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An Interview

with

MRS. HUNTER GOODRICH

January 27, 1982

Interviewed by

Graham Hicks

HICKS: This is Graham Hicks and I am talking to Mrs. Hunter Goodrich, but I will call you Mary Louise, if you will allow me.

GOODRICH: I'd love that.

HICKS: We are at Montaigne on January 27. Mary Louise, what are the things that stand out in your mind when the Natchez Pilgrimage began?

GOODRICH: The first thing I remember, after Pilgrimage started, were the great numbers of people. We did not expect to have so many people.

HICKS: Let's go back even further than that. When was the thing "birthed"?

GOODRICH: Well, we all thought Katherine was crazy. Really, we all said, "Katherine is crazy. Who wants to come to Natchez?" And I remember Katherine talking to various people, like Mrs. Kelly, saying she had to open her home to the public and to Mrs. George Marshall, Sr. at Landsdowne. Katherine said, "Now Mrs. Agnes (Marshall), we're going to come out to your house and bring some people." Mrs. Agnes said, "Indeed you are not going to bring strange people into my house to see it like it is. Indeed, I am not about to do it!" But Katherine said, "We are going to be there." Sure enough, we were there, and Mrs. Agnes opened her house and we took in all the strangers.

It was so amazing to have so many people. And they loved what they saw. As I remember our first Pilgrimage, I think we had about seven hundred and fifty people. We didn't know what to do with them! We couldn't house them all in the one hotel we had then--the Eola Hotel. We took some of them home with us. Because some tourists came by train, my mother-in-law, Mrs. Kendall, William, my first husband, and I would each take a separate car and take car loads of

GOODRICH cont.: tourists from house to house. We were just as excited as they were.

HICKS: When the Pilgrimage was getting started, was the motive a selfish one, to promote the individual homes, or to promote Natchez as a community?

GOODRICH: This is exactly the way it was: We were beginning to lose a lot of houses; especially houses on corners were being torn down and filling stations put up. So Katherine really brought it to our minds. I think we were all worried about it, but she said, "We've got to do something to save Natchez. We have got to do something to interest the world in Natchez and to interest the Natchez people in saving what we have. So let's invite the world to come to Natchez." That is the way she put it. And we did, without dreaming what we were getting into.

HICKS: And one of the first homes that was shown was Montaigne.

GOODRICH: Right. Montaigne was one of the first homes shown on the Pilgrimage. We were so thrilled. We met so many delightful people. We were just as entertained as they were.

So the next year we said that since we had so many people, we'll just have it two or three days longer. I think we went to ten days, then two weeks. Still we couldn't handle the crowds. It was amazing. People would come back year after year. We had a delightful group here from Kansas City. Then a wonderful person from Chicago-- she was later married to a gentleman who was a Chief of Protocol from the Diplomatic Corps. He was from the Argentine. She gave us untold publicity.

38297

GOODRICH cont.: We didn't have any secretaries; we didn't have anybody to pay. Everybody did work, but nobody was paid for anything. It was just sort of "catch as catch can."

HICKS: Before they began to show the houses, I understand this was a garden show, and they showed the gardens then. Was Montaigne's garden in that?

GOODRICH: Yes. Montaigne's garden was. That was not the first Pilgrimage. That was a Garden Club meeting. I think that was in 1931. The first Pilgrimage was in 1932.

This makes me think of something else. My husband and I were going to Washington to the Inauguration (of Roosevelt), and at that time it was held in March of 1933. We went to Jackson to catch the train. Gov. Conner was governor of Mississippi then, and he told us that he had just gotten word from President Roosevelt that on the next day all the banks were to be closed. I called Natchez about the Pilgrimage; you see, this was the first of March and we were just getting ready to have our Pilgrimage. Most people said, "You can't have the Pilgrimage--nobody has any money. The banks are closed. How in the world are you going to have it?"

After talking to the group that went on this private train to Washington, we found out that everybody had an ample supply of money. (The men had so much money in their pockets they could hardly walk!) Nobody from Mississippi was staying away from the Inauguration, so I said let's just go ahead and have it. So we did and it was a great success--even though the banks were closed all over the United States.

HICKS: That's the first time I've ever heard any connection with this second Pilgrimage being at the time the banks closed. I hadn't realized that those things happened together.

GOODRICH: That's true.

HICKS: Mary Louise, what is the origin of the name of the house, Montaigne?

