

BRADFORD HISTORICAL SOCIETY

RESIDENT LIFE HISTORY INTERVIEW

INTERVIEW WITH: Marcia and Dick Keller

DATE: August 4, 2022

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.

HHW: This is August 4th, 2022, and we're here with Marcia and Dick Keller at 3:30 in the afternoon at their house on the shore of Lake Massasecum, and talking about their remembrances of the town from the time they've been here, for the Bradford Historical Society (BHS) Life Interview Series.

Can I ask how old you guys are?

Marcia: If this were August 8, four days from today, I'd say 92, and Dick is 93.

HHW: Wow you both got me - I turned 80 this year.

Marcia: You're a kid!

HHW: Not so, but anyway, have you lived here your whole life? Give an overview of your history.

Marcia: I can't remember when I have not been here. I was born in August. I probably did not come immediately but by the next year I was here in the summer, at least I think I was. We are still here so I have been on the lake all but one summer of my life on this property, not the house but on this property.

We came from Massachusetts, we were flatlanders, (and so was everybody else at that point in the area). My family purchased the old Pierce farm on the top of the hill where our son lives now, along with all of the land over here and we have been here ever since, we're now what, the 6th generation of Nelson's people in our family.

HHW: Was your family involved in the lumbering business on the hills here?

Marcia: No, the property was lumbered once, what? in the 1930s. That is the first and the last time it was done until we did it in early 1980's, logging a second time.

HHW: So, you had other family here?

Marcia: I had two sisters and my older sister died about three years ago and she lived next door. As the three of us, the three girls in the family, as we grew and started our own families, my youngest sister cut off a piece of land for the house on the left as you come down, which is hers. My older sister lived next door and her grandson lives there now, and we subdivided this piece off in 1971, I think. We started building this house, which Dick did by himself pretty much with minimal help from the family and we've lived here since full-time since 1980.

HHW: So, not living here full time, you wouldn't have stories of things like the railroad, I assume?

Marcia: Actually, I went to Mount Holyoke College in Western Mass., and at least twice took the train from Springfield to Claremont and from Claremont to Bradford. I was back here visiting a friend when Dick and I were going together for a couple of years and decided to be married is more important, so I left the school. Also, my mother used the railroad a couple of times. One summer when my grandmother, her mother-in-law who is in Massachusetts, was ill, she walked over Pierce Road down Bible Hill Road, picked up the train in Melvin Mills to Concord and from there to Boston, back to Gloucester, where her mother-in-law lived. A shorter walk.

Dick: Yes, it's closer to Melvin Mills from here than downtown Bradford. When you're walking, you work on the geography you're walking to make the shortest path. Also, you could tell the time of day by the train. At 8 o'clock in the morning we would hear the whistle. We didn't use the train daily since we didn't go to school here at all.

Marcia: I did leave Mount Holyoke after two years to marry Dick, but 25 years later transferred credits to UNH and completed a Bachelor's (one semester before our daughter finished hers, also at UNH) and a Master's Degree in 1981, giving me the credentials required for my years at the Office of State Planning.

Marcia to Dick: Now when did you move up here? 1947? And I didn't officially meet you until the next

summer.

Dick: Yes, I came up from the Bronx and worked on the family property, which included 2 year 'round houses and four cottages for the summer months. My grandmother and I were here full-time. Other family members were here from time to time. Back then, I was not too involved in the town.

Marcia: I was also not too involved in the town as a summer person for three months each year until we relocated starting in 1980. I don't know what I got involved in first. I was working for the State of New Hampshire in their planning office so I got involved in planning. Initially, it wasn't until 1989 that I got officially involved because that was when Bradford passed their zoning ordinance. So, they formed the first Zoning Board of Adjustment and one of the members on the Board was named Police Chief. They had to replace him so I was named to take this slot. I guess the Board must've been appointed at that time, yes, that's true. The boards were appointed to begin with, until the town chose to elect them, so I was on the Zoning Board of Adjustment. It worked because of my job in Concord with the state. I worked closely with the Planning Commission and Bradford chose not to be a member for many, many years. They said, why should they pay dues because they can get the advice anyway? So, I was on the Zoning Board in the early 90s, switched to the Planning Board and then was elected Selectman in 1993 and served for one term, then decided we wanted to travel instead. I didn't lose my interest in the town, but we weren't here year-round.

We started going south in the wintertime for a few months but I continued on the planning board until 5 years ago or so. At the same time, I was a selectman Dick was Bradford's Representative to the Kearsarge Regional School District and became Chairman of the School Board. That was adventurous because that was the time when New London wanted to pull out of the school district.

HHW: Really?

Dick and Marcia: Yes.

Dick: A little background. When the 7 town regional school district KRSD was organized, the cost to run it was divided based 75% on number of students per town and 25% on the assessed value of the property in town. Bradford was paying too much and I said a 50/50 split would be fairer to all towns.

New London said "We're out. "They had to be convinced not to withdraw and following an extensive study, they realized their share for the schools already built was more than they could afford. The 21 selectmen from the 7 towns agreed to support a change, which was approved by the voters at a school district meeting that included over 3500 voters. Apportionment was set, and remains, at 60% students, 40% assessed valuation. New London's and Newbury's share is always much lower than other towns because of their extensive Lakefront property. So that was an adventurous 3 years!

