

# FORT BEND COUNTY HISTORICAL COMMISSION

## *ORAL HISTORY COMMITTEE*

Interviewee: **Johnnie Mae Thomas Greenwood**

Interview Date: 05/06/2016

Interviewers: Jane Goodsill and Claire Rogers

Transcriber: Sylvia Vacek

At her home in Fort Bend County. Mrs. Fletcher's daughters,

Location/Comment: Deborah Darlene Greenwood Sharp, Mary Greenwood Miller, and Constance Greenwood, participated in the interview. 22 Pages



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*Transcript*

GOODSILL: Today is May 6, 2016 and I am taking an interview of Johnnie Mae Thomas Greenwood for the Fort Bend County Historical Commission. Her daughters are joining us: Deborah Darlene Greenwood Sharp, Mary Greenwood Miller, and Constance Greenwood. Claire Rogers is also with us, from the Fort Bend County Museum.



*Interviewer (l-r) Jane Goodsill with three of Mrs. Greenwood's children, Deborah Sharp, Mary Miller, and Constance Greenwood.*

GOODSILL: Why don't we start with your date of birth?

GREENWOOD: Well that is a story in itself. My momma and daddy said I was born on July 25, 1927. My uncle said I was born in 1928. I had two uncles who said 1928, but my momma and daddy said I was born in 1927. When I got my birth certificate, it said 1928. I have been using 1927 so I don't know how you are going to figure that out [both laughing].

GOODSILL: What was your daddy's name

GREENWOOD: He was from San Felipe, Texas. His name was Jeff Blacknell when he came to Fort Bend County in 1925. He took the name Johnny Thomas instead of Jeff Blacknell.

GOODSILL: What was your grandfather's name?

GREENWOOD: Thomas Blacknell.

GOODSILL: Do you know why your father changed his name?

GREENWOOD: No.

GOODSILL: It is kind of a funny thing to do.

GREENWOOD: No it ain't either [both laughing]. He didn't tell me.

GOODSILL: There may be some family story there.

GREENWOOD: I hope somebody can find out and tell me.

GOODSILL: Tell me your mama's name?

GREENWOOD: Josephine and her maiden name is Downey.

GOODSILL: Where was she from?

GREENWOOD: She was from San Felipe, too. When she left from up there, they got married in 1925. They were on a cotton pick, and they left that cotton pick in Bottles, TX and came here to Fort Bend County. You know how they traveled with corn pickers and cotton pickers? They were cotton pickers traveling from place to place. When they got through picking up there, Fort Bend County was the next place they came to.

My momma and my daddy went to Henry Kopycinski. Mr. Henry's wife was having a baby and Mr. Henry got momma to go to his house to wait on his wife. Before momma left his house, Mrs. A. P. George needed a house keeper. Henry Kopycinski was the man who farmed all that land out there and if she needed any help she would go to him. He sent momma to Mrs. Mamie George at A. P. George's ranch and that is how momma got out there. When the cotton picking was over, my daddy went to A. P. George, where momma was because they needed a yardman.

GOODSILL: So they both got employment out there?

GREENWOOD: That's right, and that is why they stayed in Fort Bend County from 1925 up until they passed.

GOODSILL: I am thinking their lives got better when they got that employment.

GREENWOOD: They did.

GOODSILL: Because gardening was better than picking cotton?

GREENWOOD: And he was a cook for the cowboys. You know, for the hands out there. Momma and Daddy stayed together at the ranch. My daddy cooked right there in the yard, not in the yard, but in that area. It was about a hundred yards that they worked from each other.

GOODSILL: You were the first child born. You were born on the George Ranch?

GREENWOOD: I was born right there in her house. When I got to be nine or ten, I would go and help mamma do her work and she always told me that, "This room belongs to you." And I would say, "Why?" and she said, "This is where you were born."

GOODSILL: Which room was it?

GREENWOOD: It was a small bedroom downstairs. I stayed there for three days, and then they took me and mamma to their house.

GOODSILL: What was your mom's job?

GREENWOOD: Taking care of the house, washing and ironing, and helping to cook.

