

The Totoket Historical Society, Inc.

**A Partial History of the John Linsley/Doody House,
1698-99**

by

Carrie Doody

May 18, 1975

Transcribed and Digitized

by

Theodore Groom
Chairman, Technology
The Totoket Historical Society, Inc.

September 2014

Accession # 2014-547-001

**Edward Smith Library
3 Old Post Road
Northford, CT 06472
(203) 484-0469**

Introduction;

This document is a transcription of a typed document written by Carrie Doody shortly after she gave a tour of her home to a group of seniors from North Branford High School. She apparently had prepared a text from which she read during the tour. She later corrected that document and retyped it for the Totoket Historical Society, Inc. where it has remained for nearly forty years. Mrs. Doody was a member of The Totoket Historical Society, Inc. and has written several other short research papers on North Branford history.

The transcriber has tried to reproduce the document exactly as Mrs. Doody wrote it.

Theodore Groom, Ph. D.
Chairman, Technology
The Totoket Historical Society, Inc.

September 12, 2014

Mrs. Daniel Doody
May 18, 1975

Now, about some of these old homes; I have for you to see, the division of a "farm lott" dated February 2, 1696 – 97. A "farm lott" had been granted to three men, and the division of this property was made by casting lots. John Palmer was to have his part, which was 70 acres on the eastern side, Mr. Samuel Russell his part which was on 100 acres next to Mr. Palmer, and John Linsley Sr. for his part, which was 73 acres on the western side of the lot. Microphone off.

A copy of this tells in what book and on what page in the Branford town record the entry may be found. This document proves that you are on the land that was given to Mr. Linsley in 1696 – 97, which is a long time ago, isn't it?

These are all old documents which I got out and I thought maybe you boys and girls might like to see the kind of paper that they use and the stamps at the time of the Stamp Act, and before. Now, this is a division of land – and you see what it says at the end – "in witness whereof, I have hereunto set my hand and seal, this fifth day of April in the fifth year of the reign of our sovereign Lord George II of Great Britain, etc. King." And this was in 1737.

It is one of the stamps that they had to put on things you see, and they complained about this when they had the Stamp Act Congress.

Question: are you related to the Linsley's?

Well, this house was never sold and it stayed in the Linsley family until my aunt had it, and her father and Mrs. Linsley that lived here when I was born were brother and sister. My aunt came to help take care of Mrs. Linsley – her aunt – in her later years. Her husband, Mr. Linsley had died very young. She lived here, with her one son who was a semi-invalid, and never married. When he died that was the end of the line as far as the Linsley's went, and my aunt inherited the place. Then when she died, I found that I was the only one mentioned in her will. So that's how I happen to be here. After eight generations, it sidestepped you see. So, I'm not a direct descendent of Mr. Linsley, but Isaac Linsley's mother and my grandfather were brother and

sister. I used to come up here when I was a little youngster and loved it very much.

About our house, I don't know if there is anything special that you want to know. Again, we have our handmade bricks at the face of the fireplace. The floor in the back of it had to be replaced with modern brick, fireproof, for safety.

That's a trunk of a tree hollowed out for a mortar and this is a big pestle which they used for pounding their corn. The flintlock musket over the fireplace and the powder horn and the bullet pouch up on the mantle, go back to Revolutionary days. That is an English gun and it was carried, so it says in our family records, in the battle of Bunker Hill, which wasn't Bunker Hill at all, was it? It was Breed's Hill. Up there – right over the lock on the musket is Rex G R, which means King George. It is a Tower musket as this imprint says.

Question: All these artifacts were here in the house?

Yes, the musket was mentioned in the will which I have here. I don't know if there's anything else of great importance to you people.

Question: Is that a baking oven on the right?

Yes, it was supposed to be. There was one there, but having water and electricity and other things put into the house – if you open the door you'll see modern things behind it. It isn't fixed as an oven now – camouflaged.

The matter of bells – their cattle at that time could go up and down the street or roads, or anywhere. So, they had these bells for them. There was always in every herd a lead cow and they would put the bell on her, knowing the others would be near. You see how low sounding it is. That's a low tone. You see this little hand bell of the same age – it has a lighter tone. We know that a heavy tone carries better than the light tones, and so that's why cowbells always had a dull, thuddy sound. That's just a water – worn stone. This they made the bullets with - a bullet mold.

