

Project: Person Place: Voices of the Century

Interviewee: Betty McKinne

Interviewers: John and Susan McKay

Interview Date: May 23, [1999]

Location: Louisburg, N.C.

Length: 00:27:08

START OF INTERVIEW

[*Transcript begins at 00:00:18*]

Susan McKay: Today is Sunday, May 23, and we are interviewing Betty McKinne for a “Voices of the Century” project interview about a home, that Betty is going to tell us about, in Franklin County. Betty, I’d like for you to go ahead and begin.

Betty McKinne: Okay. [*Transcript resumes at 00:00:54*] Through the years I have passed a place that intrigued me in the Simms Bridges Area of the county, and that’s the McLemore-Cannady House. It’s in a great curve. When you approach it from one side of it it’s in a great curve, and you swoop around this great curve and there you are, looking at the house on your left, if you come from that direction. But anyway, one day I decided I just had to investigate something about it. I was particularly attracted to it because it had a very large American boxwood, which is rather unusual in this county. So I thought that I would talk to the people who lived right near there, up on a hill across the road from it, and it turned out that that was Mr. and Mrs. Cannady, William Cannady. They were very gracious, and I told him what I was interested in and so he went with me to look at the boxwood and he described—. It was just more than I expected to hear, but he described his mother’s garden.

So, we walked—. We went to the house; walked past the front of the house. We're facing the house, and to the left of the house as you face it there was a fence between the house and where the garden was. Well, we went through a little gate and walked down a path and there were the boxwoods. We walked sort of right into them. There was a big boxwood – let's see, I've written down here some notes – fifteen to twenty-six feet high, I think, roughly.

SM: The boxwoods?

BM: The boxwood, mm-hmm, this one boxwood, and then there was another next to it. It was an English boxwood, and I've forgotten exactly how big that was but it was, of course, nowhere near that size but it was a typical older English boxwood. But anyway, so those were the two—. The walk went up past those. Then it turned to the right, a path, which was a wide path. Of course it didn't look like that now but, I mean, this was the way it was to him, that he's describing to me. It's a wide path and you walked up that and at the end of that long path was a great big lilac bush, and behind that great big lilac bush was the garden house. I said, "A garden house?" He said, "Yes. That's the privy." [*Laughs*] Then on the right-hand side – as we walked down towards the big lilac bush – on the right-hand side he said, "On this side Mother had phlox and iris and—." What's that word right there?

SM: Lilies?

BM: "Lilies, all in here, all different kinds, and on the left-hand side of the walk she had bulbs, and the great American cure-all tree." I said, "Well, what in the world is that?" and he said, "You know, I don't know the name of it," but he said, "I think it had some little red balls on it," and said she used to make a salve using this—

SM: Cure-all.

BM: —cure-all tree. Well—.

SM: So it cured all.

BM: Yeah, and I said, “Well, that certainly would be a very interesting thing, to know what went into that salve [because] we’re trying to collect interesting things about the history of things that were done in the county.” So Mrs. Cannady wrote out for me the contents of this salve. This is called the “Homemade Remedy” and it consists of fireweed, American cure-all, heart leaves, mutton suet, peach tree leaves—. What does that say?

SM: Homemade cow’s butter.

BM: Homemade cow’s butter, and lily root. I have this little thing that she wrote herself, in her handwriting, and I had underneath it, “Kindness of Mrs. Cannady, 1982.” So I really do treasure that time with Mr. and Mrs. Cannady, and I forgot to mention, as we walked past those boxwoods, two big boxwoods, then the next plant we came to was a white rose, but I don’t know the name of the rose. I wish we did.

But anyway—. And they told me a little bit about the house, the history of it. I can’t recall exactly, but the thing that was most intriguing, particularly when you drove around that big curve, if you were approaching the house from – I don’t know the direction, but the way you come around the big curve – and you see it from the side and the rear sort of, behind it you can see the remains of an old kitchen, and it had a—. I did get as close to that as I could when I was walking around with Mr. Cannady to look at those remains but it was so overgrown that you couldn’t get too close to it. But I vowed I would come back and take a picture of that because it was the biggest chimney and open hearth that they used to cook with. It’s tumbling down but I thought surely I’ll be back here and take these pictures, but I never did get back to take the picture.

