

00:03:05:05

*Al Bowles,*

A: Presently chief of public safety for the town of Lincoln. Having gone through the school system here in town and having grown up right here on Lexington Road as a kid.

Q: Tell us about what your farm was like that you grew up on and how long your family had that farm.

IN 00:04:06:19

*Background  
Delivered in flat voice*

*old Wheeler farm*

A: We had a farm on Lexington Road which is now 118, Lexington Road. It was composed of an apple orchard. My parents moving in there in 1945, shortly after I was born. And my brother. I have a twin brother also. Previous to that the farm had belonged to my father's second cousin, Herman Wheeler. And the Wheeler family had been here at Lexington Road and route 2 for a substantial number of years, owning the property across route 2 on the northerly side of route 2 just opposite this end of Lexington Road.

00T 00:04:53:05

Q: I thought that your family had farm land on Old Sudbury.

IN 00:05:00:10

OUT 00:05:12:26

A: Exactly. My grandparents, if you go back in time, probably around 1908, somewhere in there, 1910, my grandparents moved here. That would be my father's parents, moved here from Wayland. And they initially bought a piece of property on Lincoln

IN 00:05:30:10

Road which is now the home of Wes and Toby Frost. And that was their first residence here in town. My father was born there. And then at some point shortly thereafter they bought a property on Old Sudbury Road which is directly across from Apple Tree Lane, which is now Apple Tree Lane in Wayland. So Wayland was on one side of the street, Lincoln being on the other. But my grandparents had a small dairy operation, pigs and a vegetable farm there.

OUT 00:05:56:24

Q: And the farm that you had up here was primarily an orchard?

IN 00:06:01:16

Father ran orchard

A: Primarily an orchard. And it was not a full time operation. It was maybe 150 to 160 trees. And my father, my parents, my father ran it and supplemented his full time employment with that of the orchard industry. But his hands having been in agriculture since he was born he kept with it and branched out from the dairy and vegetable and pigs into the orchard.

OUT 00:06:34:23

Q: When you were growing up in Lincoln what farms do you remember?

IN 00:06:42:23

OUT 00:06:51:28

A: I'll tell you, we didn't have to wander too far from home to get to another farm in that all through school, and I mean prior to high school, a substantial amount of all of our time, and meaning all of our time, those of us who grew up in the neighborhood, whether it been Fertile Valley, on Trapelo Road there

or Old Lexington Road, whatever, we spent a great deal of time across the street here at Warren Flint's haying. And that took care of three or four months out of July to September or whatever. But that used to be great entertainment for all the kids in this part of town growing up was to spend a significant amount of time there. Obviously with the farm we had over there, there were apple picking duties and so forth when harvest came around. And your work force to pick those apples came from the student population in the community.

Q: Can you describe the town, this was in the 50s now we're talking about, right when you were a kid and working on some of these farms. Can you describe what the town looked like then? I mean was it primarily a farming community?

A: It was tough to move about the community without at some point coming across a farm of one type or another. Whether it been a truck farm vegetable operation, whether it be a piggery, dairy, whatever. In those days it was, I would judge, maybe around 17-1800 people, and that's just off the top of my head. But there was much more of a community.

And people were there then had been there for minimally probably 50 years prior to that. A new resident might have been here for 30 to 35 years, that type of thing. And everybody, route 2 was here.

IN 00:08:07:16

Lincoln in the 50s

00:08:36:01

BUT 00:08:49:01

But you could go about your business in town, so to speak, without causing a great deal of disruption or noticeability or whatever.

And I consistently think what we used to do as kids then as opposed to if that same maneuver had been going on today, certainly it would have generated calls to public safety. One of the great pastimes was going out to, there used to be a range out on Sandy Pond Road, target practice range. And it was merely a series of a gravel backstop with some railroad ties and so forth. And everybody within the community knew it was there and if you wanted to make use of, wanted a safe place to do target shooting or whatever, you just put your rifle on your back of your back, if you were ten or 12 years old, and ridden your bike over there and done your thing and ridden back. Certainly nowadays the sound of a BB gun will generate phone calls to public safety. But back then it wasn't an issue.

