



David Briggs
Interviewed by Beverly Bishop
October 24, 2004

BEVERLY BISHOP: To start off with, I'm Beverly Bishop, and I'm work, working with the Town of Hartford on the Oral History Project talking with David Briggs in White River Junction at the Hotel Coolidge. It's October 28th in the year 2004. It takes a second to start operating. Pull this just a little bit closer so there is no feedback.

So anyway I was thinking where to start but I, I think I'd like to just see if you remember anything about your grandparents, great grandparents, do you have any memory of any of those or stories about them that you heard?

DAVID BRIGGS: Well everybody gets two grandfathers and the grandfather of mine that relates to White River is my father's father who unfortunately died the very year that I was born but what we do know about him was that he moved, born on the Canadian border in a house that straddled the line. In fact it depended on which side of the bed his mother got out on after giving birth as to what, where his citizenship was gonna be I think. We found that house and it does, the line does indeed go right through the bedroom window but he grew up in and around the area of Colebrook, New Hampshire, Dixville Notch, the Balsams Hotel where he met my grandmother.

She worked in the kitchen. He worked with the teams and the, and the loggers and the outdoor people, horses was his thing, and he decided to move to White River Junction in 1919. I don't know exactly why other than the fact that White River Junction was probably seen as a very big place for someone who was born up in the North Country such as he was.

So he came to White River Junction and he, he really sort of translated his interest in horses to motor vehicles and started his own bus company here and it eventually became known as the White River Coach Lines. I think that name actually came after he had sold it to a fellow whose name was Al Abbott but before he sold it he actually had created some of the first ever ICC transportation rights in Vermont, typically the route from White River Junction to Rutland was his, was one of his major routes. I think his everyday business involved picking people up at the railroad station here in White River and taking them to the downtown hotel in Lebanon, which was called the Hotel Rogers. It's now called the Rogers House and it's a senior citizen residential facility.

So my middle name is Cassius which is his first name so I feel very connected to this guy even though I didn't get to know him but you're told things typically always in the best light but I think he was one of those guys from what I hear was that there was no real down side to him, he was very friendly, very likeable, big, very strong fellow, some people have said he wasn't particularly adept at business, that maybe because he cared more about his customers than he did –

Believe it or not that carpeting is still there today as well, different seats but that's another story but this is kind of how it all seemed to fall into place. They didn't even have a playbill and the publisher of the Valley News said he didn't want to sit on the board cause he felt he could help us more without that kind of a conflict, editorial conflict of interest but he said he would do things from time-to-time to help whenever he can and one of the things he ended up doing was sending his wife to be on the board which was wonderful but we did, we did a newsprint program with local advertisers paying for it and an overrun of about ten thousand pull-out sections so that was the playbill for the first two years provided by that function of advertisers in the Valley News helping out. So it's all those kinds of things.

They opened their first show ever was "Children of a Lesser God". They used deaf actors from, I think Goladette College in Washington, the lead was a woman from Chicago who, who had been the stand-in for Marlee Maitlin when she gave her Academy Award winning performance in a movie "Children of a Lesser God", but she was deaf and it was just an extraordinary thing.

All kinds of things happened off this theater thing, we could probably have a five hour interview on just that topic alone but this started to create more and more hotel activity because the actors stayed here, they stayed in our hostel wing with a bathroom down the hall and all that, and they were delighted, they had just a great time with it and so the arts were really up and running in White River Junction.

Now we can return to that but running parallel to that in the same time frame early on like '86, maybe actually mid '85 a call came to me from a lawyer in Woodstock, and his name was Robert Sinservale, and I didn't know it at the time I knew he was a very prominent lawyer in Woodstock but he was also on the board of the Preservation Trust of Vermont and they were very keenly aware of the fact that the, the old Post Office in downtown White River which had now been used for a number of years by the State as the District Courthouse had been declared obsolete and the State was doing new courthouse construction all over the State and that White River Junction was going to get a new courthouse and the presumption was that it couldn't be in the Village of White River because there was no space for it to meet their criteria of 25,000 square feet and parking.

BEVERLY BISHOP: To start off with, I'm Beverly Bishop, and I'm work, working with the Town of Hartford on –

DAVID BRIGGS: Focus on the, the camp season that was so huge there people coming to stay at the Lake Morey Inn or to be involved in all the camps around Lake Morey and Lake Fairlee which he ran while the partner stayed at home at the gas station, partner's name was Elvin Phillips and then in the winter they had a little rope tow out of Norwich, Vermont called Ski Alto which both partners ran but I gather largely my dad and mother again departed from the gas station to run the rope tow. I asked my mother once, "Have you ever seen any years like we've been having lately where you didn't have any snow at all?" She said, "Yeah the four years we

tried to run that darn rope tow.” It wasn't quite that bad but it was always nerve wracking in the days before the man-made snow. This would have been, I think the years they had the rope tow were something like 1948 to 1951 or '2 and so being born in '46 as I was I got a real early start to skiing.

My dad was always proud of the fact that the next door neighbor was a Dartmouth professor named Albert Snite and he promoted his daughter's interest in skiing, sent her to Europe to train and so on and so forth and she became a member of the U.S. Olympic team and got the silver medal at Squaw Valley in 1960. Her name is Betsy Snite.

BEVERLY BISHOP: Oh, yeah.

DAVID BRIGGS: And my dad was excited about that because little Betsy had helped him pack the hill where his ski tow was when she was just a kid and then went on to become an Olympian. He always said that we, he named my sister Betsy after Betsy Snite so those are just some of the entrepreneur tales that preceded me, grandfather and father.

My dad and his partner created in '52 they gave up the gas station and created Briggs and Phillips which was a retail store, and it was called an Army Navy store which was post World War II what you called a, which really became discount stores and it was very, very small, they evolved quickly it doubled and then tripled in size, and they were partners for a little over ten years when it was concluded that the store wasn't big enough to, to feed two families so Briggs and Phillips became Briggs Limited and the store lasted until 1982, my dad died in 19 – no, I'm sorry 2002. My dad died in 1992 having run the store at that point for forty years, my mother had joined him in the early '60s when the partner left and she kept the store open for another ten years after he died until the year 2002 at which point she was eighty years old and she said, “That's it, I'm done with this,” and so that was the end of Briggs Limited. So those are some of the entrepreneur backgrounds that I was born into, probably gives you a little clue as to why I A) came back here and B) did something independent and business minded.

BEVERLY BISHOP: Could you touch on family life you know your, with your siblings, I'm not sure if you said you had?

DAVID BRIGGS: Well, with that gas station enterprise my folks were living in an apartment just across the White River from the downtown on Maple Street which is Vermont Highway 14 on a site which today has Mascoma Bank's drive-in bank facility but it was a three story tenement at that point they were able to buy their first home in 1948 just up the street about three blocks in the direction of what is currently the Shady Lawn Motel and so being born in 1946 I'm sort of classic cutting edge baby-boomer and life in that neighborhood was very positive influence on me personally, at least the way I responded to it. In retrospect I guess people would say boy, that was a real '50s existence with your dad working in his own business across the river and your mom staying home and all that which she did, she was a registered nurse and did work but it didn't dominate she, she would work maybe six months or so at a time or whenever her family needed it and then she would come back home again and she joined him in the store in the early '60s but by that time all of us kids were either nearing the end of high school or, or well into grade school years.

Two boys, two girls. The sister Betsy lives in Woodstock today. She's an elementary school teacher and her husband is a Woodstock native whose worked for many years for the Rockefeller Resorts Corporation and brother Jack who migrated with me to the mid west and stayed and I came back and a sister who was two years younger than me went off to Green Mountain College in '66. Unfortunately got mysterious form of hepatitis and died eight weeks later. So three of us surviving at this point and but life in the neighborhood was very positive and I think as a result of that I chose to raise my three sons in a neighborhood very much like it in the middle of Saint Paul, Minnesota and what really stood out about that neighborhood, the neighborhood here in White River still exists in much the same way was that it was fairly high density, the houses were fairly close together which by Vermont standards and you could get right into a downtown area where there were exciting things to do for a kid, a movie theater. There was a point in time for a few years there where we could actually get on a train and ride to grandparents' house up in Fairlee or Orford, retailing, the bigger stores of those, of those that existed were in the village, other things like church and, and smaller shops and doctor's office and all that was very much integrated into our daily life and we could get thereby walking to it,

including the school but out the back side of these houses were hillsides and forests and places where you could really sort of discover and be on your own away from all the rules that your mother would put down, you could literally chop down trees and make camp fires and ski and do sort of outdoorsy stuff and yet you were still just out the back door from all of the care and concern that your folks would provide, so it was really a great neighborhood from a design standpoint to, to grow up in.

So again with a family that was self-employed in a village with all that access to all the other fun stuff you could do it was a very positive experience.

BEVERLY BISHOP: When you left here to go out to Minnesota how old were you and had you completed your education?

DAVID BRIGGS: Yeah, I chose to go to school in Vermont. I went to Norwich University right out of Hartford High and took civil engineering and was focused pretty much on becoming an engineer at that point. Norwich being a military format with a great military tradition for service, coupled with that the requirements to take ROTC and so through that I became commissioned in the Corps. Of Engineers and when I graduated in '68 it was right in that heat of the Viet Nam War so I was required to go on active duty and committed to do that so I did, took a year off worked for an engineering company in Boston, reported for active duty in '69 and was headed for Viet Nam when an opportunity came up for all of us in that particular wave of classes to extend our commitment to the military and trade for choice assignment and many of us decided to do that, I did and so I was sent to be a design engineer for the Corps of Engineers in Saint Paul, Minnesota and that's how I was introduced to the mid west, and I considered it to be a stroke of good luck because I was certainly concerned and ambivalent about going to Viet Nam and I was ready to go if that's what the orders said but there was an opportunity here to, to preserve my exposure to engineering and buy some time frankly without dealing with that whole issue.

