

**Speakers: Janet Moorhead & Doug Leavitt**  
**Interviewers: Matthew Gunby and Linda Hough**  
**Location: Meredith Public Library**  
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MG: Is there any subject on the 200<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Meredith that you would like to start in on?

JM: Well, I was involved with the movie. That is of some interest to me. Bob Montana approached me about having a part in it, and he didn't really tell me what I was going to do – only how I had to dress. Like around the twenties. And I found a dress, actually at a local store. It looked kind of flapperish and actually Peg Montana provided the hat. We showed up the day of filming and I was supposed to make like I was out on a date. It was supposed to be raining so they were using a hose to provide the rain. We come out of the house and get into an old car and we're driving down the road and I'm supposed to make like I'm kind of arguing with my boyfriend. This was later dubbed in; it wasn't my voice in the movie. The next thing I know, we're parked at Brown's Boat Basin on the dock. I'm told to stand up as if I was going to get out of the car. Okay. Now sit back down. Now stand up and step out as if you think you're going onto dry land and I ended up in Lake Winnepesaukee the first week of June. [Laughter] There was no rehearsal, it was just on the spot is just what I had to do. So, it was really quite interesting. It was pretty cold though, that early in June.

The other time I got wet was when they were doing a PR thing with the dunking stool they decided I could get wet on that. Then I did a lot of photographs. In fact, I did win first in the print and first in the slide division, which made me pretty happy. They told me the reason they liked the one that was the print was because it didn't have any signs of civilization around it. There was no lines or other buildings or anything to really be able to say when it was taken. That's one thing that caught them on that. That was my experience with that.

My mother was very busy during that year making outfits. She made my father's town crier outfit and she made dresses for herself and I made three outfits for myself. One was just a green and the other one – the one that I had on for the dunking stool and I had another one I considered my ball gown that I had for the ball. They were pretty easy to make up and everybody had seemed to be a lot of handmade outfits. Some people bought them but a lot of them just made their own outfits for it.

I really just enjoyed all the different activities that went on that year. It just seemed like it – I remember the ice racing on the lake. There was a lot of water on the track. I know I got some shots of the cars and the water was just splashing up from them as they went around from the track – it actually made for some great photos for that. We had sled dogs and just quite a large variety of different things going on the whole year.

Doug, you were in the movie too. [Addressing her son Doug Leavitt seated to her right].

DL: I was. I don't have a lot of recollections of the movie because I was only six, but I do remember running around playing at one point and they were supposedly filming us. Probably my biggest memories of the Bicentennial as a young child is I got to stand front and center for everything no matter what was going on because my grandfather was the town crier and there's quite a few photos of me standing there by his side. Usually as a small child, you don't get to be in the front row. So, no matter what was going on, whether it was the parade or any other celebration, I was always able to stand front and center. Plus, I was a bit spoiled because I had two costumes. I had a dress costume and I guess my day-to-day Bicentennial costume.

I remember I was George Washington who cut down the cherry tree and I dragged a tree – I don't think was cherry – I dragged an apple tree or something through the parade because I was George Washington in that. There were fond memories of that and probably the only memory that I have of the actual activities were – I had never been to, there was no Disney world or anything like that – I had rarely been to any major exhibitions of any kind. I remember seeing part of the National Water Ski Competition that they had here that year. To see the little bit of water skiing that happened right here on Meredith Bay that was essentially the best in the world. That was a big deal. Something that as a small child, I had never seen and quite frankly until I went to Florida to Disney World and saw exhibitions like that I never did see again.

Then, as my mom said, my memories of – and things don't happen like that anymore – but my grandmother was a seamstress and my mom did a lot of sewing herself. When you're six years old, your eye level is right at the sewing machine and I had memories of how many hours it took my grandmother to make all these different costumes and she was always sewing for it and no matter what we needed got made from scratch. That's not something that happens today all the time.