Q: A pretty informal town at that point.

A: Absolutely.

Q: How did it feel to you as having grown up in this kind of environment to see the influx of suburbanites? The urban people coming in with their families. I guess a lot of them came in in the 50s.

*Kids in 50s  
target practice*

IN 00:10:30:27

Influx of  
"suburbanites"

(from kids POV,  
not farm-related)

A: There were probably a substantial number came in. There were three significant areas that were built up that I remember. That would be Huckleberry Hill, the Morningside, Sunnyside and Moccasin Hill, down that area. That was almost something new that it just was unheard of and kind of new to all of us. I would say that would be mid to late 50s that those started to come about. And of course it would generate some activity on the part of us because as kids we were always looking for a couple bucks or what not. And you'd ride across town to mow somebody's lawn and those places generated that type of activity for local kids trying to pick up a little change for Fred Davis' store, the penny candy.

OUT 00:11:40:25

Q: At one point the farm down here on Lexington Road, which is the one that your father had, when did that stop operating and why?

IN 00:11:50:23

Why  
orchard was  
shut down in  
mid 50's

A: I would say it was probably about '56, '57, somewhere in there that we ceased harvesting the apples as a crop per se. And what drove that was the prior two years were rather demanding as far as Mother Nature was concerned in that if it came time to spray you'd spray and the next day rain would take away the spray. It came to be a problem finding high school kids and so forth to pick the apples and it could usually only be done on weekends. And then that was about the time that DDT and those types of

OUT 00:12:54:24

IN 00:13:21:27

→ conclusion

OUT 00:13:27:16

Too wordy

things were found to be not consistent with good health and so forth. So those three factors, I think, made the determination for my father that the system just wasn't balancing itself as far as output versus income and so forth. And he was on the maintenance department at that time for Radcliffe University so he had a substantial number of hours down there as a carpenter. So it just became not a workable situation.

Q: Did you ever give any thought to continuing the farm yourself?

A: I spent a great deal of time starting back in the late 50s, as well as if you consider it, my first 20 odd years of my life dealt with agriculture of one sort or another. Of course we had a tractor and that type of thing on the orchard and then in the late 50s I started work when I was in grade school over at Lawson's on route 2 and worked there a number of years. And then going on to UMass Stockbridge school of agriculture upon graduation from high school in '63. So my first few years were heavily involved in agricultural pursuits. To the point where I had thought that that might be a viable option for my vocational endeavors through adult life. Which obviously proved to be not so.

Q: What happened? Why did you decide not to do it? And was that a hard decision?

A: No, at the time it was not a hard decision. There was a point where things in my life necessitated that I make a change relative to employment. And so I decided to go that route. My bachelor's degree was in marketing and business administration and a minor in management. So upon graduation from aggie school there at UMass in Amherst I pursued that degree through Suffolk. And got out of there in '69, '70. And at that point other horizons, should I say, opened up and my world expanded a little bit and decided to find my niche. And I hadn't at that time decided what it was going to be.

About  
decision to  
not go into  
agriculture

Wordy

Q: You mentioned that you worked at Lawson's. Can you tell me a little bit about what it was like to work there, work the farm stand?

A: Lawson's was a relatively popular point and easily accessible from the metropolitan area and reachable. They often joke now within an hour's drive of Boston. At that time it probably was within an hour's drive of Boston. Now it's within 25 minutes drive of Boston. But it was a market garden type operation with a cider mill, turkeys, we raised turkeys. A focal point more or less, an ideal location, just west of 128. At that time 128, of course it's 95 now. No longer known as 128.

Q: Can we talk about the cider mill?

