

Interviewee: May O. White
Interviewer: Hanna Solska
Date: July 28, 2011
Place: Oxford, Massachusetts
Transcriber: Muriel Campbell



[I arrived to the home of Mrs. White with my friend Dr. Alicja Rudnicka, who is Mrs. White's physician and who arranged this interview. We agreed that she will leave after introductions; however on the insistence of Mrs. White, she stayed during the interview. Present during the interview also was Mrs. White's caregiver, Carol, who helps May from time to time to hear and understand my questions. After few minutes of set-up, we started the interview.]

Abstract: May O. White was born July 8, 1908 in Oxford, Massachusetts. She is a descendant of the Pilgrims who came from England on the Mayflower and settled initially in Salem, MA, and later to establish Oxford. She is proud of her family history and historical value of the houses they built in the 19th century. Being a member of the Historical Commission in Oxford, she is helping to establish a Historic District, which designation would preserve these homes. May and her family worked in Worcester, taking advantage of the railroad connection. In this interview she discusses her family history and especially her close relationship with her grandmother's aunt, Clara Barton, the most famous citizen of Oxford, who started the American Red Cross. She reflects upon the fact that married women could not work, as per company rules. May did not go to college as the family had extensive medical bills for her sister and could not afford second college tuition. However, she graduated from a private business school for girls in Worcester and most of the time she focused on the business end, even at the time when they owned with her husband Ray a restaurant in Grafton.

MW: Alright there. That book is written up in the newspaper right there. It was written by somebody in N. Oxford, and I'm reading it right now. But, in yesterday's paper, did you get [it]? It's right there on the floor in yesterday's . . .

HS: So, good afternoon again May and can I ask you if I can record our conversation? Can I have your permission to record our conversation? When we talk, can I record on this [tape-recorder]?

MW: I guess, don't you think it's alright?

HS: Yes. Okay.

MW: As far as I'm concerned, I don't know. I'm agreeable.

HS: Okay, thank you. I have just a few questions to ask you first. What are your full maiden name and your married name?

MW: My name was May, M-A-Y Barton, B-A-R-T-O-N, Olney, that's my middle name, O-L-N-E-Y White. And, I married Ray White.

HS: White. "White" is your married name?

MW: Yes.

HS: And, when were you born? [Laughs] No, this is good question.

MW: July 8, [May stops, waiting for me to write this information]

HS: You can talk; I don't have to write actually.

MW: 1908.

HS: And, were you born here in Oxford?

MW: No, I was born in, over on West Street in Oxford. And that's a house right in back. Not right in back, but just one house over in back. Now, this is a block. I mean you call it a block, we call it a square. And, my grandmother and grandfather moved here from Washington in 1890. And my mother was seven years old. So, wait a minute now, our dates are going to be funny. Wait a minute. I messed it up somewhere. My mother was born, oh yeah. My mother was born in Washington. And...She was born in 1882. (But anyway, I was trying to get the mixed, . . .) I will tell you something before, but maybe you don't want to record it.

HS: That's okay. I can, do you want me to stop?

MW: If you want me to start at the beginning and how we started. (My family originally landed in - they came over on the Mayflower). They finally arrived in (alright, I don't want my memory to leave me) - where are the ghosts out of Boston?

HS: Plymouth.

MW: Not Plymouth, the ghosts?

HS: Salem.

MW: Salem.

HS: The witches.

MW: The witches [Laughs]. They finally landed in Salem. And, of course they were put out of Salem because their cousin was one of the witches. So he had taken a chance. [Laugh] They worked, when they finally landed, in Oxford and they help settle Oxford. And, of course, they built the Congregational Church, which is down here; but, they had a farm, if you go up beyond Oxford, where the -- it is now the ball fields and all of the sport things. And, they were living, the family lived there. (Just explaining this.)

HS: Yes.

