

**Name of Interviewee: Constance Ritchie DuHamel**

**Recording Identification: Rec004\_0037 and Rec004\_0038**

**Google Drive Folder: Oral Histories / Montclair150 / montclair150-01-duhamel**

**Additional Materials: TV34 Interview**

**Interviewer: Sophia Edwards and Benjamin Webster, Helen Fallon (MHC Trustee and friend of Connie's)**

**Date: 04/21/2018**

**Location: Montclair Fire Department on 1 Pine St, Montclair, NJ.**

### **Introduction:**

Constance (Connie) Ritchie DuHamel was born in 1929 and grew up in Montclair on the Montclair/Verona border south of Bloomfield Avenue and primarily attended private school here. She shares many memories of playing in her neighborhood, and particularly the winter fun of sledding down the steep lawns in the neighborhood and on the nearby Montclair Golf Club property. Connie recalls many of the establishments that she and her friends visited in downtown Montclair, including Wittrock's Candies, the Clairidge Theater, Ms. Sawyer's Dance Studio, Perdue Music Store, and more. Connie was active in the Junior League. She worked at House Beautiful magazine for several years. When she and her husband Young Duhamel married in 1954, they raised their six daughters in the Erwin Park area. Her children had originally attended Edgemont School, but then were bussed to Nishuane School, and Connie recounts how her children greatly appreciate the diversity they grew up among.

Connie recalls stories of her grandparents, who were originally drawn to Montclair in 1904 at the recommendation of Mr. Hinck, a colleague of her grandfather's in the textile business and the developer of Montclair's Hinck Building and residential homes; they lived in several different homes on and near South Mountain Avenue.

Montclair is special because it is like one big family. Everyone knows each other, and they are all of different backgrounds.

### **Timestamps:**

[1:54]: Constance Ritchie DuHamel was born in Orange Memorial Hospital February 21st, 1929 during a snowstorm, which prevented her parents from the planned delivery at the obstetrician's New York City hospital.

[2:25]: She lived in a wonderful neighborhood of approximately four streets on the Montclair/Verona border, behind the current Montclair Kimberly Academy near Glen Road. Everyone got along well, it was a lot of fun. There was a big brook that ran behind her house, and it sat on a hill which made for good sledding – a bit tricky with the ravine and the creek, but that's what made it so exciting -- right down to Sunset Avenue in the winter. Connie had two older brothers, and the neighborhood was populated by older boys, who liked to tease the girls. They were also close enough to the [Montclair Golf Club on Prospect Avenue] golf course to walk there and go sleigh riding there in winter. The older boys lit the sleigh path with candles so they could go at nighttime. Golfing is common also. One particularly big sled hill on the golf course was called "Blankity Blank", which was a bit treacherous but great fun. "Winter was a GOOD time in Montclair," Connie reports. They even enjoyed sledding on their street, which was never quickly plowed. She enjoyed the snow and playing with her friends.

[6:39] After Connie went to college, she got married and worked at House Beautiful magazine, she and her husband moved to Erwin Park, and she was grateful that the neighborhood had the same kind of feeling as the one she grew up in. Including her own children, there were 36 children in the Erwin Park neighborhood. The residents felt proud of the Erwin Park neighborhood and its camaraderie.

[7:23]: She had six daughters with her husband, Young. (His full name was Notley Young DuHamel but he went by Young.) She thought of the entire neighborhood as her family and her children developed bonds with many friends they still keep in touch with. Her children attended Edgemont School. She jokes that when her husband returned home after Connie delivered their youngest child and the sixth girl in the family at St. Vincent's Hospital in Montclair, a neighbor who had stayed there with the other children asked, "What will you name her?" And Young joked, "Another." She reiterates that Montclair was a great town to grow up in. People felt very comfortable. People may have attended different public and private elementary schools, but met each other through other activities like dancing school. Connie says that the Montclair Golf Club was a "melting pot" where people of many backgrounds and neighborhoods met.

Returning again to the great fun of the Blankity Blank sled hill on the Golf Club, Connie elaborates that her brothers and the big boys made bonfires to keep the sledders warm.

[11:02]: Connie discusses her schooling. First, she went to Lacordaire in Upper Montclair which ended at 5<sup>th</sup> grade; then to a public school in Verona for 6<sup>th</sup> grade. In grades 7-12 she attended Kimberley and college at Smith College, an all-women's college, in Northampton, Massachusetts. She enjoyed that experience but did not elaborate on it that much. While talking about driving around town to get to school, Connie recalls that you would go to the gas station in the winter and they would put chains on your tires for better traction in the snowy weather, particularly for the very hilly streets near the Montclair/Verona border where she grew up, like Sunset Avenue or "the yellow brick road" the very steep brick street behind today's MKA.

