

**Oral Memoirs  
of  
Marilyn Maples**

An Interview Conducted by  
Katie Kelley and Dr. Scot French

October 19, 2013

History Harvest

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*University of Central Florida Public History Center*

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## **Interview Histories**

Interviewer	Katie Kelley and Dr. Scot French
Cameraperson	Andrew Orleman
Transcriber	Drew Fedorka

The recordings and transcripts of the interview were processed in the offices of the Public History Center, University of Central Florida, Sanford, Florida.

## **Project Detail**

Creative Sanford, Inc. is a non-profit organization created to manage *Celery Soup: Florida's Folk Life Play* community theater productions. The original idea for the *Celery Soup* project came from Jeanine Taylor, the owner of a folk-art gallery on First Street in Sanford, Florida. Their first production was *Touch and Go*, which took several years of planning. The play focused on how the people of Sanford overcame obstacles throughout their history. Some of these stories include the fall of Sanford's celery industry, the Freeze of 1894-1895, and the closing of Naval Air Station (NAS) Sanford in the 1960s. Richard Geer and Jules Corriere, partners from Community Performance International, were in charge of assessing oral histories, converting them into scenes for the play, and writing original songs. Director Geer also used an all-volunteer cast from the local community, many of which were not experienced actors.

During the process of producing the show, Creative Sanford decided to rehabilitate an historic building, the Princess Theater, which was located on 115 West First Street and owned by Stephen Tibstra. The Creative Sanford offices are housed in the Historic Sanford Welcome Center, located at 203 East First Street. As of December 2013, the Executive Board for Creative Sanford included President Brian Casey, Vice President Trish Thompson, Treasurer Linda Hollerbach, Secretary Dr. Annye Refoe, and Founder Jeanine Taylor. The Board of Directors consisted of Cheryl Deming, Juanita Roland, Wendy Wheaton, and Dr. Connie Lester, a professor of history at the University of Central Florida. Honorary Board Members included: Glenda Hood, former Florida Secretary of State and Mayor of Orlando; Valada Flewellyn, a local poet, author, and historian; and Jackie Jones, a local entertainer and arts advocate.

## **Legal Status**

Scholarly use of the recording and transcript of the interview with Trish Thompson is unrestricted. The interview agreement was signed on October 19, 2013.

## **Abstract**

Oral history of Marilyn Maples, an actress in the Creative Sanford, Inc. and *Celery Soup* production of *Remade - Not Bought*. The interview was conducted by University of Central

*University of Central Florida Public History Center*

*A RICHES Project: Regional Initiative for Collecting the History, Experiences and Stories of Central Florida*

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Florida Professor of History Dr. Scot French and graduate student Katie Kelley on October 19, 2013.

Maples moved to Sanford, Florida, in 1993. As an actress, she played the roles of Marlene Baggs and Arthurene in *Remade - Not Bought*. Maples is also a member of the theatre committee, the volunteer coordinator, and a member of the marketing team for Creative Sanford and *Celery Soup*. The interview focuses mainly on Maples involvement with Creative Sanford and *Celery Soup*. Other topics include how Maples came to Sanford, how she became involved with Creative Sanford, the importance of preserving history through community theater, her acting roles in *Remade - Not Bought*, the *Celery Soup* production of *Touch and Go*, presenting difficult or dark history, segregation in Sanford, and Dr. George H. Starke.

## Marilyn Maples

Oral History Memoir

Interviewed by Katie Kelley and Dr. Scot French

October 19, 2013

Sanford, Florida

0:00:00

### Introduction

**Kelley** My name is [Mary] Katie Kelley. I'm at the Public History Center in Sanford, Florida. We're here today with Marianne<sup>1</sup> Maples and the date is October 19<sup>th</sup>, 2013. Um, Mary[sic], could you just introduce yourself. um, just some background information, where you're from, how long you've lived in the area – that kind of thing.

**Maples** My name is Marilyn Maples, and been here over 20 years. I moved into my house in 1993. And when I purchased here, Sanford was on that turn. It was either gonna go good or it was gonna go bad. And, you know, there was that sharp[?] period of time where I would drive in and go, *What was I thinking?* Now I'm just elated to drive home every morning. I love my town. I love Sanford. And, uh, we're truly a community. And there's[sic] not many communities in the United States. You know, we are, you know – our neighbors during the hurricane, they were out in forces helping each other. So – and right now, we're doing a benefit downtown because somebody has cancer, so we always come together as a family to help our community.

