

ELSIE HARTWELL ELLIOTT AND JAMES ELLIOTT
Interviewed by Tom Purdy
May 13, 1972

Tom Purdy – TP

Elsie Hartwell Elliott – EHE

James Elliott – JE

TP: Elsie, it was certainly very nice of you to let me come over and talk to you this afternoon on behalf of the North Salem Historical Society. I've made a number of recordings from the older residents here in town and I'm sure that you have a good deal that you can add of general interest. Now, this afternoon, I'd like to mention, is May 13, 1972, a beautiful May afternoon. We probably should all be out gardening instead of doing this. Now will you carry on and tell us, identify yourself

EHE: I'm Elsie Elliott. James Elliott is my husband. And my name was Hartwell and I was born here in Salem Center a long time ago and we've lived here all our lives, locally. We have one son and two grandchildren that we see now and then.

TP: How old are the grandchildren?

EHE: One's nine and one is seven.

TP: And their names?

EHE: Melissa Elliott and Scott Wesley Elliott.

TP: And your son?

EHE: He's James Hartwell Elliott. My name was Hartwell. We lived on the farm[the second battery house farm?] I was born there. And that place was purchased by my grandfather in about 1888.

TP: That was your father's, was that your father's father

EHE: Grandfather

TP: Your father's father. But his name was Hartwell.

EHE: Henry Hartwell.

TP: Henry Hartwell.

EHE: And, he bought that farm before the reservoir was built. And the farmhouse, the battery farmhouse now, was down where the reservoir is. And it moved. It was a three-family house, three-story house, a basement and an upstairs and an upstairs. That was moved at the time the reservoir was being built and was brought from, Uncle John Smith, who was a blacksmith, had the blacksmith shop there . . . inaudible

TP: The blacksmith has a shop Is that right where what's his name, Wally Butler, lives in that house that Wally Butler lived in, right near the old Wallace

EHE: Wallace

TP: Well, The blacksmith shop. Did you say that house was moved from where the reservoir

EHE: Where the reservoir is and was moved up over to the place it now is. My grandmother was furious that my grandfather didn't put it up to another level where they could look out over the reservoir then.

TP: Move it up a little higher on the hill.

EHE: But he wouldn't hear to it on account of the wind could have blown it away.

TP: Well, now that was down in the reservoir, it was where Route 116 is. Was that always right there?

EHE: The road was there, I think.

TP: Or was that changed?

EHE: I don't think that was changed very much. The house wasn't across the road. It was just There's a little pond on it, on Hartwell Flats. And it was right down where that pond was.

TP: Well, now you told me something quite interesting one time about where your family came from. Where did they originally come from? And when did they originally settle here in North Salem?

EHE: Well when they, they didn't settle here in North Salem until 1888 But they came, they had a Hartwell Farm in 1638 in Lincoln, Mass, between Lexington and Concord. And then they migrated out. That place, that original house just burned down about two years ago. It had been made into a lovely restaurant. We lost track of people in between. That's a long time ago.

TP: Well now you lived there I remember quite, a long long time there, at least your parents did. And then I'd like to know a little about some of the people, places, up and down the road, on either side of that. As you go down 116 from what is now the Bondy place, and where their caretaker Wally Butler lived. The next house down, I always thought of it, remembered it, as the Wallace House. Can you tell me a little bit about that?

EHE: The Wallace house was the Rooney farm, I think.

TP: Rooney?

EHE: I think it was the Rooney farm, a man by the name of Rooney lived there. And I think the Wallaces didn't come here to live until after my people did. They lived over near Dean's,

Casey's Crossing in Croton Falls. There was a house there, and I don't know what happened. But anyhow they came over here to live, and my father, my grandfather and grandmother always thought that they had two sons because one called Charlie Wallace 'Charlie,' the other called him 'Arthur.' It was Charlie Arthur Wallace, but they thought for a long while that they had two sons. Then the Lobdell place was next door to us, too.

TP: Now that's in the other direction.

