

**Myrtle Odlum Oral History Interview, August 2, 2001**  
**Administrative Information**

**Narrator:** Myrtle Odlum

**Interviewer:** Elaine Serdensky

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**Biographical Note and Abstract**

Myrtle Odlum (1912 ó 2007) was born on Main Street and lived her entire life at 347 Main Street. She was the daughter of James H. Reardon and Ellen òNellieö (Grosch) Reardon, and the widow of Harry James Odlum. She graduated from East Hartford High School in 1929 and attended Morse Business College. She worked for the State of Connecticut Highway Department, Travelers Insurance Company, and Pratt & Whitney Aircraft. Active in the Democratic Party, Myrtle served as Tax Collector for the Town of South Windsor; she was also President of the Democratic Womenø Club and a delegate to the National Convention, which selected John F. Kennedy as their candidate for president. Myrtle and her husband attended JFKø inaugural ball.

Throughout her life, Myrtle was a great supporter of her church, St. Francis of Assisi. She also had a passion for history which led her to become active I the South Windsor Historical Society, the South Windsor Historical Commission and the State of Connecticut Historical Commission. Myrtle served as the first president of the Friends of Wood Memorial Library and was a volunteer there for many years.

In this interview, Myrtle (aged 89 at the time) recalls growing up on a farm on 347 Main Street in South Windsor, and helping her father with farm chores and the tobacco crop and sheds. She remembers joining the Democratic Party where she met her husband, Harry, and remaining active in politics throughout her life. She reflects on how politics ó and South Windsor - have changed over the years.

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Odlumø daughter, Barbara Woods, signed a release for this interview after Odlumø death. Users of these materials are advised to determine the copyright status of any document from which they wish to publish.

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**Transcript of Oral History Interview**

This transcript was made from an audio recording that can be found in the archives at the Wood Memorial Library. Transcripts were edited for clarity and were approved, sometimes with additional edits, by the narrator. If researchers have any concerns about accuracy, they are encouraged to visit the Library and consult the draft transcripts and recordings.

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**Myrtle Odlum**  
**Oral History Interview**  
**Interviewed by Elaine Serdensky**  
**August 2, 2001**

SERDENSKY: This is an interview with Myrtle Odlum on Main Street. [My name is Elaine Serdensky and I am the interviewer.] How did you happen to come to South Windsor, Myrtle?

ODLUM: I was always here.

SERDENSKY: You were born here?

ODLUM: I was born in South Windsor. In fact, I've lived in this house [347 Main Street] since a very small girl a young girl.

SERDENSKY: When you married, did you move here?

ODLUM: Yeah.

SERDENSKY: He moved in with you?

ODLUM: Yeah, we had lost my father [James H. Reardon], and my mother [Ellen ðNellieö Grosch Reardon] had been alone, so that weö we were married in East Hartford. Of course, that was where we went to church at that time. Then we made arrangements upstairs, and moved in with my mother. We didn't want to leave my mother alone in this big house.

SERDENSKY: Tell me more about your life.

ODLUM: Of course, I've lived right here most of life, except for a few years. Really, at that time, we had a farm that was practically self-sustaining. We had a horse and carriage barn with 3 horses. We had a cow barn with 2 cows. We had a chicken coop with chickens and a pig pen with pigs, also a corn crib. We had a few fruit trees and a large garden. My father raised tobacco, at that timeö back thenö we had three sheds. Later we had more. We also had an ice shed where the garage is now. I can remember going up to Bancroft pond to cut ice.

SERDENSKY: How did you cut it? Did you have a specialö ?

ODLUM: Yeah, we had a special ice saw. It was long. How I know that isö oh, and we

also had a water tower.

SERDENSKY: When did you start losing your eyesight, Myrtle?

ODLUM: We always had a hired man that lived in to milk the cows and to care for and feed the horses. Going back to my father raising the tobacco, my job was to shut the shutters on the sheds. Often you might be up the street, and you would have to run all the way home and down to the shed to shut the shutters.

SERDENSKY: When did you get interested in politics?

ODLUM: As soon as you could get into them. I think it was 18 you could join a party. I joined the Democratic party.

SERDENSKY: Was your husband [Harry James Odlum] interested too?

ODLUM: Yes.

SERDENSKY: Tell me about it.

ODLUM: Of course, I had joined before I married him. I didn't marry him until I was 28. We were married down in St. Mary's, because before St. Francis of Assisi church was built in 1941, we went to St. Mary's in East Hartford.

SERDENSKY: When was the church built?

ODLUM: **(06:47)** St. Francis of Assisiô 1941.

