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

Lauritz Kjerulf: Today's date is April 8th, 2000. The following is a panel discussion with members of the Mosquito Beaters, recorded at the Tebeau-Field Library. 435 Brevard Avenue, in Cocoa. The panel members are Bob Cowart, Marion Paterson Jackson, and George Leeland Harrell. The moderator is Nick Wynne. The cameraman is Lauritz Kjerulf.

Nick Wynne: [00:00:30] It's a pleasure, once again, to have you here at the Tebeau-Field Library for our Saturday afternoon lecture series. Today is not a lecture, it's a discussion about some of the "old-timers," about growing up here in Central Brevard County.

The format for today is rather unstructured. The interviews and the responses of the people here are being filmed by the Brevard County Historical Commission. [00:01:00] We have back here a Mr. Lauritz Kjerulf, who is doing this in a professional manner. Some of you may know his mother, Georgiana Kjerulf who has written Tales Of Old Brevard and other stuff. So he's going to be doing it for us.

What I've prepared is a number of just questions to get started. These are general questions, and [00:01:30] I would encourage you as they respond to the questions to jump in, ask questions, add to it. We'd like to have a very free-wheeling kind of environment, so that we can cover as much ground as possible. And if you have recollections you want to share, then I encourage you to do so.

First thing we're going to do is to ask our panelists to give their name and a little background. We'll start over here, Bobby, with you.

Robert Cowart: [00:02:00] Well I'm Bob Cowart, and I grew up in Cocoa and I am 75 years old. I came here when I was 4 months old. I don't remember it. The older I get, my forgettor works much better. Any question you ask, I will try my best to answer. Thank you.

Marion Jackson: I'm Marion Paterson Jackson. I was born here. My father was born here. My grandmother [00:02:30] came when she was 17, in the early 1880s. I don't know just when, but she came here with her father. He was supposed to die then, and I think he lived until 1911. So it's a good place to live. And I married here, and raised my children here, and I guess I'll die here. But it's a good place. It's a good place to be from, it's a good place to live [00:03:00] in. I like it.

Larry: [How old are you? 00:03:05].

Marion Jackson: 78.

Nick Wynne: Only Larry would ask that question.

Marion Jackson: I doesn't care, I'm proud of it.

George Harrell: I'm George Leland Harrell, I carry the nickname of Speedy. In the Army, I was called “Cocoa”, short time I was there. I answer to most anything. If you're calling for a meal, some things they call me, I take off running in the other direction so-- [00:03:30] I get along very well with that. I was born down south. I was born in Rockledge, and I migrated up north, because they told me everything was much better up north. I live in Cocoa now. We’ll try to field whatever questions you come up. If not, we'll tell you something else.

Nick Wynne: Thank you. Most of you know this already, but these are all part of a group called the Mosquito Beaters. [00:04:00] Mosquito Beaters are a group of people who on the second March of every year, have a community reunion. And several thousand people come, people from as far away as, I think it's New Zealand and Korea and Texas. Of course, people from Texas are all Speedy's relatives. They drive that way just for the Friday night free meal.

My [00:04:30] first question here is ... We'll start with Bobby, what was your earliest memory of Cocoa? You said you didn't remember when you came here at four months old.

Robert Cowart: No, I don't know. I can remember things back to when I was about four years old. I was thinking the other day, one of the first things that I remember is being down in the Village with my daddy, and there was a bunch of people standing on the corner, and [00:05:00] I couldn't understand what they were saying. My dad, I said, "Dad, what are they saying?" He said, "Well, that's a bunch of Italians. They live on Merritt Island." That is, of course, the Garafalos, [Ballchichios (?) 00:05:17], and the Finnaris and whatever. I found out later. But, I didn't even know what an Italian was, I'd never heard the word before.

Nick Wynne: Marion?

Marion Jackson: My first remembrance, [00:05:30] and there's a picture of a sidecar over there, a motorcycle sidecar, my daddy had an Indian motorcycle with a sidecar. He used the motorcycle to go down the river road from his grandfather's grocery store and take orders for groceries. Then, he would come back and they'd fill the grocery order and they would take them back in the truck. But, my first remembrance is ... I don't know how old I was, I had to be over two because my brother was a baby, and I was on a stool [00:06:00] in the sidecar riding with mom and daddy. She said my first word was moon. That's the first thing I remember. Then there's a gap.

Nick Wynne: Speedy?

George Harrell: I don't really know what would've been my first memory of Cocoa. One of the early memories that stands out very vividly, I was a little fellow, I don't know how big, but my dad was paying off a crew of men on the street out back, up ... There was a big oak [00:06:30] tree back of Reid's store. That's where he'd pay off the

crew of men. He asked me to take a 10 dollar bill and go down to Barnett Bank and get him 10 one dollar bills.

Well I'd never been in a bank before in my life. I didn't know anything about it. But I went in there. Mr. Joiner was the teller there. He even used the wrong hand. He was left-handed and he counted me out 10 one dollar bills so fast I didn't know what happened. [00:07:00] And to this day, that seems to me as one of the biggest piles of money I ever saw. Up until then, I think I'd had a quarter.

Nick Wynne: When was that, anyway? What year?

George Harrell: That would've been probably '34.

Nick Wynne: 10 dollars in '34 was a big pile of money. Absolutely. Well, the next question ... The next two questions are sort of connected with that. I had, and you probably ought to think a little bit about this. What was your best memory growing up? Of [00:07:30] course, I know Bobby's going to say, "I haven't grown up yet." And, your worst memory of living here today?

Marion Jackson: Best and worst.

Robert Cowart: Nick, why do you pick on me? Starting this stuff every time. I don't know. I guess that you have ... At least, I have a tendency to remember the good things. It's hard to remember bad things, to me. I've just enjoyed [00:08:00] living in Cocoa. I can't think of any bad things. I guess the worst thing was when my father died. Was probably my first bad thing I can remember but--

Nick Wynne: How old were you?

Robert Cowart: I was about 14, or 15 ... I was going to say I was 15 at the time. But it hit me pretty hard. Outside of that, I've enjoyed living in Cocoa. I can remember the good [00:08:30] times better than the bad, I guess.

Nick Wynne: That's good.

Robert Cowart: I think maybe most people are that way, I don't know.

Nick Wynne: Marion?

Marion Jackson: I think the freedom that we had growing up in town. It was small, and towns seemed to encompass oh, probably about two, three blocks that way, and two, three blocks this way. So, nobody had cars. You walked, you could walk, even as a young child. I lived two blocks, practically. I grew up on Peachtree [00:09:00] street, and my grandmother lived on Willard Street, which is adjacent to Peachtree Street, then you get to King Street, and you're in town. The middle of town.

And I could walk ... As young, we didn't have any age restrictions, that I remember being old enough to do it. We could do it, we could be downtown. It's like our President's wife says, "It's take a village to raise children." Well that's the way it was around here. The village raised us. We did nothing wrong, that we didn't want reported. [00:09:30] Because it would be.

Nick Wynne: Now did y'all refer to it as a Village, or just Downtown?

Marion Jackson: No, it was downtown. Let's go downtown.

Nick Wynne: Yeah. Downtown.

Marion Jackson: The worst thing, maybe the worst thing might've been not getting caught sneaking into the movie because they knew we snuck in. It didn't cost but a dime, but we didn't have a dime. And we'd sneak [00:10:00] into the movies, you know, and I know Mr. Cogswell saw us. But we still did it with trepidation in our hearts, because we were afraid we would get caught. There really wasn't much bad going on in that time. Or any time.

Nick Wynne: What kind of movies do you remember from period?

Marion Jackson: Well, I barely remember the silents. We didn't go to them too much. I do halfway remember the piano [00:10:30] or organ that was upfront, that played when the silents were on. I suppose it had to be after I learned to read before I was ever there, and I don't believe I ever went to any silents alone, that I recall. The movies of course whatever was on.

Nick Wynne: [inaudible 00:10:48].

Marion Jackson: But I do miss, I miss the travelogues, I miss the cartoons, I miss the things that they had before the feature film.

Nick Wynne: News galore.

Josie: Buck Rogers serials.

Marion Jackson: Well, yeah. The serials, the cartoons. I said serials, [00:11:00] and ... I miss those three or four things they had before the movies. And of course you could just stay right on in, it was continuous. They didn't turn the lights on and turn you out like they do now. You could just stay and see it as many times as you needed to be gone as long as you had to be gone, you know.

Nick Wynne: I grew up in South Georgia, and I can remember my family coming on Saturdays and coming in early, and stay until 10, 11, 12 o'clock at night. And we would park down in the movie theater and stay [00:11:30] there, literally, all day watching two or three ... I assume you did that too, or maybe [crosstalk 00:11:35].

Marion Jackson: Well, no, ‘cause I lived ... I was in, what-- two blocks of town, so I didn't have to stay any longer than I really just wanted to. And the fun part at night though, was if you could be downtown at night, was to sit on the benches with the people that came to town from over on the bridge or, you know, had a long ways to come, and just sit on the benches with them, and chat with those folks. That was what was ... That was [00:12:00] a lot of fun.

Nick Wynne: Okay. Speedy?

George Harrell: Have you got a problem back there, Bob?

Bob Gross: Could we not tap on the table? It's picking up on the recorder, sorry.

George Harrell: I'll quit that.

Wallace: Can I make just a ... Before you start, Miss Jackson, do you know what happened to that organ?

Marion Jackson: No.

Wallace: It wound up in a Methodist church, it use to sit right here where the parking lot is.

