

QUONOCHONTAUG HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Oral History

EDITH FISHER

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Interviewed by Ruth Schafer Hopkinson

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Q: ... is being made so that we may record the history of Quonochontaug. And we are talking to different people at the beach, who have been down here a long time. And we're starting with our Great Aunt Edith Fisher. This is the person who is talking now, and she is reflecting on her girlhood down here, which dates back to approximately 1910, when she first came down to Quonochontaug. Tell me about the groups that were down here, Aunt Edith.

A: Well, as far as my memory goes, you know it was Uncle Arthur's summer place down here, long before I knew anything about Quonochontaug. There were five groups of cottages. One, above Blue Shutters, mostly from Providence people. The next one, between the Blue Shutters and the Fresh Water (*Pond*) Rock, was the Pittsfield group.

Q: Pittsfield, Massachusetts?

A: Massachusetts. Massachusetts. Mostly from, the people from there. And then Central Beach, which is the last one of all of them to come into being. Then there was the Ashaway group, a group of people from Ashaway, Rhode Island. And this is kind of nice about that, or funny about that. Originally in Ashaway group were seven houses, built alike, at the cost of \$500 apiece.

Q: And that was down from West Beach?

A: Yes.

Q: What's now West Beach?

A: Well, it's below Central Beach. Between Central Beach and the Breachway. Then the Breachway cottages - probably the Breachway is the oldest of them all, because that's where the Life Saving Station was. And when I first came down here, which was in 1907 or '08, as a high school girl--

Q: About how old were you then?

A: Well, I was in high school. I visited my girlfriend, whose parents had rented a house at the Breachway. And you know, Ruth, the funny part of it was how we traveled in those days. I came down on the train. I got off at Niantic, which is now Bradford. And we were met by a surrey with a fringe on top. It was a three-seater. I don't really remember whether there were one or two horses, but there must have been two horses, because we had to come over the Bradford Road, which is now Route 216, to the Breach Road, which at the *Stanton-Sheffield* farmhouse, turned down, went to the Breach. And it took us a long while. I can't remember how long. But anyhow, she gave us *dusters* veils to put on, because the road was so narrow and dusty that we ruined our clothes. The Breachway was where the hotels were. The old wooden hotels on the boardwalk. And there were several of them. Perhaps four, I think. I can't remember the names of all of them.

Q: Was one of them the Quonochontaug Inn?

A: No. The Quonochontaug Inn (*built in the early 1920's*) was, well, north or east up the coast east or north from the breachway - some people say east up the coast and down the coast west. I always say north and south, but I don't know which is right. That wasn't in that group. There was the Breakers, first I think the Eldridge House. But anyhow, they were wooden hotels. They were on the oceanfront with the Boardwalk in front of them. And big verandas. On Saturday nights they'd have these dances, or hops, they called them in those days. Everybody would congregate around. The group from the Providence group, the boys used to walk way over up to the main road and down the other road to go to those dances.

Q: Wait a minute now; when you were talking before, the boys came to East Beach.

A: That's right.

Q: Okay. And they'd have to go all the way up East Beach Road?

A: Yes.

Q: All the way down to what is now Route 1?

A: That's right. Yes.

Q: Back down to West Beach Road?

A: Yes.

Q: Tell me about if they wanted to take a shortcut.

A: If it was low tide, they could walk only about a mile or so up the beach, or down the beach. But there are a lot of rocks in front of what is now the Quonochontaug Inn. In fact, it went right down to the water's edge. So, if it was high tide, they could not pass those rocks. They had to come up into the land. Well, now the land then was a farm—a big farmhouse. And all that land went with the farm. It was very dense of vines and everything. And the farmer left his watchdog out every night, and the boys were afraid of the watchdog. So, they'd rather come up the beach, I mean up the road.

Q: And that farm is now the Slater's house? (*The Stanton-Sheffield Farmhouse*)

A: That's right.

Q: Okay.

A: Yes. That was the original farm. But afterwards was developed into Central Beach. (*In 1924*)

Q: I see. Okay.

