

Elizabeth Ann Risley Addington Oral History Interview, 03/07/2007
Administrative Information

Narrator: Elizabeth Ann Risley Addington

Interviewer: Louise Evans

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Biographical Note and Abstract

Elizabeth Ann (Risley) Addington was born on 2 August 1932, the daughter of Ruth Baker Risley and Robert J. Risley, and raised in South Windsor, CT. She married Linwood Addington in 1950, with whom she had six children.

In this interview, Addington shares her remembrances of her family, childhood friends, schools, activities (such as 4H and Girl Scouts), local residents and buildings. She discusses local bus service and how it connected South Windsor to the greater Hartford area, and how that service provided access to shopping, medical services, and social opportunities. Elizabeth also discusses birding, tobacco harvesting, and how the hurricane of 1955, World War II, and the realignment of Route 5 affected life in town.

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Elizabeth Risley Addington
Oral History Interview
March 7, 2007
Interviewed by Louise Evans

EVANS: We're all set. This is an interview of Elizabeth Risley Addington done on March 7, 2007. What I would like you to start with is your full name and when you were born and maybe where you were born.

ADDINGTON: Elizabeth...

EVANS: A little about your family.

ADDINGTON: Elizabeth Ann Risley Addington. I was born August 2, 1932 in the Risley House at 1648 Main Street.

EVANS: Okay, about your father and mother...

ADDINGTON: My father was a native [of South Windsor], in fact, the house that I lived in was his grandfather's house. He went there to live to take care of the two elderly uncles and two aunts. They passed away within three weeks of one another in the influenza that was around at that time.

EVANS: Was that 1918 or 1919 or so?

ADDINGTON: That was 1920 and he was married in 1921. He brought my mother, Ruth Thomas Baker Risley, there to live. Ruth was the daughter of Captain William Baker who was the captain of the ferry that went over to Windsor.

EVANS: Do you remember going over on that ferry?

ADDINGTON: No. Grandpa and Grandma had moved to South Glastonbury and he was running the ferry down in South Glastonbury. He did that for a number of years until he was finally retired, when I knew about it.

EVANS: And your father was a good deal older than your mother?

ADDINGTON: Yes. He was 28 years older than my mother and he was very good friends with Captain and Mrs. Baker.

EVANS: All right- tell me about what are the first things you can remember?

ADDINGTON: When I was two I fell into the goldfish pool. (laughing) Over I flipped and we were getting ready to go somewhere and apparently it was quite an experience. Not for me, but for those who had to clean me up. I remember as a child going down to the meadow and skating all by myself on those little small ponds that had frozen over in

the winter time.

I also remember my mother and father were very much interested in birdlife and they would go on a Sunday afternoon excursion down into the meadow. I can remember, many a time, seeing eagles flying over. We'd go down and sit on the river bank and at that time, there were plenty of ducks around and plenty of birds around. There's nothing around today. That was a fun experience and that's where I got to know about birdlife. I went to Union School and then I went up to Ellsworth and had to walk up there every day, which was fine, no problem.

EVANS: Excuse me, how did you get to Union School?

ADDINGTON: Harry used to take the school bus and I think Collins was just getting started back then. Harry took us to school and brought us back. I had Mrs. Arline Bidwell, and I had Grace Lucinda and Josephine Coach and Jim Welch. I think Mrs. Vibert was there on occasion and I think she substituted.

EVANS: That was for Eighth grade?

ADDINGTON: That was for Eighth grade, and all my children had Mrs. Bidwell.

EVANS: Isn't that amazing! All of them; that's amazing!

ADDINGTON: Mrs. Couch had gone and Mr. Welch came up here for just the Seventh and Eighth grades. I really don't remember too much as far as the change over when the kids were in school, but...

EVANS: So what- what sort of things did you do in school for fun at recess time?

ADDINGTON: I guess, I can't really remember that I did much other than I- I did hopscotch we jumped rope, but I never was in to athletics. I didn't get into baseball or basketball or anything like that. When I got to school, part of our gym was we did play basketball if that was what the excitement was for the day.

