

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

AN INTERVIEW WITH  
ELIZABETH WOODMAN

FOR THE  
TALES OF CAPE COD ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY  
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William Steere: This tape is the property of the Tales of Cape Cod, Incorporated, and may not be reprinted without their permission. The date is February 14, 1978. Today, I'm speaking with Elizabeth Woodman of Small Avenue in Dennisport. Mrs. Woodman, could you tell us which lighthouses you have lived in and the dates approximately?

Elizabeth Woodman: Gracepoint in Provincetown. I was there in 1912, and I lived there six months. Thacher Island, Rockport. I lived there in World War I, 1917. I was there for one and one-half years, and I took care of ten men that were sick. They were submarine watches, and they all had the flu. I took care of them all without a doctor and never lost any of them.

WS: That is remarkable. You take care of [ten] submarine watches?

EW: I was proud of it. I fed them, took care of them, and never lost one of them. I couldn't get a doctor to come out to that island.

WS: Is that right? What type of flu did they have?

EW: What type of flu did we have?

WS: Flu.

EW: It was the real flu that they had in World War I, 1917. That was the worst flu.

WS: Yes, I understand.

EW: I didn't catch it at that time, and I took care of all those men, and they were all well. When I went on a vacation, which I was allowed, I went home to my mother in Newburyport and went to bed with pneumonia.

WS: What was the duty of a submarine watcher?

EW: Well, it was just what it said. They stood four or five hours out on the bluff there – there's a bluff along there – just watching to see if there were any foreign submarines out there, and they never found one.

WS: They never found one?

EW: Never found one.

WS: Is that right? What would be the means of communication? Did they have a phone out there?

EW: Oh, yes. The government had a phone. You couldn't get a phone in your house, but the government had a phone. At that time, it was the time – you can't remember, but there was a sugar shortage. There was no sugar anywhere. Well, the government ship, lighthouse tender, brought me a hundred pounds of sugar, and I distributed it to different people in the lighthouse service and to people that had children that were sick. I only kept just a little bit for myself, and I gave it all away.

WS: That's remarkable. You were in the service in 1917. That's when you officially went into the –

EW: I went down to Portsmouth and enlisted in the United States Naval Reserves.

WS: Did they give you a rank?

EW: I got a discharge. I should have had (Danny?) get it. Someday, I'll show you the discharge. I got a discharge from it.

WS: How long were you in the Naval Reserve?

EW: Oh, I don't know. It was less than a year.

WS: Less than a year?

EW: But then the war was declared over, and I stayed until then, through that.

WS: How did the war change your lighthouse duties?

EW: It changed it so we could go – we couldn't go unless we were allowed to go by the inspector, to leave the island. You couldn't go, and nobody could come on. You couldn't have a soul come to see you. But when that was over, then, of course, we were allowed to have our visitors and people come to see us and everything.

WS: I see. So it more or less isolated you?

EW: Yes, we were isolated.

WS: During the war.

EW: We were isolated, yes.

WS: You had twelve men out there. My goodness, where did everyone sleep? Twelve men in one lighthouse.

EW: Well, my husband was in charge of what they call the north end of the light station, and that's where we lived. He had one keeper to help him, but he was the boss of that end. Over on the other end, there was a house there, a big house, and that's where those boys all lived was in that house, but they came to my house to eat. I fed them.

WS: You had to cook for more than twelve men?

EW: All the boys, yes. All the boys. I never shall forget; there was one young chap, who was about seventeen years old, came from Vermont, and he didn't know very much about water or anything. But it was awfully hard to find food for them if you couldn't get ashore to get fresh food. So I had a can of salmon, and I made a salmon loaf. He had never eaten a salmon loaf, never tasted one. It was my own recipe. He asked me if I would write it out to send it to his mother because he always wanted to have a salmon loaf. It was good. I sent the two recipes to the *New Bedford Times*. It wasn't the *Cape Cod Times* in those days – *New Bedford Times* – and I received two dollars for the recipes.

WS: [inaudible] What year was that, would you estimate?

EW: I have no idea. [inaudible]

WS: What other lighthouses have you lived on?

EW: Thacher Island, a year and a half, Deer Isle, and Boston Harbor – six months, the worst six months I ever put in.

