

East Falls Oral History Project

Interview: Sunday, June 21, 1981

Interviewer: Cherie Snyder, with Ruth Emmert

Interviewee: Mary Webster

Transcribed By: Samantha Kane, Student, Philadelphia University "Day of Service"
(Fall 2009) and Wendy Moody.

I: What kind of work did you do in the mills?

MW: I started out with sewing the numbers on the material. I had a big bolt of string around my waist. And I had fun, my sisters had fun in the mill.

I: Your sisters also worked there?

MW: Uh-huh. For a while. but my sister worked at Wall & Ochs in town on Chestnut Street, my older sister she worked there for years and years.

I: Which one Amy or Eva?

MW: Amy. But in a marriage, Eva married very young and she missed a lot. She really missed a lot.

I: What do you think she missed?

MW: Well, I think she would have gone on to something better than the mill, course she had children right away, and her husband wasn't very ambitious. And that's sad, when you have a family and you're not interested.

I: She had a large family? How many were there?

MW: Yeah, Dorothy, Donald, Jean, Stanley- Stanley was killed in the war, and who was the other one? Five children. (Ed. note: the fifth child was Arlene)

I: They were close too, weren't they?

MW: Very Close.

I: What age did you start working in the mills?

MW: About fourteen

I: Same with your sisters?

MW: Mhmm, no my sisters were, I think, they were older, but my older sister made out very good.

I: How many years did you work there, just approximately?

MW: Well I didn't work very long because my mother wasn't able to do the work so I stayed home, that's what I am, a housekeeper. Though I like it, I like it.

I: Your sisters continued to work?

MW: Oh my older sister worked, she never married, she was an old maid, but I always felt sorry for my sister Eva because she had no life, I mean she loved her children, she took good care of them, but she had no life of her own.

I: But she had a great sense of humor?

MW: Yes she did, yes she did. All her neighbors were nice to her.

I: Was it hard work, working in the mills?

MW: No we had lots of fun, an awful lot of fun.

I: David said you were a burler?

MW: Yes, after I did the string business, after I sewed the numbers on.

I: Well what's a burler?

MW: You pick out the flaws and they have a table that goes up this way and you have a tweezers and you pick out all the little knots and things. And then you pull them over and do them on the line, and then you pull them over and turn them. And then you had to go down the room and get another load, take it back and put it on your table and start over again.

I: Were women's jobs different in the mill than men's jobs? Did they have certain things that the women did and certain things that the men did?

MW: Yeah, well the women did the burling, and the men did the machines, you know, the winding the thread. I can't think of what it is.

I: Were salaries different too, between the men and the women?

MW: Mmhmm

I: Do you remember what you got?

MW: (Laughs) I didn't get very much! But it was an experience.

I: What were the working conditions like?

MW: Well it was nothing different, it was as likable as everywhere else. You know, they didn't feel bad about it, it was kind of easy. They could talk on their lunch hour, they didn't go home. They thought it was all right.

I: You mentioned that you had a lot of fun, what kinds of things did you do?

MW: Yeah, fun. There was a little old maid there and they used to tantalize her a little bit. And she didn't like it a bit. But they had lots of fun, and there were girls too, at this end of the table, two girls at the table. This one would be talking to you standing here about her. (Laughs). And I was like, 'Don't, don't, she'll hear you!' And she said, 'Ah!'

I: So it was a good time to gossip?

MW: (Laughs). Yeah, oh yeah. But we used to go caroling up to Dobson's. They were just a little past the women's hospital. And they had a big stone house. (Oh look at the parade coming in! They were out camping all night those two girls!

(Laughs) So, where was I? We used to go up caroling, all the choirs went from the churches. And the men would come; there was a group with horns that would play. And we enjoyed it so much, and we walked all the way. We were walking until six o'clock in the morning!

I: And this was Christmas Eve or just some time...?

