

Elsie Salaki

Date: November 25, 1976
Interviewer: Ruth Terwilliger
Transcriber: Jennifer Warren, March 2022
Editor:

Abstract: Elsie Salaki (1904-) is the daughter of a local baker in the early 1900s.

In this interview, Ms. Salaki describes baker life and reminiscences about Mayor Washington Wilson and Chief of Police George Hutchinson.

Disclaimer: Please note that all oral histories presented by the Metuchen-Edison Historical Society are unaltered. The language, comments, and thoughts contained therein are solely those of the individuals interviewed. Our goal in presenting them is to make the personal recollections of these individuals available, to be considered within both their historical context, and during the time the comments were made, as a part of the historical record. The content and language of these interviews should not in any way be attributed to any of the past, current, or future members of the Metuchen-Edison Historical Society Board of Directors, or to the Metuchen-Edison Historical Society membership as a whole.

R. Terwilliger: [recording begins mid-sentence] ...in Edison, New Jersey with a dear friend, Elsie Salaki, who is going to do an oral taping with me on her life history in Metuchen. Elsie was born in New York City, lived near Central Park, she was born January 17, 1904 and came to Metuchen in 1907.

Today's date is, I might mention here, is November 26th-25th, I'm sorry-1976.
[recording paused]

E. Salaki: [recording begins mid-sentence] ...**I was only three years old, three, a little over three years old, and I remember I could walk and got onto the train and we walked along the street in Metuchen. The train, the station, up in Metuchen was just the same now as it was then.**

R. Terwilliger: Oh really? The same place it was?

E. Salaki: **The same place and the same everything about it.**

R. Terwilliger: But it must have been a steam engine then. Weren't they steam engines?

E. Salaki: **Yes, steam engine. And I remember we went into the bakery, in the bakery alone, we went out the in back, the backyard, and they had a barn there and they had an outhouse. We had to go out-out, outhouse. [laughter]**

R. Terwilliger: Oh my!

E. Salaki: **And there was a big dog. He was as big, was tall as my father. He put his paws on my father's shoulders and his head would be above my father. That's how big he was. Well, I was afraid of the dog and I wouldn't go near him. So [unclear] that was all right, we went upstairs and he saw all of us [unclear] and we settled down.**

And the next morning, like when finally I thought I had gone out walking or something, went out by myself, but they went past the coop, the big dog, and found me in the coop with the big dog.

R. Terwilliger: Oh my goodness, you weren't afraid anymore then.

E. Salaki: I wasn't afraid anymore. [laughter] And I remember that big dog. Oh, we had him for several years and oh, I can remember what fun we had with him. Oh, he was a beautiful big dog.

R. Terwilliger: He was probably big enough to almost ride like a horse.

E. Salaki: I think I could have rode him. [laughter] I think I did two or three times. I think I did get on his back and rode him like a horse. Oh, he was grand.

R. Terwilliger: Elsie, what did your father bake in his bakery shop? Was it more than just bread?

E. Salaki: He baked all kinds of bread and oh, all kinds of cake and little their cake and the little cakes, the little cupcakes with icing on. And then he, he always tried to make things different, different things, to make the thing more attractive. And we were there oh, about ten or twelve years, we lived there. And then we moved.

R. Terwilliger: Well, before we move, I want to ask you more about the bakery shop. Could you tell me what time did your dad's day start? What time did he get up in the morning?

E. Salaki: Oh, he got up at three o'clock in the morning.

R. Terwilliger: [gasp] My gracious. And did your mother work with you?

E. Salaki: My mother worked with him.

R. Terwilliger: And were there things that he had to make yeast, dough, to let the bread rise?

E. Salaki: Oh yes, yes, yes. He made everything. And at that time, there was no wrapping of bread the way they have now. And everything was more or less, everything was out in the open. So you could go in and see the cakes and everything right there. And then the – oh, people would know what time we'd have fresh buns and they'd come in for fresh buns.

R. Terwilliger: What did a loaf of bread cost?

E. Salaki: Oh, about a nickel.

R. Terwilliger: A nickel for a loaf of bread! [laughs] Oh my gracious, that's unbelievable! And you've had steady customers, people who really liked your father's baked good. Do you remember any of their names?

E. Salaki: Oh yes, everybody! Oh, well all the people around us all – the McGuinnesses and the Heartmans and the Hahms and oh – what were their names? And there was butcher shop right across – oh, Wittenburt! Oh, they all came in to the bakery and we bought things and we, woman, the drug store then, was just like

pharmacy now would be – you could go in the drug store if you fell down and hurt yourself, you go in the drug store and get –

R. Terwilliger: Almost like a first aid stop?

E. Salaki: Like a first aid.

R. Terwilliger: Was that Mr. Wernik then too?

E. Salaki: No. It was Mr. Hahm then.

R. Terwilliger: Oh yes, Mr. Hahm, right.

E. Salaki: And I can remember one time we had a washing machine in our place and it was one that you pulled a lever up and you pushed it back and forth and the inside would go around. [laughter] Not by electricity, but by manpower. And I could remember I got my finger caught in there. And that's my finger there.

