



## Interview with Doris Pinsley

Under the Auspices of the  
Monmouth County Library Headquarters  
125 Symmes Drive, Manalapan, N.J.  
Flora T. Higgins, Project Coordinator

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**Name of Interviewer: Flora Higgins**

**Premises of Interview: Kislin's Department Store, Red Bank, NJ**

**Birthdate of Subject: N/A**

**Ms. Higgins:** One of the first questions that we ask people is how did you arrive at this place, in Monmouth County? How did your family get here?

**Ms. Pinsley:** My father came here from Russia. That's how we originally got here. My mother was born in Boston; she came to New Brunswick and then here to Red Bank.

**Ms. Higgins:** So your family has been here a long time.

**Ms. Pinsley:** A very long time.

**Ms. Higgins:** When did your father start the store here?

**Ms. Pinsley:** I think it has been here since around 1908.

**Ms. Higgins:** Please tell us its origins.

**Ms. Pinsley:** My dad wanted to get into business, and he had heard about Red Bank from someone else. So he came down to Red Bank and loved the town, and he decided to start his business here.

**Ms. Higgins:** What did he like about Red Bank?

**Ms. Pinsley:** That it seemed like a really good family town. The people seemed so nice. And he liked the idea that the river was here, also.

**Ms. Higgins:** When the store was started, was it essentially general merchandise?

**Ms. Pinsley:** Yes, I think my dad was always into general type merchandise.



**Mr. Woolrich (third from right) in front of Kislin's in Red Bank**

**Ms. Higgins:** What would he say about Red Bank in those days? What was Red Bank like on a day-to-day basis? Shopping, transportation, and schools?

**Ms. Pinsley:** In those days, I think Red Bank was at a much slower pace than it is today. I think he was actually the main general store in town, from what I understand from people. His store was the place to go. I hear that every day from customers.

**Ms. Higgins:** What kinds of things did he sell?

**Ms. Pinsley:** Oh, he sold clothing, fishing tackle, and he sold skis.

**Ms. Higgins:** Skis?

**Ms. Pinsley:** Yes, this was one of the first stores to sell skis and ski boots. Oh, and toboggans. I think he was one of the very first stores to sell these. Then he always sold ice skates. In those years, the river would freeze over almost every year.

**Ms. Higgins:** We have spoken to several people who have commented on the ice boating on the river, and the Monmouth Boat Club. Of course, people would come in and buy ice skates from you and go skating on the river.

**Ms. Pinsley:** Right, and the people who went ice boating would come in and get these cleats to put on under their boots so they wouldn't fall down when they were getting in their ice boat.

**Ms. Higgins:** It sounds like your store is attuned and responsive to what people need and what they want.



**Doris Pinsley with her daughters, Blair (left, twenty-two months) and Shawn (right, five years)**

**Ms. Pinsley:** I feel that we are. We listen to what the people are asking for, and we keep it in our heads. If enough people are asking for something, then we definitely get it.

**Ms. Higgins:** Have you always been involved in running the business?

**Ms. Pinsley:** No. My husband and I were living out in Highland Park, Illinois, when my mother passed away, and my dad asked us to come back here and help run the business. That's how I got involved.

**Ms. Higgins:** And what was Red Bank like then?

**Ms. Pinsley:** Well, it still wasn't as fast paced as it is now. But I think when we came back, it was thriving.

**Ms. Higgins:** That was about what time?

**Ms. Pinsley:** I think that was around 1960.

**Ms. Higgins:** Was there a time when Red Bank seemed in danger of going the way of some of the shore towns that have fallen into a depression, like Long Branch and Asbury Park?

**Ms. Pinsley:** I never felt that it was in quite the danger that Long Branch and Asbury were. I never felt that way. There was a time when it seemed in a little danger, but we were still thriving and doing a nice business. People still seemed to shop in Red Bank. I don't know what happened to Long Branch and Asbury, but I never felt that we were going down the drain.

**Ms. Higgins:** Would you comment on the changes of transportation since what you have heard or remember of your father's day and now? Was there more or less public transportation?

**Ms. Pinsley:** I think it is about the same. We have the trains and the buses. And it's so simple to go to the city from Red Bank. If people commute from here, it's very easy.

