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## White, John W. oral history interview

Andrea L'Hommedieu

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## **Interview with John W. White by Andrea L'Hommedieu**

*Summary Sheet and Transcript*

### **Interviewee**

White, John W.

### **Interviewer**

L'Hommedieu, Andrea

### **Date**

April 3, 2002

### **Place**

Minot, Maine

### **ID Number**

MOH 333

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### **Biographical Note**

John W. White was born in Auburn, Maine and grew up on Whiteholm Farm. His parents were Marion J. (Wellman) and Harold Sewall White. His father was a farmer and Bowdoin graduate. His mother attended Bates for one year, and John graduated from Bates College in 1939. He majored in Economics and was on the swim team. He was a farmer until 1977, and then became involved in real estate. At the time of this interview he was president of the Androscoggin Historical Society.

### **Scope and Content Note**

Interview includes discussions of: Bates College in the 1930s; mother's story of leaving Bates College; Model Cities in Lewiston; community history of Lewiston and Auburn, Maine; Mount David; Frank Coffin; White family genealogy; Red Sox; and William P. Frye, who was his grandfather.

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## **Transcript**

**Andrea L'Hommedieu:** This is an interview with John White at his home at 193 Jackson Hill Road in, is it Auburn or Minot?

**John White:** It's Minot.

**AL:** In Minot, Maine, on April the 3rd, the year 2002, and this is Andrea L'Hommedieu. If you could just start by giving me your full name, and where and when you were born?

**JW:** John W. White, born right here in Auburn, well at Central Maine Hospital originally, and grew up on a farm on Turner Street, and I guess that's about it.

**AL:** Did you say the farm on Turner Street?

**JW:** Yeah, we had a big dairy farm there, we had over a hundred milk cows there, had over two hundred head of registered Jerseys and a four thousand quart milk business. And in '73 when they built the Auburn Mall, it was time to move out.

**AL:** So the farm was on where all that, where the mall is and the WalMart?

**JW:** Yeah.

**AL:** Did your farm have a name, as some farms do?

**JW:** Yeah, it was White Holm Farm. And when they built the new WalMart, they wanted to know if they could name it White Holm Farm Plaza, and we told them, sure, they could, we didn't object. My great-great-grandfather settled the farm in 1794, he came up from Taunton, Mass. and, he and his brother, and I guess they bought, they had a little cabin on the North River Road just about off the end of Boxer Island, where the third bridge goes over, and the brother only stayed a year or so and went back to Taunton, sold his interest to his brother and the brother died the next year when he was twenty, and my grandfather stayed there and I guess they brought up thirteen kids. And he built the house near his brother's in 1806, and I guess he sold off the little lot they had over on the River Road. So that was about it.

**AL:** So when you grew up, did you go into the farming, too?

**JW:** Oh yeah, I farmed right up until '77, yeah. Then I did real estate fifteen years.

**AL:** How many brothers and sisters did you have?

**JW:** I had two brothers and two sisters. My two brothers are passed away, and one sister. Well, four of us all graduated from Bates, and my brother Bud graduated from Bowdoin. My father and his five brothers all went to Bowdoin, and my grandfather Frye did.

**AL:** So you had a lot of -

**JW:** And a lot of cousins went to Bowdoin. My brother went to Bowdoin because he was a topnotch athlete, he was an All-American swimmer at Bowdoin, and he was quite a good baseball pitcher, he signed with the Red Sox. And he had his orders in '42 to report to Boston in August to pitch of course, because we were in the war then. And we played ball and went down, and so he enlisted. Never threw a, he wore glasses, if he took them off he couldn't tell me from you five feet away. But with glasses his vision was perfect. He was almost 6'4" and weighed around two-twenty; very strong, very quick.

And he roomed with Ted Williams the first weeks he was, after he graduated from Bowdoin and went down. Ted would tell him to put his fastball right down the middle. In a whole week he never hit it once. He could throw 120 miles an hour. He was never timed, but I'll put it this way, when he got done Ted told Bud that Bobby Feller never threw a ball any faster than you throw and I can't hit him either. Well, once in a great while he would, but, they had Feller on the Today show I think about three years ago, and they asked him how fast he could throw, he says, I was clocked at a 120. His last season in the minors he had, he pitched two no run games, six shut-outs, won twenty-six, only lost two, and he led the league in batting with 465 average.

I don't know why he was all the years in physical rehabilitation; he never threw a ball once for all that four and a half years. When he got out he was twenty-nine. He says, you don't go back to pitching, you been away that long. And his son got caught the same way, he graduated from Rutgers, he was a pitcher. He had the best, the lowest earned run average of any pitcher east of the Mississippi the year he graduated, .065. And Vietnam told him, (*unintelligible phrase*), so he enlisted in the Air Force and went out to Colorado Springs and he ended up getting his master's degree in business administration. He was a, he got his degree from Rutgers in, oh, it was in ceramics you know. He worked for a company that made the ceramic plates they put on the space shots and all of that. He just retired almost two years ago now. He was a, he was really good at running things. He was big; he was 6'6".

**AL:** So what, you had quite a family tradition of attending Bates.

**JW:** Oh yeah, my mother went to Bates. They kicked her out I guess it was her freshman year. She lived at home on Arch Avenue. Well one Sunday morning in the fall, she went over on Lake Andrews and was skating. The dean found out about it and called her in the morning, next morning, told her she was out of the college, and my mother told the dean it was none of her business what she did on Sunday morning when she lived at home. And she got up and walked out and left; didn't go back. Kind of narrow-minded, I think, if that's the way they did it then.

**AL:** Yeah, it was against the rules. Was it because she was a woman, or no students?

**JW:** Yeah. Well, I don't know. Probably, because young ladies weren't supposed to be doing that.

**AL:** They had very different rules at that time for men and women.

**JW:** Oh, yes. The things they do over there today, if we'd done them half the college would have been kicked out. Now they just look the other way.

**AL:** Was it sort of expected that you go to Bates, or what led you to Bates College?

**JW:** Oh yeah, well, it was a, I could live at home, drive back and forth, it was a lot cheaper, so that's why. So the four of us, four of us went to Bates and Bud of course, he got good scholarships to go to Bowdoin. Now, he's one of those natural athletes; he could do anything. He could throw a javelin, just stand flatfooted, never take a step, just two hundred feet. He was playing outfield in a game at Bowdoin and the second baseman happened to look up and he saw this javelin coming right towards where Bud was, some idiot out there in the track team wasn't looking where he was throwing it. George hollered to Bud to look out, and Bud turned around and that lit right where he'd been standing. Bud was so mad, he picked it up and he just threw it right back at the guy. Oh, Jack McGee was the track coach at Bowdoin, he saw it. He walked out in the middle of the outfield, stopped the ball game and walked up to Bud and says, can you do that again? And Bud was so mad he says, how the hell do I know, I just do it. Two hundred feet. Three days before the state track meet, come up to the track, (*unintelligible phrase*), you're throwing the javelin in the state meet. So he did. What did the idiot do? He threw it, twenty feet before he got to the foul line, he still threw it 192 feet.

My son John, he threw the javelin at Maine, he held the Yankee conference record for seven or eight years, he threw it around 224 feet with a, he'd had a separated shoulder, had it strapped down, and it just took one throw, that was it. So, I didn't inherit that natural, athletic ability. My younger sister did, she could swim, too. She was the women's world record when she was thirteen years old by a fifth of a second, down the Portland Boy's Club pool. She's 5'8", she just had the perfect build for a swimmer. I had to work; it doesn't come natural to me.

