

Buckhead Heritage Society

Oral History Project

Interview with Eva Williams

November 22, 2011

Interviewer: Erica Danylchak

DANYLCHAK: This is an interview with Eva Williams, who has worked in Buckhead for many years. The interview is being conducted on November 22, 2011, at the home of her current employer, Jane Levings, on North Muscogee Avenue. The interviewer is Erica Danylchak on behalf of the Buckhead Heritage Society of Atlanta, Georgia. Thank you so much for joining me today and talking about your memories of working and being here in the Buckhead community. And we're going to talk beyond that, as well. Let's start with an easy question. When and where were you born?

WILLIAMS: I was born in Macon County, that's in Ideal, Georgia, south, that's in the south [in 1939].

DANYLCHAK: And what brought you and your family to Atlanta?

WILLIAMS: Well, my mother didn't like the country, neither my dad. And so they decided to move from the country to the city. But we enjoyed the country, and I was like six when we moved from the country. I remember very, I remember a lot from the country. I enjoyed it.

DANYLCHAK: Were your parents, was your dad a farmer, or did he—

WILLIAMS: Well, when he stayed there, yeah, he was a farmer. And it was, well, you know, it's true, we enjoyed the farm. But, you know, he didn't like farming so my mother said she wasn't

going to stay in the country. Because really and truly her mother and all her sisters, my grandmother was in Atlanta, and others here and there in different places. So she said she wasn't going to stay in the country forever. And I guess it pleased my daddy, but we enjoyed the country. I was able to help a little bit. I was too little to really do a lot. But I can remember the good times we had. We had all kind of fruit trees around our house. We had all kind of, the pecans and all kind of nuts and things. It was just joyful.

DANYLCHAK: Do you ever go back to that part of Georgia?

WILLIAMS: Well, we have been back and the old house had been torn down. And we have not been back since my daddy passed away. Not that much. But that house that we grew up in was already demolished. But we would always go back to where, near where my daddy was growed up. Because he had a brother there and we'd go over there. But we haven't gone now in a while because he's passed away, so we have no more siblings on his side. No more, well, we have a cousin on his side, but no uncles or aunts. All those are gone. My mother's side, they're all gone.

DANYLCHAK: Do you have siblings?

WILLIAMS: Yes. It was thirteen of us. Nine girls and four boys. So now it's the ten of us left. Three of the girls are gone. So there are just ten of us left. We were brought up as church-goers. And we were brought up to not fight, not fuss. And we were always taught that if we do right what the Lord want us to do, how blessed we would be. My dad would always say that. And we were brought up with, we had one grandmother, and that was my mother's mother. And we had a granddaddy, which was my daddy's daddy, and a step-grandmother. So.

DANYLCHAK: You were all very close? You gathered for holidays and that kind of thing?

WILLIAMS: Hm-hmm. We have always been close. At Christmas we would always go to my mother's, open the gifts there, have breakfast with them, dinner with them. Mother's Day the same thing. Every holiday we got together a lot. Even one holiday we always get together with my mother and my dad. So we're still a close-knit family as of today. The sisters and the brothers still get together as though my mother and father was living. So it's good to be from a big family. You don't have to worry about a friend because you've got a friend. So we always have gotten along well. We all have always gone to church. Still everybody goes to church, bringing the children, grandchildren up going to church. Talking about the Lord. And we just get together.

DANYLCHAK: What church do you attend? Is it the same one that you've attended most of your life?

WILLIAMS: No, no, no. We was brought up as Baptists, and I go to Truth and Deliverance, which is a Holiness church. So all the childrens, all my mother's, all of us got into Holiness. But we were brought up as Baptists. And we all went into Holiness. So it's been joyful.

DANYLCHAK: Can you describe a typical Sunday morning at your church?

