

Name of Interviewee: Barbara Eberhardt

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Additional Materials: TV34 Interview

Interviewer: Morgan (Montclair State Student)

Date: 4/6/2018

Location: First Montclair House Community Room on 56 Walnut St, Montclair, NJ

Introduction:

Barbara Eberhardt, born in 1924, lived in Montclair until she was eight years old (in 1932), when her family moved to Lincoln Park; they returned to Montclair in 1942. Other than several years for college in Pennsylvania and an interior decorating job in Princeton, Barbara resided the rest of her life in Montclair.

Barbara shares detailed memories of both the Gates Avenue neighborhood in which she lived as a young child, the North Fullerton Avenue/Bloomfield Center neighborhood where her family resided as a young adult, and her later Walnut Street neighborhood: stores, shopping, churches, the many organizations, and businesses in which Barbara was involved as a career (she was an interior decorator and then a realty broker), socially, and politically including the Dramatic Club, the Young Republicans Club, several women's clubs, and different churches.

Barbara shares memories of the Depression, which changed her family's finances very dramatically; of World War II, including rations; and very detailed information on how grocery stores in town changed from small markets to true "super" markets, recalling specific food and other stores she frequented.

Her active lifestyle and detailed recollections provide many, many interesting details.

Timestamps:

[0:00:40 – 0:01:27]: Barbara Eberhardt was born in 1924. Her parents had moved to Montclair in 1921, to 122 Gates Avenue. Barbara was born at Orange Memorial Hospital. When she was eight (in 1932), she explained, "my father lost his money and we moved to our summer home in Lincoln Park."

[Later in the interview, she elaborates on how the Great Depression in the United States caused the decline in her family's finances which prompted their move to Lincoln Park.]

The family lived in Lincoln Park for 10 years, until 1942. Barbara attended Boonton High School and enjoyed it. The family returned to Montclair when Barbara was 18 [approx. 1939], living in Montclair ever since.

[0:01:28]: Asked to share more details about her time growing up in Montclair as a very young child, until 1932, Barbara explained that she went to Brookside School, and then to Nishuane [School] for one year. She recalls her neighborhood as "very residential" and notes that things have now changed, with apartment buildings. She recalls that across the street from her home on Gates Avenue had been a children's home "in a big old house, which is no longer there." She recalls that all of the houses across the street were Victorian-era; many of them have since been replaced by garden apartments and Gates Manor Nursing Home [111-115 Gates Avenue]. But on her family's side of Gates Avenue, the old houses remain to this day.

[0:02:58] When the family returned to Montclair in 1942, they lived in an apartment building at 41 North Fullerton Avenue, opposite Immaculate Conception Church.

[0:03:58]: When asked about her siblings, Barbara explains that she “was like an only child” because although she had two older brothers, they were 10 and 14 years older than she was. The boys attended prep school when she was young in Montclair and they were in college by the time the family moved to Lincoln Park. When asked about Lincoln Park, Barbara shares that she “liked it! It was rural, it was fun. There were woods and a pond in back of us, and we could ice skate and ski.”

[0:04:32] She notes that she’s never been back to Lincoln Park since the family returned to Montclair. She went to college at Linden Hall Junior College in Lititz, Pennsylvania; lived in Princeton 1951-1956 to manage a decorating shop; then moved home in 1956 because her parents weren’t well. And she has resided in Montclair ever since, noting that she’s lived at First Montclair House, a senior housing development, 56 Walnut Street (location for this oral history session) since 2008.

[06:24]: Although she has pleasant memories of Montclair from when she was very young, with “little friends,” her memories of myriad activities and fun in her later years in Montclair are full and detailed. She was and remains a parishioner of First Congregational Church. She enjoyed the Montclair Dramatic Club, explaining that you had to “work to get points to become a member.” In fact, she notes with pride that she become the first female President of the Montclair Dramatic Club. Other organizations in which she was active included: the Junior Women’s Club, adding “the downtown club,” [presumably the Women’s Club of Montclair, 82 Union Street] and the Young Republicans. She added, “They kept me pretty busy!”

She reminds the interviewer that those times were before television, adding “if you were busy every night, that was fine.” Barbara recalls the family’s North Fullerton Avenue apartment was conveniently located just one block from Montclair Center [Bloomfield Avenue] and “I could walk to the movies, shopping.”

[0:07:45]: She points out that when they returned to Montclair in 1942, it was during World War II, so there was rationing, and she explains how grocery shopping was different in general. “There were no “super” markets. I remember going up Bloomfield Avenue to a bakery where they would slice the bread for you, because it didn’t come automatically sliced. There was an A&P down Bloomfield Avenue. You went in with a shopping list and told the clerk at the counter what you wanted, and they got it for you.” Barbara recalls that there was also an A &P market on Grove Street, where Churchill’s [Rugs and Carpets] currently is [127 Grove Street].