MW: And when my grandmother, which her picture is up there, you can't see it - it's with Helen, my sister and I, and that's what brought that picture up, other on, because there are my grandson- their father, and sister - he kept looking at that picture and the first thing he wanted was one like it. But anyway, when Clara Barton landed in Europe, she, -of course after the war- she had worked so hard and then she found our ..., I mean the soldiers that they had lost track of, and she was worn out. And, in Washington, they didn't think any doctors were any good and they sent her to Europe, naturally. And, I guess they had other ideas, too. And, so, she was of one parish and she wrote over when my grandmother was 16 and she said "Mary is 16; send her to New York to visit friends of mine. They will meet her on the train and put her on the boat when it's ready to go". She was 16 years old and you can imagine what it was like at that time - how old this... just plain country. And, she went to Europe. And, she told me one time, she said, "You know," she said, "it took us three weeks or more and I had a fresh bottle of wine every day," because people she visited were wine merchants. Isn't that a good story? That's on the side, I'm just telling you. So, my grandmother, after she left Europe, they were over there, she went to Art School and lived in Paris for a little over two years and of course, Clara Barton went into the Franco/ America English War, to find out how the Red Cross worked. Course, I think that's when we -- why they sent her. Then my grandmother came, as soon as she came back from Europe, she went right to Washington to live with her [family]. That's why my mother was living in Washington.

HS: So, your parents, your mother was born in Washington or she came...

MW: Yes, she, no, I don't, I think she was born in Oxford. I think that my grandmother came home when she was pregnant, but they went back after she married, she went back and lived in Washington. And then the grandfather died and there was nobody to take care of the grandmother so they came back to Oxford and bought this house. And the house we've owned it ever since; 1890.

HS: That's a long time.

MW: And then when my mother got married, they bought a house on the street in back and it was a little house, and there was land right in back and my mother's brother bought a lot, I mean he didn't buy it, he built a house on the lot and that's where he lived. And then, on the other side, my grandfather on my father's side, they built a house there. And across the street was my grandmother on the other side, my mother's.... and they lived there. And then, next door, that's where Doctor Joselin's (sp??) brother used to live. I think they built the house when they came to Oxford and started the slipper factory. And, right in back, was where my father's relatives lived. Now, how's that for a

HS: For coziness [Laughs].

MW: Isn't that something. So, you wanted to know about this.

HS: Yes.

MW: And then, my grandmother and grandfather died and we moved down in here. And since then, everybody else has died. That was my business to look after them. It just happened to come and I'm the last one. And, so that's why everything belongs to somebody here.

HS: I see. So that's...

MW: The only thing we have is books. We have a library but it's full of -- you can look in if you want. We have a real nice library in our other little room. If we get anything now, we have to put it somewhere and we put it in the library. Shut the door. Now that's my history.

HS: So tell me a little about your parents. Can you tell me a little about your parents? Your mother and father, what did they do?

MW: Well, of course, my mother she came back here and finished high school [Oxford High School], she went to high school. And she went -- oh yeah, and the Doctor Joselin's (??) brother was here, couldn't been, yeah his brother, lived there and when my mother graduated from high school, she was offered a job as a bookkeeper down there so there she had a job and she worked until she got married which was only a couple of years I guess, anyway. And, my father, he had quite a history. [ahem] They were, on my father's side - his mother was born here but the family were born, lived in England in ...-- and they were of course, my grandmother told me how, that her grandmother had told her, because they were born here but the other, she and her sister were born in Dudley. But, one night my grandfather came home - and they were having hard times in England, but over here, they were looking for workers - and he said that someone's come in the shop and said that if you - uh, and they were evidently making coffee and all -- and we're having a meeting and if you want to sign up, come down and listen. So he signed up and he took the

oldest boy, I think, and they came over here to get a job and when they got over here, where do you think the job was? Over here in Buffumville. Which is right uh,...

HS: Yes, I know where it is.

MW: Do you know where it is?

HS: Yes.

MW: So, that's where he started. But after they had money enough, which took a year or so, [he sent] for the rest of the family to come over. He had moved down to what is now Fabian (sp?); it used to be New Boston. But you see, I don't know anything about mill workers, but it used to be, they are the ones that ran the mill. They knew every worker that was there, they were good or bad and, every now and then, it was hard times, because somebody else got the job. Like, for instance if the mill - they had to have-of course that was a big job. And so, they'd have big business and then they'd go right out after the good workers. That's why people moved so much- but of course in those times- they had houses so they just moved them in the houses. And he was down in what it is now Fabian (sp?), he had moved down there, so they lived in Dudley.

HS: So it's like tenement houses? Tenement houses?

