

Key:

Q: Interviewer
B: Barbara
JP: James Pruiksmā
M: Unknown Male
F: Unknown Female

BEGINNING OF FILE A

Q: Say this is the Easton Library Oral History Project.

JP: You know the Brownell family?

Q: The Brownells? No. Who are they?

JP: She, she is in charge of the library.

Q: Oh, Helen. Oh, Helen. Yes, Helen. Yes. Yep. Helen is the director of the library.

JP: Yes.

Q: And so, this is her project, and we're here on April 17, 2008 at PVI. You want to give the time, Jim?

JP: Four minutes after, three minutes after four.

Q: And, today, we're with Jim Pruiksmā, a resident of Easton.

JP: Well, this sure is a surprise. It's like old times.

Q: Isn't it funny? Yeah.

JP: How is your mom? Is she still around?

Q: No, she isn't. No.

JP: Oh.

Q: No.

JP: I remember your dad. He was a little crippled up with—

Q: Yeah. He had arthritis.

JP: Yeah. And, your uncle was in—

Q: Robert.

JP: Yeah. He, they were nice to him, but that poor fellow, he was not in very good health.

Q: No. No, he wasn't. No.

JP: Well, in those days, farmers were really exposed to all kinds of crime, and it didn't—Yeah. They didn't have the comforts that we have now.

Q: Yeah. Lots of hard work.

JP: Yeah.

Q: Yeah. So, you remember—That's where I lived, Jim, on the yellow farm, right there in Easton.

JP: Yeah. I know a little bit—I could—I don't drive anymore. I surrendered my—

Q: You lived in beautiful place. Did you build your house?

JP: Yeah. I designed it.

Q: Well, tell us about it.

JP: Well, first of all, we lived in New Jersey. I guess I should say Jersey, and we were caught up in a rat race down there. And, drugs had start to move into the area, and so, with my beautiful family coming along, I think we better get out of here. So, [unintelligible] [00:02:16] though, it wasn't long when we were up here, and the drugs followed us up here too.

Q: How'd you find the property?

JP: Well, I had a desire to live in, for a month, for some reason or another, I don't know, where we live to go to vacation in Vermont, and when we were home, like a whole summer, we were coming up here right at a place over in—Gosh, what's the name of the town? Anyway, it was a little hick town, and it was lovely, take us out of the rat race. And, everything

started to build up all around. We loved the open spaces. So, then, coming up here, we kept our eyes open. We said, "Gee, it's quite a trip from New Jersey all the way up here." And, that's while we were in New Jersey. And, eventually, we—

Q: We're just doing a little sound check. Yeah. Say something Jim.

JP: I thought this was an ice cream cone.

Q: Yeah. That's good. Your voice is good, and it's making a nice bounce on the needle. So—

JP: So, anyway, we used to vacation up here, and then, we had our eyes open to see different properties that might be available. And—

Q: Thank you.

JP: Wright Realty had signed all over the place.

Q: Oh, the Wright Realty Company?

JP: Yes. That's right.

Q: Yeah.

JP: Wright—it did. So, we went to Bob Wrights. His son had just graduated from, I think, Rutgers, and I bumped into him first. I was his first customer, and I think was the first sale that he made a profit on up here. And, he took me up to various places. Finally, he took me up to Easton, and when I saw that property in Easton, I said, "This is it." So, we bought it, and of course, Doc—We used to call him Doc. He was not a doctor, but he was a—

Q: Wolf. Doc Wolf?

JP: Wolf. Yeah. He owned the property, and I bought that property from him. And, it was, gosh, you wouldn't think I could buy a couple hundred of acres for the price I paid for it. Now, you buy a little piece of property that's not even an acre for—Well, of course, today is inflated, but, you know, it was amazing the property was that reasonable in price. It was such a beautiful area, the views and stuff. We could look across the valley and see—What mountain was that? See, I can't think of the name. But, we could look right to the green mountains of Vermont, anyway. That's the closest, from that, we got to buying in Vermont. We did look at properties in Vermont, but it was just a little too far to travel for weekends. So, we landed in good old Easton, and we heard about the history of Easton and the, some of the early settlers that came up here that were Quakers. And, we got to talking to some of the Quaker people, and we found that they're real, real people, you know. Of course,

New Jersey was everybody for himself in New Jersey. Here, you found people that respected your rights too. So, anyway, we eventually moved up here after I had designed the house to be built. And, Wolf had made it over in—What's the next town south of Easton?