JM: I have another memory of when they made the movie they couldn't really film the collapse of the town hall, so they had this brown wrapping paper up on the wall, drew things, and then filmed it. I was there as they were drawing everything there on the paper and I happened to have on a pair of white jeans and Bob threatened to start drawing on my pants and I wouldn't let him and I've been killing myself ever since for not allowing cartoons to be drawn on my pants. So, I saw some of the back behind the scenes types things going on. The reason my father was picked to narrate the first part was Bob Montana was at a town meeting and my father would get up and speak at town meeting often and he heard his voice and said 'That's the voice I want narrating.' It was just an incidental thing that happened. It's another reason why I like being able to get a copy of that because there is a recording of my father's voice that now my grandchildren can hear. There's a lot in that that's very historical. People will have memories.

The picture they took for our screen credit for Ray Bertholet and myself set us up like Bonnie and Clyde. His gun was fake mine was real. [Laughter]. It was kind of a fun thing to have.

I don't know if there's other things that you'd like to hear about.

LH: How did your father become town crier?

JM: Well, probably because his son-in-law, Jack Rideout, was running the program. I think it was just something he felt like doing and he really enjoyed it. He enjoyed going out there and doing the publicity pitches and getting out with the public. He was retired at the time. He was born in 1900 so he was sixty-eight at the time. He enjoyed talking with people. I think that he just kind of fell into that role because of the family was so involved with the whole celebration.

DL: They had moved here in 1950. So, they weren't lifelong residents. They'd been here for eighteen years and my grandparents were both very involved. He was involved with the Oddfellows. They were very involved in the Congregational Church. So, they were very involved in the community.

JM: My mother worked for Week's Country Store. They had the bit with the older part of the town. Another reason why we probably knew the Montanas was there was a woman that worked with him, Ruth Harding, was my cousin's wife. There was a family connection with the Montanas. That's how we probably got to know them.

MG: You had mentioned earlier, the dunking stool. We just had a couple quick questions about that. How is it that you came to be the person who had that honor?

JM: Well, again, I think it's because they realized that I at the time was working at the scuba shop and they figured I was one who wouldn't mind getting wet. [Laughter] It was set up – that one in the paper—as purely a PR thing to advertise the whole Bicentennial. There's a lot of family members in that shot. There's my father, myself, my brother-in-law, my nephew, my son, my niece and nephews. It seemed like the family – they realized they could grab us whenever they needed somebody.

LH: It has you listed as the first victim of the ducking stool, was there any other victims?

JM: I'm not sure if there were or not. I'm sure other people got on it.

DL: Actually, that's a memory that I have – of my mother being dunked. When you're six years old, you don't grasp the concept of 'this is all for fun.' So, I do have a memory of that, being nervous at the time. To be honest with you, I don't remember if you even went in the water [JM: I did!], but I remember being nervous. About if anything bad was actually going to happen to my mother.

JM: [Laughter].

DL: As you can see, I was front and center again for the whole thing! It was neat stuff and, you know, it was really special because of the whole family taking part. And talking about it many years later – twenty years later when I was in my twenties and my grandmother was still alive – talking about the stuff that was going on and to my cousins. My cousin Jack who just passed

away who is right here in this photo last year, just a few years ago we went over a box of memorabilia that he had from his dad putting on the bicentennial. Just to be able to have three generations and both sides of the family take part in something all summer long. It was wonderful.

LH: Was there a little skit beforehand? The paper mentions that you spoke ill of someone from the Brothers of the Brush?

JM: I think, if I remember they did read something out about why I was there, but that beard contest was really a fun thing too.

DL: Correct me if I'm wrong, but my grandfather – Grandpa Dick – he had mutton chops which came down to here because my grandmother didn't want him to have a full beard. So, that's as far as she'd let him, am I right?

JM: [Laughter] Yep. He had his mutton chops which actually looked great on him.

DL: It did.

JM: It really did, but his father had a big beard. In the photo I have of my great-grandfather, he had a big long beard.

DL: There was a lot of neat stuff that summer.

MG: Were either of you present at the takeover of Meredith Bridge?