SERDENSKY: Tell me a little bit about Main Street and what the people were like.

ODLUM: Well, we always said that they were very likeable. Most were tobacco growers, as my father was.

SERDENSKY: Where did you shop?

ODLUM: We shopped in East Hartford, and I think there was a poultry man that came once a week, I think.

SERDENSKY: Did you sell eggs or chickens?

ODLUM: No.

SERDENSKY: Just for yourself you had the farmô just for your own use?

ODLUM: Right.

SERDENSKY: Letø go back to politics. Tell me a little bit about it.

ODLUM: **(07:58)** Well, I was always interested in the Democratic Party, because I always felt that they were forô they are merely working class of people, and that they do more for the working class of people. Of course, my husband becameô of course, this is later on, after we were marriedô my husband became Democratic chairman.

SERDENSKY: How active were you?

ODLUM: I was very active. In fact, I was head of the Democratic club one year. Then I did become state senate committee woman. I was very active. I helped them a lot. I used to make up the file for the Democrats.

SERDENSKY: Did you do the mailings? I hear you were active with the library [Wood Memorial Library] too? Tell me about that.

ODLUM: Oh, I was very active after we got a library. In fact, I was one of the first presidents of the Friends of the [Wood Memorial] Library. Bunny Shepard and myself were joint presidents. We were the first two presidents. I used to go twice a week. I was very active. I did the index file for the library.

SERDENSKY: When did you stop?

ODLUM: I stopped when my vision became bad.

SERDENSKY: How long have you had trouble with your eyes?

ODLUM: Probably 8 or 10 years ago.

SERDENSKY: It must be very difficult for you?

ODLUM: Well, like life, you have to adjust to a lot of things. I am very fortunate that I was able to afford the machine, otherwise I wouldn't be able to pick up a letter and read it. But I can take it to my machine and read it.

SERDENSKY: What do you do now for hobbies?

ODLUM: Well, I still read. I read the paper, and I read the Bible. A certain amount of

thatô of course, I canô read like I used to, because youôre slower reading. Then your eyes get tired. Then I look at TV quite a bitô current events and politics. I still like to know what is going on in politics, even though Iôam not able to be as active in politics.

SERDENSKY: Tell me how politics has changed? Did the media change how we feel about politics, because everything comes out now, where they used to hide?

ODLUM: (12:04) I think that the media exaggerates the pointô keeps it up too much.

SERDENSKY: Do you have children?

ODLUM: Yeah, I had one child, Barbara [Woods], and one grandchild, Katie [Woods].

SERDENSKY: Are they interested in politics?

ODLUM: Not to the extent that I was and that Harry was.

SERDENSKY: When did Harry die?

ODLUM: Oh, Harry died in 1983. We had been married 43 years.

SERDENSKY: Did your daughter live here, so that you werenô alone?

ODLUM: She didnô live here then. She came backô well, she did come back after he died. She came back when he became sick. He became quite sick before he died, and she came back then, and that was when we built the four-room apartment.

SERDENSKY: What else can you tell me about South Windsor?

ODLUM: Well, I have always liked South Windsor, because Iôve always lived here, so I suppose I donô know the other places that much, but I have always liked South Windsor and thought it was a good place to live.

SERDENSKY: Have you traveled very much?

ODLUM: A certain amount, but then, of course, when he became sickly, we werenô able to travel that much. We did a certain amount of traveling.

SERDENSKY: How has Main Street changed?

ODLUM: (14:22) Well, Main Street is mostly all houses now, where it used to be

farms. I don't know if there is any tobacco farm left on Main Street right nowô located right on Main Street.

SERDENSKY: Where did you sell your tobacco? Who bought the tobacco?

ODLUM: Well different people would buy it. One buyer that I remember was Atkins and Dodkins [Adler and Dobkin].

SERDENSKY: Did they make cigars here in South Windsor? Did they have a factory?

ODLUM: Well, there was something up by [unclear]. I think there was, but I don't know whether you'd call it a factory, but I think they did make cigars.

SERDENSKY: Did you ever work in the tobacco fields?

ODLUM: I worked there some. Sometimes if too manyô what they callô handlersô if they hadn't come, I would be picked up, but it was very seldom. When I did work, I was the only girl. It was men and boys were hired from outside.

SERDENSKY: Were they natives or were theyô

ODLUM: Not as a rule, no.

SERDENSKY: Where did they come from?

ODLUM: They would come from Hartford and East Hartford.

SERDENSKY: Did they stay here in the farm?

ODLUM: No.

SERDENSKY: Did you go after them or pick them up? When did your father?

