

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH KATHRYN B. DE MOTT

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES

WORLD WAR II * KOREAN WAR * VIETNAM WAR * COLD WAR

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

SANDRA STEWART HOLYOAK

and

JARED KOSCH

NEW BRUNSWICK, NEW JERSEY

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TRANSCRIPT BY

DOMINGO DUARTE

Jared Kosch: This begins an interview with Kathryn De Mott on Monday June 9, 2003, in New Brunswick, New Jersey, by Jared Kosch and ...

Sandra Stewart Holyoak: Sandra Stewart Holyoak.

JK: I would just like to thank you for coming down for the interview. Would you care to tell us about your parents?

Kathryn De Mott: My parents, during the war, at that time, my father was at Eastern Aircraft, in empson, which was, of course, a war plant. My mother [was] a schoolteacher.

SH: Where was your father from, originally?

KD: My father was from Brooklyn. His grandmother, his mother, came from England, and Grandpa Barber, because I was a Barber, came from Georgia, Russia, came into New York and he would say, after he came to this country, "I am an American," and he had nothing more to do about his past. ... As a matter-of-fact, we don't know his Russian name, because he adopted, he thought, an American name, "Barber." He spoke a number of languages and was fluent in English, and he could read English, too. So, he raised his family in Brooklyn, married Sarah Durham, who had come from England and was living in Brooklyn. So, that was their heritage.

SH: Where did you live as a child? Where were you born?

KD: I was born in Wilkes Barre, Pennsylvania, and, when I was about four, my mother's mother became ill and we came back to New Jersey and we lived outside of a small town called Pittstown, New Jersey. We lived there until Grandma passed away, and then, my folks bought a home in Clinton, and so, I really grew up in Clinton.

SH: How did you come to be born in Wilkes Barre?

KD: I think because he was in automotive electrical work, having to do with automobiles, and someone offered [him] a position up there and he took it.

SH: Do you have lots of brothers and sisters?

KD: No, none. I am it, spoiled. [laughter]

JK: Wilkes Barre was in coal mining country. Were there any coal miners in your family in those early days?

KD: Oh, no, no. See, he was from Brooklyn and he came up there. On my mother's side, they had a farm outside of Flemington, a hundred-and-eighty-two-acre farm, peaches, because that was a big crop in those days, and Great-Grandfather had the next farm, which today, is part of the Hunterdon Medical Center. They bought some of that land, built the Medical Center on it, but it was all on peaches at that time, but, you know, I wanted to know more about my mother, [who] died when she was sixty-two. I still wasn't very interested in family history, so, I hadn't

asked a lot of questions and I couldn't figure it out, why three generations of her family were in Bethlehem Cemetery, which is between Clinton and Pittstown, and I knew they had a farm near Flemington. It didn't make sense. So, I went through the census, year-by-year-by-year, all the way back, and discovered exactly where they had lived and so forth. The census is very helpful.

SH: Did you find out why they were buried in Union Cemetery at Grandin on Race Street, near the Bethlehem Presbyterian Church?

KD: Because he owned a farm there. Actually, he had connections with three farms, Kingtown Farm, which was in that Pittstown area. He had two sons, my grandfather, Chester, and his brother, Bill, and Bill received the farm where the Medical Center is today, Hunterdon Medical Center. My grandfather received the farm that was near Flemington Junction, which is just across the fields from the Flemington Fair Grounds, if you recognize that, and then, he had the one at Kingtown and that was split between the two brothers when it was sold.

SH: Do you remember any of the stories they told about what it was like to be a farmer in that time? Were they affiliated with, say, a church?

KD: Great-Grandfather joined, and my grandfather joined, the Bethlehem Presbyterian Church, I know, and our cemetery is very close to that. My husband now is superintendent of that cemetery, and so, we have quite a bit to do with it.

SH: Did you grow up on the farm or were you living in town?

KD: In town, on Halstead Street, and my father made himself a heating contractor and he installed; at that time, it was quite an innovation, for a school or dairy or whatever. They would have to stoke their furnace with coal every few hours and they came out with an invention, which is called the Iron Fireman, and this was a worm, in effect, that went from the coal bin into the firebox of the furnace and you only had to put a ton of coal in and take out the ashes. You no longer had to fire this furnace. So, this was quite attractive to schools and dairies and so forth. So, he was a heating contractor in his own business. An interesting [thing], my grandfather, a Barber, didn't want to work for someone. He believed in working for yourself and Dad worked for himself. [laughter]

JK: Was this post-World War I?

KD: Yes. My father was eighteen and he enlisted in the service from Brooklyn and he took a year's training. He was on the ship to go to Europe, World War I, and there was an outbreak of meningitis on the ship. As a matter-of-fact, several people he knew died on that ship ... at that time, and so, the ship was quarantined and, by the time the quarantine was off, the war was over. [laughter]

SH: This was World War I.

KD: World War I. So, he never really got into action, which was very nice. He came to Fort Dix, where he was to be discharged, and I really don't have any reason why he came to

Hunterdon County from Fort Dix, other than the fact that he may have had a friend, [an] Army friend, that was going home or he may have found in the newspaper that there was work in [Hunterdon County]. Again, he was in [the] automotive industry and he knew about generators and so forth and I know that's what he did in Flemington, for a garage there.

