

Oral History with Whit Hicks and Peggy Sadler. Part 2. Recorded in 1979

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I'm sorry, you were saying in the... Well, way back there when the first started going over to Hanover, see, the town paid so much, and then the people, the family had to pay so much. That must have been quite a while. Oh, it was quite a while ago, yeah.

And then it, I think the law comes through that the town shouldn't furnish education for children. So that's when they voted that the town would pay the full tuition over Hanover, which I think at that time was roughly around \$150 maybe, if I'm not right, per child. Well, that was why we were talking back and forth about joining up with Dresden.

John Fraser made the remark, he said, I'll bet, he says, the way things are going, that tuition inside of three, four years will be \$600. And he hit it right on the nose. That year the tuition kept rising, rising, that was before anybody ever knew about this.

Inflation business, you know, and he said the question of can you stand it? Of course, the state, all of the town, let's see, what was it, the state paid \$275 I think for a period of time, which was what their average cost per pupil. That's what the town would have paid if we had joined up with White River, we would have paid that cost. And I think by the cost, Hanover was a little bit higher, so that's what we had to pay, whatever the Hanover cost per pupil was, per child.

But it's amazing how the, I don't know what it is over there now, it must be \$1,300, \$1,400 per child. Oh, yeah, I don't know the exact either, but I know what's up there, yeah. Of course, I think the way it stands now is that now it pays one third of their cost, because they had about a third of the children, I think at that time.

Now, I don't know how many children they have, but at one time, I think somebody said they had about six or seven hundred over there, and we had about two hundred, which was about one third, so they paid one third of the cost of the operating the senior or the part of the school. I don't think that interferes with the elementary part, because we don't have anything to do with that over there, do we? Oh, that's right, the sixth grade now goes over there. It's sixth or seventh grade anyway, it starts long before ninth grade.

It was ninth grade when I was there, but of course I wasn't there during the Dresden party, that came after I graduated. The town was still paying tuition in those days. I think most of them were satisfied, of course there was that time, you know, when it came up that we thought we should build a schoolhouse of our own down here where the tennis courts are in the Mink Farm area, that the town owned the land.

I guess, I don't know if the school district owned the land, bought that land with that in mind that they might want to expand from here up to there. Then the story came up that they ought to have a high school there and leave Hanover. But I suppose there was a lot of consideration there and thought put into it, because a lot of people thought it would be nice, but when you look at the fundamental end of it, you couldn't give the children an education over here that they were getting over in Hanover.

What I mean by that is the variety. You see up here with 200 children, you've got a big building, and you'd have to have the demand for the education the same as they were getting in Hanover. You'd have to have that many different classes, and it would end up that you probably only had ten in one class, and you couldn't afford to have a teacher for just that particular thing.

So that was a lot of thought put into it that way, and I guess they decided that it was going to be just too expensive to try to compete with Hanover. And expensive certainly in education or something to be concerned about. And the way things have gone now, the cost of education and everything, it's quite a lot not to think of.

So I think probably they made the right decision. We were the first town in the United States to combine with another state. So that started things going I guess.

Now I think all the way up and down the Connecticut River I believe it's... Right. I know of one interstate school system on the other side was New York, Vermont and New York. So it's happening.

It was quite a change. I mean it took quite a little time to get it through legislature and through the Congress I guess. They had to go through the government to know how to do it.

But it comes through all right. Let's go back to the 1930s a little bit. What was Norwich like then? What do you remember in terms of the... Do you remember knowing everybody? What kind of a small town was it? Well, I really couldn't remember what the population, but it surely wasn't anywhere near as large as it is now.

But it used to be in the 30s. I know in mud season it was bad. It was? Where was it bad? Everywhere? Oh, everywhere.

You come across what used to be the flat down here, which would be from before the thruway was put in. It would be the old... From McKenna Road right across that flat was almost impassable in mud season. And right up Main Street I think was bad too.

All the way up to the store, right up through. If you went out at night, sometimes you'd see cars park beside the road. They'd get stuck in the mud and couldn't get out.

