

Mapping Material Culture  
Ballard Historical Society

Oral History of Esther Crossett

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Interviewer Name: Susan Cook

Reviewer: Alison DeRiemer

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SC: —Ten o'clock. And our interviewee today is Esther Crossett, Mr. Tom Crossett.  
C-R-O-S-S-E-T-T. We are chatting in her kitchen at 2430 NW 64<sup>th</sup> St. in the Ballard district  
of Seattle.

EC: [Whispers] Ballard.

SC: Really Ballard. Right. And you have some pictures this morning to show me, to start out.

EC: I was going to show you where it all began. I thought there might be an address on here,  
but I can't see it. My granddaughter took particular pains to go down... We had to go  
way down on Leary Way. This is supposed to be 4739 Ballard Avenue.

SC: 4739. And this looks like a stone-front—

EC: Brick building.

SC: And it says "Kolstrand's Machine Shop" now.

EC: They may have refinished it since. But this was... See, I was born down there in 1904.  
So, this might have been 1903. My father had a store in the front here. There was a  
rooming house above, and we lived in the back. This is another picture of it.

SC: Oh, good. Okay.

EC: I've got it on the back. We even found the address. "4739" is on my father's... When he  
became a citizen of the United States from the old country.

SC: I see. And which country did he come from?

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EC: From Budapest, Hungary. Both my mother and father.

SC: Okay. From Budapest. And your father's name was?

EC: Karl Berner. Spelled with a "K."

SC: K-A-R-L. And the last name?

EC: B-E-R-N-E-R.

SC: Okay. And these—

EC: You can find it yourself now, if you go way down. You have to go way... See, I never went far enough.

SC: And this is on Ballard Avenue?

EC: Yes.

SC: On Ballard Avenue, at 4739 Ballard Avenue. And it was a grocery store?

EC: Yes.

SC: Okay. What do you remember of the store?

EC: I remember quite a bit. The railroad tracks were in back of us, and I can hear those trains shunting back and forth all night long. I can remember my mother cooking a lot for the store. And my father belonged to the Moose Lodge. I can remember her making great big pans of potato salad and cooking hams. She probably made bread. At the time we were still down on Ballard Avenue, there were five of us children. Besides taking care of us, she cooked a lot for the store, and waited on customers for the store. We were never allowed in the store. I guess that was just a good thing, an old country idea that children were not going to be running through the store. I can remember so many things about Ballard Avenue. They were very good friends. I remember across the street, a little ways up on Ballard Avenue, there was a barber by the name of Karlson. He had a son, Fred, and two daughters. One was Laura, and one was Alfreida. And they were our friends for many years. I remember them coming to visit my mother for many years afterwards, when they were grown-up ladies. Favoli's had this fish market up on Ballard Avenue a little ways. I can remember a wonderful European bakery where we got pumpernickel bread for probably five cents a loaf. [Laughs]

SC: Is that right.

EC: Just certain things seem to stay in my mind. Of course, I can remember starting the first grade and going through the fields, and picking somebody's strawberries on the way, and back home again. But I don't know... just open fields.

SC: Where was the school you went to? Which school, and where was it?

EC: It was... I don't know whether it was West Woodlands, or down around... there was another school that I went to, but I don't remember. Maybe it was West Woodlands School that I went to in my early years. Then we moved. We moved several times. I finished at Whittier.

SC: When you lived behind the grocery store on Ballard Avenue, you went to West Woodland. Is that right? Which school?

EC: West Woodland.

SC: And you walked to school from home?

EC: Oh, yes. I can't remember anybody taking us or bringing us home. Just wandering through the fields, I can remember. I can remember going to the Princess Theater. I was older then. I was going to the Saturday matinee for a nickel to see the Perils of Pauline, and Pearl White, and Little Miss Hart, and Bessie Love. I probably was six or more by that time.

SC: And the Princess was where?

EC: Oh, gracious. Probably... on the corner of Ballard and Market.

SC: Up in that area. Okay.

EC: Uh-huh. I know Bartell's was there at one time, on the corner of Ballard Avenue and Market. You probably wouldn't remember that. They were there for a long time. I don't know how old I was when my father sold his store on Ballard Avenue. He bought another store, and we moved up to... this is what it looks like now. But the store was down here, and we lived upstairs. This is the corner of 70<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup>.

