

Oral History Interview
Barbara Becker Ciocci
WH036

(written transcript and digital audio)

On April 3, 2009 Barbara Becker Ciocci was interviewed at the Henry Inman Library by Brenda Velasco at 10:30 A.M.

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

My name is Barbara Becker Ciocci. I live now on Mereline Avenue in Avenel. I was born in 1934.

2. How long have you lived in Woodbridge?

Approximately seventy-one years.

Brenda Velasco: So you've lived seventy-one years in Woodbridge Township. We're qualifying that because previously when I talked to you, you've lived in Colonia, Avenel and Iselin. You've lived all over so you've had a flavor of the township for 71 years.

Barbara Ciocci: Yes I have.

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

Brenda Velasco: Let's start off with Colonia.

Barbara Ciocci: They moved to Colonia from Jersey City. My mother's parents had moved from Jersey City to Rahway because my grandfather had a job in the Rahway State Prison. He was an engineer and after visiting my grandparents they thought they would like to live out this way. So they rented a house in Colonia on Inman Avenue.

Barbara Velasco: Is that house still there?

Barbara Ciocci: No, that house was taken down when the Parkway and St. John Vianney was built.

Brenda Velasco: Approximately what year was it that you moved to.....

Barbara Ciocci: I would say 1937, I guess, we moved to Colonia.

Brenda Velasco: So the house is no longer there?

Barbara Ciocci: No.

Brenda Velasco: But you do remember this.....

Barbara Ciocci: Yes, it was a large white clapboard house which sat on a hill.

Brenda Velasco: How long did you live there?

Barbara Ciocci: We lived there about two years and then we moved to Iselin.

Brenda Velasco: About how old were you when you moved to Iselin then?

Barbara Ciocci: I must have been close to five years old because I started kindergarten in Iselin.

Brenda Velasco: Where in Iselin did you live then?

Barbara Ciocci: We lived on Dow Avenue.

Brenda Velasco: For how long did you live there?

Barbara Ciocci: I guess about three years.

Brenda Velasco: You're like a gypsy. From there where did you.....

Barbara Ciocci: From Iselin we moved to Woodbridge Proper.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, so we're into three sections of Woodbridge right now. Where did you live in Woodbridge Proper?

Barbara Ciocci: On Leone Street.

Brenda Velasco: How long did you live there?

Barbara Ciocci: I guess about four years.

Brenda Velasco: And from Woodbridge Proper.....

Barbara Ciocci: We moved to Avenel. My parents then bought a house, instead of renting, in Avenel.

Brenda Velasco: And where in Avenel?

Barbara Ciocci: On Mereline Avenue.

Brenda Velasco: So you're not far from where you.....

Barbara Ciocci: I built a house right next door to where I grew up.

Brenda Velasco: Okay. So we've had two generations living in Avenel.

Barbara Ciocci: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: Because your daughter now lives in Fords.

Barbara Ciocci: And my other daughter lives in Iselin and my granddaughter lives in Woodbridge Proper.

Brenda Velasco: Alright, we'll get to them in the last question. This family likes Woodbridge. We mentioned why your family moved to Woodbridge because your grandparents had lived in Rahway and you liked Woodbridge.

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

Brenda Velasco: I think we'll concentrate on Colonia and Iselin because you were young then. So let's concentrate on Colonia first. How has it changed since you first came in 1937?

Barbara Ciocci: Well, I was a little kid and all I remember was a lot of woods. To me, now, I think of them as older looking homes because none of the developments were here at that time.

Brenda Velasco: Right, you preceded. You were before World War II when you moved here.

Barbara Ciocci: Yes, definitely.

Brenda Velasco: And our developments, whether it was off Cleveland Avenue (Canterbury or Lynn Crest School which wasn't here, (Lynn Oaks and Oak Ridge); none of them were built.

Barbara Ciocci: Right, because my sisters went to school in Colonia but the school was, there's a new school there now, I think, near the Merrill Park area, I think is where they went to school. I didn't start school there.

Brenda Velasco: That was School #2 and #16.

Barbara Ciocci: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: And now it's closed.

Barbara Ciocci: Right. Yes, the new one is even closed; the old one is gone but the new one is closed.

Brenda Velasco: Did they have bus service to take them to school?

Barbara Ciocci: They took them by bus.

Brenda Velasco: I know you were young so it's hard for you to remember but were there any stores in the area at the time?

Barbara Ciocci: I don't think so because whenever we went to the store my father would drive. My mother never drove but my father would drive us in the car. My biggest memory of living in that house was that my mother and father always had a garden if there was enough property. One day my mother and I were in the garden and she said to me, "don't move stand perfectly still". And crawling, less than two feet in front of us, was a black snake and that's most of what I remember of the yard in the Colonia.

Brenda Velasco: Do you still garden by the way?

Barbara Ciocci: No.

Brenda Velasco: Well, that was quite a scare with a black snake! Was Inman Avenue paved at the time?

Barbara Ciocci: I don't think so. I don't think it was paved. I could be wrong on that because I was little but I don't think so.

Brenda Velasco: Were there any houses of worship here at that time?

Barbara Ciocci: We did go to Sunday school. I don't remember where it was located because there again my father drove. So being around three years old I didn't, you know, remember. But my mother played the organ and in my memory when she started doing that it was in the church that's on New Dover Road.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, that's a Methodist church.

Barbara Ciocci: I Methodist church I think. But I can't tell you if that's where we drove to on Sundays or not.

