Isaac Crawford: This is Isaac Crawford, at the home of Arnold and Anita Barclay, to interview them for the oral history, family background, for African-Americans in the Berkshires. The Invisible Community, as it’s called.

Hello, Anita.

Anita Barclay: Hi Isaac.

Isaac Crawford: How are you?

Anita Barclay: Fine, thank you.

Isaac Crawford: We’ll start with a few questions. Who were your parents and where were they born?

Anita Barclay: My parents were William and Alice Gross, and they were born—both of them were born in Rhode Island. My father in Providence, my mother in Newport.

Isaac Crawford: Have they ever lived in Massachusetts?

Anita Barclay: No, they’ve never.

Isaac Crawford: When did you come to the Berkshires?

Anita Barclay: In 1947, June.

Isaac Crawford: Do you remember your grandparents also?

Anita Barclay: Oh, yes.

Isaac Crawford: They were born?

Anita Barclay: My grandmother was born on the high seas, under the British flag, because her mother and father—her father was a ship’s pilot. And her mother and her—my great-grandparents, that is—in those days, sailors could take wives aboard ship with them sometimes. So, consequently, my great-grandmother
sailed with her husband around the world twice. Which is why my grandmother was born on the high seas. But her home was Bermuda. Her husband was born in Georgia. He was of Indian and black ancestry.

My father’s parents—my father, as I said before, was born in Providence. His parents were born in Virginia. No, sorry, one was in Virginia, the other one was in Maryland. My grandfather came to—that would be, my great-grandparents brought my grandfather to Rhode Island when he was about 3-years old.

What brought you to the Berkshires?

My husband got a job at General Electric.

That’s a good reason.

Prior to that, my only knowledge of the Berkshires was about Tanglewood.

And when he told me he was going to be working in Pittsfield, I had to go look on a map and find out where Pittsfield was.

So, you’ve been here fifty years.

Fifty years.

Do you have any brothers or sisters?

Yes, I do.

Do you have their names?

Oh, yes. I had four brothers. One is deceased, my oldest brother. The other three are still living. And I have a sister. One lives in Massachusetts. The rest of them are still in Rhode Island.

So they never lived, any of them, lived in this area?

No, they never lived in the Berkshires. Oh, pardon me, one did. The brother next to me, next youngest to me, Kenneth, lived here for about, two years, was it? Two or three years. You may remember him?

Kenneth?

Kenneth [and Sis? 0:04:08].

Oh, yeah. He used to live on [Northrup? 0:04:13] Street? Oh, yes, yes, I remember him. So what happened to him?
Anita Barclay: Well, he’s still living in Methuen. He bought a house in Methuen after he left here. His wife died.

Isaac Crawford: Oh, she did.

Anita Barclay: Yeah. She had multiple sclerosis. She died about three or four years ago. Longer than that?

Isaac Crawford: You have children?

Anita Barclay: Yes, I have three children.

Isaac Crawford: Their names?

0:05:00

Anita Barclay: Elizabeth, the oldest, Arnold Jr., and George.

Isaac Crawford: Were they all born here?

Anita Barclay: They were all born in Pittsfield.

Isaac Crawford: Any church affiliation?

Anita Barclay: Yes, St. Stephen’s.

Isaac Crawford: St. Stephen’s in Pittsfield.

Anita Barclay: Right.

Isaac Crawford: Do you have any particular memories of church gatherings, church reunions, revivals, and so forth?

Anita Barclay: None especially. I used to be quite active in the church. I was the third woman to be elected to the vestry, which is the governing body of the church. Rather like the board of deacons in the Baptist Church. I’m still active slightly. I’m still on the altar guild. I think I’m the longest active member on the altar guild now.

0:06:04

Isaac Crawford: Are you a member of any civic or community organizations?

Anita Barclay: Not anymore. I used to be active in campfire grills here in Dalton. And, of course, carting the kids back and forth to the various things—Boy Scouts, and all that sort of thing, choir practice. But no, I’m not active anymore.

Isaac Crawford: Where did you go to school?

Anita Barclay: In Rhode Island. Yeah.
Isaac Crawford: How far?

