



## Deephaven Historical Society

Spring 2018 Issue

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Happy Spring!

In this issue the Deephaven Historical Society is pulling from its archives an interview with John Burton from May 19th, 1999. This is one of several interviews conducted by the Deephaven Centennial Project as the village of Deephaven celebrated its first 100 years. He was interviewed by Phyllis Messenger. John Burton was the grandson of our first mayor of Deephaven, Hazen Burton. Hazen and his wife Alice Burton also were the first homeowners of Chimo on Carson's Bay in Deephaven. Because of the size of our newsletter, we will not be able to publish the whole 17 page interview but we invite you to continue reading this and other interviews on our website: [www.deephavenhistorical.org](http://www.deephavenhistorical.org)



John Burton, Interviewee JB

Phyllis Messenger, Interviewer PM

PM: This is Phyllis Messenger interviewing John Burton on May 19, 1999. The interview is taking place at the Deephaven City Hall as part of the Deephaven Centennial Project.

John, first tell me where you live and how long you've lived in Deephaven.

JB: Currently, we live at 19094 Minnetonka Boulevard in Deephaven. Where we're living now is right alongside the Chimo East Division. A little over twenty years ago, we bought a portion of my mother's property which was right alongside – this was not part of the Chimo but she subdivided her property and we bought a portion of it. Then, we built a house there twenty years ago, so that's where we're living. Prior to that, we lived in Cottagewood for about seventeen years and prior to that, we rented one of the summer cottages from my dad for many, many years on the property there.

PM: Tell me about your wife and children and where the rest of your family lives now....the rest of the family.

JB: As I say, Jan (Janette) and I live in the house that I just described. We have five children. We're happy that we have two living in Deephaven. Our daughter, Sarah Marshall, and her husband, Paul, and two children live in what is now Cedarhurst. Our son, Tom, and his wife, Georgia, live in Cottagewood with their two children. It's nice to have them here. We have another daughter who lives in San Francisco with her two children and husband. Then, we have a son and daughter in New York City. That's our oldest daughter. She has her own business there. Our son, apparently, is going to be there a long time. Right after college, he joined a Wall Street firm and he's been there ever since.

PM: Tell me about your family.

JB: On my mother's side, the family goes back to John Cotton, one of the original (Puritan) ministers. That's why that family is kind of proud of the Cotton relationship. That was Grandmother Burton. My Grandmother Gale's family came from ... Sam Gale himself came from... It got interesting. His father died quite young. He was an apprentice to the tanners trade at a very early age. It was kind of a large family. The children were all living with various relatives, but he didn't take to that too well. He had an uncle that thought he had academic interests and encouraged him a little bit. Eventually, he made his way down and he became class orator, so then he felt he had a career in law and he became a lawyer; but, then, when he came out here, he got into real estate business. My grandmother's mother also was a New England family. All of these were New England; it was only the Quakers from North Carolina. That was one difference.

PM: Let's focus a little bit on your grandparents, Hazen and Alice (Burton).

JB: Hazen really showed signs of brilliance when he was young and he had graduated from high school at the age of fifteen and was tops in his class of seventy students at this Boston English High School. His father was in the woolen business and he thought he ought to get right in on that and not go on further. They arranged that he could take some courses at MIT (Massachusetts Institute of Technology). I don't think he was exactly an official student, but he took courses at MIT while he was working in the woolen business. Then, he also, as Jan mentioned separately, studied up on four languages; so, a little bit later, he helped guide this group of architects on a European tour and translated for them in all different places. He got started right out of high school; he went right into the woolen business. According to some record there, he and his father had record sales when he was about nineteen or twenty years old for any two people in that position there. So, he went right into that business, and his brother was in the business there, too. I think the Boston fire was one thing that came along that prompted the moving, but they had relatives that were interested in coming out to the Northwest. Things were opening up; so, he just decided to come out and represent these eastern woolen mills. They went in the wholesale business out there. Sales were pretty good, but it was hard to make collections; so, they were getting all these mortgages on collections. So, they decided they would go into the retail business and that was a good move and that Plymouth Clothing went along.

