

“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 contains a list of the Green Mountain Chronicles radio broadcasts and audio files of those broadcasts.

Madelyn Davidson
January 7, 1988

Mary Kasamatsu
Interviewer

MK I am with Mrs. Madelyn Davidson in South Barre. This is an interview for Green Mountain Chronicles on the 7th of January. Just to get started a little bit, where are you from originally?

MD A little town in the town of Barre, Websterville. That's where I was born. I lived most of my life in Barre and I've lived here in Montpelier for 35 years.

MK Okay. Tell me a little bit in terms of how you came to be working for the WPA?

MD Well, those were Depression days, and there weren't jobs available, and I had just been to college. I didn't finish college but I, my father had two children in college, and he wasn't working either. It hadn't hit Vermont too hard, but it hit my family quite hard. So, they, I read in the paper that relief agency they called it. To begin with, well it was Federal, but then they set up a state agency called VERA, Vermont Emergency Relief Administration and a woman named Mary Jean Simpson, who later became Dean of Women at UVM, was the head of the women's professional projects. I read that she had set up this office and what they were going to be doing and I thought goodness there's jobs there somewhere. So I hitched a ride in a milk truck in Barre and came down to Montpelier and talked with her and she was very nice, very crowded office in the State House. There were two agencies. One was under, well under the Relief Administration, but one was for surplus commodities and so that office was part of the office we had and it was jammed full of desks and papers and everything, but Miss Simpson, a true Vermonter and had the Craftsbury twang and a lovely person, and she was so very nice to me, and, well, she didn't say she needed people, she just (which I knew she did or rather I found out she did). But that they were so crowded she didn't know where she'd put a desk, then they had no typewriters. So I don't remember really why I went back right off, but I did, I think within one day or two days, and I said to her, I'm back again. Well, she said, "What can I do for you?" when I said, "Well, you know, I got a typewriter for graduation from high school." And I said, "If you have a spot to sit me down, I can take my typewriter and help you out." "Alright," she said, "Come in tomorrow." So I started, and I was with her until the agency closed, and I got promotions all over the place. So it ended, of course, it was just starting, but they set up these projects all over the state for professional people and women, and when we were talking the other day you mentioned sewing projects. Well we had them. We had, do you want me to get into that?

MK Yes, please.

MD Into, well, we had mattress projects. We made mattresses even.

MK What did you make mattresses out of? What were they filled with?

MD We had cotton. The Government furnished us with materials. We would put in a requisition. The state headquarters, towns worked through their overseers and we worked through the overseers of the towns. That way it filtrated information out through the places where it had to go and then we would get requests and write the projects for the towns. We had to write these projects and have them signed by the town officials and the overseers had to estimate the number of people we were to appoint. And you know its difficult when you've never made a mattress. Anyway we would get the projects made up and signed and shoved out of the governor's office. Aiken was governor at that time. He'd sign them in a hurry and get them out you know. We'd get approvals back and call them, and they'd get the women lined up, and they all had to furnish working quarters, and usually they were in the city halls, town halls and sometimes churches. Basements, any old thing to get these people to work. And I can't remember really where we got the sewing machines, but we got them. So I would figure it was probably through the Federal Government. They didn't mess with us much. What I mean is when they approved the project they left it for you to do. They did send, why I will call them now, inspectors. That isn't what they called them. But they'd go out with us or sometimes alone to be sure we were doing what we said we wanted to do. They, I would say now, they policed. But at that point we just felt they were checking to see where the money was going. Was it going where we said it was going? And then we had headquarters here that, well, it was under the United States Treasury really, not under WPA. They set up an office in Montpelier and all the checks, all the salary checks were written here. We were under Federal Government as far as our employee was concerned. This is something I will never forget. The National, of course our salaries under Federal rules and regulations were \$18.00 a week. Now state workers and National Life workers were very concerned about our salaries. So they sent a delegation each of them to our, we call them administrator, that was his title and I remember that so well. I couldn't figure how the State of Vermont would want our salary decreased. They had nothing to say about it so why were they saying anything. The poor administrator couldn't do anything.

