

Oral History Interview
Barbara Baker Wyatt
WH077

(written transcript and digital audio)

On April 16, 2010, Barbara Baker Wyatt was interviewed at the Woodbridge Main Library by Brenda Velasco at 10:30 A.M.

Brenda Velasco: Most of us know Barbara Wyatt. She's a wealth of historical information on the township so I'm greatly looking forward to this information.

1. Identify individual-name, section, date of birth.

Barbara Wyatt: I lived in Woodbridge Proper my entire life and I would like to say that I'm a great-grandmother without giving you the actual birth date.

Brenda Velasco: Can you give me a year?

Barbara Wyatt: Well, that's the same thing; 1929.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, and you're in good health and you're a great-grandmother so congratulations.

Barbara Wyatt: Thank you.

Brenda Velasco: Congratulations on that one.

2. How long have you lived in Woodbridge?

Brenda Velasco: Okay, did you always live in Woodbridge Proper?

Barbara Wyatt: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: Where did you live then?

Barbara Wyatt: Right after my sister and I were born we lived on lower Grove Avenue off Rahway Avenue briefly with our parents and our maternal grandfather. We went from Grove Avenue up to Lockwood Avenue up on Edgar Hill, the same family group, but the house was larger. Lockwood Avenue was a dirt road at that time leading up from Rahway Avenue not quite meeting Ridgedale Avenue which had not been extended at that time. We had a side yard with a lot of play equipment and we lived within sound of the State Prison on Rahway Avenue which was past Avenel at that time. I remember my mother being a little fearful when the alarm went off at the prison because there was not much building between Lockwood Avenue and the prison. It was not developed at all, shoe buildings, but nothing like it is today.

Brenda Velasco: So you had the wide open spaces then.

Barbara Wyatt: Yes, very, very wide open.

Brenda Velasco: Let me just stop you now when you say your sister. She's your twin sister?

Barbara Wyatt: Yes, twin sister.

Brenda Velasco: Would you give us her name too?

Barbara Wyatt: Amy Baker.

Brenda Velasco: Because when I see her I always do a quick take.

Barbara Wyatt: We still look pretty much alike, yes.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, so you've lived in.....

Barbara Wyatt: That was the second place. Then we went to upper Main Street.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, that was the third place.

Barbara Wyatt: We were, I think, four years old when we lived there for a year. The reason we left Lockwood Avenue was because the owner of the place who had an old house, historical on Ridgedale Avenue, had, I guess, relatives who liked the way my mother and father had fixed the Lockwood Avenue place up. So she wanted to rent it then to the relative so we moved to Main Street. I have to say that the historical house was the Lockwood House on Ridgedale Avenue but it had originally been on Lockwood Avenue and had been moved. The larger part of the house had been transported some many years ago and the back portion of the house, which was also quite large, is what we lived in which was left on Lockwood Avenue so the house was split. Both sections of the house are still there. The back portion is on Lockwood Avenue and has been there ever since the split. The people who own it live there and the larger portion looks complete even without the back section and is owned by a nice couple with children on Ridgedale Avenue. John Lockwood was the original owner of the house.

Brenda Velasco: Do you remember the exact house number address?

Barbara Wyatt: No, but it's in Dorothy Ludwig's book on Woodbridge; a picture of it and a caption.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, as a split?

Barbara Wyatt: No, no, you wouldn't know because the whole front section of the house, and I think its three stories, the other part, was much lower in height.

Brenda Velasco: So the house that you lived in on Lockwood Avenue how many rooms did that have then?

Barbara Wyatt: Well, I don't remember off hand and I haven't been back in the house since we moved. I think we moved when we were three.

Brenda Velasco: So about 1932.

Barbara Wyatt: Yes and then spent the fourth year on Main Street and started school at old School #1 on School Street from upper Main Street. Then a year later moved over to High Street.

Brenda Velasco: You traveled.

Barbara Wyatt: Well, not much because it was a small town. When we were growing up Woodbridge only had about twelve thousand people, local Woodbridge, and maybe twenty-five thousand in the township at the most. That was pretty stable until after World War II.

Brenda Velasco: And all the developments came in, post World War II developments in Colonia and Fords.

Barbara Wyatt: All over.

Brenda Velasco: Yes.

