

Scott

🕒 Thu, 08/15 11:30AM · 50mins

Transcript

00:01

Okay, I'm meeting today on August 10th, 2024 with Scott Tower, and he's been kind enough to interview to get a handle on his connection with the history of Underhill.

00:20

So Scott, let's start right with the very beginning. Tell us about the early family.

00:27

And that's in 1823, John Tower came from, well, Hingham, Mass. From Hingham, Mass. He had been born, he was John Hancock Tower, and he was born in 1794 there in Hingham, wife Phoebe.

01:06

And in the schoolhouse, there is a poster board on Cornelius Poland Tower, and he was one of those that moved to Wisconsin. It had to be in the 1840s, 50s, actually, because that's when the whole family picked up and moved from Underhill to Wisconsin.

01:46

So how long was the family in Underhill? 30 years from the 1820 date.

01:55

Yeah, one of the sons moved out to Utica, Wisconsin in 1852, and soon after the father and the two of the boys moved out there. They plotted the land. They did a survey. In Wisconsin, and they ended up naming the town Towerville.

02:30

Oh, yeah. Is it still there, named Towerville? Yeah, my older brother went there, he said about 15 years ago. I was talking to him last night. And he, but the town was, it's nothing now, and it was nothing then.

02:52

Small town. Did he farm? Yes. Well, he had a gristmill. And I think that was the main income. And they had a gristmill here in town. But they built that soon after they got out to Wisconsin.

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what relation is he to you, your great great great great great great grandfather?

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He had, the whole family had come in to Hingham, Mass. in the late 1600s, and they had a family reunion there in Hingham, oh, about 10, 12 years ago. Did you go? No, I wish I had. My older brother did go.

03:51

My older brother is the autobiography historian of the family. I don't have to do anything with the family. He remembers it all, or he has it all. He's the national secretary.

04:14

What's his name? John. John, and does he live... Which is... He's... Yeah.

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John Tower. He now lives in Rutland. Oh, so he's in Vermont also. Yeah, we grew up in Brandon, and he moved south, John did, to South Carolina, and has then moved to Connecticut, and he's now back in Vermont.

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So those are your back to your roots. Yes, so then your great -great -grandfather had a gristmill in Towerville Wisconsin and

the family made roots there and the next generation was there and were there lots of children involved.

05:03

Yes. Yes. Yeah

05:05

The John Tower that left here had seven children, three or four of them died here in Underhill and they're buried in the North Underhill Cemetery and also the Underhill Flat Cemetery. Under the name Tower.

05:24

With the name Tower yeah yeah one of them yeah.

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So your roots go really way, way back in Underhill. So then what caused the family to eventually come back to Vermont? How did that happen? They didn't. They didn't. None of them did. They just stayed there.

05:45

come back until I came back. Oh tell me some more about that. Well I just now in 1980 I you know my wife and I and our son we moved here to Underhill and it was from where? We were out in Colchester. We both graduated from UVM.

06:07

So then, but you actually were born and grew up in Vermont. Yes. But not necessarily in Underhill. You came back here to live.

06:18

Yeah. Yeah, there was no tie ins to Underhill until the family, my wife and I moved back here. And it was through the Historical Society that I found out just how much ties I had to this area. Because it's not just the Tower family.

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It's also the Horners. They lived here.

06:46

How were the Horners related to the Towers?

06:48

Horners married to Tower, and that was in 1900. They were here, but the Tower family, when they were here in Underhill back in the 1820s and 1850, they had a starch mill down on behind the Underhill garage, yeah, down on the Alder Brook that comes through there along with the Roaring Brook.

07:31

What does a starch mill do?

07:32

So, they take potatoes and grind them up and make a...

07:40

And that was, but then there was also a grist mill.

07:44

Well, there was a gristmill, but I don't know I've never seen too much about the gristmill. Gristmill was definitely in Towerville.

07:54

But you think maybe they also had one before they left to go to Wisconsin and Underhill maybe the gristmill. Yeah

08:01

I'm not positive. I'm not sure about that. I've never seen any. But they also had the grocery store.

08:07

That was the one that we had we'll have pictures. Well, yeah, actually

08:11

That's the second one the first one burned and and why was it called the White Store?

