

*Interview of Jean Witherill on 7/6/16
Transcription of audio corrected 6/29/20 by DBW*

Gina: [00:00:03] Hi, so I'm Gina Chrissy. Today is July 6th, 2016. I'm in the Bayside Community Hall. And today I will have the pleasure of interviewing Jean Witherill an old-time Baysider. Welcome Jean and why don't you start off by telling me how your family first came to Bayside?

Jean: Well, my great-grandfather was born in Lincolnton, Lincolnton Beach. He was a French of the French Cemetery people and he was in the Civil War and when he came back from the Civil War he trained in Portland to be a plumber Apprentice to a plumber down there. He came and settled in Belfast instead of Lincolnton, and he opened a stove shop and plumbing shop in Belfast.

Jean: [00:01:03] He came from a seafaring family. His older brother was a deep-water sea captain and at one point my great-grandfather had a lobster type boat himself, but for pleasure. His name was Alan Drinkwater French. He was born in 1840. And he helped build the Pagoda cottage, which was just below where Bohemia is now situated. And a group of men from Belfast built it, he did the plumbing and he was the first owner of it. And this was in the late eighteen sixties or seventies. So it was before the campground really had started. Consequently my grandfather who grew up in Belfast went to high school in Belfast. A lot of his friends had places at the Battery [00:02:03] in Belfast. There was one woman that he kept in touch with all his life. He and his wife, my grandmother, were very good friends with her, and her husband worked in the Merrill Trust Company. My Grandfather said he always preferred Bayside and so he had a cottage on Park Row, where Hanora Samway lives now. So that's the location where I came as a small child. And we just loved the park and it was just wonderful for small children.

Gina: Is there anything different about the park today from when you were a child?

Jean: Yes they expanded the playground. My mother had four older brothers and Grandpa had a sailboat and he sailed with them, because he had [00:03:03] worked for his uncle who traded overseas in Canary Islands and South America and my grandfather sailed with him enough so that he loved sailing and he had his own boat. Unfortunately he died fairly young of pneumonia. (They didn't have the means to help people with pneumonia then.) And the cottage passed to my mother who owned it for awhile. For some reason she had first choice. My father came from New Hampshire and liked the mountains and lakes. So she didn't think it was fair to him to have to work on the place at Bayside. So my uncle took it over and he had the same first and last name as my grandfather. So a lot of people don't realize from the records that it's two different people. My grandfather was Clarence Freeman [00:04:03] French and my uncle was Clarence Bates French. In the years my uncle owned it, while I was growing up, he would let us use it and we paid him rent. So that allowed us to keep coming to the same cottage. That was in the period when they formed the yacht club. My uncle is one of the charter members and nobody seems to know who he is but he's on the list (of founders) and also his brother-in-law. Those two names really confound people.

Gina: So safe to say that that's sailing really is in your blood.

Jean: Well, yes but it's in Bob's blood too. So [00:05:03] let me look at my notes. Well, we didn't come during World War II at all. My father was involved with the Red Cross and was the Home Service chairman in our town. We lived in Bedford, Massachusetts, outside of Boston. And he was the one that was called, when people in WW II were wounded or missing or killed he had to go and comfort the families. They didn't have

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military personnel come knocking on the door in those days. So that kept him pretty busy. Unfortunately.

Gina: Sure, so no Bayside for a few years.

Jean: Yes, there was gas rationing and we lived 200 miles from here. Besides my other grandmother lived in New Hampshire, and my father had to continually go Pittsfield, NH to check on her so we would take our vacations on a lake in New Hampshire near where my grandmother lived [00:06:03]. So there was a period there that we really missed Bayside. We were at Sebago Lake when the war ended and the first thing we did, when they announced that gas rationing had been removed, is hop in the car and come to Bayside!

Gina: Oh, that's so nice. And how old were you that summer?

Jean: Let me think, I was about 15.

Gina: Oh prime age to be having fun days.

Jean: So we stayed at the hotel. Which was run by Betty Chitticks parents at the time. Yes, Betty's mother and father were both there at that time. And we stayed there just two or three nights. But the exciting thing was that Ruth (one of my sisters) who was two years older than I was, and sister Marion, who is six years older, were all [00:07:03] there. Ruthie and I went down to the wharf and Pammy Short Trenholm was there and she remembered us and that was quite exciting

Gina: Just Pammy Short then, right?

Jean: She remembered us. You felt welcomed back in the community. We had, you know done things with her as young children

Gina: She was about your age?

