Q: December 1, 1999 interviewing John Lyman, Jr., Jack Lyman at Lyman Orchards. Thank you for agreeing to do this. Would you start out by saying where you were born please?

A: I was born in Middletown Hospital, Middlesex Hospital but lived here in Middlefield all my life.

Q: This was your family farm?

A: This is the family farm, yep.

Q: Now you’re...you said you were John Lyman, Jr.

A: My Dad was John, my son is John and so to just sandwich in between I ended up Jack.

Q: All right. How did your father come to this property? Was it passed down to him?

A: Yeah. It’s been in the...been in the family here...I’m number...number seven in the line, and John is number eight. The first property was...was purchased by a namesake, John Lyman, in 1741. In 1991, we had a two hundred and fiftieth which we made a fair amount of fuss with it but...to for the business and the years go on.

Q: What kind of farming was done on the property?

A: It was just general farming to begin with and that really didn’t become specialized in fruit and dairy until the late 1800’s. It was always...always dairy. Always lots of horses. One of the main crops through a period of years there, my great-grandfather
Q: So then when you were growing up, it was primarily dairy at that time?
A: No, we had the orchards.
Q: Oh, all right. When did the orchard...?
A: Well, the orchard was in the late 1800’s and very heavy into peaches initially and that was really from 1880 until about 1917. 1917, during the war years, First World War, it was one of the most severe and open winters that it had. It was also the winter of the flu I believe. The frost was...went down in the ground that winter. They said down four and a half feet. And the peaches, not just the buds but the peach trees themselves...
Q: At the root base....
A: ...they froze and were killed so that...
Q: Were these Hale peaches or were they all kinds?
A: Oh, they were all kinds.
Q: ‘Cause Hale’s came...I understand came from Connecticut.
A: Well, that was...yeah, that was J.H. Hale who was a large grower up there in Glastonbury and he...he became identified with the peach industry. Actually, this was considered...the Hudson Valley and Connecticut was considered to be the peach center of the country at that time ‘cause the south did not come into its own until refrigeration came about. Peaches...peaches had to be moved into market immediately as they were picked and we had the market between Boston and New York. So there was a tremendous acreage of peaches within a hundred miles of those two cities. The further north you go the climate doesn’t permit peaches so there was a natural cutoff there about a third of the way up into Massachusetts. And it extended over into...into Pennsylvania. My grandfather had peach orchards in both Pennsylvania and Massachusetts as well as the home place here. The home place was much more acreage planted than...in fruit, in peaches at that time then what we have in fruit now. When that freeze hit it hit the whole northeast he had to, just to salvage and keep...keep going with the farm, he had to sell off his out of state farms, the one in Massachusetts and the one Pennsylvania. Then he had to sell off quite a bit of acreage here. He cut back just to try to keep solvent. And that marked a change over to...
apples as the primary crop. And this was...this was true of all growers. I mean, he was just one of many. So the dairy was utilized lower...lower land which was not suitable for fruit and primarily it was a nondescript herd that was with a lot of dealing, raising young stock, selling it, buying and selling both. Then in the early ‘30’s my Dad then concentrated on Guernsey cattle. He got up to mature bred Guernsey herds which peaked out at about two hundred and seventy-five head total. So it was a fairly good sized herd. That was a time when...before the diet craze and fat consciousness and everything and butterfat was...high butterfat milk was very much in demand. When we finally elected to get out of the dairy business in the early ‘60’s why much of it was due to the fact that we would have had to change over to a lesser butterfat like Holsteins or whatnot and we just...I was not that enamored with dairying to really see that as a viable option so we elected to move out of the dairy business.

Q: When you were growing up, what were your responsibilities? Do you have brothers and sisters?

A: I have three sisters, yeah.

Q: So then on the farm, what were your chores or duties?

A: I would...I would work summers and to a lesser extent some of the shorter vacations, Christmas, what have you. But in the summer I...when I was old enough to...to work, why I just worked primarily in the orchard.

Q: You never had much to do with the dairy when you were growing up?

A: No, except any of the outside cropping, the haying and everything else. Tremendous volumes of hay were harvested and I was very much involved in that part plus field corn, any cropping and what not. The actual herd maintenance and the day-to-day milking and whatnot I stayed clear of I didn’t get into.

Q: So where did the hired help come from?

A: They were just families primarily. We have...have houses here on the...on the farm that were devoted pretty much to the ones that worked in the dairy and so it was generally young families. Young couples with growing kids. In some instances it would be just a husband and wife. He might be older but ones that have been brought up in dairying all their life.

Q: Could some of these have been immigrants families who came in knowing agriculture and dairy or were they...were they people from other local areas who...?

A: It was primarily ones that...now going back to the early 1900’s a lot...a lot of the farm help was first generation ones that had either been born in this country but in many
cases ones that had...had come over with their parents. And then for the most part, the parents would end up either in a farm or in some rural community.

Q: Do you remember...because there were some patterns that I've found in Connecticut, do you have any recollection of where, which countries they came from or where they came....? Some of them came into New York and stayed until they could move out to rural areas. But some of them came in directly.

A: The only ones that really come to mind were either Swedes or there were...I really can't say what definitively but it seemed to me it was mostly in the Scandinavian...

Q: All right. We have a large Finnish community in the state.

A: Yeah.

Q: And well, there were quite a few different groups that came in at different times in the 1900...early 1900's.

A: Yep.