Question: What are these little things found in antique shops?

They are wick clippers to put the candle flame out. Those are not in very good condition but they were probably handmade and it just shows the different patterns that they used. I like them for that.

This tray is called a coffin tray because early coffins were hexagons and the tray is in that shape. The long handle on the frying pan was needed because it was used in the fireplace and you didn't want to get too close they are very heavy.

That foot warmer? Yes, it was often used even in church.

Now, we are going to see things that were to do with the Civil War, so I got a few of my books out because I love books, but you see times haven't changed. When they want to influence people they use these different media and the poets wrote poems and the others wrote articles, and those who were interested in art, had books illustrated to try to drive their point home, and naturally, Whittier and Longfellow, who were two of our great poets at that time, wrote very strongly in favor of abolition of slavery and brought out all the horrors of it. You know, they did have slaves in the North. It wasn't just confined to the South, and of course they abolished them earlier here in the North.

People who feel so horribly about the fact that we Americans had slaves – I think that a lot of those people are not informed as to the history of slavery. You know, it didn't originate in the United States. If we go way back to Bible times, we know that the pyramids in Egypt were built by slave labor. We know that in the earlier conquests, the people who were captured were made slaves by the people who captured them. And, so we would have some member of a royal family as a slave, to perhaps a peasant, in those early days. And so when we in the United States had slaves, we sort of followed along. And I think we should never forget that there were many, many people from England, in Europe, who made a deal with the shipmaster to come to America and serve as an indentured servant. Now, the difference between that of a slave was the fact that an indentured servant made a deal for certain number of years and then they would have their freedom. While the slaves were captured – some of them were stolen – kidnapped – and others were bought, and money was paid for them. Now, a lot of the slaveholders, I'm sure, treated their slaves very poorly. But, on the other hand, a lot of them treated them very well. Maybe not because they were so kindhearted, but just for economy's sake.

You know, that if you have a bike, or your father has a tractor, or you have a nice car, if you don't treat it very well, it's not going to last very long. And so you take good care of it. Well, just for plain common sense a lot of the slaveholders took good care of their slaves. But there were others who were terribly, terribly cruel. And, I think of the hard things is that families were broken up and according to the auctions that they held, the father could be sold to one slaveholder, and a mother to somebody else. And, the children, one by one to some other slaveholder and they'd never see them again. And, that to me was very awful because no doubt they wondered what kind of treatment the other members of the family were getting.

Now, I think that it's too bad that some of our black people feel as they do about being descendants of slaves because again it is just common sense – if you're going to buy something you look for something pretty good if you want it to last. On the other hand, if you're going to have something for sale, you polish it up and you get something that folks are going to want. So that when they were stealing these blacks from Africa, the ones that were the smartest and the strongest and the most intelligent were the ones they would want first. So that we have a lot of slaves in our country that were very fine as far as their physique went, their mentality, and so forth. I always think that it's too bad when they are ashamed that maybe their grand father or great-grandfather was a slave, or their great grandmother, because nine times out of 10 that person was really a pretty fine person.

I have here a will that was made out on the 20th day of November 1775. Now this is 1975 isn't it? So 1775 from 1975 is 200 years ago. And, down here it says "I give and bequeath to my dearly beloved wife, Mercy Linsley and also I give unto her my Negro man and my Negro woman to be hers to serve so long as she shall continue my widow, and the Negro woman to be hers to serve her during her natural life. The Negro man's name is Dick in the woman's name is Kate." Then it goes on and says that he gives to his daughter the Negro woman if the mother should die first. See, just like you give a piano way today. And then to one of his sons he gives the Negro boy Peter. So we know that at that time, right in this house, there were at least three Negroes slaves.

