

Interviewee: Jane Dewey
Interviewers: Abigail Cote and Riya Shah
Date: October 22, 2018
Transcribers: Abigail Cote and Riya Shah



Overseen By: Profs. Carl Robert Keyes and Lucia Knoles, Assumption College

Abstract: Jane Dewey was born in Wilksburg, Pennsylvania in 1931. Jane grew up in New Brighton, Pennsylvania and lived on a piece of property that her family had owned for five generations. After attending New Brighton's primary and secondary schools, Jane went to Abbot Academy and finished her education at Wellesley College in Massachusetts where she obtained a political science degree. After graduation, she married Henry, moved to Worcester, Massachusetts, had three girls, and was a stay at home mother. When her children were grown, Jane worked at the Ben Franklin Bookstore where she was introduced to a book composed of Civil War letters. These letters intrigued Jane which led her to Harvard University and the American Antiquarian Society where she researched letters from the 1840s left behind by Henry's grandfather. It took her five years to analyze these manuscripts and to this day Jane continues to volunteer in their manuscript department. She also reveals her marathon training and qualifying for the Boston Marathon at age 53.

AC: Do we have your permission to record the oral history and, if yes, can you state your name and the date?

JD: Yes, Yes Jane Dewey, October 22, 2018.

AC: Thank you. What is your full name including both maiden name and married name if applicable?

JD: Jane Kenah Dewey.

RS: When were you born?

JD: 1931.

AC: Have you ever been married?

JD: Yes.

AC: And what's the name of your husband?

JD: Henry Dewey.

RS: Do you have any children?

JD: Yes. Three daughters.

RS: What are their names?

JD: Jane [M. Dewey], Ann [D. Hofmann] and Sarah [Jensen].

AC: Do you have any grandchildren?

JD: Yes, two and they are Christopher Hofmann and Francie Hofmann

RS: What cultures or ethnicities you identify with?

JD: Caucasian.

AC: Tell me about your parents?

JD: [laughs] Well, one nice thing was that they lived a long time. Mother [Sarah Patton Kenah] died at 99. She came – they were both from Western Pennsylvania and mother just came up here after my father [Roland M. Kenah] died at 89, came up here because I was here and she lived at the Willows in Northborough. My mother and father – well, I will say my life was, I don't know how much do I embroider? They were either from Pittsburgh [Pennsylvania], mother was from Pittsburgh [Pennsylvania] and my father was New Brighton, Pennsylvania which is 40 miles outside. And they married and my father worked at Westinghouse in Pittsburg, he was an electrical engineer. He expected to stay there and I was born and they picked out a place to live. And the Depression hit and he was let go at Westinghouse because last in first out. So he didn't have much [resigned laugh] options. Actually, he took the option he had which was to move back home into New Brighton [Pennsylvania] where he was from and where his father had a small tube company, collapsible tube company. They made toothpaste tubes and such and so it was temporarily that we moved back to New Brighton [Pennsylvania]. I was one or two years old and we moved into the house that my grandmother had lived in. She owned it but didn't live in it and it was an apartment and we moved into the second floor. My father went to work temporarily for his father and the temporarily was forever [laughs] because at the end of the Depression pretty soon came World War II and that was an industry that was important and my father stayed there. And we took over the whole house, the second floor and my brother the third and my sister was born and we took over the whole house which is kind of fun. I was the fifth generation to live on that lot in New Brighton. The first was my great grandmother who came as a widow. She was a Quaker from Negley, Ohio and she was a widow, so there were lots of Quakers in Brighton [Pennsylvania]. And she moved into the house which had been a Quaker schoolhouse I guess and then that house burned and another smaller house was built and moved and on that lot my grandfather when he got married—I am speaking of my great grandmother who was my grandmother's side of the family but my grandfather who grew up halfway up the block, you know, that's the way things were. Anyway he was in the lumber business and built a

