

**“Green Mountain Chronicles”**  
**Oral History Transcriptions, 1981-1989 (bulk: 1987-1988)**  
**MSA 199 & 200**

**Introduction**

This transcription is one of approximately 42 transcriptions of interviews with individuals conducted primarily in 1987 and 1988 in preparation for a radio program sponsored by the Vermont Historical Society entitled “Green Mountain Chronicles.”

**Scope and Content**

The transcriptions in this collection represent interviews of approximately 42 individuals conducted primarily in 1987 and 1988 by Mark Greenberg, Mary Kasamatsu, Eleanor Ott, and Tom Davis in preparation for a radio series entitled “Green Mountain Chronicles.” The series of 52 five-minute programs was broadcast by commercial and public radio stations throughout the state in late 1988 and early 1989. The earliest interview in the collection was conducted in 1981; the latest was in 1989.

The interviewers spoke with well known Vermonters such as Governors Philip Hoff, Deane Davis, and Madeleine Kunin; lesser known personalities such as Catherine Robbins Clifford, one of the first women to hike the entire length of the Long Trail; and historians such as Weston Cate. The following inventory of the collection highlights the major theme(s) of each interview. The following list of program tapes gives the title of each radio program.

The goal of the radio series was to tell the history of Vermont in the twentieth century using archival sound recordings and recent interviews. The project was undertaken by the VHS in celebration of its 150th anniversary in 1988 and was funded by a \$14,000 grant from the Vermont Council on the Humanities and Public Issues with additional support from New England Telephone Company.

MSA 199, Folder 0 contains background information on the project. The VHS website at [www.vermonthistory.org/gmchronicles](http://www.vermonthistory.org/gmchronicles) contains a list of the Green Mountain Chronicles radio broadcasts and audio files of those broadcasts.

[1988]

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dub # Tape 1, Side 1

MK: It is the 3rd, 4th, 3rd of

JC: Today's the 4th.

MK: April 3rd, um, this is an interview with John Cowles in Burlington and this is about the Long Trail. Here we go. Let's start first of all with a little bit of background about you, your family, your father was certainly originally from around here.

JC: Yes my father was originally from Vermont very much a Vermonter, northeastern part of Vermont um, Albany was his birthplace. And he grew up on a farm and he had the great opportunity of going away to um, preparatory school over at St. Johnsbury Academy which was a college preparatory school and with encouragement from a man who met him while my father was a bellhop in the Green Mountains, um, in the White Mountains, father was encouraged to go to Princeton. And after that education, became lawyer through the New York Law School which doesn't exist anymore. And father came to Burlington with a bride who had Vermont connections and um, she, Laura Cowles, was also very much interested in the area here and they settled in Burlington in 1905. My mother's musical and became the music lady of Burlington really was, and she gave concerts on the piano and taught piano too. Um, the children of many of these people that we consider mountaineers of Vermont, the builders of the Long Trail. So that's the father's background and um, my mother joined him in practically everything, this is a family of family activities. We always went to the mountains together and we climbed together all those who were able and willing. Um, one brother was diabetic so he dropped out as a real energetic hiker but my older brother, Lawrence, um, got the bug of mountains and um, he became very much interested all through his college years here at U.V.M. and he became an engineering graduate and has lived since then in Texas always going to the mountains of Colorado, say for summers and so on. And he's going to Alaska shortly to visit my son who lives up there, um, to see the mountains. So it's a mountain family. Um, we have other hobbies um, father developed in his

MK: Excuse me just a moment, did your father do a lot of hiking when he was still living on the farm? Or --

JC: No, strangely enough, no, it's a funny thing er, it occurred to me to ask him about what he knew about the mountains around him because Albany's in the valley between mountains that's on the um, Black River and it's just a hop and a skip across the mountain ridges to the nearby towns and Balvidere Mountains almost within sight and um, he was so busy, I think, farming he didn't have time to take pleasurable trips away. It was not a family that did what our family could. Father romanced a bit with my mother before their marriage at Hosmer Pond which is just a bit away from Albany. But once they got to Burlington you can't look at the mountains from this particular viewpoint here at Ledge Road that my father bought very early when there was only farm land around us here; we had seven acres originally. There wasn't another house up here except an old farm shack and father became entranced with the mountains at a distance of seeing them and he had to go out and be in them. He and I have climbed most every mountain you can see of the high peaks of the Adirondacks. But only after he had already mastered, lets say, the Green Mountains here in our backyard. Um, Mount Mansfield is only about 25 miles by car to the jumping off point to the favorite trails on the west side. To go by way of Stowe is quite a bit of a trick and um, father did go there quite often to enjoy Smuggler's Notch. He'd go by car or by the trolley that went from Waterbury up to Stowe. And he take a car sometimes to Jeffersonville and then have a wagon take him up into the Notch or hike up more often. So father got to the mountains by whatever method was then current you know sometimes he'd um, hire a wagon from Hanksville, Vermont and go up toward Camel's Hump and he would take anyway to go there including the old B & L train which went rattling up through the Lamaille valley, you know, to Jeffersonville and up to his home of course Hardwick and then on to Albany.

So, um, among his hobbies now that came out of his mountain connections was a love of the ferns and here at this house why I still have the basic fern garden that he built here. And he was very much entranced by the rare ferns and you know Vermont he claimed and has a leaflet here that was printed by the Lane Press, Vermont The National Fernery. He just had to put it in big letters, um, he knew that Vermont had perhaps the densest growth of ferns but not perhaps the wide variety of California but no other state could compete Vermont for having the real ferns everywhere in the mountains. It's one of the features of the Long Trail.

