

Frank Rudd: This tape is a property of Tales of Cape Cod Incorporated and cannot be reproduced without their written permission. Today's date is May 2nd, 1978. We are in the home of Ms. Elsie Chadwick, 945 Main Street, Osterville, Mass. Ms. Chadwick was born on April 10th, 1903, which makes her seventy-five years of age. Ms. Chadwick, are you native to the Cape?

Elsie Chadwick: Yes. I was born right here in Osterville in the house I live in.

FR: Were your parents native to the Cape too?

EC: They were born in Osterville, both of them.

FR: Do you recall your grandparents?

EC: Just one grandfather I saw perhaps two or three times, that's all.

FR: What did he do?

EC: He was on the Water Commission in Marion for years and years. I don't know whether he was a town treasurer there too, perhaps. I'm not too sure.

FR: What did your father do?

EC: He was a carpenter all his life. He was an apprentice and a young man. Then carpenter all his life.

FR: Did he have a business of his own?

EC: Well, at one time he did for a few years I think. But he worked for (Daniel Brothers?) and for (Henry Leonard?) for years.

FR: These were all local Osterville people?

EC: Yes.

FR: What did your mother do?

EC: Kept house for five children. [laughter] Cooked a lot.

FR: How many in your family?

EC: Five children and my father and mother.

FR: Brothers and sisters, how many?

EC: Two brothers and three girls.

FR: I see. Let us take a walk down in Main Street, Osterville back around 1912. Can you tell me what it was like at that time?

EC: Well, pretty countryside of course. I guess the streets were made of shell probably.

FR: Out of seashells?

EC: I think so, yes.

FR: Crushed?

EC: Yes. Just a few stores. (Eye Crocker's?) was a general store. There was a little bit of a meat shop up street. There was a cobbler's shop. [laughter] They had a club of men upstairs over, well, where now the newsstand is. What was the name of it? I can't think of the name of the club.

FR: What did they do? Play cards there or?

EC: I guess so. All the men and they'd spit right over the railing, tobacco. We the children would have to watch out that we [laughter] didn't get hit.

FR: You just mentioned an ice cream parlor.

EC: My aunt and uncle made their own ice cream and had a parlor up the street with a screened-in porch because we had lots of mosquitoes in those days. You could sit out there in comfort.

FR: Did you have many more mosquitoes in those days than we do today?

EC: Oh, yes. Mosquito control came in and took care of all that and all the swamps with mosquitoes.

FR: Do you recall what year that was?

EC: No. I don't remember.

FR: What else did you have in the center on Main Street?

EC: Well, my aunt had a little gift store right beside the ice cream parlor that she opened around Christmas time and sold a few small things. My uncle also built the little theater up street and called it the Star Theater because they had a star out front with electric bulbs.

FR: Your uncle owned all that property on Main Street?

EC: Yes. My mother and her two brothers sold out their shares to my aunt and then she sold all that in recent years. There are lots of stores there now, but there weren't in those days.

FR: What else were there? Were there churches up on Main Street at that time?

EC: Oh, yes. The Methodist church now has built a new church down on Pond Street. The Baptist church has stood there for years and years. My mother's people gave the land that they built the Baptist church on. Her uncle was deacon in the church and all of her folks were in the Baptist church. My mother played organ there for over thirty years. She says, "With time out to have my children."

FR: [laughter]

EC: Then I have played there for a long, long time.

FR: Is that so? Tell me, was the school located on Main Street?

EC: Well, just in back of where the Baptist church is. Now, it's the community center. My mother went there, and said they called it Dry Swamp Academy because there was a big swamp in the back. I think I went there in the first grades and then they built a new school for us on West Bay Road, and one night that burned flat. So, then we were sent back to Dry Swamp so they could build another school.

FR: How many grades in the school?

EC: Well, I think we went our nine grades in that grammar school.

FR: How many teachers in the school?

EC: Two.

FR: How many students would you guess you had there?

EC: Oh, I wouldn't know. I can remember my first-grade teacher. She was a real strict teacher and a good teacher. She lived up street here. When we were caught whispering, she'd snip our lips. [laughter] It would hurt, too. [laughter]

FR: Do you remember her name?

