

Sandy Hook, Gateway NRA, NPS
An Oral History Interview with Jeanette Woolley Bower
Granddaughter of U.S.L.S.S. Capt. Joel Woolley
Lived at Spermaceti Cove 1910s-1920s
Interviewed by Tom Hoffman, NPS
June 25, 1976
Transcribed by Jo Anne Carlson, NPS Volunteer 2007



Image from the 1907 wreck of the *Phinney*. Captain Joel Woolley and James Moran on right pulling in a victim on the breeches buoy.



Summertime gathering of crew and family members in front of Spermaceti Cove Life-Saving Station.



Spermaceti Cove Life-Saving Station crew and family members.
Photos courtesy of NPS/Gateway NRA

Editor's notes in parenthesis ()

(Editor's note: Mrs. Bower was Granddaughter of Captain Joel Woolley, Keeper of the Spermaceti Cove Life-Saving Station 1900-1916. Mrs. Bower's Father, Morgan Woolley and her Uncles were also members of the crew. She and her family lived in the Station in summers.)

TH: This is Friday and this is Tom Hoffman and I'm interviewing Mrs. Jeanette Woolley Bower and she has quite a story to tell us and I think we should start with her. Why don't you introduce yourself and your background here at Sandy Hook?

JWB: I remember living here when I was a very little girl. In fact, my memories would probably start at four (years of age), because I don't think young people remember much before then. All I have is memories of feelings, is that alright?

TH: Mmm hmm.

JWB: I remember that I was always told that little children were seen and not heard. And that when there was any kind of a rescue going on, we definitely had to be out of the way. No one had to tell me to get out of the way. That was my responsibility. But I would somehow or other hang around. I was really interested. I got the feeling of the energy the men would get, once there was word that, you know, the boat evidently would be right out there coming right up on shore. It would be August and September was when we got the great storms. Of course, it would probably happen in the middle of the night and the rescue would go on in the morning. I remember seeing the boat, some of the big boats that would be out there. I never remember seeing anyone slide. I always wanted to see this. Come down on the

TH: Breeches buoy?

JWB: Breeches buoy. I never got to see that. I know people remember that. Then you hear the stories. Can we get the boats over the hill in one try?

TH: Are we talking about right in front of the Spermaceti Cove Visitor Center? That's the old Life-Saving Station. There's that depression right outside.

JWB: There were on funny, if I remember right, wheels about this big, solid iron and I don't understand why they used those in the sand.

TH: The wide wheels on the surf-boat carriages?

JWB: Yeah. I'd say just like a rim.

TH: Yeah, a big rim and very wide. I think it was supposed to help them get over the sand.

JWB: Does it?

TH: Did they have a lot of trouble with that?

JWB: That took strength. As I said, they would just gather up any visitor or anybody that could help them with that. Once they got the boat over, then evidently it was okay. As a little girl I couldn't see over the hill. I couldn't see that far and I wasn't allowed to go that far.

TH: You had to stay out of their way.

JWB: No. Even when nothing was going on. That was a pretty bad ocean. You know, people didn't swim in those days as they swim now. There was no lifeguard. So, I couldn't go that way. I could go this way. The other thing that I had to be careful of was the train. I don't think you were aware of the train going by here, are you?

TH: No. (laughter)

JWB: That was two barriers. Something out there that would (inaudible) and the train. Some of the big things that would happen... company would come in summer. That was a big time and we would go to pick beach plums.

TH: A delicacy.

JWB: A delicacy. The beach plums grow very well among the poison ivy. The poison ivy grows up the beach plum tree.

TH: Right.

JWB: I think they feed upon them. So, I probably would always get poison ivy. One of the reasons I was not allowed to go. So, I would stay behind. Other feelings, okay. The let down after something happened. Everyone would come back in. Storms only happen in the rain, right. They don't happen on a beautiful calm day. I do remember the smell, the wet slickers and the boots. My Mother didn't do the cooking nor did any of my Aunts. There was always the Navy personnel. There would be young, thirteen or fourteen year old boys.

TH: You mean young children serving in the Navy?

JWB: Well, they would have a job. Their job would be to get the wood for the fire, to work on the boats. And that's the picture I have that I will send to you of the fun. There was always fun going on in this Irish family. The pile of those fellas in those bathing suits that they wore at that particular time. You know, my Uncle, and another Uncle's head coming through a set of legs. My children particularly enjoy seeing these pictures.

TH: Maybe you could, that would be a great place to start. How your family got down here? How they first came to Sandy Hook? Where did the Woolley family come from?