SH: Is that how he met your mother?

KD: ... My mother taught at Ringoes and, in those days, they had parties in their homes, and so, mother said they really had a good time in Ringoes, because of these parties on Saturday nights, and he was nineteen when he met my mother. My mother ... would have been nine years older. So, she would have been twenty-six and he proposed and she thought that, "Well, you know, there's quite a bit of age difference, nine years, between us." So, she told him she was going to leave Ringoes and teach in Cranford and she would teach one year and, [if] he felt the same way at the end of the year, they'd be married. [laughter] So, at the end of the year, it was the same and they were married.

JK: Do you know which school she taught at in Cranford?

KD: I don't know the name of the school.

JK: I grew up in Cranford. That is why I asked that question. [laughter]

KD: Well, she was there one year and, of course, then, they ended up going to Wilkes Barre.

SH: That was quite a jump, though, to go from rural Hunterdon County and Ringoes to teaching in Cranford, which would have seemed almost like the big city.

KD: Well, she had her degree from, well, it was Trenton Normal School [then], and she also had a whole summer, maybe two summers, at Columbia University. So, she had qualifications. She had certification for teaching.

SH: Did she ever talk about how unusual it was for women to go to college in the early 1900s? Did she just assume that that was the way women went about it?

KD: How she got started? She went to what was called Reading Academy. First, she went to that one-room school that is on Flemington Fair Grounds. You can see it if you go down [Route] 31. There's a little building there and that was where she was for eight years. Then, she went to what was called Reading Academy, the equivalent of a high school, in Flemington. She, apparently, was a pretty good student and the county superintendent came to her and said, because she had no intent, ... I think, of teaching, "Miss Butler, at Sidney School," one-room school, ... "the teacher has left. I don't know the reasons for that. We don't have a teacher. Will you come in and finish the year?" Now, ... this is right out of [the] equivalent of high school, and so, she taught and finished out the year and did well. So, in the summer, the superintendent came to her, county superintendent, and she did well there and, probably because she did well, he asked her in the summer; no, it was later than that. It was in the middle of the year. Now, this Cooks Cross Road, this is Union Township. We're still in Hunterdon County;

it's a one-room school. It was called Cooks Cross Road, because three roads came together and in that triangle was a school, if you could believe it. [laughter] You know, you think about the ramifications of safety with roads and so forth. This was just on a triangle where the roads met and he said, "Ms. Butler, this teacher came out from New York to teach at Cooks Cross Road and she's a city school[teacher]. She didn't understand about squirrels and rabbits and things and she started talking about, I don't know, rabbits climbing trees or some such thing. Anyway, the farm boys just laughed her out of it and they were going out of the classroom windows. There was no discipline and she just gave up and went back to New York City." So, they had no teacher and they asked my mother. She was only five-foot-one. She was a short, small lady, but she went there and, of course, there were the big farm boys in this school and she'd been there a couple of days and she said a team of horses had run away from the farmer and was running down the road, away from the farmer and from the wagon, and she just dropped her books, ran out on the road and grabbed that team of horses, their reins, and held it until the farmer came and she said she gained one foot taller that day. [laughter] They were so impressed with her and she didn't have disciplines problems. She got along fine and, at the end of the year, they closed the school, because they had so many pupils, and opened Jutland School. So, she was the last in Cooks Cross Road and the first in Jutland and the county superintendent said, if she kept taking courses, that he would let her continue teaching. She still had no credits for teaching. She's just out of that Reading Academy. So, at that time, there was some kind of school in Phillipsburg and you could take courses. You took courses in geography and I know that she studied about the rock structure, so, that must have been a geology course, different there. So, she would get credits and she had enough credits. In the meantime, she's saving all her dollars, and so, she had enough money and she went to Trenton Normal School, paying her own way, and graduated from Trenton Normal School and, like I said, then, she went to Columbia University in New York City, and she retired, eventually, from Franklin Township School in Quakertown, after twenty-five years of teaching there. When she married, she quit teaching, which was very typical. Teachers didn't teach after they got married, but, again, there wasn't a teacher and they asked her if she would come. It was [the] Depression and we were really glad to have that check come in. This school was a one-room building on the edge of Pittstown, New Jersey. It was one of the five one-room schools in Franklin Township, Hunterdon County. These schools were becoming crowded with large enrollments. Mother had forty-five pupils and taught all eight grades. In 1937, Franklin Consolidated School was opened in Quakertown. Franklin Township closed and sold their one-room schools. Mother taught third and fourth grades in the new school located in Quakertown.

SH: What do you first remember about living on Halstead Street in Clinton?

KD: Well, I think it was a great town to grow up in, really. It's interesting, from the standpoint [of] today, our schools have grown so large. [At the] Clinton School, you began in first grade and you went through twelfth grade in one building. Everything was in that building. The first year, being an only child, I got every germ that came along, and so, I had sore throats and all the things that go with children's diseases and, in the spring, my mother met my teacher on the street in Clinton and she said, "Kathryn is really feeling much better now." It's after Easter vacation. She said, "So, she's coming back to school," and Ms. Williams said, "It doesn't matter. She's missed so much school, I'm not going to pass her anyway." My mother said, "[If] she's not going to pass you anyway, there's no use [in] going back. [laughter] So, I didn't go back until

September, and then, I started over again. [laughter] By that time, it was a different teacher, too. That was my beginnings at Clinton School.

