

Interview of Howard and Frances Towne

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by Dan Rothman for the New Boston Historical Society

transcribed by Teri Harkins



Interviewer notes:

In 2012 the Historical Society discussed the need to collect memories of New Boston from some of the older citizens in town. My first interview was with Howard and Frances Towne, who were 93 and 85 years of age at the time. I arrived at the Towne home equipped with a digital recorder and an old cassette recorder for backup, and I planned to limit the interview to one hour due the age of my subjects. After *two* hours, my subjects still had many more stories to tell me but I was unable to keep up with them.

In the photo are Frances and Howard speaking at Old Timers' Day, a June 2014 Historical Society event at the New Boston Community Church.

I thank Teri Harkins for transcribing the 2012 interview. I've added to Teri's transcription some headings in bold text to make it easier for the reader to scan for topics of interest. —*Dan R.*

FT – Frances Towne

HT – Howard Towne

DR – Dan Rothman (interviewer)

Frances Towne and her children

FT: I am Frances Byam Towne. I was born here in New Boston in -- do I have to tell? -- 1927.

DR: You don't have to tell me anything you don't want to.

FT: It's no big secret. I have a birthday on Friday, and I will be 85. So, I've lived here for a long time.

DR: Tell me about your children.

FT: Bradley is the youngest. Brian is the oldest, and he is married to Donna. And he has two sons. One lives in Maine; one lives in New Mexico. And then they have -- they have two children each, who are our great-grandchildren.

DR: Bradley, and Brian.

FT: Right. And Dan and his wife, Carol. They live here in New Boston. I don't think I mentioned that Brian now lives in Maine, moving up there about two years ago -- was it?

HT: Yes.

FT: -- after living here all his life. He thought it would be nice to be near his grandchildren and so forth. So, at retirement, he moved up there.

And let's see. We got to Dan. Dan has two stepchildren, Casey and Brianna; and Brianna has three children; Noah, who lives with Dan and Carol, and two others, Jacob and Autumn.

Then we have Rodney, who everybody knows; and he is married to Gina; and they live here in New Boston; and he is, as everybody knows, a member of the Board of Selectmen here in New Boston.

Then we have Bradley, our youngest, who lives in Concord and is co-owner of a florist shop up there.

DR: Howard, did Frances remember all the kids?

HT: Oh, yeah. She remembers them all.

DR: Good. I want to make sure she didn't miss a son or two.

FT: I didn't miss any.

HT: She knows more than I do. She spent more hours with them than I did.

Howard Towne and his ancestors

DR: And were you born in New Boston, also?

HT: Yes. I was born in town, up on Beard Road.

DR: And you now hold the Boston Post cane.

HT: Yes, I do. Before you go -- you probably haven't seen it.

FT: I think he was there the night you got it.

DR: And that's the cane for being the oldest citizen in town, which you almost are. There's that one lady, I think, who's a little bit older.

HT: Apparently. I don't know who it was. I have no idea, so I couldn't verify it. She was a little bit older. Somebody said over near Gougeville or over that way. I have no idea who that poor lady is that she didn't...

FT: She doesn't want it. She absolutely refused it.

DR: Right. So, we're glad it ended up with you.

HT: So, it just seems impossible to me that I'm there, the oldest citizen that they know in town.

DR: It's wonderful. Are you allowed to say how old you are now?

HT: How old I am? Yeah. I am 93.

DR: Ninety-three.

FT: Well, I just got a birthday card from his cousin, who is 94.

DR: So, you come from a line of people who live for a long time?

HT: Yes. I am.

FT: His grandfather had a Boston Post cane in Peterborough in 1910, when it was -- first, it was established in 1909; and his grandfather, James Towne, received it in 1910.

DR: So, Grandfather James Towne was living in Peterborough.

HT: Right.

DR: How did the Townes end up in New Boston?

HT: My father came here for work at the Whipple Farm. He had worked for the Bass family up in Peterborough when he was younger. He was driving a team when he was 16-years old for a farm up in Peterborough. And then he came down here. And I don't know what year he came down here, but he worked for J.R. Whipple at the dairy farm.

FT: Well, he married your mother in 1916.

HT: Right.

DR: And their names, your father and mother?

HT: My father's name was Fred -- we called him Fred; but it's Frederick Howarth Towne.

FT: And not Howard. Howarth.

DR: And he married your mother, who was?

HT: Ruth Eleanor Mitchell.

DR: In 1917?

HT: She was from Weare, South Weare.

DR: Were they living here in New Boston at the time?

HT: No. My father was. I don't know where, unless he was staying at the boarding house, which was on Boarding House Hill, what I call Boarding House Hill, Depot Street. At that time, there was a boarding house there. I just gather he was there.

Some time along, his mother moved into town; and I just gather he moved in with her. I never followed it enough to say that that's the facts. I just know she did live in town.

So, that part of it -- my mother was born in South Weare when her father was a milk-team driver that brought milk down to the creamery. I believe that that's where he first met her, because she used to ride with him on the wagon. And they picked up milk when my father was working.

After he left Whipple Farm, he went up to work for Eben Dodge, on Beard Road; and the milk wagon came through there and picked up milk; and I gather that's where they met.

DR: So, they met. And then where did they move early in their married life? Do you know?

FT: They didn't move. They lived all their married life on the farm up on Beard Road.

Frederick Towne's Farm on Beard Road

HT: Because Mr. Dodge passed away and my father bought the farm. They were married, apparently, about the same time that Mr. Dodge passed away, is -- by the way -- I haven't checked the dates or anything.

That's why I say, without a diary or something, you can't.

DR: Okay. We've got an idea. So, Beard Road, is the farmhouse still there?

HT: Yes, the barn and -- my nephew owns it.

FT: I don't think that's accurate, Honey.

HT: My sister owns it, but my nephew lives there. That's the way it is.

DR: So, from the Weare Road, if I turn onto Beard, there's a couple of new houses. Is that near to the Weare Road?

FT: It's not far in.

HT: You know where the truck place is? When you're in front of that, if you look up on the hill, you can see a barn. That's my father's barn.

So, that's up probably 200 yards from 77, but you can see it through the woods.

DR: I can picture the place.

HT: Okay. And the house stands in front of the barn. So, it's on Beard Road where they branch. The road runs at an angle, so that brings it over where you can see from 77 up to the barn. So, he lived there all his life after he married. Then that's where we were born. My sister and I were born there, and --

DR: There's just you and one sister?

HT: Yeah. Well, there was another child, but the child died shortly after childbirth. So, we're the ones existing.

DR: And your sister was who?

HT: Esthermary. It's all one word, so don't spell it wrong.

FT: E-S-T-H-E-R-M-A-R-Y.

HT: Hadley. She married a Hadley from Weare. Robert Hadley, I should say.

DR: So, you grew up on the farm?

HT: Yes, I did. I was there until -- until I went into the service. I wasn't away from there many hours until I went into the service.

DR: So, this was a dairy farm.

HT: Yes, it was. We had -- well, off and on, because we had trouble with one herd of cattle. They had Bang's Disease and he had to dispose of all of them. He lost the whole herd at that time, a beautiful herd.

I'll always remember him buying them. He bought them in Milford. When they came to test them, they found that they had Bang's Disease. That meant that you had to get rid of them. They were milking cows. They were all --

FT: Jerseys?

HT: No, no.

FT: Short horns?

HT: No.

FT: Well, I don't know then.

HT: I can't think of it. But it was a whole herd of the same cow. [Howard later added: The herd was Brown Swiss.] It wasn't a mixed herd. But he had had other cattle before then. He bought a guy's whole farm herd down there. That guy hadn't had them tested, which my father didn't check on; so he ended up losing them.

DR: Ouch.

HT: Yeah. More than ouch.

DR: Well, what did that mean? As a farmer, was he able to continue farming?

HT: Oh, yes, he did. He went back. But I can't remember how long he stayed before he bought more cattle to come in. But he bought more cattle from cattle dealers and farmers around. He brought his herd up again. The barn, I think, held 20 head. But he never had 20 milking cows. He had probably 15 head of milking cows, and he had a little young stock.

DR: So, I'm trying to do the arithmetic. You were born in 1919?

HT: Yes.

DR: And then you went into the service.

HT: Yes, in 1940.

FT: January of '42.

HT: Yeah. Right after Pearl Harbor, January of '42.

Fred Cann's poultry farm and orchards

DR: So, from 1919 to '42, you were working on your dad's farm.

