

LEXINGTON ORAL HISTORY PROJECTS, INC.

Interview
Anne Scigliano
July 15, 1992

INT: Why don't you start off telling us who you are and then a little background on when you came to Lexington and how you became editor of the *Minuteman*?

AS: I'm Anne Scigliano. I've lived in Lexington now for twenty-five years, had just moved in four years before all of this Vietnam veterans thing happened. I had been a teacher, and decided that that was not challenging enough so I gave that up. A friend of mine said one day—who worked incidentally in the advertising department of the *Minuteman*—“They're looking for a part time editorial assistant. Would you be interested?” I said “Oh, sure.” It started out two days a week and became two-and-a-half, and in 1969, two years before this, I was made editor, one of the first, I guess, if not the only, the first woman editor of the *Minuteman*. There had been an associate editor but Mr. Adams, who owned the paper and really did establish the rest of the *Minuteman* chain, was very much in command. He's the pundit that wrote “Scene and Heard,” the column. Since the *Minuteman*, which was a wonderful experience in my life—I was there twelve years—I went into public relations full time. I feel that the experiences that I had with that paper were superb and have stayed by me. I'm still active in town government. I got into things that I never would have as an ordinary citizen, just did my thing and paid my taxes.

INT: What were the primary purposes of the paper?

AS: Very, very definitely to provide total coverage for the events week by week that happened in Lexington. We work sixty hours a week to do that and it was fun.

INT: What were your roles and responsibilities as editor?

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AS: Actually it was more a reporter-editor kind of a position at that time. I think now it's mostly editorial. I covered School Committee, the Selectmen, went down to the police station probably every Thursday and every Monday to read the [police] blotter and see what went on. Wrote stories on all of that. I wrote obituaries and weddings, little club news, maybe get and put together the calendar—it was total responsibility. I had one assistant, and it was that assistant that was in town that weekend.

INT: What is your assessment of the community of Lexington at that time? Was it changing? How did groups express their difference? What was going on in town?

AS: Obviously, a lot of things were going on in town. There was a Selectman that people resisted, resented, and there [was] feeling, strong feeling, against that person. I think it showed in a lot of this. People were, and they still are, they always have been I think, very much interested in schools, in education. That was the reason that a lot of people moved to Lexington and settled here and stayed here and wanted to work to improve the system, to make it what they wanted it to be. The fact that it's near Boston attracts a lot of people who are interested, of course, in all of the cultural and educational opportunities and resources in this area. It was a time when [Route] 128 was developing with research and development, and for that reason was more mobile than a town like Concord. I think that shows in a lot of what has gone on in this town. I think in many ways we benefit from [what] they bring with them—experiences, things that have happened where they were, and they include it or introduce it into Lexington and then move on but have left us with something that a town that is less mobile doesn't have.

INT: Is there a negative side to that as well?

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AS: Probably there is. They want the best, and they may or may not know that they're not going to live here very long. I've heard a lot of people say, "They get elected to Town Meeting, they are instrumental in having all of these programs established, and then they leave and we're stuck with bills." But I don't know. I bet we all want the best, so I'm not sure that that's true.

INT: Wouldn't people who lived in Lexington at that time actually describe Lexington as a "fraudulent" community of—what's it called, a bedroom...

AS: Bedroom community.

INT: That's right. It was very, very strong language; you know I was interested in...

AS: I think that there's some truth to that, in that people live here but they spend their days working, and return only to sleep. Nevertheless, I think this is one of the communities with the highest citizen participation. It always has been, and so that to me takes away from that or diminishes that feeling or reputation of just being a bedroom community.

INT: How does this factor into what you described as resistance to this Selectman, the head of the [Board of] Selectmen? Can you define what that was about?

AS: People saw him as making the position of Selectman a job, a full-time job, and they resented that. We weren't yet at the town manager stage, and in fact it was several—I can't remember what year the town manager position was established—but anyway, they saw him as already putting himself in that position.

INT: Which is something he wasn't hired for.

AS: No, no.

INT: But then we did go that distance.

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AS: Yes. But that was after a process, too, of writing the Town Manager Act. There was a process they wanted to go through, they didn't want it to be jumped over.

