

**Transcript of an Oral History Interview in the collection of the
BREVARD COUNTY HISTORICAL COMMISSION
308 Forrest Ave., Cocoa, FL 32922**

Lauritz Kjerulff: It is February 11, 2000. The location is the American Homesteading Foundation Hall located at 535 Hammock Road in Melbourne Village. Our interview subject is Hester Wagner. And our interviewer Georgiana Kjerulff. The cameraman is Lauritz Kjerulff.

Georgiana Kjerulff: Okay. Hester, thank you for your interview. We're doing it in advance. [00:00:30]

Hester Wagner: Oh.

Georgiana Kjerulff: And I'm Georgiana Kjerulff. Would you give me your name?

Hester Wagner: My name is Hester Wagner.

Georgiana Kjerulff: You live in?

Hester Wagner: Melbourne Village.

Georgiana Kjerulff: Please tell me, what brought you to Melbourne Village?

Hester Wagner: Well, several different things. We were here visiting friends of ours and discovered the village.

Georgiana Kjerulff: [00:01:00] Did they bring you to tour the village?

Hester Wagner: No. But they had been--We had been corresponding, and they kept telling us about the village, and saying, "You'd just love the village because it has all those trees and it's so rural."

Georgiana Kjerulff: Did they tell you anything about the philosophy of the village?

Hester Wagner: Very little. They had discovered the village when they came here to buy a citrus tree from the nursery that [00:01:30] was located in the village at that time.

Georgiana Kjerulff: Tell me, do you know anything else about the nursery in the village?

Hester Wagner: Oh yes. I think Shaffer was the name of the nursery. And it was here for quite a few years after we came—after we moved here.

Georgiana Kjerulff: In other words, when you first saw the village, you decided this was a place to live, [00:02:00] to retire too, or what brought it?

Hester Wagner: Well, yes. We just happened on the village. And we drove in. And we were introduced to Virginia Wood and Elizabeth Nutting by Cap Fick. He found us reading the bulletin board. So he took us to meet them. So we got the grand tour. And then, for our vacation time, [00:02:30] we stayed in the tourist cottage up in

the front of the village. And every day, they visited us and showed us around the village. That's how we were introduced to the village.

Georgiana Kjerulff: Did they explain the philosophy of the village?

Hester Wagner: Oh yes. We were given the brochure and the philosophy. And we're taken around to meet the different villagers and showin' houses [00:03:00] that were for sale.

Georgiana Kjerulff: Were there any houses for sale at that point?

Hester Wagner: Not a lot. There were a few for sale.

Georgiana Kjerulff: And then, you decided to build your own house?

Hester Wagner: Yes. The Bottomley 40 was just being developed at that time.

Georgiana Kjerulff: Would you explain the Bottomley 40 to the people who do not know the village?

Hester Wagner: Well, the Bottomley 40 was the last acquisition of the foundation. [00:03:30] and it is located west of Dayton Boulevard. And it's 40 acres of land that was bought by the foundation and developed by them.

Georgiana Kjerulff: This is land where Borsodi finally lived, isn't it?

Lauritz Kjerulff: [Inaudible 00:03:50].

Georgiana Kjerulff: The Bottomley 40, where you were shown the land, is south of the canal. Explain the canal to us.

Hester Wagner: The canal is the Crane [00:04:00] Creek drainage. It's part of the Crane Creek drainage district. And it runs through the village.

Georgiana Kjerulff: And how many houses were here at that time when you first saw it?

Hester Wagner: I don't know the total of the houses, but there were no houses in the Bottomley 40. There were a few along Dayton Boulevard, which is [00:04:30] part of the Bottomley 40. But there were no houses in the interior of the Bottomley 40.

Georgiana Kjerulff: And did you decide to build the house yourself?

Hester Wagner: Yes.

Georgiana Kjerulff: And you had the people from Melbourne who you contracted to build the house?

Hester Wagner: Bill Newcomb who was a villager handled the contract negotiations for us.

Georgiana Kjerulff: He was in the real [00:05:00] estate business at that time, wasn't he?

Hester Wagner: Yes, yes. He advised us, took us around to meet builders. He negotiated with our contractor to build our house.

Georgiana Kjerulff: Would you give me an approximate date?

Hester Wagner: Yes. We bought-- owned two lots, which is a home site, considered a home site. We became village members [00:05:30] in July of 1956. And we came back in December of '56. And that's when we signed the contract to build our house. And we came back to live the end of January 1957.

Georgiana Kjerulff: And was Jay working at that time?

Hester Wagner: Well that is one of the things. [00:06:00] Looking back, I don't know how we ever had the courage to do it. Both Jay and I quit our jobs the week before and came here without. And we needed a job, but there were jobs at the Cape. And we moved here the end of July. And Jay went to work on Valentine's Day on the Cape for Boeing. He worked for Boeing for 27 years before-- [00:06:30] when he retired.

Georgiana Kjerulff: Then, you were both planning on working or you were feeling like a retired?

Hester Wagner: Well, after we got here, and he got the job up there, and there were so much to do around our lot, I became the yard boy, and the painter, and everything else. So I never had a job. Everything I did after we came here was on a volunteer basis.

Georgiana Kjerulff: Well, now, [00:07:00] you're in the village. Tell me what you thought of Brevard County.

Hester Wagner: Well, Brevard County was a little hard to describe because we seemed to be so far out in a rural area. At Melbourne, we're so different from what it is now.

Georgiana Kjerulff: How was it different? Was it smaller?

Hester Wagner: Well, for instance, the day we came [00:07:30] here and drove out what they called the Kissimmee Highway at that time, there was so little. It was so rural. We came out as far as the village entrance. And then, later on, we drove out to the St. Johns River. And really, there was nothing there except cattle along the highway.

Georgiana Kjerulff: [00:08:00] These were all Platt cattle?

Hester Wagner: I suppose so. We had no idea whose cattle they were at the time. And at Minton's Corner, there was a grocery store, and that was it. Minton's grocery store was there.

Georgiana Kjerulff: When did you become familiar with the Decentralist Theory [00:08:30] of Borsodi, that brought the village here?

Hester Wagner: Well, we were given all the information, you know, the brochures, and his books, and everything to read. But I never--We never met, Ralph Borsodi. He left around the time that we came here to live, but I did meet his wife when she came back from ... Was it India?

Georgiana Kjerulff: India.

Hester Wagner: When she came back from India [00:09:00] to close that house and go to India. I did meet her, but I never met Borsodi himself.

Georgiana Kjerulff: And so you were never involved in Borsodi's theories?

Hester Wagner: No, but I was involved with taking courses over at the university when Elizabeth-

Georgiana Kjerulff: This is the University of Melbourne?

Hester Wagner: Yes. When Elizabeth's [00:09:30] brother would come here in the summer. He would hold seminars there.

Georgiana Kjerulff: And do you know the rest of the history of the University of Melbourne?

Hester Wagner: I do, yes.

Georgiana Kjerulff: Can you tell us?

Hester Wagner: Well, I know that the board of trustees or whatever the leadership's name was, were mostly villagers. [00:10:00] It was actually born in Melbourne Village.

