

*Interview with Mr. and Mrs. Theodore Maybank (Mary)
Carol Borchert and Elliott Hutson
September 26, 1996*

EH: ...You hear these things the carriage drivers say, you know some things these people say are not right.

MM: Oh, some things are awful.

TM: You know the whole thing is that after the War Between the States the South was completely impoverished and so many families, I don't know whether you're familiar with the Sloane place or the Fire (?) place on South Battery.....I remember when there were five members of the family living in that place and Lottie and Carla and Elizabeth and Earl (he was my age)...they all had rooms on the second floor. And by gosh the ballroom was made into bedrooms and all of this was to try to keep expenses down.....48 Elizabeth Street..my mother was an only daughter, she had four brothers, Aiken Rhett, Edmond Rhett who we called "Uncle Bunny" and then my mother Harriet, and Uncle Iney and Uncle Burnet, so there were five children.

EH: Now William Aiken was your grandfather.

TM: My great grandfather.

CB: William Aiken, Jr. was your great grandfather.

TM: Yes. My grandfather was Andrew Burnet Rhett.

EH: And your great grandfather was William Aiken, Jr., and he had gotten the house from William Aiken, Sr.

TM: That's right. That's right...Well after the War Between the States, nobody wanted anything else ----- (to do?), but he had the first railroad in America. And he wanted the railroad to run from Charleston to Barnwell, but they said he'd have to set all the woods afire in Barnwell, so he had it run to Aiken which was named for Gov. Aiken's father, and he lived on Meeting Street where the Southern Railroad has that house now.

EH: Where the National Trust has their office.

TM: Gov. Aiken's father's house originally.

EH: OK, I see. Lovely house. Beautiful ballroom there. Woodwork in that house is marvelous, yeah. I think Carol has some questions.

TM: Well there are a lot of things I might not be able to answer. I was the youngest in the family, there was seven of us, my little brother died when he was four years old, and so all

of them have died off now except for my sister Harry. She lives in Beaufort. She's older than I am.

CB: So your sister lives in Beaufort.

TM: And her name is Harriet Boyne.

CB: Now your mother was Harriet.

TM: That's right. She was Harriet Lowndes Rhett, and her mother was Henrietta.

CB: And her mother was Henrietta Aiken Rhett, daughter of William Aiken Jr. and Harriet Lowndes.

TM: That's right. And my sister was named after her mother Harriet.

CB: Your mother was named after her grandmother, Harriet.

TM: That's right. That's right.

CB: Did your mother live in the house, then, as a child?

TM: She did. She grew up there, married my father, and then Uncle Aiken, he lived there with his daughter Lila, Lila Legare...

MM: Birthright.

TM: That's right. She married again. Lila's got to be...a hundred, she's in Bishop-Gadsden. She was first married to Billy Legare, and then he died, he was a state senator.

CB: So this would be your first cousin, Lila.

TM: Yeah.

CB: Your uncle was I'on Rhett.

TM: My mother's brother. And there were three. And there were two bachelors. He later married Frances Legare and had no children. But Uncle Burnet never married. And there were four brothers, Uncle Aiken, Uncle Bunny, Uncle I'on and Uncle Burnet, and my mother was in the middle.

CB: You had seven in your family, correct?

TM: Yes. My little brother died when he was four years old. William Aiken Rhett Maybank...My mother actually had nine children, I think, but so many of them died before they were..

EH: Um, hmm.

CB: So I'on Rhett was your uncle, and he and Frances Hinson Dill had no children.

TM: Right. They were married late in life. She was really Frances Dill. Might have been Frances Hinson Dill, but she was really Frances Dill. She had that plantation over there which the Museum now has.

EH: See they own that plantation on the Stono River which was given to the Museum...Dill's Bluff.

TM: Yeah. Dill's Bluff.

CB: What we're trying to do is understand not only geneaology but hear from people who were youngsters in the house...

