

THE WILLIAM BREWSTER NICKERSON CAPE COD HISTORY ARCHIVES
CAPE COD COMMUNITY COLLEGE

AN INTERVIEW WITH
MARY CARREIRO

FOR THE
TALES OF CAPE COD ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY
BETTY RICHARDS

PROVINCETOWN, RHODE ISLAND
MAY 15, 1978

TRANSCRIPT BY
NORMA HINTON

Betty Richards: The recording is property of the Tales of Cape Cod Incorporated, and it cannot be reproduced without the written consent of the Tales of Cape Cod, Incorporated. May 15, 1978. Betty Richards, visiting with Mary Carreiro of Provincetown, Massachusetts. Mrs. Carreiro was born July 10, 1905.

BR: What is your full name?

Mary Carreiro: Mary Isabel Carreiro.

BR: What was the date of your birth?

MC: July 10, 1905.

BR: Where were you born?

MC: In Provincetown.

BR: Do you have a nickname?

MC: No. They just call me (Mamie?), that's all.

BR: What did your teacher call you?

MC: Mary.

BR: I?

MC: Mary I.

BR: Why did she call you Mary I.?

MC: She called me Mary I. because my name was Mary Isabel (Sosa Aresta?). My father's last name was (Aresta?), but people had so much trouble pronouncing it and writing it out that, in school, they dropped the (Aresta?), and they just called it (Sosa?), Mary I. (Sosa?). There was a Mary Elizabeth, there was a Mary Clara, there was a Mary Philomena, and they were all (Sosas?). Most of them, it was the same reason; the selectman at the town hall, when you went to record the birth, and you gave the name, if they could not make out what it was, it would end up being (Sosa?). So I was Mary I. (Sosa?) from the second grade on because there were so many Sosas they have to go by the middle initial, and I've been Mary I. ever since.

BR: Can you tell me your father's name?

MC: My father's name was – the Portuguese name was (Francisco de Sosa?) [inaudible], but in this country, it was Frank (Casteresta).

BR: Can you tell me how he got to this country?

MC: He got to this country as a stowaway on a fishing vessel that was going to fish to the Grand Banks.

BR: It was coming from where?

MC: From the Azores Islands, from Ponta Delgada.

BR: How old was he?

MC: He was about seventeen or eighteen years old. I'm not sure when he came as a stowaway on that vessel.

BR: Do you know what kind of vessel it was?

MC: Well, it had sails. That's all I know. It wasn't the new boats like they have today. It was with sails like the old type of fishing boats.

BR: What year was this? Do you remember? He was eighteen, you said.

MC: Eighteen – yes. I couldn't tell you.

BR: What year was he born?

MC: Eighteen-something. I do not know.

BR: He came over in the 1900s? What can you tell me about that trip that he might have told you?

MC: Well, all I know is that he was a stowaway, and the captain was a [inaudible], he had to stay there.

BR: Did the captain know he was on the ship?

MC: No, the captain didn't know. The captain knew the morning after he got off the vessel. That's when he found out that he was there because, in those days, the captains did not go down and do any of the work. The crew did all the work. They have their own cabin, and they just took care of the captain's business.

BR: Do you know how he arranged to come over? Did someone help him as a stowaway?

MC: Yes. I think it was arranged. He paid someone there to let him come aboard. They went there to take that boat – originally, I think it came from the continent, from Portugal, and it stopped in the Azores to pick the fishermen. They were going to the Grand Banks. That's when my father stowed away when they were carrying the supplies. He worked at the tavern where they took the supplies, like flour, sugar, salt, and all that stuff. He was carrying the supplies for someone on the trip. He just did not come back; he stayed stowed away. I remember him saying that.

BR: How long was he on that ship as a stowaway?

MD: I don't know whether it was two or three months because they ran into stormy weather and they had to make harbor someplace, I forget where, before they reached here. I don't know whether it was Bermuda or what. It was someplace down South – they stopped. They had to stay because of the storm. They ran into stormy weather. But I don't know if it was two or three months before they came.

BR: Tell me about when they arrived in Provincetown?

MC: When he arrived in Provincetown, he rode across the Harbor and landed on the beach. He heard these men speaking, and he heard Portuguese voices, voices speaking in Portuguese. He has heard speak of those men; most of those men were neighbors of his mother in the old country. They all lived in the fishing village, and he had heard of them. Some of them he knew

before they came here, but they were much older than he was, of course. He happened to meet his cousin, who was one of them. So he took him home.

BR: How was he able to stay in this country?

MC: He was able to stay in this country because they took him to see the agent of the customs office here. He made arrangements with the captain that he was to pay his passage from the Azores to Provincetown. I don't remember how much it was. I don't know whether it was twenty-five dollars or what. In those days, it was a lot of money. He had to go fishing, and each trip, he had to send so much to the captain to pay for his passage until it was paid up.

BR: How about getting clothing after that long trip?

MC: They took him down to Duncan Matheson's Department Store, and had him outfitted from underwear and shoes to outer clothing. Also, outfitted him to go fishing. They used to have and take a mattress and comforter and blanket or whatever it was that they needed to go fishing.

