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**Gordon Wilson oral history interview
1972**

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Note: Moments where the speakers are unintelligible are labeled with the audio file name and timestamp for listeners' reference (i.e. T7_106_01.wav, 03:34)

INTERVIEWER: This is a tape done October 26, 1972, by Marge Lamey, with my father, Gordon H. Wilson, some of his personal reminiscences of growing up in the Adirondacks.

(Time elapses)

INTERVIEWER: Okay. Here we go. Now, I have the vital statistics from General about your family and your background and so forth. But what I would like to kind of start with is some general questions about you and your family, and where you lived, and what you did in those early days in Redford. And the first question that I have is, was that then considered part of the Adirondacks? Did the people who lived in Redford in those early days think of themselves as being in the Adirondacks?

WILSON: Oh, yes. Sure. Oh, sure.

INTERVIEWER: So, they were conscious of being a part of the Adirondacks --

WILSON: Oh, yes. Sure.

INTERVIEWER: Okay.

WILSON: Well, if you want to start with my beginning life in Lake Placid, here --

INTERVIEWER: That was before the Redford period?

WILSON: Well, yes. I was born here.

INTERVIEWER: Okay. Well, that was --

WILSON: 1903, the year of the big fire.

INTERVIEWER: That's right. I'd forgotten about that. And how old were you when you moved back with the family?

WILSON: Nine years old.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, I see.

WILSON: And so, I went to school here in Lake Placid.

INTERVIEWER: That's right. Okay. So, that's what we should start with, then.

WILSON: Yeah, if you want to start at the beginning.

INTERVIEWER: That's right.

WILSON: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: Okay. Well, let's start with the 1903 year, because I can remember you telling me that when you were born, which was April 9, that your father, my grandfather, was the only man in town, that everybody else was out fighting the fire.

WILSON: Yeah, fighting the fire.

INTERVIEWER: Hmm.

WILSON: And as soon as I was born, then my father had to go and fight fire, because the fire was right up to the edge of the village here.

INTERVIEWER: It was?

WILSON: Oh, yeah, right up here. It was right down here. Well, it crossed the [T7_106_01.wav, 02:33] down here and then up on to that mountain up there.

INTERVIEWER: Which was Cobble Mountain?

WILSON: Saddleback.

INTERVIEWER: Saddleback?

WILSON: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: And when did that fire start, and how?

WILSON: Well, it started, I think, in March, because if I -- I just don't remember the date that it started. I think it started in March, because it was so dry. They had no snow whatsoever, and no rain for a long period of time.

INTERVIEWER: No snow all winter, then?

WILSON: Oh, we had a little snow, yes, but not much. And then in the spring, in March, it was very, very dry, and of course, well, the fire just spread. It got started in the [inaudible -- 00:03:20], and then of course with high winds and dry weather, why --

INTERVIEWER: Well, now, I probably recorded some things. I just hadn't read it, or I --

(Crosstalk)

INTERVIEWER: You don't know exactly where it started?

WILSON: No, I don't. It's recorded in the history of the Adirondacks.

INTERVIEWER: I know that.

WILSON: I don't know where it started.

INTERVIEWER: I can look that up.

WILSON: I've forgotten all.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah. So, then, how big was the town back then? Do you remember, in terms of population?

WILSON: Oh, the population, I would probably say maybe 700 or 800 people.

INTERVIEWER: Mm-hm. And where did your family live, then? Where were they living when you were born?

WILSON: Right on [T7_106_01.wav, 04:02], right on Mirror Lake.

INTERVIEWER: Were there many other houses on the lake, or homes on the lake?

WILSON: Oh, there was a few, yeah. You know, and of course, there was stores there on the street.

INTERVIEWER: Mm-hm. Yeah, well, that was the [T7_106_01.wav, 04:16] was developed.

WILSON: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: Why at that point didn't people build more along the lakeshore?

WILSON: There was no room, because the stores were built right there, and --

INTERVIEWER: I know. But why weren't you -- do you know why the stores had been built up there away from the shore? Why wouldn't they have been built down there along the shore of the lake?

WILSON: Because there was no room down there. They wouldn't fit.

INTERVIEWER: It wasn't filled in?

WILSON: It wasn't filled in.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, I see.

WILSON: See? And they'd have had -- and, of course, then there was your steep hill on this side of the road, so of course they only had to widen the road there, which was about half as wide as the street now, you see.

INTERVIEWER: Mm-hm. Now, at one time, you remembered, and you mentioned having lived on what was called the Green something, Green --

WILSON: Well, yeah. We moved out there.

INTERVIEWER: By the --

WILSON: We moved out there on to that farm.

INTERVIEWER: Was that the only other place --

WILSON: Now, let's see. That was in 1907.

INTERVIEWER: 1907 --

WILSON: We moved --

INTERVIEWER: -- when you'd have been about four.

WILSON: Yeah. We moved out there.

INTERVIEWER: Now, what was that called, Green --?

WILSON: The Green farm. The Green farm, yeah.

INTERVIEWER: For a family name?

WILSON: Yeah, Charlie Green, and they called it the Green farm.

INTERVIEWER: I see.

WILSON: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: Now, there had been a lot of lumbering along in that valley, because that's the valley of the [T7_106_02.wav, 00:34].

WILSON: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. There was lumbering there.

INTERVIEWER: At that point?

WILSON: Well --

INTERVIEWER: Or was it during --

WILSON: -- yes, they was lumbering, because before we moved to the Green farm, my father and mother and grandfather and grandmother kept hens (ph) for Johnson.

INTERVIEWER: Mm-hm. Do you remember his first name?

WILSON: Hmm. Well, that was his first name. Is this thing running now?

