

Horace and Mildred Boyd

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Interviewer: Paula Bruno
Transcriber: Jennifer Warren, April 2020

Abstract: Horace Eaton Boyd (1892-1982) and Mildred (Noe) Boyd (1896-1988) met as youngsters at Franklin School and were married many years later on January 22, 1949. Both are buried at Hillside Cemetery in Metuchen.

Mr. Boyd, the son of Frederick Heman Boyd and Effie Martha (Dawson) Boyd, was born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania and moved to Raritan Township when he was approximately two years old. His parents owned a farm and market along Vineyard Road for several years. Following his education, Mr. Boyd served as a mail carrier for the Metuchen Post Office starting in 1912, and he subsequently enlisted in the United States Army during World War I. When he returned home, he became involved with the Railway Mail Service (RMS) and eventually served as supervisor for the New York City Post Office. Mr. Boyd retired from postal work in 1968. He was a member of the Centenary United Methodist Church, the director of the Metuchen Cemetery Association, and a member of the Middlesex County Barracks 2345, Veterans of World War I. Mr. Boyd was previously married to Anna Kathryn Doering.

Mildred (Noe) Boyd, the daughter of Eugene Grant Noe and Alice E. (Ludlow) Noe, was born and raised at 569 Middlesex Avenue. Her father was a grocery clerk and Ms. Boyd attended Franklin School as a young girl, graduating in 1916. She and her brother, Ralph Noe, worked in the Metuchen National Bank for many years. Ms. Boyd also worked in the Finance Department at the Raritan Arsenal during the Depression. She was a member of the Centenary United Methodist Church, a member of the Golden Age Club, and the treasurer of the Julia T. Roth Council 116, Daughters of America.

In this interview, the Boyds discuss their family background, their job experiences, and their recollections of Metuchen including the tally-ho coach, the trolley, and the ragmen. Mr. Boyd talks extensively about his work as a mail carrier for the Metuchen Post Office during the 1910s, and Mrs. Boyd talks about several of her family heirlooms.

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P. Bruno: Today is January 6, 1978 and this is Paula Bruno and I'll be interviewing Mrs. Mildred (Noe) Boyd and Horace Boyd of Metuchen, New Jersey. [recording paused]

All right, why don't we start a little bit about your family and how they first came to Metuchen.

- M. Boyd:** My grandmother, Nellie [Nancy D. (Vanser) Noe], lived in New Dover [Edison Township]. Her husband [Charles Hall Noe] passed away [in 1871] and after everything was settled, she moved to a house at the end of William Street in Metuchen. And she had three children: my father [Eugene Grant Noe] and a brother [Charles N. Noe] and a sister Bette [Ada (Noe) Woolsey]. She had the house built over on 569 Middlesex Avenue, and she lived there until about 1890 when she moved to Binghamton, New York.
- P. Bruno: And your father stayed in Metuchen?
- M. Boyd:** My father stayed there and he married my mother [Alice E. (Ludlow) Noe], who was living with her family on South Main Street, Metuchen in 1890. And they both lived in 569 Middlesex Avenue until—I lived there until 1949. Then I was married [to Horace Boyd] then. And then we lived there until 1955. And we lived in that house until 1961. We've been here ever since.
- P. Bruno: Now the house that your father was raised in was the house across from Old Franklin School?
- M. Boyd:** Well, not too far from that.
- P. Bruno: Not too far from there.
- M. Boyd:** Yeah, up this, so the distance of about 200 feet from Pearl Street.
- P. Bruno: And the chair that you're sitting in now was your parents' chair?
- M. Boyd:** This was my parents' chair and they owned it from 1809, and I've kept it in the family ever since.
- P. Bruno: It was anniversary present. Didn't you tell it was an anniversary present?
- M. Boyd:** Well, after she [mother] was married five years, this was a gift from her lady friends.
- P. Bruno: And what about your school life and education?
- M. Boyd:** I was born at 569 Middlesex Avenue. And when I was five years old, I went to the school, which is located at Middlesex Avenue and School Street. And I graduated. You know the new one was built right back of nest and I graduated from that school, the Franklin School, in 1916.
- P. Bruno: Great. Okay, Mr. Boyd, when did you first come to Metuchen?
- H. Boyd:** Well, I was born in Philadelphia [Pennsylvania] in 1892. And my folks [Frederick Heman Boyd and Effie Martha (Dawson) Boyd] moved to Metuchen when I was just a youngster about two years old. And they didn't ride in town, lived in Raritan Township at that time on the Vineyard Road. Well, I grew up there and went to school in Metuchen here as Mildred did. And so we got to know each other for many, many years.
- P. Bruno: Okay, and could you tell me about your work with the RFD [Rural Free Delivery]?

