



Interview with Ann Kofoed

Under the Auspices of the
Monmouth County Library Headquarters
125 Symmes Drive, Manalapan, N.J.
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**Ann Kofoed
Christmas 1998**

Ms. Higgins: Please tell me about your hat shop.

Ms. Kofoed: Well, hats were always the love of my life. When I bought a hat I would always change it and put a feather in it and decorate it or something. I was working as a secretary, and the company I worked for moved to Connecticut. I just decided I wanted something of my own. I was tired working for everybody else, so I told my husband I wanted to start a hat shop. At that time, this was back in the 1950s, hats were very popular. My husband asked me did I want to go in by myself or could I get a partner, and I said I thought I could get partner. I called my friend, and she said yes, she would do it with me. She was crazy about hats, too. Her brother at the time worked for Bambergers with her sister-in-law. They were both in the fashion end of it, so they were able to give us names of companies to go to, to get hats, bags,



An advertisement for the Lili-Ann Shoppe, the hat shoppe owned by Ann Kofoed and her friend and partner from 1953 to 1965. (Note the phone number in the far right hand corner, not to mention the prices.)

jewelry, gloves, and all the other accessories. So we went in to New York green as grass and we made our first purchase. My friend had transferred her account from Newark to down here, and she gave them the wrong check, and the first check bounced!

Ms. Higgins: Were there other hat stores in this area?

Ms. Kofoed: There was none from Asbury Park to Perth Amboy. Well, there was one milliner in Red Bank.

Ms. Higgins: Did you sell many hats?

Ms. Kofoed: The day before we opened we had to go to New York to buy more hats because all of our friends wanted to get the first pick. We had one group who were buying them like crazy, and they'd say, "I bought two hats. How many did you buy?" Another would say, "I bought three hats." It really was a riot. We carried hats, gloves, hand bags, jewelry, and we made out like bandits right off the bat. It was fun.

Ms. Higgins: What was the name of your store?

Ms. Kofoed: The hat shop's name was The Lili-Ann Shoppe. My partner was Lillian and I was Ann so we just combined the two names. We did very well with just hats and accessories, handbags, jewelry, and gloves. Then we expanded our because our customers would ask if we would carry blouses, so we did; then skirts. Back in the 1950s slacks were just beginning to come into fashion, so we carried them too; eventually, dresses. Then we were into the whole fashion world. We were located right next to the Jersey Central Power and Light Company and the girls working there would come in every payday. It lasted for twelve years, and it was really fun.

Ms. Higgins: Do you remember Joan and Ed White?

Ms. Kofoed: They're the ones who helped us get started with the hat shop. Eddie was my partner's brother and Joan, her sister-in-law. They both worked for Bamberger's in Newark, both into fashions. When they saw our shop doing so well, they decided to open The Town Shoppe in Port Monmouth. Joan passed away and now Eddie lives in Florida. I still correspond with him.

Ms. Higgins: Tell us about the Union Beach Library.

Ms. Kofoed: We are very proud of our library; it is a great asset to the community and one to be admired. It started in 1937 in a small cobbler's shop.

Three ladies had the desire to open a library. They obtained the building and with the help of friends and neighbors they collected enough books to stock shelves. Sixty-three years later we have a beautiful L-shaped building, staffed by a Director and two assistants. Since 1990 a Calendar Committee was formed. They have been producing a pictorial calendar which contains twelve 8x10 photos of historical sites and information of our borough since its beginning when it became a borough in 1925. We hold three socials a year, "Down Memory Lane." We invite all present and former residents to come and share their lives and pictures while living there. The calendars bring back many past memories. Our library is very active with new people joining every week. Summertime is the "Summer Reading Groups," and winters pre-schoolers attend a reading and fun session twice a month. They are allowed to select their own books from the shelves. It gets them off to a good start. We recently redecorated and painted and removed 20,000 books from the shelves in just one room. So you see we do have a lot of reading material, with the gracious contributions from the Monmouth County Library. We recently installed two computers in memory of our late Mayor, Carmen Stoppiello. We also received donations of two more computers which have receive quite a bit of use daily.

Ms. Higgins: Did you grow up in Union Beach?

Ms. Kofoed: I was born in Newark, New Jersey, and went to school there until 1929 when we moved to Union Beach. It was really a beach, then. We used to come down here every summer for many years. It was very rural, everyone knew everyone else and where they lived. There was lots of empty space between houses, and sometimes "city" people would come down and pitch tents. Some had wooden platforms with stairs. Tents were erected on the platform. It was like "Tent City."