INTERVIEWER: Yeah, it's all right. It's [T7_106_02.wav, 00:59].

WILSON: Fred.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, yeah.

WILSON: Fred Johnson.

INTERVIEWER: Right.

WILSON: Yeah. And he had a camp up by --

INTERVIEWER: A lumber camp, right?

WILSON: A lumber camp up by Roaring Brook.

INTERVIEWER: And where's that, then?

WILSON: Well, it's --

INTERVIEWER: Is that down in the back part of the --

WILSON: It's off the river road. It's off the river road, and then it runs -- let's see, that would be west, wouldn't it?

INTERVIEWER: West would bring you back toward what's now the main highway.

WILSON: Toward the main highway, and it went back west, and there I'd say about three miles. And there, he had a big lumber camp there and cut logs.

INTERVIEWER: And then they worked some other winters too, didn't they, for the same ranch? Didn't he move --

WILSON: Who?

INTERVIEWER: Your father didn't move up into the --

WILSON: Yeah. Well, he didn't move any farther. He used the same camp. We come in there two winters.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, I see.

WILSON: [T7_106_02.wav, 01:52] yeah.

INTERVIEWER: I see. But wasn't he one of those who also cut farther up in what's now the High Peaks area? Remember when you were doing that job for the Mountain Club on the Johns Brook Lodge? Didn't you talk then about there having been a lumber camp --

WILSON: No, I don't --

INTERVIEWER: -- that Grandpa worked at?

WILSON: No. No. No.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, that was the --

WILSON: That was the one that they worked at, right there. That was the only one. Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: So, well, why did Grandpa leave the meat market, then? Just because the wages were better, or just because both couples could work together up there?

WILSON: Because they could work together up there.

INTERVIEWER: Because otherwise, the meat market at Shay's (ph) was a year-round --

WILSON: Well, he'd been there five years at Shay's. Yeah, he worked there five years. He worked there before I was born, see.

INTERVIEWER: Right. I see.

WILSON: At Shay's Market.

INTERVIEWER: Mm-hm.

WILSON: Well, we were three when we went into the lumber camp, and four --

INTERVIEWER: So, you remember that winter, being in the lumber camp?

WILSON: Three and four. Oh, I remember being in the lumber camp. I can just remember it. I mean, you know, as a boy, and --

INTERVIEWER: And what did each of them do?

WILSON: Well, my grandmother and mother were the cooks, and my father kept the books, and my grandfather was the chore boy --

INTERVIEWER: Taking care of the --

WILSON: Taking care of everything, the camp and the wood and the cow. They had their own milk and butter and cream in there.

INTERVIEWER: Did they?

WILSON: Oh, yeah. And cows.

INTERVIEWER: Must have had a barn, then.

WILSON: Oh, yeah. Oh, sure, they had to have a barn for the horses. They probably had -- oh, probably had 10 or 12 teams of horses in there drawing logs all winter.

INTERVIEWER: How many men?

WILSON: Oh, I'd say probably 20 men, at least 20 men. Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: Not too big, then. Really a pretty good size.

WILSON: No, it wasn't a big operation, but it was a good operation for --

INTERVIEWER: It must have been kind of unusual to have women as cooks. Didn't usually they only hire men?

WILSON: Oh, no. Oh, no. No, they hired both men and women.

INTERVIEWER: I see.

WILSON: Oh, yes, and they still do in Canada.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, yeah.

WILSON: Oh, yes. Sure.

INTERVIEWER: You've seen some of both in logging jobs --

WILSON: Oh, sure.

INTERVIEWER: -- when you've been up the mountain?

WILSON: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: Hmm.

WILSON: You eat there.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, yes. Yeah.

WILSON: Yeah. Oh, yeah. Sure. No, they still hire women cooks in Canada.

INTERVIEWER: I just thought in the early days here that they hired mostly men, but they didn't?

WILSON: Oh, no.

INTERVIEWER: The women worked --

WILSON: No, no. There was a lot of women cooks here.

INTERVIEWER: What do I know?

WILSON: Yes, a lot of them were --

INTERVIEWER: Well, they generally, though, would've been married to somebody who was on the job?

WILSON: Well, yes. They were married and --

INTERVIEWER: No hanky-panky --

(Crosstalk)

WILSON: No, no. No, no. Well, not necessarily, no. They didn't necessarily have to be married to a man that was in the camp.

INTERVIEWER: No?

WILSON: Oh, no. They were real decent, respectable people. If any man wasn't, he didn't say.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, yeah.

WILSON: Oh, no.

INTERVIEWER: They rode them pretty hard? Who kept the water in the cans?

WILSON: The boss.

INTERVIEWER: And was Fred Johnson the boss?

WILSON: Yep.

INTERVIEWER: His own boss. He didn't hire somebody.

WILSON: No, no. No, he ran the work, see. He was the whole thing.

INTERVIEWER: He wasn't cutting for somebody else. He wasn't supervising for somebody else.

WILSON: Well, no. No, he was cutting --

INTERVIEWER: For [T7_106_03.wav, 00:22] Rogers or --

WILSON: -- for a company, but he --

INTERVIEWER: But he was working for the company.

WILSON: No, no. He was working for himself. He took the job. He was a jobber.

INTERVIEWER: I see.

WILSON: He was a jobber, and he took the job to put so many thousand feet of lumber to the river, you see. And then they drove it down the river, see.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, then so he didn't worry about the river operation.

WILSON: No, no.

INTERVIEWER: Well that's unusual, isn't it? I thought usually you had the same --

WILSON: No, no. Then that was a separate crew. That was a river drive crew.

INTERVIEWER: But often it was -- even though they weren't all the same men, still it was the same people running the job -- took -- were responsible to get them all the way to the mill.