JK: What kinds of things did you do as a young child, hobbies and so forth?

KD: Hobbies. Oh, we played tag, hide-and-seek and roller-skated. I roller-skated on every street in Clinton and I just literally wore out [the] roller skates. I love to roller-skate. Ice skating was a big thing and we enjoyed ice skating on the Raritan River in Clinton. In the summer, we swam in the river behind the Community House on Halstead Street.

SH: Were you affiliated with the church at all?

KD: Methodist Church and we were regular attenders.

SH: Were there milling operations in Clinton?

KD: Yes, the mill was in operation. I gave the historical society in Clinton the picture of the miller my father had taken. Both mills; that one across the river was working too, at that time and the quarry. There is a quarry along the, we called it the eddy, [in] back of the Red Mill and they really were quarrying there. We had a couple of windows that had cracks in them, [laughter] because they dynamited over there, took a lot of stones, crushed stone and so forth. So, that was a very active operation in Clinton.

SH: Was that the main industry in Clinton at that time? Were there other businesses that you remember?

KD: It was a place where people came to get their groceries. The funeral director was in town. It was a town setting, not for industry, no. Oh, we had two banks and a doctor and a dentist, so you came to Clinton for those things.

SH: Were your classmates mostly from Clinton or were they rural students, farm kids?

KD: First grade through eighth grade was only Clinton. Then, ninth through twelfth, students were bussed in, some from the Sidney-Pittstown area, some from Lebanon and some from up around Pattenburg and Union. So, there were students bussed in at that time.

JK: Did you go from first grade through twelfth in that same building?

KD: Yes, yes, I did.

SH: What year did you graduate?

KD: From high school, in '42, and, you see, ... Pearl Harbor was in '41, and so, the following ... June, [I] graduated from that.

JK: At that time, did you see many of your schoolmates either going off into the military or the war industry, right out of high school?

KD: One effect was, it [was] advertised in the paper, that at Lebanon, there was a factory making, I don't know the right name, but the torpedo. You put a torpedo in a big, hollow tube. What would you call that?

JK: The casing?

KD: Casing. There was a factory in Lebanon and there was an advertisement. If you went down, they would hire you and this is June. Now, we're going to graduate from high school and my girlfriend and I, before school, we got in the car and went down and we applied and we got a job and we were so proud. I think we got twenty-five dollars a week or some such thing and we worked five days a week, making the parts. We used a drill press and we filed parts and so forth. So, we had a war job right there and, of course, I put my money in the bank, because I knew I wanted to go to college in the fall. So, that was our first experience.

SH: I would like to back up and talk about your high school years in Clinton. What did a young woman do for fun then? What were your academic strengths?

KD: I was taking a college course and, being such a small high school, you were either a business student, or aim toward college, or an ... agricultural student. There were just three choices and, of course, I took the academic course toward going to college. I knew I was going to go to college. I didn't know where or what, but that was my aim.

SH: What did you do during the summer months?

KD: There was a lady in town, a single mother, who was working at Mt. Kipp, Mt. Kipp was up at Glen Gardner, and it was a state hospital for tuberculosis patients called Mt. Kipp. The fresh country air was part of the cure. She had two children and she nursed to support her family and I baby-sat for her two children. That was the way I earned some money.

SH: Did you ever go to summer camp? Were you involved with the Girl Scouts?

KD: Definitely Girl Scouts, and we made bandages for the Army or whatever. We did have a lot of gauze and you cut them in a certain way and folded them and they used them where soldiers had been hurt in action. That was our contribution, as far as the war service was concerned. I did go to camp. We had a Girl Scout camp at Hackettstown, Blairstown, that was called Camp Kalmia. That was a Girl Scout camp. I went to that for two weeks.

JK: You worked as a baby-sitter in your high school years. Did that help supplement your family income during the Great Depression or was it just for your personal use?

KD: No, I put my money in the bank, pretty much. No, like I said, my mother went back to teaching. That was different in those days. When they bought the house in Clinton, they bought that house for five thousand. You would go to someone who had money and, in our case, it was

Mr. (Ramsey?) of Lebanon and he loaned my folks the five thousand dollars and held our mortgage, but they didn't have a system, in those days, of, you know, monthly payments or anything like that. When you had money, you gave it to Mr. Ramsey and, if you didn't have money, as long as he got his interest, he didn't care, and then, the Depression hit and he needed his money and my father said, "Well, ... you know, we'd let the house go," and my mother is the determined one and she said, "No." She said, "We're going to do something," and Milford Building and Loan loaned them the five thousand and we kept our house and they started on a system of payments, like we do today, and so, there was never any more problem and, like I said, she was able to go back to teaching and, ... with the war, he went into [the] war industry. At first, he worked in Philadelphia, in the Navy yard, and worked on submarines. He said one of the largest submarines in the world, at that time, was in the Philadelphia Navy Yard, but it was a secret. No one knew that this was there, but, when I got my job in Lebanon at that torpedo [factory], where they were making those torpedo casings and so forth, ... my father was a machinist by skill and I told them how good he was and they hired him at Lebanon, and then, ... when he worked at Philadelphia, you know, gas was three gallons a ticket. You got a book of tickets, and then, you could get three gallons. That was the allowance. Unless you had some particular contribution toward the war effort, then, you might [get more]. So, he was taking the bus to Philadelphia and he'd stay all week, and then, he'd come home at the end of the week. He worked all week in Philadelphia, and then, come home. I wanted my father home, and so, I talked him and them into hiring him at Lebanon, and then, he could, you know, live home and we went to work together. So, he was a machinist there.

