

QUONOCHONTAUG HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Oral History

WILLIAM PENHALLOW

April 4, 2013

Interviewed by Anne S. Doyle

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Q: Today is Thursday, April the 4th in the year 2013. I am here with Bill Penhallow on 98 East Beach Road. We are going to talk about Bill's family and how he spends his time at Quonnie and what he has done at Quonnie. Bill, state your full name.

A: My name is William Scott Penhallow. I was born on September 17th, 1933 on a Sunday afternoon in Woonsocket. There was a hurricane coming up from the south. I don't think they had names at that time, but I arrived at around 6:30 on Sunday afternoon.

Q: What brought you to Quonnie?

A: I would say the ocean. Back growing up in Woonsocket in the summer, on a Sunday afternoon, if it was nice and warm, we would usually drive down to Narragansett and go swimming at Olivo's Beach, which is right next to Scarborough. In fact, I think it's now the western extension of Scarborough. Everyone in the family loved the water, including my maternal grandmother, who would come with us. That's how we developed a great love for the ocean.

Q: How did you find Quonochontaug?

A: I attended Brown University. I got a bachelors of science and physics, and then went up to the University of Maine. In the spring of 1957, I got my master's degree in physics, and was going to go on to NYU to study oceanography and meteorology and got a job at Electric Boat, which I thought was only going to be for the summer. But my father lost his job up in Woonsocket, and things looked kind of shaky. Rather than going on a shoestring, I decided to stay at EB for a while. There I met a fellow by the name of Lou Fenlon, who lived here in Quonochontaug on Hoxie Avenue. I got to know him quite well. I told him that I was interested in coming up this way. He said, "There's some land for sale on Hoxie Avenue." So, I came up to take a look at it and found out that there were a couple of lots available here on East Beach Road that I liked better. So, I bought one of those lots, and eventually bought the one next door.

Q: What year was that?

A: That was in the late '50s. I've been here since 1959.

Q: Were you married then?

A: I got married in the middle of all of this.

Q: So, your children grew up here then.

A: Yes.

Q: Did they go to the Charlestown schools?

A: Yes and no. At that time, the Chariho District had been formed, but only down through the seventh grade. And so, we still had the elementary school, and they all attended Charlestown Elementary, and then went over to Chariho. My oldest graduated from there and went to URI. My second son went through the Vo-Tech program for small engines up there. My third and fourth sons were going to Chariho at the time when they were having problems with double classes and all of that. My youngest son, Tommy, expressed a desire to go to Moses Brown. We belonged to the Society of Friends at that time, and we thought that was a good idea. He didn't like all the congestion and rushing at Chariho, so he went up to Moses Brown. He liked it up there. My third son was observing what was going on, and he decided to go.

Q: Did they live up there?

A: Yes. That was a time when they were still boarding students up there. My namesake, Willie, went up there for his junior and senior year, and Tommy was there for his freshman, junior and senior year. I said, "I'll send you up there, but you'll have to go to URI when you graduate." My oldest, Robert, my namesake and my youngest, Tommy, all went and graduated from URI. My son John graduated from the Vo-Tech program, and then put in a full year at the technical institute outside of Hartford in diesel mechanics.

Q: Is that what he's doing now?

A: He's at the farm up in Burrillville—the old Penhallow farm. He's not doing any farming, but he works in automotive repairs and all kinds of repairs.

Q: Tell me about the ancestral home.

A: It's confusing to friends and whatnot, but my grandfather, on my father's side, was working in Woonsocket, and through my great-great grandfather, when he passed away, he was left some money, and he decided that he wanted to go into farming. So, this farm was available in Burrillville just a stone's throw from Wright's Restaurant, which I'm sure everyone knows. My father was the oldest in the family. They worked at the American Linear Company in Woonsocket, and so he continued to do that, but the rest of

the family set up the farm up there. That's where he met my mother, because my mother lived a quarter of a mile from that on my maternal side's farm.

Q: So, your family had two farms?

A: Yes. The Penhallow Farm and the Bartlett Farm.

Q: Were they working farms?

A: The Penhallow Farm, they made a dairy farm out of it. A successful dairy farm. My maternal grandparents' was a small subsistence type of thing. He worked for the Blackstone Valley Gas and Electric Company in Woonsocket, and did enough arming to take care of the family. But the Penhallow Farm had 30 cattle.

Q: At this point, is it land that's leased out for other farmers or grazing?

