

Mary Ellen Wolcott

Side 1:

[1/1] This is tape 2 - on 8/24/94 we did a 90 minute tape but Mary Ellen, being a writer, felt it was disjointed. We set the second date which I am indexing here - however the first tape was so spontaneous I am including it (without an index) to add flavor.

Her parents were natives of South Carolina but wanted to live in the mountains. Her father worked with Grove as overseer for developing Grovemont (see enclosure). These were boom years and there was a lot of building activity. [E.W. Grove]

[1/27] Although she was unaware of the severity of the Depression, she knew her father's employment at the Post Office with a regular pay check gave the family security. The family lived in several rental houses in West Asheville and she attended Aycock School, (enclosed), across the street from one bank that stayed open. Although a few people, left after the crash with money, were able to buy up houses as investment, few people could afford to buy a home.

[1/55] Her family didn't have much money but her mother (recently died, age 93) cooked and sewed and the family did not suffer.

[1/66] For recreation the children played in empty lots; a few had bikes but most had skates. They could play hopscotch in the streets as there was little traffic. There were no fancy toys, but for the girls, paper dolls cut from Sears and Montgomery Ward catalogues was a happy pastime.

[1/87] She walked to school. She was in Hall Fletcher when the banks closed. The family had a Model T car. Even affluent families had only one car. Street car tracks went down the middle of the street and tickets cost about 6 cents. Cars changed on the square. She remembers beautiful big houses on Biltmore Ave.

[1/130] She walked across St. Dunstons Road to the beautiful new high school. There was hardly enough money to run it. Few students had cars and there was no student parking lot.

[1/142] Edwards was a genial man and students felt they could talk to him (see O. E. Starnes tape). He searched for ways to inspire the students during auditorium talks. [Lee Edwards]

[1/156] She attended Dellwood Camp for Girls in Maggie Valley (see enclosure) and saw boys working in the C.C.C. [Civilian Conservation Corps] camp across the road. Girls were not encouraged to work, though some took part-time clerking jobs after school or during vacations.

[1/186] Junior and Senior students acted as correspondents for the Asheville Times and Citizen (separate and competitive papers in the same building). They were paid 10 cents an inch and 50 cents for a picture (see Stefan Weir tape).

[1/201] One summer she worked in a hat shop. She describes hats and hat shops. Dentons, a fore-runner of Carrolls (now Kostas) had a hat department (see enclosure). [Mrs. Lil Knofsky - 1943 Asheville City Directory: saleswoman for Betty Hats]

[1/251] In her teens she had little jobs and describes Easter outfits, school clothes and the big family expenditure - shoes and winter coat.

[1/297] In her late teens she and her friends double dated and hung out around the pharmacy soda fountains - being a soda jerk was a prize job for a boy, as was selling papers (see Red Hoyle tape) (Biltmore Pharmacy in photo).

[1/333] The freeway and I-26 changed the character of West Asheville.

[1/350] Montford was a main residential area. Kimberly was in it's infancy (see Marguerite Carter tape).

[1/364] She can see downtown as it was with all spaces taken. The streets were crowded and with a date and a full car the young people would "shake the drag" - driving around the city seeing friends.

[1/393] She describes the 5 and Dime on Haywood Street [1943 Asheville City Directory: F. W. Woolworth Co., 23-27A Haywood St.]. She worked in cosmetics and a friend had the candy counter - a prime job. The store had 3 floors - the top for stock and the basement for house wares and piece goods. All stores carried pattern books and material. Her mother sewed and from the money she earned from the newspaper she would put money down on items - layaway. [1944 Asheville City Directory: Mrs. Mary E. Wolcott, society editor, Asheville Citizen-Times Co.]

[1/467] Dancing was a great pastime. This was the era of big bands and girls wanted to look glamorous. There were proms at school and dances at the George Vanderbilt and Battery Park Hotels.

[1/515] The week of the Rhododendron Festival made Asheville a hub of make believe. Parades were long and carefully done, there was a police escort and a baby parade (see O. E. Starnes tape - his brother's goat was in one but couldn't find a picture). The streets were packed (see enclosure re Florida float) (see Eleanor Stephens).