GOODSILL: Did they get paid wages?

GREENWOOD: Yea, they got paid good. She was happy.

GOODSILL: How many children did your parents have?

GREENWOOD: Four. I was first then Willie Thomas, James Thomas, who is deceased, Lottie Thomas. We are all two years apart.

GOODSILL: That sounds like a good arrangement [both laughing]. Tell me what it was like growing up on the George Ranch?

GREENWOOD: My first year in school was in San Felipe, Texas. I stayed with my grandmother but I would come home on weekends and when school was out on vacation and help mamma.

GOODSILL: How did you get there?

GREENWOOD: In a car. Ms. Mamie's car.

GOODSILL: What kind of car did she have?

GREENWOOD: I can't remember that far back about her car. I don't know too much about cars anyway.

GOODSILL: Was it a fancy car?

GREENWOOD: Yea. My daddy was a part time chauffeur, too. He carried me up there.

GOODSILL: Do you remember being lonesome or home sick up there?

GREENWOOD: Yea, I wanted to go home where my brothers and sister were at and my momma.

GOODSILL: How old were you when you went up to San Felipe?

GREENWOOD: Eight. I went to school there for three years. Then I came back home and went to Crabb School.

GOODSILL: Tell me about Crabb School?

GREENWOOD: I played basketball there.

GOODSILL: Were you a star?

GREENWOOD: Yea.

GOODSILL: That must have been fun.

GREENWOOD: Yes, it was.

GOODSILL: It was a girls' team? Did you play other teams?

GREENWOOD: Yes, just for fun. We went to different schools.

GOODSILL: You were tall and could run and shoot?

GREENWOOD: Yea, well, I was good, and if my momma would not let me go, then the team would not go.

GOODSILL: So that was a fun time for you.

GREENWOOD: Oh, yea.

GOODSILL: Did you have to work and do chores?

GREENWOOD: I worked there with momma. I did a lot of ironing, I would iron the pillow cases, the sheets, napkins, dresser scarfs, and I ironed all of those.

GOODSILL: Do you want to tell us the process of doing laundry back then?

GREENWOOD: Well, I was using an electric iron back then. My momma would wash in the machine and she would starch whatever needed to be starched.

GOODSILL: Tell us about the starch?

GREENWOOD: They had Blue Star. It was in a box, you had to make it up by mixing it with water. You did not want it thick. You sprayed it on with your hand and ironed.

GOODSILL: How often did they change the linens on the bed?

GREENWOOD: All I can remember is when they built Polly Ryon Hospital out here, my momma was the one who invented the corners, the fitted sheets. She invented that; she was the first one to make a sheet like that.

GOODSILL: Did she make it on a sewing machine?

GREENWOOD: Yes. She had one of those Singer pedal machines. You had to thread your own needle. When I was ironing those sheets, I had to fold those sheets where the four corners came together.

GOODSILL: So your mama was the one that invented that for the hospital?

GREENWOOD: And mama was one that invented those western shirts with the snaps. She was the one that did that.

GOODSILL: Really? Were they work shirts or for dress shirts?

GREENWOOD: Well, if the men wanted work shirts or dress shirts, she would fix them the way they wanted them.

GOODSILL: So she did a lot of sewing, too. Did she teach you?

GREENWOOD: No.

GOODSILL: No, you were playing basketball [both laughing]. You were our little sports girl [both laughing]. So you did chores and helped your mom and your brothers and sisters did chores, too?

GREENWOOD: Well, my baby sister didn't. She didn't do too much. She was always off going to school and my two brothers worked at the ranch.

GOODSILL: What kind of work did they do?

GREENWOOD: They would help my dad in the garden and feeding the chickens. They would pick vegetables and bring them to the house and we would have to clean it up and carry it to the kitchen. We had a special room that we put all that in. We cleaned them and the cook would cut them up. The cook was Artilla Taylor.

GOODSILL: They had one person dedicated to doing all the cooking?

GREENWOOD: Well, momma would cook if Artilla had to be off.

GOODSILL: So all of you kids got to live at home and go to school, except for the time you went to San Felipe. Where did they all go to school?