Anita Barclay: I graduated from high school, and then I took some courses up at the Rhode Island School of Design. Never was able to do anything with them, though.

Isaac Crawford: So you have any especially fond memories of your schooling experiences?

Anita Barclay: Well, my high school, yes, I do have fond memories of my high school. It was easy for me, because I was always in the upper part of the class. And I guess I was an anomaly in that sense, because it was a white high school.

Isaac Crawford: They didn’t tell you home ec, huh?

Anita Barclay: No, no, no, no.

Isaac Crawford: They did in the Berkshires.

Anita Barclay: Right.

Isaac Crawford: Have you been employed? Any occupations that you’ve been involved in?

Anita Barclay: Yeah, after my children went to college, I went to work at Crane & Co.

Isaac Crawford: In what capacity?

Anita Barclay: I did bordering.

Isaac Crawford: I don’t know what bordering is.

Anita Barclay: Oh, well, you know the—

Isaac Crawford: Oh, you mean on the stationery.

Anita Barclay: —right, right.

Isaac Crawford: I was thinking about flower borders or something.

Anita Barclay: Oh, no. Painting the borders around the stationery.

Isaac Crawford: How did you feel about that type of work?

Anita Barclay: I was looking for a job that paid well, so I could help out with college expenses. Because we had three children in college at the same time. Prior to my daughter’s going away to college,
we had a son in prep school for two years. So there was always at least two children away. And at one point, all three of them. And obviously, one paycheck wasn’t going to take care of all of that.

Isaac Crawford: We [0:08:51] have that experience.

Anita Barclay: Absolutely.

Isaac Crawford: Going back to childhood, do you remember what kinds of games you played as a child?

0:09:02

Anita Barclay: All the games that little girls play. Hopscotch, dolls. I used to love to sew, make dresses for my dolls. My brothers tried to inveigle me into playing baseball, but I was afraid they were going to hit me with the ball, so I was never very good at that.

One of my earliest memories though, which has nothing whatsoever to do with what you’re looking for, was when during the Depression years, and Hoover was president, and I used to hear over the radio, “there’s prosperity right around the corner”. So I used to run up to the corner with my [0:09:47] looking for prosperity, and I still haven’t found it. [laugh]

Isaac Crawford: That’s a good story. How about nursery rhymes and poetry? Did you learn a lot of poems?

0:10:02

Anita Barclay: Oh, yes. One I remember especially from my childhood was, I have a little shadow that goes in and out with me. Probably you remember it too.

Isaac Crawford: No. How does it go?

Anita Barclay: I have a little shadow that goes in and out with me, but what can be the use of it is more than I can see. The rest of it I don’t remember.

Isaac Crawford: Did you have any chores to do as a kid when you were growing up, household chores?

Anita Barclay: Yes, a few. I wasn’t very successful at them, because I liked to read. And my mother would have me—even with four brothers who had massive appetites, I would either have to help her peel the potatoes for the day, because my brothers ate a half a peck of potatoes—you know a peck is 15 pounds. They ate a half a peck of potatoes a day.
And then I would have to sit and watch the food while it cooked. Green beans and whatever else she was fixing. Unfortunately, I would always be reading a book, and half the time the food would get burnt. I wasn’t that alert, I guess.

Isaac Crawford: How about discipline, were they strict disciplinarians or were they lenient? How did they discipline you kids?

Anita Barclay: My father was. My mother, to a degree. She was more lenient than my father was. My father was a strict disciplinarian, and in order to keep four rambunctious brothers in line, he also had learned in his youth, magic tricks.

And so he used to say, “well, let’s have a magic show.” He would pull coins out of his ears, and do all of the little things that they do. Sleight of hand. And to wind up the magic show, he would whip the belt off of his waist and say, “now, if any of you do anything, remember how fast I can get this belt off.”

Isaac Crawford: It worked.

Anita Barclay: Right, it worked.

Isaac Crawford: He never had to use it, huh?

Anita Barclay: Oh, sure he did. All the time.

Isaac Crawford: I guess most fathers in those days—now, they would call the police, right? Child abuse.

Anita Barclay: That’s right. That’s right.

Isaac Crawford: Did you contribute any to family finances when you were growing up? Outside employment?