WILSON: Well, no. No, that was up to the river drivers. And then he was the boss river driver then.

INTERVIEWER: I see.

WILSON: He had nothing to do with -- the jobber had nothing to do with getting it to the mill. He only got it to the riverbank. Then it was up to them to get it to the mill. They hired river drivers then. The drivers were -- well, that was in the spring.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah. What were they cutting in there?

WILSON: Spruce and balsam.

INTERVIEWER: And when did they go in at the beginning of the year?

WILSON: In October.

INTERVIEWER: And stayed until --

WILSON: April.

INTERVIEWER: April or so.

WILSON: Yeah. Stayed until they broke up.

INTERVIEWER: Where -- they didn't have a dam on that river to help with the river drive. They just used a natural water supply.

WILSON: Yeah, the natural water supply on the Au Sable River. Right.

INTERVIEWER: And he didn't drive it down the Roaring Brook part --

WILSON: No, no, no.

INTERVIEWER: He took it down to --

WILSON: No, no. He drove it to the river. He landed it on the riverbank, see. Right down the riverbank.

INTERVIEWER: Is that that trail that I'm climbing sometimes over in there --

WILSON: I would say that trail off of Roaring Brook is the -- if you go right up -- they tell me -- I hadn't been up in there in years, but they tell me that the bottoms of the camps are still there.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, really?

WILSON: Old Fred Johnson's camp. It's still -- you can see, you know, some of the logs and --

INTERVIEWER: Because it must have been a pretty fairly good-sized --

WILSON: Oh, it was a big --

INTERVIEWER: -- settlement there.

WILSON: It was a good camp. Good camp. Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: And did you ever know any of the people who handled the river drive?

WILSON: No.

INTERVIEWER: You were pretty small then.

WILSON: No, I didn't know any of them.

INTERVIEWER: What did you do in the lumber shanty all day as a kid?

WILSON: Played.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah, and doing -- you didn't have much --

WILSON: I'd slide downhill and play around and, you know, go around with my grandfather and then play around in the camp and so on.

INTERVIEWER: Did you have toys or make things or --

WILSON: Well, you made your toys. You didn't buy any. There wasn't any toys to buy. Only a few. So you made a little wagon and a little sled and so on.

INTERVIEWER: Now when Grandpa came back to the Green farm, was your grandfather also there? Did they live with them?

WILSON: No. No, they went back to the Stevens house thing, see.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, I see. Oh, so then Grandpa came back in the summertime and ran the farm.

WILSON: Yes. The Green farm.

INTERVIEWER: Yep.

WILSON: Yeah, yeah.

INTERVIEWER: For those two years. He didn't go back to Shays then.

WILSON: No, he didn't go back to Shays. He eventually went back to the club -- to the Lake Placid Club.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, I see.

WILSON: And still farmed and cut meat at the club, him and my uncle, see.

INTERVIEWER: I see.

WILSON: They farmed and they cut. He cut meat at the club.

INTERVIEWER: Because that job would have also been only a summer job.

WILSON: Yeah. Well, then eventually it got to be a year-round job at the club, and then we moved -- that's when we moved into town, and of course that's when I started going to school here, see.

INTERVIEWER: I see. Now I can remember one story that you told about living at the Green farm when you saw the first car -- the first automobile that you ever saw. Remember coming

down the hill on the opposite of the river and it startled you so to see the lights because you'd never --

WILSON: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: -- a wagon only carried one single light.

WILSON: One light.

INTERVIEWER: -- and here this thing came along with two lights.

WILSON: Two, yeah. That was --

INTERVIEWER: It almost scared you as kids, didn't it?

WILSON: Yeah, sure.

INTERVIEWER: Because you couldn't figure out what it was.

WILSON: I didn't know what it was with two lights on it, see. Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: And didn't you run over to see?

WILSON: No, we couldn't get over there.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, I thought --

WILSON: We [T7_106_04.wav, 00:18].

INTERVIEWER: So how did you find out what it was?

WILSON: Inquired the next day, you know, from people that came around and asked them what this thing was with the two lights on it, see.

INTERVIEWER: You don't remember how old you were, though, then.

WILSON: Well, I must have been, oh let's see, about 6 then. Yeah, 6 years old, see.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, dear.

WILSON: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: I like that story. And did you later -- whoops, I guess we're running out of tape here.

[Interview continues on cassette #T7_107)

INTERVIEWER: Okay, now we're ready to go again. Now, do you have any other particular memories of that period, living at the Green farm, or experiences that you had then?

WILSON: Well, no memories any more than it was pretty wild, I mean --

INTERVIEWER: Was it out there --

WILSON: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: Because now it's a big open field all the way down on both sides, because since then --

WILSON: Well, yeah.

INTERVIEWER: -- there has been more farming I guess.

WILSON: Well, then they was -- those fields were open then.

INTERVIEWER: They were?

WILSON: Down there on the road, but the fields up there have grown up. Where the Green farm was, there were some nice fields up there -- some good farm fields up there, because we had sheep and cows. I think we had three horses and I don't remember how many cows -- probably eight or ten cows. We had a big flock of sheep -- I'd say 40 or 50 sheep. Of course, it was pretty hard -- we had to watch the sheep all the while from the bears.

INTERVIEWER: Oh yeah?

WILSON: Yeah, and the wildcats, I mean, because they were quite a few -- quite plentiful. And you could hear the wildcats most any night.

INTERVIEWER: What kind of a call did they have, because we heard one in the woods not long ago.

WILSON: Well, they yawl, sort of a --

INTERVIEWER: A bark or a yawl?

WILSON: A yawl. Sort of a yawl. I just don't remember now just about how it sounded, so long since I've heard one.

INTERVIEWER: I think we heard one in the woods --

WILSON: Yeah, no doubt.

