

Transcript – Isabel Ross Abbott, class of 1922

Narrator: Isabel Ross Abbott
Interviewer: Nancy Foster
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Track 1

Nancy Foster: – Foster in Washington, DC, on September 26, 1987. Talking to Aunt Isabel. I'm wanting to start with, Isabel, with asking you some things about family history that – some of which you may have told us in bits and snatches in the past, but some of which may remain unrevealed to this moment. [laughter] So that we have it in our family archives for our children. I think I'll ask with – your giving us – giving me some background about what you know about your parents.

Isabel Abbott: Well, Nancy, I think I'd like to talk a little bit about my mother. My mother was born Isabel McKay, or "McKai," as the Scotch pronunciation is, and in [Calver?] River, Nova Scotia. And [01:00] she went to a country school, and then her parents sent her in to Pictou, to go to Pictou Academy, where she was for a couple of years. And it was while she was there that she met my father. He saw her one day, and he lived not far from where she was living. And he said, "Oh, I have to meet that girl." So it was arranged through the church. Of course, naturally, she went to church and he went to church, so he was able to manage an introduction. You had to have an introduction, even in a small town, in those days. And he made up his mind that this was a girl he was going to marry. He had to wait several years, but he did finally marry her. And when my mother came to live with me in 1946, a year after my father died, she started out as [02:00] – she'd never had time when we were children, of course, except to tell us little stories – reminiscing about her life on the farm. And I was so sorry that I didn't have a tape recorder, you know, in those days we didn't have them, because – and I didn't have time to write down the reminiscences, because she was telling about a life which was really, you know, a gone type of life. It seems that my great-grandfather, Donald McKay, fought in the battle of Waterloo. And

he was given a grant of land in Nova Scotia, and he had several children. My grandfather, Alexander, was one of his older children. Was not – he was not the oldest, but he was not among the younger ones. And so [03:00] Grandfather – Great-Grandfather came out to Nova Scotia to claim his grant of land, which I gather at the time was covered with forest.

NF: Did he come from England or Scotland?

IA: Oh, he was – he came from Scotland. He came from Sutherlandshire in northern Scotland; he was a Gael – a real Gaelic – he talked Gaelic. And anyway, he came out with younger children. Now, my grandfather, Alexander, was already a young man, and he not only spoke Gaelic but also English, and he read and write in both Gaelic and English. And he was teaching school in Scotland when Great-Grandfather and the younger children came out to Nova Scotia. And later, Grandfather Alexander McKay came out to Nova Scotia and continued [04:00] teaching school. And he was teaching school over in Earltown. And that's when he met his wife-to-be, Nancy Ross. And they were married, and Grandfather was 30 years old and his wife was 18 years old. And they were married in 1940 – in 1848. And then Great-Grandfather was beginning to feel his years, and he decided to divide his farm between Grandfather and one of his other sons. And I think Great-Grandfather had something like 300 acres, and he divided it in half, giving half to each one of his sons. And then he and his wife lived with my grandfather, with Alexander. And they lived in the house which Great-Grandfather had built. [05:00] It was a log house – not a cabin; it was a log house with two stories. But of course, after all, they had plenty of logs [laughter] when they cleared the land.

And then my mother was the next to the last of their children. There was – she had a brother two years younger, and she had a brother who was 17 years older. So the children were in the span of 19 years. And apparently there were some babies lost on the way and so on. But anyway, five of the boys and two of the girls grew up. And my mother's only sister was 15 years older, Aunt Mary, and my mother was very close to her. She just loved her older sister. And Mother – then Grandfather built a new house, and Mother was the first of the children born in the new house. [06:00] Up to then they'd lived in the log house. And I've seen this house – in fact, I've seen it more than once. And the last time I saw it was when [Marnie?] and I went to Nova Scotia, and I have pictures of it – you know, colored slides in my slide collection. And

Grandfather was greatly honored in the countryside; he was called "Square McKai" – Squire McKay, you see? And he gave a corner of – a lot on the corner of his property for the church cemetery. He was an elder in the church, of course, and a supporter of the church. And they were Presbyterians, and real Scotch Presbyterians. The Sabbath was very carefully observed. Everything that could be prepared on Saturday for the Sunday meals was prepared on Saturday. And of course, the breakfast dishes and the dinner dishes [07:00] had to be washed, but you didn't wash the supper dishes, because they could be washed Monday morning. So nothing was done on Sunday that wasn't absolutely necessary. And of course they spent long hours going to church on Sundays, too.

And the little cemetery – I also have a photograph in my slide collection of a monument, a little monument to Grandfather Alexander McKay. Of course, this farm was a self-sufficient farm. In other words, they raised their own grain and they had their own cattle and cows and their own pigs and their own sheep. And when my mother was married, part of her trousseau was – it consisted of woolen blankets, [08:00] but the wool was from their own sheep on the farm and that had been spun into woven thread, and it had been woven on a loom which wasn't wide enough for blanket width, so there'd be two widths sewn together. And I still have one of these blankets in my cedar chest at home. Most of them, of course, got worn out over time, but this one I saved.

NF: Was it spun and woven at the farm, too?

IA: Yes, it was, but Mother and Grandmother didn't do the weaving. There was a woman who would come around and spend about a week with them. I think Grandmother did some spinning of the wool, but she didn't do any weaving. And they had a real – the kitchen, of course, was an ell. You know, it was a typical farmhouse. And then there was a room, as it were, over – you know, a very low room over the kitchen. [09:00] And the loom was there. And this woman who did the spinning would come maybe and spend a week. And she'd spin the wool, and she made the – you know, the homespun from which the men's clothes were made, except of course their Sunday clothes – that was of course a good broadcloth brought from England, you see. English cloth. They didn't think the homespun was good enough for that. But their regular clothes would be homespun. And also, Mother said that there was a woman – a seamstress who would come

around too. And she would live in the house, maybe for about a week or so, and she would sew the cloth into clothes, both for the men and the women, you see? And of course, some of the cloth, like the broadcloth and the certain – I suppose the best gowns for the women, that was bought in Pictou and would have come from England. [10:00]

My father was of English ancestry on his father's side, but on his mother's side he was also Scotch in ancestry. His mother came from Pictou, Nova Scotia. Now, my father's – I'm not too clear about his ancestry, except the family legend, anyway, is that there were three brothers who came over from England in the 18th century, before the revolution, and that one of the three settled in Massachusetts and one in Maine and one in Connecticut. Whether this is accurate or not, I don't know. But anyway, my father's immediate ancestors certainly were in Massachusetts. And his father, James Abbott, was born either in Swampscott or Lynn – somewhere on the coast there. [11:00] Because his ancestry – his ancestors, his father and grandfather, had been seamen, or sea captains, as they say. Everyone was always a captain. And my grandfather, James Abbott, was the first one to take to the land. And he worked in Woburn. I think perhaps he had been trained as a shoemaker that was actually making shoes. But then with the development in the 19th century of factories, people were buying their shoes ready-made and not having them made. So he moved to Woburn, Massachusetts, and worked I think in a factory there in Woburn. And he had – he married three times. The first, by his first wife, he had several children; all except one died in infancy. One, my uncle Henry, [12:00] lived. And then his wife died. I don't know, but my guess is she died in childbirth. And then he remarried and that wife died, I think probably again in childbirth. And his third wife was my father's mother, and he had three sons: my father, George Abbott, and then a second son, William Abbott, and a third son, James Abbott. And when my father was about five years old, his mother became really a permanent invalid. And Grandfather tried to keep the household together, you know, with housekeepers and so on, but it was very difficult for him. And they – my father's grandparents in Nova Scotia offered to take my father. In fact, they were very eager to have him. He was named after his grandfather there. [13:00] And so at the age of five then he was taken to Nova Scotia and he was brought up by his grandparents there. And after his grandparents died, I think the taking – raising of him was taken over by a bachelor uncle and a spinster aunt.

So Father grew up in Nova Scotia, and he went to Pictou Academy and got a solid classical education there. And then he learned the trait of being a brick mason, and as a young

man, of course, he had great hopes of becoming a contractor. And I think that he did at one time have a contract, after he married my mother, to build some of the little railroad depots when the railroads was being extended to – out from Pictou [14:00] to Cape Breton. But of course he never had enough capital to really get started in a business. So he was never able to do that.

But he and my mother were married on January 1, 1889. And he of course had a house ready for her – rented; he wasn't able to buy one – but all furnished, which was the proper way: you brought your bride to a furnished home. And Mother told me that they were married – she said they were married very quietly in the church manse, because her father had died the year before, and she'd been in mourning: she'd had to postpone her marriage, and so it was a very quiet wedding ceremony. And then she and her husband went to their new home, and they were [15:00] allowed to be there in peace together for one week. And then after one week the ladies of the town came to call. So Mother had – they sampled her – she had a tea ready every afternoon, and they looked over the place and looked over the bride and sampled her cooking. And she had a list – I don't know whether it still exists or not, but she had a list of all the ladies who had called on her during the weeks following that.

NF: It sounds like she was being put through some kind of a test [laughter] of her cooking skills and so on, hosting skills. Can you tell me how old each of them was when they got married in 1889?

IA: Yes. Mother was born in March of – March 24 of 1867, so she was just short of her 22nd birthday. [16:00] And my father was born on August 24 of 1861, so he was almost six years older than Mother at the time. And I'll digress a moment here: the last year of my father's life, he... he took me aside and he gave into my safekeeping the first letter that my mother had ever written to my father. It started out "Dear Friend," and my father had carried it in his wallet all his life.

NF: It sounds like – [background talk] It sounds like they were very much in love.

IA: And I do have that letter in safekeeping; it's in my safe deposit box.

Now I'd like to talk a little bit about [17:00] my father's various miraculous escapes. [laughter] If he hadn't made these escapes, I wouldn't be here. The first was when he was a little boy. I don't know, five or six or seven years old. He fell down a deep well. Every time he touched – the water was over his head at the bottom of the well, but every time he touched the bottom, he pushed with his feet and came up and yelled, and some other bigger boys were able to run for and find a pole. And they put the pole down the well, and Father said, "I shinnied up it just like a monkey." You can see he had a great determination to live. [laughter] And then when he was a young man, before he married my mother, he was up in Boston, Massachusetts. And I think he, you know, came up as a young man to see his father and his brothers and get acquainted [18:00] and perhaps he got – he was working there. He was in the building, and this, of course, was in the 1880s. And there was a working elevator for – working tools and things like that, and there was absolutely no protection around it at all. It was just a hole in the floor. And my father didn't know it was there, and he fell down the well, elevator well, 60 feet. And he said all he ever remembers is brushing the side of the well, of the elevator walls, and he doesn't remember anything else about it. And he lived to tell the tale. This is before he was married. Nobody could believe he was alive, but he was, at the bottom. Damaged, but alive.

NF: OK, I guess [19:00] it doesn't – [background talk]

IA: Also, my father survived two other incidents. One was when he was walking – he was taking a shortcut home and he was walking along some railroad tracks, and he saw that there was a freight train coming, so he just stepped over into the other tracks: after all, he was going to let the freight train slowly go by. And then he suddenly realized that from the other direction, from in back of him, a fast train was coming, and he didn't have time to get out of the tracks. And what he did was to fall down flat on his face between the two sets of tracks. I don't mean in the track of the train, but in the area between the two. And he – [20:00] the engineer of the express train, of course, saw the man and saw him – so he stopped the train, because he couldn't stop it until it was way by there, but he thought he'd killed him. So he stopped the train and came back, and my father was getting up and dusting himself off, and he said, "The dirt carried by these trains is something awful." [laughter] He wasn't damaged at all; he was just very dirty. [laughter] The engineer couldn't believe his eyes. And that was one then.

