

QUONOHONTAUG HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Oral History

LESLIE and EDITH BITTNER

Powaget Avenue, East Beach, Quonochontaug

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Interviewed by Anne Schaefer Doyle

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Bittner: I'm Les Bittner, and my wife, Edie; and we came to Quonnie when I was five years old--I did, not my wife. My folks built a place down on the barrier beach. I was born in June, 1919, and now I'm 83.

Doyle: Wow! You don't look 83. How did your father, your parents, know about Quonnie?

Bittner: My folks lived in West Hartford. And my mother went shopping to Hartford on the trolley car with our neighbor, Mrs. Whittaker. And her husband was the foreman of the Royal Typewriter Company. And she told my mother, "We're building a cottage down in Rhode Island." And my mother got interested: "Well, we would like to have a cottage someplace, too." "Well, maybe you'd like to go down and see it?" So my mother made arrangements with Mrs. Whittaker, and she and my mother and dad and I drove down here.

And we looked at the beach, and it was a beautiful beach. And we stopped on the way back at J.A. Burdick, on East Beach Road. And he owned the Burdick plot, and he had lots for sale. And we bought a lot next to the Whittakers'. And that became the Hartford Cottage Group, and that started a boom down at East Beach. And that was about 1924 or '5. In that year, four cottages went up; and that started everybody else buying; they found out what a nice beach this was, and the boom started. And I don't know how many cottages [there were] on the beach --at least a hundred. And probably two hundred. I have no way of knowing accurately.

Doyle: Well, just tell me a little bit more about the houses on the barrier beach, Les.

Bittner: When we first came down, there was a house on the Pond that belonged to a man--I believe his name was Eccleston. And he used it as a duck hunting lodge. It was a little small place, and it had tar paper on the outside. And across the street was the Aldrich house; that was a two-storey house. And there was no-one else on the beach until about a mile down, a little better than a mile, a mile and a half --there was a cottage that belonged to a plumber; and next to him was another cottage and that belonged to people I never met. But he had a skeet shoot down there. And he had a rig that would shoot up the --I don't know what you'd call it-- birdie or. . . and they would fire at it. And nothing else was beyond that until the Hartford Cottages bought the lots and started their development.

Doyle: Let's try and zero in on exactly--in other words, how would you get there, because this tape will be heard maybe a hundred years from now and so if you go down East Beach Road, you take a left? That's how you got --

Bittner: You turned left on [from] East Beach Road; it was then Surfside Avenue. And there was no road. We went through the sand and grass, and sometimes we got stuck on the way down. But there was no road down there, and of course there was no lights or anything like that--we had the lumber truck come down, and he let the air out of his tires to deliver the lumber; and sometimes he would get stuck on the way back.

But the Hartford Cottages was the start of a boom down here. Then there were other developments after that. They had some beautiful homes on the waterfront. And one house, two houses in particular, had steel-reinforced bulkheads. And they poured concrete on those, and that stayed until after the '38 Hurricane, until the Army came in during the war [WWII] and they used [them] for target practice and they knocked all the cement off, and finally it all rusted away. And those waterfront lots are now where the waves break on the oceanfront.

E. Bittner: Our lot's no longer there!

Doyle: It's no longer there?

Bittner: No --well, it would be the beach.

Doyle: It would be the beach! Is there any way of -- how do you identify that?

Bittner: You couldn't. Just approximately.

E. Bittner: We used to be able to; we would say -- we would recognize some kind of a mound or something! But that is long gone.

Doyle: Now, did Surfside go all the way down to the Breachway?

Bittner: All the way down, yes—not to the Breachway. Probably to Dr. Sayer’s house.

Doyle: I don’t know –

Bittner: Dr. Sayer had a house; we called it an island, it wasn’t an island. But Dr. Sayer, from Providence, built a house down there. And he had a Model A Ford station wagon, and he used to traverse the beach. And spend weekends down there with his wife and family. And that was sold several times after that. And it finally burned, about 1950 I believe it was—it was a total loss. They had been down for the weekend, these folks he—whether his friends or whoever they were – and evidently -- best we can tell--they had a fire in the fireplace. And they left without putting the fire out. The wind came up, blew sparks off the fireplace and started the place on fire. The fire department finally responded – of course they couldn’t do anything; they got stuck. It was a terrible loss.