Marion Jackson: Oh did it?

Wallace: That's where it came, your church-[inaudible 00:12:26] Methodist church, doing up there.

Marion Jackson: And that's where it came, your church-

Wallace: ’85, ’83 they asked me to start on its centennial [00:12:30] history, so I finished it in 1985 was our 100th year.

Marion Jackson: And that's where the organ went, huh?

Wallace: That organ went up there and stayed there until we moved up on Forrest Ave. and I don't know what happened to it then, but it served a long time.

Nick Wynne: Was it a pump organ, or?

Marion Jackson: When did it go up there?

Wallace: Beg your pardon?

Marion Jackson: When did you say they got it?

Wallace: We moved. Well I don't know when-

Marion Jackson: You don't know when they got it.

Wallace: [crosstalk 00:12:54] there's pieces of paper, I have microfilm of library down in-- lot of microfilm stuff, about here in Cocoa, [00:13:00] so forth. I've been doing research, that's when I found that article about that organ going that way.

Marion Jackson: That's interesting. I think my grandmother used to play ... My grandmother Paterson used to play the piano for the Methodist church many years ago. Now, I don't know when the switch happened, but there was a falling out with the Methodist church, and she ended up at the Episcopal church. I don't know what the falling out was, or just when it happened.

Bob Gross: One more thing. When people have a question, would you repeat the [00:13:30] question so we can pick it up?

Marion Jackson: Okay, because it's not picking up on the mics?

George Harrell: You'll get the next questions alright, I'm sure.

Bob Gross: Yeah.

Marion Jackson: Okay.

Bob: Speedy, what was your best and your worst?

George Harrell: Well I lived in the country. When I was big enough to move around, we lived on south Merritt Island and in an orange grove at that time. Getting to come to town was a big deal, and getting to go to the movie. I never have told this, and I don't know if I should now. But I was big enough [00:14:00] to read, and I'd go to the movie, and no matter what, if it was the cartoon was on that got to the end, it said, "The end," and I knew what the end meant and I got up and left. That was a real good move, when somebody told me to just keep my seat, they'd keep showing. So that was a good memory.

It was quite a deal to come to town. Usually worked until noon on Saturday. [00:14:30] Parents ... Then we would come into town and buy groceries, and then our grocery buying a lot of times was up at City Point. Mr. [Abney 00:14:41] had a general store up at City Point, and he also had a grove on south Merritt Island. My dad took care of the grove for him, and we bought groceries and clothing out of his store up at City Point. They'd settle up a couple times a year to see who [00:15:00] owed who and that was the way it went.

And then you saw a lot of friends, I guess, during the summertime when school was out. You didn't see them living down there. It was good to come into town and see some of your friends. Then, crossing the bridge, way back ... We had a president named Hoover at some point. People really banked up on the old bridge to fish. They tell me they were [00:15:30] really fishing for food. My dad had a

cast net and he'd usually just go down to the riverbank and catch mullet for us. But we'd cross that bridge sometimes and there'd be people on there so thick fishing, and as I remember as a kid, there was always one window that was broken out of the old car, so they'd tell us to move away from that open window. Didn't want to get us hooked with a fishhook as we'd cross that wooden bridge.

Marion Jackson: Speedy, was [00:16:00] Mr. [Abney 00:16:02]'s store, was it in the river at that time?

George Harrell: It was over the river.

Marion Jackson: Like it was when I remember it.

George Harrell: The front end of it was on the shore, at the end of City Point Road, and the back of it was out over the-

Marion Jackson: Just the one building-

George Harrell: The one building, yeah.

Marion Jackson: I didn't know whether he'd had another building or not.

George Harrell: There was only one building that I knew anything about, and at the back door, it had a big ... Like a [00:16:30] garage door that opened out onto the river. I assumed that-

Marion Jackson: Well it probably was serviced by the boats.

George Harrell: Serviced by the boats at that time. They would open that door up, and some people would feed the catfish and stuff out that window.

Josie: Was the post office in the back?

George Harrell: The post office was in the back. Sometimes they'd have 12 or 15 letters in there at the time.

Nick Wynne: Postage due.

Marion Jackson: You were talking about the bridge. Now, my grandfather Franklin was [00:17:00] bridge tender. They bridge tendered on the old wooden bridge for a lot of years. I don't remember from when to when, because as a kid I didn't pay any attention to what was. I just was. I existed and went with the flow. But they used to tell the old story about my grandfather who came from Illinois and didn't know from grits. He knew cornmeal mush and stuff like that, but he didn't know grits.

So they tell him how ... Mr. Franklin fixed him some grits one [00:17:30] time, and he started off apparently with a small pot. They had a small tollbooth there on

the south side of the bridge in the center, and it was about as big as this table is twice. There just was not much room. Maybe a little deeper. But he had a little stove in there, and a little toilet over on this end, which allowed itself to go down to the water almost, and the pipe. Anyway, he was fixing [00:18:00] his grits, and he started out in a pot. Well, I think he went one-on-one. And then, he got another pot, because it got ... They said that Mr. Franklin, my grandfather, had pots all over the place there with his first grits.

Nick Wynne: Took him several pots to get grits.

Marion Jackson: Yeah. And we kids, though, we thought one of the greatest things in the world would be to do, to go into the toilet and flush it. Because when we flushed it, [00:18:30] water came down and just tore all over the place in the river, and the catfish just came and tore all over the place. We thought that was funny.

George Harrell: Frank, did you have a question?

Frank: Yeah, did that old building up there turn out to be [Hubb's Inn 00:18:46] in later on?

Marion Jackson: No, no. Two different buildings.

Frank: Oh, okay.

Marion Jackson: [Hubb's Inn 00:18:50] was further north.

George Harrell: The City Point post office and store building was never [Hubbs Inn 00:18:55], [Hubbs Inn 00:18:55] was farther north, yes.

Marion Jackson: You can still see the pilings, [00:19:00] where both buildings were. Because I was just down there. The River Road is home. I don't care where've you been or how long you've been gone, when you're at the River Road from point to point, you're home, you know. If you haven't ridden it in a long time, you ride it in to see who's building houses where, you know.

Nick Wynne: That's true. One of the things here, you mentioned grits and you talked about shopping and Bob Gross back there suggested that perhaps [00:19:30] you might want to just talk in general terms about the kinds of foodstuff that you had during the week, and he said, "I'm sure it wasn't all fried chicken every day."

Josie: Every Sunday.

Nick Wynne: Yeah, every Sunday. Was there a lot of vegetable growing around here, or was it necessary to bring stuff in?

Marion Jackson: Well I was a city girl. We lived on Peachtree Street. I was [00:20:00] a city girl.

Nick Wynne: You didn't have a backyard garden?

Marion Jackson: We had a backyard, but no garden. We had one when I was young. We had a good well, and this is, I guess, before city water because we sold five gallon jugs, my folks did, of water. And I can remember those five gallon jugs, and Momma delivered them off, and her doctor gave her the devil for lifting those heavy jugs. But we apparently had a good well, and must've been before [00:20:30] city water. We had grapefruit trees in the yard, and I do remember one time Daddy trying to raise some turkeys on wire, and they didn't put a roof on them. They-- Turkeys drowned themselves when it rained one day, because turkeys aren't told to lift their heads up and drink water and drown themselves.

George Harrell: Are you sure those jugs were water jugs, Marion?

Nick Wynne: Somebody had a really [inaudible 00:20:55].

George Harrell: Your mother had a better deal going then you realize.

Marion Jackson: Well the ones [00:21:00] on the back porch were the water jugs that had grapefruit wine making in them. I never did like wine in those days, and I couldn't understand it, but they were always out there in the back making wine. Making wine.

And then another story, my grandfather was going to make some Kummel, and I understand that's made ... What is it, what does he make it with? I've forgotten now. Anyway, you're supposed to leave it alone. Gran-gran got into it every day, and messed it up and messed it up-

Robert Cowart: Now you're talking about the grapefruit growing in the [00:21:30] yard, they were probably making grapefruit wine.

Marion Jackson: They were making it, that's what was on the back porch all covered up, you know. The grapefruit wine.

George Harrell: Well my dad came from South Georgia, and he always considered himself a farmer, no matter what type of work he was doing. He said he was a farmer, so we had a garden and we had plenty of vegetables and we had chickens that ran loose in the yard.

Nick Wynne: Before they were free-range?

George Harrell: Yeah, before it was important. When we lived in Rockledge, [00:22:00] as a small kid, I don't personally remember too much about it, but they heard them talk about it. The mule lot ... They worked the groves with mules, and there was a mule lot that was about halfway between Rockledge Drive and what's now U.S. 1. And there was plenty of chickens at the mule lot. They ate with the mules.

There was a black man that lived there on the grove. [00:22:30] And the hawks would get in the chickens. And Daddy told him, he said, "Frank, I want to give you ... Let's take a shotgun," and said, "Every time you Kill a hawk, you can get a chicken to eat," so that we stopped the hawks from getting the chickens. He said, "That'll be fine, Mr. Harrell," but said, "The day I kill the hawk, I'll just eat him and I'll give the chicken another day." So I'm sure he was eating chickens when he wanted them, there always [00:23:00] was plenty of chickens around.

Nick Wynne: Do any of you see any real differences ...And I'm not talking when you were eating out, and when everybody's looking at you, but do you see any real differences in at-home eating? It's sort of like when I go out with my wife, I'm always worried about broiled stuff ... I'm not worried about it, she's worried about it, and I have to eat it. [00:23:30] Has anything changed, have you see a large dietary change taken place?