Brenda Velasco: Alright, we mentioned the school that was there in Colonia. That was School #2 and #16 near Merrill Park which is now closed. Alright, so were there any other houses around you when you lived in Colonia that you might remember? This is really going back because you were only three years old you said.

Barbara Ciocci: My sisters were friends with a girl named Nixdorf and when I got older I became friendly with the same girl because we both worked downtown in Rahway and her house was on Inman Avenue. But I think that was the house that she grew up in, I'm not sure if that house is still standing.

Brenda Velasco: Where on Inman Avenue are you talking about near Wood Avenue?

Barbara Ciocci: No, right by East Avenue.

Brenda Velasco: Not too far then from where your house was.

Barbara Ciocci: Right.

Brenda Velasco: Alright, we are now going to head over the Iselin.

Barbara Ciocci: Okay.

Brenda Velasco: You're a little older now.

Barbara Ciocci: Ahem.

Brenda Velasco: Alright, so you lived on Dow Avenue and where did you go to school then?

Barbara Ciocci: I think it was School #15. We used to walk to school and we walked up, I can't think of that, I just lost the name of the street.

Brenda Velasco: Oak Tree Road?

Barbara Ciocci: No, because from Dow Avenue we walked straight up to the street that I can't think of the name.

Brenda Velasco: Is it Kennedy Park School now?

Barbara Ciocci: I don't think it's on the same piece of property. I think it was School #15. It sat, somehow, in back of the movies in that area.

Brenda Velasco: And the movie was on Oak Tree Road.

Barbara Ciocci: Right.

Brenda Velasco: It was right on the corner of Correja and Oak Tree Road.

Barbara Ciocci: Right and the school was in back of that.

Brenda Velasco: What grades did you attend there?

Barbara Ciocci: I just attended kindergarten and I think I started first grade.

Brenda Velasco: Dow Avenue, this was a development?

Barbara Ciocci: No they were just older houses, there was no development type. In other words, the houses weren't the same.

Brenda Velasco: What were your memories of Iselin, going back, because you were in kindergarten?

Barbara Ciocci: I had a great big grin because we would walk over to Oak Tree Road and get bread and things like that and cakes. Most of the time my mother baked because that was what she did. But there was a great bakery there. Years later I still went back to Iselin to go to that bakery and there was a post office in Iselin on the corner diagonally across from the bakery. I think it was Correja Avenue and Green Street or it becomes Oak Tree Road.

Brenda Velasco: It becomes Oak Tree Road over there. Alright, so the bakery was sort of close to the movie house?

Barbara Ciocci: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: Was your street paved at the time?

Barbara Ciocci: No.

Brenda Velasco: Do you recall anything else in that area, houses of worship?

Barbara Ciocci: There we went to the First Presbyterian Church.

Brenda Velasco: That was there already?

Barbara Ciocci: That was there already but it didn't look like what it looks now.

Brenda Velasco: But it was up on that.....

Barbara Ciocci: It was up on the hill, yes.

Brenda Velasco: On the corner of Route #27 and Oak Tree Road. So that goes back quite a ways and you had a smattering of stores if you had a bakery.

Barbara Ciocci: Yes there were other stores on the street. I don't remember what they all were but there were other stores. We used to go to the movies and my sisters were four and five years older than me so we were allowed to go on Saturday to the movie. It was ten cents and mother would give us each three cents to buy grab bags in the candy store next door.

Brenda Velasco: That was a treat, three cents for a grab bag.

Barbara Ciocci: Three cents for a grab bag.

Brenda Velasco: Now from Iselin we're going to go to Woodbridge Proper. We are traveling through the township.

Barbara Ciocci: Definitely.

Brenda Velasco: Now this was on Leone Avenue.

Barbara Ciocci: I think its Leone Street.

Brenda Velsaco: Leone Street.

Barbara Ciocci: It's the one that runs off of Trinity Lane.

Brenda Velasco: So when you moved there, were there many houses there?

Barbara Ciocci: We had closer neighbors there than we did before, although, I guess it was about the same as Iselin. But on the corner of Louis Street and Woodbridge Avenue there was what we called, being kids maybe that was the right name of it, the Water Works.

Brenda Velasco: What was that?

Barbara Ciocci: I guess it had something to do with Woodbridge Township water but it was on the corner of Louis Street and they had had an explosion before my parents rented the house we rented and a lot of the houses in that area had had different types of damage from the explosion that people were changing. (1940)

Brenda Velasco: How old were you when you moved to Leone Street?

Barbara Ciocci: I guess I was in the second grade.

Brenda Velasco: So you'd be about maybe seven years old.

Barbara Ciocci: Yes, I guess so.

Brenda Velasco: Was there any damage done to the house that you rented?

Barbara Ciocci: Yes, we could not use the front entrance to the house because the front porch was stucco comb and half of it had fallen in. The landlord was in the process of fixing it when we first rented the house.

Brenda Velasco: Did he ever fix it completely?

Barbara Ciocci: No.

Brenda Velasco: How long were you in that house?

Barbara Ciocci: About two years.

Brenda Velasco: Alright, so you were two years without using that front door.

Barbara Ciocci: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: What about the churches in the area now?

Barbara Ciocci: Well there's the Trinity Church and the White Church, of course, they were always there. We used to cut through the White Church cemetery on our way to walk to school.

Brenda Velasco: What school did you attend?

Barbara Ciocci: School #1 which is now the Administration Building. My sisters went to School #11 and back.

Brenda Velasco: What grade did you enter School #1?

Barbara Ciocci: Second grade.

Brenda Velasco: Second grade and then your sisters were four or five years older than you so they were in sixth grade.

Barbara Ciocci: School #11.

