

CONNECTICUT 20TH CENTURY AGRICULTURAL HISTORY PROJECT

ORAL HISTORIES

Interviewer: Luane J. Lange

Name of Person Interviewed: A: Helen Spencer
 UV: Daughter, Marion

Date of Interview: November 1, 1999

Transcriber: NIM Transcription

Interviewee Address:

Q: ...interviewing Helen Spencer in Middletown. And Helen, you were referred to me as part of this history project because you are a native of this area and also have been active in Homemakers and 4-H. So would you first start by telling where you were born and when?

A: I was born in what was Johnson Lane at that time, right up here on what we call Lee's Corner and we had a farm. The farm went through here and went down as far as the fire department. In fact, the fire department was part of it.

Q: You lived there until you were married.

A: I lived there until I was married, yeah.

Q: Can you tell us a little bit what life was like growing up on that? How many acres did your parents have?

A: Oh, I couldn't tell you how many acres there were, no.

Q: And had your parents been here a long time?

A: Oh, yes. We were the originals you know, in this neighborhood. Many, ^{or} ~~of~~ a number of generations back.

Q: Do you know how it started? Was it a grant from a king or did you buy a development from some of the native Americans? Do you have any idea how it started?

- A: Well, I know that my grandfather bought the land here from a Johnson that owned it here but we were...our family was over on what's Marguerite Road now. They had a farm over there. I know that in those times, the farmers bought up as much land as they could from the government. I think it was sold for a dollar an acre.
- Q: Oh, okay.
- A: And that's how some of the farmers got such big holdings.
- Q: Before he had the farm on Marguerite Road, where had he come from?
- A: Ah, I think he came from Middlefield ...before.
- Q: All right.
- A: But we started to come right straight down from the beginning in Massachusetts, I suppose. Early colonies. But have been in Middletown for five or six generations now I think.
- Q: What do you remember about growing up on the farm?
- A: Well, I was the youngest of five children and very unfortunately, my father died when I was less than two years old leaving my mother with the farm and five children to bring up; which wasn't an easy thing to do. And so I perhaps had a different life than some of them would have because my mother had more time to develop with me as the others grew up and left home. But I...everything was very pleasant. We loved it here. And my brother married and he lived in the same house with us. The same as people did at that time. And...and his children were all born while he lived up there on...on that house. Then eventually he bought this land and took this land and built the house down here. Again, he wanted the ownership of the farm and he couldn't use this...this house and the other house so he sold this house to me and he took that house up there.
- Q: What kinds of things did...after your father died, then your mother ran the farm. You had all brothers?
- A: No, I had two brothers. They were...they were only young when my father died, eight and twelve.
- Q: How did she manage the farm?
- A: I don't know. I often wonder. I still say that and other people ask me the same thing. She...she had hired help, she had to handle, and she...she was not one that had been used to farm work at all. She was definitely a homemaker.
(Tape interruption.)
- Q: Go ahead. We were talking about your mother.

- A: Oh, yes. Well, at one time she had a brother that was on the farm with her and then my brother grew old enough to take it over himself. In fact, he took it over when he was fourteen which is unusual for one that age. And of course, we had our ups and downs with it. Times when things were going good and times when things weren't. But they hung onto in all through the years.
- Q: What kind of chores did you have to do?
- A: Oh, I didn't have to have to do too many chores. But I enjoyed the farm very much. I...as I grew older I worked on...on all the haying and things of that sort. We were a dairy farmer...farm and I used to wash the bottles and...and then help in the...in the evening with the milk and bottling the milk and things of that sort. I wasn't very good on much else on the farm. I hated the chickens even though we did chickens afterwards.
- Q: Did you have...did you deliver...do you remember when...where the milk went?
- A: Oh, they...they peddled the milk up to Middletown, city of Middletown.
- Q: Their own customers?
- A: Their own route.
- Q: Um hmm. Okay.
- A: And years ago when my father was doing it, it was before they bottled milk or anything and the people used to bring out a pitcher to put the milk in and he hated that because sometimes the pitchers' were pretty dirty. He didn't like putting the milk in that. Then eventually they had the milk and bottled it which was a big improvement.
- Q: When...when you had hired help, did they live on the farm or did they commute?
- A: Oh no, they...they lived on the farm. There was rooms in the house especially for hired help.
- Q: And then did you grow the hay and...and...for the cows?
- A: Oh yes.
- Q: So during thrashing season, was there more help?
- A: Oh yeah. And when we were getting in the hay we would have extra help in for that time. Yes. And they'd be in probably for a meal. My mother would have to get the meal for them.

Q: Do you remember much about your neighbors?