JM: Oh yes. Oh yes. We were marched down there and that in fact is when this picture with the ox cart was taken. I think there was a little bit of a problem with them taking over the radio station, because I think they – that was something with the federal laws. You really weren't supposed to go in and take over a radio station. I remember going down into - when we got into Laconia Louie Wyman was there – our representative. I got a nice picture of him down there. It was a great way that they put the celebration of Laconia in with the celebration of Meredith because it used to be Meredith Bridge that got taken over by Laconia. So, it was a great way to bring two celebrations together and it was a lot of fun. I don't know exactly how they ever set that all up. I remember we went down and we met right down by the state school at the time and then made the further march with the whole group into city.

DL: I don't have a lot of memories that day, but I remember being at the state school and finding shade cause it was a hot day and I had my little costume on and I was hot. I remember I was very thankful there were some trees there for shade.

JM: Yeah, it was a nice set up of marching down and reclaiming our town pound and stuff but I did hear somewhere that it really wasn't kosher to go in and take over a radio station [laughter].

DL: Wasn't the Mount Washington, wasn't that one of the first times that it ever came into

Meredith?

JM: Yeah. Of course, it was set up the reason they were able to do that was Bruce Heald who at the time – the band director of the high school – was the Purser on the Mount Washington during the summer so he had that good connection with the Mount Washington. But, they had to back it out, you couldn't turn it around right there. That's actually before it was lengthened. It was really nice to have it there with the band right up on the front of it. Another different type of thing to do at a celebration. To bring that aspect in.

DL: It is funny what you remember from different things. I was right there on the pier and another small child, probably a little older than myself, had his hand on the back of the pier and the boat pushed up against him and caught his hand. I thought it was amazing because just three or four men got on to the side of the Mount Washington and pushed away enough to pull his hand out. I don't think he was injured, but he certainly yelped. I thought that was pretty neat as a six-year-old to see these men push away a ship [Laughter]. Saved this boy's hand.

JM: I got a nice picture of my father ringing in the Mount which actually I think has ended up in a few books. Either that, or someone else took the same thing maybe behind me, but it was a nice set up showing the town crier ringing in the Mount.

MG: Do you remember in the planning of the 200<sup>th</sup> if there were any challenges that you or other people who were organizing it faced? Or if some things maybe you tried to do that you weren't able to? Anything like that?

JM: I really wasn't into that aspect of it so much. I know like they tried to get Madame Chiang Kai-Shek here but that didn't work out and a few things like that that they tried to do but the chances of doing it were pretty low anyway. They seemed to be able to pull off about everything they wanted to do. It was a good big parade and I don't think you could do the parade like that again because they brought it right down route 3 and you couldn't close that up probably now. The children's parade – that went down Pleasant -- Plymouth and then crossed over into the ball field area.

MG: Now, were you in the children's parade?

DL: I think that pretty much anything a child was involved with. I think it was the main parade where I was dragging the –

JM: No, that was the children's parade.

DL: Yeah, because I was right here on Main Street.

JM: My father was leading it and you, Bobby, and Karen were right behind him.

DL: Yep.

JM: They did a lot too. I don't know where you were in this one [looking at photograph].

MG: So, what were you dragging at the time?

DL: So, I had two costumes. You can see, this is my cousin Bobby, so I had kind of an everyday costume, which was a regular vest, and this is me here. But, I had my dress uniform on, if you will, I think it was a blue jacket and it had the full bow thing that went in your front. So, that was more a dress thing so I certainly looked a little different than most of the other kids did. When it came time for the parade I decided to be George Washington dragging his cherry tree that I had just cut that I couldn't tell a lie about. That's what I did for the parade.

JM: It doesn't show any of that.

LH: Do you have any memories of any other children's events?