My grandfather was very much a business man, but he also was very much a sporting person. I have something I could read later just showing what he was doing back in Boston Common in the early days playing with one of the first baseball teams, one of the lacrosse teams. When he came out here, he developed this great interest in sailing; so, when the yacht club was to be established on Light House Island out here, he thought that it was really time to move from Excelsior to down here. My dad always regretted he didn't pay tennis in college because some of the foremost tennis players were there, but he went out for track. He wasn't entirely satisfied with his performance in track. Somehow, when this tennis situation developed and they wanted a site for the Northwestern Tennis Tournament here about ten years after Chimo had been built, they decided this would make an ideal site over here, so that was the site up until World War II. So, my grandfather was involved both in promotion sailing and tennis and my dad took right on after him and was very much involved. In fact, my dad is in the Tennis Hall of Fame and there's a little plaque for him down in the Northwest Tennis Club, were they have the various people that got that honor issued.

PM: Let's go back to your grandfather and how he developed his interest in sailing. You've mentioned that he didn't really know anything about sailing at first.

JB: No, no, he didn't. There were certain people living in New York and Boston who had a great deal of wherewithal, you know. You read about the American's Cup in the early days. My grandfather wasn't in that. Actually, the Burtons were on a farm up in Wilton, New Hampshire, for about two generations. Then, my grandfather's father, came down and into the loan business, but he grew up on that farm in New Hampshire. So, sailing wasn't something that they were... He got out here and sailing was a big thing in the 1890's. If you see the old write-ups, if you look at the old newspapers, and all these races are written up in detail. He had a good friend, Mr. Eddie Phelps, who lived on Huntington Point at that time and he has sons and grandsons and great grandsons who are all involved in sailing now, too. Huntington Point and Excelsior are pretty close, so my grandfather used to crew with him in the races. My dad even got aboard on a few occasions. This was in the late 1880's. That's where they got their start.

PM: How about his relationship with Mr. (Arthur) Dyer?

JB: That's interesting. I have some things in my memoirs in support of that. The Dyers went in, and there's quite an account about Captain Dyer, Arthur Dyer's father, who came from Maine, built a seagoing vessel and sailed all the way around the Horn, I guess it would be, and sold it in San Francisco and, then, made his way back and did the same thing again. This was in the early days and he was going to do it once more, but lightning struck in the Gulf of Mexico and he had to abandon ship. Then, he took a fling at the Gold Rush. That didn't work out as well. He decided he'd try farming, so he was farming up in Wright County. Then, when the steamboat traffic developed, he said he'd get back to his original so he built a fleet of row boats and moved down to Excelsior. So, when my dad was a youngster, during his years in Excelsior, Captain Dyer actually built a boat which he sailed. Initially, he used one of their rowboats, rented the rowboat, and they got acquainted. Arthur Dyer was just a little older than my dad, so they knew each other from the beginning. Then Arthur Dyer decided he would like to get into boat building business himself, too, so together with the Burtons, they built this *Onawa*, which had a quite a record.

PM: Later on, there was some controversy about measurements and so forth?