INT: Is there anything else you want to talk about in general, in the background with the paper before we move on to the particulars of the event?

AS: I don't think so, just to emphasize that everybody felt a part of the *Minuteman*; they could call up and say, "I didn't like the way that was written," or write an article, saying "That was poorly written." Never any holdbacks as far as that's concerned. It made everybody a writer, [laughter] we used to say.

INT: Anybody can write if they read the *Minuteman*.

AS: They felt that it was their paper, and in many ways they donated more, because it's changed, there's no question. Only now and then was there ever any thought that there should be another paper in town. God forbid we should miss a meeting somewhere. If something happened on a Wednesday night or a Thursday night, and it wasn't as important as we had decided another meeting was, we just...we were so wrong.

INT: I remember being part of an ad hoc [committee] to evaluate the Franklin school, and we held sixteen copies and we were basically coming up with stuff that the principal did not want.

AS: No!

INT: No. She really obstructed our writing and submitting our report to the school committee, but to our amazement there it was in the *Minuteman*. [Laughter.]

AS: Oh, that, that didn't make any...

INT: Until we got there I'll never know, but we were so thrilled!

AS: I wish I could remember.

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INT: Winnie Freedman was the person who wrote the article. It was just terrific. Let's move on to the protest march in Lexington on Memorial Day weekend. How did you first hear about it?

AS: Selectmen's meeting the Monday before.

INT: What happened?

AS: They [the Vietnam Veterans Against the War] were there—a representative was there. They had written ahead to say that they were coming, were asking for permission to bivouac, to camp, on the Green. And the Selectmen, of course—I don't remember when they went into executive session, but we knew what they had discussed, essentially.

INT: Which was?

AS: That they were not inclined to give them permission to set up camp. One of the biggest reasons was that the Green is a cemetery¹, which the Concord Bridge [in Concord's National Park] is not. They felt that this was not the place for a protest of this nature.

INT: Then what happened? What was your next awareness?

AS: Continued discussion. They were definitely—they were going to have their... The veterans were going to do what they wanted to do, whether or not they did it on the Green, we didn't know. We know that the Selectmen met a number of times—we were privy to the meetings, we were busy putting the paper together so that we would occasionally try to get a summary. As I recall Mr. Adams was the one that for the most part was in touch, and at a meeting on I believe it was Friday, and I want to say [in the] morning, but I'm not positive of that as being what—twenty-five or more years ago? It became known that [Selectman] Natalie Riffin was not going to be in town and so it was essentially a four-member board, and there was

¹ The Battle Green, while not a cemetery does *contain* a cemetery. Within a small gated area surrounding an obelisk the remains of those who fell in the Battle of Lexington in 1775 are buried. According to the inscription, the remains were moved from “the old cemetery” and placed by the memorial in 1835.

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already some resistance to that. People felt that she should be [there]. The Selectmen themselves understood, but they also felt that if it came to a vote, one way or the other the odd vote is always important. They then decided—and I'm not sure when, whether it was Friday or Saturday that they came up with their own plan—they wanted to work with the veterans, but again, the Green is a cemetery, so it was not the place for this, so they looked, or considered, a number of sites and came up with the playground area, the athletic field [Lincoln Field], and that of course was offered and was not acceptable. The Council of Congregations I know was involved, but I was not at any of the meetings. I know that Reverend [John] Wells, who was the pastor at the First Parish church, was very much involved, and was really a leader in trying to see that the veterans did get what they had asked. He was a spokesman, I believe. I don't remember when I first met [now U. S. Senator] John Kerry but I know I interviewed him. I think it was afterwards, right afterwards. I'm fairly certain it was not before. Anyway, I also had plans for the weekend, so my assistant stayed and covered all of...in fact he was right there the whole night right with them—Tom Curran, I don't know if you remember him²—he really liked taking pictures more than anything else, and that was great. But we were in touch—in fact, we were on Lake Winnepesaukee as was Mr. Adams, but he had a cottage and we had a boat—but anyway, we went over to see him and asked him what he knew because we'd heard the news on the radio that this had happened, the arrest had taken place.

