

QUONOCHONTAUG HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Oral History

BETTY LONG and EDNA MONK

July 29, 1997

Interviewed by Anne S. Doyle

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Q: Today is Tuesday, July the 29th, 1997. I'm sitting here talking with Mrs. Betty Long and Mrs. Edna Monk in the house that they're renting on Oceanview Avenue this year. The purpose of this is a conversation to understand some of our Quonnie history through individual family memories. What we're going to do is transcribe these conversations and put them in the permanent records.

B: I'm Betty Haneberg Long. The first time I came to Quonochontaug was to visit in 1923 and '24. Then in '25 my family rented a house on the ocean where the Central Breach parking lot is now. The rent was \$300 for the whole season.

E: I'm Edna Hopeberg Monk, Betty's sister. We have one more younger that isn't here now—Ruth Hopeberg Cook. I came with the others in 1923. We went to visit the people. We enjoyed it so much that we waited and thought about coming here permanently in the summer. In 1925 we came back, but when we first came into Quonnie, you could hardly get in off the Post Road, because we had to go through tracks of grass ruts to get to the cottage.

Q: I want to have the names of the people in your family.

B: Do you want us to come up to the present?

Q: Yes. That would be good.

B: We originally went with our parents, Harry and Marie Hopeberg. We were three girls: Edna, Ruth and Betty. Eventually our families grew. We each got married and had children. My children are Jeff, Susan and Steven. Susan and Jeff are still great visitors at Quonnie. Steve owns a house on Ninigret Avenue. That's all of my family that came. But Edna had some of hers that came.

E: I have to think back. When we came here after we were married in '35, we brought our children soon after that. But because my husband, who was Theodore Monk, he had a nice, little farm that belonged to his mother and father. In the summer he thought he

should help there. He saved his vacation for that. Sometimes I came up on the train with one of the children, and my mother-in-law took care of the little one. Finally, we all came together and rented a house. I think the first one was the Goodale house down where Pitchers live now.

Q: Was that just your family?

E: That was just my family. I had two sons, Doug and Dave. Dave lives here now, and Doug lives in North Carolina. When we first came up, we stayed only a couple of weeks. That was for vacations when the men were working. And then we got down to Kentucky for five years, so we didn't get here quite so often. I think we came up, but it was a long trip. We were able to rent a cottage for a month. Then everybody was married. The boys got married. Joe married a girl, whose family had rented the Red Top on the beach. They were married in—oh, gee. I don't know. Anyway, Dave was married earlier. He married a girl from New Jersey. Her name is Joanne McGillwee Monk. Doug's wife is Jean Johnson Monk. Now both of the boys are married. Doug has two children and Dave has two children. One is Beth Monk Laymen. The other one is Emily. The other two children of Doug's are not married yet. One is in North Carolina at the University of Wilmington, North Carolina. The older child is a boy, Tom, and he is in Charleston, South Carolina studying the culinary arts with Johnson & Wales. They have a branch down there. Finally, Dave decided, after working for several different companies, as he got older, he always wanted to come back to Quonnie, so he made arrangements to buy a plot here. He and his cousin, Steven, went together and they got a plot of land and built on Sunset Drive where Dave lives now. He and his wife have a nice place there.

Q: When you were younger when you first started coming here, were you around ten years old?

E: I was thirteen.

Q: When were you born?

E: 1910. I was a little bit older. I remember the Fellows that lived next door to us. Shirley and Barbara. There were other all around, but I don't remember them so much, because finally I went off to college and I was away from here for five years. She would know more about those years.

Q: I'm interested in those first days when you were younger.

B: I think it's very interesting how we lived in those days. The mailman came, like he does now, but he knew you from year to year. He remembered you. As far as food, we had a car and could go into Westerly to shop. We had to go to the middle of Westerly. There was an A&P. The vegetable man came twice a week so that everybody went out and bought vegetables. And the fish man came once a week. We had no bathroom the first few years in the cottage. We had an outhouse for a couple of years. I think eventually, when Mrs. Bunts put in the bathroom, the rent went up to \$225 a month. The only water

we had was a pump in the kitchen that was pond water to wash the dishes or wash you face. We had to go to Buddington's Farm and pump well water and bring that home in a pail.

Q: Was Buddington's Farm in East Beach?