Q: The next town south? Schaghticoke or Valley Falls or Schaghticoke?

JP: I guess it would be Schaghticoke, yeah. And, I got to know him, and gee willikers, he was a prince. And, I had a lot of fun building a house.

Q: Yeah. It's a beautiful house.

JP: And, he took me—I wanted a special kind of brick, and he took me to a brick yard in Troy or just across the river. I guess it was Troy, across the river from Troy. And, that's where we—I said, "That's the brick I want." Well, the brick was so dense that it didn't absorb the water at all when the masons laid the brick. It took so long to dry before you could get the next layer set on top of it because we wanted a nice fireplace. We wanted a home that was kind of modern, in a way, with everything, except we wanted fireplaces. Well, fireplaces are nice, but they're not very efficient to give you the heat. But then, we got a potbelly stove, an old one. I think it was Stewart, and a friend of mine gave it to us and we put that in and hooked that up to the fireplace for the winter. And then, we had such wonderful forests left on our property where the previous tornado had struck. And, I don't remember the year it hit, but it came right up through here and left an awful lot of trees down. They laid down there, red oak, and it was easy. We didn't have to cut trees down. They were already laying—

Q: Down.

JP: ...down for you, and we got all our kindling wood, more than kindling. We got good logs from that to burn in the fire place, and of course, ultimately, we put another stove. That burned, that potbelly stove got cherry red. But, and then, of course, they—The neighbor, the Wraps [phonetic] [00:10:47]—

Q: The Wraps.

JP: They had the dairy farm there, and then, the old man was still alive. There were folks, mother and father, and they got older. And, of course, they, I think they, well, they disappeared. They died. But then, the property was bought by his son.

Q: Allen, yeah. Allen.

JP: Allen. No.

Q: Oh.

JP: Al. Yeah, Al Wrap. I'm guess his name was Allen, the father.

Q: Yes. His father was Allen too.

JP: Oh, okay.

Q: Yeah.

JP: But then, Jean, she was a lovely lady, and she was very much interested in the Christian faith and stuff and the Methodist church. And so, we lived to serve the Lord and to worship, so that was a good neighbor for us. And so, then, they stayed at that house during the summers, and they build an addition on that older house. Then, the old house caught fire, and the house burned down. And, the fire department, we heard the noise, and we looked out of the window and there was that beautiful, old, brick farmhouse going up in flames. It was terrible, and I couldn't understand why the fire department was putting water on it. It had advanced to such a state that they were protecting the new construction from catching on fire. They were letting the old building burn. Of course, they had very limited water, no hydrants. The water came by tankers, and so, it was a disappointment because it was so beautiful. But then, they had a, put a nice house on the same foundation that the old farmhouse was sitting on, but they were lovely neighbors.

Q: Do you know why that house burned? Did they ever say? Was it lightening?

JP: I think it was the heating system.

Q: Oh, okay.

JP: The old heating system. And, well, you know, the brick, the old brick chimneys, the mortar dries out, and the holes get where you could see daylight through. And, I think that's what was—They should have put the new brick fireplace in before they went onto renovate that and put the new, begin the new structure. But, they didn't, and I think that's where the fire started. But anyway, they were so nice. Then, the family moved up here from Westchester County, and their kids and my kids, they were very much—

Q: Friends?

JP: ...togetherness, you know, because there weren't that many people, young people, except down over in the valley where Hugh lived. And—

Q: Like, Sue and Christine would have been the same age.

JP: That's right.

Q: Yeah.

JP: Yes. Yeah. So, anyway—

Q: Now, your driveway, I love your driveway, how it curves. Like, you really have designed it so that you had a little paradise in there, right, a little privacy?

JP: Yes.

Q: Yeah.

JP: We were a good distance from the road. I thought, you know, here are these houses right on the road and they've got all this beautiful property. Of course, I knew, I found out why they were right on the road, because of the winters. The first couple of winters up here—

Q: What was that like?