He'd probably, don't know whether he wanted to or whether he didn't. He couldn't. It was, you were told this is what you are going to do to administer this program. This is what they had to do. I mean it sounds dictatorial, but it wasn't. It was the same all over the country, which was good. It could have become political. It could have.

But anyway, we called on the governor a whole troop of them and, no they called on the administrator a whole troop of government people, top people and made their case. They said I'm sorry, I can't do a thing about it and I think if he could, he wouldn't have. If they said these men and women are going to be paid \$18.00 a week and gee! you know that was a lot of money. The people under WPA working on the streets and the gutters and shoveling and digging ditches earn \$9.60 a week. But see, we were administrative, and it was under Civil Service. I mean they weren't. So we were controlled differently than, than we controlled the people that we paid that did the work out. They worked in libraries. They, I remember a project in Rutland where they set everything up on microfilm; all the town records and in some towns they had had fires and we tried to reconstruct records so they'd have a complete history of their town. We had a writer's project that put out the Vermont Guide. I was very proud of that.

MK That was a really interesting book.

MD Yea. And then we had art projects like...

MK Tell me about those a little bit.

MD Yea, the murals in the Waterman Building were done by our people and now the man that headed that project was Pierre Zwick. He was a well-known artist in his day. He wasn't an old man, but the depression hit so his day was over really. And he, they did the murals in the Waterman Building. They did murals in Post Offices. Had to be, couldn't be private. I mean it had to be public buildings and everything that we worked on had to be for the public, for the State of Vermont. So there was nothing you know that could be done illegally or would be done illegally that way. I mean nobody—for instance, like a town clerk could have an assistant in his office, but they were checked to see that what they were working on was City of Montpelier records and work and not some personal business for the town or city clerk. I mean, we weren't suspicious, but we had to see that it was done right.

MK In terms of the women who worked on a ~~selling~~^{sewing} project, how were they chosen? Were they skilled sewers, seamstresses?

MD They had to be, we had a good supervisor for the State, and she lived here in Montpelier. I don't remember her last name, but her first name was Martha, and I used to ride with her a lot. I didn't have a car way back then. During, over the years it did become a little political in our headquarters were moved from Montpelier to Rutland. And I didn't move over there because I didn't know if I wanted to for over a year. And so I had to go to headquarters a couple days a week so I would go one day, I'd ride with her and she would, her headquarters, being the State supervisor, she had to report in the same as I did. Although I was on the administrative payroll, but hers was another, but under the State headquarters. So she had to go and so I'd ride with her and so that was easy and then I stayed with the head of the whole program, Lois Greer. She rented a house and she used to have me stay with her, so it was real nice. It didn't cost anybody anything and they let me stay in Montpelier you see that way.

MK So you travelled around a lot then sort of checking on different problems?

MD Well after, after I got my car and after Rutland, they promoted me fast and I, yea, I travelled. I was the head of the Women's Professional Division which meant a lot of people, a lot of people, hundreds of people. I can't remember now, I did have records, a lot of records. I had a card index of every project, now many they employed and the names of the supervisors. I kept all that for a while and then I got to moving around to much so I destroyed it all.

MK Do you remember, just generally a wild estimate, how many of the say sewing projects there might have been around Vermont?

MD Oh well, we have 251 towns, do we? Well, I'd say we had at least, some towns we had more than one. I would say we had about 400 probably. And we had to have a minimum of sewers and so, but no maximum. As long as we had the equipment and the space and the supervision. The supervision was very important. We had to produce so much and people had to be capable and physically able to, I mean we weren't an agency that could employ people just to keep them, their hands busy. They had to produce and then you see we turned everything we made over to the overseers so we weren't badgered with requests for this and that and this and that. And the overseers were doing, they were good. I've always supported the overseers of Vermont. They did their jobs.

