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Oral Interview of Natalie Goodwin and Esther Holmes by Jenny Meagher for a Project on Activist Women in South Berwick, Maine

Natalie Goodwin

Esther Holmes

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University of Maine Raymond H. Fogler Library Special Collections Department

Oral interviews for a project on the history of activist women in South Berwick, Maine

Interviewer: Jenny Meagher (JM), Valerie Coffin (VC)

Photographer: Susanna Ross (SR)

Interviewee: Natalie Goodwin (NG), Esther Holmes (EH)

Date: 1992

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Length of recording: 64:12

[transcript begins]

JM: 2:00 pm. Jenny Meagher and Valerie Coffin are interviewing Natalie Goodwin and Esther Holmes at the library in South Berwick, Maine. Berwick. In South Berwick Maine I'm speaking with Esther Holmes and Natalie Goodwin. Valerie Coffin is also here, um, interviewing and Susanna Ross is taking photographs.

EH: They have, they had taped it and they put it on film. So, uh—

NG: *As the Earth Turns*, it was—

EH: *As the Earth Turns*.

NG: That's the one I saw.

EH: Yeah, that's the one—*As the Earth Turns*,

NG: That of course was a movie too. At the time.

EH: A movie, yeah.

JM: Oh, when's that going to be?

EH: It's a, it's a whole week of celebration at Dunnybrook Farm.

JM: Is that in South Berwick?

EH: That's Gladys Hasty Carroll's home.

JM: Oh.

EH: And you can go around the farm on tours and—

NG: Is that where she's living now?

EH: Yeah.

NG: Where she's—

EH: Yeah. Yeah.

NG: Right across from Harley's. (?)

EH: Yeah.

NG: Almost across.

JM: Okay. Val, do you have some questions that you want to start out with or—

VC: Um, either way.

JM: Okay, well, okay, I guess I have a couple of questions that I wanted to ask you. Um, just want to make sure that this—I'm not getting picked up on this sound. No. Can you, can you go first? Or we could switch?

VC: Okay, I can do that. Yeah, I can, whichever.

JM: Why don't you go first and then we can switch places.

VC: Alright.

JM Okay.

SR: Is it better if you just sit here?

JM: If I'm going to interview— Okay this sounds good. I think we should both be able to—
[unclear]

EH: Are you still in college?

JM: I am. I go to Hampshire College in Amherst, Massachusetts.

EH: Uh-huh, yeah.

JM: And I'll be a senior next year.

EH: Are you majoring in this type of thing or?

JM: Um, I've sort of done a major in women's studies and now I'm doing a minor in writing and documentary work.

EH: Um-hmm.

JM: I'm real interested in history. I think that's been a persevering interest throughout the whole of my whole college. Are you getting, are you getting my voice?

SR: Yeah, it's, it's not moving a lot but—

JM: Okay, I'll try and talk loud. I just wanted to ask you both what, what I asked Carolyn to start out with. Which is that she had mentioned that she felt the women of South Berwick were very honest and willing to stand up for their convictions. And I was wondering if you agreed with that. Do you think that's true?

NG: Mostly I believe it is. I uh, I guess I don't know everyone. But a lot of the women that I know. Ah, I don't know what you think, Esther.

EH: I think they are very honest because I think the things that have occurred and the accomplishments they've made and a lot of the restoration has been women. And we've

worked on different boards and sometimes we don't all agree but we I think then it comes to honesty and each one, it's finally settled in the best way for the project.

NG: Yeah. That's right.

JM: So in your experience it's been women working in organizations, working towards a certain project.

EH: And they all seem to blend in and one is very helpful to the other.

JM: Can you think of a woman in particular? That or a story about a woman who's done something that you feel like would satisfy those characteristics?

NG: I, I think that most of us who have worked, particularly on the JEM committee, did Carolyn tell you what the JEM committee was?

JM No.

NG: We're the committee who worked on the house that we bought for the library and uh, because it is the main, main reason that we have the library is that we bought the building is to have the library and get it started. And uh, I think that far as I, I know, all of the women on the board, the men, we only had a couple of men anyway. One of them is still with us but he, he can't really work with us all the time because he's not here much but he has helped us. And the other one has moved away. So, we're, really, we don't have a man on the board now.

EH: Yeah.

NG: Oh, yes, yes, that's right, he came on so recently. I was thinking about the time that we worked so—

EH: Sky Marshall.

NG: —to get the board. To get the house, but now that's right and he's been fine. Wonderful.

He's very honest.

JM: So this is J-I-M committee?

NG: J-E-M. Jewett Eastman [Memorial] Committee.

JM: That's right. And, and can you tell me a little bit about and what you took part in, what you had to do to get the library started with this committee?

NG: Well from the very beginning we started with getting the building presentable and taking a lot of the old stuff out and beginning to find what we have to do. Papering, painting, all of that sort of thing. Pulling down all the electric wires that were strung all over the house. And uh, oh golly, just about everything you can think of. You probably can think of some things.

