

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

Interviewer: Luane J. Lange, CANR, Extension

Name of Person Interviewed: Betsy Stiles
Date of Interview: December 17, 1999
Draft #: R-1 January 27, 2020
Transcriber: NIM Transcription, Charter Oak Scanning,
Adam Smith
Contract Firm: Charter Oak Scanning
Interviewee Address:

...when talking with him, I think you get a different view of ...

LL: This is Luane Lange on December 17. I am in Southbury Connecticut interviewing Betsy Stiles. Betsy, thank you for agreeing to do this. We've talked a lot. This is my second visit back and I'm here for several reasons but let's start with your own life. When and where were you born?

BS: I was born...well, I...my family lived in Thomaston, Waterbury Hospital so that my birth records are in the city of Waterbury but actually I was in Thomaston.

LL: Okay. And...

BS: And I grew up and went to high school in Thomaston.

LL: Did your family live in agriculture?

BS: No. My father was a machine tool engineer and worked for a machine tool company, first in Waterbury and then in Torrington.

LL: And so you lived in town?

BS: We lived in town.

LL: Okay. Then let's jump immediately to how you met your husband.

BS: Well, he was working for the Farm Security Administration and his office was in the...in the

Town Hall in Thomaston. One of my friends was his secretary and I worked for the Telephone Company. I don't know exactly how it came about. I can't exactly remember but it...we just ran into each other and...but I always loved the rural life. Belonged to 4-H even when I was in the...lived in the town and belonged to Scouts and spent a lot...all my summers in summer camp. Being outdoors was always my thing.

LL: Let's just...what did you do in 4-H? How...was there a 4-H club nearby?

BS: There was a small 4-H club started and all...all of my friends we...we joined. It was a girls' club and we did some sewing and... I had spent so much...a lot of time in Scouting and there was no 4-H when I first started Scout work and spent quite a few years on Scouting and...counseled in Scout camp.

LL: Is that when you...so when you...you met David Stiles and he had...his family had this farm? Is that correct?

BS: Yes, yeah, um hmm.

LL: And...and so when you eventually married, you were going to become a farm wife?

BS: That's right.

LL: What did your family think of this?

BS: Oh, they...they liked the outdoors, too. My grandparents owned a subsistence sort of farm in...in Northfield I spent a lot of time up there. My family was used to...they liked the outdoors too. My brother was always outdoors and had worked on the milk route and worked for a farmer in the area. So, that there was no problem with that. I think they thought that was just great.

LL: What was the biggest adjustment you made when you came here? Was this the original farmhouse where we are right now?

BS: Well, ye...it was here. They...but they...his family lived next door. His aunt and uncle lived here. It's been family land ever since the ea...late 1600's/1700's. And the Stiles family have always lived...this place has always been in the Stiles family.

LL: About how many acres were there when you came?

BS: Oh, my goodness. I don't...there were pieces of land, there was---, there was land over across the river. There was land up on the hill opposite us here and parcels of land spread around. I can't remember how many acres.

LL: So...and they...they...they used that...was it a dairy farm?

BS: They ra...it was a subsistence farm. They had dairy cows and then they raised some veal. This property, here, more a pasture and...and crops and crops over on what we call John's lot and woodlot up on the hill. They cut their own wood and...and raised their own food and raised their own grain. They...in the early times, this piece immediately behind us where our Christmas trees are was a tobacco lot. They raised an acre of tobacco as a cash crop. Maybe we shouldn't admit that.

LL: And...and who did they sell it to?

BS: I'm not sure. I'm not sure where they...where...what their market was for it. But, the records show that there...and you can see in the attic the sections where they hung it to dry. Where they...what the market was for it I don't know. Maybe they raised it for their own use.

LL: Maybe. So then when you came here, what was your role? He was a...he was off-farm...he was working off-farm as well as farming?

BS: He was...yes and we didn't live here. We lived here a very short time. We rented a place here in Southbury. Then leave went to the Extension Service and we went to the University of Connecticut. He...when he was working for Farm Security, he was doing farm loans but then the Extension Service...he was transferred to that to recruit farm labor because of the war effort. We were at the University for a little over a year before when he went into the service.

LL: So that project at the University was a...he was hired for a special project?

BS: For farm...for farm la...recruiting farm labor. Paul Putnam who was I think, an Ag Economist, was head of the Farm Labor Department. Dave worked with...for him recruiting labor during the wartime and then he himself went into the service.