JWB: Well, Grandpa Woolley came from Freehold around Molly Pitcher's well. His Mother was a Wardell and his Mother's family came as far as Frenchport. And Wardell house is still there. I never knew how my Grandfather got in the service. In fact, my point of view was he was there forever.

TH: As a little girl looking up to him, right.

JWB: Then, I would have a chance once in awhile to go into his office. That little building back there. He had this roll top desk. I don't think I could put my hand up like this to get to the top of this desk. He had a chair by his desk, and I would sit down. And he would say, "You're one of Morgans?" (Mrs. Bower's Father was Morgan Woolley) and I would say "yes" and he would talk to me. I don't remember him telling me tales. I remember tales from Uncle Ernie. I don't know if they were tales or accounts or I'd hear them from relatives that came to visit from New York. To a New Yorker, this was a great place to come, and I never had any idea why anyone would enjoy coming here. Why get yourself trapped in a place like this. This was the New York family coming.

TH: This was a desolate place. A place cut off from the mainland.

JWB: By weather.

TH: Yeah.

JWB: We didn't always see the mainland. The family would evidently come down on a train. Well, there was another bridge....

TH: The steamboats used to come down from New York City back then too.

JWB: Yeah, but I think they were train people.

TH: They would come down by train on the mainland. I see.

JWB: And there was horse and wagon. Another thing, I would to sit in this slat-backed wagon, and enjoy it thoroughly.

TH: You mean after getting off the train.

JWB: Yeah. Down here, right at the end.

TH: Would it be right down here in Highlands, then? And they would get off and come in on an old wagon?

JWB: The train would stop for people. That was no big deal.

TH: Yeah, back then. It was the way of getting around. I guess it looked kind of funny. I guess there was a rutted road then coming up the Hook. Would it be something like that?

JWB: Mmmhmm. Usually maintained by the railroad. They always had to have repair people so that was almost like a connection to civilization, as far as I was concerned. What else can I tell you? So, Grandpa Woolley would run clambakes. Do you know what a clambake is?

TH: No. I'd like to hear that.

JWB: Oh, another thing, I guess I was too little to eat. I better tell you that too. When one lived in this area, we had clam fritters for breakfast and another kind of clam for lunch. Clams were a part of every meal. Clam chowder for dinner, because they were very accessible out here. And these little guys, these little boys that I told you about, would dig up clams every day. Have you ever worked a clam? Well, when you bring them out of the sand, they're open a little bit. You gotta get yet your knife in there before they close up or else you'd break your knife. That power they have in that bivalve is just amazing. So, that's how we had to open the clams.

TH: This would be to get the clams you would have to go down to Spermaceti Cove?

JWB: Right out here. I feel like I'm sitting.... When I say right out here....

TH: Spermaceti Cove. (Laughter)

JWB: Down that little pathway that has been preserved somehow because I was down there.

TH: That little pathway, really?

JWB: Yeah because of the poison ivy, I could go down there. I couldn't see above the foliage that was there. There were lots of trees then, and I would get lost and my Mother would get so mad.

TH: Looking at the old photographs there seems to be bushier higher trees than it is today.

JWB: Every once in awhile, you know, Sandy Hook would get disconnected from the mainland. One good storm and we'd have....

TH: A washout, wash the inlet out.

JWB:a nice new marina built there. How easy it is to do it. In fact, Uncle Ernie was called in one year to ask his advice about opening up the end of Sandy Hook. He said, "If you ever do it, you're gonna lose your Hook." I don't know why. But, "Keep it attached because that's going to be important in the preservation of the geology." I hope they don't open it.

TH: Yeah. Getting back to the clambake...first you get the clams...

JWB: Yeah, they're steamed all day long on these rocks with a lot of seaweed that came from out there. The rest of that, the corn and the chicken, and the meat. Who has room for all that? They didn't drink beer. Not the kind of beer you have here. It was made in these big vats and put in brown bottles. And one year, I'll always remember, and I think, not Ben, but Edwin and Frank can tell you this, we decided we'd just take what was left at the bottom, and we got sick.

TH: Down at the bottom of the vat.

JWB: After they had filled the bottles.

TH: They would make it out here?

JWB: Well, you have to be very careful about whether or not this was illegal. Beer was a big part of family. I can remember it being made back in Monmouth Beach.

TH: Homemade beer. What would it be called now? Was it just beer, or did they have a local name for it?

JWB: What's hops? Something you put in beer?

TH: Yeah, it's part of making the beer. They use grain, wheat, not wheat, oh, there's certain grain and hops. Hops is another type of grain.

