

wells_mildred

Robert Livingstone, Jr.: Let me see how we're doing now. Is there a gain control on this? Here we are down here. This is volume. We're just trying. This as a test to see. The volume is set at about four. We're sitting probably 2 or 3 feet away from the recorder. I'll just introduce us by saying that my name is Robert Livingstone, Jr. I'm a retired fishery biologist from the National Marine Fishery Service in Woods Hole. This afternoon I'm visiting Mrs., is it Wilman?

Mildred Wells: No, Ray.

RLJ: Ray Wells over in Falmouth Heights. This is part of the program to get information on the history of the fishing industry in Woods Hole. At one time, Ms. Wells worked for Cahoon's famous fish market in Woods Hole. We're just having a relaxed conversation at her home this afternoon sitting by a very nice fire. We can play this back now. We are recording again. I left out the date is July.

MW: February 5th. I wish it was July [laughter].

RLJ: July. I was like, isn't that terrible? February 5th, 1981. Now, I'm just going to ask you some very funny questions. What was your maiden name? Have you always lived in Falmouth?

MW: No. I was born and brought up in New Bedford, and I came to Woods Hole. Someone got me to come to work for Sam. My name was Mildred Wright. I then married. I was married to a Russell Jennings who worked for Sam Cahoon, who passed away. He was drowned in 1935.

RLJ: Was Mr. Jennings a fisherman?

MW: No. He worked for Sam.

RLJ: He worked for Sam. When did you first start working for Sam Cahoon?

MW: In the late 1920s.

RLJ: In the late 1920s.

MW: Oh, yes. It's been a long, long time.

RLJ: When did Sam Cahoon start business here?

MW: Oh, long before that.

RLJ: Was it long before that?

MW: Yes.

RLJ: Did you ever hear of the name Isaiah Spindell in Woods Hole?

MW: Yes. As a matter of fact, at one time I think Spindell owned that market.

RLJ: This is interesting to me because going back in the history, in 1871 the Isaiah Spindell and Company, they donated \$500 to help buy the land where the Bureau of Fisheries is. Spencer Fullerton Baird was there. They had the first fishing business in Woods Hole.

MW: Well, then he must have been the original owner.

RLJ: Well, now did he own all the properties where the Steamship Authority was, and in that area where the market was?

MW: That I don't know. I can't think of anyone in Woods Hole now who would know.

RLJ: Were there any of that family around then at all, of the Isaiah Spindell?

MW: No, not that I know of.

RLJ: That's very interesting. So, Sam Cahoon started before the 1920s, you say?

MW: Oh, yes.

RLJ: This is part of his history that I don't know. You say you started there around nineteen?

MW: It must have been the late twenties. I know it was.

RLJ: In the late twenties.

MW: Yes. Because soon after I was there – and I can't remember now when it was. But remember when the banks all closed, we had the crash? Was it in twenty-nine? But I had been there before that.

RLJ: This was in twenty-nine or early thirties, yes.

MW: I had been there before that.

RLJ: You'd been there before that.

MW: So, came I came there in the late twenties.

RLJ: In the late twenties. How did you happen to get hired at Sam Cahoon's?

MW: I had some friends in Woods Hole, and they knew he was looking for someone. They talked me into coming here.

RLJ: What did you do?

MW: I was the bookkeeper.

RLJ: You were the bookkeeper. So, you mean you handled the accounts, sales of the fish?

MW: Oh, yes.

RLJ: The retail, the business and so forth?

MW: Paid the fishermen.

RLJ: You paid the fishermen?

MW: Oh, yes.

RLJ: They really did some scraping at that time, didn't they?

MW: Yes. I remember when the banks closed. As a matter of fact, if there's nothing for Sam Cahoon, there are many people – well, most of them they're gone now. But some of their children still live here. If it hadn't been for Sam Cahoon, they would have lost their homes.

RLJ: Is that so?

MW: He was a marvelous person.

RLJ: I have heard nothing but beautiful reports about Sam Cahoon from the fishermen I've talked to.

MW: Well, they're all true. He and his wife, Elsie, were the finest people you'd ever want to know.

RLJ: Isn't that something? Can you give me the names of any of those families in Woods Hole whose children you say that were much affected by Sam Cahoon's business and his relationship?

MW: Sammy Vincent.

RLJ: Oh, I know Sam.

MW: You know him.

RLJ: Oh, yes.

MW: Because I almost called him and asked if he'd like to talk to you, because his father and his boat were awesome.

RLJ: Warren and Jerry.

MW: Yes, that's right. Sammy was one of the few that were left because even Ruthie, his mother's brother from New Bedford was on the boat too. Both sides of the family were affected in that way. But Sammy was saved. Sammy has a sister, Martha, who is married to Robert Goffin.

RLJ: Who, Bob Goffin?

MW: Yes.

RLJ: Oh, yes.

MW: That's Sam's sister, his wife.

RLJ: That is Sam's sister. When you started in 1920, how many boats were fishing for Sam Cahoon? Can you remember how many boats there were in Woods Hole?

MW: Well, quite plenty. Well, no, they weren't all Woods Hole. They came from the islands from Lambert's Cove, Martha's Vineyard.

RLJ: Lambert's Cove?

MW: Oh, yes.

RLJ: Now, Lambert's Cove was that Benson who had the trap in [inaudible] Harbor who lived up in Lambert's Cove?

MW: Yes, that's right. Then of course, the ones from Edgartown, Jackson.

RLJ: Jackson. Ken Shepherd talked about Jackson.

MW: Yes. Kenny would know a lot about these people.

RLJ: He's very funny. He says he sometimes goes over and sees Henry and try to get him to identify some of the boats in the old pictures.

MW: Oh, really?

