

Interviewer: Larry E. Rivers

Interviewed Mrs. Mae McDonald at the Radisson Hotel on September 24, 1993.

Brief Introduction/Rivers: Mrs. Mae McDonald, my name is Larry Rivers, and I am very pleased that we have an opportunity to talk about the Rosewood incident that occurred in 1923. In fact, I am pleased that the Rosewood families were able to come together as a large family here in Tallahassee so that we would have the opportunity to talk with those who know about the Rosewood situation, and those who were told about it that is-those direct descendants, and others, and I understand you are a direct descendent of Rosewood.

Question: Would you please tell me how you are a direct descendant of Rosewood?

Answer: My family lineage begins with George and Mary Bradley. My immediate grandfather is Raleigh and Nancy Bradley. I am the daughter of Ruth Bradley.

Question: How many brothers and sisters do you have Mrs. McDonald?

Answer: I have one of each, one brother and one sister.

Question: How did you learn about the Rosewood incident? In other words, who talked with you about it and what age were you told about Rosewood?

Answer: I can't be specific at what age I was but I can relate back to as early as my elementary school days. From that point up to my mother's passing and I feel that was her way of sharing a part of our history by telling me of the incident, or massacre that did occur.

Question: How did your mother describe to you Rosewood in 1923, particularly in terms of the livelihood of those individuals that worked in Rosewood, those who owned homes, their occupations? How did she talk about the overall complexion of Rosewood?

Answer: From that point, mother didn't really share that with me because of her age. We are talking about when she was seven years old. Deeply rooted in the A.M.E. Church, they were a working class people but as far as the community itself she couldn't because she was not of age to do so. I do know that she knew it was a turpentine area and sawmill area.

Question: Did she tell you anything about the turpentine industry, whether it was thriving enterprise, and who owned it, and whether the majority of Blacks in Rosewood worked at the Sumner sawmill?

Answer: No, I don't recollect her specifying that in that manner.

Question: Did she talk about any of the churches (you mentioned the A.M.E.) and besides the churches other businesses, if any, that Blacks owned in Rosewood around 1923?

Answer: We were told our great-grandfather (her grandfather) had a store. I don't know if that store operated year-round, seasonally, or how, but that was one means of their income.

Question: What did your mother do? I understand some of the women took in laundry, some were domestics working in the houses of others. What did you mother do in terms of an occupation?

Answer: At that time she was a child of seven years old. Other than going to school and doing chores given to her around the house, she did what most seven year olds do.

Question: What did her mother do?

Answer: She would work in the white homes doing domestic work. I must say also it could not have been very long during mother life because she died soon after giving birth to my mother. My mother may not have been aware of what her mother actually did for a living.

Question: From what you gathered from your mother and others, can you give me an idea of the number of Black families that lived in Rosewood in 1923.

Answer: I cannot say that my mother specified a set number, but she did however say a majority if not all Black in Rosewood.

Question: Your grandmother, state your grandmother's name again?

Answer: It would be Nancy, Nancy Bradley.

Question: Did Mrs. Bradley own land?

Answer: It is my understanding here again that there was family land, but it was not specified whether it was my grandmother's, or if it was handed down through their grandfather to all of his siblings.

Question: What do you know about the Rosewood incident in 1923 and who did you learn it from?

Answer: My knowledge of the Rosewood massacre was told to me by my mother. She shared with me her vivid memory of how they escaped Rosewood. She said raining cold, they had already retired for bed. They escaped with the help, and I believe it was an aunt, one of the sisters to her father. They were hidden in the thickness of the palmettos. She said in the mist of all of this the men in their pursuit to do bodily harm to them, or to find the individual who was accused of harming Fannie Taylor, they hid in the palmettos. She remember the barrel of guns brushing the palmettos. They could not move, they were told not to breathe, in other words they did not make any sounds. How long they stayed there, I don't recall her telling me but it was until they were able to be escorted to the railroad where they boarded the train and were taken to Gainesville.

Question: The incident kicked off on New Year's Day in 1923. When did your mother and others escape to the woods.

Answer: I don't know if it was the following morning or if it was midday or the following night. I do know it was night when they did leave their home with no clothing, no shoes.

Question: Where was your mother physically during the whole situation before she fled to the woods?

Answer: They were in their home.

Question: Did the entire family flee to the woods?

Answer: Her family, the makeup of her family was my grandfather, my mother and her sister Lula, deceased at this time.

Question: Did they all make it safely to Gainesville?

Answer: My mother and her sister left by train. My grandfather and my great-grandfather I am told, along with a cousin called Cousin Soda, escaped through the swamp land. They themselves had to hide in the swamp. They talk about how it indeed must have been a supreme being that had to have been with them walking and hiding in the swamp because as you know moccasins were very prevalent in this area of the country. It was later that her father joined them in Gainesville. It was my understanding, it was only for a very brief while because they were afraid of being found there in Gainesville.

Question: From what you have gathered, were the whites that pursued Blacks particularly interested in the Carrier, Bradley, and Goins families? Or were they just after any Blacks that resided in Rosewood at the time of the incident?

Answer: My impression was, they were after anyone who was Black at the time. Mother didn't specify any particular family. She did know where the pursuit began. She always shared that part with us and that is concurred by most of the stories that you have heard. But to say that it was isolated to one or two families, no she did not say that.

Question: Did she remember anything about whites being killed. We understand that Henry Andrews, and Polly Wilkerson were killed at the Carrier house?

Answer: She never mentioned that to me.

Answer: Having worked in and around education all my life, I feel very strongly that it should be a part of the history that is taught in Florida. There is a segment, unless it has changed recently, that Florida history is taught in the public school system. I feel that this should be a part of that segment and printed in the books that the students are taught from.

Question: How do you think it should be written in terms of talking about Rosewood? If you were, McDonald, going to write a paragraph or two, how would one read that paragraph? How would you like to see the first two paragraphs, as relates to Rosewood? I say that because a lot of times when people read history, and they know they have been a part of that history, they sometimes remark, "That wasn't the way that it happened. That is a misrepresentation of the truth." So, how would you describe Rosewood in 1923?

Answer: First of all, if I was writing, the very first paragraph would begin with factual information. The most accurate data stating the time of the event, what the event was centered around, and I guess because of the sensitivity of it, it would have to be done in such a light that this is a part of history that, indeed, did happen, but we don't want it to happen again. So I think it would have to be very explicit in explaining the ordeal itself.

Interviewer: It is not my intent to put you on the spot. I am very sensitive to the way things are written and I certainly don't want to, if I were a researcher, to misrepresent individuals, and if I had a feeling of how they would present the circumstances and how they would be comfortable with what is written. I often ask how-so that we can gauge what we are doing as researchers with those who know something significant about a particular event-in this case Rosewood.

McDonald: If you rephrase that and said what would I have expected from the state of Florida, and I guess I can still put it in that same content because along with that I think it should be known that I would like to see a written apology, I would like for it

be acknowledged by the state of Florida that it did happen. These are facts that I'm stating. But not just acknowledging it, it's going to have to be

Question: Could you tell me if your mother knew anything about the situation with Fannie Taylor? I know we talked about Fannie Taylor, but nothing in particular like an assault as it relates to starting the Rosewood incident?

Answer: The fact that she accused a Black man of raping her. And of course, word traveled through the community that this was not the case but that her lover had assaulted her. From that point on, other than that information, I can't share anymore with you.

Interviewer: Mrs. McDonald, I really appreciate the opportunity to interview you. The interview is an opportunity for us to again document the Rosewood incident and we really thank you for taking time out of your busy schedule, coming from Tampa to spend a weekend with us to talk about Rosewood.