

## **Oaklands Neighborhood Oral Histories**

Interviewer: Kerri Taylor

Interviewee: English Showalter

Date: May 13, 2017

Location: Chevy Chase Maryland, English's home.

Transcribed by: Kerri Taylor

Duration: 1:05:26

KT

0:00- Today is May 13<sup>th</sup>, 2017 and I am going to interview English Showalter. We are in Chevy Chase, Maryland, and I am at his home and first I am going to ask him about his childhood, so can you tell me about your childhood?

ES:

0:15- Anything more specific than my childhood?

KT

0:19- Uh, what it was like growing up.

ES

0:20- Well I was born in Roanoke in 1935. May 14<sup>th</sup> actually, almost my birthday today. (phone rings- we pause the recorder) is it going again? Okay

KT

0:38 – Sorry the phone rang.

ES:

0:41- Um and my family lived in South Roanoke. I was the first child in my family. For the first two years approximately of my life, which I have no memory of at all, we lived in an apartment on Avenham Avenue, about a block away from where my father's father lived and in between one of my father's brother's family lived, and then we moved when I was two years old—I think because my mother was expecting my brother—to a house, still only about 4 blocks away on what was then called Lafayette Avenue, which is now Longview Avenue., also in South Roanoke.

We lived there, I lived there really all the time I spent in Roanoke. My parents moved around 1960 to another house about a half a block away higher up Longview Avenue. When I first lived there it was 525 Lafayette Avenue and by the time I left it was 2619 Longview Avenue, but it was the same house and the same place.. I went to a private kindergarten when I was four

called Mrs. Genheimer's and it was over on the other side of South Roanoke and I have very few real memories about that. Most of what I remember from these years is when I did something and got scolded for it, so I remember a day when we were supposed to be talking about things in class and I couldn't get my two bits in and so I screamed and said, "I want to talk!" and I got punished for that. And another time, I and a bunch of my friends were playing with the blocks there and we built an airplane and the teacher came over and said, "What is this?" and we said, "it's an airplane!" and she said, "What are you going to do with it?" and we said we were going to "drop some bombs on Germany." This would have been in 1939 or 1940, so early news of the war. She said, "No, no, no, no. These are going to be food bombs; you're just going to drop food for people. You don't want to blow things up." And I was extremely annoyed about that.

By this time, I had a little brother; he was born when I was 2.5 years old. My best friend in those years was a little girl who lived next door. Her name was Mary Ann Pickett. She was a year older than I was, but we played together all of the time and I guess the depression or something had stopped temporarily the development of residential area in Southwest Roanoke and so behind our house was a big patch of woods that had no houses on it or anything. It does now, but I think it had just been abandoned because people couldn't afford new houses and things. So that was our playground and we climbed trees and made paths and chased little animals and caught snakes and box turtles. Got poison ivy, did all sorts of things like that.

I went to Mrs. Genheimer's school for two years and then went to public school at Crystal Spring. I went in at six years old, but I went into the second grade and I went there through the seventh grade, so very large part of my childhood in Roanoke was spent in Crystal Spring School. I have a lot of memories of that, nothing very important it seems to me. Kind of every other year I liked my teacher and the alternate years I hated my teacher.

After that for the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> grade I went to Lee Jr. High School, which I think no longer exists. It was downtown, on Franklin Road, right near the Appalachian Power building corner and 2nd street I think. It was a big change from Crystal Spring where almost everybody lived within walking distance of it, well not quite everybody, there were some students that were bussed in., whereas at Lee Jr. they came from all over the city and I had to take a bus to and from school or street car, which were still running at the time. The circle of people that I came into contact with was considerably different from what it had been in Crystal Spring. The most vivid example of that is that in one year, in my home room class, I was sitting in an assigned desk near the back of the room and the student who had the desk next to mine was named Sammy, and he had an Eastern European last name—I forgot what exactly it was, but he looked a whole lot older than he really was and he really was at least one year older than anybody else in the class, and therefore two years older than me. He had actually run away and enlisted in the Marines when he was fifteen years old, lying about his age, and then they had found out that he was younger than he was supposed to be, so they threw him out of the marines and he had to go back to school.