Have to wait until daylight probably to have some horses come and probably pull them out. And if you come home, being a youngster, coming home after a date, if it was cold enough you couldn't ride the ridges and probably make it if you didn't slip off of them. No, we used to, with our delivery truck, we'd go out in mud season.

We used to deliver way up almost to the Brigham Orchard, Sprague Slack. We used to live there then and that was the last stop up. And it was terrible.

We had that big high-wheel dodge that we'd go up through. And up there by the old sergeant place, down at sergeant place which is... Don Crider lives there now. There's a spot of road there where I think people get stuck and took the rocks out of the sidewalls, out of the roadside and put into those ruts.

To raise them up so they'd get a little more start. Well, that was to the point where those rocks would evidently keep working up. So as you go along, you'd bump, you'd strike a rock and move.

And you'd have chains. I remember coming down from Sprague Slack, we used to pick up eggs in there. And which house is that now? That's Warner.

What's his name lives there? Wagner. Wagner. Yeah, right.

Oh, Grove Wagner. I remember coming down through there one time, Sprague gave me a case of eggs. I was empty, you know, on the way home.

And I'm coming down through, you know, and I guess we had chains on. And you'd go as far as you could, you know, so you'd spin and stick. And then all of a sudden, the chains would get hung up on those rocks and you'd bounce ahead, you know.

So that was the way it was, slowly coming down. I think probably when we get down to the store, out of 30 dozen in the case of eggs, we might have had probably 20. You know what I mean? I'm sure of that.

I don't think they'd ever hatch because I'm afraid the fertility was all gone. That's amazing. There must have been other inconveniences besides mud season in the 30s.

Or there must have been... Well, of course, there were a lot of horse and carriage buggies in the days people used to come. People never visited the store as often as they did then because we did have the delivery service, which was a convenience to the people. You know, we'd go around and sit in the kitchen at different routes and visit with the ladies, you know, and try to sell them all your specials and everything.

It's just like high-pressure salesmanship, you know. Oh, so you were peddling more than actually delivering. I mean, I wouldn't call in and say, I want this and this and this.

You'd just show up in your room and you'd have all different kinds of things. No, we just took out what they call a sample basket of what we thought people might be interested in, different things, and go into the house with your book. They might have cakes that they might want for dinner or something or different things that were on special.

We could show them what it was like. It was almost like the Raleigh Man, you know, and they'd go around. And the Watkins fellow, they used to come to the house.

But, of course, they had their full supply right with them. But then you'd go back to the store. Oh, yeah.

You'd take an order, you mean. We'd take an order, probably, well, whatever people wanted, spices or, well, I'd like some of this or some of that, and so forth. Then we'd come back in probably and then fill those orders.

The three of us would work on it and start probably about four o'clock delivering again, delivering in the same room. So you had it all in different boxes, you know, and the order

was all calibrated and added up and everything. And you took it in and put the stuff on the lady's table there.

And if she had a charge account, that was fine. If not, why, she'd pay for it. And that was it.

You'd come back home. Of course, in the meantime, my telephone service, they'd call up and add to it if they wanted to. But after we took over, that was quite an expense, you know.

And you bore that whole expense. I mean, that was the stores. The stores did, yeah.

Of course, I suppose, as anybody says, well, in them days, they never added on this as an extra expense. That was an expense of delivery, expense of the store. A lot of them say, well, what difference does it make? You're probably stuffed cheaper if you didn't deliver.

But I don't think that was true. I think it was absorbed as a business expense. Convenience to the public, we'll call it, because you'd get more business probably that way because people didn't have to come out of their house, especially in the wintertime.

Goodness, you delivered all, then you did deliver all year round. Oh, yes, yeah. Of course, when we took over, well, we didn't feel as though we could afford that expense of delivery because it took one man all the time that had done nothing but delivering and taking orders.

So we had to cancel that out, but we did offer them service that we, if they called in their order, or we called them in the morning, each one around, and if they wanted it, we'd put up an order and deliver it, you know, for a period of time. No, I'll take that back. Afterward, we had to stop delivering and taking orders.

