

EDITH MAY MARTIN VORIS
Interviewed by Tom Purdy
May 28, 1970

TP = Tom Purdy

EV = Edith Voris

TP: Mrs. Voris, it is very good of you to let me come here this afternoon on behalf of the North Salem Historical Society to chat with you for a while about our Purdys the way it used to be years ago. This is a beautiful afternoon here on May 28, 1970 and I'm sure you can tell me a great deal of what's happened in the last 50 or 60 years around here in Purdys, and I'll certainly be very interested to hear it.

TP: Mrs. Voris, you told me a little while ago that you were born here in Purdys and your father was Mr. John Martin, I remember very well, who had the blacksmith shop. You also told me he had a blacksmith shop down in the old village of Purdys. And I would like to have you tell me a little bit about some of the other businesses and organizations and people that lived there at that time.

EV: Um hum

TP: You mentioned where the blacksmith shop was. Would you mind telling me for the sake of the recording just where that was again?

EV: The first blacksmith shop was on the east side of the railroad track and he stayed there until, we had two blacksmiths at the time in the village, in the old village. One was Ed Voris on the west side of the track. And he moved to Somers. And after he moved then my father moved over in his shop because they seemed to condemn the property on this side of the track for some reason or other sooner, I believe, or made buildings move soon. And he was there quite a while and I might add, too, that Ed Voris shod oxen.

TP: He shod oxen!

EV: Oxen. He had like a stall on the outside of the shop there and they would run these oxen, one oxen, into the stall, and they had a belt like under his stomach and would raise 'em up. I never saw him shoe one, but he did do it different times, I'd hear about this shoeing them. But then my father stayed there quite a while, oh, I don't know just how many years, and finally he moved into this building here now, that we're in.

TP: That was his blacksmith shop.

EV: That was his blacksmith shop.

TP: But then his house, you mentioned that that was moved, both buildings, of course, were moved.

EV: Were moved, yes.

TP: And the house, you mentioned that your mother,...

EV: They moved the house across the railroad tracks after the one o'clock, a little later maybe, train went up. That was the last train at night. So they moved across the track that night and my mother slept all through it. She went to bed just as though she was going to bed anytime, slept all through it.

TP: She did?

EV: Next morning she was on the other side of the tracks.

TP: Then they moved it up further from across the tracks.

EV: Umm

TP: And you lived in the house, while it . . . You lived in the house

EV: All the while that it was being moved and it was quite late in the fall, getting late in the fall, you know, so that, of course, we didn't have any heat then the furnace was disconnected and all. And my father, we had like a sheet metal stove in the dining room and my father had Mr. Ferguson make a ring, an iron ring like, that would go around the stove and then it was, had, arms like going down to the side and then it swooped to the floor, to hold it in place, see, and we kept very comfortable then until we moved right along. There wasn't any stopping at all. They kept us going pretty good. Of course, we were moved on those long beams, long, how much, 12 foot beams.

TP: 12 foot

EV: 12, no, I think they were about 18 or 20 feet long, but they were square like on the end, you know about 12,....

TP: They were huge things. What did you have to pull the thing?

EV: Well, there had a horse, did it, with a turnstile.

TP: Just one horse?

EV: Just one horse. It had this turnstile made, oh, as far as from here to White's and then they had, of course, this heavy rope, see, oh, thick rope, I don't know how thick it was, about like that [indicating] you know. And he would go round, and round and round the back like that until they would get to the end of this one or two lengths of this.... And then the men, of course, used soap, you know, bars of soap. The men would be underneath there putting the soap on, you know, so it would slide along....

TP: Well, that must have been very interesting.

EV: It really was.

TP: Well, then, there were some other industries there in Purdys in the old days. There was the condensed milk factory.

EV: Oh, yes. That was on the west side, the east side.

TP: Do you remember how many people that employed?

EV: No, I don't remember. Mrs. Sweeney can tell you more about that.