JP: ...we had, you know, four feet of snow, and I remember up on Ives Hill Road, families up in there were isolated. You couldn't get to them. And, they had to get a rotary snow plow. I think it came from—I don't know—but another town, anyway. I believe it was Glen Falls.

Q: Really?

JP: And, they had the—They couldn't plow the snow, and it picked the snow up and threw it. So, it was a great big—

Q: Like, up to Steve Smith, you couldn't get out? Like—

JP: Yeah.

Q: ...on the top?

JP: Well, they—This was even before the day of the snowmobiles. Well, they did get a snowmobile. There were some around, and they used to bring food up to—I can't think of the name of the folks that lived—Smith.

Q: Smiths. Steve Smith up there.

JP: Yeah.

Q: Yeah, yeah.

JP: And, they were isolated.

Q: Way up there. Wow.

JP: That's the little road that goes up all the way up and then down to the other side. What's the name of that road?

Q: Oh, yes. It was—

JP: Ives Hill Road.

Q: Over to Hoag Road, down to Hoag Road. Wasn't it?

JP: Yeah.

Q: When it went all the way through.

JP: Well, it made it over and then down onto that other road, Hoag. Hoag, is it?

Q: Well, it would intersect with Hoag. But then, what would that road become? It would go down past the, where the Pratt's farmed it, down that way.

JP: Oh, eventually, you'd get on Hoag, and then, you either had to go right or left.

Q: Okay.

JP: And, if you went left, then you'd get to the road that went down where the farm you just mentioned is.

Q: The Pratts. Yeah.

JP: Yeah. So, anyway, that was beautiful weather, beautiful.

Q: Would you get stuck in your driveway?

JP: Oh, we'd pull it back up with a John Deere 2010 tractor from a Greenwich farm equipment company. I don't know. Robertson's. And, it'd had had a snow plow, and then, they all

had chains. I don't know where they get chains to put on a tractor. We had snow, snow, snow. It was one of the heaviest winters of—The first winters we were here were the heaviest winters of snow that—

Q: Your first winter was the heaviest one. Do you remember what year that was, Jim?

JP: '70, 1970.

Q: Was it?

JP: I believe '70, '70, '69, '70.

Q: Yeah.

JP: Yeah. But, gosh, we finally got to get the town—I plowed the snow and pushed the snow over as I could, and there was no other place to put the snow. So, I couldn't even plow, and I don't know how high the bank was. Then, they came over with the town because they were going to come down and drop that big blade down. They couldn't. If it went like this on a city corner, they had to skiv off the top of the banks of snow a little at a time. Back up and come in and drop and go again. That was really something.

Q: They really broke you in. Right? Did you think about packing up and heading back south?

JP: I think maybe my wife did, but, really, I was enjoying it. It was an adventure. Yeah. But, there were so many wonderful things that happened. I remember fighting the battle to stop the setting up of these prefabricated—What do you call those?

Q: Drills.

JP: Drillers.

Q: Do you know the Driller Ordinance?

JP: Oh, it was so awful. And, you know, over there is a trail here. For some reason or another, there was always two or three or four old cars where they used to take, like, parts off one to put on the other. The thing that struck me though, if you had a Ford, why would you have a Chevy to take parts off? You know? And, that didn't line up. But, we used to meet at the—

Q: Burton Hall?

JP: Yeah, Burton Hall.

Q: Who was—Was Bill Sharron the supervisor then?

JP: I don't know. Sharron?

Q: Yeah, Bill Sharron. Who would you meet with?

JP: Well, it was a town meeting to—

Q: To make that law.

JP: Make a—

Q: An ordinance, I guess it was.

JP: Yeah.

Q: Yeah?

JP: And then, there was, like, a family that worked for the apple people, Gordon. And, what I said about that is that, you know, come up here from down in the city and you see this beautiful village. And now, you're going to get oil. You know, you're not going to get a good breed of people to live up here and live in shacks. You're going to destroy Easton. So, I think we all thought there should be some law against having trailers and all of it, because, as soon as you have a trailer, what does a freight yard look like? Junk, old refrigerators. And, people are careless that live in trailers. That was a dumb thing to say. And, of course, some people took advantage of that and jumped me, and one of them got me, got so angry that he challenged me. And, we went, with my temper, I walked down there to him, and I was right in his face because I didn't want any more trailers put up in the beautiful town of Easton because I'd seen some of the town where there [unintelligible] [00:23:06]. Because this is a great country, you know, and we can put anything we want. This is our property. [unintelligible] [00:23:17]. So, anyway—

Q: So, you had a heated discussion?

