

Ketteringham04012003A-B

Interviewer: Angelo Tinsley

Subject: Ruth Ketteringham

Date: April 1, 2003

10:00 am

Pelton Place

Angelo Tinsley: What is your name please?

Ruth Ketteringham: Ruth Ketteringham.. This interview is being made on April 1st the afternoon of April 1st 2003 twenty o' three that's the correct way to say it.. and um--. it being made in suite 414 of Pelton place 2363 west 14th street Cleveland, Ohio 44113

AT: Alright Mrs. Ketteringham tell me your most pleasant memory about Tremont?

RK: About Tremont

AT: Yes

RK: Well of course my father was reared in this neighborhood. He came to America when he was about five and a half years old, he attend Tremont school--. He attended West High graduating in 1896. My grandparents lived in an apartment at 2004 West 14th street and Jennings Rd, at the time they moved here it was Jennings Ave. They waited until their apartment was built to move in and they moved out in 1927--. Just before it was torn down. They lived in the northern most suite which was a wonderful view of the Cuyahoga Valley--. And of course we used to come to my grandparents place frequently. When I moved here somewhat over a year ago, it's not a new neighborhood to me. I am a local historian and I have studied particularly the west side of Cleveland for about at least 20 years--. Certain parts for more than that. I worked with a young man

Who were at that time with the county archives, that when county archives was just beginning, and this was one of their first studies and I worked with them on that--. And of course I knew Mrs. Fencene who wrote the history of Tremont oh I don't know, in the late 1920's. If I'm not very mistaken that was one of the earliest neighborhood histories in the United States. I have a copy of that. Even though I was not born here and never lived here until I came here a year ago last November, its not new territory to me.

AT: O.K. Could you tell us your age please?

RK: My age, I was 86, excuse me I was 96, talk about wishful thinking (begins laughing) no I was 96 on the 20th of October last year. I was born in 1906.

AT: Have you lived in Cleveland all your life?

RK: Yes and no--. It's always been my permanent address but from 1932 to 1936 I was employed in Detroit, and I lived in Detroit for 4 years. About 1946-47 Lived in Boston Mass. For a year. In both of those times my family still lived here in the family home. I never moved in the

sense that I lived there, I always had the same bed to back to when I came back to Cleveland, knew the same people, the same food.

AT: When you think back what is your most pleasant memory, what gives you a good feeling about Tremont?

RK: Oh I wouldn't know that I had any more pleasant memory of Tremont than I have of any other place. I was in high school from 1921 to 1925 and there were three west side high schools. When you were ready for high school 10 chances to 1 if you were male and you wanted to work in something with your hands you went to west tech. If your family was a little higher on the economic scale and you knew you were going to go to college you went to Lincoln, because Lincoln was college preparatory. If you were female and expected to live and earn your living, you went to west commerce. West commerce existed from September of 1909 to June of 1929. We had very exceptional education.

What happen was the typewriter was popular, more people wanted to play the typewriter, More people wanted to learn how to use it. What was originally considered commercial courses were introduced into Lincoln and west tech. We always thought there was some politics to it, it was decided in 1929 that a separate commercial college or school was not needed. West commerce was transferred to west tech. Most of the faculty and the remaining students were also. Some people had as much as 3 1/2 years and then graduated from tech, that was the way it was you know. That was in days when the school system of Cleveland was considered one of the best in the United States.

AT: I interviewed three ladies from Tremont prior to interviewing you and they have a club and they all are still friends now and they all are still real close, in your opinion what was it about the Tremont area that may have made these ladies stay so close and good friends for so long?

RK: I don't think Tremont was any different from any other section of Cleveland. This young lady that here today, her family met my family when my sister and I were born. We have become very close, that's not the only family we knew well or kept close to. It was a neighborliness of Cleveland in the first quarter of the century. I think that was true of our culture at that time, I don't think it was unique to Cleveland. There were no telephones, there were no automobiles, there was no way to get in touch with help, so the nearest person helped. It was almost without exception.

AT: What did your grandparents do for a living?