SC: Okay. The address on the picture is 7003.

EC: Yes.

SC: 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue NW.

EC: And 70<sup>th</sup>. We lived right on the corner, so we figured that had to be the building, because it looked very much like it would be. But see, it's been modernized.

SC: And remodeled.

EC: It might even be a new building. It's the same sort of a building with a living quarters upstairs.

SC: Where was the grocery door in those days. There are two entrances now, but I suspect that's not where the doors were.

EC: Oh... it seems to me it would have been...

SC: On the corner.

EC: On the corner of this street, on 70<sup>th</sup>. Not on 7<sup>th</sup>, but on 70<sup>th</sup>. If we had a few pennies, we could go in the store and spend our pennies, but we were not allowed in the store. I can remember my mother making delicious ice cream to sell in the store.

SC: Oh, is that right?

EC: Custard ice cream. We would all help crank. No electric ice cream maker. It was...

SC: And there were five of you kids?

EC: Yes. When my folks came from the old country, they went to Long Island Sound, and they had two children, but evidently because of no refrigeration and the heat, they lost them. So, they moved to Philadelphia. My older sister and brother were born in Philadelphia. That was 1900 and 1902. So, they must have come to Ballard right after my sister was born. That probably would have been 1902, 1903, because I was born here in 1904. I remember the AYP Exposition in 1909. My older brother and sister were in school. My younger brother and sister were probably too small, so I got to go to the fair. I can remember the forestry building. That's the only thing that stands out in my mind. And the [unintelligible] with their grass skirts and their masks, doing their dancing. That was 1909. And I remember the potlaches that we used to have in Seattle when I was growing up. It was like Seafair and things like now, but it was different. It was parades. They had a lot of entertainment, mostly on the streets, on 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue. I can remember Angeline\* with her Indian baskets.

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\*NOTE: Princess Angeline of the Duwamish Tribe (eldest daughter of Chief Seattle) had passed away in 1896, but perhaps this was a relative?  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Princess\\_Angeline](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Princess_Angeline)

SC: Is that right. Did she take part in the celebration, or she was simply around?

EC: No, she'd mostly be on the streets with her baskets. Of course, as I got to be a little bit older, even ten or twelve, there was the Virginia Five we would take and go on little picnics across the Sound as a group. But that was just when I was growing up. I can remember the library was built the very year I was born. So, I never forget the Carnegie Public Library.

SC: Here in Ballard.

EC: It was built in 1904. 20<sup>th</sup> Avenue was our main street. Everything west of there was not settled very much until they started building the Locks. That was really something, when they started building the Locks.

SC: You said 20<sup>th</sup> was the main street. What kind of things were along 20<sup>th</sup>?

EC: Well, it was the main thoroughfare with traffic. [There was] 24<sup>th</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup>, but [20<sup>th</sup>] had the heaviest traffic. There was a shuttle bus, it seems to me, that went, it seems to me, across 85<sup>th</sup> Street, down 15<sup>th</sup>, and it seemed to jog on 65<sup>th</sup> or 67<sup>th</sup> and went down 20<sup>th</sup> to 47<sup>th</sup>, and then we had to transfer to another streetcar to go into the city. My husband's folks had to walk to Fremont and take the train to go to the city.

SC: Is that right.

EC: Yes. I can remember that shuttle bus. We took that a lot to get to the city. And it would go up to Greenwood, and then you'd get on another streetcar... I suppose it would be like the Phinney Streetcar.

SC: The one on 20<sup>th</sup>, was it on tracks?

EC: Yeah.

SC: Was it electrified, or was it pulled by horses?

EC: No. I came later. [Laughs]

SC: Well, I wasn't sure when they actually electrified those streetcars.

EC: Yeah. I'm sure they must have gone by trolley. There was a track right in front of our... Because we moved up to 15<sup>th</sup>. When I went to Whittier School, we moved up to 15<sup>th</sup> and 83<sup>rd</sup>. That was all woods. We picked blackberries, and gathered bark. That was a

wonderful place to grow up.

SC: What did you gather bark for?

EC: To put in the stove.

SC: Okay. So, as kindling, then?

