

QUONOCHONTAUG HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Oral History

BARBARA ADAMS and JANET MORGAN

September 19, 1997

Interviewed by Anne Schaefer Doyle

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Q: Today is Friday, September the 19th, 1997. This tape is a conversation with Barbara Adams and her sister Janet Morgan about their Quonochontaug memories. Barbara, who are the first members of your family to come to Quonochontaug?

B: This is Barbara Randall speaking. The first members of my family to come to Quonochontaug were Grandma and Grandpa Randall.

Q: Where did you Grandma and Grandpa Randall live?

B: They lived—any my sister can correct me on this—on Lamb Street in Westerly.

Q: Did you visit your Grandma and Grandpa?

B: No. It was my grandmother, because Grandpa was dead.

Q: Where did you live when you used to come to visit? Did you live far away?

B: When I first came to visit Grandma Randall, 29 Main Street.

Q: You were little when you first came to Quonochontaug. What are some of the first memories that you have about what you might have done here?

B: What I remember happening, and it was a very traumatic experience, was I had a very bad eye infection so that they had to get me down to the baby's hospital in New York City.

Q: Did this happen at Quonnie when you got the eye infection?

B: Yes.

Q: Did you come back after you got better?

B: Yes.

Q: What did you and Janet used to do here?

B: I just remember having this terrible eye infection. I always had my head down so that the sun—

Q: That memory really stands out in your mind.

B: It was bad.

Q: Janet, what memories do you have?

J: We used to visit Grandma every summer during Dad's vacation. That was in Westerly. And every morning we'd start out by going to Watch Hill, going on the merry-go-round, having our three rides and hoping nobody caught the brass ring. Because if they did, there are extra rides involved. Then we'd come down to Waterman's, the big house that belonged to Uncle Will Waterman, and later Dr. George. We'd undress in their garage and head for Central Beach. We just loved it down there—the water and sand playing around. I think we probably brought sandwiches for lunch. But we had a nice morning there anyway, or afternoon.

Q: Do you remember coming to the Waterman's house, Barbara?

B: Yes.

J: It was a place that we not only enjoyed the beach, but we enjoyed a lot of our relatives—the Waterman clan, as I mentioned.

Q: How are they related to you?

J: Dr. George is my father's first cousin. Do you want me to go through the whole genealogy?

Q: What about Kate Waterman?

J: Kate is by marriage. Her husband, George, would be our second cousin. Dad and George were always close. George was in Dad's wedding party. We looked forward to seeing them again down here. And occasionally they visited us in New Rochelle. Grandma would come down, and Aunt Dot and Aunt Molly, and Aunt Ellen later on. Some of mother's relatives from Stonington would come over. Her sister, who lived in

St. Louis, and her children would come back for a vacation, and they would come down. We had a house full of relatives quite often. But it was fun. We got to know them a lot better. We got to know our cousins better.

Q: So, it was a summer place for you?

J: Right.

Q: Did you ever come for longer periods of time than just the summer?

J: No. We didn't come for the summer. Originally, we came for Daddy's two-week vacation, and we stayed up in Westerly. Later on, in 1934 Dad rented a cottage down by Dr. Ruisi, which was maybe three quarters of a mile east of the Blue Shutters. It was a cottage. It was wonderful, because we could run in and out in our bathing suits.

Q: Was it right on the water?

J: The road ran in front of it, then a dune, and then the water was there. We'd get up in the morning, put our bathing suits on, over the dune and into the water before breakfast whenever we had a chance. Then we'd back home and put on a dry bathing suit, back in the water maybe later on two or three times a day.

Q: That explains why all of you like the water so much.

J: I guess so. I was sort of born and bread in it almost. But Dad tells about having slept on the beach when he was a young man. I'm not sure how old. Fellows used to come down and they pitched a tent and spent the night on the beach. We come by it naturally. Except for Mother. Mother never learned how to swim.

Q: I have vague memories of her.

J: Yes. She would put her suit on, and go in and dip. A lot of the ladies did that. But she never learned to swim. I always thought it was so strange, because being brought up in Stonington, and water surrounding it. But there was no beach there. Unless you went out in a boat and got pushed over or went off the dock, they didn't learn how to swim.

