline have you.

MK Not really no. Are you a native of Barre? Are you both natives?

MM Oh sure. She's descendent from one of the first voters.

MK Really.

MM In that first town meeting. Yea. Her maiden name was Dodge. She descended from Asa Dodge. Yea and my two sets of grandparents come in here freshly married see. At the beginning of this year that I'm talking about, the 30 years when my paternal grandfather, he was just a laborer, he'd been making cheese boxes up in, up in Georgia and Milton see. In fact they were going to be, they were supposed to be married on my grandmother's birthday, the 17th of November, but they had to postpone it three days on account the boss had a big order of cheese boxes. (LAUGHING) So and, that's and my, my maternal grandparents, grandfather was a Burlington Yankee and my grandmother was a Massachusetts Yankee from, from oh,...

LM I can't think now.

MM Oh nuts.

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LM Danvers?

MM No not Danvers, close to, close to Worcester. (PHONE RINGING) There she goes. Excuse us. And (PHONE RINGING) and he had learned the stone cutting business in the marble shops in Burlington, not Rutland or Proctor, but Burlington see. They used to ship stone in to Burlington by water. There was great, somebody ought to write a book on the, on the water born traffic in Burlington. It was enormous and the stone came from, from Northern New York or also the Islands of Lake Champlain. A good marble and he'd learned the business there and they came into Barre and he went into the granite business for, you didn't why that's the wrong impression there. He didn't start up a business of his own right off. The big strike in 1892 paralyzed the place and was, it was apparently legitimate to go into business for yourself then and so he could work and earn something and you weren't called scabs, see, non-union. So that's what he did. There was a lot of it. One horse granite businesses started. And he stayed in granite business for awhile and then he bought the jewelry store from a man and when he died in 1910, that was sold to Goodfellows. It still bears the name Goodfellows. It's passed through a lot of hands since then, since it was Kidder. Anyway, her grand, her paternal grandfather was the only local see. Built that house over there. Built these three houses. Her other grandfather, was a legal beagle that came from North _____.

LM Well no. He, Newbury, Vermont he came from.

MM Yea, alright, over by that time he had a degree in law as he came over from Newbury. But this town grew by, by leaps and bounds see. See it started in 1880 with 2,080 people according to the census. And in 1890 it had more than tripled. It was 6,900, then it went on to double and of course 1894, the city, what's now the city separated from the town. So you had two political entities see.

LM Do you know why it separated?

MK No.

LM Because the farmers didn't want to pay for water and sewage and...

MM Paving the streets.

LM They didn't want to do it.

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- MM All those things happened. She uncovered a paving assessment the other day of 1905 wasn't it, or 1907?
- LM No, 1903 and 1906. The first one was in 1903 I think when they did from City Hall down part way in Main Street.
- MM Yea, down in front of the Granite Miles Block up here where Electrolux is for instance. That store down on the ground floor and this other assessment was tacked on there and ran it past Depot Square and did Depot Square with the granite paving blocks. You ever seen them? No.
- LM The reason that I have it is my father was in business in that section of the city and every one that was on Main Street, every store and that received one of these. So I just happened to find it and...
- MM See her father was a watch maker and then went into business for himself as a owner of a store. And...
- LM See now, the man who ran Goodfellows learned his trade from my father. We found also...
- MM All the jewelers in Barre were apprentice to him.
(LAUGHING)
- LM Well no, Daddy was a apprentice to Perly _____ and then after that he had Goodfellow, well what Pearl Bradbury...
- MM Yea, Bradbury, Burr and that was another jeweler.
- LM And Burr, _____ and...
- MM Holmes and...a sample of Barre history. But in those 30 years they built all, they built, they are not only paying taxes to put up all the school buildings in this town. They built this thing as a four room school building in 19, what, '03 I guess and '06 or '07 they came back and added two more rooms. These two facing the front here are facing Brook Street. The population just skyrocketed. See the Scots started coming around 1885 and the Italians hot on their heels.
- MK Let's start with the first ^{Chautauqua} ~~Shataqua~~ that you remember.
- MM The first ^{Chautauqua} ~~Shataqua~~ that I remember.
- MK Yea.