Georgiana Kjerulff: And then, they've had the first buildings of the university were here in Melbourne Village. And then, they moved over to what is now FIT?

Hester Wagner: Yes. There was that one building there. And that building is still there. That small building sets out by itself.

Georgiana Kjerulff: And what was the purpose of the University [00:10:30] of Melbourne?

Hester Wagner: Well, originally, it was Borsodi's idea. I guess, they had some trouble. The leadership and Borsodi had a falling out. And he went away. So then, they struggled along for a few years before it was taken over as the University [00:11:00] of Melbourne.

Georgiana Kjerulff: His idea, I believe, was to grant only graduate degrees-

Hester Wagner: I believe that was.

Georgiana Kjerulff: ... but he also had the seminars and the conferences for other people. Besides, did you have to have a degree to get there?

Hester Wagner: Not when Elizabeth's brother-

Georgiana Kjerulff: That's Willis Nutting.

Hester Wagner: Yeah, Willis Nutting. His family would come here in the summer. He would have seminars.

Georgiana Kjerulff: [00:11:30] What type of seminars?

Hester Wagner: Well, mostly, it had to do with what I vaguely remember was discussing the integration.

Georgiana Kjerulff: Integration?

Hester Wagner: Yeah. And I also, remembering back, people from the village who would be [00:12:00] attending the seminars. They were positively opposed to the integration and were very outspoken, some of them. And that was contrary to the way the village was set up to begin with.

Georgiana Kjerulff: Were there any black people who came to the meetings?

Hester Wagner: No, no. Mostly, they were villagers [00:12:30] that attend at the seminars.

Georgiana Kjerulff: I didn't know that they opposed integration.

Hester Wagner: Well, this was an individual thing. And I remember Willis Nutting who came here from ...

Georgiana Kjerulff: Miami.

Hester Wagner: No. He came from a university that has a football team. What's the name of it?

Georgiana Kjerulff: Well, they all have [00:13:00] a football team.

Hester Wagner: Yes, but this one had ...

Lauritz Kjerulff: Pause just for a moment. Okay. We're rolling again.

Hester Wagner: And the people thought it was so funny that he had spent his best part of his life there teaching at a Catholic university when the Nutting family had a background of, what, ministers. They had a long history of ministers [00:13:30] and missionaries that were not Catholic.

Georgiana Kjerulff: About how many people would come to these conferences?

Hester Wagner: Oh, maybe a dozen, 15, 18, something like that people would be in the classes.

Georgiana Kjerulff: And when you were just settling in here, how did the village help you settle?

Hester Wagner: Oh, the people were very friendly, especially Elizabeth. [00:14:00] She should show up at my door every morning with little plants that she found for me to plant in my yard. And I planted everything she brought me. And later on, I found out I was planting a lot of the wrong things.

Georgiana Kjerulff: She just picked it up on the way in?

Hester Wagner: Yeah.

Georgiana Kjerulff: What did you think about the spirit of volunteerism here in Melbourne Village?

Hester Wagner: [00:14:30] Well I had never experienced anything quite like that. I was fascinated with the town meeting that they held. Practically every week, they had a meeting, or a luncheon, or something going on, over at the community house. And I was positively fascinated with the give and take of [00:15:00] the discussions that went on in the meetings.

Georgiana Kjerulff: Did they invite you to join any of the groups?

Hester Wagner: Well, I was never. I was never invited to join the Betterment League. I was never approached.

Georgiana Kjerulff: But the Betterment League was sort of the opposition, wasn't it?

Hester Wagner: Yeah, I was invited to the Women's Guild, and everything else, and to serve on [00:15:30] committees.

Georgiana Kjerulff: And what do you think of the whole theory of Melbourne Village?

Hester Wagner: Well, I think it's very special.

Georgiana Kjerulff: Can you give me a sense of contrast with Melbourne Village and the rest of Brevard County, and it has special theories, and beliefs, and practices?

Hester Wagner: Well, there's nothing else like it. [00:16:00] There's nothing to compare it with actually as far as I can see. And the fact that it has survived just seems like a miracle, but I do think that right now, after 50 years, the whole concept is stronger than it ever was. And I base that on the [00:16:30] interviews that we have with new members because they are looking for a special place to live. There's no question about it. And there's nowhere else that you're welcomed into a community and that you can become part of that community and participate the way you can in Melbourne Village.

Georgiana Kjerulff: What do you think the people are looking for in [00:17:00] an intentional community since this is an intentional community?

Hester Wagner: Well, first, everybody talks about the trees. And we, of course, are so protective of the trees and they're a way of life for us. And when people say they have looked everywhere, and when they drive into the village, the [00:17:30] couples that we interviewed not too long ago said they looked everywhere. And when they drove into the village, and started driving around, they looked at each other, and said, "This is the place. We have to find a place here," and they had found a place.

Georgiana Kjerulff: Could you contrast this with the new developments in Brevard County? Do you think there's any chance of [00:18:00] ... Why did an intentional community spring up here, and where Brevard County has changed so much?

Hester Wagner: Well, the only reason that it sprang up here was you can go back to the founders, to Virginia and Elizabeth, they had the original idea and held it together. [00:18:30] But now, the village and the AHF [American Homesteading Foundation] are on their own, and they're thriving.

Georgiana Kjerulff: Do you think they are basing it on the ideas that was sponsored by Virginia and Elizabeth?

Hester Wagner: Oh, I think so. Yeah, I think so.

Georgiana Kjerulff: Do you think we have a future as the rest of the Brevard County moves around us, and develops, and [00:19:00] changes?

Hester Wagner: Only if we're strong enough to hang in there.

Georgiana Kjerulff: Are we stating our case? Are we telling people enough about it as they come in?

Hester Wagner: I hope. I hope we are.

Georgiana Kjerulff: What do we have set up to tell them?

Hester Wagner: Well, first, they are given all [00:19:30] the necessary information by the AHF office, which does an excellent job. And then, they meet with the membership committee. I always think of the membership committee as putting our best foot forward, and finding out whether these people really realize [00:20:00] the importance of maintaining the village in its present state, and not letting go because the pressures from outside are terrific.

Georgiana Kjerulff: That's what I was looking for.

Hester Wagner: The pressures are from outside. And we have been standing firm against the pressures that are going on, are all around us all these years. And I think we [00:20:30] are stronger now than we were 20 years ago in that area.

Georgiana Kjerulff: That's why we're having to constantly fight off the outside world.

Hester Wagner: Yeah.

Georgiana Kjerulff: Do we regard ourselves as special people with a special creed or are we people who are changed by our environment?

Hester Wagner: Well, we come from so many different [00:21:00] backgrounds that I can't say that we have a special creed. We have all brought something to the village. I have to say that when I started attending the Women's Guild, I learned so much from all those women that would be sitting around sewing, and doing craft work, and in discussions. And everybody brought something to the village and made a contribution. [00:21:30] And we've built on that.

Georgiana Kjerulff: The Women's Guild. Now, tell us a little bit more about the Women's Guild. If you didn't know what it was, how would you describe it?

