

# QUONOCHONTAUG HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Oral History

## FRAN and PAUL KEARNEY

October 30, 2002

Interviewed by Anne S. Doyle

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QUESTION: Today is Wednesday, October the 30<sup>th</sup>, 2002. This morning I am talking with Fran and Paul Kearney of Ninigret Avenue in Quonochontaug. Please give your name and when you were born and where.

FRAN: I'm Fran Kearney. I was born in Westerly.

QUESTION: What was the date?

FRAN: March 4<sup>th</sup>, 1919.

QUESTION: What was your connection with Quonnie?

FRAN: That goes back a long time to when my uncle owned the old farmhouse. We came to the farmhouse.

QUESTION: How old were you then?

FRAN: I don't know. But I was young—very young.

QUESTION: And he owned it at that time?

FRAN: Yes. Perhaps I was maybe ten. I can't remember. But I have a vivid memory of that farmhouse was that in September when we would come down, there was no heat in it, other than the fireplaces. At night when we'd go to bed, the sheets would be so cold and so damp. I used to freeze. For some reason, that has stuck in my mind.

QUESTION: Those are the memories that are so individual and unique. Was it an uncomfortable feeling?

FRAN: Yes. It was. Sleeping in damp sheets is what it felt like.

QUESTION: You came down in September?

FRAN: In September. The early part of September, because we have a lot of relatives, and they would come in September. My Aunt Harriet and my uncle would be there. I also remember that she had a real big hat that we would use for lobsters those days. But in those days, all the kids would go to the beach and cut the mussels from the rocks. And she would cook the mussels up.

QUESTION: This is your aunt?

FRAN: This was my aunt. This was Mr. Thorp's wife.

QUESTION: So, for the sake of the tape, your uncle was Howard Thorp, who owned the farm property here at Quonochontaug?

FRAN: Yes. That's right.

QUESTION: Did your mother had one brother and one sister?

FRAN: My mother had no sisters. She was the only girl.

QUESTION: Who is Harriet?

FRAN: Harriet was Howard Thorp's first wife.

QUESTION: I understand. So, would you get the mussels?

FRAN: Yes. I picked them out from the rocks. You couldn't pick them off of the beach, because you didn't know if they were still alive or were deceased.

QUESTION: Did you like them? Did you eat them?

FRAN: No. I didn't like them. And you had to do it at low tide, of course, because the waves were too high at high tide. When we were first acquainted with Quonochontaug, my mother as a child came to Quonochontaug.

QUESTION: What is her name?

FRAN: Ferrence [phonetic 03:56]. It was Ferrence Thorp, and she was Harold's sister. And she came by horse and wagon—a buggy. The property from the Old Post Rd. was divided into farms, and she told me that on a weekend, or on Sunday when they would come from Ashaway—when she was a child, she lived in Ashaway too with her mother and father. There were stone walls and fences across the road that came into the beach. Little boys would sit on the end of the fence and open the gates for them for a few pennies.

QUESTION: I've heard that. This was probably in the early 1900s.

FRAN: On, no-no-no. My mother was born in 1882. So, this was 100-and-some years ago when she came to the beach.

QUESTION: Did she talk a lot about Quonnie to you?

FRAN: No. We didn't discuss it too much. It was just one of those things that occasionally she would mention going to the beach as a child. And that's something that she told me.

QUESTION: So, Howard and your mother—their parents came to Quonnie.

FRAN: Yes.

QUESTION: It really goes back even further than the purchase of the land and Mr. Thorp.

FRAN: Yes. Because he was so young. My mother had two brothers. He wasn't the youngest. He was next to the youngest. They would go to a hotel in East Beach.

QUESTION: East Beach?

FRAN: West Beach. Not East Beach; West Beach. Where the breachway is. Mother said that they'd get up early in the morning and get dressed and get ready to go to the beach, and by the time they got to the beach and went in for a swim and had their lunch, it was time to get dressed again and go back home.

QUESTION: Do you know which hotel it was?

FRAN: No. I think she said there were two or three hotels there at the time.

QUESTION: Did they take photographs of any of this? Do you have old photographs?

FRAN: No.

QUESTION: I didn't know whether maybe you had pictures of her down here.

FRAN: No. Not really. They didn't have a camera yet. You asked about memories. I can remember as a child going to West Beach. In the evening after dinner, most of the people that were at Quonnie would get to the breachway to go to the bowling alley. That's where they would congregate in the evenings at the bowling alley. They had two bowling alleys then at that time.

QUESTION: Do you remember actually bowling?