I actually could not wait to get back to Lexington Monday. I knew that it was going to be a very busy week. Indeed it was. Then Tuesday morning—actually because it was a holiday, there were all the Memorial Day exercises going on as well—but Tuesday morning already letters had

² Tom Curran, *Minuteman* photographer, was interviewed by LOHP.

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started to come in about the Selectmen and their position, one way or the other—both. But it seemed that as if there was more, as I recall, more against the Selectmen and in favor of the veterans, and also the whole action of the arrests. People were saying how this was the only way to express themselves given what had gone on. And as I remember—I'll never forget it— fifty-five letters the first week, and we ran every single one of them, and forty-five the next. They continued to come in, they continued to trickle [in], and every one that was signed we ran, and with no order, just however it fit.

INT: How did you find room for all of them?

AS: They gave us room. There was no question about that. No. Usually, the paper was—I wish I could remember the exact percentage—but it was more than fifty percent advertising space in order to pay for it, in order to break even. I'm going to say sixty-forty. Sometimes it even got to be more advertising than that, so we would end up with a lot of what we called “oversat,” but there was a meeting of the editorial leaders, the editor and publisher and I can't think who else, maybe that was all. Anyway, the decision was made that we should run the letters, as much as we could, run all that came in the first week, and as I recall we did. Whatever space it took, this was important.

INT: Knowing the town as you did, and having heard over the radio what was happening, were you surprised by the volume of letters?

AS: No, no. Not one bit. I was more surprised at [the] arrests, although I didn't feel that it was wrong, I just couldn't believe that it would go to that extent. I thought that somehow maybe the veterans would be arrested and maybe some people along with them, but I never thought that four hundred people would be arrested, although very understandable.

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INT: What pressures was the *Minuteman* under with the deluge of materials? What was it like to be in the office trying to scratch up all that?

AS: We did nothing but eat, sleep and drink the Vietnam Veterans Against the War versus the Selectmen at that time. It would been on for, well, the actual live coverage was on for weeks. There was no question, the Selectmen continued to discuss as letters came in, townspeople were talking about it. I don't think we could walk through the Center and not have people stop us and say something. People called me about the coverage, called Mr. Adams; it was their paper, and they felt they should express themselves.

INT: And what did they express? How was it where you should have, what is the word...when you get caught by both sides?

AS: I don't feel that I really was. I think more actual praise, direct praise, came in via telephone calls, whereas the opposition of criticism was through the letters. Except for my editorial, which is what I suppose an editorial should be, and it was in favor of the Selectmen doing what they did because at that time the town by-laws did not provide for demonstrations like this on the Green. It's a hallowed place, and I said that if they wanted it changed, they should, and that was the end, and I felt that that was fair enough. But I do remember I'd received a number of phone calls in support saying that they were glad that I had said it.

INT: Would you hold up the paper and talk a little bit about what decisions were made as to what went on the front page, and maybe read your editorial, and just give us a glimpse of the...

AS: [Showing a copy of the *Lexington Minuteman*, June 3, 1971.] The main article both with photos and stories by Tom Curran; Tom was the member of the staff that was there with them, took the pictures. The picture in the upper left hand corner is of people sleeping early that Sunday morning, I hear. This is a summary of what happened so that...it should,

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rightfully be the lead article. Today we would have used much a bigger headline. That wasn't the style then. Then [there's] a list of all of the people that were arrested and were out on bail; [that] was pretty important.

Actually, I think this should have been up here, now that I see it again, but I remember laying it out. This being more major than this, I think, should have gone in the side part [pointing to the newspaper]. But anyway, here's a story about the thing in Cary Hall where the veterans were asking for a permit and most of those people were in support of them. And a statement of Natalie Riffin, the Selectman that wasn't in town. She explained her position about plans that had been made that she wasn't able to change, and she was sorry that she wasn't here. And then this little picture down here is Memorial Day exercises. So it certainly did capture the front page and continues through. The column here by the publisher was all about it as well.

INT: What was his stance?

AS: I'd have to reread it... He was in favor, he was in support of the Selectmen. I know that, but I think he was also explaining the fact that letters had to be signed, if wanted. That was very important; we did always insist on that anyway, but he said we do run letters with pseudonyms signed to them but we must have the real name of the writer in our files, and we feel if anybody feels strongly about anything—we had to put our names on articles [and] that they should as well.