A: Well, we were one little..little community up here. Three...three houses up on this corner and it was three brothers and each one owned...owned a house up there. But as a community, the Johnson Land Community, we were a very close community and we had grand times. The people built a lyceum which was out on Millbrook Road and we used to have dances out there. We had Sunday School out there and it was just a center for...because you didn't get into places. You didn't get into the city to things. Most of the farmers were Grange members. They did get into the city for their Grange meetings but that was about it.

Q: What did you do...where did you go to school?

A: I went to start of school in a little one room school which is out...up on Saybrook Road now. We were all eight grades in one room and I had to walk more than a mile to it. And I went there for three years. Then I went to city school for two years and then afterwards the city...the little one room school was closed so I could go to a graded school right here in the town by bus and I went my last three years in the graded school.

Q: Do you remember where your mother shopped?

A: You had a grocer who came around and he took the orders one day and the next day he came and delivered them. Of course, you had a lot of your own...own food then. You raised pigs and you usually had your beef in the winter and vegetables in the summer.

UN: Fishman came.

Q: Oh, yes. The fish man came.

UN: And the fruit man came.

Q: Oh, I don't...---yeah.

UN: And the Watkins man came.

Q: Oh, yeah.

UN: With adhesive tape and shoestrings and all of that. Is she aware of...of our fields...
(Tape interruption.)

Q: When...what did you do for fun? You said dances up in the lyceum. When you said lyceum, you mean the school?

A: No.

Q: They weren't known as a lyceum, okay.

A: It was out on Millbrook Road. It's a...it's a home now. And it was just a big room where you had...oh, you had dances...

Q: Like a community center?

A: Yes, it...it was a community center. I think it all started originally the fact that they used to have oyster suppers at least one a year and they went around to the houses. It got so it wasn't too convenient for them to go around to the houses and so they all chipped in and built this lyceum out here.

Q: All the people who lived around here chipped in?

A: Yeah. Um hmm.

Q: Interesting. So then what else did you do as you were growing up for playmates or as you got into your teen years? How did you meet your husband?

A: Oh, my teen years? Well, we...when you were fourteen, you always look forward to when you were fourteen because you could join the Grange. And when you joined the Grange you got in with a group of young people and we had a lot of good times. We had special dances and...and our meetings and we were officers...some...we took our turn being officers. And we had...had good times as a group. But then as I say, 4-H came in and that was another active part for us. I was in high school by the time I joined 4-H though. But we even had good times in our club meeting. We'd have club meetings at...at the homes and then eventually we had the year the first 4-H Fair that was held in the United States over in Westfield and we got involved with other Counties and with the events.

Q: How did you get started...let's go first back...go back to the Grange. When you became fourteen you were...

A: You were old enough to join the Grange.

Q: And what did the Grange do? The adults, what did they go in the Grange?

A: It was a...it was a farming organization.

Q: It was a social group?

A: It was social and...and you had meetings on different things and connections with the homemakers, with their homes and with the farm and it was... The Grange, you had your individual chapter and then you had what they call the formal Grange which was the County. And then you took those degrees. I never took those degrees but you

could. And then you could take state degrees up at the State Capitol and once in a while, which happened...my father...father joined. I don't think my mother did, the national ---. And that was the highest of your degrees.

Q: Now, some people have talked about that the Grange was active in some issues like rural electrification and then, also, roads. Do you remember your parents talking about any of that or did you ever...?

A: No, I don't. No.

Q: They became active in getting electricity out to the rural area.

A: Oh yes. Oh yes.

Q: Did you have electricity here as a child?

A: We didn't have electricity until 1923, I think, when we put in electricity out through here. And when we put in electricity, they had to get the poles and put poles at the places that they...that they wanted them for...for the electric men to put them in. And then they didn't put...they wouldn't put them in until every one of us bought an electric stove. You see, so that a lot of electricity would be used. That made in this group that was putting in at that time was one, two, three...they sold five electric stoves before they would put the electricity in.

Q: So they had the poles but they hadn't run the wires yet? Or they hadn't run the wires and the poles to the house?

A: Well, the..the farmers had to get the poles and put them where they wanted to. I think they had to dig the holes. I'm not sure but then they put in the poles and ran the wires. They were very wise if you look at it. They made well on it.

Q: Interesting. Now what other kinds of things happened on the farm after you got electricity beside the stove? Did anything else...lights of course but anything...what about with milking? Did anything...

A: Well, then the farmers gradually put in milking machines so they didn't have to milk the cows.

Q: How big a herd did you have?

A: We had only a small herd, twenty. Around twenty, twenty-five cows.

Q: In 1927, that was considered a large herd. I've been reading about this. Now they have several hundred. So then when you...so talk about Homemakers then. How did Homemakers start? When you were in 4-H was your mother in Homemaker?

A: Yes, she was.

Q: Talk about that a little bit.