RLJ: Yes. When you started in these early days, were they mostly draggers that fished for Sam Cahoon like the trawlers?

MW: Not all. They were all kinds.

RLJ: They were all kinds.

MW: Yes.

RLJ: So, what kind of fish did you have coming into Sam Cahoon's fisheries?

MW: Oh, all kinds.

RLJ: You had all kinds.

MW: Yes.

RLJ: Not just mainly yellowtail flounder.

MW: Oh, no.

RLJ: You had lobsters?

MW: Yes. Swordfish.

RLJ: You had swordfish?

MW: Yes.

RLJ: Cod?

MW: Yes.

RLJ: Haddock.

MW: Yes. Of course, Sam shipped out every day by truck either to New York or Boston.

RLJ: You mean to the Fulton Fish Market?

MW: Yes.

RLJ: He also shipped to Nagle's in Boston.

MW: Oh, John Nagle was a wonderful person too. We were very close.

RLJ: I saw a letter that Frannie Shepherd had that Ken happened to show me. It's a thank you note for Nagles I guess just before Sam closed down, was it?

MW: Yes.

RLJ: What year did Sam Cahoon close down? See, we came here in 1956 and went right out of the *Albatross* as soon as they got here.

MW: Off head, I don't remember because I was married in 1930. I worked a year after for Sam.

In thirty-one, my mother had a stroke. So, I gave up because my husband insisted that she close her house in New Bedford and come and be with us. She was partially paralyzed. I said, "That's all entirely up to you, Russ. She's my mother, and I love her. But you are the one that's going to ask her, not me." So, we brought her down here. Oh, the Cahoons loved her. Every Wednesday, Elsie would come and get her. She'd go and spend the day with them and make homemade rolls and all kinds of things.

RLJ: Is that so? So, this was Ms. Cahoon who did this?

MW: Mrs. Cahoon.

RLJ: Her name was Elsie.

MW: Elsie Gardner Cahoon.

RLJ: Elsie Gardner Cahoon. Well, the boats that fished for Sam Cahoon in in these years, you said they brought in everything, the codfish and flounders.

MW: Oh, yes but different seasons of the year.

RLJ: Different seasons of the year. Do you remember that one winter of 1935 by chance? January 1935. I think the picture that I have in that notebook. I got this from the lab the other day, and I showed this to Henry Clemens last Sunday.

MW: Oh, Henry should know a lot.

RLJ: Yes. That was the winter of January 1935.

MW: Yes. Is that the year that was all frozen up?

RLJ: They couldn't get out for over a month.

MW: Yes. You could walk from Woods Holes to New Bedford or to Pasque Island over the ice.

RLJ: Over the ice. That was a bad winter.

MW: I have never known I wouldn't have liked it until now, this year.

RLJ: Until now.

MW: Yes.

RLJ: Well, that's almost what the Boston Globe said. They said the other bad one was 1918, I believe it was. But the temperature in that year got down to minus 18 degrees.

MW: In the old days at Woods Hole, if it got anywhere near zero, no one went out. Period.

RLJ: No one went out.

MW: No. Not only in boats, you didn't go out of the home. With the wind and the cold, you just couldn't take it.

RLJ: Yes, the wind.

MW: Oh, this looks so familiar.

RLJ: Does it? Oh, dear [laughter].

MW: Yes.

RLJ: That boat right there is the – well, we'll have to look it up – it's one of Henry Clemens. Let's see. Ida May, no I'm not sure.

MW: Well, in those days when I was there, I don't think any jurisdiction. At least, I'm sure. He is much younger than I am, I'm certain.

RLJ: You say that you don't think anybody was fishing?

MW: No. I don't think Henry.

RLJ: Henry, no. Henry didn't begin. It's interesting. Henry, Ken Shepherd, Swede Nelson, since all people came around there about 1934 is when they started.

MW: That's right.

RLJ: Yes. So, do you remember –

MW: See, then I wasn't working.

RLJ: You say you were not working?

MW: No. I'd left the market. I was married.

RLJ: In other words, you worked at the market from 1920 until –

MW: Thirty-one.

RLJ: Until thirty-one.

MW: Yes. Because I was married in 1930 to my first husband who drowned. Well, we were married on November 3rd, 1930.

RLJ: 1930.

MW: He died September 28th, 1935.

RLJ: September 28th.

MW: Just less than our fifth anniversary.

RLJ: Is that so? Oh, my gosh. Do you remember the names of any of the Woods Hole fisherman when you were a bookkeeper at Sam Cahoon's?

MW: Oh, Sammy Vincent.

RLJ: Was that the *Priscilla V*?

MW: Yes.

RLJ: The *Priscilla V* with the Vincents now.

MW: Yes. I somehow remember more of the fisherman from the islands than I do Woods Hole.

RLJ: Well, who were the fishermen from the islands? You mentioned Jackson, I think, from Edgartown.

MW: Yes, Robert Jackson.

RLJ: Did he come from Edgartown?

MW: Yes.

RLJ: That's fine.

MW: His son also was a fisherman, but he's probably retired now. Oh, gee, what was his name in Lambert's Cove? He was the one who had the traps.

RLJ: Oh, that was Benson.

MW: Benson, yes.

RLJ: Benson. I know about Benson.

MW: I was going to say Russ and I were married on November 3rd. Sam Cahoon said to him, "When you ever get married, boy, I'm wearing a pink necktie."

RLJ: [laughter]

MW: You better believe he wore a pink necktie.

RLJ: He did?

MW: Oh, he was a marvelous man.

RLJ: Oh, that is something, yes.

MW: They didn't come any better than him, I would say. Just wonderful.

RLJ: Well, you know Ken Shepherd told me that he said they nearly froze to death and starved the death during that winter right there.