WS: Why?

EW: Why? Well, the light was at the top, and underneath the light was a fog signal, and underneath the fog signal was my bed.

WS: Oh, no.

EW: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. We only stayed there six months. My husband told them if they didn't have anything better than that for him, he was through with the service.

WS: I guess so.

EW: It was terrible – hear that thing pounding over your head all night.

WS: I can imagine. How were you able to get any sleep at all?

EW: We [inaudible] sleep. From there, we went to the Gurnet, and that was in Plymouth, [Massachusetts]. They started out with three lights. Before we left there, they only had one light because it was turned over to the Coast Guard, and the Coast Guard wouldn't tend three lights; they tend one, but they don't tend three.

WS: Why wouldn't they tend three lights?

EW: They didn't think it was necessary.

WS: I see. Was it that much more difficult to tend three lights?

EW: Yes, you have to light them all. It was kerosene lamps in those days. You wouldn't snap on any electricity. You get up there, and take the lamp, and bring it down, and fill it, and take it back again, and then wash the chimney, then go out on the parapet and wash all the windows, everything all around.

WS: I see. So it really was –

EW: Before the Coast Guard took over, I took care of one light, and my husband took care of two.

WS: Oh, my goodness.

EW: Then we went to Ipswich for five years, which was a long time, and there they had twin lights. That is, they weren't twined together, but one was half a mile down the beach. He used to have to go down and light that light every night and put it out in the morning.

WS: My goodness – have to walk a half a mile.

EW: Was a mile or more.

WS: A mile or more roundtrip in all kinds of weather.

EW: All kinds of weather

WS: Day and night.

EW: Yes.

WS: My goodness.

EW: That's what we had to do. Then we went over [to] West Chop. We were over there two years, and that was the best light – West Chop Light. Beautiful over there. Home of Martha's Vineyard.

WS: Oh, that light, yes. It's lovely.

EW: [inaudible]

WS: Why was it the best light? What did you enjoy about that?

EW: Well, I'll tell you one incident. Of course, I was a great swimmer, and I liked to do a lot of swimming. So I used to swim, and I used to say to my husband, "When is it low tide here? I don't ever know when the low tide is here." He asked one of the Weather Bureau men because he used to get his signals – he had to put out signals for the boats. He had to put up those signals, and the Weather Bureau men would tell him. So he asked them one time why was it like that, where was the tide. He says, "The tide is only two feet over on the [inaudible]." It's eleven feet in most of the places on the Cape.

WS: My goodness.

EW: Two feet. I never knew when it was high or low tide.

WS: What was the Vineyard like?

EW: Beautiful.

WS: What year were you over there, approximately?

EW: I was over there two years.

WS: Two years.

EW: Now, let me see. Rockport I was four years. [inaudible] was twelve years. [inaudible] went to school in the States, but he went to school when he was six years old.

WS: Sixty years ago? So about 1918, you were over at Martha's Vineyard. You had children at that light?

EW: I had two boys, ten years apart.

WS: Ten years apart? One was six, and the other was sixteen. They were able to commute to school over there.

EW: Billy went to school in Rockport. He made a lot of himself, Billy did. Yes, he did. He made a lot of himself. We went into the Coast Guard. They sent him to three different schools – radar man.

WS: But he started school at the Vineyard? The bus could pick him up there.

EW: He used to go to school on the bus.

WS: Were there accommodations at that lighthouse for a family?

EW: Yes, I was okay. We had a nice house. You have to live in a house because you had to watch the light in those days. You had to watch the light all night and never let it go out.

WS: I see. It was a kerosene light.

EW: That's right. If the light went out, boy, my husband would be up there some fast. They did go out, too.

WS: Did they?

EW: Oh, sure.

WS: What would cause them to go out?

EW: Well, sometimes it would be the weather, the wind, or something would make it. Some other time, the electricity – you'd have to turn your light up to get enough light to show outside. If you didn't get enough light to show, well, you'd turn it up a little more. In doing so, burn more oil, and the oil wouldn't last. So then you'd have to go up in the middle of the night and refill it.

WS: Oh, I see.

EW: Now, all they do is snap a button.

WS: Snap [inaudible].

EW: And you get a light.

