

INTERVIEW WITH ANNA MATTISON MURRAY

BETTY PECK CONDUCTS INTERVIEW

FEBRUARY 3, 1978

BETTY PECK "Q"

ANNA MATTISON MURRAY "A"

Q You're Anna Mattison, growing up here as a young lady. Your grandfather came here, around the turn of the century, and rented different houses and then bought one in Highground, where the Christys now live, which is overlooking the Loop Beach. One of his daughters, Anna Woodward, was one of the first treasurers of the Cotuit Yacht Club, in its early days. So you have been - your life has been oriented around the sailing program over the years, would you like to talk about that?

A You want me to take this? Yes, and I've always been interested in the Yacht Club and, seems that I've been watching the sailboats ever since I was six months old and the pictures I have show this. Incidentally, Betty, there was one error in your introduction. My father and grandfather never bought a house. He rented a house. And he thought it was outrageous that he had to pay two hundred and seventy five dollars a SUMMER for the house. Now you couldn't rent a house in that location for that - you'd pay more than that a week. But he always rented, and we, the Mattison family, rented the house now owned by Rollinson and the house now owned by Walcotts, until we bought the present house that I live in in 1917. We didn't live in it until 1918. I've been in this house ever since then.

Q You and your sister raised your families in this house, you shared the house for a number of years and it was a very lively household, I can remember. You had -

A We had seven, between us. Ruth's four and my three and things were a little hectic at times. But because we kept the idea of having a quiet hour after lunch - which meant from after lunch until three o'clock, no other children were allowed over on the premises. Each child had to repair to his or her own room, the youngest ones could go to sleep and the oldest ones were supposed to read. This got the summer reading done. It also helped us draw checks, get our own reading done, and have a little peace

before they all started screaming at each other at three o'clock.

Ruth and I didn't separate until a few years ago when she went across the street and bought the rear of the hill, which my father had owned for awhile and I'd owned the whole hill and the beach which Christys now own. But having bought it from the Baileys and held it for ten years, why it got sold back to the Baileys again.

Also, when we were first in this house, we could see the water and there was no Loop Road, and we could walk to the beach, across the gentle hill. Then, Mr. Bailey moved the house across the street right in front of us, which pretty much cut off some of our view, but we got a little glimpse left of the water here.

Do you want me to talk about the difference that I see in the fleets?

Q Oh, yes.

A What the early pictures show of the yacht club, that nobody had numbers on their sails. Of course in those days the sails were made of duck and were very easily torn. But when the boats came in to the pier they all had topping lifts. Nowadays, none of the boats have topping lifts and I don't think any of the new kids would even know what a topping lift was. But they would pull the topping lift out and that would take some of the sail area away and the boats could stay there pretty well, and boats could stay there pretty well without banging each other up unless it was terribly, terribly windy.

In those days the racing was practically always in the outer harbor. And the boats were mostly moored out here. Everybody - the yacht club has been lucky to have people who have loaned their property and their piers for the races. My grandfather's pier, Dr. Woodman's pier, was used early in the yacht club years and later on Mr. Sears's pier was used. Mr. Sears house being the big house now owned by Larry O'Brien. And the pier in those days was, of course, a moveable pier that came in and out every winter. None of these permanent structures that are beginning to crop up now.

The courses weren't very imaginative in those days, it was usually Townsend, Codman three times to port because of the prevailing southerly wind and if the wind was north it was Codman, Townsend three times to starboard. There was no committee boat, and if somebody tipped over, the father sitting on the shore - later on when the Mortons had a pavilion up on the beach they had some rocking chairs. We used to call the fathers, the 'old men' of course they were to us, in those days. We used to call them the rocking chair fleet. The rocking chair fleet would observe everything and even though Philip Nickerson won every race, when he'd come in his grandfather would tell him what he'd done wrong.