Anita Barclay: No.

Isaac Crawford: You said you had to help out with the cooking. Do you have any favorite recipes that you…?

0:12:58

Anita Barclay: I didn’t learn how to cook that well. I just got through telling you, I read all the time. As a matter of fact, when we got married, my brothers took Arnold aside and they said to him, “we’ve got something very serious to tell you.” And he said, “what is it?” They said, “my sister can’t cook.” He didn’t believe them, but it was the truth.

Isaac Crawford: So who does the cooking in your house?

Anita Barclay: I do.
Isaac Crawford: Oh, you do. Easy dinner [menu?], right?
Anita Barclay: I was fortunate enough—one of my good friend’s mothers gave me a *Joy of Cooking* for a wedding gift, and I learned how to cook from *Joy of Cooking*.

Isaac Crawford: Do you have any particular hobbies?
Anita Barclay: Well, I used to knit some. I used to do a little artwork. When my children were small especially, I used to teach them perspective. The boys carried it on.

0:14:02 As a matter of fact, this is my, over there—the pumpkin, that’s our youngest son George. And the pencil drawing over there is Arnold, the oldest boy. The others are from Bettie Anne’s ex-husband.

Isaac Crawford: Quite a bit of artwork in the family.
Anita Barclay: Yeah, that’s George’s [0:14:33] over there. Plus, he did that—and these two are George’s. He did that just as a hobby. He’s a lawyer now, in D.C.

Isaac Crawford: Do you know of any hobbies that your mother or your grandmother had when you were growing up?

0:15:02
Anita Barclay: No.

Isaac Crawford: There wasn’t time for hobbies in those days.
Anita Barclay: Not much time for hobbies, no. By the time you got to cooking—oh, I used to sew a lot. I forgot all about that. I still sew a little bit, not much.

Isaac Crawford: Getting back to Dalton, do you any particular memories, strong memories of the town?
Anita Barclay: I can tell you about when we first moved to Dalton. If you’re interested in that?

Isaac Crawford: Sure.
Anita Barclay: It’s negative, not positive. We decided long before we moved to Dalton that we would live in Dalton, because I had always heard about this—long before I ever came to Pittsfield, I had heard about Dalton’s fine school system.

0:16:06 Don’t ask me where I read it, but I knew about that Dalton had a good school system, and that Dalton School in New York City was named for the town of Dalton, because they were so
impressed with their school system. And they used the same method that Dalton used, at that particular school.

At any rate, I had decided that I would live in Dalton, because I wanted my children to get the best education they possibly could. We had bought a house in Pittsfield, and lived there for five years, with the object of moving to Dalton at the end of five years. And I started looking for pieces of property out here. I went to three different real estate dealers out here. And one of the first ones that I went to said, “oh, you come and live where the colored people live.” Over by the dump.

Well, I dropped him in a hurry. And I came across a woman—she’s dead now. I’m trying to remember what her name was. She said, “well, I’ve got three pieces of property you might be interested in.” She showed me this one, and a couple of others. One on the corner of Henson and North Street, and I can’t remember what the third one was. But we decided on this one anyway. Because it was on the bus line. We had one car, and obviously we needed alternate means of transportation.

We went ahead, building the house. And about, oh, three or four months after we built the house, I was in—there was a little corner store up here.

Still there, but they used to sell groceries up there. I was in the store, and the man that owned the store, he had become familiar with me by that time. And he said, “did you know there was a petition out to stop you from building?” And I said, “no.”

Oh, you built the house, it wasn’t here?

No, we built it. And I said, “no, I didn’t.” So he said, “well, yes there was,” he said, “but I refused to sign it.” And he said, “I just thought you ought to know about it.” The people across the street, the man across the street, had gone around to the various neighbors. Had this drawn-up, a formal petition, trying to get people to sign it. And then he was going to take it to Crane & Co., to see if—because we bought the land from Crane & Co., to see if they could stop us from building our house.

Take back the land, I don’t know what it was they wanted to do.

There was no legal way they could do that, right?

No, there wasn’t any legal way, but of course this was 19—

'47?

