

“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.

George V. Kidder
Burlington
February 22, 1988

Mary Kasamatsu
Interviewer

- MK I'm with Mr. George Kidder. And we are in Burlington and this is 22nd of February. This is an interview for Green Mountain Chronicles. I wanted to ask first, let's get a little background first of all. You said you came to Burlington in 1915?
- GK 1915 yes.
- MK How old were you then?
- GK I was 14.
- MK Really. Now tell me about that. How did you come here?
- GK Well we had lived in Swanton for many years and it's very complicated. We had to move from Swanton and we were talking about moving to my mother's home in Johnson. And at that point, the house in Johnson burned down. So we were just about, well we were in high school, my brother and I were both in high school. The family looked for a place that would be where the good schools were and where we could move. We came and found this place in Burlington. So we came down here to live. My father's work was at that time in Roxbury, Vermont. He was with Vermont Marble Company and he had a series of quarries down in that area and he had been commuting down there anyway so it didn't matter much where we lived. He was going to be away from home wherever we were. So we moved down here to Burlington primarily because it seemed a good place to live and a good place for educational purposes. My brother was two years older than I, but we had somehow caught up with each other in high school and my sister was two years younger so we were just at the school age where it was critical. Then of course, I went to the University of Vermont and stayed right there after I entered as a freshman.
- MK Now where, let's see so you would have been going into the University at around 19...?
- GK 1918.
- MK 1918 okay.
- GK Yes.
- MK That's interesting. What was Burlington like during World War I?
- GK What was what?

MK What was Burlington like during World War I?

GK (Sigh)

MK Was there much hub-hub about the war?

GK Yes there was. At that time, out at Fort Ethan Allen, there was a large calvary troop and that had a large influence on the City of Burlington because they were most, a lot of them were blacks. There weren't very many black people around at that time so there was quite a contingent there. That had an effect. I remember particularly in connection with the parades, all the patriotic parades. They would have these units of the calvary for part of the parade. You know, horses, horseback riders would be a very attractive feature of any of these kinds of operations. And they played polo out there and people went out to the Fort to see what was going on. The industry in Burlington was largely cotton and woolen mills out in Winooski and down on the lake front. And then down on the lake front, there was a big chocolate factory at that time which is what became eventually the, what do I want, the General Electric plant down there and that of course has had a great influence on what happens in Burlington. I think that probably was due to the fact of the second World War. I don't remember just when that came in. They took over that chocolate factory and developed it into a General Electric plant. The streets were completely unpaved. We lived way out on North Willard Street and I remember the trucks, well carts with horses and carts coming by to spray the streets in the summertime at first.

MK What did they spray them with?

GK Water.

MK Water.

GK Just wet them down so the dust wouldn't fly so much and of course there were some cars, but not very many at that time. With the result that it wasn't that kind of dust and dirt. It was a different kind. They eventually got to putting oil and asphalt stuff on. That was an awful mess. But gradually they got paved and that made a difference that you can't imagine. The same thing with the highways of course all the way around there was the road from here to Montpelier was the old Route 2 and it was not even graveled when we first were here. A lot of it was pure sand. What's now French Hill out in

Williston. Sand was oh, six inches deep up there. Out past Fort Ethan Allen the sand was deep. I remember when the first, that was the first concrete pavement in the State of Vermont when that was paved. And before it was paved, it was just shear sand. Driving a car through it or walking or driving a team about six inches of sand was what made the roadway. You can't imagine what it was, how different it would seem. I can't either. Then, of course, trolley cars here in Burlington everywhere. Not everywhere, but substantially around the city from here to Essex Junction trolley cars back in that time.

MK Now did they come in after the main streets were paved or were they running on dirt?

GK Oh no, they were here before that.

MK Oh.

GK Yea, yea.

MK It's funny because I always think of trolleys on paved streets because that's the way I've seen them yea.