Q: Barb, you tried to get down to the beach just as often as you could, right?

B: Yes.

Q: You got to swim.

B: Yes.

Q: I have memories of somebody telling me about your dad swimming with a bunch of men.

J: Dave Wait.

Q: They used to go in during the fall or winter.

J: Dave Wait lived on the corner. Daddy was an old salt. Dave would come by early in the morning—probably 6:30 or 7:00—and whistle. Dad would come out in his suit, and the two would go down and have their morning swim. I can't remember when the latest date was that they swam, but it was fairly late in the fall.

Q: Barbara, can you tell me a little bit about coming down here with your children?

B: Mom and Dad bought Old Salt, and it was in 1946. We would come for our vacations. We loved it.

Q: You and your children, right?

B: Yes. We had fun times. They loved it. We were allowed to bring kids for vacations. My sister brought her family. I brought my family.

[audio stops and restarts]

B: I had a friend on the beach for a week or two weeks or something like that.

Q: Did your folks rent that house?

B: Yes. Not for the summer. Just for August.

Q: Before they bought Old Salt?

B: Yes.

Q: Is that when you used to come with your friends?

B: Right.

Q: When did you have this cottage?

J: We didn't have this cottage. In 1937, Grandma and Grandpa—did they buy this?

B: I thought it was in '46.

J: Okay. In '46. This cottage wasn't until 1958. My first husband and I bought this cottage, and it was called Happy House. I've got pictures of them there.

Q: Did you name it Happy House, or was it already named?

B: I think it was already named Happy House. It was owned by Daisy Forrest. It was one of the Craypo houses.

Q: What does that mean?

B: It was built by one of the Craypo sisters. The Craypo sisters had a whole litany of Craypo houses.

Q: I bet you have information about that.

B: It's information on the Craypo house scenario. I have a whole series of them. I have a set, and they have a set. They're all tied up in the Craypo history.

J: Who were the Taylors?

B: The Taylors were the ones that told us all about the Craypo houses.

J: I thought Mr. Taylor built this.

B: He did.

Q: For one of the sisters?

B: Yes. He built them. There is a lot of that in Joanne's histories.

[audio stops and restarts]

B: [inaudible 15:27] with Peggy Wingate and—

J: Janet Congdon?

B: Right.

J: And Joanne.

B: Joanne. Right.

J: When we came to Four Castle, we used to pal around with them.

B: And this will tie up with the Mace's house. Ginny Mace was over today. She wants to tell about Bob's part in that.

Q: Did you know the Mace's?

B: Yes. This all ties in together. It's going to be hard to get Mr. Mace. It all ties in together.

Q: Did you know Mrs. Mace?

B: When I say Mrs. Mace, I'm referring to Bob Mace's wife. We knew Bob Mace. Bob Mace was one of the kids.

Q: So, he's an old-timer down here?

B: Yes. Bob Mace and Bud Mace and Joanne Crowler and Peggy Wingate Mace. We were all friends down here.

Q: Janet, when you came down, did you stay with your folks most of the time?

J: We stayed with the folks for a week. That was before we had children.

Q: Tell us the names of your children.

J: My oldest is Barbara Grace. Her last name is Cook. Then Buck and Carl Cook. And Helen Cook. And finally, Randall Cook. We have the four of them.

Q: Do you want to give us the names of your children, Barbara?

B: Barbara. Cathy is the oldest. Then Matt. Matt's father's name was Paul, and it was too confusing to have two Pauls.

Q: So, his real first name is Paul?

B: Yes. John is the youngest.

Q: Were you all here together at the same time?

B: Yes. We had a good time. Mostly around Little Beach. Nun's Beach—the little beach. This is where we usually stayed.

J: When we visited the folks, we went to Central Beach. When you bought this house, then we would come to Mother and Dad's, and you and your children would be here. Then we'd get together at either beach. Before we had children, we'd come down—I'm thinking of the rubber bathing suit incident.

Q: Tell us.

