

**Interviewee: Richmond Barr**

**Interviewer: Joan Madison**

**Date: February 6, 2002**

**Location: Broadmeadow Farm, 475 Pond Road**

**Richmond Barr came to Shelburne from Ferrisburgh following World War II and has called his farm on Pond Road home ever since.**

**Topics discussed: local farms, farm helpers, Claflin family, roads, Pond Road, Shelburne doctors, Shelburne Bicentennial, Planning Commission**

Joan Madison: Richmond, can you tell me your full name, where you were born and your early life?

Richmond Barr: My full name is Richmond Cushman Barr. I was born in Ferrisburgh, August 15, 1910. That was my mother's home. My father was from Worcester, Massachusetts and we shortly moved down there, a little bit closer for the rest of my growing up. I went to high school in Worcester, and then I went to Stockbridge School of Agriculture at the Massachusetts State College. They call it the University of Massachusetts now. When I went there it was just the State Agricultural College and immediately after. I moved to Vermont to live where I had always wanted to be. After several years I became a DHIA<sup>1</sup> tester in Addison County, just before the World War II. I joined the army in 1943, and was in the Air Force for three years. Then of course, I always wanted to be a farmer and have my own farm, but money was always a problem, but the government guaranteed any loan up to \$4000, I believe it was at that time, that we had and so I started looking for property. A friend of mine from Ferrisburgh, who worked for the state, said there was a nice farm up in Shelburne that was for sale. So I came to Shelburne within a few days to see the farm, and this is the one. When we came here there were just three farms on the road. This one and two others beyond us...east of us....and their fields are still there, but not as farms. The street was known then as...I don't know what it was known as then...it was just a road. It was so narrow that we drove by the end of it the first time and we didn't realize it was anything more than a driveway, and not a very good one at that.

JM: What year is this Richmond?

RB: 1946. The road was so narrow that in order to pass another car you had to go in the ditch on one side to the other side to get by. The farm was empty as far as any cows or machinery was concerned, but it had this beautiful house. I think the house is what took my eye the first time. The house was built in 1909, and had only been lived in by one family, the ones that built it, who were the Palmers. <sup>2</sup>The road went from the village up

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<sup>1</sup> National Dairy Herd Improvement Association, Inc.

<sup>2</sup> George and Frances received the 140 acres of land from B. Harris Maeck and Frances Palmer deeded the land to the Barrs in 1946. Today, the farm consists of c. 1909 Shingle and Foursquare style house,

over the Hill, which is now Irish Hill Road, it was of course unpaved and at times it was almost impossible to get over the last hitch before we came over the hill there to Spear Street. As a matter of fact two or three times I go turn around and go back to Thompson Road, and come up that way because I couldn't get over that last hitch into Shelburne. When we first came here to look in the farm we came in a very expensive car, which belonged to my father-in-law, but the road was so rough we had to shift into second because of so many potholes. That gives you an idea of what Shelburne itself was, at the time, how it's changed since then. Of course, the main road, U.S. 7, had just been paved a few years before that. Our milk went to the Shelburne Creamery.

JM: So you made it a dairy farm?

RB: Oh yes, that's all I ever wanted. The Creamery building is still standing, but it hasn't been used for a milk plant since the late fifties I believe.

JM: How many cows did you have?

RB: At the beginning we had about 25....28. I bought a herd from a family right across the meadow from the farm. They were going out of business, they wanted to sell the whole dairy so I bought it, and I bought two pieces of machinery along with it. So theoretically I was a farmer in Vermont.

JM: Do you remember what it cost for the farm, the machinery or the cows?

RB: I paid \$8,900 for the farm. I think around \$1,200 for the cows. My brother-in-law and I drove them right through their pasture into our pasture and right up to our barn. So that was a very easy journey.

JM: Did you have any help?

RB: In the summer time in those days up until maybe 1975 or so, the college used to put all the Youth Corps...and they would elicit youth from all over New England and as far as New York State and New York City, and we would apply for a boy who would come in the summertime and live with us. We had, oh, probably 6 or 8 or more boys during the years that we had them. They were very good boys. They liked to farm and they liked the outdoors. Of course they lived with us and were a part of our family, actually.

