

Bayside Historical Preservation Society Oral History Project  
Interview of Al Keith  
June 5, 1998  
Interviewed by Elizabeth Wilson Transcribed by Sandy Hall

AK: Al Keith

EW: Elizabeth Wilson

AK: Well, you've asked me to give a segment on what I remember about Bayside. Nigh on my seventy-fifth year, been here all my life, assuming that you'll give me credit for the three summers that I was overseas in World War II. I don't know just where to start, so I think I'll go back to my earliest memories. My family basically came from Old Town and they first bought land from some of the Mahoneys here in Bayside in 1875. There were several - five or six families - out of the Old Town area that bought land down on the south shore. The main reason for that being was that the Northport Wesleyan Grove Campmeeting Association had very strict controls on the Bayside area. They had entrance gates, one which was over by where the Bartletts live, coming in on George Street, they had one down on the wharf so that the people coming in off the steamboats, they had to pay to get into Bayside, and the third gate was over at the brook by the Community Hall on the road leading down the south shore, and you had to pay a nickel a day to get in to the Northport Wesleyan Grove Campmeeting Grounds. Now, my people and a lot of the people (there were five or six families from Old Town, for some reason, or the Old Town area, Old Town, Milford, Bradley, Argyle) bought land down here at the same time. And they discovered that if you got to the gate and said you were going to go to the post office, then they couldn't charge you the nickel. So, anyway, that's so and obviously they wanted to come to Bayside but they weren't going to pay the nickel, probably they weren't died in the wool Methodists like the people in the campground area were, so they went down on the south shore, to get out of the high tax area where they were going to pay a nickel a day to get in here. So, anyway, that's the background of how come I happen to be here.

Now, I'll go back to my earliest memories of coming to Bayside, probably when I was five or six years old. Used to come down with my grandfather. Had a 1925 Buick touring car which we used to come down from Bangor, and it was an all day trip, pretty much, and they always came down Memorial Day weekend for the first time for the season. Now the roads down in here in those days were terrible, and it was just a sea of mud from Brown's comer up beyond just where the schoolhouse is now down into Bayside, so we always left the car out there at a garage, loaded all our dunnage onto a horse-drawn wagon, and they brought us down to the cottage. This happened - the cottage was down on the south shore, down at the foot of the hill down beyond, right at the foot of the hill going down the south shore out of the village. And... I guess the next time we came down was after school got out. By then the roads were sufficiently dried out so that they could usually make it down to the cottage with an automobile. Ayuh, now in those days, very few people had automobiles, and they came to Bayside basically, they... (of course the steamboat stopped coming into Bayside in 1927 when the Eastern Steamship Company asked the captain to kindly cut the wharf in two, which he did) but they could come from

Bangor to Belfast on the steamboat, and then there were several men in Belfast that ran a sort of a taxi service, livery service; they'd bring your trunks down the next day, and people came basically in those days and stayed all summer at their cottage; they didn't commute back and forth to Bangor or Waterville or wherever they commute to now. So, basically, when we were, as a small child, when I was down here, we were here all summer long. And you pretty much were self-sufficient. My father and grandfather used to come down on Friday, and go back on Sunday night (usually Sunday night rather than Monday morning.) My father was a lawyer in Bangor and my grandfather ran a shoe store in Old Town. Well, I stayed down here with my grandmother, and my mother was here some of the time -- some of the time she was in Bangor, up 'til the time I was probably eight or ten years old, and then from then on, I've been here every summer, as I say, except for three when I was overseas in World War II.

I don't know just... I guess maybe one of the things to talk about was some of the people that were here in those days that had quite an affect on Bayside, and one that had a big affect on me was Captain Goodwin. He had a boat called the Ellie which was a forty-four-foot double-ender and he used to take parties from Bayside over to Marshall's Cove for clambakes, and he would take trips around the bay -- go to Castine and places like that, and I was always very much interested in boats, so I hung around with him as much as I could, and he taught me the basics of boating as I came to know it as a child. He was one of the ones, he lived up on... uh, he and his wife lived in a little cottage about the size of a good-sized overnight cabin up on... halfway up Main Street between Broadway and George on the right hand side. Cottage now is owned by, uh, well, I'll think of it in a minute, Eugenia...