J: We were staying at the Four Castle. It was you and I, Mother and Dad and John and Albert. We'd go down to Little Beach to swim. We'd go down first thing in the morning with our books, our nail polish, maybe a snack, our writing paper and practically lived down there. We'd run home when we had to make a necessary trip. Maybe run home and get a sandwich and back. We literally spent the day there. That was great. We loved

that. One year, Daddy bought us both bathing suits, and they were rubber—two-piece rubber. And I mean rubber. We each had one. It was kind of nice in the water, but then when you got out, it was pretty hot. You'd have to keep going back in again. We didn't mind that. So, one day I came out, and all of a sudden, I heard some shrieking in the water, and it was Barbie. Her bathing suit had kind of given away. It split. I had to run down with a towel and wrap it around her quickly. We were all laughing. It was funny. That did away with the rubber bathing suits. No more. We went back to those awful wet things that itched and were heavy. When I look at the beautiful suits today—the two-pieces and the bikinis, I think that would have been so good then.

[audio stops and restarts]

B: The Miller kids next door.

Q: Were your children friends with the Murray's children?

B: Yes. The Si kids next door. And Janet's kids mingled with different kids in some cases than we did, because she rented Lowell cottage some of the years that I wasn't here, but she was here. How did that go, Janet?

J: Dad rented the Four Castle for us one year, maybe two. I'm not sure. My children were probably in their early teens. They were friendly with the Henry boys. They used to come over. And your sister. And the Miller boy. They were in and out of the house. It was wonderful. I loved it. I can hear certain songs that bring back the memories. The radio was going. There was no TV or anything like that. So, they'd be in and out of the house looking for something to eat, or maybe for a dry towel. It was a very gay, carefree summer with no problems. We'd get together with the folks sometimes for dinner, or maybe just for cocktails, and I'd come back and feed the kids. They loved it. They always loved it here.

Q: Do you remember us wandering around trying to find a place to go at night?

J: There weren't many options, were there? At that time, I don't think any of mine were driving. I wasn't about to take off and drive them anyplace. There was no miniature golf. Maybe once in a while a movie in Westerly. We would go to Watch Hill. Ice cream. We'd walk up to Mrs. Craig's at the Blue Shutters. When we first came, the bowling alley was running. You had to set up your own pins most of the time. Mother Brimley had a place up there—a little store.

Q: I don't remember Mother Brimley.

J: Maybe it was when we were younger. I can remember the bowling alley. We used to go up there for ice cream. We took our kids up there too, didn't we? It seems to me we did. And Cokes. We always had fun up there. This was when our kids were growing up. Johnnie Conrad speaks about this too, about going up and having Cokes and stuff to eat up there.

Q: At the bowling alley?

J: At the bowling alley.

Q: That was sort of a meeting place.

J: Yes. Ice cream, and walk home with the boys. This was in between. We weren't married yet, were we?

B: No. This was when we were kids.

J: Right. And no cars.

Q: No cars at all?

J: No cars.

Q: How did you get here from New Rochelle?

B: We drove up with David and his Oldsmobile. Or we came up on the train sometimes.

J: When we first came up to the beach at Reece's cottage, we felt very grown up. That was in 1934. Barbie and I took the bus up. We left at noon, made two stops and arrived in Westerly at 5:00. The next day, August 2nd, we bought some food. Mr. Thorp picked us up at 10:00 and took us to Reece's cottage at Quonochontaug. We had sandwiches, soup and Grandma's cookies for lunch. We made up the beds. Supper was hamburgers, carrots, potatoes and sweet buns. The bakery man, the ice cream man and the mild man came. There was a big windstorm that night. The next day our Aunt Betty came with her family. Mother and Dad and the boys arrived about 6:30 that day. That day, the president of Germany died.

Q: Was this in '34?