So, usually when somebody tipped over, after a while they'd either drift on the shore or drift on the island, and they'd tip the boat over, bail it out and pull the sail up and pull the topping lift up and let the sail shake around and get a little drier, and then sail home.

In those days there were no motor boats that you had to worry about. Very, very few. So there was no worry about any chop or wash from them either. And of course, when this was, when I first started, there weren't any channel buoys out there either. Sometimes, some of these people ought to go down and read some of the yacht club records because the yacht club wrote to Congressman Gifford and tried to see if we couldn't get some channel buoys in here. Correspondence on this is very amusing.

This yacht club has had some special races. The pirate game started way back, oh, I'd say in about 1915, I'm a little rusty on that. Again, I guess it was the Morses that thought up the idea. Because it says in the records that Mrs. Morse made the pirate flag. The pirate game, which is as far as I know isn't used in any other yacht club, unless it's one of the Chatham yacht clubs, which may have taken the idea from us when somebody left here for Chatham.

But, all the boats are pirates, and they are given a set of boundaries and the revenue cutter has to either tag you by ramming you or putting a tennis ball in your cockpit. This works very well because of course, one boat could never catch the whole fleet, but as soon as caught the pirate suddenly becomes holy and turns revenue cutter and goes around and catches the rest.

Well, one year which I remember very well, Philip Cadell and two other seventeen year old boys got together and said they were going over to Cupid's Cove and nobody could catch them because they were going to pull the boat way up on shore and just physically wrestle any oncomers so that nobody could get it - tennis ball in the cockpit. Well, they hadn't counted on Nancy and my sister, Faith Mattison who landed on this side of the island, took a tennis ball in their hands, walked across the - to the cove, where the boys were in skinny dipping. The boys were scared to come out, so they just stuck the ball in the cockpit and the boys were caught! They hadn't expected an attack from the rear.

The other races, they had - one of the early races they had this 'going around the island'. It doesn't say which island, but I assume it was Grand Island. But of course, now we have both the Dead Neck and Grand Island races. But in those days our yacht club wasn't very venturesome. We didn't go to Hyannis Regatta, there was no such thing. We didn't sail down to Waquoit. There were, of course, those in the yacht club who did go far afield, and Nickerson, probably being the one that went the farthest, because he sailed all the way to Providence, and kept his boat up there in the Providence River. In fact, he took me sailing there once. Terrible place to sail. He came all the way back for one of our regattas. We had 'tin cup' regattas in the 1930's, in 1938 we had a hundred fifteen boats sailing out here in ten different classes. The pictures in the yacht club records show there were so many boats, and we started them off the Morses pier that year, that you couldn't even see Dead Neck before the start, the whole harbor.

Today this kind of regatta would be impossible, the moored craft in the lower harbor there, takes up so much space that there wouldn't be room to race a hundred twenty two boats in an afternoon in this harbor.

Mr - Stanton Nickerson not only sailed from Providence but he also was the only Cotuit skipper of my knowledge to have sailed to Nantucket and back. He told me that on the way to Nantucket he wanted to stop and have lunch because he was hungry, so he went to a buoy in the middle of the waterways out there someplace and put down his sail and started to break out his peanut butter sandwich and get his thermos bottle open when he saw the big

Nantucket steamer coming along - he said, first of all there was a ding, ding. Then another ding, ding. Looked up and noticed that the steamer was changing course and coming right at him. Well, he realized, of course, they thought he must be a ship in distress as he was tied up to the buoy with his sail down. So he immediately held up his cup and held up his thermos bottle and poured the milk out so that they could see that he was alright. So they veered off again and went on towards Nantucket. And he made it perfectly safely.

