

Bayside Historical Preservation Society Oral History Project
Interview of Genevieve Sheffield
Interviewed by Diane Melone
July 21, 1997

GS: R. Genevieve Sheffield.

DM: And your address now in Bayside?

GS: 20 Broadway, Northport, 04849

DM: And do you mind sharing with us your birthdate or your age?

GS: My birthdate is April 17, 1917, subtracted from '97, is 80, and my age is 80.

DM: You had a milestone birthday this spring.

GS: I did, I had a great birthday.

DM: And when did you first come to Bayside?

GS: So far as I can remember it was 1935.

DM: And you were how old at that time?

GS: Well, take 1917 subtracted from 1935, I should have been eighteen, shouldn't I.

DM: Eighteen years old, that's what I come up with. So did you come with your family?

GS: Yes, I came with my mother.

DM: You did. And was it vacation? Do you want to tell us something about that?

GS: Well, yes, I can tell you something about that. I had two elderly aunts, my father's sisters, one of whom is fourteen years older than my father, and the other is thirteen years older than my father so they were always elderly aunts to me, and they felt the heat in New York in the summers, so they wanted to come to a place which was accessible to Castine where they had a friend who had a car, to Damariscotta where they had a friend who had a car, to Jefferson where they had a friend who had a car, and they wanted to be able to visit with these people conveniently in the summer, so my mother took out an atlas and she opened it up and she located these three towns, and she looked to where she thought probably was about the middle of those three towns, and she came up with Rockland, so she wrote to the Chamber of Commerce in Rockland, and her letter was answered by Mr. Gregory, who owned the cottage which is now called the Dyer Cottage, the grey cottage across the street, who owned this cottage which is called the "Akia," and who owned the cottage there which is called the Allen's cottage now. He owned these

three, and he answered the letter, and for a small sum, the cottage was rented for the summer. My mother and I came up, following the initial visit of my father and my brother. My mother was very athletic, and she enjoyed swimming in the bay. At that time there were a lot of woods, we did a lot of hiking around the woods, and all the worthy citizens sat out on their porches and thought we must be crazy. They go walking, they don't ride in cars and so forth, and we sit on porches and talk about the neighbors. There's something wrong with those folks. So anyway, my aunts came up and they had a very nice time. Their friends from those three towns were able to come and visit with them, and they had a wonderful, wonderful time. And the time came for them to retire, and after I think it was probably three years, Mr. Gregory decided he wanted to sell...I think all three cottages he sold at that time. He sold this one here to people called the Acorns, and he gave my aunts the choice of these three cottages; they chose to stay here because they knew it, so they stayed here, and I have a feeling that the one across the street was bought by a lady whose last name I no longer remember (I think it is "Carter"-GS) but her daughter's name was Violet, and it was called the "Sea Gull" and she had a gift shop there. Maybe you may know these things...

DM: No, I don't. It's just what we want to know.

GS: Well, at that time there were three taxi companies: there was Ted's Taxi, there was Roy's Taxi, and there was Bill's Taxi, and you didn't have to have a car, you could go to Belfast or any place you wanted in a taxi. It cost a dollar to go to Belfast. You didn't have to go to shop; the ice man came around, and you bought a block of ice for 50 cents, and in the kitchen there was an ice box with a hole in the floor, so he would come and he would put the hunk of ice in the box, and the water would drain down, and that was fun. And then the fish man came; Grant's Dairy came, and they brought milk and orange juice and cream and eggs, and cottage cheese, and other things, but that's what I remember.

DM: Butter or something...

GS: Oh yes, of course, butter. They didn't use margarine in those days. Butter, and anything that they sold in the shops they brought. And then Cushman's Bakery came, and they brought bread and rolls and cakes and pies, and anything that was sold in the store under the Cushman's name, and the fish man came, and he brought wonderful fresh fish from the docks- swordfish, cod, salmon, halibut, shrimp, whatever fish they dipped up. The laundry man came and he picked up the wash, and brought it back the next time he came, and he picked up any dry cleaning. That laundry is still there- it's called the MB Cleaners, what they did was they gave you a card, and you went out on your porch, and you had a nail and you put the card on one of those columns and when they saw the card they would stop. If you had laundry they would stop or if you had the card from Cushman, Cushman would stop and give you bread. The milk we had a pretty standard order, and then the vegetable people- they'd go around, and usually they'd park up there in that square. It was more open somehow than that square. They could put their vegetable cart, and the people would go and they would buy the vegetables, and things like strawberries or raspberries, depending on what was in season.