EH: Well, um, I think the fact we were without a library for a while because the library was housed at Berwick Academy and when it went into a private school, it was always a private school, but the townspeople no longer went there and the high school was built. So, we were no longer allowed to use their library. So, this left us in a search for a place and so that Jewett Eastman House became available. And had not been previously used as a library so that's where all that work came into being.

JM: Whose idea was it originally to get a library together?

NG: I think Carolyn Blouin had as much emphasis as anyone. And then she, actually we did have some other women that were with us at the time. Some of the older women went, then we were at that time, we're now at that stage. [laugh] And they helped us a lot. And we had meetings, oh, week after week, right over to Blouin's shop and talked about it. And it

was Carolyn that contacted the SPNEA [Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities]. And they gave us permission to use their place for quite a few years before we bought it.

JM: Can you tell me what SPNEA stands for?

NG: Ah, what is it?

EH: Society for the New England Preservation Women. Preservation of New England Antiquities.

NG: Yeah, right.

EH: It's a Boston-based, com—not, society. And they own houses in all the New England states.

JM: I see and, and, so did you, did you have a lot of opposition when this idea first came up? Were there people in town who thought it wasn't a good idea?

NG: Oh yes, there were always some who didn't think we needed a library. And because what we had the academy library all these years. And there was always a few but mostly it was pretty well received by people.

JM: And for both of you, did you have children at that time who would have benefited for the library? What sparked you to think this was a good thing to work for?

NG: Well I'm, I don't know. I just, well I didn't have small children at the time. I had children in school.

JM: Mm-hmm. At the high school level or?

NG: Uh yeah. Would be, well might have been before that with Holly. When did we start? How long ago? We celebrated here a while ago was it.

EH: 25 years. It was—

NG: 25 or was it 20? I can't remember now.

EH: Must be 25 years.

NG: Was it? Yeah.

EH: I would think so.

NG: Mm-hmm. And uh, we just, well because I don't think I've ever lived anywhere without a library before. So, we were heading for that. So, just, I guess, just the natural enthusiasm for a library.

JM: So you were both born in South Berwick? Is that right?

NG: Mm-hmm. Next door to each other. [laughter]

JM: Really? So, you must have a lot of memories growing up together.

NG: Yeah, a lot. That's right.

JM: What kinds of things do you remember about each other? Did you play with one another?

NG: Oh, everybody around played but she was the age of my sister. I was a little older.

EH: Well, I was at your house most of the time.

NG: Yeah, I know. That's right. We were, we were all fairly close in age. And we were together a lot and our mothers' names were both Alice. [laughter] Along with two others who played with us.

EH: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

NG: And there had been a railroad track right on the further side of Estes house. And we had we had friends that were right there with us and then some that were just across and we all seemed to gather.

EH: We all went to the one-room school, that two-room schoolhouse.

NG: That's right. Yeah.

JM: And that, this was not, this was for elementary school?

NG: Mm-hmm.

JM: And then you both went on to Berwick Academy?

NG: Mm-hmm.

JM: I see. And is that still in existence?

NG: The school? The little school?

EH: No. I was in third grade when they built what they call the Central School.

NG: Oh yeah. I never did get to the Central School.

JM: What was that like going to the two-room school?

EH: Wonderful. Wonderful.

NG: It was.

EH: It just, well I think it's a great way to teach because, uh, that we had three grades in one room. First, second, and third and the same teacher taught the three grades and she'd do a

little bit with the first and so on. And you, you just listened to the others, you know, you were learning all the time ahead of your first grade.

NG: That's right.

EH: And she would just put you in second grade if you were doing well. You just kind of went along the way she felt you could. And really, I think it was a wonderful beginning.

NG: Umm.

EH: And, and it was so few of us.

NG: That's true.

EH: You felt like a family.

NG: And then the second room was fourth and fifth grades.

EH: Fourth and fifth grades.

JM: Now did you go through all six grades in the school?

NG: We went in five grades in that school.

JM Oh, I see.

NG: Yeah. And then everybody moved up to grammar, Goodwin Grammar School?

EH: Yeah. The first three grades for this section of town were here. And then for the whole town the fourth and fifth grades. Then you went on up to the, another school in town. Which was a little larger.

NG: Yeah.

JM: What sorts of subjects did you both enjoy? Were you both interested in reading, in English, is that, or history? Has that been fostered from an early age for you?

NG: Um, I liked history and I liked English.

EH: And math. You could do math.

NG: Yes, I could do it then. I don't think I can do it now. I know I couldn't. [laughter] And then I did like math.

JM: Do you feel at that time in school might have sparked your, your interest in books and having a library and wanting to keep that going? Did, did you have books available to you throughout school?

EH: Oh, we always went to the academy library.

NG: Yeah, at the time.

EH: When we were small it was open then and I don't think we missed a Wednesday or a Saturday afternoon. That's when you could go.

