

**CONNECTICUT 20TH CENTURY AGRICULTURAL HISTORY PROJECT
ORAL HISTORIES**

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Name of Person Interviewed: Vivian Anderson Putnam

Date of Interview: August 7, 1998

Draft #: R-1 January 27, 2020

Transcriber: NIM Transcription, Charter Oak Scanning,
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Contract Firm: Charter Oak Scanning

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VP: ...was a home economist and I had done my work at Kansas State and graduate work at Iowa State and was working for Pratt & Whitney building lived in harvey house new honors house while teaching A. BC 1945-47 married gone 1947 engines in Kansas City Doubles WASP when the war stopped and I knew I would be changing very soon. My Major was Textiles and Clothing and out of the blue I got a letter from the Dean of Home Ec here at UConn offering me a job not even knowing that she had been an Iowa State graduate and had used their...their files. So I got this offer to teach here at UConn and just wrote and said, "Yes, I'll take it."

LL: Oh wonderful.

VP: So, I arrived in Willimantic in the fall of 1945 and taught the Textiles and Clothing course. The second fall, the President had a reception for all the faculty which our Dean said, "You must attend." So, we all went in our dress-up clothes and I was introduced to Paul at this President's reception which was in Hawley Armory. And lo and behold, a few days later I received a telephone call and was asked out to dinner. So that's how I met Paul. Paul came to campus as a trainee enlisted in the Army in World War I and was sent to Storrs...his basic officer's training.

LL: ROTC, the training...?

VP: It was officer's training. I'm not sure it was ROTC.

LL: That was for World War I?

VP: It was for World War I and he says he...he fought the battle of the Fenton River. But about two months after he was here for training, the War ended. So he stayed on as a student here at the UConn campus.

LL: And where was he from originally?

VP: His home was Windsor, Connecticut. He was raised on a farm so I'm not sure just what he majored in, in his undergraduate work. His degree and was quite an...quite an outstanding student from the clippings that I have. He was captain of the basketball team and he was active in...in campus affairs. Well, so after he got his degree he stayed on in the Department of Agricultural Economics. He had been a member of the faculty since 1922 which was the year that he got his degree. That's a long time, you know. One thing is that his wife and youngest daughter were killed in the Hartford circus fire.

LL: Oh...ohhhh.

VP: So that is why I came...into the picture, you see And that was, 1944. That was before I ever arrived...on the scene here. So Paul had he got his degree at UConn and did his Master's work at 48f Minnesota. His primary position with the Department of Agricultural Economics was in Farm Management. I don't believe there was a farmer in Connecticut that...they didn't know. So that's a little bit of background. At the time Paul and I were married in 1947, He had been appointed by the Governor during the World War II period to see that all of the crops State farm Sabor Superior in Connecticut were harvested.

This included shade tobacco. Well, Fruit picking; apples and strawberries and all of the...Connecticut agriculture and he was on the Governor's war council. They set up camps in Connecticut and he would go to Florida and recruit high school principals who would get high school students and they set up camps here in Connecticut with high school students.

LL: In the summertime.?

