

Interview with John C. Burton

Interviewed by Phyllis Messenger

Interviewed on May 19th, 1999

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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 play 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, where 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 1882 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 thing 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 from where he built his house and got right on the train and go in (town). 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.

Actually, interestingly enough, my grandfather's first idea was to have his home and to subdivide the rest of his land and sell the property. There were certain roads put in and they all have Indian names, but the Indian names, but the Indian names wouldn't be characteristic here. They'd be more the Indian names in the east.

PM: So some of the roads around the property at first had Indian names?

JB: Yes. They were Indian names.

PM: Do you remember some?

JB: Samoset, S-a-m-o-s-e-t.

PM: But it didn't stick?

JB: No, What happens is they submitted this plat and it was okay and they sold a couple of lots. Then, I suspect my Grandmother Burton decided, you don't have to do this with this beautiful property. Why don't we just leave it as it is and rent these houses? So, the two houses they built on speculation, they continued to rent to people in the business. I think these other two lots, ultimately, they bought those back and rented those for years.

PM: Tell me about the architects and the landscape architect and maybe describe the property as you recall it.

JB: The architect for Chimo was William Channing Whitney and he was quite a well-known architect and well known in this area. Another story: Janette's grandfather was a very distinguished architect over in Saint Paul, who lived just a little later but very close to the same era. There's been a big book written about him: Clarence Johnston. There are a lot of homes on Summit Avenue. That's a whole other story. It would have been nice if he had been the architect, but I don't know if their paths ever crossed. He was in Saint Paul and William Channing Whitney was out here.

I might have not stated it accurately the other day when I was speaking about his sailing with Mr. Phelps. Mr. Phelps' son became quite a good landscape architect. There's a picture of the senior Phelps and my grandfather looking over the land in Chimo. He was involved in quite a few things; I'm not sure he was involved ...so probably I was confused. He might have been giving advice but he wasn't strictly a landscape architect, but his son was. So, of course, the son came- his son was the age of my dad- along later.

PM: What was the house like and the grounds?

JB: What is it...*a picture is worth a thousand words?* I've got pictures of the interior and the exterior, the whole works there. I have pictures of all the tennis activity, which was just outside of the immediate area of Chimo.

I think my grandparents actually used the name Chimo Forest rather than Chimo. I will say that it wasn't entirely forest. It's interesting to see some of the land now because some of it was cut over the years. A lot of growth of the trees have occurred in the last one hundred years. All of it was cut over one hundred years ago. Chimo was kind of a bluff and there were trees there pretty much from the start.

PM: They built a tennis court and what else around there?

JB: Ultimately, for the tennis tournament, they had five tennis courts, which were only used for this tournament. It's interesting. They played on them a little bit informally before the tournament and after the tournament; but, grass doesn't last very long so it would get worn out in the tournament. It's kind of a funny thing that they put all this effort in just for this tournament. For a while, they had another court in a little different location that they played on in the early days.

PM: When did you say the tournaments began?

JB: I think the first national tournament was in Newport, Rhode Island, in the 1880's and the first one out here was in Hamel in the late 1880's. That was called the Northwestern Tournament – one year there. The, it was move out to the old Hotel Saint Louis for several years. Then, it was moved up the Lafayette Hotel. My dad said bicycling came in pretty strong about the turn of the century. Everybody was on bicycles. There was a little bit of a cessation of interest maybe. Somehow, the tournament wasn't held for a couple of years. Then, my grandfather moved it to Deephaven and it went ahead full strength there for many years after that.

PM: That was, maybe in the 1890's?

JB: The first one right here in Deephaven was in 1902.

PM: Your grandparents were involved in the beginning of the Deephaven School. Tell me how that came about.

JB: I think my grandmother was a factor there. She graduated from school at an early age, too, and was teaching in New England, briefly, before she was married. She always had an interest. They owned 90 acres of land altogether. We think more of the land that's on this side of the railroad tracks, but on the other side, that's where the school property now is and where the so-called Burton Park is. They decided to name it after my grandfather since they sold that land very reasonably, part to the school and part to the city of Deephaven. Originally, they donated a small portion for the original school. That was a one-room school. My grandmother took an early interest and she was treasurer for the first 17 years. She used to provide a book as an award for the people who attained a scholarship for many, many years. She took part in that.

