

Oral History Interview
Millie Peter Albrecht
WH019

(written transcript and digital audio)

On September 30, 2008, Millie Albrecht was interviewed at the Maple Tree Manor at 1:40 P.M. Due to technical difficulties, some of the responses were not recorded: questions 1-3 and the beginning of question 4. The responses for these questions are based solely on the notes of the interviewer, Brenda Velasco, not the audio.

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

I was born in New York City on October 23, 1911. I will be 97 years old.

2. *How long have you lived in Woodbridge?*

I moved to Avenel in 1939.

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

I was living in Jersey City. There was an article in the paper that they were building homes in Avenel; Master Construction. There would be an open house on Sunday. I went for the open house; the developer had a miniature model house – you would just lift off the cover. They were one story homes with 4 rooms.

The construction company wanted us to purchase a home on Madison but we followed my father-in-law and purchased a home at 10 West Park Avenue near the school. I lived there until I moved to Maple Tree Manor on June 1, 2007.

Maple Tree Manor was built on the site of Maple Tree Tavern which was a meeting place and the hub of politics for Avenel. It was owned by my dear friend, Annie Pichalski. We used to have Easter Egg hunts there. Annie would serve soup and coffee at the political meetings.

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

There were no houses in my area of Avenel just the development when I moved here in 1939. There were 3 houses on Park Avenue and some on Madison Avenue that Master Construction was building. The price for our house was \$2,850 and we paid \$27 per month. This was the end of the Depression. At that time, I worked in Prudential and was paid about \$50 a month. However, I could not be married. When the company found out that I was married, I “was canned”. I then had three boys: 1939, 1941, 1945.

On my side of the underpass, there was an A&P, Butlers Store, post office. There also was a small factory that made baby clothes and employed many Avenel women.

General Dynamics employed many young men in Avenel before 1939.

On the other side of the underpass, there was a new housing section; it was called the college section because the streets were named after colleges.

St. Andrews was a missionary church of St. James. We had to apply to St. James to build. (St. Andrew’s Church celebrated its 50th anniversary in 2007)

George Mroz was a committeeman who lived at the end of Park Avenue. Some man was leaving the assessor's office and my husband was looking for a job (about 1951). George Mroz told my husband to report to work and he did. At the age of 40 my husband was hired and paid \$40 per week. My husband worked in Town Hall as the purchasing agent and also for the Board of Education.

Most of the streets were not paved since there were so few homes. Park Avenue was the only side street paved since there was bus service every hour to Woodbridge and Perth Amboy. Perth Amboy was the hub. The bus fare was 5 cents and 10 cents. We would stop at the Crystal Diner for coffee and a donut.

The Presbyterian Church of Avenel was there. The old school (School #4) was there with a portable trailer. My son started there; one had to be 6 years old to start school. The school went from first grade to eighth grade. The nurse would visit the school once a month to weigh/check babies.

During the Depression I would get my hair done. I would pay \$1.00 for 3 items at Bessy's in Woodbridge: wash, set and manicure.

.....

The library, that land was donated by a man from Avenel, I can't remember his name. He donated the property on Woodbridge Avenue. What was his name now? I can't think of it. (Mr. Labat)

Brenda Velasco: Roughly, what years did this occur, before the war or after World War II?

Millie Albrecht: I'm trying to think now. That library has been here a long, long time.

Brenda Velasco: Was it before St. Andrew's Church was built?

Millie Albrecht: No, I don't.... See before me, before I came here, they had masses in school.

Brenda Velasco: Oh, alright.

Millie Albrecht: Alright, and then, it was shortly after that then, that they built this little church on Avenel Street which was right near the library. Oh, the land was donated by, now it just rushed through my mind, Mr., sounds like a French name. (Mr. Labat)

Brenda Velasco: We'll come back to that. You might recall it later.

Millie Albrecht: Okay.

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

Brenda Velasco: How about the firehouse then?

Millie Albrecht: The firehouse was just a small firehouse.

Brenda Velasco: And that was on Route #1?

Millie Albrecht: Right there where it is now.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, but that already existed before 1939 when you moved here?

Millie Albrecht: That was already here and we used to have a siren with a number and we had a piece of paper where the different numbers, 3 longs and 2 shorts would be at this street and so and so, you know what I mean, and it was all volunteer.

Brenda Velasco: Predominantly, it's still volunteer.

Millie Albrecht: Oh yes, oh yes.

Brenda Velasco: Avenel has had a good long tradition of volunteerism at the firehouse.

Millie Albrecht: Then we had the first aid squad. (Avenel Colonia First Aid) My husband belonged to it and my younger son belonged to the first aid. The first aid did not have a place for their ambulance so they had somebody's garage on Park Avenue, on the other side of Center Street, and that's where that was housed.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, so that's where the ambulance was, but where was the actual station, where it is now on Avenel Street?

