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OLD CITY HALL, HOME OF BOCA RATON HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Jeanne Nixon Baur, Artist

A report to the membership of
Boca Raton Historical Society, Inc.

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AN INTERVIEW WITH JOSEPH H. MYRICK

In the past, historians went to collections of letters and diaries for their basic research material. Today these sources are less and less available. Busy people rarely find time to keep diaries, and telephoning is easier and quicker than writing a letter. Thus the historical profession sees the collection of taped interviews as extremely important to the preservation of our heritage. Many institutions have developed "oral history" programs and systematically interview the nation's political, economic, and social leaders. In the last few years state and local historical societies have come to realize the importance of oral history to their work. Since its founding, the Boca Raton Historical Society has used oral history as a tool in collecting information about the city's past. As can be seen in the interview transcript that makes up this issue of *The Spanish River Papers*, the society is very fortunate to have Mrs. William Cruickshank heading its oral history project. Mrs. Cruickshank interviewed Joseph H. Myrick, a son of the builders of "Singing Pines," on the day it officially opened as a museum.

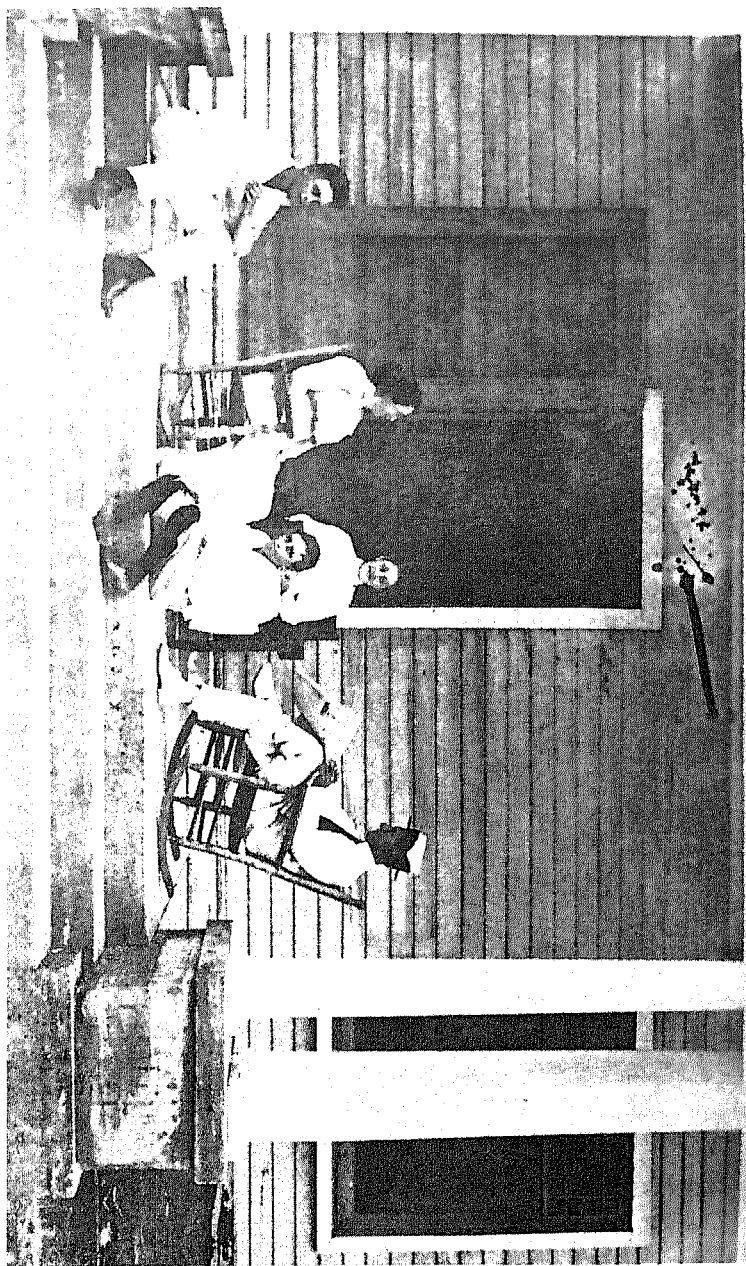
Donald W. Curl, Editor

Mr. Myrick, will you tell us about the pirate boat?

The City of Boca Raton is named Boca Raton for Rat's Mouth. Rat's mouth, that's on account of the way the inlet is and the pirates hid way back down behind that high bluff with their boats. Any boats going south always had to come in pretty close, to avoid the Gulf Stream. They would go out from there, sail out into the inlet there and rob the ships.

When we were here, part of the pirate's boat was still there. The story goes, there were fourteen kegs of gold buried over there. There was a lot of digging done but if anybody ever found it, I don't know. The story goes that Indians killed all the pirates save two. Two of them made their way to Pensacola and one of them, probably the only survivor and on his last legs, gave to the people who took him in, a chart showing where the fourteen kegs of gold were buried. In that chart, as far as I've heard, a tree was used as one marker and a certain distance from the tree was an iron peg and then so many paces in another given direction was where the gold was buried.

There was an old Captain Jim Lynch, who lived on the beach right at the inlet. He was a fisherman from Boston--and all he was interested in was making enough to live on, that's all. Captain Lynch told us he found the iron peg. He told the people with the chart that he would go fifty-fifty with them to show them where the iron peg was. They never got together. Captain Jim Lynch said they never found it because he took the peg out and dumped it in the ocean!