—no, ’51 or ’52. Because we lived in Pittsfield for five years. But he obviously thought that, since the Cranes still ran the town, at that time, that there must be something they could—
remember his father had been a selectman out here. And so he probably thought, between the fact that his father had been a selectman, and taking it to the Cranes, since we bought the property from the Cranes, that something could be done about it.

0:20:00

Isaac Crawford: Did he continue to live there?

Anita Barclay: He still lives there.

Isaac Crawford: Did you have any more problems with him?

Anita Barclay: No, because we just don’t speak. [laugh] So we have no problems. His wife became friendly. He did speak to us once, but we just ignored him after that. Who wants to make friends with somebody like that.

We were at a meeting, at the town hall, once about putting the sewer line in, and he attempted to become friendly. We spoke. But it was too late then.

Isaac Crawford: You don’t believe in forgive and forget, huh?

Anita Barclay: Well, I do towards [0:20:52]. But a case like that, no. So integrated this neighborhood in the—he was over there. There weren’t any other houses except one.

0:21:05 But nobody else seemed to object to the fact that we were living here, and they bought their pieces of land and built.

Isaac Crawford: You mentioned the blacks near the dump, would that be the Caesars over there?

Anita Barclay: The Caesars and the Hooses.

Isaac Crawford: Hooses, I don’t think I’ve—I’ve heard of the name, I mean, but…

[Arnold Barclay] [muffled 0:21:26-0:21:35]

Anita Barclay: If I were you, I’d go over there. They’re still over there.

Isaac Crawford: The Hooses?

Anita Barclay: The woman is, yeah.

Isaac Crawford: How old is she?

Anita Barclay: I would say she’s probably somewhere in her 80s or so. But you know, there are two little houses over there, by the dump. And
Anita Barclay

one they just recently fixed up, a couple years ago. She lives in
that one.

0:22:05 If I were you—she must have loads of stuff that she could tell
you.

Issac Crawford: I’m trying to get names of people—so, the Hooses and another
name you mentioned too, I’ll get, I’ll write them down before I
leave. Quite often, give us names of other people you forget to
think about. We have a list of about 25 or 30 people now that
we’re interviewing, [0:22:30]. Anybody over 60. Trying to get
some of the local flavor.

So do you have positive reflections on Dalton?

Anita Barclay: Oh, yes. I do. I have quite a few positive reflections on Dalton.
The reason I moved here, of course, was for the school system.
And as far as I was concerned, that purpose was accomplished.

0:23:05 To the point where, our youngest son—bear in mind, we had
three kids to educate. So we decided that the best thing for them
was to get good marks in school, so that they could get
scholarship help in college.

0:23:25 [audio cuts off, restarts]

I went to the school department and saw the then superintendent
of schools, whose name was Daley, and explained my situation
to him. And I said, “in the case of our youngest son, if he could
get into a good prep school, then that would guarantee his being
able to get into one of the better colleges on scholarship.”

0:23:59 So he said, “well, I don’t blame you, I’d like to do the same
thing for my sons.” Because, he said, up until grade six, the
schools are still as good as they used to be, but the high
schools—then it had gone regional. He said, “since it’s gone
regional, the quality of the teaching has gone down some. So I
can’t do that with my sons, but I’ll help you in any way I can
with your son.”

So he did. He arranged to have two special tests set up, IQ tests,
because the schools that I was interested in required them. And
in order to make it legal, he had to open them up to all the kids.

0:25:00 In George’s particular class, one of his teachers told him, he
said, “every once in a while, we get a class where all the
children seem brighter than normal, and this is one of those
classes.” So several other kids who were in his class, also
volunteered to take the test. Two or three of them went away to
prep schools too.
But anyway. Of course, he got through with flying colors. And he was accepted at Groton School, and St. Paul’s up in New Hampshire. And in both cases, he did not have to take in any remedial work to get in. Of course, they were, and still are, top ranked as far as academics are concerned.

Then, of course, from there he went on to Brown University, and then to law school.

The other two children went through high school here. I used to be down at the high school constantly fussing about not giving them enough of reading experience. The book list was rather shoddy. Because I was more of a gadfly in those days, now I just lay back and take it easy. But they went on—Bettie Anne went on to Clark University, and Arnold went to Howard University. So, my reasons for moving to Dalton were fulfilled.