Q: And so they lived on the ...on the farm and they kind of managed...they did the work. Did you have a farm manager?

A: Yep. Yeah, we had. Interestingly enough, they were brothers, here, and they were Swedes, Petersen. In fact, it was a large...large family and they...and the father worked...worked on the farm there most of his...he was an immigrant and the kids were born primarily here in this....They were around the age of my Dad in that I think there were seven in the family. They were...maybe nine and Henry Petersen was not only our orchard manager at the time but he was my Dad's closest friend. He had had a couple of attacks...appendicitis attacks but had not done anything about it. In 1938, he decided well, rather than risk having an attack again and which would probably come during the harvest season, why he elected to go in and have the appendicitis out. And lo and behold, peritonitis set in, this was before penicillin or anything else and within a week he was dead.

Q: Oh, my.

A: And that was a terrific blow to my Dad because they were like brothers. His brother Bert lived in this house as a matter of fact and was the dairy foreman, dairy manager. And then the one that replaced him, Don Gates, he...Don and Jesse were...were ones that brought the Guernsey herd into...into being there. Don...Don came I believe, from Wisconsin originally. But they were...they were great people and I had...occasionally I see one of their sons. They had two sons. Don and Jesse lived in this house also and my wife and I moved in here. When we were first married, we lived down in the next town of Durham. My grandfather had married late in life. His first wife died when my Dad was seven years old of
diabetes. He didn’t get (re)married until after all his children, six children, were married and were having families of their own. He remarried, built a home down in Durham. He died the year after the...I think it was the year after he was married. His widow lived on until 1958 and when she died in 1958, she left the home in Durham to my Dad. So when I became engaged we were...we were wondering where we were going to live and he said, “Well, why don’t you live down there?” And so we did. We lived down there for five years and just beautiful, beautiful spot in the middle of thirty acres of woods. But then it became necessary to get...get here and get back on the farm and we moved into this house. This house was built in 1830 or something and it was just a plank and beam house. And in fact, it was...had a central chimney that had been taken out. It was a great house for the kids to grow up in but its was really in dire need of repair. So anyway, we ended up buying...buying the house and then...and then doing a major renovation. This is the house where we are, here’s --- it was a main part of the house there. It’s been a very comfortable house for us since that time.

Q: When you were living in Durham...well, let’s go back. We jumped a couple of things here. Where did you go to school?

A: I went locally here through the elementary school and then went over to Taft, --- in Watertown, Connecticut. Actually, my Dad had gone to Taft and graduated from Yale in 1917. I went to Taft and graduated in ‘44. Had a couple years in the service. It was in the war. Then went to...started at Yale in...February nineteenth of ‘46. And...no, in ‘47, February of ‘47 and then graduated in 1950 from Yale.

Q: What was your Dad’s major at Yale?

A: Well, he was in the forestry school down there. I just took a straight B.A. and ---. And Dad had three years at Yale. He was over at Taft for five years and so I had four years at Taft and three and a half at Yale. We accelerated to get caught up with the 1950 class.

Q: Did you know you were going to...when you were in Durham, were you working out with the family farm at that time while you lived in Durham?

A: Oh, yes. Yes, yes. This...this’s been enough, the one career shot that I’ve had and it’s just...I was the only one in my generation that was interested in the farm per se. The family was in the gun safe business, as well, here and that was...that was an offshoot. My great-grandfather died quite young at age fifty but he had squeezed in three lifetimes. One of his...besides the farm which he operated, he had what was called the Metropolitan Wringer Company and they made washing machine wringers. And that was a big business at that time. They...they employed over two hundred and it was...

Q: How did he happen to get into that I wonder?

A: I’m not certain just who started the business but he...he bought into it early and became the principle owner. Then his brother...no actually, his son became...was an
inventor and had invented the **Peat sight**, a metallic front sight that went on the rifles and whatnot. And another invention he had was a bow facing oar. It really is a very ingenious little thing there but it never took off. People still preferred to go the other and it was a cantil...it was a jointed I think so that it wasn’t...It had to have attachments and all. But the Peat sight grew into the gunsight business and that became...in fact it’s still operating today. The family did get out of that business in 1968 and it operates now in a plant in Middletown. They moved out of Middlefield here about five years ago. And my cousins, Dad’s two brothers and their sons were in that business. The farm really was of little interest to them other than it was the family farm. And so I was...being the only son why I was the only one to pick up here. And then Bill, John and Jim came from college back here and John...John is in it solely now. Jim...Jim is not in the business at this point. He’s just...he’s just gone with a company called Softel that sells golf course maintenance equipment and so he’s...he’s going to be working installing golf courses (in the) area.

**Q:** How interesting. Well, we have to get all the way out to your golf course here, too. How many acres then were there? You said it started out and then your Dad bought some then he sold some. So when you were growing up, how many acres were there approximately?

**A:** Well, it...there was about the same size, a little bit more, about twelve hundred acres when I was growing up. And actually, it was nearer a thousand acres and then we bought the adjoining farm here in 1958 which was a small orchard as well as nonproductive land. And so when we sold property at the north end of town, I think it was kind of balanced out with the acquisition of the neighbor farm here. So we...we still have somewhere between a thousand, eleven hundred acres total.

