

Oral Memoirs
of
Fairolyn H. Livingston

An Interview Conducted by

Geoffrey Cravero

December 12, 2019

Regional Initiative for Collecting the History, Experiences, and Stories
(RICHS)

University of Central Florida RICHS

Copyright 2019

This material is protected by US copyright. Permission to print, reproduce or distribute copyrighted material is subject to the terms and conditions of fair use as prescribed in the US copyright law. Transmission or reproduction of protected items beyond that allowed by fair use requires the written and explicit permission of the copyright owners.

Interview Histories

Interviewers: Geoffrey Cravero

Transcriber: Geoffrey Cravero

The recordings and transcripts of the interview were processed in the offices of RICHES, History Department, University of Central Florida, Orlando, Florida.

Project Detail

RICHES is an umbrella program housing interdisciplinary public history projects that bring together different departments at UCF with profit and non-profit sectors of the community.

Central Florida has often been associated with large-scale, commercial tourism and housing development. While those aspects of Central Florida are important to the economic growth of the region, much of its history has remained unnoticed and under researched. The Public History program at UCF links many projects under one initiative to promote the collection and preservation of Central Florida history. By facilitating research that records and presents the stories of communities, businesses, and institutions in Central Florida, RICHES seeks to provide the region with a deeper sense of its heritage. At the same time, the initiative connects the UCF students and faculty with the community and creates a foundation on which Central Floridians can build a better sense of their history.

Legal Status

Scholarly use of the recording and transcript of the interview with Fairolyn H. Livingston is unrestricted. The interview agreement was signed on December 12, 2019.

Abstract

An oral history interview of Fairolyn H. Livingston, chief historian of the Hannibal Square Heritage Center in Winter Park, Florida. The interview was conducted by Geoffrey Cravero at the Hannibal Square Heritage Center on December 12, 2019. Some of the topics covered include growing up in a segregated community, finding the resources to attend college, becoming involved in the Hannibal Square Heritage Center and documenting the community's history, why residents attended churches of multiple denominations, conducting difficult interviews and how those who have experienced oppression have refused to allow it to define them, how gentrification has affected sense of community, changes in the community since de-segregation and gentrification, the challenges of preserving a marginalized community's history and

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

University of Central Florida

coming to terms with the long-lasting effects of segregation, how government policies encourage gentrification and her final remarks.

Fairolyn H. Livingston

Oral History Memoir

Interview Number 1

Interviewed by Geoffrey Cravero

December 12, 2019

Winter Park, Florida

0:00:00

Growing up in a segregated community

Cravero Alright. Today is Thursday, December 12th, 2019. My name is Geoffrey Cravero. And with me is Dr. Connie Lester. I'm speaking with Fairolyn Livingston at the Hannibal Square Heritage Center¹ in Winter Park, Florida. Ms. Livingston, thank you for speaking with us today. Uh, if we can, let's begin with a little of your biography. Could you tell us a bit about where you're originally from and your upbringing?

Livingston Well, I'm originally from Winter Park, Florida. I was born a block away from here at 800 West New England Avenue here in the city. In the area called Hannibal Square. I attended the local schools here. Of course, during my time, those school were segregated. And, uh, once we finished sixth grade here in the community, we were bussed to the segregated Hungerford High School² over in Eatonville, Florida.

I attended the churches in the community. Participated in the activities at the community center that had been built for the African American community. Uh, I had a happy childhood. You know? Because—I would say because the community was segregated, and we lived among people who looked like us. So the preacher was—the preacher looked like me. The—the students in the churches looked like me. The teachers looked like me. So I can probably say that we might have been a little bit, uh, as children, unaware of segregation or racism. You know? Because that was the way it was. I'm sure our parents knew because oftentimes they would warn us about different things and different places. Uh, what we might face. Some harm or some harsh words. Or some ugly words. But, other than that, um, I would say I had a good childhood.

Cravero Excellent. Um, would you tell us a little bit about your experiences at Hungerford High School, and then, eventually, at Rollins College? And how those experiences might have influenced your work.

Livingston Well, at Hungerford High School, uh, we started at the seventh-grade level. And we went through, uh, twelfth grade. And I graduated in 1964. Teachers—they

¹ The Hannibal Square Heritage Center is located at 642 West New England Avenue, Winter Park, Florida 32789.

² The Robert Hungerford Preparatory High School was open from 1897 to 2010.

were good teachers. But they also made sure that we towed the line. You know? Because not only was it about academics, which was very strenuous, but also about your conduct and how you carried yourself. That was very important. So it didn't matter what background you came from. Whether or not you was—you were middle class, uh, uh, any other class. You learned how to conduct yourself in any kind of situation.

You know? In our Home Economics classes, not only did we learn to sew and do homemaker-type things, but also how to serve and how to, uh, properly set tables. And—and use the, uh, eating utensils and all. So everything prepared us for the world that we would be entering. And that world would have been a world that was segregated. So w—we were treated, uh, and educated to survive in that type of world. In other words, we were somebody. We were knowledgeable. We could do anything we wanted to do. They always let us know that we could accomplish whatever we wanted to accomplish. So we never felt like we were hindered because of segregation or racism.

In fact, uh, Climmie Boyer, who was several years older than myself and a graduate from Hungerford, he once said in the seventies when we had a celebration to honor our former principal at the school, that we really didn't know we were poor until they told us. You know? Until they started saying everything about poverty and—and low income. You know? We [*laughs*]*—*we didn't know we were poor. So I guess that's why some of us—well, many of us out of this community were able to overcome. Because we didn't have that kind of a thing stuck into our heads by our educators.