RK: In England my grandfather was a carpenter, he had his own carpenter shop, and he made all the furniture for the little village that they lived in, and he made the coffins when people died. So when he came to America he set a similar business. He was a specialist at hardwood interiors. He built many of the fine homes in the suburbs of the west --. Of the river, to the west of Lakewood. He built the kind of homes that if you look across the street and look there, that's the kind of homes he built. Every room with a different hardwood, with that kind of walnut, that kind of maple, and he built on a con-

tract basis, about one mansion a year. All of the descendants are all people who enjoy working with wood. I don't know if they know great grandfather or not. When I talk to them their hobby is always something with wood. Interesting isn't it.

AT: What did his wife do?

RK: What his wife did?

AT: Yes

RK: Well poor dear she bore 10 children and brought them up. (She starts laughing)
I don't think she had trouble or time with anything else. Her father my grandfather died, There were 9 children, and he died when my grandmother was 9 years old, and she was taken by the Methodist minister to his home, and she was taught to read and write, because this was 1850 and you know little country English girls were not going to school in the 1850's. She could read and write, she enjoyed her newspaper as I remember. They say the English aren't very good cooks, I don't think she was known for her cooking. She kept from anywhere from 6 to 12 people feed. In the time when I knew her she was already in her 80's.

AT: Let me ask you this, how do you think the Inner belt affected this community?

RK: It ruined it--. Ruined it period. It ruined the whole west side period. Tore through neighborhoods that were more than adequate. Housing wasn't big housing but it was affordable housing for thousands of people. Ruined our neighborhoods, did a lot to destroy, I think this was nationwide to destroy the neighborliness. You know before that you used to down to a streetcar and anything 10 to 15 minutes was a good location. You say the same people day after day on the way to work, maybe you never knew his name, never knew where he lived but you talked to him everyday. The same way with girls, after the girls were beginning to work the offices they knew each other. Of course the freeway ruined that.

AT: How?

RK: I don't think you have to answer me that, I think you only have to see descent work-Men's neighborhoods torn a pieces. Schools where children couldn't get to their nearest school. Its one of the things that helped to destroy the school system. Destroyed any feelings of closeness with people, increased the who's that? I don't know him. The suspionusness that is so fundamentally part of our society today. It made us all triple crazy to drive to work. Now in an oil situation that we can't handle, nobody's willing to take a car that's uses less oil, because it's a patriotic thing to do. I'm American I'm free nobody's gonna tell me I can't abuse oil. Part of that is from the freeway.

AT: What about the bridges, the Abby bridge and how do you think that affected the community?

RK: Abby bridge, well of course this is a new bridge, this is not the original Abby bridge. That's another thing, that's very often not recognized. The original Abby street bridge and the original central viaduct were one project. They were one single bridge.

The Abby street bridge was the first one completed. In the city of Cleveland that is the first high-level bridge. Did you know that?

AT: No

RK: Well you look it up and you'll find out its true. The longer one is a bridge that was right down here you know.

AT: How do you think the bridges affected the community?

RK: This bridge affected the community you mean originally?

AT: Yes

RK: Well the only way to get over here to Tremont in the original days was to walk over. You had to walk from Columbus Rd. night or day. Elogrand Wilson tells us how it was to walk over here at night. She lived here, she lived over here for a while. She tells in her book what it was like. The bridge helped to make this neighborhood, by the way this is the old south side this is not Tremont. This is the old south side. West of Walrus run and north of Walrus run in Ohio City. That was the near west side, the old west side Beginning at 65th st. to 67th and further was originally west Cleveland and that was then called far west side. Then some people got the idea that if you could just get a hold of this and make some money by patronizing the historical part then you could be rich then you could be big stuff. They named it some years ago, they named it Tremont. It was not Tremont when I was growing up, it was not Tremont. It wasn't Tremont until I'd say between 25 and 30 years ago. I could be wrong on that. Have you ever found anybody who knows where the name Tremont came from?

AT: No

RK: See, it was a school. The school was Tremont. Why was the school Tremont?

AT: I don't know

RK: My father went there in the 1880's then it was Tremont school then. When they renamed the neighborhood they named it after the school. This name is really what I consider, and it is not the only section of Cleveland. Cleveland's full of them, I suppose the United States is full of them. They're really partly urban renewal and partly real estate hype.

AT: O.K.

RK: As you study you keep that in mind and see if you don't find it out.

AT: O.K.