IN 00:17:05:18

cider mills  
in Lincoln

OUT 00:17:27:05

A: The cider mill was, at that time there were three operating cider mills in Lincoln. One being at Lawson's, one being at Cook's, what used to be Cook's and is now part of the national park property on route 2A, and the other one, Mahoney's, was also on route 2A down towards the Concord line in the vicinity of Sunnyside Lane, where Sunnyside Lane joins route 2A. But cider was a draw to the area. It's a back to nature type of thing, or it was then. Now there's requirements that definitely control cider and its production as to pasteurization and so on and so forth.

But back then it was nothing to ... (inaudible) school field trips there with the viewing and so forth of the operation of making cider and a little public presentation, so to speak, to the classes that came out. Sunday afternoons would be a particularly big draw in that that, as much if not more than anything else, drew the more urban people out to see that had never had hands-on experience with any type of agriculture. And they certainly considered that to be a hands-on type of thing.

IN 00:18:11:22

Urban folks came to  
see cider mill

OUT 00:18:29:28

Q: You mentioned also that Lawson's raised turkeys. Can you tell a little bit about preparing for Thanksgiving? Did you get involved?

A: Yeah. There were a number of us involved in the turkeys. The raising, there was the raising and

IN 00:18:43:03  
Turkeys

Turkeys

OUT 00:19:29:09

obviously the killing, the refrigeration, the pickup, the delivery, what not. But there was probably, I'd say, at the peak there were turkey houses there for roughly 300 birds. And maybe 200, 225 of those would go at Thanksgiving with another 75 to 100 at Christmas time. But definitely it was a round the clock type of thing just preceding Thanksgiving because the demand was incredible, just incredible. Fresh turkeys were probably more prominent then than frozen are now. And of course now there's guidelines also controlling fresh turkeys and there isn't no more such thing, no more thing such as a fresh turkey. They all have to be either flash frozen or chilled to below 32 degrees.

But in those days they were killed and within three days they were in somebody's car traveling back to home to be prepared the next day for the holidays. But yeah, there was definitely an operation. Initially starting out I was tendon puller.

Which meant you put the bird into, after it was killed and defeathered, they'd go into a yoke type of operation with the two legs going through into the yokes. And then you'd come down with the lever and that would take the claw and pull the tendons out of the leg. So that's where a new recruit on the turkey line, so to speak, would man the tendon puller.

Q: Any of the turkeys ever get loose?

IN 00:20:06:17

Tendon puller

A: Yeah, it was not unusual for those to get loose. And it wasn't unusual any more than the general population, being human beings, that the odd one could become ornery at one point or another and vengeful and so forth. But everybody survived and there was no great injury or anything.

Q: Carla had noted here that they also sold eggs at Lawson's.

A: Yeah. And there was quite a demand for-- I mean it was not unusual to sell on a weekly route eggs as well as cider. The eggs were bought from an outside source. There was no chicken farm or anything on the property. But eggs and cider were the two commodities that during the fall would generate one to two trips a week into Cambridge, Somerville, Boston for deliveries of cider and eggs. And I can think of Radcliffe College, the dining commons at that facility, the Wursthau in Harvard Square which was a fairly renowned German restaurant which is no longer there, sorry to say, Cardullo's delicatessen. There were a number of small markets on Mass Ave over through Brookline Ave and so forth in Brighton. Comm Ave. The truck would go out in the morning and maybe 7:30, 8:00 and he'd come back at 2:30, 3:00 in the afternoon having completed the deliveries.

00:21:33:01

Eggs + cider

Q: I want to ask you about the fact that, I mean you're in that generation that really observed a lot of the real working farms like your father's farm and so forth disappearing. But there are a few remaining in Lincoln. Do you think it's worth our while to try to keep them going, to support these farms? What does it mean to the community?

IN 00:23:04:03

"Can't take farm out of the person"

Very good

IN

A: I can only respond for myself. But in that the town of Lincoln has been an important part of my heritage as well as my family's going back a significant number of years, you can sometimes say you can take the person off the farm but you can't take the farm out of the person. And that's the way I feel about myself. I think one of the greatest things is how we've been able to maintain some significant portions of what was here as an agricultural community many years ago. And that will carry on hopefully for ad infinitum, let's say, so that people can have touch with that. And I look to three different things here.

