

Oral History Interview with Ann Turner

Interviewer: Kerri Taylor

Interviewee: Ann Turner

Date: 6 April 2017

Location: Taylor's private residence

Duration: 45:26

Transcription prepared by: Kerri Taylor

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KT: Alright, today I am going to interview Ann Turner about her experiences in Northwest Roanoke and we are at her home and it is April 6, 2017.

0:13

KT: So I am going to start off by asking you to tell me about your childhood, can you tell me a little bit about that?

0:18

AT: Mmm yes. Well I'm originally from Pennsylvania. Grew up in Pennsylvania, near Philadelphia in a town called Redding, Pennsylvania. And I lived at a farm, but we were only 15 minutes from the city of Redding, so I was accustomed to a more rural type environment. We had animals and we raised our own food and so it was basically farm life you would say, but both of my parents worked out of the home, obviously my father, but my mother also did at certain times. My grandmother would come on the weekends and spend time with us, so I had the influence of her, both spiritual and also skills and so forth. She would sew for people and

during the week she lived with her daughter, my aunt, and so it was a very close knit family that we grew up with.

1:40

AT: Didn't have a lot of friends because of the location of where we lived. We were encouraged to be very open minded and to speak, think, and read a lot. We, I, I was an avid reader and I enjoyed knowing everything about the families (laughter). I wasn't exactly what you would say a gossip person, but I just asked a lot of questions because I wanted to know. And I had a lot of very strong interests and a passion in learning about how things come to be and why they work the way they did and what was going on, not so much that I was nosey, but uh curious would be more the way to describe it.

2:44

AT: I was not afraid to reach out to people. I have never known a stranger. I enjoy talking to people and interacting with people even though as a very young child that was not in my area. I didn't have that. I did go to church; I had a church life and although my parents were not involved, they would take me. I was pretty much, I just interacted with others in the church, so that was a big part of my life. I enjoyed that part. My grandmother was very avid at reading scriptures.

3:27

AT: My grandmother had a background, she was English and German and her parents were German. There was—and her in-laws were German, spoke German very, you know, fluently. So, that was a predominant. The old world culture would have been what I grew up with. This is what we expect, this is what we expect. And of course, the time period I grew up in was pretty strict as to what you would do and what was proper and that was most important to my parents and grandparents.

4:06

AT: There wasn't a lot of liberal thinking in my family. They were pretty strict, but that was good because I got to enjoy nature. I got, we would do farm activities, plus hiking around the property. I was very imaginative as far as persons like I was this person or I was that, you know sort of like a little actress type of thing and my parents were very acceptable to that. They would kind of just play along. My grandmother being a seamstress, she would kind of make little costumes and things and I would play out little roles. I loved to do flower decorating. I mean I would go out in the fields and collect the flowers and make arrangements. I just enjoyed that. So pretty much, and I would go periodically to my grandparent's

5:15

AT: My grandmother was English and she came this country when she was fourteen, so she had a lot of old world standards as well. My grandfather, he was a justice of the peace and he was also, he had his own nursery where he raised trees. In that point, we were, again, in nature and very open to the environment and the effects of the environment. Certain things you just would know do; you know? So I felt I had a better, I had a practical knowledge, but I was encouraged with him being a magistrate, I was encouraged to read, encouraged to advance my knowledge. Like If I had a question about something, it was, a common phrase would have been either from my parents or my grandparents, "well how 'bout looking it up?" or "how 'bout finding out why?" So that made me very much of an investigator so you might say.

6:25

AT: I didn't always trust people around me as I was growing up around me other than my family because I didn't know that they, I didn't have a lot of interaction so they may not be as safe. That

was the period and that was where I lived and was what I understood. That's pretty much, I had a very good childhood though. My grandparents would come and take me, probably like every other Sunday and we would do trips to their relatives, to my grandfather's relatives down in Philadelphia, which was not that far away from us, but it was very good and I learned a lot of cultural things. They were Irish and German so, and they had parties and things like that along the cultural lines. They also were the same way, very, we would do different kind of dances and we would sing different kind of songs and that sort of thing, and I loved that. That was very interesting to me.

7:36

KT: So would you say that this curiosity that you said that you had has carried into your life now?