HT: Well, no, because after I went out of high school, I guess I worked for him for about six months; and then I went to work for Fred Cann at the poultry and orchard farm up here on the hill. Then I stayed there until I went into the service. So, I had those -- what would it be? -- three years.

FT: What, dear?

HT: Three years that I worked for Fred Cann before I went into the service?

FT: You were 22 when you went into the service, so it would have been about three years.

HT: That was a poultry and orchard farm up there. I had studied agriculture in school, so that's apparently why I got the job there. I didn't have any problems. I went to work there, taking care of 2,000 hens and I don't know how many trees in the orchard he had. But he had a big orchard. Bill Hooper and I worked up there. We took care of poultry and worked in the orchard too when we had time. So, we stayed -- I stayed with agriculture all that time until I went into the service.

When I got back from the service, I went back there and worked for about a year; and then I went back in the military, so I don't have much civilian life. Actually, my military totaled up 35 years, when I finally got out. When I reached 60, I had to leave. So, that was really my occupation from then on, until I reached the age of 60; and then I retired. I tell my wife I got kicked out. She doesn't like that. But, at 60, I had to leave. All I could do was go in and pick up my clothes and stuff. I was done.

Military service vs. Farming

DR: What were your thoughts? In other words, I'm wondering: You had made a career out of the military, as opposed to going back and farming.

HT: Well, farming hadn't appeared to be progressive, and it wasn't being progressive. It was going downhill in New Hampshire most of the time. There wasn't anything there that enticed me enough to think that I could stand living on the farm and making the money to exist.

My father struggled all his life. I figured – I don't know how he managed. He struggled financially all his life. Most of the farms did around here.

All the farms struggled for their lives. So, I just fathomed that I needed to go where I was sure of my money, and that's where I stayed.

But I was only a reservist most of the time. I only got a total of seven years of active duty, and the rest of it was all reserve time. And reserve time gave me the privilege of being a civilian, taking care of military aircraft, which was hard to understand; but I became a Civil Service worker.



Note: Howard worked as an aircraft inspector for most of his career. Our interview included a lot of military history unrelated to New Boston, which I've edited out, except for this one incident:

HT: So, I actually grew up with aircraft, started out with the basic old DC-2, was my first aircraft I worked on, which was a Delta Airline which was confiscated by the government.

That was my first airplane that I was assigned to. That was my plane for a few months. In fact, that's the one I crashed on.

We were moving to a new base, and that aircraft came in from an overhaul. And I was assigned the crew chief on it, and we were having trouble with an engine. And our -- my whole squad left by either the other two aircraft we had or by truck, to go up to North Carolina; and I stayed to get that one in condition to fly.

And I convinced the commanding officer that it would stay in the air 20 minutes and I couldn't guarantee more than that, and it was only about 120 miles out that we were going. He said we should be able to make it. I says, "If you do things right, we should stay in the air 20 minutes." But I said, "You've got to take away some of the safety factors," which was checking the engines before they go out and take off. He followed my suggestions; and we were in the air only 12 minutes, so we crashed. The engines, I later heard, had been repaired improperly at the depot; and that's why they failed. We crashed in a swamp. He made a perfect landing and I'm here. *(The complete unedited interview with Howard and Frances is in the Historical Society.)*

Back to Frances

DR: This was all before Frances was on the scene, true? You met her after the war?

HT: Well, I met her -- I knew her when we were in school, because -- but I just knew who she was and who her parents were, because my father bought a horse from her father, bought a cow from her brother, and stuff like that. So, I knew of her. She was a kid.

DR: Sure.

HT: I was growing up, too. But, no, I didn't really meet her until after I got back from the war. That started our -- when I got back from overseas.

DR: What do you remember about that, Frances?

FT: About what?

DR: This gentleman courting you.

FT: Well, would you mind if we went back to my beginnings, my parents and so forth? Because my dad was born in Richmond, New Hampshire, and grew up in Winchester, New Hampshire.

DR: And his name was?

FT: His name was Jesse, J-E-S-S-E, Willard Byam.

And he didn't come up to this part of the country until he was about 19-years old. He had an aunt who lived in Goffstown, and he came up to visit her and look for a job. And he got a job offer on a farm up here, where he worked for a while; and then he left there and took a job on a farm on top of South Hill. It was the Dodge Farm, the Lyndol Dodge farm. And my mother had grown up on the next farm up the hill.

Byam farm on South Hill

FT: So, that's how he met my mother, whose name was Emily Josephine Upton; and they were married in 1907. And I had three older brothers. It was Donald, Harold, and George Elwin, usually called Elwin by the family, because there was an Uncle George someplace in the picture. And then I was the youngest by a lot of years, 11 years, in fact.

And my two older brothers were born on the farm on top of South Hill, on the Upton farm; and then my next brother next to me and I were born in a house on South Hill which is no longer there. It burned. So, that's the history of my being born.

And I lived there --

DR: Speaking of being born, home birth typically back then?

FT: Oh, yes. Yes, indeed.

The Village School

FT: And I went -- I never went to district school. [New Boston had up to 18 "district schools", usually one-room schoolhouses.] The district school closed on South Hill the year before I was old enough to go to school. My older brothers all went to it, but I just never got to a district school. I came to the village to first grade and went 12 years to that school, that high-school building, that stood where the fire station is now.

World War II

FT: So, I lived my four years of high school during the four war years, so it made a big difference in what we were able to do growing up and just things weren't available. You know, you didn't have any nylon stockings. They were put into parachutes. It was a different world.

DR: What else did you miss?

FT: What else did we miss? Gasoline.

You didn't go running off to the movies very often. But, you know, they had movies up here at the school in the village. They had them on the playground in the summertime and at the town hall in the winter. So, my dad would take me down to the movies occasionally.

DR: Take you in what?

FT: Let's see. He must have had a pickup truck by that time, a Dodge pickup, a rather old one. And what did we do? You had to make your own good times. We were very active at the Grange. Young people joined the Grange then. All us teenagers belonged to the Grange. And one of our members -- well, actually, they had seven children, I think -- was a square dancer; and he would bring down his music and play it and call the calls for square dancing after Grange meeting. And we had a kazoo band. We would have hobo parties and would do that kind of stuff, all at the Grange. It was a very active place at that time.

And also we had more activities at the school, of course, nothing like they have today; but, to us, it was something to do. We had our school dances right in the main room of the high school; and the principal taught some of us to dance. So, we had good times.

The School Bus

DR: I'm trying to picture you. You're six years old, going to first grade. How did you get from South Hill all the way to the village?

FT: On a school bus.

DR: Okay. Just as we would today.

FT: Oh, yeah. Just as you would today. Only the buses were a little different in those days. The beginning ones that I rode on were panel, like a panel truck without any windows; and the seats went along the side; and they were covered with leather. And, of course, if the bus driver put his brakes on, we went like this.

Eventually, they made a law that there had to be windows in it. So, he took his torch and cut holes in the side of the thing and put windows into those holes so that we had windows. But they were pretty different than those beautiful buses you see going by nowadays. But we got there.

Frances remembers the Village School

DR: I'm trying to picture class sizes, how you'd have lunch, and things like that.

FT: I carried my lunch. My mother put my lunch up. And class size? Well, when I graduated, there were ten in my graduating class. Four of those were tuition students, because New Boston High took tuition students from Frankestown and Lyndeboro, so that made us have a little bit bigger classes.

Actually, one year, in this high school there was only one girl in the class; and she was a tuition student in that particular class. I can't tell you the particular year it was, but before my time. But that's how I got to school.

And we still had -- we had our class plays; and the seniors had a play so that they were earning money to go on a class trip, which was rather a limited type of class trip because the war was on. We went to New York City -- we couldn't go to Washington -- and everything was blacked out. There were no lights on Broadway or anything such as that. Everything was blacked.

DR: How did you get to New York City?

FT: On a train out of Manchester. Some of the parents took us down to the train, and we took the train into New York with our principal and his wife as our leaders.

DR: About how old would you have been?

FT: Seventeen.

DR: And had you traveled out of New Hampshire before then? How common --

FT: I had traveled out of New Hampshire to Connecticut, because one of my older brothers lived there; and one of my other older brothers would drive my father and mother and I down maybe once a year to visit. So, I did get as far as Connecticut from home. But all my years were not as exciting as his (Howard's).

