



## Interview with Margaret Field

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

**Date of Interview:** June 25, 2000  
**Name of Interviewer:** Rita Cross  
**Premises of Interview:** Unitarian Church of  
Monmouth County, Lincroft, NJ  
**Birthdate of Subject:** September 16, 1928



**Margaret Field, present day**

**Ms. Cross:** You didn't live all your life here. When did you come to Monmouth County?

**Ms. Field:** We moved to Monmouth County the first time in 1954 or 1955 (you think you're never going to forget these things but you do); my younger daughter was born here. Then we were in Pennsylvania for three years, near Harrisburg, from 1958 to 1961. That's when we moved back - to Fair Haven - in September 1961.

**Ms. Cross:** Where was your daughter born?

**Ms. Field:** Riverview Hospital.

**Ms. Cross:** Did you live in Red Bank?

**Ms. Field:** Yes, we lived in Red Bank in the old Hubbard house at 64 West Front Street.

**Ms. Cross:** What is the old Hubbard house?

**Ms. Field:** It's pictured in some of the histories of Monmouth County; it's where a Dr. Hubbard lived. It's a fairly old house. I don't know that it was distinguished from other old houses in Monmouth County other than it happened to get engraved and appeared in some of the old histories. Dr. Hubbard was a medical

doctor and had his offices in the house. It's a three story mansard roof building. It had been made into four apartments at some point - one apartment to each floor plus the one in the basement, which my in-laws had. We were on the first floor. All of them had beautiful views of the river - even the basement, because it was only a half-basement, so to speak - it had windows above the ground - a big bay window on the river side.

**Ms. Cross:** Is it near The Bluffs and the library there? Or is it further east?

**Ms. Field:** Now it's right next to Riverside Gardens Park. There was a house between us and the park, the home of Dr. Walter Rullman, who was chief of surgery at Riverview for a long time. Some historic group in Red Bank tried very hard to save that house from the wrecking ball and was not successful, and it was torn down. So now 64 West Front is on the West Side of Riverside Park. Except now it's been re-numbered to be 62 West Front. And it's a part of The Bluffs - 62, 68, and 74 West Front, plus four more new ones that were built on what used to be the backyards of all three of the houses facing the street, have been fancied up to be The Bluffs. They look nice - the old ones and the new ones have been blended well - but they're all close together - multi-family - and probably very expensive! A driveway goes into it between 62 and 68 - when we lived there the backyard went all the way down to a bulkhead on the river except there was a garage to one side halfway down - but the yard was sloped to the water so the garage didn't interfere much with the view.

**Ms. Cross:** Where did you come from?

**Ms. Field:** I was born in Sibley Hospital in Washington, DC. My parents were living in suburban Washington, Takoma Park Maryland, at the time.

**Ms. Cross:** What brought you here?

**Ms. Field:** I went to the University of Wisconsin and met my husband there. He was born and raised in Fair Haven and had always wanted to come back. So that's how we happened to get here.



**Peggy (left) and  
Barbara Lancaster**

**Ms. Cross:** What were your impressions of the shore at that time? What are the changes you have seen? What were the things that you noticed and saw?

**Ms. Field:** I didn't notice too much change between when I first got here and 1961 when we came back, or even now, thirty nine years later. It seems like all of the vacant lots in Fair Haven are filled with houses, but I don't see a basic change - it's still basically a single-family residential area. In surrounding towns there are now a lot of condos - or town homes, whichever. And

of course there's a lot more traffic - there are many more traffic lights along the route between Fair Haven and New Brunswick where I went to library school in 1969. Lately the downtown section of Red Bank has been refurbished and upgraded, and that's a good sign. I thoroughly believe in making cities and town livable rather than having people get disenchanted with them and tearing up more farmland so they can move out and go live there. That just leads to more sprawl.

**Ms. Cross:** Why did you go to Library School?

**Ms. Field:** I had volunteered in the Fair Haven School libraries, enjoyed it, and thought it would be as good a way as any to get college money for Barb and Peg. Nobody ever becomes a librarian to get rich, but at least I'd like what I was doing. And Martha Schofield, the Librarian when I volunteered, encouraged me to do it. I started working for the County Library in 1971, and married Jack Field, another librarian, in 1980. Jack died in 1990. He worked at the Headquarters library, and I started at the Hazlet Branch. We moved to Millstone in 1984. In that far western part of the county there has been an essential change just in the sixteen years since we moved there. The farmland is being torn up to make single family homes. So it's not different in that there are more single family homes, but so much of the area has changed from agricultural to residential.

