

# QUONOCHONTAUG HISTORICAL SOCIETY

## Oral History

# MARILYN CRUMB DUHAINE

June 25, 2013

Interviewed by Anne Schaefer Doyle?

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Marilyn Crumb Duhaine

Q: Today is Tuesday, June the 25<sup>th</sup> in the year 2013. I am doing an interview with Marsie, or Marilyn Crumb Duhaine. Marsie lived in the midway section of Quonochontaug. She was born in 1923, I believe. She is just relating her memories of being at Quonnie. I was wondering if you could say what your full name is, Marsie. Do you remember when you were born?

A: No. Does anybody remember when they were born?

Q: Your full name is Marilyn—

A: Marilyn Duhaine. My maiden name was Crumb, C-R-U-M-B.

Q: The reason why I'm asking you that is because then now it's on the record. Somebody that's listening to this decades from now needs to know that kind of information. When were you born?

A: March 8<sup>th</sup>, 1923. Does that make sense? I'm 90 years old.

Q: It looks like you're doing quite well. You're walking around.

A: So far, I haven't fallen down, so they haven't put me on one of those walkers. They put everybody that ever had a fall on the walkers.

Q: Whatever you can remember is fine. If you can't remember, that's fine too. I was wondering how you got to know Quonnie. What part of your family was at Quonnie first? I think it was probably your parents.

A: No. My grandparents. And they were both drowned—swept away in the '38 hurricane. Their last name was Crumb, C-R-U-M-B. There are articles about it in there. There is a long story about that, if you want to hear it.

Q: Sure. Whatever you would like to share is fine.

A: That part I remember. I was fifteen years old at the time. I had gone back to Bristol, Connecticut, which was where I was brought up, to get to school.

Q: Yes. That's where you were in the winter, and you went to school.

A: Yes. That's where I lived in the winter. So, I wasn't at Quonochontaug, but there were several people still in cottages there. I understand from people who survived it that there was no warning whatsoever about it coming. And suddenly they saw this wall of water coming at them. My grandfather had a Packard car—a big, heavy Packard. So, they had gotten any neighbors in close cottages and put them in the Packard. One woman had a young baby.

Q: That was Mrs. Pendleton.

A: I don't know.

Q: I have already heard that story.

A: Oh, you have?

Q: But I want you to tell your part of it that you know. That was the woman—Marjorie.

A: I couldn't remember her name. But she had a little—I forget what other neighbors. But anyway, he put them in the car—the Packard—figuring they'd drive out before this wall of water they could see coming hit the beach. And then he remembered he had forgotten to get his grandfather's watch, I think it was, in the cottage. And he got out of the Packard. My grandmother got out of the Packard also to stop him and say, "Let's go. We've got to leave." And the wall of water hit at that point. They were both outside the car. And they found their bodies the other side of the pond. That wall of water just swept them. That was in 1938. My father was an only child. He didn't want to give up the property, but the only way they could find where the land was and survey it, because there was nothing left—it swept everything—was the well. My grandfather's well had a special lining he had had put in. When the surveyors, or whoever it was, found that well, they could go from that to set up the land.

Q: So, your father would keep the property? What did he decide to do with it?

A: There was me and my sister, who was two-and-a-half years or so younger. And we had a brother ten years younger. So, my father kept the land and got it surveyed. That's the order that things went.

Q: He must have built another place.

A: I think there's some pictures in there. That's kind of messed up in here. But anyway, he was a politician.

A: How did the house get there?

A: The new house?

A: The original one after the hurricane.

Q: Do you mean the one after the original?

A: That's not the original.

A: The one after the hurricane.

A: My father I guess had it built.

Q: Is that the same house that's standing now?

A: No.

Q: The house that you have now is they added a story to it.

A: Yes. My husband—when I was married to Ernest, he had that done. We had put a small shack.

Q: I think I remember that.

A: My husband was in the lumber business. He decided that we had to raise it up on poles so when the water came again, it wouldn't wash it away.

Q: Was he in the lumber business in Rhode Island, or were you back in Connecticut still?

A: Back in Connecticut.

Q: So, it was your husband that added that extra story to the house?

