

Buckhead Heritage Society & Atlanta History Center
Oral History Project
Interview with Ivan Allen IV
In the offices of the Atlanta History Center, Atlanta, Georgia
February 15, 2024
Interviewer: Chad Wright

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SUE VERHOEF | 00:00

On camera.

CHAD WRIGHT | 00:01

Today is February 15th, 2024 and my name is Chad Wright. I'm a volunteer at Buckhead Heritage, and with me is Laura Dotson and Judith Vanderver, volunteers at Buckhead Heritage, and Sue Verhoef, director of Oral History and Genealogy at the Atlanta History Center. We're here today to record an oral history with Mr. Ivan Allen IV, who is a native Atlantan and lifelong Buckhead resident. Mr. Allen's oral history is being recorded for the Buckhead Heritage Oral History Project in partnership with the Atlanta History Center. We're honored to have you with us Mr. Allen, and thank you for participating in the project.

ALLEN | 00:36

Thank you for inviting me Chad.

WRIGHT | 00:38

(laughs) You're welcome. Where did you grow up Ivan?

ALLEN | 00:42

I grew up in Atlanta, Georgia, and my childhood home was on Northside Drive between Valley and Blackland.

WRIGHT | 00:50

What's your first memory of Buckhead?

ALLEN | 00:57

I remember as a young boy, I would get dropped off at the Sears Shopping Center, which is now where Buckhead Plaza One and Buckhead Plaza Two is, and I loved to go into the sporting goods store on the backside of the Sears department store. It was also the location that I would catch the bus. The Oglethorpe 23 bus would take me out to the corner of Peachtree and Ashford Dunwoody. I was allowed to ride the bus as a young child.

WRIGHT | 01:30

And how old was that to be allowed to ride the bus?

ALLEN | 01:33

I'm guessing 11 years old, 12 years old.

WRIGHT | 01:36

And what would you do out on the North Line to Oglethorpe?

ALLEN | 01:40

The bus would turn around at Ashford Dunwoody, and I'd get off with my golf clubs with two other friends, and we'd play golf for the day and then catch the bus back.

WRIGHT | 01:49

Fantastic. You mentioned growing up on Northside Drive. Tell me a little bit about the, the house and the history of the house.

ALLEN | 01:59

Well, it may be helpful to our audience if I talk a little bit about my grandmother, Louise Allen.¹ Louise Allen was a Richardson² and the Richardson Family Home - which is commonly known Broadlands - is also on Northside Drive. It may have at one time had an interest off of West Paces Ferry, but in my lifetime it's always been on Northside Drive. It's an old stately home, about a hundred-year-old home that my grandmother grew up in. In the late forties, early fifties, her parents bequeathed a piece of property to her and her husband at the time - my grandfather - and they built their home and subsequently gave land to my parents, my aunt and uncle and other Allen members to build homes adjacent to each other, so we had a little family compound that we grew up on.

WRIGHT | 03:00

And the Richardson home where your grandmother grew up, is it still existing? And can you describe the architecture of it?

ALLEN | 03:10

I've only been at one time, and the current owners are Carl Allen, who I believe is deceased, and Elizabeth Allen, his widow. I remember in my grandmother Louise Allen's lifetime, she was just thrilled that the Allen's Carl and Elizabeth had bought her childhood home because they had a real commitment to preserving it and protecting it, and they asked her advice on what it was like when she was a child. I don't know if any of y'all have ever been in the home, but there's a ballroom that would rival the Piedmont Driving Club Ballroom (laughs).

WRIGHT | 03:51

So you went in one time... Describe the house in general so folks can get an idea of just what it might look like, visualize as you describe it. Is it a white house up on a hill?

ALLEN | 04:04

¹ Louise Richardson Allen was the youngest of four children of Hugh Richardson and Josephine Inman Richardson. She married Ivan Allen Jr. and was known as Atlanta's first lady from 1962-1970 when her husband was elected mayor of Atlanta. A devout philanthropist and patron of historic preservation, she was a founder of the Atlanta Speech School and a founding trustee of The Westminster Schools. She was also a founding member and trustee of the Georgia Trust for Historic Preservation, the Atlanta Botanical Garden, the Forward Arts Foundation, the Cherokee Garden Library, and the Historic Oakland Foundation.

² The Richardsons were a prominent Atlanta family, with Hugh Richardson (1869-1951) joining the Capital City Club, Atlanta's oldest country club, in 1897. In 1896, Hugh Richardson linked the Richardson family with another of Atlanta's founding families - the Inmans - when he married Josephine Inman, the daughter of Hugh T. Inman - a wealthy, prominent Atlanta industrialist and a leader in the development of Atlanta. Subsequently, their son Hugh Inman Richardson (1900-1994) founded the Richardson Realty Company and their daughter Louise Richardson became beloved throughout Atlanta due to her active civic profile. The Richardsons went on to help develop Atlanta by funding the construction of numerous buildings, eventually building the famous Richardson Family Home, commonly known as "Broadlands," which was said to be the most beautiful home in all of Atlanta.

It is a white house up on a hill. It's oriented so that it looks back away from Northside Drive. It looks down off of a hill onto Wolf Creek and kind of overlooks the Tophat soccer fields. It's up on a huge perch. And at one point there were stables and horses there, and it was all farmland a hundred years ago.

WRIGHT | 04:25

Did your grandfather, your grandmom growing up in that area, did she have any tales for being a child with Wolf Creek and the neighborhood and the stables or any horseback riding?

ALLEN | 04:38

I don't recall her being effusive with childhood stories, so I don't remember much from her childhood.