NG: Mm-hmm.

EH: And then, life was different. My grandmother lived with us and I had an aunt living, great aunt living with us and they each read to us constantly. And that entertained them and us too, I guess.

JM: Did you come from families with a lot of, did you have younger or older brothers and sisters?

NG: I was the oldest of six. I had one sister and four brothers.

EH: And I have one brother. Who liked history and I had to listen to it. Whether I wanted to or not he had first choice.

JM: Well, I'm wondering how you both met Carolyn. Because she came here in the 1950s, she was saying. How did you both meet her?

NG: I met at first because I was on a committee for PTA at the time, I think it was. And I, the meeting was at her house. And that was how I first met her but then we sort of clicked and we've been very good friends ever since. And usually whenever she works on something I managed to work on the same thing. Not entirely, but we do have the same interests. In fact, we both now work over in the hospital every week. So, I don't know we just seemed to be able to be together quite a few meetings so. I don't know how you met her.

EH: Well, Denny was, her son was in my son's class.

NG: That's third grade. He, they came when he was in third grade.

NG: Yes, he was in Rosalie's class.

EH: They played together and we became acquainted.

NG: Yeah.

JM: And I'm wondering, it's one thing that I really stood out in my mind about Natalie [Carolyn?], she described herself as a troublemaker. Do you see her as that? She said I'm a troublemaker.

EH: I don't see her as that. I, I think she states facts and what she believes in but I don't call it trouble.

JM: Mm-hmm.

NG: Yeah. Stir things up every now and then.

EH: Well, I think sometimes it's good.

NG: I don't know.

JM: Mm-hmm. So, do you, have you been in organizations that have stirred up town a bit?

NG: Oh yes. Town manager organization for one thing. [laughter]

JM: What was that?

NG: That was a big stir.

EH: It was a battle.

NG: Yes, it was. But we at one time had a town, well we still have it of course, but we had a town manager system put in and instead of all these public servants with nobody to tell 'em what to do. And it really did stir up a lot of trouble. And as it turned out we won by a good majority.

EH: Well we fought twice.

NG: Yeah, the second time was when Bob Weiss was, was here and some people didn't like him. They thought we should do away with it, also thought we should do away with the town manager system. And that was when we really took over. I mean, not took over, but we won that position too. So, it stayed in ever since.

JM: I'm somewhat familiar with the issues but I'm just wondering what kinds of, of issues did you want to see happening when you fought originally for the town manager?

NG: Um, we thought it would be much, well much fairer. And a, also to have a trained person in charge of government rather than just somebody who was won a vote and hasn't had any training in what they were doing.

EH: We still have a council of five men who serve and are elected.

NG: Yeah. Yeah.

EH: I think they, the time had come to be a more organized group for running a town. We were beginning to grow in population and [unclear] much paperwork had come into being that wasn't, didn't used to be there. People the, you, was a tax collector in their own home or you did your business in your own home, there was no office. And, um, all these changes were coming about at that time.

NG: It's true.

JM: This is at the original—

EH: The, the town remained a very small town until really after the war. And then, that was when changes occurred and some people, older people, were used to a very small town way of doing things and knowing people they did business with. It's really grown. We've doubled in population now.

JM: Do you think people like Carolyn who came in right after the Second World War, do you think that she was somewhat resented as a newcomer getting involved in all this kind of strife in town?

EH: If she were resented did you say?

NG: Ah, yes I do, by quite a few people. By a lot of people who had been here a long time before. But she, she, she became, she overcame it.

JM: How did, how do you think she did that?

NG: Well, just by being herself and being friendly with people and it takes a while. It takes some quite a while sometimes for people to overcome that type of thing. Not as much today because there are more people that have been coming into this town all the time. And uh, they're newer people and they don't have any resentment usually. But, a lot of the old timers did. And of course, a lot of them are gone but she made friends, many friends right up there in the country where she lives. And uh, so, I think she's really overcome all of it.

JM: Yeah, it seems at that time that would be a particularly sensitive issue because the town was going through sort of an identity crisis. Are we going to change, are we going to stay small?

NG: Mm-hmm. Yeah.

JM: It's very understandable that that would be very touchy.

NG: Very.

JM: But you don't feel like that's still a problem today.

EH: No, I think people blend together better.

NG: Yeah, right.

JM: That's one thing that Carolyn was saying that she felt that the people in town very much supported each other. Do you feel that also?

NG: Mm-hmm.

EH: Mm-hmm.

JM: In what ways? Can you think of examples?

NG: Mmm. Well, for instance, getting together the Strawberry Festival. Seemed like everybody worked on that in one way or another. And even little children and the older people they all came to hull the strawberries on a Friday morning and then they, a lot of people helped with other duties, on selling things and so forth. But mostly the Strawberry Festival itself was quite a quite a thing to have. Didn't you think? Especially the first—

EH: That came about through the Bicentennial.

NG: Yes, it did.