Robert Cowart: Well, of course you didn't have frozen foods then. In fact, most people just had iceboxes. You went to the icehouse and bought a block of ice and put it in the top of the refrigerator. And they even had a drip pan at the bottom to catch the water melted off the ice. We also had a hole in the floor where the [00:24:00] piece of hose went to, if the house was built off the ground, which a lot of them were. Of course you didn't have those. People went ... Fresh meats, they wouldn't keep to long, especially if people only went to town once a week like Speedy was talking about. So they'd eat country ham or country [00:24:30] cured bacon or whatever. And of course they had their chickens. They did quite well.

Bob Gross: Did you eat a lot more fish back then, than you do today?

Nick Wynne: The question is, did you eat a lot more fish than you did today?

Robert Cowart: Well, I grew up during the depression like I guess all of us did. And I ate so many fish that I kinda got tired of it. I ate so much chicken, I was tired of it too. [00:25:00] A piece of steak was good to come by, I'll put it that way.

Nick Wynne: Now did your families, did your mothers spend a lot of time canning? I can remember my mother canning.

Robert Cowart: No. No, she didn't do a lot of canning.

Nick Wynne: With the old ball jars, and boiling them and sealing them, and when the blackberry season was in you picked like crazy. Pickled peaches. My wife grew up in Detroit, this is all foreign food to her. But a lot [00:25:30] of dried black eyed peas, and fat back, and rice, and Irish potatoes. Josie's getting hungry over there.

Josie: We used lard back in those days too, didn't have vegetable oil.

Nick Wynne: Now you used to buy lard, if I remember, my family buying in the big tin can. Was 25 pounds.

Josie: That was before we knew about vitamins and vegetables.

Marion Jackson: Well, you know, I don't know [00:26:00] how Momma did it, but I can remember, and I can't imagine what size pot roast she used to buy, but she'd buy a piece of chuck, and we'd have pot roast. And it seems to me we had it a minimum of three days, fixed different, but there were four of us in the family. And I can't imagine what size she bought to have ... As I recall, and I guess I did the same thing, I cooked for five people. [00:26:30] I didn't cook with a table full of second helpings. I cooked for five and that was it. When you were done, you were done. You washed the dishes, you didn't put the leftovers away because there weren't any. I didn't cook that way. I didn't raise any ...

Nick Wynne: Well, I can remember growing up like Speedy in the country, where you had an old pie safe. And it would seem to me that people would cook and they would store in the pie safe. Today, when you get through, everything goes in the refrigerator. But you know, you would eat out [00:27:00] of the pie safe for a couple three days, without-

Marion Jackson: I didn't see that until I went to the panhandle-

Robert Cowart: Nick, explain a pie safe to someone who might not know what it was.

Nick Wynne: A pie safe, the one we had was a wooden ... Looks like a china cabinet, usually fairly crudely made but it had screen covering, ventilation holes, and the air would circulate through there. Depending on whether you made it-

Robert Cowart: And the flies couldn't get to the pies.

Nick Wynne: The flies couldn't get [00:27:30] to it.

Marion Jackson: Like an iceless icebox until suppertime.

Nick Wynne: Yeah, right. But I can remember on Sunday afternoon, when you had chicken for Sunday dinner, and my mother would leave that sitting on top of the stove, and you would go back through there about 50 times, grabbing this and grabbing that, or a piece of ham. I guess one of the comforts of going home to Georgia is my mother still does that, and we can all eat that. But I [00:28:00] grew up in a farming area and canning was a very big thing there, where people canned all ... The home demonstration agent used to do it.

You mentioned the icebox, once again in the country, we had the iceman that used to come around. And that was a big event, you were talking about, because you could chase the iceman down the street, and when they used the icepick you could get those little slivers of ice. He'd set up the icebox and you would wrap it in a croker sack. [00:28:30] And if you got extra and it wouldn't fit in the icebox, then you'd put it in a number two washtub and put sawdust around it to keep it.

Robert Cowart: Well, you're right. You had your iceman. The reason I mentioned that, when I lived in Cocoa, I had a little red wagon. And the icehouse was right over here, a block from here, and I'd take my little red wagon and go up there and get the ice and bring it back in the wagon. Because it was cheaper at [00:29:00] the dock, at the icehouse, then if they'd delivered it in the truck. You saved a nickel, is what you did.

Nick Wynne: Did y'all ever make homemade ice cream with that ice, where you would--and you would have to sit on top of that churn and-

Robert Cowart: Put salt.

Nick Wynne: I was talking to somebody the other day and they were looking at ... Actually, I looked several years ago, but one of those little hand churns, you used to buy them for five or six dollars and now they're about 150 dollars, just to get one that's not electric. Yes, ma'am?

Audience Member: I never heard anyone mention here about [00:29:30] how they used to bury vats in the ground, where they kept their milk. You ever heard of that?

Nick Wynne: Did they do it around here, as a root cellar?

George Harrell: Not here so much. That was more or less where you had a spring house or a root cellar or something. Those fine things that we didn't have here. We had a potato bank. We grew sweet potatoes and when you'd gather those you'd [00:30:00] put a pile of pine straw on the ground and then pile the sweet potatoes up on it. Put some boards over, put some dirt on it, and then they wouldn't freeze in there. It was more or less the right moisture content, and they called it a potato bank. A sweet potato bank. And there was more cold sweet potatoes, baked sweet potatoes in that pie safe than there was pies in it. The pie didn't last, but that cold sweet potato was usually there.

And we [00:30:30] had a milk cow. And we would put ... My mother had, she called them milk pans. They were big pans, and you put the milk in those pans and put ‘em in that safe and the cream would rise to the top, and you could skim that off to make the butter. Few years back, I was up in North Florida and people had a churn in their house, an old churn, and I said, "Well, I guess I'll never get [00:31:00] anymore fresh butter." The man said, "Well, you can," he said, "I was at one of the agricultural inspection stations and there was a load of cream. A semi-truck load of cream that was going through that station, and the man told him, said that, "That's a load of cream that's coming, and we've got to take sample," and they said, "I'll take a big sample, and you can make you some butter."

So I thought that was a good [00:31:30] deal, and he said, "Just use your hand mixer and go very slow with it." So I got back home, rounded up the mixer and I went and bought some cream at the store, and I got my granddaughter. So we

made butter. She watched, very skeptical of what I was doing. When it makes butter, there'll be milk mixed in with this butter.

Marion Jackson: That's the whey, isn't it?

George Harrell: Yeah, you have to [00:32:00] wash it with water to get rid of that stuff. And then you put your butter ... I'll put it in the refrigerator after that, and she agreed that it was butter, but she wasn't enthusiastic about it. But after it got cold in the refrigerator and was hard, she said, "Well, it did make butter, didn't it?"

Nick Wynne: That's like the old margarine. Remember the old margarine where you had to break the yellow-

Marion Jackson: Nucoa. Nucoa was the name of it. Oh, that was the nastiest [00:32:30] stuff to mix.

Nick Wynne: There was what?

Audience Member: There was a way to cheat on that margarine. Put your coloring in it, put it in the mixing bowl and beat it with electric mixer and then throw a soft stick of butter in it. It tasted exactly like fresh cow butter.

Nick Wynne: Frank?

Frank: Yes. On this making buttermilk and butter, I'd go ahead and do the churn, you know, like this. I learned all about making buttermilk and butter, skimming [00:33:00] the [inaudible 00:33:00] on the top. I knew you were supposed to save the cream off it, it's wonderful. Guernsey and Jersey milk. Richest milk the cow gives, Guernsey and Jersey something like that and Holsteins. My dad and mom always churned like that, but during college, we got 90 dollars a month on the G.I. Bill.

I was in Fort Wayne, Indiana, and my wife Holly, my first wife ... We're both from Kent, North Carolina. She knew about making buttermilk [00:33:30] too. We'd save the cream off of our wonderful whole milk, there in Fort Wayne, and let that cream sour a bit to just the right amount and we'd smell it to know when to churn it. You take in a quart jar, a Mason jar. Do this for just about 15 minutes, after churning, and here comes this butter up to the top. Beautiful yellow butter, and we'd just skim that off, and washed it like you're talking about it to wash it under the tap. Put that in a [00:34:00] little serving dish, and that was our butter. Made wonderful buttermilk. Didn't throw anything away. That's a latter day story.

Marion Jackson: My daddy ... We didn't, we kids didn't get any of the cream that was on the milk that came when the milkman, which was in the bottles you know ... This tall, with the cream at the top. First off, Daddy has one of those little things you dipped down in it and got the cream and he put it that in his coffee. If he didn't do that, then he would take the milk and Momma would pour it out in a soup plate and

[00:34:30] let it sit on the counter and clabber. Then he'd put sugar on it and eat it with saltines. I never did-

Nick Wynne: You ever put it on rice? We used to do that with rice.

Marion Jackson: I never messed with sour milk. It took me 40 years to drink buttermilk.

Robert Cowart: Marion, I never learned to like clabber either.

Marion Jackson: I never tasted it.

Robert Cowart: Lot of people did.

Nick Wynne: Isn't there a brand, though, called Clabber Girl?

George Harrell: That's the baking powder.

Marion Jackson: Baking powder.

Nick Wynne: Bob, you had a question.

Bob Gross: Why did your parents [00:35:00] or your grandparents come here, and what did they do when they first ... for employment. How did they earn their livings?