PM: I heard that Art Dyer had something to do with persuading your grandparents to start the school. Is there anything to that or do you think it was your grandparents pretty much?

JB: I have something in my memoirs... I have to think about that. There was somebody in the early days who had come over from Norway and didn't feel that his command of the English language was as good as it should be and he really wanted his children to be well-versed in English. I know that he had a conversation with Arthur Dyer on that subject; so, I think there could be something to that. For some of these things, I have to really go back talk to Ellen Wilson Meyer about because she's dug up so much

information. In fact, it I get a little short at some point, I look up my *Deephaven Happenings* and I read in there and find out early things.

PM: Of course, that was in 1892 and 1893 when the school first was planned.

JB: And in 1894, the first school house was built.

PM: How big was that school house?

JB: It was just a one-room school house. They had all ages. Initially, the idea was to go through eighth grade.

JaB: There's an interesting story about your grandmother wondering if she should marry your grandfather.

JB: Yes, I got to dig into more of that. My older sister, who lives on the West Coast, had got some early correspondence by my grandmother. Her forbearers had been all in the ministry and education. When she first met my grandfather, they had a term for that at some point. He had all mercantile interests, whatever they be and she among her friends, talked about this. They met this group coming out there, they said it was a type they weren't familiar with.

[Laughter]

JB: Actually, my grandfather had his academic side, too; but probably at the moment, he was thinking where his next woolen sale was going to be.

PM: I interested now on how they moved to deciding to establish the village of Deephaven.

JB: It's interesting to think about that. I noticed the make-up of the first council. I noticed that Lucian Swift was on there. Of course, he was very well to do and they lived on what I use to always call it Swift's Point. Later, it became Baskerville's Point. Now, I don't know who it is; (unclear) has got the biggest home up there now, so it should be (unclear) Point. It was originally Swift's Point. He named this place Katahdin because he came from Maine and he thought it should be named that, this little high point of land here. He was involved in sailing. I think some of the early people were involved in that and that was a factor certainly in starting Deephaven. I'd have to go back and read the minutes to see. They had to take part of Excelsior Township and put it in Deephaven and part of Minnetonka Township. I noticed in the early vote they didn't all vote in favor of it. I have in my memoirs that say – I guess it's accurate – there were something like 37...my dad rode around with Bob Schuck and they took the census. It was kind of informal. It wasn't everybody that voted, but I think about 37 or 40 voted in favor and seven voted against. So, it wasn't a big undertaking. Although my grandparents, I suppose, had a fair amount of prosperity for that time, I think they were very well received in this community.

There's another man I'm sorry who is no longer living, who just a couple of years ago was very active in the restoration of this steamboat up here. He used to always want me to come over there and work on it and see it. That was Gordon Peterson. He lived here. There were two Peterson families that lived here. One was caretaker for one family and the other was caretaker for another family. Gordon has memories of going to Deephaven School. My family had milk cows at Chimo and they used to get their milk from Chimo. I can recall this – he was about 10 years older than I am – that he would ski down the front hill

with this milk there. He always made it - it was kind of a tough hill – but one time he didn't make it. He had great memories and it was always nice to talk about it. He had a tough life because his parents died when he was quite young so he lived with his uncle. Of course, Trigve Peterson was just my age and he was from the other Peterson family. All of that family is gone now. Trigve said, "I should never have started smoking when I was young." That did him in at an early age. There's just one older gentleman in Cottagewood who was a son-in-law of Bob Schuck. He's ninety-three now, but he's very mentally sharp. He's one that might recall some of the old days there.

PM: His name was?

JB: Mr. [E.K.] Bodal. It's Norwegian name, B-o-d-a-l.

PM: Did your grandparents supply milk and other products?

JB: They did, yes, for certain families that wanted it, but, basically, for their own consumption.

PM: Did they have a staff of several people working for them?

JB: When I saw it – of course, I grew up in the 1930's, the Depression years – everything had kind of pulled in then. Bob Schuck stayed with the family for a long time. He originally was foreman and doing everything when I grew up. Then, there was one person who kind of kept track of the cows and the horses and so forth, but that was it. Earlier, there were more people. But, that was the way it was in the 1930's.

PM: Going back to the beginning of the village of Deephaven, where was the first location for the village? Was that in the train station as well?