7:42

AT: Oh yes, definitely.

7:43

KT: Has that influenced any of your knowledge seeking in this area?

7:49

AT: Yes, most definitely.

7:51

KT: How so?

7:52

AT: Well, because I wanted to know about the area, I read extensively about the area. At one point in my life I was a real-estate appraiser, so I had the opportunity to go to different properties, and in doing so with that I had to collect data and information that the average person probably wouldn't have done, and take pictures and note different things and that was very interesting to me, it was like I wasn't really working. I was having a good time just experimenting and exploring and I know of a number of you know, properties, but more so if I had an interest, I'd be researching. [I am] very familiar with the libraries that were available in the area for me to find—extensive use of libraries, before computers were so avidly used

8: 55

KT: So how long have you lived in Roanoke and have you always lived in the Northwest part of Roanoke?

9:01

KT: I've lived in Roanoke since 1976. 41 years. I came and lived for six months near Towers (a shopping center in Roanoke) and then moved over to this area and I've been over here. I lived over on Plantation and then lived in this area. I've been in this area for 29 years.

9:35

KT: So what—[interruption] sorry.

9:35

AT: No that's alright.

9:37

KT: So what brought you to Roanoke?

9:39

AT: Well, [laughing] I married. I divorced one husband and came to Roanoke and married another husband. Then divorced that husband and married again. So, I came to Roanoke because of the second husband's job.

10:08

KT: Okay. You said that you had lived at Plantation, near Towers and then you lived here. Is there a big difference in between those two areas?

10:16

AT: Oh yes. Did not like it over there.

10:20

KT: Can you describe to me why?

10:21

AT: Well because there's too many people. It was more relaxing; it was more relaxed over here. And I found people to be more friendly over here. I also found people to be, actually, I found people over on the other side of town to be more transient. Here they were more established. They were more family, community. I mean we have a very, very community oriented street. Not that we know everything about everybody, but we're very, very much a community.

11:00

KT: So with this sense of community, do you feel involved in your community?

11:07

AT: Hmm. Not as much as my husband is [laughter]. My husband is more interested and more involved. I'm just a high and by, but if something happens in my community I'm right there, whatever the need might be.

11:25

KT: Can you tell me about a time where you might have been at the community when the community needed you?

11:32

AT: Well yes, when my neighbor next door, not the present one, but when the neighbor next door, lighting hit her stove and it caught fire and it was smoking and I saw the smoke and called the fire department and of course was there because she was an older lady, so offered help there. Some of the other people moving in and out, sometimes they had—I'd walk up and down the street and maybe know a little bit about them and if they needed help or something to that effect. That would probably be the only thing. My neighbors across the street, both the gentleman across the street and the lady at the end of the street, they've been here for many years. I enjoyed hearing stories about the neighborhood and the area.

12:30

KT: What were some of the stories that they told you?

12:32

AT: Uh, just how the area had changed over the years and what was there at one time, and what was not here now and of course when my husband lived a little bit further down than where we are right now, and in his later life he spent quite a bit of time here and when he was younger too he talked about you know, this restaurant was here and this business was here. It was like this or it was like that.

13:05

KT: Did they ever mention any properties that were owned by some affluent families in the area?

13:11

AT: I don't think they were that interested. No.

13:16

KT: So it was more recent for their memory.

13:17

AT: It was more recent. I probably was the one that knew more about the properties that were older properties like the Petties and some of the other families that were down in this area and so forth. But no, I didn't know a lot. There was an old home on—I can't think of the name of this street at the moment, but anyway, when I worked, I worked for a while for the restaurant Macados as their administrative assistant and also I rented, I was a, I rented their properties as a rental agent and one of the Machers owned, bought a house down in this area. It was an older house and renovated.

14:08

KT: Um do you feel like you have a personal connection to where you live here and if so what is that connection? I know that you mentioned earlier that you really like nature and you like interacting with people but sometimes you're more withdrawn [Ann says the word here too] So do you feel like there's that connection there with either that the place that you're living or the community around you?

14:33

AT: Yes.

14:34

KT: Can you describe it to me?

