

The University of Maine

DigitalCommons@UMaine

Audio Files

Maine Women's History

1992

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

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.library.umaine.edu/maine_women_audio



Part of the [Women's History Commons](#), and the [Women's Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Goodwin, Natalie and Holmes, Esther, "Oral Interview of Natalie Goodwin and Esther Holmes by Jenny Meagher for a Project on Activist Women in South Berwick, Maine" (1992). *Audio Files*. 7.

https://digitalcommons.library.umaine.edu/maine_women_audio/7

This Book is brought to you for free and open access by DigitalCommons@UMaine. It has been accepted for inclusion in Audio Files by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@UMaine. For more information, please contact um.library.technical.services@maine.edu.

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

Recording number: 1992.2.8.c3.b

Length of recording: 25:15

[transcript begins]

EH: —but those things are gone today. But, we were so friendly with all of the, the people who came through every day on the train.

NG: My dad was a railroad man anyway. And, uh—

EH: But there were a number people who, who traveled every morning from here to Boston in.

NG: Yeah, mm-hmm.

EH: In the 1920s and [19]30s.

NG: That's right.

EH: One taught at MIT and one was a banker and many teachers would get on and, and they had a— And then they would come by train to go to the academy. Girls, there were several girls from Somersworth [New Hampshire] who came down each morning.

NG: Mm-hmm, that's right.

EH: So, it was more of a center than some of the other surrounding communities.

NG: And this, this lady that she spoke of as being my husband's aunt, she worked at the Navy Yard, but she was also a Navy person. And she used to take the train from a little stop about an, about a mile and a half down the track and get on down there and go to her job

and come back and get off the train right, it stopped right in the middle of the road, and she would just get off and walk up the hill to her house. But that was how you could get around because there were no cars, if to speak of, and during this particular time.

EH: Well, today you can't leave South Berwick unless you have a car.

NG: That's right.

EH: But then, you could get on the bus—

NG: Um-hmm.

EH: —you could get on the train.

NG: Yeah.

EH: Um, and, and not frequently.

NG: Mm-hmm. My family—

EH: —the trolleys.

NG: —we didn't have a car until actually until about the thirties, late mid to late thirties. We just didn't own a car, my folks.

JM: I actually have a few questions about, um, the books that were written by Gladys Hasty Carroll, is that right?

EH: Um-hmm.

NG: Um-hmm.

JM: Now, I'm not sure, Carolyn was mentioning that she believes or she was led to believe that she and Amy, Schramm, might possibly be in one of those books, as characters? Do you know anything about that?

EH: I don't know.

JM: As not, you know, based directly upon them, but there may be references, some of the characters make. Do you know anyone in town who feels that—

EH: She wrote about my mother.

JM: Really? What did she—

EH: And I didn't know it until this year.

NG: You didn't?

EH: No.

NG: I did.

EH: Uh, seems my mother had a romance that of everybody in town knew when they were in high school. And my grandfather would not let my mother marry this man because he said he'd never amount to anything. So, my mother gave up that friendship and the man died a millionaire in Philadelphia. Oh, Gladys laughed about it. But, she apparently knew about this romance and years later he would, he was a trustee of the academy, and he would come each year. So, Gladys' novel, and I'm not sure which one it is, she uses the name of Alice Gilman. And it was Wesley Gilman and—

NG: Oh yeah.

NG: Alice Hodgdon. So, she used those two names to write this novel. And she reminisced with me the other day about it. This is her foundation. Now this is something new that she's doing. She is putting her farm back as a working, to preserve it, as a working farm in the 1800s. Um, and she has put it into a foundation and has hopes to preserve that farm so that they'll always be one farm left. And, uh, I've been secretary to that foundation for probably the last five years. They're making progress but it'll still take a while. She did have another piece of land that adjoined, left last year by Burton Trafton and, and she's put up a monument that was his request. To keep it as a walking trail along the river. So, people are thinking ahead that these are going to disappear. And she did live in a very rural district and now it's all development so, it is, I think a wonderful idea to preserve part of our treasures, which is land.

JM: Certainly, yes. And I'm curious what kind of books does she write? I'm not familiar. Is it—

EH: It's New England people.

NG: Umm.