proper big Victorian house. So it's kind of fun even though it wasn't the same house I was the fifth generation to live on that lot. Which I think mother—I'm sure mother was very sad to live in this little 9000 people population. She loved people and she certainly made the best of it but for me it was great to grow up in a little town, wonderful, I loved it. So, my father stayed there and the company built a new factory which is at Rochester nearby and my family when I got married sold the house and built a little house in Beaver, Pennsylvania which is nearby so their life centered around Beaver Western Pennsylvania but I left. Everybody left [laughs] that's the thing when I think about it my grandmother's era the family lived in the block and everybody's family and now I have a cousin in New Mexico, cousin in Florida, my sister in Texas and I am here and there is one remote cousin left in Brighton.

AC: So where have you lived during your life and like in what neighborhood and what experiences did you have there?

JD: Well I just told you about the house where I lived and the town I lived. And I went to the schools there through freshman year in high school and then my mother who had seen the broader world [laughs] she... well the high school wasn't terrific, it really wasn't, and she thought I wasn't working as hard as I could. So, she asked a friend of hers who worked at Wellesley [College in Massachusetts]—mother had gone to Wellesley—asked her where a good prep school was and she sent her a list in alphabetical order and Abbot Academy was at the top [laughs] alphabetically so I went to Abbot Academy in Andover. I left my sophomore year—sophomore-junior senior year. It's now part of Phillips Academy in Andover because that's what happens to lot of these schools. And then I went to Wellesley and then I met Harry and here I am. You asked me something else—oh, where I've lived? I have lived only in three houses. Well I lived in my house in New Brighton for 21 years or 20 years and then at an apartment on Pleasant Street for a year and then we moved in here 65 years ago come April, this next April. So we are not really big movers.

RS: If you were not born in Worcester when did you arrive?

JD: 1953, January of 1953

RS: And how did you come to live in Worcester?

JD: I married Henry who lived in Worcester who'd never consider living anywhere else.

AC: Do your family members live in this area?

JD: No

AC: So you are the only one? Do your children live here, did they move further away?

JD: They are not that far away. Well, there's one in Florida now but Jane is in Norfolk [Massachusetts] and Ann is in in Carlisle, Massachusetts so they are not that far.

RS: So I know you moved here because of your husband, but what is your connection to Worcester?

JD: None. I used to go through here on the train, wake up in Springfield [Massachusetts], have a breakfast in Worcester and get off in Wellesley [Massachusetts] or Boston [Massachusetts].

AC: What challenges do you think Worcester still faces today?

JD: Well I'm just going to say I am sort of remote as I read the newspapers I think it sounds as if it is on the verge of renaissance of sorts. What I see is traffic. I now have to plan when I go out. I didn't use to have to think about that at all. You guys are part of the problem [laughs].

AC: What would you change about the city?

JD: Oh my! It's very hard for me, well I will say that when I came to Worcester it was a thriving downtown with department stores and movies and restaurants and now I mean for a long time there hasn't been any reason to go downtown. There's nothing there. I mean for me I haven't bought anything except from a catalog in many years or hand me down from my eldest daughter [laughs].

RS: So what distinct characteristic makes Worcester the place that it is?

JD: Well, I would say the colleges certainly. And culturally the Worcester Art Museum, everybody before I came here heard about the Worcester Art Museum and then since I've been here Mechanics Hall has been wonderful. Worcester Music Festival which has a great reputation and my husband was involved when we first came with the Philadelphia Orchestra for a week can you believe it? And then Chicago and couldn't keep that up very long, that was not possible. But culturally, I mean obviously I'm not going to do things at the Palladium or at the at the DCU or I mean it's not my music. That's my music over there [pointing at her piano]. No, I have to show you a friend of mine just sent 25 pieces of great old sheet music [laughs]. But I think Worcester—I am glad to live in Worcester and it's not that far from Boston. I grew up with trains. When I came here I missed trains and bridges and then we did get the trains and the minute the train came I went to Boston on the train.

AC: What do you think women's experiences in Worcester been generally?