Marion Jackson: My great-grandfather Moore, who was my grandmother Paterson's, how did my grandparents come? My grandmother Paterson, who was Caroline [Adela 00:35:24] Moore, came with her father in the early 1880s, from Babylon, Long Island. [00:35:30] He was, in my understanding, not well. He came down presumably to die. I've later learned that he had his sister living here, Mrs. [Hoover 00:35:45], and her husband Leonard and they were apparently already in the area. And that's why they came here. Now Nanny was only 17 when she came, just a young girl. Her sister [00:36:00] was a year or two older, and she stayed in the north with her mother. I think they had a rooming house up there, I'm not real sure. I didn't listen when I was a child to the stories my grandparents used to tell me, and I'm just sick about that. The last time I tried to get my grandmother's stories was with ... I would take it down in shorthand, and she says, "I'm too tired."

But anyway, they came then and lived ... I've got some of the papers that my grandmother had saved. They lived up on [00:36:30] ... They bought a house, I think, on the River Road and they moved it around to Carmalt Street, and it was right next to the Carmalt Apartments. A little bitty old, narrow, two-story house. Then my grandfather Paterson, whom she married, came in the '80s. I'm not just sure when he came. Going through stuff, I ran into some letters, notes [00:37:00] that he had brought with him from Scotland to Canada. I just realized it, and this is a day late and a dollar short, that's me, but the letters were written by an aunt of his. His mother had been a French woman, and her sister apparently had

written these letters of introduction to him, for him, to some people in Canada and some people in Michigan, so I probably got relatives I never even thought about.

[00:37:30] But anyway, why he came on down here I'm not just sure. But we had, at that time, sort of a Scottish colony up north on Merritt Island. The Whaleys and-

Bob Gross: Did they have groves, or?

Marion Jackson: Well, I think they were homesteading people and had groves up there. Grandpa was going to homestead. He was a little man, I dare say he was probably not an inch or two taller than I, and probably didn't weigh much more than I did. The joke in the family was, the hoe [00:38:00] handle didn't fit his hands. And he was not trained to be a farmer, so he went to work at Sander's store as a clerk. And Nanny's story on how she got him was that they were going ... Maybe had gone to this party separately. Probably did.

But, they were going home and I guess he was going to escort her home and she tripped, and had to hold on to [00:38:30] him the rest of the way home. She never did say she didn't trip, but she always said she tripped and had to hold on to him. Anybody that knew my grandmother knew that she was mouthier than I was. After they got married, she did all of the driving. He never learned to drive, she did. I don't know just when they [00:39:00] bought the store building, the Paterson store building that's now a park by Black Tulip.

There's so much that you don't remember because you just don't pay attention when you're kids. My father was an only child, and my mother and her father and mother came in 1920 from Illinois. Boom time, I think. I think he had bought some property out where the college is now, 40 [00:39:30] acres. So he came and he bought the house that was next door to the old Knox Hotel. Now that I recall, the Knox Hotel was owned by a man from Galesburg. There you go. I guess it's all in there, just getting it out.

And it was just a two-story house, and he made a rooming house out of it. He added to it, and where the house had gone up like this, he made it come out [00:40:00] like this upstairs. All this was bedrooms. Talk about the one bath. Well, that was it. One bath in those days, and they had small rooms. People came to town and they had that business, and then he got what was, I guess, a touring cart at the time. And I thought it was real neat because it had little fold down jump seats in the back. And he would go out to the train station and bring passengers in to where they wanted to go. When if, I guess, [00:40:30] if they didn't know where they wanted to go, he brought them to his house. But he would let me go and I'd get to ride on the jump seats, but she never forgave him for putting her in a rooming house to take care of.

Audience Member: Barlow was the man-

Marion Jackson: Mr. Barlow, that's right. Ames Barlow.

Audience Member [inaudible 00:40:47] years, he lived on the backside-

Marion Jackson: Yeah, he lived right behind there. Mable Mead was the lady that came down from Galesburg with him, and was his housekeeper. Oh, was she remembered.

Robert Cowart: Miss Mead?

Marion Jackson: Yeah, [00:41:00] Mable Mead.

Robert Cowart: Miss Mead.

Nick Wynne: Bobby, you said you came here when you were four months old.

Robert Cowart: That's right.

Nick Wynne: Why did your folks come down?

Robert Cowart: Well, they farmed. The way I understand it, the farming was down it was a depressed area. My father had made one of the best crops he ever made, but couldn't sell it. But, the boom had started in Florida and he [00:41:30] would not only could farm ... Most farmers could build a barn and do this or that, so he came down here and went to work as a carpenter in Cocoa, in Rockledge. That's how they got here.

Nick Wynne: Did he come by himself first to scout it out, or did he just pack everything up-

Robert Cowart: He came and got a job, then brought them down I think. But, as far as their roots, the best I can figure out, they came out of the debtors, both sides of the family, Carrs and Thigpens. They came out of debtors' prisons in England, [00:42:00] with Oglethorpe, to Georgia. Then eventually down here.

Nick Wynne: That's a very common story. Debra tells a story about looking for family roots in Georgia. My family's roots. And somebody says, "Try the debtor prison records," and she said, "There are about 50 of them in there." I'll get your question, but let me ask Speedy how his family got down there.

George Harrell: Just the same way people come today. It was seeking their fortune. I guess [00:42:30] the boll weevil had been part of the cotton problem up there. Again, in South Georgia, there was farming and it was work. My grandfather was already down here, he was on the grove over on north Merritt Island. Had an uncle up in Titusville, so parents came for that. There was a fine gentleman that lived here in Cocoa, Goober Yancey. I know a lot of you remember him. He was not an educated man, but he certainly was not a dumb man. And Goober [00:43:00] said that the reason there was so many people from South Georgia down here in Florida was that they would get big enough that they'd finally buy 'em a pair of

shoes, and that they'd back up so they could look at their tracks until they'd back off into Florida.

But the very same reason people come today, looking for a job. If they'd had a big farm that they owned, and the store and the bank doing well up there, they'd still been in Georgia.

Nick Wynne: Those are called [00:43:30] brogans, by the way.

George Harrell: Yes, right.

Nick Wynne: Yes ma'am, you had a question?

Audience Member: I remember reading this. I'm a newcomer, '65, but I've been reading up on the history of the area, and it's interesting. But, this one settler came down. I don't remember my source, but this one settler came down here, a Georgia civil war veteran, he came down here looking for a new frontier for farming. Good, fertile land. Because Sherman's march to the sea, he tore up all the land up there, making it unfit for farming. Now is that [00:44:00] correct?

Nick Wynne: Well, Mr. Sherman didn't hurt the land, but he sure hurt the people on the land. The problem we had was one that Speedy made reference to there. In the old cotton and tobacco areas in Georgia, Alabama. Most southern states. It was a question of farming marginal land. In many cases, and the end result was that you had erosion taking place pretty much about the same time as you had the dust bowl out [00:44:30] in Oklahoma. And much of the topsoil, which was very thin to begin with, just simply washed away. It was land that should not have been farmed extensively in the first place. And a lot of people simply experienced erosion, and falling markets, and they were looking for a new experience.

You might remember this. The erosion problem was so great [00:45:00] in the south, that one of the things they did during the New Deal, was reintroduce kudzu back in. Kudzu had first been introduced in the 1890s in the United States out of the Far East. How many people in here know what kudzu is? Kudzu is that ubiquitous vine that grows all over everything. Has these little tendrils that bite into the soil, and it was one of those great New Deal solutions. [00:45:30] In the far east, kudzu is considered somewhat of a delicacy. And people put it in a frying pan, just like you cook mustard greens, and a little oil and you wilt it down. And it's considered to be very filling and very tasty, and it's also full of nutrition.

And so, during the New Deal, they introduced kudzu to do several things. One was to reclaim the eroded soil by breaking [00:46:00] it down and creating new topsoil. And you could feed the population, supposedly, and feed the livestock. Well, livestock didn't like it, they won't eat it. And Southerners were just too obstinate to try that. And kudzu grew so fast that it just took over everywhere. As a matter of fact, you'd ride along the road and see little bumps, and people would say that was a CCC worker that moved too slow. Just covered him right over. So-

To answer your [00:46:30] question, a lot of people in the south experience that, and Florida was one of the areas where erosion was not necessarily a major problem, except for the upper panhandle area where you have those rolling hills. I have a question here that says, "World War II and mosquito control were two events many people considered to be the most significant events in modern Brevard County." Would you agree or disagree, and why?

Robert Cowart: I'd have to agree. The [00:47:00] Navy, during World War II, they sprayed for mosquitoes. And they were really the ones who started. And after the Navy left, the county started a mosquito control program, flying small planes. And I think that Lee Wenner was one of the ... County Commissioner or whatever, he was one of the leaders in that, am I right?

Marion Jackson: Mm-hmm (affirmative)-

Nick Wynne: Yes.

Robert Cowart: Getting mosquito control started.

Nick Wynne: And Joe Wickham who [00:47:30] just died.

Marion Jackson: Dave Nisbet.

Robert Cowart: Yeah, that's right. But in the whole county ... Today, I can sit here and I'm sure that most of the people that have been around here as long as I have are, since World War II, will agree that there's just no mosquitoes here now.

Marion Jackson: Not now. I don't care how many we have now, there are just none in comparison.

Robert Cowart: That's right.

Marion Jackson: As I kid, I can remember doing it, and it was fun and I'd do it today if I could. When the mosquitoes [00:48:00] were so thick outside a screen, you'd put your hand on it like that, and you'd let them bite. You'd let them cover your hand. And then, being ornery, you do this and break the beaks.