WRIGHT | 04:48

Okay, were there any histories - because I know there was a gentleman's riding club I believe called the Saddle and Sirloin³ in Buckhead - was there any participation from the Allens with that – that you know of?

ALLEN | 04:59

Not that I recall, Chad. I just don't remember.

WRIGHT | 05:05

Gotcha. You mentioned a lot of the family members ending up with pieces of property in and around. Were y'all a pretty tight knit family, even with cousins, aunts, uncles, and describe how y'all would get together or use the property?

ALLEN | 05:19

We were, the epicenter was obviously my grandparents' home, the matriarch and patriarch. That was the center of attention for Christmas, celebrations for family get togethers. We all shared the property and it would not be uncommon for me to be outside playing as a young child and to bump into my grandfather who was hitting golf balls at the time (laughs).

WRIGHT | 05:47

Fantastic. Do you remember the architect, by chance, who your grandmother hired to build their matrimonial home?

ALLEN | 05:58

I just know that it has kind of a South African stucco flare to it. I don't know the architect.

WRIGHT | 06:07

Okay, and did you grow up in that house?

ALLEN | 06:10

I grew up in a house that my parents built next door. It's a shared driveway, so you come down the driveway, you would turn left to my grandparents' house, you would turn right to our house.

³ A Buckhead riding club dating back to as early as 1929, seemingly founded separately from the famous Kansas City Saddle and Sirloin Club (1940) and unaffiliated with the American Royal.

WRIGHT | 06:22

Where did you go to school in Buckhead?

ALLEN | 06:25

I started as a young boy at Tuxedo Elementary School on Northside Drive, and I guess graduated elementary school and then enrolled at Warren T. Jackson, which was a public school on Mount Paran. I was comfortable in public school. My parents were completely comfortable with me in public school, but if you think back to early seventies, integration was prevalent in Atlanta, and school busing⁴ was the topic du jour. My parents were completely comfortable with integrating the public school system, but at the end of the day, they weren't comfortable with the possibility of me having to get on a bus and being matriculated to the other side of town, so in seventh grade I enrolled in private school.

WRIGHT | 07:17

How was that transition?

ALLEN | 07:20

I met my lifelong friends in seventh grade. It was an easy trust transition to Westminster.

WRIGHT | 07:30

Tell us a little bit about your family as well. So, you grew up in Buckhead. Did you stay in Atlanta - in Buckhead - your whole life? Have you ventured elsewhere?

ALLEN | 07:40

No. All of my family's roots are deep and wide in Atlanta, and we've all either gone to school here or returned here after school. You could throw a net over a lot of my relatives pretty easily in the 30305-area code.

WRIGHT | 08:00

Your childhood and in Buckhead, aside from schooling and Sears Roebuck, were there any other memories of favorite restaurants, favorite events, anything that was particular to Buckhead that you're still sort of fond of?

ALLEN | 08:18

Well, for those that remember, Josh Powell⁵ had his boys summer camp located in Buckhead probably for 20 years. It was located at Haverty Hollow, which I guess is the backside of Kingswood. Does that sound right? Across from Pace Academy? If you worked your way down back to Wolf Creek, he used the Haverty Barn and had a little football program and a summer program down there, and it was right across

⁴ To address longstanding segregation, in the mid-early 1970's Federal Courts implemented busing as a desegregation strategy, busing white students to black schools and black students to white schools across the city. This generated severe backlash, causing many white urban families to move away from central cities like Boston and towards the suburbs, a phenomenon historians call "white flight." Ultimately, busing ended up being unsuccessful in truly solving the geographical segregation between black and white communities and officially ended in 2001.

⁵ A former Atlanta lawyer, Josh Powell (1941-2001) founded the Josh Powell Summer Camp in 1972 and dedicated his life to running it. The summer camp still operates very successfully to this day.

the creek from us. So as a young child, I remember looking across the creek with envy and saying, I want to go to Josh Powell someday (laughs).

WRIGHT | 09:05

I think the original Josh Powell got its start across on Arden Road in West Wesley, if I remember correctly, historically, and then it moved to Haverty Hollow. I think for our generation there were lots of good memories there. Tell us a little bit about your grandfather as well. Obviously you mentioned your family has been multi-generational in Atlanta, hasn't strayed too far. Tell us in particular about your grandfather and his importance for the city of Atlanta.

ALLEN | 09:37

I don't know if he grew up in my great-grandfather's home at 2600 Peachtree or not. I'm not exactly sure where he lived in his early childhood but he went to Georgia Tech class in 1933. I believe he was an SAE⁶ at Georgia Tech. He has or had deep, deep roots with Georgia Tech. Then he went to work for the family business, which was downtown, and then pursued a political career after that.

WRIGHT | 10:10

And what did that political career lead to? What positions did he hold in the area?

ALLEN | 10:16

I guess he would be best known for being a two-term mayor in Atlanta during the sixties, which was a pretty turbulent time in our city's history.

WRIGHT | 10:27

Do you recall any family conversations or dinner conversation with stories that would be of interest with his mayorship?

ALLEN | 10:37

We had a telephone that was attached to the wall that had a long cord as many - this was pre-cellphone of course - and in our family as a young child, you were not allowed to answer the telephone. The adults had to answer the phone, and I do remember a very kind of gripping situation from my young childhood where I answered the phone, and the person on the other end of the phone was obviously disappointed with my grandfather's stance on the racial relationship. He shared some threatening remarks with me and then hung up the phone. I remember, of course, reporting this to my parents and the next thing I knew there was a police car in our driveway for the next couple of weeks which I later learned was paid for by my grandparents (laughs).