[0:09:03]: When her family lived at Gates Avenue her mother would call Aiello's Butcher Shop for meats. Barbara makes a side note that the owner was “the father of Dave Aiello who owned the Wedgewood [Wedgewood Cafeteria, 14 S. Park Street]

Aiello Butcher Shop was on the corner of Park Street and Bloomfield Avenue “where the camera place is now, next to Louis Harris.”

Barbara explains that her mother would “call in her orders and they would deliver” When asked by the interviewer if shopping was different then, Barbara replies, “Oh boy, was it!” She continues, “Where Whole Foods is now [701 Bloomfield Avenue] was the *first* SUPERmarket in town.” It was a Food Fair store.

She recalls other stores in her North Fullerton neighborhood. There were small shops near Claremont Avenue: drug store, convenience store, Tom’s Market. She explains, “Tom’s Market was where we did most of our grocery shopping. We had little bitty grocery carts, nothing like we have today.” She notes what a relief it was to go in, after World War II rationing had ended, without having to hand your list to the clerk; you could just select your own items, check out and pay, and then you’d leave without the bags because the store delivered them to you. She recalls that Tom’s Market eventually became a Shop-Rite, then moved into the A&P space on Grove Street, and then to Shop-Rite’s currently location on Broad Street in the Brookdale section of Bloomfield!

She reiterates that they were in walking distance of Montclair Center, Bloomfield Avenue. Barbara recalls “lots of clothing shops.” She mentions Louis Harris [Park Street] – “my mother loved Louis Harris!...I loved Louis Harris!” She recalls another store on the corner of South Fullerton Avenue and Bloomfield Avenue, which was a drug store at one point, and just south of that was the Bab’s (sp?) Shop, another one that she and her mom frequented. Barbara observes, “There were drug stores on almost every corner, and there were dress shops on every block. Really...you didn’t have to go out of town.”

[0:13:05]: Barbara recalls shopping one Christmas, in particular. “I waited to almost...the week before Christmas and I had a list of everything I wanted to get. I went out to Montclair Center and came back with everything.”

[0:13:41]: Barbara talks about her involvement in the Dramatic Club, working backstage at first and acting in a few plays. The Dramatic Club built the sets and rehearsed at a clubhouse on Central Avenue and performed the shows at Mount Hebron [Middle School, now Buzz Aldrin Middle School]. “After I got my membership working backstage, for a several plays I was what they call ‘the reader,’ which is the prompter. You sit in the wing with a with the book. Of course, you have to go to every rehearsal, because you practically know the play before it goes on.” She mentions that the Dramatic Club presented two big shows a year at Mt. Hebron Middle School and also introduced workshops 3-4 times per year in the Club House space, to give actors more opportunities throughout the year. She became the Co-chair of the Workshops. She noted that most of those involved in the Dramatic Club were from Montclair or from nearby towns.

[0:15:50]: She talks about the different churches her family attended over the years: Glen Ridge Congregational Church (where her parents had attended when they lived in Glen Ridge prior to moving to Montclair); First Congregational Church (40 South Fullerton Avenue, the church her parents joined when they moved to Montclair), Central Presbyterian in Montclair (the church they switched to because the minister at First Congregational Church was Scottish, and her father had difficulty understanding his accent; but Barbara was christened at Central Presbyterian Church before they moved on); when they moved to Lincoln Park in 1932, they joined a Dutch Reformed Church there (her parents had been married in a Dutch Reformed Church in Union City); upon returning “home” to Montclair after college,

Barbara's parents were attending the Methodist Church [the First Methodist Church of Montclair at 24 North Fullerton Avenue which was very close to their North Fullerton apartment]. When Barbara got home from college, she "got in with a group who belonged to the young people's group at First Congregational... So I joined and my parents said, 'Well we started off there,' so they came and joined, too. I have belonged to First Congregational Church since 1949. I'm the oldest member

Interesting to note that Barbara has repeatedly referred to returning "home" when she discusses their return to Montclair.

[0:18:27] She continues discussing First Congregational Church, how it has changed, and its past organizations: Senior Federation, Women's Guild, Congregators (the young married group), the Bradford Club (for young single parishioners), Service League (young women's group). She notes that it was friendly when she was young, within whatever group you were involved in, but she didn't have extensive interaction with the larger congregational groups. She notes that now it is very, very friendly and it is very welcoming to the LGBTQ community; she acknowledges that it might "make some of the older members "turn over in their graves."

Barbara notes that in her younger years, most of the parishioners were from Montclair, and were some of the wealthiest residents in town, living on South Mountain Avenue, Upper Mountain Avenue, etc. She talks about how the original church at 40 South Fullerton burned down on March 28, 1914, the very night one of her brothers was born – she also adds that there was a blizzard raging the same time as the fire! She talks about how while the church was still burning, the male members of the church started collecting money to build a new one.

She tells a story about the church tower: there is a room on the tower, now used for the church archives, but which was originally the Trustees Room. The trustees met there *during* the church service, she was told, precisely so the minister could not attend. She talks about how the church was run by men, but that they now have a female minister, and the head of the church council is a woman. "Things have changed."

