Joseph Watson Vibert, Jr. Oral History Interview #1, September 22, 2003
Administrative Information

Narrator: Joseph Watson Vibert, Jr.
Interviewer: Jean Klein, Frank Haviland, Joan Morrison
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Biographical Note and Abstract
Joseph Watson Vibert, Jr. was born August 1, 1927, the son of Edith Miller Vibert and J. Watson Vibert. He was a lifelong resident of South Windsor, CT. During his career he worked as a dairy farmer, in the military as a tank operator, and later at Pratt & Whitney and Gerber Scientific. He was married to Angela Rinaldi Vibert and was the father of a son and two daughters. Vibert died on March 10, 2008.

In this interview, Joseph Vibert meets with Frank Haviland of the Hartford Audubon Society, Professor Joan Morrison of Trinity College. Three of Dr. Morrison's students from her Conservation Biology class were with her at the time the interview was recorded. They were were working on a management plan for the Station 43 Audubon proptery in the South Windsor meadows. Because of this, the bulk of the interview focuses on the meadows. The recording began several minutes before Morrison and her students arrived, so they do not appear on the first several pages of the transcript. Jean Klein recorded the conversation which centered on the changing landscape of the South Windsor "meadow," a tract of land bordered by the Connecticut River and running south from Ferry Lane (Scantic River) for approximately 4 miles. The Audubon property being discussed is a 100-acre parcel of land located near Vibert Road. The group noted various brooks, ponds and drains on the property, as well as how changes in the water table have caused changes to native plant and animal life.

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Transcript of Oral History Interview
This transcript was made from an audio recording that can be found in the archives at the Wood Memorial Library. Transcripts were edited for clarity and were approved, sometimes with additional edits, by the narrator. If researchers have any concerns about accuracy, they are encouraged to visit the Library and consult the draft transcripts and recordings.

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Joseph Vibert
Oral History Interview
September 22, 2003

Note: The following interview was conducted in the "bird room" of the Wood Memorial Library and Museum. Jean Klein supervised the taping of the interview with Joseph Vibert, long-time resident and town authority. Also present were Frank Haviland of the Audubon Society of Hartford, Professor Joan Morrison of Trinity College in Hartford, CT, and a number of Trinity students working on environmental studies. See the Administrative Information cover page for additional information.

FRANK HAVILAND: That's the way Charlie explains it too—that he thought it was—might be very efficient to do it that way but it was fraught with--.

JOSEPH VIBERT: Well it lasted one year, and that was the end of it.

HAVILAND: That's the first time I heard the year. Charlie couldn't guess what year it was.

VIBERT: No, I—I—

HAVILAND: He thought it was around WWI.

VIBERT: I asked about—several people, one of them being Miller—that lived—what's his first name?

JEAN KLEIN: Not Everett?

VIBERT: Yeah, Everett.

KLEIN: Everett?

VIBERT: Everett lived across the street with his grandparents—

KLEIN: Oh, really.

VIBERT: —at the time.

HAVILAND: Oh, okay.

VIBERT: And he was high school age… And he was down there every night, he almost got blown up. And he said about 1922. I think he's right.

HAVILAND: Okay.

VIBERT: You see, there's no trees at our house.

HAVILAND: I was just going to say [inaudible]—

VIBERT: —shade trees.

HAVILAND: The photo tells me the answer to one of the questions I had for you. I expected that there would be very few trees down there.

VIBERT: Those are shade trees that they needed for the cattle, see?

HAVILAND: Okay, that was the second question.

VIBERT: Or the horses—you just can't put them out to pasture—

KLEIN: Right.

VIBERT: —in the hot sun.

HAVILAND: Yeah, they need some protection—yeah.

KLEIN: So if there weren't any, they would plant them?

VIBERT: Well, I think as they—as they cut the thing—cleaned the—as we call it "cleaning up." As they—as they cut the trees down, they left certain trees. Those are old, full grown trees.

HAVILAND: Yeah.

VIBERT: And they left certain trees for shade.

HAVILAND: Yeah. But now there's a huge island there—must be 2 or 3 dozen trees, right about where this marsh turns. It's where the—

VIBERT: Yes.

HAVILAND: —the great horned owl and red tail hawk nest sits up in the high tree there.

KLEIN: Well [inaudible] go cross country.

HAVILAND: What about along the riverbank? Did they leave the trees on the riverbank way back to hold the bank—all those cottonwoods [inaudible]?

VIBERT: The wood isn't any good anyway. They're river—

HAVILAND: Oh, no, but it's a matter of—

VIBERT: They're river maples, so they just left them.

HAVILAND: Yeah, okay. So they did—

VIBERT: The riverbank wasn't pastured only in the—in the fall, late fall—they had kind of a socialistic idea here. It was the law but they built a fence along the meadow hill. And everybody was allotted so many feet to build, and then, depending on how much land you owned in the meadow, you were allowed to put so many cows and so many horses in.

HAVILAND: Oh, right—right.

VIBERT: It was called a common field. And, of course, everything got cleaned up good because they—they left them there until they—pretty near, until snow came. And by that time, they were pretty near starved to death.

HAVILAND: A lot more efficient than a bush hog.

VIBERT: Yeah.

HAVILAND: Not as quick.

VIBERT: Yeah, a horse has teeth upstairs and down, so they can eat closer than a cow.

HAVILAND: Yeah, yeah.

VIBERT: The trees on the riverbank, for the most part, are cottonwoods, sycamore—and the river maples, which isn't good—neither one are good lumber, and they're not good firewood either.

HAVILAND: Yeah, no they're—

VIBERT: They're not the good wood that we had around here, so they just stayed.

HAVILAND: Yeah, yeah.

KLEIN: Well probably just as well because it helped protect the bank.

VIBERT: Well—

KLEIN: In flood time.

VIBERT: The bank would be all right only—my grandfather said it had never changed since the white men came here, until they put the breakwaters in in 1880.

HAVILAND: Well, I was going to ask you if you knew when that happened—1880. There's one right to the corner of Ann Serber's—

VIBERT: Yes.

HAVILAND: property—Tim Shepard's, I guess—

VIBERT: Yes.

HAVILAND: —starts there. Is there another one further up? I remember trying to paddle around that with a kayak, and I couldn't figure out why I wasn't going anywhere——until I realized it was right in front of me. And the water is—

VIBERT: Yeah.

HAVILAND: —speeded up to get over it.

VIBERT: Those [inaudible] waters are the way across it.

HAVILAND: Yeah. Well, that's what I finally did is I went [inaudible].

VIBERT: Then there was one further up about opposite where Strong Road would—no, Governor's Highway would come in.

HAVILAND: Okay.

VIBERT: And then the next one is just north of the Town Farm at East Windsor Hill, south of the Scantic.

HAVILAND: Oh, okay.

VIBERT: That's still there.

HAVILAND: Yeah, I haven't been up that far with a canoe. That's a long way to go uphill.

VIBERT: But it caused the water, immediately north of it, to flow backwards.

HAVILAND: Uh-Hunh [Affirmative].

VIBERT: Go up towards—

HAVILAND: Right. It makes a reverse eddy, right.

VIBERT: And it——that's what caused the erosion.

HAVILAND: Yeah.

VIBERT: 20 acres or so went in at Indian Camp. I don't know whether they had it—

HAVILAND: Oh!

VIBERT: —had it—

HAVILAND: It was right at the mouth of the Scantic?

VIBERT: No, it was at the foot of Governor's Highway.

HAVILAND: Oh, okay.

VIBERT: There was a big, high island there that hardly ever flooded—

HAVILAND: Oh.

VIBERT: —and it's all gone in the river. And that's where they had their—their fort, the Indians—them other Indians. And that's where they lived.

HAVILAND: Oh, I see.

VIBERT: That's where they buried their dead and we find—found all kinds of things—of course, it went in over a period of 50 years.

HAVILAND: Yeah, yeah.

KLEIN: But a lot of the artifacts came out of—

VIBERT: A lot of it never was found, it just oozed into the river, and that was it.

HAVILAND: Yeah. Who paid for that? That looks like a lot of work.

VIBERT: Yeah, it was the federal government put it in—

HAVILAND: Oh, okay.

VIBERT: Because there was—everything that was being shipped was still by barge. And they had already built the canal and Windsor Locks to get above the rapids—

HAVILAND: Right.

VIBERT: —and so forth. So they thought it was—

HAVILAND: Oh, I see it. They broke the water into a channel on the west bank.

VIBERT: Make a deep channel—or a deeper channel for the barges.

HAVILAND: Right.

VIBERT: But then the railroads came in. I suppose the railroad was already there on the other side—I don't know, but our railroad came in in the 1880s out here.

HAVILAND: Yeah, yeah.

VIBERT: And when—when the railroads came in, the barge people were just put out of business.

HAVILAND: Oh, yeah—yeah, that would happen to all of [inaudible].

VIBERT: Same as the stagecoach people were put out of business. So the federal government forgot all about it.

KLEIN: Now did they have anything—wasn't it at the end of Governor's Highway that they had a—pier in the dock for river trade?

VIBERT: I don't know as there's anything in writing but there was a building and a hotel down there and a well.

KLEIN: Really?

VIBERT: Oh, yes.

KLEIN: At the end of—Governor's Highway.

VIBERT: Right in the meadow, yes. Because my grandfather could remember the well.

KLEIN: Really?

VIBERT: Somebody—somebody cleaned the well out before it went in the river, just to see if there wasn't any silver or something down there.

KLEIN: Right.

VIBERT: But they didn't find anything.

KLEIN: Oh. So all of that now, where that hotel was, is—

VIBERT: It's all gone.

KLEIN: It's all gone.

VIBERT: But that—the land—that land was much higher than the—

KLEIN: I was going to say—

VIBERT: —riverbank to the north or the south of it.

KLEIN: Oh, that's why it lasted [inaudible].

VIBERT: See the highest elevation of the meadow is—is East Windsor Hill. And as you go south—

HAVILAND: Yeah.

VIBERT: —to East Hartford, it—it—

HAVILAND: It's dropped down, yeah.

VIBERT: —it's sea level, it does drop.