The Northerners began, after the Declaration of Independence, our Constitution, and all of those legal documents were signed, to think pretty seriously about us all being created equal and having a right to life, liberty,

and the pursuit of happiness. And so one by one and community after community they began to free their slaves. We mustn't think that the North was any better than the South, because the North didn't have a climate that they had in the South nor did we have the big plantations, so we could get along better without the slaves and probably hire them for a few dollars. While in the south it was hot and the white man found it hard to work in that heat and they had hundreds of acres under cultivation. We, in the north, had maybe 10 or 15 acres per person under cultivation, and so the north was the first to free their slaves. Finally they all just decided that it was dead wrong and that they should not be slaves, and that was one of the things that started the Civil War. But we mustn't forget either that the Civil War started when the South said they were going to secede, and right lately we see what happens when a country divides north from south. It happened in Korea and it's happened again in Vietnam, you see.

The Civil War was a terrible thing because many of the families had sons move south, and so there would be cousins fighting against cousins, maybe brothers against brothers, and it was awful. We feel a little bit ashamed about it I guess, but I think we are very fortunate to have the president we had – President Lincoln – he suffered a lot with the decision he had to make but he held the Union together – that was what he did.

Now, my grandfather enlisted in the Civil War. He left from this house and he left three children – his wife had died. And my mother was three years old. He left them here with this Aunt Libby. During the war he had a leg shattered in the battle of Chancellorsville and so the rest of his life he had to go with crutches. He experienced firsthand the horrors of a military prison camp. They were different, of course, some much better than others, but some of the tales he told and some of the records that he kept, were just awful. I think that some of the actions that happened were not probably approved by the commander in charge. But I think it probably was some trigger-happy young soldier, maybe someone who had a lot of hatred in his heart for the North. In one instance where they had been very hungry and fed only bread and water for some time, my grandfather told of this young corporal throwing bread – just hardtack they called it – down on the floor, and some of the northern prisoners that were so hungry stepped over the boundary line. That was the end, and they were shot. So you see, those are horrors of war that we don't like to think about, but when we think of the people who went and what they gave up to keep our country I think we should remember that it wasn't just a picnic that they were on.

This is a document of 1686. It says that even though other treaties were made, they were not carefully done. By this treaty the English were to have a highway across the meadow so they could cart their hay, and the Indians and their successors were to have the liberty of hunting and fishing and fowling and getting oysters and clams. This applied to all the land from Furnace Pond now called Lake Saltonstall. It really included the Townships of Branford, formerly called "Totoket." The Indians received ten pounds in full satisfaction for this transaction.

Five Indians made their marks on this document and it was also signed by John Rosewell and John Grave as witnesses on "this fiveteenth day of March in the year of our Lord 1686 in the third year of the reign of our sovereign Lord James II of England, Scotland, France, and Ireland King defender of the faith, etc."

I thought you might like to (this I keep in safekeeping) say well, I had the land grant from the Indians to the place that I'm living on now. So, if you want to, pass it around because I don't think, Mrs. Davis, there are many around of that sort, do you? No, I don't think so.

And while you will looking at that, I think we had better go on because time is flying.

Let's take a close look at that clock and see how they tried to ornament it. Also, in that same will my slant top desk is mentioned and I told you that the musket was mentioned. So, we know the ages of those without any questioning. The pewter of courses is early and the reason that it turns so dark is because it has tin and lead in it and the lead darkened through the years. If I put that in a certain wash and let it stay, I could probably get it shinier, but I haven't done it. Whether I'm foolish or not, I don't know. Now some of that is English and some of it is American pewter. It's a little easier to find some English pewter than American because the householders were asked to give their pewter and have it melted and made into bullets at the time of the Revolutionary war, you see, with lead in it. They prized the pewter that they brought from England because it reminded them of home. And so many of them gave their American-made pewter to be made into bullets and saved their English pewter. Consequently at the present time it seems they are finding more pieces of English pewter than they are of

American pewter. Though that's not always true, but it seems as though now that is the situation.

Over here on the corner of the mantle is a picture of the New Haven Green, and did you know that at one time Connecticut had two capitals, New Haven and Hartford, and Ithael Towne designed the buildings here – the State House. That's the brick building here with the white pillars. The little white house up above here – the Greek revival house – was also designed by him.