WS: What was Martha's Vineyard like?

EW: Beautiful.

WS: Beautiful?

EW: Beautiful place over there.

WS: In those days.

EW: It was beautiful.

WS: How'd you get over to the Vineyard?

EW: Boat.

WS: Ferry?

EW: There was a ferry.

WS: There was a ferry operating at that time.

EW: Yes, there was a ferry.

WS: Yes. Quiet over there?

EW: It landed downtown, the wharf downtown. Of course, you had to walk home or hire somebody to take you to the lighthouse.

WS: How did you get to the lighthouse? Do you recall?

EW: There was a neighbor that had a horse and team [that] used to take us, I think.

WS: Okay. What other lighthouses that you have lived on, besides West Chop?

EW: Straitsmouth Island. We were up there for four years.

WS: That's in Rockport, Maine?

EW: Rockport, Mass.

WS: Rockport, Mass.

EW: Let's see. Just a short ways from Gloucester, Rockport is [inaudible] from Gloucester. [inaudible] was out to sea.

WS: That was right out in the middle of the sea?

EW: Right out in the ocean. My son used to come down – there's a high head, great high head. He'd come down from school on that high head, jump down on all the rocks – down, down, down. His father would go across in a dory. There was an extra pair of oars. He put the dory way up to the rocks as far as he could get, and he'd holler, "Jump, Bill." Bill would jump right into that boat, pick up the oars, and go out to Straitsmouth Island.

WS: [inaudible] Pick him up after school. That's great.

EW: The next day, he'd go to school again. That's why you [inaudible].

WS: I guess you would on a stormy cold day, getting in and out.

EW: But just see how smart he is with those radars all around the world.

WS: That's [inaudible]

EW: He is a smart boy. I had two smart boys. Very smart.

WS: The other light that you lived in was Chatham Light. We can talk about that later. Let me ask about Race Point in P-town [Provincetown, Massachusetts]. That was your very first lighthouse assignment.

EW: That's no place to live in those days.

WS: 1912.

EW: 1912

WS: What was wrong with living there?

EW: There was nothing good about it. It was out in the sand dunes, and you had to have a horse and team to get there. Between the town of Provincetown and the lighthouse, there was what they called the Race Run. That was water, and you had to get across that water. Well, you couldn't go at high tide. You had to figure if you wanted to go out to Race Point Light, you had

to go when the tide was low, so you could get across the Race Run. In those days, the tides used to come in awful high there, and you'd have to wait until you could get across there to get out. My husband had a horse and team. The horse was loaned to him by a man in town if he would feed the horse. The man in town would take it when he wanted to use it, then he would bring it back, and my husband would take him back to Provincetown. There were no streets in Provincetown; just plain plank walks, boardwalks.

WS: Boardwalks. With a sand road for the horses to walk up and down?

EW: That's all. There was only one street in Provincetown in those days.

WS: One main street?

EW: One main street. You went down the end of it; you had to come back the same way because there was no way to go [inaudible] down Provincetown.

WS: You took the train down to Provincetown? What was the train like in those days?

EW: The train was alright. It was a good train.

WS: You were coming down from where?

EW: We got on a train in Boston, and my son Billy was three months old. My husband had to walk that train back and forth, holding that baby all the way down because all the baby did was cry.

WS: Is that right? Walking up and down with a three-month-old baby.

EW: That's right.

WS: Well, that must have been exciting. That was your first assignment into the lighthouse service. Weren't you hesitant about becoming a lighthouse watcher?

EW: No, I didn't mind. If it was what my husband liked, well, I'd like it, too.

WS: Is that right?

EW: Yes, and he would always say, "Well, I think we lived here long enough. I think we better better ourselves, go to Boston and ask the —" What do you call it?

WS: Superintendent.

EW: "Superintendent if we could have another light," and he always gave us what we asked for.

WS: Is that right?

EW: Always did. No matter what we asked for, he gave us. He was awful good to us. But then he said we were awful good to the lighthouse service, somebody he could depend upon.

WS: Well, that's true. You did go to a number — so many lighthouses. Did they move you around each [inaudible]?

EW: Oh, sure. We'd go into a lighthouse boat.

WS: In a lighthouse boat?

EW: Yes. When we moved, they took all our furnishings and moved it all.