WILLIAMS: Yeah, we love to praise the Lord. And we have Sunday School, which is really great. And really we just love talking about the Lord. And then we love to pray, one for another. We love to testify what the Lord have done for us and how He have kept us through the week, let not no harm or danger come upon us. And it's amazing to hear different testimony from different people, how the Lord have blessed them from week to week. And everybody always say, down through the years, how good the Lord have been to 'em, you know, and special things that He have done. And we just enjoy the word. We have, we learn to really trust in Him, and depend on Him. Which we was always taught, my daddy always said, the both of 'em, if you do what the

Lord say do, you will be blessed. And if we didn't, he'd say, well, you know, the Lord doesn't like this and He doesn't like that. So we didn't, out of the thirteen children, nobody went to jail, we all went to school, no problem in school. And I tell, you know, we tell the cousins, our children and grandchildren, we were blessed. We were truly blessed. When we get together now we talk about the good times we had when we were growing up and how, you know, we played. We didn't fuss. And, you know, our childrens get all upset and want to hit, we didn't have that.

DANYLCHAK: What kind of things did you do when you were a kid? What kind of activities?

WILLIAMS: Well, we did, we played ball, we played house, and we had one older brother for a long time. And the other three boys came at the end. So we loved our brother, because we had that one brother. All those girls, everywhere he went, everything he did, we tried to do, you know, what he would do. We just played. We had, we had good fun.

DANYLCHAK: And what area of town was this in? Where did you live when you were growing up? What part of Atlanta?

WILLIAMS: Over on the west side near Westview Cemetery. Over around that part. So we could always walk to church. And we would go, just do fun things a lot. And I remember we would walk around the block, run around the block. And like I said, we played ball. Marbles, pushed each other in the wagons, and skated. You know, we just did a lot of fun things, and we could have friends over. We always had to ask their parents when we had to go somewhere, could we come to their house and play. And, but my daddy loved the childrens. He didn't want to ever see nobody mistreat childrens. That was always his talk about it, you know, you've got to love everybody. That's what he would always say. And he would always say, "Well, I've got to do what the Lord say do." So we had, we all, we used to say he would be a preacher because he

would always tell us he had to do what the Lord said do, and how we had to do in order and what the Lord would say do. He'd say, "You all do that, you will truly be blessed."

DANYLCHAK: What did your dad do for a living?

WILLIAMS: He worked at Singer Sewing Machine Company until he retired. And he was a real church-goer all the time. When he got sick—my mother passed away first. And we thought, oh, after she passed away, that he wouldn't live long. But he lived I think about fifteen years after my mother passed. And, you know, we would still do things together with him, because he was always around. And the grandchildren, too, they were always around my daddy, *and* my mother when they was, you know—so my mother and daddy would always say, "Lord, if you all take the children, we don't know what we would do." And as we grow older then we realize a lot of the things they was saying, it made sense, you know. But back then, when your parent tells you something you don't think anything about it. But as you get older, "Oh, yeah, now I see. I remember, I see exactly what they were saying." I always tell 'em, I say, little children are really inspiring, and it's an inspiration to the older people when the little children, they perks up. And then as I get older I realize what my mother and my aunt would be saying about the children being around them. It's a blessing. It'll make you feel good, make you, like I tell 'em, like you might be not feeling old. You get around, you play with 'em, you sing with 'em, and do little things and tell 'em how we grew up, and how we enjoyed each other. So it's just a blessing.

DANYLCHAK: When you were living over on the west side, is that when you attended the Baptist church?

WILLIAMS: Yeah.

DANYLCHAK: And which church was that?

WILLIAMS: That was, we went to Union Baptist Church.

DANYLCHAK: And what were Sunday mornings like there compared to—

WILLIAMS: You know, we would get up on Saturday mornings and get our clothes ready for Sunday. We had to make sure we got everything ready for Sunday on Saturday mornings. Then we could get out and play and do what we had to do. We would go to church, come home, then we could do what we had to do. You know, like play, everything like that. Watch TV. But we didn't watch a lot of TV because we loved to play. We loved to be outside, so we weren't real TV fans. We played a lot.

DANYLCHAK: And where did you go to school?

WILLIAMS: I went to Anderson Park Elementary School, and I went to Turner High School. And then I went to Atlanta Area Tech and I took up printing. But the time I went they were not hiring a lot of ladies. So I worked a little bit in a printing company.

DANYLCHAK: When would that have been, when you went to technical school?

WILLIAMS: That was in the '70s.