Robert Cowart: You'd see the print of your hand.

Marion Jackson: And you'd see the print of your hand there.

Wallace: Wasn't Bill, it was Cesary, wasn't his name-

Marion Jackson: Bill Cesary. He was a pilot.

Josie: Cesary.

Nick Wynne: Speedy?

George Harrell: The Navy started spraying for them. They didn't tell us all their business, [00:48:30] they were just trying to take care of themselves. They were spraying DDT with big planes.

Marion Jackson: Big planes.

George Harrell: Yeah. I've heard older people talk about it, say, "You know we're getting in the end times, that we don't have any mosquitoes like we're supposed to, there's something going wrong." They worried about it, until they finally discovered that the Navy was spraying with that DDT. When the plane would come over your house real low, spraying, then you knew it was happening.

Marion Jackson: You really had [00:49:00] to come in because you could actually feel the pellet, the dripping, yeah.

Nick Wynne: We have a couple of people out there who ... are not familiar with this, this is a mosquito beater and before we get to your question, we'll let Speedy explain what you do with that.

Wallace: [inaudible 00:49:16] mosquitoes.

Nick Wynne: What?

Wallace: Merwin Wooten. Your neighbor.

Marion Jackson: Oh, he could tell stories about mosquitoes.

Wallace: You keep saying when he was a kid and out picking oranges and whatever, and mosquitoes were so bad, you said, "If you want to talk to [00:49:30] the-picker"

Nick Wynne: Speak louder, Wallace.

Wallace: "Next tree over," he said, "You throw an orange at him, and you speak down through that [inaudible 00:49:37]."

Marion Jackson: Oh, and he'd talk about the mosquitoes. I lived across the street from him, and he'd talk about the mosquitoes would come along, and he said you could get some of them by holding up a two by four, and then when they hit, you hammer quick on the other side to get them. They'd fly off with the board if you didn't hold on to it.

Nick Wynne: Let me just ask you a question. In 1939, [00:50:00] when they started building Banana River Naval Air Station, and we'll talk about that later on because we've got another group of people that are going to be talking about World War II. How was that viewed in the community? All of a sudden you're building the Banana River Naval Air Station, and you're bringing these people in from out of town. What was the reaction of the local community? Was there a reaction?

George Harrell: It was great. The people could get jobs making 60 cents an hour, and they [00:50:30] had a job to go to. There was always some people that didn't like it, it was going to ruin some-

Wallace: Stewart, for one?

George Harrell: Who?

Josie: Mrs. Stewart?

George Harrell: Well, it actually ... Yeah, I guess she was here whenever it happened. In fact, their water tower was so tall they came to put lights on it so the planes wouldn't hit it, and they took their yacht for use in wartime service.

Nick Wynne: Now Mrs. Stewart, which Stewart was that?

Wallace: Hacienda del Sol.

Nick Wynne: Oh, Hacienda del Sol. [00:51:00] Yeah.

Marion Jackson: W.T.

George Harrell: W.T.

Marion Jackson: W.H.

Nick Wynne: W.T. Stewart.

George Harrell: One of the jokes that was going around World War II, when all the work started going on, they said the carpenter was at work and somebody came along and said, "What are you making?" He's working, says, "Dollar an hour." He didn't know what he was trying to build, but he knew how much he was making.

Nick Wynne: I've heard that German prisoners of war were used out at Banana River [00:51:30] Naval Air Station on a limited basis, during World War II. Was that an issue of conversation in the community?

Marion Jackson: I never heard it.

Nick Wynne: We have pictures, actually-

Robert Cowart: I don't know, I wasn't here.

Nick Wynne: Yeah, you were-

Marion Jackson: I'm older than they are, but I don't ever recall having heard that we had German prisoners here.

Nick Wynne: Well, we have a couple of pictures somewhere.

Marion Jackson: We had Germans shooting other folks off there.

Nick Wynne: They built a swimming pool out there, for one of the things.

George Harrell: Yeah, there was German prisoners there at the base, [00:52:00] and it was talked about that there was German Nazi soldiers right here in this county, but they had ‘em under control out there at the base. But they were in a lot of locations throughout the United States, we had no monopoly on that.

Nick Wynne: No, but I didn't know whether that was ... Certainly in the height of World War II, particularly the first two years was something that might've signaled some sort of discussion in the [00:52:30] community.

Frank: The submarines caused more havoc than-

Marion Jackson: Yeah. And at that time, when the submarines were taking the merchant ships down, they were bringing the merchant marine survivors into the ... What was at the time our U.S.O., which was right over there, where the post office is now. There was a nice little wooden bungalow type building. And I remember at the time, [00:53:00] that I was part of the-- one of the girls at our U.S.O., and they called all of us in to help with these people, to sit and talk to ‘em because they were people who'd been through an experience and perhaps they just were probably scared to death. I would've been, too. I can remember talking to one man, an East Indian, and he said this was the third ship from which he'd been torpedoed on. I guess he'd go back for another one.

Robert Cowart: I was talking to one man, a [00:53:30] survivor that was brought in. And he said that was his, I think it was his eighth trip out of New York, and this was as far as he got. Now that's how bad the submarines were. Eight trips and this was as far as he got.

George Harrell: Bobby, you worked on the La Paz raising it when it was torpedoed, and they ran it aground, almost at the end of 520, in that ... About a close area to describe where it came aground, and it was salvaged. [00:54:00] And one of the commercial fishermen over there, my dad saw him one day in town. He said, "How are you doing?" He said, "Harold, me and the fishermen has about worked ourselves to death trying to save Johnny Walker and his family." He had a cargo of Johnny Walker's scotch on that ship, so it'd hold a lot of it in.

Nick Wynne: 900 cases, was it Bobby, of scotch?

Robert Cowart: There was 10,000.

Nick Wynne: 10,000-

Robert Cowart: 10,000. Now there wasn't [00:54:30] that many when I got out there.

Nick Wynne: Let me ask you a question. In 1947, early '48, when they were going to decommission, or they did decommission Banana River Naval Air Station, what kind of impact did that have on the community? Had the community grown so dependent on those 60 cents an hour jobs? Was there a strong reaction to that?

Marion Jackson: Mm-hmm (affirmative)-

Frank: I'd say [inaudible 00:54:57]. They were up to probably a dollar [00:55:00] in a half an hour then.

George Harrell: Well, the first spring when the shrimp would run, and the crabs was run, there was people out there dipping shrimp and crabs that you hadn't seen on that bridge in a long, long time.

Nick Wynne: So it did have-

Robert Cowart: There was a lot of empty housing.

Nick Wynne: Really?

Robert Cowart: Right. Until Patrick came back.

Nick Wynne: Now, I'm going to ask a question that demonstrates my ignorance. On Palm Way there, where John Bennett lives there now, someone once told me that [00:55:30] those were built by the Navy-

Robert Cowart: The Navy built those.

Nick Wynne: Was there a training facility here in Cocoa?

Robert Cowart: No, no that was just housing for-

Marion Jackson: Just Navy housing.

Robert Cowart: The married personnel, or whatever.

Nick Wynne: So they caught a bus and went over the bridge and into the-

Robert Cowart: They had a Navy bus.

Marion Jackson: Had a shuttle bus.

Wallace: There was another one down in Eau Gallie

George Harrell: Yeah, there was a group of housing there.

Robert Cowart: There was one built down there.

George Harrell: Almost opposite where they're building in that new Walgreens store, just on the west side of U.S. 1, [00:56:00] just south of that.

Marion Jackson: And they was selling those off in '47, because that's when I got married, in '47, and they was selling those off. The little two-bedroom houses were selling for 3,500 dollars.

Nick Wynne: Wow.

Marion Jackson:

And we couldn't get up 350 dollars. Hindsight tells you you could've if you'd really done it, but, you know, you got pride and you're not going to go ask this one for it, or that one for it, or whatever. So we didn't buy [00:56:30] down there. A lot of folks did. But that's when they were sent, and it was hard. I know Ralph was having a hard time getting a job about that time. He worked for the telephone company when we got married, and then they decided to strike that summer. And that's hard on newlyweds, especially when they get married with nothing in their pockets. And it was tough.

He finally did go to work over there in, [00:57:00] I guess it must've been '51. Finally got a job over there in '51. I never could get a job at the base. Now I don't know why, I was not stupid. I went to Washington and worked, went to Key West and worked. I got a job anywhere I wanted, I could not get a job at Patrick, what was Banana River.

Nick Wynne: Larry, you had a question?

Larry: I just wanted to interject, if I may. You were talking about the economy during the Second World War, when they built the Banana. My mother [00:57:30] Nan had a department store, and I remember business picked up big time for them. A lot of the black workers coming in the store, to cash a check, you know, and to buy something. But another comment on it, Might be to the Georgia Crackers we have here.

Nick Wynne: Make that three.

Larry: Well, we moved here. It was 48 states, and they always told my dad, they said, "There's only 47 [00:58:00] states now, Georgia went to Florida, and Florida went to hell."

Marion Jackson: I thought about that earlier, but I didn't say it.

Nick Wynne: Let me throw a couple, three names at you. Just sort of get your reaction and sort of respond to these people. Fortenberry.