**AL:** Well, it sounds . . . . Talk to me a little bit about your swimming. We talked a little bit before we were on the tape, but you started swimming at Bates College on a team?

**JW:** Well, I swam all through high school. I was a little kid. If my brother was here, he'd make two of me. When I was a sophomore in high school I was just five feet tall and weighed ninety pounds and I was the littlest kid in a class of 175. And there's my brother, 6'3", he's only thirteen months younger. My father said, you better learn to swim backstroke, you don't stand a chance with these big freestylers, so that's what I did, and I stuck to it ever since. I can still swim backstroke faster than freestyle. And, so, that's what I do, yeah, I do, two years ago, the last records we had in world's masters, I was fourth in the two hundred meter back, sixth in the hundred, and eighth in the fifty meter back. So, I'm still here and still doing it. I'm fortunate, I have nothing wrong with me. Do as I please.

**AL:** And you said that in 1937 is when they began a swim team at Bates?

**JW:** Yeah, we swam in the Auburn Y pool, the four-lane pool, twenty-yard pool. But it was always to our disadvantage when we went and swam in the twenty-five yard pool, because it affects your timing, throws you off a little. There were two guys at Bowdoin that would always

beat me by three or four feet, and I know very well if I could have been swimming at Bowdoin all the time I could beat them. Fastest I ever did was a one-one flat in the Bowdoin pool, and that was sixty-five years ago. Know how fast I do it now? About 146-48, right in there. Well, you just slow down. Yup, but-

**AL:** So did Bates have their own swimming facilities, or did you have to use the Y?

**JW:** We had to use the Y. And the last team was 1941, my father gave up coaching it then, and that was the end of it until they built this pool.

**AL:** And when did that start, much later?

**JW:** Oh, probably fifteen, sixteen years ago. Maybe Dana could tell you exactly, Dana Mulholland, but I'd say it was about, it might be a little longer. Not much, it can't be twenty years ago. It's a good pool, I like it. It's the best pool I swim in for backstroke swimming. With that bulkhead, you can see the end. Up at Maine, oh boy, the floor is about that much above the water. You're swimming backstroke and you're looking back, of course we've got flags and you count your strokes, but you never know exactly whether you're a foot too close or a foot too far out, depending on how fast you're going. Looking back, I cannot see the end. Your depth perception is gone when you're laying there flat to the water. I've hit that end wall more than once; I hit it so hard once a couple years ago they heard it up the balcony.

I use a flip turn, I don't use the free flip, freestyle flip, I do it over backwards with a somersault with a half twist. And I'm the only one that does it that way. In the New Englands when I used it they disqualified me. Joe Rogers went to, but boy, Joe, he was ready for a fight any time. He was a graduate engineer and he was a good and sharp cookie. Walked right down to the officials holding his rule book and says, show me where that was an illegal turn. They admitted they couldn't, so they reinstated me and I had a third place in the New Englands. When I swam down at U Mass, Joe knew what I did, how I did it, and he knew it was perfectly legal. He kept getting at me, he says, "Cut it out, you'll have 'em all doing it and getting us all disqualified." I wouldn't stop, I kept doing it. The next year after the New Englands, everybody was doing it. So long as you didn't turn over on your stomach you were all right. Now, you can do it, you can roll over onto your stomach and take one stroke with one arm; then you've got to do that turn. If you don't, you're out. I can't do it that good. I do it faster my way.

**AL:** So who were some of the professors when you went to Bates that you remember?

**JW:** Oh, they're all gone. Norm Ross, of course he wasn't a professor, but he's the last one. Oh, there was Dutchy Leonard, and Sammy Harms in the German department, and Doc Fisher in geology, Paul Bartlett, economics.

I majored in economics, I had enough hours for history and government, but I did my thesis in economics. My thesis was all of six pages. I did it on the Mexican oil appropriations; there was practically nothing published, only one book, and my uncle, Senator Wallace White, was able to get a copy of it out of the Library of Congress for me. A little book about half an inch thick and about 6" by 8", that's all it was. Other than what you read in the newspapers, that's all that was

available. Well, I ended up giving the book to the Bates library when I was through with it. Best I could get out of it was six pages, (*unintelligible phrase*). I didn't know what he'd say, but I put down in my bibliography, you know, whatever I could find in newspaper clippings, which were just headlines basically and what was in the book anyway. He told me after, he says, that was one of the best theses I ever got. Now, they're what, sixty pages today? Ridiculous. All they do is just waste words.

Well, another professor was Pa Gould in history and government, he was a nice fellow.

**AL:** Yeah, tell me about him. I've heard the name.

**JW:** Pa, he, he was a pretty shrewd old boy. He was, I think served on the Lewiston Police Commission, you know, he worked with the Lewiston city government (*unintelligible phrase*) with the Greek people in town. Oh, let's see who else, there was Paul Berkelman in English.

One day he called me down after class and he says, "You don't seem to be getting much out of this poetry." I said, "I don't like poetry." "Well why not?" I says, "I just don't, it doesn't do anything for me." Well, he couldn't understand that. "Well," I says, "let's put it this way, would you be interested to know the production records that my cows make and their pedigrees?" "No." I says, "Okay, there's your answer." He just, "Okay." I got a C in the course. I had him and he knew it.

I was never, I never liked to write anyway, I wasn't one for wasting a lot of words to satisfy somebody who thinks I ought to write a book on a subject which I could do in half a dozen pages and give you the same thing. Which I (*unintelligible word*) in real estate, I did a lot of appraisal for Chalmers, I do it on farms, land, estate appraisals, partnerships like that, but particularly appraisals on property, rural property in particular.

And, I had one lawyer in town come one day and he said, "I got this appraisal done by a company in Portland." Well, I had appraised this property down in Durham on the Old Quaker Meeting House Road, and they came in with a figure far higher than I had and he said, "I'm going to send this up to you, I want you to read it and give me a written report on what you think of it." It didn't take me much more than about a page and a half, he called me back a few days later after he'd gotten it and he says, "That's what I wanted to see." He told me later, he says, "You give us the best reports on appraisals; far better than these appraisal companies do. They write pages and pages of stuff, he says, it doesn't amount to a hill of beans," he says, "you give us the facts, that's all we want; we don't want all of this extra stuff." And to me, it's like college professors. They know everything between the covers of a book, but there's a lot of them I see I question how much common sense they got. I got a brother-in-law, he graduated Phi Beta Kappa, he worked for Bell Labs during the war, and he also did work for the government through Bell Labs. Anyway, there's the guy that invented radar, figured it could be adapted to underwater so they ended up calling it sonar, so they gave it to my, big stack of papers to my brother-in-law and told him, he says, you figure it out and make it work. Well he spent I guess a year and a half on and off submarines, but he finally got it to work. But, if you, that guy, I don't think he could fight his way out of a paper bag.



He came in to the house and said to my mother, "I'm going back to Turner," they have a camp up there, up on the hill in Turner, and he said that two or three times. Well, I happened to come in and I hear him say that, and I suspected what was up. It seems that the old 1928 Ford truck he had, or car or whatever it was, had a gear shift lever. Well, I knew what happened; I knew why he was saying that. And the idiot would have backed up to Turner backwards all the way, inviting an accident. He'd do something stupid like that, as bright as he was. So I went out to the truck and I unscrewed the gear shift lever, lifted it up, put my fingers down and realigned the gears, put it back in, screwed it down, walked back in, I says, "Well Sam, now you can drive back to Turner." He was mad.

Yeah, I've had some darn good professors at Bates, and I had some of them that I wondered.