EW: ...Allen...

AK: Allen! Allen, Allen. The Allen cottage. Had a memory lapse this year, I think. And, uh, he was one of the ones, and there was Elmer Decrow from Belfast. He used to come down here with a sailboat, take parties out sailing; he rented rowboats; he kind of took me under his wing and taught me a lot about boating and in later years, as I was, oh, probably ten or twelve years old, I had a small job working for the water company, which consisted of... I got a dollar a week, and I went up three times a day up to the water works. They had an old fashioned rotary pump up there that pumped water up into the reservoir up there, and I had to go up at, oh, at eight or nine in the morning and grease the pump and go up about two o'clock in the afternoon and grease the pump and then grease it about six o'clock at night and, uh, the water works at that time was owned by Todd Durham, and he used to come down periodically, and... Can you imagine now (?) this is all rotary driven machinery (?) moving, thumping, pounding, one thing and another, and a ten or twelve year old kid greasing it? OSHA'd have fun with that today! And, uh, the waterworks, the reservoir, as I don't ever remember when the reservoir wasn't there, but I do have a little anecdote which I... every time I think of it I get a chuckle out of... Seems that some of the teenagers here in Bayside, none of whom I will name, but... used to go up there and use the reservoir as a swimming pool. And some of the summer people used to get upset to think that their drinking water was coming out of a swimming pool, so one night, the situation was getting a little bad, and Mr. Durham

decided that maybe we ought to do something about it, so he got me, and we went up to the reservoir. Now he said, "Now, you get down to your hands and knees and you crawl up on one side of the reservoir and I'll crawl up on the other one and when I holler you jump up and we'll find out who's in there swimming." So, we did. We got down on our hands and knees and we crawled across the road out of the bushes up to the edge of the reservoir and he hollered, and I jumped up and hollered, and he jumped up and hollered, and a boy and a girl went out over the back wall and down into the woods towards the golf course. (One of whom we recognized, the other of whom we didn't recognize. We knew who the girl was; we didn't know who the boy was.) So, anyway, in looking around we discovered that she had taken off her clothes and piled them up very neatly in a pile. So, Mr. Durham picked them up, went down and rapped on the cottage, and when her mother came to the door, he just handed her the pile of clothes. Don't know any more about the story; that's all I know about the story, is my side of it, but it must have been an interesting evening! So that was one of the things we had to contend with here, and another one in my early youth as I remember as a kid seven or eight years old, before prohibition went out in 1931 or 32, every night there was a procession of big old Lasalle Cadillac touring cars would come up shortly after dark, loaded to the gunnels with booze, almost not make it up over the hill from south shore, hauling stuff into Belfast for the bootleggers. Now, this stuff was all brought down from Canada, and the schooners, you'd see 'em out here, they'd be going along, sailing along the shore, in the ...just anytime during the day, throwing stuff overboard. Everybody knew it, and there was quite a lively business carried on by some of the men who lived here in town in recovering this stuff and getting it up to the road. And a man could make himself, you know, four or five dollars a day with getting the stuff out of the water and getting it up to the edge of the woods where these guys could pick it up and haul it into Belfast. So, basically, down on the south shore, just this side of Kelly's Cove, where our cottage was, everybody planned on being in the house by the time it was dark and staying there until it was daylight in the morning, cause there was a lot of night activity that went on around here in prohibition.

Now, to jump from that to the same type of thing in the middle eighties, my wife and I lived down on the cottage at the foot of Park Row, the one that has a tower on it, down by the wharf, and we sold that and moved down to Saturday Cove in 1984, and one of the federal drug people told me one day that I was talking to him, my brother was a federal judge in Bangor, and he died, and I was up there, and one of the fellows said, he said, "You know," he said, "caused us a lot of problems when you moved away from Park Row there in Bayside, cause," he said, "all the time when you lived down there" which would have been from '84 to '87, they had no trouble with drugs coming in, but he said, "if you had any idea after you moved away from Park Row and there was nobody living down there in the winter, if you had any idea how much marijuana came over the Bayside dock, it'd make your hair stand on end!"