A: Yes. Ernest Dooley. He was my second husband. My first husband passed away. I get confused. Proper names are bad for me.

Q: Did you start going to Quonnie when you were really little?

A: Oh, yes. I could have been born there.

Q: Except it was March you were born in.

A: Yes.

Q: Me too. I was there all my life—70 years.

A: Were you West Beach, East Beach, Central Beach?

Q: My family started in East Beach, and then my grandmother bought a lot over on Central Beach when Mr. Thorp was selling. What do you remember when you were really little about what you did when you were at Quonnie?

A: I went in the water. The thing was, you had to get in that water by Memorial Day. And that was cold.

A: I know. I couldn't believe that.

Q: That was kind of like a family thing?

A: Yes. You've got to get wet by Memorial Day.

Q: So, everybody went in?

A: I don't know who everybody was, but I did. I never missed a Memorial Day of getting in the water. But I sure liked it a lot better in September in the water.

Q: Did you have large family gatherings down there?

A: Oh, yes. My grandparents—I probably said this already; if I did, stop me—always bought two houses.

Q: What was the other house?

A: He'd rent one.

Q: The one next to you now?

A: Yes. The picture is over here.

Q: We'll go through the pictures, but I want to get a general feel for everything first. So, you were down there staying with your family the whole summer. Is that right?

A: Pretty much, as I recall. Yes.

Q: Did you make a lot of friends down there? I think the Ecclestons were right near you.

A: Yes. They were right on the corner from us.

Q: Did you know Holly Schroder?

A: Yes. That name sounds very familiar. Yes. She was in the same block.

Q: And the Browns too. That might not have been their name at that point. I know a few of the people that lived around you. You had a sister, you said.

A: Yes.

Q: And a brother that was ten years younger.

A: Right.

Q: Were you allowed to go to the breach way at all?

A: Sure.

Q: The boardwalk—could you walk over there?

A: We were right at the beginning of the boardwalk. Well, practically the beginning.

Q: I've seen pictures of that.

A: There are a lot of them in there.

Q: Were you allowed to go all by yourself when you got to be a certain age?

A: Yes. Why wouldn't we go by ourselves?

Q: I've talked to my sister about this. Our parents were a little bit freerer, which was unusual, down at Quonnie. They would allow us to do things down there that they would never allow us to do in the winter.

A: No? Hmm. I don't remember.

Q: These days, I think parents are much more cautious. They don't let the kids just go to the breach way, or depending on where they live, don't take long walks on the beach by themselves until they get to be a certain age. Then it's okay. Did you swim right in front of your house?

A: No. There were rocks in the water. But there was a bathing beach just a little bit to the left. A short walk.

Q: Do things like Picnic Rock mean something to you?

A: Yes. That was just the other side of our bathing beach.

Q: What was the other rock?

A: Elephant Rock.

Q: Yes. I've heard about Elephant Rock. I think all the kids gave names to these rocks. This goes on generation after generation.

A: Yes.

Q: Sometimes they identify where they're going by the name of the rock.

A: Yes. And there was a little beach right almost in front of our cottage that was a sandy beach. That was called the Baby Beach, because it wasn't deep.

Q: That stone wall that they put as kind of a breakwater made it more protected.

A: That's on the breach way.

Q: So, the bathing beach wasn't on the other side of the breach way?

A: There was one. The Coast Guard house was over there.

Q: On the other side. Right.

A: On the other side.

Q: Did you ever go over to the Coast Guard house?

A: To that beach? Yes.

Q: Is that the beach that you liked to swim in the best?

A: Well, it was the biggest beach, but the one near Picnic Rock was the one that was closest and easiest to get to.

Q: How did you get over to the other beach? Do you remember?

A: Walked the breach way or swam. Or if you had a boat, you were lucky. You could just row across.

Q: I remember doing that, too, when I was young. We used to have to get on top of somebody's shoulders. We were walked across. I heard there was a rope or something that people could hold onto.

A: I don't recall. I don't know.

Q: So, you were able to walk across the breach way. Did you get to talk to the Coast Guard crew?

A: Yes. If they were out and about.

Q: Did you watch the drills that they had?

