

## **Grace Halsey**

Date: July 12, 1994  
Interviewer: Phyllis Boeddinghaus  
Transcriber: Jennifer Warren, June 2020  
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Abstract: Grace Halsey (1901-1997), daughter of James Harvey Halsey and Louise (Edwards) Halsey, was a lifelong resident of Metuchen who was born and raised at 64 Home Street. The property was originally owned by her great-grandfather, who worked as a fruit and produce merchant. Ms. Halsey's father died when she was only six months old and she was raised by her mother in the family home. Her mother, an organist, was a well-known photographer and artist who took photographs of Volkmar Pottery.

After graduating from high school in 1920, Ms. Halsey started working at the Metuchen Public Library as an assistant under the tutelage of Julia Bogert, the head librarian. She also attended summer school at Trenton State College for four years to learn how to be a librarian. Ms. Halsey became head librarian of the Metuchen Public Library in 1946 and she served in that position until 1969. Ms. Halsey, who never married, was also an active member of the First Presbyterian Church and sang in the choir. She is buried at the First Presbyterian Church Cemetery in Metuchen.

In this interview, Ms. Halsey discusses various recollections of her life in Metuchen including her family, her education, her work at the Metuchen Public Library, and her home life at 64 Home Street. The interviewer shares pictures of early Metuchen as Ms. Halsey talks about her memories of airplanes at Hadley Airport, the Robins family, Hillside Inn, sleigh riding and ice skating, the trolley, the Metuchen Post Office, the Lundy family, World War II, the Service Club, and Ruth Eby.

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P. Boeddinghaus: [recording begins mid-sentence] ... is an informal interview of Grace Halsey, a retired librarian who lives on 64 Home Street in Metuchen. And this interview is done under the auspices of the Metuchen-Edison Historical Society by Phyllis Boeddinghaus.  
[recording paused]

The date is July 12, 1994. [recording paused]

Okay, Grace, I'd like you to read that to me, please.

**G. Halsey: I don't remember what planes began to fly over the house, but I do remember running out on the back porch whenever I heard one coming. Once there was an**

**announcement about a plane flying from New York to Washington [DC; District of Columbia] and it was to follow the PRR [Pennsylvania Railroad] down. So we all went over to the cemetery [Old Colonial Cemetery] to see this interesting event. It did fly over the railroad and not very high, so we had a good look at this amazing flight. Later, they started flying mail from Washington up to Hadley Airfield in Edison where the mail was transferred to a truck, which took it to the railroad station in Metuchen and put on a train for New York. All this was a most interesting event, and if one had visitors, we gave them a treat by driving them over to Hadley to see the plane land.**

P. Boeddinghaus: Oh, that is interesting. And I remember going out to Hadley, and my mother—

**G. Halsey: I don't know where Hadley is anymore. It's probably all built up.**

P. Boeddinghaus: Oh yes, it's a shopping center [Middlesex Mall in South Plainfield].

**G. Halsey: Oh, is it?**

P. Boeddinghaus: Yes, and mother was very daring and she used to go up in the small airplane for probably a couple of dollars and have an airplane ride. And then my family would take the children in back of The Pines [at 2085 Lincoln Highway, Edison] and we'd have a pony ride. [laughs] Yeah. Well, I read your other writings. That was very interesting.

**G. Halsey: Mary said that you said something about something I had done while I was in the library and I don't remember a thing about it. What was that?**

P. Boeddinghaus: Well, in the seventies, there was a CETA [Comprehensive Employment Training Act] program and Ruth Terwilliger [head librarian] headed it up. And students from Rutgers [University] and Ruth interviewed local people like Sherwood Mundy, Ruth Eby [Mary Ruth (Burroughs) Eby], Lloyd Grimstead, yourself, Alberta Ross—oh, there's a long list of interesting people that were interviewed. And all of those tapes are downstairs in the Grimstead Room. You don't remember doing that?

**G. Halsey: No.**

P. Boeddinghaus: It's very interesting. You tell some of the same things on the tape as you said here, yeah. You know I had one question about this, and that's where the people stayed when they came from New York? Did they stay at the Robins Hall [at 401 Main Street] or at the Hillside Inn [along Main Street between Highland Avenue and Hillside Avenue]?