A: No. It's about 30 acres all together, and some of that's woodland. The acreage was able to take care of 30 cows.

Q: You talked about the Sunrise Acres Association.

A: Yes. I started building the house here in the late '50s. I got to know Howard Thorp. He is the one that really developed all of this area. After he got in your neck of the woods over there started, I think it was in the late '40s—this was before my time—her purchased land over here and was interested in developing this. By the '50s, there were quite a number of cottages on Hoxie Avenue in this neck of the woods. They wanted to, and he encouraged them, to form an association. That's how Sunrise Acres came into existence.

Q: I know that the land that he bought on East Beach, part of it was on Sunset. They called it Charlestown Estates. It was separate from what he had at Central Beach.

A: Yes.

Q: So, this was like a third section.

A: Yes. I mentioned Lou Fenlon. He and I worked in the sound and vibration department at EB. I got to know him well. They decided to have a meeting at the Grange Hall here. We all went up there.

Q: They meaning?

A: The people that potentially would join. And so, they got talking and said, "We should form a thing," and so forth. "Well, who's going to be the president?" He was sitting in back of me and said, "I nominate Bill Penhallow." I was the pro tem president through Jim Thornton, who was Mr. Thorp's lawyer. We formed the association. I was one of

the incorporators. I was the first president of Sunrise Acres. We had 100 feet of beach down there to which me and most of the people in the association had the rights to go and park at the beach and use the beach.

Q: Does that still exist today?

A: Yes. This is a little different from East Beach where you can go and use it, but you've got to have a parking facility. That's how we got started. Back in the '40s he had built a lagoon. You asked about that. It was an idea that he had where if you dig out and have an entrance to the lagoon, you could moor your boat and so forth.

Q: Are you talking about on the pond?

A: On the pond, which is part of the association. It doesn't flush out, and so it would grow over. We had it cleaned out a second time, but nobody was really interested. It was a big hole.

Q: At that time, you didn't have to have permission to create that?

A: No. The regulations were much different then.

Q: Was it ever used?

A: That was before my time. But as I understand it, when it was built, it looked fine. It had an entrance. They had a dock and a walkway around it. But it immediately began building up because of no flushing. Then they said, "We'll fill it up." But it would take some doing to fill that up, so it's not filled up. It's grown over pretty much.

Q: Tell me about Mr. Thorp as a person.

A: I got to know him very well, because he was a Mason. At that time, I joined the lodge. Between that and dealings here, I got to know him quite well. I had purchased one lot here. The deal was you put \$100 down, and then pay the balance over a couple of years, and he makes out on the capital gains. I was working on the foundation here one day, and he came with his car and he said, "Bill, I know you're interested in the lot next door. There is a woman from Providence that's interested in buying it. I know you're interested. Give me \$100 and pay me off when you can, and you can have the lot next door." He had been in politics. I think he was a senator from Westerly at one time—a state senator. We had a lot in common to talk about.

Q: Was he easy to get along with?

A: If he liked you. He wanted to purchase land on the other side of Hoxie Avenue. I'm trying to think of the woman's name. She fully realized the potential. She never did sell it. He had roads—in fact, if you look out the back window here, you can see a road going in. That was to be the access road.

Q: Does it finally hook up with another road?

A: No. That was the intent, but she never did that.

Q: How does it stand right now?

A: That land was divided up and sold. It's individual lots now.

Q: Do people go through the access road to get to their places?

A: Yes.

Q: What about the association itself? How does it function? What are some of the decisions that you have to make?

A: The land around the lagoon was always a sore point and sticking point. What I later did was to join East Beach Association, and so I got away from Sunrise Acres. I had a number of doings. The fellow that you ought to interview is Ernie Borner.

Q: I have talked to him on the phone. The board of the Historical Society is looking for a representative from this area, and there is nobody that wants to do that. I asked him a while ago.

A: He owns land right there next to the lagoon, and has remained a member from year one.

Q: How do you spell his name?

A: Ernie Borner, B-O-R-N-E-R, I think.

Q: Do you think it would be worth it if I gave him a call?

A: Yes. He lives down here with his sister. He's been coming down here longer than I have. He started coming down in the early '50s.

Q: Is he here year-round?

A: Yes. There are quite a few complications involved with that land. He would be the one to get that squared away.

Q: Do you know how old he is?

A: He is probably my age or a little older. In his 80s.

Q: Is he in the phone book?