They knew who needed, like Nellie Belleck here in Barre. She knew everybody that needed anything and she knew those that applied that didn't. So she really administered her program beautifully. And I must say, I can't say we ever found anybody that didn't. I mean the times were different. We were doing something important and needed, and you wouldn't get kind of crooked involved in something like that which, I think sometimes I'd hate to be running something like that in these days. I mean I'm not being skeptical or anything, but things are different.

MK Do you think the morals of the times have changed?

MD Well, everybody was helping everybody. I can remember in Barre, because that's where I lived, my father was in the granite business. My father was a station engineer and of course, depression times he wasn't working much. I forgot what I was going to say about that.

MK You were talking about how people...

MD Oh, I know. Of course being in granite, the people employed were strong union people and my father is a strong union man. I was proud of that. I still am. But anyway, on Granite Street there was a place where they gave out groceries, the unions. And you went every week and got what you needed or what they had available I should say rather. And I used to say to my father; see in those times they didn't have the union benefits for well they have them now for, not for unemployed union members, but for strikers. In those days they were for unemployed, of course, and there was much... whose buying monuments in the depression? So I said to him, "Why don't you go out and get some of the surplus commodities at the union on Granite Street?" He said, "We can get by, let the person that needs it more have it." That's the way it was.

MK So you think perhaps today that kind of attitude doesn't prevail anymore?

MD No. Everybody helped each other you know. Even when you couldn't afford it, you gave it.

MK Yea. Did you ever meet any of the people that received any of the items that had been sewn...

MD Oh yea.

MK in the projects?

MD Oh sure, in fact a good many of them I knew. You know. In those days you knew everybody in town, especially at my age. You'd grown up in the area. Your parents had grown up in the area, and the towns weren't that large. And you all did the same thing. There wasn't much. Maybe a movie, if you could afford it. I don't know. But, yea, yea and a lot of people if they were burned out. But I will never forget this. Of course on the outside you couldn't, you couldn't sense what was going on in the city like Barre or City of Montpelier. But if you would go out like into Hardwick, into Swanton, they were hit so hard it was pitiful. No work, no money. They charged their groceries until the poor grocer was out of business almost. They wouldn't be turned out. They had to eat. Well, I remember my brother finally, he was going to college, and you just couldn't last with my father not working and everything. And you didn't, bringing up two children and not everything. In those days the salaries were not too great. So he stopped school, college and he went up to work in the, in the for the City. We didn't have town, city managers. Somebody up there that dispensed surplus commodities.

MK Where was this?

MD In Barre. We got a job in the office, and it was a WPA job, but I didn't have anything to do with that. He applied and he was qualified. Why I say I didn't have anything to do with it. You didn't do things that way in those days. If you deserved it and you needed it, you got it. You hoped. But you weren't turned down because you were the wrong family or the wrong party or anything of that kind. But once in awhile they'd have, like I can't, I will never forget, of course I was living at home. He was living at home. Poor home, poor Papa and Mama, but that's what happened. The families all got back together. The kids got out of school. You couldn't go anymore. All were trying to work. My brother would bring home, I remember this canned beef and you know, now like you and I are thinking canned beef, but it was delicious. It was just like and everything was that way. It was the best quality. I don't know who managed that or anything, but you never got something given to you like a mattress that you couldn't, that wasn't perfect. And the food was perfect. Of course you got surplus and I remember the coal. The surplus commodities people that were in our office I used to have more fun listening to those two. They'd call off, they'd check what they had allotted so much to every town in the State and they check. And this girl was secretary would say, instead of saying Groton, she would say Grow-ton you know. I just had the best time