**G. Halsey: Well, it was, I think, called Hillside Inn. But it was on Robins Place there. I think it was built by Mr.—do you remember the Robins? Were you here when the Robins lived at—you know where, I was at the library, that big house where the Poandls lived [at 443 Middlesex Avenue]?**

P. Boeddinghaus: Oh yes!

**G. Halsey: That was the Robins house. Mrs. Robins was my great aunt. And she married a man by the name of Robins, and he was the town drunk, more or less. He was always hanging around that firehouse [Eagle Hook & Ladder Company at 398**

**Main Street], the one that was next to the pharmacy [Metuchen Pharmacy at 396 Main Street] there?**

P. Boeddinghaus: Yes.

**G. Halsey:** But he was awfully good-natured. And I'd see him downtown once in a while, he'd say, "Come on, I've got to take you home to lunch with me." And so I'd go over to lunch. He had two or three daughters and they died off, one by one. The last one<sup>1</sup> lived on the top floor there, while the Poandls, after the Poandls bought it. They were awfully good to her. So I think he probably was—he [Nathan Robins] either owned that land or he built the hotel. Now I don't remember which. But I just remember it was quite a good-sized building. And of course, I don't remember the people from New York coming out, but I was told that some of them did. And they came out to the country in the summertime to get away from the New York heat. And finally, that place was—well, I guess they stopped running when I was young because I don't ever remember people being there. But eventually, they tore the whole place down.

P. Boeddinghaus: Because there are pictures of it in the library in the archives, mostly, let's see, on postcard, on a postcard. And I've seen pictures of it.

**G. Halsey:** You know I don't think I knew what was down there. [chuckles] I never bothered with the place. I didn't have time. All I had time to do was to pass out the key to these [unclear] people that came in wanting to go down there, and sort of try to oversee that they weren't walking off with anything.

P. Boeddinghaus: Right. Well, someone made a wonderful collection of postcards of scenes around Metuchen and Edison. And then we have wonderful pictures and Mr. [J. Lloyd] Grimstead left a clause in his will that the historical society would receive all his negatives and pictures. And the relatives did follow through on that. They have them in the Grimstead Room. And it makes for a wonderful collection to be displayed.

Well, as a matter of fact, the historical society is going to do a commemorative calendar. And we were down there picking up some pictures, picking out pictures to see what to use. And it's very confusing because we have a lot of very good ones. I was going to show you a few that we decided on, and maybe you could fill me in on some of them. And one was the Metuchen Golf and Country Club [at 244 Plainfield Road, Edison]. [moving materials] I'll show that to you and see if you can tell me more, where it was located.

**G. Halsey:** Well, that's still there, isn't it?

P. Boeddinghaus: Well, yes. But you know Mrs. Eby told me that, at one point, the Metuchen Country Club was in Metuchen on Middlesex Avenue. Does that ring a bell with you?

**G. Halsey:** No. It's just over the line in Edison.

P. Boeddinghaus: Yeah. Well, that used to be a Metuchen mailing and now it's Edison.

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<sup>1</sup> Ms. Halsey may be referring to Abbey D. Robins. Based on the 1955 Special Telephone Directory, Abbey D. Robins was the only identified member of the Robins family living in Metuchen at 443 Middlesex Avenue.

**G. Halsey: I don't remember what it looked like. I haven't--**

P. Boeddinghaus: Well, we thought we would use this one. It's quite a nice one. [showing picture] And this one is of Daniels Hill. Did you ever sleigh ride there?

**G. Halsey: Don't think so. Where is Daniels Hill?**

P. Boeddinghaus: Oh, Hillside Avenue at top of the hill.

**G. Halsey: Oh yes, yes, I do. At the end of the row of houses there. Yes, I used to go there. But we had hill right up Woodbridge Avenue here that we used to ride down. I never was much on winter sports anyway. It was too darn cold. [laughter]**

P. Boeddinghaus: Too cold, that's right. Let's see what else we have here. [showing postcard] This is a postcard of [Thomas Alva] Edison's home in Menlo Park. See what we are trying to do is get equal number of pictures from Edison and Metuchen to make it balanced [for the calendar].

**G. Halsey: Well, I don't think I was up there. Even after they made kind of a park [Edison State Park] and put the light [Edison Memorial Tower] up there and everything, I never bothered to go up.**

P. Boeddinghaus: Yes. [showing picture] And this is ice skating at Roosevelt Park. Well, there again is the winter sports.

**G. Halsey: Yeah, I can remember going down there. My mother [Louise (Edwards) Halsey] was a beautiful skater, but by the time I walked that far, I was so cold and I never was any good. [Nathan] Howard [Ayers] that lived there on the corner [at 279 Woodbridge Avenue], he used to take me down there and he used to get so provoked with me because I'd get down there and I'd fall down a couple of times and I was ready to come home. [laughter] I never did learn to skate.**

P. Boeddinghaus: [showing picture] And we were thinking of using this one of the YMCA [Young Men's Christian Association at 65 High Street], which is going to undergo a big expansion program. Was the land and the building donated by Mr. [Charles] Edgar [of the Edgar Brothers Clay Company]?

**G. Halsey: Yeah, I think so. He did an awful lot for the town.**

P. Boeddinghaus: Let's see what else we have here. [showing picture] Oh, this is of the [Fugle Hummer Post 65 of the] American Legion. I hope we find a better picture. That one shows too much of the road. That was on Lake Avenue.