**AL:** Was there a professor there named Paul Sweet?

**JW:** Yeah I, yes he was there. He was a good one, I liked him, I had one course with him, yeah. He, what was it, he, this was history. Then I think he left and went to Michigan.

**AL:** Yes, he did. Actually, my husband interviewed him just two years ago in Michigan.

**JW:** He did? Oh, for heaven sake. Oh, I liked Paul; he was a real nice guy, real down to earth guy. Oh yeah, there was a, of course when I was there there were only about six hundred students, so you knew most everybody. What bothers me today is professors dress as bad as the kids do, and you wonder why they all look that way. They don't set an example for them. They're coming in in dungarees, they don't care what they look like. Yeah, they know everything between the covers of the book, but then I wonder. I put a higher premium on common sense than I do a bunch of degrees.

**AL:** What was it like growing up in Auburn?

**JW:** Auburn was, well, back when I was in high school and college there was probably, Auburn, about eighteen thousand. When I was on the city council in the sixties it got up to 25,300, and now it's back down to 22,300. Well, you've seen how the towns have grown around us. Well, zoning is partly to blame for that because it forced people out in higher taxes in town. And, it's just when my wife and I moved up here, that would be twenty-five years this next November, there were nine hundred people in Minot. You know how many there are now? Over two thousand, there's over two thousand cars traveling that road today, and they're doing fifty and sixty down through here. It's true of every town around us, Poland, Mechanic Falls, Hebron, they're all growing, and this is it.

I guess Auburn, the main part of downtown Auburn is about the same size it was sixty years ago, except that well, when Lewiston got into urban renewal and they widened the sidewalks on Lisbon Street and bring all of these (*unintelligible phrase*), when they come out around that way they forced business right off Lisbon Street and they forced it into the malls, they drove it over to Auburn, and that's just why it's happened. That's why everything is spread out around us now. But Lewiston and Auburn are not as big as they were, you know, forty years ago. In the main part of the town, population-wise, they're smaller. But the towns, if you added up that have gone

into the towns and they stayed in Lewiston and Auburn, well they would be, both cities would be far bigger. You go down Lisbon Street, half the stores are empty. And I can remember you went down Lisbon Street there were crowds there all the time.

**AL:** Really?

**JW:** Oh, sure, particularly Christmas time, oh yeah. There wasn't an empty store to be seen. No, it was a busy place, but not so. Now, the big malls came with plenty of parking, which is easier. Oh, the town has changed considerably.

**AL:** What were relationships like between the Bates College campus and the community when you were there?

**JW:** Well, I think it was pretty good actually. You know, like Professor Pomeroy and, oh yeah, Pom, he was on, I think maybe he was the one that was on the police commission. And Pa Gould, Reynolds. Pomeroy and Gould and, what was the other one I mentioned, three of them that were kind of, oh, Chase, they were involved with the community quite a bit. And, how many town students do you have at Bates today?

**AL:** I don't know. I don't know-

**JW:** Not many.

**AL:** No, because -

**JW:** We had probably thirty or forty when I was there.

**AL:** So a much higher percentage.

**JW:** Oh, much higher percent. But one of the things that is today, the kids, they want to get out of town, they want to get away from home. All my grandchildren went, they've done the same thing. My second son, John, he was a top notch athlete and football player, and he went to Maine, and he had an early acceptance in December but they couldn't tell them anything until the next May or June whether he would get a scholarship or not, and that didn't help him any up there in getting good athletes; some of them would just go elsewhere. Well anyway, Milton Lindholm, who was what, he graduated in what, it was '35 I guess. I knew Milt pretty well in college and I've known him ever since he's been here. And he called me up one night, wanted to know if he could talk with John about coming to Bates. Well, I says, "Milt, he's already been accepted at Maine." He says, "I know that but," he says, "I just wanted, I'd like to talk with him if you would give me permission." I says, "Well that's okay with me," so he did, and Bates offered John a full four-year tuition to come to Bates. He was a good track man and football player, baseball, and he was a good student. John had the ability to be a straight A student if he wanted to, but if a subject didn't interest him a C was good enough. He had too much pride to settle for less, though. But if he liked the subject he'd probably know it better than anyone in the class.

And that's the way it turned, well anyways so he accepted Milt's offer to come to Bates, and he went over for football practice in mid-August and been there a week, and Friday night he walked into the house, in a driving rainstorm. His mother wanted to know, what did you come over for? "I don't want to go back." "Well, why?" "I just don't want to." Took her fifteen minutes to get it out of him. He never wanted to go to Bates in the first place, and he was physical education oriented, he has a marvelous mind and a tremendous memory, I know two of his teachers in high school said that he has a fantastic memory. And, but some things he liked he knew very well, and so he got back into Maine again. I called the football coach up, told him what happened, this was on Sunday morning. He says, "I'm going right over to see the dean of admissions, I'll call you back in an hour or two," and he did. "He's readmitted, you get him up here Monday morning, nine o'clock."

**AL:** And that was in Orono?

**JW:** Yeah. But he couldn't play football that year because he'd worked out with the Bates team, but he went on to be topnotch defensive end up there, and track man. I walked to graduation with the track coach and he told me, he says, "John has the most fantastic memory," he says, "I've given him the highest grades I've ever given any student in my seventeen years here."

Now, my younger son Jeffrey, he was a straight A student all through high school, all the way through school, just like his mother. And he liked everything, good student, good athlete, and he had a full four-year tuition scholarship to Tufts. He graduated with a, I don't know, a 3.8 average. He never got less than an A in any course at Tufts. He took four or five courses on a pass/fail basis, asked the professor what he had for a mark out loud, nothing less than a ninety-six. He says, "Why didn't you take it on a regular basis?" "Well, I didn't want to hurt my quality point ratio." He gave up athletics in college, he liked to study. He would take a course in philosophy, or he'd take Shakespeare, ethics, stuff like that, or music. He graduated as an engineer in applied physics, and he graduated with high honors.

And he went to work for Fairchild Semi Conductor in South Portland for a couple of years and he got bored looking through a microscope at microchips, so he decided to go to law school. He went to Boston College, graduated with honors there, and he's been at Pierce Atwood for, since what, '73, he's one of the top lawyers in the firm today. He likes the law very much, he's good, he's, litigation is his field and I've heard indirectly that he's considered one of the top lawyers in the state in litigation. But he is the student, my youngest. My daughter, she's a straight A student. But John is just as smart as Jeffrey, but he wasn't interested in all the things that Jeffrey was interested in, quite different that way. But he had the head to be one if he wanted to. So anyway, all five kids turned out very well, done very well for themselves.

**AL:** Now, you knew Frank Coffin a little bit, probably from the community and then at Bates also?

**JW:** Well Frank, of course he grew up in Lewiston, I knew his father, he was, I don't know, the old Cushman Hollis shoe factory, I think he was, managed the cafeteria there. And his mother was a very smart lady. I think his father was smart, too, but I know his mother was. And her

father was Congressman Noye, and he was a shrewd one. I know, my father told me the story once that, because my father, after he graduated from Bowdoin, he went to Harvard Law School.

Well, he did Lewiston High School in three years, he never graduated from high school. He did four years in three years, and he did Bowdoin in three and a half and then went to Harvard Law School. He says, "I thought I was a pretty smart boy," he says, "I found out what brains were when I got down there." He says, a fellow by the name of Burton in my class, Justice Burton of the United States Supreme Court, Senator Bob Taft, guys like that. Now dad was very smart, and he was good at everything and anything.