George Harrell: Abe Fortenberry had a saw mill over on Merritt Island. And he was a county commissioner for a long, long period of time. [00:58:30] In fact, to get him out of there, they went to Tallahassee and changed it to where you'd voted countywide on your county commissioners, they couldn't beat him in his own district. And that got him out, and then a few years ago they changed it back to where you're voting on your own district now but--

Mr. Fortenberry was a county commissioner over there for years. And he had a sawmill, and he bought property and bought property. I've heard that one of the remarks [00:59:00] he made that he had never sold a car, or a piece of land that he owned, and he was getting too old to start it. But being a county commissioner, there was scrap iron drives. World War II, they wanted all the iron and metal that they could get. So he had to sell a lot of his old junk cars to maintain his standard as a county commissioner the voters would still elect him.

Marion Jackson: He had a son, Gordon, who had aspirations to be a professional [00:59:30] boxer. But it was always told to me that he had glass hands, and so he didn't go to very far.

Nick Wynne: Not a glass [inaudible 00:59:38] but glass hands.

Marion Jackson: Glass hands, that he just couldn't do it. And he was, as I recall, the best looking of the Fortenberry sons.

Nick Wynne: Bobby, do you have any comments on Fortenberry?

Robert Cowart: I can remember Gordon Fortenberry. I don't whether he had glass hands so much, I do remember him for his size and [01:00:00] build, he did have very small hands. I don't recall whether he broke those hands while boxing or what, which would be a glass hand. But he went quite high as a light heavyweight. In fact, he was ranked, I think, the second in the world at one time.

Nick Wynne: Wow.

Robert Cowart: But he went a long way. But he finally got too old I guess, or whatever, and he was out of it.

Nick Wynne: Well this area, Cocoa in particular, [01:00:30] always had a reputation for being very athletically oriented. Baseball certainly comes to mind. Talking with Speedy and some of the old timer people like Eddie Harrell, and even Sonny Butts playing, and a whole host of people like that. Do you think there's any particular reason why this emphasis was placed on sports in this part of the county? As opposed to say, other parts of the county.

George Harrell: Going to beat Titusville, whatever it took. And Melbourne. [01:01:00] After World War II there, they started up a local town team. I guess it was not league rules, it wasn't very binding or whatever. Summertime ball season, it would be rainy. And

Provo Park was where the ball games were played, and the park would get wet. They'd have a game scheduled maybe Wednesday afternoon. Of course, the whole town closed on Wednesday afternoon so you [01:01:30] could go to the ballpark. The post office closed on Wednesday afternoon. The bank closed. The town closed so you could go to the ballgame.

But the field would be wet. And they would pour gasoline on the field, and burn it, and rake it while it was burning to dry that water up. And I've seen them probably put 3 or 400 gallons of gasoline on there. Not all at once, but different times and rake it, trying to get it dried up. Somebody said, "Well, I [01:02:00] guess we're going to make it this time." And somebody else there in the group would say, "We got to," said, "I've got too much money bet on this game, and we can't get the pitcher from Rollins if we don't play today," or whatever.

Larry: All of those small towns were the same. I know I had a cousin in Clermont, and boy they were betting and-

Nick Wynne: Importing players? Ringers?

Larry: Mhmm. They'd bring in ringers. And then they'd spot one on the other team, they'd complain about [inaudible 01:02:30] [01:02:30].

Robert Cowart: Speedy was talking about burning the gasoline on the fields. They were not burning the grass, they were burning the clay.

George Harrell: The clay infield.

Robert Cowart: On the infield. R.L. Nicholls was the man that owned the Pure Oil distributorship. And he'd bring his Pure Oil truck out there and pour that gasoline on there. I understand he paid for all the gas. He loved baseball, he wants the baseball game played so bad that he would furnish [01:03:00] the gas to put on there.

Nick Wynne: Did they play just there in the daytime, or were there lights on the field?

Robert Cowart: It was lighted.

Marion Jackson: Later.

Robert Cowart: It was lighted before World War, right before World War.

Marion Jackson: Was it?

Robert Cowart: 1939 and '40.

Wallace: '49, I mean '40, '41. Called Cocoa Fliers.

Nick Wynne: What they members of the Sally League, or-

Marion Jackson: Class D.

George Harrell: Florida State League.

Nick Wynne: Florida State League?

Marion Jackson: We had class D Florida State League.

Robert Cowart: The Florida East Coast League. Miami and Fort Lauderdale, [01:03:30] West Palm Beach, Cocoa.

Marion Jackson: My husband played with the class D league, the Florida Cocoa class D league. Goose [Kettles 01:03:38] was the manager then.

George Harrell: Did Ralph come here with the base, or did he come here playing ball?

Marion Jackson: No, he came here with the telephone company.

George Harrell: Oh, okay. Well I first remember saw him playing ball?

Marion Jackson: Well, he came in August of '46, and I met him in October and we got married in January. And he played [01:04:00] ball ... The first ball he played with Cocoa was in '47. Now, this picture around the corner there says '48, but that's '46. Those kids ... kids. Those guys were the team in '46, and then most of them were the same ones that he played with in '47, and they went on and got real serious about their ball. There was some real, serious ball playing going on. My first son was born [01:04:30] the seventh game of the [inaudible 01:04:31] play off with Titusville, which I didn't get to see on account of that.

I wanted to say that even before that time of ball, there was ball here way back. I can remember going, well ... before then. My grandmother talked about going to the ballgames and the ballpark was up where Scotty's is now. And there had been a hill up there, and on the hill is where they built the grandstand, [01:05:00] and then the ball looked down to this way, yeah. This was left field, and that way. She said before the grandstand was built, they would park beyond the street and watch the ballgames. Park on the side and watch the ballgames, and this was way back in the early '20s. And then, it just came on from there. I think my daddy played back in those days, I know a lot of [01:05:30] Titusville guys played. Willie [Norwood's 01:05:33] brother Red played for Titusville back when I was about 14.

Nick Wynne: Was there a professional-

Marion Jackson: I don't know if that was professional then. The professional came that I know of, in '47 or 8, when Ralph--when we went with Florida State League.

Nick Wynne: What major league team were they affiliated with?

Frank: Nick, I just ran across a book at my house which I'm gonna bring over. It's the 1940 semi-professional league [01:06:00] playoff game book, but it's showing all the teams [inaudible 01:06:02] that were top-notch, we were a semi-professional game. Cocoa was on top that year. My father was playing on that team, I remember, and I was an early joiner. A. Harrell, I forget who else was on there-

Marion Jackson: Buddy Hopkins?

Frank: Don't know that name.

Nick Wynne: The reason I'm asking is, I was reading the other day. I can't remember exactly what I was reading, but it was talking about one of the major league players, [01:06:30] a black player who had played in Cocoa-

Bob Gross: Felipe Alou.

Nick Wynne: [inaudible 01:06:36]. Was that in this league, or was there a major league association with that?

Audience Member: This was later.

Frank: It was class D.

Nick Wynne: Class D?

Audience Member: [inaudible 01:06:42] Class D. [inaudible 01:06:43] Indians.

Frank: They had two to three players that went on to major leagues.

Marion Jackson: My daddy was score keeping at that time. I remember.

Nick Wynne: Was the turnout and the support as great as it had been?

Marion Jackson: The stands were always filled.

Nick Wynne: Now [01:07:00] that the Marlins are here with their ... Do you find that there's probably a drop off? Is it symptomatic of the time? You were out there the other day.

Frank: I go to see the Marlins spring training games, but I don't know about the Manatee games.

Bob: That was a big deal, there wasn't anything else to do in this town then, except slap mosquitoes and go to the beach, go to ball games.

George Harrell: Yeah, there was no [01:07:30] television, and it was-

Bob: I personally loved the semi-pros. It was a lot of town spirit.

Marion Jackson: Yeah, that's when-Ralph

Bob: Our town's better than your town.

Marion Jackson: Yeah, yeah.

Nick Wynne: Is that symptomatic of, or the cause of, the division between north, central, and south Brevard?

Marion Jackson: No, that's been forever.

Robert Cowart: Charlie's father, I remember he played semi-pro. And he was always, he supported baseball. But the first professional baseball in Cocoa was an [01:08:00] old Florida East Coast league, which I mentioned was Miami, Miami Beach, Fort Lauderdale, West Palm Beach, and up to here. And they were called the Cocoa Fliers. Going back to the naval base, that's where the name fliers came from. They had just started up and going, it was just before World War II. So it was before 1941.

Marion Jackson: Well, we also at that time had the Indianapolis Indians spring training here.

Larry: Chattanooga Lookout?

Marion Jackson: Gabby Hartnett was here. I brought in a picture that we had. I was working for Julian Lagner who was president of the Chamber of Commerce at that time, or secretary of the Chamber of Commerce. And he had Doris Bishop and me come out there in bathing suits and our bags of oranges out to the ballpark, out to Provo Park and have some pictures taken with Gabby Hartnett.

Wallace: Wasn't J.L. Smith's wife-

Marion Jackson: Huh?

Wallace: J.L. Smith's wife, kin to Gabby Hartnett?

Marion Jackson: I don't know [01:09:00] who, no, I don't think it's him. It's somebody else, but it's a ballplayer. But I never could remember the name. Ralph would tell me and it'd go.

George Harrell: Just as we've got a lot of people that came to work, lot of citizens that came to work at the Space Center or something and stayed, we had lots of citizens that came here to play ball. The [?] [Joyner?] and his brother Hollis, they were brought in to play [01:09:30] ball. Jimmy Dunn, who was later sheriff of the county, he was brought in to play ball.

Marion Jackson: How about [Blake Sellsby 01:09:37], was he [inaudible 01:09:38]?