A: Oh, I think the Homemakers all started in World War I. And even though they don't seem to give them credit for it but in World War I, they organized these meetings and I think that it came from the state and they...and they had...I don't know whether they call 'em a County agent or not but they had a lady here and they worked with the homemakers teaching them how to make what they could get where things were rationed. Like you had no sugar, what you could use for sugar substitutes and things of that sort. And then they came in and they taught them canning and...but that was in World War I. Then the people sort of formed into little clubs and they met around houses and I think that was the beginning of our Homemakers clubs.

Q: So originally, they didn't meet as clubs, they just met as groups who got together to learn something and then they formed...?

A: Yeah, that's right. That's right, yeah.

UV: How to make soap.

Q: Health kinds of things like...for...taking care of sick people at home did they tell you?

A: That wasn't brought in at that time, I don't think. I think what they were really trying to help the farm women were cope with at that time with the fact that they couldn't get the things that they'd been used to; sugar and flour and things of that sort. And how they could do without. But I believe that that is the beginning of the women beginning to band together which later formed into Homemaker clubs.

Q: In Connecticut, Farm Bureau was the sponsor for Cooperative Extension and what eventually became Homemakers clubs. So it's an offshoot of Farm Bureau.

A: Yes.

Q: Did...were you at all act...involved with Farm Bureau or was your family? Maybe it was...maybe it was these...that that brought in these agents...the home demonstration agents?

A: It...it gradually formed into the Farm Bureau. But it was very vague at that time but it was the beginnings I feel of what formed into the Farm Bureau and...and...

Q: And the homemakers and everything?

A: Yeah. But it was an offshoot that the men were beginning to develop different things

went on, they brought the agents here into the County and then we had these Specialists that came down from the college and helped to form different projects. We had a lot that we don't have today because you know, we had those Specialists come and they came right to our meetings and taught us whereas after all...after a while, when they spread out they had to divide up their time and it had to be done in a different way.

Q: What do you remember about 4-H? How did you happen to start in 4-H?

A: I had a son in 4-H.

Q: Was there already a club or did someone start a new group?

A: Oh no. I joined a club. It was really a group that was in the Grange, a branch from the Grange. It was...and...

UV: You started your own 4-H club in high school.

A: Yeah.

Q: You hadn't started as a...as a young person...younger person like sometimes eight or nine years old...?

A: ---into 4-H except as I was telling you about how I feel all this started with World War I. World War I we had getting groups together of young children. Oh, they were I guess anywhere from ten or eight, ten up and they taught them as they were teaching the mothers at that time how to use substitutes and then they...they taught them canning and things of that sort. But it was all because of the World War at that time is the reason that we had those meetings. But it was...it started these other things which continued after the war was over and developed a lot more.

Q: Were your brothers involved with 4-H?

A: No, no. I was the only one in the family that was.

Q: 'Cause as I've been reading and talking to people, they started with the corn clubs and the scientific piece of trying to get people to try different kinds of things.

A: Yes, oh yes.

Q: So what prompted you to start your own 4-H group then?

A: Oh, I don't know. I guess thought it would be fun to be a leader or assistant leader. I really didn't do too much as leader until later years.

Q: What kind of projects did you do?

A: Oh, we usually had cooking. In those days you formed a club and you usually had cooking, did some cooking and that would culminate. You would have a table food show and which was something that you could show off what you had learned. And then we would do sewing and we would have our sewing project and that would...the whole County.

Q: How often did you get together with people from other clubs or in the County?

A: With other clubs? Not too...not so much. It would probably be a thing...probably two or three times a year. But your own clubs you usually got together and meet once a week or every other week.

Q: Where did the other people in the club come from? Were they neighbors or were they...?

A: Right in the neighborhood, yeah, so that you could all get together because you didn't have the transportation you have now. You only just had...well, it was beginning of...autos were beginning to come in but you still had the horses and you had to do things close together.

Q: What kinds of things did you sew for your sewing projects?

A: Oh, we'd start with...as I remember, the first thing we started on we would make a sewing bag and then you would put in...you would do all the accessories for the sewing bag. And then you'd start and probably you would hem a towel and from then on you would get to where you would...you would...the first project usually was a skirt. And that skirt was just two lengths sewed together, hemmed up and turned down and elastic run through it. That was a first skirt, beginners skirt. And of course, you went on to that and you would have your...your pro...state project and...

Q: Do you remember the first state project you made?

A: I don't remember, no I really don't remember. I...I didn't do as much as I did after I went in as a leader, I mean, with the youngsters. But oh, I tried to make my own things, my own dresses. I don't think I did too...a good job. I wasn't an excellent sewer by any means but we got to where we'd make our dresses and...and...

Q: What were some of the experiences you had when you became a leader?

A: What?

Q: When you became a leader, you said that you helped other young people when you became a leader in your group.