In my case luck got even luckier because at the end of my two year stay in Minnesota when I was done originally scheduled to depart for whatever assignment they had for me next namely a Viet Nam assignment the orders never came and I stayed there for the third year. By that time there was, for me personally there was a lot of enthusiasm to return to Vermont I had, my first son

had been born by then and having been so happy with the Vermont being a Vermont native I really, by that time really felt strongly about coming back so I brought my family, little family wife and one son back to White River Junction and got a job working for Quechee Lakes which was a brand new idea, about three years in the making at that point. They were ready to professionalize their staff and so I joined a couple other engineers to be on their staff and did a lot of the initial work with Quechee Lakes and it's connectedness to the new Act 250 requirements and I stayed with them for a year and this would have been '72 to '73 and then decided because of the advent of Act 250 and the requirement for professional services to hang out my own shingle as a registered civil engineer and did that from '73 to '77 and so then office here in White River Junction offered the services of soil testing, land surveying, subdivision designs, utility design and a lot of work having to do with permit process around Act 250 requirements.

That was, particularly in retrospect, a very interesting time. I enjoyed it for the most part but by the time '77 came around I now had three kids, all sons and I wasn't making enough money to support them in the way that I wanted to be able to do that, so I started looking around for other employment and a firm that I'd been aware of in my Saint Paul days acknowledged that they were hiring and with my background it was easy for them to measure what I could do and so they hired me and I moved there in the winter of 1977, but more to the case of White River Junction, in those four, five years that I was here two important things happened with respect to the community I think, one was the building in which my father had been a merchant, the Gates Block, had been deteriorating and he was concerned about the overall condition of the building and he asked the owners of the building who lived in Boston if they would be interested in selling and they said that they, yes, they would.

The story of that ownership is very pertinent to the story of White River Junction. They had owned the building since about 1934 and the reason that they owned the building was the primary or what you'd now call the anchor tenant in the building was the JJ Newbury Company, the five and dime store people and they had arranged that every building in New England in which they wanted to do business and therefore had to have a leasehold would be owned by this one Boston family and that way they could control their destiny in terms of those important

buildings and so this family had been involved with the Gates Block in White River Junction from 1934 and now it was like 1974 so forty years but the JJ Newbury Company like many retailing corporate interests had evolved those rules about the leasehold were not nearly as important and they were moving away from downtown locations. The JJ Newbury lease was actually destined to last another twenty years in White River Junction until they finally left but this family at any rate was ready to divest of their holdings. In their last few years here they were so ambivalent about this building that they owned they had allowed a local person to care, to be the caretaker in turn, in return for collecting the rents on the second floor and which had been very proud offices, some of the nicest, nicest offices around and during those years those, those offices deteriorated into literally flop house where very doubtful people were using them as residential places and my dad was concerned about that because first of all he cared about quality and wanted things to be in good order and secondly he was concerned that they might burn the building down or something.

The third floor on the south wing of the building was, had been an overflow hotel facility called the Gates Hotel and that had been closed off for insurance reason one, a fellow by the name of Miller, no relation as far as I know to Miller auto people had ceased to run the Gates Hotel so they closed that off.

The other wing was the upstairs retail zone of the Newbury Company and it had been the Gates Opera House but the Newbury Company had expanded up into that space adding another 7,000 square feet to their 7,000 square foot front downstairs and so they were still operating with the two floors. They were soon to give up that second floor and the, the Newbury's upstairs opera house space really went into disuse. So I was excited about that because I love history and I like, as you can tell perhaps I, I cared about circumstances and what was my hometown and my father was becoming so much a part of it, it was exciting to have him make the leap to take over that building.

We were very optimistic in square one because there was a growing need for office space in the White River Junction area particularly in the legal community and in the government community, the State of Vermont was going beyond its normal confines of Montpelier, first to Waterbury and then to other communities around the State for so local or regional access for their

various services so we thought well it'll be easy to get this building reloaded and we proceeded on the strength of that belief, no contracts but just the belief to install an elevator and central air conditioning and to freshen up all the surfaces in the building, new electrical and decorated the walls and all that stuff that you do to make what had become very dingy space into suitable office space, new lighting, new windows, a big investment for the time because as I recall something on the order of \$350,000.00, I think it's probably fair to say in 2004 dollars that would be maybe a million and a half, something like that, so it was a big deal.

Very telling moment for us insofar as the town in its staffing arrangement hadn't really become as you might say professionalized and complete in its services as it is today so there was no real energy coming from the town to really embrace this and lo and behold there was a, a very definite trend to have the office spaces that the State was looking for be situated next to the Interstate Highway in a series of new buildings that were being happily built by Frank Gilman and his Gilman office complex so at that point in time there was an unspoken conflict, at least for us, between the new construction office buildings next to the Interstate and the rehabbed, retrofitted spaces in the downtown area and this was before there was any real strong State sentiment or conscious awareness of preserving downtown villages and we were caught in the earliest phase of that because every time there was another six or seven thousand square feet of space needed by the State or related entities a new building was easily erected in that suburban location and we just could not get this building full and it was ironic because all we were trying to fill was five thousand square feet, had we been able to fill that in the mid '70s quickly it would have, it would have made for a prosperous circumstances for us, but more importantly perhaps for the town that prosperity would have rolled over in terms of more improvements to the building and more things that we as a major neighbor and major citizen in the downtown could have done but as it turned out we were always on the edge of, of our seat because we couldn't get enough occupancy to really make, make it a good deal for, for us.

The other thing that happened in those few years was the National Bicentennial which really woke people up and got 'em excited about the heritage factor of our life in, in New England it was probably easy to do because we had so much to talk about and we, we really hadn't talked about

it much. When I got to Minnesota they said oh you've got so much history in Vermont well I found more archival information and more pictures and more everything about the late nineteenth century in Minnesota than I could find in New England it's because most of our stuff had been put away and people didn't think of it as particularly important. It wasn't old enough. In Minnesota if you had something a hundred years old it was old, here it had to be two hundred years old. So a lot of our stuff was still lying in trunks and in file cabinets and people just assumed that it was, was of no real interest so I became the Town of Hartford Bicentennial chairman.

BEVERLY BISHOP: I guess you came back.

DAVID BRIGGS: No, I was, this was before '77.

BEVERLY BISHOP: Oh, okay.

DAVID BRIGGS: See I left in '77 but before I left

BEVERLY BISHOP: Okay.

DAVID BRIGGS: I was the Bicentennial chairman for what turned out to be the better part of three years because in Vermont we had a double, we had the National Bicentennial but we also had the State's Bicentennial because the State had been formed as a republic in 1777 so there were two things to celebrate there and there are two things that happened out of that committee for which I feel like I can take some credit for one more than the other.

The one that's really kind of a pride and joy thing for me was this town had never had a need, tradition at least in my life time from the '40s on and probably going way back to having any community wide events on a recurring basis, they had no Fourth of July celebration, no Old Home Day, no standard gathering of people to have fun like so many communities do, like the Tunbridge Fair or Old Home Day in Thetford was or Orford Day in Orford, New Hampshire you just, these towns would just never think of giving up those great traditions. White River Junction by contrast didn't have that tradition at all I think they lost it back around the time when what had become the Vermont State Fair existed in White River for over twenty years it was the official state fair evolved to Rutland and when it evolved to Rutland it was coming right up on the Great Depression and I've been a great student of White River and its culture and what, what its people are like and why they're the way they are and the fact of the matter is White River Junction with

its railroad industry, once the car came the, the middle management and upper management people in a town like this would happily use the car to commute away from their business in the village and in this case they had some very attractive alternatives, not the least of which was Hanover because Hanover after all was beautiful, it had a world class university, the Dartmouth College to add to the attraction, cultured people and it didn't have twenty-four hour a day noise and soot and smoke and activity and all of the strife of humanity that will come to a railroad town so it's leadership base was drawn off and facilitated by the car so that left people at middle management and lower residing in the town in the village calling it their own and really sapped the, the strength of the natural leadership base that the town would have. The people who would either have the money to, to donate to Little League and church and things like that would now be donating it where they live which would be you know over in Norwich or, or other places and when you have a small town to begin with you can't lose a lot of your key players and not have it hurt your ability to perform as a full community. So we became kind of a poor town and when the Depression came and then the railroad industry started to devolve except for a little help from World War II it was a sudden and steady decline it left a lot of people who didn't have much to begin with to fend for themselves so there wasn't a lot of optimism in this particular village and, and they therefore had not had community events. It seems a shame because with the rich ethnic fabric that we had here it could have been tremendously colorful and unique with the Italian and Irish people but that were here but I think in fairness to them they had lost their leadership I think they've probably internally felt very bad about that, maybe even angry, and, and then they had a major Depression on top of it so prosperity was not the thing.

So my contribution, if you want to call it that, to the National Bicentennial was to call for a fam – a community festival which we called Hartford on the Fourth, and we tried to take that tendency in a township Hartford like many Vermont towns has half a dozen or so distinct neighborhoods which we call villages they were almost contentious or at least competitive with each other and they become less so. I think one of the good things about sub urbanization is that we've lost that edge a little bit but we, we brought 'em together in a festival or a celebration that was a field day at Hartford High School that we called Hartford on the Fourth and we called for

everybody who came to the festival to register in the name of their village so we went kind of right at that notion that if you were from White River Junction or Hartford Village or Quechee or Wilder you could be happy about that, but you didn't have to want to beat up the guy in the next town to celebrate that, it's kind of a good natured thing and so then you were encouraged to participate in any number of field events from horseshoes to archery, to running, to swimming, to watermelon eating, to softball, all day long and every time you competed you gained points for your village, so if you were an eight year old kid throwing horseshoes and you won a game your points went up and if you were from Wilder your points went up on the board for Wilder so we had this major, this major board on the football field, it looked like sort of the Olympic stadium and people, we had people keeping track of the score and they kept changing the numbers in big numbers and so all day long the villages could see how they were doing and happily it was all meant to be fun, it wasn't meant to be highly, highly competitive but people had some fun with that little competitive spirit and events turned out happily in a way that the scores were fairly close and they had, to make it fair they had taken White River Junction and divided it into north of the White River and south of the White River and make the population base about the same and it drew people all together, some of the nouveau people in Quechee that had kids that had, were fortunate enough to be say on a swimming team naturally dominated the swimming I but some of those farm kids from West Hartford could throw horseshoes like nobody else and so it was very cool.