And then the next incident was my father was working on a building that they were doing, building, at Rhode Island Hospital in Providence. And the staging collapsed. My father was under the staging [21:00] on a great pile of bricks, and there was a man who fell on top of all this, and that man was killed. And when they dug my father out, they thought he was going to be – you know, he would be dead too. Fortunately, they were right at a hospital. They took him into the hospital. He had a fractured skull and I don't know how many broken ribs, and this was before I was born. And he survived. But he was in the hospital for some time, and he wasn't able to work for about six months after that. I think that the chief result of that accident was that it really ruined his nervous system. It was very difficult for him to stand noise and dissension and so on after that. I think that it really, really did have a lasting damage on him. [22:00]

NF: And how did the family manage when he was out of work for six months?

IA: Well, as I understand it, the company offered my father a small compensation, and they managed to live on that. Our family doctor was really very distressed, because he felt that they had really bought off my father for a very small sum, and that he should have held out, because after all, they were at fault: the staging was faulty. And he should have gotten a really sizeable sum. But I think my father felt under such pressure to have something right away, so he really – and of course, he wasn't in a condition to use good judgment. He was really a very ill man, so that the doctor and my mother really couldn't do anything with him. He signed it and that was it. So they managed, but it wasn't right. [23:00] It wasn't fair.

My oldest brother was named Daniel Justin. Justin was my father's middle name – George Justin. And as a little boy he was called Justin. But when he grew up, he didn't like the name Justin, because apparently various things could be said "Just In, Just Out," and so forth. And so he preferred to be known as Daniel and as Dan, so that – you know, and after we grew up, we began to learn to call him Dan too. Now, he was over 11 years older than I am. And then my next brother was Frank, and Frank was almost exactly nine years older than I, because his birthday was January 20 and mine was January 21. And my brother Frank was really my favorite brother, [24:00] because when I was a little girl, he would do things with me. I can remember his taking me on a Sunday afternoon to visit Uncle Henry and his wife and family. And he wanted me to be dressed exactly right, and he'd turn me around to make sure my petticoat wasn't

showing. I was probably about four or five years old, or six, maybe. And we would walk down the hill, to the bottom of the hill, and get a trolley car and go out to see Uncle Henry.

Also, when I was little, around six or seven or eight, he would take me with him when he flew his kite. I loved that. And I would run along beside him as he was flying his kite. And then when I was a little bit older – oh, eight or nine – he would take me when he went eel fishing. We'd go to [Mashapoag?] Pond in Providence and he'd fish for eels. [25:00] And I would run up and down the shore, jumping up and down when he caught an eel, because of course it was very slippery, and he had to get some sand on it to be able to hold onto it. And I would get very excited. And then he'd bring the eels home, and my mother said she would cook them if he would skin them first. So he had to skin the eels. And as I remember, I think they were very tasty fish to eat.

So I have these memories. Also, he – when I started kindergarten, at age five, my brother Frank was the one who took me to kindergarten until I learned the way by myself. So I have always pleasant memories. I remember too, as a teenager, my brother Frank taking me to see some tennis matches. This was in the days of Bill Tilden and Helen Wills. [26:00] And it was really very exciting, right near Providence. And also, Frank took me to my first Shakespearean play, which was *Hamlet*. And I guess we went – we probably went to an afternoon matinee; I don't – I'm not very clear about that. But anyway, it was the great actor and actresses [E.H.] Sothorn and [Julia] [Marlowe. And of course I was really very excited. The only Shakespearean play I had known up to then was *The Merchant of Venice*, which I'd studied in freshman English in high school. And one of the things about the play was that at inappropriate moments, Frank and I would begin laughing, because we remember quotations that my father was in the habit of using, such as "Alas, poor Yorick! I knew him once," at which we would look at each other and begin to giggle, [27:00] to the annoyance and the amazement of the people around us. I should correct that quotation. It should be, "Alas, poor Yorick! I knew him well."

When my two oldest brothers were five years old and three years old, my mother and father came up from Pictou, Nova Scotia, to Rhode Island. I think they hoped to have, you know, better opportunities, because the work from my father was really very scattered. He sometimes had to go away from Pictou to New Brunswick and other places in order to get work, so he hoped to find more steady work with his family, and he hoped to find better opportunities for the education of the children. [28:00] Then my brother Alec, Alexander, was born when my brother

Frank was five years old. And then two years later, my brother Bill, William – "Willy," as we called him as a little boy – was born, and then in 1901, just a day late for my brother Frank's birthday, on January 21, I was born. The last of the family, and the only girl. January 21, 1901, was the date of my birthday. My brother Bill was born in January, but January 9th or 10th in 1899, and my brother Alex was born February 24 in 1897. [29:00]

Of my four brothers, only my brother Alec is still alive. He's now 90 years old. But he had a stroke several years ago, so he's been in a nursing home. But I understand from his daughter – the nursing home is in New Mexico, and I understand from his daughter that he seems quite happy and is not in any physical pain. So he's getting along pretty well.

I think maybe the earliest memory I have is saying, "Let me do it." I can't date this, but I think it had to do with either learning to tie my shoes or learning to lace them up. And I wanted to do it myself. I apparently was a very independent little girl. [30:00] The earliest memory that I can date was when I was three and a half years old, and the reason I can date that is because my mother took me down to Nova Scotia that year to visit my grandmother and other relatives there. And while we were in Westville, we spent most of the time with her sister, Aunt Mary, and her family. But Mother wanted to see some other relatives, and she went away for about a week or so. And she left me with my grandmother – my grandmother McKay. My grandmother had sold the farm – well, she kept it, I think, for a few years after Grandfather's death, but she finally had to sell it because the sons had grown up and she didn't really have the proper help there. And she had bought a little cottage [31:00] in Westville, where her older daughter lived. So for that week I was left with my grandmother. And this is the only grandparent who was alive during my lifetime, and this is the only time I ever was with a grandmother. And I have the loveliest memory of that week, because Grandmother would say to me in the morning, "Now, little Isabel, how would you like your egg? Would you like it boiled or would you like it poached or would you like it fried?" And what I remember was this lovely feeling that rose within me, because the food was [audio skips] and the food was put in front of me. And if I was well I ate the food, and if I didn't eat the food then I was examined for what I might be sick with. [laughter] So I just had this marvelous feeling, [32:00] because I had no idea how I wanted my egg. But she would finally end up "Boiled, dear?" And I would nod my head yes, or she'd say "Poached?" and I would nod my head yes.

Now, I understand from another angle, which I don't remember but which my cousins, the youngest children of my Aunt Mary, told me – they were Annie and Ivy, and Annie was seven years older than I and Ivy was three and a half years older. And this little three-year-old would come into their life, being very much admired. And they, of course, had had their noses put out of joint. So they remember that side of it. But when I came back from this week with Grandmother, in which apparently I had been thoroughly spoiled, I apparently objected to something that I was given to eat, and my mother took me out of the room. And of course I don't remember this, because this [33:00] is not a pleasant memory. I suppose she gave me a little spank, and I came back very meekly. And Ann and I were completely satisfied. I had been put in my place. [laughter]

I was really a very healthy little girl, but when I was two years old, I had pneumonia. And this is something – of course I have no memory of this, but this is something I was told about over and over in my childhood, because a two-year-old with pneumonia in 1903 had very little chance of survival. And how it came about, naturally he brought a – of course, naturally he brought it [audio skipping/repeating] home. My mother had the doctor to see him, and Dr. [Coraca?] told her what to do for the whooping cough. And he said, of course, the other children [34:00] are being exposed to it and inevitably they're going to catch it too. And so as Alec was recovering, Willy came down with it. And then as Willy was recovering, I came down with it. And Mother was doing the same things for Willy and for me that – [break in audio] were as I was running a high fever, so she called Dr. Coraca. And Dr. Coraca, of course, came and diagnosed immediately that I had pneumonia. And he told my parents that the only hope for me was in nursing. And Mother said that she just devoted her time completely to me, and that every 15 minutes I was turned from side to side to keep my lungs from filling up. And I suppose other measures were taken. But I had the impression that [35:00] the doctor was, in a sense, trying to prepare my parents for losing me, so that the fact that I survived seemed like a miracle to the family.

NF: OK. [audio skipping] Where were you living when you were born, and did you move when you were a little girl?

IA: I was born in Providence, Rhode Island, and we were living on a little street called Weston Street on the East side, on the – really on the side of the hill between Camp Street and North Main Street. But I have no recollection of there, because we moved from there, when I was two years old, to Evergreen Street, which was just a few blocks away. And I remember Evergreen Street very well, because we lived there [36:00] until I was eight years old. And we had a house – Evergreen Street ran from Camp Street down to North Main; it was a very steep street. So I remember that. And I have a very clear recollection of the apartment we were in. It was a two-family house, and we had the first-floor apartment, and then we had a room or two rooms, I'm not sure, up in the attic. And the two older boys slept up in that room. Of course, there was no heat in the room, and the house and the apartment itself was heated with just stoves and – a room – [audio skipping]. And then there was a stove in the parlor. And then there were two bedrooms that opened off the kitchen, and there was a bathroom in between the two bedrooms. [37:00] And now I think when I – after all, if I moved here when I was two, the two little boys who were upstairs were only 11 and 13. But I remember that, you know, when they went to bed at night, Mother heated irons – you know, the old-fashioned irons – or brick in the oven, and it was wrapped in newspaper and then in flannel. And the boys took that up to warm the bed. As a matter of fact, I did this, because even when we lived in a house with central heating, there was no heating in the bedrooms. That was thought unnecessary. So the beds would be quite cold. And we'd do that, and we'd put that in the bed up near your shoulders while you were getting undressed, and we did have heat in the bathrooms, so generally I would undress in the bathroom and then take my clothes back to my own room. And then when I got in the bed, I'd push that down to the foot of the bed and put my feet on it so that, you know, [38:00] the bed got warmed up. And so then of course the whole thing was warm, so you were warm during the night.

And I have recollections of Evergreen Street. Since it was a steep hill, of course, it was a wonderful hill to slide down. We had sleds. But of course it was dangerous at the bottom, because there was, yes, a main street with a trolley. So the people on the street – the men would all take the ashes from their stoves and put them on, you know, down at the foot of the street, so when the children came sliding down the hill on the snow, we had one – loved that – [audio skipping] we had wonderful times.

And I recollect – my memory of going to kindergarten is a little vague. I do remember I loved kindergarten; I thought it was wonderful. [39:00] And then my memory of elementary

school, I went through – well, I think I was in the third grade when I left there. My birthday is in January, so I could enter elementary school in the middle of the year. And when I went, they divided the grades into what they called "1A" and "1B". So I would be in 1B and then in the fall I'd go into 1A; that was the way it was. But the second day – I remember this clearly – the second day I was in the first grade, the teacher brought the alphabet to me on little cardboard squares and said, "Do you know the alphabet?" And I said, "Yes." I thought the whole world knew the alphabet. So I just put A, B, C, D, and then the next row E, F, G, H and so on in no time at all. [40:00] And she came and looked at it, and obviously immediately placed in 1A. Because apparently children came to the school and didn't even know the alphabet. It was if I'd always [audio skipping] – I'd just feel as if I'd always read, but apparently I learned very quickly. And of course, after all, I had the older brothers, you see, and I think I was learning from them, you see, as well as having, of course, nursery rhymes said to me and that sort of thing. And pretty soon I was reading better than my brother Bill, who was two years older. I just took to it, you know, like a fish to water.

