

## **Ruth Mook**

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Interviewer: Ruth Terwilliger  
Transcribers: Janena Benjamin, 2004 and Laura Cabbage-Draper, March 2021  
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Abstract: Ruth Weir (Raeder) Mook (1887-1978), the daughter of John W. Raeder and Elizabeth B. Draper, was born and raised as one of six children in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania. Her father was a bookbinder who owned a bindery and printing business that he lost after unionization in 1907. Ms. Mook, a geologist, graduated from Wellesley College with a bachelor's and master's degree in science education. She also studied at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). Ms. Mook served as a faculty member at Barnard College in New York City where she met her husband, Dr. Charles Craig Mook (1887-1966), who was a geology professor and the associate director of vertebrate paleontology at the American Museum of Natural History. They married in 1914 and had three daughters: Gertrude, Ruth, and Caryl. The Mooks moved to Metuchen in 1919 where they permanently settled at the former Stagecoach Inn at 231 East Chestnut Avenue. The historic building was demolished in 2004.

Ms. Mook also served as president of the Borough Improvement League (BIL) from 1934 to 1936, president of the Metuchen Board of Education from 1928 to 1930, and was a founding member of the Metuchen Girl Scout Council. She was also active in several local volunteer organizations and the New Jersey Federation of Women's Clubs. She lived in Metuchen for over sixty years, and her final home was the Reformed Church Home in Irvington. She is buried at Hazel Wood Cemetery in Woodbridge.

In this interview, Ms. Mook discusses the Mook and Raeder family histories and growing up in Wilkes-Barre. She talks extensively about her college and graduate school degrees in science and her teaching career. She also reminisces about meeting and marrying Dr. Mook, moving to Metuchen, and living in the house at 231 East Chestnut Avenue. Other topics discussed are motherhood, her involvement with the Reformed Church, local businesses, her children's schooling, working as the president of the Board of Education, and working with the Girl Scouts.

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R. Terwilliger: [recording begins mid-sentence] ... name is Ruth Terwilliger and on today, which is June 5, 1974, I feel very privileged to have this opportunity to interview Mrs. Ruth (Raeder) Mook, who's going to share with us some of her life's memories.

Mrs. Mook, can we start by talking a little bit about the Mook family heritage?

**R. Mook:** The name Mook is a Holland Dutch name and the family, as far as we have traced it back, originated in Holland. In fact, there is a small town in western Holland near the German border, which is called Mookerheide<sup>1</sup>. During the religious wars in Holland, the family migrated to England and it was from England that they came over to America in the early colonial days and settled in New Amsterdam. Dr. Mook's direct descendants, therefore, came out from New York City and settled in Metuchen in the 1880s, I would say. In fact, they lived in a house on Amboy Avenue<sup>2</sup> where the Acme Market now stands.

R. Terwilliger: Cool. I had no idea that you had been in Metuchen, or the Mook family had been in Metuchen, that long.

**R. Mook:** Oh yes, yes.

R. Terwilliger: My thoughts were that you came here perhaps as a young married couple or something like that.

**R. Mook:** Oh no. The Mook family goes back, way back, yes.

R. Terwilliger: Oh, that's beautiful. [laughs]

**R. Mook:** Dr. [Charles Craig] Mook was born here in Metuchen and lived here all of his life except the first five years of our marriage. He lived in the house on [219] Amboy Avenue where Dr. [Meyer] Becker now lives, and that house was built for him—built for his mother by her grandfather, who was a Craig. His mother [Gertrude Martin] came from the Craig family and they also came over in—they were a Scottish family—and they came over in the early 1800s and settled in New York and then came out to Metuchen or this region very early because Dr. Mook's great grandfather, as a boy, lived in a small farmhouse up on the New Durham Road and his ancestors are buried in the old cemetery in Rahway, the real old cemetery there.

R. Terwilliger: Mrs. Mook, did Dr. Mook ever talk about boyhood days in Metuchen?

**R. Mook:** Oh yes, oh yes. He talked about it very much. He had many friends. He, of course, attended the schools here in Metuchen through the eighth grade. There was no high school then in Metuchen, and any boy or girl who wanted to go to high school either had to go to Perth Amboy or New Brunswick. But he was sent to the Rutgers Preparatory School [in Franklin Township]. And some of his best friends were “Duke” Potter (Dr. F. M. Potter) and Jack Connor, who used to live in the big house<sup>3</sup> up in Woodwild Park, which is no longer there, Lloyd Grimstead, and many other boys of that group. They had great fun together and he often talked about the things that they did. They had a club, which met up in

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<sup>1</sup> According to the *History of the Mook Family* by Walter R. Mook, the Mook ancestors resided in the town of Mook along the Meuse River at the eastern border of Holland near Germany. The Mooks can be traced back to 1456 in Holland. It is believed that the Mooks migrated to England following the Battle of Mookerheide in 1574 during the Dutch War of Independence between Spanish and Dutch forces.

<sup>2</sup> The William Mook house was located along the south side of Amboy Avenue, east of Pierson Avenue, across from the present-day Redfield Village Apartments. The house later burned down.

<sup>3</sup> The Connor house was formerly located at 279 East Chestnut Avenue.

**the barn on Jack Connor's--on Connor property--and that barn is now the house where the Ferraras live [at 295 East Chestnut Avenue].**

R. Terwilliger: Oh my goodness, yes. Someone did mention it at one time that that was a carriage house.

**R. Mook: Yes, it was a carriage house. They had a club and they used to meet up there. And they had wonderful times with this club.**

R. Terwilliger: Oh, that's wonderful. I was thinking of something when you mentioned his boyhood days. What did his father do?

**R. Mook: His father [Charles O. Mook] was with The Travelers Insurance Company and he died quite young<sup>4</sup>. In fact, Dr. Mook was seventeen years old when his father died and he was then in his third year at Rutgers Preparatory School. But the family was left in rather modest circumstances and he felt that he had to go to work. He had planned to make his life work as a musician. He played the piano very well, he taught piano, but the organ was his real love. But he continued with his music, but he went to New York and worked in a broker's office and he worked for a cement company. But he soon realized that the business world was not for him. In the meantime, his Grandmother Mook [Mary Ann (Telfer) Mook] had died and left him a small amount of money. And he had become very much interested in geology and this came about through his music because he played the organ in one of the churches in New Brunswick. That was one of his jobs; Sunday he would play the organ.**

**Of course, he went to Rutgers Prep and he had become acquainted with the curator in the geology museum there on the old campus [of Rutgers University]. And they became very great friends and he would let Dr. Mook come in there and browse around through the files and things of that sort. So when his mother died, he decided, much against his mother's wishes, to give up the business world and go to college. And he, you see, had not finished Rutgers [Prep]; he had no high school diploma. So he went to summer school and then he took admission examinations and was accepted at Rutgers<sup>5</sup>. By this time, he was about twenty years old. And he was accepted and he graduated in three years with honors and, of course, with the idea of going on in geology. By the time he had finished his undergraduate work, he had become well acquainted down at the American Museum of Natural History [in New York City] and he was hired by Professor Henry [Fairfield] Osborn, who was the president of the museum at that time and also a world-renowned paleontologist. And he was hired as his assistant and that was the first job that he had. And he stayed on at Columbia [University in New York City] and continued for his master's degree and his doctorate.**

R. Terwilliger: What a remarkable man.

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<sup>4</sup> According to the *History of the Mook Family* by Walter R. Mook, Charles O. Mook (1859-1904) was born in New York, and he followed in the footsteps of his brother, Walter Telfer Mook, and joined The Travelers Insurance Company. His career was abbreviated due to his death at the early age of forty-five.

<sup>5</sup> Dr. Charles Craig Mook was accepted to Columbia College in 1909, where he received his bachelor's degree with honors in 1912. He remained at Columbia as a graduate student in the Department of Geology.

**R. Mook:** **And he graduated Phi Beta Kappa and a member of Sigma Xi, which is the honorary scientific society, and it was at Columbia that I met him.**

R. Terwilliger: Oh, I was just going to say that. [laughter] Did he teach at Columbia then too?

**R. Mook:** **He did. Well, during the First World War, he taught—he was drafted, but when they found out what his background was (we were married by that time), they felt that he could be of more service here in this country rather than in the trenches over in Europe. So he had classes of students who were in the military and taught them to read maps, you know topography.**

R. Terwilliger: Yes. This was at Columbia then?

**R. Mook:** **This was at Columbia, yes. But he never actually taught in the department there; that was the only teaching which he did at Columbia. But he taught at Barnard [College in New York City] and he taught at Hunter College [in New York City] and he taught at the Washington Square College of New York University [in New York City]. And of course, all the time, all this time, he was associated with the museum and was doing research work there. And then finally he went to Brooklyn College, which was just being organized. And it had started in an office building down in Court Street, Brooklyn, right in the center, heart of Brooklyn. And then of course, they built the new college out towards Coney Island, end of Brooklyn. For twenty-five years, he organized the department; he was head of the department and professor of geology until his retirement<sup>6</sup>.**

R. Terwilliger: Well, perhaps now we can switch over a little bit. You happened to mention in the middle of this that you married Mr. Mook. Can we go back a little bit to now Ruth Raeder's background and then we'll try to tie this together with how you two met, and I'm sure it will be very interesting. But let's talk a little bit about your heritage now.