EH: They decided to do that that year and it was such a success that's it's still going on each year in the same date.

NG: And I think it, I think all the people really like helping with it, they liked to get into it. I wish there were really maybe something else some other time during the year. [unclear] There are all kinds of things that go on where people help each other to get it on and so forth. But uh, but that's, I think that was probably as big a thing as we've done as a whole town.

JM: And you said that that came about through the Bicentennial. Is that of the founding of the town?

EH: No, the 1776 [United States Bicentennial].

JM: Right, okay, so, in 1976 this first began and wasn't it, I've heard actually Salt magazine was very interested in the Strawberry Festival and I volunteered to go and help on Friday morning with hulling strawberries. I come from a farming area myself and there's a lot of strawberry picking and I just love doing that so I'm very excited. But I'm just curious, um, with the Strawberry Festival, I'd heard that two women, two women kind of brought it together and I know for the numbers to call there were two women. Do you know about—

NG: Cynthia Gagnon and Margaret Stevens, aren't they the ones?

EH: I think so.

NG: I think they were the original.

EH: Yeah.

JM: Margaret Stevens, now she's a woman that Carolyn mentioned who she talked to and
Cynthia—

EH: Gagnon, G-A-G-N-O-N.

JM: And these women, how did they get this idea together?

EH: There was a Bicentennial committee, wasn't there? For the year?

NG: Yes, I believe.

EH: The town, I think, appointed one. A committee.

NG: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

EH: A committee. And these were the ideas that came from that committee.

JM: I see. Any strawberries are a big South Berwick kind of thing?

EH: Well, they don't grow so much here but it was just the fact that brought people in to
celebrate. And that year the Old Berwick [Old Berwick Historical Society] had so many
requests from everywhere in the country people were searching for their roots. And still are.
And this is where the library comes in to be so helpful because they come there and if they
don't have the information they call here.

NG: Yeah.

JM: So that's your, sort of your specialty and yours as well—genealogy?

NG: I think it's Esther's mostly.

JM: And what sort of people come, come to you and ask for advice?

EH: Well, you see, this was, South Berwick was originally Berwick and it was the first permanent settlement in Maine so many roots were here from the 1600s. And we had an interesting, one family came last summer and they were looking up their early ancestors and they wanted to come and stand on the land where he had first settled here. And they did and they were just thrilled about it. So, the whole family came. One was from Oregon, one was from Nevada, and the other son was in Boston. So, they all met here and found the spot where they first settled. And it was written as a request in a published book that someone would always come and stand on that piece of land.

JM: So, can you tell me about how the historical society was started?

EH: Well, it was the idea in the 1950s of Marie Donahoe and Burton Trafton, Jr. And we first met, about seven or eight of us in the Sara Orne Jewett kitchen. And it was formed there and from then on, we've been a going group.

JM: It seems like you serve a real service to the people as well. How do you feel about that as a person who's lived in in her native town for a long time, of these new people coming in wanting to find others?

EH: Well, it's really been, you really make friends. You, you find you're just as interested in helping them as you are in your own. And it's well, I just ran off a whole raft of paper today at the library. For, to send to someone. And then there's been a study at the University of Maine and we have three students who've called this week for notes on the Civil War so

we've been looking that up. And uh, you just feel uh, that it's a real pleasure to help someone.

JM: Now, the library and the historical society sort of work together?

EH: We always have.

NG: A lot.

JM: Can you tell me more about the library?

NG: Well what do you want to know? I mea—

JM: How, maybe how they work together?

NG: Well they carry, because they have some books that people come in and ask to look at but they're not as many. Uh, they don't seem to have the time or the place to look outside. When they have to look outside of the library, which is most often, then they probably mostly call Esther or Marie. Um, who else, does anybody else work with you on that?

EH: No.

NG: No, you do most of it, I know. And, and she starts looking and it goes on from there. But the library do work closely. They, they know when to call. They know, sometimes they get people like, they'll get maybe Esther or Marie to come up there and talk to the people and then she leaves and they go from there to wherever they wanna be to look. But, no, they're all very good about that. They know just more or less where to look and where to call.

JM: I'm very interested in the piece of history that you were mentioning earlier about the Old Joy Farm. Could you tell me again about the two women who originated it there?

NG: Oh I, I know there was one who was blind and I'm not sure just how long the other one lived there. I'd have to find out more about that. But there was one who lived there and at the time—did you go up to Carolyn's house?

JM: We did. It's beautiful.

NG: At the time, it was a very small house. The main room where you probably would have been or were you in the kitchen area?

JM: She actually gave us a tour of the house.

NG: She gave you a tour. Okay, because the house was just a center room and then there was a little room off here and another one. There were maybe, oh it was probably at least half of the size of the house. And she lived up there and she had other relatives who used to go to town and get whatever she needed but she lived there for a long time. I don't know just how long it was. It was my husband's family and she lived there until she died, I believe. And I don't know much more about it than that. But um, I think that I don't know just how long it was after that Carolyn and Maury bought it and then they, they lived in it for, she probably, she probably told you they lived in it for a year to see, or almost a year to see if they really wanted to stay out there, that's seven miles out of town. And they all decided they did and the younger son was, was born since they were up there, so. But as far as any more about the house. I don't know that much more back of it.