DM: That's Merithew Square, where the pump is.

GS: Yes, at the end, where the roads all come together up there, they used to park there. And then they would...some of them stopped in front of the house, and then the fish man, I told you the fish man came, the vegetable man came. I think I've covered just about all of the necessities of life. Down at the park there were two shops. There was a shop up there which was the Hastings Shop, which Blair moved down and made into a cottage across from his Real Estate Office. There they sold some groceries; they sold kerosene; they had a kerosene stove. We had electricity. Then there was a post office where there were two deliveries, and the girl, it was the Paige girl, in other words, it was Bill Paige's family, I think it was his aunt Dorothy, she used to come twice a day, once at lunch and once in the evening, and the stout of heart used to walk down there and everybody would gather. It was so nice down there by the post office, and the postmistress would sort, or the postmaster whichever it was, would sort the mail and then people would get the general delivery, or they would get mail out of their mail boxes, and the people who (?came far) would get into their cars and drive to the post office, but we never did do that, but anyway, they used to do that. That was before walking was fashionable. And you'd get to know people that way. It was a friendly thing. It was really very nice. In other words, it was a self-contained community, you did not have to have a car, and the years went by, and they started to build these supermarkets in other places that were accessible if you had a car, and the supermarkets could sell at a cheaper rate than the small shops, Mr. Hastings and the Parkers, so we always patronized the shops. We were so grateful to have the shops here, but a lot of people were not pleased with the prices, they were just saving.

DM: The Bayside Market I think struggles with that, down at the end of...

GS: Yes, it's just about a mile down there. I know what you mean. It's on the highway. That was there, too, but you didn't have to bother with them. You had the two shops so close. Yes, we often walk down there. Mr. Pierce was in charge.

DM: What were the social events? What did, you know?

GS: I'm not a mixer, so you would have to get the social events from Amy Spollett. She can tell you about those.

DM: How about was the Yacht Club or the Sailing School part of your memory?

GS: The Sailing School was there with Marion Eaton. It was also there with Mr. Clements. Mr. Clements did a very fine job. Mr. Clements had that house- now Shermans, there, and I think the Captain's Quarters there, the Galley was in back, the one now owned by the man from New Zealand, the Brewer Cottage, that was where they slept. The people that came slept, and they had their meals there. My brother put his child in the Sailing School when she was about 12 just to have her occupied so she wouldn't be running around wild, as so many of the Bayside children do.

DM: Do you see differences in what the children do now from back when you were closer to a child, or do you see it similar.

GS: I think it probably is similar, this running around in packs and so forth. There are a great many very young children here. We always felt this was a good place for very young children and very old ladies. It was a very good place for them and we felt that my aunts were safe here.

DM: Have you been back every year since '35?

GS: I think possibly I have. I wouldn't want to swear on the Bible, but I think after the three years my aunts rented the house, then they bought it, then I would have to come for a certain period of time to please them, so I think I probably came every year. After the aunt, who was actually the one that bought it, after she had a stroke and then she had difficulty with the help that she had counted on, then I finally came and I stayed, well, my brother had a six-week vacation and he would come and stay for six weeks, and then I would stay the rest of the time. It was much easier to do in those days. There was the Bar Harbor Express. You could come up and have a compartment, sleep overnight on the train coming up. Much easier to get here in those days.

DM: From New York you could take a train into Bar Harbor?

GS: You could take the train at night. It was called the Bar Harbor Express. And I think at first it went to Belfast. I'm not absolutely sure about that, but then afterwards I know it went to Bangor, but the name of the train was Bar Harbor Express, and it brought a lot of people up here who were summering in Maine, and they were mostly wealthy people who were going to places like, oh, Islesboro and places like that...Bar Harbor, places where wealthy people go. They weren't people who came here to Bayside.

DM: Do you still live in New York?

GS: Yes.

DM: You do. Did you get your water from the pump?

GS: We never had to get the water from the pump, no.

DM: You've always had running water.

GS: We've always had running water here. We had adequate running water at first. It was just the last years that the water has been a problem. There was an individual man that owned the water supply. It was up where that water is now held for the fire department. That's where the water supply used to be. That used to be a reservoir.