**R. Mook:** **Well, my heritage was on my father's side German, on my mother's side British and Scottish, and I am a second generation American. None of my grandparents were born in this country. My German grandparents came over around 1848 when there was great turmoil in Germany and my Scottish and English grandparents came over about the same time. I was born in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, one of six children.**

R. Terwilliger: How did you fall in line now? I'm just interested in that. Of the six children, what number were you?

**R. Mook:** **I was the second of six children, second. I had four brothers, one brother older than I, then myself, then a sister, and then three brothers. And we were a very close-knit family.**

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<sup>6</sup> Charles Craig Mook (1887-1966) was a lifelong student of fossil reptiles, museum curator, teacher of geology and paleontology, and a fellow of The Geological Society of America. He taught at Barnard College (1916-1921), Rutgers University (1921-1925), Hunter College (1921-1925), New York University (1925-1931), and Brooklyn College (1931-1958). He was also professor and chairman of the Department of Geology at Brooklyn College (1936-1958) and associate curator and member of the scientific staff at the American Museum of Natural History (1919-1966). Dr. Mook also wrote and published many scientific papers on subjects in his field.

R. Terwilliger: In Wilkes-Barre, now you were saying.

**R. Mook: In Wilkes-Barre, yes.**

R. Terwilliger: And tell us a little bit about what your father did.

**R. Mook: My father [John W. Raeder] was a bookbinder by trade and he had a fabulous bindery. He learned that as a young boy. His father [Wilhelm Raeder] died when he was eight years old. And he never had any formal education after that. His younger sister was born after his father died. His mother was pregnant at the time his father died, and he was left the oldest of four children. And my grandmother and my father supported that family. And as he grew a little bit older, he learned the book binding trade and then developed a bindery of his own. And he had a really, very interesting, fabulous bindery. Of course, it was all hand binding at that time and I have seen some perfectly beautiful bindings come out from that shop.**

R. Terwilliger: Well, it's an interesting technique. The first time I was exposed to it was when my husband [George Terwilliger, former borough engineer] and I went down to Williamsburg [Virginia] and they had a shop that did hand bookbinding. And I did not realize, I think it gave me a whole new appreciation of handbound books because is an art, a work of art.

**R. Mook: It is, it is. Yes, it is.**

R. Terwilliger: And until you see it done, you do not realize that all of these old books had to be bound in this hand fashion. So go on.

**R. Mook: Then as our family grew, he felt that he had to enlarge his business. So he combined his bindery with a printing business. And he did mostly commercial printing for banks: you know bankbooks, and ledgers, and things of that sort. And he developed quite a large business; in fact, it was the largest business of its kind in northeastern Pennsylvania.**

R. Terwilliger: So he was a very successful businessman.

**R. Mook: Well, he was in every way except financially. [laughter] But he had a large family and we were well taken care of and he was a very generous person. And I can say that in every way, except financially, he was successful. Then the Panic of 1907 [financial crisis] came, and then his shop became unionized because it was at that time that the unions were being pushed. And he fought unionization as long as he could because he had a group of workers who were very devoted and loyal to him and they weren't interested in belonging to a union. But he couldn't hold it off, back and finally the shop was unionized. And from that time on, it frankly went downhill.**

R. Terwilliger: What kind of pressures did the unions put on him at that time in his binding shop?

**R. Mook: Well, of course, they demanded much higher wages than my father could afford to pay.**

R. Terwilliger: Did he have to hire then union people?

**R. Mook: Well, the people who worked for him had to join the union, of course, yes; he could not. And I can remember my father saying that the day that—then they went on a strike. I can remember my father saying as the workmen passed by his office (men and women that had worked for him for years) with tears in their eyes saying, "Mr. Raeder, we do not want to go out on a strike." But the whole thing just crushed him and so eventually he lost the business.**

R. Terwilliger: Well, this was the beginning then really of the Industrial Revolution?

**R. Mook: Yes, it was, yes. It just crushed him. He had been an independent man. He had worked for everything that he had in every way, in every sense of the word "work." He had lifted himself up by the bootstraps. And he just felt that the union was taking it all away from him, which, of course, in a sense they were.**

R. Terwilliger: They did. And I think just to relate this a little bit even to—I've been doing some reading of Mark Twain and this was the same kind of thing in a different sense that this man felt. That when the Industrial Revolution came about, the innocence of life was taken away; that suddenly we had to be serious about things we were never serious or gave much thought to before. And I think it did put a lot of pressure on a special kind of frontier man.

**R. Mook: Well, it did. And of course, it ended up with his having a stroke at the age of sixty-one. And although he lived for nine years after that, he was just gradually going downhill. But he lost his business and that, of course, he never could forget.**

R. Terwilliger: Oh no. To a man, that would be a great deal of punishment. But let's talk a little bit about Ruth Raeder now as a young girl growing up.

**R. Mook: Well, I went through the schools in Wilkes-Barre, through the public schools. I started really in a private kindergarten. It was run by a German woman and I went there for three years. And we studied English and German and we sang songs in English and in German.**

R. Terwilliger: How large of a group was this now?

**R. Mook: It was just a very small group. I really couldn't tell you, but I don't suppose more than ten or twelve. And she had it in her own home, and she had one helper with her. I remember her name was Mrs. Hansen [phonetic] and we had a very happy time. And then at the end of those three years, my father, mother felt that it was time for me to enter public school. So when I went to enter public schools, see, I would have been—I started when I was four years old in kindergarten; I was seven when I left. So I would have been eligible for second grade.**

R. Terwilliger: As the standards go, yes.

**R. Mook: But when they examined me and tested me, they found that I was ready for fourth grade.**

R. Terwilliger: Oh my gracious! At seven years old! [laughter]

**R. Mook:** So I started in fourth grade with a result that I finished high school when I was sixteen.

R. Terwilliger: And you never felt any pressure from this being pushed ahead?

**R. Mook:** No, I never was conscious of it. As I look back now, maybe I did miss things, but I wasn't conscious of it at the time. And I had a wonderful time in high school. I just loved every minute of it and we had a lot of fun. The girls had a society called the Cirrhosis Society [phonetic]. It was sort of like a little literary club and I was very active in that. And I had a large group of good friends and we had a lot of fun. We didn't do too much; the boys and the girls didn't do too much together in those days.

R. Terwilliger: So you didn't feel the social pressure of the difference in age?

**R. Mook:** No, no, no. I didn't feel that at all, not at all. And of course, I had four brothers at home and they had lots of friends. So there always lots of boys around. And the boys in high school, we were good friends, but we didn't do as much partying and going to dances and things of that sort at that time.

R. Terwilliger: As a matter of interest, I just want to slow you down enough to say to me—could I ask you what was a normal day like perhaps when you were in high school? What kind of chores did you have? I'd be interested in knowing what section of town—were you considered in a rural area or in town?

**R. Mook:** Oh no. We were right in the center of Wilkes-Barre.

R. Terwilliger: And when you got up in the morning, did you walk to school?

**R. Mook:** We walked to school and it was a long walk, a long walk, because the school was way off and the high school was way off in the other corner of town. [chuckles] And we walked to school.

R. Terwilliger: Did you have any chores that you had to do every day? Were you responsible for the total functioning of your home in any way?

**R. Mook:** Well, there was never time to do anything before we went to school and our high school was just one session. We started at eight and we got out at one o'clock. And then I would have to come home, of course, and have my dinner. And then I would help my mother around the house, but I never had any special task assigned to me. I would help her with the cooking, I would help with the dishwashing, and help with the cleaning and that sort of thing, the baking all. But I never had any one special task assigned to me. We just assumed that there were certain things that we had to do, we had to contribute on; we did it.

R. Terwilliger: Your mother did all her own baking?

**R. Mook:** Yes, all her own baking. Friday was bake day and she baked practically all day long. And Thursday night, she would get the bread started and I would have to help her with that because she not only baked bread but she baked what we

called zimtkuchen, which is a coffee cake, a raised coffee cake. And she would be on one side of the table and we had great big round tins that you kneaded the bread in. She would be on one side of the table and I would be on the other. She did the bread and I did the zimtkuchen. [laughter] And I wasn't tall enough yet to reach into the pan to do the kneading, so I would have to stand on the stool and knead the bread, and to bake pies and cakes enough to last a week. [laughter]

R. Terwilliger: And how about food preparation now? Of course, we didn't have any refrigerators or maybe icebox.

**R. Mook: We had an icebox.**

R. Terwilliger: And the pan that had to be emptied underneath.

**R. Mook: Emptied, oh yes, yes.**

R. Terwilliger: That was always a great catastrophe if you forgot to empty the pan.

**R. Mook: Yes.**

R. Terwilliger: And what about heating now in your home?

**R. Mook: [coughs] Well, we had a coal furnace. We heat the coals. We were right in anthracite coal district. [coughs] And we had a huge coal furnace, hot air.**

R. Terwilliger: This was the register in the floor now? Not the sophisticated baseboard kind of thing?

**R. Mook: No, in the floor or in the side of the wall just above the baseboard. It varied different places. But every room in the house had a flue leading to it. Mostly they were in the wall, but we had one or two that were in the floor because I remember how nice it was when we came in on a cold winter day to stand on one of those and get warm. [chuckles]**

