

Wilmot Historical Society

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On July 21, 1993, George Peterson, representing the Wilmot Historical Society, (his words are bolded) interviewed John Lawrence Rayno, a 79-year-old native of Wilmot. The interview was conducted at Mr. Rayno's home on Monument Place in Wilmot Flat.

G: John, what year were you born?

J: 1913

G: And you were born here in Wilmot?

J: I was born on Kearsarge Mountain.

G: And Whereabouts on Kearsarge Mountain?

J: At a farmhouse.

G: Where your family lived?

J: Yes, where my family lived. It's the second house after you go by Ralph Weed's--the shop up here. And up the Kearsarge Mountain Road as you make a turn, it's the first farmhouse. Bill Waite lives there now. He and Nancy. I was born right there.

What was your father's name?

Pascal Rayno.

And your mom's name?

Ina Rayno.

And what was her maiden name?

Fellows.

Was she from here?

Yes, she was from Wilmot.

And your Dad?

He came from Andover. His folks came from Andover in the Flaghole District in Andover.

And what was your Dad's principal occupation.

Farmer.

Cattle?

He had cattle, and he had horses; and in the latter part of his life, (he died real young), he worked with the State Highway Department in Concord maintaining the road through the village to New London with horses, and dump cart . . . whatever they used. But he did farm all the time. Do you want me to tell you more about him?

Yes.

In 1918 or 19, he contacted the flu which was general through the area, and he had something like 20 cows and 4 horses and the whole family got the flu, and he got it but he kept right on taking care of his cows. Nobody would come into the house. Nobody wanted it, it was a deadly disease. And so he carried through until the boys, my two older brothers got well enough to do the chores or got able, felt better. Then he laid down, and he died within two or three days. The doctor from Warner--that was the nearest doctor--said it was the heart in weakened condition from the flu. So he was 45 when he died.

Did you have any brothers and sisters?

I had three sisters, Edna Prescott or Edna Rayno, and Ellen Rayno and Hazel Rayno. And I had two brothers, Henry, and Maurice. There were three boys and three girls. And they're all gone, passed away except Hazel who lives in Monticello, NY (she's a cripple), and myself. We're the only ones left out of the original Rayno family I guess you'd call it.

Now you are married to . . . ?

Elizabeth Wiggin from Danbury. She came from Danbury.

And when did you get married?

March 28, 1936

How did you meet her, by the way?

At a dance at the Wilmot Town Hall. Some guy brought her to the dance, and I danced with her (laughter) most of the time, which the guy didn't care about that.

Tell me a little bit about life in Wilmot when you were growing up. What was it like?

What I've often thought about is that it's so different than today, George. The area is a lot bigger for work, play or travel and all that. If you lived in Wilmot back when I was 8 or 10 years old, Wilmot was the extent of your traveling or going anywhere or seeing anyone, unless it happened in Wilmot Flat, I didn't see it, or I didn't go anywhere. If you went to Franklin once in a great while with somebody-- that was the biggest treat in the world. You was way away from home down in Franklin. So you knew everybody. You knew your neighbors. If somebody new moved in, you observed them awhile before you accepted them. You didn't know if they appeared very nice and so forth, but everybody watched their movements. They might be crooks from New York or something. So it was hard to get acquainted in Wilmot for newcomers. We made it hard, I think, for them, which we shouldn't have done but once we accepted them, they was one of us. And the biggest thing they had to do to be accepted was to join the church or go to church, and then they was all set. They were good people. They could be the biggest crook in the world, but if they went to church, they were good people.

You mention that you were born in a farmhouse on Kearsarge Mountain Road. Now is that where you grew up as well?

Yeah, well after my father died, we moved to the village in an apartment house. It's gone they took it down when Route 11 expanded through here.

Okay, where was the apartment house?

Well, if you went by the Town Office building and right out that intersection it was right on that corner. That was just a dirt road. Of course, it went along. . . Route 11 wasn't there of course. It was right on the corner. It was a two-story house an old house. And we moved down there, I think about two years after my father died. My mother couldn't run the farm, and the boys weren't old enough-- Henry and Maurice--to maintain it. So we was moved down there. And my mother was about the poorest of the poor. Well you know, with 6 children and nothing left. She sold the farm and got \$640 for the farm with probably 70 acres or something.

Now where did you fit in terms of, you said there were six of you? Are you the oldest? Youngest, in the middle or what?

I'm next to the youngest. Hazel is younger than I am.

So you grew up here in Wilmot Flat?

Right.

Tell me about some of the businesses you might remember in town.

A lot of the businesses had more or less gone out of Wilmot. At one time it was quite a business area. They had the Tannery here in Wilmot which employed around 70 people.

And where was that?

That was up, well, it was opposite Hilda Aldridge, you know where Hilda Aldridge lived, where the boys lived 'cross the road from Hilda's.

Okay where would that be John?

