Robert E. (Bob) Raymond Oral History Interview #2 June 10, 2011

MACRO: This is the second interview of Bob Raymond, conducted on behalf of the Wood Memorial Library's Oral History Project by Tony Macro in the morning of the tenth of June, 2011, in the Bissell house, 1837 Main Street, on East Windsor Hill. Good morning, Bob.

RAYMOND: Good morning.

MACRO: It's been a hiatus of 3 years since we last spoke. I understand that you are back in

town for a high school reunion.

RAYMOND: Yes, number 60, unfortunately.

MACRO: Number 60? Well, though 3 years have passed, we don't look any different from

the last time.

RAYMOND: That's true.

MACRO: There's nothing more to be said about that! Are there many of your colleagues

coming back for the 60th?

RAYMOND: We expect roughly half of a surviving class of 20 out of 35.

MACRO: That sounds good. I thought the first topic we could pick up on here would be the accounts that we spoke of earlier of your mother's [Hildred Sperry Raymond]

airplane that she used to keep down on the meadows. When did she first start flying?

RAYMOND: She was born in 1907, and I believe that she started flying at 19, which would be 1926. She learned to fly down at Brainard Field, which in that era was the Hartford airport, long before Bradley Field (now Hartford/Springfield Airport). As I understand it, a handful of women started taking lessons, and they were the first women flyers in Connecticut. I met a lady many years ago who, for some reason, mentioned that she was a pilot and held Connecticut license number 3 for women. I later saw my mother, and she said, "Oh, yes, I know her." I've forgotten the lady's name now, but she lived in Wethersfield.

When I asked my mother what number pilot license she had, she said, "Well, I never bothered to get one." The reason she didn't, Tony, was she had never had good vision, and licensing then was sporadic. She figured why take the test and fail because of vision. She had gone down to Harvey & Lewis and had her prescription ground into her flying goggles. She figured she could see fine that way. Why bother with the formalities? She was definitely among the early female flyers in the state of Connecticut.

MACRO: Did she teach others to fly?

RAYMOND: She eventually, I don't know just when, taught her father [Ellsworth Sperry] to fly, because they jointly bought an airplane, which sounds like a big transaction, but wasn't. The plane probably weighed less than your car. In those days, they were pretty small. They bought an Avro—A-v-r-o. It was a British-made product. Being British, you probably saw those?

MACRO: Yes I did, yes.

RAYMOND: They had an Avro, and they kept it in a tobacco barn down in the field. She taught her father to fly. He was probably in his 50s or so at that point. They'd just take off on the grass down there. They'd fly up and down the river. She said they had fun. She was not shy about her flying. She used to like to make the people on the boats on the river duck and things. She'd come down the river at them. She'd enjoy waving at the people working in the Traveler's Tower, as they did tight circles around it. There was no FAA or CAA. Restrictions were practically non-existent at that point.

MACRO: Did she fly distances?

RAYMOND: They didn't fly any—I'm not aware that they flew any great distances. She was in college in Northampton, MA, so she would fly up around there from here. They'd also fly up to Vermont. I believe the closest airport to where they went in Vermont was in Springfield, Vermont. It was literally somebody's pasture out there. There is a little airfield up there. It's still there. She said her claim to fame in flying was that one day, when the wind was strong out of the west, she flew backwards from Northampton to Hadley with the strong west winds, she had negative ground-speed and traveled backwards, letting the wind carry her from one town to the other.

MACRO: She could carry a passenger?

RAYMOND: Oh yes. It was a two-seater: pilot in one seat, passenger in the other. I don't know the last time she flew, but she always liked it. George Bancroft—an adjacent property owner across the Scantic River—kept asking her, "Hildred, do you want to go for a ride?" I asked her why she kept refusing, and she had a funny answer. She said, "I'm afraid I'll enjoy it and want to do it some more, having flown a lot." One day, she did go up with him, and she really had a good time. George said, "Boy, she stared at me, because I really put it into a couple of steep banks, and she just thought that was great." They just flew around, looking at the farm, looking at the east woods—the view in general. I don't know how old she was at that

point, but George, to the best of my knowledge, is the oldest licensed pilot in Connecticut. He told me one day he was born 2-22-22. When I saw him a year and a half ago or maybe two now, he had just renewed his license.