Frances attended Hesser College

FT: But then, when I finished high school, I went to Hesser College in Manchester, which at that time was one building up on Concord Street. And we had our own transportation from New Boston to Manchester. There was a bus that went from New Boston to Manchester. I don't just know when they started doing it, but I know it ran all through the war.

HT: Well, he was running it when I joined, because my father brought me down.

FT: Yeah. But that was the beginning of the war.

HT: I caught the bus to go to Manchester to catch the train.

FT: Yeah. So, but my dad would bring me down to the village every morning, because he was retired by then; and I would take the bus to Manchester. But this bus came out of Goffstown and the Public Service Company buses had the franchise on Elm Street, so he could not drive on Elm Street. So, we went down Canal Street. I got off the bus at Water Street on Canal. I walked up Water Street to Elm, crossed Elm, and walked up Concord Street to the college.

And I was late to school, so every afternoon when school was out, the English teacher at the college gave me my spelling test, after school, because I had missed it in the morning. I don't think people get that kind of service anymore.

And then I walked from there down to where the old Carpenter Hotel used to be. You walked down to Elm and turned left and go. I don't know what's there now.

HT: You don't know what street it was?

FT: I don't know what street. I don't know the name of it, but that's where the bus left from. It's actually where they stopped. That was the terminal for him, but I got off before. I had to walk up Concord Street.

DR: What were you studying at Hesser?

FT: Secretarial course. I did that -- probably must have gone for a good ten months. It wasn't a

September-to-June thing. It went on before I graduated, and so along about that time he came home from the war.

DR: And had you set your cap for him, if that's an expression?

FT: No. I hadn't set my cap for anybody in particular. But we were -- there was a dance going on in the town hall. You have to go back to when I was young. You could go to a dance. You didn't have to have a date. Everybody went. It was just everybody went.

Howard meets Frances

FT: And the dance was over, and my dad had come down to pick me up from the dance. He (Howard) was standing out in the hall. I can see him yet; and he was standing there, talking to him, in his uniform. He asked my father who that girl was over there, and it was me.

So, that's the -- was the beginning.

DR: How did he look in his uniform?

FT: Handsome.

DR: He was handsome.

FT: Of course.

DR: And what were you thinking, Howard?

HT: Well, it's odd, because I asked her father who that girl was who come strolling up the center of the hall. I used a different word. She didn't like that. But, anyway, she was just walking up, because the dance was over, coming out to meet him; and I says, "Who in the world is that girl there?" He says, "My daughter."

Well, when I had seen her in the school and everything, she wasn't the type that I thought much of.

FT: He insists that I had pigtails.

HT: Because I thought she was spoiled.

FT: Probably was.

HT: But, anyway, I saw her; and that started --

I don't know whether I spoke to her that night; but I belonged to the Grange and so did she. So, I met her again later on and --

FT: You must have been home before I finished Hesser, because you used to come down and pick me up after school.

HT: Well, I was going to say she -- when she graduated from Hesser, she asked me to escort her to her graduation. We went to the graduation.

FT: You never went to my graduation.

HT: That wasn't the graduation we went to?

FT: No. You just went to our ball.

HT: Oh. It was the ball. Okay. She was all dressed up.

FT: I had to invite him to the ball. He couldn't invite me very handy, so I felt very strange, calling up a boy and asking him to take me anywhere. You didn't do that.

HT: I still remember that, because she had asked me to escort her; and I was working for Cann. I believe that's the correct incident. But he had bought the creamery at the time and was going to put chickens or something inside it. And we were doing something outside, and we had an old GI Dodge pickup with a winch on the front. And we were hauling some stone or something out of the front of that; and the cable was tangled; and I got a bar to try to untangle the cable.

Well, it untangled or something; and the bar came loose and sliced my head the night that I was supposed to take her to the ball; and I always remember how close that came to me not being able to go to the ball.

FT: He went with this thing up on his head.

HT: But, from then on, well, we had dates and so forth. That was the beginning of it though. Her walking down there enticed me a bit to get acquainted.

DR: So, you had just returned from the war.

HT: Yes.

DR: You hadn't seen her in four years.

HT: I didn't have any civilian clothes, so I was down there with my uniform on. You weren't supposed to do that. After you were out, you weren't supposed to do it. But that's what I had to wear. I wore them for about a month, I guess. I finally got civilian clothes so I could go partying.

That's the way I came to first meet her. And you can carry on.

FT: We got married.

DR: Soon after?

FT: No.

DR: A year?

FT: It was in '45 that you came home.

HT: Yes.

FT: We were married the next year.

HT: We got acquainted.

DR: So, you called Howard up to invite him to the dance at Hesser. So, everyone had phones.

FT: Oh, yes. I never lived in a house without a telephone.

DR: This was by the end of the war.

FT: No. We all had telephones. Of course, his mother had to answer the phone, and I had to ask for him. And girls weren't supposed to ask for boys.

DR: Really?

FT: Oh, no, no, no. It wasn't acceptable, but I had no choice.

The ball was at one of the hotels in Manchester, and I can't remember the name of it. I don't think it still exists. I think it's long gone now.

Growing up on South Hill

DR: So, you grew up on South Hill.

FT: I did.

DR: The youngest by quite a bit, which is why Howard thought you were spoiled a little bit.

FT: Maybe.

DR: But did you work hard on a farm? Were you living on a farm or --

FT: My dad was a carpenter. We had a 12-acre farm, just a little farm and house, of course, and a barn attached. But we never had any large herd or anything. We always had at least a couple of cows, so there was plenty of milk for the house and so forth; but we never had a big amount. After my dad retired, he put in a few more cows and sold milk. But most of his life he spent carpentering as a cabinetmaker.

DR: So, what do you remember growing up? What did you do for fun?

FT: What did I do?

DR: When you were a child, what kinds of things?

FT: You know, I don't think I did anything in particular. I grew up alone, really, because my brothers were so much older. It was like being an only child. And there were no children in the neighborhood, and we were two-and-a-half miles out of town. So, I read a lot of books. I always read a lot of books, and I still read a lot of books. I love to read.

HT: You worked for some of the neighbors.

FT: When I was old enough, yes.

Then I got summer jobs with summer people. We used to have a lot of summer people in New Boston.

DR: Why is that?

FT: Well, they liked it up here in the summertime. Well-to-do people would come up and buy an old farm and remodel the house and so forth; and we had one up -- one remodeled place on South Hill. It's still there, beautiful place. And at different times there were different people on the hill. I worked doing housework in the summer. And then clear up on top of -- they call it Taylor Hill. If you go up South Hill to the end of the road, which is the farm where my mother grew up, and take that left -- I don't know if you've ever been there. But there's a log cabin clear up on the top of the hill.

DR: I don't remember. I've biked all the way up South Hill to Mont Vernon, but I don't remember the log cabin.

FT: You've got to take another left after you get up in there to go up to the log cabin.

And a retired colonel -- he was a cavalry man, in fact -- lived up there in the summertime, he and his wife. I used to work for them, which was a real fun place to work, because it was an education with the people who used to come visit them. And they were lovely people. They were always so nice to me.

But there was a very big shortage of gasoline, so the colonel would come down to where I lived, pick me up in the morning to go to work; but I walked home from the cabin up on top of the hill after I finished work, because he didn't have enough gas to do it twice. And so I worked up there for them.

There was another family named -- this man was Colonel Taylor. It's still the Taylor place up there. It is now owned by a lady named Alita Agee, who is his granddaughter, and a lady named Marilyn Taylor, who is his son's widow. It's still in the family, so we are invited up there for dinner usually once every summer, when the Agees are up there. And I love it. It's just like going home to me, on top of the hill.

And the cabin is -- the original cabin has stayed the same; but they've remodeled and built on a beautiful sun room with all windows and so forth.

They have improved it; and I think they've added on some bunks out where the garage used to be, for the grandchildren and this kind of stuff. But it's a -- it's a -- to me, it's home up there.

I used to pick blueberries up there. When I was in high school, my sister-in-law and my mother and I used to go up there and pick blueberries and ship them to Boston. I think we got something like 25 cents a quart.

DR: Now, you mentioned your mother -- you passed your mother's house. I'm trying to picture it. So, the Uptons lived on South Hill?

FT: Yes. Right up at the top. It's a big old colonial house right at the top of South Hill, end of South Hill Road.

DR: Now, did Brian and Donna live there?

FT: They lived in there. Brian works for Dr. Charles Townes, who owns it now. He owns it now, except that now he's 96, 97-years old. He has put it -- turned it over to his four daughters.