EC: Oh, no. it was big hunks of bark that would fall off the tree. It was just like a heater, you know. We had a cookstove, and then we had a heater. Even when I was first married, that's what we had. We didn't have electric stoves. That's why life was so simple then. The kids today have to have everything. It's just expected. We picked blackberries and gathered bark, and had bonfires, and roasted potatoes. When my older sister... My mother worked quite a bit, because there were many depressions when I was growing up. My father couldn't get work. He was a furrier by trade. He learned it in the old country. When he couldn't get... He gave up the grocery business and went back to his fur work. This was the interim. When he couldn't get work, he went out and did cooking. My older sister had to become almost like a second mother. She would make biscuits, and we would have biscuits and potatoes in the fire. It was just a good way for kids to grow up. I remember all those things. There was a big orchard on 15<sup>th</sup>. They had a big asparagus field. It was just a good, happy place to be. Pick asparagus and the fruit for the taking.

SC: These were in the area near where you were, up by 83<sup>rd</sup>?

EC: Yeah. In the area between 83<sup>rd</sup> and 80<sup>th</sup>. Or 85<sup>th</sup>. Probably 83<sup>rd</sup> and 85<sup>th</sup>. In fact, my daughter has her husband's cousins that rented a little house up in the same area where this orchard and asparagus was. The little house is an old house, and the man that rented it to them has a memory of that, too. So, it's something that... And it's not too far from Whittier School. I went to Whittier School and I graduated from the eighth grade. There weren't junior high schools then. When the Locks was first built, or opened for the public, we could go in with our car.

SC: You could?

EC: Yes. We could park our car.

SC: Right alongside of the water there?

EC: Yeah. The streets were paved up inside the Locks where you... Up at the top, where you have the view. I imagine it got so that it wasn't possible. There would be so many cars, they wouldn't be able to go in.

SC: Yeah.

EC: This was when it first opened. It was a delightful place to roll down the hills. After I got married and we had children, we'd go down around... it was before you'd get to Ray's Boathouse. And we'd go swimming with the children in the Canal. But that's not possible now.

SC: Is that the area that was known as Prospect Beach, or Ballard Beach? What name did you know it by?

EC: Well, it would be... You know, when you come around the Locks, drive around, and then you swing in here to go around Shilshole. Not Shilshole. Is that Shilshole? The main, where you go to Ray's and Golden Gardens. It's right in there where they built the apartments. That was where we'd go swimming.

SC: Okay. And you can't do that anymore.

EC: No. Of course, we used to walk to North Beach after we moved up to 15<sup>th</sup>. We would walk to North Beach. We'd just eat on a stump. I can remember going there with my mother and family, to North Beach.

SC: What was it like then, North Beach? What was that area like?

EC: Oh, it was just lovely. You didn't have a stove. You ate on a stump. You took a cold lunch. I was trying to tell my granddaughter. We would take cold chicken, like people do now, but my mother would have veal cutlets. She would bread them, and fry them, and it would just be like a piece of chicken. I suppose veal was very cheap then. We would have a great big crock, a big platter of veal cutlets along with the potato salad, and other things. But we would walk. There wasn't any other way to get there. We had to walk. And we didn't think anything of it.

SC: Were there roads? How far did the roads go, and when did you start [unintelligible]?

EC: Well, there weren't any highways, or anything. It seems to me there were some steps that we took to go down to Golden Gardens. When we walked to North Beach, we went way up north of 85<sup>th</sup> and got around that way.

SC: I see.

EC: It was probably further than Golden Gardens. But you knew about Carkeek Park.

SC: Tell me a little bit about Carkeek Park.

EC: Well, I wrote a story. [Laughs] But it would probably take me longer to find it than...

SC: Did you go up that way very often?