FRAN: Yes. I do. Duck pins and the small balls. I remember those. Then we'd go to the ice cream store across the street from the bowling alley. She was quite a character.

QUESTION: What is a memory you have of her?

FRAN: As a child, I remember her having a Dutch cut, like I have myself.

QUESTION: Did she have an English accent because she came from England?

FRAN: I really can't remember that. I just remember how she looked with her short hair.

QUESTION: Was she good with the kids?

FRAN: She was wonderful. All the kids liked her. She had little tables in that little store. I don't know whether she was still there in the '38 hurricane or not, but that was demolished during that hurricane.

QUESTION: I've heard different stories. I'm not sure if she was there in the '38. I heard that she rented. Do you know if she owned or rented? I think she rented that building from Mr. Lewis [phonetic 09:19]. I heard somebody mention Rose Dee [phonetic 09:28], who lived over there. They thought that she had a little tea house just before the hurricane. She was working over there.

FRAN: She and her sister Madge [phonetic 09:39] had a little—they took over the—so, it must have been before 1938.

QUESTION: And it was probably just a year or two before.

FRAN: Yes. They weren't there very long. Right.

QUESTION: Did you know Rose Dee?

FRAN: Yes. She and I went to school together. We went to college. We went to a business school.

QUESTION: Where did you go to school?

FRAN: In New London. We commuted.

QUESTION: Was she from Westerly as well?

FRAN: Yes. She was from Westerly.

QUESTION: Is there anything else about Mother Brimley that you can remember?

FRAN: No.

QUESTION: I heard she sold ice cream and candy.

FRAN: Yes. Mostly ice cream, I think. That was usually our dessert.

QUESTION: So, you would walk over from the farmhouse?

FRAN: Yes. And we'd go—not the road that's there now that goes to West Beach, but the road that went between the two pillars out there. It's stone wall pillars. That old.

QUESTION: The old West Beach Road?

FRAN: Yes. That's right.

QUESTION: Did you go on the boardwalk at all?

FRAN: Oh, the boardwalk. Everybody loved it, because you would see everybody's house as you went along. At low tide, you could walk across the breachway down to the other beach. And you had to make sure that if aren't a relatively good swimmer, you would be stuck there until the tide changed again.

QUESTION: Do you remember the Coast Guard men?

FRAN: Yes. I knew them. The boys. His father ran the lighthouse. His name was Broad Meadow.

QUESTION: Broad Meadow?

FRAN: Broad Meadow. And he was my class at school.

QUESTION: Did you actually go into the life saving station?

FRAN: I don't recall that I did.

QUESTION: When you went across the breachway, did you go just with a friend, or did you go with your parents?

FRAN: The kids would go across. A beautiful beach over there.

QUESTION: Yes. It still is. We take our kayaks over there.

FRAN: Do you?

QUESTION: Yes. Do you have memories of the Coast Guard men going up and down the beach looking for anybody in trouble out there?

FRAN: I don't remember that. After I got to a certain age, I didn't come again to Quonochontaug for a long time.

QUESTION: What age was that?

FRAN: I don't know. I was maybe twenty.

QUESTION: Tell me a little bit about your uncle, Howard Thorp.

FRAN: He was a very outgoing man. No question about it. He always had a story to tell somebody. Sometimes it perhaps was exaggerated a little bit to make a point. He was a very outgoing person. In later years, we knew everybody at the beach. I could call them by name, when they came, and how long they had been here, and when their parents had come here, and how long their parents had lived here.

QUESTION: When we purchased the land, then probably a lot of his friends bought the land.

FRAN: Yes. A lot of people from Massachusetts that bought here.

QUESTION: Did your mother love to be here?

FRAN: I don't think she was crazy about the beach.

QUESTION: And not the water?

FRAN: No.

QUESTION: And you didn't like to go swimming as well, or did you?

FRAN: I did. Yes. But I spent too many years on the beach in later years, and now I'm paying for it from the sun.

QUESTION: Do you have any memories of Fresh Pond Rock?

FRAN: Yes. That was much bigger than it is now. Maybe that was my imagination. During the war, I think the Army blew the top of it off. So, it's as it is now. But before it was a very large bolder.

QUESTION: Do you have memories during the wartime here?

FRAN: No.

QUESTION: What about your working years?

FRAN: After I came from school, I worked in the [inaudible 16:58] real estate office. And I typed many, many of the deeds to properties. I know a lot of the people by their name, but not their face.

QUESTION: How long did you live there? For several years?

FRAN: I think I lived there about eight or ten years.