JD: It's very hard for me to answer because I don't know.

AC: Ok.

RS: So where did you attend school?

JD: Well New Brighton schools and then Abbot Academy and Wellesley College.

RS: Did you pursue any educational programs or any vocational trainings?

JD: Did I receive any... you mean after college?

AC: Well at college? Or a specific program.

JD: I don't know what... well we had majors?

AC and RS: Yeah

JD: Ok. I majored in political science. If you can call it a science I'm not sure. I think you guys are more science.

AC: What year did you graduate from college?

JD: 1952.

RS: What were your challenges in education?

JD: Well just to get everything done, just like anybody else's. To get enough sleep and get all those things. I was talking to my book club today that I think I am very glad I grew up before there were screens, any kind. I go back to Wellesley occasionally for reunions and various things and I did notice walking around campus, kids are looking at their screens and we used to talk to each other. [laughs] My parents—I mean I was on my own we wrote letters and we would telephone but only in emergency. I remember calling when I got in Wellesley. I thought that was worth a call. It was expensive and my dorm had two phones in the cellar, outgoing payphones and I think there were two incoming that people could call you on and then you come down. So I mean you are much more on your own then than you are now. Nobody was looking over your shoulder, I just think that's got to be different.

AC: Upon finishing your formal education what did you see as your options?

JD: What was the beginning of it?

AC: Upon finishing your formal education...

JD: Oh! marriage [laughs]

AC: Did you see any other options besides marriage?

JD: [laughs] I had to laugh because you know people used to say, you were there for your MRS [degree]. I remember going to the placement office and this is all I remember about what could I do with a major in political science you know? I didn't want to go home to New Brighton. Living in Boston some people did room together and my best friend was going back to New York. I had this on the horizon and they said, "Well how about a Filene's training program? Filene's department store? But you will have to learn to step on people." I remember that and [whispers] "Wow, I don't want that!" [laughs]. So I married Harry and learned to step on him [laughs].

RS: So what support networks and mentoring have been important to you?

JD: Oh family, friends. Friends and family.

AC: What was your first job?

JD: Oh, in my life? As a 16-year-old it was supervising playground kids with my best friends. We got paid if it rained so we kept praying for rain even if it rained. So I was sixteen and then after that camp counselor and then no paid job at the time the kids were little and then the Ben Franklin Bookstore. I think that was my first and last paid job.

RS: So what has all of this work meant to you?

JD: What ...the book store?

RS: Just all the jobs.

JD: Being around books since then—okay this was accidental, my volunteer work which I have done for 30 years at the [American] Antiquarian Society actually has to do with the Ben Franklin Bookstore. When I worked there, I worked with Dorothy Cook who was a long-time bookstore clerk. She had worked at the famous Ephraim's Book Store on Franklin Street and she recommended a book called *Children of Pride*. I used to read but Dorothy had great taste. And it was edited by Robert Myers and it's a big fat book, surprised me it came out in paperback too. I can't give you the date but it was real letters of a family, the [Rev. Dr. Charles] Colcock Jones family in Georgia. It was letters written at the time of the Civil War, after the Civil War, and I was absolutely blown away by them. They were so wonderful. So I just put aside those letters wonderful letters, wonderful. And then my in-laws both died in 1974 and in their attic—they lived on Elm Street—and in their attic was wild stuff because they hadn't moved very far. And Harry had three siblings but I think we had taken a look at some of those letters. My father in law came down, he worried about all this stuff that we would have to deal with and he went up in the attic and started looking at things. And one day he came down, we were having cocktails and he said, "I threw away these letters today, they were wrapped up in it, it said cursed be the eye that sees, cursed be the ear that hears," and there were letters I figured out later, one or two remaining