OUT 00:23:51:01

IN 00:23:54:24

Codman Farm

OUT 00:24:05:06

or,  
OUT 00:24:10:26

I look to the Codman farm operation obviously which has been ongoing now for 25 years or so, which was formerly the grange. I can remember that as a kid, the caretaker over there riding around with the pickup with The Grange on the side. And nobody ever knew what it was until we were a little older and realized when we were told what it was. But the

IN 00:24:16:05

OUT 00:24:28:28

IN 00:24:46:27

Kids in Flint's  
Field  
Nice

OUT 00:25:28:22

IN 00:25:40:08

OUT 00:25:53:08

other one was the old Hathaway place which is now Drumlin farm. And the third place, probably most important to me in that I grew up on Lexington Road and so forth, the Flint family itself finding it within their means to make available to the town of Lincoln that field, Flint's field, which we grew up as Flint's field between Lexington Road and Old Lexington Road.

Because there was no price that could be put on that piece of property. And I know, speaking for myself, speaking for Al Donaldson and maybe Chris Garrison, Sal Avery, all those of us whose kids grew up haying that field and found it to be a great thrill to be offered to drive the tractor or ride the hay or toss the hay. In the winter we used to slide on that hill just below the Heck (?) property and come down through the woods, jump the wall. New Year's Eves for a significant number of years for all of us as kids we used to all meet up on that hill and slide on New Year's Eve. That was just the way things were as kids. But I can't ride by there enough and not think of that every time I ride by.

So there are some things to hold onto. But if you look around you continually think that you lose track over time of what actually was here. But then if you put it all down on paper and start to add it up I mean there were many viable farm operations that their sole source of income for that family was

farming. But then there were others, whether they had been small orchard operations dealing with apples or peaches or whatever, that subsidized maybe the main income of the family but yet were still an important part of the agricultural community. }

OUT 00:26:28:12

Q: For a child, a young person, considering taking up farming now what would you be able to say to them from your own experience as a child about farming as a way of life?

A: Farming as a way of life, as a sole source of income on a scale that would be possible here in this area, I speak for the northeast or whatever, I don't think is a possibility any longer. } If something could be subsidized or a farming operation in some way could be subsidized to make it appealing to someone, and I don't necessarily mean government subsidization. But I mean if someone were ... (inaudible), a few sheckles tucked away in their pocket that they could co-exist with the farming income generated from farming then that would be great. But I don't- } it takes a personal commitment seven days a week, ten, 12 hours a day and I just don't see that as any longer being an option for either myself or anybody that I can think of. }

IN 00:26:46:03

Farming no longer possible here

OUT 00:27:02:08

IN 00:27:29:13

Commitment - not at option

OUT 00:27:47:02

A person needs relief from something, from their pursuit. And with the economies involved of small time farming, speaking of maybe less than 200

head of milking cattle or 1,000 steers or 10,000 hogs or whatever. I mean it's too bad to see the entrepreneurship taken out of farming, out of retailing, out of hardware, out of drug stores. It's just bigger is better and economically speaking that may be so but it's still a sad part of the American way of life to see it disappear and become gobbled up by international conglomerates and takeovers. I mean even the small time supermarket.

You look back as a kid, there used to be a couple here in town. And now those supermarket chains are all being bought up by overseas international companies, even the local ones. So the day of the corner market certainly disappeared 25 years ago. But now the giants of the food marketing industry are disappearing to headquarters overseas.

Q: What was the value for you personally of growing up on a farm?

A: It was an experience that I would have hate to not been a part of an agricultural operation of some kind. I was fortunate enough to be a part of more than one. One could be grateful for being part of one but two or three times that is even better. And I look to the Flints with the haying and the dairy operation, my own parents with the orchard operation that we had. But yet again, there's my grandparents on Old Sudbury Road with a small

*New Tape*

*IN 00:06:25:09*

*Own experience  
"fortunate"*

*OK*

*Not great*

*OUT 00:00:52:00*

IN 00:01:09:11

Grandparents  
dead set  
against  
mechanization

OUT 00:01:41:07

IN 00:02:05:27

Haying by hand  
with horses

OUT 00:02:26:23

IN 00:02:39:05

Garbage route

dairy operation, vegetable and pigs. And I can remember as a kid my grandparents' farm they were dead set against mechanization of any kind in the fields. And any operation that could possibly be done or carried out by mechanization they chose to do by horse.