[0:23:15]: She talks about occupations for women. She became an interior decorator, although she thought it would have been nice to be an architect, "but women didn't do that." She speaks about her jobs working in decorating shops. Her first job was in Hahne's Department store in Newark in their decorating department; that was during the war [World War II], when it was difficult to get fabrics, so she ultimately left that job. Her next job was at a decorating shop on Church Street in Montclair, and then a larger decorating shop in East Orange. Barbara and the bookkeeper from the East Orange decorating shop then started their own decorating business, designing and making curtains, slip covers. Barbara would go to New York City to get samples, then bring them to people's homes; they did not have an office for their business.

[0:27:06]: When she was offered a manager position at a decorating shop in Princeton, she moved there. "Both my brothers went to Princeton. So I knew Princeton pretty well, and my grandmother owned a farm in Lawrenceville."

[0:27:49]: She returned to Montclair because, "My father had diabetes... this is back before dialysis and

all the good stuff they have now. He eventually lost both legs, and my mother wasn't too well... She was trying to take care of him. It seemed like every time I had vacation I was home taking care of them... So I quit [the Princeton job], I got a job here with a decorating department in the telephone company, and came home. So I was here to be supportive." She worked for the telephone company for a couple years, then quit, and went back to her own business, which she had until 1970. At that time, she got licensed to sell real estate, ultimately becoming a partner and the managing broker of a realty firm until the 1990s, when she retired (by that time in her late 70s). She quickly became bored and looked for *another* job to stay busy.

[0:30:23]: After becoming dissatisfied with First Congregational Church around that time of her retirement as a realty broker and recalling that her mother had always been interested in Unity [of Montclair Church [located at 84 Orange Road at time of oral history interview] which met at Kimberly School (she clarifies that she is not referring to the Unitarian Church), she began attending Unity services. She began volunteering in the office there and then worked there as the Church Secretary for 14 years before retiring from that position in her early 80s.

She noted that she had been President of the Board of the First Montclair House for 12 years, before she even resided there, and is still on the board. Then she really *did* finally retire.

[0:33:0]: She discusses her involvement with the Young Republicans where she was Vice Chairman in the 1940s. When asked if she voted for Wendell Willke, the 1940 Republican nominee for president who was running against the Democratic incumbent President Franklin D. Roosevelt, she responds with a laugh, "Of course I did! But that was a loong time ago." She adds that she also voted for Republican Presidential nominee Thomas E. Dewey, when he lost to incumbent Democratic President Harry S. Truman in 1948. Many of her friends were also in the Young Republicans and in the other organizations in which she was a member, other than the Dramatic Club. She noted, "It was the group I 'went with.'

[0:36:00] When asked for more information about her parents: Her father's parents were German immigrants but met here in the United States in New York. Her father was the youngest of seven. He was only about 10 when his father died. He started working for a silk company as office boy and ended up Vice President of the company. "In fact, in the early 1920s, he was a millionaire. But he decided he was going to retire and live off the stock market, which wasn't a smart thing to do in 1929. And that's why we ended up in Lincoln Park. And that's why my brothers went to Princeton [University] and I went to a junior college."

[0:37:13]: She talks about how her parents met in Union City, where both of their families lived around the corner from each other. Barbara's father would walk her mother home from the choir rehearsal at the Dutch Reformed Church they both attended (Barbara was told her mother had a lovely voice, although her mother was not an avid singer that Barbara recalls). When Barbara's parents got married, they first lived with her father's family; when her oldest brother was born, her parents moved to a two-family home in East Orange; when the second son was born, the family moved to Glen Ridge; in 1921, they moved to the Gates Avenue home in Montclair. She reiterates that they left in 1932, returning in 1942.

[0:39:07]: When asked to describe the types of activities she did with the Young Republicans Club: "We

did the scut work... we addressed envelopes, or sealed envelopes, stuffed envelopes. If they had a fundraiser, we went and served refreshments... We attended rallies. We worked... we didn't do anything dramatic... we were handy."

[0:40:19] She notes that when Republican President Herbert Hoover lost to Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1932, the country then had Democratic presidents until 1952, when Republican President Dwight D. Eisenhower was elected. Barbara recounts, "I was a Republican because my father was a Republican. It's what you did back then. Montclair was a very Republican town...predominantly Republican [when Barbara was active in the Young Republicans Club]...back in the 1940s," adding that most of the members of First Congregational were Republican. Barbara adds that the political scene then was more "dignified, civilized...if you ran into a Democratic in Montclair, which you were not likely to do back then, you had a polite conversation! You might have disagreed, but not like now..."

[0:41:49]: She talks about the "high rise" development on Valley and Bloomfield Avenue [Valley and Bloom residential tower], recalling it was previously a one-story building that housed Sears, which was then a Volvo car dealership. She recalls it was a Sears for years and Barbara's family did 95% of their Christmas shopping there. "We would get the Sears catalog and pick out what we wanted...wish list...and then we'd order it and you had to go pick it up at the store. Also, they had a garage, and we had all the work done on the car there. And, of course, those were the days when you had snow tires: you had to change from the summer tires to the winter tires. We did so much business there, they stored our off-season tires for us."