**Q:** Was this originally a King’s charter kind of thing? Going back to the 1700’s?

**A:** No, no. The original Lyman came over at the time, this was in 1631 and they was up in the Northam...or up in the Boston area and then came down with Thomas Hooker down to Hartford. Then his son moved up to Northampton Massachusetts and then a son moved down to Durham, Connecticut which...which is the adjoining town, here. It was during the move from Durham into Middlefield when they bought...when that John Lyman bought thirty-nine acres. His wife’s name was Hope and they bought the house, thirty-nine acres. Then, over time, as land became available they continued to buy and expand. And actually, the...this house and...and a fair amount of land which is primarily golf course now, didn’t come into the holdings until my grandfather’s time.

**Q:** I see. Now you talked before about the neighbors. So what were the neighbors like and how many were there around, and were they all into orchards and dairy?

**A:** Well, no...all these...actually, Middlefield was part of Middletown until 1866 and nearly all these towns were in farming...in general farming. Most of them had woodlots which they...their fuel for the winter was primarily wood. The mountain
over here was all divided up among various ones that owned the lots just to supply the wood. And the orchards they were probably modest in size planting and all were initially just to supply the needs of the...

Q: Subsistence, basically for their own use.
A: Yeah, yep. With some spillover in the neighboring communities but nothing around. There was no real industry per se.

Q: So when the dairy business changed and you went more into orchards, you had learned about orchards along the way? I mean, you came from a liberal arts background and I'm thinking now you've entered back into the family business and you relied on the managers to...
A: Well, I worked in the orchards and so whatever...whatever knowledge I had as far as I had...

Q: Fire by immersion?
A: ...as far as...as fruit growing. It was just picked up that way. I never professed to be a pomologist in the real sense of the word. I mean, it was the...the practices, cultural practices were pretty standard. And it was just at that time the plantings were...when I got back here and nearly all the plantings were forty by forty. There were seedling rootstocks and so...

Q: When you say forty by forty...
A: It’s forty feet between the rows and forty feet in the row and that would be twenty-seven trees per acre. And these were big trees where you used twenty...twenty-two foot ladders to do the picking. It was a totally different type of thing and then...then controlling rootstocks came into the picture quite pronounced in the mid to ‘50’s up through the ‘60’s. And so our pl...

Q: Those are miniatures...they're not miniatures?
A: Well, they’re...we were into what is called semi-dwarf trees. These were half...these were half sized trees and we were into the neighborhood of say sixty to eighty trees per acre. Now all the plantings in the last few years that John has made and everything, they’re all in the neighborhood of four hundred trees to the acre which is eight feet between trees in the row.

Q: These are now the dwarfs? This is not my background so...
A: And those are the dwarfs, right.
Q: Now you said controlled rootstock. How do you control how large the roots...I'm guessing that you that you control the rootstock which controls the size of the trees?

A: Well, the rootstock is...is the determinant as to the size of the tree and so the dev...this development took place primarily over in England and the Experiment Station over in England called Mauling, East Mauling. So the original dwarfing stocks that were brought over here and used were all numbered by EM, East Mauling seven's, two's what have you. I’m not sure just...just how they did...arrived at the development of these various stocks but they ranged all the way from trees that were a third the size of a standard tree all the way up to two thirds. And then...then the real dwarfing stocks came into...The first ones I know were East Mauling nine’s and those you really had to put on a trellis almost to...and most of the plantings that my son has been making and whatnot do need stabilizers by having a...either a metal or a wooden pole there but which they’re secured to. And there’ve been all kinds of different configurations in the last few decades as to some are on trellises, some are on slanted all on an angle and there’s...it’s just done on a --- and then there are wires and whatnot that they’re secured to.

Q: Why?

A: It’s just different...different cultural practices.

Q: But these...but the apples are the same?

A: The same fruit, yeah because they’re all...

Q: So they’re Delicious or Macs or whatever they are, they just come from a different...

A: Yeah all the trees are...the rootstocks and then budded to the rootstocks are the variety that...

Q: Oh, I see what you’re...oh, I see. I gotcha. Oh, that’s interesting, okay.

A: So it’s either a bud or a graft and nearly all the nurseries do the budding which is just take the bud of the particular variety that you want and it’s inserted in the cambium layer there and then pruned as that grows. Everything else is pruned out. So that becomes the main stem of the tree.

Q: So they’re...the nutrient base is this other stock ... 

A: It’s the other stock.

Q: ...which is applied. Now does the size of this fruit differ from ordinary? It’s just the way it’s grown which means it’s a smaller tree which is easier to harvest?
A: It's easier to manage in some ways. It's more difficult in others because there's more trees per acre and they have to...they have to be very attentive to the total planting but it's much easier when it comes to the thinning and spraying and harvesting. And very few have anything more than a eight or ten foot ladder at most to harvest today. And in many instances they don't use any ladders. The trees are small enough so they can pick everything from the ground. And the...the volume per acre, the trees themselves are very precocious so instead of taking six or eight years to get to a commercial bearing stage, which the old seedling rootstocks required, usually in the third growing year there's enough for a commercial crop. And by the time they're in full production, they're producing anywhere from four hundred to eight hundred bushels per acre and in some cases a thousand or more boxes. As opposed to what we used to get, their maximum four hundred per acre when it was big huge trees and most instances two hundred and fifty acres on an average. I don't think year-in-year-out we would average over two hundred and fifty bushels per acre.

Q: Now, where do you ship...has your market changed over the years also?

A: Well, the market...

Q: Or how you market and distribute, maybe that's the best way to...