14:36

AT: It's very comfortable, you can either interact with people or not and they're still going to wave to you and they're still going to be there. They're just not as demanding. They're just not as, I would not be the person with the coffee cup or tea cup going and sitting down and having a long conversation. That didn't ever occur to me to do that. The main reason being, I enjoy talking to old people who have been in an area for a long time and know a lot historically and so I like to explore that.

15:23

KT: Would you say that's from your curiosity as a child of wanting to know why things are the way they are and people encouraging you continuously look for the reasons?

15:33

AT: Yes. Yes. And history. I'm a Civil War reenactor, so I search it out, not just to know about it, but I search it out for the historical part of it.

15:51

KT: So this, the landscape around you, has it changed much since you've lived here? Since—you said 1974 right?

16:00

AT: Uh, 6 (1976)

16:00

KT: 6, 1976. Has it changed much?

16:04

AT: In some areas. Yes. In some areas it has. In some areas not as much.

16:10

KT: What areas? Has it changed?

16:11

AT: Um, I would say in the upper part between Hershberger and out towards Route 11. Up plantation, up Williamson Road, there's been a lot of changes in houses and so forth that are built behind what was present because the original was you know like the 1940's. Most of these except for some larger established plantations and so forth that were on the properties. I mean

one of the plantations, one of them was, it's called the plantation of [Roan?]. it used to be Sunny Brook Inn over on Plantation. That has quite a vivid history and German history. It's a restaurant. It's been a restaurant for many years. That was very interesting to me. Also the cemetery, the Petty Cemetery where there's a cartouche type of tomb there. Many things that are behind what you see on the surface. Markers, street markers for different, where there were different plantations in this area. There were a lot of plantations in this upper area.

17:42

KT: Does the name Oaklands mean anything to you? Does it ring a bell?

17:46

AT: I just know about it, I just don't know anything in particular.

17:53

KT: So you just know the name?

17:54

AT: I just know the name.

17:55

KT: Okay. So Oaklands was actually a slave plantation in the area and it's not too far from here and it was, it encompassed a lot of Northwest. So does it make you feel any different knowing that you're living in an area that used to have slaves in it?

18:13

AT: That was a culture of another time. They were here, I do not think a lot like Northerners where I'm from think (laughter). I think more like in the venue of Southerners in the fact that they were a necessary part of the family of a plantation. I go with the understanding that all people have value and that was a different culture and a different tie and a different responsibility. Women in general were not much different than slaves; they had their purpose and their responsibilities within family and the society was totally different. And no, it does not bother me. Slavery, I have a different thought on slavery than a lot of people do because not all people who were enslaved, who were slaves, were put under the duress that they were in other places. Virginia in particular, did not do that in a large percentage of time, they were very compassionate to slaves and in my opinion, no I wouldn't want to have been in that situation, but on the other hand, Virginia offered a lot better circumstances, some parts of Virginia, allowed a lot better circumstances for those who were slaves and it was much like for women and for men who did not have some of the skills of the financials that was a means to survive.

20:25

KT: Would you say your upbringing on a farm, that that has anything to do with you thinking of slaves purpose on a farm?

20:34

AT: Yes. Would definitely.

20:35

KT: okay.

20:38

KT: Umm so this, the demographics of your neighborhood, can you tell me a little bit about the demographics? Like what kinds of people live here? What ethnicity are they?

20:50

AT: Well, you have a lot of a mixture. In this particular area, this area has become very much Hispanic. But there were a lot of transients at one time in this area. But then there were a lot of blue collar workers, families. Very established and there were a lot of services. Like for instance,

you had service stations, garages, auto garages and other type that are related to the different services. Which is sort of transitioning, you don't have as much. You know like tires or glass, which you'll see if you go up and down Williamson road, that's still exists. And I think to a large extent that's always been like that from what I understand. There were a lot of different type of services that were available.

21:59

KT: So it sounds like you're acknowledging that they are kind of going away, these services. They're not as prevalent.

22:07

AT: No they're not.

22:08

KT: When did that start? Do you remember?

22:09

AT: About 15 years ago.

22:11

KT: 15 years ago, okay.

22:14

AT: The ma and pa situation went away.

22:20

KT: Do you know why that is? Do you have a sense of that?