3. Why did you or your family originally move to Woodbridge?

Brenda Velasco: Was your family originally from Woodbridge?

Barbara Wyatt: No, my father's parents, I guess, lived in Jersey City and then moved to Avenel I guess long before my father and the rest of his siblings were all born. My mother's family came by way of Long Island, Far Rockaway, and Brooklyn. Both

families trace back to Colonial times. On my father's side of the family his mother was *DAR, Daughters of the American Revolution* and trace back to her father, whose name was Johnson, to a signer of the Declaration of Independence, Williams from Connecticut. On my mother's side she traces back to John Underhill who was Mile Standish's second in command.

Brenda Velasco: So your family and your ancestors.....

Barbara Wyatt: Three hundred years or more.

Brenda Velasco: Three hundred years of history, wow!

Barbara Wyatt: My mother had a picture of John Underhill, a big portrait of him in her living room. All of it traces back with documentation and my mother's older sister, actively, was the Colonial Dames of the Seventeenth Century; very active with them.

Brenda Velasco: Was it their jobs or what attracted them from Long Island, Rockaway or Brooklyn, to Woodbridge?

Barbara Wyatt: My father was a building contractor and did a lot of work in New York City and he had the contract to put the final paving on the Brooklyn Bridge before it opened.

Brenda Velasco: Wow!

Barbara Wyatt: And he had a lot of property. I gather that many times, particularly, contractors who are in road paving and that kind of thing will rent or buy pieces of property to put supplies and things on it or get hold of a property that has the kind of material they need to expedite for road work. He had some properties which afterward he either sold or disposed of one way or another, if you didn't need them but did a lot of work in the city and in Brooklyn. Later on as he got older, he and some other family moved out to Avenel to get away from the city. I don't really know why my father's parents moved to Avenel but they've been there for quite a long time. When we were little they had been there for quite a long time, I don't remember just when.

I only know that my father was born in Jersey City but I don't know about the rest of the family.

Brenda Velasco: So your family goes back over three hundred years. It goes back in Woodbridge for a long time as well.

Barbara Wyatt: Five generations at least.

Brenda Velasco: Five generations.

Barbara Wyatt: Five, six, seven, something like that and my great-grandparents were in New Jersey, I don't know for how long. But they settled up in the Watchungs in Free Acres and they were involved with some of the people who ended up there for instance Jimmy Cagney in Hollywood. But at the time that my great-grandparents were in the Watchungs Free Acres was known for, I won't call them all squatters but people moved there I guess maybe long before the Depression but maybe the Depression had something to do with it in 1929 and the 1930s. My great-grandparents had a cabin, a good sized cabin up there, no running water, no electricity and they hosted a number of people whom I guess you could call them homeless who were not doing well in the acting field and other people with other interests but they all came to Free Acres mostly, I guess, in the summertime. My great-grandparents stayed with, I think, my grandparents in Avenel during the winter or they had an

apartment in New York City or sometimes maybe an apartment in Rahway during the cold weather. I can remember they were very pleased to have a two-seater on their property and the family arranged for them to have electricity but you had to go up to the spring to get the water. It was interesting.

Brenda Velasco: Oh, I'm sure it was; nice for a vacation perhaps.

Barbara Wyatt: Well you know later, I guess, I'll call it the town, they had permanent residents. They had a town pool after awhile after it built up a little bit.

Brenda Velasco: Were these your paternal grandparents?

Barbara Wyatt: Paternal great-grandparents.

Brenda Velasco: Interesting.

Barbara Wyatt: They're featured in one of the books I think. I have to ask here if the library has it. They had some documentation on newspaper articles about them.

4. *What physical changes have occurred over the years in the area you lived? -houses, streets, services, stores, houses of worship, schools, etc*

Barbara Wyatt: Main Street, when we were growing up, had a hardware store, they had **Christensen's** for a hundred years, they had a 5&10, they had small businesses that would take care of everything. They had a fruit and vegetable store and the owner would come around with a truck with raised awnings on the side so you could see what his produce looked like and he would come around through the streets of Woodbridge Proper selling fruits and vegetables to homeowners. We had an egg man who had a bicycle with a basket and he carried fresh eggs; he stopped around once a week or so and I remember one time he got flooded out and we didn't have eggs for two weeks. We could have gone to the local **A&P** on Main Street but the egg man was a relative, I think, of the Christensen family and we liked to support him so he would come around regularly.