JM: So, this is your husband's—

NG: My husband's great-aunt.

JM: Great-aunt, okay. And she was a Joy?

NG: Mm-hmm.

JM: By maternal?

NG: Yes.

JM: Okay.

NG: I'm not sure that she would, I don't think she was married.

JM: Okay. That's, that's quite amazing that a, a blind woman would live for part of the time on her own.

NG: I know it. I know it.

JM: And this is a farm.

NG: Mm-hmm.

JM: So, she had presumably animals?

NG: Yeah, I imagine she did. And then, well I believe that, that, I think she had her sister with her for part of the time but I'm not sure about that, how long or anything.

JM: And at that time, I wonder if she was schooled or if just how, how it was for a woman to be blind at that time in a small town.

NG: I know it. I don't, I really don't know too much about it because I don't think that my husband knew, course, knew too much about it because it was before he was born.

JM: I see.

NG: How they held onto the house or anything about it.

EH: There were many very hardy women.

NG: Yes. That's right.

EH: In town.

JM: Can you think of a few, a few other stories like that?

EH: Well, there was a lady up town, lived in what we call Punkin Town.

NG: Yeah.

EH: And she lived in a farm way down in the woods. And the men, the, one of the Lord family, would go up in the woods if to collect firewood or whatever. And then they would also take the team of horses and come uptown while she would hitch a ride on the back when he brought his milk and butter and eggs up to sell to the stores. And very often when he arrived at the store to unload his wares they were missing. She had jumped off the wagon— [no audio from ~31:54 to ~32:07] Um, not Edith, Helen, Helen Lord.

JM: And how do you spell her last name?

EH: L-O-R-D. There's a Nathan Lord Society here that meets each year. It's a large family.

JM: Now what, what time period are we speaking of here?

EH: Ah, this was, she, she walked it over in as late as 1930s.

NG: Did she?

EH: Um.

NG: I didn't know just how long she lived.

EH: Yeah.

JM: So, she must have been, she was an older woman when she was walking five miles to Dover. That's amazing.

EH: Mm-hmm.

NG: Mm-hmm.

JM: Can you think of some other women like that?

EH: Well, I don't know. Lots of women ran the farms. You know, they did, they had large families and did a lot of work. And were the mainstay, I think, of the household.

JM: How about in your families? Did you have aunts or grandmothers? You've mentioned before that these were important people in your family—are your mothers. What kind of roles did they take in the home?

NG: Well, they took the usual role of provider. I mean just getting us dressed and fed was enough. I don't know, they didn't work. My mother didn't work outside of the home, you know what I mean. She didn't go to work anywhere else 'cause my dad worked and she had enough to do at home.

EH: But your grandmother ran a millinery store.

NG: Yes, yes she did. Yeah, my grandmother. We had a big house and it had, you know, two, what we call two sides and my grandmother and grandfather lived in one side and our family lived in the other. It's a big house with 16 rooms so there was room for all of us. And she, she had a millinery store uptown up in the business section and she did dressmaking and made some hats and sold them and so forth.

JM: Now was this, did your grandfather work in the store as well or did he have his own business?

NG: He, well he had mostly his own businesses. Yes, yep. He had different businesses [unclear]. So, he was he was busy most of the time too. Different, doing different things and so forth.

EH: I think another thing that occurred that we no longer see. How people, their daily life has changed so. And when the trains were going through there was the two milk trains in the morning that went to Boston every day and carried the milk from these farms. And the farmers would come half an hour or an hour early and visit. And that was their social life. Often the wives would ride down. And the town was very, well, that was the town center had many stores, there was shoe stores and clothing stores and grocery stores and all sorts of business here. So, it was a town center for, I think was one of the few town centers. So, life and there were band concerts and there were things in the evening for people who got together, which it no longer occurs. Each one has his own things that he enjoys and goes more separately. And, and there were always front porches where people rocked and visited and. I, I know one friend of mine used to say every afternoon at 2 [pm] her mother would take her apron off, change her dress, and wait for a caller. And that was a way of life that isn't here anymore.

JM: So, when do you think that changed? Do you think that was—

EH: I think the war. World War II changed many things—the advent of better automobiles or automobiles. And the trains stopped running in 1942. Um, and television came in after the war and life changed radically right then.

JM: Did you see your role, I assume you were both married with children, you mentioned before, did you see your roles as wives and mothers change from when you had seen your mother—

EH: Yes.

JM: What were some of those changes that you can remember?

EH: Well, I, I know just from listening to things my parents would tell on my grandmother.

Families lived together. They stayed in a large house together.

NG: Um, that's true.