MACRO: Yes, I understand he is still fond of flying.

RAYMOND: [07:52] Yes, that's great. He'll be—that being true—next February, he'll be 90 years old. I don't think there are many 90-year-old pilots. She flew for a number of years. I guess—that's how she met my father [Robert Fulton Raymond, Jr.]. I think it is, anyway. I'm not sure, but they were both pilots.

MACRO: Well, I think that's a good entry into talking of your father and his piloting planes in the First World War that you mentioned before.

RAYMOND: Yes, he started flying before World War I. Again, I'm not exactly sure, but I think it was 1916 that he went up to Toronto and started to fly. He eventually ended up in the U.S. Army, actually; there was no Air Force. I think he was part of the Signal Corps of the Army. He really did a fair amount of flying, first in Toronto, and then in San Antonio, Texas, where there was and still is a lot of air flying for the Air Force. He went over to France on an ocean liner in early 1918. I don't know exactly when he got there, but they used to fly into and out of various French farms. They moved around a fair amount, but they were primarily in the area of Chateau Thierry and Chateau Toul, near Nancy, in N.E. France, because that was where all of the trench warfare was going on.

As I understand it, he said flying and getting shot at was no fun, but it was better than being down in the trenches. Their routine was they would usually fly early in the day. They would go over the trenches and look down and see everybody in those trenches and think, boy, they were pretty lucky not to be down there. One of his loves was music. He was a violin player. They had a little orchestra. They would play music and have fun at night. The routine was fly early, sleep in the afternoon, drink and chase the French women and play music in the evening, and get up and do it again the next morning and hope you came back.

One morning he didn't come back. He got shot down. He's pretty sure the guy who got him was Udet— Ernst Udet, who was one of the well-known German pilots; they often knew who their opposing squadrons consisted of; but anyhow he got shot down. He rode it down and landed—no parachute. The big fear in those days was burning before you could get on the ground, but he managed to get it down and got captured. The next day the Germans showed him the body of another American pilot. They apparently had some idea of whom they had, and they were trying to get positive identification from another American. My father looked at the body and said, "We have a lot of pilots. I don't know that one."

He did know him, because he was in the band. He name was Quentin Roosevelt, son of the former president, Teddy Roosevelt. My father didn't want to have anything to do with

identifying him, particularly for the Germans. He went off and spent the next several months in prison camp, where he was treated pretty well, he said—a lot better as an officer than the enlisted people were treated. The Germans had a certain amount of feeling about status, and as a result, he was treated—he said—pretty fairly.

[13:18] One thing they did, Tony, was they took their shoes away at night. They thought it would be a little harder to escape with no shoes. Eventually, he and another guy did break out, and they were wandering around the woods afraid to speak to anybody. When they finally did speak to somebody, they found out the war was over the day before. Had they held on for literally another couple of days, they would've gotten out anyway. They were out wandering around in the woods when the Armistice was declared on 11-11 of '18.

MACRO: After the war—what was his career after the war? Did he stay in the service?

RAYMOND: He stayed in the Reserves. He came back. While he was gone, he was awarded, as were many, a degree. He'd had 3+ years, I guess, of college, so Wesleyan gave him a degree, but he didn't go back to college. He went down South—he worked as a roustabout in the oil fields down in Texas and then a little bit in Mexico. He was labeled "The Aviator," because of his being a pilot. One of his jobs was to be at the top of an oil derrick, and when the pipes were pulled up to change the bit, he would have to pull them over and latch them to the side. At the end of the day, he crawled down, an oily mess.

MACRO: Tough work.