Brenda Velasco: So he came right to your house?

Barbara Wyatt: He came right to the house. Our milk man came right to the house and delivered milk for years and years. We had an ice truck that used to come around so you could get chopped ice or blocks of ice. There was a scissor grinder, a man who came around and sharpened knives and scissors. Interesting because he had a little bell and he would summon people out if you needed anything sharpened.

Brenda Velasco: Where were you living at this time?

Barbara Wyatt: We were on High Street then and have been there ever since. I think we were there in 1932 or 1933. I have a note here that says that almost every opened space since has been taken up not only in Woodbridge Proper but the township. For instance, we live right across from Harrell Avenue which was only a block long from Freeman Street to the brook which is a branch of Woodbridge creek, the one that flows past the library here and Harrell Avenue ended there. Upper Barron Avenue was the dirt road. There were a few houses in the neighborhood most of them on Barron Avenue but again there's a brook. When developers wanted to go in behind what is now the present high school and behind this library building, anybody up top wanted another way to get out in case of an emergency. So they extended Harrell Avenue and paved it and upper Barron Avenue also got paved. Then of course very nice new houses got built in that whole section above Freeman Street. So that was an entire section developed. In terms of stores and public buildings and so on

Christensen's has closed. It was a very popular place for a hundred years and many of us shopped there. We have now many more strip malls and we have additional churches now that we didn't have years ago.

Brenda Velasco: What churches did you have when you were growing up?

Barbara Wyatt: The Presbyterian Church and the Methodist Church was active. St. James had not built their most recent building and I can remember when we lived on upper Main Street and we walked down to School #1: first grade, no kindergarten. We started first grade at five years old. There was a split rail fence around that corner property where St. James is now and there were a couple of horses running around.

Brenda Velasco: Wow! So you saw horses in the 1930s right on Main Street.

Barbara Wyatt: Yes, and St. James was up further, the older building was up a little further. I can remember going out the back door of the house on Main Street and looking toward Grove Street. There were cows, unbelievable.

Brenda Velasco: Yes, you've seen tremendous change.

Barbara Wyatt: Oh, unbelievable, some of it obscene in my book. The firehouse, to me, is new. We had an old firehouse there on School Street. The post office is in a different building now. The synagogue, which was next to School #1 on School Street, a small building, the Board of Ed traded property at the back of School #11 which was adjacent to School #1 in exchange for the synagogue property and a new synagogue was built facing Amboy Avenue.

Brenda Velasco: So that's why they moved then.

Barbara Wyatt: Yes, they needed a larger one, larger synagogue, and the School Board, at that time I guess was happy with the change because they needed extra room for parking and so on. Now that synagogue has gone through another change and now is the home of a veterinarian.

Brenda Velasco: Right.

Barbara Wyatt: So talk about changes. We had Barron Library which is now arts and so on but we had the Barron Library. Sewaren Library was operating and we had the Fords Women's Club but we did not have a central library. This particular building that we are in now was a big, big change for the whole town.

Brenda Velasco: Was there anything here, and I know I just want to mention that you've also been on the Library Board of Trustees.

Barbara Wyatt: Twenty-seven years.

Brenda Velasco: So you know how the library system has tremendously expanded and then it contracted.

Barbara Wyatt: Yes, under Mayor Zirpolo they started out with a bigger building on Rahway Avenue before this building was built. So there was a change in it. It became a central library system where Sewaren and the Barron Library and Fords all operated separately with their own boards. The Women's Club, of course, was a little different activity but they did do books. Sewaren has always had a separate library board even though we have integrated to some extent and we had supported them financially, they still have their own Board of Trustees. The school system has enlarged dramatically. We were in School #1 for four years and then into School #11 for the other four years; and during eighth grade every single child in Woodbridge Township who did not live in Woodbridge Proper was bused in. So every single eighth grader from every other elementary school was bused into School #11 and we

were expecting to be happy about that because we had cousins who lived in Avenel and we were hoping that they would get into School #11 and we could see them every day. The year that they would have come there were other arrangements made and because the eighth grades were getting a little larger they stopped all of them from coming here and what elementary schools we had went to eighth grade. Then we had to keep building schools which held, then sixth graders, and we went into a middle school system with Fords and Colonia and Avenel and Woodbridge all having middle schools.