A: I think so.

Q: Is there anything else you want to talk about as far as Mr. Thorp is concerned?

A: It was interesting, the roads were always a problem, as you probably know. What he did here on Hoxie Avenue was he tried to get the town to take over the roads, and then they would tell him, "If the roads aren't up to standard, we require this." And so, he went ahead the next year or two to do that. He asked again. "These are the standards now." They didn't want to take care of the roads.

Q: Was East Beach Road always a town road?

A: I think so. It was Hoxie Avenue that we're talking about here.

Q: Was it a dirt road when you first came here?

A: Yes.

Q: At this point, the Sunrise Acres Association has to maintain all of those roads.

A: I think so.

Q: What influence did the Masons have on your life?

A: Major. Back when I first came down this way, I was working at Electric Boat and I was single initially. I would go back on weekends up to Woonsocket to my folks and friends. I lived in the north end of Woonsocket. Just up the street is the Massachusetts line, and the city of Blackstone. My male friends were joining the lodge up there one by one. Lou Fenlon was a Mason. I got to know him down here. The question I had was if I joined, where should I join. Should I join up there, or should I join down here? I realized that this would probably be the future, so I joined down here. When that came about, half of the lodge in Blackstone, Massachusetts came down, and the master of the lodge up there was one of my best friends, so they were very well represented.

Q: What drew you to join? It's a very ritualistic organization.

A: It's a fraternal organization for men. When many of your friends join, you say, "That must be something that is good," and that's what draws you to it.

Q: Did they have charities that they would work on?

A: Yes. There are different bodies within the Masons. The Shriners have their hospitals. I think a million dollars a day goes into that. The Knights Templar have the Eye Foundation. The Blue Lodge, which is the original body that you join, locally supports different charities. A church in town has a little store.

Q: The Blue Mitten?

A: Yes. They help that out.

Q: Are you member now? Is it an ongoing organization?

A: Yes. To answer in general, when I joined, it was Burnett E. Davis—I don't know if you know that name.

Q: Yes.

A: He was an older man. He and I were in the same class when we joined. We went through the various bodies together and got to be very good friends. He helped me build my house.

Q: He owned a lot of property around here.

A: Yes. He owned a couple of cottages down the road here on the left. He owned a big house up in Ashaway. He was from New Hampshire. He came down with his family and set up shop in Hartford, and then started coming down here with his family in the summer and started buying property.

Q: Did Mr. Thorp purchase some of his property too?

A: No. I think he purchased his pieces from other individuals. You asked me about Pendleton. He was a Mason.

Q: Clifford was Palmer's son, correct?

A: I don't know. All I know is Cliff married his wife in one of the lighthouses.

Q: That was Marjorie?

A: Yes.

Q: I believe Marjorie was his second wife.

A: Yes.

Q: She grew up in the lighthouse.

A: Yes. He was an older member at the time when I first got to know him. One of the officers at the lodge is the Tyler. He's the one that guards the outside. Usually, he's an old member that knows everyone. That's the job that I have now.

Q: It's called a Tyler?

A: T-Y-L-E-R. That's the official name. That guards the entrance.

Q: Do you literally have to stand at the entrance during the ceremony?

A: Yes.

Q: Where do you meet?

A: Right next to the Elms.

Q: Do you know anything about Clifford in terms of his involvement with what was going on in Quonnie?

A: He lived down on West Beach Road. He bought land off Klondike Road and moved up there.

Q: Is his son still living?

A: He has two sons and a daughter.

Q: I did an oral history a long time ago with Marjorie, and there was a son living with her at the time.

A: Yes. I think the two sons are living in that house. I'm not sure about where the daughter is. There are two things I want to talk about. Burnett E. Davis got me interested in growing apples, because he had a number of trees. He asked me to spray the trees for him. He got a hell of a crop, and I picked them. I had a pickup truck. We went down to Clyde's Cider Mill down in Mystic and had them pressed. We got a barrel of cider. He was taking care of the Lerner's property, which is that gambled roof.

Q: It's the old Burdick farmhouse.

A: Yes. He was watching the place and taking care of it, and he said, "We'll put the barrel down in the basement, which we did. We walked it down there. What he was doing at that time is each winter he owned a property in Florida, so he'd go down and spend the winter in Florida. He said, "Bill, you've got to take care of this cider for us."

Q: How do you take care of cider?

