

**Transcript of an Oral History Interview in the collection of the
BREVARD COUNTY HISTORICAL COMMISSION
308 Forrest Ave., Cocoa, FL 32922**

Roz Foster: Juanita, let's talk about how the older generation, what they did when they were going to have a baby. How were babies delivered back in the early days and what time period are we talking about?

Juanita Wright: Well, it was 1922 I can [00:00:30] say for me because that's when I was born.

Excuse me.

My mother had a midwife and the midwife is one who delivers babies. And her name was Lottie Walker, but I called her Grandma Walker and we all called her Grandma Walker until she passed on. Then, of course, she delivered me and then she delivered my baby in 1939. So this is all that we had here in this area was midwives. I knew of two, but there was another one in the Sawmill, [00:01:00] Turpentine area. I think her name was Brown, but I'm not sure. Ms. Posey and Grandma Walker, those were the ones that I knew lived in this area and they delivered babies anytime day or night. We didn't know what doctors were at that time far as midwives were concerned—I mean, as babies were concerned.

Roz Foster: Okay. Now when a woman's time came to deliver a baby, how would she get in touch with the midwife?

Juanita Wright: Excuse me.

Usually somebody, her husband or some family member would [00:01:30] run and get her because you didn't have telephones at that time.

Roz Foster: Okay. Now were these midwives licensed or-

Juanita Wright: As far as I know, yes. They had to have some kind of a training, but I don't know what kind because we didn't ask for anything like that. We just knew that that was a midwife.

Roz Foster: Right. And were they paid a salary? Were they paid-

Juanita Wright: The person, when they delivered the baby, you paid them so much and I forgot, I don't know what that amount was, but you paid them.

Roz Foster: It was probably a lot cheaper than having a baby today.

Juanita Wright: Yes. Much, much cheaper.

Roz Foster: [00:02:00] Okay. Let's talk about some other things that happened in the community. For instance, when you were younger here in the area, what did it look like in Mims?

Juanita Wright: Oh, it was nothing but sand, we didn't know what streets were. We didn't have no streets at that time, of sand and bushes. If you went somewhere, you just had a path because we used to have a path from our house to go wherever [00:02:30] you needed to go. We didn't have lights, didn't have radios, we didn't have any of these modern things that we have now when I was growing up. That's what we did, we did a lot of playing as children. And, of course, like I said in the other report, my mother loved cows so she had a lot of cows, and hogs, and pigs, and chickens, and things like that. She made sure we had something to eat.

Roz Foster: And you had garden vegetables as I understand?

Juanita Wright: Yes, we didn't do too much planting, but we did have a little bit [00:03:00] of it there. But the neighbors had a lot of gardening and they would always share. She would share the milk, and butter, and stuff with them, they would share their gardening stuff with her.

Roz Foster: And that's back when neighbors were neighbors, correct?

Juanita Wright: Yes, you didn't even have to lock your doors, you didn't have to ... because we didn't know what it was for electricity so you can just sleep with your windows open, and your doors open, and everybody looked after everybody. We didn't have a lot of this what going on now.

Roz Foster: We had talked before about Mr. [00:03:30] Crandall Warren. He was a wonderful, steadfast community leader. What were some of his accomplishments in the community? What was he responsible for in part?

Juanita Wright: Well, I can't say he was responsible, but he took the responsibility of working with Mr. Moore within the NAACP because I worked with them also when I came back home, going to different meetings. I traveled with him a lot of times to different meetings so that we could get grants, [00:04:00] or get monies, to get roads paved, lights, water because we didn't even have ... pot water is the only thing we had at that time. We didn't have anything like we have now so Crandall worked very diligently with all of those things.

Roz Foster: And you also did.

Juanita Wright: Yes, I worked with him.

Roz Foster: Okay. Where would you go to get some of this support?

Juanita Wright: We had to go most times to other areas like in Cocoa or Titusville to meetings because very few meetings, if any, were held [00:04:30] right in Mims.

Roz Foster: I see. So you went to the County Commissioners?

Juanita Wright: Well, they had certain places they would have the meetings. And, yes, we'd go to the County Commissioners when that time became available.

Roz Foster: So when were the streets paved in Mims?

Juanita Wright: Oh, goodness, I can't remember the year, but it's been quite a while now. But when I was growing up, we didn't have them, but I don't remember the year, it's been quite ... because it was paved before Crandall passed.

Roz Foster: Okay, so would you say they were paved like maybe in the '60s [00:05:00] or the '70s?

Juanita Wright: That sounds like it may be a good time, but I can't remember the times.

Roz Foster: Okay. And electricity, when—do you remember when electricity came to East Mims?

Juanita Wright: All of those things came about one after the other during those times, but it's been quite a while ago. And as I said, long before that, we didn't have any of those things. Candles, or lamps, that's what we used for lights.

Roz Foster: What did you do to keep [00:05:30] cool in the summertime?

