

# Elizabeth Markham

*This interview on March 23, 1982 is part of an Oral History of West Islip project sponsored by the West Islip Public Library. I am Ethel Morris of the library staff and I will interview Miss Elizabeth Markham who was born in West Islip in 1902.*

*Morris: Miss Markham, when did your parents come to West Islip?*

Markham: Oh around 1900.

*Morris: And where did they come from?*

Markham: They came from Ireland.

*Morris: And why did they come to the United States?*

Markham: Well, to get work.

*Morris: To get work, things were hard in Ireland. Where were you born, were you born in a hospital?*

Markham: No.

*Morris: In a house?*

Markham: No, we didn't have a hospital at that time. We didn't have, no there was no hospital. Everybody was born home.

*Morris: Did West Islip have its own doctor?*

Markham: Well, no West Islip didn't. They was from Babylon or Bay Shore, and I think we, Dr. King...

*Morris: Dr. King, Yes. Dr. King's Hospital in Bay Shore many years...*

Markham: That's right.

*Morris: So you had to send there for the doctor. And which house where you born in?*

Markham: I was born in the little house up near the Sunrise, on Higbie Lane up near the Sunrise.

*Morris: Near Bell's Nursery.*

Markham: That's right.

*Morris: And did you move to another house?*

Markham: We moved down to near the school. The school wasn't here then. There wasn't a school when we moved there.

*Morris: Which school?*

Markham: Well there's a school there now, the Senior Citizens.

*Morris: The Higbie Lane School, which is now senior citizen.*

Markham: That's right.

*Morris: And you live next door to that?*

Markham: That's right.

*Morris: North of that?*

Markham: That's right.



*Morris: Where did your father work?*

Markham: Arnolds. Arnolds.

*Morris: The Arnold's Estate. What did he do?*

Markham: Landscaper, Landscaper, what they call landscape, like a gardener.

*Morris: How many gardeners did they have on the estate?*

Markham: They had quite a few. It was, Mr. Rhine worked there, Mr. Kasnowski not Tommy's father, but another kid. There were three.

*Morris: And what salary did he earn?*

Markham: \$40 of course that did go up.

*Morris: \$40 a month?*

Markham: That's what they started with.

*Morris: A month?*

Markham: \$40 a month.

*Morris: A month, they started with \$40 a month. And how did he get to work?*

Markham: Bicycle, bike, they all had bikes.

*Morris: How about the winter?*

Markham: As far as I know he had to either walk or had to ride the bike.

*Morris: What other servants did they have on the Arnold estate?*

Markham: They had the cook, the waitress and the chambermaid. They had three people.

*Morris: Coachmen I guess?*

Markham: Oh yeah, yeah. They always had him.

*Morris: There were many Irish families here and many Ukrainian families in those days. Which came first?*

*Who was here first?*

Markham: Oh I think the Irish was here first.

*Morris: Did the Irish and the Ukrainian families get along well?*

Markham: Well, as far as I know they didn't have any trouble. No No. No. They really you know stayed, they just socialized with their own kind. Like the Irish, they stayed with their own kind.

*Morris: And Ukrainian socialized with their kind?*

Markham: Yeah, there was no problems. No fighting or anything like that.

*Morris: Where did your family go to Church?*

Markham: St. Joe's.

*Morris: St. Joe's in Babylon?*

Markham: That's right.

*Morris: Um, how many children were in your family?*

Markham: Seven.

*Morris: Seven children? Where you the oldest, or the youngest or in the middle?*

Markham: I was like in the middle. I had a sister and brother older and then I came and then I had Christina, she died when she was four and a half.

*Morris: What did she die from?*

Markham: She, there was like, in the back on where the school is there, there was a sand hole and the man that had a big place here and they used to take papers over there and burn them. It was on a decoration day. The men had brought papers there and they had burned them, but the fire wasn't quite out and she was, she had been standing there and she went back and she saw something that attracted here and she went to get it and her little dress went on fire.

*Morris: Oh how sad. What were the chores that you had to do when you were a child?*

Markham: Oh, we had to really had to help with everything, like, especially with the washing, with the wash boiler, putting the clothes and watching the boiler.

*Morris: Your mother didn't have a washing machine, so how did she wash the clothes then?*

Markham: Well, she would wet them and put them in the boiler and we had a solution, whatever solution that they had.

*Morris: You would boil a big tub of water?*

Markham: Yeah, they would bring the clothes to a boil. Once they were brought to a boil then they were just. I don't know, they must have rinsed them somehow.

*Morris: So they'd boil the clothes on top of a stove? Cold stove?*

Markham: Yeah, for years and then like in the front room we have what they call a furnace and it had a grate on top of it. No radiators. It had a grate on top.