The chairs – that one is called arrow back because these are shaped sort of like arrows. Then this is the thumb design here. The chairs over by the fireside are called ladder back and you can understand easily why they are called ladder back chairs because they are like ladders. Then on the floor there's a mortar and pestle and that too was made out of a trunk of a tree. I imagine that was done during the winter and probably somebody whittled away on it, but see how they took pains to have it a little bit fancy and made the little handle on each side just cut out from the trunk of the tree. That's what they did you see – in the winter they made furniture. They made a lot a little extra things – wooden plates and wooden spoons and things of that sort which they really used.

Now these old panels – they were the original and I remember when I was a little girl and I came up here there was paneling. I seem to be so sure of it and still it was all plastered over and two or three times I made little holes in the plaster but I didn't come out in the right place. But then when they put the heating system in the man came in and said "Mrs. Doody – did you know there was paneling in this house?" And, I said I thought there was, but I couldn't prove it. So – Zingo – all the plaster started coming off. I said, "take it off, expose it, take it off." Aren't these great big beams, open beams, and they had to be done by hand, and see where the broad ax and the adze tried to smooth them off imagine what those beams weigh. And still you see they raised them up. I suppose several people came with oxen and so forth. Then to make it just a little fancy see how they fixed the corners, the edges, here and the little end down there. What was very seldom done in farmhouses was the beaded edges up there and I was happy that they cared enough to put beaded edges here. The lime in the plaster has made lines on the woodwork and the nails have made holes, but this is the way it was way back and this is the way I like it.

Question: Are there nails in those beams?

They are put together with wooden pegs. There are some over here. Now in this corner – there's a picture of this in Mr. Kelly's book of colonial architecture. In fact, there are three pictures of our house in it. Outside holding up the roof there are four great corbels and they are not too common at all.

So they made it well. And I think a bride came here. We have no record that says it happened just then but this land was owned by Mr. Linsley – I read you the article there, and the next year the young son, John Linsley Jr., became engaged to this Mary Harrison and they were married the next June and came here to live. So whether the house was all finished when they moved in or whether it was still being constructed, I can't say just the day that it all happened, but that is how we know when the house was built. I think she probably had courage because there weren't many houses up here at that time and she was far from home. They lived down in Branford. But they did have courage, like I guess you all have courage too.

Some of the panels on this wall were not sound and I thought they could be patched. My contractor said no. "You'd never be happy to patch it, but," he said, "I think what you should do is leave your plastered walls on three sides, then," he said, "see if we can reproduce this wall. I'll draw a diagram of your west wall with all its idiosyncrasies and other things there, and then see if you can get wide boards and my men will make paddling with feathered edge just as it was in the ones that we uncovered."

So, my husband and I went up to Vermont to a mill up there to get – we couldn't get the boards this wide around here – to get the wide boards and then they set up – one of his specialist – set up his saw and things right in this room and took the boards and feather edged them and made them to match.

Now you see through the years the center beam and the board over there were – something happened – or else when it was built it wasn't even. So when we replaced it we did it the same way that we found it. That is why that's on a slant. This doesn't have much to do with history, but I do want you to see my owls in the grain of the wood. Doesn't that look like an owl with its eyes and its little nose and its little feathered head? And here's another one up here with a big eye and a little eye and it's like a hoot owl, but I love my owls.

Now we had to do the same with the floor. In the other room it's the oaken boards and they are just as strong as could be, but this is a pine floor and it was not safe so this floor came from boards from Vermont.

Now over here is a melodian. And, that's a kind of an instrument that was used in Civil War time, and probably when old Black Joe and some of those other things were written by Stephen Foster, Jenny With The Light Brown Hair, – it was probably an instrument like that that the melody was fingered out and composed.

The chair there is a much earlier one. This – the Rocker over there and the bench over here are all of the same period.

Here we have a pair of chairs called the heart and crown chairs and we know they probably were made before the Revolutionary War because I would presume that after the Revolutionary War and we were no longer colonists of England, they would never bother to make heart and crown chairs. Do you think so? And while it's nice and comfortable here, they still like to have it pretty. And, see how nice the back is. I don't think I told you, but that is called a Windsor type chair and so is the little highchair. See the little step on that – all worn out – I love that because I think of all the little feet that were pressing on there. So, I look at it and I think, "My, I wonder how many generations of little feet it took to wear that out." I love it very much.