Every-day he brought two beers for lunch, but he was afraid that the teacher would look in his desk, so he gave them to me and I kept them in my desk because she never looked at my desk. It was also, well, as you could guess from that, there were some fairly tough kids in the school. And one of the ways that I avoided being bullied or picked on, because I was much smaller than most of the other kids, boys or girls, was in the first class in the day, which was a history class if I recall, it may be social studies, we would have homework assignments and there were about three people in the class who actually did the assignment, me being one of them. When we would get to class, the first thing to do would be to give it to the person next to us, who would copy it, and then they would hand the two copies to two other people, and within a fairly short time, everybody in the class has a copy of the homework to turn in. As long as I didn't resist doing that, everybody was happy enough to leave me alone.

We had Physical Education classes where we had to walk from there over to Elmwood park where the library was, still is I guess, but in those days it was just an old house, the original Elmwood was a house that belonged to one of the old Roanoke families, the Tayloes maybe. In the park around it, we were instructed to play games of various kinds, one of which was touch football, but there were a number of kids in the class who played very rough, and so I didn't enjoy that. After a while, I and a friend of mine got in a habit of sneaking out of the class and going into the library. We would spend phys ed class in the library reading. I was very interested in tropical fish at the time. There was a beautiful book with illustrated pictures of tropical fish, so I would look at these pictures and daydream about owning those fish.

At the end of 9<sup>th</sup> grade I was sent away to prep school, and I never lived in Roanoke for lengthy periods after that. I came back in the summers for vacations and shorter vacations like Christmas and Spring Break and things like that. I did spend one other year at home because I had been sick, and had to drop out of college for a year, but that's really the end of my time in Roanoke, so I was fourteen, it was 1949 the last year that I was really a resident of Roanoke.

KT

12:16- So How does where you live now differ from where you grew up? Or your memories of it.

ES

12:25- Well it differs in so many ways that it is almost impossible to describe. I think of it every now and then. I suppose this were the year I was born, 1935, and I were somebody the age I am now, when would I have been born? The answer is 1853 and if you think about the changes that took place between 1853 and 1935, it is just about inconceivable. Everything electric did not exist in 1853. Of course slavery did still exist. There were lots and lots of other major inventions like the internal combustion engine and the steel and steel frame construction that enabled buildings to be built higher than five or six stories so that the whole landscape of the country really changed rapidly. Most of municipal systems, like sewers and running water, and obviously electrification, all that came in in that period. In some ways I think probably the change is as inconceivable to someone born now from what it was like when I was born. Although to me, having lived through it, it never seemed very dramatic. There was never a moment when I said, "oh, everything is different now!"

Some things that happened, which I remember a great deal about, like the second World War, were really earth shattering events, especially if you were in Europe where the war was going on, or in parts of Asia and the Pacific where it was going on, and there were very noticeable things that happened in Roanoke. There was rationing so that lots of things that people take for granted became scarce. You had to have ration coupons for gasoline, you had to have ration coupons for tires, so automobile travel was greatly reduced, except for people who were deemed necessary for the war effort. Various kinds of food were considered to be scarce and there was a shortage of things like sugar, and tropical fruits, oranges, this kind of thing. And candy and bubble gum, I don't know if there was any real reason for them to be scarce or not, but as kids, they were very rare.

One of my friends at Crystal Spring at some point got as a present a little box that had twenty five pieces of bubble gum in it and he was selling them to classmates—they cost a penny each, I think at the time—and he was selling them I think for a quarter. In anycase, the principal of the school found out about this, called him into her office and bawled him out and told him he was running a black market and this was profiteering. He was about eight or nine years old. Sort of at the end, when rationing ended, things began to come back. I got caught because it was Lent, I don't know what church you were brought up in, but in the Episcopal Church we were told we had to give up something for the forty days of Lent, so I had been giving up candy, there wasn't any difference, because there wasn't any candy anyway. This year I gave up candy and all of a sudden there were Hershey bars everywhere. So I was very distressed and my mother finally agreed with my conscience that I would buy it, but I wouldn't eat it until the end of Lent, so I had this big stash of candy bars and when Lent ended I ate it all and got sick and I've really never liked it much since. So it was a good thing in the long run. I like that.

We also did things like air raid drills and my father was a warden, and I don't know how often, but often enough so I remember it happening repeatedly, he would go out in the evening and we had heavy oil-cloth curtains that we would pull down that completely blocked out any light and we couldn't even have any lights on. We had blue light bulbs that we could use and he would go out with other wardens and each one of them had a couple of blocks that they patrolled and checked to make sure all the lights were out and everybody was paying attention and they would sound a siren at the beginning and end. This was all in the event of an attack by air, which of course, I think was never remotely a possibility. What are some of the others?