JP: It was heated. But, anyway, we parted friends. That was the thing about it. It was heated and discussed some things and lose the argument, and the other guy would maybe respect you anyway. So, that's the way it went.

Q: There was a lot of—

JP: The school system kept improving, and I had my kids go to school up here. It was

wonderful. It had sports—

Q: You had smart kids.

JP: ...and the 4H—

Q: Yeah.

JP: ...and I'm trying to remember the name of the lady who was good with horses. They have a farm over there on River Road in Easton. You know who. You know the woman.

Q: Yeah. Did Sue ride horses?

JP: Yeah. Well, we got a, we bought a horse, and we didn't know anything about animals. And, we couldn't, we couldn't put it—He wouldn't let us put the saddle on her, and the horse would shy. And then, we had to try and put the bridle in its, in her mouth, and oh my gosh.

Q: Did you succeed? Did you—

JP: Yeah, we did.

Q: You did?

JP: Yeah. We learned to be very calm and pet the horse and talk to the horse and so on, but don't give them oats. Because, when they had oats, boy, I'm telling you, they were [unintelligible] [00:25:34] the gas tank. But, yeah. You know, the kids had—

Q: So, now, did you have the horse right there on the—

JP: Yeah. The horse and a pony.

Q: You did?

JP: Yeah. Babe, I think, was what they named the horse. It was named Babe, and I can't think of the pony's name. It was—Anyway, the pony was—Ponies can be rough too, especially Welsh ponies. I'm sorry about that, but they lived on a hill on the side of our barn.

Q: Did you have other animals too there?

JP: Oh, well, I'm getting myself deep. One of the main things I wanted to do was to have some animals. I certainly didn't want to have cows. So, we started with a couple of pull horse

and sheep.

Q: You did?

JP: I got my first couple of sheep from—he's dead now—over in—I can't figure—

Q: Was it Eddie? Was it Herbie Ladell [phonetic] [00:27:01]?

JP: Ladell. How did you guess that?

Q: Because that's where we got our sheep from too.

JP: Oh, I know the girls were very much like this with respect to raising the sheep.

Q: Yes, yes.

JP: So, then, I seriously went and had built a good-sized barn, and the neighbors were quite chuckling a little. This guy from, this city slicker wanting to be a farmer, and so, yeah. Then, we got a100—Eventually, built it and over 100 Dorsets.

Q: You did?

JP: And so, the fellow I bought some of the sheep from took me to the cleaners.

Q: Oh.

JP: And, they were supposed to all be registered, tagged, and so forth. Well, they weren't. Their ears had a tag on them, but there was no reference to any of the heredity of that sheep, where did it come from, what was the registered ram's name and stuff. I wanted a good blue-blood flock of sheep, but I had wound up with some good ones, but some punky ones. Anyway—

Q: What did you like about the sheep? Why did you keep growing?

JP: I think it goes back to—Well, I, you know, I was brought up in a Christian fellowship church, and I happened to be a Protestant at one time and then I joined the Catholic church, not the Roman Catholic, the English. And, we, I just loved the story of the 23rd Psalm. It was connected with this, and I'm thinking about the sheep and the likeness of Jesus Christ to sheep. Of course, he wasn't stubborn like a sheep is. I found that out. So, anyway, I put up this barn, and it was going pretty good. But, when wool dropped in price—During the early years, wool was over a dollar and a half a pound, and you could shear and it paid for the shear and it helped to buy your own grain. We didn't feed a lot of grain to the sheep,

but suddenly needed it and other things. But, I jumped in too quick. I should have been happy with a smaller family of sheep flock and then gradually get into it, but I wanted a big barn. I wanted a big flock. I got it. I don't know. I guess the barn's there. I put it up myself. It's a steel structure, and that first winter, it was the coldest season, coldest winters in a row on record here for this part of the country, supposedly Easton. And, that, of course, had a telling—

END OF FILE A

BEGINNING OF FILE B

Q: ...and this Barbara.