**Ms. Cross:** Are you by Manalapan and Marlboro?

**Ms. Field:** Yes, but farther west. All up and down Route 9 there are strip malls. A lot of those are within the past twenty years. All through the rural areas they are tearing up the farms and building these enormous big houses that I think are wasteful of resources. They are also very expensive. In Upper Freehold, too, but not as much. There are still a lot of farms there - mostly horse farms and sod farms - a few other crops, too.

**Ms. Cross:** When the bottom falls out, everything is going to be empty, probably. Tell me your experiences with the library, because I don't remember the library in Manalapan.

**Ms. Field:** It's a fairly new building and has been enlarged already. When I started with the library in 1972, the Headquarters was an old house at 80 Broad Street in Freehold Boro - which is back to being a private home again - then about six months later, in August 1971, it moved to a little strip mall at 25 Broad Street - that was a fifteen-year "temporary" location. And much too small - the new one in Manalapan was built in 1986 and opened for business in January 1987.



**Margaret Field at a Library Association meeting with a cardboard cut-out of then director Jack Livingstone**

**Ms. Cross:** It's quite a time block.

**Ms. Field:** Yes. The county library started out primarily as a means of delivering service to areas that did not have any access to library service; mainly in the rural parts of the county.

**Ms. Cross:** Were you involved with the bookmobile?

**Ms. Field:** There were two bookmobiles that went out every Monday through Thursday, and occasional Fridays. I wasn't directly involved with them, though.

**Ms. Cross:** Tell me about Riverview. You said you had your child at Riverview Hospital.

**Ms. Field:** It was much smaller then, but starting to burst at the seams - at least it seemed so from my experience - there was no room available when Peggy was born so I had a bed in the hall for a day and a night. It's hard to sleep in a hospital corridor at night! Everybody was helpful and friendly, though - I remember it as a good hospital experience even with being in the hall. As far as medical practice goes, we had a general practitioner for most things; it wasn't a specialist for this and a specialist for that, as it is now. I don't really have anything very much wrong with me, but now I have to go to five different doctors to get it all checked. I had some ingrown warts on my foot; the general practitioner didn't do that. I had to go to a podiatrist. Gynecologist, dermatologist, dentist of course, that's different, internal medicine, gastroenterologist, nobody touches anybody else's body parts.

**Ms. Cross:** Do any fads or trends in your lifetime or any newspaper headlines stand out from the past?

**Ms. Field:** National things, but nothing particularly limited to Monmouth County.

**Ms. Cross:** What do you know about your ancestors?

**Ms. Field:** I don't have any ancestors from Monmouth; my mother was from Pennsylvania and my father was from Massachusetts. My first husband's father was a civil engineer and surveyor and was the resident engineer on the Rumson Bridge. That is the drawbridge that goes over from Rumson to Locust. His name was Lionel Lancaster.

**Ms. Cross:** Can you expand on that at all? What's his history?

**Ms. Field:** He was from Philadelphia originally. My first husband as a kid would spend his summers going out with the survey team, holding the rods for the surveyors. Then he became a surveyor, and someone else had to hold the rods. He and his brother used to say they had walked all over Monmouth County as

kids. Their father had rolls and rolls of blueprints in his office, which was one room in the basement apartment. Dorn's Photo Shop did all his blueprints; they're still at the same place on Wallace Street where they were fifty years ago. Getting back to the farms in Upper Freehold for a minute, I should have mentioned that the next-to-the-last dairy farm in the county went out of business recently and the last one may not last much longer.

(Ed. note: The Search Farm ceased dairy operations in 2001)

**Ms. Cross:** Do you know where the farmers went?

**Ms. Field:** No. I think that what happened was as they grew old and the children didn't want to go into farming, they sold the land to developers and the developers built houses. There's the Farmland Preservation Program trying now to preserve the few farms that are left to keep them out of the hands of developers. But I think it's very little and very late. They should've started doing this twenty years ago; I guess they didn't foresee the magnitude of the problem. I saw a bumper sticker on a car yesterday that said, "No farms, no food," and of course the agriculture business has enormously big holdings, but not in Monmouth County. When there was so much home building in what was once rural Monmouth County, there was a need for libraries - and schools...