"Our home and my family. My father, William L. Myrick, mother, Mamie R. Myrick, sister, Aldah Myrick, brother, Robert on left, and me, Joseph H. Myrick. Boca Raton, 1913-17, probably 1916."

There was an awful lot of digging done over there. One day when we went over as kids, there was a bunch of laborers around digging a great big hole. The men were standing around all wearing pistols. They told us to go on down the beach and don't fool around there. Of course we knew what they were doing. They said they were hunting for building stone. We knew good and well they were looking for that gold and they were wearing those pistols in case they found it and people went crazy.

The other story was there were three skulls dug up. I've got a picture here of three skulls we dug up down there--across from the inlet. We sent one of them to the Smithsonian Institute. Mr. Clarence Gould did that. They came back saying it was the skull of an Indian girl about twenty-two years old when she died. I never did count that as being true because these skulls that we dug up were from people who were beheaded. And the reason we know they were beheaded is because you would try to dig down and find some bones and identify them as backbones, leg bones, rib bones or whatever, and you'd dig down to find the skull and there'd be no skull there. Then another time you'd find a skull and you'd dig away from it and try to find other bones and there'd be no bones there. So we came to the conclusion that they were beheaded. We also came to the conclusion that it was not Indian mounds because they had an Indian mound at Yamato which was great big. I understand there is no Yamato now. It's all Boca Raton now. This mound, all told, if you dug down to the bottom of it, was not over three and one-half feet deep. In other words, it looked like these people were beheaded, piled up, and just covered up and that was all, not a whole lot of dirt put on them.

That was [we have a chart (map) out in the car] right across from the inlet, the north side of the inlet over the island over there. Evidently looked like a great big building there now. And they could have uncovered a lot of bones there when they built it. On the other hand, they may have filled it in rather than digging, because the lake is nothing like it was, now.

Tell me again exactly where it was to make sure I understand where.

This, [showing map] is Palmetto Drive coming down here. Right in this corner here by the canal (Intracoastal) was Gorton's house (where the public boat ramp is now). Over here, way back, I don't know when, there had been someone that had developed a place there (the house is completely gone) there were all kinds of trees planted around here--the north side of the inlet [must have been T.M. Rickards homesite]--this mound where we found the skulls was right over here.

So it's right on the south end of Lake Boca Raton--right in the middle. [the Myrick skull photo in the Historical Society file has a spot marked on back of photo]

This is all changed because there used to be a little island right there and part of that pirate boat was still there, right up against that island.



"The people in this mound were only covered by 18" to two feet [of earth] and had been beheaded according to the way the bones were located in the mound. The heads were found separate from other body bones but within a few feet from other body bones. When body bones were found we would dig up to where the head should be but it was not to be found there."

That's the little island where Mr. Mizner was going to build his home? Did you hear about that?

No, I didn't hear about that.

You left in 1917--your whole family left before Mr. Mizner came. Why did you leave?

Well, like I told them down there, my dad said it was "four outs" to farming in Florida. In 1917 we had the biggest freeze that Florida ever had, I think. My dad said, "Drown out, dry out, freeze out, then walk out." So in 1917 in the freeze out, we walked out.

Where did you go?

We went to Dunedin.

What did you do there?

I worked as a carpenter and we were building a big factory for Skinner Machinery.

When did Bob go into service? (Mrs. Overstreet asking about brother, Bob)

The war was over in 1917. He went in for a year or two.

When did you go to Akron?

We went to Akron, Ohio in 1919. We went up there to work for Goodyear for one year.

The whole family?

The whole family. [Except Mrs. Overstreet, who taught school in Titusville.] The trip to Ohio was a rough one, I tell you.

Tell us about it.

Well, there were no road signs in those days. We took several days to make the trip. In Kentucky we broke a spring in a little town there. We had to wait while they went to the next town to get a spring for the car. We got in there after lunch time.

There was a boarding house there and we went in to see if we could get some dinner. The lady said they were leaving to go out to the country. It was after hours. The lady asked if mamma could cook and when we said yes, she said, "Come in and cook for yourselves." We went in and mamma cooked dinner. The mailman came by. We put our money on the table and went on about our business.

Later we asked a fellow, a kid there, about a certain section of road. He said, "Cars do go that way."

That was reassuring, wasn't it?

Another time amused me very much. We asked some boy how far to town and he said, "Forty miles." He had never been there, although he lived on a farm there. Another time we asked another man for directions and he said, "About seven and one-half miles." After about thirty minutes of riding we asked another, and he said, "About seven and one-half miles." Dad said, "Thank God, we're holding our own." Those were rough days traveling, no road signs and dirt roads. There were real big rocks in the middle of the roads.

We drove a 1916 Buick Touring car. The trip took us three or four days. Now you can drive it in a day.

Tell us more about your early days here as a boy in Boca Raton. Didn't you find some of the building materials for Singing Pines on the beach?

No, Harry Chesebro found that stuff. He found stuff washed ashore, the sills for the house which I think you'll find are about 4 x 14 boards thirty feet long. Harry Chesebro sold them to us for a dollar apiece.