Jean: Yes. I think she was between Ruthie and myself. Joanne didn't seem to be around that summer. (But then of course later on we became good friends with Joanne and Jim), But that really made us miss Bayside with people remembering us and of course, my mother still knew quite a few of her parents friends. So after that we kept coming back here.

Gina: And where did you stay?

Jean: Well, my [00:08:03] father rented cottages, oh, I didn't finish telling about my uncle. He also couldn't come during the war. He lived in Waltham Massachusetts and it was just too far for the normal gas ration.

Gina: sure

Jean: to come up and have any gas left for you to use here.

Gina: and it took longer then

Jean: Right, so he and my aunt sold the cottage at that time. I think unbeknownst to us, and they went to Ipswich Beach area instead which was closer. So that left the problem after the war, but by then Bayside was quite a different place.

Gina: Tell me how?

Jean: The cottages had suffered from the depression and the war. A lot of them were seedy. People weren't able to get the materials to improve their cottages and had interest [00:09:03] for other places of course. Fortunately, it has survived and I think other people have mentioned some things of that period. I think Bob did in his chapter in the history. We were obviously able to find good rentals. For one thing, Mom still knew enough people that they would suggest places. There was no rental agency then. Lowell Parker in the in the corner store would tell people about places for rent.

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Gina: So you were pretty much on your own. Did you have a favorite Cottage favorite rental that you went to, or was there more than one?

Jean: Well, let's see. To start my mother remembered Park row with fondness and Freddy Jones from Belfast. He ran a store in Belfast. He owned the lowest one on Park Row hmm, which in those days we called the castle.

Gina: [00:10:03] Later, Al Keith's, now the Duggan's.

Jean: Right. And so we rented that first year. And my story about that was covered last summer in the reminiscence program. So that's where I lived when I met Bob. Yes, that was a big change in my life. I had just graduated from high school and

Gina: Does that mean the summer you met Bob, you had just graduated from high school?

Jean: Yes, he had just graduated from Colby. So we were a little different in age ---- But he was starting a job in Connecticut in Hartford. And he was going to be here for the month of July. That's when we were going to be here.

Jean: So by the end of July we were good friends. Yes [00:11:03] and I'm sure he'd had girlfriends before me

Gina: Now wasn't there something about where he was offering to teach you how to skip rocks?

Jean: Oh, yes. We were on the beach skipping rocks. My sisters and I had gone down there. So there were three of us and he and Jo Huntoon were on the wharf and decided to come check out the new girls in town. My oldest sister, when we turned off Route 1, had announced that she wanted to learn how to sail that summer. So she soon found out that Bob had a sailboat and she said "oh would you teach us how to sail?" so he said well, I'm just launching it and tomorrow night. I'm going to carry the lead pigs (the ballast) down from my car to the dock, if you girls would help lug those down, I'll take [00:12:03] you out for a sail. So we did, and they were heavy. Well, he told me how many and I don't know what they weighed. Quite a bit in each one. We went back and forth, back and forth, and finally got them all down because the boat float wasn't in. We had to go up and down to the swimming float. That's another thing, when I was a kid, there was no separate swimming and boat float. Just one.

Gina: Just one for everybody

Jean: At one time there was a diving board on the end of that and I can remember my mother. She had long hair that she wound pigtailed around her head. I can remember her teaching my oldest sister how to dive from the end of that float.

Gina: Oh, wow. Was there a lifeguard at the time?

Jean: No lifeguard [00:13:04] and there weren't that many swimming

Gina: interesting

Jean: And the bathing suits still weren't attractive!

Gina: So tell me what you remember about the stores in that period?

Jean: Oh, yes, so there was Lowell Parker's store

Gina: where were they?

Jean: Well Parker's store was where the Blair agency is. Okay, and Hastings Store was on George Street,

Jean: And that is now the cottage across from Blair. The Stuen-Wisenbach cottage, I believe. It was moved down the hill

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Jean: Right, quite a bit later on. Yes, that was moved. Bob worked there a couple of summers, he's probably told you about it.

Gina: I don't remember it. If he did, was that also the post office the one that's the Blair agency now that was both store and post office?

Jean: Where they have the antique boxes. [00:14:04] And we got mail twice a day

Gina: People have told me that was sort of a highlight, people would go and chat with folks.

Jean: It was a big social thing and we would go down, 15- 20 minutes before the mail came everybody stood around (and got in the way) and it was so nice.

Gina: Were there any organized social things that you remember as a teenager, dances or not?

Jean: Not as a young teenager. The movies had run their course. We weren't here in August, and there must have been something once in a while. But the Community Hall really sat and deteriorated a long time. My mother talked about all kinds of things that went on when she was a girl

Gina: Anything outstanding in your memory?