Brenda Velasco: And that would be grade six?

Barbara Ciocci: Six to eight, I think, went there.

Brenda Velasco: Six to eight. Did you like Woodbridge Proper better?

Barbara Ciocci: Well we could walk downtown.

Brenda Velasco: You had a downtown then.

Barbara Ciocci: We had a downtown and it had a **5&10** and an **A&P** and it was like a big city compared to Colonia.

Brenda Velasco: Oh, yes, put the black snake in the garden.

Barbara Ciocci: Right.

Brenda Velasco: They had a movie house.

Barbara Ciocci: Yes we had a movie house it was by Town Hall where the Quick Chek is now. That was where the State Theatre was.

Brenda Velasco: How were their rates, do you remember?

Barbara Ciocci: I guess at that time they might have been the same or going up a little. I don't remember.

Brenda Velasco: It's still a bargain rate.

Barbara Ciocci: It's still a bargain rate.

Brenda Velasco: What did you see when you went to the movies, do you remember? Was it just one movie as it is now?

Barbara Ciocci: No, we used to see two movies, a news reel and sometimes a cartoon. You didn't get commercials about businesses in the area or anything like that.

Brenda Velasco: Quite different than what it is today.

Barbara Ciocci: That's for sure.

Brenda Velasco: I think we covered enough. Oh, wait a minute you're going to move to Avenel yet. When you moved to Avenel how old were you then?

Barbara Ciocci: When I first moved to Avenel I was in the fourth grade.

Brenda Velasco: Still young and what school did you go to then?

Barbara Ciocci: School #4. School #5 wasn't there.

Brenda Velasco: So you were basically growing up at the tail end of the Depression and World War II.

Barbara Ciocci: Right and then in Avenel, Avenel School #4, I only went through the fifth grade. We had to go to No. 11 School in Woodbridge by bus for sixth, seventh, and eighth.

Brenda Velasco: How did you like Avenel?

Barbara Ciocci: I like Avenel, that's why I stayed there.

Brenda Velasco: Did they have stores there at that time?

Barbara Ciocci: Just a couple of stores. Along Avenel Street, I understand before the underpass was there, because there were several concrete buildings along the part that dead ends into the railroad tracks on each end and when we first moved there one of those buildings had like an **A&P** sign above it but that store was no longer there.

Brenda Velasco: So at one time they did have an **A&P**.

Barbara Ciocci: People that lived there before we did said that when they put in the underpass those businesses basically went out of business. But the post office was in that section when I first moved there. It was on the eastside of the tracks. And we had no mail delivery to the house. You had to walk to the post office and get your mail.

Brenda Velasco: You had mail delivery in Woodbridge though?

Barbara Ciocci: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: How about Iselin?

Barbara Ciocci: I don't remember.

Brenda Velasco: Were there any buses in the area?

Barbara Ciocci: Yes, we had good bus service. Through the lower end of Avenel, where I live anyway, off Rahway Avenue, we could get a bus.

Brenda Velasco: Where did the bus go?

Barbara Ciocci: Every half an hour on our corner we could get a bus. If we were going in one direction we could go to Rahway and that bus went all the way to Westfield.

Barbara Velasco: Wow!

Barbara Ciocci: Right and we could get off the bus in Rahway and in Rahway we could get buses to Newark and then we could get the trains because we used to go back to the City a lot. We could also get the bus on my corner on Rahway Avenue it was Nielsen Avenue then, to go

to Perth Amboy. On the other side of Avenel there was Bus #48. That bus went as far as Avenel into Rahway and in the other direction it went into Perth Amboy. The each ran every half an hour.

Brenda Velasco: That's frequent.

Barbara Ciocci: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: Compared to today.

Barbara Ciocci: Yes, we had good bus service, we really did, because my mother never drove and yet we went to Perth Amboy to the stores around Smith Street or in Woodbridge. We could go anywhere.

Brenda Velasco: So that's where you did a lot of your shopping then in Perth Amboy.

Barbara Ciocci: Perth Amboy, Woodbridge and Rahway.

Brenda Velasco: You were connected through the bus service.

Barbara Ciocci: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: Oh, we skipped the church. Now there's a church.....

Barbara Ciocci: We went to the White Church in Woodbridge, Presbyterian.

Brenda Velasco: Okay you went to the White Church in Woodbridge, First Presbyterian.

Barbara Ciocci: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: But there is a Presbyterian Church.....

Barbara Ciocci: In Avenel.

Brenda Velasco: In Avenel.

Barbara Ciocci: We went to the White Church when we lived in Woodbridge.

Brenda Velasco: Okay.

Barbara Ciocci: My father's mother lived with us and my grandmother would never leave the White Church. She could get on the #54 Bus on a Sunday morning and go to church there because we all went to the church in Avenel. She didn't want to change.

Brenda Velasco: So the #54 Bus was the one that you could take to Perth Amboy or to Rahway.

Barbara Ciocci: Right.

Brenda Velasco: She was very independent then.

Barbara Ciocci: Oh, she was independent until the day she died. My father worked and later in the years after World War II my mother worked and my grandmother would decide she was going to visit either her sisters or her nieces or something in the city, which was Hoboken or Jersey City.

Brenda Velasco: And we should clarify that if you're in New Jersey J.C. (Jersey City) was the city not New York City.

Barbara Ciocci: No. As I grew up to us we had two cities, Jersey City or New York but that was in our family because my father's people originally had come out of Long Island and Brooklyn, so we had the city and she would go to Rahway on the #54 Bus. She would get the train, then she would get off and she'd change to get the PATH to Journal Square and the bus too whichever one she was going. She did up until the time she was 80 years old and then we could drive and wanted to take her but she would say, "no, no, no, no, I can do it" My father and mother were worrying about her but she wanted to be independent. Then she had a stroke when she was 80 and couldn't do it anymore.