MM Was a tent of course up on Goddard Seminary's campus, the Auditorium. What they used for a parking lot in the front of the building you know towards, facing Merchant Street it does. So it was spread out on there. Along side the BOR now, the tent was set up. You know how they did, you have anybody ever tell you how they did with those tents?

MK No, you tell me, you tell me.

MM There was a crew come into town. I never saw them. Enough to handle a tent. As I remember they had three center poles. Yea, circus tent fashion you see. And they put up a stage in the one see. Let see in the end or along one side.

LM It was in the end I think.

MM What?

LM As I remember the ones up on...

MM Lincoln?

LM ...Lincoln, I thought it was in the end of it.

MM Well, and maybe they weren't exactly circus tents because circus tents are organized so the rings are between the poles and you sit all around it. This, these tents were the seating was fanned around the stage you see, arched around the stage. As for that I'm a little hazy. Remember I was young. I believe that first one was probably 1920, '21, the first one I remember. The one on Goddard. I didn't know really when it started in Barre.

MK How old were you?

MM What's that?

MK How old were you?

MM I was born in 1911.

MK So you were...

MM So in 1921, I was ten years old in the summer, July, my birthday is. So...

MK What do you remember about what you saw?

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MM Ah, there was variety entertainment. Believe me. Yes, yes and the marvel of it was that they were travelling in automobiles on the primitive roads. Every once in awhile they'd have a bog down, the talent wouldn't get into town in time. You'd get up there after a ripping thunder shower, especially a night time thunder shower, the road got washed out somewhere. And they, had come pulling in. I remember one time (LAUGH) 2:00 matinee for heaven sakes they showed up about 3:00 see. I marvel now. People, they exclaim about the terrible roads and so forth now, but what they encountered then. I can remember my first trips to Burlington. We threw a track in the sand down in Bolton for instance, that's how it was. First time I got taken across Sand Bar Bridge. Do you know what I mean by Sand Bar Bridge?

MK Where is that?

MM It's the connector between the mainland and South Hero.

MK Okay.

MM There's the Sand Bar Bridge, there's a Sand Bar State Park. Long Causeway it is now. Paved and nowadays and the first time I, it was a track in the sand. You went out there oh a quarter of a mile or apart or a little wider, there was turnouts so you could meet somebody coming from the other side. And in the Spring, it was under water. Under ice, I got pictures of it if you want to see them later on.

LM She wants to know about the other _____.

MM Yea, about the, but that was, that was the first one. It was up to Goddard. I think only, I think only one year up to Goddard that's all I can distinctly remember.

MK Then where did it go?

MM It went up to Lincoln Campus. Do you know where Lincoln School is?

MK Yes I do.

MM Okay. They put the tent, and they ran it there several years. I wouldn't begin to know how much. And then of course...

MK In a tent?

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MM What's that?

LM Oh yes.

MK Still at the tent?

MM Still in the tent, oh yea. A crew came in and erected the tent and they left a young college fellow behind to nurse, nursemaid the tent you see for the week. And his first job was to put up the canvas barricade all the way around us, canvas screens, drive-ins set posts in the grounds, like tent posts, so big, see, six feet high, had to stake those down you see. Clear around the reservation, the tent. So the chiselers couldn't get free entertainment see. They had, they had a canvas gate to it, just like a circus. You go through a ticket gate with the circus you know. That's what they had and he had a cubical back in there with the stage and dressing room areas that they had and where he slept. That must have been a means of employment for college fellows. I don't have no idea what they got paid or anything like that, but they were out and they were to tend those tents. If you had sudden changes in the weather you know, wind storms, summer thunder showers, boy they had to scramble around and hold, keep the tent down that it didn't go into the next county you know. (LAUGH)

MK Did they ever lose a tent up here?

MM Not that I ever knew of no. But they must have had blow downs in some other places. They'd whip something wicket when the wind started, picked up. But that was part of the logistics of the thing.

LM I don't remember what we saw. But I remember my folks had tickets.