GREENWOOD: We all went in San Felipe and then we came back to Crabb. Then I left and went to a Kendleton School.

GOODSILL: The school you went to in San Felipe, was it an all-black school?

GREENWOOD: I went to all black schools.

GOODSILL: What happened after you got out of high school?

GREENWOOD: I graduated from Dunbar High School in Temple, Texas.

GOODSILL: You went all over the place [both laughing]. Tell us about catching the train.

GREENWOOD: The first year I went to San Felipe. I was 8 and when I came home from school, and when I got ready to go back, my daddy had a cousin that worked as a porter on a train coming from Galveston. I caught that train right down here in Thompson, Texas and then went on to Sealy, that's where my grandfather and grandmother met me at in Sealy, and then we went on down to San Felipe.

GOODSILL: That must have been fun. Tell me a little bit about going to school in Temple.

GREENWOOD: I went there two years, the 11th and the 12th grades. It was a lot of fun up there.

GOODSILL: And you took the train up there too?

GREENWOOD: No. My daddy carried me up there.

SHARP: Mom, tell her about Mamie George's niece?

GREENWOOD: Mary Jones? Well, I was 17 years old, coming into 18 when she got killed. The chauffeur was driving the car. His name was Dave Field. An 18 wheeler hit them right at that underpass on South Main going toward Houston. Mary's momma, Rhydonia Jones, Mary, A. P. George and Dave Fields were in the car. Mary Jones got killed. I didn't go that day. I don't know how come momma didn't let me go because I used to follow her around all the time. I was being groomed to be Mary's caretaker and take care of the baby. I was going to stay with her in Oklahoma but she got killed. She was pregnant.

[NOTE: The following link provides a photo of Mary when she was a student at the University of Texas in Austin: ([https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metaph8589/.](https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metaph8589/))]

GOODSILL: That must have been terrible!!

GREENWOOD: Oh, it was. My daddy and a friend were the first ones to come upon the accident. Mr. George would not get out of that car until the ambulance picked up his chauffeur, Dave Field. He would NOT get out of that car. Mr. George would not go until the ambulance took his chauffeur.

SHARP: And the chauffeur was black and that is why the ambulance did not want to take him?

GREENWOOD: Well, that is the truth.

GOODSILL: So did any of the kids end up working at the George Ranch after Mary died?

GREENWOOD: Oh, yes. I was 17, and I am 87 now.

GOODSILL: Eighty-seven now, congratulations [both laughing]. So did you live there most of your life?

GREENWOOD: Up until I got married to Robert Greenwood in 1946.

GOODSILL: Do you want to tell us how you met him?

GREENWOOD: My daddy had a lot to do with that. I didn't know too much about him. I'd come in from school and Robert and my two brothers would be at the station to pick me up, if I came in by train. That is how I really met him.

SHARP: Mom, do you want to tell them about how Uncle Buddy and Uncle Little Buddy used to ride the hogs then started riding bulls and Mr. A. P. George entered them into the bull riding circuit?

GREENWOOD: My two brothers would make them some spurs. They would find them some wire somewhere and make their spurs. I don't know how that made them. But anyway, they started riding Mr. George's hogs, they would make their spurs and they would catch Mr. George's big hogs lying down and they would jump up on them and catch them by each ear and the hogs would jump up and go to pitching and throw them off.

GOODSILL: So they had their own little rodeo going.

GREENWOOD: In September 1949, my brother rode his first bull and it threw him off. Everybody was laughing at him.

GOODSILL: Was this at the ranch or at a rodeo?

GREENWOOD: It was at the ranch. And in 1950 he went off somewhere down by El Campo and that is when he rode his first rodeo. He made fourth place. The next time he went to third and then he went on up to first. Nobody has beaten his record yet. He is still living.

GOODSILL: And nobody has beaten his record? Amazing.

GREENWOOD: Nobody has beaten his record. They have been down here for three weeks trying to get some information. He knows it, but he cannot explain it to them in words.