0:01:08

### How Maples became involved with Creative Sanford, Inc. and *Celery Soup*

**Kelley** Um, how did you become involved with, uh, the *Celery Soup*[: *Florida's Folk Life Play*] project and Creative Sanford[, Inc.]?

**Maples** Um, you know it was, because of the networking of people. You know, you know somebody that's doing something, and they ask you to come out and be a part of it. And I was just asked by – I want to say Brian Casey asked me to become a part of it – you know, Creative Sanford.

**Kelley** Did you know what it was when you, um...

**Maples** Not really. Um, I did see the performance at, uh – uh, at the Wayne Densch [Performing Arts Center] when, uh, the group<sup>2</sup> from Georgia came down. Um, and I loved it. I thought it was great, and I was kind of well-hooked at that moment. Uh, but I saw myself as more of maybe a storyteller. You know,

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<sup>1</sup> Correction: Marilyn.

<sup>2</sup> *Swamp Gravy: Georgia's Official Folk-Life Play.*

gathering lines or, uh, doing the background, 'cause I produced over twenty shows at the Wayne Densch, so – and very little stage time.

So with this play, it gives anybody the opportunity to be on stage, whereas you go to other theater groups and it's very cliquish. So people never get the opportunity to go out on stage. Where this one, if you can fog up a mirror, you're on stage.

**Kelley** Um, what do you think is, um – what does being involved mean to you?

**Maples** Um, it means, um – well, I'm preserving history. I'm – 'm – I'm a storyteller. I'm preserving history. Um, and as showcasing what a great place Sanford is. And if you live here, you love it here. You know, there's[sic] not many people living in Sanford, I would say, hate it.

**0:02:53** **Acting roles in *Remade - Not Bought***

**Kelley** Um, what is your role in the current play?

**Maples** Uh, I – I play Marlene Baggs of Baggs Produce, here on the corner of Twenty-Fifth [Street] and Sanford [Avenue]. And they've been there, uh, I wanna say since day one. And also, Arthurene – she was a tax collector in the Seminole County Courthouse back in the [19]50s.

**Kelley** Um, well I have on here, "How do you get into character?" But I guess what we're trying to get at is, um, what is your character's role in Sanford history? Um, uh, what – why was their story included, I guess.

**Maples** Uh...

**Kelley** Do you think?

**Maples** Um, well, I mean, everybody that's lived here, you know, has a story – has a tell – has a story to tell. And, uh, the Baggs – we've got tons and tons. they were a colorful family. Um, you know particularly in the play, it's called "rat-shot." And this particular one is, uh – the mother got out the rat-shot gun, because her and the father were having an argument. So I mean, she was shooting in the store, things were exploding.

Um, and then the previous play that I was in, I was Marlene Baggs, as well. And it – he was a worm farmer. People would stop, you know, on their way to go fish and he said, "Hey. I could sell worms." Um, so Arthurene is maybe not as colorful. Um, you know, she was just a person that worked here and was a tax collector.

**0:04:35 Preserving Sanford's history**

**Kelley** Um, what do you see as Creative Sanford's and the *Celery Soup* play – what do you see as sort of their role in preserving Sanford's history?

**Maples** Well, we're preserving also Seminole County. Um, people are, you know, more attuned to be, you know – to learn quicker, I think, with the visual aid. And a lot of people come to the theater and go, "I didn't know that about Sanford." I – you know, it's just, uh, um – they're just – or they go, "I knew that building, but I didn't understand why it was here." You know, what it was used for.

Also, um, on Sunday we're gonna be hosting the fourth graders. We always host fourth graders with any of these shows, because it's part of their, uh, curriculum to, you know – the history. Seminole history.

**0:05:31 Importance of involvement with Creative Sanford**

**Kelley** Um, and then I guess finally, what do you see as the overall value of this project and your involvement, um, with the Creative Sanford group?

**Maples** Um, well, my involvement, you know, goes, you know, far more than just being an actress. I'm also on the theater committee. I'm also the volunteer coordinator. Um, I'm also on the marketing – so it just brings people together to showcase your talents. And even to showcase talents you didn't know you had. So it's a, it's an enrichment for anybody that comes out. And I encourage anybody to come out and be a part of it, because, like I said, if you can fog up a mirror, you're an actress or an actor in the *Celery Soup* productions.

**0:06:18 Presenting dark or difficult history**

**French** Um, uh, okay. This is [Dr.] Scot French. I'm also, uh, part of this project. Uh, I wondered if there ever were – if there have ever been any difficult moments in telling the story about Sanford's history or Seminole County history?