JP: Oh, Barbara.

B: I'm Barbara, Jim.

JP: Of course, there had to be a Mary in the Catholic family.

B: My mother was a Mary. I was born in the month of May, so May, you know, you had a May baby and named it Mary.

JP: My birthday is June the 10th.

Q: It is?

JP: I was born 1913. So, I'll be 40—I'll be 40. I'll be 95 on June the 10th.

Q: Ninety-five on June the 10th.

JP: Yeah. I wouldn't advise anybody to want to live to be 95.

Q: Ninety-five.

JP: Because, my wife, we were going to enjoy the rest of our days, and we were in Greenwich. Of course, I didn't get to that part of the story. We did get out of the country, to the extent that we moved into Greenwich, which is still in the country, but you could get to the stores and you didn't have to go 10 miles this way and go 10 miles that way. And, you've got to go 10 miles back. So, that was 20 miles, and of course, gasoline was as costly then. But, you'd never make it these days.

Q: And, this was after all your kids had had their time—

JP: Yeah.

Q: ...in the country, right?

JP: Yeah.

Q: They had all gone.

JP: Yeah. Then, of course, it was wonderful to have a nice family, and we would go out there and visit the kids. That's where we go.

Q: Yeah.

JP: The two girls—

Q: She's got to rewind, and then she'll take the cap off—

B: I shouldn't have rewound it to see. That was my error before. Sorry, Jim. But, we're almost ready now. So, you guys just keep chatting away, and—

Q: Okay.

B: ...I'll just.

Q: So, we can just keep talking.

JP: It's so good to see you. Well, it's good to see Bob too, but—

B: Well, you're very kind, Jim. Really, you're great with the stories. You have so much to say. It's wonderful.

Q: Barbara is a professional storyteller.

JP: Well, I've gone all over the place.

Q: She's complimenting you. Then, you are getting a compliment. I'll tell you.

JP: Easton is, you know, where it starts, where it ends. You know, you cross the river down there, it's still the river, and you're in Easton. And then, you're riding along and say, "Gee, I thought we were going to be in Schaghticoke."

Q: What was your address up there? Was it the Valley? What was your address at your house?

JP: Yeah. That confused people that come and visit you. Where do you live? Valley Falls. No, we live in Easton. Where the heck is Easton? Next to Valley Falls. Well, if you can find Valley Falls, the next little town is Easton. Well, we got used to that. Then, you look at the map, and of course, there's no question about Easton. Our property, I mean, you could see our property on the state map.

Q: Did you rent your fields out? Did that—

JP: To Doc.

Q: Did Doc keep farming your—

JP: Yeah.

Q: Yeah. He'd hay it and plant corn, did he? Or just hay it?

JP: Oh, I hayed it.

Q: Oh, you did the hay? Well, especially if you had 100 sheep, right?

JP: Yeah.

Q: Yeah.

JP: Well, another story, I told you I bought a tractor. And, of course, along with that, I bought wagons and—

Q: A baler?

JP: ...a baler.

Q: You did?

JP: Yeah.

Q: Wow.

B: I'm going to excuse myself for two minutes. I'll be right back. I left my, the little plug, I think, at Goldie's—

Q: At Goldie's house? Okay.

B: I'll be right back to you.

Q: All right. We've gone to Goldie Lawn's [phonetic] [00:04:28]. She lived on Meeting House Road, and she's here. So, we spent part of the afternoon with her. Do you know who I mean by that? Court and Goldie Lawns?

JP: Oh, yeah.

Q: They lived—

JP: She's up here.

Q: Yes, yes.

JP: She's not very well.

Q: We spoke with her today too. So, that's where Barbara's going.

JP: She was in the—I didn't shave today. Sorry.

Q: That's okay.

JP: If I knew you were coming—

Q: We surprised you. I'm sorry that we just dropped in and surprised you.

JP: But, Goldie—

Q: So, she had stories of Easton too.

JP: Yeah.

Q: So, she was telling us those. So, you really became—

JP: Well, I remember the fire at the church that—

Q: Wow, yes.