SHARP: From all the falls, he has a head injury. The George's accompanied the family and furnished two charter buses when they inducted him into the Texas Cowboy Hall of Fame in Round Rock.

GREENWOOD: The second place we went to was some place past Temple.

SHARP: When they called his name to induct him there was a white man who was a judge at the time my uncle competed. This judge said he wanted to apologize to my uncle. He said, "Mr. Willie Thomas, I want to make a public apology to you right now because when you rode that bull they made me not ring the bell. You WON even though I could not ring the bell" (to signal the end of the 8 second ride.) The man said after all these years he wanted to make a public apology. There wasn't a dry eye in the room.

# WILLIE THOMAS: *A George Ranch Legend*

Willie Thomas was born on January 30, 1930 in Richmond, Texas. He was born to Johnnie and Josephine Thomas who had worked on the Ranch since 1925. He attended school in Crabb, just down the road from Richmond, until the age of 9 when he left school to help his family. Willie started working for A.P. George as a yardman and was later promoted to taking care of the milk cows. After milking, Willie would jump on the cows' backs to see how long he could ride them. He was also known to test his skills on the Ranch hogs.



Photo of Willie Thomas participating in a bull-riding competition as a rider. The photograph is signed 'D' in the bottom left corner.

## A LEARNING EXPERIENCE

Willie participated in his first rodeo in 1948 in Hempstead, Texas. This first attempt at bull-riding was a learning experience: he was bucked off the first bull, and was disqualified on his second ride for touching the bull with his hand. He caught on quick, however, and in his second rodeo, Willie came in 3<sup>rd</sup> and won \$35. For the next three years, Willie competed heavily in the local rodeo circuit and would go the whole stretch without being thrown from a bull.

## FIRST PROFESSIONAL RODEO A BITTER DISAPPOINTMENT

Willie competed in his first professional rodeo in San Antonio, Texas in 1953. During the competition, Willie steadily worked toward winning the grand prize, but timekeepers for his final ride unfairly denied his win. Despite riding the bull for 14 seconds in the final round and then stepping off the bull, the timekeepers still blew the whistle to indicate he did not complete his eight-second ride. This event left a bitter taste in Willie's mouth, and he did not ride in another Professional Rodeo Cowboy Association (PRCA) rodeo for a year.

## MAKING RODEO HISTORY

Willie eventually returned to the professional rodeo circuit in 1958 and had great success in Boston, New York, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania and Austin. Willie won "All-Around Cowboy" each year from 1953 to 1969. Throughout his rodeo career, Willie collected 20 gold belts, more than 15 trophies and as many saddles. After a career of distinction, Willie was inducted into the Texas Rodeo Hall of Fame in 2004 and the National Multicultural Western Heritage Hall of Fame in 2008.

*News article summarizing Mrs. Greenwood's uncle's rodeo career and his induction into the Texas Rodeo Hall of Fame in 2004*

GOODSILL: So explain to us what the consequences for not ringing the bell.

SHARP: You have to ride eight seconds and they ring the bell. Well, the white man did not ring the bell, they would not let him and Willie rode and rode. He said that he rode until the bull got tired and they would not let him ring the bell. He said he wanted to make a public apology at that time while he still had a breath in him.

SHARP: Everywhere they went, even when they went to Madison Square Garden, my uncles were known as Willie and James Thomas. They were among the first black cowboys to ride in the Astrodome. They won but they didn't get any recognition because they were black. And they were required to go in and out the back doors.

[NOTE: The following link provides more about Willie Thomas and the challenges for Afro-American bull riders: (move the cursor over the second line of the link to activate the correct Hyperlink) [http://blog.pennlive.com/patriotnewssports/2011/08/african-american\\_bull\\_riding\\_t.html](http://blog.pennlive.com/patriotnewssports/2011/08/african-american_bull_riding_t.html).]

GOODSILL: Were there any other black cowboys at that time?

BOWE: They had to meet them outside the city limits to pay them their prize money. They got the prize money but they could not get the recognition. It always had to go to a white bull rider.

GOODSILL: What happened in your sister Lottie's life?