J: Yes. This was August 2nd, 1934. Hitler proclaimed himself president. We used to like Chateau de Bourgogne cheese. We ate that a lot. Aunt Betty and the kids stayed with us, and they squabbled. They were awful. We were glad when they left. Aunt Em, another of Daddy's sisters, was going to have a baby. They were twins. I was about fifteen. Their father went to school with Dad. They were the Clarks. We used to go to Stonington to the Lighthouse for tea. Do you remember that? They served tea on the lawn. Mother had a friend, Joanna Stanton, who catered the food part. Every summer, at least once, and probably more often, we would go with our visiting friends and sit on the lawn and have a whole plateful of little sandwiches, like lobster and crab. And then another whole plate of cookies and brownies and sweetened iced tea with sugar syrup. We would look out at the view. That was our supper. We just gorged ourselves there. I don't think they liked to see us come too often.

Q: How young were you then?

B: In 1934 I was seventeen. You were fifteen in '34.

Q: So, you're two years apart?

B: Yes.

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J: In Stonington, I think it was August 14th that they used to celebrate the Battle of Stonington when the British came and tried to blockade the town, and the town called their people, they got together and went down and they literally pushed the ship away. They couldn't land. This parade was a big celebration. One year we were there at that time. We went over. I had my friend Betty with me. We went to the light house, and we climbed to the light. We picked up a few sailors. This was in 1934. We picked them up. They were sort of running around town. They were young guys. We didn't let them hold our hands, because we were afraid my father might see it and get very upset. But they were very nice. One of them looked like Gene Raymond. We talked on the dock about the faults and virtues of the sailor's life. Remember that? Betty was not convinced. I don't know whether she was not convinced with the faults or the virtues. There names were Bill Erwin and Ray Skidmeyer and Bill Carter.

Q: Do you remember their names?

J: I wrote them down. When my father wanted to call any of us children at any time, he's whistle, and when we heard that whistle, we knew we had to go home. Well, we heard this whistle when we were walking around with these boys. We literally took off, and they probably wondered what happened. We never saw or heard from them again. It was interesting. It was fun. We used to listen to Little Jack Little's Orchestra and Glen Gray's Orchestra. It was great. The sound would come up on our radios. We enjoyed that. I was knitting an afghan. Did you do any knitting?

B: Probably.

J: We used to go skinny dipping occasionally.

Q: Here at Quonnie?

J: Oh, yes. We were at the Four Castle. Mother and Dad had company. We went down on the beach, and we took of our clothes and went in skinny dipping. When we came back, our clothes were missing. My father had come down and picked them up. We had to walk home—it wasn't very far—in the all-together. We thought that was a lot of fun. Jack Riley used to come over too.

Q: Mr. Riley that's here?

J: Yes. His grandmother owned Bayberry Lodge. He would come down and visit there. He was older than I was. He used to come around. The Morgans were good friends of ours. We lived next to each other in New Rochelle. Mr. and Mrs. Morgan would come up to visit and stay at the Quonnie Inn. The men would go out and play golf, and then they'd come back to the Four Castle and put their feet up on the railing, and have their Myer's Dark Rum—cocktails. The ladies would go out and go antiquing—a little shopping, or something like that.

Q: When did you meet Stan, Barb?

B: I met him in 1974.

Q: Did you meet him around here?

B: He was the neighbor of my sister-in-law.

J: His sister lived across the street from you in White Plains, right?

B: Yes.

J: And his mother used to come down and visit too. His mother had a place on the Cape, right?

B: Yes.

J: And she invited you up there, and things clicked. It was an interesting year. Bill and I were married in March, and they were married in November of '74.

Q: Barb, there is one thing I'd really like you to talk about, which is the start of your interest in the history of Quonnie, and what you did. Would you be willing to talk about that?

B: I just always loved Quonnie. We came here as a gang. We had a wonderful time. We sat on the beach. We played cards. We just had great fun, just as kids are playing on the rocks do today. That's what we did. We have got pictures of my kids, my cousin's kids down here having fun on the rocks.

Q: Was it your love of Quonnie that got you interested in trying to gather the historic information about Quonnie?

B: Right.

Q: Would you like to tell us some of the things that you did to get all of this information?

B: We were crabbing and clamming and musseling. Just fun on the beach. I used to come down and paint.

Q: You were a painter?

B: I painted the picture of Old Salt.

Q: Is that it right there?