VP: Yes...shade tobacco or the strawberries. He also brought in labor from New Foundland, from Puerto Rico and he had camps all over the State. One of the things he liked to talk about was the time that Eleanor Roosevelt came to campus here and spent a day on campus. Oh, I think these were in tribute to the home gardening efforts that were being made and Paul was one that...that made the arrangements for her visit here. So there was a lot going on there were programs that were widely, widely known, I think. In the early '50's we went down to Washington, D.C. and he was the person from Connecticut that received the award from the Department of Agriculture for outstanding work in the field of Agriculture. It was an outdoor ceremony held at the base of the Washington Monument which was right across the street from the Department of Ag. So he had...quite a bit of recognition's...in his work. The thing I remember about the early staff was that they all worked together. They had a common purpose. They had seminars and everybody else knew what people were doing and there was the nicest feeling within the department, especially in Agricultural Economics camaraderie. And then it got extra special in Extension. The Extension Staff...was outstanding. They had fun, they enjoyed what they... did and we'd get groups together. They were quite social...they would have special days up at the Agronomy Farm and Paul would have everybody come here for a picnic or something like that. They'd go down to the shore for things. So, I don't know whether that's true now or not but it certainly was true then. Whip Young, was a good administrator and I think he had very high standards for the people. Paul was made Head of the Agricultural Economics Department when Mr. EA Perrigault retired. He had been Acting...Paul had been Acting before that 'cause Perry went to France to work on some milk marketing program. He had done milk marketing here in Connecticut and then went to France. When Perry decided to retire Paul was made Head of the Department rather than just Acting Head...he had the whole gamut of the Extension work and teaching. He taught both the College of Ag classes and a Ratcliffe Hicks course in Farm Management. He was the Extension Specialist that handled all of the tax problems for the farmers. He would give classes whenever they...they started probably. They'd started late fall. He would go around the State and give the classes for people how to make out their taxes. Then as the season developed if any primary problems with tax problems for the farmers, Paul was the one that fielded it both for the IRS and for the farmers themselves. That was a specialty of his. Then they was a time, they were doing quite a bit of research into farm account books and I think, Irv Fellows was one that worked...worked with Paul on that. They published a lot. I had a box upstairs that when I

retired I put things in wondering what do with them. I went up and looked at the top of those and I pulled out a few of the publications that had Paul's by-line in which is just a very small...Ratio...they produced, also as well...and this is what happens after you lose your...your contact with the University. Things changed immensely. Although after Paul died in 1964, right after he had...he had been retired about a year. He had rheumatoid arthritis which was very debilitating for him. He retired because of health purposes and then had a heart attack the next year and I went back to work in '65. I was in charge of International Aorta on campus for ten years. And that was...a great job for me. So for many, many years I was on campus and knew people. But when I retired why, things...things kind of changed. When Paul retired George ever took our top work.

LL: Um hmm, they do, they do.

VP: But I do thing that the present Dean and the present Head of Ag Econ try hard to keep in...in touch with the older people. It's very easy to kind of forget. There is so much going on and so bringing so many new people in that the...the older times can be easily forgotten. I think you want to work for the future but I think you still want to remember the past.

LL: Do you remember him ever working...I just got a letter from someone named McClain who's now in Vermont or New Hampshire and he worked on the research about Connecticut...the Connecticut Turnpike over in the northeastern part of the State. So I got a letter from him and he said that it was Connecticut that was one of three States chosen by the Federal Government to look at having farmers be qualified for Social Security. And this he said, was in the '50's and I haven't...I just got this letter so I haven't had a chance to look back...(No.) 'cause I'm not sure when Social Security came in the '30's...

VP: Paul worked with the person that was head of Social Security for this area. I...it seems to me it was based in Willimantic but I think it was a larger area than just Willimantic. And so Paul was working with I can't tell you specifically what he was but they...they were...into SS working with farm population.

LL: Well, I've got to check to see if these years are correct because if we were one of the three States chosen to do this study and be responsible for ag...the farmers being eligible to...to develop --- to contribute to Social Security and receive Social Security, that would be a very important piece to include in the Connecticut History Project.

VP: Yes. I am sure that Paul had contact with a Social Security person. He also worked closely with what they called the "Land Bank" in the banking, improving banking for the farmers.

LL: As a...as a source for funds?

