

Burton Rawson Transcript 1

Mon, May 12, 2025 6:22PM • 39:16

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

Burton Rawson, Jericho farm, medical school, Solon Rawson, dairy farming, milking cows, schoolhouse, family history, Vermont Tech, Raytheon, Mexican workers, government restrictions, land use plan, farming machinery, muscular dystrophy.

SPEAKERS

Speaker 2, Speaker 3, Speaker 1

00:01

This is

00:06

Tuesday, May 6, 2025

00:11

John Connell and Jean Archibald are

00:16

in the kitchen of Burton Rawson, who has agreed to talk to us for a little while. And we thank you, Burton, so much for doing that. And John's going to start off with some questions.

00:32

Tell us when the first Rawsons were here,

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one of the first Rawsons were in Jericho, you know, down on the farm, right at the corner of the road, no wait, where it meets route 15. Oh, that was the Rawson house,

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originally, and then

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one of that

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would have been my great grandfather,

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and he and his brother owned that farm, and his brother went to medical school

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and

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was that Burnett Rawson? No,

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this was, uh, who became a doctor. This was another Rawson that became a doctor, okay, older

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than much before, much before, okay,

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well, I don't know what happened, but

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he had to, won't borrow money on the farm to go to medical school. And

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I'm not sure exactly what happened. But anyways, the brother went to medical school, kept the farm, I believe, or sold it or something. But I don't know exactly what happened. That's okay. And so my my grandfather moved up here and started cutting trees. He cleared this land on this farm in Underhill, and all this picture the old barn up there that he built before this barn was built. They started in 1910; they got the lumber out. They built it in 1911 they got all the wood off this land right here, Homer, Austin, which was my grandfather's brother, had a sawmill set up down here near the corner runs down through and he sought out the lumber for

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this barn. What

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was your grandfather's first name?

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So Solon? Yeah, S-O-L-O-N

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yeah. There's a lot of Solons. My grandfather's name was Solon, and I think his father's name was Solon too. And

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were you born on this farm?

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I was born on another farm, which my dad bought in 1944 I believe I was born in 1946 up on the other farm. We bought this farm from Kent when he had kidney problems.

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We bought this farm 1982 before Kent died, and he was living over at the sanward (?) place when we started milking. Here.

04:00

Did you work after work on the farm as a kid?

04:02

Oh yeah, oh yeah, yeah, start out early, get up early, go milk a cow or help out in the barn. Do

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you have other brothers and sisters to help?

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I had

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one brother that was two years older than me, so one. And then I had a younger brother that was about

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he was born 51 I was born 46 so

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he was four or five years younger than me.

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Solon did a lot of work on the farm my brother, he lives in New Hampshire now,

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as a young man. And then he left. He left. Yeah,

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he went to work after he went to Vermont Tech. College, and he worked for Green Mountain Power. And then he got a

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job working for Raytheon,

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which is a defense contractor.

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This in between,

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he also worked for the telephone company.

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So it was who was living here with you, with you when you grew up.

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I wasn't living here when I grew up. I was living at

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the other farm. At the other farm, say

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my sister Phyllis, my sister Edith, my brother so on, yeah. And my youngest brother, Steve,

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five of you, yeah. And you all grew up down there at that house, at the other house, yeah. Did

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you have any school there

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or in Jericho or Underhill?

06:00

We went to the Jericho Elementary School, which is used to be it's now the town clerk's office. Uh huh, that's where I went to school. Eight grades in that

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did you have to walk?

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My mother would drive us to school, and lots of times we would walk home.

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That's a bit of a walk. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

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Did you like school?

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Yeah, I liked it. You did, yeah,

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remember any teachers?

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Mrs. Parker, Mrs. Casey,

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Loretta, Casey, oh, yeah,

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we got up in the fifth

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grade, went to the Jericho

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the Jericho town library in Jericho center. Sixth grade, we went in the basement of the

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church in Jericho center, and

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then they built the new school. So we went to seventh and eighth grade at Jericho Elementary, the brand new school.

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We had

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Helen Williams was the principal, and she was also our teacher,

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plus we had other teachers too.

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She was eighth grade. I remember, yeah, and then from there you went to high school in Jericho center, yeah, Jericho high school for four years. Yeah.

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Did you ever get into any trouble?

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Not, not much.

07:38

Not much. I it.

07:43

We were pretty quiet. My dad kept us pretty busy with lots of times we have to go home and shovel out the silage out of the silo, feed the cows or something. So we didn't have too much side play around,

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which is probably a good thing,

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kept us out of trouble.

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Were there other families then you remember as a child who lived here nearby? Well,

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of course, Kent had five children. He lived here,

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so and my mom and their mom were sisters, and Kent and my dad were brothers, so we're kind of like double cousins.

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So Kent and family with five children was up here, and your family was down the other house, up at the other Okay, I got it. I Yeah, were the cousins all contemporary same age? More or less,

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yeah, more or less, yeah. I mean, Joyce was the oldest one in Kent's family. She was about the same age as Edith, my sister, and then there was David and Lincoln

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and Jenny.