SH: Did he ever tell you the name of the submarine that was the largest at that time?

KD: I don't know the name.

SH: As a high school freshman, things were really starting to boil in Europe. Did you hear about any of this? What would you have heard about what was going on in Germany and Poland and England?

KD: ... The radio was all that we had at that time and I guess ... young folks were more interested in our own lives.

SH: I wondered if your teachers talked about it at all in your history courses.

KD: I don't remember that they did.

SH: Were there any immigrant populations in the area that might have been concerned about what was happening to their families in Europe?

KD: The people of Clinton were people who had lived in Clinton for years. Their parents had lived [there]. It's not like today, you know. ... Oh, I mean, you walk down the street, they're [of] all nationalities, but that wasn't true at that time. There were people of families that lived in Clinton for years.

SH: What is your most prominent memory of the Depression?

KD: I could say one thing. My grandfather would come up from Brooklyn and my mother said to me, she said, "Someone might say something to you about your grandfather, because he has an accent," but no one ever did, but that's how unusual it was and there was only one black girl in our school, Juanita. We had no idea of black and white. She was just one of us. We played with her and she did all the things that we did and we thought nothing different. She was one grade ahead of me and I remember that she and some of the girls in their senior year took a trip to New York and they wanted to go into a restaurant or theater, whatever it was, and she couldn't go in there and that was the first time. They were surprised, because we weren't aware of color discrimination at all.

SH: Were there any families out of work during the Depression?

KD: Okay. Clinton was along the main drag between Easton and New York and people were walking on the highway, men, walking, looking for work, and they'd come to Clinton and they would come to your house and knock on the door. ... They'd usually ask, "Missus, may I do some work for you? I'll chop wood; I'll do some gardening or something, for some food." My mother never asked them to work, but she always gave them food. We weren't flush with food, but whatever she had, she always got them sandwiches at least and they sat on the back porch and they ate them. We never had them come in the house. At Thanksgiving, we really had a meal. We had turkey and all of the things you had and a man came to the door asking for food and she fixed a big platter and she put everything on it. We had someone at the door for three or four days after that, because that man, when he got back on the road, said, "You ought to go up to 21 Halstead Street and get a good meal." So, I do remember the begging, which is pathetic, that they had to do that, but that did occur and it's because Clinton was on that main drag between Easton and New York.

JK: Did your house have a mark on it, perhaps a notch on the fence?

KD: Our houses were numbered and we were 21 Halstead, so, I'm sure they said, "Go up to 21 Halstead and get a good meal." [laughter]

SH: Can you tell us what you remember about where you were and when you first heard about Pearl Harbor?

KD: Oh, definitely. I was into Amelia Earhart. I read all her books and that fascinated me and I was making model airplanes. We called them rubber models and what you got was a paper plan and you cut out the balsam and you cut out the wood and you glued it together, and then, you pasted paper over it. It shrunk the paper to the shape of the airplane and it had a big elastic band that was the power for the airplane. You could take it out and fly it, in a little way. I was at the dining room table, the radio was going, and I was working on one of these airplanes and the news came over about Pearl Harbor and, I remember, my mother got up and left the room and she was in tears and I asked her, "Why?" naive me, and she said, "A lot of your friends, and particularly the boys, will go away and they'll never come back," because she remembered World War I, when so many were lost, and so, that put a little reality into the whole picture. That was when Roosevelt announced it on the radio.

SH: The next day, at school, what was the talk among your friends?

KD: I really don't remember.

SH: Was there any immediate action taken in Clinton?

KD: They set up a board and, like I said, it was amazing how fast our country mobilized. They set up a rationing board and you were allowed so many coupons for sugar, for meat and coffee, I think they were the three things, and, of course, gasoline was rationed, and then, my father was on a group of [airplane spotters]. Outside of town, on a hill, there was a barn that had a high structure to it and at night, they took turns, these men sitting up there and [they] would report by telephone if they saw airplanes and that was one of the things that went on. Of course, lights had to be out at night. There weren't to be lights seen.

SH: How was your graduation?

KD: I graduated in June and we had a very nice graduation in the Presbyterian Church. Remember, the school had eight grades in it and we didn't have a gym, we didn't have an auditorium, we didn't have a library. So, we graduated in the Presbyterian Church. The only sport that we really had was basketball and there's a community house in Clinton, as a matter-of-fact, on Halstead Street, and the basketball games were held there. It was strictly academic studies, but it's interesting that they had agriculture then and I don't think our high schools do now, like they did.

JK: How many people were in your school or even just in your grade?

KD: Our high school class had fifty, maybe fifty-five students and, down in the grades there would be first and second, third and fourth, fifth and sixth, seventh and eighth, and I'm trying to think, there would be two rows of one grade and two rows of the other, that would make about twenty-four students or something like that, to a classroom.

