

FMH- A0004b

Interview with Hazel Payne and unknown interviewer

Run time 31 minutes

Topics: Continuation of FMH-A0004a. *Life in Fairhope c.1910-1920: Parties, Personalities and Minstrel Shows*

It was a good floor. We had the time of our life. And Bowens were there, and Mabel Bowen, you know, she was sort of an epileptic. Maybe that shouldn't go on. But it keeps still there. And, uh, I think that's what I'm going to do. bit of a little bit that was our amusement a big diversion there and then we'd go up to the top of the hill and old fellow by the name of he's asleep sandy something and he had a restaurant he was German and sort of a delicatessen it was the first delicatessen in Fairhope. And we'd go up there in the evenings and if he wasn't awake we'd rout him out and he'd have pans of beans and sauerkraut and hot German salad. He'd fix it hot for us and we'd get that stuff and sit down at little tables and eat on that. Wasn't Smedelius. No. I can't think of what his name was now. So the young folks liked the horseback ride and they danced. Yeah. And then down at Burkel's, you know Magnolia Beach? Yes. He had a wonderful dance floor down there. We'd go down and walk down the beach and dance down there. It was maple floor, they said. Is that the same place he had the skating rink? Yeah. Later it was turned into everything. But at first it was built for a skating rink, for a dance hall.

And down at Battles, before the Burkel's was built, they had a wonderful dance floor Battles, Pagoda, and we'd walk the beach all the way to Battles. Go down there and dance your fool head off and then walk all the way back. And then you got a crowd of the airways isn't very far.

And down at Point Clear, the old Point Clear Hotel was out over the water and the bar was out over the water. We'd get sailboats and sail down there and tie up at the bar and there were steps went from the water up into the bar. And the girls would sit in the boats while the boys went up and got them some liquor and came on down. So, that was selling down to Point Clear.

Those really sounded like happy times. Well, it was happy and we had much more time for fun then than the kids do nowadays. And then we'd gang up some nights and the boys would go out in the country and steal chickens and bring them in. And we'd build a big bonfire on the beach and girls would bring the pans, you know, and grease and things. And they'd kill those chickens and skin them and fix them and we'd put them in that hot grease still kicking us. I wonder it didn't kill us. They weren't even cool. We'd put them in and we'd sit there and eat those things and bring sandwiches.

I was teaching school then, and we'd been out and had a big time right down in front of the old Swift house that night. And next day I took my kids on a walk on the beach. We used to, then only had about 12, 15 children. And you could take them on walks and they'd behave themselves. We walked on the beach and went along there and they caught all these chicken feathers on the beach. Gee whiz, they were just thick. And they wanted to know where in the world those chicken feathers came from. And it caused a lot of talk. Well, I didn't say a word. I just didn't know a thing about it. But I tell you, next time the gang got together, I sure let them have it. I told them next time to bury those feathers deep. Because the tide would come in and wash the sand off and all those feathers would come up on top.

Oh my goodness. but we had amusement and things like that nowadays the kids nowadays would have fit as they had it goodness did you do things like that well that's all right I've heard about you folks skinny dipping too and they didn't you have those skinny dipping parties? Might have had them but I didn't want to mix stuff you weren't mixed up in them not in that not in that one they'd steal watermelons and bring down they'd go out and steal satsumas from the orchards. They had satsumas way back then huh? Yeah. They grew then because our climates were warmer then they weren't cold like they are now. Well they must have had other things too then if they were warmer.

Hazel Pilcher was teaching school way out in the country in a little one room schoolhouse and we'd gang up and go out there and everybody would take a box of lunch and fix it and we'd there and line the boxes all up you know and then the boys would all bid on the boxes and whoever that box belonged to they'd have to eat supper with. Uh huh. And she'd sit down with the little old organ there and play turkey in the straw and we'd dance our heads off. I was wondering if we didn't dance the building down. And that was out, that wasn't too far out. Sounds like almost more fun than they had nowadays. It is. Sure. Life seemed so much more simple then.

