

QUONOCHONTAUG HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Oral History

JEAN MASE

November 2, 2000

Interviewed by Anne Doyle

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Q: This is Thursday, November 2nd in the year 2000. This morning I am talking with Jean Mase of 5 Oceanview Avenue in Central Beach, Quonochontaug. She will relate memories of her time here at Quonnie, as well as her husband's. Say your full name and when you were born.

A: My name is Jean—[skin in audio]—his mother's parents came here many, many years ago. That was when they had to come in by horse and buggy.

Q: From New Jersey?

A: From New Jersey. They would come up into Westerly somehow. Maybe they came by train, and then by horse and buggy into Quonnie. They used to rent cottages. Of course, that was the days when the breachway was the busy place where there were many hotels and houses. They not only rented houses for their vacations, but they also stayed down in some of the hotels. Then as the generations proceeded, his parents brought my husband and his brother here. They came as babies, and they've been coming ever since.

Q: Did they build a house? Did they have their own house?

A: They didn't build until they built this house in Central Beach. Everything else they rented.

Q: So, they rented over on West Beach?

A: They stayed mostly in the hotels down there. There were a number of them: The Eldredge House and a number of others. I would have to refresh my memory.

Q: Did you know his grandparents that came down here?

A: After I met Bob, yes. I knew his grandparents.

Q: What about that little house that's in back of the inn? Was that in the Mace's family?

A: Are you talking directly behind—

Q: That little road that goes in back of the inn and the Ashaway group.

A: When you go in that driveway, which we all own parts of, to the left, as you come in, is where the nuns used to have their little religious afternoon programs down there.

Q: Outside?

A: In these little buildings that looked like bathhouses. That's when the nuns all wore their habits, and they all had their blue dressmaker bathing suits, their white bathing caps and their white rubber slippers to go into the water.

Q: What year was this?

A: I came here in '47, so it was then and for a number of years after that.

Q: It doesn't seem that long ago.

A: No, it doesn't to me, but it is.

Q: And they were renting a house there too at that time?

A: I'm not sure what year the inn was sold to the nuns. It was a number of years after I first came here, because the Lewises, who were running the inn, still owned it at that time when I came. And then they sold it, and they built the house down on West Beach Road opposite the driveway that comes in toward the inn.

Q: So, that was at least in the '40s.

A: It had to be in the '50s sometime.

Q: So, that was their first house that they had in his family?

A: I'm talking about the people who owned the inn. The people who sold it to the nuns were the Lewises. They sold the inn at the same time as the house down at the end of the driveway.

Q: Is that still standing?

A: Yes. I think it's recently been sold again to somebody else. I can show you who all lives where—where they live, and what houses that survived the storms.

Q: Did you meet Bob in '47? Is that when you started coming? When were you married?

A: We married in '48. The reason I came here was my aunt and a friend of hers—they were all from New Jersey.

Q: I don't know anything about them.

A: They lived in a house behind us. The next one down. Through them, I happened to come up here for a vacation. They thought I was a hard-working young woman where it would be nice to come up for a little weekend vacation, so I came up and stayed at the old Seabreeze Inn. At that time, the Lampurdys were living in—I forget the name. Well, it's where the [inaudible 07:04] are now. I'll think of the name later. Bob's folks were living next door at [inaudible 07:13]. That's where the Lampurdys were, and the Maces were in [inaudible 07:19]. And sometime during the weekend, there was a little cocktail party, so I was invited along. Somehow, they persuaded Bob to take me out to dinner, and that was the beginning of it. We lived only fifteen miles apart in New Jersey. His mother invited me back the next weekend, and the next weekend and the next weekend. A year later, we were married.

Q: How many brothers does Bob have?

A: One brother.

Q: What was his name?

A: Frederick was his name, but we called him Bud. He was a dentist, as was Bob's father. He lived in Spencer, Massachusetts where he married a dentist's daughter. He met his wife at Quonnie too.

Q: And this was a Geff. What was her first name?

A: Sarah.

Q: Sarah Geff?

A: Yes. They met here at Quonnie when they were fourteen, or something like that.

Q: Did Bob's parents own [inaudible 08:46]?

A: Yes.

Q: And they built it?

A: No. They didn't build it. That was probably in the '20s. Prior to that, they had rented other places. I have a deed someplace, but they probably came here in '47. I have some letters that Mr. Thorp wrote when he was taking care of it for them. I'd have to look that up. They were not in this house during the '38 Hurricane. It was after the '38 Hurricane.

Q: When did they make the move to where we are now?

A: When Dad retired, which was in 1960. They built this house and sold [inaudible 09:58]. Then they lived here—let's see, Bob's mother died in '80, and his father died sometime in '70. We had hoped that his mother would still be alive when we were ready to retire, but we just missed that. She had looked forward to that. We always knew we were going to retire here. Bob's brother did not want this house, and we did. It was very nice. There was no problem. So, it was left to the two boys, and we bought them out, and here we are now.

Q: And you've been here since?

A: I guess it was early '81.