08:16

That's what they called it just called that the white store yeah because it was white, no family I don't

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know when it became the white store but John Tower, John the original John Hancock Tower yeah and Henry Oaks built a store there on the green.

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On the Green in the Flats.

08:48

And that burned.

08:49

first one burned.

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and then they build the second one and that's what this one is.

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And how long was that there? Well, long, long, long.

08:58

time yeah until the probably what 40s or 50s 19 40s or 50s I'd have to read this

09:06

So, so where on the Green, where was it in the Flats?

09:16

On the green. Right on the green. Yeah, I think it's more where the Underhill Garage was.

09:22

Right and of course it was all dirt roads then and people were it was quite a quite a village of people there in the Flats many many people living and taking the train into Burlington eventually and all that yeah.

09:35

Now, Tower and Oaks owned where the United Church of Underhill is, and they sold that to the Second Congregational Society.

09:50

of Underhill and it's been that church ever since

09:53

Ever since

09:54

Yeah

09:55

They also owned all down Park Street, to the corner, and that's where the Underhill Cemetery is now because John Tower sold the land, or actually gave the land, to the Second Congregational Church.

10:21

That whole section of land that's the cemetery. Yes.

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you know when they knew they were leaving in 1853 they sold the land or they gave the land to the

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the church he might have was he probably was part of the church he probably was a member and wanted to leave something behind

10:45

they had when they were first here during the 1820s. His parents died in Lincoln, Maine. His mother died. This is John Hancock Tower. His mother died in Hingham. The others, most of them died in Hingham.

11:24

chart is something that Scott is looking at and he will place it in the file at the schoolhouse under the Tower section of the history of people who have been in the town. So when he's referring to different ones he's got a really amazingly detailed chart in front of him that gives the whole family.

11:52

It's amazing and your brother's done a lot of research on this you said.

11:57

but I like this chart this is me you did this part yeah he's interested in all he's interested in all the Towers yeah as I said he's national secretary of the Tower the family is family yeah so he's always been interested is our mother got got us interested in genealogy I cheated I I would go to the library and make up things just to satisfy her

12:34

Is that right? That's amazing. So that you and your brother, with your mother being so interested in genealogy, would talk about it a lot, and you wanted to sort of impress her.

12:49

Yeah, I was tired of it. Yeah.

12:55

I blew it off.

12:58

And this is your family living in what town at this point when you were growing up Colchester?

13:03

No, Brandon

13:07

We were here from 1950 to 1970. Okay. We lived in Brandon. And that's where you grew up. Yeah. Yes, I cheated.

13:21

That's all right. It's amazing how many families don't know all this about their ancestors at all. It's wonderful that you do. So basically the Tower family in the 19th century was around the flats mostly.

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And you're living now quite close to that.

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And we picked up, you know, the whole family picked up and moved out to Wisconsin Yeah, it's in the if you look at that poster board. I got there the Schoolhouse it's down in the lower Southwest corner.

13:59

Mm -hmm in Crawford County and As I said, my brother went About 15 years ago and looked went through Towerville. Mm -hmm. There's no Signs of us having ever been there, but it's a little small town. Yeah, so my brother took my mother to Hingham, England.

14:27

Mm -hmm Because that's where they came from

14:32

what part of England is Hingham in? I'm not sure. Yeah. No. Rural, some places, probably one of the counties. Yeah.

14:43

No, I could look that up, but no, they toured all through England for a month. She was really into genealogy, so she didn't mind being dragged all over England.

15:03

She was probably really pleased to have all this happening in terms of genealogy. Yeah.

15:09

And she wrote notes and notes about English history and about the family just for herself. And she, I have most of that information now, my brother sort of lost interest in our family.

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So what you have is sort of like a family diary type of there seemed to be a lot of and it was a habit of people years ago to keep a kind of an ongoing history within their family. You know, just written down about what was going on and then when they pass and there would be that record of.

15:54

Yeah. And so you have some of that. Yes. Yeah. That's wonderful. It really is more than most people have.