A: Some. Yes. They had a lot of boat drills.

Q: The young ladies of the community in Quonnie were very interested in going down and watching the boat drills because of the Coast Guard crew.

A: Because of the young men.

A: Smart ladies.

A: Yes. They weren't dummies.

Q: Were you ever down there when you were a teenager and then worked in one of the places?

A: No. I didn't work in any of the places.

Q: I want to see a picture of you when you were younger. What do you enjoy doing now, Marsie, as far as the activities?

A: I play solitaire there. I play bingo in the dining room for nickels and dimes. I have a lot of nickels and dimes.

Q: This is a little picture.

A: My eyes aren't that good. This is the Coast Guard practicing.

Q: Children playing in the breach way. Is it hard for you to see those pictures?

A: Yes. Those aren't important anyway. This is a cement block. Where is the beginning of the boardwalk, right here?

Q: This is one of the Ecclestons.

A: This is our cottage. And this is my grandfather's that he rented, I think. This is our cottage. I know that. Crumb cottage Quonochontaug about 1920 right there. And this is the small one next door that he always rented.

Q: And the Ecclestons were right next to you.

A: Yes.

Q: Did you have a name for the cottage?

A: No. Why?

Q: Some people name their cottages.

A: Quonnie house, I guess.

Q: I can see where this is part of the boardwalk.

A: The boardwalk starts right here.

Q: So, you were then first place—

A: Beyond the boardwalk.

Q: Did it have an outhouse?

A: Yes. It did. I had forgotten that. It definitely had an outhouse.

Q: So, you could just get up in the morning and run right out to that beach.

A: Yes. I never ran very much.

Q: Well, you didn't have very far to run right there.

A: That's the boardwalk. This is what we called the Baby Beach. And our cottage is right off the boardwalk.



Q: Did you have Money Rock right in front of your house? Do you remember Money Rock?

A: Yes. It was right directly in front of the house.

Q: It's still there.

A: I know.

Q: Do you know about Money Rock?

A: I don't know which rock you're talking about.

Q: It has become very famous, because part of it is in the Smithsonian Institute. From the glaciers, it was dumped there. If you look at it, only part of it is left, because people were taking pieces. It's like little discs.

A: It's like round coins.

A: Which rock is it?

A: It's right in front with kind of a flat top, because it's been cut away so much.

A: I'll have to look for it. Is it on the beach or out in the water?

A: It's not the beach. Right at the edge of the water. It has round like coins—circles on it.

Q: If you walk around, there are some people that still have these big chunks. Mrs. Dorsey—do you know Finlayson?

A: The name sounds familiar.

Q: They had the cottage that used to be on the old boardwalk around the corner from you. If you walk up their driveway now, there's this big chunk of Money Rock. Paula, your grandmother's place was around the corner and over in this section. This is the breach way, and this what they called the Summit House here. The boardwalk started about right here, but it didn't go the whole way down. And all those little rooming houses that used to be along the way—

A: Well, all along the breach way, those were hotels.

Q: Hotels. Right. I noticed when I was in your cottage when my sister was renting it, I wrote a book about the history of Quonnie, and the book is in your house. It's got a spiral binding. You might want to look at it.

A: That's right at the curve on the boardwalk.

Q: Do you know Bob Gager?

A: Yes. I know him well. Is he still alive?

Q: He is. He's in his 90s.

A: I know Bob Gager too.

A: He used to be my boyfriend.

A: I get all the juicy stories now.

Q: I still bump into him once in a while at the post office.

A: I think he was about four years older than I was. I know he was older.

Q: He is taking me all around here to tell me, "This is where this hotel was." He loves Quonnie.

A: Does he still live up over a store?

Q: He does. A hardware store.

A: Yes. I remember he lived above a store over at the beach. It's not at Quonnie—not at the breach way end.

Q: No. Not anymore. I think he lived with his wife over a little house at the breach way area, but now he's alone, and he lives near the post office towards South Kingstown. Do you remember going into any of these hotels and walking along the boardwalk and looking in?

A: Not really. I had no reason to go into any of them. You've got two pictures there. That's the breach way there.

Q: Do you remember the King cottage?