George Harrell: He was from up New Smyrna, they brought him here and got him a job as a deputy. Eddie Harrell was brought here to play ball. They got him a job with Nevins Fruit Company, and they worked right on. Jim [Caldwell 01:09:52] came here to play ball. I don't know-

Josie: Johnny Culbreth?

George Harrell: Johnny Culbreth. There's any number of people that came here [01:10:00] to play ball, and they liked it and stayed.

Marion Jackson: This town loved their baseball. They really did. I worked for Mr. Travis before '68, and I can remember him telling me years ago that when Lawrence Abney, when we were playing ball in Cocoa, in Titusville, whatever, he said, "Lawrence Abney was an outfielder." He said, "There's one thing about Lawrence. Lawrence always came up with the ball. Now, that might've been a new ball hit out [01:10:30] there, but Lawrence might not have brought in a new ball when it came. They always came up with a ball."

Robert Cowart: Man, I'll tell you a story about baseball that your daddy told me. Back when he played. If people can remember where the railroad is now, of course at that time railroad came down through here. But the baseball field, if you go out Peachtree Street, across the hill [01:11:00] where the cemetery is, and back down where the railroad is now, there was a real low place. Baseball field was on the other side of where the railroad is. He said they had some long timbers that they'd walk across over there until you get to the ball field out Peachtree Street. Because that was the best way to get to it. That's the way the people went out, they'd walk out there to watch the ballgame. Later, they built the ballpark up-

Marion Jackson: Up there-

Robert Cowart: I know what you're talking [01:11:30] about. But not very many people realize there was ever a ball field out there. That's what your daddy told me.

Frank: Black field, up there too, I remember going [01:11:41] ... Some men that ... woodcutters or something, they had a big old field down there.

Bob Gross: I'd like to know about the Space Center, and when they first came here and started buying up property. What kind of rumors went through town? [01:12:00] Did everybody know what was going on, or was there a lot of mystery in the beginning?

Marion Jackson: Well, as far as knowing what the property being moved and bought and sold, you've got to realize that unless we've learned it in history, coming down, we were just high school kids at that time. And as I said, I got out of high school in '39, and [01:12:30] they were several years back behind me. I, as a girl, could've

cared less whether anybody bought any property or not. I was interested in dating at that time, if I could, you know.

Frank: I think there was a lot of hesitation, because they closed up the base, you know and they thought something like that'll happen again.

Nick Wynne: You mean with the Space Center, they thought it was just a flash in the pan kind of [01:13:00] operation? Well, I was throwing some names at you, let me throw another one. A couple of them we've already talked about. One we talked about several weeks ago here. Gus Edwards. I'm very much interested in Mr. Edwards, and sort of, I get two opinions. One was that we have the image of him being the father of Cocoa Beach, but we also there's apparently another image [01:13:30] that he was somewhat of a shrewd dealer to ... Sometimes that you needed somebody to describe him to when you shook hands, occasionally, you would have to count your fingers just to make sure they were there. Do you have any reaction to him? Was he considered ... How was he perceived out in this community? They're thinking carefully. It is being recorded.

George Harrell: Well, Gus owned a [01:14:00] tremendous amount of property. He had been an attorney in town, and he had brought up property and he promoted sales of property. He had a zoo in Cocoa that was up on Highland Street. It's the best area I can determine west of Forrest Avenue, between there and the present U.S. 1, along Highland Street he had a zoo. To bring people in to see the zoo, and maybe [01:14:30] sell them some land or something. And supposedly, he had armadillos in that zoo and he sold, I saw ads in the old Cocoa Tribune, he had zoo animals for sale. I suppose he sold whatever he could. But anyway, the armadillos ... Couldn't sell armadillos, so they just turned them loose and supposedly that's why we have armadillos in this area today.

[01:15:00] But having property and having money, even though they're hand in hand, they're two different things. If you don't have sales for that property, you don't have money. So he was in the situation of being land poor there for several years, until, actually after World War II and this Space Center started up.

Then, in World War II, there was price controls and rationing and all that, [01:15:30] there was not any big growth in things that took off, like it did at the Space Center. Where somebody, a promoter could come in and buy land and build houses and sell them and all. But when that started, Gus Edwards came. He sold property and had money. So he went through a tough period of time, but he always believed in Cocoa Beach. And there was a painting in his office that he had made, [01:16:00] depicting what he thought the area would look like someday. It's surprisingly ... I'm not sure where that painting is anymore, but it's surprising how accurate it was before everything went on. If you look at today's situation, an aerial shot of today against this photograph or his painting, it's very close.

Frank: I know one deal he made as well, the Boy Scout. The Boy Scout you got in my memory and they [01:16:30] had a campsite out there at Cocoa Beach and Gus had a little piece of land here. So, during that swap with him, I guess maybe where

Snug Harbor is built. I'm not sure, but the boy scouts had a little land out there. He had a clear title with them, the scouts of Cocoa.

I came here in '53 and '54 I became scout master of that troop, and we met at the little [inaudible 01:16:55], by the water tower and the band practiced there, and later on, the highway went through. That [01:17:00] piece of property became valuable. He gave us 4,000 dollars, so he had to set up a group of guys here. Judge Ackridge and Carl Wolry and others. I was a scout leader, but they put me on that board, I think they took possession of that land. Gus Edwards made it official, clear title so forth. They got 4,000 dollars for their part, four lane U.S. 1.

Anyway, Gus did us a good job, we still on that filling station there. Scout friendly scout, helping to set up that troop, and we now [01:17:30] get about 600 dollars a month from the people that run that filling station. That money goes into a fund, and we manage to send scouts to summer camp and jamboree. Buy supplies. But Gus Edwards did us a good job by giving clear title of that piece of land, and maybe rather than that piece on Cocoa Beach.

Nick Wynne: Wonderful. Yes?

Larry: I remember, it was Christmas Day 1943, and how I remember it's Christmas Day, it's my dad's birthday. We had relatives from all over the state coming[01:18:00] there, and we were celebrating his birthday. He came-

Nick Wynne: Speak up a little bit, Larry.

Larry: He came to the house, banging on the door. I guess he saw so many cars there. He was feeling no pain, and he was trying to sell lots over at Snug Harbor. That's just you know ... When you say remember people-

Nick Wynne: Well, he's, like I [01:18:30] say, I'm just very interested in people who were active during the boom period and what happened to them. So many of the people who were active in the boom period died soon afterwards, or left. But he was one of those survivors. And it's rather interesting, you get so many different pictures of Gus as a man who was very charitable and who did good deeds like that, but who-

Larry: I remember he had a daughter named Patty.

Nick Wynne: But at the same [01:19:00] time, I've heard stories about when he put together Snug Harbor, he kept part of the coastline property in his name so you had water access, but 10 feet out it belonged to him, and you had to deal with him first. I don't know whether that's, you know, good business or what.

Marion Jackson: He was shrewd.

Nick Wynne: How about Marie Holderman? Any comments on her as it relates to Cocoa, or growing up? Or?

Marion Jackson: [01:19:30] Nothing personal, particularly, just to know that she was a woman who came by the fact that her husband had a stroke, she was forced into having to take over and fortunately had the capabilities to do this, and worked long and hard and I guess gathered around herself some real good people to work with the papers, and [01:20:00] had very high morals about what would and would not go in the paper. Killings might not make it. Might've happened, but it might not make the paper, you know.

George Harrell: They passed away.

Nick Wynne: Bobby, you have any comments about Mrs. Holderman?

Robert Cowart: Well, Mrs. Holderman, as I remember her as a little boy, when she came here she was white-headed [01:20:30] then. I know that she worked hard at the newspaper. I would say, if you want to find out about Marie Holderman, Lowell, when he was growing up, he lived next door to them for quite a while. So he might can tell you some stories about them, but I don't know.

Nick Wynne: Well certainly-

Robert Cowart: Well, I'm going to be talking a little later.

Nick Wynne: Surely an important person in the city of Cocoa.

Robert Cowart: Right.

Nick Wynne: [01:21:00] Two more. Myrt Tharpe.

Robert Cowart: Who?

Josie: Myrtburger.

Marion Jackson: Myrt Tharpe.

Robert Cowart: Myrt Tharpe, yeah.

Nick Wynne: The reason I bring her up, she was described to be as the mother of Cocoa politics. And I thought, what a thing to be labeled. It's just-

Robert Cowart: I don't know, but she ran a restaurant, she was a hard-working woman. [01:21:30] She sure did.

Nick Wynne: Was she influential?

Robert Cowart: She's supported her family and her husband. I don't know if he ever worked a day in his life. She did work hard.

Nick Wynne: She was hard worker.

Marion Jackson: Wasn't she a city councilwoman? Didn't she run for council? She was a city councilman, she cared. She cared about what went on in her town and did-

Robert Cowart: She knew what was going on in Cocoa, because the people come in her restaurant. And I think a couple of the city fathers, a story I've heard now this might not be true. [01:22:00] There's a joke they talked her into running for city council, and she won. And she was a good one. So the joke came back on them. I don't whether that story's true.

Nick Wynne: I understand ... Like you say, she was described to me as a lady who very much cared about Cocoa, and very much involved. Charlie?

Charlie: I was just going to say, back I guess in the '60s when she first ran, everybody used to [inaudible 01:22:20] for coffee, and Jack Oates promoted her running for city council. He got everybody to put money in. He went out collecting money and put up for her to run [01:22:30] for her fee, and she really didn't want to. But after a while, it starts to sound like a good idea. I guess her ego got to her, she turned out to be one heck of good councilperson and mayor. She really got a lot down at the start of this Cocoa Village thing, she was our big pusher in City Hall to get things going, which was really nice. We were getting a lot of static about a lot of stuff, but it got done... It was wonderful.