0:04:54

Finding the resources to attend college

Livingston

After I graduated from high school, I didn't think that I would be able to go to college because I was raised by my grandmother with three other siblings. And I was the oldest. And basically, I was like the matriarch of my siblings. Um, I got scholarship offers, but I knew that my family didn't have the money to fill in the gap. So basically [*clears throat*], even though I desired to go, I had more or less, um, accepted the fact that it would not happen.

And then one Sunday, I was in church at New Hope Missionary Baptist Church³ on Capen Avenue. I was in the choir stand because I sang in the junior choir. And the usher came to the choir door and asked me to come out. That there was a gentleman there that wanted to talk to me. And so I left the choir stand and went around, uh, to the front of the church. And the gentleman was—was from a segregated community college in Leesburg, Florida. And, uh, he offered me a scholarship. You know? That I—that—that he had just, you know, studied my transcript and whatever.

³ New Hope Missionary Baptist Church is located at 274 North Capen Avenue, Winter Park, Florida 32789.

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

University of Central Florida

Then I got an offer from a community college in Ocala, Florida. Hampton Junior College. That's now Central Florida State College.⁴ And I accepted that one because they told me that they would, you know, find me some part-time work to fill in the gap between financial aid, et cetera.

Not knowing my – unknown to me, rather, my grandmother, Victoria Redfin, she went down to the First National Bank on Park Avenue and New England, where Luma's on Park⁵ is now. And she went to the cashier at the – the teller. And she wanted to s – know if she could borrow some money to help send her granddaughter to college. And the teller told her to go over and talk to one of the ladies that handle loans. And so my grandmother went over there. And the lady told her, "Why don't you go upstairs and talk to Mrs. Nancy Bradford?" Mrs. Nancy Bradford was a part of Winter Park's Worthy Persons group, which now, I believe, is part of the Winter Park Foundation. So my grandmother went up to see Mrs. Bradford. And Mrs. Bradford, unbeknownst to me or my grandmother, started some paperwork with the people on the committee that included Mrs., uh, J. Lynn Pflug⁶. Mrs. Pflug's husband had once been the mayor of Winter Park.⁷ So Mrs. Pflug and others – they did the research. You know? Contacted my high school. Contacted the junior college where I was. And next thing I knew, I got a letter from them saying that they would be financing me for the school year. And, uh, for two years, I got that scholarship. Every two weeks without fail, I got a stipend, uh, from that group. So that's how I ended up being able to go to – to college.

However, I got pregnant after I graduated and got my A.A. degree. And so my dreams of finishing a four-year college, you know, got backburnered. And, uh, it wasn't until the late-seventies that I started going to evening classes at Rollins College. I had some financial aid, but mostly I paid for my own. And, um, I had worked for the State of Florida since about 1971, so I had a lot of savings bonds. It was toward the end of the journey. I started cashing in the savings bonds to pay for my tuition.

Well, it was my last session, and I was out of financial options, if you will. I had a friend of mine. She was from Dunedin, Florida. Her, uh, parents owned a, uh – their own business. And they were avid golfers. And they were supportive of, uh, what used to be the tournament at Rio Pinar, and then subsequently at Bay Hill.⁸ Her father always participated and contributed to, uh, a scholarship fund

⁴ In 1966, Hampton Junior College merged with Central Florida Junior College. In 1971, the school changed its name to Central Florida Community College. In 2010, the name was changed to College of Central Florida.

⁵ Luma on Park is located at 290 South Park Avenue, Winter Park, Florida 32789.

⁶ Kelly Pflug (January 2, 1908–December 23, 2010).

⁷ J. Lynn Pflug was mayor of Winter Park from 1958–1961.

⁸ The Arnold Palmer Invitational is a professional golf tournament on the PGA Tour, played at the Bay Hill Club and Lounge. The event was founded in 1979 as a successor to the Florida Citrus Open Invitational, which debuted in 1966 and was played at Rio Pinar Country Club.

led by Lee Elder⁹. Lee Elder was a black golfer. And so I guess she must have shared with him my story because she invited me and my children over to her parents. And we'd visit them off and on over the years. And her father said to me – she and her parents – both her parents were there. She said, "You know, every year, we donate money to Lee Elder's scholarship fund. And we have no doubt that Lee does the right thing with that money. But we have decided that, since we know someone who can use that money, we're gonna divert that money to you." And that's how I was able to graduate from Rollins Hamilton Holt¹⁰ in 1983.

So I come from a situation of "it takes a village." You know? Whoever I am, whatever I am, it come from this community. And that was sewn into me. Basically, I'd say it's in my DNA. And because of the way I conduct myself. I'll never forget the bridge that brought me over. That draws people to me. And people willing to be there with – with and – and for me. And for that, I'm eternally grateful. So that's how I got from not being able to go into college and thinking that to actually finishing up with an A.A. degree and subsequentl – subsequently with a B.A. degree. So I've had a lot of, uh, blessings from on high. You know? It wasn't that – it wasn't Fairolyn. Because there's a saying that, uh, "sometimes you find yourself in a place and you only see one set of footprints. And that's because God carried you." And sometimes when I got to a certain place, I'd wonder, "How did I get here?" You know? I just – I j[laughs] – it just – it's just amazing. Just amazing.