R. Terwilliger: Yes, let it blow up your clothes.

**R. Mook: But we had a huge coal bin in the cellar (huge, big coal bin), and every fall the coal would be put in for the winter.**

R. Terwilliger: Oh, must have been huge then.

**R. Mook: It was. And we had two bins really (a smaller one and a larger one) because in the furnace we burned large-size coal and then, of course, we cooked with coal in the kitchen. We had a coal range in the kitchen and that we had smaller coal for that. And that we had to carry up in coal scuttles.**

R. Terwilliger: Right, that was probably the boys' chore.

**R. Mook: That was the boys' job, their job to take care of the ashes.**

R. Terwilliger: And you probably had some pretty severe winters out there.



**R. Mook:** Yes, we did.

R. Terwilliger: And you still walked to school in the snow?

**R. Mook:** We still walked to school, and there were no snow days! [laughter]

R. Terwilliger: No, and I'm sure your knees were rosy red by the time you got there.

**R. Mook:** Well, we wore long stockings and we wore long underwear. Yeah, we were dressed for it, yes.

R. Terwilliger: But you do remember enjoying the beautiful winter weather?

**R. Mook:** Oh yes. Oh yes.

R. Terwilliger: I'm sure you were the outdoor type. [laughter] Well, Mrs. Mook, now let's go on to—you're growing up, you finished high school in Wilkes-Barre.

**R. Mook:** Yes, and I met a girl at that time who had moved from Stroudsburg [Pennsylvania]. And she was a year older than I, and the year I was a senior in high school, she had gone to Wellesley [College in Massachusetts]. And when she came home for Christmas vacation, she told me about it and I became utterly fascinated with this story of this wonderful college up in New England. And I began to think seriously, *Oh, if I could only go to college*. And I began talking to my father and mother about this. And of course, this was a totally new experience because to my knowledge no one on either side of my family had ever had a college education, and for a girl to want to go to college! Of course, the boys were going. Lafayette [College in Pennsylvania] and Lehigh [University in Pennsylvania] were the two popular colleges that the boys went to. But a girl going to college, that was really something and they were very skeptical about it.

R. Terwilliger: You were kind of one of the first liberated women then? [laughs]

**R. Mook:** Yes, at least in my family, and really one of the first because very few of my friends went to college. So I persevered though and they saw I was really in earnest, so they [parents] said, all right, I could try it for one year. Well, when I applied, as I graduated from high school at sixteen, I found that I didn't have all of the necessary credits for admission. I had never had any science in high school. See, they didn't require—you took Latin then and you took a modern language, things like that, that were required and I had taken German as my modern language and I didn't have any science. And so, in order to get into Wellesley, I had to take a post-graduate year at high school and I took chemistry, which I immediately fell in love with. And I took the entrance exams and I was finally admitted to Wellesley.

R. Terwilliger: Do you remember the day the letter came?

**R. Mook:** I don't remember the day the letter came, but I remember the day that I went there. My father took me up. And I had applied, I was accepted so late in the summer that I had no place to live. And in those years, all the freshmen lived in the village. There were no dormitories for freshmen on the campus, so they lived

in private homes in the village. And I had been given the name of a woman that might be able to take me in. Well, my father went up with me. We went up on the Fall River boat and then on to Wellesley. And he went out with me and we went to this house and the woman said she was very sorry, but that she did not have a room. But she knew of a woman a few blocks away that she thought still had a vacancy and I might go over there and try. Well, it meant a delay for my father of maybe an hour, and he had planned to catch a train back to Boston [Massachusetts] to get on back home because he didn't want to be away so far. So I said, "Well, it's all right. You go on and get your train and I'll go over to Mrs. Steven's house, and they're pretty sure that they can take me in." So I picked up my suitcase and I walked in one direction, and my father walked in the other direction going to the station. And he told me afterwards that every few steps, he stopped and looked back to see whether I was looking back at him and he watched me until I went around the corner, out of sight, and he said I never looked back once. And he knew then that I was ready and that I would get through the four years, instead of the one year.

R. Terwilliger: Do you remember your thoughts walking in the opposite direction from your father? Just anxious to get on? [laughter]

R. Mook: Oh, I was all really excited, just anxious to get on. So I went to Mrs. Steven's house and she had—there were seven girls all together counting myself who lived—she was a widow and her unmarried daughter lived with her. And she had one double room in which there was only one person which happened to be her niece, and so she said I could have that other half of that room. And the niece came from New Hampshire and her name was Dorothy Hancock. And she was a direct descendant of John Hancock.

R. Terwilliger: Oh, how wonderful for you!

R. Mook: And we never had seen each other before the day we met and we roomed together all four years in college.

R. Terwilliger: Oh dear. And did you keep up a relationship after college?

R. Mook: Oh yes, oh yes, yes, yes. We don't write frequently, but we've been back to reunions and I have visited her. And when I lived up in the big house, she stopped to see me. She had a family of three girls and I had a family of three girls, and she didn't do too much traveling, but we've kept in touch with each other.

R. Terwilliger: Does she still live in New England?

R. Mook: She still lives in New England in the same town where she was born, Franklin, New Hampshire.

R. Terwilliger: Now how did you ever end up then down in Columbia meeting Mr. Mook?

R. Mook: Well, I went to college with the idea of majoring in French and German. I had had German all through high school. And of course, my German grandmother had lived with us until she died, so I had heard German spoken between my grandmother and my father. And I thought I wanted to be a teacher of German. I

had never had any French. In fact, I don't think they gave French in the high school then. German was the language. See this was before the First World War. So when I went to college, I continued my German freshman year and again sophomore year. But there were many required subjects. So I hadn't yet been able to start French. And in my sophomore year then, I was living on the campus; we lived in a small dormitory, Dorothy and I, and there were two girls who had transferred to Wellesley from Grinnell College in Iowa, and they had the room right around the corner from us and we became very close friends.

And one day—we'd go back and forth between each other's rooms—I went in and on the desk, I saw a textbook and it was [Joseph] LeConte's *Elements of Geology* and I just casually picked it up and started to look through it. And the more I looked at it, the more fascinated I became. So when Ethel came back to her room (she was taking this course), I said, "Ethel, is this an interesting subject?" And she said, "It's fascinating." I said, "I have to take this next year." So in my junior year in college, I took the first course in geology, the elementary course in geology. And by the time I graduated my senior year, in the two years, I had taken every course that the department had to offer. Of course, they didn't have a large variety of courses in those days in geology. What woman ever would want a course in geology? But they had a very good department. And I never took any French, and I ended up with majors in sciences because I had taken botany my freshman year in college, and then I took zoology my sophomore year. And then when I started in with geology my senior year, I had nothing but sciences, nothing but sciences.

R. Terwilliger: Isn't that interesting? You really went to the other extreme of what your intention was when you went.

**R. Mook:** So when I hear of parents say, pulling their hair and out of their wits because their boys and girls can't make up their minds what they want to do, I say to them, "It doesn't bother me at all. I went to college fully expecting to be a German and French teacher and I ended up being a geologist."

R. Terwilliger: You know in my own mind, I had only two years of college in a very small woman's college, Trinity College up in Vermont. It was a Catholic college. But my own daughter's experience now after two years of college—she started out as an English major and decided that she would use that, teach elementary teaching. And in this practice teaching that she did this year, she had a relationship with very young children and these were children that had learning disabilities. And believe it or not, through this relationship, she decided that she'd like to have a much closer, meaningful relationship with young children and has decided she would prefer to be a nurse. So this is the very same thing. I think if we allow our exposure to things and there is that interest—as you say, you saw that book lying there on the desk, picked it up casually and actually this probably has a lot to do with your meeting Mr. Mook.

**R. Mook:** It changed my whole life! [laughter] It did, it did. Then my senior year, my father, he had not yet lost his business, but he was really having a very difficult time and I felt that I would just have to try to get something that I could earn some money. And between my junior and senior years, I did work at a shore restaurant down on Fire Island Beach [New York], across Great South Bay from Patchogue. Fire Island Beach in those days was just a beach and this was just a—what do I want to

say? Well, it just accommodated yachting parties, who came there for shore dinners. They had wonderful shore dinners.

R. Terwilliger: Kind of a layover spot?

R. Mook: Well, they didn't even stay. They'd come sailing across the bay, and they would have their dinner. They didn't stay overnight. And then they would sail off to wherever they wanted to go. This was just across the bay from Patchogue, Long Island. And I had an aunt, who lived in Patchogue, and she knew all about this. So I worked there that summer. And that, of course, was a very interesting experience for me because the first time I had ever earned any money. And then during my senior year, the head of the Geology Department, whose name was Elizabeth Fisher [phonetic], said that she needed some help. And she knew that I needed money and she wanted to know whether I would be willing to do some assisting in the department, and of course, I would be paid for it. So the second semester of my senior year, I did work in the Geology Department. And then the year was over and I had applied for a position—I thought I wanted to go down to Arizona—and I had applied for a position down there to teach. But it didn't seem to pan out; and at least, I didn't get any response from them. I had gone home. We were then living up at our summer home, my father had—no, we hadn't lost our home in Wilkes-Barre at that time, but we did have a summer home up in the mountains between Wilkes-Barre and Hazleton on a little lake. And I was very, very upset because I just didn't know what I was going to do when word came from Wellesley that they would like me to come back as a member of the department.