EVANS: Who about after school, when you got home, what would you do?

ADDINGTON: I apparently learned how to sew at a very, very early age and I think I did some needlework. I know I do a lot now, but my mother was in 4-H. I was a Girl Scout and I don't remember any great activities in Girl Scouts other than to go on picnics (laughing). I learned how to sew through my mother's teaching me and I learned that before I was in grade school. And then as the children grew up and I was in school- you know- still in high school, I did a lot of my own clothes. I think it was an accomplishment.

EVANS: Certainly was.

ADDINGTON: Certainly you don't have that today.

EVANS: That's true. Tell me, Elizabeth, did you have friends or relations on the street that you went to school with?

ADDINGTON: I had the Pelton girls and their mother was my father's niece. Helen's father was Frank Risley, and he was the brother to my father. When my mother married my father, Helen Pelton – Helen Risley, became my mother's niece.

EVANS: (laughing) I'm glad you have it straight.

ADDINGTON: All right, and how about your best friends- who were your best friends who you played with?

ADDINGTON: I had a best friend, Delores Gogan—Addington was her maiden name—and she was adopted by Harold and Margaret Turner. I played with Barbara Burr quite a bit and Iva Howard. I can't think of anybody else. Those were—

EVANS: What would you do when you played with them? Did you sew also or where they from being...

ADDINGTON: I was – I was trying to think of what we did. We were just into whatever girls were in at the age. This was—this was while I was still at Union School. It was before the 8th grade. After 8th grade, when I got into high school, I had a very good friend up in East Windsor. We sold basketball tickets and lunch tickets to the kids and the two of us did that. The friends that you grew up with in grammar school weren't necessarily the ones you had in high school.

EVANS: All right, from what you said about East Windsor, you must have had people come in from other places for high school?

ADDINGTON: They had people coming from Warehouse Point, Broad Brook and Wapping. Lorraine Jones came over from Wapping and I can't think of anybody else at the moment.

EVANS: What was Lorraine's name, maiden name?

ADDINGTON: Dubord.

EVANS: Zooboard.

ADDINGTON: Dubord.

EVANS: Dubord.

ADDINGTON: I can't think of anybody else that came over from there, and that's about it. But there were girls that I was quite friendly with that came from over in Broad Book and of course, they built the East Windsor school so that took- high school- so that

took care of that. Now, it's strictly South Windsor.

EVANS: When was that built, the East Windsor High school? While you were in High School or...

ADDINGTON: No, no.

EVANS: Or after?

ADDINGTON: After—I don't know when it was.

EVANS: And what years were you in high school?

ADDINGTON: I was in high school from '46 to 1950.

EVANS: Do you remember when the high school was built?

ADDINGTON: My brother was the first freshman group that went in up there. So that would have been, he graduated in...he graduated in '41 so four years back from that.

EVANS: All right, did you ever hear why the high school was built? Where had people gone before the high school was built? Do you know that?

ADDINGTON: No.

EVANS: No. All right. I think it was probably the amount of students had gotten so... had overgrown for here...and, of course, Bob went up to there for the 7th and 8th grades in the late 50s.

EVANS: Yes.

ADDINGTON: So they had built the South Windsor High School before that. I'm not sure when the South Windsor High School was built.

EVANS: You mentioned a brother, did you have other brothers and sisters?

ADDINGTON: No, I only had one brother and he was ten years older than I and went off to college... He went to the University of Amherst, which is now UMASS. Then he went out and tried to get his doctorate out in California. He stayed out there and never did get the doctorate. But anyway he worked in the great big horticulture department and he went out there in 1966 and never came back. Until his remains came back last year.

EVANS: Oh my God, last year?

ADDINGTON: In September...

EVANS: All right—how has Main Street changed? Was the trolley still around when you were young?

ADDINGTON: No, no. We had hourly bus service and I would take the bus and go into Hartford by myself and I'd go in and would be there for an hour. The bus would come back and I'd take it when it came back out of Hartford. That was enough time.

EVANS: And what did you do while you were in Hartford?

ADDINGTON: Oh, I'd go in the 5 & 10 cent store, which we don't have any more. I'd pick up something like, you know, various trinkets...so forth and so on.