GK Because they were, yes. There wasn't any paved streets except I think I can't remember when Church Street was paved or whether it was paved. I somehow feel that it was still dirt down there on Church Street at that time. The trolley cars ran straight down Church Street and down the foot of Church Street they went down Main Street, then they went out South Union Street to go down South. Golly, I haven't thought of this for some time. I was just trying to think where they are going. They came up over the hill. They came up Pearl Street and over the hill into Winooski. And up on top of the hill in Winooski and then out to Essex Junction also. There were two splits out there. One went just to Winooski and the other went out to Essex Junction. Railway line of course was very active between Burlington and Essex Junction at that time. And then it ran from all the way from Burlington to Cambridge, Vermont. There was a junction up there Cambridge Junction, then over to St. Johnsbury, but that was originally the St. Johnsbury and Lake Champlain which ran from St. Johnsbury to Swanton where we previously lived and down to the lake in Swanton. And then there was a connecting line from here up to Cambridge Junction, from Essex Junction to Cambridge Junction. So, well that was very different from what it is now. The whole transportation system was quite different. We had our first car in 1911 when we were in Swanton. And all dirt roads at that time. And single lane dirt roads. You turned

out to meet a team of course horse drawn vehicles were the common thing and there was room for them to get by each other, but when the cars came in of course they were much noisier than they are now and the horses were just terrified absolutely frantic at meeting one of these horrible machines and all kinds of things happened. I can remember in our early days, when we were driving, we used to go from Swanton to Johnson, my mother's home. And that was on the road over through Fairfax and that kind of thing and always meeting horses. You expected to or you were bound to because they were on the road. And it was difficult to get by because the horses were frightened of that too, but when they met them they would just jump around and rear up and pull the team off the road and all that kind of thing. Not always, but frequently. It was a long time before they got used to them of course. Eventually, they learned that nothing was going to hurt them. Well that's a long, long time ago but it was a very different kind of life.

MK I had wondered whether there was any kind of law that motorists had to stop to turn off their cars you know so that the noise would...

GK No there wasn't. You would frequently drive off the side of the road and stop. I don't remember whether we turned off the motor or not. Of course, in those days you had to crank it, there was no self-starter. And so you wouldn't normally turn it off and then get out and crank it up again unless you had to. But I suspect that if the thing weren't moving and weren't making that much noise, the horses probably would have accepted it and not made a fuss about it.

MK It is amazing to think about those kinds of changes.

GK Yes it was. I remember very vividly the armistice in the first World War which was a tremendous event, of course. I was a senior in high school and just going into college at the time of the end of the first World War. They had just pulled a lot of young people, eighteen year olds into service, and a lot of them were, my brother was in the navel unit here on the campus at that time. I was too young to be in the military service so I didn't get in at all. I missed active duty in both World Wars because I was just between the two. But everybody was involved of course and there were a lot of parades and things of that sort and yes financial campaigns for funds of various kinds.

MK Do you recall any of your acquaintances of going to Camp Vail or the programs like Camp Vail?

GK Camp Vail, is that the one at Fort Ethan Allen?

MK No, that was the one over in...

GK New York State?

MK No, it was over around Lyndon.

GK Oh yea, the Vail family were over there. That's right. No I don't think I did know anyone who was involved in that. No I haven't any information on that.

MK I just wondered. I ask everybody. Now let's see, you probably, you would have been in Burlington then during the 1927 flood also.

GK Oh yes. Oh my, oh my, I can tell you a lot about the flood.

MK Okay.

GK I don't know where to start. Well let me start this way first of all. As I told you, my father was at that time in charge of quarries down in Roxbury and by that time they were exploring, he was a specialist in verde antique marble which is this green and white marble, very beautiful marble, but very hard to quarry. And they were trying to find more deposits of it. So he had a series of quarries. Ones up in Rochester North Hollow if that means anything to anybody. You know where Rochester is of course. And he had a couple of experimental quarries down in Duxbury as well as the quarry in Roxbury for which he was responsible. So he was travelling all the time and back in those days of course the roads weren't what they are now. That's what I'm talking about times during the period that they began to be gravel roads even. And so in the winter, in the springtime when the frost was coming out of the ground, his travel was frantic. He was going up to Duxbury at the time of the flood and between Duxbury, Waterbury and the area where he had to go he eventually ran into a place where the water was over the road. There was a whole puddle, whole area of lake where you couldn't see anything at all and he knew it was too deep for him to go into. And he did turn around and come back to Waterbury. So he was in Waterbury. I think it was a Thursday night that the worst of the flood came through Waterbury. He was up on the second floor of the hotel in Waterbury and they went up to the third floor and

the water came up onto the second floor in that hotel and he was up on the third floor with a lot of other people through that horrible night when houses and barns and all kinds of things were floating down the river right through the village of Waterbury. So he was right in the middle of it. His car was parked out there in the garage and on Saturday they were able to get out and he walked from Waterbury to Northfield on Saturday and on Sunday he walked from Northfield to Bethel where my mother was. They were living in Bethel at that time.