A: Well, it's changed from my Dad's time to certainly in my time... It changed because a lot of the fruit that we grew was...was sold to wholesalers that were situated in the various markets from New York to Bridgeport to Hartford to...These buyers would buy the fruit and then they in turn would sell to the outlet. Whether it be an independent or whether it be a chain. There was very little direct sale to...to a retailer. Then many of us got into the retail business and that was seasonal at first. Getting into it in early August and then when winter came in, why we closed up and anything that we had in storage would then be sold to these wholesalers. When I got here...a group of us got together and we jointly marketed to First National Stores primarily and we had what we called the Laurel State Fruit Growers Association. Then we hit our zenith on this. First National in many of the Connecticut markets had as much as sixty per cent of the consumer food dollar. That was the premium chain. And we supplied all of their stores in Massachusetts, Connecticut and Rho...and Long Island. Each...each participating grower would pack in the same design bag and the same containers and whatnot so that a couple of us would do the negotiating and establish the price structure. Then each of us would deliver to a set number of stores. So that was all well and in our case we took care of New Haven all the way down to Bridgeport. And we would...we would deliver two or three times a week to them, whatever the store...

Q: Where was your central...each of you were...were packaging at your own place. You didn't have a central packaging area? You used the same packaging but you did it at your own establishment?
A: We made one...one effort, not the Laurel State group but a group of...of growers in the state worked with Agway as a matter of fact, to try to set up a central packing plant. We set one up over in Meriden. It...it just didn’t work out. We had...we tried it for over a two or three-year period and it just...just did not work. So that...that went belly up and we went back to....we stayed with the First National with our Laurel State group there through the ‘50’s and ‘60’s. The other growers just went back to their way of merchandising which was ...for the most part either retail...their own retail or to independents or smaller chains. And there was a group that...that worked the same kind of a deal with Stop and Shop as we did with First National. (Then) First National fell on hard times and they were sold and all that type of cooperative selling fell by the wayside.

Q: Now when did your...your son John take on the maj...more of the business? What did he major in?

A: It was just a liberal arts, too. He was up at Colby College up in Waterville, ME. John had one year on a fruit orchard over in Holland and that was a good experience for him?

Q: In Holland, ...in Europe?

A: Yeah.

Q: Okay.

A: In the Netherlands.

Q: Netherlands.

A: And then he came back here. Jim graduated from Cornell, he’s ag economics major and he came directly back here to the farm. So both boys have had just the single year experience same as I did with the exception of that one year John had.

Q: So now you have...you have the orchard and you have retail sales and a market. Your own market.

A: Right.

Q: Talk about that. Let’s talk about that a little bit.

A: Well, we had this...when I came back on the farm, my Dad had gotten...actually his father when they was growing peaches, they had the seasonal sales and that’s when families came out and bought five or six baskets...

Q: And canned.
A: And canned, lots of canning. And that was...the retail effort was over a three month period. When I got back here we would work in this open shed during the fall...fall season. Then, as winter set in why we went inside to what was a storage...a storage plant that my Dad had put up in 1931. And the middle room which is the equipment room and where we did the packing and whatnot, we would devote some of that to retail also. So we just had an area there where people could come in and buy fruit. When I got back here and actually, that was nearly ten years with that kind of a set up, a little over ten years then we winterized what was the open shed and redid...had an architect redesign it and all. And so we worked out of that from 1963 until 1972. And the business had gotten...gotten just too hectic during the...particularly during the fall season to handle the traffic reasonably well. So that’s why we moved to where we are at the present time. And that...that move...

Q: Which is about a half a mile, a mile down the...

A: Just really over the hill here. Just a short...a very short distance but it...

Q: Compared to being in your yard so to speak?

A: Yeah. It’s the round building over there. The architect which designed that had designed the traditional rectangular building and he designed the round one. He was delighted when I elected to go with the round and probably in hindsight we should have gone with the square because it’s been a difficult building to work with. But I felt at the time that it would be a...be something more than for people to be attracted to. If it were a little...

Q: When you drive in it fits in with the contour of the land very well.

A: We put it together and we’d never been in the bakery business or anything else that we’d...my wife and I had done quite a bit of traveling around to see other...what other growers were doing in other states and everything and nearly all of them had gotten into a bakery of some sort. So we put it together with a baker and then the baker that I’d hired to run the bakery after one week proved to be, to have been a wrong choice. So we parted company and I had nobody to run the bakery and my wife ran it for three years.

Q: I was going to ask you how...what kind of a partnership did...did your wife have in this whole business?

A: Well, she got...she pulled more than once she pulled th...

(End of side one.)

Q: ...and you said that you...it was a friend. (An inquiry about how he met his wife.)

A: Yeah, we’d...Dan and Betsy and I had a date with a gal that...so the four of us were going to go to the game and Thursday before the game well, my date called and she’d
come down with some bug, at least that’s what she claimed. So she backed...she backed out and I had no date so I...

Q: For the Yale/ Harvard game.

A: For the Yale/ Harvard game so I told Dan that just forget it, count me out. And he said, “Oh no.” He said, “Don’t.” So he got in touch with Kathy and said that...and she was a nurse down in New York at the time, and he said, “You got to be on the train on Saturday morning. It comes into New Haven at nine thirty in the morning.” And she didn’t get the word on this until Friday night. So anyway she came up and we did hit it off well and we in fact, it was six months to the day from that football game...