A: Yeah, when I became a leader why we would meet at homes, same as we did and have the projects which would be planned out for us. Or we would have a choice and our material came from the office. And we had a 4-H agent who would come around and visit the clubs every so often and then as I say, we would have our County projects and then we would have dress review at the state dress review. Then some that were chosen, went on to national and they would go to 4-H Congress.

Q: Chicago.

A: Chicago. Yes. You see that was what you edged up to if you could do it.

Q: Did you ever work with any animals on any animal project?

A: No, I never did, no.

Q: So when you were...then you...eventually you met your husband at one of these events?

A: No, he was never a 4-Her. No, this has been my own project.

Q: Okay. When did you meet your husband?

A: In...we were married in 1928. 1928 we were married. And we lived in Higganum for one year but then we came up and bought this place and we've been here for seventy...over seventy years.

Q: You said you worked for Russell's?

A: We worked for the Russell Company, yeah.

Q: What is the Russ...I'm not from this part of the state.

A: Well, the Russell Company was a manufacturing company. It was during the war, different war, both wars. It was belting and then it was...it had...did some belts and things for cars.

Q: Belts?

A: It was...it was prominent that was built up in the two world wars which built it up to a big company. But then it went...when the wars were over it went down hill. And...

Q: But you stayed in the area.

A: Yes, I've always been in this area. Yeah.

Q: And you had...I've met a daughter and a daughter-in-law. How many children did you have?

A: I just had the two.

Q: A daughter and a son?

A: Yeah.

Q: What do you remember most about the people who you met from town? Were they different? Did you feel different because you lived out in the farm area?

A: Oh yes. You certainly did in those times. They thought you were a country bumpkin.

Q: Like what...what would happen.

A: Well, you just didn't join in with that group. You didn't mix in with that group. You had different...you didn't...live different, very different. It was a treat for those people if you invite one of those girls out to visit you; for her to come out and see the farm and things of that sort.

Q: How many miles were you from...from town? I mean, now it's...it's moved out to here but how many miles were you from town?

A: I think it was two miles to the lower end of Main Street if I'm not mistaken. Oh, you could walk it but it was a good long walk. When I was in high school I had to walk from there down for over a mile down to the trolley car and take the trolley car up...up town and to school.

Q: When were trolley cars? They were here all the...all that time?

A: They came in in the late 1880's

Q: So there were here when you were a kid?

A: Oh, yes. The trolley went out about 1927, 1928 when the buses came on. But then, of course, you had your buses and then everyone got a car so nobody was using the buses so the buses went out for years. We've had the...the street buses through here now for ...about seven years I'd say. But for years, if you didn't have a car, you didn't get any place that was all.

Q: And you think the bus lines come out here now because the town has moved out this far so they have a population?

A: Well, I don't know whether...

- Q: I'm watching. A couple buses just went by out here.
- A: Yeah, that wasn't...our bus goes by that way.
- Q: Oh, I see.
- A: Goes by every...I don't know if it still goes every half hour or not. I used to take it all the time but of course, I've got back...past that stage.
- Q: Now, tell me more about Homemakers as you were not a married woman and you were in Homemakers many, many years.
- A: Oh, yes. We still have our Homemakers club. We have five members left. Except it's pretty much of a social affair now. But we still get together about every month except through the winter. We have been a club since 1930 and that came from the fact that our mothers had a Homemakers club before that but I think they had only two or three years when we organized ours.
- Q: And so then as you had children then these Homemakers clubs, they...you had lessons?
- A: Oh yes. I don't know what we would have ever done without her. What we learned as I say, it's just unbelievable because at that time the Specialist came and they would come to our club meeting and we had a Specialist on for sewing, a Miss Mason. And we had a Specialist for cooking, Mrs. Dakin. We had a Specialist on like home planning and things of that sort which they did a lot of work with the women because the homes didn't have the modern appliances or things of that sort. Bathrooms and things of that sort and they worked with the women to get those things across and...and we had a health care nurse, Mrs...Miss MacDonald who came to us for years. She practically brought our children up and it's just unbelievable what...what it really was, what it really did for us. We were very, very lucky to have that kind of treatment. And of course, as more Homemakers formed and more women needed the information that's where they...they could not give individual information as they was giving it to us, then we had to send representatives to the meetings and then it go to where the Homemakers clubs. I guess there's not many of them left. It's just that you do work through the County office now.
- Q: So then when the representatives would come back and teach their own group, is that what would happen?
- A: Yes, they would do that afterwards, yes. And that wasn't the same as when you had a Specialist coming for you but we did all right on it.
- Q: Now what do you think has...has evolved...like you said your club started from your mother's but your own daughters didn't necessarily start another club.