MK How could he do that? That's incredible.

GK Well it was and the bridges and everything were washed out. Many places, there was one place where as I recall it the railway track was held together by the tracks and people went across the stream. See he had to follow the rivers down through and he had to get from one side to the other sometimes and that sort of thing. It was really a very perilous kind of thing to undertake. But my mother was alone in the house in Bethel and she was down on the lower level of Bethel. I don't know whether you know Bethel at all. You do, well it was on the West side of the river away from where the road now goes down through. And it was where two branches of the river come together. The one that comes down from Rochester and where the little town is in between there, I can't think of at the moment, and their house was right at the confluence of the two really. The river coming down cut across where they were and flooded out the house that they lived in and they had just fixed it up and moved in a year or so before and it washed out, it washed the L off from the house and mother was able to get out when some neighbors left and she got from the porch into their car or truck to get away from it and stayed with some neighbors. We were here in Burlington and following what was going on with the newspaper and all of that and wondering whether we should try to go down and see if they were alright because we didn't get any word about them of course for awhile. Eventually there was a story in the paper that some boys from MIT had got into Bethel with a recorder, a radio broadcasting outfit and there was a little squib, a little piece in the paper, note along with other things in the paper that they had interviewed mother in Bethel, so that we knew she was alright. And it was the next day after that, that there was something in the paper about Dad getting down to Bethel from Randolph or Northfield, and so we found out that they were alright. But...

MK So communication was completely wiped out.

GK There was no communication whatever. This was the only communication there was and nobody could believe it. This is the thing you can't understand. Well people down South in Boston were furious because the reporters were trying to get news back from up here and nobody could get anywhere. And they couldn't understand that you couldn't get anywhere. Of course a lot of the railway, Central Vermont Railway was washed out down through that middle section. And highways were all closed. The minister of my church was on his way down to Boston I think on a train. The town of Roxbury is at the highest point on the line. There's a place where the water comes down off from the mountain on the west and in the springtime it divides and goes two ways. And the one part goes south. It would go down to White River Junction and out into the Atlantic down there. The other one goes north and goes into the Dog River and then comes up and flows into the Winooski and goes out into the, well St. Lawrence River eventually. But Roxbury is at the dividing point. Well this train got into Roxbury and found out that the road, the highway, the railway was flooded out below and washed away and by the time they got stopped there, they found out it washed out the other side too. So this train was stalled in Roxbury a little bit of a town for, well it was months before they got the cars out. But of course they got the people out after awhile. But it's something you cannot really understand by hearing about it without having been part of it because nothing like that had ever happened before. I'm sure you know, everybody in Montpelier knows, where the water came in Montpelier. And then of course that new dam down there has stopped the possibility of that happening again. But the height of the water came through Waterbury in the night and so that made it particularly horrifying I think for the people that were involved. They talked about a house washing down the street with people screaming out of it because they didn't know what was happening. Most of those wrecks piled up on the bridges, railway bridges further down the stream, down in the Duxbury area I suppose. Things like that happening. But in the middle of the night all this was happening. And it was early morning, getting on toward daylight, see this was early November. The height hit the area up around Williston - Richmond. Yes, Williston - Richmond and I know at that time they were just starting to build the new highway down through there and there was a road crew which were occupying a house down in the Jonesville area somewhere which was washed away in the flood. There were some fatalities there in that case. There weren't very many for fatalities, there were some. I don't remember how many. But that was, the '27 flood was certainly something. Here in Burlington we were wondering about the

Winooski Bridge. We went out. We had to walk from our place on North Willard Street out there which was a couple miles and the water at that time was below the level of the bridge. And we were not there, I did not see the bridge go out. But my wife's family were living in Essex Junction at that time and we of course wanted to get to see them and did periodically. But of course the trolley cars left on the Winooski side of the bridge when the bridge went out. So there were trolley cars over there and they finally got the trolley cars running from Essex Junction to Winooski and then the trolley cars here in Burlington were running. So they got off in Winooski and walked across this pontoon bridge which the National Guard or some Federal Government, Army troops put in. A pontoon bridge which you could drive across with cars and people could walk across this. And I remember going across that with our car which of course a pontoon bridge you know would flex up and down as you went across. But that was the transportation from here to Essex Junction. And we were trying to go out and visit our family out there and keep in touch with them and get some food once in awhile. They made donuts for us and that kind of thing. Just family affairs. But that's all very vivid and very real and unusual, nothing at all like this had ever happened here I think before.