B: It was in East Beach.

Q: Tell me about exactly where your house was.

B: The house was where the Central Beach parking lot is now. There were houses all along there on both sides of the little road. The little road was Surfside Avenue and continued all the way up to Blue Shutters. The first few years we were there, Blue Shutters wasn't there, but that little road was there and it had people's houses on both sides.

Q: All the way up it had houses?

B: All the way up there were houses. Yes. And there was a great big rock on the beach at the end of Highland Avenue, which is where the East Beach bathing part is. Not all the way up as far as Mrs. Prague. Right down by us. During the 2nd world war, they blasted that rock, because they said you couldn't see up the coast. We had military men walking on the beach every day regularly—a couple times a day.

Q: When you were here, was that going on?

B: Yes. By that time, the hurricane had come and blown away all the houses on the beach and on the pond. So, we moved to the farm. Nobody wanted to come to the beach the first year after the hurricane in 1939. My father called up Mr. Thorpe and said, "We'd like to rent a house, and we'll take the farm for \$100 a month." He was delighted to rent it, so we stayed there.

Q: What farm specifically?

B: Buddington house on East Beach. Then my family had various houses on East Beach. The hurricane of '54 came along. I was there with the children alone. When a roof of a house blew by, we decided we'd better get out. That was '54.

Q: Were you still on East Beach?

B: We were still on East Beach. But we should go back a little bit and talk about when we were kids. On the beach, there were the Fellows and Henry Seamons occasionally, and Helen Seamons. The Parsons had a boy. He was a little bit younger. He was a little bit different.

Q: Are you talking about the '20s now?

B: We're talking about the '20s and very, very early '30s. In the evening, you walked up to Mrs. Craigs, or you went down and you bowled, or you hung out at somebody's house. After the '54 hurricane, a few houses disappeared, but not too many. Eventually we moved over to Central Beach. First, we got Fisher's house on the water. Then [inaudible 11:58]. And then we ended up at Glover's for about fifteen years. Now we're over at Reevey's, which is now Riley's. The looks of the beach have not really changed that much.

Q: What did the area look like?

B: The area looked pretty much the same. The roads are maybe a little wider. There used to be blackberries growing right up to the little dirt roads, and they'd cut them down for visibility, so they were gone. In the last five years, there are some bigger houses. But other than that, there hasn't been a whole lot of change in the general looks of the place. This little house on East Beach that we were in, where the parking lot is, was where you had to bathe, just like now. It's the bathing beach. The three Vinose boys used to come down with their parents and their friends, and they are all here now. There were some others. I forget their names.

Q: Were the houses right on the sand?

B: The houses were about a foot off the sand so much so that when the tide was high, if you had a storm, the water could wash underneath and wash through. The houses were shacks.

Q: You were saying that they were on both sides of Surfside.

B: Yes. Both sides.

Q: The McGlone's house and the Varr's house?

B: Yes. Varr's was the next house to us by the parking lot on the beach. I think the Varr's house was the beginning of Central Beach. We were the end of East Beach. There maybe just a lot between us. After the Varr's house was Nelson Thorpe's, which was Spray Rock. In the '38 hurricane, the Varr's house floated up to Ninigret where they just bought the lot and planted it there. The Varrs still own it. Ruthie Varr was one of the young people. Ruthie Varr is now Barns. The McGlones were year-round people on the pond. It was very rugged to be here for the winter. They kind of looked after everybody. Their house floated up to where it is now. They lived there for a while and then sold it to the Crosses, who improved it a little. The tennis court, as far as I remember it was always there. But if you wanted to play tennis, you had to get the roller and roll it a little, and you had to find the net and put the net up.

Q: The ball field was not there at the time.

B: There was a field there, but nobody played ball.

E: I picked a lot of blueberries there. The blueberries all disappeared around there.

Q: Did you spend time picking berries?

B: We used to spend a lot of time picking blackberries and blueberries, but not too many blueberries in this area. You used to have to go up in back of the other side of Route 1. There used to be some places that you could pick blueberries. As far as shopping, there was Brightman's. Brightman had a little store, with very few, but essential things. He was on the other side of Route 1. That's a well-known name here: Brightman. After Brightman sold it to Crompton, in the '54 hurricane, everybody went to Crompton's, and they made coffee. Then Crompton sold it. From then on there was really nothing.