MW: That's right if it hadn't been for Sam Cahoon.

RLJ: He said that I wished I had all the fives and tens and twenties of Sam Cahoon who lent out and didn't get back. I'd be able to retire for the rest of my life.

MW: That's right.

RLJ: That's how generous he was to everybody.

MW: That's the truth.

RLJ: To buy coal and to buy grub.

MW: Yes, that's absolutely true.

RLJ: I know Cynthia very well, and I know her daughter and son-in-law. I did not know Sammy. I don't know the Cahoon boy.

MW: No. Well, Sammy wasn't like his father. I'll never forget one time his father had bought a new package, and Sammy's out painting the package. I think, I believe he was painting it pink or doing something.

RLJ: What?

MW: Oh, yes.

RLJ: [laughter] This was one of those packages with the cop that came down?

MW: He was young.

RLJ: Oh, dear [laughter].

MW: The year after I retired from Sam's, so he called me. He said to Russ, "What's Millie

doing today?" Russ said, "I don't know. Nothing I guess." So, he called me. He said, "Elsie doesn't feel good." It must have been around Easter time. So, he said, "Can you take the children to New Bedford then take them shopping for their Easter clothes?" I said, "Sure." That day I took Sammy. We all went. I took all the children.

RLJ: You took Sammy, Cynthia, and Frannie?

MW: Yes, and Rebecca. They have another sister.

RLJ: No, I don't know Rebecca.

MW: No. Because she's married to Ames or was. I don't know whether they're divorced. I have a feeling they are. Well, she lives, I think, in hospital. But I took them all shopping. I'll never forget it, because I had to take them out to lunch. Sammy, he could be a little bit of a problem sometimes. So, I said to him, "Now, Sammy, you remember your table manners, and you sit right up there." He drank water like there was no – every time the waitress would fill the glass of water, he'd drink it. Oh, dear.

RLJ: Oh, my.

MW: We had a lot of fun. I used to take some of them home over the weekends when I'd go home before I was married. One weekend we took Cynthia. I always stopped downtown in the Five and Dime.

RLJ: This was where, you mean?

MW: No, in New Bedford.

RLJ: In Bedford.

MW: Commander Baird from Woods Hole was stationed in New Bedford. So, he'd always be in the five-and-ten on Saturday night. So, I'd always go and see Roy. So, I was busy talking with Roy. Sam had given Cynthia money to spend and buy what she wanted.

RLJ: How old was Cynthia then?

MW: Oh, in her early teens. She was nine.

RLJ: [laughter] That was wonderful.

MW: So, Sunday morning, we came down to breakfast. I took one look at Cynthia – because I didn't ask what she bought. It was her money. Boy, was she ever made up. Oh [laughter].

RLJ: Lipstick and everything.

MW: The whole world.

RLJ: [laughter]

MW: So, I let her have breakfast. Then after breakfast I said, "Cynthia, come over here. I want to talk to you." I said, "You're too young for that. That doesn't go with you."

RLJ: Oh, dear.

MW: So, I said, "Please go up and take it off." I said, "It's a good thing daddy never saw it, because Daddy would never go for that."

RLJ: [laughter] Oh, dear.

MW: I paid no attention. I wasn't watching what she was doing.

RLJ: This reminds me of my grandmother taking me to the art museum one time. I liked a particular painting where a woman had very, very red lips, and I was a teenager.

MW: [laughter]

RLJ: [laughter] My grandmother wanted to know if I really thought that a woman like that would make a good wife [laughter].

MW: [laughter] Oh, dear. I have so many memories.

RLJ: I think that is wonderful.

MW: When the children were little, Russ and I used to go up. We used to play cards a lot with Sam and Elsie. Always on Christmas Eve we'd go up there. After the kids all got to bed, we'd play cards until then. We'd put all the gifts together and put them under the tree. I have so many memories.

RLJ: Do you mind if I ask you, when you started working as a bookkeeper how much did you get paid?

MW: I don't remember.

RLJ: It was probably very little but enough that you could get along with.

MW: Oh, yes, well, in those days.

RLJ: Do you remember what the fishermen were getting for fish?

MW: Oh, yes. Sometimes peanuts. Very true.

RLJ: Did anybody ever saddle skates or skinned dogfish? Is that right? Do you remember that?

MW: I don't. It seems to me that the MBL or the fisheries used to take the dogfish. Didn't they use them for scientific programs?

RLJ: The MBL did, yes. Now, Ken, described that beautifully. He told about how they injected them with different colored latex in the veins and the arteries. He remembered that pretty well. What relationship did you or Sam Cahoon's market have to the fisheries?

MW: A good relationship.

RLJ: Did you know any of the people down there?

MW: I know them vaguely.

RLJ: Did you know the name of Seti who worked on mackerel? Oscar Seti?

MW: No.

RLJ: Or Dr. Rupert Walter who worked on haddock?

MW: No.

RLJ: They were sent here from Harvard. But you knew Bob Goffin, I take it.

MW: Oh, yes.

RLJ: That's interesting because Ken mentioned Bob Goffin. Now, was Bob the superintendent of the lab or something in charge of the aquarium?

MW: I think so. Bob also, if I remember correctly, Bob was a fire engineer. See, years ago they had fire engineers that met once a week on Fridays.

RLJ: This is now, he apparently provided a room where they can hang up a suit or a couple of shirts where the guys who were on call could go down there and change their clothes and have a shower.

MW: That's right. Oh, yes.

RLJ: That's very different than it is now [laughter]. What I didn't realize was that Bob's daughter, A.B. Goffin, was married to Nick Rodell.

MW: Oh, yes.

RLJ: She taught in Woods Hole School. In fact, she taught my kids over there.