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Jenny was the youngest, and Kathy was a

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little bit younger than Lincoln, I believe good for you for remembering all i one.

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But there's a schoolhouse here on Cilley Hill too. Oh yeah, this whole building right here and and who went to that?

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I don't know. My dad used to go to the school down in Underhill. They had to, he had to haul the milk down, and then they put the horses in the in the stalls down there at the school. They took the milk to the creamer. You know, it used to be right across the road from Yeah, from

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the flat. Yes, down in the flats. Yeah.

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So that schoolhouse would have been for your father or grandfather,

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I think so when they were young. Yeah,

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actually my

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one of my relatives, I

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I'm not sure. Say,

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what did you do for fun? Oh,

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probably could ski off the hill up there when there wasn't so many trees. Used to be a lot open land here, because my my grandfather, had 500 sheep. They used to run all over these hills up here, and then got more into dairying after, you know, first, when they're cutting all the trees off, they had a lot of sheep back to the bushes and stuff. And of course, they had to move a lot of rocks, very stony up here. But these hills, obviously, used to be the back lot. Used to be all there, right up to the top, except for the maple trees. They always tap the maple trees. They used to tap 5000

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with a horse, horse and oxen

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horses and buckets, you know, pick it up on sleds, take it over the sugar house.

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So you grew up, and then you finally married here. Yeah, yeah, 1871

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71 and you had children?

12:07

We had one that was still born at eight months, the first one, I'm sorry about that. And then Daniel was born three years later, in 1974 okay? My wife had muscular dystrophy. She came from West Bolton, but it didn't affect her too much when she was younger. But it's a progressive thing. My son has it; he's been bedridden for 18 years.

13:02

you've been here your whole life,

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yeah,

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did you go out when you were younger? Did you go into town at all?

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Not too much.

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Might go with my mom or something, down to the

13:26 Stygles store there, on Jericho, on the hill there. So we used to get most of our groceries back then. Burdett Stygles,

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Ed Stygles oldest brother, I think this is Stygles yeah.

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We just talked with Ed Stygles yeah.

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And Mrs. Stygles, of course, was a teacher at the grade school. Jesse, yeah. Jesse, she like Daniel or like Steve for a while,

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how did you ship the milk?

14:11

Wow, so about 1960 it was all went in milk cans. It was picked up by somebody that was all about. But my mother, for years, drove the truck and took milk cans to Cambridge, where the premier was up there, United farmers, lot of, lot of farms shipped their milk there. At that time, I Hmm. So when my Dad was a kid, it all went to Richmond Co Op because they had the creamery down here in Underhill

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like Richmond. Do

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you have mostly Holsteins? Yeah. Yeah, mostly Eli,

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what was the most cows you had at one time? Was the biggest surge?

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Well, when we owned both or milky on both farms, from 82 until 2010 no 2020 we were milking at both barns. We were probably milking 110

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did you when you left this house and you went to the farm and you went down into pass Davises and Cilley hill that down that way? Yeah, well, that weather. Were there other farms nearby

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Beecher Blow had a few cows at one time down on this side?

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What was the name Beecher? Blow?

16:04

But other than him, you and Gary Davis were the main farmers on Cilley Hill

16:09

yeah. I mean, between Kent and our farm, there was, there wasn't a house on this road, hardly, except for the farm where Dorothy Blodgett lives. Now, there used to be a farm there for Fitzgerald, but they sold that and they moved over onto Raceway road that they get sick of the rocks and

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the mud, I guess. But

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did you ever have when you were born?

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Did you ever ever have to thought about the military at all? Do they look after you?

16:54

Well? They, of course, they had the draft back then, but sullen joined after you got out of Vermont tech, and he was in the Marines, he was in Vietnam, and after that, he was in Iraq, and doing when he was working for Raytheon. But I my my dad, got a deferment, agriculture deferment, because he needed to help.

17:27

My wife stayed on the farm

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over the years. Did you find that you had enough help for the farm, for what you were doing with 100 cows?

17:39

Oh, we had to get some help from some Mexicans.

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And would they come and live up here?

17:52

Yes, they they lived in the schoolhouse, and one lived at my dad's house, and they were very good worker. Good workers. Yeah, like them, yeah, they'd like to work seven days a week so they could send money back,

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and they would work during the time you really needed them, and then go back home. And did they repeat? Did they come over and over?

18:21

One came, and he worked a total of 12 years, but then he tried to come back, but so difficult to get across the border. Now, back when Reagan was present, they could get green cards and come

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it was different. Then it's tough for them. Now, yeah, yep. And of

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course, Vermont doesn't really care if they're legal or not, as long as they can help run these farms. You know,

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I bet you were a good boss. But still the still the ICE people game. Did they come up here?

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They didn't bother us. Good, yeah, but just recently there,

19:06

did you have, how about raising crops? Did you raise any corn? Or

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we have raised some corn, but this land is not well suited to corn because it's so heavy soil, it grow pretty good sometimes, if, if it's not too wet, but then come fall, if it gets wet, it's hard to get it off.

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Get somebody

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still got some ruts in the field from the last two years trying to hay.

