

An Oral History Tape Transcription
Of
Baytown Oral Histories
With
Interviewer: Linda Roberts
Interviewee: R.W. (Maude) Matthews
Third Party: Mrs. Sara Swafford
Aug 17th 1976
Transcribed by: Lynnette Sargis

(Tape 1 of 1)

Baytown Oral Histories

Interviewer: Linda Roberts

Interviewee: R.W. (Maude) Matthews

Third Party: Mrs. Sara Swafford

Interview Date: Aug 17th 1976

LR: 3, 4, 5. This is an oral history interview with Mrs. R. W. Matthews, a historian with the Priscilla Club. The interview is being done on August the 17th 1976, with Mrs. Matthews. I'm Linda Roberts of Sterling Library, and assisting me is Mrs. Sara Swafford, Reference Librarian with Sterling Library.

Mrs. Matthews, I understand that the Priscilla Club is the oldest club in Baytown, or the Tri-Cities. Explain to me how it got started?

RM: Three ladies got together and decided that, um, uh they needed a sewing club, and on the second meeting, they set the membership, set the membership at 16.

LR: They set it at 16. Why did they choose the number 16?

RM: They felt like that uh any home would accommodate 16 members. 'Course they don't always attend each time; there's always someone out at different times.

LR: Mhm. Well, why did the ladies feel like they needed a sewing club?

RM: Because they were interested in fancywork and wanted to get others interested in fancywork.

LR: What do you mean by fancywork?

RM: Uh well, uh, crochet and needlepoint and um, uh, embroidery, all of the, uh, fancywork that they do.

SS: Does the, the fancywork that the ladies did when your club started uh compare with the type of fancywork that people are doing today? Or how was it different?

RM: Well, um, I think that, um, it's about the same, other then they don't do as much embroidery as they used to; that was the leading one at the time. It-, there's more needlepoint done now than anything I think people are making needlepoints for their home, their chairs and their upholstery and different pictures,

LR: Well, were they doing this handwork just for use in their own homes, or were,

RM: No.

LR: They looking to sell, or--?

RM: --to give as gifts.

LR: To give as gifts.

RM: Mhm, and too for their own home, too.

LR: Did they ever contribute this handwork to groups, so the group could sell it to raise money?

RM: No.

LR: Okay, so Priscilla Club then was not really a charitable organization?

RM: No.

LR: It was established just as a, as a sewing club.

RM: That's right.

LR: In 1920.

RM: Mhm, that's right. Other than we gave to worthy, uh, causes when we were called upon to give, and that is the Red Cross and the Good Fellows and if their general organizations that at different time of the year call upon us to come in,

LR: We-,

RM: And we always contribute to those.

LR: Did the ladies just give from their own purses or did--?

RM: No.

LR: You have a method of,

RM: We uh, our dues are 2 dollars a year, and that's what we use our money for. And, uh, at different times with this money in the treasury, we, if a friend goes to hospital, we send them flowers, and we always mail cards. But if there's not enough money, we divide it among us.

LR: Now the club meets once a month?

RM: Once a week.

LR: Once a week.

RM: Once a week, starting, uh, May, the 3rd week in May, and -- I mean, the 3rd week in September, pardon me.

LR: Mhm.

RM: And ending in May. The 3rd week in May. And during the summer months, we meet once a month someplace for lunch just to keep in touch with each other.

LR: That's great. It, it's become kind of a, a social gathering of old friends, then?

RM: Uh you mean the luncheon?

LR: Mhm.

RM: No, it just, it's just when you have a guest, you can bring them, but uh it, it's just for the members.

LR: Have you been able to meet weekly consistently since 1920, or have any things developed during that time that made the club maybe become inactive for a period of time?

RM: No, not that I recollect.

LR: So then the war didn't--?

RM: No.

LR: Bother the-, the meetings,

RM: No.

LR: Or anything like this? Well that's great. What are your colors?

RM: What are our colors?

LR: Mhm.

RM: They are, uh, gold and, um, blue.

LR: Why did you choose, do you know why they chose these colors?

RM: Now, I can't answer that because I don't know. [Laughs], And the, um, let's see there's something else,

LR: Flower is, is the bluebell, is that right?

RM: A, uh is the bluebell, mhm. Now I, I don't know why they would were chosen.

LR: When I first read it I thought it said blue bonnet.

RM: No it, it is them.

LR: And then when I, went back over it, it was the bluebell

RM: Bluebell, mhm.

LR: The bluebell.

RM: Mhm.

LR: An unusual very lovely flower.

