

Oral History Interview
Elizabeth Fishinger Kozub
WH015
(written transcript and digital audio)

On August 29, 2008, Elizabeth Fishinger Kozub was interviewed at the Main Library by Brenda Velasco.

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

My name is Elizabeth Fishinger Kozub. I grew up on Mawbey Street, Woodbridge Proper. I was born September 5, 1931.

2. How long have you lived in Woodbridge?

I have lived in Woodbridge all my life.

Brenda Velasco: Alright, so that's about almost 77 years.

Elizabeth Kozub: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: So you've seen a lot of changes then.

Elizabeth Kozub: Many.

3. Why did your family originally move to Woodbridge?

My grandfather had family in Iselin. There was a farm there and they spent the summers at the farm. In fact, my mother often told me she delivered milk with a horse and buggy on Oak Tree Road. He liked the area so they bought the house on Mawbey Street in 1922.

Brenda Velasco: Where did your grandfather come from before that that he liked Iselin?

Elizabeth Kozub: Well he lived in Yonkers, New York, and his wife passed away and left him with small children so that's why he brought the children to Iselin to be with the relatives and then instead of commuting all the time he decided to live in the Woodbridge area.

Brenda Velasco: So Iselin was very rural at the time you're talking about?

Elizabeth Kozub: Yes, they had a farm there. Actually ever one on Mawbey Street had cows and chickens and each house had a huge piece of land along side of it where they grew every vegetable that you can imagine.

Brenda Velasco: So it was like a green acres then going back to the 1930s. It was quite rural back then.

Elizabeth Kozub: Actually Mawbey Street was a dirt road at that time.

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

Well it has just built up so much now compared to what it was then. Streets were cut troughs where there were fields, schools were built and lots more traffic. The Woodbridge Train Station used to be at ground level and after the big accident they elevated it. The post office, of course, moved. The library was on Barron Avenue (Barron Arts Center now).

Brenda Velasco: And did you go to the Barron Library when you were that young?

Elizabeth Kozub: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: And right now you're being interviewed in the Woodbridge Main Library, so this is quite a contrast to when you were growing up.

Elizabeth Kozub: It sure is, right.

Brenda Velasco: How about houses of worship?

Elizabeth Kozub: A lot of them are still here. In fact, when I go for walks, even the houses of the streets I walk down, I think gee when I was a little kid these houses were here and they're still maintained so well. St James, of course, has changed but many of the other churches, the white church and then there's one, I think it's the Trinity Church, they've all stayed the same.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, how about the synagogues, were they here?

Elizabeth Kozub: No, just the one on Amboy Avenue which is no longer a synagogue (former Adath Israel).

Brenda Velasco: Okay, so that came in later?

Elizabeth Kozub: Yea.

Brenda Velasco: How about the stores, we missed out on the stores?

Elizabeth Kozub: Oh, yea. We really didn't have to leave town. Main Street just had about everything. A men's store, a big children's store, a shoe store, and we had two department stores.

Brenda Velasco: And what were they?

Elizabeth Kozub: Christensen's and Chopper's and they were really department stores. They sold like linens and in fact I was into knitting and they had yarn and knitting needles and it was just a true department store.

Brenda Velasco: Did they sell furniture too?

Elizabeth Kozub: No that I think they didn't.

Brenda Velasco: Alright, so a lot has changed on Main Street then?

Elizabeth Kozub: Definitely.

Brenda Velasco: Was Main Street where you did most of your shopping?

Elizabeth Kozub: Yes, in fact on Sundays that was our entertainment. We'd go, what they called, window shopping. The families would walk down along Main Street and then our parents would meet other parents and they would chit chat and the kids would play. It was the social event on Sundays to go window shopping. Then we'd stop at Publix. They had a soda fountain then, Publix Drug Store, and we'd go in for a soda.

Brenda Velasco: What stores were open then on a Sunday?

Elizabeth Kozub: Nothing.