MM Had tickets to it, oh yes. There was a variety entertainment. They always ended up on Saturday night with a play. Very good plays too. You ever heard of, ever heard of Sun Up. It was a play about the Appalachian Residents, Appalachia and Civil War.

LM That one they had.

MM What's that?

LM That one they had.

MM Yea, that's one they had. Yea. Oh one they liked, Smiling Through, about the, have you heard of that one? You had a little introduction to the theatrical field?

MK Minimal, minimal.

MM We're into it in a large way. They, and they had lecturers. Always lecturers. ^{Chautauque} ~~Shataqua~~ was famous for their lecturers. They had, you heard of the one "The Acres of Diamonds."

MK No.

MM I never heard that on a ^{Chautauque} ~~Shataqua~~ stage, but that's where it was born. Yea.

MK Do you remember any particular lecturers that did hear?

MM No. No.

MK What was the subject of them?

MM No.

MK Any famous lecturers who came through that...

MM On the ^{Chautauque} ~~Shataqua~~ Circuit I don't know. The Barre Opera House had some famous lecturers come into Barre on the circuit there, yea. And when I say variety entertainment, there was always magicians, puppeteers, marionettes. They had, the first puppeteers I ever saw were in the, on the Shataqua circuit. Along, way back early, there was a harp quintet. Five girls traveling with harps. Imagine, those going through Vermont back woods. Judds Priest they had their problems.

MK I can imagine.

MM Yea.

MK Just tuning five harps would have been...

MM What's that?

MK Getting five harps tuned together would have been really something else.

MM A bit of a problem yea.

MK Traveling around on the bumpy old back roads with...

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MM Yes, yes, yes, yes.

LM The place that I remember ^{Chautauque} ~~Shataqua~~ mostly, I remember that it was up on Lincoln Campus, was when they brought it down to the armory.

MM Oh yea, she's, Louise is five years younger than I am, so, also my grandmother Kidder was an exceptional woman. She was, she had a high school diploma, graduated in the Sentinel Year 1876 see. Not too women went through high school in that era. In a family, they went everywhere. They all trooped off to Philadelphia that year you know. And when 1893 came around they all trooped off to Chicago, these people, they found the money to, to cover the ground. Of course, railroad travel was the way to get around then. So she wasn't much interested. She dragged me off down to Montpelier to about the same time and I don't know whether it was 19, or 20 or 21 to Sussa's Band Concert in Montpelier City Hall. Sussa himself, John Philip himself.

MK Do you remember what the occasion was? Why he was there?

MM Oh no, he, the band was out on tour.

MK Tour.

MM Yea. Whether it was his last tour or not. I read quite a bit about Sussa and he didn't go, he didn't stay on the road much longer than that, no. But I can remember the, that's the first time I ever saw the four piccolos come out front you know and then his trumpeters and his trombonists.

MK That's something to see.

MM Yea. That was historic as far as I was concerned. Blistering hot day and we had seats in the balcony. But you forgot all about the heat when the band started.

LM You can't tell her any of the programs.

MM Especially string quartets.

LM But I'm talking about, she wants the ^{Chautauque} ~~Shataqua~~.

MM Yea, string quartets, instrumental quartets and quintets and just a illusionists. Always a magician. I believe every year, every season, there would be a magician. Some of them were extremely good.

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MK Did your family have the season tickets and go every day?

MM Oh yes, yea, matinee and evening. The women folks and the kids could you know. And usually, usually one group travelled took care of the matinees and something else for evening and yet again there were, there were sometimes a mix, the matinee talent made a contribution in the evening too sometimes see. It was well mixed believe me. They, ^{Chautauque} Shataqua was the, was the spotting ground for a lot of, a lot of talent that went to be expensive later on in their careers yea. Now I don't, I don't remember whether Fannie Bryce for instance travelled in ^{Chautauque} Shataqua or not. She was, she was on the _____ Circuit, yea I know and a lot of those other, a lot of the other talent that's well died in the last 20 years see. We, we keep getting these, these death notices of the talent that we knew, saw ourselves many years ago who was the great violinist that just died in the last few months?

LM I can't think now.

