

Interview with Lucine Slayton Martel on June 12, 1976. With her husband Charles, she lives on the corner of Wyoming Avenue and Linden Street. She and her family have lived in Millburn since 1917.
Interview by Jan Weisblatt.

Jan : Lucine, your father was Gene Noyes Slayton and he came here in 1917. Can you tell us a little bit about how he happened to come here and where he lived at first.

Lucine: As a native of Vermont originally, he came to N.Y. for his first job. He was a graduate of Columbia University Law school and he obtained his first position in N.Y. During the summer he and his then room-mate came to Millburn to board at a rooming house just one block away from where we now live, as a summer boarder and to escape the heat of the city.

Jan : What house is that?

Lucine: That was Mrs. Tepper's house. She later remarried and became Mrs. French. It was a rooming house.

Jan : Your father wasn't married then. This would be about when?

Lucine: Probably 1914-1915. Then he was married in 1916 and came down to Millburn at that particular time.

Jan : Did they buy this house initially or.....

Lucine: No, they first owned a house directly on the opposite side of the tennis court down on Linden Street.

Jan : How long did you live there?

Lucine: Three years, I think, and then they purchased this house when it became available.

Jan : Tell me something about the tennis courts there. I was told this was one of the two oldest clubs in Millburn or something like that - the Wyoming Club.

Lucine: I think it was. But the club was formed as a community club for Wyoming territory and the men of the neighborhood actually put up the club. It was, sort of, even then a prefabricated affair. As I understand it they literally put up walls, one piece at a time. Senior Mr. Herbert Marshall was very active then as were many other people in the neighborhood.

Jan : Were you born in this house?

Lucine: Actually no.

Jan : You were born down on Linden Street.

Lucine: We moved to this house when I was three years old, so I have lived here quite a number of years.

Jan : Can you tell me something about this house?

Lucine: The Township Hall of Records lists it as built around 1890. Actually, the same Mrs. Tepper who had the rooming house up on the other corner remembered as a little girl walking down here and watch-

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ing her grandfather build this house. So I believe the records are probably accurate, around 1890.

Jan: Your family has lived in this house since.....?

Lucine: About fifty years, or thereabouts. But actually five families lived in this house prior to our moving into it.

Jan: When you were little and lived here, what did the general area look like?

Lucine: Wyoming Avenue was a dirt road, as were almost all the side streets. I do remember when Wyoming Avenue was paved and how we climbed through all the sewer pipes. It was quite a lark at that time. Beyond Mountain Avenue, on Wyoming Avenue, it was practically all farms, dairy farms. There were cows and it was very much a farmland out towards South Orange.

Jan: You must have seen quite a few houses go up on this street - the Christian house across the street, that was in the 30's..... The house where the Whitaker's lived.

Lucine: There were quite a few houses built, although this area started as a sort of resort area at one time, I believe. So it was fairly well built up then.

Jan: And of course, it was near the railroad.

Lucine: But I do remember one or two blocks up from us it was all wooded. We walked through the woods to school every day.

Jan: Where did you go to school?

Lucine: I went to the Wyoming School which was built in 1920, I believe.

Jan: The one right down here?

Lucine: Yes. And also the youngsters from Couth Mountain had to come over to Wyoming to school.

Jan: "There weren't many elementary schools then, were there?"

Lucine: Not too many. I really don't know how many. Of course, the Hobart school.

Jan: Can you tell us anything about the changes in the area when you were growing up here?

Lucine: Well, most of the changes I recall are about Millburn center. I remember the old hotels and I remember the trolley cars that came up from Newark through Vaux Hall to Millburn.

Jan: Was Millburn Avenue paved or was it cobblestoned or dirt? Do you know? Somebody brought that up the other night. I said I thought it was cobblestone.

Lucine: Could be you are right, though I don't remember.

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Jan : Was the Wyoming school the same size then as it is now?

Lucine: Basically it is the same size. They put on a small addition just recently, but until that time it has been basically the same.

Jan : How about changes in the neighborhood, in the people who were here. Have there been a tremendous number of.....

Lucine: Up to very recently the neighborhood stayed very much the same. People had been here for a long time, particularly Miss Hill down on the corner of Chestnut and Wyoming. She was a teacher in the school system for very very many years. And Evan.....Marshall who lived in this neighborhood for years and years. Most of the people stayed pretty much the same. But recently a younger generation has begun to move in. Older people have retired or passed away.

Jan : Your family. Your father was well-known in the town. We have Slayton Field here... Can you tell us something about your father and mother and what they did here.

Lucine: Of course. My father was very very active in civic associations. He was very civic minded and was a superintendent of the Sunday school next door. In fact I remember when the cornerstone of this new Wyoming Presbyterian Church was laid he presided at the ceremonies and he went on to become president of the Board of Education after being on the board for a number of years. He was Township recorder for twenty years. He was involved in very many things that took place in town.

Jan : He was a judge. Where did he.....

Lucine : He was a judge here in Millburn.

Jan : He also had something to do with the library?

