



Interview with Anna Morford

**Under the Auspices of the
Monmouth County Library Headquarters
125 Symmes Drive, Manalapan, N.J.
Flora T. Higgins, Project Coordinator**

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Name of Interviewer: June West

Premises of Interview: Ms. Morford's home, Red Bank, NJ

Birthdate of Subject: September 3, 1904

Deceased: March 24, 2003

Ms. West: Mrs. Morford was affiliated with the Middletown Township Board of Education as an assistant to the clerk. Mrs. Morford could you tell us a little something about yourself?

Ms. Morford: Well, my family was very small. I just had one brother and we lived in a home on Cherry Tree Farm which was a house that my father had built when he was married in 1895. He and another carpenter built the house; the total cost of a fourteen room house was thirty-five hundred dollars. I lived there until I was married in 1928 and then stayed there for about a year or two before we moved to another home.

Ms. West: You had just the one brother, right? What did your dad do?

Ms. Morford: My father was a farmer.

Ms. West: And your mother was a housewife?

Ms. Morford: She was a housewife, homemaker.

Ms. West: And while your mom and dad are busy working on the farm, what are you and your brother doing, working with chores, or playing, or -

Ms. Morford: Well, until I was old enough to work, we just did nothing but play and fight.

Ms. West: What games did you and your brother play as youngsters?

Ms. Morford: Well, we didn't play together too much because he was eight years older than I, but as children we played tag and hide and seek, and other home games, like croquet; we just occupied our time as children. We didn't have all the activities that children have today. So it was impossible to do much of anything but stay on the farm and just be a nuisance to our parents, I guess.

Ms. West: But would you tell us about Middletown? What was the ambiance at that time?

Ms. Morford: Middletown Township was a farming community and most of the residents were farmers. All the surrounding people where we lived were farmers. And they didn't do much of anything but farm.

Ms. West: How was the terrain at that time?

Ms. Morford: Well, as I say, it was open territory, open farms, open land, and not many hills and not much water, no rivers or anything, a few brooks. A brook ran in back of our property. It was pretty flat and not much different than what it is today.

Ms. West: In a past conversation you mentioned about the plank road. Would you tell us something about that?

Ms. Morford: There were roads, back in those days; some of them were built with wooden planks. And there was one road in particular that my father always referred to as the "Plank Road," and it ran from New Monmouth right across from St. Mary's church down to Port Monmouth. It was a short trip but it was one of those that my father always called the Plank Road, so I assume that it was originally a road built with wooden planks.

Ms. West: That was apparently the main thoroughfare going from Middletown to Port Monmouth. Could you tell me about your education? What grammar school did you go to at that time?

Ms. Morford: I went to a one room school for five years at Harmony, where there was one teacher for all five grades. The teacher was a man by the name of George Leonard. From there I went to the Leonardo Grammar School over in Leonard through eighth grade, and on through to high school at Leonardo which was a Middletown Township High School. That was all the formal education that I had.

Ms. West: Who were the people in Monmouth County who might have influenced your life? Could you tell us a little something about them and if there is something that you'd like to say to them that you may not have said in past years?

Ms. Morford: I think my role model was my father, and of course we didn't know too many people except the neighbors. My father was very active in education in Middletown; he was on the Middletown Township Board of Education for nineteen years. During that time when I was in high school, of course, I think some of the children thought I was maybe favored because of my father's position, but I'm sure that never occurred. I earned everything I got.

Ms. West: Is there any particular area or location in Monmouth County that has a personal significance to you?

Ms. Morford: Well, really Middletown Village, and the church in Middletown which is now the Old First Church, which was the First Baptist church in New Jersey, and that was where we always gathered for all our social affairs, which were centered around the church. Actually, Middletown was a farming community, and all of the people would go to the church with horse and carriage. Horses and carriages were the only mode of transportation.

Ms. West: Is the church still standing today?

Ms. Morford: Yes, it is.

Ms. West: Talking about your school, in reference to your school, what fond memories might you have regarding that?

Ms. Morford: I think that my fondest memories were when I was a senior in high school and I was on the debating team. We had interscholastic debating at that time sponsored by Rutgers University. And the team that I was on happened to win the championship that year and we were very proud of it. Former Judge LaBrecque was on the same team as I was, and I have very fond recollections of

him. We won the championship. That was a highlight of my senior year in high school.

Ms. West: What schools did you debate? Just the schools in Monmouth County?

Ms. Morford: Yes, it was in Monmouth County we debated. Neptune High School, that's the main one I remember. There was Freehold and Red Bank, and several of them in the group.