R. Terwilliger: Oh, wonderful. Whew!

R. Mook: So that was, of course, just a gift from heaven! [laughs] So of course, I was thrilled and I went back in the Fall to teach in the department.

R. Terwilliger: And this, you were directly out of college?

R. Mook: Directly out of college. Of course, I was called an assistant, but I did do actual teaching and laboratory work and things of that sort. And I decided to go on for my master's degree. And of course, there were no graduate courses in Wellesley in geology. So in order to get my master's degree, I had to go into Boston to the Massachusetts Institute of Technology [MIT], which was then located in Boston, not in Cambridge, where it is now. So I was given time, of course, and for three years, I commuted into Boston and took my courses there in geology. And at the end of the three years, I received my master's degree from Wellesley, not from MIT, but from Wellesley.

R. Terwilliger: Now may I ask how old were you at this time?

R. Mook: Well, I graduated from college when I was twenty-one. So I would have been three years older. I would have been twenty-four years old.

R. Terwilliger: With a master's degree.

- R. Mook:** With a master's degree. Of course, I could have done it faster if I hadn't been teaching at the same time. Then Miss Fisher [phonetic] thought—I had been at Wellesley for seven years, you see, three years as an undergraduate, and three years as a graduate student—that a change of locale would be good for me.
- R. Terwilliger: This was just a personal interest in you then that she had?
- R. Mook:** Yes. So she tried to find something for me to do. At that time, the head of the Geology Department at Bryn Mawr [College in Pennsylvania] and also at Mt. Holyoke [College in Massachusetts] were women and she asked them if they had any openings, and also at Barnard. All three departments had women as heads of the department. But there didn't seem to be any openings, so I went back to Wilkes-Barre. And I got a job in the high school to teach science, not chemistry, but just general science. So I taught there from September until the first of April.
- R. Terwilliger: Did you find this adjustment difficult from teaching at a college level?
- R. Mook:** Yes, very difficult. Because in college at that time, there was no discipline problem at all. And the girls who were taking geology had elected it. It wasn't a required subject and they were taking it because they wanted to take it.
- R. Terwilliger: Right. There was a sincere interest there.
- R. Mook:** Yes, so there was nothing. It was beautiful teaching really; it was beautiful teaching. Well, along in March, after I'd been in Wilkes-Barre for just those few months, I received a note from the head of the department at Barnard saying that she was herself a graduate at Bryn Mawr, you see, and had studied under the woman at Bryn Mawr. And the Bryn Mawr woman who told the Barnard women about me and so Miss Ogilvy [phonetic], who was the head of the department at Barnard, wrote to me and said that her instructor was leaving as of the first of April and would I be interested in the job? If so, would I come down for an interview? Well, it didn't take me long to get on the train and go down to Columbia. [laughter] And she had a beautiful apartment right there on Claremont Avenue overlooking the Barnard Quadrangle. And I was just petrified really. But anyway, she evidently thought I would answer. And so, she said, "Well, I need you the first of April. Do you think that you can be released from your contract?" And I said, "Well, all I can do is to go home and find out." Mr. Coughlin [phonetic] was superintendent of schools, I had known him for years and his children, and I went to him and explained the situation. I said, "Mr. Coughlin [phonetic], this means a great deal to me. It's the opportunity I've been looking for." And he said, "Well Miss Raeder," he said, "there is no question at all." He said, "We will release you as of the first of April." So the first of April, I came down to Barnard and starting teaching there, and immediately went over to Columbia and starting working towards my doctorate. And it was there that I met Dr. Mook, who was also working for his doctorate at the same time. [laughs]
- R. Terwilliger: Oh, that's wonderful. Can you recall, without trying to appear too personal, the first time you saw Dr. Mook? Did you think he looked interesting?
- R. Mook:** Yes, I can recall. Of course, there were mostly men in the department, students in the department. [laughter] I had a large variety of choices, but I wasn't really

interested in anything of that sort. I was interested in my teaching and in getting my degree, and I was going to make geology my career. I was interested in a career. I can remember he was very shy and I suppose girls today would have said prim. But he had a very attractive personality and I didn't particularly single him out; he singled me out. [laughter]

R. Terwilliger: It was more the other way around.

**R. Mook:** Yes. And he began asking me to go out to dinner with him and things of that sort, and I could see how things were drifting and I was kind of backing off.

R. Terwilliger: Right, you were bent on this career you wanted.

**R. Mook:** I was bent on this career and I didn't want to get involved, but he was very persistent. And so I just told him frankly, I said, "You're a wonderful person and I'm very fond of you as a friend, but I really am not interested in anything serious. Let's just be good friends." But he didn't want it that way. I think he was afraid possibly of the some of the other men that were buzzing around. [laughter] So he finally pinned me down and I said, "Well, all right," because I really did really like him very much. But I didn't really give him an answer. I came home for Christmas vacation and he had gone west on some fieldwork for Professor Osborn, and he was going to stop off at Wilkes-Barre on his way back and spend Christmas. And of course, I had told my parents about this and they were all very skeptical about it. My father, he, you know, someone that he had never seen and knew nothing about and so forth—this was really something terrific. So anyway, he did. I remember going to the station to meet him and we were going to have a little Christmas Eve service at our church and on the way home, we passed a flower shop, florist shop, and he said, "Let's go in and see what they have." And we went in and he found a beautiful bunch of violets, which he bought for me.

R. Terwilliger: Oh my gracious; this was in December!

**R. Mook:** This was in December. Violets in December. So they put them in a box and we went to church and we came home. And when we got home, he gave me the violets and that's was turned me. [laughs]

R. Terwilliger: Oh yes, knowing you, Mrs. Mook, I know that that would really appeal to you.

**R. Mook:** That's what really turned the trick. And so we were engaged.

R. Terwilliger: And I'm sure your family fell in love with him upon meeting him.

**R. Mook:** Oh yes, they were always very fond of him. They never quite understood him because he was really a scholar.

R. Terwilliger: Oh, he was quite an intellect, surely.

**R. Mook:** But they loved him very much. But with it all, he was very practical. And of course, we used to go up to the lake every summer for our vacation and one of Dr. Mook's hobbies was chopping wood. He loved to chop wood!

R. Terwilliger: I remember that.

**R. Mook:** He always used to tease me by saying that it would never do me any good to have him sent to the workhouse for ninety days because if they let him chopping wood, it would be a vacation. [laughter]

R. Terwilliger: He must have had a good sense of humor then too.

**R. Mook:** He did. He had a wonderful sense of humor. And so, he would chop the wood for my mother. We had a fireplace and he did what my own brothers didn't do. They never chopped any wood for her, but Dr. Mook did all the wood chopping and she said many times, she said she didn't know what she would do without him because he kept her warm with wood.

R. Terwilliger: So you were married where?

**R. Mook:** We were married at the lake up in Pennsylvania, a little lake called Nuangola. We were engaged nearly—well, for over two years—before we were married.

R. Terwilliger: And he did get his doctorate?

**R. Mook:** And he got his doctorate. We were married in 1914 just as the First World War broke out, just as the First World War—the news had just come. We were married on the second of September and the news had just come that Germany had gone to war.

R. Terwilliger: Now did this affect his work or your plans?

**R. Mook:** Well, no. We came down to New York and we had—of course, the United States didn't enter the war at first, you see. So I continued teaching and he continued his work because he hadn't yet gotten his doctorate when we were married.

R. Terwilliger: I see. Did you live in New York?

**R. Mook:** We had an apartment in New York up on 129th Street. It was within walking distance of the [Columbia] University, but it was kind of a long walk. And we lived there for just one year. And of course, he was at the museum. And at that time, he spent all of his time there except when he was up at Columbia working on his degree. And I taught at Barnard. And then at the end of the first year, neither of us liked living in New York City. We moved across the river to Palisade, which was up in Grantwood. It was right at the—well, we were within a half of block of the amusement park. And of course, at that time, to get over there you had to go by ferry. And there was a ferry at 125th Street that went from New York over to the foot of the Palisades, and then there was a streetcar that wound its way up along the cliff to the top. And we were just a block from the streetcar. In good weather, we'd walk up there.

R. Terwilliger: It must have been beautiful there at that time.

**R. Mook:** It was. It was lovely. Yes, it was lovely. The front half of the house—we lived in the upper floor of a two-family house and the front half of it was in Palisade and the

**back of the house was in Grantwood. The line ran right through our house, and we lived there until 1919. We lived there four years and by that time, of course, we were in the war. And he was doing this extra teaching of the military students at Columbia, still at the museum, going off in the summertime.**

R. Terwilliger: Someone had made comment, you mentioned about his teaching map reading. But in the First World War, and the soldiers that we sent to Europe to do this fighting, did not have the background that our soldiers had in World War II.