listening to those two. And they had to double check to see that the figures were right and then it was given to the people that shipped or delivered, I guess they delivered the coal _____, all over the state. What a job that was. Getting rid of that, those commodities. And a good many times of course, a good many times, it was fragile. Like potatoes, out they went. Everything worked like clock work. They had Proctor Page. Now he later became Treasury of the State of Vermont, UVM. He was down here as Finance Director for the State. They didn't have, they had a special division anyway, he was involved with us. A good many people that went up through the ranks and became very important to the State started way back then when they were young. See this was the '30's. I would say, well Social Security started in '35. This started a couple years before that, maybe more because it took awhile a national level to get everything set up. They'd never done it before. We used to get these orders from these wheels in Washington and I loved to read that, those names you know. One later became head of the National Archives. I remember that. With my first check, I showed it to my father and we were in the dining room. And he said, "You know it's too bad you can't frame that. That's going to make history." I would love, I would have preferred to, but of course I couldn't. You had to cash them. Maybe I would have forgone the \$18.00 if I could have kept it.

MK Now really \$18.00 was not considerably about, more than what the State workers were making?

MD They got \$9.60.

MK Even the...

MD The top people? Well my boss...

MK The folks that came over to talk to the administrator from National Life.

MD Oh those people. Oh well, they didn't get any \$9.60. But they didn't get much. Now my boss Mary Jean Simpson, her salary for WPA was \$40.00 a week. That was the highest woman, the highest paid woman in the State of Vermont at the time. \$40.00 a week. Of course to me that was a lot. When I think of what they got for \$40.00 and she had, they finally got politicalized as I say. And this Proctor Page went out, and they put in a Democrat. See when something changed in the whole operation, somebody else came in and I can't remember why it changed, but it did. And so the person I worked for lost his job, and they brought in Harry

Witters and they bumped Mary Jean Simpson into Washington. They didn't get rid of her like, Harry Witters was an attorney from St. Johnsbury. He just went back to his practice. And the character they got in there was — *know from nothing*. Then it got political, boy. I remember I was, I told you I lived in Barre, and I used to go over. Well, I ran into trouble one night. I used to go like a bat because I had my family. My daughter and my husband lived in Barre. I would be gone one night, two days and one night. And it was hard. They got along alright, but I didn't like it. So this particular night, my trip, the route that I took went through Williamstown, into Williamstown Gulf. That was the fastest as far as I was concerned. We didn't have any interstate or anything. And so I was coming in through Williamstown Gulf, riding as fast as I could go. And I came across, or up to, just like that, (probably around a turn) a team of horses. And here was this car coming at me, just like this I had to pass those horses and slam and miss that car, truck or whatever. I tell you, I was like this. And I did it, but you know, I could have been smashed to smithereens or they could have and you know sometimes even now I dream and I see horses' legs up in the air. Because this would have happened. We were three vehicles and a good many horses, like six. And anyway, so then I said to myself I can't do this anymore. I just can't do it. So we moved to Rutland during Labor Day weekend. That was about a month after. I still had to travel. I had to have a girl live with us, because my husband worked in this area. It was hard. They were always leaving the girls and you didn't pay them anything. \$3.00 a week, room and board. And I lugged them from over this area and they didn't like it in Rutland. I didn't particularly, but I remember the Chamber of Commerce gave us a big party at one of the big hotels, the whole staff. It was moved. This Chamber of Commerce officials all there talking to each other, never to us. We had our dinner, and they left. I said, "Boy, what a welcome this is!" They didn't want us there. It was political. We were a bunch of Democrats and Rutland wasn't Democrat. We weren't Democrats. Nobody asked us what we were. We didn't even know. How did I know when I was that age.

MK How old were you then?

MD Oh gosh. 1930, I was probably 20, 21, yea.

MK How old was your daughter? She would have been...

MD Oh, tiny. Yea. And when we moved back, she was in the fifth grade. So, she was really tiny. But oh, it was

hard to get girls to, who were responsible. Once I had to go to Washington for a whole week. You know I never wanted to do those things.

MK Washington, D.C.?