**G. Halsey: Yeah. It's still there, isn't it?**

P. Boeddinghaus: It's still there, yes. It's still a meeting place, yes.

[showing picture] Oh, here's a nice scene of Main Street with the trolley car.

**G. Halsey: Oh yes. There used to be a drunken Irishman that piloted that trolley car. And I can still remember him. Just typical beery Irishman, you know. [laughter] But**

**they went back and forth and I don't why they finally gave it up. I guess maybe when automobiles got more prevalent, they decided they didn't need the trolley.**

P. Boeddinghaus: Was that operator, Eugene O'Hare? They say he was so accommodating and he would take bread and butter and milk to the housewives. He'd stop the trolley and go and run in and do some shopping for them.

**G. Halsey: I never heard that.**

P. Boeddinghaus: [showing picture] Oh, this is cute. This is a parade on Main Street, probably on a Memorial Day or Fourth of July. [showing picture] And this one is another scene on Main Street, but featuring the post office.

**G. Halsey: That was when the post office was on the east, west side of Main Street, wasn't it?**

P. Boeddinghaus: It moved around quite a bit, didn't it? It was on the west side; it was on the east side.

**G. Halsey: I think it was about where the Commonwealth Bank [at 407 Main Street] is now. Then they moved over where the taxi stand [at 7 Pennsylvania Avenue] is, and then they built the regular post office [at 360 Main Street].**

P. Boeddinghaus: Yes. You mentioned that in your history of Metuchen, how it moved from time to time.

**G. Halsey: [looking at picture] I don't remember this insurance [company next to post office at 7 Pennsylvania Avenue].**

P. Boeddinghaus: No? [showing picture] And then this, I think you'll remember, this is the Bloomfield estate [along Amboy Avenue in Edison]. And on the other tapes, you mentioned going to parties up at the Bloomfield estate in Clara Barton section by horse and wagon.

**G. Halsey: Mrs. [Anita Irene (Lundy)] Bloomfield's mother was Mrs. [Henriquetta (Hanschid)] Lundy. She lived in a big white house over on Amboy Avenue and we used to gather there, all the invited guests, and then they send the hay wagon up there and we'd all get on and have a hay ride down. And finally, Mrs. Lundy, she had a brother that lived with her, they decided that house was too big so they moved into the white house about the third one down. And then they decided that was too big so there was a barn out in the back, which they moved out and built that very nice house just beyond what was Abbotts [phonetic] and the next one. And the next one is the one they made out of a barn.**

P. Boeddinghaus: Well, you've seen a lot of changes in the neighborhood.

**G. Halsey: Hmm.**

P. Boeddinghaus: You've seen a lot of changes then on your street and in the town.

**G. Halsey: Well, yes. The best change was when Mr. De Forest died and Mr. Ostergaard bought the house and I don't know who built that house on the corner. That was built after he moved out. He died and his daughter—he had two daughters, one of them lived in the second house down here, the other one lived the foot of the street in a lovely brick house [at 211 Amboy Avenue] that they tore down to build**

**that row of apartments or whatever they are down there. So it's been quite a change.**

P. Boeddinghaus: I have one question here I was going to ask you. Where were you on Pearl Harbor Day, December seventh [1942]? And what were you doing?

**G. Halsey: Where was I?**

P. Boeddinghaus: Yeah.

**G. Halsey: Probably at work. I haven't any recollection.**

P. Boeddinghaus: Now wait a minute. Now that was a Sunday, that was a Sunday, December seventh.

**G. Halsey: I have no recollection of it whatsoever.**

P. Boeddinghaus: No, there was snow on the ground. That's what I remember. And everyone was all upset that war [World War II] had been declared. The Japanese had bombed Pearl Harbor. And you have no recollection of that?

**G. Halsey: I suppose not having any immediate family in the Army or in the Navy or anything that—I don't know, the war didn't touch us very much here.**

P. Boeddinghaus: Right. Except that you had to cope then later with the rationing of gasoline.

**G. Halsey: Yeah, I remember that. When I first started working for the library, I used to get my salary in six of paper that my grandmother [Grace (Voorhees) Edwards] could use to buy things with. What do they call them?**

P. Boeddinghaus: Script.

**G. Halsey: Script, yeah.**

P. Boeddinghaus: I used to help my mother [Evelyn Smith] with the rationing books for food, for meat and sugar, and paper items. She'd turn it over to me because she was working in the Raritan Arsenal. And then I would stand in line downtown Metuchen and try and get these items. But perhaps you were working and maybe your mother dealt with having to do that?