GREENWOOD: Well, she was the baby and she did whatever she wanted to do.

GOODSILL: When she grew up, what did she want to do?

SHARP: Aunt Sissy's husband was Albert Solomon and he worked at the ranch. He actually was the main cattle herder and he drowned on the ranch in the flood.

ROGERS: What year was that?

SHARP: That was in June, 1973, the year that Don and Donna were born, because they never met their dad. They actually have his picture at the George Ranch School and Uncle Buddy and Uncle Little Buddy's pictures are on the wall, a mural, as the cowboys.

ROGERS: So you call them Uncle Buddy and Uncle Little Buddy. Is Uncle Little Buddy, James?

GREENWOOD: Yes.

ROGERS: And Uncle Buddy is Willie.

GREENWOOD: Right.

SHARP: There was Big Buddy and Little Buddy.

GREENWOOD: That is what my momma and daddy called them, Buddy and Little Buddy.

GOODSILL: Do you want to tell us the names of all your children?

GREENWOOD: Robert Greenwood, Jr., we just call him R L Greenwood, Roy Milton Greenwood, Verge L. Greenwood, Eula Mae Greenwood, Willie Floyd Greenwood, Patricia Ann Greenwood, Mary Greenwood, Debrah Greenwood, Constance Greenwood, that is the mouth of the south [all laughing], and Annette Delisa Greenwood.

GOODSILL: Which one was your favorite?

GREENWOOD: All of them [both laughing]. Do you remember that ferry on the Brazos River in San Felipe? I rode it many, many, many times. I rode it across the Brazos river from big momma's house, Patterson to San Felipe.

ROGERS: They didn't have I-0 then [all laughing].

GREENWOOD: But I couldn't figure it out, if I am on one side of the river, I could look and see on the other side where the ferry would go to, but when you get on that ferry you go up the river and then come back down and it would land right at that road where we needed to cross. I can't figure that out.

ROGERS: It had to go up the river because of the current because if it tries to go straight across it will end up down the river. It had to go up first and then come back.

CONSTANCE GREENWOOD: Mom, tell them about working for the Moore's, who lived across from the courthouse.

GREENWOOD: I worked for the Moore's. I sat with the Moore's daddy and I worked there in that house.

ROGERS: Was that Judge Moore and Mrs. Dorethea.

GREENWOOD: He was by himself. His wife had passed.

ROGERS: So Congressman Moore.

GREENWOOD: I was a sitter for him.

ROGERS: So it must have been when the judge was older, in the early 1870's because he died in 1975.

GREENWOOD: Yes. I worked for the Wessendorff's, the Ferguson's, the Miles', the Manning's, the Moore's, and Ms. Wallace.

CONSTANE GREENWOOD: Who was the firefighter who fought fires with Red Adair?

GREENWOOD: Mr. Bink Manning.

CONSTANCE GREENWOOD: He and Red Adair were best of friends and he used to tell me about that. Mr. Scott used to tell us about the Jaybird-Woodpecker Feud.

GREENWOOD: I wasn't even born when that happened.

GOODSILL: What do you remember that they told you about it?

GREENWOOD: How that shot was fired from that house. The gunshot killed a little black girl.

GREENWOOD: I remember when they stopped the Santa Fe train from coming through Thompson; they routed it around Rosenberg to Houston.

GOODSILL: Do you remember why?

GREENWOOD: I don't think they were getting enough passengers.

GOODSILL: So you remember when the trains were better to take because the roads were so bad?

GREENWOOD: The people did not have a lot of cars.

SHARE: Mom, I also heard that Aunt Eula worked on the Good Row. She was on the chuck wagon. She was a cook for all the men as they traveled and built the railroads. This was my dad's godmother.

ROGERS: Was that here in Fort Bend County?

GREENWOOD: That was up the country but she came down to Fort Bend County. No, no, she came down to Wharton County on the Colorado River.

CONSTANCE GREENWOOD: Do you want to tell her about the Murphy Jones Cemetery?

GREENWOOD: Oh, we need a whole lot of help out there.

GOODSILL: Tell me about the Murphy Jones Cemetery. Why is it important to you?