HAVILAND: Although, I've noticed from the floods, the real low point is really at Newberry Road. There's a dip there.

VIBERT: Yes.

HAVILAND: Where Newberry Road and Main Street—

VIBERT: But, you see, that's not the—that's not the original.

HAVILAND: That's not the general [s/l trend]. Well is that right, was that dug out—or washed out?

VIBERT: The—the bank caved off there at the end of Newberry Road.

KLEIN: [inaudible].

HAVILAND: No, no I meant on Main—Newberry at Main.

VIBERT: Oh—oh—

HAVILAND: That's a low spot there.

VIBERT: —on Main Street itself?

HAVILAND: Yeah, there's a low spot there.

VIBERT: That's—that's the low spot is because of the brook coming in.

HAVILAND: Yeah.

VIBERT: And the road is much higher now.

HAVILAND: Yeah, the brook now goes under the road.

VIBERT: Yes.

HAVILAND: Yeah, yeah. Yeah, so there's a breakwater here.

KLEIN: You said it was a hotel—there was also a dock?

VIBERT: Well, I'm not—I assume there was a dock… But I know there was a hotel.

KLEIN: Now that was—?

VIBERT: I don't know how big a hotel—you know—it wasn't—it wasn't like they have in Hartford, but—

KLEIN: No.

HAVILAND: Yeah.

VIBERT: But that was a—a busy road when—

HAVILAND: When the ferry was there?

VIBERT: —when the stagecoach—when the ferry was there.

KLEIN: Yeah.

VIBERT: See?

KLEIN: Yeah, so it would be a ferry—

VIBERT: I suppose the ferryman—

KLEIN: —ferry stop, right.

VIBERT: —who collected the toll lived there.

KLEIN: Yeah.

VIBERT: I mean the [s/l Wilkers] owned the ferry, but they—they [inaudible]. No doubt they hired it out, they didn't—

HAVILAND: Yeah, run it themselves.

VIBERT: —run the ferry. They were people of means, anyway—

HAVILAND: Uh-Hunh [Affirmative].

VIBERT: —always looking to increase their—increase their financial holdings.

HAVILAND: Uh-Hunh [Affirmative].

KLEIN: You know, you don't hear very much about them. You hear all about the—the Bissell ferry.

VIBERT: And see there's a—there's a pier on the other side of the river that comes right across that island. That island wasn't there.

HAVILAND: Well—yeah, I thought this was just created by the Farmington River bringing down silt.

VIBERT: There's another—There's another pier.

HAVILAND: Really?

VIBERT: Yes, I don't exactly know where it is.

KLEIN: On the mainland here?

VIBERT: Yeah, it comes out of the mainland.

HAVILAND: Oh, do you think it's—?

VIBERT: I don't know where—It must have come out of the mainland. I don't know if the bank's caved off over there or not.

KLEIN: This is an awful, rocky area. That was—that was all riverborne?

HAVILAND: Well, if you look at this—This is a sandbar.

KLEIN: Is it really?

HAVILAND: There may be some stones in it, as well. I don't—I've never paid much attention.

KLEIN: Because—well I canoed by it.

HAVILAND: Yeah, I've canoed in here, and you almost can't get through with a canoe, unless it's spring or high water.

VIBERT: It's high water—it takes high water.

HAVILAND: You've got to get out and walk along the canoe.

KLEIN: Right.

HAVILAND: —on this end. But it stays open all the time. But this is all sandy in here—

KLEIN: Okay.

HAVILAND: —and so is this trailing edge.

KLEIN: Okay.

HAVILAND: And then now it's all treed.

KLEIN: Right.

HAVILAND: There are some rocks down there, but [inaudible]. There's a lot of rock over in here.

KLEIN: Right.

HAVILAND: In fact, there's a stone foundation like right in here, of an old building.

KLEIN: Yeah, well all up in here there are—Well, the interesting thing is [inaudible].

VIBERT: Yeah, the federal government has a—I don't know where you get them—have maps of the original breakwaters. Because my father—they came up and got my father once and then they showed him that. They had the maps, but he had to show them one or two existing breakwaters to—so that they could orient themselves.

HAVILAND: Oh, I see—figure out where the map fit in.

VIBERT: Yeah.

HAVILAND: Yeah, yeah. That's interesting. Well, I'll talk to the [inaudible] survey people. They have an office [inaudible].

VIBERT: You see there was another breakwater at the end of Governor's Highway—

HAVILAND: Yeah.

VIBERT: —or somewhere around here—

HAVILAND: Around here, yeah.

VIBERT: —that—that—

HAVILAND: That one I've never noticed.

VIBERT: Well—

HAVILAND: This one I have—here.

VIBERT: That one's gone because the water broke between this one and the land. And somebody got the federal government to come up, and they took that one up and they rebuilt it—

HAVILAND: Oh!

VIBERT: —back on here.

HAVILAND: Oh, wow—I see.

VIBERT: And it's low enough, you can see they angle of it is a little bit different than the original. What they did with the rest of the stones, I don't know.

KLEIN: Was this where that little swimming hole is—right in there?

VIBERT: Yeah, that's actually not a very good swimming hole. More people have drowned in there.

KLEIN: Have they, really?

VIBERT: Oh, yeah. There's a—there's a—

KLEIN: In it, yeah.

VIBERT: The water goes around and round.

HAVILAND: The bank here now is eroding dramatically. It's—3 years ago it was a little beach.

VIBERT: It's going to break—it's going to break—it's going to break through, again, and it's really going to take off.

HAVILAND: Yeah, yeah. But there's a crack that started to propagate in. Two years ago, it was just a little "d" shaped thing. I thought, "It must have been a thunderstorm or some"—looks like it was from underneath, like an underground water flow. And now it's gotten to be a big wedge—very noticeable—just upstream of this.

KLEIN: Well all along here, too, where the bank swallows—

HAVILAND: Right, and they've all moved.

KLEIN: Have they, yeah. Well a couple—well a couple—

HAVILAND: They lost their bank.

KLEIN: Yeah. Well a couple of times they get flooded out.

HAVILAND: Yeah.

KLEIN: But I always thought the Indian burial ground was in here, but it's not, it's up here.

VIBERT: No, see the river—the riverbank—the river went like—this is what's caved in.

KLEIN: Oh, okay.

VIBERT: That's what's caved in, all the way up through. And that's what we call Grant's Island and that's the end of it there. That wasn't there originally either.

HAVILAND: Yeah, that's now the end of the Podunk [River]—hold on.

[Professor Morrison and students enter]

KLEIN: Hello. Did you meet the vice president?

JOAN MORRISON: Well, no—a little unexpected roadwork on 291 coming across the bridge.

HAVILAND: Oh, yeah, they were doing that when I did that too.

MORRISON: [inaudible] backed up there for [inaudible].

HAVILAND: It was inspecting. I was lucky enough that they broke for lunch, and so, all of a sudden, they got out of the way.

MORRISON: We weren't so lucky. So sorry we're late—my goodness. Okay.

KLEIN: All right. Well this is Joe Vibert. He is our—

VIBERT: I'm in my working clothes.

KLEIN: —resident authority on town—

MORRISON: How are you? Very nice to meet you.

HAVILAND: Nice to meet you.

KLEIN: —and the meadows.

MORRISON: Well, we're not quite in our working clothes, because we didn't wear our hiking boots. [inaudible] classroom working this time. So anyway, I appreciate you being here with us today. And I don't know how much Frank told you about the plan—what we're working on.

KLEIN: No, I had to explain it—we haven't—we haven't heard the whole—

MORRISON: Okay. Well this class is Conservation Biology—Trinity College. And the course focuses on understanding lands and landscapes and how they're used by people, by animals, what kinds of things live on the landscapes in terms of native organisms like plants and animals. What kinds of exotic organisms live there, maybe exotic plants or unusual organisms that have been introduced somehow, how the humans use those lands, economic uses of the lands, recreational uses of the lands.

Conservation Biology is a very interdisciplinary science, which means it incorporates not only the study of the natural environment, but the study of humans in that environment and how humans interact with the environment, and so it incorporates values and economics and natural science, social science, a lot of different disciplines. So the charge for this part of the course, which is our laboratory component, is to work with Frank and Patrick from the Audubon Society, and to work with you as a landowner and other people who have some interest in this piece of property to, sort of, study the property, look at its values—all kinds of values, look at its history, and how that's influenced what's going on right now, look at possible future uses—like might it be a good place for conserving species, might it be a good place for using—for some economic purposes for people to be there—farming or recreation-wise or whatever, and developing a plan for that piece of land—particularly the piece of land that Hartford Audubon owns, but then the context of that land overall—sort of that little piece of land by itself, but what is the context of where that piece of land is and how what happens on that little piece of land might affect the overall landscape or the overall context.

So that's what our mission is for this part of the course, is to work on developing that plan—management plan and land management plan. And so we're seeking input from a variety of sources that will help us do that. And you are identified as, sort of, the best source for the history of the site, and the land use history, and how humans have used the land over time. And so we appreciate—we certainly appreciate you being here today and helping us understand what the past of that piece of land was, and how it was used before and what it looked like and how people feel about it and how people might feel about it right now, and what might happen to it in the future. So that's, sort of, the intent. And we each have some specific—

VIBERT: And you're talking about the Audubon—what the Audubon Society owns?

MORRISON: Uh-Hunh [Affirmative], and where is it, specifically.

VIBERT: Yes.

MORRISON: But that piece, within the context of the larger landscape.

VIBERT: Yeah.

MORRISON: So, yeah. So—

KLEIN: It's very limited—you know—what they own. So you have to talk about all the surrounding stuff, too.

VIBERT: Yeah, no—that's all right.

HAVILAND: I know the wildlife pays attention to what we think of our important boundaries.

MORRISON: Yeah.

VIBERT: This flashed through my mind. My grandfather could remember the remains of the original beaver dams—

MORRISON: Uh-Hunh [Affirmative].

VIBERT: —that's called—I don't know what they call it now, but it's Beaver Pond.

MORRISON: Uh-Hunh [Affirmative].