**R. Mook: Well, that was why he had to teach them!**

R. Terwilliger: Right. This is what I thought was so interesting. They could not read maps or read signs in German.

**R. Mook: Yes! Have you ever seen a geologic topographic map?**

R. Terwilliger: Oh yes.

**R. Mook: Well, he would have to teach them how to read those maps and interpret the topography and things of that sort.**

R. Terwilliger: I'm familiar with it only because my husband is a civil engineer and did topography and there's a name for that kind of surveying—it escapes me at the moment—but I know what you're talking about. And this, I thought that was very interesting point. You know I wondered why there was this emphasis on map reading, but that was one of their most serious trainings.

**R. Mook: Yes, it was. And of course, they were going over to France and into country which they had no knowledge of.**

R. Terwilliger: No knowledge of at all.

**R. Mook: You know it was really very important.**

R. Terwilliger: Yes, that they be able to read these maps. So he did play a very important role in the war effort.

**R. Mook: Yes, I feel that he did.**

R. Terwilliger: Even though not being actually involved in any frontline sort of thing. Mrs. Mook, are you getting too tired for us to continue? Can we go on? It's eleven-thirty.

**R. Mook: I can go on until twelve o'clock, if you want to. But I would like to leave then because I have to change my outfit, yes.**

R. Terwilliger: Oh yes. I know you said you have an appointment at one o'clock, so we will keep that.

**R. Mook: But I think I'm saying too much.**

R. Terwilliger: No, you're not! We haven't even completed our first side of the tape yet here.



Well anyway, now we're married. We lived in the Palisades and I would be interested in knowing when you came back to Metuchen.

**R. Mook:** Well, we came back to Metuchen in the Fall of 1919. The reason for it was that the house in which we were living was sold. And the man that bought the house wanted the upper floor where we were living. So we had to find a place to live. And this was during the First World War and anyone who lived at that time knows housing—it was impossible almost to find a place to live. There was no building going on and so we couldn't find anything. By that time, Betty [Gertrude Elizabeth (Mook) Stanley] was not quite two years old.

R. Terwilliger: This is your first child, Betty?

**R. Mook:** That's our first child, yes. And we had been married three years before we had our first child. And when Dr. Mook was drafted, I said, "Well, if we are going to have a family, we better start." And so Betty was born. And she was not quite two years old when we moved out here. He said we couldn't find any place up there, and he said, "It's just as difficult to commute from Palisade to the museum as it would be from Metuchen. So let's go back to Metuchen and see if we could find a place there."

And his mother, of course, and his sister<sup>7</sup>, and his great aunt were living over in the house on Amboy Avenue. And his mother was not a well woman and he felt very responsible for her. He couldn't do anything for her financially, but he did feel that he should be near her in case of need. So we came out here, and we looked and we looked and we looked. Old Mr. Charlie Campbell [Charles C. Campbell] was the real estate man. He had a little place down on Station Place, a little bit of a—

R. Terwilliger: Probably maybe where [Francis Joseph] Von Tury's lamp shop [was], the one of those.

**R. Mook:** No, it was beyond that. I think afterwards, Mr. Letson was in there. I think it's gone now.

R. Terwilliger: Oh yes, yes. Yeah, it's been torn down.

**R. Mook:** There's a gas station right in there now. It was just a little bit of a one-room place. And he was quite an elderly gentleman. He was the real estate agent of the town. And we looked and we looked and we looked. And finally, we found out that over on [16] Graham Avenue there was a Mr. & Mrs. [Nelson] Roray. I don't know whether you've ever heard of them or not. But they had no children and he taught in one of the high schools. He taught in the Barringer High School [in Newark], I think it was. And he commuted back and forth every day. It's the house on Graham Avenue where Estelle Baldwin lives now.

R. Terwilliger: Oh yes, yeah, I do know that.

**R. Mook:** Yes. Well, that was their house.

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<sup>7</sup> Dr. Mook's sister, Edith May (Mook) Craig (1895-1972), married Percy G. Craig and lived at 82 Linden Avenue.

R. Terwilliger: It has a lovely porch on it, if I remember. Doesn't it have a lovely porch across the front, or am I thinking of another one now?

**R. Mook: No, no. I don't think there's any porch on the front. And Mrs. Roray was a sort of an invalid, and she had decided that she wanted to go back to the city. So that was the only house that was available, and we looked at it and it really wasn't just what we wanted. It was on the small side. I think they've added on to since, in the back. But we were desperate, so we said, "Well, we would take it." So we had all the papers drawn up and we were to meet them the following day for the final closing when they sent word to us that they had changed their minds and didn't want to sell.**

**In the meantime, we were living with Grandmother Mook on Amboy Avenue. And so, then we had to start all over again. So this Jack Connor, whom I spoke of earlier, who was a boyhood friend of Dr. Mook's, was a teller in the old [Metuchen] National Bank.**

R. Terwilliger: In Metuchen?

**R. Mook: In Metuchen. He was a cripple, but he was a teller in the bank there. And he said to Dr. Mook, he said, "Charlie, you know I own that old house up in the fields ..." [recording ends]**

[END OF TAPE 1, SIDE 1]

**R. Mook: And he [Jack Connor] said, "If you're interested, go up and look at it." So we went up and it was up there in the field; there was nothing around it. In fact, you could only see the top of the house from Chestnut Avenue because there was a hill, sort of, between the road and the house<sup>8</sup>. And to get into it, you had to come down from the corner of Oak [Avenue] and Chestnut right at the corner. There was a dirt road that went down across the field to the front door and then there was a circle, a dirt road circle around, that you could ride in and turn around and come back again. And so we went and we looked at it. And from the outside, it was the most dilapidated looking old house you ever laid eyes on—one shutter off, another shutter hanging by one hinge. [laughter] It was just sad looking. And when we walked inside, it was sad looking too. But we looked at it and we knew right away that that was the house for us. We went home, we told Dr. Mook's mother that we had decided that that was where we would like to go, and the only time in her life that I ever saw her cry was when we told her that. And she said, "I can't understand why you want that old broken-down dilapidated house." [chuckling] But we could see the possibilities and all the potential in the house and so we bought it.**

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<sup>8</sup> Mrs. Mook is referring to the former Stagecoach Inn at 231 East Chestnut Avenue. The house used to be a rest stop for stagecoach passengers traveling between New York and Philadelphia and once stood on the northeast corner of Main Street and Middlesex Avenue. The building was moved near the site of the Metuchen Public Library to make way for the Metuchen Borough Hall, and later to 231 East Chestnut Avenue. The oldest part of the structure was erected around 1745, with a newer section added in the early 1800s. After its use as a stagecoach rest stop, the structure was owned and occupied by prominent Metuchen families, including Ross Freeman and Charles Craig Mook. In March 2004, the building was demolished to make way for the construction of new homes.

And the people that lived in there, there was a couple by the name of Vanderpoel. And Mr. [Edwin] Vanderpoel was in the Army and he was in France at the time. And Mrs. [Edna] Vanderpoel's mother and father lived with them, and they were very disturbed, of course, that they had to get out. And we had to give them time to get out. So they finally found one of Aylin Pierson's houses down on [32] Elm Avenue, the one that old Mr. Pierson [architect] lived in.

R. Terwilliger: They just rented this house then? In other words, they rented it.

**R. Mook:** They just rented the house; they were just renting it, yes. So they moved out in January. And we moved in on Valentine's Day, in 1920, snow on the ground. We had stored all our furniture up in Jack Connor's barn, which as I say [is] where the Ferraras live now. That's where our furniture was. And we had old Berry Borum, who was colored man here in town—I don't know whether you would remember him or not?

R. Terwilliger: No.

**R. Mook:** No? And he had a horse and a truck of some kind, and he went up and he got the stuff and brought it down.

R. Terwilliger: Do you remember those first few days in that old house? [laughs] Did you ever have the feeling of, *Well, I hope I can keep its potential prominent in my mind?*

**R. Mook:** In the first place, it was a bitter cold winter when we moved. The snow was so deep that they backed the truck up to the steps and they put a plank from the truck to the porch. And they slid the piano off on that plank into the house and the furniture too, because the snow was so deep. And it was bitter cold. Betty was then—she just had her second birthday, and of course, we didn't have—the furniture was sparse.

R. Terwilliger: Right, I'm sure you were really beginners.

**R. Mook:** We were just beginners. The furnace in the house was totally inadequate to heat the house. It was a coal furnace with steam heat, and forcing it as hard as we could, we nearly froze to death. And Betty's bedroom was a good-sized room, and all the furniture that I had to put in that room at that time was her crib and a chest of drawers and a little rocking chair. And if I spilled water on the floor, it would freeze.

