

Buckhead Heritage Society

Oral History Project

Interview with William Word

October 30, 2011

At the North Buckhead Civic Association Fall Fling

Interviewer: Erica Danylchak with Clara S. Baugh

ERICA DANYLCHAK: This is an interview with William Word. The interview is being conducted on October 30, 2011, at the Blue Heron Nature Preserve on the occasion of 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 so much for joining us today.

WILLIAM WORD: Thank you for having me.

DANYLCHAK: Nancy Jones mentioned that you now live on Emma Lane. How long have you lived there?

WORD: Since the early '70s.

DANYLCHAK: Can you describe a little bit about the changes that you've seen in North Buckhead since you first moved here?

WORD: Traffic. Yeah, I was here before they built Lenox Square, you know. We used to play football on the old horse ring back of where, on the backside of the property that they developed. And then Mr. Alexander had an old Buick and he used to, he wouldn't shift it. He'd just start it off in high gear. And there was a mechanic up the street that used to put clutches in it for him about every six months. You'd hear the engine screaming. He wasn't going to mess with that shift!

DANYLCHAK: When you went out to the property where Lenox is now, to play football, did just a bunch of guys from the neighborhood go—

WORD: Right, right.

DANYLCHAK: —or did you know the property owner, or was it just a good place to congregate?

WORD: It was a change-off [?]. There was a horse ring back there, and barns behind the house, and we used to go back there and play football.

CLARA S. BAUGH: It was close to where he lived.

DANYLCHAK: And where did you live then?

WORD: On Eulalia Road.

DANYLCHAK: And what did that area of town look like when you were growing up?

WORD: Nice houses all the way to Buckhead.

DANYLCHAK: And when did you move to Emma Lane?

WORD: In the early '70s.

DANYLCHAK: And did you come and frequent this property where the Blue Heron Nature Preserve is now?

WORD: No.

DANYLCHAK: We heard that some people came and, used to recreate here and swim in the lake.

WORD: No, I didn't know much about this street. I knew that there was a clubhouse that caught on fire and burned, you know, and things like that. And Mr. Moore had some pretty good-sized parties.

DANYLCHAK: Did you ever go to any of those parties?

WORD: No. Mr. Erwin Balmers [sp?] was a fella who worked for him for many years. He was a black man, and he said, "All those white folks go out there and get lost." That means get drunk. I'd never heard that term before.

DANYLCHAK: What do you know about Mr. Moore?

WORD: Not very much other than he was a very successful man, had an oil company. And almost was, he was going to run for mayor I think, once.

DANYLCHAK: And he owned all this property in this area, is that right?

WORD: I don't know, somebody said he had 200 acres. I don't know how big the thing was. He built the first, those apartments, and then they subdivided the street during the period that there was, Emma Lane, when poor architecture was being developed.

DANYLCHAK: So over the years what have been your favorite places to frequent here in this area?

WORD: You mean, nature places?

DANYLCHAK: Nature, or restaurants, or, where have the people from North Buckhead congregated? Did you ever go to Peachtree Gardens?

WORD: Hmm-hmm.

DANYLCHAK: What was that like?

WORD: It was nice.

DANYLCHAK: What kind of music did they play? Did they bring bands in-house?

WORD: I'm not that familiar with it.

BAUGH: Your dad was a member of the Cherokee?

WORD: That's right.

BAUGH: He was a member of the Cherokee Country Club.

DANYLCHAK: Did you ever go to the Cherokee Country Club?

WORD: Oh, yes.

DANYLCHAK: And what can you tell us about that? What was that experience like?

WORD: Well, it was the Grant house originally. And they sold it to form that club. I think the original members only had to pay five hundred dollars to join it.

DANYLCHAK: And then were they members for life?

WORD: Yes. And I think at their death they got the money back. The money came back. But they sold to somebody else. . .

BAUGH: Your dad was with—

WORD: Otis.

BAUGH: Otis Elevator.

WORD: My grandfather worked for the Trust Company Bank.

DANYLCHAK: And what's your profession?

WORD: I'm an antique dealer. I have an antique shop. I was up in Buckhead for years on Early Street, and then I bought a building on Miami Circle.

DANYLCHAK: When did you transition to Miami Circle?

WORD: It was in the mid-'80s.

DANYLCHAK: What was the reason? Was there just not as much business right downtown in Buckhead anymore.

WORD: I went from fourteen hundred feet to twenty thousand square feet, size.

BAUGH: He has the best antique store in the south. People come in from all over the country.

DANYLCHAK: Was Miami Circle at that time just getting started? How far back does Miami Circle date?

WORD: Miami Circle was developed in the '50s. It was a warehouse, offices in the front and warehouse in the back. And then it transitioned in the '80s over to home furnishings. And now

we just have six new art galleries that have moved off of Bennett Street over there. So that's a good positive thing.

DANYLCHAK: Are there any other stories about Buckhead that stand out in your mind that you want to share with us today?

BAUGH: Your grandfather's house was on Piedmont.

WORD: Right.

BAUGH: And it's where those—

WORD: Where the big building is, the Buckhead Center, the Piedmont Center. Piedmont Center.

DANYLCHAK: Can you describe what that looked like?

WORD: The house?

DANYLCHAK: The house and the area around it.

WORD: It had a gravel driveway that winded down and around. There was a circle and the porch next to the circle. My uncle had a garage that he built all kinds of stuff in. We had terraces on the back of the property where he, my grandfather, grew boysenberries. He had five or more beehives back there. Had a spring house. Had a chicken house. Had a servants' quarters back there. And he wouldn't build a house with a dormer because dormers leaked.

DANYLCHAK: And how long did he have that property?

WORD: Bought it in 1919 and sold it in 1949.

DANYLCHAK: And then what became of that property in 1949?

WORD: Another party bought it and added another wing on the back of it, beyond the dining area. And then developers and speculators got it after that.

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DANYLCHAK: And Nancy mentioned that you knew something about [George] Mathieson. Do you remember anything about Chief Mathieson?

WORD: Chief Mathieson was chief of the police for a good while for Fulton County. And he would come down and visit with Mr. Moore. They'd sit on the porch. Like I said, he brought the grandson, this is repeating, I think. We'd go fishing down there.

DANYLCHAK: And that's the lake that's here on this Blue Heron property now?

WORD: Yes. There was a dock down there, and boats. And he put a well down there. I believe it's still down there. There's a big boulder sticking up out of a caisson. I guess he wasn't getting the water flow he wanted.

DANYLCHAK: So that was a popular activity for people to come out and fish here, on this property.

WORD: Well, in the south, people would go visiting on Sunday afternoons, after church. And your friends would just show up. And I'm sure a lot of that was part of the activities. And he had a big facility and an interesting place. And he had his children living around him.

BAUGH: So Mr. Moore named Rickenbacker [probably Rickenbacker Way in Atlanta]—

WORD: For Captain Eddie.

BAUGH: For Captain Eddie.

DANYLCHAK: Thank you.