

BRADFORD HISTORICAL SOCIETY

RESIDENT LIFE HISTORY INTERVIEW

The purpose of these interviews is to allow individuals to share their memories of Bradford over the years. These are based on audio interviews, transcribed into text. The original audio files are stored at the BHS.

INTERVIEW WITH: Harriet Douglass

DATE: August 11, 2022

Interview with Harriet Douglass of Fairgrounds Road, recalling 'how it was' in the Bradford area when she was younger and thoughts on the Town today. This was recorded by Harry Wright 8/11/2022 for the Bradford Historical society (BHS). Final edit 8/29/22.

HHW: This is August 11th, 2022 and I'm here with Harriet Douglass at 1:30 in the afternoon at her house and talking about her remembrances of the town from the time she's been here, for the Bradford Historical Society (BHS) Life Interview Series. Can I ask how old you are?

Harriet: 93, I'll be 94 in October.

HHW: Very, very good, and have you lived here your whole life?

Harriet: No, I've lived here for 77 years. I was sixteen when my parents bought the house on Rte. 114, number 2230, next to the road to the dump. It was a white farmhouse with 20 acres of land at that time.

Since then the state has widened 114 and put Rte. 103 where the railroad tracks used to go. Oh yes, we owned all the way to the brook, all the way to the Warner River. I was 16 when we moved here and ready to be a senior in high school. The town paid the tuition for high school, but you had to provide your own transportation, so most of the children from Bradford went to Simonds High School in Warner and we would take the B&M train to Warner in the morning and take the Vermont Transit bus home in the afternoon, for five dollars a month. There was some kind of a deal with the train and bus companies, somehow cooperating between the towns.

HHW: So, we're talking mostly about Bradford but where were you born?

Harriet: I was born in Belmont Mass, and in lived in in Gloucester for eight years, which we loved. It was West Gloucester and was a small town like Bradford. Then when the war came, my dad had to work at the shipyard and we moved to Braintree, Mass. where we lived in a two family house which I didn't like because the neighbors weren't always polite and quiet, but we were thrilled to move to Bradford.

HHW: And what brought your family to Bradford?

Harriet: My parents wanted to move out of Massachusetts to a smaller community, my dad's family came from Maine but my mother didn't want to move to Maine because at that time it was a pretty desolate state. Living on the coast was okay but inland there were not so many jobs available; it was not as good as New Hampshire at that time, in the 40s.

We had an aunt living in the 'halfway house' which is halfway between Bradford and Henniker. I can't think of the name of the girl and her husband who lives there now.
(HHW): Sherry Gould? Yes, that's the one, Sherry.

My aunt lived in that house and we used to go up and visit her, so my parents looked at several houses and Bradford and a few in Warner but they settled on the property on 114. I graduated from high school here when I was only 17 so I couldn't go into nurses training until I was 18. I selected that in the next the next year until I had a serious boyfriend and they wouldn't let you get married while you were in training so if you got married they'd kick you out. So, I spent just a little over a year in nurses training and left because I had decided that, if I continued, I wanted to work in the operating room and that made another year and my husband didn't want to wait that long so we got married. But I worked, I've always worked a bit in the medical profession one way or another.

My husband Donald Douglass worked for the B&M Railroad out of Warner. He was a track supervisor for building and moved all over, until the railroad went out of business. Then he went to work in a hospital. He worked at New London Hospital for 25 years.

I worked for 10 years for a doctor and I worked at many, many jobs here in town. I never went looking for a job, but I always ended up with meeting someone on the street or having a phone call saying, "would you come to work?" I worked at the golf course. I worked at the Pleasant View Hotel three summers as a hostess. I worked 10 years for a country doctor and I worked for 23 years for the post office.

HHW: Did you start as postmaster?

Harriet: No, I started as a part-time flexible clerk, and when Vernon Hall retired I applied for the job and got it. I was postmaster for six years. Although earlier, I took over when he was gone, so I was postmaster whether I had the job title or not. I was able to give him a lot of advice because I have a big mouth. (Laughter)

HHW: Very Good. What are some your earlier memories of town?