Marcia: Most of the time he was Chairman of the School District. I was Chairman of the Board of Selectmen for one year, yes, '93 to '96, though I guess we had been involved prior to that time. You (Dick) were on the Budget Committee, and were also part of the Historical Society years back when they were trying to salvage the Dodge barn on Fairgrounds Road, and the land was eventually given to the Masons, I think, presumably they still own it. The Historical Society couldn't raise enough funds and the barn was taken down.

Dick: I was also a Library Trustee when they put the addition on, so much of public service came from my construction background. I weighed in to make certain changes to keep the stairway open from the 1st floor down to the basement. The architect wanted it closed and the fire marshal agreed it could be open, based on the population.

Marcia: Then we were involved in the Historical Society, various things that they were doing at that point involved renovating the schoolhouse. Then we got involved in the Lake. We were very involved in the lake - Dick was the one that spotted the milfoil.

Dick and Marcia: Then we started fighting it right here: we wanted to see how we could get rid of it. The Lake Massasecum Improvement Association (LMIA) bought a pontoon boat and we converted it to drop a clipper down into the water with the hope that it would not grow back, though it was a very hardy plant. The State agreed to put the net across the end of the cove that you may remember, and that kept the milfoil from spreading for quite a while, contained it in the cove, and then when growth started to show up down at the south end of the lake the whole Lake Association got involved and took over. Haven't eradicated it, but it's been close.

HHW: When was it first discovered?

Dick and Marcia: 1996 or 8, I think it must have been 1996

HHW: I was surprised to hear it had spread but the overall efforts have been really good.

Dick and Marcia: Yes, it took quite a while to convince the town selectman that the lake was important enough to pay attention to. This went on for a long time. Historically, when I was a kid there was very little oversight on assessments and if the town needed more money they would just raise the taxes on lakefront people because we weren't voters, and continued even after more of us were living here year-round. It just took awhile to get that it really was worth paying attention to. The milfoil finally did that and the town stepped up with their contribution for many years at this point. At the start it was the Lake Association that began the effort. The Association fought the milfoil with help from the state and then the town and still does.

HHW: What are your recollections of the holidays here in town?

Marcia: When I was a kid, the big celebration of the summer was the Women's Club Fair, it was not the 4th of July. It was sometime in August, and that's where the parades were involved and the floats and the bands and everything else. I don't remember at what point the fire department stepped in and started doing it on the 4th of July with the fireworks.

HHW: Was the Women's Club just Bradford?

Marcia: Bradford and Newbury, but Bradford primarily. It was a very, very active organization for many years. They were involved, in the late 90s, I guess, when the state had a 'Cornerstone' project and towns were asked to identify 21 places in the town important enough to protect into the 21st century. That was quite a process we went through, and we had input, the Women's Club was involved in that, among others, Nancy Hibbard and I really spearheaded that because partly that it came out of the state, the governor's office of the state Planning Office where I was still working, and we identified our 21 cornerstones, and they are all supposed to be protected.

The only one that we absolutely, resolutely finally lost was the soda fountain at Dodge's, so the focus should be on the second or third or fourth owner after it was sold. Other projects include the Brick

Mill at the west end of Main Street, the Church and Town Hall that I think will get put back together, with all of the focus on the restoration of the Town Hall, but the Cornerstones of our town are very important and most of them are still here whether the people are aware of them or not. I know we revisit them in the Bridge periodically, and they are definitely listed in the town records and pictures are taken of all of them which can be displayed.

HHW: I've heard of the Women's Club and didn't realize how active it was.

Marcia: Extremely active, in fact I think they still have some funds, though I don't know what they do with them.

HHW: Dick, we talked briefly of your early time here, but there's more.

Dick: I lived here and took care of the property, there was just my grandmother and myself. Then I went to college: New England College in Henniker. I was in the 2nd graduating class.

HHW: And then where was the family property?

Dick: It was called Lakewood and it was where your house is. I guess Bob Toppi's is on one side. Skyhigh, the property on the other side of Oakdale (where you used to live) was part of the property and also the houses on either side of Howlett Road. It was all one piece with a lot of land that ran up into the woods. Nice piece of property. Unfortunately, it was all divided up. When 114 was relocated, one of the cottages was moved down south of French's Park, it's still there. Then in 1950 my folks sold the property, I graduated from college, my father married his second wife, and Marcia and I got married.

Marcia and Dick: It was also because the Korean War started and the draft was after you and there were all kinds of reasons for convincing you we should be married. There were a lot of changes in those few months of the summer with the property being sold, such a busy time. We left Bradford for a period of time.

HHW: That's right, you said that you were summer people until 1980.

Marcia: When our youngest, Leah graduated from high school. We had come back to New Hampshire at that point because Dick was town engineer over the town of Alton on Winnepesaukee,

so we lived there. She went to school there as did our son Brad. I guess it was the week she graduated that Dick resigned from the town so we could live anyplace we wanted. We started to build this house, the original two rooms were done and it was a place we thought we'd retire to, but at that point I was working in Concord and Dick was working on jobs with engineering firms, architectural firms in Concord, why not live here? So we did.