EVANS: You mentioned you were a sewer. Did you pick up the cloth?

ADDINGTON: Yeah, I probably did. I was—turn it off, I've gone blank.

EVANS: Tell me something.

ADDINGTON: I used to go to Grants in Hartford and I'd scoot through over to Sage Allen's and—I know where I bought my fabric. I'd go over to Kresge's or Korvette's and then I was only in there not for an hour. I'd come back home again and I'd either sew or do homework, or whatever and...

EVANS: Did you learn to sew on a treadle machine?

ADDINGTON: Yes, I did. In fact, it was the treadle machine that was in the house when my mother moved in there. So that's got some history.

EVANS: Yes, it must have. Why did you go to Hartford? Weren't there any stores in South Windsor?

ADDINGTON: No. The closest Sage Allen's was in East Hartford and once in a while I'd go there. In fact I went there when I was married. I would go down on the bus and my mother would take care of the children and I'd go shop. I'd shop at the A&P and sometimes I'd go to Sage Allen, and then he would pick me up on his way home from work and that killed two birds with one stone.

EVANS: Okay.

ADDINGTON: So, there were no stores in South Windsor whatsoever. The first...

EVANS: Was there a Post Office or-

ADDINGTON: The Post Office. As a child I got sent up to get the mail and often times I would get groceries and that stayed around until the late 1950s, I think. Then that closed down and it just became a Post Office. I went to work in the Post Office in 1966 helping Delores Aldington or Margaret Turner who was the Post Master at the time, and I was just a clerk. There was talk of the Post Office closing so Delores moved on and she went over to Pola Brick to work. I was the one in command at the moment and I became the Post Master in 1972 and left there in 1992.

EVANS: All right, did you ever have occasion to go over to the Wapping section of town?

ADDINGTON: My father didn't have an automobile so our only mode of transportation was the bus, and the bus didn't go to Wapping. Unless somebody took us... The first drug store I remember was Pleasant Valley Pharmacy (drug store) on Route 5. Eventually when South Windsor got built up more on Sullivan Avenue there was the other drug store, South Windsor Drug, opened up. There wasn't anything like a convenience store here.

EVANS: How about Bossen's store—when did that start?

ADDINGTON: Oh yes, Bossen's. When we were in grammar school, we used to go up to Bossen's store and get some candy. We were so fortunate. That was a good grocery store although we never used it because we'd have to take the bus to do that. Oh, I remember, you were going to ask me about the flood. In 1936 or 1938 the flood washed out down at Kasheta's in that gully. My mother played the organ down at the First Congregational Church and I would go down there with her. Well, when that washed out, the bus couldn't come up any further than there, so my mother and I would walk down into that gully. They had it fixed though that there were steps in it, and go up the other side and we'd get picked up by the bus (laughing) and it took us the rest of the way down to the church. So that was interesting, quite adventurous for—I had to be six anyways. To remember that.

I do remember that when the hurricane came, Mr. Turner's car was stuck in this side of the front of... you know... across the street from Lorenza's. One of the big trees came down and closed the road and he was within walking distance of his house. And I remember a tremendous amount of great big enormous trees down; in fact, there was one in the back yard. It missed everything, and that was about all I can remember. I know there was a lot of wind and damage, and excitement, and that's about all I can remember of the hurricane. There was a hurricane in 1955 and we had a family and there were more trees down that year and later, another bad storm. And I remember friends of ours from Hawaii were here.

EVANS: Yes, yes.

ADDINGTON: And they use to live in New Hampshire so they knew what this was all about so it didn't upset them that much. But, you know, you get nervous during a hurricane.

EVANS: Did you lose power?

ADDINGTON: Yes, yeah.

EVANS: Do you remember when electricity first came to Main Street?

ADDINGTON: We already had electricity in the house. It was in there and there wasn't very much of it, but there was all we really needed. I remember during World War II you had to pull the shades down to keep the lights out on the street so that you couldn't see in. I can't remember we must have had shades in the back part of the house. But I do remember my mother faithfully pulling the shades down every night when it started to get dark. I remember, I was ten years old, I'm pretty sure in 1941 when they declared World War II.