JM: Tell me more about your family. Now you were already married when you bought the farm?

RB: Yes we were married, in the army, in Detroit in 1943.

JM: Where had you met Elizabeth?

RB: We had been together for ten years before we got married.

JM: Oh my goodness!

RB: We used to go to a really good dance over in Bristol, Japanese Cotton they called it at the time. They had dances usually on Saturday night. That was before TV so we would depend on that for entertainment.

JM: This was before World War II?

RB: Oh yes, dancing and movies were our big source of entertainment. My father was from Massachusetts originally, from Worcester, and my mother of course from Ferrisburg. My father's father was born in Maine and at the end of a few years of school he needed to earn his living so he went to Boston as a very young man, probably in his teens. And he went to work for a man by the name of Ed Richmond, who was a ship fitter. And he was so good to my grandfather that when my father was born he named him Edwin Richmond Barr for the Ed Richmond who had taken him in. My mother's family had seven children in it, five girls and two boys. I think I am the only one of the nephews and nieces that were born, at that time, left alive. I don't know of any other relatives that I have. I was the only one in my father's family. I had no brothers or sisters. My mother's family is all gone too. I have a half-niece out in Vergennes. I guess you would call her a half-niece, my cousin's child's child.

JM: Tell me more about your wife, Elizabeth, and where she was from and how you met.

RB: Elizabeth was from Charlotte and they lived on a large farm right on the main road, which has been developed. She was a Claflin, and her father was from Boston. He went to Harvard for one year and then he decided he wanted to do something else, so he came up and went to some college in the middle of Vermont. I don't think it is still exists, but anyway he went there and somewhere or other met my mother in law, Lela Van Vliet. Her folks were on the Mayflower. When I first came to Shelburne, I think there were only 400 on the checklist for the voting list. In those days we couldn't vote unless we were 21 and we had to be accepted by a Selectman as being residents of Shelburne. You could not vote if you were not residents of Shelburne. I think the original town hall which has been torn down or maybe moved up to the Museum. And this new one, which isn't new anymore, but was new then of course, probably in the fifties as a town hall.

JM: You were on the Planning Commission back in the 1960s. What kinds of things you were planning back then? Do you remember any of the activities?

RB: I know one big thing that I remember very well... the people who owned this big store, the central store at the time which was the big stone building still standing on the corner of U.S. 7 and Harbor Road. They thought, as business increased, the size of the town increased, the people just didn't have enough room to park and they wanted to buy a the building in back and tear it down and build a large store there. At the time the land

where the shopping center is now was a farm and the person that owned it had decided to give it up and sell the parcels of land off it. One of our good members of the Planning Commission influenced the Claytons, to look that over and perhaps buy the land and build the supermarket over there. So we were one of the first ones to have a shopping center and it worked out very well because the traffic was well organized and there was room for everybody to build. So that was one of the big achievements of the Planning Commission.<sup>1</sup>

JM: Tell me more about your family. You had how many children?

RB: I had two girls and a boy. The oldest girl went to Castleton State and was a nurse. She was in Boston for seven years at the Children's Hospital, and then she moved back to Burlington and became a member of Mary Fletcher....at that time it was Mary Fletcher. She married her husband and had one child. She passed away in 1995. My second child was a boy, and all he's ever wanted to do was farm so he is the farmer on the farm today. He went to Randolph Agricultural School. That's all he's ever wanted to do. And my youngest girl lives in Keene, NH with one boy.<sup>2</sup>



**Picture 1 Mary Fletcher Hospital, Burlington**

JM: Has life changed for you son, Wayne, who is running the farm? Do you have more cows? Is the day shorter for him than when you were milking?

RB: Longer, by about three hours.

JM: Why is that?

RB: Because it's his life; that's all he wants to do.

JM: Has he had to update all the machinery?

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<sup>1</sup> The Shelburne Shopping Plaza opened to the public with a Vermont Liquor Store, City Drug store, Chittenden Trust and the Shelburne IGA in 1968.

<sup>2</sup> Cynthia Elizabeth Barr, Gail Lee Barr and Wayne R. Barr

RB: Oh yes, but not tremendously so. We had a good supply when he took the farm over. His uncle was a farmer for a good many years and he still misses it and he comes up and buys him machinery and helps him out in the summertime a little bit.

