

Dartmouth College Oral History Project
The War Years at Dartmouth
Interview with Elizabeth Cone Gardner
By Mary Stelle Donin
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DONIN: As I told you, we're always very interested in hearing from the women who were really the first women of Dartmouth, who were on campus during the 1940s. Tell us how you came to know Clint and what the sequence was of how you met him and how you ended up being on campus.

GARDNER: Well, I had been working in New York, and I came back to Hanover. Actually our family lived in Hartford, Vermont. I went to the School for American Craftsmen. It was in Bissell Hall.

DONIN: Oh.

GARDNER: That's where the Hopkins Center was. I had come back because I had been offered a job to teach mechanical drawing to the students that were at the School for American Craftsmen. But when I got back here, having quit my job in New York, I was informed that I didn't have a job anymore.

DONIN: Oh.

GARDNER: So I decided—my family lived close. I'd go back and take some pottery. I had majored in art in college. And then the School for American Craftsmen moved to a college in Pennsylvania and became incorporated with that school. And I stayed here and opened up a pottery studio in 1946, yes. And actually Clint's mother came up to buy some Christmas presents, and I met her. And then Clint was home for a holiday and didn't have a date. And so his sister said, "Oh, I know somebody maybe you could have a blind date with." And that was me. And that's how I met him.

DONIN: Amazing. So where was your pottery studio located?

GARDNER: It was above what is now—it was where the old Ward's stood—

DONIN: Ward's Department Store?

GARDNER: Right. And the camera shop. It was up on the third floor.

DONIN: So downtown Hanover, right on Main Street.

GARDNER: Yes.

DONIN: Ah-ha.

GARDNER: And I knew a lot of students actually at that time.

DONIN: Were you teaching them?

GARDNER: No. But I met the people that were at the school, some of the Dartmouth students.

DONIN: You must have been socializing with them, weren't you?

GARDNER: Well, we had a fairly good time. [Laughter]

DONIN: I bet you did. To be a single woman in Hanover in the 1940s with an all-male....

GARDNER: It was fun.

DONIN: Yes, I bet it was. Did you get invited to a lot of social events, dances and that sort of thing?

GARDNER: Oh, yes. Mm-hmm.

DONIN: Were you here, say, for VE-Day and VJ-Day? You were already up here?

GARDNER: I was here for VJ-Day.

DONIN: Wow.

GARDNER: I was still in New York for VE-Day.

DONIN: There was dancing in the street.

GARDNER: Oh, yes, it was pretty wild. But why not?

DONIN: Wonderful pictures. Yes, exactly. Cause to celebrate.

GARDNER: Right.

DONIN: And I gather women were in short supply in all sorts of ways, including to take the female roles in the productions that they were putting on.

GARDNER: Oh, yes. Well, some of the younger wives of the professors quite often took those roles.

DONIN: Mm-hmm.

GARDNER: That was fun for them.

DONIN: And I guess there were some single women who were working at the hospital at that point, the nurses.

GARDNER: Oh, yes, there were lots of nurses. [Laughs] And various secretaries and what have you. We all had a very good time.

DONIN: I mean where would you—If you had a date with a guy on campus, where did you usually go in those days?

GARDNER: To their fraternity parties usually.

DONIN: Oh, yes.

GARDNER: And if they were.... Well, I don't think I ever met anybody who wasn't a fraternity person.

DONIN: Right.

GARDNER: There was a lot of socializing in what was the old coffee shop that was right on the street, and that was—that was really a fun area. I mean everybody got to know each other.

DONIN: Uh-huh. So that's on the corner where the Inn is now, right?

GARDNER: Right.

DONIN: Yes.

GARDNER: Now they're talking about putting the coffee shop back.

DONIN: Exactly.

GARDNER: It just amuses me so.

DONIN: [Laughs] Yes, I gather the coffee shop was quite the gathering place.

GARDNER: Oh, it was lots of fun.

DONIN: Mm-hmm. Did you ever leave Hanover and go, say, to Lebanon or White River Junction?

GARDNER: Me? Yes. I had lived here all my life.

DONIN: No, I mean on dates. Did you have dates? Were there things to do there that were—

GARDNER: No. No, there was very little to do. Actually it was—

DONIN: A little down at the heels over there, wasn't it?

GARDNER: Well, a little bit down at the heels there. But also there wasn't very much to do in Hanover either.

DONIN: No.

GARDNER: I remember about four years ago of having lunch with a group of women that were married to Dartmouth people, and they said at the luncheon: Oh, I wish we could go back to the old times. And I just looked at them, and I said, "You do *not* want to go back then." It was just quite dreary. It really was.

DONIN: Right. Well, it was wartime, too, so so much of the activities that normally were going on at the College were sort of on hold for a while.