16:03

And I haven't really referred back to any of that. See, I'm not as interested in the Tower and the things. That was my brother's job. Yeah, yeah. So, but no, I know that she always talked about going to England with him and his family.

16:28

So she'll always, she's passed away. She'll always remember that.

16:37

Yeah, that was important. Add anything, Scott, you can think of about that family before we get on to. Well, is the town.

16:49

history when it comes to John Tower mm -hmm was a the town clerk from 1824 to 1834 and he was also the town treasurer

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So he became those things fairly soon after he arrived. Oh, just boom.

17:35

Within a year.

17:37

Yeah, but there wasn't the population was only about five six hundred then

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Everybody had something to do. That's right.

17:45

I noticed that his business partner, Henry Oaks, took over the town treasurer when he left—when John Tower resigned. He resigned that position in 1829. Now ten years later, his son has been born. So from 47 to 53, John Junior, John Hancock Junior, took over the—being the town treasure.

18:26

He was—and he was also—

18:29

of the town clerk. He must have been pretty young at that point. Yeah. Well, see now. Just grown up enough to take on the jobs. 42.

18:40

he was 23 at that point. But he had the name. Everybody in town knew who John Tower was. One of the poster boards there at the schoolhouse refers to John Tower as the town father. So now whether they met junior or senior I'm not sure.

19:14

There was no reference on that on the sheets or on the historical part whether which one it was. But junior took over but there in you know John junior dies there in Retreat, Wisconsin. Retreat, Wisconsin.

19:44

Yeah and quite a few of them only one took off to Iowa. The rest all had died here in Underhill or were there in that little corner of Wisconsin.

20:04

So, the poster board has a lot of this information that Scott's referring to, so I would recommend for anybody to, in addition to listening to this interview, to check that out at the school house because there's a lot on that.

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In the windows, upstairs. There's what, 12 poster boards on soldiers from Underhill. And there was, what, 175 that came out of Underhill. But I took only those which I had good photos of.

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In Cornelius, Poland Tower, I had lots of photos for.

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So that's where a viewer could read and see more and when you talk about soldiers you're talking Civil War. Yes. Yeah entirely Civil War.

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Two, this Cornelius Poland was one but in the next generation up John John Joseph Poland Tower fought for the Wisconsin 17th in the Civil War

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So members of the family who were no longer in Vermont also were involved in the Civil War? Both Vermont and Wisconsin. Yes. How did you get interested in the Civil War?

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I was in Charleston, South Carolina on a vacation, went to Fort Sumter, and I had the book. When I got back, I started reading the book, Vermont in the Civil War, one of Coffin's books. And I had read the blurb in the town history, Brandon's town history, and it lasted for about five minutes.

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There was hardly anything. In fact, I have never traced the soldier who they had letters from. I've never traced him. I've never found him any reference to him. Did you have a name?

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You don't remember now but you but it intrigued you because there there all was but no follow -up that's right yeah yeah

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was, yeah, there was no follow -up, and it was only, you know, three or four paragraphs about the Civil War. They had a great picture. They were called the Allen Grays, the local militia. Just the Brandon area.

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Yeah, and that tended to be the way the Civil War was recruited by town. But, so I decided I wanted to know more about the soldiers of Underhill, or of Brandon. So I started doing Brandon, the same way I ended up doing Underhill.

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I tracked down all the soldiers. I did the genealogy on every one of them

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What source did you originally use? I mean, how did you do that?

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It's called Vermont in the Civil War uh -huh, and if you go they'll list every soldier that was either born died It was credited to the town

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That's a document or a book that's that's in Montpelier. That's right. Right? Yeah, so you use that. Yeah

24:15

And someone, there's a gentleman, Richard LeDouc of Swanton, it's just, he's a font for information. He knows it all. He has done so much. Along the way. Yeah. There's a person here in Underhill, Barb Destromp.

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I know the name. She likes taking photos. So she's done the cemetery, and if she can find a photo of the soldier, she posts that.

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So, she's concentrating on the Civil War. Well, if she does...

