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Aimee Schramm

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

Interviewer: Jenny Meagher (JM), Anonymous Interviewer (I#2)

Interviewee: Aimee Schramm (AS)

Date: 1992

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Length of recording: 59:00

[transcript begins]

I#2: —some older folks, maybe people who are in their nineties—

AS: You missed it by a year, one of the most wonderful resources. My dear friend who lives across, who lived across the river here. As you come down the hill, a big house on the right—

I#2: Uh-huh.

AS: —belonged to a woman by the name of, of [cough] Varney, Frances Varney. Who was a complete, was first family of South Berwick and a complete authority on the town. And she died last year and I miss her like the devil. She was a remarkable woman. She traveled in the wilds of South America and the green forests with—

I#2: Oh, wow.

AS: —she wouldn't go to Paris. That was far too cultivated for her. Or London. She was down in Nicaragua all through Central America. All, she, I think she climbed Mount Washington something like 34 times.

I#2: Wow.

AS: At the age, and she bicycled to Boston at the age of 68. [laugh] What a woman! She was remar—, I'm so sorry that you missed her. She was remarkable. I do have a tape that some

girls made. I could lend you, if you send it back to me. She, it was an interview with her. I think I can find it. I had two girls up from a, a college in Albany. And she was alive then. That was two years, three years ago, and they interviewed her. And they taped it surreptitiously. She woulda had a fit. [laugh] But, I'll, I think I know where it is.

I#2: Um, so are you involved at all with the organization, The Friends of Sarah Orne Jewett, or?

AS: I belong to it.

I#2: Do you belong to the organization?

AS: But it hasn't been very active.

I#2: No?

AS: Sandy can tell you more about that than I can. She organized—

I#2: Yeah, she, she already told me a little bit about that.

AS: But, uh, I think it's only met twice to my knowledge, so.

I#2: Yeah. Well why did you decide to join?

AS: Why?

I#2: Um-hmm.

AS: [laugh] That's a good question. Well, I'm chairman of the library board. When we bought the land, we bought the library building. And of course, Sarah being a prime literary author for South Berwick, I'm interested in that, from that point of view. So, I joined that.

I#2: And you're also involved with the historical society?

AS: I'm, first of all, I'm on the Old Berwick Historical Board and I'm chairman of the South Berwick Historical District Commission, which is a legal commission to protect the historical resources of South Berwick. So, I'm on that. I'm also on the Rocky Gorge Land Trust. We're going to make this a green belt here that's going to be protected forever.

I#2: Uh-huh.

AS: For, for the public, for walks, for take, getting canoes out and fishing. And I permit people full-time fishing [unclear].

I#2: It's beautiful.

AS: Oh, it's a beautiful spot.

I#2: Um-hmm.

AS: We got, we got some hoi polloi here for a while, but they're gone now.

I#2: Hoi poi?

AS: Hoi Polloi. [laugh] That's a euphemism for the bottom of the deck.

I#2: Oh. [unclear] Um, having read, um, Sarah Orne Jewett's literature, what do, what do you think of her portrayal of, of Mainers and—

AS: Well, she had a wonderful ear for the vernacular, local, the local idiom. She tended to stress old ladies. That was her. She was remarkable in portraying with and characterizing an old lady. She did one, let me see. I think it's *Deephaven*. She was not good with men. She couldn't portray a man. And uh—

I#2: Why do you think that was?

AS: I don't think she knew a heck of a lot about them. And then, she was an old maid. And I don't think she had too much to do with—except her father, whom she adored. Who certainly directed her right, and told her to write about what she knew. And that's what she did and she did it extremely well. It's, course it's been documented as local color for years. I tend to think that most of her stories have a universality to them. That she's been under, underestimated, in that sense. But she had a remarkable ear for the dialects. And she was, she was deeply concerned with the dying off of the old crowd that was associated with the maritime era (?). And she was very reluctant about the invasion of the industrial world. So, that's about all I could tell you about it. I just know her from a broad sense of, but she adored her father.

I#2: And, well in light of your knowledge of history, um, do you, I've read that people felt that her portrayal of the late 19th century was romanticized—

AS: [unclear] highly romanticized.

I#2: So, you feel like most people, you know, let's say like in South Berwick, would read her, you know, people who had lived here for generations, would read her literature and feel that it was not the lives, their, their—

AS: Oh no. No, I, I think she dealt with the specifics, that is a daily living, but probably she romanticized the, uh, the relationships. She, she never dealt with anything below a certain level of, of interaction between people. You know that when you get different levels, you're going to get conflicts. Well there was very little conflict, to my knowledge. Very little— [door creaking] You're gonna get another side of this from somebody else. But from my point of view, yeah, it, they're nice people and they probably were. But there was incest, there was cruelty. And she never dealt with that. I mean, that's everywhere, that's universal. There

were fires set in this town and objection to the fact that there was a feeling against liquor. And I guess Maineiacs loved their liquor at that time. [laugh] You're going to see a very different side from me. I'm seeing it more objectively, I guess.

I#2: [unclear]

AS: Yeah, it is romanticized, no doubt about it. It's pleasant. These are nice, warm, gentle country people that the— *White Heron* is a charming story about a young girl. And I'm sure it's fairly accurate. But the relationship between the man and the girl. It's, it's very nicely done, but it doesn't go into any depth. But she was making her point. She was, the bird meant more to her than the offer of the young man, the material. Quid pro quo. What else do you want to know?