A: You put brown sugar and some steak and few other things in while the stuff is fermenting. He said, "What you've got to do is come down each day and keep the barrel full." I added a little bit of cider and let it sit for the rest of the winter. The property was sold that year, and we didn't have access to the cider. Maybe that cider is still there. It would be 40 years.

Q: I have a story about that. When the Oars sold it last year, they called me and said, "I think we have some things that the Historical Society would like." They gave me some of the things that were in the garage. I got a chance to look down in the cellar, and there was this big keg.

A: That's it.

Q: I don't know whether it's still there. I thought maybe it was a liquor or something.

A: By the springtime, you'd have some hard cider. Mr. Davis said, "Bill, I have the old cider press that I got from Pendleton. Why don't you make cider with it?" which we did. He said, "You can have it." I had that for a long time. My sister-in-law is a water-color painter, and she painted me a picture of that.

Q: Did that originally belong to the Pendletons?

A: Yes. Cliff and I used to talk all the time. I'm sure you've heard the stories about the black sand at the beach. I think that's Cumberlandite. The most prominent source of that in Rhode Island is up in Cumberland. That's how it got its name: Cumberlandite.

Q: Is it a form of iron?

A: Yes. It involves the Bartletts, which is my mother's side of the family. The Bartletts were iron workers. They were involved in the operation in Cumberland. Then they moved across the river and came up to where the ancestral Bartlett Farm is in North Smithfield.

Q: So, they mined it then?

A: Yes.

Q: You know about Thomas Edison being here.

A: I understand he was involved. Cliff told me he had a wagon that they used. What the wagon had was an organ of some kind. You would take it down to the beach after a storm when all that ground-up Cumberlandite is available. The first thing was to dry it, and then have a magnetic separator. I never quite understand what it involved until recently when another Mason friend of mine, Dave Crandall, from Klondike Road was a welder, among other things, and he said, "The welders used that. What they would do is separate it all out and put it in bags, and then cart it up to Providence." It was purchased up there, and in some way used in the process of welding.

Q: What we know about it is when Thomas Edison was here in 1881, he set up his company on Central Beach, and he invented the separator. Then he would put the iron on a barge, and they would bring it down to the beginning of the Hudson River and up the river to

one of the steel mills in Poughkeepsie. But it got to be too expensive. After a year, he gave it up.

A: As I understand it, the same thing happened to the welding operation, although technology came in.

Q: Tell me about the wagon. Was that just for local use?

A: It must have been left over. It must have been Edison that designed it and built it. I don't know, but I'm sure that that was probably the origin.

Q: I wonder if we could see that. I know a few people that would love to look at it. I wonder if it's still in the Pendleton family.

A: I don't know.

Q: What about the people that you got to know?

A: Frankie Frisch was a marvel. He was rough and ready on the outside, but he played the violin. He had a lot of notebooks on music. He was a very accomplished fellow.

Q: Did he live across the street from you?

A: Right across the street where the McClutcheys are. People used to say, "You live near Frankie Frisch," and I said, "No. He lives near me." He had two dogs. I think they were Cocker Spaniels. One was Flash, and Patches was the other dog. They were alive when he first came. He was out in the yard, and somebody was driving down East Beach Road too fast. Boy, he got out there and hollered at them, "Slow down." The dogs died, but he saved the leashes. When he died, he had lost his first wife and married a gal down on the beach.

Q: Somebody gave me a picture that appeared in the Westerly Sun of he getting married to the two of them together.

A: They lived down at her place. The only relatives were a niece and a nephew. When he died, they didn't know what to do with things that were over there, and so they had an open house and said, "Take anything that you'd like." He had quite a collection of books. I've got quite a number of his books. What he would do with his big scrawl is he'd put his name in and the date, what the weather was like.

Q: What subjects are they?

A: They were about life in general. Sports. History. I have Flash's and Patch's collars.

Q: You must have been good friends.

A: After he lost his first wife, he was just living by himself.

Q: Did you know his first wife?

A: No. Not really. We would talk over the fence. I got to know him better after she had passed away, and before he got involved with his second wife. I'd go over there and talk. He was a great baseball great. I went with my oldest son, who was interested in baseball, and he got involved with a sports writer at the Westerly Sun. They made an arrangement to go out to a Red Sox game out in Boston. My son and a handful of other kids went out there.

Q: Did you go?

A: No.

Q: Was that their first professional game that they had been to?

A: I expect so.

