

# SHARING OUR STORIES

VOLUME IX

Excerpts from Conversations with Some of Windsor's Long-Time Residents

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Photo by Barbara Connors



## LESLIE BIRD

*Leslie Bird moved to Windsor 60 years ago from Leonia, New Jersey, after serving four years in the Navy and working as a draftsman and machine design engineer. He worked for General Electric for many years and later started Windsor Land Clearing with his son. He served two terms on the Windsor Select Board.*

### Yearning for New England

"I went into the Navy, came out in '51, and I've worked in the country all my life . . . I'd go to my cousins' house in Rivervale and work on truck farms all summers when I was on vacation from school. I decided at that point in my life — I was 17, 18 years old — that I wanted a New England farmhouse. So, in the meantime I got married and I worked at Foster Weir Company as a draftsman and then I was transferred to Alcoa and worked there as a machine design engineer and went to school. Then, all this while was thinking I would like to move to New England because that's where the old farmhouses were . . . and I liked the New England attitudes.

"Then one day I was laying on the bed reading the *New York Times* and there was this house advertised in Windsor, Massachusetts. I didn't know where the hell that was. It was an antique farmhouse with 200 acres of land and the price was within my realm. So, I called the real estate agent and yes, he still had the house and I asked him what industry was in town, said I was a mechanical type. He said G.E. So I called G.E. and they gave me an interview. I went for the interview and they said they would hire me and I turned around and told the real estate agent, 'I'll buy it.' The house was in terrible, terrible shape. It hadn't been lived in in ten years."

### Restoring the House

"I insulated the house; I sheetrocked it; I fixed the electricity and fixed the water pipes. . . . in about ten years I was done. I'd work a couple hours in the morning, go to work, come home, change clothes and go to work right again and work until 11 o'clock at night. So it was long hours but I feel it was all worth it.

"It was the type of post-and-beam house where you don't see the beams, they're embedded in the walls. which made it easier to insulate. . . . The old, antique cookstove was there, no washer and no dryer, so we had it really rough. But the water was good and there was plenty.

"There was two outhouses, one in the field and a two-holer in the house. While we were living there, we realized that these cutting boards that we had for cutting meat and slicing, they were round and I didn't pay much attention to it. And they had a load of knife marks. Something dawned on me where they came from. They were cut-outs for these indoor outhouses!


"I left the floors as they were, I sanded 'em, they were wide-board flooring. The fireplace is new, I built that in the family room. We ended up with an office and a kitchen and a family room all in one extension. The other parts of the house was six rooms, two bedrooms, four bedrooms, a living room and a dining room and downstairs bath and bedroom. . . .

"I asked my neighbor, John Peck, 'Where is my spring or my well?' And he said, 'Come on, I'll show you.' We walked about a quarter of a mile, up the hill. . . . Here was a little puddle of water about three feet in diameter. I couldn't believe it. It was a spring that never failed. Even to this day, after sixty years, never gave me any trouble."



The Birds' house is furnished with antique collections, such as these silhouette portraits on the wall. Photo by Barbara Connors.

### A Love of Antiques

"Up in my house it's all furnished with old antiques that were given to me through my family either or bought at auction. I have nothing modern in my house, I don't like modern furniture and my wife fortunately is in the same mental attitude that I have. She likes the antiques and doesn't like the modern furniture at all." 



## EVELYN BIRD

*Born in Adams, Evelyn Bird grew up in North Adams. She moved to Windsor in 1980 (after marrying Leslie) and became active in many organizations in town, serving as a volunteer librarian, a member of the Historical Commission, on the board for Friends of Windsor, as a justice of the peace, and, most notably, as Town Clerk, a position she held for 23 years.*

**D**ream Come True  
 “I came here forty years ago, after I met my husband at a Berkshire Singles’ Halloween dance. He was dressed as a sailor and I was a gypsy . . . I had dreamed of living in a big, white Colonial house. . . . after meeting him that’s exactly what I would live in: an 1860s white Colonial with the big red barn behind it. We were married there and for the reception we had a picnic table in the backyard and chairs on the porch.”

### Involvement in Town Organizations

“I was the President of the North Adams Friends of the Library, so my first thing I became a volunteer at the Windsor Library. There were only two of us, Mrs. White and myself. I did Saturdays and she did during the week and then we kind of reversed it.

“I also joined the Historical Commission so that gave me information about who to direct people to if they came into the Library looking for historical information about the town or their family history. Jim Kierstead was somebody who knew everything about town — his death was a terrible loss — and Pete Menard and my husband were sources for newer stuff. I always attended their meetings and I was usually in charge of their pie sales. I loved it. I liked the genealogy part.

“Then Arnold [Westwood] came along and he started the *Windsor Now and Then* . . . he asked people to help with folding and mailing. So my husband and I went up to his home and did that ‘til other people came on board. And I always stayed involved in Friends of Windsor.

“It’s a very important thing to get to know people. It was fascinating, absolutely fascinating and at one point in time, because I was town clerk, I probably knew everybody or knew the name of everybody and very likely knew where they lived. I was town clerk for 23 years. I am feeling kind of out of it now because I’ve been out of [the town clerk role] about five years.”

### Shared Interest in Antiques

“My husband bought clocks and fixed clocks. And then he got into lamps. If

you come to our home, it’s full of clocks and lamps. There’s not only one on every wall, there’s probably three on every wall. And hopefully they don’t all get chiming off at the same time. . . .

“When I was with the Historical Commission, one year they had a house tour and we opened our home and people came. . . . I am still a justice of the peace and one time an elderly couple wanted to be married in our home because her sister had lived there. That was one of my more memorable marriages.

“. . . I read an article in the Berkshire Eagle that they were having a train ride through the Hoosick Tunnel. When I was a Girl Scout, I had taken the last passenger train through the Hoosick Tunnel. So when I read that I said, ‘Gee, I’d like to go through it again.’ So [Leslie] went with me and then he became interested in model trains.

“. . . [Leslie] always said he liked his aunt’s player piano . . . I read about someone who was selling player pianos in Adams, so we went up. He bought one and then they sold out all the others for parts, picked ‘em all up and he re-made three more player pianos. We still have the original one, the rest are gone. It was something we could do together.”



Leslie at one of the player pianos he restored. Photo by Barbara Connors.

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