



Orleans County Historical Association

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1916-1991



Orleans County Historical Association

INTERVIEW

Mr. Harold G. Hill
13361 Million Dollar Highway
Albion, New York

Harold Hill was born January 17, 1916.
Interviewed by Luther Burroughs of Albion, New York.

H Hill
B Burroughs





Orleans County Historical Association

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

The purpose of this project is to collect information about the historical development of Orleans County by means of tape-recorded conversations with people whose experiences reflect the county's growth.

These tapes and transcriptions will be preserved as educational resources and possible publication (all or in part).

I hereby release this tape and transcription to the Orleans County Historical Association.

Wood A Hill

Signed

5-22-79

Date

Understood and agreed to:

Justin P. Burroughs

INTERVIEWER

5-22-79

Date

H Well Mr. Burroughs, I was born January 17, 1916 in the Town of Shelby. I lived on a farm until 1950 at which time I moved to Barre Center because of a back injury that prevented me from farming. My ancestry from my mother's side: my mother was Antoinette Pettingill. My father was Robert C. Hill. My grandfather on my father's side was Edward Hill, and his wife's name was Anna Hill.

Grandfather Hill was a bugler in the Civil War in the cavalry. I happen to have the bugle that he used in the Civil War in my possession at the present time. My brother has the sabre and the belt; and the last I knew, there were two pieces ofhardtack in the old belt that he used to wear when he rode his horse. His revolver was stolen the night before he left the Army.

On my mother's side, the Pettingill side, my grandfather's name was John Pettingill, and my grandmother's name was Effie Pettingill. I have only one brother, Howard Hill, who is four and a half years older than I am. He now resides in Winter Haven, Florida.

My brother and I farmed together after I got out of high school for a number of years, until 1950. In the meantime, my school education consists of going to the grade school, what we call the grade school in District Number 8 in the Town of Shelby, where I went through my first eight grades. After I completed my 8th grade, I came to Albion to attend high school. I lived with my Aunt, Carrie Pratt, on Liberty Street. She was a schoolteacher in the Albion system, and I basket-boarded at that time. Instead of paying money, my parents would furnish eats and groceries and this type of thing to pay for my board while staying with my aunt and going to school. I graduated from Albion High School in 1934.

In the fall of 1938, I attended the Reppertt Auction School in Decatur, Indiana and graduated from that school in the spring of 1939. I have conducted auctions all through Orleans County and surrounding counties ever since. I am still active in the auction business on a limited basis.

As I said, I farmed it until 1950, with my brother, at which time I had a back injury and I was told by the doctor to leave the farm.

I ran for Supervisor for the Town of Barre and was elected and took office as the Supervisor, January 1, 1950. I served in that capacity until the fall of 1961 at which time I resigned and moved to Florida to establish myself as a Real Estate Broker in Florida. This experience lasted only a little over a year and I decided to return to Orleans County and take up my auctioneering business, as I had left it in 1961.

When I got off from the farm, I also got my Real Estate license and was associated with a Mr. Carl Durling, Broker, who lived on the Ridge Road, route #104, near the hamlet of Gaines. Mr. Durling was an excellent Real Estate Broker in my opinion in the community, and he certainly treated me as a son in the Real Estate business. My association with him lasted for a number of years, at which time I got my own Broker's license and then became active as a Real Estate Broker having my own Real Estate business as well as my auctioneering business.

I have been a Republican County Committeeman ever since the early forties; and I am still a Republican Committeeman in the Town of Albion at the present time.

B During your 12 years as Supervisor, were there any particular things that were interesting in the county at that time?

H Yes. I would say one thing that might be quite interesting. As I said, I went on the Board of Supervisors January 1, 1950 and it was in the early fifties that Orleans County's total budget exceeded a million dollars for the first time in history! This made big headlines in our local papers and I believe, as we are talking here today in the year 1979, the total county budget is something in excess of sixteen million. So you can see that there is a great deal of added expense and inflation that has taken place since I served on the Board.

Another thing that happened when I was on the Board of Supervisors: we built an addition on the County Clerk's office on the east, principally to make room for a library for the Court system, and also for Conference rooms for the attorneys.

When I was serving on the Board, for the first time in history Orleans County adopted a system of foreclosure in rem proceedings on properties with unpaid taxes. The principle reason for adopting this type of foreclosure that the old system - a county would sell

a piece of property that they had taken back for taxes and all they would give is a tax deed. Well, banks would not recognize this type of tax deed to loan money if a person wanted to get a mortgage on a piece of property. So the law permitted the county to collectively, each year, foreclose those properties that had unpaid taxes over a period of four years in what they called the process of rem foreclosure. Once they were foreclosed it worked the same as any foreclosure on any piece of property. A good deed and a good title could be given to that property once it was sold and put back on the tax roll; and people could borrow money on it.