INTERVIEWER: -- a couple weeks ago. But the bears, you never heard, did you?

WILSON: Oh no. No, we never.

INTERVIEWER: They never --

WILSON: No, they don't make any noise. Unless they're fighting -- they growl if they were fighting, but --

INTERVIEWER: You never saw any like that in the woods.

WILSON: No, I never saw bear fighting the woods. Never.

INTERVIEWER: But they came around -- of course, they'd come around anyplace where there was free food.

WILSON: Oh, where there was food, wherever they could catch it, and of course it was easy to catch a sheep, and we lost quite a few sheep from bears.

INTERVIEWER: How about at night? What did you do?

WILSON: Brought them in.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, did you?

WILSON: Oh, had to bring them in.

INTERVIEWER: Into a pen, though --

WILSON: Well, in the barn, you know, right in a pen right to the barn because they were a little afraid to come to the barn.

INTERVIEWER: They were.

WILSON: And then of course we had a high fence around there -- high rail fence so it was pretty hard for them to get over without somebody hearing, and we had a good dog, and of course the dog would bark. Of course, most any dog is afraid of a bear. Only a bear dog.

INTERVIEWER: Oh yeah?

WILSON: Oh yeah.

INTERVIEWER: So what's a -- I mean, it doesn't have to be a special breed, just a dog that --

WILSON: Just any dog, unless it's trained to hunt bear.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, I see.

WILSON: Yeah, if a dog is --

INTERVIEWER: I didn't know they did that.

WILSON: Oh yes. If a dog is trained to hunt bear, then he's not afraid of a bear, but any other dog is afraid of a bear, and as soon as a bear comes around, he'd yell and bark and howl and go crazy. Yeah, he's really afraid. And so is a horse. A horse is afraid of a bear, too.

INTERVIEWER: I bet, yeah.

WILSON: Right.

INTERVIEWER: Well, how do they train a dog, though, to --

WILSON: I couldn't tell you. I don't know. You know, they were from over in Vermont where we went there. Well, my cousin's daughter --

INTERVIEWER: Oh yes, right.

WILSON: They had a couple of bear dogs.

INTERVIEWER: Really?

WILSON: Yeah. Yeah, they had a couple of bear dogs and -- oh, you don't want to make noise.

INTERVIEWER: Put it on there. I think it won't as long as you don't whack it too much.

WILSON: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: But they had just recently trained. I mean, these were --

WILSON: Yeah, they --

INTERVIEWER: -- why would they train them there --

WILSON: Because they wanted to hunt bear.

INTERVIEWER: For game, for sport or for protection?

WILSON: Yeah, for sport. No, for sport. They wanted to hunt bear for sport.

INTERVIEWER: I didn't think Vermont had that many bears.

WILSON: Oh yes. Sure they had. Well, that was one of the reasons that we moved from the Green farm --

INTERVIEWER: Was it?

WILSON: Because my mother was afraid up there. She was afraid to live there. See, my father was gone all day and of course --

INTERVIEWER: Well, that's what I was going to ask you. In the first place, it's a pretty good-sized farm for one man to live by himself.

WILSON: Yes. My uncle helped him, see.

INTERVIEWER: Yes, I see.

WILSON: But of course my uncle had to go to town with the milk and then he had to do other things and he was out, and my mother was there alone with just two little -- us two boys, see.

INTERVIEWER: I see.

WILSON: So of course she was afraid, and so she finally got sick of it after we lived there a couple of years or more, and she got sick of it and we'd go back to town.

INTERVIEWER: I see -- then he was working at the club.

WILSON: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: And that was year-round.

WILSON: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: So that he didn't have to --

WILSON: No. And we, well --

INTERVIEWER: No, that's all right.

WILSON: Well, shut it off until she gets --

INTERVIEWER: Yeah. Now the -- so then he just got out of the farming business as a whole.

WILSON: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: What were you doing -- leasing the farm?

WILSON: We were leasing it with the option of buying.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, I see.

WILSON: Lease it with the option --

INTERVIEWER: Who owned the property?

WILSON: Charlie Green.

INTERVIEWER: Oh yeah, you told me that.

WILSON: Yeah, Charlie Green owned it.

INTERVIEWER: But there were other farms -- there were quite a few other farms around there, so it shouldn't have been all that --

WILSON: Oh, no. There were no other farms near that one.

INTERVIEWER: Oh no? But you said they had been farming down there next to the river, which is only a short ways away.

WILSON: Well, yes. That was a mile down there.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, was it?

WILSON: Sure.

INTERVIEWER: I didn't realize it was that far.

WILSON: Well, yeah. All woods between there and the river.

INTERVIEWER: The river, right.

WILSON: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: How far was it from the Green farm up to what's now the country club -- Craig Wood Country Club?

WILSON: Oh, that's a pretty near mile through the woods.

INTERVIEWER: About a mile -- about halfway up that ridge?

WILSON: Yeah, and there was a farm up there. Woods farm was up there.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah, they farmed out over what is now the --

WILSON: The [T7_107_02.wav, 01:14]. Right.

INTERVIEWER: What did they grow? That was a pretty big operation.

WILSON: Same thing. Potatoes and cows and sheep.

INTERVIEWER: Some grain, they must have --

WILSON: Well, they raised their own grain, see.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah, grain and corn.

WILSON: Well, they couldn't raise corn. It's too cold up here for corn.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, is that right?

WILSON: Just grain.

INTERVIEWER: What kind of grain, though?

WILSON: Oats and buckwheat, and rye, peas and oats, which made awful nice feed.

INTERVIEWER: That was a combination -- rye, peas and oats?

WILSON: Yeah, and they ground it up, see.

INTERVIEWER: What kind of peas?