0:12:34

Becoming involved in the Hannibal Square Heritage Center and documenting the community's history

Cravero Um, what – can you tell us about, uh – what is the Heritage Collection Team and how did you become involved in that project?

Livingston Well, around 1999, 2000, Peter Schreyer with the Crealdé School of Art¹¹ here in Winter Park – he had been working in the community with the seniors and the children for a number of years. You know? Providing, uh, opportunities for art. For, you know, underserved people in the community. He had won, uh, a grant from the Winter Park Public Library. And this was in the nineties. And I had won the same grant a couple years later. His project was photographic. He photographed and – the interior and the exterior of all the local churches. My project was to find some way to document the early history of the community and the role that African Americans played in the community. You know? Because when you would go to different archives, you would see different people of color in the pictures, but they weren't named. So we didn't know who they were. They were just faceless. And they were mostly in subservient-type

⁹ Lee Elder (July 14, 1934–).

¹⁰ Hamilton Holt School at Rollins College.

¹¹ The Crealdé School of Art is located at 600 St Andrews Boulevard, Winter Park, Florida 32792.

situations. When I knew growing up that that wasn't all that the black people did.

So it's kind of odd how it happened because I didn't set out to – to get – to apply for that grant. A group of people in the community were trying to save the Ideal Woman's Club building¹². That building had once been on the property and used by the First Congregational Church here in Winter Park. And when the Ideal Woman's Club started in the late-1920s, one of the members, Mrs. Mary Lee DePugh¹³ – she worked for Mrs. Maud Kraft.¹⁴ And Mrs. Kraft interceded on behalf of the women to get the building. And then there was fundraising involved, uh, to buy a lot here on Pennsylvania Avenue. And to have the building moved.

Well, in the late-nineties, DePugh Nursing Home needed more space. And so, the board offered to buy or trade the land where the original building was placed to a site across the street. But the people in the community wanted the building saved. But they didn't have the resources, nor the backing to make that happen. You know? There wasn't enough interest citywide and there wasn't any money communitywide to do that. You know? 'Cause years later, Casa Feliz¹⁵ got moved. And then, the Capen House¹⁶ got moved. But that was private money, even though they moved, uh, Casa – uh, sorry – Casa Feliz to the golf course property, which is city-owned. That effort, it failed. And there were some members of the First Congregational Church who tried to work with us. To try and direct us to find some funds to move the building. To save it. But there were people that said – on the board and connected in the community – um, that said that the – that the building was, uh, termite-ridden and it wasn't worth saving.

But someone, uh, had someone come down from the department that takes care of s – you know, that takes care of, uh, uh, preservation. And they said that the only part of the – of the building that was termite-ridden was the section that they had put on years later to close the porch in. See 'cause there had been an open porch for years. And then they closed that porch in. And that was the part that was – had some termite problems. The rest of the place – uh, building was all this pine. And this was – was no damage. But, of course, we didn't get the support needed. So, uh, the building was razed and a new building put up.

Long story short, I had been reading about this in the newspaper. I wasn't living in Winter Park at the time. And it seemed like every time I picked up the paper, there was all of this negative about Hannibal Square. "Oh, the crime. And the drinking. And the brawling. And the drugs and stuff." And I said, "That's not

¹² The Ideal Woman's Club of Winter Park, Inc. is located at 419 South Interlachen Avenue, Winter Park, Florida 32789.

¹³ Mary Lee DePugh (1878–1949).

¹⁴ Agnes Maude Houston Kraft (November 4, 1873–August 24, 1957).

¹⁵ Casa Feliz Historic Home Museum is located at 656 North Park Avenue, Winter Park, Florida 32789.

¹⁶ The Capen House is located at 633 Osceola Avenue, Winter Park, Florida 32789.

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

University of Central Florida

where I grew up. I—W—What is this?” Yes. There’s always been people that did some of those things, but it wasn’t the whole community. You know? And they were just painting this community with this broad s—stroke as being such a terrible place to be. And that somebody needed to do something about it. Finally—and I saw about—that article in the *Sentinel* about, uh, razing the building and the [inaudible] of the community. And I said, “I’m gonna go to one of the meetings.” So I went to a meeting. I sat on the front row. The people who were con—who were conducting the meeting, I knew ‘em all ‘cause we all grew up together. So—but I didn’t want to get quote involved. You know? I just wanted to see what’s going on. So I sat there and I tried not to make eye contact. And I guess at some point, I must have relaxed. And I made eye contact with Eileen Abraham Bryant, who was part of the group that was trying to save it. And she mouthed to me, “We need you.” And I was hooked.

That led to me applying for a grant at the library—Winter Park Public Library. And I was—and I got that grant. It was hard at first. Trying to get information. Because [clears throat]—excuse me. Because people in the community—many were reluctant to talk about the past because they were afraid that a—in other words, they—they never said this to me, but I got the feeling that they were afraid that I might be digging up dirt. But when they began to see that I wasn’t digging up dirt, that I was trying to document the rich history of this community, most people got on board with that.