DANYLCHAK: So there still weren't a lot of jobs for women—

WILLIAMS: Not in printing. Not in printing. They weren't hiring, not in printing. They had just began, and I did get a chance to do a little printing in a printing company. And I enjoyed that. When I left there, then I went to Wayne Watson. What we did there, we did the uniforms for the Braves, we put the letters on 'em. And we did all kind of stuff for the schools. You know, like the sweaters they have with their names and all that on 'em, we did that.

DANYLCHAK: Where was that located?

WILLIAMS: Wayne Watson? Right around on Miami Circle off of Piedmont.

DANYLCHAK: And were you still living in the—

WILLIAMS: West side. We've always lived in the west side, on the west side. And when I left there, well, I did private home when I first got out of school. I stayed there up, oh, I don't know how many years I worked there. Because I worked there a long time. And I always worked with childrens. And I always say I have a lot of childrens. [chuckles] Black and white, I have a lot of children. So when you grow up with children or work around children, you get real close to them. And when I left there, Wayne Watson, then I went to Arrow Shirt Company. Worked there until it went out. And I enjoyed that. And after they went out then I started working for the Hayeses. And I worked, I'm still working for them. I've been with them for thirty years, thirty years.

DANYLCHAK: So going back to the work on Miami Circle, was that, when you started that would have been in the '70s. Was that still a manufacturing district at that point?

WILLIAMS: Yeah, it was.

DANYLCHAK: So it hadn't been turned over to antiques and art and the galleries.

WILLIAMS: Back then it was still industrial, all industrial at that time.

DANYLCHAK: And what brought you so far? I mean, that's a long way to travel from the west side of town to Miami Circle.

WILLIAMS: Well, it wasn't really that far. Because, where we lived it didn't take over ten or fifteen minutes to get downtown. And then when we got downtown we got the, it was bus service from downtown all the way out here, go out on Miami Circle.

DANYLCHAK: There wasn't as much traffic then, right?

WILLIAMS: Right. And the bus was faster than they are now. So it wasn't a problem. Even when I worked at Arrow, it wasn't a problem because the bus was faster. So that wasn't a problem.

DANYLCHAK: Jane had mentioned to me that your sisters also worked at Arrow. Can you describe the different, your job and—

WILLIAMS: Okay. I had two, three different jobs when I worked for Arrow. When I first went there I turned the cuffs. Everything's made in a different department, and we had to turn the cuffs. And we put 'em on the machine and, like, bring 'em down, stretch the corners out. And it would kind of like press them out. And that was production. When they took me from there, then I went to collars. I sewed the collars. The little strip that was to button up. I put that on to the collar. The collar was already made. So I put that on. Everything was made in a separate department. And then when I left there I did yokes. All this was in the same company. I did yokes, and when we did a yoke we sewed the shirt, the yokes to the shirt and I had to put the little sides tab on 'em. And that was, I enjoyed, I did always enjoy working. So it was worth it. When I went back in private home I enjoyed that. But I'll tell you, working in a place like that, it's really, you don't realize how much noise you work in until you get out of there. And you didn't realize it affected your hearing. Or you would be talking and you didn't realize how loud you would be talking. Because the machines and all would be going but you still could talk and

hear people. Well, we had to talk louder because the machines would be going, but you didn't realize how loud you were talking. And you didn't realize it was affecting your hearing.

DANYLCHAK: Now was Arrow also in Buckhead?

WILLIAMS: No, no. It's on Murphy Avenue in East Point.

DANYLCHAK: And you mentioned when you went back into private homes. So you worked in private homes before you worked out at Arrow, and up on Miami Circle?

WILLIAMS: Uh-huh.

DANYLCHAK: What—

WILLIAMS: When I worked there, when I was still in private homes I worked in the Decatur area, out near LaVista, in that area.

DANYLCHAK: So, was that after you went to school for printing?

WILLIAMS: No. I didn't go for printing until after I had my daughter. Because I was a single mom. And after I had my daughter, when I stopped working in private homes, when I got pregnant, then after I had her, then I went into factory work. But then after factory work went out, then I went back, believe it or not, to the same people, some of the same people that I had been working for before I, you know, had my daughter.