It was right on Tannery Pond. If you went up here it's right on Tannery Pond. There was a building and a fella owned it and rented it out to young fellows that worked and stay there.

Where did you do or where did your mom do her shopping?

Well at the apartment house now, up here, there was a general store.

You're speaking of the apartment house that's across from the present day town office building?

Right. That was a general store as long as I can remember and of course, long before that. And there was a dance hall up over the store. But they used to have, square dances, I guess, I don't know. I don't remember much about 'em. My mother used to, she like to dance. I think the admission was 10 cents.

Now where was the Post Office located?

As I try to remember the Post Office, it was located where Maurice' house is up here. Maurice and Jackie's house in one room.

Okay so it's diagonally down from the present-day Post Office?

Yes. And then they changed from there, and there was a community center. They had a room over there, and this is when I was real young. And then they moved to where it presently is now. I don't know just the year but, they moved to there and they been there ever since.

What did you do for fun here in town back in those days?

We played ball all summer long whenever we didn't have chores and other stuff to do when we were quite young.

Was there a ball field?

No just this side of the Town Office Building there's a field, a little field and we played there and then later on there was a place up where the Pine Hill Cemetery is off to the left, we dug up trees and everything and made a ball field out there. And then later there was another ball field up almost across the road from the present little league field, we made another ball field.

Who were some of your peers? Who were some of your friends you grew up with?

Well, I was talking the other day maybe to Liz about that and they're gone, they're all gone. Passed away.

Who, do you remember some of their names?

Well there's the Charles family—you know where Van Rayno lives? You don't know much about Wilmot Flat (Laugh). Across from the apartment house up here, that big one.

Well, you see what I'm trying to do is get you to describe exactly because people who might be listening to this fifty years from now, may not know places by people's names.

Yup. Well, I could say about these, there was a family named Trow and they was directly across from the General Store. And there was four boys, no girls. So, and I lived, of course, close to 'em. So we played together all the time practically. Whatever we did as a group. Playin' ball, some mornings, we might decide to climb Kearsarge, and their mother might give us an apple or something for lunch, and we'd leave here and walk to the top of Kearsarge and come back in the afternoon. Today I couldn't walk up the hill 'fore I'd fall down. (Chuckle)

Tell me a little bit about school life back then. Where did you go to school?

Well, getting back to where we lived on the farm. I went two years, they had Kearsarge Mountain School, grade school, up at the top of the hill. Emory Baily lived there, I don't know if you ever heard of him, but I don't know how to explain it but from the farm you'd go up a steep hill called Winslow, and up there on the bend was a red house now, but that was the Kearsarge School, and anybody in that area went to that school.

So what grade?

It was second grade that I spent there.

Do you remember who your teacher was?

Her name was Dean. Della Dean, and she was the best teacher. I remember she sent me out for doing something. She'd send you out in the hall and make you stand there 10 minutes to think about what you did or said. And after I'd been out there, I was about 5, I wasn't too old, I probably cried, but she came out and talked to me and she cried. (Laughter) She was real nice.

So you went there for grades one and two then once you moved down here to the Flat?

I went to what now is the Town Office Building. That was the school here. I went there until I graduated in the 8th grade, and then I went to Proctor Academy in Andover for 4 years and graduated from Proctor. You will probably sense as we go along that I didn't major in English at Proctor and I didn't major in spelling either. (Laughter) I always figured that I was pretty dumb, and they let me get out in 4 years to get me out of there before I influenced any of the other boys.

Now, you went through 8th grade in Wilmot Flat. Could you have gone on?

There was no other schools.

There were no other schools?

No.

So if you continued, you had to go to Proctor.

Before that they had a school in Wilmot Center it was known as Kearsarge School of Practice. My two older brothers went to that, but it closed down for some reason, I don't know, funds, or what it was, before I was graduated to go there.

Now how did you get to Proctor every day?

Well most of the time there was a man who had a son that went to Proctor, and he took four or five of us from here, and we had to pay him a dollar and a half a week, my mother did. He'd take us down in the morning and leave us, and then come down in the afternoon and get us, and some of the time, if he was sick, we walked from here to Andover.

Now when you say he took you, he took you in what?

He had a model A Ford. Yup. Sedan, I guess you'd call it.

Tell me a little about Proctor.

Well, I didn't indulge in sports much because I tried for awhile at basketball, but I had to walk home. See, he wouldn't come back and get me. You had to go home when he went home. So I had to walk home a few snowy nights from Proctor, nobody would ever pick you up and give you a ride you know, so I gave up that, you know. And I played football, but I found out I wasn't heavy enough for that game. So I gave that up.

What did you do when you graduated?

Well I've had a lot of jobs. This is just, you can look at this later. These are all the positions that I held in my lifetime and so forth. But back then, . . .

It looks like a rather long list.

Well, it's 20 things, places and things I've done.

Well, let's run through them.