DR: But that was the Upton house?

FT: Yes.

DR: And that was Townes, completely no relation --

FT: Yes. It's got an S on it.

But Brian and Donna lived up there for 40 years in the small -- it was a small house originally that the Townes remodeled for them and built on it. They built on a second story, basically, put up two bedrooms and another bath upstairs and built on a big living room and so forth in the house that, you know, was just part of the farm.

So, yeah, that's where you're at. But we used to pick a lot of blueberries up on top of that hill. That's about the way I grew up.

And there was another place down further down the hill; and now Dr. Townes' daughter and her husband own that; and they're remodeling that. And I used to work there. It was owned by a man named J. Brooks Keyes, out of Boston. He was involved in owning sugar plantations on some island. I know he only had one daughter; and when he flew there and his daughter went too, his wife insisted they fly in separate aircraft, because she was just so afraid of losing one, because that's all she had for a family.

I worked there. And I guess I worked for -- there was a Dr. Hodgson that owned the house down below that. What's her name, who owns the Cuddy house?

HT: I can't think of it.

FT: Well --

HT: Oh. I can't think of her name.

FT: Martin, Sue Martin. Do you know where Sue Martin lives?

DR: Where the road turns, South Hill Farm.

FT: That road all got changed. The road used to go straight through there, right through where the big living room is now. When some people purchased it that had lots and lots of money -- they were involved in Scott Paper -- and they had the road moved so it goes where it is today; and they built this big living room and so forth.

Before that, it was owned by a Dr. and Mrs. Hodgson. He was a surgeon from Boston. They weren't big, wealthy people. They didn't do a lot to it, but it was a place to get to when he wanted to get away from the surgery and so forth. They were nice people. I worked for them quite a bit.

So, there were places where I worked through high school and kept me out of trouble some of the time.

DR: Some of the time.

How were you -- this tape apparently doesn't make a noise when it stops. That's fine. I show that we've been talking an hour. How are you both doing?

HT: How are we both doing?

FT: We're okay. We're fine.

DR: Can you both keep going, or do you need a break? That's my question.

FT: Do you need a break, dear?

HT: No. It's interesting, because -- It brings back memories and --

Retirement

HT: When I retired, she had already planned, financially, buying a trailer, having the car paid for and so forth. So, about two or three weeks after I retired, we were on the road with a trailer to have a vacation, a long vacation. We went to Alaska.

DR: What year did you retire, about?

HT: Seventy-nine, right? Yeah.

HT: We can talk all night here about the things we have done, because we --

FT: But it's not historical, Honey. They're looking for historical.

DR: I'm looking for the New Boston stuff mostly.

So, one day I've got to hear an Alaska story, but I guess that's not too related to the topic.

FT: No, not really.

Raising a family

DR: So, I'm trying to picture it. You raised the four boys in this house?

FT: Yes.

DR: So, you married in '46; and then Howard pursued his career, sort of military/sort of civilian, for another 30-something years.

FT: Well, mostly military, because he was working for Fred Cann's poultry farm when we got married; and then he spent one summer working for his dad; but he knew the poultry farm and his dad's farm too were not for him. And he drove -- he was an egg buyer for HP Hood. He went around to the farms, buying eggs. But that didn't -- that was just the wrong timing, because that's when, around here, the poultry business was going down. So, he decided he wasn't going to stay there.

So, that's when he re-upped and went into the Air National Guard and got his job there at Grenier Air Force Base.

DR: So, it was Grenier that you spent most of your career when you were in --

HT: About half, two thirds of it, I would say, over there before they closed it and sent us to Maine.

FT: It was something like 12 years, because Brian was going to the university --

HT: That's right.

FT: -- when you moved over to Pease, because you used to pick up his typing and bring it home to me to send back for him the next morning.

DR: Was Pease a commute for you? You wouldn't go down there every day?

HT: No.

FT: Yeah. He did. Of course, you did, dear.

HT: We thought about moving when they first sent us over there and closed the base down here; but I just couldn't see moving -- leaving New Boston. I knew New Boston. She knew New Boston. It was -- to me, it was going to break the family up. It wasn't a living. And I finally just said, "No. We are going to travel." I ended up in a carpool. There was four of us. I was -- well, there was nobody from here.

Yeah. Smithy.

FT: No. Smithy lived in Goffstown.

HT: But it started here. I'd start here and go down and pick up somebody in Goffstown and then Pinardville, and then there was one guy in Manchester en route. I did that for -- until I retired, except -- well, I tried for a month to drive alone; and I wasn't getting ahead with money. I was putting it all in the gas tank. Besides that, it was tiresome too, because when we rode in the carpool, I slept half the time in the carpool. It was nice to relax. You get through work over there and head for home and go to sleep, come home, let the guy drive.

They would do the same thing when I was driving. But that's the way I went to work over there.

FT: And back here, the boys were -- two of them were in high school. Brian was in college, but the other two were in high school. Bradley, of course, being little, was in grade school.

But we also had two sets of elderly parents here in town; and we could just see that he might as well travel back and forth to Pease as me travel back from the Portsmouth area to look after my folks, because I was the only girl, and look after his folks. So, it just worked out better that way; although, he was gone an awful lot. But, at the same time, I could handle the things that needed being done here. So, that's what we did.

HT: Figure that I was gone probably eight hours.

FT: Eight? You were gone 12, Honey.

HT: I would be gone 12 hours a day, so she was on her own here.

FT: And on top of that, you had to be on duty two weekends a month.

HT: I had to do that, too.

FT: So, he was gone a lot. And sometimes they sent him off somewhere to put an engine in another aircraft.

But I can tell you -- this is not history, but it is a funny story. He was gone. I don't remember where. Brian had already left home. So, it was Dan and Rodney and Brad. We had all gone to bed one night, two boys upstairs. Bradley was little and he decided he was going to sleep downstairs with mom. So, he was asleep on the couch, and I had gone to bed.

All of a sudden, it was the gosh-awfulest noise in this house you can imagine. "Crash, bang." Well, I flew out of bed, ran to the foot of the stairs.

The boys were at the top of the stairs. "Is that you, Brad?" "Is that you, Brian?" whoever was up there. "Mom, are you all right?" The boys came down. We couldn't figure out what that horrible noise was. Well, I knew I wasn't going to go to bed until I found out what it was.

So, finally, I said, "I'm going to go down and check the cellar." So, here are the boys lined up behind me, going down the cellar stairs to find out what.

And it must have been funny, because by that time Danny was 17 or 18 and he had a full beard. Danny is six-one, a great big guy; and he's *behind me*, going down the cellar stairs to see what the noise was.

Well, there had been a jack with a post on it down there, and gravity or something hit it. One end of it hit the furnace. The other end of it hit the wood pile. It made a lovely noise. The back cellar door was wide open. I mean, we didn't close things up back in those days.

So, I went and shut the back cellar door, and we all went back up and went to bed.

DR: So, the brave boys followed behind you.

FT: Oh, yes, very brave. Yeah. They were going to protect me.

Going to School

DR: So, I'm trying to picture, Howard, how you went to school and the schooling situation for your boys. You were living up on Beard Road?

HT: Yes.

DR: Did you come into the village for school?

HT: In my 12 years, it was all the village school; and I think --

FT: He was too close to the village to get a bus.

HT: It was a mile and a half. There was a two-mile limit for the bus. So, we got to school. Normally, my dad brought me down to the creamery. The creamery was running, and then that shut down. And then the Manchester Dairy System had a little room up here; or, I guess, the farmers had one.

Where the hardware store is now, there was a little room in that barn, about the size of this kitchen, called the milk room; and the farmers brought their milk in there.

So, my father brought the milk down in the morning; but, at night, I would have to hike home. No matter what the weather was, we hiked home. I think it was 1937 that -- that was my junior year in school. My dad had had a car -- I don't know how many years. But, anyway, he had a '21 Dodge touring car. He finally got it back on the road again, because he was so tight on money that half the time you wouldn't use the car. It had to just sit there.

We would use the horse and wagon to bring the milk down.

But, anyway, he let me have it to come to school with, and I drove that '21 Dodge to school until I graduated. So, I didn't have to walk back and forth then.

But we would hitch-hike or get a ride. Neighbors, some of them came and got their children.

So, my sister and I would hitch-hike with them if they were coming up empty; and there was a guy that used to get his mail or something that lived up near Jim Dodge's. He had a Nash, a neat little car. He would come down, apparently, every day for something in town. I want to say at least 50 percent of the time he would pick us up somewhere along the sidewalk going home and take us up to the corner of Beard Road and drop us off so we didn't have to walk all the way.