*Ann Callahan
(Kofoed), 1920*

Ms. Higgins: Was there swimming and boating and fishing?

Ms. Kofoed: Swimming and playing on the beach was our pastime We'd go down to the beach after school and in the summertime. That was our main playground. We'd go in the morning and stay there most of the day, and we would have great fun down there all the time. We would have relatives come down weekends and that was the first place they always headed down to the beach. Of course we had to wait for the tide to come in to swim, but at low tide men would come down and dig clams right out of the mud for dinner. There was fishing from the shore. Some residents had boats, but not big ones, mostly row boats which were also used to catch another great delicacy which was plentiful then: crabs. However all that is gone now, except a few crabs are still being caught in our creeks. There were lots of activities on the beach, like dancing. Every Saturday night there was a dance going on somewhere. Either the Fire Company had it, or somebody would be having a party or another organization

called The Pleasure Club. Everybody belonged to that. It didn't matter whether you were a Republican, a Democrat, Catholic, or Protestant. Everybody joined The Pleasure Club.

Ms. Higgins: Was the beach equipped with a lifeguard?

Ms. Kofoed: Yes, we had two volunteer lifeguards who were high school boys. They learned to be lifeguards by taking life-saving instructions from the Red Cross in Red Bank. One was William Hays and the other was Edward Levine. They weren't paid by the borough. They just did it on their own, and that was for several years. Now everyone wants to be paid; there is no volunteerism anymore. At present, we only have policemen patrolling the beachfront. In time, lifeguards will be necessary, but I don't think many boys are interested in becoming lifeguards. We recently had a beautiful beach reconstructed, and it is well occupied by beach lovers. On the weekends though, there are no parking spaces.

Ms. Higgins: Is there any swimming there now?

Ms. Kofoed: Oh, yes. We have loads of sand and lots of swimming, sitting, sunning, and everything down there. We can thank our past mayor, Carmen Stoppiello, for that. He was the one who instituted this and it's absolutely beautiful.

Ms. Higgins: How big is Union Beach?

Ms. Kofoed: Our borough is only 1.4 miles, from Keansburg to Keyport and Hazlet Township. We are sort of off the beaten path along the Raritan Bay. People using Route 36 ride by and don't realize we are another town along the Bay. But it is a little private, and that is the way we like it. I feel protected in a way. We don't have all this bad publicity that other towns get. It's not too overcrowded, although now, many new two story houses are popping up, bringing in new residents.

Ms. Higgins: Do you know how it got the name Union Beach?

Ms. Kofoed: Yes. Union Beach was settled in 1693. Richard Poole was born in Union Beach in 1761. The Poole family was one of the first. Developers came and they purchased the land and they called it Union for a while, but then there was a Union up in Essex County. So, as there was so much beach front, they called it Union Beach, and that's how they started the name.

Ms. Higgins: This may be one of those relatively economically depressed towns that is steadily coming back.

Ms. Kofoed: Oh, definitely. It is on the upswing now. New people are moving in everyday. Our Police Force as well as our First Aid Squad and Fire Company are some of the finest in the state. We do have our little incidents going on, but nothing our police force can't handle. They're wonderful, but it's getting harder and harder to get volunteers to help our First Aid, Emergency, and Fire Departments because no one wants to volunteer.

Ms. Higgins: Yes, and your tax base is relatively small because the town is small.

Ms. Kofoed: Everything we have is volunteer, and all the volunteers are wonderful. Our first aid and our emergency squads and our four fire companies have eleven mobile units between them, and they're very efficient and just wonderful.

Ms. Higgins: It sounds like the kind of town where everybody knows everybody else.

Ms. Kofoed: Years ago when the Bamberger's truck would come into the town they'd ask you where a certain street was, you'd say, "Well, who are you looking for?" And they would tell you the names. "Oh, he's down two blocks and the third house." You knew where everybody lived because there weren't many people living there. Now there are so many strangers, there's so many new people, and they don't seem to be getting as active in the organizations as we did. Maybe they're too busy; I don't know. It's a new generation.

Ms. Higgins: I think that's a pretty common phenomenon. People are so hard-pressed for time now.