**Ms. Higgins:** There are also a lot of homes in Red Bank. Are these being priced out of the reach of average people?

**Ms. Pinsley:** In the town itself?

**Ms. Higgins:** In Red Bank. There are a lot of lovely houses, but I hear they are getting very high priced.

**Ms. Pinsley:** Well, I don't know of any that are empty. (Laughter) It seems as if there are people living in all the houses. I haven't heard that.

**Ms. Higgins:** Probably supply and demand makes them relatively expensive.

**Ms. Pinsley:** I would agree with you on that.

**Ms. Higgins:** Your store, Kislin's, is advantageously positioned on the river. Would you please give me your opinion of the various schemes for developing the river here in Red Bank?

**Ms. Pinsley:** Are you speaking about from Broad Street into the river?

**Ms. Higgins:** Yes.

**Ms. Pinsley:** Well, in the past few years I have heard that they were going to develop this area. And I know ninety years ago they spoke about it; they were going to do it then. And now they have been talking about it again, but I don't hear of anything being done. But I certainly would like to see it accomplished in my lifetime.

**Ms. Higgins:** They were talking about riverfront development in 1910 or 1912?

**Ms. Pinsley:** Yes, they were talking about developing Broad Street to the river over ninety years ago. I think they even have records about how much it was going to cost, and they were into that. Now they're back into it, but I don't think that anything concrete has happened.

**Ms. Higgins:** As an influential businessperson in the town, do you belong to any of the advisory commissions?

**Ms. Pinsley:** I go to the meetings when they have different problems come up, where businesses want to come into the town, but they are not going to be advantageous to the town. We get these letters in the mail, and I make it my business to go to these meetings and hear what it's all about so that I can understand why these people want to come to the town. And I try to find out if they would be the right people in the town. I'll get together with a lot of the other business people in the area where we are and meet them at the meetings.

**Ms. Higgins:** Is it true that Saks Fifth Avenue was going to come?

**Ms. Pinsley:** I heard that rumor, but I think it was only a rumor.

**Ms. Higgins:** And is there a Dux Beds?

**Ms. Pinsley:** Oh, yes, they came. They are in the middle of Broad Street, and I think they are doing a nice business.

**Ms. Higgins:** I think Red Bank is a wonderful town, myself. Do you remember the Mayorship of Katherine Elkus White?

**Ms. Pinsley:** Oh yes.

**Ms. Higgins:** Would you comment on that for us?

**Ms. Pinsley:** She was a lovely lady. She would shop in our store, and she was wonderful. I liked her very much. That was a very good era.

**Ms. Higgins:** And Daniel O'Hern? Could you also comment on him?

**Ms. Pinsley:** Oh yes, he was a customer. Another person that we were always very fond of and who was also a lovely person and very well remembered was Alfred Beadleston.

**Ms. Higgins:** Oh, yes. He recorded something for the Historical Association. He gave us permission to use this recording in our archive. Would you comment on the regime of Daniel O'Hern? We interviewed him for this project.

**Ms. Pinsley:** That was a good era, too. Actually, I can't think of any bad eras. They were all good. I think we had some wonderful people in the town. And the people who ran for office seemed to have the town in their hearts and wanted the best for this particular town. I think that had a lot to do with how well the town is turning out.

**Ms. Higgins:** Was your husband or, in fact, are you a member of the Root Beer and Checkers Club?

**Ms. Pinsley:** No. We are members of the Chamber of Commerce, and we are also members of the River Center.

**Ms. Higgins:** Did your children go to school in Monmouth County?

**Ms. Pinsley:** Yes, they did. They went to the Ranney School.

**Ms. Higgins:** Could you tell us about that experience?



**Doris and her husband, Richard, on a coffee break on a Sirgita Game Drive, 1999**

**Ms. Pinsley:** Well, that was when Mr. Ranney had the school. And Mr. Ranney was a tough master of the school, so you adhered to his rules.

**Ms. Higgins:** Is that when he was in Rumson?

**Ms. Pinsley:** No, he was in Tinton Falls, on Hope Road. He was there when our children went there. They went there for a good many years.

**Ms. Higgins:** Of course the Ranney school is expanding. Do you think since Mr. Ranney left it has maintained his standards?