MW: They lived, I think it's (Moore Court?) now, isn't it? Or it's inside the path, that's where

she lives, I think.

RLJ: Were there many menhaden boats or mackerel seiners that came around in those early days in summertime?

MW: I wouldn't be surprised, but I don't remember.

RLJ: A big change over there?

MW: Yes.

RLJ: Did Sam handle scallops in those days?

MW: Oh, yes. He'd always taste them raw.

RLJ: Oh, gosh. The fishermen do this all the time. I tried it, and I don't like them at all, tasted a little bit mundane.

MW: No, I didn't like them.

RLJ: But they're always doing this, I've seen it.

MW: But there used to be a racket years ago. They used to water them. They'd buy them by weight, wholesale. They used to water them. But Sam could tell in one minute they were watered.

RLJ: Is that so?

MW: It is so.

RLJ: You mean these were when they were shucked in those sacks that they used to sell to him.

MW: Yes.

RLJ: Do you remember what he paid?

MW: See, yes, our men used to go out to the fisherman's homes, some of them around here, and buy the scallops.

RLJ: Buy the scallops.

MW: Buy the scallops from the men.

RLJ: After they came in.

MW: Oh, yes.

RLJ: You mean they would shuck them?

MW: No, but they'd all be shucked.

RLJ: Oh, they would all be shucked.

MW: But Sam would send a truck out with a man on it. They'd go pick them up and pay for them.

RLJ: Now, the fishermen who lived around here in Falmouth area, you mean, in Woods Hole?

MW: Some and some lived down the cape further down.

RLJ: But he had a truck that would go around.

MW: Oh, yes. Oh, Sam had all kinds of trucks. They used to go to Providence and Boston all the time to deliver.

RLJ: Do you remember what they paid for scallops in those days?

MW: No, I don't. But nothing like they do now.

RLJ: Do you know what Swede told me?

MW: What?

RLJ: 60 cents a gallon while harvesting.

MW: I don't ever remember that price, but it could be. It's a long time ago.

RLJ: Now, they're \$9 and something in Boston. Fantastic.

MW: Well, I still buy them. I like them.

RLJ: Well, they're wonderful. Me too, yes.

MW: I've got some in my freezer right now.

RLJ: You have, I know. Are they bay scallops or are they –

MW: Oh, yes. Oh, I wouldn't buy any other. I don't like sea. I've never tried the sea scallop, but I wouldn't.

RLJ: Well, the sea scallops are delicious if they're fresh.

MW: Are they?

RLJ: But you may be getting what they call the calico scallop which is about the size of a bay scallop because bay scallops are all frozen in now.

MW: I know they are now.

RLJ: So, the ones from North Carolina would say its muscle meat is similar to the size of the bay scallop. I think they're not paying as much for them. When we go to a restaurant and order scallops, we're probably eating those, and they're making a little money on those.

MW: That's right.

RLJ: Just like scrod. Oh, by the way, did you sell scrod when you were at the old market?

MW: I don't think so.

RLJ: What was scrod?

MW: It's a combination between the cod and the haddock, isn't it? No?

RLJ: Now, scrod way back when had to do with a haddock. It was a pound and a half or less. The term used to be S-C-R-O-D. Now, it's S-C-H-R-O-D, which I have always thought was cod being served as haddock and paying the same price for it in restaurants. But in the latest definition of the dictionary, scrod or shred or it can also be a piece of a filleted off a larger fish that is called the scrod.

MW: That's right.

RLJ: Because these big market cod now they can be sold as scrod or shred.

MW: That's right.

RLJ: But did you handle any small haddock or cod and sell them as scrod?

MW: Oh, yes.

RLJ: What was the main business that Sam had? Was there a main species or something that he did more of than any other?

MW: No, he bought and sold everything.

RLJ: He bought and sold everything. But he never went to New York himself, did he?

MW: Not the fish market, no.

RLJ: In other words, he did everything over the telephone.

MW: He did it every morning with John Nagle Company in Boston.

RLJ: In Boston.

MW: They used to call. If Sam wasn't there, I'd have to do it. It was just like the stock market that they'd call, and you'd have to take all the prices and the whole –

RLJ: Were they having auctions in those days?

MW: No, I don't think so. But it was just the way the prices changed from day to day.

RLJ: Oh, I see. Was there any reporting of catches of fish by amount landed by price, by types that went to anybody?

MW: Not that I know of.

RLJ: There was no collection of statistics or any data by anybody from the Bureau of Fisheries or –

MW: Oh, they may have been down there, but not in the market they weren't.

RLJ: There wasn't at Sam Cahoon?

MW: No.

RLJ: There was someone else. Do you know whether there are any records that would tell about the landings in any of those early days?

MW: No.

RLJ: I'm trying to get a look at the catch composition that came for a year and so forth.

MW: No, I know we never kept them when I was there.

RLJ: What would be a really big volume of fish that you remember being there?

MW: I don't remember about that. It's a long time ago.

RLJ: Would the boats go out in the morning, and would they all come in the afternoon?

MW: I know some would come in the early evening.

RLJ: They'd come in the early evening.

MW: Yes, and all out in the day.

RLJ: The fishermen would unload the boats to the scales where they were weighed. Then they'd put in boxes. Then they were shipped. You got the weights, and you paid them.

MW: Our men weighed them.

RLJ: Your men weighed them. Then the price was already determined from what was quoted from Boston or New Bedford or whatever.

MW: No, we always got it from Boston.

RLJ: From Boston.

MW: Always John Nagle Company.

RLJ: John Nagle Company.

MW: John Nagle was a very, very close friend.

RLJ: Of Sam's?

MW: Yes.