SH: You went to work that summer in Lebanon. What were some of your friends doing?

KD: I really don't know what they did. Some enlisted, as far as [the] boys, enlisted. I was saying to my husband, "Bobby Garrison didn't finish high school, but [he] enlisted." Somehow, when he got out, he got enough credits, because he went to pharmacy school, became a pharmacist afterwards, when he came home. The real reality of the war in Clinton was felt when a popular high school student who enlisted in the Air Force and was killed. ...

-----END OF TAPE ONE, SIDE ONE-----

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JK: This is side two of tape one of an interview with Kathryn De Mott. Please, continue.

KD: Yes, you asked about [the] Fourth of July celebration. The year I graduated, I was salutatorian for my class and they had just a little ceremony in the middle of town and I gave my high school, you know how you give that little speech at the graduation, and I gave that on the Fourth of July as did the valedictorian.

SH: Did your address have a patriotic flavor, because of what had happened with Pearl Harbor and World War II? Do you remember?

KD: ... Each of us had a different theme and mine was on equality and one was on, I don't remember what the other two girls had, but it wasn't about the war. It was about equality.

SH: Equality in terms of gender or race?

KD: Race, which is rather interesting, since we didn't have a race problem in town, but that was the one that, I guess, the English teacher gave me to write on.

SH: You were given your theme.

KD: I was given the theme.

SH: Okay. You spoke about how Clinton lost one of its more popular young men to the war. Do you know if any of the students in Clinton had aspirations for higher education?

KD: Well, several of my girlfriends became nurses. That seemed to be the popular thing, for girls to become nurses. The boys, I don't really know what schools they went to.

SH: Do you think they went on to college?

KD: Some went to school, until they were drafted, and then, they went in the service.

SH: You talked about your fascination with Amelia Earhart. Did you ever think about trying to become a pilot yourself?

KD: I don't think so, but I did enjoy reading and, of course, later on about Lindbergh. I followed all of the things about Lindbergh, too.

SH: He was quite a hero.

KD: Yes, yes.

SH: Before Pearl Harbor, was there any talk in Clinton about whether or not we should be involved in the war effort?

KD: No. Isolation, that's one difference with this; Pearl Harbor occurred and we went one hundred percent. We were in war and there was never dissention, to my knowledge. My husband, every one of the young men, were given a number, a draft number. When your draft

number came up, you went to the draft board and they checked you out. They checked him out in Trenton, physically, whether he would be physically [fit] and gave him his number, that he had to learn at that time and stayed with him throughout the war. Then, they went to Fort Dix and from there on, but, of course, there were some that enlisted, but all the men got draft numbers and I don't remember anyone thinking, "Well, they weren't going to fight." ... Hitler was just a terrible person, there's no doubt about it. I corresponded with, I still correspond and I have since I was about twelve years old, a girl in Wales and I visited her in Wales, too. She wrote me in one of her letters and she said, "I don't know why you people in America aren't coming over to help us." She said, "They're bombing London," which they were and she was disturbed that we weren't coming into the war, which we hadn't, but, when Pearl Harbor occurred, there was no question. We were all one hundred percent.

JK: Did this correspondence with your friend in Wales continue throughout the war?

KD: Yes, and has ever since, you know. I get a couple of letters every year and we have a nephew in Wales, now. He is with a pharmaceutical company, Aventis. You've heard of Aventis? Well, Aventis was in England before it was here and he is a salesman for them, married an English girl and she declared that she wouldn't like to live in America. She will come and visit. So, they come over periodically and visit his father in Columbus, Ohio, but [he] lives in Wales. He writes. The last letter he wrote, and I haven't answered that, he said, "I've talked to doctors," because he is in this medicine he's in, Aventis is a pharmaceutical [company], "a doctor in Afghanistan and they're not very friendly about America," and so forth. So, there's a feeling there. Well, you've been hearing it on the news, too. They've been questioning things.

SH: You had always wanted to go to college and you saved money from your jobs, and then, went to work in the torpedo factory. Why did you pick Trenton?

KD: Probably because it was close, relatively, you know. It was a prominent teacher's college and my mother had gone to Trenton Normal. My grandfather, her father, was a graduate of what would have been Rider Business College. So, it had been in our family, going to school; that wasn't unusual. It was expected. I really didn't apply to any other school. [laughter] I applied there and was accepted and attended there.

SH: Did you have any idea of what you wanted to teach? Obviously, you wanted to teach.

KD: I liked science. I liked my high school science teacher and the subject very much and the math teacher was a little amazed when she heard that Kathryn had signed up for math-science, [laughter] because I hadn't taken trig in high school. I had taken the first two years of algebra, that was it and she thought, you know, going to college and not having that [was not good], but I survived, made up for the losses that I didn't have when I got there and made out all right.

SH: Tell us about going to school in Trenton. Where did you live? What were some of the things that you remember?