JWB: They'd called it hops. They'd go out and get a drink of hops.

TH: Where would they have a clambake? Would it be right by the, I refer to it as the Visitor Center, maybe we should refer to it as the Life-Saving Station.

JWB: Yeah. People didn't seem to go down to the beach that much. I wasn't aware of people on the beach on towels, under umbrellas. I think people wore far more clothing then. (laughter)

TH: It amazes me. Years ago, didn't they have long, woolen underwear? Or am I mistaken?

JWB: I can bring in those pictures of the black stockings. Would you like to see those too?

TH: Yeah, black stockings? (laughter)

JWB: We wore black stockings when we went swimming and tennis shoes too.

TH: I guess to protect your feet back then or to cover up.

JWB: I don't know. To cover up I guess.

TH: Well, the Victorian era you'd cover up for protection of your feet against broken shells.

JWB: In Dad's outfit, the Life-Saving Service people had some kind of summer outfit. It was like a sleeveless shirt and pants from here to here. I thought those fellas looked so funny in them. But I'll send you that picture.

TH: You mean cut off pants down to their knees? Like from the waist to the knees?

JWB: Yeah.

TH: What was the material like?

JWB: I would say it was like what we call jersey now.

TH: Was that a lightweight material for summer wear?

JWB: Stretchable like all suits are made of. I wouldn't be surprised if they come back to that style.

TH: I'm just amazed at the woolen underwear. Did you have to wear it during the summer months?

JWB: No. We took the woolen underwear off at Easter time. I'm glad you mentioned that.

TH: Really. You took it off, then what would be worn then? What material?

JWB: Cotton.

TH: Cotton, would be looser and cooler, I guess.

JWB: Shorter. That woolen underwear, I had to fold it like this to get my socks over it.

TH: Yeah. Fold it over so you could get your socks over it. Right.

JWB: I was coming a little bit out of that. My Mother objected to that. But my Grandmother was the one who wouldn't let woolen underwear come off until a certain date. Of course if the weather changed....

TH: Yes. Right.

JWB: I think it was Easter time. We would go to church.

TH: The reason I'm getting off on the clothing is because we started to say that you didn't have any recollection of people going to the beach or the umbrellas and all. And I'm wondering how they would relax during the summer back then, and if they would stay near the house.

JWB: Yes. In the shade.

TH: Right in the shade. And then even...

JWB: Women had umbrellas.

TH: Umbrellas like parasols...

JWB: You had to be considered wealthy to have umbrellas in the summer and much to my surprise wore dark clothes in summer. But the size of them when you see some of the pictures, but a very happy family. I have good feelings about them.

TH: Could you tell us about your family centering around Capt. Woolley? His full name was, was it actually Captain?

JWB: Yeah, Captain Joel Woolley. I never knew he had any other name.

TH: Joel? Joel Woolley.

JWB: Of course, he would be Uncle Joel to a lot of people coming.

TH: We were debating his dates here because you started to say it was like forever and ever. Because I was thinking that maybe he did switch stations. You know, in his career, maybe was up here for a couple of years, then he spent twenty years down at Spermaceti Cove. We'll have to find out.

JWB: No one ever mentioned it to me. I just thought he had been there forever. I thought he had built it. (laughter) That was my point of view. He was held in very high esteem and he had some good rescues to his credit. He studied the sea. He knew the sea. I remember walking down to the ocean with my Dad once in awhile. He was six foot something and he would tell me how to tell the tides, how to tell the currents. I'll always remember the moon would be coming up. And he would say, "Some day man is going to be on the moon." Once I used to think, "Well, that's a fairy tale." You know, about the man on the moon. But my Dad died before man got on the moon and I'm really sad about that because my Husband is a scientist and worked for Cal Tech, JPL, and was quite influential in the early developments of what was needed to get man on the moon. And wouldn't my Dad have been proud. Because I would say, what were they, you know, there was always a design on the moon. I would ask him what he thought they were. He said, at that time probably mountains and craters. Isn't that interesting? Or a reflection from the earth. He didn't know. So, in their own way, my family was well informed even though they were not college people.

TH: Alright, but with Captain Woolley, starting with him, like who did he marry and how many children because you were mentioning a lot of names. I'd like to put everyone in chronological order. Or not chronological, but your family here?

JWB: My Grandmother's name was Catherine and her name was Moran. She was from New York City. How my Grandfather would have met her, I don't know much about that. There were quite few children. There were quite a few deaths too because of...

TH: Disease?

