

ACCESSION SHEET  
Maine Folklife Center

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Collection Name: Butler, Joyce / "Wildfire Loose"  
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Interviewer / Joyce Butler      Narrator: Arthur Roberts  
Depositor:

Address  
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**Description:** 1243 Arthur Roberts, interviewed by Joyce Butler, July 28, 1977, in Saco, Maine. Roberts talks about the fires of 1947 in Lyman; his work putting out spot fires as a member of the volunteer fire department; evacuating his family; how the approaching fire looked; fire destroying a lumberyard; backfiring and a backfire that got out of control; improvements in firefighting that Roberts thinks would prevent a repeat of 1947; needing permission from the National Guard to travel freely in the fire zone; food donations; porcupines fleeing the fire; and how the fire changed Lyman.

Transcript: 21 pp "only essential information transcribed"

Recording: 1 hour T1307

Related Collections  
& Accessions

Restrictions

# Arthur Roberts

BIDDEFORD — Arthur L. Roberts, 88, of York Manor, died Friday at Southridge Living Center.

He was born in Lyman on April 23, 1913, a son of Arthur L. Sr. and Winnifred Emerson Roberts, was educated in schools there, graduated from Hebron Academy and attended the University of Maine.

On Sept. 7, 1940, he married Lorraine Lombard. She died in 1975.

Mr. Roberts was a member of the Masonic Arion Lodge in Goodwins Mills and enjoyed hunting and fishing.

Survivors include one son, Bart of Casco; one daughter, Bonnie of Portland; two grandchildren and several nieces and nephews.

1243

1243005

ORAL HISTORY

Maine's 1947 Forest Fires

An interview with Arthur Roberts, Saco, Maine

*Roberts address long - Hamilton & Waterboro, Me*

Interviewer: Joyce Butler

*Interview conducted at Roberts Home, Saco*

Date: July 28, 1977

Only ESSENTIAL INFORMATION  
TRANSCRIBED. NOT EVERY  
WORD.

A.R.: I hope you'll ask the questions. (033)

Int.: Yes. We'll just talk... Now you in 1947 lived in Lyman.

A.R.: Yes. I was born and brought up there. The set of buildings  
right across from Spang's sawmill...that used to be mine.

Int.: Did you own the mill also?

A.R.: Yes, but I had sold it just six months before the fire came  
through. The Gillies Lumber Co., from Bath, Maine, bought it.  
It had between 8 and 9,000 feet of stuck (~~or struck~~) lumber  
in the yard which burned within an hour.

Int.: It did burn?

A.R.: It did burn. Mill and all.

Int.: Your home did not burn?

A.R.: No, I stuck it out and managed to save it. Eight of us  
there, spread around. I had 4 down behind the house below  
me...it was even larger than my house and myself and 3 others  
between the Alfred Rd. (Rt.111) and the back of the house.

Int.: You had a family?

A.R.: Yes, I had a wife and 2 children and I'd sent them away.

Int.: Where had you sent them?

A.R.: *I sent them*  
Up/toward Alfred and it was probably the worst thing I  
could have done, but I didn't know where to send them.

Int.: What kind of warning did you have? I believe the Lyman  
fire was on the end of the week. Kennebunkport had gone  
and Bar Harbor had gone and Brownfield and so forth.

*Saco  
Lyman  
Bath  
Alfred  
Kennebunkport*

*Brownfield Bar Harbor*

Roberts - 2

A.R.: It was late Thursday afternoon and night that it hit Lyman.

Int.: So it was the 23rd. And you were aware that there was fire around.