ODLUM: I don't believe so. I think they got here on their own. I used to go to the library two days a week, and the library was the basement of the Town Hall here on Main Street, at that time. The Town Hall was on Main Street back then. It has since then been demolished.

SERDENSKY: Did you work at all outside of the house?

ODLUM: Oh, yeah, my early married days I worked at Travelers [Insurance Company]. Then I also worked at Pratt & Whitney [Aircraft].

SERDENSKY: What did you do? What was your job?

ODLUM: **(17:40)** At Pratt & Whitney I was a keypunch operator. Then at Travelers I worked in the bookkeeping department.

SERDENSKY: What did you do for recreation?

ODLUM: Well, I suppose the same things that most people doô go to dances and go to movies.

SERDENSKY: Were the dances here in South Windsor?

ODLUM: No.

SERDENSKY: How about the movies? Was there a movie theatre?

ODLUM: No, there were no movies either.

SERDENSKY: No department store?

ODLUM: Uh-hunh (negative).

SERDENSKY: Did you go in to Hartford often?

ODLUM: Oh, yes, we went into Hartford very often. In fact, the bus service was wonderful back then. Here where I live, in those days they called it Station 31. The bus came to Station 31, and it came every half hour to Station 31, and it would go once an hour up to theô as we called itô up to the hill.

SERDENSKY: How did you get to the dances?

ODLUM: Well, I was around when people had cars and things, and weôd get to the dances.

SERDENSKY: What did you do as a child? Where did you go to school?

ODLUM: **(19:44)** I went to Union School, and then, of course, then when it came time for high school, we didnô have a high school, and the children went to different places. I went to East Hartford High. Some went to Rockville [High School].

SERDENSKY: What did you do for recreationô playgrounds, swimmingô any of that?



ODLUM: Of course, weôd go to the beach and picnics and so forth. Well, the place is cool, and often it was a place to meet. Often we would have big gatherings right here.

SERDENSKY: Did you furnish all of the food, or did everybody help?

ODLUM: There was a certain amount of help.

SERDENSKY: Was it friends or was it people that worked for you? You said you had big crowds?

ODLUM: Oh, it was friends and relatives.

SERDENSKY: Do you have many relatives here now?

ODLUM: No. In fact, Iôam the last one on both sides of the family thatô left right now. I have nieces and nephews, but I am the only one from the old generation. We bought a cottage down at Lake Hayward [East Haddam] to get away from the farm. Thatô how active we were. We were very active. I donô knowô I think when you tell it, you just condense it down. You donôô

SERDENSKY: Go into detail a little more.

ODLUM: **(22:30)** That was the reason we bought the cottageô to get away from the farm.

SERDENSKY: Politicians?

ODLUM: Well, of course, Harry was chairman at that time, and of course, the farm was very busy. Then when he resigned, they wanted me to take it over, but we thought it would be the same thing. The phone would still be always ringing.

SERDENSKY: Did you get out of politics entirely?

ODLUM: No, I never get out of politics. Even now Iôam not really out of politics. I reallyô Iôam still very interested in anything that goes on. I might not get to everything like I used to, but Iôam still very interested.

SERDENSKY: Are the politicians any different now than they were?

ODLUM: Well, I suppose you always think that they were in those days. I hope they

were.

SERDENSKY: I think money corrupts, when you get too much money. I see you have a doll collection. Tell me about that.

ODLUM: Well, that's mostly Barbara's idea, that she decided to - she kept giving me dolls, so I thought, well, I might as well have a case and put them in it. I still have dolls that I haven't got room to show.

SERDENSKY: How old is the oldest one?

ODLUM: I really don't know.

SERDENSKY: How many do you have?

ODLUM: I don't know.

SERDENSKY: Absolutely, you don't know?

ODLUM: I don't know.

SERDENSKY: Anything else you'd like to add?

[Tape ends 24:56]

## INDEX

### A

Adler & Dobkin (cigar wrapper business)

### B

Bancroft Pond

### D

Democratic Party

### E

East Hartford High School

### F

Friends of Wood Memorial Library

### L

Lake Hayward, East Haddam, CT

### O

Odlum, Harry James

Old Town Hall, South Windsor

### P

Pratt & Whitney Aircraft

### R

Reardon, Ellen ôNellieö Grosch

Reardon, James H.

Rockville High School

### S

St. Maryø Church, East Hartford, CT

St. Francis of Assisi Church, South

Windsor, CT

Shepard, Bunny

Station 31

### T

Travelers Insurance Company

### U

Union School

### W

Wood Memorial Library

Woods, Barbara

Woods, Katie