

ORAL HISTORY OF AMOS KIMBALL

Interview by Harry Rosenblum.

September 1 (Labor Day), 1997; and we are talking to Amos Kimball, a life-long Bayside resident and (not legible) man about town.

AK: My first years at Bayside are, as most, who came in infancy, rather sketchy. My mother carried me over the threshold in 1932. And at least part of every summer since I have been here. Since my residence is only some 25 miles distant in the neighboring town of Newburgh, Maine, we were really in a position to come any time we wanted to, and so we might come and stay for two or three hours and then would return to Newburgh. But my date is from 1932, which I find is some 65 years ago.

AK: Now, our mode of transportation in that day is much the same as it is today. My father, as did the other members of my family, have automobiles from an early date; and so it was by automobile that I came. However, the older members of my family who have occupied the cottage since it was built in the last decade of the 19th century; they came by horse and carriage or by steamer. That was their main mode of transportation.

AK: This is the only cottage that I have ever stayed in at Bayside. As I said, other family members by the dozens had stayed in the cottage, largely before my time, as nearly all of them had passed away in my young adulthood.

HR: I think we should mention that this cottage... what is the current address under the new postal scheme here.

AK: The current address is #10 Maple Street, and that is the current designation, but in other years it was simply called Maple Street; and it's as simple as that.

AK: I don't remember specifically who some of the earlier members of the community were. Names were passed by me in distant conversation, such as the Blaisdells, the Lothrop's, the Clements, and a host of other names. I did not know them too personally, except Amy Blaisdell, I knew Amy, who was a cousin. She used to visit us in Newburgh, and also had some connections here in Bayside. I never was involved specifically in any group or organization as far as that goes in this area. I've always refrained from being too active in any organization.

AK: In those early days, a man by the name of E. Kelly Crosskill, who is Gordon Fuller's grandfather, was very instrumental each summer in promoting an affair that was put on by Shriners through Anah Temple in Bangor. Mr. Crosskill always seemed to be very active in that activity. There would be one day every summer when the Shriners would come with all of their colorful regalia and the band, and so on and so forth, and they would put on a very nice concert at the bandstand, which if you can remember the day, in Ruggles Park. That was one of the events. And of course, the other events such as on the Fourth of July and things like that; we usually got here for the Fourth. We would have our little picnic. Not particularly different from what we would

experience today. I won't say we would have more people or less people than we did in those days.

AK: And then of course came the war years.

HR: Park. Where was the bandstand in Ruggles Park; what's there now in Ruggles

AK: It would be...part of the bandstand originally stood just a little below the playground apparatus where the swings are. There's a little area down there that was where the bandstand was. There are photographs in my collection that show the bandstand.

AK: That was a lot of fun. I remember they kept lawnmowers in underneath it. There was an opening in the latticework, and that's where the lawnmowers were stored.

AK: Now, I don't know of too many interesting stories that I could relate. Perhaps some of the most dramatic deal with the war years, of World War II, when it was widely reported that there were submarines located right out in the Bay area. And I remember on one occasion when we came down to check over the cottage, that the military personnel were here; and we were stopped and we were very carefully examined before we could continue on to our property.

AK: There are some very fascinating stories dealing with World War II; and some of those might be related by others would perhaps be a few years older than I, who might recall more intimate detail.

AK: I remember one or two boating episodes dealing with some of the fellows who were some ten years (perhaps) older than I; who had met with some sort of a mishap, but no casualties, I remember. But other than that, Bayside has maintained pretty much a degree of serenity that still pervades the atmosphere. It's still a quiet and lackadaisical attitude.

HR: It is now, it's after Labor Day.

AK: It's Labor Day. Well of course Maine, you understand Harry, has two seasons - winter and July. Probably the big month for Bayside is July. August now has its place as does September. And there are still hangers on who stay will be here for the Columbus Day weekend in October. But by then we must by necessity get closed up and like the birds, we will disappear until sometime the following spring. Then we all seem to surface again.

HR: Mud Season

AK: Mud season, and black-fly Season.