QUESTION: Were you married at the time?

FRAN: I was married for a short time when I worked there. Back then, when I got pregnant, then I retired.

QUESTION: That's when you had the twins?

FRAN: Yes.

QUESTION: You said you knew people by their names and not necessarily by their face. Is there anybody else that you remember here at Quonnie in terms of being with them?

FRAN: I remember [inaudible 18:17]. She had been dropping me off whenever she came to the beach from practice. She had worked for Lord & Taylor, and she looked very smart when she came back.

QUESTION: That's Joanne Thompson's [phonetic 18:37]—

FRAN: Yes.

QUESTION: Is this after she had purchased a couple of—

FRAN: Yes. She wanted her houses at that time. She would stop in to see if there were any problems.

QUESTION: Most of the properties were rental properties. Is that right?

FRAN: Yes. At that time, a lot of them were. A couple of other people that I knew quite well that came in. There would be Beatrice [inaudible 19:27]. She had a little cottage—

PAUL: Over on Central Street.

FRAN: Surfside Avenue. She wanted to take full charge of that house. Everything was lovely, lovely. Everything that he did was just lovely. Oh, lovely. Lovely. And she was the sweetest lady. Her friend was Miss [inaudible 20:10]. She would

come with Miss [inaudible 20:13], and Miss [inaudible 20:16] eventually built a house also here. And Daisy [inaudible 20:25].

QUESTION: I've heard that name.

FRAN: She was a very attractive lady.

QUESTION: Is it Hasbro?

FRAN: Yes.

QUESTION: Do you know which house it was?

PAUL: They had two houses. The first house that she had was Eercon.

FRAN: Yes.

QUESTION: Miss Sapio owned a separate—

FRAN: No.

QUESTION: They owned it together?

FRAN: I think so. And then Miss Hasbro built another one. So, those two properties Mr. Thorpe gave up for her.

QUESTION: Did you ever to go inside any of these cottages?

FRAN: Not then. No.

PAUL: My name is Paul Kearney. I'm from Worcester, Massachusetts. It's September 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1990.

QUESTION: Tell me how you were first connected with Quonnie.

PAUL: As a young man, after World War II, we used to come down to the beach. I met my wife there at Narragansett Beach. We courted for a year, and then we decided to get married. At that time, I was working in Worcester, Massachusetts at a tobacco company in the sales department. France's Uncle Howard and his son, Nelson, were looking for a salesman to come into the office. I happened to tall into the deal.

QUESTION: How old were you then?

PAUL: I was 28 years old.



QUESTION: How old were you when you were married?

PAUL: I was married when I was 28.

QUESTION: So, you just moved down here?

PAUL: Moved down from Worcester. We had a little apartment in a place called Potter Hill. That's in the north end of Westerly. And then we moved into another house up on the same road, and it was owned by Fran's grandmother. We bought that from her. We had been there for a number of years until the children were born. They went to school in Westerly and had to ride a school bus. They went until about the fourth grade, and we thought that maybe we better move into town so they don't have to be riding that bus. We purchased a house in Westerly.

QUESTION: Do you remember the address in Westerly?

PAUL: Yes. Sixty-two Beach Street right across from the shopping mall. There used to be a big green house. It was sold, and there is a shopping mall and an apartment.

QUESTION: Is that Panache?

PAUL: There is a restaurant there. Then there is a pizza place. Right on the corner. It was a big white house. It had five bedrooms. Huge. A nice corner lot. Beautiful shade trees. I think we paid about \$18,000 for that in those days. We lived there a good number of years. My mother used to come and stay. And then Francis would come and stay. My mother was getting along in years and stayed with us. They did not go at the same time. And then after they passed away, the girls went to college and we decided the house was too big.

QUESTION: Did they go together to the same college?

PAUL: Yes. They went to the same college. We sold that house, and we bought a house a stone's throw of where we lived just up the street. It was a Cape Cod-style house in a place called [inaudible 25:55] Avenue. That's just up the street from the road that runs from Beach Street. We lived there for quite a while. And then we came down.

QUESTION: What about your house here in Quonnie?

PAUL: We lived in Westerly. Our house came for sale over on Highland Road. That's the road that goes to Fresh Pond Rock. The people that owned it were very elderly.

QUESTION: Do you remember their name?

PAUL: I can't remember. Their house was closed up for two or three years. There was a sign on it that said "not for rent," and, "not for sale". These people thought they were going to be able to come back, but they were elderly and they weren't able to. As a matter of fact, that house was down on the beach before the '38 hurricane.