GREENWOOD: Mary, what is the name of the girl that is buried out there?

MILLER: They think her name is Kian. They think that she was Jane Long's personal slave. They think she is buried out there in Murphy Jones, because at that time there was no other black cemetery around so when she passed away, she is out there somewhere.

ROGERS: I have heard that from people on the cemetery committee, but there is not a marked grave.

GREENWOOD: Will you tell the cemetery committee that I am praying that they can help us.

ROGERS: What do you want them to help you do?

GREENWOOD: Getting the history and putting it in a historical marker because it is old enough.

SHARP: What is the oldest grave that you have that you know of?

MILLER: It would be hers. I think Roy and them ran across one from the 1800's.

ROGERS: And hers would have been in the 1800's.

GOODSILL: Where is the cemetery located?

MILLER: Brazos Town Center. Mennonite Road, you take a right to go to Mennonite Road and Cemetery Road on the left hand side. Our whole family is buried there.

GREENWOOD: We do not get a lot of support in keeping this cemetery.

GOODSILL: Nobody does. Cemeteries are so hard to get help for.

GREENWOOD: Last week they broke our gate for the fourth or fifth time, Mary.

MILLER: Fourth time.

GOODSILL: Vandalism?

MILLER: When we were out there Sunday, somebody had had a pizza party and somebody had a beer party.

GREENWOOD: They throw all that trash over in the cemetery.

MILLER: Whatever trash and lumber they don't want they will take it, because the gates are locked, because they cannot drive in there so they just take the trash and throw it over the fence. The ground keepers when they go to mow have to pick it up and put it in a spot so they can burn it. They can't burn it now because it is so dry.

SHARP: They have an annual Murphy Jones Cemetery up-keep program every year and it is for all the people that have their love ones there to come aid in the up-keep of the cemetery.

GOODSILL: Do people show up?

GREENWOOD: Did you?

GOODSILL: I didn't, but my people are not buried there [both laughing].

MILLER: Somewhat, but not enough.

GOODSILL: And not the ones young enough to do any work. That is the same in every cemetery. It is so hard.

MILLER: Do you want to tell her about Polly Ryon and Dr. Frank Ammon and Nurse New?

ROGERS: Where did you have all of your kids?

GREENWOOD: At Polly Ryon hospital. Not R. L. It was Sugar Momma.

ROGERS: What does that mean?

GREENWOOD: Sugar Momma was the first one.

GOODSILL: Sugar Momma is Eula?

MARY GREENWOOD: Where were R. L. and Verge born?

GREENWOOD: R. L. was Dr. Barky. I had him at the house. And I had Roy at the house. I had Verge at the house and then Sugar Momma in the hospital.

CONSTANCE GREENWOOD: She is referring to the house that is off what is now called Williams Way. The church is called Pilgrim Baptist Church and we have been members of that church for sixty plus years. My grandfather on my daddy's side was a sharecropper and all the fields over there, that was his area.

ROGERS: Did most of that belong to the Wessendorff's?

CONSTANCE GREENWOOD: All of it.

CONSTANCE GREENWOOD: Bubba Watson and the house right next to the little wooden church and our house was down that road, it is a municipal road now. Our house was back there. They got paid money for cleaning up the church but our big daddy, he used to grow corn; he would flip from corn to cotton and okra.

GREENWOOD: A vegetable garden

CONSTANCE GREENWOOD: Pecans and dewberries and Aunt Eula would make jelly. She would have all the women that had babies to save their baby jars and she would make homemade jelly and give them to people. She would bless people with homemade jelly, especially the grape. My mom makes homemade wine, too.

GOODSILL: So you girls brought up a good point about your church. I want to know about your church. Start by telling me the name of it.

GREENWOOD: Pilgrim Journey. We call it P J now. I joined that church in 1947.

GOODSILL: When did you get married? You got married around 1947, didn't you?

GREENWOOD: 1946.

GOODSILL: Did your husband join with you?

GREENWOOD: He was already there. I was at Zion Hill Baptist Church and after I got married I came to Pilgrim Journey.