EC: Oh, yes. Mrs. Crosby. She taught for years.

FR: Getting back to Main Street, was there anything else on Main Street at the time that you can recall?

EC: Well, I don't know about the fruit store up on the corner. I don't know when that went in. It wasn't there when I was little, I guess at all. I forgot to mention the hay scales up in the center of the village. (Mr. Scutter?) used to have his boats come in from – I don't know if it was Providence. Then they'd bring hay and coal in and weigh on these hay scales. Then they'd take

them out and deliver.

FR: Would they weigh the wagon? What would they weigh on the scales?

EC: Well, I...

FR: Did they put a wagon on the scales and weigh it?

EC: I suppose they'd have the wagon on. Then I suppose they knew how many pounds of coal and they'd just subtract.

FR: That was then right out in the open in the center of the village?

EC: Yes. I wish the hay scales were still there because it would be a good old village item.

FR: We were talking about your school. Did you go beyond the ninth grade?

EC: Not here in Osterville.

FR: Where did you go?

EC: Then the high school was in Hyannis.

FR: How did you get to school in Hyannis?

EC: Bus. That had four years of high school. No junior high. See, we took nine here and then that took care of junior high.

FR: You went to school in Hyannis. Did you go beyond high school?

EC: Yes. I went to the state normal school in Hyannis for two years.

FR: Did you commute?

EC: No. I stayed in the dormitory. I wanted to stay there. So glad that I did because I got the dormitory life, which you wouldn't get. But I'd come home. If there was something at home I wanted to attend, I'd come home for the weekend. Or I'd stay there if there was something at school that I wanted to attend over the weekend.

FR: What was the dormitory life in Hyannis?

EC: Well, we had one roommate and we'd had a lot of fun besides – [laughter] I remember my birthday, my folks came over and we used to open the windows and throw candy or things to the rooms next to us and they'd catch them. [laughter] We weren't supposed to be doing it, but we did. So, we'd throw them out the window. [laughter]

FR: How many graduates from high school did you have the year you graduated?

EC: Well, of course it wasn't too large a class. Not too many. I can't remember how many.

FR: Do you remember how many from normal school?

EC: Not too many there either.

FR: What did you do after normal school?

EC: Well, I taught for three years and then I substituted parts of another year. The first year I was awfully homesick because I had never been away from home.

FR: Where were you?

EC: South Seahawk. [laughter] It was a little bit of a place. One little bit of a store there. I was awfully lonesome. [laughter]

FR: Do you remember what they paid you?

EC: No. I don't.

FR: After you get through teaching, what did you do?

EC: Well, when I lost teaching, I had a summer job in the Osterville Post Office. Then I had a chance to go in for more time. During World War II, I was made a world war regular, I think they called us. Then after that I had to work all the time, because you see we got a good status in by being a world war.

FR: How long did you work for the post office?

EC: Well, I think over a period. For my summer work, it was about fifty years. But that wasn't full time. But I enjoyed it very much. I got to meet all the nice people.

FR: Tell me, what was a typical day like, say, back in 1912?

EC: Well, we'd get up and have breakfast of probably hot cereal and eggs. My father kept chickens and so we had plenty of fresh eggs. We'd have to buy the milk from different men around who kept cows.

FR: How would you buy the milk?

EC: We had a tin pale we'd go and get milk. I suppose we had toast, cocoa, I suppose, hot cocoa. We'd go to school and walk home for lunch. Of course, I was quite near the school, where some of my classmates had a long walk to go home. Then after school, we'd play quite a while. But I don't remember whether in the morning. I don't suppose I had much time in the

morning. But in the afternoon perhaps, we'd have to fill the lamps, and wash the lamp chimneys. Of course, we made our beds probably in the morning.

FR: Girls do the dishes?

EC: My two brothers did dishes [laughter] until I was old enough to. My mother always said, she told my brothers that they had a new little baby sister and one brother said, "Oh good, she can do the dishes."

FR: [laughter] What chores did your brothers have to do?