VIBERT: And then the drain was called Beaver Pond Drain, but on the South Windsor maps they call it Newberry Brook now. How that ever changed, I don't know. But all our deeds refer to it as—all of the old deeds refer to it as Beaver Pond Drain.

HAVILAND: Yeah. Well that brook went down a long parallel to Newberry Road, though, for quite a while, right?

VIBERT: Well, that's another brook coming. The brook that comes along Newberry Road goes into the Beaver Pond Drain—

HAVILAND: Right, right.

VIBERT: —and it should end there.

HAVILAND: Yeah.

VIBERT: From Beaver Pond Drain east should still be Newberry Brook because it never was called anything else. But once it hits Beaver Pond Drain, that should be Beaver Pond Drain—that's the way it always was before.

KLEIN: Beaver Pond Drain goes north and south?

VIBERT: Yes. It goes as far as Tudor's Drain—in which—Tudor's Drain was dug.

MORRISON: Here's the photo [inaudible] aerial today. [inaudible].

VIBERT: The Tudor's Drain wouldn't be on that one [inaudible].

MORRISON: Is this it here?

VIBERT: No—but anyway, Beaver Pond Drain goes south to [inaudible] Drain which goes to the river—which was quite a—an undertaking in colonial days to dig through to the river.

MORRISON: So there's a big beaver pond down in here someplace?

VIBERT: Well, the beaver pond is where the—what the Audubon Society owns now.

MORRISON: Well the original pond?

VIBERT: Yes.

MORRISON: Okay, so that would be right down in here.

HAVILAND: Right.

MORRISON: And so now this is Newberry Brook that comes out of that pond—but that's new, you're saying?

HAVILAND: Well, no—right. That was dug in order to drain the fields.

MORRISON: Okay.

HAVILAND: And that's why it—

VIBERT: It was dug in order to drain Beaver Pond too [inaudible].

HAVILAND: Yeah, yeah.

KLEIN: The Beaver Pond was much larger.

VIBERT: Yes.

KLEIN: But if you look at it with a topo[graphical] map that's a little bit bigger, what you'll see is that the brook—this drain goes very straight north, south, and then takes immediate right turn and heads straight to the river.

MORRISON: Wow, okay.

HAVILAND: —unto themselves, water courses don't do that. It was—

VIBERT: Well that was dug [inaudible].

HAVILAND: And this is similar here, the Stoughton Brook.

MORRISON: Uh-Hunh [Affirmative].

HAVILAND: It ends here and then, all of a sudden, it takes a hard right turn and goes straight to the river. And, in fact, this is another dug drain. It's nowhere near as deep. But this "z" shaped thing does exactly the same thing. It takes land off—water off the Kasheta farms.

MORRISON: Okay.

VIBERT: And then on Newberry Road, you'll notice, once you go west of what the Audubon Society owns to the river, you'll find a dry ditch.

HAVILAND: Right.

VIBERT: Well that was dug after Tudor's Drain was dug, with the idea of—of draining the marsh more.

HAVILAND: You mean this swale in here?

VIBERT: Yes—

HAVILAND: This low spot?

VIBERT: —dug to the river.

HAVILAND: Oh, you mean this one, in the midst of the trees.

VIBERT: Yeah, yeah.

HAVILAND: Yeah.

VIBERT: And I don't know which end it's on. I don't know which end they dug first, whether they started from here to the river or from the river to here. But when they got down to the desired depth to drain it, they hit quicksand, and there was nothing they could do about it. They couldn't tile it or anything. So the whole thing was a failure, after all that work.

HAVILAND: Okay, it's extremely wide down here. It's really opened up where the river has gone in—

VIBERT: Then the next flood that—the big flood we had, the water rushed in and that's why it's so wide.

HAVILAND: Oh, I see.

VIBERT: It washed the banks. So they came back with dump carts and oxen, everything else and they—the land that had washed out, they scooped up and they—they made it narrow right around the riverbank. But that's all caved in the river since, so—

HAVILAND: Yeah, yeah. That was pretty low.

VIBERT: And there's no—that doesn't even show anymore.

HAVILAND: That's right; it's very low all the way into the river.

VIBERT: Yeah.

HAVILAND: Yeah, there's just a little rise—at the edge where—I guess minor flooding has deposited some of that—

VIBERT: Yeah.

HAVILAND: —new stuff.

KLEIN: So that's not the ditch they dynamited?

[inaudible]

VIBERT: Well it was Beaver Pond Drain itself.

KLEIN: Oh, okay. It was never clear.

MORRISON: So when were all these big ditches put in then? Were they sort of all done around the same time or was it a period of intense digging, or when did this all happen at first?

VIBERT: I think, for the most part, it was probably put in just before the Revolutionary War. Everybody had—that owned land at that time, had a common interest; get the water out so the grass would grow. And they could grow corn on lower elevations of land because they had to feed their animals, plus there was a market for it in Hartford—in that—see today we run our cars on gasoline.

Today we run our cars on gasoline, but in those days all transportation, even in the cities, was by horse. Well the city people couldn't grow hay and corn, and live in the city so, see they—they bought it from the outlying towns. And supposedly, the fact that it flooded every year, or most every year, brought in fertilizer so that it grew the hay, and stuff would grow better than hay on the higher elevations, or the higher towns.

MORRISON: Uh-Hunh [Affirmative].

VIBERT: Something like this—isn't there something in the Bible about the Nile flooding?

HAVILAND: Oh, yeah.—yeah.

VIBERT: And they depended on the flood swell—

HAVILAND: That's right.

VIBERT: The same thing worked here.

MORRISON: Uh-Hunh [Affirmative]. Yeah, deposits all that nice silt and nutrients from upstream—

VIBERT: Yeah.

MORRISON: —and dumps it on those fields and what do you know; you don't even have to spread manure or anything.

VIBERT: So the idea was to get it all drained. I'm losing my train of thought here, but—anyway—Every year the landowners got together, and once these ditches were—were put in to drain it, they—they'd get together at least once a year, probably twice a year, with the shovels and forks, etc., hand tools and clean them out good so that they'd be kept at the desired depth.

But as time went on, I suppose bigger dairy farms came in—there wasn't the call for—for—for cows—there wasn't the need for the grass that there originally was. So that people slacked off, and they didn't clean the ditches out and they got plugged up. And by 1922, or thereabout then, that's when they did the blasting. But it probably took 50 years—for it to get—

HAVILAND: To fill in.

VIBERT: —filled in, really.

HAVILAND: Yeah, yeah. Well there were a lot of ups and downs in the agriculture in the valley going on at the same time. At the time of the American Revolution this was booming. Connecticut was called a provision state because it had such agricultural surplus it was able to feed the troops. And the Connecticut River Valley was the primary area because the rest of the state is so hilly and so much rock, that the real transportable stuff was here. Then after that, they fed the islands, in the West Indies, as part of the tri-corner trade—slaves and rum and—and onions from Wethersfield and all kinds of other things from here. But when that started to fade away—in fact, what blew them up was the Erie Canal. The Erie Canal, in the 1820s, made it possible for farmers in Ohio and Indiana to export food to New York and the Atlantic Ocean. And while the land here is at least the agricultural equivalent of anything in the world, it's small. In Indiana you could have a farm that was 50 miles long and 50 miles wide—perfectly flat, deep, deep top soil. It's just impossible to compete with the economies of scale.

VIBERT: Plus every time a generation died off—if he had 100 acres, and he had 3 kids, each one of them ended up with 33 acres. So—

HAVILAND: Yeah, started to make it harder.

VIBERT: —it wasn't feasible enough—

HAVILAND: Yeah.

VIBERT: —and yet there was friction enough between the siblings not to cooperate about it—

HAVILAND: Yeah.

VIBERT: —probably, but—even within my memories, when it was still cows, it was a dairy farm down the street here, Wilson Brothers; they even peddled milk. There would be strips of land that had already grown up to brush, some already to trees because the heir that owned them wouldn't sell them, or their children wouldn't sell them and they wouldn't let the other ones on and it just—it just got divided up so—but by 1922 or so, they decided—we must have had an awful crop of mosquitoes too, because all the old timers used to tell me that that's how they got it. Everybody involved was—if you don't clean it out, you're going to die of malaria or

something else. So they held their meetings and legally assessed everybody a charge and paid somebody to dynamite it out. But that was the last time it was ever done on a—

HAVILAND: Uh-Hunh [Affirmative].

MORRISON: How many birds did that kill?

VIBERT: I don't think any birds got it, but the snapping turtles, they say—

KLEIN: Oh.

VIBERT: —went up in the air—200 feet.

MORRISON: [inaudible] in 1932 or 1922?

VIBERT: 1922.

MORRISON: So that was, yeah—there would have been a lot of snapping turtles in a pond that big.

VIBERT: Well all along the brook, of course.

HAVILAND: Charlie Nielson explained to me that it was somebody from the neighborhood who was in the First World War who learned enough about explosives to come up with the idea. They apparently had done similar things in France, when they were trying to hurriedly drain an area where they were going to build an encampment or something. So he had this brainstorm.

VIBERT: Yeah, [inaudible].

HAVILAND: But I don't know who did it, whether they hired someone or they—

VIBERT: There was a Lobdell, a man by the name of Lobdell that dynamited, and a man by the name of Ludlum. They were uncle and nephew. I think they probably were the ones that did it.

HAVILAND: Oh, okay. But that was their business—blasting the road cuts.

VIBERT: Yeah, Ludlum did grow tobacco too. He—they were new to town here, but they did grow tobacco.

HAVILAND: Oh, okay.

MORRISON: So the landowners used to work a lot together to work on the land. Then do they still—?

VIBERT: Yeah, this part of the land—yes. It's kind of hard to understand how they could work together because all the Yankees here were so independent that—and they fight over an inch of land.

MORRISON: So how is that—?

