

Interviewee: Jack Ockert
Interviewer: Pamela Daly
Date: April 11, 2002
Location: Ockert residence, 514 Shelburne/Hinesburg Road

The Ockert family came to Shelburne in 1883 and over the years members of the Ockert family have been farmers, storeowners and caretakers for the Webbs.

Topics discussed: Immigration, Shelburne Farms, cottages, Webb family, Marsett family, Shelburne Point, traveling, World War II, Limerick Road, development, dairy farms, Burlington

Pamela Daly: What is your full name?

Jack Ockert: Carroll A. Ockert

PD: How old are you?

JO: I will be 67 in June.

PD: Where do you live?

JO: 514 Shelburne/Hinesburg Road

PD: The reason that I am here today is because you are the...third generation?

JO: Yes.

PD:...the third generation to live here in Shelburne. Was your grandfather the first to live in the Shelburne area?

JO: Yes

PD: Why and how did he get here?

JO: He migrated here from Germany in 1883.

PD: What was his name?

JO: Well, he changed it once he got here. Robert was his first name. Heinrich or Henry was his middle name. Ockert.

PD: Was he married when he came over?

JO: Yes. He came six months ahead of my grandmother. She came six months later with four children. All in 1883.

PD: Why did they come over here?

JO: I really don't know to be honest. I think in that particular time in Germany was a big time for migration because of millwork and things like that. I really think he ended up in the wrong place because his background is what we call a shipper –he worked on ships in Germany. Kind of what we gathered from the research that we have done on our family history, I think he was originally looking to go some place to work like Iowa because he talked about the what fields and all these kind of things which we don't have here. We really don't know how he got here because there is no record of him coming through into the United States. We think he came through Canada. We know our grandmother came – she came through Ellis Island. He did not come through Ellis Island or Baltimore or New York or Philadelphia. We just know that he got here.

PD: Where did he work?

JO: He started working soon after he got here at Shelburne Farms. He started in 1883. That's not right...Dr. Webb, at that time, owned Oakledge. And that is where he started working for Dr. Webb...at Oakledge. He walked to work every day. He walked from Shelburne to Burlington and walked home at night.



Photo 1 Oakledge Manor, Burlington

PD: What did he do there?

JO: Caretaker types of things...as he always did.

PD: So, dealing with building and grounds more than agricultural work?

JO: Yes. When they bought down here, he continued to work with them when they came to Shelburne.

PD: Did he live on the estate?

JO: He lived in what we call the gatehouse at the Southgate.

PD: How long was he there?

JO: He died in 1935.

PD: When was your father born?

JO: 1897. The house, that is now at the Southgate was on Limerick – Old Limerick, which is the road that runs from the Bostwick property to Shelburne Farms. There were several houses and then they moved them all. That is one of them that was moved. My dad was born in that house that was moved to the gatehouse. There were five or seven of them down there and they moved them all from down there and onto the farms. Dr. Webb developed the place and they moved the two houses. The French restaurant up here across from the Museum – that is the old schoolhouse. They had an old schoolhouse over there. The three cottages behind the old railroad station.



Photo 2 Ockert Cottage, Across from Railroad Station

PD: And there are some cottages on Harbor Road?

JO: Yes. There were four cottages up there. There was our cottage. There was Northgate and up behind the Breeding Barn, there was another cottage.

PD: Who were the cottages for?

JO: The families – the people who worked on the farms.

PD: What was your father's name?

JO: Alfred

PD: Your grandfather had four children when he came over?

JO: Yes.

PD: Your father was....

JO: the youngest.

PD: Out of how many?

JO: Lets see. I think they had a total of eight. A couple of them died.

PD: Your father was born in one of the cottages?

JO: Hmmm...hmmmm

PD: And he was pretty much raised there?

JO: Hmmm...hmmmm

PD: Where did your father go to school?

JO: In Shelburne.

PD: Was it the brick school?

JO: No, it wasn't there then. The old school that was there burned. He only went to a freshman in high school. That is as far as he went.

PD: What did he do after high school?