WS: They would take the furnishings in a boat.

EW: We had our own. They didn't furnish the lighthouses for the family. No, they didn't. We had our own.

WS: So, each move you had to move your furniture?

EW: That's right. You had to move your own. I want to tell you when we went to the Gurnet, it was a bad day that day that when we went there. Half of the boatload of furniture that they were putting ashore in a smaller boat went overboard.

WS: Oh, no. You lost half of your furniture?

EW: Oh, yes. And they didn't give us any more, either.

WS: They didn't make good your loss.

EW: No.

WS: So you moved your furniture from lighthouse to lighthouse by boat.

EW: That's right.

WS: That's remarkable.

EW: It's terrible. They ought to at least put some furniture in for us.

WS: That's right. You'd think they would have had it furnished.

EW: You'd think so.

WS: Why would they move you so often, or relatively often?

EW: Well, my husband asked for it to better yourself.

WS: It would better you to move to other lighthouses?

EW: Oh, yes.

WS: Why?

EW: Because the living was better. We lived out at Straitsmouth Island, and it's up on a rock, and, of course, it's all rock up on Straitsmouth Island. The boat ways is right up – just like that. You had to go from the water here [inaudible] and the boat ways would stop. You'd go right up straight, just like that. You'd have to winch the boat. You couldn't get it up there any other way. You'd have to winch the boat to get it up there. That's the way we got our food.

WS: I see. So some lighthouses were a lot more difficult than others?

EW: Oh, surely.

WS: Well, you didn't light Race Point Lighthouse?

EW: No, it was a terrible place.

WS: You were out there all alone with a three-month-old baby?

EW: Yes

WS: Weren't you scared?

EW: No.

WS: No? It was your first baby, wasn't it?

EW: Yes, but I wasn't afraid.

WS: You weren't?

EW: My mother had seven children, and I brought them all up.

WS: Is that right?

EW: I took care of them for her because she was in bed. She was in bed with what they call (phlebitis?) now – poor soul. I was eleven years old when the last one was born, and I brought up those kids.

WS: So it's nothing at all for you to go take care of a lighthouse –

EW: No, I loved it.

WS: – and a baby and husband.

EW: That's right. That's right. But five years at Ipswich. My last boy was born there in the (Crane Hospital?). Mr. Crane is a multi-millionaire, and he lived just a short way from the lighthouse. His chauffeur killed a man in a car, so he gave the town of Ipswich – there was no hospital. If there'd been a hospital, they could have saved his life. So the millionaire gave the town of Ipswich a hospital, a beautiful hospital, and that's where my youngest boy was born, was in that hospital.

WS: I see. Where would you do your shopping in P-Town?

EW: My husband did it. I didn't go into P-town after I once got out there, let me tell you.

WS: You didn't? Why not?

EW: Too many snakes.

WS: Snakes? What kind of snakes?

EW: Great big ones.

WS: What color were they? You don't recall?

EW: I didn't recall. I know one time he went to town, and when he comes back, there was a snake across the road, and that snake wound itself right around the front wheel, just like this. Amongst it all, the Portuguese women down there in Provincetown, picking blueberries.

WS: They were picking blueberries?

EW: There'd be a big snake on them, and they would take the snake, snap it, and keep on picking blueberries.

WS: Where were they picking these blueberries? On the dunes?

EW: Yes, amongst the dunes.

WS: Where were the Portuguese people?

EW: Oh, there are a lot of them in Provincetown.

WS: What were their occupations?

EW: I don't know what they did. Fishing, I guess.

WS: Fishing?

EW: Yes, I think that's what they did.

WS: Did you have any visitors out to Race Point Light?

EW: My father came out once, God bless him. But that's the only one.

WS: That was it? What about the local people? Wouldn't they come out?

EW: [inaudible] come out there. No

WS: Well, how would you spend your time out at Race Point? You were there all day and all night, seven days a week by yourself.

EW: Yes, but I used to have to work. You have to work to keep everything polished, everything clean and nice, like I always did. I used to do a lot of sewing. I made my husband's uniform.

WS: Is that right?

EW: Yes. I made his uniform that he wore.

WS: How would you sew? You didn't have electricity.

EW: No.