VIBERT: [inaudible]. But in colonial days, somehow they formed what they call the common field here. And they held their—held regular meetings, and they had the power to what they agreed to enforce on anybody that didn't want to agree to it—even though they were a landowner here. And for at least 100 years, maybe 200, they were all—depending on how—what your acreage was, you were assessed so many feet along the meadow hill, and you were responsible for a fence in that area. And, of course, there had to be side fences, at least two of them; one on the south side and one on the north side. To the rear of us, the Scantic River maybe was big enough to provide—to be the north side—I don't know. And so you have this—this whole area here as a common field, and then they would vote as to what the date would be to get all the corn out of the meadow because you couldn't put the animals in there with your corn crops still in the meadow.

MORRISON: Did they make decisions on who grew what and things like that?

VIBERT: No.

MORRISON: No, they all grew what they wanted.

VIBERT: You could grow what you wanted to, but you had to have your corn out by the date that was set by them. Of course, if you were going to cut a second crop of hay, why—you would have it out. And then, depending on what your acreage was, that determined the amount of cattle you could put in. And it wasn't necessarily all local cattle. Of course, [inaudible] Mr. Jennings lived in the second house up here, and he came from out in Willington, and he'd—he'd stand by the gate. He only owned 4 acres of land in the whole meadow, and he was only supposed to put in 6 or 8 head of cattle. And he'd stand by the gate, he'd let all of Willington in. And nobody could do much about it—or did much about it.

HAVILAND: But that was mainly to control the brush, right?

VIBERT: And, well it was a—

HAVILAND: To feed the cattle too.

VIBERT: [inaudible] to feed the—mainly to feed the cattle, I would say. And you could put so many head of horses in, too. See by—by everything being drained—a cow has a split hoof, so it's pretty hard to stick a cow in the mud. But a horse doesn't. It has a cup—cupped hoof. So by having everything drained good there wasn't that much danger of the horses getting stuck in the mud and having to be pulled out or—they're not much good once they're pulled out. I think it takes so much life out of them. But there were both horses and—and my grandfather used to tell about—they'd go down and—and

[Tape ends]

[Tape 2-3 begins]

VIBERT: —1818 or something like that, until our new constitution was written. And people read it now and they think the church ran the town. Well the town ran the church, really. They decided what the minister was going to be paid and what he wasn't going to be paid.

That's—I'm getting off the subject now, but things have really changed.

KLEIN: It was rotten apples, and—

HAVILAND: What did the meadows look like when you first went out there as a boy? Do you have any memories of—?

VIBERT: Well, yes. It was much more open than it is now, and every time we went out on the meadow, my father complained about how the meadow was growing up, because these different strips of land—that as people died off, and nobody did anything with them.

HAVILAND: It began to turn into woodland—

VIBERT: It began—first it was brush, like it is on the north side of Vibert Road, and then the trees take over—come out of the brush, and they kill the brush off. But it was much—

HAVILAND: So that was already begun when you were young.

VIBERT: Oh, yes.

KLEIN: Now, how about the hedgerows that seemed to separate the property--east and west. Were those—they [inaudible]

VIBERT: There were no hedgerows, because we plowed with horses and we wanted every inch.

KLEIN: So those were—

VIBERT: You plowed right up to your neighbor's land. Trying not to get over, because he'd holler if you did, but he did the same thing to you. And there were definitely plowing stones. People did—for the most part, respected plowing stones in those days. A plowing stone was sacred. When the tractors came, they plowed them up. And then we had trouble re-establishing boundaries.

MORRISON: So the hedgerows were more recent, then?

VIBERT: Oh, yes. No, the old-timers didn't have hedgerows.

MORRISON: Were the—so the hedgerows were actually planted by the next generation, sort of, to then [inaudible]—

VIBERT: No, the hedgerows were just the wild stuff that came up.

MORRISON: Where they missed plowing.

VIBERT: They just didn't plow to the line.

HAVILAND: What is it about a tractor that makes it harder to get to the edge than a horse-drawn?

VIBERT: Well, with a tractor, you got a wheel here and a wheel here, but your plow is here, so you can't run your wheel over the line.

HAVILAND: Oh, that's right. A tractor is wider than a horse.

VIBERT: Number one, and number two—a lot of the hedgerows—by that time—we spoke of barbed wire earlier. By that time, barbed wire had come in and a lot of the—a lot of the land was fenced after the common field had ceased to exist. It was fenced with barbed wire, so you couldn't get up to the line, plus—barbed wire was the best thing for bringing in other things, because the birds sit on the barbed wire and they poop. And they poop out live seeds that sprouts very good right under the fence, and all kinds of things come up.

MORRISON: Good ecological point. So the birds planted the hedgerows.

VIBERT: Now as a rule, we don't like hedgerows. I mean, hedgerows in a hot day, it makes it that much hotter in a meadow, and some plants can't take the heat.

MORRISON: Well, they break the wind, probably.

VIBERT: Well, nobody worried about breaking the wind, because—well, yes, that made the heat, but what I was going to say was nobody worried about breaking the wind like they did out west because we didn't have dust storms in the meadow. We had it on this level up here, but not on—not in the meadow.

MORRISON: But the hedgerows prevented the nice breeze from blowing across the whole area, so it made it hotter.

VIBERT: Yes, you're right. It made it terrifically hot, which was even bad on the horses. See, if it gets over 95, you don't work your horses. But you can still work the tractors. It was easier, years ago.

MORRISON: You didn't have to work so hard. Now you don't have excuses anymore.

VIBERT: Then they put lights on the tractors on top of that.

MORRISON: At night, huh. But they have cabs with air conditioning.

VIBERT: See, my father changed from tobacco to dairy in the Depression because it was difficult to sell the tobacco. My father was very independent. He'd tell the buyers where to head—which was bad. Yeah. It—well, it wasn't good—common sense, but he found a place in Hartford that would take milk, so he changed from tobacco to dairy in—in the Depression. But the point I want to make is, at that time even the University of Connecticut said a man could make a living off 16 milking cows.

HAVILAND: Wow.

VIBERT: Well, today you need 316 for one man. It was much easier, farming, years ago than it is today.

MORRISON: Well, it's because everybody was—

VIBERT: The poor farmers that are here today, I mean the farms are so much bigger, and it requires so much more for just one head of a household than it did at that time.

KLEIN: The middleman probably didn't get the most profit in those days, did they?

VIBERT: I don't—I don't know who got what—

KLEIN: The farmers would sell directly, more or less, to the—

VIBERT: I know they thought—

KLEIN: —the retailer?

VIBERT: They didn't have—they had—before that, we had 38 acres of tobacco and only one cow for milk, for our family cow, and then we—if there was extra milk, we sold it to the neighbors. And they built the barn in 1935 and it had 16 stalls—for—that was for the milking cows. And one man could make a living off of 16 cows then—one family man.

MORRISON: So that was when the system was more localized—more sustainable. People were feeding themselves, but also their communities, pretty well, and there probably wasn't much of a middleman, then. And now like you say you need 300 or 3,000 for somebody to make a living because there's so much shipping and other costs, and—

VIBERT: See, when—when you had a loss, then, we always kept hay ahead in case of a bad season. Some hay would be—we wouldn't feed it out for two years, [inaudible]—but you can't do that with it when you have 300 head of cattle. But when everything was on a smaller scale, you could keep things ahead for a bad crop or anything like that.

MORRISON: Now you just wait for the government to bail you out—subsidies.

VIBERT: If the government doesn't bail them out, they're under—you get nothing grown.

MORRISON: So tobacco was actually grown in here at some point?

VIBERT: —Tobacco was grown along the riverbank. That's kind of a sandy soil. But it went in spurts. The tobacco grown in the meadow is a darker tobacco, which is what they want now. You see the tobacco Kasheta's have up on it. And you're not growing it on the upland, but the upland tobacco was what was in demand for the most part. So the—there wasn't that much grown in the meadow, really. Maybe more in East Windsor Hill meadow, because that's a higher plain. But the—they were—

HAVILAND: Well, this is all private land, right?

VIBERT: Yes—but for what they wanted, the meadow didn't suit. The meadow tobacco didn't suit what the buyers wanted.

HAVILAND: Because the other side of Main Street is where they grew all the—

VIBERT: Right on this table where we are now is where they grew it—grew it for the most part.

HAVILAND: So it was still all broadleaf down here, or was there any shade along—

VIBERT: It was all broadleaf, except for the Second World War. Then there was some shade grown. But when I was young, there was no shade grown here.

HAVILAND: Hmm. I wonder what the problem is with the lower ground. Just too wet?

VIBERT: No, it just—tobacco is a very sensitive plant, and it just didn't—it didn't grow the way they wanted it to, I don't know— [inaudible]. It wasn't what they were looking for. It makes a difference now—I'm probably getting off the subject, but what we used to think of as the bigger tobacco farms on Main Street, here, they didn't get bigger until 1880, when the railroad came through, and the reason the railroad allowed them to get bigger was—New York and even Hartford was all still on horses, and they didn't know what to do with all the horse manure in the city, so they used to put it on coal cars and ship it up here, and that's what we grew the tobacco on. You couldn't buy commercial fertilizer in a bag like you can now, and when the railroad came through and they shipped the horse manure up in coal cars, why they cleared the land, they tiled the land on this to get the water out of it, and they could really grow tobacco, they thought.

KLEIN: They also used nightsoil from Hartford, I've been told.

VIBERT: They used what?

KLEIN: Night-soil. You know, the carts from the outhouses—

VIBERT: Well, yeah, maybe, but I don't think it was shipped in railroad cars.

KLEIN: No, but—

VIBERT: The only thing—they used to joke—Barnum and Bailey used to come to Hartford once a year, and they had a car full of elephant manure, and we got it. And the leaves of your tobacco were that big….

KLEIN: Which is off the subject. It's more details, really.

VIBERT: And it went for ten years that way, but—I mean the same land grew such big leaves, but that's just a story.

KLEIN: Hmm. Well, the archeologists probably stumbled on the fact that all—many of the things—buttons and coins and things that they can find within the plow zone on the meadows here was not native, you know, it wasn't from the colonial times. It was from Hartford with the night soil—the night soil that came up—

VIBERT: Hartford, New York, yes. Coins and everything came up in the horse manure. But when it came to emptying the outhouses, that went to grow the horse corn. And the horse

manure—they wouldn't put nothing but horse manure on the garden. They knew enough not to eat their own—of course, in Mexico and so forth, they still use their own for their own gardens, but here we did switch.