QUESTION: I wonder if that was the Williams' house?

PAUL: No. Williams is two houses down. This was right next to the old Bennington farmhouse. Before the hurricane, they moved the house up.

QUESTION: Yes. That was the Thompson Jewett. My grandmother knew them.

FRAN: Jewett lived next door to us.

PAUL: I can't think of the people's names, because I had never met them. The niece called up one day, and they thought they were going to sell the property. They weren't going to be able to use it. They wanted us to put it up for sale. I cleared everything with the people. I was in the real estate business. There was no conflict at all. They said, "You can put a bid in too if you want to." We never went in the house. It was all shuttered up. We made a sealed bid of \$3,500 for it. We were high. We had the highest bid. I think the next highest was \$1,500. So, we fixed it all up.

QUESTION: That was a strange way of doing things.

PAUL: It was. I don't know how it happened.

QUESTION: Who lives there now?

PAUL: I don't know. It's probably three more times. I can't remember what the name is. I didn't sell it to him. The people that bought it from me were the Johnsons. They lived in it for fourteen years and sold it.

QUESTION: So, there's the farmhouse, and there is the Jewett's?

PAUL: This house, that we're talking about, and then Jewett. This is going towards the beach. And then Williams.

QUESTION: Okay. Now I know.

PAUL: It was Texas Avenue. And then a couple of houses down, Dexter owned one of them. Baxter was in the back. There was a lady that owned that before Dexter, and she also owned that house on the corner—the white house. As you drive over, the white house on the corner. I don't know what her name is.

QUESTION: How long were you over there?

PAUL: About five years.

QUESTION: Do you remember when you bought it?

PAUL: I think it was 1952 when we bought it. Of course, the 1954 Hurricane Carol came. We had a close call there.

QUESTION: A close call in what way?

PAUL: Getting out. The hurricane was starting to blow the morning of the hurricane.

QUESTION: I was here during it.

PAUL: Were you?

QUESTION: Yes.

PAUL: That morning I said, "I don't think I'll go to work. I think I'll stay home." The storm kicked in stronger, stronger and stronger. We had to put up shutters. I pulled the door closed. We couldn't open the door. The wind was so strong. The girls were a couple years old. And I had my mother. She was down visiting us. We had Mrs. Jewett next door with her daughter, Ann Thompson, her cat. A thesis that she was typing up. She was a student at Columbia University. We all had to get out of there. There were houses on the street. You could see them washing right across the pond. I couldn't take them out the front way, so I parked the car in between Jewett's house and my house. There was a clothesline like a helicopter thing. That thing was spinning like a helicopter blade. I got my mother and Frances got the kids in the car. I went over and got Mrs. Jewett and Ann and got them in the car. We all got in the car.

QUESTION: And the cat?

PAUL: And the cat. And the typewriter and the thesis. We were going to come out this way to go up West Beach Road. The water was rushing right across it—right across from that pond into the swamp. And so, we turned around and went up onto the East Beach Road. The water was coming across there from that pond. I said, "I think I'll go through," and Frances said, "You better not." I said, "I can make it." I drove down and I forgot there was a dip in the road. Water came right up and killed the car. Right there. We had everybody in the car.

QUESTION: What did you do then?

PAUL: I got everybody out. I had the girls up under my arms, and the water was up to here. My mother and Ann had to hold my line. I had the twins. We got up on

high ground up in the corner over there. I turned around, and the sea was up under the car. The water was that deep. We couldn't get in. We couldn't get out.

QUESTION: Where did you end up?

PAUL: We ended up in Mrs. Lawson's house—Allison Lawson. That's up around the corner. Do you know where Walsh lives, the attorney? John Walsh. He has a big, big house over there.

QUESTION: The yellow house?

PAUL: Yes. This is almost across the street. My brother had a little cottage right there that he built after the hurricane. So, we stayed there. Mrs. Lawson's daughter lived over in the Quonochontaug Inn at the time, and she was petrified about what happened with her daughter. Luckily, she was safe over there. Some experience. To finish off the story, the kids were so small that we had these kiddie locks on the door so they couldn't open it. Luckily, I decided to keep those open. I could pull everybody out from the back, because if those were locked, I don't know I would have gotten them out. I would have to take them over the seat through the front. Those old ladies were going to be a little hard. But we got them out. So, Hoxsie Dodge came down and pulled the car out. He took all the wheels off, cleaned all the salt and sand out of it—all the wheels. Dried it all out.

QUESTION: Did it run again?