Lucine: I'm told he was active in forming the Millburn library, but of course, then it was just the beginning of it. And he had nothing to do with the location of it, as it is today, or the move.

Jan : Can you tell us about places you played as a child, things like that, things like that which might be of interest.

Lucine: I played primarily on the tennis courts which were so convenient to our house and walking through the woods to school became quite a playground too. There was the building of huts and tree houses and one thing and another. Then, as teenagers, we rode our bicycles to the Short Hills area which was underdeveloped at that time and very wooded. We also took advantage of the Reservation.

Jan : Yes, Locust Grove used to be quite a place for school picnics.

Lucine: Yes, and church picnics and one thing and another.

Jan : I can remember that. I also remember the spring.

Lucine : Yes, ;I can too--where we all used to go and fill up bottles of water.

Jan :Where was that?

Lucine: On Glen Avenue.

Jan :And it's still there, isn't it?

Lucine: I believe it is, though I don't know whether it is used. I would hesitate to use it now.

Jan : Do you remember your first car?

Lucine: The first car we ever had was a Dodge Brothers car as I think they were known then, and I believe my father sold it eventually for \$375.

Lucine: Big deal.

Lucine: Which amused me no end because we sold a car very recently ourselves for that much money and thought we were doing very well.

Jan : This old car, was it a touring car, did it have open windows? Do you remember anything about it?

Lucine :Not too much because I was so little then. I do remember a touring car that we owned at a later date which was a Franklin, a seven passenger touring car. It was complete with the glass windshields between the driver and the back seat and two folding seats that folded up against the front seat.

Jan : Was that the car your father would let you occasionally ride on the running board?

Lucine : Yes, he would occasionally proceed at a speed of no more than five miles an hour and let us hang on while he went down the street. At that point we had the folding luggage rack that kaleidoscoped up and held the suitcases on the running board. We'd stand inside these and ride down the street.

Jan : Did you go ice skating? Was there any place around here that you went ice skating?

Lucine: Mostly we used Taylor Park when that was frozen over. We skated there and I do recall going up into Short Hills once or twice and skating on ponds that are no longer there. When we went sleighing we usually went over to Clinton Avenue and sledded down between Wyoming and Ridgewood Rd and sometimes on Mountain Avenue. But even then sledding was pretty much off limits for the children on the street. I do remember as a youngster before Wyoming Avenue was paved the Church used to have big winter picnics. They'd hire a big sled, it was horse-drawn, and off we'd go and take members of the congregation for rides.

Jan : On winter picnics?

Lucine: Winter picnics.

Jan : You were here when the Church burned down. That was in 1956-57. Do you remember anything about that particular night?

Lucine"No, except that the young people of the Church were to have a

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a party or dance that particular evening and for some reason or other after they had finished decorating the church, the fellowship part of it for the party - the church caught fire. I don't think the origin of the fire was ever determined but by the time it was noticed the church was a blazing inferno so that by the time the firemen arrived on the scene it was going at a tremendous.....

Jan : It was pretty well gone?

Lucine: It was pretty well gutted and the organ part of the church fell through to the basement. It had to be completely renovated. The Wyoming Club at that particular time was able to accomodate a lot of the possessions of the church when whatever could be was salvaged.

Jan : While it was being rebuilt, fixed up, where did you meet?

Lucine: Many offers were given to the church. It's wonderful how people responded to theThe Jewish synagogue (B'nai Israel) did and we had monetary offers from them I know, and from many other churches in the community. But primarily church services were held at Wyoming school. I remember that on the Sunday following the church fire, I attended services at the Wyoming school auditorium and even then the spirit to rebuild started and people were anxious to begin work on the church immediately.

Jan: Were there any other disasters around here? Do you recall any?

Lucine: I remember the big snow storm of 1947 which was followed a week later by a very bad ice storm. There was also a hurricane back in 1944 when I believe a great number of trees fell down. We have had our share of nature's disasters.....
.....walking to school and the Jr. and Sr. High school was all combined in the original section of what is now the Jr. High school. The 7-8-9-10-11-12th grades were in the original building over there. But as we walked to school along Glen Avenue where the houses now back to the railroad tracks there were no houses at all. Those were completely wooded areas and even as we progressed past the Millburn station there was a path that ran parallel to the tracks and the bridge was there to walk across. But the other side where the new library is being built was completely wooded and I do remember one particularly sad time when we walked through and a man had hung himself from a tree during the night. Many policemen came there to gather evidence as we went to school that day.

Jan : How big was the High School?

Lucine: I believe when I graduated there were 132 in my class. There were probably six or seven hundred in the school, from the 1st grade on.

Jan : I asked you before about the origin of the name Wyoming and you had a thought on that.

Lucine: Only in that I do think that it was because they hoped to attract people to an area that they thought was rather hilly, mountainous and rugged.

Jan : So they gave it the name.....

Lucine : ..of Wyoming because it was rather unspoiled and hilly and they hoped to attract people.

Jan : All very good. Thank you.