A.R.: I was a member of the volunteer fire department and I'd been going to these spot fires all week long. Wednesday we'd had a couple of small fires up the end of the town near the Waterboro line, and we had to keep a crew there with a tank truck and 6 or 8 men, it kept firing up, beating it down, until about the middle of Thursday afternoon, after which we had to be watching the smoke from the Waterboro fire and we could see that there was a wind springing up and that the smoke going along was really driving the fire fast ahead of it. From that point on we were really busy. I was acting as sort of a liason between the fire chief of the department of Goodwin's Mills and the couple of crews we had out in the field. And I reported back to Mr. Burbank, who was our fire chief, and he asked me to go to Waterboro and check the time when it came across the railroad track up there and call him by phone. When I timed it across the track <sup>and then</sup> I went up to the nearest house to get a phone the telephone lines were practically ~~nearly-impossible~~...everybody was making calls and that killed it. So I had to go clear back to Goodwin's Mills and report to him. At the time I said, "Ray, you'd better let me go up and get our team of men out from near the Aaron Andrews farm (129) which was up back of Roberts Pond." He said, "Does it look that bad?" And I said, "Yes, it does." So I went up there <sup>Lyman</sup> and told em to roll up their equipment and get out as fast <sup>Waterboro</sup> as they could. By that time the air seemed to be full of <sup>Goodwin's Mills</sup> ashes, cinders, dense smoke, and I pulled out just ahead of

<sup>Roberts Pond</sup>

Roberts - 3

the fire truck. There was a tank truck behind the small pumper, as we called it, and the truck hauling the water tank was nearly cut off. They had to come through flames to get out of there. Fortunately they made it and back at Goodwin's Mills I told the chief, I said, "Ray, I'm sorry, but I'm going to have to go home. It looks that bad." He said, "Do you mean it?" I said, "I sure do." So he let me go home and ...tracing down a false alarm...somebody thought they saw someone setting a fire...wasted 20 minutes, went back to my house, told my wife it didn't look good and to be ready to move. So I (word not clear) to my cottage at Kennebunk Pond, about 2 miles away, trying to make up my mind whether to spend a few minutes picking things out, and I decided I'd better get out of there fast. Went back by my sister's house who lived at the corner of the Kennebunk Pond Rd., so-called, and the Peach Orchard Rd. I said, "Eleanor, get your gang out of here fast." She had two children there, four others scattered around. She and her husband were there. I drove back to my house. Told my wife, "Grab some clothes, whatever you think you need, your valuables, and get in the car, and I'm going to send you to Alfred." So about 10 minutes after I'd thrown some tools and whatever I could think of in my own car that I was using, she came out, she said she was ready, she said all she could think of was an old sweater and her pinking shears. (Laughter) We've laughed about that so often. Of course she didn't want to go off without me, but I said, "Hon, I think it's the only thing to do." I said, "I want you to go to

Goodwin's Mills      Kennebunk Pond      Alfred

Roberts - 4

Alfred to my aunt's house. If they try to evacuate the village up there go to Wells Corner and stay there until you hear from me." She went up through (Rt. 111) dodging cows, horses, pigs...everything else, finally got to Alfred.

Int.: She went up 111.

A.R.: 111. The fire just about 5 minutes after she left crossed the road down between Rt. 35, <sup>&</sup> my home...down by what we call the Jackson Schoolhouse corner, and that really worried me, but I figured, "Well, she'll get through." And probably 10-15 minutes after that my sister and her husband came down from their house at Kennebunk Pond, also my hired man with his son came walking along. They lived about halfway to Kennebunk Pond. And I said, "Claude ( or Clyde...check this further on), do you want to ~~stay~~" He said, "I wouldn't be happy going anywhere and leaving you here." So I thanked him very much and 3 or 4 other fellows showed up..."We're with you Mr. Roberts. We'll help you all we can. What <sup>scattered</sup> can we do?" So we gathered ourselves around. I went up to my little office at the corner opposite the store, went in there, threw some maps and deeds into an old safe, locked the door, ran out, and if I had only thought and taken the wooden steps away from that set of buildings...from the under pinning of the building, I think that office building would still be there. But I just didn't think. Beat it back down to the house, and all I could think of was, "My God, I've got a box of dynamite up on that top scaffold up in the barn." <sup>246</sup> So I spent another 10 minutes getting that down and over to the brook, burying it in the brook, and I never thought of the caps which were the most dangerous things.

alfred  
Kennebunk Pond

Roberts - 5

Int.: Where were they?

