

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Thomas-Ward House

Personal Experiences

O.H. 1822

KATHRYN WEDDELL

Interviewed

by

Elaine Fowler

on

May 31, 1996

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

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INTERVIEWEE: KATHRYN WEDDELL

INTERVIEWER: ELAINE FOWLER

SUBJECT: Thomas-Ward House

DATE: May 31, 1996

F: This is an interview with Kathryn Weddell for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program by Elaine Fowler at 1101 Lantern Lane in Niles, Ohio on May 30 at approximately 2:40 p.m.

What do you remember about your parents and family?

W: My parents...all I remember is that my father left when I was eleven years old. I only remember my mother mostly. We lived closed to the Thomas House. That's where we were raised, on East Third Street.

F: What street?

W: Third Street. East Third Street. I don't remember too much about my father. He left five children.

F: And those children names are?

W: Well, the oldest brother was Darrell and he is deceased now. He was only eleven years old. Then I am next, Kathryn Pollard Weddell. Then my sister Garnet, Henrietta Pollard Smith, my brother James William Pollard, and my youngest brother Robert Edward Pollard. My father's name or my maiden name was Pollard.

F: Tell me something about your childhood. How you met the Waddel's?

W: We used to get in trouble when we crossed the street and go back there and swing on the

gate. The caretaker, who we called Old Mr. Rob, was crippled in one leg. Mrs. Waddell sent him down to tell us to get off the gate. We were allowed to roller skate on that sidewalk that was right across the street from our house. We would go back sometimes, to where the Jaycees have that haunted house, as long as we didn't get in the flowers. Seriously, after Mrs. Waddell found out that my mother was left a widow with five children, she sympathized with mom and tried to help her out. She sent groceries sometimes. At Christmas time she always send candy and even some money for mom to go buy toys for us. Then she found out that Garnet and I wanted to take dancing lessons and she bought us our shoes. I'm not sure if she paid for the lessons, but we would go back there and dance for her and Mr. Waddell on the back porch. I can still picture them sitting there on the old rockers watching us dance and sing for them. When we were younger than that our father taught us how to sing. He and my mother were beautiful ballroom dancers.

F: That was when?

W: I think I was five or six years old. We were there a couple of years before he left. My father trained up to perform. My sister and myself would sing and dance for the Odd Fellows Club. Mother would remember more about where we went to sing and dance then I would. I can remember us having to stand up on benches to sing because we were small. We were allowed to go back there as long as we didn't misbehave. She sent an African American lady to bring us an apple, sucker, or candy. Mr. Waddell would take him to the bank every morning, and we would wave to him and then he would wave back. He had this stick. What was it called?

F: A walking stick.

W: Yes, a walking stick. He would always wave at us with that. It had pearl and black on it. We thought it was a thrill to have him wave back. Mrs. Waddell would go by and wave, too.

F: Were there any other children in the neighborhood?

W: Not at first. I don't think there was. The Waddell's didn't have any. There were no children that moved there until I was thirteen.

F: Did they have any children?

W: No, they didn't have any children.

F: How long did you live there?

W: I lived there when I was married. I was married at 18. Eleven years, but mom lived there after I left.

F: Did you go to school?

W: I went to Garfield.

F: What was it like?

W: Well, I thought it was very nice. I do believe that some of the teachers helped mother out. Ms. Walsh used to have the kids bring the tree and all the trimmings to mother, and that really did help out.

F: When you went to grade school, what was a typical day like?

W: Well, we would naturally wake up and have our rolled oats. We would have that every morning for breakfast. Everything was rush, rush, rush. We didn't have a furnace in that house. We had a coal stove in what they called a parlor. Later on though, when I was thirteen, mom got one of those fuel oil heaters. It was coal stoves, though. Mom had something like what was at the Thomas House.

F: So, you had breakfast every morning?

W: Yeah.

F: Did you walk or ride to school?

W: We walked, because it was just across the street. You just cross Main Street and walk one block and then there's the school.

F: What school was that?

W: It was Garfield Elementary. We all walked. We used to have really cold winters. I remember that my sister once lost her shoe and she walked all the way home with her foot in the snow.

F: Was there a middle school?

W: I went to Edison. That's where I graduated from.

F: Then it became Niles McKinley?

W: They built a new one. The new one was built after I left. I graduated in 1944.

F: All the records went there?

W: Yes.

F: Did you go to college?

W: No, I didn't. As soon as I graduated I got a job in Taylor Wynfield up in the office. I only stayed there one year because I got married.

F: What type of training did you receive there?