JWB: Typhoid fever from the water. So, my memory is only four boys: Uncle Ben, Uncle Mick, Ernie, and my Dad. I don't remember the sister. They're in the pictures of her you could certainly see them in pictures. In the pictures you see me in my Brother's arms.

TH: Right, a little baby girl.

JWB: Two brothers that were still babies. Children did come close together. My Mother had the girls and the rest of the family, you could tell by the names were the boys. Grandpa of course, retired and moved to his home in Monmouth Beach. I'm still

concerned about those dates because...could he have come back here in the summer and used this place after he was retired?

TH: I don't know.

JWB: I'd love to get the history of that time because I know we were here during World War I.

TH: You were mentioning about giving some personal insights and things. He got respect from his men.

JWB: Oh yes.

TH: He was gruff though. You mentioned that he was gruff.

JWB: Very.

TH: You especially mentioned your Morgan or Moran was it?

JWB: My family name was Moran. My Dad's name was Morgan.

TH: Right. We were starting to discuss that. He didn't cotton to you or take you to his heart sort of, he was kind of....

JWB: None of us. Whether he was busy or whether or not that was the attitude of the time, I'm not quite sure. My Dad was a quiet man. The whole family is quiet people, quiet, supportive, and very knowledgeable people. Like my Dad became the local Commissioner. After Grandpa Captain Joel Woolley was retired, this must have been around 1936, no 1926, (He retired in 1916) he was the head of the Board of Education of the Monmouth Beach School. I'm not sure if he did not start the Monmouth Beach School. He then did things down here in the Navy. He was the president of the Board of Education. He was the head of the Board of Education. Of course, I was down at that particular school. Then my Father followed him as being a member of the Board of Education. So, my family was either between Spermaceti Cove or Monmouth Beach.

TH: From Life-Saving Service to Monmouth Beach and into the school system?

JWB: And of course I told you my Mother's concern, well obviously had three daughters and no husbands for them here. What was she going to do? So she sent us to school. And then during World War II this place blossomed once more and my Mother came back down here and became, was the head of the USO. Do you know what the USO was?

TH: Yeah, it's the organization that you know, sandwiches and the coffee..

JWB: The recreation for the soldiers all over the world.

TH: Recreation, right.

JWB: That's how we all got husbands.

TH: Really. (laughter)

JWB: Western Electric had their scientists down here. Fort Monmouth had people over here. My middle Sister married someone from Western Electric and I married someone...

TH: You were saying she was concerned about getting you girls out of here.

JWB: Yes. She wanted us to lose the kind of, I think you would call it dialect, that people have here. When I first went to California, people noticed it. I would say water if I was caught off guard. The a's at the end of a word always became the r. That's Irish. I think President Kennedy said it that way too. (laughter) It's Irish, it's New England. But my Grandfather, I don't remember him having a British accent with a British background. Does that surprise you? Or having the British ways of talking when I went to Britain. What else can I help you with?

TH: Well, getting back to clambakes, do you have any memories of it being near the house?

JWB: Yeah.

TH: Where would that be held, the clambake, the get-togethers?

JWB: Well, sit on this porch.

TH: Yeah, there is the photograph of it.

JWB: I would say down around here somewhere. All you had to do was get some rocks....

TH: Well, we still got that road going down to the beach there with that famous little knoll that they had trouble getting boats over.

JWB: I'd say it would be out over here. The pictures that I'll get for you were always centered here.

TH: Right out in front. Here's something. How about the mosquitoes back then? Were there mosquitoes out there? Do you remember being bothered by mosquitoes? Right now we give a Campfire Program and there are gnats that bite and there are mosquitoes and horse flies, all biting you.

JWB: In this particular area, no. To have mosquitoes you have to have stagnant water, right? Well, this land drains pretty well, this sand. And I don't think gnats had been invented by then.

TH: Because, (laughter), we still have them, yes.

JWB: (inaudible) I don't remember the mosquitoes. Now once we got to Monmouth Beach, which is marsh land which is all tidal land....

TH: Yeah. Yeah. The tidal marshes.

JWB: There were the mosquitoes. In fact, Uncle Ernie, became our mosquito expert. He was in charge of mosquito control in his time. Now Uncle Ernie was on a Government pension too.

TH: See there's old records that can be traced back to certain dates.

JWB: Well, that will give us dates, wouldn't it?

TH: Definitely, yes.

JWB: He was on the Civil Service. They had to transfer his pension to Civil Service. I don't know how they did that. He tried to argue that he had fought in World War II, but I don't know if he won that particular one, by being on those big guns. My Mother was telling the company yesterday that when the guns were, when people would practice with the big guns on the train, oh, pictures would fall, mirrors would break, and it was just so wrecking. You have a model of one down in your....

