

Fairhope Single Tax Corporation Archives

FMH-A0005c Transcription

FMH-A0005c. Mary Lois Timbes-Adshead interviews Helene Beiser Hunter and Evalyn Berglin Porter for background information for her books *Meet Me at the Butterfly Tree* and *A Fair Hope of Heaven*. 1998

Continuation of FMH-A0005b.

Mary Lois Timbes Adshead interviews Evalyn Berglin Porter, Helene Beiser Hunter, Eloise Nichols Rowe and Kenneth Cain for research for her books *Meeting Me at the Butterfly Tree* and *A Fair Hope of Heaven*. Run time is 33:21.

The audio is difficult to hear, with parts unintelligible. This transcription, by Whisper translation software, understandably has some errors due to the poor quality of the audio. It is offered for assistance. Starts at 23 seconds.

And Uncle Ralph owned Rex, I'm trying to think, who owned, ours was a stargazer. Uncle Ralph was the Rex and there was another one. And I can remember Ray Gartman dancing around the boats, doing like this. Gavin and Roberta, as they painted boats, pink, baby pink and baby blue. He was the funniest thing down running with his hands like this. So, Gavin was Gabina and Bobby was Roberta. Oh, he was a character. And you all had that big inboard, that barwood, I remember. That big speedboat, didn't it? Oh, yes. That was a wonderful boat. It was so nice. Who owned My Blue Heaven? Not Jimmy Dealey. Not Jimmy Dealey. Jimmy Knowles. Oh. Oh. I think about Gene Austin. Yeah, they bought it from Gene. Right. Because that's what it was then. I love that body. Absolutely classic. I love that. I can't remember names anymore. You'll think of it.

Well, the Yacht Club was quite a social center. It was. Which was the Carpenter's general store? Was it on the north or the south side of the creek before the Yacht Club? They couldn't remember that. And there was a little, was that that little tile? It probably was that little tile building that we had our first yacht club activities. I thought Charlie Carpenter told me it was across the river. Oh, it was? I thought they were. They don't seem to remember.

When did Bayou-Volanta become Fly Creek? Bayou-Volanta means Flying Creek. It's Flying Creek is its proper name. That's right. But Volanta, that whole section has been called Volanta before I ever saw it. Aren't you on Volanta. No, this is Red Bluff, isn't it?

No, this is Sea Cliff. Volanta was up the hill there. By the Blue Light up that way. Which isn't the Blue Light anymore.

Anybody got any stories about the Blue Light? That was quite a place. Was it always a den of iniquity that I recall? It was the Pink Elephant. It used to just be a hamburger shop. It was called the Pink Elephant then? And it was a hamburger shop. Well, to begin with, it was Mr. Forster's filling station. And those archways, in the building still existing, was where you drove in to get gas. And the pumps were in between here and those archways. And then they sold it, and it was called the Pink Elephant. Then later it became a great big elephant with those arches and those legs.

Then it became Blue Light and that was when Lee Parker had it. Oh, the Parker house at Lee Parker? No, that was Parker house later on, but Lee Parker did run it. I remember Lee Parker's wonderful coffee and coconut cream pie. He was the one that was almost blind, wasn't he? By the time he knew him, he had cataracts. That was an institution, everybody ate at the Parker House. In the forties and fifties. And his brother had the Kit-Kat, or had it for a while. Mama Kapan had it first, I remember. And after we danced, that was a wonderful place to dance.

What happened, do you think, through all the dancing? I mean, I know the dance club started up and there helped the Ravellys ?and the whatever they wanted to figure out. But what -- And those were from the early days. Well, they're fifty-some-odd years old now. How did the dancing evolve into dance clubs, do you think, instead of having them to get Just a social get together. The FaHeras were started by Adelaide Malone and Lenora Pittman. Right. And I first met Glessner was started by Mary Pittman and Lenora and Adelaide and Rola. Right. And Rola was also a charter of the FaHera and Helen Dyson and Huffington. The FaHera were the first ones. Right. And I think she's still alive, the one who lives out on Greeno Road that's up in the Norris area and so is Adelaide. Lauren, well Nora and Adelaide are both shows. Right. But I'm thinking about the one that was up at Westminster all those years. Um, remember we had our graduation party at the, she was a good friend of Helen Dyson and um. Oh, I don't know who you mean. She lived out on, I don't know. On Greeno. Um, I don't remember who you mean. And she was about a hundred years old just recently. Oh, you mean Glessner Taylor? Oh, yeah. She's a hundred and two. And she's so a lot of, she was one of the two. She's one of the originals. And also, uh, Henry Bishop's wife, but she just died not long ago. Oh, that Glessner Taylor's a wonderful person. She was in the garden club too. How was she?