letters that his grandfather had written when he had come to Worcester in the late 1840s as a young lawyer. And his first wife died and he married again but there are people who don't throw things away. So, I suspect he didn't want his second wife—he probably just tied it up with a curse on it and might have bothered a lot about the curse and threw it away. Very annoyed with him but anyway there are awful lot left. So, we opted for them and were very glad to have them. I covered a ping pong table in the cellar with these letters and started reading them and making notes. And then I had seen that the New England Historical Genealogical Society had a two-week summer camp, where you lived at Harvard [University] and so I signed up for that. I enjoyed that and then Marcus McCorison, who was the head of the [American] Antiquarian Society at that time and was a friend of my father-in-law's, said of course they would like to have all of that at the Antiquarian Society. That was fun and we took them over and he assumed I was going with him. I guess he knew I had been working on them so I went. It took me five years to do that collection. I was learning too and it was 50 manuscript boxes. At the end of it I stayed, so that was my unpaid work. I'm glad to have done it that way to have been home with the kids. I saved money by being at home and later when they were off and gone I could do my volunteer stuff and have fun.

AC: So, what were your primary responsibilities in terms of the house work and the child care?

JD: Well, everything. We did have a wonderful thing though. I will say, when the kids were little there was something, a prototype called the Becker Girl. You know Becker? Well it's Becker College now, but anyways the Becker Girl, we never had a Becker Girl but we had Worcester State [College], and gosh we had Anna Maria [College]. They were girls—we have a full attic with a bath and I love it up there. [laughing] Anyway, we had a student who would come and live with us and we'd eat together. She didn't have housework, but she had babysitting and she'd have every other weekend off and whatever. It worked, it worked for us. It didn't work for people who tried to get too much out of the ladies. [laughing] But it worked beautifully for us. And we had five or six girls. And so that was a big help because they'd come home, well after school, three or four or whatever it was and give me a little break and then we'd have dinner together and then they would be upstairs by seven. And it was great. So, even though I didn't have family here to babysit because Henry's mother had multiple sclerosis, and so you know there was no way. I remember thinking, "I wish my mother was around." [Laugh] But that was a great help. And then we had babysitters too.

AC: You said your husband was a lawyer.

JD: Yup.

AC: Did you ever help him in the office or anything?

JD: No. No. I don't think I would have been. I think it would be too private. I don't think you'd be allowed to do that. I don't think. Because he never would talk. I mean you don't talk.

AC: Have your dynamics in the house changed. Are you like still responsible for like all the housework?

JD: I do. I do. Actually, our dynamics have changed a little bit because my husband doesn't drive anymore in the last six months. He used to do some. He retired twenty years ago and he has a little office up here. But he doesn't have outside clients. So, he's been involved in lots and lots of things. And it's been very nice because he would do some of the big shopping and do his own things and now, for instance, I go to the market and he'll meet me at the back door and carry things from the car. And then we put things away together. And I've done my own housework since the last forty years. I guess it was great when the kids were little. When the kids were little I think, oh my god, what a lot of work. [laugh] It was. And we had a dog.

RS: So, how have you balanced the different priorities, responsibilities, interests in your life?

JD: How does one ever? Well, some days better than others. [laughing] But I think most of the time we say, "Gee, how lucky we are." And we are at the point right now where how long can we stay here. We looked at the Willows. We don't really want to go anywhere. [Laughs] And there's other options of getting care. Well we've been through this with my mother. She was at the Willows but she was blind the last years and so she had help. A lot of help. And there is help available. Yeah, it is an adjustment for me. I'm just beginning to find out.

AC: What do you think the pros and cons are of the path you have chosen in life?

JD: The pros and cons of the path?

AC: That you have chosen in life.