I remember as a child, my stepfather had an uncle. Frederick Simpson¹⁷. Frederick—Frederick would travel all around the country. And then he would come home and stay for a few weeks. And then he’d disappear. He was in and out. And Fred would always talk about his father worked for the city. Or some kind of way involved with the city government. But, you know, as children, you know, you hear these stories. We really didn’t give much thought to it. And so that’s where I started digging to only find out that he was the son of one of the first African American men to serve on the Town Council of Winer Park. Elected in 1887 and served to 1893. And then I was able to find out that a young woman that basically was raised by the Simpson Family, that grew up in the community, that her great-grandfather was Frank R. Israel¹⁸. The second black man to serve at the same time period on the Winter Park Town—Town Council. And so through, uh, the archives at the Winter Park Public Library, Rollins Library, Ancestry.com, cemeteries, interviews with many, many people, I was able to flesh out that criti—the critical roles the African American plays in the community.

One of my great sources—well, two of my great sources were Mrs. Wilhelmina Allen¹⁹, whose family came here as early as 1875, and had property out across

¹⁷ Frederick P. Simpson (1899–1968).

¹⁸ Frank R. Israel (April 16, 1858–July 25, 1925).

¹⁹ Wilhelmina Hernandez Allen (October 19, 1913–April 20, 2004).

the railroad track on Pennsylvania Avenue. Then I had, uh, Mr. Alonzo Gerard Roberts²⁰, whose family came here around 1881, when Chase²¹ and a couple of his investors and supporters went over to Volusia County to where black men were working on the railroad to try to hire some black men to come and help hew out the community – the 600 acres he bought in, uh, Hannibal Square. Acres that he – ‘cause he planned Hannibal Square specifically for an African American community. And so his grandfather was one of those men. And his grandfather also worked for Mr. Dommerich²² over in Maitland. And he owned property on the opposite side of Lake, uh – Lake Maitland. So he had groves. And then he would go across the lake and take care of the Dommerich groves. In fact, before they built their house at 1001 New York Avenue, which is now home to the First Baptist Church, he and his wife lived on the Dommerich property. Yeah.

So those two were very critical. Along with, uh, Mrs. Rose Charlton Bynum²³, whose family had been here since the early eight – 1800s. Uh, well, around 1881, ‘82. And then, uh, her brother, Richard Harold Charlton Jr.²⁴ So a lot of people I’ve interviewed, uh – Walter Simpson’s granddaughters. All of them are deceased now. But he has, uh, great, uh – great-grands and great-great-grands still living in – in the area. You know? So, um.

0:23:54

Why residents attended churches of multiple denominations

Livingston

I wasn’t shocked. Because as a kid growing up, you know – you know, in my time of growing up, a lot of the churches didn’t have church every Sunday because the minister might have been, uh, assigned to a church here for two Sundays a month, and then somewhere else, and maybe in a rural area, for two Sundays a month. And so growing up, we all went – it didn’t matter whether or not we were Baptist. It didn’t matter whether or not we were African Methodist Episcopal. Whether or not we were members of Church of God and Christ or any denomination. We all went to the different churches. In fact, the first church/school building in the community that was built after the community was platted – because Chase donated our lot for a combination church and school. So as a result, uh, two Sundays a month, the Methodists would use the church. And then two Sunday a month, the Baptists would use the church.

It wasn’t until the town was actually incorporated in 1887, and later, that they actually took over the school for coloreds, as they called it at that time. And then the council gave the trustees of each church, the Methodists and the Baptists, money to buy other land and build their respective churches on that land. And that resulted in Mount Moriah Missionary Baptist Church, which is at the corner

²⁰ Alonzo Gerard “Trick” Roberts (October 29, 1922–July 3, 2018).

²¹ Loring Augustus Chase (July 1, 1839–August 21, 1906).

²² Louis Ferdinand Dommerich (February 2, 1841–July 22, 1912).

²³ Rose Charlton Bynum (January 25, 1925–).

²⁴ Richard Harold Charlton Jr. (1913–January 16, 2001).

of Lyman and Pennsylvania Avenues, and Ward Chapel African Methodist Episcopal Church, at the corner of Welbourne and Pennsylvania Avenues. They were the first two churches established in the community. Mount Mariah being the oldest church.

And so as a kid, I would follow the Johnson children and the Berrys, my neighbors, down to Mount Moriah for Sunday school. Mrs. Ethel Cross, who was – lived on the same property as we did because the lot that my grandmother bought was 50 by about 100. And so she sold the back side of the lot to Mrs. Cross, who built a house. And so, uh, Mrs. Cross belonged to Ward Chapel AME Church. And so many Sundays, I went with her. And then Mr. Bobby Washington, whose sister-in-law lived across the street from us – he was the superintendent of the Sunday school at Ward Chapel. And many times, he would pick me up and take me to Sunday school at Ward Chapel.

So I was all over the place. And not – but not just me. That’s the way the community was. We all went to different churches other than our own churches. And I think that’s a part of, um, the success that we experienced. Uh, because we had so much exposure to different types of religions. Different types of services. Different types of people. They called, uh – I remember growing up, they called Mount Moriah “the big hat church” because the women wore big hats. You know? And, uh, it – it was – it was a – it was a good experience. You know? It was...

0:27:35

Conducting difficult interviews and how those who have experienced oppression have refused to allow it to define them

Cravero

Um [*clears throat*], could you tell us a little about, uh, some of the most memorable, or maybe even difficult, oral histories that you’ve conducted?

Livingston

I would say the most difficult would have been, um, the interviews I’ve done with the Sage Project. We’ve had, uh, three phrases – phrases of the sage, where we interview people in the community ages 80 and up. And some of them – they really felt that the community had not been fairly represented and treated fairly in what was going on with gentrification. Some spoke on record. Some of them spoke off record. Some felt that, basically, members of the African American community were complicit in the gentrification. And by that, I mean that some of the later generations inherited property and opportunities. And did not stand up to the plate to do what they needed to do to hold onto it.