RAYMOND: One of his characteristics in later life was a great fear of fires, because of the fear of burning up in a plane. Secondly, one day in Texas, they were in the washhouse at the end of the day. They heated the water with flare-off gas, and the bathhouse exploded. He and another guy got out, but two or three others didn't. He said he was in there taking a shower, and the next thing he knew he was several yards away. The thing just blew him out. As a result, any time in my teenage years when we went anyplace after the war, lodging sometimes was hard to come by. It was before motels dotted the highway. There were many times we would go into a second or third or fourth class hotel and he would look it over and say, "No, we can't stay here," because he just didn't like the looks of it. If he didn't see an easy way out, he wouldn't stay there.

He loved to fly, and he kept flying in the '20s. Again, I couldn't tell you when the last time he flew was. During the '20s, after going back to Massachusetts from the oilfields, he sold real estate in Boston. He worked for a company that sold stuff down on the Cape. When he wasn't trying to peddle real estate, he was flying. They put on air shows. They would rent Braves Field, back when Boston had two baseball teams. Braves Field is now buried below part of Boston University.

[17:19] They'd get people in the stands, and then they'd get a bunch of guys up in the air and they would walk wings, going from one biplane to another. They would parachute down onto second base. For a few years, the big event was Jimmy Doolittle—later known for his World War II bombing raid on Tokyo. They'd—on the loudspeaker system—say, "Where is Doolittle?" Then at the end of the show, "Here comes Doolittle," and Doolittle would dive bomb second base and pull the airplane out at about rooftop level. That would be the grand finale of their air show.

MACRO: This was an airplane club that he was a member of?

RAYMOND: I don't know exactly what the association was or the group was. I think primarily it was a bunch of guys who got together and did this. They didn't do it all the time. It was just something they did occasionally. After the air show was over, they'd all go down to the Statler Hotel in Boston and have a big party. Of course, it was prohibition, but that didn't seem to make a lot of difference. They had good times down there. As a result, as a kid too young to know who they were, I got to meet two well-known wartime heroes: Eddie Rickenbacker that he knew from flying in World War I, and Doolittle that he knew from the air shows. Rickenbacker, of course, later became president over at Eastern [Airlines].

Years later he did an autobiography—probably someone else wrote it—but when he was on the circuit trying to hype the sales of the book, he was at the department store, [G. Fox & Co.,] in Hartford. I purchased the book and he autographed it. I showed him a picture of my father, and he said, "Oh yeah, I knew him." By that time Rickenbacker was kind of a crusty old guy, not terribly social, a lot less sociable, I thought, than his successor, the astronaut Frank Borman; I had some business meetings with him and he turned out to be pretty friendly.

The last part of story on my father is he tried to get back in World War II. Due to years of open cockpit flying and maybe some kind of a propensity for deafness, he didn't hear real well. Several times he went to sign up for active duty; every 6 months they let him take the physical. He would take the physical and do well. He was a very good squash player, and he was in good physical shape, but he couldn't hear worth a darn. They wouldn't let him back in, even with his connections. He was really chagrined, because one of his acquaintances, Hap Arnold, ended up running the Air Force when it was still part of the Army.

[21:07] He ended up, instead of being in World War II, working for the Federal Housing Administration. He was the head real estate appraiser for the state of Connecticut. His claim to fame there was that, although the FHA had hints of scandal all around the country, they never had one issue in Connecticut. He was in charge of appraisers and they didn't have a big problem with bad loans in that era. His appraisers weren't in on the take, like they were in some states.

MACRO: He was in Connecticut then. Did he ever live in this house, in East Windsor Hill?

RAYMOND: Yes, briefly. We moved from Boston. It was the depression, and obviously, you

went where you could find work. In '34, we moved to Farmington and rented a house there. We stayed there until the owner's son came home a little bit early from the war. I guess he must've been hurt or something, because the war wasn't over, yet he was coming home. We got tossed out of that house. We are now talking 1944 when we moved to Main Street; we lived across from the Library for a year. Then the next year, Will Wood, who gave Wood Library to the town, died, and we moved to this house [the Bissell House] in '45 or so.