JO: When he got out of high school, he was in the army – World War I. He did not go overseas but he was in the army for a short period of time. He worked on the railroad as a section hand. He worked about three jobs for a while. He ended up working where the country store is now – he worked for Mr. Deyette who had that store. Then he had the store for a while. But my father was too kind hearted and who would not make people pay their bills so his business went under. In 1935, he started working for the Webbs. We moved back into that house in 1937.



Photo 3 Deyette Home

PD: Back into the gatehouse?

JO: Yes. It was empty for two years. It was the only period of time when nobody lived there from our family until 1982.

PD: What did your father do at the farms?

JO: He worked mainly down at the point for Mr. Samuel B. Webb – his caretaker. My mother worked down there and I worked down there and my sister worked down there.



Picture 1 Entrance to Shelburne Farms

PD: Where was your mother from?

JO: My mother was born....the Marsett family came from Ferrisburg but she was born in Burlington.

PD: How did she meet your father?

JO: I don't know. I don't think it ever came up. (Jack yells to the other room) Hey sport, how did mom and dad meet, do you know?

PD: You will have to explain for the tape who "Sport" is.

JO: "Sport" is Genevieve, my wife.

Genevieve Ockert: She and Ralph (Marsett) were classmates – they were the same age. He always said that he pushed her in the carriage.

JO: Oh yeah, that was one of dad's favorite stories. Dad was thirteen years older than my mother. He pushed her in her carriage until she got old enough.

GO: That would make her furious.

JO: Oh, she would get upset.

PD: So it was because the grew up...

JO: in the same community. They lived next door.

GO: Did the Rays live next door to Marsetts at one point?

JO: The mom and dad lived down at....

GO: ...three cottages.

JO: They lived down there. The Marsetts lived down there and the Rays lived down there. Those folks all worked for the railroad station. That is why the three cottages were there. My grandfather lived in one, the Rays in one and the Towers lived in another.

GO: David Tower

PD: So we have Marsett Road...

JO: That is my grandparents.

GO: I call it Marsett House – the big white house.

JO: The big white house – I was born in that house.

PD: You were born in that house?

JO: Yes. I was born at home. I used to my tease my sister: “you could have been mixed up - you were born in the hospital. I couldn’t - I was born at home.”

PD: When did you mother marry your father?

JO: They got married in May of 1928.

GO: Mr. Qiumby, the Episcopal priest, married them.

PD: Did your mother stay home?

JO: She did for a while. Then she worked with dad at the point. When we were really little, she worked over there and we would play outside. She worked down there with dad on Fridays and Saturdays during the summers until the early 1940s.

PD: What kind of work did she do?

JO: Cook. Then in the fall, the Webbs would come back in September, October and November for hunting season. She did all the cooking down there.

PD: The Webbs were there just part of the time?

JO: Mainly in the summer time.

PD: Where did they live the rest of the time?

JO: New York City. Mr. Webb, the one that I worked for, was an insurance broker.

PD: When were you born?

JO: 1935.

PD: Do you have any brothers and sisters?

JO: I have a sister.

PD: When you were living out the gatehouse, were the roads paved?

JO: The ones on the farm were paved. Not all of them. Just the main road to the big house. What we call Dairy Barn Hill was not paved.

PD: What was it like around there. Were there any other houses?

JO: Once you went beyond the Northgate, which is where you enter Shelburne Farms now. As you went up the hill, there used to be place that they called Bayview. It was a big old house and it burned down. 1950s probably...maybe in the 1940s. There wasn't much from there down to the harbor.

PD: So there was the big house that they tore down?

JO: Yeah, that was there. A little further down were the Tellers. That has been there a long time. There was one other place on the left – the Browns. Other than that, there was nothing. And then from there, it was the shipyard.

PD: So, you lived there through high school?

JO: Yes. And through college.

PD: And you went to college at...

JO: UVM¹

¹ University of Vermont, Burlington, Vermont

PD: What are some of the changes that you have noticed over the years?

JO: First of all, I would say this development right here was my grandparent's farm. Both of my grandparents died in 1952 and my mother and her two brothers inherited it.