JB: Yes. I noticed they had their early meetings right here at the Cottagewood Grocery Store. That was kind of interesting that they did that. Then, they moved to the train station. I think the first meetings were in the grocery store.

PM: Your grandparents were involved in the first governing, the city council, that sort of thing?

JB: Yes, he was the first mayor. I have to dig into some of those early minutes and read more about it. I noticed they had little problems in those days. I remember reading what Ellen Wilson Meyer has in... There was on family that they felt was drinking too much. They wrote letters to them, but the family took offence to that and wanted an apology. So, they had that right from the very beginning. [laughter]

PM: Do you have some family stories about your grandfather's days as mayor?

JB: Not really.

JaB: You have that wonderful tribute to your grandmother that your dad...?

JB: Yes, I have a great tribute that he paid her.

PM: Tell me a little bit more about your grandmother. She was an artist, wasn't she, among other things?

JB: Yes. Jan saw that we got one beautiful painting that she did, which was exhibited at the Minneapolis Institute of Arts one time. She was accomplished.

Just before they built Chimo, the family made a European trip. I think the company had been going well and they took the time off and went over to Europe. I noticed my Grandmother Burton make sure that they got to all the art galleries in the various countries, so she had that interest. I should read this one little bit which describes her on forty-two and forty three. This is worth reading here.

Our home in Chimo by the shores of Minnetonka came into being at a time during this period of change, which I believe afforded the greatest amount of happiness alike to old and young. There were horses in the stable, Jersey cows in the barn, white leghorns in the hen coop and white dragon carriers in the pigeon loft. There were skis in the racks and ice boats on their chocks. There were rare books in the library, easels in the studio, and a sugar bush among the maples. Above all, there was a host and hostess and an open hearth carrying forward the home life of Asia transcendentalism and the glories of Boston Common.

How vividly come to mind our family groups about the living room fireplace as my father read from Stevens or Kipling, on the Adventures of Sherlock Holmes, or [unclear] Girard, or Conan Doyle. The cold snowbound evenings vanished before the cheer of a maple log as our thoughts visited England, India, and the South Seas. The old English songs handed down from the colonial times were favorites of my mother. *In the good old colony days when we were under the king, Three roguish chaps fell into a mishap because they would not sing* were a favorite with me. Her rich contralto voice, her love of music and poetry, her skill in painting, her kindness, patience, and industry enriched and dignified our new home.

She joined us in many a long gallop over country roads and abroad harvested fields in autumn. Our horses were always given a rest at the high point of the Joe Schmidtt farm in Zumbra while we dismounted the viewed Minnetonka wrapped in autumn foliage and, again upon reaching the high bluff overlooking the broad valley of the Minnesota River with Shakopee and Chaska in the distance occasionally submerged by spring floods, was an outlook which in imagination always takes me back to the geologic past when this mighty stream first received the waters of the tiny Mississippi trickling in from the north. She was happy in sharing the labors of field or afloat and was invaluable at camp in the north woods. In the early spring, she took charge of the sugar bush and after gathering the sap, always attending to the boiling and sugaring, which frequently occurred at night. I recall many moonlight nights in the sugar camp – one in particular – when a flock of trumpeter swans, northbound, passed close above.

JB: That give an idea of how he felt about his mother, you see.

PM: Incredible woman.

JB: Yes.

PM: One of the things they did to recreate that sense of Boston and culture [unclear] was the Shakespearean plays.

JB: Yes.

PM: Tell me about that.

JB: I never really heard very much about the growing up. There were just these little folders showing the pictures. I guess my dad talked about it on occasion, but I didn't zero in on it very much. I'm sure that Ben Greib was over here doing these plays and it just came about. How it happened to center here....

PM: Ben Greib was a British director?

JB: Yes.

PM: He brought his company...?

JB: Yes. The natural amphitheater, where they held the tennis tournaments, was just a perfect place to hold his play. They figured out that they could run a launch over from the yacht club and they could go back for refreshments afterwards. Fortunately, they didn't have a big thunderstorm or a tornado run through, so it worked out.

PM: Who came to these plays?

JB: I think the yacht club group pretty much were supporting it. There's a picture of the group and there's a pretty substantial group there.