Isaac Crawford: You mentioned working at Crane. Were there many black employees at Crane?

Anita Barclay: That’s another story. I was looking for a job, and I went to England Brothers in Pittsfield, I went to Dr. Nevers, who offered me a job, and I went to Crane & Co. And when I went in there, their director of personal—I don’t know if he’s still alive now or not, but not the same person that is there now—said to me, “oh, we don’t hire colored people.”

Isaac Crawford: Oh, really?

Anita Barclay: I said, “oh.” And the more I thought about it, the madder I got. And so, I said, “I’m going to call up Bruce Crane.” He was the head of the company. “I’m going to call him up, and tell him what this man has told me, and tell him how dissatisfied I was with his answer.” I did. He said, “I’ll look into it.” Two days later, he called me back, and he said, “would you come in to our personal office. We have a job for you, if you’re interested.” So I went in, and I got a job.

Because I had raised a stink about it, I felt that I should take the job. Which is how I happened to get there. How I happened to take that job. I would probably have preferred to—I was offered the job in England Brothers, and Dr. Nevers also offered me a job. But that’s why I went to work at Crane’s, because I felt, after having gone through that, to say, “oh, no, I don’t want your job.”
Isaac Crawford: Did you have any major [interactions? 0:29:13] with the man afterwards you get the job?

Anita Barclay: No. In fact, some of my fellow workers used to say, “how come all these people come in and say, ‘how are you, today, Mrs. Barclay?’” They always called me Mrs. Barclay. But no, I never had any problems.

Isaac Crawford: This was before or after the civil rights movement?

Anita Barclay: It was before, not—the civil rights movement had started. As a matter of fact, I read in the paper about a year later, where somebody locally, I won’t mention any names—was taking credit for my having gotten the job at Crane & Co.

0:30:03

Isaac Crawford: For civil rights?

Anita Barclay: Mm-hmm.

Isaac Crawford: Well, I can tell you it wasn’t me.

Anita Barclay: I know it wasn’t you. I know who the person was.

Isaac Crawford: Are you familiar with any famous blacks who visited or lived in this area?

Anita Barclay: Well, as I’ve mentioned earlier, when I was a teenager, I met W. E. B. Du Bois, who came to Providence, to give a talk to the local branch of the NAACP. But, I’m afraid he’s the only person that I know that lived in this area, that I ever had any contact with. And that was the very lightest of contact, of course.

0:31:00

Hmm? Oh, I forgot about him. I don’t know if he’s famous or not, but he’s somebody that you knew. Gilbert Langford.

Isaac Crawford: [0:31:14] the name just doesn’t ring a bell. It doesn’t have to be famous, but also you could name some of the people who lived in the area.

Anita Barclay: Well, they lived here for—I don’t know how many years. They lived here in Dalton. When they first came, he was working for GE, he was an engineer with GE. He went on to, go up through the ranks in GE until he was the head of their lighting plant out in Ohio. Cleveland, wasn’t it? He had 800 people working for him out there.

0:32:01
Isaac Crawford: Do you know of any blacks who owned businesses in town?

Anita Barclay: Well, I know who they are. Patronize them. For instance, James Williamson.

Isaac Crawford: In Pittsfield.

Anita Barclay: Right. But not in Dalton. Oh, no, no.

Isaac Crawford: What did [0:32:25]?

Anita Barclay: Oh, that was Archie [0:32:31]. Yeah.

Isaac Crawford: Then of course you didn’t have any black women involved in any commercial ventures either. Outside of [Great Barrington? 0:32:41].

Anita Barclay: Not in Dalton.

Isaac Crawford: OK. A few reflections. What did you do in your life that you’re most proud?

Anita Barclay: Got through it. [laugh]

0:33:00

Isaac Crawford: Just mentioned your lovely family.

Anita Barclay: Raised three kids, certainly. For the most part, with all the ups and downs that all families have, have turned out fairly well.

Isaac Crawford: You mentioned some of the changes that have occurred in Dalton. What do you think of some of the changes that have occurred, or still need to occur?