Then Oliver Dodge used to come and get his sister down at school, and he'd also pick us up and take us up to the corner and drop us off. So, I would say probably half the time we had a ride.

My sister and I would have a ride. It wasn't all the way home. We'd still have to walk from the corner in.

FT: Well, that wasn't that far.

HT: But --

FT: Well, you might find it interesting about my going to high school. You know, the school bus picks up everybody now. High school students were not transported by the Town. If the bus driver had room and was willing, he could pick up a student, a high school student, and they paid him. My folks paid so much a week for four years to the school bus driver to get me to the school, to the high school.

DR: Was high school optional? It's mandatory that you go to school now until 16 or something.

FT: I don't know when that law changed. I remember at one time they could quit school if they graduated from the 8th grade. I don't know when the law changed; but I do know that, when I was in high school, the Town did not transport if you were in high school, for free. Well, the Town didn't pay for this anyway. But my parents paid the bus driver so much a week.

HT: That was the same way when I was driving the bus. I couldn't pick up high-school kids and drive them home on the bus.

FT: Well, you weren't driving that bus. They were transporting high-school kids then, weren't they?

HT: Yes. But you weren't allowed to take them if they were in the limits.

FT: Oh, okay. I don't know when it changed.

HT: The kids that lived up on Meetinghouse Hill, I couldn't take them up on the bus. I'd go by them and --

FT: Well, they lived in the limits. It's not the same thing, Honey. I was outside that limits.

HT: I know.

FT: But they still would not transport me.

HT: No. That's right. The high-school kids didn't get free transportation. That changed. I don't know when it changed.

FT: Now they pick up and stop for everybody. I guess it's a good thing they do, with the things that happen nowadays.

They have something up at the school which I had never heard of; but one day there was a lady and she says, "I have to be up to pick up my daughter at the -- where she gets off the bus. If I'm not there to get her, they'll bring her back to school." And I had never heard that before.

I said, "Is that your rule or the school?" She says, "It's the school," because the house is not within sight of the end of her driveway, which is in hogback (Mont Vernon Road). They just don't leave her off if her mother's not -- or someone she knows is not there to pick her up.

Agricultural Class

HT: The school system has changed. I have to go back to the school. I was lucky enough to get aggie class, so I became more acquainted with agriculture, agricultural class, as part of high school. It was an optional course. I did four years of that, because I didn't like the other things that there were. Like the secretarial, I didn't want any of that, so I took the agricultural class.

FT: That's vocational/agricultural, it's called.

HT: VO-AG, it's called.

But I had four years of that; and it took me from anything -- well, I call it self-sustaining for a farmer. They taught me how to do blacksmith work. They taught me how to do woodwork. They taught me how to do -- well, raising vegetables. I had to have a project, so I raised potatoes and peas for my project from my dad's farm.

They taught us how to judge animals, and we would go to Concord and judge at a dairy farm up there. We'd go to Durham to be selected of who was the best judges. We took, well, everything that was really involved in agriculture at the time around New Hampshire. We learned the whole program.

At one time they tested us for driving, for plowing -- my dad volunteered his team -- not with a tractor, with a team. We went up in one of his fields, and we all had to try to plow a furrow down across it and get judged whether we kept the horses straight down through the field or not.

DR: So, who teaches you blacksmith and woodwork and how to plow?

HT: Our principal, Mr. Nadeau, taught us the woodworking, thought us the anvil work. He was our teacher. The school class had an orchard up on the hill near the cemetery that they operated. They taught us how to spray apple trees. They taught us how to prune apple trees, how to pick apples, how to market them. We used to send the apples to Boston to make money so we could travel somewhere for some of the work.

Like, we made enough money one year, 1936 or 7, one of those years. Anyway, we made enough money so that the aggie boys could go to Missouri.

FT: Kansas City.

HT: Yeah. Kansas City, Missouri.

There's a club, the FFA, you've heard of that probably, Future Farmers of America. Well, that had a convention once a year in Kansas City, Missouri; and we made enough money from apples and stuff almost to take us there. It cost us individually \$45. We had to pay that, besides what the school had, in order to go to Kansas City for -- I think it was a week. We went by rail.

And there we took part -- some of our people took part in the program of the national FFA association. But it was a real educational program. We went to -- it was quite an experience for us, because none of us had left New Hampshire, you might say.

DR: That's what I was wondering, if you'd ever been far from New Boston prior to going to Kansas City.

HT: The farthest I had been was Springfield, Mass., going to the exposition down there.

DR: The Big E.

HT: Because we were a judging team and so forth, so we had been down there, paid for again by the school apple orchard stuff. There was enough money to take us down there; and we went in an egg truck, a box truck from New Boston, down to Springfield to that fair.

I'll always remember it, because there was about 15 of us in the back of that truck. Kenny Purington owned the truck; and he had been picking up eggs. It was a box truck, no windows in it. We went down there.

That was about the first of my going out of state. It was a good experience, because I didn't know what was outside New Hampshire.

FT: Interestingly, when Brian was in high school here -- he graduated in the final class out of here (New Boston) in 1965. But when he was in high school, he took VO-AG; and he became the state president. I guess, first year of college, he was the state president.

New Boston schools

DR: So, all of your boys went to the (New Boston) school; and, obviously, the next three must have gone to Goffstown or some other school.

FT: Danny finished junior high in New Boston; and Brian graduated from high school, that year, in '65. Of course, Danny had to go to Goffstown for high school. Rodney and Bradley went junior high and high school to Goffstown.

DR: And that little Central School was built in the 1950s. They must have gone there for the lower grades?

FT: Yes. Yes, they did. By that time, they were using the whole high school building for high school and junior high. So, Brian -- they started there. They all started in the school and some of them in the white buildings.

While they were building, Brian, I think, was in the third grade -- I think it was Brian -- when they were building the first part of the Central School, because he was going to school over in the depot.

His class was over there, because they used the two little white ones for the first and second. I remember saying to his teacher, I said, "I'll bet you'll be glad when they get the new building finished," because they moved over there in the fall, after -- but it was after the opening of school. And she says, "No." She says, "I like having my children all to myself."

(The white buildings were self-contained classrooms between the new Central School and Town Hall.)

HT: The (New Boston) high school was -- they took care of everybody. You could study Latin, you could study French and so forth, when I was in school.

FT: But not when I was. They changed it somewhere in between us.

DR: Now, how many -- I'm trying to think of the offerings that you're describing there. Your graduating class would have been how big?

HT: It was 14, right?

FT: Eleven.

HT: That's right, too. There was 11 in my graduating class.

DR: How could they offer such variety of classes, I wonder?

HT: Well, there was -- let's see -- two of us in aggie.

FT: Well, the classes had -- grades had classes together, for one thing. Freshman and sophomore classes were held -- you studied together, junior and senior; and they alternated the choices, some of them. Of course, you had your required subjects.

But then the next year, you were graduated; and you became a senior; and somebody else came up; and you were taking the opposite classes. But you did all your classes. At least they did when I was in high school.

HT: It was mixed constantly, two classes.

FT: Two grades were in the same class, but they --

HT: In my class, I was one of the only -- there were only two in my class, I think, that were aggie. Bob Boulter was business class. They had what they call junior business.

Who is the girls that took -- some of them took Latin.

FT: Well, the girls wouldn't be in aggie anyhow.

HT: No.

FT: The first aggie students, girls, was when Brian was in high school.

HT: Yeah. They weren't allowed.

FT: There were no girls in aggie.

HT: The girls, most of them -- you had some of them who were taking, as I say, Latin. There was about three different categories that my class could be in.

FT: But all the languages were gone by the time I got in high school. No French.

DR: There were no foreign languages?

FT: No foreign languages at all. But we had aeronautics.

DR: What did that entail? I mean, I can't imagine.

FT: I'm not sure I remember too much about it; although, I liked it, except there was a lot of math in it. Of course, we had to figure wing angles and all these things; and I'm not a mathematician.

DR: Because some teacher had an interest in it? Why would they offer that?

FT: Teacher must have -- Laurie Eastman taught that.

HT: Who taught it?

FT: Laurie Eastman.

HT: Oh. Laura.

FT: And she must have studied it in college. She was a teacher who came to us right out of college. We had a lot of young teachers. When I was going to high school, we had a lot of young women right out of college. There were no men to come and teach. They were all fighting a war.

