

Bayside Historical Preservation Society Oral History Project

Interview of Amy Spollett by Gina Cressey

7/31/96

Orono Cottage, Bayside, Maine

GC: Amy, If you could tell me a little bit about when you first came to Bayside; what some of your early memories are, anything you'd like to share with us we'd like to hear.

AS: Well, my first trip to Bayside was in 1931 to spend time with my aunt. My whole family came; we came on Route 1, and Atlantic Highway which is now named Cross Street which is now quite wide from what it was in 1931. It took us between 7 and 8 hours to get from Boston to Bayside. When we came it was pouring great guns, and my folks said, "This can't be the place, " because it did not have any eye appeal on that particular day. It only took a very short time, though, for us to feel that this was the place that we would love to be, and it has been that way ever since. I guess that is one of the unique things about Bayside is that generation after generation of families come here. I'm here now for probably the fifth generation and if I took my aunt into consideration, it might even go back further, to the sixth.

It's a very unique place. Many people who are here now, and there are full-timers here, came in off the highway just to see what was down at the end of this road, and went "AAHHHH", this is wonderful! Let's see, who can I tell you. Ellie Lagner was one of those. I remember their family when they came in, with two little girls and a very little boy named Norman, and they stayed. Every year they came back from Washington, D.C, then Maryland, Illinois, I don't know, all kinds of places, but this has happened to many, many families.

Oh, and you know Jo Huntoon. I remember Jo when he was a little boy. He was always very tall for his age, and I used to be so enthralled and interested in that kid because he always looked as if he had things under control, and his head was a mass of blond curls. I've never forgotten that.

So, anyway, here we were for this first time on a holiday weekend, no, it was well into July, not a holiday, but we were here just for a few days, and my uncle, Harold Hook, asked if my father and I would like to go fishing. I had never been fishing in my life...sounded great. Well, down toward Little River there were fish weirs, and we got into the boat. Uncle Harold rowed; my father, not being a person who liked water, held on to the sides of the rowboat as if he were going to capsize momentarily. We got to the fish weirs, all dropped our lines, and within, well, perhaps an hour or an hour and a half, I can't remember exactly, we had something like 20 to 24 flounders in a pail...it was very exciting...just with drop lines...just sitting up there. We came back, cleaned them, and had them for lunch. So that was a very exciting thing for me. This was 1931.

Then up in back of the cottages on Broadway, back of where Carl Mattesen and the rest of those folks live, where now it is sort of a mud hole and a place where stored boats, cradles, and what have you, that was a very, very much used horseshoe court. There were

probably four pits going back north and south on the set-up there, and there were benches up on the banking- the banking is still there- but we spent hundreds of hours every summer- all of us kids- pitching horseshoes. I often wondered about the people on Broadway, because we'd be out there at seven in the morning, and you'd hear PING as the horseshoes hopefully were making ringers, and every year, at least once during the summer, there was a big tournament that involved, I don't know, several counties around, but, anyway, cars came from allover the place, and there was an all-day horseshoe tournament.

GC: Now who would have organized that? Would it have been people in Bayside?

AS: Yes, I think there was a horseshoe association probably in the state at that time. Of course, everything in Bayside's changed drastically when the war came, and people had cars after that. Until the frequent availability of automobiles.(?) At one point, if I can recall correctly, I think there were five stores down here. Where Blair is now was a little store - Mr. Tuttle had that and a photography service in there, and the post office. Right in back of that, the large cottage, I can't even think who's in it, Ken Higgins had a store there, then the little house where the Weisenbach's live, was up on the upper road on the corner of Clinton, and that was moved some time later, but the Hastings had a store there, a rather good store, and if we went up to get something there, Mrs. Hastings always said, "You know, we're going to have that very thing for supper tonight!" Well, that was always a standard remark for us. Then next to where the Haywards are, the Tudor cottage, there was a store called the boys store on Clinton, and that was a gathering place for us kids at night. My brother played the trumpet, somebody piped (?), I can't imagine how this all happened, it couldn't happen now because people would complain, but they were doing wonderful things, but people would complain. In some ways, I understand someone's complaining about the basketball court right now. I cannot imagine removing it. What would kids that age have to do except get into trouble. So let's keep the basketball court!