MW: Yes. That's why you go and you see these tenement houses. The mill people-of course now they don't furnish any house. But, you always had a house, because they built small houses for their workers.

HS: Sure. So your father worked in the mill?

MW: And that would be my grandmother's father had gone down there. I probably left a generation; I don't think so. But my grandmother, on my father's side, and grandfather, they lived in - . . . oh my father, but the Onley crowd. That would be my grandmother's who she married, and they were, of course, they came from Thompson. They lived in Thompson, CT. Do you know Thompson?

HS: Yes.

MW: Well, part of the Inn -- you don't remember of the tavern down there, the old inn, we used to go down to eat? Well, right along one of those houses, was where my grandfather was brought up. And, they came over a little after the Mayflower because, I think, from what I remember now the Onley was one that brought the people from Europe over here. He was a Captain or owned a boat or did something, I don't know. But he had something to do with it. And he finally settled. And I think they settled in Salem too. But then, they left -- all of those people left

and went to Rhode Island. And you know, you go to Providence and there's Oneyville, they just left out the "L". They were too lazy. I had to fight over it. I went to Rhode Island and we used to go down for summers, we had a cottage, we leased a cottage for the summer down there. And, the man came from Providence, lived next door, and he came over and he said, "Well, you people don't know how to pronounce your name." I said, "Oh no," I said, "It's the other way around." I said, "They're too lazy to keep the L in." It's Oneyville down in Rhode Island. And it's still is Oneyville. And, so -- but then he met my grandmother and married and my father and Uncle Louis. And then the, Richard Onley was Secretary of State under Cleveland. And his brother had charge of the Winnebago Indians out in Nebraska. And when the election business changed, he lost a job. And he went down the river – Yukon River I think it is - and started the Town of Norfolk, Nebraska. So, of course, he wanted people to [come and] live [there], so he came back to Thompson to get people to go down. And my grandfather and grandmother were one of the people who went down and of course my father and uncle. And they stay nine years; my grandmother hated it. She didn't like the flat part of the – oh, she said tornadoes, she said, they had a church steeple landed in their front yard one time. Steeple. But they came back.

HS: So your parents were born here actually?

MW: No

HS: No. Not here, but I mean in the area?

MW: My grandmother Stafford came back here, the one that was in Washington. They came back here to live. And then we lived over across there. My mother was, I think, she was born in N. Oxford. Because the Stafford were still living in N. Oxford. Of course, she was living in Washington. So she would come home -where you get onto the Turnpike - up there. The house is gone now though. And my grandfather and my father, of course, he was born, where the heck was dad born? Dad was born in

HS: That's okay.

MW: That's funny. All of a sudden, I have to stop and think. Yeah. Grandma Onley was born in Dudley. Dad, oh, he was born in Connecticut. You know where he was born down there Fabian (spelling????). I pointed the house out to you. [Laughs] For a second it just left me.

HS: So, you said that your mother, after she got married, she stopped working and stayed home. Right?

MW: Oh yeah. No, she never worked.

HS: She never worked after a short time here next door. And, how about your father, what did he do for a living?

MW: Well, he worked in Worcester at the Howard Brothers [company founded in Worcester in 1866]. They made card clothing. You know anything about it? They made the card, but they called it card clothing but it's the cards that held the spikes that combed the wool.

HS: I see. I know. And that's was his job; all his life he was working there?

MW: Yes.

HS: I see.

MW: He worked with – it was an English concern- was down near the railroads, gone now. But, he worked there. Walked down to the -- got the train in the center of town, went to Worcester. Every day at 6:00 in the morning.

HS: I see.

MW: And came home, got home at 7 at night.

HS: That was a long day.

MW: Yeah, that's what they did then. And, we never - my grandmother I think, she had a lot of -- the ones that lived here had a horse at one time -- but you got along, nobody thought anything about it. Oh yeah, that's the reason my father, my grandmother Onley and grandfather moved to Oxford - because they put in the trolley track and so he got a job as a conductor. That was a new job, a new thing to do. [Laughs]

HS: New thing to do. I see you have a lot of grandchildren probably, children, grandchildren, a lot of pictures.

MW: Oh, I have pictures; I put them up everywhere.

HS: Yes.

MW: Yes, those are the ones there and this one here.

HS: So, how many?

MW: I've got four great grandchildren. And there are two of them [shows a picture].