My uncle who was married to Anna Woodman, David Webster, sailed around Provincetown in a small catboat where it wasn't a Cotuit skiff. But, in those days people did venture out of this harbor and go to Nantucket and to the Vineyard. Quite often. In fact, my grandfather, who drank, wasn't supposed to - my grandmother disapproved, found out that there was a Chinese launderman over at Oak Bluffs that put just the right amount of starch in his collars. So every Wednesday he had to go over with his dirty shirts and bring back his clean shirts! And people have told me that they have seen my grandfather and Orrin Nickerson, who was his captain come reeling out of the Oak Bluffs House to go to their boat to make the return trip. I assume that by the time my grandfather got back into port that he had enough Moxie - which was the other horrible drink - so that grandmother didn't know.

Because one of the whole points for coming down here was that there was no place that grandfather could get a drink. Because there was no liquor store then. They didn't have a car, so you were really isolated. Grandmother didn't know what went on in Oak Bluffs.

Q If a man gets thirsty enough, he'll find a source.

A Evidently. So, in 1926, I noticed in the records we began to get sail numbers. One of the reasons we got sail numbers, we used to be invited over to race in West Bay under the auspices, I suppose, of the Wianno Yacht Club. Though I really didn't know. In those days Bill Morris used to ask me to go as a crew once and awhile. He went down through Sepuit and way down the harbor to the races. I thought we were miles from home. Because in those

days, well, I wasn't sailing very much alone, myself. Though I sailed in 1923. We didn't come down for the summer, but my grandmother had Ruth and me come to the hotel Pines for August and there was the Trillium out there ready for my use. I remember my grandmother saying, do you really know how to sail it? And I said, oh yes, certainly - I really didn't. But I did know how to tack, and somehow I managed to get around the course, last!

But I did win the pirate game that year. Because they had two games, and after playing the first pirate game, - I can't remember the boys name who won, but I think it was one of the Hitchcocks, - we played a second game. So I pretended - my boat was moored at the hotel Pines, - I made believe I wasn't playing the second game. I put the furl, - sail, went ashore and sat near the bathhouse and waited until I could see everybody else got caught. Then I went out and pulled up my sail - and the boy who had won Mr. Morses pirate flag in the first game, who really was the winner, came by and just handed me the flag. I thought that was the biggest deal I'd ever had. Course, I was all of twelve years old that year.

Some of the other races the yacht club had, - they started the obstacle race fairly early. In those days the obstacle race really was a terror because they used to put five oyster stakes out in fairly shallow water here, off Loop Beach, and you had to make a complete circle around each stake. But when you had two or three boats doing this at once it became a little complicated, and sails would get caught in those stakes and torn, and - torn sails, those duck sails tore very easily as compared with our sails today. Today they seem to just slip off the stake, or something. But those were very bad.

Also, everybody had to have a rowboat. You'd start on the shore, and you'd push the rowboat out and row to the boat where you had it anchored. And the sail was furled and you'd get up the sail and sail to the mark. Then you - well, you'd sail it without your centerboard, and going to windward, and you'd throw objects over when you went to leeward and had to go back and retrieve them. And we kept that obstacle race up for some time ago - But kids don't do it now. I believe they don't like it. It's a lot of work.

Course, one year when they put in their obstacle race that you had to land on the island and run over to the cove and dig a clam! It didn't become a sailing event any more. The boy who could run the fastest would win that race, because he'd get such a lead.

Also, I'm trying to think what the other races are. The long distance races came much later. The race to Waquoit came much later. The Edgartown Regatta we used to go to in the 20's. Some boats would get towed over, but usually we raced over. However, we practically always got towed back. Sometimes not, but usually the wind was too much in the afternoon to stay over there. Course, I wouldn't think of letting anybody do it today, it's much too dangerous.

Actually, the Hyannis Regatta has been a nice thing to come along. Because at least you aren't out in open water. It's nineteen miles, it was to Edgartown, I believe. It got to be quite a slop out there. This way, at least you're close to shore going down, you aren't spread way out in the middle of the Sound.

One of the rules in our yacht club says that it doesn't count if a boat fouls with its centerboard and it said in the minutes that the ---- buoy was in such shallow water that often, going around the buoy your centerboard could touch the chain. So they made a special rule that centerboards didn't count, which I thought was rather amusing.

