



Oral Histories: An Important Component of the Archives

By Lise Steinhauer

In recent issues, *The Tustenegee* has included transcripts of oral history interviews from the archives of the Historical Society. This spring, we expand their occasional appearance to fill the entire issue. Our collection of oral histories began a half century ago, when the term “oral history” was not yet widely used. The four interviews in this issue offer an idea of the Historical Society’s efforts in this area and the increasing improvement in techniques of recording, transcription, and accessibility.

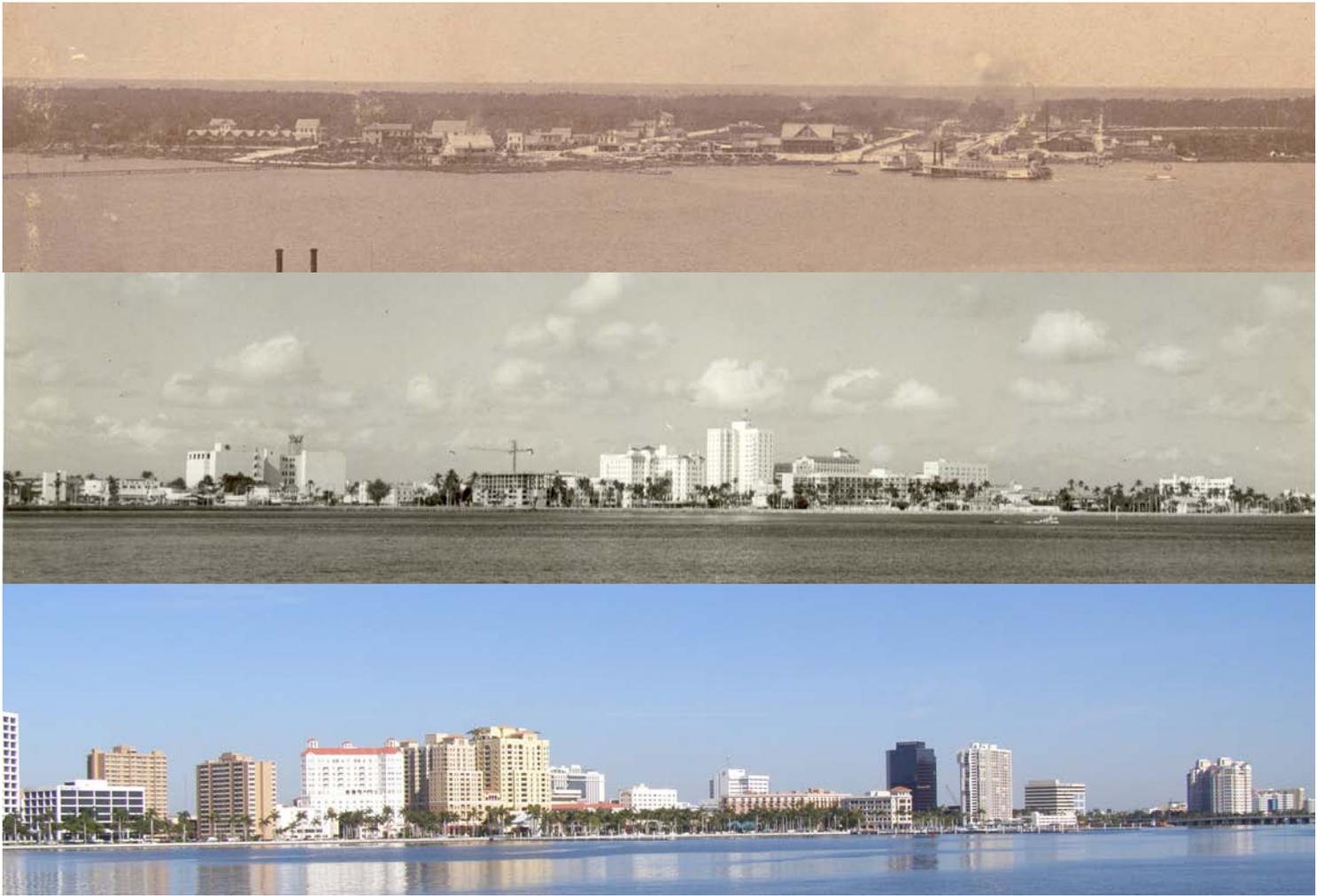
Daisy Butler Lyman (1871-1964), one of the county’s first schoolteachers, participated in the Historical Society’s first oral history program in 1962, an ambitious project that included thirty local pioneers. The interviewer, a semi-retired broadcaster, was not a local. These recordings were upgraded to compact disc in 2006, and new transcripts restored verbatim language. It was too late, however, for the narrators to review the transcripts for corrections, an important step in the process.

Ector Orr Munn (1891-1993) was related to several Palm Beach-New York society families, such as the Pulitzers and Wanamakers. He and Stafford Beach were among a handful of oral histories recorded in 1987 by artist and Palm Beach resident Maria Bacinich.

Stafford Beach (1899-1990) was the son of a pioneer horticulturist. His microcassette tape recording was transcribed in handwritten narrative form without questions, as shown, and was too fragile later for replication or proper transcription.

Judge Edward Rodgers, Ret. (1927-), helped bring down racial barriers in Palm Beach County as its first Black assistant state attorney and later as a judge. In 2006 he was one of ten interviewees who had been great achievers in their fields.

This 2006 group followed five interviews in 2004 chosen from a long wish list. The list continues to expand with additions, while also losing names of those



Oral histories are important because they help tell the story of changes over time. Above, top to bottom, Skyline of West Palm Beach 1896, 1970s, 2012. Top and middle images are courtesy Historical Society of Palm Beach County; bottom image courtesy Richard A. Marconi.

who are no longer available. Though most of our narrators lived very long lives, it is tempting fate to wait too long to talk with others.

Increasingly, we realize the importance of documenting the lives of not just movers and shakers, but of working men and women, like Daisy Lyman, a schoolteacher married to a boat captain. Every life is of interest when viewed from a different time. Just as three of the four presented herein, born in the nineteenth century, are intriguing to us in the twenty-first century, the fourth—Judge Rodgers—and other narrators interviewed today will captivate those looking back in another 100 years. This documentation of life must be ongoing, to preserve local history for future generations for uses that we can only imagine.

Lise M. Steinhauer is a wordsmith, oral historian, and researcher through her business, History Speaks. Projects for the Historical Society of Palm Beach County have included the Palm Beach County History Online website, the docent manual for the Johnson Museum, and many oral history interviews and transcriptions. Lise's work has been published in academic texts; A Photographic Odyssey: Around the World with Alexander W. Dreyfoos; and the upcoming biography, Alexander W. Dreyfoos: Passion & Purpose. She has recently joined the Historical Society of Palm Beach County part-time as Membership Associate. Lise holds a Master of Arts in Liberal Studies and lives in Jupiter, Florida.