A.R.: They were right in the barn, along with a lot of rifle ammunition, a shotgun and all sporting goods stuff like that. Well, anyway, when I got back, we looked across the field toward the Northeast and it was really roaring, coming.

Int/: I'm not good on directions. Northeast...which way would that be?

A.R.: Northeast would be right about here (drawing diagram)

Int.: Okay, back toward 111 and 35.

A.R.: No, it was about quartering between. So it was really... We'd filled up what tubs we had with water, or pails...

Int.: What did you see when you looked back there? Flames? Or smoke?

A.R.: We couldn't see flames. We could see a red glow. A red glow...that was about all. And as it got closer there was so much smoke we couldn't even see that. But when it got... if you recall, right across from my house there's a big field, about 50-100 yds. in the woods before it got out to 111, the wind, instead of bringing it right straight there, we could see the wind swinging that around and it went just about 60 feet by the corner of my house, landed...and the whole business landed right on the store, the little building here, and the board yard.

Int.: Which had how many feet of lumber?

A.R.: Around 900,000 feet of stuck lumber.

Int.: When they say stuck lumber what do they mean? Lumber that's been cut into boards?

A.R.: Lumber that's been sawed into boards and piled for air drying.

Int.: Was there anyone at the yard at that point? The owner, was

Roberts - 6

he there?

A.R.: Oh no. He was busy at other places. He had a mill at Waterboro...

Int.: Did you say Gillies? I think they lost lumber at Scarborough, didn't they?

A.R.: I wouldn't be a bit surprised.

Int.: So the wind was what...it just took it.

A.R.: The wind really brought that in the air. When that came over in the field it was a...all I could think of was a big, rolling wave, the most weird roaring sound I ever heard in my life, a mixture of gas, ashes, flames and everything else, just rolling. And when it hit on the ground, we'll say about here, it looked as though there was a big wave just cascading, opening out, full of fire, right onto those board piles. Anything in front of that...they'd have been no help for it at all.

Int.: There really wasn't anything to do against that, was there?

A.R.: No, if we'd had 15 or 20 fire trucks wetting down for about a half an hour before, maybe we could have done something, but other than that, I should doubt it.

Int.: You hadn't had time to do anything about wetting down your house.

A.R.: I had...while the power...until the power went I had the garden hose and as I say filled up my tubs and pails that I had, and I had wet down a little bit, but of course it was so dry it didn't really do any good, but it just gave me the... Then of course the power went so without the power, as soon as the pressure tank in the basement went, there was no more water, so we had to just depend on the pails and buckets, basins.

*Waterboro  
Scarborough*

Roberts - 7

and a few of us had shovels, we had brooms...

Int.: Were there any firefighters with tank trucks, that sort of thing, that came into your area? (351)

A.R.: About 10 minutes before this rolling wave of fire came over here, one of our tank trucks...it was a big water tank on a lumber truck, that's what it was, came up here and stopped right there, slowly turned around and slowly went down... I was across here, trying to catch him, you know. It was so smokey he couldn't see me, he couldn't hear me.

Int.: So he turned around and went back.

A.R.: Yeah, he turned around and went back down and...I don't know just where he went. I never asked him.

Int.: This fire that came across here and destroyed the lumber yard...is this the same piece of fire that went on and destroyed the forest, the Massabesic Forest.

A.R.: That's the same one, right.

Int.: It did that after it was here?

A.R.: It hit Massabesic in the upper end of Lyman first before it got down our way, but then as it went through this way, the wind was out of the Northeast, it was rolling this way, then after it got over into the Southwestern part of the town, why, I think it hit some of their lots over there.

Int.: They did lose part of the forest down in that area.

A.R.: Over in what we call the Drown neighborhood.

Int.: Well, how long did it take this lumberyard to go?

A.R.: Less than an hour.

Int.: And you just stood there and watched that?

A.R.: Couldn't do a thing.

Int.: You must have been just awestruck.