Mr. Cannady also told me that right in this area – and of course the story has been maybe told about how there was a great massacre, Indian massacre, of the Tuscarora Indians and it occurred right in that general area—

SM: Where the house is?

BM: —on the river. Well, no, in that general area, the Simms Bridges area, that area, and that he had collected quite a few – found quite a few – artifacts, Indian artifacts, and I think I saw them. I don't remember exactly what they were but I did see a few of them that he had there. But it was a very delightful visit and I'm most appreciative of it.

John McKay: What was the house like?

SM: Was it a plantation home?

BM: Oh, no, it's a house—. The house, of course, it's in Thilbert's book. Here it is. It's—. Well,—

SM: Was it at one time a plantation?

BM: —I can't do too much talking about the house, but I think that the plan was that one of his nephews hoped to restore it someday. I did go into the basement with him; very nice basement, very good basement. It's a typical—. I can't recall the—. I could tell you if I would think it through or read this, but it's in Thilbert's book on page twenty-nine of his new edition of *The Early Architecture of Franklin County*, number two of that thing.

SM: Do you know if it was a plantation though?

BM: Oh, yeah, I'm sure it was. I've really forgotten. Of course all the story, I guess, that they know about is on here. I've forgotten what family—. Well, McLemores must have had something to do with it, but I really don't know the history of the house.

SM: Where is Simms Bridge in relationship to Louisburg?

BM: I don't know. [*Laughs*] I'm not familiar, I mean--.

SM: Is it like five minutes out of town, or fifteen?

JM: Simms Bridge is--

BM: We could drive there.

JM:--[00:0947]

BM: I could take you there. I really can't tell you.

JM: [00:09:51]

BM: That what?

JM: [00:09:53]

SM: Oh, okay. It's down that road.

BM: Oh, if you keep going. If you keep going--.

JM: What is the name of the road?

BM: Lovers' Leap.

SM: Dyking Road.

BM: The Dyking Road, uh huh, the Lovers' Leap road.

JM: You take Dyking Road all the way down and it intersects with Simms Bridge.

SM: Take Dyking Road all the way down and it intersects with Simms Bridge, okay.

BM: And then I can't tell you from there. I just really am not good at that,--

SM: Well, that's okay.

BM: --but it's a beautiful view. Of course we could put a picture of this house in a little thing because it's a very valuable house of the type, of the style.

SM: Is anyone living there now?

BM: No, uh-uh, and there were bees in it at one time. I don't know whether they've gotten them out. But they do care about the house, and I know that they had a daughter, and I'd love to talk—. Maybe she could talk to us some about it, because she's a very nice young lady. I think her name is Mary, and she was in the National Guard, I happen to know. Colin had told me that about her. I don't know whether there's a son or not. Maybe there is. But anyway, I treasure that visit with them.

SM: Looks like they had a cellar, that I'm sure was a very important part.

BM: And I would love to find out though what the all-American cure bush was, because the only thing that I could imagine, in my small knowledge I have of the wild plants in the area, is the *Euonymus*. We were talking about it, *Euonymus americana*, I think it's called, which you know has those little—. It's called "hearts-a-bustin."

SM: Oh!

BM: You know what I'm talking about?

SM: Yeah. It's like a vine or something, or—?

BM: No, it's a—. I'll show it to you. I've got one. I dug it up. You know, it's a little one, but I have it. But it has a fascinating little thing with orange—. But it has a little orange and red on it, a berry affair.

SM: That's sort of a bumpy pod that pops open—

BM: No—.

SM: —with a little red berry?

BM: I think so. That's it. You've probably seen it.

SM: Yeah, my grandmother had it.

BM: Small leaf.

SM: Yeah.

BM: That's the only thing I can imagine. I don't know. It's kind of a pinkish-. It's sort of, not cerise, but a fuchsia color in there. But I'll bet you that Mr. Washburn might know that plant and that story, I mean, what its properties are.

JM: Mr. Washburn? Was he-?

BM: Seth Washburn. He taught biology up at the college. He's quite elderly. He's late eighties, I think, and he knows all the wild flowers and everything. You know, Bill Lord might know something about that plant.

SM: That's true.

BM: We'll ask him. Ask Bill,-

SM: Yeah.

BM: -if you will.

SM: An American cure-all plant.