**Ms. Pinsley:** I can't really say because I'm not really involved. So I couldn't comment on that.

**Ms. Higgins:** I wanted to ask you also about the career your daughter, Blair, had as an equestrian. Monmouth County is, of course, big horse country. We developed our East Freehold Park during the time that Blair was riding. Could you tell us a bit about that experience?

**Ms. Pinsley:** That was a fabulous experience. She was one of the first riders in Monmouth County to go to the National level of showing horses. So it was actually a very exciting time. She loved riding, and she was taking lessons from one of the top instructors in the world, George Morris. She was a Champion at Madison Square Garden, and many other high level shows. So we were very, very proud of her.



**Doris Pinsley (left) with Blair**

**Ms. Higgins:** That must have required a lot of commitment on the part of the whole family to reach that level.

**Ms. Pinsley:** It did. At one time George gave lessons out in Hicksville, Long Island. And that was a very long ride from here. Her dad would pick her up after school at Ranney, have her horses and riding clothes with him, and they would start out for Hicksville for her lessons. And I think it took about two hours to get to Hicksville. Then George moved to Pittstown, New Jersey, which was also another long ride. But they went every week for Blair to take her lessons with George. Also, the second season the East Freehold Park was opened, my husband Richard organized and managed The Monmouth County Horse Show in August.

**Ms. Higgins:** What did Blair do after that?

**Ms. Pinsley:** Let me think now. She gave riding lessons for awhile, and then she became the Consultant for a Balsamic Vinegar Company from Milan, Italy. They

had her come over to Milan and interviewed her, and they liked her very much. They hired her to represent them in the United States, Canada, and in Europe. So she had to do a lot of traveling for them. In fact, they called her recently. They would love to have her come back and be with them again, because she was very successful.

**Ms. Higgins:** And your other daughter; what is Shawn doing?

**Ms. Pinsley:** When Shawn graduated from Sweet Briar, she gave riding lessons in Virginia for awhile. Then I decided that I needed her, and I asked her to come back here and help me. This seemed like too big a project for just myself. So she did come back, and she has been with me ever since. We are a team together, and it's been good.



**Shawn Pinsley (left)  
with her daughter,  
Houston**

**Ms. Higgins:** Kislin's is one of the Monmouth County places that has reached fame outside Monmouth County. Can you tell us about some of the famous people who have shopped here?



**Kislin's Department  
Store window during  
the holiday season**

**Ms. Pinsley:** Oh we have had Katharine Hepburn; she was an extremely good customer. We had Rex Harrison, Frank Sinatra, Bruce Springsteen, and Bon Jovi. We also had Red Skelton. We have had a lot of famous people shop here.

**Ms. Higgins:** Do you know them when they come in?

**Ms. Pinsley:** Do I recognize them? Yes. In fact Katharine Hepburn was such good customer that she gave us her home phone number. She told us when we got anything that we thought she would like to call her and let her know.

**Ms. Higgins:** As we discussed earlier, the winters seem to be getting more mild. Has this affected your inventory or your business?

**Ms. Pinsley:** I would say that we are so diversified that we have been able to go into other fields. We have a lot of merchandise that the people would want. In fact this year, we took in kayaks.

**Ms. Higgins:** That's the new thing, isn't it?

**Ms. Pinsley:** Right, kayaks. We decided to go into kayaks. We have done so fabulously with the kayaks, that even the salesperson who was selling us the



kayaks calls us up every so often and says, "I can't believe you two women. You jumped into this kayak story, and you are selling them like mad. And all the accessories like the vests, paddles and everything that goes with these kayaks. I'm very proud of you."

**Ms. Higgins:** What advice would you give to a young family trying to start a business in Red Bank now?

**Ms. Pinsley:** If they were starting a new business in Red Bank, I would think they would go around and look at all the different type businesses that are here already, and try to get into something that isn't here.

**Ms. Higgins:** Any suggestions?

**Ms. Pinsley:** I haven't really given it enough thought to suggest anything. If I was just going to come into the town new, I would go around and look at all the businesses that were here. Then I would try to think of something that would be entirely different than what's already here.

**Ms. Higgins:** Can you tell us some of your most memorable reminiscences about life in Monmouth County, either related to the store or personal?