And so that was the first that I ever knew of a married woman teaching school. We've always said, young women out of college, they'd probably teach a few years and then get married; and then they wouldn't teach anymore. Married ladies didn't teach.

But, during the war, they started hiring married women to teach. I had a couple at least who were married.

World War II

FT: And there weren't very many men around. It didn't make any difference what you were. If you were over 18, you were gone. That was a rule that hurt a lot of people, a lot of young men, because if you turned 18 before you graduated in June, unless you enlisted, they took you immediately. You didn't get to graduate. If you enlisted, then you could finish that year, finish your senior year and graduate and then go.

There were four boys in my class; and I remember going to take our class pictures -- I think a Wednesday -- the day after graduation. They didn't take them in the fall like they do nowadays. They took them after graduation. You'd have a class picture, as well as our individual pictures. The next day they were in uniform. They were gone. That went on every year.

Enlisting

DR: Did you enlist, Howard, or were you drafted?

HT: I enlisted.

FT: He didn't want to be in the army.

HT: Well, I had heard that, if you worked on a farm or were a farmer family or something like that, you'd get exempt. Well, I didn't fancy going into the military, so I went and saw the -- well, I asked my boss, Fred Cann, about it; and he says, "No." He says, "You have to go, as far as I'm concerned."

So, I went and saw my old headmaster. I had been out of school. I knew him. I figured he could give me some advice, and I went and talked with him. He lived up where the therapist is now. I went up there to see him. Bob Bose and I went up. And I said, "I've got a problem." I says, "I don't want to go on the service and be drafted"; but I says, "The boss isn't going to sign anything for me to stay on the farm." "Oh," he says, "He doesn't have to. Probably the best thing to do is go and enlist."

Well, it took me a while to make up my mind; and another buddy of mine says, "Well, let's go down and enlist, Howard." So, we caught the bus and went down. We were going to be Marines. We went up to Marine recruiting, went in and took the physicals, stripped down, and got all that done with. And I came out of the room and started to put my clothes on; and the sergeant says, "Get all your clothes on and get out of here."

I says, "I haven't done any paperwork." He says, "You're not going to"; and he tore up all my forms, threw them in the waste basket. He says, "You lied to me"; and I says, "I never said anything to you."

"Well," he says, "anyway, you've got a problem."

"Well," I says, "what's the problem?" He says, "You've got flat feet." I didn't know I had flat feet. Anyway, he says, "Get your clothes on and leave."

So, Bob Boulter, he came out. He hadn't got his clothes started on; and the guy says, "Get your clothes on"; and Bob says, "How am I doing?" He says, "Same thing. You don't need to sign anything. Just get out of here." He says, "What's the matter?"

"Well," he says, "you've got one bad eye." Bob says, "Yeah. But it doesn't bother me" or something like that.

He says, "Leave." He says, "You guys, get out of here." He says, "We can't use you."

So, we both left; and we came home; and I guess it was the next day or two we went back down; and I joined the air force and Bob joined the navy.

DR: And they didn't mind your flat feet and bad eyes?

HT: Heck. But my feet gave me a different direction in my life, because I went to Devens. I took my civilian clothes and sent them home, and they gave me a uniform. When they checked my feet down at Devens, they said, "Well, we don't have any shoes that will fit you." So, I says, "Well, what do I do?" He says, "You're going to wait. You can wear your civilian shoes."

So, fine. They got me all inoculated and everything, with my gang that was there, to ship me to a school. I went to the train. I had eight shots for everything. I went on the train with my bags and everything; and the sergeant says, "Off. Get off."

I says, "Why?" He says, "You haven't got the right shoes on." I says, "They didn't give me any yet."

He says, "Off."

So, I got off and went back to the headquarters; and they said, "Well, you've got to stay until your shoes come." About a month later the shoes came, and they gave me eight shots again.

DR: Oh, no.

HT: Oh, yes. I wasn't good at taking shots.

But, anyway, I got my boots; and they sent me to another training post. I was going to go to Missouri. I ended up then going to Mississippi. I wanted to go to Missouri, but I went to Mississippi. That's where I had to go to school. That's an incident in my life that really upset me. I was kicked out of the Marines, accepted by the air force; but my feet again got me, because they measured my feet to be 13 size and I wore 11-and-a-half.

When I got the new shoes, well, I didn't wear them much, because they gave me combat boots; and I only wore those shoes for inspection. I kept them polished and everything, because I didn't have to hike in them or anything. So, I didn't care if they didn't fit until I got in my outfit and I'm supposed to show -- you have your shoes out for inspection.

And I don't know who found out about it or what, but they found out that those shoes, I wasn't wearing them. I guess I wanted to go out on leave or something with a pass, and you had to dress in dress shoes to do that. I didn't have dress shoes.

Anyway, I went to the supply sergeant or the officer. He says, "What's the trouble?"

I says, "Those shoes are trouble for me. They're too big."

He says, "We'll probably take care of that." I says, "Well, what do I do?" He says, "I'll give you some shoes in a short time." I think two or three days went by; and he called me in and says, "I've got some shoes for you, sergeant." I wasn't a sergeant; I was an airman. He gave me some shoes. So, I ended up with a big pair of shoes and the shoes that I could wear; but I always appreciated him being nice to me, because I didn't have to sign for them. He just handed them to me.

FT: When did you ever get some dress shoes?

HT: Oh. I didn't get dress shoes until -- I don't know where -- I really don't know -- until I got out of the service even. I think the shoes we got always were lace-type shoes, dress shoes.

Them work shoes were combat boots.

FT: You mean after the war. You don't mean after you retired, because you always had dress 18 shoes.

HT: The fact is: When I got out of the service, I was in brown shoes; and when I joined the national guard, it was black shoes. They changed the uniform, that part of it. You had to have a black tie and black shoes; and then, in another couple of years, they changed the uniform to blue, took away the army uniform and changed it to blue. And then you wear your black shoes and your black tie.

But anyway, that situation there has always bugged me. Why did they measure my feet wrong? But if they hadn't have, I wouldn't be here today probably.

DR: You would have gone to Missouri and then what?

HT: I didn't know where I was going anyway.

DR: Okay.

HT: But the stream of things that have taken place and bring me to where I am today is just unusual.

DR: It would have been different.

HT: Because I didn't ask for any of it. The only one I asked for was to go to Missouri. And from then on, I asked for nothing in the military. As the result of that, I'm here.

DR: Well, that's good.

HT: The situation, it's a long story of how things work; but you don't know what the answer is to them or why it worked that way.

I always feel so lucky. When they took me off flight pay, I didn't have flight combat and my buddies did and I lost buddies.

DR: Sure.

HT: I feel lucky.

DR: Things worked out for the best.

HT: It's so unbelievable. How did it all come together? You know, you try to tell somebody your story. How did that happen? So, I feel very lucky. I talk military. Well, it was quite a -- I have to say this: I felt very proud. I got on the school board after -- I forget what year it was -- '63.

FT: You were on when Brian graduated, Honey, because --

HT: Anyway, I got on the school board here in town, talking about things happening; and at one of the meetings --

(Telephone interruption.)

FT: That's probably a politician, but I'll go check it.

HT: At one of the meetings, the superintendant was there; and we got to talking about teachers and stuff. He says, "Why aren't you teaching?" I says, "Well, I don't have a teacher's degree." "Well," he says, "I agree to that; but you ought to get your degree." I says, "What do I have to do?"

He told me, "You've got to take English"; and I didn't like English and that. And he told me all these little things that I had to do to get my degree to teach.

And he says, "You should go. With what you've been talking about and I hear here in the meeting when you're talking, you should be a teacher." And I said, "Well, I just can't go back to school. I don't want to go take English and this stuff." But I always felt pretty good to think that my military education had given me that; that I was passing in his review to become a teacher.

New Boston High School

HT: But the school up here, when I was there, I thought it was a good school, those that were around me and the teachers and everything. All the things that they wanted to teach us, wanted us to know, seemed very important, to me, no matter which class they were in. So, like my friends that didn't take aggie, heck, we were good friends. Just because they were taking English or something like that didn't mean that I couldn't associate with them.

The school was like that. It wasn't -- I don't know. It wasn't specialized, I call it. You learned to live a normal life by going to that school.

FT: Bob Todd wrote an article for the (New Boston) Bulletin not too long ago that commented on being a small school and you had individual attention and so forth and got to know your teachers, got to know your classmates.