Many people don't notice this. So father and I used to climb all over the mountains looking for the rare ferns because we got quickly used to the Wood Spinulouse, you know, that you find most everywhere and we'd find some rare ferns in great profusion. This puzzled me quite because Vermont has a lot of certain ferns that are so rare that they have laws protecting them even though the florists of down-country, down in New York City and Boston, they come up here and gather pounds and pounds of ferns grabbing them up wherever they saw. Well luckily the ones they got to by road were not the ones we climbed the rocks for, of course. So fern hobby is a very important feature of father's interest in the mountains. So he'd go up a mountain sometimes more looking for a fern than perhaps looking at the view that he'd seen. He's a great charter of mountains. He like to show what you could see from the top of Mt. Mansfield and from all the neighboring hilltops of Burlington including the Ethan Allen Park which has the big tower and the Webb Estate down here which has a pine tree hill in their back yard and so on. Now you tell me what to do.

MK: Um, lets - how did he get together with James Taylor?

JC: James Taylor um, was an interesting character that we met up here in Burlington, I believe. But he was born and brought up in a region around Colgate, New York. Colgate College, excuse me, in New York. And um, he was a very brilliant scholar by the way. People didn't know that but Taylor was I think an intellectual companion to my father. And he'd come to the house very frequently and he liked music. He was a flute player, among other things. And my mother being a pianist um, loved the accompanist and so he'd play long concerts of flute here while I'd go to bed and listen to this while I fell asleep. Um, he was well acquainted with languages and liked German, my mother too who'd practically majored in German along with her music at the University of Minnesota. Er, she was an English major actually, but she was great in languages. So they would pick out all the German songs and Taylor would sing them on the mountains and that kind of thing. So that we had a lower of intellectual interests that kept us with mountains and not just the sheer achieving the summit which is a way some people enjoy mountains. The Alps and the mountaineering thing, father was not a mountaineer. We persuaded him to go some of those chimneys in the Notch. Smuggler's Notch has these narrow sharp breaks in the cliff, you know those? Well I was able to take father up there but he would

say "John no further. No, I won't go any further." So Lawrence and I would go up until we cleared up to the top of the ridge and the biggest chimney of all is Pringle's Chimney, of course. Well, what's Pringle? He was a great botanist in Vermont. Father mastered, you might say, all of the ferns using Gray's botany and Pringle's discoveries and we were amazed at what Pringle had found in Vermont, some of these very very rare ferns found sometimes nowhere else except in Japan. Matter-of-fact when I was in Japan I found some of the ferns that were considered very rare here. Japan has many more by the way of species of ferns, great families of ferns, that we don't have in Vermont. Now father (sound of chimes ringing in the background) was very careful with ferns. He knew you could not transplant ferns from the rocks but he transplanted some of the rare ferns from the depths of the valley where they were numerous and planted them in the garden here. And there was Goldies Fern, there was the Browns Holly Fern; I have a very beautiful plant growing here now, it loves Burlington, if you take reasonable care of it, you have to keep ferns moist. The Silvery Spleenwarf is another one which is a beautiful big fern, doesn't look like anything very rare but that Silvery Spleenwarf you turn over the frond is gorgeous in a silvery back that is possessed by whole families of ferns in Japan. It's the only one that I know of in Vermont that has that characteristic. And then on the rocks of Smuggler's Notch, now I don't want to tell too much to the public but there are regions of Vermont where you can find ferns that grow only in single clusters and I don't know where else they might be found. We have found a rare fern in the vicinity of Stowe, Vermont, which I've never seen anywhere else, I mean in the world. And yet it was at one time reasonably common in New England, the Climbing Fern. Um, there's another one that grows so near the trail at one point I'd hate to describe just where it is very very rare fern. I tried to persuade the Green Mountain Club to make the trail go to a different point so it wouldn't brush against-people wouldn't brush against this very rare and tiny fragile fern. It's not the Fragile Fern, there is a Fragile Fern. There is another fern which father and I, I think, practically discovered. Hearing a tale that someone had once seen it in the vicinity of Mount Mansfield, we went all over the cliffs. So father would break away from the trail and we went up into er, certain parts of Mount Mansfield, which is best not mentioned, and found this very rare fern, a lovely fern that smells like strawberries called  
it's called my common name the  
Fragrant Fern. Well I photographed the largest plant

I saw up there and then oh some 10 years later went back up to find it and couldn't find it. People steal whatever they think is rare not knowing it can't grow anywhere else except where it's presently growing. So I have confirmed that that fern is still found in Vermont but not I cannot find any of it on Mount Mansfield. It's just across the valley in a very remote region of the Green Mountains which I don't think anyone, living or dead, would know just where to find it now except possibly one park ranger that traded tales with me. He told me where some ferns grow and er, so I gave him the story of this one. So somebody, younger than I, would know where this rare fern is found. So father was a ferns expert and er, not a collector in the real sense except to make sure that those that might grow could be seen by local people here in Burlington without climbing the mountains and risking their lives. (laughter)

Father was not only a trail builder and he built or reconstructed some five trails on Mount Mansfield, the major trails that are there now. The oldest trail, I believe, was the so-called Halfway House Trail that took, was a carriage road actually to a summit house, not the later summit house which was not on the summit at all. Many of Vermont's mountains have had summit houses and um, even counting mine, Camel's Hump has had a summit house there and er, I believe Lincoln Mountain had one and um, of course we know about the one down on Mount Equinox and so on. Father saw to it that um, that trails were not only accessible to people, numerous enough so the trails wouldn't be heavily used but were also picturesque from standpoint of viewpoints along a trail. He built the Sunset Ridge Trail and mapped it out. People don't know that generally. Um, he was really the builder of the Sunset Ridge Trail which became the principle access for Burlingtonians outside of this halfway house. Old Rocky very uncomfortable um, carriage road up to well a point on the ridge that's way over near the nose. Whereas father's trails always aimed up toward the chin of the mountain. A Judge Hazelton of Burlington built a trail from Smuggler's Notch up to the old summit house but nobody ever uses it. I don't believe they use the Hazelton Trail unless it's now a ski run. But father built trails that focus on the chin of the mountain and on Taft Lodge which he had constructed. He had that built by competent builders using horse teams to draw these huge spruce logs up the mountain from the valley. And father had that constructed in