WRIGHT | 11:39

And he was a two-term mayor. So obviously it sounds like he was mayor during your childhood as well, or at least your early childhood.

ALLEN | 11:47

I believe I was born during his first term, and my birth was actually announced. It was announced on the radio that Mayor Allen had his first-born grandson. That was my introduction to the world.

⁶ A member of Sigma Alpha Epsilon (SAE), a fraternity at Georgia Tech.

WRIGHT | 12:03

That's a good introduction. You mentioned your grandmother as well and their history. I want to ask [about] sort of both branches of your grandmom and your grandfather. Let's start with your grandmom's side. Tell us the history of her side of the family in Atlanta. Obviously, it sounds like they had been here for a while as well.

ALLEN | 12:24

Louise Allen Richardson has a strong connection with the History Center,⁷ which has been kind enough to host us today for this interview. So I'll reflect back on her for a minute. She was born a Richardson, as I mentioned, she grew up in the Broadlands home on Northside Drive, but if I'm not mistaken, her parents - her mother - Josephine Richardson was an Inman.⁸ Josephine Inman had a brother and I don't recall his name, but he went on to later build and found the Swan House⁹ and she had a sister who married a Grant¹⁰ who went on to live and found the Cherokee Town Club.¹¹ So in my grandmother's family tree you've got descendants that lived in the Swan House in what is now the Cherokee Town Club and what is now the Broadlands home on North Side Drive.

WRIGHT | 13:35

And she was pretty involved philanthropically as well to botanical gardens.

ALLEN | 13:41

I don't know her history, per se, with the botanical gardens as much as I do with the History Center and some other organizations.

WRIGHT | 13:49

⁷ Louise Allen Richardson joined the board of trustees of the Atlanta Historical Society in 1967 and later served as chairman. When the Swan House, the home of her late uncle and aunt Edward and Emily Inman, came on the market, she convinced the Historical Society to purchase it and relocate its headquarters there. She was key to restoring the beautiful grounds and was later instrumental in acquiring and moving the Tullie Smith House, a historic 1840s farmhouse, to the History Center grounds. Finally, Ms. Richardson led the effort to raise the money to build the impressive Atlanta History Museum, which opened in 1993.

⁸ The Inmans moved to Atlanta from Tennessee in 1859. Originally three brothers (John H. Inman, Hugh T. Inman and Samuel M. Inman), they accumulated enormous wealth and became one of Atlanta's founding families. Through the money the brothers made from cotton and railroads throughout the late 19th century, the Inmans were able to help rebuild Atlanta after the Civil War by jumpstarting the city's economy through their respective businesses and participating in philanthropic activities throughout Atlanta. They were key to the development of the Georgia Institute of Technology and Agnes Scott College and were responsible for much of the real estate development throughout Atlanta, especially the Buckhead area.

⁹ The Edward Inman "Swan House" is a mansion in Atlanta, Georgia, located in Buckhead. It was built in 1928 for Edward and Emily Inman, and designed by Philip T. Shutze, Atlanta's best known architect at the time. The Swan House quickly became known as Shutze's finest work, as it successfully combined English and Italian classical style architecture while also accommodating 20th century lifestyle. In particular, the Swan House was designed, in typical Italian fashion, to overlook its lavish gardens. Featuring cascading fountains, terraced lawns and finely trimmed hedges, the Swan House Gardens imitate those of an Italian villa, distinguishing the property as one of Atlanta's most famous historical sites. The Atlanta Historical Society purchased the house in 1966, fully restored the property and maintains it to this day.

¹⁰ Most likely referring to John W. Grant who married Annie Inman and went on to help found many of Atlanta's prized institutions like Georgia Tech. The Grants were one of Atlanta's founding families, residing in the famed Grant Estate, built in 1917 and encompassing more than 100 acres of land.

¹¹ After John Grant and Annie Inman passed away in the mid 1950's, the Grant Estate was eventually converted into the Cherokee Town Club, chartered in 1956.

And the History Center being the donation of the Swan House or the acquisition of the Swan House, and any other involvement of laying its roots?

ALLEN | 13:58

Well, I can just speak to my childhood memories as it relates to coming over here with my grandmother. I guess McElreath Hall, which is where we are today, is the original Atlanta Historical Society building.

VERHOEF | 14:15

I believe there was one on Peachtree earlier, but I don't know...

ALLEN | 14:19

My earliest memories in involved coming over here as a young boy, I was maybe not even 10, and there was a wonderful garden out back - I think it's now the Goizueta Gardens¹² - and it had all of these mountain laurels and rend drums that needed attention and watering, and I never thought of her as anything more than just a gardener. She would ask me to help her hook up watering hoses, and she would hook up three and four watering hoses (laughs) and have me lug those out into the garden so that she could water the native plants that were here, and hopefully some of 'em have still survived,

WRIGHT | 15:07

I would imagine so. Your grandfather's side - so the Allen side you had mentioned - had his original house on Peachtree. Where on Peachtree, you mentioned the address, but where approximately was that?

ALLEN | 15:21

2600 Peachtree is now some town homes, but it's between Lindbergh and Jesus Junction, just down from Park Place on the same side of the street as Park Place. I guess that would have been considered consistent with the Randolph Lucas House.¹³

WRIGHT | 15:42

Fantastic. And so he grew up there and then moved to the Richardson House when he married Louise. Is that...

ALLEN | 15:50

No, this would've been my grandfather - Ivan Allen Sr. Senior - who lived his entire life in a home on 2600. I did have the privilege of going into my great-grandfather's home at one time, and the only thing I remember about it was it had water radiators. I guess this was before central heating and air.

