

Oral History Interview
Judith Elias Vincze Quinn
WH012

(written transcript only)

On June 13, 2008, Judith Elias Vincze Quinn was interviewed by Brenda Velasco in her home at 205 Main Street, Woodbridge at 1:00 P.M.

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

My name is Judith Vincze Quinn and I live on 205 Main Street, Woodbridge Proper, Woodbridge. My date of birth is September 22, 1926 and I was born in Carteret, New Jersey.

2. How long have you lived in Woodbridge?

I've lived in Woodbridge for about fifty-five years. Prior to 1954, I lived in several Middlesex County communities since my father was the pastor at the Hungarian Reformed Church on Pershing Avenue in Carteret and later became the pastor of the Hungarian Reformed Church on Kirkland Place in Perth Amboy when I was two years old. Hungarian was my first language. My father was elected the archdean/archdeacon of the Hungarian Reformed Church in Perth Amboy and all of the United States of America until his death in 1954. Since there was no pension or death benefits, my mother was facing dire financial straits. We had a summer home in Mantoloking but it had no heat.

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

As a result of my father's death I moved to 205 Main Street, Woodbridge to live with my mother, Helen Elias Vincze. This was my grandmother's former house. We were able to purchase it from my grandmother's estate. The Elias family originally moved to Woodbridge in 1898. My grandparents had three daughters and three sons. One son, who was about a year old, died and was buried in the First Presbyterian Cemetery. The Elias' had a house and grocery store on New Street*. My mother used to deliver goods in a horse and carriage. My grandfather Elias built the Knights of Columbus as a residence for his large family. Elias Street, off Green Street, is named for my grandfather. Later the Elias family moved to New Brunswick and started College Town Foods Company. All the Elias children were graduates of Woodbridge High School and are college graduates. Dr. William Elias worked on the development of penicillin with the Wyeth Company in Philadelphia. My mother taught at School # 17 in Colonia and her two sisters were teachers also. I have my mother's diplomas from Elementary School #1 in 1910, Middle School in 1917 and Woodbridge High School in 1921. I also have my mother's college degree from Temple University from 1923.

*There is a bottle of root extract in my cellar from the original Elias store. I also have artifacts from my father's ministry.

The Quinn family also had roots in Woodbridge. The name of Barrington Hadden Quinn is on the main wall in the Post Office. The grandmother of my husband was a member of the DAR. His grandfather was Arthur Quinn of Sewaren, a State senator.

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

The part of Main Street where I live is no longer residential. There are only three residences left with many professional buildings now. People used to walk or take buses. When I first starting working in Perth Amboy as a substitute teacher, I took a bus. For ten years I taught at Campbell School in Metuchen and rode two buses to work: one bus to St. Cecelia's and another bus to Danford Corner. I later taught in School #11 in Woodbridge when my son Charles entered kindergarten. I retired eleven years ago after teaching for thirty-three years. The mom and pop stores were predominate and provided a variety of goods except for an **A&P**. Mr. Dahl was the owner of the 5&10 store. Now the space is occupied by **Eleks Realty**, **CVS** and **Neves Jewelers**. **Christensen's** was a huge store and sold everything-bedding, jewelry, clothing etc. There were several drugstores including **Jackson's Pharmacy** and **Publix Drug Store**. **Platt's** was the stationary store. The **State Theater** was a movie theatre with a candy store nearby. **Lomax** was located on the corner and sold appliances. **Parnes** was the bakery and there was a garden center which was located across from Town Hall. There also was a shoe store, a liquor store, jewelry stores, a book store, **Bernie's Bike Shop**, gift shops, **Vaticano Shoe Repair**, **Handerhahn's Fish Market**, restaurants, beauty shops, etc. In 1940 the **Middlesex Tavern and Hotel** was located on the corner where the karate store is now located. There was a pajama factory, **Slumber Sue**, off Barron Avenue which was owned by the Kaufman family. **Costa's Ice Cream** factory was located on Route #1. Oak Avenue was a Hungarian neighborhood with its own grocery store. There also were Hungarians living in the area and many are buried in the cemetery of the First Presbyterian Church on Rahway Avenue. The Methodist manse had a gift shop. St. James was the newest and biggest church. At the fork by Strawberry Hill there was a park and hot dog stand. There was a **Howard Johnson** on Route #1 which later became the Landmark Inn and was very popular. I would eat there once a week.

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

Main Street had a children's playground at the corner of Amboy Avenue where the gas station was and the Bank of America is. The current **Elek** building was a huge mansion. The maid who used to work there also took care of my mother, Helen, when she became blind. There are no longer dogs at the firehouse on School Street. The dogs used to be buried in the nearby park. When Boots, the fire dog, became tired chasing after fire trucks he would collapse in front of my house at 205 Main Street and wait to be rescued by the firemen.

6. *What did you do for recreation?*

We would have picnics at Varady Grove which was located off Ford Avenue in Fords. On Grandview Avenue there was a farm with milk cows and buttercups. The **State Theatre** was on Main Street where the Quik Chek is today. We had clay pits. There

also was swimming in a pool at the clay pits and two Metuchen teachers drowned there. We purchased our milk from Maple Hill Dairy and the public was able to milk the cows there. There was a children's playground at the corner of Amboy Avenue and Main Street. In more recent times, there are the St. James Fair and the carnivals with elephant rides.

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

The church on Kirkland Place in Perth Amboy. There also were five movie theaters in Perth Amboy; Perth Amboy was a major shopping destination. In Woodbridge there were the shops on Main Street and the **State Theater**.

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

Living on Main Street. I could walk anywhere-post office, doctors, dentists, **Parnes Bakery** etc. All services were within walking distance. Everyone knew everyone.

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

Prior to World War II, my father and I visited Hungary in 1938-1939 where I met my grandmother and other relatives. I witnessed the German troops march into Hungary. While our return was delayed we did not suffer any persecution. I did not return to visit Hungary after World War II since I did not like the changes wrought by the communist regimes. During the Hungarian Revolution of 1956, my father and his parishioners helped with the refugees at Camp Kilmer by finding them new homes and employment. In 1977 lightning came through my driveway, burned my porch, hit a tree and struck the gas main across the street. The whole street had to be evacuated. My house was not burned. (Todd Howell, another interviewee, confirmed this story.)

10. *What do you like about Woodbridge today?*

It has drastically changed; the demographics, streetscape, and volume of traffic. One no longer walks nor does one know everyone now. However, Judith I do love **Wegmans Food Store**.

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

My children, Charles and Alice, live in a mother/daughter house arrangement. Charles is a lawyer and Alice continues the Elias-Quinn tradition of teaching in the Woodbridge School system. There also is Christopher Quinn who lives on Green Street.