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Pierce, James W., 1900-1987.

Interview with James W. Pierce and Helen Bell  
Pierce / recorded by Audrey Pierce Boerckel. -  
Valley Stream Historical Society, September 10, 1986.  
1 cassette.

NOTE: Audrey Pierce Boerckel tells of interviewing  
her parents, James W. Pierce and Helen Bell Pierce,  
on their memories of old streets, buildings, people, and  
activities of the 30's and 40's.

Recording was made on October 10, 1990, based on  
written interview prepared in 1986.

1. Pierce, James W., 1900-1987. 2. Pierce, Helen  
Bell, 1900- . 3. Valley Stream (N.Y.) - History.  
I. Valley Stream Historical Society. II. Boerckel,  
Audrey Pierce, 1923- . III. Pierce, Helen Bell, 1900-

ADDITIONAL MATERIALS:

1. Brief outline of interview - Prepared by Helen Dowdeswell.
2. Detailed summary of interview - Prepared by Helen Dowdeswell.
3. Photograph of Helen Bell Pierce, James W. Pierce, and  
Dorothy Pierce Kuhn (Sister of James), July 19, 1986. \*
4. Photograph of Helen Bell Pierce carrying 1-month-old  
baby, Audrey Pierce, January 26, 1924. \*
5. Photograph of James W. Pierce carrying 2-month-old  
baby, Audrey Pierce, February 23, 1924. \*
6. Obituary for James Pierce, Maileader, 1987.

\*Original photograph is filed in the Valley Stream Historical  
Photograph Collection.

VALLEY STREAM HISTORICAL SOCIETY ORAL HISTORY RECORDING

JAMES W. PIERCE & HELEN BELL PIERCE

Interviewed on Sept 10, 1986. Tape recording made on 10/14/90.

Both born in 1900

Move to Valley Stream in 1927

Streets and buildings that have changed

Well known citizens of the 30's and 40's

Activities of children , teenagers and families

James's target pistol shooting

Local papers

Household chores and equipment

Civic activities

Shopping- local and out-of-town

Ham radio operator

Pierce James W., 1900-1987

Pierce Helen Bell, 1900-

Parents of Audrey Pierce Boerckel..

Audrey tells of interviewing her

parents on their memories of old

streets, buildings, people and

activities of the '30's and 40 's.

(Interview-Sept. 10, 1986)

(Recording- Oct. 10, 1990

VALLEY STREAM HISTORICAL SOCIETY INTERVIEW FOR

JAMES W. PIERCE AND HELEN B. PIERCE

Date of Interview--September 10, 1986

Persons being interviewed--James W. and Helen B. Pierce

Place and time--131 East Carpenter St. Valley Stream, N. Y. 11580--Pierce residence--afternoon of September 10, 1986.

Interviewer--Audrey Pierce Boerckel--daughter of James and Helen.

Focus--Between W.W. L and W.W. 11

1. Birthdate and place--

James--February 15, 1900--Manhattan, New York

Helen -- August 1, 1900--Brooklyn, New York

2. When did you come to V.S.?

Couple moved to V.S. in September, 1927. House at 131 East Carpenter St. was built to order by George Young of Lynbrook, N. Y. House was completed in two months.

3. Why did you choose V.S.?

Relatives already lived in V.S. and liked the general atmosphere.

In 1950 sold part of the property to daughter Audrey and husband, James R. Boerckel to build home of their own.

4. Were some streets different from today?

Fletcher Avenue had trees in center further down than today.

Many streets were dirt roads.

Cottage St. and Grove St. ended further south than today as there were farms to the north.

There was a center mall on Rockaway Parkway from about St. Marks up to the school.

5. What buildings do you recall that have disappeared?

District 13 wooden school building.

Franklin School

Well-known restaurant--corner of Emerson Place and Merrick

Pavillon Royal

Hoffman's (night club)

Hattie Miller's large home on Merrick Road

6. What buildings are still here but are used for a different purpose?

Original Fire Headquarters on Merrick Road between Corona Ave. and Franklin Ave.