BR: So, where did he go fishing?

MC: To the Grand Banks. He was gone, I don't know how many months that they were gone. He came back to Provincetown, and then he settled here. I think it was either a year or two years later that he married. My mother came over and they married.

BR: What are your earliest childhood memories are of Provincetown?

MC: Well, I remember living in this house on – it was Mechanic Street when I was born. It wasn't Franklin. We did live on Franklin Street. When I was born, it was Mechanic Street. I remember we lived upstairs, and the owner of the house was fishing, too. My father was fishing. I remember coming downstairs, and the lady taught me to sew. I was only a little girl, and she gave me a pin with a thread tied onto it. She said, "Now you do this," and she kept showing me how to put it through, but the pin was a common pin, and it wouldn't go through. I would scream because that pin couldn't go through like her needle went through. I must have been about three or three-and-a-half years old. I can just barely remember sitting on a little footstool. She was a great big woman. She wore a [inaudible] dress and a big white apron – "Now (Mamie?), you sew." In those days, elderly people, whether they were related to you or not, they were your aunt and aunt in Portuguese, we called *tia*; that's aunt. Tia Mariana – her name was (Marianne?). She says, "Tia Mariana is going to show you how to sew." She was making patchwork quilts. They didn't have sewing machines; everything was sewn by hand. She gave me two pieces of cloth; I remember that very well, sitting there with two pieces of cloth. I'd scream – I must have had a terrible temper – because the pin couldn't go through. I used to see her pull it through, and I couldn't pull mine through because it was a pin. That must have been about three or three and a half years old because I remember when my oldest brother was born, I was about three years older than him. This was after he was born because my mother used to stay upstairs with the baby. I used to come downstairs with the old lady. She had – I don't know what they call it – it was in the kitchen. She had a trap door, and she'd lift it up to get water out of that well. She'd fill up the containers for the day and have the dipper hanging up there. The day she lost the container to fill the buckets with – she couldn't get it. She tried and tried, and she couldn't reach it. It kept going further and further. I don't know how big that was. It was like a well. I don't know how big it was, but she could reach it. She says, "I know how I'm

going to get that back.” She got on her knees and started praying to St. Anthony, and the tin came back. [laughter] She finished filling the containers and closed the trap door, and that was it.

BR: How did you say they got their water for washing clothes?

MC: For washing clothes, they’d have a big barrel outside, a great big cask outside of the house, where the gutters were situated. The rainwater – it would gather the rainwater or the water that would come down. To do washings, that’s what they used – that water. They had a pump in the yard, but for washing clothes. They would use that water, and the well was the inside water for washing dishes and cooking.

BR: When did you finally graduate to a needle when you were sewing?

MC: I think it was just before I went into the first grade; I started using needles. My mother got me started hemming little things. She used to do all our sewing. She used to do her own house dresses and aprons and my clothes. Of course, she did patchwork, too, and she got me started making patchwork sewn by hand. If it wasn’t right, it had to be taken apart and done over again until it was right. It was my job – no matter what she sewed, if she basted it, it was my job to take the basting out, so that I hated to see bastings to come out. Oh, I hated to do that.

BR: What kind of clothes did you wear?

MC: Little cotton dresses, and she used to make the little pants to go with it, with the little decorated – with the rickrack braid. She did all the sewing. All the clothes were handmade, all sewn by hand. When the boys came along, she used to do the sewing for them, make their pants. She’d take my father’s old clothes apart and make it out of his used shirts. She’d cut shirts for the boys when they were small. Nothing was thrown out. Everything was saved.

BR: She made your pants to match your dress?

MC: Yes.

BR: Were they long pants that came to your knees?

MC: No, they were little pants. I remember everything was starched. On Sunday, everything was white – the white petticoats and the white pants. The everyday dresses – every dress had a pair of little pants. They didn’t have elastic on the leg or anything; it was just little pants to match the dress, and they would have a little decoration on the bottom of the hem. Those were the type of dresses they made. When I was smaller, I don’t remember that, but she said when I was just starting to walk, she said [of] the style then, the children had longer dresses. But as I got older, they were made shorter.

BR: You mentioned aprons. Did you wear little aprons with your dresses?

MC: Always had aprons on, until this day, still have aprons.

BR: With the bibs on them?

MC: Yes, and pockets.

BR: Did you wear hats then?

MC: I remember having hats, but I don't remember seeing a hat on my mother until we were all – until the boys and myself were older. I remember seeing my mother with a shawl and a kerchief. She used to use a [inaudible] here. After we were all grown up, she started wearing a coat. I remember she wore a coat – I must have been ten or twelve years old – the first coat that I ever saw my mother wear. Up until then, she had a shawl that she wore for weekdays, and she had a special shawl for going out to special occasions.

BR: This was in the wintertime, you're talking about?

MC: Even in the wintertime, winter or summer, they either had lightweight shawls or something light, and then in the wintertime, they had the shawls, and they always wore little jackets under the shawls.

BR: What kind of shoes did she wear?