Q: Blind date basically, the blind date.

A: Yeah, six months to the day and we were married.

Q: Oh, wow.

A: So, we got married on May 24th and it was November 24th that we met at the game. But I hated the city of New York and to go down there for dates with her it was just too much I thought. And early on decided that this had to end one way or the other, that was all. So anyway, that...

Q: So then did she continue nursing while she was...when she moved to Connecticut?

A: Yeah. She continued and worked with...she was in charge of the...of the nurses’ aides, I think it was there at that time when she worked there at Middlesex. And things were so different at that time. I think with her the responsibilities for this group and everything else, I believe her pay was four fifty an hour at that point. And actually, my pay when we were married was only eighty dollars a week. So things...things...things really changed.

Q: You were basically at that time an employee of your father?

A: Of the Farm Corporation.

Q: Of the Farm Corporation. Oh, that’s a good point. When did it become incorporated per se?

A: It was incorporated in 1949. It had been left as an estate in favor of my step-grandmother and then as she got on in years, it became obvious that with her passing t unless things had...were set differently there was going to be six brothers and sisters trying to divvy up some acreage and that was not going to work out. So they decided that the best thing to do was to set it up and incorporate it. It was set up in 1949 which was about seven or eight years before she died. And it’s just continued as just a
regular corporation since then but there are about a hundred and seventy shareholders, all family, family related. And so it’s...and who knows what or how it will go from here.

Q: When was the decision made by the Board of Directors to...to develop part of it as a golf course?

A: Well, we decided to get out of the...the dairy business. We had actually, for a period of time we were in partnership with a neighbor, Vic Guybowski, who had a small Guernsey herd next door just across...across the way from us. We combined forces and he...he became the manager of the dairy. Then Vic wanted to get out and he...he...Joe Gill was...

Q: Commissioner.

A: ...Commissioner and he made Vic an offer to come into the department. It was then a very attractive offer and Vic decided that if he’s going to make a career change he’d better do it.

Q: Now, did you have...where did you sell your milk? Did you have your own route? Did you sell it to the Milk Producers Association? How did you...?

A: Yeah. Actually, my Dad was instrumental in working with the Brocks. Ray Brock and...and others down there to set up the Brock-Hall Dairy Association and that Association was the outlet for our milk all...really from the time that the decision was made to concentrate on a dairy herd. I mean a Guernsey herd up until we got out of the business. And there had...Brock-Hall had...had been absorbed there when we were in partnership with Vic. And so we had gotten into the...I forget...I forget just there at the end there...there are two or three years we were selling. I don’t know whether it was the Connecticut Milk Producers that we were selling through at that point or...

Q: Where did you sell your herd to? Where did those animals go? Do you know?

A: Actually, that’s rather interesting, too because we...we ended up selling to...who...the man that Vic had brought in as head herdsman, Warren Wilcox. Warren was...was determined to stay in dairying as a career and so we sold the herd and leased the facilities to him. And November...November seventeenth the freak storm came in and about four o’clock in the morning...and ...to the best of my knowledge there was only one bolt of lightning but probably more but...

Q: This was a rain storm?

A: This was a rain storm and it would have to hit...it turned very mild. It was up close to sixty and this front came in and this storm and this one bolt of lightning there, hit the barn and...and our bedroom was right on this side of the house and we woke up after
the bolt of lightning had just practically knocked us out of the bed. Then before we
got to sleep why there was kind of flickering on the wall. But we... we thought well,
the men are coming in to milk ‘cause it was just about the time that they would be
starting. Then it continued to flickering. In fact, a little bit more so I got up and I
looked and I started to see the flames right over here which was right just a few feet
away from the house. And so I screamed to Kathy to get on the phone and get the fire
department and I threw on some clothes and went over there. Then the men... a couple
of the men that were going to milk the herds started coming in and we started getting
cows out of there. We got all the cows out of there except for one. The bolt of
lightning had hit right in the silo area in the center of the barn. This was in November
and the upper part... hit the section of the barn which was full of hay and everything
and so the fire had gotten into that and this... it was coming there and there was
one... one cow that was just pulling so against the necktie that we couldn’t... we just
couldn’t untie her and she went. We just... the heat was too much. But all the rest
and there were about eighty animals and we got them out. With the exception of
down in the stanchion... in a back stall there was a young bull and he evidently was
drinking water at that time and the lightning went right down and knocked him out. So
Warren was left here with a herd and no... no place to house them. So luckily, we
found over in East Wallingford a beautiful barn that was just standing idle and the
owners just opened the whole thing up and we moved the herd over there and with the
insurance money we’ve rebuilt the barn even though we knew that Warren wasn’t
going to be here very long. But we... we felt that with the loose housing type of setup
that the barn could be changed to other than just dairying, which after Warren left, and
he went up to... in to East Suffield Mass., or... Sheffield... East Sheffield Mass, when he
left why we did convert part of the barn over into dry storage area and then eventually
put in a cider mill but when we got out...

Q: You had never done cider before?

A: No. That... that came about really when we had a hailstorm come in 1977. It really
devastated the crop and so we thought well, the... actually... actually, we had gotten
into the end of the cider with a smaller press a little bit before that but then we put in a
larger press and got into it in a more substantial way. The land was all there and we
really didn’t have any idea what we were going to use it for and a group of business
people from Middletown, business professional people came out and approached us
and wanted to lease the land for a golf course and we agreed that we would. And
we... we set up a lease with them but it was contingent upon their being able to raise
the necessary capital to build the course. Well, they went out for a membership drive
and fell short and...