KD: Okay. I lived in a dormitory and there wasn't so much unusual about that. A black student could not take music, could not major in music. A black student could not swim in the

swimming pool. Black students cannot eat in our, we called it the Inn, it was a cafeteria, and it was a dining room there. They could not do that. They had to bring their lunch and eat up in the science rooms and they came in from Trenton. They came in on the bus. The music teacher, Ms. (Bray?), said that no one would hire a black music teacher, so, there was no reason to educate them. In my junior year, so many boys had been taken out, drafted. Their numbers came up. As their numbers came up, they left. So, there was no point to a boys' dormitory and we moved in the boys' dormitory. Bliss Hall became a girls' dormitory and our housemother had a Southern background. Now, I don't know exactly what state she came from, but they made her the housemother and she was broad thinking and she thought that black people should have privileges, and so, we had, I think, six students come and live in the dormitory with us. Can you imagine that? Oh, my goodness.

SH: Were they allowed to eat their meals with you in the Inn (a cafeteria and dining room)?

KD: No. Gradually, they let them do that. You know what? I think World War II had a lot to do with equalizing, because black men were fighting [with] the white men and they deserve the same things that the white people had.

SH: In Trenton, were you involved at all with the war effort? You talked about wrapping bandages in the Girl Scouts.

KD: That was in Clinton.

SH: Were your courses accelerated?

KD: No. It was just regular school. We did bring our ration books and give them into the dining room. I know that. No one had cars, really, because there wasn't gas anyway. Immediately, they suspended building cars, and so, ... whatever existed at the time of Pearl Harbor, that was it, because all industry immediately changed. For instance, that's why my father went out of the heating business and went to work in the shipyard. You couldn't buy refrigerators or cars, etc. ... All effort went towards the war.

SH: How often did you get home to Clinton from Trenton during the school year?

KD: My dad had left the Lebanon, Hunterdon County, war job and was now working at Eastern Aircraft, Ewing, New Jersey, where they were building torpedo bombers. He commuted daily on Route 31, right past Trenton State College. Well, my dad was going right by the college and going up to Clinton. He commuted from Clinton to Trenton, so, I had a ride there and I could go home on weekends, if I wanted to, but it really curtailed sports. ... Of course, football and so forth was no more and, yes, the activities at the college were very much curtailed, socially.

SH: Did you work at all while you were going to school?

KD: I worked in the science department. I cleaned up the lab equipment after the teacher/instructor left and I would set up for the next class and, yes, that contributed toward my tuition there.

SH: What were the social activities for a young woman in Trenton?

KD: Social activities, because it was wartime, were greatly curtailed. It just not so much existed.

SH: Were there dances for any of the soldiers that were stationed nearby? Did you attend those with you and your girlfriends?

KD: Not from the college. We didn't, no.

SH: What did you do in the summertime, between semesters?

KD: Well, I worked in the war plant.

SH: You would come back and work in Lebanon again.

KD: Yes. I worked at Lebanon, and then, another summer, I worked in Finderne. Let's see, they were manufacturing fans? What was the plant I worked at in Finderne? Do you know the names of plants there? There was a plant there and I worked during the summer.

JK: Was it another war industry plant or was it a private plant?

KD: In that case, it was private. Yes, that was not a war plant.

SH: How did you come to be at Rutgers?

KD: Okay. In my junior year, I sort of felt I wasn't doing anything for the war effort and so many of my friends, particularly the boys, [laughter] were in service in the South Pacific and in Europe. Well, I could write them letters. That was one thing I did, but I didn't think I was doing very much, and so, I talked to my dad about it. I said, you know, "I think that I'm not helping and so many people are giving their lives and their time." So, he said, "Well, I don't really think you're cut out for being a WAC or a WAVE." [laughter] I don't think he thought I had been in a rough-and-tumble world. I'd been out in Clinton, not in New York City or someplace like that. So, he said, you know, "Why don't you look into working in a war plant?" and Eastern Aircraft being convenient there in Trenton, why, ... coming up to the end of my junior year, I went out to Eastern and made an application and they were very enthusiastic. They said they were just starting a program at Rutgers called junior engineering and my background was math and science, which fit in very nicely, and they'd like to send me to Rutgers. Well, that sounded good to me and they're going to pay me to go, too. So, I went back to the college and explained and I wanted to get out early, because the course is going to start the 1st of June. So, they fixed it up so [that] I could take my tests and I finished my junior year at Trenton State and, June 1st, I arrived in New Brunswick with my suitcase and went directly, of course, towards the college here and, now, General Electric was paying for me. General Electric had built this plant at Eastern Aircraft. They had Rutgers design a special course for us. They explained that a number of their engineers at Eastern Aircraft had been taken for the draft and so forth and they

needed to replace them and they needed people trained to do that and they worked through your Rutgers University to design a course which they called junior engineering and it was an all serious course. We started class at eight in the morning. We ate in the cafeteria there on Queens, as I remember, and we went to classes until five o'clock and we did that five days a week. We studied metallurgy, stress and strain, mechanical drawing and drafting and I don't remember what else. I think there was a math course in there, too, and it was in the Engineering Building. There were about twenty-five people, other girls. Now, they've come from different communities. I only remember one girl in particular, because we palled on. She was from Branchburg, older than I, by maybe six years or something or other, but we sort of stuck together and I don't remember her last name and I don't know whatever happened to her afterwards, but we did some things socially together and so forth on weekends. During the week, it was study, study, study, I'll tell you, eight to five. You were really with it. ...

SH: In the evening, were you studying in your room?