GOODSILL: How big was it? How many people?

GREENWOOD: It would be about 75 or 80. And is it still going!

CONSTANCE GREENWOOD: We have over 800 members now.

GOODSILL: Oh, that is impressive.

CONSTANCE GREENWOOD: The church sitting there now is from the effort and hard work and determination of all the older people. She put on so many benefits to build the church. I would get so mad when I was little because she would cook a lot of dinners and it was always for the building. Everything was for the building fund. It gives me great joy to see what that church is now. I went there when it was a wooden church and I see the fruits of her labor.

We have two services. We have an eight o'clock and we have an eleven o'clock service – with a full choir.

ROGERS: You had the wooden church, when did they build the brick church, the one you have now?

CONSTANCE GREENWOOD: Bobby has been there for ten years, so I think it has been thirteen years ago. Rev. Walker was still there and we voted. The elders did not want us to build that big church because they said it would never fill up.

GOODSILL: And now it is filled.

GREENWOOD: Two services.

CONSTANCE GREENWOOD: Sister Mary is the head usher and in the finance department, she is the church police.

GOODSILL: Is there anything about this area of town you want to tell me about?

GREENWOOD: This area out here. Don't start me on this area out here.

GOODSILL: I want to know about it [all laughing].

CONSTANCE GREENWOOD: This was originally called Sullivan's Addition.

GREENWOOD: It started about 1939. Every little spot around here had a house and somebody in it. Now things have kind of dwindled down. People are trying to buy it all up. But if the good Lord keeps me with the senses I've got, they ain't getting mine.

GOODSILL: Was Sullivan Addition when it started mainly a black addition?

GREENWOOD: Yes. Every house around here was full.

GREENWOOD: I was working for Mrs. Mamie George's kitchen when the first labor pain with Connie hit me. I was still working for the A. P. George's.

GOODSILL: You stayed there a long time. You mentioned a lot of other ladies that you worked for. What did you do for them?

GREENWOOD: Oh, just taking care of them when they were sick and needed somebody with them, just sitting with them.

CONSTANCE GREENWOOD: She took care of those foster kids, they would drop them off here, they were juveniles and they would come live with us and she took care of them.

GREENWOOD: Anything I wanted in Richmond, I just would go there and get it. That is how Ms. Mamie had it set up. Anything I needed I could go get it. When I went off to school and I would come in, they would be calling for me to come in to different stores to get what I wanted.

GOODSILL: That must have felt great.

GREENWOOD: You know it did. We used to go up to the movie, we called it picture show then, we didn't have to pay.

GOODSILL: You had kind of special up bringing then, because you were connected to the George's?

GREENWOOD: My kids too. They could go get whatever they wanted.

CONSTANCE GREENWOOD: We took full advantage of it [all laughing].

ROGERS: How long did you work for Ms. Mamie?

GREENWOOD: When she was born, I was in Ms. Mamie's kitchen.

ROGERS: After Connie was born, did you still work out there?

GREENWOOD: When Connie was born, I was staying here in town. Now you might think this is a lie but I never paid for any of my children to be born.

GOODSILL: Why is that? Ms. Mamie helped [both laughing]. That is so nice. You didn't have to pay for any of her children to be born, because Ms. Mamie took care of it.

GOODSILL: I want to go back a little bit. Tell me a little bit about your mother? What kind of lady was she?

GREENWOOD: Momma was alright. She was really a good lady.

GOODSILL: Was she a strict mother?

GREENWOOD: No, she was just one of those easy going mothers, but she was really good and she didn't have to say something but one time.

GOODSILL: I know that kind of mother. It is interesting to have a connection with the Georges because not everyone has that.

GREENWOOD: I went out there the Saturday before Easter and when I walked in the door, Debra brought me in the front door I said, "You didn't bring me in the back door you brought me in the front door. That room to the left is the piano room." Debra said, "How do you know?" [NOTE: Mrs. Greenwood is blind now, so her acuity was especially interesting.] Then I commenced to tell them about every room in that house.

GOODSILL: And the room you were born in! YOUR room.