**AL:** So did he get a law degree from Harvard?

**JW:** Yeah.

**AL:** And then he came back and farmed?

**JW:** He practiced law for four or five years and didn't like it. He was expected to be a lawyer, he told me. His father was a lawyer, his grandfather was a lawyer, two brothers were lawyers. He was the youngest one in the family, and he only did it to satisfy, he didn't like it, he liked outdoor, being outdoors working. So, he closed his office and went to farming. And his father died suddenly one fall and his conscience bothered him, so he went back and opened a law office up for another year and a half and finally he told his partner, he said, "This isn't for me, I'm through." He locked the door and went out, he never went back to it. He liked farming.

He was good at everything, he was a whiz with math, he could draw, he played a guitar. My grandfather Wellman, he was a musician, he was the treasurer of the People's Savings Bank for forty-five years. I got a little diary, I was looking at it yesterday, January 2nd, 1868, I think it was, opened my new bank today, and have a new, it was a walnut desk or a mahogany desk. His salary was eight hundred dollars a year.

**AL:** And was this locally?

**JW:** Yeah.

**AL:** In Auburn?

**JW:** Well, the People's Savings Bank was on Lisbon Street, just about where it is today.

**AL:** And what was his name?

**JW:** Edward Wellman. Oh yeah, he was very artistic, he did oil painting, he could do cabinet work, he was a whiz with math, my father was, and his father. Not me, not me, no.

**AL:** So what were your impressions of Frank Coffin when you were at Bates?

**JW:** Well, the only impression, of course I knew Frank around campus but, you know, I never spent any time with him, never went to talk with him or anything like that, but we were in the

same geology class and Frank was very, maybe the top notch student in his class. He was, what, '41 I think. Anyway, Frank always sat up in the old, what's the north edge, Jordan's, there's a Jordan building? Well, you know, there was a amphitheater type room. Frank would sit way up the back row, and he was always talking with the guy next to him. Well one day Doc Fisher was lecturing, Doc stopped and just looked up at Frank, Doc had kind of a grin on his face and he just stood there for about a minute, he says Frank, "I know you know more about this subject than I do but will you please shut up." Oh, that about brought the whole house down. And he, Doc just stood there laughing himself. Frank didn't talk any more. But Frank did, he probably knew the subject as well as Doc did, he was that bright, very good student, very quick mind.

Ed Muskie, I was in, I don't know, what was it, American history class or American government class, it was the only class I was ever in with him. He was a quiet fellow, never said a lot. I always thought he was a good listener, if he talked with people he would listen to them, and I think he was always that way, even when he was in the Senate. He would listen to people and then they'd ask him, you know, what his opinion was. But he was a good student.

I remember once Pa Gould, after he sold his house on Riverside Street, and after my grandmother had died, she was living upstairs over a son's house on Ware Street and so he and his wife took that apartment. And of course we had a camp at Taylor Pond and my Uncle Frank had the cottage right next to us. Well, Pa Gould and Mrs. Gould would come over about two or three times a summer in an evening, we'd all sit there and talk. I don't know what brought the subject up, I've never been able to think what it might have been. I think something that Pa Gould said, something about Ed Muskie. Well, I said, "Well, Ed Muskie can thank Frank Coffin for being where he is today," and Pa says, yeah, you're right. And I said, I says, "I think Frank has probably got a sharper mind than Ed Muskie's." He says, "Yes, I agree with that but," he says, "I'll tell you a fellow that's smarter than the two of them put together," and I says, "Yeah, Vincent McKusick," he says, "Yes."

Vincent was a freshman when I was a senior. I knew who he was. His sister, she graduated, she was a topnotch student, she was '37 I think. I knew their parents, they had a Jersey farm up in Parkman, you can't even find the name on the state of Maine map, it's just a little bit of a place, not enough population to list, but it's way up north of Bangor I guess, or off in that direc-, I tried to find it yesterday, I could not. I have two Maine maps, you can't find it. Anyway, I know his folks, and of course Vincent had a brother, a twin brother who is a doctor at John Hopkins and he's another smart one, but the whole family was smart. But that's all I ever knew about Frank and Ed, that was about it. But they both did very well in politics.

But I started to say once, my father had to go for some reason and see Congressman Morey when he was in town, and his father said, "Well that's okay, but make sure you understand what he means." Dad said, "I got the message." He says, "If you want to," he says, "if you knew exactly what Congressman Morey meant or what he said, you're all right. But if you didn't understand it, you could be very wrong, that he'd have you." He was that kind, he was a shrewd operator. He didn't fool Dad any. So, that's about all I know.

**AL:** Did you know Harry Rowe?

**JW:** Oh, sure. Harry, good old Harry, he was quite an operator, let's put it that way. He was very good at getting people to do things, but he might not come out point blank and ask you to do it. He might hint at something sometime, talking to you. That was that, you didn't think anything more of it. Well Harry had been president of the Androscoggin Historical Society for ten years, and when I look back on it, he said something to me once, something to the effect he thought I'd be a good president. And I didn't think so, and nothing more was said. He never asked me, nobody ever came and asked me if I'd do it. He got up at the annual meeting and announced the slate of new officers, me, president. That's the way Harry operated. I found out from other people he, they all said the same thing, it's what he would do. Oh yeah.

**AL:** What did you do?

**JW:** What could I do? I did it for ten or eleven more years. Yeah.

**AL:** Okay. Are you still involved with the Historical Society in any way?

**JW:** I go once in a great while, but I did those things for so many years, did that for ten or eleven years, I don't know if it was ten or eleven, one or the other, and I was president of the Auburn Heritage for about the same number of years, I was on the city council for eight years, and urban renewal for five years. I think I paid my dues, so I refuse to do any more.

**AL:** Yup. Do you remember the Model Cities Project in Lewiston back in the late sixties and early seventies?

**JW:** What, the urban renewal?

**AL:** Yeah, it was -

**JW:** It was along that, oh yeah. That's what I say, I think they destroyed downtown Lewiston with what they did.

**AL:** With what they did, yeah.

**JW:** You know, these city planners, I think they, they're not as good as they are. Oh, that was going to be great, rebuild downtown Lewiston, build these wider sidewalks and make the storeowners clean them all off, build those roundabouts, and the snowplow crews just hated it because they didn't know where the curbs were. They eliminated so much parking that they drove business right out of Lewiston into the Auburn Mall, and that's the way they do things. I'll tell you, I see a lot of these government people, yeah, they're most all college graduates and they were good students, they knew everything between the covers of the book, but nothing is said about common sense, which most of them don't have. They end up working for the governments. And (*unintelligible word*) I say, I put a higher value on common sense than I do a bunch of college degrees. And I don't regret going to college and having a degree, but I've had to get by on common sense and using my wits.

I remember once in the blizzard of '52, we had a twenty-six inch snowstorm, a big, my father

always talked about the blizzard of '88 when Mount David, whole side right down onto Frye Street was just covered with snow. Well, '52 beat that one by two inches, and I was snowbound at the Summer Street farm for a week. You know where Whiting's greenhouses are? Well, right on the corner of their field there was a snowdrift thirteen feet deep. I lived down at the farm at the foot of the hill, towards Dingley's, and I called my father up that morning and said, I'm going to ski down. "Well, you better not try to come in this storm." I says, I'm coming, because we got a big milk business, bottle the milk and get that out.