EHE: The other direction. You want to go down.

TP: Well, that's alright. Then that's about the last place, the last old place

EHE:

TP: Really, in what we thought of as Salem Center. If you went on down beyond that the first place you come to was the Caesar's place.

EHE: The old Horace Greeley.

TP: And I remember the Sterns

EHE: I do too.

TP: Owned that property before the Caesars did. But then you remember the old Horace Greeley house. Do you remember when that was still standing?

EHE: I remember when it was just a shambles; you know, a shell.

TP: Well I do too. I just about remember Jim Holt bought that property.

EHE: He bought that property there.

TP: He bought that property and he heard that the Horace Greeley house was there but he didn't know just where it was. But I remember

EHE: Sure, I do too.

TP: Where it was. So I took him up and showed him right on his own property the old foundations that he had never really noticed before. Which,

EHE: That's where that rock came from, too.

TP: Well, that's another thing I wanted to ask you about because I remember my father, Thomas Purdy Sr., and Hobart Keeler spent quite a long time hunting all over fields and one place and another to find a rock that they thought would be appropriate for World War I memorial for the soldiers in this area that they have now out in front of town hall. And I heard my father tell where it came from, but it didn't mean anything to me and I

was just a youngster at the time. So, I wish you'd tell me a little about moving that rock and putting it up there and just where it came from.

EHE: I remember being very small and standing on the porch. The whole family was out watching them move this rock. But I can't really remember. It was on a stoneboat. But I can't remember whether it was horses who were pulling it or a truck. And I can't believe, that didn't impress me, that part of it. Then they had...every, no one is around here now remembers Burt Lobdell, but he was in the service and they had a big party for him when I was just a little tiny girl. He came home on furrow. And I remember how handsome he was and young and everything and then he went back to war and was killed. And the whole town mourned that man.

TP: That was Paul Lobdell's

EHE: Brother.

TP: Brother.

EHE: Younger brother. He was the youngest/er one.

TP: Another thing you're going to tell me about, Elsie, I believe, on your list was about some of the old tea rooms that North Salem had long since departed us by. Will you tell me a little about where they were, who ran them, and whatnot?

EHE: Well, one was run by the Close family. And the name of it was the Old Hundred. And it was located across from the town garage on Route 124, across from the Episcopal Church.

TP: Diagonally across from the Episcopal Church.

EHE: That's right. And Mr. Close was a town character almost. He looked like Mark Twain and he sounded like Mark Twain. Had all the humor of Mark Twain.

TP: Before we go on to your telling us about the next tea room, Elsie, I'd just like to mention that I remember Charlie Close very well indeed because he used to tune pianos. I remember his coming down to Purdys and tuning our piano and going 'bing, bing, bing.' by the hour. And he also used to tune organs and fix them up and did it both for St. James and St. Luke's. I remember that. And his daughter, Mrs Andrews, I believe her first name was Fannie, gave me violin lessons and I used to go up there with my dog and the dog would howl I remember and I'd try to find a vowel, but I never succeeded very well. Anyway that's another story. But, now you're telling us about the tea rooms and how, what are some of the other tea rooms.

EHE: Second one up the road, where David Lawrence lives, which is at the junction of 121 / 116. And the name of that was the Maples. A German family run it. I don't think it was there very long.

TP: Wexel, Wexel I think.

EHE: Then as you went up to North Salem, of course, The Port of Missing Men, everyone knows about that. Then,

TP: Now, that Port of Missing Men, you say everyone knows about it. You and I know about it and we assume everyone knows about it, but that's been out of existence. Right now this is 1972, and I'd venture to say that's been out of existence for close to fifty years.

EHE: I never saw the building.

TP: Well, I saw the building. I use to have tea there with my mother. Winding around over those roads up there that

EHE: Must have been gone a long time, that building.