**G. Halsey: Well, grandma ran the house. Mother was a photographer, portrait photographer. And she was more moderately busy. And she had a studio in New Brunswick for a time. Now I don't remember if that was before the war or after the war. But she had a studio up opposite where I think it was the [unclear] Theater was across the street.**

P. Boeddinghaus: I'm from New Brunswick, um-hm.

**G. Halsey: And during the war, she was hostess at the Service Club.**

P. Boeddinghaus: Tell me more about that. That's interesting.

**G. Halsey:** Well, that's the house that's still there when—that building on the corner was Campbell and Morris' Grocery Store. And the Morrises lived, Ethel Morris lived on the corner of Main Street and Clinton Avenue [at 8 Clinton Place], I think that is. And the Campbells lived in the house right next to the store [at 267 Amboy Avenue]. And after they moved the store downtown, they sold out and I guess Mr. La Forge bought the store. He had it downtown. The Campbells apparently died out or something. They had a couple of children; I guess they married and moved away. So they may have turned that house into a—what did I say it was?

P. Boeddinghaus: Well, like a retreat or service.

**G. Halsey:** Service, Service Club.

P. Boeddinghaus: Serviceman's Club, yes.

**G. Halsey:** Because first the fellows had to go back and there were no bus services at that time. They had to go back and forth to camp on the trolley. So they could wait there if a trolley came. There was a pool table, I remember, and a room where they could sit, and read, or talk. And as I was saying, my mother was head of it and I could remember, I don't know how many years it was, but she had to spend most of her time over there and so we used to walk over there every night for dinner. She'd get dinner for us over there.

P. Boeddinghaus: And then did she continue with the photography during the day? And she was over there in the evening?

**G. Halsey:** No, I guess she had given that up by that time.

P. Boeddinghaus: That was an interesting profession for a woman in those days.

**G. Halsey:** Well, she was very modern. I don't know how she got interested except that she always was very artistic. And she did all the painting on this wall, on these walls.

P. Boeddinghaus: Oh!

**G. Halsey:** I don't know how she got interested in photography, but she did. She went into New York, took classes with Clarence H. White<sup>2</sup>, who was a quite a famous teacher of photography at that time. I can remember, I don't know how she did it because she never was very strong, but she had this big box camera, you know heavy, she had to carry that, carry her bag with her glass plates in it and a tripod back and forth to New York. I don't know how she did that, but she'd do anything she set her mind to.

P. Boeddinghaus: So then you were raised by your grandmother?

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<sup>2</sup> Clarence Hudson White (1871-1925) was an American photographer, teacher, and founding member of the Photo-Secession movement. Born in Ohio, Mr. White was a self-taught photographer known for his pictorial photographs that captured the spirit and sentimentality of America in the early twentieth century. In 1914, he established the Clarence H. White School of Photography, the first educational institution in America to teach photography as art.

**G. Halsey:** Well, yes. Of course, mother was living here or she'd come home nights. But I didn't start public school until fifth grade. I went to two different private schools. I guess I went to one up where [Robert] Moss' office is now [at 404-406 Main Street], and then Dr. [James Gilbert] Mason's daughter [Irene Mason] before she got—it was before she got back, that was just before because she has children, and she came back from India. Before she went to India as a missionary, she had a private school. Well, I suppose there were a dozen maybe. Edith Kingman was one of them. I remember there was a Trumbull Marshall; he lived up on Hillside Avenue somewhere. He was a [unclear]; oh, he was into mischief. [laughter] And Edith Campbell, she went there for a while. So after that closed down, then I finally was [unclear] had to go to the public school. So I entered the fifth grade.

P. Boeddinghaus: I see. And was that the old Franklin School. Was that at the old Franklin School on New Street and Pearl [Street], around in there?

**G. Halsey:** No.

P. Boeddinghaus: Where was that?

**G. Halsey:** The school that I went to was the building that's still there on Middlesex Avenue opposite the big shopping center there.

P. Boeddinghaus: Oh, yeah. The Borough Improvement League [at 491 Middlesex Avenue].

**G. Halsey:** No, those buildings on Hillside<sup>3</sup> Avenue was the old high school. They tore those down and moved them over on New Street, built this new building<sup>4</sup> [former Metuchen High School], and I guess they turned in to kind of tenements for a while. And then they got so ram shackled they finally tore them down entirely.

P. Boeddinghaus: So then you attended on Middlesex Avenue in that building.

**G. Halsey:** It was new then practically.

P. Boeddinghaus: Yes, yes, um-hm. Because there's terrific pictures downstairs too in the archives of the old wooden building on New and Pearl around in that area.

**G. Halsey:** Well, they were the buildings that they moved over. They were originally where the present—where the school isn't anymore, but where that present building is.