Brenda Velasco: She was quite a lady.

Barbara Ciocci: Oh, definitely! She always wore a hat and white gloves up until the time she died. When I look at how we all walk around. When my grandfather was alive you would

not eat dinner in his house at the dining room table without a jacket, the men. You didn't have to have a tie. And if he didn't have his suit jacket on he had a, I can't think of what they called it now, like a smoking jacket or something like that grandpa used to put on.

Brenda Velasco: So you always were very formal eating. Wow! And to think what we come to the table with. We're lucky we could sit down as a family sometimes. Quite a contrast.

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

Brenda Velasco: What about the library did you have a library?

Barbara Ciocci: Oh yes, we went to the Barron Library where the Arts Center is now.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, we mentioned where the post office was.

Barbara Ciocci: Oh, Avenel had a library also right next to School #4.

Brenda Velasco: Okay.

Barbara Ciocci: The library property and all was sold to Mr. Labat. I think it was one big room like. I think the YMCA has a daycare center there now.

Brenda Velasco: Yes they do, so the building is still being utilized. So you went to School #4 and they didn't have a School #5 there was that time?

Barbara Ciocci: No, we had two portable buildings in the back of the school for extra classes.

Brenda Velasco: Then eventually back to School #11

Barbara Ciocci: Right.

Brenda Velasco: Where your sisters had attended.

Barbara Ciocci: Right.

Brenda Velasco: Then eventually you ended up, after School #11, at.....

Barbara Ciocci: Barron Avenue High School.

Brenda Velasco: What was your graduating class there?

Barbara Ciocci: 1952. I was younger when I got to high school. The high school stadium wasn't where it is today.

Brenda Velasco: Where was it?

Barbara Ciocci: Do you know where the Town Hall is?

Brenda Velasco: Yes.

Barbara Ciocci: If you would follow, in my mind and I know it's not, where Rahway Avenue ends and I can't think of the extension. You just kept going straight and on the left hand side now where there's a VFW or Legion or something.....

Brenda Velasco: American Legion, right.

Barbara Ciocci: Yes, well, on that side at the end of that street was the stadium.
(Berry/Legion)

Brenda Velasco: For the high school?

Barbara Ciocci: For the high school. Then when they were going to put in the Turnpike, they took some of that property and that's when they built the new stadium.

Brenda Velasco: In back of the current high school.

Barbara Ciocci: The stadium came first because when I graduated in '52 our graduation ceremony was in that stadium but there wasn't any new high school there.

Brenda Velasco: Were you the first class to graduate at that stadium?

Barbara Ciocci: I don't think so. I don't remember but I don't think so.

Brenda Velasco: Sports came first though.

Barbara Ciocci: That's another thing that's different is the high school, when you graduated,

the Sunday before you graduated, we always had what you called Baccalaureate Service in the high school auditorium.

Brenda Velasco: What was that?

Barbara Ciocci: It was a church service but non-sectarian because they played more somber music and we all had to process in, whatever. I don't know what year they did away with that.

Brenda Velasco: But you had it for graduation in 1952.

Barbara Ciocci: Yes. That's where I met Frank Pelzman, in grade school, when I moved to Avenel and then he and I met Dotty in high school because she grew up in two different parts of Woodbridge. I think she grew up near St. James's Church and then she came over to Strawberry Hill too, I'm not sure.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, she came from Woodbridge Proper.

Barbara Ciocci: She came from Woodbridge Proper and then we met her in high school. We've been friends ever since.

Brenda Velasco: Wow! And he was our former mayor.

Barbara Ciocci: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: In the 21st century, so that's pretty good; closed circle here.

Barbara Ciocci: Right.

Brenda Velasco: What about parks?

Barbara Ciocci: I always remember the park next to the firehouse on School Street.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, Woodbridge Park.

Barbara Ciocci: Woodbridge Park and what is the Pelzman Park now, there was always a little park down that end of the street.

Brenda Velasco: Okay and that used to be called Avenel Park.

Barbara Ciocci: Right. Merrill Park wasn't there. I don't think Merrill Park was established until after I was married.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, and what year was you married in?

Barbara Ciocci: '55.

Brenda Velasco: I think we covered most of everything on Question #5, oh, firehouses.

Barbara Ciocci: There was a smaller firehouse on the corner of Avenel Street. That was there when I moved to Avenel but I understand that before that there was a firehouse on Remsen Avenue.

Brenda Velasco: Then eventually they moved to Route #1 in Avenel, that location.

Barbara Ciocci: But our church, First Presbyterian Church, not the sanctuary that's on the corner now, the chapel, it's diagonally across from it.....

Brenda Velasco: On East Woodbridge Avenue?

Barbara Ciocci: On East Woodbridge Avenue, yes. The land for that was donated by a Mr. Clark, who was related to the Clark, that signed the Declaration of Independence.

Brenda Velasco: Oh, yes.

Barbara Ciocci: This is like Craig (Coughlin, Township Attorney) told you I know a lot about.....

Brenda Velasco: Yes, well I'm glad Craig mentioned and at the conclusion you'll be signing the release form that your son-in-law had us write up. So once again it's a small world.

Barbara Ciocci: Exactly.

Brenda Velasco: So he was a descendant of I think it was Abraham Clark but I'm not sure.

Barbara Ciocci: I think so. I'm not sure either that's why I didn't say it.