My brother happened to be home and he had the radio going and we all sat around it, no television, listening to the announcement of World War II. He went off to war but he was only in the service I think less than six months. He had osteomyelitis in a leg and they discharged him because he was not...

EVANS: What else do you remember about World War II? How did it effect the town as far as you knew it? You were pretty young at the time it was...

ADDINGTON: I don't know. I was in the fourth grade; I think I was in the fourth grade-third or fourth grade. In school is where you got your stamps, food stamps, and I remember Mrs. Couch dealing out our food stamps to us. We also bought savings bond stamps: I remember those. Those were 10 cents apiece (laughing) and that's about all that I can...

EVANS: You never knit or sewed in any way for the war effort? Even when...

ADDINGTON: No, no, my mother never did either.

EVANS: Did you have a car by this time?

ADDINGTON: My mother and father never had a car.

EVANS: Never had?

ADDINGTON: My father had one in younger days. But when those two were first married, no there was none. They relied strictly on the bus, and the bus service was a lot better than it is now. It would, like I said, it ran every hour and it ran clear up into midnight. It started at 5 o'clock in the morning. So, I mean it was tremendous bus service and we really had to rely on it.

EVANS: And were the buses fairly crowded?

ADDINGTON: Yes.

EVANS: Did a lot of people go?

ADDINGTON: Oh yeah, yeah. There were fewer cars then that there are today. I mean today you have to really have a car to get anywhere.

EVANS: Before the war came around, we went through a depression. Was that noticeable to you at all as a young child?

ADDINGTON: No, not really. My father, of course, was a good deal older than us and respectfully, he worked for Harold Turner in a Sewing Cellar right next door to us. His income was very minor, he was a town selectman years ago, but I'm sure that didn't bring much money. I don't know—my father had chickens and oh, yeah, we had fish. A fish man came out every Friday and he'd deliver—that's where we'd get our fish from for the week. We had an old cat and the cat would be sitting out at the end of the driveway waiting for that man to come. He kept getting goodies every time. (laughing)

EVANS: Did he (the cat) know to come and only wait on Fridays?

ADDINGTON: He only went out on Fridays.

EVANS: Isn't that something!

ADDINGTON: He got to be a real old cat, Hotzy. I remember my father, through the bird club, he was asked to band some birds. He had a cage that he caught them in and then he would take them out and he would band them. I remember Linwood helped him one time, and of course, Linwood knew nothing of what birds would do when you went to catch them. There were a couple of Evening Grosbeaks in there and they let him have it. (laughing)

EVANS: Well, let's move onto Linwood. How did you meet your husband? When and where?

ADDINGTON: We, Clara Clamp and I, would go square dancing by ourselves, and of course, you're relying on the bus service. So we would go down to the East Hartford High School, which was right there on Main Street, and go square dancing down there and you relied on the bus coming back at midnight to bring you home. (laughing) And that's where I met Linwood and his friend Merrill. They were both from Glastonbury and he showed up on a door step about a week later and then we started going square dancing over to the Millers, over in Manchester on Tolland Street, I think. That was in the fall and eventually we were married the following March. We square danced continuously, and we picked it up again back in 1976 when the children were grown and we stayed in that for a few years. Then it got too demanding and we said, "Phooey", and so we got out of it.

EVANS: Now you mentioned that you went with Linwood over to Manchester. How did you get over to Manchester?

ADDINGTON: Okay, we got picked up in a car. It wasn't until... My uncle would come from Rhode Island and he had a car. He had a gas station business and he would come over and they'd send the weekend bring their children over. My uncle would haul

us all over to an ice cream factory, Smith Ice Cream Factory over on Route 5 to get ice cream. Then he'd take my father wherever he needed to go and that was kind of how we got around. When Linwood came along, he had just gotten out of the service and he had just picked himself up a fairly decent, recent car and he took over running around for us. My mother moved down to Glastonbury in 1959 to take care of her ailing mother and father and she was still working up at Sage Allen. She was using bus transportation down there in Glastonbury. My grandfather passed away in 1959-1960, and my grandmother lived for another eight years. She ended up in the convalescent home up here in South Windsor. My mother continued to stay down in Glastonbury as it was easier for her to walk up to the food store or to the Post Office and then over to the library than it was to stay here. Then we took over renovating her house after she left in 1960 and then we moved into the Risley house in 1966.

