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Danforth, Raymond and Hildreth Spooner oral history interview

Mariah Pfeiffer

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Interview with Raymond and Hildreth Spooner Danforth

Interviewee
Danforth, Raymond
Danforth, Hildreth Spooner

Interviewer
Mariah Pfeiffer

Date
July 14, 2006

Place
Shelburne, New Hampshire

ID Number
MC 101-04

Format
Audiocassette

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This interview covers Ray’s career at the paper pulp mill in Berlin: interviewing for a research position, becoming environmental director, and his various duties and projects; environmental issues on the Androscoggin: low dissolved oxygen, deforestation, Gulf Island Pond’s dead zone, turbidity, foam, sulfur, dioxin, and mill-related spills; environmental interventions: waste water treatment plants, the National Forest designation, Dr. Lawrence’s equalizing chemical dumping, the Gulf Island Pond Oxygenation Project, smoke stack scrubbers, the decline of the mills, and landfill development; Berlin area’s economy: industrial innovation, decline, real estate, future development issues, and the outflow of young people; ways of remembering Berlin before the decline; federal and state environmental regulations; environmental politics; environmental awareness; relating to the river meaningfully: recreating and the
community of those in the river’s valley; and the impact of new prisons on Berlin’s citizens.

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Transcript

Hildy Danforth: --knowing nothing about the paper company story.

Ray Danforth: Absolutely nothing. I didn’t know that there was a difference between pulp and paper, and (unintelligible).

HD: In the interview they asked, now you know this job is in Berlin, New Hampshire? He said yeah, that’s why I want to go there. We always think he got the job because he knew where Berlin, New Hampshire was and was willing to live there. And at that point they showed us around and they said, well there’s not too much shopping available in Berlin but you can always go to Lewiston, that’s the big city. We just spent four years in Lewiston, I know what’s there. Nothing is there.

RD: My first job was research, and from ’73 to ’75 that’s pretty much all I did. Then in ’85 I started working with the then director of environmental on a couple of odd projects, which got me more and more into environmental. And then In 1975 they started building the waste water treatment plants. Prior to that, everything (unintelligible), until 1976 everything went to the river, and July of ’76 everything was tied in.

With your experts you got different predictions, but the predictions were that it would take anywhere from two to five years for the river to clean up somewhat and have a reasonable amount of (unintelligible) so that the fish could live and (unintelligible). We plotted it and the BOD level in the river come down, and the dissolved oxygen levels in the river came up in a matter of days. It was incredible. And it wasn’t perfect, but it was up high enough that fish, if they were there, could live in the river at that time. It was that fast. And this was down through Rumford, where they were having their own problems.

You still wouldn’t want to swim in the river because of all the municipal sewage come right into the river, but the heavy load on the river was pulp. And that was at the time an
absolutely incredible investment. It was $28 million, I believe, for the two treatment plants for a pulp and paper facility that was starting around (unintelligible).

And backing up a little bit, and you may have gotten this from (unintelligible) so if you have gotten some of these turn me off. In late 1980s, when Brown Company first started up, they started a research department and literally, and this sounds strange, but literally every major development in the pulp and paper industry from 1920 to 1950, ‘55, came from them, in the world.

**Q:** What kind of things were these developments?

**RD:** Better ways of bleaching pulp, better ways of making paper.

**HD:** Crisco, was it Crisco?

**RD:** An alternative of Crisco, (unintelligible) working from there, literally was first developed there, not by the mill, by an outside person, and it was incredible. Berlin was the research center for pulp and paper in the world. And then they started with a family, and it’s classic, a family owned company and the older people were dying off, the younger people had no interest in the company, it wasn’t a publicly-owned company, and they found they started losing money so they did what many companies do when they first start losing money is they get rid of the research because research doesn’t make any money instantly. They did, and that was basically the beginning of (unintelligible).

It then got sold to an Italian company, I am not sure exactly, I think an Italian company. It was run by (unintelligible). Each of these groups that owned it just milked it for everything they could, they put nothing back in, and foreign competition started to take over. No one of these things killed the mill; it was a combination of all of them. So now (unintelligible) sold it off to EPA, EPA put it into bankruptcy, Fraser bought it, (unintelligible) Fraser wanted to keep it running or not. (Unintelligible) many of us thought their strength was going down, and sure enough it went down. It once was the paper company in the world.

A lot of people keep thinking that it will come back; somebody will buy it and restart it. Frankly, that’s the absolute worst thing that could happen. Berlin has got to get used to the idea that the pulp and paper mill isn’t here anymore. They’ve got to move on. They started to go into bankruptcy, started, and Fraser bought it, oh wonderful, saved, now they’ve accepted to move on.

**Q:** You said these turnovers started in the mid seventies?

**RD:** No, the turnovers started in the sixties and just one thing after another. At the time everything, the future (unintelligible) looked at wonderful (unintelligible), and from the perspective of thirty, forty fifty years managed to see where each of these (unintelligible). When we came here, or when we were in Lewiston, at Bates, French was still the primary language at many of the schools, English was an elective. When we
came to Berlin, about forty percent of the population preferred speaking French. They could speak English, (unintelligible), and now when you go to the nursing home or wherever you will find people who still prefer French, very definitely. If you’re going to work at like a medical center or whatever, if you can speak French it’s a real asset. But today probably two, three percent speak English, or would if they had to. You can still find people whose English is pretty rough but they’ll speak English.

There’s been a huge social change there, and typical of many towns the core of the city has died (unintelligible) various shops that are missing, or boarded up, for sale or whatever, it’s pretty obvious the center, the core doesn’t exist anymore. (Unintelligible), but it’s moved up to the Walmart (unintelligible) and they’ve expanded tremendously, but they used to be right there in Berlin.

Q: What did the Main Street look like before, or how different than today?

RD: It looked very much, in the last thirty forty years it hasn’t changed that much except for (unintelligible), same buildings, same (unintelligible). (Unintelligible) and there are pictures—Brown Company had a company photographer, don’t ask me why, and he took pictures of paper machines, and gatherings of company officials, and absolutely everything. He took pictures when Eisenhower was here and went up to the company camp to go fishing, and he took pictures of the river and the mills and the logging camps (unintelligible). Those pictures are now at (unintelligible) and they’re available, if you want to go over and get a look through them. Many of them are labeled, not all of them. (Unintelligible) not catalogued (unintelligible), because they need somebody to spend three or four years really cataloging. But it would not be that difficult to thumb through, find a picture that looked like Main Street of Berlin, or Main Street of a town and figure out what it was.

I remember going through the pictures myself (unintelligible). There were pictures taken about 1910, 1915 looking from the center of Berlin out to the (unintelligible) mills and there’s not one tree in those pictures, not a single tree. The mill cut what they could transport most easily (unintelligible), and then they worked out from there. But initially they cut very close to the river.

HD: Probably the reason the National Forest (unintelligible) came by, or whatever it was for, was that there were no trees left and that they needed to preserve the forest. The only trees around there were really steep slopes that were hard to get to.

RD: New Hampshire is now about seventy-seven, seventy-eight percent forested. At one time it was under twenty; huge change.

Q: When did that process start, the re-foresting?

RD: Nineteen hundred give or take. Somebody like Brad Weiman (sounds like) could tell you to the hour.
After that (unintelligible) national forest, (unintelligible).

Yeah, but usually things like a national forest gets formed after all the damage is done and things are starting actually to regenerate a little bit on their own. Incredible forest fires they had, just slashed all the woods (unintelligible). Not that they wanted the forest fires but (unintelligible).