HS: Oh, those are beautiful boys.

MW: And the other two are on the table out there. Oh, they are, I wished you could see them. They are all near in age. And it's funny, course there's, one lives in Leicester and the others live down in the Southern part of Connecticut. And they don't see each other too often, as you know, like running back and forth. But the two older ones, they go, you'd think they'd seen each other the day before. They have the best time together. And they are all going to the beach this weekend for the couple of weeks.

HS: Beautiful weather for that.

MW: So, they will have fun together. They'll have a good time. But the summer, my gosh, kids, they have camps and this camp and that camp and running back and forth.

HS: So, how many children did you have?

MW: I had two children. Boy and a girl. No Olney (sp???) was one and Steven. Steven's up in Maine. Olney's the older one, he taught, he went to college to teach History. And he's a historian. And they couldn't get an Art teacher. So they asked him: "Could you teach Art?" and he said "Sure, I can teach Art". So he taught Art and loved it. This is funny too, because, of course he's retired now, and wherever we go, some man comes up, "Oh, that's Olney White" – everybody knows him. And Steven, he's - lives up at Sugarloaf in Maine.

HS: That's the ski area.

MW: Yeah. And he's done everything. Steven's a natural cook. And he finally got a job up there. He went to the University of Maine; graduated, taught school a while, but he didn't like that. And he went up there and got a job working for a -- in one of the Inns -- and the chef had just come out of New York. He was semi-retired and Steve hadn't been there more than a couple of months when he said, "I'll teach you everything I know." And boy is he a first-class cook. [Exclaims]. But he doesn't do it very much now. He did run a hotel at one time. A small one and he ran a restaurant and course he's a golfer and he could have been a good golfer but he teaches golf and runs a golf school in the summer. And, does build houses in the winter. [Laughs] I don't know, they're funny kids. That's what Olney's doing now. He's retired and he does over people's houses inside and out and they just like to do it.

HS: Yes.

MW: They can do anything.

HS: He wants to be busy.

MW: Yes, and he today - - he called up and I said. “What are you doing?” Well, he said, I’m painting this morning. Some woman over in Upton is having a house all done over inside and does a color one day and she decides she wants a different color the next day. And then he said, “I’m going over and help him.” A man that works for his son wasn’t working, living with his girlfriend’s family [and] in the afternoon helping them. They had three horses and they lived over there. Did you see on television any of it? The tornado we had? [June 1, 2011]

HS: Yes.

MW: Well, the house that says, “Thank God it wasn’t any worse,” or something. And that’s where he worked. Of course, his boy called his father right off. And Olney and Steven went over. And they have been helping him clean up ever since. But it’s an awful job. Did you go and see it?

HS: No, on television only.

MW: You can go now anytime. Olney came down, took us over. It’s devastating, you know. And, I had this feeling: you go, Carol and I ride the back roads and going along and the woods on both sides just flatten. Just awful, you just can’t imagine how terrible. Of course they are scared to death, afraid there will be a fire because everything is everywhere. And so they- Olney’s got about 40 acres of land - so he goes over and they bring down what they can and he’ll use. But if you help, you’ve got to have some way of carrying the stuff away. They have no place to put it. So, he goes up and with this Steve that works with him and they bring load down now and then and then they cut up stuff and chop it up into little bits and it’s really quite awful. They were on this morning or last night, the section where he’s been working. He wasn’t on, but it showed it – it’s a terrible thing. And the houses got to be torn down and rebuilt and, of course you know the insurance isn’t crazy about paying for all this.

HS: They have to.

MW: So it really is...

HS: So that’s one of your sons. Right? How many grandchildren do you have?

MW: I have four.

HS: Grand? or Great?

MW: 4 grandchildren, 4 great grandchildren.

HS: Oh, wow! Can we talk now a little about your education?

MW: Well, I just graduated from [Oxford] high school and I went to business school in Worcester. And, then I worked at State Mutual.

HS: I see.

MW: What is it now? Some other [name than] Mutual? Hanover? I worked there about nine years. They called me up afterwards, about five years afterwards and asked me if I'd come back but I said no. I had a family by that time.

HS: So you went to business school. Was this unusual for a girl to go to business school at that time?

MW: No, because it was a private, it's now, what is the business school now, was originally – Fairchild's - it was a small business school.