MD Yea. I never wanted to do those things, but I had to. And so my mother came and stayed with and that was a big help. But of course my father was alone. But oh yea, I used to, I've been in my jobs, I've spent so much time in Washington as I did in Montpelier. It was kind of fun. I don't remember too much about those days, but as, when I worked for other agencies it was always fun to go to Washington. I like their eating places and places to see, people you met. I was, I went to a reception for, let's see now, it was the National Council of Small Business Administration. And I was on the Vermont Council and the first woman to serve on the National Council and so the Council was called in and we had a reception at President Johnson's office. The White House, not his office. The White House, and they had the Marine Band. I was a person of habit I guess and it was in the afternoon, and we heard all these, all the cabinets speak first and the meeting was in the White House. The reception was in the White House, but our meeting was in the Executive Building across the street. And then we were to go for the reception. It was getting late, it was like 5 o'clock and the Marine Band playing, and we personally shook hands with the President. And oh, I danced with the President. Imagine that! He said to me, "You know, my wife is up in Vermont, and here you are from Vermont down dancing with me. What do you think of that?" I said, "I didn't think I'd live that long." (Laughing) Oh, it was funny. But anyway I thought gee it's getting late, I've got to have some dinner. I didn't eat any dinner, and here I go. I leave the Marine Band and all those nice people, head back to the hotel and eat all alone and I thought, after I eat I thought, what did you do that for, you dummy. Just because I thought I was supposed to. Oh, I don't know. Maybe I get sick of it for all I know.

MK Maybe you needed a break. I want to ask you a couple of other things about your time at the OPA, but just to back track to a couple of points on the sewing projects that I didn't cover, what kinds of things, you mentioned mattresses. What other kinds of items were made?

MD Clothes.

MK A lot of clothing?

MD Oh, a lot of clothing. Winter clothing, summer clothing, hats.

MK Children's, grown-ups, everybody?

MD Yea, yea. It's whatever the towns needed. We didn't tell them what to make. Except this project was a mattress project. This project was a sewing project. But see, the overseers had a heck of a lot of work to do and the town selectmen. Excuse me, they were just wonderful people. I mean they did it because they knew it was so much needed, and they did the right thing all the time. But they didn't do it alone. And they didn't take credit alone. I mean it was, "we" did this and the towns were very proud of what they did with Federal money. That never happened before. And they accomplished, and the whole State of Vermont was proud, it really was.

MK Yea, I was reading that the reason that this program had been so successful in Vermont was because of this incredible cooperation with the local people and it wasn't some sort of State level thing that was top down saying, "This is what you are going to do."

MD No, it wasn't, not a bit. We were their support. We backed them, and we approved things. And we went and fought for them. If they thought some project wasn't just right and they didn't think they wanted it to be done. And we felt that the town was right and the people like the Writer's Project for instance. They wrote that guide as they saw it was needed and they weren't, we didn't allow Washington to say, you do this, you do this, you do this. They had supervisors. They had people from Washington, but like we were their support. They were their support too. And their job that they finished was their job and it was their protection, not the folks above them or the people paying them because I remember Earl Richmond, he worked on the Writer's Project. He did a lot. He has died since, just not too many years ago. Dana Doulton was the top man on the Writer's Project. A very good friend, his wife Margaret. She was on surplus commodities in headquarters. She was the gal that used to make me laugh, but we were very good friends over the years. When I go to Washington, I always would go out for dinner with them you know, and she came from Barre. He used to teach at UVM. And he lost his job to Depression. He was head of the Writer's Project, and Earl Richmond and some of those, they worked like beavers. And their project people adored them. There are people here in town that worked on historical sites. I have a neighbor, I have one for a neighbor. Yea, not historical sites,

Doulton (?)

historical records. But those signs along the road. Those historical sites project. All kinds of things I can pick out that were projects. A lot of work in the cities and towns on sewers and stuff. Municipal buildings. Well the municipal auditorium in Barre was built with WPA money. That would never have been done by the city. It is a good building still. They wouldn't have all those tournaments and everything there. There are lots of associated benefits we don't connect with that at all. Those happened a long time ago.

MK What, in terms of how people were hired to work on the sewing project. Were there formal written out criteria for hiring people?