WS: No electricity.

EW: I had an old-fashioned Singer sewing machine.

WS: That you would pump by your foot?

EW: Yes, treadle.

WS: What do you call it?

EW: Treadle.

WS: Treadle? You'd treadle it.

EW: Yes.

WES: That's remarkable. So you'd do sewing, and, of course, cooking.

EW: I did plenty of cooking. My husband was a good eater, and he loved pie and cake and all the good things. I made them for him every day.

WS: What kinds of pies would you make?

EW: Anything that would make a pie.

WS: What was his favorite?

EW: His favorite pie was apple. Then I used to make mincemeat, and I'd make it in an urn, they'd call it. Big like this. I would make that full of mincemeat.

WS: About thirty inches high, very large pot.

EW: Yes, and we had that all winter.

WS: All winter?

EW: Yes. I'd make two mince pies a week.

WS: Two mince pies a week. When would he eat it? All through the day? Pie and cake all through the day?

EW: Sure. My husband ate pie for breakfast.

WS: Is that right?

EW: Yes, and my father, too. My father, if he didn't have pie for breakfast, he didn't think he had his breakfast.

WS: What would they have for breakfast?

EW: What would we have for breakfast?

WS: Yes.

EW: Well, baked beans.

WS: Baked beans?

EW: Yes. We had baked beans often for breakfast, and cereal, old-fashioned oatmeal, not like the kind they have now that's all cooked for you. Some that you had to put on the stove and leave it there for about three hours before it was cooked enough to eat.

WS: My word.

EW: Yes, but it was good, though.

WS: Better than today's?

EW: Yes, by far.

WS: What else would you have for breakfast?

EW: Oh, we never heard of eggs for breakfast in those days.

WS: No? No eggs?

EW: No eggs for breakfast.

WS: What would you do with eggs?

EW: Well, you couldn't get too many of them. They didn't sell eggs like they do now.

WS: No?

EW: No. People didn't raise chickens or hens like they do now either.

WS: Is that right? Eggs were kind of scarce.

EW: That's right.

WS: You needed them for cooking, though, of course. Right? For cakes?

EW: Yes. You'd put one in a cake. You wouldn't get no more than one to put into a cake.

WS: What time of day would you have breakfast?

EW: We'd get up early. We'd get up at sunrise. If sunrise was four o'clock, you get up at four o'clock.

WS: Turn off the light.

EW: That's right.

WS: And not waste the fuel.

EW: Well, sometimes, if it was real cold, my husband would come back to bed to save the fuel because you don't need so much when you're in bed as you do when you're –

WS: What kind of fuel were you using?

EW: Coal and wood. Have to build your fire, put the wood in and put the coal in on top, and burn it until you get a nice fire.

WS: How would they get coal out to these lighthouses?

EW: Lighthouse tender brought it.

WS: Lighthouse tender brought it.

EW: They allowed us – let me see now. How many tons of coal did they –? It was a long ton, not the two-thousand; [it was the ] 2250 pounds of coal.

WS: A long ton is 2250.

EW: That's right.

WS: I see. An extra two-hundred-and-fifty pounds.

EW: Yes. I think we were allowed eight-ton.

WS: Eight long ton.

EW: Eight long ton.

WS: For one winter.

EW: One year.

WS: One year?

EW: Yes.

WES: That would also be cooking?

EW: Yes, it'd be everything.

WS: Through the summertime.

EW: It'd be everything.

WS: I see. So you'd have breakfast at about five o'clock, something like that, after you turn the light off?

EW: Yes.

WS: You'd have baked beans and pie. Well, you must have had a hard time with meats because you really couldn't keep meats out there.

EW: We didn't have much meat.

WS: What would you eat if you couldn't eat meat?

EW: I was trying to think what we had. We used to go up in the boat, up to Rockport, and the man up there was awfully good to us. He used to always save something a little bit special that he had for us to have.

WS: Such as what?

EW: Some kind of meat, or something.

WS: What would you do, have salted meats?

EW: Another thing we used an awful lot was saltfish.

WS: Saltfish. You would buy that?

EW: We had saltfish. No, we wouldn't buy it. Salt it yourself. You bring the fish in and take the fish and hang it up, the whole fish. Then, when you wanted some salt – you salted it. Then, when you wanted some saltfish, haul off a strip.

