

Bayside Historical Preservation Society  
Oral History Project  
Interview of Magdalena Brown Smith  
July 12, 1997  
Interviewed by Gina Cressey  
Transcribed by Sandy Hall

GC: Today is July 12, 1997. I'm Gina Cressey on the back porch of my cottage in Bayside, and I'm talking to Magdalena Brown Smith. And I guess, Magdalena, that the first thing that I would ask you to tell me is when you were born and how your family first came to Bayside.

MBS: I was born on the 31st of December, 1915. And I'll tell you how I got to Bayside first, but I'll tell you about, according to Amos Kimball, they came down from Newburgh, my grandmother and grandfather and his family and a whole lot of other families by horse and buggy, and would come down to Bayside. And I don't know whether they had any property then, or not. Also I know they didn't come because they were religious, 'cause I don't think my family they were religious. But somewhere along the way they bought a cottage, which is the one that we have now.

GC: And that's the one that you have the deed for.

MBS: I have the deed for, and it's in the name of my grandmother Angelia.

GC: Angelia!

MBS: And she was "Chick". But it's "Angelia Brown, of Newburgh, Maine," dated December 30th, 1889. And it was "received December 31, 1889, released by Annie E. Wales, the husband of the grantor," so I presume that they were the ones that owned the cottage before.

GC: Yeah. And how much did it cost?

MBS: It cost the great sum of \$400.00, which, I suppose, is still \$400.00.

GC: And that was a lot of money.

MBS: I don't know how they would...for \$400.00 for a cottage. But anyway, it's still standing there, hale and hearty! Also, falling apart!

GC: As they all do! Now, that picture that you were showing me of your grandparents sitting on the porch...

MBS: Yes.

GC: About when would that have been taken?

MBS: I don't know, I have no idea. My father looks young. It must have been early 1900's, because I know my grandmother Brown died...

GC: Tell me the names of some of these people.

MBS: I don't know. That's Angelia Chick, and that's Henry Brown, and that's my father, Leon Brown.

GC: OK.

MBS: And there's someone there with a baby and someone else pretty, but I don't know who they are.

GC: Right

MBS: But anyway, I don't know when, because I know she died young, about 62. And I have a feeling that she was one of the early Christian Scientists, and I think that she probably just didn't do what she should have done, and just lay there in the cottage, and went. Anyway.

GC: Tell me what other families your family is connected to in Bayside.

MBS: In Bayside? Really, not connected to anyone in Bayside.

GC: No? I thought you had relatives.

MBS: I have relatives up in Dixmont and Newburgh....but that was many, many...no, not connected, except for knowing them for many, many years.

GC: Sure. Want to tell who some of the people are who are around now who you have known for many, many years?

MBS: Oh. Well, she's not here...that's Betty Hoffmann, who owned the cottage that Freddy Lincoln and so forth have bought. And Lisa (?). But I have known her since my very earliest days, because Mrs. Hoffman and my mother were very close friends and that was practically my second home. So I knew them. Probably Janet Collett or Janet Collett Pattee when she was a little girl, she was my brother's age, and they used to play. But...not a great many others. So many are gone! No, that's about it. I knew Adelaide's mother.

GC: And what was her name?

MBS: Oh, lord, I don't remember any more.

GC: Tell me about some of the places that you associate with Bayside.

MBS: First let me tell you when I got here, shall I?

GC: Please.

MBS: All right. I got here...Elizabeth Sperry, who owned the cottage McNiches had and that Rosenblum owns now, Mrs. Sperry owned that cottage. She came from Orlando, and it was a boarding cottage, actually, in the summer with people, and that's one of my places that I hung out and spent so much time when I was a little child. She bought all these wonderful things. But a few years ago, it must be ten years ago, Elizabeth Sperry, the daughter, said she remembered the day in 1916 when Edith came off the Boston boat and carried Magdalena, who'd been born that December. So I got here for the beginning of the Northport Village Corporation, which some people are trying to destroy. Okay, now what was the question you asked?

GC: Well, it was going to be about places, what places, when you looked back to your childhood years, do you remember? Tell me about stores, for instance; what stores...

