

**Interviewee: Ken Albert**  
**Interviewer: Cathy Townsend**  
**Date: March 8th, 2002**  
**Location: Town Hall**

**Ken Albert arrived in Shelburne in the early 1970s when he was transferred to IBM. In his thirty years in the town, he has dutifully served the Shelburne community as both a member of the Planning Commission and the Select board.**

**Topics discussed: Planning Commission, Town Meetings, Select board, Thomas Haddock, Eustace Thomas, Ice Storm, Shelburne Farms, Tourism, Development and Change**

Cathy Townsend: What is your full name?

Ken Albert: Kenneth Albert.

CT: How long have you lived in Shelburne?

KA: Since 1971.

CT: When and where were you born?

KA: I was born in New York City in 1938.

CT: Do you have a first memory of Shelburne?

KA: I don't recall exactly one memory of Shelburne. My first sort of introduction to Shelburne was when I was transferred up here with IBM when they were transferring in the late 1960s.<sup>1</sup> I arrived here in 1969 and at that point in time, my boss, who moved up here six months before, said "You have to look for a house in Shelburne. That's the best place to live." So, that is my first memory of Shelburne. That was Bob Crook. I believe he is still living in town.<sup>2</sup>

CT: Have you always lived in the same place in Shelburne?

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<sup>1</sup> IBM first arrived in Essex Junction and occupied a 10,000 square floor building with 400 employees. Over the years, the facility grew at an incredible rate and by the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, 7,000 employees occupied over 3 million square feet of building space.

<sup>2</sup> Bob and Mary Crook bought their home on Woodbine Road in the Hullcrest Acres development in 1968.

KA: Yes. We first arrived in Burlington and stayed in an apartment for a couple of years. We bought a lot and had a house built on it in Shelburne.

CT: Do you think the school system in Shelburne has changed?

KA: The school system in Shelburne, K-8, has essentially the same spirit to it that it always had. It always been a parent involved schools system – I think it still is. I don't think that it is all that different. Obviously, it is larger and it is a different school building. Still, I like to think that it is not all that different in spirit.

CT: Did your children go to the school?

KA: Yes. Two children. Two daughters.

CT: Do you think Shelburne Point has changed since you have been here?

KA: When we first came into town, they were developing Harborwood Shores, which was the open land on the point. So that was basically open land when we came here. In fact, we considered buying a lot but we decided that it was too far out on the point. So the point is built up, but even then, it was very obvious that it was being suburbanized.

CT: Do you think there was a feeling between Shelburne Point and the rest of Shelburne?

KA: I don't know. At the time, we did not have that sense. It is just far away.

CT: What types of organizations and groups have you belonged to in Shelburne?

KA: The first organization that I joined in Shelburne was the Planning Commission. I applied, I guess, in early 1973. I was on the Planning Commission for ten years. Since then, I have been on the Select board for sixteen years. I haven't belonged to any other non-governmental organizations in Shelburne.

CT: Who have been the key Shelburne community leaders or decision makers?

KA: The first person that influenced me as a community leader was Thomas Haddock. Tom was the chairman of the Select Board when I came to the town. I remember attending a lot of meetings as a newcomer. I remember listening to the Select board and remember being impressed with the decorum and orderliness and politeness that he conducted meetings. Actually, I think he had a big influence on me since I been on the select board. I remember him always saying that no matter what the dispute was, the select board had to restrain itself and not act like a bunch of moronic people. I think he set the tone in town....maybe it was set before, but at least for me, he was the first leader in town that set the tone in town for Shelburne government. I think we are a little different than the governments of other towns. We have a lot of squabbles, but we seem

to resolve them in a reasonable way. When you lose, you lose and when you win, you win.<sup>1</sup>

CT: Who have been some of the memorable personalities that I have lived in Shelburne?

KA: The most memorable personality was Jack Stevens. He lived on Falls Road and he had irrepressible personality. He died about seven years ago. He was quite the personality. He attended every town meeting and everybody look forward to hearing Jack Steven's complaints. I also remember Eutie Thomas, who was in his 90s, would come to Town Meeting and give us a little slice of history. He was a former farmer and former selectman.<sup>2</sup>

CT: What are some of the most beautiful natural areas in Shelburne?

KA: There are so many of them. You could look at Shelburne Farms and say that is the most beautiful natural area but it also not really natural anymore. It is designed as a park one hundred years ago. That is obviously beautiful. One of the most beautiful things that I can recall was doing some cross-country skiing out in the fields between Spear and Dorset Street.

CT: Where do you think the best views in Shelburne are?

KA: I think one of the best views is from the street that I live on...not that the part where my house is on...we have no view but if you continue south on Pierson Drive, which is in my subdivision, there is the most sensational view of the Champlain Valley. You can see a 180-degree view from southern Lake Champlain to all the way beyond Burlington.

CT: Where do you think is the best place to go for a walk?

KA: I think Shelburne Farms.

CT: During your time in Shelburne, have there been any major disasters – Hurricanes, Floods, Fires?

KA: No hurricanes. We had some rain. We had one flood that affected our driveway. All this water came down one July and basically washed our driveway out. It was not a disaster for the town but it was a disaster for us. Probably the biggest disaster was that

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas and Lois Haddock bought their house and land on the south side of Webster Road in 1971. The land used to be part of the Roberts Family Farm who had been living and farming in Shelburne since the 1880s. The Roberts family also had homes in the Village and the Falls.