WILSON: Just wild -- field peas. They called them field peas.

INTERVIEWER: I see.

WILSON: Yeah. They were small, like peas that you make pea soup with.

INTERVIEWER: That you eat, yeah.

WILSON: Yeah. Called them field peas.

INTERVIEWER: And you called the mixture rye, peas and oats.

WILSON: Rye, peas and oats. And you had it -- it was awful good grain for any animal, cows or sheep.

INTERVIEWER: And you took it someplace and had it ground?

WILSON: Took it to the gristmill and had it ground.

INTERVIEWER: Where was the gristmill then?

WILSON: Well, I forget where the nearest one was now. I think Au Sable Forks.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, that far you had to make it?

WILSON: There was one there. And then -- there was one for a while at Lake Clear.

INTERVIEWER: There used to be one in Wilmington.

WILSON: Wilmington?

INTERVIEWER: Was that closed down by then?

WILSON: Yeah. I don't know if it was or not. And then the next one was where.

INTERVIEWER: Why wouldn't there have been one in Placid at that point?

WILSON: Oh no. There wasn't enough grain, enough farming, see. And a lot of people fed this grain without grinding it, or else they had a little grinder of their own that they run with the horsepower, or -- yeah, horsepower.

INTERVIEWER: Did people use dog power more than horse power?

WILSON: Well, they did for churning and washing clothes.

INTERVIEWER: More of the smaller things.

WILSON: Right. Smaller things. But they wouldn't run a grinder.

INTERVIEWER: No, no.

WILSON: They'd only run a grindstone and a washing machine, if you had one -- and a churn. They used them to churn and so on.

INTERVIEWER: Now, I gather that more people used horses than oxen. Was it because the oxen were more expensive?

WILSON: Well, the oxen had really -- no, they weren't more expensive, but oxen had really gone out of style then. They'd --

INTERVIEWER: But why, that's what I don't understand.

WILSON: Well, because people figured it was too hard to train them. They could train a horse easier and a horse was faster, because oxen --

INTERVIEWER: And they could also use horses for other purposes.

WILSON: Well, they could use the horse to go to town and draw their grain. If you started for Wilmington with a team of oxen, why, it'd take you --

INTERVIEWER: Two days.

WILSON: Two or three days to get there. If you started with a team of horses, you'd be there in one day, see. And so that's why they went from oxen to horses.

INTERVIEWER: And the pulling power was just as good.

WILSON: Well, just as good, yes.

INTERVIEWER: Now, Grandpa's specialty was really horses, wasn't it?

WILSON: Right.

INTERVIEWER: And he was something of a ferrier, too. I mean, he treated their illnesses and he shod them and he -- wasn't he called on a lot by other people?

WILSON: Oh yeah, veterinarian, to do -- yes, he was called on --

INTERVIEWER: Veterinarian's work without the training.

WILSON: Right, right.

INTERVIEWER: Did he just pick it up?

WILSON: Well, they trained themselves. You know, they had to train themselves because they had to do this work on the farm, see. If you had a sick horse, you had to find out the best way to doctor it.

INTERVIEWER: But some people seemed to have a little special vet for it, and he appeared to be one of those people.

WILSON: Yes, and then you'd call it -- if you didn't understand enough about it, you'd call in your neighbor and see how much he knew, see.

INTERVIEWER: And so gradually he just worked up a little specialty.

WILSON: Right, right. Well, when they found out that he was handy at it, why, of course, everybody called him, you see.

INTERVIEWER: So he made more at that than cutting meat.

WILSON: Well, no. He couldn't make more at it, but he --

INTERVIEWER: He did that on the side.

WILSON: Well, a lot of times he did it for nothing, as a neighbor, because you didn't charge in those days, see.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah.

WILSON: Like if you had to deliver a calf or deliver a colt, or a horse had colic or botts or something like that, why then you had to -- you'd call in a man that knew more about it than you did. And of course, if -- well, if he felt like paying you, well, he'd give you a dollar or two, and if he didn't, well, he'd say, well, I'll do something for you sometime, you see. And that's the way it worked.

INTERVIEWER: The old barter system.

WILSON: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: Now, where did he learn the meat cutting business?

WILSON: From his father when he was a boy.

INTERVIEWER: Just from being around the farm.

WILSON: Yeah, because we -- they had to do all their own butchering and that's where I learned it, from my father.

INTERVIEWER: Now, at the club -- of course, this was the reason that they hired him, wasn't it? They had this whole raft of farms out there that provided the stuff for the club.

WILSON: Right. They raised all of their own stuff. They were self-supporting, see. They had all their own milk and butter and cream and eggs and chickens, and their vegetables, and their beef, and their lambs and veal. They were self-supporting, see. Of course, their farm hands did the butchering, and then it was brought in to the club coolers, and there it was cut up for meat for the tables.

INTERVIEWER: And so they kept the supplies coming. I mean, they didn't cut -- couldn't cut very much at a time. They had to cut just for the --

WILSON: Well, no. They kept a supply on hand as much as they could, but then they killed -- every time that they'd see they were getting low with the beef or pork or veal or lamb, they called or went to that farm and said, well, we need two lambs and a veal and a beef and so on.

INTERVIEWER: And how many were there at that point? Do you know?

WILSON: Farms?

INTERVIEWER: Farms supporting them.

WILSON: I think there were seven farms. I think the club had seven farms.

INTERVIEWER: Then -- or in later days when they got --

WILSON: Well, they had seven altogether. You know, they bought them --

INTERVIEWER: They didn't start as early as that period when you were a boy, did it?

WILSON: Well, yes.

INTERVIEWER: Was it that big then?