At the end of the day it came down, as I recall, to like three villages could win it, Wilder, Quechee and Hartford Village could win it depending on who won the tug-of-war, and by that time people were filing into the football stands because if they hadn't been interested in the field day because it was such a new tradition they were at least coming to see the fireworks, the first fireworks that Hartford had had in decades and so the stands were filling up and they were being told as they entered you know what had been happening and they were updated on the score and how close it was. Well they got very excited about this tug-of-war and it went down to the last event, of course, and this was in the center of the football field, and it was about 1,500 people watching this so it was very exciting thing.

It gave right to at least fireworks every year. I left town for that Minnesota tour after, well before '77's field day started and I think a little bit of it was me being the visionary of that thing without that kind of insistence that it be done according to a formula it started to devolve, but what did stay in place was the notion of getting together every Fourth of July for fireworks and it's the biggest gathering of Hartford people to this day so that was, that was something good that came out of that.

The other thing that came was our so-called official bicentennial project and it had to do with reclaiming a piece of land at the intersection of the White and the Connecticut River which had been alternately a dumping ground, a carnival site, just waste land, we all looked at the river front land as sort of marginal and what can you do with it, who cares and of course this ties to the fact that until 1964 the rivers were a legal sewer and it took another ten years or so to get 'em cleaned up with sewage systems and whatnot. The rivers were just, we turned our back on 'em but we on the bicentennial committed felt that the rivers were an important resource, it was time to reclaim our access to them and this would be a beautiful site and so our official project became known as Lyman Point Park. Since I left and the park had not been completed the committee stayed in gear to ensure that that project would get done, it's sort of our pledge to the community and a woman named Toni Loudon was the driver of that and so although I can claim to have been the chairman of the committee during the time when that came to life she absolutely made that park happen and there's a plaque around someplace acknowledging that, it's a site that among other things Rogers Rangers had camped out on their way back to Fort Number Four so many years ago and today it's just a beauty, community members still have not totally figured out what a resource it is but concerts have been held there, it's great for picnicking and more and more downtowners realize they can go there and swim in the river all summer long as a quick way to refresh themselves. So those are some of the things that led up to my time away in Minnesota from '77 to '84.

So how we doing? Where should we go with this?

BEVERLY BISHOP: You're making this so easy for me. It's getting very close to end of this part of the tape.

Just to clear up you left to go to this job in Minnesota in '7 -- which?

DAVID BRIGGS: Yeah I had originally been in Minnesota for the military from '69 to '72, came back to Vermont and then went back to Minnesota in early '77.

BEVERLY BISHOP: So when you were here during that period you had your own business?

DAVID BRIGGS: I was an engineer with Quechee Lakes and self-employed but also involved as a citizen with the bicentennial thing and more or less connected with the family's decision to rehab this big building.

BEVERLY BISHOP: So you kind of assisted your father?

DAVID BRIGGS: Oh, yeah.

BEVERLY BISHOP: In doing that, your engineering skills must have come in handy?

DAVID BRIGGS: Oh, yeah, they were key to that and my office was in, in that building so I set an example as a professional in, in the building with an office, yeah.

BEVERLY BISHOP: Yep. Can you just talk a little bit about your knowledge of the Quechee Lakes development cause people I've talked with said that you know they really have said good things about the whole thing and I was just curious?

DAVID BRIGGS: Well, I feel very close to the Quechee thing because ironically when I came back there to work in '72 as a professional I was coming back to a place where I had really worked, the first work experience I ever had in my life was exactly ten years earlier in the summer of '62 when I was fifteen years old my father had, I like to say, exiled me to Quechee because he says, "Your fifteen now, it's time for you to learn how to work" and he had been, although born in White River Junction had spent the last ten years of his growing up years in Thetford, my grandfather relocated the family out of White River to a family farm in Thetford and he felt that farming was the, absolutely the best way to teach a young person the realities of work and life maybe in general so he found a farmer by the name Merrill Henderson high on a hill outside Quechee when Quechee was nothing but family farms in the summer of '62 there were some ten bona fide classic family farms in Quechee all making their livelihood from farm activity and almost all of 'em had herd sizes around fifty milk cows. The Quechee Fells Farm which is today the

centerpiece of the Quechee Lakes Clubhouse probably had seventy-five cows and they had a hundred thousand chickens literally.

BEVERLY BISHOP: Wow.

DAVID BRIGGS: It was probably the biggest farm in Hartford at that time. So he took me out there in the summer '62 and he said, "I'll be back to get you in the fall."

BEVERLY BISHOP: Wow.

DAVID BRIGGS: I say that with tongue in cheek because Quechee today is like just an errand, you know it's like six miles away we go there and come back two times before lunch, but in '62 even with cars being prevalent people didn't move around that way, those farmers in Quechee might come to White River once a week to do serious business like go to the bank or the feed store, check up on something or go to the doctor. They would come to White River Junction on Friday night to do their shopping but they didn't leave the farm for much other than that, rare occasion when they'd go someplace special like Boston or whatever but so when I went to Quechee I think I came home that summer maybe three times, today you'd probably wouldn't even put a kid out there, you'd drive him out every morning like a soccer mom would do but my pay was, the farmer wanted to offer me for, a workday was five in the morning, you broke, you got to the barn at 5:00 the morning you were done milking by six at night, plus all the haying and chores that went in between, so it was thirteen hours a day less those wonderful home cooked meals that you got and that was six days a week. Saturday was not off and Sunday was not off, every other Sunday was completely off but the odd Sunday you had to get up and do the milking from five to eight and then three to six so on an off day it was still six hours worth of milking. For that he wanted to offer me \$15.00 a week plus room and board. My father said I was worth twenty and the farmer couldn't deny that so I got twenty bucks. So you know what did I work, maybe eight weeks \$160.00 plus room and board. So that, you know that was a pretty phenomenal experience.

When I got out of the service I was back in Quechee and by that time the Quechee vision created by John Davidson was five thousand acres of land, 2,500 residential elements, 2,000 home sites and 500 condominiums and he was very proud about the fact that he was only gonna

put 2,500 units on five thousand acres and that there would be therefore a lot of greenbelt property to preserve the nature of Quechee and I think, oh, and the other thing of course is by the time he had bought all that land there was only one farm left out of the ten, that was the Maxim Farm down on the road towards Taftsville, all the other farms had been bought out. Ironically the farm that I worked for, the Henderson Farm was sold to somebody else, not Quechee Lakes the developer and the farmer had moved back into White River Junction.

(The end of side one of tape one. The beginning of side two of tape one.)

BEVERLY BISHOP: If it wasn't going to be farm country?

DAVID BRIGGS: Yeah, if Quechee making that transition from classic, oh, geez it was just wonderful summer, it's a "Gone With The Wind" kind of image you know of being there in, in true farm country to a, the second home development that was envisioned that at least it be done well, that it have a very enthusiastic sense of the past of the place and I was a big advocate for being, for it retaining some of its agricultural character and they talked about taking that one farm which was the Maxim Farm and making it a showcase farm with real animals and all that and I think probably the only real disappointment of Quechee Lakes given that family farms in an area like the Upper Valley had to go away was that they didn't do that, they didn't do that. Harold Eastman's Quechee Fellows Farm became the centerpiece of its golf course and country club. Mel Fogs barn on the Main Street of Quechee where he literally had cows on Main Street and grazing on what is now the cute little village green became an office and apartment building. The Dubois Farm on the side of Dubois Hill could have been the showplace farm but didn't somehow make it, the farm concept of having a showplace farm maybe not quite so posh as the Billings Farm but still a good hard example to everyone there I think would have been a big benefit to Quechee but.

BEVERLY BISHOP: Is it too late?

DAVID BRIGGS: It just didn't happen. Probably unless somebody put a lot of money in it, just forced it to happen. They had an opportunity there to have a transition from say either the Dubois or Maxim family to carry on their farming and make it more and more of a demonstrator kinda piece but, but that just wasn't there for some reason or another it didn't happen, but there was a

high concern for high quality. The design has proven to be very good. Quechee Lakes has brought a lot of very fine citizens to the town and if you go back to that concern that I talked about at, in my case the village of White River Junction losing its citizen leaders now we're thinking more beyond the village limits to the township as a whole so it has worked out that people who live in Quechee will embrace the whole town they don't just stay on the island in Quechee. They really do look at Hartford as a whole so they'll run for the select board, they'll serve on commissions and, and committees. They will give philanthropically to things like River City Arts, Northern Stage, the New England Transportation Institute and Museum and other things and so they bring culture, they bring intelligence and they bring financial resources to the community at large. So that's a very big benefit.

The more pragmatic reality is that many of them don't have children so they're not, in this first you know integration of Quechee Lakes which is gonna, before you know it, be a fifty year experience they haven't, they haven't brought a lot of kids to the formula that would say challenge the school population. So it's been a very positive thing and a lot of, well for example the Harris Emory Mills shut down in the early 50s, the Dewey's Mills shut down in '62, but for Quechee Lakes I don't know that Simon Pearce for example would be there. Certainly Simon Pearce did an extraordinary thing by retrofitting that mill and preserving its ability to create waterpower into the form of hydropower, hydroelectric power. So the, you know the list goes on and on of the positive things that Quechee has brought to the community. It's been a little trying at times from a sociological standpoint because in the effort to confirm that Quechee was going to stand for quality the, the efforts to make that really clear have positioned people socially in, coming into Quechee more with their neighbors in Hanover or Woodstock because they would be from that same socioeconomic stripe which has caused a little friction but that's largely dampened out and, and I don't think that it's a, it's a, a big problem the elitism hasn't really been the problem that it could have been. So Quechee has been a success story but there, there were, I, that's the thought I was going to convey there was a time when a lot of people around the State and there may still be a good number of them didn't even know that Quechee was part of Hartford because Quechee wasn't anxious to share the fact that they might be say lined up with White River

Junction because White River Junction as the primary mercantile commercial center, that leading retail center in the '50s and early '60s had atrophied to where it was none of that and now becoming depressed and even pretty tattered and so White River you know took on the unfortunate role of being quote the wrong side of the tracks which was ironic and difficult, difficult stigma to shed. We're not over it yet in the year 2004 we've still got a little bit of slugging to do here to, to regain any kind of dignified stature in the Upper Valley.