But one of the happiest memories that I have from the years on Evergreen Street is the last Christmas that I was there – this was just before my eighth birthday – was one of the happiest Christmases of my life. [41:00] I got up in the morning and ran into the parlor, and there in the parlor was a little bed and a little doll in the bed. And the bed had – oh, Mother had – of course, I don't know whether I thought it was Santa Claus or not. But Mother had made a little mattress for the little bed, and it also had a little quilt made of – oh, it had sheets, little cotton sheets, and it had a little spread, a quilt, with dotted muslin on the top and little blue bows on it. And then it – the bed had, like, a little canopy, and Mother had made these little, you know, [audio skipping] – close her eyes if you put her back. And she had – she was dressed – she had little, little drawers with a little lace on the bottom, and she had a little [42:00] slip with lace on the bottom of that. And then she had – that was all of cotton. And then she had a dotted Swiss dress, and that was with little puffed sleeves, and it was trimmed with a little blue ribbon, and she had little white shoes on her feet. And it was one of the most ecstatic moments of my life. I can see it still, and how happy I was.

NF: Oh, my. Had your mother made the clothes too?

IA: Everything had been made by Mother. As I said, I don't know whether I realized it or whether I thought it was Santa Claus, but, you know, I was pretty big, you know, almost eight. So I probably did. But then my birthday came, of course, in January. And so for my birthday, Mother made a dark blue cape for the doll, lined with a light blue material [43:00] and a little hood, a little cap, for her head. I guess like a little bonnet. It was like a little bonnet. And then in March of that year we moved from Evergreen Street across town to Anthony Avenue. And I remember going with Mother the day that we moved on the trolley car. And I remember sitting beside Mother, and there were long seats along the sides of the trolley car – I was sitting beside Mother, and I had the doll in my lap. And I wanted to display the doll. And there was a lady across the car, and I thought she was looking at my doll, so I carefully opened up the cape so she could see the pretty dress underneath. [laughter] I realize now she was probably looking at me, but I thought it was the doll she was admiring.

And then on Anthony Avenue, we were there for just two years, from eight to ten. [44:00] And the reason we left there was that my great-aunt Ada, Ada Ross, in Salem, had a home and a little variety store in there. And she was getting elderly – she was about 80 years old, and she thought perhaps Mother could take over running the store, you see, and still have the home. And so of course I don't know what all the arrangements were; I was just a little girl. And so we moved to Salem, and we stayed there – but we stayed there for just two years, because I think Mother felt that – well, I think I felt, too, and apparently expressed it to Mother, that she didn't have much time to listen to me anymore. And I think she felt that, you know, that it was taking too much of her time, [45:00] really, and that it would be better to move back to Providence and give me more attention.

NF: That kind of retail work in a store can be enormously demanding of time.

IA: Yes, I think it was, because it was open – well, from early in the morning, when I got up in the morning, it was already open. And it was open way into the night. And I think – again, I don't think it was open on Sunday mornings, but I think she opened it, you know, Sunday afternoons and evenings and so on. It was just for all kinds of small things. And I think it just didn't bring in enough income to pay for the long hours. And of course, Mother did have a – well, they had to have a maid to help in the house, because Great-Aunt Ada was there too and

she needed help and attention. But even so, it wasn't – it just was too demanding [46:00] of time for what came out of it. And of course, actually, it was really very fortunate that we did leave, because the next year was the great Salem fire, in 1914, and the house burned to the ground. So we were safe from being burned out completely. It was very fortunate. And Aunt Ada, of course, escaped the fire, and she went back to – well, Nova Scotia or Prince Edward Island, I don't know which, and lived out her remaining years there, I think with the Ross relatives.

NF: So you moved back to Providence when you were 12 years old.

- End of Track 1 -

Track 2

NF: – teen-13. Right. All right. And so what happened next?

IA: Well, actually, we moved into a cottage which my family had taken rather suddenly. My father had gone ahead to Providence to find a house to rent, and Mother and I came down and the furniture was on the way. And Mother discovered that he had – the cottage he'd rented, the bedrooms upstairs all opened in each other, and he said, "Well, there were three bedrooms." Mother said, "You can't have bedrooms opening into each other. We'll have to find another place." So they did find another cottage, which was really quite nice. But it was not in a location they wanted to stay in. So we only stayed for the summer. And then they found an apartment in a two-family house out on Hillside Avenue, on the edge of [01:00] Providence. So in the fall we moved there. So when we came back, I went to a school, the Veazie Street School, just for about – in the seventh grade for about a month or six weeks, something like that. And the difficulty in changing from the Salem system to the Providence system was the Salem system had nine grades before you went to high school, and the Providence system had just eight grades. And in changing, there was no problem in connection with – well, things like reading and so on, but I faced a problem in connection with arithmetic, because the children in Providence had all had decimals and I'd never had decimals. So I was in, you know, real difficulty there with, you know, trying to catch up. But I had a very nice teacher at Veazie Street, [02:00] and she really was very nice with me, and, you know, and helped me and had me come up to the desk, trying to show me

what the kids had already had during the year. And, well, you know, you're not born knowing this; you have to be taught it. So I was having real problems there.

And then in the fall, when we moved to Hillside Avenue, I then went to the Rochambeau Avenue grammar school, and that's what I graduated from for the eighth grade. And unfortunately I had really a rather nasty teacher there who wasn't very nice to me. That's a long story. But she was put in her place, finally, and things were worked out. It was just in connection with this arithmetic. And of course, once I got it, once I understood it, why, you know, there was no problem at all. There was just – I was a good student and I liked school, so I was doing all right. And when I finished there, [03:00] I ended Hope Street High School. And I loved high school.

NF: (inaudible)

IA: Yes, we did have a moving van, but not like the great big vans of today. They were smaller, and usually driven by horses. And the packing – you didn't have any professional packing. Well, I guess you might have had some for dishes, because I think Mother did have some dishes packed one time by a professional packer and learned how to pack dishes. But otherwise, you know, all the packing was done by – well, I guess by Mother. By the family. And then the moving van, with its horses, would come up, and well, we had – when we left – while I was on Hillside Avenue, we got a piano, [04:00] because my father had hopes that I was going to be able to play the piano – for which, alas, I had no talent. And they had the equipment, you know, to take the piano – we were upstairs – to take the piano upstairs and down; they had all that equipment. So we did have a regular moving van, but it would look rather strange to anybody today. And of course, when we moved from Salem to – I don't remember going up to Salem, tell the truth, but I do remember coming back, because it was, again – the moving van was coming, but it was, again, being drawn by horses, so it was going to take all day to come from Salem, which was – well, Boston's about 45 miles, and I suppose Salem maybe was 50 miles. So I don't know. Maybe a little bit farther than Boston to Providence.

NF: Salem's a fair distance north of Boston, so it must have been a long trip. [05:00]

IA: But anyway, there was time, obviously, to rent another house and to head off the moving van. But being a child I wasn't paying much attention to the logistics.

And when I started in Hope Street High School, I had a long walk to high school. It took me about 40 minutes. It was well over a mile, a mile and a half, a mile and three-quarters. Now I notice that youngsters never think of walking that distance, but there was no question: I was young and strong and had a good pair of shoes, and walk I did, no matter what the weather was. But I loved high school. I think it was – I think I was getting kind of bored in the eighth grade. Once I got over the arithmetic problem, everything came easily. And the time that had to be spent with the ones who were slower [06:00] in the class were very boring to me. And when I got to high school, I really began to feel as if the world opened up. I remember that first year, I had ancient history, and I just – I just loved it. I just loved this history about the Greeks and the Romans. And, you know, finding out more about the myths of the Greeks: it just to me was very exciting. And before that I'd had American History in elementary school, but it had been very poorly taught and had been very dull, and not presented interestingly at all. And that gave me a set against American history: I thought American history wasn't interesting, and I didn't discover that it was really very interesting until I was a graduate student.

And then I had – I remember I had a course in English in which I was first introduced to Shakespeare: [07:00] we studied *The Merchant of Venice*, and we had a young, enthusiastic teacher. And then I had algebra, and I just loved algebra, and I had an excellent teacher. And I started out in what was known as the French-English course, because the idea was that I would go to normal school when I finished high school. And in the course of the year, I met someone who had a sister who was going to the women's college at Brown University. And somehow the conversation got around about, "well, that would be lovely if one could afford it." And I remember this older sister said, "Oh, you can manage. You can work your way if you have to," and so on. So I thought about that and I thought, "Well, I guess I'll try to go to college." So before the year was over, I made up my mind that I'd change to the classical course, and then the teacher, Miss Warner, [08:00] who was teaching me algebra, also asked me to stop after class one day. And she said she thought I should change to the classical course – that I ought to go to college. So I did, and in my sophomore year, then I took beginning Latin – I'd been taking French before – and then I started German, because you had to have a second language too. But that was no problem, because they were very different. But then in my junior year, I took second-

and third-year Latin at the same time. And what I'd done, between my sophomore and junior year – and at this time, of course, I was just 15 years old – I borrowed the books for second-year Latin from the school, and I set myself a program, and I did, you know, the lesson – every day during the summer I did a lesson from the books. So I'd gone through all the books, [09:00] and they started reading Caesar and so I started reading Caesar. So I'd done all that, but of course, I had no one to correct my mistakes. So if I made mistakes, they were there. But I did all that. And then in my junior year, when we started out, the first quarter in the – when I was taking second and third at the same time, the first quarter of the year in the third-year course was very hard. I had a hard time. But after that it was easy, because I was doing all the basic grammar in the second-year course that the third-year-course students had begun to forget. So actually it was easier for me than it was for some of the others, because I was doing the two at once. And I remember that year, too, it was my second year of German. And because I was doing these two Latins, I missed one class of German each week. But the teacher was [10:00] very nice, and she – I would meet her in a free period and she'd give me some written work to do, you know, so that I kept up with the class without any difficulty. And then I was supposed to take public speaking one hour a week, and there was no hour free. So once in a while I guess I skipped Latin or something and took the public speaking. [laughter] In which I didn't do very well, since I wasn't there very often.

But then of course the senior year was just a regular year, yes. And it was – I had excellent teachers. I think in high school, I had only one poor teacher: that was in English in my sophomore year, and she really wasn't very good. It was very boring and not very well-taught. But otherwise I really had excellent instruction. Just, it was – I just loved it. [11:00] And I just felt worlds opening up. It was really lovely.

NF: You were very fortunate. It sounds like that really set the stage for your whole career.

IA: Well, I think I was just ripe for it, you know? And I was offered things that I had to grasp for, you know, and reach for at just the right moment. And it was – you know, I was getting an intellectual stimulus at the time when I was very receptive to it, so it really – yes, it really was exciting.