EH: There was always a grandmother, maybe two grandmothers. And we had a great-aunt who lived with us as a cripple. She fell from her horse and so there was a more of a family unit than there is today, everyone lives— And then the building began of small single homes. Right away after the war and of course then that was another change. But the older people always had their place in the home. My grandmother had certain things my mother never did. My grandmother cooked the pies and she baked the beans and she did certain things and that was her life and my mother did the other things. So, there was always a very agreeable family unit. But I don't think you see it today.

NG: No, I don't either.

EH: No. I met a lady at the dump the other day and I've seen her around, I don't know her name but, I don't know how we got into discussion and she said nothing's the same anymore. The children aren't the same. The town isn't the same. It's, it's not as good as it was. But you have to accept change and that's good. You have to sort out what you want.

NG: Um-hmm.

JM: What do you think are the good changes?

NG: What do you think are good changes? It's hard to say. Some things would be good for some people. I don't know what you'd say are the good changes. A lot of them are, I think.

JM: For you, say in your life.

NG: Well, I don't, I didn't live at home at all after college and I enjoyed that. I liked the change of being away and working and so forth. But I liked coming home too. And usually about this time, but things really changed [throat clearing] when usually when the children got married they moved into their own place. Whereas a while ago, before this they were apt to take a part of the house that, of the family. But, I think, I [unclear] liked the family living by itself. although I didn't, I liked it when my grandmother was living with us, and. So, it's very hard to say. I guess I grew with the times and I liked most of the changes.

JM: Were you, can you think of any good changes, Esther?

EH: Well, I think all change is good and I think that nothing stands still. There has to be change. And I think you can accept what your needs are with the change and, and—

JM: It's important, I remember, um, Carolyn, Carolyn seemed very disturbed by some of the changes. She was saying she was worried for our children who stayed in homes where there was no parent there.

EH: This is the, I think after the war this is all countrywide, perhaps worldwide, I don't know, that women are out working. I know it does disturb friends of mine who have daughters who she, they feel put money ahead of children's care and the children are in daycare centers, and, as early as six weeks. Um, so there is this change and it's not happily accepted by all.

NG: Mmm.

EH: Some change is good and, but I think it makes a difference in the lives of children.

JM: One thing that Carolyn said is that she's a, she's a woman that really actively seeks change when she feels that there is a problem and considers herself somewhat radical in that . Do,

do either of you see yourself in the same way? Possibly not as a radical but as someone who wants to make that kind of change, who's worked in their life to see that change happen?

NG: I, I think I think Carolyn is very much that way because she can't bear to see anybody suffering. You know, that, children or something like that and she does everything she can to make changes. I think we'd all like to see some things that have changed so much and particularly probably with children. That's the way I would feel.

EH: I think one change that has occurred, and I see it here. Children have left the area. They've left New England. They've gone all over the country, perhaps all over the world. And families do not see their children or grandchildren sometimes for quite a long space of time which is very different from the way, the years that we were growing up.

NG: Yeah.

EH: You had cousins who, you know, nearby, and you had family and it was a pleasant time. And life gets so hurried. I know my two, three of my grandchildren live, they will not live in Massachusetts, but they live in New Hampshire and commute daily to Boston or Cambridge where they work. And it's a long, they're stressed more so than the people who led a quieter life. And yet the, I can see their eagerness to be in the business world. But one has to be.

JM: And there, it seems in Maine, Maine, with the economic recession in this country, Maine has been particularly hard-hit.

NG: Maine's a large state and I think Southern York County, we haven't been as, as poor as the northern part of the state where the farms and the potato farms are. And, and this distance to travel there and many families left. Um, but right here we haven't been too badly hurt.

EH: Um-hmm.

JM: So, you don't see families so much having to struggle to— or young people...

EH: There's al—I think it's a struggle for young people and I think, though I just listen to my own grandchildren and, and land is scarce and then they feel they won't have the same opportunity to make a home and settle as easily as we did back. The prices were so low that you could afford something then. And today, and, but I think it's may go back because price is constantly changing of real estate and land. Yeah, it, but there's been a space of years here that it has looked pretty expensive to begin a home. And I think they do worry about it.

JM: Um, Natalie, there was just one other question that I wanted to ask you. I was really interested in what you're saying earlier about remembering coming into this building when it was the home of a friend of yours.

NG: Mm-hmm.

JM: And this is in high school that—

NG: Yes, yes. Quite a bit. Mm-hmm and maybe a little earlier. No, it was probably about high school.

JM: And, so it was all done over as a house.

NG: Yes, it was, it was, they lived on the top floor entirely, didn't they?

EH: The Warrens?

NG: Yeah, they did.

EH: I came when Agnes was six—

NG: Yes. Yeah, right. And they were a family of girls. Well, they had one boy but, then when I knew them, I believe their mother was dead. And the father was the man who was the engineer over here at the station. And he brought them up by along with, they had, there were a couple of, there was one older girl in the family, they all sort of took care of each other. And they were just a really nice family. I loved being there because it was, they were, just, this was just such a big place. And I just liked it. And we got the one particular girl that I was friendly with in, in my grade we used to have a really good time together. And I always did like this house.