What happened to me, is I gradually worked more and more into environmental and in 1980, sort of late winter, early spring of that year I had burned a lot of bridges in the mill because I told a lot a research (unintelligible) why I didn’t think they were doing it right, and the then president of the company called me in and had me tell various managers that, which that was not fair. I mean, I told him in confidence and he had me tell them, and that night I got a phone call from the manager of environmental saying that he was turning in his resignation the next morning and he thought I might be interested. Oh yeah, I’m interested, because I am looking for a job. So in 1980 I became environmental manager, but manager doesn’t do anything. EPA didn’t want to ever talk to the manager at ground level; they wanted the next higher level, they wanted the top people, so I asked and nobody had any problem so I became the environmental director. I gave myself the title. Oh, environmental director, well we can talk to you.

Q: What kind of work were you doing, or how did you get involved in this environmental (unintelligible)?

They needed somebody with a technical background who could figure out why the testing to restructure the plant doesn’t work, so it was basically a matter of reading the books and watching what they did and straightening out what they did and writing up procedures that actually followed the book, and were testing effluent (unintelligible), and it meant modifying the procedures just enough to get the tests to actually work, while still having valid tests. I mean I wasn’t modifying (unintelligible) valid data. And so I spent two or three months on that, and then they needed someone to straighten out the air monitoring so I did that. I did (unintelligible) around and about until finally I was able to, I took over the whole department, and when took over the department I had, I ended up being in charge of both the environmental and technical for the pulp mill. I didn’t understand the pulp mill that well at the time. They finally decided to punish me because I wasn’t really paying much attention to the pulp mill part so they took it away from me and I thought, great, thank you.

Q: Wonderful.

If you want to think you’re punishing me in the process that’s okay too. But what I wanted to work on was the environmental. So I was then in charge of the environmental which meant negotiating all the permits, filing all the permits. I guess I should back up a little bit—it meant digging out what permits were needed, getting all the application forms, getting all the input from a dozen different places to package up an application, getting the application off to the state, the EPA, wherever it might go, just to the city for some things. And then finally, once they had time to digest it, negotiating
with them to come out with a reasonable permit, and then implementing the permit once they got it to make sure everybody knew about it (unintelligible).

Q: So before you were in this position and making these changes, how was the company dealing with these things?

RD: The environmental laws, the federal EPA laws, came in 1970-plus or -minus. Prior to that there was really nothing.

HD: And then it was kind of a part time add-on to somebody’s job, and then it became more and more time consuming and (unintelligible), under the EPA, (unintelligible).

RD: And prior to that there have been some push to clean up the river. That is where you need Dr. Lawrence’s report, but they had tried dumping in this chemical and dumping in that chemical but none of this really would work while the load on the river, the fresh stuff coming in primarily from the pulp mill was so high. Basically, they had to go back and turn off the source. Once they fixed the sources, for practical purposes, everything cleaned up downstream. Now, I say that carefully because there are a lot of people out there who say well my section of the river is no better than it’s ever been. Okay, fine, but by and large it’s in great shape now. Gulf Island Pond is the one major exception, and that will not clean up over (unintelligible).

HD: (Unintelligible).

RD: Oh yeah.

Q: The Gulf Island Pond Project?

RD: Did you go over, do you know where the dock is on Gulf Island?

Q: I know where the dock is, I’ve been out there.

RD: Okay, fine. The State of Maine likes to be one notch better than anyone else on environment. I’m not saying that as a negative; I think that’s probably good. But they have (unintelligible) figured out the major load going into Gulf Island Pond was from the three mills, three pulp mills, Rumford, Jay and Brewer, and there were also inputs from this town and from sediment and everything else, but those were the three big ones, no debate, absolutely correct. And it was decided that these could be cleaned up, and EPA issued permits (unintelligible), all of them about seventy-five, seventy-six (unintelligible), seventy-four, somewhere in there. This is shortly after the Clean Water Act had been issued, signing the law (unintelligible).

And into the eighties there was all kinds of studies, debates, and nothing happened at Gulf Island Pond of a practical nature. There was really very little more going into Gulf Island Pond, but for sediments on the bottom, (unintelligible) huge, huge sediments, particularly in the dead spots behind the island and what have you; the main channel
Q: Like the deep holes?

RD: Deep holes aren’t deep anymore, or aren’t as deep. The particular problem is right in front of the (unintelligible) which is the deepest part, but the take-offs for the hydro station aren’t on the bottom, they’re up a bit, for many reasons, among them being that if they’re right on the bottom they’ll be sucking in rocks and everything else. But you know, good technical reasons (unintelligible), but because of that there’s really a dead (unintelligible) on the bottom. And the State of Maine just passed some laws at some point in all of this saying that the Pond, the Great Pond, had to have a dissolved oxygen level of $X$, and a river had to have a dissolved oxygen level that was higher, never coming to grips with the fact that impoundment is really a pond, it’s not part of the river. However, politicians being what they are, once they’ve made a decision, trying to change it and perhaps getting a different constituent (unintelligible), they don’t change things like that.

So the various mills were trying to make things up to this upper standard and make it perfect. They lost about three to five years because of all of the debate back and forth in the State of Maine. There was a lot of modeling done as to what the contribution was from each of the mills and how this was going to be factored into whatever was going to be done, and the various proposals were put forth by the Gulf Island Pond group, it didn’t really have a name then, but it wasn’t probably going to make Gulf Island Pond perfect. Therefore, the State of Maine didn’t want that, they wanted perfect, so finally in about 1990 Gulf Island Pond Oxygenation Project was put together, (unintelligible), for lack of anything else. I got a nice jacket, a green jacket from it.

And what we did is generally bought, I think we bought land just south of the Bates dock, and we had a bunch of tanks and evaporators and what have you right there and ran a pipe, and we set up a system where we would buy liquid oxygen, it would go through a pipe out into the river, (unintelligible), right across the whole river, deep, not quite on the bottom but close, and we would be forcing not liquid oxygen but oxygen gas up through (unintelligible). And this would dissolve a lot more oxygen into the water than was just coming in with the flow of the river, and the goal was to raise the dissolved oxygen level by one milligram per liter and we did that.

And across the entire top, down about fifteen feet, and I’m not certain of the exact numbers but bear with me, we raised the oxygen level about one milligram per liter. It met all of the state’s standards, except (unintelligible) because the deep part, for practical purposes (unintelligible). It doesn’t turn over, it doesn’t mix with whatever there is above it, and the state of Maine said no, you have to have the standard right down to the bottom. Finally they backed off and they said it would have to be $1$ milligram (unintelligible), it had to meet the standard of within one meter of the bottom, the bottom fifty feet and the deep part (unintelligible).

They did some days, but most days not all the way down there, but the bottom layer goes
up and down a little bit, and they are still fighting over it and they will be fighting over it until hell freezes over. There’s no good answer. With a small spot of luck they will be fighting over incoming (unintelligible) for the next hundred years, at which point the sediments will have broken down and it won’t be a problem anymore.

And I’m serious; there were proposals to dredge it. First off, if you do dredge it where do you put the millions of cubic yards of sediments? There’s a lot of mercury in there, probably; I’m guessing at that. There’s mercury in almost every other impoundment up and down the river because mercury was used so heavily by the pulp mills. Dioxin is absorbed through various (unintelligible), pulp fiber being one that absorbs (unintelligible), bacteria being another and that’s what most of the sediment is. So if you stir it up and you will end up with a problem of what do you do with the product, and now that you have stirred it up aren’t you just moving the sediment downstream? Have you really made an improvement with the proposal to add in (unintelligible) two, three, five feet of sand, gravel, over the top of everything, just seal it off it won’t be there anymore. Basically, if we can’t see it it’s not there, and that would accomplish the getting the sediment out of the oxygen, out of the water column, but it’s not going to improve the dissolved oxygen (unintelligible). It’s still going to be a problem because it’s the lack of (unintelligible). And while you’re pouring all that sand what other problems are you creating, what kind of gravel pit are we creating? Have we got two-thirds of Maine to fill the pond (unintelligible)?