Okay. I was a member of the Trustees of Trust Funds. That was my first political job. I probably got four votes, I don't remember. And then I was the Overseer of the Poor for awhile.

Okay, but what did you do when you graduated from Proctor.

Well, I'm trying to think. I didn't have any steady jobs. There was no such thing as a steady job in Wilmot. And some work you could get in New London, like shoveling, or driving a truck when you got old enough or helping Henry Holman run a shrubbery business, and he'd hire, never paid much. But there was no work around, see you'd just be gettin' by 'til the '33 depression and work hadn't picked up much. And there was no work in Wilmot or in this area after fall, October. Nobody thought, they all thought building houses . . . everybody else thought landscaping but it was too cold. So you went through the winter and the only way you could get by was to chop wood for somebody and they paid you 50 cents a cord or 75 cents, and it took me about two days to split a cord a wood. But, my mother, I'll tell you how we got by, she got mother's aid, it was a state program, and she got \$30 a month, and that was her income to take care of us six kids and pay her rent. I think she paid \$6 a month for rent she told us. She had a hard life, my mother did. And we cooperated all we could and then as the boys got older and Edna got older some of 'em took other jobs and helped her along.

I take it that she never remarried?

No, she didn't. I guess she'd had enough of married life with eight kids probably.

So what else, you mentioned several moments ago, you held some town offices, what else is on that list of things?

Well, I was a member of the Wilmot School Board for a few years. I was the Town Health Officer for a few years. That's appointed job by the Selectmen. Trustee of the Town Cemetery and a Trustee of the Pine Hill Cemetery. I was a Supervisor of the Checklist. I was chief of Police, Chief of the Fire Department, and I was a charter member which was 1942. I was a state forest fire warden, deputy warden, and the warden. I spent two terms in the NH Legislature. I was a member of the State Fish and Game Committee while I was in the legislature. I was vice president of the [Wilmot] Community Association here. Master of the Wilmot Grange, that was the Kearsarge Grange. Vice President of the Andover Fish and Game Club. Member of the Wilmot Planning Board—five years. Served on petty jury at the Superior Court. Attended Police Training School—State Police from January 31 to April 7th in Franklin, NH, 1965. And I became certified as a Police Officer. I also in my younger days was leader of the 4H Club. I guess that winds it up.

Well that's a rather impressive list.

(Laughter). Well, it is, yup.

I take it you ran as a Republican.

I did. And the only reason I can think of why I was a Republican is because my mother was. I think that's true of a lot of families. Whatever the father or mother was, you automatically took that position up.

What were some of the jobs that you did? Besides the civic things. What were some of the jobs that you worked at.

This is some of them. Do you want me to read this off to you?

You can, if you'd like. I'd like to go back and discuss some of them.

In 1936 we had a big flood and lost a lot of railroad tracks up through Potter Place, Andover and Danbury Grafton. So I worked that fall on that for the B & M Railroad.

Now, to put it into perspective you graduated from Proctor in 1933, is that correct?

Yup.

Okay.

Then I worked for a while for the State of NH Highway Department. When they were tarring roads they used to hire a lot of help to spread the sand by hand. Again, you probably heard that. And then again, I worked for the United States Department of Entomology and Plant Quarantine.

Now, doing what?

Well this was on the control of white pine blister rust. I had a crew of 8 men. We went through the woods looking for skunk currents, they called them, and gooseberry bushes, they grow wild, you see, any, even tamed current bushes. If we found any on your lawn, we pulled them up.

Why?

There was an infection from these berries that went to pine trees and it entered the pine needle end and infected the pine tree and killed the pine tree which the State Forestry, I suppose, settled, they figured pine trees were worth more than gooseberry bushes. And then in the winter they had a program on for the brown tail moths and we went through the woods especially around farm buildings and they'd have nests on top of trees, you could see 'em and we'd cut 'em down, and then a supervisor came around about twice a month and picked 'em all up and we'd have a bon fire, we'd burn 'em all. And that was all Government Programs, see, sponsored by the Government. And I worked for a while for M.E. Walker as a plumber in Elkins as a helper—I never became a plumber. And I worked for a construction company out of Manchester that built the old library at New London at Colby. And then I worked for Charles Shephard as a truck driver—he had a fuel business, wood and fuel. And I worked for N. P. Clough Lumber Company, which was in town, I worked there probably for nine years as a truck driver in a grist mill, they ground grain and so forth. And I worked for Lull and Prescott who were building contractors as a truck driver. I worked for Kidder Lumber Company in Franklin as a truck driver.

I worked for Colby-Sawyer College on maintenance and as a chauffeur for 23 years. I retired in 1979. Now do you have any questions about that or . . . I tried to make it clear as I can.

One of the things I wanted to ask you was what did Wilmot look like when you were growing up? How is it different today?