7. Can you locate some of the former farms?

Reisert farm on Wheeler Avenue

Farms on Central Avenue north of Merrick Road

8. Can you remember some old time families and where they lived?

Finn family--Mike Finn--lived on Dutch Broadway

9. Can you think of some businesses or trades that we don't see in Valley Stream any longer?

There was a wagon builder on Merrick Road.

10. What people do you recall who were particularly interesting? Tell something about each one.

Bob Dibble--descendant of Pagan family--referred to as Uncle Bob.

Fletcher Chalmers--also descendant of Pagan family--was Village Clerk at one time.

Jack Carey--when Mayor of village--was youngest mayor in area.

Wm. B. Houston--very active in activities of Grace Methodist Church and school board of District 13.

Winfield S. Boerckel, Sr.--very active in Fire Dept. for many years in influential in its work.

George S. Bell (father of Helen B. Pierce) very active in political circles, honored by Kiwanis on 80th birthday--charter member of that service group.

Well known religious leaders--Rev. Kenneth Richards of Grace Methodist Church, Father McGovern of Holy Name of Mary R.C. Church, Pastor Becker of St. Paul's Lutheran Church.

Beloved doctors--Dr. Duggan, Dr. Foster, Dr. Richard Darby, Dr. James Hollister, Dr. Quinn.

11. How did you get acquainted with other Valley Streamers? What clubs, societies, etc. did you join?

Church, political groups such as the Citizen's Club (a civic assn.),

12. What were some celebrations or activities that involved the whole village? Any special recollections?

Churches would parade in June--Anniversary Day, Memorial Day Parade, Village elections and school board elections and meetings.

13. What did you do for pleasure when not working?

Gardening--prize winning delphiniums and HUGE strawberries. Target pistol shooting (James)

Everyone played horseshoes

Citizen's Party had a clubhouse. Held barn dances and parties. Think it was on Fifth Street.

Sunday School picnics and church fairs.

14. How did the children amuse themselves?

Baseball, roller skating, ice skating on V.S. Lake, hopscotch, jumping rope, dolls, paper dolls, collected base-

Ball cards, collected deposit bottles, movies (especially Saturday afternoons, in the summer swimming at the V.S. State Park.

15. Was there anything you recall specially for the amusement of teenagers? Where did they go for fun?

They got together in each other's homes. Many had ping-pong or pool tables. Churches had activities and dances. The schools arranged bus trips to N. Y. City, etc.

16. How did you spend your weekends?

Household chores, gardening or visiting relatives. Beach in the summer--Jones Beach and Town Park at Point Lookout.

17. What about Thanksgiving, Christmas, New Year, Easter? What was special to the day in your family?

Easter meant new clothes from top to toe. Christmas stockings to fill with dimes for needy through the church. Never setting up and trimming the Christmas tree before Christmas eve.

18. Do you recall some things you used to do about the house (about your job) that would be different today?

All the electric appliances we have today that we did not have. We used hand beaters, potato mashers, washed dishes and clothes by hand.

19. What school(s) were you acquainted with? What was your connection? What recollections do you have of the schools: buildings, teachers, principals, board members, P.T.A. what pupils were like, what was taught?

Daughter, Audrey, attended Wheeler Avenue and Central H.S. James W. Pierce was member of District 13 board and Central board from 1930 to 1945. Remember active board members-- John P. Schmidt (known as J.P.), Bill Houston. Remember well Wheeler Ave. principal, Ira Mummert, and Central principal, Harry Gross.

20. What can you tell about the Long Island R.R. as related to V.S.? Commuted to the city for a short while after moving to V.S. Have only good memories of this.

21. Have any other recollections come to mind during the interview that you would like to tell about/

During World War II James was an aircraft spotter from Central H.S. roof. They remember the street vendors such as those selling fruits and sometimes fish. They remember home delivery of milk, baked goods (Krug, Dugan's). They remember a village newspaper, the Record, as well as the

old Valley Stream Mail. They recall the organ grinders (always with a trained monkey that appeared in the neighborhoods during the summer as well as someone with a pony to provide rides for a fee

/was called Uncle Bob.

10. Robert Dibble was a great one for walking up and down Rockaway Avenue in his last years--became a fixture on the Avenue.  
  
Fletcher Chalmers--believe he worked for Bob Dibble at some time. Was a member of the Board of Education. They remember how he helped daughter Audrey with information on village government for a high school project while he was Village Clerk.  
  