TH: Right, they're called Coast Artillery rifles. The Army would refer to them as rifles. I would refer to them, being a historian, I would call them Seacoast Artillery. These were massive guns that would duel with battleships or cruisers. Now, I'm wondering, you mentioned that everything would fall off the wall from the concussion.

JWB: Yes, the mirrors would break, the windows would break, when they first started. Then, I don't know what they did to make them less powerful. This was the very beginning of the experimenting with some of those tremendous, the Coast Artillery as you call them.

TH: That's right, yeah. Would this be the Proving Ground, because you had the Proving Ground, you had the Sandy Hook Proving Ground,

JWB: But they were way down...

TH: Up here, but they were firing down in your direction toward Spermaceti Cove. They had targets going down the beaches. Did they ever complain about that? Did the men

under Captain Woolley ever complain or were worried about walking up a test range when I come to think of it?

JWB: Yes, Uncle Ernie certainly was, my Dad. I think it was a little war going on between the Army and the Navy.

TH: Definitely.

JWB: The Navy felt that this was their place. This was a Navy center. Suddenly the Army comes to practice and to experiment, to keep their stockpile. What's used in those things? The great big...

TH: The bunkers? Ammunition storage, right. You were saying that your Uncle didn't like that.

JWB: No, they didn't like having to... They didn't think it was safe. They were built rather in a hurry. They're still there, aren't they? I think I saw them yesterday.

TH: Yeah. How did they get into something like this? Were they employed by the Army or told to do it?

JWB: I think the feeling was, you saw you needed help and you saw a body and they were recruited.

TH: Volunteered, right?

JWB: Their services were volunteered down at the Coast Guard.

TH: I would think they would be creating bitter feelings there. I mean, they were Life Savers, aren't they?

JWB: Oh a much different kind of thing and no experience with these guys. I think they were just used for

TH: Muscle? Just to help out.

JWB: Or to tell the lay of the land. After all the Army didn't work here. The Coast Artillery, is that Army?

TH: Yeah, the Coast Artillery Corps was part of the Army, right. And the Ordnance of course, there was this bitter friction between the Ordnance Department and the Coast Artillery. And then there was friction between the Life-Saving Service and the..... and on and on it goes it seems.

JWB: And the competition for funds...

TH: Yeah right, whose going to get more to work with more.

JWB: And of course the Life-Saving... What was the turning point in the Life-Saving, it was before radar, was it not?

TH: Oh yeah, much. Radar was developed like between 1935 and 1939.

JWB: It the radar during World War II that made this place not as important anymore, in my point of view.

TH: War changed, was changed with the development of the airplane.

JWB: I can remember (they) had nothing to do with the war, as far as he was concerned.

TH: Right.

JWB: These were cargo boats, very small.

TH: Transports, right.

JWB: Very small, about that big and my Mother always tells the tale that when the boats would pretty much break up, everybody would furnish their houses with what came off.

TH: From shipwrecks.

JWB: Shipwrecks and of course, lumber would come. She would say that this house was built from lumber from such and such a shipwreck. That was acceptable at the time. That was an alright thing to do.

TH: Captain Woolley, you were saying, in personal appearance, had red hair.

JWB: Red hair, short, stocky and of course, I remember portly. Not what they have in the Navy these days.

TH: When you say Navy you are referring to the Life Saving Service?

JWB: I guess they were part of the... we were Navy kids, how's that?

TH: Okay, 'cause you were by the ocean, right.

JWB: Coast Guard. (The U.S.L.S.S became the Coast Guard in 1915) The blue uniforms, the buttons, and the cap. That's sort of part of it. I guess captains on boats that don't belong to the Navy, they consider themselves Navy.

TH: Yeah, yeah. Captain.

JWB: The pension came from the Navy, doesn't it?

TH: From the department, I think back then, let's see if they were in the Department of Commerce. They kept switching departments I even get....

JWB: Back home I will go in this famous closet in my Mother house. I'll see if I can find that for you. Getting to some of these places is a neat trick.

TH: Yeah.

JWB: Our house isn't too different from this.

TH: What was he like, Captain Woolley? Any little things about him that you remember, besides not being too warm hearted towards you, at least as you remember it? You say he hugged you once.

JWB: Yeah, he was conservative and very aware of the Government and very aware of what was going on. He would get mad and swear. For instance, when they were in the process of paving the streets, he thought that was the worst use of Government money. Then, of course, it had to go on. Did you ever see a road paved? That was before your time.

TH: No.