So anyway, there was that store, then there was one where Atlantic Highway or Cross comes down and swings out and there's a little house that now has two huge evergreens that were once very cute little things, now they've completely consumed the house, but that was Brown's Corner, and Mr. and Mrs. Brown lived in the little house and had a store there. Of course, what's on Route 1 now, the Hideaway and the steer place, and the Bayside Store and all that, that was all just woods. And then we went down around, Route 1 came down around Brown's Corner, and came out where the Dos Amigos now is, and that also was a store. But when we came to Bayside, the man in the family left you in Bayside for the summer, and he went back to Boston, or wherever, so you had to buy your grub in the little local stores.

GC: So there was enough business to support several stores at the same time.

AS: Speaking of the basketball courts, when I first came there were tennis courts there, and they were not used. There were also tennis courts up at the golf club, as you go in the driveway to the right there were tennis courts, so we used to be able to play up there, and

we paid the large sum of probably 50 cents for the privilege of playing there, and then the courts down in front of the inn, but they weren't being used and were in disrepair, but the space was totally wasted, so my brother and a bunch of the fellows said, "Let's ask if we can make a basketball court," which they did. So that was in approximately 1933-4, probably, and they played and played and played, and there was even a tournament that would go back and forth between the Belfast team and the Bayside team, and people gathered down there evenings to watch the basketball games which were very, very exciting, and again, a wonderful thing for kids to do because if you don't have something for them to do, they'll find something, and you won't like what they find, so let's keep the basketball courts. Now remember, these kids played until they got heated to the 110-degree heat, you know, but no showers. This is hard for my grandchildren to understand; no showers, no bathtubs, no hot water, no washing machine, no dryer, no laundromat in Belfast...that was never heard of...so you heated the water on the stove...it was a wood stove we had, just like this one, and that's how we did our bathing and our washing, carrying buckets of water back and forth. And our cooking was done on a wood stove, so the mothers, at least in our family, had to come home and plan to get the fire going, and so on and so forth. And always at the beginning of each summer, there was a big load of wood dumped outside here; I think Jack did that, who was also the garbage man, the lawn-cutting man, the street-care man- everything; Jack would dump this big load of wood and then we would have to carry it in through our kitchen under the front porch, and stack it, which was all summer.

GC: Could you tell us about the location of the cottage you were speaking about?

AS: Yes, the cottage I'm speaking about was next to the Orono, overlooking Auditorium Square. And speaking of Auditorium Park, when we came, the line of trees down in the park now marks where, from that point down to the curve in the road, there was the biggest, ugliest building you could possibly imagine which was called the Tabernacle, and it was used, of course originally, by the people who established this little community, the Methodist Campmeeting, Wesleyan Methodist Campmeeting Grove, or something anyway, started up in this little area, and that was still there when we were youngsters. It was an eyesore, and of course you had no view of the water whatsoever; all you saw was this thing, but it was wonderful for night time hide-and-seek, kick-the-can, hoist-the-green-sail, and all those good games which we, as teenagers, (and teenagers today would rather scoff that) we played those things in the evenings, and even I can remember one or two years...two years I guess... when we did have a week-long camp-meeting time; people came from everywhere in the state; cars parked everywhere, funny old cars..

GC: What decade would this have been?

AS: Well, that again, was before the war. The Bangor Chapel did have a little chapel in it, where people from Bangor held their own individual services if they wished, but many of the chairs in Bayside, perhaps even some that we're sitting in here, came from the auditorium, the tabernacle, and they had benches, big wooden benches, which people, when it was finally torn down, (it was condemned because it was so dangerous); it had a bell tower and a bell...

GC: Were your teenagers allowed to go in there?

AS: No, we didn't go in there to play. We just played around and hid under the stairways and under the building, and all kinds of...didn't happen to confront a skunk at any time, but we were lucky. I particularly remember one of those weeks, which really left a very strong mark on me, an impression on me; it was a wonderful week, lots of really lusty singing of hymns, you know, on off-key pianos. Oh, we just had a grand time. And there was one man...I just, when I was moving from my old home to my new one this year, tossed out a little flyer which I should have kept, a picture of one of the preachers who came from New York City. I can see his face clearly now- white hair, a white goatee, and he was something, and he made a real impression on me.

