

Buckhead Heritage Society

Oral History Project

Interview with William (Bill) Pulgram

October 30, 2011

At the North Buckhead Civic Association Fall Fling

Interviewers: Erica Danylchak [Part 1]; Sam Alston [Part 2]

ERICA DANYLCHAK: This is an interview with Bill Pulgram. The interview is being conducted on October 30, 2011, at the Blue Heron Nature Preserve on the occasion of the History Day at the North Buckhead Civic Association Fall Fling. The interviewer is Erica Danylchak representing the Buckhead Heritage Society of Atlanta, Georgia. Thank you for joining us today, Mr. Pulgram.

BILL PULGRAM: Pleasure, pleasure.

DANYLCHAK: I hear you have a story to tell about the Weinstock Nursery company.

PULGRAM: Well, it's a little story about him. Well, it's a very important story for me, because he was basically responsible for my being in this country.

DANYLCHAK: And how did he bring you here?

PULGRAM: Well, I was living in England after I had fled Austria. I fled Austria after Hitler's takeover. I fled to England. And then I wanted to come to this country. And some friends persuaded Mr. Weinstock to sign an affidavit for me, which guaranteed my livelihood in this country in case I needed such when I first arrived here. I didn't know him, and he didn't know me. He just took those people's word that I was worthy of his efforts. So after I came to this country I came to Atlanta and I got a job, I was working at Davison-Paxon. And after I was there a few days I went to see Mr. Weinstock. And Mr. Weinstock said, "What can I do for you?" I said, "Well, I just came to see you just to say hello." He said, "Who are you?" I said, "I'm Bill Pulgram." He said, "Bill Pulgram?" I said yes. "Do I know you?" I said, "No, you don't know me, but you signed a paper that guaranteed my welfare here." He said, "Oh, yeah, I remember that. Yeah, I remember that. And what can I do for you?" I said, "Nothing at all. I just wanted to say thank you for doing that for me, and just wanted you to know I am here and I want to thank you, sir." He said, "Well, by all means, but just let me know if you need anything. Thank you. Goodbye." That was it. That's the first and last time I ever saw Mr. Weinstock. But that was a very important happening for me, that he was able to sign that paper for me. So that guaranteed my coming here, or permitted it. It enabled me to come here, because you had to get somebody in this country to sign a paper that would guarantee that I would not become a burden to the state or to the county or to the city. That's how I arrived here, and that's my story about Mr. Weinstock. He was a very kind gentleman.

DANYLCHAK: Did you ever go to the Weinstock Nursery company that was right across the street from where we are now?

PULGRAM: Well, it was across the street. I never visited beyond, I do remember buying some flowers sometime or other. I mean, much later, when I had some money to buy some flowers. After all, I arrived in this country with twenty dollars in my pocket at that time. But America's been good for me. It's been good to me, and good for me. And it's a wonderful country. I love to be here, happy to be here.

DANYLCHAK: Do you live in North Buckhead now?

PULGRAM: I did for 49 years, until four weeks ago. I lived on East Conway Drive, which is right off of Northside Drive. And four weeks ago my wife and I moved to Lenbrook, which is a retirement place on Peachtree Road. Still in Buckhead. In North Buckhead I guess. But I lived in Buckhead, I built—actually, I'm an architect, and I designed our house and we lived there for 49 years. So I have no complaints.

DANYLCHAK: Can you describe how the community has changed over the years?

PULGRAM: Oh, it's fantastic. I mean, when I first came to Atlanta, Atlanta was a little town. It was a very small town, with very small town attitudes. I remember the Jacob's Drugstore on the dividing line between where Peachtree and Roswell split, there was a Jacob's Drugstore. And there was a Buckhead somewhere there, I don't remember exactly where it was. And there was a Wender & Roberts Drugstore. My wife was a native Atlantan. She tells the story when there was the ice, when the ice-man came, you know, and delivered the blocks of ice. I think the store that one could buy ice was also in Buckhead. And there was a hardware store there, and the drugstore, and that was about it. That was about the size of it. And that was true in 1939 when I arrived, true until after the war when things changed rapidly. I came back to Atlanta after I had served in the Army for three years, and went to Georgia Tech on the G.I. Bill, all that happened as part of my life. So that's the story, that's all I know about Buckhead really, which is not a whole lot.

DANYLCHAK: Where were your favorite places to go in Buckhead?

PULGRAM: Well, I recall that before World War II there was a restaurant, Hart's, that was in Buckhead. H-A-R-T. That was just south of what—I mean, I see Buckhead as being the intersection of Roswell and Peachtree. And Hart's was south of that on the west side of the street. I don't remember exactly where. Of course, it's long, long gone. That was one of the very few restaurants in town that you'd eat. There was always the Piedmont Driving Club or the Capitol City, which I couldn't go to. But Hart's was a big splurge when some friends took me there. But that was one of the finer places. The Piggly, no, there was the, what was the other place named? Not Piggly Wiggly. Hmmm. There was another restaurant. Can't think of the name right now.