R. Terwilliger: Oh my gracious!

**R. Mook:** And she slept in that room.

R. Terwilliger: Did you use the fireplaces then for heat?

**R. Mook:** No, we were afraid to use them. We did use the one in the living room, the big old one in the living room. But we were afraid to use the others because the chimneys were not lined with flue lining and we knew that some of the timbers came into

**the chimneys and we were afraid of fire. And so, except for the one in the living room, that big one in the living room—**

R. Terwilliger: Is that the corkscrew?

**R. Mook: —the corkscrew one, we didn't use any of the fireplaces. [phone ringing] Of course, in that next summer, we immediately put in a tremendous, big furnace and a lot more radiation. There wasn't enough radiation; there weren't enough radiators.**

R. Terwilliger: Now when, the house when you moved into it, Mrs. Mook, was the kitchen where the dining room is now?

**R. Mook: Yes. Well, that room was used as the kitchen, but that was not the original kitchen of the house. You see the house stood down where the Borough Hall is now [at 500 Main Street]. And it had belonged for years to the [Ross] Freeman family and then they built houses out on Route 27. And the house really went through a period of decline. They rented it and there was a Negro family living in it at the end, and it was really in very bad shape. Well, a family by the name of Upjohn came to town and they were antique buffs, at least Mrs. Upjohn was. And she saw the house and fell in love with it just as it was and decided to move it up.**

R. Terwilliger: On the hill?

**R. Mook: No, no, not on the hill. Right where this library is now.**

R. Terwilliger: Oh, that was Mrs. Upjohn that did it.

**R. Mook: Between the library and Dr. [John] Witmer's office [at 456 Middlesex Avenue], yes. And there was a house on the other corner where the Shell [gas] station is, which was somewhat similar to our house, and that house was bought by Mr. Fred Pearse. And he moved it up you see where—well, you probably remember that house because the Meyers family lived in it—and our house stood pretty much where the library is. And Mrs. Upjohn and Mrs. Pearse were both antique buffs, and they became very, very good friends.**

**Well, when they moved our house from the corner, the old original kitchen just dropped. It was so bad, it just collapsed and they never bothered to bring it up and restore it. So they turned the dining room into a kitchen, you see, if you call it a kitchen. It had a sink in it and a stove, and that's all there was, a sink with no drainboards. And they had a coal range in front of the fireplace with a stovepipe going up into the chimney. And then they did have an old dilapidated gas stove, which Mrs. Vanderpoel said she wanted to take with her, and I didn't want it. [laughter] I thought I was glad to have it taken. So the first winter I was there, I cooked on that coal range and I was glad to have it because it was no good for cooking. Well, you could cook on top of it, but you couldn't bake in it, but it did keep the kitchen warm. So we used that room for twenty-seven years until we—and there was the shed off of the kitchen, which is now the present kitchen, yes. But that had no heat in it and it was wainscoted. It had a set of washtubs in it, and that was all, but I couldn't use it in the wintertime.**

- R. Terwilliger: That wasn't what I've heard to referred at times as summer kitchen or anything like that?
- R. Mook: Well, you could call it a summer kitchen, yes. She didn't have any stove out there, so I think she just used it as a washroom, a laundry room. I don't know really what she did use it for. I never had the chance to talk to her very much. She was, of course, very upset that we had put them out of the house and she was terribly worried about her husband at the same time. I can understand because he was right in the thick of things in France. He did come back all right, but she was very worried about him. And her father and mother were invalids, so she really had her hands full.**
- R. Terwilliger: Yes, so this just added to her problems at the time, which is understandable. So now here we are, Dr. and Mrs. Mook are landowners in Metuchen and taxpayers. And Dr. Mook continued to teach over into Brooklyn.
- R. Mook: He spent four hours a day commuting.**
- R. Terwilliger: And this was on the Pennsylvania Railroad? They were commuting on the Pennsylvania Railroad? [laughs]
- R. Mook: Yes, the Pennsylvania Railroad and the subway. And he also continued his connection to the museum up to the time of his death.**
- R. Terwilliger: And you, did you retire then to motherhood?
- R. Mook: Yes, I retired to motherhood.**
- R. Terwilliger: Well, let's talk a little bit about that. Now you have Betty and Ruth [W. (Mook) Fink Kerr] comes, is it two years later?
- R. Mook: Ruth came at the end of the year 1920, the year we moved in there. Yes, she was born on the twenty-ninth of December, the same year we moved in. So I had the two girls.**
- R. Terwilliger: The two girls. And can you tell us a little bit about what life was like then? What was your daily life like and what did you involve yourself in here locally? What were your feelings about Metuchen?
- R. Mook: Well, of course, the first thing I did—I mean Dr. Mook, of course, had been brought up in the [Dutch] Reformed Church and it was coming home to him. And so of course, I immediately affiliated myself with the church. And of course, I had these two little girls.**
- R. Terwilliger: Now where was the Reformed Church at this time?
- R. Mook: It was then on the corner of Amboy Avenue and Graham Avenue. It burned [in 1948], of course. You must have remembered that.**
- R. Terwilliger: Oh, I do remember it.

**R. Mook:** Yes, that's where it was. And of course, the little girls went to Sunday school every Sunday. Well, Ruth didn't at first, but we would take—we had no car—and we would walk from Chestnut Avenue over to the church, and we would take Ruth down to Mother Mook's and she would keep Ruth while Betty went to Sunday school and we went to church. We went to church and then when Sunday school was over, Betty would come into church with us.

R. Terwilliger: Did Dr. Mook play the organ in the church?

**R. Mook:** Oh yes. Well, not in the Metuchen church, just occasionally. By that time, he had long since been away from it. He could play up until the very end of his life, but not proficiently, because he hadn't had—you know that's something that you just have to keep at all the time.

R. Terwilliger: I just wondered as a point of interest if he did.

**R. Mook:** But as far as knowledge of the organ is concerned and the mechanism and all that sort of thing, I don't know of anyone who had greater knowledge of it than he did.

R. Terwilliger: Well, he was that kind of man. I think anything he had interest in, he thoroughly knew.

**R. Mook:** And of course, he would sit and listen to someone playing the organ and he would say did you notice this, or did you notice that, or they were playing this stop, or they were playing that stop. And of course, it was just all Greek to me. I just knew that I enjoyed it. But he just enjoyed it in a way that very few people do. Because even the young men that we have had there as organists, who are trained musicians, have told me that when it comes to understanding the mechanism of the organ, they have nothing like the knowledge of it that Dr. Mook had.

R. Terwilliger: Isn't that amazing? So then we belong to the Metuchen Reformed Church. I'm sure you became active either in teaching Sunday school or [unclear].

**R. Mook:** Well, I did a little later, not when the girls were small, but later I did. I had a class for some time of high school girls. It was what we called then a teacher training class in teaching them to teach other children, younger children. And I can remember—well, they were people that you wouldn't know, I'm sure, in the class. And I think of several of them with a great deal of love and affection.

R. Terwilliger: You should mention their names I would feel.

**R. Mook:** Well, one of them was Ruth LaForge.

R. Terwilliger: Oh, I know the LaForges.

**R. Mook:** And one of them was a girl by the name of Mary Dennis.

R. Terwilliger: Now these were young high school girls at the time?

**R. Mook:** These were young high school girls, yes. I should remember more, but those two stand out in my mind. And it was interesting to watch them as they went out into

life and the things that they did. Mary Dennis came from a very humble family and really had a very difficult childhood, and yet she married one of young men from our church, [Emmett Leslie] Paige his name was. They lived on Fifth Place; they went up to Delmar, New York to live. She was one of the most active women in the Reformed Church up in Delmar. They knew her all over the Albany area. And they live now up in Pennsylvania, up in the Poconos.

R. Terwilliger: And it must give you pride to know maybe you have a little bit of that first interest, as I told you with myself and my bird watching.

**R. Mook:** Yes, yes. Of course, I was very much interested in the church school. But I really became more involved in the women's work in the church because I can remember when Ruth was about two years old, Mr. [Frederick] Zimmerman was our minister at that time—

R. Terwilliger: I was just going to ask you who was minister.

**R. Mook:** Well, he came the same time we came to the church. He had just graduated from seminary and he just started as we came back into the church. And I remember when Ruth was two years old, he came up to me, up the house one day. We had, of course, two women's organizations in the church; we had a Missionary Society and a Ladies Aid Society. And of course, they were all older women. And he said, "Ruth, there's nothing in the church for the young married women or the businesswomen, the young women, who were teachers or secretaries," and so forth. And he said, "I would like to start something for a group like that. And that could meet in the evening and I want you to help me with it." And so, we talked it over and I said, "Well, I've got these two little youngsters, but I guess I can do it," and so forth. So we did. We started a group, which we called the Church League for Service, which was a very active group. And then he said, "I want to start a group for high school girls and I want to start a group for younger girls so that all the young women in the church will be involved." Well, I had no part of that, but of course Betty belonged to the younger group.

R. Terwilliger: Let's talk a little bit about Metuchen. I'm sure the people that will be listening to our oral taping would be interested in knowing things like what was Main Street like? Did you shop locally?

**R. Mook:** Oh yes. Oh yes.

R. Terwilliger: For clothing? Of course, you're connected with New York now too.

**R. Mook:** Well, I used to go into New York a little bit, not much. Once in a while to Wanamaker's when John Wanamaker was downtown [in New York], I would go there. But of course, Kramer's was the store, department store [at 441 Main Street], and I used to do a great deal of shopping there. I would buy all the children's shoes there. They carried a very good line of shoes for children. And I would buy underwear for them, things of that sort. And their dresses, of course, I made or had them made, yes.