DANYLCHAK: So was it more lucrative to be in industrial work? Is that why you left private homes to go into manufacturing? Do you remember what you made, like, per day, in private homes versus—

WILLIAMS: When I left private home it was like \$7 a day. [chuckles]

DANYLCHAK: It's hard to raise a little one on \$7 a day.

WILLIAMS: And then I, after I went into factory, we did production work. Then my check got bigger. And then after Arrow was closed out I just went back into private home. Because a lot of factories then began to close down. So I just said let me go back into 'em.

DANYLCHAK: And it was something you were comfortable with, and you knew the family would take you back into their home?

WILLIAMS: Oh, yeah, because I had worked for them, it might have been ten or more years before I stopped working for them. Their children were little and they was in high school when I left them. [chuckles] But, you know, I still talk to them. But I never got a chance to work for any of their childrens, after they grew up and they got childrens. But I just never got to work for any of them, which is nice. But, you know, and where I'm working now, for the Hayes, I've been there thirty years. Oh, boy, those childrens, they, they always, they was really, the little girl, she was, let's see, Sarah was turning two when I went to start working for them. When she started to school her daddy told her momma, "Don't let her stay home with Eva. Because if you do, she's not going to want to go to back to school." And she did. When she stayed them days, left with me, she didn't want to go back to school. [chuckles] 'Cause, see, I would play with 'em and they'd have fun. And then she didn't want to go back to school. She wanted to stay with Eva all the time. [chuckles]

DANYLCHAK: Was that the main part of your duty, looking after the kids, or—

WILLIAMS: No, my main part of duty was to, I never had to really see about the children. I would just do the housework.

DANYLCHAK: But the fun part was playing with them.

WILLIAMS: The fun part was to play with them when they was left. . . I never hardly had to just, say, babysit the childrens. I really didn't, never had to babysit the children. But—

DANYLCHAK: But you enjoyed spending time with them, and so—

WILLIAMS: Sometimes, even if I didn't have time to do what I had to do, the children was always the priority when they was left with me. So, and I worked over on Habersham Way, and that little boy, I think I went to work for Cyndae, when Gus was like, he might have been three. Now he's in college.

DANYLCHAK: Do you still keep in touch with that family?

WILLIAMS: I still work for her.

DANYLCHAK: You still work for her. How many families do you work for?

WILLIAMS: I work for, it's three different families, well, four, because I started working for Sampson before he and Jane got married. He was, you know, he wasn't married. Then I worked for one of his friends which wasn't married. And both of them have gotten married, and both of them have childrens. So, it's just a fun, it's nice. I don't work hard anymore, because, like at Cyndae's, there's nothing to do, really they want me for the house. Because she does a lot, gone, so a lot of times it's like babysitting the house. Because she has somebody come in and clean the house. I never had to clean up. I always just did the washing and the ironing. Still just do whatever little ironing, and the washing, and she has somebody to come in. And here I do just like I'm doing today. If she's got to go somewhere, I'm seeing about the children. I don't clean up. The other family, I just work for them, every other Saturday I just babysit the two childrens.

And the oldest little boy, he always fuss at the little girl because he knew me first. He always says, "I knew her first, but my dad knew her first." It's like he's closer to me because he was born before the little girl. And it's so funny sometimes. And I say, "Well, I love both of you so what you fussing about?" It's just really nice. The Hayeses, their children don't never want me to stop working. They say, "Well, is you, is you thinking about retiring?" I told 'em it would be a long time before I was going to go. So Mrs. Hayes always says, "Even if you don't feel like doing anything, if you just come out and really do my ironing for me." And you know I go in, twelve o'clock I'm leaving and then come back home. They just don't want me to quit working. She says she never had nobody like me. We prays together and we talk about the problems, her problems, our problems, we pray about 'em. So we just, we just like one big happy family. And her son keeps saying, "Mama, can you find me somebody like Eva?" She says, "There's not another one." [chuckles] So, you know, that's just it.

DANYLCHAK: Since you've been in the community for so long working for these families, can you tell me, are there places in the community that you have gone in the past or you go to now, shops or restaurants, or do you really, have you really just come in to work for the families and then gone back home to the west side? Have you done shopping?