Ms. Kofoed: They don't have time for volunteering; it's a dying process. It's terrible really. We are having the same problem up at the hospitals where there used to be ten or eleven auxiliaries, and now they're down to two, and eventually there's going to be none.

Ms. Higgins: What did you do for amusement in the winter?

Ms. Kofoed: We would have basketball at the high school, and I was a cheerleader. I stayed home and read a lot, too. Radio was just beginning, so you stayed home and you listened to radio on the evenings. That is when I learned to knit, crochet, and embroider. We did a lot of singing; you could buy sheet music for a quarter and a song sheet for a dime, so we learned all the songs. My family was a singing family, too. We had parties and visited friends and neighbors and on weekends we usually had company, so we went to the beach and amusements at the Blue Bird Park, near our house. We played Bingo and went to card parties. I ice skated on Natco lake.

Ms. Higgins: Where did the Union Beach population go to high school?

Ms. Kofoed: Most of the time to Keyport. Union Beach was part of Middletown Township at one time. We were all part of Middletown, and then they broke it up and turned it into Middletown Township and then Hazlet Township. Then our group decided they wanted to be a borough of their own and that's what happened in 1925. They formed a Union Beach Improvement Association and got an agreement from the judges and the state and made their own town. Then it grew from there.

Ms. Higgins: Tell me about Sara B's Restaurant.

Ms. Kofoed: Sarah Brunelli opened a family restaurant on Highway 36. The building was owned formerly by a family named Scrober. They opened it as a German restaurant on a two lane unpaved road back in the 1920s. That part of the highway, known as Stone Road, which is still there, was the gateway to the sea shore before the highway --or Route 36 -- was built. You had to go through Keyport along the waterfront, which led you back onto the main road again. We also had a trolley that used to run from South Amboy all the way along into town. The town had the trolley turntable and there are still parts of a trestle there, believe it or not. The trolley would go right on down to Sea Bright and Long Branch. There was also a railroad there.

Ms. Higgins: Could you get to Newark and/or New York that way?

Ms. Kofoed: The trolley started at Perth Amboy. In order to get to New York or Newark, you had to change trolley cars at Perth Amboy.

Ms. Higgins: Is that the trolley that went down to Highlands?

Ms. Kofoed: Yes, the same one went all the way down until the railroad came along. Then the railroad took you to Newark. I worked at Prudential in Newark and I got the train right at my back door.

Ms. Higgins: You must have ridden on those charming little trolleys in Newark.

Ms. Kofoed: Yes. I loved the trolleys in the summer, it was open and cool. Summers here in Union Beach, we rode them to Keyport to the movies.



"Open Trolley Car" heading into Union Beach from Keyport on the trestle built over the railroad tracks. Trolleys ran east to the Highlands, others into Campbell's Junction South to Red Bank.

Ms. Higgins: As you were growing up, did most of the people who lived in Union Beach commute out of the borough to work?

Ms. Kofoed: Yes, most people who worked in Newark, New York, Kearney, commuted by train. There weren't too many autos at that time either. Most every working person commuted from the borough for work.

Ms. Higgins: And today, do they still?

Ms. Kofoed: Because there were so few jobs in the borough, most of the residents now travel to work by car, train, or bus. Years ago we did have sewing plants, making men's jackets and ladies dresses, but there are none now. McGregor was one of them. Years ago many residents worked nearby on the farms, but now everyone travels away from home.

Ms. Higgins: Those were the days of the train with the coffee car in the morning and bar car at night.

Ms. Kofoed: Yes, we spent a lot of time on trains, We had lots of fun, especially on holidays when one fellow would bring his banjo and we would sing and have a wild old time! Some people napped, some read or did needle work. It passed the time. I knitted a whole dress and jacket one year. Somebody got sick of seeing that dress.

Ms. Higgins: So you went to high school in Keyport and then you worked at Prudential and stayed on as a resident of Union Beach all those years?



Ann Kofoed

Ms. Kofoed: Yes. I lived with my mother and father until 1942 and then I married and I moved around the other side of the Beach. We could have moved out of the Beach, but for some reason or another, we stayed. It was close to my husband's work. He was a boat builder in Keyport, and his family lived in Keyport; we were between the two families. I've never had any desire to move. I never cared about going any further. I was content where I was. I liked the town, I still do.

Ms. Higgins: What kind of architecture and houses do they have there mainly?