Well we had a victory garden, that was another thing, which I learned sometime after the war was totally unnecessary, but was meant to give people a sense of participating. So, there was also a big area at the lower part of Longview Avenue that was undeveloped, it's got apartment buildings on it now, but it was just fields then. And so it had been taken over, and we had what the British would call an allotment, which is just a little patch of ground that doesn't belong to you but you have the right to grow flowers or vegetables in it. So we had one of these and every day, or every couple of days at least, we would go down with tools, seeds, and plant and we grew, I don't know, radishes, lettuce, and carrots, things like that. Considered part of that our contribution to winning the war.

We also had a thing called Junior Commandos, which meant that every Saturday I would go out with a little wagon and go around the neighborhood and pick up spare grease, which was presumably used for making munitions in some way. Most of the families in that neighborhood had maids. A few didn't, but I knew all of the families' maids, and I went by and picked up a bucket of grease in a container and we took it to school on Monday and it was presumably poured into a bigger container. I don't know what the grease was coming from because they didn't have bacon then. That was another war time scarcity. After the war, everybody had tons of bacon grease, but in those days, I'm not sure what it was.

KT 21:03

KT

21:03- So in the Virginia Room, I've seen a few maps with your family's name on it: Showalter, on big estates, I was wondering if your family still owns any property in Roanoke?

ES

21:16- I think the answer to that is really no. The Showalters never did own huge amounts of land in Roanoke. My mother's family, who were named Watts, did own a really really large plantation that covered most of what is now the northern part of Roanoke City and a big chunk on the Eastern side that I think included everything North of the Roanoke River in the Eastern part of Roanoke, but that was when there wasn't any Roanoke, it was Big Lick and as Big Lick grew into something more like a city, and the family divided up, the owner, who was a single person at one point, divided it up among his four children and then the one who owned the largest part passed it on to direct descendants who didn't have brothers and sisters to split it up, but that family still owns a decent part of it. My father liked to buy business properties, but they were never residential things. He owned a couple of buildings in Salem that were rented to stores, some pieces of undeveloped property on route 460, but it was in Salem and things like that. And in the very old days, if you're looking at the Hildebrand maps, he had plotted onto a modern map the land holdings in 1850, or something like that, and there was a Showalter who owned not a very large, but a piece of land at that time, but I don't know what kin he is to me. It was not a direct ancestor.

KT

24:15- Okay.

ES

24:16- Very likely an uncle. You know? A cousin of an uncle or something.

KT

24:23- So when you were in Roanoke, were there any existing black or white communities at the time?

ES

24:29- Umm yes. I mean there was a large black population who lived mainly in the area that was just North of the railroad tracks and running on to the West of the Southern edge of the Watts plantation. There's a stream that runs along the end that was kind of the dividing line, and it ran on out to the city limit. Most of that area was predominantly, if not entirely, black. There were very, very large numbers of them who worked in other parts of the city, including South Roanoke. As I said before, most of the people that we picked up grease from on Saturdays had maids and those maids were, I think 100% black. They all took the streetcar, from South Roanoke to their area of town and they all knew each other from riding on the street car and things together and social life that they had in their churches and things like that. But they also knew each other in the neighborhood because they spent a lot of time outdoors and I guess they got to know each other back and forth and so I knew everybody else's maid as well as our own. It's the maids who really, I mean in the tradition of the Southern mammy type thing, they really brought up the children. They were nannies as well as cooks and cleaners. There were also a lot of men who did thing like yard maintenance, yard work.

in the early days, we had a coal burning furnace and there was a man who would come every morning before dawn, and put coal into the furnace so that it would heat up before the family got up and I think he had a string of houses that he did that for. All I know about it is that his name was Mose and I'm not sure I ever saw him, but I remember well my family talking about him. That gradually changed. I mean one of the things that I have seen changed was in my earliest years, it was a coal town. Railroad brought the coal and transshipped it to the Roanoke yards and things like that. Everybody had a coal furnace and the first big step towards progress was everybody got a stoker that only had to be filled once every three or four days and that put people like Mose out of business because they had a stoker and didn't need to have someone come every-day.