Brenda Velasco: He must have lived in the area then.

Barbara Ciocci: He did and the property in back of the church also had a pond where we used to ice skate.

Brenda Velasco: There's no longer a pond there.

Barbara Ciocci: No.

6. *What did you do for recreation?*

We ice skated behind the church. In fact, sometimes we could even ice skate from the Reading Railroad tracks to what's now Homestead Avenue because that creek, the firemen every year, would burn off fields out there because there weren't any houses at that point. That allowed the creek, when it overflowed, and the rainwater or melted snow, to make a place where we could ice skate. We didn't have to ice skate on the creek so we could ice skate back there.

Brenda Velasco: And you didn't have to pay anything.

Barbara Ciocci: No.

Brenda Velasco: That was during the winter?

Barbara Ciocci: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: During the rest of the year what did you do?

Barbara Ciocci: During the rest of the year, would you believe I went swimming in Sewaren Beach?

Brenda Velasco: Well Boynton Beach, at one time, was very, very popular. That was the turn of the 20th century.

Barbara Ciocci: But then we had to stop because all the tankers came in during World War II so it polluted the Kill there. Then Perth Amboy had a beach at the end of State Street so when we couldn't go to Sewaren anymore, we could get on the #54 Bus and go straight down to the beach.

Brenda Velasco: Thank goodness for those buses.

Barbara Ciocci: Absolutely.

Brenda Velasco: They linked you throughout.....

Barbara Ciocci: Sure because my mother never drove.

Brenda Velasco: Did you go fishing?

Barbara Ciocci: No, I didn't go fishing. My father would take us, on the weekends, to a beach called Charlie's Beach that was down below Lawrence Harbor. We would go swimming there. Mom and Dad were really considerate parents I have to say because if they said to us, let's say on a Monday, "this coming Saturday we're going have a picnic" and if it rained on Saturday the picnic hamper got put in the car and we would take a ride. And if it was still raining and we couldn't get out of the car he would pull off at one of the parks, park the car and we would eat our picnic lunch in the car and go home.

Brenda Velasco: They kept their word.

Barbara Ciocci: He said we were going on a picnic, we went on a picnic.

Brenda Velasco: Yes, rain or shine.

Barbara Ciocci: Right.

Brenda Velasco: And in New Jersey you never can tell. It is the most unpredictable weather with all our little micro climes. Did you do any bike riding?

Barbara Ciocci: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: Where was that?

Barbara Ciocci: Well, I would leave my house in Avenel and my girlfriends and I would ride up Avenel Street to Route #1, which we didn't call it Route #1 we called it 25 Highway, and we would ride down the highway to Roosevelt Park. Picture that trip today, I wouldn't do it.

Brenda Velasco: No.

Barbara Ciocci: You couldn't pay me to ride a bike down Route #1.

Brenda Velasco: How long did it take you to get there?

Barbara Ciocci: I don't remember.

Brenda Velasco: Good exercise though.

Barbara Ciocci: Definitely.

Brenda Velasco: So Roosevelt Park was one of the attractions.

Barbara Ciocci: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: Still in Middlesex County.

Barbara Ciocci: We would roller skate and even play touch football with the boys because we were neighborhood kids. So whatever it was, whether it was kick the can or touch football or whatever, everybody played that lived on the block.

Brenda Velasco: Nobody stayed in the house.

Barbara Ciocci: No. They taught us girls how to play baseball. We just did it.

Brenda Velasco: You didn't have TV then.

Barbara Ciocci: No we didn't. In fact, we didn't have TV until I was in high school. I had seen it when I was in grade school though because one of the girls I went to school with her father worked for, I don't know which one Westinghouse or somebody, he was in the experimental part of TVs so he had the tiny little thing where people were in black and white and what he had done, I'll never forget it, there was some type of a magnifying glass that he had attached like in front of his set so that the people would look bigger to us.

Brenda Velasco: I remember that type of TV with that huge magnifying glass and now we look at everything in color and the huge screens we have. I remember RCA was located not too far from here either and they made TVs at one time too.

Barbara Ciocci: RCA was located where Pathmark and K Mart are now.

Brenda Velasco: That's Avenel/Colonia.

Barbara Ciocci: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: On Route # 35.

Barbara Ciocci: Right.

Brenda Velasco: Anything else that you can think of?

Barbara Ciocci: Churches would have movie nights sometimes for the kids from Sunday School and that and different places would have dances and then, of course, the school things, you know, the school would have dances and there were the football games.

Brenda Velasco: Where were the dances held for the schools?

Barbara Ciocci: In the gym. In fact, all our senior proms in Woodbridge, when I was there, were held in the Barron Avenue high school gym. No one went to restaurants or nightclubs or anything, it was in the high school.

Brenda Velasco: Quite inexpensive.

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

I would say the churches, the schools and then the township. They always had parades or, you know, something going on.

Brenda Velasco: What kind of parades did they have or when did they have the parades?

Barbara Ciocci: They had a Memorial Day parade. Every year there was a big Memorial Day parade.

Brenda Velasco: Where was that held?

Barbara Ciocci: In Woodbridge Proper.

Brenda Velasco: Do you remember the route that they took?

Barbara Ciocci: Well, the ceremonies were held on the White Church property.

Brenda Velasco: In other words the First Presbyterian Church?

Barbara Ciocci: The First Presbyterian Church, yes. That's where the Reviewing Stand was. I'm trying to think where we started the parade because as a Girl Scout I marched in them but I can't remember where we started.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, so you were a Girl Scout, too.