KD: In my room. Okay, so, like I said, I arrived with a suitcase. We didn't know where we're going to sleep that night. At the railroad station, because this was wartime, there was an agency for traveler's aid. It had some initials to it, I don't remember what, but it was travel aid. We went down to the railroad station and we told them that we wanted to rent a room and they gave us several addresses. So, after class that day, we started going up the street and the first house, we didn't think so much about that one, but, on Mine Street. I thought that room would be all right. I rented a room there and Mary rented one just around the corner on Easton Avenue, and so, that was our living [arrangement] and, of course, we only had to walk down to class back and forth, so, everything was convenient.

SH: Were you the only renter in this house on Mine Street?

KD: This woman regularly rented to Rutgers students. There was a boy still there. That's why she had a room for me and, while I was studying that summer, he was drafted into the service. He left Rutgers and I don't remember his name or whatever happened to him, but the three houses that we were sent to, they were regularly renting to students at Rutgers.

SH: What was it like on campus? Were there other students there, besides this engineering course going on over the summer?

KD: You see, the boys had been drafted, so, things were rather deserted, I imagine Rutgers was happy to give this junior engineer [program a home], because their students were gone.

SH: Was there any military presence? Were the ASTP students on campus at that time?

KD: No. We went, once in a while, to Fort Dix, to a dance, and those soldiers there were simply being held there until they were shipped out. I guess we had a few dates. Again, it was just a date, because they were gone the next week, probably shipped out, and another thing, Mary and I would go up to Buccleuch Park and play tennis. Other weekends, I went home and that was about it. There wasn't much activity here.

SH: What about Camp Kilmer?

KD: Maybe Camp Kilmer is where they had the dances and were shipped out. I probably misspoke on that. It's probably Camp Kilmer.

SH: Did you go to the movies?

KD: I think a fellow came up, maybe, and took me out or something to a movie, but I wasn't a big movie person to start with.

SH: Do you remember seeing newsreels? Did you enjoy your courses? Did you have a favorite professor?

KD: I don't remember their names. You know, I never thought about this until [laughter] six months or a year ago, when I saw a little notice in the paper and it brought my memories back of having gone to Rutgers.

SH: How long were you at Rutgers?

KD: From the 1st of June until the end of August. It was three months of intense instruction and, at the end of that, we were supposed to be junior engineers and I went back to Trenton Eastern Aircraft and worked in the engineering department as a draftsman, for one year. Now, at the end of the war, which was 1946, the plant shut down like that. We went in one morning and they said, "We're closing down today. Yes, today. Take all your things and go," [laughter] but it was very nice, because I'd built up a bank account and it was just in time to go back to Trenton and do my senior year, which I did, and completed my year and that was it.

JK: The plant shut down, but did Eastern Aircraft offer you employment opportunities elsewhere?

KD: No. You see, all these companies had to retool. There was no longer a need for [warplanes]. They built the Avenger there and the Wildcat and these planes were carried on aircraft carriers and mainly used in the South Pacific, because there was more fighting on the Pacific Ocean. Europe was on land. So, our airplanes were mainly used in the South Pacific. I really didn't have a lot to do when I got back to Trenton, when I left here and went to Trenton, although they hired me and they paid me. ... When was that [bomb] dropped in Japan? Was that '45? So, the war in the Pacific was beginning to wind down, but they kept us there and, sometimes, I said to my dad, "You know, maybe I should just quit, go back to college," and he said, "Oh, why? You're getting paid. You might as well stay there," and so, I stayed until the plant was shut down.

SH: How did you react to the news of the end of the war in Europe? Was there any kind of a celebration? Was there a sense of relief that that was over and, now, we could focus on the South Pacific?

KD: Well, it seems to me that the South Pacific was over before ... Europe, wasn't it? It was the other way around? I can only say one thing; Ken and I have traveled around our country and we would see all kinds of monuments to the Civil War. You go in a city and the park is a big monument. Flemington has a big monument for [the] Civil War. You didn't see monuments to World War II. I think that our country was just so glad for the war to be over, they just wanted to get back to normal living and we just didn't see monuments to World War II very much.

SH: After you went back to college and finished up, where did you begin teaching?

KD: My first teaching was; well, I was in industry. I was working at this plant in Finderne, which I'd worked [in] each summer and I thought, you know, "It's a good job," and then, the helping teacher, which I knew, came to the house and she said, you know, "At Pattenburg, they don't have a teacher and this is September and won't you come and teach one year? Teach one year; if you like it, fine. If you don't, you can go back to industry," and so, I took that job, which was interesting. It was a two-room building, with an out toilet, [laughter] and so, I had about fifteen students there and it turned out to be sort of a fun thing. You know, you're on your own; you don't have a principal there. You're just your own boss. [laughter] The next year, I got offered ... a thousand dollars more and I went to Clinton High and I taught [at] Clinton High School one year, because my favorite science teacher, the one that got me into science in the first place, took a year of absence and I filled in for her, and so, that was the way it went.

SH: When did you meet Mr. De Mott?