But that's modern history. Now to go back to the other. One of the things that people in Bayside have always been quite concerned about was fire. And Bayside through the years has been fairly lucky; we've had two or three potentially serious fires. We had three cottages that burned up at the top at the corner of the South Shore Road and Cobe Road;

there were three cottages burned up in there. There were four cottages burned in '48 at the corner of George and Sea Street. There were three cottages burned up on the corner of Clinton and George Street. There were two burned across from the Van Fleets, which would be up on the upper side of Griffin Street above George Street on the right hand side going up towards the waterworks, and there was one burned on the corner on the other side. That was Bill Paige's grandfather's place; that burned. And there was one burned down in Bayview Park between the Conover cottage and the Fulton cottage. It could have been a potentially bad situation down in here, and I remember when, when I was probably in high school or I might have been in college, over in Waterville Lakes, over in the western part of the state, they had a fire that started on one lake, and it burned 56 cottages. That has always been a potential problem down in here, and we've been very lucky that we didn't get a fire going on a good windy night and Bayside isn't just a memory.

The yacht club was formed in the very late 1930's, 1937, 1938, somewhere along in there. Prior to that, that kind of set off the community project that everybody seemed to be able to get involved with and in the early years as a yacht club it was really quite a going thing, and there was quite a lot of activity, and then it sort of died out after World War II. People, up to World War II, they had sailing, come in in the evening, somebody would come in, they were going out, sail around for an hour or two, you know, they'd go up to the dock, say if anybody'd like to go out for a sail for an hour or two, and people would go down and get aboard the boats and they'd sail back and forth out there, and that all died out after World War II. It was an entirely different ... uh, well, of course, a lot of people, up to World War II, most of the people here came from Bangor or Waterville. There were some from Massachusetts, but the Massachusetts people, Connecticut, New York, New Jersey, that area started coming in and buying cottages after World War II, and it changed the whole face of the community. Nice people, and for the most part they assimilated well, and we died-in-the-wool Mainers accepted them as not maybe total equals, but we did figure that they were somebody worth knowing. I'm going to stop just a minute here, and get a little consultation here about what else we can go into.

AK: Okay, I'm back. Before World War II, very few people that were here on a ... all during the week had cars. I mean, Ken Higgins ran a store here, and he started a system whereby he would come down and go around to your cottage at night and find out whatever you needed that he didn't have in his store, and the next day when he went to Belfast, he'd pick up all of these items, and then he'd bring it down to you in the evening. Well, that was a big convenience, 'cause a lot of people had no way of getting to Belfast other than walk. And, uh, you know, you do ask, now, 'course you go to the supermarket twice a day and your great-grandmother went to the store twice a year, but now, everybody, you know, it's no problem, you need a bottle of vanilla, you drive up to Belfast and get it and you're home in ten minutes. But in those days, it didn't, so he used to go around and collect this, and also, the Cushman bakery cart came around three days a week, and they sold bread and cakes, that type of stuff. There was some people named Hopsy in Belfast who had a little ice cream shop which is about where the district court building is now on Church Street, they used to come down every afternoon if it was sunny and warm with an old Model T truck selling ice cream cones. And if a kid dropped

a nickel ice cream cone on his foot you probably had to go to the doctor, you got so much ice cream. I'm going to say the cones that they put out, there must have been at least a pint of ice cream in each one, and they were a nickel apiece! And there were two fish peddlers; one came from Rockland, fellow name of Louis LaRoux, and then there was Frank Hause, came out of Rockport, and they came around two or three days a week, selling fish. And, uh, course in those days the bay was loaded with mackerel, and us kids was going out and catching mackerel and giving them to anybody who'd take 'em off our hands, which didn't help the fishermen too much. One other humorous anecdote that I can... this is a true happening... There were three or four people to go back that were involved with the Massachusetts Conservatory of Music. One of them was Ralph Flanders, who was Ralph Robinson's grandfather, he was the treasurer of the Massachusetts Conservatory, then there was the couple down in Kelly's Cove, down by the little bridge in Kelly's Cove, they taught at the Massachusetts Conservatory, and then, an aunt of Jo Huntoon's, up on the north shore, the square place down back of where Jerry Sav..., where Broadway and Griffin Street come together, Jo Huntoon's, this was an aunt of Jo' s, taught there at the New England Conservatory. I think he (she, or her husband?) taught violin, but anyway, the Stevens down in the cove, Mrs. Stevens was a lovely lady, but she was, urn, well as I want to say about people, she was pixilated, she just wasn't too well glued together at times, in my estimation. Now maybe it was me that wasn't glued together.