Well, I don't know . . . there's more houses of course and we have better roads. Cuz' as I was growing up, everything was dirt. I remember the first time they tarred the road through the Village here it was the biggest thing kids used to go barefoot in the summer, we didn't have enough shoes to go all year round and we run out after they spread the sand on the tar to see how it felt. Of course, it picked the tar right up on our feet. We had to go home and our mother had to take kerosene to get it off your feet. Your feet were sore for a few days. We learned not to do that again.

Was Wilmot more cleared?

Yeah, oh yeah, much more. Very much more. There was a lot of farmers. As I have said before, most everybody in town owned a farm or some field or land, and back when I was real young that was 90% of the family living. You got your living off the farm. Very little that you earned otherwise. I've been going through a lot of old town reports and you had John Doe earned \$3 working on the road, or \$2.50 or something like that. And a lot of 'em did that to help pay their taxes. They wouldn't take the money, but they'd turn it toward their taxes so it was tough. But Wilmot, as I say, these pine trees, you look out there, George, and you see all those pine trees. That was a field when we moved here. We moved here in 1946—bought the place for \$200 down and I had to borrow that, but that was a field clear far as you could see, you could see the schoolhouse and everything. It was all fields there, and there were so many places like that in town now that were fields that's grown up.

Now, you got married in what year?

1936.

Okay. How many children?

We had two. Stanley and Robert. And Stanley passed away. He passed away in 1985.

Of a heart attack?

Yup.

And how old was he when he passed away.

He was 49.

And Robert is Bob who lives on Cilleyville Road in Potter Place now.

That's right. Bob comes up to the house on his way to work every morning. He never misses any unless it's a golf day. And he more or less checks to see if we're still around, I guess. And we appreciate it, of course.

Now what I'm interested in learning is in relationship to some of these jobs that you did. You must have lots of stories to share with us.

Well, I could but they'd run into the evening tellin' you all about it.

Well, tell me some of them.

I remember, especially on this flood one; this is humorous. They had a man in Danbury that was real religious. He was an elderly man. And he wouldn't do nothing on Sunday. Just go to church all day. Well he worked on this railroad same as I did, and Sunday morning, we had to work Sunday too, he showed up. So some of the boys that knew him said to him "Gosh, we never thought we'd see you here today, Andrew. Ain't you going to church?" He says, "Money speaks louder than religion." (Laugh) Wherever I worked, and I been awful lucky, if I was on committees and so forth, we always had--it weren't perfect--but we had harmony. And I think, not that I'm braggin', but laughter helps a lot on committees. So many people get, well, bound up and serious and thinking about the articles, and so forth, and lose the real prestige of what they're supposed to be doing. A little laughter never hurt nobody. I think it helps.

How long were you a member of the Grange?

I never stayed long enough. I think 23 years. I didn't get a 25-year pin which they gave out then. There again, I went from the bottom, the gatekeeper, up through the chair as they called it to the Master. Nowadays, if you never held an office and you're sitting there they'll beg you to run for Master, if you look somewhat intelligent or something. But them days, you had to work your way up. That's good I guess.

John you mentioned that you were a police chief here in Wilmot. How long did you serve as Police Chief?

I'd say six or seven years maybe.

Now, what was that like?

Well, it's altogether different than it was today because it's so complicated today. Them days mostly all you had to do was try to settle family feuds. Somebody's beating his wife up or she's beating him up or . . . and you had to go to try to stop them. I only had one case that I took a person to court, and he was beating up his pig. He and another man and his wife.

Really, a pig?

Yup, beating up a pig. They didn't like the looks of the pig. They were drinking, see. And so she called me, and I went up, and you had to go to Franklin if you took 'em to court, see. And I knowed both of 'em, you know. So I said, well let's go down to Franklin and talk to the judge about this. I think we can settle this alright see. If they said they weren't going, I don't know what I'd done about it, but they went, anyway. And one funny incident of the hearing, more or less a hearing, that George is his name, I won't mention his last name, the judge said, "Well, I fine you fellas \$30 for beating up that pig." And George says, "Well, I got it right in my pocket." He said, "30 days, you got that in your pocket?" George said, "No." (Laughter)

Did you ever investigate anything of a criminal nature?

No. People was content then. There wasn't any shooting going on. We've had several accidents in town, shooting, since then . . . not accidents, intentional. I wasn't in then.

What general time period? I know you said earlier to me that you couldn't remember exactly when you were police chief but what was the general time frame? Do you remember?

Let's see. I was trying to think. Back in '60 maybe.

Oh. Okay. Now you were also a member of the NH Legislature.

Right.

For two terms?

Right.

What happened during that time period?

Well, the reason I was elected. There was a person that represented this area from New London, and she moved away, and it created a vacancy, and so they needed to have a special election here to have somebody take her place; and Earle Chandler came to me and said, "Why don't you run, John?" He said, "I got a lot a friends, and I know they'll help you." I said, "Honest to God, I'd like to but I never put myself forward to." So I ran at this special election, and I beat two other guys. And so I went to Concord to finish out that term in '80, and then I got elected to a two-year term in '81 and '82.