MD Yup. We had an agency. Well, I might say use the word agency. It was all under one cap. Now these people I can remember so many of them that I knew personally and I know, I knew the head of the whole thing personally. She came from Burlington. Pichet(?) Kathleen Pichet, was her name, but what they would do was hire social workers. That was what her job was. She had a slew of social workers who would go out, and every person that received any kind of aid had to be certified by her staff as why they needed it, the work and why they needed it, stuff like that. Their certification of need anyway had to be made. And so that was her job and that was done and was done religiously, and they had their own offices, separate apart from our people. I imagine it was paid by the same center, the U.S. Treasury here in Montpelier, but we had no connection with them at all. Their job was their job. And we took the people that they certified and we never interfered. That is, if we got to know somebody or a mayor knew somebody and they weren't certified, it didn't do a thing about it, because this group, that was their responsibility and obligation, and they did a good job and they were right. Later you'd find out that they were absolutely right. Somebody was trying to pull a mayor's leg or something you know or sometimes people might have a nest egg. Not that there is anything wrong with that, but in those days you had to use it to be eligible. Administratively we weren't checked as far as that was concerned but I bet you if we were checked, they'd find that we needed it too, as much as anybody else. Because everybody was in dire straits there then. See I remember the artist, no, what was he? You'd know his name so well. He hasn't been dead too long, but he came from a very wealthy family. So many of those families, they were in these nice businesses and everything. They just went down the flue. And we never knew in Vermont what hit us. We read about Boston, New York, and the lines and the ~~Apple~~ vendors
apple'

and this, but see it didn't hit us. All of a sudden it did. A couple of years after the rest of the country or rest of the area, New England.

MK That's interesting. Why was Vermont's, why was the impact delayed for Vermont do you think? Was it because this was mostly a rural state?

MD Well, everything that happened, happened in Vermont two years after anybody else in those days, really, it did. I don't know. I think we were kind of slow at changing anything and cautious. Maybe not slow, cautious. Wanted to be sure that we wanted to do a thing of this kind you know. I think they were right. I never felt that we were too, too cautious. I mean well a lot depended on legislature and the governor of course and until they got sold on something you didn't, the state didn't get into it. So you really knew very little about it as a layman. That was okay. We had a good governor. Gee, he was so helpful. I remember I'd trudge out there with projects for him to sign. He'd stop everything he was doing and sign those things, get them out. Yea, we had everybody's help. All the state officials were great. Gee, I remember when I was with OPA and we rationed for the first time. And I was the head of the night crew, day crew too. We had all volunteers from National Life and the State over at the Union School issuing these ration books and all this. We'd have the darnedest crews come in, work like beavers until 11:00 - 12:00 o'clock at night. After they'd worked all day in their jobs, they were National Life people and State people. We'd send out a call for volunteers and we'd get them just like that. No visiting, no joking, right working. But I got mighty tired going down there. Our crews started at 10:00 o'clock in the morning and of course I had to go to work at 8:00, but then I'd get home 12:00 - 1:00 o'clock. Gee, I had a hard six weeks. We did the whole job in six weeks.

MK That was issuing the rations?

MD Ration books.

MK And that was 194 ??

MD '42.

MK '42.

MD Yea.

MK Now, what was, could you get me a sense of what the rationing was like? What kinds of things were rationed and how?

