

Transcript of conversation between Ann Fisk, Suzanne Fisk Smith, and Katie Fisk Wissman

Common Singers

Introduction by Kate Martineau: The Montague Center Oral history Project aims to preserve stories about Montague Center past and present. What was it like growing up here? How has the village changed? What is it important for younger and/or newer residents to know about the village's past? Montague residents have signed up to record their neighbor's stories, and boy, do they have stories to tell!

Our ultimate goal is to strengthen the connections between our community members and our community fabric as a whole. By collecting, preserving, and sharing our oral histories, we aim to transmit knowledge from one generation to the next while facilitating meaningful interactions between people. We will enhance our understanding of the past by illuminating personal experience. We hope you enjoy listening.

Common Singers: Let union be in all our hearts. Let all our hearts be joined as one. We end the day as we begun...

Ann Fisk: Today is February 28th. I'm Ann Fisk, and I'm here with Suzanne Fisk Smith and her sister, Kate Fisk Wisman. So Suzanne was born in 1939. She was the oldest of five children. Harry and Alice were her parents, and Suzanne's gonna share some stories of when she moved to Montague at the age of, go ahead Suzanne. I'll let you just,

Suzanne Fisk: yeah, we moved to Montague in 1946. I was going into second grade when we moved to Montague. And we moved into a house that we had no heat except for a potbelly stove downstairs in our house. The house, the downstairs we didn't use at all except Mother cooked down there sometimes. we had a kitchen upstairs that was very small because we lived in the whole upstairs in our house, the rooms upstairs were finished. There was no bathroom, and Daddy took a big closet and turned it into a bathroom and it, the man that needed to approve of it so that we could use the bathroom arrived that morning that we moved in.

Thank goodness we didn't have to use the outhouse! We lived upstairs, but the stairs weren't where they are now. They were in the back hall. The, so we went in, we didn't go into the main part of downstairs. We had to go in, into the I guess we called it the what room? The spare room downstairs?

Katie Fisk Wissman: Back hall?

Suzanne: Yeah. The back hall. Yeah. And there was a double door. Right at the top of the stairs that went downstairs to the basement. And so you could put, they could bring material in because the house was originally on the first floor was a factory. They made, I don't know how to say it, but the spindles to go on the bottoms of chairs and the rungs that were on the bottom of chairs and that's all they made.

And they had the equipment and that in our downstairs to make those particular pieces for orders or for chairs that they might make themselves. On the back porch—what we used for a back porch, there was a big concrete block area that the engine was on and Daddy was able to sell the engine that kept all the machinery going in on the first floor.

One of my first memories was the first Sunday we lived there. Mother walked Peter and I up to the church and where the Sunday school was in the back. We had not gone to a Congregational Church until we moved to Montague, and Mother said, from now on you'll be going to your father's church. This is where he was a member at one time.

I don't know whether that's true or not, but I know Uncle Art was a member there too. And so, and he was in the service during that time. But, Mother walked us up and Annie's mother, Clara Lawrence was standing outside of the Sunday school building door and she said, "Mrs. Lawrence will show you where your Sunday school teachers will be."

So, and that was the end of that. I don't think Mother walked up there again. Mother attended church there on days at the end of the Sunday school year when we had our different things. But she, she didn't go to church there, but she always helped with suppers. She might not have gone all the time to work there, but she always made things for it.

She also made choir robes for all the children because we had a little chorus that we had. And when I, we first went, I was taking piano lessons with Miss Mabel Lincoln. And, so I, I knew how to play, "Jesus Loves Me" and some of the basic songs that we sang, that children sang, and I played the piano.

And the mosaic that was on the back of the wall was the altar really for our Sunday school room and where we would have our little service before. And Clara Lawrence would be guiding all of us. They had a sandbox for the little children and while they were just playing in the sand with their little cars and just building things with the sand and they we were reading Bible stories to 'em. There wasn't any other sound except that. And while they just played with the cars and the trucks in the sandbox, I thought it was great because the children listened to everything because you could stop and ask 'em a question and they would immediately come back and tell you what it was.