[Some of the other experiences around here:] The Purdoms lived where the City Hall is now. The Purdoms had a bunch of chickens. Their house was built with bedrooms in one section and kitchen and dining room in another section with a porch connecting the two sections. One night a panther got after the Purdom's chickens. The panther came up on a tree. Mr. Purdom went out and shot at it and it fell into his yard so he stood between the two buildings and shot the panther right where the City Hall is now.

That was Mr. Purdom, Eula's father.

One of the amusing things I did was, across from where Gorton's place was, one of the coconut trees that was in that landscaped place [Rickards] across the canal, leaned out over the canal. It had some real nice coconuts on it. Nobody bothered with them because if you picked them they landed in the canal. One day Bob and I decided to gather some. I was going to climb the tree and throw them down to Bob, who stayed in the boat so he could pick them out of the water.

I climbed the tree and there was a ten-foot snake in the tree. I managed to get the snake out on a limb, then to shake the limb so that the snake fell into the water. The snake went straight for the boat. Bob was going from the front end to the back end of the boat trying to stay away from the snake. I sat up in the tree and laughed and laughed. We got the coconuts. It was a brown snake, a coachwhip or some such.

[Another childhood experience:] Harry Purdom, my brother, and I were going alligator hunting. We borrowed a rifle from Billy Jones. We had a long pole with a hook on it, which we would shove into the cave to try and pull out the alligator. The creek we were going down was almost dried up--with just spots of water in it. Harry had the rifle, I had the pole, Bob had nothing. I had to get

on my all fours and crawl under an old oak tree. I said to Harry, "Have you got that rifle on safety?" Harry said, "Yes." As the Good Lord would have it, at that time I saw what I thought might be an alligator, I bent over to put the pole into the cave and the rifle went off. The bullet from the rifle caught me right about here.

The bullet went in right at my shoulder blade and came out right about here. If I hadn't been bending over, it would have gone into my heart. We knew that if anybody found out that one of us had gotten shot, it would be the end of our ever using the rifle again. So I had a new shirt (I knew I couldn't get rid of that) which I washed and dried out in that stagnant water, as well as my underclothes.

We went home and all the medicine we could find was my mother's favorite, Mentholatum. Bob put Mentholatum on the wound. That was all the attention it got. It was five years later before my mother ever found out I had been shot.

How about the story you were telling me this morning about the colored man that got hurt when they were draining the area where they built the air base--where the University is now?

We farmed over there. The Hillsboro River used to end where you go to the top of the hill there on Palmetto Drive here, at North West Fourth Avenue. Right along in here is where we lived and the mouth of the Hillsboro River was there before they dug this canal. There was water about waist deep, covered with lily pads and alive with fish. There were so many fish in there you could see the lily pads moving with them. One could catch a tub full of fish in thirty minutes. We'd take them back and feed the chickens with them.

What kind of fish were they?

Well, bass, brem, fresh-water fish. The canal was about one hundred feet wide, nearly ten miles long and ran all the way to Delray. Houses, etc., are built in there now. Every time we got high water, the fish would come back into Hillsboro River.

When did the men get hurt?

They were digging the Japanese canal and a cable broke. Some colored men were working there. They were building tracks as they went along on the back. The cables were whipping up and down and slashed them on their backs. They had to lie at the depot until the train came by that evening to take them to West Palm Beach. About four were injured.

Along that same line, I was going to Deerfield one day with the wagon and where you come to the curve in the railroad, there before you get to Deerfield, there was a (RR) handcar. One of the fellows that was on that handcar riding down the rails, fell (his hand slipped on the handlebar) and the handcar ran over him--gash in back. I put him in the wagon and I hauled him down to Deerfield.

You said there were only ten families here. Can you remember who they were?

There were the Longs, the Purdoms, Raulersons, later the Douglases, the Jamisons, the Craigs, the Gates and the Gortons were here during the winter months. He was just a tourist. The Gorton house on the boat ramp that we looked at in the picture--just across the railroad. This is a picture of the Raulerson's house which you can have. Their house was just across what was Old Dixie Highway then. Dixie Highway used to cross over the railroad, go down to where our house was, and cross back over the railroad. But they've got it now running straight down--it doesn't cross over. The reason it crossed over was that a quarter of a mile north of the depot, and the depot was right here, it was a quarter of a mile south of the depot where we lived. It crossed back over and there were packing houses here. From this side of the railroad was where the Longs lived, then the Purdoms lived down beyond where the Raulersons lived.

This house is still standing?

Not where it was.

This is the Raulerson house?

It was across Dixie Highway from the depot.

You can look at these pictures to see if you are interested in them.

Any pictures you would like to give to the Historical Society, we would be very happy to have.

Copies can be made of any that you want to keep.

You say these two we can keep?

Yes.

Who are the people on the porch?

The Raulersons. They had this one little girl. I can't remember the little girl's name.

This is a picture of me making tomato crates.

Is this at Long's Packing house?

I don't remember the name of it, but there was just one packing house here. We had dances and stuff in the packing house. The packing house was on the siding that is there now. One other thing that I didn't tell you about is, that this road here, when you're coming up here you turn down here (what is now Royal Palm). At that time it was a lime rock road leading to the canal and back up to this point. We shoveled the rock by hand out of the railroad cars. It was a heck of a job shoveling from the top of the car till you

"Cypress Creek. About two miles south of center of Pompano. Mr. Gould, the school teacher on left and Bob Myrick. They are standing in middle of creek that is filled with water hycinths."



got to the bottom. Once you got to the floor it was easier to slide shovels along the floor. We put the lime rock on the road from mule drawn wagons with shovels. We took the bed out of the wagons and lined it with 2 x 4's, rounded on each end and let ends stick out front and rear. We then took one 2 x 4 out at a time and let the rock fall onto the ground and raked them with a potato rake--that's the way the road was built. We didn't have any roller or anything.