TP: Incidentally, I'd just like to mention for the record that since we started talking about tea rooms Jim Elliott has joined the party here. Elsie's husband Jim Elliott, and I'm sure he can add a great deal to information on various historical events and institutions that were here in town. So, you go on and tell me now there was a, this tea room up on the top of Titicus Mountain, that was the

EHE: Port

TP: The Port of Missing Men.

EHE: I never did know how it got its name.

TP: Well, I heard that it got its name from a book that was called The Port of Missing Men.

JE: Yeah, it wasn't really a port of missing men. There was no men missing there.

TP: Well, I don't think any men... But, now what was the other, some of the other

EHE: One next to the catholic church in North Salem, on Wallace Road.

TP: Just off 116

EHE: Just off 116 and that, the name of that was The Maples, too. It was the same man that run

TP: The same man

EHE: Yuh, he moved. Then you go up to Dr. Lincoln's place, which is across from Dr. Lord's on Norton Road.

TP: And that's off Wallace Road.

EHE: Off Wallace Road, and that was Babbling Brook.

TP: Babbling Brook.

EHE: Yup.

TP: Well, I never heard of those.

EHE: Then Mrs. Walter Howe had a tea room on Baxter Road at the present Parrish, Jr. house. I waited on tables there, that's how I knew that was there.

TP: That's about mid-way on Baxter Road between 124 and 121. There were some other interesting institutions here in North Salem that you were telling me about earlier. Can you tell me a little bit about those so that....?

EHE: One was a saloon, across

TP: A saloon! Mercy.

EHE: Across, almost across from the present Academy. And,

TP: A great place for it.

EHE: And, it was run by a man by the name of Rasmus Finch. And my grandmother was a very temperance woman and she called it Rat Finch Rum Hall. She thought it was a terrible place and no one should be in that place. I don't know, I guess it was moved when the reservoir. Or it was torn down maybe.

TP: Well, there's no sign of it there.

EHE: No sign.

TP: Maybe some foundations. But that was across 116 from the present town hall.

EHE: Right on the river.

TP: Right, right on the river. Well that's ..., I never knew there was a, that's something that I learned this afternoon. I remember you telling about a school house in North Salem that's long gone. Jim, that is across from where your garage is.

JE: That's right. That's back in, back in about 1916, just before the new school, 1917, and it was burnt down. Remember back there a few years ago? It had a one-class room. First grade to the eighth. And above that was the blacksmith shop and a store with a butcher shop. Jennie and Jim Fisher as the....

TP: Now let's just locate this for the purpose of the record. It was across from your garage, as I understand, on 116, just before 116 and 121 part. And 116 goes to Ridgefield, and 121

goes to North Salem. Right in that curve of the road.

JE: On that, it was on the dirt road, Tom.

TP: On the dirt road.

JE: On the dirt road.

TP: Right in that area.

JE: One tree left, sort of a marker there where the school was, towards Warren Lucas.'

TP: And what that was when this town was all divided up into seven or eight school districts.

JE: Dingle Ridge School, and North Salem School, and, let's see, Starr Ridge,

EHE: Pine Tree

JE: Pine Tree, Starr Ridge, they all consolidated right into one. That school down here...

TP: Well that is a very very interesting. They consolidated into one school district in the 20's, I believe, when New York, when the Town of North Salem consolidated all the various school districts, we were the first centralized school district in the whole state of New York. And the high school then was down at Purdys.

JE: And that was started in the late 20's

TP: I was,

JE: No

TP: It was that the late 20's or in the 20's ,early 20's. I don't know exactly what date it was but that was one of the schools. I know there was a school down in Purdys, too. It was a two-room schoolhouse down in Purdys.

EHE: My mother taught there.

TP: She taught, that was, Mrs. Hartwell.

EHE: She lived up here. There was one winter she skated three weeks straight on the reservoir. It had such good ice.

TP: The reservoir was in then. Well, the reservoir was built around the turn of the century, wasn't it?

EHE: I don't really know.

TP: A little bit before that. I have that information somewhere, but it was about that time. But she skated down there?