Doyle: Because now is it blocked and you can’t--? Is it hard to get down there now? Or—

Bittner: If you had a four-wheel drive –

Doyle: That goes by the State Beach?

Bittner: Yes, you could get down there.

Doyle: Yes, you can, with a certain vehicle, drive on the beach. Now when did Dr. Sayer build his place?

Bittner: I’m not sure; it was after the Hartford Cottages.

Doyle: So was it after the [*38] Hurricane?

Bittner: It was before the Hurricane.

Doyle: So – did he lose that house?

Bittner: No; that weathered the Hurricane.

Doyle: That did weather the Hurricane!

Bittner: It was on high ground.

Doyle: Oh, I see.

Bittner: That was on high ground, so that weathered the Hurricane. And then he sold it, two or three times. I can't think of the name of the man that bought it. One was a very prominent commentator on the radio.

E. Bittner: Yeah. Something like Rather – or one of those—

Bittner: Nope; it wasn't Rather.

E. Bittner: No, it wasn't Rather, but he wanted wires, electric wires. So they'd have electricity. And they wouldn't do it.

Bittner: So he had his own generator.

Doyle: You mentioned Eccleston. See, I have interviewed a Ray and Jessie Eccleston over on West Beach. And the Ecclestons have lived – And I have a feeling it's the same family—

Bittner: Might be relatives.

Doyle: Was he from the Westerly area? Some lumber company or something?

Bittner: No; I thought he owned an Inn in Westerly. Now there was Peckham, too. And he owned the Peckham's Inn in Westerly. I think I'm confusing the Ecclestons and the Peckhams. I think it was Peckham's shack, duck shack; a simple small place he used for duck hunting.

Doyle: Did you go duck hunting?

Bittner: No; no. I'm not a fisherman, either.

Doyle: No – you're not!

Bittner: A friend of mine took me fishing one time. I said to him: “ You will regret it; we won't even get a bite.” We didn't. He never asked me again!

Doyle: Let's talk about some of the other families that were in your group of cottages.

Bittner: OK. Elder Whittaker was the foreman at Royal in Hartford. And he was the boss carpenter. And he designed the Hartford Cottages. And we all used his plans to build our cottages. Two lots up from his was a fellow by the name of Palmerie, Charlie Palmerie. He was also a foreman at Royal. One side of Mr. Palmerie was a Marhartz, and he was Superintendent of the Royal. And he built a cottage with the same plan. And next to the Marhartz, was the Bittner cottage. Beyond the Bittner cottage was a vacant lot that was never developed. But the next lot up, was built on by a man, I believe his name was Taylor, he was a builder in Westerly: Harris Taylor. And he built a place xxx over on West Beach Road. And that's

been sold and torn down, as I understand it; and they saved the chimney. And they rebuilt the rest of the house around the chimney. And that belonged to Harris Taylor, I believe.

Doyle: And this is West Beach Road?

Bittner: On West—not West Beach Road: West Beach.

Doyle: Oh, *West Beach*.

Bittner: Yeah, right on the ocean front, next to the ocean. . . .And beyond us, later on in the years, as the whole strip developed, there was a lady by the name of Higgins; she was an artist. And she built a beautiful home down there; It was --East Mere she called it. And that was wiped out with everything else. It was a \$100,000 home at that time. It was beautiful. And that was a lot of money in those days.

Doyle: That was! I never heard of – wow!

Bittner: I believe her name was Higgins. I never met her, but she had a beautiful home and she had a wall around, a fence around the place, low fence—

Doyle: So you weren't allowed into her property?

Bittner: I don't think she ever kicked anybody out, but we never tried. They lived beyond us, about a mile.

Doyle: Now, if you didn't fish, or whatever –what did you do when you came down here?

Bittner: Oh, we used the beach and had a boat, and we clammed and we caught crab. And there was no power when we first came down; there was no electric. And of course we didn't have anybody delivering any groceries. And we used to go across the Pond in a boat, to the Hoxie Farm, and buy our milk.

Doyle: Which Pond is that? The Hoxie Farm?

Bittner: The Hoxie –it's still –

Doyle: Oh, I know –

Bittner: xxxxxxxx

E. Bittner: Parallel to East Beach.

Bittner: It was almost directly across the Pond.