summer of 1920 after locating it the winter before when he was exploring the um, features of winter snowshoeing near the summit of Mansfield. He went to the summit of the mountain on a hike with several others and at the same time came down through this little, um, secluded um, what shall I say, kind of a plateau not far down below the summit of the mountain and he slashed a um, tree with a blaze and there marked, what he believed to be, the finest location for a shelter. And he got a judge here in Burlington, a legal colleague you might say, Judge um, Taft, Elihue B. Taft, who also gave the money at - on his home property for the Elihue B. Taft School here in Burlington. It's a very lovely school, right near the DeGrosbriand Hospital. But he got this old Judge Taft who then was unable to climb mountains, he couldn't have gone to Taft Lodge if we'd hauled him up. We didn't have lifts up the mountain then, of course. But Judge Taft um, was very difficult to carry around and um, must have been in pain because I never saw him as a very pleasant character but we took him by car all over the northern Vermont and trips because he couldn't drive himself. Father liked old Judge Taft and persuaded Taft to give the money for this lodge. The biggest lodge on the entire trail system when it was built. Sleeping well, 16 people in each of the two sides and it was segregated with men on the west side and women on the east side of the big lodge and when I was caretaker there some years later we slept as many as er, instead of the 32 people, 16 plus 16, we slept anywhere up to 70 in and around the lodge. And it was a great goal for people from Burlington to go up and spend the weekend say and stay up there. We had a caretaker almost continuously summers er, at Taft Lodge as a custom long before the trail became so used that we've had caretakers now at other trail er, lodges. But Taft lodge was considered a very fine place for people from Burlington. Go up the mountain over the top of the ridge and go back down on what was then called Profanity Trail er, and father lured all kinds of interesting people to take the trails to Taft Lodge if just to visit the place.

This picture you see is from the All Outdoors magazine featuring a photograph of my father, it's in blue which is not bad with the snow all around, blazing that tree on that occasion when um, in 1920, the winter of 1919 to 1920, he blazed a tree and spoke to his companions that we'll put Taft Lodge here. He had the mad old, er, the judge lined up and the lodge ready to build that very summer of 1920. And father climbed the mountains something like 31 times in just a couple of months. He said he set a record. Father was great to proclaim

these records you know. They weren't world records but they're records certainly for people on that mountain. He believes that he was the first one to climb to the summit of Mansfield in the winter, perhaps on that very trip. He also persuaded my mother and a lady, Miss Guffrey, to go up on the forehead of Mansfield. And I have pictures of father and these two ladies in their great wraps of long dresses, wool dresses, and the toke on the head and the big muffler and all, on snowshoes going up onto the forehead of Mansified in what father called the dead of winter. He always used that phrase, the dead of winter. So father spread his enthusiasm from the mountains not only to other sturdy hikers like himself who would sleep out in a forester's tent at 20 below zero and think nothing of it because they'd put a fire at the base of the rock until it would reflect the heat back and he spent many a night in the mountains without any regard to the weather. I mean he would just make sure that there was snow for snowshoeing (laughter) or it was clear enough to walk instead of through mud in, er, on fairly substantial soil in the summertime but father thought the mountains were to be enjoyed the year round. He was not a summer resident (laughter) on the mountains, not at all.

MK: Um, when he and Taylor got together, there must have been quite some stories --

JC: Well, I'll tell you. I'll have to tell you about Taylor cause Taylor is a character. Now, I've told you a good deal about Clarence P. Cowles, the city judge who became a Probate Judge, matter-of-fact and who was climbing the mountain up to his, climbing mountains till um, well the summer before he died on Mansfield. And on the occasion of his death on Camel's Hump. Taylor was an intellectual and was attracted here to this little house because he was a hotel liver, a lonesome kind of loner. Taylor was a man of ideas. He loved Vermont. He developed the creed of Vermont that's hanging on the wall there. He took that photograph of my house. He was a very expert photographer. He took pictures of us children climbing the staircase at Christmas occasion when we were frightened by his flash equipment. Taylor gave us our play equipment making sure it was something useful, you might say, in the mountains. For example, skis. He gave me and my two brothers, skis in the 1920's about 1921 or 2 and it was for that reason that I went across the lake to a school where skiing became the major sport. Northwood School, it's called now. It was then the Lake Placid Club

School. In the heart of those beautiful mountains, the entire surrounds of that school was for skiing really. And it became the sight of the winter olympics in 1932. So Taylor came out here on many occasions to have fun with us kids giving us something in return for his being, you might say a kind of a star boarder, came on short notice and we always made an extra place for him and somebody would shout from the livingroom "Oh here comes Jim Taylor, here comes Uncle Jim." We called him Uncle Jim and he was going to bring a football to us, we were never much on football or he'd bring snowshoes or he'd bring skis and other kinds of equipment. Um, packs to carry er, our equipment in and so on. Taylor was a great family man of his own kind but considered this his family in Burlington. He had a sister, Marie, that he was very fond of and talked a great deal about who in turn had a son, his nephew, and we heard a great deal about Marie. And his father was a professor at Dartmouth over in Hanover whom I had occasion to meet. Taylor founded the Green Mountain Club. He got a number of people together, he knew my father's interest in mountains prior to the founding of the club and they met, I believe, at the Hotel Vermont and Taylor was living then there but he moved over to the Vanesse before it burned down. Taylor, to telescope his life, was interested in beatification of the roadsides of Vermont. Unknown to people here now in this present generation, he had a car. People say he never had a car.

