

Bayside Historical Preservation Society Oral History Project
Harriette Cross Henninger & Eleanor Cross Knight
Interviewed by Gina Cressey August 5, 1996
Transcribed by Nancy Freeman & Eleanor Lagner

GC: I am interested in hearing, of course, stories from the early days and perhaps you could start off by telling me how it was that your family first came to Bayside.

HCH: We are here because our grandparents came here and pitched tents for camp meeting. All these cottages around here are really close to the auditorium which was just down in that park, so our lot is tent size. It is 20 feet wide by 75 feet long. But you see if a cottage burned down, we could not replace it. We can remodel. We put in a new porch, saved the old roof and then later we thought we could put a new roof on it, just remodel it. Grandma and Grandpa had a farm in Lowell, Maine. Grandpa believed in investing in real estate. He owned a lot of cottages here and he rented them. Now Eleanor and I were born in Massachusetts, Canton, Mass., and we came here eighty-three years ago.

GC: Oh, what year was that?

HCH: That was 1913. The first year we were here, right across the park, is a cottage called...

ECK: Sunnyside.

HCH: Sunnyside. We stayed at the Sunnyside that first summer. For two years we lived in Belfast and we rented different cottages, some of them Grandma Olga's and finally, mother was a school teacher from Scotland, and she bought a cottage on the south shore in the fall. When we came down weekends in the spring, my father discovered it needed a new sea wall so we sold it.

ECK: That wasn't the only reason, but...Harriette and I didn't enjoy being down there 'cause all our friends were up here and we just seemed so removed down there.

HCH: In 1921, mother bought this cottage, because she was a school teacher, she had the wherewithal to buy it, you see.

GC: And the time to enjoy it.

HCH: She was born in a little summer place outside Glasgow in Scotland. I think the people either love cottage life or they hate it. I don't think there is any middle ground.

GC: I think that's still true.

ECK: I thought everyone liked it.

HCH: Oh no, oh, no. No.

ECK: Everyone I know thinks I'm so lucky to be coming to the seashore.

HCH: I have friends who love to dress up. Cottage life is not for them.

GC: It's pretty informal. You're right.

HCH: We like the best of everything and that's what we enjoy.

GC: Now, I've heard that in the early days the young people would dress up for a dance at least once a season?

HCH/ECK: Yes, oh yes.

GC: Do you remember that? Where were the dances held?

ECK: Sometimes they would be up at the country club. We didn't belong to it, but usually if some organization had a dance, then anyone, even if they didn't belong, could go to the dance.

GC: You didn't have to have a date?

ECK: Oh yes, you usually had a date, but when we were younger, we went a group of girls and a group of fellows. We didn't always have dates. Well, we remember when across the street was a real park. Before it was a parking lot for cars.

GC: Where we are now, what we are talking about is Merithew Square. We are looking out the window on a hot summer day and we are seeing the pump and the grassy area that is now full of cars and what you are saying that that used to be a park.

ECK: Just a park. We used to play there after dinner at night. We'd have quite a gang of boys and girls. We used to play "run-a-mile" and that type of game. (to HCH) Can you think of any others?

HCH: No. All the mothers would sit on the porches and they could hear us. So we liked that. There weren't many boys, Eleanor. There were mostly girls and a few boys. We played "Hide-and-Seek". The tree out there with the Merithew Square sign on it would be the place to run when someone yelled "Olie, olie in free"!

ECK: The tree near the pump.

GC: Did you get water from the pump?

ECK: Yes, my son, when he came here as a child, that was the first thing he wanted to do...get water to drink.

GC: Kids love that.

HCH: He still does. He takes one of his daughters and they go over there and get water. They test it once a month.

ECK: Well, I didn't know that last year. I wasn't sure if it was safe to drink.

HCH: It has a lot of iron in it.

GC: What are some of the ways in which Bayside was different when there were not so many automobiles?

ECK: If you had an automobile, you had to have a garage to put it in.

GC: Oh, that's interesting.

ECK: You couldn't put it out here.

GC: When did that change?

ECK: Oh, I don't know, but probably at the advent of so many cars.

GC: How did you get here? Tell me about your trips. Where did you come from?

ECK: We drove down from Bangor.

GC: Even as early as 1921?

ECK: Yes. For a while there we lived in Belfast, for about two years.

HCH: We always had cars. My father would have a car for his business, and Grandma lived in Belfast, and we would come down to see her.

ECK: Some of our ancestors came from this area. They came from out in Morrill. I suppose that's one reason why we gravitated here.