MS: Button shoes, which I hated, with the button. In the summertime, there were shoes. There were straps there. I forget what they used to call them. There was a special names to them. They were, I remember, black patent leather, my Sunday shoes in the summertime – black patent leather with all these straps, and they would come up high, but they were straps.

BR: Open?

MC: Open.

BR: In the summer.

MC: In the winter, there were shoes with buttons. Everything was buttons.

BR: How did you button those?

MC: With a button hook. If you lost the button hook, boy, were you in trouble.

BR: Did each member of the family have their own button hook?

MC: Well, these were the girls. The girls had buttons; the boys had laces on their shoes – the tips, like a copper thing on the front of the shoe.

BR: On the toes.

MC: On the boys. On top of the shoes –

BR: On the top.

MC: – right across, there would be a piece of copper the shape of the front of the shoe that was to avoid scuffing. Everyday shoes, the boys had those. Of course, they used to have the things on the heels and on the tips underneath so they wouldn't wear out.

BR: The taps.

MC: Yes, the taps. My father used to tap our shoes. He didn't go to the shoemaker. He had a set, and he used to do his own – he used to buy a strip of leather and resole the shoes and everything himself.

BR: Did you have a boot jack? Did you ever hear of a boot jack?

MC: You mean to put the boots on?

BR: Put the heel in to put it on.

MC: No.

BR: No?

MC: We weren't that stylish. [laughter]

BR: What happens if you lost the buttons on your shoes?

MC: Well, you always looked around for old shoes or go around in the neighborhood and find out if anybody had any shoes that they weren't using or were going to throw out, and save the buttons. When we got through with a pair of shoes, we always made sure we took the buttons off and saved them. [inaudible]

BR: What did the button hook look like?

MC: It was like a crochet hook, a wooden handle, and it had a little – the point to it was metal, about a couple inches long, with a hook on it. You'd put it through the hole in the side of the shoe that was cloth. Most of them were cloth or leather. Then grab the button and bring it right through the hole on the top.

BR: Did that take very long to do?

MC: No, not unless – if your shoes were too tight, they did. If your shoes fit you right, it wasn't too difficult to put on.

BR: Can you tell me about early Provincetown streets?

MC: Well, the streets in Provincetown – in those days, they were beautiful. You could take a walk all the way down the street and not feel hot or all the sun shining on you with the shade, trees. They had trees all the way down the street.

BR: What kind of trees were they?

MC: I don't know just what kind of trees they were, but I know they were nice big shade trees. Even in the town hall, around the town hall, were all shade trees. The sidewalks were wooden sidewalks. You'd walk all the way down on the wooden sidewalk on Commercial Street. The side streets didn't have any.

BR: Both sides of Commercial had sidewalks?

MC: No, just one side. Near the water – the waterside didn't have any sidewalks – just one side. Just the way they are now. Just one side of the street had sidewalks, and they were wooden sidewalks. But there were a lot of stores in Provincetown in those days.

BR: There were a lot?

MC: Oh, yes. There used to be a store downstairs before it was made into an apartment. There was a little store next door. There was a store where the bar is now. There was a store across the street where that green house [is]. There were a lot of little variety stores –

BR: They're all the same?

MC: – that sold tobacco, and then there were quite a few grocery stores, too.

BR: Were there a lot of piers down here? Wharves?

MC: Yes. There used to be Freeman's Wharf before the cold storage went in. Then there was a cold storage wharf. There cold storage over here called the Puritan Cold Storage, which burned down some time ago. There was a wharf here. There was a wharf in the property here. There was (Mantis?) Wharf, Matheson's Wharf. Later on, they made a [inaudible] Wharf, which was quite a big wharf, like the Railroad Wharf. Then they had what they call – the pier that we have now, that long pier, used to be called the Railroad Wharf because the railroad used to go down to the end. It was called the Railroad Wharf.

BR: What would they be going out to the wharves for?

MC: These schooners would come in from Nova Scotia and other places loaded with lumber and some with coal, and they'd land here. The freight train would go straight down to the end of the wharf, and just pick it up. They had a loading platform near the New York Store on the wharf there. At the beginning of the wharf, they had a great place, like a shed, where all the freight would come in, and it would be stored there. It was called the landing platform, and then the horse and teams would stop there and pick up their freight to deliver.

BR: Do you remember any of the passenger trains that used to come down?

MC: Oh, yes. It was a Sunday ritual after dinner to come down, take a walk, go down to the depot. The depot was a nice building, and it had settees inside. It had a nice big potbelly stove, which was always nice and warm in there no matter how cold it was outside. You'd go down for no reason at all except to see the train come in and watch the people get on the train and go off. Whether you had relatives going or coming or no matter, you'd take a walk on Sunday afternoon. The train used to leave at about 2:30. You'd go down, sit in the depot, and wait for the train to go off, and watch the train go off. In the summertime, you walked down the pier and see the Boston boat come in, and sit there. They had seats made of planks, but they had seats there, and you'd sit down. It was nice and cool there. And watch the people come off the boat and then watch the people get back on the boat and go off. There was nothing else to do on Sunday afternoons.

BR: Where those settees out on the wharf?