TP: You gave me a picture of that.

EV: Yeah.

TP: Or showed me a picture of it. And, well, then, there was also MacNeil's store.

EV: McKeel's

TP: McKeel's store.

EV: Aaron McKeel

TP: Aaron McKeel

EV: Um hum

TP: And that later was

EV: Was taken over by his son-in-law.

TP: Mr. Minor.

EV: Mr. Minor.

TP: And then that was taken over by his son-in-law.

EV: That's right.

TP: Berkeley Grey.

EV: From up here on the hill.

TP: And now it's Les White's store.

EV: That's right.

TP: So that's quite a history to that. Well, now, you mentioned that there was the hotel, that was run by Reynolds.

EV: That's right.

TP: What was his name?

EV: Eli.

TP: Eli?

EV: Eli Reynolds.

TP: Eli Reynolds. You have a good memory. [laughter] Well, then, there, what other industries? You said there was a tinsmith there.

EV: Yes.

TP: And Mr. Gott.

EV: Adam Richard owned the tin shop. And then there was a jewelry store at the end of that.

TP: Who ran that?

EV: And that was John Fanzini.

TP: Fanzini?

EV: Um hum

TP: And then there was the, Mr. was Gotlin? , was

EV: Yeah, Mr. Gotlin.

TP: He made tombstones.

EV: He had tombstones. That was on the west side of the tracks.

TP: On the west side.

EV: And further down below. The old depot was on the west side of the tracks, too.

TP: It was on the west side?

EV: It was on the west side. And, oh, about as far as from here to White's, I guess, below the old depot. They had quite a lumber yard down there. There was a house down in there.

TP: And a lumber yard?

EV: And a lumber yard. Mr. Hunt run the lumber yard.

TP: Well, do you remember what this area where your house is now and, where your home is here now and where the White's and the post office are, what did that look like back in the old days?

EV: It was, it was an orchard, I remember over, over all throughout Millers. But I really don't know what was up here. I can't remember. But there was a big apple orchard. It was farm land, like, you know, and I don't even, I suppose your grandfather owned it.

TP: My grandfather, I think my uncle owned it at the time that most, ...

EV: At the time that the buildings were being moved, of course, he bought quite a few of the houses that, you know, in the old village, and moved them up here and rented them.

TP: He bought them and moved them up on this property?

EV: Yeah.

TP: Well, he, I've heard my uncle and my father talk about how they laid out the street up here and my uncle, I know, didn't want anybody to, any neighbors to fight or argue, so he always kept a little strip of property between the,...

EV: He did, that's right.

TP: Between each lot.

EV: A little strip.

TP: And he had a little strip here and he had a little strip there, because he said he wasn't just sure where one lot started and another stopped, ended.. [laughter] So, he kept a little strip in between so the neighbors wouldn't fight. And I remember we were left with all kinds of strips here, there and the other place.

EV: What to do [laughing]

TP: And I remember your father saying that part of his shop was on one of those strips.

EV: On one of those strips.

TP: Strips. And he didn't know when we were gonna come and cut off that little end of the shop. I remember this

EV: I remember that.

TP: Let's talk about that, but I guess you never did cut off the end of the ...

EV: No, never did.

TP: I guess Merwin has the whole thing now, doesn't he?

EV: He has the whole thing.

TP: Well, that's nice. That was something [both laughing]. We still have a couple of those strips.

EV: You have!

TP: We have a little triangle over here with the Christmas tree is.

EV: Community tree is.

TP: Where the community Christmas tree is now.

EV: Did you have to pay taxes on that? I suppose.

TP: Yes, we used to pay a dollar a year taxes, well, it was assessed for a dollar for a long time, but then the new assessor came along and decided that they had to assess it higher than that, so now we pay three or four dollars a year.

EV: Like this strip, you haven't got that on now?

TP: Oh, yes.

EV: Well, xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx

TP: Oh, go ahead, say it. People like to hear it.