**Ms. Cross:** And more stores and more strip malls.

**Ms. Field:** Right. Marlboro had just a very small "reading room." Then, they built a library. The Marlboro municipal body has been very far-sighted in providing service. That small library has been enlarged twice and is now one of our busiest branches. Millstone and Upper Freehold don't have their own libraries. Their residents go to Headquarters in Manalapan or they go to the Allentown Branch. We have deliveries to Allentown twice a week - people can order books from Headquarters by phone or at Allentown and have them delivered to Allentown.

**Ms. Cross:** Are there any locations in Monmouth County that have personal significance for you?

**Ms. Field:** I guess just the place in Fair Haven where we lived for twenty years. It was a nice little house, and Fair Haven is a nice little town, and we were content there. That's where the kids grew up; they were very fond of Fair Haven. And I like history, so many of the historical sites are some of my favorites.

**Ms. Cross:** Like?

**Ms. Field:** The Monmouth Historical Association properties - Marlpit Hall, Covenhoven House, the Holmes Hendrickson House, Allen House - the place in Atlantic Highlands where Henry Hudson was reported to have anchored his ship and gotten water.

**Ms. Cross:** Oh, tell me about that. I don't know anything about that.

**Ms. Field:** It is below that road that goes between Atlantic Highlands and Highlands, Ocean Boulevard.

**Ms. Cross:** That's also called Scenic Drive.

**Ms. Field:** You go on Scenic Drive to Lawrie, then onto Hilton, and right where Hilton meets Bayside and goes down the hill there's a spring. The water comes out of a pipe in the wall. They've kind of bricked it up to make it a little place where they can put a plaque. I don't know if this spot is really where he actually anchored the ship, but it's said that he got fresh water from that spring. And then there's the Spy House and Monmouth Battlefield. They're gradually restoring as much as they can of the whole battle area to the way it was in 1778. Monmouth County is a very pretty area. I love Allentown - so many houses, and the old grist mill - the mill is The Black Forest restaurant now, on the first floor - there are shops on the two floors above it.

**Ms. Cross:** Did you see the notice about the place where they found bones?

**Ms. Field:** Yes. They found bones in Middletown, but it doesn't give any hint as to whether they were Indian bones or maybe of someone who died twenty years ago.

**Ms. Cross:** It was interesting though.

**Ms. Field:** Yes, it was. I clipped that article out. I do clipping for the library of articles having to do with Monmouth County and some New Jersey articles. And those I intend to offer to Gary Saretzky of Monmouth County Archives when I leave the county.

**Ms. Cross:** In what way is your life different now from what you thought it would be when you came to Monmouth County?

**Ms. Field:** I never thought I would be divorced, but I guess nobody does when they get married.

**Ms. Cross:** I think in our generation, and probably also young people, think that they're never going to get old anyway.

**Ms. Field:** Yes. They're never going to get old and love will last forever. But hindsight being what it is, I can't say the divorce was all bad - there are many good things that have come my way that never would have without it, though it was very hard at the time.

**Ms. Cross:** What would you say is the most unusual thing about you and also what's your greatest achievement?

**Ms. Field:** The most interesting thing about me maybe is my sand collection. I have a sand collection from different beaches all over the world.

**Ms. Cross:** In bottles?

**Ms. Field:** In bottles, yes. And I belong to the International Sand Collectors Society, if you please; it's very small.

**Ms. Cross:** I didn't even know there was one. What made you start?

**Ms. Field:** My father worked for the Department of Agriculture and went on a business trip to Italy when I was about eight. He brought a can of sand from a beach there just as an interesting thing. I remember thinking that was really real cool. I saved it and I don't think until I got to be maybe high school age did I start collecting sand, but I remembered that sand I had gotten as a kid from my father. So now I have all the states of the United States including Alaska and Hawaii and Washington DC and lots of countries. I also have some related things such as simulated moon dust. NASA brought the moon rocks back and analyzed their mineral content. They didn't want to squander that precious stuff by subjecting it to endless study, so they analyzed it, simulated it, and studied the simulated rocks. I have sand from every continent. I have sand from Antarctica.