EC: I imagine we did. This one particular time, I can remember... Maybe I was old enough to remember. We were still down on Ballard Avenue in the grocery store. I can remember my father saying, "Okay, I'm going to hitch up..." We had a horse and wagon to deliver the groceries. This was our only way of delivering groceries. This would be on a Sunday. Evidently, he must have said something to my mother. It was early on Sunday morning. We all got into the wagon. My mother had this great big lunch basket. I don't know how far from Ballard Avenue to Carkeek Park it must have been. It must have been four or five miles. Six? I don't know. We try to figure out how many miles it would be from Ballard on the rough roads. It took a couple, three hours to get there. This couple that had the brickyards were some old country Czechoslovakian people that my mother knew and my father knew, maybe because they were from the old country. They were like my own uncle and aunt and cousins. It was just a grand and glorious day. It probably was in the summertime. Carkeek Park was just beautiful then. The creek ran down there, and there were forget-me-nots and watercress. My mother would bring this big basket of food. They were old country people, and food was it. Everything. They had everything. They had a large family, too. Lena was my age. We would stay all day. They had a boardinghouse, and cabins for the men that made the bricks. We tried to figure where they had gotten the clay. They must have gotten the clay from the bank, because they couldn't have shipped it in, anyway. They must have gotten the clay from the banks. I don't know how long they were there. But we just had a lovely day. Of course, we had to go home before dark. It was dark in the woods. At that time, you didn't have any lights. I called Lena Oravetz Taylor. She is the only surviving one of her big family. She is still alive. She is my age. I just had the urge to call her to see if she was still alive. She was so glad I called, and we had the nicest conversation. She said, "Esther, I was born there at the brickyards."

SC: Is that right.

EC: Yes. She said, "You know, when we wanted to go into the city, we had to go down to the railroad track and put up a white flag so the train would stop for us to take us into the city."

SC: Is that right.

EC: I was so glad that I talked to her, because who knows how long either one of us are going to last.



SC: That's great. do you think she would be willing to chat more about the brickyard if someone were to contact her?

EC: I don't know if she'd have much more to say. I might call her one time and find out. She might not have much more to say. I told her what I had written. Probably as much... Her family, when they got through making... the clay played out and they finished at the brickyards, and they went on up to Beacon Hill, and they had the boarding house for men the same way, and they built the reservoir up there. There's a reservoir on Beacon Hill. So, they did that, her whole family. We always had such a wonderful experience. When they got through with the reservoir, they bought acreage out by Lake Tapps. They cleared it and put up charcoal kilns. They started making charcoal. This was the first charcoal that was made anyplace except, seems to me on the East Coast. Whether they made briquets or not... but this was charcoal for the hotels and restaurants. It was the first charcoal that anyone... I think they had two or three kilns. My brother and I would go out every summer. My brother would go out and help sack the charcoal and sew up the sacks. After we got married, my husband had the privilege of getting to know these people. She would cook a great big turkey, and have us out for a wonderful day of food. Those are things that you never forget.

SC: That's great. That's great.

EC: So many things come into my mind after I sit down and write. Then I can think of so many things I have forgotten. What I try to do is write things down after I have forgotten, and I turn it into a story.

SC: Good.

EC: Yeah, I can't... There was an oil well pumping away for a long time.

SC: Tell me what you remember about that. It's kind of a mystery.

EC: We used to go down to Ballard to get the ferry. When we first got some property across the Sound, we would go from Ballard across. I don't know how long that pump was going. Where the money came to work it, I don't know. It was down around the Locks.

SC: Close to the Locks?

EC: Yeah.

SC: Uphill from it?

EC: Yeah. Around 32<sup>nd</sup>, someplace up the hill. But why they worked it... It was working for a long time.

SC: But it was an oil pump? It wasn't water?

EC: Oh, no. it was an oil pump.

SC: Huh. And you remember it from when the ferries were there, so—

EC: Yeah. We had a ferry going from Ballard to Suquamish. Why they took it off, I don't know. It was quite a long trek.

SC: Yeah. I bet it was.

EC: Still, they go from Seattle a long ways. But maybe... I don't know why they took it off.

SC: Do you think people were kind of disappointed when they took that off?

EC: Yeah, we were, because it wasn't very far. We could go... We had bought a piece of property in 1932, and it was easy... Otherwise, you had to go to Kingston. I don't think we could get there any other way besides Kingston. Now you could go to Winslow. Yeah. I've got a picture here someplace. I've got so many books. Everybody brings me books and tablets. They're probably in some other books. I got the delphinium seeds from the gardener at the Locks, and raised the most beautiful delphiniums. My husband, as a boy, used to go swimming in the Canal. His mother had a cow that they pastured out in the field and brought home at night. I remember what a treat it was to go to the Public Market, and go to Manning's.

SC: Where was this?

EC: This was about 1916.

SC: Where was Manning's? I've seen a picture of it.