[1/541] She remembers driving over Beaucatcher Mountain before the tunnel was built.

[1/550] When she visited Chapel Hill, dances were held in the "Tin Can." This was the era of the jitterbug, big apple and slow dances. [Tommy and Jimmy Dorsey, Benny Goodman, Kay Kaiser, Les Brown]

[1/592] People rode the trains. The trip was exciting and going by car around the mountains was expensive - and made her car sick.

Side 2:

[2/1] With the end of train service to the city the lifestyle changed. There was more traffic on the road. The airlines started coming in (see Lacy Griffin tape).

[2/17] Everyone was very involved with what was going on in Europe during the war years (see enclosure). She and Billy were married April 19, 1942 when he had a weekend pass from Fort Bragg. His uncle gave the couple a compartment train trip to Jacksonville as a present and they shared a little apartment with another couple until he went overseas. She describes the young women waiting for the troop trains to leave and their concern. [William "Billy" Wolcott]

[2/66] She went back home to live with her parents and her job at the paper. After work she volunteered at the hospital. The city was full of women waiting, listening to war news on the radio, writing V mail, and worrying. The city manager assigned her to interview service men. Her mother was in charge of the family ration books.

[2/120] The newspaper moved to its new building. The papers were still divided. She describes the lay out and the pneumatic tubes that carried copy from one part of the building to another. Because of the war, the elevator was not installed until later. With the coming of TV the papers combined and focused on local and national stories in depth (see Nancy Marlow tape).

[2/220] When her son was 5 he used to go across the street to watch westerns and ball games on the neighbor's TV. They finally got a set for a big ball game 35 years ago - and the neighborhood kids were asked in. She always listened to news and mysteries. The assassination of President Kennedy and war shots from Vietnam were almost too painful to watch. [Joe and Elwynne Bostic, Milton Berle, Bishop Sheen, Lucy [Lucille Ball], Kukla Fran and Ollie, John F. Kennedy]

[2/262] She grew up in a segregated society and, while she had a meaningful friendship with another 12 year old girl who shared her feelings of being treated like a second-class citizen, neither thought of the possibility of change. She was able to obtain an interview with a bright and dedicated teacher who described the separate and not equal schools (see Milton Ready tape and Louis Silveri interview). She also interviewed the head of CORE who wrote Three-Fifths of a Man. [Lucy Herring, Floyd McKissick]

[2/300] After the war women had more of a place in society - not only as teachers, nurses, store personnel or secretaries. She, however, stayed at home with her children for 15 years and went back to cover a temporary maternity leave. She retired in 1992.

[2/322] Her daughter also stayed at home for a long time with her children. Most families need two earners if they want to send their children to college, have piano lessons and attend camp. [Ann Wolcott Guillet]

[2/332] She worked while attending college and boys almost had full-time jobs in order to attend.

[2/340] World War II and the Vietnam War were watersheds for our country. She was watching the rerun of Woodstock (see Stefan Weir tape) and reminded of the shocking social changes.

Vietnam hurt everyone as there was no real conviction - and no back up for the returning servicemen.

[2/374] The young now are trying to turn to basic values. Some, turned off by materialism, are taking drugs. Children's lives today are highly programmed with activities - but there are still some wonderful parents.

[2/398] She discusses dances during her teen years and formals at UNC Greensboro - stag lines, corsages, dance cards, punch bowls, little if any liquor, little smoking.

[2/478] Billy, after graduating as an engineer from VMI managed his sister's livestock yard (see Grace Kouns tape) for a short time and then became involved in every major city project - and is still involved. [I had hoped to be able to interview him but, since he is still active as city clerk I doubt if he will agree to a tape until he is no longer in office - however he is referred to on other tapes, e.g. Lacy Griffin.] Bill, Jr. is a lawyer, his wife teaches at Country Day School. Ann graduated with a degree in French, returned for medical technical training and is working. [Grace Kouns, Billy Wolcott, Bill Wolcott, Jr., Debbie Wolcott, Amy Wolcott, Ann Wolcott Guillet]

[2/513] Mary Ellen and her sister shared their mother's care and will now continue to write. Her family, she said, comes first and she feels blessed.

These are tapes to listen to and enjoy. A lovely, warm woman.