I think the last part of being with Mr. Merrill was that we'd done that. You wouldn't go out and take orders. Yeah, we decided that it would be probably a little bit better if we could just call the folks on the phone, call our customers and take their order, and they were very cooperative.

They would have their order ready and they'd spill it right down through, and we'd copy it down and then put it up. Well, you can see that that would make it quite a little different. And then we'd go out and deliver it.

But then when Dan and I took over, I don't know why it was an expense that we couldn't afford, so we did it. But they were still cooperative. People would come.

What other stores were there in Norwich at that time? Well, I always say that we outlived quite a lot of competition. I think when I first went to work there, because Merle Currier had a store in Lewiston. You're saying Merle.

Merle Currier. Well, I call Merle Currier's store is in Lewiston, right? Right. Where the post office was.

Right. He ran the post office there, too. He started running a delivery cart up through, you know, if anybody wanted to.

He wasn't quite as large, naturally not as large a store as Merle's was. Then there was an A&P store that came in across the, where the dentist's office is now. The dentist's office.

There was an A&P come in there for a while. Wilford Croteau ran it for them. And as you know, Wilford Croteau, he was related to Ruby Fitzgerald up here.

What is his relationship to Buddy? Was that his father? Wilford was, yeah, Buddy's father. Oh. Yeah.

He ran the A&P there. He ran the A&P when it was there, but they didn't stay there very long. They evidently couldn't make it go.

Then there was, of course, Bob O's. No, Gil's store. Gil had a drugstore, opened up a drugstore in where the Gardner agency is now.

That was Gil's store in there, that side of the. I didn't realize that he was there. But it wasn't Rob O's.

It was Gil. I said it was Gil. Didn't you? I thought you said Rob O's opened it up.

Rob O's, I started to, but Rob O's worked for Gil over in the corner. Yeah, he did. Rob went from the, well, that was about Gil, I think, had a store over there, opened up, of course, it was, I don't know who was in there first.

Isn't it funny? There was a store there. The Gil took over anyway. And Gil opened up, moved from what they call the drugstore over to there and opened up and sold groceries in competition to Meryl, see? I'm a little bit confused.

Gil opened up, he bought the store where the Gardner agency is now? Yeah. And he had a drugstore there. He had a drugstore there, sold ice cream.

But then he bought the corner store. Corner store. And moved over there.

Moved over there to the drugstore and then he carried a parcel line of groceries, you know, see? And Rob went over to work for him. When he closed down his shop? Yeah, his drugstore. Then after that, I think, Charlie McKenna had what they call the lamppost in there where Gil was.

Was it a little restaurant like? Yeah, I think so. I think he'd come after Gil. I don't know.

It's a long ago, but anyway, in a pair of years there was those two stores that were in there. Gil hit it first. Is that on? It's on.

Gil hit it first because then Charlie McKenna was afterwards. Well, Gil must have had it because I worked for Gil a few times, you know, so I went in there. Therefore, you and I were married.

Yeah, that's right too. Gee, the time flies. Yeah, because Gil and I were kind of acquainted.

I don't know where we met, but he was kind of lonesome. He was all alone. He just, and we met and we went different places.

I think he wanted a little friendship, you know, see? Because he'd come up to the farm and stayed with us a couple of nights at the farm, you know, just to be with somebody. And that's right. And I went down.

He and his father operated the store down there and the drugstore because I remember going in there cutting up ice cream, you know, gallons of ice cream, cut them up in chunks and put a Popsicle stick in and dip them in chocolate and then put them in the freezer. Oh, wow. Made our own Popsicles.

Uh-huh, sure. Isn't that something? That was before I went to work for Maryland, that's right too. And then there was the IGA.

That's right. The IGA was over there. That's... That was over where the hairdresser was, yeah.

Oh, yeah. Well, that was Donny Ballin and Mal Follis opened up a store over there. And I guess... They had one one time in the front of Dorrance Sergeant's house.

Didn't last long. Yes, there was a... Was that the same two you mean? The fellow that left the A&P that was running... Oh, what's the... Yeah. Crowder won the A&P and then this other fellow they brought in won the A&P.