H. Boyd: Oh yes. An odd thing happened when I was in high school, the RFD¹ routes were started here in Metuchen under the postmastership of Mr. Truman Pierson. And there were two routes: Route 1 and Route 2. And I remember the first carriers, one was Peter Kempson and the other was Harold Fisher. And that was around 1909 or 1910. I'm not sure which date. But anyway, this first carrier, Mr. Peter Kempson, I got to know him. He was talking to me one day and wanted to know if I would be his substitute; that is to take over his mail route when he went on vacation and couldn't carry on. And I said, "Why yes, I would." It was something I could do in the summertime. So he said, "All right." So he put my name in and I was made the substitute carrier for his route. And then about a year later, Harold Fisher resigned and Dave Kramer² was appointed carrier. And he kept it for about a year. And then one time, it was getting towards the first of July, he contacted me and wanted to know if I would take over his route when he went on vacation. And I said, "Yes, I would," because I was still a contender as a substitute for both carriers. So he went on the vacation first of July and he never came back because he resigned. He took his vacation, and then he resigned. So I was appointed temporary carrier and then in August, I took the examination and I was appointed the regular carrier on November 1, 1912

P. Bruno: And which route did you have?

H. Boyd: Route 1.

P. Bruno: Route 1. And what area did that cover?

H. Boyd: Well that covered around up through High Street, Prospect Street, Lincoln Highway, the Vineyard Road, the Old Post Road, down through Bonhamtown, the part of South Main Street, and what they call the Sand Hills³. I don't know whether you know anything about the Sand Hills?

P. Bruno: No.

H. Boyd: Well, that's down beyond Raritan Arsenal, and Fords, and [unclear] towards Perth Amboy. And then they would swing around and come back on Amboy Avenue to Metuchen.

P. Bruno: On you used the horse and wagon?

H. Boyd: Horse and wagon for several years. I also used a motorcycle. I had a Harley Davidson motorcycle.

P. Bruno: Wow.

¹ The Rural Free Delivery (RFD) service began in the late nineteenth century to deliver mail directly to rural farm families. Prior to the RFD, those that lived in rural areas had to either pick up mail themselves at remote post offices or had to pay private carriers for delivery.

² David Kramer was the son of Edward Kramer, who owned Kramer's Department Store along Main Street.

³ Sand Hills, also historically known as Ford's Corner, was a small settlement located along King Georges Road in Bonhamtown near the Woodbridge Township boundary line. It was the site of several Revolutionary War battles and was later exploited for its rich clay deposits in the nineteenth century.

H. Boyd: And when in 1916, I bought my first car, a Ford roadster⁴. [laughs] When I used it, it's not on the mail route. And I continued with that until 1917, [when] I went in the Army. You want me to continue with this?

P. Bruno: Yeah, go ahead. [chuckling] We'll get back to Mrs. Boyd a little later.

H. Boyd: Well, I was in the Army a little over a year and a half. And then when I came back, my job was still open to me so I went back for about a year. But then I decided that I didn't want that much longer, so I took the examination for the RMS, which was the Railway Mail Service⁵. And I got an appointment in May of 1920 and at that time, everyone started in what they call a "substitute." I substituted and I ran on the trains from New York to Washington [District of Columbia] three times a week. And I was on that for about six months and then I transferred to New York through the Penn Terminal. And I lived in New York for thirty-eight years in the Penn—that was called the PTS, the Postal Transportation Service.

P. Bruno: And what were your duties? What was your job?

H. Boyd: Well, I started in as what they call a mail clerk at first. And then I worked up; I was supervisor when I retired.

P. Bruno: Great. Okay, what about you, Mrs. Boyd, you told me you worked in the bank?

M. Boyd: For twenty-five years.

P. Bruno: Now this is the National Bank?

M. Boyd: Um-hm, National Bank. The Metuchen National [Bank] at that time, then they changed to National Bank of New Jersey.