MD Well, sugar was rationed. Meat was rationed. I remember, see I worked all these hours and I'd get to a store when everything was gone. And I remember once I, one noon hour I went I heard Joe's Market on Elm Street in Montpelier had chickens. So I went down, he never saw me in his life. I didn't live there. I lived in Barre. I said I'd like a chicken. He said we only are having them for our customers. So I've often thought, Sylvia and I lived on ground meat. We were lucky to get it for several months. ~~Garth was~~ *not awful* sick of it. I gave up sugar. You know why? Because two of us, I was divorced then. Two of us, the ration didn't give us enough for one. So for her cereal, I'd let her have my sugar. So I never went back to sugar again. Coffee was rationed. People would stand in lines for meat. I finally had a connection with a person who used to sell to the little stores around the state, around this area and there would be a farmers slaughtering under the apple tree. Once in awhile I'd get a piece of meat that somebody had given me. But once I got a piece of frozen lamb and I cooked that. It was so old, you couldn't eat it. Yea. People hoarded it at that time. And they took black market stuff too. Which, you know, what are you going to do. I didn't do it. I wouldn't do it. I didn't have a chance to do it anyway. Shouldn't feel like that quite bad at all. I'd don't know what I'd done, but probably wouldn't, but, gee whiz, if you got children, and they need things to eat, you might have to pay a little more, but if you could afford it, you'd get it.

MK How did the rationing work? Did they allow to buy so many pounds of butter or so many pounds of sugar a month or?

MD Well, you had a book and it was for a length of time. And so you could have, tear out a coupon and use it as you saw fit. But you'd ration it yourself. You'd ration your coupons yourself to make them stretch. And they weren't issued often so you had some for quite a period of time. I used to have a copy of one of those books, but I didn't even keep that. Then there were other, there were little round celluloid things that were part of a coupon that you could use like coins, little colored red. One denomination would be red. One would be yellow. See dimes, nickels, or whatever.

MK And you could use those to buy more food or to?

Madelyn Davidson

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MD Yea, but you had to have those with your money. But those you had to have first. So you didn't have a big party when you got your ration book. You knew you had to let it stretch, let it go, stretch. Big families got along better than small families. Because they got, you know with a lot of children they had as much as they would for a minor. What I mean is _____? minor. So it wasn't so much for one age, so much for another age. So much if you had a coupon. I mean if you had a book.

MK So each individual had a book regardless of the age, I see.

MD Yea.

MK Interesting.

MD But everything worked like clock work, really. I remember gasoline. I had an X ticket on my car. Now X meant there was no limit on what I could buy and the reason I had it was I was doing the work of OPA. And everybody used to wonder why don't you take a trip. You got all those, nobody is going to check you. I said, "We take a trip when somebody else can't even, has to walk five miles for something?" No. We didn't do that. But there weren't that many with X's either. They weren't, they were doled out. And even if you didn't want it, you took it because it was charged to you. Exciting and interesting years.

MK Now you said typewriters were rationed too.

MD Yea, yea. Typewriters, oh goodness, things that you really needed. The tires is what bothered people most. The dealers didn't have tires. And even though you could buy one, you had the coupon to buy one, chances are you couldn't find one and sugar, even though we all had ration tickets. Sugar, it would be sold out. They didn't get enough for what the demand was even with just those coupons. Yea. I don't even remember if people ate in restaurants. Once I know once during those years, I went down to Boston on a business trip, and I was alone and I went, I used to like Paroni's. Way back then the Paroni family had several restaurants in Boston, and this was near my hotel. And I thought gee, I'm going to have a lobster. You know, you don't, you never saw lobsters up around this way in those days, and so I went in to Paroni's. Great big beautiful restaurant right near the Common. I was the only one in it. Yea. And I said to the man, the waiter. "Gee, I like your lobster stuffing. How do you make it?" He said, "Come on out in the kitchen." He was Italian. I went out in the kitchen, and the man showed me how to make it

and taught me and I've made it ever since. Paroni's dressing, That was the nicest meal I ever had. Yea.

MK How long did you work with the, it was the Office of Price Administration, the OPA?

MD Yea.

MK How long did you work with that office then?

MD I'd say four years. Uh huh. Then I think that was started to be phased out. The man that took my job at OPA, I moved to Burlington and I commuted two weeks and that was all I could stand. I used to get so tired, and I smoked then. And I'd get logy. One cigarette after another. Because you know I had to hurry all the time. And so the man that took my job, I remember him so well. He worked for me, under me, and by that time, I had a staff of writers and what not, because I was information officer they called me at that time, and it was working with newspaper editors and ways to, public relations and speakers and all this stuff. Anyway, he took the job, but he didn't have it very long. He did get a job in Turkey or some place because he was a good newspaper man. But I guess it was phased out shortly after I left. But I didn't know it was going to be. They, if they didn't appropriate money you were phased out just like they are now. What else would you like to know?