VP: Yes, I think as they...as they needed money for...for their businesses As of course, all of this time the amount of capital that was needed and the amount of money you needed to purchase the land if you didn't inherit it, he worked with the...the Land Bank. Because when he retired, he was offered a position with...with the Bank he...my forgetter is the best thing about me right now. It's just...what it was he did. Paul was on the Faculty Senate. He was on the Athletic Committee for his interest in athletics. I don't think there was a basketball game that we missed. There wasn't much else we missed either. Either home games in football or what...whatever they were playing, Paul was there and he was the loudest rooter in the whole in the whole fieldhouse. And they're... they're very nice to me up in the Athletic Department because they...they remember his contribution. He was active in, church work but I...I think this especially true of people in the College of Ag. Now I don't know of my friends that are in other schools are quite as active...were...were quite as active in the...in the community while they could not participate in town politics because what was the name of the act?

LL: Oh yes, the Hatch Act.

VP: The Hatch Act. So they couldn't get...I think that...I think they can now but the Hatch Act kept them...kept them out of politics. But they...they were encouraged, you know, to do as much as they could.

LL: Be in town, sure. Do you know when he...he his work for Extension. He primarily worked one to one with individual farmers rather than...?

VP: No, I would...I would say he did on specific problems but he was more likely to go out and do the leader training. But did contact individual farmers on specific problems in this farm management specialty.

LL: Okay.

VP: He would be the one that, you know, would go and give a talk and they would bring...bring the people in. Probably there...there would be...well he could give several kinds of workshops. They could bring in the County people to...to teach them or they...they could...they could bring in the farmers themselves. And then if there was follow-up work, why then he would he would go out and...and meet individual farmers.

LL: Okay, sure. Did you have much...any experiences with people with people from other parts of the Country or even internationally because of his work?

VP: Yes, yes. There w...there was quite a bit of exchange and in the '50's. There were a lot of agriculture staff that was going abroad and training. In fact, several times Paul came home and he says, "You know...I was offered a chance to go to Austria today to spend a year." He says, "I don't...I don't think that kind of work is for me, but people would come here. And that was one factor...because we had done quite a bit of that, that was one of the things that helped me get my job at International House Coordinated because this...this was not new to me. Owen Trask particularly was one who all 4-H exchanges. In fact, our daughter was exchanged to Ireland...and Randy Whaples both, whaples was state 4H leader.

LL: Oh yes. I worked for Gene, right.

VP: Oh did you? Well, you know the...the bringing foreign people onto campus was quite c...quite common. We always entertained people that were here for interviews. We always entertained people that were here for interviews. We had an extra bedroom. That's where they stayed. In fact, Paul hired John Brand and I always thought (Oh, did he?)...and I always thought that...that was one of...one of Paul's contributions to the University 'cause I'm...I'm quite fond of John.

LL: Yes. Who was the Dean? Are...are there...he served under two Deans then?

VP: Oh, he served under several Deans. Whip Young was the one that was here the longest and then when Whip retired...
Person sailed in Circes fire to Dean woodway.

LL: There was a faculty member who was killed in the fire too. Was there a Dean? Along with wife one of believe grandchildren. Before Dean going was Dean Kersting.

VP: Yes. He...it was...it was the Dean of Ag.

LL: All right. Before Whip Young?

VP: Well, yes I guess he would have been.

LL: All right.

VP: You see, I didn't...I did not know that person.

LL: Yes, and I don't know. I'll have to check. There was a picture down in the hall and that would tell me, yeah.

VP: I should know that because I...I've heard that. In fact, the...the two Putnams was with the Dean and the Dean's wife and I...I...if I remember right, they had a grandchild and these people were altogether. They had gone in...in a car to...to Hartford and evidently were in the area that was...was worst affected. And of course, at that time I was working for Pratt & Whitney in Kansas City and I had been back to the East Hartford plant on a trip and, you know, here this happened in Hartford. I was...I was aware of it but I never thought of about it affecting my life like it...like it turned out to.

LL: Never dreamt, yeah. Now where was your home originally?

VP: Kansas City.

LL: Oh, you were from Kansas City?

VP: Kansas City, yes. So...

LL: Just let me check my notes here. Did he ever talk about any big changes happening in the way things were being done within Extension or the College or as...as the kind of work he did? Did it change between the '50's and the '60's and the '40's?