MBS: Stores! Well, my grandfather had a store, which I have a picture of, and it says "Bakery" and I guess it says "Brown's Ice Cream". We had a big front window, and there's a picture of it, and it's open. I think this was his summer past time. I don't know what he did in the winter.

GC: Where was it?

MBS: It's in our cottage. That's the cottage, and that's the front window, that's the same front window.

GC: I never knew that. And so it was called "Brown's".

MBS: Mmm. I don't know how long he did it, but he did.

GC: That's a wonderful picture! So it was a bakery. What year do you think that might have been, do you have any idea?

MBS: Oh, God, it must have been before 1900. Probably when he first bought it, I don't know. What does it say? Nothing on the back, but it had to be then.

GC: What are some of the stores you remember in the campground?

MBS: Well, the one I remember best was up where Blair Einstein...that was a store and it belonged to W.C. Tuttle, the photographer that so many of these scenes come from. And he had ice cream, and all kinds of good things. I remember Tootsie Rolls, and there was a platform, and you could stand up and look up over. His daughters were there; one was Phyllis, I don't remember the other, I think it was Hilda, but that was one of the places. And when that went it was very sad. Eventually I think it became the Post Office. And

the other was Perkins store. It was up the hill, it's hard to say, where the first road goes up to the country club, it's a house now. It's sort of catty-cornered to John Von Bergen, it's that white house there. It was Perkins Store. All kinds of things there. Then it became Hastings Store.

GC: The same one. Perkins became Hastings.

MBS: Yes. And then it closed, and those things are sad.

GC: Yes, it is. Now did your parents do all of their grocery shopping right here, or did they go to Belfast to shop?

MBS: I'm sure they went to Belfast; there wasn't anything to do here. There were people that came, but I can remember, 'specially was the milkman, Harold Herrick, I could recognize him now if I saw him. He brought real milk with cream on the top. And eggs, and he came practically every morning, and there are still Herricks somewhere in Northport or Lincolntonville, and he came, and there was Jeff, who was the fisherman, who would come to the dock with a boat filled with fish. I remember those specially.

GC: Did you parents have a car?

MBS: Yes, I would assume so. I don't remember. We must have had a car!

GC: Tell me how you got back and forth from New York.

MBS: By boat. For the first years we used to come upon the Boston boat. We'd go from New York on a boat to Boston, and then get off, and get on the boat and come up here, and arrive here in the morning.

GC: So you slept on the boat.

MBS: Yes, we slept on the boat, but I still can remember getting up in the morning and having breakfast. Probably we'd be down by Rockland or somewhere we'd have breakfast.

GC: Was it exciting, knowing you were getting close to Bayside?

MBS: Oh, always, it's always exciting. It's as exciting now as it was then! And then after, we'd drive up, but that wasn't as much fun. And then sometimes we came on the train, when they had trains.

GC: Could you come on one? How many trains did you have to take?

MBS: There was a train that would go all the way from New York to Burnham Junction, and then we would get off at Burnham Junction and get on another little train and come to Belfast.

GC: On the same tracks that are used now for the tourist trains?

MBS: Yes, I'm sure they were the same tracks. Those are the three ways, and then, later, it was always driving.

GC: And so you remember when the big boats would come in, because you would come on them yourself.

MBS: Yes. There would be one at night, going south, and the one in the morning and everyone would go down, and we had this great big wharf, until it got knocked down.

GC: Was it a social gathering spot?

MBS: Yes, everyone would go down, just like everyone would go for the mail, and we'd see everybody at the mail.

GC: Now tell me where the mail was. It wasn't delivered to your cottage.

MBS: No, it was up there in the corner store, the mail was there.

GC: Where Blair is?

MBS: Yes. And then they changed it from there to the little house next door, and for a time it was up the hill somewhere. It was really crazy.

GC: Can you remember the names of any community leaders from your youth?

MBS: Oh, my gosh, yes. There's Flanders, and Cobe, and well, mostly Cobes, and Mortimer.

GC: Cobes. Are they the ones that built the big house that Jean Evans owns now?

MBS: Yes.

GC: And were you in the gang of kids that used to sneak up there at night?