Brenda Velasco: And then what year did you graduate from high school?

Barbara Wyatt: 1946.

Brenda Velasco: So you were in high school during World War II.

Barbara Wyatt: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: Okay and we'll get to that because that's a tremendous event for anybody who lived during that time. So you went to the Barron Avenue School for your high school?

Barbara Wyatt: Graduated from there, yes, and we were on split session the entire time we were there. It wasn't made into a junior high until after the other high schools the newer high school was built. (Around 1956)

Brenda Velasco: So you had split session as well during the 1940s.

Barbara Wyatt: Oh yes.

Brenda Velasco: Then you didn't go to kindergarten because they didn't have.....

Barbara Wyatt: They didn't have kindergarten.

Brenda Velasco: Alright it was grades one through four at School #1 for you?

Barbara Wyatt: Yes and then five through eight at School #11 and then four years of high school.

5. *What public buildings/property were there?-post office, library, parks, firehouse, schools, etc.*

Brenda Velasco: How about parks because we've combined Question #4 and #5?

Barbara Wyatt: Parks, we were limited in terms of what parks there are in Woodbridge today but you really didn't need parks so much because there was so much open space. The park next to the firehouse on School Street and running through to Pearl was part of a designated system by Ordinance that ran westward through Woodbridge Proper and up into the clay banks and that was all the township park system. We would go over to the park on School Street because you could skate over there, they had a wading pool if you wanted to cool off and they had swings. Now it's mostly taken over by older kids who do basketball and that kind of thing. We also went up westward off Elmwood Avenue into the section of the park that has the lake. Most of the houses that are there now were not there, the apartments were being built and Route #9 was being constructed at that time. There was no Woodbridge Center, there was no heavy development the other side of Route #9 or Route #1 and we would ice skate on the lake. Somebody would come along and light a fire in one of these oil drum things so we could warm up and everything was within walking distance so that we could go almost anywhere. Because we lived in different sections of Woodbridge Proper and because we knew people from eighth grade and we knew then a lot more people in the high school, I had the wide range of

acquaintances throughout Woodbridge Township because we were able to meet people, work with people and go to school with people. We weren't separated by schools and not in competition with others. We were a united community.

Brenda Velasco: Right, when you start having the three high schools your identity is with that section. That's a good point to make.

Barbara Wyatt: And we still have friends that we went to school with when we were five. The part of the clay pits that had been.....

Brenda Velasco: You're talking where Woodbridge Center is now.

Barbara Wyatt: I'm talking about the park section and the park section that was not really recognized is a park. But the clay pits, the digging out and the excavating up there had stopped but you could go up there. I learned how to shoot a gun up there in the clay pits. They didn't have the police firing range up there at the time and so I learned how to shoot a rifle. Some of my friends, not many of them, tried skiing up there but you had to be very careful because there was water in some of the clay pits, that had be excavated.

Brenda Velasco: Had they stopped mining the clay?

Barbara Wyatt: I think it stopped mostly by that time. I'm talking over a period of twelve to fifteen years, something like that. As far as I know, they were not doing any heavy mining and I know from the talk around that some of the kids went skinny dipping in the pools that were left. (Woodbridge Center officially was dedicated on March 4, 1971).

Brenda Velasco: Not any more.

Barbara Wyatt: Well, they've all been paved over and pulled over.....

Brenda Velasco: And we have Woodbridge Center or the apartments or townhouses.

Barbara Wyatt: Yes, there has been a big, big change. I have often said that when you have lived in a place a long time and then a development comes in and radically changes it has a big effect on the environment that you knew. You end up being a stranger trying to re-learn all of the places that you traveled to or drove to. There have been times when I've gone out with a car and there's an empty space one week and two weeks later there's something there. Well, where did that come from? Then you kind of lose your sense of where you are and where you've been because you have to relearn everything: new intersections, new highway turns, roadways that never existed before.

Brenda Velasco: And there has been rerouting with some of the highways, too.

Barbara Wyatt: Yes, so it's renamed. Highway #4 we had and then we had Highway #25 and it's all the same.

Brenda Velasco: Where was Highway #4?