Barbara Ciocci: Right, I even belonged to the USO during the Korean War, the Rahway Chapter.

Brenda Velasco: That was during the Korean War because you were too young for World War II. Did you recall anything because you were growing up but you still were young?

Barbara Ciocci: Do you know where the Reading Railroad tracks cross Rahway Avenue?

Brenda Velasco: Yes.

Barbara Ciocci: We could tell when the troop trains were coming because the train had a certain sound and parents, grandparents and the kids would all run down Rahway Avenue and stand by the railroad tracks and wave to all the soldiers and whoever was on the troop train going through. Sometimes the engineers knew and of course they had to go slow to cross the intersection anyhow. They would go twice as slow, I guess as they could, because a lot of the mothers and grandmothers would try to hand up goody bags of cookies and things to the servicemen.

Brenda Velasco: You were just a little child at that time.

Barbara Ciocci: I remember air raids. I even had ration books my mother didn't finish using.

Brenda Velasco: Which is all from World War II and with the air raids what did you have to do?

Barbara Ciocci: They had to put green shades on the windows.

Brenda Velasco: To block out the.....

Barbara Ciocci: To block out the light and when the air raid whistle blew you had to pull down your green shades and shut most of your lights off so that the enemy airplanes couldn't see any light in your house. They had air raid wardens, men that volunteered to be the air raid warden, and if you had a light on in your house they would come and knock on your door and tell you to shut it off or you would be sited for having an illegal light on. They used to paint the top of the car's headlights with black paint during the war.

Brenda Velasco: So your dad had a car and he had half of his headlights painted black.

Barbara Ciocci: Right and gas was rationed, the same as food, and we had a sticker you'd put on the front windshield and then you had smaller stamps that when you went to the gas station you were only allowed gas for getting to work and enough for emergencies and that. You were not allowed to have it in abundance so that you couldn't travel far.

Brenda Velasco: So you have some very vivid memories then. Now was your father in World War II at all?

Barbara Ciocci: No, my father wasn't healthy enough to go to serve in World War II. My father, from when I guess we lived in Iselin is when he first got sick. He had arthritis so bad

that the only way he could come down from the bedroom was to sit on his behind to come down the steps to get to the first floor.

Brenda Velasco: Wow!

Barbara Ciocci: Then a friend had introduced him to a doctor and they gave him gold treatment. He used to get gold injections. Then he became healthy enough and could go back to work.

Brenda Velasco: Because he had a family to take care of.

Barbara Ciocci: Right.

Brenda Velasco: And a house, he bought the house in Avenel.

Barbara Ciocci: That's why it took them so long to buy a house because by the time we left Iselin and were in Woodbridge is when he was taking the gold treatments. Then he could go back to work and he worked in Foster Wheeler. The whole time my father was sick my mother was a fantastic sewer. We would look at a dress and say we like it and, with no pattern, we would end up with that dress.

Brenda Velasco: Wow!

Barbara Ciocci: So she did dressmaking to make money when my father was sick.

Brenda Velasco: What a talent! So she pitched in and was able to stay home. She didn't work in a factory or anything.

Barbara Ciocci: Not until World War II. When they bought the house she decided that there were things she wanted to do with the house and they were looking for women to go to work. So she went and worked in the office at Foster Wheeler also.

Brenda Velasco: Where was Foster Wheeler?

Barbara Ciocci: In Carteret.

Brenda Velasco: So your dad didn't have to commute very far then.

Barbara Ciocci: No.

Brenda Velasco: Anything else you want to mention about World War II because you were starting to go to school by that time? Because it was '41 to '45 and you were just in elementary school.

Barbara Ciocci: Most of the houses had flags in their window with gold stars for how many people in the house were in the service. Summertime when I was growing up was always frightening.

Brenda Velasco: Why?

Barbara Ciocci: Because we all feared getting polio.

Brenda Velasco: Yes.

Barbara Ciocci: Because I remember a boy that went to school with me who lived on Avenel Street ended up in an iron lung and that made all of us who used to walk to school with him so afraid because, you know.

Brenda Velasco: That was a big scare at that time.

Barbara Ciocci: Oh, definitely.

Brenda Velasco: Especially with pools.

Barbara Ciocci: Sure, nobody had a pool in their yard. If you knew somebody who had a pool in their yard they were the wealthiest person.

Brenda Velasco: Well you had pools in the park sometimes.

Barbara Ciocci: Yes, because we used to go swim in the county park in Rahway at their pool.

Brenda Velasco: And you could take the bus into Rahway.

Barbara Ciocci: Right, the #54 Bus because it stopped on the corner of St. George Avenue and Westfield Avenue at the Girl Scout hall.

Brenda Velasco: And then you just walked a little.

Barbara Ciocci: We just walked down the street.

Brenda Velasco: To the Rahway pool.

Barbara Ciocci: I had to laugh though because they were so strict that we had to walk through a disinfectant bath before you went to the pool so no one would get athlete feet supposedly. Then we had to walk through a shower system before we got into the pool; no more.

Brenda Velasco: But there were other fears back then that we don't have anymore because by the '50s we had the Salk vaccine. It was a different era growing up for you.

Barbara Ciocci: Definitely, sure it was, when I stop and I think, I mean, our first telephone we had a four party line.

Brenda Velasco: Explain to the audience what a four party line is.

Barbara Ciocci: If our number ended in, we'll say 21, the other person on the line was 22, 23 and 24. When the phone would ring I think it rang by the last number that you were and then you would know to pick up your phone. But if you were going to make a call and you picked up the phone and somebody was speaking, you were supposed to be polite enough to put the receiver down and not listen to their conversation and wait until they weren't there and then try again later on to make a call.