EC: Well, they had it about in the middle of the Public Market. They had coffee and tea.

SC: So, this is down in Pike Place.

EC: In the Pike Place Public Market. You could pick out what you wanted, or go upstairs and take... All the Scandinavians loved it, because you could get the best coffee, and go upstairs or downstairs and drink and pick up a coffee cake. I worked at Rhodes Department Store, and we would take our lunch and just get what we wanted. You had

the whole Sound spread out there before you on 1<sup>st</sup> Avenue.

SC: Oh, beautiful.

EC: It was right in the Pike Place Market. They had it for years and years and years.

SC: That's great.

EC: I'll never forget, they made a kippered salmon sandwich. It was just out of this world.

SC: Let's see... I just wanted to ask you another question about the oil well. Do you know when it started up? You don't know whose it was.

EC: No. I never knew who. No one else knows. In my writing class, one other man remembered the oil well, but nobody seems to know anything about it.

SC: About when it started or when it stopped.

EC: You might do a little research. [Laughs]

SC: Okay. It sounds like a good idea.

EC: I don't know who would have... Somebody might have an idea. There might be something. Of course, my life wasn't very long on Ballard Avenue. Of course, I grew up in Ballard, so I know the growth of Ballard. I can remember all the stores. Fraser Patterson, MacDougal, Southwick, Rhodes, Frederick & Nelson. They were all down on 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue.

SC: Down in Seattle.

EC: Yeah. All the changes. The Liberty Theater... And of course, I was growing up, too. You don't stay the same age. I can remember we had a streetcar strike.

[TAPE CUTS OUT]

SC: That was the telephone, but we're back again, talking about strudel party.

EC: Each one of us was given a recipe, and we each made our own dough. Then each one got the chance to roll it out and stretch it. My mother had a round table. You put a great big tablecloth on there, and flour. You pull it and stretch it until it covers the table, and it's paper-thin. And then you butter it with melted butter and a brush. Then you chop apples, and put it on one side with some raisins and some crushed cornflakes and a little cinnamon and sugar. You can use cherries. You can make cottage cheese. You can make

cabbage. You roll it up.

SC: One great big one?

EC: One great big one.

SC: Is that right.

EC: Of course, you can make smaller ones if you want to. You brush it with melted butter as it's baking. Then you sprinkle powdered sugar on it. Haven't you ever had strudel?

SC: I've had strudel, but the idea of making it with a group of ladies together, all doing one huge one... You break it into separate pieces and bake it separately? Is that how it works?

EC: No, you just wind it around like a snake.

SC: Oh, I see. So, you coil it.

EC: You coil it. Some people make smaller ones. They're easier to handle. Hopefully the juice won't run out. It takes dexterity and know-how. It's funny that the ones that know the least about it have the most success.

SC: Is that right?

EC: Yes. My daughter-in-law hadn't made it ever before, and hers turned out just beautifully. I think it's the patience. And you can't have any rings on. You have to do it with the back of your hands. You never really know until you've tried it, what it's like. That is one thing. But other than sauerkraut, and meatballs, and Hungarian goulash, my mother used to make. She was a wonderful cook. Sometimes I wonder how she ever became a wonderful cook, because whether she even knew the English language when she came here... She was only 16 or 18 when she came here.

SC: Did she learn English fluently?

EC: Yes. Strange. She never even went to school, or anything.

SC: Is that right. Sounds like you had a good growing up. We're coming close to the end of this tape, and I wanted to ask about the spelling of some of the names we've spoken of before the tape stops. The Favoli family— do you know the spelling of the last name? it starts with an F.

EC: I'd have to play around with a pencil.

SC: Okay.

EC: Let me just...

SC: Also, Lena Taylor. Her maiden name was what? The family that had the brickyard. Okay, The Favoli family is F-A-V-O-L-I, and the brickyard family, the last name is O-R-A-V-E-T-Z, and the lady's name is Lena Oravetz.

EC: Oravetz.

SC: Oravetz-Taylor. Okay. Good. It's important for the transcription that we have the spelling on these names. Okay. Well, thank you very much. We can continue to chat if I can change tapes, or we can stop and continue at another time if there are more things that you think of or more questions that I have. Okay? Let me stop this tape now.

END OF PART ONE

PART TWO

SC: We're still chatting with Esther Crossett.