22:21

AT: Yeah because, first of all, property values, the circumstances, ownership of properties. There were a lot of properties that had older, they were held by owners that were older, and then they were sold off and the children didn't retain those businesses they went into either larger businesses or they were eliminated.

22:54

KT: And so, what happened to those businesses? Did they turn into residential areas or did they just become buildings that just sit there?

22:03

AT: They're still there. Well it's a little bit of both. It's a little bit both. There's not so much residential, but they've you might say, revitalized, but they're not as—the small business in the Northwest section here is, really struggles. And you can see that from storefronts that are changing all the time. Within a year they can change two or three times. And within five years they can change even more than that.

23:46

KT: And who is it that owns these stores? What kind of people own them?

23:51

AT: Well might be, maybe young people that are breaking into retail of some sort, or they could be some skilled that maybe they've worked many years in a larger garage or something and decided to open a garage of their own. They could be, oh my, such a variety. We have a lot of retail shops like where they would sell antiques or they would sell mostly cars, there's lots of a large part are cars that maybe they would have their own financing and that would be totally different than your larger car dealerships. There's quite a number of them up and down this area.

24:56

KT: Is there anything that you liked about Roanoke that has changed that you are perhaps a little sad about or you feel like there's a loss?

25:09

AT: Yes. We've lost a lot of ma and pa businesses in general, you know to franchises and other sorts of businesses now. You just don't have the same relationship with the business owners now.

KT:

[interruption] And which...sorry.

25: 32

AT: Also the housing has changed too.

25:36

KT: Yeah? Can you expand on that?

25:37

AT: A lot of the larger older houses may have four or five apartments in them now which they didn't have before. They've transitioned. There's not as many single family as there is multifamily?

25:53:

KT: Is there a sense of crowdedness in Northwest? With the moving in of people into these homes where there's a lot of people?

26:02

AT: I don't know. I think it's the nature of the culture of the people who have moved. They're typically like that, and so that's why it's developed. I wouldn't say they were crowded. I don't know of crowdedness in this area. Now they have built other behind established, they have built other in between, they have built other duplexes and that sort of thing, but I wouldn't say it's overcrowded at this point.

26:36

KT: So you mention the culture of these people, which culture are you referring to?

26:41

AT: Latin American, Hispanic. Puerto Rican, there's quite a number of Puerto Rican families. Uh and there's like Bosnian and different other cultures in— Lebanese, there's quite a number of Lebanese. Large community of Lebanese. Hmm. And a lot of people who at one time who were rural and another part of the state or states and have come and they like communal living. It's very conducive to communal living because they can walk to a lot of things. They don't have to drive.

27:33

KT: When did you notice this cultural shift? Was it here when you got here or has it been an ongoing process?

27:39

AT: It's both. It was here when I got here, but it's more so now than it was before.

27:48

KT: And was it the same group of people when you first got here or?

27:50

AT: No.

27:51

KT: Okay, who was that first group of people?

27:53

AT: They were a lot of the younger people. And then they because they came out of colleges and they were living in this area because they were close to the colleges and then they transitioned



from there, the properties became more, well it's the same situation as you lived, you know, like we have millennials that live at home and they, the parents are gone, and they are transitioning. There's a lot of nursing homes that have become available and that population has definitely grown. So the older you know, retired situation there's more of those than were. Also veterans, there's a lot of veterans that live on this side of town even though the VA is on the other side of town, but there are a lot of veterans over here because of the cost of living of a family unit.

28:58

KT: Do you mean that it's cheaper on this side of town?

20:00

AT: Yes.

29:02

KT: Okay. Do you notice with the price of living here that sometimes the quality might be a little cheaper as well? Like for example the roads are torn up a lot?

29:16

AT: Yes.

29:17

KT: How does that make you feel? Do you feel like your side of town gets a lot of attention or that because it's old there's just some work...

29:27

AT: Well it's a combination thing because, see for instance my street, these last eight houses are in the county, the rest is in the city. The majority of this area right off of Williamson road or Williams road are right in the city. So it's influenced throughout the city. The city has a different system of maintenance than the county does.

29:57

KT: So do you know any of the history of the neighborhood you're living in right now? Did you ever make it that far in your curiosity?

