

Mary Reagan/TC1992.0059
Mad River Valley Project/VFC1991.0004

JB Jane Beck
MR Mary Reagan
Place Waterbury, VT
Date 05/13/1992

JB Okay.

MR I'm Mary Reagan, it is May 12th, 1992.

JB Good. Okay, now, I guess the, the let's start with did
you grow up in Moretown? [1.10]

MR No. No, I married and moved to Moretown in 1931. 32.
Yes. And I lived there for well until seven years ago.
And I sold my home, and came here.

JB Now one of the things that I've been interested in and
I think it was Robert Wimble who told me about, he
said you would be a good person to talk with was,
south hill or, paddy hill, he said was an Irish
community.

MR Yes. Yes. Mrs. Halite who was, a Doctor Halite's wife,
used to tell me quite a few things about Moretown,
she, she was a librarian there, for a long time, and
she told about the, oh the Irish people that came over
from the, from Northfield when the railroad was built

there, and they settled on, south hill, and formed this, quite a large community, there was a school up there and, and of course the, catholic cemetery is up there and a lot of the, Irish are buried there and it she told me that there was an epidemic of diphtheria, and that it was so severe that they would bring the, bodies of the people who had died from Northfield, and they were buried in a common grave up on that, in the cemetery up there. [3.06] Now, of course this isn't, authentic, I mean it's, it's just. Here say, but I think probably it was, it was true.

JB I'll be darned.

MR Yeah.

JB And they mostly had farms.

MR Yes. Yes. They.

JB Now south hill is where Bob Gove lives, now, right?

MR Yes right. In fact the school house was, across the road from where Bob lives there the, I think the original sight can be found if.

JB Is that right. [3.42]

MR Yeah. And up on where my husband's mother lived, there is a, a marker commemorating the first mass that was

said in Moretown. Oh it, that information is in that little book there.

JB Um hum.

MR I've forgotten just, now just exactly what the year was but it's in the little.

JB Well they must of settled there what about 1852?

MR I would, yes. Because most of the Irish people a lot of them came to this country during the potato famine, and that was around that era. I know my ancestors came over around 1850, 1848. So.

JB Now, when Moretown seems to me to be different from Waitsfield or Warren in that every body seemed to work for Wards Mill.

MR Well yes that was the main source of income there and well it was the lumber mills, and that was, well more, probably more into the 1880s and 90s that the mills were started. Or came to be there in Moretown. [5.17] And yes they were, they were the, a few, well there were farmers around too but, a lot, a lot of people, my husband worked, worked for the company all his life. Yup.

JB Now you're, your mother-in-law was it her father that

came to work or who first settled there or?

MR No her, her, they came I don't know just when they came but she was originally from Burlington and I think her husband was from Bolton and I think they, moved up there to work for someone else on a farm and then they had a farm of their own, eventually. And.

JB But did they live in sort of the area the Irish?
[6.13]

MR Oh yes they lived on south hill.

JB Tell me a little bit, a little about the Irish community like, that made it distinctive, maybe, well the church I guess, or the.

MR Well I think probably the church as much as anything but at the time that I, I can't tell you too much about that, because they were mostly gone by the time that I lived over there and so they were, they were a lot of French Canadians that had moved into, around the area, well in Fayston and Waitsfield, Duxbury, and Moretown, you know, they were, so the church was French and Irish and everything by the time I moved here. [7.01] In fact, when I first went there, they had, they weren't having mass, every Sunday like they

do now because there wasn't any pastor there. The
pastors came from, Waterbury to, about once a month
to.

JB Um hum and then the French Canadians came in because
of the mills?

MR No, I don't really know, I think that they were
farmers a lot of them.

JB Like Vassar.

MR Yeah. Ah ha. And the Sweinards, and I don't, I'm sure
some of them, you know were, I guess just didn't
probably any, source of, employment they could find.
But, I don't really know too much about the, of that
part of it. [8.00] So. But they, where Bob Gove lives
now was, was a quite a large farm I think for those,
for that well, compared to those times. Now, of course
it isn't, the farms are so much larger.

JB But the farms were small.

MR Yes.

JB Who owned that before Bob Gove did? [8.25]

MR The Wards, Ward, the Wards owned it at one time.