MM Yea, I've forgotten now, but we heard him in person because later on there was, there was a community concerts in Barre see which are a direct decedent of ~~Shataqua~~. ^{Chautauque}

LM Have you ever heard of _____?

MK I have yea, I have heard of him.

LM Because...

MK There's a lot of cultural activity that went on in Barre.

MM Yea the community concert around here in Barre and Montpelier bought their talent from Columbia Artists.

LM Gee, just a little while ago, I threw away a booklet that I had on...

MM Yea she had a whole catalog of all their talent.

LM Because I worked for community concerts when they were here, but that was after I graduated from high school, so that was in '30...

MM In the late '30's.

LM Yea, '35 or '35 or '36 in there somewhere. But we used to go to those.

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MM Yea, you got Community, you bought tickets in that and you could run to the other towns around to St. Johnsbury, Burlington, Rutland, trooping around in the winter.
(LAUGHING) Driving an automobile...

MK ???

MM Yea, that was a little adventurist too. We went to, I remember one concert we went to Burlington in the College Street Congregational Church and heard _____ Gorsky. Do you know who he was? Great cellist.

MK I've heard of a lot of people that I wish I could have heard.

MM Beg your pardon.

MK I say, you've heard a lot of people that I wish I could have heard.

MM Oh yes, yes, it's unfortunate you come a little too late for those people. But, there's supposed to be artists now of course. Well, the Shataqua...

MK What did it mean for people?

MM What did it mean?

MK Yea, for people in a community like Barre where you did have a lot of other cultural activity. Now I've talked to people who went to Hardwick and for them it was, you know, they never had seen anything or heard anything like what they heard at ~~Shataqua~~. What was it in Barre in terms _____?
Chautauqua

MM Well it was about the same thing. There was nothing else, by that time, in the '20's now, the Opera House was past its prime. You know, why I keep coming back to the Opera House is I was much involved in this restoration of it you see.

LM The first of it, not now.

MM In 1974, '05, and '06 see, I was involved in that. I was, they named me the building chairman of that Barre Opera House Foundation it was called then see. And we dug into it, Dave Sheets, you know him?

MK No.

MM You don't!

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MK I know the name, but I've never met him.

MM Oh, you, he's into it. Now he was up in Barre as a researcher at first. Up in the library see. And for instance now, some woman connected with the bicentennial sent back to Barre two notebooks that her father had kept as Boss Grip, you know what I mean by Boss Grip? Okay. A page in there for each, for each booking, each play and the men that he used as helpers, stage hands, helpers see, have to remember he paid them a \$1.00 a night, gave himself \$2.00 see. And there would be stock companies come into town. Now roughly speaking one a month. Maybe they were six, seven weeks apart, but they were thick I'm telling you. They were close together.

MK This would have been _____?

MM This is, from right, from the time this thing got built in 1899. This, these notebooks covered an era from mid 1908 I think it was until mid 1910 or something like that. About 18, 19 months in that area see. I counted, 156 shows were here see in that span of time. See, that's pretty close together, plus wrestling matches, lectures, anything like that see. Barre wanted and patronized entertainment. Money was flush. See I told you. See they could afford to build the buildings up on the street and pay the taxes and pave the street and all the rest of it, nothing was impossible around here. After the first World War they stagnated or after the Great Depression they stagnated for sure.

MK What was Barre like during the Depression?

MM During the Depression?

MK Yea.

MM Hard scrambled just like all the rest of the towns.

MK Well that's one thing that we've been looking at is that you talk to people who are in the country who had hard times basically all the time and felt like we're always poor, we're just a little poorer now right.

MM Yea.

MK And it seemed to be at least they still could plant a garden, they still had some animals, but we're thinking that perhaps the people in the towns who were dependent on industry had a much harder time during the depression
_____.

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MM Just the granite business collapsed. In fact when the second World War came around, they turned a couple of stone sheds into war industry. One of them was making chain.

MK Huh.

MM Yea, what did you start to say?

LM I know it was hard for us because my father was in business.

MK Let me turn this around for you here.

LM My father was in business and you know jewelry and watch repairing and things like that people just tried to get along with those things.