**Ms. Pinsley:** Whenever we lived someplace else, I have always felt that this area was even nicer than any other areas that we have ever lived in. When we travel, I still feel that I love coming back to this particular area. I think we are very fortunate that we don't have mudslides, and we don't have forest fires, and we don't have to think about our houses sliding into any rivers. So I have always felt that we have been fortunate in this particular area.

**Ms. Higgins:** Doris, you said you were born in Boston. How old were you when you first...

**Ms. Pinsley:** No, my mother was born in Boston.

**Ms. Higgins:** Then you were born here.

**Ms. Pinsley:** I was born here.

**Ms. Higgins:** In Riverview?

**Ms. Pinsley:** No, I was born in the Long Branch Hospital at that time.

**Ms. Higgins:** And that became Monmouth Medical Center?

**Ms. Pinsley:** Right. My own daughters, though, were born here at Riverview. My own two daughters, Blair and Shawn, were both born here.



**Ms. Higgins:** Would you have any opinion you could offer about the way medical care was handled in the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s as opposed to the way it is now?

**Ms. Pinsley:** I think even in the 1940s and 1950s, the medical care around here was good compared to many other places.

**Ms. Higgins:** Do you ever get down to the seashore? And when you do, where do you go?

**Ms. Pinsley:** To Spring Lake.

**Ms. Higgins:** Spring Lake is a beautiful shore town.

**Ms. Pinsley:** I love Spring Lake. In fact we have friends who visit us from London. They come every summer and stay with us for around ten days. We take them around to the different places. We have taken them to Brielle, Spring Lake, over to Princeton, and they have enjoyed being here with us. They love where we live, and they love the area where we are. And we visit with them. But they love coming here.

**Ms. Higgins:** When you took over this business for your parents, had you had any professional training in retailing? Or did you just learn from your family and father?

**Ms. Pinsley:** I actually didn't learn from anybody. I think I just fell into it, or jumped into it. I dove in, maybe, and learned from my own experiences.



**Kislin's General Store, 1984**

**Ms. Higgins:** There is a unique quality to Kislin's Department Store. Could you comment on that please?

**Ms. Pinsley:** Well, we have changed the name of our store now. We call ourselves Kislin's General Store, because both my daughters felt that that name fit the store much better because we do have so much general merchandise.

**Ms. Higgins:** When did you change the name?

**Ms. Pinsley:** We did the outside of the building over, and then we did the interior over, and that was in the past two years. Both my daughters felt that Kislin's General Store was a better name for the store.

**Ms. Higgins:** I was asking you if you had any memories that especially stand out. Was there ever a fire here?

**Ms. Pinsley:** No, thank God.

**Ms. Higgins:** A hurricane?

**Ms. Pinsley:** Well, I think one year there was an ice storm. I think that may have been around 1948, and I think the glass in a lot of the buildings was broken.

**Ms. Higgins:** When your father opened the store, there were probably still horse drawn vehicles on the streets.

**Ms. Pinsley:** Yes, I think there were pictures of horse drawn vehicles when he was here. I remember on Broad Street there was a shoe store that I think was called Allen's.

**Ms. Higgins:** Did you ever ride the trolley?

**Ms. Pinsley:** Not that I remember. No, I don't ever remember riding the trolley.

**Ms. Higgins:** Why is Red Bank such a success when it was obviously a difficult century for several of the other shore towns?

**Ms. Pinsley:** I still feel that it had a lot to do with the people that were in charge of taking care of the town. They had more of an interest in seeing that the town went forward instead of backwards. And they did everything in their power to make it go the right way. I personally think that has a lot to do with it. There were a lot of good people. They may have had their differences, but when you get to the end, they are still interested in the town. And I think that has a lot to do with it. In the other towns, I don't think the people were as interested in taking care of the town itself.

**Ms. Higgins:** Would you comment please, Doris, as what you see as a difference in values between now, embarking on this century, and when you first came back in the 1960s?

**Ms. Pinsley:** When you say values, do you mean with the children?

**Ms. Higgins:** Yes.

**Ms. Pinsley:** Well, I see that some people are a little different. But I think I can tell that most of our customers instill values in their children. I feel that they do instill values in their children.