Juanita Wright: With the door open and wind blowing through, or a fan, you know, fanning yourself, because we didn't even have the electrical fans. We didn't have no electricity so we had to take care the best way we could. Sit out on the porch, sit out in the yard, people sitting around the trees.

Roz Foster: But then again, that type of lifestyle led to being very neighborly and communication within the community, correct?

Juanita Wright: Right. Every neighbor looked out for the other neighbors. Mhmm.

Roz Foster: [00:06:00] So there was quite a sense of companionship and community spirit?

Juanita Wright: And love for each other.

Roz Foster: Love for each other.

Juanita Wright: That's right.

Roz Foster: Let me ask you this, do you remember in the early days if the churches got together here in Mims and held picnics and socials, ice cream socials?

Juanita Wright: I don't know about the socials and picnics, but we used to have revivals [00:06:30] because people would come and I was converted in one of the yards of Ms. Hattie Johnson that I told you about before. In the evenings, they'd have all these chairs

and sitting around or benches and this is where the people would come and preach out there, we didn't have to go to the church. All the community would settle in that area and preach to you there.

Roz Foster: Oh. And where was one of the more popular places here in Mims location wise?

Juanita Wright: [00:07:00] What now is, right down the street from me, Mable Fields, but it was all woods all around there. But behind their house, because that's where I was, Ms. Hattie had these chairs and benches out there and they would come out there, down Harry T. Moore, not far from my house.

Roz Foster: The north end of Harry T. Moore?

Juanita Wright: Right. Not all the way, but yeah, the north end. This would happen at a lot of the neighbors' homes.

Roz Foster: Oh, how wonderful. That was wonderful. The Masonic Lodge [00:07:30] that's on Main Street, do you remember anything when that got started or some of the people that belonged to the Masonic Lodge here?

Juanita Wright: I remember, but I don't remember the dates. My husband was a Mason and I joined the ... forgot what the women's department was called now, but we had that also in that building that's there on Main and we would have our meetings. But the men would have their meeting at a certain time and the women would have [00:08:00] theirs. But yes, we had that here, I think it's trying to get active again, but that was years and years ago.

Roz Foster: Okay. Do you remember when the school was there in the interim when they were building the new school here at Cuyler? I was told that they used the hall, it was referred to as the hall and they used that as the school for a short period of time. Do you remember anything about that or hearing about that?

Juanita Wright: I know they used it for a school for a short time, [00:08:30] but I don't remember much about it.

Roz Foster: Do you remember about when that was?

Juanita Wright: No. Uh-uh (negative). Because this building here, when it was built, I went to school here at the front part of this, but it wasn't as nice as it is now. It was an old building, but that's where I went to school.

Roz Foster: At the Cuyler Center?

Juanita Wright: Yes, up here.

Roz Foster: In the front?

Juanita Wright: Yeah.

Roz Foster: All right. Do you remember the school out on the Warren Estate at all?

Juanita Wright: No, I heard my sister [00:09:00] talk about that. She's deceased now, but she went down there, that's the one I'm next to. But I remember her talking about having to walk down there to school. But this one was here and this is where I came, is here.

Roz Foster: Okay. You also had mentioned before about baptisms in the river and Salt Lake. I wanted to ask you, what period of time was this when they used to baptize at Salt Lake? Why did they go out to Salt Lake?

Juanita Wright: [00:09:30] We didn't have pools in the churches like we have now and the only place we could baptize would be at some other open place. So I was baptized at Salt Lake, some of the others were baptized at Indian River, but we didn't have no special, no indoor place for baptism. It's like at my church at Greater St. James now, we just baptize right there in the pool. If we have a baptism, they run the water in there. We didn't have that then.

Roz Foster: I see. Yeah, I was interested in, [00:10:00] was it just on the main bank at Salt Lake that this took place?

Juanita Wright: That's where I was baptized is, when you go down there, there'd always be a place you could walk down to the water and the deacons or somebody would go out and check it and see, you know, where to go. And that's where we would carry, into that area. I don't know the exact area, but it's near the bridge where we would walk down.

Roz Foster: Okay. What do you think the younger generations [00:10:30] today should know about the early days in Mims and the hardships that people went through to pave the way for what they have to enjoy today? I know some of them don't think they have too much, but relatively speaking, it's come a long way. What are some of the things that you would like them to feel an appreciation for?

Juanita Wright: [00:11:00] One thing I would like for them to ... number one, it has to be the parents because the parents are not interested in themselves in knowing what's happened. And somebody have to have that interest to share it with the children. But to know that people like Mr. and Mrs. Moore, Jameson, and all those people, I was the first person Jameson met as a woman when she came here to teach. I was subbing in her room that she was going to take over.

But our children need to know these kind [00:11:30] of things, but usually we're not sharing them with them. It's so many things that ... they think that what they see now has been here all the time, but it hasn't. We've come through some hard times because had a lot of Ku Klux Klansmen who would, you know, come into

the area or whatever. It's a lot of things that we've been through that we don't even discuss with our children. 'Cause I don't discuss it a lot of time myself.