My father died in '57. Coincidentally, he, his only brother, and his mother died the same year. That was in 1957. He was born in '95—1895—and died at 62, while visiting his kid sister living in Mexico City: he got off of the plane, said he didn't feel well, and died a few days later.

MACRO: You mentioned Will Wood just now. As the Library's founder, he clearly must've

been the one who set up the Association of the Library. Is that correct?

RAYMOND: Yes.

MACRO: Can you tell us something about the Association and how it got started and how it

has functioned over the years and your involvement?

RAYMOND: Well, he established the library in honor of his parents [Dr. William Wood and Mary Lyman Ellsworth], who lived in this house. He built his doctor's office at the south end of the yard. He was a GP and was also very interested in ornithology. In 1926—is that right or '5? I'm not 100 percent sure at this point, Tony, either '5 or '6—he established the library: built it and provided a small corpus of money to help pay for the expenses. He didn't give it title-wise, but made it available to the town. They set up the Wood Memorial Library Association and the bylaws, which say it is to be used as a library/meeting room for the benefit of the town.

[25:43] At that time, he, his nephew—my grandfather, Lewis Sperry, and George Boardman, who lived here in the Hill in what is now known as the Peck house [on South corner of Main Street and Sullivan Avenue] and was an officer at—I believe—what was then Hartford National Bank; the banks have all merged and consolidated over the years; but anyway, they were the trustees of the Association. The Association has been in existence ever since. It, in essence, owned and ran the library for years. Of course, Edith Vibert was the librarian for many years.

When the town decided to build their new library in the early '70s, out in Wapping, the building became—you might almost say—surplus property, but the Association continued to run it. At that time, the Friends of the Library got together and began running it in its present fashion as a combination library/museum, etc. The Friends have done a marvelous job.

At this point, the Association, which is still run by the family, is in essence, the landlord, the Friends of the Library, the tenant. There is no rent. The Association pays for the real estate-related expenses and contributes to the program. The Friends does a great job of raising

additional money and making up the budget to run the day-to-day operations of the library. The Association is—what—over 85 years old. The bank acts—kind of—as co-trustee. You do that for continuity, but the continuity has been more in the family than it has been with the bank, because the bank has gone from Hartford National to CBT to Fleet to Bank America.

MACRO: It was Boardman's connection with Hartford National, was it?

RAYMOND: Yes, that got them in as a co-trustee.

MACRO: He set up with your mother as the...

RAYMOND: Well, for years the board was primarily Will Wood, Lewis Sperry, and the then active board member, my mother, who had done it for years. My uncle, a guy named Larry Dow, a name known around town—Dow and Condon, real estate folks. They lived right up here where Lewis Sperry lived, just north of the store. Larry was treasurer forever, but then Larry died in '74—I think it was. He was on a trip, he and his wife, and Larry died. He had handed me the checkbook to write out the checks while he was gone. That was 1974, which is now—what?—37 years ago, and I'm still writing out the checks.

[30:04] The library, I think, has been a great thing for the town. I think that Will Wood's idea has been realized, and, at this point, the Friends do a great job. The South Windsor Cultural Arts deal uses it for the music programs. It is being used in 2011 exactly in accordance with the statement of purpose that was generated when it was built in the mid-'20s. It is interesting to see something have that kind of continuity.

MACRO: Yes, indeed. Switching back to your father, you have mentioned to me in the past that his grandfather—I think you told me—ran a whaling ship. There is a tremendous story attached to the career of that whaling ship. Do you think you can get into that, as we end the session?

RAYMOND: Sure. His grandfather, like many people, started out as a cabin boy on a whaling ship, and many years later, worked as a captain of a whaling ship. We were lucky enough to have a series of maps showing where he went. The best of the maps is in this house, and it shows that he sailed from New London and seven times went around the bottom of South America. They didn't go through the Straits of Magellan down there. They would go around the bottom, because, even though the weather was terrible, it was safer. Having been in the Straits of Magellan myself, I wouldn't want to be there with just sails, because the wind can blow and the rocks are pretty unforgiving. They didn't want to mess with the Straits, so they'd go down around the bottom—seven times because they made three round trips. Usually they'd be gone approximately 30 months. It was quite a life.