Ms. Kofoed: It started as a summer resort, so you just had twenty-five foot lots and people would come down from the city and pitch tents. It was really tent city when it first started. Then along came the Depression and the people moved down into these tents. They couldn't afford their homes up in the city so they came down and moved into the tents, and that's when they were like bungalow type houses. The town right now has so many new beautiful

homes, mostly two story on 100 feet lots, or more. It's wonderful to look out our windows and see all these houses instead of one floor bungalows.

Ms. Higgins: Was that legal to build houses so close?

Ms. Kofoed: There was no law at that time. There were no building codes. It wasn't till many, many years later that they passed building codes. We still have many of these little cottages, but now they're putting upper floors on all of them or they're extending out. Some bought the lot next door to them and they're extending out. The town right now has so many beautiful new homes, and they are all worth thousands of dollars.

Ms. Higgins: Do they have water views?

Ms. Kofoed: Not really. Part of the borough is surrounded by water on two sides. We have about three creeks and they aren't well because of ecology. You're not allowed to build anything anymore, for all of the empty lots are being filled now. There's senior homes being built near where the railroad was. There were a lot of houses all along the railroad. Now they've been sold, and they are going to have a big development going up right now.

Ms. Higgins: When you first came down to Union Beach, how did you find the quality of the water?

Ms. Kofoed: We came down to Union Beach in 1929. Our bay water was so clean that residents dug clams right out of the Bay and crabs from our creeks. But I don't think it is quite that clear today. Our drinking water was the best. When our friends from the city came on weekends, the first thing they would do was drink a glass of our water. It was so clean and cold because it came from an artisan well. It dried up after many years and we now get water from the New Jersey Water Company. Our bay, like all the others, was sort of not too pleasant to swim in for a while, but now is coming back to where it was.

Ms. Higgins: And they're probably getting better.

Ms. Kofoed: Oh yes, much, much better now.

Ms. Higgins: I think that's one good thing we have done in the 20th century: we've reversed water pollution.

Ms. Kofoed: Definitely yes, and we're getting more conscious of it, and how scarce good water is. We have to be more careful.

Ms. Higgins: Was there any talk of Union Beach being a site for water commuting? Is there any plan like that?

Ms. Kofoed: Years ago Governor Driscoll was going to build a bridge from the point of Union Beach to New York, but it never happened.

Ms. Higgins: Well, that would pick up the traffic in town.

Ms. Kofoed: We wouldn't be the littletown we are. But the plan never developed. For many years they talked about a ferry, but that never came to pass, either.

Ms. Higgins: The ferries have been pretty successful from the Highlands.

Ms. Kofoed: Yes, and they did run some boats out of Keyport. But I don't think you'll ever see it out of our Beach.

Ms. Higgins: Again, it's probably just as well.

Ms. Kofoed: Right. Like I say, we're out of the way and we can't have too much development. Now we have a huge sewer plant and that's enough along the water way for us.

Ms. Higgins: How do you envision Union Beach seventy years from now?

Ms. Kofoed: Our town cannot expand too much because of the environmental programs. There will be more lovely two-story homes built. Right now a development is going up for adult homes; ten or more, and wherever there is an empty lot, a foundation is being built. It will be a prettier town. Older people are moving to senior apartments; I predict a younger group will be moving in, which will be good for development. Again, I say it is a small town and will always remain that way.

Ms. Higgins: Pretty soon all the available land is going to be gone. There's a similar situation in Colts Neck.

Ms. Kofoed: I don't really see too much development now, and I hope our beach front will still be there. I'd hate to see that gone again because it was just rebuilt a couple years ago when we had that bad storm in 1990 that washed it all away. Now it is bigger and they have more protection for it.

Ms. Higgins: Were most of the original settlers of Union Beach Germans?

Ms. Kofoed: No, Polish. There were a lot of Polish settlements. One part of the town was all Scottish and they called it Scotland. Another part of the Beach, along the beachfront, was Italian, so they were all segregated more or less. It's funny, but that's the way it was years ago, and a lot of those older families are gone now, but the children are still there. Some of them have moved, but many of the families stay, like me.

Ms. Higgins: Where did you and your friends go for fun when you were growing up?