Harriet: When we came to town it was a beautiful town. It was Main Street we walked, because of where we lived, we would walk uptown to the IGA and the street was lined with maple trees and they were so beautiful. There were three grocery stores in town, quite a few if not, 'garages' they were gas stations, gas pumps; one in front of the IGA, one in front of Dodge's store, one at this end of town (west end) and it seemed like you could get gas anywhere.

The Bradford Inn was used summers, it was owned by Jack Reardon who was a writer for the New York Times. I think a sportswriter for the Times and he ran the Inn in the summer and lived in the house in the back of what used to be Carr's store, the building that Mike Bauer now owns. Barbara McCarthy's son in law. They lived on Pierce Road high up the bank at Breezy Hill and Crittenden Roads.

Now, I forget what I was talking about. I did a lot of things like trying to get a replacement when the doctor retired, formed a committee to try to find another doctor to come into town and I wasn't successful. But then a doctor that I wouldn't have asked moved in. He was not a bad person but was just not what I wanted for a small town.

We formed the Rescue Squad which was wonderful but we lost that due to finances.

HHW: Who is the 'we'?

Harriet: There were about 10 to 15 of us originally in it to begin with. I was only in it for 15 years, because then I was postmaster and it was, I couldn't go out and be out all night and work.

HHW: So the rescue squad was blessed by, or formalized by the selectmen?

Harriet: No, nobody, just Chris Frey. Chris Frey found an ambulance. One of the garage owners in town retired, and when he died he left money for an ambulance or a vehicle that could be used for an ambulance and Chris Frey found it. We were all talking about getting some more training so that we could have a good answering system. That was in 1970 to 72 in that area, so we had someone coming in that did advance first-aid and then we all took the EMT courses needed.

I can't remember the years, I think was in the late 60s, I was on the steering committee for the VNA which at that time was the Kearsarge VNA. Now it's the Lake Sunapee Region VNA. We had one RN and one part-time therapist, that was the VNA very beginning and I was on that board for a while. They certainly have expanded since then. Yes, and they do a good job.

We are really lucky in Bradford in that we are in New London's and also in Concord's availability for VNA. Both of them will come this far, and I have used both when Donald had trouble. In fact, once when I fell, I used Concord because that's where my doctors are so it seems more practical to use the same facilities as they use.

We are so lucky in Bradford. We are so lucky about a lot of things. Like weather - whenever I look around this summer the weather out West and South, floods and fires, we really are lucky here. The summer has been awfully hot but it hasn't been dangerous. Well, it is if you don't watch it, it can be very dangerous particularly to seniors.

HHW: Have you had water issues here?

Harriet: No I haven't. I've been really lucky. We have a good artesian well and the brook right out back. We did get the well going when we first built the house. We lived next door for 30 years already and then we split the land. That was an old, old, old, cape and I could see that when Don retired he wasn't going to be able to keep doing work on it, so we had my brother build this house for us.

HHW: Your maiden name was Harris?

Harriet: Yes, I'm Sonny's aunt, his father was my brother. So yeah, I had just one brother and my mother and father and my mother died young. She was 50. I lost her - she was very active in the church and things like that.

HHW: So everybody's related to somebody if you've lived here long enough.

Harriet: I learned the hard way early on to be careful what you said about families because the person you're talking to might be related. And it doesn't go over well here.

HHW: Growing up here you learned to be careful. Where did you meet Don?

Harriet: I met him at the Casino dance on Lake Massasecum and I had just graduated from high school. It was I think was the Fourth of July dance. They had dances there at that time very often on almost all of a Saturday night. And there used to be a barn dance right across from my old house right up here: it was Frank Fortune's Barn Dance. It was right beside that building that you can see. That building is in place of a hotel in

the 1800s which was only open for a short while and then burned. I don't recall the name of it but it's in the Bradford Warner book. There is a picture of it that's interesting.

HHW: Everything is tied together isn't it, including family and friends. Tell me about your friends.