I#2: So how would you characterize your South Berwick in the late 19th century? Near the time she was writing.

AS: Well, it was a rural town with a strong maritime history. There was, there was a definite class society and Sarah Orne Jewett was top drawer. And I guess the, uh, Hag Hagar (?), I think it is from whom they bought the house was also top drawer. And there was, I guess there was rather a paternalism on the part of these, this upper class toward the, the local country people. But it was a very loving and caring kind of thing. Very, I guess uncritical. She picked the nicest things and they were there. But she didn't scratch the—in other words, it was not naturalism, by any means. It was romanticism.

I#2: So, do you feel that, um, South Berwick today, obviously a hundred years later, but do you feel that it's still that kind of—

AS: It has many of the, yes, it's a gentle town of living. The people who come here adore it. They love it. I mean, I came from Long Island and very sophisticated society and I, I

wouldn't go back if someone, gave me a million dollars. And it has a great natural beauty. And my interest is in preserving the historical. The history of the town and also the old historical houses. Cause we've, we have now, two historical districts. Liberty Street, where you were and the Main Street, and I want to make this a historical district now. This area is absolutely growing—this is the first part of South Berwick, right here. And down where you were. That's the original part. And the cemetery up there is the first formal cemetery. Then you had, let's say you had Hamilton, who was also the first family before. Of course, that was before Sarah. And then I guess, did Sandy tell you that Sarah persuaded the Vaughans to buy that house, the Hamilton House?

I#2: No. No. She didn't tell me.

AS: Oh, she, it had gone, the Hamilton House had gone to a farming family, which I believe had 13 children, and treated it badly and had no money. And it went down, down, down. And then it was wiped out. And I guess it must have been lying there for some years, and Sarah persuaded the Vaughan family, Mrs. Vaughan, to buy the property. And they restored it beautifully. And there's a whole history down there in the room. You can see it. And she loved that house. And they were close friends. And this friend of mine, Frances Varney, knew Sarah, Mary Jewett when she was a little girl. In fact, I have a book that Mary Jewett gave to Frances Varney when she was a little girl. And she used to, and she used to go down to the Hamilton House and there would be canoes lying on the shore, nobody would ever steal them. And she, she learned how to run a canoe down there, how to row a canoe, and that's, that's what she did in South America. On the wildest rivers. Quite a gal. So, you did have a, you had a kind of paternal, well society with the top drawer. It was a class society, no question about it. And I think that was quite typical of America all the way through. Certainly was in New York.

I#2: Other than *The Tory Lover*, which is set at the Hamilton House—

AS: *The Tory Lover* is a terrible book, you know that.

I#2: [laugh]

AS: Badly written. She couldn't write a complete novel. She could not carry a plot. But *The Country of the Pointed Firs* is a wonderful—it's like a little piece of [unclear] lace that's exquisite and beautifully written. But she could not carry a full novel. She couldn't plot. That was her forte. And it was, when she was good, she was very very good. But the [unclear] *The Tory Lover*. And *Deephaven* is not a bad book at all. Autobiographical, I think. Ask Marie on that.

I#2: I thought that's what the tour guide said. What I was wondering is did she have other novels that were obviously set here? I know *The Tory Lover* is set at the Hamilton House—

AS: Well, she always denied that they were really set here. I'm not sure. Ask Marie that. I'm not an authority on, on Sarah.

I#2: I know.

AS: I warned you. [laugh]

I#2: Do you know if, would you say that Sarah Orne Jewett still has a place in the community here?

AS: Here? There's a renaissance of interest in Sarah. She's now being reappraised in a far superior light to what she was originally appraised as. The criticism has certainly raised the value of her as a writer. They're beginning to recognize, I believe in *The Country of the Pointed Firs* is, I know it's the beginning of the end of it where the Wharton has—let me get it for you.

I#2: Okay.

AS: When we bought the Eastman House which has a library now from SPINEA [Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities] we reprinted *The Country Doctor* and used the money to finance the purchase of it, as a very nice, we did that.

I#2: So the Historical Society did that?

AS: Yeah. No, JEM Committee. Jewett Eastman Memorial Committee. That was the committee that bought the library.

I#2: And that's something separate from the historical society?

AS: That's right, yeah.

I#2: And what do they do?

AS: That was, the JEM Committee? It was a group of women, myself and six other women and two men who became very concerned that the Eastman House, which is a perfect Greek Revival indigenous house, architecturally indigenous to New England. And we were upset that it was going to be lost and sold to a commercial outfit. So we initiated a fundraiser to buy it, which we did. And now we contribute it to the town free as a public library and we maintain the house itself. The town pays for the library but we give them the house free. And it's going to be that in perpetuity as a library. Marie wrote a very nice prologue to this thing, an introduction. This is the one I was talking about. This is a very scholarly [unclear] and I think it's excellent. Do you know it at all?