They were the first, one of the first couples to move into, Colonial Acres. That's where I party was. I thought it was out on the house on Greenough, the White House on Greeno Road. Well, they owned that, Gavin's father owned that at one time. Oh really? Yeah, and they did live in that house for a while. Yeah, but we had our, because Colonial Acres

was not even around when he graduated. Gretchen's husband, who was critical, he's the one that actually developed the Colonial Acres. Clark Taylor and Chester Billie. Clark Taylor. I think their house was one of the first houses built in those two. They just didn't eat any wood?. That's right. They've got a lot of houses around, haven't they? I don't see her much anymore because...

Well, I mean, she's almost completely blind. No! Who is this? Aileen? Aileen is? It's with Macro? Well, she was at the reception for Luke and her family. She was at the reception for Luke and her family. And Ed's 50th wedding anniversary, she recognized me. She can see what she is losing her sight. So she's not able to do her artwork. And she's still married to Fred. But she's doing beautiful baskets. She's been taking baskets weaving. Oh, the one at the Art Center. I have not been in there yet

I would just think I've got to go home and cook for Gavin. Come on, I'm taking some salad. I'm taking some salad. I've got plenty left over. They're so good. He loves to eat, and I think he'd weigh 250 pounds. She certainly would.

And with a piece of material that she thought would be nice, she'd always get a dress length or something. So there was this Mrs. Possien who was a seamstress. She was a modiste, you know. And she would come in and make some of our clothes. And I made a dress one day when Mother went to Mobile on the boat. And I got a piece of material out. And I must have been about 10 years old. And I cut myself out a dress. And I made a dress. and it was just a straight piece, and I cut like this for the arm hole, and a piece like this neck, and I sewed the shoulder seams up, sewed the side seams up, and took some, it was a piece of white with little tiny black rings like that all over it, and I took some black bias tape, and I bowed my neck and about the sleeve, and turned the hem up, and I had myself a dress when Mother came on. Oh, my gosh, did you wear it? And I wore it, yeah, I did, I remember that.

So now why did Mrs. Johnson scare you a little? Mrs. Johnson, I used to make my clothes, and I made a couple of jumpers, and I had a real little tiny waistline, like that one's is now. And I made this darl-- I remember it was a celluloid color pink, and I had a white stiff blouse that I wore under it. It had lace on the collar and lace on the sleeves to hit, and this jumper, and it had a wide band around the jumper here, and it was real, you know, wide, so it showed you a little waistline. And I think it was a junior high school, and she called me over to the office. She said she wanted to see me. I thought, well, what is she going to see me before? I haven't done anything wrong. And I walked in that office and she put her hands in my waist. She said, "I don't want you wearing a waist pincher. It's bad for your health." I said, "But Aunt Mary, I don't have a waist pincher on." She called her in here. She said, "Oh, I'm sorry, dear." Oh. So she apologized. She apologized. Oh, that's nice. And so then I thought to myself, "Well, I better behave myself. She's really observing me." Oh, that was funny.

I can remember at the Damrosch concerts, the radio, every Friday morning we had an assembly, and that's where we all, the whole school, from kindergarten all the way through, would gather at Comings Hall and they had the loudspeaker system and the Damrosch concerts over the radio. And they were wonderful. That's what my introduction to really classical music. And they would, you would say, "Now listen, do you hear the fruits? Do you hear the fruits? Do you hear the fruits? Do you hear the fruits? Do you hear the fruits? Do you hear I don't know if it was a rhythm. The rhythm of a soft-limbs lullaby, the sunny shallows, the wooden spring, and how great love that the ultimate face. It is a very beautiful poem. I say it every night. And you still run into it because of some of the people. Has she signed her name to this poem? She didn't write it as far as I know. No, she didn't write it. Nobody knows who to credit it to, and I just, we're hoping we need some. And she just, out and on, she just had a way of putting something that you just, you were just a believer. She had a, it was like a magnet. A cult. It really was. You just became completely fascinated.