GC: Probably so. What memories do you have about the park and the dock area? Was that a center of activity?

ECK: Oh, yes.

HCH: We used to hear the boat blow its horn just as it came around the bend.

ECK: She's talking about the Boston boat.

HCH: Eleanor and I would jump out of bed, throw some clothes on, and run down to watch the boat come in.

GC: A big event!

ECK: Oh, yes, but only the children showed up because it was 7 o'clock in the morning.

GC: How often did it come?

ECK: Every day. Often it would be very foggy, but we had to see what was going on.

HCH: Yes, mother would get up and cook breakfast, making blueberry muffins and that sort of thing, and we'd come back and eat. Everybody went down there at night (4:30 to 5:00). It was the social meeting place and if you didn't go there, they'd talk about you. Just like they do today.

GC: I guess life hasn't changed much in that way.

HCH: The line of the boats coming from wharf here, they had to stop, and they morning when, unfortunately, my sister accidentally. Boston had an agreement as long as we had a were losing money. So one very foggy, foggy Eleanor and I slept in, they rammed the wharf

GC: Accidentally, of course.

HCH: They had to rebuild the wharf, but they never stopped here again.

ECK: It was a case of less freight. Most of the freight was being carried by trucks, so it just wasn't worthwhile.

GC: How was the mail delivery here?

ECK: They came down here twice. Twice a day. In this old Ford car. The man who drove the Ford and carried the mail was Mr. Norris. His face was black from the dirt on the road. He never washed it.

GC: It came from Belfast?

HCH: Yes, it came from Belfast.

ECK: Yes, twice a day.

GC: People would walk over to...

ECK: Yes, it was on..What street is that?

HCH: Main street?

ECK: No.

HCH: What street is Blair on?

GC: That's where the mail came? Right?

ECK: It was a grocery store, Dickey's store.

GC: I'm interested in hearing about stores. Where was Dickey's? It sounds like there were so many.

ECK: It was at right-angle where the real estate place is now. The name of that street is. I can't think what.

HCH: I served as working in the post office one summer. (To ECK) You served one summer, didn't you? The interesting thing is when our father was a boy he worked in the post office, too!

GC: A family tradition. Were there several employees?

HCH: Mr. Dickey, who was the sheriff, swore me in by putting up my right hand and my heart was going pitter-patter.

GC: What year would this have been?

HCH: This would have been about, let's see..I think I was 15 or 16. 1925.

ECK: We were assistants to the postmistress.

HCH: The postmistress was Harriet Whiting, Mrs. Whiting. Mrs. Whiting didn't like to get up early in the morning, so she hired us to come at, say, 8 O'clock, and the mail came in at 10 or 10:30. She would get there and help with the mail, and then we would have the afternoon off to play. We had to be back at 4:30 or so to help with the second mail.

ECK: We had two mails.

GC: That's amazing!

ECK: Yes. I can't remember where the mail came to. (To HCH) Do you remember?

HCH: Well, I remember Dickey's was up the hill. He was the one who swore me in.

ECK: No, I mean the address of the mail.

HCH: It was "Bayside, Maine". Then later, Lowell Parker's wife, Arlene, was the postmistress. She worked quite a few years and then they decided to close all the small post offices across the country. The funny thing is the one here was making money, but, you know, you have a law, close them all. By that time Lowell...

ECK: He ran the store.

HCH: S.S. Pierce canned goods and that sort of thing
The best donuts from somewhere.

GC: Did people mostly do their grocery shopping right here in town?

ECK: No, they didn't do a whole lot.

GC: Did they go into Belfast?

ECK: Yes, yes.

HCH: We didn't have a car, so we did quite a bit here, but those people that ran the car into Belfast saved 2 or 3 cents.

GC: The ones that could. Many people didn't have cars, is that correct?

HCH: Yes. People used to come around in carts and they would sell fish and vegetables. Some man would stop right out here in the park and sell all his things. People would come to wait for him 'cause he would come in around a certain time. They would sit on the porch and talk business with him.

ECK: Remember when the fisherman's son used to come? You could get three tinker mackerel for a quarter. Fresh out of the water. They were good.

GC: You can't beat that!

ECK: There was a store up here at the end of Clinton Avenue. That was Hastings. It wasn't (Hastings) when we were young. I was going to say it (the name) but now it's gone out of my head. (To HCH) Can you think of it?

HCH: I thought Hastings was the name.

ECK: Oh no, that was later.

HCH: When we were young, they still had the building down here with services.

GC: Oh, the church services.