Now what were some interesting stories to come out of your service in the legislature?

Well, they had the general run of bills; and I was on the fish and game committee so we had, well we met, and the governor would come in once in a while and speak to us, but as I told so many people, and I still think so, in the legislature, there's about twelve or fourteen people that run the NH Legislature . . . any way you want to figure it, and I can name most of them. They're the ones that make sure all the big bills are in there and bills that *they* want and they've been in the legislature a long time so they're respected and they're well-educated and nine times out of ten, whatever these ten or fourteen say it goes to the legislature without any doubt. Sometimes there are, of course, there's arguments, but they always get what they want. And they're the ones that get up and talk on every subject. Sometimes you wonder if they know anything about what they're talking, but they talk anyway. They just liked to talk.

Did you sponsor any legislation, John, during your service?

Well, I didn't sponsor any, but I signed in with one of Sumner Thompson's daughter-in-law up in Orford. She was a representative from up there, and she had a bill in the legislature to make it compulsory in the schools to salute the flag. And she asked me if I'd sponsor it, and I said, 'I sure will, cuz' I believe that.' So I had to go to this committee—I forgot the name of the committee the bill was presented to—and tell why I thought so. And so she had a big speech there. But they voted it down when it got on the floor. The committee didn't even recommend it. See, they recommend it to the House and then the House votes on it, and you get up and speak

whatever you want to about it. She got swearing a little and the Speaker said, “We can’t have that language in the legislature.” She was mad. Oh gosh.

You mention that you’re a charter member of the Wilmot Volunteer Fire Department.

That’s right.

And you joined the Fire Department in 1942.

That’s when they organized.

Now, what did you do for fire protection prior to 1942?

Well, my brother was a Fire Warden, and I was a Deputy Fire Warden, and the State would loan us fire tools like fire rakes, we called them, and other stuff. We had no hoses, and both of us worked at N.P. Clough, so if there was a forest fire or something, one of us would take one of the trucks up there and throw on the fire tools and the knapsack and go to a fire. We used to ring the church bell. That was the first distinction. Anybody heard the church bell ringing--except on Sundays--they knew there was a fire, and they would go and ask somebody cuz’ they couldn’t go to the fire house cuz we didn’t have one.

Now you’re talking about the bell of the Baptist Church, up here?

Right.

Now are you a member of that church, John?

No. No I’m not.

Okay. What were some of the more interesting fires that you may have witnessed during that time?

We had a bad fire in the church there. As far as I can find out, I only know about that one, but there was two times that the church was burned up here. And we had a fire truck then, with a hand crank on the back of it, like a fire engine. And we had some hoses. But not very much. Of course, you’d call New London, which always came down and helped us. But it burnt completely down. And it started in four o’clock in the morning and the guy that had the store across the road saw the flames coming out the doors. That’s the first thing we knew about it. So when, of course, everybody was running round and round and there was no way you could get near the church, there was so much heat . . . and down it went.

Now old timers like you always have some interesting stories about what life was like in Wilmot in the old days during the winter. Now you must have some interesting tales to share?

Oh, I probably have, but there again my memory don’t stay with me too long. Now I can remember stuff that happened 50 years ago but I can’t remember what happened last week.

How did they make the roads passable after a snowstorm?

They had a roller. They called it a snow roller, and they’d hitch about three teams of horses, in other words, six horses on it; and on the top--three men rode up there, and they would go all over town rolling the snow down. We kids really enjoyed seein’ them comin’ especially like a hill out

here cuz' it made great sliding afterwards—it was so hard you know. And then there was a group of men . . . well they had a pair of horses, the road agent did, and he had the little “V” plowers and after about one or two good storms, he was done. And then, of course the modern plows come on the front of the trucks, and so forth.

Now were you active in the Community Association?

Up here? Oh very much . . . I thought too much. That's why, I could have been the president of it, see, but it was getting to be a lot of responsibility. They were runnin' bingo games. You had to be there every night, and it was so hard to find help, you know. Somebody'd say they work on the committee next week on bingo, and then well, sorry but they couldn't. And then you'd have somebody make a cake or refreshments and well, they couldn't, and it got so I said, 'Well, this is too much for me to worry about' so . . .

Nowadays we have TV sets to keep us occupied in the evening. When you were growing up as a child, do you remember how you spent a lot of your evenings, and certainly there wasn't a TV set to . . .

I said so many times, like the Grange and other organizations that are dying out . . . the whole reason is TV. Now, it's a lot easier for me to sit in here and watch a TV program than it is in the winter to dress up and go up to the Hall and see something up there. See, and its ruined and ruining the Granges and other organizations. I know you could blame me for not going up there, but it's so much easier to sit in a warm house and watch TV than it is to go out.