GARDNER: Yes. It must have been very difficult to...

DONIN: So when you came back, you settled in here and opened your pottery studio.

GARDNER: Mm-hmm.

DONIN: So that's when you met Clint.

GARDNER: Yes. And we were married six months later.

DONIN: Oh, really! Nice. Did you get married here in Hanover?

GARDNER: No, I got married in Hartford in the Hartford Church.

DONIN: Mm-hmm.

GARDNER: In the Congregational Church in Hartford.

DONIN: Right. And did you have a lot of Dartmouth people involved in the wedding or was it a small gathering?

GARDNER: No, we had Dartmouth—I mean Hanover people and White River people and Hartford people; it was a mixture of professors and doctors and what have you.

DONIN: And when you met Clint, where was he living at that point? Was he in a dormitory or in the fraternity?

GARDNER: Yes, he was living in Richardson.

DONIN: Uh-huh. And then how did you figure out where were you going to set up housekeeping, the two of you after you got married?

GARDNER: Well, Wigwam had been built by that time.

DONIN: It had been built?

GARDNER: Yes. A place there.

DONIN: Right, right.

GARDNER: Did you ever see Wigwam?

DONIN: I've seen pictures of it, right.

GARDNER: It was [laughs] quite a place. We lived on the corner in Wigwam. But we lived on the northwest corner on the bottom level. And it was *so* cold. Oh!

DONIN: I gather you each had just a small kerosene heater in your apartment.

GARDNER: That's right.

DONIN: Yes.

GARDNER: During the winter, if you went in to take a shower—because that's all they had were showers, not a bathtub—you had to be sure that there wasn't ice on the floor of the shower.

DONIN: Oh! [Laughter] Unbelievable.

GARDNER: And Clint's family lived in Norwich. And when we first moved into Wigwam, they brought their dog over to see us. It was a Beagle. And they took that dog out of their car and carried it into our apartment. And carried it out of the apartment and put it back in the car so that he wouldn't have left any....

DONIN: And marks?

GARDNER: Any marks. And he showed up the next night.

DONIN: He showed up the next night?

GARDNER: He came.

DONIN: How did he find his way?

GARDNER: We have no idea. But he was there every night after that. [Laughs]

DONIN: That's amazing.

GARDNER: So we had to let him sleep on the sofa.

DONIN: Aaw....

GARDNER: It was so cold, it really was.

DONIN: Yes, he couldn't be on the floor. There probably wasn't much insulation in the place.

GARDNER: No. I think there were three feet between the floor and the ground. It was bad.

DONIN: Yes. And so were you continuing—Once you came back as a couple, married, and moved into Wigwam, were you able to continue working in your pottery studio?

- GARDNER: Oh, sure. I kept right on my business. And he went to school.
- DONIN: Right. And how did your life change then? Did you continue to socialize in the fraternities, in his fraternity?
- GARDNER: Some. Not as much. I think we socialized more with the people that were in Wigwam.
- DONIN: Other couples?
- GARDNER: Yes. And then Sachem. There were a lot of married people on that campus at that time. And you got to know and made friends with people. And we had several very good friends that lived in Wigwam. So there we were.
- DONIN: That was your social life.
- GARDNER: Right.
- DONIN: Now did you— Clint was—was Clint going to school on the GI Bill at that point?
- GARDNER: Right.
- DONIN: Yes. Did you feel that.... I mean one theme that I hear from a lot of couples who were back here after the war was that they were broke. Did you guys feel you were broke? I mean were you short on money? Or was everybody short on money?
- GARDNER: Well, everybody was short. Well, you didn't go out and spent a lot. You know back in those days people didn't worry so much about spending money as they do now. I mean this recession has shown the difference between what it was like during the Depression and also during wartime. I mean we didn't find it really that difficult. We just didn't buy things.
- DONIN: Right.
- GARDNER: But nowadays the youngsters feel that they *have* to have all these things, that it's their due to have them. And it's ridiculous.
- DONIN: Well, it's what they've been raised to believe.

GARDNER: That's how they've been raised. Their families have given them everything.

DONIN: Well, having grown up in the Depression, you all were used to this already anyway.

GARDNER: Yes, very much so. [Laughs]

DONIN: Right. So how was it on the campus—I mean did you feel welcome on the campus as a woman?

GARDNER: Oh, sure.

DONIN: Mm-hmm.

GARDNER: Dartmouth men have always loved to have women on the campus. [Laughter] Even though some didn't like them to come into their college.

DONIN: Right. And I mean did it ever occur to you to ask to be able to audit a class or anything like that?

GARDNER: Oh, a lot of the women did audit classes.

DONIN: Did they?

GARDNER: And I think—I don't know for sure, and I don't know anybody that did—but I think that some started going to school.