MORRISON: Did you bring questions? Because you guys have got—you can ask your questions, too.

STUDENT: Well, other than the—what was it, did you say? Well, corn and tobacco, or tobacco and dairy that you used the land for? Were there any other crops that you grew?

VIBERT: Well, in my time, it was just some tobacco, corn—oh, potatoes! Potatoes were growing in the meadow, yes.

KLEIN: In fact, they still are—or at least they were until Spielman died.

VIBERT: Potatoes were growing in there. I forgot about that. If you get an early fall bug, you lose everything. You get nothing in the ground except a white spot where the potato was.

MORRISON: What's the relationship between the land owners now? Do they still meet at all? Do they talk?

VIBERT: Well, the ditches are becoming filled in more and more, so the water table is rising. So the only land that was being used is the land that's high enough out of the water table, as I see it.

HAVILAND: Well, that explains some of those wood lots now out in the middle of the meadow. From the Soil Conservation Service maps, I can see that they were more poorly drained than the surrounding fields—

VIBERT: Yeah.

HAVILAND: —so now with the lack of maintenance on the drain, the water table's up, so they've been abandoned.

VIBERT: So we've got—we've got the Burnhams down here that grow sweet corn, we've got Kasheta's that grow field corn and it goes out to Franklin somewhere. There's a mill or whatever you call it out there. There's no potatoes, hardly, and there's a few vegetables that Kasheta's grow. There's a little tobacco that Franny Bordua grows—we've only got about four people—four farmers left and doing anything with the whole meadow, really, and those of us that still own land and don't do anything with it, what's tillable and so forth, we rent to these people.

STUDENT: So you rent out your land to the other farmers?

VIBERT: Yes. Right. Kasheta has all of mine.

KLEIN: Yeah, very few of the people who are farming own land, right? Very few of the—

VIBERT: Oh, yes. Years ago, the people who were working were—there was very, very little land rented years ago. I mean people had owned it.

KLEIN: But now very few people—

VIBERT: But now, Kasheta's do own some land, but they rent a lot more than they own.

KLEIN: That's why it's so hard to track down when you're trying to get permission to do something—find out who actually owns the land—

MORRISON: Do you think the people who still own the land wish the land would be more farmed, but they either can't find anybody to do it, or it's too expensive or it's too hard because the water table is up? What do you think is the disposition of the landowners now about the property? That it should be farmed more? Or do they think about it that much? Or do they just like to live here.

VIBERT: —Well, it's people like me who have a little bit of sentiment for it who like to see it used, but when I go, the rest of my family, they could give—they could care less.

MORRISON: Are they still around, your family?

VIBERT: Yeah, my daughter lives in the—she might tell you she's interested in it, but she doesn't understand any—anything about that.

KLEIN: And they have a hard time, too, because whoever had the field right down at the end of Vibert Road, there, where they had to put up fencing with barbed wire, but even then, the off-road vehicles went and went over the crops, and then you had so many people coming down to that area—it's hard to protect your labor you put into it.

MORRISON: That's true—you've got fishermen and recreationists on there.

STUDENT: That brings up another question: with the conservation plan we made for the small patch of land, potentially there are going to be many researchers. Of course they're going to try not to disturb anything, but how—what are your feelings towards that and what do you think the feelings of the other landowners are?

VIBERT: I don't think they care.

STUDENT: Yeah?

VIBERT: I think they'd be cooperative. I don't know of anybody who wouldn't be cooperative—I mean, when I say I don't think they care, I don't mean that they don't give a hoot about it. They just probably, for the most part, would like to see something done, but I don't know.

You see, when I was young I said, there was foxes here, which were plentiful, raccoons—no, no raccoons—foxes, skunks, and muskrats. Pheasants were very plentiful. They hatched themselves. They never had to stock pheasants like they do now. We used to mow in the hay lot, and you couldn't have a man walking in front of the mowing machine—they pay to do that—and we'd hit a nest and cut the mother's legs right off and she'd fly away and the nest would be smashed, but there were still plenty of—we just couldn't help it, but there were still plenty of pheasants. The raccoons came in—well, that's what we think happened—and they ate the pheasant eggs because they laid them—they made the nest right on the ground. So now you don't see any more wild pheasants. No more hatching.

KLEIN: Where'd those raccoons come from?

VIBERT: Before that—before the pheasants were here, there were—my grandfather said there were plenty of partridge. He always said the pheasants drove the partridge out.

MORRISON: By partridge you mean the ones that go "bob-white, bob-white?" Those?

VIBERT: Yeah.

MORRISON: The little quail.

HAVILAND: What do you think drove them out?

VIBERT: The pheasants.

HAVILAND: Oh, just by being bigger and burlier.

VIBERT: Yeah, something. I don't—you know, in our woods—in our woodlot there are still some partridge, but I don't think the pheasants ever left the valley here. I never saw a pheasant east of Route 5.

KLEIN: Now, the pheasants, weren't they a European import?

HAVILAND: Oh, yeah.

KLEIN: They weren't a native—

VIBERT: No, they weren't natives—they brought them in.

MORRISON: —bird. So yeah, where did the raccoons come from?

VIBERT: Well, I think they were here originally, but I think they brought them in from Pennsylvania, again. I don't know what—

MORRISON: They brought them back.

VIBERT: Yeah, the state brought them back by the pairs. It only takes two or three, and a good 20 years and you're loaded with them.

MORRISON: For hunting, they brought them, or for fur trapping?

KLEIN: They—they were trapped out, just as the beavers were.

VIBERT: And see—see, we never had wild turkeys like we do now. We might have had it in colonial days, when the first Thanksgiving was, but that was unheard-of.

MORRISON: They used to eat the chestnuts, too.

VIBERT: And geese were hunted so that they flew over higher than the jets—you could hear them, but they never landed, and you can't get rid of the geese now.

KLEIN: They were smart.

VIBERT: And—and the birds—now, the redwing blackbird likes to nest in the hay lot, but they'll nest on a weed or something in the hay lot. They'll be above—they won't be on the ground. They used to be loaded with them, but I see very few redwing blackbirds now. See, so—the animals will adjust to whatever the vegetation and the water level is, near as I can see—

KLEIN: Did you ever hear an American bittern down there? I have yet to hear one. Have you heard one?

HAVILAND: Oh, yeah.

KLEIN: I've just never—

HAVILAND: "Glug-glug, glug-glug, glug-glug."

VIBERT: You are back—Uncle Levi Hayes—I don't remember him; he was gone before my time, but he'd been a bachelor all his life and he saved his money and he probably retired when he was 50 and he lived to be almost 90, so he had nothing to do but be in the meadows and so forth. This is before Uncle Charlie.

KLEIN: Oh, yeah?

VIBERT: And somehow, he got a wild goose and shot it, and of course, that was fresh meat and he wanted to eat it, but the geese were still coming down from Canada. And so he staked it up in the marsh that you're studying now, to try and draw out the others, and a family by the name of Driscoll came out of the meadow at noontime where they'd been working on their corn lot and they saw the goose staked up there and they knew that goose wasn't alive and they stole the goose from him and took it home and ate it for supper that night. So he never got his second goose [inaudible] off the first goose, and they asked the Driscolls why they did it, and they said, "Oh, Levi Hayes is too stingy, anyway." That's a true story.

MORRISON: I bet. Did you ever see any big animals in there, like a cougar, or a bear, or wolves or anything that used to be in there?

VIBERT: No—there were bears east of—or a bear east of Route 5 in about 1930—it just went, passed through—and somebody that lived out on—what was the road by the firehouse.

KLEIN: Ellington Road?

VIBERT: No, it goes off Ellington Road there. Came in and got Charlie Vibert and there was a bear trap. But that was in the early 30s. But the deer—on the first day of hunting, sometimes a deer would come in the meadow. It's loaded with deer now, but it wasn't—they were all—my father stood on the riverbank and he saw this wake coming across—he heard a shot on the other side and he saw this wake coming across the river and it got almost to shore and just settled there, and he could see two nostrils and it was a deer. It submerged itself except for its nose under the water because it didn't want to get shot at again. Then, so Pa wouldn't shoot a deer, I mean, they were too scarce. So he threw something in the river and the deer went out and up the bank. To prove it was a deer.

MORRISON: They were scarce, but now they're everywhere.

VIBERT: Well, they're—the deer were—I don't know—I suppose they ate them for meat. I don't know, but they were gone. It was nothing like it is now—

MORRISON: Well, they've been really heavily market-hunted in the east. And then it was mostly forested, so between the forests being here and the market hunting, there just weren't very many. Then when the farming really opened up the landscape and the big predators were gone, then the deer started to really take off. So they come back now in big, big numbers, so

they're really pesky. Do people have problems with deer down in their fields, now, with the crops, do you think?

VIBERT: Well, I don't have to grow a garden for my wife anymore—I say the deer got it. So—

MORRISON: Yeah.

VIBERT: I was in Germany in the Army, and you go out in the country and they'd have a plot like this and it would be all sticks, like a fence around the whole thing, wondering what in the world that's for. And they would explain that the deer would jump the fence to get in the garden, but then he would see that he was cornered, and he'd jump right out again and he wouldn't touch anything. I was there, so I think it was true.

KLEIN: Well, I live on a road parallel to this, and they always eat squash and pumpkins and that kind of—and this year, they ate tomato plants, if you can believe it—not the tomatoes themselves, but the plant.

HAVILAND: Oh, that's unusual.

KLEIN: And you know, if you've ever handled a tomato plant, you know, it's—

HAVILAND: And they're nightshades,

KLEIN: Yeah, that's right.

HAVILAND: —so I'm surprised that it didn't bother them.

KLEIN: It's viscous and it's dirty and it's smelly, but they were topping them off.

MORRISON: But you get so many deer—they're eating anything.

VIBERT: Yeah, they're hungry.

KLEIN: I had good luck last year. I put little nets of soap around—

MORRISON: I've heard soap, they say, works. Human hair, things like that.