MK Or since really.

GK Huh?

MK Or since then really.

GK Never since then, no.

MK Yea. You must have been incredibly worried when your father was in one place?

GK Oh, I was, I was. And yet, you never realized the seriousness of it, even though you read this in the paper, you couldn't believe it because it never had happened. There was a big land slide right near Middlesex, just south, just north of Middlesex. There's a bank down there that's called Blue Hill and it was clay and that whole side slid so there was a large, large area down there where the railway was completely washed out and all the route where it had been was gone. There just wasn't any foundation to build on down there. But things like that you couldn't conceive of that being true, but it was.
(Laughing)

MK Interesting. I've interviewed some people who were in Waterbury at the time.

GK I have no doubt. Of course, there would be lots of people around that were. Not so many left now though, but there are probably some.

MK Yea. It's amazing. When your father walked from Waterbury to Northfield.

GK Yes. Charles Plumley in Northfield, the Plumley family were one of the well-known families in Northfield and Charles Plumley was more than an acquaintance of dad's, not a close friend as far as I know, but fairly close, enough so, so that he stayed there overnight with them. That was how he happened to be in Northfield, and then from Northfield he took off the next day and walked on to Bethel. But that's quite a little trip too. Northfield is seven miles to Roxbury and twenty-one to Bethel. Yea, close to thirty miles.

MK That's incredible, I mean that's a good hike.

GK Under any circumstances, yes.

MK Then to walk it when climbing through mud and muck. It must have been incredible.

GK And trying to find which side of the river to be on. See there aren't, well the roads run close to the river and they got washed out here and there. He went some of the way by rail line and some of the way by roadway. Some of the way perhaps just making his way.

MK Incredible. It's amazing what people can do when they have to.

GK (Laughing) Yea.

MK It's incredible.

GK Well he was in the prime of life really. Let's see that would have been '27. He was born in 71. That would be 56 years yes. He was a healthy man but full grown and really an adult. And it was, it was an experience even for a younger man.

MK Now at that point, you were, you were where? What were you doing then?

GK What was I doing then? In '27, I was back here. I graduated in '22. I was in, I taught for a year in '23 and then I went to Oxford University for three years. I got back in '26.

MK Just in time.

GK So I had just been here about a year when that happened. I had one year, I was an assistant professor of Greek and Latin at the University at that time. I came right back and started teaching here. I taught one year after I graduated and came back afterward and then I've just been here ever since until I graduated, retired 20 years ago.

MK Moving a little more toward, up to World War II.

GK Up to World War II, well that's another story too. I...

MK By then I'm assuming that the major roads in Burlington were all paved.

GK They were yes. Oh yes, definitely and everything was in good working order at that time. We'd had the 1920, '30 crash and the depression period of the '30's which was something of an experience.

MK Did the depression hit Burlington really hard? Were there industries that just shut down or folded up here?

GK That I do not remember. I don't know. I wasn't involved in the industrial aspects of the thing.

MK Did the University see a substantial drop in the numbers of students that could come during the depression?

GK Not in between. Of course when the war came on, they pulled out all of the ROTC students. Oh the advanced ROTC students and then of course all the boys that were of age were in the army. And the enrollment of the University dropped from around 1,000 down to about 600, mostly girls. And at that time, the Waterman Building had just been finished. It was finished in '41 and we began to occupy it but...the washing machine downstairs is running, are you picking that up.

MK Not substantially. It's fine.