<sup>2</sup> Eustace Thomas came to Shelburne with his parents in 1901. He went to high school at Saint Michaels in Winooski. Eustace served the community in a multitude of ways. Eustace Thomas served on the school board from 1929 to 1961 and he also served as Shelburne's Town Representative in 1961. He and his wife, Lena, ran a farm (the former Andrews Farm) near the junction of Spear Street and Thomas Road. Over the years, the farm grew to over 550 acres and it had over 400 apple trees.

ice storm a few years ago. We were lucky that we had a wood stove then – we cooked soup. Fires? I think the most sensational fire that I recall was at the Jelly Mill, which is now where the Gailer School is.<sup>1</sup> One of the buildings went up and it was absolutely spectacular. You could see it hundreds of feet in the air.

CT: What were Shelburne Town Meetings like?

KA: The Town Meeting when I first came to town attracted between 2 and 3 hundred people. And maybe even more than because you voted everything in town meeting... even the budget. That changed not too long after I moved to town. Maybe eight years or so after I moved to town. It changed to Australian Ballot and then town meeting became less important to many people.<sup>2</sup> The attendance has been below 200 people most years. People vote the next day.<sup>3</sup>

CT: Do you remember any major decisions that were brought forward at town meetings?

KA: The major decisions at Town Meeting were basically the budget.

CT: What do you think drives tourism in Shelburne?

KA: I think it its location on the way to the Burlington area makes it very important. Its access from Burlington and to Burlington makes tourism here. Shelburne is the first place, when your are going south on Route Seven, that looks like you are re-entering Vermont. I think it is a natural place for tourism to happen. I think also the hotels like the Heart of the Village Inn<sup>4</sup> and the Inn at Shelburne Farms<sup>5</sup> create tourism as well. It helps that the Farms and the Museum are here.

CT: Do you think tourism in Shelburne has grown?

KA: Definitely. Shelburne Farms is becoming a major tourist attraction.

CT: How do you think tourism has affected tourism?

KA: It is surprisingly gradual. That is not the thing that has changed Shelburne. I think what had changed Shelburne has been the valuation of all these homes that are built

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<sup>1</sup> The Jelly Mill complex opened to the public in 1984 and the Gailer School was founded in 1990 with eight students.

<sup>2</sup> The State of Vermont first converted to the Australian Ballot system in 1890. This type of voting involves government-printed ballots that listed all qualifying candidates rather than town meeting voting or handwritten voting.

<sup>3</sup> In a 1985 oral interview found in the Town Vault, Eustace Thomas, who Ken Albert described early as a Town meeting regular, said the following about Town Meetings and the Australian Ballot: "You know it's sour grapes to me, the Australian ballot. I don't know if you do any better with a big population."

<sup>4</sup> The Heart of the Village In is located in the 1885 Cyrus Van Vliet home on Route 7. When the house was first built, a 9 x 6 copper-lined room was installed in the second floor to collect water.

<sup>5</sup> The Inn at Shelburne Farms opened to the public in 1987

close to the lake or right on the lake. Shelburne changed, obviously, not just to a suburban community but to a suburban community with a mix of average homes and some very high-end homes.

CT: What do you think serves as Shelburne's community center?

KA: I think it is a contest between the Shelburne Supermarket and the Town Hall. Probably the Shelburne Supermarket is number one.

CT: Do you have a favorite house in Shelburne?

KA: I think the house...I think it is owned by one the Precourts right now...it was owned by the Millers. It is at the intersection of Spear Street and Barstow Road. There is a brick house...I think it is Greek revival...it is absolutely beautiful.<sup>1</sup>

CT: How has Shelburne changed over the years?

KA: It has been a gradual change. Shelburne, when I arrived in town, was already pretty much full with a lot of newcomers like me...suburbanized. People working at IBM and in the Burlington/Essex area. Its dulled the population or close to it. We still have a few farms and obviously farming has become less and less important. I remember many more working farms when I cam to town. Shelburne understood then that it was going to be a desirable bedroom community for the rest of Chittenden County. So, from that point of view, it has not changed. It has just gotten more so. I think we have tried to do it carefully so that we retain some of the hints of what Shelburne used to be. Maybe a little better than some of the other towns.

CT: Do you think your neighborhood has changed?

KA: No. It was established before I was there. I was one of the last homes. Except, it has gone through some cycles. When we arrived, it was mainly families with small children, including mine. Then they grew up and the neighborhood seemed to have an absence of small children. Now, it seems like a lot of older people are moving out and more small children are coming in...generational shifts.

CT: How has Shelburne not changed?

KA: There always been in Shelburne a commitment to trying to keep the character of Shelburne. I think we retained, not to a 100% extent but to a pretty large extent, the character of the town the way it was before we arrived.

CT: What does Shelburne have that other communities don't?

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<sup>1</sup> Edward and Joanne Precourt purchased their brick Greek Revival Spear Street home in 1999 from Rita Claire Meilleur. Ms. Meilleur received the land from her mother, Evalina Kelly in 1996. The Kelly's purchased the farm, which was once the 130 acre "Johnson Farm", in 1930.

KA: I think what it has that kind of a conscious commitment to try to contain that character.