DM: Up on Bluff Road?

GS: Yes.

DM: Can you tell me about the park area, and the dock, your memories, and if that's changed.

GS: Oh, I don't remember people playing in the parks like they do now, but then I don't know because you see we used to walk. We were those odd people from New York that used to walk, and there used to be lots of woods around that were very nice, and we would walk in the woods. Route 1 hadn't been built. No, just a minute, not Route 1. What is the other one? I think they re-routed Route 1 or something.

DM: Atlantic Highway?

GS: Yes.

DM: Yes, exactly.

GS: Anyway, we used to be able to walk up that way, and there weren't a whole lot of cars. We used to walk to Belfast, and it wasn't at all scary because there weren't that many cars. I guess it was Route 1 in those days but the...it didn't have all the cars and everything like it has now. I'd be afraid to walk to Belfast even if I felt physically able to. I'd be afraid to walk there now with all the cars whizzing by, but you didn't have that and so we would walk to Belfast or we would walk in the woods. We would go down to the beach and we would go swimming. We were the queer ducks that went swimming. Mrs. Lovejoy's father, her grandfather, Mr. Bragg, there used to be a house there where she has her garden, you probably know that, and he used to sit out there. He was an old gentleman, and he would sit out there and we would go down to the beach to swim, and he would look at us and absolutely marvel and say, "Here come the girls!" Nobody could understand why we would go swimming. They didn't realize that we came here so we could go swimming. It was a nice place to swim, and the water wasn't as cold as in many of the places we had been in Maine.

DM: Right. Now, the dock was there.

GS: The dock was there.

DM: Was it when it was much bigger, or was it pretty much the way it is now.

GS: I really can't answer that. I don't remember. I remember later on there was a high diving board, and the high diving board used to go across from where the house was. So far as the size goes, I don't know. It seems to me it's about the same but I could be wrong about that, but I do remember the diving board 'cause I used to like to dive.

DM: Were the rafts there? You know, the side ramps and the rafts.

GS: Oh, the swimming rafts?

DM: Yeah. Or did you swim off the beach?

GS: Well, I can remember swimming off the beach. I think probably we also did have a float there but that I can't remember too well. I remember going off the high diving board. I must have swum to the raft. I don't think I went off the high diving board and swam to the beach. That would seem like a lot of wasted energy. It's not too clear in my mind the way it was, but, oh, there were always people down at the end of the wharf, and there was ...the floats must have been there because they had boats. They had dinghies and rowboats and things there, so there must have been..they must have both been there.

DM: Did they have a life guard?

GS: They had a life guard on the wharf. When we first came, there was no life guard, then after a while they had a life guard who really organized things for the children. She had all sorts of things going on- almost like a real employee. And then there was a period in which there was no lifeguard, and then they started getting a lifeguard again. I've always been slightly suspicious that they got the lifeguard again because I got caught in the current and I had difficulty, and a man who was on the wharf jumped in and gave me his hand to help me because I was having so much trouble swimming against the tide. It's a very strong tide there at times.

DM: Yes,

GS: ...and I told Peggy Lovejoy whose husband at that time was an Overseer, and I think that that initiated the fact that they have had a lifeguard ever since that happened. It's something that they need there. That's not a completely safe area.

DM: You're absolutely right. It's a very good thing.

GS: Because I'm not a bad swimmer, and if I had difficulties, someone who was a less good swimmer than I would have certainly had difficulty.

DM: Then there's a lot of children down around there. You're absolutely right. I think it's a great thing.

GS: So, I guess I remember now, I remember them standing on the end of the...it's coming back to me as I think about it. They were standing on the end of the wharf, fishing. They were always standing there fishing, fishing, fishing, catching mackerel, then bringing mackerel around trying to give it to people. "Oh, please, accept these mackerel. We've got fifteen. Won't you please just take five?"

DM: You're not a lover of mackerel?

GS: I'm not a lover of mackerel.

DM: Was there a policeman?

GS: I have no memory of a policeman. First policeman I remember was a very tall young man who was here...I don't know, a year or two ago, was the first one I remember. The Coast Guard people I think used to come around every so often somebody in a car with a uniform used to come around, but I think they were looking for people who were stealing lobsters rather than for- or who were fishing illegally for lobsters- I think that's what it was. I think you have to have a license to fish for lobsters and I think they were going around and checking people's licenses. I remember they were always pleasant, but I don't remember a policeman. The first policeman I remember was that tall, young man, who was very pleasant.