Anita Barclay: Well, one change—and here I go again with negatives, but one change that has occurred is that there are more black families living in Dalton now then there were when we first moved here. When we moved here, there were, counting us, there were three black families in Dalton. Sometime in the 60s, the Dalton Police Department, which then consisted of about four, five people, said that they had to equip themselves with riot gear.

0:34:12

Isaac Crawford: Because blacks were moving here.

Anita Barclay: And I said, “who do they need to patrol, us?” But since then, there’s been quite a few more black families, you yourself included, that have moved to Dalton. I think that’s a big step in the right direction.
Anita Barclay

Isaac Crawford: Of course, we were in the late 60s. [0:34:42] in an isolated area, where everybody’s friendly.

Anita Barclay: The only other thing that happened, that I can take responsibility for, and then again it was correcting a negative into a positive—

0:35:03 —the local Rotary Club used to have pancake suppers or breakfasts, every year. And they would have Aunt Jemima come. And so, at this time, my friend Gil Langford and his wife were living here. And so one day Isabel, that was his wife’s name, called me and she said, “guess what, Aunt Jemima’s going to come, and she’s going to entertain at the junior high school.” Both of our kids were in that junior high school. So, I said, “oh, we can’t have that.” Because, at that time, you can imagine how those children—there would only be two children there—would have felt, with this person that was imitating Aunt Jemima going through mammie stuff.

0:36:09

Isaac Crawford: Was it a black person, or a disguise?

Anita Barclay: I don’t know whether she was black or white, but she was going to come dressed as Aunt Jemima and go through the mammie routine. Of course, this was in the 60s. So, Isabel and I decided we were not going to put up with this. We went down to the—at that time it was a junior high school. The superintendent’s office was there, and the superintendent was a man named Thomas Bright, and talked to him.

0:36:51 Of course, it being the era of the beginning of civil rights stuff, he said to us, “I can’t have a pressure group pressuring me into stopping something that’s been going on.” And I said to him, “we are not a pressure group, we’re just two concerned mothers.” I said, “if you’re going to have Aunt Jemima come and entertain the children in the school, my children are not going to be there that day. And I’m going to send a letter to the State Commissioner for Education, telling them why.” The upshot of it was, is that Aunt Jemima did not entertain the children in the school. And since that time, I don’t think they ever did that again.

Isaac Crawford: Thomas Bright gave me my first job in teaching, I was a substitute—

Anita Barclay: Oh, really?

Isaac Crawford: —a few times. While I was working for the—

0:37:58
Anita Barclay: We had a great long talk with him, and at the end of it, he was a man that could see both sides of the question. When I explained to him how our children would feel, he said, “I guess my children would feel the same way, if I were in their shoes.”

Isaac Crawford: I understand that the Dalton Follies had minstrels up until recent years.

Anita Barclay: That’s right. And if you look inside the town hall, and you look at those pictures—if I were a little bit more active, I would have gone down there asked them, how about getting some of those pictures down.

Isaac Crawford: I’ve never seen them. Because I go up there, to videotape the town meetings when John is not available. I’m on the Dalton [0:38:57] commission.

0:39:00

Anita Barclay: In the corridor where all the offices are. They may not be there now. But they used to have pictures of their minstrel shows, with the blackface.

Isaac Crawford: We’ve videotaped all these—a few times, in recent years, and they’re just regular…

Anita Barclay: Yeah, I don’t think—no, they don’t have that anymore. But back a few years ago, they used to have regular minstrel shows.

Isaac Crawford: And those were whites disguised as blacks?

Anita Barclay: Right, right. With the white lips and the whole bit. Up until about five years ago, they used to have those pictures in that corridor.

Isaac Crawford: You gave me a lot of information.

0:40:00

Anita Barclay: Good. I hope I helped you some. You want Gertrude Dillon, who lives in [0:40:05] town.

Isaac Crawford: Well, Anita, it’s been nice talking to you. Do you have anything else about your history you’d like to add?

Anita Barclay: It’s been very nice talking to you too, Isaac. And no I don’t.

Isaac Crawford: Thank you, very much.

Anita Barclay: You’re welcome.

0:40:24 [recording ends]