

Oral History Interview with Mildred Hickman
Morris Hill Neighborhood Association History Project

- LML: Okay, today is Tuesday, June 11, 2013. This is Linda Morton-Keithley interviewing Mildred Hickman for the Morris Hill Neighborhood Association history project. So, as I said minute ago, what I'd like to start with – you had told me previously that you and your husband bought this home in 1959. Can you kind of set the stage for me; where were you in that point in your life when you bought this home?
- MH: We had been married 10 years and we already had the five children – five of six, actually – and we moved here in June. And it is my understanding that these homes in this development were 10 years old. There are some older homes around them, or mixed in with them, but my home was one of the 10 years. Some of them had basements, some had garages, others had carports, some didn't have any. Our home was a two bedroom and the garage had been converted to a third bedroom. It was my understanding that when it was first built, it was \$10,000. No shower, no double sink. It was just a single sink. No dishwashers; I don't believe they were even made for the ordinary home at that time, but they might have been. No garbage disposals. They were just bare bones houses. They were, of course, just after the war had ended and most of them were on the GI Bill. I can't say that all of them were but I know our house was.
- LMK: Did you ever learn anything about who the contractor was or the builder who was building these houses that were in that 10 year old range?
- MH: There were two, to my understanding. And one of them, his name was Allen; I don't know the first name. And the street in front of my house, which is Clinton Street now, was Allen Avenue at that time. And it was after we went into the city limits – I'm going to say around five years after we moved here, at least once they got the sewer system in-- they changed the name of this street. Archer Street was named after an old-time resident in this area. Perhaps this property was Archer's. That I don't know for sure but it could have possibly been. But that's who the side street was named after.
- LMK: What caused you and your husband to buy in this part of Boise or to buy this home?
- MH: Well, looking for work I guess you could say. His brother, George, had moved to Boise prior to us and he had a job with Opal Harvester and, so, my husband came to get a job there, too. He didn't immediately but, consequently, shortly after.
- LMK: Were there changes that you and your husband made to this house? You already mentioned that the garage had been converted. Were there other things that you did to the property to make it more comfortable for your family?
- MH: It had a floor furnace between the kitchen and living room. We had furnace and air conditioner duct work installed to begin with. And then new, permanent siding shortly after that. And then quite recently we had new cupboards, oak cupboards, put in our house. We planted trees and dug trees, and still are in the process of taking down trees and planting new trees. Partly because I think I've got hardwood bore in the ground and that has caused a great deal of difficulty for us.
- LMK: Does this house have a basement?
- MH: No.
- LMK: So you were able to raise five children in this home with three bedrooms?

MH: Yes [laughs]. Well, we actually dug a half a basement out by hand but it's for storage only.

LMK: I see, okay. What was the neighborhood like at the period when you bought it?

MH: Lots of young people and lots of kids. We loved the sound of the children. Of course, with our five, most of the kids came to our yard so that I could babysit and watch our children, too. So most of the time the kids were here.

LMK: So, a lot of young families...

MH: Yes, very much so.

LMK: What about, kind of, physically, the other types of homes. You mentioned already the ones that were in that range of being about 10 years old. Was that primarily what was in this immediate area for you?

MH: Well, not half of the older homes but more than half were new. And the streets were short. And I was told afterwards that that was to slow down traffic.

LMK: Yes, it does seem like most of the streets back in here are just three or four blocks long, maybe.

MH: Yes, they're not square, the blocks are not square at all. And some of them, you'll go the distance of several blocks before you can hit a cross street.

LMK: What about physically? When I was here the other day, you mentioned that, in the early years, you could actually look out your kitchen window and see over to Orchard Street. What can you tell me about physically what it was like, you know, with landscaping and trees? What was the neighborhood like when you moved in and how has that changed?