WILSON: Yeah, it was -- they had those farms then. They had the same farms that they owned -- well, they don't own them now, but they did own them until they sold out, yeah. I think there were seven.

INTERVIEWER: Now, where did you go to school then?

WILSON: Right here in Lake Placid, right where the -- the school was just below where the arena is now.

INTERVIEWER: Oh yeah?

WILSON: Yeah, right on the main street.

INTERVIEWER: On what's now the campus.

WILSON: Well, it was just up this side -- between the campus and the arena, that's where the school was, right there.

INTERVIEWER: About where that restaurant is.

WILSON: Right where the arena grill is.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, is it?

WILSON: Yeah, right there.

INTERVIEWER: And how many buildings were there along the main street there?

WILSON: Well, there weren't very many. There was a hotel there. [0:03:28] had a hotel there.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, up there?

WILSON: Well, right near there. And well in there -- there wasn't very many buildings then. Just a few residents there. I don't think there were any stores down there, not right there. Farther down in Newman -- what they called Newman -- there were stores there.

INTERVIEWER: Of course, that was the original settlement, really --

WILSON: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: -- Newman's. Well now, where did you live then? Where did the family live?

WILSON: On McKinley Street.

INTERVIEWER: Oh.

WILSON: We had a big -- we had a house, nice house right on McKinley Street. And then between our house and the school was all woods, and a brook ran down through there, the outlet of Mirror Lake and down through there.

INTERVIEWER: And that was underneath the camp.

WILSON: Right.

INTERVIEWER: That had to be covered over when they built --

WILSON: Oh yeah. That's all the [T7_107_03.wav, 04:25] down there now, right.

INTERVIEWER: They covered that whole -- filled that whole area at the time of the games --

WILSON: Filled the whole area, yeah.

INTERVIEWER: -- for the [T7_107_03.wav, 04:31] Olympics.

WILSON: Right. And that was all woods down in there and a big valley down through there. We had a path where we used to -- all the people that lived on McKinley Street had a path right straight across from there over to the school so that you didn't have to go around by the road.

INTERVIEWER: Was that where the street -- or the road ran in, down along the route it now goes, down toward [T7_107_03.wav, 04:56]

WILSON: Yeah, it runs the same route.

INTERVIEWER: Because it would seem to be the easier route -- up from Newman would have been up that little back, what's now McClanathan Street.

WILSON: No. No, the main road was right down where it is now --

INTERVIEWER: Where it goes now.

WILSON: -- that was always the main road, as long as I can remember.

INTERVIEWER: It did.

WILSON: Yeah, that was the main road down there. Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: Can you remember anything else about school? Well, we have to stop because I'm almost out of tape.

WILSON: No, I can't remember much about the school, only that I went there, I guess, through kindergarten and first grade.

INTERVIEWER: And after that, you moved back to Redford.

WILSON: Moved back to Redford. Then we all moved back to Redford because my father wanted to farm.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, I see. I wondered why -- he decided that that was better than a part-time resort --

WILSON: Better than -- right.

INTERVIEWER: -- job.

WILSON: Right. And so we moved -- everybody moved -- well, the family, our family moved back to Redford, and my grandmother and grandfather used to come home in the winter and live with us, and then in the summer they came back to the Stevens house.

INTERVIEWER: They had been all that time at the Stevens house.

WILSON: Oh yes. They were all that time.

INTERVIEWER: What were their jobs there?

WILSON: My grandmother was the cook and my --

INTERVIEWER: Cooked for the help.

WILSON: For the help, yeah.

(Continued on cassette # T7_108)

INTERVIEWER: Okay, here we go again. Now we were talking then about your—

WILSON: My grandfather and grandmother working at the Stephens' house.

INTERVIEWER: Right.

WILSON: And they worked—

INTERVIEWER: They were in charge of the health quarters.

WILSON: They were in charge of the health quarters. My grandfather and grandmother had full charge of the health quarters, and they-- well a few years they stayed there in the winter, but mostly it just in the summer. In the winter they'd come home to Redford. That was their home, Redford.

INTERVIEWER: Originally.

WILSON: Originally that was their home. And they'd come home there and live with us because we were on the farm, see. We were on my grandfather Bruce's farm and that's where we lived.

INTERVIEWER: Now which was grandpa Bruce's farm, the one where they were living in Redford?

WILSON: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: The one that we recently sold?

WILSON: Right. That was the Bruce farm. Right.

INTERVIEWER: Oh yes, because the Wilson place is where—

WILSON: The Wilsons were all down on what they called the Wilson Road. They were down on the Wilson Road.

INTERVIEWER: And when were grandpa and grandma married?

WILSON: Oh my. I think it was 1898. I think it was in 1898 that they were married.

INTERVIEWER: Oh they went a long time before they had any kids then.

WILSON: Yes, sure. They were married right here at the Stevens house. They were working here. Mother was taking care of Curtis Stevens, see. Curtis is about 5 years older than I am, 4 or 5 years older than I am. And mother was his nursemaid, and my father was driving team there.

INTERVIEWER: I see. But they must have known each other in Redford because they [T7_108_01.wav, 01:53].

WILSON: They did. They did, but they were married here. Well they might have been-- No, they might have been married in Redford. I don't know. But they were working here when they were married and they both came back here and went to work here, and they worked there for several years until-- Well not several years, no. They worked there for another year or so and then that's when my father went to work at Shay's Market, see, and he worked there 5 years in Shay's Market, see.

INTERVIEWER: Shortly after they were married then, yeah.

WILSON: Yeah, short, probably a year after they were married he went to work for Shay.

INTERVIEWER: And then when you went to the Green farm he worked at Shay's some of the time?