Q: And that's when Bob retired?

A: Yes.

Q: Is there something in particular that you would like to tell me about?

A: I want to show you some old clippings that I've got here, that I think you will find very interesting. I don't care to keep them anymore.

Q: You don't want these anymore?

A: No. I'm going to give them to you. There are all kinds of old things from way-way back. This is one of Oliver's brothers back in '67.

Q: Oliver Wilber?

A: Yes.

Q: I didn't know him.

A: He was an accountant. He was an accountant for the district. You'll be interested in some of the—let me see if I can find one quickly. Look at this.

Q: That's so funny. That puts stuff in perspective, doesn't it? That's interesting.

A: You can have this.

Q: Talking about your initial experiences here, it was Central Beach that you came to?

A: No. Bob's grandparents built the little cottage over there, which when they died, they left it to Bob's mother, which we bought from Bob's mother in 1957. We were West

Beachers up until 1981. We still have the cottage. That was where we would come for our vacations.

Q: Did you save these, or did Bob save these?

A: I saved them. I collected them somehow.

Q: You're a historian. There is a lot about Mr. Thorp here. You have memories of the West Beach area and the inn. Did you go into the inn before it was sold to the nuns?

A: [no verbal response]

Q: Were there any activities going on there that you were involved with?

A: No.

Q: I thought they had dances and things like that.

A: The only social thing that I ever went to was down at Manny's, the [inaudible 14:33] house down there. They would have dances on weekends and lots of hooting and hollering. And then of course the bowling alley was a big deal then at the time.

Q: Did you go to the bowling alley?

A: Yes.

Q: You were down here when I was five years old. I remember going down to the bowling alley too. Is there any particular article here—

A: [overlapping conversation]

Q: Should I just take them back?

A: Take the whole thing.

Q: Thank you very much. We're going to talk about some of the families that the Maces were associated with at Quonnie.

A: The ones I would hear about were the ones that Mother would play bridge with, or something like that. That's the Dall girls, Florence, and Agnes.

Q: Did they actually play bridge with them?

A: Florence played, and Agnes would watch. I don't think Agnes every played, but they would both be there. I guess Florence was a good bridge player.

Q: Did they go over to the—

A: They went to different houses. It would be Lampurdys or it would be Maces or it would be at the Dalls or someplace else.

Q: Did you ever meet the Dall sisters?

A: Yes. I can't say I knew them well. I met them, and that was about it.

Q: You don't have any memories about what they were like?

A: No.

Q: They seem to be very mysterious people in Quonnie. People have mentioned them, but they really don't know that much about them.

A: There were people who knew them well. I guess Florence was—I think they were both brilliant ladies. Florence was a designer. Somebody else could tell you better about them. It would be nice if you could talk to Bob's sister-in-law, Sally Mace, because she goes way back to her childhood here, and would probably know more about some of those people than I, as a latecomer, would know.

Q: Where does she live?

A: She lives in Spencer, Massachusetts. She still owns the house over here. She doesn't come down very much, but maybe sometime you could snag her when she's here.

Q: And you mentioned also the Lampurdys. Do you have many memories of that family at all?

A: Louise and Frank Lampurdy lived in Montclair, and with them lived Lonnie Graywatts, who had been a life-long friend. When I came up here, Lonnie was here. Lonnie's mother was here, and her niece was also here. Louise and I knew them, because the Maces and the New Jersey connection. I didn't have too many connections with anybody else in Central Beach until we actually moved here. All I would hear about would be the cocktail parties, their long dresses and—

Q: The long dresses?

A: Oh, yes. The ladies would all wear their long dresses. It seemed like they were meeting the same people every weekend.

Q: That's what happened in Newport.

A: Very low scale. Thank goodness they don't do the long-dress thing anymore. They would get gussied up and go to each other's houses.

Q: Did you bring some long dresses down at the time too?

A: I was not in on that. In fact, I think that had faded by the time I came along.

Q: When you first came down here, what other things were going on? Did the men go out fishing?

A: Bob's father was a great fisherman, and loved to fish. We remember one time we came to our cottage for the weekend loaded up to put stuff away, and we opened the refrigerator and it was full of striped bass.

Q: So, he was using your—

A: Yes. There was no way he could do that anymore. That was quite a sight. He was a good fisherman. Kent Glassman—he taught him how to fish.

Q: So, the Glassmans—

A: They've been here a long time.

Q: I didn't know that.

A: They used to rent the one that's Pete's now on the front. Betsey's folks', the Coes, owned that. I get mixed up. But there was a family connection with that house.

Q: The Phillips maybe.

A: The Phillips bought it afterwards.

Q: I think it was White before that.

A: The [inaudible 20:57]. Betsey Glassman would know the history of that. They've come here for a long time. They rented—I don't know if they've always had access to that house before they bought this house here. The Glassmans would have to tell you for sure about that.

Q: They were friends from the beach; not from back in New Jersey?

A: No. They're from Scotia, New York.

Q: Did Bob like to fish too?