In 1914, my mother took me to Nova Scotia for a trip to Nova Scotia, for the first time since I'd been there when I was three and a half, and I was now 13 and a half and had just finished grammar school. My mother's [12:00] plan originally was to relieve her sister Mary during the summer in the care of their mother, who'd had a stroke, I think, some seven or eight years earlier. But before we could actually leave Providence, Grandmother died. So then we left two or three days before we'd planned to do, rather hurriedly. And of course it was sad for my mother, but I didn't really know my grandmother, and so I wasn't really, you know, deeply affected by it. And the summer, actually – that summer in Nova Scotia remains for me really a very happy summer, because I saw cousins and I spent time on the farm with some of them. And I remember riding around on the hay rake – me. I didn't really know much about horses, and the little boys had let me drive the horses around with a hay rake, [13:00] which was probably very dangerous, but anyway, nothing happened, fortunately. [laughter] And I thought it was great fun. And I remember other happy things, too. I remember meeting the daughter who was my age, Rita Murray, the daughter of the woman who had stood up with my mother when she was married: they were young couples together. And Rita and I became good friends and corresponded all the years, until she died just a couple of years ago. But I was in the country at – for, well, I don't know, at least a week or longer, at the time when war broke out in Europe. And of course we didn't get any news out there at all; we didn't know what was going on. And I came back to Pictou and discovered that the war had broken out. [14:00] And I remember how shocked I was, because I'd heard about fighting in the Balkans, which seemed very remote, and people perhaps weren't quite as civilized. But the idea that war had actually broken out between England and France and Germany and Russia just seemed incredible. It was just a shock. So that shows how strong – it seems to me it must have shown how strong a peace movement before that was, because this really was a shock to me, that these great nations would actually go to war with each other. And while I was in Pictou – I was in Pictou for about a week or so, I think, before going back to Westville, where my aunt Mary lived. And while I was there, these young Canadian boys who had volunteered to go to fight for England [15:00] – there was a parade of them through the street. And I can remember standing on the sidewalk and just being – well, just puzzled and kind of appalled by it all, not fully grasping it. And of course in retrospect, I realize that hardly any of those boys ever returned. And my little friend Rita Murray had two brothers killed in that war – two older brothers who'd gone abroad.

NF: (inaudible)

IA: And then I remember when I came back to Providence, there were, of course, some people, naturally, in Providence of German ancestry. And suddenly all these stories – you know, antagonisms were raised against them. People were really quite strongly pro-English. And I can remember being puzzled by that. You know, if Mr. So-and-So [16:00] was a nice man two months ago, why is he suddenly not a nice man? He's still the same man. And I can remember being very, very upset by the rise of this attitude toward people who were nice just a little while ago. It just didn't make sense to me.

But I became quite an avid reader of the newspapers, and I followed the war. And maybe I should go back a moment and tell – when I first started reading newspapers was with the Titanic. I was living in Salem at the time, and when the news came of that, I started reading the papers. I read everything about the Titanic. So I have a vivid memory of, you know, when the news came and the stories, you know, about it and all this. And from then on I read newspapers; I suppose I didn't read [17:00] everything, but I – nevertheless, I always read the newspaper.

NF: I'm thinking that the recent discovery of the wreck must stir some feelings from long ago about when it really happened.

IA: Yes, it does. And I belong to those who think it should be left alone. I don't like this idea of looking for treasure in it. And of course I read that book, *A Night to Remember*, years ago. Very moving. Yes, very moving to me.

And reading the papers during the years of the war, I can remember picking them up, and a new push on the Western front, 100,000 casualties, and so on. I can even remember being just appalled by it all. Just – it just was all so dreadful, so dreadful. And it filled me with hopes that [18:00] we were going to have a good peace. And of course, I remember Armistice Day, and how happy everybody was and how excited everybody was, how glad everybody was when the war was over. And of course I had two brothers in the war. My brother Bill was actually in France for some 17 months, although not that many months before the end of the war – he was there afterwards, of course, before he could come back. And my brother Frank was in, but he

didn't go abroad until after the war was over. But still, there was family anxiety in connection with their being in the war.

NF: Was Bill involved in any of the fighting?

IA: Well, actually, what he did, as I understand it, was to drive a truck or something like that at night with supplies up to the front lines, [19:00] which of course they had to do without lights and over roads and so on, and of course the roads were often bombed at night. And they were supposed to, you know, get out of the trucks, stop the trucks, if there was bombing and seek refuge in a ditch by the side of the road. And he said sometimes he was so tired he just fell asleep at the wheel. [laughter] He couldn't manage to get out of the truck. But he did survive. He didn't get – well, he was just lucky the bombs didn't hit him. But he wasn't actually in trench warfare; he was just driving up to the lines at night with these supplies.

NF: How did he get into the Army? Was there a draft at that time, or had he volunteered, or what?

IA: Well, he volunteered, and he was – since he was over 18, you know, he volunteered. He'd had his 18th birthday in [20:00] January, and he volunteered right after war was declared, which I think was in April. And so the family couldn't stop him; he was of an age to volunteer. They were upset, but away he went.

NF: Was there upset – a very natural fear of what would happen to him, or did they have some question about whether the country should be sending soldiers over there?

IA: Well, I think that – no. I think that they felt he was young and that he didn't need to rush into the – to volunteer. And yes, and of course naturally one is concerned for one's own. Yes. I didn't – no, I don't think there was – I had no – I don't think there was any antagonism in the family to our getting in. [21:00] At least, I wasn't aware of that, no. But just the anxiety one has for one's loved ones, you know?

Well, I graduated from high school in June of 1918, and I'd been accepted at – to the women's college in Brown University. And I also had a small grant to help me with my tuition. I would live at home. And the tuition at that time was \$150 a year, and my grant was \$50. So I had to raise the \$100. And I had had a little job in my – between my junior and senior years, because I was then 16, so I was old enough to have a little job. [blank/pause in audio]

NF: This is a continuation of the tape [22:00] of Aunt Isabel talking to me, Nancy Foster. By now it's September 27th, 1987.

IA: And then I was also going to have a job after I graduated to earn some more money towards my tuition, but I'll speak about my graduation first. The – we didn't have a valedictorian in the class; instead, the top 10 students had their names on the program as giving orations. But of those, about half of them were excused, and the top five actually gave an oration. And I'd had almost a straight-A record in high school, so I was one of the top five. And my oration was on the Russian revolution. [laughter] [23:00] And I said – which had occurred a year before. And all I remember is the opening statement: "It is some time now since the czar of all the Russias lost his throne."

NF: I think that's wonderful. [laughter]

IA: And also, because it was wartime, we were – the girls were not to dress up in fancy dresses. Instead, we were to wear white skirts with white middie blouses. So that's the way we graduated – no fancy clothes. But of course, my mother and father were there, as they always were when I performed. Very proud of their little girl, graduating with honors. And then that summer, I got a job in the office of the American Screw Company. And I think my wages were \$8.10 a week. And [24:00] we worked – well, fairly long days, and also Saturday mornings, but we had a long lunch hour. And fortunately the company was not so far from home: I could walk home in about 10 or 15 minutes, so I walked home to lunch every day, which was very nice. And what I was doing was billing – typing bills. The American Screw Company then had sold its products all over the world. It was really quite a big concern. And I had learned typing because my brother Frank had sent me, during my senior year – I think it was my senior year – in high school to a

business school three nights a week for several weeks, because he felt the typing would be very useful to me [25:00] both as a student and for getting a job. And I studied typing and shorthand. But of course, I never used the shorthand, so I forgot that in a short time. But of course, the typing was very useful, because I wouldn't have gotten the job without it. And there was no opportunity to learn anything like that in the high school – unless you took a business course, you couldn't manage that. So I was very grateful for being able to learn the typing, have the touch system. And I have that job, that summer job... The company always had summer jobs, because the regular help would be having summer vacations, so they needed extra help, you see, because the regulars would be – they got a two-week vacation. And so there were a number of us who were there just for the summer. And so I met Ann [Cogzole?] there, and she was entering Brown in the fall, and we've been good friends ever since. [26:00] We went together. I was there for three summers – let's see, 1918, 1919, and 1920. And I think the next summer, I got \$16 a week – inflation was starting. So the wages were going up. And then in the third summer there was a recession, and they – the company was not hiring: I was there for only two weeks. They were not hiring any more summer people; they were letting all the summer people go, and they were even firing some of the regular people. I'll never forget those days, because for some of the regular people it was really, you know, the food out of their mouths being taken. So it was really very sad. And of course I was young and full of hope and felt, oh, [27:00] you know, I could manage somehow. And actually it turned out for me very well, because when I went back to the college to, you know, see if they had any suggestions, we didn't have any regular office – I guess I went to the registrar or somebody like that. But anyway, I got tutoring to do. It was a shame nobody had mentioned it sooner, because I made a lot more money in a lot fewer hours, and I loved the tutoring. I enjoyed it tremendously. I had two sisters and then I had another person, another girl, and then I was offered a fourth. But I said, "My friend Nancy True needs some work desperately, and I think you should give this girl to her, because I'm going to make enough money, and she needs money if she's going to go back to college next year." So I wouldn't take the fourth – I gave it to her. Then also, my freshman year [28:00] – see, I was earning all my own tuition and all my incidental expenses, and also paying for most of my – well, some of my clothes. If it was a very expensive item like a coat, my family helped me. But my freshman year, I did babysitting. I took care of a little boy for three hours three times a week. Maybe that's not quite right, but anyway, as I remember, I got 25 cents an hour, so I earned

\$2.25 a week. But at the end of my freshman year, I was offered the opportunity to work with another girl in the little bookstore which was at the women's college, which was just an adjunct, really, of the main bookstore over on the men's campus. [29:00] And from that, I don't remember exactly, but I think I made about – at least about \$200 a year. And that was really very nice, because while we were very – the other girl was a year ahead of me, and while we were very busy... of course, when she graduated – when I was a senior, somebody younger, you know, a younger student came in. We were very busy at the beginning of a semester, when all the students were crowding in for their books and so on. But otherwise, we kept certain hours, you know, which were posted – otherwise there'd be not a great deal of [inaudible] so I could actually study and that sort of thing, you know, and just wait on the occasional customer. And we worked out the hours between us, the two of us, you see, so it was always manned during the hours that it was open. And that was really a very nice thing to have happen. [30:00]

And I loved my college years. They were very different from the high school years, because in the high school, I really didn't get closely acquainted with a lot of the other students. You know, when we left high school, we scattered to different parts of the area. And I did have my good friend, Nancy True, whom I knew when I was very little and lived on Evergreen Street – we came and we kept in touch; we came together again in high school. And we would walk together away from school after school. And then our paths would separate: I had to go one way and she had to go another, and sometimes she'd walk partway with me and then I'd walk back partway with her, and then she'd walk back partway with me, but finally we had to part [laughter] [31:00] and go our different ways. But when I got to college I really made lots of friends, and was really active in all kinds of activities. Took part in plays, and oh, all sorts of things. I just enjoyed it. I really had a very good time. I enjoyed my courses; some of them were not so good, but some were very good. And the whole experience was just great fun. [break in audio]

NF: Here we are: it's October 24 now, and I'm back in Washington to pick up the narrative where we left it. And I'm wanting you, Isabel, to tell me more about college – maybe... I don't quite know where to begin, so I'll just let you talk. [32:00]

IA: Well, perhaps I could say a little about my courses in college. My freshman year was pretty well-set by the requirements. In those days, in order to go to college, you had to have four years of Latin in high school and three years of either Greek or German. And I had German. So my freshman year, I continued with the Latin. And we had an interesting professor, really. I don't think that my command of Latin improved any during that year; I think we were inclined to use [trots?] rather than working hard at the translation. But I think I came to appreciate Latin literature [33:00] more, so that there were pluses and minuses in the course. I continued with German, and was getting really quite proficient, so I could really pick up a German story and pretty much read it in German without thinking of translating it. The other courses – the other course that I remember particularly was biology. And it was a – although I'm not scientifically inclined, I enjoyed that course very much. I really learned a good deal. It was very well-taught. It was really – the laboratory work was excellent, and I certainly profited from that. I think of things today that I learned way [34:00] back then, so many years ago. And I continued with mathematics – that was also required. And I remember particularly that year we had some analytic geometry, and I enjoyed that very much.