GOODRICH: I have done research on that and have been told that it was the original name of the Martin family. They were French, and their name was Montaigne. It was spelled Montaigne--I am sure of that. Through some misprint sixty or more years ago, the name was printed Monteigne. I have an old clipping where it was spelled with an a. So I am sure of that. We have never found any -teigne, ever. It was just a mistake. I understand that when the Martins came over to this part of the world, they decided to Anglicize their name from Montaigne to Martin, and they have been Martins ever since. Now they have named some of their children, grandchildren, etc., Montaigne, but that is my understanding of it.

HICKS: This was the Martins who built Montaigne?

GOODRICH: William Martin, who was later a general in the Confederate Army. He was a lawyer.

HICKS: They have some other local connections here?

GOODRICH: Oh, yes. Miss Margaret Martin. She is part of that family. Also, Louis Martin, who used to be in the bank, was another member of that family. Wonderful family.

HICKS: As I remember, your husband then, Bill Kendall, as we knew him, was very much interested in camellias when they first came to this part of the country.

GOODRICH: Very much so. He devoted the last twenty-five years of his life to camellias. We now have and have had over 350 varieties of camellias on the grounds here at Montaigne. This is the first year, I am sorry to say, we have not had camellias in the house. We had a horrible cold spell this year, as you well know. Ordinarily, the cold will kill the blossoms that are open and then three or four days later, you can cut all you want.

HICKS: Now, do you have any legends about Montaigne that were brought down to you through the various former owners of the house? Do you have any ghosts?

GOODRICH: We don't think so, but every so often we hear the stairs squeak, and I say, "There's General Martin coming up!"

I have read that this was the site of a much older house here on the grounds. This property was once part of Linden. Mrs. Martin was born and raised at Linden. She was Margaret Conner, and when she and General Martin were married, her mother and father gave them this site on which to build--a twenty-five acre house-site which was part of the Linden acreage. She and her husband built this house. They lived here until the Civil War. Since General Martin was in the Confederate Army, Mrs. Martin was told by the Union officials, who were stationed at Fort Rosalie at that time, that she should move back to Linden with her children and finer furniture for safety.

She moved, and the house was not occupied for those years. But they moved back after the war was over and raised a family of thirteen children. Their descendants lived here until 1915 or 1916. At that time the house was sold to a delightful family named Darling. They came here from the Midwest and lived here for a good many years. Then they sold it.

HICKS: Now, I understand the house was completed about 1855, so it was here during the Civil War. What stories have survived about things that happened here during the War?

GOODRICH: I've read the story about the Union troops stabling their horses in Montaigne. That's hard for me to believe. I do know that while the house was being put in excellent order in 1926 or '27, I did see

GOODRICH cont.: some floor boards with hoof prints on them. I don't know why we didn't save those.

But I like to think that some impetuous Union officers rode their horses through--just for the heck of it. I just don't believe they would have stabled their horses in the house. There was so little damage done to the houses in Natchez. We must have had unusually fine Union officers here. Otherwise we would have had a great deal more damage. I cannot believe they would have taken a lovely house like this and used it as a stable. I just can't believe it.

HICKS: Were there any records remaining in the house used by the Union Army?

GOODRICH: No, not that I know of. But when John Darling would come back to Natchez, he would always come out here. He would tell me about stacks of books that General Martin had. They saved a few, but so many of them were thrown out. I'm sure the Martins took what they wanted with them--the ones they could house properly. But a lot of things were simply thrown out.

HICKS: What is the style of Montaigne?

GOODRICH: Well, I really don't talk about Montaigne except during Pilgrimage and have forgotten my research, but I think of it more or less as Regency Revival--that is what appeals to me. Some people call it Federal--I'm not too sure about that.

HICKS: What do you remember about the activities that went on during the first Pilgrimages? Were you Queen?

GOODRICH: No, I was never asked to be Queen. I was asked to be president in those early days, but William didn't want me to be president. I was secretary of the original Natchez Garden Club. My name is signed on the charter papers in Jackson, if I remember correctly. After we became so successful, we decided that we had better incorporate

GOODRICH cont.:

and get a charter, which was the proper thing to do.

