

Hartford Oral History Project 2014

Interviewee: Judy Barwood

Interviewer: Kaitlin O'Shea

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Transcribed by Kaitlin O'Shea

00:00:01 START OF INTERVIEW

KO: Today is Tuesday July 29, 2014. This is Kaitlin O'Shea interviewing Judy Barwood for the Hartford Business Oral History Project. Good afternoon, Judy.

JB: Hi, Kaitlin.

KO: Well let's see. Where were you born and how did you get here?

JB: Well actually I was born in Herkimer, NY, but my parents were living here when I was born. My mother just went home to have me. I don't know why that happened. My father was born and brought up right here in White River, actually born in the family house in White River. My family has been here for probably four or five generations, since the early 1800s, here in White River.

KO: Did they come here to farm originally?

JB: No, the first one came. The railroads brought him, Arthur Latham. He wasn't the first one though. No, the first ones came down from Worcester, VT and Marshfield, VT. The river and the railroad brought them down. They had a fork and hoe business, the Watsons did. It was in Hartford Village right on the river. They were the first ones that came, I believe.

KO: Okay, so four or five generations. Let's go through the generations just so we can get it on town record.

JB: Okay, you want to go back from me?

KO: Sure, let's do that.

JB: I'm a Cameron. My father was Jed Cameron, one of nine children, brought up on South Main Street in White River. His father was Carl Cameron, who was a postmaster here in White River. He married my grandmother Caroline Wallace. So that goes to the Wallaces. I'm trying to remember. Everett Jackson Wallace, and then it goes back to the

Saffords, Norman Bigelow Safford who was a businessman in White River. Actually, he came up from Springfield, VT and came to handle his father-in-law's business, Arthur Latham's business. And Arthur Latham came down from Lyme to go into the railroad business. He had a business here in White River that manufactured locomotives and repaired railroad cars and things. So they're all down on South Main Street.

KO: Is it still in the family, any property down there?

JB: No. My grandmother was the last one who actually lived on South Main Street, and when she died the house was sold. My parents lived up on Christian Street.

KO: Okay, so that's where you grew up?

JB: That's where I grew up, yea.

KO: Did you go away to school? Stay here? What did you do after school?

JB: I did go away. I went to Colby, well it was the Colby Jr. College in New London, NH, and then I came back here. I worked in Woodstock for a while, but I basically always lived here.

KO: What did you do in Woodstock?

JB: I worked at the Ottaquechee Health Center. I was an X-Ray laboratory technician when I first got out of college. Then I traveled in Europe for a few months and came back and went to work for Thermo Dynamics Corporation in Lebanon.

KO: What do they do?

JB: They make plasma flank torches. They are pretty world wide known.

KO: And is your husband from here?

JB: He grew up in Norwich, went to UVM as I told you, and then came down here and worked for Mr. Drown in Drown & LeBorveau Insurance Company. So that's how I met him when he came down to White River.

KO: Okay.

JB: And then we were married in 1961 and we lived on Christian Street. My husband died just over three years ago, so I'm still there on Christian Street.

KO: And you have a few kids?

JB: I have three children. Our oldest lives in Payson, AZ up in the mountains and he's married. No children. My second son lives next door to me on Christian Street, which is wonderful. And he is a co-owner of Kinney-Pike Insurance from Rutland and all over Vermont. And he has three children. And then my daughter lives in Louisville, KY and she's a horse trainer and riding instructor and she has three children. So we're spread out.

KO: Scattered. At least you have some of them right here.

JB: Yes, it's great to have three right next door.

KO: So there are six grandchildren running around your house right now?

JB: Yes, and we're together the whole two weeks, everybody's here.

KO: Excellent.

5:31

KO: So let's see. You have many more connections to business than you let on.

JB: I don't know about that. It's mainly insurance.

KO: That's alright. I haven't talked to anyone in the insurance business all that much. Well, John Clerkin this morning. But let's jump into that. Tell me about the insurance business.

JB: Well I guess I should probably start with my parents. My great uncle Alfred Watson was the son of the original Watson that came down from Worcester and had the fork and hoe company. And he started Watson and West Insurance Agency in 1885. And I'm not sure where his office was. His house was in Hartford Village. He had a big old house and I'm not sure where he – and he was active in all kinds of town affairs, school board, this that, well known in the town. He co-owned it with George West and Mable West. I don't know what the connection was or who owned much or who ran the agency except that that's how it was named Watson and West and that was in 1885. But my mom and dad moved back here after my dad graduated from college. He graduated from Colgate. He met my mother out there. They came back here in 1938 and in 1939 they bought Watson and West Insurance Agency and they were running it together. Then it was during the war and my dad went to Springfield and got a job at Lovejoy Tool Company in Springfield, VT. So my mother ended up as of about 1940, I think it was, managing the insurance agency herself. And she was a real entrepreneur at that time because women weren't out in the business world. This was 1940 and she was running the business.

KO: That's pretty unusual.

JB: Yes. And then she went on – well maybe I should tell you about the Agency first.

KO: Whichever you prefer.

