

**Interview with Ned Meany**  
**Chatham, MA**  
**1973.002.01**

**Description:** Interview with Ned Meany detailing his life and how he came to Chatham. They also discuss the recent funding and building of the Mural Barn and a new wing to the building. This was made during the time the famous Stalknecht murals were returned to Chatham. Ned also describes his career as the headmaster at Northfield School in Pennsylvania.

**Interviewer:** Don't you get frustrated with inanimate things?

**Ned:** Uh huh.

**Interviewer:** Because you can't talk to them and say "You son of gun!"

**Ned:** That's right.

**Interviewer:** Now tell me about Ned Meany.

**Ned:** Where do you want me to begin? Way back, before Chatham?

**Interviewer:** Oh yes! I want to know how you happened.

**Ned:** How he happened?

**Interviewer:** Yeah.

**Ned:** All right.

**Interviewer:** Now you don't look at your notes. You put the notes aside. Come on, just talk, just really relax and talk. Where did you grow up?

**Ned:** Dorothy and I were both born in Seattle.

**Interviewer:** You were?

**Ned:** We became acquainted by going on hiking trips and mountain climbing expeditions.

**Interviewer:** Yeah?

**Ned:** We graduated from the University of Washington. And then I came east for graduate work.

**Ned:** And a year later, we were married. And have not returned to Seattle except for visits since then.

**Interviewer:** What is Seattle like, very briefly?

**Ned:** Well it's a lovely city. If our two daughters had not married and were living in Massachusetts, we would've moved on back and retired there.

**Interviewer:** Really?

**Ned:** Because the mountains are very close and Puget Sound- it's one of the reasons the Cape attracted us- the Puget Sound is omnipresent. Bays and harbors, and trees coming right down to the water's edge. Beautiful.

**Interviewer:** Rocky coast?

**Ned:** Rocky coast. Some good beaches and, of course, the mountains practically reflected in the water. So close by. However, as young people we chose the mountains rather than the salt water for our pleasures. And then, after graduate school, we were in Washington for a couple of years.

**Interviewer:** This is Washington State?

**Ned:** Washington, D.C.

**Interviewer:** Washington, D.C., okay.

**Ned:** Where I was in the Workings (?) Institution, where I was a research fellow for the year. And then in the National Archives for a year. But, I had teaching in my blood. So we decided

that we didn't want to stay in Washington forever. So – this was Depression time – and the first good teaching opportunity come along was in a boys boarding school in Pennsylvania, the Hill School. So we were there until the war took me away. I was in the Navy as a reserve officer. And then for three years as an educational officer at the University of Michigan, doing administrative history at Great Lakes, an office of the 9th Naval District. All of which is very amusing because as a naval officer I was on saltwater twice. Once was a ferry going to Staten Island and the other time was a ferry going from Oakland to San Francisco.

**(Laughter)**

**Ned:** So my sea experience is slightly limited. At the end of the war we came back to join friends who were already established at Mount Herman. People we had known at the Hill School were now at Mount Herman School. Of course, another boys boarding school. After several years there, we moved across the river to the sister school where I became headmaster of Northfield School. And we were there at the two institutions for 25 years. As time came for retirement, we began looking around. We decided that we mustn't retire in the town where I had been headmaster. That was just out of question. You're moving too close to the establishment you'd helped to run. So we shopped around in Vermont and New Hampshire. And decided that after all, as our retirement years were going to advance that wasn't a very good climate for us to be in. And we had been down here to the Cape earlier for short periods of time. And then for the past four or five years, we had been in the Gregorian House on Crowell Road.

**Interviewer:** Oh really?

**Ned:** So that made us acquainted with the neighborhood and some of the people, not very many. So we put ourselves in the hands of a couple of real estate people and saw this house.

**Interviewer:** This was Sally Erath's?

**Ned:** This was Sally Erath's house. We fell in love with it right away. Particularly with the garden because we had not had time enough to do much gardening in the more recent years, but we loved it. And as time went on we became aware, after we bought the house, after we became acquainted with Sally, we began to realize that it's charm was because Sally had lived here a long time and developed the garden, restored the house in part, and shown her affection for it by all of the things that she did. We did not buy from Sally, we bought it from an intermediary party. Our first, we bought it in 1969, and in 1972 we retired and moved here. And we've owned it for a short time since then. But from the very first, we deeply understood in the garden and in the house, and in the greenhouse because this, as a typical New England house, had been added onto it at least three or four times before. And our edition happens to be a tiny little greenhouse, which we built through the generosity of the trustees, alums, and faculty members of the school when we retired. It provides goodies for us to plant out in the garden in the summer time. And of course, is an interesting winter occupation. And Dorothy rather soon became interested in the Friends of Monomoy, mutual friends. And that, of course, is the organization which is interested in the theater, but also interested in the concerts that come at the end of the season. As time went on, through Bill Westgate, I became interested in doing some counseling at the high school.