JB Ah ha.

MR Ah ha. I don't and someone, they hired someone to run

it for them. And, before that the, Good, Goodrich or Good, yes I think their names were, Goodrich. I kind of forget, it's in that book, they owned that farm and they were instrumental in moving the original Catholic church which was up on the south hill, where the cemetery is now. And, they were sort of instrumental in getting it moved down to the village. I think it's under churches there in that little book.

JB This is terrific. How did you come to do this?

MR Well I don't know, I was always interested in, in history and looking back to see, what it was like and, many years ago and then when I was in the post office I, you know learned a little bit more about, about the town, and, and but I had a lot of help, I didn't do it by myself. I had a lot of, a lot of help and, and we were going to have a, a commemorating the, what does it say there on that book? [10.12] I think inside it.

JB The celebration of Moretown's Heritage and St. Patrick's Church's Centennial.

MR Ah ha. So that's how that book came, came about. Ha! Ha! We had a real, quite a nice celebration we had a, kind of a historical walk, and we, I done five places

that are in Moretown village, now and who owned them, and where certain buildings were that were no longer there, and that day we could, people could, we had printed sheets that, identified the buildings and so on, and people could walk through the village and it was nice. [11.13]

JB How did it come to be called Moretown?

MR Well, that, yes, it's, according to legend or whatever, when they, the towns were laid out, in Washington County, there was this plot of land, a piece of land quite a large area of land that was left over, but they, ha, ha. I guess they didn't know what to do with it, so they called it Moretown.

JB Ha! Ha!

MR Ha! Ha! As far as I know it's the only, town in the United States with that name. I've. Ha! Ha! That is that is really a town.

JB Um hum. It's a nice little book. Do you remember your mother-in-law talking about the Irish community at all? [12.17]

MR No, not all that much.

JB Or anecdotes? The.

MR She was French.

JB She was French?

MR Yes she was French.

JB So the community was really began to be melded with both Irish and French.

MR Yes I think it must of been because I know she was, she was French but her husband had, was from Ireland, came from Ireland. Was born in Ireland. [12.50] But by the time that, I, came to Moretown they were more or less, as you say blended, ha, ha, into a. Interested in the schools you know, the little, things that went on to help support the schools and, they had card parties and, sales, you know food sales and church suppers and all those things. [13.28]

JB Was it a tight knit community?

MR Yes I always thought, thought so. Ah ha. I, I loved it there, but always was sorry that I, had to leave, I didn't have to leave but, I, came over here because my daughter lives here and I came from here originally and I couldn't keep up my home because it was, I was alone and it was too, too much for me to do, so I, but I've, Moretown is really my, my town. Ha! I was

interested in the, in everything that went on there.

JB Well, the fact that, the Wards had such an influence
was there hard feelings about that at all or?

MR Well.

JB Or was it.

MR Yes. And I think there probably were people that,
resented their, well, felt that they really owned town
because everybody, they had the company store and
everybody you know, people didn't travel to
supermarkets and things then, and but there are two
sides to that, I, they didn't pay big wages, but when
during the depression when, you couldn't find work
anywhere else, they kept their men and people working
where in many, many cases, people just did not have
jobs. And, I know that there's a lot of things that
the company did that, and Wards did that, they never
got much credit for. Ha! They didn't, blow their own
horn, in other words. And, so you know.

JB Like what? [15.32]

MR Well, I'm sure they helped some families that were,
poor and couldn't get along and carried them for a
long many times and when they couldn't pay bills and

things. But, people tend to forget those things, you know.

JB No you're right, there are.

MR And Mrs. Aileen Ward, she was, she's a lovely lady, I admired her, she any kid that she was wonderful. And education. And encouraged the kids to belong to school to be sure, they didn't have no, there was no high school of course there and they had to travel to, Waitsfield or Montpelier, or Waterbury to, if the children wanted to go on to the high school. [16.40] And, then if they wanted to go to college or go further, she made every effort to, to help them find a grants or loans or, or whatever. Or would, recommend them, right, you know, if they had to have someone, vouch for them, or something and I know in my, with my own children that she, helped, helped steer us to the, funds that might be available and so on. So she, I think she really, I think there was a lot of kids that never would of gone farther than high school if it hadn't been for Aileen. [17.35] So, as I say there are two sides to the story.