MH: Well, definitely, the trees have grown. Everybody was so proud of their home and proud of the neighborhood. And now it's gotten to where people move into these homes to take care of them until they can get to larger homes and nicer homes. So, consequently, we have homes that they're not as well-kept as they were in those days. Of course, there's more work, too, because the trees have grown, the grass has encroached on fence lines, that sort of thing, too. And I don't know the neighbors like I used to. And even though I walk every day, I wave and I speak to everybody that I see, you just don't get to know them as well. I know them to speak and I'm very proud of that. But I don't know who they are.

LMK: So how would you, I guess, characterize... Today Morris Hill neighborhood is a very defined area within the construct of the city planning system, where you've got very firm borders. Can you characterize, I guess, how you would define neighborhood from when you first moved here to today?

MH: There's not nearly as many children here now. A lot of people still walk and a lot of people ride bicycles where, in those days, children were the only ones you hardly saw. [laughs] All adults drove. I can't exactly think how to answer your question.

LMK: Well, we can circle back to that. Let's talk a little bit about then, you mentioned the children several times. Where did the kids in this neighborhood go to school? Let's start with elementary, then proceed up.

MH: We went to Jefferson School and even though... Then the junior high went to West Junior High. A little further west from where I live and a little further south, they went to Franklin School. And then all of my children went to Borah High. And that was pretty close to the whole perimeter.

LMK: How did the kids get to school?

- MH: Mine had to walk and I know we tried to find a way for my children, when they went to West Junior High, to go by bus. But they said that we lived just short of a mile and so they had to walk. And all of the children in the neighborhood walked to elementary. Now their parents take them.
- LMK: And high school also? How far of a distance was that from here to Borah?
- MH: I know my children did get a car for that, then.
- LMK: Were there organized activities for the kids during the school year, during the summer? What sorts of activities did they take part in?
- MH: I'm just beginning to learn what they did! [laughs] Once in a great while somebody will be reminiscing and tell me something that I didn't know about.
- LMK: Okay, officially, what were they doing?
- MH: Ann Morrison Park had just been built and the children that were just a little older – out from under our noses – did spend a lot of time down at Ann Morrison Park. They played in the Boise River; not to swim or that sort of thing. But they did fish down there and skateboards were very popular. And since we did have sidewalks here on our street, they spent a lot of time doing that, too. And occasionally they did walk over to, or ride bikes, over to South Junior High to go swimming.
- LMK: If I'm remembering correctly, there's not, for the time period, not a city park here in this neighborhood?
- MH: No. No, this has only been here for seven years.
- LMK: The Morris Hill Park?
- MH: Yes, right at seven years.
- LMK: Was that developed as part of the synagogue moving up here?
- MH: I don't know, because it came in about five years ago.
- LMK: Yes, I was trying to remember the time on that.
- MH: I think I read, they had a feature on that 150 [Boise 150 Icons series in the *Idaho Statesman*] and I think it was five years ago that it came in over here. But before the park, it was just an alfalfa field.
- LMK: What about for adults, were there any kind of organizations, clubs, activities, that adults could take part of, when you were first in this neighborhood?
- MH: Oh, yes, there was Boy Scouts. There was never anything, I don't believe, for girls.
- LMK: Were there women's organizations that you did or could have taken part in?
- MH: If there was, I didn't. I babysat lots of children instead of going out to work.
- LMK: I've been somewhat curious... I know that at one point in time there was a Mesa Garden Club up in this neighborhood but I haven't quite figured out yet when it may have ended. It may have ended just shortly before you came here.
- MH: I've never heard of it.
- LMK: Okay, so it might have already been defunct by the time you moved up here.
- MH: McDonald's went in almost two years to the day when we moved here. There just weren't all that many drive-ins on Orchard Street. But as I mentioned to you last week, it seemed like there was a service station, or more, at every major crossroads in town and Orchard had their share.
- LMK: What were some of the other types of businesses that were along Orchard?

MH: Potter Drug was big. It took up almost the whole strip that is there right now. I walked that street this morning and it was 610, 612 Orchard Street. And McCracken's – it's not called garden center but I can't think of what it was. It was a garden store but I can't think what it was called. [Union Farm and Garden – added 6/24/13 by MH]

LMK: If it comes to you, go ahead and mention it later.