Whose house did you live in there on North West Fourth Avenue?

Don't know whose it was at that time. There was a five-acre pineapple field right in front of the house--that had been abandoned. We had lots of pineapples and pineapple juice.

[Tell her how you made your home-made press. (Mrs. Overstreet)]

We took a board and put a railing on each side of it and took a big board like a 2 x 4 and put the pineapple underneath that and mashed it down. The top board was hinged and you lifted up one end and put the pineapple in there and mashed down on it.

I'll tell you another thing, back in the old days, the "Florida" people didn't want anybody down here. Anybody who came--they wouldn't give them any information about farming. Of course, farming at that time in Florida was entirely different from anywhere else. When we first came in, the first year, to Deerfield, they wouldn't give us any information (on farming). When we first came in we planted beans by hand--sowed them by hand. The next year, my father found and bought a cotton planter. He worked with that thing all that summer. He would take the plates out and get them drilled and tried to change it over to a bean-planter. He would get out there and Bob and myself would pull that planter and he would hold up the back end of it so he could see just how the beans were being sowed--what distance apart. He kept working at it until he got it the way he wanted it. He had two plates--one for a certain season, another for another time of year--on account of the differences in thickness of the planting.

I'll never forget the first time we planted beans. It rained and stormed and rained. The beans were soaked and we didn't get a very good stand. One of the farmers came up to me and said, "I knew that thing wouldn't work. I'd throw it in the deepest hole in the river."

The next batch we planted came up just as pretty as you could ask for. It wasn't two weeks later when the same farmer wanted to borrow it. It was, I guess, three or four years after when people were buying bean planters. They used Dad's plates as a sample.

We farmed beans, mostly, Chesebro raised peppers, some raised tomatoes. We always just raised beans. We farmed about twenty acres here, then in Pompano we farmed about three months of the year (while living at Singing Pines) twelve acres. Then we bought 135 acres in Pompano and we were farming that 135 acres until the freeze in 1917. Dad rented out five acres of that land to some

other man. My brother and I found a still in the swamp on the five acres and we called the Sheriff to get it off our property. He didn't remove it so we called him a second time and he still didn't respond, so we got the old still and set it up right along the Dixie Highway. It stayed there all day. Right after dark-- it was gone!

There was quite a bit of bootlegging in those days, wasn't there?

Yes.

We had a lot of fun--going on picnics every day. We would leave our house, going to go swimming--we had this old 1916 Buick and people all along the way would be sitting on their porches with their bathing suits on. By the time we got down to the canal there was somebody on all the fenders, running boards, etc. [picture of group.] There was no bridge there and we had to cross the canal in a boat and then walk the rest of the way. It was swampy--just a twelve-inch board to walk across the swampy part. [Picture for our files.]

Is this a railroad track siding or is that the main track?

That's a side track. You know where just before you get to the Hillsboro River at Deerfield, this side track went off there and the railroad people had this, this sand pit, that's white sand. [Picture] The sand was so white and so pure, you could put it in a bowl and you couldn't tell it from sugar. When you walked on it, it would cry. This picture was taken just across from where that is and when we had a flooding situation, the Hillsboro River was clean up to the road and washed out all Dixie Highway here. [Two pictures]

Where was this taken--of the men working in the field?

This is Chesebro farm taken on the canal about a mile or so from Boca Raton. Peppers were what he raised. [picture]

What about this?

This is a picture of Vinton Long.

In a little car, is it?

No, that was a bicycle.

Now here's an interesting picture for us. Whose house is that?

I don't know. Evidently this was taken around Yamato at the time. This is the number one school bus. [picture]

Let's see, how many children are in the horse-drawn wagon?

The horse and wagon belonged to the Chesebros. Mr. Gould would go up to Yamato and pick up these kids, take them to school and bring them back.

We ought to have a picture of that. When you send back the pictures to us, would you write on the backs of the pictures all that information and tell us who the people are, if you can?

What about this, that is Singing Pines, isn't it?

The Historical Society has one very similar to that one. Do you want one of these, too?

That would be very nice to have, and is that all of your family there? If you would, write their names on the back.

This is a picture of the tourist boat that ran aground on its way down the inland waterways.

A private yacht?

Yes, one that ran aground. [Pictures looking down from lighthouse to ground, to inland waterway.]

This is a peculiar thing that happened then, that I'll never forget either. I was with a group of people in the lighthouse. When you're up that high you can see the ocean very plainly. You remember the lifeguard, Snyder, that I told you about?

Yes.

As Snyder lay floating, a great, big shark came right up to Snyder and we were screaming our heads off to try and attract somebody there to get word to him. With the waves roaring, you never could make anybody hear. Again, as the Lord would have it, just as the shark got up to him he turned over and kicked and the shark went away. We stood there and watched every move of it.

[Picture discussion]

Tree grew over him. Cypress Creek. Pompano

Shot of Raulerson house.

Wrecked ship south of West Palm Beach, on the beach.

Tacky dance they used to have.