C.O. White had a big farm out in the country and he had three daughters and one son. They came down from the north. And her girls were lonesome, they'd come in here and go to school, but they lived out quite a ways. So once in a while we'd load up old Jane on the mule, actually Johnson's, with hay, and we'd all pile in and we'd go out to the White farm. We wouldn't get out there at nine, ten o'clock at night. chances are they'd gone to bed but we started hollering soon we hit the gate. Old Mrs. White would get up and grab some clothes on and get downstairs and start the stove going lickety-split and start baking cakes and she'd make these big sheet cakes you know and put the frosting on them hot and bring them in to us. She knew good and well we wanted something to eat. That poor soul she was so glad to have us come out there where her girls were so they'd have company. That's when Bill Dealy was alive and he was a character. Yeah, I wish I could have known him. And we'd come to a hill and there'd be so many of us in there, but poor old Jane couldn't pull us. So we'd have to pile out and walk up the hill

while Jane got the wagon up and then we'd all jump in on a level ground and old Jane pulled us on.

Tell us some amusing things about Bill Dealy. About what? Bill Dealy. Oh, Lord, he was a sight. He lived out there. You know where Fram's lunch place is? Yes. Well, he lived right on up about half a mile. They had a house up in there. His mother was practically blind, and it was a pretty good-sized house, but it had a big chicken shed on the side of it somehow or other, and he came in one night tight as a tick, and unhitched the horse and let it in the chicken coop. Tied it in there all night with the chickens. He got up the next morning and his dad saw his horse in the chicken coop with the chickens in the chicken shed. He could sing and he was so musical and he wrote so many poems and poetry and things. It's just wonderful what he could do. Wasn't worth it now. And they married this Myrtle from Illinois somewhere. She was crazy about him, but she didn't know. She couldn't boil water hardly. And I just felt so sorry for them, and they just lived. They just didn't have anything hardly. And had one child after the other. About five or six of them. But he was a character and everybody loved him. And he stirred up minstrel shells in Fairhope. They'd have the grandest minstrel shows. And Bill Dealy would be the one at the head of it. He was quite an engineer it turned out when he left here they finally went up to Chicago. Got in with the engineering department somehow and worked there in Sheridan, Illinois and then he was at Muscle Shoals. He got in there when they built that. We visited him up there.

Who were some of your best friends? I guess Piney and Jim were. Piney and Jim and Nettie and Axel. They're gone you might say. Francis Crawford was a little bit older than Ray Francis Gaston. They lived where the old Gaston house is now. I wonder Mrs. Gaston didn't kick us out. She was the most wonderful soul. We gang up at her house and we tear up the back stairs and go up for the girls room And one night there were three or four or five of us sitting along the edge of the bed Talking up a storm and the bed had these iron rails over it, you know Yeah, all of a sudden ka-fluke we went down. We were so heavy. We bent the iron rail. And I've often thought since poor grandma Gaston it was in Fairhope You couldn't get any replacements and things like that. And I just wonder what did they do? We just thought it was a big lark and a big joke, you know, and we'd sit up there and talk a storm, a bunch of us, and she never was a word out of us. Sometimes I'd go in there and she'd be sitting in the kitchen with her feet in a bucket of hot water and she'd say, "Oh, my feet just hurt me so bad." But she was just a patient thing I ever saw with all those kids, four Gaston kids. Yeah. grandfather uh E. B. Gaston was I imagine he wasn't any saint to live with he was smart as he could be but more or less tempermental but she was a Mershon and she was so patient and lovely she was a sister of Arthur and Nathaniel Mershon.

Now you said Frances had a goat, Frances Crawford. Just this one goat, big old goat Pedro. Just like a soapbox is what it was. She made, I guess she made it, she and the

boys somehow made this cart. She'd get up and she'd get in the Fourth of July parade and go there down to that thing and pull her down the road.