Q: Now this is in the ‘70’s?

A: This was in the ‘60’s.

Q: In the ‘60’s, all right.
A: In the mid '60's and in fact, they...we still had the herd here but Warren had given notice that he was picking up and leaving here within a year, two at the most. So it was really a case of trying to see if we could avoid just selling the land off. When they fell short on their capital drive, it had planted the seed in our...our mind that a golf use on the property would probably work out. We hired the...hired a architect to come in to...designer, course designer. We drew up plans for nine holes with another nine to follow if we were...made a success of the first nine. And then my cousin, who was on our Board of Directors said, "Why don't we get another architect, ...course designer and see what he thinks." And so we...we acted on that and we got this Robert Trent Jones to come up...

Q: Robert Trent Jones?

A: Robert Trent Jones. He was really one of the best-known course designers at that...at that time. In fact, he really was one of about three that all golfers would recognize. And he came up and we walked over the land and we asked if he agreed that the land was suitable for that and he said, "Yes," he said, "We can make a decent course here." I explained to him that we were just, had a limited amount of money and that we were going to put up nine holes and then...then go on to hopefully meet with some success, be able to build another nine at a later date. There were a group of us sitting around the table there down at the homestead and he got up at that point, shook my hand, shook the hand of the others and said, "Well, gentlemen, it's been nice but, "he said, "I've got no business here." And so we said, "Who...what's...?" He said, "I don't associate with losers." And so that got out attention.

Q: Oh, very interesting.

A: And we said, "Well, explain...just explain what it is that you..." And he said, "You know, you're not going to go anywhere in the golf business on the scale that you're talking about. Either you go into this and build a course that is second to none or forget it." And...and so we sat down and we talked and he laid it out there for us. That first bid was so far out of our range as we had been thinking and so anyways he left us with that gem and then as time went on there we began thinking more that, is it possible? Can we do it? And then we...we had contact with the bank and explained that we were thinking in terms of full fledged course and everything and the bank perked up its ears and they were very interested.

Q: Now did they...as part of this, did you do like a market analysis to see where your golfers would come from? Do you play golf?

A: I don't play golf, no.

Q: How far are you from...from town for the tapes sake? Where do your customers come from?
A: Well, we draw all the way down into Fairfield County and around...we’re drawing a good fifty-sixty miles and many...many from further than that. But I mean, that’s the primary market.

Q: It’s a public course?

A: It’s a public course but there’s two...we’ve built a second course.

Q: Oh, I didn’t know that. Oh, all right.

A: Yeah and so we have thirty-six holes and this...

Q: So then what year was this and did you hire this man to come and do it?

A: Oh, yes.

Q: Robert...he is the one that did it?

A: Yes, he was the one and then we had a...I thoroughly enjoyed him. I don’t know that he enjoyed me. He said he would never, never do another course for a private...for private interests, again. But anyway, it...it...it was a good...he’s still living and he’s...he’s in his nineties. The one that was his...his man on the job here I...Roger Willovitz, would come up at least once every three or four weeks and during construction and everything. Roger’s got his own business now and is very renowned course designer in his own right. In fact, he’s building one down...it’s on the way into East Haddam and it’s a...it’s a six-seven million dollar course going in down there. An

Q: Your structure here...I have a lot of questions. I’ve come...couple questions actually. When Warren went to Sheffield, he went there and he bought a farm?

A: He bought a farm up there.

Q: Is he still dairying?

A: As far as I know, he’s still dairying. I haven’t seen Warren for quite a while...long time. The last time I saw him was at a Farm Credit meeting and that was I guess eight or ten years ago I guess now.

Q: Now you mentioned the bank. Does Farm Credit finance something like a golf course?

A: They did in our case.

Q: All right, beca...
A: I was the first...

Q: One of the questions that I usually ask people is about insurance and banking as to how...because over a period of life you know, people had to use both at one time or another and who did they go to for help and so...

A: Well, we’ve been with Farm Credit practically all my career years. In fact, when my Dad was...back in the ‘30’s for working capital we borrowed from Production Credit and we...we shifted the basic mortgage itself to Farm Credit in the 1950’s. They’ve been the mortgagor for us all through that period and were the primary source of borrowed capital with the expansion.

Q: Your...your...your group is different and so a couple of my questions are going to have to be different, because your set up as an incorporation and you have all of these stock holders. But you have a Board of Directors and so you run it actually like a corporation where they elect the Directors, but from among the family members? So there...there’s a smaller Board of Directors who makes the decision?

A: Well, yeah. The stockholders elect the Directors and we have the twelve man Board of Directors and the majority of those are nonfamily, outside...

Q: Oh, they are. Oh, I see.

A: Right now we got eight nonfamily and four...four family. Then I think ...I think the move may be to bring the board down in size to nine instead of twelve. But if that happens, it’ll probably be a year or two before it would take place. We have intentionally tried to keep...keep a family presence on the Board as a minority vs. the outsiders and for a couple of reasons. One is that we haven’t...as a family, we haven’t had the element of who controls, is what I mean. I’m not certain that that’s going to continue. I wished it would but I’m not sure that it will continue in the next...next generation. And the...the outsiders have been ones that have just enjoyed it. I mean, they’ve gotten very little out of it other than it’s different and rather enjoyed the association. And they’ve been a tremendous help to us because they bring in for the most part, outside business interests.