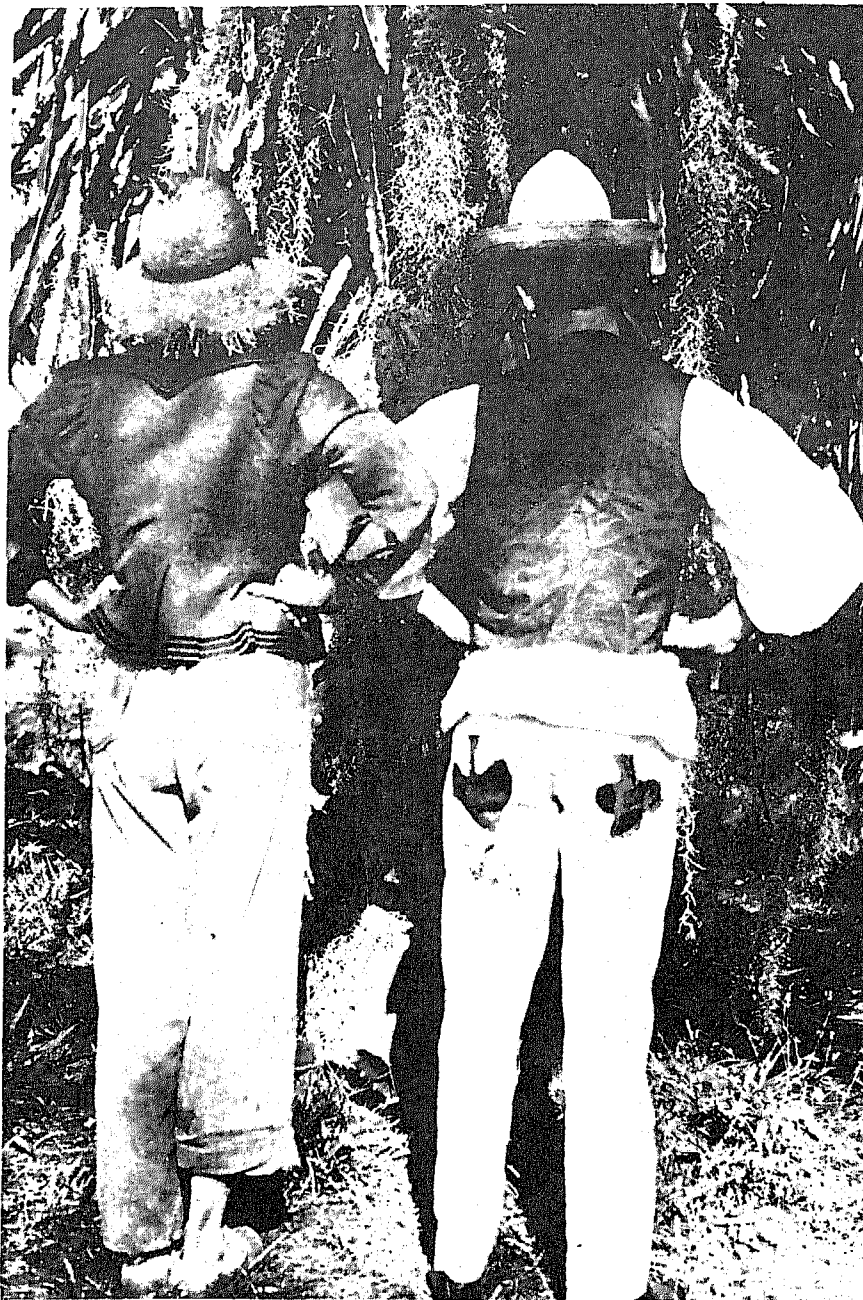
What do you mean by that?

We dressed up in tacky clothes, overalls, patches, etc. [Picture of Mr. Gillan and Bob Byrick.] The dances were held in the packing house. The packing house was the social hall.

We ought to have a picture of that.

Pepper field. [picture]

Picture of Mr. Myrick's mother and baby.



"Everybody created their own entertainment--that usually included the whole town. This is Bob [Myrick] and Mr. Gould dressing up for a 'tacky party.' They were both about nineteen years old." 1916.

Picture of Mr. Myrick's brother (bathing outfit).

Mr. Gould's picture. (school teacher)

Would you like to tell us about Mr. Gould?

He was nineteen years old and he came down here to Boca Raton and taught school for two years to get sufficient amount of money to continue his education. He went on after he finished his education and was in World War I and was with Byrd's Expedition to the South Pole (second in command). Later he was Dean of the University of Michigan, and I heard President of Brown's College. The last I heard was that he was in Texas. (picture). He went on to be a pretty notable person.

Maybe when you send the picture you would draw a little map on the back of the picture so that it wouldn't get lost (from its location).

Here is a picture of the school kids--Rap-a-tap-a-tap.

We'd like the picture with the most children.

Now this is taken by the first school building?

Yes, that is the school building.

Did you go to school in this building?

Yes, I went to school in this building and I am in the picture.

Did you go to school in the packing house before you went here?

No.

Then the school was already built when you started?

Yes.

This is the second year of the school bus. We had a Model T Ford for our bus.

We ought to have all the pictures of the school buses.

Here is a picture of all the pupils. Did you get that one?

This is Stanley Craig.

What happened to the Craig family?

I don't know.

Were they still in town when you left?

Yes.