GK Alright. Waterman Building had just been finished, but part of the money for it had been tied up in a law suit in Colorado so they didn't have the money for the furnishings for it. The University came just after the death of

President Bailey who had been President for twenty years or so. And in the last years of his life, he was very, very frail in health with a, I'm not sure what it was. I think it was tuberculosis of the spine, but I'm not sure precisely what it was. And he had by trying to run the University himself and save it through the depression which he did remarkably, had taken some financial moves that tied up the funds of the University to the extent that we were really, I think we were bankrupt at that time. He had confidence that he could pull it out, but he couldn't and he died right in the middle of that situation in '41. At that time, President Millis (?) eventually came in and took over. The University was in a very perilous situation and we not only were in financial trouble, but we lost all our student body because of the war. And then the University picked up a Air Force Unit and they were sending us 1,200 students for well educational and pre-flight training which included considerable mathematics and things of that sort as well as their actual flying. But we had a flight unit here and this 1,200 unit was maintained at about that level, but they stayed I think, I'm not sure, whether it was six weeks, or ten or twelve weeks for each unit that would come and stay that period and get their training and then they'd go somewhere else and another group would come in. So that kept us fairly well occupied but it changed the focus of course from the arts and sciences area that I was concerned with to the more professional technological areas and math people what they had to have more than anything else. The Air Force furnished the flight training instructors. But as far as the University was concerned, that's what happened at the University. It went down to a very low level. Picked up these people and then in '45 after the war was over, the Veterans came flooding back and that's when the big increase in the number of students at the University came about. So that's for the University. Here in the city, all the men were pulled out and the thing that since I was ineligible for military duty, we all did volunteer duty and to me the volunteerism in that period was a remarkable part of the home field. They had watchers, sky watchers, plane watchers. For one group of people assigned they had outlooks in various, some were built for that purpose, but they used the tower of the old mill at the University of Vermont was one of the centers because of very good view you see over a tremendous area up there. Plane spotters they called them. They were organized and places were manned with volunteers. They had air raid wardens, a large group of them. I don't know how many here in the city. I didn't have any direct contact with it, although I thought when I first heard about it that, that was one area that I would be willing to work in who were suppose

to go around and check on homes around the city as to there being well able to block windows so they could pull down the shades at night and that kind of thing so that they wouldn't be visibility of the operations on the ground and also in case of any invasion of any sort, these air raid wardens would be available to do what could be done to help the people that were involved. That was a second group, the spotters and the air raid wardens. A third group were the volunteer fire departments. And you see the able bodied men were all called into the service and so the crews for the fire department and the police department both were very much reduced and so they recruited large, large numbers of auxiliary policemen and auxiliary firemen. Some of my friends at the University were auxiliary firemen so I got involved in that and I was an auxiliary fireman for several years. I don't know when we started that, I don't remember.

MK Did you have special training?

GK Oh yes indeed. We had a very good chief at that time. He was genuinely interested. Of course, they were interested in having us because they needed this help desperately. But this man was excellent with these volunteers and they put us through a very substantial training course down there and then we carried on for years after the war was over as auxiliary firemen. When there would be a big fire here in Burlington, they'd call us out. We had a system all worked out so that the fire department would call one person, this one person would call four or five more. I was in the second echelon and then we would call some more. And by that system, we reached I don't remember how many, but it was something like 35 or 40 men day or night. And they'd tell us where the fire was and we'd go down to the station and get our boots, and coats and hats if we didn't have them at home and go to the fire. We were not supposed to get into the dangerous situations. We were not supposed to go into burning buildings. The rules changed somewhat as time went on. But we did man the trucks. We did supply equipment and hoses when they needed more gasoline or more whatever, more hose carts, whatever. (cars?) They'd call on us to do it. And we held the hoses frequently. These things happened of course in the middle of the night. I'm thinking more about I guess times after the war was over than I am about during the war really because of the times that went on. But there were a lot of lumber yards down on the lake front in those days and one of those would catch fire. We had two or three lumber yard fires down there. You can imagine what a lumber yard catching fire would be. And I remember being down there one period when the temperature was right around zero and

a big fire down there on the lake front and here we were with, I was holding a hose. It was cold. (Laughing) Take our gloves off and put them on top of the motors of the trucks to get them thawed out and then go back to our job. But I was at several big fires down there and not only at it, but was involved. You see we were right in there where the firemen were working, and it's an experience I'll tell you. The Van Ness Hotel was a big hotel on the side where the present Howard Bank and that was one fire that we were at.

MK Was that during war time or after?