PAUL: The insurance man came down and took the car. I said, "What are you going to do with this car?" He said, "I've got about 500,000 cars in Providence that are all flooded. Do you want to buy it?" I said, "How much do you want?" He said, "Give me 10%." I gave him \$85 and I bought a car that I drove for three years. It was real musky.

QUESTION: What was the state of your cottage after the hurricane?

PAUL: The roof was blown off—not the roof, but the shingles. The screen porch was ruined.

QUESTION: So, if you had stayed there, you probably would have been all right.

PAUL: We would have been all right. Sean Dexter had a house just below us across the street. His house backed up to the barn. He had a Cadillac and another car in the cellar. The water came right through and just took those cars in the cellar and smashed them together.

QUESTION: When did you finally go back to see what happened?

PAUL: We went back down during the eye of the storm. Mrs. Williams had another house down on the corner, and that wound up in the back of the pond. It laid in there all winter long before they got it out. Mrs. Williams' house was ruined. It's still there. Mary Conner's house was down there. That washed out.

QUESTION: Maybe we can drive around and you can show me. I need the visual stuff.

PAUL: Sure. It was worse in Misquamicut. People died there.

QUESTION: After the hurricane, is this when you came over here?

PAUL: We rented it. We couldn't stay there in the summer. We wouldn't get the rent. We came down in the fall. When the girls weren't old enough to go to school, we used to come down. Then we decided where we'd like to be. We bought the lot across the street first. We were going to put a house. We dug it up to start building it. Jack's mother—she lived down below. She wanted to move back further from the beach, because they had a lot of houses right on the ocean. So, Uncle Harold talked me out of building [inaudible 18:42]. I guess she owned that, so we traded. I think Mrs. [inaudible 38:50] owned it. No. Mrs. [inaudible 38:52]. I don't know which. Then I bought a lot next door to Mrs. [inaudible 38:58]. I guess that's who we bought it from. So, we had two lots.

QUESTION: Give you me a time frame with this?

PAUL: This house has got to be 30 years old, so it would be in the '70s. We rented from John Kelly in '62. Because I happened to be right here listening to the radio.

QUESTION: So, this was first a cottage?

PAUL: Just a summer cottage. Right. It had a porch. Two bedrooms upstairs and one down. Mr. Thorpe was very good to me. He taught me all I knew about the real estate business. If he didn't know it, he made darn sure that he did know it—how to do things, how to sell things and treat people. As far as his character, he was a wonderful man. I would sit on the beach on a Sunday afternoon and go around to baseball games. He would be down here visiting people. A lot of people had problems. If they explained their problems to him, he would listen and ask them a few questions and end the conversation. Two or three weeks later, he'd come back with the answer for their problems. Straightened them out and did certain things for them and they didn't even know it. That's why he was so successful. He just loved this place. It was his whole life. He had a fabulous business in Westerly. He was very busy. He and Nelson. And then Neal came into the office after that. He developed that land. He developed properties where the Westerly High School is—the junior high. In Connecticut he bought the Jessie Morris estate. Acres and acres of land. We built the roads. That was up near the Stonington—it's a junior high school now. It was a senior high school. I'll tell you another thing about him. Up near the Westerly High School near the football

field, he used to sell land. They would come in and run it by, and he would sell them a building lot 60 by 150, and he allowed a year to pay for it. There would be no interest and no taxes. That's the way he did things.

QUESTION: These days, that just doesn't—

PAUL: No way. But helped a lot of people. He was a state senator for years. He was very popular in Providence. He had his ups and downs in politics.

QUESTION: He was a state senator?

PAUL: A state senator from Westerly.

QUESTION: His son Nelson—were you friends with Nelson?

PAUL: Yes. I worked with Nelson very closely. Nelson is very smart. He graduated from MIT. We used to come down here and sell these lots. Nelson would help the YMCA in Westerly and the hospital. We used to come down and visit quite a bit when we lived in Westerly. We went down to Spray Rock for the Fourth of July party with the kids. There were a lot of families that I enjoyed. I enjoyed Mr. and Mrs. Fisher.

QUESTION: What do you remember about Dad?

PAUL: He was a worker and a talker. He was a great talker. We had a few disagreements, but nothing serious. Mr. Thorp was very good to him. Of course, we did business with Henry Brightman. You couldn't forget him. That's Henry, Sr. There is Henry, Jr., and now there is Barry. There are three generations there.

QUESTION: I'd like to know more about that family. Did you know the old Mr. Brightman?

PAUL: Sure. He had the store up here.

QUESTION: I remember what he looked like.