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So what do you what do you have now in the barns? What? What are you farming with now?

19:46

Oh, we're still milking at the other barn. We stopped milking down here in 2020

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but we've been keeping some heifers in this garden.

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But you're not, you don't have any. You're not producing milk now. We are producing milk at the other firm, Oh, the other farm, yeah, okay.

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A lot of work. Yeah, it is. You never know what's gonna break next. Cow

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trouble calving or something.

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So you probably didn't have any tractors that you have everything horse

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driven. Well, my dad had two teams of horses,

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and he used to do a lot of logging in the winter.

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He would buy up a wood lot, you know, that

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went up for tax sale or something, and he logged that off because he didn't have enough money to pay the mortgage when he was starting out.

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Of course, he would sugar every spring too.

21:02

He you, hire different people. Of course, you could find help pretty easy back then, farm work was about the only thing it was for working around putting here,

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where'd you have to go to get supplies?

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Is there hardware or a farm store nearby? I

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don't know. Dave gallop used to have plumbing supplies and different things down there. Teacups would have piping, different things.

21:47

Burton, what? What would you say you're the the best at, what is your best talent for, for farming? Are you, is it especially with the milking, with the cows, or is it your your fields, or the finances of it, or the the machinery, what? What's your best part of being a farmer? Hard question. I know. Yeah. I I

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can tell you're thinking about that.

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I don't know, maybe,

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maybe producing the milk,

22:42

I guess producing

22:44

the milk, yeah, I mean, it's, Do

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you think life has changed much

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since your early days? Oh, yeah,

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there's been a lot of changes, changing constantly in the farming industry, with all the different machinery and different technology and

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it's more restrictions from the government and even on the towns

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zoning and

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that used to be able to do different things on Your land, but now, because they of the wetlands restrictions and stuff, like places where we used to put tile in, they won't let you do it anymore, because they are trying to preserve wetlands. Of course, that's not much help to you on a farm when you gotta go through the mud. I

24:03

So Do Do state officials connect with you as a farmer? Do they come and help you, or check up on their wetlands, or anything like that? They check up

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on the woodland quite a bit, because it's in the land use plan. Of course you gotta, every 10 years, you gotta draw up a new plan and suggest that you do this or that. Or

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are they helpful? Or do you? Are they just more tell you what they think you should do.

24:45

I think they

24:51

tell you what to do a little more than you'd like. Yeah.

24:57

Do you know how your grandfather ended up here?

25:04

Well, he ended up on the land in Jericho, and then he came up here. Started cutting trees. How did

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he end up in Jericho?

25:14

Where did he come from? What made him become where?

25:17

I don't know. They came over from England, and

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Secretary Rawson was the first Secretary of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, really, he was related to us. Know

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why they ended up in Jericho? Well,

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it must have been something for them to come over from England,

25:47

yeah, and somehow, up in Jericho month, yeah,

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with all those sheep,

25:56

he was the sheep farmer, your grandfather. Yeah, more. So he had

26:01

a few cows, and then he had a lot of sheep.

26:07

Have you had other animals?

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No, just cows, just cows and sheep and a good dog around. No doubt.

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I was a kid, my dad had 50 sheep,

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but he gave that up. No money in it.

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How about gardening? Did your family did a lot of gardening? Yeah,

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my mom always had a good garden.

26:38

Your mom sounds like she was a good, strong woman, yeah, worked hard, yeah, very hard worker. Yeah,

26:48

She milked the cows. Sometimes we were haying or something. Blair Williams even came over to help her milk a few times.

26:59

yeah, I knew her.

27:04

She was a good neighbor to you then, oh

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yeah, we used to cut all the hay for to keep the trees back over there for years.

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Did her place border your land? Yes, yeah,

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you're kind of at a crossroads here. You're, you're, you're one side down to Jericho, the other side down to Underhill, and there's Essex and there's Essex and Westford, they all come. Yeah, we pay taxes for towns. You pay taxes for towns. Yeah, wow. Just got a reappraisal on

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Westford. They raised it from 320,000 to 620,000

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Jericho, I guess, is starting a reappraisal. Now,

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last year, our taxes were like 25,000 on the two farms. Wow,

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that's changed, yeah,

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did you have a school bus ever? Where'd you walk? My

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mom used to drive us to school because back in the 50s and early 60s, they didn't come up through here with a school bus, least not for Jericho Underhill did come up

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as far as Kent's driveway and turn around

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just they would Pay her so much a month to bring us to school. It wasn't much, but some days it was very difficult to get back up that hill. I bet

28:54

I'm pretty near to the top, and I get stuck

29:02

on the ax. Station wagon with the wooden you know, the wooden tailgate.

29:15

Pontiac i

29:27

So do you do you see some of the people you grow up with? Now, do people come by? Or is everybody scattered all over the place?

29:40

Occasionally I see somebody, some

29:42

old friends,

29:47

yeah, might see the Blodgetts or something they had for the two boys there.

29:51

It's Dorothy Blodgett, yeah, yeah. We interviewed her. She has that big salt and pepper Collection. Yeah,