Hester Wagner: Well, the Women's Guild was functioning and very active when I came here. I understand that Cap Fick's wife, Kate, was instrumental in starting the Women's Guild. The Women's Guild made such a contribution. [00:22:00] I have pointed that out just recently to various people. The newcomers do not realize how active the Women's Guild always was and what a contribution they've made. In the last few years, the Women's Guild was faltering terribly. But now, I think they're picking up and becoming more active.

And I point out to them the contribution the Women's [00:22:30] Guild made. They raised money. They bought all these tables that we set up for our special activities because the foundation did not have the financial security that they have now. They furnished the kitchen. They bought everything in the kitchen. And when something was needed, the Women's Guild got together and raised money. And it has been, what would you say, a cushion all [00:23:00] these years. And hopefully, it will become the same.

Georgiana Kjerulff: Is there a comparative? There used to be a men's club, but that doesn't seem to flourish as much.

Hester Wagner: The men's club, as far as I can see, there's no hope of ever reviving the men's club.

Georgiana Kjerulff: Do you think it's because the whole time and ideas of what gentlemen's club is has changed?

Hester Wagner: I think so. You see, any [00:23:30] of these activities have to have leadership. And the leadership is what is missing in many areas. That's why it's so important that we maintain our 17 committees.

Georgiana Kjerulff: Would you explain a little bit more about 17 committees?

Hester Wagner: Well, the foundation [00:24:00] elects each year at our annual meeting the membership of 17 committees. They're all set up under the bylaws as to their

function and activity. Each committee has no less than five and no more than nine members. And this happens every year. Right now, we are in the nominating committee as working on setting up the committees.

Georgiana Kjerulff: [00:24:30] Now, who do they report back to?

Hester Wagner: They report back to the board of trustees.

Georgiana Kjerulff: Do they give them a written report, a verbal report?

Hester Wagner: The committees are charged with making written reports monthly to the board of trustees.

Georgiana Kjerulff: And when do they do this?

Hester Wagner: The board of trustees meets monthly on the second Thursday of each [00:25:00] month.

Georgiana Kjerulff: Each committee reports to them each month?

Hester Wagner: As I said, they're charged with making a report. Sometimes, they do not make a report. But I do remember one board member who was very active who always reminded [00:25:30] the board of trustees and the committees that each committee should report each month. If they only say they did not hold a meeting the month before, they should make the contact.

Georgiana Kjerulff: This is all a part of the informal government?

Hester Wagner: That's right.

Georgiana Kjerulff: And there's a more formal form of government too?

Hester Wagner: Yeah.

Georgiana Kjerulff: Explain the two governments that govern this small [00:26:00] intentional community.

Hester Wagner: Well, first, you would have to go back to the beginning and why we became a town. In 1957, Melbourne was expanding and West Melbourne, who at that time was not a town. And they were planning to become a town [00:26:30] to keep the City of Melbourne from gobbling them up. And Melbourne Village was caught in the middle, and was going to be gobbled up, annexed by either Melbourne or West Melbourne.

So the board of trustees, as I remember it, financed the hiring of an attorney to draw up the proper papers and submit [00:27:00] that proposal to the state legislature, and asked to be a charter town, which they did. The AHF financed the

whole thing. We sent somebody to Tallahassee, I don't recall the name of our representative at that time, to present [00:27:30] that to the state legislature and they were granted a charter and a name. That's how we became a town.

Georgiana Kjerulff: Now, how do we divide the governing?

Hester Wagner: Oh, well, the town is like any other charter town in the State of Florida. And the town has elected commissioners. It's a commissioner form [00:28:00] of government. And they have six elected commissioners and an elected mayor. And they, too, have a committee system. And they are charged with the maintenance of the roads, the ditches, the police force. And they have set up an office. We have a town clerk [00:28:30] and the usual officers.

Georgiana Kjerulff: Well it seems like--Do you think that we are overburdened with government with the AHF and the town or do they divide their responsibility?

Hester Wagner: I think they're entirely separate. And each one functions in its proper space.

Georgiana Kjerulff: Could we define what space? In other words, the [00:29:00] town handles such things as police, roads, fire, municipal government.

Hester Wagner: Yes. And they also are our taxing unit. They levy tax, an ad valorem tax. The AHF owns the parkland, the [00:29:30] swimming pool, which is in parkland, and supervises and finances these things, and the new community hall.

Georgiana Kjerulff: That's one of the unique features of Melbourne Village is the amount of parkland. Would you tell us something [00:30:00] about that parkland?

Hester Wagner: Well, the AHF owns—the town of Melbourne Village--The original land that AHF owned is 360 acres. Of those 360 acres, 44 acres are parkland.

Georgiana Kjerulff: 44 acres of the original 360?

Hester Wagner: Yes. And that includes the Erna Nixon Hammock, the Deerhead [00:30:30] Hammock, and all of the Tippi Lake area, the swimming pool area, and all the adjacent paths. There are paths going through all the parkland that people can enjoy the parkland.

Georgiana Kjerulff: What sort of recreation or do they enjoy it as wild parkland?

Hester Wagner: Well, [00:31:00] the Erna Nixon Hammock has guided tours. The Deerhead Hammock holds the Easter service. There are a lot of weddings held in the Deerhead Hammock. And many of the members of the--the villagers [00:31:30] walk in the park lands all the time. And all the maintenance of the parkland is done by a committee, the Parks and Paths Committee, which is a committee of the AHF.

Georgiana Kjerulff: And the town has the responsibility for what? In protecting the park lands? The Parks and Paths [00:32:00] do the paths and take the guided tours, but what role does the town have in it?

Hester Wagner: Well, the only town's responsibility that I can see to the parkland is the protection of the park lands by the police force.

Georgiana Kjerulff: What sort of duties do the police take care of now or have taken [00:32:30] care of in the past?

Hester Wagner: Well, actually, the police are charged with the safety of the parks and the paths, just the same as they are charged with the safety of the roadways and the villagers.

Georgiana Kjerulff: [00:33:00] Hester, tell me something about the village players.

Hester Wagner: Well, when we came here, the village was 10 years old. And the village players were very active. They would put on maybe twice a year a very elaborate play. They would choose a play. And the villagers themselves would take all the parts.

Georgiana Kjerulff: [00:33:30] And this would be at the old village hall in the community building?

Hester Wagner: The old village hall. In front of the curtain that said Melbourne Village on it, that had been painted by [Marion] "Mimi" Britten. And Mimi was very active, very active with the village players. Later on, I remember after we had moved over into the new hall, her [00:34:00] putting on an art show. All those things, the AHF sponsored.

Georgiana Kjerulff: Art shows and we had poetry readings, didn't we?

Hester Wagner: And when people would take trips, they would bring back the pictures, and show the pictures, and describe their trips. And if you remember, when the group [00:34:30] of villagers took the trip around the world.

Georgiana Kjerulff: Oh, I remember. I didn't go on the trip. But tell us about the trip around the world.

Hester Wagner: Well, I didn't go on the trip bit when they came back, they showed us the pictures, and described their trip, and brought back their treasures, and shared 'em with us. And it was very, very interesting.

Georgiana Kjerulff: In other words, this was not a sponsored group but [00:35:00] a group of villagers decided to go around the world.