These are called banister backs and these are very old too. See, the back is like a banister and there's a mate to it. The desk is about the period of Lincoln. This they make now – this is like a hutch. This top tips back and then it's fastened by little dowels and then the seat comes up if you want it to, and I have some wooden things in there. Youngsters would use that near the fireplace and the back up high would protect them from drafts and they'd get the warmth of the fire. And then when they had to put away their toys, they put them in the bottom part. I think that was very good planning.

Now this was the birthing room and the reason that they had that on the first floor was first that it was so cold, and they wanted it near the fireplace, and to be handy to the living room, because all the children were born at home you know, and that was what this room was used for.

The paper that I have here – we've got it so covered up with our Rogue's gallery that it's hard to find it., But I have a little bit of an early, early primer and you see they start with numbers then A, B, C, D, E, F, now G for goblet, H, I, J, K, L, M. M for moth, N would be down here and Nightingale, Olive, N, O, P. And it goes right up to the end of the alphabet. I was a long time wondering, "Am I going to get tired of those little rectangles staring at me all the time?" But, I thought of my library, and I thought that would be nice and I loved it. I haven't gotten tired of it. So, it was fun picking that out but it did take a long time. Guess I was a slow-motion person.

That clock isn't an old one. Our son brought it back from Germany, the black forest.

This French toile is original, and it probably dates back to about the time of Benjamin Franklin and at that time the French – this was the beginning of the metal print – tried to tell or represent an episode in their history in pictures. I have no way of knowing what episode this refers to, but doesn't this make sense? Here are some people perfectly contented – see chickens, the men, everybody is contented there, but the dog is very vicious with the visitor. Now that could represent one little group of people – a little tribe or something like that – having some enemy of some neighboring tribe come. So, now we see that there was trouble – but this could be the battle. Everybody is at sword's point there, and there is conflict going on and then the third episode. This is the same outfit as this, and this is the same outfit as this, and here is a young lady so that he could have come – in the story – to have made love with her. Now the dog is no longer after him and so they have a treaty signed and they live together in harmony. You see the two little places – villages or areas – could unite and live together in peace. Now it could be that. But, then when you say, Mrs. Doody, where in France did this happen? I don't know, but it just could be. I think it's fun to try to make sense out of it because I do know that their early tapestries did tell a tale. And, it seems to me that might be what that is pictured.

It's high, you know why? Because they had trundle beds that they put underneath. Little low beds for the little children. Now, you see there are not too many rooms in the house and they had good-sized families so that during the day the little beds were pushed under, then at night it was brought out and maybe a couple of little kids would sleep in that. Then, here's the little cradle for the Wee – one and mothers would do their work and put their foot

on here and rock it and knit. I can't knit but I could rock it. As a result, I don't think I would make a very good colonial mother.

That chair is a Boston type of chair. Now this floor is white wood – American tulip. And we have the same thing here. But aren't those wide boards? Imagine how big the trees were. It probably was a primeval forest.

Again these are white wood floors. This bed is a tiger maple. See why it's called tiger – the streaks in it and then up at the headboard it's the same. This coverlet is linen and wool. The white part or ivory part is linen thread and then it's done with wool to make a pattern.

When I got the paper for this room you'll see the design or little figures there is not too different from the little pattern that's used in this early weaving. It's not a copy of it, but it's similar you see. I thought it would tie in together very well.

Now, I told you my grandfather fought in the Civil War and was wounded. For many years he was a semi-invalid and couldn't get around very much and he was interested in drawing and painting. So we took a part of this – the headboard to his mother's bed that had been discarded, up there, cut a place out for a mirror, and he painted the flowers around it, and kept himself occupied. I like that because he did it.

The bed warmer over here..... Now this bed is called a youth bed. You see this is the third bed – you had your cradle then I told you about the little bed that they put under the big bed. Then when the children got older, maybe like you folks, I'm sure that you'd probably get into a youth bed – some of you shorter ones because you aren't quite as tall – you wouldn't be too long for that. Now you see it's put together with ropes. All of these old beds are put together with ropes but this will show you how. Then it's laced back and forth, up the sides, and then they put a feather tick, or corn husks or straw in the tick, and that would be the bed.