JWB: Well, that was before your time. They take a dirt road and they dig it out and then they put a base and something else then they start putting cement down and they put hay all over it to dry. He knew enough about expansion and contraction and they weren't leaving enough grooves in between. So, I'm sure he wrote to the Government and wrote to the Government, he was always writing comments about things. And he could swear. I think that was part of the culture of the time, too. He had opinions about education. Oh, one of the reasons we had to excel in school, not just have to go to school and do a good job, one of the reasons we had to do a good job was because of Capt. Joel Woolley. He was the one that handed out the medals. I can remember that. My two older Sisters did a very good job. I didn't do such a good job. As you can tell, I lived in a world of imagination. This place developed my imagination. How else could I live but through imagination? So, I leaned toward reading and living in a world of fantasies with my sisters became mathematicians and my other sister was quite an excellent teacher. So, I didn't do so well. We still had this thing with Captain Joel Woolley. So when it came to give out medals, I wouldn't get none. (laughter) But I think the kinds of things I'm doing now, he would appreciate. I don't seem to get my other two Sisters interested in this at all.

TH: No.

JWB: And Frank, I think you should meet Frank, because he too, lived and had quite an imagination. Edwin is a very good business man, the reverse of a world of imagination.

TH: Right. Yeah.

JWB: The feeling for history is not something that everyone has.

TH: Definitely. Unfortunately, too.

JWB: I like it. We cannot lose our history. When I was out in California this winter, people were not interested in the American Revolution and weren't interested, Tom, in the forming of our Constitution.

TH: Back then?

JWB: No, people now, who don't have feeling for the history.

TH: Oh, definitely.

JWB: Because, I guess, we've moved along so quickly.

TH: Yeah.

JWB: And yet that's what made us what we were. Maybe we should look it over and see if we could solve some of our present problems. Certainly we had problems at that time too.

TH: I can close my eyes and I can get a feeling of being back there at that time. I didn't know the people, but I can sense it, feel I was back there, and also feel there was a different feeling. A whole different feeling, more patriotic, really cared about their job. I can just see Captain Woolley keeping on top of everything.

JWB: Pride of job. Responsibility.

JWB: I'm sure you know, getting back to the building at Spermaceti Cove there, I'm sure that boat house, that now houses the exhibit room, I'm sure that boathouse was spic and span. Do you remember that or were you even allowed in there too?

JWB: I remember the floor would be just as polished as a barn floor but once again, time to do it because they weren't always on an emergency. When one sits around waiting for an emergency, I think you become a reader. And you become a handicraft person. In fact, I have some of these heads that I can send down to you, whittling. The whittling, my Dad would do, very good replica of the Lighthouse.

TH: Really.

JWB: Oh, it's just a beautiful thing. It's one of the things I inherited. They'd shoot, you know the guns around because they did kill the ducks. A safety from the kind of living

we're having now, but not a safety from the elements. So much work just to keep living. I think is the difference. The feeling for seasons, "Oh summer is coming." And summer was going. And after the storms... I don't know how nature does this but we had Labor Day storms. And then winter was here and it was going to be a long, hard winter. I was telling some guy the other day about beach plums. Beach plums, you know were preserved. How they could figure out that by the time that the next beach plum season would come, they would just about be down to the last bottle.

TH: Yeah, you run into seasons. You live like that.

JWB: Seasons were important. Or watching the foliage come out. Of course the evergreens were here then and a kind of holly. Do you still have the holly here?

TH: We've got a whole forest of it.

JWB: Do you really? Where?

TH: Over on the Spermaceti Cove.

JWB: Things were so different.

TH: You mean today? So neat and spic and span?

JWB: Yes, I think we have closets now.

TH: To hide everything.

JWB: To put things in whereas before, it was pegs. When something was not in use it was on a peg. Everything was on a peg. No closets.

TH: About the clambake being in front of the house down there and your relatives coming down from New York and they loved to come down here, but what would they do?

JWB: Well, it would only be a one day thing.

TH: Oh, it was just for the day.

JWB: The Fourth of July.

TH: What would they find here at Sandy Hook that they would like to come down and visit? You said, to you, that you were here, trapped. (laughter)

JWB: Well, I have to tell you that I never got out of here. I never got out of New Jersey until I was thirty years old. We were really here.

TH: Centered, yeah.

JWB: Centered. Well, they would just come down. Families were important it was a big family get-together. But why didn't we ever visit the people in New York? That has never answered to me. They would always come this way and Grandpa Woolley, I think it was because he was generous. My Mother always mentioned that. In fact she said, "Grandpa Woolley was generous and we'd do the work," to feed that number of people. I think it was a one day thing. Fourth of July was a big day. Labor Day was another big day. Once in awhile, some of them, some of the men, would spend their vacations here. Maybe they were here when they weren't supposed to be here. I was so excited about that.