I#2: Um, I've heard of—

AS: She came and gave a lecture on her research. And it's a, it's a critique of her writing in essence. And it's a, it's a well done, well documented and very very scholarly book. And

very insightful. And it's well worth reading. [unclear] No, Marie wrote this one too. *The White Heron*. That's probably her best story. That was done in a film. *The White Heron*. And it's available now and you can rent it. I think the University of New Hampshire has a copy of it. And I'm very sure that Sandy has one for the Hamilton House. [unclear] It's a lovely little story. And the gal [Jane Morrison] who, who filmed it and produced it very young and died about three years ago, I guess. She was doing something in Africa and contracted some kind of a fatal disease and died. But she received prizes for it. It was so well done. And then this. I haven't read this book. It's on her childhood.

I#2: Okay. I saw this at the library. They have the illustrated copy. It's really nice.

AS: Yeah. But on the history, I think you'll find that's very radical. On the history of the town. 'Cause this was the first settlement in Maine, you know that. 16, 1630 [unclear]. Across from Frances Varney's house on the hill there is the well of Gibbons, one of the original men who came from England representing a, an industrial group in England to establish a business in South Berwick. Of course, it was not South Berwick at that time. South Berwick, Berwick and North Berwick were all one. And Eliot, all one.

I#2: How long have you been here in South Berwick?

AS: Since 1950.

I#2: 1950?

AS: Yeah, we came up, it was his first executive job.

I#2: And you still calling yourself a carpetbagger?

AS: I'm still a carpe— I'll always be a carpetbagger. [laugh] No, I'm only fooling. I've been, I've got, made my very best. Anybody tells me a New Englander is cold is telling a great big fib.

I've made some of my very best friends up here. No, I've been warmly welcomed and I've been active ever since I came up. I was chairman of the high school building committee in 1960. And then I've been active ever since in various things. And the town manager battle. We had a great battle to keep the town manager once. We did very well. [laugh] It was fun. It's a good sport. What else do you want to know?

JM: Actually, I've heard a lot about that town manager battle—

AS: Oh, it was really something.

JM: What exactly, now— I mean I know basically the terms of what happened and that you wanted the new form of government, but—

AS: Well, it had a mayor form of government. Rudimentary. And it was, then again, paternal. You know, if you wanted to buy something you bought it on credit in the store and then you— This is Mayor Curley, reduced, reduced to nothing in South Berwick. And, South Berwick was growing fairly well at that time so there was a movement, a general movement on the part of probably half the people in town to bring in a town manager to have it managed in a businesslike fashion. And we had a man by the name of Bob Weiss from, he was Phi Beta Kappa from Pensyl—, University of Pennsylvania. Brilliant man. Who, it was a second job and he did a wonderful job of running the town, of straightening out its finances, of putting it on a firm basis, financial basis. But there was strong feeling on the part of a small group of entrenched natives who did not want change. Which is just a classic condition in any political change. So,[19] it's, there was an enormous battle over it. And I was on the side for the town manager and, have you met Carolyn Blouin?

JM: Yeah, I'm, I've been interviewing—

AS: Well Carolyn Blouin and myself are the two rogues, that we're carpetbaggers. We were new then. That was, I don't know, 1951 to [19]52 I guess. And it was a wonderful battle. We had a great time. And we won. And it was a night of, the vote, was at a night of a bitter bitter cold winter. Real New England snowstorm. And they kept traipsing in and we kept, we were on the phones. We had, we had it organized very professionally because we had been on, she was from Jersey and I was from Long Island so we knew how to organize. And she had a husband who was in a position to help us with printing. So, we put out white papers. You better edit this after a while. [laugh] And finally we won, we won handily and it's been town manager ever since. But it was just, it was inevitable.

JM: So, so what kind of, you said you had, you both had organizing skills. Had you, had you done things—

AS: Yeah, I've been in law and politics in Long Island.

JM: What kind of—

AS: In civic organizations.

JM: Okay.

AS: Yeah

JM: It seems like there's a lot of civic activity in this town.

AS: Oh, yes. Yeah. it's a good town. It's a wonderful little town to live in. And there's real interest in it. And the people, I think it's gone up to about, I think it has 6,000 now. It was about 2,000 when we came. But that isn't much growth. We have a controlled growth now. Just so many houses can be built so it's, it's pretty well taken care of. And I think only 10% of the land has been taken over and developed which is very low considering how close we

are to the border. So, we've been, but we'd like to keep, we'd love to keep, people come here because they love the town. There's a paradox. But then they come in and they want services and then it becomes co—, a cosmopolitan area. So, if you can keep it, but you can't stop growth. But you can control it. And keep the charm and the— For instance, the Hamilton, the Jewett House, and the Eastman House, is it the whole ambience of the talents around that little area and that's right smack in the central part of town. But the whole charm of this town lies in those two buildings.

JM: Um-hmm. Yeah, it's really interesting the way there's the gas station on one side and then you have this whole little—

AS: Well, I'll tell you something about the gas station. It's very interesting. I found out that the man who owned it sold it to a subsidiary of Mobil Oil and they were going to come in and put one of those horrible canopies that's on gas stations now. You know what I mean, this big square thing.

JM: Right. Yeah.