INT: Would you read your article?

AS: Is it all right to hold this up and show this spread of letters? See, they just went on and on, all of them. Each of them was read and titled and so on. It was an experience. I don't remember what time we finally put the paper to bed, but anyway... Tried to, if we could, we ran one for and one

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against, or maybe not, I know we did that at some other time.. I entitled it
“Armed with Right.” [Reading:]

“All is quiet on the Green today, but not in our hearts and minds. We are disappointed, disillusioned, and saddened for what has happened, that it did happen. But confrontation was inevitable. If Concord had resisted, it would have happened there, then here, and all along the way. Camping was not allowed on the Capitol Mall; none is permitted in the Minuteman National Park. It is not lawful on the Lexington Battle Green. These places are all symbolic, they form a part of our heritage, but none is ours to take. Where taking is prohibited by law and the breaking of that law is permitted for the moment, the taker scores a victory. Where taking is prohibited and officials enforce the law, he who takes in spite also scores a victory.

To many it would appear that the only ones who lost this past weekend are the members of the Lexington Board of Selectmen. The superficial glance would bear that out in their votes in a subsequent election. They lost the favor of many of their townsmen, and to what might appear to many, they may seem to have lost a reputation that is Lexington's. Take another look. Where on Saturday night many of their townspeople lost their dignity to the side of protest, the Selectmen gained in stature. They had the courage to uphold the law, which even our Attorney General did not. They showed their strength in the face of pressure, their determination to protect what is their given duty to protect. They had right on their side.

When people believe in something as strongly as did the people in Lexington Saturday night, their belief must be appraised, but when these beliefs extend beyond the law, then they must be re-examined. If we are to remain a nation of laws, not of men, if we are to retain our posture in the world of the seventies, we cannot allow our laws to be twisted and misshapen. They are ours to abide by, our elected officials to uphold. According to the American Way, if we are not happy with a law, we have recourse to change it. If the townspeople who joined in the bivouac want to permit camping on the Battle Green, then let them assemble and proceed to change the town bylaw, but until that time allow them to condemn no one who does what is right in upholding that law.”

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That was that, and then next week we got more letters. This was also covered in the section that went on to other towns. That was just to sell papers elsewhere. Then they continued, and so on.

INT: To go back to the response to your editorial, to your coverage, did you have more people making hate calls or threatening calls?

AS: Thank goodness, no. It was not hate calls, nothing that strong, and, if they wanted to object to that as well as to the Selectmen's action, then they wrote a letter the next week. I don't remember how many were in favor or against, I just remember there were forty-five of them.

INT: I recently studied the letters in detail, though not all of them, and I didn't see much on the coverage, I don't remember anything critical of the coverage. The passion is for [or] against the vets

AS: And the Selectmen.

INT: I didn't remember any criticism of the paper at all.

AS: There may have been some thoughts about the editorial as not being broader, but as I said, editorials aren't. You've got to take a stand.

INT: Would you talk a little bit about the consequences for the town and the Selectmen?

AS: It certainly did color the town elections in the next year, and for the next several years. I feel that it divided the town. People became labeled as—maybe they already were, but this certainly brought it to my mind that they became labeled—as conservatives or liberals based on their actions or their sides in this particular event. Selectmen who were good Selectmen lost their seats; they lost support even before they decided to run. It was known in one case that support would be withdrawn. It involved people who might not have been involved in town government, and possibly changed or influenced even Town Meeting. That extended beyond now, anything like this. But in some ways [the attitude was] “I'll do what whatever I can to

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oppose the Selectmen if the Selectmen or some individuals more than the Board are in favor of this, [and therefore] I will vote against it.” It went on for a number of years, this feeling. I think maybe some people didn't even realize that it did go back in their hearts to this, but I feel that it did in a lot of cases—into the seventies. I left the paper in 1978 so it seemed to have quieted down by then, but by certainly 1975, 1976.

INT: Why did this issue arouse such passion, such division in the town?

AS: Don't you think a lot of it has to do with the feeling nationally that was right here also about the Vietnam War? People saw no sense to it, still don't, never will. Any protest of something like that just increased in magnitude. There was so much sympathy for them, and in this case, not for national government, and that may have been transmitted even locally.