JB: The office was on the second floor of the Gates Building facing the railroad depot so it was really kind of fun up there. I remember that was a USO room up there. You're familiar with the USO?

KO: Mmm-hmm.

JB: And the service men were coming in and out all of the time, and that was really pretty exciting when we would go down and visit my mother. Somewhere around 1950, I'm not really sure of the exact date, my dad and Lawrence Nichols bought a piece of property on the corner of North Main Street and Currier Street. What's there now? Tom Terry, the optometrist is right there. It was right there on the corner. It was called the Nichols-Cameron Building and that's where my folks moved the insurance agency to. They had the downstairs there. And then in 1962, my mother – wait a minute – I've got some. [Reading over notes.] Well, anyway, my dates are mixed up. My mother decided to stop working in 1956 because I have a younger sister who is many years younger. And John Abbot came to work for her. And in 1962, John Abbott and Bob McDonald bought Watson and West from my mother. And then they moved the Agency up to Tafts Flats, which is Route 5 North, the corner of Pearce Street and Route 5 where there is a coin-operated laundry. Across from the Haven, there's kind of a modern building right there across from St. Paul's Church. And that's where they moved the insurance agency. And then in either '65 or '66, my husband purchased Watson and West. He already owned another Agency in town and I'll go back to that history in a minute. So in '65, he bought Watson and West and merged it with Drown & LeBorveau. So that's one side of the insurance.

And the other side. So in 1900, Charles LeBorveau formed an agency, and I don't know what it was called right then. But in 1921, Earl S. Drown bought the agency and changed the name to Drown & LeBorveau.

KO: Can you spell that for me?

JB: L-e-B-o-u-r-v-e-a-u.

KO: Okay, thank you. I was not going to get that.

JB: Their office was located upstairs over the bank, the corner of South Main Street and Gate Street, which is kind of across –

KO: - [motions] that way.

JB: Yea, that way. And my husband started working there about 1950. And in 1960, he started buying the business from Mr. Drown. Mr. Drown was probably in his 70s at that age and he was going to Florida in the winter. So anyway that was in 1960. And then in 1965, as I said, my husband Wendell merged Drown & LeBorveau with Watson & West. Of course, that was quite a big long name, Drown & LeBorveau and Watson & West Insurance Agency. And they moved the Agency office to 37 Gate Street, which was a former Garfield Miller home, Garfield Miller of Miller Auto. He lived right there. It's now senior housing, kind of across from the Methodist Church, next to the telephone company.

KO: Yes, yes.

JB: And he moved there in October of 1967, moved the agency. And then in '84, decided we better change the name. So we changed it, or he did, to Barwood Insurance Agencies.

KO: That's much easier to say.

JB: Yes. And then in 1989 my husband decided he'd like to retire so he sold to Kinney Pike Insurance. Kinney Pike had been in Hartford – Kinney Pike Hartford. Kinney Pike / Hartford, it was established in about October of 1964 when Kinney Pike from Rutland, which was the head office purchased the Hartford Insurance Agency. I don't remember who ran that. That was in 1984. They bought that. And then later on, they merged with the former I.J. Davis Insurance, which was another small insurance agency in White River owned by I.J. Davis. So Kinney Pike had been in White River since 1974, but they bought our agency. It became Kinney Pike Hartford. And then it was several years later that my son graduated from college and came back and started working for Kinney Pike. Now he and a couple partners have purchased the whole business and they have, I think, six or seven offices throughout the state.

KO: Kinney with an "I" or an "E"?

JB: K-I-N-N-E-Y [dash] Pike.

KO: That's what I thought. Oh yea, they're up north, too.

JB: They started as Kinney, Pike, Bell & Connor in Rutland. That's what they were originally. And then the partners have gradually left or died and now it's just Kinney-Pike Insurance Agency.

KO: I've heard of them.

JB: I'm sure you probably have. I know they have at least two offices in Burlington and they have one in Randolph and Brattleboro and Rutland and St. Johnsbury. They're all over.

KO: That is statewide, for sure.

14:25

JB: So that's about all I can tell you about the insurance business. But I can get back to my mother. I don't have the dates, but she was very active. She was chairman of the Chamber of Commerce in town. Again, unusual because she was a woman in the 40s and 50s. And she was on the Lebanon Airport Authority, and they were instrumental – again I don't remember the dates – in getting the big airplanes into Lebanon. We used to have just the small little tiny ones but they got Northeast Airlines to come in >She was on that board. She went to be on the board of the School of Nursing at Dartmouth Hitchcock. It was Mary Hitchcock then. And she was a trustee at Colby Sawyer, too.

KO: Oh wow.

JB: So she did a lot and then went on to work at Quechee Lakes. She was one of the first employees at Quechee Lakes. And she did all the remodeling, restoring, all that sort of thing at Quechee Lakes.

KO: So your mother must have known Gayle Ottman.

JB: Yes, she worked with Gayle Ottman. And before that with Al ? what was his name? You would know him from the State. But, anyway, she was very instrumental in a lot of the early Quechee Lakes. She worked for Quechee until about 1980, early 80s, for 10-15 years.

KO: And her name?

JB: Elizabeth "Betsey" Cameron – B-E-T-S-E-Y. Betsey Cameron, Elizabeth Cameron.