VP: Oh, I'm...I'm sure, I'm sure it did change. I don't know that I specifically can think of anything. You know, budgetwise (there were a away periods when you had?) a little bit more and I...as I remember, the College of ag was never as affected financially as maybe some other schools in the...in the College. I had heard that there were instances wherein the President needed money and when he found it why he found it in the College of Ag.

I think I were going back and saying, I would say probably Paul was working at the time of the golden era at UConn. There was a lot going on. There was a lot of building. Oh, they may...might have cut back some funding but really a lot...a lot was going on. It seems to me the farmer always has had somewhat of a problem in Connecticut. You know, making the money he...he should compared with...with the industrial part of Connecticut. The farmers had...had a struggle. But they were creeping...and then there came a period in which the farms were being bought out for...for industry and that was a period where the...the small farms changed con...considerably in...into the conglomerate, larger farms operation. I...I know that was a concern of...of the people. I don't know enough about it but I was aware of the fact that it was all, the small family farm that was being pressed moneywise and landwise and... also era in whose there were farm co-op businesses

LL: I wonder what he would have thought of all the computer work that management now has?

VP: Paul was just at the beginning when there were no computers on campus but the person in Ag Econ that was schooled in this was going up to MIT to...to use their computers there in his research. That...that would have been a change. They used to keep these farm account books, It was the old...(Oh, yes)...the old time bookkeeping so that...that would be completely, completely changed.

LL: I interviewed a family who...who has had a farm in Connecticut for a lot of years and the man said that it was his wife who basically was the business manager of, you know, the family farm.

VP: Yes, I wouldn't be surprised. There were...there were many couples and they...they would choose outstanding farmers for this, that or the other reason. Very frequently it would be a couple that...that would be acknowledged by the Grange or something. I don't know whether that's true

anymore.

LL: I don't know. What do you know of the Grange?

VP: ...not much. I do know that when Paul retired, the Grange gave him special recognition because of the work he had done but beyond that I don't know much. I have a few friends, now, who belonged the Grange but I really don't what the Grange is doing now.

LL: Um hmm. I understand that we have one of the largest Granges east of the Mississippi in Connecticut but there are a lot of Granges who are not doing well. So it's a change in (Yes.)...in ---. They originally were responsible for getting the ability to have insurance.

VP: Yes.

LL: And someone said that there used to be...when they...to get the highways, they went to the Capitol and said, "Get Connecticut out of the mud." They wanted a highway system so they could get their crops to...to market.

VP: One thing I thought about that might be worth interjecting here; when I was being courted, one of the things that happened is, Paul was on the radio nearly ever Saturday morning on Frank Atwood's program. I would ride into Hartford with him and that was...was big, All...all of the people that he knew that were the experts that were Spreading about home gardening and this, that and the other thing and that is...that's completely gone. I don't know...you've heard of Frank Atwood probably. He was on the UConn staff and then I guess was hired by WTIC and was their employee but he, Frank Atwood, used the Ag Staff to a great...to a great extent. And Paul was a pr... a regular on the Saturday...morning program.

LL: You have...this is an interview with Vivian Putnam and it's Friday, August 7. We're talking about some of the oriental objects in the room and Mrs. Putnam was talking about two framed scripts over the fireplace. Would you like to go ahead now and...and explain those...?

VP: All right. These are two plaques in old Chinese calligraphy, that a graduate student in Agricultural Economics brought to me after the death of my husband saying that in their culture, this was a very common practice. The first frame says, *For forty years, Paul taught in the College of Agriculture, and there are a number of different objects doing to agriculture; chickens, cows, pigs, grain and that he gave good lectures.* The second frame says *In three thousand years, these students have had their thoughts spread all over the whole world and the world is very productive giving forth a good harvest and that this was due to his teaching.*

LL: That's wonderful.

(End of Interview)