Q: You had a car at all times, but did everybody have a car?

B: One or two years we didn't have a car. It was because my sister was the town nurse in Bloomfield, New Jersey, and she had the car. So, we were up here without a car until she came for the weekend. We managed fine. We were teenagers then. It was a just a couple of years.

Q: Was that unusual that you had a car?

B: I think most people had a car. The house we rented was owned by a man—Bunce. He owned two houses. He drowned in the '38 hurricane. They thought that he possibly went out. On the other side of Surfside Avenue was his garage, and they thought he had gone out to shut the garage doors. He was killed, and they found his body in the rushes by the pond. There were a couple of other people. For instance, did you know Stan Griffin? I think his wife was Kate Crapo. She lived on one of those houses by Red Top. She also drowned.

Q: Red Top was there even in the '20s when you were there?

B: Yes. Red Top was a solid house in the '20s.

Q: What about West Beach area when you were there?

B: I don't know much about West Beach. West Beach didn't have too much blow away. They were stronger. The houses weren't as shabby as East Beach, and they had a lot of rocks in front of them. The only time we saw West Beach was if we walked down to go to bowl or go to the breachway. I think there were more rocks at Central Beach that you could get star fish and things like that, but each year it changes. I may just be remembering when my kids were little.

Q: During the war, did you go up to the solders that were on the beach?

B: Not really. We all had to have black shades, and you had to pull your shades down at night—black or dark green—so that there was no light showing. There was always talk. They always said that a submarine had come and somebody had landed on one of these beaches, but we always thought it was a rumor. That was all that happened during the war.

Q: As far as the beach is concerned, could you bring food down to the beach and have picnics?

B: Yes. You could, because maybe once or twice a year we would make a fire on the beach and cook on the beach. There were very few people here as far as the beach.

Q: Was it more of a family thing, or did the teenagers do that?

B: It was family. The kids didn't have cars. They didn't leave the beach. Your fun was right here.

Q: Did you play cards?

B: I think we did once in a while. It depended on what group you were with. The Fellows lived in a house on the beach next to us, and they had an organ in the house. That used to be fun to spend an evening in there with the organ. They lived right next to us on the beach. That house belonged to the McGlones. They rented that.

Q: Was that the Quinona?

B: They eventually bought that house.

Q: That's a different house?

B: It's a different house. All those houses disappeared. They floated out or blew away. The year after the hurricane, when we were in the Buddington Farmhouse, as we called it, my sister, Edna, was up there and we went down to the beach and we dug up sand and we found plates, cups and saucers that had been buried in the hurricane. They were covered with sand.

Q: Were the steps of the houses there?

B: Some of them. But not on the beach. There was nothing on the beach. There were a few things that blew back further. You wanted to know my age. The first year I was here, I was eight in 1923, so that makes me 82.

Q: I know the hurricane was a big event.

B: We weren't here in the '38 hurricane. It was in September. We were here for the '54 hurricane.

Q: Were you evacuated?

B: No. They came and told us to go up to Crompton's, but as soon as it was over, we came back. There was no electricity in the cottage. I was here with the children. I cooked on a little stove outside—a little grill. Eventually they suggested that we go home. I was alone, so we did. The water at that time came up. I had an uncle who was visiting my mother and father. They were in the Benson house on the corner of Ocean View and Ninigret. My mother and father rented that house for a few years. They had a brother visiting them. His car went through water, and it got overfilled with water. The whole car was covered with water. He had to dry it out and drive home. That was interesting.

Q: You came every summer?

B: There were two summers that I wasn't here since 1923, and that was because two of the children were born in the summer. Steve, who owns the house on Ninigret, he was five months old when summer came, so he came and spent two weeks at Benson's. We have strong memories of a lot of things.

E: I remember the first house—we visited there. They had a big chest as long as this. The men would go for ice to put in it. That was the only refrigerator.

B: We had an ice man. The ice man delivered. It must have been three days a week.

E: Talk about a coffin, that's what this was like.

Q: Did the ice man come and fill the box?

B: Yes. We didn't have to go and get ice. And the fish man had a truck, like Mr. Pappadia with the tools—like Danny has—and instead of tools, he had fish. I guess it was a fish truck. Every time we see the men with the toolbox in the back of the pickup, we think of that.