A: So, the Breachway, the big excitement down there was to go down when the lifesavers (*from the Life Saving Station*) had their training period when they all came out and jumped in the boats and went out the Breachway. They trained like policemen do, or firemen or anybody. They have their training, and you can go watch them. So, that was always exciting, especially for the young people. It was a time to get together. And that was the big excitement there. They also had Mother Brindley's store. Mother Brindley was a character. After the hurricane, she came up to the Pittsfield group. She was a character. She had short hair. In those days, women didn't have short hair. And she was very pompous, but she had her own penny candy store and ice cream, and everybody congregated at Mother Brindley's. That was at the Breach. So, those were the two things to do. If you wanted to go bathing, you had to cross the Breachway to the beautiful ocean and the dunes over on the ocean side. There was no bathing, except to jump into the Breachway and just swim, if you were a good swimmer. But the two ways to get across there was [one]: they had a rope that went across to a pole like on the other side of the Breachway. This was right down in front of the hotels. And you either had to pull yourself across, or if you were a good swimmer, you swam across, or [two]: you got in a rowboat several people in the boat, and pulled yourself across, and then went over to this beautiful surf. But if you went over there, you spent practically all day there. You'd take your lunch and go bathing all day.

Q: Didn't it make a difference if it was high tide or low tide? The water was going in and going out?

A: Yes. You had to watch the tide. It didn't make much difference in the ocean when it was low or high tide. But if you went across that Breachway when the tide was going out, you had to be pretty careful, because it was so fast and furious. And if you weren't a good swimmer, you needed that rope to get across on the other side. If it was coming in, you had a better chance, because you only land in the pond. And the men that were in the lifesaving crew patrolled the breach. They had these stations. I forget what they called them. But anyhow, the men from Watch Hill would come up to Misquamicut, Misquamicut to Quonochontaug, Quonochontaug went to Charlestown. They would patrol the beach every night. Sometimes they had dogs, and sometimes they didn't.

Q: What were they looking for?

A: Just patrol the beach. It was part of their duties. And they're watching for anybody that might be in trouble out in the ocean. But they did that up to the time of the war. It was the first World War, wasn't it? (*Editor's Note, it was WWII*)

Q: You're asking me?

A: How times flies. Well anyhow, the reason I was telling you about those patrols, of course, they always had their eyes out for young girls in the houses. They found out that I made fudge a lot for my children, and so they would come up there and make a remark about I didn't have a *blackout* curtain down. And by the way, the war was on. You had to have the blackout curtains and pull them down. If there was a ray of light around the outside of the curtain, these guards that would patrol the beach would come up and tell you about it. And they found out I made fudge quite often, and so I always had some for them. And they would come up and tell me they saw a light, and they didn't!

Q: And so, you gave them a piece of fudge?

A: Yes.

Q: You were talking about that there were hops (dances) at the time.

A: Yes. That's right.

Q: Was it like every weekend?

A: Yes. Weekends. Usually Saturday night. And you know what the orchestra consisted of?

Q: What?

A: A piano, a violin and a cello. After a while, they included a cornet, we called it. Trumpets they call them now. There was a cornet, which is different from the trumpet. They're not really just alike. But they got a trumpet, and you really stretched the money. We did have a masquerades. Every year, there was a masquerade. Every year there was a sheet and pillowcase party. Do you know what that is?

Q: No.

A: A sheet and pillowcase, you would take an old sheet and cut a hole in the middle, and put your head through it. You'd take a pillowcase and cut slits for the eyes, nose and mouth to breathe, and put it over your head. And you went to these parties disguised that way. Everybody looked the same. And there was always a prize for the one who could last the longest not being identified.

Q: Did you talk with each other?

A: We danced in them and everything.

Q: Did you have to muffle your voice and change your voice?

A: You tried to. I remember going in with my girlfriend. She went in with my mother. I went in with her mother trying to fool the public. But seeing I was a lot bigger than she was, I guess I didn't fool them.

Q: Did you ever go quahogging then?

A: The quahogging was over in the pond.

Q: Was that an activity that you ever did?

A: Yes. And crabbing. We did a lot of crabbing. We had a boat. (You wanted to get back to Central—we haven't gotten to Central Beach yet, so I wasn't going to say about what we did there.) I was only down at the beach as a visitor. Maybe I only stayed a week or two at first, because I had a summer home up on Narragansett Bay until after Bradford was born, so you can see that was after I was married. So, most of my youth was spent at another summer home. This, *Quonochontaug*, was the Fisher summer home. Although Grandpa (*Henry*) Fisher never owned a house, he rented every year. So, that brought your grandmother (*Annie Fisher Seamans*) and her children down here before I ever came that much.

Q: Let's keep talking about that. Tell me about the first home that was here.