HD: I remember toward the end of working for the pulp mill saying that, you know, when I first was environmental director the things you did improved the environment. You built treatment plants, and you built landfills, and you put scrubbers on (unintelligible) and things, and after a while instead of improving the environment they just created more paper work. (Unintelligible) more things that at the smaller levels.

RD: What I said, it used to be fun because you stand back and you’ve put in a treatment plant and people say, well that’s great, you’ve have done something good. And toward the end, no matter what you did, you might have improved the environment to some extent but really all you were doing was trying desperately to satisfy some law, some rule, or whatever which might have been, well almost guaranteed that all the laws and the rules that were ever put together regarding air and water and whatever were done with very good intentions. Unfortunately they were done without a look at the practicality of it. A lot of work, I’m not arguing that, but in a lot of cases they needed to be modified and state and federal agencies and politicians don’t modify something easily because to do so it looks like they (unintelligible).

I mean, I was quite famous at one point in time for sitting at a meeting with the EPA in Boston and telling the EPA people, who were telling us exactly what we had to do, and it couldn’t be done, telling the EPA that you guys don’t care about the environment, you don’t give a damn about it; all you care about is your rules and as long as we satisfy your rules you’re happy, and if it improves the environment that’s nice but if it doesn’t you don’t care. They were not happy with me. Finally one of them came to me and said you know Ray, you’re absolutely correct.
HD: The air people would care about the air and the water people would care about water, but they didn’t care about if you have to move all the sediment it cleaned up the water but what have you done to the land and for the environmental hazards of moving all the sediment (unintelligible)?

RD: It’s a circle; when the air pollution was a big issue everyone said put scrubbers on, take all the solids and everything out of the air. Great, scrubbers were put on, and then the upshot was—and the scrubbers had to go somewhere, (unintelligible) the river. Oh can’t do that. So there we built treatment plants, took care of all the effluent from the scrubbers and the effluent from the mills, and everything else and ran them through a treatment plant, and of course now we get solids coming out of that, we haul it up and build a big pile (unintelligible). Well, can’t do that, you’re contaminating the groundwater, you’re killing off various animals I’m sure.

So everybody built nice, solid-containing landfills, and the (unintelligible) the bottom water drained through the bottom of the pile; oh, can’t send that back to the river. And the other thing that they did with it is collect all the solids and take them back to the boiler and burn them; they can’t do that, that might putting dioxin up the stacks. It was just this circle, and each group, state and federal, focused on their little tiny piece and nobody was there standing back looking at the big picture. And they’ve gotten better, but (unintelligible).

Q: What would you suggest to make it easier to look at that whole picture?

RD: Quite frankly the people, air, water, solid waste, it doesn’t make any difference. People right at the top levels, they need to work with people who come in and write the permits and all that, but they need the people at the top who have had industry experience, who have been out there in the world trying to make these things work, and they need people at the top who have had years and years and years of experience in the various agencies and can go beyond fighting for their own little bit of turf, that can bring in the other groups to work together. And it doesn’t happen, and most people from the industry want nothing to do with trying to work for state or federal. First off, they end up taking a thirty to fifty percent pay cut, not the top people, the (unintelligible), and second once they get into those positions it’s nothing but paperwork. You’ve got to fill out forms in triplicate to do anything. Very few people from (unintelligible) buildings and the agencies, state or federal. I worked for the State of New Hampshire briefly as a consultant and the amount of paperwork was just unreal.

Q: (Unintelligible) project, was this through the mill or was this independent—

RD: Oh no, no this was through the mill. There were representatives from Rumford, IP from Jay, and at the start of it was James River (unintelligible) and Central Maine Power.

HD: Of course the Central Maine Power analyst was there, this was their problem.
RD: And it has been suggested to them, if you remove your dam, hasn’t been a popular suggestion either, although they were forced to (unintelligible), what they wanted to do with Gulf Island Pond was use it for surge, so when their hydro (unintelligible) electrics (unintelligible) all the way down, not down fifty feet but a drop of ten or twelve feet, and then they let it fill back up and then drop it, and the advantage to that is it actually mixes the layers somewhat, so there is a plus there. The disadvantage is that you get the shoreline hanging out there, and you also end up with the oxygen distribution screwed up. It’s a problem and for a while they agreed to run it virtually run of the river, so a hundred thousand cubic feet come in, a hundred thousand cubic feet going out, with some slight variations, (unintelligible).

Of course Gulf Island Pond is only a problem the tail end of June through maybe the first part of September, during the hot season. After that you have to wait until the next year. When I first started, the State of Maine—there has never been a lot of love lost between (unintelligible). Maine’s river has the unfortunate habit of flowing a very short distance through New Hampshire. If New Hampshire mill wasn’t there, their river would be perfect. Well okay, it’s not quite that simple. Boy, on several occasions—

HD: (Unintelligible).

RD: They couldn’t then, but now Maine has sign-off (unintelligible) around the river, anywhere on the river.

Q: Even New Hampshire?

RD: Yes.

Q: How’d they get that?

RD: A lot of arm twisting with EPA and then it’s one of these things, I believe the way it works is Maine gets a draft of the permit, they get to review, comment on it; if they like it great. If they don’t like then, well they can’t absolutely I think enforce the change; they talk to EPA, EPA makes the change, so it’s not Maine making the change, it’s EPA.

Q: But Maine has influence?

RD: A lot of it. It was funny because initially, this goes back into the eighties, Maine was all uptight about the terrible, terribie things being done in Berlin and how the load on the treatment plant was such that the treatment plant couldn’t it and on and on and on, and how their mills in Maine were just such good examples. Well when it finally came down to calculations, the Berlin mill, the plant, oh, did that create some embarrassment. When I was done in 1999, when I retired, the Rumford and Jay were dramatically cleaner. They cut their load by eighty percent, and it wasn’t an accident; they worked at it. They get tremendous credit for what they did, or they should get credit.
The other one was Maine put in a (unintelligible), and they said that, and I don’t remember the unit anymore, but the color could be no more, no odor, no foam, turbidity and to be less than (unintelligible), and they worked with their mills in Maine and set it up and then started talking to New Hampshire and EPA so that they could inflict their laws on New Hampshire, particularly in Berlin, because they knew that the Berlin mill was dramatically worse than (unintelligible). The Berlin bulk mill and the paper mill at that point was about seventy percent clear water. We were dramatically better, again. That trend unfortunately never continued. James River didn’t have money to put into improvements, (unintelligible) didn’t; EPA didn’t have money to put into anything. They have done nothing. And there were a lot of people who thought that when the two mills shut down because of the bankruptcy that the river improved dramatically.

HD: It got a lot cleaner.

RD: You could stand out here on the bridge–

Q: (Unintelligible).

HD: Maybe months, anyway.

RD: In a couple months.

HD: We do a lot of community things, we just always have, but we were (unintelligible) in the autumn when the leaves were turning and we could see leaves floating under the water. It was quite pretty.

Q: And you couldn’t see them before?

RD: Oh no, it used to be you could see–

HD: You could see the bottom very well.

RD: You could see occasionally rocks or whatever, and if you stuck your paddle down you could see most of the blade.

HD: It was horrible.

RD: And now you could see down eight, ten feet. Not everywhere; not right below a dam, obviously. Out here at the bridge I could walk across and see the bottom on either side part of the way out; I could see out five feet (unintelligible).

Q: This happened just in Maine, right?

RD: No this happened–

HD: No, this happened when the bankruptcy (unintelligible). We’ve been waiting to
The two different treatment plants, one for the pulp mill, one for (unintelligible), put out different, the (unintelligible) one puts out primarily bacteria, the paper mill one puts out primarily (unintelligible). The pulp mill one, the pulp mill is shut down, the pulp mill treatment plant is not shut down; it's still draining tanks (unintelligible). The paper mill treatment plant is still running and the color is always mostly (unintelligible) out of the pulp. The turbidity (unintelligible).