You say Dr. Mershon had a... Dr. Mershon had started this little drug store in the corner where the Fairhope Pharmacy now is and it was small and Paul Mollinot lived with him went to school he was in my class at school and he worked for Dr. Mershon and he lived there because I think his folks must have moved they moved down on the farm someplace out farther and he lived with Dr. and Bertha Mershon and worked there in the evenings and that's what started Paul to be a druggist I guess because as he got older he went to Auburn and came out in pharmacy and worked in Mobile and he had his own drug store in Mobile from all-known Dumas there for years. He died about two years ago but they had that pharmacy and then down the street from the pharmacy

Jack Galbraith was here, he they came from the east someplace and he had a barber shop and then there was a telephone exchange right there on Main Street and there was a butcher shop. That was all right across from where Bedsoles are from the pharmacy down. And this Dr. Sheldon's office was in there and people by the name of Wilson had a house that they ran more or less as a boarding house or a hotel that was between right along in there what Price's place is the far side and it had several rooms upstairs where they rented for people that wanted to come here for a while I don't remember what was on the corner

Now, we're recording February the 20th, 1980.

Go ahead, Hazel, and tell us about the minstrel show that Bill Dealy used to have. Bill Dealy was quite a cut-up. And he got about 12 or 15 of the young men of the town all together and produced the minstrel show, which Bill was instrumental in all of it, Dr. Sheldon, a retired army surgeon here, helped him a great deal. And they held these shows upstairs in the old building. It used to be a school building on the corner of Morphy and Church, which is now torn down. And Dr. Sheldon composed a song about a chicken hawk. And he dressed himself up that night as a chicken hawk. and he flapped his wings and went back and forth across the stage singing the song of the chicken hawk, "with a chicken hawk and a chicken hawk, and I surely envied you. If I had my way this very day, I'd be a big one too. You'll be king of birds, them beautiful words, no matter where you'll fly. When Gabriel blows his golden horn, I'll be one of when I die".

Good. Can you remember any more, or was that it? Then there was another one, I don't know whether it was this same minstrel show or not, but there was another one that Bill Dealy used to compose a great deal, and I don't remember whether he composed this song or someone else did about "Adam Was the First Man." Adam was the first man

ever was granted, lived all alone and he was the discontented. Along came Eve, chucked full of sin. Right from there the trouble did begin. Won't you humble, won't you humble, won't you humble yourself for the Lord he am a-coming. Won't you humble yourself before the Lord. Along came Abel, then came Cain. Right soon after that it started in the rain. Forty days and forty nights the rain came coming down. The whale threw Jonah on a patch of sandy ground. Won't you humble, won't you humble, won't you humble yourself before you lower the end of time. Won't you humble yourself before the Lord. Along came Noah, stumbling in the dark. Found him help a sack, found himself a hatchet, filled himself an ark. Along came the animals, two-two by two, the hippo-cake around the must, a high kangaroo. Along came the monkey, then came the bear, then came the elephant without any hair. Won't you humble, won't you humble, won't you humble yourself for the Lordy ever coming, won't you humble yourself before the Lord." That's all I can remember of.

Now this is April of 28th, 1980 isn't it?

And this is Bill Dealy's PPK minstrel book dated February 5th, 1916. 16? Yes. And we're at Hazel Payne's house and she's going to tell us some of the history as we read about old PPK minstrels. Bill Dealy has compiled this little booklet in 1943. The PPK minstrels of 1916, Humble Yourself, Brother, Humble Yourself, written in song by Bones, Bill Dealy. Gaston was the first man that ever was invented. When he lived in Iowa, he never was contented. There's a parody on that. So he ambled down south with some single-tax dope and built this little town that we call Fairhope. Old Andy Cullen said, Boy, you're right. We'll start at the town on this very site and send back home for the rest of the gang to start this colony off with a bang. So down came the Hunnells. The Hunnells were the early settlers, the older people. They lived on Fairhope Avenue where the Price Furniture Store is now. And they had a small cottage there, and later their daughter and son-in-law and a couple of children named Wilson I don't know where they came from, whether from Iowa or not. And they built a larger home, and it really was our first boarding house or hotel, you might say. They had a couple rooms upstairs that they rented out. And that's about all I know of those. Down came the Hunnells, also the Browns. The Browns were -that was Daphne Brown, and they had the first sawmill in Fairhope, about a mile out on Fairhope Avenue. They came from Chicago and he was a jeweler in Chicago and he came down here and started a sawmill, some contrast, jewelry work and sawmill work. Their home is where Fram's restaurant is now. That's the old Brown home. And the Bancrofts? The Bancrofts were early settlers and had the first hotel opposite Knoll Park. The Bancrofts built on the colony ground. Next came the Mershons. Yeah, there were several Mershons. Arthur Mershon and Nathaniel, they came with their families and they had the first mercantile store in Fairhope. And Gaston's kin. Next came the Mershons, Gaston's kin. Right from then the trouble did begin. Mrs. Gaston was a Mershon, or she married Mr. Gaston. Then came the