In those intermediate years when I guess I was in Crystal Spring, one of my jobs was to go down every two and three days and fill up my grandmother's stoker and then eventually, everybody shifted to oil furnaces. I think I was gone from Roanoke by the time that happened. I grew up very much aware of the railroads because our house, it was high enough up on the hill so you could see across the valley. You could see to Round Hill, which was on the Watts plantation, but it was in hearing distance of the Virginian Railway Yards. The Norfolk & Western bought the Virginian Railway, but the big railroad yard that's close to the river between Jefferson Street and Franklin Road, that was the Virginian Railroad all the time I was in Roanoke and it was a big yard where they unhitched the locomotives that brought it down from West Virginia and hitched it on to a different one and took it on down to Norfolk. We could hear the sounds, the 'chuh fuh chuh fuh' sound of the steam engines, which I still find very relaxing and soothing. I don't hear it much anymore, but I quite like it and any railroad sound. It's been awhile since I was in Roanoke, but I like to stay in the hotel Roanoke because it was close to the railroad and you could hear the trains going by and I like that.

KT

30:37- Was there any neighborhood segregation or segregation at all during the time that you were lived in Roanoke?

ES

30:44

Oh, it was total. It was the law.

KT

30:46

Can you describe some of that?

ES

30:49

Well you know, I was hardly aware of it until I got to be a teenager, and around that time I wasn't living in Roanoke anymore. I mean, for the most part, people accepted it and just didn't pay much attention to it. There were things that black people were forbidden to do and there were things that white people were not supposed to do because it would interfere with the smooth operating of the system. As kids, I and my friends used to violate all the time, the rule that was posted in all public transport: "whites to front, colored to rear", I don't know if you've ever seen one of those signs or not, but all of the street cars and buses had a notice like that posted on it somewhere and we wanted to go sit in the back, so we did, although, if it got to be fairly crowded, we would occasionally be asked by one of the black riders to move up to our own part.

The most obvious incident that I ever had any contact with, I don't know what year this would have been, it must have been in the 1950's and probably the year I was home because of being sick, which would have been '53, '54. One of the black churches got together with St. John's Episcopal Church, which was my family's church and they worked together on producing some kind of musical production, whether it was a choir recital or performance of a musical, something like that. I think all of the performers in it were from the black community and the white church provided financial support and helped pay for the sets and the costumes and lighting and this kind of thing. Anyway, most of the people that I knew disapproved of segregation, wished it did not exist, were happy to see it go when it did go. This was a way of—they thought—of avoiding it and doing something that showed inter-racial cooperation and so forth, but it was against the law to have the audience unsegregated and the plan had been that nobody was going to say anything about it and they were going to go in and sit together, and somebody reported it and so they were forced to drop that plan—it was a terrible crisis, I mean everybody was dismayed because it undid the whole spirit of the whole thing. I think what they finally did was agree to have an imaginary line down the middle so in fact there were going to be in every row whites and blacks sitting next to each other, but they would all be the same to either side and you know, my family was just distraught about it. This person had intervened and wrecked this plan.

But other than that, I had been gone for several years before the Supreme court decision desegregating the schools came into effect, and the school I went to in this area, Episcopal High School in Alexandria was as segregated a school as you can imagine. Episcopal High School basically had white southerners in it, boys, all boys.

KT

35:43- Can you describe the difference between the segregation here and in Alexandria?

ES

35:49- Now?

KT

35:50- No. When you went to the high school—from what you had experienced from what you grew up in Roanoke.

ES

35:56- Well when I was in the high school, I don't think we ever saw a black person. There were certainly none in the student body, and there were none in the faculty. There may have been some who were working in things like grounds keeping or something, but I don't remember if they were there. I certainly had no significant contact with them and of course the state of Virginia where it is, was under the law of segregation then, so any of the places that I would have gone would have been segregated as well.

In the city of Washington, there was , I don't know what the legal situation was, but the segregation was just about the same as it was in Virginia There was a black area of town, which I never set foot in, and then there was the downtown area. I mean I did go, but we couldn't go in very much. In order to keep us from mingling with the townies, of course they weren't black, it was just because they were townies, we had our day off on Monday, when the local kids were in school. So Mondays, if we had behaved ourselves, we could come into Washington. We'd take the bus in, and what I normally did, I and my friends would take the bus in, and we would go to movies. There was a movie theatre in the area of Dupont Circle that showed double features of the Marx brothers and we would do that and we would eat at the White Tower, which was a little hamburger joint and have five hamburgers and see two Marx brothers movies and that would be our day in Washington.