MM Strictly luxury business.

LM Yes and but I do know, I don't know whether anyone has told you, but of all the banks in Barre, the only one that people didn't lose their money in was the Granite Savings Bank. That's...

MM They reopened as quickly as the Washington permitted.

LM Yea. And never lost a thing out of that, but the People's National Bank, Morris' grandparents had money in there, their life savings and they lost everything.

MM No, they didn't lose everything, but they lost substantially.

LM Well, you never, they never got back.

MM Never got it all returned.

LM No, never.

MM So...

LM But...

MM But my father who was a (LAUGHING) carpenter and a skilled one, if there was any work available he got it. Haven't you, there's a lot of these systems that put a mike on the floor and they pick up anybody and everybody.

MK Oh, it'll pick you up, it's just the quality is much better if you're right on the mike.

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MM That's my Dad, I'll show you later. He was idle for months. He didn't really get back to work until FDR started up the triple C. And then they come into here, oh the first dam that was built was East Barre dam. You heard about these flood control dams? Well he was...

MK So your father worked on...

MM He was building the barracks, what I'm talking about. Barracks, not on the dam. They imported fellows that came up from New York and other cities that built the dams, but he built the, helped build the barracks. All the woodpeckers in Washington County found employment see and when they got done up to East Barre, they moved down onto Worcester Branch, onto Little Riv...

MK Wrightsville?

MM No, what am I trying to think of?

LM The one on the way to...

MM Elmore yea, yea, yea.

LM Worcester.

MM Worcester yea, out there. And after that they went to Little River built those.

LM Did your Dad go down to Little River?

MM I don't remember. I don't think so.

LM I didn't think so. Didn't he go...

MM Yea, I think he went to work for Hookers Store then.

LM That's what I thought.

MM See he, my Dad worked, he had such lousy health, asthma, that ne never finished school. And he never finished high school. Knocked off at the eighth grade. And so he was working as a carpenter for near 30 years and then he went into work for G. A. Bixby in the Hooker Company and worked another 30 years at that almost. Yea...

LM 25 years there, they honored him.

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MM Floors, because when you started it was hard floors, linoleum, asphalt, tile, he laid that asphalt tile floor out there see. Then the carpet came along and he was into that too. And Bixby had a lot of diversification. He had St. Charles Steel Kitchens. Steel cabinets and they had to be installed in an existing house you see. And you needed a carpenter to true up the thing before you installed, you couldn't twist those cabinets around very much without the doors refusing to close see and the drawers. It's very handy that Bixby had somebody to do what he was doing.

MK I was just wondering since you have such wonderful memories of your family going back before you were born, did anybody ever tell you stories about Dewey Day?

LM Oh yea.

MM Oh yes indeed. Yes. See in that book there, there's a picture of the temporary railroad yard that was put in down in Montpelier. Also of the bonfire. Only the caption on the bonfire is wrong. Whitney and Jones Chase captions and information diligently but within a year after they, Whitney had a whole page of errors, corrections.

LM I thought I had it in here, but I can't find it. There's the bonfire.

MM There's the bonfire.

LM That's not the right...

MM It says there of course it was up on the Capital Grounds.

LM But it wasn't, it was up on the hill.

MM It was up where the tower is, up in the park.

MK Oh okay.

MM Yea, that was the logical place to put it of course. After that book was published, some woman called him up or word came to him anyway and he went...

LM Whitney had a whole sheet in here of changes.

MM Yea, I don't know whether I got it in there or not.

LM Well I thought he had it.

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MM She said oh no, it wasn't on the Capital Grounds, I, she said I can remember the wagons climbing up the hill past my house carrying all the stuff, railroad rails, barrels and all of that stuff that they lugged up there to make a great pyramid. That was a great business, celebration. At the end of the first World War, there was a bonfire up here in Barre in front of the BGA, you know what I mean, Barre Granites, out there in that triangle. Whopping big thing, twice in fact they set the thing, they touched the thing off first at the false armistice on the 7th of November and burned it up then, though they had to redo it.

LM We had pictures of...