EH: In a different style than Sarah Orne Jewett but based somewhat upon the same idea. Rural people and their lives and families. Um, and the part that they played in the wars, the Civil War and the Revolution. And the settling of wilderness really and establishing these farms. That's what her books are really—

NG: One of her most successful ones was *As the Earth Turns* and after she had written the book and it had become partly fairly well-known they put the play on up in a field up in back way up the back of her house and all the local people played the parts of the. And they, it was great. I saw it and it was really good. It was one—

EH: It'll be fun to see it filmed.

NG: Yes, it will.

EH: Again.

NG: Mm-hmm.

EH: Yeah, they had the film repaired and so they'll be showing it in July.

NG: Oh, that's great, yeah.

JM: In July they'll be showing the—

EH: That's uh, part of that Welcome Week.

JM: Oh, wonderful. Oh, that's great. Now do you feel do you feel she's done a good job in capturing the life of South Berwick, do you think?

EH: Her section of town, yes.

NG: Yeah.

EH: She has not participated in town affairs, but she seems to cling to her particular section of town.

JM: What constitutes this section?

EH: Well, it's what we call Tatnic.

NG: Yeah, that's right.

JM: Tatnic?

EH: Tatnic. T-A-T-N-I-C. And it's the northern part of the town and they really have their own—

NG: They do.

EH: —churches and, and stick sort of together and, um, they're a unique—

NG: I personally, I, and I wouldn't want this to go in the book or in any magazine or anything and, but I do like her first books. I don't care for her others.

EH: Oh, some of them are very good.

NG: I'm sure they are.

EH: *Fifty Years Ago* was wonderful.

NG: Yeah, that's what I said. I did like, I did like her early books.

EH: Yeah, But, no, oh, some of her novels I can't get through.

NG: No.

JM: So, you suggest reading the earlier books about, and they're about South Berwick.

NG: Hmm.

EH: Well, that section of town.

JM: Now, I'm trying to get a sense, is it more rural, what is it that makes this northern section Tatnic?

EH: Well that's where Carolyn lives. So, you've seen it.

JM: I see, I see.

NG: Yeah, and it, it goes all the way down until it joins Ogunquit. And it is country, way out in the country.

EH: Based around Mount Agamenticus I think 'cause she, one of her books is *West of the Hill* and she calls Agamenticus the hill. But they, they, they had their own really separate, I would say it was almost a separate life from the town.

NG: Yes, it is. It really is.

JM: Is, how, I'm just trying to think of what those different, where those differences may lie. It's just a matter of distance, is it a matter of social class, are those people more affluent or less affluent?

EH: Less affluent. They're farming people. They're, they're rural—

NG: Rural farming people.

EH: —good farming people. Um, but—

NG: They, they don't seem to go to want to—

EH: They're the people that they might resent change.

NG: Yes, definitely.

EH: We spoke of. You were asking about change at the library, was there any people who did not wish it and I think, yes, probably that would be the type of person. They're wonderful people, they're good people, but they resent change, growth.

JM: That's interesting that that Carolyn Blouin would live in a center of that area because she seems one woman who was very much in furthering change. Do you think that's been difficult for her living there?

EH: No.

NG: It has been, very.

EH: You think so? Do you think so?

NG: I do. Out, living out there, the first of their living there. Until they got, 'til they, there were more people—

EH: But I don't think they would have bothered her to live there and yet to live a life that she believed in.

NG: Oh no, no. And, but you see she, they did, they had children who were in school. They, they came back, he had work, his, his work was always in South Berwick, off Rollinsford [Road]. And they were, they were back and forth all the time. Whereas the people that, that Esther was talking about our people who live deep in the country and sometimes they probably don't even see their next-door neighbor for a month or two. You know, not always of course, that's maybe a little exaggerated. But, but not much. And they are people who really don't seem to care about meeting other, the other people.

EH: They have their own way of life.

NG: Hmm?

EH: They have own— But they're very, they're very, they're caring in their way.

NG: Oh yeah.

EH: Now my father used to be road commissioner and he would have this old snow plow.

NG: Umm-hmm.

EH: You know and it wouldn't go very fast.

NG: That's right.

EH: You know, just very slow. And he'd go up in the country, called the Country Tatnic, he'd be gone for three days but they'd feed him. They would invite him in when they, you know when he'd be plowing, and he would sleep on their floor and they would feed him three meals a day. Never took anything with him. And so they were, they took care of and then one farmer gave us a cow.

NG: No kidding.

EH: Yeah, we had a cow one winter. And, uh, we'd go blueberrying.