HS: Small business school. I see. Were there a lot of girls there?

MW: At the business school?

HS: Yes.

MW: No, it wasn't very big. But it was in the State Mutual building.

HS: I see. Was mostly girls or boys?

MW: Just girls.

HS: Just girls, it was for girls? Okay, I see.

MW: And, I liked it. My sister went to Wheaton College and graduated.

HS: Did you go to college too?

MW: No. I didn't go to college. My sister was on a Christmas vacation and she went -- a friend of hers had a horse- and so she was on a roll and she was riding a horse and it was very cold and she got thrown. And she fractured her skull. She went down, but she stood up and went down again – so she fractured her skull twice. She was at Memorial [Hospital], oh God, I think three, four, five weeks – a long time. But when she came to - she was specializing in languages - and she talked whatever language happened to be wakening up to and they had quite a time. But then she had to go back another year. When I graduated that year too, so there wasn't that much money because it cost so much for keeping her in the hospital. Just didn't have any. So that's why I went to business school.

HS: I see. And then you worked for Mutual.

MW: Yeah.

HS: And any other [job]?

MW: Then I got married.

HS: I see.

MW: And we, at that time, you couldn't work when you were married.

HS: Why?

MW: Of course I went right through the Depression. to go to the bank one day and the next [day] a man would be sitting on the street selling apples. This business that's going on now [in Washington] bothers me. Boy, I went through that and it was awful. And, so that's what happened there. So I got a job. I went to work. First thing I did was buy a car.

HS: Wow. What year was that – do you remember?

MW: I graduated in 1926, I went to school two years, I think that was, I worked nine years, I got married in 1937.

HS: You drove car all by yourself? You had the car all by yourself? You drove?

MW: Oh, yeah. I bought a car; we were a family that didn't have a car. We had one but we sold it and I bought a car. Oh, did we have fun with that car.

HS: What kind was it?

MW: It was a Ford Sedan and it had some leather on it or something. They use to do that. And then, my father and mother loved to ride in it. My dad didn't want to drive. He tried but he was too interested in the scenery. What he used to do, my mother wouldn't even let him drive a horse. Because he'd drive it into the pasture if he got to looking at something. [Laughs] He loved to see, so we just made a business of seeing the countryside. We traveled everywhere. It didn't make any difference what the roads were up and down or everything. We traveled all over Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts, Connecticut, and Rhode Island. Now and then, we get out into New York State. We just traveled all the roads and got to know them.

HS: And, you were the driver?

MW: I was the driver and I loved driving.

HS: Good for you. But that was before you got married?

MW: Yes.

HS: I see.

MW: While I was working. Because I went to work and I think in two years I had a car. [Laughs] How I ever got it - I got \$12.50 a week. Can you imagine?

HS: No.

MW: And that was a good place to work.

HS: Uhm, uhm.

MW: Worked for an insurance company. I worked in the Treasury Department. My cousin had an insurance business in Webster and they called me up [because] she was sick. Because I worked for the insurance company, of course I figured I knew insurance. I didn't know anything about insurance; all I knew was what the insurance people did with the money after they got it. [Laughs] It was different. I said, "Sure, I'll run it." So I went down to Webster and there's a lot of Polish people in Webster.

HS: Yes [Laughs].

MW: And it's very hard when you don't know [the language], because we don't have very many in Webster, I mean in Oxford. So I wasn't used to it. And here I was in the office and these two women came in and wanted the insurance for their husbands or sons or somebody. And, they told me their name, I haven't the vaguest idea of what they were talking about.

HS: Difficult names to pronounce – Polish names.

MW: Yes, they have – not very many vowels. [Laughs] Anyway, I knew a man that ran one down, I called him up and he explained how to do it. And, in three weeks' time I could talk to anybody. I was so glad and I ran that that month while she was sick. Then, I worked, whenever she got stuck, I'd go down and help her out. After I got married..

HS: So, you said an interesting thing that after you got married, you actually quit your job.

MW: I got married, I didn't have any job, I had to quit. It was the rule but they called up four or five years afterwards when they changed the system and asked if I wanted to come back. And I said no. I was married then. Couldn't be married when you worked. Oh, but that was a company rule.

HS: That was company rule. I see.