Well, I wrapped a scarf around my face, grabbed my skis and I started, and I got up there almost to the top of the hill and, skiing along, and there were drifts would be about this high and then just drop right off, so you didn't ski, you went this way. It ended up taking me forty-five minutes to ski a mile and a half, which I could have walked in about twenty minutes. And I skied by and I thought, saw something shiny down here, and I said, oh, I guess old Johnny Beale just lost some of his shingles. Then, oh wait a minute, asphalt shingles don't shine. I backed up and looked, there was like a car down in there, glass, so I, all you could see was a little piece about this big around, and I reached down and there was the windshield. And I banged on it, no sign of any -

*End of Side A*  
*Side B*

**AL:** We are now on Side B of the interview.

**JW:** Okay, so I went in and I saw to a couple of city of Auburn highway crew there, and I saw they had a pickup truck was off over the bank in the fork of the road where Whiting's store, down in there, I said, "You know anything about this car buried out there in the snow?" "Yeah, we went out, we got a woman out of it." They had left the car running, trying to keep warm in it, and so she passed out. Well, I don't know whether it was, her husband I guess, he finally managed to get the door open and get out and go up there and got help, and they came back and shoveled that side out and got her out. Well, Mrs. Whitehouse was a nurse and she said, if I hadn't been a nurse that woman would have died right then and there. We had all we could do to pull her through. And . . . .

**AL:** Carbon monoxide poisoning? Yeah.

**JW:** I guess, yeah. Anyway, that, I could stand on those, top of that snowdrift, take hold of the telephone wire, just reach up and take them. I was snowed in for a week. They finally got a big power shovel from Peterson's Pit to come up, took them thirteen hours to dig a eight foot tunnel through it. And of course, Doc Perkins who lived just on the other side of the street past my barn, right next to Dingley's, he could get out every day and go off towards Dingley's to Lake Street and come in. But that road was four feet deep, packed. And snowmobiles were traveling the road, packing it all down. Well, the city came up with a Lynn tractor, "Oh, we can open that up with a Lynn tractor." Well, they drove into it and there it died, it got buried. About three days later the city had, received I think three Osh Kosh big snow plow trucks and they brought those three up, chained all three together, hooked the first one onto the Lynn tractor, and then a guy dug, got down into the tractor and got it going and finally on a given signal they all started

to back and they hauled it out. Then they got Peterson out, they opened the road. So, it was photographed, the *Sun-Journal* had to come up and take a picture and they had to put it in the paper. I guess that was on a Saturday they got it out.

I spent most of Sunday hauling people's cars out that got stuck down in there. They'd come up from Auburn, drive into it, nowhere they could turn around. People were coming from the other way, they couldn't see anybody coming traffic jam. I called the police up and told them to come up and barricade that road. They did, people just picked the barricades up and threw them aside. Finally it was time to milk the cows, I told my wife, I says, anybody wants to get hauled out, tell them to call a wrecker. That's what I did. Serves them right.

But anyway, that's about that. But I remember, was it '43, we had a snowstorm about the 13th of November, heavy wet one, and it froze on the wires. I'm not exaggerating, about that much on the wires. Every power pole from the mausoleum at Mt. Auburn cemetery was laying flat on the ground to my door yard, including the big power bank in front of Whiting's that had four big five foot transformers on it, and that was all on the ground. Now, I had a little Farm All cub tractor, had lights on it and a battery. After half an hour, I managed to get it around the barn and in the back door, crossways to the floor, because I had twenty-four cows to milk. The night before I'd milked about half of them until I couldn't squeeze any more. If you're not used to it, it gets you after a while. Anyway, so I took one light and I got it crossways in the, this was an old-fashioned cow barn, it had what you call a (*unintelligible word*) wall and you had drop doors to feed them, and cows are on the inside in the tie up. So I had one light I shot down the alley in front of them so I could have light there, and I took another light and a long piece of wire and I hung that up in the tie up behind the cows so I had light going down that alley, and I made a belt about twenty feet long with a piece of harness (*unintelligible word*) and put it on the belt pulley and I finally had myself a milking machine, which I used for a whole week. My father was telling Colonel Skelton, he was the chairman of the board of, at Bates, and so what Skelton, after dad told him, he says, "Huh, his college education didn't hurt him any." I thought that was a very good compliment.

That's what I mean. My brother-in-law couldn't have figured out to get out of the mess I was in. He may have been smarter than I was in scholars, but I could outsmart him in a lot of ways.

**AL:** Now, what were your parents' names, including your mom's maiden name?

**JW:** My mother was Marion J. Wellman, and my father was Harold Sewall White. The Sewall name came for Arthur Sewall, at Bath Iron Works; he was a really close friend of my grandfather Frye's. It seemed grandfather Frye'd just named most of his grandchildren. Let's see, the oldest one was William Frye, and then Wallace Humphrey was named for my great-grandfather John White, he married Augusta Humphrey up in Livermore, and John Humphrey, and Thomas Carter was named for one of grandfather Frye's law partners, and Donald Cameron was named for Senator Cameron of Pennsylvania, and my father picked up the Sewall from Bath. They're no relation, but that's the way, oh yeah, and my aunt, Emmy, she was the middle one in the family, the only girl, and she was Emmy Duncan and that was from some other friend of grandfather Frye's.



Yeah, he was a pretty powerful political figure in Washington, and when McKinley decided, he was president pro tem of the Senate under the old system when your state legislature elected your senators and congressmen, and he was the presiding officer of the Senate. And McKinley came to him and asked him to run on the ticket with him as his vice president. My grandfather Frye says, "Well, I was sent to Washington to represent the people of the state of Maine, not to be a figurehead for anyone," period. So, McKinley gets Teddy Roosevelt to run. He got elected; three months after McKinley takes office, he's dead. Who becomes president? Oh, grandfather Frye, he knew what was important and what wasn't, and being vice president wasn't one of them. He could, if he had said yes, he would have been president. A miss is as good as a mile. Then-

**AL:** He must have had such an interesting life.

**JW:** Then, after the electors voted, McKinley gave the ballot box to grandfather Frye, because my brother had it, and his son has it now.

**AL:** That's neat.

**JW:** I got another thing I'm trying to figure out with, trying to work with Olympia Snowe, because I knew Olympia when she was a girl in high school, she used to ride home with me, and I'd go down and pick the boys up at high school and she lived on Turner Street and she'd ride up with us a lot. Of course Georgia Chomas is her cousin and so I (*unintelligible word*) Georgia.

**AL:** And Georgia's a real estate person so you must have that connection with her.

**JW:** Yeah, we were in the same office together for quite a few years, oh yeah.

**AL:** I know Georgia.

**JW:** Oh yeah. No, Georgia and I, we always got along fine. In fact, I went in about a week ago to see her. I drop into her office about once a week just to keep up old friendships. But down through the family, grandfather Frye was given a, I'm going to get it and show it to you.

**AL:** Some.

(*Pause in taping.*)

**AL:** Oh, wow. "Presented to the Honorable William Pierre [*sic* Pierce] Frye."

**JW:** Pierce.

**AL:** Oh, I'm sorry, Pierce, "Yes, by the Lifesavers of the United States in grateful recognition of the steadfast efforts in their behalf." Wow. What is that made out of?

**JW:** Those handles?

**AL:** Yeah.

**JW:** Deer horn. And it's sterling silver, it was made in California. I've had it appraised not too long ago, and the fellow that looked, when he saw this he says, "I'd be willing to bet that that was made by Chinese artisans," because this company, he was given this in 1904, and he says, "This company in California were hiring a lot of Chinese artisans to do this kind of work," and he says, "I'd be pretty sure they were the ones that made that and put that on, see, the top and bottom."