B: Yes. I painted the one in the other room.

Q: I didn't know you painted.

B: I didn't paint that much.

Q: But you were good.

B: I used to like to paint seascapes. I painted the one in the other room. When I was in school, I was an art major. That's what I liked to do.

Q: And John is now an artist.

B: Yes.

Q: Looking at the picture of Old Salt that you painted, it doesn't look the same. What do you think about all the changes at Quonnie now?

B: I don't like them.

Q: You don't like the changes?

B: No.

Q: Do you think it has changed the people?

B: Yes.

Q: Is there anything that has stayed the same that you do like?

B: The water. I did sell a couple of watercolors. But I never thought I was good enough.

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J: They were wonderful. The group of regulars would get together, and you couldn't keep your feet still. It was such fun. And then afterwards we'd have a square dance. That was

always a lot of fun too. I remember all the callings. Mr. Hoxie, who sold corn, was the leader. He had mischief in his eyes.

Q: Did you write this in your diary?

J: This is all part of my diary. Yes.

Q: Was it intergenerational?

J: Yes. Everybody went. That was nice, too. And then the clam bakes at Dr. Waterman's. The men would all put that on. The boys would go down to the beach and bring big rocks up, and they built a fire in the morning. They got the rocks really hot, and then George had a barrel that was sunk into the ground. They put the rocks on the bottom of that. They collected seaweed and put that on top so that it had beautiful steam. Then the various levels of food were put in. I think the lobsters went in first. We had corn and we had clams. We tried white fish once.

Q: Was this at his house?

J: Yes. In his yard. It was so good.

Q: Did he do this every year?

J: Probably once a year. He may have done it a couple extra times for his family. We had a family gathering, and that was what we had to eat. It was good. We used to go up to Craig's for lunch occasionally. Do you remember Craig's?

Q: Yes.

J: That's up near Dunn's Corners. The Blue Moon Tea Room—the credit union is there. It used to be the Blue Moon Tea Room. Later on, it became Dunn's Corners Market. Then they started to go out of business. Everybody was very upset, because they good meat and produce. We used to do a lot of our shopping there. Then we heard that one of the guys—a mute man. I guess it was Tommy Tuckadiver, and moved it in where it is now. But that was great.

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Q: This is when you were young that you used to get in the kitchen and do this?

B: Yes.

Q: Where? Down at Old Salt?

B: Old Salt.

J: We did it at the Reece's and we did it at the Sand Castle too.

Q: Was that to keep busy on a rainy day?

B: Yes.

Q: Did you eat it all up?

B: Yes.

[audio stops and restarts]

J: ...with us when we were young people. Wait a minute; that was when we were older. She would come up and stay for the summer. The heat bothered her. And Dad would come up for long weekends and for his vacation. He must have retired about 1946. I don't remember the year he retired. But I remember parties there when he would start talking about retirement. Mother would get all upset, because she did not want to leave New Rochelle for good. She had a lot of good friends there, and church friends. They both did. But finally, it came to the point where they couldn't live in New Rochelle anymore. They sold the big house, and they rented an apartment there for a while. Daddy said, "We're going to go up to Quonochontaug." He had hip problems, so it was hard for him to go up and down stairs. Old Salt was not a winterized cottage. We had some heat in there. There was a floor heater between the dining room and the living room, but it really wasn't adequate for living there all year-round. He had sold the two lots behind to the people before Kata—it's the place that Kata had built. He sold those, because Barbie had her cottage down here, and John had gone to California. He was married and had gone to California. He wouldn't be coming back, except for trips. I had four children, so he said, "We're going to build." Mother got all upset, but I think she liked it once she got up here. Then he bought the lot over on Bay Street, the house where we live now. He had that built. He bought the lot and had the house built. I was instrumental in having him build it the way he did. I found the plans in one of the Hartford papers, and brought it down one time. He liked it. And so, he built it—not exactly. The front was just a little different. The sun parlor in the plan was off of the living room. He moved it off the dining room, which was a very good move, because it let a lot more light into the dining area. So, they built that. Then they moved up and lived there year-round.