Millie Albrecht: Yes, after they moved from Park Avenue they acquired that land. How they got that land, I don't know, but that's where they built their first aid building.

Brenda Velasco: Okay.

Millie Albrecht: But was a big two car garage which housed the ambulance, on Park Avenue.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, and did you have Avenel Park designated as.....

Millie Albrecht: Avenel Park was there, and you know in the center of Avenel Park, they have, oh, what would you call it now, they have water in it.

Brenda Velasco: Like a fountain of some sort?

Millie Albrecht: Yes, and they would allow the children to go swimming there because I used to take my boys down there to go swimming. Well, not swimming, they'd go wading, you know, and stuff like that.

Brenda Velasco: I don't think they have that there anymore.

Millie Albrecht: I don't think it's there neither.

Brenda Velasco: No.

Millie Albrecht: No.

Brenda Velasco: That was great then for a new family moving in.

Millie Albrecht: Very nice.

6. What did you do for recreation?

Well, recreation? I was on my own. There was nothing here as far as recreation went, but we did have like, we'd started the Women's Club, we had that for many years.

Brenda Velasco: Was this the Avenel Women's Club?

Millie Albrecht: The Avenel Women's Club. It's not in existence now. Of course, then we had, like, a rosary (Altar Rosary Society) from the church and the men had the Holy Name. Then, of course, you had friends. We used to play cards a lot. We'd go to each other's homes once a week, you know, play cards, which they don't do anymore. People are much too busy for that.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, so the men had the Holy Name Society, though, but this is out of St. Andrew's.

Millie Albrecht: That's right.

Brenda Velasco: And, what did the children do?

Millie Albrecht: That's a good question. The children really had it hard because there really was no place for them to go. Now, where St. Andrew's is now, that was a big vacant lot, okay, and they used to have a ballpark there, and they'd play ball. The Presbyterian people, they allowed their kids to come in and they had things for them to do during the day.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, the First Presbyterian of Avenel had things to do.

Millie Albrecht: Right, but, how many times Father Egan would call me. At that time, you know, we were not supposed to go into any other church. Father Egan would say, Mildred do you know where your boys are? I said, yes, they're up at the Presbyterian Church playing basketball. He'd say, get them home. You know how kids are, they wanted to be with other kids

and that's the way it was. But this happened two or three times a week that he would call me. You know where the children are? You know where the boys are? I'd say, I know father and he'd say, get them home. So that's how things were and, you know, often times I think now, when we walk into the new church, how hard it was for us people who were here to get that started. Nobody ever thinks of how hard we had it or what we had to do to get it started to get a building fund.

Brenda Velasco: And what did you have to do because you were busy raising money for it. That was costly.

Millie Albrecht: That's right.

Brenda Velasco: Yes.

Millie Albrecht: That's right.

Brenda Velasco: What were some of the things that you did?

Millie Albrecht: Well, the rosary society, during Lent, we'd make clam chowder on Fridays and sell that for the building fund. In the wintertime, when we had ice and snow, we'd go up here to Burnet Street, where the hill is down to Rahway Avenue, and we'd have sleighing parties. We'd charge them a quarter a night to go up and down the hills. Just, you know, to make money and then, years ago, my son, Bud, was quite an accomplished little pianist and we put on variety shows. First we put on minstrels, but we can't use the word minstrels anymore, if you know what I mean, not here, because we had colored people. But we did put on a variety show for three years and the money we got from that went into the building fund.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, and what instrument did you son, Bud, play?

Millie Albrecht: Piano.

Brenda Velasco: Ah, he has talent then.

Millie Albrecht: Oh yes.

Brenda Velasco: And that involved you and your husband too?

Millie Albrecht: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, how many other people did those variety shows?

Millie Albrecht: Oh, it involved the rosary people. But my husband and myself and the boys, we were the main ones, but they checked it out and Buddy played for them. We had a very good turnout, very good.

Brenda Velasco: Alright, and that all went into the building fund.

Millie Albrecht: That's right.

Brenda Velasco: For St. Andrew's. Do you recall how much it cost to build that church?

Millie Albrecht: I have no idea. We just celebrated our 50th anniversary.

Brenda Velasco: Wow!

Millie Albrecht: The church and they often wonder, with the people going in, do they often think what we had to do to get that money to build the new church, you know.

Brenda Velasco: Yes.

Millie Albrecht: But it was all for the good.

Brenda Velasco: It brought the community together, too.

Millie Albrecht: Sure.

Brenda Velasco: You knew a lot of people.

Millie Albrecht: Oh, yes.

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

Brenda Velasco: The hub of your community

Millie Albrecht: When?

Brenda Velasco: When you first here. It was Maple Tree.

Millie Albrecht: That was the hub.

Brenda Velasco: Maple Tree Tavern under Annie Pichalski. Also, would you say the church, St. Andrew's Church?