INT: Did you think the events in Lexington had any effect nationally?

AS: I don't. [Laughter.] I've never stopped to think of whether they did or not. Not that I can think of.

INT: Certainly, the coverage was very good.

AS: Oh, yes, we [laughter] got national coverage.

INT: ... national press and the media?

AS: It's funny I don't remember that. I don't recall. I know that it was in the national press, but I have the feeling that it was picked up from television. I don't remember ever talking to AP [Associated Press] for example until I moved on from the *Minuteman*.

INT: How do you look back on this now?

AS: When you first called and asked if I would be willing to be interviewed, my first reaction was, let it die, because it was a extremely emotional time. Now I guess you know, I'm interested in what you're doing. I think that your project is a worthwhile one. To shake it all out and see how can we look back on it.

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INT: Do you think the town has changed? Could this happen again in Lexington? Are we more conservative? More liberal? How do you see the town? You say you're still active.

AS: I see it now as probably more liberal than it was before this, but I'm not sure that that's related to this. I think that there are a lot of factors that may enter into that, one of them being what we had talked about earlier, the mobility that's in the town.

INT: Are there any other aspects of this you'd like to talk about? Before we had the camera rolling we talked a little bit about the way these events accentuated the divisions you noticed.

AS: Let me just go back to something that I did say earlier, and that is that the seventies were a time of protest, and even after this protests continued in the form of teenage weekend parties in warm weather where the police then became the target. I'm not so sure that that was just Lexington, I think it probably happened everywhere, but as people became—or labeled themselves or labeled others—liberals and/or conservatives, it seemed to me to affect even my own entrance into a room. For example, Cary Memorial Hall on the night of election results, where people would look around and say [whatever]. People wouldn't feel comfortable in joining a group of their own townspeople because they knew that they were voting for the labeled “liberal” candidate and they were for the “conservative” candidate. That was just judged by the stands that people took, I don't think it had anything to do with the amount of money they were willing to spend on projects. There were certain things, issues in town that seemed to be labeled liberal or conservative.

INT: I can remember some of the school debate, open classroom versus...

AS: Mm-hmm.

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INT: Can you think of some other issues that suffered those kind of polarizing divisions?

AS: I wish I could.

INT: In the Planning Board, or let's see...

AS: The Planning Board, yes, definitely, the low and moderate income housing. That was another issue—if you were for it, for low and moderate, and for high density, higher density, like—one of the highest densities proposed was a twelve-unit per acre or something. Then there were sides, there were divisions. Conservation I don't think really became an issue in that, but certainly the subsidized housing was one.

INT: Was it inevitable that such labeling and polarization take place, or was it an unfortunate consequence of this particular event?

AS: It probably happens in a lot of towns, as we see people today on television, for example, something might happen in a town and all of the TV cameras are on the Selectmen or the School Committee, or whatever, and there are different points of view which are healthy. There's a certain amount of polarization. Right now [there are] issues on abortion [and that] is the same thing. I don't see it as any different. It may have been a little bit newer to us then. This was in fact the largest protest that had ever happened in Massachusetts. I'm not sure I could think of another one since anywhere in Massachusetts.

INT: In terms of arrests.

AS: Right. The townspeople becoming involved.

INT: You've answered every question that I had planned.

INT2: I have another one that goes along with your last one. You just said you had come to the town maybe four years before this event occurred. Did you have a sense that your coming to the town and the growth of the

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town [was] bringing in more diversity than perhaps was here ten or twenty years before?

AS: That's true.

INT2: Does that tie in with the idea that Lenore just asked about, perhaps that sort of division or separation was inevitable because of the fact you're going to get a broader spectrum,?

AS: I think that's true. I think, too, that perhaps a lot of the old-time Lexingtonians were realizing that they were losing control. They were having to share their offices or they were no longer certain that they were going to be holding offices.

INT2: What was it like before then?

AS: The same people moved from one board to another. There was always...there was a small group; I could name half a dozen of them right now that were on the School Committee and the Planning Board, and then on the [Board of] Selectmen, and then on the Board of Appeals, and felt that they controlled the town. With the change and with the newer residents, the diversity did put an end to that in many respects.