MK: Let's wait just until the --

JC: Oh, the furnace --

MK: The furnace kicks off, yes --

JC: Yeah, I could shut it off if you want cause it won't get that cold. This place is very well insulated by oak siding and --

MK: Turn it off?

JC: Yeah, turn off the master switch.

MK: Or I can turn it down to --

JC: No just turn it, well, turn off the master switch, it won't be that hot now.

MK: Okay.

JC: Just flip this switch up or down.

MK: Up here?

JC: Yeah, good. I'm sorry.

MK: Thank you. (laughter)

JC: Now we'll go back again.

MK: Okay.

JC: Are you recording?

MK: Yes, it's on.

JC: Oh. To pick up on Taylor. He was a Phi Beta Kappa from Colgate University and um, quite a scholar. Father and he would philosophize but Taylor would walk up and down the livingroom here many times chanting his new slogans to hand to the governor. He and Governor Weeks of Vermont were very close and um, Taylor gave him and others the idea of beautifying the roadsides. Taking down the signs was one of them. Another was planting trees. He got the women's clubs interested in this kind of thing and he gave lectures and talks all over the state and he pranced up and down the state in his little Model T Ford um, making friends up and down the state to support his ideas. Not so much for the Green Mountain Club perhaps on the state wide circuits as it was for getting acquainted with the state and its people. Um, he um, founded the Green Mountain Club because he wanted as he said to make the mountains a larger part of the life of the people. He didn't mean just Vermonters. He recognized that out-of-staters like himself could come and adopt the state. He adopted Vermont very definitely. He developed this creed um, which I will give you a copy of it before you go, it may be good to hear but the creed of Vermont praises its people and its mountains. Would you like me to recite it here because I think it's very good.

MK: Yes.

JC: To my knowledge it's not been published lately and I think people have forgotten it's not in the publicity of Vermont um, it's not on a map of Vermont as you'd expect to find, we know that Hermit Thrush is the bird and of course that's another thing I should mention (sound of rustling through papers in the background). Each of these people contributed something in a different way. Father was into ferns, um, Taylor was um, the intellectual and he was the orator and the writer, you might say he was the publicity man. He belonged

to the Greater Vermont Association, he may have even founded it. I know he was the secretary of the local Chamber of Commerce for example. He was like the regional rotary man who got everybody together over ideas. And one of them of course was making Vermont a great place for recreation and for enjoyment of its mountains. Particularly its mountains. Not a hunter, not a fisher but he was a hiker and he found enough people here in Burlington, I should give you the names of some of those that helped originate, you might say, the whole idea of a continuous trail from Massachusetts to Canada. But the first impetus of the Green Mountain Club was to develop trails on those mountains we knew best here within the sight of Vermont.

Here's Taylor's creed (sound of chimes ringing in the background) for the State of Vermont. And at the top is a um, logo it's the seal of the Greater Vermont Association but within it is the seal of the State of Vermont with a pine tree and a cow and the shocks of corn and the mountains beyond. With the phrase Freedom and Unity, Vermont's motto. And the circle representing the spirit of the Greater Vermont Association was Team Work For Vermont Development. There is a development commission now here in Montpelier associated with the State and are getting state funds. It's the PR branch, you might say, of the legislature. But Taylor's idea was then was not anything legislative or um, state operated. It was a thing of from the grass roots really. We believe in Vermont in the glory of her mountains and the richness of her valleys. In the beauty and the power of her lakes and streams. We believe in the people of Vermont in their honor and their vigor. In their passion to begin, their steady resolution to complete large affairs in peace and war. We believe in the name Vermont forever symbol of the best in fruits of field and arts of shop and gifts of mine in men and the deeds men do. We pledge that by thought and act we will magnify our state and the life of our people. Bind our scattered valleys with easy roads and with inviting paths through mountain fastnesses put our streams to labor that our sons may work at home. Aid nature with such wise skill that far distant peoples may share her bounties. Open with welcoming hospitality the pleasures of our land to all who seek new life in body and in mind. We pledge that as our fathers won freedom so we and our children will win perfect unity for the people of our state. Make the common life ever richer in its rewards. And ever render larger service to the nation with which Vermont has cast her lot. I think that

should be republished annually at least and given to our school children as a basic document um, of what Vermont stands for not what we hope for it necessarily but what we would believe to be the course that Vermont could best chart. We're not going to be the largest state, the most popular state, the richest state you name all the aspects of Texas, California or Alaska (laughter) but we're going to be one that has a dedication to the natural beauty of the state and that was Taylor's fundamental believe. Taylor, um, not only enlisted the help of the governor and the Greater Vermont Association that followed as a result, I'm sure, of Taylor's impetus and of course, the local association here, the Chamber of Commerce, and Taylor with his car got our family out into the mountains in ways that weren't easy for us without a car. He had a Model T Ford which we helped him crank on occasion, making sure we didn't get kicked by that little vehicle. And he would back up them hills of Vermont because the Model T couldn't forward up a hill, you know, the gasoline fed (sound of a door opening in the background) by gravity from underneath the seat the tank. So we often times would run to the nearest stream and get water for the boiling over of his little car as it labored up the biggest hill into Smuggler's Notch. And I remember distinctly putting those big boulders under those wheels as he backed up and would have to have more water added to the front end of the car which was then going up last. So we'd get up Harlow Hill um, and I could tell a lot of tales about Taylor's interesting little pranks. He was a very good humorist. He had a canoe parked down here at Peter's Landing at Queen City Park here just south of Burlington near Red Rocks and he told us boys oh we could use that canoe anytime we wanted to. He was a great canoeist himself and he enjoyed going out canoeing and enjoying the beauty of the Adirondacks as well as the Green Mountains. The Adirondacks are much more impressive from the lake, of course, as you know. And we always found that um, a little rental was due on that canoe so we helped take the canoe out of hawk from Mr. Peters who, of course, wanted a little rental for the storage of that canoe that Taylor left there indefinitely and sometimes didn't use because he couldn't afford to. Taylor was not ever um, a rich person. He spent his money, I think, on friends, on family like ours and for his car and for getting out in the mountains and for his photographic equipment. He has some very good equipment. Perhaps for his flute, but that was an old wooden one and I can't say that he spent much on music cause he used the music we had here. Um, Taylor was a lot of fun. And everybody loved him, um, they'd