MC: On the wharf. There were mostly planks on barrels. People just sat up against the building. There was a building at the end of the wharf where they sold the tickets. They had the ticket office for the boat out there. You'd sit in the shade. It was nice and cool down there. I remember, as a teenager, going down Sunday afternoons and sitting there, not alone, of course. You had to go with a grownup.

BR: Who would be the grownups that would go with you?

MC: Some woman that lived in the neighborhood that liked to go walking. When she went, she always had two or three girls going with her. The boys could go off by themselves; the girls had to have an adult with them. They couldn't go anywhere unless they had someone to check on them.

BR: What year was that you would do this?

MC: I remember it was just before the First World War. I was about twelve years old.

BR: That was around 1917?

MC: Yes. About that time, because I remember after the First World War, then I was older, and I started working.

BR: Had these boats come in from Boston for a long time? For a number of years?

MC: They used to have, as far as I can remember – as long as I can remember, there was a Boston boat that came in. There was a fairly large boat that was called the *Dorothy Bradford*. In those days, they used to take twelve, thirteen hundred people. That was a lot of people. I can remember on the holidays in the middle of the summer, on the Fourth of July and on Labor Day, when that boat was loaded, and they left people on the pier. They didn't have room for them.

BR: So what would they do?

MC: They would have to stay over. Or, in the later years, when they started having buses, they'd go on the bus that left after the train stopped. Before they had the buses, they just would have to stay over; there was no other way of getting out until the next day. But I remember that boat being just loaded with people – eleven-hundred on the boat, twelve-hundred. That was quite a large boat, the *Dorothy Bradford*.

BR: They just came down for the day.

MC: Yes, they used to come down for the day. I think, at the time, it was a dollar and a half round trip. I remember there was another big boat, too, they called the *Steel Pier*; they came down after the *Dorothy Bradford* was discontinued, and that was quite a large boat, too. Of course, there weren't that many cars. People didn't have too many cars, so they didn't come by car; they'd come by boat and, of course, the train. The train came in at noontime and left at 2:30, and there was a train that left early in the morning. There was a train going out of town twice a day.

BR: How many cars were on those trains?

MC: I couldn't tell you. I don't know.

BR: You said they had a gate that closed up when they came down Commercial Street.

MC: Well, it was like arms, like a railroad crossing has those arms that come down when the train would be going back, backing up, going down the wharf. Of course, that was a freight train. The passenger train would be left at the depot. The depot was along Bradford Street, where Duarte Motors is now. That was where the depot was before. The passenger train was left there, and then the freight train would come down past Commercial Street to the loading platform and down on the wharf. Mr. (McGuire?) was a sailmaker. When he had his place down on Hilliard's Wharf, he had a sail loft that he used to make sails. Then there was another place up here – Andrew Williams. I remember the old gentleman, and I remember when he had the store. They were supposed to – there was a sail loft on that wharf there, too, but I don't remember that. That was before my time. But I remember the old man and the store.

BR: Did you ever see him make sails?

MC: No, I was too young. Of course, I wouldn't be going to those places.

BR: That was off-limits to the girls?

MC: Oh, yes. It was.

BR: Were there a lot of fishing shacks down there?

MC: Oh, yes. All along the beach, there were places. Back here, they had fishing shacks, and down where the boatyards are now – where Taves Boatyard [is] they had fishing shacks there. Most places had [them] on the beachside.

BR: What did they look like?

MC: Just little houses. They had a loft where they could hang the nets and mend them on rainy days, or when it was in wintertime, they'd mend the nets there.

BR: They were used just for equipment storage?

MC: Yes. When the fisherman came in, they'd bring the tubs. So they had tubs with their fishing lines and everything. They would have to bait them and unsnarl them. I remember my father doing that, seeing my father do that. Most of the places along the beach – this house was a captain's house, Captain Costa's house. In the basement, he used to have all the fishing gear, used to store all the fishing gear when they went fishing in the wintertime. They used to have the oilskins hanging up. I'm not sure, but I think he used to sell oilskins and things. You know what I mean – fishing gear and stuff like that. Then, after he retired, down here, there was a fish loft. The Cabral brothers were fish buyers, and they had a wharf, and they used to take in fish, and then they'd haul the fish down to the freight train to go off.

BR: You talked about oilskins. Did they make their own oilskins?

MC: The women used to make the oil clothes and oil them and have them hanging up to dry. At first, they did because I remember my mother saying that she had to make my father's oil pants, and he would get the oil, and they would oil it to do it. In later years, they sold that stuff ready-made. Companies started making it, and it was cheaper to buy it than it was to make it, because you had to buy the unbleached cloth and make the pants and the coats, and then oil them, and you had to know how to do it. I remember my mother saying she used to make my father's oil pants.

BR: Then, later on, they got the material already prepared?

MC: Yes, the suits, like they do now – the Sou'westers and like that are ready-made. But when they first started fishing when I was a little girl, I still remember hearing them talk about having to do that. They used to use something on their hands when they pulled in the hand lines. They used to call them nippers.

BR: Nippers?

MC: They were made of wool, and they were round. They looked like an oversized donut, and they stuck it on their hand, and it had these ridges, and they'd pull the line so they wouldn't have their hands all blistered. Well, I remember making them for my father.