Doyle: Is that, um, Mr. Hox— oh, he was there, Mr. [Munroe]Hoxie, at our Quonnie History Evening, was he? There were two Hoxie families; that's why I'm trying to determine and – do you know an older Hoxie right now, used to live on--?

Bittner: They'd be gone by now, 'cause—

Doyle: He's not in his 90's, but he was a boy – he talks about delivering milk down on East Beach.

Bittner: OK. Gettin' the xxx. Probably was. They had a farm; they had cows. It was raw milk; it wasn't pasteurized.

Doyle: It was probably the same family.

Bittner: It was a great house. On the left-hand side, on Route One, going East.

Doyle: East. OK; That's—

Bittner: It was a square house.

Doyle: Yup. It burned; talk about – there was a fire there, and they re-built it or something --like 1950--.

Bittner: Oh, I didn't know that. Hoxie? I don't think it ever burned – but maybe it did.

Doyle: Maybe we could even take a little ride or something –

Bittner: Ok. Sure, that'd be fun.

Doyle: ' Cause I need xxxx. . . . Now, when you were crabbing and clamming, did you eat what you found?

Bittner: I didn't eat the crabs. My mother did!

Doyle: You didn't? What were you doing down here? [Much laughter]

Bittner: I never ate them till I got married!

E. Bittner: [What about] the berries?

Bittner: Cranberries, we picked cranberries.

Doyle: Cranberries?

Bittner: Oh, there were a lot of cranberries, and beach plums, down here.

Doyle: Now where were the cranberries? Right around the edge of the --?

Bittner: Across the street from our house. It was kind of swampy, and there was enough soil there to raise cranberries. They were wild; nobody ever planted them, as far as I know.

Doyle: 'Cause that was right near the Pond.

Bittner: Yes.

Doyle: On that side.

Bittner: To the left side of East Beach Ro—not East Beach Road--Surfside Avenue.

Doyle: So you ate cranberries --

Bittner: Yeah; Mother made them for Thanksgiving -- her jelly or jam.

Doyle: And you had plums --?

Bittner: Had Beachplums.

Doyle: And where did they grow?

Bittner: They grew on the strip.

Doyle: They did? There aren't anymore --

Bittner: No, they're gone. I don't think they ever came back [after the Hurricane].

Doyle: No, I don't think so either; I haven't seen very many of them. So-- and she made --you said-- jam and so forth --What about blackberrying and blueberrying?

Bittner: I don't know if we ever had blueberries or not. I think we used to go back in the Burlingame area for blueberries. I don't think we had them down here.

E. Bittner: We used to have blueberries up here—

Doyle: Yeah; there were more over here. See your experience was down [directly on the beach] --it was a completely different experience.

Bittner: Yes – this was more exclusive up here! [500 feet up East Beach Road from the beach!] [Laughter] There are nicer homes than the cottages are, that were built for the summer.

Mother and I would stay for the summer, and Dad would come down weekends; and he had two weeks' vacation. He would spend his two weeks' vacation down here. And we really had a nice time down here. We'd have our family picnics where a lot of the cousins and relatives came down, you know, bunked in our cottage.

Doyle: How big was your cottage?

Bittner: It was 20 by 26. And it was on pillars; it was raised up so the garage was underneath. And of course we had a room down cellar, and we had some extra beds down there where we put people. 4th of July was a big day down here; we had a big picnic.

Doyle: But you were an only child?

Bittner: Yes.

Doyle: So you had --but you had cousins that would come.

Bittner: Relatives.

Doyle: From the Hartford area?

Bittner: Yes. All from the Hartford area. Except my mother's cousin, and their name was Holmes and was a carpenter, and he built the cottage. My dad hired him, and in two weeks he put up the cottage. And my dad finished it after that; he worked at it part-time and finished it on his own. But we had a roof on and a place to stay. And of course we had outhouses down here.

Doyle: Yeah; all right! That's important! Were they all in the back of the cottage?

Bittner: Yeah; around the back, toward the road. Then we all got sophisticated, and we put in septic tanks. And plumbing.

Doyle: This was before the ['38] Hurricane?