A: Central Beach was developed by Howard Thorp of Westerly. And he built his house (*"Spray Rock" at 175 Surfside Avenue*). The *Stanton Sheffield* Farmhouse was here. There might have been one or two other houses put on land that was owned, and afterwards was incorporated in Central Beach. But as I remember it, in 1926, Howard Thorp built his house (*"Spray Rock"*) on the waterfront, on Central Beach, down near Central Beach bathing beach. I know it was at least 1926, because I have my pictures and the dates when we rented the house in 1926. And then in fact when Uncle Arthur and I bought our lot (*at 156 Surfside Avenue*) which we later built on, was practically in back of his house (*referring to "Spray Rock"*), which was on the waterfront. Now, there were only two or three houses built when we were down then (*on this eastern end of Surfside when we were first down here*). There were also two houses built up by the baseball field. Dr. Waterman's and Mrs. Jordan's were there. In addition, there were, the Thorp's (*at 175 Surfside Avenue*), Dr. Arnold's (*at 152 Surfside*) and Bill Saunders' (*at 182 Surfside Avenue*). *The Arnold's and Saunders* were cousins, and had houses at either end of that first block (*on the east end of Surfside Avenue*)

*NOTE: There were actually two Saunders families living on Surfside on the east end. These families were **not** related. One was at 182 Surfside "Checkpoint" near the entrance to the Central Beach parking lot, and the other was at "Bayberry Lodge" (? 153 Surfside) on the oceanfront.)*

Q: Which is now what? What's the front row there? (*Surfside Avenue*)

A: I forget what the names are.

Q: The Thorp's house, Arnold's house and Saunder's house "*Checkpoint*" were all on the same stretch of road. (farthest east end of Surfside)

A: Yes. Thorp's was on the oceanfront.

Q: Right. Okay.

A: And then Mr. Goman built a house (*159 Surfside Avenue*) within two or three houses of his, on the front. Then (*continuing to the west on the shorefront of Surfside Avenue*) there was Dr. Tetlow and the Van Osts and the Wholeans and two or three others. I just can't think of their names now—on the waterfront. Then across the ocean road there, right in back of Thorp's first house is where Uncle Arthur and I bought a lot (*156 Surfside Avenue*). And Aunt Lula Soule bought a lot (*170 Surfside Avenue*), and Mr. and Mrs. Herrick Brown bought a lot (*176 Surfside Avenue*).

Q: Right.

A: Your Grandmother Annie Seamans and Grandfather Raymond Seamans bought a lot there, which they afterwards sold to Herrick Brown.

Now, we bought our lot in 1926. But we still had a summer place up at Field's Point on the Bay. We didn't build until 1937. And we brought down a builder from Providence, at that time to build our house, who afterwards built several houses on East Beach Road. George Sarcy built cottages over there, known now as the Sarcy Cottages.

Q: Tell me about when Mr. Thorp originally bought all the land at Central Beach. He had the intention of what? Tell me about that.

A: Well, it was his intention of having a Mason colony. And as far as I know, the first people that were here were Masons. That was what I remember. I know they started the Music Colony over to Shelter Harbor before that, which was a music colony for Masons—training for their Demolay boys. The band and everything came down. But that financially didn't work. So, Mr. Thorp was a great Mason and Shriner like Uncle Arthur was. That's how we happened to come down here.

Q: Tell me about how he intended for it to be only for Masons.

A: It got out of control by the young generation, marrying different people. It was dropped. Anyhow, Central Beach was the last one that he developed. When we built our house, there were fewer houses. Nobody stayed winter. Of course, they weren't winter houses. We'd come down here late and early spring and fall. My father thought we were perfectly crazy, because he had a perfectly good place near Providence that wasn't so far away. But after the automobile came along, it wasn't so far to get here.

Q: After the automobile came, how long did it take to get here from Providence?

A: Before that, Uncle Arthur used to come down. Now, Uncle Arthur Fisher and your grandmother, they came down in the first place with horses. And they had to drive the horses down. Uncle Arthur used to come down with the Wolcott family, who owned horses. The boys had horses. I don't know how many they had, but they had two or three. And he'd come down with them. And they had to come down from Providence and stay overnight in Hope Valley, because they couldn't make it all in one day.

Q: Did they ride the horses?