Actually, I did so well in the mathematics – I had done very well in mathematics in high school, you know, and was top grade – that it was the one field in which I was invited to major. But while I enjoyed mathematics, I didn't want to be a mathematics major. I think I thought of it – oh, I don't know, maybe more as puzzles to be worked out; I'm not quite sure. But it was fun. I enjoyed it, but I didn't want to spend my life in mathematics.

In my sophomore year, I didn't want to continue – we had to have another year of an ancient language [35:00]. And I didn't want to continue with the Latin, because the person who taught that second year in college of Latin – the sixth year we would have had it – was Dean King, and unfortunately, she was famous for being a very dull teacher. So I just dropped the Latin and took a year of Greek. I'm not sorry that I dropped the Latin, because that year of Greek was really very interesting. We covered in one year in college what's covered in three years in high school. Actually, at the end of the year we were reading parts of the Iliad. It was a very demanding course, but it introduced me to Greek. I'm sorry to say I've forgotten all my Greek, but nevertheless I did enjoy that year and I felt it was very worthwhile.

The mistake that I did make was to drop the German. [36:00] There was still lots of pressure from the First World War, and while I had resisted it in high school and certainly my

first year in college, I think I must have succumbed. I really got far enough so that another year really would have made me quite proficient. I was fairly proficient, but it was too bad that I decided to drop it. And I took up – I had a year of French instead. But in my sophomore year, I had my first course in general European history. And that determined what I was going to major in. Professor Collier was the teacher, and he was a superb lecturer, very interesting. And I found the course most interesting. [37:00] It was really introducing me to all sorts of new ideas and new possibilities. So that determined what I would continue in. And I took more courses, of course, in history, and in my sophomore – I mean, my junior and senior years.

NF: Had you thought when you entered college that you might major in history? Had that been one of the possibilities, or did this course really open a new door for you?

IA: I'm not quite sure about that. When I was in elementary school, we were taught American history in a very dull, uninteresting way. And I had decided that American history was an extremely dull subject. When I went to high school, in my freshman year in high school I had ancient history, and I loved that. I just loved that course. [38:00] Greek and Roman particularly. So I think the possibility might have been in mind. I also thought – I greatly admired my brother Frank, who is nine years older than I. And he was going on to law school, and I think I thought a little bit about preparation for law school – not too heavily, because it would have meant a long pull. And I'm not quite sure. I think that I really didn't know what I wanted to major in, but obviously the area of history and political science did interest me. And when Professor Collier's lectures turned out to be so interesting, that really determined me.

Now, I should add, I think, [39:00] that when I got to graduate school, I realized that interesting as the courses with Professor Collier had been, I really had not had good preparation for graduate school in comparison with students who came from such places as Mount Holyoke and Smith, because I'd not really been introduced to source material and how to use source material. The courses had been largely lecture courses, except in my senior year, we did have a seminar. And the subject which Professor Collier chose was the Russian revolution. And he chose that not because he was particularly expert himself in it but because he was very much interested in trying to find something out about the roots of the Russian revolution. And therefore, his guidance for the work that we did was not really the guidance of a [40:00] – in it,

we wrote papers in that course – was not really the guidance of a person who was an expert in that area. And when I got to graduate school, I really was at a great disadvantage. My first year there, when I was in courses with students who'd been trained by Miss Nielson and Miss Putnam at Mount Holyoke and who were at home in sources of English history which didn't mean anything to me at all – at first I was completely lost, so that I had really a great deal to make up. So I realized that they – that the preparation really hadn't been very good that we... that while the courses were well-organized by Professor Collier and we had a syllabus, [41:00] we tended mostly to read a textbook and some secondary sources, and really didn't get any introduction to primary material, which it definitely needed.

However, I think I should add that I am grateful to Professor Collier, because he did interest me in this field, and he really was a superb lecturer.

NF: Did he give any indications to you of how these ideas were derived? And even if he didn't send you to source material, did he bring out any of the controversies around historical research, or was it mostly his ideas about what the history was?

IA: No, as I recollect, he didn't give us much indication about controversy. He might, perhaps, in his lectures sometimes have brought out that certain things were controversial, but [42:00] that's not the memory that I have. I really – I really feel that we were not introduced to source material, primary source material, at all. That I had no idea how to use that sort of thing. I don't mean that he presented history as if it were facts cut and dried, not at all, but it was his interpretation and his interpretation of maybe the secondary texts that we read.

NF: You mentioned biology. Were there other subjects that you were introduced to in college that intrigued you, that you got at least some – well, Greek; you mentioned Greek also – that you feel you had an introduction that carried – and then some interest that carried over into your later life?

IA: In the freshman year, [43:00] we took – we had English literature and also English composition. My memory of the composition is trying to write a theme twice a week or something like that. I think I learned a good deal from that. Sometimes I think I dashed off things

that were rather worthless, but on the other hand, being made to write something – it might be descriptive, it might be imaginative – as often as that was really very good, very good practice. And then in the literature course, I think we went from *Beowulf* to the present – [laughter] rather covered everything. But I guess something I got introduced to, to new figures in literature that hadn't been covered in [44:00] high school, although I had some very good English teachers in high school, too.

- End of Track 2 -

Track 3

NF: Why don't you tell me more about the activities you did just for fun?

IA: Well, we were required to take physical education in college. There'd been no such requirement in high school, but I had belonged to the basketball team in high school, the girls' basketball, which was entirely extracurricular. I mean, we had no guidance from any officials in the place. And in those days – I think basketball perhaps is played differently even by girls today, but in those days we had a position called "side center," and although I was small, I could play this position, and I loved it. I played it through high school and I played it through college. I didn't make the team, however, in college, but I enjoyed playing basketball. [01:00] And I kept that up, I think, through most of my college years. And then I learned to play tennis. I had never had any introduction to that. I didn't turn out to be a very good tennis player, but I had a lot of fun. I enjoyed playing tennis. And I enjoyed gym. We did things with ropes and ladders and all sorts of gym equipment and so on, and I had fun doing that. And we had bowling – there at the women's college we did have a couple of bowling alleys, so I learned to bowl. And I enjoyed all that sort of thing.

I mentioned that I liked to be in plays, and I was, I think, in some one-act plays. The play I remember best is Shaw's *Pygmalion*, because I took the part of Mr. Doolittle in the play. [02:00] We girls had to take men's parts in the plays, and over on the hill the men took girls' parts in their plays. And I'm happy to say that I think about 10 years later the men broke down and agreed that it would be nice to have girls taking girls' parts. [laughter] And of course the girls were perfectly willing to do so, and they had men take men's parts in their plays. I enjoyed that

play very much. It turned out to be very interesting. And we had – now, for our plays, we had, again, a special coach. It was not part of the curriculum; it was really sponsored by the students themselves. And our sophomore year, we had – we always celebrated May Day, [03:00] and the sophomores were especially in charge of what was called the Sophomore Masque. And so I was very active in that and took a part in that and learned all sorts of little dances, a Maypole dance and that sort of thing. I enjoyed these activities. And we had – of course, we had dances, to which we invited our boyfriends. And well, we did all kinds of things, really fun things. And I liked to walk. And I remember one of my classmates and I decided to take up a dare, and we would walk all the way from Providence – actually, east Providence; I think we took a trolley across the river – down to Bristol, which was about 15 miles away. Which we did, to our pleasure. [04:00] We said we were in training to walk to Boston, which was 45 miles away, but we never did get around to walking to Boston.

In my senior year, I was a member of the Question Club. And this was – the members of the Question Club were the ones who were the heads of various organizations, such as the play group and other groups. I think I was the president of Brownies, and we were supposed to put on various social activities.

NF: Now, you were living at home all this time? Were there – were you one of many day students, or how did that work out?

IA: Yes, there were quite a large group of day students. I don't know what the proportion was. And we had [05:00] a lunch room – I took my lunch, and most of the other day students did too, in this lunch room which was in the basement of Pembroke Hall. You could, I think, buy some sandwiches and soup maybe, things like that. But I never did. I always brought my lunch from home. And there were a group of us who would sit around one of the big round tables down there and have our lunch together, and we always had a gay time. We really enjoyed our lunches, and they brought their lunches too. I also – I made friends not only with the persons in my own class, but in other classes. Because the whole student body in the women's college was not very large. [06:00] My class had only 70 to begin with, and I think we lost some and then we gained some during the four years. But when we graduated there were only 50. So I had friends in all the classes.

Also, part of it is that I had an opportunity to make friends because I was really working my way through college. I lived at home, of course, and I didn't have to pay any room and board, but I tried to raise the money – I paid my own tuition, and I also, you know, needed money for books, and some of my clothes. My parents tried to help me with clothes. And my freshman year I had what was called a rebate of tuition – about a third of my tuition I didn't have to pay. But in the last three years of college, my sophomore, [07:00] junior, and senior years, I had the – I was in charge with another student of the college bookstore. Now, the college bookstore on the women's college campus was really an adjunct to the college bookstore which was run by a full-time person over on the men's campus. And I made enough money from running this with another student to cover my tuition and a little bit more for my last three years. And of course, we weren't open all the time: we were open just certain hours, and the other student and I would work it out together. And of course, when the semester opened, there was a great rush because students were getting their textbooks and other supplies and so on. And then during the course of the semester, [08:00] students would come in for this, that, and the other, you know. But we had to keep our hours. And it was a little room, it reached – it was between the second and third floors of the hall, of Pembroke Hall, and reached by a little staircase, so that it was really quite a private room. And interestingly enough, I think this was the way in which I met a lot of students from other classes – sometimes I could be sitting there, usually studying, you know, and just waiting, if a customer came, to wait on the customer. And they might sit down, and we'd get acquainted with each other. It turned out to be quite interesting, because sometimes I think they wanted somebody to listen to – listen to what they had to say. And so I became a kind of confidante, [09:00] somewhat to my surprise. But I guess I'm a good listener. And so they would unload what they had on their minds. And I think the situation the room was in kind of contributed to this.

NF: What were you doing in the summers, between your different college years?