I think probably the highlight of my career while serving on the Board of Supervisors, happened while was Chairman of the Board. I was Chairman in 1959 and 1960, and in that period of time, we built a new County Home and Infirmary just west of the Village of Albion on route #31. We spent a great deal of time investigating the facts and figures on costs before we voted to build this County House and Infirmary. The State and Federal Government had condemned our old County Home, so we got no reimbursement as far as county patients were concerned. We had to pay for county patients in the locally owned nursing homes which (cost-wise) seemed to be going up by leaps and bounds. After two years of investigation and search, it was voted unanimously that we build our own County Home and Infirmary whereby we could receive state and federal reimbursements for keeping of indigent people.

We built that building for the sum of one million dollars for the construction of the building, plus the furnishings, which I am sure today would cost in the neighborhood of four to five million dollars. The building in itself has more than paid for itself over a period of years on the savings that the county has made from the cost of keeping a person in our County Infirmary, compared with a proprietary type of nursing home. I think that these are probably the main highlights of my career as the Supervisor of the Town of Barre. I will say this: I feel that the 12 years that I served on the Board of Supervisors was the best education I have ever had in my life. It teaches one, one thing; and that is that there is always two sides to every subject.

Now, you might have some questions, Mr. Burroughs, that you want to ask me at this time.

- B In regard to the county: you were on the one vote for each township. Did you find that there was anything wrong with that at the time? In other words, did you come into any troubles?
- H We certainly didn't. I think in a small rural county such as Orleans County, with a population of approximately 37,000 people, I think that the Supervisor representing his town, and also representing a member of the Board of Supervisors for county work is an ideal set-up in a county this size. Personally I am very concerned about the set-up that we have at the present time on the weighted voting. Perhaps it might be a more fair way but I am sure with the weighted voting, the concern that I have that a very small number of supervisors, in fact at the present time three Supervisors by getting their heads together could control the county by weighted voting. And I don't think this fair to the smaller populated towns. You know, a problem in a small populated town is just as big to that town as a problem in one of the larger towns that has a larger population. We got along fine. We had disagreements certainly, on different issues, which is natural. But I do feel that one vote in one town in a county of this size is the ideal way to have a County Board of Supervisors operate.
- B You probably have had some experience with possibly going to Albany or having people coming here. Could you tell us something of that, Harold?
- H In my political career I know one thing that stands out in my mind very vividly that up here in our local restaurant known as Marti's, Nelson Rockefeller, who ran for Governor and was later elected Governor of New York State and served, I believe, for 12 years, he attended a luncheon we held up at Marti's; and Orleans County was the first county in the State of New York to endorse Mr. Rockefeller as their candidate for Governor that year. And he was later elected. It was very pleasurable to meet Mr. Rockefeller. I had the pleasure of talking with him and meeting him several other times. He later went on to be assistant to different Presidents, as well as being Vice-President of the United States.
- Another man I had the privilege of meeting in New York City at a political rally was Tom Dewey, who was a former Governor of the State of New York and also a candidate for the President of the United States; not winning. Mr. Dewey was a very remarkable

man. In his political career he did a great deal, in my opinion, of cleaning up some of the rackets in New York City.

I have had many other pleasantries happen to me during my political travels and associations. I know one year, while I was in public office as Supervisor, a group of local fellows including Richard Bloom, Arthur Eddy, Harland Harvey and myself was invited to Washington to visit Barber Conable, from Alexander. At that time Barber Conable was our Representative in Congress, representing our local district. We spent two days with Mr. Conable, in Washington. He took us all through the Capitol, different offices; took us into restaurants where the members of the House of Representatives eat, and we had lunch there. We certainly had a most enjoyable time and a very enjoyable experience.

There are probably other individuals that doesn't come to my mind at the present time, but certainly it has been a wonderful experience with the contacts I have had in the past in meeting these different gentlemen.

B Well, we will leave that temporarily. Could you tell us something about your farming days? Was there anything unusual at that time in your line of farming?

H Well, I graduated from high school, as I said before, in 1934 and I returned home on the farm to farm with my brother, on a 300 acre farm. The Hill family was known as pure-bred-sheep-breeders for three generations. My grandfather, Edward Hill, my father, Herbert Hill, and my brother Howard and myself raised pure-bred-sheep for three generations. We sold breeding stock all over the country. My father shipped some pure-bred-breeding-stock, Dorset Sheep, to South America on a sale made through Cornell University. We showed our sheep at the different fairs: the local fairs, the State Fair, Toronto Exhibition, and also the Chicago Live-Stock Show. I can't remember the year, but one year at the Chicago Live-Stock Show, we had the grand-champion Dorset ram at that show!. He was later sold at auction at that show, for \$500.00 which was the highest price ever paid for a pure-bred Dorset ram, at that time.