MH: And then, on the north end of Orchard, of course, was the fair grounds. And I actually only went there only once, not so long before they moved down to Garden City in '67, I believe, '68.

LMK: For being in this neighborhood, where would you be able to go to do your grocery shopping?

MH: My main one at that time was at the corner of Orchard and Emerald and it was M&W Market. And there were several of them in Boise at that time and then they slowly decreased.

LMK: And as far as, well you mentioned the drug store being nearby. What about clothing shopping, where was the nearest place you could do for those sorts of needs?

MH: Had to go downtown. I did most of it at J.C. Penney's. There were what we called then, dime stores. There was one at Franklin and Orchard – King's, I believe.

LMK: Yes, they've been around for quite a while.

MH: I was sad to see them go.

LMK: It hasn't been that long, I think, since they finally folded up.

MH: No, down at Collister was the last one in Boise and then I went to the one in Eagle quite a bit, after that, because it was in the direction of where I traveled quite a bit. But I did like the dime stores. I don't recall any Albertson's nearby or anywhere near here.

LMK: What about things like professional services, the doctors, dentists?

MH: Well, my doctor that I started with was Dr. Morgan and he was Barbara Morgan's father-in-law, and he was at the corner of Emerald and Orchard. And he, a little later, moved to the Ustick area.

LMK: Okay, so those sorts of services were available.

MH: There was a dentist at the same general location, too.

LMK: And then, what would have been the nearest hospital for this neighborhood at that time period?

MH: Downtown, both of them.

LMK: Transportation. You've already mentioned a little bit about the streets, you had sidewalks so I'm going to guess the streets were probably paved when you moved in here?

MH: Yes.

LMK: Was there any bus service available up here in this part of town?

MH: Not to my knowledge. I know we never used it and I just don't believe there was any.

LMK: Okay. What about some of the city services since when you moved in here, you were not in the incorporated city yet.

MH: We had garbage pickup twice a week! We had newspaper, the *Statesman* had a morning and an evening *Statesman* and my husband loved to read so we took both. Yes, the garbage was picked up twice a week.

LMK: And I'm assuming it's probably once a week now?

MH: Yes, that's right.

LMK: Utilities like water service, sewer... Do you remember who the providers would have been in those earlier years?

MH: I know Idaho Power was still with that, but that's all I know. About four years ago, they tore up our street to put in a new water line, an eight inch water line. Prior to that it was two inches and I saw the pipes so I know. And every morning in the summertime, by 6:00 in the morning, you could hardly get a trickle of water because everybody was using the water. And that went on until, say, four years ago.

LMK: I noticed walking around the neighborhood last week that there are several irrigation canals that run through. Were those of any use to you as homeowners or was it just transporting the water elsewhere?

MH: It just wasn't available to us and we tried to get it but they said we'd have to go down the street and under the street in front of our house to get it. And none of the neighbors wanted to go in with us for the cost and so we never had it available to us.

LMK: What about, I think you mentioned this earlier, sewer? Did you have a sewer system here when you first bought the home?

MH: No.

LMK: Septic tank, then?

MH: Yes, septic tanks.

LMK: And when did sewer come in?

MH: I'm only guessing about five years afterwards. And a number of the people were already having problems with their... Because we have a lot of hard pan in our soil and so it just wouldn't absorb the water in the septic tanks.

LMK: You mentioned five years or so after you bought your home here becoming part of the incorporated city. Did that bring any changes with either services, differences in, perhaps, the police or fire protection?

MH: I can't say that I saw any difference.

LMK: I don't recall having driven around, seeing a fire station in this neighborhood. Do you know what the nearest service would be in an emergency?

MH: Down on Front Street-- 16th and Front.

LMK: A little bit of a distance.

MH: And I thought when they put in a hydrant on my property, when they put the new water line in, I would get an insurance reduction but you don't even get that anymore. [laughs]

LMK: How about the fairgrounds? I believe it was 1966 when they held their last one here is what I've seen so far.