P. Boeddinghaus: I see, uh-huh. They were moved. There was a lot of that in Metuchen that the buildings were moved either to another location or it was switched on the property. And listening to different stories, I gleaned that from the different neighborhoods and so forth. Do you remember much about south end Metuchen? You know where our flower shop [Jack's Flower Shop at 182 Main Street] is? What was down that end?

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<sup>3</sup> Ms. Halsey is mostly likely referring to the school buildings along Middlesex Avenue.

<sup>4</sup> The Old Franklin Schoolhouse (present-day Borough Improvement League building) was constructed ca. 1807 as Metuchen's first school. A larger two-story framed structure was built in 1870 at the corner of Middlesex Avenue and Center Street to replace the original schoolhouse. This building was later moved to New Street to make way for the third Franklin School, a large brick Colonial Revival building, that was constructed in 1907. The third Franklin School was damaged by a fire in 1957 and later converted to a middle school; it was demolished in 1999. In 1958, a new high school was built along Grove Avenue.



**G. Halsey:**           **No, I don't really remember.**

P. Boeddinghaus: It was a small business section, a small business section of stores. I think there was a couple of grocery stores.

**G. Halsey:**           **Well, I don't know when they started because we always used to shop downtown. It was nearer.**

P. Boeddinghaus: I always heard about Mr. [John] Leis' Hardware Store.

**G. Halsey:**           **Mr. who?**

P. Boeddinghaus: Leis. With an "L." Leis, he had a hardware store on South Main Street.

**G. Halsey:**           **I don't remember him.**

P. Boeddinghaus: No. And where our flower shop is, that was an office building (Modern Building Company) and also a grocery store. Now I can't find out much about south end, but maybe it wasn't developed. Maybe there wasn't much.

**G. Halsey:**           **Well, I don't think there really was a lot of private houses along—yeah, it must be Main Street out that way.**

P. Boeddinghaus: And see that was the road to the Raritan Arsenal.

**G. Halsey:**           **Yeah.**

P. Boeddinghaus: And the trolley went down that way to Bonhamtown.

**G. Halsey:**           **Yeah, went down past the Arsenal and then on to New Brunswick.**

P. Boeddinghaus: And so the servicemen that came to the house on Amboy Avenue, they were from Camp Raritan [Raritan Arsenal] and Camp Kilmer?

**G. Halsey:**           **Well, no. Most of them from Camp Raritan. Kilmer was—of course, that was in the opposite direction. It was over in Edison. Matter of fact, I don't remember much about whether—I don't know when that was started originally.**

P. Boeddinghaus: Now, did the Robins, the Robins family, did they have a home on Woodbridge Avenue, along in here?

**G. Halsey:**           **Not that I know of.**

P. Boeddinghaus: They didn't. You think it was the house on Middlesex Avenue?

**G. Halsey:**           **Well, I know it was.**

P. Boeddinghaus: And it was not here on Woodbridge Avenue. I don't know where I got that idea. There are some pictures that show a beautiful garden and a greenhouse and sculptures<sup>5</sup>. And that wasn't along on Woodbridge Avenue here? You know it was on Middlesex Avenue?

**G. Halsey: Well, that would be on—Robins place was on Middlesex Avenue.**

P. Boeddinghaus: Yeah. Oh, then I'm twisted up with that location of where the Robins family lived. I'll have to look at the pictures again. And that house is still there where the Poandls lived [at 443 Middlesex Avenue].

**G. Halsey: Yes, they're still living there.**

P. Boeddinghaus: And that was the Robins place.

**G. Halsey: That was where the Robins lived.**

P. Boeddinghaus: I see, uh-huh. Well, that's interesting because I was twisted up on that, yeah. So when you worked in the library, it moved all different times around town too, didn't it?

**G. Halsey: What happened?**

P. Boeddinghaus: The library. It moved from different places, over the banks and the Borough Hall.

**G. Halsey: Well, I moved. I didn't move the first time. The first time was when they moved from that little house on Hillside Avenue [at southwest corner with Robins Place] to up above what was then the [Metuchen] National Bank [at 404-406 Main Street] where Bob Moss' offices are now. That was, I guess, about the time I graduated from high school. And so Miss [Julia] Bogert [former head librarian] said, "Well, wouldn't you like to come and help me in the library?" So I did, and we moved across the street to the second floor of the Commonwealth Bank [at 407 Main Street]. And then when they built the Borough Hall [at 500 Main Street], they said we could have a second floor there, which was kind of a come down because it was smaller really than the space we had over at the Commonwealth. But of course, we get that rent free. And as I say, when the WPA [Works Progress Administration] started, when they got the new building built [at 480 Middlesex Avenue], and then finally planned an addition to that just about the time I retired [in 1969]. Well, I had planned to retire anyway, but when I found out I was going to be head of a new addition, I thought that was sure time for me to get out. Anyway, I thought whoever was going to follow me should be consulted rather than my doing so.**