*Morris: Where did you get the coal?*

Markham: Oh down at the, they had coal companies.

*Morris: They had coal companies that delivered the coal. What did you do for recreation in the summer time?*

Markham: I just, I said, we went swimming and did a lot of walking.

*Morris: Where did you walk?*

Markham: We would walk to Bay Shore, to Lindenhurst.

*Morris: Oh my, a long way.*

Markham: I walk to Babylon every morning.

*Morris: For school?*

Markham: No, I mean now.

*Morris: Oh now, oh my, that's wonderful.*

Markham: I leave here about 7:30. I love to walk and even in the afternoon I walk.

*Morris: That's good. How did you get any spending money when you were a young girl?*

Markham: Well the only way we got any was picking huckleberries.

*Morris: The woods were full of huckleberries?*

Markham: Oh yeah. Picking huckleberries. There used to be wild blackberries around here too somewhere. Anything in the line of berries. And as I say with the bottles. We got money for the bottles.

*Morris: You sold the berries?*

Markham: Oh yeah.

*Morris: To whom?*

Markham: Um, we used to take them down to the Higbie Inn.

*Morris: Which is now the LaGrange?*

Markham: The LaGrange, yes. And then into the private homes, they used to buy them cause they used to have cooks and they would make pies out of them.

*Morris: The LaGrange was there when you were growing up? It was a nice restaurant?*

Markham: Yes. It's like a hotel. They always had like a restaurant, but as I said it was hotel, of course it's not a hotel now, it's just a restaurant.

*Morris: It's just a very nice restaurant. What do you remember about your school days?*

Markham: Well, you mean like the Higbie Lane?

*Morris: Yes.*

Markham: Well, we just had the one teacher and I don't know...

*Morris: What was her name?*

Markham: Mrs. Kellum.

*Morris: She was strict?*

Markham: Oh yeah she was strict. She would tell us that if we finished our own work to get our Catechism out and study it. Yeah, she wasn't Catholic, but she'd said, you Catholic people bring your Catechism and if you don't have anything to do, study your Catechism she used to tell us.

*Morris: Different today. And then you went to Babylon starting in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade?*

Markham: That's right.

*Morris: And what do you remember about that?*

Markham: Well,

*Morris: Did you find it difficult?*

Markham: Well, I did, I found it difficult, cause as I said I was a child that needed help and of course when you get in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade, they had large classes there too. They, most of the teacher didn't come from around here, they came from upstate. All the teachers that we had, commercial teacher came from upstate. In fact all of them, the art teacher, the English teacher, they all, none of them, we didn't have any teacher from around here. The all came from upstate, but that's why I had, I better get out.

*Morris: Because you were having difficulties, you weren't getting much help from the teachers?*

Markham: Well they didn't have too much time to help.

*Morris: Did you have art classes or music classes or gym?*

Markham: We had art class.

*Morris: In high school?*

Markham: Of course the only music class we had we would just sing some songs in the morning. There was no music.

*Morris: Instrumental classes?*

Markham: No No

*Morris: Did you have gym?*

Markham: Yes, we did in the assembly hall before we went to classes we had gym. You know just doing exercise.

*Morris: Just exercise?*

Markham: That's it.

*Morris: But you didn't play any games, you didn't have any basketball or baseball.*

Markham: Oh I tried basketball but that wasn't for me. A lot of people liked it. The only thing that I really every liked was I played a little golf. I like the driving and the putting. That's all I like. And of course I understand baseball, I like baseball.

*Morris: So you left high school after the second year?*

Markham: That's right.

*Morris: And then did you get a job?*

Markham: Well that's when I went into the city with a friend of mine. She had graduated from the 8<sup>th</sup> grade, but she had been working, she was working in the 5 and 10 cents store we had. So she told me that she was going in and I said Ok, so we went in so she knew this, knew of this woman, so she gave both of us a job.

*Morris: In what company was that?*

Markham: That was the Addressagraph.

*Morris: Addressagraph Company? I see.*

Markham: And then of course the New York Life needed people, needed people, cause they had the same system, the Addressagraph, so I think they sent 15, 20 girls over there to the NY Life, but some of them didn't stay..

*Morris: What did you do exactly for NY Life?*

Markham: Well, of course, for years, that's what I did, I was with the system.

*Morris: The Addressagraph system?*

Markham: That's what they had, that was their system, the Addressagraph, then it got too much for them. So then they went from the Addressagraph to the IBM. But then I had been in the company for quite some time.

*Morris: How long did you work for NY Life?*

Markham: 42 years. And they wanted the younger people. Well the IBM was much more, that you really had to have an education. Being an Addressagraph wasn't bad at all. I mean it was a machine, once you got to working on the machine you were alright. But IBM was much more...