Millie Albrecht: That was it.

Brenda Velasco: Yes.

Millie Albrecht: You know you pioneer and there's nothing here. Whatever is here you gotta make.

Brenda Velasco: And you made it.

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

In the beginning?

Brenda Velasco: Yes.

Millie Albrecht: Well, I was so busy and very happy to have the house. You know, it was a small little house and what not. My husband worked in New York and he worked over on Maiden Lane, he was a jeweler. It was for a jeweler, I should say. Then it got so bad with the Depression that he had to get a second job and after he finished that then he would have to go over and he got himself a job with the United Food Company maintaining their books and stuff like that, you know. So there's a lot repercussions to what's happening now. I feel sorry for the people because they don't realize what's in store for them.

Brenda Velasco: No, you grew up having it difficult and we'll have to see what happens with the stock market tanking yesterday. Alright, so the Depression impacted you?

Millie Albrecht: The what?

Brenda Velasco: The Depression of the 1930s had an influence on you.

Millie Albrecht: Oh, definitely, definitely, sure. Well, you see our rent was \$27.00 a month mortgage and we paid \$2,850.00 for the house and my father always said, never have your income less than what your rent is. You know. Then there was a time when I was working part-time in Security Steel in the cafeteria. Security Steel had this cafeteria that they gave food for their employees but they paid, you know, and what not. That was the big thing here, in Avenel.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, and Security Steel is where General Dynamics.

Millie Albrecht: We called that the Security Steel.

Brenda Velasco: Okay.

Millie Albrecht: And as far as entertainment, we had to make our own entertainment.

Brenda Velasco: You had a good time doing it though.

Millie Albrecht: This is just a little anecdote, but when I first moved here with Bill, I came in from Jersey City, he was 6 months old, with the moving van and I brought my bird with me. So it was me and the baby and the bird in the front seat of the moving van. When we got here, the house was supposed to be occupied on June 1st, well, there was no way. They were just varnishing the floors and there was no way you could get in. So around the corner from us was a little Dry Good store right on Park Avenue and Avenel Street and her name was Kuzmiak, I don't know if you ever heard of the name. He was a big tall huxter. You know what a huxter is?

Brenda Velasco: Oh, yes.

Millie Albrecht: Okay and he'd go round with his truck to the different people and he'd sell stuff but she had a small Dry Good store. I didn't know what to do with my baby. I couldn't get in the house and he had to have his bottles and what not. So I went around her, I never met the

woman before with the baby, and I told her my story and she said you bring your baby here. Imagine doing this today, you bring your baby here, bring me the diapers and his formula and I'll give it to him.

Brenda Velasco: Wow!

Millie Albrecht: She wouldn't do that today.

Brenda Velasco: No, and she helped you then?

Millie Albrecht: Oh, dear, sure.

Brenda Velasco: That was very, very nice.

Millie Albrecht: But you would never leave your baby today.

Brenda Velasco: No, no, no, no. So when did you eventually get into the house?

Millie Albrecht: Well, then my mother and father-in-law moved into their house and it was about two weeks later. It dried, you know what I mean, but couldn't move your furniture around and stuff like that, you know.

Brenda Velasco: Right.

Millie Albrecht: We didn't have any gas. I had to go next door to my mother-in-law's house to heat up the baby's bottles in the morning. It was tough.

Brenda Velasco: So your in-laws lived right next door to you?

Millie Albrecht: We lived at 10, they lived at 8, which is a very bad thing to do to, live next door to your mother-in-law.

Brenda Velasco: That can be a problem. That can be a problem. But you liked Avenel?

Millie Albrecht: Oh, I like Avenel, oh sure.

Brenda Velasco: You still are living here.

Millie Albrecht: I'm still here.

Brenda Velasco: You're still here.

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

The train wreck

Brenda Velasco: Oh, okay. Were you able.....

Millie Albrecht: I didn't go but my father-in-law and my husband were there and my husband was working with the team; it was he and Mayor Greiner worked together.

Brenda Velasco: Alright, now your husband, you said, was he the Purchasing Agent at the time?

Millie Albrecht: No, not at the time.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, but he was on the First Aid Squad.

Millie Albrecht: First Aid.

Brenda Velasco: So he was on the Avenel First Aid Squad.

Millie Albrecht: I might have been working at the Town Hall then because I started when I was 40 years old so that would have made it 1951. I don't know when the train wreck was.

Brenda Velasco: 1951.

Millie Albrecht: Okay, then, that's it. Oh, yea, that was quite a tragedy.

Brenda Velasco: And how long did your husband help out with the train wreck? Was it a few hours or was it the whole evening.

Millie Albrecht: I was working in Town Hall when we had the train wreck. They worked all night long climbing in and out of windows trying to get to the people. Now in Town Hall the Committee Room was right across from our office, I was in the Assessor's Office, and we had all

the dead bodies in the Community Room, right opposite the Town Hall, you know, in the Town Hall, opposite our office. It was a very, very touching scene.