RK: You have your old neighborhoods, and what I started to tell you about schools was the closest high school to this neighborhood was Lincoln. It was on Scranton Rd., this side of Clarke. It was the closest school. God forbid anybody pay a child's carfare to school. Every child that was within a couple miles had to walk to school .

AT: O.K.

RK: Lincoln high school was known not only locally, but coast to coast for having the most different nationality groups. They weren't call ethnic in those days they were called nationality. I don't know the exact year, but it was about 1914 that the school law was changed and children had to stay in school to 16 years of age. Before that I think they only had to stay until 12 or 14 what ever it was. I am a member of the first generation that was ever expected to go to high school.

AT: Let me ask you this ,How do think the World War II affected this community?

RK: Oh don't be silly it affected everybody.

AT: How--? (She starts to laugh) I don't know I wasn't here. How did it affect you, what happened?

RK: They changed everybody's life. Let me tell you a story. May I? (Talking to her friend in the room) Her brother was 3 or 4 years older than you. When he graduated from high school, Lincoln no Parma high school I sat in the balcony and he was singled out for his unusual work in high school. He was already selected for officer training. He went from high school to Officer training. Now this isn't somebody who had been in the Army For a while and decided to promote themselves. This was a high school kid. He was going to take this course under the United States Army and come out an officer.

AT: O.K.

RK: He graduated in June. If I remember correctly he was in officer's training six to eight weeks. They got the word that he was going to Europe. He was put in the infantry, and the Battle of Bulge fought in November --. That boy died in the battle of the Bulge. Now how do you think that's affected that family, since 1941-42? How do you think that's affected our family since we were so close to them? Do you ever go down on the Mall and go around the statue? The one with his arm up in the air. Do ever go around and look at those names?

AT: No

RK: You do it sometime. Everybody who died from Cleveland and from the Korean War has his name in brass on that plaque around the--.

AT: Tell me about the rationing she mentioned?

RK: Nobody in civilian life ever saw butter. You were allowed so many pounds of meat a week. If you could produce the ticket that entitled you to it. Everybody had a book or something, every neighborhood had a gasoline committee and they approved how much gas or how necessary your driving was and how much you could have. It only permitted you so much you know--. Her grandfather was on the gas committee. About the meat, you got little stamps like this--. Went to the meat market like for instance my mother would buy meat for four, but you couldn't tear them all from one book. You had to tear one coupon from each book, because you were buying for four people and meat was rationed. WWII was when large numbers of women went to work. Women didn't work in factories before the war unless you were at the bottom of the pile and couldn't raise your head otherwise. You could work all night at your own sewing machine. Women just didn't work in factories and there were women who never handled their own money and handled their money for the first during WWII. .

AT: Tell me how the election of Carl Stokes affected the community?

RK: I rather not talk about Carl Stokes. He was nothing at all like his brother. I think he uh--. I'd just rather not be on record about what I think of him. I'd may say a good deal of this hip-hip har-ray about him. He was not his brother by a long long way. They were like two different ends of the earth.

AT: They we like night and day?

RF: They were very different people. I think the man who represented this area for so long and was down in Washington, he was a student. He had a very good mind and used it and he was a student of government, and a student of what his neighborhood needed.

AT: Are you talking about Carl or Lewis?

RF: Carl

AT: O.K.

RF: I think as far as that goes, you know it takes a certain type person to go into public life. Not everybody can do it. I think probably from that point of view you might say he almost had a gift.

AT: Alright, what I would like to know now, how do you feel about the women's lib movement affecting the women of this area considering how they were raised?

RF: I couldn't answer that question because I was not here. I can only draw some ideas from what I see here. I couldn't put my finger on it on any one group or on any one time of immigration or anything of that sort. I think that many of the women in this neighborhood came from cultures where they weren't supposed to have any ideas, any education, were not supposed to have any interest. If they had their supper on the table when their man came home and kept the kids from getting into jail--. They weren't supposed to be people in the sense of being an individual women. I think that it was the second and third generation after that who grew up, women who went to work and never, you know here's my paycheck. They never had a thing to