30:06

AT: Well I don't if you know the large plantation La Maison was a restaurant at one time. Well see that was a large plantation at one time and a lot of this property actually out here, they were part of that. There was another one down farther that at one time, it was called the Barn Dinner Theatre and that was the large property as well, plantation and so forth and I mean eventually at some point the barn was gone and whatever, but there were a number of like of Florace the grain houses and that sort of thing and hay owned a lot of property and plantation and all that particular property was built up around it, across the street from where that is. There now lots of garden homes and homes in there and behind there are two large plantation homes too. Also, in the out farther, this is the same situation. Also down below, I can't think of the name of it, but the pl—the large home, I can't think of what its name was at one point, but anyways, it was a large, it was between plantation and Williamson road, was a large plantation as well.

31:52

KT: Do you notice any lasting elements of perhaps in that culture or some of that land still around? Do you notice just like it in the nature around you or is it kind of disguised?

32:07

AT: Well La Maison is a business and you see it there. Some of the other structures are still existing, but they're just a small property now versus what it was at one time.

32:22

KT: So unless you knew the history, you probably wouldn't know it existed?

32:24

AT: You wouldn't know. It's broken up quite a bit. It's all subdivided. That's what I want to say, it's subdivided.

32:32

KT: What do you feel you have contributed to the area that you live in?

32:38

AT: I don't know. (laughter) I've just been, we've just been good property owners and maintained our property. I don't know that I did much else. Tried to be a good neighbor. Tried to be a good citizen.

32: 53

KT: Have you made any meaningful connections here?

32:58

AT: Uh in Roanoke in general?

33:00

KT: Mmhmm. Since you've lived here?

33:06

AT: I think so. I've been involved in a number of organizations and volunteered a lot of it, volunteer organizations.

33:23

KT: Could you tell me a little bit more about the organizations that you were involved in?

33:26

AT: Well, American Business Women's Association, Girl Scouting, other historical type of organizations to do with the confederacy: United Daughters of the Confederacy or the Confederate Rose. Some other organizations like Juvenile Diabetes, that was fundraising, of course with my children there were in a lot of things that I was a part of. Me, and of course in my church, a lot of the activities within my church.

34:15

KT: Can you tell me a little bit about your church?

34:17

AT: Well my church is the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. And we are definitely a community based and family based and we sustain those who may not have funds to sustain themselves such as food and housing and so forth we help through our contributions as regular members to help to sustain them as well in whatever trials that they may be going through. So we're somewhat what you'd call self-sustaining, to me that's important, think the church should not be for itself and its hierarchy but for its people and its member and the needs that they have.

35:14

KT: So I know a little about the church that you go to and that they do a lot of genealogical work, has that influences any of your curiosity and history of this particular area?

35:50

AT: Oh yes. Yes. I started, my daughter went to dance down in Floyd ward off of Elm Avenue and while she was at dance I was the Virginia Room and found out quite a bit about my family and just learned to extensively about the area, you know read extensively. Libraries in this area are very well supplied with current information, with specific information. I found a great aid there to finding a lot to what, anything I wanted, it was there.

36:11

KT: What are some of the topics that you researched?

36:16

AT: Well, sewing obviously. Sewing and geological. I would also, the arts, cultures, of course my favorite, the Civil War. But any kind of history. I enjoy any type of history. I like fashion. Fashion history. I like liberal arts of many different—and I love the cultural things, like when you want to know something you go to the library and read about it. You know, that was important. I did I used to, I haven't as much within the last year, but I used to take out a lot of tapes and resources you know that I could play while I was sewing or whatever to entertain me and learn a great thing, a great amount of knowledge. When I was young person, now this was true, my mother was very influential in getting a lot of materials for me from the library and I traveled around the world. And I still to this day, if I want to know something about a country or a culture, the library is my place.

37:46

KT: What is the culture around Roanoke and does it differ from this specific section of Roanoke, in Northwest?