**Interviewer:** Oh really?

**Ned:** For juniors and seniors about their college plans, at a time when the staff was changing somewhat at the high school and a little additional outside help was welcome. So that was an interesting way to become acquainted with the town. And I learned that there were an awful

lot of young people and professional people, teachers, who were quite similar to the ones I had been teaching with for a long, long time and that, of course, helps to keep one young. So this was an interesting transitional period. A transition from a very, very active career, which involved both of us, which is one of the reasons why we went into boarding school life, the transition was much easier for us than it has been for a lot of our friends and acquaintances who have come from urban situations, and suburban living and they found the transition to living in Chatham –

**Interviewer:** Abrupt.

**Ned:** Abrupt. So that's been one of the pleasant things. And then of course more recently I have become interested in the Historical Society and that's become more engrossing.

**Interviewer:** Really?

**Ned:** Because about the time that I became president I found that a great number of the members were already generating interest in motion, and moving things. And so the Board of Directors and the members were ready when Mrs. Nye and Mr. Wight decided that it was time the murals came back to Chatham. Together with that, the board decided that it was time to use the money that had been set aside earlier for a building fund and go out and raise more money in order to add a wing to Atwood House. And that's what we've been busy doing in the last few months. The project, of course to everyone's pleasure, has been really going along very well. The dedication of the Murals Barn took place a month or so ago, less than a month actually. And it is now having a great many people come to visit. Many people now coming, of course, because of the publicity that has been aroused by the fact that the murals have had a period of being shown in Houston and Los Angeles. They've been restored beautifully. And

Eleanor Henderson, who is the curator of the Historical Society, has chosen to be the hostess in the Murals Barn all summer. Every day – virtually every day since the dedication she has been on duty. Whether Atwood House with its voluntary hostesses is open or not, Eleanor is there. Many people have come to see the murals and then have gone next door to see Atwood House too. Because you can do both for the price of one. I think also a great deal of interest has been generated this summer, and early spring, by Josephine Ivanoff's publication in the paper. She has been very active, as you know, in digging into the records that are in the historical society and using them for a basis of articles. That's good. We have a very active Ways and Means Committee to raise funds. We're very pleased with that because, about 400 people have contributed, just short, almost \$11,000 for the new wing. The Murals Barn is pretty well paid for by the generous gift of \$25,000 by Mrs. Nye. The landscaping is to be taken care of by gifts from the family and friends of Sally Erath. Because she was president about 1959 and deeply interested in gardening and that seemed to be an appropriate way to pay honor to her. But we need, aside from the money already in, we need another \$20-\$25,000. Which we hope to raise in the next weeks and months so that the new wing will be functioning next spring. And the way in which it will service well is that the – we now, in fact tomorrow, will be moving out of storage things that Josephine Atkins left to us. Which had to be moved out of her property into storage because we had no place to put it. Now we'll be able to sort it and decide what things are of historical value and what things can be sold or traded. That's one purpose for the building. And there will be a room called the Atkins Kent Memorial Room. There also will be an opportunity then for us to spread out a lot more of the things that we have, put some of them away and bring them out for special exhibits, and make Atwood House Proper more of a home.

**Interviewer:** Yeah. It's really a –

**Ned:** It's cluttered now with things that could be used in other ways and exhibits. There will be some storage space, there will be a room for people to go when the building is open in the summer time, for research. We seem to be gathering now that it's the spirit of the times. We seem to be gathering a lot more information about genealogy.

**Interviewer:** Really?

**Ned:** People come to ask about family trees and so on. There are some things there about Nickersons, and the Eldridges, and the Atwoods that need to be available to members of the families and others who are interested in them. These are things which we hope that the new wing will promote. And we're very anxious to get that done because there are so many others things that the Historical Society ought to be doing. We ought to be doing more with publications. We ought to be doing more with relations with other historical societies on the Cape. Because there isn't very much other people know about we're doing and we know little about what's going on in other places. And some of them have been in longer existence than we had. Our organization is only little over 50 years old.