A: That was at the curve of the breach way.

Q: This one.

A: Yes.

Q: Mr. King lived across the street from me when I was growing up at Quonnie. He had moved at that time. I think it was his grandmother that first came to Quonnie. I think they took in borders. I think he was a big fisherman, even though he was older. We used to go crabbing and give him crabs.

A: We were all fishing people in our time. That's the Coast Guard station.

Q: It looks like after the storm.

A: It might tell on it if you—I don't know whether these are written on the back or not.

Q: That's definitely after the storm. Was your home, after the '38 hurricane, just completely destroyed?

A: Yes. The only way they could find a lot was my grandfather had a special lining in the well.

Q: Did they ever find pieces of your house in the pond or anything?

A: No. They found pieces of my grandparents.

Q: This is on the breach way here. Do you know Monger cottage?

A: No. That sure sounds familiar.

Q: The Hathaway house.

A: Yes.

Q: That's still there.

A: Is it?

Q: Yes. And that's at the end of your road.

A: What do you mean the end? I've been down there in the last couple of days.

Q: Do you know where the Albert house is near the Schroeder's—the white box—the little, tiny house. It's a cottage now, but it used to be part of the Charlestown Air Base. They brought it over. Take a walk—don't go out to West Beach Road, but just keep going straight and you'll see this little white box. This is right near that.

A: The Hughes' house?

Q: The Hughes. I think that's right.

A: Whose house?

A: Pat Hughes. Remember they live in the little house, and they rent out the big one on the beach? Their son was Peter, the beach guard, and David.

A: I remember now. Yes.

A: I think that might be the house next to them.

Q: This was one of the only ones that was kept after the storm.

A: That's my husband.

Q: Is he on a ship or something? Yes, it is. This is a ship.

A: No. I guess it isn't.

A: Old Rock at Quonnie.

Q: Part of it looks like a bow.

A: It looks like it's the beginning of the breach way. Whatever, whatever. Nobody we know.

Q: Now when we have a storm, what happens sometimes is these old wrecks are being uncovered. They're buried in the sand, and so it's a big thing to go down and see that.

A: Of my four daughters, her mom is the youngest. She's been such a big help. But her sisters call her the pit bull, because she tries to run everything. And she does a good job, doesn't she?

A: She does. She makes sure everything gets done.

A: That's my grandmother and my grandfather—the ones that were drowned in the '38 hurricane. And this is me. Those are Eve and—

A: You have it written on the back.

A: It's Eve and Bing.

A: You were two in this picture.

A: And this is our cottage—these two. This one and this one.

Q: That answers a question that I had.

A: These two?

Q: Yes. That little one that you talked about that he rented, and then the one that you stayed in. It was right next to it. I've seen a couple of pictures with that, and I had no idea that that was your family's. That's interesting.

A: Are these the Ecclestons, like Ray and Jessie?

Q: Ray and Jessie—

A: No.

Q: Well, Ray and Jessie, they ended up—

A: They're in the back.

Q: ...they're in the back, because after the '38 hurricane, I guess they took the garage or some part of it and made it into the cottage that is on the other side of where you are.

A: I know Ray and Jessie. But these were originally theirs, you're saying?

Q: The family. Right. When your grandfather built this, did he also come from Connecticut?

A: He did the same thing in Florida and in Connecticut. He lived in one house and bought another one to rent to pay the bills for the house he lived in.

Q: Did you ever go to Florida to be in their houses down there?

A: Yes. I went to Florida. I don't know the reason. One of my husbands—

A: You and Ernie spent the winters in Florida.

A: Yes. Thank you.

Q: This looks like it's after the storm too. Did you go down there? That must have been a difficult thing to think about going down when you lost your grandparents.

A: I was fifteen years old.

Q: Did you see the destruction?

A: After a while. I didn't go down right away. My father did. He was their only child. But he was a politician—the mayor of the town, so he could handle things pretty well.

Q: He was the mayor of the town in Connecticut?

A: Yes. Which town was it? Was it Bristol? Bristol, Connecticut.

Q: Were you there during Hurricane Carol in '54?