Brenda Velasco: Quite different from the cell phones we have today.

Barbara Ciocci: Definitely.

Brenda Velasco: I'm glad you brought that out, I had forgotten about those four party lines.

Barbara Ciocci: In fact in '56 I went and said I wanted a telephone and I wanted a private line and they told me there wasn't any available. I had to have a two party line and I said, my mother lives next door, and she said, well there aren't any available right now, so no one was ever on the other party. One day Letitia or Leslie, one of them, picked up the phone and wanted to call someone and they said, "mommy somebody's talking on our phone and they're not talking to us". I quick called the phone company and said, are there any private phones?

Brenda Velasco: Right, because you had two daughters and phones are essential to daughters.

Barbara Ciocci: Oh, definitely. I had even forgotten that I had a two party line. Nobody was ever on the other phone so we didn't think about it.

Brenda Velasco: So this goes back to the '50s then.

Barbara Ciocci: Yes.

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

Brenda Velasco: Do you want to say Avenel because you resettled there and you got married and built a house right on Mereline Avenue.

Barbara Ciocci: I thought it was a nice place to live. People were friendly, and I say were, I don't think they're that friendly at this point and time. It was convenient to the airport and to the trains. Back when I built the house we still had buses.

Brenda Velasco: That was a great bus service.

Barbara Ciocci: Oh Brenda, that was fantastic!

Brenda Velasco: Great bus service for you. It connected you to Rahway and eventually....

Barbara Ciocci: Sure because when I graduated high school I worked in Rahway. So I got the bus at the corner, got off the bus on Main Street in Rahway, walked one block up to Irving, turned right and there was the office. In that office, it was Bower Brooks Company,

they also had the Industrial Building and Loan and the Motor Vehicle Agency for the State because that was back when everybody renewed their driver's license and registrations in the month of March for the whole State.

Brenda Velasco: Oh my Gosh! So you had.....

Barbara Ciocci: From the first day of March until the end of March we had lines up Irving Street in Rahway. People had to renew. I mean, Woodbridge had a Motor Vehicle Agency also at that point in time.

Brenda Velasco: Yes.

Barbara Ciocci: That's what I tell the kids some time, things are a lot different than when.....

Brenda Velasco: They sure are. Did you like Avenel better than Colonia, Iselin or Woodbridge Proper?

Barbara Ciocci: Well, I was so small in Iselin and Colonia. I think I would have liked to stay in Woodbridge Proper because there were a lot of things, like the high school was there and you could walk to the high school and things like that. We had to be bused to the high school because if I had walked from my house in Avenel to the high school I think it just barely made two miles. So they had the school bus go up Avenel Street to St. George Avenue, down St. George Avenue to Grove Avenue down to Barron Avenue High School. Of course we picked up students all along the way but that was what made us eligible for a bus from our section.

Brenda Velasco: Right, because you had to be two miles and it would have taken you a long time to walk especially with the snow or something or the rain. But Woodbridge Proper was the place to be.

Barbara Ciocci: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: For the convenience there.

Barbara Ciocci: Right.

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

Well I remember the cyclone. The Hopelawn section was hit the hardest with the cyclone.

Brenda Velasco: When was this?

Barbara Ciocci: I was living in the Leone Street house then. Well, if I moved to Avenel in '42. It had to be before the last week in '42 between school Christmas vacation. That was when we moved from Woodbridge Proper to Avenel and sometime before that, in the early '40s, the cyclone hit Hopelawn. Houses were off their foundations. Some of them were down the street from where they started out. The whole township had damage but nothing as bad as in Hopelawn. (1941)

Brenda Velasco: Hopelawn got hit bad then?

Barbara Ciocci: Yes, and I remember the train wreck in the '50s.

Brenda Velasco: Yes that was 1951. Were you there?

Barbara Ciocci: No because I had a part time job in Koos Brothers in Rahway and I came home from work and, like you say there weren't cell phones or things like that so nobody called you at work to tell you anything and my family was telling me but it wasn't something that I thought I wanted to go downtown and look at.

Brenda Velasco: No, no. Those who were eyewitnesses said it was not.

Barbara Ciocci: I did not want to go so we didn't go.

Brenda Velasco: We mentioned about World War II your experiences there and though you

were a child you still felt the impact of that.

Barbara Ciocci: Right.

Brenda Velasco: Living in Avenel were you aware of the semi-professional football team at all?

Barbara Ciocci: No.

Brenda Velasco: Okay.

Barbara Ciocci: My father was interested in the football team and things like that because he came from Jersey City so there was a team who played in Jersey City but don't ask me who they were, I don't remember but I was a Brooklyn Dodger fan.

Brenda Velasco: Alright, good.

Barbara Ciocci: I knew batting averages and everything else and when they went to the West Coast I lost my interest in baseball.

Brenda Velasco: Many people in this area.

Barbara Ciocci: Yes and for hockey we always rooted for the Rangers because Jersey didn't have a hockey team. And when my grandson Craig was old enough to like to watch hockey he told us we should root for the Devils because we lived in New Jersey and that they were the Jersey team. So now we root for both the Devils and the Rangers.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, cover all bases.

Barbara Ciocci: Right.

10. What do you like about Woodbridge today?

Well, Woodbridge is still convenient to get to just about any place because we have so many highways going through this section. Of course that's a drawback because that's why we pay high car insurance because they all go through and that goes back to the '50s when I worked and I got out of high school because they sold insurance and even then Woodbridge Township was higher than some of the communities around us because that was before the Turnpike and the Parkway so, you know, Woodbridge still had Route #1 and #9 and #35 and #27. They all went through Woodbridge so we paid extra.