DANYLCHAK: Was it the Pig & Whistle?

PULGRAM: Pig & Whistle, of course. Pig & Whistle. That was the restaurant. And later on there was the restaurant down at the road, right where the Spring Street and Peachtree part is.

That was, I mean, where you could get lobster, I mean, all you could eat, all this kind of stuff. What was that? What was the name of it? You probably remember it.

SAM ALSTON: Was it Aunt Fannie's?

PULGRAM: No, Aunt Fannie's Cabin was out in Smyrna.

ALSTON: It was there first.

PULGRAM: Well, it was, and then they moved to Smyrna. And then there was the Cross—

ALSTON: Crossroads.

PULGRAM: The Crossroads. And there was the Pickininy. Which was next to the small coffee shop. There were wonderful places, there were good places.

DANYLCHAK: Are there any historic buildings or places now that are still here that tell stories of Buckhead? Can you think of something or a historic landmark that is still important to us?

PULGRAM: Well, I think, I don't know how important it is, but that building that's still there on the west side of Roswell and Paces Ferry, I mean where the theater is. All those buildings were there at that time. I hope they will remain there. I think they are important historic landmarks. And I'm glad that the movie house has been redone. I haven't been inside since it's been redone but I'm glad it was done. I'm glad it's still there. So I think that's some good remembrances of the Buckhead area.

DANYLCHAK: Well, thank you for sharing them with us today.

PULGRAM: Pleasure. I'm glad you're doing this, for history's sake.

Part 2 – Interview by Sam Alston:

PULGRAM: So I was drafted and I was ready to go. And there I went through all the physical and all the examinations and all that. And there were all, there were about twenty of us, you know, in groups of twenty. We were all lined up and there was this second lieutenant sitting there going through these papers. And we were waiting to be sworn in to become soldiers.

SAM ALSTON: Was this on Ponce de Leon Road?

PULGRAM: No, Fort McPherson.

ALSTON: Went down to Fort Mac.

PULGRAM: Fort Mac. So he said, "Pulgram, Pulgram. Is there a Pulgram here?" I said, "Yes." So I went up and he looked at this and he said, "Pulgram. You're an enemy alien." I said, "Yeah, I suppose so." I was a citizen of Austria. He said, "We can't have you in the Army." Rejected. I

was very upset about that, because I was ready to go, you know. I had good reason to be ready to go. But I went back and, sort of downhearted, and went back to work at Davison's. And they had said goodbye to me, all the friends and all. So I said, "Well, how can I, what can I do about this?" And they said, "Well, there is a way of getting in maybe by, you can enlist to be drafted, and I think they will take you then." So I enlisted to be drafted, and they took me. So that was the beginning of my Army career.

ALSTON: What was your job in the military?

PULGRAM: Ha! I was a song and dance man. Literally. Strangely enough, I was at Fort McPherson, I mean the second time, and they finally took me. And I was there and everybody got shipped out, and I was there for four days and that was unheard-of. I mean, people got in there, took off. And I got to know the sergeant with his lists of people when they began. And after two days I mean I was, I mean, I was assigned to be a guide to the new recruits as they'd come in, because I'd been there a few days. I was an experienced person at that point in the routine. So the sergeant said, "Nope. I don't see you on my list." After four or five days, I don't know exactly just what it was, he said, "Hey, I've got you on my list." He said, "You're, you're going to Santa Anita in California. That's the racetrack in Pasadena." I said, "What?" He said, "It's a central shipment. You're going by yourself and you're assigned to the 23rd, to the Special Service company number 23." I said, "Special Service company?" I said, "Is this the Secret [Service]?" So I said, "What is Special Services?" He said, "I don't know." He said, "I don't know." He said, "All I know is that they hang around there, they fool around with the WACS and they do strange things."

So off I took. I went to the Special—I took my duffle bag and got on the train, it took me three days, out to California. They gave me meal tickets, and I was on the train. So I arrived there. When I got to, they told me to go to the Military Police office when I got to the station. I was by myself. So I went to the Military Police station. They looked at my papers and said, "Okay, just have a seat here." So he called the Special Services company out there and talked to them. And while, what they said, they'll pick you up about 4:30 this afternoon. This was in the morning. They couldn't get there before to pick you up. So I was on my own in Los Angeles for a day. I was there at 4:30 in the afternoon. I got there and there was, a Jeep came and took me out to the racetrack. The horse stables were our barracks. And I went, I went in there and I saw the sergeant who was on duty in the Special Services company, and he said, "Okay, you go ahead and get your blankets and your barracks number is so and so and so." So I got my blankets and I went into the barracks. There were these guys kind of lying around there. And they said, "And what do you do?" I mean, what do I do? I'm not doing anything. This guy is a musician and this guy operates the movie cameras and this guy is something else. I said, "I don't do anything." But, yes, I played the piano.