KD: Well, the next year, I was teaching at Annandale, because I just filled in for Mrs. Kershaw that one year. The next year, I taught [at] Annandale. That was an elementary school, seventh and eighth grade, and, at that time, Granges were quite the thing in Hunterdon County. There was a Flemington Grange, Sidney Grange, Chatham Grange, Stanton Grange, you name it. These were farmer organizations, basically, but other people came, too, because they had dances and social events, and so, I went to [the] Sidney Grange and I had an office in that grange and we invited Grandview Grange, from Flemington. He was master of Grandview and it was a dance. So, I met him and I thought he was sort of nice, so, at our school at Annandale, ... you know, the PTA was putting on a dance and I suggested he come to that and that's the way it went.

SH: Did you stay in teaching?

KD: So, we dated. We were married in March 1951. I quit teaching. Well, I became pregnant with my first child, so, I quit teaching and I didn't teach until our son, David, and daughter, Carol, were almost school age, and then, I went back to teaching.

SH: How many children do you have?

KD: Carol, who lives outside of Philadelphia, and she's presently in school now, again. She graduated as a phys ed teacher and she did it for a few years, but I don't think teaching was her thing. She wanted to raise her family. She has three children. So, she left teaching and she had a nursery school and she ran along with her own children, and then, as they got older and got into high school, she went to work for UPS, part-time. UPS is very good to work for. They

would pay tuition for her to go to school and you could also buy stock in UPS and they seemed to be a good employer. At any rate, when she heard about the tuition, she decided that she would go back to school and she's going to (Moran?) College now, part-time. She works part-time for UPS and [goes to school] part-time and, by the end of next year, she will be a veterinary technician and she's very interested in animals. We were with her yesterday and there are four horses there that she has been looking after, but, when they had their dental work done, she helped the dentist work on them. She helped with a foal that was premature and they do the same things for horses that they do for humans. It was premature, so, they milked the horse, and then, they bottle-fed the foal. I'll tell you, the courses she's taking this semester are pharmacy, surgery and anesthesia, you know. [laughter]

SH: Like being a nurse or being a vet.

KD: Yes, that might be in the future yet, but, now, she would be a technician. She would work with a veterinarian. I know, a couple of weeks ago, she was to some agency that takes animals and neuters them, and so, they invited the students to come in and observe neutering. She had a rabbit there at the house yesterday that she has now and she's talking about [how] it should be neutered and I said, "Well, you know, couldn't you do that?" "No", she said, "I couldn't do it, yet," but, anyway, David is our son and he lives in Washington, New Jersey. He went to George T. Baker School to become an airplane mechanic and, when he got done, he decided that he didn't really want to do that and he went into heavy equipment. He went to Caterpillar school and he is chief mechanic for a man who does excavating and all of that kind of thing. He has forty, fifty pieces of equipment and he keeps all those things [running]. He and his helpers keep all of the equipment running.

SH: Before we started the tape, you told us about how, at Eastern, they built the planes, but they also flew them right from the plant and you talked about how they made an airfield and everything. Can you tell us about that?

KD: Yes. Well, I didn't have anything to do with that, but, of course, in the book, it shows, but Tarrytown made parts for the airplane and Bloomfield had a plant, and then, these components that were made at these other factories were brought in to Eastern Aircraft and they, in turn, assembled them into an airplane, and then, the plane was tested there at Trenton and, if it passed their approval, [it was dispatched]. These are pictures of some; this is a picture of a Wildcat. These were all Grumman airplanes. Grumman designed the airplanes.

SH: Were the planes flown by women or men?

KD: I had [not] anything to do with that.

SH: You did not see them after they were tested. There were no air shows. [laughter]

KD: No, I was just in that drafting, engineering room. It was a big room and I had a board and I sat at it, [laughter] but, you know, I sat by a window and the train went through there and, day after day after day, I would see, they were Army cars, best I can describe, big crosses on them and they were bringing home the wounded and taking them to, I suppose various [hospitals].

See, this is Trenton; where would they have been taking them? maybe to New York, to the hospital. I don't know where, but to hospitals and we'd see that day after day, those carloads going through.

JK: Did you work on a particular component of the planes or just whatever the day brought?

KD: To be truthful, I really didn't have much work. Once in a while, they'd bring a blueprint [over] and they'd say they want that bolt moved over to there or there. The truth of the matter was, we ended our course here at Rutgers in August and the atomic bomb was dropped in August, and so, basically, the needs for our kind of aircraft [dropped]. They really didn't need [them] and, I don't know, they kept us going. They kept the plant open, you know. I asked my father, I said, "You know, why are we staying here? because, basically, they're not redesigning anything. It's just status quo," and he said, "Well," he said, "you don't know until the war is over and things are settled down." So, he said, "That's why they continue."

SH: How long did your father continue in his position?

KD: Same as myself.

SH: Did he go back into the heating business?

KD: He went back into that, yes.

SH: Do you have any other questions?

JK: I think that is it.

SH: Okay. Thank you so much for coming down.

JK: Thank you very much.

KD: If it were of any help, fine. [laughter]

SH: If you have anything else you would like to tell us, please do.

KD: I can't think of anything. Ken, did I forget something?

Ken DeMott: I think there's probably more, but I don't know where to start. [laughter]

SH: Thank you very much.

-----END OF INTERVIEW-----

Reviewed by Hans Zimmerer 10/11/04

Reviewed by Shaun Illingworth 10/25/04

Reviewed by Kathryn Barber De Mott 1/10/05