Here is a picture you might want. It is all of the pupils from

the first to the eight grade (in one school).

Yes, we would, even though I see they are not all identified.

I can identify quite a few.

When you send us the picture, identify the ones that you can.

Who is the one marked with an "X"?

That was Bob, I think.

Is this the teacher?

Yes, that is the teacher.

That is Mr. Gould.

I set me up a little alligator farm in the back of the house. This was it. [picture] (In back of Singing Pines). This is a picture of Bill Young, my brother and the alligator farm--with alligators biting each other.

Was this in back of Singing Pines?

Yes, it was in the back yard.

We ought to have pictures of that.

What did you do, catch a couple of alligators--or get an alligator that laid eggs for you?

Yes, we caught these alligators and made a cave for them to go down in. This is a nest that we found the alligator in. Course, I don't know if you are familiar with the way an alligator lays its eggs or not, but it lays the eggs and then puts brush and everything over the top of it. Then they will get up there and fan water over it in the heat of the day to make it heat so the eggs will hatch. We took the eggs and hatched them out. This is a picture of a day-old alligator.

These are grand pictures.

Where did you find this nest?

Right here in Boca Raton (where there is a city now).

Not very far from your house?

About a mile, I guess. (pictures)

Another story that I didn't tell you about. We decided that we would go alligator hunting--another trip. Harry and myself went this time. We had the gig and the rifle and we knew right where the old 'gator was and she had young ones. We had caught several of the young ones. In the cave where she was we could just see the

nose sticking out of the cave. We took a shot with the rifle at her nose. She came out of the cave down under a pool--the creek was dried up on each end. It was kind of a hole that made a curve and water was in it. We were punching the 'gator with the gig, trying to get her to come up where we could shoot her. We never could get her to come up. I got over on the side of the bank, which went straight down on a step down there where I thought I could get closer to her and get at her better with this gig. By the time I got down there her tail went by my face so fast I could feel the wind of it. She was trying to slap me into the water and that would be it! I didn't lose any time getting back up from there.

Then we decided that it was the proper time to call the old 'gator up, so we started grunting like a little (baby) alligator does. The old 'gator stuck her head up (apparently trying to locate her babies) and when she did, we shot her. She was eight feet, one inch long. We had to get the wagon to haul her back to the house.

What did you do with her?

Have you ever eaten alligator meat? It's real good.

So you ate the meat. Did you save the skin?

We saved it for awhile, then threw it away.

Did you do any trapping of animals?

Not in Boca Raton. I did trap in Pompano, for coons, etc.

I felt the creepiest that I ever have when while working in Pompano (we worked from daylight to dark). I went down and looked at my traps one morning--it was dark as pitch. I was always running into great big spider nests. I never worried about snakes, but I never liked spiders. There were spider nests with spiders running all over that gave me the creeps. I felt like I was freezing when I heard this shriek like "Yoooooooouuulll". I just knew there was a panther just ready to spring on my back. Then he said, "Whoo whoo whoo." I said to myself, "If I could see you, I'd let you know who I am." I had the shot gun with me but when they let out that first shriek, you just knew there was a cat ready to jump on your back.

Did you ever see a panther?

Yes, I saw one about the distance from me that we are apart, going out to the Everglades one day while going hunting. (Hunting was one of the main things that I did.) I had this old single-barrel shotgun that would kick you, jump on you and stomp you, but it wouldn't kill anything. One day I decided to go out and hunt some deer and turkey....

Tell them about the boat trip that you, Robert, and Lawrence Gould took to Lake Ocheechee. (Mrs. Overholt)

About this panther deal, if we passed a quail in the morning, he would be back to visit the same place that afternoon. We didn't go hunting for sport, we went hunting for meat. Going out this dirt road about four miles, the place where I'd seen the quail was a little pine tree with "scribbles" all around it. I heard a rustling in the pine leaves and I said, "Uh, oh, there's my quail." So I sneaked up the best I could, parted the oaks and undoubtedly the quail was there. I was looking one way, trying to see the quail, and the panther was coming at them the other way. He was evidently after them, too. The panther came up to less than ten feet from me, then turned and went after the quail. The old gun I had would have blown him to pieces, birdshot or not, if I hadn't just kinda froze. That panther's head was as big as mine and he had brown and yellow bars running across his face. I never will forget him! He sure scared me!

Were there wild boar in this area?

No, there were some around Lake Okeechobee, but not here that I know of.

Mr. Gorton invited Bob and myself to go on a fishing trip. He had an old dory down there. There was a colored Nassau man down there, Joe Butler. He had Joe Butler to stay around to take him fishing. We had gone out three or four miles into the Gulf Stream, as luck would have it, it was hard to believe, a squall came up in nothing flat. This boat we were in was about fourteen feet long and I guess those waves must have been sixteen feet high. The boat would stand straight up on its end and back up. Those Nassau men were professionals at handling a boat. He'd feather his oars to keep the breeze from pushing you back. He told my brother and myself (we both had twelve-quart buckets) to sit with our feet wrapped around the seat and our feet locked together to hold ourselves in the boat. He said we would have three waves and two curls. When the three waves come, "Bail as hard as you can bail." When the two curls come "Just hold on." When those curls would come (Mr. Gorton was sitting in the back of the boat) the waves would break over his head and slap right down on the boat. He put on a collar life preserver and told Bob and myself to put one on. We didn't want those things to drown us! Back in those days we could swim five miles and think nothing of it. Before we could get to shore the squall eased up. It was quite an experience as the waves were higher than the boat was long.