Barbara Wyatt: I think that was what turned into either, I have to go back now that I'm thinking about it, but there was at one time a Highway #4. (Route 35)

Brenda Velasco: Did you have a car? Did your parents have a car at that time?

Barbara Wyatt: For a part of the time. My father had a car and had an accident. I think he said somebody cut him off and hit the car. I did not ever ride in whatever car that was and for about seven years we didn't have a car. Well we walked everywhere and we had three or four buses we could get to within a block or two of walking. My father took a bus to work. He worked in Carteret and so he walked down to the Barron Library, got on the bus, went to Carteret and came home the same way. Then

we were only five minutes or less from any bus that went to Rahway, Newark or Perth Amboy; anywhere you wanted to go. We would get on the bus either the #48 or #46 and then later the #84, go down to Perth Amboy. I think it was ten cents on the bus and we would walk Smith Street in Perth Amboy where they had five 5&10 stores. Woodbridge only had one, and they had five or six movie houses. We always had our choice of movies both in Woodbridge and Perth Amboy.

Brenda Velasco: That's right.

Barbara Wyatt: We'd walk down to the ferry and take a ferry ride over to Staten Island and walk down to Arthur Kill Road and find a beach on the Staten Island side. We'd go over there and have a day at the beach, not that it was terrific but it was.....

Brenda Velasco: So you had a lot of things to keep you going here.

Barbara Wyatt: The First Presbyterian Church in Woodbridge owned a lot of land across the street on Rahway Avenue where there are garden apartments today. The church sold off the manse, the minister's home, later on and that's where the senior citizen building is.

Brenda Velasco: Finn & Adams.

Barbara Wyatt: And the rest of what was the Parish House Field, it was a parish house that belonged to the church, that got sold where the garden apartments are but when we were growing up the parish house was there. They had activities there, a ping pong table and that kind of thing, and that was turned in briefly before it got sold to the circle in the round theatre. That was another activity we got involved in.

Brenda Velasco: You were a self-contained community. You had everything here.

Barbara Wyatt: Yes, everything.

6. What did you do for recreation?

Brenda Velasco: Recreation was supplied by your church or the open spaces that were here.

Barbara Wyatt: We played dodge ball and we played touch football. My sister and I practiced basketball with the neighbor next door. We ended up playing basketball briefly when we went off to Syracuse for four years. Amy was a forward and I was a guard. Because we were twins the people that we were playing against didn't know which was which.

Brenda Velasco: And we have to say when you're playing girls basketball, the court was split in the middle.

Barbara Wyatt: Yes, but we didn't play for very long. We just did it one or two seasons and no big deal.

Brenda Velasco: No, but everybody would do a turn around seeing your twin.

Barbara Wyatt: Of course, and didn't know who was who. They didn't know who was going after them.

Brenda Velasco: That was confusing for your opponents.

Barbara Wyatt: Yes, very much so and during our high school years my father got a ping pong table and we put it down in the basement and it didn't matter whether my sister and I were home or not the gang came over to play ping pong. So we always did our homework quick in the afternoon. Split session you got out 12:30 P.M. or 1:00 P.M. Sometimes we would take electives afterwards so we would get home a little later. That was helpful because you could maintain your high school schedule

but you could take an elective afterwards and they made time for you to do that; the school system made time for you to do that. But anyway we would get our homework done early on so that if anybody was likely to show up at the back door knocking, anybody for ping pong. We had wild times with the ping pong table. I got to be very good. I ended up, by default, being the one time ping pong champion of Syracuse University.

Brenda Velasco: Wow!

Barbara Wyatt: My sister said it was because a lot of my opponents didn't show up for their scheduled times.

Brenda Velasco: Whatever, you got the title there.

7. What was the focal point of your community at that time?

Barbara Wyatt: Physically or activity wise?

Brenda Velasco: Where you went provided the activities. Was it family, church, government, or home?

Barbara Wyatt: All of those. I think we made our own entertainment. We had a close group of friends and we did a lot of things as a group. Other times we got involved, for instance one time the Methodist Church contacted the school system. They were doing a special program for Christmas and they wanted to know if anybody were interested in coming over. Would they come and sing with the choir or would they have a children's choir? They had a group that they needed members for special events. So even though we were not members of the church sometimes we would volunteer to go over and sing with them. Our own church, the White Church, was very active in the community and we were there for a number of different things during the week and almost all day on Sunday even to the evening when we went over after vesper services over to the minister's house for him sing and we were very active in sports, my sister and I.