**I wanted to do some volunteer work, so I started and I worked for—I don't know how many years—as a volunteer in the medical library over in Muhlenberg [Hospital in Plainfield]. And made a couple of awfully nice friends. The head of**

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<sup>5</sup> Ms. Boeddinghaus is referring to photographs in the archives from the 1880s of the former Robins Park estate at 39 Woodbridge Avenue, which was owned by Wright Robins who built the Robinvale Station along Grove Avenue. The estate was later owned by several noteworthy residents including Frederic Coudert (international lawyer), J. C. McCoy (active with Raritan Copper Works), A. C. Case (partner of Andrew Carnegie), and Abel Hansen (founder of Fords Porcelain Works in Perth Amboy). The estate was demolished in the 1970s to make way for the Irongate Village Condominiums.

**the library there was—names are awful—she still lives in Plainfield. Her husband was connected with Macy’s in New York. And then there was another woman that did volunteer work, and she at one time was head of the nursing school [Muhlenberg Hospital School of Nursing] there. And she and Edna still come over once and a while to see me for fun. But that was very enjoyable. I did that, I guess, for maybe ten years or so. I just went, I don’t know, once or twice a week. I think I went twice a week, and one day I worked in the admitting office running some kind of a machine. And then the other day, I worked in the library—of course that was regular work quite overdue with postcards to the doctors that took books out and didn’t get them back. [laughter] Oh, great. But I remember one very attractive young doctor came in, check the book out one day, and I looked at the card and I said, “You know I hate to tell you this, but I don’t think you are going to be a success as a doctor because your handwriting is too good.” [laughter] You never saw such [unclear] handwriting in your life! They signed out their own books, and when I’d come to write overdues, I’d have the most awful time trying to figure out what some of the names were. But it was fun. I liked it.**

P. Boeddinghaus: Yes. Well, you came to visit me when I was a patient in Muhlenberg in the early eighties. You came to visit me when I was there.

**G. Halsey: Well, that was nice of me. [laughs]**

P. Boeddinghaus: Yes. Well, would you like to hear more about it? You wanted to bring me something, and you said could you bring me some ice cream from the coffee shop? And I said, “Yes, that would be wonderful.” And you brought me a nice container of vanilla ice cream.

**G. Halsey: Oh yes! I do remember something about that.**

P. Boeddinghaus: And you sat with me while I ate it. And it was very delicious and it was very refreshing! And I thought that was very nice that you took the time out from your duties.

**G. Halsey: Speaking of ice cream, I’ve got some of those little Carvel ice cream things. Would you eat one?**

P. Boeddinghaus: Sure. Would you?

**G. Halsey: Sure.**

P. Boeddinghaus: Yes.

**G. Halsey: After I get up, I can move. But getting up is sort of a chore. Would you like to see the rest of the house?**

P. Boeddinghaus: Yes. I’m just going to turn this off. [recording paused]

**G. Halsey: [recording begins mid-sentence] ... this for here is—**

P. Boeddinghaus: Yes, yes.

**G. Halsey:** Started out as a soprano and ended up as an alto. [laughs]

P. Boeddinghaus: Oh. [laughs] Yeah, I'm friendly with Lenoir Stewart, Lenoir Applegate Stewart. She still sings in the choir, and very active in the church.

**G. Halsey:** Of course, I don't get to church anymore. I kept going as long as I could walk that far and then got so it was too far to walk. There was no point in driving because you could never find a place to park. So I finally decided that I'd give it up going to church.

P. Boeddinghaus: Is Rev. [Robert] Beringer [of the First Presbyterian Church] come to see you? Does the minister come to see you then?

**G. Halsey:** Well, no. He left, I think, before I stopped going to church. But Mr. Beringer has been very nice to me. I'm very fond of him. I don't know anybody that doesn't like him. I've never heard any adverse comments.

P. Boeddinghaus: Well, you always speak about your mother and your grandmother. Was your father [James Harvey Halsey] in the service?

**G. Halsey:** My father?

P. Boeddinghaus: Yes.

**G. Halsey:** He died when I was about six months old.

P. Boeddinghaus: Oh my goodness!

**G. Halsey:** From TB [tuberculosis].

P. Boeddinghaus: Oh! That was hard on your mother then to have a young child?

**G. Halsey:** She did everything she could to support us.

P. Boeddinghaus: So then this was your grandfather's house?

**G. Halsey:** My great-grandfather's farmhouse. I wouldn't be a bit surprised if this house [at 64 Home Street] and that house next door [at 56 Home Street] were built at the same time because you walk in the front hall over there and without this room on the side, it's just the rooms are laid out about the same. And of course, I don't know when they added this room and two bedrooms up above, but it's been that way as long as I can remember.