In 1930, because Bud Bailey and Stanley Morton and - Philip Nickerson, I think it was, won the Southern Massachusetts elimination races for the Sears Bowl and went to the finals - then we were the host yacht club for the Southern Elimination Finals. We had eleven boats out here. We ran a series of six races, and then five other yacht clubs came in later in a series of five and then the winners ran two out of three. Now these were done in Wianno Seniors, which were not boats - we had to borrow, because our yacht club doesn't have them. We ran them off the end of the channel. We have had other elimination races since then, but those have been in the day sailers. We could never do it in our skiffs, because they demanded that we do it with a jib boat, and a boat that has a spinnaker.

The other things I'd like to talk about, are the changes. When I was a little girl the flats in front of the Morses were always there at every low tide. Now we have them at special low tides, you see them again. But for awhile and when my children were growing up, they never saw those flats. We used to tell them how we played line tag on the flats. To play line tag you put your - you jumped ahead with one foot and dragged a toe behind you and made lines with your foot going way out to the end of the channel and around. And when you played tag you were supposed to stay on the line. Of course, some of the lines were just dead end lines, and went to nowhere. So when you found yourself one of those you proceeded to make the line a little longer and came back to get away from the person who was it. You always made a big circle, about nine by ten which was 'home' in the middle of the flats, where you could come to safety if you wanted to.

The other thing, when we first got this house - was we had an outhouse. We had a pump in the back yard. We had a wood stove. We had kerosene lamps. And of course, all the present and modern refinements of hot and cold running water and electricity - of course, washing machines have all come since then. Living was much harder in those days. I can remember the laundry, being particularly the diapers when Edith came along being boiled on the stove and we'd poke them with what was once the mop handle to get them sanitary before they were put out on the line.

In those days you spent so much more time just living, and doing for things. The peas all had to be shelled. There weren't any Birdseye peas. We had a garden down here in 1919 and 1920, but that didn't pan out because there were so many mosquitos in those days, if you went down to pick a few radishes, it wasn't worth it. After awhile you didn't go down to get them anymore. Finally the garden was given up. Of course, the mosquito control came along and really did control the mosquitos, but as a child I can remember just hiding under the sheets because the mosquitos kept me awake at night and the buzz, buzz, buzz - waiting for them to land and then wondering when you were going to feel that prick and hoping you didn't get it.

Q These photographs we've been looking at are very interesting, just the amount of clothes people wore. Small children had shoes



and stockings and dresses and bonnets and -

A Sunshade hats -

Q The women dressed in the Cotuit skiffs - it's absolutely killing with their long full skirts -

A And stockings and shoes.

Q Yes. How they could even move about in those boats! They aren't there just having their picture taken. I suspect your grandmother - you say she didn't like the water at all, but she's all dressed up, a parasol, sitting in the stern of the rowboat. But that's obviously a posed picture. But the other young ladies in the skiffs, with all the clothes - appalling.

A Yes, they must have been very uncomfortable. And one time I remember going to over and have a picnic on the island, and my mother in that day had a bathing suit on, which was a voluminous affair - with lots of bloomers and had a big middy blouse like thing, top with a v-shaped neck in it.

Father was getting some driftwood and suddenly -- oh, also she had black stockings to go with this dark bathing suit, most unattractive. And out from under the piece of wood when father moved a board came a little mouse! Mother shrieked and the mouse went up underneath her bathing suit, ran all the way around and she was screaming to beat the band! Father kept saying, now Polly, now Polly, just keep still and she says, but he isn't running around you! Finally he found an exit on one of her sleeves and got away. Well, can you imagine a mouse getting under anybody's bathing suit in this day and age? Not enough left to hide a mouse.

Q Well, all those clothes contributed to the hard life, because none of them were drip dry.

A That's true. And there weren't any drying machines too. Everything had to go out on the line. Of course, when you had a good summer, that was fine. If you had one where it rained all the time, then things never got dry. But then you weren't as clean either, because you didn't change you underwear every day.