JB I only actually, spoken with people who have, told the

good. I mean there are obviously seems to be a lot of positive, things that the Wards did and I understand too, just by innuendo, that you know wages some people felt wages were kept too low and.

MR Yes.

JB And they just had to trade almost at the company store.

MR Well.

JB And some people resented it.

MR That, perhaps that was true up to a point and of course they owned a lot of the buildings and and they did really got their money back from their employees, because they rented and they, traded at their stores and so on, but, I can't, I know I went through the depression, 1930s, early 1930s there, and I do know that they kept their help working and anybody that wanted a job they might not be big pay but it, it a, they were kept busy. And I think that makes a lot of difference even if you don't earn a lot of money as at least you keep your pride, if you keep employed, ha, ha.

JB There's a lot to be said for that. Your own self

respect.

MR Right. [19.09] Yup.

JB So most people worked in the mills, or driving teams.

MR Yes, or, or and then they of course they had people working in the lumber and operations in the forest and so on. Too. Yup.

JB So they must of employed.

MR Well at one time I couldn't say, they, you know they probably were, I don't know how accurate I am but perhaps forty or fifty people, maybe more.

JB I would of imagined more.

MR Through through the lumberman that were bringing, furnishing the lumber and the logs and so on.

JB Yeah cause they would be cutting all winter I would think.

MR Um, hum.

JB And the teams would be driving up to get. And then.

MR But, if you interview, if they interview Mrs. Ward she probably could tell you a lot more about. Excuse me.

JB I'm actually waiting to hear that interview or see it so. She'd how old now would you say?

MR Oh she's, oh she must be 92 or 3, now, but she's,

she's alert and full of energy just, how much more so than most people.

JB Did she grow up in Moretown?

MR No. No. She came from, I think Pennsylvania.

JB Oh no kidding.

MR Yes. I think, I think perhaps she met her husband in college. But her husband grew up of course and he was, he was a Ward and he grew up in Moretown.

JB And he, was he Bertram? Was that her?

MR Ah, no, that was his father, Merlin Ward is, was her husband's name. Bertram Ward was the, his father. Merlin's father.

JB Cause he's the only one I've heard that wasn't too popular, I don't think. [21.06]

MR Well, ha, ha. Yeah there's lots of stories about him, I guess but.

JB And then his, it was his father that first came there, I guess.

MR Yes. I think his name was Hiram. [21.25] I think they were in Duxbury too. I'm not sure but they came, it tells in the, I've forgotten some of that, that's in the, little booklet there but it tells about the, it

seems to me it was somewhere around the 1880s that they started the mill and, in Moretown, and I think, before that they had mills in Duxbury. They owned a lot of property.

JB Well now the mill closed down, when in Moretown?

MR Oh, I can't, really remember they, there were a couple of different times the mills burned, and finally they moved, they came over here to Waterbury, and had the lumber mill over here in Waterbury for a while but they still kept the clapboard mill and I'm not sure but they still run that little clapboard mill there in Moretown now. [22.24] At the other end of the village.

JB Um hum.

MR I don't really know.

JB And well they don't own apparently now, it's much of the town as, I mean that's changed, hasn't it?

MR Oh yes. Yes. I don't think that, it's either mills that no longer there so, really Moretown is more or less a bedroom town now, I think. For people. But. As far as I know they, they own, I'm sure they still own property but I, I see the family scattered now I guess more or less and, and.

JB When did the town begin to change? [23.11] Was that with the skiing or was it?

MR Well I, I don't know, probably, probably as the mills began, began to, move out of the area, and people had to find employment in other places, and I do think that the, the ski industry probably had, quite a bit to do with the town changing. It didn't hit Moretown though that much, but I, I think it's beginning to, people are beginning to move in now, and have their homes there, and commute to, work, other places in the last few years.

JB Is it mostly, Montpelier or?

MR Well I expect this, you know they were, I, yes I would say Montpelier, Waterbury, goodness some of them commute clear to Burlington I guess. I'm, to different places to IBM and, and General Electric and those places, see I've been, I've been away for seven years, so and I know it's changed a lot since I moved even, I used to know just about every body and now, the names are no longer familiar to me. [24.42] Yeah.