MW: Yeah, that was a company rule. They had about 250 girls working there. That was a company rule. Teachers couldn't work and be married. Couldn't pull that now.

HS: That's right. Everybody works. Did you do any other jobs? Did you do any other work after or not? That was it right? After Mutual, you didn't ever work again? You stayed home?

MW: No, I used to - uh - how much of this business are you - you're not going to print all this? This is personal stuff I'd been telling you.

HS: If you don't want, I will have some forms for you to sign and, for example, if you don't want us to say something, because it goes to the library, put on this form. We're collecting these oral histories to put in the Schlesinger Library at Harvard University, so researchers can research the histories.

MW: I don't want anything printed that somebody's going to pick up. You know what I mean.

HS: That's okay, so we don't have to talk about this. I just wanted to know about your life.

MW: Yes, I knew that, so I was just trying to tell you what was going on. And some of it is interesting but I don't want something that's going to be picked up and land on the front page. Just because of my connection with Clara Barton I get on the front page every so often. So I kind of hang back a little bit. You've been to Clara Barton Museum? Well, they have just taken on the - one Dr. Joselin started. The boys' camp was nearby and they have just taken on that and they are running both of them. But that's alright, there is only two or three miles between which was a good idea.

HS: What did your husband do for work?

MW: Well, he went to -- graduated from the University of Maine. Graduated from high school and then he went to the -- graduated from the University of Maine and was funny course. He graduated in the Depression and you know it was hard to get a job but as soon as Roosevelt got in and started those camps, of course he got a job right off. Because, coming from Maine, they had all. Maine has been one that takes care of the woods and things like that. He got a job and he ran those camps and then when the camps closed, they opened a like camp, only one year was in a hospital up in Holyoke. It was a school to teach boys, he had boys - it was a boys and girls - but he had just the boys. And they would teach them anything so they could get a job, making - you know...

HS: Like job training?

MW: Yes, training for working – whatever they do. And they had this school and he ran that and then there was a big one up where Roosevelt lived at the end of – up there Nova Scotia – not Nova Scotia, New Brunswick. At the end of the point, and across was a lot of land that the government owned because of military. And he was going to run that and they were going to have a big one up there for boys and girls. We went up and saw it. It was quite a place. One side was on the ocean and they had everything. But then the war came on and everything changed. Then of course they took all of the younger people right in the war then. So, then he went into business. While he was running the school, he was going around getting jobs for the kids that were graduating and he'd been offered several jobs but he liked working for the young people like that very much. But when the war came on, he got a job in one of the, they were making stuff for the war and then he was a businessman, salesman, all over the country, he was in the air most of the time.

HS: I see. So you had to do all the household duties and the bringing up children because he was gone a lot?

MW: Oh yes. When you have -- my uncle had a job, he did the same thing and uh - when you have somebody that's working like that, life is very different. You just plan things for weekends. Because you never know when they're coming or going. And they don't either. I remember we bought a new car once and he was going out to – he used to drive once in a while when we go out to New York State – and he got out as far as Syracuse and they called him up and told him he got to go somewhere else and it was a brand new car and he left it in the parking lot. Two weeks later, we went on back and shoveled it out. [Laughs] You never know what's going to – when you have a husband that works like that. He was good natured and a nice guy and everybody liked him. He was a good salesman. So that was nice.

HS: What was his name?

MW: Ray – Raymond

HS: Raymond White.

MW: Raymond White, yeah. He was good looking.

HS: Uhm, uhm.

MW: I don't know if his picture is here or not – probably somewhere, up there. And, a lot of fun. He was an athlete and he was a real good one. He made the Olympics, but he graduated a year too soon and he was out. And, the minute you stop, you can't make it. That was alright. I

don't think it bothered him any. And, of course when my son - he was - he runs and of course you asked what he does - I forgot, he coaches track still.

HS: Uhm, uhm.

MW: I said to him, I said, "How long are you going to coach track?" He said, "Well, we've got another man like me," he said, "only he's older, he's 85." [Laughs] But they like it. And course they have an organization so he knows, he coaches it - Leicester. He coached several years at Nichols College. He was a runner too. One hundred yard dash - seem to run in the family. Funny how you stick to things like that. Sorry he isn't here because you would have been....

HS: Yeah, I would enjoy meeting him, sure.