MBS: That was not when I was a child. I was older; no, I didn't. I didn't sneak up there; I'd been there. That's where they used to go, I remember, Mama and Jane Hoffman and all, and they went partying all the time, the Cobes. They'd have parties and the Mortimers and the Bradfords (?); it's a real party place.

GC: So what are some of the things that you remember doing when you were small? Were you a swimmer?

MBS: Oh, God, yes. I would go swim with my little friend, Trudy. Martha Borgeson has that cottage, the Dillingham cottage. She'd be little, and she'd come out in the morning and get her, her grand-aunt would do her curls in corkscrews so we'd play and go swimming. There're pictures of us in the water. And other children, too, I don't remember all of them, but I know that Trudy was a special friend, and we'd swim and play. I know that we were not always good children.

GC: Tell me some of the things, rules that you remember breaking, naughty things that you did.

MBS: Oh, I don't know.

GC: You must have had an independent streak even then!

MBS: Oh, I think I did, but I can't remember all the things I did! I loved to go get wild strawberries.

GC: Where?

MBS: This park, here, was filled with them, and in back of the town hall. But we also used to see movies; they used to have movies there, in black and white, and someone would play the piano.

GC: They were silent movies?

MBS: Yes.

GC: Great. Can you remember any titles?

MBS: No.

GC: So you'd all troop up there, you'd watch the movie, and somebody would play the piano.

MBS: How do you remember what you did 75 years ago?

GC: Tell me about dances. Did they have dances when you were young?

MBS: Oh, yes. Even when I was fourteen, fifteen, that was a while ago, they used to have them up at the country club almost every week, with a band that would come, and we would get...even I can remember when I was 15. We'd wear a little evening dress, and dance, and it was wonderful. It was fun.

GC: How elegant! Now did people go with their dates, or did they just, everyone would go?

MBS: Everyone would go.

GC: That's best.

MBS: Yes, I think so.

GC: And there were chaperones?

MBS: Of course.

GC: Now, how about boating? Do you have any memories of going out in sailboats?

MBS: Yes, I used to go with the Bryants who owned the jewelry store in Bangor. They bought a cottage where my Auntie Nan lived, down on the South Shore. And I'd go sailing with them. I never really cared about it, but he'd take us up moonlight nights, and there was Captain Goodwin who had this long, very slim cabin cruiser. We'd pack in, and go across to Marshall's Cove. But I didn't tell you something, that happened again when I was a child, but I was still too little. The fire! The hotel burned down. I can remember that, because I can remember standing up in front of the cottage. I must have been four years old, and someone was holding my brother, who was three years younger, and mother had...I can't remember his name, it wasn't Bill Paige, it was someone else...hosing the cottage, and mother, with these sheets full of our possessions and clothing and everything, so we could go, and we did, we went down to Auntie Nan's. But it didn't, but it was a tremendous fire; that was the big hotel, this great big thing that's here somewhere.

GC: This is the one, with the two sort of twin towers?

MBS: Yes. There it is. And fortunately the wind was right, and it didn't spread, and I don't think it burned anything but the hotel.

GC: But when you think of how close it is to some of these other cottages...

MBS: Right, right, they're still there. That's the one that the Colletts lived in (I don't know then, but that's Janet's cottage.)

GC: Do you have any other memories of fire?

MBS: There was another fire in the woods; there was a hotel in back of Robinson's, the garage?

GC: This is up next to the Community Hall?

MBS: Up the hill, you know, where the Robinsons are. That was on Flanders Road. There was a hotel there. I don't remember the name, but there was a fire.

GC: How old, about, were you?

MBS: Oh, gosh, I don't know. This is all...little!

GC: But did you dash up to see it?

MBS: No, no.

GC: How about the cottage right across Bayview Park from me; were you around when that burned, the one that was between the Conovers and the Fultons?

MBS: Oh, yes. I don't remember much about it, except that it did burn. It didn't do any harm to Luli's cottage; it was Luli Crapon, then.

GC? Let's see what else we have here in the pictures.

MBS: I have lots more at home, but these are some. I'm not sure whether that's our cottage or not. There's not a big porch, but this is awfully close to the shore. It isn't like it is now. But I don't know what it is. I don't think it's our cottage, but I...they could have built a porch on it after. The cottage next door is Sylvie's (?), the same that was there when I was little.