EHE: Three weeks straight, up and down to school

TP: I've skated on that but Ice But, let's get on to some of the other institutions that we had here in town. You were telling, you, I'm sure could give me and The Historical Society a good deal of information on the Battery farm, which is the place located just north of June Cemetery on Route 124. Now just was that?

EHE: Well they brought the horses from the army there, to summer them, I think. And Harold Milligan's grandfather was one of the men who took care of those horses. I don't know what they called him.

TP: Well, now that was ...

JE: Sargent, pardon me, Sargent or a colonel.

TP: That was actually a part of the National Guard. National Guard Regiment or Battery, and these were the horses, for the Battery.

EHE: I don't think it was very active. I think they were, you know, just farmed out, more or less.

TP: Well, then I know, Mr. Raymond bought that property and he lived there for quite a few years. And he was quite instrumental in establishing zoning, and was the first chairman of the zoning and planning board combined, and for years and years he was instrumental until after we had our master plan and then he was the attorney for the planning board. We want to have that recorded for the historical records. And he lived there at Battery Farm. Now I believe the man that owns McDonald's restaurant.

EHE: Gene Colley

TP: Colley. Eugene Colley owns that and lives there. Jim you have a number of interesting things to, establishments to tell about here in town. You mentioned Bailey Hotel that's across from where your garage now is located at, very close to the, where Route 116, heads over to Ridgefield, and 121 goes up toward Peach Lake. Will you tell us a little bit about the Bailey Hotel? I never heard of.

JE: The Bailey Hotel, that's where the elephant barn, that was part of the Bailey barn circus, and part of the Bailey family and that was there for a long time until it burned down

TP: This was a elephants' barn and they kept elephants over winter there.

JE: Yeah. When they were transferring

TP: Transferring them

JE: Transferring them from circus to circus, they stopped there, and they called that the Bailey hotel.

TP: Was it actually a hotel or they just feciciously called that because they kept elephants there?

EHE: Oh, No, there was a ballroom there,

TP: There was a ballroom.

EHE: They danced there.

TP: Well, that's very interesting and that was right there on 116.

JE: Where that store and blacksmith shop; they were all together.

TP: And that was on the north side of the road, was it, across from your garage

JE: Right.

TP: And you say that this hotel, and they had a ballroom and, I suppose where people could spend the night, probably a bar. But, then you say there was a store, now where was that located?

JE: That was next to the hotel across on that dirt road on Old Salem Center post road, they called that now. The store and a blacksmith shop and the school they were all right together there. Mrs. Bailey would, Mrs. Bailey would go out on the porch and hollered at Mr. Finney. "Mr Finney, Mr. Finney." He'd say "Yes." Mrs. Bailey, "Well, if you don't bring my meat, I won't cook it."

TP: Mrs. Bailey ran the hotel.

JE: Yes.

TP: Finney ran the store. [Fitkins]

JE: Jim Fisher had the blacksmith shop. And below that was the school. And I think it was in the 30's I believe the store and blacksmith shop and the school all were torn down.

TP: As late as the 30's?

JE: Well, maybe earlier than that but it seems to me it was in the 30's, I don't know.

TP: Well, I remember when they paved, when they were paving that road, 116, from right where your garage is, where 116 separates from 121 they paved that with concrete over to the Connecticut line.

JE: That was in 26, I think.

TP: That was about 1926 because I was going to Ridgefield school at the time and I had to commute. And I remember we had an old Model T station wagon and it turned over [laughter]. I was, you know it was just a little old. They were building this bank and the car turned over and Ray Cole, who was mother's chauffeur at the time, and I got out and just picked this thing, shoved this thing, got it back up on its fours and on we went.
Laughter

EHE: That's the kind of car it was.

TP: That's the kind of car it was. Just scratched up a little bit and on we went. But I always remembered they were paving the road when I went to school there. That was a long time ago. So, well, there are some other interesting things. There's a store, the one that Mariam Balmesi has now, that's called Balanced Rock Antiques. That old place had quite a history and I'm sure you can tell me a lot about that.