MM They built an enormous, down in Montpelier, the Central Vermont Community put in an enormous number of tracks.

LM The one thing that of course I don't remember anything, but the one thing that my father used to tell about they went to the celebration.

MM They went to the parade yes.

LM Yes and they standing under a telephone pole and of course they were, people were climbing up everywhere to see and this man all of a sudden something landed on my father's shoulder and he looked up and the man said put them in your pocket. He lost his teeth. (LAUGHING) That's the one thing that I remember. My dad says, "What shall I do with them?" He said, "Put them in your pocket." I remember because Daddy told us and Daddy used to...

MM 40 times.

LM ...and he used to he knew the man. But it wasn't anyone that...

MM Her father was an excellent, all these...

MK ...back eventually...

MM ...all these stories (LAUGHING) always told them the same way. You know some people got a different version every time, not her father. Honest to God, I, he was a...

LM Always tell about it.

MM ...you never got, I never had any reason to doubt the specifics. They'd also on occasion.

- LM _____, Dewey Day Celebration.
- MM They run a few tracks for big circuses down there. But not too many because...
- LM Here it shows the...
- MM The railroad yard...
- LM ...railroad yard and it says 80 and evidently this is...
- MM Schedule for...
- LM ...for the trains. Yes, so it says...
- MM Excursion schedules.
- LM Yea, but it said, both of them. But this is the track that Dewey Day Celebration here.
- MK So they brought in all those extra tracks just to accommodate all the people coming in.
- LM Now it says, a temporary 12 track coach yard was constructed by Central Vermont Railroad to handle trains that brought thousands of passengers to the Dewey Day Celebration on October 12, 1899. This yard was built in what is now the site of Montpelier High School. Within a few days following the great celebration, the tracks were removed without a trace. And this came, Vermont Magazine.
- MK What did they do at Dewey Day, I mean tell me what...
- MM What did they do?
- MK Yea, tell me about what the day was like.
- MM This is all second hand of course.
- MK Sure, it has to be. Nobody's around who can tell me first hand at this point.
- MM The monster parade and when Vermont tries to, when they put on parades and they really exert themselves, they put on quite a parade they can here. What more can, you get the idea on this Shataqua?
- MK I think so.

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MM When I say it was variety entertainment, you name the kind and they had a sample of it. The cast of their plays were, were well done of course. And they were out on a circuit and by the time they got around to Barre, they'd thoroughly rehearsed of course. There were no hitches. And they had, they had good shows, good plays and well done.

LM The lectures too.

MM Yea, the lectures yes they were thoroughly done. I cannot, you got to bear in mind that I was pretty young to remember titles of the thing. They didn't have, oh, another thing. Not only was there a young college fellow nursemaiding the tent, but there was a man who stayed in town as master of ceremonies. Any of the other people mention that?

MK I don't think so no.

MM I'm dead sure of it that there was even with the tent shows. I know, later on I was going to say radio began to cut in to the attendance see in the summer time. And then they went to winter ^{Chautauque} ~~shataqua~~ which they used first the opera house stage see. By that time there was, there was a mid-week play also. There were two plays, mid-week and the end of the week. And then as she says, after they got the armory built, what's now the Elks establishment on Elm Street, which when did that go up? '25?

LM I can't remember.

MM You go up and look at the corner blocks.

LM I can't remember.

MM They've got two dates on the corner blocks now, but, corner stones, but when they redid it. '25 I think. After that, after that was erected, that was Barre's latest public assembly hall see, so they went over there. There was a lousy stage, it wasn't a real stage in that hall, terrible. The Opera House has got a decent stage.

MK When did the ^{Chautauque} ~~Shataqua~~ sort of peter out?

MM When did it die?

MK Yea.

MM Uh, I think, I think the Depression polished it off.

MK Uh.

MM What's your recollection?

LM I think so too. I don't think, see I was trying to think.

MM Were they still having it when you were in high school?

LM No, no. I would say, yes I was trying to think after brother graduated from college. I think '29 was the...

MM The end of it?

LM Uh huh, I think so.

MM I can remember, see I come out of high school in '29 and she did in '34.