Ms. West: Being able to be on the debating team means that you must have had quite a bit of knowledge. Did you read a lot?

Ms. Morford: I read quite a bit when I was in school. And we had a very fine English teacher, Miss Susan Williams, in high school who taught us public speaking and gave us a lot of experience in that respect. So I never seemed to be afraid of audiences. Later in life when I was in political areas I didn't mind getting up in front of a whole big crowd introducing a congressman or a governor or someone that we were interested in. Politics seemed to be my affinity. I liked politics, and I still do.

Ms. West: As a youngster, did you have any favorite books? Or you liked just books in general?

Ms. Morford: Oh, just what we were required to read in high school.

Ms. West: What do you know about your ancestors?

Ms. Morford: I do know that they were very early settlers in Monmouth County. The Hendricksons and the Morfords both were old families and the Hendricksons came from England and my grandmother was a Conover, and that was Holland Dutch. She came from Holland. They came over to this country in the late seventeen hundreds. Most of my family were right around the area; they didn't move very far away.

Ms. West: How was the medical situation at that time? Were hospitals and physicians accessible?

Ms. Morford: No. We had a family doctor who lived in Middletown and my brother and I both were born in the house. We didn't have any hospital experience at all. Until I had my second child, I never went to the hospital.

Ms. West: Who was the first president that you can recall?

Ms. Morford: I think Taft. I remember when I had relatives who lived in Brooklyn and we used to have a big parade there on what they called Children's Day, and I was visiting and standing on the sidewalk and President Taft rode by and he

reached down and said, "Hello, little girl," to me, and that was quite a big event in my life.

Ms. West: When you spoke to the President, were you too awe struck to say hello in return?

Ms. Morford: I probably said hello, just shook his hand.

Ms. West: You remember President Roosevelt, I'm sure.

Ms. Morford: Sure.

Ms. West: And all about the New Deal?

Ms. Morford: Oh, yes.

Ms. West: Would you tell us something about that?

Ms. Morford: I don't remember too much about it. I just remember it was part of the history of this country. His planning and all of his ideas. Of course during World War I we had canning clubs and did food preservation and all of that which was very interesting. Herbert Hoover was the Food Administrator at that time. President Hoover. And we used to can. I remember one year we canned about five hundred cans of vegetables - my mother, my sister-in-law and I together. That was our sustenance for the winter. All the canned fruits and vegetables, because we raised a lot of them on the farm.

Ms. West: Is there any particular newspaper headline that might stand out in your memory?

Ms. Morford: I don't recall anything special in my younger years. Of course I remember Pearl Harbor and all that was very tragic and challenging for us.

Ms. West: And Pearl Harbor is related to -

Ms. Morford: It was when Japan bombed Pearl Harbor and started World War II.

Ms. West: Did you take part in the war effort during World War II? Anything special?

Ms. Morford: Yes, I was on the food conservation committee for Middletown and we had to go to different places and teach people how to can and also to teach them how to live on a limited income, which we all had to do at that time. We met in different parts of the town, and the county even, and I even went to the state level one time when I gave a canning demonstration up at Rutgers.

Ms. West: And I imagine by this time you were married?

Ms. Morford: Oh, yes, I was married.

Ms. West: And how many children did you have?

Ms. Morford: Three. Two boys and a girl.

Ms. West: And they are all with us today?

Ms. Morford: Oh, yes. All with us, and I have eight grandchildren. I have eleven great-grandchildren.

Ms. West: Eleven?

Ms. Morford: They range in age from one year to nineteen.

Ms. West: With all these grandchildren and great-grandchildren, do you have any hobbies that you could help them with, you know, participate with them?

Ms. Morford: Well, I don't really participate too much with them because I am so much older and they live not right in Red Bank. Some live a little farther away, in Spring Lake and Pennsylvania, and so I really don't participate too much with them. Two great grandchildren live in Middletown and one great granddaughter in Rumson.

Ms. West: Do you have any favorite songs that you might be hearing?

Ms. Morford: I like the patriotic songs and I like the old hymns. Old familiar hymns.

Ms. West: Were there some of these songs you could have sang with your children and grand children, right?

Ms. Morford: Yes.

Ms. West: If you were to sit down and contemplate your life up to this point, how would you describe it as a road map? Would it have been smooth, rocky, uphill, downhill?