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other wars I don't know yeah or but she definitely does the Civil War and between I started off with what was on the internet with this so Vermont in the Civil War was it - "Lest We Forget" is the full name so I've done Brandon and when you do when you do one town you also do the neighboring towns mmm you know Leicester, Salisbury, Pittsford, they were part of the whole

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The units were from there

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And it's the same thing when I came up here to do I started doing Underhill.

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So Underhill was also Jericho, Cambridge, Jeffersonville.

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Westford, and that's why it went from—actually, I think it was 125 true Underhillions that fought in the war, and I have traced 275 that had ties to this town because between having moved out, they were born here, they moved away like the Tower family, they ended up being credited to Underhill.

26:25

Right. Because that was their original home. When they were fighting, they were listed as Underhill soldiers. It must be very interesting, but also very sad, to see how many were lost in the Civil War.

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I mean, out of 275 people, some young men, what would the percentage be?

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it was probably a dozen that died during the war during the war yeah yeah and same thing the numbers here in Underhill the numbers were about the same

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So young men would return home when it was over, yeah

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or someone never came back to the town that they were started from and they came back they they left and all those books I have there at the schoolhouse they tell by census reports where those people were

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where they moved. So that's a good way to do your research. You can check the names through those books, yeah. That's a smaller percentage than I would have thought from what little I know about

27:53

Well, you know, those are the ones that were killed in action, but then you got all those that died of disease, I mean a lot of them were.

28:03

wounded and came home and died.

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A lot of them were in the 7th Regiment, which went to Louisiana and the Vicksburg area and they all caught malaria. Those who died in the South, good chance they didn't die of bullets.

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So can you pretty well pinpoint if you if you're looking say for a certain soldier you know which battles that person was in. That's part of the research.

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with it if you know what day they died and that was pretty accurate you can go back to what that regiment was or where they were on that day and so it's

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In some ways, our retention of history of the Civil War is pretty good, we know quite a bit. In other ways, there are gaps, there must be gaps that you run into of just no idea then what happened. That's right.

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And also, photography was coming in during...

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Yeah, it was Matthew Grady, you know, documented the Civil War so well, and he was the main photographer, it seems.

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did he identify everything he took also so there was no just a picture with nothing on it yeah which oh there's

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sure hundreds of those too that you didn't identify but no he did document it very well. So there's a we have it at the schoolhouse. Wickman, Don Wickman out of Rutland has written a book on Houghton out of Brattleboro that went south also and you know he just took lots of photos no it's very documented you could the information is out there you can find

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Are you finding that other people are responding to Civil War history if you talk about it or yes? Yeah a lot of certain

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people. You've got a certain niche that they're really interested in the war and that's even to this point you know I have a couple different publications I get and there's nothing about Vermont or hardly anything but they document the battles and who why did this person you know or why did this battle happen

31:01

and the generals and what commands they gave and who did what when.

31:05

So during the, I'm going to say 15 years ago, I would, when I went on vacation, I would go to Virginia, I would go to Pennsylvania, I would go to the battlefield.

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That's what I was gonna ask you. You've been to all of them. Oh, yeah. Yeah

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you know, between Gettysburg and Antietam. Some of them, the first year it was fine with my wife and an actor, her mother went with us. She was interested in enough to go the first year. You'd go by car, you'd drive.

31:43

Yes. Yeah. And you would tour the battlefields by car. Second year, well, they went with me, I would march, I would march. I would go out on the battles.

31:59

and covering the terra-

32:00

Yeah, and yeah, I mean, I'm at the Battle of Bull Run and I come across Zebulon Tower. And what's Zebulon doing? Out in the middle of this battlefield, well, he got injured and came back to be the superintendent of West Point because he was injured.

32:27

Mm -hmm. So is he one of your ancestors? Yes. Yes. Yeah

32:33

You figure all these people, you know, they came from, you know, Massachusetts and our part just sort of came north. So I got, I think, a list here of twelve Towers that fought in the Civil War out of Vermont for some—

33:00

Not all, the Underhill area, some Brandon, some different parts of Vermont.

33:05

state, but I can make tie -ins some way. It's even like my brother living in Rutland. If you remember, Senator John Tower was out of Texas.

33:22

Oh, I remember that name, yes.