The tennis tournaments, by the way, were open to the public. My mother once said, "You really should charge admission to the tennis tournaments." My grandfather was an extreme amateur sportsman. He didn't want to profit at all from the sport. He resisted that and my dad followed suit on that and he said, "No." It cost something to put on this tournament, but that's the way it was every year. There no admission charge on it. They had a pop stand and they sold pop. They could do that.

PM: Let's think about your childhood and what you remember about your family's activities and how their history influenced your growing up.

JB: I think I was kind of brought up in a sporting tradition and I guess an academic tradition. My brother, Lindley, as the one who followed the academic side. He was very bright. He was valedictorian of his high school class and he went on and got his PH.D. in mathematics and was a mathematics professor at Bryn Mar and, later, Lake Forest College. But, he died at an early age. He was the intellectual in our family. My older brother, I think, had aspirations in that direction, but wasn't quite as good at it. He was very good at athletics. I kind of decided I'd do what I could in the academic, but I put more efforts on the athletic, I think. My dad would [unclear] each one of us, whichever we wanted to do. I think my dad kind of combined the two. I developed a great interest in fishing as a youngster, in fly fishing, and I spent a lot of time doing that. I preferred that to the sailing and tennis playing; although, I did those a lot. It was just going fishing just on a row boat or a canoe.

PM: As a child, did you live at Chimo?

JB: No. My older brother lived for in Chimo as the grandparents got older. I think my mother wasn't sure she wanted to come out. The came out to Maplewoods in the summer, but she thought herself as a city person. My dad was involved in the Plymouth Clothing Company. He said, "This place is nice. If I'm in town, I can get right down there every day." In the summer, he would always talk about coming out here. They had these two summer homes, which were built in 1890; so, sure enough, they occupied one of those the first years they were married. Actually, my parents had four children in pretty quick order.

One year, they lived in Chino with my grandparents in the summer. Then, they always went back to town in the winter time. Ultimately, they bought the land just adjacent to the Chimo section. That was land that had been platted into about twenty lots. They only built on one of them. My grandfather then bought them back lot by lot and they ended up with just short of four acres there and that's where they built their family home. That's a nice home. My mother lived there, basically, all her life, once it was built. She lived into her early nineties. But, the house got kind of run down at the end. It's been fixed up now and it's going strong. It's occupied by somebody else now. That was the home I grew up in.

There were four children in the family and then, later, my two younger sisters came along. I was kind of tagging around after my brothers, you see. We each had our interests. My oldest brother, Gale, had a great interest in horses and farming. He was in the 4-H Club. My next brother had as good a tennis game as any of us, probably a better tennis game, but his strength was academic. I was going around fishing and doing all these things as a youngster there. I really didn't have jobs outside of that. I think a summer job could have been helpful at that time, but we didn't do that.

PM: Were the sports organized?

JB: No, no. for instance, in the winter, we'd have fathers and sons hockey games. Sailing was, of course, kind of a special activity and I guess as a group, we would sail, but that got kind of competitive. We'd said as crew on my dad's boat for a time and, then we did it ourselves. No, it was very much family oriented. When our family used to rent these cottages in the summer and people would come out, my mother used to say that some of the fathers complained a little bit because they wanted to come home and relax and my dad had all these activities going on they felt they couldn't exactly measure up. I think my dad was married at forty and he wanted to be involved in all his children's activities.

Later, I developed this interest in cross country skiing through my uncle. My uncle was on the Olympic Ski Team. My dad thought that's a great sport and he encouraged that; so, we had these family ski runs. I say family ski runs: there were about eight or ten families around the lake here that hosted these runs. Our long run was from Chanhassen to Deephaven. There was no Highway 7 at that time. We started at Chanhassen and worked our way along Lotus Lake and Christmas Lake and come back here. It was a very nice event.

PM: Did you cut your own trail?

JB: We set our own trail in those days...very, very nice. We had a few distinguished participants. We had Carl Sundquist who was junior champion in Sweden and he came out.

[Break in interview]

PM: John, I'm going to ask Scott Keely to ask you a few questions that he wants to find out about.

SK: You grew up in the 1930's, right?

JB: Yes.

Sk: Were the roads paved?

JB: I can't entirely recall. I mentioned that Highway 7 was in existence. I do recall when that became a gravel road when it was first put in. On our ski course, we still use to cross it at a point. I think the roads was paved in Deephaven. Yes, they were, I think.