IA: The summer before I went to college, I got a job in the office of the American Screw Company, typing bills. The American Screw Company was a firm which had customers all over the world, and they had a large number of girls in the office who just did this typing. But in the summer, the girls would have vacations. I don't know, I think they had each two weeks. And so

they needed summer help, [10:00] because of the fact that the regular help would be gone. I think that that first summer, my pay was something like \$8.10 a week. And I – fortunately it was within walking distance of my house, and there was a long lunch period. I can't remember the hours, but they were fairly long. But the lunch period was an hour and a half. So I always walked home to lunch, which was very nice for me. And we worked five and a half days a week. We worked Saturday mornings. But of course, one has to remember, when you think of that very low wage, that tuition for the whole year of my freshman year was only \$150. [11:00] My sophomore year, the tuition went up to \$200. And that sum – I worked again at the American Screw Company, but my salary had been increased to \$16. So I was able to make enough money. My freshman year, as I pointed out, I had this rebate of tuition at \$50, so it was \$100 I had to pay. And I had a job as a babysitter for a little boy, three afternoons a week. And I was paid – three hours each time; I was paid 75 cents – 25 cents an hour. So I got \$2.25 a week, and that helped me to – I didn't have quite enough money to meet the second semester's tuition, so that helped me to meet that. [12:00]

And then, as I said, the next summer I had an increase in my salary. [audio break/blank]

The second summer I worked at the American Screw Company, I had an increase in my salary to \$16. And then I had the job, as I mentioned, of helping to run the college bookstore so that I was able to meet my expenses. And then the next summer I worked again for the American Screw Company, and this time my salary was \$18. So again, I managed. The tuition went up, I think, again, for new students coming in. But they didn't increase it – I'm not quite sure whether we got it increased [13:00] our third year and not our senior year, but I know that they didn't increase it at one point where they did increase it for the incoming students, because they realized it was making – it was going up so fast, it was making a hardship for the students.

Then between my junior and senior years, I again started – this, now, was the summer of 1921. And I again started... with the American Screw Company. I'm not sure if I worked only a week, but I worked a very short time – it might have been two weeks – and there was a recession, an economic recession, and the company dismissed all of the summer help and some of the permanent help and some of the people working in the factory itself. And it was really very sad. I, of course, was upset [14:00], but I remember being more upset about some of the permanent help, because they had nothing. One has to remember that at that time there was no unemployment insurance. And I remember one girl in the office who was dismissed, and her

mother worked in the factory, and she was dismissed. And they had no idea of how they were going to make ends meet. They had nothing. And I just remember that desperate situation. So I really felt more upset for them than for myself. But naturally I was very anxious. I finally went back to the office at the women's college. I don't know to whom I talked, whether I talked to the dean or the registrar, but to somebody there, and would they have any suggestions? And it ended up [15:00] that I got students to tutor, which I enjoyed tremendously, and made a lot more money than I'd ever made before. I wish somebody had suggested it sooner, but nobody had ever made such a suggestion. I taught – I had two sisters, and I taught them in literature. I remember that they had to know a good deal about Milton's *Il Penseroso* and the other companion poetry. And I learned so much myself. There were always references to Greek mythology, and of course I looked everything up and read, and I enjoyed it tremendously. I learned a great deal. And I also taught these girls in mathematics. [16:00] And they hadn't had very good high school records, and so they had to take special examinations if they were going to get into Brown. And I'm happy to say they passed their exams and were accepted. Then I had, I think, another student – I'm not clear; I think that student was just in mathematics. Mathematics seemed to be the thing that was most difficult for most students. They had to have four years of mathematics to get into Brown, and some of them had real difficulties. Then I was offered another student, but I was very much concerned about my friend Nancy True, who hadn't been able to find any work and who desperately needed to earn some money, or she wouldn't be able to return for her senior year. So I turned that tutee over to Nancy, so that she could earn some money and be able to come back for the fall.

NF: Actually, [17:00] I think we're doing some duplication; as I listen to you tell about the summer work, I think that was something we talked about the last time I was here. But it's – I think so, but it's still interesting. And –

IA: [background talking, inaudible]

NF: – matter; we'll just go ahead from here. Want to talk... I'd like to hear about graduation now. I'm guessing that your family must have had some nice feelings about seeing you get your degree.

IA: Yes. The graduation, of course, was a great occasion. I think all the parties and proms and dances and things ahead of time are the things that were fun. The graduation day itself turned out to be a kind of rainy day, and I remember being very sad that my four years of college were over. At Brown University, [18:00] in those days, the whole Commencement activity took place in the meetinghouse of the First Baptist Church. This meetinghouse was erected about 1776 for the worship of God and to hold Commencement in. And Commencement was held there. Each graduate had two tickets, and my mother and father came – my father stayed home from work, and it was Monday morning, in order to see his daughter graduate. And we marched down the hill in the procession with bands. The Commencement procession at Brown University is really a parade. It's quite an affair. Of course, today it's so large and the classes are so large that only the seniors can get into the meetinghouse, and even then I wonder how they all get in. [19:00] I suspect that they don't all get to sit down. And they have only a part of their Commencement there, because there's nobody but themselves and the leading officials with them. I think all that they do is they have a class oration, one by a woman and one by a man. And then they go march back up the hill and have the full Commencement ceremonies on the middle campus and the green of the university. But in my day, the whole thing took place within the meetinghouse itself.

I wasn't sure that I wanted to teach in my senior year. I thought maybe I did, maybe I didn't – I wasn't quite sure. And I remember going to Dean Allinson and talking with her about this. [20:00] And she introduced me to or made it possible for me to see a woman who was in business, and I had quite a talk with her. But that didn't appeal to me particularly. And I had an opportunity for a – to go on for one year of graduate work in the field of education with a full scholarship covering the whole cost of my tuition. And that would give me a Master's degree, and I would need a Master's degree in order to teach in the public schools – the high school of Providence; they didn't take any teachers who had only a bachelor's degree. So I went ahead and had this additional year in which I took these education courses, some of which were good and some of which I think were a waste of time. And I also remember I took, I think, a course in economics along with that. [21:00] And in the spring we had student teaching – my student teaching was over at Technical High School. And then I had the opportunity – I think maybe I did the student teaching earlier, because I remember I had the opportunity – towards the end of the year, they needed an extra teacher at the high school. And I actually did some teaching for

which I received some pay. I don't remember; I think it was one class or something like that. And then I received an appointment for teaching, full teaching, in the field of European history for the next year. I had a great deal of difficulty with discipline. I hadn't [22:00] expected to have that in high school. I didn't have the memory from my high school days of difficulties with discipline. But the Technical High School, the boys and the girls for the most part were in separate classes because the boys got some – besides regular course of study, they got some shop work. And the girls got some work in home economics and things of that kind. So what I had the misfortune to get were all boys' classes – just boys. And the freshmen I had no difficulty with. I was teaching ancient history to them, and they were, I guess, sufficiently intimidated by arriving in high school, [laughter] so that I really didn't have any great [23:00] problems. But the sophomores I was teaching European history to, and the boys were growing, they were big and kind of obstreperous, and I really had a great deal of difficulty. And I disliked that aspect very much. I liked the teaching, but I didn't like spending energy and trying to get discipline. I had wonderful support from the head of the history department. He'd keep saying to me, "Miss Abbott, you're going to last longer than they are, and you will finally, you know, get them under control." I didn't feel that I had very good support from the principal. He was pleasant, but I don't think he was firm enough with the few students who were making the trouble, really. I remember keeping students after school and staying myself for an hour or two after school was over just to [24:00] discipline them – to make them write and so on, to make them, you know, feel that they should behave themselves. I remember one boy who came late to this because he was being kept by other teachers, so he was apparently a trouble to more than me. [laughter] I also remember some very bright students and some very responsive students, and I enjoyed them very much. But anyway, I decided that surely there must be a better way – that I could do better things if I could just concentrate my energy on teaching. So I made up my mind I would try to go to graduate school. And I applied at – oh, of course, the obvious places – Harvard and Yale - where I was accepted, [25:00] but nothing – no scholarships or anything were offered to me, and that, of course, was quite impossible, even though I was trying to save money from my small salary, but I was also paying board at home, because my family had done a great deal for me and they needed some help; I couldn't be a burden on them any longer. So that was quite impossible. And then I went – maybe before I'd heard from Yale and Harvard, I don't remember exactly, but I do remember that I went to see Dean Allinson again – she wasn't the dean anymore, but she was in

her home and she was very approachable. And she said, "Well, have you thought of applying to Bryn Mawr?" And of course, the thought had never occurred to me. And I said, "No." And she said, "Well, I suggest that you do that, and I'll be happy to write a letter in support of that."

[26:00] And of course, I had – Professor Collier was writing for me, and I assume I had some others; I do longer remember just exactly who they were. And then in the spring, after I'd got these notices from Yale and Harvard that they, you know, were happy to have me but had no money – of course, they had no money because I was a woman. They had money for men. And I got this letter from Bryn Mawr: I was hoping I would get a scholarship, but actually what I got was a fellowship. It was worth \$810, and room, board, and tuition were \$710. So all that was covered, plus \$100 which would help me with supplies and other things I would need. I can remember when the letter arrived and [27:00] I opened it, I was so excited I could hardly read what was there. It was just wonderful.

I didn't mention that during my college years I was elected to Phi Beta Kappa as a junior. When I went to college, of course, I'd never heard of Phi Beta Kappa. And I think that even as a freshman and maybe even as a sophomore I didn't really know much about it. But I remember that in the spring, after the elections took place, there was some sort of rumor going around that, you know, that I might be elected. And someone said something about – one day the letters were out. I don't know, maybe it was one of the seniors. And I remember rushing to the telephone and phoning my mother, and I said, "Is there a letter there, you know, [28:00] for me from Brown?" And she said, "Yes, there is." And I said, "Oh, open it up and tell me what it says." So she opened it up and it said I'd been elected to Phi Beta Kappa.

NF: What an exciting moment for both of you.

IA: I think I should add about my college years that when I was in high school, I didn't date at all. I wasn't interested in boys. I think this might have been partly because I had all those brothers, and therefore I wasn't particularly interested in them in a social way. But when I got to college I started dating, and I loved to dance. And so I would go to dances with boys, and of course when we had our own dances at the college, I'd invite them. And you know, I met a lot of different boys. In fact, I had enough friends so that some of my [29:00] friends in college wouldn't have anyone to invite to a dance, and so sometimes I'd call one of my boy friends and

ask him if he'd like to go to the dance, and he would say yes, and then I would say, "Well, I'd like you to go with so-and-so." I'm not sure how some of them took it. But I had one friend who really very nice and very sweet. And he always responded, oh, yes, he'd be glad to go with Mary or Jane or whoever it was.

And of course in college, in those college years, I fell in love for the first time, which was wonderful. And then I fell out of love, which was painful. And so this added, of course, to my social life during those years.

NF: Were these mostly fellows you met at Brown or people you knew in the city?

IA: Some of them – a few of them were Brown men, but I think most of them were [30:00] ones I had met in the city or that I had known before. One was – I think I'd known him in the church, in Sunday school, when we were younger. And one had lived in the street that I'd lived in when I was a little girl. He was really, well, older than I – not a great deal older – and one whom I saw was really about the age of my brother Frank, was really a friend of Frank's. Most of these boys I was not particularly interested in romantically; they were just fun to be with and fun to go out with and so on.

NF: I'm wondering what thoughts you and your friends in college were having about marriage, and how that might be part of your lives.

IA: Yes. I think the – maybe the chief topics that we were thinking [31:00] were boys and marriage, love and marriage, and religion. There was a great deal of interest in religion. I imagine – most of us, I think, has been brought up in, you know, the ordinary denominations, and I think we were at an age when we began to maybe question the particular religion we'd been brought up in. And sometimes people were changing their minds. And then the other topic, which I think was universal among young people with – who really had no boyfriends [audio skips] at the time were expecting to be married.

NF: I should say by now it's October 25th, where we picked up a couple minutes ago. [32:00] And let's get you to graduate school now. Maybe you can tell us what year that was and go from there.