Q: Did you ever go fishing for your own food?

B: Only for pleasure in the pond. I used to go fishing in back of the parking lot in that pond. You could catch perch and pickerel.

Q: That was considered a fresh pond.

B: Yes. It was fresh. I think now it's sort of brackish. I was asking David Monk yesterday, the salt in the hurricanes—

Q: You can tell because the phragmites are growing now. Do you remember cat tails around that pond?

E: Yes.

B: Right. The pond is so much smaller than it was.

E: That is gradually deteriorating.

Q: So, you used to spend time in the pond?

B: Yes.

E: I remember the boys always tried fishing.

B: I can remember sometimes fishing when I was a teenager. Sometimes the line would get away from me. I can remember going in the pond and swimming out for it. I hated to do it, because the bottom was mush.

Q: Were there turtles?

B: Yes, but I don't think about them. All I thought about was putting my feet in that crud on the bottom of the pond.

Q: After swimming in the ocean, that's not a very pleasant experience. If you got together at night with friends, what were some of the things that you would do?

B: What do kids do? Chat? Talk? I think we played a lot of hearts.

Q: Was there any music?

B: No.

E: No.

Q: Were there instruments?

E: No.

B: A couple of pianos.

E: A Victrola. They had pianos.

B: If you were lucky and somebody had a car, you could go to Misquamicut. They had skating, and the next night they had dancing in the same place. That was really a great thing to do. It was like a big, open arena. But a lot of roller skating.

Q: Would you go as a group?

B: Yes. I remember Henry Seamens. He had an open car. It was a five-passenger car. He couldn't go as far as Misquamicut, because it didn't have any brakes to speak of. He used to have to stop about a mile before he wanted to stop so that we'd stop.

Q: I think I have a picture of that car.

B: He was great when he came to visit, because we had transportation.

Q: Did they have a carousel over there?

B: Yes.

E: Yes. That was going. It goes back before 1900.

B: That's Watch Hill. There wasn't one at Misquamicut.

Q: Would you go as far as Watch Hill?

B: Not really. There was no reason for us to go as kids. There was no fun stuff there. They didn't have a place to hang out or roller skate or to dance. We didn't go anyplace like that.

Q: Did you go up the other direction towards Galilee?

B: I never did. No.

E: We'd go up to Galilee to get lobsters.

B: But that was when we were older.

E: I can remember going in Dad's car.

B: I don't remember ever going to Galilee.

Q: What about the Quonochontaug Pond? Did you ever go over to the big pond?

B: No.

E: We didn't have much to do with that.

B: The only time I went to Quonochontaug Pond was in the last six or seven years looking for clams. That's the only time I ever went in there. We never had a boat. The kids didn't then. There was a doctor one time who had a house along the beach.

E: Dr. Mason?

- B: That isn't the one I'm thinking of. But he had a boat. His son had a friend, and they went out on the little pond by the parking lot. One summer they caught all sorts of fish, and they came around and sold them to us on the beach. The fish man didn't like that, so they made him stop.
- E: I didn't know that.
- Q: Was there lobstering going on?
- E: No.
- B: Not that we knew about.
- Q: What about trips to Block Island?
- B: I never went to Block Island until after I was married and the children were grown.
- Q: Did people go over to Block Island?
- B: I don't think they did like now. You came here and you stayed.
- Q: How do you feel that it has affected your life having had Quonnie as a part of it?
- B: It's been a great place to have a vacation. The main thing about vacation is to know where to go—to have a place that you want to go. Every year you planned to come to Quonnie. I suppose it did us good to spend a month or two just doing nothing.
- Q: It's a centering for your family.
- B: It's something we all know about. Our children too.
- Q: Have they visited you?
- B: Jeff was here for ten days. Susan was not here this year. She was here last year for a week. Her daughter was here this year. Jeff's kids talk about coming to Quonnie, but it's expensive for five of them to come from Oregon.
- E: My great grandchildren are coming this week.
- Q: How many great grandchildren?
- E: Four boys.
- Q: You're going to be running after four boys.
- E: I can't run. I have a bum leg, but I'm ready to sit down after they've been around.

Q: You're going to be staying here until the end of the month.

E: Yes.

Q: Will you go back home?

E: Yes.