But for the most part, I would say all the stories were just funny. Uplifting. Sometimes we ended up just laughing. And, uh – and what made it so good was that I knew all these people because I grew up among them. I went to school with their children. And I had respect – not only respected them for – for – for decades. It’s – I would say I’ve never been disappointed in any interview I’ve done, no matter how it went. I just feel bad for those people who – especially any

elderly person who ended up losing their property or not being, you know, um, fairly compensated I would say. But, um, for the most part, I understood and respected their stories. And, um, I don't think that they were making 'em up. They just was[sic] happy to share the happy parts of their lives rather than—you know, because it's like Zora Neale Hurston²⁵ said, "Believe it or not, these people, including myself, we didn't—we didn't live in the kitchen of despair." You know? We had lives. You know? We valued our institutions. We valued our schools. You know? Just like people value on the east side of town. You know? You know? We have the same feelings about the people in our community in the—in our churches. In our schools. In our children. You know?

Um, my family never had a telephone. We never had a car. But that wasn't a problem because somebody in my neighborhood would, um, let us use the phone if we needed to. And take us someplace if we needed to. And especially if we needed to go to something at the Hungerford School in Eatonville. You know, I had to catch a ride to my graduation, you know, uh, from high school. But most—for the most part, we used the city bus to get around. We would go up to the corner of Morse and Pennsylvania in front of the Hague's grocery and catch the bus to Orlando. And the terminal at that time was on Pine Street. And then we could go and do our shopping and whatever we wanted to do downtown. But if you wanted to go outside of that, then we'd have to get a transfer to go someplace else in the city.

You know, sometimes people go and they look at you and they see that—that you're different and you don't look like them. They don't realize that you have the same challenges. Ups. Downs. Highs. Lows. Maybe for different reasons and different ways, but it's not like you're walking around sulking. You know? Because, uh, this was a great place to grow up. This place was so great to grow up in that back in, um, the early-2000s, I sold a house I owned in Winter Park to my daughter and son-in-law so that they—so that like their mother—like my grandchildren's mother and uncle grew up in Winter Park, I wanted them to experience growing up in Winter Park. So my son graduated from Winter Park High. My daughter. And my 18-year-old grandson just graduated last year. And he's in college in Michigan. So it was good.

Cravero Um...

0:33:29 **How gentrification has affected sense of community**

Livingston And one thing I want to add is...

Cravero [clears throat].

²⁵ Zora Neale Hurston (January 7, 1891–January 28, 1960).

Livingston ...those people that I interviewed for the Sage Project, they all owned their homes. They bought their homes in thirties and forties and fifties. And they were mortgage-free. And these people did daywork. They worked in the laundry. They worked at Rollins. They worked at the Alabama Hotel. They worked at the Morrison's Cafeteria. And they had their own homes. And that's something now will not be happening in – in Winter Park. If you left Winter Park for whatever reason, unless you have some big bucks, you cannot come back.

And the thing about it is, you know, this is my opinion, everybody wants a – they want a, uh, prestigious Winter Park address. And they want a sense of community. But the people I see who live here, I never see them outside their homes. I know who they are just by the homes. But I never see them out. I don't see their children in the street playing stickball like we did coming up. Or playing hopscotch. Just out there playing. You know? And being. And doing. I know they're there, because I can tell from the new houses that they put here. I guess they just come home and close up. And then come out. You know, and do whatever they do during the day. I'm sure some of them, they have a relationship with their neighbors. I mean, they're neighbors. But I don't see the sense of community that I grew up with. And for them, I feel sorry that they don't have that experience. You know, they don't know how to have that experience.

0:35:30

Changes in the community since de-segregation and gentrification, the challenges of preserving a marginalized community's history and coming to terms with the long-lasting effects of segregation

Cravero That was actually touching on my, uh, next question. Was, um – would you tell us a little bit about some of the major changes that have taken place in Hannibal Square and what that means in being able to preserve the history of the community?

Livingston Well, I would say the only saving – one of the only – well, I – I'll put it like this. There are some things in the community. Okay? The Hannibal Square Heritage Center here. This is something that will help preserve the community. I – you have to realize that, uh, we have a 30-year lease with the City of Winter Park. We've already burned through 10 years. So we don't know what the future might hold. We don't know whether or not 20 years from now, when it's time to request a renewal or whatever – not only that, in the interim. Because if either one of us could break the – the lease requirement, you know, with the proper notification. So we don't know what might happen with this. We might get people on the council who don't support this. They may say, "Well, we've got a history association downtown at the farmer's market. Why do we need two?"

So as far as seeing differences, you know, I grew up – now, Hannibal Square's always been kind of a conflicting community, as far as the business section was concerned. That's because there was a bar. And they had little cafeterias that

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

University of Central Florida

sold, uh, liquor and beer. And they had restaurants that sold, uh, alcoholic beverages. And you had, uh, barber shops, etc. Dry cleaners. You name it. So most families did not want their children in Hannibal Square in the business section. Because of the alcohol and booze. They – we were against that. You know? It wasn't against the – the insti – the, uh, businesses. But they didn't want they're children exposed to that. But I remember as a teenager, we loved to walk past the square [*laughs*]. We didn't dare go in the square, but we – that was one of our rights of passage. And then we got to driving age and had cars, we would drive through the square. It was like a right of passage.