*MW: Christmas Eve. Mmhmm. And they'd give us money for the church. So one time when we were in there, Mary Elizabeth Altemus was home. And there was a boyfriend there, and she was kind of showing off. And she said, and we were all standing there, (of course we couldn't sing when she was talking on the phone). She said, "Oh my," she said, "you should be here," she said, "There's a crowd of people here; they're looking at this strange telephone; they've never saw a telephone." And that made me furious! I thought, "Oh if I could just go over to her and say 'My dear, we've had a telephone for years!'" *Laughs.**

But we went there until they moved, I guess he died; I don't remember him dying. Then he had a brother down on Allegheny Avenue.

I: And which one was that?

MW: That was James. But this was James, oh that's John.

I: They always said John was the cranky one?

MW: Yeah he didn't bother with anybody, much.

I: At Christmastime, did the Dobson's do anything for their employees? Did you get a bonus or a turkey?

MW: Oh no, no.

I: Nothing? They didn't do that back then, huh?

MW: Yeah, nothing like that.

I: What would happen if you were sick and you couldn't go to work one day?

MW: You would just go in the next day.

I: Did they have a telephone? Did you call in sick, or did you just not go in?

*MW: *Laughs.* We just didn't go in, we went in the next day.*

I: And you weren't paid for that day?

MW: Oh no, oh no.

I: What would happen if you were hurt on the job, something happened? Did the Dobsons take care of your medical bills?

*MW: I don't know about that. I was healthy. *Laughs.* Oh! I have a picture of Mrs. Altemus upstairs if you'd like to see it.*

I: We'd love to; we'd love to see it.

MW: She was a nice lady, very nice. Kind to you, speak to you. If she saw you, she'd pass you in the car she'd wave to you. That was nice; she didn't have to do that.

I: Can you describe how she looked?

MW: Oh she was tall, white hair when I remember her. And mostly wore black, I think.

I: Why was that, did she just like it?

MW: I imagine she just liked it. In that time they thought she was really dressed up. And she wore that same hat for years and years and years, had it recovered. (Laughs). Poor Mrs. Altemus. But she liked the way that hat looked on her and felt, so she kept the frame and just had it covered over and over and over again. And her mother was the sweetest little soul; I don't ever remember hearing her talk. But the family used to sit in the stairway, when we would go to sing. And Mrs. Altemus would be down with us. They gave us coffee.

I: So you were actually invited in the house? Do you remember at all what it looked like? Or what your impressions of it were?

MW: This is what impressed me: the drape, one of the drapes, was over the radiator, and it must have been too hot, and it burnt. Well it wasn't taken away and fixed, it was still there, and it was there the next time! (Laughs). So you see how we do things?

I: So the rich maybe aren't so different from us sometimes?

MW: (Laughs). That's right! That's funny.

I: I'm also curious about the house, just because its not there and I think other people in this community had seen it and I never had. What was their house like on the outside?

MW: Well, when we were young, we kind of thought it was more like a castle, stones, you know. And they allowed us to go during the picnics on the grounds, and we had nice times. And the Mother's Club used to go up there for picnics.

I: And what was the Mother's Club?

MW: That was a group of all kinds of women, housekeepers, and they had it for years, in the Falls. And Mrs. Altemus was interested, and she helped them out occasionally. I got in on the tail end. And they used to do nice things; they had a choir, they met at the library.

I: At Old Academy or up at the Falls Library?

MW: Mmhmm, the Falls.

I: Somebody in another interview told us that Mrs. Altemus, she thought Mrs. Altemus actually worked at the mill a little bit when she was younger; do you know if that's true?

MW: Oh no, I don't know, I didn't know that.

I: Maybe in the office or something?

MW: Yeah, maybe.

I: What would you say might be your most vivid memory of working at Dobson Mills? What just stands out more than anything, or a feeling you had about Dobson that just stayed with you?

MW: Well there was many, it was fun. I had lots of fun. Lots of fun, and then later I worked at the Harry Clayton's store, on Conrad Street. Between Sunnyside and Bowman.

I: So you worked there?