Ms. Kofoed: After high school, we always went to Asbury Park to hear the big bands at the Casino. We used to think Asbury Park was wonderful, driving down we'd go along the shore, and we just loved the shore. My family used to go down to Sea Bright swimming all the time. We loved to go down the ocean, and that's what we seemed to enjoy; then we'd go up to Cliffwood. There was another casino or dance hall up there. That was the main entertainment years ago, dancing, but we didn't drink in those days. Asbury Park was a great place. I hope it gets rebuilt soon.

Ms. Higgins: Tell us more about your library.

Ms. Kofoed: That started in 1963.

Ms. Higgins: That was a big time for libraries to go up because they received federal money.

Ms. Kofoed: One lady wanted to get a library started. She found a little building which was a shoemaker shop, and she started the library there. She got friends and relatives to help her. They all brought books, and then a building became available across the street. The borough donated the property and everybody pitched in for material. Carpenters came, masons came, painters, electricians, and everybody worked for free, and that's how she got the first building. Eventually, they made a Health Center out of it for children, and they added another room in 1987, and in 1988 we added a fifty by sixty foot room.

Ms. Higgins: Now you're connected to the whole world with electronics, and many of your books are all part of the county system.

Ms. Kofoed: Through the help of the Monmouth County Library system. We are very proud of our library.

Ms. Higgins: Was your husband a resident of Union Beach or did you meet him in Keyport?

Ms. Kofoed: He lived in Keyport. His father had a boat yard. They built boats and had a boat basin. I went to school with him. He didn't have to move too far from work. He only moved another mile or two.

Ms. Higgins: And then you commuted to Newark?

Ms. Kofoed: I worked at Prudential for five years till 1942, and then one of my friends asked me if I would come to Fort Monmouth, so I did.

Ms. Higgins: You must of needed a car for that.

Ms. Kofoed: Oh yes, we had a car. A Ford convertible. I picked up the girls everyday.

Ms. Higgins: Can you describe how World War II had an influence on your life in Union Beach?

Ms. Kofoed: During World War II, women made badges for the Red Cross, knitted scarves, gloves, hats for servicemen. They built a watchtower down on the beachfront for watching any new ships or anything coming in. Everybody was involved in the blackouts.

Ms. Higgins: With blankets over the windows?

Ms. Kofoed: Oh, yes, yes. As a matter of fact, my husband and I were to be married and we were at the priest's house and we had a blackout, so we remember the blackouts well. Everybody would help, and they all joined different organizations that were necessary: Red Cross, and everything else at the time. We had Air Wardens who blew whistles and sirens for the blackouts.

Ms. Higgins: Of course, as you are on the water, planes were no idle threat.

Ms. Kofoed: No, that's right it wasn't. It's strange, but nobody has a picture of that building on the watchtower. We have pictures of everything else.

Ms. Higgins: Of which building?

Ms. Kofoed: The watch tower they had built, the wooden building on the beach front to watch for enemy boats and ships.

Ms. Higgins: How was it manned?

Ms. Kofoed: Everybody took turns watching; night watch, day watch, so forth.

Ms. Higgins: Do you remember any parades?

Ms. Kofoed: We always had parades. They started in 1925 and we still have parades. I think our American Legion has the reputation for the longest yearly Memorial Day parades. Every Memorial Day we have a parade and everybody gets into them.



The First Memorial Day Parade, 1925, (then known as Decoration Day) Mayor Charles E. Miller, leads the four-man police force down Union Avenue.

Ms. Higgins: We used to live in Highlands and I remember those parades.

Ms. Kofoed: Next year we're going to have a parade bigger than ever for our seventy-fifth anniversary.

Ms. Higgins: Do you have any idea of any trends that might have been around in the 1950s? For example, the government was looking for communists at Fort Monmouth.

Ms. Kofoed: I don't remember anything like that in our town. Not that I can remember.

Ms. Higgins: Did the Civil Rights movement in the 1960s have any significant impact in Union Beach?

Ms. Kofoed: I don't think so. Union Beach is quietly doing its own thing; as our mayor used to say, "This is the way we like it." Nobody is bothering us. We do our own thing and we seem to get along very well.

Ms. Higgins: Do you have any grade schools there in Union Beach?

Ms. Kofoed: Yes, we have a very good school. We've always had a very marvelous school system. I understand they're going to build several more rooms on to the school very shortly. They are building seven more new rooms on to the present Memorial school. It presently has over 1000 pupils and with the new homes going up, expect more. We have always had a very good school system. Our first school was built in 1915 and is still used to house the adult school, preschoolers, and Superintendents' Offices.