What was her husband like? No, but he was a nondescript. I don't even remember him. I don't remember her sons either. Well, one of them died before I would, you know, I'll put the other one, Clifford Ernest. We just didn't know her. I don't remember the boys. So she was the dominant personality of the family. Well, that was her life, the school was her life. I mean, I think the boys and the husband came. Well, like, if she were a man, it would have been the same way, but because she was a woman in those ages, that hurt.

Well, that's why I would wonder what her speaking style was like, you know, if it was feminine or what it sounds like. Well, it was, she was not, it was a woman. Very forceful. In her. But that's why you found it a little scary to be called into her office. Yeah, I think she, yeah, she was very firm, but, um, um, There was nothing mean or ugly about her, but she just made you feel like you better do right. Yeah. Well, everyone's... But she was kind of inspiring from what people said. Yeah. They wanted to please her. I mean, Claude Arnold was quoted as saying, "I just wanted..." To please her. Yeah, to please her. He just repeated it, you know, and this is in one of these interviews. Which is what... Not part of her philosophy of education. No, that's funny that she... That used to kind of, I think, kind of curb with me. Yes.

Well, in spite of her philosophy then— You felt like you better do right, or else, you know. Oh, so that's true. Instead of enjoying the learning of—the joy of learning for you or for yourself, it was really to please—there was a lot of having to please Mrs. Johnson. Well, we wanted to please her. Right. Let's put it that way. We wanted to get it right. Yeah, we wanted to get it right. And what she was saying was, do whatever you want to and that'll be right, but you weren't sure if you could trust that. Do it your way, not be forced into doing it somebody else's way. Yeah. So it must have been pretty hard to enforce. That's a hard thing to get people to do. Okay, you do it with anything they are.

Well, no, I don't remember any discipline problems in the school. No, no. I don't ever remember any discipline problems. Because she had that personality that people did want to do what she wanted.

And all of our teachers at school were teachers who were retired college professors who came down here to winter. We had the most wonderful teachers. We had the most marvelous teachers in this world, teachers that were professors in colleges. It really was great. They came down because they wanted to learn from. Well, and they came down for the winter. See, they wintered here. And some of them went off and started their own schools. That's right, Grace Lapsol. Well, she started, she started schools too, right? Oh yeah, yeah. And Ricki, my older sister, went out, when the Cases left here, and went out to Oregon, Ruth and Albert Case, they took my sister Ricki with them, because she had had a teacher's training, and had been at the University of Alabama, graduated from the University, no, she had three years at the University. And they took her out there, and they started No Gangster? in Alabama. I didn't know that's why Ricki went out there. Yeah, in Hood River, Oregon. But they started at, what do they call it? They started a school out there. Organic school? Organic school. And then Ricki came back here and went into the School Home. Well did the school fail out there? Did the school fail in Hood River? No, I don't even know. I can look that up. I corresponded with Ruth Case for a long time, but I gave up, I mean years ago I put writing to her. because her son, Charles, was in my graduating class. Oh. Charles Case, and Mr. Case was my science teacher, her cousin. And then Ricki

became School Home mother. Rickie became school home mother when she came back, and that's where she met Jim, because Jim had come down to teaching school from Boston. Oh. And he was a buddy of Prof's. Yeah, he and Prof both came. Well, I knew that. And Martha. And Prof was another one that had come down from another part of the world? His friend was Jim. And that's how he got here. Okay. I thought they just became friends when they met. I don't know if they were from the same place, but I think they were college chums with each other.

I think the best part of the organic school was, I mean, for sure. Yeah. Aunt Mittie died the year that Buddy graduated from high school. I graduated in '34. Beth graduated in '36. No, '35. And Buddy graduated in '37. We're all two years apart, except Dot and I. We're three years apart.

Pause in tape with missing transcription.