Q: What exactly is turbidity in layman's terms?

RD: Lack of clarity. Not color; I mean you could have a (unintelligible) solution, (unintelligible) that is absolutely crystal clear, you can look right through it. You can have colorless water but you can't look more than inch into it because there's so much solids in there. And then on the other extreme there's sediment, which is big particles which are clouding up the water, or looking at another thing, submicroscopic particles which are scattering light so you just can't look, really; that's turbidity.

Q: Great, got it.

RD: The pulp mill discharge is always dark brown, coffee colored.

HD: The water is dark brown above the pulp mill. The natural water, we were canoeing in the Magalloway on the 4th of July and it comes into Lake Umbagog and it's dark brown too, and there's no pulp mill up there, just from the tannins in the soil, and a certain amount of the foam comes from that as well; it's not all industrial.

RD: One of the things that very few people realize is that wood has more than just fiber that is the pulp. It has (unintelligible). If you rub up against a spruce tree you know, ah yes, it has gum and pitch and things like that; also actually has tremendous amount of fat. Fat, in wood, no. It actually has a fair amount of fat which when freed up here by natural processes that go on in the woods, or in a beaver pond or whatever, or in a pulp mill where of course it happens a lot faster, you end up making soap. This is not Ivory, the best soap, let me tell you. This is really gooey, rank, odoriferous stuff, but it makes the most wonderful foam. You talk about soap suds, green liquid dishwashing soap can't hold a candle to this stuff, and these are suds that once you make them don't break down as well. It's a real stable foam that just sits there.

Q: That's the foam on the river?

RD: That's the foam on the river. But the majority, well the majority of foam on the river does not have anything to do with the mill. It's coming from natural sources and the pulp is the creator. When the water goes over the dam, there's a turbulence there, or a rapid or whatever, that's--

End of Side A, Tape One
RD: (Unintelligible) called me up one day to help out with this. He said Ray, I want you to come down here and look at this sulfur washing off the roof. The pulp mill used various sulfur compounds in its process, and I'm thinking sulfur off the roof? I'm down there, and the guy had collected this sulfur at a down spout and he noticed the water was coming out yellow. He had a quart mason jar, and before I went I checked the density of sulfur and sulfur density is about 1.5; it sinks at the bottom. Well, what we had was water with a yellow layer on top, fluorescent yellow, really, and I said that is not sulfur, sulfur sinks. Oh yes it's sulfur. I took the lid off the jar and smelled some of the finest pine wine you could ever imagine. It was pine pollen, and pine pollen floats. And it was close to June, pine pollen season, everybody's cars, houses, everything is coated with this yellow which must be coming from the mill. No, no it's not coming from the mill.

(Pause in taping.)

RD: I should know a lot about Lawrance because he was officially my advisor for a year or so at Bates, and then he was in the process of retiring and I never really had that much to do with him after that. I never had a course with him. He was sort of this older guy who was around occasionally, you know, that sort of thing. Some people reported to him as an advisor because they just didn't have enough faculty to go around. I know he was selected through some process or other to be the river master and worked to trying to clean up the river back in the late forties, fifties; I don't know the exact time frame.

Q: I think it was about the late forties.

RD: And they were particularly concerned about Gulf Island Pond or Island which (unintelligible) of debris and bog, it was full of gas, just anaerobic decomposition and it filled it and it would be—this huge 20X100-foot island would be there, and then it would break up and the (unintelligible) would settle it down, and then another one filled up, and you couldn't go boating really, you know the hydrogen sulfide was nauseating. Houses along the banks, and lead was commonly used for paint, to paint houses, would literally turn yellow, which is the color of lead sulfide. I guess it wouldn't have been so bad if it turned a uniform color of yellow, but the side near the river would be yellower than the side away from the river. People got all upset about that. The river front property, you couldn't give it away on Gulf Island Pond.

HD: And even (unintelligible), I mean nobody wanted land that looked at the river.

RD: No, because of the smell.

HD: That was a big change.

RD: Color, (unintelligible), nobody cared about that, but the odor.

HD: In a way it's protected the shoreline.
RD: It has, it has really protected the shoreline, and we're seeing a development pressure for now, the river *(unintelligible)*.

Q: In Berlin?

RD: In Shelburne.

Q: Lisbon too.

RD: I'm sure.

Q: How recently did that start, the pressure?

RD: Last five years or something. It's one of these things that's very, very gradual, *(unintelligible)*. We're in this phase right now, we're starting to increase.

HD: For years and years there were two houses, as you'd come into the center of Shelburne you could see two houses over in *(unintelligible)*, but now you see four or five, but not hundreds. And of course it floods routinely so some of the area on the river is flood plain and couldn't be built.

RD: Or shouldn't be. In regards, you know, and I don't know what legal authority he had—was it federal, State of Maine?

HD: He was just collecting data.

RD: He was collecting data but they were also trying experiments, dumping various chemicals in that would help break down the fiber or help get a level of oxygen into the water that would help. And they didn't have the type of equipment that would deliver these chemicals to the river on a continuous basis. Almost *(unintelligible)*, not quite literally but—

HD: I remember when we were at Bates the river was changed, its designation was changed and there were letter changes, like D to C or something like that.

RD: D to C.

HD: And we joked about, oh, that means you could wade across without your legs dissolving or something.

RD: A lot of it's pollution but a lot of it's dissolved oxygen. Fish in the river, for practical purposes, didn't exist. There'd be brook trout down here down to basically the mouth of the brook, but not in the mainstream of the river. And now—

HD: Almost every time we drive across this bridge there are people fishing, catch and
release, because (unintelligible). And we’ve got eagles, which we never used to have.

**RD:** Who are not catch and release.

**Q:** So you have seen some bounce back, it sounds like.

**HD:** The loons aren’t doing so well but the eagles are doing well.

**RD:** No one seems to know what’s with the loons. They rebounded tremendously and now they’re starting to taper off again. But canoeing in the shallows, I’ll see blue strip. In fact, when we were testing for dioxin in the fish we tested in the Sherburne reservoir up here and the key was, believe it or not we actually hired people to go fishing, they thought it was the best job in the whole world, and the rule was that they had to catch fish the way a fisherman would catch it, number one, and they had to keep those that a fisherman would keep. If they were little, six inches or four inches, throw them back, but twelve inch, sixteen inch, and they were pulling in seventeen inch, fifteen inch trout, big monsters, and we would filet them open, send them off for analysis for dioxin; we weren’t eating them. It was a shame, you know, sacrificing the trout but hey, (unintelligible).

**Q:** And this was in the seventies, eighties?

**RD:** No, this is in the late nineties, mid and late nineties, testing for dioxin, but the fish were there. And prior to the treatment plant (unintelligible) that lived based on dissolved oxygen in the water. There would be frogs, well, adult frogs don’t care about the oxygen in the river, and eventually some of the testing was being done (unintelligible) and a report was issues. But eventually the Androscoggin River Commission, I think was its title, (unintelligible) because all these treatment plants (unintelligible), and it wasn’t that nobody cared anymore, that’s the wrong term, but nobody was willing to do anything further to try to clean up the river that wasn’t going to be done by the mills themselves. And it finally it come down to, we can’t dump anything in; we got to take it out at the beginning, which seems pretty obvious to anybody thinking about it today but it was before there was any real technology for (unintelligible) waste treatment and what have you. And looking back on it, people would say well, why don’t they just clean up the effluent? Well, that was a technology that hadn’t been developed yet. It’s still developing. You would never build today a treatment plant like what we have up there. It would be much simpler.