B: Edna lives in Westerly.

E: I live at the Elms.

B: Where your father was.

E: That's why I said to Joanne, "Will you find me a nice place?" and then I heard about your father.

Q: How do you like it?

E: It's wonderful. I love it.

B: Your father did too.

Q: Yes. He was there for about six months. When he got here, he knew it was the right place.

E: That's the way I feel.

B: But Edna came from New Jersey.

E: That's why Dave said, "You're getting older," and I'd had a couple of operations that took a little attention, and they'd have to come down. So, Joanne looked around, and she told me about the Elms. I went by the place, because I was up here. She said, "Wait until we go inside." So, the next time we came up, I went in the back where the parking lot is. I said, "This is it," the minute I walked in the door. I'm lucky, because I have Dave and Joanne here. I don't know how I'd like it if I was down in North Carolina, but I know this place.

Q: This is part home to you.

E: Yes. I had the car, and I knew where I was going.

Q: There's nothing like having familiar surroundings.

E: Right.

B: That's like on vacation. If you didn't know the place, you'd have to get used to it. But we can move in like it's home.

Q: For me, there is nothing like seeing you and having this immediate—

B: Yes. People are looking forward to seeing you.

Q: It's a good feeling.

B: I live in Montclair, New Jersey. I've lived in an apartment for ten years.

Q: I thank you so much for doing this.

B: It's fun to think. I was even thinking what would be interesting, but there is so much that's interesting. You can't remember it all.

Q: It's those little things that are sometimes the most interesting. I thought that outhouse was very interesting.

B: There was a woman along the beach. Her name was Mrs. Mason. She was a crotchety woman. The boys used to—not my boys, but boys in my age group—

Q: Is this East Beach?

B: East Beach. They used to knock over her outhouse about twice a month. That was always a good laugh.

Q: Things haven't changed, have they?

B: No. It's fun to reminisce with you, Ann. I wish your mother was here to reminisce with us, or your father.

Q: I know. And my grandmother.

B: I remember your grandmother.

E: Yes.

Q: You do?

B: Sure. She had a house on the same road that we were.

Q: Right on the front?

B: Right on the front. I don't remember whether it was back a little, but I don't think so.

Q: Maybe you can clear up some of my own family history.

B: I remember your grandfather so well.

Q: We're collecting pictures and putting them in chronologic order. There are pictures in front of houses. I thought they were East Beach houses, but I really wasn't sure.

B: I remember that your grandmother and grandfather Simmons very well. Of course, it isn't terribly many years that they've been gone, because they built the house up there where your parents retired.

Q: Yes. They both built that together.

B: Then there was a house right next to them that belonged to people by the name of Wood.

Q: Melvin Wood?

B: No. That's a different Wood. This Wood was our age, and they had a niece, whose name was Janet Whitten. Her parents were dead, so she was being raised by the Woods. They were next door to your grandmother and grandfather.

Q: On East Beach?

B: Yes.

Q: You were in the same crowd?

B: Sure. Your grandmother was a very nice lady. Your grandfather was a nice man, too. When I was about sixteen or seventeen, I was in the fudge business. I sold fudge for 50 cents a pound. My sister Ruth was the sales lady. She would go around to all the houses on Central Beach and get orders. Then she would come home and I'd make the fudge and she'd deliver it. My father contributed boxes. I bought the sugar and the other stuff that went in it. I had to give Ruth twenty cents for selling it. For every 50 cents, I had to give her twenty. That was fun. I think we did that for about two years. Two or three. I had forgotten that.

E: I wasn't around then.

Q: You really made a profit.

B: Sure. We were kids.

E: It was the best fudge.