Cresswells. Cresswells were an older couple. I don't know where they came from, but they lived where Greer's store is now. What a lovely home there. The Cresswells and old Delamar. Delamars came from Canada, and Delamar Street is named for them, and they had a home on Church Street, and the home still stands, but it's been added on to and made into an apartment house. And he said, "Let's build a wharf off the Gully Bar, and start us a post office too by gum, but it'll put Battles wharf right on the bum." The first post office was attached to Mershon's mercantile store uptown, just a little tiny cubie hole, really, because at that time there were so few here. By now E.B. had took full command, had all the say about the colony land. Postmaster, too, was the job he drew, beside printing the Courier each week or two. By now the town was well on its way to pass all the others on Mobile Bay. But the folks we drew were mostly pranks. You may have heard of their crazy pranks. Now there was Bellangee and Old Doc Hail. Bellangee was one of the early settlers and his daughter Mrs. Call came here and had the first millinery shop. And Dr. Hail was one of our first doctors and later he moved to Robertsedale. Bellangee and Old Doc Hail, they got on each other's trail. Bellangee was a Dutchman. Hail was a Mick. Hail socked Bellangee on the head with a brick. Sweet Marie with Wild West Hall drifted in with Old Man Hall. Remember Sweet Marie or Old Man Hall? Sweet Marie must have been Mrs. Howland, the... It shows a picture of her here with a shovel in her hand looking at the cow. Yeah, that's the librarian. She was the first librarian and she came from Mexico where she had a small library in Mexico and she came to Fairhope with her nucleus and started the first library here. Yes, that was written up in the Courier about the library history. George Coleman, too, came in by chance and started teaching folks how to dance. George, he had the whole square of what is now Ingleside. He had a large home in the middle and the pecan trees all around and about once a month the whole country gang would gather there and old Mr. Bell used to play the fiddle for us and we'd all square dance. He'd call us square dancing. Oh, I thought it was folk dancing. It was square dancing in those days. Then came Littlefield, stumbling all alone. Found himself a hammer built himself a home, and down by the gully he found him a spot where he built a house all over the lot. Littlefield is related some way to the Mershons, and he had a home on Cliff Drive. We had several, he had five children I think there, and they had quite a home on the corner. They had a big lot. Oh yes, we forgot that Euclid crew, Molasses Smith and Culberson too. I think Smith came from Arkansas, I'm not sure, some place in there. He lived in the country several miles out, started a farm, and he specialized in sugarcane. And he had the first canned syrup, you might say around here, sugar cane syrup, had big vats of it that the old mule would go round and round and crush the cane in the syrup, get the juice out of it, and they would be boiled and put in these vats. And my husband worked there sometimes, and he said they'd go in the mornings and take the cover off of the vats and sometimes they'd find a rat or two in it and they'd just pull a rat out and stir it up and go on. Jerry Luciere and his old mule team that he'd drive to town with a nail in

the beam. Well that was Luciere, Luciere Rockwell, yes. He shows him with a nail on the end of a stick poking his mules. Yeah. "Get along, don't stop," he said. Mm-hmm. And then came Greeno from the north somewhere and said, "What Fairhope needs is a mayor." He was Fairhope's first mayor and had a home on the Bayshore two doors down from where is the Colonial Inn, and it was later turned into a Beasley place, I believe, as a nursing home, but that was his home there. He said Fairhope needs a mayor, so he and Gaston ran for the place, but he kicked friend Gaston out of the race.