Brenda Velasco: Nothing, was Publix open on a Sunday, because that was a pharmacy?

Elizabeth Kozub: It may have been, yea. In fact, the stores were closed Wednesday half day.

Brenda Velasco: Wow!

Elizabeth Kozub: And everything closed at 5:00 P.M. and we all seemed to manage.

Brenda Velasco: You're right. I remember back then too. Did your mother work then?

Elizabeth Kozub: That was during the Depression time. My mother worked in the Night Craft which was behind where, what funeral home is that down Green Street?

Brenda Velasco: Costello's

Elizabeth Kozub: Well behind there, there's a little street and that was called the Night Craft. They made pajamas and nightgowns and my mother was the speedy folder. She always showed me how they folded them up to put in boxes.

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

We kind of went into that already.

Brenda Velasco: Yes, we did. How about the firehouse?

Elizabeth Kozub: That's a new firehouse but I don't remember really when it was built.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, and how about the parks? Did you have parks at all?

Elizabeth Kozub: Well, there are the parks that are still there like down by School Street.

Brenda Velasco: Woodbridge Park?

Elizabeth Kozub: And where the lake is. They were about the only parks. There were none of these where the kids play now.

Brenda Velasco: No equipment then?

Elizabeth Kozub: No, no. You walked down and looked at the lake. Actually in the winter, when it froze, we ice skated on it.

Brenda Velasco: What school did you attend there?

Elizabeth Kozub: School #1 which is now the Administration Building. Actually, my mother went there too.

Brenda Velasco: Wow, so you had two generations then. Two generations attended School #1. Then where did you go to high school?

Elizabeth Kozub: Barron Avenue which is now the middle school and my grandson is going there now and I went there and I said it looks the same. In fact, we're having our 60th year class reunion next month.

Brenda Velasco: Terrific, and where is it being held?

Elizabeth Kozub: At the Forge.

Brenda Velasco: Good, so it's local then?

Elizabeth Kozub: Right.

Brenda Velasco: When you went to School #1, what grades did you attend then? Was there a kindergarten?

Elizabeth Kozub: 1 to 4. No, nobody went to kindergarten; we went right, five years old, into full day 1st grade.

Brenda Velasco: And then that went up to?

Elizabeth Kozub: 4th grade.

Brenda Velasco: Up to 4th grade.

Elizabeth Kozub: And then we went to what was School #11. I think they call it Ross Street now.

Brenda Velasco: Yes.

Elizabeth Kozub: And that was 5th, 6th, 7th and 8th. Then we went to Barron Avenue; that was the high school. We were the first ones to graduate in the new, what was new then, the school wasn't built yet but the stadium or the field.

Brenda Velasco: Oh, so you were the first to graduate in the field?

Elizabeth Kozub: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: Okay and I imagine you have a lot to talk about when you have your 60th class reunion.

Elizabeth Kozub: Right.

Brenda Velasco: And you can mention that your grandson is now going to the Middle School which was your high school back then.

6. *What did you do for recreation?*

Well, actually nobody had cars. Our parents didn't even have cars. Everybody went by bus. But on Saturday afternoons we would go down to the State Theatre to see a movie. In the summer there were a lot of empty fields around so we would just get a group of kids, all ages, boys and girls, and play baseball. They'd send the little kids out in the field to catch the ball and we used to go bike riding to Roosevelt Park.

Brenda Velasco: That's quite a distance.

Elizabeth Kozub: And Route #1 was deserted so we'd ride down Route #1 to Roosevelt Park. But it was just kind of low key things that we did. Our grandparents used to take us blackberry picking in the clay pits which is now the mall.

Brenda Velasco: Do you ever tell your grandson that?

Elizabeth Kozub: Oh, yea. They like to walk around town with me and ask me questions about it.

Brenda Velasco: So this is where you went for the blackberries? You had blackberries in the clay pits?