This chest has some of the pattern showing. That was a sailor's chest. These look like for drawers, don't they? But, they're not, they're blanket chests and this is a fake. They aren't drawers, it's just the top that lifts up they put their blankets in there. Then the two bottom ones are drawers.

This Boston rocker you see had a design on the back in gold leaf, but through the years that has worn off.

This is a yoke back chair. This is an oldie. You see they used to carry water and things on yolks over their shoulders and that is the design you see.

Well, I guess that's it for this little room.

Our son was unofficial photographer on the American Mt. Everest expedition in 1963. He was taken gravely ill before the summit was reached, and had to remain in one of the high camps much to his disappointment. However, he was honored and given a medal by President Kennedy. I think probably that was one of the happiest moments because he was a great admirer of President Kennedy.

These are pictures when they came down back off the mountain and they were a pretty tired looking bunch. Here are pictures of my boy growing up. Little fellow, and a high school graduate, and when he got his Masters out in California in cinematography. And in the little cabinet are some of his mementos. These are things they shape to make music in Africa. Pottery from Peru. This is similar to the boats on Lake Titicaca. Those wooden shoes he got in Holland. This is a water gourd that he got in India or Pakistan. This is a book he wrote and published, and some more pottery. So, that I say this is my sons corner of the house.

That little trunk went out West in a covered wagon. It stayed in Wisconsin for a great number of years and then came back.

Down by Mrs. Davis's feet is a little butter churn and here is another chest for linen, and these are hat boxes. Now I've been doing a lot of talking, so I think we should have a model. This hat is a covered wagon hat and so I think we should find a girl – the first girl here – this one – and let's model a hat that went west in a covered wagon. Now isn't that nice? I think it's lovely. You make a nice model.

The other box has mourning hats and veils in it, which are very somber.

Now here is a picture of the iron clads – you had that probably in your history – the Monitor and the Merrimack.

Some of my little treasures.

Now be careful you don't fall down my back stairs. This is one of the big beams. They call it a summer beam. It's used in these old houses, from one side to the other. So, we couldn't remove that, but it makes it sort of hazardous by the back stairs. Remember there are stairs here.

I call this my loom room. This was a bedroom, but you'll notice that on these coverlets both the brown and blue, they have a seam right up through the middle, and the tablecloths and the early bedsheets have a seam right up through the middle. And, this was the reason for it. These early looms only could take that whip and so they made two sections and seamed it up through the middle.

Now I've got to get this repaired. These rugs were made on this loom but the woman who did it died, and this loom was taken down and moved, and finally I succeeded in getting it back. When they took it down they numbered the different parts where they went so it's been put together, but it has to be repaired. Then, of course, that's hung just to show where it goes. They're even. I'll have to take something and get the rust off that. But you see by this postcard that there's a loom exactly like it down in Williamsburg, Virginia. This has only two pedals so that you can only do the double – they call it the tabby weaved. I took lessons in weaving and know how to do the tabby weave so if I have get it fixed, I can make rugs like this. I don't know when I'll do it, but I think it's kind of nice.

In the early days this hall was different. This is not like the original hallway, but I thought it was very pleasant and as the gentleman who was doing the work for me said after all, this is old and if you put a reproduction in, it will be new, and if you like it why don't you leave it? So I did that. I remembered that in 1801 this particular pattern was first printed. Do you know what they call that? Crewel? Here's one. You have it in material.

Question: Paisley?

That's the pattern – paisley. Paisley lived in Scotland and he put that design on the market in 1801. The gentleman doing the work for me said to me, "I think that this stairway and this hall was changed about 1800." So, when I found the paper with a paisley pattern in it, I thought, just the thing for my 1800 Hall, so I did do that. And, I too have been interested in it, and I like it.