BM: Yeah. I mean, I can't imagine-. But some-. I tell you who might know something, close to you: the girl who does the herbs.

SM: The Timberlake [00:13:26 herb store].

BM: Exactly. She's one you ought to interview.

SM: Is she from around here?

BM: No, she's not from around here, but she has built up a business which provides a lot of people with things-.

SM: Old-fashioned remedies.

BM: Yes.

SM: Yeah. That's true. There's nothing like an old-fashioned remedy. [*Laughs*]

BM: Well, that's something we ought to discuss too. I mean, old-fashioned remedies is Joe Person's—.

SM: Joe Pearce?

BM: No, Joe Person's—. What was his called? Well, I'll take up the whole tape while we're trying to think about this.

SM: That's okay.

BM: But Joe Person, who lived eventually on one corner of the Person Place property, he and his wife created — is it an elixir or—? Oh, now right at this moment—. A remedy. A remedy, Person's Remedy.

SM: Oh!

BM: And also they lived—. I think when they were producing this remedy they lived in the—. Can you shut that thing off a minute?

JM: [00:14:51]

BM: No, I have to think of his name, in Franklinton, a person who should be—. I just—. You really should stop this while I can think, or look up—.

JM: You can think while it's running.

SM: He's right.

BM: I can?

SM: Yeah, just ignore it.

BM: Okay. [00:15:09 Another Mack.] Ah! I just can't think of his name. I just talked about it the other day, that he should be interviewed, because his home is on the road leading from Franklinton to Henderson. I do wish you'd let me look up in this book. It would be in here. No, it's not in this book, I don't believe.

JM: Shut it off for her, Susan.

BM: Yeah, shut it off, because it's—

JM: Till she feels comfortable.

BM: I feel uncomfortable because I can't say his name.

JM: [00:15:35]

[*Break in recording*]

BM: —still ginning cotton.

SM: Oh, okay.

BM: And there's a picture, I know, that was in the *Franklin Times* when they celebrated the hundred and fiftieth, or something like that, old pictures, and there was a picture of these wagons filled with cotton, all lined up on Church Street, headed downriver, you know, going down to the river, because there were two cotton gins. I thought there was just one but there was a cotton gin—. Let's see. There's nothing on that corner now. I'll tell you where it is. It's the corner of Church and Nash. See, this is Church and Nash. In other words, it's a corner of the Town Hall property. Okay, right on this corner, right across the side, was where they had a cotton gin, and then there was another cotton gin down near the river, of course, where they had that—. I guess they had power. No, I don't know whether they would have had any power for that. But anyhow, it's right where the entrance to the park?

JM: Mm-hmm.

BM: I didn't know that there was one there but there was. But these old residents who knew this little town, you know if you could get some of them. Gosh, Mr. Strother's dead. He knew everything. I'm trying to think of who would be—. Hmm. But anyway, the point of the story is Colin told me, because it was colorful. He said it was really a colorful scene to see these

wagons that were waiting for their turn to have their cotton ginned. He said the children in the families who brought the cotton in – a lot of them were black – these little black children would be asleep up there in the cotton. [*Laughter*] It's a real sweet little story. They would have taken the mules, I think, because they had to wait a long time. I think they may have disconnected the mules. I don't know.

But, see, Philip could tell you those things. And who's left of the Allen family, an old person in the Allen family? I'll tell you something cute about the Allen family. Somebody should – because that was a big, old family, the Allens and the Fords. I was thinking of the Fords, really. But Mr. Ford came south after the Civil War from up north – I don't know where he came from up north – and he was a very enterprising man, and then he married a Southern woman. In fact he married twice. His first wife was in Franklinton but his second wife was from here. But anyway, he was very enterprising and built so much of downtown, those brick buildings and everything down there. But they had a business, coal, and they ginned cotton too, and at some point–. Now, we would be talking about the second generation from the first one who came, his son, who was Hazel Allen's–. Of course she was Hazel Allen. That was Hazel Roberson. Do you remember her? Hazel Roberson's father was an Allen but her mother was a Ford. She was a descendant of that man who came after the Civil War. In fact, she was his daughter, I guess. Anyway, she married Mr. Allen.

Well, they were trying to think up a gimmick for their enterprises. See, they ginned cotton and they sold coal, and so the kids–. They were talking about making up some little things, advertisements, for their companies, and so they came up with something. Hazel told this to Colin, I think. She said the kids came up with this: "We gin your bales and warm your tails."