LL: And you followed him?

BS: Is...he was shipped overseas to Germany and he put in for me to come to join him, which I did, about six months after he got there, I was able to go.

LL: And we've talked before, So this is because the fighting was over at that time?

BS: Yes, just as the...eventually, the Army of Occupation. But he was in...in Counterintelligence work.

LL: And when you came...when he got out of the service and you came back, you came back to this location?

BS: Yes and we rented a little house up across the street while he...he went back to UConn for two months. Then he started with Connecticut Light and Power as a Farm Service Representative.

LL: When did you have your son? During which of your travels?

BS: Well, we lost one son. Our first son was born before Dave...just before Dave went overseas. Then Ben wasn't born until Dave had been with the company for four or five years, I'd say, after we got back.

LL: When he went to work for the...as a Farm Service Agent, he still maintained the farm. At what point did he move into more...more responsibility on his family's farm?

BS: Well, the farm...finally the animals were sold because his father just wasn't able to...to continue taking care of them. His sister took over the home, there, and we never did go back to that home. We came back to his aunt and uncle's place, here.

LL: And how did he manage to farm while he was still working?

BS: He was...he...he work...he came and helped his father until the animals were sold and until they stopped farm operations over there. So, his farm operations on that place ceased when his sister took over.

LL: So basically, you lived in the rural area, you didn't farm at that...?

BS: We didn't farm after that.

LL: Okay, all right. Now, would you like to...

BS: Except when we came here, then we started in here developing the Christmas trees and the maple syrup. We'd always made maple syrup on the farm next door and this is one thing that...the first thing we...When we were able to start here we built the sugar house and started again planting trees. We had planted trees on the farm next door and then we started over here. We've maintained those two operations. When Dave first retired, he did a lot with crops. Raised corn and pumpkins and sold them at a stand off...roadside stand as part of his retirement project. And...but we still maintain the syrup and the Christmas trees.

LL: So when did...can you give an approximate year, like in the '50's, '60's...when did you start the Christmas trees and the maple...maple house here?

BS: We had planted Christmas trees when we were first married on some of the land up at the north end of this piece that was cleared. Then of course, we weren't here. Then we planted some in one of the lots that belonged to the farm next door and that land was sold.

So...but we...we...we lived for some...for a while in Cheshire to be near CL&P which is what his boss wanted. So we planted Christmas trees there, too. I think there still...they're still growing them on that...at that place where we lived.

LL: So then, this all started like in the '60's?

BS: We came back here in '65.

LL: Would you talk a little bit about the sugar house? No one else has talked to me about maple sugaring.

BS: Well we've made...this place has made map...way back even when they did it outside before there were sugar houses. Dave's father was interested in...in...and then of course, Dave was. The New York World's Fair was back in what? '34 or in the '30's. Vermont had an exhibit down there which Dave saw. So .he approached them as to what they were going to do with their equipment when they got through and they didn't know what they were going to do with it. They weren't exactly anxious to have to spend money to ship it back to Vermont. So Dave said, well...they said he could...they gave him a price, he could buy it if he...at the end of the fair if he wanted to come down and pick it up. The time he was to go and pick it up, they had a strike at the World's Fair. He had an awful time borrowed a neighbor's station wagon. Went down and moved it...moved it out and moved it up for a stand. They built a little log sugar house down near the brook here and they made syrup there for quite a few years. Then when we came back here we decided that we were going to...the thing that hap..that really perhaps pushed it a little more was that before we had time to move into the old house, lightning struck the buildings behind it and just about completely destroyed everything. So when we got everything cleaned off we figured that was the spot for the sugar house. We owned a piece of property in Vermont and had an old barn on it, So we moved all the old barn boards down and moved the sugar houses' old barn boards that we had brought down from Vermont. We've added on but

can't...remember whether this is the second or third evaporator we've had. This one...this evaporator is copper. This, too, was used for an exhibit by Leader Evaporator. It...they did their fair circuit and we picked it up at Turnbridge at the end of the fair season one year and put it...brought it down and installed it here.

LL: What kind of expertise does it take? I mean, how...you learned this and I've not talked to anybody about sugaring in CT.

BS: Well, I guess you just have to love it and learn it by doing.

LL: And then your market, you...you...did any of the regulations change over the years as to how you do this?