Now when this house was built, this wall was different and it was paneled and the stairs came up here. It was a narrow hall. You can see some of the marks there – that was a hand hewn beam, the original. It was a narrow hall and the stairs came up, and then they turned and came up again. And on the side of the stairs there was paneling and in our family story – history – of the house it says that they put in a secret stairway and went to it through this secret panel that slid sideways, and went down and they built what would be like a bomb shelter outside the wall of the house so that if the house were burned by the Indians, they wouldn't be burned here or have to run out into the arms of the Indians who set of fire to the house. Now, the Indians in this particular region were friendly to the whites but the Pequot's over in the eastern part of Connecticut and in Rhode Island – and out at Block Island – and the other Indians in Massachusetts and New York – the Mohawks – were not friendly and they used to go on hunts and they did burn and destroy. So, I remember when I was, I think not quite as old as you people are, coming up here with my father and my big brother and they filled in this place that looked to me like a cave because they had supports, wooden beams, with others on top and they were rotting and so it wasn't safe. Well, instead of keeping it, I do. My husband says I like to keep everything. Instead of keeping it, they said, "this isn't safe," so they took out these big timbers and things and filled it in. There's still a little depression where that was, out by the lilacs, but the stairs remain the same.

Now when my grandfather was fighting in the Civil War, Aunt Libby and Cousin Isaac decided that they would break the law and they would try to help the slaves who were mistreated get to Canada to get their freedom. Now, at first if they got over into the north they were free, but too many of them did that, so they made a law whereby if they were caught, north of the Mason Dixon line, they had to be returned to their owners. But, if they got into Canada, then they were free. So my relatives fixed a trap door over the stairs and then they had wall-to-wall carpeting here. But I remember when I was a little girl I had to get down on my hands and knees and drive tacks in the carpet and pull it as hard as I could to get it smooth. It was all tacked down around the edge. And so what they did here was put the tacks in. Now my aunt Carrie told me this and see it was her aunt who lived here and her father left from here. They put the tacks in lightly around two sides and that looked real innocent like.

Now, remember, back in those days it was just heat from fireplaces, so they had doors closed and halls and things weren't used too much, except when the house was opened in the summer. Sometimes the parlors, as they were called, were used only for weddings and funerals and big parties. The rest of the time they were closed. So they made this trap door and they made it so there would be no hinges to make a bulge and it wouldn't be noticeable, and they did get slaves from Fairhaven, that is this part of New Haven. There was a house in Durham that is still standing – a beautiful, beautiful big white house on your right-hand side edge of going into Durham Center – it's just beyond the Ackerman store on the left-hand side, and the only big white house right there. The slaves went from here to that house.

One time there were three slaves here and word got to the sheriff that this was linked to the under-ground railroad and one day they came into the yard and told my cousin, Isaac, who they were. They had their badges and they wanted to inspect the house. They had been told there were slaves being harbored here. Well, he acted very surprised as of course he would. They went into the barn and they took pitchforks and jabbed them down into the hay mows so that if slaves were hidden there they would find them. Well, they didn't find anyone in the barn and Isaac then came to the house, told his mother, Aunt Libby, that they were looking for hidden slaves, and of course she acted very surprised. They searched all around the first floor and cellar and then they wanted to go upstairs and in the attic and search. She didn't go upstairs but stood where I am standing now – as I said there were three down here. Well my mother who was probably four years old by then began to cry and the men were coming down the stairs here my Aunt Libby said, "now, if there's anything I can do to help you, I'd be glad to do it, but the little one is hungry and wants her supper and if I can't be of any use will you excuse me please while I go and take care of the children." And the sheriff said that he was sorry that he had disturbed her and that they had been misinformed and they were through with the search. So they walked out. Aunt Libby went out and got the children quiet and then in due time the carpet was moved from that corner like I am going to move the rug now, and the trap door was opened. My cousin went down with food for the slaves for their supper and then the next day they were moved up to Durham.

Now, I think the easiest way for you folks, if you want to see where the slaves were is to go down the stairs – my husband has put the light on and he has opened the door outside – so if you want to, go down. There was no connection between this little dugout here and the main cellar to the house

but when we put the heating system in they had to break a hole in the stone wall to put the pipes in here. So there is now a hole between the two. But, this was just the steps that went through here and the passage did go through into that bomb shelter I call it. Now there are outside stairs where that opening was to the Indian hideout and you might even notice that the ground is a little lower there outside.

So, if you want to, we'll call this a day. I'll see you make an exit down through this trapdoor and then outside. I promise not to close the doors and shut you in.

It's really been a lovely afternoon for me and I hope you enjoyed it.