Hester Wagner: That's right.

Georgiana Kjerulff: And they brought back all these movies and snapshots, and gave lectures.

Hester Wagner: Silks from China. And the stops they made, they brought back the usual things that you'd get in the different countries. When they went to France, they brought back perfume and all that kind of stuff from France. [00:35:30] And I think they went through the Mediterranean and down the Suez Canal. And I think that was the direction of their trip if I remember correctly. It was fascinating.

Georgiana Kjerulff: About how many people went on this trip?

Hester Wagner: Well, I think I can mention or I can name the people that went in this trip.

Georgiana Kjerulff: Why don't you?

Hester Wagner: Virginia, Elizabeth, Nina Davison.

Georgiana Kjerulff: [00:36:00] Who was an artist?

Hester Wagner: Yes. The Fullers, and Ray Jones, the Ray Joneses, Ann Jones, Ray and Ann Jones. There may have been others but those are the ones I remember.

Georgiana Kjerulff: That's certainly something [00:36:30] very different to have the whole town have a trip open for them around the world, and come back, and share it with everybody. What else do you think is unique about that group?

Hester Wagner: You mean the group of people that went around the world?

Georgiana Kjerulff: I mean, the group of people that would sponsor going around the world.

Hester Wagner: Oh, well, [00:37:00] that they were all individuals, and all very different. But they were also very active in the village, supportive of the foundation, and contributed so much time.

Georgiana Kjerulff: What are the things that sets this village apart from other intentional communities? Because there's a long history of intentional communities in the United States, particularly [00:37:30] in California, but we never had any religion.

Hester Wagner: That has been pointed out at various times that it is believed that this is one of the reasons that the AHF and the village has survived because we never had a named religion. People went to their own church and worshiped regardless.

Georgiana Kjerulff: [00:38:00] But we did have one big religious service, and that was Easter.

Hester Wagner: Yes, we did have the Easter and we still have the Easter dawn service. And that is Christian. We always have a minister from a Christian church. Well, naturally, Easter is a Christian holiday.

Georgiana Kjerulff: What happened to that beautiful altar that we had in the center of the Deerhead Hammock?

Hester Wagner: [00:38:30] You mean at the cross?

Georgiana Kjerulff: No, the big flat altar. It wasn't a cross. The altar was finally destroyed by vandals.

Hester Wagner: Yes. Then, the cross was, I think, in memory of Virginia Wood's sister, Fran Pierce, [00:39:00] but it, too, was vandalized so badly that, nowadays, it is taken down and stored in one of the storage rooms here, and put back up for the Easter dawn service each year.

Georgiana Kjerulff: What other--we had a Christmas service too, didn't we, but not a church service, like Christmas celebration?

Hester Wagner: Yes, we always had a Christmas celebration.

Georgiana Kjerulff: Are [00:39:30] we still holding these here in this intentional community?

Hester Wagner: We still have the Christmas dinner each year. We still have the Easter dawn service. And we used to always have a Thanksgiving dinner. And it was started by the villagers who had no family here or no family to go to, and would have been alone on Thanksgiving. So they got together and had Thanksgiving dinner together. And at [00:40:00] one time, I would say that we had maybe a hundred people attending the Thanksgiving dinner. That has been discontinued and that's unfortunate.

Georgiana Kjerulff: Can you give me any reason? Is it just that people don't cook as much?

Hester Wagner: Well, it was great undertaking because we cooked our own turkeys, and did all the cooking, you know. Now, for the Christmas dinner, [00:40:30] the turkeys and the ham are bought already cooked. People do not want to take on that kind of thing anymore.

Georgiana Kjerulff: Do you think society itself has changed and women's lives?

Hester Wagner: It has. It has in that area, but I would like to say that Melbourne Village has great cooks, always has. And when we have a carry-in meal, the food is terrific because [00:41:00] everybody brings their specialty.

Georgiana Kjerulff: We have published cookbooks, haven't we, in the past?

Hester Wagner: Oh, yes, we had.

Georgiana Kjerulff: Tell me something about preservation committee.

Hester Wagner: Oh, the Historic Preservation Commission has been created by the Town of Melbourne Village Commission by official action. And it has six [00:41:30] members. And the Historic Preservation Commission has published a cookbook within the last five years. And each year, they have published a calendar. We have

published the calendars for the past four years. And that is a fundraiser for the restoration of the community house.

Georgiana Kjerulff: Yeah, the community [00:42:00] house, what else does the preservation committee do?

Hester Wagner: Well, we ... Excuse me for saying we, but it raises money wherever it can, and keeps prodding the Town of Melbourne Village to get on with the restoration.

Georgiana Kjerulff: Who puts up these nice signs we have marking historic spots?

Hester Wagner: Yes, and they have been responsible for [00:42:30] initiating the markings of early residences, and also park lands. And the signs are all handmade, very rustic, and are put up in various places suggested by the Historic Preservation Commission.

Georgiana Kjerulff: Do we have special [00:43:00] houses that we mark?

Hester Wagner: Yes, we have. We have marked, especially, the first undertaking was the barracks that were moved in from the Banana River, a naval air station, when it disbanded.

Georgiana Kjerulff: That is now Patrick?

Hester Wagner: Yes.

Georgiana Kjerulff: Tell me, were the other buildings [00:43:30] moved in from Patrick or Banana River?

Hester Wagner: Well, the original community house was moved in from Patrick.

Georgiana Kjerulff: Any homes?

Hester Wagner: Yes. I think there were nine altogether.

Georgiana Kjerulff: And are they still standing?

Hester Wagner: Well, some of them have been. One, in particular, has been moved out intact, the whole building. Several of them have been demolished, [00:44:00] and new houses built on those lots, those home sites.

Georgiana Kjerulff: Well, Hester, do you want to look into the future and tell me what do you see the changes that are developing now?

Hester Wagner: Well, society has changed so much, but deep down, people are still looking for a nice, quiet, comfortable place to live. Melbourne [00:44:30] Village furnishes that. It is all a matter of-- It's a long struggle, and people have to be dedicated because that is the only way Melbourne Village can survive in its present form.

Though it would be a catastrophe if it was annexed by [00:45:00] the surrounding but-

Georgiana Kjerulff: One town can annex another, can they?

Hester Wagner: Well, I'm not up on what the law is right now. But we are surrounded by—we are touched by the City of Melbourne. We're touched by West Melbourne and the county. So--

Georgiana Kjerulff: A question came up, what our population is [00:45:30] in this community?

Hester Wagner: I understand that presently it's about 650.

Georgiana Kjerulff: The last I heard, it was 700 something. That's pretty close.

Hester Wagner: Yeah. There's not much chance of it getting much larger because there are so few lots.

Georgiana Kjerulff: [00:46:00] Do you think that we will annex anything else or we have any ideas of expanding?

Hester Wagner: Well, last year the foundation bought that land north of us as a buffer. And I'm not sure just what the acreage is. I believe maybe it might be about five acres, but I'm not sure of that.

Georgiana Kjerulff: Why did you say we bought it as a buffer? What is the buffer doing? Is it just open land?