Elizabeth Kozub: Oh they were really big and juicy blackberries. All the grandmothers would have pails. At that time generations lived together, it was not uncommon to have grandparents live with you, so all the grandmothers would pick a time and all the grandkids would come and we'd all go up to the clay pits. Then the fish man would come on Fridays and the vegetable man would come and we had the bread delivered every morning. We would wake up to fresh bread. A loaf of bread was on the front porch. The milkman would come. Everything was delivered. In fact, they even had peddlers coming with clothes and things.

Brenda Velasco: Quite a difference from today.

Elizabeth Kozub: Oh, very much different.

Brenda Velasco: And that's why you didn't need a car. Now the State Theatre that you talked about was on Main Street?

Elizabeth Kozub: Yea, let's see there's a Quik Check or something like that there where it used to be.

Brenda Velasco: Okay. So Woodbridge Main Street has changed significantly?

Elizabeth Kozub: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: Was the Town Hall still in the same location?

Elizabeth Kozub: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: Anything else that you can think of for recreation?

Elizabeth Kozub: Well at the school there were dances on Friday nights and then, of course, there were, I think, 6 or 7 movies in Perth Amboy so when you got bigger you took a bus into Perth Amboy and Friday nights the stores were open in Perth Amboy so people all went into Perth Amboy. That was the big shopping district.

Brenda Velasco: And you just had to take the bus right on Amboy Avenue there?

Elizabeth Kozub: Right. Now from Mawbey Street there was only, I think, the 48 that came from Rahway but then if we walked down Main Street we had, at the corner of Main Street and Amboy Avenue, there was a #46 that came from Carteret and an #84 which came from that general direction. So you had more choice of buses.

Brenda Velasco: Okay.

Elizabeth Kozub: In fact, Sunday it was usually going to visit relatives and my father's family was from Perth Amboy so we would take the bus because he didn't have a car either. My

grandfather, actually, never never learned how to drive. He rode a bicycle up to the time he died in his '90s.

Brenda Velasco: Maybe it was a little bit healthier then if he could ride a bike till he was 90. Wow! And he lived in Perth Amboy?

Elizabeth Kozub: My husband.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, that's where your husband was from.

Elizabeth Kozub: Yea. Now who are you.....

Brenda Velasco: Okay, the grandfather that rode a bike and lived till he was 90.

Elizabeth Kozub: Well, that was my grandfather that lived on Mawbey Street.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, that was your maternal grandfather?

Elizabeth Kozub: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: Okay. Well you've got a good set of genes there.

Elizabeth Kozub: I hope. In fact, we received a phone call and my daughter-in-law answered the phone and this man said, I'm calling from Hungary, and she thought it was a joke. She said, are you kidding? The man got upset and he said no. Evidently my father's sister, my aunt, is turning 100 on September 28th but she was born here in the United States and for her birthday they wanted a copy of her birth certificate.

Brenda Velasco: Why did she return to Hungary then?

Elizabeth Kozub: Because my grandfather, my father's father, died right after she was born and my grandmother had a couple of little kids, one after the other, and she really didn't know anyone here in the United States so she went back to Europe to be with the family. That was on my father's side.

Brenda Velasco: That was your.....

Elizabeth Kozub: My aunt, my father's sister.

Brenda Velasco: And she's 100 years old and they're celebrating.

Elizabeth Kozub: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: Genes are good. Genes are good.

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

I would say family. The town was very community minded though. When we had parades the whole town would turn out and then they'd give talks and speeches in the park and everyone stayed and sat on the grass and listened and it was very close. Like everybody seemed to know each other.

Brenda Velasco: Now when they had the parades, where did they march down? Main Street?

Elizabeth Kozub: Main Street, yea, and then they'd end up in the park, there's like a monument there and that's where they would set up a platform to give speeches.

Brenda Velasco: You mean the monument on School Street? That park over there?

Elizabeth Kozub: No, not that one, there was one I don't know if it's still there. It's like behind where the synagogue was or in between the Dunkin Donuts and the synagogue.