A.R.: Well there was so much going on. The next set of buildings

*Lyman*

Roberts - 8

down below. My brother-in-law was down there with 3 men and after this billowing mass had gone over us here, we got all the little spot fires out around the field beaten down, he sent one of the boys running up to me, said...it was his oldest boy, I guess, he said, "Uncle Art, back of the barn next door has caught." The fire had come across the field in a hedgerow, got up on the back side of the barn and it was so smokey they didn't see it till it had caught. But just before they noticed that it had caught on the back of the barn ~~it~~ a manure pile in the barn yard burst into flame..it was just spontaneous combustion. I never heard of one doing it until that happened. They managed to get two horses and a cow out of the barn. There was a little calf in there we didn't know about. The cow walked back and forth within 40 feet of that barn for at least 3/4 of an hour while that barn was burning. We didn't know what it was.

Int.: Cause she knew her calf was in there. Oh dear. The people who owned that place were gone? What was the name? Merrill.

A.R.: They were gone. Merrill, yes.

Int.: Isn't that sad.

A.R.: Yes. Well, some sad things happened. There were some comical things too.

Int.: Oh, tell me some stories. (Laughter)

A.R.: Well, about my wife and the pinking shears. That was a good one.

Int.: Someone told me the other day about the man in the Wildes Town area of Kennebunkport (story of man who took away goats and left family...see Martin Wildes) *Kennebunkport*

A.R.: That (the recorder) isn't running I hope. I wouldn't want to tell this one.

Int.: All right, you tell me after.

A.R.: I told you earlier that my hired man, my Dad's old foreman who'd worked for me for years...

Int.: What was his name?

A.R.: Claude Emmons. He and his boy came walking down right after my sister and brother-in-law had left their house, and Mr. Emmons lost his barn, his house, the only thing he could find to save all in one piece was a pair of pants. And his son (446) who had his house about 100 yards down in the woods, in an old grown up pasture, with a winter supply of slabs, wood, mostly pine slabs for kindling wood, piled within ten or 12 feet of the house, all around, the house stayed there, all of the wood burned. Queerest thing you ever saw.

Int.: Now where was that?

A.R.: That was on the Kennebunk Pond road.

Int.: Had this all happened before they came to you?

A.R.: No, they could see that it was coming so fast that they didn't want to be trapped in there so they came out.

Int.: Isn't it amazing that more people weren't trapped.

A.R.: I heard...there was one old gentleman went out with a horse and buggy, lost his life up in Newfield somewhere? It's the only one I know of...

Int.: You don't know anything about an old couple that were at a sawmill somewhere in the Waterboro area that got burned do you. (A.R. said no. Int. tells how read this in newspaper but couldn't pin it down)

A.R.: There were some close calls though, a lot of close calls.

People going down these roads, you know, and the fire on both sides of em. I know a very good friend of mine at Day's Mills on Rt. 35, about a mile and a half below my

*Kennebunk Pond  
Newfield*

*Waterboro  
Day's Mills*

Roberts - 10

house headed out...he and his brother...with 2 trucks  
 (words missing here, sounds like "tractors on the drivin")  
 and the fire went right over em. I don't know whether you  
 know that the Kennebunk River goes across there at Day's  
 Mills, Rt. 35, and there's a little bit of a gut beyond...  
 went right over the truck on the way up there. And that  
 was another fire. That fire came up the river and the only  
 reason...I couldn't understand why, for days afterwards. Harold  
 had told me the fire that burnt him came up river, and we  
 finally pinned it down and that fire had been set as a back-  
 fire.

Int.: Down in the West Kennebunk area?

A.R.: Nope. No. (Backfires that got away <sup>are</sup> were spoken of only  
 in a very hush-hush way.)

Int.: This backfire business... In some areas they used it and  
 it was effective, but evidently it was technically against  
 state law at the time.

A.R.: Right.

Int.: I don't know if it still is...I haven't looked into that  
 yet. And in some instances people knew this and they went  
 ahead and did it anyway and they were lucky and it worked.

A.R.: I was among the people...the volunteer firemen over at what  
 we call Cluff's Corner...Rt. 5 and 35 in Dayton?