But anyway, she, there was down over the hill from where Dr. Crofoot's and the old Cobe Robinson Flanders place, the big brown one up on top of the hill there, there was a lady who at eighteen, her name was Clara Porin (?). At eighteen she went to work as a secretary for an undertaker in Brookline, Massachusetts, and when she finally retired at 75, she owned the biggest funeral parlor in Brookline, Massachusetts, which is a posh, big money area. Had a lot of money, but she wasn't about to spend much of it. But she and Mrs. Stevens was great friends, and so one hot, it was a day or two before the 4th of July, and Mrs. Stevens came down and she was going to go down and talk to Clara Porin. Got out of the car and she left it in gear and when she stepped out of course the clutch popped out and the car went down and Frank Hause with his fish peddling cart was halfway down over the hill and her car went down, run into his truck, and the whole load of fish went out onto the ground. Well, she ran down and she said to Mr. Hause, "Well, oh, I'm sorry, I didn't realize that I'd done that! I'll pay for the fish." So he said well, that he was satisfied, all he wanted... It didn't do any damage to his own truck; but anyway, he was tickled to death to get paid for the fish, so he put the fish in the trunk of her car. Well, her car, the front end of it was damaged, so , to make a long story short, they hauled it up to Belfast with a wrecker, and it set over the hot 4th of July weekend with about two hundred pounds of rotted fish in the back end of it! So anyway, come (I think the 4th of July that year was on a Monday) so come Tuesday morning they went up and... they said you couldn't even see the car for flies! Anyway, that was another rather humorous incident that us kids thought it was really funny. I guess the grown-ups weren't too happy about it.

Oh, we had another... 'nother rather humorous incident that took place, we had a gentleman who, I won't give his name, but anyway, he was, uh had a big Dodge Watercar

speedboat which in the early 30's was the Cadillac of speedboats, big inboard boat, and he used to go down to the islands, probably Vinalhaven (I never did know where he went) and he would bring back booze. And he was selling it around the neighborhood around here. Well, prohibition went out. He had this beautiful speedboat, and he went out, told somebody, he said, "You want to be down to the wharf at high tide, be down at the wharf at high tide today." So, they passed the word around, and everybody kind of trooped down to see what was going on and he went out in the middle of the bay (no, I'm going to take that back, it was low tide. They were supposed to be there at low tide.) and I was there with them, and he went out in the middle of the bay, and he came in just as fast as he going (now this is up at the white place up at the top of the hill up by the Community Hall) he came laughing across the bay just as fast as that boat would go and about twenty feet from the low tide line he jumped overboard and that boat went all the way to the high tide line, and stove it... ripped the bottom right out of it. Somebody asked him why he did it and he said, "Boat was no use to me," he says, "all it was is expense, I couldn't make any money with it!" That, I witnessed. I thought that was quite a happy incident.

EW: (Asked an inaudible question.)

AK: I just had a rowboat.

EW: Yes, but I mean all, during, over the period of the years.