DM: Just in the summer- the summer one that we ...

GS: There was a summer...I don't know whether it was last year...it was rather recently there was a tall young man who used to talk to everybody regardless of their age. He was so friendly and so nice, and he used to go down there on the wharf, and him I remember, but I don't remember any of the others.

DM: So there wasn't need for a policeman? They didn't have problems?

GS: There really wasn't. There were no problems.

DM: Good. Do you have any memory of church services, or..?

GS: They had this little church in Belfast which is still there- St. Margarets, a beautiful, beautiful church, yes, that's a lovely little church, and I think there was another little church that was a local church down where there's a fork in the road that has been made into a house. You probably have seen that- there used to be a church down the road, and there used to be...

DM: Do you know which house it is?

GS: As you're going towards the store, the Bayside Store, you go, I think before you get to the school, there's a...I think it's just around Atlantic Highway...

DM: I do know.

GS: ...there's a building, and that used to be a church. It had stained glass windows and everything. It was built like a church, but I think it's been made into a house now.

DM: On the left.

GS: On the left as you go. You go this way on the left.

DM: But you don't remember anything right within in Bayside.

GS: No, but we're not people who exercise a great deal of religion. We went to St. Margaret's church. It was a beautiful church and we enjoyed it, but we don't pray before we eat.

DM: Are there some people here that you've known for many years?

GS: I remember Mrs. Spollett. She's the only one I can think of now that I've known for that many years. I was riding on the bus once, and there was a bus driver who was the grandson of Mrs. Beech who owned this house that was next to the one that they now call the "Barnacle", the one where the man has just sold it and he was painting there. He was the grandson of the lady that lived there, and she was very friendly with my mother. They had a lot in common. She used to bake beans. You've probably heard about Mrs. Beech and baking the beans and selling them on Saturday nights and bread, but so far as the other... Oh, the Downses were here a long time. They bought the house from the Acorns. I've forgotten when they came, but they came after a while, they bought the house from the Acorns...

DM: Is that the house right next here?

GS: The Downses were here and they sold to the Allens, and they moved down there in that ocean-view house. I don't think it has a name; I don't know, it's right at the edge of the park..

DM: On the corner.

GS: Yes, you know about that one.

DM: The one she's in now, Mrs. Downs?

GS: But I can't think of anybody off-hand here that I knew back there when I was in school. I was still in college then. I can't think of anybody.

DM: Do you have any memory about people coming and staying in the inn?

GS: We stayed in the inn one night- my mother and I, ...it was the last year that the inn was in operation. My mother and my brother and I came, and when we arrived, Mr. Howard had not properly drained the water out of the toilet, and there was a great big hole like this in the toilet, and my brother said that my mother couldn't stay here like that and so we went and we took a room at the inn, and mother and I stayed in it. It was very nice. There was a great big fireplace in the living room, and I think Betty Chittick's sister was running it, but she told us it was the last summer that she was going to do it. My brother stayed up here with the broken toilet. It was easier for him to manage than my mother.

DM: Was that before it burned, was that when it was a hotel?

GS: It was when it was a hotel, but it was not before it burned, I don't think. I don't remember when it burned. Oh, I think it must have burned before that, I'm almost sure. But we were the only people that stayed in it, and I guess we were about the only people that stayed in it all summer. She was a nice lady and she was so nice to my mother. I don't know what her name was, but I think she died rather recently...Betty Chittick's sister. You know Betty Chittick up there.

DM: Yes.

GS: I think her father had owned that inn before her sister.

DM: Do you have any favorite stories, or certain memories that you would like to tell me about.

GS: Well, I think I told you quite a lot.

DM: You have.

GS: You want in the past. I can't really think of anything particular in the past.

DM: Well tell us about your traditions right now. You're known to go down and swim most every day, don't you?