AS: So, the historic district ends just a little before that in the brick building. But I thought, I'm going to take a shot at it and see what I can do. So, I wrote to Mobil Oil and asked him if they'd make it an appointment with me to discuss the canopy and the sign. And then I gave them the history of the Jewett House and the, that area, the historic area. And I wrote, took pictures and sent them to him. And they came through and made an appointment with me. So then I got an architect to come with me and had him design— Oh, I asked the representative of the company what their budget was and if we could come in within their budget, would he think, would he assent to, to constructing one that was compatible to that area, and he said yes. So, he said if I can get permission from Mobil Oil. So, we went back

to Mobil Oil. I had the plans, gave them to him and now it's a fait accompli. They're going to put a, it's going to be angled and it's going to be with the shingles. And the sign has been reduced from the original. And there's going to be shrubbery around the sign so it'll be attractive. So, it will be compatible. But these, I find these big firms are developing a social conscience, it's good business.

JM: Seems like there's a lot, I was very impressed by the respect that people have here for the historical—

AS: That's the point. It was a point I was making with them that you have repeat business in a small town. And if the small town treasures its historical district, it's to his advantage to maintain it. And it worked out very fine on both sides. So, I'm thrilled about it.

JM: Yeah.

AS: [unclear] You just try, that's all. And I'm just stubborn, that's all. [laugh] Take that out of there. You better edit that thing.

JM: It seems like, it seems like there are a lot of women who are, in town especially, I guess because, maybe they're not working or, I don't know why exactly but who have taken on historic interest or civic interest.

AS: Yeah. Or even when I was teaching I still would, I was on JEM committee when I was teaching. I always, yeah, I always.

JM: Where did you teach?

AS: Dover High.

JM: For how long?

AS: 15 years.

JM: Wow. What did you teach?

S; English. Honors all the way down. Oh, I loved to teach. Yeah, but I disagreed with what was happening in education. I don't like what's happening.

JM: What do you mean?

AS: Grinding kids out as if they were sheep. You have to deal with the whole entire child. You have to deal with the psychic problems. And there are all kinds of psychological problems today with kids. And I was bringing them home. And a lot of politics. I can't play politics. I won't play politics Never. I'm stubborn.

JM: Do they, do they want to control the way that you taught your classes and curricula?

AS: Well, you know, syllabus. Yeah.

JM: So, they want to—

AS: I don't do that.

JM: What, where did you, I, it's really interesting because one of, the woman who started our program started out as an English teacher. And she was given the dregs. The kids who supposedly, she tells us, couldn't even pick up a pencil. And she started with creative writing.

AS: That's what, the way to go. Writing was my forte.

JM: What did you, what, what did you teach, what methods or what ways did you—

AS: What methods? The Schramm method.

JM: The Schramm? [laugh]

AS: I took every course at the university on writing. Tom Williams was a very good friend of mine. Who else? Don Murray was a good friend of mine. Near the top writers over there now. Well, Tom died a couple years ago. But, it's, you know, I don't teach grammar per se. If he's making a mistake, I deal with that in the group. But I deal with the writing. I take his writing, not out of a book. I don't take vocabulary out of a book. I throw every book out. I took and wrote sentences that had to do with topical things. So, I believe in cross discipline. History, English, goes together. I mean, I don't like the isolation of the classroom. It's sterile. I was the first one to take kids outdoors. Show them what, what it is to see. And to feel one. To sense, to sensitize them. And don't ever tell me the lower kids aren't good. They're great. They were my best friends. Particularly, classes of boys, did I love them. They're wonderful. But I taught honors all the way down. Schramm method. [laugh] Composite of everything. [laugh] Well, that's extraneous stuff.

I#2: What university did you go to?

AS: I, I had a business from, from NYU but I went to UNH. And got a BA from UNH. In English. They have an excellent English department. Very good. There are some top writers. Murray was a Pulitzer Prize winner. Tom Williams had many many very prestigious awards. And in fact, I have his latest book now which is a compendium of all the short stories. And he's, and he was a wonderful teacher. But I enjoyed, I love to write.

JM: Do you still do it?

AS: And I love to teach writing. Oh, the only way to learn how to write is to write. You never write out of a grammar book. That's stupid. What a bore. Right? If you foul up your participles, straighten them out. Don't spend hours going over them.

I#2: This might make you feel better but there's a resurgence in that kind of—

AS: I know.

I#2: —teaching again at the university.

AS: Well, I was the one, one of the first who brought it in.

JM: I was going to say—

AS: [unclear] was my god.

JM: Wow, Yeah. Because—

AS: Simon, Simon from the University of Massachusetts.

JM: Um-hmm.

AS: Values clarification. I brought that in. That was way before—

JM: How long ago was this that you were teaching?

AS: That was, when I first started and brought values clarification was about 1970.

JM: That— Wow, because Hampshire started in [19]70.

AS: I know.

JM: And that was a big deal.

AS: I know.

JM: That's amazing that a small community—

AS: Yeah. Oh, I would I went in with firm ideas of what I wanted to do.

JM: I can imagine there would be a lot of opposition.

AS: Quite a bit.

JM: What did people say? Was it parents or—

AS: No, the parents were wonderful. They'd come in and I would talk to them. I mean when you produce writing it's good.

JM: Right. They were probably happy with it.

AS: Sure. Why not? I mean the child's writing and he's enjoying it. He's riding out of his own experience. What better thing to do? And values clarification was wonderful.

JM: What's that now? What is it specifically?

AS: Well you pose a problem and then you work it out with the kids.

JM: Okay. [long break in audio]

AS: Who was this?

JM: Carolyn. Carolyn Blouin.

AS: Carolyn Blouin? On zoning? I don't know what she's talking about.