**AL:** Yes, that's nice.

**JW:** Well, what is the Lifesaving Service, Red Cross Lifesaving Service. The family's always said it was, the Red Cross Lifesaving Service became the United States Coast Guard. When this guy appraised it, he says, I doubt that, see, he says, we had the Coast Guard back at the time of the Barbary pirates in the Mediterranean, our ships went over there and beat them up. But he says, I don't know what that Red Cross would be. I can't believe it's the American Red Cross. That's what we're trying to track down. My guess is he put some bill through the Senate and Congress to set up that, and we're going to see if we can track down what it really is. This came down through the family. My Uncle Tom had it, and then his son Billy ended up with it and he didn't want it. He asked me one day, "You want that?" Well, I says, "Yes." It's in a great big walnut box this long, that wide, that deep. And it's got a bronze plate on the top, William P. Frye, 1904. Well, the appraiser, he put a value of forty-five hundred dollars on it; it's not the value of the silver, it's what it stands for. But they're trying to figure out exactly what it was.

**AL:** Yeah, that's really neat.

**JW:** Quite a piece. I polished it a year ago, and I think it could stand it again.

**AL:** Yeah, those things have to be polished all the time.

**JW:** But I guess there's some kind of a treatment they put on so they don't corrode any.

**AL:** Well when you find out what that is, let me know.

**JW:** I think there is something. You use it on-

**AL:** Probably is.

**JW:** There must be. Anyway, so that's, that's that. What else you got in your mind?

**AL:** I just was going to ask you about Mount David, that you mentioned earlier. Does that belong to Bates now?

**JW:** Sure.

**AL:** And how did that come to be? Because it was owned by your family?

**JW:** It was on the Davis farm, which was from Main Street, say from Ware Street, down Main Street probably to Frye Street, that's been the Frye's from Frye Street on down past Union Street. In other words, those farms were laid out more or less east and west, rather than north and south. Well the Davis farm ran right straight through. Well, if you figure out a hundred rods, times 16.5, you're going out probably eighteen hundred feet from Main Street. That's going to take you pretty well past, say, Chase Hall. And if you're going from Ware Street down to Frye, at fifty rods, that's still quite a ways. Well, that mountain was useless as far as the farm was concerned.

But the story in the family was that he gave it to the college to build an observatory on, to put a telescope up there. Well, that probably may be true, but I don't think David did it because he died, you go down in the cemetery on Sabattus Street, that's an old Quaker cemetery, and over in the southwest corner there was a Quaker meetinghouse. It was gone before my day, I don't remember it, or if I do it's so vague I can't be sure. But anyway, he's buried right there and he died in 1850. Well, Bates didn't exist until 1865. It was the, what was the Latin school, Nichols, that was J.B. Hall, Nichols Latin School, that's what, that was the first building on the Bates campus, but Bates didn't build it. And, so I think what happened was, after David died, one of his descendants that inherited the farm may very well have given it to the college. Because the college didn't buy it, it was given to them by the family, let's leave it that way. And I was talking to Jay, who's the editor of the -?

**AL:** Jay Burns?

**JW:** Yeah, and, about it and, because he had a query, somebody had submitted a query on how did Mt. David get its name. This was a couple years ago. And so I went over and told what I knew. He'd never heard that. And so, that was the story on it. He thought that, Jay thought the farm base was on the Nash property. Well, George Nash, when I was in college, lived in the house, what is it, the Clason House, he lived there. Next house (*unintelligible word*) Professor Gus Buschmann lived. Now, I knew Gus well, he's a nice guy. And so I think as the farm got broken up, the Nashes acquired a piece of it. That's, but actually it was all on the Davis farm, except probably the, well, where the new field house and swimming pool and new athletic field is, probably weren't, probably somebody else's. But the main part of it where most of the buildings are, they're all on the Davis farm.

The old Davis house, that was on Main Street, there's a vacant lot just on the south side of Aliberti, Larochelle & Hodson, engineering firm, just below Hoyt Street, Curtis Street. Between that and Holland, the original Davis house was right there. And then there was another Frye house down on Main Street hill where the tractor trailers back in off Main Street to the Bates Mill. If you were going up the hill from the bridge, it's that opening in there; the original Frye house was there. Dean Frye built that, he came from Westbrook, and he ran what was the (*unintelligible word*) mill along the river, an old wooden woolen mill, and his son Colonel John Frye was city clerk of Lewiston for a good many years. Now he lived on Main Street the next house below where Rainbow Realty is was the house my uncle built. That house was painted multi-colored brick, you know, yellow and brown, there is a little paint left you can see it today, but that was Colonel John Frye's house. And the Fries and Davises intermarried, so my family practically owned that whole middle strip of Lewiston.

**AL:** It sounds like it.

**JW:** Yeah. Anything else?

**AL:** I don't have any more specific questions. Do you have any thoughts that I haven't asked you that you think are important to -?

**JW:** Well, I can talk a lot about things that are inconsequential, that don't belong in this. But, no, I don't really think of anything. yeah, you were talking Professor Gus Bushman, I'll never forget, I met Gus Buschmann quite a few years ago down on Main Street, it was probably twenty years ago, came along one day. And we stopped and talked, and he says, "Johnny, I had my doubts for a while that you were going to make it through Bates but," he says, "you turned out okay."

**AL:** What did he teach at Bates?

**JW:** German. Yeah, my wife majored in German, and so, she liked Dutchy Leonard and Sammy Harms. I'll never forget the day Dutchy Leonard called me down to his desk at the end of a class. Most of them had gone out, and he says, "John," and he had a Phi Beta Kappa's key, he picks this up out of his vest and he says, you know, "I know you're just an average student," he says, "I'd swap this key any day to be able to do what you can do, the way you organize and run things, how you get along with people." Of course, I thought that was pretty nice. But I was an average student, B's and C's. Never got an A, but boy, I came within one point of it once in geology. But, math was my bugaboo, and chemistry. I didn't like either one of them.

The year I went down to, the semester I was at Mass State, the dean asked me, you had high school chemistry? I said, no. "Well, you've got to take chemistry, you've got to take both quantitative and qualitative analysis this semester." It didn't mean anything to me, but I found out. The professor, he had taught at Harvard, and they were trying to get him back. And he had a voice that would break and bounce off the ceiling; he had about two hundred of us in that lecture class. He called me down at the end of the class and he said, "Mr. White, I have never had a student do so poorly in chemistry of anybody that's had high school chemistry." I said, "Well I never had high school chemistry." "What, (*unintelligible phrase*), well what are you doing in here?" I says, "The dean said I had to take these two courses." "What was, which dean?" I says, "(*name*).". "Well, I'll check with him." He did, called me down the next day, he says, "I talked with the dean, you're right," he says, "I'm assigning a student to help you." It turned out to be a fellow, brother of a girl at Bates that I knew. Their father was superintendent of schools in Newton, Mass, and he helped me.

I got through both of them with D's, so I had to take chemistry again at Bates when I came back. I got through that time with a C. I've never liked it. Math was not my forte. History and government, geography, I liked that. My wife, she was, she graduated with honors, she was voted the most typical Bates woman, she was a professor's assistant in German, and I guess Latin.

**AL:** And her name?

**JW:** It was Evelyn Jones. She died last July. She had a lot of, she was a valedictorian of her class in high school, and she graduated with honors from Bates. She was into all kinds of things. If she wanted to be bookworm, she probably would have been Phi Beta Kappa because she was a whiz with math, and with German and Latin. But she didn't like French. I was better in history and government than she was. She was good at the things that I wasn't, and vice versa.