Well, they did in Alice in Wonderland at the school one year. Yeah, he brought it, he taught it down in the field, or she did, I don't know this one. Maybe they didn't teach, they were just. The choir director, this is what happened. And it's, um, McFarlane? McFarlane. Yeah, I didn't know if I saw any of those in there, but, um... Well, one of the first theatrical productions I remember, our family moved over the bay in 1949, and we

went to see the little theatre production of Arsenic and Old Lace. Were you in that? I think you were. Well, your dad We should be there. Your dad played Teddy Roosevelt. Yeah, Charlie, that was my dad. I was about I was about 11. No, you were older than that. You were older than that. I know that Jay had a terrible time. Because he broke his... He had a little place that had two front teeth out. And he broke one in two front. And his house was... I was very afraid of the next day. I was very after the next day. Anyway, he said, "I can't do any about it, but I'll send you to the mosquito and look and look at it." Oh, I know, in the meantime, he decided, "Well, he can't do any about it, I'll glue them myself." Oh, yeah. Well, you know, do it yourself, uh-huh. Yeah, the organic way. Yeah. So he glued them, but he made the mistake of putting them in the field of hot water, if you want to sit, so it could heat and dry it. Yeah. Oh. So then he really wasn't. He ended up in the same place where he liked him. And they made him a partial place to be like that and love it. I'm sure he had another place before, but he really wanted to find the world where he couldn't make him hate my friends. For real. And I don't know whether they did it again. Yeah, anyway, he's got him fixed for the targe. Yeah. Targe! Yeah, he had the howl out there. Howl, didn't he? Yeah.

Well, you're welcome to coach that with you, both in the organic school and in the public school. Yeah. You know, they always say that the public school doesn't have any extracurricular activities. That isn't true, because they had band and they had choir and things like that, so that I know that they turned out to be intelligent people. Turned out to be. Wasn't sure they were going to be when they were young.

Well, we weren't sure about it at Organic \either. No, heavens not. Without any tests or anything. Well, now they did actually have a way of grading, because Daddy got grades. He didn't know that he was being graded. They would keep a record. A silent grade. And it was never shown, and Mrs. Dunson felt very strongly that you show the parents, they start comparing it, they start following the kids out and make a thing about it. And that's true, too. Just don't do it. Yeah, that's true. My kids are very conscious of grades, but then they've always gone to public schools. Becky went to the Organic School the first year she went to school, and that was because her little friends went to school. And when they changed after the first grade, they were on the grade and publicschool, and Becky wanted to go too. She said, "What could I do?" And you know you weren't your kid to be unhappy. She wasn't happy anyway. She wasn't happy anyway. She wasn't on the public school. I think she liked the Organic School, but at that time, we didn't have the money to put money on. Rough times. Well, what I found from the people who come in, even if they just went there one year in their life, they said that was the best year in my life, the year I came to this school. So it just had that special.

There's a video you should see, too. Linda and Karen Horn are talking about their memories of it. And Linda suddenly says that she had gone to first grade at Foley School and she transferred in second grade. And that the first life teacher was Eloise

Nichols-Rowe, and she had the most wonderful class. She said she was just such a happy, giving person. I had a good time doing that. I did not. And I could imagine that that would have been an ideal place for you at that time. You were young enough to relate to the kids. Mary Howell, Marie Howell. Mary Eva. Mary the good Howell, yeah. Gwendolyn, no, not Gwendolyn. She was a star of the year. Margaret Howell. Yeah, Margaret Howell. Who'd I get Mary Eva? Mary Eva's the daughter. Yeah, that's right. I knew something.

We had a good time. One of the funniest things that happened to Tommy, and he was in first or second now, if I don't remember which. Tommy says, "What does playing hooky mean?" And I said, "Well, it means you don't go to school." And he said, "Let's play hooky." And we were already up on the campus, and I said, "Okay." So we started running around on the campus, just having a ball. And the teacher, I guess it was his wife, came out and said, "Effel, you say, Thomas, what are you doing?" "We're playing hooky." She said, "You come on down here." Sounds like a good idea, huh? Yeah. So we went to school. It was pretty easy to hooky. Well, the whole idea was that school wasn't very much different from not moving in school. Yeah. You know, we just don't know.

Do you remember the swimming pool? No, it wasn't there. I think it was blown over, but it was still a... It was deep though. Yeah. When I was there, they didn't have water in it, and it was just the flowers were blown over. It wasn't deep on me now, but... It was a place where I thought it was wonderful. Yeah, and the big blocks. I love those blocks. You could build your picketons?. Well, apparently Mrs. Johnson deliberately had real oversized things for picketons. and things of paint, and so the bigger the better, and she said she noticed that the kids gravitate to this building a lot.