A: Yes. Or they might have come with carriages, with loads in the carriages like caravans. I don't remember about that, because I wasn't in the picture then. But that's how they got down here first. And of course, that was before Central Beach was developed. When the Providence group, as we'll call them—it really was North Providence, around Fruit Hill—came down here, they were a group of friends up there. I don't know how they ever came here to begin with, because it was before I was around. But there was the Wolcotts and the Parrotts of whom Elaine Henry, of Central Beach, is the granddaughter. And then there was the

Moultons, David and Benjamin Moulton. These were all people from Providence. Then there was Thornton, Sayer, and Soule, all friends from the same location in Providence. And Dr. Sayer, there were two Sayer houses. His father had a house; and he afterwards had the house up on Governor Island, which is now way up in Charlestown Pond (*Ninigret Pond*). That group, when they came down, they had to come down through East Beach Road. Afterwards they had automobiles, but I mean originally with their horses, they would come down East Beach Road. The Buddington Farm was there. And they had to come down East Beach Road and through, what they called the Dingle, which is a little cart path. Well, East Beach Road wasn't much more, but it didn't come down much farther. It went down to the beach. There was a little cookie stand there. It's now the Blue Shutters. But *[to get drinking water they had to come]* through the Dingle, which turns off just below the Sarcy Cottages, up through the barnyard of Buddington's farm. Farther there was a swing gate, which you had to get out and open. Also a big well right there (*in front of the Buddington farmhouse*), which is now there. But I mention this, because everybody had to come up night and morning with their pail to get fresh water from that well. They had pumps in their house only for dishwashing (*Editor's note: the water from these pumps was brackish and not used for drinking.*)

Q: Can you estimate how long it took for the trip from Providence to the farmhouse originally? Was it days?

A: No. They'd make it in a couple of days. But from North Providence, I don't really know, because all I can remember is my experience of coming down, which by that time was automobiles.

Q: When you took an automobile, was it a daytrip?

A: No, but it was a good afternoon trip or a morning trip. You probably brought your lunch and ate it on the way.

Q: And there was only one main road from Providence to here?

A: Yes. And that was Route 2. We came down Route 2. This group used to come over through Johnston and Olneyville to Route 2. They were north of Providence, so they didn't have to come through Providence to come down here. That group that I'm talking about, which cut off a little in going right through Providence.

Q: Originally when people came down here, the group that was over at East Beach, did they pretty much stay the whole summer?

A: I think they came down and landed their family here, and the men went back and forth.

Q: Like they do now?

A: They did. But before then, when there were horses, they must have taken the train and met at the train in Niantic. I don't think they rode horses back and forth.

Q: You said that Uncle Arthur would bring maybe a horse and carriage down, with provisions. But when they were here—

A: They were here all summer. The women and children stayed here all summer.

Q: In the meantime, where did people get their food and things that they needed?

A: They had grocers, a vegetable man and bakers came to the door. A milkman came to the door.

Q: Was Westerly there at the time?

A: Oh, yes. Westerly was a big town. They probably came from Westerly. In fact, your Uncle Henry was a milkman when he was in college. That's how he met Betty.

Q: No kidding! Was she part of the Fruit Hill group?

A: No. She was in Tunxis with her aunt waitin' on tables.

Q: So, all during the summer they got all their provisions from men--

A: Men who came to the door. Fruit men.

Q: Milkmen?

A: Yes.

Q: Icemen?

A: Icemen. Sure.

Q: Was there every any need to go into Westerly?

A: No. Nobody went. It was too far. You came down here and you stayed for the summer with your children. That was all you wanted, and all you needed.

Q: Was it hard work for the women living down here?

A: What do you mean hard work? For who?

- Q: Well, they didn't have, of course, have half the things that we have to make life more comfortable.
- A: No. The old houses had water pumps, which I suppose the well was driven in the ground for water. But it was so salty that it was not drinkable. So, as I told you before, everybody had to come up to the pump (*at Buddington Farmhouse*) quick. They came up to the well. We're talking about East Beach. We're talking about the group over there by the *Buddington* farm.
- Q: The Pittsfield?
- A: No. Not Pittsfield. I haven't gotten to that. We're talking about the North Providence group. They got their drinking water, at the *Buddington* farm. And I've got pictures, that you've seen of your grandmother and Henry, as a baby, going up for that water.
- Q: Everyone got their water from the same place?
- A: Yes. From the farm. The well right out in front of the farm.
- Q: Why couldn't everyone have their own pump?
- A: They did, but I just told you that it was all salty. They were too near the ocean. It was too salty. It wasn't nice, clean well water like this other was (*from the Buddington Farmhouse well*)
- Q: Once the women and children were down here—
- A: They stayed.
- Q: Well, they stayed, but was a good part of the day spent on the beach?
- A: Yes. That was your day.
- Q: But it just seems to me that it was such hard work.
- A: Yes. But people did all their own bakin' and all their own cookin' in those days. Your grandmother (*Annie Seamans*) was a wonderful cook. They did all the bakin' and cookin', and women were happy just to sit on the beach and let the kids enjoy. They didn't expect any other entertainment. They had little wagons and little tricycles and dolls, which have gone out of style, and all their toys. Later on there was a group that played bridge. We called it whist then, of course. It originally was whist. And they had whist parties at the hotels too.
- Q: Way back when you were a teenager, when you were a high school girl coming here, this may sound like a silly question, but did the women wear bathing suits then?