WRIGHT | 16:18

Do you recall if they built the house?

¹² Goizueta Gardens is a 33-acre landscape encompassing nine distinct gardens—including the famous Swan House Gardens. The gardens feature a variety of flowers and plants native to the area as well as a preserved woodland. They are currently kept and owned by the Atlanta History Center.

¹³ Designed by P. Thornton Mayre in 1924, also the architect who designed the famous Fox Theater, this red-brick Georgian Revival style home was built for Hollins Nicholas Randolph, an Atlanta attorney and businessman, and the great-great-grandson of Thomas Jefferson. Facing the danger of demolition in 2012, Buckhead Heritage successfully spearheaded the effort to relocate the mansion, relocating the historic building in 2013 from 2500 Peachtree Road in Buckhead to 78 Peachtree Circle in Ansley Park.

ALLEN | 16:20

I don't know if he built the house or not Chad. It's not there anymore, I know that (laughs).

WRIGHT | 16:28

And did he start the Ivan Allen Company?¹⁴ Your great-grandfather?

ALLEN | 16:31

He did. He started the Ivan Allen Company, which was an office supply company throughout the nineteen hundreds. He started it in the late, in 1890s. He came down from Dalton, Georgia, and what I find interesting about his career was he began selling typewriters out of the back of his car, the old timey typewriters that you'd push the button and the I guess the letter would come up and hit the ribbon and make an impression. But what was revolutionary at the time was he was selling on credit,¹⁵ and nobody was selling on credit at that time and that was somewhat revolutionary.

WRIGHT | 17:16

And primarily started with Atlanta and grew to serve the Southeast, or was it still primarily Georgia?

ALLEN | 17:27

The five southeastern states were Georgia, North and South Carolina, Tennessee, and Alabama. But it was a regional operation - Southeast only.

WRIGHT | 17:40

And it stayed within the family. So your great grandfather started it, your grandfather worked there prior to his political aspiration, and who else in the family?

ALLEN | 17:51

My father, Ivan Allen III¹⁶ led the company for probably 20 years and my uncle Inman Allen served as president for a term, and as well as my cousin Louis Allen served as president for a term.

WRIGHT | 18:09

And did you ever work there?

ALLEN | 18:11

¹⁴ Founded in the late 1890's as a typewriter business, eventually Ivan Allen Sr. transitioned the business to an office supply retailer that generated millions of dollars and hundreds of jobs. Ivan Allen Jr. was able to expand the firm to 17 offices across the Southeast, further contributing to the local economy. The company was sold off to Staples Inc. in 1999.

¹⁵ Throughout much of the 19th century, borrowing to acquire luxuries such as typewriters was generally seen as imprudent. Only the wealthy used credit to finance consumption of things that weren't absolutely essential to daily living. Moreover, social pressures and the lack of willing lenders meant that even if there were enough wealthy people interested in buying with credit, the market was virtually non-existent.

¹⁶ In addition to serving as a President for the Iven Allen Company, Mr. Allen III was also actively involved in the civic affairs of Atlanta. He was a member of numerous community organizations, including the Woodruff Arts Center, the Atlanta Area Council of the Boy Scouts of America, the Atlanta Chamber of Commerce and the Carter Center of Emory University. Moreover, Mr. Allen was closely affiliated with former President Jimmy Carter and played a central role in securing Atlanta as the host city of the 1996 Summer Olympics.

I started in the family business in 1987 sweeping floors in the warehouse, (laughs).

WRIGHT | 18:21

And tell us a little bit about the history of the company. Ultimately, it being a regional company was a target for a national, and what happened to the company?

ALLEN | 18:32

Well, I love talking about the history of the company more so than the current environment. I've got copies of really old Ivan Allen Company catalogs from the fifties, and if you think about what was going on at that time, fire safety was not really prominent in the Southeast. So, everybody had to maintain their critical business records in a safe. So, we sold an awful lot of safes. We sold an awful lot of spittoons,¹⁷ which is surprising to me, but in 1999, the family made a decision to sell the company to Staples, which was a national and international operation out of Boston, Massachusetts.

WRIGHT | 19:21

Where were the company headquarters?

ALLEN | 19:22

We were located initially on Ivy Street, which is now Peachtree Center Avenue, 221 Peachtree Center Avenue. It later became a very prominent parking deck in downtown Atlanta (laugh).

WRIGHT | 19:40

And I imagine delivery of the office supplies primarily to downtown starting and servicing...

ALLEN | 19:45

The niche that Ivan Allen Company served was the southeast market. In Atlanta in particular we offered twice a day delivery, which is hard to believe you could get something delivered the same day. At the time that set us apart from everybody else (laugh).

WRIGHT | 20:07

And a very distinct logo, if I recall, growing up as well. So going back to you, we've established sort of the family history, and let's go a little bit more about Ivan Allen IV. After you left private school here in Atlanta, where'd you go to college?

ALLEN | 20:26

I went off to Pennsylvania to Bucknell University. [The] reason I did that was I knew I'd come back to Atlanta and start my career here and wanted to experience a different part of the world. I went to school primarily with young men and women from New Jersey, New York, and Pennsylvania.

WRIGHT | 20:45

And returned to Atlanta. Are you married any children?

ALLEN | 20:50

¹⁷ Vase-like containers commonly found in the early 19th century used primarily by men to dispose their chewing tobacco and saliva.

I do. I have two boys, two biological children. Ivan V, who's 27, a younger son named William, and two stepdaughters Jordan and Taylor Upchurch.