- A: They had a club too but that's dissolved. Of course, when a lot of women went to work and things like that, life changed.
- Q: What do you think is the biggest change that you have experienced since your were raised on the farm across the road here and as you experienced this area of the state.
- A: Oh, I think of change, I think we went through the biggest changes of about anything, anybody because we went from...from the horse to the...to the cars. We went from the horses doing the work on the farm to the tractors. And we...we...our homes, we had washing machines and electric irons and you figure before you had to take your iron and put it on the stove and heat it and hope you didn't scorch it. And we had the vacuum cleaners and you think of all those things that helped the ladies do their work.
- Q: Was there...electric company...you mentioned how they had a stove. They had people in the electric companies that taught also.
- A: Oh, yes, yes. They often came to our club meetings and taught us different things. And then like, if you bought an appliance, you bought a stove or anything, a representative would come out and teach you how to use it.
- Q: What about canning. How much canning did you do?
- A: Oh, we canned everything here at one time and that was...there's another thing that did change. Got through canning, now we got freezing. We don't do canning...I think there's very few do canning now. Everything goes in the freezer.
- UV: ---Peaches, pears, green beans, tomatoes. I know about peas. Everything that you raise in the garden got put in a can. When you put them in cans too, it was a lot of work. Sterilizing them and everything.
- A: And sometimes you didn't have enough water.
- UV: Pickles.
- Q: I'm sorry, you didn't have enough what please?
- A: You didn't have enough water 'cause you didn't have your driven wells, you had just your dug wells and if it got dry in the summer, you just didn't have the water for doing things.
- Q: When did water come out? Did you get city water?
- A: Your driven wells?

Q: Um hmm. You said. You didn't get city water, you got driven wells. When do you think that happened?

A: Driven wells? I think they gradually came on from about the 1980's to...1918, to 1920, from there and on. I didn't get a driven well until...

UV: After your kids were gone.

A: Yeah.

UV: We used to take our bath...my father would go to the brook and get a forty quart pail of water with all the polliwogs in it and put it in the bathtub and I'd take my bath first and my brother would take his second for us to go to school.

Q: When did you get indoor plumbing?

A: Oh,...

UV: Sixty-four years ago.

A: Yes, you were a year old, sixty-four years ago is right. We had ---do it plumbing put in.

Q: What do you remember about prices?

A: Oh, prices. Do you know when it was...when we had Depression when the Depression was on you got along on two and three dollars a week to buy your groceries and for everything too. I don't know we ever...I don't know how we existed but we did. And you take the...came on...there was one time there a man was only earning say around twenty dollars a week for pay. Look at what they're getting today. But still, look at what you're paying for things today. So, I don't know whether there's really so much difference.

Q: Now in the Depression, did you get any of the things off the farm then to help you along the way?

A: Yes, my brother furnished us our milk. My husband was out of work from...for a year and a half and as I say, in those days you work for a dollar a day out at the farm. It's...we'd only have three, four or five dollars a week to buy our groceries with. But we existed. We got along.

UV: You were raising your own chickens at that point.

A: Yeah.

Q: You said you didn't like the chickens.

A: Oh, I hated chickens.

Q: You...you...did you raise chickens to sell or for the eggs and meat?

A: Oh, yeah. Oh, yes. We had...we had a chicken business here for years. As I say, I don't like chickens and I never did. But it was daddy's part-time job yeah. So...

Q: So it was...so...while he was working...was that while he was working at Russell's or afterward?

A: Yeah, he was working at Russell's.

Q: Um hmm. There were a lot of part-time farms. In fact, in Connecticut still, about sixty-six per cent of our people are part-time farmers.

A: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah.

Q: ...work off farm. What kinds of connections did you have to town as you got older? You said as a...as a youngster you went into school and to town but did you have any connections with any groups? I mean, either on school boards or connecting into anything that was happening in town?

A: No, I never did, no.

Q: And did your brother or your husband?

A: No.

UV: Just the Grange.

A: Yeah.

Q: And the Grange was in town? That's what...

A: Yeah, at one time yes it was.

Q: So you went into town to go to the Grange? And the Grange covered...how big an area did the members come from do you think?

A: Mostly in...in Middletown because you see...the fact is there were separate Granges. You had **Mattabasset** was Middletown Grange and then Higganum had their...their Grange. East Haddam had theirs. And Killingworth had theirs. All the little towns had their individual Granges. That was definitely a...a...a neighborhood affair.

