

BRADFORD HISTORICAL SOCIETY

RESIDENT LIFE HISTORY INTERVIEW

BHS P.O. Box 551, Bradford NH 03221

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: **Chan Blodgett**

DATE: **September 20, 2020**

Interview with Chan Blodgett of Blaisdell Lake, recalling 'how it was' in the Bradford area when he was younger. This was recorded by Harry Wright 9/20/2020 for Bradford Historical society (BHS). Final edit 5/10/21

(HHW): Okay we are recording and I'm here with Chan Blodgett, a long-time, part time resident of Blaisdell Lake. Chan, just for reference can I ask how old are you?

CHAN: 87

HHW: 87! Good for you. Have you lived in this area all your life?

CHAN: I have been associated with the Lake all my life, albeit most of the time a part time resident.

HHW: I'm Harry Wright with the Bradford Historical Society. Chan had previously mentioned that he would enjoy sharing some of his memories and history of the area, which is wonderful.

This is our first experiment with this new equipment, so we may have to redo some or all of this.

So, Chan, give us a few ideas on your early childhood that you recall.

CHAN: While I was growing up, Blaisdell Lake was in reality more culturally a part of Bradford. In those days most of our daily activities such as shopping, mail, church, gas stations, garages, and other daily activities often centered around Bradford.

A thought that just came to me was about Lafayette Square. In those days there was a circular watering trough in the center, so the horses could water. It was no longer in vogue, of course.

I even took my auto driving test in Bradford. I met Leon Perkins at the Texaco station at the west end of Main Street (he was the examiner) and we drove the length of Main St to the intersection with Rt 114 (Lafayette Square), drove around the watering trough and back to the garage. (I passed).

The town has changed a bit during my lifetime. The train between Concord and Claremont ran through the center of town. Rt 103 where it crosses Main Street was the roadbed of the train (back then Rt 103 was Old Warner Rd and Main St.). The site of the station and Railway Express office were where the large unoccupied building is now. Back during WWII my mother and I would take our kitchen fat from cooking down to my grandmother In Concord. She made donuts, and on occasion would hand a package of them to the rail mail clerk in Concord, who in turn would hand them to me off the train in Bradford at about 8:20 in the morning - now that's mail service.

HHW: That's a service that doesn't exist anymore.

CHAN: I remember Carlton Bradford SR. He drove his 'coach', a station wagon carrying passengers and mail on the route from Bradford through So Sutton, Sutton Mills, No. Sutton to New London. He met all the trains (4 daily) and transported kids and lots of luggage to the three juvenile camps we had on the lake.

All things in those days was manual. We each had a mailbox on his rural route from Bradford to New London. We all had a mailbag in those days, and he would pick it up on the way by at 7:00 or 8:00 the morning and if we hadn't picked up the mail during the day, he would then at 4:00 or 5:00 in the afternoon come back and toss the bag into the yard. And if I was in the yard, he'd toss out his driver side window over the truck for me to catch – Things were simpler then.

There used to be a dance hall halfway up the Fairgrounds Rd. Frankie Fortune's barn, where there was a Saturday night square dance, known sometimes as the Saturday night fight.

Main Street has had a few changes. On the corner of Main and High St was Eddie Westerberg's sawmill., (where the river goes under West Main St, the red brick building, powered by the river going by). He sawed up thousands of board feet of lumber after the 1938 hurricane. It was said that you could always tell who the Sawyer was since his middle fingers were often missing.

Next door on W. Main was Jim Guncheon's Texaco Gas Station, and next was Carr's supermarket, and on the corner of Gillingham Drive was a nursing home run, I think, by Mrs. Westerberg. Across the street was the Bradford Inn, then a garden (still there today) and the first house was that of Dr Wright (the town doctor).

A couple doors further was a house where a cousin of ours lived (Addie Cheney). I remember her when I was a little kid. She used to be a very old lady then and Dad

used to stop by, take her food and things. In those days the house had a porch. It had been her father's house who was my great uncle George Rand. Further on that side of the road was a restaurant, The Green Gables, just about where the road bends slightly.

Beyond that was Cressey's International Harvester garage. And further on the Town Hall.

Across the street from the Town Hall was the church, the telephone operators' office (now the church office) and between that and the Railway (now Rt 103) was a diner. I think Harris Wheeler Jr started it. He was said to be an excellent mechanic, went into the army and came out a cook! I believe he later opened the Bradford Junction restaurant.

Across the track (now Rt 103) was the Ansart's antique shop, on the knoll before Dodge's General Store (now empty) and Smith's gas station and garage.