WRIGHT | 21:06

And do y'all still live in the family property?

ALLEN | 21:12

No. The home that I grew up in later transferred ownership to my sister Amanda, and she lived there for 10 or 15 years. And - bless her heart - she came to a family meeting one day and said it's been idyllic raising my kids here. I can turn 'em loose. It's just enchanted living in this part of Atlanta that's so nestled and protected back in the woods, but the only two people I see are the garbage man and the mailman, and I need more social interaction. So she moved to a more popular neighborhood or a neighborhood that had more...

WRIGHT | 21:54

More populous. Yeah, a little bit more of a neighborhood feel. Was there some intense lobbying or competition to see who might stay within the family bounds?

ALLEN | 22:04

There's always been a family member who wanted to be there, and I spent my childhood there and that was long enough. I settled down in Atlanta, but not I near the rest of my family.

WRIGHT | 22:20

So your dedication to Buckhead, has been in 2011 you joined Buckhead Heritage, and tell us about your involvement. What drew you to Buckhead Heritage, your involvement with them and some of your pet projects that you've championed?

ALLEN | 22:38

Well, I have a natural connection to the Atlanta History Center. So I'd like to delineate just a little bit about what I feel is different about Buckhead Heritage and the Atlanta History Center. In 2006 when we were founded our founder, Wright Mitchell,¹⁸ was out on a run and he got up to the corner of Chatham and West Paces Ferry and looked over and found this unattended overgrown cemetery, which he later uncovered and found that it was just littered with graves and is now Harmony Grove Cemetery.¹⁹ It's one of the first cemeteries Buckhead Heritage has taken over stewardship for and we don't have a physical

¹⁸ Mr. Wright Mitchell is a successful Atlanta lawyer, specializing in civil litigation and historic preservation law. He founded Buckhead Heritage in 2006 and spearheaded the restoration of the historic Harmony Grove Cemetery in which he received the excellence in Rehabilitation Award from the Georgia Trust for Historic Preservation in 2009. Mr. Wright also served on the board of the Atlanta Preservation Center and since 2023 has moved on to become the President & CEO of the Georgia Trust, collaborating with Buckhead Heritage to spearhead numerous preservation projects.

¹⁹ Harmony Grove Cemetery likely originated when wealthy Buckhead landowner James "Whispering" Smith purchased the land in 1860. Smith buried his infant son at the location in 1870, later being buried there himself after he passed away in 1872. There are documents from 1889 suggesting that Harmony Grove Congregational Church also existed on the property. There are at least 171 graves in Harmony Grove Cemetery, with archeologists concluding that most of the belong to African American slaves. The cemetery was used as late as 1982, with the last documented burial being Charlotte Krause, the daughter of German immigrant stone carver August Krause.

presence. We're not a museum like the History Center. We're more of a grassroots organization with like-minded individuals like myself that are just trying to preserve and protect Buckhead's historical resources, which could be oral history like we're doing today. It could be an institution like Rich's Department Store,²⁰ or it could be a place or it could be a lot of different things. But I've enjoyed being involved with Buckhead Heritage for over 10 years now.

WRIGHT | 24:02

I think one of the most important projects that you probably would be humble to admit to would be the work with the cemetery at New Hope Church. Can you tell us a little bit about the history of New Hope and what drew you to that project and what all you got done over there with, through Buckhead Heritage and members of the church and other groups?

ALLEN | 24:21

So, the history of New Hope Church is... it is an African American church located on Arden Road, right in the center of Buckhead. So, I was compelled to learn a little bit more about how did this church originate. In the 1860s or 1870s, a prominent white farmer James Whispering Smith bequeathed two acres of property in his will to colored persons, and his intention was for them to build a church and a school. And you may think, why, why would he have done that? My understanding is that the African American population at that time were hosting church revivals²¹ on the site. So it was a natural place for them to build a church. They begin burying their membership across the street in the cemetery. It's about a two acre cemetery. And I got involved in 2007 where we raised some money. We did a archeological survey of the cemetery and –

WRIGHT | 25:39

Describe what the cemetery looked like in 2007.

ALLEN | 25:42

Well, it was completely overgrown, much like Harmony Grove was when Wright found it. It was almost impenetrable with weeds and jungle, and along with Peachtree Road United Methodist Church, who's been a wonderful key stakeholder in the project, volunteers came together, they cleared the property. Peachtree Road has donated tens of thousands of dollars to get old trees, dead trees, removed from the property. But once it was in sort of a navigable shape Buckhead Heritage hired a architectural surveying company to come in. The guy does ground penetrating survey. He surveys all the identifiable graves and

²⁰ Rich's was a high-end department store, headquartered in Atlanta, that was founded in 1867 and grew to become one the largest department store chains in the South. Many wealthy citizens of Atlanta enjoyed shopping at Rich's because they could sit and dine at a lavish, high-end restaurant within the store called the Magnolia Room. Rich's became nationally famous during the 1960-1961 Atlanta Sit-Ins, as it had tolerated but segregated against its African American customers. Due to its prominent status in the South, the newly formed Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) designated the department store as its main target. Civil Rights leaders like Julian Bond, Lonnie King and Martin Luther King Jr. boycotted Rich's and even sat in the Magnolia room, persevering until the owner – Dick Rich – gave in and authorized Ivan Allen Jr., then head of the Atlanta Chamber of Commerce, to create a compromise that ultimately desegregated the department store, paving the way for mass desegregation among stores throughout Atlanta.