MW: I worked there. I remember twin boys that worked for them, one worked at the grocery store, where I worked, and one worked at the meat store down at the next corner. And they were the skinniest kids I ever saw! (Laughs). And they were demons! This one, every time I went down to the cellar- of course Mr. Clayton didn't care when I carried up from the cellar- I used to carry up cases of cans, up the cellar steps. And I met his son not too long ago, and he said, "Mary, how did you like, uh, remember what you got for salary?" I said, "Yeah I remember." He said, "Eleven dollars." I said, "Oh no, oh no, Harry, no! Seven dollars!" (Laughs). Because I remember when he gave me that seven dollars one week, I went home and I said to mother, we are going to Row's (?) in Germantown, and I'm going to buy you something. So, I bought her a seven dollar pocketbook.

I: Oh I bet that was a big deal.

MW: (Laughs). Oh boy was that something! And she said, "Oh child," she always said oh child, "Child, oh that's a shame you shouldn't have done that." So this boy that worked with me, he would hide down the cellar, and I didn't know he was down there, and he would jump out at me, and I would get a hold of him, I could handle him, you know, he was skinny, and I would get him and I would thump the back of him. And he would laugh, you never knew that he felt it because he wouldn't let you know. (Laughs). But he would do it again the next time!

I: And how old were you when you worked there?

MW: I must have been about fifteen, sixteen.

I: David said something about pushing a truck?

MW: At the store? Oh I pushed everything! I cleaned the shelves, I cleaned the windows, I did everything!

I: Well was the truck an automobile truck?

MW: Oh yeah, actually no it was a car, an old fashioned car. And you know there's a street-Division Street- between Sunnyside and Bowman, and they treated me like I was a boy. 'Mary come on you have to help push the car!'

I: Were you as little as you are now?

MW: Oh I guess I was littler than I am now. There had to be about four of us pushing that car, through the little old street. And they didn't think anything of

that, having a girl push the car. That was nothing! What are you talking about, you know! Laughs. Oh but through it all, I enjoyed my life. Really, I didn't have anything, but I enjoyed life. So I can't, he put, did you have the paper that he wrote on?

I: Yeah let's take a look, let me just ask a couple things, I usually like to start out asking, but it doesn't matter when I ask them. And then we can go to some other question. When were you born?

MW: I was born in 1897.

I: What day?

MW: The day? Oh, August 11. We have a cradle that all our children were in, it's a wooden cradle that I put over

RE: I was going to bring that up. They had a family cradle.

MW. It came from England.

RE: It came from England. The youngest girl said that was what was wrong with her - that when she was in it - that was Gladys - she said - she cried - anyone who was minding her at the time had to rock the cradle and they rocked her sideways -back and forth - and her head banged on one side - banged on the other side - back and forth - and she always said that that was what was wrong with her.

MW: Well there was a hole bored in the side of the cradle, and we put a string in there, and we used to pull the string up at the end, you know. Maybe that's what wrong with me, I don't know. Laughs.

I: Were you born in East Falls?

MW: Yes. I was born on Sunnyside, lower Sunnyside.

I: And your parents were born in England? Both of them were born in England?

MW: Mmhmm, the same town.

I: What town?

MW: Osset.

I: Do you know, I don't know England, do you know what part of England that was? North, South, East, West?

MW: Yorkshire.

I: And do you remember just approximately when they came? Were they a young couple?

MW: Yeah, he came first. See when there's a family, the oldest one would come first. And after he got a job, the next one would come. And the father would stay over there until they were all over here.

I: Was he married to your mother at that time?

MW: *No, he was a young boy. And, let's see, that's how they came over.*

I: And she didn't know him when she came over?

MW: *Oh yes she was keeping company, that's why they sent him back again. He went back over to bring my mother, and she lived with these people, until they could afford to get a place. But, the girls, there were two girls, they used to make fun of him, when she came over it was in February, and she had on a white hat. In those days you didn't wear a white straw hat in February.. And one of them said to her, "Is that the only hat you have?" She said, "No I have a black hat." And they said, "Oh well wear that, don't wear the white one, that's for summer." And they used to tease her a little bit, you know, she was green.*

I: They were married in England then?

MW: *Yes, because her mother was furious at her for going, coming over here.*

I: Her parents were angry with her because she came to America?

MW: *Mhmm, so you know she must have been sad when she came.*

I: And you don't have any year that they came over? How old would they be now? When was she born?