Hester Wagner: Well, [00:46:30] it was an area that was platted with very small lots. And I think they were bought up by people up north that never saw their lots. And they were finally picked up for their taxes. Those lots are actually in the county. And it has been suggested that the town on Melbourne Village [00:47:00] annex that land and that it become a part of the municipality of Melbourne Village. But now, it is owned by the AHF.

Georgiana Kjerulff: We have the possibility of some expansion, but we don't plan to expand?

Hester Wagner: That's the general idea.

Georgiana Kjerulff: If we keep it as open land?

Hester Wagner: [00:47:30] The idea was that it become a buffer strip against the development north of us.

Georgiana Kjerulff: Well, tell me a little bit more about the founders, the founding mothers, Virginia Wood, and Elizabeth Nutting, and with her friends from Dayton, Ohio.

Hester Wagner: [00:48:00] Well, I've heard Virginia and Elizabeth talk about it all the time or at first when I came here, how they came here with the Mileses, Ashley and her husband.

Georgiana Kjerulff: Pret.

Hester Wagner: Pret Miles and Ashley. They came here from Dayton, Ohio to look for [00:48:30] land. And this was in 1946. So they made the pilgrimage down here from Dayton, Ohio, and to meet someone who was going to show them land in this area. So they came here. And the person that was going to show them land showed them what they had to offer. And they were so disappointed. Apparently, it was out [00:49:00] right along the St. Johns River, south of here. And they weren't happy with the land they were shown.

So they went back to the hotel. And that night, they were talking to people in the hotel, and met this man who had a land for sale. And he said, "I'll show the other land tomorrow." So they made a date with him to come and look at his land. And this was the first section, [00:49:30] which was just north of the Crane Creek. And they came out. And he showed them around the land. That included, which is now the area that is now Deerhead Hammock and Erna Nixon Hammock in that area, the first section. And I think they paid \$100 an acre for the [00:50:00] land.

Georgiana Kjerulff: They did all this on speculation? Who put up the money? Virginia?

Hester Wagner: Virginia Wood put up the money.

Georgiana Kjerulff: I believe that these people had originally been working together in Dayton, Ohio for a project that they called Liberty Acres, which was a project to save people after the Great Depression. And that project failed, but they thought they would start again.

Hester Wagner: Yes, [00:50:30] that's right. That was the whole idea. And the idea was for people to come here, and have lots large enough that they could grow some of their food, and have goats, and chickens, and what have you if another depression swoop down. And instead of another depression, the Space Center moved in. And that's a whole other [00:51:00] story.

Georgiana Kjerulff: I can remember back in the times when some of the things that we really had according to Borsodi's theory, there was a herd of goats.

Hester Wagner: That's right.

Georgiana Kjerulff: And there were some sheep. And when we went to restore the old buildings, we found the loom.

Hester Wagner: Yes, that's right.

Georgiana Kjerulff: And the idea was to grow, tend the sheep, shear the sheep, and spin it on the spinning wheel. [00:51:30] And then, weave it on a loom. Then, cut your own fabric.

Hester Wagner: That's right.

Georgiana Kjerulff: I will start back and I'll say, tell me how they planned to live on the land here?"

Hester Wagner: Well, I can only speak from the time we came here. The village was 10 years old when we bought our lots and came here. And at that time, there were still goats living in the village being milked, and the milk [00:52:00] being sold. People had chickens. I think there were people here in the village who raised chickens, and had a large number of chickens. And that was a great failure because they didn't take very good care of their chickens, and the villagers complained. So they left with their chickens. But--

Georgiana Kjerulff: What are the industries [00:52:30] did they develop?

Hester Wagner: There was a hydroponic gardens.

Georgiana Kjerulff: Would you explain a hydroponic garden?

Hester Wagner: Well, a hydroponic garden is a soil-less way of growing vegetables and plants, anything that grows. And they're grown in gravel and water, and fed nutrients. [00:53:00] Now, when we came here, the hydroponic gardens was still in operation. And I think they were doing carnations. Tomatoes and carnations, I think they were doing.

Georgiana Kjerulff: And I believe they had a little industry of shipping the carnations north?

Hester Wagner: Every so many days, they would meet the plane over at the Melbourne airport and ship [00:53:30] them north. That's right.

Georgiana Kjerulff: And besides that, what other whole industries did they develop? Because that was a part of the whole idea to have a whole industry.

Hester Wagner: Yeah. Well, the other one that originated here was the printing of fabrics. And that started in the [00:54:00] community house. But it got so large that they moved in town into that loft downtown. And that was in operation when we came here in '57 because I went there and bought fabric for my kitchen curtains.

Georgiana Kjerulff: So they did have some successful industries. [00:54:30] And the rest of it, I remember some about the goats, and the goat milk, and the people who depended on it.

Hester Wagner: Yes. They had the regular customers that they delivered the goat milk to or would come and pick it up.

Georgiana Kjerulff: I believe only one big chicken ranch.

Hester Wagner: Yeah.

Georgiana Kjerulff: But that closed.

Hester Wagner: [00:55:00] That closed because the villagers thought they didn't take good care of that, didn't maintain the operation well.

Georgiana Kjerulff: Well, when you can do the history of this area, you always come back to the mosquitoes. Did we have worse mosquitoes in the early days here?

Hester Wagner: The mosquitoes were much worse earlier on than they are now.

Georgiana Kjerulff: Did we do anything [00:55:30] like smudge pots?

Hester Wagner: Oh, yes. Early on, they used smudge pots. And then, the county took after World War II. The county took on the spraying of the mosquitoes, of the canals, and the waterways.

Georgiana Kjerulff: We'll see all these things developing, but the brains in back of it, the spirit in back of it, of course, [00:56:00] was Elizabeth and Virginia. And do you know anything of their background?

Hester Wagner: Yes, I do. Virginia was very active. I think she served on a school board in Dayton for quite a long time. She's very active in volunteer work and that kind [00:56:30] of thing. And this all happened after her husband died and ended up coming here. Virginia had two sons who became members of the foundation and both lived here. And Elizabeth, I think that she served the Boston University. I [00:57:00] think she was a professor at Boston University.

Georgiana Kjerulff: So you have two highly educated women. And they were followers of Borsodi?

Hester Wagner: Well, they found out about Borsodi, yes. The third member, the founding mothers was Hutchinson. What was her first name? They always referred to her as Hutch.

Georgiana Kjerulff: Hutch.

Hester Wagner: [00:57:30] I never met her. She had left just before we came here. She had to go back north and take care of her aged father. But those were the three that came here, and really struggled, and set up. You realize, the land that they bought was range land. No [00:58:00] roads. Then, of course, all of the roadways were laid out in Melbourne Village by a professional landscaper.

Georgiana Kjerulff: By the name of Louise Odiorne.

Hester Wagner: Louise Odiorne came here. I think, she also had a university job, didn't she?

Georgiana Kjerulff: [Ackland 00:58:31] [00:58:30] .

Hester Wagner: Yes. Anyhow, she came here. She did the whole layout of the village.

Georgiana Kjerulff: Tell me why this layout is different from other communities.