Q: Different kinds of ideas?

A: Ideas and they’re very successful in their own...in their own careers. So they’ve allowed us to see things in a little broader scope than we would otherwise.

Q: Over the years as you’ve done this, did you...over the years that you’ve done this, have you had...how did you keep updated on things? I mean, you mention your wife and you went to meetings and visited other groups. Were there associations, were there groups who got together? How did you...with new technology and new stuff?
A: As far as the fruit end of it there, why we've always been active. My Dad before me and myself in my case and John now. My Dad was one of the charter founders of the New York, New England Apple Institute which was a promotional group of growers for northeast apples. Then we had the Connecticut Pomological Society and that's...that goes back even to my grandfather's time. And that continues.

Q: I have their history books. Someone loaned me one of those.

A: Yeah, and then we had...

Q: Hundred years old.

A: ...We had our own marketing group there that we formed during the '50/'60's and whatnot. That centered around First National and the Extension Service group that...from UConn and from the Experiment Station. The Extension Service from UConn but the Experiment Station has been very...

Q: I'm interviewing Paul Waggoner (Retired Director of the New Haven, Connecticut Experiment Station), next week.

A: Yeah. Well, he's...he's a close friend and as was Horsfall before him. My Dad was on the Board of Control there and John, my son, is on the Board of Control. He's I believe, the Secretary of the Board. John also has just recently been elected a Director of First Pioneer Farm Credit which used to be...it used to be Connecticut and then it became the Southern New England and then finally the Pioneer. They have the farm business all the way from Rochester New York all the way down into New Jersey. It's a billion dollar loaning establishment now. Most people feel that it's government subsidized or around there something but it's not. It's totally independent. So it's...it's been a...it's been a...really a case of reaching out to the various groups and associations.

Q: Where you ever connected to the Farm Bureau in any way?

A: Yeah. We...Farm Bureaus...we've never been as active in the Farm Bureau as we have in some of the other things there. John...John was I think, a...a Director of Farm Bureau for a while. (Tape interruption.)

Q: Let's see. Did you have any connections in town? Did you...were you into...onto any of the town boards or commissions or...?

A: Yeah, I was on the Board of Education for twenty-three years and that...that really was the...my primary involvement in the community.

Q: Was that elected or...?
A: That’s an elected. Yeah. And I...I was a charter member of the Midstate Regional Planning Agency.

Q: Oh, yeah. There were fourteen or fifteen of those at the time.

A: Yeah. And...and I was on the first group of trustees that set up the Middlesex Community Technical College there and then we’ve been active as a company...we’ve been quite active in the community, the Middlesex County Community...oh...

Q: Is it the Chamber of Commerce?

A: The Chamber of Commerce.

Q: Okay, all right. You should see the blanks I draw sometimes.

A: It gets worse here.

Q: I mean to ask you, what do you think was one of...as you were involved in this business because you were primarily in the orchard end of it and everything that has evolved ...the dairy was kind of before you and the golf course was kind of after you. What were some of the key issues or problems that you ever faced do you think?

A: Well, the golf course has been very much involved. I mean, because that really was my central focus from the mid ‘60’s up until....up until I retired here. In fact, it was almost too much so. That...that became such a major part of the scene here, taking ...a tremendous investment. It...it really started out as a complimentary piece to the...but if we hadn’t gone into the golf course business, we wouldn’t be talking here. I mean, we...we could not have survived without having that part of the puzzle. And...

Q: Do you have pick-your-own?

A: We have pick-your-own. Yeah. That’s...

Q: So you do primarily direct sales now rather than wholesale? Or do you do both?

A: Well, we...we still...John’s primary outlets for the fruit and everything are Big Y chain store, Stew Leonard’s as the independent chain store and then he’s got other...other smaller...smaller accounts and then our own retail. And this year has been particularly tough, another real tough year for him because of the drought and the size of the fruit has made it almost unmarketable.

Q: You know, it’s amazing, different parts of the state...I was up in the northwest part of the state and their fruit is remarkable and then you go just a few miles and then it’s just bad....it’s just...
A: I know it. It...there were some timely showers that hit ar...some areas not others.

Q: Just at the right budding time or whatever, yeah.

A: And yeah, we had a prospect of an excellent crop. Plenty of fruit set but without the moisture it was just almost a disaster.

Q: So basically, one of...your one business kind of counters the other in a bad year.

A: Yeah, unfortunately the fruit business is a...it’s a very marginal business because of the uncertainties of things we can’t control. We can’t control weather, we can’t control market. And we’re such a...then the amount of fruit grown in the State of Connecticut really doesn’t impact price that much. It’s outside fruit coming in that determines really what the price is and if there’s heavy crops out in Washington State, no matter what...what volumes we’re looking at, the price has pretty much been dictated by outside interest. And so a year like this where you might hope that you might get something of the better price and actually we end up with the same situation. We haven’t influenced the price except that the amount of fruit that we can sell is so much less because it’s just not up to our size.

Q: So generally, if there was a shortage, the price would go up, but there’s not a shortage because they import some from other states.

A: Because the imports just overwhelm anything that we grow here.

Q: Is there any kind of...of thought by the...the wholesalers and the chains...do they feel any kind of commitment to “Connecticut Grown”?