EV: I was going to say about the strip there, that Merwin bought from your mother for a dollar, you know, and it was taxed for so little. But now, he says it's four thousand dollars they assessed it for!

TP: Four thousand dollars.

EV: For that strip.

TP: My goodness! It's quite a difference.

EV: Oh

TP: Why, the taxes are. Well, now, tell us some of the big events that have happened here in town. I remember one of the biggest events as a small boy was when the White's store burned down, and their house.

EV: Oh, my.

TP: That was right across.

EV: Right here.

TP: Practically on your front porch here.

EV: Half past five in the morning.

TP: Well, tell us a little bit about that.

EV: How it started?

TP: How, do you remember, I think it started out in the back there.

EV: It did. Leslie, young Leslie was out there repairing a tire, you know, vulcanizing a tire and he went in the store part and left it and it overflowed, the gasoline overflowed on it [laughter] That was what started....

TP: Well, that's all right, but I remember I was terribly sad about that because, of course, there wasn't any fire engine around here and

EV: No.

TP: And the only thing that they had to put out the fire was an old hose cart, and that was stored up in Croton Falls, so my father and I, he had a little Buick runabout.

EV: Um hum

TP: With yellow wheels, I remember. And we went dashing up to Croton Falls, probably about 15 miles an hour, and got, hitched on this hose cart, pump, a big pump, and brought it up and put it by a wall back of the Miler's place, there used to be a windmill there.

EV: That's right, that's right.

TP: And they pumped, I thing four or five, six men on a side. And they pumped and pumped and pumped and finally got a stream of water going here and I think they may have saved a couple of other houses that were....

EV: Oh, yeah.

TP: Right there near by.

EV: Of course, the house on the north side there, Mrs. Ward's at the time, Macy Ward's mother. They lived there at the time. That got burned a little bit, but White's house got burned a little, too, not too bad. Neither one of em wasn't too bad, but bad enough, so that they didn't live in it, you know. They moved over into Miller's house, or Roz's house it was at the time. They lived over there until they built this one.

TP: Well, can you tell us, we've gotten off on more modern time. Tell us, I wonder where the schools used to be, where did you go to school?

EV: Well, the school was down, right back of our house in the old village, see, and it was a two-room school, it's up here on the hill now, this isn't ours.

TP: Yes, this is ours.

EV: Well, it was up here on the, Second Street here and it's now a private home.

TP: Yes.

EV: A family by the name of Farmers lives there.

TP: I remember that school very well.

EV: Well, the other school was way up on the, it's covered with water now.

TP: Wasn't it right up near where the Fields lived?

EV: It was across, Sunday we went by there and Ella Sweeney was with us, and she said that school set right down near the reservoir.

TP: Near the reservoir.

EV: But I don't remember. I went to school there first. She took me the first day I went to school, she took me.

TP: She did?

EV: Yeah.

TP: Well, that was District No. 6. I have the assessment roll for District No. 6 back, long before your time, in 18., when they wanted to build that school. And they assessed, they estimated the cost of the school was going to be \$171 to build that school. And they raised just about that amount for it, to build the school. And I thought that was very interesting since now they want over a million dollars to build a school.

EV: Oh, yes.

TP: And I made a copy of that old assessment roll and sent it to Mr. Ed. Field, not Ed Field, to Bob Field and I think he'd be quite interested in that.

EV: Sure.

TP: But you mentioned a moment ago that there was big department store in Purdys years ago. I'd be interested to hear about that.

EV: It was big in those days! Mr. H. H. and T. W. Fowler owned them.

TP: Fowler, yes, I think I've seen that sign on some of the old maps.

EV: That's right.

TP: But it didn't say what business he was in.

EV: Well, they had this store and they had anything from, I can't remember, groceries, yet it seems to me,....

TP: Well, MacNeil, McKeel had the grocery store.

EV: Well, so did Sam Smith.