**HD:** It’s amazing how (unintelligible) ecology or pollution (unintelligible) changed. It was sort of like if you couldn’t see it, it went away, or if you dumped it in the river it went away, without anyone thinking where is it going to. And when we were at Bates and had the Popham Beach clambake we dug a big pit on the beach and buried the garbage and thought were responsible citizens. I’m horrified by that now, absolutely horrified.

**Q:** So you’ve seen that change in yourselves as well?
HD: Yeah.

RD: Oh yeah.

HD: Yeah absolutely.

RD: It was after 1985, because the new bridge was built around 1985, I’m going to guess it was ‘86, ’87, ’88, I was driving across the bridge and there was a car parked right next to the rail dropping something in the river so I stopped and asked, and he was a selectman from Gorham and he had some meat in his freezer that he thought was really old that he wanted to get rid of but it wasn’t garbage day. If it had been garbage day he would have put it in the trash, but since it wasn’t garbage day and he didn’t want it stinking up his trash so he brought it to the river and tossed it in.

HD: And he couldn’t see anything wrong with that.

RD: Why, there’s nothing wrong with that. You know, it was probably thirty pounds of frozen meat in white paper wrapped up just the way you would normally expect see it. And one our friends up in Gorham, every year, hundreds a year, not hundreds but, his neighbor would rake leaves in the fall, put them in a big tarp, drag them down to the edge of the river, tip it in. You say well, out in the woods leaves fall in the river. So we went up to this guy and said well why are you doing that? Well, I got to get rid of them somewhere. So I said I’ll take them and put them in the compost; fine, problem solved, but this guy could not see any reason why not dump the leaves in the river because they’ve always done that.

Q: Where do you see this change in consciousness coming from?

HD: I think it is just gradually--

RD: Very, very gradually.

HD: You know the first (unintelligible), the first, well apparently there never used to be a landfill in Shelburne; there isn’t again now, but when they first built it that was a novel thought, just take your garbage out in the woods and just dump it, or why would you need a landfill if the river’s right there. Somewhere people start--

RD: We moved here in ‘73 and (unintelligible) left in 1970, (unintelligible) been here since 1950 roughly, twenty years. From their kids we found piles out towards the barn there of old swing sets, rubber hose, all kinds of trash--

HD: Cans and bottles--

RD: Which probably was their dump.
HD: I don’t know where—I mean, I feel as though it just happens gradually; we start getting returnable containers and we start getting recycling programs, and now I’m horrified if I go someplace and there is not a compost heap. They’re just throwing that stuff in the garage?

RD: Right, right, it is a change of consciousness, and how did that happen, its education and you can’t teach it in a class.

HD: I think the big thing, not locally but nationally, the big thing was the first picture on the Apollo of the earth as a circle. The first time the Apollo rocket in 1968 or whenever it was went to the moon and could to take a picture of the whole earth, I think that made more of a difference in the environmental movement than anything else.

Q: I like that.

HD: The first time, with all these Beatles songs about the big (unintelligible) floating in space, that’s the first time people thought of the earth as something small.

RD: Finite; there’s an end to this thing. And the other half of the problem is people cannot perceive of something that’s big. The ozone hole over the Antarctic that’s a hundred miles across, well this year it’s eight thousand miles across. There’s no concept of what that ties to, what that means or anything like, it’s just too big. It’s like saying the national debt is $50 trillion; it’s just too, you can’t get your hands around it, you can’t get your mind around it. I think with the photo from space, I think that a little bit, a little bit of gradually changing consciousness.

As far as outright education is concerned, after about third grade (unintelligible). In grade school they can learn about recycling and things like that and will carry it the rest of their life. If you try to teach someone in their sixties, grandfather did it this way, my father did it this way, I’m going to do it this way; there a difference. I’m only one person; that’s not going to make a big deal.

Q: So do you see a difference of how the younger generation thinks of the river here?

RD: No.

Q: Why not?

(Telephone interruption; pause in taping.)

RD: I think probably on an individual basis absolutely. Did your father care about the river, no, you do, and so there’s been a change over time sort of thing. And I think on an individual basis there’s definitely been change. I can think in terms of newspaper article about this third grader who’s done such and such to help something or other, but I can equally—there’s a huge mentality here, and not just Berlin but Boston and a lot of other places, of if it’s gas and if it’s using more gas it’s better. I know you can drive up and
down one of the roads here and you see these houses that are shacks that you would not expect to see in sub Sahara Africa, but they got four skidoos in the front yard. You have to wonder after a while about peoples’ priorities. And because I have to wonder about their priorities I don’t think that we have everybody on board with improving the environment, where I see eight miles per gallon SUVs on the road in quantity versus Honda Civics or whatever, I’m not yet (unintelligible) environment in general or the river in particular, or both.

Q: So do you think the reason you’ve been involved in the river or environmentalism in general has come from experience in the past, or where does that interest come from?

RD: Me? When I was twenty or twenty-five, I was a member of Audubon, a woodland society, several things like that and I think that started me very heavily into environmental. I feel those groups in general have a very great purpose because they can push, but I also thought very strongly that their position, not my position, that they seemed to be out there trying to rattle sabers and get lots and lots of money contributed. Oh, and incidentally, if we can do something to improve the environment that would be nice but we’ve got to get lots and lots of money to pay our staff. And we’ll go out there and we’ll take water samples and we’ll try to preserve land (unintelligible). I am being very negative, obviously. They’ve done a lot of good, I have to temper my comments with that, but I felt that I could do a lot more good on the inside than the outside. When the opportunity, and I don’t think it was conscious, I think not at first, but when the opportunity came up at the mill to become environmental director I jumped at it because I needed a job and I wanted to stay in the area all that sort of thing, but I very rapidly realized that I was on the inside and because of that I could enforce policy, and I did and I am very proud of that, and I retired.

My group, people that worked with me, I can’t say for me but worked with me, anything that they said in confidence was accepted as absolutely gospel truth and it developed a reputation that if there was a problem it would be reported, that we weren’t going to mince words, we would lay it right out and we would work to fix it; get out of our way. We had a statement in our group, because we don’t care about the environmental laws because we’re not out here to do it (unintelligible); we’ll do better. And pretty much that’s the way it was all the time.

Q: You mentioned that the mill wasn’t always necessarily happy with that stance. How did that play out?

RD: The mill, well when I was there, when I was in charge of the environment, it was Brown Company and then James River and then Brown Mill, and through that era I fought long and hard to get money to do this and money to do that and I never lost an argument with my boss, and it didn’t matter who my boss was over the years. I went in knowing what had to be done and presented it in a manner that there was only one answer. The fastest way to lose an argument is to give a choice. Do you want ice cream or do you want to go to bed early? Well, so what you have to do is you have to present it so that ice cream is the way they really ought to go and that’s basically what—we had to
learn how to phrase it so that they felt they were doing something really good, and even better if you could phrase it so it was their idea. I didn’t care who comes up with the idea as long as it gets done. Over the years I think we did a pretty decent job.

Q: So how would you describe your legacy as environmental director within the mill and for the river?

RD: Mill’s closed; it’s hard to say because of that. The person I groomed to take over when I retired in 1999 has just left the mill, primarily because the mills closed. She didn’t leave the job. Incidentally, my group had more females in it than it had males most of the time. *(Unintelligible)*. She’s left now, but she continued the same philosophy that I had. And my present job is a consultant for the landfill that I originally developed and helped build, and I got called back into that and I’m working for them because of my reputation and because I, you know, and this has been carrying through, that we are known for working for the environment, and it isn’t always going to appear as if what we’re doing is environmentally positive because sometimes you have to take two steps backwards to go three steps forward.

Q: Like what for example?