ECK: It was a pavillion. Just a wooden structure.

HCH: And we kids, I suppose we were in our early teens, used to go down there Sunday nights, and someone in our gang of girls would play the piano and bang out hymns, and we would scream hymns at the top of our lungs. We thought we were pretty..... Remember doing that, Eleanor?

ECK: No, I don't. They had nice hymns. This was a Methodist church and they were rather strict. We used to go with my grandmother down to the services and they took place for about a month when we were young. I suppose previously they went all summer. We went a few times, but we liked the music mainly.

GC: When you were talking about selling the mackerel, how was cooking done? What kind of stove?

ECK: An oil stove. You could do anything on that. It had an oven on top.

GC: When it was time to do the dishes, you didn't turn on the faucet and get the hot water?

ECK: We always did the dishes, Harriette and I.

HCH: When we got the water heater, I thought that was the most wonderful thing in the world.

GC: It really improved your life. Were there tubs and showers?

ECK: I don't remember. We went in the water.

HCH: We just used the bay.

ECK: We all learned to swim with water wings. Have you ever seen those?

GC: Certainly.

ECK: You blow them up. I was never allowed on the wharf until I could swim. We learned to swim down here, then when I could swim over to the wharf, then I was allowed on there. Today, anyone goes on there, don't they.

GC: Different families have different rules. Of course, we have a life guard there now. Was there a life guard?

ECK: No, you were on your own.

GC: I am wondering about the horseshoe pits. Were they back behind this cottage? Tell me about that.

HCH: That was regulation in style. My father was one of the members of the club. A lot of the men played, and they, one year, they invited Mr. Bragg to come. None of them knew Mr. Bragg very well, he sort of kept by himself, but as soon as he started playing horseshoe pitching with the fellows, they thought he was a wonderful man and it gave him something to do.

GC: Where did he live?

HCH: Peggy..she's right on the corner.

ECK: Lovejoy. That's her father.

GC: I see, he was shy. Did children play as well, or was it an adult past time?

ECK: Adults. Just the men.

HCH: I think they mostly played indoors, don't you. (?) It was regulation. It was all measured out.

HCH:and there was a woman from Philadelphia that lived down a ways, and she worried, and talked about terminating it, and she worried that they'd play at night, but they never played at night. Tell about the tennis courts, dear, remember that.

ECK: Down there where they have the basketball. That was the tennis court, and it was in front of the Northport Hotel, and we used to try to play there.

HCH: It wasn't kept up either. I twisted my ankle, and oh, it was sore. I felt that for about three years. It was worse than a break, I guess, a sprain. The only thing I could do without pain was swim. It was great in the water.

GC: Did people wear white on the tennis court?

ECK: All colors were allowed.

HCH: We had a chorus master. His name was William Mahoney. Now Mr. Mahoney was a great singer, and he had an outfit that was blue serge and had lots of gold braid on it..... and he had a cap, and in those days, little girls didn't wear pants; they wore pretty dresses, and pretty pants underneath, and Mr. Mahoney's yen was to look at little girls' legs. How shocking! We'd go down in the afternoon for chorus, and Mr. Mahoney would say, "Don't you want to climb up this ladder and see what is on the second floor?"

GC: Did the adults know about this?

ECK: I didn't know about it 'til she started telling about it.

HCH: I don't know if they knew or not. We asked mother about it once, and mother said, "Your grandfather..." (he had one of those loud voices...) and she said, "We don't have to worry about Mr. Mahoney with your grandfather. They're afraid of him. "

ECK: There was a much larger building on the wharf; it went out much farther when the Boston boats stopped here.

GC: So do you remember any other powerful characters?

HCH: Oh, I remember the woman that made bread. Mrs. Haseltine (?). She was up on George Street. She was a great cook, and that kitchen. We would go up at night every Saturday night, and buy a container worth of baked beans, and that kitchen was so hot, that her face was almost ... We could also buy brown bread. And there was a handy man that wandered in here one summer; his name was George McGaskell, and he did odd jobs for people (....) and the next thing you know he was living there...

ECK: The store up here when we were young was Perkins Store.

GC: Did they all carry pretty much the same line of goods, or did you go to one store for one thing, and another for another?

ECK: No, I think they carried about the same. And up at the post office Mr. Dickey (?) carried some goods, some groceries. The post office was a social center. If you haven't seen anyone, you were apt to meet them at the mail; at the five o'clock post office was everyone's meeting place, and you would plan the evening's doings. It was fun. Swimming was the main thing we did, and also we liked to go on hikes; we'd go to Mt. Percival, which was the big hill then. Up on the top there was this old building that they claimed a German spy lived in during World War I, and all around the outside of the building there were nails with the points sticking out. There was a good view of the water from up there.