EH: There was a man who came here last summer who had lived here when he was a boy and he had been living in Alaska. And he came in and he just walked through the rooms, he said, my grandmother set right here by this window and she'd watched the cars come down over the hill and she'd say, my land where are they going? Where is everybody going? [laughter] So, he was just thrilled to come back and he could picture the whole, this whole life you know unfolded as he was here.

JM: That's wonderful that that kind of history can be passed on to so many different people. Oh now, Valerie, you had some questions that you wanted to ask?

VC: Um, yeah. I have a few actually. I was wondering, um, how did you start being involved with the genealogy type thing?

EH: Well, I don't know. I think from my grandmother taking a little bit of pride in family and listening to her. And then I think it was during the Bicentennial actually, that year that I started doing a lot of it and uh, so.

VC: So, there a lot of books already accumulated about them?

EH: Yeah. Um-hmm. Yeah, we have published books, yeah. And then my grandchildren have been very interested. In fact, every time we go by a cemetery, I think that's all we do is get out and go through the cemeteries. But we're always hunting for a lost person. But they enjoy it.

VC: Did your, was your family part of the original settlement, or—

EH: Not here. No, no. But we've joined, each year we go down to Duxbury in Plymouth to the reunion and uh, we stem from the John Alden-Priscilla family, so I've joined those different societies but. It's kind of fun. But, I know that you kind of get a real feeling when you, I took all the grandchildren on the Mayflower and, and to think they, you can't believe how these people endured this and the numbers that were on there. Because it's so small. And the trip and the time it took and what they struggled with. And then they left Duxbury and settled way down in Maine and then came back up to this area through the years. It, it's not just names that you go by, it gives you a sense of their drudgery, in fact, to, to settle these places and how they traveled. It must have been very difficult to travel. Um, they came by oxen and took everything they had. And the bravery of the women to leave where they were familiar with and to come down into wilderness, which it was. And to raise a family and they all had eight, ten, twelve children and 'cause some died and, uh. But the life must have been very difficult so, I think it teaches today's children that life isn't, life is always a struggle.

NG: Esther's husband was very interested in antiques and also did he get a chance to be interested in genealogy at the same time?

EH: Yeah, I've done his family.

NG: Yeah, that's what I thought, you had. And he was actually, he was responsible for us getting this building because he was a manager of the electric light company here in town. And when they moved, to move away from here, he was the one that prevailed on them to give him, to let him have this building and they did for a dollar.

VC: Were they actually using this then or?

NG: This was the—

EH: It was the apartments. And it was going to be sold because they had no use for them. So, the idea popped in his head that we needed it.

NG: Craig really did a lot for this company, for this this place here and, and the historical society. He was really one of the head ones of it and—

EH: Well, he just enjoyed it.

NG: Huh?

EH: He enjoyed it.

NG: Well I know he did, like you do too, but he still, he still did a real lot of work towards it. And it, it was just great to have him, and we had a memorial for him at one time. He built us this cabinet where our books are, and he did an awful lot of things. But he, I would say that he's really the one who's responsible for getting us going the way he did.

VC: Um, do you think that the historical commission and South Berwick being like one of the first settlements in Maine gives people some other sense of history from living here or?

EH: Do you mean the people who live here or the people who come from another place?

We've, we've had numerous requests. We used to get them all the time from people who

want to establish their roots and they come with thick volumes and just keep adding to it. And one instance that I was particularly pleased about. A library called me one day about two years ago, would I come up and talk with this lady was doing genealogy of the Hodgsons, that was my grandmother's family. And this is where it pays to have somebody who knows somebody in town. You know, this is a small town. And I went up and chatted with her. And so, I said well I'm looking for a certain man and gave her the, she said give me the information. And it was a year later and I had forgotten about it when she con—, this man contacted me from New Hampshire he had all the information I needed and it was through the woman from Florida who contacted the man in New Hampshire and I got my information. So, it, it just works out to be so pleasant to have these things occur.

VC: Um, what else does the historical commission do besides the genealogy and maintaining this building?

EH: Well, I think it's just people who get together with a love of history and a love of the age of the community and we're not a big group but we're certainly enthusiastic.

NG: Umm.

EH: And everybody is just so friendly and it's just a very small group of wonderful people willing to do everything.

VC: Do you have monthly meetings?

EH: Um-hmm. We have outside speakers.

NG: And in the summer this building is open too. For people to come in on Saturdays only. Because it's free. And we haven't, we haven't opened except for meetings and all kinds of other things but.

EH: We do a house tour each year to make money. And there are some of the older homes in town as well as some of the new and we've always made a great deal of money that way and people from everywhere have come.

VC: I noticed that there were a few signs in the center that said something about the Berwick Historical District?