JM: I'll have to ask her because we were talking about a lot of things. We were talking about zoning and I don't know if she heard me correctly. So—

AS: She has bad hearing. She's quite deaf.

JM: Yeah. And I tend to mumble so I think between the two of us.

AS: It might have been because I know of no problem on zoning.

JM: Yeah.

AS: Not to my knowledge. In fact, we have probably minimum zoning. I would— Zoning's difficult. Very difficult. It seems to do the job but then, I can support it by making a historic district which adds a little to it. So, I could protect some old [unclear] way.

JM: Right. Yeah.

AS: But I don't know a problem with zoning. I think, I bet she misunderstood.

JM: Yeah.

AS: She has great trouble, she's completely deaf. She's a remarkable woman. She's just got a mind like a steel trap. Don't ever underestimate Carolyn. She's wonderful. [laugh]

JM: So, you've done a lot of things together.

AS: Oh yeah, we've battled over. Yeah.

JM: What are some current things that are going on?

AS: With her. Let me see. Well, it's mostly cutting. These towns are in terrible shape because the federal government has cut the grants to the towns, to the states. The states mandate things that they don't fund the towns. The towns are now in sad shape because employment's down so the tax receipts are down and the cuts in the town are really hurting. And that's national.

JM: Right.

AS: Now that's, we can thank Reaganomics for that.

JM: Right. Um-hmm.

AS: Supporting a war and cutting taxes. You can't do it. And he's getting credit for you know for bringing Russia to his knees, which has been coming to his knees for 25 years. It was a

very infinitesimal part of it. Forcing them to keep their military guard but it forced us to keep ours going. And military doesn't produce the way the industrial area does. So, what happened now our industrial area is shot. We have a service which pays peanuts. And we're penalizing the poor people because they can't live on five dollars an hour.

JM: Yeah.

AS: And that's the same problem in small towns. I mean they had to cut the uh, the police. They were cutting the police force with two. That was a battle. I don't know how that stands now. They cut the office force. They're gonna, they're going to have to cut services I'm sure of it. It's universal.

JM: When you say battle do you mean town meeting?

AS: Town meetings, yeah.

JM: So that happens how often?

AS: Once a year.

JM: Okay. So, there must have been—

AS: We used to have it March. I think it's in June now.

JM: Um-hmm. Are there things going on like, weekly or council meetings—

AS: Council meeting. Every other week I believe it is.

JM: Okay. Okay. So that's when these kinds of things come up?

AS: [coughing] Yeah, but there isn't anything major that I know of that isn't universal. I mean when you see the state of California and bankruptcy there's something very wrong. No wonder the people are in revolt.

JM: Right.

AS: And what have we got? A choice of three morons.

JM: Um-hmm.

AS: That's my personal opinion. [laughter]

JM: Yeah.

AS: What else can I tell you that's extraneous? [laugh]

JM: Well, yeah, it's just, it is interesting the way those kind of things really just hit vastly different areas.

AS: Sure.

JM: Yeah, and I'm just wondering how, it's interesting to hear how different people are coping. I mean—

AS: It's difficult. People are cut to the bone. Retired people now are down, they've cut the interest down to 3%. Banks are giving three percent. They, they're over a barrel because if they keep in the bank they're getting, from, I think it was 7.9 a couple of years ago down to 3%. If they invest it in the stock market, the higher the interest the greater the risk. So, they're over a barrel.

JM: [unclear]

AS: There's no money. They want you to save money, but they want you to spend money.

JM: Um-hmm.

AS: And you know you have all these conflicts.

JM: Um-hmm.

AS: There's no rational plan for, for the economic survival of this country.

JM: It's interesting, Carolyn was saying, I mean we were just kind of talking politics, that kind of thing. And she was telling me that for her, she really thinks that women really need to take the role in, in changing this. And she really thinks that women are the ones that are gonna come around, women and minorities, come around and, and make these changes.

AS: Absolutely. I've thought that for all my life. [laughter]

JM: Uh-huh.

AS: And practice it.

JM: Sounds like it.

AS: Absolutely. Yeah. Yeah.

JM: And what do you see, this change? When do you see it coming out more?

AS: I think it's coming very soon. I think, I think you're going to see, you're going to have a lot of women putting in the Congress. I think you're going to get a nice surprise.

JM: How about in a town like this that is small enough so that a lot of, there are a lot of still traditional pockets. Do you see women here—

AS: This is all by now the, the old guard. They're kind of dying off. And as the new people that come here are sophisticated better-educated. And I think better able to handle it.

JM: What about when you first got here? That, that's really—

AS: That was another story. Yeah. It was like coming from a very sophis—Long Island's a very sophisticated society, to this little rural. I loved it. It was wonderful.

JM: But were people threatened, do you think? By you?

AS: No. Oh, I gotten a few damns but nothing much. [laugh]

JM: 'Cause I know with Carolyn, I just was amazed, for what people have told me about the area she lives in.

AS: Oh, she's in the worst place.

JM: Really?

AS: Yeah. That's the backwoods. Yeah, that's pretty well entrenched old-timers there.

JM: Um-hmm.

AS: But she's friends with all of them now.

JM: Yeah.

AS: I mean she has a way with it. She's wonderful. So, it's all, it's gone. And I think it's gone generally too. I don't think—

JM: But I wonder if she had been a man making those kinds of changes instead of a woman.