WILLIAMS: I used to shop at Lenox Square a lots but I don't do all that now. When I leave work now I go home and rest.

DANYLCHAK: Did you ever shop right in the heart of Buckhead?

WILLIAMS: Yeah. I used to go up in that area, when Tuesday Morning was up in there. I used to go there. Oh, and the fabric, I don't know if you remember when the fabric shop was up there. Okay, I used to go there. Sears was up there. I used to go there. And I used to go around up in

that area and shop. I went to Linens ‘n Things before they moved away. And down at Peachtree Battle, I go down there and shop sometimes at King’s and at the 5&10 store [Richard’s]. I like that.

DANYLCHAK: Can you describe to me how Buckhead has changed over time?

WILLIAMS: Oh, my gosh. It has truly. Because see, along where a lot of the shops and things are were houses. And that really changed. Because I remember when they built Lenox Square, it was houses all out in that area. All the way out Oglethorpe, all that way, it was houses, so everything has really, truly changed.

DANYLCHAK: Have you ever gone to the Buckhead Theater?

WILLIAMS: No, I’ve never gone there.

DANYLCHAK: Are there any other memories you want to share with us?

WILLIAMS: Really, it’s a lot of memories, because things have changed so much. Even in the area where I’m living. Okay, at one of the stations, where the train goes going to the west side, I used to live right at that train station. But then they tore all the houses down to make the train station. The train comes right through that area. That’s where I grew up at and went to school. So that’s changed. And—

DANYLCHAK: Which train station is that?

WILLIAMS: It’s the Hamilton E. Homes. That’s going toward Six Flags, out that area. So the train took up a lot of spaces over in that area where, you know, houses were. Things have changed so much I always tell ‘em that if you go and come back to Atlanta you won’t know it anymore. You see where it used to be Atlanta Terminal Station right downtown, where you

could catch the train and all that, you know, that's all gone, you know. They had a place downtown what they called the Peachtree Arcade. It was almost like Lenox Square. All the stores inside. And I think about that place. I say, they should have left that. You know, where a lot of trains come into that area.

DANYLCHAK: Is that where Five Points is?

WILLIAMS: Five Points.

DANYLCHAK: What was Peachtree Arcade like?

WILLIAMS: It had stores in it. And you had an upstairs and a downstairs. It was something about like Lenox Square, you know, with stores, and you'd walk upstairs to the other floor. Have you ever been to Arbor Mall? Have you been to Cumberland Mall? It's like Cumberland Mall, stores upstairs and downstairs. It was something like that. But it was nice. And I often wonder, all these beautiful buildings and things, why they tear down so many. Because it was beautiful. Engraving and stuff. And all that's gone. We don't have too much memories. You know, after they moved Macy's and Rich's from downtown, that has changed. So downtown is nothing like it once was.

DANYLCHAK: Do you remember Lenox when it was in an open-air mall? When you first started going there was it an open-air mall?

WILLIAMS: Hm-hmm. I remember when they built it. When it was first built.

DANYLCHAK: And was that all country?

WILLIAMS: No, it was houses. It was houses in there. And before they built Lenox Square I worked on Crane Road, and that was right like in the back of Lenox. Like, Lenox Road, you

know where you come around, well, houses were back on the other side. But they have torn down—

DANYLCHAK: Which road was that?

WILLIAMS: I worked on Crane Road. But you know where all those apartments in the back of Lenox Square? Well, that used to be houses all up in there. And a bus went through there. So they have really changed.

DANYLCHAK: Do you remember Johnstown or Piney Grove, those were African American communities that were in Buckhead until the '50s or '60s?

WILLIAMS: I remember, I didn't get around that much out in that area because I was so little. But I can remember a little of it after I got grown up. But I do know it was a lot of people, black folks, living out around Lenox Square. They said it was farmland and country in that area. But I never got to see that part. And I did go, Linwood Park, I know, is just near Oglethorpe University. I did go out in that area, so I assume, last time I went through there, it still was a lot of houses in there, where the black peoples live around that area.

WILLIAMS: Well, that area is changing very rapidly as all of Atlanta is.

WILLIAMS: All of Atlanta is really changing. All around Grant Park it's changed. I remember when the Stadium got built, when we first got, you know, the Falcons. And all where the Dome and all that were, that was part of downtown. So it really changed. It's just amazing.