A: He liked to fish. He was not as fanatic as his father, but he did fish a lot. That was in the days when you used to be able to get black fish very easily. He'd go out in front of the cottage and throw in a line, and he'd get a black fish.

Q: Did you fish too?

A: Very little. I went for the bait. I would go and get the crabs for the bait.

Q: Would you actually go—

A: You would tie a mussel on a string, and then get the little crabs. The green crabs were bait. I preferred doing that and let the guys do the fishing.

Q: We used to get the crabs from Mr. King. So, once you were down here using the little house over there, who did you meet?

A: We were kind of a little clique over there, because Bob's brother and his family and our family and the Ecriggs were good friends of ours.

Q: Who were the Ecriggs?

A: The Bennett House that was the inn over there.

Q: I've seen pictures of it, but I don't really know that much about it.

A: That was the early part of the Ecrigg family. That's how they ended up with that land and that house. They were good friends of ours. We saw a lot of them. When Matt was down here, we had a whole gang that used to get together.

Q: Is that the house that's being built now?

A: Yes.

Q: Is that the same family that's building it?

A: This is Atwoods that are building here.

Q: But that little red house—

A: The little red house that was.

Q: It has gone through a tremendous change, hasn't it?

A: I can't believe what they're doing. At first, we thought, "It's going to be this size," and then all of a sudden it's this size.

Q: We can go up to our little walk at our house, and we looked down one day and we days, "What's happening over there?"

- A: That little house—you'd go in their living room and you would think you were on a ship. It was wonderful. The same with the Ecriggs' house. That's a wonderful location up there. Gallino bought that house.
- Q: The one next to the inn?
- A: Yes.
- Q: Didn't they sell it again? Is that the Bess Eaton person? Gallino?
- A: No. Those people are from Connecticut.
- Q: When we go over there, we can ask.
- A: What happened was Bob's grandparents owned this lot that went from the ocean to the West Beach Road. His grandparents built a cottage on the back half, and at one point my brother in law said, "Could we buy the front half?" and so Grandpa said, "Okay." So, they bought the front half and built in '54. Then we came along in '57 and bought the back cottage and the lot.
- Q: Did you buy it from his grandparents?
- A: No. Bob's mother had inherited it, and then we bought it from her. So, we had that connection. Next door to their house, Sally's brother built a house. They had several children. Sally's sister owned part of it. That was another family connection.
- Q: That's the Garrishs?
- A: Right. So, it was the Maces and the Garrishs and the Ecriggs. We were all great buddies. And then this place, before the Blackstones bought it, Barbara Briggs' family—Lloyd Briggs—had the house forever. It's been through the '38 Hurricane. It's been there a long time. It's still there. So, she was a good friend. We had a very companionable group.
- Q: Would you get together in the evenings and play cards?
- A: Before Sally built their house up in the front, they lived in what we call the shanty, which was little, and next to our cottage. Just a little one-room place. They had three kids. They brought them all down, and we would all go over. They had a big, long table, and we'd play cards and all kinds of stuff. It was nice times. We had clambakes. It was a nice group. Unfortunately, time marches on. Those things have changed.
- Q: Life is always changing in every way in terms of how we age and how a community ages. I don't want to lose that feeling.

A: One of the sad things is the homes that have been in a family for ages and ages and ages when the family can no longer afford to keep it. That's what's happening a lot, particularly where there is disagreement among siblings. If somebody can't afford to buy them out, then it has to be sold. I think it happens many times.

Q: Are you happy being in Quonnie now?

A: I count my blessings every day. I've got my beautiful view. It was wonderful for Bob when he wasn't well that he could be here and enjoy it. It was nice.

Q: Did you want to talk about Bob? You came around '81 here, right?

A: Yes.

Q: At that point, I know it was hard for him to breathe at the end of his life.

A: Yes. Diabetes, emphysema and neuropathy of his legs. It was tough.

Q: But before that, he had time here.

A: Yes. We were blessed. We enjoyed it. We had the cottage to kind of play with. That was fun.

Q: Do you rent that now?

A: No. We have two sons.

Q: It's also nice to have your family separate where you're able to go about things the way you want.

A: My daughter in law has cancer, so she's going through this. This summer they came for a good part of July, and then she was still not working, and so they came back and had another week in August. It was wonderful. They have two kids. Her mother came back from Florida to be with them. So, there were five people. It was wonderful that they could have their own way over there. We'd be falling over each other here, so it was good.

Q: How is she doing now?

A: She's doing very well. She's back at work.

Q: Do they live nearby?

A: They live in Southamptton, Massachusetts. They'll be here for Thanksgiving, so that will be nice.

Q: Is that traditional in your family to be here on Thanksgiving?

A: I've been able to manage that. My sister is up in Watertown, New York, and so they'll be down—she and her daughter and their kids and husband.

Q: Is that just for the day? Because you can't put everybody up. Or do you?

A: The New York people are staying in Shelter Harbor. Laurie and Dryson will just be here for the day. It will be fun.