NG: Mm-hmm.

EH: But they were, if they liked you—

NG: Yeah.

EH: If you didn't offend their way of life. They, there's nothing they wouldn't do for you. But don't come up with any, I used to say highfaluting ideas.

NG: Yeah, right. When you asked about Carolyn, did she have a hard time. It was when they first went up there and they decided to live up there and, and I think that that was when she had, they had a little tougher time. But there was, there were people around there that just couldn't imagine what those people were doing, you know, building that little house over or not. Because she was way up in the country with a lot of those same farmers—

EH: No, this is where they didn't want change. They wanted things to stay.

NG: And they were rebuilding the house and all of that sort of thing and some of them, some of them did make appearances to them but a lot of them stayed away. They really did. But

that has been overcome. You know it, since all the changes that have gone on and, but I do know that she had some tough times.

EH: Well, of course the, the school, they didn't come down to town to school. They had their own little school up there in their own community life. And so, when the children came and the future generations came down here to school and mingled I think that helped.

NG: It did. It did.

EH: So.

NG: And now you see very few of those people who hold themselves away from anyone else. Very few of them. Of course, a lot of the children have grown up and been in the schools and so they think nothing of it. I'm sure it was quite a place to live. It was very hard, a very hard life because they just didn't come down much at all. I sure had enough around. A family of six children. [laugh] My poor mother probably had a lot around when she didn't want it to.

VC: Was there any ethnic differences for the people that lived out there as opposed to the people that lived more in town or? It didn't matter.

EH: No, I don't. I don't think so. Um, there were sections of town, what they called The Point. And those were the people who worked in the mills and mostly in the Salmon Falls cotton mill. And then there was Shoetown. And the people lived in Shoetown who worked in the shop and why they called it Shoetown, the, all of the houses in that section were owned by the man who owned the shoe shop, ran the shoe shop. And he didn't even allow electric lights put in those houses 'til, 'til he died, I guess. And that was in the [19]40s. Girls I went to school with, in the [19]30s, I'd got up there and they'd be burning kerosene lamps and

there were no bathrooms and he wouldn't allow anything. Didn't want wires going through his trees. And uh, so there were different sections of town which now it's more of a blend. It's—

NG: At that time it was really more of a feudal type system. I, I never could get over that system up there, how he controlled those people except of course by their pay, that sort of thing.

EH: He was not a generous person.

NG: No.

JM: This was in South Berwick?

NG: Yes.

EH: Yeah, the South Berwick shoes shop.

NG: It's not very far up from, around by the library and then you go up and in a little way.

JM: Is this still in existence?

EH: Yes, but the people now have bought, the man has died, and the people have bought the houses and each one now has a sort of an individuality to it that didn't before. You see it was just all felt alike. And uh, must have been what 30 or 40 houses up there that—

NG: Yeah.

EH: —he owned. So, we always called it Shoetown.

NG: Um-hmm.

EH: AndTthe Point.

NG: Yeah, that was sh—, and this is the landing.

EH: This is The Landing.

NG: —down here. There were, for a small town there were several differences in people. This down here was The Landing, I suppose because originally it got called The Landing from the boats that came up. But there were the same people that lived down here on, for a long time.

EH: Yeah. Well, people didn't move, they stayed in one place.

NG: Yeah.

EH: Today is more mobile, constantly in and out.

NG: And quite a few of these houses were built alike too and but now there are more or less taken over by different people and don't notice it so much. But those people mostly worked at the beginning down here in these in the mill.

EH: In the mills.

NG: Yes.

JM: And you both grew up in the same area. What part of town was that?

NG: We came right through it. When we came downtown. We both lived on Main Street just above the railroad track.

EH: Well there was a large building where this garage sits which was called the "Hash House" because the girls who came here from the farms would stay in the Hash House all week and would go home on weekends. I suppose they had hash a lot to eat. [laughter] I don't know, but they, they were well looked after. They locked the door at nine o'clock. You

couldn't, you couldn't get in so, yeah. It was like a boarding house, you know, but controlled by the mill people. And you lived by regulations, which no longer exists, type of living.

JM: And your father, you were saying ran a snowplow?

EH: Well he was the town, what they called, the road commissioner. So, he know all the people up in the back part of town. But they were all very, very friendly to him, you know.

NG: Oh, of course.

EH: 'Cause you know, of course.