Fulton Redmond. And he got through from there and then he got mad and he opened up where the old Dorrance Sergeant's house was. He opened up the front end of that where the steps used to be.

They used to go up and he had a little small grocery department there, you know, see. And, of course, he had his friends and that didn't last very long. He went out of there.

Well, Wilford Crotto had a place. Wilford? That government building that's back here was built for Wilford Crotto to have a grocery store in. He ran it for maybe a year.

Yeah, maybe. I guess so. And he had the post office when he... Yeah.

Would you remember the post office as being here first before they went to Tracy Hall? Oh, yes. It was, yeah. Yeah, it left the store and came here for... That's right.

It was here for maybe four or five years. Yeah. And then went to Tracy Hall.

And then went to Tracy Hall. That's why they call that shack. It was here, the government building.

Right, right. And then it went to the parish house. When did they have it over the parsonage or the parish house across the road? Well, that was after they left Tracy Hall.

And then, I don't know where it was just during that in between the move and the... Did it go back to Tracy Hall just in between that move? I think they were in Tracy Hall while they were building the post office. I think they went to the parish house from here to the parish house. Then to Tracy Hall.

Then to Tracy Hall where the police station is while they were building the post office. Building the new post office. See, they moved that building over there and then they... around the corner.

Yeah. So that's... Now we got that solved. All right.

There used to be a lot of activity centered around the Grange Hall. Wow, that's where the... Oh, yeah. Were you involved in... I shouldn't say that.

Every Friday night we used to have card party and dance. You did? That's where we met. Can you imagine that? Card party and dance.

Yeah. I'd go over and kick her in the shins and ask her if she wanted to dance. You weren't quite there.

No, but... That's Zeke Hazen that did that. The Grange... It was who? Zeke Hazen. What Hazen was that? Well, that... Roy Hazen's son and they lived up where Charlie Hazard... I don't know who lives in the house now.

That's different. That was a Hazen family. I think... Yeah, he was a... Yeah, they used to have some real activity there.

Tell me about the card parties and the dances. How were those organized? Well, the Grange organized them. You know, like I said, they had a committee I suppose on the Grange.

Same as most of our organizations do. And they went and played until 10 o'clock and then they danced from then until 1. Every Friday night. And what kind of dances was... Round and Square.

Round and Square. Was it... Western Square? Oh, they didn't hear the Western Square. And it was just the playing cadre, you know, or... What is it? More like the old... Boston Fancy, you know, just... And... Yeah.

Did you have live music? Oh, yeah, sure. Who? The Cossinghams. The Cossinghams that had an orchestra and... The Grange people.

I would go down there sometimes and play them a harmonica. Yeah? Yeah. And Bob Whitney would tap dance there for them and... He used to drum.

Yeah, he was a drummer. Uh-huh. Lonnie Dinsmore was a violinist and... Oh, the Cossinghams... The whole family played then.

Colleen used to play the piano. Remember Colleen Cossingham? Uh-huh. And... George... I think George played a... Did he drum? I'm not sure.

One of them played a saxophone and I guess there was a stranger out of the family that came in and played that. Bill... Was this... Wasn't Bill Cossingham the saxophonist or the wind... the wind instrumentist? Yeah, I believe so. Right you are.

Yeah. He's the one that lived down on Carpenter Street. That's Colleen's husband.

Right. Yeah. Yeah, that was the... They used to call it the Cossingham Orchestra.

And... Round dancing would be waltzing and... Waltz, foxtrot, one step or the gallo as they used to call it. Donnie Dinsmore used to... and Doris Sargent used to like the gallo. You remember Doris? That was the oldest daughter of Donnie... Younger.

Turis. Sister. Sister.

The name sounds very familiar. Was she kind of plumpish in height? Maybe a short woman? Not terribly short, but maybe... No, taller than I am. Oh.

You're quite heavy. Then I guess I do kind of remember her. That's amazing.

But what is this, the gallo? Yeah, that's where they call it a gallo. It's really a big, fast one step where they almost hop around, you know, and Lonnie, he was pretty spry. God, he'd kick his leg up in the air.

like the polka. Oh. Yeah.