TP: Oh, Sam Smith?

EV: Sam Smith had a store down there, too. Now we're off of this,....

TP: Now Sam Smith's store was moved, up by the Methodist Church.

EV: That's right.

TP: And the Methodist Church, you say, that new Methodist Church, or relatively new, the one that is in existence now in 1970, you mentioned a while ago that that was dedicated when?

EV: In 1903.

TP: 1903

EV: I'm quite sure it was then.

TP: Now, who was the minister of it then?

EV: That I couldn't tell you.

TP: Was that before Mr. White came here?

EV: No, I think that was after Mr. White came. I believe Mr. White came in '84, I think, or else it was '85. I think it was '84.

TP: And he had a livery stable here, didn't he?

EV: Um hum.

TP: Did he have the livery stable in the old building?

EV: Yes. It was just across the track, and there was a little house set right down there, almost on the track, I can see it just as plain as can be, there was just about a roadway between that porch and the house. And there was a basement in it and Mr. and Mrs. Swarms lived there. Uh, Mrs., Alister's sister, married one of the sons. And then there was quite an open space there and in there was Mr. White's ...

TP: Livery stable.

EV: Livery stable.

TP: He had the livery stable and then he moved up here and

EV: And had a livery stable

TP: Had a livery stable up here

EV: That's right out back here.

TP: And, tell us a little about the livery stable. That was a place where they rented horses

EV: Horses.

TP: Horses, and a wagon, horse and wagon. With a driver or without a driver?

EV: Well, mostly with a driver, I think. I think it was done more like a taxi, as I remember.

TP: I see, people would take people from the train

EV: And they would take people, you know, from the train and things like that

TP: Have you any idea what they charged to take somebody up to North Salem?

EV: Wasn't very much, I imagine.

TP: I suppose it was a long way then.

EV: It was a long way, yeah, in a way.

TP: Well, then, after they got done the livery stable the White boys, that was Ferno and Leslie, and the oldest boy was Bob.

EV: Bob.

TP: They ran a garage later on.

EV: Well, I don't think Bob was,....

TP: Bob wasn't interested.

EV: Because Bob worked in New York. He worked in the railroad, you know, in the baggage department.

TP: But then there was Ferno and Leslie.

EV: There was Ferno and Leslie, they run the garage.

TP: They ran the garage, but they had a little garage and a little house right next to you here.

EV: There was a little house down there.

TP: Right next to you.

EV: Right next to us, right

TP: Where that big concrete building was built.

EV: And then they tore down the little house and built this,

TP: Great big place.

EV: This big place.

TP: Um hum. And they had a garage there for a while. I remember they used to have dances up on the top of that barn.

EV: They did, that's right.

TP: That was quite a time years ago.

EV: Yeah.

TP: And I remember

EV: They had some nice parties, really nice parties, dances there and all.

TP: Well, I remember going there. My family went there one time to vote on whether the school district would be consolidated or centralized.

EV: Oh, yeah.

TP: Do you remember that vote, when, back in those days

EV: I don't remember.

TP: It was a very big thing as to whether we would vote for centralization of our school district here in town. Do you remember what year that was, about when that was?

EV: No,

TP: I think it was about 1923 or 24.

EV: I couldn't say, don't have the least idea.

TP: And it was voted then to centralize and we became the first centralized district in the State.

EV: Um hum.

TP: But, I'm here to have you tell me some stuff [laughing].

EV: Well.

TP: I talk too much.

EV: My house, the man that run the store, you know, was down here on what was the main road to Golden's Bridge and I think the back of it would be more to the main road, but the front, there was another street run from the main road to Golden's Bridge, there was another street running in the village, form the hotel and wound around down. That house was torn down and moved to Ridgefield and built up.

TP: It was?

EV: Um hum.

TP: I think I know where the house was.

EV: Yeah.

TP: I think some people by the name of Crane lived there.

EV: I don't know.