BS: Well they...ye...equipment has changed tremendously. We still hang buckets but most of everybody use plastic. We don't have elevation here for plastic.

LL: What do you mean, use plastic? To do what?

BS: Plastic tubing that runs tree to tree to a central pipeline.

LL: So it's all got to be then centrally? It's got to be on a slope?

BS: Yes, you've got to have some elevation unless you pump it. But the...we're not big operators. We've always done it and hopefully we'll always do it, real. We make...I sell what we don't need ourselves but we're not big a commercial operator. But we love to do it every spring and the neighbors wait to see the buckets. It's a sign of spring.

LL: So like, how much...what kind of time span does it take to do this and how...?

BS: It takes you all day and all night. Chuckle

LL: Once it starts running, then there's a regular process. Like, when in the spring is a good time to see this? It depends doesn't it?

BS: Well, we usually start...when you see the buckets out. We usually start the first or middle part of February. But, it really goes into February and the first weeks of March, are usually the time span when you get your best runs. It has to freeze nights and warm, forty degree plus temperature in the daytime to make the sap run.

LL: Is there a suga...is there a Maple Sugar Association in this State?

BS: Yes, yes,

LL: And are there very many commercial people?

BS: Well, there are some. There's one that's commercial right up in Woodbury and I should know the number. We've always belonged to the Association and they do a very good job. Got a very good organization. I'm not quite sure of the numbers.

LL: That's okay. Then you've got Christmas trees, here, too, you don't have a big lot but you have...today you've had a constant stream of people come to your back door and these are return

customers?

BS: Yes, yes. Most of them. We...we have a lot of the same customers. Now we're getting to the point where the kids that used to come and get their tree are now bringing their children. We had a woman the other day that her mother still lives here in Southbury but she lives in New Hampshire. So, she comes down every year and gets her mother and they have to come here to get their Christmas tree which she takes back to New Hampshire.

LL: Interesting. Now, your son...is he...is he in agriculture?

BS: No. He...he's a teacher of what started out to be industrial arts. Now it's technology. A good many of the schools are dropping this program both for the boys and girls. He taught...teaches in the junior high and these students used to, both boys and girls, go through his course and the home ec course. Now they're beginning to drop these courses which is...what he's teaching, now, I'm not quite sure. It was computers.

LL: Now he's also not...works with you. Your husband died a few years ago?

BS: Yes.

LL: And...but Ben has worked along with his dad to...to learn the maple sugar.

BS: Yes, to do the maple sugaring and to do the trees. We probably wouldn't have been able to continue it if Ben wasn't interested because of the work and keeping the equipment in repair and running. I couldn't do it. If Ben wasn't interested in it, we wouldn't be able to continue it. But he likes to do it and he's...he's able to keep things running and the same with the trees. He's taking over the whole business. It's his.

LL: Does he have children?

BS: He has one daughter. She's only...she'll be three in February.

LL: Well, how does...does...he lives in town?

BS: Yes, he built...he owns...owns what was the wood lot up...well, it's out of sight. And he took a small acre, acre and a half off the top end of it and built a home for his family there.

LL: Does he have Christmas trees up there, too?

BS: No. That's...it's woodland.

LL: Okay, all right. Let's talk about Dave's job when he went with the power company. This was during...which was how I was led to you originally, was during the time of electrification in the state. So this had begun in the '20's and then he came back though, from the war, and began to work with them which was in the '40's. Do I have all that...?

BS: He went to work for CL&P in 1948.

LL: All right. Supposedly at that time, much of us in Connecticut were already electrified. But there were pockets of...he went...he joined a department that...that did certain things. Could you...and you have a remarkable memory of things that...that he did. So can you talk about that a little bit?

BS: Well, Walter Ackerman was the one who started the Farm Sales Department for CL&P and the Sales Department had...had sections. I mean, there was Commercial Sales, Industrial Sales, the...the Home Service girls were under Residential Sales So they added the Farm Sales because they realized that there...the farmer was going to use a lot of electricity. It was sales but to promote the proper use of electricity and applying it to all phases. There were so many things that electricity could do for farmers. They realized that they needed someone out there that could tell the farmer or help him with things, like a hay dryer for their barn or to improve their milking parlor or refrigeration and also the farm wife. There was things that she was going to want and need. So, that the Home Service gals were a part of it also. And this is why the Farm Sales Department was a...was brought into play. It really grew from back in the '30's, the early...the record show that there was concern in the '30's about the use of electricity, rural electrification. And this department was an outgrowth of that.