Nick Wynne: This has been going on about an hour and a half, let me [01:23:00] just ask one last question and then we'll just sort of break up and you can informally do it. If you had to make a list of three people from your memories of Cocoa that were most influential either in creating what Cocoa is all about, or central Brevard, because I don't want to leave out Merritt Island or Cocoa Beach. Who would those three people be, and just in 10 or 12 words, why? Speedy. [01:23:30] See there Bobby? I started at the back of the alphabet.

Robert Cowart: I didn't look at you neither.

George Harrell: I'd put Abe Fortenberry on the list. Maybe not at the top of the list, but he would be on the list. He was county commissioner of Merritt Island for many, many years, and he worked to promote the area. He was a man that pushed to have Canaveral Harbor built. One of the great pushes to do that. I'd also put on that list C. Sweet Smith. He was a ... [01:24:00] I don't know what all he was. He was county commissioner, but he knew how to get things done. He made many trips to Tallahassee and Washington and different places to help get Cocoa going.

And Charlie, Danny [Briest 01:24:19] was on there as well. He'd be on the list. If I had to stop at three, that's what I'd put in because [Briest 01:24:28] knew how to get things done. If I [01:24:30] were to think about it a week, I might make a different list, but at this time ... They certainly deserve on. People that made

Cocoa what it was. Marie Holderman would belong on there, so I'll shut up at that.

Nick Wynne: Marion?

Marion Jackson: Well, I think about Lee Wenner. You talked about Sweet Smith being the county commissioner. Lee Wenner also was a county commissioner. The only one I know of for sure that never made a nickel [01:25:00] off of prior knowledge. And I guess prior knowledge is the fact that you can buy properties, or you could do things if you wanted to. It was sort of frowned on, I suppose, but Lee never did. And Lee was one of those who did know how to get things done. He knew how to work with all the other county commissioners in the county. And they did things and got things done that would [01:25:30] not have been done. Roads built and all sorts of things. Lee was ... He was the best, to my knowledge, the best county commissioner we ever had. He had the poorest personal life management of most folks, but he-

Nick Wynne: That's an inside joke.

Marion Jackson: Married several times. However, the last one he got was a good one. She stayed with him until his time came. Then I also [01:26:00] think about Dave Nisbet, how hard Dave worked. Particularly around the time of the base coming in, Banana River coming in, and how he worked with all those folks. Fred Travis, running Travis Hardware for his father, after his father died. He was the oldest, I guess, of the Travis sons. There were several of them. [01:26:30] There was Bob, and Doc, and [Gator 01:26:33]. [Gator 01:26:34] was the fun type boy.

Mr. Travis, Fred Travis's nickname was “Pars.” I don't know who gave it to him, but I guess it's because ... I don't whether it's because he was parsimonious or whether he was just like a parson. He used to tell me, we were talking about my number three child and how fun loving he was and whatever, and Mr. Travis, Pars said, "Well," he said, "Every family's got to have one." [Gator 01:27:01] [01:27:00] was their's.

And he did a great deal of work in the community, giving anonymously. People did not know what he had done. He never allowed it to be out, but he did a good bit. Gave a good bit.

Nick Wynne: Bobby?

Robert Cowart: Well, you know, I have to agree with them. [01:27:30] There's so many. You stop right now and think about who is running the City of Cocoa today. They won't be running it five or six years from now. So, through the years, there have been so many. I could throw so many names out there-- like ‘em or don't like ‘em, but they haven't mentioned them. John D’albora. Very influential in bringing this whole area up. W. H. Faulk [01:28:00] was. We could go on and on, all these people are good and, of course, you know D’albora was in the fruit business, the

packing house business, and W. H. Faulk had many holdings. One of them being he was ... A car dealership, and whatever.

Marion Jackson: Road builder.

Robert Cowart: And also, a road builder. He built the first paved road on Merritt Island. So you can go on and on with these, and we could probably kick [01:28:30] this around for an hour and a half, naming names of people that really helped this community.

Nick Wynne: Well, I said we're going to quit. Just because we do have a couple of people who haven't been here before and who are very much interested in this area, I'm going to sort of end this officially on sort of the humorous side. What's the significance of number nine?

Josie: Number of my engagement ring.

Robert Cowart: You'll have [01:29:00] to ask the girls about that.

Nick Wynne: For those of you that don't know, number nine was a place on the river that was somewhat of a well-known parking space. It had limited access and limited egress.

Marion Jackson: One car.

Josie: No, you get two. Fit two.

Nick Wynne: You got there and you claimed it. You held it for as long as you could. I do [01:29:30] invite you to come up and talk with these guys, but before they leave, I'd like to give them a certificate of appreciation. Marion, thank you so much for participating in this. Bobby, thank you.

Robert Cowart: Thank you.

Nick Wynne: Dr. Harrell, thank you.

George Harrell: Thank you, sir.

Nick Wynne: For those of you that don't know, Speedy recently received from Indian River University, a doctorate in folklife studies. And he'll be happy to [01:30:00] show you his diploma when this is all over. Thank you very much. There's punch and cookies, will be available in just a few minutes. Come on up and visit. Thank you very much for coming.

Clyde mentioned the fact Speedy that you didn't give an explanation of this to those people who are new to the area.

George Harrell: If you lived in [01:30:30] this area back when we was talking about all the things that happened, and not much going on prior to all the Banana River, DDT spraying, and that type of things. The mosquitoes was thicker than you've ever seen love bugs. They was just unbelievably thick. And at each door, outside, hung one of these fronds out the palm when it first grew up, before it opened, they'd cut [01:31:00] them and dry them and that was ... They hung outside your door, and when you came home, you beat the mosquitoes away from your door, so they wouldn't go in with you.

So 15 years ago, we decided that the area had grown so much that the ones of us that were still here, we didn't see and talk to one another, that we needed one day a year to get together and just talk with one another. It was no program planned, [01:31:30] there's no anything except we just have a place to get together and you sign in and get a name tag. When we was talking about getting an organization started, the name mosquito beater was suggested from the tool, and from the people that'd done it. That used them.

During that 15 years, we've been able to put out a book each year, that we get people to write us stories. [01:32:00] Whatever they will think of and write. And they go back all way to the beginning. We have about the last three years that are available. The very first one was not much of a book. But it was a book of kind, where that people could write [inaudible 01:32:20] a friend of theirs address on the back of it or something, and take it home. From that beginning, it has grown and we had approximately 1,000 [01:32:30] people that are signed up last, well, the first of March. We start the second Friday in March. I believe Nick said-

Marion Jackson: He said the second March.

George Harrell: It's the second March of each year. Don't wait on the second March, just the second Friday of each March. We start up. So it’s an unusual organization that we do record some of this for history. In 15 years, we've never had a thing go wrong because there's nothing planned.

Marion Jackson: [01:33:00] Speedy. Speedy, how many the first time? How many registered that first year? Do we know?

George Harrell: I don't have a figure, but there was probably 500 people or more-

Marion Jackson: Even the first year?

George Harrell: The first year.

Robert Cowart: Speedy, you mentioned that now we don't have a program at all, but we tried having that and about the number two and three. There was so many people. We had a band, about an eight or ten piece band [01:33:30] that played if the people wanted to dance or whatever. They just wanted to talk, you couldn't even hear the band with that many pieces playing. Honestly, [crosstalk 01:33:39].

Marion Jackson: Another thing now. He's got this, and you see this is real dry. They weren't this stiff, because this one's never been really used. But they became as soft as the material that I've got on now. Why they didn't break, I never knew.

George Harrell: We soaked them [01:34:00] in human blood, that we beat out of those mosquitoes.

Marion Jackson: I never had a red one. But they would be so soft, and even shredded finer than this. I remember when my grandfather would make them, it'd be even shredder finer than this. I told you, he had a rooming house there, and this was outside the door of the rooming house.

Josie: Didn't he have a smudge pot too?

Marion Jackson: No, we didn't have smudge pots at our house.

Josie: We had smudge pots.

George Harrell: [01:34:30] The big old barrel that's in front of Gould's store down there, he used to have two of them in his store. One of them had a false bottom in it, and it had clothes pins in it, and the other one was full of smudge powder. It was a deal made out of sawdust and a low grade, but what burned it is that smudge powder.

Marion Jackson: All you wanted was smoke.

George Harrell: Yeah.

Larry: I wanted to show you, demonstrate if I can, how I saw a lady use it when she was walking out to get her paper. In her day at the space program, going up toward the harbor on A1A, two lane road and coming out from the Banana River side, this old lady coming up from her homestead back there to get the paper or something. She was doing what we called a syncopated walk. You can probably demonstrate better than I. She was swatting those things, walking around like this, and just doing a bit like this. All the way up and back to get her paper. I call it a syncopated walk.

Marion Jackson: Well you know, if you did it right, you flip it far enough back and it came on your butt side. [01:35:30] It got to your butt side back there. The arm up and down and around, you just ... As I said, they were much more limber than this.

Larry: My grandmother had two of them. One outside then she had this big one on the porch at the back, and you just knocked them up when you went into the screen door in the house.

Marion Jackson: Yeah, you had as many as you could get anybody to make for you, or make yourself.

Audience Member: We carried smudge pots [01:36:00] to the baseball field, when my daddy played baseball.

Marion Jackson: Yeah. It was a good place to grow up in. And when I get through growing, I'll let you know about that part.