EVANS: Your parents built the small yellow house, well, it was yellow at the time.

ADDINGTON: The yellow house was my father's sorting cellar. So that was on the property when I was growing up and it was a convenient building. The town let us, Mr. Pelton was the assessor then, build and renovate it and we moved in to that. Back in 1950, we renovated that building. It was nothing but a shell. We, Lin, did all the work. He got a construction loan for \$4,000 and that gave us used furniture as well as a house.

EVANS: And when, what year, were you married?

ADDINGTON: I was married in 1950.

EVANS: All right, so this was right after you were married.

ADDINGTON: Right, I only went down to Glastonbury to live with his mother and father. Finally we came up here because he started to renovate the house and it was foolish for us to travel back and forth. So we stayed with my mother and father and eventually, we moved up when our first child was born. The house wasn't finished but-

EVANS: Linwood wasn't working at this time, other than just working on the house.

ADDINGTON: He was working for Pratt & Whitney and did for 40 years. He went in there before he went in the service and came back and went into drafting.

EVANS: You mentioned the Peltons. Were there any other people around town whom you considered important and you...

ADDINGTON: Charlie Enes was the Town Clerk. He was a very nice man, I remember when we got our marriage license he said, "Come on over to my house" because Lin wasn't home at that time, and it was not a work day. He said to come over to get your license. When the Town Hall wasn't open, he'd say that. I was trying to think of who else... Tom Burgess.

EVANS: And what was his job?

ADDINGTON: He was a Selectman and then he went into real estate or insurance I should say. Linwood was on a bowling team down there at the old Methodist [Baptist] Church that was on Main Street and it...they turned it into a recreational bowling alley. He got quite a few people, more men in town, that basically I would know and were older fellows. I can't think of...

EVANS: Now, the church you mentioned. Where was it located, the Methodist church?

ADDINGTON: Yes, it was the one right there on Main Street just below the...it wasn't a church back then. But it was where they gathered upstairs and used it as a recreation center.

EVANS: Was that the American Legion hall?

ADDINGTON: Yes, I think it might have been. That of course is gone now too.

EVANS: Scouts were in...

ADDINGTON: Scouts, yes. The Girl Scouts were there and the Boy Scouts...

EVANS: And they had that bowling thing too so...

ADDINGTON: Yes.

EVANS: You're right. I had forgotten that myself.

ADDINGTON: Let's see, the old Town Hall was there, in fact, they used to hold dances upstairs in that Town Hall when I was a kid, and all the business was downstairs. Probate court was down there in the back part of the building. I think Charlie Enes was down there as the Town Clerk. And of course they took that down. Let's see. Yep.

EVANS: I wanted to ask, do you remember when Route 5 was cut through?

ADDINGTON: That was back in 1940-1941 and we were... I can remember my father had an apple orchard and I'd walk out in the orchard and the place would be full of black snakes. They had dug a den up there where Route 5 went through and all the snakes came...

EVANS: That must have been interesting. Do you remember any of the controversy about building Route 5?

ADDINGTON: No, I didn't.

EVANS: Too young to?

ADDINGTON: Yes. Now my brother was always a train nut and he would out there watching what was going on as far as the train track was concerned. Of course, it remained there. But I remember him having a few pictures of the train track and everything from underneath it was all dug out. I guess that was part of the structure for Route 5. But, I don't really remember anything too much other than the snakes. And my father said that was because they drove them out of where they were working on Route 5.

EVAN: Do you remember any roads in South Windsor not being paved?

ADDINGTON: No, no.

EVANS: Here's a question: why do you like living in South Windsor?