SK: What did they pave them with in those days? Did they use black top?

JB: We have to go to our Deephaven Council minutes and look at them. Of course, automobiles came in about 1920 or so for extensive use and I think, by the 1930's they had pretty good transportation around.

SK: Certainly, we had the Bennis Farm, of course, a nice truck garden right down there now the park is there, Thorpe Park. Gene Carr had a nice farm up here in Vine Hill Road. Ellen Wilson Meyer has a nice little write-up about his son as a matter of fact. He was a full-fledged professor over at the University of Minnesota. He could reminisce about his early days out here, too. There were certain farms out here in Deephaven at that time.

I mentioned a moment ago that that my wife and I had these ski classes for years. It was kind of interesting because even in comparatively recent times when we ran these ski programs, I had permission for some of the land owners to go over. We had all these trails we made out right around here and it would be impossible now. That was kind of unique. The Amesbury's had a good amount of land up here and we had trails through that. I mentioned the one from Chanhassen and back, so we had just a lot of areas. That's all changed now. I think a lot of it changed when the sewers....

[Break in the interview]

JB: I think it ended with the sewer out here. Having additional land was kind of a luxury then. The sewers supplied everybody so they didn't need so much ground in order to clear the land of waste and so forth. I think that's what made a difference there.

SK: Would you say that when you were growing up in the 1930's and 1940's that Deephaven was more known as a recreational destination?

JB: If I think about it, I have to be frank on this and my family were kind of anxious to expose me to a private school education. My brothers and I all went to Blake School, so we all went out there. There were certain other families around that used that school. But, I had a lot of people that were my age here that were using the Deephaven School at the time. Now, there we a new Deephaven School built in 1939 and I had a lot of friends that graduated and so forth. Most of the people that I knew there who went to Deephaven School were in a less fortunate financial situation, you see.

I can think of other names here, Phyllis, to talk to around here. I can think of Bob Holasek who lives down here and is just my same age. He was a hardworking fellow who has lived here. His house blew down in the tornado but he built it up again. There's a lot of individuals who has the experience of going through the Deephaven School.

Now, Deephaven School itself, I remember going over and it had a pretty good nine-man football team. They weren't big enough to play in the bigger leagues, you see, but they had a good nine-man and they played some of the schools. I guess until you had consolidation, it was really a little smaller operation out here.

SK: Deephaven is a little more exclusive now than it was?

JB: Yes, it is. I guess so, yes.

SK: It's where people like to move.

JB: Yes, it is now. We always [unclear] everywhere and so forth. That's true. I think the lake shore was always prized. I think Deephaven has changed. The yacht club was going strong in 1890 and there were certain families around here who were quite prosperous and they've always been around. There's a bigger base of prosperity here now.

SK: And a smaller base of the less prosperous?

JB: Yes, that's right.

SK: Do you recall anything like during your childhood...? My dad speaks of the veterans of the wars. Do you recall any of the old Civil War veterans marching in the Fourth of July parades?

JB: Certainly, Excelsior had the Fourth of July parade right along. I confess that Fourth of July was always a big day for sailboat races out here and I think I was more involved with that than I was up at the parade. The American Legion certainly had them up at Excelsior right along, every year, and they still do.

JaB: Johnny had a brother who was a conscientious objector.

JB: Yes, this brother who was so bright. He decided that he was really the real Quaker of the family.

SK: So, do didn't join in the war, too??

JB: No, he finally decided...He actually had a medical thing and he probably could have been exonerated but he took a stand and he said, "No, I'll go to a CO (Conscientious Objector) Camp and that's what he did.

I'll digress for just one moment here. There's a Hill family that lived out here and the Hills also were Quakers in North Carolina. Two of them took part in the Civil War and one of them, the Friends Church wouldn't let them back in. They said, "You're not supposed to solve problems that way." So, he never came back (to the church). He came out here and was very active in Hennepin Avenue Methodist Church. Ultimately, they [unclear]. The other one apologized for his transgressions during the war and was taken back in the church and stayed in Indiana. But the Friends Church was pretty strong on that. I think now there are some of the Friends' Churches that took an active part and others that went in the service, but the general culture there was to solve problems in other ways. My dad didn't discourage any of us. I happened to go into the Navy myself in World War II. Whatever we wanted to do, that was fine. I think that may be part of it too.