And that included plowing of the fields, cultivating of those fields. Towards their last years when my uncle, my father's brother, one of his brothers, was running the operation he did contract out with a farmer in Wayland to bale the hay. But that was late, that was probably through '58, '59, through the mid 60s when they sold the place over on Sudbury Road. But up until then everything was, the haying operation was all loose with pitchforks and that type of thing. And you got it on the horse and wagon that way and then brought it to the barn. And then you either went up on a hay fork that came out of the loft or else the wagon was pulled into the barn and it was hand pitched up to the loft.

And then to support the pigs, obviously they don't live on commercially purchased feed and grain and what not. That meant people had a garbage route. Those who had pigs had a garbage route. And that necessitated going from house to house. And that was great as we were kids, to get on the wagon on a Saturday morning and go with our uncle

*Fern as kids*

*Turning 16*

*OUT 00:03:18:12*

*SEE TRANSCRIPT*

*IN ON PG 18*

to pick up the garbage. And of course he enjoyed the extra hands because he didn't have to get off the wagon. We were the jumpers that went and got the pail. But then it got on in life and my brother and I turned 16 and one of our immediate tasks at hand was Saturday morning was no longer riding on the wagon, it was driving my father's pickup truck. ]We used to take the pickup truck across town to pick up my uncle-- **GO TO PAGE 18**

[end of side A]

Q: What was the value for you personally of growing up on a farm?

A: It was an experience that I would have hate to not been a part of an agricultural operation of some kind. I was fortunate enough to be a part of more than one. One could be grateful for being part of one but two or three times that is even better. And I look to the Flints with the haying and the dairy operation, my own parents with the orchard operation that we had. But yet again, there's my grandparents on Old Sudbury Road with a small dairy operation, vegetable and pigs. And I can remember as a kid my grandparents' farm they were dead set against mechanization of any kind in the fields. And any operation that could possibly be

*Transcript Repeated from pg 14*

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*Repeated  
on pg 15*

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(OUT 00 03:18:12)

IN 00:03:17:27

Feared girls  
would see them -  
ducked down

00:03:36:14

OUT 00:03:46:08

We used to take the pickup truck across town to pick up my uncle and then go on the garbage route. We'd always live in constant fear that the girl we were going to go out with that night would drive by and see us picking up garbage and maybe have second thoughts and not quite carry the prior appointment through for that evening. So we kind of ducked down if we'd see somebody coming. )

But then you'd have to get the truck home quick and wash it out because there'd be runoff from that in the back of the truck. And you wouldn't want to pull in to get an ice cream at the drug store and soda fountain at the railroad crossing, to have the smell of the swill in the back of the truck permeating the business district, so to speak, down there.

Washing out  
smell of swill

OUT 00:04:07:25

Q: You talk very fondly of these days. Just personally, how did you feel it changed your life? That it gave value to you?

A: Value derived from that, is it measurable?

IN 00:04:40:10

Value of experience

OUT 00:05:02:18

No. But can you go away knowing that an important part of Americana, so to speak, you contributed in one way or another? And as I said earlier on, I'm just thankful for the chance that I had to have a hands-on part of that. ) In that so many probably, and I wouldn't

venture a guess as to what portion of the population grow up without having even visualized a farming operation of any kind, and so much of my family's heritage is involved with agriculture that again, it's just another fortunate aspect that I was able to be part of that too. }

OUT 00:05:25:22

Q: Do you have anything else you want to add that maybe I haven't asked you?

A: No, I think between this presentation and my 45 minute presentation with the board of selectmen of the fincom today I think I'm just about talked out.

[end of interview]