RLJ: Now they're still in business in Boston now, John Nagle Company.

MW: Well, it must be someone else.

RLJ: Have you been up in the Boston Fish Pier?

MW: No.

RLJ: You've never been up there.

MW: It must be someone in the family because this was a long time ago. Sam was in his eighties.

RLJ: Was he in his eighties when he died in the sailing –

MW: I'm sure he was.

MW: His father lived upstairs in the market, Alden Fuller Cahoon.

RLJ: What was his name?

MW: Alden Fuller Cahoon.

RLJ: Alden Fuller Cahoon. This was his dad?

MW: Yes.

RLJ: He lived upstairs in the market?

MW: Over the market.

RLJ: Did he have a nice little studio apartment up there?

MW: Yes.

RLJ: How old was he when he lived back there?

MW: He must have been almost a hundred when he died. He was in his nineties before he died.

RLJ: Is that so?

MW: Oh, yes. He always called me Nelly. He never called me Millie. It was always Nelly.

RLJ: Was this a special name for you, not remembering Millie?

MW: It was his name. When it came to the holidays, he had some very odd ideas sometimes. Then he decided that he was not going to Sam's for the holiday.

RLJ: This was his dad, you mean?

MW: Yes. Sam would be all shook up. He'd say, "No way." If he was not coming, you're not going to have a holiday. I said, "He'll come. I'll take care of it." It's why Sam would always come to me.

RLJ: Is that so?

MW: So, I said, "Okay, I'll take care of it." So, then Skipper would say – we always called him Skipper, his dad. We called him Skipper. So, I'd say, "Well, Skip, have a nice holiday." He said, "I'm not having a holiday." I said, "What do you mean you're not having a holiday?" "I'm not going to Sam's. I'm going to stay right here." I said, "Okay, then I'm not going home."

RLJ: Then I'm not going home.

MW: I said, "You'll ruin my family's holiday too."

RLJ: Oh, dear.

MW: That would change it.

RLJ: He'd come to life then?

MW: Yes, he'd go. I could swing him right around my finger. He worshipped the ground I walked on.

RLJ: Did you live in Woods Hole? What was your feeling about the fishermen in Woods Hole? What kind of social life did they have? Did they do a lot of drinking and carousing around, making a lot of noise the way they still do?

MW: No, I don't think so. I never saw any of it.

RLJ: Was there a place called the Rendezvous in Woods Hole then?

MW: Could be, but I probably never went to it.

RLJ: You don't remember.

MW: I never went.

RLJ: Was there much religious feeling amongst the fishermen or among the people who worked for Sam Cahoon? Did they go to a local church?

MW: Oh, yes.

RLJ: What church did they go to?

MW: Most of us went to church in Messiah. Sam and his family went to the Methodist church.

RLJ: The one that was right next to the Fish Market? Used to be down on the dock?

MW: No, not that one. It was on Water Street then.

RLJ: On Water Street.

MW: Before they moved it to Millfield. Now, they don't have a Methodist church there anymore. Do they?

RLJ: No.

MW: No. I know Cynthia and all of them go to the church in Messiah now.

RLJ: Did you go to the church in Messiah?

MW: Oh, yes.

RLJ: You did?

MW: As a matter of fact, the first time I was married, I was married in my own church in New Bedford, of course. Reverend Bancroft was our pastor at Messiah. He went to Woods Hole. I was married by two ministers.

RLJ: Was George Fisher there then or who was the minister in Woods Hole?

MW: He was ahead of my time, I think.

RLJ: Who was the minister when you went to the church in the Messiah?

MW: Bancroft.

RLJ: Bancroft. I guess I've seen his name on a plaque. Were the Fays active in the church at this time?

MW: Yes.

RLJ: Mixtures?

MW: Yes.

RLJ: Gatherings? So, I've been going to that church for a good many years. I served on the register with Sydney.

MW: Sydney Ron?

RLJ: Oh, yes.

MW: Sydney was just wonderful. He was nice to me.

RLJ: Matter of fact, we got into a big argument in an investor meeting one night because they used to have horses for the church fair sometimes. There was a barn up on the property where the church parking lot is now. They were getting in a terrible argument about having to take care of the horses all the time.

MW: I think it's still there. Isn't that a barn?

RLJ: I think the little barn is still there.

MW: Yes, I'm sure it is. Because once in a while when I go to Woods Hole, I go down to the cemetery. I always go by the Shore Road. I'm fed up with Woods Hole. It's changed, so I just –

RLJ: Oh, yes, I know.

MW: So, I just go backway. I go into the driveway of the cemetery and come out. When I come out, I always come out that back way. I'm sure that little barn is right on the right.

RLJ: That little barn, there is something there. Yes, I think you're right about that. Then you know Dorothy Elseman's Earth Garden right there.

MW: Oh, yes.

RLJ: That's a very beautiful garden. But I remember Sydney [laughter], he got so disgusted with the registry one time. He pulled out \$50 or a hundred dollars out his pocket, threw it down the table and said, "I'll buy the barn," or something like that. They were complaining about having to get rid of all the horse manure. It went to somebody's garden, and we did what with it. We argued. But I remember Sydney very well.

MW: Yes. He was a great person.

RLJ: My wife and I see quite a lot of John Tate. You know him?

MW: Oh, do you?

RLJ: Oh, yes, a lot of him. As a matter of fact, he came for Christmas dinner.

MW: Oh, that's nice.

RLJ: My father was eighty-seven. He was with us for five and a half Christmas dinners.

MW: How old is Mr. Tate now?

RLJ: He had his ninety-fourth birthday recently. Did you know him?

MW: I didn't know him as well as I know his son and his son's wife.

RLJ: Bob, you mean?