33:24

Well, he was nominated by Reagan to be Secretary of Defense and got turned down because he was a womanizer. Oh, dear. He had a bad reputation. There you go. It was funny. That's too bad for him. My brother was in LaGuardia, or JFK one, and he was in the bathroom and in walks Mitt Romney.

34:01

And Mitt introduces himself, and my brother is John Tower also, and he says, oh, you could have been my running mate. And my brother said, well, if you remember the reputation of John Tower. That would have been the end of that campaign.

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Yeah, they ended it right there.

34:29

But that's a good story. So it's ongoing though, isn't it? I mean it doesn't stop, it doesn't end, it isn't as if you have all the information that you could ever have, you keep finding more. Every time you look in a book or in some document.

34:54

I'm starting, I'm coming to a point where I'm drying up when it comes to the Civil War in our tie -ins with Underhill. I'm bringing Jericho into it a little bit more because there's so many different.

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They're all tied together, those two towns, yeah. So I'm having to come up with other projects tied into this. And I've been doing the Irish here in Underhill. Irish settlement. Yeah, that whole road.

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So I'm away from the Civil War, but from 1830 through 1880, there was such an influx of Irish into this area. And I'm documenting them. I'm not doing their genealogy. All I'll do is cemetery records and which ones were born in Ireland or by county.

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And that's interesting too. When I first started, I had a county map of Ireland, and maybe half the counties were accounted for. Now it's 80% of all the counties in Ireland. Sent people.

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into Underhill. The Stonehouse down Pleasant Valley Road was a man named John Smith from Ireland who came. He built the house.

36:43
And, uh...

36:44
So he was on Pleasant Valley and not—there probably wasn't any other house around at that point. Probably not.

36:51
So, when you look at the town, I mean Doon Road, all the Doons came from Ireland. Let me think of some of the others, I just have to think about this for a second.

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Stone family, Bobby Stone's family. They weren't Irish, okay. They were probably English. They're probably it, yeah. That's a really good project. That's so interesting.

37:22
Well, and I just finished my poster board for the Irish descendants in here in Underhill. I'll be bringing that over on Wednesday for our meeting so people can look at it for the first time.

37:50
So that's what I'm working on now is, and I have, I just finished the 1880 census and there was a lot of tie -ins from the 1880 census to all the Irish that were coming into town. Same thing, you can do it with the cemeteries between Irish Settlement Road.

38:17
That's where most of them came from. That's where I found most of.

38:23
the Irish Settlement Road Cemetery. There's also Duran Cemetery.

38:28
But there wasn't much in the Duran, there wasn't much when it came to St. Thomas, which I was a bit surprised, I thought there would be. I've got to go back through now and document which cemetery they're all in, that won't take that long.

38:50
Well, St. Thomas is in charge of the Range Road Cemetery too, three from St. Thomas.

38:58
interesting. And then the Sand Hill Cemetery was older and there wasn't quite so many Irish. See they didn't start coming in until 1830 and there was a good reference from the St. Thomas Church book and it told what year all these Catholic families came.

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I'm ignorant of what the date of the building of St. Thomas was.

39:36
in the last time. Oh, okay. So that was

39:39
would still be, and that's during the famine in Ireland. Yes.

39:43
Yeah, they came over during the famine, but they kept on coming. But between 1840s, 50s, 60s, there was a real rush for

the Irish.

39:59

and didn't have employment and really needed to be in a place.

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occupations of these Irish for farmers. Was it dairy or sheep? I think it was dairy. Yeah. Yeah. They don't make any reference between the two.

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I know there were sheep farmers around, but it seems like Underhill has always been more a dairy farming town.

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And I always had thought that Underhill was started on the lumber industry, and very little that were in the lumber industry. It might have been the English that were doing all the...

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were bare. There weren't very many trees at that time.

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I have a great photo from Nate Sullivan of my house with the hill behind it. Not a tree. It's a great photo.

40:57

Where you live now was a Tower house.

41:01

It was my house from 1980, but prior to that, I have a record of who lived in that house.

41:12

house. You didn't own the land. No. You bought the land and built and put the house there.

41:18

No, actually the house was built in 1850 and I have a list of a dozen people who owned that house, Burroughs, there's a whole list.