A: No. I don't think so. I guess there was warning on that one. This is the little shack we bought and put on the lot when we got it surveyed.

Q: Was it built new, or did you bring it from another—

A: We brought it from a housing project.

Q: I wonder if it came from the Army base, because everybody was doing that.

A: Wherever.

Q: This is '58. I do remember. It's got the date, November '58. So, you did not actually see a lot of the destruction? It took you a while to go back down there?

A: I guess so. Yes. That's our boat that we used to fish out of. My grandfather and my first husband.

Q: Coming into the breach way. Did you go fishing as well?

A: Oh, yes. I surf cast off the rocks. Most of us did.

Q: I think Jessie Eccleston talked about that. She was quite a fisherwoman.

A: Yes, she did. She fished a lot.

Q: There was a fish market down on the breach way.

A: Yes.

Q: Is it her family, the Ecclestons, that ran that, or not?

A: I don't think so. I can't remember who ran it.

Q: Some people that fished would sell their fish to them.

A: I don't know.

Q: Did you like to eat a lot of fish?

A: Lobster. Scallops. Yes. I ate a lot of fish, because we caught so much. It's a cheap meal.

Q: What about clamming? Did you go clamming then?

A: Oh, yes. We used to clam up in the pond.

Q: The quahogs or the steamers? Some were soft shelled.

A: Yes. I know what you're talking about. I think we did mostly quahogs, because we dug. We used to catch a lot of striped bass right off the rocks. Here's the cottage when Ernie had it. He added onto it and we moved—

Q: When you say moved—

A: Well, they moved it off into the next lot, which we owned, and then they put the poles under it that raised it up. You can't see them here.

A: '87.

A: '87.

A: It's on the back of it.

Q: But that's what it looks like now.

A: Yes.

Q: Were you there when they put the new breach way in—the one that's straight now instead of curving around?

A: I must have been. Yes.

Q: I think it was about 1960. Somebody took a plane ride and took an aerial. This is the new breach way. Your place would have been around here.

A: I don't know.

Q: Paula, this is a great picture.

A: That's my brother and my husband. He's got a great big striped bass.

Q: They used to have the tuna fishing derbies over in Galilee a long time ago. Once you were in Quonnie, you didn't get out of Quonnie too much.

A: Not much.

Q: That's what it was like for me too. This is the breach way the way it is now.

A: Yes.

Q: You can see where the old breach swung around here. Part of that is the little pond area, and then in here, and into the pond this way.

A: Yes.

Q: We can take our kayaks now and go in this way and come around so we can get in this way. If you get out here, it's privately owned, but usually they let us in just to look. Part of the lifesaving station—the wall tucked right in there. This is where the lifesaving station was.

A: Why would they want to keep you out?

Q: Because it's private. It's their place.

A: The Coast Guard?

Q: No. It's not the Coast Guard anymore. It's a fishermen's association. Now they've cordoned off a lot of the Weekapaug side—I call this the Weekapaug side—because of the piping plover. They're trying to bring those birds back. They're endangered, so they have to cordon off that.

A: There is a portion right now that's roped off here.

Q: I haven't been this far lately, but we were out kayaking the other day and we could see in the distance the lines that they used to rope it off. We could see the line in the beach down further. Did you cook the fish?

A: Yes.

Q: Did you have to skin it?

A: I never cleaned it. I never cleaned it. That's one thing I refused to do with clean fish, so I never learned. I was smart, because I would have got stuck cleaning all the fish.

Q: Where did you keep your boat that you went fishing on?



A: On the breach way. There was a dock there. One of the hotels. I suppose they rented space. I don't know.

A: You used to cook those clam fritters. The best clam fritters I've ever had.

Q: Did you get the clams first, or did you buy them?

A: We used to get clams. We bought them when we were there.

Q: And you deep fried them? Is that what you did?

A: Yes.

Q: Did you make clam chowder?

A: Not so much.

A: Every once in a while.

A: Yes. You all wanted the fritters. You liked them better than the chowder.

Q: Mr. and Mrs. Hugh Banes leased Crumb cottage for years. Lyndall cottage on the same lot. Was that the little cottage that your grandparents had?

