

# QUONOCHONTAUG HISTORICAL SOCIETY

## Oral History

# JANET CONGDEN

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Interviewed by ? Thompson

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Q: Well, Peggy and I are involved in this Historical thing at Quonnie. And there aren't that many left of us that remember back before '38. And there were certain things that—we always remember you were telling a story. There used to be a windmill at Dowd's property, one by Morris Point, and then there was another one way over. Well, after the '38 Hurricane, there were no more windmills.

A: I don't remember that.

Q: Well, it was on that road where Helen Baxter lived. But it was over there.

A: At the Colonial Inn?

Q: No. It was to the east. Yes. There was one. I can't remember the place. And we always remember the story about up on the third floor of Morris Point, there was the—what do you call it?

A: It filled up one hole little bedroom there.

Q: Yes. Well, it really was. Yes. We used to have little sailboats that we'd put in once in a while. I don't think your father ever knew that.

A: No, he didn't. But we didn't use that, though, for cooking.

Q: Oh, you didn't use it?

A: I had to go to the pump—I had to go out to the windmill and pump it into jugs for cooking, or dishwashing or drinking, or anything like that. My father drank that rusty water? Never. Because the pipes were a little rusty, and he wasn't about to re-pipe that whole place just for two months in the summer. It was all right for cooking, but it came

through quite rusty at times. No. We didn't drink it. But I had to go out and I had to keep the tank filled.

Q: Now, how big was that tank? It must have been, what, 5 feet high?

A: It was 5 feet high. Was it higher than I was?

Q: It's hard to judge, because you were young at that point.

A: It must have been around 5 feet high, and I would say it was way up there at least, if not more.

Q: Yes.

A: It would have been less. And I had to get that filled. Now, that didn't mean to the top. My father impressed that on me. He said, "I don't want it filled to the top." You know, that far from the top.

Q: About a foot from the top?

A: Yes. Many times I rushed up three flights of stairs and stuck my finger in just in time. I stopped it right at the top. Boy, did I rush down those stairs out to the window and slammed that piece of wood, and that's what stopped it. I hoped it would never run over, because if it did, it would run over the seam down below.

Q: Onto the second floor.

A: But when he told us to do something, we did it.

Q: Well, what was it Danny was saying the other day? Why would they have a windmill? Why wouldn't they use an electric pump or something? I don't know. Maybe because the windmill was always there.

A: It was always there. We didn't put it in.

Q: No.

A: It was there from Morris Point.

Q: Now, when did your folks buy Morris Point, do you know?

A: That was about 1925 or '24.

Q: Was it that late? Because it was 1925, I think that Grandpa built this.

A: It must have been about '24, because before that, I was down at the Breakers that summer. I can remember. My Uncle Dexter took me out in the boat, and it swept us right out into the ocean from the Breakers. And everybody was out there whooping. My mother said, "My God, you got smaller and smaller and smaller." Finally the Coast Guard went out and got us. My Uncle Dexter, he had to face my father after that. But the current was so strong. We rowed against it, and we kept going out and out. He said, "Your little jacket got smaller and smaller and smaller." He said, "Oh, God, we'll never get them back." Everybody in the hotel was out at the point by the pier there with their hair done, shivering from the sun. I think I was about three years old then. And then we didn't come down there one year.

Q: You rented it one year.

A: One year we rented it, and I went to summer camp. I remember that.

Q: Those people have a chauffeur, and the little girl had to get dressed for dinner every night.

A: Oh, my God.

Q: When you bought it, was it all electrified? You didn't have to put in electric?

A: No. It was electrified. But I don't know about that, Peggy. I know when the Morris had it, Chester Morris told my father it was his mother's job to go around and clean the wicks and all those lights. So, I don't know. Maybe it wasn't electrified. Maybe Daddy had it electrified. That I don't recall. But it was electrified when we were in there.

Q: Did your father sell the Morris Point to Charlie Downy?

A: Yes.

Q: Was that about '35?

A: No. I think it was after that.

Q: We know that Downy was in it in the hurricane of '38. I don't know how many years he used it as a hotel.