LM I don't think...

MM I'm inclined to think that it, that it ran until, until the depression.

MK I wondered if you had any movie theaters operating in Barre.

LM Oh yes.

MM Oh yea, there was three of them. There was three of them because when the Opera House petered out as live entertainment, when the stock company ceased coming to the Opera House, then they, then they erected a projection booth in the back of the balcony and bought a curtain and they were showing movies. You go around Barre and talk to people, oh yes, I went there and I got a glass plate or a cup every time you went you know, they gave away glass dishes. That went on for years up there at the Opera House and they had the Paramount, present location there where they got two projectors, corner of Merchant Street. Then they had another theater that they called the Magnet Theater on the corner of Pearl Street where, where Belltrami's Photographic establishment is and the chain drugstore there, that was the theater building, the whole of it. I can remember when they created that thing and there was a contest to name it. I can even remember who got the prize for the, for the Sylvia Levy, Sylvia Levy got the boobie prize for naming it. She came up with the word named "Magnet." So that ran from the late, no not late, mid-'20's until I don't know when that thing died, but they had three movie houses there at the height of the thing. See during the Depression, the Opera House was the

cheap one. Kids could get in the balcony for \$.09, \$.10 see. (LAUGHING) In fact, when we went in there with the restoration job, we discovered where there was another stairway in the back of the orchestra, from the orchestra level up to the back of the balcony see inside the theater, not the stairway in the vestibule outside, but this one was inside. I had forgotten about it until you could see the scars on the wall where they'd torn the stairway out so the kids couldn't buy a ticket for a dime and then sneak downstairs see. But that really served to remind me that I watched a couple of commencements sitting on those stairs see. Because commencement time, Spaulding Commencement, up until 1939, including 1939 was the last one was held in the Opera House. After that, they got the auditorium built see and they shifted over there, larger. It was simply jammed full, the Opera House was you know. And so I didn't tickets, so I sat on those stairs to watch some of my buddies who were a class or two behind me graduate. I plum forgotten about that stairway until that day. The, that Opera House business is really fascinating. Barre was a, people of Barre wanted entertainment. A man does not live by bread alone you know. No, no. So as you see here, they had this Entertainment Association started much earlier than this. I think we have doped that it started in, they built the first building in 1885 anyway see. That had a theater in its upper reaches. No, no, pictures that I know of exist of the first theater. There's some of the building but not of the first theater, but then I never cease to marvel that in 19 months after that building burned, they had a replacement. They'd shuffle paper for 19 months in this day in age, getting past 250 and all the rest of the bologna. But those people, they wanted, they made up their minds they wanted it replaced. They found, they found an architect, got a plan, you realize what's involved to get an architect, get an acceptable plan, he got the drawings out, the contractor on it.

MK The money?

MM They obviously went to work in the spring of '98 to clear up the wreckage and it was burned to a shell. Have you seen the pictures of it? Of the wreck I mean?

MK I think I have yea.

MM Yea, ice encrusted, yea.

LM That was Vivian.

MM Vivian.

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MK One other thing that I want, I'm going to have to go in about 10 minutes here, but I wanted to ask you one other thing. You mentioned that you thought radio might have had something to do with the decline of the ~~Shataqua~~ ^{Shataqua} too. I wondered if you had recollections of, if you could remember really clearly when you got your first radio?

MM When did the first radio show? Oh yea.

MK Yea.

MM Again, my grandmother Kidder took me to a man's house, right around North Seminary Street, he had a crystal set, I put earphones on and you heard the voice radio. That was my first example of that. And then...

MK Do you know how old you were?

MM What?

MK Do you know how old you would have been then?

MM Oh yes. It was in the early '20's, maybe about those same years '21, '22, what's the dope now. KDKA start broadcasting?

MK I don't remember.

MM Very early, and so he was picking it up and her brother for cripe sakes had a crystal receiver when he was in high school. Now he built his own crystal receiver. Now he came out of high school...

LM In '23.

MM In what?

LM In '23.

MM '23 yea.

LM I have to call up Harry Bernet and find out because Harry can probably remember when he first came to the house to hear it. We had it in the attic in our...