**AL:** Well, that's good, you teamwork.

**JW:** Yeah. Yeah, we had a great life together. Yeah, she never talked about her accomplishments, never. Now what she's, if she couldn't say anything good about anybody, she said nothing. She edited the *Japanese Review* for nine years, until she broke her left arm and her right hand all at the same time. Well, turns out it was the result of a lymphoma, non-Hodgkin cancer, and she was eighty-three then, and oh, she took one and a half courses of chemo and psytoxin, but the longer she took it, the more it wore her down. She ended up in a hospital and finally the doctor said that they tried antioxidants, she turned out she was very allergic to both of them and she said, there's really nothing more we can do, and says, it's just putting it off. Every third week she ends up in the hospital for a week, to get her back on her feet again.

And, so she had to quit editing the *Review* very quick, I had to put was a call in to a fellow for her on the west coast, it was the president of the Japanese Society, and tell them they'd have to find somebody, I says, I don't type and I don't have a computer, and I says, Ted can't handle any more than he's doing. Well, it's been a mess ever since. The lady who did do it, she didn't like it and she gave it up after one or two issues. Now they're a year and a half behind on any issue.

**AL:** Is this a part of the Japan-America Society? Oh, no it's not.

**JW:** No. Well, it's, the *Japanese Review* is, we have the National Japanese Iris Society, which is affiliated with the American Iris Society, and you have the Siberian Society, you've got a small society for most any of the smaller groups. Like, Pacific Coast Iris, they're a separate entity. The Siberians are, and the Japanese, and, oh, there's more than a hundred different varieties of Japanese, I hybridize Siberian and Japanese and Pacific Coast Irises, and I've been working the Pacific Coast Iris for the last ten years. Of course, they don't grow east of the Cascade ranges, just on the west coast, from central California into southern Washington. They're beautiful flowers. Most of them don't grow very, about this high, except the Graciano might get up oh around this high.

And I've been fooling with some, and two or three years ago somebody out there, it dawned on them, well there's, it won't grow in a cold climate, and of course they grow, nor will they grow way down in from central to southern California, it's too hot. Although one fellow down there has succeeded in doing it, down in, well it's about forty, fifty, sixty miles south of San Jose, and it gets pretty hot down there. He's succeeded in developing a strain of heat resistant ones. I always figured if you could do that, why can't you develop a strain of cold resistant ones. So I had a lot of iris Tenax, which grows up in the mountains, five, six, seven thousand foot elevation. So I got some seed and I've been able to keep those plants and keep them growing.

I've got some I've had, they're on their seventh year and I was out looking at them the other day, they're still growing. They're semi evergreen. But the more modern ones, I'll show you something, I've got a lot more pictures than this but, well there's a man that he just passed away a year ago, but that's some.

**AL:** Oh, they're beautiful.

**JW:** Look at these. Here's mine.

**AL:** That's yours.

**JW:** That's my seedling, that I won the, had the best seedling in the iris show last spring. Everybody was shocked. Now, you see, the modern ones are big like this. But that's crossed with an iris Tenax with one that's this size, that's bigger than the Tenax is.

**AL:** How do you spell Tenax?

**JW:** T-E-N-A-X.

**AL:** Oh, just like it sounds. Okay.

**JW:** Yeah, so I've been working with those. But I've been fooling with them for ten years, and somebody out on the west coast figured about three years ago, if we started to use Tenax, maybe we could develop some that would grow in the northern states. Well, I've been about seven years ahead of them.

**AL:** "Hello, I've been doing it already." That's great.

**JW:** There's two or three of them, (*unintelligible phrase*) trying to help me in making crosses of something particular that I think I could work with. And, well, I got, my son gave me his old computer here last spring, it was a Packard Bell five years old, but it wasn't big enough because he heads up the United States Day Lily Association. When he took it over about five years ago, they had I don't know, forty or fifty members. Today they have over twelve hundred. He has to update the membership list every two weeks, changes in address, changes in email numbers or fax numbers. And so he got a new Dell, and, but this thing once in a while would lock up on him and he took a lot of stuff out and gave it to me, but every once in a while it would give me trouble. I couldn't get out of the Navigator (*unintelligible phrase*) even, I'd shut it down one, two, or three times before you could clear it. And sometimes it would do it when I was in the middle of something. Not often, but it's just annoying. When it locked, you just shut it down, start again.

**AL:** That's no fun.

**JW:** Well, pa, he says, you know, you're having so much trouble with that and so frustrating, he says I think you ought to get yourself a new one. It's a lot faster, with a lot more capacity, but you don't need one as big as mine, because his will do twice what mine is. Mine's a new Dell, a

Windows 2001 XP, and it's twice as fast. And of course what he had is Packard Bell, that was the best thing available. Now Dell is. And I get along a lot better with that. I do genealogy on it basically, and I wished I knew somebody that knew how to really use the computer on genealogy, because I don't. I'm finding out some things because I worked in genealogy for the last sixty years, trying to figure out who my first ancestor was in this country. Nobody had ever figured it out, and I found it.

**AL:** Yeah, how long has your family been here?

**JW:** Sixteen thirty-five.

**AL:** One of the early ones, I'd say.

**JW:** William White, he came on the ship Increase, in 1635, age fourteen, servant to Philemon Dalton, linen weaver, and his wife, thirty-five, and his son Sam, five. The Daltons have never found where they came from in England. He had an older brother, Reverend Timothy Dalton whose church was in Liverstone, southern Suffolk. He got kicked out of his church in 1636 and he got passed along in their underground railroad and got into Holland, then to Boston in 1636.

Well, my wife's cousin, she worked in the LES center over in New Hampshire, and for some reason she'd been in touch with a Millicent Craig in California who was the secretary of the Dalton Society of the United States, and this lady suggested I get in touch with Dr. Lucy Slater in England, who is the secretary of the Dalton Society there. Well, she gave me her address and said, "She's been ill, I suggest you wait perhaps a month before you write, give her time to recover." So I did, and I had a nice letter. So Lucy and I have been corresponding, it's Lucy and John all the time. She's a retired don at Cambridge University, she turned eighty in February. She had a very high position in the British government in WWII. She won't say what. Probably top secret. She set up an internet for the British Army after WWII; she set up the first genealogical internet in England.

My younger sister's son goes to England, and he was going about every two months for the last few years for his company, they have a big, their company is Genomics and it's in, just outside of Lansing, Michigan, and they have a big plant in Huntington in England, which is half-way between Dennington and Cambridge. And on one of his trips, he went to see, call on Dr. Slater, and he sent me an email, he (*unintelligible phrase*), this kid is a whiz with computers and they're working with genes and everything. Kid is bright as the devil, but he flunked out of Dartmouth because he was horsing around. He had spent more time on his bicycle riding down to Smith College to see his girlfriend, he did studying, and that got him. But smart as the devil. Anyway, he said she was a fascinating lady. He says, do you know the top woman admiral in our Navy? And I says, no, I know about her a little and I've seen her photograph. Well, he says, I liken this admiral to this lady, he says, they are both brilliant.

Well, Dr. Slater says that William lied about his age and lied about his occupation. She says, he was more than a linen weaver; he was a master of weavers. Well, what that means is he was no doubt a property owner paying taxes, and she says, Dennington was the hotbed of Puritanism in England. There was vandalism there, property just destroyed, property including the loss of the

records because you can find practically no records in Dennington, or in Suffolk, in that early period before Cromwell, and of course Cromwell, they destroyed a mess of stuff. And it seems that Charles I in 10 July, 1635 issued a proclamation that no one could leave England without a license, except sailors, soldiers, factors, and their apprentices. Factors meaning businessmen, because he knew they'd be coming back. And so what we think is that Reverend Timothy through the grapevine in his church knew what was being discussed in the court and decided it was time to get out of England.