RD: We’re in the process of getting permits for the landfill, and in the process of that we’re going to destroy some wetland, *(unintelligible)*, acres of that. Nice wetland. This isn’t the sort of stuff that’s desolate, this is nice wetland, and that’s unfortunate. Now, we’re going to build about eleven acres of wetland, four acres of new wetland and improve about seven others, and we’re going to set into conservation easement 700 acres, and conservation means it’s never going to be built on so we have a large chunk of a watershed that is never going to be touched. So the steps backwards are destroying the wetland; the steps forward are that the landfill will continue to operate in the same area it is now, we’re not going to close this area and go build another one twenty miles away and destroy another area there; it’s all going to be there. So any environmental damage that happens is going to continue to be contained in this one area. We’re not looking at areas that are further off to be destroyed. As I said, taking this backwards, destroying some wetland is ultimately a much more environmentally conscious project.

We could probably have gotten away with conservation use a couple hundred acres. I kept pushing and pushing and pushing, go bigger, go bigger, go bigger. Now, there are two reasons for that; one, there’s more into conservation of land that I’d like to see preserved, but secondly, if you’re doing a better job than you might do you end up with your reputation that you’re really trying to do something decent. *(Unintelligible)*; a couple hundred acres, I don’t know what you would do with it, but a couple hundred acres versus a reputation of doing something well, it’s not even an issue.

Q: What sort of steps backwards were you taking in the mill, were there any?

RD: Yeah, and they’re still there. A number of things in the mill, we just simply couldn’t do it; environmentally they were not right. The mill was on a site, it just sits
there, that had been used for a pulp mill for over a hundred years. Anybody that thinks that there weren’t spilled chemicals there is very, very sadly deluded. They put these filthy things up, they poured millions of dollars into them, (unintelligible) basically everything, but there were ancient spills. Were they leaking into the river probably. Had they been leaking for thirty to forty years, yes, at a steady state, half a mile downstream we’d never known about, probably fifty feet downstream we’d never known about. In fact, you’d probably never be able to find but leaks, but instead of trying to encourage the mills to spend millions and millions of dollars to clean up something that environmentally wasn’t really going to make any difference, and digging a huge hole in the ground and probably making more of a (unintelligible) in than that, better to spend the money and push toward better landfill, better treatment plant, things that actually will do something. You accept a negative but get a positive out of it.

Q: What do you think they are going to do with the mill building now that it’s still standing?

RD: I think Fraser wants it today. They’re working to try to solve the site as a whole. At the same time they’re trying to clean out tanks, button it up, whatever, drain pipes. If they can sell it as a whole to somebody who’s going to use the facility for producing electric power, using the boilers that are already there and converting them, you need a minor conversion to do that, great. Relatively clean, and okay, you have smoke stacks, you have some air pollution, but you can put scrubbers and all on that. You have some waste water; well, there’s now a treatment plant down there. If they can do that fine, if not they will attempt to—and I think these are sort of public, I am guessing these are sort of going on simultaneously—they’ll sell off components to anyone who wants to buy them.

However, it is a pulp mill and in the very recent past the pulp mill was closed and shut down, Ticonderoga from York is gone, Old Town’s down, and I heard stories that Old Town might be reopening but it is down. The IP Mill in Jay has been sold, in Bucksport, to a group of investors; I think that’s one step before they close the door to the thing. Foreign competition is just incredible in the pulp paper industry today, mostly South America and Indonesia has it, so trying to sell off parts of a pulp mill, components to somebody else (unintelligible) would be primarily for a pulp mill and they’re in the process of not wanting it either, so I don’t have a whole lot of hope for that.

If they don’t sell it as a whole unit I think there is a very good chance that the thing is just going to be moth-balled for a year or two and then abandoned, leaving a (unintelligible) at the site. Are they are going to have a kid’s playground there in the future, probably not. It could be, with some really careful planning, eliminating two-thirds of it, keeping chunks, it could be turned into a degree of (unintelligible) where people could see what the inside of a pulp mill were like. Unfortunately, seeing a pulp mill running and seeing a pulp mill not running are night and day. To get a concept of how massive the process is you really need to see it running. Oh yeah, that’s a nice big (unintelligible), but with some very careful planning a historical museum site could be built around it. (Unintelligible).
Q: Yeah, I have been up there. It’s a little different side of things.

RD: It’s a different concept on things. They’ve had a really rough time getting going and then getting going again, continuing to get going. I don’t they’re the ones to take over the mill site near those rivers. I don’t know that they could or not; I think they’re whole process is different.

HD: In other words, they’re research polling but they don’t know what to do.

RD: The level of things that have to be cleaned up there (unintelligible). Whether they have the interest or not is a totally different question but they haven’t got the wherewithal. I think if the clean industry, power and energy or something like that came along it would be a good thing, but Berlin needs to come to grip with the fact that there are not going to be (unintelligible), in the combined two mills. Now they’re down to four hundred and fifty maybe, I’m guessing, somewhere in that range.

Q: Yeah, I think that’s right.

HD: It’s such a pretty area, (unintelligible), they’re gorgeous. The river is beautiful, the mountains are beautiful, and it would be something.

RD: I have been down in that (unintelligible) more than once and it’s phenomenal. I mean, you’ve got mill buildings on each side and what have you, and there’s a lower gorge down below Mason Street there, beautiful areas and it could be, if Berlin took two steps backwards and said okay we have to reinvent ourselves and what can we capitalize on? Okay, we’ve got the woods all around here we could end up with parks and recreation facilities that we, the city, could develop and control. We’ve got the river and we could turn that into a recreation resource; let’s go and do it. I think they have a tremendous asset. Where they keep fussing back and forth, somebody’s going to come in and open up this mill and give us fifteen hundred jobs. As long as they keep thinking that the harder it’s going to be for them. I feel very sorry for the people who have lost their jobs today and two years ago and what have you. For them it’s really (unintelligible). But Berlin could plan for the future rather than looking to the past. That’s not Berlin; I don’t know that there are more than three communities in this country or any other that have said okay, we’ve just got to stop this and start all over again. It’s hard; it’s human nature.

Q: So what do you see as the future for the river, or Berlin’s relationship to the river?

HD: Recreation probably. I don’t know what for, but river recreation is certainly growing. (Unintelligible) all those white-water rafting companies on the Kennebec, or canoe rentals in Bethel and Errol--

RD: Also down at the Great Glen now--
HD: Great Glen *(unintelligible)* with the river so they’re having canoe trips weekly here all along.

Q: Sounds like you’ve been pretty active in that.

RD: It would be rediscovering our river.

HD: People come here to hike, but maybe one of those, that article I gave you that says, now no one might come to Berlin to look down the gorge and look at the beautiful river, but it is a beautiful place. Without the smell, without some of the mill buildings, I don’t know, it’s such an environmental baggage that comes with building. Any company that has to come in and clean things up right spends all year trying to clean up one site, and they capped it and grouted it and did a bunch of other things and it still may be a *(unintelligible)* site. There’s still liquid mercury in it, so a hundred years of being a pulp mill is not nice to the land. I don’t know, it’s hard to *(unintelligible)* that things happened. None of us want to see *(unintelligible)* second-home developments. And probably part of that, is we want everyone to come canoe the river but we don’t actually want you to be here. I think some of us want to *(unintelligible)* around my little compound here, swiping off some of the mosquitoes. *(Unintelligible)*

Q: How do you think your recreation on the river has affected your views or relationship to it?

HD: Well, we’ve always known the rivers were here, unlike some people, and we’ve always done quite a bit of it. I don’t know that it has. It’s made other people more aware of the river. I think all it’s done with us is make us know that it gets crowded here. We still don’t swim in the river. If it were swimmable—I don’t know if you’ve ever seen the Saco River *(unintelligible)*, in the summer weekends it’s horrible with what we call the bank-to-bankers, with like the *(unintelligible)* behind the canoes. Fortunately it’s not gotten to that. There are a lot of fisher people in here, pretty *(unintelligible)*.

Q: Would you say your recreation has affected other people’s *(unintelligible)*?