Brenda Velasco: Yes, that's Woodbridge Park over there right along Heard's Creek.

Elizabeth Kozub: Yea.

Brenda Velasco: That's where they had the speeches.

Elizabeth Kozub: Everybody assembled.

Brenda Velasco: Then when you had the parades, what were the occasions for the parades? Do you recall?

Elizabeth Kozub: Every holiday: Memorial Day, 4th of July.

Brenda Velasco: Did you have a Christmas parade back then?

Elizabeth Kozub: No.

Brenda Velasco: Did you have a Labor Day parade or Veteran's Day parade?

Elizabeth Kozub: Veteran's, yes.

Brenda Velasco: So you had more parades than what we currently have?

Elizabeth Kozub: Yea, that's what I said everybody was very into the community.

Brenda Velasco: And family, we said, was the focal point. How about church? Did you go to a lot of church activities? Did the church play an important role back then?

Elizabeth Kozub: Well, I mean, everybody went to church. We belonged to Mount Caramel, which was a Hungarian church, and they had a lot of their customs: they brought their customs, like grape festivals and things like that. Everybody in the family went. It wasn't just like for adults or for children, it was a family event and they did have a lot of different things to go to.

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

Brenda Velasco: Because you're still there.

Elizabeth Kozub: Same neighborhood.

Brenda Velasco: Yes, you are.

Elizabeth Kozub: Actually my mother grew up on Mawbey Street and I grew up on Mawbey Street and when I got married I moved around the corner to Lincoln Avenue.

Brenda Velasco: You did not move far.

Elizabeth Kozub: You know when I go to the supermarket I meet so many people I went to school with that are still in the area. We really didn't go far.

Brenda Velasco: No.

Elizabeth Kozub: The men were all drafted and, like I said, everybody kind of stayed around. We had split sessions in high school and we liked that because when you were a junior and senior you went in the morning and you were out by 1:00 P.M. Times were pretty rough then so everybody had jobs. We worked in the 5&10. I worked in Security Steel in the office. When I was 16 years old I was a secretary already. Because we had no kindergarten, most of us were graduating at age 16 or 17 so nobody even had a car then. Then our senior prom was in the gym.

Brenda Velasco: It wasn't as expensive as it is now.

Elizabeth Kozub: In fact, people borrowed gowns. No one went out and bought a gown. We didn't go anywhere after the prom because no one had a car.

Brenda Velasco: Did you have a good time?

Elizabeth Kozub: Oh, yea.

Brenda Velasco: That's what matters and you had it on far less money. So you liked growing up in Woodbridge?

Elizabeth Kozub: I didn't see any reason to move out.

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

Everything, everything that you see now has all been built in the time I've been living here.

Brenda Velasco: So you saw some rapid changes then?

Elizabeth Kozub: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: Do you recall any that had an impact on you?

Elizabeth Kozub: Well, the mall. That brought a lot of traffic.

Brenda Velasco: And Turnpike and Parkway.

Elizabeth Kozub: Yea, all that. In fact, when they were building the Turnpike, that's when we had the big train wreck because they had that temporary bridge that was on February 6th, 1951. I remember it was my brother's birthday and we just happened to be driving down Amboy Avenue and we saw all these people walking dazedly on the street and my husband, we weren't married yet then, but he stopped and I was afraid and I said, gee I don't know who these people are and he says, well they look like they need help and he opened the window and the people were saying, could you get us to Perth Amboy because we were just in a train wreck. So we gave some of them a ride.

Brenda Velasco: That was largest train disaster in the United States. Is there anything else that you can think of, the construction? How about the houses? Because you don't have cows and chickens on Mawbey Street, do you? Only kidding.