say, they couldn't even buy themselves a hat. They worked and gave their pay over. Of course they wanted something to say about their own money. I came from an English background and I came from a background that my grandfather believed you know, he won't have put two girls through high school in the 1890's if he hadn't believed in women's rights. I didn't grow up in that age, the women's movement never had an appeal to me, and I think it has brought devastation on our culture. I think it depends a lot on the age of the person your talking to. You know, a mother was supposed to be a teacher, she was supposed to teach a child manners, she was supposed to teach them respect for themselves not only for other people. The mother was considered the original teacher in the family. She was a successful mother because she was a successful teacher. There no opportunity for real teaching now the way a good many families live. I don't know, they talk about women--. This is personal they talk about women breaking the glass ceiling and being a c.e.o. Women have the power to make the next generation, what more would they want. If you could control the next generation and teach them how to be kind to other people, how to earn their living, how to have a respect for a civilization--. And were losing that, were losing our democracy, were losing what we were founded so--. So fast that its, you know you can't put a child in day care with four or five different people taking care of it and changing from month to month and expect a stable personality. That isn't the way stable personalities are made.

AT: Right

RK: Besides that, by the time a women who goes to work, buys her transportation, her lunch, her clothing, and pays for daycare what has she earned.

AT: Right, Lets talk about some of the landmarks around here in Tremont. Tell me did you ever know of a college that was supposed to be built around here?

RK: Now listen, did I ever know it. I've read a great deal, but whether your aware of it or not the movement for the college was in the early 1850's. It lived long enough to graduate a class. (She starts laughing)--. I know a lot about it because I've read about it. If you want to talk about the university that's another matter.

AT: What university?

RK: Cleveland University!

AT: Cleveland state

RK: No! Cleveland University. I'm telling you it was founded in the early 1850's 51 or 52 by Mrs. Thryza Pelton. She persuaded the president of Oberlin to come and be it's president.

AT: Where was it at?

RK: Right here where you and I are talking, that was the campus! You haven't come to Tremont without knowing anything about the university.

AT: No that's why I'm here to find out.

RF: (she laughs) Well Mrs. Thryza Pelton wanted to found the university. There's some confusion in this neighborhood about the founder, the difference between the founder and the first board of trustees. The board of trustees did not found the university. The university was founded by Mrs. Pelton.

AT: How do you spell it?

RK: (She spells Thryza) --. Thryza Pelton.

AT: Is that why this is Pelton Place?

RF: Well it was a Pelton who built this. Yes--. I don't know, I don't think it was her husband--. I've been told it was his brother whether that's so or not I don't know. I've never seen any original papers and I'm a stickler when it comes to research, so I don't believe anything I haven't researched. So anyway, this women Mrs. Pelton, they founded the college and there was to be a department for women. Now if you anything about college education, you know that Oberlin was way ahead of everybody else. They graduated the first female graduate ever in the United States. Mrs. Pelton persuaded Mahan (she spells mahan) Dr. Mahan to come from Oberlin and be president of her college. They had a-- , I don't know maybe half a dozen students the first year maybe, but anyway she was taken sick and before she could, you know in those days they didn't have the various ways of taking care of illness and she died. The idea of the university died with her.

AT: Right

RK: As you know, there's a professor street, there's college street, there's university street, and that's where the university was. I can't quite figure out because those streets are further to the east. Why was this the campus? This was considered to be part of the campus and a residence for the president was built and he lived there for a year. I supposed after she died and the idea died, that he, I don't know where he went, I never read that. I don't know the year but you'll find it as you read you'll find it, if you very much about Tremont you'll find it. The lady and I don't know her name now, if I'd had a couple days I'd looked it up, she wrote her thesis on the university. Unfortunately, she made the mistake, she said it was founded as a women's college. That's a mistake that has come down, so if you hear, be aware it is not true. It was a department for women. In those days anything above the 14 years of age was a finishing school for women.

AT: Tell me about St. Augustine church.

RK: St. Augustine which one is that.

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AT: Isn't that the one right over there

RK: That's the one here? Are you sure?

AT: No

RK: That's orthodox., and so is the church up here on the corner of Fairfield. That's Greek orthodox.. This is the mid-European, Tremont as probably is known for its churches.

AT: No I didn't. Tell me about it.