P. Boeddinghaus: Because in your writing too, you mention that the house started out as a basement and then was gradually added on.

**G. Halsey:** Yeah, the dumbwaiter must have come out up there in the corner where the [unclear] closet is. It's a very comfortable house, and I would like to end my days here.

P. Boeddinghaus: Yes. Well, it is. It has the high ceilings and it's comfortable and cool.

**G. Halsey:** The picture there is the house before the front porch was taken off. It used to have a porch all the way across the front.

P. Boeddinghaus: Well, you mentioned that. And I see it's gone now, uh-huh.

**G. Halsey:** Yeah. And I was out the other day, suppose I had been to the doctor's, I don't where else. But when Barbara brought me home, there were two ladies standing out in front of the house, and Ida was just seeing them out when I got out of—one of them was Edna Ayers. And we of course grew up together. She lived on [104] Hillside Avenue there, I think in the house where—I can't think of his name anymore—used to be the undertaker's daughter, I think, lives there now. So here was Edna and some friend—I don't remember now where she said she was living, but this friend had driven her over—she had been over to look at her old house. “Oh,” she said, “she's taken the front porch off!” “Well,” I said, “that happened a long, long time ago.” It was never satisfactory when the sun was there in the afternoon when you wanted to sit out there.

P. Boeddinghaus: That's right.

**G. Halsey:** So they just decided to do away with it, built that little porch in the back, which is nice if you like it. I was never sit out there; it was more comfortable sit in the house.

P. Boeddinghaus: Yes. Well, that's right. That's the western exposure. You have the late afternoon sun beating in, and that's the east and south. You might get a breeze from the south.

**G. Halsey:** Yeah. I had a man here yesterday who trimmed all the shrubbery. And I said, “I don't understand,” and I said, “these rhododendrons on both sides of the front of the house are planted at the same time. Those grew beautifully; all the ones on this side died off, and I had to have them replaced. And of course, now they don't match.” And he said, “Well, rhododendrons like shade.” And he said, “I suppose that's the one. The ones on that side got the shade from that big tree in the front.” So they did very well. And the others, I hate the lopsided effect. [chuckles] I still think [not] much you can do about it.

P. Boeddinghaus: It looks like you have a new front walk too when I came in.

**G. Halsey:** Yes. I can't remember why. I guess maybe the roots of the trees have made the sidewalk come up so I have that—a colored man, I don't know if he still does, but at that time he did that sort of work. He came, did a very nice job.

P. Boeddinghaus: Yes, it's very nice. Well, you keep your home in very good order, very good condition.

**G. Halsey:** Well, I tried to. I had the trim painted last year. It cost me over \$4,000. The painter was two or three doors up, he's awfully nice. Anytime anything goes wrong, I call him. He comes down, fixes things up for me.

P. Boeddinghaus: Yeah, Mr. [Edward] Legenza [at 40 Home Street].

**G. Halsey:** Legenza, yeah.

P. Boeddinghaus: Yes. He's going to paint the Borough Improvement League building also this summer. They gave him the contract because they are trying to keep that building restored.

**G. Halsey: Of course, I hope they will.**

P. Boeddinghaus: Yes. Well, the interior has been completely restored back to like the original walls and different [unclear], chandeliers for instance, and keeping with the era when it was built. And now the fundraisers are to paint the exterior and they hired Mr. Legenza to do that work this summer. It's a very active group that tries to keep that building going because it's really very quaint, very attractive.

**G. Halsey: Well, it's a shame to let those old places fall into disrepair, but I don't know.**

**[phone ringing] Excuse me.**

P. Boeddinghaus: Yeah, sure.

**G. Halsey: [talking on phone] Hello. No, she hasn't come back yet.**

**[speaking to interviewer] She gets more calls. It's the second one this afternoon. I hope to heaven she isn't planning on leaving me because I-**

P. Boeddinghaus: She lives in? She lives here with you?

**G. Halsey: Yes. She's had an awful lot. I don't know whether she's got a second job somewhere or what. But she has been going to school too. She was trying to get her high school certificate, but she's about the third or fourth person that I've had and by far the nicest. But she certainly doesn't have to work very hard for her money. I mean she keeps the place clean and picked up and it doesn't get too dirty. She's been working out in the yard last two or three mornings at the tree out there. The bark peels off. It's the dirtiest tree; I hate it.**

P. Boeddinghaus: Well, she has a nice place to live. And I'm sure she appreciates it.

**G. Halsey: I think she comes from Plainfield. That is that's where she lived when she started to work over here. And I hope she'll stay with me.**

P. Boeddinghaus: Yes, because that's important. If you have somebody in—if she's here all night, especially during the night, she's here.