MK Well.

MD I'm having a lot of fun.

MK Good, I'm glad.

MD It's nice to think about these things. I don't have anybody to talk to about these things. They are all gone. All dead or else they are not around.

MK Uh huh. You know, I wondered whether you had kept in touch with any of the people?

MD Well, these ^{Dontons?} Doultons, of course I did because anytime I went to Washington I always saw them, and, of course, she'd come up in September and I would always have them over or take them out for dinner, and I used to look forward to the foliage season. That's when they'd come. And we go out all over the hills and everything you know. And they just thought Vermont was beautiful. They were both Vermonters. But no, as I say, I have a neighbor that was one of the workers on the historical records project, but I knew the

supervisor of that, John Clemmons. His father was governor of the State. Governor Clemmons. He was from Rutland and I knew him very well, but she was the unit supervisor. I didn't know her so well. So the people that are around that were with either WPA or OPA, in fact she was WPA...

MK This is your neighbor you are talking about?

MD Uh huh. I don't know, I never see anybody to talk to about it or anything. It just seems to have disappeared into thin air. Well you know here I am 74. There aren't many people around that worked with me. Like Jim Carney, of Hazen, Carney ~~was~~ in Burlington, He was ~~the~~ administrator in OPA and he's the fellow that hired me when I went with OPA. And now he died, oh 30 years ago maybe 20 and people like that that I knew I don't know any people in Montpelier that were back in those jobs. Maybe they know, I know a lot of people know me and speak to me but I met so many in my lifetime and you know I was Employment Security Commissioner for four years. I don't know. There were hundreds of people in that agency and in headquarters there were lots, and I would always get into the offices. I'd never would call and say please come and see the Commissioner. You know, I would walk and go just and get my business done and all that, and I would speak to everybody. Then we had a cafeteria so I'd be in the line along with all the rest of them, I always tried to be friendly because I wanted to be friendly. But they speak to me now, and maybe, in fact my grandson married a girl, and I went to the wedding last November. (Not this, last, a year ago) And the mother said she worked for me in Employment Security, and I tell you, (the mother of the bride) I would have sworn I'd never saw her in my life. Very embarrassing to me. They must think I think I'm something, but you know, here you have so many people and you talk to them, maybe I didn't remember I talked to some. There's no excuse for it, but I don't know what it might be.

MK What was your maiden name? You were married or you were not married when you began working?

MD Yea, I was married.

MK Oh you were married then, okay.

MD My maiden name was Suitor, S,U,I,T,O,R. And there was a big family of Suitor's in Graniteville and in Barre and I'm the only one left. Yea. My uncle Fred Suitor, was the socialist and he was, ran for governor on the Socialist ticket and I used to go with my father who

chauffeured him all over the state and it was the most interesting experience of my life. He, of course, he didn't win and he didn't expect to, but he believed, the principles were like the Democrat principles are now, just had a different name.

MK Now when did he run for Governor?

MD Well that was in the '30's. I'd say around 1934. He was also mayor of Barre. Socialist mayor of Barre. I think Bernie, old Bernie up in Burlington is the second Socialist mayor in Vermont. But my uncle was very tame compared to old Bernie. He was a well educated quiet a leader and he had one of the top jobs in the International Granite Workers Association. It was an international group. Yea.

MK That was headquartered in Barre?

MD Yea.

MK Yea.

MD In the Scampini Building. He died after he made a trip to visit President Roosevelt on the National Recovery Act. He was on the original council that set up the NRA, it was called during war years. It's nice to remember these things.

MK Good, good. One other favor ...

MD The Green Mountain Chronicles are on the air.

MK Great, thank you.