KLEIN: And it seemed to …. They didn't touch our stuff, so I attributed it to that, but it could have been they just kept away because we had a dog, and—

HAVILAND: The beaver pond was really always there, as far as you know—

VIBERT: Uh-hunh (affirmative). Yes.

HAVILAND: Originally invented by a beaver, presumably, but—

VIBERT: Yes, but, I think both sides of what is Beaver Pond Drain, which drains it now, I mean—we're pretty much of a marsh, too, but not as big as that, because that is just a lower hole in the earth, there.

KLEIN: There's a spring in the north part of that pond—

VIBERT: Well, yeah, there are springs all along the meadow hill.

KLEIN: I mean I know I walked in that—I mean, in the wintertime when it's icy, you have to be careful if you go skating there, because there's a part that doesn't really freeze over very well, and there's a part that's always open.

MORRISON: So what do the local people, or the people who've still been here a while, think about environmentalists? Or do they think about environmentalists at all? Do they see people who want to preserve land or things like that in a certain light, or do they think about that much? I mean, what's your impression?

VIBERT: Well, to most people here, as far as preserving land is concerned, there's no problem with the meadow because you can't build on it. You can't build on it, so it's going to be what it's going to be. Maybe it's going to develop into animals and plant life that we don't like—I don't know. Like the—what is it? The duck horn—

KLEIN: There's—yeah, duckweed—but there's—

VIBERT: And that never used to be there.

HAVILAND: And the loosestrife….

KLEIN: Yeah, the … the purple loosestrife…

VIBERT: None of that stuff was there when I was a kid. This is how the meadow—read the other side—that's from standing on the bridge.

MORRISON: —from the north side of the bridge looking south.

VIBERT: No, looking north.

MORRISON: Oh, looking north. So this is right after...

VIBERT: So that's how the meadow looked. It was clear right after they blasted—opened it up.

MORRISON: Yeah, my goodness.

VIBERT: But you see, it was one big open field outside of a few big trees that were left—you have to have shade for animals.

HAVILAND: That photo is taken from right here, looking this way. And if you remember, right here, there's this huge cluster of large trees where the great horned owls and the red-tailed hawks and they're not in that photo. It's just wide open.

VIBERT: That cluster of trees belongs to me now, and I can tell you how it happened.

HAVILAND: Ok.

VIBERT: At that time—shortly after the—1922, it still belonged to Nathaniel Jones, who lived across the street, here, and it was a nice piece of land, very fertile. Of course, the adjoining land is just as fertile, I suppose, and he grew a crop of potatoes there, and he had a bumper crop, so the next year he grew a crop of potatoes there, and we had an early fall flood before he harvested them, and that ended the whole thing. He never did another thing with it, and the trees came up right where—

HAVILAND: Right where the potato field was, yeah.

VIBERT: Yeah.

HAVILAND: It's a beautiful spot. In fact, there's a road, a farm road that sneaks in here, right here, just along the edge. It starts just over the bridge and heads in, and when you get all the way in, there's that great tree that shades the whole corner of the high spot of this open field here. It's a really pleasant place to just sit, in the shade of the tree, and watch some of the birds hunting on the meadow.

VIBERT: Yes. This was our hay lot. It belongs to the gun club now.

HAVILAND: Right. Right.

KLEIN: Well, of course, you all know that these meadows were populated from about 8,000 B.C.—for almost 10,000 years before the Europeans came. And UConn did a—his father found an archaic site by walking his property and looking for a woodchuck, brought up some back dirt, and here are all these little quartz chips. And so he got the state geologist up at UConn to come, and they did a dig for what, five, six years down there and found an archaic living floor,

and, actually, I think, several floors that went on for about 2,000 years. And I think the date was something like 6,000 to 4,000 years ago.

MORRISON: So there's actually evidence of structures that had been here; so evidence of a permanent site along the river.

KLEIN: Yeah, this was inland a little bit further, and they would have had summer lodges there, then they would have stayed through winter and spring? Probably not. Because they were pretty smart. But they probably had their—and the seasonal—what they found in doing the centrifugal analysis of the dirt that came out—they did—what they did—they cropped or they gathered nuts in the uplands, and they had—they used a number of weeds, and I can't remember exactly what their names are, but things that still grow there today, that they used as food, and supplies. There's a lot of that information. So this was, you know, this was inhabited for a long, long time. People think of the Indians coming. They think of them coming through 300 years ago. But Connecticut was populated 10,000—soon—as soon as the glacier left. We had paleo humans coming up through the valley, particularly. We can find paleo artifacts dropped along, you know, the river. At least along the river way. There's … dropped them in Glastonbury, they dropped them in East Haddam and Glastonbury, and up in Longmeadow [MA], where you get paleo suns and paleo—that's the older Indians that would be coming in after the mammoths and mastodons and things like that, and following up the river valley. And, of course, this area, too, is interesting because down as far as Rocky Hill and east over here as far as Buckland, you know, where it used to go up Buckland Road, west and just the hills before Simsbury, and up as far as Lyme, New Hampshire, it was a glacial lake—

[Tape ends]

[Tape 3-3 Begins]

VIBERT: Making sure. No I'm not thinking. I don't—you know—if I go down there I would spray myself with something.

KLEIN: Yeah.

VIBERT: But I mean the last few years that [s/l Pelas] has rented our pasture had cows down there. One car came up, they saw him at the store planner. Well they heard a shot—they shot and killed a cow right in the pasture. So I mean it's a rough crowd.

KLEIN: In fact, there are all these roads now, Vibert Road, Newberry Road used to be sort of unviable you know. Nobody went down there except the old farm carts, but now I understand that they're going down there also with cars.

HAVILAND: It's got to be pretty hard. You've got to have a pretty rugged machine to get through the muck… Four wheel drive.

MORRISON: [Inaudible] Your Passat wouldn't get very far. You'd have to have four wheel drive down there. It's pretty, it's really muddy.

VIBERT: But I was to go in the—if I was to go in the meadow I would want to, I won't start until nine o'clock and I get out by three. If you get down there too early, there might be somebody who spent the night there that's coming off of a high on drugs.

MORRISON: I would have hardly thought of that, but I can see you're going out and doing birds.

KLEIN: Well I hate to think of that kind of thing. I have a dog that I you know run here all the time. If I couldn't do that I wouldn't want to live here.

VIBERT: I don't see too many of the natives going up and down Griffin Road, nothing like it used to be. Sunday afternoon maybe are safe enough and they figure other people are walking but it's not a—.

KLEIN: You know to follow through on this question she's asking, how do contemporary people feel about conservation in the meadow lands or anything. If you heard any scuttle butt about something that Frank has been proposing, and that is to keep the marsh a marsh. I mean, it's growing in now, and if something's not done, it eventually will not be you know a nice haven for birds anymore. Have you heard any scuttle butt like that?

VIBERT: No, but I don't—it's such a reasonable request to keep it open. I don't see how anybody could be against it, but there again ownership is what really counts.

HAVILAND: Yeah that's right.

VIBERT: I mean we have zoning issues here, but the person that owns it has the final say. I mean, well that's why I hang on to my land with the house and so forth, because if I own it I can patrol it. The zoning boards—they might defeat something undesirable to begin with, but it'll only be presented five years down the road [inaudible].

HAVILAND: Right.

VIBERT: So, if the—like the Audubon Society owns the west side of the marsh there, they don't own the east side.

HAVILAND: But we own the southern end of the pond but not the part that belongs to—.

VIBERT: Coles… But I'm sure he would cooperate because he's a nature man.

HAVILAND: Yeah. I think that's right.

VIBERT: I think he's a nice man.

HAVILAND: That's right.

MORRISON: Which is which part? This, the part you're talking about or this part.

HAVILAND: He owns—let's see where are we—he own this piece. This is his land.

MORRISON: Okay.

HAVILAND: Like—something like that.

MORRISON: Okay

HAVILAND: All the way up to Main Street. That's his home at the corner, and now he's built a new one in the back here, his retirement home.

VIBERT: He has—.

HAVILAND: And we own up to about here. The extension of this tree line and then there are two or three owners up in here. The Woolams own the big hunk of it. From about here up.

VIBERT: The Woolams and their cousins own a big hunk of it in there.

HAVILAND: Yeah from about here to here and then there's a couple slices in here, Bill Paul.

VIBERT: Michael Paul has a narrow piece and then there's a piece.

HAVILAND: Helen [s/l Barthelome] got a piece in there.

VIBERT: What was the name.

HAVILAND: Helen Barthelome. I don't know her. She lives out in Tolland some place. I think she inherited it from somebody. She's the owner of record that's in here. But what's happened, if you haven't been down there in a while, the only part that's open right now is about this big.

VIBERT: Yeah I know when she….

HAVILAND: Everything else is …

VIBERT: … died at 75 and they were concerned then about it. The same pickleweed where this guy was asking whatever.

KLEIN: Yeah it's taken over.

HAVILAND: Yeah there’s several things happening. One is the road is only gravel so it washes out. You get a big flood or something and it gets a little shallower, a little shallower, a little shallower. That lowers the height of the pond because that road is effectively is dyke and its dam.

VIBERT: Well yeah, but the pond went for years before this stuff came in and it never was high. There was always a tile under that road.

HAVILAND: Well yeah there’s still tile there and it still works but there's the—inflow and the out flow is balanced and the tiles are small compared to the inflow. So it—it kept it up, so what really sets it is the height of the water here. Even now it's always over the road. The water is like 6 or 12 inches higher than the low part of the road.

KLEIN: Well there used to be more of a berm there.

HAVILAND: Yeah. That's right. It's been broken away.

KLEIN: And somehow it suddenly disappeared, so if, you know, a berm factory comes through …

HAVILAND: And so that's lowered the top. Pickleweed grow until the water is about 18 inches deep, so as soon as the pond got lower, the pickleweed crowded out further and further from the banks. So now there’s only a small little hole there, but as the pickleweed dies it sinks to the bottom and makes like a mucky peat, and so the bottom is coming up, and there's fertilizer run off from the corn that's grown out here which helps the pickleweed to really grow luxuriously. The whole thing is on a downward spiral.

VIBERT: See the people to the north of it will not like the pond raised—the height of it raised anymore because that would block their road from Main Street into their crop.