AS: He wouldn't have had the same problem.

JM: Really?

AS: Well a woman never, always has a worse time. Our wages are lower. Our status is lower. Not anymore. I think, I think women are definitely coming into their own. What I, what I

object to is I don't like the extreme radical ends. I am not a feminist that way. I'm the middle of the road.

JM: What do you mean?

AS: I don't, I don't like, I mean I like men. I don't want, I want to be a woman with power, with a decent salary, with a voice, but I don't want to throw a man out.

JM: Um-hmm.

AS: But I think men are lots of fun. So.

JM: [laugh]

AS: No, I'm kidding but I, I resent that anti-man. But I think that's a ridiculously thing. Just nonsense. I don't like the radical end of anything. Either left or right.

I#2: Do you think when you moved here people thought you were a radical?

AS: Oh yeah. Sure. Absolutely. The only thing that saved me is a class structure. Because I obviously had a few more dollars than they did. And, and, you know, people worship money and think you're great. Which is so much garbage. So, that helped a little. But it was dicey for a while. Yeah. [unclear] But I have friends all over the place now.

JM: It seems like there are a lot of, in your own way, there are a lot of women from South Berwick that are just really rough. I was amazed. I was talking to, um, Ruth Hower.

AS: Ruth Hower's a wonderful— and a bright, bright gal. She was one, one who worked on the town manager thing.

JM: She did too?

AS: And she comes from an old Berwick family.

JM: Right. Well that's what I was going to say. That her, her, let's see, her grandmother, her step-grandmother who just died, Mrs. Ethel Hasty.

AS: Yeah.

JM Was a schoolteacher and she was telling me, someone was telling me that she went and taught school and her husband took care of the farm and the kids and the cleaning and the cooking.

AS: Yeah. Yeah.

JM: At that time.

AS: Yeah.

JM: Now that's—

AS: You know we generalize. We're really not very accurate. We're not giving the right, the complete picture.

JM: What do you mean? Who's not?

AS: When we say all women, you know, that's not so.

JM: Oh, yeah.

AS: That's not so. There were pockets.

JM: So, Ruth, I didn't realize that she was involved with the town manager? What did she do?

AS: She supported it. You know we were giving out pamphlets and drawing up white papers and talking to people and getting votes and getting vote-getting telephone batteries, long ago before they paid for them. [laugh] It was great fun.

I#2: What did you mean when you said you handed out white papers?

AS: Just a sheet of paper. We'd get the kids to travel through the neighborhoods and dro- with the, the town man—the assets of it, of a new record, need for a town manager. Supporting the thesis that we needed a town manager. It was fun.

JM: Did you have any doors slammed in your face or anything like that, I mean, were people—

AS: Well we sent kids. [laugh]

JM: Smart. [laugh]

AS: My daughter went around. They didn't slam doors on faces of kids, so we always got them in. Oh dear. It was fun.

JM: So, it was a vote?

AS: Yeah. Oh, it came to a vote. Oh, yeah. A town meeting vote.

JM: I'm trying to find out more about that and it doesn't seem like town office has a whole lot there.

AS: On the, on the—

JM: On just dates and specifics—

AS: Really?

JM: I don't know where to go for that.

AS: The Counting House. Now, I'm not doing the archives at the Counting House, I, we have it computerized. And I can get you some stuff on that.

JM: That would be great. I'd really appreciate that.

AS: Okay. I think we have a whole book on the town manager thing. Let me, you leave me your address and I'll find out.

JM: Okay. Yeah, I'll be in South Berwick over the weekend so—

AS: Oh, you will?

JM: Yeah.

AS: Okay, maybe I'll go down there tomorrow morning and check it out.

JM: Actually, I'll be in South Berwick tomorrow afternoon.

AS: You will?

JM: Yeah. Yeah.

AS: Let me— [unclear] Would you like to go now?

I#2: You mean now?

AS: Yeah.

I#2: Do you want to go?

JM: To the Counting House?

AS: Yeah.

JM: Is, is it inconvenient for you to go? Or I mean—

AS: Oh, I can go. I'm free for the afternoon.

JM: That would be great.

AS: Would you like to?

I#2: Yeah. The only thing is we don't have a car with us. Is that a problem?

AS: I can drive you down.

JM: Oh, okay.

AS: I didn't expect you to fly you know. [laugh]

JM: Um.

AS: Go ahead. Incriminate me.

I#2: We're not trying to get you in trouble.

AS: I know. I love it. [laugh] What?

I#2: I was wondering, when you said you were teaching. Um, did you only teach writing or did you also teach literature?

AS: Oh, everything.

I#2: Did you? Did you teach Sarah Orne Jewett to your classes?

AS: No.

I#2: No? Do you know if that in the schools today—

AS: They're teaching it in the colleges now.

I#2: But they don't teach it in the high schools?

AS: I don't believe so. Not to my knowledge. But that, don't count on that. It's drifting down, but I do know that colleges are having courses on it. And they'll also include it in their women writers course. And I know UNH does. This gal, this [Sarah] Sherman, is UNH.

JM: Right. Right.

I#2: Yeah. I've heard her [unclear] several times.

AS: That is one of the most scholarly books on her.

I#2: Okay. The other thing, um—

AS: May I see that for a moment?

I#2: Sure.

AS: Yeah, I guess it is.