Q: It sounds like he was a very kind person.

A: He was. And accomplished. But he was the manager for the Saint Louis Cardinals. That was a rough-and-tumble kind of thing. I think that's where most of the people got their impression of what he was like.

Q: Do your sons still talk about that?

A: It was only my oldest son. He was a little older than I was. I can't recall how this all gelled. It was my oldest son, Robert.

Q: How did they get up there? Was it by train?

A: I think by car. Do you remember when they would play out of town? They would have these radio programs where they had a recreation of the game. The link was by telegraph. They would broadcast it, and you were on the receiving end of the telegraph. You had to recreate the excitement.

Q: How long ago was that?

A: We lived in two places in Woonsocket. One was from when I was born until eleven, and the second was beyond that. It probably would have been in the middle of the 2nd World War in the mid-'40s. By the end of the '40s, we had TV coming in and radio, but that's what you did. You listened by radio to the Red Sox games in town, and then you had the telegraphic recreations for the games away.

Q: Did you know Frank Crompton?

A: Yes. It was through the Masons. This was way back in the early '60s.

Q: Is this the Frank that had the store on Route 1?

A: Yes. He joined the same year that I did. That was in the '60s. The Master Lodge took in 28 candidates that year. It was a record that no one has ever surpassed. I was in the class that went through in the spring. The Master got special dispensation so that the class of candidates could put on the first degree, which was unheard of. But the Grand Master gave him permission. He said, "Yes, you can do it. Do a good job." I was appointed the temporary Master. We put the first-degree on Frank Crompton. I got to know Frank very well, because at the time, there was the Crompton Store there, but then he had a coffee shop too next to it. That whole thing had been a gasoline station.

Q: Yes. With Mr. Brightman.

A: Yes. The coffee shop was in the bay of the repair shop. He and his wife ran the other part. I got to know him quite well.

Q: Did he live around here too?

A: Yes. Are you familiar with the Poquonock houses? It's a little town on this side of Groton. During the war, the Navy—I think it was the Navy—had housing. And so, when that was over and done with, all of these houses were sold to individuals. Quite a few people here from Charlestown bought them. Some of the buildings that the Crandalls have over there in back—

Q: In back of what?

A: Where the stand is now. Frank lived in a house in back of the store. I think that burned to the ground. What was available up on the hill, and it still is, is a Poquonock Bridge house.

Q: Is this in back of the stand?

A: It's up the hill further. They have done it over. It's a nice.

Q: Can you see it from the Post Road?

A: There's nothing in front. You can see it from the road.

Q: It sounds like all these little places were bought from the Charlestown Naval Base and brought down here.

A: Some of them are Poquonock stuff. Poquonock Bridge is a little settlement on this side of Groton. I don't know whether that was the Navy or Army.

Q: So, they ended up selling all the structures?

A: Yes. What's his name? He's still alive. He owns property, and is going to give it to the Indians down in Westerly.

Q: Are you talking about in Charlestown?

A: What's our next community down here where the crossroads are?

Q: Bradford?

A: No. Halfway to Westerly. Walmart.

Q: Dunn's Corner?

A: Dunn's Corner.

Q: I've heard about Martha Crandall. She must have been a relative. She lived right on the corner of 216 and the Post Road, and the structure is down now. You can see that there is a foundation there. I've heard some stories about her.

A: I think the roof collapsed. The chimney lasted. But this Crandall ran a junkyard there on 216. He would be a fellow to talk with.

Q: If it does come to you, maybe you can email me. It sounds like he must be elderly.

A: Yes. He's pushing 90, I would think. He knows everyone and everything that's going on. He has moved lots and lots of buildings. Do you remember when the local school house was moved from back here and up? He's the one who moved it. I was the speaker at the time, because I was chairman of the school committee.

Q: Tell me about that.

A: There are a bunch of stories. There were two people: Rufus Prassa and George Prassa. The Prassa Farm was—

Q: It's Prassa Trail now.

A: What's the farm up here that was converted to a motel?

Q: The Hoxies?

A: No. You drive up Route 1, and Old Route 1 goes in by the air field. And you've got the Chamber of Commerce.

Q: The Champlain Farm?

A: Off to the left is a big building.

Q: Windswept?