build a lodge, of course, and called it Taylor Lodge. James P. Taylor Lodge still stands well, I guess it's been burned down recently and um, I think, replaced it now but it's been burned a couple of times because it's a little too accessible through Nebraska Notch there north of Mansfield. Father and Taylor did a lot of thinking and planning and um, let's say, got people interested in the whole concept of the Long Trail being completed. And Taylor had phrases for it, of course. ~~Jo Peak~~ ~~Bust~~; we heard that until we thought that was the end of the trail until somebody got the idea, no, we got to J. Peak alright and all these helpful people have constructed trail, let's take it on up to Canada. Well, that wasn't Taylor's original idea. But father did a lot of scouting out of trail, um, especially between Mansfield and Camel's Hump um, and got Will Munroe, the teacher from New Jersey who bought a farm up on the side of Camel's Hump to enlist the help of people to develop trails on Camel's Hump which Munroe insisted be called ~~Gandy Line~~ and I still think of it as ~~Gandy Line~~. (silence) *Couching Lion*

I'd like to tell a few tales about my father. He was a practical joker --

MK: Yes, one thing I'd --

JC: Would you like to hear? --

MK: Yes, I would. But, when your father was cutting the trails.

JC: Yes.

MK: How old were you then? You said you helped him.

JC: Well, I helped him mainly as far as material help goes from the time I was in college. I started college in 1929 and I always came back to Burlington while I was going away to school. When I was over to Northwood, for example, I'd be here every summer going up mountains with father. All through the 20's, oh that was when I was pre-college. Let's say from the time I was in junior high school, um, early 1920's, I was up in those trails all the time with father. He would say: "John, let's go up the mountains this afternoon" just like that. Let's go up into the mountains and the mountain would usually be Mansfield. Unless he'd say let's go up and visit the professor. So we'd go up to visit Professor Munroe any season come what it may. The old professor you know retired to this farm and had a cluster of books around him as I do here. He had an awfully good library, especially in my specialty, psychology, which I was then studying in

(Tape 1, Side 2)

college, you see. So I'd go up there and ask the old professor for suggestions. That's where I learned about John Deery, for example, (laughter) and his educational philosophy. And I picked up German and French books there at the recommendation of Professor Munroe. And he was a very apt and able diplomat too, by the way. Munroe was an Ambassador to Bulgaria. He wrote a book on Bulgaria and its people. People don't know that. I think that the old man wasn't just a trail builder or an ex-um, teacher who um, not only lived on a mountainside but would wear a smock and look the part of a dog lover cause he had 13 full blooded dogs as his companions. That was his principle life, er, living with this family of dogs. And we'd go up and visit that old professor, father and I, er, father on snowshoes and I on skis, let's say, we'd go up for North Duxbury after riding the bus down and walking across a trestle making sure the train wasn't coming and then we'd go up through the valley from North Duxbury up to the old professor's farm. It wasn't much of a farm but there was a garden and that professor had wild flowers abundant in that garden. He grew the Edelweiss straight over from Switzerland. He grew the rare ferns and he grew flowers that were hearty at that latitude. They were pretty hearty plants he had and he had an old barn, by the way, with curtains of burlap that separated these little cubicles, you might say, where he could sleep overnight quite a crowd of people. He was a hostelry to those that he was friendly with and any Green Mountain Clubber, of course, would be automatically welcomed there and many people from out-of-state. The professor knew people from all over the world. He'd let them come up and stay whole summers with him. He had a sister who lived with him during his, the professor's, ailing years er, and he gradually paired down the heap of dogs but some of the dogs are important to know as part of the professor's life that surrounded him after he'd built trails up there. He was a great bird lover. He knew all the birds you ever hear in Vermont and he taught my father the birds as well as the ferns and then father in turn imparted his fern knowledge to me so that I'm now a real fern hobbyist in every sense of the word. Um, the old professor had a couple of huge dogs. He had an enormous um, well he's called a um, a Basque-Pyrenees white dog that is as big as a cow, big as a pony. He was the president of the Pyrenees Club of America. I mean of America when I think they were just forming and their headquarters were down in New Jersey somewhere. And he had a Newfoundland, he had a Black Retriever, he had a Sheltee, he had Collies one after