GK I think it was after it was after the war, I'm sure and, but on top of a lot of those buildings down on Church Street, up on the roof there, for one purpose or another and that kind of thing. So that's another experience that was unusual I think. I remember the nurses home up at the hospital burned after I was in the Dean's office. That would have been in '48. It came in the daytime and I got a call up at the office and I went home and got my stuff and went up there and that was, well it was on part of the present site of the hospital, Medical Center Hospital. Things like that and that all grew out of the war experience.

MK So up until the war, Burlington hadn't relied on volunteer fire fighters?

GK No, they had a professional team and I don't think there was any volunteer, I don't think there was any volunteer organizations so far as I know during the time that I had been in Burlington or recenter than that time. Originally of course, they were all volunteer things. When we first came to Burlington, the headquarters for the fire department was well in that Church Street building just up the street from the City Hall which is now the Burlington, what it is some center they call it. Well you know what I mean probably. That building, it's a big building. And the first floor in that was where the horses were stabled and they, we used to go down and see these beautiful horses in there all ready to go and when the fire alarm came in, their harnesses dropped down on them and they buckled them in and they took the hose cart and off they went up Church Street or wherever they had to go. But that is something I have seen and that of course is way out of line with anything that there is now. You watch the trucks go out from where they are. There was a real building period that took place here in Burlington in the '20's. The Mayor at that time was a Dr. Beecher who was the Dean of the Medical College as well as being Mayor.

George V. Kidder

Page 14

MK That's an interesting combination isn't it?

GK Yea and it was at that time that the City Hall was built and the Fire Station and the Memorial Auditorium. And that, well those three buildings I think made about as much difference as anything has in that downtown area until the rebuilding came through.

MK Were you involved in any activities that happened on the lake during World War II?

GK No I was not. We used to, well of course there was rum running at that time.

MK I'm sure.

GK Lot's of people looked into that. I got some good stories on that from various sources. No, we had a camp up at West Swanton, but that was pre-World War II, World War I and I had no connection with the lake down here. I do remember the yacht club building which used to be down at the foot of College Street very well. We used to have college dances down there and things of that sort. And I've skated on the lake. I have skated out to Juniper Island a number of times in those days. We always skated inside the breakwater when there when there was skating. But skating on the lake was the only participant I had apart from our experience in Swanton.

MK You talked about watching for planes, plane spotters.

GK Uh huh.

MK What was the procedure? If you saw a plane, what would you do?

GK They had to record what it was, identify it, where it was and what it was doing. Of course, what they were really watching for was a possibility there was going to be some hostile plane that would be attacking, and, of course, there weren't any. But there could have been, that's the thing. Oh, there was another part of the warning system that was interesting. They had a system set up for notifying alerts if there were such of invasions of any sort. And they had monitoring stations all over the country. But here in Burlington, there was one which at one time was up in the Old Mill and later was over in the Medical College Building. I don't remember where else, whether there was somewhere else. There were different places, different times. But that had to be manned every night. And I was

on that assignment at one point. I don't remember whether it was one night a week maybe or, I think one night a week. Yes one night a week you spent up there. There was a cot where you could lie down and sleep. But a certain number of calls would come through during the night just to see if there was anybody there. And you had to get up and answer the phone. About all you had to do was say that you were there and that was it. Unless there was some information that were to be dispersed. But that was part of that warning system. And of course that would supplement the radio. There wasn't any TV of course then, but it would supplement the radio system. And there was a telephone system to get the warning out. So that was another part of the citizen protection. All of this was really for that purpose. Oh yes, there were air raid warnings, sirens here in the city too. And they used those for—the Winooski had a siren that used to go, and I don't think it does now. When that would be turned on, it would call the firemen in for a fire and that was also a certain pattern of the warning of the siren that would be a warning of an air raid coming in.

MK For the air raid drills, was there a sort of a public information campaign about what you should do and everything?

GK There were, yea there were drills, yes. But those were not very effective I would say. There were assignments of where you were supposed to go if there were an air raid warning. I don't remember very specifically about that because I don't think it ever functioned really. You really can't get people to take these things too seriously, you know. They did have air raid warning shelters down in the cities, in the subways and things of that sort and that was more effective than it ever was here, partly because they would have been more chance of an attack on a big city than there would be here in Burlington. There's been the Plattsburgh Air Force Base, of course, for a long, long time and that's been regarded as a potential attraction, a target for trouble, but never has been any.