R. Terwilliger: Oh, you can still see how it bent the bone, really!

E. Salaki: And I went in the drug store and had that fixed up in the drug store right there and never went to a doctor, never went near a doctor with it. But my mother took me over there and he bandaged it up for me, put a little stuff on it, and well it was never any good. Well I can't put my other finger. It's a small one. It's didn't grow the length of the other.

R. Terwilliger: But it didn't impair the use of your hand at all.

E. Salaki: No. It didn't, no.

R. Terwilliger: Now the day started at three o'clock in the morning and the store was open all day?

E. Salaki: All day until about nine o'clock at night. And my mother would – well, my father would go out in the evening. He'd gone out with his boys and he'd have his glass of beer and then he'd like that. And my mother would sit down for a little while after supper, she'd threw an apron up over her head and she'd go to sleep for about a half hour or an hour. And then she'd be wake up and she'd be ready to go again.

R. Terwilliger: Just had that little bit of snooze and she was all ready. But when did she do her housework, Elsie?

E. Salaki: Well, she'd always have relatives in that would the housework. And she didn't do very much housework. She couldn't do it. Well, her sister-in-law came to Metuchen to live and then her sister and her husband came to Metuchen to live and then another sister [unclear] came to live. They all came out to Metuchen. And they all lived in New York then.

R. Terwilliger: Well, when you got older, did you have to help in the bake shop too?

E. Salaki: That was one of the saddest things to ever happen. I was in the eighth grade, ninth grade, I was starting the ninth grade, and my mother said, "You have to come home and help with the bakery."

R. Terwilliger: After school this is? [laughter]

E. Salaki: After school, that was in school and you see my younger sister [unclear] paralysis and she was crippled. Her one leg was crippled and my mother thought that she should have the schooling and she needed it more than I did.

R. Terwilliger: After ninth grade, you had to work full time?

E. Salaki: After ninth grade, I had to work full time. By that time we were in the new building. We moved across the street. I don't know.

R. Terwilliger: Well, that's up near to the railroad then.

E. Salaki: Yeah, right next to the railroad. And they took up our property, took up the whole length of that block.

R. Terwilliger: That block there. It went from Main Street back to Pearl Street, yeah. And that's where Drake's Hardware is now.

E. Salaki: Yes, that's where. Now I saw a picture the other day of Drake's Hardware Store out Metuchen. It was the center of Metuchen where it was taken, both side of the street. And there isn't any barn anymore.

R. Terwilliger: No, that's been taken down, right. Well did you live then over top of that bakery shop also?

10:00

E. Salaki:

R. Terwilliger:

E. Salaki:

R. Terwilliger:

E. Salaki:

E. Salaki:

R. Terwilliger:

E. Salaki:

R. Terwilliger:

E. Salaki:

R. Terwilliger:

E. Salaki:

R. Terwilliger:

E. Salaki:

R. Terwilliger:

E. Salaki:

R. Terwilliger:

E. Salaki:

R. Terwilliger:

E. Salaki:

R. Terwilliger:

E. Salaki:

R. Terwilliger:

E. Salaki:

R. Terwilliger:

E. Salaki:

R. Terwilliger:

E. Salaki:

E. Salaki:

R. Terwilliger:

E. Salaki:

R. Terwilliger:

E. Salaki:

R. Terwilliger:

E. Salaki:

R. Terwilliger:

E. Salaki:

R. Terwilliger:

E. Salaki:

R. Terwilliger:

E. Salaki:

R. Terwilliger:

E. Salaki:

R. Terwilliger:

E. Salaki:

R. Terwilliger:

E. Salaki:

R. Terwilliger:

E. Salaki:

R. Terwilliger:

E. Salaki:

E. Salaki:

R. Terwilliger:

E. Salaki:

R. Terwilliger:

E. Salaki:

R. Terwilliger:

E. Salaki:

R. Terwilliger:

E. Salaki:

R. Terwilliger:

E. Salaki:

R. Terwilliger:

E. Salaki:

R. Terwilliger:

E. Salaki:

R. Terwilliger:

E. Salaki:

R. Terwilliger:

E. Salaki:

R. Terwilliger:

E. Salaki:

R. Terwilliger:

E. Salaki:

E. Salaki:

R. Terwilliger:

E. Salaki:

R. Terwilliger:

E. Salaki:

R. Terwilliger:

E. Salaki:

R. Terwilliger:

E. Salaki:

R. Terwilliger:

E. Salaki:

R. Terwilliger:

E. Salaki:

R. Terwilliger:

E. Salaki:

R. Terwilliger:

E. Salaki:

R. Terwilliger:

E. Salaki:

R. Terwilliger:

E. Salaki:

R. Terwilliger:

E. Salaki:

R. Terwilliger:

E. Salaki:

R. Terwilliger:

E. Salaki:

R. Terwilliger:

E. Salaki:

R. Terwilliger:

E. Salaki:

R. Terwilliger:

E. Salaki:

R. Terwilliger:

E. Salaki:

R. Terwilliger:

E. Salaki:

R. Terwilliger:

E. Salaki:

R. Terwilliger:

E. Salaki:

R. Terwilliger:

E. Salaki:

R. Terwilliger:

E. Salaki:

R. Terwilliger:

E. Salaki:

R. Terwilliger:

E. Salaki:

R. Terwilliger:

E. Salaki:

R. Terwilliger:

E. Salaki:

R. Terwilliger:

E. Salaki:

[END OF INTERVIEW]