JB Well when you first moved there, were there still a lot of farms?

MR Yes. I, yes there were many, I, more farms quite a few more farms than there are now, I, I don't remember just, small farmers. They weren't the big farms that. Cause when we went there, my, my, my mother-in-law had this little farm, and they had a few cows and, and that was mostly what it was and the farm next door the Gosses lived next door they had a little, a little farm and, and so they were small farms.

JB A few cows, a few pigs, a few chickens.

MR Yes, right. Sort of, that sort of a family farm. Sometimes the young people would, work out during the day and, and be able to do chores and so on at night, in the morning and. [26.04] So. But I think you'll find, quite a bit of information n that little booklet.

JB Yeah. I know I will.

MR How the, farms, the older community and.

JB Now did you interview people to get this history or talk with a lot of people or?

MR Oh yes we talked with lots of different, of different people, there, the, it's a large town and, and when I first went there, we were, the village was just in one

little corner of the town you see, and than there was another, settlement over near Northfield, and out.

JB Yeah tell me about the settlements, cause I, you know, coming from away I.

MR It's almost like four different little towns almost because Northfield, was part of that area of Moretown which is near Northfield they had their own little community and school, over in the Jones Brook area, near Montpelier, there was another community and still is as far as that goes although the children are all, coming to the Moretown Elementary School and to Harwood Union High School, and but there were schools there, down toward Middlesex, there was another little, there were two schools, on the Middlesex road, between Moretown and Middlesex, when I first came there.

JB Was that community called anything? [27.56]
Particular.

MR Taplan, one of them was the Taplan school, and one of them was the Flanagan school, that's who the name was that had the Gove farm before years and years ago was Flanagan.

JB Ah ha.

MR And then the Raw bridge school which is, was near Waterbury here, just on Route 2 up there. And, then the Jones Brook area.

JB What was the Northfield area called?

MR Hum. Oh I can't remember. Cox Brook.

JB Cox brook.

MR Yeah, C O X. Ah ha. Cox Brook.

JB A family.

MR I believe that was where the name came from. The Cox Brook School. [28.50] So there were, there were lots of schools and that's what forms your community, your schools and your church. You're each one and I've always thought we've lost something. By making one big, bigger school where, it never, you never had the community, spirit that you had, in each little section of the, the town I don't think.

JB Were there, did each little community have sort of characteristics all its own.

MR Well I, I guess so, of course I can't speak for the others because I was right there in the, in, on the Moretown village, but, the talc mines were here at, at

the rock bridge area up here on Route 2. And, a lot of the families worked there and they had their own little communities and they'd have their little school parties and dances or, box parties or whatever.

JB How long did the talc mine run?

MR I'm not very good at dates it may tell in there, I really don't.

JB But the talc mine went for a period of thirty or forty, fifty years.

MR Yes I think so. Ah ha.

JB Cause they know very little about that. Who could tell me about the talc mine?

MR I, I don't know. The people, the lady that we interviewed, or talked with, that gave us the information about that area, she's passed away so I can't tell you. [30.53]

JB Here we are, about thirty five people were employed there, it opened in 1911, in 1961 when talc was being converted to liquid instead of powder this plant was closed, so 1911 to 1961. 50 years.

MR Beatrice, I think Beatrice Eastman was the name of the lady that gave us the information on that. [31.30]

JB Cause there was a talc.

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

JB Her father was head of this talc mine here or?

MR Yeah ah ha. And I think that's how Mrs. Eastman knew,
you know, was able to give us all that information.

JB Yeah.

MR Ah ha. [.19]

JB Ha! Cause they must be sort of a stones throw part of
the same.

MR I expect so. I don't really know. [.40]

JB Who was the most colorful person you talked with? That
could tell you the most stories?

MR Well, I think, not for this book especially but for
material that I used in this book I think this Mrs.
Halite, used to tell.

JB And she is dead.

MR Oh yes. Yes. She's been gone for, a good many years.

JB And she grew up in Moretown.

MR I don't know where she came from originally but her,
her husband Doctor Halite was gone before I, went

there but they were, they had been there for many, many years. [1.40] And she was, very elderly when I first went there so she couldn't tell me more about the 1880's and those.