Ms. Higgins: What is the population?

Ms. Kofoed: A little over 6,000 now. With all the new homes and more children there are bigger families moving in now, so the population will be growing.

Ms. Higgins: Can you tell me a little bit about the road project a few years ago?

Ms. Kofoed: Most of our roads weren't paved when we first moved down here during the winter; we had terrific snow storms. All the neighbors dug out the streets to the main road. They would help my father dig out to the main road so he could get his car out to go to work. Then the WPA built the sidewalks and the paving. The WPA did very well in Union Beach. Now the main roads are under the control of the county, so we take care of our own roads. Some of the sidewalks the WPA built are still here. There were private farms in Union Beach. There were egg farmers, vegetable farmers, and strawberry farmers in Union Beach. They were all along where they built the new highway, Route 36. The highway divides Union Beach and Hazlet, and that's where they had to buy

all the property down into Natco. They were all private farms. There was a Smith farm down in there. All of the school kids would go to these farms and pick strawberries. They got a nickel a basket.

Ms. Higgins: Those kids had to have a way of earning a little money, too.

Ms. Kofoed: Our first ambulance, a used ambulance from Newark, cost \$150 dollars. Books were brought to town by the Monmouth County Library bookmobile.

Ms. Higgins: What kind of bathing suits did you wear?

Ms. Kofoed: Then they were all the one piece wool bathing suits, which were very proper and hot. Wool, they were all wool and they took all day to dry, but they were also very stylish. We used to have great fun down at the beach because after a storm all these big logs like telephone poles would float in from New York, and we'd all swim out to get them, and we'd dive off them and roll each other over. We always looked for big logs, it was lots of fun. We always had a lot of fun. My cousins came down weekends. I had four cousins who were older than I and they would come every weekend and one was greater than the other. They played the ukuleles, and we sang.



Miss Mari Ryan and Miss Anna Callahan (Kofoed)
July 4, 1930

Ms. Higgins: Probably had a fire on the beach at night.

Ms. Kofoed: Oh yes. Even at our grammar school graduation. The principle, Mr. Wells, gave us our party down at the beach. We had marshmallows and hot dogs and all that sort of thing. It was great. Now you can't even light a match down there. You're not allowed anymore -- you dirty the beach and everything else. Louis Sloan lived a block away from us. He started out with a butcher shop. There was another little building along side of it with a big veranda, and they put in a soda fountain, so that was quite a hang out for the kids. We had a beautiful school too, Cottage Park, but it burned down. Now they have a mobile unit for Cottage Park.

Ms. Higgins: And almost all of these are within walking distance.

Ms. Kofoed: Oh, definitely. The town is only two miles square. We walked all the time.

Ms. Higgins: A safe environment.

Ms. Kofoed: Yes. And we've always been proud of our schools. I belong to the Keyport High School Hall of Fame Association, and we nominate inductees every year, and many of them come from Union Beach. They've gone on to college and gone on to great things: one is a scientist, one is a maestro -- he's out in California; also an educator and a writer. We've done some pretty nice things.

Ms. Higgins: Tell me about your mother and father.

Ms. Kofoed: Before we came down here from Newark during the Depression, my mother worked in Bambergers and my father had his own welding business. Then my father came here and bought this house and he got a job in South Amboy with John Cross Welding. My mother got involved with the different clubs, such as The Pleasure Club, and the ladies socials. They'd have card parties at different lady's houses every week. Then they formed the Democratic Club and the Republican Club. And it was just sort of social. My mother and I were involved with elections. She worked on the election boards, which I took over later. I just seemed to follow in their footsteps. I don't know why, but I do. They were into many activities; my father became a Councilman.



Ann Kofoed on her pony

Ms. Higgins: Your parents got to Newark from where?

Ms. Kofoed: Well, my mother was born in Newark. I don't really know, but I'm sure she was born in Newark, and my father came from Orange, New Jersey. His mother and father were from Ireland, and they were gone before I was born, and my mother's parents came from Germany.

Ms. Higgins: What was your maiden name?

Ms. Kofoed: Callahan. I never have any trouble spelling that name. Everybody has trouble with Kofoed. When we were up in Newark, my father took me down to see the Memorial Day parades there, and now of course we had our own parades down here.

Ms. Higgins: Although you left Newark at thirteen, do you have any memories of the Newark Public Library?