TM: Well right after the War Uncle Bunny's family lived there, Uncle Aiken's family. Uncle Aiken had one daughter. Uncle Bunny had Henrietta, Lowdy, Betty, and Bunny. Uncle Bunny had four children. Three daughters and one boy. And Bunny is living there on Logan street, I think. He's younger than I am.

EH: Yeah, yeah. I see him every now and then.

CB: And he's the one son of Edmund.

TM: He's Edmund, Jr., Yeah.

CB: Are any of the three sisters, the three daughters living?

TM: Henrietta died a while back, and Lowdy died. I'm sure Betty is living, but she'd be the only one. She married a guy named Bob Canady, and I haven't seen them in years. She's in Camden.

CB: So Edmund lived in the house right after the first world war?

TM: After he got married. He married Lowdy Ball.

CB: And he lived there right after the first world war?

TM: Well, I don't know when he was born. I was born in 1910, so I guess he was born during world war one, I would say.

CB: Now did you ever live in the house?

TM: No.

CB: No, but you visited, right?

TM: I spent many a night up there. When I was a kid, yeah. When the family'd go away.

CB: So you would go and visit, then, which members of the family?

TM: It would be all of them. Uncle Aiken would have Lila, and Uncle I'on, and Uncle Burnet lived with us every summer of his live at Flat Rock, so you might say we were closer to him, than anybody else, 'cause for threee months every summer we had Highland lake up there, and after we sold Higland lake, Mr. Holt..H-O-L-T..who developed it as an inn and country club which didn't go over....[description of new place]

EH: Oh, that was the Lowndes place where Betty Lee lived.

TM: Right.

EH: OK. I know where you are.

CB: When you refer to Uncle Aiken...

TM: He was the senior one, my mother's brother.

CB: Was his first name William?

TM: Right. And that was Lila's father.

CB: So were the two brothers ever living in the Aiken-Rhett house at the same time?

TM: Well for years, and years, and years ..because let me see, Mary you better help me with this...Frances Dill and I'on must have gone together thirty years before they got married.

MM: I think they probably did.

TM: A hell of a long time....She always made fun of it because he resigned from the St. Cecilia, and she said when she married a Rhett she thought she was marrying somebody, but he had resigned years back to save money...and she had married Uncle Iney, cause I think she would have been the bride of the ball..I was the manager when Mrs. Peter Barnwell was the bride of the ball, and she was in her 80s...

EH: Theodore, I was curious the other day because I went to look at the back of that courtyard and I was looking at the stables...When do you think those carriages rolled out of there last?

TM: I remember exactly, because they had a hell of a time getting them back...they were used in Grace Kelley's movie "The Swan" in Asheville, North Carolina...And they took the carriages from here to Biltmore house..and we had a hell of a time getting them back, and then we sent one to Charlie Duell, and it had one carriage lamp off, so Charlie said if we let him use them for a year he'd put the carriage lamp back on, so he took them out to Middleton Place and used them for a year and put the carriage lamp back on...and they've been there ever since. We don't let anybody use them now.

CB: So have they always been there at 48 Elizabeth?

TM: Always have, just as they are now, except when they went to Biltmore House for the movie, and I think they called it "The Swan."

CB: So what about an automobile? Was there ever an automobile?

TM: And so, the automobiles, they just parked them in the yard. Or...you just left them on the street...at one time you had to clear the streets in the City of Charleston for the street sweepers...

CB: So the automobiles were never parked inside the buildings?

TM: The carriages have been there as long as I can remember.

CB: Were the cars parked inside the gate?

TM: Should be parked inside the gate becasue one time you have a lot of uh...I don't think the house was entered, I can never recall 48 Elizabeth street being broken into, we never had much trouble with vandalisms and what not up there. We had that wire thing over the front door so that nobody broke the glass to get in.

MM: Did you tell her that your grandfather owned all of those houses on the side of the street? I guess you knew that?

CB: The Aiken tenements.

TM: That's right. He owned all of those and a batch of houses all over the city.