BEVERLY BISHOP: So your years away, you want to talk about that just a little bit and how you came back?

DAVID BRIGGS: Yeah, I would I like to talk about the years away because they, once again they contributed mightily to what has happened here in White River Junction and, and what I have been able to do. When I went back to Saint Paul I was helped along by a fellow that I had met in my first three year stay there just from playing basketball but he turned out that he was a fellow who had grown up in the older neighborhoods of Saint Paul and was a part of a growing generation of people who were getting excited about reclaiming them and restoring them and they had some material to work with, these neighborhoods were the fantastic Victorian neighborhoods created by the prosperity of the growth of railroading and the lumber industry in the late 1800s and ranging for about a two mile by one mile wide area from the Saint Paul Cathedral west were just blocks, block after block of magnificent homes starting with the most magnificent closest to the Cathedral and extended all the way down to lesser but very well kept bungalows that were, were very, very nicely built in the 1920s and I really caught the fever for that. We had, the family had bought the building here and White River is an older place so I, you know I was sort of easy catch for that whole concept but moved into that neighborhood and bought a fourteen room Queen Anne Victorian, I think I paid \$65,000.00 for it which was a lot because some of these people just a couple of years before had bought even bigger mansions for \$25,000.00 that nobody wanted.

BEVERLY BISHOP: Wow.

DAVID BRIGGS: In some cases there was ten or twelve families living in one Victorian mansion that was built with the intention of serving one family.

BEVERLY BISHOP: Wow.

DAVID BRIGGS: And it was the neighborhood in which Scott Fitzgerald had grown up in and had an ancient social club called the University Club of Saint Paul and it was just full of excitement and I really got the fever there and it was during that time that across the street from me in a duplex lived, just happened to be living a, a tenant who was working for Minnesota Public Radio and writing narratives about a fictitious town in which he apparently had grown up in and his name was Garrison Keillor and he was writing these stories about “Tales of Lake Wobegone”, and he had started this Saturday night variety show that he modeled after the Grand Ole Opry called The Prairie Home Companion and this was when it was nothing, it was just a local thing we paid five bucks and we’d go down and walk in and buy a ticket and watch him do his thing and I never got to know him although he lived exactly across the street from my house and then he lived, then as he prospered he bought a nicer house on my side of the street up the block away and then finally one of those mansions nearer the Cathedral but he’s such a prolific creative writer that you never see him. I got to meet his significant other because she was more involved in neighborhood stuff but the guy that I did meet was his musical sidekick a guy named Butch Thompson who plays the traditional jazz piano and we became good friends and so when I decided it was time that that phase of my life had come to an end and I was going to come back here I asked him if he would come back to White River Junction and play some music and he said yes and it’s what gave rise to what history now shows as River City Arts and now Northern Stage because of his willingness to come, Butch Thompson also lived across the street from me and during those years I had never lost touch with White River the summer of ‘79 I actually went on sabbatical from my engineering job and my father paid, matched my salary from the engineering company to come back to White River and spend the summer here to function as an ad hoc Chamber of Commerce. The Chamber had failed and we thought the two of us that that lack of support in intensity that a Chamber brings to a community if restored would make a big difference and so if I were to come here for three months during the school vacation that summer I could do the research and do the networking and meet people around and find out what kinds of elements could happen here in White River and we felt so confident that if we did that for

several months it would make a difference, a lasting difference so on the strength of that he matched my salary so I could come and do that.

BEVERLY BISHOP: Wow.

DAVID BRIGGS: That summer I discovered a fellow trying to put together a high grade excursion train out in Pittsford/Proctor area, great concept, one that's been now used in numerous places around the country but his operation didn't make it, Steam Town in Bellows Falls was failing and looking desperately for a final home so after I left my dad, Edgar Meede and a guy named Don Marshall from Woodstock created a non-profit called The Vermont Railroad Museum which resided in, literally in a lawyer's office across the street until we resurrected it only five years ago to become The New England Transportation Museum but what did, but what also happened was we found out that summer through networking that the National Trust for Historical Preservation had commissioned a movie called "Main Street" and it was espousing the wisdom of nurturing and restoring and caring for Main Street that, not as a museum, not as an acronym, not as an obsolete mechanism but as a really important part of the whole community, that it wasn't just cute, it wasn't just Disney Land. It really was --

RT: Functional.

DAVID BRIGGS: It meant a lot to communities and it was important cause if you let it go squalid then you had all these kind of social problems and if you didn't use all of the buildings there you were wasting your infrastructure and on and on and on. Well this movie was commissioned to be made by a filmmaker who lived in Orford, New Hampshire even though it was a national initiative and all the communities in it were mid-western communities. The filmmaker was John Carroll from Orford, New Hampshire and my cousin told me about this, he said, "Hey that guy John Carroll is making a movie I think you'd be interested in." Like I wasn't, were we ever. So we brought the movie, him and his movie to town for a fund raising dinner that occurred following that summer and it occurred in February of '78. My dad flew me back here for the dinner and a couple of fellows Larry Chase was the driver, the real driver just a very loyal supporter of, of things having to do with White River. Larry and others put together a fund raising dinner to reconstitute the Chamber and we had it at the American Legion and we, it was a night where a lot

of people came, the movie was shown as the element, Chester Leibs from UVM was the noted historic preservationist came as a keynote speaker and he said, "You know," he says, "I drove into your town tonight, it's a one way street system," and we had never changed the one-way pattern since the Interstates had come, so when you came down the hill from the Interstate into the village you were entering at right angles to where most people had entered over the years through the railroad underpass, he said, "So it was strange," he says, "I came down the hill into your village tonight to find the first sign that I came to said do not enter," he says, "I don't find that particularly hospitable." So one of the things that dinner caused was us to you know how committees can be they don't want to change anything or they take forever to do it we were able to change the direction of that one-way street system quickly because of that.

The other thing was we raised \$15,000.00 in pledges that night to fund the office of the Executive Director of the new Chamber and where it had been, it had been called the Hartford Chamber of Commerce or the White River Chamber of Commerce we decided that it had to be really fiercely focused on just downtown so we called it Downtown White River, Inc. and we basically said if you're not in downtown you can't join, well all of the other people had been apathetic about joining the Chamber, what good does it do me, why should I pay my dues, blah, blah, blah, it played reverse psychologically and immediately people outside the village wanted to be in it, they couldn't be, we told them they couldn't join so now they wanted to, and so quickly it became the Greater White River Area Chamber of Commerce. So that was '78.

Then two years later I found out the Hotel Coolidge was going to potentially fail and it might be for sale so I corroborated with the former owner who had some paper on, on the property and he decided to, to take the property back but it had tickled my interest and I thought, geez maybe that's what I ought to do and he said, his name is Fitus Dantos and he had owned the Coolidge from '70 to '73 because he was a colleague, sometime partner, of John Davidson who had created Quechee Lakes, and he had been brought up from Andover, Mass. in '70 to run the Coolidge as the de facto clubhouse for Quechee Lakes who had no clubhouse and so prospects for buying land at Quechee were wined and dined in the Coolidge and Dantos used the old established menu here, gourmet food but his flashy style as a restaurateur making it a very

popular place, then he had sold it, and the new owners were failing. This is 1980. So he said, "I'm gonna take it back". He took it back, reopened it but he quickly realized that he had done it once and this was not the right part of his life to be doing it again, and so he, he ran it with ambivalence, he leased the restaurant out, the restaurant got very bad and by 1984 I was back again for a twentieth high school reunion and he said, "I'm gonna sell it, if you want it this time I'll sell it to you," and I decided to put together an investment partnership based on local investors to embrace the idea that new blood would come in and that I would be that new blood and take it over to do that and that's what I did.

That was, that was coming off the time when the nation had been really struck by ultra high interest rates and the attempted real estate development in the mid-west had been successful except for those high interest rates that had just thrown everything into a tizzy. So I decided this is my moment and put that partnership together and came back and bought the hotel from Fitus Dantos and proceeded to take it over. So that's how I got from '77 to '84, there was an awful lot of involvement in White River Junction even though I was living 1,500 miles away, and as I pulled out of Saint Paul the last guy that I saw was Butch Thompson this piano player, and I said, "Hey I just bought this old hotel in Vermont, would you come to play some music," and he said, "Sure." So that was September of '84. It took all fall to get to closing, to put the financial resources together and this is an important part of history I think this statement is that I wanted the investment partnership to be local citizens who cared about this business but who would see it as a real, a real business not something that they were just donating to, that they would put not only their investment capital into it but they would also support it emotionally and, and as patrons and this would make it a stronger business because of it and that if, my legacy would that be that this business would be viable and not just a museum, that if it was really viable it would set all the right examples, it would help lead the way for other businesses to be viable that, that a district ought not to be a museum and ought not to be dependant on philanthropy or government handouts, that it ought to really run on a sustainable basis according to the rules of our economic system, but about the minute that I started selling the units I felt that I wasn't getting that kind of response from the investment community and it probably has to do with that law of the jungle that

no matter how good you are or how good an idea is if people for whatever reason don't believe it that you have a self-fulfilling prophecy and so I found myself battling upstream against that uncertainty and doubt in the, the investment capital didn't come in as vigorously as I had hoped, I was able to patch together my own resources to force it to happen but it wasn't the same and one year later the IRS passed the, the, the landmark legislation that changed the rules by which passive investors could participate in a project by saying that, that their deductions from those losses were, were limited and so that was my, I had learned about this investment model from one of my neighbors in Saint Paul who was very, very successful in rental real estate using this limited partnership model, but the model all of a sudden was broken and it was critically dependant on me being able to go back to that community for more resources to finance what had to be done with this whole building. I only, I only took down enough in square one to buy it. I said I'm going to run it in the "as is" condition and then we'll decide based on real experience what to do next so that we don't spend money in a crazy way. I thought that was prudent. The truth probably is it would have been better to raise all the money and beautify the building without taking a breath because along the way you get so many people second-guessing what was going.