Hester Wagner: Well, the reason the roads curve instead of going straight lines, many of them went around groups of trees that they wanted to save.

Georgiana Kjerulff: [00:59:00] Then, they designed the whole village to save trees, not for lot lines or convenience.

Hester Wagner: To keep it rural and natural.

Georgiana Kjerulff: To keep it rural, to keep it natural.

Hester Wagner: Yes.

Georgiana Kjerulff: And they were very active in preserving our two major hammocks.

Hester Wagner: That's right.

Georgiana Kjerulff: Erna Nixon Hammock and Deerhead Hammock.

Hester Wagner: That's right. And then, of course, [00:59:30] we simply would not have the Erna Nixon Hammock if Erna Nixon wouldn't have come here to live because Erna knew about Florida Hammocks. And she fought and struggled to save the Hammock.

Georgiana Kjerulff: If we're giving credit, let's also give credit to Gerald Einem.

Hester Wagner: With the help of Gerald Einem, who was a teacher at Melbourne High School. [01:00:00] And our Erna Nixon Hammock is part of the county, Nixon Hammock. Now, when I say it's part of the county, Erna Nixon Hammock, I mean it was one hammock that had a property line run through it. And by the struggle of individuals, the whole hammock was saved.

Georgiana Kjerulff: It was saved [01:00:30] at the time that the developers were coming in to cut down the trees, and put up houses, expensive houses.

Hester Wagner: That's right. Our hammock is much smaller than the County Hammock. I think the County Hammock is maybe 50 some acres, and I think ours is maybe five or seven acres.

Georgiana Kjerulff: And what about Deerhead Hammock?

Hester Wagner: Well, Deerhead Hammock is another story. It's so special [01:01:00] that it's called Deerhead Hammock because of that oak tree that looks like a deer with great big

antlers going up. It contains beautiful, beautiful huge oak trees, and also some pine trees.

Georgiana Kjerulff: If you were not a Floridian, and didn't know what we meant by hammock, [01:01:30] could you give me a definition of a hammock?

Hester Wagner: I'm not very good at that. There are high hammocks and low hammocks, but I'm not very good at describing them. A low hammock has water in it. And a high hammock is above the waterline. It's not flooded as much.

Georgiana Kjerulff: What grows in a hammock? Is it woodland?

Hester Wagner: Yes, yes.

Georgiana Kjerulff: It's a general progression of certain [01:02:00] woodlands.

Hester Wagner: Yes. Ours has oaks and pines. And I think, we are gradually losing the pines. I think the oaks are crowding the pines out.

Georgiana Kjerulff: How many years does it take to build a hammock? Do you have any idea?

Hester Wagner: Oh, it goes back, back longer than anyone could remember.

Georgiana Kjerulff: And is it unique to Florida?

Hester Wagner: [01:02:30] I believe it is. There could be some hammocks in the Georgia area. I don't know.

Georgiana Kjerulff: So we have two unique woodlands here in Melbourne Village that we are preserving.

Hester Wagner: That's right, and they're priceless.

Georgiana Kjerulff: Do we open it to the public?

Hester Wagner: It is dedicated as parkland to the residents of Melbourne Village. [01:03:00] It is not a public park. And we pay taxes on it. For that reason, the foundation pays taxes on our parkland, because it has not been open to the general public, just dedicated to the residents, but it is not restricted to the residents. Outside groups come through, and enjoy our hammocks all the time.

Georgiana Kjerulff: [01:03:30] Tell me about the committee that preserves this?

Hester Wagner: Oh, there's a special committee for the Erna Nixon Hammock and for the Deerhead Hammock.

Georgiana Kjerulff: Two committees or do they just preserve the hammocks?

Hester Wagner: No. Each hammock has a separate committee.

Georgiana Kjerulff: Well, what else makes the village very special besides the hammocks? And we [01:04:00] provide recreation for the children by way of our own pool.

Hester Wagner: Oh, yes. The pool is open to the residents of Melbourne Village. You pay a fee to help support it, support the pool. And in the summertime. the foundation hires a lifeguard. They give swimming lessons to the children. [01:04:30] And the foundation also sponsors a recreation program every summer for the children. They have workshops. And I think they go on trips. And there's a committee that handles all that. No one is paid. This is all volunteer work. And that's what makes the village so special.

Georgiana Kjerulff: Do [01:05:00] you think that we have a chance of surviving into the next ... We're in the next century, but how are we doing? We're being pushed.

Hester Wagner: Yeah, you're right. We've survived for 50 years. I hope we will survive another 50, but the pressures get greater all the time.

Georgiana Kjerulff: Are these industrial pressures, or [01:05:30] housing developments, or all of it?

Hester Wagner: It's people pressure. As more people come in, they require more services, and more roads, and more housing. And they pollute the air and the atmosphere.

Georgiana Kjerulff: As a long-time resident, how many years have you lived here? [01:06:00] Just under 50 years?

Hester Wagner: 43.

Georgiana Kjerulff: 43 years. What has it added to your quality of life?

Hester Wagner: Oh, significantly. I feel I was so lucky to have discovered this place, and come here, and spend the last 40 years of my life [01:06:30] here. And the relationships and the contacts I made with other villagers, I have learned so much. Really, it has.

Georgiana Kjerulff: Have you felt that the village people help each other?

Hester Wagner: I think so. If you need help, [01:07:00] all you needed to do is let people know that you need help, and they are ready and willing to help you. And then, the other thing is if you need a service of any kind, if the foundation is doing some work or something, you can always find that talent and that service in a villager. We have such a cross section [01:07:30] of people that are knowledgeable in so many areas.

Georgiana Kjerulff: How do you think that the people find the village? We don't recruit.

Hester Wagner: We don't recruit. By word of mouth.

Georgiana Kjerulff: Is it friends, and organizations, and kinfolk?

Hester Wagner: I think so. I think so. And then, the other thing that has happened that it's [01:08:00] almost a miracle, but it's such a comfortable feeling is we have had quite a few of the young people who grew up here in the village who have gone out into the world, to make their way. And all of a sudden, they come back, and they say, "I want my children to have the same opportunity I had to live in the village." They come back and become part of the village, and bring their children [01:08:30] with them. I think that speaks for itself.

Georgiana Kjerulff: Are we still just self-contained or do they start any other communities like this?

Hester Wagner: I have no idea what is going on around. I don't know if anyone would have the courage in this day and age to try to do something like this. I don't really think they would.

Georgiana Kjerulff: Do you think that [01:09:00] it was the times or maybe—or the people who led us with Virginia and Elizabeth primarily?

Hester Wagner: I think, first, you had to have the people who had the courage. But I think the times had a lot to do with it too.

Georgiana Kjerulff: So we have mentioned very little about Borsodi and his theories. Are they all in the background or do we just recognize them by the books and don't [01:09:30] really practice his theories?

Hester Wagner: Well, there are so few people who know anything about Borsodi. And when you try to describe him, all you can do is ask them to read his books. And there are books.

Georgiana Kjerulff: Well, tell me about the wildlife here in the village. Is it the same as when you came or has it diminished?