JD: Oh, my paths. Pros and cons? Hmm. I don't think I can do pros and cons. But I was thinking, it's fun, at this age you can see the connections. Which you have to be here to see here. I became a marathoner. [laughs] And I'll tell you that is a very funny thing to see my trophies are with my plates. When I was at Harvard for my—see it went from Dorothy Cook and *Children of Pride* to Harvard. And my roommate was a runner and—talk about roommates at Harvard, you each had your own bedrooms and then we had a sitting room—but I think what she said, "I get up at six o'clock and I go to Brigham's and have some coffee and then I do a little run." She was getting ready to go hiking in the mountains somewhere, but we're talking forty years ago. Yup, forty years ago. And I wasn't used to sitting. I hadn't been in classes when I went for umpteen years, I mean or however many. Thirty years. So, I said, "Well I'll go." I had tennis shoes. So, I went with her and I thought, "This is. This is fun." [laughs] And, it was only two miles or something. I liked having coffee from Brigham's and doing that. So, when I came home I bought some running shoes, such as they were then. Little waffle trainers. They didn't have ladies' shoes like they do now. And, that was seventy-eight. No seventy-seven, seventy-seven. And I thought, "I really like this so I'm going to start next spring." So, I started in the spring of seventy-eight and I really loved it. And so, I joined Central Mass. Striders and I met a lot of

people and I ran eight marathons. I wanted to qualify for Boston. And you had to do it in under a certain time for fifty and over. So that made a huge difference in my life. Huge. Huge. And that came from *Children of Pride* to Harvard, to running, to the Antiquarian Society.

AC: Did you ever make it through the Boston Marathon?

JD: I did, yeah.

AC: How many times?

JD: Just once. I wanted to qualify. You didn't just qualify by raising money but at age 53 I had to run it in under three hours and forty minutes. I had to run an earlier marathon. And I ran it in three hours, 37 minutes, and 55 seconds. So, I just made it. [laughs] But in those days, once you got in, you got in. Now I see they take the best qualifiers and it's hard to get, if you weren't the thirty thousand, so anyway that was a goal. I was never goal oriented in my life before that. And in order to do that, you have to have a plan and you have to do it rain or shine.

RS: So how do you feel about the choices you've made in life? Do you have any regrets?

JD: No.

AC: Do you consider yourself to be active politically?

JD: YES. [laughs] Yes, I've been on marches. But right now, I just send money.

AC: Alright, I know you've touched on this a little bit, but have you been involved in like any volunteer work or community work.

JD: Oh yeah, yeah. Sure.

AC: And what led you to these particular, like groups that you volunteered at?

JD: See right now, I don't do anything except AAS. Oh, when I first came, people look at the new brides and say, "Come work for me". And, oh gosh, cerebral palsy, the hospital, and what's the name of the shop? The Salisbury Shop which is where the Salisbury Mansion is now. Oh gosh, all kinds of things. All kinds of things. Mostly because people asked you and then you asked them to do something and it was I'll do this, you do that.

RS: So what role has religion played in your life?

JD: Well, not a huge one. Right? My husband's family were pretty active Unitarians and my family were Presbyterians but not really. So, here we really did go to the Unitarian Church quite a lot and we used to walk down the last few years and then we couldn't do the walk anymore so

we sort of just—I mean we are still supporters. It’s an interesting subject that I just read Jefferson’s Bible and Tolstoy’s Bible and I realized how little I knew about Judaism. And my Jewish neighbors next door, he was over here and he saw my Jefferson’s. It’s a little pamphlet. So, he borrowed it and then I said to him, “I don’t know much about Judaism.” He said, “Come here.” And he sent me home with two big books. He’s got ten more on Tonalitic studies. [laugh] So, I’ve got those in the dining room. He said, “It’s very complicated. And things aren’t settled. And people are asking questions

RS: So how have health issues impacted your life and those of your family.

JD: Very little. Very little. Very lucky.

AC: What are your experiences in accessing quality affordable health care?

JD: We have Medicare so. We were lucky when I think about what—we just found a bill for Janie’s birth and it was like twenty-five dollars in 1950 something. We had insurance. But the leap in costs are—we’ve been sort of been ahead of it because of Medicare. I had a basal cell carcinoma, I’ve had three of them actually, but anyway, this time he said, “Well, there’s a tiny little one that I didn’t get so you could get some cream and put on that cream.” I picked it up. A hundred and seventy dollars. And I thought, “That’s outrageous!” So, there is something. I think probably someday we’ll come to single payer. It would make sense to me.