HCH: During the war,.... and my husband was a fire (?), walked around at night; I never felt close to the war until I came to Bayside. All the lamps were painted black on the side toward the water. (World War II). We had black outs. We moved around quietly...we were afraid of gunboats out there.

GC: I understand that the Cobe mansion was also a place to ...

ECK: Oh, yes, they used to climb the water tower up there. This was after our generation...and before the summer was over they had to climb the water tower.

GC: Was there a policeman here in the earlier days?

ECK: I think there was just the sheriff. That would be Mr. Dickey (?). (?) was for a while. He was when I got the post office job. And another thing, (?) had a very close friend that lived across the street, and her name was Betty Gibson, and the three of us did a lot of

things together; and on a rainy day we played three-handed bridge out on the porch. It was probably whist at the time, then we went on to bridge.

HCH: We could play cards, but not on Sunday.

ECK: And we couldn't sew; my grandmother was rather strict. I don't think she'd say anything, but we weren't allowed to sew on the porch on Sunday.

HCH: I think that back in the old days the people that owned the cottages stayed. Now-a-days there are so many renters. Why, last year we had that water shortage. Down here there was a cottage that was rented to two women and there were ten children. We know they went in swimming, but they all had to have showers every day. Just think of the water they used in that one cottage. There's a lot more renters now.

GC: I think part of it is that as cottages become more expensive to buy, people feel they need to do that (rent).

HCH: The one next door; the people bought it last year. They have to rent it to help pay for it. I bought a screen...we're so close.

GC: That's a problem. We're so close. Being here alone... what's going on in Bayside...sometimes it is enjoyable- people chatting from porch to porch.

ECK: Yes, it's a very friendly neighborhood.

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

HCH: The Shermans have been here for about 25 years. The Reileys have been here at least that long, maybe longer. Carl Matteson has been here about 25 years too. And it belonged to his aunt and uncle before that. Bruce Reed and his father have been here as long as we. The sign across the way belonged to the Maine Sailing School. That was Marion Eaton. Marion was a teacher in New Jersey...taught Latin. She and her mother came up here and bought or rented a lot of those society cottages down in Auditorium Park. She had lots of people from New Jersey. I know my daughter fell for one of the little boys one year, and he wanted to come to Akron, Ohio, to visit us. My husband was in the hospital, and I tried to explain to her; she thought he could sleep in the car in the yard. You know, children are so naive, and I kept explaining to her that since Dan was in the hospital we couldn't do it. This was one of those little summer romances that was supposed to die at the end of the summer.

GC: But it would seem that people used to go in the water more when you were young.

ECK: Oh, yeah, that was the main diversion. There wasn't as much else to do. If we decided we wanted to go to the movies, we didn't have a car, so we went up on Route 1 and thumbed, that was if there were more than one of us, of course. But can you imagine

doing that? There would be two of us beside the road, and more hidden in the bushes. We had to go up to the Colonial if it was a bad day.

(A lot of talk here I couldn't decipher.)

HCH: ...Very stylish about bathing suits...you got to get your money's worth, and they were wool. Now, when I was in college, I bought a bathing suit (E.C.K.- they were sharp!) It was one piece, very fitted, and then it had an extra pair of pants you put on that you wore in public, and they were just a little bit bigger than the others; and mother said, "This is for a child!" and I said, "No, mother, this is for me." That was the only time I ever had a bathing suit that fit!

ECK: You know, about that time, I had a bathing suit. I got it in Boston. It was an Annette Tellerman. She used to be a champion swimmer. It was bright red. It was a famous bathing suit maker, like Jansen.

GC: Can you remember when men wore tops when they went swimming?

ECK: Oh yes.

HCH: Dad used to go down and help teach the swimming.

EKC: He used to go down and dive off the float.

GC: And where did you swim, down at the dock or down below..

EKC: After we learned to swim, we went down to the dock and swam off the float. We used to swim where the boats have taken over. They took a lot of big rocks out, but now it's a place for boats. But that was the swimming beach right down there, this side of the wharf.

GC: And this summer it was again. We saw a lot of people down there (while they were fixing the wharf). And were you boaters?

EKC: We weren't allowed to go out with anyone, not unless they were very experienced. My grandmother said this bay could look like a mill pond, but it could get very rough and people had drowned out here, and I suppose they were a little afraid.

