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An Interview

with

MRS. ANABEL YOUNG MAXIE

August 25, 1981

GRAHAM HICKS: This is August 25, 1981, and we are with Mrs. Anabel Young Maxie, and our purpose is to get on tape what she remembers about the famous old home now known as King's Tavern. What is the first thing you remember about King's Tavern as a youngster?

MAXIE: Well, my first recollections would be when my father and my grandfather played cards in the bedroom, and my brother and I played house in a big box that was put in front of the fireplace for us to keep us quiet while they were playing cards.

HICKS: You speak of your father and grandfather. Can you give us some names?

MAXIE: My father was Thomas Young, and my grandfather was Aaron Register.

HICKS: Your connection with King's Tavern came through your grandfather, did it not? What year did they acquire King's Tavern?

MAXIE: It was about 1820 that my great, great, great grandmother, Elizabeth Margaret Postlewaite,moved there. Her husband was Henry Postlewaite, who was one of two brothers who came here down from Pennsylvania. When Henry died in the yellow fever epidemic, his widow moved to King's Tavern. It was owned by the bank at that time. Then in 1823, the house was deeded, not to Mrs. Postlewaite, but to Dr. Duncan, because women were not allowed to have property in their name at that time. Then in 1861, it was deeded to Mrs. Postlewaite's two daughters.

HICKS: You were raised there as a child. And born there?

MAXIE: Yes, I was. I was born in the back bedroom, as I call it. I think I was the fifth generation of my family to have been born in that house, and the seventh generation to have lived there.

HICKS: Of the Postlewaites and the Registers?

MAXIE: Yes, and the Bledsoes.

HICKS: Where do the Bledsoes come in to this? Were they before the Postlewaites?

MAXIE: Oh, no. Elizabeth Postlewaite was the first one. Her daughter married a Bledsoe--Benjamin Bledsoe. Then their daughter married a MacDonald, married a Register. My mother was a Register. It came down through the women of the family.

HICKS: You must have heard a lot of tales coming down through the years. What have you heard about the earlier history of King's Tavern? Do you know what the first grant was that got it out of the government? Do you know who it was granted to?

MAXIE: No, I do not. But I believe some of the earlier deeds were written in Spanish. And I believe the record went back to Spain. At one time, after I had deeded it to the Garden Club, they were going to check into that, and my Aunt Jean Modessit wrote to the Spanish government. But she was never able to get a translation of those records.

HICKS: Do you have any idea of how King's Tavern got its name?

MAXIE: Yes. Richard King ran a tavern there. And at one time it was called the Postlewaite House, and another time it was called the Bledsoe House. Eventually it went back to King's Tavern when it was put on tour in 1932.

HICKS: In the early writings about King's Tavern, it was referred to as being on the outskirts of town, but when you were growing up it was right in town.

MAXIE: Yes. When I was growing up, there was a gravel street in front of the house, and I remember the horses and buggies and drays. And I remember Grandmother going early in the mornings to the market, particularly on weekends, on Franklin Street, one block over, where the farmers brought all their things by horses and carts. King's Tavern is located on Jefferson Street.

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HICKS: What other stories have you heard about the Tavern? Possibly some reference to Indians being in the area?

MAXIE: My grandmother has told me stories about how her grandmother watched the Indians out of the window on the plain, which was visible from the windows there.

And then we have this legend about this chief who appears at midnight at the Tap Room. He didn't appear all of the time, but just on certain nights--maybe a full moon or something.

And then a dagger was found at one time. Later on, when they put some lines through, three skeletons were found.

HICKS: What do you remember about this dagger? Is it presumed that it was hidden in the chimney by some earlier tenant?

MAXIE: Well, yes. Maybe some pirates had used it. I have the jeweled dagger right here.

HICKS: Now when King's Tavern was in its heyday, the Natchez Trace was also being used. There are rumors about the Harp brothers--the Big Harp and Little Harp?

MAXIE: I didn't hear anything about specific alledged outlaws. They are said to have been there. And of course Indian runners brought the mail to the Tavern, and it was distributed from there.

HICKS: I think that is where we got the name "Post House" up in that area--because it was a postal stop where the mail was handled.

MAXIE: Yes. It was brought down the Natchez Trace by the Indian runners. And there is a portrait up here of Samuel Postlewaite, who was mayor of Natchez. He is said to have received Lafayette at King's Tavern at the time of his visit to Natchez.

HICKS: Can you remember any other famous persons who have visited King's Tavern?