**Interviewer:** And your organization is very lucky to have you because it's been dead for years.

**Ned:** Well it's –

**Interviewer:** Sleeping, let's say.

**Ned:** There has been this ferment going on.

**Interviewer:** Good. I'm very glad.

**Ned:** And it just seems that all the things that have been happening during the last few months are stimulating this.

**Interviewer:** Oh yeah.

**Ned:** Without things like Mrs. Nye's offer and Mr. Wight's offer with the murals themselves.

**Interviewer:** Enthusiasm is self-generating, like yeast.

**Ned:** It comes to the top.

**Interviewer:** Good. Well, I felt so for a long time that it has not been doing it until very recently.

**Ned:** Well there are other things that we ought to be doing. It isn't that the Historical Society should be the center, but the Railroad Museum, the Mill, the Commission, the Garden Club already is working with the Historical Society on some things and with other organizations too, and that way the Garden Club is a very active organization. But we ought to be in more constant touch than we are about things in the town that are of common interest.

**Interviewer:** Aside from – this is something that I have wanted to do, put together. Of course, I'm extraordinarily busy, but I have felt that there are many organizations in this town that have similar aims, but they are not focused, they are not even focused in their heads. I have been wanting to get together the heads of various organizations to sit down, to see what we can do together for the town because working together there is infinitely more stuff than we can ever do alone. Especially if we organize, discuss, if we say, "Now look what is really good for Chatham," and all put it together. But, a thing like this is a really big job. This isn't something you do in a month. It's something you spend a year organizing. So my idea has been before I try to bring everybody together, I want this winter to go from organization to organization and attend meetings, get some idea of where their head is at. So then we can pull the whole thing together. Don't you think we need to do that? The selectmen, Chamber of Commerce, all these groups and coordinate – we won't agree on everything –

**Ned:** No. I think that some people are a little, maybe a little fearful that somebody is trying to create an empire.

**Interviewer:** No. Who?

**Ned:** I'm not thinking of anyone.

**Interviewer:** I mean what sort of people? I can't think of anybody thinking of that. I mean what empire would you create?

**Ned:** This is one of the things will wipe out of this when the time comes.

**Interviewer:** Oh yeah, sure. What could you create for an empire?

**Ned:** I was thinking that some of the organizations, like perhaps the Garden Club, I can't speak for them, of course I don't know anything about them or the Women's Club. They might feel that, say the Chamber of Commerce, to use that only as an illustration because I don't know them well, was trying to build up their organization as prime, and perhaps for business reasons, rather than thinking of in terms of the general welfare.

**Interviewer:** I would think that that would lessen, getting together on a group discussion because the Chamber of Commerce exists, the Garden Club exists, if they sit down and talk together they're going to have to have a much more friendly view of the whole thing. There would be less fear, there would be more "we can do this together."

**Ned:** I was thinking of the recent unhappiness, a year or two ago, by some of the Garden Club people, I think it was, wanting to develop the triangle more, do you remember the one that would put marked trails through?

**Interviewer:** Yeah.

**Ned:** Which would, we could dream up reasons, good reasons for leaving it alone or developing it.

**Interviewer:** Ferment again, right.

**Ned:** There has to be some sort of compromise there, rather than an adamant position.

**Interviewer:** Well, of course you don't have to get together on everything, but if you sit down with a Sign Code, the Architectural Review Board and say, "Let us settle on a few basic goals, ideas, general patterns that are good for the town." That is what I had in mind, not coming down to specifics and saying I want this, no I want that. General directions, general attitudes that this could foster. I think that the Chamber of Commerce needs input from other organizations. This way they don't really have it. Except as individuals, when they go as individuals they're there for more money. But if they see where other people's heads are at –

**Ned:** Well of course, there's always competition for funds for one thing or another. And this should probably not enter into our thoughts about such a thing, except that there is a limited amount of funds.

**Interviewer:** All right, so we all exist. If we think in competitive terms, that is not constructive.

**Ned:** No, it isn't.

**Interviewer:** If we get together and say, "Look we have some general aims."

**Ned:** I remember when there was discussion in the Historical Society meeting, years ago, about our need for money. And someone said, "Well now with all the competition for money with Strong Island, I don't see how the Historical Society could think that they could get it." Someone else then stood and said that there may be some people that just aren't interested in Strong

Island. They might very well be interested in the Historical Society and be willing to give quite a bit.

**Interviewer:** I find that concept of competition, within a town, unfortunate. I think this is a barrier that should be dissolved.