**G. Halsey: Yeah. But I mean as far as taking care of me outside of getting the meals, I don't require any nursing help. But you never know, you get to be ninety-two, what you're going to need next? [chuckles]**

P. Boeddinghaus: You might like to know that I visit Mrs. Eby up in the nursing home. Ruth Eby. She's still living; she's in the Reformed Church Home in Irvington. And I have an impairment, as I keep saying, about my vision. So I don't drive out of Metuchen. So I have to wait for my husband Jack [Boeddinghaus] to take me or somebody. I have to prevail upon other people to take me. But she's still so sharp, and she used to love to use the library. She read extensively.

**G. Halsey: She must be almost one hundred, isn't she?**

P. Boeddinghaus: Well, she's ninety-eight. She turned ninety-eight in March.

**G. Halsey: Well, I pray three or four times a day that I won't live much longer. I mean this business of living to be ninety-eight or a hundred, that's for the birds.**

P. Boeddinghaus: Yeah. Well, she has her moments too. She's kind of surprised when she wakes up in the morning, but she's still living. And she has some sort of episodes or something, she doesn't feel too good, but she seems to come out of it. She's very well taken care of. And she realizes she's in a good place because all of her daughters have passed away.

**G. Halsey: [offhand comment] Does your [unclear] squeak?**

P. Boeddinghaus: Well, once in a while, yeah.

**G. Halsey: You have it turned up too high.**

P. Boeddinghaus: Yeah. I was saying all of her daughters have passed away. And she has some grandsons and granddaughters that come to visit her. But she has such vivid memories of growing up in Metuchen too on Middlesex Avenue. And she does writings also. She writes about her family, which included the Mook family, which is long-time Metuchen people. And her father [Edward Allen Burroughs], who built a lot of buildings in Metuchen, [and] her brother [Edward Allen Burroughs Jr.], who had the pharmacy.

**G. Halsey: I remember Mr. Burroughs. One of my teachers finally married him.**

P. Boeddinghaus: Now, was that the pharmacist you are speaking about?

**G. Halsey: Yeah.**

P. Boeddinghaus: Um-hm, yeah. And he was very nice and took very good care of his customers. And he had the Western Union [Telegraph] Agency. You mentioned that in your writings too. And then after he gave up the Western Union, we had it at the flower shop.

**G. Halsey: Oh, did you?**

P. Boeddinghaus: Yeah, we delivered the telegrams.

**G. Halsey: I don't know where it is now.**

P. Boeddinghaus: Now, I think they took it back because you see if you made any money on it, then right away, they took the accounts away from you and did it themselves out of New Brunswick. Now, we've been in business forty-six years now on South Main Street.

**G. Halsey: Oh, it's impossible.**

P. Boeddinghaus: I know. Jack's still going strong. He's very ambitious and he loves his work. Well, I appreciate you letting me chat with you and have it on tape.

**G. Halsey: Well, it's been nice to have you. I'm so glad you came.**

P. Boeddinghaus: And thank you for the ice cream. It's very delicious.

**G. Halsey: If there's anything more that you think of, well just call me up.**

P. Boeddinghaus: Or if you just write it down like you did. That's great if you put it into writing.

**G. Halsey: Well, as I say, I think I thought about everything so far.**

P. Boeddinghaus: Yes. So you enjoyed growing up in this area I take it from your writings and from the way you speak about—

**G. Halsey: Well, I was always horrified at the thoughts of moving away. My mother, she would have picked up and moved somewhere if she had the opportunity. But I never liked change, and I was perfectly content to stay right here.**

P. Boeddinghaus: Well, there is something nice about being known. And if you walk downtown and somebody waves or toots the horn and you meet people that you—

**G. Halsey: When I used to go down, I knew everybody I saw. But now I go down, I don't see anybody. Once in a while when I used to go shopping, they'd be in the store and somebody would come up and speak to me. They used to come to the library and I would have no more idea of who they were than a man on the moon. But I used to be remembered.**

P. Boeddinghaus: Yes. I was going to mention this, I'm on the board too of 35 Lincoln Avenue, the [Metuchen] Senior Citizen Apartments. And it makes me very pleased that there are a lot of local people who lived there and have such a lovely place to live. And maybe you remember Margaret Ross? She was once school nurse? And her father built a lot of houses around Metuchen. And Mrs. [Mary] Gianvito whose husband [Mario Gianvito] had Mario's Bar & Grill downtown.

**G. Halsey: I remember the name, but—**

P. Boeddinghaus: She's in the Lincoln Avenue Apartments. Well, I look at the doorbells. I recognize all the different names. And it makes me feel good that they (ladies) have such a nice place to live. And I say ladies because there are only twelve men out of 122 apartments. So you see that the women live longer. And I plan to interview some of those ladies also.

Well, I really appreciate you talking to me today. And I'm going to put your writings in the— [recording ends]

[END OF INTERVIEW]