JM: How many cows does he have now?

RB: Average around thirty or thirty-three. One thing that he did do that had never done was board his Heifers. As soon as they were two months old he sold them to a boarding farm in New Haven, and they won't come back until they are ready to calve. So he doesn't have to worry about livestock.

JM: When did you lose your wife?

RB: She liked to go into the barn. Her heart wasn't the best. She fainted just as she was going into the barn and broke her ankle. Her sister at the time was theoretically on her deathbed and we were taking care of her. We didn't operate immediately on her ankle until after her sister passed away which was in a day or two from the time she broke the ankle. About a week later they operated on her ankle and for some reason or other her heart just couldn't take it and she passed away in the hospital.

JM: You've been carrying on since? Tell me about your life now.

RB: Well there ain't much to tell Joan. I try to keep the house warm which is a big chore.

JM: How do you heat it?

RB: With a portable hot air furnace. Originally we had a big wood furnace in the cellar. They called them pipeless furnaces at the time because that is what they were. They were just one big three foot round ventilator at the top of the furnace. That was supposed to keep the heat. Of course we have a wood stove in the kitchen. We shut off quite a few of the rooms and the stairway. We just had this room, that hall, and the kitchen. We had the upstairs draped down so the heat wouldn't go up there. I think I miss the kitchen stove as much as anything. That was a great source of heat. We don't have those anymore.

JM: Who does the cooking and shopping and things?

RB: I am the cook and I am the shopper and I do most of the errand running for my son.

JM: He lives here on the farm, but not in the big house with you?

RB: Yes...and as a pastime...we used to pick up antiques. I dealt particularly with clocks. I bought one and it didn't run and I decided I would make it run, and finally I did, but I had quite a lot of learning to do before I did. And I went on from that and became a fairly decent clock repairer and collector of clocks, which I sold.

JM: You still have a lot of clocks?

RB: Well, not many compared to what I did

JM: And, was it glassware that Elizabeth collected?

RB: Yes. We used to do antique shows inside of Mary Zais' on North Avenue. That was the first show at the time. We went there probably four or five years and then she decided to go somewheres (sic) else because there wasn't enough room in the church to satisfy all the people that came. So she rented the fairgrounds' buildings and put the show on there for several years. Mary passed away twenty years ago I imagine.

JM: But you continued going to the shows?

RB: Just for a while, but not very much longer. Things started to, as far as I was concerned, seemed to deteriorate. People didn't seem to like the type of things that we had considered antique so we just stopped.... stopped our buying and selling

JM: Do you remember any other special things about Shelburne from the early days as compared with now? Where did you go to the doctor or did the doctor come to you?

RB: The doctor came to us, definitely!

JM: Do you remember any of the early doctors in Shelburne?

RB: No, we went to Charlotte... Dr. ....Never grow old, that's one thing about age you start to lose your memory. No, we tried to maintain the farm as it was and hope it will be. We have seen a tremendous amount of farms taken over and all these buildings and developments and so forth. The lakeshore at the time was owned mostly by the Webbs. Derrick Webb was a pretty good a friend of mine. He was the last full farmer down there. He was a man that really lived for the farm. He was on the many Boards with us.<sup>1</sup> There was a time...I think there are pretty close 3000 voters in town now compared to what, 406 when I came here. Of course there are a few of them that. The town has maintained itself very well I believe. It's still a very attractive place. This street...Pond Road... I think it had three families on it and now I think there are nineteen.

JM: And you have Shelburne Pond which is...

RB: We were responsible for naming it Pond Road because, at that time, people wanted streets named, and I thought as long as it went right by the pond, Pond would be a good name for the road. Another thing we accomplished was putting in a four way stop at the corner of Pond Road and Dorset Street. Cars were coming down Dorset Street and

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<sup>1</sup> Derick Webb held many positions in town: Justice of the Peace, Town Representative (1955-1959), Library Trustee, School Director, Fence Viewer and Planning Board

if you were going across and going down Pond Road they would almost wipe you out. So I asked the Selectman if they wouldn't put in a four way stop which they weren't planning on doing. That was quite a few years ago. Do you remember that?

JM: I know it's been there for as long as I can remember, a long time. Yes.