Ms. Morford: We had a lot of rocky times. We had a lot of times when times were pretty rough. My husband had a very small income and I tried to give my children the best education we could. My oldest son went to Peddie school, my daughter went to Glassboro for one year, and then she came back and took a secretarial course and worked as a secretary. And my youngest son went to Monmouth College. He went to Dickinson for a year and then he transferred to

Monmouth College and graduated from there. He was a teacher, and is now the president of the New Jersey Food Council. My older son is retired. My daughter is also a housewife, a mother, and lives in Middletown.

Ms. West: What would you say is your greatest achievement?

Ms. Morford: I guess my work in the political arena. I worked with the Republican party and Mrs. Katherine Neuberger, who was a personal friend of mine, who also helped me climb the ladder in the state women's organization. I was second vice-president of the state Republican women. And I think that's the one thing I'm very much interested in all political aspects. I met President Eisenhower and I was very pleased to do that. That was when he was running. He wasn't the president when I met him. I met Nixon and I met his wife. So I think the highlights have been these people of importance that I've been associated with. All the Freeholders represented in Monmouth County I knew very well.

Ms. West: How did you find working with politics? How did you find working with that today as opposed to many years ago?

Ms. Morford: Well, we always said we had good representatives in the older days. Today I think everybody is in it for what they can get out of it.

Ms. West: So at this point the biggest thing was meeting President Eisenhower and meeting President Nixon and his wife. If you could choose a symbol for your life today, what would it be? What would you choose to represent yourself?

Ms. Morford: We had to turn in a paper recently about it and I said you live each day as it comes, and be thankful for all your blessings. I'm very thankful for my family and for my ability to live here in Navesink House and have the care that they give us here. I think that the life expectancy is so much longer than it was. I never thought I'd live to be ninety-six years old. It's a little bit difficult to think beyond that. One of my granddaughters said to me, "Nana, you're going to be the first Morford to live to be a hundred." I said, "I don't know about that."

Ms. West: Looking at you right now you have a pretty good chance. I hope you get to be a centurion - let's see, who would be president then? George W. Bush will be finishing up his first term in office. And then you'll get the letter from the president congratulating you for living so long.

Ms. Morford: I hope he'll win the second time.

Ms. West: What would you say is the most unusual thing about you?

Ms. Morford: I don't think anything is especially unusual about me; I'm just an ordinary citizen, trying to live a good life. As my husband would say, "If you can't

say something good about someone, don't say anything." I think that's a very good philosophy.

Ms. West: Did you do much traveling around Monmouth County?

Ms. Morford: We used to go to different towns, Red Bank, of course, and Keyport, and Freehold, down the shore Asbury Park, in the summertime.

Ms. West: What changes have you seen in the county over the years?

Ms. Morford: Oh, it's a great change. The county has built up so, there are so many people now and the whole climate has changed as far as attitudes of people and children. It appalls me to see the children some days, the way they dress and the way they act, and they're irresponsible. We have it right here with our own employees. We have them come to work for a few days and then they don't show up, they don't call or anything, they just don't show up. There doesn't seem to be any responsibility taught to children. At least to a good many of them.

Ms. West: What were the fads of dress in your days?

Ms. Morford: We wore midi blouses and skirts, and I used to play basketball in high school wearing big full bloomers. We always had to be dressed nicely, and when we'd come home from school we'd change from our school clothes to play clothes. On Sunday we had a special dress that we would wear to church, and the dress code seemed to be one of dignity and a little bit more - I don't know how to express it - but a little bit more dignified.

Ms. West: How do you see the youngsters dressing today?

Ms. Morford: Sloppy.

Ms. West: If you had to live your life over again, or if you could, what changes would you make, if any?

Ms. Morford: I can't think of anything in particular; I surely would marry the same man again. My husband was a wonderful man. We were married for almost forty-five years, and had a wonderful family life. My husband was the most thoughtful person in the world.

Ms. West: How long has he been dead?

Ms. Morford: Twenty-seven years, and it doesn't seem possible. He had a heart attack, and died very suddenly. I've always been thankful to the Lord for that because he would have been very unhappy to have me wait on him; he hated to have me wait on him.

Ms. West: Of course it meant too, that he didn't have to do a lot of suffering.

Ms. Morford: That's right, he didn't have to suffer. My older son was with him when he was very ill in the hospital and he said, "If I don't make it, take good care of your mother." He always had me in his thoughts.

Ms. West: Isn't that beautiful? Is there anything that you feel that you still want to accomplish?

Ms. Morford: No. I just want to have good health. My health is very good except for my knees. I have a hard time walking; I have arthritis all through my whole system. Thank goodness, I don't have the pain.