Bittner: Oh yes! And the indoor plumbing: For a septic tank, we bought pickle barrels up in a store, a place in Westerly. And we dug a hole and put two barrels together and connected them – and drilled holes in them, and that was our septic tank!

Doyle: Oh my goodness!

E. Bittner: [Laughter in Background]

Bittner: And we had a pitcher pump for the water, and we would pump the water out and flush the john with a pail.

Doyle: What about drinking water?

Bittner: Drinking water was usually brackish. We couldn't drink it. We used it for dishes and things like that, but we carted our own drinking water down from home.

Doyle: So that you had a well, and a pump –

Bittner: We drove a pipe down about three or four feet in the ground until we hit the water, which was brackish. But it was adequate for washing your hands and face and so forth.

Doyle: And of course everybody used to take their baths in the **lotion**—you couldn't get clean down here no matter what, that's the way I felt anyway!

Bittner: Ours were sponge baths –we didn't have baths or showers or anything like that until after we got electricity. Then we put in an electric pump.

Doyle: And this was still down there! You had no electricity there till then?

Bittner: Oh yes! Finally the Narragansett Electric Company put in the power, ran it down about two miles.

Doyle: Wasn't this just shortly before the Hurricane?

Bittner: Oh, a while before the Hurricane. Yes. I would guess about three or four years anyway.

Doyle: So all the homes then were hooked up at that point to–

Bittner: Yeah; they were all hooked up to the electric.

Doyle: Interesting.

Bittner: The Coast Guard used to patrol the beach. And in front of our cottage was a little shack, with a telephone in it. And the Coast Guard would walk down the beach and ring in and let his superiors know that he was on base, or on station I should say. And then he would walk back; he would call different stations and confirm that he was—

Doyle: Did he walk from the breachway to your place or did they come from the other --?

Bittner: Usually as far as our house; they didn't go on beyond that.

Doyle: But they came from --?

Bittner: The station up at Quonnie.

Doyle: Oh I see. OK. I've heard about them being on the other part of the beach, but I didn't know how far down –

Bittner: They went down –we figured a mile down.

Doyle: So how did they punch in? What did they do?

Bittner: Well, they had telegraph—

Doyle: Is that how he would let them know?

Bittner: --and he had his clock, like watchmen have. And he would go into his shack; and there was a key there. And he would put the key into the clock and run it, to verify that he was there. And he would call back to headquarters and say that he was there and that everything was fine. And then he would head back.

Doyle: Did you talk to them?

Bittner: Oh yes.

Doyle: So they would stop and talk. It would be OK for them –

Bittner: Sure. They had a little time to play. He wasn't on any time schedule; he just had to be there. And he usually came down two or three times a day. He came down in the morning and in the afternoon, and then midnight I believe it was. I'm not sure of the hours.

Doyle: Did they ever see any ships in trouble?

Bittner: Not that I know of.

Doyle: At that point in time, there were fewer . . .

Bittner: I think it was more for rum running and things like that. Because the beach was barren, and nobody was gonna stop anybody. So I believe that's what it was for.

Doyle: So you didn't see any activity, in terms of . . .

Bittner: No. No.

Doyle: Did you have – other children your age when you --?

Bittner: Only the neighbors. The Palmieris had a boy, Bob Palmieri; the Marharts were older children, and their grandchildren came down here.

Doyle: Well, you could sleep, do whatever you wanted-- or did your parents have restrictions? I mean did you always have to be with somebody when you went in the water?

Bittner: Oh yes; in the water, we couldn't go in alone. But I was free to walk up the beach, and we walked up the beach many times, to West Beach and the boardwalk that used to be up there. I don't know [what happened to] that. It disappeared.

Doyle: Oh yes, it sure did. What do you remember about the boardwalk?

Bittner: Walked on it! [Laughter]

Doyle: Do you remember looking into people's houses --?

Bittner: No, no; we just walked by and – we sort of minded our own business.

Doyle: Did you ever go to Mother Brindley's?

Bittner: No; no.

Doyle: So you stayed, pretty much, on the ocean front; you didn't go in –

Bittner: Yeah; we just walked up to the inlet up there, and then we turned around and came back.

Doyle: I see. And your boat, you mainly kept in the--?

Bittner: Down here, yeah; it's a rowboat.