AK: Oh, boats? Oh, I've had half a dozen different boats. I've had, started out with a roundbottomed rowboat which was made by an Indian up in Old Town for my grandmother for her twelfth birthday. Now she was born in 1865, so that must have been built in 1877, and they came down here in 1885, and I gave that boat to the Penobscot Museum over in Searsport about 15 years ago. They came down... (it was a round-bottomed boat, hand made, it was a beautiful boat, but it, you know, the years had taken its toll on it) and I guess they've still got it over there, somewhere, in there. And then I went ahead and started out with a, uh, outboard motor when I was twelve years old. They let me have, when I was twelve, they said I could put out twelve lobster traps, and, so I put the lobster traps out, and I used to sell lobsters to the, uh, everybody on Sunday used to buy lobsters from me, and we used to get 25 cents for lobster. If they were over two and a half pounds or so I would get 35 cents, now that's for lobster, not a pound, that's for a lobster, and we all, us kids all had pails, and big old kitchen metal kitchen spoon, hidden in the woods, and somebody'd haul it down, "Get me a pail of clams, get me a pail of clams!" We'd get a quarter for a pail of clams. But I probably sold more clams than the other kids did, simply because they were selling a twelve quart pail of clams for a quarter and I was using a 16 quart pail so most of the people were my customers' cause they got more clams for their quarter! And I lobstered, actually, I started when I was twelve, and I quit when I was, well, I guess I was about sixty-four, no it was about, yea, I was about sixty-four when I finally gave up lobstering. It got so the last two or three years, the poultry plants had gone out of business in Belfast and everybody who worked in Belfast decided that they would go into the lobster business, and they put out ten

traps and haul the first hundred they came to. And having come from a family with a couple of lawyers in it, one thing and another, I'd been taught that you don't go around with a baseball bat and break peoples' heads open. So, I kinda didn't do a whole lot about it, which I probably should have done. I was a little easy going with that type of thing. But it finally got to the point where I just had to sell 'em every day, and I couldn't and, uh, up to the last two years that I lobstered I sold all of the lobsters, I never sold to a dealer, I sold all the lobster I ever caught off the doorsteps, which gave me a better break on the price and gave the customer a break on the price. The fishing, when I was small down here, you could, well, actually I used to go down to Kelly's Cove and catch a... a half a peach basket full of flounders to bait my lobster traps with every morning. I mean you could go down there and you could catch that half, this is a half bushel basket, half full of nice big flounders in twenty minutes in the morning. And, no problem at all, the bay was full of mackerel. Once in a while you'd catch codfish out here, once in a while you'd catch a haddock. One time in later years I did catch a 45 pound halibut, but that's the only one I ever caught in the bay out here, but there were a few halibut around. That's all gone now. Of course, we had the period when the poultry plants were going, you know, and every time the tide came, fifty feet of the beach was littered with chicken heads, necks, feathers, guts, gurry, you name it, it was there. We had a couple of women here in Bayside decided that they were going to do something about it. It was when Reid was governor, so they got a bushel basket and a pair of rubber gloves and they went down and they picked up a bushel basket full of chicken guts and legs, feathers, and one thing and another, went over to Augusta. Two middle-aged ladies who shall remain nameless. And they went over to the governor's office and the state cop, who was the governor's guard, was sitting in there in the chair half asleep and they kind of watched and they saw the governor sitting at his desk, and then they waltzed right in with their bushel basket full of chicken guts and put it in the middle of the governor's desk. 'Bout that time the poor state cop realized what had happened and I guess one of his secretaries smelled a little odor, went by with it, so anyway, they went in and, the cop he says, "You can't come in here!" and the woman says, "Why not, we're already in here!" and the governor is sitting there looking at this basket of wet... oooh, what a mess! And that time, we had a gentleman lived down on the south shore by the name of Bill Jabine who was a died-in-the-wool Democrat and I'm a died-in-the-wool Republican, but we did (?) He was on the governor's council, and he, uh, so he was the one that alerted me that this had happened. Well, they, actually, they called over to see if these ladies were crackpots and should be arrested and sent to Augusta Mental Hospital or just turn 'em loose. And I told them that we had a particularly bad day with chicken feathers and stuff on the beach that day, and I didn't blame them a bit, so they just said well, the governor smiled and said, "Well, I'll take it up with somebody and we'll see what we can do about it." Course it was ten years before anything got done about it. Anyway, that's another one of our incidents in Bayside that I can remember with a lot of pleasure. I'm going to set her down just a ....