So okay, so the next day in the morning I went to the captain, Captain [unintelligible]. I remember him very well. And, he said, "Oh, you're the, we were expecting four people and you

are one of the four people. And where did you get basic training?" I said, "I haven't had basic training." [laughs] So, "Oh, you have to have basic training to go overseas." So he said, "Well, I'll have to wait and see what the other three people are who are coming in." So in the course of the day a little guy came over who was a magician. Prince Harrah he called himself in normal life. The other guy was a nice, handsome man, Casimir Kokich [sp?], who was a ballet dancer. He had been with the Ballet Russe in Monte Carlo. And another guy was a little guy named Valencia. He was a little Latin fellow who did Spanish dances. And none of them had had basic training. [laughter] The Army, yeah. So the captain said, "Okay, we'll fix that." He assigned a sergeant who was a piano player to give the four of us basic training. So we got our little carbines and walked up and down the company street, just marching up and down and turning around. Within four days we had finished our basic training. That was it. It was complete.

And from there it went on and on. It was a screw-up all the way through. I tried to get overseas. I was, but our company commander was finally kicked out because he was terrible. He had screwed up the records. And we went out on maneuvers out in the desert where General Patton was training the troops to go to Africa. And we were doing soldier shows, we were dancing and singing, and I was producing for the shows. We were out in the desert, and then we finally got alerted to go overseas. But before that the company clerk told me a bulletin had come through that General Patch, who had come back from the East, I think, was looking for people who spoke European languages. And the company clerk told me, "Don't tell the captain that I told you." The captain didn't want anybody to go. So I went to the captain and I said, "I understand that there is a bulletin out that requires, that asks for people that speak—" "Oh, yes, I didn't think about it. I'd forgotten about you." The company clerk remembered but the captain didn't remember that I spoke some foreign languages.

ALSTON: What languages were those?

PULGRAM: German and French.

ALSTON: German and French. Where did you pick the French up, sir?

PULGRAM: I learned it in school before I left home. I spoke French better than English.

ALSTON: Well, Mr. Pulgram, I would like to know. This is 1939 when you came to the States. How old were you then?

PULGRAM: 19.

ALSTON: 19.

PULGRAM: No, I was, hold on, I came in 1940. I went through England in 1939. I went to England in 1939. I was 18. I had just barely turned 18 when I left.

ALSTON: So you were 20 then in 1940.

PULGRAM: In 1940 I was 19. I was born in '21.

ALSTON: Well, when you were an architect, you came back out of the military and then went to Georgia Tech to get your degree, did you do any work on any of the buildings here in Atlanta?

PULGRAM: Yeah, actually, our firm, the Finch, Alexander firm, did the old Fulton County Stadium. The one that was torn down.

ALSTON: In 1960? Is that right?

PULGRAM: Sure. That was one of our projects. What else did we do?

ALSTON: Well, you did a darn good job on it, because it was hell to take down. It took more dynamite to take that stadium down than any other structure that they have taken down in a long time.

PULGRAM: Really? And how were you involved in that, in some way or other?

ALSTON: Well, I was in high school in the 1960s when that Fulton County Stadium was built, and I saw the Beatles there and I saw Felonius Monk, come and perform there. The Atlanta Braves moved from Ponce de Leon Park across to—

PULGRAM: Well, the Braves moved from Milwaukee.

ALSTON: That's true, but we had the Atlanta Crackers in the Ponce de Leon Park.

PULGRAM: That was the baseball park across from Sears, Roebuck.

ALSTON: Across from Sears, that's true.

PULGRAM: I don't remember ever going to a game there, frankly, because baseball was not my thing. I was a soccer player. I didn't know baseball. But I thought the stadium was a good building. And we did the BellSouth building too.

ALSTON: The BellSouth building downtown, that tall one next to IBM?

PULGRAM: On West Peachtree.

ALSTON: On West Peachtree next to the IBM building?

PULGRAM: Yeah.

ALSTON: So your firm did quite a few commercial—

PULGRAM: And the Coca-Cola headquarters, I mean, the headquarters building. And I, on the international architectural firm, we did a lot of work abroad because we had a lot of work for the

state department and we had embassies and consulates in various parts of the world. I did a lot of work in Brazil. Yes, I traveled a good deal. And Saudi Arabia and all sorts of places.

ALSTON: See, that's the only way you'd be able to pay for a house on East Conway.

PULGRAM: Sure, sure. I built the house in 1962 on East Conway. There wasn't much there.

ALSTON: I'm sure there wasn't.

PULGRAM: We have two and three-quarter acres there.

ALSTON: Whew! I'm glad those are your property taxes and not mine.

PULGRAM: Yeah, well, I'm going to have to sell come next year. I mean, we've still got stuff in the house because we couldn't move everything, we just took whatever we could to Lenbrook. Much more restricted space. We had four children and now we don't have four children. Well, it's good to meet all of you. It's been fun.

ALSTON and DANYLCHAK: Thank you.