And did you do polkas there? Oh, yeah. Yeah, they did the polka. But there was a... I don't know what the names of the dances were, but the foxtrot and one step as they call it.

That's just a fast... And the gallo and the... But a lot of them were... Some of the folks wouldn't get out of the gallo because there wasn't room enough for them, you know. There were a lot of... Did you do this upstairs? Yeah. So did you do it downstairs and upstairs? The cards one place and the dance... Well, the card party used to be upstairs and then they'd come downstairs to... They had a little hole in the ceiling and so we'd get up there and they'd put the tables up through the hole in the ceiling.

Well, first, after the card party, you know, they'd have refreshments. Oh, boy. Cake, the best cakes and sandwiches and whole meal practically, you know.

They paid a quarter and that was the... That was the whole night's entertainment. So when you played cards, you just played to win, not to win something. Oh, there was a prize.

They had a little prize, I think, for the... Yeah. You'd bring in the partners, you know, and you'd move around. The winners would move, you know, so you... just like they do at cribbage or anything like that, you know, progressive whiz, they call it.

Yeah, that's... Then after that was over, they'd clear the... I think they went downstairs to eat and then they'd... Oh, they probably went around and they ate right at the table where you played cards. Then they'd... It would've taken more than five minutes to put those tables up through into the attic and then they'd... Dance. Dance until one o'clock.

How many people would go... I mean, what would be a crowd? Oh, I bet you'd have... Of course, a lot of people would come to the dance afterwards, you know, so you'd probably have four or five people three, twelve, maybe fifteen tables before the table. There's sixty, you know what I mean, and that would play. the extras would come in for the dance.

Then, of course, there'd be a lot of them come in for the dance, yeah. That's something. Would they come from all around or were they pretty much normal people? Oh, mostly normal people.

Some youngster from Hanover would come over. Hanover would come over. The older people, you know, the townspeople went and played cards and some of them stayed for the dance.

Some of the people that played cards went home and didn't stay for the dance. All the high school gang came in. Hmm.

That's neat. It was a decent place to go, you know. Of course, you could always raise Miss Jippy if you wanted, you know, but most everybody came and they mostly stayed in the hall.

Oh yeah, they had a lot of fun. It was really weekend entertainment, annual entertainment for the weekend. That's neat.

What other social things happened at the Grange? Well, of course, I don't know. Were you involved in the Minstrel? I was a Granger for a while and then I got out of it. Were you involved in any of the Minstrel shows, which were not Grange necessarily? They were lions, I think, weren't they? Oh no, the Grange started the... I think there was a fire house with.

Maybe I'm wrong. The Grange ran the Minstrel shows and then the fire company ran the Minstrel shows and then the two of them got in together and they ran them in a combination and they ran them for quite a little while and then I don't know why it changed but they were running they were raising money for the Parsonage Congregational New Parish House out there back and they started we started up with running the shows for them to raise the money for their benefit. Now that must have been gee, I think they must see the Lions Club have had it for 25 years.

I know they must have been those shows were going on about 35 or 40 years because I get involved with it I think at the when the fire company were putting them on and the Grange came together and then they split I think and then Grange got sick of it and I think the fire company took it over themselves and then we went down it was during the war I think that nobody had them for a while and then we picked it up for the Parish House the first year we had some first year we started it we used to spend probably three or four months on it rehearsing for it and then after the vacation of it it was called while some experienced fellas come in from Clairland and started them up again their idea was that we put the show on three weeks from the time we started rehearsing the show went on and of course they brought us up all these fancy top hats and everything like that dressed the end men up in those suits and but from then on we decided not to hire them we could have our own do it the same way and we were doing it so then we started on it just the three concentrated everybody got on and really put it on it was a whole lot better show because you didn't get tired of it you know you're all excited until the show time and then it was all over but that was but we really felt bad when we lost our minstrel show the blackface when did that happen? well I can't tell you the year but it was at the time when there was quite a little controversy about the blackface business Owen Hanover you know and there was threats that they were going to raise the roof if we put on blackface and I think we did that one year regardless but [lost 3 minutes of transcription at end]