A: Yes. That they rented.

Q: Here is a picture of your house with the second story going up.

A: Yes. June 1987.

Q: How do you feel that your family is still enjoying the cottage?

A: I'm glad they are, but I'm sorry it's costing them so much money. Sorry I can't be more help to you.

Q: No. You've been a big help. This has been fun. I've enjoyed it, and I'm so glad that Paula could be here too to hear it. Is there anything else that you can think of that you might have done at Quonnie that we haven't talked about?

A: Did you ever go crabbing, Grandma?

A: Yes. We caught the crabs to use as bait for the fishing—for the surf casting. The crabs lived in the rocks right out in front of the cottage.

Q: What did you use to get the crabs?

A: Muscles.

Q: You crushed them and put a string around it?

A: Yes.

Q: They don't do that. Do you know what they use nowadays? Pieces of hotdogs.

A: And just tie them onto a string?

Q: Yes. But I've taught my grandsons the real way of getting a crab.

A: That used to be fun to see them peeking out of the rocks.

Q: Did you read books when you were there in the summer as you grew older? Did you spend a lot of time reading?

A: Quite a bit. I ended up being a school librarian, because I wanted to be home when my kids got out of school.

Q: So, you worked as a librarian in a school system?

A: Yes.

Q: Was that a school in Connecticut?

A: Yes. Bristol, Connecticut. It's up in the middle of the state.

Q: So, if you wanted to be a librarian, it meant that you must have loved to have been reading.

A: I did love to read. Yes.

Q: You have a lot of books in your house, I noticed.

A: Yes. Grandma is a fast reader. You were always a fast reader.

A: Was I?

A: Yes. Not anymore.

A: You still read.

A: I had my eyes tested. They're not working like they used to before I was 90.

A: They're working good.

A: Whatever.

Q: Thank you.

A: I'm sure I haven't been much help to you.

Q: You have. You've been a very big help. I have been very interested in what you've had to say.

A: Maybe you can talk people into spelling Quonnie the way it's supposed to be spelled: Q-U-O-N-Y.

A: You tell them.

A: It doesn't do any good.

Q: Did you know that the name Quonochontaug has changed its spelling through the years?

A: It has?

Q: Yes, it has.

A: Q-U-O-N-O-C-H-O-N-T-A-U-G, Quonochontaug.

Q: Right. But it wasn't too long ago when they didn't put the C-H in it; they just put the C-O-N.

A: C-H-O-N.

Q: Instead of that, they would put C-O. I have studied some maps, and depending on when the map was done, they had different spellings. And then way back when, when the Native Americans were here, the spelling—of course they didn't write.

A: I was going to say, they didn't go to school.

Q: No. They didn't. But the settlers would come and they would listen to what they said, and then tried to put it into English in their writing. There have been many, many ways that Quonochontaug has been spelled.

A: Grandma, do you have any other questions? You had the spelling. Is there anything else you wanted to ask?

A: I don't think so. Are you writing a book?

Q: I wrote a book.

A: You did?

Q: I did.

A: I think I have it.

Q: Yes, you do. You have it. I might write another book. What I would like to do next is write little family stories. I think that would be interesting—how families spent their summers and so forth at Quonnie. But that's not until a little bit later in my life. Is there anything else you want to ask me?

A: I asked her about the Quonnie, didn't I?

A: Yes.

A: That was the big thing. All the spellings of Quonnie.

Q: You're not the only one that has mentioned that. There are a lot of people that said, "This is the way I spell Quonnie." A lot of people spell it Q-U-O-N-N-Y—two Ns with a Y. Now we spell it Q-U-O-N-N-I-E.

A: I don't know who we is, but it's not the way it should be spelled. Take it from a 90-year-old.

Q: All right. We've got that down.

A: As if anybody cared.

Q: It is interesting. Before I shut this off, there was a time when the post office at Quonochontaug wanted to change the name to Aiden, and it caused such a feud between people. It was somebody in politics that knew somebody named Aiden, and he wanted to name the post office after him. Some of the postcards that we have collected are stamped Aiden instead of Quonochontaug.

A: For heaven's sakes.

Q: Thanks, Marsie.