And speaking of Auditorium Park, I never thought of this until now, but Bruce Reed lived in Auditorium Park then, lived over here in a cottage which they called the Ark, has been torn down; I think I've seen probably nine or ten cottages removed destroyed, and torn down, probably for safety reasons in Auditorium Park, but the Reeds, Doctor and Mrs. Reed, a very dignified couple, he was a retired Navy dentist, and their family had the Ark, and we hung out there, and Bruce played the piano, still is able to play the piano, a wonderful pianist, and his hands are large as hams, and his fingers just stretched out on that keyboard, and it didn't matter what we wanted, Bruce could pound it out. I was thinking how different the noise level is around here now, than it was then, and people loved it, so when people complain now of kids making noise, I find that so hard to understand.

GC: You can remember being a young person yourself.

AS: Yeah, we had such a good time. There was no mischief, there was nothing wrong, and we were allowed, (I'd forgotten this until this moment) by the caretaker of...what's now... what's the house on the hill that used to be the Pingrees.. anyway, we were allowed to go up there. There was nobody living there, and can you imagine saying to a bunch of teenagers, twelve or fourteen of us, "Oh, sure, go up." So we romped around and played and rolled on the banking and turned somersaults, and we just had a grand time, and that was a real privilege. And it wasn't all cut away in front the way it is now. It was more wooded. Well that was fun. Some people dared to climb the water tower, but I never had that much gumption.

And every year we had a trip to Islesboro. There was a retired sea captain, or maybe he was a fisherman, I don't know, but anyway, he lived right in back of the inn in a little cottage; he lived alone. His name was Captain Gooden; I have his autograph in my autograph book, which my granddaughter Sarah Spollett now owns, so Captain Gooden had a launch, and it carried, I don't know, 20 to 30 people, so every year this was organized, and you paid your money up front, and Captain Gooden took a group of people to Islesboro. We took our own lunches, but when we got there he dug clams, or maybe he did it before, but anyway, he would have a clam feed for us included in this.

We would (jump up?) on an absolutely wonderful sandy beach. That was always one of the high points.

GC: At this time there was no Yacht Club, Sailing School... You weren't doing this under the auspices of an organization.

AS: No, just folks wanting to be together. No, nothing like that. Nothing organized. And speaking of picnics, many, many nights my aunt and Jeanette Tardif, who was a little girl then, and her sister Marilyn and my mother and my brother and I and a bunch of us would go down on the rocks around six o'clock and have a picnic, and the last cottage down in the park here on the left was called the Rockport Cottage, and Captain Torrey lived there and he was a retired captain from the Boston to Bangor Steamboat Line, so it was always a great treat to us to be down on the rocks; Captain Torrey come out on his porch and wave to the boat, and have them salute with their big horn or whistle or whatever, and they came quite close to the shore so they could see us and we could see them. So that was super!

And every summer we had a swim meet, or a water meet,...I don't know which we called it... off the dock. And there was only one float then, it went down on the south side of the dock, and then out beyond that there was a raft to which we could swim. There was a diving tower on that. And at that time we had quite a colony of people who came from Panama every year.

GC: Do you know what the connection was?

AS: I don't know how they got here originally, but one after another would tell come to this wonderful place, and I remember Audrey Hudson particularly was an absolutely incredibly wonderful diver; I can see her clearly, and I can see her father clearly. I think the VanFleets were part of the Panama group originally, although I wouldn't want to stake my life on that. But anyway, we had swimming meets. I probably have a post card somewhere, probably Melrose, though. Oh, there would be 20 or 30 kids competing. We had relays with (?) of watermelon...imagine passing a watermelon back and forth in the relay in the water; we had little tub races for the small kids with paddles, and they paddled, and, of course, capsized. There were rowing races, diving contests, all kinds of swimming contests, and the boys, some of them wore bathing caps so they could swim faster in the water, and there were prizes, and it was a big enough event so that pictures were taken and post cards made; you could buy post cards. I have one; I think it 's home. Oh, and once a year, at least once a summer, there was a formal dance at the golf club, so we always brought a formal gown.

GC: Did people go in pairs, or on dates?

AS: Mostly all of us just went, and I don't remember that we had cars available, so I think we walked. That was the big time of the summer!

And it was one of my jobs always to go to the pump before every meal and get a pitcher full of cold water for our meal.