GC: How about war time in Bayside, World War II. Were you here at all? How did the fact that there was a big world war going on effect this little summer colony?

MBS: I wasn't here for all of it, because I went away with the Red Cross, but we had to cover up our windows, so there wouldn't be any light, because supposedly of German submarines. But who knows? We've had enough warships in there, in the Revolution. I think otherwise everything went on.

GC: Were there shortages of goods?

MBS: Probably, yes.

GC: So that was one era I wanted to ask you about. The Depression? Do you have any memories of how that effected Bayside?

MBS: No, not really, it may have done, but you know, people didn't rent their cottages the way they do now. People had a cottage and they stayed in it, or they weren't here; it was empty.

GC: And did most people come at the beginning of the summer and stay the whole time, as your parents did?

MBS: Yes, I think...yes. My father didn't, but Mother did, yes.



GC: And what was your father doing?

MBS: He was in the theater, and he'd be traveling, be on the road, traveling all over the United states. But when he got back, then he'd be here.

GC: Yes. Now, this is your mother's side of the family that...

MBS: My father's! Yes, my father was born in Dixmont, and they lived in Newburgh, and his family settled there in the late 1700's, so they didn't...Yes, it is my father's.

GC: So that's the Brown name that carries through, and it's your maiden name. And so your mother started coming here as an adult, after she was married.

MBS: After she married my father.

GC: Now, what other pass times? how about horseshoes? Do you have any memories of that?

MBS: I never played horseshoes, but they used to be up there, up the hill. I don't know, in the back...

GC: Behind Broadway, behind those cottages.

MBS: Yes, somewhere there. I can remember there was something related to horseshoes.

GC: Right. And tennis? Was that something that you have memories of?

MBS: Yes, there were tennis courts, but I didn't like tennis. I didn't care for tennis...too much jumping around, chasing a ball. I felt the same way...my mother used to go golfing, and I never liked golf either. Seemed to me a waste of time, knocking a ball around, when I could walk.

GC: Tell me what are some of the longest walks you've taken from here. I've seen you walk to the store. Where else have you gone on foot?

MBS: Oh, Saturday Cove.

GC: That's a good, long hike.

MBS: Mm, hmmm. We used to walk all the time, down the road, down to Temple Heights, practically once a week or so, when I was a teen. Betty Gibson, who is no longer here, and some other people, and we'd walk down there.

GC: Sounds like fun.

MBS: Yes.

GC: Let's see, what other activities...

MBS: But that's really a nice walk. I don't think I want to do it now, but still...

GC: Yes, well, I want to point out that you are one of the few people here who doesn't drive, because you're from New York City where you don't...

MBS: That's right. We had a car until about twenty-five years ago, but in New York, we couldn't use it there, and up here it was too hard to leave it for the winter, until finally we gave up.

GC: But you seem to get along pretty well.

MBS: Yes, except...I would like to drive, but my daughter said, "I wouldn't drive with you, Mother." I had my license, so...I don't.

GC: Let's see what else I wanted to ask you, Magdalena.

MBS: I haven't told you very much.

GC: Go ahead!

MBS: There's nothing else but I mean I can't think of anything.

GC: One thing that many people associate with you now, of course, is your great love and kindness towards cats. When you were a little girl...tell us how you became the famous Bayside cat person that you are.

MBS: I don't know. I think it started when I was a little girl. We lived in Briarcliff. My daddy loved cats, and we used to have cats, and have kittens. That was in the days when they didn't spay them. I don't think you even went to a veterinary; I don't think there were any then. So you would have cats. And half of Briarcliff would have our cats, and then we'd come up here, and I can remember driving up with the cats in the car, remember with the mother cats and the kittens. I was maybe eight or nine years old, and we'd bring them up.

GC: Did your mother like them as well?

MBS: Yes, mine did, but my father loved them so. In those days, you'd have all those little kittens, and you couldn't find anywhere for them, and I can remember him killing...(?) and crying because he had to drown them. You couldn't find a home for lots of little kittens. And I can remember him, he would cry so.

GC: So that's a thing you inherited from your father, a love of cats?