LL: When they were...because during rural electrification, the...there had to be a certain return on the investment of the company to move out.

BS: In order to get that pole out...way out at the last end of the...farmers were...The farm was removed in those early days. Road part of it. But the cost of running power poles for one person many miles at the end of a road was prohibitive. The company did help finance but some of. The remote farmers just...it was just too far. But as time went on, it didn't get to be so far. I mean, there were better roads, there were better communications, more people in the area so that it finally became feasible for the company to run these extensions. The farmer himself didn't have the capital either, in many cases, but the company and the farm organizations worked together. Eventually they were successful and a hundred per cent electrification for all farms in Connecticut.

LL: And do you want to do something about the REA? The Federal Rural Electrification program?

BS: Well, by the time Dave started with CL&P, they were beyond REA pretty much. Because, this was after the end of the war and the power companies, particularly here in Connecticut, took on developing the electricity for the farmer on their own rather than having Rural Electrification Administration and government funds doing it. It was the private companies that managed to electrify the farm and rural areas. In fact, all areas in Connecticut.

LL: There were many, many, many, many private companies originally. And then they gradually, through either stockholder or...I don't know how they...they moved into...

BS: Connecticut, I don't remember that...it doesn't seem as though there were as many small companies. I think part of this was because of water power. Many of the small companies...

(Tape interruption.)

LL: We talked about the small companies and that there may not have been as many small companies because there was the water power.

BS: These independent companies, I think in many respects, started with somebody that had water power and so they generated electricity. I think that's where some of these small plants may have been established. And then slowly, the larger companies did absorb them. Just how this happened, I'm not quite sure whether CL&P for instance, I know they took over the Litchfield Bantam Hydro plant. How they actually absorbed them, I'm not quite sure.

LL: Some of that's in on the files that you gave me. There was some of that in...so then

when...what was Ben's...I'm thinking of your son. What did David do in his work? He went out and talked to farms. He also did educational programs.

BS: He did educational programs with FFA and VoAg and with all farm organizations. With the commodity groups and...and worked with them. Meetings...it was purely educational. Although, it was to sell power naturally. But, it was to help make sure that the power was correctly installed and that they had adequate power to run the equipment that they wanted to use or were going to use. And trying to encourage many new products that were coming on the line like freezers or milk coolers or milking machines or mixwells for grain. There's just no end to the things that electricity was applied to.

LL: So were all these other inventions if you will. I mean, that's when technology was coming. It was like, they were coming and then it was an effort to keep...actually, to promote them or to expose people to the fact that they existed.

BS: That's right. That...that...this is what's out there. These are good methods that can help...that will be of help. And people had questions too, as to how they could best apply the use of electricity to help them do the job easier and how there were going to afford to do it to improve their workload. I suppose the scarcity of labor played a part too because some of these labor saving pieces of equipment came into play because they didn't have--- the labor. They didn't have the farm workers and as a result it was automated. It probably would have been anyway but as...as we progressed...but this is perhaps more reason why they used some of the new equipment to help them laborwise.

LL: When we talked about the cost of this...Some farms even now, ...some have to get larger and larger and larger people make decisions about which size category they're going to stay in. So, some farms have had to...to either quit or change because they couldn't afford the new equipment. Now, in the '40's you had more of a booming economy after the war. Because this...as the plants were making transitions...and a lot of people were probably working in the plants. Because of labor and in the transition to domestic industries...

BS: Many farm people moved into industry because of the money, the income that they could get. So, it was either go to larger farms that were automated because of the labor shortage or they...some of...many of them gave up farming and went into different fields. Then of course, the next generation comes along, doesn't like to farm, went into more technical fields and things that were of more interest to them.

LL: So then what kind...you said that he did workshops and you said that he had...that he taught things to the kids. Like, what were some of the projects he taught?

BS: He had a fellow that worked for him. In fact, he started out as youth specialist and then Chuck Morgan came on the staff to work with 4-H and VoAg and youth groups, too. They built student lamps and they built extension cords. Simple electricity to teach them as they were growing up how to handle electricity and...The kids really enjoyed the student lamp --- part of it which also taught good lighting for the student.