Ms. West: What would you say are the milestones in your life?

Ms. Morford: I think my high school experience was one, my marriage of course was certainly a big milestone, my children are wonderful and they're all nearby so I see them. They're big milestones. My family, thirty-one of us in all, is a very close family. I don't see my great-grandchildren as much as I'd like to, but I do see them and hear from them, and contact them.

Ms. West: What would you describe as the most important legacy that you would leave to your family and friends?

Ms. Morford: I think to live a good, clean life is most important thing there is. To be considerate of other people and to be true to yourself: "To my own self be true."

Ms. West: What concerns you most about the state of the world today?

Ms. Morford: The unrest and the feeling of wanting to be the top man in everything and the unrest and unhappiness with a lot of people. I think it's very unfortunate that we have to have so much stress.

Ms. West: "Wanting to be the top man." Could you elaborate on that some?

Ms. Morford: I don't know how I can elaborate individually, but I think that the countries all have this wish for being the all-powerful country. The United States has that privilege right now, but you wonder how long we can keep it. Other countries are climbing up fast.

Ms. West: What are your ethnic cultures and practices in religious celebrations?

Ms. Morford: I think I've been tolerant and I believe in tolerance and I believe in being friendly to your neighbor. I am a Baptist by birth and conviction. In my religion I enjoy church but I don't go very much anymore because it's too much of

an effort, I have to go in a wheelchair and it's a little bit hard to do. I watch church on television.

Ms. West: So you don't physically go to church, but you attend services via the television. Do you have any stories that you could tell your grandchildren and great-grandchildren?

Ms. Morford: I know my great-grandchildren have asked me to tell them about when I was a little girl and what I used to do, and I think that the thing I enjoyed most of all was the family gatherings and the love of each other. The thing that children probably don't understand today is the mode of transportation that we had. We had horses and carriages, and we used to go to church, doctors, shopping, anything that way. My father had a team of horses and that was the only way we could get around, there were no automobiles until I was about eleven or twelve years old when my father bought his first car. So we really were a rural community, no trolley cars or anything like that nearby. When I went to school, I did go down to the trolley at New Monmouth and ride that trolley to Leonardo. We didn't have paved roads or anything like that; it was all dirt and gravel roads, and very dusty.

Ms. West: When did they start having the trolley cars here in the county?

Ms. Morford: Probably eighty or ninety years ago, I think, because I have been out of school for over seventy years, and we had trolley cars then from Red Bank to Campbell's Junction which is in Belford, and they used to have a trolley that went to Highlands and one to Keyport. That was the first trolley that I remember.

Ms. West: What would you say are your deepest values?

Ms. Morford: That's very hard to describe. My values are to live a good life and not to be too greedy. I've never been a greedy person; I don't think I have, anyway.

Ms. West: What are your personal strengths?

Ms. Morford: I think my personal strength is in my faith.

Ms. West: What advice would you give youngsters today and future generations?

Ms. Morford: I think you have to grow up with respect and grow up to be an honest person and not greedy.

Ms. West: How would you like to see the world, this new millennium now? What insights do you have that you would like to share with us or anyone who will click on this website and read this history of yourself?

Ms. Morford: I would like to see the world be at peace and I would like to also see the families closer. It distresses me to read of so many divorces and split up families and that doesn't seem to be a good core for growth and for a good country. You have to have good family life to be a good country.

Ms. West: Now here at the Navesink House, what do you do for pleasure and recreation?

Ms. Morford: I play bridge once or twice a week and we have a great many programs. Of course I am not able to go out and do the things I used to do. We used to go for long walks and walks in the garden. But I use a walker all the time because I'm so afraid of falling. I don't want to fall and break a bone. I've had a broken hip and a broken knee and broken wrist and I don't want any more breaks, thank you. They have entertainment here and they have church services every Sunday, and they have various programs, music, and lectures. As a matter of fact, I have a great-granddaughter who is sixteen, and she wants to come and play a piano recital for us sometime in the near future.

Ms. West: So you have a pianist in the family?

Ms. Morford: That's right. And she's also a swimmer; she's a champion swimmer.

Ms. West: In high school or a club?

Ms. Morford: She's a junior in high school.

Ms. West: Isn't that wonderful. Did you ever have a nickname when you were a youngster?

Ms. Morford: No.

Ms. West: Any favorite toys?

Ms. Morford: No, I don't think I had any favorite toys. I used to love to ride a bicycle. When I got my first bicycle I was so mad I couldn't get on and ride right away, I had to learn to ride a bicycle; you can't just get on and go.