JP: ...her husband—

Q: Yeah.

JP: ...was—

Q: Court.

JP: Well, it burned. He went back to get some of the things out of the church.

Q: I think it got hit by lightning.

JP: The church—

Q: The church got hit by lightning.

JP: Yeah. I don't know for sure, but I guess that's the—

Q: Yeah, yeah.

JP: They were preaching the Gospel and Satan didn't approve it. So, he was going to get rid of it.

Q: That's funny.

JP: Yeah.

Q: What about when you were saying that you—So, you just taught yourself how to hay it? How'd you do that? You just said to yourself I'm going to figure this out and started—

JP: Well, I watched them do it, and if you have the equipment, it takes a little while to know how to properly use it. But, when you're full of zeal to do it, it's surprising how quickly you learn. In fact, I learned before I really knew what I was doing with—

Q: You learned on the job.

JP: Yeah. And, of course, you've got to pay the price sometimes because you're not really in a position to proceeding with limited knowledge. Yeah.

Q: So, then—

JP: Sometimes, you figure, you're smarter than you really are, you know.

Q: Yeah, yeah. Yeah. You learn the hard way sometimes. It stops you.

JP: It was difficult for, I think, my older kids. See, I had three wives. Two of them died from cancer. The first one, I had two boys and a girl, two sons and a daughter.

Q: Now, what were their names?

JP: Margaret Dale, James "Jim", and—

Q: Your namesake.

JP: ...and Benjamin. Not Benjamin. Benjamin is great-grand, is a grandchild, son of mine. Bobby, Robert. And, I hate to say it, to tell you this, but he's the only one that died of the group, and he did it as a result of taking his own life. He had to do it. It was a marital problem, and—

Q: I'm sorry to hear that. Yeah.

JP: And, he was a dandy kid.

Q: Yeah.

JP: But, I always—Our priest always told me that I'm sure the Lord would understand better than I could because it felt like anybody who took their own life was committing murder. They're killing themselves, and then, once they were dead, they could not repent and say "I'm sorry, Lord." But, his soul lived on.

Q: Yeah.

JP: So, I'm sure the Lord forgave him.

Q: I'm sure too, yeah.

JP: Oh, my gosh.

Q: Oh, she's back. She's got—

B: I'm sorry about that. I'm glad I didn't go home without it. It was just [unintelligible] [00:09:34].

Q: Yeah. It was good that it was discovered.

B: I'm sorry for keeping you waiting. But, I thought it might be just nice to have a little video

of you, if you didn't mind.

JP: Where?

Q: Would you want me to stop with the microphone because—

B: No. No, no, no. Don't trouble yourself, my dear. You can just talk away about whatever you were talking about. It's perfectly fine.

JP: Well, we're getting talked out here.

Q: We're giving you a workout, aren't we? Yeah.

B: But, you know what you might do is maybe just have Jim introduce himself on the video.

Q: Yeah.

B: Say who you are, Jim, and maybe, I don't know, where you lived in Easton. There we go.

Q: Go ahead.

JP: Well, folks, I'm awfully sorry that I'm receiving these two beautiful young ladies who are interviewing me on the wonderful life that I experienced as I had in that beautiful, wonderful town of Easton. So, there's a vote for you. Who's running for council now? But, anyway, it was a pleasure to come from New Jersey and to get up here into God's country and suddenly find there are real people up here. I shouldn't say that because they're all part of God's creation, but when you live in an area where there is agriculture and there are beautiful animals, as well as beautiful people, I think that's the wonderful culmination. And, that I found here, and the time just went too fast to get from [unintelligible] [00:11:44] to be here. And, I call this place a prison, and they don't like that. But—

Q: Did we surprise you?

B: We are just finishing up.

M: Well, you know, two of them was good. Now, you've got three here.

JP: Yes. In spite of the good air here, you still have to take pills. She's just been a wonderful gal.

F: So, you're being interviewed also, huh?

B: Indeed, he is.

F: Cool.

B: We got some great stories.

F: Oh, good. Oh, that's great.

JP: I didn't tell them any of our secrets.

F: Oh, okay. That's good.

END OF FILE B