RB: When we first came here there was a schoolhouse just above us on Irish Hill Road.

JM: Is that where your children went to school?

RB: No, my children never went there. The school closed two years I think after we moved there.. It was just the second and third and fourth grades I think that still stayed there for a while, and then it closed and everybody went to Shelburne because they had transportation.

JM: Were there school busses for the children?

RB: No, not buses, just automobiles full of kids

JM: So you carpooled the children?

RB: Yes, carpooled. I don't remember, sometime in the fifties the first school buses came but eventually I drove one for a couple of years. The school was built in town to accommodate the increased population. Then CVU was built. My son was the first class at CVU and the boy that we had living here was the first class to graduate from CVU in '64.

JM: Do you remember any other major events in Shelburne? Do you remember the Bicentennial at all?

RB: I remember it, but not very well. I think we took a tractor and a hay wagon down and drove it through the parade but I am not sure.

JM: Any particular people stand out in Shelburne history, you mentioned that Derrick Webb was good friend of yours, any other community leaders?

RB: The Maecks owned the farm that's called the Maeck Farm. They have been there for as near as I can understand 150 years. The one that we knew that never married. He gave his nephews their education. Their father was one of the owners of the general store at that time was Tracy and Maeck.<sup>1</sup> Tracy was the brother-in-law. They lived very close to each other on US 7 across from the Trinity Church. As the population increased the farms started breaking up. The farm that I remember most about was the

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<sup>1</sup> From c. 1851 through the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, the brick building at the corner of Route Seven and Harbor Road served as Shelburne's general store. In this period, the store was familiarly known as "Simonds", "Mead and Tracy", "Tracy and VanVliet", "Tracy and Maeck", "Doenges and Towle" and "Harringtons", with the Tracy family having the longest involvement with the store.

big farm at the corner of US 7 and Bostwick Road. That was a beautiful big farm with a brick house. I think it belonged at one time to the McGees, but I am not sure.<sup>1</sup>

JM: Is the house there anymore?



**Photo 1 Construction of the Shelburne Museum**

RB: Oh no! It's the museum. The museum owns it all.<sup>2</sup>

JM: The museum was just getting going about the time you bought this farm...

RB: Oh no...

JM: No....1946?

RB: No, the museum didn't start until the fifties... '55 or '56. There was no talk of museums at that time. A big wind storm....we had a cyclone one year.<sup>3</sup>

JM: When was that?

RB: I think it was in 1955. It blew down lots of buildings.

JM: Did you have damage?

RB: We had some, but not particularly. My brother-in-law had a farm in Charlotte on the top of the hill above Ferrisburg Hollow. And it blew his barn sideways so one row of cows were crushed by it.

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<sup>1</sup> Edward and Jennie McGee owned land north of Marsett Road.

<sup>2</sup> The museum purchased the corner farm from the Lamson family in 1954. The farmhouse, on the north side of Bostwick Road, was demolished in the 1950s due to excessive deterioration. Two of the farm's barns which were on the south side of the road was purchased by the Mann family in the 1960s and converted into a residence and artists studio/retail space.

<sup>3</sup> Shelburne Museum opened to the public in 1947. One of the many displays was the impressive carriage collection donated by the Webbs of Shelburne Farms.



JM: What was his name?

RB: Sidney Claflin. My sister was very good at going around and helping people out when they were in trouble at the time, and doing what she could to help them, and straighten things out the best she could. She and these other ladies that I don't remember. She would get the church to help people

JM: This was back in 1955?

RB: In 1954, 1955. It was a hurricane came up from Montpelier, it just blew everything apart. At the time of course, there weren't any houses that were noticeable on Pond Road. I remember the farm between mine and the corner which is now owned by four or five people.

JM: I'm sure your getting tired. Have we missed anything that you wanted to tell me about?

RB: I have been asked several times to marry people and we would marry them here in house, or I would go to various places on to marry them. I married one couple at Dr Maeck's down on the lake. I married another couple on Mt. Philo and another couple in a trailer down in the village. I don't know how they turned out, but I do hope that everything turned out very well for all of them. I think I married twelve or fifteen people in length of time that I was able to and I enjoyed it very much.

JM: That's wonderful, thank you very much.