What about the trip that Aldah was reminding you of? (Mrs. Myrick)

Mr. Gould, Bob and I made a trip to Okeechobee. We went out the canal from Deerfield. We rented a boat--in which you could sleep six people. Two weeks to make a trip for \$25.00. There were four of us on the trip, then there was the man that ran the boat and the man that owned the boat. Two weeks for \$25.00, six people. This was back in the days before there were any roads at all. The only means of getting places was by water--Lake Okeechobee. That was quite a trip.

My brother and Mr. Gould said they would do the cooking if Tom Owen and myself would wash the dishes. When it came time to eat, they would go down and open a can of anything they could find and dirty as many dishes as they could. Then they would laugh (knowing we were to wash the dishes). Tom and I got us a "croker sack" (burlap bag), put all the dirty dishes in it and dropped it overboard. When it came time to eat--we'd reel it in, we couldn't let them get ahead of us.

I have seen the time one could go along the beach and find a lot of driftwood--washed ashore from shiploads, etc. We took about a 12 x 12 foot piece of timber, rolled it down to the river to get it in the water, nailed a couple of one-inch boards crossways of it, got us another board for a paddle and went fishing, straddling the boards.

There were lots of fish then, weren't there?

Yes, lots of fish is right. I can remember going over to the beach with Bob about nine o'clock in the morning one day. There was a school of mullet running north. It looked like the school there was about twenty feet or so wide and you couldn't see any break in it north or south (standing on the high beach one could see a long ways). That school of mullet swam north all day long and when we left that night you still could not see a break in it. Every so often you would see a shark cut across through there and the mullet would jump out, trying to get out of its way the best they could. As soon as the shark was gone, the gap would close up again.

In those days they caught mullet in schooners by net. They loaded a twenty-ton schooner with mullet and took it to Jacksonville to be made into fertilizer. We caught blue fish right off in the breakers there. Along in September every year we get a Northeast wind bucking against the current in the Gulf Stream and the water would get real choppy. The minnows would come ashore right along these breakers. The bluefish could come ashore feeding on these minnows. The bluefish is a very mean fish. Bluefish would snap at the minnows and kill them somehow without eating them. We would go along the beach and pick up the ones washed ashore (minnows), put them on a hook, throw it out and catch the bluefish right off the shore. I can remember one particular time, my brother took a casting net and cast it into the breakers there and caught seventeen bluefish. It took two of us to pull the net in. We caught as high as fifty to sixty bluefish in an evening. The average weight, as near as I can remember, was about four or five pounds apiece.

When Pop was down here--these people wouldn't eat a Grouper--nothing but Snapper. We would go fishing out there and have a fish fry there at the inlet. We'd catch Snapper and wouldn't have anything to do with Grouper. Nowadays you go to a restaurant like Roscoe's and they tell you all they have is Grouper. The fishing over there has gone, too. I don't know how it is here.

It's not very good any more.

We used to go out there with Joe Butler. We would go out early in the morning, and right along the shore in water about three or four feet deep, there was a lot of rock along in there. We took what we called a grange--a two-pronged gig, on a long pole on a water glass. You put this water glass down to smooth the water and look through that and take this grange and paddle it along until we would wind up getting three or four crayfish. We'd take those with us fishing. Joe Butler would take something and beat them into pieces and throw them overboard and shovel the fish out. Now, I'd be tickled to death to get the crayfish to eat with the fish.

Who was this Joe Butler again?

He was a Nassau man that Mr. Gorton had to row the boat for him when we went fishing. We didn't have any kickers or motors for boats.

Did he have any family here?

No. I think he lived in Deerfield except during the time that Mr. Gorton was here in the winter.

Where was Mr. Gorton from?

He was from Utica, New York.

And he never lived here year-round?

No.

Well, what did you think of the house today (Singing Pines)? Did it look pretty similar to when you lived there?

It looked pretty natural. There was one or two things changed. They have taken out the partition in the front and made a double room. Mom and Dad's bedroom was in the front room (now the north end of the living room) and in the second room, behind that, was Aldah's, the third small room back there was Bob's and my bedroom. The room right in back of the living room was originally designed as the dining room, but we lived and used the room in the back of the house which ran longways from the kitchen as the dining room, and Bill and Peggy Young moved in and lived in the dining room for a year or two until they built a home. They built a home down on Palmetto Parkway. I helped build that house. It was a ready-cut house.

Didn't you say you had parties and dances in the living and dining rooms? (Mrs. Myrick)

Yes, we used to have them. We had a phonograph setting between the two windows of the living room. We would have ten or twelve young people come in and have dances. There were not too many young people in town then.

How did the kitchen look to you today?

Are you about to run dry for the time being? (Mrs. Myrick)

I certainly appreciate your taking the time to come over here and make this tape for us because it will be a marvelous asset for the Historical Society to have in its file.

[Mr. Myrick is now showing me snapshots of the 1926 hurricane damage at West Palm Beach. His mother was at West Palm Beach and the family came over to get her.]

[These are pictures of the hurricane of 1926.]

What building is this?

We had some friends (you may remember the girl we told you about named Carla) her folks were living up there in a bungalow. A few days after the hurricane there was no sign of it.

This was 1926?