Brenda Velasco: The sports were provided by the school system? You didn't have like what we have now the Woodbridge Recreation League?

Barbara Wyatt: No, no, no, but most of the time it was our own planning. Because there were so many things to do, you could go almost anywhere and find some even though it wasn't what we have today. It wasn't organized, it was spontaneous I would say more than organized. Then again, because we knew so many people in Woodbridge, we had a very active life. We'd go over to the house to do things in the afternoon. We'd invite people over. During high school some of the teachers were, for instance our French teacher was very interested in getting us into the ballet in New York and opera. So we went on school trips to either matinees or evening performances.

Brenda Velasco: Did you pay for your own?

Barbara Wyatt: Yes, but we went in a group and that was an opportunity for us to maybe have some friends sleep over because we would get home late from New York City. We had one friend that lived in Fords and if you're coming in on the ten o'clock train or even later into Woodbridge, it was easier for us to say come stay overnight and go back to school the next day. The friends didn't have to worry about getting transportation home. And the train was very convenient.

Brenda Velasco: Right, you could walk to the train station.

Barbara Wyatt: You didn't even have to look for a parking place down there, we just walked.

Brenda Velasco: That was great.

Barbara Wyatt: And we went out roller skating. You could always find to do something with them at the park on School Street.

Brenda Velasco: Where did you go roller skating?

Barbara Wyatt: All around, sidewalk, street, park.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, just in the vicinity.

8. What did you like about living in your section of Woodbridge?

Barbara Wyatt: Well again, the bus travel was available. The ferry was interesting. Perth Amboy was interesting historically. We went on tours around to different places. The Craftman's Club, Masonic, the Craftman's Club lower level, they had Friday night dances. And of course we had movies here in Woodbridge, so most times we reserved Friday night for the latest movies; they weren't the latest in Woodbridge. But back in Perth Amboy at that time we had a car, my family had a car at that time or we could go on the bus, and you had such a choice of so many movie theatres that you saw the latest. There was the **Ditmus**, the **Majestic**, the **Crescent**, I forgot the one that was down further on Smith Street.

Brenda Velasco: Was there a **Roxy** or anything.

Barbara Wyatt: I think so but that wasn't one we went to.

Brenda Velasco: Okay.

Barbara Wyatt: The theatre in Iselin was available and the theatre in Rahway so you weren't restricted to Woodbridge.

Brenda Velasco: And they were all contiguous communities.

Barbara Wyatt: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: That was great.

Barbara Wyatt: And we had, in the 1940s, Woodbridge had a drive-in movie up where **Shop Rite** is now. We did bike riding and there was always something to do.

9. Did you experience any significant happenings in Woodbridge-construction, accidents, sports events, riots, discrimination, etc.

Barbara Wyatt: Construction we had a terrific number of multifamily dwellings, garden apartment units, condos. Unbelievable! Our population went from twenty-five thousand to just under a hundred thousand. At one point, one quarter of our population was school aged children. Not so much now but it was then. We went from a limited number of elementary and secondary schools to twenty-five schools during the 50s and the 60s.

Brenda Velasco: Don Aaroe, when I interviewed him, he was in charge of so much of that construction and then the closing of some of those schools as well.

Barbara Wyatt: That's true; complete reversal. We now have a larger number of senior citizen buildings. I would say warehouses have come in more so lightly than residential and they're big. We've gone into a whole different sanitation system. One of the big things that was traumatic, I guess for some people, was the fact that the Penn Station burned in Woodbridge, **Pennsylvania Railroad Station**.

Brenda Velasco: When was that? Was that the one on Main Street?

Barbara Wyatt: It was the regular station on Green Street extending to Main Street and after that they elevated it. That was a train wreck which caused another train wreck. It was a collision, I think, with an oil tanker and the station burned and they elevated after that. I shouldn't say they elevated the tracks on Freeman Street they lowered the road but they elevated some of that. The train tracks were not at ground level for Main Street and Green Street. So that was a biggy and then in the 1960s we had the train wreck which was again the tracks were elevated at that time and it happened a block or two south of Main Street along Fulton Street. (There were several accidents at the Green Street grade crossing in the 1930s. In 1934, Miss Harriet Short was killed. On February 21, 1935, a Shell Oil truck exploded after it was hit. The trestle was dedicated on May 20, 1940).