We used to grow cash crops such as tomatoes, beans and sweet corn. We also, later, went into the dairy business. As I said

before, I sold out my farming interests to my brother in 1950 when I moved off the farm. I had carried on my auction business when I was still farming and am still doing auction work today. This is my 42nd year selling auctions. I have sold most everything that you could imagine. One thing that might be of interest to you is the fact that when I first started selling auctions, the average size farm then was 50 to 100 acres. And I remember many March and April days I would have a sale every day because they were small farms. This was back in the horse days when most of the farming was done by horses. The average farm sale then, of course this was right after the Depression, the average farm sale would amount to \$2,000. to \$4,000.00 where today the farms are - if you don't own 500 or more acres, many of the larger farmers own 2,000 or 3,000 acres with a real large investment. A big tractor today could cost as much as \$65,000. to \$70,000.00 for a tractor itself. So there has been a terrific change in the agricultural picture in Orleans County during my lifetime, which has been quite interesting and enjoyable.

- B One thing I always wanted to know about the auctioneer and his clerk: do they work on a percentage basis, or do they work for so much for the job?
- H Well, when I first started to sell auctions, the fellow that I took over as the old auctioneer, I am sure that you remember him, was Ed Sayres that used to sell auctions all through this community. And Mr. Sayres used to sell by the hour. Well, we were taught out at auction school that we should sell by commission because if you sell by commission, the more you get for the owner, the more you get for yourself. So I started selling auctions on a commission basis. At the time I started selling auctions, at a farm sale we got two per cent of the auction sales for our services. The clerks, they usually work on a per dien, or hourly, basis depending on the length of the sale, and the time it takes to do their work; the clerk and the cashier.
- B Now there must have been some auctions that remain in your memory; some unusual things have happened. We would like to hear about that.
- H Well, I think I have sold pretty near everything there is to sell; all types of auctions. And I know, I can't help but think about an

old general store that I sold out, up at Johnson's Creek. This was a number of years ago, and it was back when they used to carry shoes and clothing and groceries and everything. In this old store, I remember they brought down several boxes of ladies stockings. They were silk stockings. I opened the box, and I went to pick up one of the stockings and they had been on the shelves so long that the stockings had gone back to dust. All I had in my fingers was a little bit of dust. So you could see they had been around for a bit of time!

I think of another instance that happens. You know once in awhile you get bawled out because somebody blames you for something that might not be your fault as an auctioneer. I remember one sale that I had south of Medina on route #63 for a man by the name of Bacon. This was back in the horse days, and we had five or six horses to sell at that sale. When you put a horse up at an auction, or a team of horses, you usually put them up with "choice of the privilege of the pair". That means you pay so much apiece and you can take either horse at that price, or take two of them at so much apiece and make a team. Well, I sold these horses at this particular auction and didn't hear anything for about, oh it must have been a week or ten days after that. A man drove in my yard one day and he really started calling me all kinds of names! That I was a crook, and I misrepresented stuff, and everything else! And I said, "Now hold on!" I said, "Just what's wrong?" "Well", he said, "You know I bought a horse over at that Bacon auction." And I said, "Yes". "Well", he says, "You sold him to be straight and right". Now, when you say "Straight and right", any time a farmer would bring a horse out to sell, I would always ask the owner, I said, "Is this horse straight and right or is there something wrong with it?" He might have the heaves; he might be a kicker, or something of that nature. So I said to the gentleman, I said, "Now listen; I think you have rode my back just long enough! Just what is your problem?" "Well", he said, "that horse kicked me. You sold him to be straight and right!" "Well", I said, "Let me tell you something Mister". I said, I had never seen that horse before that day I sold it to you, and did I ask the owner if the horse was straight and right; and he said "yes". And I said, "Look, if you've got any beefing to do, you better go back and talk to the fellow that I sold for, not me! I am sorry if the

horse kicked you; but I didn't know that he was a kicker and I didn't sell him that way!" And different situations like this that we have run into.

I could go on and on, on several different things. I probably could write a book on auctions if I took a little bit more time and made more notes and things of that nature. But it has been a most interesting experience during the last 40 years.