Elizabeth Kozub: Well the houses on Mawbey Street were knocked down to build the school and actually Church Street didn't go all the way through. Lyman Avenue didn't go all the way through. Church Street was almost the last street up to the railroad tracks and little by little the streets kept getting cut through and the houses being built. In fact, Warr Coal was at the side of the railroad tracks. We used to have coal delivered because we had a coal furnace. In fact, every floor had a stove that they cooked on and used it for heating. The second floor and the first floor each had a stove. My mother would get up early and get the fire going so when I woke up the house would be warm. Then there was a grate in the living room floor where the heat from the furnace would come up but we could only use the living room on weekends. We all stayed in the kitchen during the week. There was a shoot for the men to deliver the coal into the basement.

Brenda Velasco: That's right. And you got the coal from?

Elizabeth Kozub: Warr Coal.

Brenda Velasco: The living room was only used on Sundays.

10. What do you like about Woodbridge today?

I must say, especially the neighborhood I live in, I mean it's like the United Nations now. There are all different ethnic groups there. But it's still like a hometown, little area, because I see young couples walking down the street with their babies in the evening and young kids bike riding up and down the street so, for as busy as the town is, there are still little pockets, I think, that are kind of quiet.

Brenda Velasco: And that's true throughout the township because I've been interviewing so many people and different parts of the township you still have that hometown feeling.

Elizabeth Kozub: Actually on Mawbey Street, there's still a woman living there who grew up with my mother.

Brenda Velasco: Wow!

Elizabeth Kozub: The neighborhood, just in the past couple of years, these older people have been dying but up till then the families that moved in in the '20s stayed there and then when the older people died then the next generation took over the home.

Brenda Velasco: Which means, they liked the neighborhood.

Elizabeth Kozub: Yea.

Brenda Velasco: For economic reasons they may have inherited the house but they liked living in this neighborhood; this neighborhood feeling that I'm finding, so many other people are saying. Now do you still have children?

Elizabeth Kozub: My son lives around the corner from me on Church Street and my grandkids are 5th generation in the neighborhood. Then I also have a son living on Green Street,

Brenda Velasco: So you still have quite a bit of your family living here?

Elizabeth Kozub: Yea, two sons have moved away.

Brenda Velasco: So you have a total of four sons then?

Elizabeth Kozub: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: Two sons remained; two sons moved away.

Elizabeth Kozub: Well it's because of their work primarily.

Brenda Velasco: But if your two sons remained here they must like Woodbridge, too.

Elizabeth Kozub: Well, they were involved with the fire department. In fact, one still is a volunteer fireman. He used to be a fire chief one year.

Brenda Velasco: And which son was that who was the fire chief?

Elizabeth Kozub: Richard, he's still involved as a volunteer. Chris was but he's no longer because of his work. He didn't have the time.

Brenda Velasco: Alright, is there anything else that you'd like to add? Did we miss anything?

Elizabeth Kozub: No, I'm looking at my notes and I think that's about it. I guess I talked enough about things that came up.

Brenda Velasco: I'd love to have a display of those pictures because this is all Mawbey Street, right?

Elizabeth Kozub: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: Alright, maybe once we get the museum going then perhaps we could make copies of these pictures because most people would not believe this was Woodbridge in the 1930s.

Elizabeth Kozub: My one daughter-in-law was a substitute teacher, Mawbey Street, but now she's a regular teacher in another school, but I went to a function and I showed the principal and I said look at this. I told her, I said, I would go talk to the kids and show them these pictures but they didn't seem to be interested. Now here's the old Edison Tower before the other one was built.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, look at those chickens in these pictures from your picture album, my goodness.

Elizabeth Kozub: And the houses are still there.

Brenda Velasco: Well maintained. Well maintained, yea.

Elizabeth Kozub: Yea, that's what I said when I walk down the street, I said, gee now these houses were here already built.

Brenda Velasco: They're older than you.

Elizabeth Kozub: Yea.

Brenda Velasco: And they're still well kept.

Elizabeth Kozub: This is the house that I told you that woman still lives. It's the corner of Lincoln and Mawbey. I was looking for her daughter to see if you could get to talk to her but I haven't seen her around.