Oh, and we also walked to Belfast...a way to get back and forth, and the movies were continuous then; of course there was just one feature, or two features, one biggie and then another one, and then we had cartoons, newsreels, of course there was no TV or anything like that; we got our news...what... a week or so after it happened in the news reels, and the previews, so I can remember when a bunch of us walked up to see the first filming of Showboat. I think it was Irene Dunne, and we were so absolutely taken by this thing that we sat through it twice. It was probably about four or five hours that we sat there in that theater.

The dock was still a very, very important focal point, as it still is, and, as my son Peter said, this is the summer that never was because...

GC: A new dock is being constructed

AS: We hope it is being constructed.

GC: A careful listener might be able to hear the jackhammers in the background.

AS: Once in a while, once in a while. But how customs have changed. It was not at all unusual for all of us to get together, and that meant parents, little kids, teenagers, and go for a walk in the evening, and we played silly games while we were walking, and we loved to look into other people's cottages and see what they looked like, and I guess you've probably heard of the Maine Sailing School.

GC: Were you a participant of that?

AS: No, I was not a participant; I was a little bit older than those kids; Jeanette Tardif and Ellie Lagner...names are suddenly escaping me...there were a lot of them...I don't know whether Don Knott was one of those or not. Those kids came from New Jersey, and they came year after year after year, and never obviously told their parents of the lack of supervision that they had here, but they were good kids, and the times were different...temptations were different; they weren't exposed on TV and all kinds of things that they might try to do, so they were just good kids. And they roomed, were in different cottages here in Auditorium Park, so it was very, very, very active. They had a fleet of boats, and went out, as I say, with very inadequate supervision, and frequently were rescued by the Coast Guard, towed back in.

Oh, and another very important at least once-a-summer event, was to go, it is now a road but...and it doesn't even go the same path we used to go, but anyway, to go up to the top of Mt. Percival. Have you ever been up there?

GC: No

AS: Well, I don't know exactly how you get to the tippy top now, but there was a house up there, and we believed that a German spy lived in it during World War I. It was a great big house, and it had huge shutters, probably six feet... window closers they were... six feet long by probably four feet high, and those went up and hooked up, so we'd open those up and we'd have this wonderful view of the bay. Oh, there was a tower up there, too, that I think was put there by the Coastal Geodetic Survey, whatever that is, and there was a medallion in a rock, so we used to go blueberrying up there, and we'd take a picnic; again, very, very often these were family events, but times have changed; they would not happen now, things like that. But those were good times.

And there was a little one-room school house out on Atlantic Highway, the first house in on the right was the school house, and I don't know if it was torn down and rebuilt, or whether it is the same little house remodeled, so we've seen that go from a one-room school house to the current Drinkwater School which has been quite exciting to see. Then again, I just want to say how unusual a place it has been, such a unique place, where people out of curiosity drive in, stay, and come back forever.

GC: Did you come here with your own children?

AS: My children, and my grandchildren. I just talked to my 22-year-old granddaughter this morning, and she said, "Grandma, I can't believe that I haven't been to Bayside this summer." But her lifestyle at the moment does not permit that.

GC. Your two grandchildren who live here now are outstanding members...

AS: And then two of my other young grandchildren, unfortunately their parents have built a house on Mount (?) so they're very unfortunate children, but they always look forward to coming to Bayside. They talk about it all year, and they came this year, and one year I had them by myself for two weeks and then their mom and dad came and picked them up and stayed a few days. That was two years ago; they weren't able to come last year which has always been a point of sadness for them; today, this year, we opened the car doors, and they were gone. They knew just where to go, just for whom they were looking. They were back home. They just felt wonderful about it. And Fred and I used to always bring our two oldest grandchildren, Marge and Kate, for two weeks, and Marg (?) was a great fisherman; he would get up, (he was only 8 or 9 at the time) and he'd get up all by himself and head down to the float and fish and fish and fish, and when I'd wake up, I'd take down peanut butter sandwiches and milk for his breakfast because he didn't want to come home.

GC: Tell me Amy, who are some of the people that are in Bayside now that you remember from before.

AS: Al Keith. Morrill Martin. Bruce. Ruth Paige. (Billy's mother. I remember Billy when he was a little kid). Across the street here... Harriet and her sister. Their name was Cross at the time. They were young business women then. Peggy Bragg, Janet Collette, who's Janet Pattee. They were probably... oh, and the Lightners. The first time we came here, the

Lightner's cottage, the big one, .the big white one right opposite here; I can't think of the name of it, North Seasmont I think it was called; anyway, it's the big white one that sits right where the roads fork that house was in absolute total disrepair, and the front door was on this end on the street, and there were four or five very poverty-stricken children; it was a sad, sad, sad family, but they roamed in and out of this door with no steps, and the chickens roamed in and out the door, too. Then the Lightners bought that...Oh, I think Dr. Reed bought it actually. Yeah, I'm pretty sure it was Dr. Reed, because Dr. Reed and Bruce did a great deal of remodeling, restoring, and new building. So anyway, then the Lightners bought that cottage.

