

## **Frieda's Tobacco Days: The summers of 1961-1963**

By Frieda (Hayes) Omasta

While attending Frontier Regional High School in the mid-1960s, I worked three summers for Zagrodnik's Tobacco Company. Several of we girls from South Deerfield (myself, Nancy (Szymanski) Shyloski, Sandy Lacey, Sandra Mitchkoski, and Liz Johnson) gathered at the corner of Graves Street around 5 am daily (including Saturdays) to catch the exhaust-filled bus to the field for the day. We



**Frieda (center left) and Kathy (last name not remembered), waiting for the bus. Note water barrel in the back.**

had a wonderful and very pleasant driver. While waiting for the bus, we often went to Bill's Drugstore across the way to purchase Fudgsicles (best ones ever) to complete our breakfast.

Although it was excruciatingly hot (seemingly well over 100 degrees) while working under the tents as we made our way down the long rows tying the tobacco, we had a fun time socializing while enjoying each other's company. Luckily, there was a water barrel waiting for us at the end of the rows. Oh yes, once during the Summer Mr. Zagrodnik would treat us with a soda of choice.

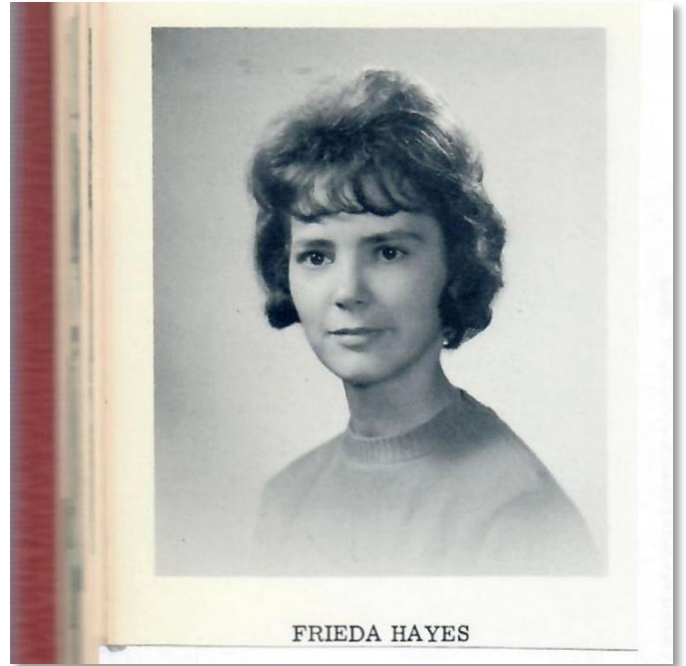
After all the tobacco was tied, picked and the leaves sent to the barn in huge canvas baskets (sometimes filled with frogs, snakes and other unpleasant wiggly creatures at the courtesy of the boys in the field), it was time to sew the leaves, after which they were hung on the poles to cure.

We worked as a team (two sewers at each sewing machine) and, not to brag, we were the fastest sewers making \$1.00 a bundle consisting of 50 lath. Incidentally, we made 60 cents an hour while tying the tobacco.

Mr. Zagrodnick graciously provided a wonderful and generous end-of-season party at the Hatfield Barn with delicious food and music.

The year after I left to go to college, a watch was provided to the fastest sewer -- just my luck.

*\*\*See more of Frieda's photos of friends working at Zagrodnick's by clicking [HERE](#).*



Graduation photo from Frontier Regional HS yearbook. 1963

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### **Frieda's Addendum**

*After my last summer working in tobacco (1963), I went to Fisher College in Boston. After graduation, I took a position at the Central Intelligence Agency in Washington, D.C., where I was employed for over 40 years. I married Bob Omasta from Hatfield in 1971 and we have two boys, Jason and Martin Omasta, both of whom reside in North Hatfield.*

*What I took away from having worked in tobacco was a positive work ethic and the value of teamwork, which clearly contributed to my successful professional career.*

Frieda (Hayes) Omasta  
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