GREENWOOD: A little room, just big enough for a bed and a chair and Dr. Johnson was my doctor.

GOODSILL: Was Dr. Johnson a black man?

GREENWOOD: No, he was white. I don't think there were any black doctors back then and that was Ms. Wessendorff's daddy.

GOODSILL: Janie Wessendorffs daddy.

GREENWOOD: You are so right.

GOODSILL: He was a doctor? I didn't know that.

GREENWOOD: Rhydonia Jones was his nurse.

GOODSILL: She was a white lady?

GREENWOOD: That was Mary Jones' momma. The one that got killed in that wreck.

ROGERS: Rhydonia and Mary lived in the house with Ms. Mamie and Mr. George didn't they?

GREENWOOD: Yes, they did. Ms. Mamie had built and given momma her home. Did you know that?

ROGERS: I did not know that.

GREENWOOD: My sister is in it right now.

GOODSILL: They built your momma a house. How nice.

GREENWOOD: They gave it to her, a two story.

SHARP: When mom and I went down to the Easter Egg Hunt, there was a young intern talking about the house. We were coming around the back from the visitation center and I explained where we were at and mom said, "There is a milk room somewhere, a little milk house." So I started to look around and saw what must have been be the milk room. She said, "This is where I used to churn butter in here. There is a smoke house around here somewhere, too." We went into the smoke house and she said, "This is where daddy used to slaughter and clean the animals, and make the sausage and all of that." The next thing we knew, we had a little group of people with us listening to mom!



*Mrs. Greenwood relaxing on a bench at the George Ranch and remembering her long life there.*

GOODSILL: So you are giving a tour.

SHARP: When we got up to the house there were so many people they were touring them by groups. We were in a later group and sitting there and mom started talking about the house.

Next thing all these people from Alabama and Rock Port and the little kids came and sat at mom's feet like she was doing story telling. Momma was telling them all about the house and when it was time for the next group to go in for the tour, everybody said we got to go with her. So we are going through the house and mom walks through and she said, "You brought me through this door earlier. There is a piano on the left hand side." Everybody looked and there was the piano. Then she said, "There is a vault somewhere here in this room." And the next thing there is a vault.

Everybody was so highly impressed at mom; she remembered how they have kept the house. So we get to the kitchen and she's talking about Itilia Keys, how she didn't want anybody messing with her stove, so she would take the knobs off and take them with her. She said something about ironing and mom said, "The ironing board is on the left side of that wall." And there was the ironing board. Everybody was wowed.

One man said, "Everything that this woman has said is right." That was rewarding when mom was talking and the little kids were sitting down and listening. Mom's great grandchildren were there. The man from Alabama was sitting adjacent to us and he was on his computer and he looked up and he said, "Is your mom named, Josephine Thomas and your dad's name." Mom said, "Who said that?" [all laughing].

GOODSILL: How did he find that out?

SHARP: He Googled it.

GOODSILL: You are really famous now [all laughing]. There is a question that I want to ask you. Did you know a lady who worked for Mrs. Wessendorff named Hattie Mae Bailey?

GREENWOOD: Very well!



GOODSILL: I interviewed her and she gave me a great interview. She was the one who thought I was such an idiot because I kept asking all those stupid questions about spray starch and how the wood burning stove worked.

She has that dull look in the eye when you are talking to someone really dumb. [all laughing] I had to act ignorant to get her to tell me things she thought were common knowledge but that modern kids do not know about. She gave a great interview; you can read her interview on the website. So she is a friend of yours?

GREENWOOD: I have known her ever since we got married.

GOODSILL: Isn't that funny? I love that.

GREENWOOD: She was married to Leonard Bailey.

ROGERS: We also interviewed Annie Sherman, when they dedicated the church over here.

GREENWOOD: That little church over here. My kids call her Ms. Annabelle.

GOODSILL: Maybe you can think of some names of some other people that I can interview, people that you knew growing up or some people that you think might know some history. Tell them to Debra and she and I will go out and do them. You can come with us and listen.

So nice to meet you! Thank you for sharing your memories.

Interview ends.