- A: They wore bathing suits with skirts that consisted of a garment that had bloomers attached to a waist, sleeves to the elbow, a square neckline or a round neckline, and the waist was attached to the bloomers. Then a skirt went over that. I think I've got one upstairs that I can show you. The skirt went over that, and it came below the knees. You wore black stockings and sneakers in bathing. And a hat.
- Q: Was it heavy?
- A: I suppose we knew no different..
- Q: Was it like a knit material?
- A: No. It was serge.
- Q: What's serge?
- A: Serge is a thin woolen. It's a , - well, ya don't know what brigantine was either, do ya? Q: [No!] A: Well, it's thin, weightless. Men's summer suits are made of serge—very nice serge.
- Q: If you got wet, you wouldn't go around dripping water the rest of the day. Would it dry out?
- A: No. It wasn't wool, not in that way. It was more like—I don't know. It was serge to me. That's all I know. They covered you very well. Nobody expected anything else.
- Q: Was it black?
- A: No. You could have black or blue or brown or tan. But not the light colors. Shades of blue. I don't think I ever saw a red one. They pretty well covered ya. All ya had was your neck to your head out. Elbows to your arms.
- Q: So, that was the original bathing suit?
- A: Yes. I have some pictures of them—old pictures of Atlantic City from one time when I was there. When I went to Atlantic City the first time, I took that bathing suit.
- Q: Tell me about when you built your house, Aunt Edith, where it was and the work that went into it? Whatever you can remember.
- A: I told you about the first house on the waterfront. Then there was one road in back of that street. It went in back of his house along the waterfront. There were several other houses on the waterfront. There was Jeff Lowes and Gomans and

Saunders and Wholeans and Van Osts right down the line of Central Beach. Many others. And then the road that went right in back of them. That was the only road there.

Q: And now it's Surfside Avenue?

A: Yes. Surfside Avenue. And then we bought our lot in '26 (1926), but we built in '37 (1937). And we brought our carpenter from Providence down to build the house. He rented a house on East Beach Road. After he got through building our house, he was so charmed with the beach that he built several little cottages over on East Beach Road, now known as the Sarcy cottages. His name was George Sarcy. Well, after we built the house, we were delighted of course, but only came down for summers and weekends. And that was in '37 and '38. Well, the '38 summer came, and we came down, as usual. But Uncle Arthur going up for the week, like most of the men did, and leaving the women and children down there. So, we'd only see them on weekends. And many times we had our company on weekends. And in September of 1938 we had a house party, and had company. We all went home, because Bradford and Chester were in school then. So, we went home to our house on Academy Avenue. And in September, I can't remember the day. I think it was a Monday. Pretty shortly after we'd been down there, this terrific hurricane hit the shore, and went up into Providence and took all the boats from the Providence Bay right up into Providence. The water came way up to the old station at the foot of the hill that goes up to the capitol, so we knew there was a hurricane. The children were in school on Hope Street. He had to come across the Point Street bridge with the water pouring over it to get home. Our house, way north of Providence, the slates shingles were going off the roof in a big way. So, I knew there was a storm. We knew Providence was hit. The telephones were all out. The next morning Bradford, who had come home from Boston from school, he said, "I want to know what happened down at Quonochontaug." So, he said, "Let's go down." So, Chester and Bradford and Arthur, we got in his car and started for Quonochontaug. By the time we got down to Providence, it was so bad that I said to him, "I think we better take the little trailer." So, we went back and got the trailer, and came down here. Well, were we ever glad we had it, because when we got down here, we kept meeting carloads all the way down going out with their cars full to the top of mattresses and furniture and everything, so we knew we were in for it. And when we got down here, and got where we could see our house down the road, I said to my boys, "We haven't got a house. It's not there." So, when we went down there, there it was. It had washed over, like every other house that was built down there on the waterfront, or around that Surfside Avenue, had been washed back. Now, there were several reasons for some of them for being washed. They were hit by other houses as they'd come from in front of them. Mr. Thorp's house, that first house, went back as far as the street and stopped by the telegraph pole, which I have pictures of. Mr. Goman's house, that was three stories high, because he had chauffeur's quarters, living quarters and the bedroom quarters upstairs, had come over and we figured hit our house and the Soule's house. The top part of the