MW: Bob. But I was amazed, late this summer or early fall maybe, I was in the AMP one day, and I met Madeline Tate.

RLJ: Madeline. If you get tired, please say so because I know that you better not strain. The time that you were at Cahoon's is a time when I have no information at all because everybody I've talked to came in the 1930s. This was a time when, well, Cahoon's flounders were sold as Cahoon's flounders in the auction in Boston. This is what I remember, which is quite a distinction really. Did Sam have quite a bit of lobster?

MW: Oh, yes.

RLJ: Was the lobster caught –

MW: Right in Woods Hole most of it.

RLJ: It was caught in Woods Hole.

MW: Local boats mainly.

RLJ: There were local boats that would just simply set out pots around Woods Hole. They didn't go out to Gay Head.

MW: Well, yes, some did. But some of them weren't what you'd call fishermen. They were just natives who would set their pots and couldn't use them, so they'd sell them.

RLJ: Were the boats that fished for Sam's, would you say were they all under 60 feet or were some of them bigger than this?

MW: Oh, I think they were bigger, some of them.

RLJ: There were some steam trawlers?

MW: I think so.

RLJ: Big steam beam trawlers in those days?

MW: I think so.

RLJ: Did they go out to Georges Banks?

MW: I don't think so, no.

RLJ: In other words, at this time they did not go to Georges Banks.

MW: I don't think so.

RLJ: But they mostly fished the channel and the Cape Cod grounds and Nantucket shores and Nomans Land and all that.

MW: Yes.

RLJ: Did Sam Cahoon handle steamers and quahogs too?

MW: Oh, yes.

RLJ: Did he have local people digging them around here or did he buy those?

MW: No, they were locally –

RLJ: They were locally dug.

MW: Yes. Now, in the scallop season, I remember the men used to go as far as probably Osterville to buy scallops.

RLJ: But these were bay scallops.

MW: Yes. He'd send a truck out with the man and the money. They'd just go and buy the scallops and come on back.

RLJ: What kind of social life was there in Woods Hole in the 1920s for families? What went on in there?

MW: Mostly through the church.

RLJ: It was mostly through the church. That's interesting. There were no Nickelodeons or there were no movie houses or anything like that. Were there some good restaurants?

MW: Nelly James had. Well, she had the store on the corner across from the market. I forget what it is now. Nelly and Tally James. They used to serve lunches and things like that.

RLJ: But there was no traffic from here to the islands or at that time there was?

MW: Oh, yes. But not as much as there is now.

RLJ: Not as much. So, this restaurant catered to the people that were moving back and forth between the islands. Did they go to Nantucket and the Vineyard?

MW: Oak Bluffs, everywhere.

RLJ: Cuttyhunk and so forth.

MW: My husband owned the old Tivoli in Oak Bluffs. Remember that? The big Tivoli Dance Hall?

RLJ: Oh. No, I guess I don't know about that.

MW: It was right down by the waterfront and had stores underneath.

RLJ: It had what?

MW: Stores underneath.

RLJ: Oh, it did. Was it kind of a summer pavilion type of a dance hall with restaurants there?

MW: Oh, yes. But they were open year-round.

RLJ: It was open year-round.

MW: Oh, yes. Now, his was just a dance hall, the part that he –

RLJ: Did they bring bands in from the States?

MW: Yes. Oh, the Tivoli was famous for their dancing place.

RLJ: Really?

MW: Oh, yes.

RLJ: Did you have any Goodman there or –

MW: Oh, I don't remember. It was a long time ago.

RLJ: But they did bring bands in from New York or New Jersey or whatever.

MW: Oh, yes.

RLJ: That's interesting, yes.

MW: That was a night's spot in Oak Bluffs.

RLJ: Was it? Now, I don't know that much about the Vineyard.

MW: Well, of course, Tivoli is gone now. They shut it down and built a bank.

RLJ: Ms. Wells, did you know Louis Doucette?

MW: That name sounds familiar. Didn't he come from New Bedford?

RLJ: Louis Doucette is in New Bedford now and fished out in New Bedford. Louis Doucette fished for Sam Cahoon. He had a boat called the *Gleaner*, was one that I remember.

MW: That's right. He has a daughter.

RLJ: Loretta.

MW: Loretta the nurse.

RLJ: Yes. Loretta is retired. She's a member of the same group in civil service that I am. That's where I first bumped into her. So, her father was very famous. He has a Carnegie Medal for rescuing some people off a schooner that went down in 1910 on the backside of the Vineyard.

MW: Oh, really?

RLJ: They got awards for this. Then he's written up in Edward Grove Snow's book. Let's see, one of his many books. I just happened to see this one. It's a chapter about Louis Doucette as someone who's rescued the people in the schooner. Then his son, Louis, who was in his early seventies now lives in Fairhaven. I saw him a couple of weeks ago on Friday for a little while. I'm going back to see him again. He had a great experience fishing with his father. But the *Gleaner* was the one that blew up in New York Harbor. Twelve people were killed on it actually.

MW: Really?

RLJ: Yes. He was injured. He was in the hospital for two years after that.

MW: Who, Louis?

RLJ: Louis, yes. They came from Nova Scotia. They were nine in the family. He was a rumrunner. Had a really interesting life. I went out and talked to Loretta. You could just see an overpowering love for their father-in-law. The man was not educated, but he knew so much about the sea. He was such a wonderful man that just had the greatest respect for people. His son, Louis, said the same thing.

MW: She lives right down near somewhere.

RLJ: She lives over on Seacoast Shores.

MW: Oh, is she right down there now?

RLJ: Yes.

MW: Because she was near here, I think.