LL: Did...did he do anything much with Scouts?

BS: No, it was all rural. It was all farm groups. It was farm groups not...

LL: And Scouts didn't tend to be out in the rural areas?

BS: No, no. That's the...and the camps, 4-H camps were farm---

LL: Talk about the far...what he did with 4-H camps.

BS: Well, he...he used a similar program that he used with clubs. They did similar things during camp season because all the 4-H camps had planned programs. They'd have a...an hour's class in the morning and along with their swimming and boating and all their other activities. They had simple things that the kids could build during that class period.

LL: I was...had been interested in...in knowing you and you know so much about your husband's work. Would you talk about what you did when he went to camp?

BS: Well, some...some years I went with him because ...4-H camps depended on volunteer staff. They had paid for nurse and some of the key positions but throughout the counselor staff, they used volunteers.

And Dave, his program was a volunteer one. So, that I quite often went with him and served on the staff. Help swimming and helped teach swimming.

(Tape interruption.)

LL: You were talking about what you did at camp with...you were a counselor and...?

BS: Yeah, and I...and I helped out with the swimming program. Then I had a little class for some of the girls on flower arranging, simple flower arrangements. That was Tilford Cox's idea at the New London camp. The kids had fun doing it.

LL: You had fun too?

BS: Oh yes, I had lots of fun...

LL: Now, you had talked over a period of time about other people who were in the Farm Service part of the business and...and people still stay in contact with each other.

BS: Well, the...each state, New England state in fact, most ...all of the states...the independent power companies had farm...in one way or another they had people working with farms just as Connecticut did. And, here in New England they had a New England Electrification Council. The men that had similar jobs to Dave in the other states would get together during the season, in Boston usually, and compare notes on their programs and the needs that their farmers had. So that there was some continuity between the states as to what they were advising farm people to do. And the...the New England group ...used to get their families together for a weekend in the summertime. And that...a group still, the few of us that are left, still get together in September each year which is rather fun.

LL: In all...so they always included their families in this...?

BS: In the summertime session the families were included.

LL: Did Dave ever talk about issues, problems that...that he's...that he had to face trying to do this program within the power company?

BS: Yes, but there were struggles. And there...there were a lot of them. I don't know that I can explain them so that it would be understandable. Just working closely with other departments and what

have you, naturally there were. But Dave liked his job and I never heard him complain about anything that I can remember. I'm sure he may have but he worked on his program and... He did work quite a bit...Edison Electric Institute in New York had representatives from companies all over the country in all phases not just farm but industrial, commercial, residential. They used to have an award that they gave each year for the program. Companies would have outstanding programs in any one of these phases.

Dave of course, entered his farm program and he won this award three times for the Connecticut Light and Power Company with the program ...they had worked on here in Connecticut, which pleased him. He worked hard, they all worked very hard to put this award together and worked very hard on the program to begin with.

LL: Can you think of how...when you said that he won it three times, can you think of anything that each year would had to have been a little different. Did he have a different kind of focus at different times?

BS: Well, yes. Of course it would be different: As new things came into play, early on maybe a hay dryer but then later there were better methods than that particular hay dryer and as every...maybe not every year but changes came very fast in the application of electricity. There were...the milk cooler he had this year, there's probably a better one in a very short time.

LL: How did he keep up? He actually has kind of a double job going on. Actually, a triple job going on. He's having to keep up with the changes in electrification and the power companies goals. Then he's got to keep up with the...the builder of the equipment and what they had. And then, he had to apply adult education methods to bring together all of these other things. So where did he get his information from?

BS: Well, all of the manufacturers of course, would supply all kinds of information on their whatever equipment we're talking about. Edison Electric Institute provided a great deal of educational material. It's like anything. The faucets? You could draw on. Early on I can remember working with milking machine companies as they perfected their equipment. All the equipment manufacturers of course, would...there are reams of material here on...from equipment manufacturers about their product. The lighting...and you mentioned Menlo Park. They did a lot of research in lighting and they provided a lot of equipment. All of the manufacturers in every field and there are a lot of them when you stop and think of...

LL: Kind of what's happening to computers now.

BS: Yeah.

LL: It just with new...