Running parallel to that though I had my own game plan for bringing life back into the community and one of the things was this notion of culture and the arts and I did not have a big background in the arts. I'm a trumpet player of the lowest caliber. I can play good enough for a family wedding and in the town band but I'm not a musician and I'm not an artist. I mean my background is engineering so you know what did I know about culture, but traveling back and forth to Minnesota I used the Burlington airport and I saw what was happening on Church Street and with Ben & Jerry's and all that and I said boy this is just perfect for Vermont that back to the land, hippie generation, and all the other kind of interesting people that are in Vermont make it a very lively place and yet people aren't really fully embracing that. They could do a lot more with this and it would be a lot of fun.

So we closed on the hotel deal in January 2nd of '85 and on February 24th it produced in that Newbury's upstairs space which had formerly been the opera house which was now just a

big empty room a concert featuring the Butch Thompson Trio of the Prairie Home Companion was, turned out there were a lot Prairie Home Companion fans around here. That arena today seats two hundred and fifty, that night we had four hundred and ten people in there sitting on old rickety risers, wooden folding chairs and they gave just a magnificent performance and it, I was able to form a non-profit called the River City Arts Forum. I named it after River City because that's what we had; those of us locals had assigned River City to White River Junction after The Music Man, the Meredith Olson thing.

BEVERLY BISHOP: Oh, yeah.

DAVID BRIGGS: Where they said, "River City, we've got trouble right here in River City." We said, ahh, we've got plenty of trouble let's, we might as well call this place River City so and I'd been on the Arts Forum at Norwich as a cadet and so I said well River City Arts Forum sounds like the right name so we called it that and two years later after a series of concerts that had marginal success a couple of guys came to town looking for where the Green Mountain Guild had performed and they had done some summer stock theater in this space trying to make sure that they had a Woodstock based audience and they had marginal results, they couldn't quite make it work and they had gone but these two guys came to town looking for it because among other things they had heard that Meryl Streep had acted here. Well she hadn't really. She'd been part of the Green Mountain Guild troupe the summer she was at Dartmouth in the early '70s so she was sort of tangentially connected and they asked around the community where the, where the theater was and no one could tell 'em even though the theater was right literally under their nose. So they found their way to me much and I took 'em up and showed them the building and I said, "You know if you guys are thinking about theater company of your own why don't you come here?" So in the spring of '88 they came and formed the White River Theater Festival, which became an equity actors' theater, highest caliber. It grew from nothing to about a million dollar a year budget and then failed over about a ten-year period, and there's lots of tales that can be told about the evolution of that some of which are in the history of the Briggs Opera House.

In the process we reconstructed or reconfigured that space from the old style opera house into a modern studio theater and the theater company honoring my father and his

willingness to let them do that and charge them next to nothing for rent and sometimes nothing for rent when they couldn't pay it and outfitting it with an air conditioning and seats and lighting and the whole bit renamed it the Briggs Opera House and so the arts became a part of this.

The other Minnesota story that's kind of fun to tell is as a trumpet player I participated in the McAlister College Symphonic Band in Saint Paul and because they opened it up to the community and being the worst of the trumpet players had me seated next to a tuba player who turned out to be a PhD musicologist who every year did a brass band festival in Silverton, Colorado playing nineteenth century music on antique instruments from the Civil War and he called it the Rocky Mountain Brass Band Festival and I said to him, being a lover of brass band music, these guys by the way think John Philip Sousa is nouveau, they won't play anything as modern as that so it got to be before 1900. I said to him, I said "Why don't you come and do a band festival in Vermont, I'm gonna be moving back to Vermont." He said, "Well," he said, "that would be great," he says, "cause all this music began in New England, it didn't begin in the Rocky Mountains," and he said, "I do all my research in Manchester, New Hampshire where they have a library from nineteenth century brass band music." He said, "I pull the stuff out of the, the archives and set it, reset it down, it hasn't been played in a hundred years."

So we created between the two of us a thing called the Yankee Brass Band Festival, which goes on to this day. Every year twenty-two musicians from around the country come sit under his baton, he comes from Minnesota and they practice for two days, they're all so brilliant they only have to practice for a few hours and then they do five concerts, about half of these guys are PhDs in music, some of 'em sit in symphony orchestras.

BEVERLY BISHOP: Yep.

DAVID BRIGGS: And they play for free on village greens around Vermont.

BEVERLY BISHOP: Wow.

DAVID BRIGGS: But the last concert is always in White River Junction.

BEVERLY BISHOP: When is that usually?

DAVID BRIGGS: The last week of July.

BEVERLY BISHOP: Yeah, okay.

DAVID BRIGGS: Now because one of our co-founders is from Portland, Maine every third year we go to Maine.

BEVERLY BISHOP: Yeah.

DAVID BRIGGS: I say we because my heart's still in it, but they rehearse at Norwich University where the, the band director there is part of the troupe, and then they do their five concerts and they always end up in White River.

BEVERLY BISHOP: I want to continue this but because of my time constraints today and I'm sure you don't have a lot of time to give, I, I know there is so much more here and I'm not sure how this will happen and whether we'll get more from you and visit with your mother too, or, so anyway I'm going to stop the tape now and then we can talk about that.

DAVID BRIGGS: Sounds good. There's lots more to say.

BEVERLY BISHOP: Hopefully, hopefully we can come back to this.

BEVERLY BISHOP: So here we are back at the Hotel Coolidge with David Briggs. I'm Beverly Bishop and we're going to finish this tape. It's the 19th of November. We're in White River Junction and where we left off was we were talking about that brass band, fantastic.

DAVID BRIGGS: Right, the antique brass band festival, and also or more, more really about the notion of cultural activities now as it relate to all that hotel activity and community activity. One of the really interesting recollection was that the first summer that they were here we decided to have the concert right out in front of the hotel which we did on a flat car that was behind the Engine 494. By the time the Yankee Brass Band had arrived here we had achieved, I say we, but local active, activist committees had achieved the relocation of the Engine 494 from the Municipal Building to here in the village, and its first location was on the hotel side of the tracks running parallel to what is now black iron fence and the consist included a flat car which my dad and some other folks had gotten, so we used the flat car as, as our bandstand and the Yankee Brass Band performed on the flat car.

The next year or possibly the year after we actually decided to have the concert in a park and Hartford at that point had no bandstand so what we decided to have it at Lyman Point Park

and Lyman Point Park is that park that we created for our, as our bicentennial project some, well at that point only ten or so years earlier but the interesting part was the park was beautiful, the Town had done a good job of maintaining it but you had to know where it was. It's not just behind the Municipal Building, it's along the river and you have to cross under a railroad trestle and down a slight grade and you break out into this nice little park-like setting along the White River where it meets the Connecticut and very few Hartford residents knew about it. Naturally Vermonters don't always go to the park like city people do because the whole state is a park and we go to other places but the New England Digital Company had come to White River Junction. It was a company that developed high grade devices to help composers, musical composers do what they do and it had grown out of the Dartmouth College presence and they had relocated to the old Shepherd Plumbing Buildings in White, downtown White River Junction and they were on their path to growing to almost a hundred employees and these people were high tech people and they didn't all come from the Upper Valley naturally so they were more inclined to go to the deli for lunch and seek out a place like a park and they found Lyman Point Park and they started to frequent it. So they knew about it but ironically the locals didn't know much about Lyman Point Park at all. When we put the Yankee Brass Band concert there that Saturday night, the last Saturday in July of that year, I'm gonna guess that it was 1987 or so and we advertised it tonight there'll be a free concert at Lyman Point Park and the word rippled around town is where is Lyman Point Park. We actually had to tell our own people where their own park was.

I tell this story because it's been there any number of times and, and other events have been held, held at Lyman Point Park but it led to the inspiration by very progressive Parks Director in Hartford is Tad Nunez professional brought on after the, the ice arena was developed by citizen initiative led to a real professional staff for Parks and Recreation in Hartford and Tad is a true professional so combined effort of him and the White River Lions Club resulted in the construction of a band shell on the, part of the Municipal Building lot that is on the other side of the tracks from Lyman Point Park but the point is that all of those activities around the Yankee Brass Band really had a multiplier effect to where we now have a nice band shell on the grounds of the Municipal Building and Lyman Point Park is used more and more. These are just some of

the ways that this, this idea of culture centergizes people and all the activities they would do that led to that wonderful contribution by the Lions Club for example.

Along the cultural lines there's a wonderful story about the increased development of the opera house. River City Arts Forum for a couple of years only did several concerts including the Butch Thompson Trio, it came back in total of three times and some musical reviews which engaged among others the talents of Dick McCormick as the MC character and we called it the River City Review. The, one of the other things we did was a Lego Building Expo for little kids to encourage them to come and be creative and once a year we had a ton of Lego's and kids came to it, doing this little design contest around Lego's but with three or four people on the board and no fundraising and no real expansive vision that didn't really do anything but the Green Mountain Guild which had done summer stock theater for a few seasons in the opera house calling it the Junction Playhouse had receded back to the Killington area, the first year I was here '85 they had a full range of theatrical performances. In '86 they had children's theater only and then in the summer of '87 they were gone. The theater was dark and in the later part of that summer a couple of guys came through White River en route to the Champlain Shakespeare Festival in Burlington and they had heard that Meryl Streep had acted in White River Junction. Well that wasn't quite right. Meryl Streep in her summer term at Dartmouth in the early '70s had actually done some work with the Green Mountain Guild which was a repertory company, the directors lived in the Town of Hartford but the theaters were in the more boutique towns of Stowe, Mount Snow, Killington, they struggled mightily to bring to get into the Woodstock area, Woodstock really couldn't provide them with the space they needed, they evolved to Quechee where they were actually in the building where Simon Pearce is today for at least one summer and one summer they were under a tent at the Quechee Club but they discovered this formerly Gates Opera House down at Newbury's store in White River and moved into the upper level because Newbury's had pulled out of that upper level, and they had called it the Junction Playhouse. So that's what the two fellows were referring to although they didn't know it, and this is, this is an interesting story of how small towns know everything on one level but on some levels they don't know as much as you think they would and these two fellow went into the Polka Dot Diner, and

they said, "Do you know where the theater is," and the, the voice said, "No, we don't know where there's any theater but go down to the hotel and ask Dave Briggs he knows everything," and I'm not sure that was a compliment. I think that was sibling rivalry, anyway in the, in the way that neighbors in a village are like brothers and sisters you know that we're so close to each other and we're so, and we can irritate each other so much, that was a little feedback coming to me.