BR: How would you make them?

MC: You knit them on needles, and then you put the double thickness – it was a special yarn that they used to get from Nova Scotia. Most of the women that knew how to knit nippers – just the way it sounds, I think.

BR: [inaudible]

MC: Yes. That's what they called them in those [days]. They might have had another name for them, but everyone called them nippers.

BR: Was that before they had rubber gloves?

MC: Yes, I think so. Because you see a lot of the fisherman went, what they called, hand-lining in the wintertime with the dories from here, the gasoline dories, powerboats. They'd have to pull that line, and, of course, it was wet and tough. If you didn't have something to protect your hands, you'd get blisters, and that's what the men used.

BR: Do you remember when they wore the leather boots fishing?

MC: I remember my father had a pair of boots that were all leather. They were awfully heavy. But I was quite small because I remember afterward when they went, he had the rubber boots, the long-legged rubber boots. I remember seeing a pair of those leather boots. They had straps on the side that they could push them up with.

BR: What was your first job?

MC: My first job I washed silverware in the Atlantic House. I think I was thirteen years old. I did silverware and glasses, and I got paid, I think it was, a dollar and a half a week because I only went at boat time, for the boat dinner.

BR: What was boat time? Boat dinner?

MC: The boat used to come in around one o'clock.

BR: In the afternoon.

MC: I would sit in the kitchen and wait because they had a regular dishwasher, a person washing dishes, an elderly person. But when they had the rushes like that, like on Saturday and Sunday, they'd have someone extra come in. I used to go in to help; that was my first job.

BR: That was the boat that came in from Boston?

MC: That was the Boston boat that used to come in. At the head of the street – this was on a little lane off of [Commercial Street], where the Atlantic House is now. It's still the Atlantic. It's called the A House now. They used to be a young man with [inaudible], like the girls use at their cheers in the football game. I can't think of the name of it now. It's on the tip of my tongue. They would holler out the specials at the Atlantic House – shore dinner for a dollar, dollar and a half, something like that. They'd go from steam clams, fish chowder –

BR: He would walk up and down the street?

MC: He would be at the corner.

BR: Oh, I see.

MC: At the end of the alleyway on the sidewalk, yelling, calling the people to come into the Atlantic House.

BR: He was marching like a parade with the baton?

MC: No, no. It was like a horn.

BR: Yes, I know what you mean.

MC: I can't think of it. It was narrow and came down. I can't think of it. But he would talk into it.

BR: Megaphone.

MC: That's it. I couldn't think of it. Every day he was there at that hour when the people would just come rushing up Commercial Street. Of course, we'd get a rush at the Atlantic House. That was my first job, washing dishes – not washing dishes – washing silverware and glasses; that's all I did a couple of days [a week]. I think I got a dollar for the two days.

BR: What did you do after that?

MC: Then I had – because I used to do little things around the neighborhood, help the different women in the neighborhood do housecleaning and little things around. I worked in the bakery, Portuguese bakery for a while. I worked in a rooming house. I did silverware and glasses there. I ended up doing a lot of kitchen work in between. From then, I worked on a fish wharf, canning sardines at the Colonial Cold Storage, twenty-five cents an hour, rolling barrels of fish out of the freezer.

BR: What year was this?

MC: I was fifteen years old then.

BR: About 1920?

MC: I was a big girl. [laughter]

BR: You rolled big barrels.

MC: Yes

BR: Was it hard work?

MC: Oh, it was terrible. It was awfully hard. The older women and the older girls, whenever they had a chance, they wouldn't let me do it. I was the youngest in the group. They wouldn't let me roll the barrels out with sardines. The boys would bring it out of the freezer, and they were full of chunks of ice. They'd lift it up and pour it on the table. We used to sort out the sardines and put them in jars with a bay leaf and a pickle. From there, I got a job at the telephone office. I graduated to the telephone office. I was a telephone operator for eight years, I think it was.

BR: This was in the early '20s.

MC: No, later than that. After the Cold Storage, I got the bakery job. I used to make a dollar a day. When I was working at the bakery, someone asked me if I would be interested in being the telephone operator, and I didn't know the first thing about it. My education stopped at the ninth grade. I didn't go any further than that. My mother was very sickly, and I had to leave school to stay home and [inaudible]. So I didn't get a very wonderful education. I learned by myself what I could. I didn't think I could make it to the telephone office. They gave a test, [to see if] I could read and write, and you could hear well. That's all that mattered. So then I got a job at the telephone office.

BR: Will how long had telephones been around? Had they been around very long?

MC: Oh, yes. Because by then, I think I was seventeen going on eighteen when I worked at the telephone office. I must have been around eighteen years old.

BR: That was in 1923. Do you remember the first telephone?