Ms. Kofoed: Not really, I knew where it was, and I may have been there once or twice but it was quite a ways from where we lived. We lived on what they call "the hill," and the library was way down the other end of Newark, so I never got to be involved with that.

Ms. Higgins: Tell me about the tavern called The Blue Bird and The Black Hat Dance Hall.

Ms. Kofoed: Well, The Black Cat Dance Hall was a very naughty place. People drank, smoked, and danced. We used to peek under the swinging doors to watch. The Pleasure Club started in the early 1930s or late 1920s. Its meetings were held in the Blue Bird Inn, a tavern and hall in the Blue Bird Park Amusement Center on Union and Jersey Avenues. Everyone in town belonged to it, Democrats, Republicans, Independents, all religions. Everybody was friends, no politics. They held dances, bus rides to Colts Neck, a picnic area, card parties, everything. It was a real social club for everyone. The Pleasure Club. That is the most wonderful name for a club. It sounds right out of Pinocchio, doesn't it? And The Blue Bird had concession wheels.

Ms. Higgins: Gambling?

Ms. Kofoed: Not really, you would receive prizes instead of money. They had a stand with hundreds of strings hanging from the ceiling with prizes attached to the other end, you would pull the string and receive the gift on the end. There was another one in Highlands because my grandmother used to bring me home gifts on the nights she won. Oh, I had so many little things from my grandmother who used to be down in Atlantic Highlands. Oh, they had millions of strings. They were run by Chinese and the gifts were all made in China. They had a merry go round there. There was one incident concerning a dog that lived down the street. When they let him out, he heard the music, he would run away and go ride the merry go round, and everybody loved it.

Ms. Higgins: Keansburg, of course had the rides.

Ann Kofoed: My three girlfriends used to go there a lot, too.

Ms. Higgins: Nickels on Tuesdays. Did Union Beach have its own amusement as well?

Ms. Kofoed: Yes, there was skee-ball along the avenue too until everything was moved to the beachfront. Then that became the amusement center, with a merry go round, food stands, and games of chance. We used to go down to walk on the boardwalk. I haven't gotten there this summer, but I threaten to do it before the winter sets in.

Ms. Higgins: So Union Beach had its own amusement as well.

Ms. Kofoed: Yes, but it's far from where it was. They tore down all the stands. Then they moved the merry go round down to the beachfront. They moved all the concessions along the beachfront where all these stands were: the merry go round, and pinball, speedball, and all.

Ms. Higgins: And that washed away?

Ms. Kofoed: Yes. That was all damaged in the 1950s. And then where the library was originally they made a soda fountain, and a drug store out of that, and the merry go round along side of that.

Ms. Higgins: Is the merry go round still there?

Ms. Kofoed: No, no everything is all gone now.

Ms. Higgins: We had a merry go round in Highlands, but it was destroyed by fire. It was very sad. Do you have a business section in your town?

Ms. Kofoed: We have no business area in our town as the creek divides our town. There is "this side" and "that side." Each section has stores and restaurants. One section has two barbers, the other has three grocers and four restaurants.

Ms. Higgins: Is there any economic-socio distinction between one side of the creek and the other. Are there poor people on one side and wealthy people on the other?

Ms. Kofoed: No, it's nothing like that. It's just that a business will start but it just can't continue, something happens, it falls apart. We have two barbers and they're both across the street from each other. We had a butcher shop and then he moved down to the beachfront, now that store is empty. Now he has a deli, but he just bought what used to be The Sandbar -- the original boat-house -- now they're along the beach. There's a couple of things down on the beach but they can't seem to settle on one side or another. Scorer's store was in the business section, but then there was also another store on the other side of the beach that was as popular. So it's always been divided. It's hard to put your finger on the business section.

Ms. Higgins: What's the best restaurant in town?

Ms. Kofoed: We have two Italian gourmet restaurants. Piero's, on Highway 36 and Cervino's on Union Avenue, in town. Jake-A-Bob's, mostly a fish restaurant, is directly on the bay; the Colony Inn and Ader's both on Florence Avenue, each with great food. We also have two wonderful delis that serve subs and sandwiches. We are well endowed with eateries.

Ms. Higgins: Were snow storms much more severe in mid-century?

Ms. Kofoed: We don't have it nearly as bad years ago when we would have to shovel out our whole street before we could get to the main street.

Ms. Higgins: How did you shovel that?