So, what did you do in the evenings?

Well, we also played cards a lot—different families—maybe me and the next-door neighbors. They had one or two boys or a girl or something. We'd go there and play till eight o'clock or something and then come home and go to bed. My wife and I was married before we ever had a radio, and we lived up to the other end of the town, and there was the first radio, and we paid \$2 a week till we got it paid for.

What were some of the issues that you had to deal with as a member of the Wilmot School Board? What would be the general time frame that you served on that Board?

There again, it was probably in the 60s. I done a lot of this active work from the 60s to the 70s. But the issues then were local issues: to raise so much money to paint the schoolhouse or pay so much for fuel, and you presented a budget to the Town Meeting or the School Meeting which was separate from the Town Meeting.

I'm skipping around here, but what were the names of some of the people that you went to school with?

Well, there were the Trow boys, I told you about. And there was Dodge—some girl and brother named Dodge. And there was John Kenniston. Carl Evans' wife Dottie. I went with her. I can't think of too many more, but I have a class picture. I don't know where it is, but it was when I was about 4th or 5th grade maybe. I have a picture. A lot of them are gone now. All the Trow boys are gone. Dottie Evans and I went to the school up here now. The rest of 'em passed away.

As a teenager in town, what would you do on a Friday night?

The same things we did the other six nights. Once in a great while a show—we had a guy who'd come around—he had pigeons and he'd come up to the hall and he'd have 'em climb up ladders and down the other side and so forth and that cost up ten cents to get in and a lot a times we didn't have the ten cents so the man who lived next door—we called 'Uncle Sam'—and he was a great guy for asking you to do things for him and when we got through he'd say, "Much obliged, boys," and we never got paid. So we'd go and tap him for ten cents once in a while and go to the show. There was nothing going on in the summer—it wasn't any different than the winter. There was more ball games and sports and so forth. You was really confined. You lived in Wilmot Flat and that's where you lived. You knew nothing about the rest of the world—don't know as you really cared then.

Did you have anything to do with Wilmot Center or North Wilmot?

Wilmot Flat. Wilmot Center—the politicians used to fight a lot. Sometimes they would get two selectmen from Wilmot Flat elected—like North Wilmot and Wilmot Center were real mad. Oh they did shout here, 'Oh you want everything down in Wilmot Flat and how about us? We pay taxes up here.' There used to be three road agents in Town. One from North Wilmot, one Wilmot Center and one down here. They didn't work more than 30 days a year. Roads got so bad you couldn't pass 'em. They go out and fill them up with dirt or something. They didn't have the money to do it.

If you want to hear more about the schools I'd like to tell you about the Kearsarge Regional.

Sure.

When they organized, or were trying to organize, they had several meetings at the Town Hall and they planned, of course, for Wilmot to join. I, more or less, was against it. Maybe it was selfishness, I don't know; but I had two boys in the grammar school and one of them was only in the second grade at the time— Bobby—and I couldn't see sending our kids up to New London all day long. Up here they used to come home for dinner and all that. I thought we'd be losing control of them. But they promised me, the Speaker that night, he said "Mr. Rayno, if you join the Kearsarge Regional," he said, "There will always be a school in Wilmot Flat—a grade school in Wilmot Flat. It may be only for the first 4 grades, but we guarantee you'll have a school the first four years." And that, more or less, persuaded me to accept the school. Two years after that they voted to close the Wilmot school! What could you do about it. It had gone by the Board. I always resented that.

I know I talked with Mildred Howard about that—that that was a very bitter issue.

Yup, yup. You see, Andover was invited into it too, you know. They took a vote, and I think they lost by about two votes. It was awful close.

Now, you mention that you went through Proctor Academy. Now that was a private school. How did you go to Proctor?

Well, they took day students. We were day students.

Now, did your Mom have to pay or did the Town pay?

The Town had to pay it. Something like \$200 a year. We had somebody that died before my time—a woman, named Fisk—and she left quite a little money to the Town of Wilmot, the interest to be used to help children go to High School. You see, a lot of kids in my class never went to High School. We just went to work and so forth. So they divided that interest money up among the families that did go so that helped some. My brother, at the time, was working over at the Quack Water Farm over in Wilmot, you know where that is? If you went up towards Wilmot Center there's a big place on the right—a nice set of buildings and a pond there.

Yeah, across from the old milk farm.

Right. It was. And a man from Boston owned that and my brother was a caretaker over there—brother Maurice. He worked quite a few years for him. So Maurice--course he didn't make big money--but he helped my mother quite a bit and he, at least, . . . it helped me. But when we went to graduate, they were going to take us down to Boston for an overnight show or something—Proctor was. And of course everybody was going to wear a suit naturally, you know, and we were going to stay at some bigshot's house—Jimmy Wittemore and I—and I said I wouldn't go cuz' I said I didn't got a suit, and I didn't own a suit. So there was some finagling between my brother Maurice and my mother. They dug up enough so we went to Franklin and bought a suit for me, so, I graduated in a suit. There was quite a few in our graduation that didn't have suits, but I did. I had to have it long because I wore it for about ten years or something.