KO: Was she always just industrious and wanted to work?

JB: Yea.

KO: That's neat.

JB: I just remember her always working. We had a housekeeper because there were three of us and she wasn't home to cook or clean or take care of us. She was working.

KO: Did she ever talk to you about being one of the few women working at that time?

JB: No. She never did. Except I do remember any meetings or wherever she was, it was always my mother and a lot of men. There weren't any other women. I've got lots of pictures of her at conventions and things. It was always my mother and men.

KO: I interviewed Barbara Ticehurst, do you know her?

JB: Sure.

KO: She had similar experiences of working with mostly men.

JB: I know Barbara.

KO: She said, "I'd go to conventions and all the men would have their wives along for the trip and my husband would be along for the trip."

JB: Yup. My dad traveled a lot, so that was probably another reason my mother had time to work. He was a sales manager for Lovejoy Tool Company so he was traveling all over, mainly the United States a lot. And then during the war he lived in Springfield during the week because he couldn't afford the gas to go back and forth. So he lived with a cousin, the Saffords in Springfield.

KO: Let me process all this.

JB: I know, I've probably thrown a lot at you.

KO: No, it's okay. It's good.

JB: As I say, I've kind of got all the facts with the insurance business. I didn't go into any personal stuff.

KO: Well you can certainly do that. That's what I like about recorders. I don't have to remember all of that stuff immediately. I'll remember it as I'm typing.

JB: As you're typing, yes.

KO: And put it together. Well you worked in the insurance business with your husband?

JB: Actually I didn't. Well, yes and no. I didn't go into the office. I feel I did my job by answering the phone at home because people are calling insurance agents every minute of the day and night. But, no, I did not work. I did not get involved directly except to go to the conventions with him, that sort of thing.

KO: Of course.

JB: We had three children, too.

KO: They must have kept you busy.

JB: Yea.

KO: Did your husband like the insurance business?

JB: I think, yes. He stayed in it all his life, so he liked it. He started in life insurance in Mutual of New York Life Insurance when he was still living at home. Then he came down here to the general agency. I think towards the end of his career in the industry it was getting kind of dog eat dog. It was getting very competitive. He didn't like it as much then so he retired as soon as he felt he could, he didn't feel like he had to work forever. And he was active in other business things, Rotary especially. Very active in rotary here, and other things. He was very instrumental in getting the hockey rink here in Hartford, which they named for him a year or two before he died. There was a big need for an indoor hockey facility and the town wasn't about to put the money up for it. So they got BOR funding, and the town had to come up with 25%. So he went out and raised it privately and we got the arena up in early 70s.

KO: Is the arena at the high school?

JB: At the high school, yes. They are remodeling right now, which he worked very very hard to get the town to approve the renovations and to raise the money, to get the Town appropriate money to do that.

KO: Every Vermont town needs a hockey rink, right?

JB: That's right. And it's used not just for hockey. They are trying to make it a year-round facility. We call it the hockey rink, but you know. It's used for a lot of other things, too.

KO: Field house.

JB: Field house, yes. That's why I try to say arena.

KO: Oh right.

JB: So it's very exciting that they are doing all that construction right now.

22:05

KO: So you've lived in Hartford all your life?

JB: All my life.

KO: Let's talk about some of things that have changed. Of course, the town changes all of the time, but what are big, significant changes in your opinion?

JB: Well I guess some of things that I think about often. I went to the one-room schoolhouse on Christian Street when I started school. That kind of dates me. It's right where Christian Street meets Route 5, next to Dothan Brook School. That little white house was the one-room schoolhouse and we had six grades in there. I was there for two years and then they closed the school and took us all to Wilder to the school there. So we went there and then to the high school. I've been to the – our class was the first class in the new middle school when it was built in 1952. We went to grade 9 there and then we went back down to the old high school, which is now the elementary school. That's where I went to high school. And Christian Street was a dirt road for, golly, a lot of years. I don't know when they paved it. I mean from the corner there, what you think of as Christian Street now. I remember sliding on the hill there by Woodhaven. You know where the Woodhaven apartments are? And I don't even remember looking for cars. But that was a great hill to slide on because the snow was packed or it was plowed and it was great sliding on sleds. So those things I really remember.

KO: Wouldn't do that nowadays, huh?

JB: Oh yea. And of course the railroad depot. I mean with my folks' insurance agency right up the stairs, we were watching trains in and out and crowds of people all the time. Every time a train came in, there were just all kinds of people in town. It was really busy all the time.

KO: Travelers or businessmen?

JB: Probably a little of everything. Of course Dartmouth College brought a lot of people in. Those big weekends it would be mobbed down here. And then my grandparents' house was right beside the railroad on South Main Street. I was just brought up with trains. The freight trains, all the time. It was just really busy, really busy here in White River. So those are probably the main things that I remember from way back.

KO: The trains would bring in all sorts of things right? People and goods, flour.