the other and called each one Scottie Munroe. For some reason was very very fond of the Collies. They are a little easier for him to um, pat and have on his lap and um, be charming with um, and make them a member of the family than other breeds of dogs. They were perhaps more active, either too small or too large. He had a Saint Bernard that was so big and um, roared so much I was terrified when the dog would come to the gate and practically leap over it after me. Um, he didn't need any watch dogs. (laughter) He had them. That professor would come out and call the dogs off when my father and I showed up. "Oh Judge Cowles" he never called him by his first name. It wasn't Clarence. "Judge Cowles, it's so good to see you and John too. Well, come right in", you know, and he'd um, have a sample of his homemade preserves. He'd have wild raspberry preserve or gooseberry or something on the table and I'd enjoy the library while father and the professor talked about the visitors to the mountain and the trails that are being built and so on. Well, we got to like very much the Couching Lion and um, I got to know the trails there about as well as I did the ones on Mansfield. But father spent more time on Mansfield. That was his mountain. Um, we'd call him the Man of the Mountain, of course, at times but in the same sense Munroe was the Man of Couching Lion, no question about it. The trail down off the summit of Couching Lion was called Munroe Skyline Trail. It was a skyline trail and that was the design of the Long Trail throughout its entire length was to stay at the peaks. Sometimes you have to slab, as father calls it, the side of a mountain um, so that you're down off the peak because the peak is inaccessible or it's just too threatening to be a good hiking trail. Mansfield was broad shoulders and um, all kinds of points of interest so you wouldn't think of going, slabbing that mountain although there are trails slabbing now like the Trail, you might call it the subway and some of those other picturesque trails on the sides of Mansfield. But I must come back and tell you more, I think, of the tricks and stunts that father participated in. He was a bit devilish now and then. And he liked, as I say, to climb the chimneys of the Notch. I don't think you had it on tape but um, Lawrence and I would persuade him to go up these chimneys as if to look for ferns, of course there's no ferns in those awful rugged chimneys. They're all solid rock and then you have these loose rocks down beneath and you'd have moss covered edges and water dripping down through and it was not very good climbing and we didn't take a rope. We're not, you might call us, rock climbers at all. Father didn't have any use for the pitons

and the rope and the carabeanas and all that kind of thing. Well, we'd go up there to where we couldn't turn around and go down even and we'd observe the birds. Now the ravens are new up here now but at that time we had hawks. And they were threatening. They'd dive down at, after you and it was quite exciting, I'd say, to go up these chimneys, looking as if for ferns, (laughter) and finding if possible hand-holds, they were pretty scarce um, and finding the rock sometimes crumble where you thought it was solid but, um, father didn't encourage that kind of sport. And since then, of course, people have been climbing the Elfen's Head and making a sport out of anything that challenges the rock climbers um, and they have their achievements noted in the press. But we weren't that type. We went up generally looking for ferns usually in the non-chimneys regions of the Notch and we found some awfully good ones and they're still there. I'm glad to say that people aren't energetic enough, you might say, to get out of their cars and do more than look at the scenery. But they don't want to climb in and amongst it. (laughter) Um, the Hale Brook Trail, for example, is a trail on Mansfield (sound of chimes ringing in the background) that's very very steep and if you want to go up the mountain quickly and directly, you go to the height of the Notch, so to speak, and take a trail there which has been washed out by a landslide and it's being reconstructed, the Bear Pond Trail. Or better still, take the Hale Brook Trail from the Big Spring. The Big Spring is a big spring, it's the biggest one in Vermont and probably in the northeast and it flows at 44 degrees. I happen to know because they had a sign for sometime so somebody stole it. 44 degree water the year round and we always take our friends up to the Notch. That is the sight of Vermont to take people to from Burlington if you're interested in the scenery. Take them up to Smuggler's Notch. Go one way, go up through Jeffersonville and do the roadway that's the easiest approach and then come down that spiral that's very very steep, you wouldn't want to come up it and ruin your car unnecessarily down to Stowe say then shortcut back to Burlington one way or another. So father um, conceived of taking friends up to the mountains, I don't know where he'd park the car or take a bus or train or whatnot but there's some interesting stories of his playing little tricks on people because he liked to persuade people harmlessly, let's say, to do things they wouldn't otherwise do. Now for example, one of the local lawyers, a colleague of his, a young fellow, and um, another friend of his were persuaded to go up to Taft Lodge for an overnight one time.

Well, they knew it was a summer thing to do and therefore you wear summer clothes and they were ex-golfers, I guess, so they showed up in white kneww pants. Well, they came up the trail of um, Mansfield and I'll tell you more about the Cowles' Trail, they didn't come up the Cowles' Trail then it wasn't built then, but they came up the trail and went down Profanity Trail, mostly on the seat of their pants. Um, water running down the trail with you, you know, you join the water flow necessarily cause that's where the rocks are. That's where the bare steps are where you can find what you're putting your feet on and when they got down to Taft Lodge I could see those chaps were never going to climb a mountain in any form whatever again because they had ruin their clothes, they'd done far more exercise than they'd probably ever done in their life in a daytime certainly on a golf-course. Father called the mountains his golf-course or the garden was his golf-course (laughter) and er, to get these duffers, he called them to go to the mountains was really quite an achievement. While one winter, father persuaded, I think it was, Craig Burke who was one of the er, owners of lots of territory up in Mansfield region. He was a lumberman. And Craig Burke didn't know the mountains at all well and father, of course, gave the impression at least of knowing them exceptionally well. So one winter afternoon, pretty late, father always got to the mountain a little late, um, he took this man up Mansfield, he intended to go up Mansfield each of them carrying parts of the stove for Taft Lodge. That was back about 1920 or 21 somewhere around in there. So Craig Burke was , you know, he was a sturdy chap he'd been all through the woods without a trail, so he knew he was safe enough with father to take him up to Taft Lodge cause the trails weren't built then and of course in the winter time you couldn't find a trail if it were there. Father followed his nose in the general sense of direction. Well, they hinked until almost dark and father started to um, listening to the man with him so he says, "Well Judge, aren't we there? Where's the lodge?" Father said, "oh, we're prettily near there" and as he often told me it's just around the next corner. That was one of his favorite stunts to tell children climbing the mountain, well, don't get impatient, don't get tired, it's just around the next corner. Well, he told this man it's just around the next corner and here he was struggling under this heavy heap of iron, the stove, and then father say a break in the clouds just before the sun went um, completely over the er, mountain and became dark. He said "by George," that was his phrase, he said no, "by Jove." "By Jove Craig, I think we're on the wrong mountain." Well, lo and behold they were. They were over on Spruce Peak, the part of Sterling Mountain that's now covered with ski trails and um, father had to take the man down that