**Maples** Well, uh, in our original, uh, production, *Touch and Go* – uh, it was about a, uh, lost pilot who was between, uh, between worlds. He had already died, but he didn't know he was dead. And, uh, so one of the scenes is the actual burial, you know, of a military, uh, personnel. And so they're folding the flag very, uh, you know – it was very reverent.

And the woman playin' the role, Karen Casey – I mean, she would just weep. And everybody's in there weeping with her, because it was, uh – also, we have a thing at the end called, "I Remember." and it's, uh, where we're remembering people who had passed. And, uh, and I've had two actors tell me that it would remind them of their kin. Uh, don't remember kid's last name, but it reminded him of his mother passing. He came over there and was just weeping on my shoulder. And then another woman, um – she's, um, Dodie, and she's the *Celery Queen*. [clears throat] And, uh, her son had passed away, and it brought tears to

her eyes, because, you know, it was that time of year when he had passed. And so it—it—it—it touches not only the cast, but, uh, the audience, as well. I've had audience come up to me and say, "I cried and I laughed." I mean, this was just unbelievable. So there are difficult moments.

**French** How about the fact that you're dealing with, uh, a history that is, uh, in some cases[?] very painful? Things like segregation, and there's even a scene with Dr. [George H.] Starke and the...

**Maples** I tell ya, I weeped[sic] when I, you know, first saw it bein' performed during rehearsals. Um, because I had no idea that a black person, uh—during that time, if they were injured, they could not go to the hospital in an ambulance. They either had to go by hearse or a family member. So, I mean, um, segregation is just—was just a bad thing, but it didn't just happen here in Sanford. it was all over the United States. And it didn't just happen in the South. it was also happening up North. Um, it was, uh—but not as bad, 'cause, uh, just the population.

But I think, you know, even today people—even in the last year—people tried to show us as a very racial town and we're not. Um, I think we've really evolved. Uh, I know for, uh, one of our actresses, Nancy [Harris] Ford, uh, she grew up here. And she remembers Jim Crow law[s] at the Wayne Densch. Wayne Densch has a balcony, and that's where black people had to sit. And, uh, the white people were sitting down beneath. And when I would volunteer at the Wayne Densch, I would have people come in and say, "I remember I had to sit upstairs. But we were throwing things on the white kids below." [laughs] So, you know, it's been a hairy moment for everybody. You know, it was a sad time in our history. But throughout the world, there's[sic] been many sad things. But there's always, uh, something that rises up good out of it. You know, like the Phoenix. It rises up and is reborn.

0:10:05

### **Significance of integrating histories**

**French** Um, is the cast and crew and everybody involved, are you sort of aware of the significance—the symbolic significance—of coming together like this and—and telling these stories and integrating the—these histories that maybe not—weren't integrated, you know, in the past? There was one community and another community. You made a very self-conscious effort to sort of weave these stories together. Are you sort of—do you think there is an awareness about, among the cast and crew, that what you are doing has this...

**Maples** Oh, yeah. I mean, really, this brings you, uh, in a place where you would meet people you would not normally meet. Just because of, you know, where you live or who you socialize with. And so—and because of this, I have met some of the most wonderful people and I call them, you know, dear friends, like Dr. Annye Refoe. She was in the original one, and, uh, it was one of, uh, her tales of generations, where she was outlining, uh, you know, her roots. From Africa to



Barbados to, you know, all the way up to Sanford. And she was the first one from her generation to get an, uh, education and a Doctor's Degree. When I saw Annye on stage performing it, you know, during rehearsals, I fell in love with her. I said, "I want to be just like this woman." So, yeah. I mean, would I have met her in any other place? No. So it's really good.

0:12:29

**Closing remarks**

**French** And is there anything else that you would like to share with us or with anybody who is interested in this project? Just some final words or anything?

**Maples** Well, you know, just as we were joking about, you know, there's so much money to be made in history. You know, the theater suffers, as well. And so I was looking for, you know, people to come and see the play. and we're also looking for people who want to sponsor it. You know, 'cause, uh, history is so important. And particularly oral history. You know, I mean, I'm going to look back at this as cave drawings. You know, they had a story to tell. they told it on the walls. So this is, you know – this is our version of cave, uh, drawing. We're telling the story. Preserving history.

**French** Uh, great. Thank you.

**Kelley** Uh, just to clarify. I believe in the introduction I said her name was...

**Maples** Was Mary. It's Marilyn.

**Kelley** Marilyn.

**Maples** You can call me Marley. you can call me Marilyn. You know, call me anything, but don't call me late for dinner [*laughs*].

**Kelley** Marilyn Maples is the subject of this interview. Thank you.

**Maples** Alright.

**French** Thank you.

*End of Interview*