MW: *Oh I don't know, does it say on that paper?*

I: Was that Mary and Joseph (Smith)? They came over in the late 1880s just approximately, that's what the note says here. And your grandmother returned to England in the early 1890s with your two older sisters, Amy and Eva.

MW: *Yeah, she went by herself with the two children. She was so anxious to see her mother, you know. I don't know how she did it, I really don't know.*

I: Did she stay long?

MW: *I don't imagine.*

I: And then came back and never went to England again. What kind of work did your father, do you know what kind of work your father did?

MW: *He was a weaver. He worked at Dobson's. But he then became a clothing salesman, he knew the materials, you know. And that's what he had as long as he lived, until he retired. He worked in Wanamaker and Brown's first, that was down at 6th and Market. Then he went up to John Wanamaker's, and then they had the, what should I say, the boss. They had the boss on his floor, um, died. And they put a younger man on, in his place. Now they should have put a man that was used to the job. And he stood at the upstairs and looked down and there was another man moving. And he said, "You see all those white haired men down there? Well they're going to go." This was when my father was still living, working. First thing you know, he was the one that went, and the others were*

put back again. You know, a smart Alec. So, you never know, you never know.!

I: Did the, did it seem like a lot of people who came over from England would work in the Dobson Mill?

MW: Yes, an awful lot of them, because they knew the material, they had done the work, you know.

RE: But in England was it noted that if you get to America that you go live in East Falls and you'll get a job in the Dobson Mill?

MW: Laughs. They used to go down to the water, and wait to see if there was anybody that got off that they knew. And they would direct them right up to East Falls.

I: They meaning some of the workers or some of the people..?

MW: Some of the workers.

RE: I always wondered how they decided where in the United States they were going to go when they got here.

MW: Yeah, yeah. They used to go every time the boat came in they went down.

I: The boat came in to Philadelphia?

MW: Uh-huh. Yeah.

I: And you had, um let's see, just two sisters? Amy and Eva?

MW: Amy, and Eva, and Gladys, and one boy. Oh yeah! Ida; Ida died when she was five.

I: Older or younger than you?

MW: Younger, no, older!

I: So you didn't know her? Or you did?

MW: No, I don't remember her.

I: What did she die of?

MW: I think it was spinal meningitis.

I: Did most women have their babies at home or did they go to the hospital?

MW: At home

RE: Edna Wooley mentioned Miss Dunns?

MW: Yeah, she was, I think she was Irish, but she was a very good nurse, and she never had any trouble getting work. And then she got to know these two women on New Queen Street- they owned some of the houses on New Queen. I can't remember their name right now. But a lot of people had her, she brought a lot of children into the world.

I: She had a sort of hospital on Henry Avenue, a three story house? And instead of going to the hospital when you had your baby...

MW: I had David up there.

I: And did you walk up when you got kind of heavy, you walked up?

MW: *Uh-huh. I walked up. On Henry Avenue near Ainslie, the end house in the row. It's still there, I think.*

I: But it was a house? Like a small private little hospital. Was she a midwife or a nurse?

MW: *A nurse. She was very pleasant.*

RE: Did she have a doctor come in?

MW: *Yes*

RE: She didn't deliver the babies...

MW: *No, Dr. Entwisle.*

I: About what years did she have the house? Was it there for as long as you can remember?

MW: *No, she hasn't been there for quite a while. Well she was getting up in age, you know. She was a lovely person, she was comical. Her sister lived with her, and one day I said, "Miss Dunn, I hear a noise, like somebody tapping, where would that be?" And she laughed and she said, "That's my sister, she's doing a jig down there." Laughs. And she was such a sober looking person you'd never think of such a thing, you know?.*

I: Why did you choose Miss Dunn's to go to have a baby?

MW: *Because I didn't want to go to the hospital.*

I: You were scared of the hospital?

MW: *Yes*

I: Did everyone have the same feeling?

MW: *I don't think so. I think in years past, you know, they were more in the home.*

I: Was she less expensive?

(tape is blanked out for a minute or two)

Resumes:

MW: *...I could kill that man so easy. I don't know who ever gave him the outfit.*

I: What was his name?