- Q: I guess that's why I was wondering if...but Middletown was a larger area?
- A: Yes, we were a larger area, yeah.
- Q: So it took in several neighborhoods, so to speak. Did it?
- A: Yes. Yes, it did because it...it came out this way and then it...and there were people from West...Westfield and...and Cromwell and I don't know if Crom... No Cromwell had its own Grange most of the time I think.
(Tape interruption.)
- Q: Is there anything else you remember about the Grange or the Farm Bureau? The people that...the women that became members of the Homemakers club, did you know them through the Grange also?
- A: Very often yes. Very often yes. And it was...it was sort of a...of a...our neighborhood from the Brock's all the way down the road. The Roberts'...
- Q: The Homemakers clubs or the Grange?
- A: Grange.
- UV: But the Homemakers clubs formed from the people...
- Q: The Grange.
- UV: Yeah.
- Q: What do you think brought you the greatest satisfaction having been with Homemakers?
- A: Well, maybe it was the friendships you formed and the...you learned...the things you learned that you wouldn't have learned otherwise. And it was something that you did and still it was...you enjoyed it and so it was very productive for you too.
- Q: There weren't as many magazines and radio, TV. I mean...
- A: No.
- UV: I remember the first radio we had here.
- Q: Do you? Can you talk about the first radio that you had?
- A: First radio. I don't know.

UV: First radio you had in your living room.

A: Oh.

UV: In fact, you used to sit there and listen to Tom Dixon all those, and it was all “staticky.” That was the beginning of soap operas. There were Stella Dallas and all...

A: Oh yes. I used to listen to those in the afternoon when I was ironing.

UV: Tell her about your disappointment in starting at the University of Connecticut.

A: Oh, that was...

UV: Well, that’s important I think.

A: I didn’t go very long. Didn’t work out.

Q: Did you go after you graduated from high school...?

A: Yeah, I went to...well, it wasn’t the university then it was Storrs. I went there that fall.

Q: Oh that was still Storrs Agricultural College or was it the Connecticut Agricultural College?

A: I think it was still Storrs. I turned around that time. Around ‘27...’25 on. It was along in there that they changed to the...

Q: How many women were there up there then?

A: We had just the one...one building there, Holcomb Hall was the only women...women’s place at that time.

Q: And so you would have been in Home Ec? Were you in Home Ec?

A: Yeah.

UV: But you didn’t live there, you lived with...

A: You know I lived with a family.

UV: With a professor and his family and did housework and earned a...

A: To make for my...

- Q: I talked to a man yesterday who did that. He...he lived with a professor for his room and board is what he did.
- UV: Um hmm. But her mother got sick and she had to come home and was never able to go back.
- Q: So then...well, let's follow that a little bit. When you came home, then you stayed home until you got married?
- A: No. I went to...I...instead of going back, I wasn't able to go back again. I went to business college and I worked in a...as a matter of fact, I worked at the Russell Company in the office there until I was married...until after I was married. But you change your life from branch to another.
- Q: Oh, I know that one.
- A: And back and forth.
- Q: Now you've gotten very involved with 4-H. You became a 4-H leader and as a married woman you continued in 4-H?
- A: Oh, yes.
- Q: So what kinds of experiences do you remember from that when you had 4-H clubs?
- A: Oh, I've had lots of girls. I don't know how many girls I've had. I would like to figure out sometime but some of them come to me today and even say they remember being in my club. I've almost forgotten and went from one club to another from about...started in when Marion was two years old...
- UV: Before I was able to...
- A: Two years old and...and I went through until...
- UV: Easily you had over a hundred. Easily. Because we tried to have you know, honor her at different times and we couldn't...there are more girls who have passed away now that were still in her 4-H club. She just went from one to another.
(End of side one.)...maybe when we had that big party honoring you for your forty...thirty-five years as a 4-H leader. We've honored her forty years. She's well over fifty years and then she stopped. Well, my brother considers her a 4-H leader now because she's teaching Betsy.
- Q: Oh.

UV: On how to do different things. But she's been a 4-H leader well over fifty...she got her fiftieth year award and then they...I don't know if there's anybody else in...

Q: I don't know that, yeah.

UV: But I know they said that they didn't know what to give her for her next pin. She's got her pin with all the pins on it.

Q: So what do you remember, then? When you first started being a 4-H leader in your own right that started when your kids were little...when your daughter was little?

A: Yes, I was asked a few times before but I...I wouldn't go in 'til the children were...'til I had the time for it.

UV: But you did have a --- club down at Hubbard School.

Q: No, that was just...I worked with somebody else on it. That was not mine--- But working with the...with the children, it was a most interesting thing to see them growing up and how they change and maybe you can feel you had a little bit to do with...with their lives. At least you tried to. And it was very interesting to see how one year a girl couldn't do anything and the next year she was very proficient. And you felt well maybe I did a little bit anyway. But...and in a way it seems as though it sort of changed at different times. I tried to go along with their interests because their interest wasn't always in...in sewing and...and...sometimes maybe our club was really more that we set and visited. But I felt that we did a lot of good sometimes just talking things out in that age where they were...oh from fourteen to sixteen there. They'd open up and...and say things to each other which I think was very beneficial.