Jean: [00:15:05] I think there were bowling alleys on Cobe Road right up here.

Gina: And did I hear of something back on cradle row? Where people leave boats in the winter. Do you know what I'm talking about?

Jean: That's where the outhouses were!

Gina: But not in your time right?!

Jean: Horseshoes. I can remember going to bed with that sound of the ringing horse shoes when they would play

Gina: What a memory

Jean: It was a pleasant sound and consequently, following up on that when we bought in Florida, we were in a really new park (which people should do when they buy down there [00:16:05] then everybody's the same age!)

Gina: Good point. Now before I ask you more questions, you should you look like you have a lot of material to cover.

Jean: So let me see. Oh, I want to finish about, Florida. We bought purposely a lot that was fairly near where they played horseshoes and on warm evenings. I could hear that ring and reminded me of Bayside.

Gina: That's nice story.

Jean: Oh, yes. I wanted to mention again, when my grandfather bought the cottage on Park Row, it was right at the end of World War One. My mother had three brothers who were in the trenches in France and in 1919 [00:17:05] they were coming back home. She had one brother that was wounded and had to stay in a hospital in France for several months, but he did come back the following year, and that was the very summer that my grandfather had bought the cottage on Park Row. And Mom said that was the most wonderful summer and everybody was euphoric, just the same way they were after World War Two. And people were so happy to be back. They always came up on the Boston boat. The night they were traveling to come, they got word on the boat from the radio operator that the Northport Hotel was on fire. Everyone else coming to Bayside found out and of course and they couldn't sleep a wink. Probably some of them were probably planning to stay in the hotel. Well my grandfather and my grandmother had always stayed in the hotel until they bought the cottage. Everyone kept saying "how did you

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know to buy a cottage, but it probably won't even be there in the morning." It was a windy night and they expected everything in Bayside would burn. So they arrived and the cottages were still here. And it was the first summer they'd had the cottage. So that really made a big impression when my mother would tell the story.

Gina: I guess in a way isn't it a miracle that all of these little wooden Cottages have lasted so long . Okay, take a look at your notes because [00:19:05] I don't want you going home and say I meant to say more.

Jean: So my mother had spent her teenage years coming here. She was younger than these brothers fighting in France, and she spent teenage years at that cottage.

Gina: So you got to hear a lot of her memories.

Jean: Yes, and you know gradually there were always people we got to know when we were here, even for a short time. Mom would go see several different people. What was the cottage Janet Patty's mother lived in?

Gina: Collett's

Jean: the Bragg's, and I remember the Colletts lived near them but then I remember one summer that we came we weren't staying at Bayside that summer we were staying in Camden. It was ??? Pond. Oh, which was a real disappointment to us kids, [00:20:05] but it was after my uncle had sold the cottage. And yes and my father thought he had mastoid trouble that season and he thought the Ocean Breeze was bad for his ears. We didn't do that very often, but that one year and we drove up and Janet's parents (the Colletts) had moved. I remember going in there and visiting Janet's mother and I think they were the ones that had put the glass windows in. Because that was the big topic of conversation.

Let's see. Well, I told about my uncle selling the cottage. His brother-in-law was Frank Fleming and that name along with Clarence French. They [00:21:05] were on the list of Directors the when they formed the Yacht Club.

Gina: sure charter members. That's great.

Jean: And I remember when I stayed in that Cottage on Park Row, I think it was the same summer we had come up on the Boston boat, going to Sunday school in the old Tabernacle over in Auditorium Park.

Gina: . Yes. Oh, that's a memory

Jean: I have two sisters and I had one hand with my older sister Marion and the other with Ruthie, walking over between the Cottages to this big spooky building, and I just remember it smelled funny, musty, and it was dark.

Gina: maybe you didn't want to be there

Jean: Probably, I was really scared. Yes, and we sat on hard benches. And they were not the benches that are upstairs in this building, [00:22:05] but they did have chairs. Some of the small chairs ended up in a lot of cottages. Oh, especially the ones right around Auditorium Park

Gina: They're probably some still around.

Jean: Yes, I know Sandy Hall and they have some in that Cottage. And I don't know where the people bought them.

Gina: I think some just help themselves, we will never know. What else do you have?

Jean: Let's see. Oh when I was little. We didn't swim very much at this new swimming beach which is popular now right inside the wall.