MH: It was either '66 or '7, I don't know which.

LMK: That general time period.

MH: I think that Lynn [Lockhart] gave somebody one of those books. Did you get it? Because I found mine.

LMK: Yes, Arthur Hart's book on the Western Idaho Fair. Yes, I have looked at that. You mentioned that you personally had only gone to it one time. Do you have any recollection of, within the community, how that property was seen? Was it seen as a benefit to the neighborhood? Did people enjoy going over there?

MH: My children did, they loved the carnival and I let them go. Because I was babysitting, I couldn't get away. I was pretty much as home all the time.

LMK: Sure. Do you know if there were neighborhood feelings when the decision was made to move the fairgrounds out to Garden City and put the Connector through?

MH: I had never heard anything one way or the other. I don't even know if people in my neighborhood participated in the exhibiting. I just don't know.

LMK: Okay, that makes sense if you were busy with other things.

MH: I really was.

LMK: Are there any other changes that you can think over time? Certainly you've mentioned the trees have grown up, the mix of the neighborhood is different now with not as many children. Can you think of any other things over time that have changed?

MH: Yes, empty lots have begun to fill in. And at the end of some of these street where they don't continue on, they build circles. Yes, that sort of thing, it's just built up. I don't see much controversy. I never did, in the neighborhood. They seem to get along okay, or they put up with one another very well. And I do believe, though, that since the neighborhood watch, neighborhood patrol, has helped very well, from what I hear.

LMK: So that kind of goes back to the question we said we were going to circle back to, the sense of neighborhood when you first moved here in 1959 to today, where there is an organized neighborhood association. Any thoughts, compare/contrast, what it felt like in those early years compared to today?

MH: Well, in my neighborhood, we knew one another better. And at that time, not necessarily very many of the women worked. The mothers stayed at home and took care of the children, at least until they got into school. And now it just seems like everybody's coming and going. But I think they're still very friendly. And I think it's partly because my arm is already up [laughs] and I walk every day, and so I am highly recognized. But I think it is so important to recognize my neighbors so I like it very much.

LMK: Well, you're active in a lot of different organizations, it sounds like.

MH: No, no, I'm not. I am a member of the neighborhood association and I have china painter's club that I belong to. And I work at the fair, only during the fair. I volunteer at the Canyon County Fair, prior to the Boise fair. In the spring, I volunteer with the ceramic show in June, May or June, in the spring, anyway. Partly because I do china painting and so I work with entering, to help them out. But as far as clubs are concerned, I'm not.

LMK: What, as vice-president of the neighborhood association, what do you personally see as the goal of that organization? What is the, I guess, the need that you see they are filling?

MH: Oh, we're active. Lynn Lockhart, our president, she has so many activities for the people to volunteer to do to make everybody in the neighborhood know what's going on. And if they don't know someone, it's because they don't want to. Because she makes everybody available that can possibly have time to get involved. And I think that that's some of the others don't do so well, because they don't have volunteers to get out and do whatever there is to be done.

LMK: Something I remember from when I was younger was the Welcome Wagon. Do you do anything like that here in the neighborhood?

MH: Lynn puts them together and I distribute them.

LMK: And what do you do to welcome people to the neighborhood?

MH: Oh, I have a badge that I wear to show that I'm a volunteer. So when I deliver the packets, I let the people know who I am and that I'm with the association and that the merchants of this area have put this together for the newcomers so they can get acquainted with them. And I just try to make them welcome and then, if they have a computer, if they're interested, I take their names and their address and their computer number, and Lynn will give them messages that are of interest in the neighborhood all the time. It keeps everybody abreast of what's going on, good or bad. And once in a great while I have the opportunity to relay a message to the police department of something that might be going on. We aren't law enforcement ourselves; we can only relay the message that we received. Otherwise, as a patrolman, I do maintain the Morris Hill Park. It's not in our portion of the neighborhood but because, through Lynn Lockhart, we got the grants for the childrens' playground and for the picnic shelter. And, so, I chose to keep the park maintained, picking up garbage and putting out plastic bags in the dispensers, and greeting all the people who go to the park. And then I have other streets that I pick up garbage, too. So the people know that in our neighborhood, we are doing something more than just a name.