SK: Do you recall anything during the Depression Era around here that stands out? Was Deephaven hit pretty hard like the rest of the country?

JB: Oh, I think it was. I kind of recall the truck driver strike in Minneapolis. Thinking back on it, there was a lot of bullheadedness. It should have been resolved sooner. I think there were certain members of my

extended family that they were siding with the employer group. I had on relative who went out there and recognized that it was not a very friendly environment when he went out there, so whatever advantage he had showing that he was with on group, it would be better just to not be a part of it, so he removed his identification from this one group. Of course, there were a couple of fatalities in the on both sides. I had a classmate in Junior Blake School whose father was killed in the strike actually. That classmate's name was Art Lyman. His father was killed. Harold Lyman, the other son, lives out here now.

SK: Were there fewer people coming out here to recreate during the Depression?

JB: There tennis tournaments kept on going through the 1930's. In the old days, the courts were well tended. Actually, it came down that it was kind of a skeleton crew working on them. People used to complain about the bounces. They'd say, "They don't bounce." Of course, they were kind of chewed up but they still went on. My dad didn't get rid of the thing. Ultimately, they went right up to the time that World War II came along. It would have stopped at that time anyway. It did go right on up to that time.

SK: Once again, go over that story...elaborate a little bit if you would, on... What's about your family? Chimo had milk cows?

JB: Yes.

SK: Who was delivering milk from...?

JB: No. This was families that lived in Cottagewood who would just come over and pick it up.

SK: And they'd ski down?

JB: Yes, they'd ski across the ice in the winter time and ski down the hill carrying a couple of milk pails.
[Laughter]

SK: They would pay your...?

JB: Yes, I don't think it was very much, but they paid for it. They appreciated having this service there. This was in the very early days, you know. People rode into Excelsior to pick up provisions before there was [unclear]. Of course, the early Deephaven School...people that were living in Cottagewood would walk across the ice to go to school in the winter time rather than walk around. It was more ambulatory in those days, yes.

SK: You pronounced C-h-o-w-e-n, Chowen or Chowen?

JB: Chowen. Ellen Wilson Meyer has a little comment. She said Annie Chowen was very offended when people called her Chowen. It should be Chowen. I think Mike Chowen likes to have it Chowen, too, not Chowen.

SK: Does everybody in Deephaven...?

JB: I don't think other people...There are other works that you can see where the *H* is not pronounced, too, not just in Chowen.

SK: Chorus.

JB: Chorus, thank you. [Laughter]

SK: Who is Ellen Wilson Meyer?

JB: She's remarkable. Her father taught in a school in Minneapolis. I'm trying to think if he was a principle, but it taught. The family decided they'd like to move out here in Deephaven, so they bought kin of an apple orchard out here. He enjoyed raising his own crops, which he did. They lived near the Deephaven School. So, Ellen grew up here, and with other people, went to school out here. She's just very resourceful. She actually is very musical and a couple of our girls took piano lessons from her when they were young. Who is the other lady who has written....?

JaB: Thelma Jones.

JB: Thelma Jones wrote *Once Upon A Lake*, a very, very, nice book. Ellen Wilson thought it would be nice to kind of bring that up to date and go into more detail. Her (Meyer) first husband succumbed to cancer at an early age. Then, later, she married Mr. Meyer. He lived a long life, but he died recently. She just really dug into the history of Deephaven. She's just a very alive person mentally and just a very nice person.

SK: I was reading part of her book. I'm amazed at the amount of research she must have done.

JB: Oh, yes, yes.

SK: She's got plots. I love the chicanery that was going on between Ferguson and the chamberlain, the minister, and Ferguson losing his land to Horst.

JB: I'm not up to date on all of this. She's (Meyer) got a little books of happenings around the lake: "*Happenings Around Deephaven*", "*Happenings Around Wayzata*", "*Happenings Around Excelsior*". She's very thorough there.

PM: [unclear] your grandfather and how he kept his business going.

JB: He tried to keep it going as long as he could. There were a lot of people on the payroll there. He kept it going. Their last headquarters was the Plymouth Building in Minneapolis, which was a pretty big building. They had responsibility for the whole building. For the store, they only used two or three floors, you see. They really got stuck with the lease, which was more than they could handle. Of course, my grandfather was older at that time and maybe my dad wasn't as...I think times were tough. They just tried to operate it and they kept people longer than they should have. Finally, they just closed down; that's all. They lost their lease, so to speak. That's was the way it was.