Lantana Depot. That's what was left of it. We came from Tampa down through Sebring down into Okeechobee City then across to Fort Pierce. This is on the road to Ft. Pierce. The road was completely covered with water.

This is a picture taken in Lake Worth. There was a bunch of casualties. They wouldn't let us get any closer.

This is a picture of building materials, etc.

This was a garage with a car supposedly parked in it, completely blown down. This part there was part of this building torn off.

Moved the fourth story right off the building.

Here's a row of houses.

This was a garage, smashed down.

Was there more destruction in West Palm Beach than in Boca Raton?

When we got there we picked up mother and father and drove all the way down to Boca Raton. We took pictures of Lake Worth, Lantana, and places like that.

Where was the most damage?

A lot of people had put up these Australian Pines for wind-breaks. They were flattened.

See these buildings--they just looked like someone put a hand on them and just flattened them.

[Showing pictures continued.]

This is one of the streets. This is the picture that I would love to have had show up, but it doesn't show up at all.

Right here is a coconut palm. You see the fronds--just like it was wrung off and set down here.

This is the road between Fort Pierce and West Palm Beach that is washed out.

This is another picture of Australian pines flattened.

This is a boat washed up on high and dry land.

This car was loaded with fertilizer and blew it off the railroad track.

More Australian pines.

This is the canal--around Palm Beach, I think.

This is one of the houses over here. This part was blown off.

Were you ever in a hurricane while you lived in Boca Raton?

No. I don't know of one hitting here while I lived here. I was in a hurricane that hit Tampa in 1921. It wasn't very bad.

This was quite a hurricane--the one in 1926.

Were there some killed?

Yes, there were some killed in Okeechobee and Key West. Twenty people were killed in Okeechobee.

Hurricane of 1928 was very bad also, 1926 and 1928.

The hurricane of 1926 was the one I was talking about. If you go to Okeechobee there are twenty graves right there in the parkway of the people killed.

I certainly thank you for coming over. Are you going back to Tampa today?

Yes.

You have quite a bit of a trip ahead of you.

We'll just get on I 95 and go.

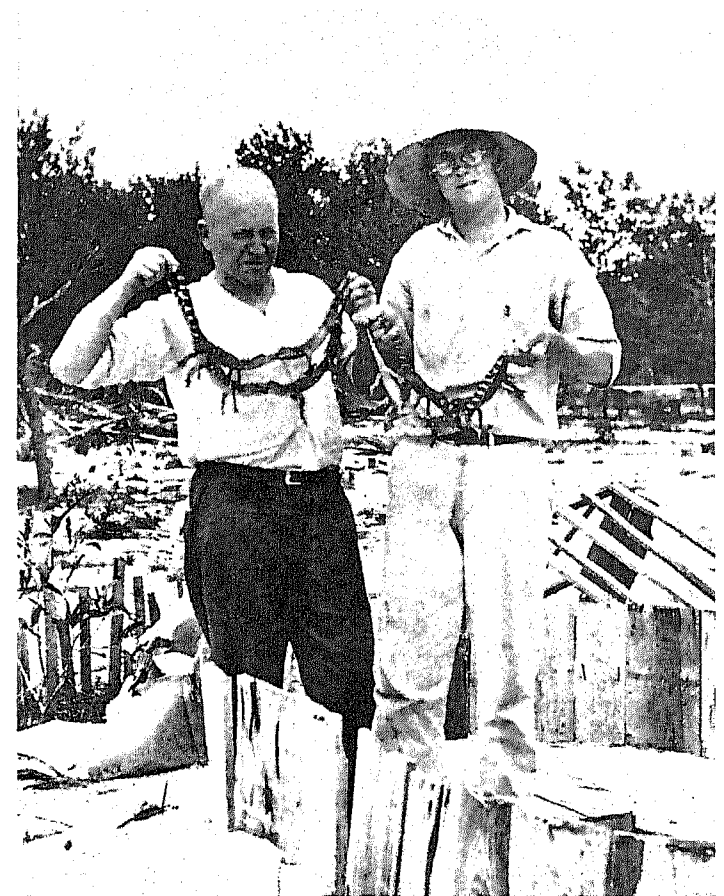
* * * * *

The tape you have heard contains early recollections by Joseph Myrick of his childhood in Boca Raton with background voices of his wife and sister, Aldah.

Today is October 21, 1979.

This tape was made by Betty Cruickshank for the Boca Raton Historical Society at her home. Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Myrick of Tampa, and Aldah Myrick Overstreet, were in Boca Raton for the official opening, this afternoon, of Singing Pines Museum.

This historic house (Singing Pines) was built by Robert Myrick, father of Joseph and Aldah, in 1911. The Myrick family had come from Charlotte, North Carolina to Deerfield Beach in 1910 for Joe's father's health. They moved from Deerfield Beach to Boca Raton in 1911, living first in a house on Northwest Fourth Avenue, until Mr. Myrick built Singing Pines. The Myricks left Boca Raton in 1917. The father, Robert Myrick, died in 1946 and is buried at Haines City, Florida.



"Robert Andrew Myrick on right with Bill Young, a stonemason brought over from Scotland to carve fence around the Deering estate in Miami. Later settled in Boca Raton and opened the first grocery store and eventually took over post office after Mr. Long. 1912 or 13."

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"I am holding one of my day old baby 'gators. They make very cute little pets. About 1915."

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