MK There wait, I'm going to ask you to start that again there okay.

LM My brother made the first set and really it was the first set around here I know that and it was in our attic and it was run by an automobile battery.

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MM _____ storage battery.

LM And, did I say it was in the attic?

MM The attic yea.

LM And Harry Bernet who is still living told me that that was the first radio he ever heard. He was a classmate of my brother's and came to the house and my brother graduated from high school in '23 and I would say it was around '21...

MM Yea.

LM ...that we have the first one. And then he went to Norwich and he put Norwich University on the air.

MM Built a transmitter over there.

LM Transmitter over there. And for, for years, well a number of years afterwards it was a going affair. And then he went on to Schenectady to New York and worked for General Electric.

MM He came out of Norwich and graduated an electrical engineer in 1927.

LM And then he built, after he went to Schenectady, not on his own, built a set that we had for years and years and years. And it had a...

MM With the three dials, wasn't it?

LM I don't remember about the dials, but he had a speaker that was...

MM The Goose-neck Speaker, right.

LM No, as I remember, almost seems as though it had a, I can't remember for certain, but a ship...

MM Remember what?

LM ...a ship on it.

MM Oh, oh, painted on the...

LM No, it wasn't painted, it was metal that was over the...

MM The speaker yea yea.

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LM ...speaker that set there. And before, in the first place of course, it was ear phones when it was in the attic, but he made this one for mother and dad and they used it for years and years and years, we used it. We never had a boughten radio.

MM For years and years.

LM Um, and the first one we had was I think Montgomery Ward one.

MK How did having a radio in your home change family life then?

LM Well we stayed home. See the one thing that my father was interested in being in the store, he regulated railroad watches and we have his regulating clock and he used to come home every noon...

MM In time.

LM In time to get the, the...

MM Time check signals...

LM ...checks from Washington D.C., every noon he'd come home and get that.

MM They broadcasted that time check.

LM For years.

MM Then you know much like the New Years Ball comes down. That gives you an idea, only much more pretext. Yea, from the Navel observer tower.

LM To me...

MM Was that _____ or?

MK No, no...

MM I forget some of these things.

(inaudible)

LM They say he had it. But to me now you go into a jewelry store or like Wobbys and that, they have a clock there, but I always have this feeling, I wonder if it really is correct. See and I will probably all the rest of my life

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because I know that ours were always checked with Washington.

MM All these electric clocks you understand run off the current.

LM And...

MM And the current is timed by a the frequency, timed by a master clock obviously. But what's she's saying is, is that master clock the same as the Naval observatory for instance?

LM See I always have this feeling.

MM You know about the standardization of time?

LM Well see they would come in with their watch and it had to be, their watch had to be checked to our regulating clock.

MM Once a month.

LM And, well depending on too, sometimes it was, depending on the man's watch, if it wasn't acting just right it would be twice a month.

MM They would make them come in more frequently.

LM And I, at one time, I could do the checking, but now I've forgotten how just how we did it, but...

MM See he was, he was watch inspector that's what they called him, watch inspector for both railroads in town.

LM I couldn't think.

MM As I told you, M & W and Central Vermont, so the fire, the engineers, the firemens, the firemen, the conductors and one, one brakeman out of a crew had to have a railroad watch. Do you know what I mean by a railroad watch? Okay, both of them jewels. Pocket watches and all this. When I spoke about standardization of time when, you know when they did it? 1883, huh, did you know about that?

MK I might have known once, I hadn't remembered 1983.

MM The railroads were responsible for it because for instance New York was a half an hour difference than Phili see before the first, all this traveling, by this time, 1883, there were a lot of people travelling see. First thing they had to do, they walked in the depot station look at

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the clock. You didn't know, all railroad stations had clocks on the walls see. That was the local time prior to this 1883 you looked up there and it must have been maddening because they got _____ or they decided they got to do something about it. So October 19, time changed. Yea, that's one of my great grandfathers that kept that little book.

MK Oh boy.

MM You got 40 years in there. They would, the Johnson's and the Kidder's were interested in what went on in the world.