BS: It grew...it improved so...Almost I think, computers actually come faster but...but this equipment changed and it improved steadily. But the fella that was building a mouse trap well, you know that, so he--

LL: Um hmm. So their Marketing Department connected with an Education Department to pass it on...it was one way. I still get things in the off...from my own background. Would you talk a little bit about the Pinchbeck's rose.

BS: This was a wonderful project. Dave really liked working with...of course, he liked growing

flowers and growing anything. But Pinchbeck has for years...was famous for their amount growing under glass. They were probably the tops in the country for the amount they raised under glass. Of course, here in New England it takes a lot of fuel in the wintertime to grow long stem roses under glass. But, the market is always very...always has been and always will be very good. And Dave...Dave came up through as we talked of it to manufacturers in the lighting field of...there has always been GroLux and lighting for greenhouses and for growth. So they came up with these lights that they put in for Pinchbeck's houses where they were growing long stem roses. The results were pretty satisfactory because it increased the stem growth. They...they were able to get even longer stems which...

LL: And thicker ones actually.

BS: Yes, sturdier. A sturdier plant but a plant that brought them a premium price ...in the market. I believe they're still using those same lights. One of the...at least one of their houses I think, in Guilford. But there are...we've got pictures here.

LL: Yes, I saw that and you have pictures of the other different kinds of categories and things too.

BS: The categories are mind-boggling. It's in brooding chickens, dairy, pigs, beef, bedding plants, forestry, greenhouse. There's just no end of things...

LL: Do you remember the name of...?

BS: Tobacco, potatoes, carrots.

LL: Do you remember any of the names of the home demonstrations agents who worked with Dave? I was just thinking I should try and contact some of their families.

BS: Oh, yes. Gosh, you have to...

LL: It might be even in some of those files.

BS: Some of those files are...I'm sure there is a list of...because I've got some of there...most of all, Dave's farm men and oh, names don't come to me. But off the top of my head, remember there was --- Elias Shaw, remember...

LL: We're right at the end of this...

(Tape interruption.)

I have some notes from the last time I was here and one of the things that you talked about then, if I can find what I did with the paper, was the Women's Land Army.

Think about that because we're about to turn the tape over but we...we...if you can have any recollections of that, it would be good to include that. Then we also talked about the Woodford farm. The Alsop?

BS: The Alsop farm.

LL: And we talked about the Waterbury Republican.

BS: Well, all the...the Waterbury Republican I mentioned because you were wondering about libraries and I thought perhaps the Republican might have...because they've always covered the rural

area, the Litchfield County and this area. I thought they just might happen to have a library of news articles of some of the activities of rural electrification. Whether they did or not...but I notice that there's some letters here that...weren't they written...they were written to...

LL: To the...as an editorial. That one was in...

BS: Yeah.

LL: Okay, I'm going to stop this one on...

(Tape interruption.)

BS: Although whether...

LL: We were talking way back and that...I had been reading about some kind of red bug that had gotten into some Christmas trees a few years ago. And, you were talking about things that happened to your trees. Then you talked about the maple trees and that there was something that was happening. The University of Vermont was looking at it. What is it that they're looking at? What's been happening with the maple trees.

BS: You better turn that off. (Chuckle)

(Tape interruption.)

LL: All right, we're going to jump over because we've talked about redoing the barn and this was a major project.

(End of side one.)

Not the barn when you brought the barn in to restore the sugar house. This is your other barn that has been restored in recent years.

BS: This barn was probably the first building that was built on this land when the Stiles' acquired it. They lived in Stratford and came up here summers. The barn dates to 1690 and in our restoration work, we've...the man that worked on it, he and his sons he found indications ...that back then...that, yes, originally it had a thatched roof on the back. A thatched roof was a sign that you weren't particularly well off. So they put the shingle roof on the front side where you could see it but the thatch was on the back. The thatch poles are still there. And we...they left them. They preserved them but the barn like all building that old...it had been well cared for and had always had a good roof on it and...over the years. But when we took it over, the...the sills were going. It needed new sills, it just was getting pretty tired. We had to do a real job. It's taken us ten or fifteen years to really complete it. We...we'd do part of it and then we'd get the fellas back to do more of it. This last fall...summer and fall and spring, we...Ben had gotten out-siding for it and we finally got it on. Put it on over the...the old siding, got the fellas to...reset the dry wall, the big stones in the dry wall. Found big stones on the place to replace the...where they were gone. Now, except for some drainage work, think the barn is back where it ought to be. The family's kind of proud of the old barn. 1690's quite a long ways back.