RS: Whose health are you responsible for besides your own?

JD: Well, I don’t think anybody’s. I mean my husband’s. I mean we’re in it together, everything together. But I’m not responsible for it. You’re going to have to come down and meet him. [Laughs]

AC: So, how do you get through tough times in your life and what kinds of thoughts keep you going?

JD: [Laughing] Well I say we’re very lucky. But I will say I got lost the other day driving somewhere and I said “Mother!” [Laughs] “We can do this mother.” [Laughs] I did. [Laughs] So there’s your answer. [Laughs]

RS: How do you define success in your life?

JD: I don’t think I have ever tried to define it. Alright the big question. I don’t define that. I don’t. But like qualifying for Boston, that’s easy. Winning a race, that’s easy. Having something, your cooking turn out better than you thought. [Laughs] So little successes are measurable. Big ones, too big.

AC: Based on your life experiences what advice would you give women of today and future generations?

JD: Oh wow, that's easy. [Laughs] That's impossible. That would be very hard. I don't know. Follow your better instincts and don't get too discouraged. I know I'm a little discouraged about the world but I'm hoping.

RS: So now that we are working to tell a fuller story of the history of women that has been recorded in the past. Is there anything else you would like us to include in our transcript? Anything you would like to share?

JD: Well, I was going to say. There is an awful lot of changes. I spend a lot of my time in the nineteenth century world at the Antiquarian Society. And it's only recently that women's role has been appreciated. Remember it was just the men that they really cared about. And then about fifty years ago maybe they decided that women have a lot to do with it too. And, so, I lost my train. What is, what is... [laughing]

AC: So, now that we are working to tell fuller stories about the history of women that has been reported in the past, what should we be sure to include?

JD: Well, I think things are being included at a faster clip. I remember the first woman—was it Pauline Frederick—the first woman news reporter on the radio. It was a shock because women weren't thought authoritarian enough to give the news. Listen to the news now, NPR. I am an NPR addict. My golly, of all the things that women couldn't do, just in the space of my lifetime, it's amazing. I mean they could teach, in the nineteenth century they could teach or have a boarding house. Very, very little, limited, limited options. So, keep going and tell the story. [Laughing]

RS: So, how old were you when you were allowed to date and where did you go on dates?

JD: Oh, sure. High school. Oh, I think I went to the movies with Gerald Golden when I was in fourth or fifth grade so something like that. Well, [laughs] it was only four, four blocks up, and only costed ten cents. Can you believe it? Ten cents and the war came along and they wanted to put a tax on it so they dropped it to nine cents and put the penny tax on it. It was still ten cents for a double feature, Saturday afternoon.

AC: What was considered fashionable when you were a young woman?

JD: Well, I think not being fashionable. I am in Worcester you know. [Laughs] My sister lives in Houston [Texas], that's a totally different world. Everything really is dyed blonde and gold, you know.

RS: How were girls treated when you were in school?

JD: Well, since I went seven years to a girls' school, very well. [Laughs] And in high school it was all the same. I mean elementary up, same as boys.

AC: What did your parents' education consist of?

JD: My mother graduated from Wellesley [College]. She majored in French because she went abroad her junior year to France. And my father went to Cornell [University]. And both of my grandmothers went to college, which is surprising.

AC: Do you know what they studied?

JD: Well I'm sure it was teaching. One went to Indiana State [College] which is in Pennsylvania. It was a teacher's college and she taught. And the other one went to Geneva College in Beaver Falls [Pennsylvania] and I don't know if she ever taught. I really don't know.

AC: What memories do you have of significant historical events that took place while you were growing up?

JD: Well, World War II, for starts. [Laughs] Pearl Harbor. I mean on the radio, everything that happens since 1941.

AC: Alright, well we would like to thank you for participating in our project.

JD: You are very welcome indeed.