WS: You'd take the whole fish? You wouldn't cut it up?

EW: No. Hang it up and salt it. Hang it up, and when you wanted a piece of saltfish for dinner, haul off a strip, cut it up, and cook it. It tastes good, too.

WS: How would you cook saltfish?

EW: Didn't you ever have saltfish cooked?

WS: Baked?

EW: No. Did you ever have fish balls? With a potato and saltfish together and cook it – delicious.

WS: How did you cook it? Fry it?

EW: Yes, fry it in lard. That's all the fat there was in those days, lard. Then we used to have what we called creamed saltfish. Take a little flour and a little milk, make a little sauce, and put the saltfish in, and cook it a while together, and with a baked potato, that's pretty special.

WS: You pour that over the potato or eat it on the side?

EW: Both ways. It's delicious, too.

WS: That's pretty special?

EW: Yes, sir. I wouldn't mind some now.

WS: How about the holidays out on a lighthouse?

EW: Holidays didn't mean a thing to us.

WS: No? You never celebrated?

EW: No.

WS: What about Christmas? With those children, you must have had some –

EW: Well, Christmastime was the time that we tried awful hard to get back home.

WS: Take your vacation?

EW: In those days, they had what they call the additional keeper. He'd go around and give different people a few days off. So we used to do it that way. First come, first serve. So we used to ask in the summertime for our Christmas vacation.

WS: Is that right? I see. So you planned ahead.

EW: Yes, we most always got a few days off at Christmastime. I can remember my mother putting up the Christmas tree. They didn't have any bulbs in those days on the Christmas trees or anything. You know what they put on?

WS: No.

EW: They throw on handkerchiefs, handkerchiefs on the tree.

WS: Is that right?

EW: To trim it.

WS: What kind of handkerchiefs?

EW: We didn't have any such things as this down here. We had good handkerchiefs you buy in the store.

WS: Not Kleenex like you have today?

EW: They didn't have such things. I had handkerchiefs. She'd make a handkerchief up in a little ball, and throw it all over the tree, make it look pretty, like so.

WS: She'd round them up into a ball?

EW: Like snow.

WS: Like snow. That must have been pretty.

EW: It was pretty.

WS: Did you have candles on it, too?

EW: No.

WS: Lights?

EW: No. There was no such thing.

WS: Just the handkerchiefs?

EW: The first lights I had ever had I had when I came to this house. You could get candle lights to put in the window. Those I had to watch because they weren't electric.

WS: Well, did you ever spent a Christmas at a lighthouse?

EW: Sure, we did – couldn't get off.

WS: How did you celebrate up there?

EW: Nothing

WS: Have a tree?

EW: Nothing. No. We wouldn't have enough to eat sometimes.

WS: You're kidding me?

EW: No, I'm not kidding.

WS: You were paid a good salary.

EW: A good salary?

WS: Well, I don't know. I'm taking a guess here.

EW: Well, you're guessing wrong, mister.

WS: Is that right?

EW: I guess you are.

WS: They didn't supply the food. You had to buy that yourself.

EW: You had to buy your own food. Sixty dollars a month was my husband's wages.

WS: Wow. Two dollars a day.

EW: Everything you had, you bought yourself.

WS: Furniture?

EW: Or you went hungry.

WS: My goodness.

EW: Oh, the government's awful good to work for.

WS: They are? It sounds terrible to me.

EW: You'd think it was terrible if you were there.

WS: I can imagine. You had a family to raise on sixty dollars a month.

EW: That's right.

WS: You must have had to be a careful cook.

EW: I was. Make all your own bread.

WS: All your own bread.

EW: You couldn't buy bread. They didn't have such a thing in the store. You made your own bread. I use to make mine. Every other day, I would make a batch of seven or eight loaves and a big pan of biscuits. I'd like one of those biscuits right now.

WS: Okay. What kind of biscuits were they?

EW: Raised bread biscuits.

WS: Raised bread biscuits.

EW: [inaudible]

WS: What would you put on them, butter? Did you have butter out there?

EW: We had some butter, but we didn't buy too much butter. There was no such thing as margarine. We didn't have margarine. So we use to pick beach plums and make jelly out of beach plums and use that on the bread.