MC: No. I remember in the neighborhood there was only one telephone, only one family that had a telephone. When you needed a doctor or anything, you'd always ask to go to whoever it was that had the telephone and ask them to call the doctor. I remember when there was a fire next door to our house. There was no telephone in the neighborhood. I ran all the way down the street to the Cold Storage to call my father. The men used to sit outside of the Cold Storage on planks; they used to have planks [inaudible] they would come from fishing, and they were through with their work, and just sit and talk. There was a fire next door to us, and it was quite a bad fire. Someone ran and called the fire department, the volunteer fire department, the same as they are today. I ran all the way down the street to come and get my father because it was so close to our house, and my mother was afraid. There was no telephone. I couldn't call anywhere in those days. There was a little variety store where the bar is now, and they didn't have a telephone. That's where my father was, was around there. I had to come down the street and look for him and ask him to come home. Then we both ran all the way back to the house.

BR: What did you do to prevent the fire from getting to your house?

MC: We used the garden hose and watered down our house as much as we could. It was quite a bad fire. Sparks were flying, and it was really bad. Of course, the houses were all wooden houses. The fire department, as always, was very efficient for a volunteer fire department.

BR: Getting back, were you a telephone operator then?

MC: Not then. That was before I was a telephone operator. I was quite young.

BR: What did you when you went to work for the telephone company?

MC: I was a telephone operator. Just the switchboard.

BR: Tell me what the switchboard was like then.

MC: The switchboard was ancient. It was something. You used a headpiece, which was quite heavy. Of course, you sat up on a high chair with your feet upon a rail. I will never forget my first thunderstorm at the switchboard, and it caught me alone. In those days, you worked alone. Sunday afternoon, especially you were alone at the switchboard, no two girls. In the summertime, there were two girls, but on a Sunday afternoon in winter or summer, there was only one girl, and Sunday nights, there was only one when I first went in there to work. After I

left the telephone office, they went into this new system where you just lifted the receiver. But while I was working, they still had the crank – you turned the crank. We had a few – there were about five or six operators in all to keep in line. In the summertime, we used to have two together because it was real busy in the summertime. But in the wintertime, it was rather quiet.

BR: How much were you paid when you first went to work?

MC: When I first went, I think it was about twelve and a half dollars was my first pay.

BR: Was that for a week?

MC: For a week. Then, of course, we got raises the longer you worked. Every year, you'd get a raise. I forgot what I was getting when I left. I think I was making either twenty-two or twenty-four dollars, and that was a lot of money. It was good pay. In those days, it went further, of course. We used to get two weeks of paid vacation. We only worked so many hours a day. I felt as though I was very fortunate to find a job like that because, in those days, operators were picked, special people. They didn't just take anybody off the street and have them train as an operator. They were very strict. You had to behave. So I was used to that – didn't matter to me. [laughter]

BR: Can you tell me about your outdoor houses? Outhouses?

MC: That was another thing. It was a little house in the backyard, and it had three holes. It reminded me of the three bears: the big bear, the middle size one, and the little tiny one. When we had a storm, and it toppled it over – oh, boy. But it was a nice thing to have when I was growing up because it was an excuse after supper to go out. You had to go to the bathroom. You had to go to the outhouse. Of course, you always met someone outside. There were always children outside.

BR: On the way there.

MC: We could always talk, and then my mother would come to the door and holler, “(Mamie?), aren't you going to come in? Aren't you going to come in and finish the dishes?” It was my job to do the dishes. It was an excuse to get out.

BR: And talk to your friends.

MC: Yes.

BR: Were you allowed to go out?

MC: No. After supper, of course, we used to call it – the night meal was suppertime. The boys were allowed around in the neighborhood for about an hour until it got dark. I was supposed to stay in. It didn't matter to me much. I used to like to read. I used to get a lot of library books and read. I was always interested in sewing, crocheting, and doing something. So it didn't affect me much, staying in.

BR: When you got interested in boys, were you allowed to go out?

MC: No.

BR: Did you entertain at home?

MC: Well, some. Of course, I had two brothers, and they had friends, and they would come on Sunday afternoon. They'd come in sit, would sit around, [have] popcorn. I had a mandolin, which I tried to play. One of my brothers played harmonica. We enjoyed ourselves in our own way. Of course, today, the kids wouldn't think much of it, but to us, it was a nice time.

BR: What were some of the songs you used to play?

MC: When I had the mandolin, the songs that were out were, "Three O'clock in the Morning," "Peg O' My Heart," and, of course, the old-time songs like "Turkey in the Straw," and things like that. My father played castanets. So we used to have house parties at Christmastime during the holidays between Thanksgiving and right up to Lent. Each house, on a Saturday night, they would have a house party. These were Portuguese people, of course. They'd get together, and they'd dance their folk dances. One man had a guitar. My father played the castanets. Someone else played an accordion. They made their own music and entertained. We didn't have radio or talking machines or record players or anything like that. That was our form of entertainment. Then, all the women made quilts. They knotted these quilts. One week, it would be in one house, another week it would be in another. They'd knot a couple of quilts in an evening. The men would sit in one room playing cards. There was always popcorn and apples that I can remember, bowls of apples. No cakes or candies, but bowls of apples, and loads of popcorn – popcorn balls and popcorn. The women would be knotting quilts. Of course, I always knotted quilts. Even as a very young girl, I learned to do it.

BR: Is this part of your house party then?