HAVILAND: Well that's right. Well that's clearly the upper limit unless that road was raised.

VIBERT: Yeah.

HAVILAND: Yeah. The other part is that even if you go through out this, this part that is still open, it's probably only 4 or 4 1/2 feet deep. That's marginal for a diving duck. They'd like 5 or

6 feet of—. So one of the ideas was to go in there and dig some pot holes that were 5 or 6 feet deep and maybe 20 feet in diameter or something like that, which might be a good idea unless the clay that's the bottom of that pond is not 5 or 6 feet deep. In which case we'd dig right through and wind up pulling the plug on the drain, and all the water would go down into the sand underneath it. The soil maps tell us that there's plenty of clay down there. But we really need to drill a hole and make sure we're right. I asked them—the soil maps here are very complicated. Detailed little jigsaw puzzle etches, and I said well how often do you do a test coring and it's like 1 year, 1 year. It's like well where do you get all this data?

MORRISON: Well that's the other thing. Most of these places [have] been so disturbed by all the farming and the flooding and everything else that's in there that you can't really tell from a soil map what is even natural soil there.

HAVILAND: Well that's probably too—but I was astonished when I went out there with the soil experts. They literally pick up a handful of dirt in the middle of the field and start doing this with it and then start to talk about it, and they talked for 3 quarters of an hour without taking a breath. It was amazing what they could tell from just squeezing a little soil.

MORRISON: Yeah but that's just right there.

HAVILAND: Oh yeah. That's right.

VIBERT: They have to do it from each of the places in the pond where you wanted to do some reading [inaudible].

HAVILAND: Yeah that's right. They didn't do anything in the pond. This was wandering around the fields out here. In fact what we're interested in is growing warm season grasses out here, and their conclusion was the soil is much too good. The cool season grasses would reinvade and crowd out all the warm season grasses. Warm season grasses really work best on really bad, poorly drained, dry soil.

MORRISON: Would a few years of some serious burns back in there fix that?

HAVILAND: Well yes, but you're essentially fighting a battle. The—the cool season grasses would get a running head start in the spring while the warm season grasses are asleep, and that'll happen year after—and then again in the fall when the warm season grasses go to sleep in mid-September, the cool season grasses will grow like crazy until beyond Thanksgiving.

STUDENT: Why would you want the cool season—or the warm season grasses over the cool season grasses?

HAVILAND: The warm season grasses grow in ways that the grassland birds prefer. It's what they grew up with. That's the natural habitat here. Cool season grasses were brought in by the

farmers from places like Kentucky and Tennessee back in the 1800's. Because it grows so fast in the spring, you can mow it in July and then mow it again in September and get two crops out of one—instead of one. Whereas the warm season grasses are sound asleep until June, and you can mow them maybe once in late September, early October.

KLEIN: And they're so different the birds really prefer.

HAVILAND: Yeah they grow in—in tussocks. Okay. And so the birds can kind of run around on what looks like bare dirt even though it's arched over by tall blades of grass and they can peck around and find little stones and some birds need it for their crop. They have to eat stones to keep the game going, but they find all the little seeds on the bare ground, and then they build their nests up high on these little tussocks, and so they're protected from a flash flood or sometimes it's just hard to find them, so it’s less likely they get caught by a raccoon.

KLEIN: Plus, a lot of them have a strategy where if you're looking for the nest, they're hard to find. Because the birds will land here, and then they'll run, and their nest is really over here somewhere. So when you're out there trying to find the nests to study these things—you know—you watch the bird go down and you say oh there's a nest and the nest is over here. And so they've got this strategy of—you know—running quite a distance to really hide themselves very well.

HAVILAND: Yeah it's very clever.

MORRISON: It's also [inaudible]. We'll how much of this was actually tile. You mentioned that some tiling was done for draining. Was it done a lot or just a little bit by the roads?

VIBERT: Tiling is all on this level of land here.

MORRISON: Oh, here okay.

VIBERT: Yeah there's no tiling in the meadow. Outside of it going under a road or something.

MORRISON: So once the cool seasons come in, it's a losing battle to get the native reestablished then. Because we were thinking about doing that out at the farm—just taking some of that—

HAVILAND: Yeah it's a real—if the soil is poor enough then it'll work because the cool season grasses can never—you know—they won't do well. The warm season grasses will beat them in like raw sand or something, poor soil, bad drainage and not much nutrients, but the warm season grasses are more rugged, more able to cope.

VIBERT: It's a battle no matter what you try to do to it to change it. The strongest—I'm sexton of the cemetery here, and we have Zoysiagrass and we cannot get it into sections and it keeps spreading and we can't get rid of it no matter what we do.

KLEIN: It's a weird looking thing that.

VIBERT: It's beautiful right now and it's—you know—you sink in it when you walk on it, but it—in a couple of weeks it'll begin to die and brown in the early fall, and it doesn't start until late spring to turn green.

HAVILAND: Yeah that's right. It's a real southern variety.

VIBERT: It's a southern variety.

HAVILAND: Looks great in Georgia.

VIBERT: So everybody complained about their mother's grave has got this brown grass on it. You've got to do something about it but I can't do nothing.

KLEIN: That cemetery is also a wonderful place for turtles. I think it's a box turtle that has their nests up there. They come up from the bog and—.

VIBERT: It's the snapping turtles.

KLEIN: Oh is it the snapping turtles?

VIBERT: It's the snapping turtles, yes. They come up and they—they lay their eggs and the sun hatches the eggs. They don't sit on them like a chicken, and so I don't know how many of them hatch because the skunks are right after out that night to eat all they can, but there's still plenty of snapping turtles.

HAVILAND: Yeah I've seen people take snapping turtles the size of manhole covers on hand. [Inaudible]. You don't want to go paddling in a canoe with bare feet.

MORRISON: No, [don't] hang your hand over the side.

VIBERT: People used to eat them here. They were considered fresh meat, turtle food.

MORRISON: Is it illegal to hunt turtles anymore or they just don't do it?

HAVILAND: I don't think so. There's not much demand for it so they don't need to enforce much. I do know some members of the hunt club do it. Will catch a few.

MORRISON: I guess when you've live down the road from McDonalds what's the point in going through all the effort. You know unless you really like turtle meat.

VIBERT: Yeah Jessie [s/l Olsen] used to take his fire place tongs and of course a snapping turtle would snap on, and he'd come down on his head with [inaudible] and pull his head out and chop it off with an axe and the turtle—would take 24 hours before the turtle—'tho his head was off his body—would release his jaws from the fireplace tongs.

MORRISON: Wow, it'd take that long?

VIBERT: They're prehistoric animals.

KLEIN: For some exotic restaurants around the world serve turtle meat in their… you know, hunting these big sea turtles and things like that.

MORRISON: Turtle populations in many parts of the world are in big trouble—

KLEIN: That's right.

MORRISON: —because so many people still get them and do it commercially. So maybe it's good that McDonald's going to South America. It'll take the pressure off the turtles.

MORRISON: It's good that McDonalds is going all over South America because it'll take pressure off the turtle.

VIBERT: They'd probably bring in some disease before they get through.

HAVILAND: Joe, do you remember if these swales were natural or if they were dug. This is where [I]291 cuts through. These are behind Tim Shepard's land and in the land just south of him, but all that black stuff is his water, or at least it is in the spring. They're very odd shapes. Some of them look like they might have been natural swales. Some of them look like they were dug.

VIBERT: Well, I think for the most part they're natural swales, but, see, there used to be for Tudor's— this is Tudor's Drain. There used to be a drain coming up through here that drained into a tube.

HAVILAND: Oh I see. Okay.

VIBERT: This was Fred King's farm here. His son was Commissioner of Agriculture under governor Wilbur Cross when I was a kid, and they really—he ran a dairy farm and they grew tobacco up here; and they really had this all cleaned out nice, and they drained it off in here but since then it's all—.

HAVILAND: Yeah I think the Shepards own half of that on this side, or maybe they're more up in here.

VIBERT: No they own from here to here. They own the Arthur King farm, but their homestead is up in here.

HAVILAND: Oh yeah. Yeah I knew that.

VIBERT: But this is the Arthur King farm. They own this, the width of it. Right, the main stream.

HAVILAND: Oh okay. Yeah they own this piece too.

VIBERT: Yes that's Starr's.

HAVILAND: And some of this but not all of it.

VIBERT: And they own—they own this. This belongs to the town.

HAVILAND: Right.

VIBERT: This—because we used to own this. This close to the sewer plant. But you can see how it all—every time somebody died, it got split up something terrible.

HAVILAND: Yeah. Yeah. This is the area that Tim Shepard has been talking—in fact Kip [Shepard] has talked about it too, about doing something to connect them together and make it a little more open for water fowl. Right now there are these strange little ziggity zaggity shapes.

MORRISON: They don't have anything to do with making that bridge? Because it would seem to me that they would have had to have done some major excavation to raise this up for putting this bridge in—

HAVILAND: Well they did and some of these.

VIBERT: Oh no they didn't get anything out of here. That's too low. When they dug the—when they—dirt for the fill for here came out of here.

HAVILAND: And maybe this one.

VIBERT: I don't know how that—some came out of here too. Yes. They didn't get up into here. These people wouldn't sell, but it was a high river bank land that they took. They didn't go in the swamp at all.

HAVILAND: Okay remember the ridge is high here.

VIBERT: One good flood like 1936 will take that right out.

HAVILAND: What you mean? The bridge?

VIBERT: Close to the bridge.

HAVILAND: Yeah, yeah.

VIBERT: If it tops it it'll go quick. This—it is not—it's not rip wrapped or anything else.

HAVILAND: Yeah, that's right. It's just grass on the back.

VIBERT: No that's what the chief engineer told me when I brought the thing.

HAVILAND: Temporary highway.

MORRISON: Has there always been such a good strip of cottonwood along here?