RK: Oh yes, Oh yes, and the interesting thing about Tremont churches is they're quote unquote ethnic. (She starts to laugh.) We used to say nationality. There are Roman Catholic, the are Hungarian Catholic, there are two or three different kinds, there's a Russian orthodox, St. Theodosius's is Greek orthodox, and I that's orthodox too, but I can't think of what it is. Pilgrim is the oldest church in Tremont. That's congregational, that's liberal Protestant. It has probably done more or about as much for the city of Cleveland as any one church with the possible exception of Old Stone. It's the oldest church in Tremont. This is Grace hospital, next to Grace hospital there's what I call an 1870's house. (She starts to laugh) And then the next house was an 1870's house, and the next building to that is the art gallery. Now that building is attached to that second house. That is the residence of professor Alney. That is a study in itself, for what he did for this neighborhood. People don't know that, and there're not interested. When you say that's the Alney Art Gallery, they don't care. Never did care, never intended to care. The same with Pilgrim church. Pilgrim began programs and is still beginning programs all over the city.

AT: What about Lincoln Park? What can you tell me about Lincoln Park?

RK: Do you know why it is named Lincoln Park?

AT: Of course not.

RK: That is where the soldiers, in one of the places in this area, Cuyahoga county, and Medina county, where the soldiers were enlisted in the Civil War. That was about 10 to 12 years after Pelton and it was a clear place and that's where the soldiers for the Civil War drilled. It was named, it had been named Pelton Park before that in honor of Mrs. Pelton. It was named afterward .It was named later, I couldn't tell you exactly when in honor of president Lincoln. That's why it's Lincoln Park. It was a railroad station down by Scranton. When the soldiers were mustered out they came up here to be mustered out. The soldiers from Cuyahoga county and Medina county, and I don't know other places or not. That information is easily available. They were mustered out of the civil war a few feet from where you and I are sitting. (she starts laughing)At times it has been neglected and as you research and talk to people you'll find that people in this neighborhood are very close knit. At one time it was going to be used for something else and the neighbors got down there and wouldn't let them do it.

AT: I want you to tell me about the bathhouse.

RK: you know what the bath houses were don't -cha?

AT: No I don't know.

RK: (she laughs) Well, these houses the oldest ones, and this is not true of only Tremont, there's also a bath house over at 40 something and Clarke Ave. and there one on Detroit st. These neighborhoods when water wasn't available, cause see these neighborhoods were all settled with wells, oh yes they were settle before there was any plumbing. That was one of the things that brought these neighboring settlement into Cleveland. Then they could have city water, and they could have water piped into the house. The city established these bathhouses from place to place. I was never in one of them because I always lived in a house with a bathroom. These houses that had no bathroom, you could take your towel and your soap and your clean clothes and pay your fee and go take a bath, and have a hot water bath. So they were essentials to the neighborhood. The one for this neighborhood is the yellow brick building at the other end of the park. That's right opposite the churches, to the east of the churches. Time passes so quickly, it was various other things for a while, and then it was neglected for a while. I think about four or five years ago real estate made it into 4 or 5 apartments. They sold for a very hansom price. You'd be proud to live on the gold coast for what you'd pay for one of these. I understand they are very nice I have a friend who lives there and he's says they're very nice. It was a landmark so they couldn't change the outside. I'd would or wish I'd like to say that I took a bath in one of them. A modest house, a house like I lived in for most of my life sells for 60 to 65,000 dollars now, I think it was built for about 2500 dollars, you know a 100 years ago. They were upscale houses because we had bathrooms, so I've been very fortunate in my life, very fortunate. A lot of people would think that it was more than modest, but you wish that all of God's children had it this good.

AT: good, Good

RK: To the east of where were sitting down is Tremont school and that is built on one of the sights of the original Brooklyn Township school. I have not been able to research the exact date of that school. I would think that it was in place by 1836 or before. It was a gathering place for a community. It was eventually replaced by a lovely brick school, and anybody interested in a picture of that school its in the George H. Ketteringham collection at the Cleveland public library. It's a picture collection. It's a picture taken about 1902. Afterward that building was used for um, well it was added to at various times because, there were a lot of kids in this neighborhood. It was a big school, and Pilgrim church was founded in the little brick schoolhouse. I've got it here 1864, or something. It became the detention home for the children that were under the care of the juvenile court. It was that for quite a while and now its back and for a school building in a quote-poor neighborhood it's overwhelming. It's a beautiful building. Anything a child could want for learning we saw as we walked through that building. It just seems to me as though people who find so much fought with the Cleveland public schools, would do very well to get a little better acquainted.

AT: O.K. thank you.