41:33

From 1850 all the way up to when you got it. When I bought it. Did you buy it partly because of the history? No. No, it just happened. It was just practical.

41:44

when I joined the historical societies when I found out that I'd been here before. Oh no kidding!

41:52

yeah so you you can you personally returned to that piece of land not really knowing that it was that's right your ancestors oh that's a good that's amazing that is something something said call to you and said live here yeah that's right

42:08

When I tracked to my grandfather, Roy Horner, he lived from 1900 to 1980, and he lived up on Range Road, his ancestry. And I have his, let's see, here's the list of the soldiers I've got. Here's Roy.

42:48

Those are the twelve, see, they're all over the state of Vermont, yep. But this Roy was born here in Underhill in 1890 and died in 1964, and he was my mother's father.

43:05

Mm -hmm. Um, so that's where the name Horner came from was yes. Yeah

43:10

And Roy Horner, my mother married Ralph Tower, who was out of Burlington. So not the Tower, there was no relations closely to the Towers at all, moved to Wisconsin or anything. But Roy Horner, his parents were Harvey Horner and Laura

Smith.

43:45

Well, Laura Smith was Philomone Smith, who was up on the Range Road, and he owned the poor farm. Which was on Range Road. That's right. And it's up in the Range. So now closed off. That's right. And it's also, it burned back in 1930, the poor farm.

44:11

So I haven't been able to track that down any further than I have.

44:17

at this point. Yeah, the history of poor farms is interesting. Yeah. Each time.

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have a very good poor farm history.

44:27

Ah, um, this specific one or just for farm general? No, this one specifically.

44:35

everything from who the doctor was at that time, who the overseer of the poor farm, until 1920. They actually, this Philamon Smith bought that piece of property and I have the layout of the house, but the house isn't there anymore.

45:06

That also brings across Genevieve Smith, who is Genevieve Morgan, Roosterholz, Als French Fries, and that's this tie -in here. Her father was a Willie Smith, but his father was this Philamon Smith.

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One of the brothers of my grandfather, Victor, married one of the Smith girls.

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Lots of Smiths from lots of different families, so yeah.

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A lot of them are buried in the Underhill Flats Cemetery, Philamon and who else, his wife Jenny Stroud and he can go back even further, Smith and the Joy family. We had a lot of holdings up in the range area and they dedicated or they gave the land for the parsonage at the Jericho Congregational Church, you know, the, no, this is, I might have this wrong, the Pentecostal Church there in, there's a building to the left of that that's called Joy Hall.

46:48

Oh yes. And that Joy Hall is not because of joy, it's because the Joy family gave it.

46:56

It was named for them. My children went to school in that building, okay. I used it. Yeah, so yeah

47:03

others you can find a lot of tie -ins like this

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I'd like to just add to this interview that anybody listening to this would, if you want to follow up on anything, a lot of this information is at the schoolhouse, either on the storyboard or in the file, the interview file, and Scott Tower's whole story here is really important to the town of Underhill, so this is just sort of a suggestion that there's even more to look at, and if there's anything else you want to add,

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we're coming kind of to the end here.

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There's not too much more that is my tie -in, and I moved in here in 1980, and I haven't done anything earth -startling, you know, and it's just— Well, I think this is—

48:17

All this work you've done is pretty earth -startling. Yeah.

48:21

I must be bored stiff, you know, to do all this. It is fascinating.

48:29

It must just sort of at times peak your mind, like you're just thinking about something else and suddenly it all comes in, oh maybe that's where that ties in. Yeah. You're a true historian.

48:40

And to think that I went from, you know, the Tower family being here in the 1850s to 1900 with Roy Horner and how it ties into Genevieve Morgan, and she's our benefactor. She gave \$20 ,000 to the Historical Society, thanks to Randy Clark.

49:05

He knew her well, too.

49:08

she and she's since passed yes yeah she has passed

49:12

But she, you know, she liked history. She grew up in the District 5 schoolhouse. She went there. She had quite a walk from up on Range Road down to the schoolhouse.

49:30

Thank you, Scott, very much. We're gonna end here and I really appreciate it. I think this has been wonderful fun. Very interesting.