It was amazing! We all worked so hard, and we loved what we were doing. Nobody had a dime. Natchez lived off of Natchez. There was no industry. And so Katherine would say, "Who is going to Memphis? Let me ride with you. I'll go and show my slides." She would borrow the church lantern to show her slides, and somebody would put up ten dollars, somebody else, fifteen dollars-- enough to buy some slides. So she would go to Memphis and stay with friends and eat with friends and give her lectures. And the same thing happened anywhere she went...New Orleans...it was all local mainly.

Once or twice she got to visit friends in Chicago. She would write these friends who would have a big meeting of Garden Club members and let her make a talk. And that's the way it was, all word of mouth.

HICKS:

I want to go back to that question about the motivation. Back in those days, were you hoping to eventually make a financial killing out of this thing or did you think about the advancement of Natchez?

GOODRICH:

We never thought about the financial end of it. It never occurred to us. We simply were excited about the people coming and liking what they saw. Yet, we were distressed over the state of delapidation of houses, because some of the roofs leaked, some of the cornices were falling, and the paper was coming off the walls. We saw that people were becoming interested in Natchez, and maybe we hoped that the houses would not continue to be torn down.

Then we made some money, and as our next project we decided to restore Connelly's Tavern. Connelly's Tavern at that time was terrible. Some of the columns were out on the ground, and you could see straight through the roof.

GOODRICH cont.: Everybody thought we were crazy. They thought that house was gone. We got Dick Koch up here. We put it in wonderful condition. We had copper guttering installed and an old-fashioned hand-hummed shingled roof. All of that.

HICKS: It must have been a source of great pride to you.

GOODRICH: It was. I think it cost us either \$12,500 or \$18,000. Those two figures stick in my mind. One sum was what we accumulated in our treasury after restoring Connelly's Tavern. The other figure represented what we spent to restore it.

HICKS: Speaking of either figure, was that money the Club had earned by Pilgrimage for several years?

GOODRICH: We earned every penny of it.

HICKS: You didn't borrow anything--you didn't sign notes?

GOODRICH: No, not at that time.

HICKS: You had money to restore Connelly's Tavern.

GOODRICH: Yes. That is the money the tourists brought into the Garden Club-- \$18,000 plus \$12,000. It was at that time that the home owners started thinking of the wear and tear on the houses due to opening them for Pilgrimage--that they would not normally have for years and years. They thought some of that money should be diverted to the restoration of the houses making up the tours. It was a worthwhile project. That was the beginning of the thought of money going back into the private homes.

HICKS: It must have been a wonderful sense of accomplishment--the opening of Connelly's Tavern. Do you remember anything about the dedication?

GOODRICH: I remember that we were so proud of it. I remember the raising of the flag. We sent invitations to the Governor of Mississippi and maybe the Governor of Louisiana. We had some very noteworthy people come to help us celebrate the opening of Connelly's Tavern. We

GOODRICH cont.: were so thrilled and proud of what we had done.

HICKS: You remember the actual event? You attended it and participated in it?

GOODRICH: Oh, yes indeed. If you had seen that house! And of course the people in Natchez were saying, "Those ladies are just crazy. They can't save that house. It's gone completely."

HICKS: You mentioned a name earlier--Koch?

GOODRICH: Richard Koch. He was well known for the restoration work he had done in New Orleans and around New Orleans. He was one of the finest architects at that time. He is dead now. He was active in Natchez. When we started restoring our houses in later years, we wanted Dick Koch to tell us the proper thing to do. We didn't have any money. Our first checks were three hundred dollars, then five hundred dollars, but that was better than nothing. So we employed Dick Koch. Some of the home owners would say, "I've lived in this house all my life. I'm not going to have a strange man come here and tell me what I can and can't do!"

We had that to contend with. But we knew he was a marvelous architect. And he has proved himself through the work he has done in Natchez.

HICKS: I remember when I first opened my office here. I was employed by the ladies to attempt to settle the tax problem--a reasonable city tax and county tax. I did some research at that time and found that the ladies had received an average of seven hundred and fifty dollars a year. That was after 1949 or '50. So nobody was getting rich.

GOODRICH: I think the first money was paid in 1935 or 1936, which was one of the things that caused the split. A lot of things caused the split. We won't go into that. It was just due, because all the houses were falling apart then. Dick Koch said the first thing to use the

GOODRICH cont.: money on was the roof. Then the foundation. He said not to worry about the looks on the inside or outside.