Sometimes we did something else, nothing ever very educational. It wasn't like we came in and went to the Museum of Natural History or anything, but the big theatres at that time, movie theatres, had live stage shows and so sometimes you could go to the movie and they had these big Wurlitzer organs and things like that. Every now and again there was a show that we wanted to see in one of those and I remember vividly going to hear a singer named Frankie Laine, you ever hear of Frankie Laine?

KT

38:51- Maybe.

ES

38:53- Well before you were born, in the late 1940's, early 1950's, he had two big hits kind of right in a row. One was called *Lucky Old Sun* "up in the mornin', out on the job, work like the devil for my pay." Play it on Youtube and you can hear it, and the other one was called Mule



Train, and he came and did a show in the movie in Washington, so we went to it, but those movie theatres were all segregated. Walking on the streets, there would've been some black people walking on the streets, but way below the proportion of the black population of the city.

KT

39:49- So we are going to move a little away from that topic and we are going to move more towards this question: What does the word Oaklands mean to you?

ES

39:59- Well, Oaklands was the name of the plantation that my, I think it is three great grandfather built on the, in the Northern part of the area that is now Roanoke County. The time he built it, which was around 1818, Roanoke County was still a part of Botetourt County and the only settlement immediately close to it was Big Lick, which was barely more than a crossroads with a couple of shacks by it. Salem was the main town in the area, it was an important stop on the road from the East through the Cumberland gap out into the Midwest, so there was heavy, heavy traffic of settlers who a lot of them came down the Shenandoah Valley and others came just from the East and across where route 460 is now from Lynchburg, and then they went on West through Salem and Christiansburg and all that where the interstate goes now.

My personal memories of Oaklands are that I had a relative that lived there we called Aunt Dolly. I made you a list of the people who lived at Oaklands. Follow this, and if you come down

KT

41:51- Thank you. Right now we are looking at the list.

ES

41:53- Yeah, if you look down it number 321 William Watts, and he married Ellen Catogni and she was Aunt Dolly. The Catognis and I guess it's an Italian name, I guess they were of Italian origin, and he was a grocer and they bought a piece of land that had been a part of Oaklands near Round Hill, and so I guess that's how they happened to know each other and they ran off and got married because I think her father didn't approve or something. In any case, they were happily married, although he died fairly young, he was only fifty and she lived on another forty years. So all the time I knew her, she was a widow and they had one son, William Watts, my mother's first cousin. He was my mother's age, so I didn't know him very well, but I had some contact with him. We used to go out a lot to see Aunt Dolly and it was a place where I could play and it was a place between, well, the house that Michael lives in, that was aunt Dolly's house and from there over to Round Hill, was all cornfields. and there was a little cemetery there that was moved to Fairview back in the 1970's when they developed it. All the shopping malls on the other side of the interstate are built upon what was farmland in those days and a good deal of the development around 10<sup>th</sup> street and out towards the airport, most of the houses there were built after the war.

At one point, almost all of that land had been part of Oaklands, but when I was alive and knew about it, it had been sharply reduced, but it was still quite a large farm and it was a working

farm. They had dairy cows in the barn behind down what was close to the creek and a vegetable garden that was down in the yard on the East side of the house and towards the rear, there was a huge vegetable and flower garden that Aunt Dolly kept. She had a black live in maid whose name is, we called her Rya but her name was Maria, and they lived there together for thirty years or something, just the two of them.

KT

45:24- So on your aunt's old house, where we live now, there is old, I want to say they are like old platforms, old foundations, have you seen those when you went down there?

ES

45:40- I may have done, but I don't remember it.

KT

45:45- Okay.

ES

45:49- The house that you're in was built around 1917. There was a house before there that burned down around 1897, I think it was because number thirty-two on the list, John Allen Watts, decided— he was the owner of it—and decided to develop it in the 1890s, which was a boom period for Roanoke; it tripled in size every ten years over a couple of decades. He turned it over to a land development company and they sold off pieces of it and some of the houses along 10<sup>th</sup> street, what I knew as 10<sup>th</sup> street extension, were some of the original chunks taken out of Oaklands and sold to other people.

Some of those people, the Hunt family, married into one of the families that is related to me. There's another one whose name I forgot, one of the big houses that's still there right at the end of Rockland across 10<sup>th</sup> street, there's a big old house there, and it was built in this period. The Catognis were one of the people who moved into the area during this period. If you look at that book I gave you, it talks about this to get some idea. They laid out some streets and so forth, but the boom came to an end and it reverted to the Watts family so that Oakland development company went bankrupt, but the land came back into the Watts family and that is why my Aunt Dolly was living there. Her son, another William Watts, moved into the other little building, I think it used to be a barn when I was little, or a shed, they had farm vehicles in there, onions to dry, and things like that.