UV: You helped instigate the baby-sitter's bag, 'cause that's when we were all starting out to baby-sit. And you helped with that and the one who was never married up at UConn used to take that baby-sitter's bag which was helpful to all of us. (Tape interruption)...baby-sit you took and it had things you could help entertain the children with.

Q: So when you...when you first started your 4-H club, did you start it in this neighborhood or did you...you mentioned the Hubbard School...

A: Oh, no. That was...that was way back when I was out of high school just...just an experiment let's say.

Q: All right, okay.

A: But no, I've always had the meet...always had the meetings at my house. And I always planned not to have too many girls in the...in the club because you couldn't

handle them in your own home. I figured that six or eight was enough and so that you could work individually with them.

Q: Where did the girls come from?

A: Usually right in the neighborhood or a girl would ask her girlfriend but always...I was always tried to be sure of one thing was that the...that the...we had to have the meetings of course, in the evening and I always was sure that whoever the girl was coming into the club would have transportation, that her parents realized that they were expected to furnish transportation. Because sometimes you could run into being a baby-sitter which didn't work out either.

Q: Um hmm. Um hmm. So they did sewing, they did some cooking?

A: Yeah, we usually did some cooking.

Q: And you said you'd sit and talk. That'd be the what they call human development now. Youth development, youth development.

A: Well...

UV: Grooming, you had a Specialist come in...

A: Oh yes, we had...we had grooming and...

UV: Color. Picking out colors that were suitable for you.

A: We had...

Q: Do you think that...so if you were in it for forty some odd...forty-five years, then did...it just kind of self-perpetuated. A couple would leave and a couple would come in?

A: Well, they would sometimes drop that maybe I didn't have one for a year or two and then somebody was going to start at once to come into the club and I'd get another one started. And sometimes it went on a few years without a club but I had a club most all the time.

UV: You were still very active in 4-H even as a judge or she was always Chairman of the Favorite Food Show until the past couple years, always judging at the 4-H Fair.

Q: When you do the...the 4-H Fairs...I mean, you think about how they're run...how the young people run them by-and-large, too.

UV: I know, I was the President one year.

A: Ah, well that was the aim when we first started that first 4-H Fair was that it was to be run by the young people. And they had some...some...they had some adults who would help them and so...as committees but they still, it was the 4-Hers who ran it.

Q: Now, how did that come about? You said it was the first one in the country?

A: It was the first one in the country, it was formed... We had a man and he was a...he was one of the Russells...the Russell Manufacturing Company. A very wealthy man and very...very sporty and real, real nice person and he had this big farm out in Westfield and he offered to...to let us use his land for a day or two to have this fair. So the first time we had a 4-H Fair, it was nothing but some tents put out there. Even the women, I know my mother, I think, it was that first year my mother served on the committee. The women from the Grange put on a dinner at noon. They had to do it in a tent with oil stoves. You can see how we started and then it worked up 'til we...we were out there on that farm I don't know how many years we were out there. Not too many. And then he sold the farm and then we started down in Durham, the Durham Fairgrounds and have been down there every since.

Q: I noticed that you...I didn't know about Camp Vale until I looked through the photographs. (Referring to a Middlesex CES Center file of old photos that had been catalogued by year by Mrs. Spencer)

A: Oh, yes.

Q: And I didn't realize that was up at Eastern...that was held up at Eastern States.

A: Eastern States, yes. That was wonderful. You look forward to being able to go to that and of course, the boys that went up with their...well, boys and girls both that went up with their young stock and so they were part of that camp.

UV: Girls went up with their Home Economics.

A: But then ...we went up, the girls went up for demonstrations. And...

UV: I spent a week up there just doing this demonstration, three or four times...

A: Then they'd go from that, whoever was chosen for that would go to Chicago.

UV: Still we also went up to the University of Connecticut. What was that called?

Q: Home and Farm Week.

UV: No.

Q: No?

UV: When we were all...that was...Camp Vale was Eastern Conn...Eastern States.

Q: Eastern States was Camp Vale.

UV: But there was something we went to...

A: Short course...?

Q: Short course, two-week short course.

UV: Yes.

A: Yes, we used to have those short courses and they...they had a wonderful time and it...they learned a lot and...

UV: Even ate the ice cream at the dairy.

Q: Let me go get the pictures out of the...
(Tape interruption.)

Were there any uniforms for 4-H?

A: Oh, yes. If we went to...to Camp Vale you had a uniform.

Q: And so how did people get their uniforms?

UV: Made them.

A: Made 'em.

Q: All right. This one man told me that he had to borrow, that he couldn't afford he white pants and so they...whoops, this one shifted. They had to borrow some clothes for him to go to where he had to have his white demonstration outfit.

UV: We used to have green aprons, didn't we?

A: The...the original uniform was green for a girl.

Q: And they all made them?

A: Well, I think everybody made their...