JB: Right, right. The businesses shipped things by train. There was a train directly to Boston and south. My grandparents lived down in New York State. We took the train everywhere when I was little. If we went to Boston, we went by train. If we went to New York State, we took the train to Greenfield, Mass. And then had to pick up another train to go west. Burlington. I mean we went everywhere by train way back. This was before interstates. I remember the interstates being built.

KO: Tell me about that.

JB: That's another huge difference. I mean my dad was working in Springfield and it took him (this was after the war when he could afford to drive back) and it would take him an

hour from here to there. And the year he died: he died in May and that fall the interstate was finished.

KO: Oh geez.

JB: And it was like, oh dear. It would have cut his travel in half. And where we live, the interstate wasn't far from where I live. There was just a lot of construction and a lot going on. It was pretty exciting when the interstate was finished because we could drive to Boston, drive to Burlington, drive to Montreal.

KO: It might have been cheaper than taking the train if you're not paying for everybody's passage.

JB: Yea. So those are the main things. I really can't think of anything else.

26:50

KO: I've asked those questions because people generally give different responses: what has had the most effect on businesses. And I guess it depends on your business. Like the interstate was really good for the auto dealers but not necessarily good for the small business owners in downtown. And then the tax in Vermont sent a bunch of businesses over to New Hampshire.

JB: To New Hampshire, right.

KO: So I wonder if everybody saw those things or just a particular business did.

JB: I don't think it bothered the insurance business, really. I think the interstates coming in certainly had a big effect on the small retail businesses in town. White River was a pretty booming town. We had Newbury's and Colodny's. We had all kinds of businesses and it's very different now. It's more artsy with all the little cafes and things like that. Well we had three drug stores. One on the corner of Gates where the Tucker Box is. One on the corner where the frame shop is. And then one across the street, Howard Drug, was where the old bank was, kind of near Vermont Salvage. And they had soda fountains and people could go there for lunch and get ice cream. They were busy. There were no little shopping plazas or anything like that. We pretty much did all our shopping here in White River, unless we went to Boston.

KO: Where would you buy your groceries down here?

JB: Where would we buy our groceries? Actually we bought most everything at Dan & Whits in Norwich. We didn't have the supermarkets like that. There was some kind of little market here in White River and I don't remember the name. Dan & Whits would go out and deliver. Because my mother was working, they would call get her order or get

the housekeeper's order. And they came twice a week and they would bring a basket with them of all kinds of things they were trying to promote, like goodies, because you might buy out of the basket. I don't her going anywhere else way back.

KO: Is that the store that's still open in Norwich?

JB: Yup.

KO: Right in the center?

JB: Yup, the general store right next to the Norwich Inn. It's been there for years and years and years. Yup. As I said, we had Newbury's here, which was great, the five and dime. We had Aubuchon Hardware. We had Lang's. Lang's Hardware, where the American Legion is now. Of course, the movie theater, the Lyric Theater was next to the Good Neighbor Clinic.

KO: Oh yes.

JB: We always went Saturday afternoons to the movies, and that was like 35 cents. And they had really great movies all the time.

KO: Was it a one screen?

JB: Oh yea, one screen, definitely.

KO: Just checking.

JB: And I know my aunt remembered, I guess there was a movie on South Main Street way back. But I don't remember that one.

KO: I wonder if it burned.

JB: It's not there now, I don't think. I don't think it's one of those buildings, but I don't know.

KO: I haven't noticed any that looked like a theater.

JB: Right. The traffic used to go the other way around the block. I remember when they changed and I don't know why they changed it. It was one way in the opposite direction.

KO: Interesting. That must have confused people for a while.

JB: Yes.

KO: I've heard that the parking lot right across from the Briggs building, that was actually a park?

JB: A park and a garden. In fact, my great-grandmother was active also in town and I think she was president of the Literary Club, which was the library. I think they started that. It was a park and a garden there. And then it became, well when I first was here I first remember where this end of the park towards the Polka Dot Restaurant, there was a filling station. The Briggs had a filling station garage. We used to go walk across the tracks between there and what is now the Cartoon – that big building – to get over to the railroad station. That was where everybody went across. They had the big white gates with lights on that came down when the train was going across there. And then it became the parking lot. I don't remember when that garage ended. It was the only right here in town.

KO: I hear there are plans to remove the parking lot and turn it back into a park?

JB: Yea, I've heard that.

KO: That's exciting.

JB: But people have to park somewhere.

KO: I know.

JB: When you think about things going on at the theater or at the Coolidge. It's hard to park sometimes in White River, very close to downtown.

KO: Maybe they'll build a parking garage.

JB: Right. The other thing I really remember – I'm very active in St. Paul's Church. And St. Paul's Church was originally right across from the Catholic Church in their parking lot, the original St. Paul's Episcopal Church, the little old wooden building, was built in the late 1800s. I know they used to have church services in a store where the bank was on the corner of Gates Street and South Main Street. And then they built that church somewhere in the late 1800s. The old building needed a lot of work and it just seemed like it wasn't worth repairing because it right directly across from the Catholic church and they had hundreds of people. The town was pretty much Italian here. So the Catholics had a little group. That's when they sold that property to the Catholic Church and they made the parking lot and St. Paul's went up on Route 5. That's when they built that one.