MAXIE: No, I really can't, except more recent people. Of course President Taft was here in the early 1900's, and Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt, and Mrs. Woodrow Wilson. I have publications on these visits. And I have the pamphlets from the Tableau and a booklet that was written especially for President Taft's visit. It is called Proud of Natchez, by Judge Reba. That would have been written about 1909.

HICKS: You know we are tying this into the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Pilgrimage. What is your first memory of Pilgrimage in connection with King's Tavern?

MAXIE: In 1932, I dressed in costume and took up tickets at King's Tavern. I was nine years old. My cousin Needra Bowman and the lady next door, Dorothy McClure, helped me with the tickers. I have a picture of us in the dining room.

HICKS: I believe King's Tavern was on the first year?

MAXIE: Yes, it was on in the first group of the original houses that first year. The tours lasted only a week.

HICKS: It was simply a residence then? Not a tavern?

MAXIE: There was no form of tavern there after my family moved there in 1820.

HICKS: What did you do when you "received" in those days?

MAXIE: Well, we greeted the tourists and took up their tickets at the gate and directed them into the house. Then my grandmother, Mrs. Register, whom everyone around here knew as Miss Nanny, talked to the tourists in the parlor. Then she directed them down to the basement where my uncle took over and told them about the construction of the house and the rooms down there.

HICKS: Was it a three story house then?

MAXIE: It was just as it is now. The third floor has two rooms. When we were there, I think one was converted to a bath. Then above that we had an attic.

HICKS: I think it is sitting on one of the highest points of the city, is it not?

MAXIE: I don't know, but it is on a high point.

HICKS: Was King's Tavern considered a town house?

MAXIE: My grandfather's family, the Registers, had a plantation in Tensas Parish, Louisiana, and of course most of the workers over there were born and raised on the plantation. And Cass and Martha Brant were brought to town and worked for my family at King's Tavern and helped to raise me. Her daughter, Anna Brant, who married a Smith, has always claimed me as her child. Anna died last year, but her son, Earl Smith, works at the bus station. Anna used to bring him to work with her, and he used to swing us from the peach tree in the back yard.

I have a picture of Martha on the front porch during Pilgrimage, and since Earl didn't have a picture of his grandmother, I gave him a copy of it.

HICKS: Let's talk about the skeletons.

MAXIE: Well, my grandmother told me that when they put the sewer lines through, they had to dig a sort of trench through the basement. When they did, they located the human skeletons. They didn't know who they were so they buried them in Potter's Field. That was in the 1930's, and I don't believe they ever really tried to identify them. At the cemetery they may have a record of that.

HICKS: Has there been any wild speculation as to who they might have been?

MAXIE: Oh, there has been speculation that they were some people killed with the jeweled dagger. Or it may be people killed by the Indians and brought in and buried there. Or they have been maybe the alleged land pirates, the Harps.

HICKS: Tales about King's Tavern also contain stories about ghosts. What have they told you about those?

MAXIE: Oh, the ghosts are still there. And they are also here.

HICKS: Oh, the ghosts have come up here?

MAXIE: No, these ghosts belong here.

HICKS: When you say here, what do you refer to?

MAXIE: The house where I live is called "The Key Hole House." Dr. Sullivan lived here until his death. He was the Baptist minister of the First Baptist Church. This was the parsonage.

Will Sullivan came down here to ask me about the dagger and asked if I had heard strange "goings on" here. I told him that we had. He said, "Well, think nothing of it. When I visited my grandfather as a child, we heard them, too."

So that is how I know these ghosts belong here. They have been here all this time.

HICKS: Do you remember any stories about them?

MAXIE: Particularly the one about hoop skirts, and I have heard that one. When my grandmother, my aunt, my brother, and I would play Parcheesi in the evenings, whether we wanted to or not, we would hear a tap, tap, tap coming down the steps. And it was the girl in the hoop skirt. When you wear a hoop skirt and pick it up in front to keep from stepping on it coming down stairs, the back droops and slides from one step to the next and makes the tapping sound.

HICKS: You didn't see it, but you know that was the girl in the hoop skirt?

MAXIE: Oh, yes. I don't know who it was. We guessed about that. Of course my mother died when she was in her late twenties. After she died, my grandmother said she saw this figure of a Sister of Charity standing at the foot of her bed. She wasn't there to harm her, but was there

MAXIE cont.: to comfort her. The St. Mary's Orphanage was diagonal across the street, and Sister Lydia was a friend of the family the whole time she was here. She would come to King's Tavern to visit my grandmother, and we went to the orphanage and visited there, too. It was one of the Sisters who just appeared to comfort my grandmother, because she had lost my mother, and a year earlier, my Uncle John Register had been killed in an automobile accident at Devil's Punchbowl. That was in 1925.