**Ms. Higgins:** If you had some advice or comment to people in fifty or seventy-five years who are reading or listening to this recollection of Red Bank, what would you say?

**Ms. Pinsley:** I think I would like them to remember that this area has always been a fabulous area. They should be very happy that they are here in this particular area.

**Ms. Higgins:** You were saying you thought Red Bank was well cared for. I think by what you are saying now, the whole county has been looked after well by the Freeholders.

**Ms. Pinsley:** Yes. Different people have different opinions about things, but I think in general they have always come together and wanted the best for this area.

**Ms. Higgins:** Doris, when was this building built?

**Ms. Pinsley:** I know the building is over one hundred years old. It's actually a fascinating, beautiful building. Many people comment to us on the exterior of the building, how beautiful it is. And just in the past two years, we brought the building back to the original way it looked one hundred years ago. We didn't put up anything that hindered that look. It looks the same as it did over one hundred years ago. We have done the interior of the building over, but we have still kept the flavor of how it would have been many years ago, with the exposed brickwork. It still has the look of when it was first built. When we did the building over, we must have had a hundred phone calls from customers telling us how much they loved the way it looked, and how they were so happy that we brought it back to the original way it was. Having the people calling up on the telephone was very rewarding, I would say. When they came into shop, too, they would tell us how much they appreciated what we did.

**Ms. Higgins:** Was the building built as a store? Did your father build it?

**Ms. Pinsley:** No, this was built originally as a newspaper office, I believe. I think there were some lawyers on the other floors. Then I believe it became a hardware store, and then we bought it. So that's a good many years ago.

**Ms. Higgins:** Red Bank has become the site of a lot of festivals. Is this a good thing? Would you comment on the various festivals in Red Bank? Almost every week there is something happening.

**Ms. Pinsley:** Well, sometimes I will say they are good, and sometimes they are not. But since most of the time we are not open on Sundays, when most of the festivals occur, it really doesn't affect us. Most of the time we are not here on Sundays.

**Ms. Higgins:** Where did people who lived in Red Bank shop for their food in the 1940s and 1950s? Was there a supermarket?

**Ms. Pinsley:** There was a supermarket on Broad Street called Davidson's. I believe it was a very popular place to shop. There was an A&P on Monmouth Street.

**Ms. Higgins:** Was there a movie theatre?

**Ms. Pinsley:** They had the Strand Theatre on the corner of Linden Place and Broad. Then there was the Carlton Theatre on Monmouth Street. So we had two of them.

**Ms. Higgins:** Doris, what were some of your favorite movies?

**Ms. Pinsley:** I have to say that I don't go to the movies too often. I'm not a moviegoer.

**Ms. Higgins:** There was one gentleman I interviewed, and the first movie he ever saw was *Gone With the Wind*. And he said it has been all downhill since then.

**Ms. Pinsley:** I do remember *Gone With the Wind*. That was excellent. But I'm not really much of a moviegoer.

**Ms. Higgins:** When you go out to eat around here in Monmouth County, what are some of your favorite restaurants?

**Ms. Pinsley:** I love the Fromagerie. I was there the other night. Then the Bistro is very good, and we go to Zsenza. We went to the new one last night on Monmouth Street, and I think it's called The Grill and the Grape. And then we love the one in Ocean Grove, one of our favorites, called Moonstruck. We love that one. There are a lot of good restaurants in this area.

**Ms. Higgins:** Are you an antiquer?

**Ms. Pinsley:** Well, I was. But now our house doesn't need anything else. Originally, I did love going antiques. That was one of my favorite activities.

**Ms. Higgins:** Red Bank is, of course, the center of that now.

**Ms. Pinsley:** Right, I loved going antiques. I would go in Red Bank, New York, Pennsylvania, and all over.

**Ms. Higgins:** What do you see as the future of Red Bank and Monmouth County?

**Ms. Pinsley:** I think Red Bank is like the hub now. I feel that with the way it is going, it is just going to be more thriving than ever. It's becoming a center for financial investment companies.

**Ms. Higgins:** Well, I am sure Kislin's will thrive. I thank you so much for this interview, Doris.

**Ms. Pinsley:** Thank you.