[13:19]: Connie reports that her grandparents arrived in Montclair in 1904; her mother had been born in 1903 in New York. Her grandparents had met in St. Louis, where her grandmother lived; her grandfather, who was in the textile business, was on a business trip in St. Louis. Connie notes how brave her grandmother must have been to move all the way to New York from San Francisco (St. Louis?). Connie recalls that Mr. Hinck, of Montclair's Hinck Building [corner of Church Street and Bloomfield Ave.] was also in textiles. When Connie's grandfather expressed an interest in moving out of New York City to raise their child [Connie's mother], it was Mr. Hinck who suggested he consider Montclair. The train service to Montclair was a draw, and her grandparents first moved to 50 or 52 Christopher Street [near the Erie train line]. Then her parents moved to South Mountain Avenue and lived there for many years; when her grandfather thought the street was getting "too busy" they moved to a house on Clinton Avenue, right behind their former South Mountain Avenue home.

[14:51]: She recalls memories of her friends and what they used to do in the past. She remembers a man named Winslow Lovejoy, a friend of her uncle's who lived in a large, rather imposing home on the corner of South Mountain and either Union Street or Gates Avenue. Returning to the

sledding topic, Connie notes that at times in the winter, the steep streets such as Union Street, Gates, Berkeley Place, were closed to automobile traffic and open for sledding! She recalls a story her mother told her of Winslow Lovejoy who was sledding and sled right under a passing truck and survived. She recalls telling that story to a relative of Winslow Lovejoy who also lived in the neighborhood who was a very accomplished cardiologist who cared for Connie's husband.

[17: 04]: When asked what she did for fun, Connie replied that she loved going to the movies at the Clairidge Theater – almost every Friday. She and 5-6 friends who attended Kimberly, which dismissed at 1 pm on Fridays, would go to Wittrock's Candies near the corner of Church Street and South Fullerton Avenue. She and her friends would get a sandwich at Wittrock's soda fountain before movies at the Clairidge. Sometimes they would go to the Wellmont Theater, which had double features.

[18:20] Connie would take the trolley to school, catching it at the Sunset Avenue/Bloomfield Avenue corner. She would take that trolley to Valley Road and then walk to Kimberly. In good weather, she rode her bike to/from school – testing her stamina on the yellow brick road!

[19:15]: Connie was asked, "What is distinctive about living in Montclair? What stuck out to you?" Connie comments that, "although it might sound corny, she feels the whole town was a family, in a sense."

[19:54] Connie notes that she wasn't very familiar with the Upper Montclair area, as it was not near her house. She remembers doing most of her things in downtown Montclair. The 5 & 10 downtown – it was fun to shop there. School, Ms. Sawyer's Dancing Class (held at the Montclair Women's Club on Union Street) were downtown. (There was also a Ms. Sawyer's Dance Class in Upper Montclair.) All the doctors were on Plymouth Street downtown.

[21:01]: "Did you attend any churches?" Connie replies that she has always attended Immaculate Conception Church. When new in town, her mom attended Immaculate Conception even though she was told it didn't have the prestige of other churches in town.

[22:01] When asked about summertime activities, Connie notes that they'd stay in town for a bit, but then they would "go up to the Cape" in July, Hyannis Port, when it was still a quiet little town before the Kennedy family became so well-known. There were many wealthy people and big homes there, like in Montclair, but they were low-key and friendly people, just like in Montclair. She, her mother and grandmother would stay at one of the "big hotels" in Maine for August...Poland Spring House, etc. Connie said as a little girl she sometimes felt like Eloise, the character in the book that lives at the Plaza Hotel in NYC. Her brothers went to camp, but Connie traveled with her mom, who Connie recalls as "fun."

[23:33]: Connie was a young teenager during World War II. She remembers the gas rationing and food rations. and her two older brothers were in the Air Corps and the other one was in the Ski Troops. She remembers when some Australian Navy young service men came to their house for dinner during the war and their ships were docked in NYC; her mother, as head of the volunteer Navy League would have some of the servicemen for dinner and would find other homes to

similarly host the visitors. Connie enjoyed the visits, since she grew up with all brothers, she grew up as a tomboy.

[25:58] Asked about organizations in which she was involved, Connie notes the many committees of the Junior League. As part of the Garden Committee, she remembers meeting with Lonnie Brandon, Director of Montclair's Parks and Recreation Department who would identify gardens that needed volunteers. She and others from the Junior League also volunteered at St. Vincent's Hospital, folding linens in the basement, and they had some fun with the gurneys.