Doyle: Down here in the Pond; --Not out in the ocean –

Bittner: No; we didn't go out in the ocean in those days. Not till we came up here. Then we went out in the ocean.

Doyle: I see.

[Change of subject]

Bittner: I had graduated from high school and went to work at the Underwood Laboratory, in Hartford. And met some friends there. And, the week before the Hurricane, several fellows and I came down here and spent three or four days. It was a very bad week; it rained all the time, and it wasn't a good beach week, or anything else. And we finally went home. And we were in Wethersfield then, when the Hurricane came along; and of course it wiped all the cottages off the strip. And –

Doyle: Could you get down?

Bittner: Yeah; we came down the next weekend, and we saw where the cottage was. And beyond us, there was a cottage that belonged to a priest. And we met him, and he had lost his car; his car was on the back of where the house was. And he was all battered up, his legs, from the storm: he rode the roof of his cottage. It went out to sea and fortunately turned around, came back and washed up across the Pond. And he was saved by that. I don't remember his name.

Doyle: Was he about the only one that was around, in that strip, do you think?

Bittner: He's the only one we met, after the Hurricane.

Doyle: Were there many people lost?

Bittner: Yes, there were a lot who–

Doyle: Right in that strip, though?

Bittner: Oh yes; they didn't know a hurricane was coming. There was no way -- And Mr. Davis did get some people out, when the ocean started coming over the strip; but other people said, "Oh, no; we'll stay here." And they didn't leave. And there was – I've forgotten what the total was in Rhode Island, but it was it was very high, the number of people – I don't remember exactly –

Doyle: Now you talked about Mr. Davis helping people during the Hurricane; can you say his full name? And did he live here year-round?

Bittner: Yes. Bernie Davis was a Vermonter from birth. And he came down here and he had several houses he built. And he rented the houses. And he also had a –he was a baker, and he delivered bakery goods on the beach. Until the Hurricane. And he was down here trying to get people out. And of course after the Hurricane, he salvaged a lot of the lumber, and he built more houses.

Doyle: But he did live here year-round --?

Bittner: Yes, he –

Doyle: And he lived right at the corner here?

Bittner: On Burdick Street.

Doyle: On Burdick Street. On the corner of Burdick and Powaget –

Bittner: At the middle – no--about half-way.

Doyle: Oh, OK.

E. Bittner: He xxxx; he had five children.

Doyle: When you said he sold baked goods: did he bake right in his own home?

Bittner: I don't know that--whether he was selling from a bakery; I believe he worked for a bakery. I'm not sure about that.

Doyle: Yeah; it sounds like it. Do you remember people from – the vegetable man coming-- or?

Bittner: Yes, the vegetable man, came down once a week, selling vegetables; and I say the baker – I don't think we had a meat man. We had to go to Westerly.

Doyle: Did you go into Westerly? You remember going into Westerly?

Bittner: Oh yes. The Mohegan Market used to be in Westerly.

Doyle: What market?

Bittner: Mohegan. That's where my mother used to shop. They had good bakery goods, too.

Doyle: Where in Westerly was that? I haven't heard about that.

Bittner: It was at the end of town, across from the Library. There's a restaurant there now. That was the Mohegan.

Doyle: Oh. Where the xxx are.

Bittner. Yeah.

Doyle: So, would you travel into Westerly once a week or so?

Bittner: Yes.

Doyle: And you had a car?

Bittner: Well, no; we didn't have a car when we stayed here all summer, until my father came down weekends; then he would take us into town to do the shopping. And we were on the beach for the rest of the week.

Doyle: Yeah; that's what I remember! [Laughter and unintelligible comments re fishing?]

But there always seemed to be somebody selling something, and I don't remember anybody ever going hungry around here.

Bittner: No; we never did that!

E. Bittner: XXX went over to West [Beach] Road, to get their milk, which was not pasteurized.

Bittner: There was a farm on West Beach Road.

Doyle: There were a couple of farms! There was an Asa Hoxie; some people went there, on West Beach Road. That was a relative of another [Hoxie?], and then a Clarke Farm; Mr. Clarke had—uh-- lived up on the head of the road. And then he owned pasture land and had his cows; and he used to sell milk further down – don't ask me where the xxxxx was. A lot of people got their milk from him.