R. Terwilliger: Now where did you buy your fabric? Did Kramer handle it? Yard goods too?

- R. Mook:** Oh, Kramer's had a wonderful—oh, they had wonderful yard goods.
- R. Terwilliger: And patterns? Were there patterns at that time?
- R. Mook:** Yes, they had patterns. They had patterns and they had yard goods. They had a very nice line of especially cotton yard goods. And I can remember buying dresses for them or material. And I remember one summer when I was up at the lake, I made Betty and Ruth—I used to dress them alike. [laughter] And I made their outfits for them for the school in the Fall. [phone ringing]
- R. Terwilliger: Well, that was probably a more economical approach too because you could probably use the same pattern for the two girls.
- R. Mook:** Well, I did. I used [unclear] pattern.
- R. Terwilliger: They probably enjoyed dressing alike. I think there is something special about that.
- R. Mook:** Yes, they didn't mind that.
- R. Terwilliger: Now how about grocery shopping?
- R. Mook:** Well, I did my grocery shopping—Mr. LaForge had a grocery store where the Metuchen Hardware Store is now [at 401 Main Street]. And he would deliver and, of course, I had no car. So I could call in an order and he would deliver to me.
- R. Terwilliger: Now we're talking about the telephone system in Metuchen at that time. It was a local operator. There was no dialing or anything. You picked up the phone.
- R. Mook:** Well, you just picked up the phone.
- R. Terwilliger: And the operator asked you, "Number please?" To some young children, this would be a great impression.
- R. Mook:** It was one of these stand-up things, with a thing on the front that looks like a daffodil.
- R. Terwilliger: Right. [laughs] I always thought they probably stole that design for the phone from a daffodil.
- R. Mook:** And Mr. [Samuel] Schwartz had a butcher shop on [426] Main Street.
- R. Terwilliger: Where was that located, Mrs. Mook?
- R. Mook:** Well, it's where the Marmax [Shoes], along in there—one of those buildings along in there. And I always bought my meat from Mr. Schwartz.
- R. Terwilliger: Now was Main Street paved at this time? Were there flowers?



- R. Mook:** Not at first. It was kind of—I don't remember. It was more of a dirt road really. It wasn't really paved, not nicely anyway. And there were no curbs or gutters or anything like that. In fact, there were big shade trees.
- R. Terwilliger: Along Main Street?
- R. Mook:** Along Main Street in quite a number of places. They'd been taken down in some places. But in some places, there were shade trees.
- R. Terwilliger: And did the stores then have the wooden porches that were so typical of that time?
- R. Mook:** Some of them did, yes. Mr. [Benjamin] Ford had a hardware store on the corner of Highland Avenue and Main Street, and that had a little front porch that you went up to go into. Some of them did, yes.
- R. Terwilliger: And how about for medical care? Do you remember any local doctors?
- R. Mook:** Well Dr. [Clarence] Hofer was one of the doctors, Old Dr. Hofer. And then Dr. [Alfred] Ellis was here. And I think they were the only two when we first came here. And Dr. Mook's mother went to Dr. Hofer, but I chose Dr. Ellis. He lived over on [169] Maple Avenue, and it was convenient for me to take the children.
- R. Terwilliger: And he made house calls, of course, then?
- R. Mook:** Oh yes, oh yes.
- R. Terwilliger: That was probably the meat of his business. [laughs]
- R. Mook:** Oh yes, they made house calls and didn't think anything of it.
- R. Terwilliger: Right. And then you became pregnant for Caryl [C. (Mook) McNeill]?
- R. Mook:** Yes, but that wasn't until quite a number of years later.
- R. Terwilliger: Who delivered Caryl?
- R. Mook:** Well, all of my children were born in New York City.
- R. Terwilliger: You did go to New York to have your babies?
- R. Mook:** Yeah. When I was affiliated with Barnard, I went to the university physician, a Dr. McCaslin [phonetic], who took care of me. And when I became pregnant for Betty, I was then living, of course, in Palisade and I asked him for a good obstetrician, and he recommended a Dr. Hull [phonetic], who had his offices down off of Broadway. And I went to him, and Betty and Ruth were both born in the New York Nursery and Child's Hospital, which is no longer there. It became affiliated with the Columbia Medical Center. But Caryl was born in a little private hospital up around 72nd Street, Sherman Square. But I had the same doctor for all of them. They were all born in New York City.
- R. Terwilliger: Well, let's just ... [recording paused]

Mrs. Mook, did all three girls go to Franklin School?

**R. Mook:** Yes, all three of my daughters went to Franklin School. That was the only school in town except the Edgar School, which of course was just a small building at that time. [muffled microphone] Everybody was in Franklin School from kindergarten through high school. And both Betty and Ruth, of course, went right through high school in the Franklin School. In fact, Caryl did too as far as that's concerned, except for a few years in the elementary grades after the Washington School had been built and the Franklin School was so overcrowded. The Board of Education asked for volunteers to go to the Washington School and not too many people were anxious to respond. So Caryl volunteered to go to the Washington School, which meant of course going from East Chestnut Avenue over to that school. And at that time, of course, there was no underpass at Grove Avenue.

R. Terwilliger: Oh, that's right.

**R. Mook:** So only a grade crossing with no gate. And of course, it was a very dangerous crossing. And she used to ride her bicycle, but of course she was not permitted to go through Grove Avenue across that crossing. So she went down through Main Street and then up Woodbridge Avenue to the school. And she quite enjoyed it; she didn't seem to mind it at all.

R. Terwilliger: Do you remember who the principal was?

**R. Mook:** Yes, Mrs. Frear was the first principal of the Washington School, Luella Frear. She was a marvelous person.

R. Terwilliger: Yes, I guess it was Dr. [Mildred B.] Moss that took her place then, when she left?

**R. Mook:** I think so, although I don't exactly remember. I think she succeeded her.

R. Terwilliger: Right, because I had a daughter who went there later on and Dr. Moss was the principal then. Now I understand you had spent several years on the Board of Education.

**R. Mook:** Yes, I was on the [Metuchen] Board of Education for six years. I went on in 1924 and served until 1930, which was the year that Caryl was born. And the last two years on the board, I was president of the board.

R. Terwilliger: Oh, I didn't realize that. Do you remember what some of the issues or some of the accomplishments or problems different than today?

**R. Mook:** Well, this is a very delicate subject to discuss. [chuckles] But there were members on the board, and I do not want to mention any names, who were extremely conservative and who weren't particularly interested in seeing the school system enlarged and new ideas brought in. And the time had come when that had to be done. So we really had quite a difficult time at that time and it was at that time that Mr. [Thomas G.] Van Kirk, who had been supervising principal of schools, retired and we brought in a Mr. Buntz [phonetic] from South Jersey, who was

**really too good for us if you know what I mean. [chuckles] He really was not able to, so suddenly, put into practice that some of us were anxious to see done. He stayed for a while and then he was succeeded by Mr. [Elmo E.] Spoerl.**

R. Terwilliger: Was that then, would you say, one of the main goals of the Board of Education was the enlargement of the schools, of curriculum?

**R. Mook: Yes, yes, yes. Of some of the members of the Board of Education, yes.**

R. Terwilliger: Well, I don't think that's too much different than it is today. We always have those who are—

**R. Mook: I was talking with Mr. Cummings a week ago Sunday, and I had never met him before, and he hadn't realized that I had served on the Board of Education and he was asking me too something about the problems and he said, "Well, it sounds exactly like today." [laughs]**

R. Terwilliger: Right, right. I still go down religiously and sit in and listen. And when you said that, I thought I don't know how long it's been since Mrs. Mook has been to a Board of Education meeting, but— [laughs]

**R. Mook: Well, I [unclear] but I follow the reports in the papers and in the letters that we get, of course. I've always kept in close contact in that way.**

R. Terwilliger: Yes. Well, I knew you've trained to be always interested in education.

**R. Mook: I've always been very much interested.**

R. Terwilliger: But this was a little bit unusual, a woman to be president in, what, this was about 1929 then?

**R. Mook: Well, I was president from [19]28.**

R. Terwilliger: Nineteen-hundred-twenty-eight to 1930?

**R. Mook: Two years, yes. Well yes, I think it was, yes.**

R. Terwilliger: You seem to have been a real leader.

**R. Mook: In fact, I don't think there has been a woman president since. [laughs] Maybe I finished the job [unclear] at that time, but I enjoyed it. It was a difficult job. And I've often made the remark that the Borough of Metuchen owes me a good many hours of sleep. [laughs] Because I would come home from board meetings and really couldn't get to sleep thinking over the problems, and so forth, that we had.**

R. Terwilliger: I'm sure you took it very seriously.

**R. Mook: I don't regret any of it. It was an education as far as I'm concerned.**

R. Terwilliger: Also, I know from personal experience that you were very involved in Girl Scouts. Did this precede your Board of Education?