I want to make this remark: that I have found through the years of serving the general public, that 99 and 9/10 percent of the general public are pretty fine people. It is that 1/10 of one percent that makes it a little bit miserable once in awhile. And maybe it's a good thing for that 1/10 of one percent, you know, to keep a fellow on his toes.

Another thing I might mention as far as auctions are concerned: I noticed in our local paper the other day that it stated that 30 years ago Harold Hill held an auction for Charles Howard, with the largest group of people ever to attend an auction in Orleans County. At that auction there were over 1,000 people.

Charles Howard was a farmer that lived just west of Albion, and he was more than a farmer. If you don't mind I would like to say a few things about Charles Howard, Mr. Burroughs.

B I would like to know, yes!

H Charles Howard was a very unique person. I am sure that he could have been a millionaire had he had a good manager to manage finances for him. He was a wonderful man to put on shows. He was the Manager of the Orleans County Fair for a number of years. As you remember, we used to have two grandstands by the racetrack out in the old - I am talking now about the old Orleans County Fair, at the west end of town. Charlie used to manage that Fair. One year he even brought the Rockettes (famous female dancers) from New York City out here as entertainment! Bit I think one of the most outstanding things we should mention about the life of Charles Howard in the community, and I might say that he did a great deal to promote Orleans County and the Village of Albion; but Charlie Howard started the first school to train Santa Claus. He was a great believer in Santa Claus. In fact he was the Santa Claus in Macy's Parade (at Thanksgiving time) in New York City for a number of years, until, I believe, the year that he died.

Charles Howard also was invited to the continent of Australia as a special guest to represent the people of Australia the image of Santa Claus. Charles Howard did, in my opinion, certainly as much as anyone I can remember to promote Orleans County, western New York and particularly the Village of Albion. He ran the Santa Claus School; he made Santa Claus suits that have been sold all over the world for Santa Claus to wear at Christmas time; he was a wonderful individual and certainly the people in this area, I think, little appreciate some of the work that Charlie did to promote this area.

B Harold, could you tell us something about your present job as Election Commissioner?

H I was appointed in May of 1972 as Republican Election Commissioner of Orleans County. As you know, in the Election Office the two major parties each appoint an Election Commissioner. So both major parties are represented in the Election Office. And everything that has to be done, has to be done by the two major parties as far as inspections are concerned: setting up of the ballot, setting up of the voting machines, any special election, making up of the ballot, supervising elections. We have to enforce and carry out the New York State election laws. The elections that we have jurisdictions over in our office are for town elections, county elections which is for the county offices or town offices, state office and federal office. We do not, at this time, have any jurisdiction over village elections or school elections. They are handled differently and not through the County Election Office. We have approximately 17,000 people registered in Orleans County that are eligible voters. You must register to be able to vote at a general election. One thing I think a lot of people overlook, and that is to vote at a Primary election. You must be enrolled in a Party. And I think so many people today are neglecting to enroll in a Party and by so doing they are depriving themselves of the privilege of voting at a Primary election. I think this is very important!

I started school in a little country school known as Shelby District #8. It was a little old brick school located at approximately a half a mile south of the Millville Cemetery on the north-

east corner of Martin Road and the Millville-East Shelby Road. It was a one room school. The teacher at that time taught all eight grades. At the time I was going to school there was, oh I would estimate about somewhere in the neighborhood of about 20 different pupils that went to school, representing all the grades.

I remember some of my first teachers. One of the first teachers I had, her name was Hazel Bish. She later married a man by the name of Caldwell. She was one of my first teachers. There was Matilda Shroeder. She was one of my teachers. Vincent Compana was a teacher. Hazel Boyle was one of the teachers that taught in that school. And there were one or two more. I can't recollect what their names were.

We lived a mile from the school and of course there was no school busses back in those days and we used to have to walk to school. And in the winter-time, we lived east of the school, in the winter-time when those west winds used to blow, it was pretty cold. And as I drive down that road and see this big old maple tree that's gone. That used to be our haven because when it was cold and nasty, us kids would hurry to get to that tree; to get back of it, to get our wind to finish the rest of the route to school. It kind of gave us a little break. It is gone now. And I went by the old school the other day, and the west side of it is fallen in. It certainly doesn't look much like it did in the days when I used to attend my grade school. Many happy memories go back to that old school, and many friends who have been lifelong friends, I went to school there with.

B Could I ask you Harold, can you remember many of the names that were in school at the time you were? That might interest us.