KT

48:24- So it was a plantation, was it ever a slave owning plantation?

ES

48:28- Oh yes. One of the largest slave owning plantations, maybe the largest in Roanoke County. Up here at the top of the list, Elizabeth Breckinridge, the Breckinridge family lived in Botetourt County, kind of just the other side of Tinker Mountain, and they owned another very

large Plantation up there, which I think was the largest, or one of the two or three largest in Botetourt County. So yes, they definitely were slave owners.

KT

49:12- Do you have any idea what the numbers were?

ES

49:16- I could look it up and tell you, I think, but I don't know right off, I would say somewhere around one hundred, but I'm not certain about that.

KT

49:32- So I know you've done research on some of this stuff, what was something that was appealing to you when you began your research? Or even as you went through it.

ES

49:46- Well, appealing about them or appealing about me doing the research? Because they are two different things. I mean I love looking at old papers, deciphering old handwriting and things like that, so.

KT

50:01- Appealing in the sense of the information you were gathering.

ES

50:04- Well I liked very much, discovering the background of a lot of things that I had seen and known, and heard about when I was young and grew up surrounded by people I had known that I had no idea how they were connected to me, and found out about it through doing this. A lot of people that my parents had talked about, sort of names that I'd heard now and then, but until I was quite old, I never much paid attention to kinship systems. My mother used to go see somebody, whose name wasn't a real name, but everybody called her Beauty, and her last name was Persinger. I had no idea who they were. There is a street in Roanoke named Persinger and they lived on the street and they owned a fairly big piece of land called Persinger and they are in some distant way kin to me and I was really pleased to find that out.

I love maps and I really enjoy reading the documents about how Edward Watts put together the plantation, bought other pieces of land and in some cases traded one piece for another piece and sort of assembled this enormously large estate that is the plantation. And it was really interesting to me, I knew absolutely nothing about it, about what they grew on the plantation, what the crops were. In the early days it was possible to grow things and make a living there, but later, just economically wasn't feasible. Things like wheat, one of the big products was flour. They grew the wheat and they milled the flour and then they shipped the flour to Richmond, where there was big market, but the quantities that you can grow in the Roanoke area are just too small to make it viable product in this day and age. But it must have lasted a fairly long time

because there was, until fairly recently, there was the Roanoke City Mill, it's on Jefferson Street, near ... do you know where Victory Stadium was? Right there, there is probably still a stadium there.

KT

53:12- No.

ES

53:11- Well, you know where Jefferson Street is?

KT

53:16- I'm really bad at directions. Apparently I suck at geography.

ES

53:18- Well Jefferson Street is the main street in Roanoke and it runs from the middle of downtown, comes straight up.

KT

53:26- By the Virginia Room?

ES

53:27- Beside the Virginia Room, yeah.

KT

53:30- I know, I know.

ES

53:31- If you keep going down that, you come to a bridge that goes over the Virginian Railroad Tracks, the round arch bridge, and just on the other side of that, on the left side of Jefferson Avenue as you go South toward Southwest Roanoke, there was a flour mill that was called the Roanoke City Mills and it had I think four big, concrete, sort of silo-like towers that they stored the grain and the flour and stuff in, and they produced I think what it was called was Metropolitan and Light White Flour. It was one of those brands they sell. In any case, it was a functioning business through most of my childhood and at some point they had a fire there and they had to spray water all over the flour and those things and it rotted and produced the worst stench that you can ever imagine. It must have gone out of business quite some time ago, but I don't know if it was ever demolished, I don't know what they did with it. You should go look at it, if you're interested in this kind of stuff.

KT

54:55- Yeah, I'll go drive down the street and I'll let you know.

ES

55:00- So anyway, I was very much interested in knowing the background of the past, and you know, I have a lot of admiration for the life that these people lived, and they were pioneers when they came to the area. There was nothing there, hacked it out of the woods. I don't think there were any Native Americans left by that time in this area, at least not in numbers sufficient to be any sort of threat. One of the children, twenty second on the list, Mary Scott Watts, the Gamble family, who had been living in Richmond, moved to Florida and she went to stay with them and fell in love with her first cousin and they married and that was still Indian country. There were Indian raids on the settlers and she wrote back that Andrew Jackson put an end to that, but the hardships of life, I mean look at the ten children and the number of them that died very young, is quite striking and is very different from modern age. The chances of survival were limited and the son William Watts, who carried on the line, his wife Mary Jane Allen died when she was thirty.