RM: But I really don't know, course I, why the ladies chose that, the first ladies.

LR: Okay tell me about a typical early meeting of the Priscilla Club, what would, what types of things did you do?

RM: Well, of course, we always meet at 2:30 and disband at 5, and, um, the afternoon is spent in doing the kind of fancywork that you want to do, are interested in. And uh then refreshments are served later.

LR: How did the ladies come to the meetings in the beginning? Horseback, buckboard, cars? How did they come?

RM: [Laughs] I expect, I expect they did uh come that way. Because there were very few cars at that time in 19-, and people, very few people owned cars at that time in 1920. So they probably walked, lots of them did, or were probably picked up by a friend that had a car.

LR: Were there many social activities during this time, you think, that people could get into in the 1920's, or...outside the church? Did you have picture shows or things like that that you could go to for--?

RM: Well,

LR: ...social events?

RM: I'm sure they did at that time, um, have picture shows to go to, and of course um, at Christmas, they always had a Christmas party and would invite the husbands as our guests. That was a nice thang, but in later years they sti-, we still have the Christmas party and exchange of gifts. But we only have the members, because so many are widows in the club now. I think there is only 6 left in the club that have husbands now, there were so many widows.

LR: Are there any of the charter members still living today?

RM: Yes, two. Mrs. A. E. Archer and Mrs. Ella Herring.

LR: Now I understand that you've had some anniversary parties.

RM: Yes.

LR: Three of them?

RM: Yes.

LR: Tell me about the first one you remember.

RM: Well let's see, I think the first one is um, in the home of um, Mrs. E. T. Arnett and um,

LR: What were the purposes of these anniversary parties?

RM: Well that was uh to celebrate the uh um length of time that the club had um -- I'm still trying to find that...now, that was at Mrs. E.T., E. T. Arnett's, the first one, I believe.

LR: Okay now you had a big one though in 1970, tell me about that one, and that was probably the biggest one.

RM: Oh that, that was the, our um 50th anniversary and it was celebrated at the home of Mrs. um Leslie Wilburn. She was our president at the time, and we extended invitations to all um past members of the Priscilla Club and to come as our guests, and I think there were 34 and that, of

course, included the two charter members and at that time well um, we were given the history of the club was written up by Mrs. Lillie and the history was read at that time at the club.

LR: How do you go about joining the Priscilla Club since...

RM: The name--

LR: ...there are just 16 members?

RM: ---the names, uh the members put the names on the list, and I'm not supposed to tell who outside the club that the name is on that list. No one knows that their name is on that list.

LR: Uh-huh.

RM: And when there's a vacancy, then they are voted on as members and invited to come. But they don't know at that time until uh,

LR: Have people ever been rejected for membership?

RM: Not that I know of. Not that I, since I've been in the club, they haven't been.

SS: Do, do many people drop out of the club? Do you have many people--?

RM: Well, for various reasons, of course, over this period of 50 years, I, I think --I gave the history at Mrs. uh Wilburn's, I think over 100 names had passed through the membership of the club, and for different reasons the uh they have moved away or, either from death, and, of course, the club has been so much richer for having had those names on our list.

SS: I'd would like to go back to, a little bit about your handwork. Um, will the, the work that you did just in, each of you did individual type work or did, did you have any projects that the whole club worked on like a...

RM: Well--

SS: ...quilt or a tablecloth or something like that?

RM: Well, we exchanged work, lots of times. Different ones would get tired of their work -- it's a big, uh, tablecloth or something like that -- the others will say, "Well, let me put the crochet around for ya." We, we have exchanged our work that way. Course not everyone does uh crochet and not everybody does needlepoint, and those that do those, uh, that kind of work would do it for the others. Exchange it you see. Just,

SS: But basically each member brought her own work to do.

RM: That's right.

SS: And you didn't start as a group and say we're going to...

RM: No, no.

SS: ...to quilt this as a club project? I see.

LR: Well, can you think of any interesting things that have happened to the ladies in the club?

RM: Well I, I think an outstanding thing is that we have celebrated four golden wedding anniversaries in the club, and Mr. and, the late Mr. and Mrs. Henry Catharina. The, the late Mr. and Mrs., um, let's see, I had those names down, and I've forgotten them. Um, Mrs. Riggs, the late Mr. J. W. Riggs. Mrs. Difani and the late Mr. R. H. Difani.

LR: Has Mr. And Mrs. Jess--?

RM: And the late Mr. and Mrs. Jeff Howell. Those were the, uh golden wedding anniversaries, and the members acted in the house party, helped out in the house party.