Harriet: Well, I've lost most of my friends. I only have one friend, maybe two that's older than I am, which is one of the hard things about growing older. Yes, the friends that I went to school with, some of them moved away, they went to college and settled somewhere else. George Cilley and I went to school together. He's a couple of years younger. I had some good friends and I had a good marriage. 57 years it was. I have a lot of younger friends.

My mother was very active in the church and I taught Sunday school for 13 years and Hazel Morse and I did the vacation Bible school for quite a few years. I didn't work once we adopted my daughter. I didn't work full-time. I would work part-time. I was available for a lot of things and still take care of family.

HHW: When did you adopt her?

Harriet: We adopted her in 1957. We found we couldn't have a baby with Don's genes so we adopted, and she was born in San Francisco. My brother was just out of the service and met and had married and was living in San Francisco and I had a call from him in at Christmas time in 1956 telling me that his wife had a friend who was in the service with her who was going to have a baby and wasn't going to keep it, and she was going to give it up and they wanted to know if I was interested so I said "Oh yes."

HHW: Wow, what a Christmas present!

Harriet: I know. I also I talked to Jim Cleveland who was a lawyer to see that I could do it with no problem. No legal problems, and so we just decided that I would wait until the baby was born, and then I would go. I got a phone call on February 10th that the baby had been born but they didn't know if it was a boy or a girl, they just knew the baby was born and the hospital wouldn't tell them if it was a boy or girl. So, I said "Well, I'm leaving tomorrow morning."

I went out by train, it took me three days. I went out on Monday and I got there Thursday. I got to Boston in the North Station and had to go to South Station and Don was with me. He didn't go to San Francisco with me but he took me into Boston and we were waiting in the station and I was paged and I went to the phone and it was the telephone operator from Bradford telling me it was a girl. That's how people communicated with each other then. The operator was like mega news today - always had the news. So, I knew all the way to San Francisco what it was, but it didn't matter.

And then, in ten days when she was 10 days old, we flew home. I did see a little bit of San Francisco and that area.

HHW: Did your daughter know she was adopted?

Harriet: Yes we told her right away when we talked to our baby. I don't think it's right to not tell them because children are too upset if they find out they they're not your birth children. We made up all kinds of stories about adoption. We adopted dogs and cats and baby, only one baby.

HHW: So what was life like as the postmaster?

Harriet: It was hard in that when I took over as postmaster the rural carrier hurt her back and couldn't work and I couldn't replace her. She wasn't quitting, she didn't get through, but I had to find someone to fill in and I couldn't hire someone. I just had to borrow from different offices and that was difficult.

I started with the post office in 1967 and worked there for 23 years before retiring in 1990. I was postmaster for the last 6. And I really loved working in the post office because I like working with people. That's the trouble with post offices today is that they, the clerks, Bradford doesn't have any regular clerks. They have clerks that move around from office to office and so they don't get to know the people, they don't have any knowledge of what the town is like, and so they're not helpful in many ways.

Our postmaster had never worked in a small post office. She was an office worker in, I think, Manchester but she never worked the window so she wasn't used to the rules and regulations of being a postmaster which is not easy.

It was a good job. This was before computers, so I never really had to work with the computer in the post office, but you had to have the knowledge, and you had to have more knowledge than they have now because they have to rely on what the computer tells them.

I only used computers after I retired. For eight years, I volunteered at Concord Hospital after I retired because I missed being with people. That's the hardest part of retirement. It's nice not to have to get up and rush to work every day, but you miss working with people. I think most everybody does, who likes people.

HHW: What do you recall of the Holiday Season?

Harriet: When we were kids, we always loved Halloween of course and Thanksgiving. The family always got together for Thanksgiving and Christmas with cousins and all. Christmas itself was a big deal even when we didn't, you know, I grew up in the

depression when there wasn't a lot of money but you always had had a few things and everyone was in the same spot so nobody was lording over the fact that they had 16 toys and you two.