DL: That was pretty much it. Certainly the water skiing. At the time, I spent my summers because I lived in, I went to Kindergarten, First, and Second grade here in Meredith before my parents moved. So, I was here in '68, '69, and '70 when we moved to Wentworth, NH. My summers were filled with fishing. My cousin Bobby and I would go up a little stream down here down by the elementary school and fish and right at the head of Meredith Bay where essentially the mill the water came out of from -- Lake Waukewan -- comes down through that came through the mill is the coolant. Of course, in the springtime there was a little bit of warmer water there, and landlocked salmon would go up to spawn and we would try to catch them and big suckers. That's how our summers were filled. We spent all day fishing and swimming as kids. Of course, the house we used to live in which was right at the head of Meredith Bay has actually been torn down and they extended the park. I'm trying to think -- what was the woman's name who lived in the other side and rented to us?

JM: I can't remember. Mabel Bouchard.

DL: Mabel Bouchard. Lived in one side and she rented the other side of the duplex to us. The town park was essentially my backyard. That's where I played all of the time. All the way down to the Old Oak Tree which was up there.

JM: Yeah, that was the year after -- the next year after the Bicentennial.

DL: Yep. The next summer.

MG: So, we have a question on how did the weather affect the filming of The First 200 Years. I guess there were a number of rainstorms or something. Do you remember any of that?

JL: I don't remember having any troubles with rain. When they shot mine that was all fake rain. I don't think they ran into much problems with rain that I remember in any of them.

DL: Sounds like they could have used a real rainstorm at that point.

JL: Yeah, no they had to sprinkle rain on the vehicle.

MG: We had another question, what is your favorite memory of working with Bob Montana?

JL: Just that he was a fun person to be around. He was very personable and I just remember him as being a nice guy. Actually, I remember way back even before then for some reason we were up at his place, it was some kind of a youth group. I remember him getting out a tractor with a bucket on it and he had some kids in a bucket and he was putting them up on a roof. You never knew what he was going to do.

We had an auction of original artwork from cartoonists and I hadn't really looked that close at them but they came up to be bid on, I saw this one that had this bit of the old man in the mountain. I thought, 'Wow, I'd like to have that one.' So, I starting bidding on it and I ended up with it. I found out afterwards that Bob had been bidding on it but when he saw I was, he stopped bidding. What it has was a newspaper, more like an editorial cartoon, and it says where it all started in 1968 and it was the primary. It had all different characters of the people that were running in the primary. Romney is up there flying a kite, saying: 'I can fly, I can fly!' I think Johnson was running down over the neck and Nixon is on it. There was some others. Doug has it now.

DL: Yeah, I could actually bring it down and put it on display. If you guys want. It's kind of a neat piece.

JM: He was thinking of donating it now. They have a Primary Historical Group thing that they collect stuff of the New Hampshire Primary. It probably should end up there. It would be a great, great piece for that. It's about the primary that year.

DL: And now, of course, with the Old Man gone it has a more historical significance.

JM: Yeah, I gave it to Doug because of where he was up there in Woodstock and so close to the Old Man. It's one of these things that should be in a historical place, but it again it has memories down to our Bicentennial because of how I acquired it.

LH: That auction was right in front of the library, correct?

JM: Yep. It was and I think a lot of people got things at a reasonable price because they didn't really realize what the significance of these things were.

DL: Anything else?

LH: Anything else you'd like to share? Any other memories?

JM: Not that much.

DL: I didn't have too many memories when I was only six.

JM: Yeah. [Laughter]. That was fifty years ago.

DL: The neat thing, not just for the Bicentennial, but my memories of Meredith were Annalee Dolls and being to know the creator of Archie. Those are two pretty famous things to have a small town to have both those things and to grow up with a piece of that was neat. Doesn't always happen. It happens in Hollywood, but not in small town New Hampshire.

JL: Sometimes we don't realize the significance of the people we hand around us. Chett Brickett that did the filming of the movie, he did a wonderful job. The photos that he took – I have my screen credit as a Bricket Block. You have one of the Bricket Blocks don't you? Those were nice souvenirs of the whole thing.

Maybe what I should do is dig out my slides.

LH: That's all I had.

MG: Yep.

DL: Good!

LH: Thank you so much.