IA: I got my A.B. from Brown University in 1922, and then I had the year of graduate study I mentioned before and got my master's degree in June of 1923. And then I taught for two years at – taught history at Technical High School in Providence. So it was in September of 1925 that I went to Bryn Mawr. I might mention that I had made a trip down – the previous Thanksgiving time I'd gone to see my brother Bill in New Jersey, and [33:00] he lived outside Camden. And I had gone over one day to Bryn Mawr College. I didn't have, then, I think, a chance to talk, I think, [audio skipping] with the dean of the graduate school, and possibly some others I don't remember. So this was before I'd actually put in the application. You see, I began thinking about the possibility of graduate school during the first year that I was teaching at Technical High School, so I began to make plans and make applications in the fall of 1924. And in retrospect, I think it was probably a help that I'd actually made a visit to the campus at that time, even though I didn't meet Dr. Gray himself. So I had made this – [34:00] I'd never been there before, so I had made this one visit out. And I suppose I took – well, I must have taken the local, what was called the [Pay only local?] out from Philadelphia out to Bryn Mawr. I remember vividly when I arrived in the fall of 1925, it was already – it was late in September; they opened rather late. And it was already – by the time I got there, it was dark, and the local stops at all the local stations; it's a commuter's train, of course. And I kept trying to get off the train – every place sounded like "Bryn Mawr". I kept trying to get off the train. [laughter] I would hear the conductor shout the name, and I'd get myself all ready to get off the train, and then we'd pull in the station and I would see it had a different name on the station. [35:00] So I'd go back and sit down. And it really got kind of funny [laughter] by the time I got to Bryn Mawr.

Since I'd lived at home, this was my – [audio skipping] first experience of dormitory living. And therefore it was very interesting to me. If I'd done this as an undergraduate, I probably wouldn't have cared much for it, but it was to me a very interesting experience. And also, another aspect that was very interesting was that we had a number of foreign students in the graduate group. At that time at Bryn Mawr, every one of the halls had a wing that was for graduate students, and the rest of the hall would be just for undergraduates. I believe now that the

graduates have their own separate hall. [36:00] This idea of having the graduates in the same hall as the undergraduates was President Thomas's idea, that there would be interchange between the graduates and the undergraduates. Well, this was an ideal, if you want to call it that, or a dream that never was true. There really was no interchange between the graduates and the undergraduates. We really were quite – we felt quite separate from each other. Our interests and – were really – well, I don't suppose they were entirely different, but they really were different. And – but as I started to say – because [audio skipping] I hadn't had this kind of contact before. And I became very good friends with a young woman from Germany; we remained friends [37:00] as long as she lived. I visited her in her home in Germany, and after the war we sent packages. She was not a Nazi – she was an anti-Nazi. And I saw her last in 1949. She died in the early 1950s. I also became quite friendly with a Dutch student, and I did see her when I was first in Europe in 1927 in Amsterdam. But as time went on, we kind of lost touch with each other. And there were other foreign students that I became friendly with even though we didn't keep it up after we left Bryn Mawr. And of course I made other friends too, lifelong friends, among American students who were from different parts of the country. [38:00] And I remember I had never been – until I went down there I'd not been out of New England. Well, at Bryn Mawr, I think that the [audio skipping] farthest west I got was Valley Forge. And that was the farthest west I'd ever been. I remember introducing a friend there who was from Ohio as being from the West, and she was convulsed with laughter at the thought that Ohio was considered West. I really enjoyed the – my dormitory life. Of course, we were graduate students, and therefore we were serious students. We all had a great deal of reading and writing and preparation and things like that to do. But we – in the dining room, the graduate students [39:00] of that hall had a large table, or maybe we had two tables, I don't remember, but anyway, we did not sit down with the undergraduates; we sat at our own table. And I remember the food as being excellent. And of course, we worked hard and had big appetites. And of course, it was still the need to dress for dinner as it was expressed, so that we would come home and come back to our rooms from the library or the laboratory or wherever it was that we were working in time to change into a silk dress or something like that, and be sure our stockings didn't have runs in them and put on our dress shoes and comb our hair and so forth. One had to appear in the dining room like that. I was a poor [40:00] graduate student, and I remember that I had just two dresses to put on. And I can remember both vividly, since I wore them so much. So I'd put on one silk

dress one night and I'd put the other silk dress on the next night, and so it went through the year. And most of the graduate students were equally poor, so we were not displaying our clothes to each other. Although I think some of the undergraduates did that sort of thing, but some of them didn't. They weren't interested in that sort of thing either.

NF: Did you have your own room in the dormitory?

IA: Oh, yes. All the rooms were private rooms. The undergraduates sometimes shared a suite that – a suite would consist of a fairly large study or living room with two small bedrooms off, and each student would have a private bedroom. But President Thomas had been insistent that [41:00] the private room – the students should have private rooms, at least have something that was private – privacy. And also – of course, President Thomas had retired by this time, and the president at that time was President Park. But she was still alive, President Thomas was. She also – President Thomas insisted that since the men were waited on, the women should be too. So our beds were made for us, and we had regular waitresses in the dining room, and someone – this work was not done by the students at all; our rooms were taken care of. Which was, of course, from – at least from the busy graduate student's voice of view, very nice. And I might say that we were very busy indeed. The demands were really great. And Dr. Gray, who was my major professor, [42:00] expected a great deal from his students. And we took, at least in my field – I'm not sure what science fields were like, but in the humanities, a graduate student would take three seminars, and we would meet once a week for about two hours. And I would spend most of the week working for Dr. Gray's seminar, and then squeeze in what time was left for the other two. And that year, that first year with Dr. Gray, I was taking English history; we were concentrating on the 14th and 15th centuries. And I had no background in English history, so it was really quite difficult for me.

NF: I'm realizing I don't know how you had chosen your field of specialty or who would be your adviser, and I'm wondering if you [43:00] could identify this Dr. Gray a little more for us. For me.

IA: Well, I didn't pick Dr. Gray. My interest, of course, was in – and what background I had was in European history. And the history faculty at Bryn Mawr was rather small, so in a sense I had no choice. This was the person under whom I would do my major work. Professor Smith, Dr. Smith, taught American history, and I took American history with him that year, a seminar, and discovered that American history could be fascinating. We did the pre-Revolutionary period, for the most part, of the 18th century. And it was an eye-opener to me, and I found it very interesting indeed, but I didn't want to major [44:00] in American history. And my third course was in... with – well, I'm not sure whether that year my third – or the next year, my third course was with Dr. David, which was in – dealt with, oh, bibliography and paleography and that sort of thing. Historiography and so on. But it might have been that year with Dr. David. Then the next year, the second year, I had a course in political science. At the moment, the name of the professor in that escapes me. I think that we dealt in international relations – I can't remember the exact name of the course now. And [45:00] since the seminar that Dr. Gray was offering that year was this seminar which was his area of specialty – he'd made the 15th century his period of specialty – I really had no choice. And of course it was during the course of that that I was at such a disadvantage with the students who'd studied at Mount Holyoke under Miss Neilson and Miss Putnam, and really had a background that I simply didn't have at all – of which I was completely ignorant. I mean, terms were used which meant nothing to me. And I really struggled quite hard through that.

Then the second year with Dr. Gray, I had – the seminar he offered was [46:00] really a diplomatic history of the 19th and 20th centuries, leading up to the background really to the First World War. And this period interested me very much, and I did have some background for that. So I wasn't at such a disadvantage. One of the professors –

- End of Track 3 -

Track 4

NF: Interviewing Isabel Abbott, [laughter] picking up on our third tape as she is in the midst of describing her years at Bryn Mawr.

IA: I've mentioned Dr. Gray as my major professor at Bryn Mawr. He was Dr. Howard Gray, chairman of the history department at Bryn Mawr, and he had his doctorate from Harvard University. He'd already published, and during – well, not during the years that I was there at Bryn Mawr, but shortly afterwards, he published another book. And of course he'd written articles. And he was a very – he was not married, and he could devote his entire energy to his scholarship and to his teaching. And he was – as I think I've mentioned already, [01:00] his chief interest was 15th century English history. He was interested in Parliamentary History, the development of Parliament at this time. He was also interested in financial and administrative history, in which not a great deal of work had been done up to this time, because the records were voluminous. But they were not easy to use, nor idea to interpret, so that many scholars shied away from them because it would take such a long time and so much of their effort to get to understand the documents before they could even exploit the material that was available in them. He spent every summer in England doing research in the public record office. [02:00] I might say that I felt that when I arrived at Bryn Mawr, I went to see Dr. Gray – he was the chairman of the department, so naturally I went to see him first. And I didn't get off, I thought, to a very good start, because he asked me about my knowledge of foreign languages, and I said that I knew German fairly well but that I'd had some French, but very little French. And that I could manage, but not very well, or words to that effect. Anyway, he immediately presented me with some French to read, and I remember I couldn't manage the first sentence – so that I was really somewhat taken aback and somewhat embarrassed. I think it was some sort of an idiom in the sentence [03:00] that threw me. I could get the other words, but I couldn't make the sense. And I think he helped me out. And then – it was historical French, of course, which is comparatively easy; in literary French I would have much more difficulty, where there's a lot of idiom. And anyway, he helped me out and I was able to read the rest of the paragraph more or less correctly. But it wasn't the best of starts, I might say. That somewhat intimidated me. But as time went on, I got to realize what a kindly man Dr. Gray really was. He was really very kindly and very sympathetic, and very encouraging to me in moments when I got discouraged. And I remember that at the end of that first year, I said something [04:00], I guess, which brought out that I felt my deficiencies or something. And he said, "Well, you've made wonderful progress," considering, you know, with what equipment I had arrived. He was – he really was a lovely person, just a lovely person, and all his students were devoted to him. And as we said, we

worked for him. It wasn't that he – he didn't sort of sit there and demand this; he just held up this standard, and you just felt you just had to rise to the occasion, so that you'd just put in tremendous hours of work. And we – well, I spent all my free time in the library. And I went back to the library, of course, every evening. I remember that we would play [05:00] double solitaire – I played double solitaire with somebody after dinner: we'd sit on the floor in my room and play double solitaire till 8:00. And when 8:00 came, no matter where we were, the cards went away, and back to the library we went. Because we had so much to do. We did get some exercise. I can remember that we had graduate hockey games. I'd never played hockey before, but I thought that was great fun. And I learned to ride a bicycle, another student and I – I think that was in my – not my first year there but my second year. We got some old bicycles that had been abandoned by undergraduates down in the basement of one of the halls, and I think we put parts together and took them down to a bicycle shop and got some repairs made so that [06:00] we could manage the bicycles. I'd never ridden before, but this other student had had a bicycle as a little girl, and she taught me to ride. And I can remember that we went to this street that was behind the campus, but it sloped and went down to what was a – well, not a main road, but a road on which there would be cars. And she didn't teach me how to brake the bicycle before she taught me how to get on it. And she said she thought I would fall off as soon as I got on, so she didn't think that was necessary. Well, I started away and I realized that I was going to go down this hill onto this road, and I didn't have any idea of what I was to do to brake it. So I headed for a bank – [laughter] I didn't have the good sense not to go down onto that road. [laughter] Headed for a bank, [07:00] of course, and fell off, [laughter] to our mutual amusement. We were young, and I had lots of bruises, I must say. But anyway, we survived, and she quickly taught me how to brake the bicycle before I got on it again.