On the opposite side of Main Street, at the train track, the old station and the Railway Express office was there. In those days, all the kids coming to camp (we had juvenile camps on Blaisdell in those days) would all send their steamer trunks and other stuff and Carlton Bradford would deliver them to the camps. Some of the parents would even fly in for parent's weekend, like a senator from NY who landed on the lake and was met by a boat to bring him to land to visit his daughter.

I remember back then we used to catch shiners for fishing in the brook behind the station, we would make a homemade shiner trap from a gallon jug with a piece of screen rolled into a cone for the entrance. Crumble a few crackers in it and in 20 minutes we would have a couple dozen shiners. The Merrimack Farmers Exchange was later in (I think) the old Railway Express building.

On Main St after the railroad track was the old post office (which now resides on the Bradford Historical Society [BHS] site). Then some parking spaces between the Post Office and Danforth's IGA. Upstairs over the IGA was the town barber Clarence Wiley, who used to cut my hair.

On the western side of the IGA (now the Pizza Chef) was the current driveway and then an abattoir (slaughterhouse and butcher shop). This was active before my time, and for a short time was a video shop.

Halfway up the street on the north side was Frank Wise's gas station and garage, more recently the site of Bowie's market. Frank had some interesting cars, he had the Kaiser - Frazier concession, but my favorite was the Tucker. Not too many people remember the Tucker, it wasn't around very long. It was a Ponzi like scheme. They produced many prototypes, but never actually manufactured any more. Frank had one to drive around. It had a great innovation, a cyclops headlight, that is a headlight in the center

of the grill which turned as you turned the steering wheel, to provide better lighting for night driving (lighting up the ditch).

Further up Main Street was the village store, another food and beer store, and across the street was Eva's diner, primarily a coffee bar.

What else can I remember from back there? Oh, the Women's Club Fair. That would make the current ones look very small. Back in the 40s and 50s I remember it was a big deal. They had high school bands from Claremont to Concord, they had the Temple Band from Concord. There were people on horseback, cowboys and several other local 'stars'. It was an hour-long parade that would go through the town. That was a lot of fun.

They had the demonstrations and floats; it was a big deal in those days. It went on for a long number of years. The Bradford Women's Club was then made up, as I guess it recently was, Newbury, Bradford, and Sutton members, a substantial group.

The 4th of July fireworks were always outstanding, in fact one year one of the national TV stations came to feature it as a symbol of rural Americana patriotism on the nightly news.

Also, in those days each town had its own baseball team, and after the evening game was over they would all descend upon the Dog House at Blaisdell Lake for snacks etc. I witnessed this first hand as I was the first employee of the Dog House, the folks would be 3 deep at the counter.

For several years the citizens would present a theatrical play in the Town Hall. I remember when Tom Lowe from Sutton was active, writing and directing some of these plays. I was 18 years old, and I was in one of his plays with Martha Wells, the cast was primarily from Bradford and Sutton. That was a fun thing in those days.

I also remember the Sunday newspaper was delivered by Everett Kittredge about age 10 or 12 pulling his wagon down and back on Main Street.

HHW: One question I had about the railroad station, I heard there was a turntable there so they could turn the locomotive around?

CHAN: I never saw that in action, it was probably in action before the Newbury Cut was available for the trains to proceed beyond Sunapee Lake. I do remember the large water tower near the station. I also remember 4 trains a day. As the era of this train service came to an end, it briefly became the Concord to Claremont RR, a local outfit (known affectionately as the Clickety Clack).

HHW: Did you take the train to school?

CHAN: No, but my Dad did. My Dad lived in So. Sutton, and he went to High School in Warner. He would walk to Bradford Monday morning, take the train to Warner and stay with his uncle during the week, and return Friday afternoon. Some school bus!

HHW I know a lot of Bradford folks took the train to school in Warner, In fact I knew Everett in later years and he is the one who told me about taking the train daily for school.

Do you know George Cilley?

CHAN: Yes, My grandmother knew the family years ago.

HHW: She has lived here for a long time, where did the family start?

CHAN: Several of my ancestors arrived in New England in the 1600's. The Blodgetts (I'm the 10th generation) landed in Cambridge and worked their way up through Chelmsford to the Manchester area. After his discharge from the revolutionary army, my great, great, great grandfather bought a farm in Newbury on the lake, which is now Blodgett's Landing. My grandfather married Maude Littlehale of So Sutton and they eventually lived in the Littlehale homestead after my great grandfather died in 1904.