One thing I miss now is things like Mayday. In Gloucester, which was my happiest young years, I went to a two-room schoolhouse, which was a mile and half away and we would have a Maypole for Mayday. Do you know what a Maypole is? A tall pole with ribbons and you weave in and out with the ribbons and sing a song. Things like that aren't done today, although I saw them doing it two years ago, maybe it was three years ago at the Bradford Center, of course it was Laurie doing it. It looked so wonderful, and we don't do things like that.

We used to pick flowers and take to neighbors when were in Gloucester. We rented a house. My father never owned a house until Bradford. We rented where we lived because he worked for this company as a machinist and he was transferred several times to different towns. We had the most wonderful landlord in Gloucester and my mother used to take care of his father who was an elderly fellow, was widowed and lived by himself, and so we would take flowers to people. Wildflowers, not that we bought flowers. We don't do things like that today.

Often neighborhoods are not what they were then. I have some nice neighbors around here, but I don't ever sit and talk with them. I go to quilting once a week and I have knitting here often, we have knitting twice a month and so I have a lot of friends that we sit and talk, but I'm not close with my neighbors. They are always there and they always say "You know, if you need anything let us know" but that's not the same as sitting down and chatting. The world has become more electronic. People stay at home or go to shows, but they don't as often connect. It's just a different century. Yes, it's not necessarily bad, just knowing that society is what it is.

HHW: Getting into quilting: Quilting's been a major hobby for you for a long time?

Harriet: Knitting particularly, but quilting is fun; like I've made quite a few old wall hangings and a couple of bed quilts, but Mary is excellent. Mary Derry is, as you know, a nationally registered quilt judge. (HHW)Yes, says her license plate. (Harriet)She has traveled all over the country to judge, but she's sort of slowing down a bit now - it's not as easy to pack up and go halfway across the country to judge a show. She enjoys it, but it's fatiguing because she carries so much stuff with her. She doesn't try to fly. She drives and that's really tiring. It takes two to three days to get to Florida or somewhere in the south.

One place where the 'community' works is the Bradford Area Community Center (BACC) and Senior Center which is great for Seniors. We have our quilting group session there once per week and there are a full range of activities for the greater

community. Things like a Bridge Club, exercise classes, Mahjong group, providing rental space for driver training, and many other activities that benefit the community. The BACC is also home to the Meals on Wheels distribution center for the area.

HHW: What's your thinking of local politics? From the time you've been here?

Harriet: We've had some really good selectman for local politics, some not so good but we will live through them all. I never thought I'd ever see the day that we'd have three Select Women. Marcia Keller I think was the first woman who was a selectman. Now we have three of them and hopefully they're working well together. I don't really know. They're pretty strong women and sometimes when people are really strong it's not as easy to meld together but they all, I think, mean well.

I think national politics are a mess right now. I never thought that we would be investigating a president. He's a scary guy. I couldn't believe that he would get in to begin with, but he sailed right in. He has a lot of believers who still believe and that frightens me. If he didn't have, we wouldn't have had that mess on January 6 that was terrible. It could have been worse and why wasn't it stopped sooner? Nobody called in the National Guard or any organization that could have been called in. I would think, but what do I know? I don't have the knowledge of what was available. (HHW) Well, if the commander-in-chief doesn't ask for it, who was going to respond? (Harriet) I felt so terrible for those police that were beaten. That is just horrible to think that it was our own people doing it, about as unamerican as you can get; yes, and they don't think they are. (HHW) Yeah really scary. I don't think it's over half the people so upcoming elections, could be major turnaround. (Harriet) I hope, I really do. I probably won't see the next presidential election, but I hope it's better and friendlier though silence is not really acceptable.

HHW: Back to the local stuff: You said it was better or worse, but we just kept going.

Harriet: Sometimes are better than others, but we're lucky that we haven't damaged the town any more than we have. I mean, the town depends on rules and regulations and they're not always carried out. For example, there are no calls from the police about having storms and stuff. Chief Jim Valiquet was wonderful about calling the seniors when a storm was coming in or there was a chance of power outages or like this hot weather. He would've called us once or twice to see if we were doing okay and if we had an air conditioner or how we were doing. They're not doing that. He did affirm a lot of people and I do think that it made us feel that somebody cared enough that there was someone you could call if your power was out and you couldn't reach the public service or anybody. It was nice that someone was checking on you and made you feel like you're not quite totally alone. I think it's financial, they just don't want to pay someone to do that, but that might not be true. Someone told me that, but I'm not sure it's true, but I do miss the calls. (HHW) Yeah, he did it as part of his job but it was volunteer time beyond his official duties, and, as the Town has grown, may be impossible.