JB: (laughter) Well, the *Onawa* was a radical design. I've got a lot of pictures that show the boat in action. Basically, most of the boats that were sailing at that time were heavy boats. They had big sand bags they would shift from side to side to keep them from capsizing in a big wind. They carried up to 1000 square feet of sail, a tremendous amount of sail. My grandfather had done some canoeing when he was young. In fact, one interesting side light... My Grandmother Burton actually had five children and about every two years, somebody arrived, but there was on period when they had a little break for about four years. That particular year – that was just before they moved out here – grandfather took her on just a couple week trip up in Maine. She said she had never done that before. What they did was canoe the Penobscot River. At one point, they were pretty near Mount Katahdin and they climbed Mount Katahdin, which is the highest mountain in Maine. My dad claims that she was the first lady to climb Mount Katahdin. It isn't too arduous a feat really. It isn't like climbing Mount Washington or something. Nevertheless, it's just kind of a wilderness trail leading up there. They had this canoe that they went in with a guide and that was along. Ultimately, they had this canoe shipped out here. They did like canoeing. So that was the idea... if we could have something as light as a canoe which goes over the water rather than a big heavy sailboat. So, the *Onawa* was built. It used less sail. Four hundred square feet was the maximum sail they used and it was light construction. They didn't use sand bags, but they had a five able-body crew to shift their weight to either side. It was just plain faster. The first year some people said, "That's a glorified canoe. That can't be out here racing." The first race they had was in a heavy wind and it showed that they could handle anything. I think there was a little bit, probably, of ill feeling about that. I noticed that in the next couple of years that on vacations the family went back to New England and saw more of the relatives in the East and they sailed at Marblehead and such places as that. Some of Arthur Dyer's boats were shipped actually to buyers there and they sailed on those boats; so, for a couple of years, they weren't quite as active here in the yacht club.

The other boat they had, I might say, the first boat they had, was a heavier boat. That was the *Volante*. The *Volante* was a sandbagger, but it did very well. I think I have the records of 1982 and 1893 showing how well those two boats did. He only got the *Volante* after he'd had his year of sailing with Mr. Phelps and got the feeling of it.

My grandfather ended up as an early commodore at the yacht club there and my dad actually ended up later....I was never too involved in administering things; I steered clear of that. But, my son (Tom Burton) ended up as commodore a couple of years ago. They kind of skipped my generation.

PM: John, let's focus on the time when your grandparents first came to what is now Deephaven. Tell me about them getting here and establishing their home.

JB: As I mentioned, they had those summers at Excelsior and they got very much involved in the lake activity. The business was going sufficiently well and they decided it was time to establish their permanent home. This property somehow was available on Carson's Bay. I don't know how there happen to be that much property available but it was. Cottagewood had been well populated for some time. He saw the bay and there was this land that just had a single ownership and it was available. My grandfather's idea was to move down and build his permanent home near the yacht club. Another feather was – of course, there were no automobiles at the time – that he wanted to get transportation to Minneapolis every day and the railroad went right by; so, he could walk right down the hill; form where he built his house and get right on the train and go in. In fact, he could even have a last drink of tea or whatever it would be and then jog down the hill and get on the train.

PM: After he saw it coming?

JB: Yes. The station had been where the current Minnetonka Yacht Club has its facility. There was kind of little island there. I think in order to get to it, you had to almost row there. In those early days, there wasn't any country road there, no bridge, but there was a railroad trestle going across. Somehow, my grandfather persuaded them that it would be nice to have that station on the mainland and right at the foot of Chimo hill. I think they had

something to do with the architecture of that station. Whether they had any financial input, I'm not exactly sure. I have a nice picture of that station. It even served as a post office for the first couple of years.

PM: (unclear)

JB: Yes. (Laughter) that building ultimately got moved and it's serving as a residence here in Cottagewood.

PM: Tell me about the naming of the station.

JB: Actually, my grandparents had used the name Deephaven. Chimo was really the name of the house, but somehow the name Deephaven was in there very early, too. We concluded afterwards that my grandmother enjoyed reading some of the New England authors and Sarah Orne Jewett was one of them and she has a nice book, *Deephaven*, about a community in Maine. Grandmother liked the name so she came up with the name and apparently, that was received; so, that was the name of the station and the village of Deephaven when they started to incorporate.

PM: The name Chimo means what?

JB: It means welcome. It's an Indian name, but it wouldn't be Sioux or Chippewa out here: it would be from the eastern Indians, where they came from, you see.

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