Brenda Velasco: If you do see her, you have my card. All they have to do is just call me, okay. My home phone number, if I don't answer the phone right away it's because I'm busy and I will get back to everybody.

Elizabeth Kozub: Yea, the garage is still there and this is the Kunis house but it's not that anymore. That house is still there. Actually, Mawbey Street, where my grandmother's house was, there was like one, two, three, four houses on one side and I think three on the other and then there was nothing till all the way down towards Amboy Avenue. The rest was like open fields and that's where we played.

Brenda Velasco: And that's where the cows went too, probably, to graze.

Elizabeth Kozub: And then down Lyman Avenue too, the houses weren't there, so the cows would graze down there too.

Brenda Velasco: Woodbridge, about 80 years ago, and look at it now. We're one of the largest townships, over 100,000 people. Well, Betty, I thank you for letting me interview you. It's been a pleasure to see Woodbridge when it was with cows and chickens and everything else.

Elizabeth Kozub: It was nice then. I really had a nice childhood. When I see my grandchildren growing up it's a lot different.

Brenda Velasco: I agree. I agree. Thank you again.

Conversation continued after the formal interview as Betty Kozub perused the pamphlet, *Woodbridge Historical Downtown Walking Tour*.

Elizabeth Kozub: We would get a square of ice and we would chip away and put it in the icebox, it was not a refrigerator, it was an icebox. And the Methodist church, that was the same, and the Parsonage, yea. Oh, Tier's Hardware, that was on Main Street and then they moved to School Street. That was a nice old building; the floor creaked when you walked in there. It was a wooden floor. Handerhan's Fish Store, I remember that too. You could get everything you needed in Woodbridge. You didn't have to really go anywhere else. Here's Chopper's Department Store, that's a restaurant now. Oh, that was the 5&10 where Floral Expression is now and then we had a McCrory's too.

Brenda Velasco: So you had two 5&10's then?

Elizabeth Kozub: Yea and we had Acme and A&P on Main Street. The Busy Bee, I remember the Busy Bee butcher shop. There's Publix Pharmacy, it had a soda fountain and a luncheonette. And Christensen's Department Store, their motto was the friendly store and when I talked to some friends we kind of joked about, we got this at the friendly store: that was their motto. That's right, they didn't have running water. My mother said it wasn't till they were grown up that they put the bathroom in the house. There was Alexander's, that was the men's store and children's clothing store, Martin Lawrence Jeweler and there was a shoe store also. 5&10 and A&P. Actually my cousin, Bert Fishinger, his mother-in-law owned the house that they call the Cross Keys Tavern. When we visited them, it really looked like an old Cross Keys Tavern. The Middlesex Hotel, I remember that, and Tassle's College Inn. There was the Woodbridge National Bank, actually my grandfather worked there. He was a handyman there at that time. Oh, there were two like magazine and newspaper stores. One was on one side and one was on the other. Blake's was one. That was on the left hand side and then there was another one and that's where you bought your newspaper and they sold cards and things there and Parnes Bakery and, oh, Jasper's Fruit Market. That was on the corner of Main Street and School Street.

Brenda Velasco: Okay.

Elizabeth Kozub: Jackson & Son. That was across from Jasper's on the other corner. Coca cola was a nickel. Taborowsky's Market. Then on Amboy Avenue, across from Mawbey Street, there was a butcher shop and grocery store and you had to go to the store almost every day because you didn't have the refrigeration.

Brenda Velasco: You didn't have the big supermarkets with the freezer.

Elizabeth Kozub: But I was thinking at age 11 or 12, I was walking down and crossing Amboy Avenue to get a weekday's groceries and then come home. There was Lattanzio's, I had my

picture taken there. In fact, I have it here. No it's in my other album, the picture that Lattanzio took of me. Here's Busch Garden's hotdog stand. Klein's Garden Store, that's where we got the feed.