Int.: Oh, yes, that's where the town hall was, right?

A.R.: Right. And there were about 120-30 people milling around  
 over there, fire coming toward us and nobody to take charge.  
 One of the National Guard men came to me and said, "Mr. Roberts,

*Kennebunk River  
 Day's Mills  
 Dayton*

Roberts - 11

will you handle these men and set a backfire?" He said, "Can you set a backfire?" I said, "I can but I have no right. I'm outside of my territory." He said, "If I will back you up, assume the responsibility, will you set a line of men out here and set a backfire?" I said, "If you say so." We set a backfire. But it didn't do any good. The big fire just overrode it.

Int.: Had anybody ever seen a forest fire like that?

A.R.: Not as large a front.

Int.: Now, by front you mean the...

A.R.: Width. That seemed to go with different fingers. When one finger would go off here another finger would go off here and as the wind might die down a little bit this part here would catch up and spread it. All the time that was being blown ahead, embers were being blown ahead of that fire, anywhere from 250-300 yards to half a mile. And little spot fires were seen to be picking up ahead of that. (538)

Int.: Course everything was just tinder dry, is that right?

A.R.: Tinder dry. Very little rain for a month.

Int.: Do you by any chance remember the spring of that year when supposedly there was so much rain?

A.R.: I don't recall. A lot of people have said<sup>2</sup> "what would happen if we had another one." I've said, "I don't think it could happen." "Why not?" I said, "In West Newfield...this is hearsay, but it was from a fire warden who told me, there were two small fires smouldered for 4 or 5 days way out in the swamp until...nobody would bother with them and "twouldn't do any harm" so they thought. Then the wind came up. That started up there and they came together into one and came down through the Waterboros.

*Newfield*

Int.: So you're saying people have a better understanding now.

A.R.: Much better understanding. They have a better understanding of ways to fight the fire, they have the equipment to fight the fire, and best of all they have fast communications.

Int.: That was a terrible handicap. Wasn't that terrible?

A.R.: It was. I know from my own case, reporting back in and out, I don't know how many miles I put on my car in that 3 or 4 days. I would imagine in the vicinity of better than 450 a day.

Int.: A day?

A.R.: Oh easily.

Int.: How long was it after this yard had burned and your own house was saved and so forth that you were able to contact your wife again, and find out about them?

A.R.: I sent my older sister who was there with me...she lost everything in her house, and she had 3 of her children with her, I believe. (The Kennebunk Pond sister.) She had one or two children in the immediate neighborhood and the rest of em were stretched out from Kennebunk to Old Orchard. I said, "Eleanor, I can't go over to Wells Corner..." but I told her where Lorraine Elaine would be, my wife..."you're going to Kennebunk to pick up the rest of your family. Will you go over to Wells Corner and tell her everything's fine here. I don't know what she will decide to do from then on." She said, "let me handle that." She took em back to Kennebunk with her and they stayed with some friends of ours at Kennebunk over night. Next morning they went to Old Orchard and they came back up...I understand they got home the middle of the afternoon the next day. Around 6:30 or 7 we were hoping the power company would get the lines hooked up so we could

Kennebunk  
Pond

Kennebunk  
Old Orchard  
Wells

have some light..I went back and she was there (at home)  
 She had to get a pass at the police station. By that time  
 the National Gd. was stationed around. She had to get a  
 pass to come back up home.

Int.: At that time all the vigilante groups were forming, I guess.  
 People were hearing a great deal about arson.