CB: Now I'm trying to figure out who lived in the house in the twentieth century.

TM: Well, when they first got married, Uncle Aiken married Mary Valentine, from North Carolina, and they had one daughter Lila, and they lived there, and Uncle Burnet lived

there, and Uncle I'on, and Frances Dill. Uncle Burnet died first and Uncle I'on lived there until his death, and then his widow left it to the Museum....We offered it to Historic Charleston, and Frances worked with me on it, and I think it was too architectural and nothing other... and then the Charleston Museum took it, I think mainly because Frances was leaving them Dill Bluff....and then they sold it to Historic Charleston...I think they got a million dollars for it...

EH: We paid \$600,000.

TM: And before they could have gotten it for free!

[Discussion of Frances Edmunds opposing the Foundation taking over the Aiken-Rhett and the subject being quieted until it was given to the Charleston Museum. Discussion of conservation policy of HCF.]

TM: I don't know much about it, but I do know that during the War Between the States Jefferson Davis stayed there.

CB: But did your Uncle Edmund, Uncle Aiken and Uncle Burnet live there at the same time?

TM: All of them did, yeah. The only one to move out was my mother when she married my father, Joseph Maybank. When she got married he got a place on Rutledge where I was born. And then after that we moved downtown and lived at 11 Meeting Street for a long time, and then....said...tired of these big old houses and built 41 Meeting Street.

CB: So you had all four brothers living in the house at the same time?

TM: Definitely, yeah.

CB: Where did they live? Do you remember how the floors were used?

TM: I don't remember because I was so small.

CB: Do you remember bedrooms being on the third floor?

TM: Yeah....And then they had something on the first floor, I've forgotten what it was, 'cause the dining room and everything was on the second floor, and then the carriage house was back there, but I think that was for the help. The servants lived in back over the carriage house.

CB: The servants lived in back over the carriage house?

TM: Yeah.

CB: Did they live over the kitchen? Was there old kitchen there? There are two large outbuildings...

TM: There was back there, but then they moved the kitchen on inside.

MM: Frances Dill did that.

TM: See, I don't remember. There were two bachelors, and Uncle Iney was City Alderman for years and years and years, so they weren't recluses or anything like that, but they remembered the house in the glory and they weren't too happy to have people in there. Although the portrait is still in there of my great grandmother, which was given to my mother and she give it to Lowdy, but Lowdy's got no place for it, so I guess that it'll always be there.

CB: So the way I'm understanding it, the brothers lived in the house, and they had servants living over the carriage house..

TM: That's right.

CB: And the kitchen was out in one of those buildings but Mrs. Dill moved it inside. Now where was it? On the first floor?

TM: No on the second floor, right by the dining room.

CB: Was the basement ever used?

TM: Not to my knowledge.

EH: See the kitchen was on the first floor at one time.

TM: I don't remember that 'cause Frances moved it to the second floor, see.

CB: Were there servants still living out in both back buildings, or only living in one?

TM: I couldn't answer that , could you Mary?

MM: When Frances lived there, I don't think there were servants living out in those buildings.

TM: I don't either.

CB: Were there servants that stayed overnight?

TM: When we were little there was a groom who lived over the horses, who took care of the horses...my uncle ----, put this down too, because he'd love it...he loved to fight

chickens, and Uncle Aiken was just like him, and he was such a great raiser of game chickens that they had a special brand called Rhett Morgan. That was his brand of game chickens...back then was a gentleman's sport...

CB: Which uncle?

TM: My grandfather.

CB: This was your grandfather?

TM: My grandfather, Uncle Aiken inherited it from his father, you see. And Jack inherited it. Jack loved to fight chickens.

EH: I remember that. I remember those chickens back there. And at Peter's grocery store. All those chickens wake you up in the morning crowing....[Story of chickens in First Scots graveyard]

TM: Charleston was a small place in those days.

CB: So they'd lock the chickens in First Scots graveyard??