- B: If we made \$25 for the summer, that was a lot of money. We were fourteen or fifteen. That was fun.
- Q: Did others around the same age try to make money doing other things, like selling their blackberries or selling blueberries?
- B: They might have. And nobody went around and cut the grass. If you wanted the grass cut, if you rented there would probably be a hand mower in the garage, and you could go out and cut the grass yourself. But they didn't have anybody taking care of the lawns or anything like that. They didn't have the lovely landscaping that you have now.
- Q: How do you feel about that?
- B: I think it's nice the way that they have nice gardens and the nice landscaping. But it's more of a beach colony now. It used to be beach houses—cottages; not vacation homes.
- Q: Do you have any sense for how Quonnie was originally found, and who the first people were that decided that they wanted to come down here?
- B: I don't know that.
- Q: What I can remember, and I don't know if it's right, my grandmother saying that originally it was hunters that came. Maybe it was from Pittsfield.
- B: Could be.
- Q: They came into this area, and they eventually brought their families.
- E: I can find out for you, because there one of the Bensons is at the home. She has books and pictures from about 1898 or before of Quonochontaug and Charlestown. I saw them all the other day. I'm sure we can get hold of them. She's got them in books like this. It's a beautiful record.
- Q: Where did the Bensons come from?
- E: This woman lived in Stonington. She was a Wilcox way back. Her grandfather started—he had a lot to do with the library and Wilcox Park. Now she's 90 or more.
- Q: Would she live somewhere else in the winter, and then come to Quonnie for the summer?
- E: When she came here, I don't know whether there was anything built at the time. There were some houses here, but I'd have to look at it a little more carefully.
- Q: I'm going to leave you my number.

E: She lives down the hall from me. We had quite a good day the day we put them on the table. We had a meeting reviewing old things.

Q: Sometimes having a photo album in front of you starts eliciting so much in terms of events.

B: The first house that was on West Beach was Chester Morris' house.

Q: That's at the point, and it's Mr. Pete's house now?

B: Right. That was West Beach then. Linda tells me it's Central Beach now, but it was West Beach.

Q: Do you remember when that was built?

B: I don't know anything about it. Red Top was there as long as I've been here. And Chester Morris' house was here. I never knew how far back they went. The only reason we knew it was Chester Morris was because at that time he was in the movies and he was a celebrity.

Q: Was that a hotel?

B: No. It was just a home. It was a house. Quonochontaug Inn wasn't always an inn. Seabreeze Inn was an inn.

Q: Tell me a little about Seabreeze.

B: I know too much about Seabreeze Inn. I had a sister-in-law who stayed there. We had no reason to go there, because we rented a house. When you came, you ate home. You didn't go out for dinner like you do now. We ate home. We had three kids. The only thing we did was go over to the Kenyon House on a weekend when you could hang out there. But there were people—the Johnsons stayed there, whose daughter married Edna's son. And also, the Frosts. They were friends in New York. They came up from New York and stayed there. How they got started there, I wouldn't know. There was train service.

Q: Do you know of people that came down by train?

B: The only people I knew that came by train were people that we met. One time there was a woman in Seabreeze Inn, and she was walking on the road. We picked her up. She was going to walk up to Brightman's, which was the little shop across Route 1. She was going to walk there and telephone for a cab to take her to Westerly to do some shopping. We said, "We're going to Westerly. Come with us." And so, she came with us. She did her shopping, and we did ours. She came home. I can remember she bought my father a box of cigars. I remember that. She was staying at Seabreeze Inn. That's what you had to do if you wanted to go someplace. You had to walk out to somebody that had a phone.

We had no phones. The kids didn't drive the cars when we were on the beach. That's why we stayed put. Everybody stayed put. People were more content than they are today as far as amusement. Even the adults.

E: We didn't have any radios that I can remember.

B: We must have had a radio.

Q: Who would have had a phone?

B: Nobody had a phone. If anybody wanted to get ahold of you, they sent you a telegram. The telegram came the next day with the mail.

E: I thought you got some kind of a connection with Brightman.

B: Maybe later years, but I can remember getting late telegrams a day later. The mailman would bring them.

Q: Like saying, "I'm coming"?

B: The telegram might have come to Brightman's store, and the mailman delivered it. I know it came by the mail. It was late.

Q: ...Narragansett Pier?

B: It was too far away.

E: The road wasn't made here—the highway.

B: I can remember going crabbing when we were kids. On the way into Charlestown, there was a bridge. I don't think it was as far as Jerusalem. I think it was in Charlestown going to the Charlestown Beach Road. There was a little outlet there, and we would hang over there is a net. We would get crabs. I can remember bringing them home when we were kids. We'd have guests, and everybody would sit around and pick the claws of the crabs. They were miniscule.

E: We had a pile of carbs for a lot of people to eat. I don't think the kids cared whether they had it.

B: Yes. We didn't even pick them. The adults picked them. But we caught them.