P. Bruno: And your brother also worked in the bank?

M. Boyd: He worked there for fifty years. He was manager [unclear].

P. Bruno: And what was his name?

M. Boyd: Ralph F. Noe, N-o-e.

P. Bruno: And did you work in the bank during the Depression?

M. Boyd: No, I didn't. I worked in the Raritan Arsenal in the Finance Department there, and then I was called back to the National Bank.

P. Bruno: What was your job in the bank?

⁴ A roadster is an open two-seat car with sporty appearance.

⁵ Established in 1896, the Railway Mail Service (RMS) was a department of the United States Post Office that carried most of the mail in the United States between 1890 and 1970. The mail was sorted en route by postal clerks aboard a separate car on passenger trains known as the Railway Post Office (RPO). The service was renamed the Postal Transportation Service (PTS) on October 1, 1948. The last railway post office car operated on June 20, 1977.

M. Boyd: I was teller and note teller in charge of the vault.

P. Bruno: Oh wow.

M. Boyd: Safe deposit boxes, and bookkeeper, fixture of different things.

P. Bruno: So you did a lot of—what’s the difference between a note teller and a teller?

M. Boyd: Well, a teller, you cash checks, you take deposits. And the note teller, you take care of notes, papers, notes, keep a record of those when the payments are due, and you take payments on it, you figure out the interest. And I also have to every morning take the morning paper and go through the value of all the [unclear] that people put up for their notes, and it had to have a thirty-three and a third percent margin or they had to be notified to reduce their loans, make larger payments.

P. Bruno: Do you remember anything about script being issued in Metuchen?

M. Boyd: No.

P. Bruno: Oh, somebody mentioned that on one of the tapes that during the Depression they issued script money. I was wondering if you remembered anything about that?

M. Boyd: No. I haven’t anything to do with that. And vacation time, some of my duties were to bounce up to the other banks, if one bank paid more of our money and support out, we had a settlement between the two banks. I was responsible for that vacation time.

P. Bruno: Did you like your work?

M. Boyd: Yes, I liked it. It was nerve-wracking sometimes, but I enjoyed it.

P. Bruno: Okay, let’s get back to Metuchen. Last time I was here, you mentioned a few things and one was the tally-ho coach. Do you want to tell me about that?

M. Boyd: Well, this was a coach with about three seats in it. They had a coachman all dressed up in his regalia and it traveled from New York to Philadelphia. Of course, they had relays and replacements of horses and so forth, but when it was about the outskirts of Metuchen—see Metuchen originally was two miles each way, the area, that was Metuchen boundary line. But when it would get down as far as Menlo Park, we could hear this horn. This fellow sat right alongside of the driver, and he’d blow this horn and that was the tally-ho. And of course, that was a big sight from Metuchen. People would go out to their front yards and see the people going back and forth to Philadelphia.

P. Bruno: And how about the trolley car on Main Street?

M. Boyd: That used to run from Amboy Corner to what we call Benner’s Corner, which is now just before you turn to go to Plainfield [Road]. And Gene O’Hara was the conductor, the motorman, and had several jobs, just a one-man trolley. But he took the place of a taxi sometimes, anybody want to go one side of the town to the

other, and it was always very accommodating, wait for you if he saw you in the distance and was trying to run for the car.

P. Bruno: You told me that he also delivered packages to people.

M. Boyd: Yeah, if somebody, one man under the line wanted something sent to the other, why he'd deliver it for them.

P. Bruno: How about the ragmen?

M. Boyd: Oh yes, that was Philip Manziano [phonetic], and he used to have a horse and cart and he'd ride through the streets and call, "Rags! Rags! Rags!" And he had a string of cow bells on his cart, which he would ring those bells so everybody would know he's passing by.

P. Bruno: How about the story about your mother and how she got one of the bells?

M. Boyd: Yes! She wanted one of the bells one day, so he said, well, he'd let her have one because he had about ten in this string of bells. And he'd pull a rope and he was driving through the town. He'd pull on this rope and that would ring the bells, so [unclear] instead of a barn.

P. Bruno: So in exchange for some rags that she gave him, she got a bell?

M. Boyd: Yeah. Well, not that way. I don't know just how—whether he gave her a bell, I guess, because she was a good customer.