Anyway they came down and they said, "Mary said to come down and see you that you could talk to us about the theater," and I said, "I sure could." The irony was that when Mary stands at her grille at the Polka Dot doing what she does so well, if she'd had only turned and looked up through her window she could see the opera house windows there, that close to her grille but she was uninformed nonetheless. So I took the, these young fellows up to see the opera house and it was empty and they told me that they had gone to school at Washington University in Saint Louis, one had gone to a, a kibbutz in Israel for a few years who was Jewish and they had reunited and they were gonna do a professional theater activity probably in Boston or New York and naturally I said, "Well why not right here," and I talked about the presence of Dartmouth College and the Upper Valley's and its quality of life and so on and so forth and they didn't seem to indicate any particular response to that, they were polite enough to listen to my pitch but they called back within a month and said, "We've been thinking about what you said and we think we'd like to try this," and so we talked off and on over the summer and by the first of May or so maybe late April it wasn't much earlier than that, they came back and they went to work on that Newbury's space the former Gates Opera House to fashion a theater with the idea that they were gonna be open for their first performance in late June which it seems unbelievable at this point but that's what happened and I'll never forget the first day that they came to town, it was the two creative people that I, that I had first met and one of their pals was in tow and soon to come were another half a dozen or so of their best college friends to help them do this thing who were all very talented people, but the third guy whose name was Calvin and Calvin was a riot because in our totally white culture here in Vermont he was a black from, from Chicago, and he had such character, we, we enjoyed him a lot, his sense of humor and his contribution but Calvin got on a high ladder and proceeded to paint the ceiling of the, of the Newbury space black and my father

happened up the back stairs of the fire escape and he saw this and he had lost track, I guess that these guys were coming and they were actually gonna do something, he calls me up and says, "Hey those guys are up in the opera house and they're painting the ceiling black," and I said, "Well let 'em go, I'll come over and take a look at it," his typically easy going way he said, "Okay," and we, we, we pitched in with them because they had to build risers, they had tons of two-by-fours arrive, and risers on which to put seats and they had no seats, so in the hustle and bustle to get this empty box of a room fashioned into a theater by the middle or end of June hotel desk clerks and the rest of us pitched in constructing these risers which are still there today out of two-by-fours and stove bolts and whatever and at that end of that, coming to the end of that project what to do about chairs, so my dad and I started to innovate and we networked to the company that was bringing chairs up for Dartmouth College graduation which was around the tenth or so of June and they said yes, they had more than enough chairs and we said we needed three hundred chairs and that we could rent chairs from them and we'd rent the ones that they were bringing, some of the ones they were bringing for Dartmouth's graduation and then they could come and get 'em in the fall. Well the upshot was we, we did rent those for the summer and then we eventually decided to not send them back, we just bought 'em.

The lights were rented by a company from lighting place in New York City, and at the last minute my dad seeing these plywood risers felt, gee, I know this is, we've done such a good job it's too bad that we have to sit on these plywood risers so he pitched in and had 'em a lot, had them all carpeted and we're almost twenty years later and that carpeting is still there today as well different seats but that's another story but this is kind of how it all seemed to fall into place. They didn't even have a playbill and the publisher of the Valley News said he didn't want to sit on the board cause he felt he could help us more without that kind of a conflict, editorial conflict of interest but he said he would do things from time-to-time to help whenever he can and one of the things he ended up doing was sending his wife to be on the board which was wonderful but we did, we did a newsprint program with local advertisers paying for it and an overrun of about ten thousand pull-out sections so that was the playbill for the first two years provided by that function of advertisers in the Valley News helping out. So it's all those kinds of things.

They opened their first show ever was "Children of a Lesser God". They used deaf actors from, I think Goladette College in Washington, the lead was a woman from Chicago who, who had been the stand-in for Marlee Maitlin when she gave her Academy Award winning performance in a movie "Children of a Lesser God", but she was deaf and it was just an extraordinary thing.

All kinds of things happened off this theater thing, we could probably have a five hour interview on just that topic alone but this started to create more and more hotel activity because the actors stayed here, they stayed in our hostel wing with a bathroom down the hall and all that, and they were delighted, they had just a great time with it and so the arts were really up and running in White River Junction.

Now we can return to that but running parallel to that in the same time frame early on like '86, maybe actually mid '85 a call came to me from a lawyer in Woodstock, and his name was Robert Sinservale, and I didn't know it at the time I knew he was a very prominent lawyer in Woodstock but he was also on the board of the Preservation Trust of Vermont and they were very keenly aware of the fact that the, the old Post Office in downtown White River which had now been used for a number of years by the State as the District Courthouse had been declared obsolete and the State was doing new courthouse construction all over the State and that White River Junction was going to get a new courthouse and the presumption was that it couldn't be in the Village of White River because there was no space for it to meet their criteria of 25,000 square feet and parking.

(The end of side two of tape one. The beginning of side one of tape two.)

BEVERLY BISHOP: So you were talking about the courthouse.

DAVID BRIGGS: Right, the Prese --, the Preservation Trust of Vermont doing what they do is to ensure that we're not too rash in the way that we change things in village settings and pulling the human activity of a courthouse, the, the judges and the lawyers and, and all the people that are involved in that activity would seem to be regressive and so they were on this case and he called me and he said, "We need to save that courthouse and keep it in downtown White River," and I said, "Well I'm aware that this is a struggle and I understand that it's a, it's a tough one but what

can I do," and he said, "Well you stand by and, and we'll, we'll let you know." Well the fact is Madeline Kunin was very true to a paper that had actually been developed under the earlier Snelling administration indicating the vital necessity of village structures in Vermont and that things having to do with the quality of life and the vitality and the feasibility, viability of villages was deemed to be an important consideration of the State of Vermont and so based on that she was very open and concerned about this courthouse question of whether or not it could stay in downtown White River. It was, it was made doubly difficult in the case of White River because the office part which existed up off the, in the Interstate highway the Gilman Office Center had been well established as a place for State agencies to rent office space and the owner, Frank Gilman had offered to the State that if they would build the courthouse next to his Office Center he would actually give them the land to do that and that was seen as a very good and cost effective way to solve this problem.

So now we had the problem of a large building, two hundred-car parking and the economic lever of free land. Well it turns out that Preservation Trust had very close ties to the Kunin administration and the Governor's office was able to call me as the local contact on all occasions in which legislative committees and other activity in Montpelier were discussing the factors relating to the courthouse and so on many occasions I would be called and, and would hop into my car and drive to Montpelier and add input as to the efforts and the progress we were making in White River Junction.

The land that we had our eye on was across the railroad tracks on what is now or had been, always called Railroad Row. Now there were a dozen or so ramshackled railroad buildings that were totally in disuse, there were two apartments or one or two apartments in those buildings, they were in pretty sad shape, there was a couple of people living down there, and there was a lumber yard which had been very successful in its day was, had closed and the lumber yard building which had been there for a long, long time was technically sitting on railroad land so although the guy owned the building he didn't own the land under it. So if this land could be purchased by an authority or municipality or the State or anybody and dealt for the State for the courthouse there was a chance that would be a good location for the courthouse, it was big

enough to meet all the criteria but Boston/Maine Railroad called Gilford Transportation, a very difficult organization to speak with, well it turns out that the old Post Office which would become the courthouse in White River owned by a local partnership had been sold to a new but local developer whose name was Bane Stevenson and Stevenson among other things went on to build a very high grade commercial development in West Lebanon called the Power House, it done some marvelous office reproduction architecture up in Lyme and had strong financial resources and was a graduate of the architecture school at Yale, had great sensitivity for architecture and he bought the building across from the hotel, the old courthouse Post Office with his eye on White River projects and so he became our neighbor and, and jumped right in with us in terms of struggling to keep the courthouse downtown. It didn't hurt that the CEO of Gilford Transportation was a member of the wealthy and famous Melon family and had also gone to Yale and so Stevenson was able to speak directly to Gilford in a way that perhaps no one else could have done and he also had the dignity and the style to go with me to Montpelier which eventually resulted in a special legislative session in the summer related to the final question of the courthouse location and we prevailed.

So the land was purchased from the Boston/Maine Railroad and made available but there were two interesting factors one was political and one was physical. The political one was well what about this concept of free land, why should the State pay \$125,000.00 which was about the price of the land for the site when they could have land for free, and we had to develop a counterpoint to that and the counterpoint was this, if you will build the same courthouse that you built in Brattleboro using the same plans you can save \$125,000.00 in architectural fees and that will cover the cost of the land. So that's what was done and of course building the Brattleboro Courthouse here in White River was appropriate because it was downtown architecture, the bulk and the style and the shape and the feeling of the building was compatible where as the new architecture plan for up on the hill wouldn't have been nearly the same fit, so all these things came together.

The physical problem was that when passenger service had ended in White River Junction in 1964 the railroad companies had put up a ten-foot high chain link fence blocking off access to

Railroad Row from the downtown area. To get to Railroad Row you had to go down through our underpass and go out Railroad Row up to where the courthouse was and so we had, we had the prospects of this lovely courthouse sitting across the tracks but behind a ten foot high chain link fence a, sort of removed from the rest of the downtown so it kind of defeated the purpose of centering human activity cause you couldn't get there quickly and directly, and moreover there was a concern for safety because fire trucks taking the most direct route would have to go through that underpass and there was a question about whether fire trucks could even fit through that underpass, particularly when they were in a hurry. They could go around about over the other bridges but that would delay their approach to the building so there was this concern for safety. The State naturally is very sympathetic to create a grade crossing there but the railroads resisted because grade crossings are always a liability consideration and they put quite a bit of resistance up against reopening a grade crossing in White River and they said, "You know right in the middle of a village it's not a very good idea and we don't like it."