MK I was interviewing a woman who talked about, she was a school teacher during the war and talked about having an air raid drill once when she was in the classroom and how the children were so frightened of it.

GK That's right. I think there were drills in the schools. Of course they've had fire drills in the schools all the time. This would just fit in with that same thing. I don't remember that we had anything of that sort at the University. There must have been. Yes, there were some

air raid drills at the University. I'd forgotten about that. I'm sure there were. Not very regularly and not, never taken seriously.

MK What about rationing?

GK About what?

MK What do you remember about rationing?

GK Rationing, oh, oh, oh, ha, ha, ha. I have three aunts who had saved some of their old ration books and it wasn't too long ago when I was cleaning out the house where they had lived that we came across some old ration books. Yes, that was true. It was primarily sugar and coffee. Those were the two things that were most rationed. Meat and you had a book of stamps and it depended on your family and so forth as to what you had to use. Yea, during the second World War, coffee was rationed I know. There was one story about the grocery store had a certain amount of stuff to sell of course, but they had to get stamps for it. They weren't suppose to give it out without, but they sometimes did under various titles. One woman went in and asked for some bird seed when she wanted some coffee. This was an understood arrangement. And he said does your bird, does your bird perk or drip? Does your bird perk or drip? So she said her bird perked and he got the right kind of coffee to go with her bird seed. Well that kind of thing. Sugar was scarce, very scarce and so that was rationed. I remember it was about the time we changed from butter to oleo. When oleo came in, and oleo then, the dairy people prevented its being colored, so it had to be white, so it looked like lard.

MK So you could color it yourself?

GK Yes, little capsules that were filled with coloring matter. Of course, butter had already been colored though. There was color in the butter in the old days and you punctured these capsules and mixed it then with the oleo until it got colored, the color that you liked. Real margarine when it was first used sold, it ought to be margarine, but they never say it that way and I don't know why. That's one peculiarity I've never solved. I'm very much interested in the derivation of words naturally from my classical background. So I'm always puzzling over these things. But the oleo part of it, the o-l-e-u-m, that means oil, so that takes care of that part. The last part I don't know why that came in, what that's from. It's interesting to find out some time.

MK I wonder when the dairy lobby dropped their concern about, about allowing it to be colored by the manufacturer?

GK Remember what?

MK I said I wondered when the...

GK When it began, well I can't, I can't, it changed. Vermont held out for a very long time. It was local for quite awhile. It couldn't be sold in Vermont. But then, they gave up on it after awhile, they had to. But it was a long, years that getting it accepted as, as a fit substitute. But the butter lobby, of course the dairy farmers wanted to preserve it. Of course, in those days, milk with a high butter content was favored. It had to be about 4% butter fat for a quart of milk. Now you go out at 2% or 1% and they don't do much with the cream, but the cream used to be a prize in those days.

MK What about gasoline and tires? Those were rationed?

GK Gasoline was definitely rationed, yes it was and tires I don't remember restrictions. I don't remember any problem with tires. But we did have to have for a period during the war, we had to have tickets, rationing tickets, to buy gasoline. \$.17 a gallon at one point. That was about \$.35 in the war I guess, but \$.17 is the lowest I remember it. Times have changed. Well, dollar isn't worth anything.

MK Yea.

GK That's an interesting comment for you as a youngster. I have concluded that from the time I was well your age or younger, until now, the total pattern of costs has increased about ten times. So the dollar now will buy what \$.10 would have bought then. And I could point to a very large number of things which now cost in cents, ten times as much as they did then. When we were living in Swanton, we kept cows and we had produced milk for ourselves but we had a surplus which we distributed to a neighbors. And we used to sell milk delivered for \$.05 a quart. Of course it wasn't pasteurized and it probably was not, wouldn't keep as long as it would nowadays. But to go from that and you can't get milk for less than \$1.00 a quart now where it's available. And a good many other things are just the same. Of course, my \$.17 a gallon for gasoline wouldn't work out very well would it, with the present one, because that's only about six times more but, but I think of it as not being an increase in the cost of things, but as being a decrease in the value of money.

And I noticed awhile ago, they were talking about cutting out pennies because, well, a penny isn't worth anything anymore. It won't buy anything. But according to what I've just been saying you see, you could cut out nickels and pennies and dimes would then be your pennies. Something to think about, that's all. It just puts things into proportion and it's helped me when I see the prices I have to pay for things, yea.