HCH: Boating was very popular, and sailboats were very popular, until there were two sons came to Park Row, and they drowned one summer, so that killed yachting for several years.

EKC: We were only allowed to go out with George Bryant; he was considered a very good sailor; and his grandparents had come here formerly; their name was Blaisdell.

HCH: Now, grandma and grandpa and a group of friends, there must have been 25 or 30 of them, and they all had picnics together, and they came from all over; some of them came from the south shore, and the Blaisdells lived right over there; some of them were very well-to-do, some of them had to work all winter to take a few weeks off in the summer, but that whole group went down to Orlando in the winter. In back of Blair's on the water, there's a cottage that Mrs. Randall used to rentthat was Mrs. Sperry's, and Mrs. Sperry also had a boarding house in Florida, so this whole group...25-30 people...would go down there for the winter, and they played around all winter long. When I decided to move to Florida, I thought of Orlando, but I was going alone, and it was a little too big for me. I didn't have a group of people that I played with all summer, so I went to this small, inside place, and it's gotten to be just as busy as Orlando was fifteen years ago.

GC: So, were there some summers when you were not able to get to Bayside at all?

HCH: Yes, it was too far, really. Eleanor came every year. I was working some of the time, then I had two weeks. Then my family would be here, my father and stepmother, but I would come for two weeks. I always came here, I got very attached, I suppose.

GC: What's different about your cottage?

HCH: Well, it used to end right at that threshold there. At one timeold man had the cottage, and he built the dining room on there. It was long and narrow. Up over the (fly table) on a ship. I used to sit here and dream about being on a boat. It was natural-colored wood, and the windows all slid side to side, and it came up and seemingly went like this, like it does on a ship. And then mother had a cabinet built in, and she painted it light grey, and then they used the grey paint up. Oh, I hated that place after that. I wasn't on a ship any more.....We had a full bathroom built on the back of that room, and we had a man I thought we could save this built-in cupboard, and he used 14 nails, and he toenailed everything in. So he worked a couple of hours, then he said, "Harriette, it's no good; we have to just scrap it." And so I bought one up at MacClouds.

I've been a great reader all my life. I had this romantic idea of summer camp, so I joined the YWCA in the spring just to go to camp, and everybody had their pal if they were going to go, and there was one girl that didn't get along with anyone else, so they gave her to me. The first day we were up there... it was cold stream...and we went in for a dip every morning at six a.m., and this friend of mine that didn't get along with anybody cut her foot on a tin can the first day, so she had to go home. The family came up on the weekend, and mother brought a box of divinity up, and the YWCA tries to do everything as cheaply as possible...the milk was sour...nothing was good; well, this divinity fudge was wonderful, and I was so (darned eatin' about it???) and this old woman that ran it (the camp?); we weren't allowed to bring any food in, and she grabbed that box. I wouldn't admit to the family that I had made a mistake. When I came back, I was covered with mosquito bites. There was an old man up there with this old woman. It served me right. I didn't have a good purpose for joining the YWCA. I wanted to go to camp, and mother said, "Harriette, you should realize that what you have here at Bayside is better

than any camp."We slept outdoors in sleeping bags and when I woke up in the morning I was half way out of the sleeping bag, so I got bitten plenty.

GC: Did you ever camp out in Bayside?

ECK: Yeah, we slept on the porch, and that was a great place to sleep. We didn't get bitten; there didn't used to be as many bugs as there are now. We didn't need a screened-in porch at all; you could sit out there and not get bitten.

GC: Were there any horses here at all in the earliest days?

ECK: Yes, I think so.

HCH: In the early days, Johnny Dykstra's family had a cottage on Park Row. And Johnny is a couple of years older than I am, I think, and we grew up with him. And he was treasurer of the Corporation, and one year he ran for presidency. Johnny was not very well-liked, and he stood up at one meeting, and he proceeded to tell us how all the things he had done were wonderful. But this was the type of interview you'd give if you were applying for a job, and he lost the bid. So he had all the treasurer's books- they were great big books, and he brought them to the porch one day, and showed them to me, and I would love to see them again. They showed people who paid ten cents a head to get into the campgrounds. They collected on the wharf (and at the toll gates)- the church did this, and they had three or four hundred dollars a month! Then on Saturday, when they had meetings, they charged a nickel to rent a tent lot. I think they were wonderful business men! I would love to see those books again. Estelle (Stella) has them; she has a whole family; she has the books in her bed by the front door, so if there's a fire, they'll take the books. She has the cottage on Park Row, and they also have one up in Belfast. She is a widow now.