34:25

KO: What about this area? I guess that's Route 4, so Route 4 right over here beyond [Bridge Street, Town Offices]. Right there's a lot of strip mall development going on. What did that look like?

JB: Okay, if you go across the bridge from where we are, going north, on the left there was a grocery store. There was a market down below and Vermont Cut Flower exchange was above. The Rices lived there also. They lived upstairs. Of course the municipal building was always there. That was the school. And across the street going towards Hartford Village, there was a couple of stores. There was a gasoline station on the corner and there were a couple of stores. I don't remember. Did Torrino's have a store there? I don't remember. There were just a couple of stores, and that's all I remember along there. I'm trying to think where – Hartford Motors just left. I don't remember there. That was the main road around, before they put the interstate in and put that other bridge in. That was Route 5 and that was an awful hill to go up through because you go past the high school and it was almost an S and it in the winter it was always bad.

KO: That's why they straightened it out now.

JB: Yea, now they've straightened it out. That was always an issue. Then there was a Dairy Queen over there where Stern's is now. Dairy Queen was over there and we used to love to go there. Probably the first soft ice cream place. So that was very popular. I don't remember if it was open during the winter. I think it was only open during the summer because it was walk-up.

KO: Definitely.

JB: Yea, had to be. Hartford Motors, that building was there.

KO: What about where the coop, the grocery store down there is?

JB: That's all new. That big building in the back. That was actually a town common and it had a bandstand there.

KO: Oh really? Oh my goodness.

JB: Yea, it had a nice bandstand in the back there. Yup. And I'm trying to think of anything else. Of course, the new bridge, the Route 5 bridge wasn't there. It was just the one right here at the underpass and the next one would be Hartford Village.

KO: What was going on in Hartford Village that you remember? Anything?

JB: I don't really remember much in Hartford Village. As I say, my great uncle lived across the river, the big house going over the railroad tracks and up. Do you ever go that way? Go over the bridge, up over the railroad tracks? There's a big old, well it was a nursing home. It's an apartment building now. That was his house. I remember going there but I don't remember much in Hartford. I remember Dewey's Mills which was one of the villages in town. One of my best friends lived there. I remember the factory there. It's amazing to drive by there now and you can't imagine that there was this huge

factory there, a woolen factory. It was huge and there's nothing there now. And there were several houses along there, along the main street. She lived just up off the main street. Her family was the Deweys of the Woolen Mill and Dewey's Woolen. So they lived right there. I remember right there.

KO: How long did that operate? Round-a-bout?

JB: Well I'm trying to think. I graduated from high school in the 50s and it was still there in the 50s. It must have been sometime in the 50s. I don't really remember exactl. Well it was when they put the dam in. There were several houses there. Some they moved. Some they tore down. My aunt and uncle lived there and then they moved to Wilder. When would they have moved to Wilder? Probably in the 50s, I would say.

KO: That's probably about right. Quechee Lakes came in the 60s?

JB: Yea, like '69, '70, right in there. That's when my mom went to work for them. And we bought property from them in the 70s. So I'd say '69 maybe. And of course that whole – I mean I've been here – that's all happened in my lifetime, Quechee Lakes coming in and revitalizing Quechee. Quechee, as I remember it, was really run down, nothing when I remember. Prior it had been quite a bustling town. I don't remember it being anything. We used to ride our horses from Christian Street to Woodstock and we would just ride right along the main street in Quecche, right along the river road to Quechee. There was nothing there. It was very run down.

KO: I've heard that. That's a nice, positive perspective. Often what you hear about Quechee Lakes is not so positive.

JB: They've done a lot of good things. They've really revitalized it. I think they've tried to not spoil it. The old houses were remodeled and renovated. For the type of business they are, they've done a good job. The houses that are up in the hills have to be a certain color. They don't stick out and stand out. There was a lot of thought put into those things.

KO: It brought a lot of people back, a lot of money back, and tourism.

JB: Absolutely.

41:07

KO: Speaking of Quechee, I've interviewed Don Ransom of Scotland by the Yard. Have you been in that store?

JB: I've been in that store, but I don't really know him. I can remember whoever started it. I can't remember. I think he ended up marrying her and I don't remember her.

Debbie – I remember when she started that. I think she started down in town. Did he mention that? I'm thinking that building up there was new and that they built that after they started Scotland by the Yard. I think it was on Main Street in Quechee. I think it was on Main Street in Quechee.

KO: I'm sure it's in my transcript. It was one of the early ones. I'd have to go look it up.

JB: Uh-huh. And did you ever talk with Jonathan Schectman?

KO: I haven't, but I know him.

JB: He started the business there.

KO: Yea, Meeting House Restoration. My friend works for him.

JB: Oh, okay. I'm trying to think of other people.

KO: I've talked to a lot of people.

JB: I'm sure you have. Everyone's gone now from Dewey's Woolen – well not Dewey's Woolen. Well, the Dewey Corporation, which is the one right by gorge now.

KO: That's too bad. Kip Miller.

JB: Kip Miller, yea. HE bought it.

KO: And the Laros.

JB: Good.

KO: Matt Bucy who is Tip Top.

JB: Yup.