Now, back in those days, John—and this would have been in the early 30s late 20s—am I correct—when you went to Proctor? You graduated in '33?

Ayah.

When you had shopping to do, other than what you might be able to get at the General Store here in Wilmot Flat, did most people go to Franklin, or New London or down to Concord?

Everybody went to Franklin. The majority, that had cars, went Friday night. That was the shopping night—every Friday. And they were ready to get down there and see who could get the parking spot nearest Woolworth's. And they'd sit in their cars and watch people go back and forth. So that was their entertainment. My sister did that. I used to laugh at her cuz' she said they went to Franklin cuz' things were cheaper than Ted Currier's store was. And I said, "Well how much?" and she said, "Ted is asking five cents a pound for sugar and you can get it down to the A & P for three." And I said, "Well how about the gas it takes you to get down there and back." "Well, we don't count that," she said. Everybody shopped in Franklin, you know.

I wanted to get back to the subject of working in Wilmot and you mentioned that there were some government projects. I assume that this would be during the 30s after you got out of school or maybe even while you in school. Tell me a little bit more about that job.

Well, it was during the depression in '30 to '33 we had a real regression—Franklin Roosevelt was the President then. He was a Democrat, and he put to Congress all this money to start these projects: CWA and PWA. And if you needed help or was looking for work even, they tried to

pick out the people from poor families that needed the income, but otherwise they hired other people. And you could only work three days a week, and you received a salary of \$16.50 for the three days.

Was that considered fairly good pay?

No, for a long time in Wilmot, the pay was essentially 40 cents an hour. That went on, seemed like, for a long time in Wilmot never raised—just stayed at 40 cents. I worked at N.P. Clough there for nine years, and I got \$19.80 a week—a check every week. And we worked six days a week from 7 in the morning till 5 at night. No paid vacation. At Christmas--the N.P. Clough was from Lebanon— they'd send us all down a jackknife. That was our Christmas bonus.

Tell me about some of the public assistance jobs here in town.

Well down at May Joneses they filled in a lot on her road down there—which was the original road— with wheelbarrows.

Now, this would be along what is now Route 11?

To the right of Rt. 11. It came right by May's and came up here. And that was a government project, and there was a gravel bank below May's, and we had to fill the wheelbarrows with gravel and push them up to where the swamp was and dump them. That was our job there. That was a project. But the biggest project I was on was the CWA--one on Kezar Lake—what's the name of that project-- Wadleigh Park. That was just a park there. How the State owned it, I don't know. There was a beach, but nobody ever used it or anything. And they spent thousands of dollars there. At one time there was over seventy guys working. They cleared off all the underbrush and the dead trees and made a beautiful ball field over there.

Now, did you work on that project?

I worked on that project, ay-up. I forgot what the pay was on that, but none of these government jobs paid very big money. It was just way to help you live, really—help support your family and so forth. Nobody got rich on it.

Did you live at home until you were married?

Yes, I did. Well, there was a time, maybe from 15 or 14, I lived at Lida Gross's with my uncle and aunt—Ernest Howard and Anna Howard. I went up there one time with my mother in the winter for an overnight stay, see, and that day my uncle let me drive the horses around, see, so I said to him as we was going around, I said, "Gee, I'd like to stay up here Uncle and work on the farm." And he said, "You would?" I said, "Yup." So, that moment I winked at my mother, but he said "John wants to stay up on the farm with us. What do you think?" and Ma said, "You want to stay up there?" And I said, "Yeah, I'd like it." All I could think of was those horses, you know. And she said, "Well, you can if you want to." So I stayed, I don't know, three or four years— until I went to Proctor.

Really?

Well, it was more convenient cuz' there was no way of getting down from there. We walked every day . . . the Morgans above us, where Earl Chandler lives—there was a big family there. Every day we walked down to the school there.

I suppose that was one less mouth to feed on the part of your mother.

That's true. She probably appreciated it, and I did too.

Now, did you work pretty hard on the farm?

No, he was a good fellow to work for. Every summer, one day during the summer on a Saturday, Wilmot Flat would go down and play Potter Place in baseball. That was the big event of the year, you know. I used to fight with my uncle because we'd be hayin' then, see. And I'd say about three weeks before, "Hey, Unc, we got a ball game next Saturday, or three weeks from Saturday." "I don't know boy, we'll see how the hayin's going." You know, he'd never say "yes." And right up to the last day almost, he'd start cutting hay so I knew damn well I'd need to get it in. But that morning--my aunt got after him, I guess--he'd say, "Well, you can go to your ball game there, but you'll have to work Sunday on the hay." I said, "That's alright. I don't care. I want to play ball."