TP: My father told me that they, he showed it to me, my brother told, showed it to me over there.

EV: Uh hum

TP: I think I know right where the house is. But you mentioned that they had a strawberry festival.

EV: Strawberry Festival

TP: Tell us all about that.

EV: Every summer and just as sure as we would have it, there would be a thunder shower – it was outdoors, see. And the tables would be all set up and everything was really very nice, and then we'd have a thunder shower. Well, they got so disgusted they came and built a hall [laughing] the church hall which is over by there by the church now.

TP: Was that the hall that, they moved that hall,

EV: They moved it over there.

TP: Over there.

EV: Um hum.

TP: And they still have it, I believe, they use it as a garage.

EV: Well, there's a garage down underneath, you know. The hall was upstairs.

TP: Upstairs, yes.

EV: And they used the garage down underneath and, of course, that is connected with what was the barn, at that time the minister had a horse, not a car. And then the upper part was the hayloft. But the minister at one time had been using it for like, an office there, but I don't know what it is now. Then, of course, they bought the old garage next to the store that Yuul Smith run, they bought that and added it on for a hall downstairs.

TP: Well, that was just a few years ago.

EV: A few years ago, yeah.

TP: Well, now, we have talked about the schools and the churches in town here, and, there used to be a doctor, I'm sure.

EV: Oh, yeah. We had two doctors here.

TP: What was, what were their names?

EV: One was Dr. Castleman.

TP: He was Sadie Paulson's,....

EV: Sadie Paulson's father.

TP: Father.

EV: And then he left, and I believe he went to California when the City took over the property

here. And then there was a Dr. Potter here and he left and there was a Dr. Waterman come after him. And they had, their office was on a side street. It was this side of the tracks, but it was on a side street between the Golden's Bridge Road and the main road in the village that we called South Street, right by the hotel and on down through the village.

TP: Well, now, when I was a small boy I remember a Dr. Brown, Dr. Louis Brown.

EV: He come after Dr., took Dr. Castelman's place.

TP: He was an Englishman, wasn't he?

EV: Um, hum.

TP: I heard that he was a doctor and a British man of war and he retired from that and then came here. And he had quite a large family, didn't he?

EV: Four children, I think.

TP: Four children? I thought, I was under the impression there were more than,....

EV: Or five.

TP: Four. There was Herbert and Eric and Edith and Connie

EV: Connie

TP: and

EV: and another sister. That'd be five, what was the other sister's name?

TP: I don't remember, but I remember they lived down where the Citgo station is now.

EV: Um hum, that's right. That was the old Dr. Castleman house.

TP: That's where Dr. Castleman lived?

EV: You see when he moved his house from City property he just moved across the road onto that property.

TP: Well, that's interesting.

EV: Ah huh.

TP: Um hum.

EV: And I don't remember that they ever lived there, I wonder if your uncle bought that property and moved it across there,....

TP: I don't think he did. I don't think, I know he thought of buying that at one time, years later, but we never did, and but, I remember my father saying that, that our old family homestead was about the only place that hadn't been moved around town.

EV: that's right, that's right.

TP: And that was just beyond where they took all that land.

EV: That's right.

TP: Bu it certainly must have been a big change in appearances here in town.

EV: Oh, it did.

TP: Must have been a great deal of excitement when they, when people came here to town, didn't they?

EV: To work on the reservoir?

TP: Um.

EV: Well, they were mostly all up on the

TP: Where did they live?

EV: Well, um, that I can't tell you too much about, where the engineers and they lived, I really don't know where they lived.

TP: Well, Mr. Collier was one of the engineers and he

EV: He lived up there

TP: Across from Fred Guss.

EV: Yeah, up in there. Lived there for a long time from back till after, well, he lived there even for some time even after the reservoir was built. He was the engineer.

TP: Oh, yes. I remember this daughter, Catherine Collier. I remember her very well. And, then, well, Mrs. Sweeney's husband worked there.