I say 'seven times' because on one trip—and we have the log from this trip—he went east over to the Azores and down around Cape Horn and across the Indian Ocean. It was fun following it. Bev [Beverly Wetherell Raymond] was better at reading his writing than I was, so she would read and I would follow on the map where he was. He got a whale in the Straits between Australia and Tasmania, which was fun, because Bev and I have been right there, including in Tasmania.

[33:23] Then later, he got a whale, as he said, within sight of Akaroa. Akaroa is a town east of Christchurch, NZ. Bev and I have been there. In fact, in Akaroa they raise salmon out in nets in the water. Bev and I were out looking at those, so when you're doing that, you are "within sight of Akaroa," so he must've gotten that whale probably within a couple of miles of where we were. He was a whaling captain for a number of years, and finally the whaling fell off. The ship, the last one he had, the 'Candace', was later used to provide food to people in Alaska. A lot of the people in California and Alaska got fed by food grown in South America, especially Chile. Anyway, the ship eventually was abandoned in San Francisco harbor, as were many others. When the city got expanded, a lot of silt was dumped into the bay, and many of these ships were literally buried under mud. The Candace got buried and sat there for a number of years until just recently, when they were excavating for a building. They came across a bunch of wood that looked like it was in pretty good shape, so an archeologist got them to extract the ship, and they finally determined, lo and behold! it was the Candace. I need to find out what is going on now; but the last I heard, it is the stern, which would've been the captain's quarters, that has actually survived the best. I understand that it has been put in a warehouse with the idea that, when money is available, they'd like to add a room to the whaling museum in San Francisco and put that part of the ship in it.

At such time as they do that, they'd love to have our charts and books, and maybe we'll give them a duplicate of something, but we're not too inclined to part with the originals. We have too much in the family history. Our younger son's wife, Jennifer Raymond, is great on genealogy, and she came across all of this information about the *Candace*. In fact, when she found out that it had been discovered, she wrote or emailed the person mentioned in an article in the San Francisco paper. When she said that our family had the logs, he was just dumbfounded to get this message out of the blue from some lady saying, "Oh, yes, the ship that you just unearthed—we've got the logs."

MACRO: Extraordinary.

RAYMOND: [37:23] That is a story that is not in its last chapter. We don't know just what is going to happen to the ship. I never met him [the sea captain who was my father's grandfather], but my father used to say that he would brag that his grandfather was one of the toughest guys he ever knew, because he held up his socks with a thumbtack. The reason for that is that he lost a leg when it got caught in a rope when they were out harpooning a whale. The

whale ran, and his leg got caught up in the rope that was running out. They had to take the leg below the knee, so he had a wooden leg, hence the ability to hold up his socks with a thumbtack.

MACRO: That's a marvelous story, and clearly, he was a remarkable man. Maybe when this story can be completed, or in the process of completing it, there might be a website that we could add to this file; we could put in the transcript the name of the museum or potential museum in San Francisco.

RAYMOND: Yes, the last I knew, Tony—I haven't done it for a long time; it has been a couple of years now, but it seems to me, I used to just Google 'Candace, the whaling ship Candace', and it would come up with the articles from the paper and a fair amount of information.

MACRO: Yes, that's the thing to do. Well, thank you very much, Bob, for making yourself available for this second interview. We very much appreciate it. It is a fascinating history you have, and good luck to you. If you can think of anything else to come back to you for, we will, but it looks to me as if we're pretty complete here.

RAYMOND: I'd be glad to do something.

MACRO: Thank you very much.

[Tape ends] [39:41]

MACRO: [00:06] Bob Raymond is about to add an addendum to the first interview. Thank you, Bob.