HHW: What is your thinking on local politics?

Marcia: One of the things I've been involved with is the Bradford Bridge and that originated with a group of four or five of us, four or five couples formed what was called the Bradford Voters Coalition. Local politics were in turmoil at that point, firing the Road Agent and doing things that Selectmen do, etc. We came up with a mission statement that what was important was to get information out to the townspeople in part because the Concord Monitor, then and now, never covered anything out this far. We were too far from Concord and too small a town. So, we started the Bridge and that is been going on ever since. I was involved in that until two years ago and finally decided it was time to retire, but it is still bringing local news to the local people. One of the things I find particularly good now is the whole movement to return to Bradford that started with the Kearsarge Food Hub and the Sweet Beet organization. One of the founders of it is Garrett Bauer, my second cousin who went away to college and after doing a few interesting things after college, wanted to come back here and came back with the idea of living and working in Bradford. Quite a few of the other initial active people in Sweet Beet organization had done the same thing, just determined that this is where they want to be and I think that is so positive for the town. One of the problems, of course, is to find enough volunteers for everything as I'm sure you know, but that's an example of young people finding the town important enough to be here and live here.

HHW: In recent years the pretty large ingress (if that's a word) of residents has surprised me.

The magnitude of it.

Marcia and Dick: Well, the population was what 600 when you moved here and 600 for years. Now, it's larger, but I think it's grown reasonably. Even at that point (600population) we had a local grocery

store, hardware store and farm store, a strong, thriving downtown center of activity for the area. Even with a population of only 600 we had the stores that would bring our Sutton neighbors here to do, to take care of their needs, with the IGA and Dodge's Store, the Farm Store, etc.

HHW: Was Carr's Store active at that time?

Marcia and Dick: It wasn't. I don't recall that as being very active, it probably was for awhile, but then the farm store was very important. They opened one in Henniker and sold that one separately, then sold this one. No one managed to make a go of it, unfortunately.

HHW: I was talking with Hanna Flanders at the Sweet Beet open house recently and she said they started with 4 people and have 22 employees at this time.

Marcia and Dick: Yeah, that's great! And Garrett has decided it's sustainable at this point, so his wife, France is the director along with Hanna Flanders. The world evolves, as you say.

HHW: The downtown crashed, Market Basket in Warner killed the IGA and the old Dodge's store closed. The revival going on is encouraging to see.

Marcia and Dick: Finally, somebody has opened the old Dodge's store. I have heard about this and that is very good as the owners would not allow anything else in that building, just home goods and perhaps some furniture. I'm glad that primary commercial space is occupied, and I'm hoping at some time to have enough pressure put on the Pizza Chef to finish that building on the old railroad property and get tenants, which he is intending to do.

HHW: Yeah, I talked with John the owner a number of times early on at Pizza Chef. He was planning on doing that fairly quickly, but for whatever reason...

Marcia and Dick: The fire marshal required something that is costing more than he thought so the project is on hold. Then, whoever owns the Bowie store property on Main Street across the street from the Bank. Somebody, the town, or the Selectmen should think about contacting the owner and finding out what the town can do to help him. The store was an active part of town even before Bowie's and always was a real thriving place that was always a small convenience store and gas station, and of course it was the gas station that did it in. The gas station final leaks did it in. That was

when I was a Selectman, Joe Battles and I were standing out there on Main Street and watching the gas run down. That was pretty bad, the old leaking tank. Yes, they were going to replace the tanks and then the building caught fire – can't remember what caused the fire, but it burned the store.

That was the end of something there, because that was not only the store, but at one point there was an automobile repair shop in the blue building in the back of the property and it's another piece of what was going on on Main Street.

HHW: Was that property the site of a car dealership way back when?

Marcia and Dick: I don't know. It was one of many gas stations in Bradford. How many were there?

HHW: I've seen numbers on that, but I don't recall.

Marcia and Dick: Down by the West End of Main Street was one. There was one where the old Millie Jane (an ice cream shop) was - a gas tank outside of that one. Then between the bank and Cilley Lane down to the Highway Garage there was one, that was torn down only a few years ago. There was lots of activity in the town and you can see some of the feedback.

HHW: You mentioned the Women's Club parade – did that have anything to do with the Fairgrounds?

Marcia and Dick: I think the fair had stopped operating by the time I was old enough to go to something like that so I don't recall the Fairgrounds. Do you, Dick? Dick. I don't either. I know where it was and I've heard some of the history of it.

HHW: I have to bring up something you mentioned to me when we were talking onetime about Chief Massasecum: We were talking about where he is buried and you said you knew two people who knew where he was buried, and it was two different places!

Marcia: Yes, one of them was Dick MacLeod and the other was Dick McCarthy's father, Harold McCarthy.

HHW: I told Sherry Gould, who is part of the Abenaki Nation, and she thought that was very funny.

Marcia and Dick: She didn't offer you the location, did she?

HHW: No, she was hoping to learn.

HHW: Thanks for your time and input – it was a great conversation