three-story house was left, and it came to rest against her house. Our house was washed way back. The living room was demolished. It was caught by a big boulder several hundred feet back. That's what must have stopped it. That was pretty disheartening. We just looked at it and didn't know what to do next. But we got to work, and everybody was collecting crockeries, silver and everything around. I'll tell you one thing, if that ever happened again, I'd try to organize people to pick up anything that was wood, because in trying to find your own silver, your own dishes, other people's was stepped on and you lost it. You were so panicky at the time, you don't know what you're doing. Of course, that was the work of some weekends to come. And Bradford and Chester had both been in the Boy Scouts and Demolay. They got some other boys to come down. When they got organized, they got organized by all the cottages down there. And the PWA came in. They collected everything around everywhere that was of any good, and took it over on East Beach Road on Kenyon Avenue—it's all over here, which I have pictures of—and put everything there. Then people could go and pick out their chair or their table or whatnot. We were lucky. We had a house that could be put back. But so many houses just simply collapsed, especially from East Beach. There wasn't a house left there. There wasn't a house left in front of us all along Central Beach.

Q: Tell me more about the marigolds.

A: Yes. We had our house party with our company. I had flowers on the dining room table. I had a pottery vase of marigolds on my dining room table. When we walked in, the furniture was all gone. The fireplace was no more. It was a beautiful field fireplace. It just simply melted away. The dining room table had gone through the dining room windows, and was on its end. But the dish of marigolds with the marigold in it with not a crack in the dish. It just slid off of that table and stayed there. I want to tell you about Mr. Goman's house. It came over and knocked our house off we figured, because we could follow the furniture and things that were left. And then knocked off on Lewis' house, because it landed there. And do you know where it is now?

Q: No.

A: Well, on Ocean Field, the second house there around the corner is the top part of that house. If you could see a picture of your house, you'll see how the top part of their house. Next to Saunder's house, which is next to the original Saunder's house. It's next to the top part of Mr. Goman's house on the second row on Ocean View. Now, Saunder's house landed in the pond and stayed there all winter. I have a picture of just the top of it. All it was were the bedrooms and the roof left of that. That was put on—whatever you do when you move a house—and taken from the pond over to this other side. And that's where a lot of these other houses are. I guess it was worth it. Of course, there was tons of storage. In our case, to build a house one year and have to build it over the next year. However, that's what happened.

Q: Tell me about the McGlone's house.

A: Oh, yes. The McGlone's house. It's on top of the tennis court (across from the ballfield/tennis court). What's the man's name that lives there now? Do you know?

Q: No.

A: I can't remember his name, who bought it. That was the McGlone house, which was down between the ocean and the pond down by Fresh Water (Rock) with that group. Mr. McGlone was in the house with his dog when this hit. I think there was somebody else with him—one of his friends or something. Anyhow, it hit and landed in the pond back by the bathing beach. And the water got up to the house. The houses started across the pond floating, and the water got up in the house. He had to get way up on the top of the roof and take an ax. He chopped a hole in the roof. He and the dog, and I think there was another person, if I remember, rowed across that pond. I've got pictures of that all crushed and everything. Now, that house is the one behind Dr. Waterman's house over here by the tennis court.

Q: On the Corner of Ninigret?

A: Yes. Ninigret and Neptune. And very much like it was before. Mr. McGlone and Ida lived there for a number of years.

Q: Was Ida with him at that time?

A: No. She wasn't in the house. There were two people who drowned in that hurricane. Mr. Bunce lived in the house next to Ida McGlone. No, it wasn't Ida McGlone. Ida McGlone's father, Mr. Thurston (?sp?), built the house first in that group on the waterfront. And then Ida and Jack built their house across the road on the pond, but it was in that group. Mr. Bunce, they say, came out on his porch to see what it was all about, and he was washed right over into the pond and wasn't found for many, many weeks. Then there was another one who was drowned at our beach, and that was Mrs. Crapo, who lived down near Red Top—a house ("*Cedar Haven*") down near Red Top. She was the mother of Gladys Best, the artist, and Lucille Griffin that lives up the road now and Lila Soule (*not the same Soule that bought a lot at 170 Surfside Avenue*). She (*Mrs. Crapo*) and her nurse were drowned in that.

Q: Tell me about the Tetlows during the hurricane.