A: Windswept. I think that was the Prassa Farm. Rufus was the state senator from Charlestown. He ran a gasoline station a stone's throw from the Chamber of Commerce. Old Route 1 goes that way, and the new Route 1, his gas station was in the middle of the new road. It had to go. He then built the station, which is still for sale, before you get there on the right. He had a lift. The store part of it was his workshop. I wouldn't be surprised if there is still the lift that he had. I got to know him, because he was taking care of my car. I would go back and forth to URI. He said, "Bill, wouldn't you like to get into politics? We need a school committee member. It's only one night a month." I ran, because it was an elected position. I got the job. It was more than one night a month. At that time, there was only the six grades.

Q: What year was that?

A: The later '60s.

Q: Did you become chairman of the school committee?

A: I became chairman of the Charlestown school committee, but then I got to become a member of the Chariho school committee, and got to be chairman of that too.

Q: What changes occurred when you were head of that?

A: Chariho has been a great success education-wise, but it's been a very tough road to hoe. The people from Hopkinton never really supported it. The state offered the Vo-Tech facility, and Hopkinton didn't go along with that. The district had to sue the town of Hopkinton. There were many issues.

Q: Do you feel that you really made a difference when you were there?

A: Yes, I think I did.

Q: Hopkinton just turned down—

A: My good friend, Scott Bilhurst—

Q: Were you there last night at the meeting?

A: No. Scott wasn't there, because we were at a Commandery Meeting in Westerly at the Masonic Temple. They have never been that much for it. They certainly envy our tax base. I once told them, "Back when, you had a chance. I took it. I bought land in

Charlestown. You had an opportunity to do it. Why didn't you do it?" I started having heart trouble in 1974—atrial fib. I'm convinced that part of that was these meetings that we would have, which would go to like 1:00 and 2:00 in the morning. I'd come home from that just all tensed up. The last thing I had to do a few years ago was on a committee to study the possibility of Charlestown going out, but that was the last chance. It's never going to happen. We've got to live with it. So, I was in the midst of politics. I used to be involved in the running of those hearings on the budget at Chariho, which were quite a thing. Finally, I finished up my tour of duty on the school committee, and the Hopkintonites were really happy about that. It so happened that I had gotten into town politics even more, because I ran for town moderator and got that position. The next year it was incumbent upon the Town of Charlestown to provide a moderator for the meetings, so I was up there the next year too.

Q: Are you involved in any way with any of the committees right now?

A: No. Looking back on it all, it took a terrible toll on me. I was just in too much of it.

Q: Kate Waterman lived right down the street to me. I still talk to her once in a while. It was a terrible situation. Hopefully now things are improving.

A: I have been out of that, except for this subcommittee in Charlestown, but that's a dead issue.

Q: What was the Green Acres program?

A: That was Senator Chaffee's—not Lincoln, but his father. He was a great fellow. I knew him a little bit, because during campaigns, he would come down to shindigs and all that. I had great respect for him. He owned a property over there near Moonstone Beach. He had this idea of wouldn't it be nice if the state could buy the land between Burlingame and the strip down along the beach—as you go down Blue Shutters, take a left in the parking lot. The state owns that all the way to the Charlestown Breachway, except for little pieces here and there. Think of what the state could do if it owned the land from Warden's Pond right through here where it would be one big area. So, we were faced with the possibility of that occurring.

Q: What would have been done with that land? Would it have been open space?

A: Some kind of a park. You had fresh water. You've got the camping area and fresh water facilities. You'd have part of it salt water facilities. And all tied together. It's a good idea.

Q: Why didn't it go through?

A: Charlestown didn't care too much for it. Hoxie Avenue, the people on the other side of the street had a stone wall north and south, which is that back boundary. That woman, whose name I can't think of, who owned that was against this proposal, because that

would be the boundary. That would be the west boundary of this thing. The east boundary—I don't know quite where that would be. Probably where the air field was. I'm not sure.

Q: That would have been uprooting all these families.

A: The state would condemn them and give them a pittance.

Q: Is there anything else that we haven't touched on?

A: The nuclear plant was a big thing.

Q: Were you involved in that?