MW: *Dr. Roe. And when my sister had Dorothy, the oldest girl, she had her home, and he came one day and I was in the room and I didn't know how to get out, I hated him so. He was annoying, you know. He would put his hands on you. So, um, I crawled under the bed. And my mom was in the room too, and I think she must have given him the goat eye and told him where I was, so he leaned down and got a hold of my leg and pulled me out. Well then I just hated him a little more. And then my mother would say sometimes when somebody was sick, "You'll have to go down to the doctors and get some pills, he'll give them to you."*

And I would say, "Yeah, well mother, I don't want to go." "Well you have to go because there's nobody else to go." So, my girlfriend went with me, Esther, remember her? She went with me. And I said uh, "I came for pills," oh I hated that man! And he said, "Well you can't have them until you sit on my lap." And I said, "Well I won't sit on your lap!" He said, "Well, all right," so here he slipped them to Esther, and he sent me a note saying that he...

I: So in those days he was a very old man?

MW: Oh he was, he was. You could tell to look at him. So, um, when we got a little closer to home, she said, "Listen Mary, here's your pills, he told me not to give them to you." Then I hated him more, how much hate can you hold. Oh dear it was awful, it was awful. Anytime my mother would say, "Go down to the doctor..."

RE: Dr. Zinn(?) was like that too.

MW Was he? I kinda thought he was!

RE: You had to stand flat against him and he had you put your arms around his waist and hold him tight and he held you while he looked in your eyes to examine your eyes because he said it was steadier that way, but he never made the old ladies stand that way.

MW: They were a thing of the past. Oh dear, it was awful. It was awful. Anytime my mother would say go down to the doctor ...r

I: I bet you didn't get sick much.

MW: No, I wouldn't say I was sick. Laughs.

I: Where did you go to school?

MW: Forest School, right down off Krail Street, it's gone away by now.

I: What are your memories of the Forest School?

MW: Um, bad boys. This Mr. Gotwols, who just died, he was in an automobile.... See, I'm getting stupid now. Laughs. He and his wife were in the car, and the dog, he never went anywhere without his dog. He came to our church, they lived all the way out in Jersey and they came to our church, the Methodist church. And he let it stay in the car while they were in church. Ain't that funny? Well he died a couple of months ago, is it two months ago?

RE: This was George Gotwols?

MW: No, George died before this, that was my sister-in-law's husband, and nobody liked him either. And this Alfred was in school with me, and he would think nothing about grabbing the hat off your head, hair along, and throw it up in the tree! And you wouldn't even have a hat to wear, you couldn't reach it! You couldn't climb the tree, you were out of luck. Oh he was bad! Did awful things. So now he's dead and buried, and she's in the hospital with all kinds of complaints. I don't know where she's going to go. I really don't.

RE: Who were the teachers at Forest School?

MW: Well, in first grade, I always heard this name now, I don't know whether it was right or now, Miss Clara Cap(?) And she used to wear a little shawl around her, oh she was an old maid. Typical old maid. And she had first grade, Miss Walker - I don't know her first name - , she had one first grade, and she had the other. And then there was Carrie Dyson- D-Y-, and her father had a junk store down on the Ridge, and you could get nice things down there, you know, cheap. Yeah, that was Miss Carrie Dyson. They were in the lower grades; then did I say Miss Walker?

I: You just mentioned Miss Walker, now what grade was she?

MW: oh, I just mentioned Miss Walker... she must have been the third or fourth. And then I can't remember the others.

I: Was there a principal of the school, Mary?

MW: Yes. Um, Reese, Dr. Reese was one. Then there was an old, old man with a beard, and his, I think his name was Dr. Samuels, and he was kind of cute. Laughs. He used to kid around with the kids a little bit, nice, you know, real nice.

I: Wasn't it accustomed to call school teachers by their first names? You would call them Miss...

MW: Miss Clara, yes.

I: Did the teachers tend to be older people or young people right out of grammar school?

MW: They weren't real young, course you couldn't gauge in those days, they were almost old, you know what I mean?

I: What age did you become an old maid?