MBS: My daughter got it, too.

GC: Your daughter Elaine got it, too! Someday we'll want to interview Elaine, because she certainly has had a lot of Bayside memories of her own.

MBS: Oh, Lord, yes, she's had wonderful ones. Losing her dearest friend, Cheryl McNinch, you know those.

GC: Memories sad, and memories happy. Let's see, what else we can cover. Any community-wide events that you can remember happening here, any 4th of July celebrations...?

MBS: Oh, it used to be fun. I can remember when they used to do things...I can remember when the Shriners used to come, practically come every year or so. They'd come down, and had the most wonderful parade. It was great, in their costumes. Nothing like that happens any more. We don't even have a concert on the 4th of July.

GC: We didn't this year, did we. We didn't have a band concert.

MBS: Nope. They used to be fun.

GC: Tell me a little bit about what people wore in your earliest memories.

MBS: Oh, Lord.

GC: Well, when you look at these pictures, for example.

MBS: I don't remember what people wore.

GC: You don't?

MBS: I can remember Mother wearing...I mean, they didn't wear short dresses.

GC: Did they wear slacks?

MBS: No, they didn't wear slacks, I don't think so.

GC: Well, that's certainly a major difference between then and now.

MBS: Yeah, they wore dresses. Then I guess in the twenties I think they started wearing shorter dresses.

GC: What kind of bathing costumes; do you remember when men wore bathing suits with tops?

MBS: Yes, and I can remember, I still have a bathing suit there of my mother's. Janet and I were talking today about them going out here in the water and holding hands and

popping up and down. Luli Crapon probably, Anna Cobb (?), Mother Webb, probably Jane Hoffmann; I don't remember them swimming, but remember as a little girl they were out there.

GC: Were they exercising or were they just having fun?

MBS: They were having fun. It was too cold. They just didn't want to get wet, but they could bob up and down. I used to go all the time, though. At night, any time of day. And swim back and forth to the dock and back.

GC: Even when the weather was cold because you got used to it when you were very young.

MBS: It probably wasn't cold to me then. But it is now.

GC: What else do I associate with you, Magdalena. Picking wildflowers is something that you've been doing?

MBS: Oh, I've been doing that always. But there're not as many to pick any more. They come along with these things and cut them down along the road.

GC: That depletes the supply, doesn't it. Any changes that you can think of that are pretty drastic between your early days and now? For example, did you have phone service?

MBS: No, no phones.

GC: How about water?

MBS: Water? I always remember having water. But we didn't have phones. I can remember going up to the store to use the phone. Or Mother'd go next door to Catherine Hart.

GC: And what kind of a cook stove did your mother use?

MBS: A regular gas stove, as far as I can remember.

GC: You didn't have to haul wood, or anything.

MBS: No, we had our stove in the living room that burned wood, that we used when it was cold, which I still use.

GC: Is it the same stove? Gosh! How about refrigeration? How was that handled?

MBS: With ice. I think there was someone by the name of McGaskill (?) used to come around with ice. We had a strong, tall refrigerator, I guess, and we would have ice in the top. I can remember that. Until we got our first Sears refrigerator.

GC: And of course you didn't have any frozen foods then.

MBS: Aah, not then, no, no, no, I don't think so. Everything was nice and fresh.

GC: Now these boats that would come in and bring people, did they also bring food and other goods, or were they strictly passenger boats?

MBS: I think they were strictly passenger boats; I don't know, they might have brought food, but you're not really, as a child, interested in whether someone's bringing...as long as you have food! We always had plenty of food, I think from Belfast. But there weren't many stores, and they didn't have great many things, like the way they do now.

GC: Has Belfast changed a lot?

MBS: Oh, yes, I think so. I mean, basically, downtown hasn't, but for shopping and so forth, it has. I mean, we used to have to bring things like olive oil, and all these things up with us, because you couldn't get 'em in a store up here.

GC: And now it's a more sophisticated town with a lot more available.

MBS: Mmm, hmmm. A lot more.

GC: Okay. Well, Magdalena, I'm going to thank you very much, and I appreciate your coming and talking to me this afternoon, and you have a lot of memories of a time that I can't remember.