²¹ Referring to the revivalist fever that swept across the nation in the early 19th century known as the Second Great Awakening. The Second Great Awakening marked a turning point in American Protestantism, as many Protestant priests abandoned the traditionally formal style of preaching and instead gave passionate sermons in a variety of buildings and even outdoors. This new style of preaching often drew large crowds and was popular with both white and African American Protestants.

tombstones that are there. But what really piqued my interest, Chad, was he found over a hundred unmarked graves, and that - in my mind - was worthy of continued exploration. So we went back to, I guess, the Habersham Park neighborhood, and asked them if they would be interested in raising money for future exploration.

ALLEN | 26:58

They lifted up considerable amount of resources that allowed Buckhead Heritage to fund a fence that delineates the property of the cemetery, and that's important because the property lines were not clearly demarcated, and it was important to the church and to the membership and the congregation to know exactly the boundaries of their cemetery. The other thing that we did with the funds was we thought that the congregation would be interested in memorializing with some tombstones or some headstones, the unmarked graves. But when we approached them about putting just a simple piece of marble in front of the unmarked graves they chose not to, and we have to respect their wishes because it's their congregation, it's their descendants, but they felt it wasn't historically accurate to have a piece of marble that would not have been representational of the time of when those descendants were buried there. They did allow us to place some rebar in the ground so we can go back at any time and identify and locate where those unmarked graves are. But the other thing that Buckhead Heritage has done a great job of is engaging Ashley Shares. Ashley Shares is the Director of Preservation at Oakland Cemetery. We contracted with her, with the funds that we raised from the neighborhood for Ashley to come back and restore a lot of these tombstones and gravestones that have been broken and crumbled over the years, and if you take the time to go into New Hope you'll see that not only have the tombstones been repaired, but we've also cleaned and really made it presentable. Again, it's really an asset to the neighborhood now.

WRIGHT | 29:04

And I think it is probably one of the most interesting historical record of Buckhead and the times. I know that Buckhead Heritage has interviewed a number of folks at New Hope as well, Moses Few who is an elder, as well as some neighbors grew up around there and the interaction of the neighbors within the church has been something special. It's been great to see that continuance - a hundred and some odd years later - of the neighbors still working with the congregation and it being such a vital historical link for Buckhead and the community.

ALLEN | 29:46

My hat's off to the Habersham Park Civic Association, Buckhead Heritage stuffed mailboxes for a couple of three days, and that neighborhood really lifted up their support of New Hope Cemetery with over \$35,000 of contributions, some as small as \$25. So there's a real interest in the neighborhood to preserving the legacy of New Hope, and Buckhead Heritage was happy to step in and be the conduit for that.

WRIGHT | 30:15

Well, I think it's in hopefully a position to stay present and in great condition for a long time. Thanks to your...

ALLEN | 30:24

A little anecdotal story about what might be happening at New Hope Cemetery going forward is the Magnolia Garden Club, which is just adjacent to New Hope Cemetery, was interested in doing some volunteer work. I explained to 'em that as, as Judith and others know, it's arduous. It's raking leaves, it's

pulling weeds, it's backbreaking work. The concept that we've come up with that might have some interest for the congregation is there are plants that are historically significant in African American cemeteries, one of which is Ivy, another of which is the Yucca plant. We've approached the congregation about allowing the Magnolia Garden Club to raise money and maybe refresh the cemetery with some additional Yucca plans.²²

WRIGHT | 31:17

That's fantastic. That's fantastic. Your current term at Buckhead Heritage - you just became president - what do you see and hope for the organization during your tenure of leadership? Are there any pet peeve projects or initiatives or expansion of ideas?

ALLEN | 31:41

I'll talk about some headwinds that are in our sales that were created by the previous administration. Charlotte Margo²³ and Faye Pierce²⁴ have done a great job of energizing our membership with our monthly programming. As you may or may not know, we host a speaker series at St. Philip's Church the third Thursday of every month. We try to have a speaker on something that's topical to Buckhead, and the attendance has grown to 125 members and guests for these lectures on Thursday night. So we really hope to continue that momentum that Faye and Charlotte created last year throughout the year. One of my audacious goals for Buckhead Heritage, and this is just my personal goals, so I don't know if the executive committee agrees with this, but wouldn't it be exciting if financially Buckhead Heritage could find some way to move their little one person office that's in Mathes off of Matheson Road in the heart of Buckhead into The Lodge,²⁵ which is right across the street from the E River School. It's a historically significant building. It's got some really restrictive covenants and restrictions that's gonna maybe prevent a developer from going in there and doing something contemporary to the space. I just have this vision of Buckhead Heritage housing our one person office in the lodge at some point in the future,

WRIGHT | 33:24

And I probably need some fact checking on this, but I do know it's owned by the Atlanta Public School system. I think it was the original sales office for the developer who developed the Peachtree Battle and the neighborhoods back in their Peachtree Heights and in that area.

ALLEN | 33:41

²² In African American culture, Yucca Plants were often used to symbolize motherhood, eternity, mourning, and to ward off evil spirits. African Americans also believed that Yucca plants help keep restless spirits in their graves, which is another cultural reason they are so prevalent in cemeteries. Furthermore, Yucca Plants are very easy to cultivate and therefore extremely cheap. They are very durable, often lasting centuries, which makes them an ideal way to mark graves for those African Americans who lacked the financial liberty to commission gravestones or other markings.

²³ Past President of Buckhead Heritage and an active philanthropist, volunteer at numerous charities, founding Director and President of the Ladies of the Lake and board member and Chairman of Atlanta's Table.