- R. Mook:** This all began happening at the same time. There was about that time just one Girl Scout troop in Metuchen and that met over at the Reformed Church. And Ruth Powell and Lucile Manning were the leaders of that troop. And interest began growing in scouting and it became necessary [coughing] to enlarge the [unclear]. Betty was a member of that first troop, which was Troop No. 1. So a second troop was started down out at the [American] Legion building [along Holly Street] and Mrs. [Louise] Simms was the leader of that troop. Then it seemed to begin to grow like a mushroom and the third troop was in the Borough Improvement League [at 491 Middlesex Avenue] and Harriet Molineux was the leader of that troop for many, many years. That was the troop that Caryl belonged to. And it still kept growing, and it had become difficult to sort of keep the work coordinated in various troops. So we began to think it might be well to form a council. And we wrote to headquarters and they advised us to do that. So we organized the council [Metuchen Girl Scout Council] and I just happened to be the commissioner. [laughter] Instead of calling them the leader of the council, the president as they do now, they called them commissioners. And I was commissioner for the first five years.
- R. Terwilliger: Then your responsibility was to coordinate all—?
- R. Mook:** Coordinate and see that there was training. Of course, there were committees for leadership and training and out of doors. So it was much simpler than it is now. In that connection, we were responsible for securing the first cabin over in Roosevelt Park for the girls. Mr. Edward Dana was chairman of the Camp Committee on our council, and really he deserves the thanks for really securing the cabin for us because he made frequent trips to New Brunswick and interviewed the Board of Freeholders, and eventually they consented to allot the space and put up the cabin for us. And that's the way in which we secured it.
- R. Terwilliger: And that was part of parks property, county property, before it became—it is owned by the park systems?
- R. Mook:** I think it is, yes, because at that time and I think it still is, but it's designated for Girl Scout work just as the Kiddie Keep Well Camp is designated for the camp.
- R. Terwilliger: County welfare review, yeah. I remember spending many an overnight up at Mole-Top [phonetic]. [laughter] And going down to the spring for water or hikes through the woods there, when they really were woods, looking for Jack-in-the-Pulpit and Lady Slipper and all the rest of the spring flowers we learned about. But it was, even though Metuchen at that time was much more rural, it was a little escape from your backyard or your own familiar circumstances.
- R. Mook:** Well, I later had a troop of my own. We met in the Legion building and I remember planning with the girls many an overnight. And I can't remember all of the girls in the troop, but I remember Charlotte Wernik was one of them, Dorothy Schneider was one of them, Betty Hansen was one of them, Bernice Sorensen was one of them, that group of girls. We had a wonderful group of girls. And I can remember their planning and buying the food and so forth. [chuckles]

- R. Terwilliger: Right. Now the troops by the time, when you were commissioner, how many Girl Scout troops do you remember were there in Metuchen? You were up to four?
- R. Mook: No, because we had a Mariner troop at that time too, which was really quite unusual.**
- R. Terwilliger: Oh, I didn't realize that.
- R. Mook: Mrs. Kemp [phonetic] was the head of that and they had a lot of fun too. But that fell by the wayside. I don't know that there are any—I suppose there are Mariner troops. I don't know whether they call them Mariner troops now or not. But of course, there are troops that are interested in water activities. The whole program has changed so radically that—not radically, but shall I say drastically.**
- R. Terwilliger: There isn't even the interest in scouting that there was years ago. I know that my two older children were very active scouts and stayed in it until they were senior scouts.
- R. Mook: Well, I think that's partly because it's gotten to be such a tremendous organization and it's lost its local personal touch.**
- R. Terwilliger: That's exactly it. Right.
- R. Mook: I feel, I read the reports—of course, the council now is called the Delaware-Raritan Council and takes in everything from Trenton all the way up, I don't know, beyond Rahway and includes really a large area—and I think that it depends on the community—I think some communities are more active than others. But I have had a feeling that here in Metuchen, the interest has lessened. And I have heard others say that and with regret. And I'm hoping that something will come along to sort of stimulate the—**
- R. Terwilliger: I hope so too.
- R. Mook: Of course, on the other hand, there are many more activities for girls now than there were then, many school activities, which they didn't have at that time. And so, they have to choose what they want to do. But I think good scouting is something that is good for any girl.**
- R. Terwilliger: Well, I think it's a very important growing process, the experience of scouting. I know I enjoyed my years. I was with Harriet Molineux and we always tell the funny story on her. She had a shore home and she'd take us down there.
- R. Mook: Yes, I remember Caryl talking about it.**
- R. Terwilliger: Did Caryl ever tell the story of how she'd [Harriet Molineux] have a bowl of peas and would go around because she believed in fairness, and dish one pea out to each one of us. [laughter]
- R. Mook: I never heard that story.**

R. Terwilliger: It was really a joke, but she said she was going to be that fair, that everyone was going to get their same share of peas. [laughter] But we had many nice times with Harriet Molineux and she was always a very generous woman.

**R. Mook: Yes, she was.**

R. Terwilliger: Well, let's move on now, Mrs. Mook. We're coming to near the end of our taping time and I thought maybe to wind it up, we spoke of reflecting back on your life and perhaps to some of us younger people who have held you in very high esteem all of our lives, you could leave us with some thoughts on what you felt made your life so rich and full and rewarding.

**R. Mook: Well, of course, I feel that I really shouldn't take the credit really for things that I've done because I had a very wonderful home background of a devoted family and a father and mother who really taught me—and not only taught but practiced—the basic principles of a good life. And so that part of it— [phone ringing]  
You let that ring. [recording paused]**

R. Terwilliger: You said your parents taught you the basic principles of a good life. Would I be imposing on you too much, Mrs. Mook, to say what are basic principles of a good life?

**R. Mook: Well, I don't know. [laughs] That's a difficult question to answer. I think being honest in every sense of the word, realizing that your life is not your own, that you have been put here to do something worthwhile, not for yourself, but for other people, and trying to live what you say.**

R. Terwilliger: I think that's beautiful frankly. And we don't want to get too emotional, but I think these are the kinds of things that even though you and I are of different religions, I think the longer I live—and I'm sure I'm not telling you anything—

**R. Mook: I wouldn't say that we were of different religions. I would question you there. We both worship the same God and the same Christ, but just in a different manner.**

R. Terwilliger: Right, and I think the longer we live and the more people communicate on this level, the more we're realizing how close we really are. There are very little differences.

**R. Mook: You know, in the wording, the name of the Reformed Church—I don't know whether you've ever known the full title of the Reformed Church, but if we use our full title, we would say The Holy Catholic Church Reformed.**

R. Terwilliger: Oh, I never did realize that. Oh, that's beautiful to know.

**R. Mook: So we are a part of The Holy Catholic Church. And of course, we recite that in our creed every Sunday morning. I believe in The Holy Catholic Church.**

R. Terwilliger: I never realized that. That's our creed too. [laughs] But I didn't realize it was recited in your creed.

**R. Mook: Oh yes, oh yes. Yes, indeed, it is.**

R. Terwilliger: And I think over the last few years, the changes that have taken, drastic changes that have taken place in our religion, we're becoming more reformed. [laughter] But religion has always played a very deep part in my life.

**R. Mook: Well, it has in mine too.**

R. Terwilliger: I know it has in yours. And I think that—I kind of will admit I was hoping this is what you would bring out and you did.

**R. Mook: I think that the world will never be at peace until we recognize some these things, all of us recognize these things. But I believe someday there will be peace.**

R. Terwilliger: Oh, I do too. I firmly do.

**R. Mook: And as far as any, shall I say, mottos for my life, I suppose I could say two. One, as a child, my mother used to say to us (and there were six children in the family), "I don't care what you do when you grow up." She used to say to my brothers, "If you want to be a ditch digger, that's all right with me. But be a good ditch digger." And she impressed on us whatever we did, to do it well, as well as we could. Not to do a shoddy job, but to do it well if it was a job worth doing. And I think from my college years, I have constantly thought of the Wellesley motto: Not to be ministered unto, but to minister.**

R. Terwilliger: That's beautiful.

**R. Mook: And I've kept that in the back of my mind.**

R. Terwilliger: Well, you certainly have been a loyal servant to the world, to your family, to your community on all levels, and it's been an inspiration to me all my life. As I said to you, I think before we started the interview, I never tapped you on the shoulder and said what I felt. But I really think it was God's will we should be brought together so that I could tell you that I came from a very humble family. My family were not extensively educated, but very prideful people. And my dad and mother were the kind of people that took pride in their work and the level that they lived at and worked at. And I was always very proud of them. But Metuchen was a difficult town for girl with an Italian name and Catholic to move into when I came here.

**R. Mook: I can believe it.**

R. Terwilliger: But I think that was purposeful. I think that it was divine guidance again, that it always has been my aim to make them a little less prejudiced than they were when I came. And I have seen it happen. And it's only through the effort of people like yourself that gathered all under their wings, in scouting, in education, that this kind of thing has happened in Metuchen. I think a lot of credit in your own simple dignified humble way, you have contributed to us here in Metuchen and we'll never forget you for it, Mrs. Mook. You not only gave me a pleasant friend for many years, but a woman I will always admire and I thank you and wish you well in your new move up to Schenectady [New York]. And I hope once in a while, perhaps through someone or maybe personally, I can hear what you're doing, what you're thinking.

**R. Mook:** Well, I hope to come back occasionally.

R. Terwilliger: I hope you do. My door will always be open. [laughs]

**R. Mook:** There are lots of doors that are going to be open [unclear].

R. Terwilliger: I'm sure so.

**R. Mook:** But that, we just go from day to day. You can't project too far into the future.

R. Terwilliger: Well, you're always trying new things. [laughter] I understand this is a new experience, doing the tape recording, an oral interview. And now you're going to be moving to a new area and sharing a new kind of life. And from past experience, I know you'll do well. So godspeed and much happiness, Mrs. Mook.

**R. Mook:** Thank you. Thank you very much.

[END OF INTERVIEW]