INT: ..A lot of tension over police, town kids' issues?

AS: Mm-hmm.

INT: In the seventies? Does that relate to this?

AS: I'm not sure whether directly. It was more relating to the seventies and not to this event, but yes, the teenage parties [that] I don't think would happen today. I really don't think that the kids would have any time for anything like that, but then it was...

INT: Well, there was more than the parties, there were charges of general wanton harassment. On the part of the police.

AS: Mm-hmm. Do you remember...?

INT: Who had beards and...

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AS: I remember when [a reporter] wrote an article about a black youth that was arrested in Lexington, I believe it was Patriots Day, and I can't tell you the year, but it was prior to this. The sentiment was that the Lexington police were out to get blacks. There were blacks on the Lexington police force. Still, I think the feeling that for a long time young people didn't feel they could drive through town without possibly being stopped by the police. Especially if they had beards or long hair, whatever, but that's all changed and going by the board now. I don't know, I'm not, you know...[laughter].

INT: I've been struck by I think it was Chief Corr, writing in the *Minuteman* that it was the job of the police to teach Lexington's children that they couldn't always have a second chance because their parents were so meek and mild, and I remember saving that newspaper.

AS: Really.

INT: That was pretty powerful.

INT2 Was it in that era?

INT: Yes. I thought Kay asked you that question, and as a newspaper editor where did this polarization—where did that come from?

AS: Well, it gave me a label. I was definitely labeled a conservative. I tried to...which I thought I did in an open broad-minded way. It's obviously difficult. I think it's human nature if you feel strongly about something that you do, having a bias, it's difficult not to show it, although I really did sincerely try not to... It was very important. It was a stress to all of us that it...there were two sides, or more than two sides, and [we believed] that we should reflect those. In election coverage, in personal candidate coverage, we interviewed every single candidate on all of the issues that we felt or that they felt were important. Whatever they wanted to talk about. Absolutely. I don't recall that we ever took a stand. I don't think so. On one candidate at least for a while until new owners took over, on one candidate versus

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another. I don't know that a town newspaper, if it's the only newspaper in town, should do that. They don't present the news, and we were there to present the news and it meant covering, presenting, both sides.

INT: How do you think the paper's changed now?

AS: I don't think it's Lexington any more, not really. People stop me on the street—and I've been out of there for thirteen years—and they'll say, you know, it's just not the same. Well, we did put a lot into it. It's different now in that there're more staff members who try to cover as much but do not. For example, the Board of Appeals that I'm on. We never, never get a reporter. I made sure that every Board of Appeals meeting was covered because there're a lot of things that affect neighborhoods at those meetings. It's changed. We'll get the notes, but it is not the same as being there and quoting people, so that was very definitely... leave a meeting before it's over in order to write it up and get into the paper... The deadline is different. It has to be put together now on Tuesday nights and it goes by sections. We put it together on Wednesday mornings. All the major town boards met Mondays and Tuesdays so we had that luxury. We didn't go back on the Tuesday night and write a story.

INT: How could you ever get to all the meetings with only two of you?

AS: We had two freelance writers

INT: Ah, stringers.

AS: That helped, stringers, too. But those were the only things that anybody else did. The School Committee and the Board of Appeals.

INT3: Some of the things I remember you were very generous [about] is somebody else's writing—if we'd submit it, you'd print it. That was a wonderful way from my perspective of somebody who was acting in a local organization, communicating.

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AS: Sure, because there was and there is still a lot going on in—a lot of clubs. As I said earlier, I don't know if there's another town equal to the percentage of citizen participation [in Lexington]. Look in the Annual Report and see them—well they don't put them in anymore, because it'll cost them to put the Annual Report together—but if they were to list every single committee and all its members, it [would take] pages and pages.

INT2: I'm just adding into this, being involved in the schools, because I have kids in school. They have a volunteer luncheon in the spring, or they had for a couple of years, but I don't think they can afford it because all the people who volunteer in the school in one capacity or another, it's such a huge group that they can't really afford to have them over there though they want to show appreciation.

INT: Thank you very much.

END OF INTERVIEW