RAYMOND: Tony, we were talking about your house across the road here in East Windsor Hill [1828 Main Street]. When I moved here in 1944 or '5, that house was occupied by the McGrath family. The McGrath family really consisted of an elderly man whose name was Green and his grandchildren, Ann McGrath, Kathy McGrath, and Jim McGrath. They were born in that order. Ann, I would guess, was born probably about 1928, Kathy about 1930, and Jim about 1932. I could be off a year, but those are virtually the years when they were born. They lived with the grandfather and with their aunt who we called Aunt Jo. I honestly, at this point, don't know whether her last name was McGrath or Green, but their parents were dead. The five of them lived in that house—old Mr. Green, Aunt Jo, and the three kids. They lived there for many years, and eventually the girls got married. I'm hesitating—Dick Doran, that's his name: Ann, married Dick Doran, and they had two children, Joey and Beth. Those people now would be, I would say, in their late '40s.

One night when Ann, and Dick were out—by this time, of course, the two elder members of the family had passed away—but they were out one night; the kids were being babysat by the mother of a good friend of all of ours at that time, Mrs. Edward Barry, who lived down the street in the house now occupied by Lorraine Jones and before her, Bleater Craven. While Mrs. Barry was babysitting the Doran children, their house caught fire. I don't remember that it was very extensively damaged, but Mrs. Barry got the kids downstairs, and the fire department came. Mrs. Barry was a heavy woman, the excitement was too much for her, and she died in the house the night of that fire.

MACRO: Did she have a heart attack?

RAYMOND: She must've had a heart attack, because the kids were fine. Now, I am talking probably 1967, '8, '9—somewhere in that era. Kathy McGrath married Art Kelly, and I forget now where they lived, but they have been divorced for several years. Kathy is probably now 81 years old, lives in Maine. I haven't seen her for years. Jim McGrath, who was married, I believe, briefly, at one time, lived out on Rye Street. I guess, maybe that is the house that their parents had at one time.

He lived out there [on Rye Street]. He raised Christmas trees. Unfortunately, at one point, a son of Kathy's, who lived there with him, got into some drugs and ended up literally beating up Jim and doing him some fairly considerable damage. Just recently, my sister Carol said that she thought that that boy would not be any kid. He'd be 50 years old perhaps. He might be in jail, as a result of that incident. The house on Rye Street, jogging by there earlier this week, I noticed it is for sale.

[05:47] Kathy and Jim live in Maine much of the time, but they tend to live together. Kathy's husband is dead, and I don't know what her other children are doing, having not lived here myself in town for 50 years. Unfortunately, much of what I am repeating is secondhand information, but that, as far as I know, is the current story on the people that lived in your house. You bought it, you say, in '83?

MACRO: Eighty-two.

RAYMOND: Did you buy it from Ann and Dick Doran?

MACRO: No, there was a period of 3 years when a couple named Skehan lived in it. Both of them were in education in East Hartford schools. I believe they, the Skehans, had bought the house from the Dorans in 1979 or thereabouts.

RAYMOND: Well, the Dorans moved off, I understand, to the southern part of the state. I don't know exactly where.

BWR: They're on the Shore. [Voice of Beverly Wetherell Raymond (ed.)]

RAYMOND: Dick Doran died. Ann Doran—I have not seen her to talk to in 30, 40 years. Like I say, I'm, at this point, a bit of an immigrant here, having moved away after Bev and I were married in 1960.

MACRO: Well, an immigrant with a remarkable memory. I'm envious of your ability to remember dates and names. I wish I were as adroit. With regard to the house [1828 Main Street] that has been the focus of this addendum, there are extensive signs of fire in the roof, but in the roof only. The roof was clearly rebuilt. Your date in the '60s indicates clearly that that is when it was rebuilt. There is no sign of fire below the roof. Well, thank you, Bob. Thank you very much for adding this information.

RAYMOND: That's fine, thank you.

[Tape ends] [08:21]

[This text was amended by ADM according to revision by RER, November & December, 2011.]

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