RLJ: If you drive out this back road and go out beyond the boatyard and turn it back to Prescott, if you turn down that there's two roads. There's Seacoast Shores Harbors. Anyway, I think you know what I mean. It's on that Prescott Road. There are two one-way streets that go in there.

MW: Now, Seacoast Shores is way down, a part of the Eastern. That's why I didn't think she lived down that far.

RLJ: Yes. She lives on Pine Street which is right on that block from the entry.

MW: Yes. I thought it was just the other side of the Heights somewhere, but not way down east down there.

RLJ: Harbor View was up there.

MW: Harbor View was up here.

RLJ: How many years have you been here?

MW: 1930. I was married to a chief in 1938. I lost my first husband in thirty-five. I was married to a chief in thirty-eight.

RLJ: Since 1938.

MW: I was talking to the town clerk and treasurer the other day, (John Devas?), who I'm very fond of. So, I went up to see him. They wanted to get some tax forms that they didn't send me for household employees. For some reason, I didn't get them this year, and I had to file. So, John had some, so I said I'll be up. So, I took them some brownies. They love brownies. I always make them for them.

RLJ: You still make cookies?

MW: Oh, not cookies, but brownies.

RLJ: Brownies, yes.

MW: I give them all away. I've never tasted them.

RLJ: Really?

MW: I always made them for the registrars on voting days when they're working at night. They always had Millie's brownies. What was I going to tell you? There was something John told me. Oh, yesterday, he said, "Millie, you haven't sent your papers in. Coming up is a town meeting member again, I have to be voted on." I said, "I haven't sent them in because I'm trying to make up my mind." I said, "I think I've been a town meeting member long enough. I think it's about time I quit."

RLJ: [laughter]

MW: Now, I don't drive at night. It means that I have to have someone come and get me, and they drag on. I said, "John, I'm afraid to give up." That there are so many Johnny come lately, you never know what they're going to do. They don't care about this town. But anyway, come to find out, I've been a town meeting member for forty-two years. I said, "I think it's time I quit."

RLJ: Oh, I know something I wanted to ask you. If you've been a town meeting member for that long, do you remember when they first talked about the dock in Woods Hole?

MW: You mean the new dock?

RLJ: Well, the dock that they built before Sam Cahoon died.

MW: No, I don't recall it.

RLJ: Sam Cahoon went to a meeting and surprised the town with how much money he made over the telephone in Woods Hole when he was talking about the document. They didn't realize how much of a business that he had in Woods Hole.

MW: Oh, yes.

RLJ: They apparently had a finance committee meeting. They also had a meeting to discuss what is now the town dock in Woods Hole. I'd like to locate that meeting. Is it simply me going to the town hall and going to the selectman?

MW: I bet John Devas would help you.

RLJ: John Devas.

MW: He's the town clerk and treasurer and a very, very fine person.

RLJ: John Devas, I'm just going to write that name down, so I won't forget it.

MW: Do you have a pen or do you want me –

RLJ: Yes, I do.

MW: John was a great person, but I think –

RLJ: How is John Devas spelled?

MW: I really don't know exactly.

RLJ: But he's been on the town committees for good many years.

MW: Good many years. I wouldn't be at all surprised he comes up for reelection this year. I wouldn't be surprised if he didn't run.

RLJ: You say ask him about this?

MW: He would be able to tell you, I'm sure. I think. No, John's a wonderful person.

RLJ: Did Clara Adams come in after you left or was she with you at the same time?

MW: At Sam Cahoon's?

RLJ: Yes.

MW: No, after I left.

RLJ: After you left. The Vineyard Gazette, did they call and get figures on you on fish patches and landings every week?

MW: No.

RLJ: They must have done that later then. Can I tell John Devas that I was talking to you?

MW: Yes, certainly.

RLJ: That would be wonderful.

MW: John Devas is a very good friend and a wonderful person. We are very fortunate to have a person like John. Very, very devoted.

RLJ: Well, I guess we're all going to be somewhat affected by Proposition 21/2 now.

MW: I guess so. People on fixed incomes, I don't know where they're going to get off.

RLJ: I don't either. Certainly, social security is not enough to take care of it.

MW: No. When the taxes double, forget it.

RLJ: One more question. Did you know Frannie Cahoon pretty well?

MW: Oh, I knew the whole family.

RLJ: What?

MW: I knew the whole family.

RLJ: What was Frannie's relationship to the business? Was she working at the same time you were?

MW: No, none of them were.

RLJ: None of them were.

MW: They were young people when I worked.

RLJ: They were all young people. You were taking them to five-and-ten at this stage [laughter].

MW: Yes. Now, that was Cynthia I took to five-and-ten.

RLJ: I'll have to remember that story about her putting on all the lipstick.

MW: I often wonder if she ever thinks of it. Oh, dear.

RLJ: That's funny. I heard another story about Sam Cahoon. Was he quite a cut up at times or could he really be a –

[talking simultaneously]

MW: Oh, he was different. Ellen's brother, we used to go dancing in the old parish house in Woods Hole. Boy, would they swing it. I used to have moss marks on my shin. They'd swing me around [laughter].

RLJ: Who was this, the Cahoons?

MW: Sam and Ned Gifford.

RLJ: Oh, really?

MW: Oh, yes.

RLJ: Oh, wow. This was in the old parish house.

MW: Yes.

RLJ: Now, the old parish house, that was the one where the exchange is now, house vegan is at.

MW: Yes. Oh, we had many a good time in there.

RLJ: Way up in the attic, you mean?

MW: Yes.

RLJ: Oh, I'll be damned. A real hoe down.

MW: Yes. I remember another time we were having some kind of a supper or something, and Roy Berg was home. This was downstairs in the hall. I must have been one of the hostesses because I was serving. I got to Roy. I think he had on a brand-new suit or some friend of his did that was with him. I'm passing him a cup of coffee, and the coffee goes all down over. Oh, talk about being embarrassed [laughter].