**Ms. Cross:** You know what always amazes me is you see somebody in one dimension and I almost wish we could have an hour with everybody because everybody....

**Ms. Field:** Has a story.

**Ms. Cross:** I know, and different facets too.

**Ms. Field:** The sand from Antarctica is blown in by the wind from some other place and then the wind dies. It drops the sand down on the ice, and so this sand was not from under the ice, it was from top of the ice, but nevertheless it was picked up in Antarctica.

**Ms. Cross:** And how did you get this?

**Ms. Field:** Through the Sand Society. Most of the other ones I've gotten I didn't pick up myself but friends or relatives or friends of friends would bring samples to me. The club does a certain amount of trading. Interested members will trade, and some scientist who was on an expedition to Antarctica gave some to other scientists, and about ten people later it came to me.

**Ms. Cross:** Oh gosh, that's interesting. You just told me a little story about Antarctica.

**Ms. Field:** That's really one of the most interesting samples I have. For National Geography Week one year, Flora Higgins, who arranges these things, thought it would be cool to have a display of my sand, so that's what we did. We had a big map on the wall in the lobby with numbers; the sand samples were in the display cases and numbered to correspond to the map. I have about 500 samples now because very often people bring me sand, not knowing that I already have it from that place, and of course I can't bear to throw it out.

**Ms. Cross:** That's wonderful.

**Ms. Field:** Also you can get three samples of sand from the same state, but they can be totally different in color, or texture, or shape.

**Ms. Cross:** What would you say has been your greatest achievement?

**Ms. Field:** I don't feel I have any great achievements, but rather a number of small achievements, like every time I really, really help somebody with something they really, really needed at the library. That's a small achievement of a kind. Some of the times I felt that the information I gave them really helped them make a difference in their life and that to me is an achievement, if even a small one.

**Ms. Cross:** I agree.

**Ms. Field:** I haven't done anything to make me rich or famous or immortal or anything else but those I still believe are achievements.

**Ms. Cross:** Those small things. I have things like that too, where I've had an influence on somebody's life. I think they're wonderful achievements. What do you feel you still want to accomplish?

**Ms. Field:** When I retire, which will be not too far from now (I'm still working but I don't want to die in the traces), I'll be still working. I think I would do some volunteer work with service organizations, to give something back, or with some historical group of some kind. Maybe a literacy tutor - a person can do anything they set their mind to if they can only read.

**Ms. Cross:** I want to play with the cats. And I want to read for the blind, which I should do soon. Are there any people who influenced your life in Monmouth County?

**Ms. Field:** Lots of people in small ways, but I don't know if I can think of any right now except for Martha Schofield, the librarian in the Fair Haven schools. Some of my teachers did, but I didn't go to school in Monmouth County.

**Ms. Cross:** How did you come to the Unitarian meetinghouse? Were you born a Unitarian?

**Ms. Field:** Yes, I was born a Unitarian. My father's family has been Unitarian ever since there were Unitarian churches. My mother was a Presbyterian. My husband was a Methodist, and he thought that Unitarians were not much removed from Druids and Gypsies. So we went to his church, but when we were divorced, I said, "Okay, now I'm free to go to the Unitarian church," so that's what I did.

**Ms. Cross:** And was it here?

**Ms. Field:** It was right here in Monmouth County, but it was the old building.

**Ms. Cross:** Which was? Oh yes, I remember when I came, they met where they have coffee now.

**Ms. Field:** They did everything where they have coffee now.

**Ms. Cross:** Harold Dean was here. What are your favorite books, television shows? Who are your heroes?

**Ms. Field:** I would have had to think about that ahead of time to be able to answer that one... I used to like Laugh-In and The Tonight Show, Murder She Wrote, and PBS shows. I've never watched TV very much and watch even less now. I've always loved the Sherlock Holmes stories and still reread them sometimes. And the Brother Cadfael stories. As to heroes, I'd say anyone who speaks out for justice or steps in to help other people or creatures in spite of great personal risk - things like that.