Hester Wagner: Well, when the original villagers [01:10:00] came here, I think, we mentioned earlier, this was ranch land. After they laid it out into lots and people lived here, they had to build fences to keep the cattle out, but there was such an assortment. There were so many birds and so many animals living here. And naturally, [01:10:30] when people come in, they crowd out the animal life, the turtles, the birds. And I understand there are people, just in the last few years, that say, that they have seen ... Personally, I've seen a red fox crossing Dayton Boulevard when I would go out. [01:11:00] But there are still a lot of animal life around, but not like it was originally.

Georgiana Kjerulff: What do we find these days, or just that the village could still harbor some wild animals?

Hester Wagner: Oh, yes.

Georgiana Kjerulff: But it's not out in West Melbourne. Most of the cattle have been ranched?

Hester Wagner: Yes. Yeah.

Georgiana Kjerulff: Hester, we do have [01:11:30] organizations here in the village that are bird lovers and bird watchers.

Hester Wagner: Well, we have a lot of members of the Audubon Society and the Native Plants Society living here. And those people practice. The fundamental beliefs of those organizations, which is to plant only natives, [01:12:00] to maintain their lots, their home sites. And also, Melbourne Village, early on, was designated a bird sanctuary. And we've always—the cardinal has been our—people recognize Melbourne Village by the cardinals that show up here.

Georgiana Kjerulff: Do we have a number of bird watchers?

Hester Wagner: [01:12:30] We have a lot of bird watchers. We have quite a few people who belong to the Audubon Society. We have some very active members of the Audubon Society living here. The same way with the Native Plants Society. And I think that we have a lot more birds that you would find in the surrounding area, but I do know we [01:13:00] have lost a lot of birds. Early on, when we lived here, we had meadowlarks in our backyard. We never see a meadowlark anymore.

And Towhee Drive was named Towhee Drive because there were Towhees there. There were Towhees there after we lived here. I never see a Towhee anymore, but I have seen them in Erna Nixon Park just the last year or [01:13:30] so. It is a sanctuary for the birds and the wildlife. Most villagers treat them with respect. Now, there are exceptions, but most villagers treat the wildlife with respect.

Georgiana Kjerulff: Tell me more about the native plant society. How do they decide who does the instructing and introduce [01:14:00] you to our native plants? Is it ...

Hester Wagner: Well, the Native Plants Society is a state organization. And we have an active group in this area. And they hold monthly meetings and have speakers from all over the state coming in. They offer books. All the current books are offered by the Native Plant [01:14:30] Society. And the Audubon Society does the same thing. They belong to the national and the state Audubon group. And they also do the same thing, offer books and information, and speakers on a monthly basis.

Georgiana Kjerulff: In other words, people from the village join this organization outside of the village, and they both work together?

Hester Wagner: Yes. [01:15:00] The membership duplicates itself in those two organizations. A lot of them.

Georgiana Kjerulff: Do you suppose we are still drawing people who are interested in this or have we changed in our membership is what I'm trying to get to?

Hester Wagner: No. I think the people who come in are very special people. And they are interested in the trees, and the wildlife, the birds, the little [01:15:30] animals, and very protective of them.

Georgiana Kjerulff: So we have a good chance of preserving what we have?

Hester Wagner: I think so. [inaudible].

Georgiana Kjerulff: Now, let's talk a little bit about the early financing here in the village.

Hester Wagner: Well, there's no question about it. The village have never, never been born, [01:16:00] or being established without Virginia Wood's money.

Georgiana Kjerulff: That's her personal financing?

Hester Wagner: That's right. She happened to be in the position of being able. But you have to realize that they bought the 60 acres of land for \$100 an acre, and laid it out in lots, and sold the lots for \$250 apiece. [01:16:30] And when things would get rough, Virginia's money was always there. And Virginia helped some. I know that Virginia helped villagers financially in more than one instance when they were having hard times. But she was prepared to do that.

And Elizabeth was always [01:17:00] pushing for expansion and new members. And she patrolled the village picking up the trash, and making contacts. And these were two strong, educated women. You have to point that out. People think that only now have women become educated. And this is not true. Back 50 years ago, there were those women [01:17:30] who were educated, and found a place in society, and they always were an asset.

Georgiana Kjerulff: Virginia came here in her middle years, didn't she?

Hester Wagner: That's right.

Georgiana Kjerulff: As a widow?

Hester Wagner: Yes.

Georgiana Kjerulff: And she had money from both sides of her family.

Hester Wagner: She inherited money. And her husband, apparently, was a high-ranking military man. I think he was a [01:18:00] general, wasn't he?

Georgiana Kjerulff: He was a general. But she married him right after college. At that time, he had already left. And this was after World War I. They lived all through the depression. And this was not a depression community.

Hester Wagner: Yeah. And I think that she received money from his military service [01:18:30] all through her life. And Virginia knew how to manage money.

Georgiana Kjerulff: There was something about the way she loaned money.

Hester Wagner: Yeah.

Georgiana Kjerulff: It was very careful. Did she have bonds or what?

Hester Wagner: I have no idea. I have no idea, but she always was able to scrounge up the money when it was needed.

Georgiana Kjerulff: She had very little poor debts. I mean, the [01:19:00] money came back.

Hester Wagner: Yeah.

Georgiana Kjerulff: So she made a good investment in people?

Hester Wagner: Yes. Yes.

Georgiana Kjerulff: In the back of all of these, besides her education and the strong women, we really haven't gone too much into Borsodi's theories. That sort of sparked Virginia and Elizabeth, particularly Elizabeth.

Hester Wagner: Yeah. I think Elizabeth would [01:19:30] lean more toward Borsodi's theories than Virginia did.

Georgiana Kjerulff: I believe Ralph Borsodi thought that we didn't have to have a depression if people had enough land to grow their own food, and a way of making their own clothes, and doing all their own work. How much of that rubbed off here [01:20:00] in the village? How many people had garden plots and grew their own food?

Hester Wagner: Well, I think the villagers are a resourceful lot. I think when the chips are down, and they would band together. Even today, I think the villagers are a resourceful lot. You just get in the conversation with people. They all have hobbies and things that do come up as surprises to [01:20:30] me.

Georgiana Kjerulff: We're here together because we work together.

Hester Wagner: That's right.

Georgiana Kjerulff: How well did you know Elizabeth Nutting? We credit everything to Virginia, but where was Elizabeth in this?

Hester Wagner: Oh, I knew Elizabeth very well. Elizabeth worked mightily to maintain and sustain [01:21:00] the village.

Georgiana Kjerulff: Was it her theories or religious background?

Hester Wagner: Well, I believe she had a good, strong religious background, but she never flaunted it. She never tried to influence anybody as far as religion was concerned. And this was one of the important reasons, I think, that the village has survived. We have a cross [01:21:30] section of religions represented in our membership.

Georgiana Kjerulff: We are primarily a Christian organization though.

Hester Wagner: But we have others.

Georgiana Kjerulff: Do you remember our main, Reverend Reece who used to speak. He was a Swedenborgian, which is a-- I don't want to go into the theories of it. [01:22:00] There are very varied religions showing up here.

Hester Wagner: I never quite understood that. But we have had Jewish families, and very good villagers got along fine with the Christian people. And the religion was never mentioned.