mountain, no trail, he'd gone up an old lumber road, you see, so it looked like the well, the base of Mansfield Trail up to Taft Lodge which did start on a lumber road. Took-um down into the Notch and back up and they finally were, I guess, practically crawling up the mountain to Taft Lodge and you know you can hike at night when the snow's on the ground. You can see your way. There's light enough to hike safely, let's say, if there's a little starlight um, or moonlight even better. The moon doesn't last very long and where you want it to be. So hiking in the winter is something most people don't realize you can do at nighttime and you cannot, because of foliage and other darkness and a dark surrounding, you can't do in the summertime. Don't ever try it, if nightfall catches you in the mountains you'd better have the proper equipment to stop right where you are as I did on the Appalachian Trail. You really have to stop where ever you are. There's no point in stumbling over roots and rocks. But snow is protective, it's soft and with snowshoes and all and um, in light of the sky, it's not impossible without the foliage do a lot of hiking at night and people should be encouraged to try it in fact our um, Catamount Ski Association has um, discovered you can do the entire length of Vermont. Um, in starlight or moonlight um, there must have not been in moonlight all the time on skis on that new trail, the Catamount Trail, which is a kind of skyline trail like the Long Trail, doesn't follow it all the way but it does an awfully good job and um, I'm a member of that association cause I think it's a great thing to get people out on skis to ski day or night um, especially in the wintertime when you aren't harming the vegetation as you might in the summertime with heavy boots and so on.

MK: That's actually, if I could interrupt you for a second --

JC: Yes.

S. ■: (whisper - unclear) (laughter)

JC: Oh, well that's that story. Now another story is another better one which my tenant here enjoys hearing because I've told it to a number of people she has it well memorized and can tell it better than I can.

MK: You can start it when we flip the tape over.

JC: Oh, you ready for --

MK: (unclear)

JC: Now an important part of that story um, which accounts perhaps for my fathers being disoriented. He's not the kind to get disoriented very easily and I'm not sure I

should say this about him because he was not um, a person who like the bottle at all but, you know, on that particular trip he stopped at Harlow's house at the top of Harlow Hill. I don't know how they got there except by sleigh perhaps from Stowe and um, they had these stove equipment and that would be the place where they started walking from was Harlow's house. Well, Harlow was a genial, hospitable person, I can remember and um, he served father um, I guess, um, a little catnip of something that was cider or whatever it was. It was a little stronger than water, I'm sure. And father always confessed that Harlow was very generous and um, they had a little nip of um, Catskill brew, or something like it before he went up the mountain and he'd laugh and say, "well, I don't ever get disoriented." This was a very dark night, you know, and there were trees there and um, the trail looked like the Taft Lodge um, but he excused, but that was an honest getting lost and I think it was aided and abetted as somewhat by that little bit of refreshment that Mr. Harlow provided these two indomitable hikers in the dead of winter as father would call it (laughter). I must tell you another story. This is a summertime one. Um, shortly after Taft Lodge had been built and used and gotten quite well known and father always thought of himself as being um, not only the father of the lodge as he was for its construction and getting the funds for its building. But he kept going back up there and he provided caretakers in the form of my older brother and me, each of us had two sessions up there. Lawrence and Glen Aiken were there for a couple of summers and then I was there with Birdus Dean and later by myself. Um, we enjoyed being caretakers at this lodge because at that time it was surrounded by nice balsam trees. It was a lovely place and um, you can't imagine a summer as I had one summer alone, um, hearing the water rushing down off the mountain and sounding like human voices and you go out and take blankets with you and flashlights, you think somebody is lost, turns out nobodys lost at all, and the people up at the hotel didn't hear a sound and they didn't think anybody was lost but you have this alarming sense of um, of not only a responsibility for the shelter and with a kerosene stove which could be flooded and set fire to the cabin there, you didn't leave it very often very long. Well, I'd been a caretaker up there um, sometime and father thought then as part of my caretaking it might be nice if he installed mattresses at least in some of the bunks so that the ladies when they came up they wouldn't be sleeping on these very harsh, there're really soft, balsam bows. You'd gather balsam from somewhere off the side of the mountain, not near the lodge of course, and then bring back these bows with the soft tips upward and cut with very few real substantial branches. And um, balsam on top of these poles were the way of forming very very comfortable bunks. Anybody going up there when a caretaker was there could