HD: I think the river being cleaner has affected other people, and that I suppose affect ours because we know that there’ll be other people out, but it’s never really—we’ve never avoided canoeing the river because, oh, there are too many people out there today, whereas wouldn’t go canoe the Saco in the summer; we might do it in October.

Q: Do you have a favorite canoe spot?

HD: Several, several. There’s the Shelburne to Gilead stretch, there’s the Bethel, the Hanover stretch is beautiful, put in at Bethel and go down ten miles or so. We’ve seen lots of eagles there. We’ve done Gilead to Bethel any number of times. In Shelburne, the dam to Gilead is our home bit, home stretch, when the kids are all here for the day all of us go canoe the river just because it makes mom happy, so we do that a little bit. It is nice, there’s enough currents and rapids to be interesting, and *(unintelligible)*. The last
time we did we saw a mother moose and a baby moose (unintelligible), and not too many people, two or three people that were in our group.

(Tape slips)

RD: (Unintelligible) what effect the river has on our life, more than that just on the (unintelligible) it’s the bottom of the barrel, like where everyone’s life is one way or another tied to the river.

HD: It’s a tiny little town, it’s got mountains on both sides, it’s got a road, two roads, it’s got a railroad track and it’s got a river and a pipeline, so there’s not that much land so it kind of affects whole development of the valley.

RD: For here, and the same goes up to Gorham or Berlin, on upstream, everyone in one way or another is tied to the river, consciously or not, makes no difference. The guy who’s running rafting trips, well that’s real obvious. The nurse that goes to work every day, drives across the bridge to go to the hospital, big deal, but she knows it’s there, and her brother does go fishing in the river, you know, whatever, everyone’s tied to one degree or another. And I think as it cleans up more, and it will clean up with all the mills close, or it will clean up slowly if they don’t tighten regulations or what have you, one or the other. It’s going to become more attractive shore front property is going to become interesting rather than oh my goodness no. I think people’s lives will start to center more and more around the river.

HD: Before we came here we use to drive from New Jersey to New Hampshire to go hiking, and after we came here we always waited for the perfect day to go hiking. We decided we had two small children and we had to carry so (unintelligible), and now we hardly do any hiking at all (unintelligible).

Q: Do your kids have appreciation for the area as well?

HD: To some extent. Some went away to college and then discovered that, hey, we lived in the mountains. He’s an avid hiker/climber. He lives in Boulder, Colorado at the moment and he’s always hiking and climbing in the (unintelligible). (Unintelligible); they both wanted to go to cities. When they grew up in a little town—the graduating class at Gorham High School was in the range of fifty kids—and I always, even when we came here, wondered whether I with have (unintelligible) with getting a proper education for our children in this little high school, and I thought well there’s a prep school down in Bethel if worse come to worst. But in fact kids were horrified with that, of course they would go to the high school, and they did very well. Even though that’s a small pond to be a big fish in, but even in a broader sense they both were National Merit scholarship winners and things so you can’t fault the education. And there were always teachers that were willing to work with them because they were good students, and the classes are pretty small because, well, fifty kids in the graduating class and everybody knows everybody. We had a French exchange student our daughter’s senior year in high school and she went to the French class and she said the teacher knows every student by name.
Well yeah, he’s had them for three years, you kind of hope he did, but she thought that was just astonishing. So you know, it’s not bad being in a little place where you can still do well. The kids wanted to go to big cities and felt that since they grew up in a little in a little school they shouldn’t go to something in New York City or something, but they both went to colleges close enough to cities to (unintelligible) and now they both would just as soon move back into a little town. They don’t yet.

RD: I think the thing that we’ve been seeing, as I said the river’s going to clean up thinking forward and I would expect more and more people. It’s not like our great, great grandfathers who worked from dawn to dusk, (unintelligible). People have more free time. (Tape slips) I remember (unintelligible), and the price of gas will keep going up or the availability of gas will go down, whichever way you want to look at it, it amounts to the same thing so people, instead of driving from here to Yellowstone to go hiking are going to say, you know, I could have a really nice week on the river canoeing or (unintelligible) and spend ten dollars for gas to get to put into the river, and it doesn’t matter whether it’s this river or people going to Lewiston going up the Kennebec or (unintelligible)

End of Side B, Tape One
Side A, Tape Two

Q: I’ve heard a little bit about the high school classes diminishing since the loss of mill jobs and everything. Have you noticed people in Shelburne leaving, or is that more a Berlin thing?

HD: No. More of Shelburne is now retired people than used to be, because some of us grew older and retired. It used to be teachers, professional people, people who taught at Votech, which is a Votech through Granite State College or whatever they call it now. Now the it seems like a great many people up and down the road, the new people who’ve come in have been retired people, and some of them have been people who came just over (unintelligible) and they retired and there’s a house for sale on that road and they want (unintelligible) there. I don’t know of anyone who’s left because of the jobs, do we? I think the (unintelligible). Okay, we do know some people who have left because of jobs. I think it’s an aging population more than a declining population.

RD: But Berlin is also a very good (unintelligible), I think it was close to twenty thousand. (Unintelligible).

Q: Twenty-three or something like that.

RD: Now it’s one side or the other of ten thousand. It took the last census to convince them that they’re above, because they’re eligible for more grants if it was over ten thousand, and literally the count came out something like 9,985 and they found a few more people quick. I’m sure (unintelligible), but in any case Berlin’s shrinking so presumably that means that size of the schools have been cut in half, roughly. Gorham I don’t think is affected dramatically.
HD: Randolph and Shelburne if anything have gotten bigger.

RD: Because their taxes are generally lower.

HD: And partly the people have the freedom to move.

RD: I believe Milan is actually growing, I think I've heard that recently. It’s the urban sprawl, there’s been really urban sprawl; the overall population in the area I’m willing to bet has dropped.

HD: I think the population of the county.

(Tapes slips)

RD: Partly their own, partly in general.

HD: The economic boom that hit some parts of New Hampshire has not hit this part, and it’s not just the mills. They were saying the other day, things are closing, you read the paper and there’s this going out of business sale and that going out of business sale. The garden shop in Shelburne is going out of business, and I don't know why, I don’t think that was much local clientele anyway. Shops in North Conway are going out of business, although North Conway is kind of a shell game, businesses come and go and move around and you never know where they are.

RD: But I think that among major hubs of transportation, Boston, Portland, Berlin is over a mountain range. No matter how you cut it, we’re over a mountain range, number one. Number two, we’re I think by road three, four hours from these places. With the end of the transportation system you can’t bring raw materials in here (unintelligible) and haul it back out and sell it. The economics just aren’t there. I don’t care what it is; it’s work. You have to start with something here and you’ve got a lot of work. Forest product industries is probably long term a greater use of their raw materials, whether they’re making two-by-fours and shipping them out, or whether they’re making pulp, whatever, it’s going to have to be something (unintelligible). Or the other aspect is you have the raw material here and you bring the end user to it, so we have the river, we have the mountains for hiking, we have snow for the winter, what have you, so you bring the users here. One of those two, and realistically it has to be a mix of the three, can’t do one or the other and that’ll never happen.

What we’re going to see is a long term change from a woods-based economy to more tourism. I think we’re going to see that all of a sudden the South Americans and Southeast Asians, they’ve just raped their forests entirely and regardless of the cost of labor (unintelligible) and the forest will be rediscovered here for pulp, timber, whatever, and assuming that the costs of labor in Southeast Asia stay what they are, relative to here, in another hundred years their forests will regrow it’ll probably swing back. Some great philosopher at one time said that the one great constant is change; I think they got it about
right. And if Berlin, or Lewiston or Boston or anyplace else can roll with the changes they’re all set.