Ms. West: You mentioned going to Asbury Park. Tell us about it.

Ms. Morford: It was a very nice place at that time. The boardwalk was lovely. We used to go sit on the boardwalk and watch the people. The people were something to watch, they were nicely dressed and walked nicely and behaved themselves. They didn't wear the clothes they wear today and they didn't race around the way they do today. It was a nice family outing to go to Asbury Park on

the boardwalk. Then when I was older and going out on dates, we used to go to Asbury Park to dance at the casino, and that was a fun time.

Ms. West: What family recollections do you have?

Ms. Morford: The holiday dinners. The Christmas dinners. My grandmother and grandfather and other cousins of my mother and father were married on the same day so we always had a wedding anniversary dinner on the twentieth of December and a Christmas dinner on the twenty fifth, of course. And the family gatherings were always a big part of our lives.

Ms. West: How do you find Christmas celebrations today as in relation to how they were when you were a child?

Ms. Morford: It's all commercial now, everything's commercial, it's about how much money people spend on Christmas gifts for children. We had a very modest Christmas. We hung our stockings, and that was Santa Claus's gift to us, and there were presents to open in the morning. We were allowed to go downstairs, take our stocking down, open them, then after that we had to wait until after dinner before we could open our presents. One nice present was about all we'd get. It would be a doll or doll carriage or something like that. That was a big present.

Ms. West: Is there any particular birthday of yours that stands out in your mind?

Ms. Morford: My twenty-first birthday, of course, I remember that. I became engaged right around that time and later my ninetieth and ninety-fifth have all been big celebrations that my family have provided for me. My eighty-fifth, too. I guess they weren't sure how much more I was going to live, so they better celebrate each one that came along.

Ms. West: In a month you'll be having your ninety-seventh birthday.

Ms. Morford: Right. If I live that long.

Ms. West: Big plans for that one?

Ms. Morford: I don't think so. It's on Labor Day this year, and that's a bad day.

Ms. West: Is there anything else you'd like to tell us?

Ms. Morford: I can't think of anything in particular. I know Monmouth County has changed and grown, almost too much. It used to be a big farming community, but now it's all commercial. We have malls and strip malls and stores and the highway is a very ugly road now. I know I came out from Avon Sunday night with my son and I saw that Highway 35 is just one glitzy light after another advertising

some building or some business. There is nothing pretty about it. The Parkway, of course, is still very nice, but the county has changed greatly.

Ms. West: So physically, it's the roads and things that have changed, and the population.

Ms. Morford: That's right. It's a little bit hard to understand why we have to have so many riots and so much vandalism and so forth. People don't seem to respect anybody else's property. It's very upsetting to see the way people go today.

Ms. West: This is more prevalent in the county than when you were growing up?

Ms. Morford: Oh yes. We wouldn't dare. I remember when I was a child we had an old aunt who lived with us, and if I wouldn't say "Please" or "Thank you," my father made me go sit in the corner until I would say it. Now if anybody says please or thank you it's a miracle. I have one great-granddaughter who is always very nice. She says, "Thank you very much, Great Nana." She's very sweet about it. All of my great-grandchildren are very nice, very kind to me, and my grandchildren also. But in general today you don't see the respect that you used to see.

Ms. West: Do you think that will turn around some day?

Ms. Morford: I hope so, but I know I'll never live to see it.

Ms. West: I kind of hope so myself. Maybe people will go the other way when they see what is happening in the world and around. It just can't keep going in the same direction; everything seems to be so adverse.

Ms. Morford: Got to have a bond somewhere and tie them up again.

Ms. West: You were telling me about this picture on the wall. Is that the home that you were born in?

Ms. Morford: That's the home I was born in, and it's still standing today. It is now a doctor's office. My husband's old home in Shrewsbury on Sycamore Avenue is still standing, too.

Ms. West: The home that you were raised in; where is that located in Middletown?

Ms. Morford: It was Cherry Tree Farm on Highway 35 and New Monmouth Road intersection.

Ms. West: Do you know what year your homestead was built in?

Ms. Morford: 1895.

Ms. West: What about the churches, do you know when they were built?

Ms. Morford: The Old First Church in Middletown, was, I think, built in 1832.

Ms. West: Okay. I'd like to thank you for your time, again.

Ms. Morford: You're very welcome.

Ms. West: I'm sure everyone at the library appreciates you giving us your time and sharing in your life. Thank you so much.

Ms. Morford: Thank you.