²⁴ A longtime supporter of Buckhead Heritage, serving as Vice President and Programs and Events Committee Chair for many years. Mr. Pierce is active within the historic preservation community, having served on the Board of Directors of the Historic Oakland Foundation and is an Emeritus member of the Board of Directors of the Bobby Dodd Institute.

²⁵ Also known as "The Lodge at E. Rivers," this historic building was built & developed starting in 1910 by Eretus Rivers, a prominent Atlanta industrialist and real estate developer, as part of a historic neighborhood now known as Peachtree Height Parks. The Lodge became the headquarters for E. Rivers Realty until 1937 when it was donated to Fulton County to use as an educational building.

The other things that I, we have a lot of wind behind our sails is what we're doing today, the oral history project. We've got a litany of individuals, Buckhead residents, Buckhead natives that have wonderful stories that we want to capture and we want to catalog and make available to our membership and to the public in the exact same setting we're doing today.

WRIGHT | 34:07

Well, here's, here's one more chance for you to, to reflect on Buckhead and your times growing up. How have you seen Buckhead change and any, any places that have been lost? You mentioned Sears, which is, has been lost. Any other places that maybe have changed or sustained that you want to reflect upon?

ALLEN | 34:27

Well, as a young adult, of course, I remember the Buckhead Village quite well. That was the epicenter of our nightlife as young adults and that has changed dramatically in my lifetime. I enjoy the restaurants in the Buckhead Village. I enjoy all the improvement and development that has come in, but it does have a different feel from when we were younger.

WRIGHT | 34:58

You know, as we work through our oral history list, you may be one of our younger ones we've interviewed to date that maybe enjoyed the Buckhead Village at that level than others. So you may have be the first inaugural –

ALLEN | 35:12

So firsthand knowledge?

WRIGHT | 35:13

– reflective... yeah, comments on that area. Is there any particular establishment that you went to more often than others? And describe a little bit of that Animal Crackers²⁶ maybe?

ALLEN | 35:25

No, I just remember Buckhead Heritage hosted a trivia night and we got together in teams of five or six and Thornton Kennedy, our vice president, grilled us with questions. And one of the initial ask of the audience was develop your team name, and our group came up with the Five Pacers (laugh).

WRIGHT | 35:51

A reference to the bar there across from Herbie's, indeed. Do you remember Good Old Days? Was that a haunt at all?

ALLEN | 36:01

²⁶ A mix between a bar, club and fine dining restaurant opened by notable Atlanta businessman Bill Swearingen in 1980. This all-in-one mix made Animal Crackers revolutionary, as it displayed a 1931 Rolls Royce in the bar, an oyster bar, and baskets of wine suspended from a conveyor delivering the bottles directly to the tables. Swearingen even built an indoor Ferris Wheel known as “Big Eli” and contacted the Guinness Book of World Records about setting a world record for riding an indoor Ferris wheel for the longest time. Animal Crackers converted to a club known as Buckhead Beach a few years later until it eventually closed for good.

Was that the corner of Far Road and Peachtree? Or no, it was part of the Buckhead Village, wasn't it? It was

WRIGHT | 36:08

It was part of the village. It may have been the corner of Far and Peachtree on the northeastern side, but I could be wrong on that.

ALLEN | 36:17

Getting away from the nightlife angle (laughs) –

WRIGHT | 36:21

Yeah (laughs)

ALLEN | 36:22

– I do remember what a coming of age it was as a young boy to go up to the Buckhead Men's Store on Peachtree Road and East Paces Ferry and get your first blue blazer. That was a rite of passage. You could maybe parlay that into a trip to Everett Roach Sporting Goods Store. There were some institutions that I remember at that corner.

WRIGHT | 36:54

Well, I'm gonna open up some questioning to the other folks in attendance here. If there's anything that I might have missed or that you have thoughts of wanting to take advantage of our time with Ivan to ask those now.

JUDITH VANDERVER | 37:10

I read that your grandfather and grandmother were friends with the Kings. Martin Luther King's family, Martin Luther King, and his family. Is there anything that was told to you about his assassination or his tenure.

ALLEN | 37:30

Well Judith, they did have a friendship, and the story that I think is really insightful about my grandparents' marriage and their connection was the night that Dr. King was assassinated in Memphis. My grandfather knew to go to Coretta Scott King.²⁷ He knew to be of service to her personally and as a, a steward of the city. But when he decided to go to her that night, my grandmother said, I'm going with you. She said that because she, as a woman, felt that she could relate to a woman that was grieving more so than perhaps her husband could, and I just think that's such an insight that I never would've thought about.

VANDERVER | 38:20

I think you, he and your grandmother, they both embody the city that doesn't hate²⁸, and growing up in Atlanta myself, I always felt that while we were distinct communities, that there was a cooperation, and I

²⁷ The loving wife of Martin Luther King Jr's from 1953 until his assassination in Memphis in 1968.

²⁸ Referencing the narrative perpetuated by William B. Hartsfield, who was mayor from Atlanta from 1942-1962, that Atlanta was "A City Too Busy to Hate," spinning a narrative that economic progress and racial progressivism went hand in hand. This narrative successfully portrayed Atlanta as handling the challenges of the Civil Rights Era with maturity, moderation and compromise, earning the city national praise and a positive reputation.

just, I read that about your grandparents, that they were there with them before they even knew that Martin Luther King had been... that they were there as soon as he was shot, but that just is a neat coming together.