PD: What farm is that?

JO: It is from Marsett Road all the way down to the Citgo station on Route 7. That was all farmland. About 130 acres. Then all the land from Marsett Road south to the Teddy Bear factory. And where the Gables is? That was a farm there too – my father's farm. That was odd shaped lot in what we call a twenty-acre lot – a bunch of houses and meadows. I was in Germany – it was in the 1960s when they sold the cattle and tore the old down barn and rented the house. When my uncle died in 1957, they sold the development to Ray Pecor. That was the first development in Shelburne.

PD: Ray bought a lot of land...

JO: Probably, that was the first one. How he got into that, I do not know. He did not own a house – I don't think he ever owned a house up there where Doctor Cleary is now but the land behind it, south of there- he sold it. That was the first development. There was one house on Route 7 on one side of the road – it was the little brick house that there now. A little further down, where the bridge to the museum – that was a gas station. Wesley Fisher had a gas station. And next to him were the barns across from Harringtons. Where Harringtons is now used to be a little ice cream shop – Fenwick's Diner.

PD: The house where Lisa Mann's mother lives – the converted barn. Was that barn moved from somewhere?

JO: Originally, across the street, there was a nice big old brick house. It was an old stagecoach inn. When Dunbar Bostwick bought that land all the way down to the museum, he tore that old house down. Behind it, was the brick red barn which the Lamson family lived in. The one where Lisa Mann's mother....I am not sure if they might not have been part of the Lamson's property.

PD: So it was probably moved.

JO: I think so. There never used to be anything on that corner. That barn was not there when I was growing up because it was close to my grandmothers. I used to go up there everyday to get milk. I grew up on raw milk – I never had pasteurized milk until I was in college. Two quarts every other day.

PD: When you were growing up, did your family have a car? Did you travel much?

JO: No. We had a car but that was it. That was mainly used to go back and forth to work. As far as traveling...

PD: Not even a big trip into Burlington?

JO: Well, Burlington. Saturday nights in Burlington used to be a big thing. My grandparents used to go up there on Saturdays – it was the only night they were open. We would go up to Burlington and on the way back we buy some ice cream at the little ice cream place my father really liked. We would come home to my grandmothers and have a little ice cream. That was it. As far as folks were concerned, back and forth to work. Once a year...not even once a year...in the fall, we had Thursday and Friday off for teacher's convention in October. Once every three or four years we would drive to Massachusetts – that is where my aunts and uncles ended up. All my dad's brothers and sisters – except for one or two – ended up down there. We would drive down on Thursday and drive back on Sunday.

PD: Where in Massachusetts?

JO: Attleboro

PD: So you drove down?

JO: Yes. Long drive in those days. Nine hour drive. Once we took the train. It picked us up in Boston. That was a long time too.



Photo 4 Shelburne Railroad Station

PD: So Shelburne was primarily agricultural when you were growing up?

JO: Oh yeah. Mostly farms. A large percentage of the kids that I went to school with came from farms. This was all farm through here.

PD: What kind of farming?

JO: Dairy farming.

PD: How do you think WWII affected the area?

JO: I was ten years old when it ended. It affected us the same way it affected everybody else. There were a lot of folks from Shelburne who went off to World War II and there was a few who did not come back. We had one in town who ended up being a prisoner of war from Shelburne. Barbara Kent's husband. He was a prisoner of war in Europe. He was a changed man when he came back. He was spick and span and spotless before he left.¹ We knew a lot of folks in town who went off to World War II. The same as everybody else – rationing and that kind of thing. It pulled people together. Shelburne was a lot smaller during World War II. When I was growing up, we only had about 900 people in the town. So probably in World War II, it was only six or seven hundred. If you look at the plaque in Shelburne Town Hall, there is a large number of people from Shelburne in World War II.

PD: So it was pretty much the 1950s and 1960s when the suburbs started popping up?