A.R.: Yeah, and that's where I say better communications today  
 would save a lot of that trouble. They had me pinned in a  
 ditch over at Dayton right near Cluff's Corner, Rt. 5 and 35,  
 for about half an hour on the following Saturday. Friday  
 night I'd been to Clark's Mills to offer my services to the  
 Clark people over there and I'd been with them till about  
 12:30 at night and I started home. On the way home about  
 right where the Central Maine Power sand pit was this side  
 of Cluff's Corner toward Goodwin's Mills, I saw a flicker  
 of flame down over the bank. So I pulled into a little side  
 road there and I heard a pumper going went down and found  
Fred Ellwell and Harry Mullet operating the pumper spraying  
 water, so I helped them about 10 or 15 minutes. But I  
 left my car out by Rt. 35 with the dimmers on. Central  
 Maine Power Co. trucks hauling sand to Skelton Station down  
 on the Saco River, which was under construction at the time  
 reported in that they'd seen a car there. They'd seen a  
 flickering, but it was smokey and they didn't see the fire  
 truck. Well, the next day, I left G. Mills around noontime  
 heading for Clark's Mills and I got to Cluff's Corner and I  
 got stopped. And the National Gd. wanted to know how, why,  
 and what. Fortunately a very good friend, Hugh Googins of

Dayton  
 Clark's Mills  
 Goodwin's Mills  
 Saco River

Roberts - 14

Kennebunk and a couple of other fellas ranged up beside me and the boys from Westbrook...Legionnaires...who thought they were going to rough me up a little bit didn't. So the N. Gd. officer rode with me over to C. Mills to the lumber office over there and I said, "Sir, if it's all right with you I'll stay here until I'm cleared." So within an hour they cleared me. I said, "How about the state police?" He said, "I don't know." I said, "You FIND out."

Int.: You must have been angry.

A.R.: Angry! I was burned. I was so pooped the tears came right down over my face. I was burned over that.

Int.: I don't doubt it. But that, as you say, was a lot of it communications. This explains a lot of things I'm reading in the newspapers about them on the lookout for license plates and questioning people and that sort of thing. All these people were over-reacting. Do me this also points up the fact to me that they did not understand conditions and what had happened. They still don't.

A.R.: They still don't. They still can't understand how anything of that magnitude could take place, I suppose. But there was a lot of awfully good things that people did for each other too. I can repeat quite a few of em. I know my sister made her headquarters there at the house. I said, "Upu might just As well stay here and that became one of the depots for probably half a ton of clothing that came in <sup>666</sup>My friend, Len Shaw, sent a 40-50 lb. pack of Swift's cold cuts, frankforts, butter...anything you could think of (explained he arranged this through his company, not on tape as running out)  
(and side one of tape)

Int.: Of course, all around you were families who were burned out.

*Kennebunk Westbrook*

Roberts - 15

There really isn't anything to ask about that.

Int.: Oh...what can anybody ask about that./ I was watching on TV tonight the people in California right now who just lost their homes. It was just a devastating, devastating thing.

A.R.: I wouldn't want to live in that area. That happens every year practically.

Int.: I know. I don't understand why they stay there.

A. R.: And this one (current Calif. fire) was started by a kite string tightening up around a high tension wire?

Int.: The kite caught on fire and dropped into the dry brush and.. So Mr. Shaw sent food.

A.R.: He did. There was a lot of food came in...course the Salvation Army brought in a lot of food. The Red Cross. You should have seen the back seat of my car...sandwiches enough for a platoon of soldiers in there. I had a big milk can of milk, milk can of water, another one half full of hot coffee. That was going wherever I went. They would all gather around, you know.

Int.: You really touched on a lot of the areas didn't you. You were at Day's Mills, and Clark's Mills, and Dayton...

A.R.: Right. While the hot spot was in Lyman I was pinned right in Lyman. When we cooled down then I could get out...help whatever I could do.

Int.: What about livestock? Did they come into your area/and with trucks and move livestock?

A.R.: Not in my immediate area. There was only 1 dairy farm in <sup>California</sup> <sup>Clark's Mills</sup> <sup>Day's Mills</sup> <sup>Dayton</sup> <sup>Lyman</sup> my immediate area. That was Mr. Taylor's over there on Rt.111 going toward Rt. 35 from my home and his son Jim was in <sup>Kennebunk</sup> there all alone and he saved everything around there but that was the closest in our immediate area where there were any cattle. Across the way down the road from my house toward Kennebunk, why Clarence Day's big Marm...at the time...fire

Roberts - 16

didn't get down in there at all. That was all open field land, you see. But Mr. Meserve over at Dayton, he lost a few head of cows.