MC: I'm coming to it. They would knot the quilts. When they got through knotting the quilts, they'd roll up the frame, take everything away. There were no rugs on the wooden floors, and then they'd have a dance. They'd dance until it was time for the men to go fishing; sometimes, it'd be two o'clock in the morning. The children were all sleeping; some were zigzags on the bed, one one-way, one another. Those that lived nearby, the children would be in their own homes. But if they were people from a distance, from the other end of town or anything, they'd stay right there, and stay overnight.

BR: This was part of the house parties?

MC: We called it a house party because there was music, and we were entertained. Of course, the women were knotting quilts, and they'd be singing. If the men weren't playing cards, they'd be playing the instruments, and they'd be singing. We enjoyed it. To us, it was a wonderful time.

BR: And you did this up until when?

MC: Until Lent. During Lent, all the instruments were put away, no music. All the instruments were put away. Then the Saturday before Easter, they'd start bringing out the instruments and tuning them and everything else. Then after Easter in the spring, they'd start again until it was summertime, until the warm weather. Because the women would make quilts all winter long, and in the spring they'd knot them. I remember in the summertime knotting the quilts outdoors and have a squall come and have to hurry and take the quilt frame in. [laughter]

BR: You said you put these frames on barrels.

MC: Yes. Sometimes, they'd put them on chairs. The chairs, in those days, had knobs on the ends, and it was straight across. It was nice – we'd put them across on the chairs. But if you didn't have chairs, if you had four barrels, you'd put them on the four barrels, and that would be an even height to stand and do it. But I don't stand and do mine. I had barrels that are low. In fact, they're barrels that had wire in them. My son-in-law used to work for Honeywell computers. The wire used to come [inaudible], and he got me four of them. I store my wool rugs in them. I use them to put the frames on. I have a folding chair on one side of the frame, and a folding chair on the other. I work on one side of the frame as far as I can, and then I move to the other side, then I get [inaudible].

BR: [inaudible] you remember when you were a little girl. How about Christmas?

MC: Christmas, we always had a Christmas tree. We went out in the woods and got one, and that was the thing. It smelled so nice, the pine tree. We had a few decorations, but not many. We made most of ours.

BR: What did you make them out of?

MC: We used to make a chain out of the old wallpaper books – pick out the pretty colors of the wallpaper, and with a paste made of flour and water, we used to make these chains that went around the tree. We used to string cranberries, and we'd string popcorn to go on the tree. We had candles on holders, which were never lit. The candles were never lit because my mother wouldn't allow it. But we had candles on the tree. It looked pretty anyway.

BR: How big were the candles?

MC: Well, they were the little candles on a little holder that caught on the bow.

BR: Two or three inches.

MC: Yes.

BR: Different colors?

MC: They looked pretty. They were different colors. Of course, right after Christmas, when we took down the tree, the candles were wrapped in newspaper and put away for the next year so they'd last. We didn't get too many Christmas gifts. My mother used to make – out of my father's old socks, she would cut out mittens for us. In those days, money was very, very scarce. We never ran out of food. We always had food because we had our own garden. We didn't have to go to the store, except [for] red meat once a week.

BR: Red meat. That would be –?

MC: Red meat once a week.

BR: What would that be?

MC: That would be either for beef stew or chuck roast. One week, it would be beef stew, and the following week it would be a pot roast or something like that. We had chickens, our own chickens, so we had plenty of chicken. My father used to raise two hogs, one to sell and one for us. So then we had our own pork and our own shortening, the lard that my mother used to melt. We didn't go to the store much because we had our own vegetables. My mother used to put up

everything. We used to have a barrel in the garden filled with cabbage through the whole winter. They used to take the cabbages and wrap them in newspapers and put them in this barrel. Then you'd have to mark it because when the snow came, you had to know where that barrel was to dig.

BR: That was put down in the ground?

MC: In the ground. We didn't have any other way of storing it. It was under the ground. It kept. Then we had about five apple trees, so we had plenty of fruit. We had apples. We always had molasses cake, johnnycake, and squash pies, and apple pies. Because we had squash from the garden, and we had apples. That was our pastry. On holidays, like at Christmas and Easter and different holidays, my mother always made, what they called, sweet rice, a Portuguese sweet rice pudding. That was the other sweets that we had. Other than that, that was it; no candy. Popcorn was the thing of the day. When I got a little older – molasses taffy. My brothers and I, we got a big kick out of pulling the Molasses taffy – butter your hands and pull. That was the way we spent our holidays. Of course, from Christmas until almost up to Lent, every Saturday they'd gather in each other's house. The people would gather in each other's house, and either talk – to us it was a party. It was a social gathering. That was it.

BR: What kind of food would you have on Christmas?

MC: At Christmas? Well, we had our own chicken, so we always had roast chicken; we never had turkey. I didn't have turkey – we never had turkey until after I was married, and we had a grocery store. That's when we started – because we had our own chickens. We used to raise our own chickens. We had these big chickens. My mother would roast one or two chickens at Christmastime or for New Years, the same thing. We never went out and bought turkeys. Whoever heard of going out and buying turkeys when you had chickens? So that's the kind of food we had. My mother always had one chicken for chicken soup and a roast chicken, a good size roast chicken. Of course, she'd make her pies, and we always make molasses cookies and different kinds of cookies.