I#2: And what is that?

AS: It's a preface to this book.

I#2: Um-hmm.

AS: I think Edith Wharton wrote [unclear].

I#2: Um, the other thing that Sanders (?) said you might be able to help me with. Um, is the names of maybe some older people who might have been—

AS: Carolyn would know more than I do. You could ask Marie Donahue if Elizabeth Goodwin is still capable, but I don't think so. I think that she's out of it. Yeah.

I#2: Yeah, I heard she's in a nursing home.

AS: Yeah. Yeah. And that she would be the only one that I would know. How you doing Sean?

S: Fine.

AS: Did you catch any polliwogs?

S: Yes, three of them.

AS: Put 'em back when you get finished.

S: I put them back.

AS: Oh, you did put them back. Okay. Good boy. Nice going. He's a doll.

I#2: Are those your daughter's children?

AS: Yeah. They're adorable.

I#2: Um—

AS: What?

I#2: Yeah, what I thinking was talking about talking to some older people maybe 90 or 95. You know, talk to him about not necessary specifically about Sarah Orne Jewett, but talking to them about what it was like growing up in South Berwick—

AS: Carolyn would know more than I.

I#2: Okay, I'll try and get in touch with her.

AS: I don't, I don't really know any of the— The only one I had was Frances who was wonderful, but she's gone.

JM: I have a couple of ideas and I'm going to talk to Carolyn in the morning so.

AS: Why don't you ask her where they are.

I#2: Okay.

AS: 'Cause she knows, in fact she delivers book stuff to well all those people.

I#2: Oh, that's great.

JM: She works in the hospital so.

AS: She's very good like that, she is.

I#2: Did you have any other questions you wanted to ask?

JM: I guess when we're in the car or something. Yeah, okay.

AS: Okay, we'll drive down when I get the keys. Not going to last forever.

JM: Yeah. Yeah.

AS: They're going.

JM: One thing that that really got me though was what Mrs. Howarth was talking about with the anti-nuclear demonstrations. Particularly the ones about the Navy shipyards. And that was very intense because, well, like Mrs. Howarth, her husband was working in the shipyard.

AS: I know. There were a lot of people felt that way.

JM: Were you involved in the—

AS: Yeah, yeah.

JM: Do you know—

AS: I was involved in the Vietnam War demonstrations.

JM: Really?

AS: Sure.

JM: In this town?

AS: Yeah. And Ports—, more in Portsmouth.

JM: Okay.

AS: Yeah, we stood every Friday on where the monument is, you go out of town, do you know where that is?

JM: Yeah.

AS: We stood there, I, did you see the sign on my garage?

JM: Not, which, I saw a couple. I didn't—

AS: Oh. I'll show it to you when we go back. We carried signs.

JM: What did it say? Did it, was it your slogan or something?

AS: What did one say? I forget. I took it from Shakespeare. It's in the garage. I'll show it to you. I got a couple of them in there.

JM: Yeah. Was there a large anti-war contingency here?

AS: It wasn't large, but it was vocal.

JM: Uh-huh.

AS: Very vocal. And against the Panama War there was a vocal, small but vocal. I stood [unclear] once a week by the church. And it was led by the minister.

JM: Jim Christensen?

AS: Jim Christensen. Who was superb.

JM: He seems like a—

AS: Oh, he's a doll. He is wonderful.

JM: Yeah. Yeah.

AS: And he was the one who started it.

JM: Really?

AS: Yeah. We'd hold, it was a candlelight vigil. We held—

JM: Really? And how about the Gulf War?

AS: That was the Gulf War too.

JM: And he was involved in that?

AS: Yeah. Well, I'm anti-war. It's stupid. These are not wars for democracy, these geopolitical wars, which makes a big difference.

JM: Yeah. Yeah.

AS: You can't justify a geopolitical war anymore. Not in my book.

JM: Yeah. [unclear] Um, and—

AS: Well, look what happened in the Gulf War. Nothing. The Emirs are back in power. There's no democracy there. It's a mere gesture to it. He's back in power more than ever. And we never protected the Kurds. We let them be slaughtered, so. This country concerns me very deeply. What's happening.

JM: Now, I'm just wondering in terms of dates. Neither Carolyn nor Ruth can remember the date of the anti-nuclear demonstrations down by the monument. Or when you actually went to the gate, um, of the shipyards.

AS: The shipyard I don't remember. The, I would guess five years ago the—

JM: Oh, really?

AS: Yeah.

JM: 'Cause they were thinking it was around the time of Seabrook which is around, I think it was around [19]77.

AS: Well it was somewhat going on then but, but we stood every week. Well, I think it was five years ago when we were against that.

JM: Okay.

AS: Yeah.

JM: And how long ago did you stand out? Like how—

AS: We were there about two years, I would say.

JM: Every day?

AS: No, every Friday. Every Friday. Yeah.

I#2: And where did you do this?

AS: Where?

I#2: Yeah.

AS: Right by the monument in town here.

I#2: So, the war mon—

AS: You know the war monument—

I#2: Yeah.

JM: Now I know that someone, it was funny, I was at the strawberry festival, and this one woman was telling me about people in town. And she mentioned Carolyn as a woman who

had tied herself to a tree one time to protest. Now I talked to Carolyn about this and she said that's crazy—

AS: Carolyn did not tie herself— [laugh]

JM: That never happened?