A: Yeah. I think, not Connecticut per se, but Big Y, Stop and Shop, Waldbaum’s to an extent, there try to emphasize that they handle New England grown products in season. But when it does come to apples they all pretty much fall back on the...on the western deals and understandable so in that there’s uniformity. There’s a volume commitment that they don’t have to worry about at all. It just...just is much easier for these chain buyers to see that as their primary source.

Q: So let’s go back then. What would you say were some of the biggest problems you faced? Or challenges, maybe we should talk of challenges.

A: Well, I think...I think they’re...essentially they’re trying to keep...to keep the thing in a some kind of viable condition. We’ve not been overwhelmingly successful here financially. I mean, we’ve had almost as many loss years as we’ve had profitable years. But (to)keep the thing together and to be able to shift sufficiently in the dedication of resources and whatnot to keep up with the times. That’s where the golf end of it did come in. Without that move, why we couldn’t have survived. And we’ve overcome some major difficulties in the orchard area there. We almost got knocked
out because of soil, an acid soil that took near ten years to correct and then we had seventeen year locust ...almost did us in. And it wasn’t until 1962 that we finally got a handle on that when they...when we had the material Sevin made available to us. Prior to that, there was nothing that would touch the locust. And they did their damage underground as they...through that seventeen year cycle as they...

Q: They’re dormant basically.

A: Well, no. They start off, of course, as...minute in size and then they keep growing and growing but they’re feeding on the roots of the trees and as they get near maturity, the last...the last three or four years before they would emerge, the trees would just go into decline. So we in fact, before the 1962 emergence we were able to keep some of the blocks alive only by injecting into the ground insecticide to knock off the grubs that were feeding on the roots. And when they did come...when they did come out it was almost like the ground was moving. I mean, there’s just millions of them and...and they didn’t eat when they came out. I mean, as adults that’s why there was no materials that would...they didn’t ingest because they had no...their sole purpose was to reproduce. And so when Sevin came out, that was systemic and...and we were able to knock...essentially, knock the adults out before they bred and lay...the eggs were laid.

Q: That was in ‘62?

A: That was in 1962.

Q: You know, that answers a question I’ve had. I got the pomological history and it showed a number of orchards in the state. There’s a list on the back and it shows the years they came in and I noticed that in the ‘60’s a lot of orchards changed hands and that may be...

A: I don’t think that would have been the cause. The ‘60’s really...that’s...that’s when farming hit the attrition generally. Not just growing...growing but dairy and everything else was very, very heavy because you had...it was such growth...

Q: The population growth?

A: There was the population growth, there was the housing during the ‘60’s there came into its own the land appreciation. And we...oh, it was such that a lot of growers just had come to the end of the line. And they looked at it from the standpoint of what a year’s effort was doing vs. selling to a developer and having it go into housing.

Q: So they may have sold off a larger plot of land and...and left the house and some acreage. What I would need to do is go back and see who bought it and to see if it changed the size of the orchard at that time.
A: Well, yeah.

Q: Interesting, very interesting.

A: Yeah, that would be worth looking at but the attrition...there used to be...there used to be...a normal crop in Connecticut was a million, million one boxes and now it's about six hundred thousand. When you consider that Washington State grows over a hundred million boxes a year and here we are but a half a million. We're just in the nonagricultural state and that's...it's a...Some of the farms have been preserved through the Development Right purchase and all that. And to an extent that will prolong it but it's still...even a lot of these farms that have been...had the development rights sold, now are almost in some cases sitting idle because they can't develop and they've...there's nobody that is there to farm. And so you're going to see more...see more of that. There'll be some move on to allow some kind of development, open space development of some kind.

Q: To reword or amend some of the guidelines for those development right things? Do you think we'll ever be without agriculture in this state?

A: No, I don't think...well, no. Because I think, there will be those that...that hit niche markets that just whether they...whether the product line is food or not, I mean, a lot of them have gone into...into greenhousing and to nursery and all that stuff. And there is...there are those who have specialized in the pick-your-own whether it be the small fruits, raspberry. We've done...we're in small fruits ourselves but we're not...not into it as...as in some areas there.

Q: I interviewed Roses.

A: What's that.

Q: Roses Berry Farm, I interviewed Sandy and Henry Rose.

A: Yeah, and they've done well and they'll probably continue to do well there.

Q: Everyone has concerns about land use, lots of concerns about land use. One other thing I want to ask before we run out of tape. What's brought you your greatest joy of satisfaction from your life here?

A: Well, I've been very fortunate. I've been really blessed with a life partner who is a fantastic gal and with a family that has been healthy and, I think, just in their own way, just very supportive of what we've been doing here. And in their own way too, they've been successful. So all the way through the Lord's just been great and I don't know that I can name any specific thing other than the fact that it's been a privilege to have a place like this to spend most of my life.
Q: Now this is probably one of the last questions. When you had to deal with locusts and you had to deal with weather and so on, why do you...why...why stay?

A: Oh, there’s a...there are more things than just...it’s a challenge. I mean, it’s been a challenge and it’s been a fun...it’s been a fun time, by and large. If...if Kathy were here, she would...she might question that in that I was always looking....for many, many years, I always thought we were on the last precipice and we were about ready to fall over and didn’t see any survival for tomorrow. But by-and-large we...we...we’ve got something that is a little bit different and a little bit unique and it’s been worth...worth struggling with and trying to preserve.

Q: I do have one other question....
(End to tape.)