VIBERT: Yes. They farmed pretty close to the river bank, and there was always a road along here. One of the first roads in South Windsor went up along here really. Because the farms were still in Windsor, and they came across with their cattle to pasture here somewhere but—and as the—the sand—it encroaches a little every year. See that's when they had—when they had to common field that was all eaten off and it didn't. But the land from the top—the river used to come right to the edge here and the top of the bank went right down in the river, but because of all the land that eroded up north, you've got a shelf along here now which wasn't here 200 years ago. And that island of course wasn't there.

MORRISON: Well do you all have any other questions or get your questions answered that you came up with today? I suppose we're going to have to hit the road here pretty soon to get everybody back on time.

VIBERT: I—the way—I mean I don't—. I'm not trying to be against what you're trying to do with the marsh, but it looks to me like you'll have to find some kind of—it'd be easier to find some kind of an animal that could live with what's there now than try to keep it the way it was. It's a heck of a job to battle nature.

HAVILAND: Oh yes it is. It is, but this part of it doesn't see that hard. If it's safe to dig those pot holes, they'll last quite a while and keep the water fowl that migrate back and forth, spring and fall.

VIBERT: Yeah, that's right. More power to you.

HAVILAND: They'll see open water and they'll decide to land.

VIBERT: I don't wish you any hard luck.

HAVILAND: Once they're there they love to eat the pickleweed. It's just that if it grows all the way across, it won't occur to them that it's not a grassy field.

MORRISON: What we might need is a hippo.

HAVILAND: Yeah there you go. A hippopotamus.

VIBERT: The raccoon are back here now. I wonder where they went and why they were out. Well raccoons will raid ducks. There's domestic ducks and chickens. So if there was a raccoon around in my grandfather's time they, shot him and killed him. The farmers would be—

HAVILAND: Oh yeah.

VIBERT: [inaudible]. They didn't want raccoons. They didn't want eagles. I don't know; is there an eagle in here?

HAVILAND: Yeah. Right there.

VIBERT: Yeah, that's Uncle Eli stuffed that eagle. He got the last of the eagles along the river bank. They didn't like the eagles because the eagles would—

MORRISON: Eat some chickens.

VIBERT: —would get the chickens. See what I mean? The farmers got rid of all that stuff. They're the ones that—and more than half of your people where still on farms then. Of your total population, and there was one in every household that would shoot and shoot pretty good, and they got rid of the—like the animals that were destructive like the raccoons. The turkeys— they must have got rid of them too because they were hungry because —I don't think they hurt anything.

HAVILAND: Well, the turkeys actually walked away because they chopped down all the trees. Turkeys like to live in the woods. When they chopped down all the trees for farming there was no place for the turkeys to live.

VIBERT: And the deer—they did that commercially and everything else. There used to be three people on Ellington Road, and there's a tobacco shed that's still standing. They say if they ever—if they ever knock that down and build a house where that tobacco shed is, they're

going to find all kinds of deer bones, because it was illegal but they still butchered and buried the bones and the—anything that they couldn't sell in that shed.

HAVILAND: Scene of the crime.

MORRISON: Well suppose somebody was interested in becoming a landowner around here? I know my husband and I would really like to live here and have a house and have some land here and do some things on it. How would one go about doing that? I've looked all around this area and at some point this is the place that I'd like to live, near this property and work on this property.

KLEIN: Good for you. That's terrific.

VIBERT: I can't—I'm—I'm here because I was born here. But if I had to come here now, I couldn't afford it.

MORRISON: Yeah the houses and the land.

VIBERT: Yeah. Well there's a house—do you know where Newberry Road is, where you go down to the thing? There's a stucco house coming this way on this side of the street, and then there's a white house. That sold a month ago, that house and I think there's 6 acres of land, and they—it had water above the window sills in both '36 and '38. That house sold with the building lot that they got permission to have to the rear of it, for $520,000 dollars a month ago. Now I can remember when the bank foreclosed on it when I was a little boy, and it was sold to the Burke family for $4,000. Well I'm a—I'm a [inaudible]. I'd die pretty soon because I can't keep up with this stuff.

KLEIN: How do you feel about this subdivision of these lands? I don't know if you've noticed but—.

VIBERT: Yeah well they're all being subdivided.

KLEIN: You know and now we've got a second tier of—

VIBERT: And the second generation used to stay, but they don't anymore, and for the most part they're not so foolishness to sell it to somebody else to subdivide; they subdivide it themselves.

KLEIN: All you have to do is keep being aware because the property is changing hands quite rapidly now that [inaudible]. When we came here nothing had changed. In the '70s they said oh you had to be born here and it never went out of the family and then slowly—you know—new people have come into the mainstream area.

HAVILAND: Is there one real estate agent that really specialize in [inaudible].

VIBERT: My wife lived in East Hartford. And she was married with two children and they wanted to live out here. This is 30 years ago and she finally found a lot up the street and she paid—three acres but only enough for one house, and she paid 30 years ago, $15,000 for it, and then her husband was killed, but she still went ahead and built the house, and I met her at work, but I remember at the time they said those people paid $15,000. They must be out of their head. And then I went and married her. But I still own over here, the homestead. And today you can't touch a lot for 100—for under 100 at least here. [Inaudible] a lot lower but that's inflation.

MORRISON: But that's probably not true for land in the meadows, the farming land.

VIBERT: Well it is but—

KLEIN: It's not buildable.

VIBERT: It's not buildable. But you can still acquire it for farming and whatever.

VIBERT: I don't know who owns these—like Michael Paul's strip. Nobody knows who owns it anymore.

HAVILAND: Yeah it's in his wife's name. I'm not sure she's still alive.

VIBERT: Yeah but she's dead.

HAVILAND: Yeah I thought so.

VIBERT: She's been dead for 15 years. They kept her ashes for 12—for 8 years—and I buried them last fall.

HAVILAND: Oh okay well that's about as much evidence that I need that I need to find your phone number.

MORRISON: No wonder you couldn't find her phone number.

VIBERT: So I don't know who you deal with there. I mean—

HAVILAND: Well, she had a son. In fact her address…

VIBERT: Well he's dead too. That's what brought this to a head.

HAVILAND: Oh okay. Well it shows up in the town [inaudible].

VIBERT: So nobody knows—nobody knows who owns what there now, even in the family.

HAVILAND: It shows up in her name and then the address at East Haddam…

VIBERT: Yeah.

[Crosstalk]

MORRISON: So it— does somebody step in at some point and say I'll pay somebody to buy the piece of land?

VIBERT: I think if somebody found some heirs—

HAVILAND: Well that's not the point. They may not have been paying the taxes.

MORRISON: If you step in and pay the taxes, you can get the land.

VIBERT: You can buy it for back taxes. Yeah. Usually somebody comes across. I don't know—and then—well there's one piece there quite large and the owner, the blood related owner of an undivided part of it is owned with other members of the family, ended up out west and she died here two years ago and her husband inherited it, who has never lived here in his life, and he won't sell for under a million dollars. See the taxes are not that high on meadow land, especially if it's farmed because you can get it in 490 …. So there's no—no desire to sell.

MORRISON: [inaudible]

VIBERT: I had two pieces— kept one in the family but the larger piece that I still kept and they were a nuisance because everybody was dumping on them and so forth. So I sold them to Shepard for $1,000 an acre. But if I really put it to you, would you want to buy 4 acres for—$4,000, for 4 acres of meadow land; because nobody was interested in it before. Of course this is a few years ago. Nobody was interested in it until I sold it, and when the word got around that I sold it for $1,000 dollars, well why didn't you let me know? I would have bought it but really they wouldn't have. I'm not trying to put you on the spot there but.

MORRISON: No I'm open to seeing what's available. I don't know the market here—I mean in this, area and I'd like to know more about it, because long term this is a place where—.

VIBERT: But if somebody was really interested in a piece of land it would, should pursue that—that plot that I'm talking about, because that goes from the river to the cemetery.

HAVILAND: Yeah, that's right.

VIBERT: And a right of way in from Main Street, through the cemetery land.

HAVILAND: No I know that property. But what I haven't done is check with the town hall to see if anyone's been paying the taxes.

VIBERT: Well they should have. Somebody has paid the taxes because—maybe not the last three years but Michael Paul's widow's son, who was by another marriage, just died two years ago. So maybe it hasn't been paid for the last two years, but I think he'd been paying the taxes. Plus—.

MORRISON: That'd be worth a check.

VIBERT: —people don't—you know if you're going to do something with real estate, you really have to go through a lawyer or you get messed up. Because Michael Paul and his wife had a survivorship deed. So Michael Paul's children from the first wife said, survivors will? We're survivors. We should have part of it. Well survivorship is between Michael Paul and his second wife, legally. And just because they're survivors don't mean they have any claim to the property is what I'm trying to say.

KLEIN: So do you want to build? Do you want a house? Do you want to build or are you just interested in having a piece of property?

MORRISON: I'd rather buy a house. I don't like building houses. I'd rather buy one and then have some property too and have farming and stuff.

VIBERT: If you do buy here and if you want to, you don't have to, consult me and I'll tell you where the flood was in 1936.

MORRISON: Absolutely.

VIBERT: Because it's going to be one heck of a—if we ever get another one of those. In those days we had a coal furnace in the cellar and the only water we had was the electric pump for water, but now we have city water at least. We don't have to worry about that, but you have all kinds of motorized stuff plus if you have any insulation and it's flooded for a week, you have to pull either the inside wall or the outside wall. The '36 flood now would be a very expensive proposition for quite a few people.

KLEIN: So … to wait for that to happen?

MORRISON: Well that's the real crapshoot. I'm going to die before it happens.

VIBERT: Yeah, it may not happen, you don't know.

MORRISON: Yeah, well, besides that fact that yeah a lot of things have happened along the river since then—the channelization and other building [inaudible].

VIBERT: The man that headed up the flood control things came through and talked to my father, and he said with all the dams that they've built up north and all the dams still on the drawing board, if this valley is so big that if we had the same condition as '36 or lower, it would be about 2 feet here. Because it helps the smaller valleys up there just below the damns, but by the time it gets to the Connecticut River, it's such a big water shed that nothing can control it. Plus in 1936 there was a—the Bulkeley Bridge was the only bridge and then there was what we call a dry bridge for the East Hartford—.

[Tape 3-3 Ends]

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