BR: Where did you get your molasses?

MC: My father used to go fishing in the winter in the vessels that went from here to Boston. He was out for three or four days, and then he'd go into Boston with the fish. At the end of the season, when they used to finish – they used to finish about October – the last trip they made into Boston, he wouldn't bring any money home. He would bring a little barrel of New Orleans molasses. He'd bring a box of butter. It would be a little wooden box of butter. I can remember my mother making some kind of – she used a brine to put the butter in to keep the butter. We didn't have refrigeration.

BR: You put the butter in that water?

MC: In that water, that brine. She'd test it with an egg to see that it was okay. If it wasn't – if it was going bad, they'd take the butter out, and they'd make new brine and put it in, so it always would be fresh. That was the refrigeration.

BR: How would the egg tell you if it was going bad?

MC: I don't know whether the egg would float up or something to signify that the brine was going bad. Of course, we used to put up all our stuff. We used to have our own kidney beans,

but he used to bring the white pea beans from Boston for baked beans. Every week, there was a big pot of beans baked. He used to bring rice, flour, cornmeal flour. My mother used to always make cornmeal bread. I make cornmeal bread. I make it. The children, for them, it's cake. They eat it like cake with butter on it. We used to eat it with molasses on it. My mother always made cornmeal bread, and she baked her own bread. So he used to bring barrels of bread, a barrel of sugar, and brown sugar. All these things would come, so we didn't have to go to the store.

BR: It's nice your shopping was all done for you.

MC: Yes. Nobody used to can goods in those days. We used to put up our stuff in jars, and that was it. We'd get along fine. We didn't have any problems with teeth or anything because we didn't have any of this junk that's on now. In the summertime, we made lemonade with fresh lemons – none of these drinks that they have now – colas and all this stuff. We didn't have this stuff. I can remember my mother making a drink when it was awfully, awfully hot. She used to make it with baking soda and vinegar, and I don't know what else, and ice-cold water. It was wonderful. It used to cool you.

BR: Like seltzer water?

MC: Yes. She'd stir it up, and it would fizz. Well, we thought it was great. Once in awhile, she'd do that. We didn't have orangeade or anything like that.

BR: Did she have a name for that drink?

MC: No, I can't remember what she called it. She used to do that as a treat. Once in awhile, she'd do that, and she'd make a pitcher full of it. Of course, we couldn't let it go. We had to drink it right then. It wouldn't last. We got along. We didn't have the things that we have today, but we had enough to eat. But as I say, we didn't have too much money. There wasn't too much money. Of course, there used to be movies in those days, the silent movies. It was a nickel to go to the movies. I paid a nickel, and I took one boy on each side of me for free.

BR: Was that friends?

MC: No, I was old enough to pay a nickel, and my brothers were younger than me. They didn't pay anything. So my mother would give us a dime – a nickel for a bag of peanuts or a bag of popcorn, and a nickel for me to get in. Each boy, one would sit on one side and one on the other. I'd have the bag of peanuts, and I would divide that five-cent bag of peanuts between the three of us. When it wasn't the bag of peanuts, it would be a roll of wafers. The roll of wafers [was] about that big.

BR: Four inches long?

MC: It was big for a nickel. That nickel was for snack, and I would divide those wafers equally in three parts. Everything was divided. I can remember in the summertime when they were too small, I'd come down to this beach here with them on a Sunday afternoon. I would bring three ears of corn cooked, and we'd sit. They'd sit with me. They minded. In those days, children minded. I was the oldest one, and they minded me. There was three years difference between my oldest brother and I, and two and a half years between my youngest brother and my oldest brother, so they weren't that much younger than me. They weren't little itty-bitty things. They were small, but they minded me. We'd sit, and if we felt hungry, we each had an ear of corn.

What we did – while they were playing on the beach on the sand, I was taking the corn off the cob and putting in a little bag, so that when they came up, they had their little bags of corn. That was our snack. Today, can you imagine the kids taking ears of corn to the beach to eat?

BR: You were cutting the ears off?

MC: I wasn't cutting it off. It was dried. It was already cooked, and it was very easy to take it off the cob. I'd have a dry cob in my hand, and the kernels of the corn would come off, and I'd put them in a little bag. My mother used to save all the bags, and these little bags were saved for that one purpose.

BR: Little paper bags?

MC: Little paper bags. If my father brought a bag of peanuts and came home on a Saturday afternoon, he'd bring a bag of peanuts. He'd put it on the table in the dish, and we'd all share that one bag of peanuts. My mother would take the little bag – it was a little stripped bag with colors on it, and she would keep it. Everything was kept. It came in handy for things like this. We didn't have any money to spend. We didn't have money for ice cream. There was a cart that used to come around with a bell, jingles for ice cream, but we didn't have money for ice cream. I never knew they sold ice cream in the wintertime until I was grown up.

BR: You made your own ice cream?

MC: We used to make our –

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Reviewed by Molly Graham 8/13/2020