[End of Tape 1, Side 1]

[Tape 1, Side 2]

PM: They closed the business?

JB: Yes. My dad stayed in business. They had some real estate interests in town. There were certain businesses they were managing and so forth. My dad kept on doing that. He had certain buildings he was in charge of in Minneapolis. He heart was more in athletics out here at that time. I used to go down and see him at his office. There were a couple of movie theaters that use to be responsible for the operation of and so forth.

PM: Thinking about the future and the generation of your family and your extended family that have been here, what would you like your grandchildren to know and to remember about the family and Deephaven heritage? If there was something that you hope they would pass on to their children, what would that be?

JB: I guess I would hope that they would have the combination of the academic interest and the athletic interest. I have one little philosophical comment of my dad's memoirs. I thought it really epitomizes it here now...page fifty-seven.

PM: You're reading from your father's memoirs?

JB: Yes, a lot of this, I wouldn't care to have publicized. It's good, but I have kind of screen out certain portions.

[Laughter]

JB: During my last four months at Harvard, I audited many courses and registered in two courses, contracts and torts at the law school. This, my brief venture and I feel a jurisprudence, may have been untimely and then I had previously completed a course in ethics. For my comparison, I reached a conclusion, which I still retain, that justice is provided either by the law, by fair play, or by good manners- law being the least desirable. True morality is deeper than law. Manners make up the man is the motto of Worcester College, England; Veritas, that of Harvard. Each motto seems to pass judgment upon the law. At the beginning of my freshman year, I sensed the absolute free and civilized society that was Harvard. (He was Class of 1899 at Harvard.) The university seemed to develop a community entirely devoid of law. It seemed to be the realization of the ideal of Thoreau, that a people was best governed when least governed. I cannot recall any restrictions when supervised in my senior year and it was surprising in my senior year to find a note from Dean Griggs, awaiting my return after a two week absence, requesting that I call at my convenience. (His sister was ill and that where he'd been.) My hasty departure from Cambridge caused by an illness in the family seemed to be of less concern to the dean than his concern about the condition of the patient. In parting, he urged that should such absence again be necessary, "Do let us know where you can be found." The college authorities seem to have absolute faith in the student body – however, they did provide every freshman with an advisor. My only call upon my advisor was congenial and constructive; but, upon learning that I was running with Teddy Ames, he implied that a second visit would be unnecessary.

JB: Teddy Ames was a couple years older and he'd been living at home and then he had roomed at collage. He was the pitcher on the baseball team there and a well-liked individual so he figured he was in good hands.

SK: One last question. What is the most important, endearing part of Deephaven? What do you like the most about the city of Deephaven?

JB: I feel it's kind of a nice size right here now. Maybe it's unwieldy. Maybe we should be part of a larger... But, I think it's just a nice size and the way it's set out on the lake here. I think in the area it has it had quite a variety. I think the city now has been upgraded a lot. I think been upgraded too much. There's too large of homes coming in. I guess some substandard home have to be replaced. I think it's just kind of a nice spot.

SK: Is there a feeling of community here?

JB: Well, certainly, I see our grandchildren playing in these sporting teams now and [unclear] activity, but it seems to me there's quite a nice esprit de corps around here. It does. It's different than when I grew up. [Laughter]

PM: That gets to a comment that you said your dad had made about consolidation.

JB: Yes. Of course, from a financial standpoint, he said, "We finally get our school paid for and now we're throwing it in the [unclear]". So, he was a little disappointed in that. But looking back on it, to be honest on it, Deephaven, I suppose, wasn't providing full education really; although, people went on and did very well. With his own children, he kind of wanted us to go to Blake School. He thought we might do a little bit better. He wasn't entirely consistent, I guess. Of course, [unclear] consolidation because it's an enormous area here. They might have anticipated that more people would be moving out of the area. They really consolidated too large, I guess, but who can tell those things?

PM: Thank you very much. It's been a pleasure talking with you.

JB: It's been interesting for me to delve into all these things. Now, I might delve even further.

[End of Tape 1, Side 2]

[End of John Burton Interview]