Brenda Velasco: And #440.

Barbara Ciocci: Yes, and #440. I forget about that being considered a highway. I was brought up in the Woodbridge Township school system and I thought it was a good school system. My children did well and my grandchildren have done well. I figure that's a plus.

Brenda Velasco: We could just say that your daughter right now, Tish Coughlin, is the President of.....

Barbara Ciocci: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: What is her proper title, President of the.....

Barbara Ciocci: President of the Council.

Brenda Velasco: President's Council. So the continued connection to and support of the Woodbridge School system.

Barbara Ciocci: And I think the President's Council, I could be wrong you might have to research this I don't know, but I think the President's Council started back in the '60s because I was President of the Keasbey Home School Association and I went to a few meetings of the President's group. I assume that's what it grew out of. My children went to Keasbey school from Avenel because the school.....

Brenda Velasco: Oh, good thing you mentioned it. I'm saying you covered every place you have lived.....

Barbara Ciocci: Because Avenel Street Schools #4 and #5 were not large enough to hold all the Avenel students. The students below Rahway Avenue to the Rahway city line and including the trailer park all went to Keasbey school. For the Avenel Street School they were taken for kindergarten but first grade to sixth grade they went to Keasbey.

Brenda Velasco: That was quite a trip for them.

Barbara Ciocci: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: So that's why you were president of the Keasbey Home School Association.

Barbara Ciocci: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, and what years were they, late '50s or early '60s?

Barbara Ciocci: Letitia was born was '56 and Leslie was born in '58 so figure, she was born in October so she made the cutoff when she was five so that would have been.....

Brenda Velasco: 1961, yes so that's the early '60s that you were there and then you're still involved in Woodbridge Township.

Barbara Ciocci: Oh, definitely. I'm trustee for the Library Board.

Brenda Velasco: And I know you belong to several other organizations too.

Barbara Ciocci: I belong to the Red Hat Society.

Brenda Velasco: That's right.

Barbara Ciocci: I'm Elder in the Presbyterian Church in Avenel.

Brenda Velasco: You're still very active.

Barbara Ciocci: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: Which is great.

Barbara Ciocci: Oh, it's fantastic Brenda! I couldn't fathom sitting at home.

Brenda Velasco: I was lucky to get you to do the interview today with your busy schedule.

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

My daughter Letitia lives in Fords, Letitia and Craig. My daughter Lesley and her husband Greg they live in Iselin. My granddaughter, Stephanie, is married. She lives in Woodbridge Proper.

Brenda Velasco: You've got quite a few bases covered here.

Barbara Ciocci: Right, and my granddaughter, Laura, has her own apartment and she lives in Woodbridge Proper also. She lives in Barron's Gate.

Brenda Velasco: Not too far. That's great.

Barbara Ciocci: That's about it.

Brenda Velasco: Okay and I know one of your grandsons is going to NYU.

Barbara Ciocci: Yes is he.

Brenda Velasco: So the Woodbridge School System was very good.

Barbara Ciocci: Definitely.

Brenda Velasco: Is there anything else that you want to include Barbara?

Barbara Ciocci: We said something about discrimination here.

Brenda Velasco: Yes.

Barbara Ciocci: When we lived in Iselin, my father was so ill, there was a black man that did yard work and handy work for people that lived in that area in Iselin and he had done some work for my father at the house and he had a granddaughter my sister's age. He used to take her swimming and he asked my mother and dad if he would be allowed to take us because she came to our house a couple of time when he was working on it and

they played well together. So he took us three girls because my brother wasn't born then and this swimming place he took us to became Mirror Lake, it was a swim club at one time.

Brenda Velasco: In Edison?

Barbara Ciocci: Yes, and out of respect my parents had us call him, for no other reason, Uncle Fred when he was at the house doing work. So we would go to the swimming place and we would refer to him as Uncle Fred. I thought nothing of this. He took us several times in the summer. Then one day these boys and girls came up to us and said, "how come you call him Uncle Fred"? He is black and you're white and we said, because he's a very good friend. We didn't feel any prejudice in our family so we said because he was a good friend. When we came home he said to my mother, "your children are no problem but", he said, I cannot take them anymore because he heard the children ask us and he said "I will not put them in danger or harms way" and that was our first introduction to discrimination. That's true I mean, we didn't think anything of getting in the car with Uncle Fred.

Brenda Velasco: He was a good person and you had an invitation.

Barbara Ciocci: And my father was sick and couldn't drive at that point in time and my mother never drove, so that was a good day for us.

Brenda Velasco: An eye opening experience.

Barbara Ciocci: Oh, definitely.

Brenda Velasco: Especially with your blonde hair.

Barbara Ciocci: Well, I had red hair then. My older sister and I had red hair and my middle sister had blonde hair like my father because my mother was a redhead.

Brenda Velasco: Well, I thank you very much for spending this time.

Barbara Ciocci: You're welcome, no problem Brenda.

Brenda Velasco: As I said, this will go into the oral history archives of the future museum as well as the Main Library and it will have a written transcript in both instances. So I thank you again. It was quite a pleasure.

Barbara Ciocci: You're welcome. When do they expect the museum or whatever?

Brenda Velasco: We're working on it. We're hoping the museum will be on Main Street in that area. We're looking at a couple of sites and also negotiating to get grants to defer the cost but with the economy and this downtime everything is on hold. But I thank you very much.

Barbara Ciocci: You're welcome Brenda, no problem.