ADDINGTON: Because I never went anywhere else, I guess... was that a very stupid answer? But that's about what it boils down to. When we (my husband and I) were going together, my father offered him the tobacco Sewing Center as a place to live if he wanted to work on it and we took it. We've been here ever since.

EVANS: And of the churches you mentioned previously—the Methodist Church—which church did your family go to church to regularly?

ADDINGTON: My mother was the organist down here at the First Congregational Church and that's where we went to church. My father did a lot of janitor work down here at the Masonic hall and he was a Mason. My grandfather was a Mason, is that what I want to say, a Mason?

EVANS: Yes.

ADDINGTON: And I think a couple of his brothers were Masons also and I can remember he'd go down there at night and clean up after they'd had something, which was another part of his income. He never was really into retirement when I knew what was going on. He was a tobacco sorter and he also did a lot of slate roofs on the tobacco sheds. The rest of them are all down. But that's what he did for a living and that was only because I heard it. I never saw him do it.

EVANS: Well, how about your children? When were they all born?

ADDINGTON: They were all born in Hartford Hospital.

EVANS: Did you go there by bus? (laughing) I'm laughing.

ADDINGTON: I was ready to go in with three of my children. When it came to Tom, the fourth one, he was in no hurry to be born. So, finally, they induced labor and believe it or not, I went in on the bus. All the way over to the hospital I was...well I wasn't

in labor so... and I took nothing but just enough money to get me there and only the clothes on my back.

EVANS: And I hope he was born soon thereafter.

ADDINGTON: I can't remember. He was the easiest one. I had induced labor with Tom, Nina, and Linda.

EVANS: Now here's a change of pace: do you remember the Grange in South Windsor?

[Tape fades and begins with new question...]

EVANS: All right, would you tell me about some of the things you did to earn spending money when you were younger, a teenager?

ADDINGTON: When I was a teenager, I used to babysit for Henry Adams' children. He was the principal at Ellsworth High School. And I used to babysit for Clarence Nicholson's children. Clarence was involved with something in South Windsor—politically—can't remember what. Do you want me to go into what I did as a kid?

EVANS: Sure.

ADDINGTON: While I was growing up, my father and mother had a large garden and I used to help pick vegetables or do the weeding. When it came time to process the food, I would help my mother can. I would probably get the "wash the jar" detail or maybe packing detail. I can't really remember just exactly what my jobs were. When I was growing up the only thing we had on the plan for wildlife was chickens and my father always fed them, so I didn't get that job. But when I was married we had three horses, three cows and several sheep, and those would be my project or the children's to take care of. Bob, my oldest, milked the cow if his father didn't do it. We also had geese. We slaughtered a couple of sheep and every time that happened, it seemed I was pregnant. (laughing)

EVANS: (laughing)

ADDINGTON: Therefore, I didn't care much for lamb. (laughing) What else?

EVANS: Well, I guess that's pretty much covers today's session at least.

ADDINGTON: Okay.

EVANS: Thank you very much.

ADDINGTON: All right. [END OF CONVERSATION]

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Ruth Thomas (Baker) Risley	1, 11
Route 5	8, 10-11

S

Sage Allen Store, East Hartford	5
Sage Allen Store, Hartford	5
Savings Bond Stamps	7
Sewing	2-3, 5
Clothes	
Needlework	
Treadle machine	
Skating on the Main Street Meadows	1
Smith Ice Cream Factory, Route 5	8
Snakes, Black	10
South Windsor Drug Store	6
Square Dancing	8
South Windsor High School	4

T

Tobacco	8-11
Sewing Cellar	
Sorting Cellar	
Tolland Street, Manchester	8
Town Hall, Main Street	10
Town Appointees/Employees/Elected	
Assessor	9
Clerk	9
Selectman	8-10
Trains in South Windsor	11
Turner, Harold (husband of Margaret)	3, 6, 8
Turner, Margaret (wife of Harold)	3, 5

U

Uncle, ? from Rhode Island	8
Union School	2-3
University of Amherst (now UMASS)	4

V

Vegetable Growing and Picking	12
Vibert, Edith	2

W

Wapping Grange	12
Welch, Jim	2
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5 & 10 ¢ Store, Hartford		5