LL: Yes, it is. But who...who were the people who worked on it?

BS: Man by the name of Babcock. He's done quite a lot of barn restoration and this is his life. He has restored some old barns for housing but that's not what he likes. He wants to restore barns, the

barns. He's done a lot of research. He's written books and...and we've had...learned an awful lot in this barn restoration that we wouldn't have known otherwise. We did have a chance to go back to...to go to England. We went to the area where the Stiles brothers were supposed to have come from.

(Tape interruption.)

LL: Now you said we're seeing that this was an English form, talk about that.

BS: Well, it was the first thing that was built when the Stiles brothers came or the Stiles brother that settled here. It was built for grain, for the feed for their animals, not for the animals. The first thing they had to have prepared was some place for the feed to be stored so they...The animals by and large stayed outside. Although they had a shed on it where there was some protection for animals to be in. It's definitely...we were able to trace it back. We found records in England of the Stiles brothers coming to...in the...in an old bible in a church that they had left for the States. So it was...naturally you knew that they were carpenters over there. The first...what they would build would be the same thing that they knew how to build in England. We found only two barns that were comparable to this one. So we know that the...we have determined that it probably was built in a little bit different location, faced a little different way. That it may have been moved, jogged around a bit. Whether it was because of the prevailing winds or why they moved it, we aren't quite sure. But the records are...there's no question about it. But if you go into...over into New York State, you'll see the Dutch barns and the German barns in other parts of New England. These people were...this was an English Colony. They're different, very different.

LL: Now, where in England did they come from? Do you know?

BS: Bedfordshire.

LL: Bedfordshire?

BS: Is it? I don't...

LL:

BS:

(Tape interruption.)

LL: This is...you said it was in Millbrook.

BS: Millbrook in Bedfordshire. The four brothers came first to Windsor.

LL: Windsor Connecticut?

BS: Connecticut. And the land grant that the brother that settled here...which he thought he had in Windsor, didn't materialize. So he went back to England and established a grant for this area. Then he came back to Stratford and then moved up from Stratford, eventually permanently here.

LL: So the land grant was from the King?

BS: Yeah.

LL: The King's land grant. I wonder how those were done?

BS: I'm not quite sure. Our little triangle down the street here where the two roads...the main road and the lower road, that piece of land we always called, "Kingsland," it was a...it was still...it was common land at the time and of course, the road...the main road finally...but the roads still go around it. It's only within the last few years that it's finally become a...the property of the town. But it was always considered Kingsland 'cause the King still owned it.

LL: Someone told me that prior to the thing that happened with the King was that the argument was that the wood had to be sent back. A certain percentage of the wood had to be sent back to England.

BS: I don't know this for a fact but I wouldn't be at all surprised. I think I've heard that too, that...because England was...was short of...of wood. They just didn't...and this country was...New England...

LL: And any trees over a certain size had to be sent back. The planks had to be sent back. I don't know if they planked them here and shipped them. They might have and...

BS: I think they probably did because it would be better. They could do a better job of it once they got wheels up and they had water power and there was a shingle mill across the street, down across the street so that they...they could have rolled them out. They probably would have shipped them that way. But I'm not an authority on...

LL: So now, why did they come back to...they came directly to Stratford in the 1600's?

BS: I believe so. They may have come to Windsor and then moved to...

LL: I mean, did they come by ship into New York and end up in Stratford or did they come along the shoreline?

BS: I think they came along the shoreline and...and because Stratford's one of the early settlements. That would be in Stratford's history.

LL: I want to turn this off for a minute.

(Tape interruption.)

We're back. And thank you for lunch. We're talking about the Alsop farm. Well of Alsops who had it. It was Woodford farm?

BS: Yeah.

LL: Yeah. And we got talking that Corrine Alsop was related in some way to Eleanor Roosevelt, you thought. And I recall that I found in some files that I was going through, Eleanor Roosevelt was here in the state touring some places back...I want to say in the '30's. And so this was of interest to me because at that time there were many the Roosevelt programs You mentioned the Women's Land Army or just the Land Army. Then you'd also mentioned that David, your husband, had worked with the Labor program during the war. It seems that all this might fit together somehow. So what can you...can you talk about David's program with the Labor Department, the Farm Labor...