EC: Well, I guess they had to fill up baskets with wood for the fireplace. We had a fireplace. Then later coal. They'd have to bring in the coal and take out ashes, I guess. Of course, they had to fill lamps, until I did. They didn't like that much. [laughter]

FR: What would you do on weekends?

EC: Well, play more, I guess. We had clubs in church.

FR: What would you do in the clubs?

EC: Well, just little business. They were religious clubs. They were in the church. I did have programs and probably some games afterwards.

FR: Do you remember the toys you might have had in those days?

EC: Well, teddy bear. I always loved a teddy bear. I always had a teddy bear and dolls.

FR: Where did you get the teddy bear?

EC: Oh, I can't remember. I always had one.

FR: Did you have pets?

EC: Oh, we always had cats. Lots of cats. [laughter] When the mother had kittens, my father, he'd go over the pond and drown a lot of them. There were three of us girls. We each could choose a kitten of our own.

FR: Why did you have cats in –

EC: That one kitten was our own. We each had one. [laughter]

FR: Why did you have cats as a pet?

EC: As a pet? I don't know. We loved them. We named them, of course. I always had cats.

FR: You say most of your social activity evolved around the church?

EC: Yes.

FR: What did you do for entertainment?

EC: Well, my aunt and uncle, they had this little theater up street.

FR: That is still there today.

EC: Yes. It's been renovated, of course, several times. I don't think we had to pay.

FR: Do you remember any of the movies?

EC: No. Then I can remember the lady who played the piano. When in the play would be a sad part, she'd play sad music and then lively music. Oh, she played a long time in the theater.

FR: What else? Do you remember any of the movies you saw, the names of them?

EC: I don't think so.

FR: Did you have dances?

EC: Well, we weren't allowed to. My parents didn't allow us to go to dances or play cards. But a lot of the others went.

FR: What kind of games did you play?

EC: Flinch.

FR: What is flinch?

EC: Well, a card game. I guess you made books that had different numbers. Flinch and well, we had a lot of outdoor good games. We played throwing away.

FR: What was throwing away?

EC: Well, you had sides. We'd have all the neighbor children, of course, playing. One side would stand out in the yard, and the other side, sit out on my porch and we'd call "throwing away," and they had to run and try to get our places at the porch.

FR: I see.

EC: [laughter] We played statues. Somebody had to get out and be a statue and they couldn't move. If they moved, of course they were out. [laughter] I can't remember too well how we played it. But that was one game.

FR: Were there house-to-house salesmen coming through the village at that time?

EC: We had one man. I don't know how he got to the village. But he walked through the village with this heavy pack. He'd come through, I guess, in the summertime. He had shoelaces, ribbons, pins, materials. He was a nice man. My mother always thought of him. (Isaac Cohen?). Then we had another lady. She was a relative of my mother's, who would come around with nice dress materials and you'd order how many yards that you wanted. We had a candy man. I guess he came with a tin and he had homemade special candies. So, that was a big event when he came. He came around every summer with the little organ grind-up, is it?

FR: Yes.

EC: Played the music and we were allowed to follow him down the street just as far as the corner. We couldn't go any farther than that. We gave him a few pennies. Of course, oh, we loved that little monkey. The same man came every summer, I think, with that little monkey.

FR: You mentioned that a man came around selling materials. How did you get your clothing? Did you buy it, make it, or what?

EC: Well, I think we used to hire a dressmaker to make our dresses and we got the material. Of course, we'd get to Hyannis once in a while and that's where we'd buy clothes and shoes.

FR: Tell me, how were the holidays? How were they celebrated?

EC: Well, 4th of July, the wealthy people, I think paid for fireworks to be held at Wianno Beach. So, we looked forward to that all year. My uncle had an old Ford and he had to make two trips to get us all up there. Of course, we had torpedoes that we threw on the sidewalk.

FR: Yes.

EC: They'd go bang. We had a few little fireworks of our own at home. Oh, firecrackers that we had, we'd shoot off in the backyard. I don't know if it was 4th of July or when we burned an effigy of Kaiser down in Hollow, up street.

FR: That was the (the annual event?).