H Oh yes. There was Arthur Schrader, Jake Schrader, Geraldine Schrader. There was Howard and Oren Prest. There was Maynard Watts. There was Howard Caldwell, Richard Cladwell, Alfreda Quintern and her sister. There was four Sharmon girls who were sisters. There was a girl by the name of Hazel Brown. There was a boy by the name of Ferdinand Kabitski. He was a natural artist! He could take a pen or pencil and draw animals that were beautiful! I don't know whatever happened to him. I've lost track of him, but he was excellent as far as an artist was concerned.

But those were many enjoyable days to think back when we were kids in our - well, I started school when I was six years old

and started high school when I was 14. So the eight years I spent in the country school will never be forgotten. Some of the happiest days of your life!

B I believe so.

H You might be interested to know something about my family. at the present time. Well, I was married in 1937, November 6th. I married Genevieve Plummer and she was born in Albion. She was the daughter of Sevilla and Clyde Plummer. She lived on South Clinton Street and we were married, as I say, November 6, 1937. We have two children born to our marriage. Our first being a daughter, Barbara Jean Hill, who was born in 1941. A son that was born three and a half years later in 1945, Lynn George Hill. Of course, these two children are married now and they have children of their own. My daughter married Thomas McCabe who was the son of the former Chief of Police here in Albion, "Hunky" McCabe, and they have two sons. One by the name of Mark McCabe, and the other, Michael McCabe. Their father Tom, who married my daughter, is a policeman with the Rochester City Police at the present time. My son married Pauline Alvut, who was the daughter of Clifford and Marjorie Alvut that lived on the Hulberton Road. They have three daughters: Amy Sue and Stacey and Kelley Hill. My son Lynn works for Eastman Kodak. He has been with them 12 years at the present time. And you know, one of the biggest joys I think in life is when you do have a family and they grow up and marry and have a family. You think a lot of your own children, but those precious grandchildren, I think, is one of the biggest joys that us older folks can appreciate.

B So far, we haven't mentioned anything about church. Are you a church-goer?

H Oh yes. I am sure I am a dedicated Christian. I've tried to live a Christian life all my life. My philosophy of a Christian is not just going to church on Sunday, but I think it's the life you lead seven days of the week that makes you a real Christian. I was baptized as a small child in the Knowlesville Presbyterian Church in Knowlesville, New York. Later, after I married, my wife and I attended that church until 1950. My wife, Genevieve,

was baptized in the Village of Albion in the First Baptist Church. When I moved off the farm in 1950 to Barre Center where I bought a home, it was close to Albion and we decided that we would go back to her Baptist Church. We have been going and attending, and now we are members of the Baptist Church in the Village of Albion and this is where we are attending church services at the present time.

B Since we are doing this (interview) for posterity, it might be well to see what your ideas are on the present energy crisis.

H Well, I have my own ideas on the present energy crisis.

I have said for a number of years that someday there has to be a limit to the amount of oil and gas and what-have-you that we could take out of our earth. I'm sure we have wasted a great deal of it, but I am not sold in my own mind yet that we are in as critical a position as far as gas and oil are concerned as the government is trying to make us believe at the present time. One of my reasons for this type of thinking is this: that oil companies in this country, and automobile companies in this country probably are the two main economic factors of the economy of our country. It seems to me that if we have got the expertise in this country to put a man on the moon, then we have the expertise in this country to develop the automobile through its use of energy, through its carburation system or what other type of system might be developed. That we could get many more miles of energy out of a gallon of gasoline than we are now getting. I am sure you read in the paper here a week or two ago where two fellows in Florida developed a diesel engine and drove that automobile to Washington where they got some 80 miles per gallon on diesel fuel. But you haven't heard much about it lately, have you?! And you won't because the oil companies want these fabulous profits! Personally I think the general public is really being taken on the tremendous increase in the price of energy that we are now paying and expect to pay in the future. I think a great deal could be done if we could do something with the lobbyists and the bureaucratic government we have, to develop a more economical use of energy that we have left in this world.

* * * * *

End of taped interview. (See next page!!)

This interview with Harold G. Hill, 13361 Million Dollar Highway, Albion, New York was conducted by Luther Burroughs of Albion, N.Y.

The original transcription of this tape was made by Mr. Burroughs. Editing and final typing was made by Helen McAllister, Medina, N.Y.

Approximately ten minutes of the remaining tape has Harold Hill as auctioneer at the May 17th sale for Mrs. Ida Sargent of Waterport.

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HAROLD G. HILL

AUCTIONEER, APPRAISALS & REAL EST.

TELEPHONE 589-9647 or 9-7213

Albion, N.Y.

Date 5/17/80

Items Purchased:

Bamboos 600

Paid 642

NO. 94
Harold G. Hill
Auctioneering Service
Real Estate Broker, Appraisals
R. D. 3 Albion, N. Y.
Phone 589-9647