A: I did tell you that. Well, there was Dr. Lloyd Tetlow. He was a retired dentist. And his wife, Esther. They were right down there. When this thing started, they collected their good silver that they had with them there, in a basket and started to

run up the road. A wave came and took them and landed them way up in the marsh grass. When the water receded, as it did—it came very quickly and out again—they were both knocked out. And when they got their breath, one of them hollered to the other one. After a while, they located each other in the marsh grass. But their silver had gone to the winds. So, everybody around there was hunting for their silver for days in the sand and the marshland and everything.

Q: They were just lucky they were alive.

A: Yes.

Q: I'd like to know about this area where you're living now, and what the original homes were, and when you built your home. Tell me about your original home in this area of the beach (*25 Ninigret Avenue*).

A: This (*Edith Fisher's home where the interview is taking place*) was kind of forced on account of the houses that landed in the pond. They didn't want to go back anywhere near the water. For example, right across from where I am now (*25 Ninigret Avenue*) the cottage, was originally built for Mrs. Vars, the mother of Raymond and Clarence Vars, and she had the house on the waterfront near Thorp's. That landed over across the pond, and so they came up here first, along with the three houses right there where Mrs. Var's house is now located (on Ninigret). There are three houses. My house came from Central Beach. The next house, Turner's house, or the wood from that house, because it was really demolished, comes from farther up the beach. The corner house (corner of Sea Breeze Avenue and Ninigret Avenue) was professor Wilkinson from Connecticut College (1 Ninigret Avenue owned by the Priors at the date of the interview). They used to come down here with his boys—the carpenters—and built that house. That was down between the Pittsfield group and Central Beach. Down in there, there were two or three houses where our bathing beach is now. Those are the three houses right opposite me (*at 25 Ninigret*), and they were the first ones that were put up here after the hurricane.

Q: Tell me about one of the homes that was built from the wood left over from the pumphouse.

A: No. The icehouse. That was a little red house over on East Beach. If you go down the road there. Mr. Conklin owns it now. That was the wood from the icehouse on Fresh Water Pond (?? Garden Pond) down there near East Beach.

Q: And Mr. Conklin's red house is right next to the Dingle?

A: Yes. As you go down the Dingle, there.

Q: Okay.

A: It was built by a man—I can't remember the name. I knew the people. Anyhow, it changed hands. He bought it, but he does have it as a guest house now for his children when they come visit him.

Q: Getting back to the Vars, Turners and Wilkinsons.

A: The [inaudible 45:17] and came up now to where I live, on Ninigret Road. It came up around the dirt road, and right above Bradford Fisher's house (Between 38 and 54 Ninigret Avenue). It turned off and went over to the main road that goes down to Old Quonnie where the old Kenyon house was. It was a dirt road. That was all the roads there were in this part of Central. In fact, when Bradford built his house, he built one down on Oceanview Avenue first. Then he came up here and built the house where he lives now. At that corner, there was no road in front of his house that went to the beach. But now there are tennis courts. There was no road. You just came up this little road. It's Kenyon Avenue now. And it went out to the main road to the "Kenyon House" (*Sea Breeze Inn*). In fact, right below Bradford's house is an electric light pole across the road. You just walked to the beach from here. In the next year, we bought this land up here that had been opened up. As I remember it, originally, this highest part of the land, which is where my house is now, it's the highest part of the whole plat. It was originally set out for a recreation park across from the tennis courts. But through the years, everybody kind of came down to that end to the tennis court and the ball field. I told you about the water, didn't I?

Q: No.

A: Down where the tennis court is now, and the ball field, there was a pump. Of course, we couldn't use the water in our well. Didn't I tell you that?

Q: You told me that, but I don't think it's on tape.

A: No? Well, anyhow, we had to get our drinking water at a pump, like we did at East Beach at the farm. Central Beach had to get it at this water pump for fresh water, because it was still salty and brackish, the water that we had in our houses. So, every morning and night you would see everybody going out. People who had children had baby carriages or strollers with a big gallon glass jug. Up to the pump to get the water. That's where the ball field is now. And also, of course it's been renamed Howard Thorp Memorial Field, in memory of Mr. Thorp who started this whole thing. Now to get back to my house, we built this house in 1949. There were no trees. I have pictures to prove that there were absolutely no trees around the house. There were a few shrubs, blueberry bushes, blackberry vines. You could go right out and pick whatever you wanted. And a few shad roe trees, which were bushes in those days. But now they've grown. There was something in the original deed where we weren't supposed to plant any trees to take away anybody's view of the ocean. But these trees have grown, and people have planted more pines that have grown into a forest so there's not much view

for anybody, unless you're pretty well up front. In my own instance here, these shad roe, they bloom in May. They just come out for about a week in May, and that's all you see from them. They have grown into shade trees, and they have taken away other people's views. That tree over there, it's higher than the house. Of course, they don't quite stick to all the rules they used to have, because people will not do what they're supposed to do.