Int.: What about deer and other wild animals. Did you see any of those?

A.R.: I saw a few porcupine, a lot of rabbits, I don't think I saw any deer at all.

Int.: When you say you saw p. and r. /..you mean burned or dead?

A.R.: No. Running. Have you ever seen a porcupine run? Very fat and they can only move so fast. One of the comical things I saw was on the Sunday morning after the fire had gone through Cluff's Corner at Dayton. <sup>An</sup> The arm of that fire was burning back against the wind toward the Wadleigh Pond area. I'd had about an hour and a half sleep at the fire station which was the old garage over there. Mr. Burbank shook me. He said, "Arthur, it's time to go! Head toward Wadleigh's Dam and I want to know how far that fire's come down." So I took off. He thought about it afterwards and he and my cousin Coyle Smith from G. Mills there in Dayton came up after me, to see that I didn't get into trouble I guess. We were standing there talking about half a mile below Wadleigh Dam and we heard a bulldozer coming down toward us. And it kept slowing down, speeding up, slowing down, speeding up. I said, "What is going on." So I walked up about 100 yards and looked around and here's a big D-7 Caterpillar coming down the road, the driver standing up looking over his blade, trying to catch a porcupine waddling down the road. Everytime he'd drop the blade it'd slow him down just enough so that the porcupine could keep ahead of him. He finally got out

*Dayton  
Wadleigh  
Pond  
Gardner's Mills*

Roberts - 17

of the wet place where it was wet on both sides of the road there in the swamp...where it was dry and got off the road.

(Laughter) That was one of the funny things.

Int.: So Sunday that was. You were out and fighting that long afterwards.

A.R.: Oh sure. We'd been going since Monday afternoon..or Tuesday I believe previous to that on spot fires...one down in Kennebunk just over the Lyman line. Another up there near the Aaron Andrews farm near Roberts Pond. We'd been tending those for 2 days and a half before. Biddeford had a small one over near the Turnpike...this was before the big one got started over there. (760)

Int.: Well how long did this go on.

A.R.: Eh we'd been chasing small fires for 2 days and a half before the big one came through. Then after the big one went through we were mopping up...some real hot spots would erupt for a least two days and a half afterwards, because on...it was on Sat. afternoon that Dayton had their close call over there at Cluff's Corner at Rt. 5 and 35.

Int.: That was the day Mr. Meserve's place went.

Well in some of the towns they had patrols out along the back roads into November. Did you do that sort of thing?

A.R.: Everybody took it upon themselves in our town. I don't recall that we had regular patrols. Maybe. My mind's a little hazy on that. But I do know this...that I stopped one car, a Mass. car, above Kennebunk Pond one evening on my way home. Maybe one of these patrols, I don't know. I saw them snap a cigarette out of their car window and I took off, pulled in ahead of them, stopped them, I said, "Lady, I don't know whether you realize it but we had quite

*Kennebunk  
Lyman  
Roberts Pond  
Biddeford  
Dayton  
Kennebunk Pond*

a fire here a few weeks ago. If you have any more cigarettes please use your ash tray, because if I catch you on another one I'll have to report you to the sheriff." So then I went back and put out the cigarette. I found it. It fortunately stayed on the tarvia. It didn't go into the grass. I have to say this: that a fire under certain circumstances can be caused by a burning cigarette, but I myself have never seen one. I've seen a lot of smouldering grass from a cigarette, but I've never seen it catch fire. Maybe I got there too soon, or something.

Int.: Well, I don't know. That kind of bothers me, but the Newfield fire supposedly was from a cigarette.. Somehow or other I wonder how they know.

A.R.: I have seen a cigarette which was loaded with a match..match-head start a fire...as a demonstration. Poke a wooden match right in, light the cigarette. When that burns down it will burst into flame.

Int.: Did you loose your place at Kennebunk Pond?

A.R.: Yes.