DR: Well, I'm wondering. I think a good way to end today's recording would be on school memories. Like you had that great story I was reading, re-reading, in your newspaper article about the ink wells that you were using.

FT: That's his memory, not mine. I didn't have ink wells.

DR: I was never quite sure who was writing the story (article by Howard and Frances). But I was interested in stories from school and teachers who made an impression on you or other incidents like the ink well.

HT: Well, there's other things to talk about, well, like my traveling.

DR: I was thinking that could be another day.

FT: He wants to talk about the school, Dear.

DR: If we could wrap it up with the school, just for today's session. (Editor's note: the interviewer was exhausted but the interviewees could have gone on forever.)

HT: School is important to me.

DR: This is good. Tell me again, in your words, about the ink wells. I think there was a wood stove and some frozen ink or something.

HT: Well, when I started school, the school didn't have a central-heating system. They had a wood stove. It was probably three-feet long. I can't remember. It must have been about three-feet long anyway; and it had a shelter around it, of galvanized steel around it, so that you couldn't run into it. If you were walking by, you wouldn't hit it or anything. It probably stayed about 18 inches from the stove, all the way around, square.

And we -- I was downstairs. The kids used to get -- if we were short of wood, we'd go out to the wood shed and get wood for the teachers to stoke the fire. Anyway, the ink that we used -- we used straight pens. We didn't have fountain pens. I don't know when we finally got a fountain pen. But we didn't have fountain pens when I was in the fifth grade.

DR: What is a straight pen?

HT: A straight pen is just a -- well, it's a pen with a blade.

FT: A thing with a point on it. The points come off. They get dull and you throw them out.

HT: They just slide onto a black handle.

DR: That's it?

HT: Mine was a black handle. So, you dip it into the ink.

FT: Yes.

HT: About that long. And then in the corner of your desk, up on the right-hand corner, there was a hole to hold a glass ink well; and the ink was not -- didn't come to the school all made. The school made it. Whoever was in the classroom, the teacher probably, was supposed to make it. But anyway, my buddy and I volunteered to do the ink one day for the school teacher; and we had to mix it in a glass bottle, probably about a gallon of ink.

But you had to warm it to get it to stir in and become ink, water and whatever the coloring was. So, we had made it up, and we thought that we could speed it up a little bit and set it on the stove. So, we thought, well -- we really thought nothing more about it after we put it on the stove. We were in our seats; and, all of a sudden, there was steam coming off the stove and blue was flying all over.

It had come to a boil and broken the glass jar, and all of that stuff was running on the floor. They had a metal pan on the floor, but it didn't stay on that. That was kind of a bad situation for us, to clean it up.

FT: I swear. That blue stain was still on the floor when I went in the grammar room.

HT: I was just going to say I think it stained that floor permanent, because it was all wood floors, no covering on them. They didn't have linoleum or anything on those floors then.

FT: They were oiled, I think.

HT: And Bob and I -- well, the teachers told us we shouldn't do that; but we didn't plan it that way. But we used to have to take it out of that bottle and put it in the ink wells. That's what you

had to write, with a pen, with a straight pen. There was no reserve in the pen. You'd keep dipping it.

DR: So, you made ink, fetched wood for the stoves. Did you have any other chores at school, anything else you had to do at school?

HT: The only thing you had very much regular was clapping the erasers. You'd have to take those out the back door at night; and, possibly, if you'd been acting up a bit, why, you'd have to do them all. And quite often you'd have to clean up, wipe the blackboard, with the erasers. If you had a math course left on the blackboard, after a class, why, somebody would get called to wipe those down.

It was a matter of following orders. It was part -- really part of school, but we didn't think so. You were supposed to do things right, and you would have to do those things to make up for it. So, you did have to clap the erasers. I don't recall ever having to empty a wastebasket, because the janitor was supposed to empty the wastebasket. So, we didn't get cornered for that. There was no trash can to go put it in, so...

DR: Now, did you bring lunch to school, like Frances did?

HT: Yes. I always had a lunch.

DR: In a pail? We were trying to figure out all that stuff we've got at the historical society. Did you have some kind of lunchbox or a sack or what?

HT: Yeah. Lunchbox. I've still got -- I still think there's one of my old ones in the attic or somewhere around here.

FT: Usually they were like this.

HT: Square.

FT: And a Thermos bottle in it. And it had somebody of the era, pictures, some characters, comic characters, Mickey Mouse -- I don't know what -- that type of thing, pictures on them.

HT: Well, I used to have a -- my lunchbox was a tobacco box; and that's what I think is upstairs. It's a Mayo's tobacco, chewing tobacco. It used to come in a box about ten-inches long and about five-inches wide and about five high; and it had a latch on the front, so you'd tip it up. And I can't remember whether my uncle chewed or what; but, anyway, that's what I carried my lunch in for a lot of years. I didn't have one of the fancy ones. But I had it in that; and I never carried a Thermos, never while I was in school, because I don't think my folks ever had a Thermos bottle. So, I just had water or something like that. I don't think I ever had milk or anything.

DR: Was there indoor plumbing in the school? I mean, this is in the '30s.

HT: I'd have to go back through and do some searching, because there wasn't a water system in that school for quite a few years. Finally, they put a well in across the road, up on the hill. So, there was one, but just --

DR: Gravity-fed.

HT: -- pressure from the hill that fed it. I remember it was -- somewhere along the line, it got in the entrance to the men's room, boys' room. It was just a skating rink in the morning, when we went in. It was just a skating rink. Well, you had the doorstep, what you call --

FT: Threshold.

HT: The threshold.

It was filled right up to the top of that, iced all over. I'll always remember it. If you were in a rush, you had to be careful when you went in.

DR: Now, the school, when you get there in wintertime, was the classroom kind of cold until the fire got going; or did someone come early?

FT: Oh. The janitor must have built a fire.

HT: The janitors had the fire going; but we had to help the teachers stoke them, because you had a block of wood that was two-feet long or something, because the stove was long; and it was a job to fire them, I think. I'm surprised that they expected teachers to do it, but they did.

FT: Did the high-school boys come downstairs and stoke the fires? I mean, a teacher, a woman teacher, would find it very quite difficult to put the wood in.

HT: That's what I don't know what happened, because I was in the grammar room while we did this downstairs. In my first three grades, I don't remember who took care of the stoves for Mrs. Leach.

FT: I don't remember who took care of them for my teacher either.

High School Workshop

HT: But in the room that I remember this taking place in, the ink and so forth, was in a room where we helped the teacher with the wood pile. They had a wood box in the corner of the room. They filled it up. The janitor filled them. But if it was a cold day, we used more than that.

So, we'd go out to the wood shed and bring it in, which turned into a workshop after the central-heating system was put in. That wood shed out there became a workshop for the agricultural classes, while they -- well, we even did auto mechanics, too. We'd tear out engines, take an engine apart and put new rings in it, new bearings.

The shop that was finally built took us through almost everything, all of the things that you needed to do. You'd do lathe work. You'd do cut-off saw, planer work; and then you'd have a blacksmith's anvil in the corner; and you'd have your stove pipe for your coal for your heating your iron; and we had a post drill, which you ran by hand, for drilling wood and metal. It was a post driller. You've probably seen them in the shop. But that's what we were drilling holes with until we got electricity in the shop, finally. In my last years, we had -- we had a blower for the anvil, for the forge; and our saws, when I first went in, were run by a horse-and-a-half Fairbanks engine down in the floor. We had to crawl in the hole to start the engine.

DR: Was this gas-powered?

HT: Gas-powered. And that ran up through the floor with the belts and ran a massive pulley; and the lathe ran off of one side; and the power saw ran off another one. And we finally got a drill that also ran off the power -- off the belt lines. But we started out without electric motors. We worked up through it, so we graduated with electric motors.

But that's the type of schooling it was; and the school continually changed while I was in school. Like the central heating, I don't know what year it first came in; but I must have been upstairs by then, probably a freshman or something like that. I don't know what year it would have been. If I searched it out somewhere, I could probably look it up and find it; but they put in a central-heating system.

Also, somewhere along the line, they modified the school, because one end of the school faced the west and had a whole mess of windows on the side. They discontinued the windows and put a blackboard in there so that the class, instead of facing out the windows, facing south, to the windows in the south, they turned you around and you were facing that wall and didn't have the sun in your face. So, they modified that whole wall.