DONIN: Ah-ha.

GARDNER: Just one course at a time.

DONIN: Right, right.

GARDNER: Dartmouth was very generous to their married people. Well, Dartmouth has always been generous to people. I mean they're very generous now to older citizens at Kendal and what have you.

DONIN: Mm-hmm.

GARDNER: And they were then. I mean they welcomed you to their sports events. I think at that time you could swim in their pool and what have you. And they're wonderful with the high school.

DONIN: Right.

GARDNER: They're just marvelous.

DONIN: Mm-hmm.

GARDNER: I know loads of seniors in the high school that have entered Dartmouth basically.

DONIN: Taking courses, language courses and such, math courses, right.

GARDNER: And getting credit for them.

DONIN: Sure. Right. There are a good—a big part of the community here, aren't they?

GARDNER: They are a good part of the community. Dartmouth once in a while gets up on their haunches, but we won't say anything nasty.
[Laughter]

DONIN: We won't go there, as they say. So you were a married wife for how long before Clint finished? Was it a year?

GARDNER: He stayed for.... Yes, we were married in '47 in June. And we left in February of '48 to go to Paris.

DONIN: Oh, yes. That's right.

GARDNER: And then on to Germany.

DONIN: Mm-hmm. So you left behind some good friends here then, couples that you met in Wigwam and Sachem.

GARDNER: But everybody does that anyway.

DONIN: Right. And there were also married couples living in—

GARDNER: Fayerweather.

DONIN: Fayerweather.

GARDNER: Yes.

DONIN: We've got some funny pictures of these little cooktops.

GARDNER: Yes, there's a couple at Kendal that was in Fayerweather and they are lots of fun and they just loved it here.

DONIN: Yes, they had a good time. And they must have been fun to socialize with back then too. And there were lots of people having babies as well at Mary Hitchcock I guess.

GARDNER: At the Mary Hitchcock or Alice Peck Day.

DONIN: Uh-huh.

GARDNER: Yes. The couple that had our apartment in Wigwam had a baby and they didn't have any money at all. Because their baby slept in a cardboard carton on that floor.

DONIN: On the floor? It was so cold!

GARDNER: Well, I know. I couldn't imagine it. You know, I looked in and I was just horrified. Here was this little baby and her crib was on the floor.

DONIN: Oh goodness, I hope they had lots of blankets to put around her.

GARDNER: I hope so.

DONIN: But everybody made due in those days with what they had.

GARDNER: Yes, and he got through school and that was the important thing.

DONIN: Exactly. But by then some of the sort of fun traditions had returned to campus like, you know, Winter Carnival and such. So I assume....

GARDNER: We left before Winter Carnival but I had been to so many Winter Carnivals.

DONIN: I'm sure you had. So, did you ever meet President Dickey?

GARDNER: Oh, yes, I knew President Dickey.

DONIN: Did you. Uh-huh.

- GARDNER: And my father had gone to Dartmouth and my grandfather had gone.
- DONIN: Oh, my goodness!
- GARDNER: My great-grandfather had gone.
- DONIN: Oh, so there's a long legacy for you.
- GARDNER: There's a long, long legacy.
- DONIN: What was your family name before you got married?
- GARDNER: Cone. C-O-N-E. It was a family that had lived in the Hartford and Norwich area for... Well, they'd come up here from Connecticut and so they came first to the Royalton Randolph area and they went over the hill to Strafford and then down to Norwich. And then my great-grandfather started a woolen mill in Hartford and that's why we were there. So yes, I have a long history of Dartmouth.
- DONIN: And your family must have been delighted that you were marrying a Dartmouth man to continue the tradition.
- GARDNER: I'm sure they were. [Laughs]
- DONIN: Did you have any brothers that went to Dartmouth?
- GARDNER: My brother did not attend Dartmouth, but he took courses at Dartmouth eventually. But I had cousins that went to Dartmouth and uncles and what have you.
- DONIN: Oh, my goodness.
- GARDNER: Our son—our sons did not go to Dartmouth. The first boy was not admitted, and the second son, we said to him, "Do you want to go to Dartmouth?" Because he could have gone. And he said, "No, I really don't. I know the bookstore."
- DONIN: [Laughs] Now whatever became of your pottery work after you went to Paris?
- GARDNER: It's around here.
- DONIN: Uh-huh.

GARDNER: Well, we went to Europe. I closed everything up. And when we came back, we were living in New York or outside of New York. And I finally found a place where I could go back and take pottery. And then when I moved back here, I went to the League of New Hampshire Craftsmen.

DONIN: Oh, perfect.

GARDNER: And there I taught pottery and took pottery and became very active in the league.

DONIN: An active potter.

GARDNER: Yes.

DONIN: Great.

[End of Interview]