Georgiana Kjerulff: You think probably we all get along because religion was not stressed?

Hester Wagner: That's right. [01:22:30] And each person respected the other person's religious beliefs.

Georgiana Kjerulff: And they could go out to the rest of the county.

Hester Wagner: Yeah. And that's still true.

Georgiana Kjerulff: I know many villagers helped in the founding of one local church. That was a Unitarian.

Hester Wagner: That's right.

Georgiana Kjerulff: Ashley Miles and Larkin. Miles and Larkin were the primary ones from the [01:23:00] village. He went out. They said ... I don't want to ...

Hester Wagner: Yes, that's right. A quite a few villagers belong to the church. Gladys Hansen was a member. There are other quite a few.

Georgiana Kjerulff: When we say that it's successful because we were not highly [01:23:30] religious, it didn't mean that people who had religion didn't go out and practice it.

Hester Wagner: That's right.

Georgiana Kjerulff: Now, do you remember when the one split did develop, and they called themselves the Betterment League. Can you tell us anything about them?

Hester Wagner: At first, I have to say I was never asked to join them because I had a feeling [01:24:00] that they thought I wouldn't make a good member. And they were active for a few years. The thing that always mystified me was that the foundation tolerated them the way they did. Each time the foundation had a meeting, they made a report. And the reports were always so negative, or, at least, I thought so.

Georgiana Kjerulff: The Betterment [01:24:30] League made a report?

Hester Wagner: The Betterment League made a report to the foundation. And the people that belonged to the Betterment League were all members of the foundation. And their conception is, as far as I could see it, was that they felt they were making a contribution by their criticisms to the AHF.

Georgiana Kjerulff: And how did we survive [01:25:00] it?

Hester Wagner: I think that they disbanded and made a report. And they said they had accomplished all that they thought they were able to accomplish, so they were disbanding. I think that was her final report.

Georgiana Kjerulff: And they made these reports through the AHF?

Hester Wagner: Yes.

Georgiana Kjerulff: Written reports

Hester Wagner: Written reports.

Georgiana Kjerulff: So, in most intentional communities, [01:25:30] a second group develops and splits the community. And at that point, the community disintegrates, but we didn't. Why do you suppose we didn't?

Hester Wagner: I think the fact that the AHF tolerated them speaks for itself. So, maybe criticism, sometimes, is helpful. [01:26:00] I think we have to think on that one.

Georgiana Kjerulff: We accept the criticism. Did we change anything with their criticisms?

Hester Wagner: I don't know. That, I cannot ... Like I said, I was never an insider there.

Georgiana Kjerulff: Do you suppose it was just a second group of strong people?

Hester Wagner: It was. It was. After they disbanded, quite a few of them became officers [01:26:30] and very active in the foundation. And some of them were active while they were members of the Betterment League. They were members of the foundation, but you would think that they would go off and wouldn't make a contribution, but they were active in some of the things that we're going on in the foundation. That's the way I viewed it.

Georgiana Kjerulff: That's a very unique and different pattern from other intentional communities.

Hester Wagner: That's right.

Georgiana Kjerulff: The [01:27:00] opposition group was absorbed.

Hester Wagner: That's right. I think that was quite a high watermark.

Georgiana Kjerulff: The development of the opposition and the acceptance of the ... was a high watermark of the village?

Hester Wagner: Yeah, that's the way I see it. I could be so wrong, but ...

Georgiana Kjerulff: It's an interesting development, that's for sure.

Hester Wagner: Yeah.

Georgiana Kjerulff: [01:27:30] Well, let's finish up with what developed with the so-called split in the village. And tell us what you just said about the people who helped you, and how the village factions developed, and what they did next. How was this battle carried on? [01:28:00] Since it was an argument.

Hester Wagner: Well, as I stated before, I was never part of the opposition. I was never asked to be part of the opposition. I knew what was going on pretty much. All the years that I've lived here, I have participated actively in the operation of the foundation. I've worked on committees. [01:28:30] I've served in the board of trustees. I served as president of the foundation. When I thought I was burned out, I no longer served on the board. But I've always followed the board of trustees. The split healed itself over the years.

Georgiana Kjerulff: [01:29:00] That makes it a rather unique feature to intentional communities that a split developed really divided the town into two factions, primarily two factions lead by a very strong intelligent people. And they weren't people who were trying to take over too much. They wanted the town [01:29:30] to function the way they thought it should function.

Hester Wagner: You have to say that I think some of the opposition stemmed from the fact that Virginia Wood and Elizabeth Nutting were women. I think that was the root of the whole thing. And then, furthermore, [01:30:00] you have to go back to the time and the place. Money was not as plentiful then as it is now. And there was certain resentment about Virginia Wood's financial situation.

And Elizabeth Nutting, who had had so much experience being a college [01:30:30] professor and in the outside world, people resented that also. And I think that is where the split originated from. And the fact that they were able to field that and absorb it, the whole thing just petered itself out.

Georgiana Kjerulff: I thought it was rather unique that they kept [01:31:00] bringing reports to the American Homesteading Foundation. They didn't set up a separate organization. They may have met separately, but they didn't set up a separate organization.

Hester Wagner: Well, I really don't know what they thought. It was impossible for them to set up an actual organization.

Georgiana Kjerulff: [01:31:30] In other intentional communities, that's what happens. A separate organization is set up.

Hester Wagner: I do not think that they had the financial ability to acquire property maybe, and set up an opposition.

Georgiana Kjerulff: They did not set up a like community. They would move in to control this community, but they never won. [01:32:00] They worked through the community, so they didn't consider themselves as setting up another one, right?

Hester Wagner: I don't think they ever considered that.

Georgiana Kjerulff: Are those papers still available?

Hester Wagner: They're in the AHF's historical archives.

Georgiana Kjerulff: And has anyone made an analysis of this?

Hester Wagner: No. [01:32:30] I don't think many present villagers are aware of that time and the history of the foundation. And I think it would be very difficult for the current members of the foundation and the citizens of the village to grasp the enormity of that.

Georgiana Kjerulff: [01:33:00] The emotional factor, I think.

Hester Wagner: Yeah.

Georgiana Kjerulff: Well, in summing up, why do you think this intentional community succeeded where many, many other intentional communities both here and the rest of the United States have failed? Why have we succeeded over 50 years? And that's as much as any community.

Hester Wagner: I would say the people. My observation, [01:33:30] and this is ... I'm speaking from close contact with the villagers, and participating in the activities, the people. Melbourne Village is made up of exceptional people.

Georgiana Kjerulff: But we have been circulating, People come and people go. How do we keep drawing out the right type?

Hester Wagner: [01:34:00] It seems to attract a certain type of person.

Georgiana Kjerulff: It's not money. It's more education, and it's not always the-

Hester Wagner: The people, they are not alike. It's a cross section. I think that is the secret, the cross section of Americans that come here, their backgrounds, [01:34:30] their education, whatever.

Georgiana Kjerulff: Well, Hester, we thank you very much for your analysis and for your time up here talking about the village. I think that people who pick up this tape will understand a unique intentional community, and you have helped them. Thank you again.