TH: When you had the relatives come, food went out on the table. It was that sort of thing. When you say Capt. Woolley was a generous man, everybody was really welcomed.

JWB: A very, very large table. I think the clambake was the night time meal. The rest was just lots of people. I can still see the sugar bowls and the silverware stuck up like this in holders. The table was not set and there was never a linen table cloth. I think this was what my Mother wanted us to have the niceties of life. This was Government Service. This is like being in any service I don't think you had that sort of thing around, a big table with all those black chairs with the spindle backs, seeing the stuff hanging around. What other gear would be there? The actual gear of the boats and everything were in the boat house. Grandpa's office, okay, this big desk.

TH: Where would his office be?

JWB: Well, I could show you if I go back there.

TH: We come in off the porch....

JWB: The office is off the side of the kitchen.

TH: Is that our store room in the back there? Because where we were sitting would be the kitchen. So we come off the porch into the viewing room which would be the kitchen and off on the right hand side was a door that was closed. There is also a door that was open. The girls were in the back there. That's where we have our typewriters. That's our office now.

JWB: I feel that was more like for storage. I think that was open for awhile. I could sit in the kitchen and see him in his office. I still remember that. He was busy. He had to fill out papers and such things and he had to work the monies that were sent to him to feed everybody and do all the purchasing. That's what a Captain did. He didn't have a purchasing agent as we do now. The big black stove, I remember that was running all the time.

TH: Okay, why don't we do this, what year are we going to talk about now? Your earliest recollection of it.

JWB: That's why I'm going to go home and ask my Mother. I still say he must have been down here in 1920. Either legally or illegally.

TH: Hmm. It was probably more year's service around here put in ...

JWB: Can't we find out when that shipwreck was? We should be able to find out when that shipwreck was.

TH: That was 1907. It's marked down as 1907.

JWB: That was before 1907 when Moran....

TH: ...was out in the surf.. The photographs you just gave me was 1907.

JWB: He died (inaudible) I remember some, this is getting to be very hazy to me. All I'm giving you now is feelings. They were people, big people. They went to bed very early.

TH: About how early would they go to bed?

JWB: We always had to be in bed by nine. That was the rule.

TH: The children, but how about the grown-ups? Would they stay up?

JWB: I think they said up.

TH: Really. They would be talking?

JWB: I could hear them talking and Uncle Ernie would be the one to bring me a drink of water and such if I pestered him enough, I guess. I must have been Uncle Ernie's godchild, everyone's assigned an adult in the family. I think I was, because he was the one that I would relate to.

TH: Let's say we approached the building, what was your recollection of it? It wasn't painted in white then, was it? Because these photographs look like....

JWB: I can't tell you colors of paint.

TH: You can't do that.

JWB: No. I remember the porch was open.

TH: It was an open porch. Anything centered on the porch. Was like the Captain and his Wife would sit there at the end of the day....

JWB: Ah, yeah.

TH: Would you play on the porch or were you allowed to?

JWB: I played out here. I remember steps, wait a minute, there were steps out here. Yeah, Grandpa Woolley smoked a pipe that was curved.

TH: A curved pipe?

JWB: Yeah. I think we have pictures of that. Maybe we can get a hold of that. Yeah, rockers on the porch, true. But also gear. Not neat as it is now. There were a whole lot of people living here. When you get a lot of people together, everybody has something.

TH: Well if you went upstairs and saw the room, we've all got something. (laughter) You say a lot of people, the family plus the men on duty, how many?

JWB: The men on duty were family.

TH: Family, is right! How many all together would you say?

JWB: The clan?

TH: Yeah, everybody at the Life-Saving Station or the Coast Guard Station.

JWB: Children didn't eat with adults.

TH: Really?

JWB: We ate separately, that I remember.

TH: How come?

JWB: Number, attitude, and Grandpa Woolley, we didn't eat with Grandpa Woolley . I remember him standing at the head of the table carving or serving whatever we had, that came to mind, but no, we did not eat with the adults.

TH: Who would supervise you then? Because, you know, how children are. They get carried away.

JWB: I think it was an attitude that, you just wouldn't dare.

TH: Really.

JWB: Yeah these automatic good manners, where did they come from because I'm interested in children and how did I learn that. I think it was constant talking and maybe a squeeze of my Mother's hand. I think my Mother lived in awe of my Grandpa Woolley too. Such things as that. No, we didn't throw food. It was a fun loving family, though. We had fun.