PAUL: I think he had a wooden leg and a handlebar moustache. He was a scary guy. He lived in the little house right next door.

QUESTION: When you said you did business with the Brightmans—

PAUL: Henry.

QUESTION: This is the old Mr. Brightman's son?

PAUL: Yes. He was a carpenter and a contractor. He built houses down through here too. He built a number of houses. He died in 1970. He died young. He had a

son, Henry, Jr. Henry, Jr. was a builder too. He built houses down here. Nice guy. And he died young. Barry is the third generation.

[skip in recording]

QUESTION: We meaning?

PAUL: The Charlestown Estates. We had a property. We bought a lot of land in the Charlestown Estates. That's some place, isn't it?

QUESTION: Samuel Davis used to—

PAUL: Sam Davis. Yes.

QUESTION: From what I can remember, Mr. Thorp bought up his land.

PAUL: He bought Sam Davis' property.

QUESTION: Did he get into some kind of trouble?

PAUL: It was a scam. He went to jail for it.

QUESTION: Oh, really? Oh, my goodness.

PAUL: Didn't he?

FRAN: I don't know.

QUESTION: So, Mr. Thorp did buy—

PAUL: He bought Sam Davis'. And he also bought the Willington farmhouse. It was a small farm. The girls—Ernestine.

QUESTION: Yes. I have pictures of them. My mother knew them.

PAUL: I'm sure she must have. They lived on a farm.

QUESTION: Do you know anything about them? They were adopted children.

PAUL: Yes.

QUESTION: I've been trying to figure out who their father was.

PAUL: Littlebridge. They're from Hopkinton.

QUESTION: Say that again.

FRAN: Littlebridge.

PAUL: No. Lillibridge.

QUESTION: So, that was the father of these two girls?

FRAN: I believe so.

PAUL: This is just hearsay.

QUESTION: I have so many pictures of those two girls in my grandmother's file. There was kind of an arrangement.

FRAN: Mrs. Lillibridge is a sister to Mr. [inaudible 49:30].

QUESTION: That makes sense.

PAUL: She had the most to say about the property. They took it over when they had the farmhouse. Ernestine's husband owned a big piece of property in Florida. He used to sell turpentine. It was pine groves and he harvested turpentine. I don't know what else he did. They used to come up in the springtime to visit. We sat out front talking to them. And then Gwendolyn, her husband—they lived up in the northern part of Florida. He was kind of a guy that lived off the land. That's the way I took him. An alligator hunter and all that sort of stuff. He only came up several times. Mr. McGray used to come up quite often with Ernestine.

QUESTION: Who was Mr. McGray?

PAUL: Ernestine's husband.

QUESTION: I have some photographs, and some of those names are in there.

PAUL: Yes. The other one's name was Andreu—Gwendolyn Andreu.

QUESTION: I think they were described as a little strange.

PAUL: They were very cautious. Particularly Gwendolyn. She was shy.

QUESTION: Were they adopted when they were older?

PAUL: I don't know when it was.

QUESTION: Because in the pictures, the Benningtons looked very old, and they are not that old. I didn't even know that they had been adopted at that time. But then it all made sense to me, because of the photographs.



FRAN: I think perhaps there were older when they were adopted, because I remember Ernestine coming into the office with Papa Bud. That's what she called him: Papa Bud. I thought then that he was kind of old.

PAUL: Ernestine had a son, Buddy. They lived in the house over there right next door to me. He was a pain in the neck. He was always over here wanting to play with the girls. He was like five years older. We all liked him.

QUESTION: Is there anything else that you'd like to say about the Brightmans?

PAUL: Henry was a nice guy. We did well with him.

QUESTION: Where do they live now?

PAUL: I think he lives somewhere up in Ashaway. I see him down here once in a while. Whenever the grands have to have something done, he comes down and takes care of it.

QUESTION: I would love to have a photograph of his—was it his great grandfather?

PAUL: The one that ran the store?

QUESTION: Yes.

PAUL: I don't know what his first name was.

QUESTION: I wonder if they have any family photographs.

PAUL: Probably.

QUESTION: I still haven't been able to find one of them.

PAUL: I've seen Barry when he comes down here. I think he works part time. I think he works at Electric Boat now. He keeps his hand in the property work.

QUESTION: His name would probably be in the phone book. There were two Sewel families here.

PAUL: Yes. There was Dan Sewel. He lived down here around the corner on that first street across from where Jim Brown lived. He owned the lot there, but he owned a house on Surfside.

QUESTION: He did. He was from Providence.