Int.: What about blame? Did anyone blame the state for not having a better f. f. fighting organization? They didn't feel that way evidently.

A.R.: I don't think so. I never heard anybody cast any blame that way. But back in those days there were very few volunteer fire depts. which had had any training to speak of or any <sup>Newfield</sup> decent kind of equipment. When I say decent...our own fire <sup>Kennebunk Pond</sup> department had an old 1925-26 Reo truck and it might have held 150 - 75 gallons of water and hose. Axes and shovels, chemical extinguishers, maybe a couple of ladders and that's about all.

Int.: After this the companies must have felt they needed to do

something about that.

A.R.: Course our vol. f. dept. at G. Mills is made up of vol. from the town of Lyman and Dayton. Goodwin's Mills is a little village that sprawls into both towns.

Int.: Technically what town is it in?

A.R.: Most of it is in Lyman, but as you're going to Hollis Center from Kennebunk and you go through the little village, as you go around a curve and down over and cross over a bridge, the old mill pond...when you cross over the bridge, you're in Dayton. And you keep on 35 and go up and you're dodging into two corners of Lyman the next 200 yards. That's the way the road winds.

Int.: It must make it hard for them in terms of town meeting, fire col and the whole thing.

A.R.: Well, the towns support the fire dept. equally I believe. They have some wonderful equipment up here. It's really something. The govt. supplied surplus equip. which started us off. We had an old Chevrolet truck chassis donated to us. We made it into a tank truck with its own pump. We had another one that we made into a regular fire truck I believe. We received a trailer Chrysler pump...mounted on a little trailer as I recall. 500 gallons a minute. That was a beauty. We didn't use it very much. The big thing was a big Army 4 x 4, 4 x 6, <sup>all</sup> wheel drive dump truck towing a flatbed trailer with a D-7 bulldozer on it. Boy I'm telling you in the fires we had the next few years that came in awfully handy. And hundreds of feet of hose which would have cost the two towns a lot of money. It was ours just for a very simple token payment. (859)

Int.: Was this shortly after '47 or was this gradually?

A.R.: This was over a period of years until about 1953 or 4

Goodwin's Mills  
Dayton Lyman

Hollis  
Kennebunk

Roberts - 20

I believe.

Int.: Do you think that...how do I want to say that...do people carry a memory of '47..I guess is what I want to say.

Do you think it motivates them now to be volunteer firemen?

A.R.: I think possibly. They know now the value of a vol. f. dept. in Lyman

A very good friend of mine, his son's the chief up there.

And he...(the father) lost his own home in the fire and his father-in-law lost his home in the fire.

Int.: How did it change the town, because they lost a lot of homes.

A.R.: They lost an even 85% of the town area burned over. We were heavily timbered. And the next 3 years...more portable saw mills around there than you could shake a stick at.

Int.: Which must have hurt the economy over the long run.

A.R.: It did. Once that was gone...Bingo. It was slow going for quite a few years. The thing that helped the town of Lyman out a lot, I think, is the fact that it had at least 4 good sized ponds and about that time the interest in getting summer cottages on the pond came in and those ponds developed. And it's amazing the non-resident taxes...

Int.: Now what ponds are those?

A.R.: Kennebunk...Swan...Wadleigh...Bunganut...

Int.: So that't really what happened in Lyman then, was the summer home business.

A.R.: I think so. It took quite a while.

Int.: Did many of the families who were burned out leave altogether?

A.R.: Very few. Most of em rebuilt. The govt. furnished...through the Red Cross?...the govt. sent in a lot of these pre-fab...

(houses). I can recall 5 or 6 of them around.

Int.: Were these the metal ones?

A.R.: I believe so, yes. They weren't too awfully good for our

Lyman  
Kennebunk

Swan

Wadleigh  
Bunganut

Roberts - 21

climate, but they filled the purpose till they could get something going. (902)

Int.: (Tells about Newfield school. And Brownfield garages)

(Discussion of other possible names of people in Lyman I could talk to.)

End of interview

Newfield  
Brownfield  
Lyman