Bittner: Well, we used to buy it.

Doyle: Did you ever go to the East/West Farms?

Bittner: No; don't remember that.

Doyle: On the corner of West Beach Road and Route One.

E. Bittner: [That's where we went] to buy our corn. West Beach and Route One is where we used to buy corn. And I would buy eggs –

Doyle: Now the Clarkes were across the street; there were two separate—

Bittner: On the West side?

Doyle: Mr. Clarke had a farm on the north side of Route One.

Bittner: Oh, OK.

Doyle: xxxx. And then the Hutchins ran a farm that was on the other side, the south side of Route One or the Post Road.

Bittner: There was a fan there on West Beach Road; that was when the barn burned.

Doyle: That's the Hutchins' farm.

Bittner: That's where we stopped. I was wrong.

Doyle: That's OK –That's all right.

E. Bittner: That's where I got the eggs and corn.

Doyle: Now where were you living then?

Bittner: Here.

Doyle: OK. Now, can you tell me about your transition from being on the barrier beach to here. [Lots of laughter]

Bittner: It's a long story!

Doyle: That's OK. I have plenty of time! Because I can flip this [tape] over.

Bittner: Ok. Well, after the Hurricane, my friends that worked at Underwood that had spent the few days before the Hurricane down here—one of them came from Stratford, Connecticut – his name was Ernie Hull, and he was the son of Commodore Isaac Hull of the *Constitution*, and he was quite a boatman. He had a sailboat; we used to go sailing down in Bridgeport. And he liked it so much down there that after the Hurricane he said, "There'll never be another hurricane. Why don't we buy the lot from your mother – I'll buy the lot, and she can give it to you – and we'll put up a cottage down here." So Mother said, "Well OK; we'll never build again down here. We've built on the sand and the old saying, you know – a house built on sand –" [unintelligible comments].

So we came down here, and we put a little shack up; and it was the only place on the beach except Mr. Sayer's, Dr. Sayer's place. And our place was a 9 x 12, and we carted the lumber down; we bought a Model A Ford, and we built a little bachelors' quarters. And that weathered the first year. And we bought a Model A Ford, as I said, to bring the lumber down; and

we built that cottage. We had Brahma tires on the Model A, and we went down the beach. The lumber truck went down once, before us; and he got stuck; so he wouldn't go down any more. So we had to cart all the lumber down in that old Model A. It stayed the first year; so then we went out and added to the front. We came out, and we had a really nice cottage. We had a living room in front, with a sofa in it –

E. Bittner: Even a john!

Bittner: Our friends' wives were down here. Xxx 'course, after that, I got married.

Doyle: What year were you married?

Bittner: 1946.

E. Bittner: We weren't married in '46.

Bittner: What year?

E. Bittner: '43--

Bittner: '43!

E. Bittner: Better be '43 – xxx we had a son!

Bittner: My wife and I spent a week, before I went into the Navy, down here. And that was the time of the Ringling Brothers fire, in Hartford, Connecticut. And we were on our way to spend the week down in Rhode Island before I went into the service. And 'course when I came back, the house had been taken by another storm and deposited across the Pond.

Doyle: Did the first house, your first cottage – did you find the pieces of it?

Bittner: Yes; yes, we found sections of that; and I came down with a truck and salvaged several windows and all the lumber –we had a truckload; and we brought 'em to Saybrook, Connecticut. My mother and dad had bought a lot down there, and I built a cottage down there for them.

Doyle: You built it yourself?

Bittner: Yes.

Doyle: This was before you went into the service.

Bittner: Yes. Yes.

Doyle: [Apparently looking at picture] So this is your cottage.

Bittner: This is the original cottage. Xxx I see two; this was our cottage. And this was Marhartz', and this was the Coast Guard station.

Doyle: You came down for a week before your husband went into the service?

E. Bittner: Well, yes; well, we were married then. I came down here first in 1940 to visit, and I wasn't used to the ocean. My folks came from the mid-West, and they were – they liked the lake. So this was new to me. And I guess if I hadn't liked it, we probably wouldn't have gotten married! I don't know –but so it was all a new experience for me, and I did like it a lot. So then I came down here, but—

Doyle: You came down here when the cottage -- when they built this place?