ALLEN | 38:55

Two stories that I'd like to share in regards to that is, in my lifetime, cannot tell you the number of not Atlanta natives, but individuals that have moved into our city that might have been in their seventies or eighties, who said to me, your grandmother, Louise Allen, came to my home less than a month after I'd moved to Atlanta and said, here are the list of institutions that you will get involved in, and it was the Atlanta Historical Society, it was Westminster Schools, it was the Speech Center, it was Junior league, and you have a choice, but you will get involved in one of these. Then the other story I like to tell that my grandparents were both very adamant about, as it relates to the sixties and all of the racial unrest, was that it wasn't just one person doing the heavy lifting. It was a combination of the black power structure, the black educational leadership over at Morehouse.²⁹ They were all meeting behind closed doors with the business community, and they did this as a team,³⁰ and I don't want that part of the story to ever be forgotten.

WRIGHT | 40:15

Well, I think that is, that is a good point, and I do wanna go back to the story when you answered the phone. You had mentioned that your grandfather may have had some views that some folks in Atlanta may not have held. Could you elaborate on those just to kind of clarify what those views might have been?

ALLEN | 40:36

Well, in the sixties in Atlanta and the South in particular, were struggling with integration. How does a city integrate their public accommodations? How do they integrate their schools, their swimming pools? How is this gonna work out? There was federal legislation that said it was gonna happen, but the South was slow to enact that, and he took controversial stands. For instance, when he went into the mayor's office and said we are going to remove signs that said this is a colored water fountain or a colored restroom, we are going to integrate city hall, and that push went on to more public accommodations in the city, and his white friends did not like that (laughs).

WRIGHT | 41:28

Well leadership for seeing where the direction needed to be for certain. Are there any other...?

²⁹ A historically black college established in 1867, Morehouse was a hub for civil rights leaders in the 1960's and 50's. Students who became involved during the civil rights struggle in the 1960's often received support from the faculty and administration at the college. This emboldened many student activists like Lonnie King and Julian Bond to form the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). These student activists would go on to prove just how influential politically motivated young people could be in shaping America's future. The student movements in the South were so successful that many white students from prestigious universities such as Berkely who volunteered to help the Southern civil rights movement in the summer of 1964 would adopt the tactics and structure of organizations like the SNCC and use them to expand civil rights liberties at their own colleges.

³⁰ Referencing the "Moderate Coalition" that ran Atlanta for much of the 1940's, 50's and early 60's. Formed and led by the politically savvy mayor of Atlanta, William Hartsfield, this coalition was made of up moderate white politicians, elite businessmen and African American leaders. The coalition helped dictated the pace of racial progress in Atlanta, allowing the city to avoid much of the brutality and negative national spotlight that many other Southern cities became known for during the Civil Rights Era.

LAURA DOBSON | 41:40

I'm trying to think, actually, what's your favorite memory of... What do you wanna pass on to your children about Buckhead?

ALLEN | 42:01

What I would want to say to my kids about Buckhead is that this initiative at one time to make Buckhead a separate city,³¹ in my estimation, was not representative of the fundamentals that our little city was founded on. We were – in my memory and childhood – we were an inclusive, welcoming community, and I hope that we will continue to be part of the city of Atlanta throughout my lifetime and throughout theirs, and I hope that they'll support that as well.

WRIGHT | 42:43

That brings back another point that Buckhead Heritage has worked on was Frankie Allen Park, which I think when you grew up and I grew up, being a man in my fifties, was Bagley Park and Buckhead Heritage recently had an initiative to rename that. Can you tell a little bit about the history of Bagley Park and that renaming.

ALLEN | 43:06

Sure. We have a wonderful board member, a long serving board member, Elon Osby and Elon is a descendant of Mr. Bagley. Mr. Bagley was a resident of the Macedonia community. It was an African American community, which is where current Frankie Allen Bagley Park is, and it was a thriving African American community that the city took through eminent domain and displaced all of the residents. So, the name Bagley Park has historical significance, and Elon and others felt that it was appropriate that the park be named Bagley Park. Notwithstanding Frankie Allen was a longstanding loved and revered umpire of the Buckhead baseball community. But I think we've reached a wonderful compromise where we've got Bagley Park with Frankie Allen Field now.

WRIGHT | 44:15

Did you ever play Buckhead baseball growing up?

ALLEN | 44:18

I was an NYO guy, so I didn't make it to Buckhead baseball.

WRIGHT | 44:25

Well, Ivan, this has been a pleasure and a privilege to sit down and hear the history of your family and the legacy that it held and as well as you and your champion cause of the love for Buckhead and your involvement in the community and your continued leadership. So we thank you for that.

VERHOEF | 44:49

Anything else that we haven't covered that feels important to you?

ALLEN | 44:53

³¹ Referencing the desire of some Buckhead residents in 2022 for Buckhead to secede from Atlanta and form its own city. While the movement claimed to have strong support and millions raised, their desires never materialized, and Buckhead still remains a part of Atlanta.

I just want to thank the Atlanta History Center for their partnership with Buckhead Heritage.

VERHOEF | 44:59

Okay.

WRIGHT | 45:00

Well, thank you Ivan.

DOBSON | 45:02

I actually have a question, (laugh) and it's gonna be a strange one. Did you guys have any pets? Did you have any pets? Your father or your grandfather?

ALLEN | 45:10

I did. Oh my goodness. I grew up with German Shepherds. My grandparents had chows. I have terrible memories of their chows chasing me around the house (laughs).

DOBSON | 45:26

Do you remember their names?

ALLEN | 45:27

I remember Penny, they had an affection for these Chinese Chows, and they were mean as snakes (laugh).

VERHOEF | 45:44

Alright, well thank you very much. Thank you for coming in all.