W: On the job training as a secretary. It was filing and typing. I wanted to be a nurse. So, in high school I took a lot of biology and stuff. My aunt that lived in New Castle was a nurse. She talked me into nursing, but then I got married.

F: What were the 1930's like?

W: I don't remember. I was only four years old.

F: I was thinking along the lines of the Depression.

W: I don't remember too much about the Depression. You should ask mom. She knows a lot about it. I remember she said that we were on welfare because me father didn't work. Oh, I remember. I don't remember being hungry or without clothing or anything.

F: Do you remember WWII?

W: My husband and I were only married six months and he got drafted by the Navy.

F: What did you do at this time?

W: I went back up north with my mother. My mail would always go to the Weddell's and Old Mr. Rob had to bring it down.

F: So you knew the Weddell's for quite some time then.

W: Yes. I was married quite young and then we moved to Mineral Ridge. I went back to live with my mother until my husband got back. He was gone eighteen months. I went to California to be with him and that is when I became pregnant with my first child. When we came back we lived with mother just a few months and then bought a home in Mineral Ridge. We lived there for thirteen years and then built a home off of Vienna Road across from the cemetery. And we've lived here for thirteen years.

F: What was a typical day like when you were sixteen or seventeen?

W: I used to babysit after school. Basically I had typical days by getting up and going to school. Of course, mom was already working at Packard, and me being the oldest girl, I got up and made rolled oats for the kids before I went to school. A lot of times I had to stop after school at the super market to buy groceries for supper. I never cooked supper

because mom was home by then. That was more or less a typical day. On the weekends I went to play with friends and roller skate. Mom always sent us to church, but she never went there herself.

F: You mentioned that you used to go down to the Waddell's, but you were always told to stay out. Did you ever go down and visit the gardens.?

W: Yea. Mr. Rob took us in the greenhouse and in the barn. We tried to be careful. After Old Mr. Rob died Mr. Harris came in and lived in the house back there. All the caretakers lived in a lovely home in the back. He would let us come in there once in awhile and look at the flowers. We didn't go up there all the time. I was never taken through the house. We usually just stayed in the kitchen. Mrs. Waddell let us go in the parlor.

F: Did you go with your brothers and sisters when Mr. Waddell died?

W: Mom took all five of us. We all went. I can still remember going up those stairs. We was just laying there with his eyes closed. He was always such a distinguished gentleman. She was a pretty lady.

F: Does anything stand out in your mind about that event?

W: I didn't get too close. I said behind mother.

F: How old were you?

W: I'm trying to remember what year he died. I don't know. Maybe I was eleven or twelve.

F: When you visited Mr. Rob, did he ever mention anything about the flowers he grew?

W: No, I don't think so. He just told us to stay out of them.

F: Did they have any formal gardens?

W: Yeah. It was just like it is now. I remember he let us sit under the tree and long as we didn't get wild.

F: Does any significant event undermine you living there? Did anything happen in the area?

W: Other than Mr. Waddell's death, I don't know. When Mrs. Waddell died I was living in Ridge maybe even California.

F: What about the Thomas'?

W: The Thomas' lived there, yeah. We never got to know them very well.

F: Was that before he came Congressman?

W: It must have been, because he lived there. I think he was married.

F: Did anything happen in Niles like a president coming to visit?

W: The only thing I remember, and we didn't live on Third Street, was the KKK. Mayor Tom Smith had one arm. He was a nice man.

F: What happened? Did they just march?

W: I think they just marched through town. Mom would let us go out, but I think my father went. There was a big fire. The HH Hoffman store burnt down. That was in 1950

F: Looking back through the history, do you see any significant changes that you would like to have redone or that haven't benefited Niles?

W: The vidock needs redone. It must be as old as me.

F: That would be the 1920's?

W: Yeah. It was built when I was real small.

F: Do you ever remember it flooding in that area?

W: No. Real good friends of my parents did. The man died in the flood down on First Street. It runs right by the river.

F: There hasn't been any flooding since?

W: Not that I recall.

F: That was a major flood?

W: Oh, yes. That was 1918. I wasn't even born yet. I'm just going by what mom told me.

F: Is there anything else that you feel is important to add?

W: I should talk to mother again and get more facts. I remember Lou Tabor, they were African American and such a lovely family, they lived out in a train. In a boxcar. There were three boys and the father worked with my father. There were three sons and the youngest drowned by the chemical plant in a pond. It is close to Kerr Cemetery. My

father tried to jump in to save him but it was too late.

F: Well, thank you very much.

End of interview.