Brenda Velasco: Okay, that was the 1951 train wreck. Were you a witness to any of these?

Barbara Wyatt: My sister worked in New York at the time and she didn't come home at the usual dinner time and so we didn't know what happened. Of course we didn't have TV; you could turn on the radio but you didn't know to turn it on because you didn't know what had happened. So I was seeing my husband at that point but we were not engaged, we were just friends at that point. He came in and he said I'm going down to the train wreck and we said what train wreck and that's how we found out. My sister was not involved with that because it happened past the station but because of the wreck, people had to get off in Rahway and the railroad provided busing to Woodbridge and Perth Amboy and so on because the tracks were, you know, blocked. So she came in quite late, we had a late dinner but we were just glad that she was not involved with that and it was not before Woodbridge it was after Woodbridge. When my husband, who wasn't my husband at the time, went down to see if he could help he said it was chaotic; he said you couldn't even get into help so he just came back away from it so he won't be in the way. And, of course, the building of Woodbridge Center was humongous. We had such flooding on Main Street, lower down, that some people had to wait to get out in rowboats and stuff. Main Street used to flood all the time and the lower portions of Woodbridge Proper out toward the marshes toward Port Reading and Sewaren. Of course, Woodbridge Center added to that in some respect but then there were some changes made so that the flooding is not critical like it was before.

Brenda Velasco: It's been elevated.

Barbara Wyatt: Yes.

10. What do you like about Woodbridge today?

Brenda Velasco: You're still in Woodbridge; you haven't left.

Barbara Wyatt: Well my husband is a collector and I don't think we can afford to move him and move everything that he's collected so we're here and we have roots.

Brenda Velasco: You have long roots, very extensive roots.

Barbara Wyatt: Well all our grandchildren are here and children and the great grandchild so we're settled.

Brenda Velasco: Good.

11. Do you have family members still living in Woodbridge?

Barbara Wyatt: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: They're all here because you have a daughter; I know you have a daughter, I met her.

Barbara Wyatt: We have a daughter and son and we have four grandchildren married, one grandchild is married.

Brenda Velasco: So they have remained in Woodbridge.

Barbara Wyatt: Yes, very close.

Brenda Velasco: And how old is your great grandchild?

Barbara Wyatt: She was a year old in January.

Brenda Velasco: And they all live in Woodbridge Proper too?

Barbara Wyatt: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: Wow, that's so unusual Barbara. You're very, very fortunate.

Barbara Wyatt: Yes we are.

12. Are there any other stories that you would like to discuss?

Barbara Wyatt: I think I've probably given you an earful. Woodbridge was a very nice place to grow up in and again we still have friends, (Donna Berse) is one of them out in California that we went all through school with. She said she always looks back with nostalgia at Woodbridge because she used to go down to the section of the park on School Street, all weeping willows, quiet, shaded and she used to go there and spend a lot of time reading. Just by herself down there, quiet time, and she looks back on that as something remarkable. I said you wouldn't recognize the town now.

Brenda Velasco: We still have the park though.

Barbara Wyatt: The Park is there except the weeping willows have been changed into cherry trees which are also pretty.

Brenda Velasco: Especially at this time of year.

Barbara Wyatt: Oh, yes, gorgeous and of course the brook there was settled when the WPA was doing work. They put cobblestones in to hold the brook slopes back and.....

Brenda Velasco: That became a wall, yes.

Barbara Wyatt: Part of the cobblestone business was removed and they put concrete in but for years that WPA project was very helpful. It was a nice place, you know. Of course there were a couple of wooden bridges that crossed over. You could go from one side of the brook to the other and there was always some kind of a monitor from the school there so that you would walk down the one side and get on to School Street and if you wanted to go through the park you couldn't go across the bridges. They didn't want anybody having any accidents or liability, I guess, on the part of the township so it would have been a short cut for us but we couldn't use the bridges.

Brenda Velasco: But look at how healthy you are now. You walked.

Barbara Wyatt: Well, we did.