DANYLCHAK: It is. It's amazing. And we'll see more and more of it in coming years, I'm sure.

WILLIAMS: Oh, yeah. You know, like 17th Street was houses all in that area.

DANYLCHAK: What part of Buckhead do you hope stays the same? Are there areas that you hope never change?

WILLIAMS: You know what, I hope they don't change the heart of Buckhead, and down around Peachtree Battle. But it seems like they're trying to change it.

DANYLCHAK: That part of Buckhead still has that small town feel, doesn't it?

WILLIAMS: Yeah, hm-hmm. Well, see, they intend to put all that new stuff in there now. I was seeing that on TV. So it's going to really be changed again. But, I don't know. And see, Roswell Road has really changed. Because it used to be houses. All those little shopping centers? That used to be houses all out in that area.

DANYLCHAK: So they all fronted Roswell Road, up and down?

WILLIAMS: Yeah, hm-hmm.

DANYLCHAK: They weren't as grand as the Peachtree Road houses, were they?

WILLIAMS: Yeah, they were nice big houses all out in there. Sure. They've changed so much.

DANYLCHAK: Someone told me recently that they remember all the trees up and down Roswell Road and it looked like you were going into the country as you were driving north, not that far out of Buckhead central.

WILLIAMS: And, you know, I worked at, out off on Paper Mill Road, do you know, you probably don't know where that is. That's out Marietta way. Okay, I remember when you would go to Sandy Springs, and the people I worked for they moved out in that area. And it was one lane to go across the river. One car had to wait until the next car come. And then it could go

across the river. But see now they have widened it. And that was something else. If a car was coming you had to wait 'til that car come and then you could go. Just one lane to go across the river. In Sandy Springs they have torn down all the old beautiful homes out there, and just everything is changing. Don't have a lot of old beautiful trees and stuff anymore. It's always something else.

DANYLCHAK: Well, I imagine that the various families you've worked with, you've seen the inside of some beautiful, beautiful homes.

WILLIAMS: When I worked in Decatur, they had a big home. That's around LaVista near Emory. Then they moved out on Mount Paran, which was a beautiful area off of Roswell Road. Just beautiful. And I worked off of Riverview, off of Northside Drive, which was a big, huge, beautiful house. I worked in some beautiful—but it was the same people, they would move. And now it's like, where I'm working right on Habersham Way, she lived on Habersham when I first started working with her over there. The house was real old. And her daddy kept telling her that she needed to just tear the house down, grade the hill down and rebuild, but she didn't. She bought a house on Habersham Way which is a huge house. And the guy that bought her house on Habersham has made a much beautiful house than what she live in.

DANYLCHAK: So he tore the—

WILLIAMS: He tore the whole house down, graded the hill down and built the most beautiful home than she had there. A couple of swimming pools. Where she's moved at now, it's nice and it's big, but I'm thinking, why would she want a big house like that? But, you know, she says she's going to downsize. She keeps saying, "Eva, we're going to downsize." I says, "Okay." I just got to wait and see if it happen. Because I don't think she will ever move. She's got too

much, you know, to . . . And I doubt if she'll ever move. But she says she is, now. But I don't know.

DANYLCHAK: Well, is there anything else you want to share with me today before we wrap up?

WILLIAMS: I think that's about it. I enjoy, you know, working for Jane and Sampson. It has been a joy. I just love working, I love to work. That's why I told 'em, I'm 72, and I told 'em I'm going to work as long as I can get around. My dad always said, if you work, the longer you work, the more you get around, and when you stop working you go down. And that I don't want. I want to keep on as long as I can move. That's what I was telling Janie. She said her mother wanted the Thanksgiving dinner. I said, I understand that. As long as she can do, she wants to do. So that's good. As long as my daddy, he was 88 when he died, he was still going up until he got sick. He was driving. He was still going. So he always said, as long as you can move around you'll last longer. And I said, that's going to be my goal.

DANYLCHAK: Thank you so much for talking with me today. You sure have good memories. This has been such a pleasure.

WILLIAMS: You are welcome. I enjoyed it.