JB And did she describe sort of the way of life and.

MR No I, it was mostly the Irish community that she would tell me about because she knew that was what was, interesting to me, a. [2.07]

JB Did she, I guess what I'm trying to get at is stories that would, bring the community alive and Irish wake or a get togethers or, sharing work, that.

MR Well of course by the time I went there, that wasn't, a common practice, and I don't know, I really couldn't tell you much about that part of it, of their sharing the work, I was trying to think, the trouble is, most of these people, would be older than I am, and have lived there longer are gone.

JB Yeah well I was wondering, in asking you about that was, do you remember any of the stories she told you about those kind of things. [3.06]

MR I don't, I don't remember, much about that it was mostly the, the history of, of the settlements and so

on, that, she told. Would tell me about.

JB And the fact that they worked on the railroad.

MR Yes.

JB Over in Northfield.

MR Yes. Yes. They were building the railroad over there.
And. But, I've tried, I was trying to think if there's
anyone that was, you could interview over there, that
was there, much longer before I was. I don't.

JB Everybody says to me, if you'd just come ten years
earlier.

MR Yes. Yes. Because there's so many of those people gone
now. So many of them. [4.01] The original settlers. I
can't think of anyone that, except Mrs. Ward or. I, I
just can't think of anyone right now that would, would
have, could give you that, more information.

JB Yeah. Yeah. I'm gonna see Marion Wallace, this
afternoon.

MR Oh, that would be, yes. They would be very. Quite
knowledgeable I would think about, about that area. I
think it was Clifford Wallace's or Marion Wallace's
brother maybe.

JB Bisby.

MR Bisby. [5.04] Who did quite a bit of, research I think, in that area.

JB Yes he apparently had a manuscript that nobody knows where it is now.

MR Oh that's a shame. It's a shame.

JB Mrs. Conrad was telling me.

MR Ah ha. It's.

JB Cause he, he apparently was a wonderful story teller and he wrote them down.

MR Yes. Yes, he, it's a shame because he, he really knew quite a bit about the area. But maybe Mrs. Wallace could.

JB Well I hope so.

MR Yes.

JB I interviewed Otis Wallis, too.

MR Oh yes.

JB The brother-in-law.

MR Ah ha. Yeah. That's a _____ up in Waitsfield. Yeah.

[6.01]

JB Yeah. Yeah.

MR Um hum.

JB But it seems that each community really was very

distinctive.

MR I think, it was. For a long, long time. And then they consolidated the schools, and like I say I think we lost a lot.

JB Yeah, cause Harwood Union High School draws.

MR From all five, five towns is it, let's see there's Warren, Waitsfield, Fayston, Moretown, Duxbury, and Waterbury. And there's so much, there's, I notice a big difference between the Mad River valley, and Waterbury, it's, there's a lot of, a lot of, oh a lot of difference, I don't think, I sometimes wonder how well they've blended. Ha! Ha!

JB What now can you put your finger on the difference?

MR Well, of course, since well since Harwood Union has been built the ski area, ski business has come to the valley over there, and that's there main interest now, that whole, the whole valley is, is really kind of dependent on that, on the recreation. [7.25] And Waterbury is sort of a half way place between Stowe and and Mount Mansfield and the Sugarbush. I think they, there are so many, I think one thing, there are so many, new comers over in the valley, that have come

from, cities and places where they had so many, more, services than these little towns, and they move in here, now I'm not, I don't want to be critical because heaven knows we depend of these people too. [8.21] But they, they expect the services that they had in these larger places, and it's sort of, driving the natives out because they can't afford, the taxes and things that provided for this. So it's, and I think maybe that's perhaps that's one reason that the, that those areas over there and Waterbury not so much Moretown I think Moretown but, I think Waitsfield and Warren, who have the, all the business a lot and Fayston have all the business, that maybe they can, they have a broader tax base than some of the other communities and. I don't know. [9.20]

JB It seemed that Moretown was a little bit removed.

MR That's right. A little bit, sometimes kind of resentful I think of, of the fact that when it was, when the valley or the Mad River valley was talked about, Moretown wasn't, was a lot of times wasn't even mentioned as a valley town. Because it really is, it's on the Mad River the same as all the other.