GS: Well, I try to. You can't go every day. You can't do anything every day. I do try to. My mother was a great swimmer. I never did swim like my mother. I learned to be a fairly good diver when I was in college, and I used to like to dive. I haven't dived in so many years. I tried... when I was in my fifties I thought, "I'm too old. I shouldn't be diving any more." I stopped, which was very, very foolish, and I tried about ten years ago- I thought "Oh, I probably can still dive" and I tried to dive, and when I came out I was all black and blue, and I thought to myself, "This is tricky business." And I haven't yet found a place where I could gradually build up to diving again so I haven't really bothered. When I've been in the pools, I've gone more for distance rather than trying to dive. My mother used to...she just loved the water. She grew up on the River Avon in England. There were nine in her family and because they were on a river their father made them learn to swim and they used to put on swimming exhibitions. She swam 250 yards when she was four years old, and I have the watch she was given. I don't think she could even tell time, and she was given a beautiful silver watch as a prize. But she was a wonderful swimmer, and she loved the water. So she would always want to share this with other people. There was a little retarded girl called Marie. At this time, this summer, Mrs. Beech rented her cottage to Miss McDougal, and Mrs. Curtis who afterwards bought the house which is called "Little Harbor" where Joe Reilly now is, and they had this little retarded girl that they had adopted, and my mother taught her to swim, and my mother used to take her down to the beach, and she called her "my little fish", and the little girl learned to swim. It was really so touching. And my mother bought her a little barrett. that was like a fish, and when the little girl could swim, my mother gave it to her for a prize. That's kind of a nice story...

DM: It's a very nice story.

GS: Sort of touching. But not anything else that I can think of. Because we didn't really fit in. Socially we did not fit in with Bayside. I didn't and my mother didn't. We were the odd people from the city. We were the queer ones. Now everybody does all the things we were doing then.

DM: Exactly.

GS: See all these people walking along, and I think of me, all looked at us, "Won't you take a ride, please take a ride. Sit down and rest on the porch and talk about the neighbors." Oh gosh. I get a bang out of it now.

DM: Do you remember when the Yacht Club was built?

GS: No. The first person who had the Sailing School was Miss Eaton, who taught in Ridgewood High School. She taught Latin and the first person she had come here was a girl from Ridgewood. She was the only, only one, but Miss Eaton could make things sound great, and the girl's parents didn't realize it when she got here she was going to be the only camper, but anyway, the girl came from Ridgewood, and this house was owned by Mrs. Green and somebody else. There were two ladies, and they had a son, and the outcome of this girl coming up from Ridgewood, New Jersey, was she met the son who later became an employee of the American Tel. and Tel. in Houlton, Maine, where they have the cable...they did in those days, whether they still do I'm not sure, but they had the cable that goes across the Atlantic Ocean under the water- that probably is still there, I don't know, but anyway, that girl became very friendly with me, she and I were very good friends, and she had a two-year-old child of whom I was very fond, and I had a nice time with them, and she had me to stay a week with her in Houlton, which was a good experience. I went by train from Belfast up to Houlton, and what a dull ride it was, just potatoes, potatoes, all the way up there. Oh, my goodness. But I would never have gone if it hadn't been for that girl being stationed up there in Houlton. It was an interesting experience. But on the whole, I didn't have very much in common with the people here. The little boy sort of brought us together, and the fact that his mother was my age and was from Ridgewood, New Jersey, we had something in common. But I didn't have too much in common. These other people had a lot more money than we had. We were always the ones who were trying to sort of get by. We were children of the depression and these other people around here that were established seems to me were mostly merchants. A lot of families here that were merchants. Mr. Gregory that rented us this house... he was a merchant.

DM: Where did you go to college?

GS: Barnard.

DM: And what was your major?

GS: Chemistry.

DM: Really. You're a chemist.

GS: No, I was a chemistry teacher.

DM: Oh, at what level?

GS: Oh, in high school.

DM: At high school level? For how many years?

GS: Thirty-five.

DM: And that was what you did in New York.

GS: No, it was what I did in New Jersey. All the time I taught I taught in New Jersey.

DM: OK. And then that gave you your summers off, to be in Bayside.

GS: My brother was a librarian in City College, and he had six weeks, so he...my brother just loved Maine.

DM: Is he still...

GS: No, he died seven years ago. My aunt left him the cottage. He had a child and it was nice for him to have the cottage, so she left...well, she gave him the cottage, and then in turn he gave it to me. He died in '91.

DM: Did you marry?

GS: No.

DM: No.

GS: Didn't need to.

DM: Had a lot of children in the high school.

GS: A lot of young people- didn't need to. Had a lot of responsibility taking care of older people.

DM: That's wonderful. Well, thank you so much for sharing this.