AK: A typical summer's day of course, would entail getting up late in the morning and sitting up late at night. In my case I go to bed before it is dark at night, and I prefer to be

up early in the morning. But most Baysiders have a tendency not to have their breakfast before 11 in the morning, or at least that's my opinion.

AK: You asked me a few minutes ago if I had any old photographs. As I said, I have thousands of them, and the availability has already been made to the general public in that the collection is now part of the Maine State Archives in Augusta. I was afraid that something might happen to that enormous collection, and so I thought the thing to do was to give it away before I gave in to the collection and it completely absorbed me. But there are still many wonderful photographs that are surfacing - wonderful photographs, and many yet remain to be identified. This of course will become, without question, a major aspect of the newly-formed Bayside Historical and Development Society, which of course will, over the years accumulate and eventually we will build up a fabulous archives which of course belongs to the people of this area. And it is absolutely wonderful that this organization has been promoted, and has now come to fruition. And I for one am quite delighted in that endeavor.

AK: I never was in to boating; I've gone for a few boat rides around the Bay, and had some interesting experiences, but I never owned a boat - neither did my father. He was going to buy a boat when he was about age 36. I remember going down to Saturday Cove where we looked at a boat. He had negotiated to buy it, but we kind of shied away from it in the wake of the war. World War II was about to erupt, and so the boat episode didn't develop.

AK: I've never been involved in any of the municipal politics, or have had anything to do with the community or that sort of thing; because I thought I would leave that up to those who might be more qualified than I. Neither would I want to be President of the United States, so that might explain many things.

AK: You asked me something - we dressed just about the same then as we do now, very casually. Bayside has always been sort of a casual place. We leave our tuxedos and our formality, for the most part, we leave it somewhere else. Bathing suits have always remained essentially the same, except of course those which the old photographs which I have disclosed as being otherwise. That was more than a century ago.

AK: So essentially, that is in answer of some of your suggested question, unless you have something else you'd like to elaborate on.

HR: If there's anything of interest that you can remember - any incidents or..

AK: Well of course, anything prior to 1932, and my years of memory, of course scarcely go back to 1932. Other than that, I must rely on the memories of others who related different stories and situations to me, particularly my mother, and other members of my family who were living in my young years.

AK: My grandmother came to Bayside in company with her aunt. This is well before the turn of the century. While they did not come to this cottage, she related some very

interesting stories. One in particular she remembered of boarding one of the steamers in Hamden; and there were many steamers that touched here at Bayside; then called Northport. She would get on the boat with her sister, or sisters, sometimes the three girls would come, with their aunt who was Elmira Hurst of Hamden. And Elmira would bring her carriage, and a team of horses. Can you imagine a woman loading what they called a "top carriage"? This was a surrey with closed in sides with brass lanterns. And she would come, bringing the girls with here - she would come to Bayside for campmeeting.

AK: Now this takes us back to an era before Bayside really became Bayside. This takes us back to the Northport Wesleyan Grove Campmeeting Association. And the very reason for the beginning here at Northport.

AK: In the 1840's, 1848 to be exact, and to give an example of what was going on - this whole area was nothing more than just an open pasture which belonged to the cousins of my late great-great uncle Jabis Knowlton in Newburgh. The Knowltons had a farm situated just northerly and westerly - the foundation I believe can still be located not far from the mansion up on the hill. They were approached in the year 1848 or 1849, or thereabouts, and the acquisition was made for twenty-five acres of land that is right near where Auditorium Park, right in that section.

AK: The first Campmeeting was held by this group of Methodists in 1848 on Islesboro, but it was a little far removed from the mainland, and a bit inaccessible for many. So in 1849, the acquisition of the land was made, and consequently that was the beginning.

AK: A few years later, we find the first of the cottages that were being built, of the wooden cottage type - the so-called society houses. And, it is remarkable that any of them have survived. During the interim period between the building of the cottages and the first campmeetings, or tent-meetings, as they were called, came the Civil War, and following that activity, Northport really began to develop. Soon it was overcrowded, people came from far and wide, and the tent-meetings or campmeetings were in full swing. And not only were the Methodists participating in the campmeeting activity, but there were camp grounds all over New England where people would congregate; usually the last two weeks in August, and they would congregate for the purpose of having and conducting the religious meetings.