Mayor Jack Carey, youngest mayor in N.Y.State--enlisted in the Canadian Air Force in World War II.  
  
Bill Houston--remember him leading the hymn singing in Grace Church Sunday School--had a very good voice. Always dressed up to play Santa Claus at Wheeler Avenue School Christmas parties. Once when sitting on the Pierce front porch with Helen and Jim a car passed, and it was obvious that the man and woman in the car were having a violent argument. Bill immediately ran down the steps and jumped into his car to give chase in case any physical mayhem was taking place! Believe he had been show business at some earlier period in his life.
12. Football games were very well attended at Fireman's Field--hundreds of students and parents came to cheer on Central H.S. Many traveled to other school fields when games were out of town.
11. School board elections were very important--everyone came out to vote. There was a lot of electioneering including parades.
19. Board of Education activities and duties took much time--though probably much more complicated today. It was considered quite an honor to be a Board member.
21. Many times the street vendors would be a seasonal thing with the vendors calling out their wares--watermelon, strawberries, fish, etc. There was a large fresh fruit and vegetable stand on Merrick Road and Grove Street operated by Nat Hayes and his mother. Nat and his wife, Olive were well known in V.S. Prior to the 4th of July each year fireworks would be sold at his stand, as well. Many folks would call local grocery stores and butcher shops, also delis, for a delivered order--perhaps a number of times each week. Fresh meat could not be kept too long in the iceboxes or small refrigerators after they were introduced. Housewives also went "down to the village" many times a week for food supplies. As we recall,

most folks in our area did not grow vegetables, except tomatoes in the summer. However, there were many farms in the outlying areas. During World War II years most everyone had a Victory Garden.

All necessities could not be obtained in Valley Stream. There were dress shops, accessory shops, mens shops, shoe shops, etc. However, many folks who had come to V.S. to live from Brooklyn, Queens or even Manhattan continued to go into the "city" to shop--Abraham and Straus and Loeser's (also Namm's) in Brooklyn--Gimbels, Macy's, McCreery's, in Manhattan. Eventually they shopped in Hempstead and Garden City, when the city stores opened branches. Helen remembers going to Lynbrook to shop on Atlantic Avenue where there were many nice small shops. Jim Pierce worked in Rockville Centre, so they also shopped there at times.\*

13. Jim Pierce belonged to the Rockville Centre Rifle and Pistol Club. They used the old reservoir site off Lakeview Avenue for the practice. There was always a shooting match before Thanksgiving--prize--a large turkey. Daughter Audrey remembers her Dad also practicing with his pistol in the basement of their home and her grandmother holding her hands over her ears!

Helen remembers driving to the city to shop saying there were fewer cars on the roads <sup>then</sup> than pass her door now in her residential area. She recalls driving her sister to a doctor on Park Ave. in Manhattan and parking right in front of his office. This was in the early 30's!



Helen Bell Pierce, James W. Pierce, and Dorothy Pierce Kuhn  
(Sister of James), July 19, 1986.



Jan. 26 1924 1 112

Helen Bell Pierce carrying 1-month-old baby, Audrey Pierce, January 26, 1924.



James W. Pierce carrying 2-month-old baby. Audrey Pierce, February 23, 1924.

## James Pierce Dies, 60-Year Resident

1957

James W. Pierce, who came to Valley Stream from Brooklyn in 1927, died at the age of 87 on March 16. He had been employed by the Prudential Insurance Company prior to retirement. Pierce was a member of the Valley Stream Elementary School Board 13 and the Central High School Board, No. 1, from 1930 to 1945.

During World War II, Pierce was an active member of the Red Cross Disaster Relief Corps and an aircraft spotter. An avid ham radio operator, he was a member of the Lynbrook Masonic Lodge since 1930.

Pierce is survived by his wife of 67 years, Helen; a daughter and son-in-law, Audrey and James Boerckel; grandchildren Elizabeth A. Bayardi of Upper Makefield, Pennsylvania, and Beverly A. Muckler of Staten Island; and two great grandchildren, Adrian J. and Julia Y. Bayardi.

Burial took place in Greenfield Cemetery, Hempstead, on March 20.