WILSON: No. No, he was all through at Shay's and we went to the Green farm. We rented the farm with an option to buy it, the farm, and then after awhile they asked him to go to work at the club, see, because they were short of a butcher there, short of butchers at the club, and so they asked my father to go to work there, and he worked there until we-- Well, I guess we moved back to Redford.

INTERVIEWER: But the farm land, actually the farming in Redford was a lot better than Placid.

WILSON: Oh yeah.

INTERVIEWER: [T7_108_01.wav, 03:12] was a lot better.

WILSON: Oh yes, because it wasn't as wild and of course it was, you know.

INTERVIEWER: Even though it's farther north, it's a little warmer because it's lower.

WILSON: Well it's warmer because it's lower. Right. And then, well, my mother had company, companions I mean. She wasn't alone in the woods, where up here she was right in the woods. In those days people didn't visit much, especially the women.

INTERVIEWER: But of course after they moved back into town that wouldn't have been so much of a problem except that he just decided he wanted to farm.

WILSON: Well, it was mostly my grandfather and grandmother that talked them into going back to Redford and farming. They thought they'd be better there on the farm than they would here, see, and so they went back.

INTERVIEWER: This was your father's parents who were here though, or your grandfather Bruce?

WILSON: Yeah. That's right. Not my father's parents were here, no.

INTERVIEWER: Grandfather Bruce.

WILSON: My father's father-in-law and mother-in-law. They were the ones that were here.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah father-in-law and mother-in-law, right.

WILSON: And they were the ones-- It was their farm that they went on to when they moved back to Redford, when we moved back to Redford.

INTERVIEWER: Both couples.

WILSON: Yeah. It was their farm. Well both couples moved back and my grandfather Bruce and grandmother only come back in the wintertime.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah right. I had another question. You don't remember in particular any things that you did as kids here in town?

WILSON: No. Slide downhill and play with the other kids. I don't even remember the other kids' names now.

INTERVIEWER: But by that time there was some winter sports activity for instance?

WILSON: Oh, there were always winter sports here, sure, but I wasn't--

INTERVIEWER: Skiing.

WILSON: Yes, but I mean in those days little kids didn't, or young kids didn't get into them as much as they do today.

INTERVIEWER: I know that. Did you have any equipment for winter things, skates or?

WILSON: No. Well I might have had a pair of skates, but I didn't have any skis. I had a sled, and I didn't have any skis.

INTERVIEWER: Sled with wood runners or was that?

WILSON: Yeah, wooden runners.

INTERVIEWER: [T7_108_02.wav, 00:36]

WILSON: Well, yeah, you made it.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah, that's what I thought.

WILSON: Yeah. And oh you could buy sleds, but they were pretty expensive, so you made them, and if you had a good sled, you'd get the blacksmith to put some shoes on it, some steel shoes, and then of course it'd go faster. No, the first skis I had I made out of a pine board.

INTERVIEWER: Where was that?

WILSON: In Redford. That's the first skis I had, I made.

INTERVIEWER: And how old were you then?

WILSON: Oh, probably 12. 11, 12 years old.

INTERVIEWER: So kids were aware of—

WILSON: Oh yes.

INTERVIEWER: doing this.

WILSON: Oh sure. They were aware of sports and of course we had-- well, we had bobs. We had up bobs out of wood.

INTERVIEWER: Things that you sit on.

WILSON: Yeah, that you sit on like bobsleds, you know, and you could get-- Well, it'd all depend on how big you made them, 3/4, 4/5 on.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah, I gather they were used a lot for fun, for sports.

WILSON: We steered those with a rope too. Unless you were lucky enough to get ahold of an old wheel somewhere that you could put on it, but mostly was with a rope. You steered it with a rope.

INTERVIEWER: Do you remember where you got the ideas for that kind of thing? Did you see them in magazines or newspapers?

WILSON: Well, yes, you saw them in books and you'd read stories about it, you know, and sliding downhill and see pictures of it in magazines. So, of course, then you'd build one.

INTERVIEWER: How about the rest of the year? What did you do as kids for sports, for entertainment?

WILSON: We played ball and baseball. We'd have baseballs or we'd play with a tennis ball or we'd make a baseball out of string, wind it up.

INTERVIEWER: So that you could hit it and retrieve it.

WILSON: Tie it and varnish it so that it'd, you know, and that it wouldn't all come apart.

INTERVIEWER: Oh I see what you mean. You'd make your own ball itself.

WILSON: Yeah, make our own ball and made our own bats of course out of wood.

INTERVIEWER: How'd you turn it? Did you have—

WILSON: No, whittled them out. And then we played hockey too. We made our own hockey sticks. Well, as I got older, of course, then I had skates.

INTERVIEWER: Did kids in those days go into the woods to stay and camp the way they do today?

WILSON: Oh yes. Oh sure, and they hunted. Yes, they hunted. Soon as they were old enough to hunt, they'd hunt.

INTERVIEWER: But you didn't go out for the day and come home? You actually went in and stayed in the woods?

WILSON: Well, not always, no. Well, when you got older you did, but until you were old enough, why your people wouldn't let you go in the woods alone.

INTERVIEWER: And how about having guns? You didn't have your own guns did you?

WILSON: Well, yeah, had your gun, but you were trained. Your father trained you how to use it.

INTERVIEWER: When did you start?

WILSON: Well, you weren't allowed to go out alone with a gun until you were probably 12 years old and then they considered you were old enough to know how to handle a gun because your father started training you when you were 8 or 9, 10, and so on, and then you got your own gun if you had money enough or could get money enough. Then you'd go hunting by yourself then.

INTERVIEWER: Could you make much money as a kid on side jobs?

WILSON: Well yeah. You could maybe work for some farmer. Then, of course, if you worked good at home, why you might get a few pennies at home. You sell papers. There were papers to be sold then. I used to sell The Grid. Every week sold The Grid paper. Sold 50 papers every week.