**Ms. Cross:** Is there anything more you want to add?

**Ms. Field:** It seems like I should say something different about the changes in Monmouth County. But whenever I think about it, I just keep coming back to the farms disappearing. It's just very painful to see another farm bite the dust. And particularly with the kind of houses they're building: they are not houses that the average family can afford to live in. It is very sad.

**Ms. Cross:** They are big enormous houses without any real charm.

**Ms. Field:** Yes, and they are just plopped down, not designed to embrace the landscape.

**Ms. Cross:** Yes, I know.

**Ms. Field:** When they landscape they just put a few little sticks in. But I'm glad that they are trying to preserve open land, even if they're starting so late to do it. Monmouth County came out third, I think, in a *Money Magazine* survey of good places to live in the country. And of course, everybody wants to come here, and they build houses for them. I'd like to see them build houses more like the one we had in Fair Haven - big enough, but cozy - and not like every other house on the block. Ours had seven rooms plus two full bathrooms; and a full basement - half of it was a playroom. It also had a secret passageway between the upstairs bedrooms, and a loft in the garage.

**Ms. Cross:** I know it's so expensive to live here.

**Ms. Field:** Yes, it is expensive. I'm thinking of moving out of Monmouth County when I retire. I may change my mind because of all the people that I've known for so many years.

**Ms. Cross:** Yes, that's tough. Is your family here?

**Ms. Field:** My daughter Barbara lives in San Francisco, and my daughter Peggy died eight years ago; those are my only two children. My grandson lives in Raritan, but he's twenty-five. He's free to go anywhere, so I wouldn't stay here just for him.

**Ms. Cross:** Where would you go?

**Ms. Field:** I'm thinking of Portsmouth, New Hampshire.

**Ms. Cross:** Do you know people there?

**Ms. Field:** I do now. Mostly it's New England that I know. I have ancestral roots going back to the early 1600s. There's water there as there is here, and that makes it pretty. There's a strong Unitarian church there. There's an historic restoration called Strawberry Banke - on the order of Williamsburg but one hundred times smaller - I could volunteer there. Good library, too. Lots of interesting shops and restaurants, distinctive architecture. In many ways it's a mini San Francisco.

**Ms. Cross:** It takes a lot of guts to go by yourself, when you don't have a husband.

**Ms. Field:** I have friends and former colleagues in New England, although not necessarily right in Portsmouth. But another thing about Portsmouth is it's only an hour from Boston.

**Ms. Cross:** Oh, so you have a big city, too.

**Ms. Field:** Yes, a big city right close by with an international airport if you want to go someplace.

**Ms. Cross:** Sounds nice.

**Ms. Field:** And at present there's no income tax and no sales tax. The property tax, I have been told, is very high to make up for what they don't have in the way of other taxes.

**Ms. Cross:** They don't know what high is until they live here.

**Ms. Field:** It's about the same as here.

**Ms. Cross:** I have a little condo and I pay almost \$3,000 in taxes, and you probably pay even more because you have a house.

**Ms. Field:** Yes, I pay something like \$4,500.

**Ms. Cross:** Do you ever think of going out where your daughter is?

**Ms. Field:** No. San Francisco is a lovely place. It's beautiful to visit, but it's also very expensive and it isn't near any of the other things that I am familiar with. She's really the only person there that I know. And I think it's a mistake to go where your children are only because that's where your children are, because they might feel obliged to stay there because you moved in to be with them. And next year they might want to move to Minneapolis and here I would be in San Francisco. So no, I have never planned to move there.

**Ms. Cross:** My daughter is in Indianapolis and I said, "It's lovely here, and I just love it, but I don't know how long you're going to be here and I'm fine where I am." Like you, I have friends here and there's a familiarity about it. Somebody said something to me one time about Monmouth County: "Most Monmouth County women don't move away." I don't know why that is.

**Ms. Field:** I never heard that.

**Ms. Cross:** A lot of them stay here.

**Ms. Field:** I came here by accident, but I've been happy living in Monmouth County. It's a lovely place to live.

**Ms. Cross:** We have everything I think.

**Ms. Field:** We have everything and we're close enough to New York to take advantage of everything there.

**Ms. Cross:** I really thank you for taking the time and it was nice.