EV: That's right.

TP: On the reservoir.

EV: He was working there when he died.

TP: Mrs. Voris, could you tell me now a little bit about your own personal family, your own

immediate family, who your father and mother were and your brothers and sisters and children and so forth.

EV: Well, my father's name was John Martin, John White Martin.

TP: White.

EV: White. And my mother's name was Anna Reynolds Martin. And she was

TP: Was she any relation to the Reynolds that ran the hotel?

EV: My grandfather was, a cousin.

TP: A cousin

EV: A cousin. And then they had five girls.

TP: Five girls.

EV: Edith, do you want the last names?

TP: Edith.

EV: Edith

TP: You're Edith.

EV: I'm Edith. And Josephine, and Cora, Marie and Ruth.

TP: Well, now, they didn't all live in Purdys in my time. I remember Cora.

EV: No, they married, my sister, my husband's name was, I married Harry Voris.

TP: Where was, where did, was he a resident of Purdys, his family?

EV: No, no, they came from Golden's Bridge.

TP: Golden's Bridge, that's what I thought. And his father was the engineer.

EV: The engineer. And

TP: Sam Voris, that's right, I remember.

EV: And then my sister married Tom

TP: Your sister, now which sister was that?

EV: Josephine, yeah. And then Cora married Edward Flewellin from Bedford and Marie married Eli.

TP: Albert Eli.

EV: From Bridgeport.

TP: That was which?

EV: Marie.

TP: Marie.

EV: And Ruth married Aubrey Wilson from New York, or New Jersey, I think it was. So, that's the family.

TP: And I suppose they must have.

EV: No, my

TP: Children

EV: Marie, married Albert Eli, has two girls.

TP: And where do they live?

EV: They lived, one lives in Trumble, Connecticut. And the other one lives in Guilford, Connecticut.

TP: Oh, Guilford, that's interesting.

EV: And then I have three, two boys and a girl.

TP: Um hum. Merwin.

EV: Merwin and Harold.

TP: And Harold.

EV: And Marjorie.

TP: and Marjorie. And Marjorie lives with you, here, doesn't she?

EV: Um hum.

TP: And Merwin lives up in your father's house, his grandfather's house. And Harold, I see Harold form time to time.

EV: He lives in New York

TP: He never did get married, did he?

EV: No, oh, yes, he was married, couple of times.

TP: I didn't know that.

EV: Oh, he's a great guy.

TP: He's very interested in historical things.

EV: That right, he is.

TP: And he showed me where Sarah Bishop's rock was, or cave.

EV: Yes, he was just up there a week ago.

TP: He was. He's very much interested.

EV: Yes, he's very interested.

TP: He joined the society and he'll be interested in, to hear that you've been making a recording for the historical society. Well, I certainly appreciate very much your letting me come and talk to you about these. And, if some more questions come up at some time, I hope I can come and talk to you some more. I'm not very much of a professional but I had a lot of fun talking over some of these things and I won't bother you any more today.

EV: Oh, that's all right. Glad to have you come down, what little I could tell you. Really, Mrs. Sweeney knows more of this.

TP: Well, we'll talk to Mrs. Sweeney, too.

EV: She's, her memory's good.

TP: So, that you very much and we'll call it a day for right now.

POSTSCRIPT

Debby Voris Moore: You've just heard a recording of the tape made by Thomas L. Purdy on May 28, 1970 during his interview with my grandmother, Edith May Voris. She was born December 6, 1885 and died May 6, 1977. She was born Edith May Martin, in the old village of Purdys near the Croton River. On September 22, 1904 she married Harry Nathaniel Voris of Golden's Bridge; they moved into a small apartment over the blacksmith shop owned by her father, my great-grandfather, John Hoyt Martin. There she lived for 73 years. It was there that she gave birth to her three children, Merwin Athington Voris, Marjorie Hope Voris and Harold Martin

Voris. And it was there that she died at the age of 92.