LMK: That's good and I would think it creates more of a sense of community.

MH: Yes. And I love it when people wave to me first, honk their horn at me, so that they do recognize me. [laughs]

LMK: Are there others in the neighborhood that are doing those sorts of things, too?

MH: Yes, but not in the scale that I am, partly because they work. One of my neighbors, [name removed at request of MH – 6/24/13], did until this winter and her feet have given her so much discomfort that she's not able to do it anymore. Yes, there are and some ride bicycles.

LMK: I think that's amusing that you said it used to be just the kids that rode the bicycles.

MH: [laughs] Yes, there's a lot of us who do now. I wouldn't be caught on one! I don't think I've ridden a bicycle since I moved to Boise.

LMK: And you had told me before we started that you were from Parma?

MH: Yes, I was born in Parma and moved to Wilder when I was three.

LMK: And how did you meet your husband, if you don't mind my asking? You said he was from Nebraska?

MH: Yes. Well, he moved to a community called Arena Valley. It was a farming community and they had a Grange. They had dances on Saturday night at this grange hall and we meet there after he had returned from the military.

LMK: And you did say that you had all five of your children when you moved into this home.

MH: Yes.

LMK: Okay, so they all grew up here.

MH: Yes.

LMK: Do they still live in the area?

MH: They all do except one. My third, a daughter, lives in the Phoenix area.

LMK: Can you think of anything that you would like to add, that tells us anything else about the community here?

MH: I was going to call a former neighbor, [name removed at request of MH, 6/24/13], and see if she can verify for sure when these houses were built because I believe that she was one of the original owners. But I wasn't able to reach her so I don't have that for sure.

LMK: We can do some research about that. When I talked to you the other day, you did say that—did you tell me that there were three previous owners when you bought the house?

MH: I was the third. And the ones just before me, had it two years.

LMK: What about churches in the neighborhood? Driving around I don't see too many churches in this neighborhood today. What about when you came here? What churches were here?

MH: Well, there is one at the corner of Morris Hill and Garden that was here when I moved here, but I don't know how long it had been there. And there was one on Latah, across from the cemetery. And then further south on Latah, there was, I think it was an Episcopal Church. Getting pretty close to Overland. That's all I can think of.

LMK: It does seem that this is really a pretty tight residential area with the services all outside.

MH: Yes, Orchard and Latah.

LMK: Some of the changes now, types of businesses and activities compared to what was here previously. Along Orchard, a lot of different businesses now. Some buildings--I drove that way coming here today and saw homes that had been converted to business. M&W Market isn't there anymore, of course. Potter Drug is not there anymore. There seem to be a lot of the smaller stores. Boutique is the word coming to mind but I don't mean that in the sense of a clothing boutique but the smaller, maybe, family-owned.

MH: Yes. There's getting to be more and more tattoo parlors [laughs] in this area but, as you say, there are more personal family businesses. There's a wig shop near Fred Meyer store. Then there's craft stores, several of those.

LMK: You mentioned the bowling alley.

MH: Yes. And small eatery places, too. They accommodate more smaller groups or individuals, then the masses like they used to, the grocery stores handled and the service stations and those sorts of things.

LMK: When I had the tape off, you mentioned the bowling alley. Is that a newer...

MH: No, it's probably been there 15 years or more. They've remodeled it since they originally did. Oh, there are more and more – how do I word it? – immigrant shops. There are those in the Orchard area.

LMK: Specialized foods and things like that. Is there more of an ethnic community now than in previous years?

MH: I've been told that some of the apartment complexes are more of those than Caucasian. But I don't know personally.

END OF INTERVIEW

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