AK: These Methodists were very zealous in their attachment. Consequently, groups of Methodists from neighboring communities pooled their money and built what we now refer to as the society cottages. These are indeed museum pieces. As time went on, that original twenty-five acres became terribly congested; there was too little room and too many people, and more people to come, and so additional land was purchased. By the 1870's we find the eruption, I would say, there was like a volcanic thing - the Cottage City of the Penobscot. These little cottages began to come up like so many mushrooms, all painted white, and many all trimmed with green. And then they just began to sprout up and to appear, and the attraction to the upper middle class of the society of this area ~ the attraction was tremendous. And if you were with somebody, you had a cottage Northport.

AK: Well, there is some evidence, at least in my opinion, that a number of the cottages were pre-cut in some of the great mills on the Penobscot and were shipped by barge or schooner down the river, were unloaded, and were put together. There is more than a little evidence that some of these were prefabricated cottages.

AK: At any rate, the thing began to develop, and the prominent people who began to see this as a wonderful place; they began to realize that there was perhaps something more of an attraction than that of the Methodist religion, because all of them were not Methodists. There were many people of other faiths who came and became interested and eventually were to acquire property. Well, this went on through the building of two hotels, the laying out of the streets as we currently know them - the roads; the setting aside of green areas for park areas was very, very advanced for something of this type.

AK: By the turn of the century, by 1900, things were in full swing. We have the recorded documentary of sometimes several thousand people who would be here for the festivities, if you want to refer to it as festivities, during the campmeeting time - as I said usually the last two weeks in August. But this came stretched into not only the whole month of August, but even a couple of weeks into September.

AK: But, we've had to keep in mind that in those days, there was something else that was going on that was also very important, and that was the rural fairs and many of the country fairs; and these people, they had to wind up their campmeeting activities in time to return to their homes, so that they could go to the fairs.

AK: However, on scene by the turn of the century, and a few years after, was that mechanism that was designed called an automobile. And faint rumblings were heard from time to time, which were soon to make a radical change. By 1910, there were a number of people who were coming to Bayside, not by steamboat, not on "shank's mare" so to speak, walking or bicycling, or by team, but they were coming by automobile. Among them was my own family. Peg Lovejoy's folks, they had an automobile as did Ira Cobe, Mr. Cobe and Annie, who came to "Bohemia", that's where the Crofoots live. Others, I think a Mr. Stowell. But I am still trying to identify the makes of some of these old cars. I'm working on that one. But I think Mr. Stowell had ~ it may have been Haynes Aberson (Apperson, ed.), an enormous old piece of machinery. And of course as these mechanisms slowly made their way around the highways and byways, all of which in those days were gravel.

HR: Gravel, if they were lucky.

AK: If they were lucky. And the few remaining horses who were around shied away from the whole scene. The 1920's, more so; then of course in my own time the demise of the steamers - no longer would steamboats stop in because folks were coming by auto.

AK: Now, in the next century, there were autos, which we seemed to know and recognize. Today will also be written into the pages of the past, and we will be coming by some other means of travel.

HR: The Cobes; the Bohemia place as you mentioned, that was Cobe's summer..

AK: That was Bohemia, where the Crofoots live, was built by Ira Cobe prior to 1913 (1899, ed.), when they built the mansion up on the hill. My mother recalled the uncle, who was acquainted with Ira. My mother recalled a visit up to the new house, and she may have possibly visited them at Bohemia. I believe she did. But I regret that I don't have detailed information on that.

AK: The house, the big mansion on the hill, which is now on the National Register of Historic Landmarks, that house was built as a summer cottage; and it's quite a summer cottage. I don't believe that either Mr. or Mrs. Cobe ever planned to live there year-round.

AK: But an interesting little tale was told me quite some years ago by one of the young carpenters who, at the time he told me, he had grown to be a very elderly man. But he worked, as he said, on the job. During that time he occupied this cottage here at #10 Maple, and his name was Simpson, Amos Simpson, was a cousin of my grandmother's. Amos and his wife...

HR: Any relation to Peter Simpson the contractor around here named Simpson?

AK: Perhaps remotely. I don't think it's an immediate connection since I have that lineage, and I don't think it's immediate. But, however, quite possibly connected.