WS: What kinds of food were you able to harvest out there yourself? Beach plums and fish.

EW: Blueberries.

WS: Blueberries?

EW: Cranberries.

WS: Wild cranberries?

EW: Yes. There's wild cranberries on most of the islands.

WS: What would you do with the cranberries?

EW: Make jelly.

WS: Jelly. Anything else?

EW: No, we just make jelly, and that's what we used because there wasn't enough of anything else. Sometimes, for breakfast, we'd just have biscuits and jelly for breakfast.

WS: Biscuits and jelly. That would be breakfast?

WS: What would lunch be?

EW: Whatever we had leftover from the day before.

WS: From the evening meal before? That could be anything from codfish –

EW: Most always would be fish or beans.

WS: Fish or beans.

EW: Good thing I liked baked beans. I did. I loved them.

WS: How would you fix your baked beans?

EW: Put them in a bean pot. In fact, I have the bean pot today that I used to use for beans. You ever see a bean pot?

WS: Yes, yes.

EW: Well, I used to use the bean pot. Put a piece of salt pork – you could buy salt pork. Piece of salt pork on the top and bake them all day.

WS: Bake them all day. That was it. Did you [use] molasses?

EW: I didn't put molasses because I didn't like it.

WS: Didn't like molasses?

EW: I don't like sweets. I'm funny like that. I never buy anything sweet. I don't like sweets. I don't remember when I have had a piece of candy. It must have been years since I've had a piece of candy.

WS: What about fishing? Would you do any fishing yourself out there?

EW: No, I didn't do any.

WS: Your husband would do it.

EW: Yes, he would do the fishing. You want a fish, you go out and do it.

WS: What kind would he get?

EW: Sometimes, bluefish. Sometimes he'd get a haddock. Sometimes, it was sea fish, tautog.

WS: Tautog?

EW: Make the chowder with that.

WS: Yes, that's good.

EW: We had Carman's crackers, old-fashioned Carman's crackers to put in your chowder.

WS: That must have been delicious.

EW: It was good.

WS: Well, you left the P-Town light and went up to Chatham Light in 1928?

EW: No, we didn't leave P-Town for Chatham. It's Rockport to Chatham.

WS: Race Point was in 1912, and then you came back to Cape Cod in 1928.

EW: We went there from 1912 – out of the service, my husband went to the Coast Guard. Then he found out that he couldn't be in the Coast Guard. He couldn't get home as much as could if he was on a lighthouse. So he gave up the Coast Guard, and we went to Thacher Island, Rockport, 1917, during the First World War. That's where I was. Then we went to Deer Island, and from Deer Island, we went to the Gurnet, stayed one year at Plymouth. Then we went to Ipswich and stayed for five years, which is a good – it was nice up there. You had to walk to town five miles, but we used to go just the same.

WS: I want to bring you back to Cape Cod here. In 1928, you came down to Chatham Light after being in the lighthouse service. What was Chatham like in those days.

EW: Wonderful

WS: Wonderful? In what way?

EW: Wonderful. To be on land, and be able to walk the street and go to the store.

WS: I see. Did you have an automobile at this time?

EW: No, we didn't have nothing in those days.

WS: No?

EW: No. We were just glad to be able to walk to town, bring home the groceries.

WS: You could walk [inaudible].

EW: I could walk in those days. Yes, I could.

WS: How would you carry your groceries back?

EW: In your arms.

WS: In your arms?

EW: In a shopping bag.

WS: You didn't have a little wagon to pull or anything.

EW: Oh, no. They didn't have those in the stores either. You went to the store, and there was a counter there. You'd tell the man what you wanted, and he'd get it and put it on the counter.

WS: I see. I thought Cape Cod was pretty well-modernized by 1928.

EW: I guess so.

WS: What kind of light did you have down at Chatham Light? I know at Race Point you had kerosene. At Chatham Light, did they have electric?

EW: Kerosene. No, not for a while. No, they had kerosene light there, too.

WS: Is that right?

EW: Yes.

WS: How big a light is used?

EW: I don't know. You could see there.

WS: Well, when you were there in 1928.