You just used one bath towel a week. Now, if a child takes a bath towel to the beach for the morning, he wants a clean one for the afternoon. You don't think anything of it because you can run your washing machine every day. Course, if the energy shortage catches up to us we may have to go back to the olden days.

Q But I don't think we'll ever go back to all those clothes. - Well, as you say, they didn't change them that often, and when you had one of those nifty dresses all ironed and ready to wear - you wore it - you hung it up carefully when you took it off, and planned to wear it two or three times probably.

A Yes, and of course we have many more clothes than people had in those days. People talked about their suit to go to Sunday - to church, and their working clothes and that was about it. Now we have many suits and many clothes and many dresses and many pairs of shorts and blouses and so we do have changes.

Cotuit is, I've always said, is a very geographical place. The people up here didn't seem to know the people down the end of the woods. Unless, indeed they all joined in and went to the yacht club races. But even so, the geographical cliqueness still persists.

Of course, in my youth, when I was a little girl, I wasn't allowed to go any farther than the Townsend house and watching Dr. Helen Townsend, who was then in Radcliffe, probably, play tennis up at her tennis court. I wasn't allowed to go any further than that, though some time I would sneak up to the Wessons. Because they had pigs and I thought that pigs grovelling around in the garbage was fun to watch. Also they had horses. I wasn't allowed to go any further down the other way than to the Barolles, which was where Horace Nickerson was and I don't know why we were going to his house. Except that he had the insurance on this house. But most of the time I just went over to Barbara Morses and played with her. I wasn't allowed to go downtown.

This is, now talking before I was ten. Later on when my brother used to sail downtown to get the mail and go to the town dock and walk up and get it. Nobody would think of doing that today. But when I grew up not as many people had cars, and they weren't as

much in use, and therefore the roads were safer. But we didn't have bicycles. The children have bicycles today, but I - we didn't have bicycles. I don't know why.

Q Was there a grocery store in this area?

A I don't remember one. Betty Field would be good on this, she remembers all that stuff. I remember Miss Handy's store up here being run - she sold postal cards and gift cards. I don't remember it for very long. There was a place, yes I think there was a store down here where you could go and buy milk. But, one of the reasons we didn't get our milk there - our milk came over from Marstons Mills. But the reason father didn't come down in the summer of 1923 when Edith was born was because he didn't think the milk was good enough. Of course it hadn't been pasturized, it was straight from the farm. This was the first baby for my stepmother to have, and I guess they were a little too worried about it.

So that was the summer Ruth and I were at the Pines, and that was a great summer. The Pines was a great hotel for families. They had lots of children's programs. They had swimming races and they had - also grandmother found out that they made their own ice cream every Tuesday and Thursday and - whipped with our teaspoons that we borrowed from the hotel dining room we could go over and you could lick the dasher with our teaspoons. It really was great.

Before they turned the hose on it, which used to make me weep. Also, walking around with grandfather in those days - grandfather knew his mushrooms, and so he'd say, quick, quick, go to your grandmother, get a paper bag then we'd pick these mushrooms. He'd take them back to the hotel and have the hotel cook them up for dinner. Of course, he so - got it through my little head never to pick the mushrooms unless he was along because there were so many poisonous ones that you had to really know what you were doing that I never dared to pick the mushrooms.

Q Oh dear, you never learned?

A No, I never learned, no. But he knew. I've tried to learn, but the books are so confusing now that there are poisonous

mushrooms that look just like the good mushrooms.

Q You talked about the fields of daisies, too. And there are so many photographs of you as a small child in fields of daisies down the hill.

A Yes, there are fields of daisies. I guess the growth of the trees did away with the daisies. There were daisies all over the hill. Particularly over the whole loop. There were daisies out back here. I now go around trying to swipe daisies trying to grow some just because I remember the daisies.

End of Tape