So, it is also very interesting to read about their engagements in the politics and things of their time. Edward Watts was a general, it was a title he got in the war of 1812 because he was in the Virginia Militia; he was a high ranking figure in the Virginia militia and up until after the Civil War, the United States didn't have a standing army, the different states had militias. That's why there is a second amendment, so that people could arm themselves to join the state militias. They never had any clue that it was going to be applied to some of the things that it is applied to now. But then William Watts, his son, was a colonel in the civil war, which meant that he raised a regiment in the area and went off and led it and they fought in Northern Virginia and in the Peninsula Campaigns. I don't think William Watts, number 321, I'm not sure, I don't think he fought in World War 1, but his son was in World War 2 and then did a station in the Aleutian Islands in Alaska. They talk in the materials that I've looked at, they do talk about issues in the day, there was a lot of anguish about the events leading up to the civil war and they were all in the party that did not want secede, they wanted to find a compromise, but they all still felt much more loyalty to the state then they did to the federal government, and so when the state seceded, they went along with that.

KT

59:52- So I've interviewed a few people asking them what the word Oaklands means to them, and they don't know what it is. Back when you were growing up, did anyone know what Oaklands was? Was that still an alive idea, or was it kind of people just didn't know what it was unless someone told them?

ES

1:00:12- I think outside of the family and maybe a few close friends, nobody knew.

KT

1:00:17- So it's not surprising that nobody knows?

ES

1:00:20- No. I don't think, no, unless they were history buffs, they wouldn't know because well beginning in 1890, even really beginning before that, it would be broken up, but it, I think in 1890

is roughly when John Allen Watts, number 32 there, he was a lawyer and he's the one that set up the development company, he moved into downtown , well it's not downtown quite, the place they lived is totally gone now, it's also right down Jefferson Street, in an area known as Orchard Hill, but I think the hill has been totally leveled now. The Community Hospital has taken over the whole thing. It started Community Hospital was down at one end of it, but there used to be a residential community behind it and I think that is all gone, and that's where he lived.

KT

1:01:29- So is there anything else you'd like to add before we close the interview?

ES

1:01:32- I don't think so. I mean there is almost nothing you could ask me about Roanoke that I wouldn't probably be able to babble on for a while about. I was going to ask you, have you read a book called Truevine?

KT

1:01:53- No.

ES

1:01: 44- You should do that. It's about Roanoke. You might even be able to get in touch with the woman who wrote it, who I think maybe she must live somewhere close to it. Her name is Beth Macy. The basic story of it is about two albino black brothers who— Truevine is the name a little town , somewhere East of Roanoke—and they were according to the family story, they were kidnapped by a circus recruiter and displayed as freaks. This started back around 1900 I think, earlier than that maybe. In any case, their mother eventually went and found them and brought them home. It's a complicated story and I'm not going to tell you much more about it than that, but in their later years, they lived in Roanoke. They lived just off 10<sup>th</sup> street on the Southern side of the railroad tracks in a little black area up there, but it's a fascinating story and it talks a lot about the situation of blacks in Roanoke at the time. She says that Roanoke was one of the worst cities in the old south for segregation and mistreatment of blacks, which I think is an exaggeration and maybe worse than an exaggeration, maybe even just wrong, but there was in the 1890's a really terrible lynching in Roanoke that if you're interested in the history of Roanoke you can look up and read about. Somebody wrote a book about it and tried to figure out why this happened and said that J. Allen Watts, number 32, tried to be like Atticus Finch in *To Kill a Mockingbird* and went out to try to tell the crowd to go home. It didn't work, but he made the effort anyway. In any case, it's an interesting read and if you're doing a thing about the history of Roanoke you really ought to look at that, but other than that I won't say any more.

KT

1:05:05- Alrightie, well thank you so much for interviewing with me.

ES

1:05:07- Hope you've enjoyed it. I hope you get—is this your thesis or something or your project?

KT

1:05:26- Just a project that I'm working on.

ES

1:05:26- Just a project. Hope you get —top marks for your project.

KT

1:05:25- Well thank you.