AK: Amos Simpson told me a fascinating little story. One day when some of the delivery people came and they found no sign. So, this was at the beginning of the construction on the mansion. So one of the boys hastily grabbed up something for a scrap piece of wood, and cut in the letters COBE. Now that's sometimes called "COBB", and I've seen many mis-spellings of Ira's name. It was Cobe. So he cut that out with a giant knife, and the sign is now standing right beside my front door. I think that might make an interesting addition to the local historical society, in that it is the original sign to the mansion. However, the mansion was dubbed "Hillside Farms", which few people know today. That was "Hillside Farms", and he referred to it as the "Farm". Many, many stories were told concerning the Cobes. They were very beneficent, they were very interested in the affairs of early Bayside, and they did a tremendous amount of good with their money. They were not arrogant, they were very down to earth ordinary every day people.

AK: Ira Cobe - many enjoyed his company and he was known to have entertained many, many people there during the years. On the death of Annie, there were no children in the family, he sort of slipped into the depths of depression. He became lonely and unhappy. I believe he passed away when I was two years in 1934; and that began another era with the purchase by Mr. and Mrs. Pingree. And that's another chapter in the history of the mansion.

AK: I suppose that at the time the mansion was built, that there was a great deal of smiles throughout the general population as to why anyone would want to build such an enormous, huge, vast, as Jack Evans (the late Mr. Evans) told me, he referred to it as a

mausoleum. Why they would want to do any such a thing as that in this area? But they did, and it certainly has been beautifully maintained over the years. It's really quite - I think it's a very important aspect of our area. It is, of course, on the National Register of Historic Landmarks.

AK: Interestingly enough, the Bayside area here was accorded the honor of being nominated to the National Register just a few months' past. Strange to say, that Mr. Christensen, his residence in Northport; his residence in Thomaston, excuse me, beside the replica of the Knox mansion; that too is on the National Register, and I might add that my property in Newburgh, the store of Jadus Norton, is also on the National Register. I think that is rather significant to have three owners, Cliff and myself, and now Mrs. Evans (Jean Evans) and family, to have property that has that distinction. And that is a very honorable position to hold. I attended the hearings and of course, when the formal presentation was made for that designation. I think perhaps that the worth will be proven in the years to come.

HR: It will keep people from building condominiums here.

AK: I think I'm quite safe in saying that probably we are a rather selfish little group. All we want to do is to keep this nice little area for ourselves; and the proof that we enjoy other people coming to visit lies in the fact that we are on the National Register. We love to have people come, and enjoy our little village, and if a property comes up for sale, maybe someone who would like to become a part of our own little community. In other words, we just want to kind of hang on to it and keep it essentially the same as it has been since it was built. I don't think that is asking too much. I think it's a rather generous approach to society in general.

AK: Here we are, we have a nice little village, we love it the way it is, and we'd like to keep it the way it is. You're welcome to come, and if you see something that you would like to buy, and become a part of it, we'd love to have you.

AK: The Methodist sermons, I might say - the Methodism perhaps has faded somewhat into the background. But I am now doing some research and am quietly making an acquisition of some of the old documentary - particularly books and the things that some of our older connections valued so highly. I think this is important that that sort of thing be not entirely neglected. And who knows, the day may come when there may be a piece of property designated for a nice little museum. We don't know, but it could happen. We never know. It would be very nice.

AK: Preservation, I think is very important. Perhaps some of us have preserved too many things.

HR: But nobody in this room, of course.

AK: There are those in the community with whom I am personally acquainted, who are avid collectors of all sorts of memorabilia. I would almost designate one as my interviewer, Harry Rosenblum. But it's an education; the whole thing is an education. And if we don't know where we have been, Harry, we don't know where we are now. And if we don't know where we are now, we will never know where we are going. It's as simple as that. The past is the key to the future.

AK: With that, I think I will conclude this first edition of an interview with the understanding that at a future date we may resume our conversation. This being September 1st of 1997, who knows you may be interviewing me in another forty years, if not sooner.

HR: I certainly hope so.

AK: Thank you very much.

HR: Thanks, Amos.