Brenda Velasco: Yes, that was the largest number of people who died from a train wreck.

Millie Albrecht: Oh, God.

Brenda Velasco: And how long were they there, those bodies in Town Hall?

Millie Albrecht: Oh, I don't remember. Not too long. But people had to come in and identify them.

Brenda Velasco: Oh, yes.

Millie Albrecht: That was the first thing. I don't remember that. They couldn't be there too long because other than that, you know, the Board of Health came in and what not.

Brenda Velasco: So that was in the Council Chambers then?

Millie Albrecht: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: Yes.

Millie Albrecht: Oh, yes.

Brenda Velasco: In the old Town Hall.

Millie Albrecht: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, were there any other events that you remember, any other accidents?

Millie Albrecht: No, nothing that would measure up to that. That was the big finale.

Brenda Velasco: That was the big one.

10. What do you like about Woodbridge-Avenel today?

What do I like about it?

Brenda Velasco: Yes.

Millie Albrecht: Well, not being able to drive, I haven't driven since I was 87, and I can't walk with the aid of a walker, I don't get around, so I mean I'm very happy being right here at the Manor. I don't get out much at night or anything like that, you know.

Brenda Velasco: And you like Runi?

Millie Albrecht: I beg your pardon?

Brenda Velasco: You like Runi.

Millie Albrecht: Oh she's a wonderful lady! She runs a tight ship and she's respected. You know and she demands respect because she has a lot of, you know, when you have a position like that you can't do what you want to do. You can't make your friends. People watch every move. Some people can watch every move you make. It's a shame.

Brenda Velasco: Yea, but you've got a great place here.

Millie Albrecht: Oh, I love it.

Brenda Velasco: So, you've come full circle. This was the hub, Maple Tree Tavern, and now Maple Tree Manor, the hub of your life.

Millie Albrecht: Do you know, last year, somebody sent me a birthday card and they addressed it to Mrs. Mildred Albrecht, Maple Tree Manor. I got the letter.

Brenda Velasco: Wow!

Millie Albrecht: I got the card.

Brenda Velasco: Okay.

Millie Albrecht: It just had Maple Tree Manor on it.

Brenda Velasco: And it came, everybody knows where it is.

11. Do you have any family members still living in Woodbridge:

Oh, I got three boys, three lovely daughter-in-laws.

Brenda Velasco: Do they live in Woodbridge?

Millie Albrecht: No.

Brenda Velasco: Nobody lives in Woodbridge anymore?

Millie Albrecht: No, my George works in Hess, he's been there, that's the first job he ever had. He's an electrician there. If it wasn't for George I won't be here because he was the one that pestered me every day and Runi said to me, one day, she said, if the phone rang, she said, and if it's George I'm going to scream. Every day that boy must have called.

Brenda Velasco: And you were living by yourself.

Millie Albrecht: For 18 years I lived on Park Avenue.

Brenda Velasco: Okay.

Millie Albrecht: And my older son lives in Freehold, his name is William and I have, let's see, he has three daughters but they don't have any children. George has one. So I got four grandchildren, three granddaughters and one grandson.

Brenda Velasco: And George has the grandson.

Millie Albrecht: He's got the grandson. He's going to be graduating from college next year.

Brenda Velasco: Oh, how nice,

Millie Albrecht: And if it wasn't for George and Marrell, I wouldn't be here. They went out and bought all my furniture. I never saw it. You know, they fixed it up for me and just the way she left it is the way it is today. But, you know, I keep it up, clean and what not. And Bill lives in Freehold, he's retired. And Buddy lives in North Carolina.

Brenda Velasco: Oh, he went far.

Millie Albrecht: Well, he works for IBM and, you know, IBM stands for I've been moved and when you're 58 years old they don't want you anymore.

Brenda Velasco: No, so you go wherever you can hang on to your job.

Millie Albrecht: So then he was transferred to North Carolina.

Brenda Velasco: Okay.

Millie Albrecht: So he teaches college down there and he just got the man of the year. He was elected the best professor.

Brenda Velasco: Terrific!

Millie Albrecht: For 2008.

Brenda Velasco: And what college does he teach at?

Millie Albrecht: Well, its three community colleges, I don't know the names of them, honey.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, but it's down in North Carolina.

Millie Albrecht: It's in North Carolina.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, well, that concludes our interview.

Millie Albrecht: Well, thank you.

Brenda Velasco: Oh, I thank you and I thank your memory for being so good and mentioning so many of the highlights of Avenel.

Millie Albrecht: That's what I say, I tell people, it's alright to get this age provided you keep your memory.

Brenda Velasco: Well, you sure did. So I thank you, Millie Albrecht, very much.