MW: Oh, Amy was an old maid. Oh, about in your twenties.

I: In your twenties you were an old maid. So if you weren't married by then, you were an old maid?

MW: Yeah, yeah. She was never married. But she enjoyed life, so she was great for music, she played the piano very well, she used to go to all of the good shows in town. She took a few trips, and she took a trip to Bermuda, I think it was Bermuda. Is that the one that the water is so rough?... Bermuda?

I: That's probably right. I get the Bahamas and Bermuda all mixed up!

MW: Well anyway, she went on this boat trip, and she had everything new to go in. A suit, a pretty little suit, and a pretty hat, and I thought, "I'll borrow that hat when she comes back." Laughs. And she got sick, seasick. She went to bed in the suit and the hat and the shoes and everything, She was so sick. And the hat, the nice hat, was turned up at the back cause she wore that to bed, and I said, "What happened to this hat? Cause I was going to borrow it." She said, "I didn't know whether I had a hat on or off."

RE: They always wore hats and gloves to church. Not so informal as it is today. David said something about the flags out...

MW: Well I used to go out from the store and get orders. And I knew the people on my street, you know.. So, I don't know what day it was they put out the flags and here I was on New Queen St. putting flags out on the road and Harry Clayton, my boss, was boiling in the store saying "Where can she be?"

I: You were helping the people put the flags out?

MW: Yes, when I got back to the store I could look at his face and knew he was mad and he said "Where in tarnation have you been? I said I've been out getting orders." He said "Well, it took you a long time." Harry was a grump. He was grumpy."

I: There's something here about the building of the Manor. What was the Manor?

MW: The Manor was from Vaux Street on...

RE: - Queen Lane Manor. It was when the new houses were built.

MW: Now that house that Ruth lives in, that was one of them in it.

RE: Queen Lane Manor, from Vaux Street to Henry

MW: Onto Germantown Avenue

RE: Queen Lane Manor? Wissahickon, I think.

MW: Wissahickon, maybe.

I Why was it called Manor?

RE: The builder, McCrudden, McCrudden was the builder.

I: It was a development?

RE: Yes, it was a development and he named the section Queen Lane Manor.

I; And that was in the '20's?

RE: Yes.

MW: And, you know, when they built the Lutheran Church, there was a man who would take care of things while the workers were away - see that nothing was stolen or anything like that. And we - they allowed the kids to gather up pieces of wood to take home for firewood - we didn't need it but I used to go up and get it for my girlfriend. Oh I loved it - I loved picking up that wood.

I: It sounds like you were a hard worker.

MW: Well we had jobs to do. They don't have them now. These girls don't have jobs to do, do they?

I: What kind of jobs did you have to do?

MW: Well, we had to dry the dishes, we had to sweep the sunporch and the pavement, you know - things like that.

I: What did the boys do?

MW: *Well, we only had the one boy – he did nothing!!!*

RE: David mentioned the 2-4-6-8-10 Club...

MW: *Yes, that was a Sunday School class.*

RE: Was your whole social life then, when you were young, was the church, wasn't it?

MW: *Yeah. We had the junior league on Friday night – we'd all come together and we enjoyed it.*

I: What's the 2-4-6-8-10 Club?

MW: *Because there were 10 girls in the club – we named it 2-4-6-8-10.*

I: But it was actually a Sunday School class?

MW: *Yes.*

RE Something about counting it out by twos?

MW: *Yeah. And the first teacher that we had was Mrs. Stupplebein and he was the – do you remember him? Store on Midvale? Well she had us in her house. Come to my house. So then it grew – we took a few others in – and it just recently stopped.*

I: It was in existence all this time? It was the same people?

MW: *Yes. Alice Hess is in the Methodist Home. Myrtle Wilcox, that lived down Queen Lane – she's in a home in a home.*

I; In Maryland?

MW: *Where? I think it's Maryland, I don't know. Anyhow, we used to meet in one another's houses once a month and we'd have a spread, you know. And she took us down to Strawberry Mansion and then she's take us over across the Ridge to an ice cream store. Oh was that ever something. We loved a plate of ice cream.*

RE: What other clubs were in the church? There was the Queen Esther Circle, wasn't there? How did it that get its name?