A: I don't know just when he bought it. I remember looking at it from the hotel down at the Breakers there at night. My father always wanted to buy it. But you weren't there. Did you come in when you were five?

Q: No. I came in when I was about three, because we used to go to the Breakers too. But I think in 1925, Grandpa built.

A: I don't know.

Q: I can remember Murry coming down with Sabra at the Morris Point.

A: I don't remember him at Morris Point. I remember him at—

Q: At the old farmhouse? You should see the farmhouse today.

A: Sabra was born around '68, wasn't she? Didn't we figure it out the other day?

Q: Not Sabra. Not '68.

A: Oh, not Sabra. Sabra was 66 when she died.

Q: Thirty-two? That was in '32 then, right?

A: I guess.

Q: Yes. After you left Morris Point, then you lived one year up at the old farmhouse, didn't you?

A: For a year, or a year and a half.

Q: And then you bought Red Top.

A: My father one day was sitting out on the front porch. And he said, "If I'm going to live at the beach, I want to look at the water. I'm not going to look at the beach." So, he went down and bought Red Top. And we moved down there in the middle of the year.

Q: So, that must be '36. You were there two or three years.

A: Yes. He died in '36.

Q: He did?

A: Yes.

Q: Oh, my goodness.

A: He died in March '36.

Q: So, was it maybe '34 that he bought Red Top?

A: We must be all off with these dates.

Q: I know you had a piano there. You practiced piano every day.

A: Oh, God, yes. I didn't keep it up. I loved music. What else did we do?

Q: We all played. At that point in the cellar, where your father had a pool table, there were the Randalls, the Maces—Peggy. I'd be around some of the time. The Taylors.

A: Bob Palmer. You don't remember him?

Q: I do vaguely.

A: He's the one we all thought was very good looking, but we didn't go over and ask him to go to a roast we were going to have that night. Remember? And Wesley went over and said, "Look, the kids were too bashful to ask you. They're having a roast tonight. They wanted to know if you'd come." He was tickled to death to be asked. So, he came. We knew him quite well. Then he moved away at the end of the summer.

Q: But we never saw the Norths. We knew who they were, but they were at the other end of the beach.

A: No. I didn't know them.

Q: Chet Fisher was at the other end of the beach.

A: I didn't know them either.

Q: But when you started down from the main part where we really started, what we thought was Central Beach, there were three cottages: Hoffsbro, then the Taylors and then Daisy Forrest.

A: Oh, Daisy. Yes.

Q: And they were like prefab homes. Sears and Roebuck.

A: Were they?

Q: Yes.

A: I didn't know that.

Q: Taylor built them. But she bought it. You got the things already cut, and then you put them up. And then the next one down was the Parsons, which was bought by the

Maces, and then Grants. It's now torn down. Then the next one down was my grandmother's first cousin, Frankie Crandall.

A: Yes.

Q: Then after his father sold it to Mormons, I guess. Mathesons rented it for a while.

A: I don't remember that. I remember the Crandalls.

Q: Yes. And then Wyle built Hobby House. And then there was also one that has now been upgraded by Steve Pete. Who owned that one? Phillips owned it after the '38 Hurricane, because whoever bought it before was so disgusted, they got rid of it right away.

A: Yes. I can't think of her name.

Q: Then coming along the waterfront was my Grandfather Crappos. Peggy's Grandfather Merrills, then Red Top that your father bought.

A: Angry Mr. Falsey's second wife got—when he wouldn't let her take the piano out.

Q: Really?

A: She was furious. Q: She died, didn't she?

Q: This was his second wife. And then was it the Burdicks next?

A: No.

Q: No, it was somebody else.

A: Yes. They rented it.

Q: Chipmans from New Jersey.

A: They were never there.

Q: Charles Chipman from New Jersey. And then the Burdicks. And then the Wolfs? No, his wasn't built then.

A: Mr. Wilson.

Q: Was that just before the hurricane? And then you had Holines that moved back away from the hurricane.

A: And Glen Moles.

Q: And then Trammers.

A: He sold to who? Maybe they built afterwards. I don't know.

Q: Who?