Bittner: Yeah, we—after I got out of the service, we came down; and the man next door, Vinnie Vincelle, who then owned the Burdick's house, next door – he loaned us his place, and his boat and motor; and I went over across the Pond to the ---- over there, I think it was the Jackson property; and we disassembled the cottage that we had-- used it across the Pond. And we brought it back; we towed it back in sections. And we put it up on the waterfront; we couldn't get close enough to the water. So we were right close to the water on this lot that we had purchased in 1946, I believe it was. And that stayed until '54--the hurricane of '54. And it wound up – the house next door's lot--her house, which was a Burdick place, was now the xxxxx's place. This was –I'm sorry; it was then Learned – Mrs. Learned owned the place. And we landed on her front porch. Well, we jacked up the place, and we moved it back here. We moved it back from the waterfront, had a foundation poured four feet above where it was before. And of course we added on to it, to its present state.

So when I was discharged from the Navy, we came back and picked up the cottage that was on the beach and brought it back here. We towed it across the Pond in sections, with a boat-barge from our neighbor next door, and erected it at the present location. And it stayed there until 1954.

Doyle: All right. Now, had you already purchased this property?

Bittner: We purchased this property after I was discharged from the Navy, in 1946.

E. Bittner: He was in the service when this happened.

Doyle: OK; I understand.

E. Bittner: It was sad news, to tell him that.

Doyle: [Let's] talk about Hurricane Carol, in '54.

Bittner: Hurricane Carol in '54 picked up our cottage, again, and moved it to the front porch of our next-door neighbor; it was then owned by the Learneds.

E. Bittner: The neighbor –they owned—they used to own—was it xxx?

Bittner: The family-owned the Quonochontaug Inn. And we came down, we jacked it up and moved it back to this lot, back from the waterfront about a hundred feet. And we had a poured foundation, an old inch wall we really hoped would hold in another hurricane. And hope that we wouldn't have another one. And of course we've added onto it and remodeled it, and we have our present place today.

Doyle: The Shutters – you kept the car there?

Bittner: When we were building our place on the beach, after the Hurricane, we bought a Model A Ford, to carry the lumber and to transport us down to the cottage on the strip. And we parked it in the Blue Shutters when we left, and Mrs. Craig was the manager. She managed the Blue Shutters for the Barber family; it belonged to Barbers. And she always said it was the "Barbers' Blue Shutters." Mrs. Craig was a very nice lady, very hospitable and friendly. And I think it was '54 when she lost the place-- – she set up shop on East Beach Road; we set up tables to sell some of her merchandise she had salvaged.

Doyle: What did you --?

Bittner: We came down. She had tables set up there; she had a lot of trinkets –

Doyle: Was this just to get rid of things that were in the –

Bittner: No, she sold these things in the store.

Doyle: OK. So, they were salvaged and she was trying to sell them—

Bittner: Right.

Doyle: I've heard that she was very good to all the officers during the war, that were stationed –

Bittner: She was a nice person. That's all I can say. Very nice. She didn't even want to charge us for parking the car there. So that's how –We needed a place to park it, you know—

Doyle: She didn't live down here all year round, did she?

Bittner: She [started?] in the Blue Shutters; she lived there in the summer. I don't know where she went in the winter. No. 'Cause we weren't here in the winter.

Doyle: Do you think she might have been a relative of the Barbers?

Bittner: I think she was -- I had first heard -- son-in-law? I believe that --I'm not sure about that though, so I shouldn't --

Doyle: OK. All right; thank you.

Bittner: The bunker at the end of East Beach Road was used by the Army, for communications and storing ammunitions. And they were bringing artillery and set 'em up in the Blue Shutters lot and fire, in the off seasons--practice. I never saw them actually do that, but we were told that that happened. Of course also, the Air-Base, across Charlestown, the pilots used to fly off and practice their landing on a carrier off shore. And they would fly right over our house -- for years. And one time a fellow didn't make it, and he landed in the Pond. And they picked him up in the crash boat; he didn't even get his feet wet. And of course they figured the plane wasn't worth saving, so they came over and used it for target practice. And this really upset some of the neighbors; they thought that the Army should have taken the plane off and put it back in service.

Doyle: Oh Wow, that's interesting!

[END OF CONVERSATION]

Quonochontaug Historical Society



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