NG: But also, he had a col—, a coal business and which he was kept pretty busy.

JM: And Natalie, and your father was a railroad man.

NG: A railroad man. Mm-hmm.

JM: And he also had other businesses going as well?

NG: No, no, he mostly, he was he was Boston and Maine [Railroad] right straight through. We all were too. And I really have bemoaned the railroads ever since they went out here.

EH: They went out at a very unfortunate time. They thought they were no longer needed. Now we're trying to have the government get millions to restore them and put the tracks back in.

VC: How do you think that changed the town? That trains stopped?

EH: Well, I think it made it more inconvenient but by that time people owned cars. And I think you lost something because when you get on a train you were with people. A bus, or a trolley car, you were with other people and, and then people began to separate their lives and live a little differently.

JM: I'm wondering if you could both think of a few women that you think might also be interesting to interview about life in South Berwick? About holding strong to their convictions about organizing—

EH: Marie Donahoe.

NG: Yeah.

EH: And, and where she lives they called "Irish Acre".

NG: Yeah, that's right.

EH: And she can tell you about that.

NG: She would be very good.

EH: Because those were the people who worked in the mill at Great Works in the woolen mill.

NG: Yeah. Great Works Mill. That's right. We were pretty surrounded by mills.

EH: Yes, and you know I don't think we were the average mill town.

NG: Mm-hmm. No?

EH: There seemed to be, it seemed to be a little above the average mill worker. It retained something that other towns didn't.

NG: That's right. That's right.

EH: Marie would be very good.

NG: Mm-hmm. Yes, she'd be excellent. She's just written a book too, about the academy.

JM: That's right she's a writer as well.

NG: Yeah. Excellent. How, um— Who else would be? Awful when you try to think of someone and you can't. Probably I'll think of it, several, when I get away.

JM: Well, if you do think of more we can be in touch maybe—

NG: Okay.

JM: I can give you both a call and see. If you think of any.

VC: Do you think Gladys Hasty Carroll would mind if we talked to her at all?

EH: I would write to her and ask her. Not phone her. She doesn't like to be phoned.

VC: Okay.

EH: Um, but you might write to her. She might be interested. You can tell her I recommended "cause we do talk a lot.

VC: Yeah.

EH: She's 87 years old and she's you know, kind of, but she's as bright as she ever was.

VC: Yeah.

NG: She just got herself a new car.

EH: Oh, I know. I don't think she should be driving. [laughter]

NG: Who else would be good?

EH: Well, so many of the older people are not here and.

NG: I know it.

EH: Helen would have been wonderful.

JM: Mary Cheney. Does that name ring a bell?

EH: Mary Cheney? No.

JM: C-H-E-N-E-Y. Cheney, I believe.

EH: I don't think she was originally from here.

NG: Mmm?

EH: Mary Cheney wasn't originally from here.

NG: No. I was wondering if there was anybody down here. Most of those places are taken by newer people. And I can't think. Did Carolyn give you any other names?

JM: She did mention a few other people. Um, I had them written down to see if you know anyone. Marie Donohoe was definitely one.

NG: Yeah. And she has two sisters that live there with her.

JM: Oh, she does. Oh.

NG: And none of them married. Three of them.

JM: Thank you.

EH: No, there were four. Four girls.

NG: There were?

EH: Um, yeah.

NG: Oh, there's still four living?

EH: No, Bernadette died but there's three left.

NG: Well, I thought there was—

EH: Bernadette and Marie and Julia and Martha.

NG: Yeah. Okay.

JM: And Margaret Stevens was another.

NG: Martha Stevens?

EH: Margaret.

NG: Oh, Margaret.

EH: Yeah, she's—

NG: She's Canadian. She's been here since she's been married and she may know, you know her husband. Oh, that's right, you're, you're getting women. [laugh] Gonna say he knows a lot of stories.

JM: Elaine England was another.

NG: Yeah.

EH: Gloria Robard.

NG: Gloria, yeah. Have you talked to her? No.

JM: Not yet. But she's another.

NG: She definitely. Yeah. Both of them.

EH: She's all South Berwick. [laugh]

NG: Yes, she is. Yeah. She's really a great person. I can't think of anybody else right now. If I do, I could like you know. I have your telephone number.

JM: That would be wonderful. That would be wonderful. Okay, well thank you very much. This has been great. And, oh, the other thing, there are a few things I wanted to ask you—

[end of transcript]