[*Laughter*] Isn't that cute? I don't know whether they wanted it told but I think it was very clever of them to come up with that.

See, that was a big family, and they owned all kind of businesses. They had a big—. See, if only Philip could tell you about the business and everything, but he couldn't do it now. Because the McKinnes came here from a little place called—. Well, they came from Goldsboro. No, they actually came—. The grandfather came from Goldsboro, went from Goldsboro to Princeton after the Civil War. That's not very far from Goldsboro, just about eighteen miles, I think. Anyway, he got into a general—. He and his wife were going to just teach. It's after the Civil War and they were going to teach, but that wasn't lucrative, so they went into a business. They had a little farm and then they had a farm supply store, you know a general merchandise, like Seaboard Store Company. It was after the Civil War so they wouldn't have much, you know.

But anyhow, they had these three sons who ended up by coming to Louisburg, and Uncle Frank came first. He graduated from the university, Uncle Frank did, and he came here about 1905, I believe it was. And then Uncle David came later, and he came, well, before 1910, I'm sure. Then Colin's parent's came about 1912 or '13, and they were in this business; you know, they provided things for the farmers, and hardware, but big farm stuff, you know, like barrels of sugar, and fatback, and lard, and hay, and everything you can think, flour, everything like that for big farming. But anyhow, so—. I lost my story.

SM: They had the store and they provided everything.

BM: Yeah. I think that they bought out the Allen brothers' store. The Allen brothers had a big store here. You really need to get someone—. We ought to get together on that because that was a very important store. But the McKinnes – I take it back – the McKinnes first came in the horse and mule business and they built a little building. Part of it's still there, I think. I don't

think it's all torn down. But I have a sketch of it that my niece did, of horses and mules, and it was painted on there, a horse and a mule, and "McKinne Brothers," I think it was, horses and mules, but they dealt in horses and mules. They had that business and then at some point after that one they started this farm business, this farm supply business. What would you call it, general merchandise, I suppose?

SM: That's the word I was trying to think of.

BM: Anyway, and I think that the Allen brothers were in that business but at some point they bought their business, I believe. I can't remember. But anyway, I can't remember the complete history of that business, but during the Depression they lost the business but then they got it back. I don't what that story was, but they had to close the store, of course. But they kept plugging on it.

JM: Are you talking about the Seaboard business?

BM: Seaboard Stores building, mm-hmm.

JM: Philip had that.

BM: Yeah, uh-huh, but, see, the three brothers were originally Uncle Frank, Uncle David, and Malcolm, my father-in-law. It was a great big supply business, you know, these farmers out here, and they did a bigtime business, and of course when the Depression came they had everything on the books but nobody could pay. But they had little-. We've got two, one for each of the children - I'll have to show them to you - little snuff boxes, and it had the pictures of the three brothers on there.

SM: Oh, really?

BM: Yeah.

SM: "Three Brothers Snuff?" [*Laughs*]

BM: No, no, "The McKinne Brothers." It was a little advertisement for the store. I'm trying to remember. I'll have to ask. I think Philip wrote up a little history of the store. I'm going to see if I can get that.

SM: That would be--.

BM: It would be. It would be good to do because it was a very important business here.

SM: Is he unable to share any stories now?

BM: He gets--. He has fluid that gets in his lungs and he's taking oxygen. You know, he's walking around and everything. He's sitting on the porch--.

[Break in recording]

BM: --to dinner at their home. This was after VE Day. So Philip and this GI went and he wrote this perfectly wonderful letter to his parents describing the meal, something like six courses with wine with each course. But the little personal things he said in it was so sweet, about how wonderful it was to sit down at a table with a white tablecloth and to see china and crystal and silver again, and he described the whole meal. So, that's one we can have. It's already written.

JM: Yeah. I'll ask him.

BM: So, we may not have had such a productive day today but--

SM: Oh, I think it was very productive.

BM: --it's a beginning.

SM: Yeah. Betsy, I think, feels comfortable with it now.

BM: Oh, yeah, and she'd be a good one because she's alert about these things. I--

END OF INTERVIEW

Betty McKinne
May 23, 1999

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Transcriber: Deborah Mitchum

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