Well, Lucy's last letter to me said that Philemon did get a permit to leave it, so I figure I'm going to send one back to her pretty quick and say, well, if he had one, why didn't William have one. She said, I'm very certain, from the work I've done years ago, that your William is the son of William White, Lord of the Manor of Dennington, and she says, I think he was born in 1608, which would have made him twenty-seven. But all the genealogists that have worked on that for the last, say, seventy-five to a hundred years, never could figure out who William was, or where he was. Well, if he was a fourteen year old boy, he was apprenticed, he had to stay with Dalton until he was, well, twenty-one was the legal age in the colonies. But the Daltons would have been settled in Watertown immediately on arriving.

Next year his brother Timothy comes to Watertown, 1637 they became settlers and proprietor of Dedham. Sixteen thirty-eight Philemon got in a row over land and went to court, but the history of Dedham says he came out of the court house with a sour look on his face and left town, and was never seen again. So he becomes a settler and proprietor of Hampton, New Hampshire. And Reverend Timothy is called there to the church apparently, more likely, they said, to teach school because they were Puritan ministers, although New England was a Puritan colony, but no doubt he did teach school and preach, too. There's no record of any of those three towns that William White was ever there. Except (*unintelligible word*) history of Hampton, New Hampshire mentions him as being the servant of Philemon Dalton. Well, what he did is picked up what the passenger list said, that's what everybody did and it got them nowhere. William disappears for ten years. Well, he turns up in Boston in 1645 when he was arrested and fined four pounds for making a bar, selling beer. And he was well educated, he was a beautiful penman. And I've got a copy of the letter he wrote to the general court asking the fine to be taken off.

**AL:** Oh, you do?

**JW:** Yeah, and on top of that I was able to get a copy of his will, and he died in 1673. New England Historical Society cannot get any copies of any of those old documents. Ann Harding, that was the associated editor for the Register, because I (*unintelligible phrase*) for a good many years, and I got to know her, I met her a few times when I'd go down there once a year to work. And so I got that will, I got a copy of his estate appraisal, of his son Isaac's will and the state appraisal, I got copies of two or three guardianships and one or two other, all told I've got seven copies.

**AL:** Sounds like you've done a lot of work so far.

**JW:** Yeah. And, so I've got all of this stuff, and I made copies, and I gave copies to Ann



Harding to give to the New England Historical. She says, how did you get those? She said, we can't get them, no one will give us copies. She says, "We could solve more mysteries if we could get copies of this stuff." And she said to me, she said, "You know how valuable this stuff is?" And I says, "Well, yes and no." She says, "No you don't." She says, "You have just untangled a problem on these Whites that several of us have worked for years and years and never been able to straighten them out," and she says, "you got it right here." There were two names that witnessed the will; I couldn't read the first name of one of them, or the last name on the second. She took a look, oh, she knew instantly who they were. And it took my wife and I ten hours to decipher his will.

It's written in old English script, probably more words to one line, really tiny letters, more words than you could put on with a typewriter today. Well, finally I tumbled to why I was having so much trouble. It seems that whoever wrote it was dropping the last syllable of a word and amending it to the following word. There were three or four times I picked that up, twice they had taken the preceding word and, the first syllable, and attached it to the last one. And when I finally figured out what those words really were, then I, we got through it. Then I wrote it all out in modern English, see, got it typed up so you can read it. Well, William named all his children in his will. He named who his daughters married, and it turned out that they, something threw me off.

I had seen one or two of those names in Providence, so I started checking out Providence. Turned out three of the daughters married Providence men, although one of them I think at the time she married was living in Boston, but he also had got taken to court in Lynn for beating his wife in front of two witnesses, and he got fined. Well anyway, they go to Providence, they started in Providence. So the other two girls were the Hermans, Bennett and (*name*), were the three. Well, I have found, Maine Historical has got a set of the earliest records of Providence, twenty-one volumes, but they theirs start with the third, but I think there's a lot of stuff in a book, separate book that's not part of the series, that's in those first two.

Well, it turns out that Providence was settled by Roger Williams in 1630. There was one record of his son William born in 1633. The next record that you can find is just one or two references to something in 1657. The town, from 1657-58 on, they've got most all of the records. Some of them are still missing, but they think there were a lot of records that were kept on newspaper or notebook or, anyway, they practically have all been lost so we don't know. The records of Taunton, Mass., that was started, there was probably two, three, four settlers living at Taunton in 1633, but they don't recognize it as being a town before 1635 and more likely '37 to '38 when it became actually became a town.

Well, Dr. Slater says, William, my William, was a brick mason, a stone mason, and he owned soldering tools, he owned a salt works, a soap works, and a turning mill. This is all in Boston after 1645. His last child, which I'm certain is correct, was born in Boston, January 7, 1646, Cornelius, and he's the one I descend from. His father was Cornelius, too. Dr. Slater says that there was brick mason, manufacturing, going on just west of Dennington towards Cambridge or Huntington, and I read that there was brick manufacturing starting in Taunton. But whether it was being done in 1635, I don't know. All I know is, a White from Taunton appears in Providence, but there's no date on the document. They list, they say there's quite a lot of dates

that are missing on some of these earliest documents of Providence. Well, like a first name is so damaged or obscured, they can't read it, or a last name, and you run into a lot of that. Well I got all those records on a CD Rom, so I can go through them, so I know there was a White came from Taunton. Now whether it was William, if he knew about, now, if he knew about, of course, let's go back up to Dr. Slater.

She said it was customary in that, those times, for the son, first son to be named for the father and the first daughter for the mother, then they go to grandparents, and others go on to -. Well, if you go by that completely, and you rule out the possibility that William was not the first son, what does that mean? Primogenitor, if he had an older brother, he inherited nothing, William didn't. So he had to learn a trade. He may have learned his trade in England, with an older brother. Now they're trying to find his father's will, and if that, wills the biggest help, I think.

**AL:** Yeah, and when they name everybody.

**JW:** If he named his children, now William's children are named William, Isaac, Cornelius, and his daughters were Margaret, Elizabeth, Ursula, and, it's a common name, anyway. If I could find his father's will, and I saw some of those same names, I'd know very well we, that Lucy Slater is absolutely correct. Although you'll never find any documents to prove it. Circumstantial evidence, bits and pieces, pretty certain it leads you to that.

Now, I have got copies of all the William Whites born in England through 1608, through 1613. Only two White names appear in Suffolk in all those years. Lots of other Whites all over England, I got pages and pages. I've got also 1620-21, in case William was fourteen. Just one, in Riverstone, I found his father's name was Abraham, his mother Marie. But none of William's children have any of those names, so I think you can throw him out. No, it leads us right back to Dennington and just what Lucy says. I asked my nephew if she was actually a genealogist. He says, not as such, but he says, I doubt if there's another genealogist in England that knows more than she does. And she knows what she's talking about, and she's done a, she says, one of her last letters was, she says, I worked on that family years ago and I was convinced then that William White was the Lord of the Manor of Dennington. And so, by bits and pieces I've worked my way through it. And I also, there's a record that William White was granted a house lot in Providence at the time the town, of course it was, been a town perhaps from 1630, but they were still giving away house lots for settlers. William (*unintelligible word*), he was granted a house lot. He bought twenty-five acres of land between the two rivers -

*End of Side B*

*End of Interview*