What are your memories of her? Mrs. Johnson? I really had very little to do with Mrs. Johnson because she was still teaching in upper grades and I was in the lower grades. I'd see her walking around the campus. Was she intimidating you? No, not at all. Not with nobody, because she was too many of those days. That's good. No, Dr. Zeuch did, when I was older then. But, you know, she was a very loving person. I can remember seeing her put her arm around people and they were all in work and they needed to. Well I got that feeling too, that she was a personage, but the kids felt they just liked it. Almost everybody says that. It's hard to describe. I don't know, I don't know why she did the things that she did. Because she was a real, go get 'em. She'd go all these things everywhere to try to get money for the school, of course. And they would make speeches anywhere. Yeah. And apparently they were just hugely successful.

So these are really just what I'm looking for. I've got numbers on all of them. Do you have any photographs from any of these productions? No. This is all I have. I'm sorry. Just take pictures like that. No, take pictures like that. You can keep one of these

because I think there's another thing in here that's a There's no point in you taking this with us. Okay. Just in case.

But for my book, I'm exploring the whole of Fairhope, and how people remember it. And one of the things I would like to be able to describe to people who don't know is how much we used the gullies. The gullies were all through Fairhope. And when I moved back, I don't know where they went, really. I guess they filled them in. No, there's a big head gully still there, Fairhope, the city of Fairhope still uses it as a runoff for water. As a matter of fact, they exchanged part of the gully for some land somewhere, I don't know where it was, exchanged for the same attack?, and they could build on the property that they exchanged it for, and then they'd let the water run off. They needed a way for the water to go down the bay. In fact, the last time Carolyn was here, she and I went down and walked up through the hill and we sank in sand, wet sand, up to our knees. It kind of scared me. The first time I realized I wasn't going to go any further than that. And some lady came out behind me, she had a house that backed up to the hill and she said, "What are you girls doing?" Oh, we lost our boat. She always had an answer for everything.

Well, most of the kids played in the gullies. Oh, yeah. I certainly did. And the school used to use them. Did they still take you on nature walks and things like that? Did you have, um, she was a nature person, she brought big turtles and things like that to school. I think, I don't think it was a real, a live turtle, it's like one I have over there, just the shell. And, um, and snakes, live snakes. I think she was, do you know, Miss Rickman? No.

No, I don't think she was. Marge Ewing, do you know Marge? Marge's mother and father, and I think it was her mother that got all these rights and Oh, that's right. I know who that is. Edward. And then, Bill Edwards built the boat and took them to Russia.

I don't know. I don't know. I think that was very important. Yes, it really was. And I came across that at the museum. But there are several very interesting dissertations about Mrs. Johnson, the two that just give the whole history and tie it in with Fairhope. Is that in her books? These people just did research through about her life and what her philosophy was. And both of them came to the conclusion that the school could never have existed in any time or any place except Fairhope at the time. The town supported it, and it was an experimental school in the same way that the town was an experiment. And so it was just a natural combination, and that Mrs. Johnson attracted as many new citizens.

And the library, too. Yeah. The library was one of the first libraries in this vicinity, and gosh, people came to the library, too, because they had?. But the people, Mr. Gaston was always raving about Mrs. Johnson

in the Courier. He'd send a Courier all around through the north, to his contacts time, he'd get more people to go there. But he used her as a magnet as well as a? and she was very committed to send it out. Oh yeah. She'd give lectures on that. There were quite a few people here that were not dedicated to them. No, I told you, save the time. It was a hard sell. But everybody agrees that it's safe for time. Then that we wouldn't have such a beautiful place as people said. I don't know where to now. Maybe if we wouldn't have heard it, it wouldn't have been before the past. The sad thing about the way the house is going now is that the price took advantage. And people say, "Well, that's fair, but it's just an expensive place." That's not fair. That's what's wrong. Oh, it's too bad. It used to be that you'd go anywhere in Fairhope and not worry about a single thing. I mean, nobody would die. We could run around and spend all day long down at the bay. I don't know what my parents were thinking. Well, they really weren't that worried, I don't think. No, they didn't have anything to worry about. I heard two stories like that, Helene Hunter and Evalyn Berglin, they were best friends.

End of audio recording FMH-A0006a. Interview continues on FMH-A0006b ...