BS: I can't remember...I remember that the short years that he worked for the Farm Labor Program, and this was during the '40's, we were at Storrs from the fall of '43 until the spring of '45. During that period he worked for the Farm Labor Department which was really part of the USDA. They recruited labor for farm people and they conducted...they...they helped provide housing for them. They called them farm labor camps but it was a method of housing these people who were brought in to work on the farm. I don't know much about the Land Army. I just know that Corrine Alsop and a gal by the name of Harriet...Harriet...is it Harriet? Her last name was **Goodman**, who worked for Corrine, were recruiting women for the Women's...so-called "Women's Land Army" The best I can remember I believe this was also a government program. Under Roosevelt there were many of these programs that recruited labor like the CCC, the Conservation Corps. There were...there were many of them. And the Women's Land Army, I believe, was probably one of them. I know that Corrine was...was...had some relationship to Eleanor Roosevelt and whether she ever was here or not, I don't know.

LL: I have pictures of her at and it's in the file. Let's go back to...where did the people come from in your husband's work that he recruited for Farm Labor?

BS: Well, some of them were people that were not ...eligibles for the service that took farm jobs, helped out. Some were recruited from...Newfoundland. They had a group come down It was usually seasonal for these people. And it was seasonal for the Land Army girls that...it was during the summer when the harvest were...during harvest. Of course, Jamaicans came in and they still do for apple, fruit harvest. The tobacco growers recruited from some of the islands for help. They got them anywhere they could find it.

LL: We were talking before about perhaps the conscientious objectors.

BS: I'm sure of that. I'm sure that some of those people were objectors, that this is what they did as there service to the country.

LL: Now, the...the women who did the labor on the farms, where were they recruited from? Local, nearby, from that area?

BS: Yes, and the tobacco growers did have some recruited some from Florida because they were more accustomed to heat than some of our New Englanders were able. And the girls came up from Florida and stayed for the summer and worked during the tobacco harvest. I think we had other women from down there that were---

LL: Do you remember much about...I've lost my train of thought now because I was thinking about the Women's Land Army. Oh, you said there was...the other Land Army was...that women were just part of a larger group. That that was not the same group your husband was re...was working with. Is it...you had the...you had the land...you had the broader Land Army by title of which the women's group may have been one of them?

BS: All...all I remember was that it was a Women's Land Army and whether that's what they named it for these groups of women that volunteered to work on farms. I know individuals volunteered because I can remember hearing a woman say that she worked on a farm. I think it was in Vermont. She'd never been on a farm in her life before. They were sort of help and so she got a job for a period working on a farm. So people did show up and where they...how they recruited them, how they locally, I'm not sure.

LL: Kind of like, maybe patriotism? I mean um...

BS: People that....yeah, but people that had time and didn't want to go into a manufacturing concern.

LL: That Rosie the Riveter factory.

BS: They opted to help in farm work. I think there was a lot of this, more than we...I don't...I can't remember it but I'm sure there were because every once in a while you run into somebody that mentions that they had done this.

LL: Well, I...I'm going to pursue that in the back of my mind too. Do you know anything else about the Woodford farm? Now, where...where is it?

BS: It's in Avon.

LL: It's in Avon.

BS: Yeah, I don't know if it's still in operation but they ---

LL: Well, I found a picture of it.

BS: They had breeding. They have Ayrshires.

LL: I...I have...I found a picture that I'm going to go call the Historical Society about because you can see Avon Mountain. I thought it was Talcott Mountain. That's...there's a mountain in the background and you can see fire tower up there and I could probably position it. There are people in Victorian dress in the front of this. It's a very long...they must have been on another hill taking the picture. And there are a few cattle in the picture too.

BS: Yeah, town records would show this.

LL: Yeah, but I'm going to go back and look at them.

BS: The Historical Society. There would...should be a lot of information in that area 'cause it was a ver...well known farm.

LL: Anything else you'd like to...to add to this as we...we've gone around. We've gone from you to your husband to electrification and back to your farm again.

BS: Well, I just wish I could do a better job of telling some of these things. I'll think of something after you stop recording.

LL: That's all right. I think your idea of having me talk with your son too, is s good one.

BS: I think so. He...he would...he might remember. I'm sure he would remember things that I don't happen to think of. I'm sure of it. The things that he did with his father that don't come to mind.

LL: Thank you very, very much.

(End of Interview)