A: Yes. In a double-ended way. I was associated with the people that were in favor of the plant. I had an open mind, but it turned out that the electric company was trying to pull a fast one with the government to get that land bypassing regulations and all that. So, that was something. But then the majority of the people formed a very active antinuclear group, and were successful in putting a break on this process that the electric company was trying to overrun to get the land and put it in there whether they liked it or not. So, that group was able to elect Claudine Schneider to the House of Representatives. That was successful in stopping that process. That had a positive result, because the Town of Charlestown then got part of the air base over there, and was able to have a park. It was George Blivlan, who was very influential, and did a great deal to establish that park, and to establish the nature center. He would get volunteers and get all kinds of projects done. He got really friendly with the National Guard, and once a month they had to be active and do something, and he said, "Come on down and do some things down here." They would come down to help out, do this and that and everything. In 1986, Halley's Comet came by, and he knew I was interested in astronomy. He said, "Bill, could you bring over some of your telescopes to the Nature Center?" because in April, just at this time, in 1986, the comet came around from the southern hemisphere and appeared in the morning sky, and so I said, "Fine." I think it was a Saturday morning, the coldest April morning at 5:00 I have ever seen. I went over in my pickup truck with one of my telescopes. I got over there, and there wasn't anybody there at 5:00, and so I started setting up my instrument. I turned around, and there were like 200 people in line waiting to look through the telescope. It's interesting, because lots of times in the morning off in the east there is a cloud bank a few degrees above the horizon. I think it's associated with the Gulf Stream. It's there many mornings. They were there this morning. I looked out there. It was clear above it, but you couldn't see any sign of the comet. I was fishing around, and I heard, "There it is." It rose just up above that cloud bank. They had a very successful go of it. After that, George said to me, "Bill, wouldn't it be nice to have an observatory here?" I said, "Yes." Within two years we were operating. Why this came to mind was the organization that had been formed to fight the nuclear plant, and raised money, and they had some money left over. George was in banking in Providence. He was able to get the money. I scurried around and contacted an outfit in the Midwest that did observatory domes. He said, "Here is the possible deal. I'll bring the dome out with

a crew, and I'll put it all up for X dollars. Or, if you want to save money, I'll drive the truck out by myself, get the thing all ready, and you get a crew of half a dozen people and I'll show you how to put it up." We saved \$20,000. We went to the second thing. The crew of half a dozen people that we contacted showed up. The fellow that sold it to us said, "It normally takes about five days to do this." By the third day, the thing was operating, because a few of the people were contractors and they knew how to do this. I wanted to get the very best telescope for the observatory that was available at the time. It was this fellow making them out in the Midwest in Illinois. I said, "We want a telescope. We're willing to wait for it, but we want it done and done right." He took great pride in producing one. The months went by. In the meantime, I had a URI telescope set up in there so that we could operate until we got the one that we really wanted. I called him, and he said, "I'm sorry I haven't contacted you. I started out grinding three pieces of glass, and I wasn't satisfied. I started over." I said, "Okay. Take your time." It was another year. We got a 7-inch refractor telescope. The best in the world. We set it up.

Q: I had no idea you were involved with that.

A: Yes. That's not the end of the story, from my standpoint. Going back to the family homestead in Burrillville, my uncle was the last of the family. In his later 80s he took sick. He didn't have any family up there, and so we went up there for four or five years to take care of the farm and take care of him. I realized that in so doing I had to relinquish the directorship of this, because I couldn't in any way run back and forth. So, I had to resign. I had some fellows that I trained that I hoped could take the job. Unfortunately, they wanted a different telescope, and sold that telescope for what they paid for it, which was unfortunate. So, we've got a different telescope there.

Q: Do you still go up regularly?

A: No. I haven't. I know most of the people who are involved. Former students are running it: Francine Jackson.

Q: My husband used to volunteer there, because he likes astronomy. There was a man there that was in charge, and he died.

A: Yes. I can't think of his name. He had cancer. He took over and was running the show until he couldn't do it anymore.

Q: I remember going in there one Friday. He would relate Greek mythology.

A: Les Cole.

Q: That's right. Is there anything else that you would like to add for your family?

A: In this day and age, it's unusual to have a family with all the kids having grown up in one place. I had a couple of stints at Indiana University. I had two National Science Foundation faculty fellowships. They were in the midst of the space age. What they

were trying to do was to encourage the teaching of astronomy. I still don't have a PhD, but I sold them on the fact that I should have some more graduate training, that would be the best way to improve my teaching of astronomy. They bought that, and off to Indiana University I went for a year. The whole family went.

Q: So, you just left?

A: We left. And then seven years later, I got another one, but Nancy didn't want to go. She stayed here with the family. I got involved with Wesleyan University through that connection. I taught at Wesleyan for summer school. I worked at Yale. Yale had the best measuring instruments in the world. That was very profitable.