JO: 1960s. I remember when Shelburne Road was a dirt road. As you came from Burlington down Shelburne Road...where Friendly's is now used to be A&W Rootbeer. From there south...until you got to where the Howard Johnson's is now – that was open field. From there down...it used to be called the Victoria Inn...it was a beautiful old home...it is a restaurant now. From there down to the Lozons....Lozons is where the Sirloin Saloon has their corporate office. The Lozons lived there when I was growing up. There was one across the street. The Lozons owned both of them. And then from there down, there was a few houses. The red brick one on the left where the Lighting House is. Where the motel is...that used to be cabins at one time. Strong family.

PD: The Strong family?

JO: Different strong. Halvorsons up on Church Street? Jackie Strong married a Halvorson. She and her husband ran Halvorsons but Jackie and her family lived in those cabins at one time. Sally, Betty and Jackie – three girls. Jackie and my sister went to school together.

PD: So you were in the service?

JO: Yes. I went into service in 1958 for two years as an obligation for ROTC. I liked it so well, I stayed for thirty years.

PD: Which branch?

JO: Army. Medical Service Corps. You can't call it the administrative branch of the Army Medical Department because within there is all your rehab services. The first ten years I was in field units. I spent 3 1/2 years in Germany with the 3rd Armored Division.

¹ See Barbara Kent interview

Finally ended up in hospital work which I did not want to do. I did not want to work for the dumb doctors and dumb nurses.

PD: Your wife wasn't a nurse?

JO: No. Schoolteacher. In 1965, I knew my assignment in Massachusetts was going to be up in June of 1966. I started volunteering for Vietnam and I got a letter one day saying "no problem" in December of 1965 – "Next summer, you will be assigned to Vietnam". Good. A week later, I get another letter saying you have been selected to attend the US Army Baylor Hospital course in Hospital Administration. I got a master's degree in hospital administration out of it. For five army hospitals, I was deputy commander for hospital administration. I was in Vietnam – two different hospitals in Vietnam, one in Germany and two in the United States. On my final tour, I was Inspector General for the 7th Medical Command for 5 years. I traveled all over Germany, Belgium, England, Holland, Italy, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia

PD: You spent a lot of time in Germany. It is in your roots.

JO: I was there for 11 ½ years.

PD: Have you traced it back in your family?

JO: Yes, back to 1743. Germans did document everything which does get them in trouble frequently. We knew when my family migrated – we knew 1883. We knew where they came from. So we sent a letter off to a place in Hamburg and they kept beautiful documentation. They sent back the name of the ship, the date it sailed, the captain of the ship and where it stopped. That is when we found out what ships my family came over on. Then we also knew when they came to Shelburne, they went to Episcopal Church. We knew if they had been Roman Catholic, they would have gone to the Catholic Church. If they were Methodists, they would have gone to Methodist Church. They were probably Lutherans. We took a chance and we wrote to a little town (in Germany) and that is where we got stuff back from a priest at the Lutheran Church. That is where my family had gone to church. He took it all the way back to 1743 for us. This was when the Iron Curtain was still there and he was over 65. If you were over 65, you had a little more access to back and forth. We always paid him German Marks. We were told when we were doing all this that we would probably get three letters through but you won't get any more. We got three letters done but no more which means they were being stopped going through. They were always done in German and mailed from German Post Offices and there was nothing army/military or American about it. After three letters, they stopped. He sent a very nice picture postcard of the church. I always wanted to go there. We can go there now. Yeah, I spent 11 ½ years in Germany. It was almost like home. They way were raised and the way my father was raised was very strict. When Dad was growing up, he spoke mostly German in the house.

PD: Any other final thoughts?

JO: Growing up was different...growing up on the Webb estate. I kind of had the run of the place. I had lots of acres to run around in as a kid, which most kids did not have. I grew up there at the Point. They had two children there – Sam jr. and Holly. We were puppies together. Sam is four years younger than I am. Mr. Webb, I remember, in the summertime....Sam was about ten....every afternoon he put up a target and taught us how to shoot. I shot my first duck with him. He had a marsh up in the Missiquoi Bay area. In 1946, I shot my first duck up there. I spent a lot of time fishing, hunting and running around with the youngsters over there. It was unusual. It was fun.