LR: What did, did they have a ceremony and remarry these people or--?

RM: No, no just, just to, of course, the one that was celebrating invited all of their friends. But we were in the house party to do the things that was needed to be done, you see, and the friends could call during the afternoon to welcome the ones that were celebrating their anniversary.

LR: Do you think that the Priscilla Club has been important to the history of Baytown?

RM: Yes, I do.

LR: Tell me why.

RM: Well, uh, it is a group of ladies that are just bound together through friendship and love and for the love of doing fancywork and also, um, we've been called on so many times for things that are important, that, um, I just feel like it, it's an outstanding club and, and that it has, um, lasted this long, and we are just as eager in September as children to get together.

SS: [Laughs]

LR: [Laughs]

RM: We can hardly wait.

LR: Do you sometimes get so busy chit-chatting with each other that you forget you're han-, handwork?

RM: Oh yes.

SS: [Laughs]

LR: [Laughs]

RM: Make mistakes and have to pull it out [Laughs].

SS: [Laughs]

LR: [Laughs]

RM: We've unraveled a many a piece of, of crochet and different things that we get so busy talking. But we enjoy the fellowship of the club. I mean, being together, enjoy each other so much.

LR: Have you seen many changes in Baytown in the 50 years in the Priscilla Club?

RM: Yes.

LR: Tell me about some of them.

RM: Well um.

LR: What was Baytown like when you joined the Priscilla Club?

RM: Well, it just almost just was a little stop in the road, it seemed like to me in 1943. Of course, I moved here from a larger place, and it, it seemed uh like just such a, it was gonna...not be any activity, I was afraid, but I was soon...

LR: You was afraid they'd roll up the sidewalk? [Laughs]

RM: I was soon in two clubs, before knew what I was doing.

SS: [Laughs]

RM: ...and enjoying both of them, and still belong to both of them. The Priscilla Club's one and the other' the tea party tea club, Blue Bonnet Party Tea Club. I joined them both at the same time.

LR: Did y'all have any special activities for the Bicentennial year?

RM: No. No.

LR: You didn't fix a special quilt?

RM: We all feel like we're all getting kind of decrepit. They called in on us to uh have display, but somehow or another, we, we just felt like we wouldn't, um, couldn't do it.

LR: I thought maybe y'all had gotten together and made up a pretty quilt with an eagle on it and red, white and blue, or something like that?

RM: No, well there's some that were anxious to do it and some, the younger ones naturally.

LR: Uh-huh.

RM: But the older ones felt like, no, we'll just sit on the side and look.

SS: Well, I guess the group of ladies that have met together for that long have sort of a special bond. You sorta...

RM: We do, surely.

SS: ... reared your families together and gone through troubles together and you almost feel like, like you're kin in a certain way, right?

RM: Yes, because when one member is in trouble, we all go in, and, I should say, uh, in the loss of a loved one or something like that, we're right there, to serve a meal and to do the necessary things that we should do for the family. We never neglect each other. It just takes one phone call and then it just, um, puts us in action, to look after each other.

LR: Well can you think of anything else you'd like to share with us about the club?

RM: Well...

LR: Sara, can you think of anything you'd like to ask?

SS: Um, well she's covered everything pretty well, I believe.

RM: Uh, I don't imagine you could want the list of officers that run it at this time?

LR: Certainly. Go right ahead and tell me.

RM: Well the current list of officers are, uh, the president, Mrs., uh, J. L. Hart, vice president Mrs. J. W. Riggs, secretary and treasurer, Ms. Theo Wilkin, historian, Ms. Royce Matthews and, uh, reporter Mrs. Luther Parish. That's our list of officers, and we elect officers every two years. Holdover for two years.

LR: Well Mrs. Matthews, I'm very appreciative of the fact that you've allowed us to come into your home and to talk to you today about the Priscilla Club. We hope that you will allow us to take this tape recording and store it at Lee College Library and have copies made for Lee College and Sterling Municipal Library and any of the schools in the area that might want a copy so that, say, 50 years from now someone who wants to know what Baytown was like in 1920 can pull this history of the Priscilla Club and find out what a part of Baytown was like. So will you allow us to add this to the collection?

RM: Yes, I feel like I can speak for our president because she phoned all the different ones when you called her. She called and, uh, they were all enthusiastic about it and felt like it's something we would certainly do 'cause we certainly were proud of our club, and we want it to be mentioned.

LR: Okay. Thank you very much.

[END]

Transcribed By: Lynnette Sargis