MW: He's got a wonderful memory - he remembers everything and anything. That's why I suppose he'd be good in history.

HS: Yes. So the last questions I have about your involvement in the community. Were you, involve in this community somehow, volunteer, doing something?

MW: Ask Carol. [Laughs]

HS: You name it, okay?

MW: No, I was on the Board of the Genealogy - is that it? The State said that every town had to have a representative, a Historical Commission, and I was it. One of them. There were three - they had three and I did that for twelve years. But, I'm always semi-attached if they need or want to know anything in history they come see me. And I like to keep in contact.

HS: Absolutely.

MW: Yeah. I know what's going on. Try to. Now, not so good; although, the one that's doing it comes to see me a lot. And, I have pictures, old pictures that they have taken copies of, so they could have them. I used to belong to the Friends of the Library, that's right. But, I can't - of course to me, it seems as though I never was, but I suppose it isn't - it's just the last few years that I just can't go to these meetings anymore.

HS: Sure.

MW: I was the head of the DAR for a while in Oxford.

HS: The DAR - Daughters of the Revolution. Yes.

MW: And, I belonged to all the things, Huguenot Society.

HS: What is that?

MW: Well now - way back, in the beginning, the French came to Boston, I guess, they came to Boston and then they came here. And we have the Huguenot Hill and that's where they settled. And, then they first had settled down, you see this is kind of the plains – it's pretty level right through here and way down there. They settled and the husband had gone to Woodstock and they were the Indians were raiding the place. And, his wife escaped and went down to meet her husband but she took the wrong path and missed him. And he came home and discovered the children had been killed and he was killed too. And, after that, they kind of moved but they had – up on Huguenot – they had a settlement up there. And these people down the foot of the hill just wanted to be on their own, have a place, of course, plenty of land around. And now we have Huguenot Society. And like that Huguenot Society, my mother was one of the first ones that were on the – that started it sort of. She wasn't a Huguenot, but she was great on getting involved and things like that. And Jennifer writes things and she gives lectures.

HS: Who is Jennifer?

MW: My granddaughter. Yeah. She gives lectures and she gives one lecture that I heard, you know, and it was to, I heard, I know the lecture she gave – it was to try to inform the high school generation that you've got to keep the water clean. And it had quite an effect on those kids. They really got into it. She has a certain way of showing; of course she's connected with the river anyway. She was in New Haven – the New Haven, something or other, Library. They kept asking, they wanted her over there because – and she goes out, they have sail boats and things like that.

HS: It looks like you were very involved in this community.

MW: Yes, I've always been, but right now the Oxford changed so and I've lived so long that my friends have all died.

HS: Oh.

MW: You know it's a different life. And this people think different. Of course I have a few friends that I have – I have a good friend that comes to see me but she's 93. And, she was a nurse in the war and when they had a year ago, or two years ago when they had a big celebration over there in Europe for the ending of the war, you know what, they called her up and said that they were – would she like to join them – she went over and stayed for three weeks. At the time it was happening, she was in a foxhole over there. And she's over Overlook, which was a

Masonic [nursing] home. She lives there, she has an apartment and her sister lives there too. And, she comes to see me about every so often and they all meet – a Burgerama up here, it's a small place but a lot of them meet and they are trying to get me to come, Carol and I, but I don't know. I enjoy my lunch at home.

HS: Did you ever run for any political office.

MW: No. Except I was on the Historical Commission for twelve years. And that has to – that's a historical business.

HS: Yes.

MW: Oh Lord, we went around and have to go around and check on people and houses and make sure that - we just had a little commotion down here – somebody was trying to – we wanted – the State wants it to, but we want it too - a historical district. We had one woman and one summer she came in and bought a building and sold it. And we've been upset ever since. Because it was a nice building and a nice plot of land right in the center of town. Now we've got the drugstore and so much traffic and they want to do it some more. Not that we can do anything about it but at least we can make and we got all mixed up in that.

HS: So all of those houses nearby look like they are very old? All the houses here on the street are very old – Nineteen Century houses.