Gina: Yep,

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Jean: There were times we did, but usually my mother took us over to the swimming beach. That was below Auditorium Park. [00:23:05] On those steep stairs, through the thick trees. That was the preferred place simply because there was one small area where there were no big boulders. Before I knew how to swim I would wade in to my chin and then turn around and walk back. Well one day we were there and got the waves from the Boston boat going by, and I was standing with the water to my chin and all of a sudden I was swept off my feet. Fortunately my oldest sister was right near me and grabbed me, because I couldn't have walked back

Gina: Now was your mother there to see this?

Jean: I think that she was on the beach that just scared her and she pulled me out.

So I never did that again. I think I was only three or four.

That's just another scary memory. I did learn to swim at a lake, when I think I was five.

Yeah, it's good, but the salt water was easier to float in

Anyway, let's see. My grandfather had a boat as I said and then my oldest sister remembers going out on it. But he had died when he was early 60s, from pneumonia and I never had a chance to go out on it. He had four older sons and he always had plenty of help. My mother said she had never gone out because there wasn't room for her because her brothers were all there. When Grandpa died it went to the [00:25:05] oldest son Uncle Joe. He lived in Connecticut on the Thames river right beside the clubhouse where they had the big crew rowing regattas. So he kept that boat there, and his family sailed it. He had two sons and they liked to sail, and the one thing I failed to do was ask my cousin's what was the name of that boat. I never knew the name.

Gina: Yeah,

Jean: but it was wrecked in the 1938 hurricane.

Gina: Oh, that was the big one.

Jean: They had just bought a new set of sails. Those sails went to the Mystic Museum. They wanted them because they fit one of them boats of that era

Speaker 2: What rules you remember for your sisters and [00:26:05] do you remember were there curfews or you could only go so far without telling your parents?

Speaker 1: When we were on Park Row because that's when I was the smallest we could go out after supper and play in the area and I think we played hide-and-seek. I don't remember how they controlled how far we went. But I remember the two girls named Patsy and Dolly Benny, and they lived in the Broadway Cottage that says Driftwood on it. I think it still has that name. They were renting it and they were here more than one summer and they came from the Panama Canal Zone. There were several [00:27:05] families here that came by word of mouth, from others. And years later when Dave was at Maine Maritime the captain of the State of Maine was Captain Hill. He had been pilot in the Canal Zone. He told me the first people that came to Bayside from the group were Henry van Fleets parents and they liked it so much they spread the word. Captain Hill was one that came to this area so when he retired as a canal pilot, he took the job at Maine Maritime. He really liked working on the "State of Maine" and the kids all liked him. I was fascinated with the story that he told when he learned I came from Bayside. He wanted [00:28:05] to talk about that. I mentioned those I could remember that came from Panama and he said yes, they were all from that group.

Gina: Think how long it must have taken to get from the Canal Zone to Bayside!

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Jean: Yeah, I never thought about that! I remember those little girls because they were about the same age as my sister Ruth and myself. They had pierced ears! I had never seen another girl that had them. You know, I was fascinated sure.

Gina: Did your family have any Customs that you remember. Things you did in Bayside that you didn't do at home?

Jean: Not really. We stuck pretty much to Bayside. Nowadays everybody goes shopping and Bayside can become peaceful.

Gina: That's right back and forth [00:29:05] to Belfast to do errands.

Jean: I do remember going to Mount Desert Island and you'd wake up and some mornings at the top of Ruggles park you can see Mount Cadillac just from certain places. When Bob and I lived on Griffin Street from the upstairs bedroom, we could see it. If we woke up and saw the top of Cadillac, everybody would say well, this is a Bar Harbor day.

Gina: Oh, of course because it's so clear

Jean: Our family was at four generations (of Baysiders) by the time I came along and right now we have a brand-new great-grandson, [00:30:05] which is the Seventh Generation.

Gina: That might be a Bayside record

Jean: They are coming hopefully for a week the end of August

Gina: photo opportunity.

Jean: They're renting a cottage so that's exciting for us.

Gina: Sure.

Jean: I talked about after Bob and I were married. Well, actually the year before we got married Bob bought a cottage on Griffin Street. In those days a lot of people had bought up some of the old cottages during the Depression and Toddy Durham from Belfast was one of them. I think Al Keith mentioned him in a story one time. But he was a nice man. He and his family owned Moosehead Furniture. His mother still lived in Belfast on Church Street. [00:31:05] and he had bought a few of the cottages and he owned the one on Griffin Street. He put it up for sale that summer. It was the one that he used personally. We bought it for \$2,000.

Gina: who could resist that

Jean: So we came there for 10 years while our boys were young. And 10 years later we sold it to a man from Aroostook County for \$4,000.