We lighted the candles downstairs in the chapel. They sang, we sang, a few songs and I gave my book that we used for the children's music. I gave the book to Anne. So she has that book that I had back then, and Ms. Lincoln helped me to play some of those things too.

The boys in town, the teenager boys were a little bit rough with some of their things. One time they put a car on top of the Kaufman's porch. It was a small automobile, but it was still runnable and I couldn't, I don't know how in the world they got that car up there. But then one other year, the Rosses lived next door to us and somebody pushed Mr. Ross's car into the garden and turned the lights on on it into their bedroom window. So Rob had to get up in the middle of the

night, kind of where those boys, they were teenagers and there were a whole bunch of 'em and they were into something all the time, and so Rob had to get up and get dressed and go out and move his car and turn the lights off because the boys had done that.

Another time, I remember, that there was a lady who lived at the end of our street, she played the organ at our church and I can't remember her last name.

Ann: Florence Smith.

Suzanne: Florence Smith. And she was walking down the lane one night and that crew of boys who were in high school surrounded her completely. And I thought, oh my gosh! I was watching and I thought, oh my gosh! I was home babysitting with my brothers and sisters, and I thought I should call the police or something. But I just watched. And she just was rattling off all kinds of stuff and they were just laughing and laughing and she was laughing and laughing and they were all happy. So I thought, oh, I guess they're all having a good time. And then she went back in the house.

In Montague Halloween was wonderful. We had the best time because people were ready for us downtown at that time too. Most of our treats were homemade, especially with Ms. Lincoln and her sister, Mrs. Payne I think was her sister that lived next door.

And Ms. Lincoln, she was very generous and she prepared. I think she had little bags because they had more than one kind of things, and a lot of it was homemade. When we stopped at Ms. Lincoln's, she would have us come in and in small groups and she would play the piano and. Bless Patty. If Peter and I were there or any of our students, she'd get us to play a little tune too, which we really didn't wanna do, not with our peers anyway. We were happy just to get candy.

We lived in Montague Center when I was a baby. Mother and Daddy lived over the Caouettes and,

Ann: on Main Street.

Suzanne: On Main Street, and that's where right next to the Bartley store and the pasture. We lived upstairs and the Caouettes were my godparents from Saint Anne. That's where they took us one day when Daddy wasn't home.

We all went over to St. Ann's and the priest baptized me and he asked what my name was and they said, "it is Suzanne Alice." And he said, "what kind of a name is that? I baptize thee Marie Suzanne Smith." I mean Fisk. So that's what my baptism certificate says, but nobody ever said anything more about it.

But anyways, so we, lived upstairs there and we always had somebody living with us that would come in, a teenager who wanted to finish high school. This happened to us a couple of times. We'd had seniors in high school who wanted to finish high school at Turners Falls. And, that was Mary, that lived with us.

And Mary stayed with us for a long time and she and Mother were pretty close to the same age. And my uncle Art was just madly in love with her too. He used to come and sit on the steps so he could talk to her. And then World War II came around. And, Daddy decided we had to move to Millers Falls because gasoline was rationed and he wanted to use the car to be able to go over to his father's in Montague from Millers and for him to be able to take Mother to visit her parents in North Adams, where we usually went every couple of weeks up there because Mother still missed her mother. And Grandma was really good. She wrote to my mother every single day. I don't know, the letters were brief, but Mother looked forward to getting mail every single day. Grandma was a wonder and she came when we were upstairs over Caouettes and she would take care of me too. So I had lots of mothers there and the Caouettes would come if they heard me crying, they would just come up and get me out of bed and take me downstairs. And the boys, her sons were, were my big brothers. They would take me sliding down the hill. In back, and I have fond memories of sitting in front of 'em as we went down the hill.

And, uh, the snow would all blow in my face because I was in the front and they would just laugh and laugh. And after a while I would laugh and laugh too, because I might as well. I just felt like I really had a family. I really did.

Common Singers: Where are we bound? We'll learn to live in unity. Here is my home. Come, darkness, come, light. Where are we bound? Come, morning. Come, night. Here is my home.