Then we lived in peace for about a year, but hell broke loose when Wolff appeared. He damned the colony at town as well, and at us kids, how he would yell. He was very, very antagonistic to anything that the colony did. I don't know where he came from, but he was just a bone thorn in the flesh there. He and a little man named Melville, that they sort of ganged up together. They made it a little bit rough. He and Stimpson would fight all day about the colony lease or the rent we paid. Stimpson had the first sawmill down where the Western Woodworks is now. But old Buckeye stayed with the ship and threatened old Wolf with a buggy whip. Was that Buckeye Stimpson? That was Buckeye Stimpson.

Then came the Dutchman's, short and tall, Van Bendegon, Shuler, and Old Vanderwall. Got them from farmland east of town, out near the mill that was owned by Brown. Yeah, they were about, I'd say they were two or three miles out. And they had quite a farm out there. and they specialized mostly in cows to begin with. The, some boys from Texas, the Ring boys came, young boys seemed to have plenty of money and they bought the farm of them Bendigans I guess. And they turned, it didn't last long, they sold it finally. But the Vanderwall place is still there, and it's owned now by Bernie Klumpp. Oh, yeah.

During these years, old Doc did shine. Believe me, folks, he had some time, until old Clements tried to spoil his fun, when, for the mayor's office, he too did run. I don't remember Clements.

Then there was Albright, who came in one night, but hit us kids as only half-bright. About this same time came another guy, Melville, by name, just four feet high. Albright came, he was the first justice of the peace. He came here, and he was very sedate, quiet, and had to do exactly what he said. He had a home facing Knoll Park.

And Melville, as I said before, the little fellow was a bone of contention around here. It says Albright Real Estate and Justice of the Peace on this little caricature here. "Twas just about now that Freeman blew in, said in dancing and such there ain't no sin, and started a club at the old town hall where you'd see sweet Alice for Reef and all."

Freeman was from Arkansas. I don't know very much about him. He lived on Morphy and he specialized in garden material. He had wonderful gardens and things that we go out and get sometimes. But he was on the socialistic order. It makes me think that he

came from Arkansas because there was quite a colony of socialists over there. And several of those socialists here at the Fairhope. The Shepherds were one of the families that came in, socialistic, and I don't remember the others right now.

Do you remember Sweet Alice? Yes, Sweet Alice. That was Alice Herring. She, I don't know where she came from, I don't know very much about her except if she was a nature lover. Used to sunbathe as much as could build a little shelter and get in there, walls around it, and the sun would come down and we'd sneak up and try to look through the cracks. We knew she was in there. She was just an oddball that hit Fairhope.

Back in those days the streets were dark, from the Old Town Pump to Knoll Park. But talk about movies, it sure was a show to watch folks a-walkin' with their lanterns a glow and it shows a couple of women with lanterns and skirts you can see through. Well that was our mode of travel then when you had to go any distance you carried a lantern and she didn't have much on my hand went through.

Yeah and then there was that lady who lived up in a tree who started that slang of come up and see me. That was Mrs. Schramm. She had a treehouse down South Section Street somewhere and she built this, it must have been one room, she never let anybody up to see it, but it was quite a room up in there and a ladder that led up to it. And she lived up there, I don't know how long, I don't remember, but I know we children used to go down from school lots of times and just a curiosity to see her. And you'd get too close, well she'd come out and run us away.

Upton Sinclair stopped off for a time. He'd eat all the meat to give his kid all the rinds. He was, Upton Sinclair was a poet from Georgia. He had quite well known his poetry was. And later when he died, his wife came here with the two children and had them in the Organic School in the early days.

And that wild old man who'd run to the bay, naked by gosh, as the newborn jay. And another dink whose love was free, who would poke, P-O-L-K, around the magnolia tree. Remember them? A naked wild old man and another dink. P-O-L-K around the magnolia tree? No, I don't. We would, we would, we could rave all day.

Thank you.