Harriet: Even when he was out of state he would make a call.

HHW: What's an excellent piece of small-town life that you would still like to have.

Harriet: We only had one part-time police chief when we came to town and you never saw him because he didn't do anything visibly – I suppose, you know, if there was a fire he would be directing traffic, if there was an emergency he would be there or if there was a fight or something he would be called. But there wasn't a department or anything, there was just one person that the town paid and that was when the town's population was 600 people or so. The town had a big population in the late 1800s and then it went down. I think it was only about 600 when we moved to town and I think it was a little less than that during the war because people were gone. Men, soldiers were gone of course, but families sometimes went to stay with their families, it was a different town, it was a different time.

HHW: Since then, of course, the town shrank. You said there were three grocery stores, The IGA, Carr's, and?

Harriet: Carr's wasn't Carr's, it was Boutwell's, in the Carr's building, and there was one next to the house where George Cilley lives. And there was a little shop almost like a diner across the street, just a little narrow building beside the house that burned where the garden is today. Beside that was a little diner where you could go and get a cup coffee and a donut or sandwich, whatever, not a big meal.

Don and I, for a couple of years after we were married while looking for a house to buy, we lived in what was the Bates Block which was right across from Cilley's, it was a big house with five apartments on all three floors. It burned soon after we moved out. It's where Jason Allen lives now. Stan Brown built that house for his mother a few years after the fire.

Anyway, Don and I lived on the second floor in the front. My father gave us a dog who he found somewhere with one of his buddies in Massachusetts. They were going to shoot this dog because it was a purebred and the dog got loose and got impregnated and they were going to shoot it. So my father took it, gave it to us living in an upstairs apartment and we had 11 puppies to take care of! We found homes from all of them!

I've been lucky to have a good life, truly, a good husband and a happy marriage. He died in 2005, he was nine years older than I am and that's why he didn't want to wait three more years for me to get through school to get married. I've never really regretted it because we had a good marriage and I did a lot of other things. I even worked for Tooky Toys which was at the brick mill, Eddie Westerberg owned it and they made toys. It was the first time I ever worked on a machine and it was freezing cold in there. So I

would be wearing gloves, which is treacherous while sliding blocks through this machine. It's a wonder I didn't lose some fingers. God was looking after me.

HHW: Are there any particular people that stand out to you, good, better or weird?

Harriet: We always had good neighbors. I've always been close with the Messers. I worked for them at the hotel and sort of took care of Marion, the mother she lived in the star house downtown that Oona Tropeano owns now. You know the one I mean, right across from Gillingham Drive on Main Street, the house that has a star window. She lived there after her husband died. I used to stop every day to check on her, bring her her mail and things like that.

I always had somebody to drive around. Frank Fortune lived across from our old house and he was the one that had the barn dance and he was a great neighbor, not anybody you'd want to do business with, he was a little bit crooked, but you couldn't help but like him as a neighbor. And when we first bought the house, we worked at the barn dance. Here's a photo (Don and Harriet dressed at the dance). That would be 1953 or '54. It's online because my sister-in-law just gave me this recently, and she found it on a Bradford website.

HHW: Do you have any recollections of the early telephone service?

Harriet: The telephone office was in the Fiske House, which is now the church's business office and that's where the switchboard was, covering everyone's house. Everyone's phone had a different ring, there would be 2 to 10 people on a line, our ring was one long and two short, and that that meant me.

Everyone had a different ring on the same line and sometimes if you had neighbors who talked too much it was hard to get to use the phone, and also you could have nuisance ringing when it's not yours, particularly at night or in the daytime if you're a night worker.