AS: No. [laugh] Easy to get apocryphal stories all over the place. God knows what they say about me. [laugh]

JM: I just thought that was funny. I mean, has anyone though? Has anyone gone to those kind of extremes in this town?

AS: Would be stupid. No. We just, we, we marched and we stood there and we put signs up and we had truck drivers for a while shouting at us. And then all of a sudden, they went like this. Turned around.

I#2: What were they shouting?

AS: What?

I#2: What were they shouting?

AS: I wouldn't tell you on that thing. [laugh] It would be verboten. It, it was fun. I'm, I'm frankly a liberal. I mean I believe in government. I think we can't get along without it. I think we need reform desperately. Nothing can go on for 50 years after [Franklin Delano] Roosevelt and not be reformed. It's a different time. We have to reform the welfare system. We have to reform our economic system. You start, have to start thinking in a different way. We're not thinking. And it's shocking to me that le— fewer than 50% of the Americans vote, do not vote. That's appalling. As a democracy depends on it. A sophisticated electorate who are interested. And it won't exist. Democracy's not a game, it's a serious responsibility.

JM: Do you think we have a democracy right now?

AS: I think it's being diluted badly. I think we have an oligarchy running the country. A small group of industrialists with too much power. And we have a president that's kowtowing to them. Witness the lumber industry out in the west. Cutting those two-hundred-year-old trees. Slaughtering them. The poor little owl got pushed back, didn't he? To a small area. Yeah. Well conservationists can, can be, can go too far too. You've got to reach a compromise on it. And it can be done. But you have to have people with the intelligence and the integrity. We have no integrity anymore. We're a plastic, cheap, non-caring society. And it's very distressing to me. Extremely depressing. I don't know, I just wrote a letter today to a friend of mine. It was very depressing. I'd better go and tear it up. Too depressing. But I don't see, I just see that we've lost our sense of, really our sense of responsibility and our sense of integrity. And honor. Honor's a lost word. And that's sad. I taught my students to write letters to their congressmen. I thought it was extremely important. They could write what they want. For or against, but at least write. Every letter is equal to a hundred votes. That's the exchange. That's important. I have stacks like that home. I love to write to my congressman. [laugh] It's great fun. So, you want to come on Saturday?

JM: That would be great.

AS: Okay, fine.

JM: Yeah. That would be great.

AS: Good. You can sit here, come at one and stay 'til four.

JM: Great. Will you be here if I have a couple of questions?

AS: I won't be here but you could call me.

JM: Okay.

AS: If you will. Okay.

JM: Um, I was going to say. Yeah, that's super 'cause I, I, there's a stack over there and I could look through it now but to really go through it carefully I'd maybe just want to spend an hour or two.

AS: Sure.

JM: That, this is a wonderful archive. It's just—

AS: Nobody around here has anything that can touch it. I've been to the archive and society. They're way behind. We, it's three years now. I thought it was two but it's three years now that we've been on it. A lot of work. But it's been fun. And stuff is coming in all the time. Now we have to be selective on what we take.

JM: Who, do people, families bring in things when they come?

AS: Yeah.

JM: Okay.

AS: And we've requested through the schools too. To bring old photos and documents and. We found a wonderful whole series of documents by a lawyer by the name of Abner Oakes in the 1800s, late 1800s. Personal delightful letters that were found in the office of a building that was being destroyed. We brought here. And it's a complete record. It gives you a feeling of the time itself. And the ritz and the amounts of money, five and ten dollars, you know it was a lot of money then. Interesting.

JM: Yeah.

AS: We forget, don't we?

JM: Yeah. Yeah.

AS: Now five dollars won't even buy you a cigar, will it?

JM: What do you do to keep hopeful about things? I mean you said—

AS: I'm an eternal optimist. I, I think we'll survive, yeah. But I think we're gonna have to, we're gonna hurt for a long time. I think you really have to hurt before you change. That's a, that's human nature.

JM: You don't mind my asking, what do you think about our generation?

AS: I think all young generations are marvelous, wonderful. I love to teach. I get along better with you kids than I do with my own. They're stuck in the mud sometimes.

JM: Do you think—

AS: Take that out. [laugh]

JM: But—

AS: You're gonna have to edit that. [laugh]

JM: Okay. Do you think though that, I don't know, they call us the slackers. I mean, you talk about democracy being participatory, but it seems like stereotypically our generation are slackers. Do you think that?

AS: Well I think when you don't get the Pell Grant you're gonna stop slacking. I think when you don't get the money to get an education you're gonna wake up. And it's here. I, I just think

that probably they got a little surfeited with what was going on and probably a little overwhelmed. And I think a lot were hypnotized by a president who was a consummate actor. You know, he could sell snowballs to Indians. Impossible. And he never said, his rhetoric was empty. But this man. I have a book called *Bushisms* that, you have to read it. It's marvelous. it's so full of non-sequiturs you won't believe it. Here's a Yale man who can't articulate a straight sentence from ver—subject to verb to object. It never gets there. He's incredible. And he's in the back pocket of the industrialists. There's no question about it.

JM: Hmm.

AS: Anybody who recognized China after Tiananmen Square has no morals at all. Morals, my cat has better morals than that. Come on kids, let's go.

JM: Okay.

[end of transcript]