P. Bruno: And he used to wear a coat in the summer?

M. Boyd: In the summertime, one time he came to our back door and she said, "Well Philip, what have you got the overcoat on today for?" He says, "What keeps out the cold, keeps out the heat." So, that was it. [laughs]

P. Bruno: So what are your impressions of Metuchen as a town? Let's start with you, Mr. Boyd. What do you think about it?

H. Boyd: Well, when you go back as far as we do, you remember the town when it was very small, only maybe a couple 1,000. And you walked down Main Street and everybody you saw, you really knew them. And that's the time of day and it was very interesting to run into old friends. After the war, I was away from Metuchen for twenty-three years and although I had friends out here and I used to come out occasionally, I lost track of really a whole generation that grew up in twenty-three-years' time. And it was like a new town when I did come back; I'd come back maybe for a day or two to see my friends and some of my relatives lived around here too. And it didn't seem so cozy as it did when we were youngsters going to school and knowing everybody. Although I will say it's still a friendly town, but you don't meet as many of your old friends. There are more people that you don't know than the ones that you do know.

P. Bruno: How about you, Mrs. Boyd?

- M. Boyd:** Well, I've never lived anyway else but Metuchen, so I've watched it grow from just a low population until several 1,000. But I like it, and I'm satisfied to live here; haven't any idea of moving away.
- P. Bruno: And you keep active today and you belong to the Golden Age Club and the Methodist Church and the Barracks Club?
- M. Boyd:** I'm a member of the Methodist Church since 1917.
- P. Bruno: Mr. Boyd, do you want to tell me about the special lamp that you have? That one over there [pointing to object].
- H. Boyd:** Special what?
- P. Bruno: Yeah. Isn't it a shelf?
- H. Boyd:** Well, that belonged to Mildred.
- P. Bruno: Oh!
- H. Boyd:** She can tell you all about that.
- M. Boyd:** Yes, my mother bought that at an auction sale, which was held where See-More's [TV & Appliance Center] building is right now [at 551 Middlesex Avenue]. And a soldier had that, and he was moving on so he had put that there for sale and my mother bought the shelf. It has a solid brass base, a square base on it about two inches thick, and then [the] shelves [are] brass with a copper band, and then the cup part is where the fixture of the lamp is connected.
- P. Bruno: And how about those bottles that your parents made from the cut glass?
- M. Boyd:** Yes, there [is] a stone jar, and that was covered with putty and allowed to dry just a little while to set. And then before this started, they had been collecting pieces of broken bric-a-brac, all different small pieces and they're each about the size of a half dollar I would say, and of course, with the different colors. The jar was covered with putty, as I say, and then these little pieces of bric-a-brac were placed on it. And that was all allowed to dry. After that was thoroughly dried with pieces of the putty that would appear between each little piece of china, [it] was gilded.
- P. Bruno: They're beautiful.
- M. Boyd:** [unclear mumbling] The clock is near a hundred years old [referring to object in room].
- P. Bruno: The one that's decorated with the tinsel? And that's been handed down through your family?
- M. Boyd:** Yes, um-hm. And also the lamp back there up on top of the—
- P. Bruno: Uh-huh.

M. Boyd: **The large one [pointing to object]; that's very old too. Must be close to a hundred years old. It's china; it's fine china, hand-painted. The other one is pewter-based, and then the oil paintings are some that my father painted. He was quite an artist; he had studied along that line. And this one over here [referring to object in room] is tapestry. [long pause; looking at object] The date of that is 1842.**

P. Bruno: And who did the tapestry?

M. Boyd: **I don't know. That came down through the family also.**

P. Bruno: So was your father a painter by profession?

M. Boyd: **No. He took that up as just pleasure, but he took lessons from an artist that was here in town.**

P. Bruno: Do you remember the artist he took the lessons from? [long pause] Because a lot of people have mentioned the [Charles] Volkmar and the pottery.

H. Boyd: **Oh yes.**

M. Boyd: **Volkmar, yeah. That was pottery here in town too. That was down the end of Middlesex Avenue, across the [Pennsylvania] Railroad on the right-hand side going towards New Brunswick.**

P. Bruno: Okay. Well, I don't have any more questions to ask you. And I'd like to thank both of you very much for doing this for us.

M. Boyd: **You're very welcome. That's all I can think of right now. [laughter]**

[END OF INTERVIEW]