EC: Well, that was the end of them all.

FR: Oh, I see.

EC: That's about all I remember that 4th of – oh, I guess we'd have parades up street and we'd go get some ice cream at my aunt's.

FR: What about the other holidays?

EC: Well, Thanksgiving, we always had roast chicken because my father had a lot of chickens out back, and I guess turnips and regular vegetables. Then my aunt used to have us over at her house every Thanksgiving all the time. Oh, she'd put on a big spread for us. All of us children went. She had no children, so she made a lot of us five.

FR: What was Christmas like?

EC: Well, we hung our stockings the night before. We'd find an orange, which was the big tree, to have a fresh orange in your stocking and a few walnuts, perhaps a little bit of candy and a tiny toy perhaps.

FR: How was the tree decorated? Did you have a tree?

EC: Yes. Of course, the village had a community big tree in the village hall. Every family took their own family, all their gifts down the tree at the hall.

FR: The entire village?

EC: All the village. Then they had a Santa Claus come stomping down the stairs and he'd hand out the presents. When I got a little older, we could go pass out the presents. They'd call everybody's name for a present. They'd say, "Here." So, we'd go pass it to them. Of course, the village got bigger and that fell by the wayside. [laughter]

FR: Did some of the people in the town supply presents to the people that could not afford them?

EC: Yes, I think so.

FR: Who would do that?

EC: Well, I suppose some of people who had stores.

FR: The merchants.

EC: Merchants.

FR: What was transportation like?

EC: Well, of course horse and buggies. The older folks, my mother and father, they'd make up a load, they'd call it. They'd hire a man who had a nice buggy and he could take, well, perhaps six people. They'd get up a load. Call their friends, "Do you want to go to the Hyannis?" "Yes." They'd pay so much a piece to go to Hyannis for the day to go shopping. I can remember my mother telling me about that so much. Make up a load. Well, of course, the iceman came around with a horse and buggy.

FR: You were telling me about some of the wealthy people that had coaches.

EC: There was a very wealthy family from Boston in the [19]80s. They would come for the summer. They had a beautiful home at the end of Wianno. They'd come riding by through the village some days with their beautiful coach and coachman and footman. The footman or the coachman would stand up when he'd go through the village and blow his cornet, I suppose it was. Oh, we thought that was wonderful. They had, I guess, four lovely horses, all trimmed up. So, that was a big event when they went through the village.

FR: Was this very common? Were there a number of people that had this type of thing?

EC: I don't think so. That's why we liked it so much. [laughter]

FR: Do you recall the advent of the automobile?

EC: Well, I know our old Dr. Higgins who lived in Marstons Mills had the first automobile anywhere around. But he used to come to us with his horse and buggy before that. Then he got this automobile.

FR: When you were sick, how would the doctor treat you?

EC: Oh, when we saw him coming, we'd feel better. We might be feeling awfully sick and I'd say, "Here comes Dr. Higgins." Mama would watch for him to come and we'd say we felt better the minute we saw him coming.

FR: Where did he get his medicine?

EC: Oh, I think he had a case and he'd mix up powders. He had two or three different powders. He'd ask my mother for a glass of warm water. I guess of hot water. I can hear him now stirring and stirring that mixture with his spoon. Then he'd say, "Give her a teaspoon full once in two hours, Mrs. Chadwick." [laughter] Oh, he was a nice old doctor.

FR: Did he deliver babies still?

EC: Yes.

FR: Did he have any help?

EC: I don't know of any. I guess he delivered. He probably delivered me and my sisters and brothers, perhaps. I'm not too sure.

FR: Earlier we mentioned cooling of some of your food supplies. How did you keep your food cool in the summertime?

EC: We put it down this well and put the butter and the milk down in the well. Of course, then we later had an ice box. The man came around, measured out so many pounds of ice for us.

FR: Thank you Ms. Chadwick for the opportunity to sit here and chat with you.

EC: Well, thank you. I'm glad to do it, except I don't remember too much sometimes about it.

FR: Well, that is very good. I am sure that you have made a contribution. Thank you.

[end of transcript]