KO: Today I talked with Pete Schaal.

JB: Okay. Have you talked with any of the Lifords, of White River Paper?

KO: No, and only the other day did someone give me that name?

JB: Oh good. Well, Michael is giving a presentation at the historical society in November. So he's getting stuff together and Tammy Ladd is helping him.

KO: So now would be a good time.

JB: It would be a really good time. I would think.

KO: Alright.

JB: I know she is going to interview Mike Liford and Eddie Nichols, who is Eddie Nichols father and grandfather started White River Paper.

KO: Oh Mike Blood, he said, "Oh, the Lifords, they've been around the longest." HE was a good interview.

JB: I bet.

KO: All sorts of people. Jim Flanagan. Dennis Brown of Charlie Brown's.

JB: Okay. Well, even one of Windsor Brown's sons, David Brown.

KO: Oh I have talked with David Brown for the agriculture project.

JB: Oh yes, he would have been. He's always happy to talk farming.

KO: Yea, I think I did two interviews with him.

JB: That was another big change because the farm was where the interchange is now. And basically it's gone.

KO: Put them out of business.

JB: Oh yea, because they needed that whole cloverleaf area.

KO: That crazy interchange; it's so big.

JB: I know. Yup. But it's great having two interstates intersect and meet right here. It's kind of taken over where the railroad left off, bringing people in.

KO: Yea. Too bad. Well I think it's too bad (I'm a historic preservationist) that all of the development is up over there and not more business down here.

JB: I know. But in the last few years, we've gotten a lot more down here with Tip Top, that whole building, and the Tip Top Café and now Tucker Box. And the Coolidge brings people in. There's more downtown than there used to be.

KO: Yea.

JB: I mean than there's been in a long time. Not originally.

KO: When would you say was the lull in downtown?

JB: Oh golly.

KO: You don't have to be exact.

JB: Well, I'm trying to think. It was still really hopping when I was in high school and I graduated in '56. And probably by the '60s, I would say it was starting to kind of fall away. By the time the interstates came, everything was moving uptown, where the McDonalds and all the motels are. So it was probably '60s. And it just kept going down until, golly, I don't remember when we started picking back up. There were a lot of empty storefronts for a long time and now there aren't many.

KO: Yea, I think I walked around the whole big block today and I didn't see any.

JB: I think it's pretty much – but I don't remember when it kind of started coming back. Of course the theater, the Northern Stage, has been a big boost too. It brings a lot of people from out of White River in for dinner and the theater.

KO: What does Northern Stage look like on the inside?

JB: Well that's interesting.

KO: Because the outside –

JB: Well, Northern Stage – Briggs Opera House – have you been up there?

KO: No, not yet.

JB: Well that was the auditorium for the high school. So when my dad was in high school they played games and things up there. It was the auditorium, right? And J.J. Newbury's had a big store where they have bingo games now. And they decided to expand, so then they went up there. They had an upstairs. You had J.J. Newbury's downstairs and they had these stairs and you went upstairs. That didn't last very long. I think they shouldn't have expanded. And then shortly after that is when the Briggs decided to go back to an opera house. But my grandmother – I think it must have been originally an opera house, auditorium, because she was 9 years old and she was upstairs. There was some kind of a performance. She sat on the windowsill and didn't realize that the window was open and leaned back and fell two stories down just missing a metal stairway and fortunately – I guess there must not have been any cement there. And she was in a coma for months.

KO: Oh my gosh.

JB: And she was my great-grandparents' only child. So it was written up in the newspaper. And she was 9 years old. But she survived to get married and have 9 children. So she was okay. But they were having some kind of a play there then. This would have been probably – I think she was born somewhere in 1880, so it would have been 1880s. That room has seen a lot of different uses. I know the high school played all their basketball games up there at one point.

KO: That's so funny, playing basketball on the second floor. I don't know why.

JB: I know.

KO: That's amazing that your great-grandmother?

JB: My grandmother.

KO: Your grandmother, that she survived.

JB: That she would survive back then.

KO: I mean in a coma, not that it's good, but your chances are better now than 1880s.

JB: Absolutely.

KO: Wow.

JB: I know. We've talked about that so many times in the family. If she died, none of us would be here.

KO: Oh my gosh. She had some angels looking out for her.

JB: Yup.

KO: Oh man. I was going to ask you something else. Hmm. Well I don't recall. Let's see: downtown White River. I think it's interesting that there are three drug stores because I think it's crazy when Rite Aid builds across from CVS or whatever. And I think, how in the world are those surviving? But clearly drugstores across the street from each other are not a new thing.

JB: No. And that's three right here in downtown White River. And now we have just one, Corner Drug.

KO: Highly unusual. Weird.

JB: Weird.

KO: Only now they're gigantic and you can get anything except a soda fountain.

JB: As I said, they all had soda fountains. My mother and some of her friends always had lunch at Howard Drug, which was the one on the side street. And then Springers was across from where the frame shop is. And Corner Drug was right here. Or Hall's. It was Hall's for a while and then it became Corner Drug.

50:40

KO: Oh, that's what I was going to ask you: the drive-in theater.