Well about that same time the tracks from White River to Brattleboro had deteriorated so badly Gilford Transportation as the owner of those tracks had allowed them to go down to ten mile an hour tracks because they said that's all they needed for freight and Amtrak was willing to put up with it. Well Amtrak was no longer willing to put up with it and with the help of Patrick Leahy something, I'm gonna guess here I'm pretty sure I'm right, something on the order of six million dollars was raised Federal money to upgrade the tracks, the fifty mile stretch from White River to Brattleboro to get those tracks back up to fifty-nine mile an hour tracks for Amtrak and all other good reasons, and in the process the ownership of the tracks was actually rested away from Gilford and sold to the Central Vermont Railroad. When that project was done at the end of the summer an inaugural run was held on the railroad and all of us up and down the line had fun getting on the train in our town and riding to Montpelier and some onto Essex to celebrate that and this is a story of Vermont politics because there, our population is so small we know everybody and, and it's so human cause we can, on that basis we can all talk to each other in a way that perhaps you can't in bigger states.

Well that night the train came through my dad and I got on together and we sat down right next to Madeline Kunin, we're actually in the same seat with her, it was like we were able to do that and our focus that night was to watch how the train goes through all these other Vermont villages like Bethel and Randolph and Northfield and Montpelier, and of course along the way it's apparent that all these towns have the train going right through the middle of 'em and the grade crossing is a long standing reality and there is no empirical data that says they're any less safe for that, there's no more accidents and probably fewer accidents in the middle of villages and we made that point to the Governor and she picked up on it I have to assume because within a very short time there was a grade crossing in White River Junction. That was the end of the resistance from the railroad.

The story I like to add to that was that we had struggled for a couple of years around the notion of \$125,000.00 problem on building this courthouse, my understanding is then we had to have public hearings and things like that to overcome that and had some pretty good arguments, but my understanding is that the instrumentation and the real cost of putting in a, a modern rail, grade crossing exceeded \$300,000.00 but there was never a peep about that, no public hearings, no angst over the impact on budgets and whatnot. It kinda shows you that when the political ducks are lined up correctly things get done irrespective sometimes of the cost and other issues, so that time we, we prevailed and we had that nice railroad crossing going over to, to Railroad Row.

So those are some of the early happenings in like the '85 to '88, '89 time frame. Back at the hotel we were discovering some realities about being able to do business here as I put it in the "as is" condition, and I mentioned earlier that we'd been stymied by changing the Federal tax regulation, really retarding the ability to get more investment here, so we really had to do it by building the business and making it stronger and one of our, one of the customers that we inherited was a repeat group customer with Vermont Bike Tours, a company that had been crafted out of the enthusiasm and the talent of John Freedman over in Bristol, Vermont, really the granddaddy of Vermont, of touring, bike touring in Vermont and so well done, and John had included the Hotel Coolidge as one of his places to stay because it's historic and interesting and

but because the Upper Valley was a very convenient place to start and end trips, including the Lebanon Airport. So we were included in two or three of his itineraries and quite often it meant they would stay here on the first or last night, sometimes both and it was a nice block of business. In retrospect it was a very nice block of business.

By the second or third year that I was here John had matured his company and sold it to, I'll call it an MBA type, a person who really had bought it as a pure business transaction, not out of driving love for biking that John had had, has had, a very nice fellow named Bill Perry, and he called me and he was forthright, he said, "You know we're not coming back to the Coolidge next year," and he said "The reason is we had realized that our market is an upscale market and as we refine our product we're basing it on the finest country inns in the most pastoral Vermont settings," and he said, "The busyness of the roads leading to White River Junction and White River Junction itself," and candidly the Hotel Coolidge was not the finest of Vermont country inns, to this day I wouldn't call it the finest, it has very good character and we are, we are now achieving those comfort levels and whatnot but not purely an upscale product for sure and less so then in our, in our infancy, and he said, "So it just doesn't fit the pattern and we're not coming back."

That was about \$30,000.00 worth of business and in a good our, a good segment of the population to be related to but what he was saying in this wasn't, it wasn't just the hotel it was the whole White River Junction scene that was the problem and so I, I realized that then more than ever it was very vivid to me that my mission and my challenge here in White River wasn't just within these walls, once again it was the whole village fabric, the way the village looked, the way the village felt, its philosophy, what it, what was happening here had to be addressed and I took this message to Town Hall, I went right to the, to the board of selectmen and I said, "Here is a clear example of how we need to work together more than ever," and for me the response that I got at that point was really a, a deaf response, there was just no affect from the board, it, it and what I was hearing back door was this is a business sector problem, this is not a place for government and, and essentially you've got to solve that problem yourself and what I was starting to contend was that I don't have a front lawn with my hotel I have public space and public

infrastructure and so, and it comes right smack up to the building so we're in this together and I can't, I can't redevelop my perimeter land I have to really collaborate with, with local government to get that done.

Well I found some allies in Town Hall who understood this from a planning and development standpoint and we proceeded to put together an action group which we called the White River Action Project or some such thing as that and then it evolved to the River City Action Plan and a little bit of money came from the Town. There seemed to be enough sympathy or enough enlightenment there to do that and we hired some consultants and I think the consultant we hired, I know the consultant we hired to lead us through design shore-ups and things like that was David Rafael and did a wonderful job and has continued to do things with us here in White River and with the Town of Hartford, resulted in some visioning and the conclusion was that the first thing that should be done would be to upgrade the sidewalks and the street lighting and some plantings and to soften the space and make it less hard and less pavement and so on and so forth, and so the package was put together, estimated and it had to go to public referendum to, to get approval for the funding which would be a combination of State and local funds and this was voted down two or three times and the last time it was voted down it was voted down by four votes. We just couldn't get the job done. Finally through the Planning Department we were able to get the necessary funding through the Community Development Block Grant Program so it was independent of Hartford tax dollars, so Hartford tax dollars really did not do that project. We just couldn't get citizens and the town fathers, the select board or whatever excited about this project but nonetheless it got done and we started to inch our way forward from that point.

One of the nice factors about it was that in softening and creating landscaping and plantings in downtown the spot that was finally determined to be available, just because of the geometry of the downtown was a little triangular piece of land near that railroad crossing which became a little patch of grass which was right where my dad's gas station had been and because of his longtime involvement it was concluded graciously by the Town leaders that this should be called Fred Briggs Park. So it seemed like it was a, a real justice there. My dad died about that time, it was

sort of a changing of the guards generationally, Ralph Lehman who my dad and two other select board had hired many, many years ago --

BEVERLY BISHOP: Really, your dad hired?

DAVID BRIGGS: He actually was on the select board in the late '50s for one term and it was during that time that Hartford made the shift to professionalize their town management and Ralph Lehman was hired out of the University of Maine, School of Town Management to be Hartford's first professional Town Manager and Ralph was retiring, a bridge across the river was named for him and another contemporary of my dad who had been one of his pals and cronies just after, in the early World War, the post World War II years had become a long standing Hartford select board member and representative and had become somewhat less of a friend to my father because they, they weren't really on the same page with their, their political direction, fellow by the name of Joe Reed who was quite prominent in, in Montpelier for many years, he had passed away so the, the connector street over the railroad crossing was named Joe Reed Drive at that time and so it tickles me you know and it would my dad too that realize that Fred Briggs Park is right next to Joe Reed Drive, a guy that had been his pal and sometimes his nemesis and right around the corner the Ralph Lehman Bridge so all these people who'd been so much a part of Hartford in my formative years passing on and retiring, things came to be named for them which is kind of nice.

So that led us to where we now had somewhat improved infrastructure but now what to do with it is the recurring question. The next project that was put together had to do with a major attempt to refurbish the Hotel Coolidge and the committee that I was working with had developed a comprehensive plan called the River City Revival Action Plan, included in it as a priority that a key element in the, in the village like the hotel should be refurbished and, and brought up to industry standards. So that, that was something that we turned to next but I want to go back just a bit here and we talked about the evolution or the arrival of that theater company, the White River Theater Festival by now had been up and running several years and had gone from what I explained virtually nothing to something that was nearly a million dollar a year budget at both

ends of the Town we had encouraging commercial activity with New England Digital rising to a hundred employees and selling these two, \$300,000.00 musical devices to the stars of the music world and at that south end of Town the Swift Meat Packing Plant had been, been converted into the Catamount Brewing Company so we had a lot of reason to be enthusiastic and yet it just wasn't ready to happen I guess because in a nutshell New England Digital making some effort to build their, build a campus of their, of their own activity here in White River with the help of Bane Stevenson that developer that I mentioned who was so helpful with us on Railroad Row couldn't put the land together. There was just enough ambivalence in the landowners or their, probably the thought that they were going to get rich quick if they, if they held back just couldn't put the land together and New England Digital moved to Lebanon into an old mill complex expanded there and ironically within two or three years was in big financial trouble and went under and that left some serious vacancies here in downtown.

Within a few years Catamount Brewing Company was destined to be inspired to, to expand and to do that they moved to, to Windsor and to a lovely new facility and their expansion plan did not work and they went under, not that we, we weren't happy to hear that naturally but we were even less happy to, to face the reality that they actually, actually had moved out of the village and somewhere around 1995 or '6 River City Arts and the White River Theater Festival had failed to create a sustainable model for it and it was terminated by its own board so that went under.