Roz Foster: Where did—The Ku Klux Klan was active here [00:12:00] in the 1930s, 1940s, would you say?

Juanita Wright: I think it was about that time because the times that I'd seen them, really saw them, was going down the road to Titusville and up the little hill from where the old hospital used to be. There was a little hilly place there and that's when I would see them.

Roz Foster: Do you know where they came from?

Juanita Wright: We thought—I heard from a mother that knows that they came from Scottsmoor, a lot of them [00:12:30] were in the Scottsmoor area. I don't know just where in that area, but this is what I'd hear them discussing.

Roz Foster: Do you remember any...--Where did you teach school?

Juanita Wright: Right here at the Cuyler Center for a little while. I was just subbing there.

Roz Foster: Oh, okay. Do you remember that the schoolbooks that you used when you were a teacher and what time are we talking about when you taught there? [00:13:00] Was it in the '50s or-

Juanita Wright: It was probably in the late '40s because my baby was a little girl. She wasn't old enough to go to school then, but Ms. Jameson told me let her stay. She was born in '39. So I would do the substitute teaching until we got a teacher. Mr. Moore was instrumental in having me to come out and do some work and he's the cause of my going back to school.

Roz Foster: Okay. Do you remember, what was a typical day [00:13:30] of teaching? Were classes held ... like what time of the day did you start and what time of the day did classes end?

Juanita Wright: I don't remember, but I think it would start about eight o'clock and I don't know how long we'd go. I don't remember that exact times because Ms. Jocille's aunt, Ms. Sims and those in Ms. Ella Warren who's a little cousin of hers also, they were the ones who were responsible for [00:14:00] seeing—giving us what we had to do.

Roz Foster: Okay. Did the students enjoy going to school back then? Did they realize that it was important to them, getting their education or ... how did the students differ then than they do today? Could you tell us something about that?

Juanita Wright: The parents were involved. They might not have come out, but they saw to it that the children did what they had to do. [00:14:30] And back then children could be

punished with a paddle, so, I mean, they knew that if I say, "I'm going to tell your mother," they knew what was going to happen. But that's not relevant now, but those kind of things. Teachers could talk with the parents and the children had to respond.

Roz Foster: So actually, the parents gave the teachers authority to correct the child while they were in school.

Juanita Wright: And they would do it again when they got home.

Roz Foster: And they got it when they got home. [00:15:00] I think a lesson should be learned from that experience back then that we need to get back to the basics and continue that today.

Juanita Wright: That's why we are so far off in so many of our children, so much is happening.

Roz Foster: Yes. We had talked about the churches being involved in educating the youth about the history of the area and also about the [00:15:30] history of the people, the congregation that make up the community, what the contributors were and about the people in general. What do you feel that the churches may be able to do so that the youth will know what was done prior to today and about the pioneering spirit of the community, the history?

Juanita Wright: [00:16:00] I think the history should be shared with the children, but the pastors of most of the churches now come from in between what happened. Therefore, they aren't too interested now either because some of them support don't spanking the children or no punishing the child. And the parents don't seem to have the input or the appreciation for what went on back then because that's the ones who have the children you see now were not the ones coming with my [00:16:30] time. There's just a very few of us left. They don't care what went on back then and to see that the children can get what's better for them now. That's making it real hard.

Roz Foster: And I think the other equation to that is that there are other social issues that they have to deal with in society today that possibly the history of the area or the roots, so to speak, is a [00:17:00] low priority.

Juanita Wright: That's so true.

Roz Foster: However, do you feel that maybe within the church communities that the elders could take the responsibility upon themselves to help educate the children by doing projects like this?

Juanita Wright: I think they could, but, for the most elders, we don't feel up to that burden because I know, as I said, I've had a lot of experience with that, but even with the pastors [00:17:30] is you can hardly get in to talk with them and let them

understand because they didn't come from that way back. We don't have very few old pastors now. Pastors are young and they're wanting to do it their way.

So I mean, there's so much, so much that's missing. Just like I said in the other ones, we used to have what's called BYPU and BTU where we could train the children and, of course, everything that was needed in the church, the children received that training and they were able to use it, to exercise it, so that when they were [00:18:00] called on, they were ready. You find very few of those now.

Roz Foster: And I think in the modern generation too that the correlation between the elders and the youth has [segmated 00:18:16] and, like I said, they have other issues that they're dealing with today and they really don't have an attitude at this present time that they really don't care. [00:18:30] Hoping that the Moore Center¹ will be a repository so when they are ready, we will leave them something so they can learn.

Juanita Wright: I certainly hope so.

Roz Foster: Well, thank you very much for talking with us today.

Juanita Wright: Okay.

¹ The discussion of Mr. and Mrs. Moore, along with the mention of the "Moore Center," in this interview is in reference to Civil Rights activist Harry T. Moore and his wife, Harriette Moore, who lived and were tragically murdered in Mims, Florida in 1951. The Harry T. & Harriette V. Moore Cultural Complex is located at 2180 Freedom Ave. Mims, FL 32754.