EW: I don't know how many miles it was out to sea. Out to sea, in the range of Chatham Light, there was a lightship.

WS: Oh, they did have a lightship.

EW: They had a lightship there. But, you know, they did away with that lightship. They did away with Monomoy Point Light, too, and put more volume in Chatham Light with electricity.

WS: How tall would one of these kerosene lamps stand?

EW: Oh, they weren't too big. They put them on a pedestal.

WS: Put them on a pedestal?

EW: Yes, they put them on a pedestal.

WS: How big would you estimate they were? Eighteen inches?

EW: Probably like this.

WS: Only about a foot? Something like a foot?

EW: Yes, and they put it on the pedestal, and then they had a lens that went around, and the lens magnified it, I forget how many volumes, two-thousand volumes or something liked that.

WS: I see. So it was the lens that took the light [inaudible].

EW: It was the lens, yes. You had to keep the lens clean. My husband used to wash that lens every single day in the morning. Fill the lamp, and he used to have to take it upstairs – the lamp full upstairs, put it on the pedestal, and then he'd clean the lens again, and then light the light.

WS: Now, this was enclosed, right?

EW: Yes.

WS: Windows all around?

EW: Yes.

WS: So he'd have to keep the lamp clean, the lens clean, and the windows clean.

EW: That's right.

WS: I see.

EW: It used to take him from to two hours every day to clean.

WS: One to two hours every day, twice a day, actually, to start it and stop it?

EW: Yes. Then, of course, he had to do all the painting inside the lighthouse and all the painting inside the house we lived in, and even paint the roof on the house we lived in. We had to have that roof painted.

WS: Paint the roof? What was the roof made of?

EW: Shingles.

WS: Shingles?

EW: They had to be painted.

WS: Paint the shingles?

EW: Yes.

WS: Do you remember bad storms on the Chatham Light?

EW: No, none of them as bad as we had here the other day. [Editor's Note: Ms. Woodman is likely referring to the Blizzard of '78 on Cape Cod.]

WS: Is that right?

EW: That's right. We never had no such storm. That was the worst storm, and I came to Cape Cod in 1928. That's fifty years ago. That was the worst storm I ever saw.

WS: That was a beauty of a storm, alright.

EW: It was worst than any storm that I saw when I was a kid. Yes, that was a terrible storm.

WS: That was the storm of '78, 1978.

EW: 1978. Everybody will remember it, too. It was terrible. But I had plenty of food in the house, nothing to worry me. I just watched it.

WS: Me too. That's what I did – sat right there and watched it.

EW: Didn't bother me one bit. I didn't care.

WS: Well, your duties in the Chatham Lighthouse were to keep the house, basically.

EW: Yes, keep it clean, which I did. I kept it clean. I went over there after I was out of the service, and the Coast Guard took over. I went over there. The way [inaudible] in that house and what it looked like made me sick. The Coast Guard don't keep up very much. One thing that I felt bad for and I still do, the inspector, when he came around one time – we were leaving then. He was condemning things. In our dining room, we had an old-fashioned clock, like a schoolhouse clock. Remember the big schoolhouse clocks they used to have?

WS: Yes.

EW: I said to him, “That’s the only thing I’d like to have out of the lighthouse service is that clock.” Of course, he couldn’t tell me I could have it. He said, “Well, it does come off the wall,” and I, like a fool, didn’t know enough to take it.

WS: Why did you want that? They’re just round clocks?

EW: That clock had meaning to me. Every single lighthouse had a clock just like it in it. Every one of the lighthouses had that clock, and I wanted that clock. He said, “Well, it [does] come off the wall.” Of course, he couldn’t say you could have it. I don’t know why I was so dumb. I thought about that more times that I was really dumb. I could have had that clock.

WS: Well, what kind of stove did you have? You had a coal and wood. What did it look like? Was it a range type?

EW: Did you ever see an old fashioned cook stove?

WS: The range flat type?

EW: Yes [inaudible]. You didn’t keep on lights. You tried to keep a fire all night; it’d go out in the middle of the night.

WS: Would it?

EW: Every morning, you have to build a new fire. Bring up [inaudible] of coal and an armful of wood, and build a new fire.

-----END OF INTERVIEW-----

Reviewed by Molly Graham 8/24/2020