TM: No, they'd let 'em walk around over there and then come home and feed 'em and then you'd lock 'em up. The southeast corner of Tradd and Meeting was Peter's grocery store.

MM: It was called the Black and White store because all the white birds sat on one window and all the colored birds sat on the other.

CB: Do you remember the privies at the back of the property ever being used?

TM: No I don't. They were pretty well closed up.

MM: Those privies are adorable.

CB: They are, aren't they?

EH: Do you remember anything about the parties they used to have up on Elizabeth Street?

TM: Must have been before my day.

CB: When you were little were those first floor drawing rooms used?

TM: You walked up the marble steps and that was used. Nothing on the first floor was ever used. That was just a basement. You had to have a basement in those days to keep

the air circulating to keep the house cool. We never had any problems with the tide. I never heard of the tide coming in.

CB: What was this about the air circulating under the house?

TM: So it wouldn't be stagnant. I got a basement seven feet under the house, didn't want the dampness in.

CB: OK, that makes sense. So what you're calling the second floor, where you go up the marble steps, that was used.

TM: Yes, that was used. Everything was on the second floor.

CB: Now the double drawing rooms on that floor where the portrait of your great grandmother is....

TM: That was up always there. Used that mostly for parties and Christmas and what not, and family get togethers. Other than that, kept things pretty well closed up. Not much furniture in there. When Uncle Aiken moved out he took his furniture which he had a right to do, then when mother moved out she took her furniture which she had a right to do, when Uncle Bunny married the Ball girl, she took hers out, so Uncle Burnet and Uncle Iney with their furniture, and the curtains...I don't think anybody took the curtains out. So the house as you might say was very sparsely furnished.

CB: So it was just your Uncle I'on and Uncle Burnet living there?

TM: Uncle I'on was still living there when he married Frances Dill.

CB: So did they use those grand drawing rooms at all?

TM: They had it open every Christmas, there was a Christmas party. I think everyone wanted to see the portrait of their great grandmother, so they had it all opened up, but most everything was in the dining room and that other little room.

CB: So the dining room which is at the far end when you walk in...

TM: That's right. That's where everything was.

CB: Your Christmas dinners?

TM: A lot of times, yeah.

CB: And the kitchen was right next to that.

TM: That's right. At the head of the dining room was a partial sitting room.

CB: On the end of the dining room there was a sitting room?

TM: Yeah, on the Charlotte Street side.

MM: It had a sofa in there. I'm talking about the dining room where Frances and Uncle I'on...

TM: The dining room was huge.

MM: I know, but what I mean is when you went up there to see Frances and Uncle I'on that's where you always sat.

TM: That's right. You didn't sit in the little round picture room..

MM: Excuse me, but the only time you ever went in that little room was at Christmas when they'd have the Christmas party.

TM: That's right. And are the statues still there? [Story of how Uncle Josie had had too much to drink one time and put his arm around the statue and everyone teased him about that ever after] Always a joke of everything up there. No one took anything seriously.

CB: So you remember all of the Christmas parties being in the room with all of the art and the statues?

MM: That room was where the Christmas parties always were. That was the only time you ever went in that little room was at Christmas, when everybody was in there for a drink before Christmas dinner. They had a Christmas party every Christmas day. The whole family went.

TM: And Mary remembers that Frances and all wanted to give me 48 Elizabeth Street. I said even if you endowed it I couldn't afford it. I said no way.

MM: I wouldn't have had it.

TM: It would have run you crazy up there. Some fifth cousin coming and calling you up to see the grandmother what not. It would have been a rat race up there. I said no way.

[Discussion which got cut off of changing carpets seasonally, in the lifetime of both Mary and Theodore Maybank and the way the straw would be put down or else everything would get eaten by moths. Nothing remembered of the third floor except that it was probably where the carpets, etc. were kept. Second floor was entirely bedchambers. Wool carpets were stored in newspaper and turpentine.]

[end]