Home Economics class

FT: Well, the stairs to the HOME-EC department went up behind that wall.

HT: Probably so.

FT: I know they did. I don't know when they put them in, but I know that that's how you got up to the third floor. The HOME-EC department was the remodeled attic.

DR: Is that what you did when the boys were out playing in the wood shed? Were you doing HOME-EC?

FT: Well, yes, when I was in -- well, he did all this before I went there. But, sure, we had a home-economics class. It was first only the high school; and then, eventually, it went junior high. I can tell you approximately when, because I did not have it in junior high; but I had four years of it in high school. But they had remodeled that third floor and extended the fire escape and everything up there.

DR: What did HOME-EC include?

19FT: Well, it depended on which year you were taking. It alternated, cooking, sewing, learning how to entertain. We had to --

DR: How did they teach you that?

FT: We entertained once a year. We had a mother and daughter banquet. We did all the cooking and decorating and fixing the tables and the whole thing.

That was part of our training, how to properly set tables and do things like that. And we'd have the mother and daughter banquet in the springtime sometime, when we knew enough about what we were doing. We cooked the meal and served it.

DR: Did your mom enjoy that?

FT: Yes. I think she did, because she had raised three boys. So, I think she did, after she got up that third flight of stairs.

DR: She was hungry.

How about clothing? Did you dress nicely for school or just wear everyday clothes?

HT: The best that you could afford is what you used. I remember --

FT: Not necessarily, Honey. There were people in school that could afford to be really all gussied up; and they -- that's not the way you went to school. We wore saddle shoes and Bobbie socks, never pants. It was not permitted to wear pants to school.

You wore skirts and usually skirt and sweater in the wintertime and skirt and blouses in the warmer time of school.

You know, one of the nicest things I've always said about New Boston when we were young and when we were young marrieds, we were all in the same boat. Nobody had any money. You know, we were starting out, but we were starting out equal. You weren't looking at somebody else that had a brand new house and things, beautiful furnishings. You just got what you could afford. But we were all in the same financial and pretty much educational level.

And I think people were happier when there weren't too many levels to the economy.

HT: Well, I always felt that the school made it possible for that grade of people to exist, made them self-sustaining. Like her cooking, it taught them how to cook. They didn't have to go out to a restaurant or anything like that. It wasn't there to tease them. It made it so you could come out of that school and make a living and have a living. It may not be the specialist. You wouldn't be an engineer or something like that, but you'd be able to do the whole thing. You'd be able to raise the food, prepare the food. You could keep your house clean, and all of those things were taught in the school.

FT: But didn't my mother sputter. We were taught in sewing class -- we were taught to do it right; and the patterns come with a layout that you're supposed to lay the sleeve here and the back of the blouse here and the sides here and the skirt across here, this sort of thing. You did it that way, and you came out sometimes with rather strange looking pieces left over.

Well, when my mother made a dress, she put it on the piece of fabric at the most economical way to do it. They taught us right. Mother did it economically, and she was always sputtering about how they taught us to do things like that. And I had -- I can remember maybe once I made something in school at least, and she took it apart after I got it home and did it the way she thought it ought to be.

Teaching in a One-room Schoolhouse

DR: Well, you raised an interesting point. How was your mother educated?

FT: My mother graduated from New Boston High in 1902. I have her diploma. I have it framed. It was this big. And she went, right from graduation, in that fall, she started teaching school, eight grades in the district school, right out of high school.

DR: Was it the same building more or less that you went to?

FT: Same building. Yes.

DR: She graduated from that village school; and she then went and taught eight grades in a district school?

FT: Right.

DR: Where was that?

FT: Well, the one she taught in was what we call over east. I don't know if you know where Chanceys live over --

HT: Bedford Road.

FT: -- Bedford Road, out that way and then off of it. Well, that's where her school was.

DR: Where on Bedford, more or less? This side of Sunday Driver Rock or...

FT: Where did Chanceys live?

HT: I'd have to go get a map.

FT: Oh. All right, Dear. Because she had to -- Chanceys lived -- this is the same Chancey family that live here today. Let's say their great grandchildren or something live across the street here and so forth.

DR: There are so many Chanceys. This isn't where Pulpit Road kind of splits off?

FT: It's over in there. They lived up on Wilson Hill Road. That's where the farm is. My mother boarded at that farm, and then she would walk down to the school in the morning and start the fire in the school so that it would get warmed up some before the children got there.

And she taught there until she married my dad in 1907. So, five years she would have taught over there. I remember seeing somewhere in a town report where she received, I think, \$28 for a term, a full term of teaching; and out of that she had to pay her board and buy her clothes and whatever. But that was how she -- that was her education, was high school.

DR: High-school education and then immediately went to teach eight different grades.

FT: Eight grades. And she was very proud of it. I have some souvenirs of it, but not handy by.

The last day of school was examination day. And the school board would come to your classroom, and you would examine your children in all exhibits. And my mother said she always did it without a book, all eight grades. She was very proud of being able to do that.

DR: So, we're looking at an old map.

HT: She's talking about -- this is the place. See, this says, "Warren." There's a schoolhouse there; and I gather that was -- her mother lived up at this house. So, I gather --

DR: This looks like Bog Brook Road. Is this McCurdy? I see "schoolhouse" here.

HT: McCurdy is somewhere. So, I just gather that this must have been the school that she taught at.

DR: Here's Baker, Dick Moody's house, the Baker farm. So, this is right near Sunday Driver Rock, in other words?

HT: Yes, it would be, just above.

(It was District School #2, now a private home on Bedford Road.

For more information see: <http://www.newbostonhistoricalsociety.com/school.html>)

FT: She said her brother, her older brother, would come and pick her up on Sunday night with the horse and buggy; and she'd go home to the farm; and then she'd go back over there.

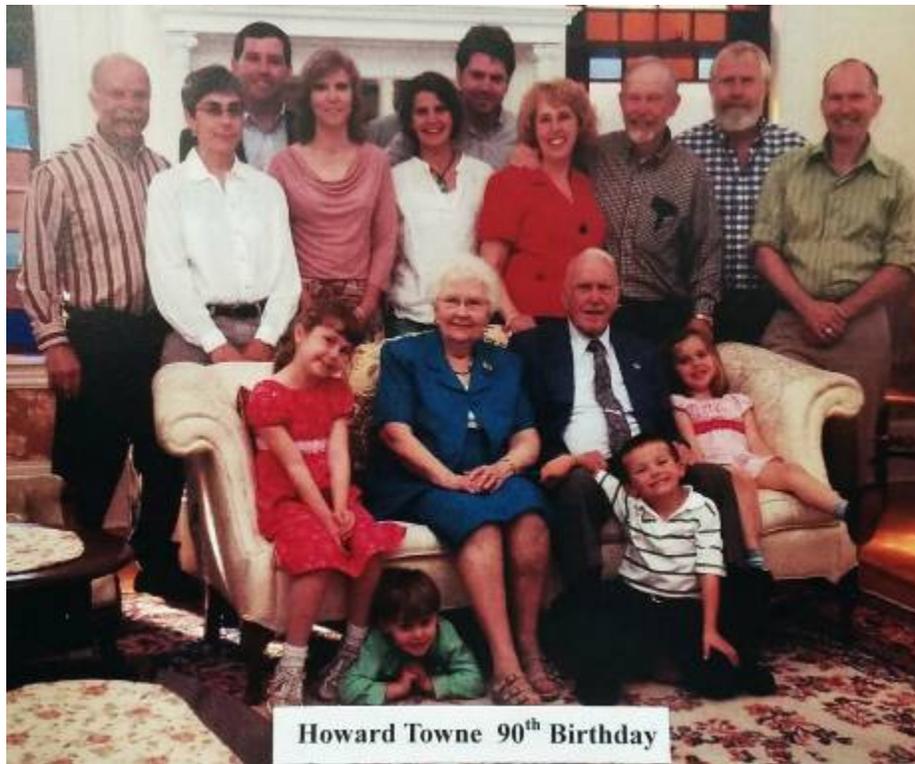
HT: From Upton's. That's what I keep this for, so you get a reference to what you're talking about, so we can say -- like there's mills and stuff were on here, too.

DR: This is great. I have a million more questions. I'm running out of energy.

HT: Come again sometime. We can do some more.

DR: Good. I'd like to.

(end of interview)



Frances & Howard Towne and their family – 2009

This photo was displayed at Howard's 100th birthday celebration in the New Boston Central School gym, in June 2019.