37:56

AT: It's different. The Northwest different from the Southwest, is different from the Southern part. Mainly it's a level of income because that is what is the factor in these different areas and it's reflected in the people in these areas. It's more struggle in some areas and I don't think this is interesting to some areas to spend time interacting. They're so busy just trying to maintain what they have to maintain, it's a little hard to branch out and meet other people where I think in our area here, we're fairly, we're more communicative. It's not that we care more about what's happening, we care about our community. We care about who is here. Like if there is people here that don't look too, or look questionable and don't like they should be, we say something about it or make note about it. That's one thing I like about this area. And there's not as many people, like you kind of know the people that go up and down and who live in this area. Now of course we have banks at the end, so there's people who come up and down, but you basically know your neighbors and that's a little bit different than on the Southwest, Southeast sometimes you don't necessarily do that. Now you do in Salem. You know that, because it's a little bit smaller communities, but basically not it a larger one. I at one time lived in downtown, A short time, and that was very different. Of course I loved living down there because the architecture was fabulous.

40:04

KT: So what kind of people did you mean when you said people who don't belong In the neighborhood? Are these people who are like causing trouble?

40:14

AT: Yes. We've had that happened. Its transitioned. It's not happening, but it did happen at one time.

40:24:

KT: And what caused that transition would you say?

40:30

AT: It was well, some elements came into the neighborhood, but the police took care of that.

40:42:

KT: What's an element?

40:44

AT: That's someone who robs you.

40:46

KT: okay.

40:48

AT: My neighbor across the street was robbed. Yes.

40:54

KT: So would you say this is a fairly safe area?

40:55

AT: Now. Yes, but there's things we do. We have a neighborhood watch and there's certain things that we do, leave lights on, if we noticed unusual people that don't normally frequent the area, or for instance if they drive up to the dead end and they sit up there, that's questionable. We in the neighborhood call the police sometimes. We don't call to send them out, we just let them know that there's an element going on and we take license plate numbers.

41:35

KT: Have you noticed any existing or forming ethnic communities, and I ask that in that they stick together and kind of branch off into their own little thing or are people pretty well integrated in the neighborhood?

41:52

AT: Not integrated.

41:54

KT: Not integrated.

41:55

AT: They keep to themselves.

41:57

KT: Do they stay to themselves in the way that you do or do they stay to themselves with people who are like them?

42:04

AT: Of their own culture. Yes.

42:06

KT: And would you, how often would say that happens? Is this a big group of people or is it a small group of people?

42:18

AT: I don't know. That, it changes. I can't say it's always like that, but most of the time certain areas in this area, where they are more communal living, there's more transients back and forth. We have a lot of people who live maybe four or five families in the houses, in large houses. They're not necessarily apartment-sized, I don't know if there's a word for that.

43:01

KT: Is this something that is distinct to Northwest? Does this happen in the other areas?

43:05

AT: More so, yes. Because there's more single family in other areas in Salem and in Southwest. Now in Southeast you have a lot of that.

43:20

KT: Is there anything you would like to add to your experience of living in Roanoke before we conclude with our interview?

43:27

AT: Just that I have been here 41 years and I have no desire to move. I love this area. My children have moved to Florida. I visit, and I love coming back to the mountains.

43:40

KT: What is it about the area that you love?

43:42

AT: Well I like the mountains, I like the nature very close by and I like the people because they mind their own business. I don't have a lot of, there's not a lot of adverse neighbors and that makes a big difference and we don't have a lot of transient type environments, we have apartments yes, but they don't influence us, our home.

44:15

KT: Just briefly, can you elaborate on what you mean by transient? You've used the word a lot.

44:20

AT: Well because there are people that live for 3 months 6 months, maybe even a year and then they're moving.

44:30

KT: So temporary people?

44:31

AT: Now okay, that's a word. Well sometimes the transients are maybe someone has a home and they may be living in the home for 3, 6, 8, 12 months, but they're not family members, they're in the home. We have that on this street. But they're not, they're not, hmmm, a detriment to the neighborhood.

45:01

KT: Right. Do they feel like outsiders?

45:05

AT: I would say so.

35:07

KT: But that doesn't affect your liking of Northwest?

35:12

AT: No. Not at all.

45:15:

KT: Alrighty, so is there anything else with that?

45:17

AT: I don't think so.

45:18

KT: Alrighty, well thank you so very much. It was nice talking to you.

45:21

AT: Thank you.

25:23-45:26:

sound recording ends.