HICKS: I think that reinforces the belief that the ladies have been unanimous in saying the motive for starting the Pilgrimage was the promotion of Natchez. There was no selfish motive in any of it. Nobody was getting rich, in fact they were not covering expenses.

GOODRICH: No, indeed. We never thought about that. In fact, the first year or two of Pilgrimage, we wore beautiful original costumes we had found in our attics. I remember the most beautiful costumes were worn by Liza Conner at Clovernook on South Union Street. The Geddes live there now. Anyway, Mrs. Conner had saved these beautiful hand-made French imported dresses made at that period--around 1850. Other people also had beautiful costumes in their attics. So we wore these beautiful costumes for the first year or two. Then they fell apart. Then we had to start having costumes made. Of course, nobody had designed costumes. We had the old Codey books and sewing women here--Mrs. Ellen Starnes was one of the first to make professional looking, really beautiful dresses. Yet some of our colored sewing women, who used to come to us one day a week, could sew beautifully. I remember Violet, who used to come to us every Wednesday, would sew for the children and made beautiful costumes. She is dead, too.

HICKS: Mary Louise, in those days, you were active in politics to some extent. What do you remember about the attitudes of the public bodies--the Board of Supervisors and the Board of Aldermen--when you were starting the Pilgrimage? Were they a hindrance or a help?

GOODRICH: I would say the Board of Aldermen and the Board of Supervisors were a help. I don't think we asked them to do anything. I don't think we needed that much help at that time. But I'm sure if we had, they would have helped.

The only thing I remember that was not helpful was our Chamber of Commerce. That is the tragedy of it. I spoke before the Chamber of Commerce several times, and several other people did, just begging the business people to spend--if they did spend money on their buildings--to spend it in the Natchez manner. This was my theme: "I am not asking you to spend any money on your building, but if you do spend it, spend it so it will look like Natchez. We don't want to look like a little town in the Midwest...like every other town. We want to look like Natchez used to look." When I was growing up, the buildings on Main Street were beautiful, just like Joe Dixon's is now. He's one of the very few left. On Franklin Street, every building looked just like Joe Dixon's on Main Street. They were lovely old buildings. We nearly went crazy when the Mississippi Power and Light Company destroyed that corner--Tillman's Corner. It was a lovely spot. We begged them not to do it. They said, "Oh, it will look just like Natchez." It doesn't look like Natchez.

I was president of the Garden Club at the time the Kress Building was built on the corner of Commerce and Franklin. I wrote them a letter asking them to build a building that would look a little like an old Natchez building--the outside brick to have a Flemish bond and to build a simple building. And they did. We did the same thing with the telephone company, and they did. Their original

GOODRICH cont.: brick building on Main Street was in keeping with Natchez. But the business people of Natchez thought we were crazy. That's the sad story. The business people in Natchez said they wanted to be modern. They didn't want to look old-fashioned. They just didn't realize. We sold the world on Natchez, but we couldn't sell the Natchez business people on Natchez. It was a tragedy really.

HICKS: Do you feel that there has been some little change in attitude of the business people?

GOODRICH: Oh, there has been a great change. One young man whose family has been in business here a long, long time, almost a hundred years, said, "No, indeed, Mrs. Mary Louise, we don't want to be old-fashioned; we want to be modern." He is one of our staunch supporters now in trying to get the restoration of Natchez going. It just took a long time. It is amazing, though, how the outside world would go along with us. Not only did we accomplish a lot in the preservation of Natchez, but I like to feel that we also have done that throughout the country. Everywhere you go there is a Pilgrimage, not just in the South, but all over the country. People are realizing what they have and what they should keep as history, as their part of the history of the United States. That's the way I feel about Natchez. We are just caretakers of our history. We will be gone tomorrow or the next day, and somebody else will come along, and I hope they will take care of our history. That's the way I think Natchez people feel about Natchez.

HICKS: It would seem to me that you've done a pretty good job of infusing, if that's the proper word, this feeling in Natchez. Mary Louise, I have heard it said that if anybody has in his veins pure Natchez blood, you have. Where do they get that idea?

GOODRICH: I like to think that all of my mother's ancestors and all of my father's ancestors came to the Natchez territory before 1800. When people come in my house and ask, "How long have you lived in Natchez?" I say, "Since 1790." Some of them don't even hear me, but some of them will say, "What did you say?" But I like to say that.

End of Interview

Transcribed by Peggy Forman

Typed by Phebe Winters