*Morris: Complicated?*

Markham: Oh yes

*Morris: Did you ever regret that you didn't finish high school?*

Markham: No, I didn't. We had to get out to make some money. People needed money in the homes.

*Morris: Of course you probably wouldn't have gotten that job today if you hadn't graduated high school.*

Markham: Oh that's right, that's for sure. You have to have a high school diploma.

*Morris: So you commuted to NYC for 42 years? Tell me about commuting on the LIRR in the 20's and 30's?*

Markham: It was as far as I'm concerned there was no problems. Everything was, the trains were on time, they kept them nice and clean. That's about all.

*Morris: The windows, you could see out the windows?*

Markham: Oh yeah, there were no real problems; no one seemed to be upset over anything.

*Morris: Over late trains or anything like that, the way they are today.*

Markham: Oh no, everyday they stay there late. We didn't have that problem. Well they have, I guess they still have what you call a Y up here where the trains would come in and they would clean them at night and they would be all ready in the morning. I don't know, I guess they still have the Y up there, I guess, I don't know. Haven't been over there. We just go over there to the Y and get the train sometimes. Not too many times, you weren't supposed to do it. Of course if anything happened you'd be out of luck.

*Morris: So trains were, commuting was a lot different then.*

Markham: Oh yeah, I went in and every year the company sends us a ticket to come to a show, but there was, David Copperfield, West Side Story. Last year I went in, but Penn Station is so changed, you get so confused. They say don't ask people, because if they know you don't know where your're going, it's bad, a different time. And there were so many elderly women you know they'd go in, and they were hit right over the head in Penn Station.

*Morris: Never had to worry about that when you were...?*

Markham: No, we never worried about, rode of subway trains, and no, now people are afraid to ride on them. But the last time I went into the city, that was last year in May, I did finally find my way out on 8<sup>th</sup> Avenue, so all I had to do was walk up 8<sup>th</sup> Avenue to 52<sup>nd</sup> Street. I would't even take a bus.

*Morris: It was different in those days, the city was different?*

Markham: Oh yeah, you weren't afraid, that's one thing, although I do know there was some people had their, like in the summer time they'd be sitting in one of the trains and somebody would reach in and grab their pocketbook, but that didn't have too often. But today...

*Morris: Was there vandalism in West Islip when you were a young person? Today there is a lot of vandalism here.*

Markham: No, we didn't, nobody ever bothered us and any of the people that I knew, nobody every bothered. They don't do what they do now. Now they go over the lawns with the cars and breaking windows. No, they didn't. This house was built in 1938. I know now that if they are building a house they make sure that they, you know, that they board up the windows and things because if they put the windows in, they break them. But they didn't do any damage here.

*Morris: When you were younger, where there any stores to go grocery shopping, any food shopping in West Islip?*

Markham: No, not in West Islip. No, we had to go outside.

*Morris: Where did you go?*

Markham: Babylon, Babylon.

*Morris: And as a youngster did you have to go into Babylon and shop for groceries?*

Markham: As a rule, but as I say, they did have deliveries, I don't know, some of the stores would deliver.

*Morris: In those days, before you had a refrigerator, how did your mother keep the food cold?*

Markham: The old ice box. The ice man would deliver the ice.

*Morris: Big chunks?*

Markham: Yeah. Big pieces, but it in the ice box.

*Morris: How long did it last in the ice box?*

Markham: In the summer time of course it didn't last too long.

*Morris: Probably had to drain the water out?*

Markham: Oh yes, you had to, that's one thing you had to watch was the pan of water on the bottom.

*Morris: A lot easier today.*

Markham: Oh yeah.

*Morris: When you were growing up what was your favorite holiday?*

Markham: The 4<sup>th</sup> of July.

*Morris: Why?*

Markham: Well, just on account of the fire works. The used to have them, go down near the water, private estates.

*Morris: Private estates had fireworks and they would invite everyone?*

Markham: Well, we'd just go down and see them. The word would get around that they were having them and we'd go down and watch them.

*Morris: Different estates had fire works, that's interesting. Did they have parades?*

Markham: Well, it was in Babylon the parades.

*Morris: Was there a fire department in West Islip when you were growing up?*

Markham: No.

*Morris: Where was the closest one?*

Markham: Babylon.

*Morris: Babylon, oh.*

Markham: I don't really know how long that one has been up there, but I know that when I was growing up we didn't have a fire department.

*Morris: Did you have a police, any police in west Islip?*

Markham: Police protection, no, no.

*Morris: Probably didn't need it right?*

Markham: Oh, that's true.

*Morris: Well, Miss Markham I wan to thank you very much for allowing me to interview you today*