[*laughs*] So, um – but, you know, there was a grocery store. And one of the grocery stores I grew up with was owned by a white family. And, um, they would give you credit on the food. Then there was another groc – there was[sic] two grocery stores owned by white families. The Davises. I can't remember the other. Prevatt. The Prevatts and the Davises. The Davises had a store right there where Dexter's used to be. At the corner of Pennsylvania and New England. And the Prevatts had one on the opposite side. Close to Hannibal Square East. And then the Davises moved north, near the corner of, uh, Pennsylvania and Canton in one of the, uh, Masonic lodge buildings downstairs. Which is now home to a new boutique-style, uh, store called – it was called The Grove or The Glove. Was it? Something. It's brand new.

So, you know, I've seen a lot of changes. Uh, there's only one barber shop, um, on the corner that had been there for a number of years. All the barbers that – well, two of the barbers that worked there f – one of the barbers that worked there, he's deceased. And the other one is still living. But, they're, you know – he's older. This is a new group here. And, um, we had a dry cleaners. Mr. Hurley's. Back during that time, when I was a teenager, coming up as a young person, uh, when we wore our jeans – we took our jeans to the dry cleaners. And they'd put starch in 'em. And then they would press 'em. And you'd have a crease in there that was so sharp, that if you did – if you weren't careful, you might cut yourself [*laughs*]. Mr. Hurley was a professional, um, hat blocker. That was his specialty. And then we had, um, hairdressers in the community. We had Mrs. Christine Hardaway. We had Mrs. Alberta Kelly. We had Ms. Nellie Mae Lewis. We had, um, several more. We had many hairdressers. Because during that time, um, I was growing up, most African Americans, you know, they'd straighten their hair, you know, with a hot pressing comb and things like that. Now we've come to accept and appreciate our kinky hair.

So it's, you know – we had the community center, where we'd have Saturday night dance – dances with teenagers. We had Saturday night dances. Uh, when I was in elementary school, during the, uh, World Series baseball games, um, if you wanted to go and watch the baseball on a little, small tv sitting up on the stage, they would bring the kids over who wanted to watch the baseball game. Um, that's – community center had a jukebox in it. So if you're doing, you know – if you went over there during the daytime, you know – went after school

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

University of Central Florida

or whatever, you could play the jukebox and pool table. And, of course, like I said, the Saturday night dance [*digital alarm rings*]. And now at that time, there was a, uh, dj on AM radio, was named – they called him Little Daddy. And he visited all the rural African American communities in Central Florida. So wherever he was scheduled to go for the weekend or Saturday night, he would advertise it during his show. And most times, he would say something like, “Okay. We’re gonna be in Winter Park Saturday night. Practice, Winter Park. Practice, Winter Park.” And we would all be so excited to go to the community center for the dances.

And we didn’t go to summer camp. The churches were our summer camps. Because in the summertime, many of the women who worked outside their homes, they would take time off their jobs and provide vacation Bible school for us. So we had like nine or ten churches in the community. Or more. So each church would take a week. So you didn’t have to be conflicted about where you wanted to go. So by the time you made it through nine to ten churches, you’ve already had your summer camp. You know, we would study the Bible. And we would learn Bible verses. And then we would do, uh, little skits at the end of the week. Every day we had our Kool-Aid and our sandwiches. And a cookie. And the women were very nice and kind to us. Didn’t matter whether or not you went to the S – Seventh Day Adventist Church or the Church of God in Christ or a Baptist church, etc.

[*clears throat*] So you know, we – we had a – we used to fish the lakes of Winter Park. Because often, black people worked on those estates. And so we knew a lot of them. And so when we would go to fish, we could go into the yard. And usually the butler or the maid or some house, uh, worker or servant would come out wondering how you – how we’re fishing. You know? What – what are we doing? Are you catching anything? And a lot of times they would bring out cold water or tea, you know, for you. So we were allowed to go into these properties. But now, a lot of times I think about, “Well, I won’t really drive down that street again.” ‘Cause I remember walking down that street. And there was a stand – a stand of, um, cane poles that my grandmother used to cut from and let it dry out. I said, “But I’m sure if I drive that there now, especially if I drive slowly, just reminiscing, I’ll probably get the cops called on me. You know? But those are the things.

Uh, we couldn’t go to the public library. Mm-mm. With help from Rollins College, um, professor of books – I can’t remember his name right now. And it’s a shame that I don’t. Um, he donated books and a bookshelf. In the – in memory of his wife. ‘Cause his wife was active with the black children at the Hannibal Square Elementary School. She would come and read to the children and provide books. And then he started a campaign. And said, “Rather than, um, sending flowers, donate a book or books to the school.” And eventually, that led to an effort and the success to build a library in Hannibal Square.

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

University of Central Florida

So it was in the sixties before we could go to the library. I'm right here in '64 in Winter Park [clears throat]. By the time they had a library in, um – by the time we were allowed to go to the library across town, I had read every book probably in the Hannibal Square [laughs] library. Some of 'em probably twice [laughs]. And so – but, you know, i – i – it didn't – w – we didn't resort to saying somebody saying, "Well..."

Cravero [clears throat].

Livingston ...I'm not gonna read because I want to go to the white library." You know? I – i – w – we went to the library. And we, you know – and a lot of families at the time, they invested in buying, um – Oh, god. Here we go. Britannica. Uh.