Ms. Kofoed: By hand. All the neighbors would come out and all the men would help you shovel out the street so you could go to work. They saved all our coal ashes to put on the dirt roads.

Ms. Higgins: It sounds almost like a rural community.

Ms. Kofoed: As I say, we were very happy. The people are very nice. If anybody is in trouble or needs help, neighbors bend over backwards. A few years ago my house burned down. I couldn't thank enough people that came and helped and offered their services. It was just wonderful. And if anybody is sick, really bad with cancer or bad problems, neighbors help. They'll run all kinds of spaghetti suppers and Chinese auctions. They're the first ones to help every time. It's really wonderful the way everybody gets together when anybody needs any help. It's a great little town.

Ms. Higgins: That's wonderful to hear, particularly in this year when we all seem disconnected.

Ms. Kofoed: Maybe it's because we're small. Maybe if we were bigger it wouldn't be that way, but we seem to be connected somehow or other when it comes to hardships.

Ms. Higgins: I think maybe that the newer people will gradually become absorbed in the community.

Ms. Kofoed: I think so, yes. They come down to get away from all that togetherness up in the city, but it's a different togetherness down here. Maybe they even didn't know who their neighbors were, whereas here, you'll learn who your neighbors are.

Ms. Higgins: What is the most significant thing that you would like to leave behind to succeeding generations? As this archive becomes a part of the history of Monmouth County, what would you like to leave behind you to have people hear or read?

Ms. Kofoed: Well, I think Monmouth County is just wonderful. No matter what you want, it's here. We have the Raritan Bay, not too many miles away, we have the ocean. Off to the right, we have all the mountains. You come out here towards Freehold, you have farms galore. We have all the great hospitals. We have a freedom here not found in big cities.

Ms. Higgins: It must have been hard before Bayshore Hospital was built.

Ms. Kofoed: Many years ago when I had to have my appendix out, I had to go all the way down to Long Branch Memorial, which is now Monmouth Medical.

Ms. Higgins: That's a long trip with an emergency.

Ms. Kofoed: That's where you had to go. The other one was South Amboy, but that was mostly for babies. Most people went there to have their babies. Red Bank was very small at that time.

Ms. Higgins: Were you active in the Bayshore Hospital Association?

Ms. Kofoed: I am still. I am a past president, and now I'm just one of the members, but yes, I'm involved.

Ms. Higgins: Is there anything you would like to advise to succeeding generations to save?

Ms. Kofoed: Well, I don't know what's happening with the new generation. I don't know where all this badness is coming from or why. They seem to want to destruct instead of build, and I hope that passes soon. I say I'm glad I'm on the end of this generation and a part of it, because I don't think I like what I see now. I hope it changes for the better eventually because we will have nothing if it doesn't. It has to change. We need to preserve. Of course, ecology-wise they're doing it, but there's other things that are falling apart, and you don't know where it starts. Does it start at home? Does it start in the schools? Where does it start and where do you start cleaning it up?

Ms. Higgins: What do you like to read? Is there a book discussion group in Union Beach?

Ms. Kofoed: No, they don't have a discussion group right now, but the library's very, very active, and we have not only school children; the adults too.

Ms. Higgins: Especially now with the computer.

Ms. Kofoed: Yes, and with the computer, more adults and students are coming in.

Ms. Higgins: What do you personally like to read?

Ms. Kofoed: To tell you the truth, I don't have much time to read.

Ms. Higgins: What with one meeting and another meeting, you probably don't have a lot of time to read.

Ms. Kofoed: I like to look at historical things and pictures like that, and I really don't know that there is really one particular thing. I'm always aware of fashions. I always like to keep up with what's going on that way. And I love my gardening

Ms. Higgins: Please tell me about the Plank Road.

Ms. Kofoed: Well, many years ago when the men of the borough formed a group, they bought all the property, and built a road into Keyport. They built it out of wooden planks. Now we have paved tar roads, but I'm sure if you go down far enough you'll find some planks down in there. Then they built the houses along the road. The house I live in goes back to 1856. There's a few other old places around. Our forefathers had a lot of foresight and dreamed of how Union Beach was going to be and I'm wondering if they see us now if they are proud of what they see.

Ms. Higgins: Thank you so much, I have enjoyed this interview so much and I'm going to make it a point to come up to the Beach.

Ms. Kofoed: Thank you for having me.