rent blankets and they wouldn't have to carry a sleeping bag, they wouldn't have to carry anything literally except per haps their food. And many times I had cabineers go up there with things they couldn't cook. They'd come up there with two pails full of chicken in parts, you know, hoping to have a chicken roast or there's no way to do it in a shelter that has only a little stove with four little griddles on top of a rectangular stove that father had carried up the mountain (laughter). Well, one time he'd started up the mountain kind of late carrying some more of those mattresses. He'd made many trips with me while I was caretaker there and I'd meet him down at um, the foot of the trail in Smuggler's Notch and um, he'd drive up with the car we then had and um, take these mattresses up that had been purchased at the Army-Navy store down at Sall Evans on Church Street, no less. And he got a bargain, I'm sure. They were nice mattresses, very substantial and I didn't like them. They were too thick and too unyielding, you know, they weren't comfortable, the balsam was much better. So I'd prefer balsam but anyway we had these mattresses on and father always would try to get mother to go up there. Well, mother wasn't much of a climber in her later years. She was diabetic and pretty weak and um, would stumble easily and so on so that mother didn't ever get to know Taft Lodge except pretty much from a distance and the pictures and so on, experiences we had. And she'd go with father to bring us supplies and um, we'd send them by um, parcel post to the summit house by the way and I'd go up across the ridge and take back kerosene um, on my back in the middle of a lightning storm, think nothing of it cause that was my little footpad of the day was to go over and catch mail at the hotel and take the supplies down to the shelter and check with them on who'd been around and so on. We had some very interesting experiences. Well, this time father and I decided we'd go up the mountain carrying some mattresses late in the afternoon. Father never worried about the time much cause he knew, well, we knew the trail very well. It's a two mile trail from Barnes Camp up to Taft Lodge. Well, we hadn't anymore than started in this lovely late summer afternoon and down the trail, wouldn't ya know, came this family of people in street clothes who had considered themselves having accomplished a tremendous achievement. They had taken, I guess, all day to go up to the lodge and come back down again looking awfully tired and slightly muddy and so on. And they say this elderly gentleman and this young man, college age, starting up the mountain carrying a couple of mattresses each with one mattress rolled up and just tied on their backs. And they were startled, no little, and um, father started the conversation as he always liked to to set the scene. He said er, "well folks, how'd ya like the lodge?" And they said, "oh, it's great."

They pretended they'd hadn't any problem at all. And father said, "well, it's not far up from here, is it?" "Oh, oh, well" they said, "yes, oh yes, it's quite aways. Haven't you just started?" And father said, "no, I thought we were just about there." We hadn't gone a quarter of a mile, you know how that first half mile, um, there's a marker every half mile, we hadn't even reached that. And they looked more startled. And they said, "well, what are you carrying these mattresses for?" And father looked a little tired and I looked even more tired, of course we really put it on. Father said, "well, I can't ever sleep without a mattress and I understand they don't have mattresses up there so I thought I'd better take my own." Well, that's before the day of down sleeping bags weighing two and a half pounds, you know, for quite good comfort. Well, father said, "well, I guess we'd better go on. We don't have anywhere else to sleep, any other place to sleep." And they said, "well, you won't get there before dark." Father said, "oh, no! Will I get lost?" They said, "Well, you're sure to fall off that trail somewhere with that load. You'd better turn around and go home." Father said, "no, no I'm determine and my son won't let me turn around." He said, "we're going to go up to that lodge and see the lodge and have a nice sleep in it. We hear the air's good up there." Father said, "I like mountain air." He always said that to people. "Don't you love the air?" He'd take a big deep breath and say, "oh, isn't that wonderful, John." You know, he had a little tendency to nasal guitar or whatever it was and he'd go up the mountains and he'd clear his sinuses, you know. He just loved the mountains and he'd sleep um, no longer for the comfort of the mountains, um, because he had to be up in the morning to see the sun rise (laughter) of course. Well, those people, I think, went home telling a tale about the elderly gentleman and young man carrying the mattresses up the mountain and sure not to arrive at a lodge two miles up the mountain and they just barely started (laughter) at sundown. Well, we got there I must have to tell you. It was a perfectly safe landing (laughter) and father turned the mattresses into the comforts of the shelter that I was caretaker for. Well, he did other strange things like going down Hale Brook in the winter sitting on snowshoes, you know. You wouldn't think of doing that um, in this day in age. You'd have a ski run all mapped for you and all carefully graded and um, with a lift to take you up there but nope, father, even when he was tired, would still do these crazy things that would require an awful lot of skill and strength and I never have yet recalled an occasion, I've tried to, when he ever got injured on the mountains (sound of chimes ringing in the background) and I've never heard of anybody in my family getting ill, catching a cold or getting really seriously sick on the mountains. I suppose there is such a thing as

mountain sickness but not in these low mountains. These aren't very high. But it's a fact that when you're hiking and using your system as you do um, you're in pretty darn good shape if you are an ex-gardener as father was who goes out every morning to till the ground and climbs the mountains just for fun. Um, up until his death at the age, what was it, 87, I guess. He was climbing those mountains with as much vigor as anybody I know of half that age.

MK: He died at the age of 87 on the mountain.

JC: 1963 and he was born in 78 so that's 25 and 63, yeah 80, 88. He almost was 88. Yeah, so that was fathers best way of passing away and we all thought, we had all agreed that to have a heart attack climbing the mountains with a bunch of young people was exactly the way he would and as I myself would say want it to be. And, no lingering illness. No people moaning and groaning. His spirit was one of rejoice of someone in the family dies because they're going to a better world, perhaps. He had a great feeling for eternity and um, what's the word for um, ever living in the world beyond. That's your eternity. Um, he never had any fear of death at all. Um, he said that live the best life that you can and consider that er, if passing away um, do it in the spirit of enjoyment. He specified the hymns that should be sung and so on so forth. Wouldn't you know, the er, Oh God Our Help From Ages Past was his hymn for his funeral and for birth and death and marriages and everything else that occurred in our family cause he worshipped the mountains. Um, they represented eternity. Er, they would be certainly something that's here long after we're here and um, your youngest descendants, your great great great grandchildren can still enjoy them as you did. That's the repetitious feature of having mountains that are what were tru of your great ancestors and your descendants lives too. I don't think you can think of any other activity, certainly there's no man-made activity that can be one that can be an inheritance the way our mountains are.

Well, I've got to tell you one other story, could I?

MK: (unclear)

JC: This is about Professor Willis Munroe who was the great mountain lover, the mountain man of Camel's Hump, Couching Lion. I should keep that as the only designation for the mountains, I will. It's Couching Lion. Professor Munroe was a great trail builder in his own way. He liked to go out alone usually with one helper only. Um, he had a man that'd come up and do his garden work and his, keep the barn in shape and um, I guess, um, clean up the place at the end of the summer and so