PAUL: Yes. He was a superintendent of highways in the city of Providence. A nice man. He used to help Uncle Howard out quite a bit with construction problems on the roads and that sort of thing.

QUESTION: You're talking about another Sewel.

PAUL: George Sewel was one of the [inaudible 55:27] husbands. He used to take over for Laurel.

QUESTION: You have to be careful what you put on the tape.

PAUL: I wouldn't want to say anything bad about anybody. He was always a gentleman. When I came here, I didn't just sit in the office and run around showing houses. I had to come down here and work—manual labor.

QUESTION: Tell me about that.

PAUL: These roads were only 18 feet wide. They are laid out 40 on the map from here to the wall. Every spring there was a fellow here. You know him. Roland D. Orlando. He had a dump truck. He used to pick up the trash.

QUESTION: I remember.

PAUL: He would come down and pick up the trash. There used to be a group of guys down there around Mr. Orlando. Henry Lockwood. And there were a few others. Howard and Phineas Randall. Those guys used to meet every day and have coffee, walk around the beach and snoop into everything. I used to enjoy them.

QUESTION: At the time were you right here?

PAUL: Yes. I would go up to the quarry up in Hopkinton, and Roland would get his truck loaded up with sand dust and bring it down. There used to be a big shed with the old-fashioned garage doors. We had a manure spreader that was there—a wide thing. We'd hook that up the back of Roland's truck, and go down the road and spread the stone dust. That's the way that road was built. That was before it was tarred. It's like sand that would get dusty and blow and get in everybody's houses. So, what we'd have to do then is we get a big trailer truckload of chloride—100-pound sacs. It looks like salt. We would dump that into the spreader, and we would go over it with that.

QUESTION: Would that just keep it down?

PAUL: It made the road look wet. It would keep the dust down.

QUESTION: I do remember that.

PAUL: I had to unload those things.

QUESTION: And you did this?

PAUL: Yes. There were four men. There was Sid Johnson, a retired Navy career man. He used to come down and work with us. He lived in a place called Potter Hill. He was Howard's right-hand man.

QUESTION: Did you know that this was going to be part of your job?

PAUL: Maybe they told me.

QUESTION: I didn't realize you did that.

PAUL: We used to do that. We also had water lines. The pipes were on top of the ground.

QUESTION: Tell me more about that. I remember the pumphouse being up here.

PAUL: There was a pumphouse right down here, and a well. Every spring, that well had to be cleaned. I was elected. I was a skinny guy, and the youngest, so I was elected to do that. I'd go down and washed the well down good. Then we put a bunch of stuff in it.

QUESTION: I was told there were two wells. One was for the drinking water. I remember pumping the water for drinking. But then there was also a well that was brackish.

PAUL: Yes. There were two wells. But I can't remember. Did you talk to Chuck Fisher at all?

QUESTION: I did.

PAUL: Chuck knows the history of this place.

QUESTION: Every time I talk to somebody, we don't talk about everything.

PAUL: I often asked him about things that I didn't know about. Anyhow, we'd take those pipes—in the fall, we had these things called tripods. They were nailed together, and we'd take the pipes apart and put them on the tripod and drain them. We would run the water out. Then we hooked it up again. This was in the fall after the season was over. We would get that all done. There was Oceanfront Street and Oceanview Avenue and Neptune—I think those are the only streets—there was nothing up there. We'd get that all done.

QUESTION: What year are we talking about?

PAUL: Nineteen forty-nine. We'd have to dig trenches to lay these pipes in. We tried to bury some of the pipes if we could.

QUESTION: You actually ended up burying a lot of them. But they were only like six inches down, weren't they?

PAUL: Yes. They weren't down too far. They'd freeze.

QUESTION: How did you drain them once they were buried.

PAUL: They used to be pitched certain ways, and they had shutoffs. But most of them were on the top of the ground. We always found a whole bunch of broken pipes in the spring when we came down. Then we'd have to close up all these cottages: the Bennington farmhouse and a whole bunch of them—Mr. Sloan's. We'd go down and do that.

QUESTION: That's what Danny and McLeod is doing now.

PAUL: Danny does it now. He charges people for doing it. I used to get a little extra for doing that too. It was part of my salary. That was always nice to get. Do you remember the tennis courts? They were clay courts. The fence was chicken wire on posts. Roland used to have to go up to Ashaway to a place named Bricks. They had a lot of clay there. He would load the truck up with clay. We'd built the tennis courts.

QUESTION: How often did you have to do that over?