UV: If possible. There are some mothers may have made 'em but...

- Q: Now this outfit, it looks like they're in military uniforms. This one is very old, if they...if it was the historical society they would have me using white gloves...
- UV: Could have that have been the Victory Fairs? We didn't talk about the Victory Fairs during the World War II.
- Q: ---on the fold, it's...it's been folded at some time and it's...this is...it looks like a military uniform.
- A: Oh yeah. That's was these were.
- UV: Was that World War I or World War II when we used to have the Victory Fairs because we couldn't have the fairs in the different Counties so we had...
- Q: --- troop for Middletown. Would they have been Scouts that came along and had the same kind of thing? We should...I should mount this one so it doesn't deteriorate any more. Conservation Corp.? I have no idea.
- A: I don't know.
- Q: And then here is the...I should really put these between acid paper for them. She's just loaned these to me, she has not given them to me but...
- UV: Mrs. **Sherring**?
- Q: Mrs. Sherring, yeah. As I brought you some things, I said we need to be more careful about how we preserve them. I've had things that were given to...
- UV: She told me they were all in a photograph book.
- Q: No, they aren't...
- UV: This was our discussion group at church yesterday.
- Q: No, they're on file.
- UV: Yeah. Okay. No, I was just laughing at what she said.
- Q: There may be others in a book, I don't know. I have no idea.
- UV: She said that...did you sort these all out Ma?
- Q: Yes.
- A: Yeah.

- Q: Here's some more people in uniform at Mr. Russell's barn.
- A: Beautiful. A stable, that was your first fair.
- UV: That was with the judges for the first fair.
- Q: Judging prime hogs at Mr. Russell's barn. This is in the...there you go...oops, get in the... And here we go, Connecticut State College, yep. I'll put that back in this section. I don't think they...but here's where I first came across Camp Vale which I had not heard about before.
- A: Oh well that was...oh yeah.
- Q: And then this is 1920's Connecticut. Oh my goodness. Oh, this is interesting. Here's Holcomb Hall. Here's post cards of UConn. We have pictures of the Hall Armory with Home and Farm Day with...in the 1920's with people...with....with the cattle going across the...the green that you have now. Yeah.
- UV: Green, yeah. All I can remember was the only time we were really going across at night to the dairy farm and getting our ice cream, the best ice cream I've ever had.
- Q: It still is. The new dairy barn has just opened.
- UV: Right, well they seem to advertise it lot on WTIC. Right.
- Q: Yeah, yeah, yeah and it's...it's...and what they've done too is they've picked out...they've gone through old archive pictures and they have pictures of old things up on the walls of...of parts of the college, yeah.
- UV: Oh, I'd love to go up there to the college, yeah. I go through there on our way to a wedding reception not too long ago in Mansfield. Do they still have the North Church. That was the very...the Congregational Church where we all went. Is that still...
- Q: The Congregational Church is there in...
- UV: It's still there?
- Q: Oh, yeah and in fact, what we see is...I've found some old photos in another...from another source and it's like taken from where there are some dormitories now looking down the hill toward the yellow barn, the big old barn. And the Congregational Church you can see to the far right and it's facing 195. And that's how we can tell how old the picture is because it...after it burned, they built it facing Eagleville Road.

UV: I was just going to say, we always went up and went South Eagleville Road or North Eagleville Road.

Q: Yeah.

UV: In fact, when I worked for **Lloyd Wilhelm**, who was a 4-H agent, he used to get basketball tickets and my husband and I were just newly married then and if he couldn't go he would give them to us and we would go North Eagleville Road to the stadium.

Q: Okay, yes. Yes.

UV: What road did we use to go up...you were working at the time and I used to go to State 4-H Leaders Day. That was held on a Saturday once a year.

A: Yep. They used to have the Leaders Day.

Q: And that was held up on campus?

UV: Um hmm.

A: That was always held on campus and they finally began having it around..

UV: Having it different...different places but it was held at UConn when it first started then at UConn Storrs. I was a 4-H Leader for twenty years and then you know...so...it was a lot of history. So you knew Veronica's (Zanelli, a retired Home Economist) --- now.

Q: Oh yes. She hired me. She was on the committee that hired me and...
(Tape interruption.) What are some of the major things that you remember about technology that affected you, the farm, your husband's poultry business or as a life? You mentioned a few of the appliance that came in with electricity. Is there anything else that you remember that made a big difference in your life? You mentioned cars...that personally affected you, that you...

A: Yeah, cars. The trans...as I say, the transportation. I told you how cars came in and they took away the...the trolley cars and buses. So anyone that didn't drive had a hard time getting along. I never drove so...

UV: Electric sewing machines from your own ---.

A: Sometimes maybe it was a good idea that you didn't drive because you didn't have to go every place. You could...but...