My brother met his wife here. We were here as kids with our grandmother, she was in the little house that we always called the doll house (it's for sale now) and it was a very sad thing that that left the family, but Dot's grandmother died, and Ben and Dot were way out in New York State and for whatever reasons, they were never kept up to date on taxes or anything like that. Nobody ever told them what was going on, and they were so involved in their own lives it didn't occur to them, so they suddenly received a notice that said that the town of Northport had taken the cottage and it had been sold. It was bad news, but they were in no position to do anything about it, so it went.

(several names already mentioned). And Duke Mahoney was a local handyman. We all thought Duke was great, a real local guy. And one day he came down to the dock to talk to us teenagers, and he had this big patch over his eye. We all said, "Duke, what happened?" He said, "Well, I was out chopping wood and the axe caught on the clothesline and came down and hit me in the eye." We all said "Oh! Did you go to the hospital?" He said, "No, just put a little ice on it." So that was how it was at that time, as far as he was concerned. I mean, you dealt with what you had.

Oh, the mail came in twice a day down to the post office. People had little boxes with a little combination gizmo on there...I guess they're still down there... and you'd wait morning and afternoon for the mail car. Lena Page was one of the people who got the mail then. Lena would drive down and Miles Dodge was the postmaster. They were natives here, and going out towards Dos Amigos on the right...the Samuelsons live there now... big white house...in their driveway is the remnants, the vestiges of a big smoke bush. When we were youngsters, that bush, this you understand that was 60 years ago, that bush was four or five times the size that it is, so it must have been very old at that time, and it was an absolutely huge mass of smoke blossoms, or whatever you call them, so anyway, Miles was one of our gang down here, and his father was the postmaster, and he sorted the mail and if you didn't have a box, or were one of the unfortunate people that didn't have the money to rent a box, you received your mail general delivery. There was this long line of people and you took your turn, but it was a time every day for people to gather. We got to know each other; we knew people much more then than we do now. Oh, the Dykstras, those folks were here when I was first here.

GC: And then the inn. Were there people coming and staying at the inn?

AS: No, not a great deal. Not to my knowledge; in my lifetime it has never been what I would call a flourishing business. That was earlier. The boat didn't stop here; it went by, but it didn't stop.

Then of course down here in Auditorium Park, next to Morrill Martin, is the Malm Cottage, which is now owned by Libby Carlson and her sister Sue Keith. Well, they lived next to Grandpa Hook in Melrose; that's how they happened to come here because Grandpa Hook was the one who owned the cottage next door. The site on which Dick and Jeanette Tardif's cottage house was the site of two huge, huge buildings. One was the Morrill cottage, and the other one was the it's gone. The one next to my aunt's had to be torn down because it was so (?), and when it was torn down, it became obvious that the Morrill cottage, because of the tremendous length of it, and it again was made of those huge, anywhere from 12 to 18' wide hemlock boards. In the center, it sagged. It had four stories in the back, and three stories on the front. It was a long, long cottage; it started where this cottage ends, but it went out to here. To repair it, it would still be an ugly old clumber (?) of a cottage, so, anyway, my aunt bought that piece of property on which the cottage had stood, and with her own tore that one down (Jeanette's mother, Polly Hook), and I remember when this cottage was torn down next to the Orono, between the Orono and the Bangor Chapel. From under it came a skunk, with two or three little ones trailing along, and everyone said, "Look at the skunk!", and Jeanette said (she was just a little bitty thing), "That's a skunk?" and we said, "yes," and she said, "I thought skunks were flat!" She'd only seen them on the highway! So that's another family tradition.

So, as I said the Lightners, we loved them dearly. Lovely, lovely people. And Nancy's father and mother were idols of ours. We thought they were just the cat's meow. He was a wonderful guy. There was a lot of diving done in those days, because we did have a diving board on the front of the wharf too, as well as the one out on the float.