JB: Oh the drive-in theater.

KO: Do you recall that?

JB: Oh yes, because I was a teenager then. I don't really remember when it came and there was Marion's Drive-in up there, too. Marion's Drive-in was right about where, I think where the town maintenance garage is now. No, not down that far. More like behind where Cloverleaf, Cloverleaf Gifts and the bus station.

KO: Oh yea.

JB: Actually facing the bus station, it was on the left. And that was a very popular summer drive-in where you drive in and they bring you food. And the theater was going then. It must have been more in the 50s because that's when I was in high school. And then I don't remember how long it lasted because I don't remember going there after I was married.

KO: Right.

JB: So it was probably more the 50s. Probably mainly the 50s.

KO: I think that was the height of drive-ins.

JB: I remember when it was the airport before it was the drive-in because my family owned that property and their big family house was down on South Main Street. The big apartment house on the corner as you go up Mountain Avenue – Sykes Avenue now, whatever. And they owned all that land up there. I had 16 years of my great-great-grandfather's diaries that I transcribed a few years ago and it gave a lot of that history. And he was the one that was the railroad man. So I had a lot of history that I transcribed and the historical society has a copy and the Vermont Historical Society has a copy.

KO: Oh that's wonderful.

JB: I volunteer up there, too.

KO: The one up in Barre?

JB: In Barre, one a day a month.

KO: That's a beautiful building.

JB: That's great to have that old school down there. There's so much room and places.

KO: There's usually a preservation event in there, every few months or so.

JB: Yup, it's a neat place.

53:08

KO: What about the Polka Dot Diner? It's still there.

JB: Still there.

KO: It's hardly ever open and I really would like to interview Mary Shatney and I can't seem to catch her. I'm just looking for someone who knows her who can catch her for me.

JB: I don't know her but the Mayfair Restaurant was a landmark here. That's where the branch post office is, just beyond where the bingo is. That was a hopping place. Jo Elliot was one of the waitresses. She was just a landmark; she was always there. I think they were open all day. I think they had breakfast, lunch, and dinner. And of course with the railroad station across the street they were really busy. I can't remember when the Mayfair went out. My aunt and uncle had a card shop in there at one point. So probably the Mayfair was gone by end of the 50s, I would say. But it was here a long time. And then we had, oh what was the place down here? We had a soda fountain grill. Teddy's Grill. What was next door to it? I can't even remember the name, where all the high school kids hung out. I think it's too bad that there's no place downtown where the kids can go after school or after a ball game. We always hung out after.

KO: Now you have to get in the car.

JB: Yea, get in the car and go somewhere. There's no place here now.

KO: If the Polka Dot would open.

JB: I know.

KO: Well it seems like the changes in White River are reflective of the whole nation, I guess, from what I'm hearing.

JB: Probably.

KO: Which makes sense. I guess it's interesting to hear that little Vermont changed about the same time as everybody. And now it's coming back and the trend of businesses and people moving back to more dense areas. I like that.

JB: The other thing I remember is when the **Terrio** building burned down, which is the one right across the railroad from here, next to Polka Dot. That was like a three-story building with a hotel upstairs and Teddy's Grill and there was something else along there. That burned and then they built a long, kind of flat building, a more modern building that had a shoe store. Teddy's Grill was there for a while. What else was in there? The soda fountain place I mentioned. Norman's. Norman's Grill. We all went to Norman's. It would be absolutely packed after like a basketball game or a football game. All the kids would come down, get our sodas or whatever. Of course that was all burned, too.

56:40

KO: Do you have any favorite family stories from your grandparents or great-grandparents?

JB: Golly, favorite stories.

KO: Or anything. I guess we've been talking about things in order, but anything random you want to pull in.

JB: This interview is going to be interesting. Offhand, I can't think of any big stories. I was at my grandmother's a lot growing up and it was safe for us to talk as little children from her house on South Main Street, upstreet to Newbury's or to get candy or something. I can remember doing that when I was probably 5, 6 years old. They would just let us go because it was safe. A sidewalk the whole way, and we could do that. But I don't really remember any stories from my grandparents. They had that big house on South Main Street and it was full of family, always. Back then they took all the old folks in because there weren't any nursing homes. There were probably 2 or 3 or 4 generations there a lot of the time, a lot of the time.

One story that I think is kind of interesting: when my grandmother died. I'm the oldest of 19 grandchildren, so after my 8 or 9 aunts and uncles took what they wanted, I got to go down and look. We found a wooden box in the attic. My husband was interested in stamps so we took it because we thought we better take this, it might have old stamps.

So we took it home and we put it in our attic for like 40 years until we were remodeling. We pulled it down and to make a long story short, my great-great aunt's husband had been a paymaster in the Civil War out in St. Louis. And inside that box (I still get goose bumps talking about it) were original Civil War papers and all his records from like 1861 to 63 or something, in the the St. Louis area. They were preserved because they were all folded up and tied with the ribbons they used to. And nobody had opened it. And that box could have been thrown out because nobody even looked at it. I got these out and I thought, oh my gosh, what have I got here? I realized it had nothing directly to do with my family. It was *just* these Civil War papers.