Brenda Velasco: You walked a lot.

Barbara Wyatt: We ran. We always were afraid we were going to be late for school so we ran and you'd find other kids in the neighborhood running too so we'd all get there on time. One of the groups, it's a two man group, the Hutt twins, went to school the same time, not the same year, and sometimes we were all running. They were on Linden Avenue there for a while and we were on High Street. We were all running

down Grove Avenue to get to what is now the middle school and we were seated in the auditorium. You didn't go into class first, you went into the auditorium; and the teachers were there and they had opening exercises with the salute to the flag and a bible reading. Only, we were seated alphabetically and because our name was Baker we were out in the front row so if you were late you had to really move fast to get all the way down the aisle and get into your seat; you had assigned seats and they took attendance right in the auditorium. So you had to run for this.

Brenda Velasco: Then when you got married you went to the end of the alphabet.

Barbara Wyatt: And do you know there is quite a difference. That's one of the reasons I ran for the School Board in 1968. My son came home from school and he had a torn up arithmetic book and a message from the teacher saying show this to your mother. They handed stuff out alphabetically and if they ran out of things in good condition the end of the alphabet suffered and I have seen that. I used to suggest sometimes that they go in reverse order so that once in awhile the kids at the end of the list would get some new books. When he brought the math book home, it was missing the first twenty-five pages.

Brenda Velasco: Gosh.

Barbara Wyatt: They were still teaching typing in high school. My son had to share a typewriter because there weren't enough to go around, so he got to use it for half the period and another boy got to use it the other half of the period. I can't fault the school system because they worked with what they had.

Brenda Velasco: And this was that big explosion in population the '60s.

Barbara Wyatt: Yes, and I taught very briefly over I Colonia, only a year. But in that time we were back on split session while five or six new schools were being built. We had to share with the other teacher in the room, because we were on split session, one set of textbooks for the classroom.

Brenda Velasco: Do you recall what year this was Barbara?

Barbara Wyatt: 1955/56 school year.

Brenda Velasco: That's the '50s and the '60s as you said. I think we had close to twenty thousand children in the school system by the end of the '60s. We were one of the largest at that time. Now we're down to thirteen thousand. But that was a tremendous spurt of growth and that was after World War II. How did World War II affect you while you were in high school, do you recall anything there?

Barbara Wyatt: We bought saving stamps. Once a week you could buy bonds but nobody had the money to buy the whole bond at the time, a war bond. We were asked to do some knitting for servicemen if you could knit and if not you were able to learn how through the gym teacher. I knitted a sweater, navy blue.

Brenda Velasco: You remember.

Barbara Wyatt: Oh, yes. We had the savings stamp booklets and you would fill them out.

Brenda Velasco: What was it, a quarter?

Barbara Wyatt: I think so; I'm not sure about that now. We had rationing. Shoes were rationed, butter.....

Brenda Velasco: Sugar?

Barbara Wyatt: Sugar, yes.

Brenda Velasco: Gasoline?

Barbara Wyatt: I gave my book away after the war to somebody who was collecting historical stuff. I'm a little sorry now I did that because I would have liked to have looked back on it. It was hard to get meat. If we had canned goods at home, when you opened up a can you took top and bottom off, emptied the stuff out and crushed them down and you also saved fat, cooking fat and so on, which we turned in at the **A&P** on Main Street. Foil, tin foil, anything like that you turned in.

Brenda Velasco: So you were recycling.

Barbara Wyatt: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: Your generation recycled.

Barbara Wyatt: And of course you couldn't get tires for the car and you were rationed on gas and you had to have a card or a stamp on the card I'm not sure which to show what you were entitled to. If you were in some business that was related to the war, you got probably a better gas card for more gas. It was very hard to get both of those things, tires and gas.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, I thank you for an interesting, informative part of Woodbridge history a segment that has been ignored. I'm glad you were able to find time and thank you again.

Barbara Wyatt: I appreciate your asking.

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After the formal interview concluded, Barbara recalled that after Sunday dinner the family would take a scenic ride to Colonia and remembers 2 big houses there. Iselin was still wild/open spaces and there was a lot of hunting then; she also remembers the dairy farm on Metuchen Avenue.

To travel to the shore, the family rode Route 35 which was a two lane highway.