[27:23]: Connie recounts that she worked at House Beautiful magazine in the 1950s. She didn't take the train, but commuted into New York every day for three years with a carpool of four men who were married to friends of hers. Most of them worked in advertising, including at N.W. Ayer and they were very funny guys. They would listen to the Bob & Ray show on the radio which was very funny on the way in. She remembers being dismayed at her first job at McGraw Hill: after graduating from a good women's college in 1950, she was asked to be a file clerk. Then Connie worked at House Beautiful. She recalls that there was a product advertised in House Beautiful that was made at the Holiday House gift shop in Montclair, where her friend Ann Von Hoffman worked. It was a glass cigarette box onto which your wedding invitation would be engraved. The House Beautiful "window shop" buyer thought it would be a big seller and it was. It was early mail order. The Holiday House was incorporated into the Bellevue Theater building on Bellevue Avenue and is now Weichert real estate office. Connie recalls that there was an art gallery above the Bellevue Theater, Jean Jebb (sp?). Jean Jebb had been a pediatric nurse, working for Dr. DiLorenzo ("a great doctor"), whose office was on the corner of Upper Mountain Avenue and Bellevue Avenue. She also remembers Dr. Sidler, on Plymouth Street, who took care of all the caddies from the Golf Club for free. And Dr. Cox and Dr. Rhys-Jones also had offices nearby on Plymouth Street. And Dr. Love had an office at Immaculate. (?)

[33:00] Connie and Young were married in 1954 and she stopped working in New York City when her first child was born, given the costs of commuting and child care. When asked how she and Young met, Connie notes that it's quite a story but she'd rather not have it on tape, so she requested the recording be temporarily stopped!

## **Pt. 2- 2<sup>nd</sup> recording**

[00:17] When asked what is special about Montclair, she quotes her youngest daughter, Charlotte, who said, "I am so glad I grew up in Montclair because there were so many different kinds of people there, so many backgrounds, so many histories" and now, living elsewhere, she realizes that not all towns are like that. Connie remembers the 1960s as being a bit hard for everyone and bussing was introduced. She recalls that African American families near Erwin Park, on Talbot Street, were also uncomfortable with bussing and many wanted to stay at their neighborhood school, Edgemont. Her children were bussed to Nishuane School. Connie did not realize that Montclair had been a great place to grow up in if someone wants diversity until her daughter said that.

[3:36] She speaks about the Penick family, a big family in Montclair. The parents had grown up in Montclair and were friends of Connie's mother's growing up. The Penick family owned a huge pharmaceutical drug plant.

[5:47] When asked when she got a TV, Connie remembers seeing a TV at her friend's house in 7<sup>th</sup> grade; that friend's family sold jukeboxes and had the new technology. Connie remembers that she and Young enjoyed watching the Sid Caesar Show after they were married – so funny. Connie talks about the Perdue Music Store in downtown Montclair, where she'd go after Wittrock's and the movies. Perdue was the only Magnavox distributor. They had listening rooms and Connie enjoyed listening to the classical music records. Perdue's was also the headquarters for the political campaign who sold Wendell Willkie merchandise. [Wendell Willkie was the 1940 Republican nominee for President] Connie remembers having many Wendell Willkie pins in 7<sup>th</sup> grade and her Kimberly teachers admonished her for taking political sides at that age. Perdue's was on South Park Street, and Connie described the shops in that area as "snazzy," especially when it was decorated for holidays. She remembers the Wedgewood Cafeteria on that street.

[8:08] Her Grandfather worked in textiles, and there were a number of people in town who owned woolen companies, like Fortsmann. She thinks that there was such wealth in Montclair (vs Upper Montclair) because of its connection to New York City businesses via the Lackawanna Railroad. She was not as familiar with the business people in Upper Montclair or aware of their connection to New York City. She acknowledges small divisions in town but that nonetheless it felt like one family.

[10:00] She recalls some places and people of Montclair:

- one of the first women to join the US Air Force, Bessie Gray, lived on the corner of Clinton Street and Union Street.
- At the corner of Valley Road and Bloomfield Avenue there was a very tall building called the Montclair Theater; that's where the Junior League used to have their shows; in the downstairs bar there was a great, African American jazz pianist that her brothers used to go see (she was too young).
- Herman Hupfeld, who wrote the iconic song "As Time Goes By" from Casablanca was a family friend of her uncle.
- She notes that her mother's friend married Virgil Thompson (an American composer and critic.)
- She used a James Joyce quote as a way she could describe Montclair, "Here comes everybody."

[13:00] She remembers that her grandmother would take her to the Montclair Art Museum on Sundays, which, as a little girl, she was not always excited about. Connie also recalls going for "Sunday rides" out to the country: Livingston, NJ! (which was all egg farms at that time; they would buy four dozen each Sunday). During the Depression, when people were anxious for jobs, her grandparents employed a chauffeur and a maid; the chauffeur was like a butler, and they also had a gardener. At this time, her grandfather supported her mother, as Connie's parents were divorced. Her grandparents lived at 78 Clinton Avenue.

[16:05] Connie tells the interviewers that she enjoys following the Montclair State athletics in the Montclair Times. She remembered the campus when it was just two buildings – the State Teachers' College and the Normal School.