Q: You told me a while ago about the view you had before all the trees and houses were built.

A: Oh, yes. When we first built this house, believe it or not, I could see three flashing lights from lighthouses. Of course, Block Island is the nearest. You can see that. Point Judith was the second. But would you believe it, the third one was the lights on the end of Montauk Point Lighthouse. It isn't credible. You can see how trees and bushes—you wouldn't believe it, but there were no houses between me and the clear view. Now I can only see the one at Block Island. And that one wasn't shut off to me, because it comes up the street, so the houses can't take it away. But houses of course have taken away the other two.

Q: So, you started building in 1949?

A: You can see how nice it was up here. We found out. Now there's hardly any land for sale anymore. It's about all gobbled up.

Q: Just as a matter of history, if you don't mind me asking, in 1949 when you bought this land, what did the lot cost?

A: I think it was \$600. Of course, we bought three lots. We hoped to make more than \$600 on those. I think it was \$600, if I remember right.

Q: And just so I have this on tape, right now, your land would go for about how much?

A: I wouldn't know.

Q: It would be thousands of dollars.

A: Yes.

Q: I think the lot next to Mom and Dad's house, which has no home on it now, they could sell it for nearly \$10,000.

A: I bet they could. You don't know what you can do ten years from now. Everybody may be all broke and not sell anymore. We've reached the peak. I don't know, and I'm not going to find out. I shouldn't worry about it.

Q: It's interesting how the price of land has gone up.

A: Sure. Just like along with everything else. I was going to tell you something else.

Q: Were there any year-round residents that lived down here when you first built your home on Surfside Avenue?

A: No. They were just summer houses. We didn't have central heating. We did have a little potbelly stove that we put in the fireplace to come down early in the spring and late in the fall on weekends. I had sons, and they loved to get down and get in the water and do all those kinds of things. We did come down as early as we could, say May and June, and October. There were about fourteen, seven couples, that did the same. They came from everywhere, and we had wonderful weekends. There was Dr. Mace and his wife, Edith. Kenneth Mace from New Jersey. There was Mr. and Mrs. Indlay (?sp)—Frank Indlay (?sp) and his wife. There was Tom Prescott and his wife, Mable, from East Beach. They were from New Jersey. And the Fields from Providence, Jenna and Lester Fields. And Dr. Louis and Mrs. Tetlow—Louis Tetlow from Westerly. And the Keenes. The Keenes were down at the Breachway, and they were here in the wintertime long before anybody from Central was. Harold and Ruth Brown, who lived in the big, old farmhouse ("*Whistling Chimneys*" – *Jared Babcock Farmhouse*) s over on the pond now. And the Fishers. When we came down on weekends, every Saturday night we would get together. Each one would do different things. I would bake the beans. I always had a little pots for Dr. Tetlow and Dr. Mace, who always wanted to go home with stewed beans. So, I put a little pot. Afterwards, two or three of us had pianos. Wherever there was a piano, we'd sing. We'd play cards. We had a jolly time. Every weekend, we would get together in the spring and fall. There were no weekends year-round in the '40s. Of course, when we built this house, this was winterized, so we went down in May and June and September and October, and rent it in the summertime for quite a few years before we sold the big house.

Q: And now?

A: Of course, most of the people down here are not from Rhode Island. Many from New Jersey, New York, Connecticut, Massachusetts and as far away as Missouri, Cincinnati, Philadelphia. They're from everywhere, and have come here. But it's a funny thing, you'll find out that somehow in their background, either an aunt, an uncle, a grandfather or a friend or somebody, they had been here to visit, and eventually wanted to come to Quonochontaug. Hardly anybody just comes down and buys a house not having been here before.

Q: Now, how many year-round residents are there?

A: About 40 people are here year-round. Of course, all the houses that are built now are beautiful. Just as good as a city home. They're not summer houses anymore.

A lot of these people maybe take trips or rent them for a month or two during the summer, but they're here during the year. It's a jolly crowd. There are many bridge parties, cocktail parties and things—whatever you're interested in. Of course, Westerly is near. Providence is near. You can go up there for the culture.

Q: Thank you very much.