Lester Encyclopedias. Encyclopedias.

Livingston Encyclopedias. And so you would go to your friend's house. Some people didn't even have the complete set yet. They might have had – they might have bought A through D. You know? And then the next year, they might buy F through whatever. And some people were able to buy the whole set. So you would go to your friend's house and use their encyclopedias.

And so it was – there's a lot of change. I remember one time this, uh – it was in the sixties. Early sixties. There was a restaurant. A little burger joint on, um...

Cravero [clears throat].

Livingston ...Fairbanks Avenue called The Golden Point. Now every Sunday after church, me and a group of friends would – after dinner, usually at one of my friend's house, mostly Doris Taylor's house [laughs], we would take a little walk around the community. So this particular Sunday, we decided we'd go to The Golden Point. So we walked up to the window and the lady told us – the young lady told us that we had to go to the side to order. And we said no. We wanted to order there. And so what she did was she closed the window down. So we stood there for a while. And after it was obvious that they were not going to serve us, we began to walk away. But as soon as we walked away, she opened the window back up to serve a white customer.

I'll never forget one time, um, this was around '57 or '58, when they first put a 7-Eleven at the corner of Pennsylvania and Fairbanks. My mother had given me money to go and buy a loaf of bread. I went to the store and I got the bread. And I gave the young man, the cashier, a 20-dollar bill. When he gave me back my change, it was not correct. But he gave me a look to say, "Don't you dare challenge me." Now it wasn't so much that I was afraid to challenge him. I was afraid that this would create a problem for my mother. Because my mother was one of those people that just didn't take any hostages. And I knew my mother would go back down there and probably tear the place up and end up in jail. So I

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

University of Central Florida

had to go home and lie to my mother. I—I lied to my mother. I said, “I must have dropped some of your change.” ‘Cause I knew she was not going to let it go.

I’ll never forget one day I was crossing Park Avenue at New England on my way to Hogue’s Five & Dime store. On Saturdays, sometimes we would get, uh, 25 cents or 10 cents. You know, like I said there was[sic] three of us. Four. Four of us. And we would go down to Hogue’s and buy the little, you know, rick racks and jackstones and different little things. It would always be crowded with children because the children would be—be—the white children would be down—would be down on Park Avenue for the Colony Theater. Because of the movies. This time, as I was crossing the street, there were three little white boys. And they were snickering. And I could tell from their body language that something bad was coming to me. And so as we passed each other, one of ‘em snickered and said—and called me Aunt—Aunt Jemima. Aunt Jemima. That’s the pancake mix. Well, during that time, that was not something to be called. You might has well have used the n-word.

So sometimes I wonder. These people that I had these encounters with, are they—are they now or before—were they on the City Council? You know? Are they in places of power? And have they changed? And have they taught their children these same things against people who don’t look like them? I—I wonder about those things. And now as I began to be among a lot of people who are not of color, I see the connection that they all have. They know everything about us and we know nothing about them. So that gives them leverage. That gives them the upper hand. Because many of the older people who have gone on, and many who are aged now, worked for a lot of those families. And those older people from our community share some of their pain about their life or their children. About their husband. About their wife. And so that’s been passed on to generations. And that feeds the negative feeling about people in—in my community.

You know? Just like, uh, historians. Historians in the community, they are only concerned about white history. I’m not only concerned about black history. I’m concerned about all history because I can see the thread. I could see the—I could see each—in other words, when you tell your story, there’s a component story from this community that is parallel to that. And people don’t always see that. I know many years ago in the paper, someone wrote that if you didn’t graduate from Winter Park High, you didn’t live in Winter Park. That’s to disenfranchise those of us who had to go to the segregated schools, which was not a call that we could make.

And then when you go to Winter Park High—if you go to one of their yearbooks around ‘70-’71—now this was after the Civil Rights Movement. In the yearbook, there’s a redneck club, which is fine. But one of the kids has a noose around his neck. Then there’s a poem in that yearbook. “How much does your daddy make? Does he have enough—make enough to live on a lake? And buy his wife a long-

length mink? Or does he live in a..." I can't remember the whole poem. But does he live in, you know, like a low-income place? Or maybe he doesn't work at all. That's in the yearbook. In 1971-72. So I wonder. Those children in that picture. What are they doing? Are they still here?

And then in a picture, they showed, uh, the black student. And the pictures of the black student looking like the — tish[sic] — pictures of black students in the picture, they look like — they look like they're stressed about learning. You know? Like they're confused or something. They look like they're challenged about whatever they're trying to — to look at. You know? Then they took pictures on the back side of some of the old rooming houses in there to show, I guess, where these black children come from. And then they have a section called, "The Community". And that's where they show Downtown Park Avenue. The houses on the lake. Blah, blah, blah [laughs].

You know, the first African American didn't attend Winter Park High School until the 1964-65 school year. This was a young lady. Barbara King Lloyd. She lived on Lyman Avenue. She had one brother. Scriven. But they always attended school and church with their family in Orlando. The came from p — a pioneer family here. And, um, they picked — she was picked to attend the school. I guess as a test. And I would say, um, in my opinion, she was picked because she was very fair-skinned. It wouldn't be so obvious. They wouldn't pick me. Y — you know? And she was not treated well at all. She was ostracized. And it was tough on her. This was a young woman who had come from Jones High School in Orlando. She'd been a majorette. She was a star student. You know? So she was popular. She's in Girl Scouts here. You know? Very involved with everything. And she'd go there. And for hours on hours a day, had to — had to face that.