TH: But all together about how many?

JWB: There'd be about ten. Let me do it for you. Three,.....nine, kids.

TH: Nine children.

JWB: Well that's the stable group.

TH: Okay.

JWB: Well, I have to think, Uncle Ernie didn't have any children. There were fifteen kids around the table.

TH: Fifteen children? I mean then think of the crew. I mean the Life-Saving Crew.

JWB: Well, that's the husbands, that's our Dads plus other people that were there. That's not clear in my mind either. I think the crew ate by themselves too and then family.

TH: Would this all be going on at the same time though?

JWB: No, no, shifts.

TH: Shifts.

JWB: The children ate first.

TH: Wow. What time in the afternoon would that be?

JWB: Early supper, yes.

TH: Early supper. About what time?

JWB: Four-thirty. It's very strange to me now but in fact, there was some kind of a whistle around at four-thirty or it may be four. Is there a four o'clock change or something at that time or some kind of a

TH: We still have whistles...

JWB: Some sort of a whistle that we knew wherever we were, we had to be home by four-thirty.

TH: Somewhere up in the Fort area you would hear a whistle?

JWB: Or maybe from the mainland.

TH: Mainland, right, 'cause even in Newark, to this day, as a little boy, at four and four thirty whistles go off at the local factories in Newark...

JWB: And did you learn to tell..

TH: Yeah, right, exactly, I still remember that.

JWB: (inaudible) Yeah I remember that now. I remember the thing that we had so much of, was jello. I used to say to my Mother I didn't know it was invented at the time. And they did, they had a recipe to make ice cream.

TH: Homemade ice cream. What was your favorite back then?

JWB: The only thing you made was vanilla.

TH: Vanilla, right.

JWB: And whatever fruits were around. But taking the turns, you know, those things don't make much ice cream.

TH: Oh, the bucket, the old fashioned....

JWB: Yeah, you go like this and put the ice around. I was always so disappointed. All that work and....

TH: Very little ice cream. That's interesting you mention whatever fruit was available. Anything out here at Sandy Hook would you utilize?

JWB: Blackberries.

TH: Blackberries.

JWB: Blueberries. Of course, beach plums, but that was a preserve fruit. There was a lot of fruits coming from all over.

TH: I keep getting off the subject of the house. We started with the porch and you said it was messy. There's one thing that I'd like to know how, was there any remedy for poison ivy back then? If you caught it. I know that juleweed is weed that grows in fresh water and you can get it locally in Monmouth County you boil it

JWB: No. They didn't use a remedy like that. There was some awful black salve that was put on me and I would hide.

TH: Black salve? It wasn't an oil or a grease but a salve?

JWB: It was called black salve. Once in awhile so I could endure it I think, bicarbonate soda, that might, and corn starch was something that was available to take out the hot itch. I would just have to go through the blistering and then that was it. The worst times I would get it was when they would burn. Do you know what cattails were?

TH: Oh, yes. Yeah.

JWB: Well for safety, they would be burned when they would get very dry. Then oh my, poison ivy would burn too and if I would just get in the ...

TH: Smoke?

JWB: Smoke. I learned how to hide when that was going on. The big kitchen, okay, the tablecloth....

TH: I'm sorry, about that porch you say, things were scattered around it?

JWB: Yeah, everybody's.

TH: You say Captain Woolley used to smoke that pipe. Would he be on a rocking chair or just sit there on the stoop?

JWB: We didn't have rocking chairs. Do you know what a captain's chair is? They would bring captain's chair out there.

TH: A captain's chair.

JWB: Yeah, a captain's chair.

TH: A regular type of old captain's chair that are popular right now that people like to buy for their kitchen sets?

JWB: Back here there was a hole and spindles. They were not as sturdily built or as thickly built as you see now in maple.

TH: They were thinner. Yeah, skinnier. And he would sit there and smoke his pipe. I'm sure there was a lot to talk about.

JWB: I don't quite remember that so I guess I would be off somewhere. Adult talk to a four year old is, you know, I think adults have to talk to a four year old for them to understand.

TH: Yeah, right.

JWB: No, I don't have anything like that to pass on to you. They were very well aware of everything that was going on. Weren't there anymore rescues after that particular one?

TH: Oh, yeah, there was quite a number in fact, the records are down in Washington. I can tell you that. That they are down in Washington.

JWB: But they might have been rescues when Grandpa Woolley was not the captain.

TH: Right.

END OF INTERVIEW