INTERVIEWER: This was in Redford now?

WILSON: Yeah, and walked to deliver them too. And only in the summertime I had my bicycle. Well, I got a bike, a secondhand bike, and your father didn't carry you around to deliver the papers for you.

INTERVIEWER: In a car. (laughs)

WILSON: You just walked. You walked no matter just 2 miles. If you could sell a paper, you sold one.

INTERVIEWER: How about your shopping? When you wanted something? Did you get much chance to go in-- Down there, you'd have gone to Plattsburgh.

WILSON: Well you'd have to go to Plattsburgh to shop. That's where [T7_108_03.wav, 00:36]

INTERVIEWER: How about, for instance, with a bicycle? Could you order it at the local store?

WILSON: A bicycle?

INTERVIEWER: Yeah.

WILSON: Well you could. You could order it at the store and he'd order it from New York or Philadelphia or Boston or somewhere, wherever he bought from a wholesale house, and you waited for it to come. But mostly you'd-- Well, I bought a secondhand bike. I couldn't afford a new one, so I bought a secondhand bike and that's the only bike I ever had was that one.

INTERVIEWER: How much was that, do you remember?

WILSON: I think I gave \$8 for it. Well, a new one was about \$24, \$26 for a new one, and I got this one for \$8. It was a good bike too and I had it for years and years. No, I had it until I left home.

INTERVIEWER: And you left home very early though?

WILSON: Yeah, when I was-- Well 17 I left for good. The year I was 16 I came up here and caddied for a little while because my grandfather and grandmother were here at the Stevens house, see. But the year I was 17 I came back here and went to work and then I stayed and worked steady.

INTERVIEWER: Could you make a lot of money caddying?

WILSON: Oh yeah, made good money caddying.

INTERVIEWER: Now was that a 9-hole or an 18-hole course?

WILSON: 9.

INTERVIEWER: 9-hole.

WILSON: 9-hole.

INTERVIEWER: That's right here on Stevens Hill over the side down toward Lake Placid?

WILSON: Yeah, right down to the lake. Some of the greens and the tees were right-side the lake. Yeah, right-side the lake.

INTERVIEWER: That's a pretty big waterhole.

WILSON: Well, I guess so.

INTERVIEWER: Now, the Stevens house ran in the wintertime?

WILSON: No, no.

INTERVIEWER: Ever?

WILSON: No, never. Only the summer. They did a couple of years. There were some extra games or something and they kept the annex open for a year or two, but that was all, and they could only accommodate a few people there. That was where the family lived, in what they called the annex. That was their home. And of course there were some extra rooms there that they rented out in the summer, and so a couple of years they rented those in the winter, but it didn't pay off and so they—

INTERVIEWER: I don't remember too much about it. I mean I can remember what the building looked like in later time, but it didn't seem like a very elegant building to be living in.

WILSON: Oh yes. It was very elegant.

INTERVIEWER: Was it?

WILSON: Oh beautiful.

INTERVIEWER: It was beautiful?

WILSON: Oh beautiful inside. Beautiful floors, hardwood floors, and nice staircases and bannisters, the big fireplace.

INTERVIEWER: What else was there?

WILSON: There were two fireplaces there.

INTERVIEWER: They must have had a fairly good size staff in that case, didn't they?

WILSON: Where?

INTERVIEWER: At their home.

WILSON: At their home? No, not too many. One or two. A cook and a waitress.

INTERVIEWER: That's a pretty big house. Now they stopped operating the Stevens house when? I know we've got it recorded somewhere.

WILSON: I don't remember now. Was it '28 or '29? Something like that.

INTERVIEWER: At the time of the crash.

WILSON: Yeah, at the time of crash I think. Well they operated it a few years after that, but under a new management.

INTERVIEWER: Not the Stevens family?

WILSON: Well, the Stevens' were there, but it was under a different—

INTERVIEWER: I remember they had a nightclub or something, didn't they?

WILSON: Well, the Raymond had that there. Two summers I think.

INTERVIEWER: That was in the '30s because I can remember it vaguely.

WILSON: Yeah, well that was in the '30s, yeah. But the hotel was closed then. He only rented the Grill Room. That was all. Beautiful Grill Room. Beautiful. It had a sunken dance floor. I helped build it.

INTERVIEWER: Did you? And that was done in, I guess, three sections, two or three sections, that hotel?

WILSON: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: I remember.

WILSON: And that was all. That was the end then. After that it was sold.

INTERVIEWER: I thought I remembered seeing some pictures of winter-type activities out on the golf links. That's what made me—

WILSON: Well, they were a lot of-- Yes, they had—

INTERVIEWER: But it wasn't the Stevens house that was operating?

WILSON: No, they just let them use it. Yes, they had a toboggan slide there, a big toboggan slide there.

INTERVIEWER: Went on the lake or just [T7_108_04.wav, 00:23]

WILSON: Yeah, went right out on the lake, and right from in back of the hotel. Went right out into—

INTERVIEWER: They didn't use that roadway down there? That drive?

WILSON: Yes, but you went right across it. They only used it for teams. That was all.

INTERVIEWER: So it didn't interfere with the toboggans?

WILSON: No, not a bit. Then they had-- Well, they eventually built a little bob run there.

INTERVIEWER: Oh did they?

WILSON: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: The boys?

WILSON: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: Or was this before?

WILSON: Everybody. The town people. Oh, before this bob run, yes.

INTERVIEWER: Using that other, the old bobsled that [T7_108_04.wav, 00:54]

WILSON: Yeah. Using the old bobsleds.

INTERVIEWER: I have to stop.

INTERVIEWER: Okay, stop it.