Then, of course, we tried to take advantage of our opportunities in Philadelphia, so we'd sometimes go in there. We didn't have much money, but we needed recreation, of course. And we'd go in there and go to the symphony, the Philadelphia Symphony. And we'd stand in line for going up to the, you know, to the top gallery. You could get a ticket for 50 cents, and then the doors would open and we would race up the stairs, way to the tippity-top of the opera house. And then [08:00] up there they didn't have seats; they were just benches. I think they did have backs to them – they were just benches. But the idea, of course, was to get up and to get down into the front bench, if you could. And of course we loved it and we just enjoyed that beautiful music. It

was great. And sometimes, when we felt real flush, we'd go in early enough maybe to have a dinner at the restaurant. We had to feel real flush for that; we couldn't do that very often.

In retrospect, I really think we didn't take enough exercise. I think that the pressure so often was so great – and the pressure was great, really – that we tended to skimp on getting out and getting exercise as much as we should have.

In my second year at Bryn Mawr, [09:00] I didn't have the full fellowship, because they had only one fellowship to offer and they felt it only fair to offer it to somebody else. But I was offered a scholarship and then I was given a supplementary grant to the scholarship, and then I was also offered the opportunity to correct papers for Dr. Manning. Dr. Manning was the husband of Dean Manning, of Helen Taft Manning, at Bryn Mawr, and he himself was on the faculty at Swarthmore. And so with these three things together, I was able to meet the basic expenses of my second year. And I'd like also to mention again the seminar that I had with [Kanyes?] Reed. Kanyes Reed was an expert in the Elizabethan period. He had been on the faculty – [10:00] he'd written very distinguished publications on the Elizabethan period. And he'd been on the faculty at the University of Pennsylvania, but he had developed extreme deafness. And at that time they didn't have the facilities that they have today. And so he had to give up his position on the faculty. He came from, I think, a rather well-to-do family, and so he went into the family business. But he continued his scholarship, and since Dr. David was going to be on sabbatical leave, he took – he offered – he was offered the opportunity, which he welcomed, to give one of the seminars at Bryn Mawr. And actually, I realized that this was really a great opportunity, and I [11:00] enjoyed that seminar with him very much – although again, I got off to a rather bad start with Dr. Reed. He – we were to write some papers, and I think my paper, as I remember it, was on Mary, Queen of Scots. And he said, "Now, I want you to read various sources and so on and so on, and then I want you to put them all aside and write the paper." And I followed the advice, which turned out to be very bad advice, because in the course of reading – then we read our papers at the seminar, and they were not long, because several of us were reading during one seminar, and he had restricted the length of the paper. And I was dealing really with a conflict, of course, between Mary, Queen of Scots and Elizabeth and Mary, Queen of Scots' death. [12:00] And the fact that Elizabeth had held off ordering the execution of Mary, Queen of Scots because she feared the repercussions in Europe. And in mentioning – when it actually happened, there were no repercussions of any importance. I don't remember the

exact phrase, but I said something – I wrote something like "It didn't cause a ripple in the surface of European politics." And it turned out, to my embarrassment, that this was really a direct quotation from an article which Dr. Reed had written. And he said – I remember after I'd read this that he said, "I remember when I wrote that phrase I thought it was a particularly good phrase," or some words to that event. [13:00] This was not conscious plagiarism: this was following his suggestion that I not look at my notes and so on – that I sit down and just write the paper. I never did that again. I was always careful to look at my notes. I was not conscious that I had actually taken over a whole phrase. But in spite of the bad start, we eventually – that was eventually forgotten, and it worked out very well in the end.

NF: How did he conduct the seminar if he were extremely deaf? How did he do that?

IA: He had a large box which I would say was about, oh – it was oblong and maybe 12 inches or maybe longer, maybe about eight inches high, and maybe three or four inches thick. [14:00] And he would place this in the middle of the seminar table – we sat around a table in the seminar room, and then of course it was connected by wires to his ears. And this was in the middle of the table, and of course our voices would go into that. So with the help of this rather cumbersome device, he could hear us. And of course, as the years went by, this whole matter of hearing aids improved. So the last time I saw Dr. Reed was at a meeting, and I think it was in New York City – a historical – of a historical group; I think a British historical group that was always interested in British history. And that was by the time I was Dean of Western College, so it had to be in the '60s – [15:00] and of course by that time he had a small device with just wires coming from his ears. And of course it didn't have the kind of batteries today; they had larger batteries, but it was concealed in his pocket or somewhere down there. So the conditions had improved. I might say that when I came to write my preliminary exams, one of them, of course, was set by Dr. Reed. And I'm happy to say that he told Dr. Gray that I had done very well on the examination.

I haven't mentioned anything about how I spent the summers after I left – after I graduated from Brown. I'm not quite sure what I did in the summer of 1922. You know, I cannot [16:00] remember at the moment what I did in the summer of 1923. In the summer of 1924 I know that I made a trip to Nova Scotia. I hadn't been there since 1914, and I visited my relatives,

and I remember this really being a very interesting trip, and how much I enjoyed the trip. I don't remember now how long I spent on that. But in the summer of 1925, before I went to – at least I think it was this summer – before I went to Bryn Mawr, I got a position as a counselor, a tutoring counselor, at the Wyonegonic Camps in Maine. The difficulty is I can't remember if it was the summer of '23 or the summer of '25, but I think it was [17:00] the summer of '25. And I earned a little money, of course – not a great deal. But I enjoyed the experience. I'd never had any experience with camp life, and I liked – I really learned to – I learned a little about – I'd never learned to swim as a child. I hadn't had the opportunity or anyone teach me. And I had learned to swim in the YWCA pool, or maybe it was the YMCA pool – I don't remember; one or the other, in Providence. I went and took some lessons. And then that summer that I was at Wyonegonic, of course, I learned to swim much better, and I learned a little bit about diving. And I learned how to paddle a canoe, and I learned how to, you know, to upset a canoe and get back into it again, and various things like that. I enjoyed it a great deal. [18:00] I really enjoyed the camp. The one thing I didn't like about it was that I felt the counselors were really too confined – that we needed to have, you know, a day off more often to get away. The girls that we had were between the ages of 12 and 14, and I liked the girls very much. I liked the girls in my tent. I really had a very nice group of girls. But I think the administration of the camp was a little too demanding on the counselors. I think – you know, I think I should go back. I think I went to Wyonegonic in the summer of '23. And then in the summer of '24 I did go to Nova Scotia – I remember that. I wasn't there the whole summer, [19:00] but I was there – gone maybe a month or something. And then in the summer of '25, I went to a different camp – Camp Waukeela. That's right. That's the way it was. And this camp – Wyonegonic was in Maine, and Camp Waukeela was in New Hampshire. The atmosphere was very different at Waukeela. There was more realization that the counselors needed to get away from camp, and we did have some opportunity – after the youngsters were in bed for the night, some of us could walk around the edge of the lake to a little village. And then we always had – I don't know if it was just one day during the eight weeks or maybe [all that way?] where we could go away for the whole day long. [20:00] Usually two of us would go together, and take a lunch with us and hike off somewhere. It wasn't as confining as Wyonegonic. I think that the administration was less demanding and more realistic. As I remember, I think that the youngsters that we had at Wyonegonic, I think I liked them better than the youngsters I had at Waukeela. I didn't dislike them, but the caliber of the

youngsters was a little higher at Wyonegonic, but the caliber of the administration was better at Waukeela – less demanding and less, oh, I don't know – at Wyonegonic it was sort of pietistic; that is, they were really – they [21:00] ran a place for profit, which was all right, but they tried to make it sound as if it weren't, which was not all right.

Then in the summer between my two years at Bryn Mawr, which was from '25 to '27, the summer of '26 I lived with a friend that I had, Beth Coleman and her family, whom I had met in my graduate work. She was doing graduate work in history; she was living at home at that time, and she invited me to live there and get a job in Philadelphia. And I worked for a publishing company that put out the *Saturday Evening Post*. And what we were doing really was working in connection with statistics that had to do with their advertising. Of course, [22:00] their advertising revenue was very important. I can't remember the details of it, but I know that we would work alone, and then this material then went out to the advertisers. And then we would read to each other – proofread, because everything had to be accurate. And it was – I remember that the persons that I met there were really very pleasant. I was a little uncertain at first because some of them seemed to have kind of a closed circle. But that opened up, and so the colleagues I was working with were pleasant. And it was pleasant living with the Colemans, who were a very nice family.

[23:00] I don't know whether I would have made more money if I had – because I did pay some board to the Colemans, at least enough to cover feeding me – and if I would have made more money if I had found a job in Providence. But I didn't seem to have any good leads. And I didn't – I remember that – perhaps it was Dr. David; I can't remember, but I remember there was someone who thought I would make more money if I took a camp job, because of course one had no expenses with a camp job, so whatever you – and you never had the opportunity to spend any money during the eight weeks. [laughter] And thought I would make more. I don't remember exactly now. And then, of course, I did have some time to spend at home. But then after my – in '27, since I sailed [24:00] for Europe in August, I didn't have any job before I left.

At the beginning of my second year at Bryn Mawr, Dr. Gray suggested to me that I should apply for a fellowship to help me go to England for a year, because the work that I was going to do on my dissertation demanded that I work in the records, in the public record office; otherwise I couldn't do it at all. And he was very supportive, and I think the other members of the

department were too. And I can't remember whether I applied only to the AAUW, or the American Association of University Women, or whether I applied to anything else. But I did apply to the AAUW. I should say that in 1927, [25:00] the opportunities for scholarships and fellowships for women were extremely limited. Very limited indeed. Opportunities for men were many, but women had very few. And AAUW was one of those who did offer some fellowships for students who'd already done graduate work and were ready to start on their dissertations – were far enough along. I received word in the spring that I was the runner-up for one of their fellowships: it was called the Boston Alumnae Fellowship, as I remember. And it meant that I was the second person. And I assumed from this, of course, that that was it. There was no hope that I would receive anything. And [26:00] we always had in the spring at Bryn Mawr a special dinner at which the announcements were made of seniors who'd receive special graduate fellowships and scholarships for graduate study, and any of the graduate students who had received anything. And I was at the dinner, and announcements were made – so and so had received this and so and so had received that and what have you. And then suddenly, to my utter astonishment, it was announced that Isabel Abbott had received the AAUW fellowship, or the Boston Alumnae Fellowship. And I was completely overwhelmed. I remember I burst into tears. It seemed that the person [27:00] who had been the first named for this AAUW fellowship had received a much larger fellowship – she was a woman in the field of English literature, and somewhat older than some of the rest of us – had received a much larger fellowship, I think one that was in the gift of the college, and President Park said afterwards that she didn't know that I didn't know that if this woman received this other fellowship, I would get the AAUW fellowship. So she was much taken aback when I cried.

I can remember that afterwards, we walked down – my friends and I walked down to the village and I sent a wire to my parents to tell them. In those days you didn't telephone; that was beyond anyone's pocketbook. [28:00] But I sent them a wire.

NF: Sounds like such an exciting moment. I'm hearing it in your voice again. [laughter] I'm hearing the excitement in your voice all over again. And of course – and of course this would be your first time abroad, wouldn't it?

IA: Well, now people go abroad so easily, I think it's difficult for many to realize what it meant in 1927. Going abroad was something that only wealthy people could afford to do. One went by ship; the ship could take anywhere from maybe five to ten days. It was an expensive thing to do. People with short vacations, of course, couldn't possibly consider it. So to me, it was like – [29:00] it was more than a dream come true. It was something I'd hardly ever dreamt about that was within the realm of possibility. So I really was up on cloud nine with this news that I was going to England and I was going to live in London for a whole year. It was just wonderful.

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