EH: Yes, that's another, that's part of a town planning the comprehensive planning of the town.

VC: So, it's—

EH: Natalie had a great-aunt who was one of the most wonderful women I've ever known. Was she a great-aunt? No, Helen tante, not great-aunt. Helen tante. And Helen left us a considerable amount of money when she died but she was one of the pioneers I think of many things.

NG: That's right.

VC: So, this historical society, is it associated at all with the Sarah Orne Jewett house or—

EH: No. This is, uh, it's independent of that.

VC: Okay.

NG: There is a group we belong to of state historical societies. Every society in the state pays a certain fee and we are, we exchange information and belong to a league I guess you'd call it of societies.

VC: Um-hmm.

NG: It's amazing how many people do write from outside the town, oh, for information on some things, not just genealogy. But what was that about that coach that we lent that somebody has that we— Who was that, that Mary saw often in New York?

EH: Oh, that was the Grace Darling.

NG: Yeah.

EH: That was, uh—

NG: Just as an example.

EH: Instead of buses they would have these open, large, long wagons that would take people, a group of people, as many as 20 to the beach or to Dover, what, and it was just free bus era. And it was very elaborately painted and drawn by horses from the livery stable. And that was purchased by St. Paul's School in Concord, New Hampshire and they carried the basketball team in it. And then time went on and the, I don't know how or why, but the Stony Brook Museum in New York has acquired it. And it's been repainted and refurbished, and it's called the Grace Darling, I don't know who named it. But it came from South Berwick.

NG: We get lots of different things like that that we look up and all that we send them or whatever and we've done a lot with any number of things that—

EH: When you go out, I'll show you a plaque that we got last year by belonging to the Gemological Society in Boston. We get a daily, not a daily, weekly newsletter and in it they had these plaques to give away. Well it was it was families here, the Chadbourne and the Major Lee family, who had donated the plaque. So, my grandsons went up to Boston, brought it back down here and we were going to do something with it, I don't know what.

But it's, those were one of the early families. There were 30 plaques and it had, they had been donated. They had donated money to that society and then they outgrew the buildings, or the plaques were no longer needed, and so they were giving them away so it's come back home again. Just so many nice things happening that make it kind of interesting.

NG: We've been involved with the gundalow project a lot too.

VC: What is that?

NG: Which is the, we can show you a model of it out here too. It's a type of boat that came up the river to Hamilton House quite a bit. And with—

EH: Well there were shipbuilders right along the river here.

NG: Yes, there were.

EH: And many ships were built and the gundalow was very unique to this area as a lateen sail. My grandfather owned a gundalow 'cause he owned a brickyard and he took his bricks from Eliot by gundalow to Portsmouth and then they'd be loaded on a schooner for Boston. And I guess he built a good part of Boston with the bricks. But they were not known anywhere else other than on the Piscataqua River.

VC: Wow, that's—

EH: They hold hay, coal, wood, and brick. And there were 40 brickyards along this river during the late 1880s. So much of Boston was built from this area. And then the clay ran out.

VC: I was wondering too, um, you seem to think, well, you remember like a sense of unity and family in South Berwick when you were growing up. And, uh, do you think that's unique to South Berwick? Or—

EH: No, I think it was the era that people lived in.

VC: Uh-huh. Do you think South Berwick is unique to this area even or— How would you think that South Berwick or the people here are different than other places in Maine or?

EH: I think South Berwick was a little more literary community—

NG: Yeah.

EH: —than the others. See, we were first one town and then they were separated, North Berwick, South Berwick, and Berwick in 1814. And I think South Berwick had more elaborate homes and people with quite a bit of education and many lawyers and doctors and so forth and, and in education also. And with the academy being here, it, I think, brought a more educated class of people perhaps than some of the other places. And because we had the authors and so forth that lived here. And also, during the time the railroads were running, uh, you had many people from Boston coming here to, for a very summer home.

NG: Umm.

EH: People with money and they would build lovely homes and stay here for the summer.

NG: And I do think that South Berwick might have had a more, a bigger center too.

EH: Umm-hmm. Yeah.

NG: And the center itself is also spread out a little more than some of the other towns did.

EH: And the railroads.

NG: The railroads helped a lot too. Yeah. But I do think that they reached, they were, be able to reach out a little more here in South Berwick. I can't think of any particular thing right at the

moment but that's what I think that it was. And I think people got in and out of here more too. If you wanted to go somewhere. And people wanted to come. It was easier for them than it was in some of the other towns for a while.

VC: Did the train stop here or did it go farther north?

EH: It was Boston-Portland. And then you could make connections from Portland with other small railroads. But there were, oh, I don't know how many trains a day, every half-hour—

NG: Yeah.

EH: You could go to Boston or Portland.

VC: Wow.

NG: It was really great. You could get on a train right, right below our houses and just go—

EH: —and of course we knew all the engineers and the conductors and—

[end of transcript]