MW: Oh yeah. Yes, this one was built around 1900. This house was built in 1829 and I think that one was built about the same time [points to different windows]. And, but the next two were built recently, after 1800. And the first one, I don't know for sure, I think that was built about 1840 or 35 or something. That's been there a long time. We are trying to keep it historically correct to look at. But, somebody always wants to spoil it. And then we have this park. Dr. Joselin, uhm, bought the land and gave it to the town for a park. Of course, Dr. Joselin came from Oxford anyway. Where the Five Cents Savings Bank is, where he lived. Did you know him?

HS: No.

MW: Well, he was wonderful. He did a lot of things for Oxford and a lot of other people too. And, gosh, they aren't any Joselins left now. I don't think.

HS: Thank you May. Is there anything else we should talk about? Do you have any suggestions? That would conclude my interview with you but if you have any suggestions, should we talk about something else?

MW: Well, I don't know. You see the other interview I had was how I lived, and what we did and things like that. Like, of course, for 58 years – this isn't interesting I mean except to me – we went to the beach and stayed all summer. And I loved the salt water.

HS: Where did you go?

MW: Do you know Misquamicut ? Any of that? Well we were way down the other end down there – Weekapaug. Only we were on the salt pond and the salt ponds are a wonderful place to be on. And especially in Rhode Island because they keep track of it all of the time. Because you can eat out of the salt pond. See we did quahogs right in the pond in front of us and there – had lobsters and crabs and all that stuff. And then we swam in the ocean – they have a – we belong to the beach club. They started one down there, which was nice. Because you go to a public beach you can't find enough space to sit down.

HS: True.

MW: So we still belong to the beach club. But after Ray died and the one we used to rent the house from, I was in three different houses. And we should have built our own, but it was too much. It's 65 miles and Ray was gone all of the time and I had to take care of it and I had this house and two other houses besides and I said, Lord I can't, I don't want to have to be running back and forth all the time.

Carol: May, tell us about Klondike Inn.

MW: My husband - I suppose that's where Steve got his idea of cooking - because Ray liked to cook. He didn't want to do it and he traveled all the time. He'd come home sometime: "Oh, if I was running a restaurant, I went in a restaurant today," he'd say and, "If I was running it, I wouldn't do that to it." He always wanted to be in the restaurant business. So he retired and bought a restaurant. Never done or worked in one in his life. But of course he ran those camps, I suppose..... And it was a good one. We had quite a time with that. Everybody in Oxford went over and went to it.

HS: Where was it?

MW: It was over in Grafton – South Grafton, I think it is. Grafton runs along in there you know.

HS: How long did you have it?

MW: Twenty years.

HS: Wow.

MW: Imagine he retired when he was 65, we bought a restaurant and he worked and sold it when he was – let's see 20 years, 65, 75, 85, 95 – he was 95.

HS: And you worked too?

MW: I did just the business. I didn't do anything with the restaurant. But, I did the – I was a business partner – that part I liked but I wasn't interested in cooking.

HS: Cooking [Laugh]

MW: Anything like that, I like to cook but not like that. And I did all the business and we had - of course we sold liquor – you have to run a restaurant and I did all that and every other thing. I never forget though, when we were trying to sell it, this liquor business is crazy anyway, and we had to have a meeting down in Boston because they had to know who we were selling it to and everything else. So we went down to the meeting and the lawyer went with us, I didn't know what they were going to do. And one man came out and he stood there and he talked about five seconds and then another man came out and he talked to us about that law and they came out and said you're alright, you can sell anything. All they wanted to do was look at us. [Laughs]

HS: How old were you when you sold that place?

MW: Ray was 92, when we finally got it sold, I think he was older. I think he was older than that and I'm only a year younger.

HS: When did he die?

MW: When did Ray die?

HS: Yes.

MW: September 28, 2004. Carol came then to help me take care of Ray. And then, she stayed on which has been very nice and Carol and I get along, we don't fight. We get along very well. We have a system and she does what she wants to do pretty much. She's working between times and one thing or another.

HS: Thank you so much. Thank you so much for sharing this with us. And then, I will now turn off the tape recorder.

[May called me on 8/22/2011 to add to her story this important information about Clara Barton. Clara Barton was May's grandmother's aunt with whom she lived since an early age. Therefore,

she inherited many memorabilia of Clara Barton. May's family donated the house which became the Clara Barton Birthplace Museum, and its furnishings and personal items. May was involved with the museum from its inception serving on its board, volunteering and driving other volunteers to serve as docents and guides.]