Now his name was what, John?

Ernest Howard. He married my mother's sister.

You mentioned to me before we were taping here, another government project that you worked on during the Depression. That was putting up some towers?

Yes, some. I guess they called 'em, we called 'em, light towers. But they were steel frames. They had to be all put together—probably six-foot sections, probably twenty feet in the air, and there would be a spotlight on top of them-- blinker light—and we'd run wire down the pole—sometimes it was a mile— we'd dig ditches and lay it in there, and I helped put up six of them, I remember.

Whereabouts?

On Kearsarge, I worked. And I worked in Salisbury on a couple, I guess. I worked at the Stone House Hill which I mentioned. I worked in Danbury on one.

Now Stone House Hill would be in the general area of where Grace Hill Road would be?

Well, there used to be a road—don't think it's open now—from Pleasant Lake that went up to the Stone House. That was a general road but there was another that went up from Wilmot Center that went up there, too. They did away with that one down there by the lake. I guess a lot of people were using it at night, see, and they didn't want 'em to.

Where else did you put up these towers?

That was about the extent as far as I went.

Were you involved in any other projects?

I had a lot of projects in town that were for nothing. I helped paint the Town Hall twice. I helped put in two different dams up here at what we call, School Pond. right across the road from Tannery Pond, there is a little water there now, but there was a big dam—a wooden dam—and it got rotted and I'd go out and tear it down, and we might be two weeks or more building it and then we'd draw in a lot of gravel dump in front of it. And I worked once on the Tannery Pond Dam doing the same thing.

Now, you worked at Colby College as part of the maintenance crew and you also were a chauffeur. Tell me about that.

I got the biggest kick out of driving for the girls. I mentioned once in an article I wrote somewhere that I got more education by driving those girls to Claremont and Logan Air Base than I ever got in school. All you had to do was listen and you heard all about it. A lot of girls used to go home weekends that lived in Connecticut or maybe New York or Massachusetts, and we would take them to Claremont, and they would board a train at Claremont junction and go where they were going, and then Sunday afternoon and night I had to bring them back. We had two girls that came from Detroit—they were freshmen. And the first time they went home I took 'em. And going through Newport going to Claremont there is a shortcut up over the hill by Kathan Gardens. So I took that road. I always did. And they said, "Mister, mister, you're on the wrong road. There's a sign right back there that says Claremont." And I says, "Well, I didn't see it. So we'll keep going perhaps we'll come out alright."

Well, in Claremont there was another railroad station—and I thought I'm gonna have trouble getting by that railroad station. So the minute they saw it, "Stop! Stop!" they said, "There's the railroad station here. I guess you've never been here before."

I said, "No, I haven't."

"Well, you better stop. You went right by it." And I said, "We'll go down the road and turn around and come back." So we went down to Claremont Junction and there was the railroad station. But they went home and told their father about it, so on Parent's Weekend, the father and mother came and made it a point to come see me. They were laughing then even about it. The father said, "I think you better practice driving to Claremont a little more." (Laughter)

Now wouldn't it have been closer to drive to the train station in Potter Place?

Well, you see, Potter Place only connected them with Boston. And all these girls come from New York and Connecticut.

John, what haven't we talked about or what haven't I asked you that you would like to share? Anything about your life, about life in Wilmot back in the 20s and 30s?

Seems as though we've talked about most everything. As I say, after you leave, I can think of a hundred things I should have said. But, as I said once before, in the winter, there was no employment for anybody around here and you either cut wood or . . . right after we was married, I worked for different people but there was no work in the winter. And I know that Raymond

Reed owned a store up here and then Frank Cutler owned it and Paul Sanborn owned it. But when Frank Cutler owned it . . .

Okay, now what store are you referring to?

Where the Post Office is now on Village Road. That was the General Store. During the winter Frank Cutler and Raymond Reed would let me charge my groceries cuz' I couldn't pay my grocery bill. So when it come spring with summer jobs opening up, well, I'd pay 'em back four or five dollars, and I'd just about get it cleaned up in the fall when I'd have to start charging again. But they were good.

Well, I would imagine you weren't the only one in that circumstance.

I wouldn't say the whole town but probably 75% of it. It was a poor town, George, a real poor town.

But they probably had to carry many people through the winter months and then just were paid back come spring like you said.

But you could apply for aid from the Overseer of the Poor. A lot of people were proud, including me, and a lot of them did apply for food and so forth. They'd give you a grocery order for \$5, and you'd take it to wherever they'd accept it, and you'd get \$5 worth of groceries each week. And then, of course, the war come along, and everything was rationed. You probably remember that. You couldn't buy nothing unless they give you a ration book—good for one pound of coffee for two weeks or something and two pounds of hot dogs or something like that. There wasn't much meat on that.

Well, thank you very much, John.

Thank you, George.

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