JE: They had, I could remember when I was a kid going in there, they had penny candies and gum and horse....

TP: Now who ran that?

JE: B. R. Lobdell

TP: Benjamin

JE: Benjamin

TP: Benjamin Lobdell

JE: And son, Emory. Upstairs they had a Union Hall. I think the Union Army, probably, or someone, met there. Seems to me I heard something about that.

TP: Well, at the time of the Civil war most, practically everything was called Union this and Union that, and, but they did have a hall up above it. But I remember there was, I, I just barely remember when it was a store. You say they kept absolutely everything, a good old country store.

JE: It certainly was, wasn't it?

EHE: BR was all alone?

JE: BR

EHE: The post office was there.

JE: The post office was there, too, also.

TP: The post office?

JE: Umhm My father picked the mail up then drove to Purdys and bring it back. Now today they have to deliver the mail

TP: In your car with your dad

JE: It seems to me all the, everyone went in there every, once a week and do all their shopping for everything.

TP: That was a supermarket

JE: Supermarket. You go in with ten dollars and almost buy the store out.

TP: Now North Salem had a number of mills. Do you actually remember any of the mills or heard your family tell about any of the mills that they had.

JE: I don't remember the mills. But I heard my mother telling about my grandfather working down in the old grist mill, that's across from Milligans [inaudible]

TP: Well that is just, that's right near that big balanced rock. Just a little south of that.

JE: Yes, just below that where we call the mill pond.

TP: On the Titicus River, just below the that. I remember a man that used to saw fence posts for us and we still have some fence posts we haven't used yet. That he sawed, they're local He was a Lobdell too.

JE: That was Gilbert Lobdell.

TP: Gil Lobdell

JE: That was on Route 24, 124, right across from Baxter Road, probably a little north of Baxter Road on the left, as you go north.

TP: And, Gilbert Lobdell had quite a lot of property there. They are building a school now on part of what was Gilbert

JE: Was that Gilbert or was that part of Anson.Lobdell

TP: That was Anson, I guess, Anson Lobdell. Well the Town of North Salem was just full of Lobdells

EHE: Oh, yeah.

TP: And they owned, I guess, the majority of the land up in this part of the country

EHE: Well, Mrs. Lobdell was a Baxter. That's how they got Baxter Road.

TP: Oh, Mrs. Lobdell was a Baxter.

TP: Mrs. A. J. Lobdell. Well, A. J. was supervisor for years.

EHE: For years.

TP: He was supervisor before Bert Purdy. Bert Purdy, then Earl Vail, then Donald Mossman, all good Republicans. I might mention that you were on, you're a councilman, on the town board. I just wanted to have that recorded for the record. Ah, Jim, we started this interview and you weren't here. And I asked Elsie if she'd be kind enough to identify herself. So, just for the sake of the record would you identify yourself and tell us a little bit about you and your brother.

JE: My name is James Leslie Elliott and my mother was Florence Barhite. They lived next to....

TP: Would you repeat that?

JE: Florence Barhite,

TP: Barhite

JE: B A R H I T E . Cynthia Florence Barhite. They lived next to the Methodist Church; that was my grandfather's home. His name was Wesley Barhite. And he married a Bates.

TP: When you say the Methodist Church, that's

JE: In North Salem.

TP: That's in North Salem. Up near where the community Christmas tree is.

JE: Yeah.

TP: The post office. Not far from where your garage is, on 116

JE: My father, his name was James Francis Elliott, from Boston, then they moved to New Milford. And I was born in New Milford.

TP: You were born in New Milford?

JE: Connecticut, yes. And then they come back to North Salem where my mother's folks. And I've been here

TP: You've been here ever since. Thanks very much, Jim and Elsie, for letting me come over this afternoon. And, I'm sure, that you told us a lot, about, certainly told me a lot about

North Salem that I never knew before. As I've lived in the township of North Salem all my life, I haven't lived up on this end of town nearly as long as you people have.

EHE: Thank you.

JE: Thank you.