Now one of the things that had happened in the middle here as, as an ongoing program along with the White River Theater Festival was a wonderful wintertime music series sponsored by Catamount called the Catamount Cabin Fever Music Series and some very high grade people were brought in for about half a dozen concerts a year for a three or four year period and it was immensely successful, people like Livingston Taylor, who is James Taylor's brother, and John Sebastian of the Loving Spoonful, and Rory Block and Eutaw Phillips and the Indigo Girls, and it was just terrific, and so that was a ray of hope and in fact when the White River Theater Festival and its parent River City Arts decided to shut its doors the Cabin Fever Music Series was strong enough so that it was able to be sustained and a fellow who had kinda grown up with the White River Theater Festival was very much a local citizen, his name is Matt Dunn and of course he's

now very well regarded as a Windsor County Senator but when he first came into the picture he was just finishing up his undergraduate work at Brown University and he was as an avocation an actor and he was on stage with the White River Theater Festival in its first couple of seasons off and on as sort of an intern helper and his interest, his genuine interest in theater had brought him to that and so he was close to the action and when the Cabin Fever Music Series was sitting there without a, a producer he became the producer of the Cabin Fever Music Series and kept it going and he, this is really pertinent factor here he knew that theater was really important piece of this so he went to Burlington, Vermont and found Brooke Wetzels who came to town and, and brought what she calls Northern Stage.

Well the short version of that story is Matt moved onto his up and coming political career and Brooke stayed as she was very passionate about with Northern Stage to create, to recreate essentially an arts organization in the opera house which is there today called Northern Stage and is really successful. It had to weather some of the same storms that River City Arts did but second time around with a lot of the same citizen leadership and some newcomers it really has found its place and continues to be a vital factor here in the village.

So you can see that the whole experience here is like ahead two back one. About the time you think you got it all cooking something falls out of orbit, all of those things bring us up to somewhere around the year of 1998 or so and sorry to be so vague on these dates but those could all be dug up and confirmed for sure. Northern Stage has been a marvelous presence here and continues, continues to be.

The next thing that was to happen or actually two things that happened almost simultaneously but the next thing that happened was that for years we had been aware of the fact that there was a model railroad club in Lebanon, New Hampshire, some background and substance and they were looking for a place to have a permanent home and with the arrival of the street program and all of that the 494 display was moved on the other side of the tracks to be near the railroad station and there was a committee formed to nurture that old engine and so on and so forth, River City Arts in its attempt to have a major fundraiser festival event one of its board members created the, the concept she called the Glory Days of the Railroad and this

railroad enthusiast festival would be held once a year and it would be a major event and it would, the hope of course was that it would produce some needed income to River City Arts. Well after that whole thing was put on the drawing board and analyzed by a lot of different folks it was concluded that this was really not an arts organization function, it was more like a Chamber of Commerce function and so the Chamber of Commerce took it over.

So we had a railroad festival, railroad enthusiasts nurturing the locomotive and this model railroad club looking for permanent home and then in addition to that National Railroad Historical Society Chapter was formed in White River Junction. Well the word came out from all that activity that perhaps a nonprofit organization needed to be formed to house all of these organizations and it, it happens that back in that summer of 1979 or so when I was working with my father to analyze and, the possibilities for White River Junction one of the things that happened in the months following that summer one of the byproducts of that was a meeting that included my father, a guy from Woodstock named Don Marshall, was one of these guys that built these five foot long model steam engines you could ride 'em around his back yard, he had several of 'em, he took 'em around to shows and whatnot and a very well regarded author of railroad history books, Edgar Meede from Hanover, New Hampshire, and a guy that was director of the then Chamber of Commerce which we had reformed as Downtown White River, his name was Bob Tripler, he was kind of a newcomer from down in the Marblehead, Gloucester, Mass. Area, a lot of enthusiasm. Well those fellows got together and they created a nonprofit called the Vermont Railroad Museum and the notion from what Edgar Meede's influence was that it be a repository for rolling stock, railroad yards in White River could be full of antique trains or trains worthy of restoration and the museum could be formed out of that.

Well it didn't really happen but the corporate papers and whatnot were held in a, in a lawyer's office, the office of George Wenz here in White River and George as a good citizen had done all this work pro bono had sustained this, these records so when the word came that it was time for a railroad nonprofit to be formed I heard about it and called a meeting and said, "You know you don't have to create another one we have one, and we can make this into a, a parent organization and gather all these resources," and the brainstorming that followed concluded that

White River Junction true to Edgar Meede's original vision should be, not just a spot location museum but the whole village should be a railroad museum campus with some sort of interactive interpretative access points for citizens and they could see things happen, they could be told what had happened and so on and so forth, so the campus concept gave rise to the usual, usual meetings followed where they crafted a new name and a new mission statement and so on and so forth and the Vermont Railroad Museum became the New England Transportation Museum and more brainstorming followed and it was concluded that museums can be accused of having a backward look, they're only dealing with history and the new approach to museums is much more interactive and, and much less stuck in the past like the Montshire Museum of Science a, a wonderful example of that and so what would be the equivalent if we had a railroad museum here in White River Junction, our transportation museum that would do that and it was concluded that perhaps that it should be an institute of sorts that would be a factor in forming public policy around transportation issues where transportation issues had had such an impact on White River Junction it also had had an impact on the whole nation and wouldn't it be appropriate that in this little busy railroad town its future activity would have something to do with transportation more in the intellectual or academic way but nevertheless transportation.

And so we networked to a couple of people who were transportation consultants and lo and behold we found four in the Upper Valley that had national clients and one of them particularly had been on the faculty of their school at Dartmouth and he said it was his dream to, to have an institute and he'd be delighted to join the board. So those four people joined in and it, and it became the New England Transportation Institute and Museum.

These things lead to so many other things. The fellow that I'm referring to is Tom Adler, PhD in Transportation Planning has his own company called Resource Systems Group and thirty or so engineers bursting at the seams in their building needed to move and announced that to a couple of us and we courted 'em to the fact that won't it be terrific if he moved his engineering company to White River Junction and with the emergence of this institute they would be tangent to each other and he understood fully well that this would lead to research projects and things that his company could do and, and, and, and symposia and other workshops that happen in

White River and it'd be just wonderful for everybody. Well this is the year 2004 and as of a year ago he made the commitment to move his company to White River, a local developer was put in touch with him and the old Twin State Fruit building on Railroad Row, the last, one of the last two remaining buildings on Railroad Row across from the courthouse was purchased and torn down in favor of a new building which is today, as of this very day is nearing completion. So that will house upwards of fifty engineers doing transportation planning and they will continue to be close to the evolution of that transportation institute. So these things all kind of interlock, it's all kind of a wonderful dance.

BEVERLY BISHOP: Getting close to the time that you allotted for this. Just a couple of things I was wondering about, one was I understand you're quite involved with the railroad group now, now were there some oral histories done as a result of the formation of that group?

DAVID BRIGGS: Yeah, the railroad festival which naturally has become the province of the New England Transportation Institute and Museum which we call NETIM now hosts several thousand people every year to their festival and we do an oral history exercise every year so we now have, I think four or five of them video taped and recorded and I must say we've done them without any formal training or expertise, just winging it doing our best, but we have quite a bit of raw material that deserves to be groomed and put into some sort of an album format, probably the best of it cleaned up and compacted into one thing that would maybe be chapter one and going forward perhaps so we could commit to getting the right training so that those things could be done more effectively, more properly.

BEVERLY BISHOP: Where are they kept?

DAVID BRIGGS: Well I have some of them and others are kept by my fellow board member Joe Massi who is a professor at the Tuck School at Dartmouth so they can be assembled and I've been trying to get the Hartford High School Honors Program to take this under its wing, that one of the students should, as they get to choose their pursuit would choose this one and what they would do is they'd have a multi faceted experience where they would learn a lot about video taping and audio taping and oral histories and they'd learn a lot about history as well, but so far no takers on that. So the resources would seem to exist here but we need some help.

BEVERLY BISHOP: I also wanted to know, I never got to hear the story about how you met your wife?

DAVID BRIGGS: It's also related to a train story she, she's a woman whose family had summered in Vermont forever but she had personally come to Vermont in the back to the land hippie movement in the early 70s purposely to really reside here and did and ended up eventually through the school in Putney, SIT learning to be a teacher of English Second Language relocated to Japan for eight years. She came back to Vermont after that to, to decide what to do next and had discovered White River Junction the summer before visiting here with her sister at Vermont Salvage Company that sells architectural antiques and her sister was looking for a new front door for her house so she discovered the hotel and the little restaurant that was in it and decided several months later to take the train to see her folks in South Carolina, it was a night train so she came over to have dinner in the hotel restaurant, parked her car and catch the train and in making arrangements to park her car she asked if she could park it in the hotel lot which I was happy to charge her for and in the process of that we got to meet her and our common interests just sort of multiplied from that and within a couple of years she was fully involved in the, in the hotel, it just seemed to be a natural for her and eight years later we were married not wanting to hurry into anything too quickly you know and it's been a wonderful personal happening for me.

There is one other piece that I would like to go back to maybe tie this off where we're ending here because I think it's really important the arrival of Tom Adler and his engineering company came within about the same time frame, within a year or so of the, the rehabilitation of the old Tip Top Baking Company building into an arts and cultural center for very high grade art pursuits like print making, and furniture making, and interior design and so on and so forth and Matt Bussi the developer of that -- Oops too bad. A little more?

BEVERLY BISHOP: Keep going.

DAVID BRIGGS: Had, had made that project happen because he had discovered that art space was important and, and was a saleable item, the key word there for White River is investment and as those original select board members were reticent to pour any money in here as the lead factor we could've made that, they were reticent, they were right from the standpoint that

ultimately private sector investment is crucial and Matt Bussi and the developer added to it, he took and Tom Adler and the developer that we put him together with and resulted now in what will be millions of dollars of public, purely public sector investment and I can tell you from the time those two projects hit, hit the ground the whole temperament in White River Junction has been immensely different and much more positive.

BEVERLY BISHOP: Well, thank you very much, David. We're right at the end of this tape, which has worked out well.

DAVID BRIGGS: My pleasure

BEVERLY BISHOP: And I'm sure you still have more stories to tell and I hope you get a chance to do it.

(A train whistle blowing.)

(The tape ended.)