MK Do you recall hearing any stories about people trying other than like the coffee example, of people trying to bribe a storekeeper...

GK Oh they did of course.

MK ...or a official who gave out the rationing books?

GK Oh yes.

MK It's interesting to see that at the same time there was an incredible spirit of volunteerism, people also did try to stretch the rationing system as much as they could.

GK I suspect even some of the volunteers probably stretched their ration things and probably most of us would have taken advantage of any opportunity that came up, in a way. But there were other people of course that really cut corners. I was talking about the man that sold the coffee, pretended he didn't have any, but you could buy some bird seed, that kind of thing. People evaded them of course. But that's human nature, and I don't think there would ever be a time when that wouldn't happen. Of course, this rum running business is an interesting part. That goes back to prohibition days, but there was a Judge Howe here in Burlington who was an alcoholic. He was a heavy drinker no question about it. And he had his own bootlegger who provided him with booze also. That was general knowledge and I haven't any doubt it's true. I wouldn't want to publish it and say it because it's too far back in the past. He was a very good judge in many ways, but this was one area in which,, Of course, prohibition was very unpopular, tremendously unpopular and people just made it impossible to enforce it. It's like marijuana nowadays, trying to enforce the rules is almost impossible and people addicted to it would get it no matter what. So that's what he was doing. But there was the case where the judge was sending people to jail for being bootleggers and patronizing his own.

MK I ^{was} going to ask if he was lenient with the bootleggers, but he wasn't particularly, huh?

George V. Kidder

Page 19

GK I don't know that I have any way of judging that. He didn't have the reputation of being. I think that he was probably sympathetic but he felt he had to do his duty. I suspect that he got off lighter than they would have otherwise.

MK That's great. It was an interesting time.

GK Yea.

MK I just wanted to ask you about one more thing and then I'll let you go here.

GK That's alright. I have to go Rotary about quarter of 12, so I was watching a little bit, but don't be nervous.

MK Okay. Well one thing we hadn't talked about, but, well you actually did touch on it, radio. Since this is a radio series, one of the programs that we are going to be looking at is the coming of radio to Vermont.

GK Uh huh.

MK I wondered whether you remembered when radio arrived in your family, when you started having a radio in the family and the what kinds of programs you listened to? What was there to listen to at that point?

GK Well, of course, I was going, I was alive and interested and active during the period when it was being developed. And my brother, my older brother and his particular pal here, we were all three of us the same class in high school became very much, not I, but my brother and this pal of his were very much interested in radio and they had an old, the old crystal set. They made their own equipment, and, of course, you could only get it with earphones and things like that and the only station that we got up here was the Pittsburgh Station. But that's my first contact with it and this was when we were in high school which would have been '15, '16, '17, '18. And then it went on from that and the earliest station here in Burlington was WCAX which was started by Dave Howe who was the publisher of the Free Press at that time. The Howe family was a very prominent family and he and Fritz Shepardson who were very good pals, same class in college at the University. Fritz Shepardson who was the head of the Multex Company, as it was then down here on the lake front, (Multex is a cereal, a breakfast cereal) were very prominent business men and very forward looking, very good citizens, definitely always working for the welfare of the city and they started this little station up at the

University. They financed it and it was done by the University people, so we did have a little station up here and that has been there ever since and has gone on to become WCAX which is, well became eventually television as well as radio and multiplicity since then.

MK Do you remember, I was wondering if you remembered listening to any of the early broadcasts?

GK Oh I suppose I did. Yes. Do you mean the radio broadcasts?

MK Yes, radio broadcasts.

GK Oh, well there were lots of programs that we listened to regularly.

MK Did you have any...

GK Amos and Andy. I hadn't thought about, oh yes you do think about them. Oh heavens, you listened regularly to Amos and Andy. Everybody did. I don't know, they had a tremendous following and they were very, very entertaining. A man we used to listen to. There's a program family, oh dear, I'm not coming up with the things I want to there.

MK Well it's really interesting for me to hear about some of these things. Because of course my knowledge of Burlington especially is only in the last several years.

GK Yes.

MK Well I don't want to keep you any longer, but I want to thank you very much for taking the time.

GK Well I'm happy to do it. I hope you find something useful in it. It's kind of fun to revive some of these things.

man's
mily " ?)