PAUL: Not too often. But we would have to weed it.

QUESTION: So, Roland really did a lot of work.

PAUL: He did a lot of work here. He dug the trench for our septic system when we built this house. He did a lot of work.

QUESTION: I didn't realize that. You have added a lot of knowledge.

PAUL: I would go over to the town hall and get a list of the taxes. We used to do all the typing and bookkeeping for the fire district. The treasurer would send the bills out and collect the money. We would be the assessors.

QUESTION: Did you ever have a role—

PAUL: As an officer here?

QUESTION: Yes.

PAUL: No. Just the tax assessor. That's all. In the '38 hurricane, John had a house down on the oceanfront. He and his wife stayed in the house, and they got washed out. They were up in the attic. They moved the house right up in here. John could do anything. John was a fabulous man. He could put some shingles on a roof. He could do just about anything. He was the pleasantest man you would ever want to see. His wife was very nice. She was a stay-at-home wife.

QUESTION: Did they live here year-round?

PAUL: Yes, they did.

QUESTION: I don't know when that happened, because they did live in Westerly for a while.

PAUL: Oh, they lived in Westerly?

QUESTION: I thought they did.

PAUL: I didn't know that. I just knew of them down here. When he first started working at the beach, John was a young kid in those days. I think he was twenty years old or maybe nineteen. John is a handyman. He can do anything.

[skip in recording]

He used to own that house. The guy is just finishing it off again. It's next to Van Pope. He's a stockbroker.

QUESTION: It's the Walshe's now. I have heard the name.

PAUL: He owned that. He sold it to another family from Springfield. The house on East Beach Road—he lived there for a while. He sold that when he died to Franky Fish. We had a lot of fun with him.

QUESTION: Tell me about Franky.

[skip in recording]

PAUL: ...playing baseball for the St. Louis Cowboys. He's in the Hall of Fame in Cooperstown.

QUESTION: How did you know him?

PAUL: One day I was in the office, and this man walked into the office, and he said, "I'm interested in some property down in Quonochontaug that I'd like to buy." I looked at him, and I thought I knew him. I was a great baseball fan. He said, "I'm an old broken-down ball player. My name is Frank Fish." That's all he had to say. We gave him all the attention necessary. His wife, Ida, was a very nice

lady. We took him all around. We set him up in a house in Sunnybrook. He fixed it all up. He spent a ton of money. They were very happy there. We used to go over there for dinner. He'd invite us over for dinner. Eddy Cottington would go with us. Eddy always like a good time, and his wife. Frank lived in New Rochelle. He still owned a house down there. He had to go down and do an ad for the Saturday Evening Post. So, I drove him down and stayed at his house. Everybody came to his house to do the picture—the advertising company. All their models and everybody. There was a picture with Frank's son-in-law. He put the young kids next to him, and the father was standing back. Frank had a baseball, and he was showing it to him. He got 25 million dollars for that. All he spent was about three hours. We had a good time. We had a nice supper. When he retired, he was broadcasting for the Boston Bruins.

QUESTION: I have never seen a picture of him.

PAUL: These are his daughters. We had Mr. and Mrs. Fisher for dinner one night. We took this picture of him with the girls. That's a picture of them when they were small.

QUESTION: They're identical, aren't they?

PAUL: Yes.

[recording skips]

This is a fellow by the name of Jesse Burkett. He played in the big leagues for fourteen years back in the early 1900s. He worked in the coal mines in Pennsylvania. When he left the coal mines, he said, "I'll never be back." He went up and played for the St. Louis Cardinals, the Cleveland Indians. I used to play baseball a lot. I played all through New England semi-pro—Maine and New Hampshire and Black Stone Valley—all over. When I was playing baseball, I met Frances. I used to have to leave to go back up to Worcester to play baseball on a Sunday afternoon, which didn't go over too good. I had to leave Saturday night and go home. I had a trial with the Boston [inaudible 01:12:05] and played baseball. Jesse Burkett was the scout for me at that time. He took a bunch of us and tried us all out. We went to Boston and tried out down there, and they signed me and four other guys. That was the minor leagues. I went down to Pennsylvania to three other leagues and played for a while. I messed up my arm.

QUESTION: What position did you play?

PAUL: First base. Jesse was instrumental. He was quite a guy. He was retired. How do you like those uniforms?

QUESTION: This looks like quilted material.

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PAUL: That's the kind of hat they wore. They didn't wear those big helmets. If you got hit, you got hit.

QUESTION: You must treasure these photographs.

PAUL: Yes. I have a lot of them.