RLJ: Oh, dear. But I heard a story about Sam Cahoon that there was a certain summer policeman in Woods Hole who he knew. Sam apparently dressed up in a woman's attire and got a baby buggy and dressed up a baby in the buggy and pushed the buggy down to the Steamship Authority and then pushed it right over the dock.

MW: Oh, God [laughter].

RLJ: Then he swam back to his place. The poor cop called the ambulance and got all the town – you never heard about this one?

MW: No, I didn't.

RLJ: I have to check on this. I think that's pretty funny. But I didn't know he could just do that.

MW: Because he and Ned Gifford, boy, they could really cut up.

RLJ: They could?

MW: Oh, yes.

RLJ: Was there drinking at those dances in the parishes?

MW: No.

RLJ: No?

MW: I don't think people drank in those days.

RLJ: Isn't that something? You still had a good time. Yet people feel they have to have that crutch now. Isn't that something?

MW: Well, I can remember years ago, the chief and I, we would never have a drink during the week. We'd have cocktails on Sunday at 4:00 p.m. before dinner, and that was it.

RLJ: Is that so? I remember my mother and father used to have – well, dad came home from work, and I know he used to go in the pantry and take a hooker. But they always served cocktails when they had guests. But I don't think they drank wine. My wife and I used to have one glass of wine. We do that.

MW: Yes, I do before my dinner.

RLJ: It's relaxing.

MW: Now not in those days.

RLJ: But it's amazing the changes that are taking place in society.

MW: Yes.

RLJ: So, the old parish house was a real swinging joint?

MW: Oh, we had some good times.

RLJ: Now, that's marvelous.

MW: Really good times.

RLJ: Would you bring in music, or would you have victrolas? Or how did you do it?

MW: No, I think they had victrolas and some stuff.

RLJ: They had a band.

MW: Yes.

RLJ: How did Sam Cahoon relate to the to the MBL, to the Oceanographic community, and whatnot? Of course, the Oceanographic wasn't in, but the MBL was.

MW: Yes. No, he was always on good terms with everybody. Sam was a marvelous person.

RLJ: The MBL was not taking Dr. Stanley in. They were taking specimens of dogfish.

MW: I think so.

RLJ: Were they?

MW: Because a very, very dear friend of mine, Jim McGinnis was the head of the supply department for years in MBL. He's long gone now.

RLJ: Did you know the old glassblower, Tom?

MW: Yes. What's his name? I have a vase sculptor there that he made for me.

RLJ: He's one of the most entertaining people I've ever been able to talk to and Jim Warren.

MW: Isn't that awful I can't remember his name?

RLJ: I can't remember his name either. But he told me more funny stories about science and whatnot than anybody I've even spoken to. He went by (Dr. Gossoff?). Paul Gossoff worn a tremendous amount of respect for in the MBL department. We made a great mistake by not getting a tape of the old glassblower before he died.

MW: Yes, I can't think of his name. Isn't that awful?

RLJ: In recent years, he was taking people's wine bottles and turning them into lamps. He used to have a fit, "I need to know more science." I feel very badly about that. Because I've even got a reference to him in a paper I wrote once. Oh, he made you that beautiful little pig? Oh, for God's sake, that is out of a test tube.

MW: Yes.

RLJ: Oh, that's remarkable.

MW: Oh, I've had that for years.

RLJ: [laughter]

MW: What was his name? It wasn't Gray, was it? No.

RLJ: Graham.

MW: Graham.

RLJ: John Graham.

MW: Graham, yes.

RLJ: Oh, that's beautiful [laughter]. How did he happen to give you this?

MW: Through Jim McGinnis.

RLJ: Oh, through Jim McGinnis. That's nice.

MW: See, Jim and Mariam were very, very dear friends of mine.

RLJ: That's nice. That's very precious.

MW: Yes, certainly is.

RLJ: I can tell it's made out of test tube glasses.

MW: I've had that for a good many years.

RLJ: Oh, he could do things like that. He really could.

MW: We've certainly had a rough winter so far.

RLJ: Oh, yes. This has been worse.

MW: It's unusual for here.

RLJ: Yes, I know.

MW: But nothing we can do about it [laughter].

RLJ: Yes. No, I know, not much we can do about it.

MW: The other week, in one week I spent \$45 for being plowed out three times in one week.

RLJ: You have to have all this plowing on here?

MW: Well, my driveway. See, my driveway is on the other side of the house. Then this back parking space that I put in. I don't go out in it half the time. But it's just the fact of being a fire chief's widow, you keep things so you can get out if you have to.

RLJ: You keep your hydrants dug out and so forth.

MW: You better believe it. I've lived with it too long.

RLJ: I can't think of any more questions I want to ask you. I think there's another period that I need to cover, perhaps I need to talk to Frannie Shepherd. So far, everyone has been amazing.

MW: Frannie saves a lot of old records way back. I think even more so than Cynthia.

RLJ: Than Cynthia did. But I certainly appreciate the time you've given me.

MW: Well, I'm very happy to meet you and have you come in. Please, feel free anytime.

RLJ: Oh, well, aren't you nice? I like that. Maybe, Frannie, I could stop over some afternoon. Are you usually here in the –

MW: Usually are. I can always be here.

RLJ: Yes. But do you have any help here or –

MW: I have a girl that comes once a week.

RLJ: You have a girl that comes once a week. But who carries your wood and your coal for you?

MW: Oh, well, now one thing I'm doing is I said I don't use my porch in the winter, but I can. But now, the last time I got wood I had some of it put out there because I can't –

[end of transcript]