MW: *Yeah. That was from the children's home down in the depths of the city. We had a home down there for poor children and that was where that money went to*

RE: But why did they call it the Queen Esther Circle?

MW: *I never knew..*

I: Queen Esther from the Old Testament, right?...

MW: *Yeah, I guess ...to help people.*

RE: We had varied stories on how the Moment Musical started, and some people said the Queen Esther Circle put on this musical play - minister's wife

to earn money for whatever – and others say, no, it was not the Queen Esther Circle it was something else, but they don't know what. What do you remember?

MW: I think it was the Queen Esther Circle.

RE: It was the Queen Esther Circle. And the people of the church picked this musical play and put it on, and then later the minister thought it wasn't suitable for a church to have plays and that's when they formed the Moment Musical Club – in 1923.

MW: Yes that's about right.

RE: But it was the It was the Queen Esther Circle that did it first

MW: Yes, hmhm.

I: Were you involved in the Moment Musical Club?

MW: I wasn't, but my sister played the piano, and my brother was in it, and my younger sister.. My younger sister was a comic. Do you remember Gladys, don't you

RE: Oh, how would I ever forget her?

MW: I have a little picture upstairs – I'll bring it down. And Mrs. Altemus

RE: Never forget Gladys – the greatest actress, comedian - a natural, self-taught and she used to do monologues Yeah - and she could do them at the drop of a hat and go on and have an audience in the palm of her hands – they would be in the aisles laughing at her. Nobody does those anymore but Gladys could do them anytime and she was a marvelous actress.

MW: She worked at Wanamaker's in the audit department and those girls loved her.

RE: Everybody loved Gladys.

MW: She would carry on for them, you know.

RE: Mary's brother was Stanley Smith who was a charter member of the Moment Musical which later became the Old Academy Players when they moved into the Old Academy.

I: Where did the Moment Musical Club meet at first?

MW: Well, they met at church

I: And then when the church felt that it wasn't suitable, then where did they go?

RE: They went in each other's homes, they tell me.

MW: Yes, they did.

I: And where did they put on their performances until they got to Old Academy?

MW: Did they ever do them in America Hall?

RE: They did them in – you mean Palestine Hall on Ridge and Midvale?

MW: *Yeah, it might have been down there, but there was a hall on 35th.*

RE” Oh , America Hall, yes I know – the hospital has that now. They also rented the Germantown Women’s Club on Washington Lane. They rented various places and did them. Where they rehearsed I don’t know. In each other’s homes, I guess.

MW: *Yeah, I don’t know.*

RE: Until near 1932 when Jim Lawson suggested the Old Academy might be available for them. And they agreed and they moved in and renovated it and have kept it in good condition ever since.

MW: *I guess the English Lodge – they used to meet in there.*

RE: The English Lodge, yes, but they couldn’t do anything to keep the building in repair. I understand it was to be condemned and torn down when Jim Lawson brought it up about the Old Academy – the Moment Musical moving in. And that’s when they changed their name when they moved in there.

MW: *How about that; I didn’t know that.*

RE: And there was Selwyn Briggs – we must interview him - he still lives on Ainslie Street does he?

MW: *Yes, upper Ainslie on the opposite side from (?)*

RE: She’ll know which house, though. He was one of the charter members and he remembers everything. Did you go to Breck School.

Yes, It was Forest – then it was changed

I: Changed the name?

Yes..

I: The building was the same? Did they add on to it at all?

MW: *There were two buildings one for the younger classes and the other for the older. One was brick, one was stone.*

I: Yes, we’ve heard that. Now there’s something here about “Ducky”?

MW: *The Ducky? Yeah, it was just a little pond at the top of Sunnyside and there were more accidents in that darn thing – the boys used to swing out on the limb of a tree and down they’d go! And how many broken arms, I don’t know...an awful lot*

RE: That’s when it was all woods above Vaux.

MW: *Right where you were living was a big field where there were horses.*

I: Who had the horses

RE: *The 3300 block of Ainslie St., she’s talking about.*

MW: *There was a pool*

I: But who owned the property?