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A: Right on the waterfront. The one that offered me a dollar bill if I'd swim from the beach up to where you come into the rocks, and not get a scrape on me. And I did. Only when I got up there, I said, "I didn't get a scrape," and he said, "Look at your leg. You have blood coming from your knee." And then he gave me a dollar anyway. Mr. Gustin. That's his name.

Q: Oh, Gustin?

A: Yes.

Q: That's right. Were they there before the '38 Hurricane?

A: I don't remember. I know they were there afterwards.

Q: He owned a house that they're trying to tear down and build another one next to Gustin. And then after Trammers, there was [inaudible 14:53]. And who was the other one? And those two houses—in fact, Joey Pryor lives in one of them now. It was the Fars. Did Howard Thorpe build his before or after the hurricane?

A: Where was Howard Thorpe's house?

Q: Just before the Bathing Beach.

A: Oh, the other bathing beach?

Q: Yes.

A: Central Beach.

Q: Central Beach. And who was the one who played tennis? Dolly Saunders.

A: I don't remember.

Q: You don't remember how we'd be up at the tennis courts trying to play? And Dolly would come down, and we'd have to get off?

A: No. I don't remember that. Why didn't we tell her to go fly a kite?

Q: Because we were young, and nice people.

A: That wasn't my way. It wasn't my way.

Q: The house next to Fisher's—Fisher's was the second one in. But there was one on the corner that evidently was there before the '38 Hurricane.

A: I can't remember. I don't remember [inaudible 16:27].

Q: Was she in the hurricane?

A: It was Carol, Molly and Little Rick.

Q: And she doesn't remember?

A: No.

Q: She may have wanted to forget that part of her life.

[overlapping conversation]

A: [inaudible 16:57] all the dirt out in the inside of the seawall. The grass and the dirt right down to that rock ledge. Everything was in our house. And the sand on the other side, it looked like the Wall of China. And she had to have that all filled in. All the water got in. It was over the piano, but it dried out. The house was that A shape. I can't think of it. And the porch came right out from the house. You know what I mean? So, that went down to Anna Hinge, and that saved a lot of rubbish inside the house. There were two front windows on each side of the front door, and the front door—all of it. And on the side of that was [inaudible 18:18] Beach. I can remember Molly, Nina and Emily, they were trying to remove the big book case full of books, and tipped it right over. They got it back up again somehow. And they put sheets around it and nailed the sheets right to the wall.

Q: That must have been some experience for them to live through that.

A: And then they went upstairs when the water was coming in. They went out the kitchen. They took milk and water and a ham and some bread and stuff like that. They wanted to eat. And up they went. And they got up there, everything was all full of water. She said, "Carol, I'm sorry [inaudible 19:12]. She said, "I don't care. Make me a sandwich."

Q: Did Ricky remember?



A: Rick was four then. He must have been born in '34. And Sabra was two years older, so she must have been born in '32.

Q: But she wasn't there?

A: She left that morning with Rusty to go to school. He taught, and she went. And it was the first day of Gibbs, and I went, so I wasn't there. It isn't like you would see it on television now. Back when I went to Gibbs, it was an old building down by the tunnel on the East Side. Nothing like they have now. But we had one typing teacher, one shorthand teacher. It took a long time to get into the [inaudible 20:42]. When I got in there, Roger said, "What took you so long?"

Q: We didn't know about hurricanes. Was this after Mr. Pendleton couldn't get out?

A: Yes. They were up at—

Q: Seabreeze?

A: Ricky had dreams a long time after. Especially one woman who went to the hotel. I don't know if it was Mrs. Phillips? Right across Charlestown.

Q: Mrs. Curry maybe?

A: I don't know.

Q: Was it someone in the Phillips' house?

A: That's why they sold. And she said [inaudible 21:46]. But I'm sure he was four at that time. We read about it in the magazine.

Q: Right. The letter she wrote.

A: And it was such an experience. There was a time down there that I had trouble. I had Jennifer with me. It was Jennifer, Debby and me.

Q: Down at East Beach?

A: East Beach.

Q: In the water. Yes.