One year, when she — when they had a reunion, the [Orlando] *Sentinels*[sic] contacted her. She was living in Miami-Dade County around that area at the time. And asked her about wh — whether or not she would be attending the reunion. And she said no. That she would not be attending. And then they interviewed some of the classmates. And some of them expressed remorse for the way that they — they didn't reach out. They didn't try to welcome her in any way.

So — but this is not an anomaly. This happens all over the — the country. Most specially in the South. See, the people think of Florida, they think of beaches and palm trees. But the same dynamics that play out all over the country plays out here. Yeah.

Anyway, Mr. Rogers²⁶, you know, he attended Rollins. And he graduated in 1951. Well, Mr. Rogers spent time in this community at the Winter — at the Welbourne Avenue Nursery and Kindergarten²⁷ through the Human Relations

²⁶ Fred McFeely Rogers (March 20, 1928–February 27, 2003).

²⁷ The Welbourne Nursery & Kindergarten Inc is located at 450 W Welbourne Avenue, Winter Park, FL 32789.

Council at his school. By the time Mr. Rogers got here, the enrollment at the Hungerford School had declined. Because before the early-fifties, the Hungerford School had been a private school. Boarding school for African Americans. And so when enrollment went down, and I guess they couldn't afford the teachers, Mr. Rogers and many of the students in his department and members of the Humanity Council would go over to Hungerford and actually teach the classes. You know? And work with the children. And things like that. Yeah.

Hamilton Holt²⁸. He was a little different. You know, he was good friends with Zora Neale Hurston. Zora Neale wanted to put on a play. But she couldn't do it at the main campus. They had another theater somewhere around present-day Virginia or Fern Creek Avenue area. So she could – she was allowed to use that. Many of the people in her play, especially the singing parts, came from this community. So, you know, Hamilton, the Ball Family. The Balls. They worked for Hamilton Holt. Every year when he would go to his estate, you know – the people are connected someplace. Uh, they would go with him. In fact, uh, Mrs. – Mrs. Ball, uh – her son, who's still living, he's in Atlanta now – whenever she would go with them to their estate, she would leave her son, young son, with her father. And one summer, the child cried and was so upset about his mother leaving that Hamilton Holt had the kid brought to the estate. And from that time on, every summer he went with his mother to the estate.

So there were some kind people. I'm – I'm not saying everybody – I'm not – I don't – I don't wanna do what they do. I don't wanna be like them. I don't wanna paint the whole city. There are pockets of people. There are people that you don't even know that have empathy for what has happened to this community. I just don't know who a lot of 'em are. I know a lot of 'em. But then there's many more that I do not know.

It's a great place to live. It is. And I can see why people would want to come in. I just hope that they enjoy it as much as I do. Did and still do. I drive from Mount Dora at least two or three days a week coming here. 'Cause I love this place. Yeah.

1:02:05

How government policies encourage gentrification and her final remarks

Cravero Well, appreciate you sharing your story with us today, Ms. Livingston. I think you've answered all of my questions. Is there anything else that you'd like to add? Do you have any final thoughts to share before we wrap up the interview?

Livingston Well, sometimes I wonder. I know where some of the people who were just relocated, uh – had to leave because of gentrification or for whatever reasons. And I know some of 'em are living in Altamonte [Springs] or Eatonville. And Pine Hills. And somewhere in another area. But when, uh, people who do

²⁸ Hamilton Holt (August 18, 1872–April 26, 1951).

development – and I’m not anti-development. I know things change. When they are the ones that – the thing about gentrification, there’s no, uh, requirement that they see that people get compensated in some ways to make that move. And cities, not just Winter Park, but cities around this country, they allow that to happen because they don’t have to pay the location money.

I think one of the biggest problems is that a lot of people have given up on local, state and national politicians. A lot of people don’t vote. They think once they’ve registered and get the card, that’s the end of it. But that’s just the first step. I know that African American communities, uh, their lifetime is just about over. Uh, many states, including Florida, have what they call the partition laws. And that helps bring about gentrification. The partition laws are where let’s say me and my three siblings own – or we’re heirs to property. And there is no – no will to say who actually gets it. Or how it should be divided. And let’s say it is divided. And out of the four, let’s say I’m living in the home. But let’s say one of my brothers might be paying the taxes and he’s in another state. The other two may have no interest. So when the developer contacts any of those three and says, “I’ll give you x number of dollars for your share,” well, the one that’s paying the tax deal may feel, “This frees me up. And then I get a few dollars.” And the other two, they may be doing very well, wherever they’re living. And, you know, don’t plan on coming back here. And so they sell their share. But then it only takes one person to buy – to – to sell their share. And then the developer can get a judgement against the remaining members to buy the property. In other words, what they’re gonna look – go for the judgement in, they’re gonna say, you know, “I’m ready to move forward with my investment. And this is costing me money because these other two people will not sell.” This is happening right now in North Carolina and Georgia. South Carolina. With farm property. Petition. And it’s legal. But you know, everything legal, it’s not always right.

Lester Thank you.

Cravero Thank you very much. This has been Geoffrey Cravero and Dr. Connie Lester with Fairilyn Livingston at the Hannibal Square Heritage Center in Winter Park, Florida, on Thursday, December 12th, 2019. Thank you.

End of Interview