**Ned:** The other day I called Carl Carlosi (?) to ask him - giving him a specific invitation to come to the dedication of the murals because a couple of other ministers had been asked to take part and he had not. But he had carried the service for Mrs. Wight when she died, according to Fred Wight. And so he wanted him to be sure that he was welcome. I called him and invited him and he said, "Good I won't have to do anything, that's great. And I said, "I guess maybe we're in competition." He said, "I guess maybe we are now." For funds.

**Interviewer:** Oh no, I don't like the idea of competition.

**Ned:** No. We were joking about it and so on and again there are people who would give to the church project who are just not interested in the Historical Society, and the other way around. This is not – everybody is pleased about Strong Island. Everybody will be pleased when the Historical Society's job is done and it can turn lesser resources then, endowment income, and so on, to other things. So this is the way we go. And I think it's important, important that we get together as you suggest.

**Interviewer:** Oh yeah, because this feeling of competition immediately upsets me. This is not a – it shouldn't be there. We are all together, we are in the same direction, we hope. And there isn't room for us all, is rather strange. Tell me a little bit about Northfield. It must've been very interesting, very stimulating. It must've had some unusual aspects, yes?

**Ned:** Yes. We were there during an earlier period when things were quite traditional and had been that way for a long, long time. It was definitely a girls boarding school, conservative and in the old tradition. We were there also during a period of restlessness in the late '60s and that wasn't nearly as much fun because it was a period of turmoil. Youngsters were of course wanting to be independent, and rightly so. But it was also a period which was difficult for older people who were teachers and administrators.

**Interviewer:** Anything getting born is always messy, isn't it?

**Ned:** It was hard to adapt and, of course, this is a pendulum, a pendular (sp.) sort of thing. When the pendulum is swinging to an extreme on either side it is a hard time. And of course, things have changed since. But we were there also during the period when there was great movement toward true coeducation. The school was an interesting one, in that it had been founded by D. L. Moody, both Mount Herman and Northfield, with the idea that it was for people whose means were very limited. And this is still true. There is a tremendous scholarship program.

**Interviewer:** Really?

**Ned:** But in that period of founding, there was also a great deal of religious conservatism and so on. And a lot of this had changed over the years. The school had become, the two schools had become one in the sense of being under the same Board of Trustees, with a president and fiscal officers, and so on, over both. But run each by, each one run independently as far as education and the activities on the separate campuses. The movement toward coeducation came in the late '60s. The year before our retirement, it had been decided that they would become wholly coeducational. Which meant that not only were classes in common, with teachers moving from

one side to the other, but the students were also moving from one side to the other, one campus to the other. One of our chores in that last couple of years was to help engineer this to make sure that it moved along rather smoothly. And then in our final year before retirement, it seemed that the people who are going to be running this new coeducational venture should be the ones that would really start it, in its proper way. And that we as lame ducks, as it were, were about to retire and shouldn't be that active in it. So the trustees sent us around the country to explain to, we went to over 50 cities, to explain to various alum groups, prospective students and their parents, and others who are interested friends of the school in cities all over the country, really, because when we went back we were in Seattle one night, but we were also in Los Angeles and San Francisco, and Kansas City and Texas, and Florida and so on. The whole year was spent in this kind of travel and explanation so that people knew and became acquainted with what was going on back on the campus. And then we retired and came to Chatham.

**Interviewer:** Now do Northfield and Mount Herman offer sufficiently different backgrounds that you might exchange students and have each student getting a different thing that they wanted?

**Ned:** No, it's pretty much the same. Each campus has its own gymnasium and its own classrooms, and so on. What's likely to happen, however, that if a person wants to take Russian or Russian literature and he or she lives on the Mount Herman campus, he may take a bus and come over to the Northfield campus and get those things. Crew is centered at Mount Herman because Mount Herman is more directly on the Connecticut River than Northfield is. And so there are now women's crews as well as – girls crews as well as boys crews. And they go to the

Mount Herman campus from Northfield, if this is the activity that they are interested in. Buses are flying back and forth hourly on the hour. There is a common catalog for the two libraries. And if one book is not in one, chances are it's in the other. If it's a fairly popular book and needed. So this is the way things function pretty well.

**Interviewer:** In other words, they really have come, they have in turn meshed more now than ever.

**Ned:** We started out as two fairly independent institutions, except for things like dramatics and music and social activities. Which function more on weekends than not. That was pretty much what it was when we arrived on the campus in the late '40s. Gradually it changed into really a coordinate sort of program, with some courses being offered one place and some at the other. And the teachers going back and forth rather than the students. Gradually more busing took place and now it's integrated –

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