

# The Oral History Project Origins

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**Olwen Jones**

In 1973, Barbara Bloch, who had earlier done oral history interviews in New Hampshire, asked the Greenwich Historical Society and the Greenwich Library if they would be interested in helping to sponsor a project for the nation's Bicentennial in 1976. The Greenwich Oral History Project (OHP) began under the joint sponsorship of these two organizations.



*Maryanne Gjersvik*  
MRS. BARBARA BEMIS BLOCH

**Barbara B. Bloch, photographed by  
Marianne Gjersuik for The Nutmegger**

Bloch began holding training classes for interviewers, with the help of Olwen Jones. Apparently, in those early months, the Historical Society elected a new chairman who was not interested in oral history and the Project was in jeopardy. However, Nancy Reynolds, a local philanthropist, offered the new group a \$25,000 challenge grant and the Project gained momentum.

In Bloch's interview, she recalls that she turned for assistance to Nolan Lushington, then the Library Director. Lushington was asked if the Library would take on the OHP as sole

sponsor and as its Bicentennial Project, requesting the use of the Library's 501(c)(3) number to accept the grant. He accepted the proposal and later suggested—critically for the Project's development over the years—that it should publish some of its interviews. With Lushington's insights, the Project became more than an archive; the Project actually produces books that circulate in the town libraries.

The challenge grant was met with the crucial help of prominent town residents, Helen Alvord, then director of the town's Community Chest (now United Way) and of John M. Gleason, then the Chief of Police.

In 1977, after the Bicentennial celebration and after the Project had produced a number of interviews and books, the members thought about disbanding, but were hesitant to do so. At about the same time, the Friends of the Greenwich Library offered their sponsorship, which was very fortunate for the Project, because the members therefore can spend all their time on oral history, *not* on fundraising. The Project has continuously been in operation since its inception.

(The Oral History Project has interviews with its founder, Barbara B. Bloch, and Olwen M. Jones.)