KO: No big deal.

JB: Yea. Each big paper documented a certain troop and all their actions for a month, what each guy got paid and where he was from, and the troops went like 10 miles today. We went like this and killed this many people. Unbelievable records, unbelievable. So I immediately contacted both the Civil War people and the historical society in the St. Louis, MO. That's where he was stationed. It was the St. Louis historical society and said, oh we really want these papers. They paid me to ship them, wooden box and all. They told me how to wrap them and everything. And when they got them, they contacted me and said, you won't believe what records and what historical stuff is there. So that was just sitting in my grandmother's attic.

KO: That's crazy.

JB: Because he had come to live at my grandmother's with my great-great aunt when they got older. My grandmother just took them in. So he was here when he died. He died here in White River. He was from Derry, NH. Why did he have those and why did he bring them here? Why didn't somebody turn those over the government? Somebody must have forgotten.

KO: Maybe when the war ended, nobody cared anymore.

JB: I think or something. I'm not sure when he came back here to White River. Then he was ambassador or consult to Germany and Italy. He was sent over there for several years. He was quite famous.

KO: what was his name?

JB: James M. Wilson from Derry, NH. So I've sent everything about him to Derry, to the historical society down there because he wasn't really from here. Those papers, that was pretty exciting.

KO: That just goes to show that you never know what you're going to find in an attic.

JB: And don't throw anything out until you look at it.

KO: Yes, look at it!

JB: I told my children, "Don't throw anything out!" Ask the historical society and if they don't want it, they can throw it out. And the diaries I mentioned of my third great grandfather, I don't have the Civil War years. I have from about 1859 to 1880 something, but the Civil War years aren't there.

KO: Did he keep a diary?

JB: He kept a diary. He wrote every single day, so I can't imagine he didn't write. But somebody else them. I don't know, which is sad. But at least I have 16 years, which is impressive. And I gave those to the historical society in Barre. I figured they have the climate controlled and everything and they really need to be –

KO: And people can have better access to them there.

JB: Right.

KO: Did he talk about what he did everyday?

JB: Yup, what he did everyday. He was older. He was still in St. Louis, he lived there for a while, but mainly when he came back here. He would talk about walking up to the depot every day. Or doctor so and so came. I bought something from so and so. There's a lot of history in there. It's great. And of course, 16 years, the book is like 500 pages and I transcribed it all. It wasn't easy.

KO: That takes some dedication.

JB: Yea.

KO: Especially with the handwriting.

JB: Yea. And I was determined I was going to get that done.

KO: So your family is from here. Do you have a family plot in one of the cemeteries?

JB: Yup, in the Hartford Cemetery, the one up on Maple Street. We have actually several plots, but everybody is buried right up there.

KO: Everyone is still together.

JB: Yup, pretty much, all in the same cemetery anyway.

KO: So you must be one of the longest family – or longest living families. Well you know what I mean, generations living here.

JB: Yea. I hadn't thought about that, but probably, of who is still here. A lot of the ones I know were here a long time but they came from someone else more recently, like 1900.

KO: Right, instead of-

JB: 1840.

KO: Where did your family come from, well I guess that's many branches, before Marshfield?

JB: Massachusetts. Probably it was the same, Worcester, Mass. they named Worcester, VT. And Marshfield was in that area. Then my Lathams came from the Bridgewater area in Mass, which is down near Foxboro and Boston. And my Camerons, I don't know. They came into Marshfield, but I'm not sure where. That's one of my brick walls. I'm trying to find. They're from Scotland, but I don't know who came when.

KO: Cameron, of course.

JB: I know they were in Barre in 1802, but I don't know before that. I have a marriage record of my 4th great grandfather being married in Barre, but it doesn't say anything about him.

KO: So pretty far back.

JB: And then my mother's family, as I say, is from central New York State, Herkimer, NY.

KO: Generations there too?

JB: Yea, they were there for like probably 4 generations anyway when my mother was born and they are still there. My cousins are still there.

KO: I'm meeting a lot of people whose families have been in New England and New York and the United States for generations and generations. I feel like my family is only recent compared to that. I'm from Ireland and Scotland, but more like mid to late 1800s.

JB: Yea, most of mine are probably 1700s came over. My Hildreth family was 1600s, 1636 they came. That was my mother's maiden name was Hildreth. And we can document them back to 1636.

KO: Well that's one of the earliest.

JB: Yea. And they were in Chelmsford, Massachusetts. And then they branched out all over.

KO: Interesting. Well you have quite the rich family history.

JB: And I love history. And I do a lot with genealogy. It's fun.

KO: Excellent.

JB: So I don't know that I have anything much else to tell you.

KO: I probably have questions when I transcribe.

JB: If you have some.

KO: But see, you have a lot to say and you thought you wouldn't.

JB: Well I thought you wanted only some kind of insurance.

KO: I just go based on the notation that Pat gives me.

JB: Oh okay, I see.

KO: People say, "I can talk about this, too." Sure!

JB: Okay, yea. Alright.

KO: So thank you very much.

JB: You're very welcome.

01:07:32.6 END OF INTERVIEW. END OF RECORDING.