Gina: Couldn't go wrong when you doubled your money

Jean: And now a woman named Violet something lives there.

Gina: I know where that one is.

Jean: We loved that place, and our oldest boy remembers it very fondly. Don was only three when we sold it.

Gina: and where'd you go?

Jean: next? We sold it in 1960. We bought it 1950 and sold at 1960 because Bob wanted a bigger boat that we could cruise on. So actually that's where Dave got his love of sailing, because we would spend a month on the boat. Bob's folks still lived down on the South Shore. We would visit them. We tried to stay on a mooring, but you know the weather! The boat wasn't that big (26 feet) but it was comfortable. So we only did that for about two years., because we'd wake up, you know at five o'clock and it would be pretty rough. So then Bob and I started renting Cottages. Yes, [00:33:05] and we did that

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into the 70s, and eventually Bob's father decided, he couldn't keep up with the work down at Greyholm.

Gina: You want to tell where Greyholm is?

Jean: it's down the South Shore just beyond the Northport Village Corporation line. It's right on the water. Bob's father was used to do fresh water fishing and he wanted to buy a lot on Moosehead Lake. The one he was interested in turned out to be not right on the water. So that next Sunday they took a drive. They lived in Waterville, and came down to the coast on a picnic. As chance would have it, they drove down the Shore Road. And there was a lot for sale and they stopped there and had the picnic. [00:34:05] On the way back to Waterville he found the real estate agent.

Gina: What a nice story. So and who uses that Cottage?

Jean: We did for 24 years. Now our sons and wives share it. Each couple uses it for a month. So we still get down and sit on the porch.

Gina: of course

Jean: If no one is going to be there they will tell us and we just go for the day. I told Bob if I stayed overnight I'd miss it too much!

Gina: Then you go home for dinner. Before we wrap it up. I want you to have a last look to see if there's anything else you want to say. We've covered a lot of territory. I wanted you to tell about the sailing school. So go right ahead

Jean: When we lived on Griffin Street the Sailing School was full strength and very active. It was kind of sad to see it taper off. But it [00:35:05] was partly the times. It gave quite a boost to Bayside when it was operating, and there are funny stories!

Gina: things to tell

Jean: It brought us some wonderful people who stayed. That was very interesting, watching that. It went downhill partly because sailing kind of took a nosedive, at the end of the 50s. The yacht club was having a struggle to keep going and at one point there were only three sailboats in the mooring field. Motorboats and water skiing had become a favorite sport and it was really a funny change. It made quite a difference in the boating but then, like everything else that tapered off and sailing [00:36:05] came back.

Gina: Well, I'm glad

Jean: In 1983 Bob and I retired and decided we would be much happier in this part of Maine than in Southern Maine. We figured the boys would rather come visit us here. So we moved to the South Shore Cottage full time. We were young enough so we could have stayed through the winter there. Bob's father started to winterize it and then we did a lot more, and it was very comfortable. We could have handled the hilly entrance to the cottage when we were younger, but we had a motor home [00:37:05] and we started going to Florida. We finally put a house on the lot that we had bought down there (in Florida). Yes, we did that for 23 years. We were lucky. When we finished and decided to sell in Florida, Bob said we were too old to winter at Greyholm. So the next best thing was Penobscot Shores for us, that has worked well.

Gina: it was just must have been pretty new when you moved in.

Jean: It was almost 10 years old when we moved. We have been there ever since [00:38:05] yeah, so we miss Bayside a lot. But we are very close. So we see our kids and now we're excited that the pull for Bayside is strong enough that Colin wants to make it a habit of coming back. Colin is our grandson. So he makes six Generations. He's the sixth and his little boy is the seventh.

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Gina: That's just wonderful. I don't think anybody can beat that.

Jean: Well, was because my great-grandfather was a native of this area and he kept coming back until he was into his nineties. He had his 92nd birthday party at the Sperry College, which is now where Harry Rosenbloom lives. I have wonderful pictures of that. He's (my great-grandfather) the one that owned the Pagoda cottage. We rented the Sperry cottage after renting on Park Row and there was a picture of my great grandfather on the wall. Mrs. Bates, who was Mrs. Sperry's daughter, told my mother to take it. On the picture is a note, that my grandfather [00:40:06] was quite young when his wife died and he spent several years boarding with them here in the summer and then they owned a place in Orlando, Florida and he would go there in the winter when it worked out.

Gina: Well Jean I can't. Thank you enough.

Jean: I can't tell you how much it has meant to us to be in this area. And as you said the pull is strong.

Gina: Yes, for those of us who love it. There's just no place else. We'd rather be right here.