MW: There was a Mr. Fanning. I think he was a milkman and he had a few cows and a couple of horses. Now my cousin – there was a crowd of us walking through that field one day – and one of the horses was there and one of the boys got smart and said to Myrtle “Would you like a ride on the horse?” And she said yes, so he pushed her up on the horse and then he gave it a crack and it flew up that field. I said “Oh! That was a dirty trick” She was scared green.

RE: Bad boys, again.

MW: Yes, bad boys; they were rough. Very rough.

RE: But this pond, or whatever it was, at the top of Sunnyside and Vaux, they called it the Duckie? Did it have a lot of ducks?

MW: No ducks!

RE: You “ducked” into it...

MW: I guess they were ducking themselves in; I don't think you were supposed to swim in it, but there was water in there. Now it might have just been water that laid in there but they used to swing out on the branch and drop down. Sometimes they dropped too far.

I: Where the school is now, the Mifflin School, what was there before the Mifflin “School was built?

MW: Nothing. Midvale Avenue? None of those houses were there, not many of them. Down lower, near the Ridge, there were houses., and where the Catholic Church, St. Bridget', there were houses on the other side of the street. But it was all woods there when we were kids. There would be a little stream on Midvale and we'd go over and move the stones and maybe find little animals...

Crayfish....

MW: Yeah, We would be out all day – all day! – sometimes we'd forget to go home for lunch. Do you want me to get that picture? And the little one in the frame right there?

RE: I remember from my early days on Ainslie Street the Foggy Dews on Christmas Eve going around caroling and nobody seems to remember – some people remember the name - but who they were and what kind of music they played – what instruments or what it was all about. Do you remember?

MW: Well he was Bill Thorpe's – his father – you know Bill Thorpe - he married Grace Tregae and Otto (?)

RE: And he had the Foggy Dews?

MW: Yeah And they used to go out Christmas caroling.

RE: And who else was in the Foggy Dews?

MW: I don't know.

RE: Were there three or two?

MW: *Four, I think*

RE: And what were the instruments?

MW: *I think he had a horn, Mr. Thorpe.*

I: Did someone say a fife and drum, in another interview?

MW: *They might have. I guess in such times as we're having now, people don't want to do things.*

RE: No. Where did they get the name Foggy Dews?

MW: *It was before my time, I think.*

RE: Grace Tregae's husband, Bill Thorpe?

MW: *Hm, hm*

RE: Well that wouldn't have been before your time...

MW: *No, but this is his father...*

I: The other thing there was a note about was all the stores on 35th Street, so I just thought we might talk about that. Conrad Street, right?

MW: *Yeah. Why, Mrs Horsefield and her husband, Mr. Horsefield, and he rode a motorcycle and he would take his sister-in-law to the store on the back of that motorcycle. She'd go anywhere - she'd go upstate - the wife wouldn't go with him. And he wasn't so good with the eyes - the eyes weren't so good.*

I: He was an older man?

MW: *Yeah, He was no kid. They had a little - why can't I think of that...she sold girdles and stuff..*

I: Dry goods?

MW: *Dry goods. Things like that. We had a name for him - everyone laughed about him - I never knew what he worked at, or if he did work, but she ran the store. We'd say "Look out, here comes Mr. Horsefield!"*

RE: We didn't touch the library.

I: Oh, let's do that.

RE: Do you have any idea how long the library was there in the Old Academy?

MW: *As long as I could remember.*

RE And how long ago would that be? Would it have been before 1901?

MW: *I imagine so.*

I: You were born in 1897. Do you have your first memory of going to the library, there?

MW: *When we were at school..when I was in the early grades at school. We used to stop in on the way home and get a book or take a book back.*

RE: Do you remember the librarian?

MW: Yeah.

I: Who was she?

MW: I can see her in my mind.

I: What did she look like?

MW: She was dark complected and she sometimes was very grumpy, cause we were noisy I guess.

I: Was she an older woman when you first remembered her?

MW: Yes she was ...

Tape ends here.

(This transcript was reviewed by Irene Webster, Mary Webster's daughter-in-law on 2/15/2010).