JB It just was more removed from the mountains.

MR Yes. And, and. And didn't benefit I think from the ski industry for some time but, I think it does now maybe up to a point with people building their homes and so on. [10.24] They're. But you see they don't have the. They don't receive the taxes, and don't have the money there like they do in the other valley towns. So I think, I think with between maybe between Waterbury and the valley towns, that they're, they, demand different services. They don't, maybe Waterbury doesn't think that, they need the same things that the valley towns need and I, this is just my personal opinion, I don't know.

JB I've heard it many times before.

MR Ah ha.

JB And, I was talking with Ed Eurich the other day and also Otis Wallace and they pointed out, the introduction of a lot of money made for big changes because up until that time, everybody was pretty much the same.

MR Yes. That's true. And all of a sudden, it changed. Ha! Ha! Yup.

JB And it was people, coming in who hadn't lived through the hard times.

MR That's right. [11.53]

JB And had no comprehension.

MR No. That's right. It's a. It's kind of sad in a way to see how much things have changed in the last twenty five years.

JB Yeah. [12.19] (tape off and then on)

MR Peak and it's beautiful there isn't a more beautiful state in, any where. And then when they get here they want to change it. And, that's the sad part of it. I think one of the things that I resent, is to see these crazy houses they build here, they aren't no more like Vermont, than, than anything. And it hurts me to see those scattered through the countryside, I don't know what they're thinking of, it just doesn't blend in with, with Vermont. Some of them anyway. Hum. And the condominiums, not that there's anything wrong with them, and I guess we're coming to that.

JB I drove by, I hadn't driven through, sort of through the Sugarbush area in a long time, and I did it yesterday and I was just astounded by all the

condominiums.

MR Yes. Yes.

JB And the change in character.

MR Yes.

JB And then suddenly I drove down through the golf course and as you said I saw the, different architectural styles and then suddenly I came on an old sugar house. Ha! Ha! And a farm that had obviously been a, an old farm.

MR No I think Moretown village is a, is the prettiest little village, in the valley now. [14.00] Because it hasn't changed all that much. Of course Waitsfield hasn't changed too much either, not the village itself, it's, the buildings are, in Warren but, of course I suppose I'm sort of prejudice but I, I think Moretown is a pretty little village.

JB It is a pretty little village and it used to have a dam, at either end, did it not?

MR Yes. Yes.

JB So was there a big mill pond in the, in the middle of it? I mean.

MR Well there was, not a big one, but, there, there were

dams that, at each end, I've got some where I've got
a, a picture of the upper mill.

JB I think you do in this little book.

MR It may be in that booklet.

JB It's nice to have included the photographs. Now the
upper mill, sawed what dimension lumber?

MR They used to sell, produce what they call chair stock.

JB Ah ha.

MR It was used for, shipped to, a furniture making, mills
I guess.

JB Um hum. Now where was Cobb hill?

MR Cobb hill is, is over here from Duxbury and, it goes
over the hill to Moretown. [15.49] It's. Well, the
road to Cobb hill is right, of course you're not
familiar with t he area, but do you know where Route 2
and Route 100 meet over here.

JB Yes. Yes.

MR Just a little ways from that, there's a road that goes
over, up, goes up to what they call Cobb hill, ah ha.

JB Is that almost in Fayston?

MR No.

JB No.

MR No it would be Duxbury and Moretown.

JB Cause Fayston comes oh I'm not quite sure where Fayston runs. Cause it seems to run, in sort of three pockets.

MR Yes.

JB North, central I would say and south.

MR Yes. [16.46] See it, I don't, Fayston, does Fayston hit Moretown? It must.

JB Yes I'm sure it does.

MR Yes. A little part of it does. I've got a, I have an original. [17.08] Bairds atlas.

JB Ou!

MR Which is Washington county, Baird's atlas that get all the.

JB Oh yeah.

MR The.

JB It's a wonderful book. [17.25]

MR Of course you can get copies of those, but this is an original. Could you excuse me a minute, I got somebody out here mowing my lawn. I'll be right back.

JB By all means. [18.07] (tape off)

END OF TAPE