HICKS: Are there any other ghosts?

MAXIE: Don't forget the Indian Chief. My grandmother did what she called "ghost writing." People would ask her questions, and she said she had no control over her hand. She would take a pencil and hold it over a blank pad and all of a sudden it would start writing answers. It was sort of like a Ouja Board.

HICKS: When did you move away from King's Tavern?

MAXIE: I left there in 1945, then moved back in 1949 and stayed until 1955.

HICKS: Was the house vacant for a while?

MAXIE: No, it's never been vacant until my aunt died in 1969.

HICKS: What is your relation to the lady we know as Margaret Register?

MAXIE: She was my great aunt, my grandfather's brother's wife. She was with the Red Cross.

HICKS: When your aunt died in 1969, what happened to the house?

MAXIE: I sold it to the Pilgrimage Garden Club. And I worked on the Restoration Committee.

HICKS: Has there been a great deal of work in restoration?

MAXIE: Yes. There has been a lot of work that I would not have done. Of course a lot of work had to be done to preserve it.

HICKS: What are your feelings about having the house restored? Do you wish they had left it alone, or do you have a feeling of pride that it has been restored?

MAXIE: Oh, both. Because the old kitchen was torn down, with the old chimney, and I do not yet know why the old chimney was torn down. It was presumed, from all the evidence, that it had been built in 1823. It was a big chimney with an open fireplace with a crane where the pots hung. Then the front steps were worn, so they were torn out and replaced with smooth steps.

HICKS: You were in the Tableau in 1942. That was the last year we held Pilgrimage for three years because of the War. What do you remember about the tableaux you were in?

MAXIE: I was in two tableaux that year. One was the entertainment at Concord, I believe where the Spanish governor entertained his English friends with a Spanish dance. I was one of the English, but I did wear a Spanish costume.

HICKS: Where were the Tableaux held that year?

MAXIE: They were held in Stanton Hall, because with the gas rationing due to the war, they presumed they would not have as many tourists as usual, so we did not have it at the auditorium.

HICKS: Where was it held in Stanton Hall?

MAXIE: In the double rooms to the right.

HICKS: How many people could you accommodate?

MAXIE: The seats were all in the room to the front of the house, and a stage was built in the back room. It could not have held too many people.

HICKS: How many people would you guess were participants in the Tableau?

MAXIE: We had the regular tableaux. I believe we started off with the Queen from the prior year. Then, on through the life of a young Southern girl, on up through her entertainments. I was also in the Court that year. The Queen was Mimi Brown Dupre'. The King was Oscar Hardy, and my partner was George Abbott.

HICKS: After 1942 we had cessation for a few years. What were you in the Tableau afterwards?

MAXIE: I was the mean old school marm for about three years. And then my children took over. They started off in the Little Maypole and went right on up through the Polka and Soiree.

HICKS: I imagine you have fond memories of the Tableau.

MAXIE: Oh, yes. All of them are. One of the first tableaux I was in was the Elizabeth Female Academy. And they tried to have people who had some association with that particular tableau, like in the paper I was reading an article that said the members of this tableau are descendants of those who graduated from Elizabeth Female Academy.

HICKS: That was out at Washington, wasn't it?

MAXIE: Yes, just this side of Washington. My great, great aunt, Elizabeth Postlewaite Bledsoe, was a graduate of that school. I have here a pamphlet from the 1939 Pilgrimage Garden Club Eighth Annual Pilgrimage. It has a notation on it saying, "Tuesday, March 7, at 8 p.m. Grand Theatre. Mrs. Franklin D. Roosevelt. A typical day at the White House." Of course we had a special presentation for Mrs. Roosevelt.

HICKS: That would have been the Baker Grand Theater we know now.

MAXIE: That year, all the tableaux were held at the Baker Grand Theater. Prior to that they were held upstairs at the Memorial Hall. And after the Tableau there was a Confederate Ball. You didn't just leave the Tableau and go home.

HICKS: At the first Pilgrimage they had a parade, then a ball that night.

MAXIE: In the afternoon they had the parade.

HICKS: What do you remember about the opening in 1932?

MAXIE: I do recall going to the parade and it was so beautiful with the carriages decorated with flowers and the ladies and girls in hoop skirts and the men in their costumes. It was just a beautiful parade to look at.

HICKS: Thank you for letting us share your memories, Anabel.

MAXIE: Thank you, Graham.

End of Interview

Transcribed by Peggy Forman

Typed by Phebe Winters