There are three houses down on Main Street that are owned by the Oona Tropeano that are filled with junk stuff and they don't look good. One is the Cressy & Williams building right across from Fisherfield, one is the old garage across from Sweet Beets, and the other one is the star house (window). She owns that and doesn't live in it and that's too bad. She's a hoarder, I suspect, and she doesn't have to worry about money so she doesn't care about if the taxes are due or not. I mean, so she pays the taxes but lives in Massachusetts. I don't think she's lived here for a while. Maybe she comes up and stays a night or two, but I don't like to see empty property. It's not healthy.

The property where Bowie's Market was, that's a bad house but still has historic age, I don't know if it's rebuildable or not, I rather doubt it. I think it's like the house that was just torn down on the street here with a new house going up there. Yes, there was a house there that that was destroyed in about 10 years, despite people living there – not

taking care of it, windows broken and not repaired, etc. Anyways, it was good to see it gone

HHW: Something I remember, as I think about coming down to the end of West Main Street: It doesn't seem like there's enough space but there was a house between the existing white house and the corner.

Harriet: Yes, it was Charles Page's house, he used to work for the railroad, he was a postal worker for the railroad. (HHW) Yeah, I remember a house being there years ago. We came up one summer and it had turned into a small yard addition to the house next door. Hard to believe there was a house there. (Harriet) It burned. It was a house, three floors, full of stuff also. (HHW) Is Charles still around? (Harriet) No, but his son Francis Page lives on Main Street next to Audrey, they had six or eight children.

I know when we first lived here, one time I was coming home, coming up the hill and I met one of the Page kids riding down the hill on a lawnmower. He was sitting on the body of the lawnmower just having a ride down the hill. They were kind of scary kids. God was always taking care of them. But he missed a few times because one ran out in front of a car and got hit, but he recovered. They were nice family, but there were just too many to take care of.

HHW: Do you have any recollections of the Winter Carnival?

Harriet: They had a Winter Carnival every year and they had skating on Lake Todd. One year they had a parade even in the winter. (HHW) This was by the Women's Club? (Harriet) No, I don't think so. I think maybe the Fish and Game Club and they chose a king and a queen and stuff like that.

In terms of the Women's Club, there was a lot done in the town hall because upstairs in the town hall they had dancing classes for like junior high ages. My brother was younger than me - he was five years I think behind me in school so they always had (this was by the woman's club) and actually I think it was sponsored by the man that built the school. Anyway, they always had three chaperones and the women would wear like a long gown, and they taught the kids how to behave, how to shake hands with the chaperones, and you had to ask the girls to dance and they couldn't refuse you. I was a chaperone one time, because they must've been short and I was just not very old. But anyway, for several years they did that when they did the winter carnival, with the iceskating and all kinds of things.

Back then the Town Hall second floor got a lot of play - we had a minister - actually he was the minister that married Don and I and he was in a lot of shows - he and his family

and the name I don't know. And in the war people in town and Sutton, particularly those that were in vaudeville did a lot of shows here after vaudeville ended - Cressy and Dayne, and Pat Rooney who owned The Doghouse up on Blaisdell Lake. Pat Rooney, he was a soft shoe dancer, not a tap dancer but soft shoe dancer and his wife's family was in vaudeville, and the Lowe's, Don and his brother, they put on a lot of shows at the Town Hall; it was a fun time. (HHW) I'm looking forward to getting it back. (Harriet) it really, really should come back. Then people would know each other. You know this. There are 1800 people in town and I only know a few of them. Then I used to know everybody. We just don't know each other because there's no community, only the BACC. The only place I see people is in the post office, because I have a po box which costs me a fortune! Do you know it costs \$156 a year for small po box? Well, I know it and they don't have to deliver. Anyway, the only place to see Bradford people is the post office or Market Basket other than the dump. But there is no central meeting house. I do use Sweet Beets and see people at Town Meeting. I used to enjoy working the polls because then I would see people after I retired, but I've been retired for 32 years, never thought I would. I have been lucky.

HHW: Good words!!! Probably good words to end the conversation. I think we touched pretty much everything.



Harriet & Don Douglass at Fortune's Barn Dance