**HD**: Lewiston is reinventing itself, not as a manufacturing place so much as, because they’re close enough to Portland to be a spin-off kind of professional center as well. There’s been talk that the two-year college up here could become a four-year college, what about that, and what if we could have some assisted living facilities; doesn’t matter what the climate is, those people don’t go outside anyway. There are a lot of elderly people here and that would be a thing that would require workers, trained and untrained. I’d much prefer that to another prison. I’m not at all happy about the world being taken over by control freaks that work at prisons.

**Q**: How do you see that affecting the area?

**HD**: I think it has affected the area considerably already. You go through the grocery store, and we have lived here thirty years, I should know lots of people, and all of a sudden there are a whole lot of people that don’t look like Berlin people. Either they’re relatives of prisoners, or there’s a lot of rumor about Manchester sending up welfare people because of the (unintelligible); there are a lot of disadvantaged people or handicapped people, much higher percentage, and I think that’s the result of either the low housing or the prison.

**RD**: I think too, again, Berlin has done, Berlin politicians, our local people too, but the Berlin politicians--

**HD**: (Unintelligible).

**RD**: Exactly, we might be able to get a prison and it might, you know, that’ll employ nine hundred people or three hundred, I don’t know what the number is, and that’ll solve all our problems. Well, the fact ninety percent of these people will be brought in from outside, it seems, the (unintelligible) people, it isn’t going to provide all the answers.

**HD**: You can’t blame them for grasping at straws in bringing in jobs, they need jobs.

**RD**: But if they would back up--

**HD**: But what they have are electricians and mechanical type people and not prison guards. It’s a different type of skill.

**RD**: They need to back up and say okay, where do you want Berlin to be ten years from now?

**HD**: And maybe Norm Charest (sounds like) has done that.

**RD**: Norm Charest (sounds like) is one who could well. I think he--
HD: I was complaining about the ambiance of having a whole bunch of prisons and he said what about the mill, do you think that adds to ambiance?

RD: Everybody's got their own answer to the problem. I just wish that the Berlin, (unintelligible) the town would think their way through to where they want to be.

HD: I remember the past wasn't always (unintelligible). We hear about Harry Kelly stories and Louise Dickinson (unintelligible); have you read We Took to the Woods?

Q: No.

HD: The book was written in 1950 I think.

RD: About the '38 hurricane, the '40s I think.

HD: By Louise Dickinson, she lived between Lake Richardson and Lake Umbagog.

RD: Upper Androscoggin.

HD: Upper Androscoggin, at the time when logging camps were around and Berlin was the big city where when people got their paychecks they went to town and spent their money on all the things that bachelors would spend their money on when they have money to spend, and I guess it was quite the place. And Harry Kelly said that his mother, when she was growing up, there were places she wasn't allowed to go in the spring every year when the loggers came to town, so it wasn't always such a pristine place.

RD: (Tape skips) --pictures of logging camp if I had one.

Q: Yeah, I've seen a bunch of those.

RD: People think that workers have it rough today, they just have no concept.

HD: No OSHA, no labor laws.

RD: Literally hand-cutting four or five cord of wood, ten cords of wood a day with a hand saw and stacking it, and there aren't more than about three people I know that would even pretend to be able to do any of that work, just going into the woods. Come November, family stays inside and you come out in April. If your family's house burned down, you may hear about, probably not. Life was different then.

HD: (Tape skips) --large machinery which runs on gasoline, far fewer people--

RD: And the end result of severe environmental constraints, fuel being the obvious one, (unintelligible) could be a lot more wood jobs.

HD: I don't think anyone is going back to (unintelligible).
Q: Probably not.

HD: They'll find some way to fill the (unintelligible). I don't know. Can you ever picture this area being an Internet technology sort of—that's what everyone's goal is, you know, let's have all these companies that do all their business, like we could be a call center for Dell computers instead of India.

RD: And that's true, but if you call the Dell computer center, whether it's in India or not or makes no difference where the heck they hide it, you have a receptionist, relatively low paid, and all that person has to do is say yes, fine, I will put you on hold and within four hours somebody will pick it up. But then you have to have somebody when they pick it up has enough intelligence (unintelligible)—

HD: Well, we can train those.

RD: Right now we don't have anybody trained to do that.

HD: But we could.

RD: We'd have to train everybody to run it, but it could be done.

HD: India didn't used to have that either.

RD: You could train three hundred people (unintelligible).

HD: It's kind of too bad that kids have to go away. I mean our kids went away, but there aren't too many jobs for astrophysicists in Berlin, New Hampshire.

RD: Or even history teachers.

HD: Or history teachers, yes, but the history teacher is married to somebody who family planning clinics in Africa and so they've been living at an airport. History teaching is a mobile skill. But you know, other people's kids also go away. They get more money somewhere else.

RD: As long as there's (unintelligible) for jobs, quite a number of people leave this area and then come back.

HD: That's true.

Q: Come back when?

RD: They'll leave for college. They'll leave when they're eighteen-ish, they'll go to college and get a degree in something. They'll be gone probably for another ten years, so let's say thirty-five, thirty-two.
HD: Then ours should show up any moment, huh?

RD: People start migrating back into the area when they suddenly discover the glamour of living in the city wasn't maybe quite as glamorous as they thought.

HD: *(Unintelligible)*

RD: If you want to go to the opera, well tough. One of the things about living here is if you can't make your own entertainment, don't even think about it. We know a lot of people over the years, they would move here, frequently getting a job in the mill or a job in the area doing something, and they wanted to move here because they wanted to get out of New York City and they were going to make this new life and they were going to grow their green beans and everything was just going to be wonderful. And of course the husband, and I'm being *(unintelligible)*, the husband would be off at a job and the wife would be at home. And the first winter it really going out on snowshoes and what have you, but shoveling snow in April got a little bit old. In the second year they were still here and shoveling snow in April was really old, and the wife was really bored, and the third year they weren't here. We've seen this pattern.

HD: On the other hand we had some cousins who love hiking and they're saying oh, you're so lucky, you live with all these mountains around and the rivers here and you go canoeing. Yeah, and if you go to an airport, if you want to fly somewhere it's a three to four hour drive to an airport, and if you want to buy any sort of ethnic food, we don't do that, you have to go somewhere else. It depends on what your priorities are; if you're okay with that then great.

RD: Medical care, we have excellent basic medical care. We have surgeons, anything you want, but if you have heart disease, don't do it here.

HD: You have to be shipped somewhere else.

RD: Hanover or Concord or Manchester or Lewiston, and if you're in a serious accident it's air ambulance to usually Hanover, sometimes Lewiston, but--

HD: This is the Appalachian Trail.

RD: It's very rare that somebody gets mugged up here, so *(unintelligible)* happen.

Q: Do you think that isolation is first part of the population loss problem?

HD: I think that it's beginning to erode with new people coming in. We read in the paper about drug busts and things like that; we never used to have that sort of thing, so I think that the crime situation is becoming more of a problem. It used to be everybody knew everybody, everybody knew who is who and who belonged where.
RD: I think that from that aspect to some extent the drug market is somewhat saturated in Boston and Portland or wherever. If they’re looking for more customers they’re going to go further and further and further out.

HD: We may just be naive. I remember talking to my daughter when she was in high school and I said would you know where to buy drugs in high school, and she said no but I would know who to ask and I could find out quickly. So I was probably just (unintelligible) about the whole thing too.

RD: I guess it’s now appropriate to say well all right, what other questions did you have, that we haven’t hit on?

Q: I was just going to say I think that’s probably about it.

HD: And maybe you have places you need to go.

Q: Well, not really, unless there’s something that you’d still like to share that I just didn’t hit on at all.

RD: Well, it’s two o’clock, and about two-twenty we’ll think of it.

HD: But we worked out what your e-mail must be.

Q: Yeah, I can leave you with that.

RD: That would be good, we’ll make a little card with your phone number and your e-mail.

End of Interview