

Interviewee: Mena Fuller Webb

Interviewer: Cathy Abernathy

Interview date: April 2, 2007

Location: Durham, North Carolina

Length: 2 compact discs; approximately 90 minutes

CD AND TRANSCRIPT INDEX

<u>CD Time;</u> <u>Page</u>	<u>Topic</u>
00:59; p. 1	The Fuller family. Mena's father's family moved to Durham in 1881 from Fayetteville. Her father, Ralph was eight years old. Grandfather, Bartholomew Fuller was a lawyer, worked for Julian S. Carr, and was on the first Board of Education. Fuller School was named for him. Bartholomew died in November, 1882.
03:53; p. 3	Thomas Blount Fuller. His oldest son, Thomas Blount Fuller went to work to support the family, rather than attend university. Thomas B. worked for Julian S. Carr, first as an accountant and eventually became President of the Golden Belt Manufacturing Company, which made cotton bags for tobacco and other staples.
4:58; p. 3	Fuller children. Ralph was the youngest. There were five older sisters, Agnes, Kate, Eleanor, Marion, and Margaret. Eleanor and Marion married educators and moved out of town, but were frequent visitors during Mena's childhood.
7:46; p. 4	Ralph Bell Fuller, Mena's father. He went to work at James H. Southgate insurance agency. Ralph's older sister Kate had married James H. Southgate, Jr. the son of the agency founder.
8:52; p. 5	"Sickly as a child." Ralph suffered from allergies and asthma. Ralph was good looking and considered a 'catch' for the ladies. He was twenty-eight years old in 1901. At times as an adult, he was a semi-invalid. Mena remembers his using an atomizer to spray medicine up his nose.

- 13:10; p. 7 Caro Bacon Fuller, Mena's mother. Ralph met his wife, in Durham at a party given by Ella DeGraffenreid from Pittsboro and later Durham. She was a classmate with Ella at a boarding school in Georgia. Caro Bacon was born in Monticello, GA. They were married in 1901, when Ralph was twenty-eight years old.
- 16:40; p. 8 In the insurance business. Ralph worked in insurance in Durham, Yonkers, NY, and Atlanta. Ralph, Jr. was born in Durham. Bacon, Carolyn, and Mena were born in Atlanta. Remembers picture of Caro in fashionable 'Gibson Girl' dress in Yonkers, NY.
- 18:57; p. 9 From Atlanta to Durham. Family moved to Durham in the summer of 1915. Ralph had tuberculosis and was in a sanatorium in Oteen, NC, when Uncle Thomas helped Caro and the four children move to a house on Cleveland Street. Mena was six weeks old.
- 20:25; p. 10 Moving to 313 East Main Street. In 1922, when Mena was seven years old, Uncle Thomas died and the Ralph Fuller family moved to his house at 313 East Main Street. Mena's grandmother and namesake, Wilhelmena Bell Fuller had died earlier. The house was next door to the Durham Public Library.
- 21:22; p. 10 Playing with Mary Ann Carr. Mena went to Somerset Villa to play with her while she was out of school with bronchitis. The playground at Somerset Villa was "quite an operation" and used by the Carr boys and neighborhood children.
- 24:03; p. 11 Living at 313 Main Street. For Mena it was a wonderful, big house with cubby holes and a scary attic with a ladies dress model, ladies magazines for paper dolls, and a rocking horse. Rose Murray, a wonderful cook, inherited from Uncle Thomas was "a big part of my life." Later Mena wrote characters fashioned on Rose. Mena's mother was energetic and busy with the Tourist Club book club and the Ladies Circle of the First Presbyterian Church.
- 28:43; p. 13 The First Presbyterian Church. Mena remembers the round Sunday school, Mr. George Watts and the minister Dr. David Scanlon. Uncle Thomas was a supporter and benefactor of the church and became President of Golden Belt Manufacturing Company. After Mena married Mack Webb, she changed to St. Phillips Episcopal Church, because that was the Webb family denomination.
- 31:30; p. 15 Mack Webb's family. He had grown up in Hillsborough, but his mother had moved to Fayetteville, where her daughter Helen lived. As in many southern families, Mena's aunt Maggie, (Ralph's

- sister, Margaret) had married Mr. Alex Huske, who was the uncle of Mr. John Huske, Helen Webb's husband.
- 32:48; p. 15 Nanna Webb. She became ill and visited Duke Hospital. Mena learned to give her mother-in-law insulin shots for her diabetes.
- 34:57; p. 16 Mena's mother. Her mother is now in Mena's thoughts frequently. She was pretty and dainty. She sang a lot. Singing was a part of the family, especially when Carolyn was nineteen and Mena was fifteen. Mena learned to play the piano by ear after a year of lessons.
- 38:12; p. 18 Moving to Hope Valley residential, golf course and country club community. Automobile use encouraged the development of suburbia. Her father played golf at the Hillandale course and at the Hope Valley course. Her mother was eager to move from the smelly, smoky center of town. They built a new house on Dover Road.
- 40:50; p. 18 Oil furnace explosion. The new oil furnace exploded when it was being demonstrated, because a wad of cloth had been left in the chimney or flue. The furnace company man was badly burned and Mena's mother received skin grafts. Mena remembers watching her father run from the car to wrap his wife in a quilt.
- 44:27; p. 20 Servants. Rose Murray lived in a servant's room at the back of the house, but soon preferred to retire to her home on Piedmont Avenue in Hayti, the Negro neighborhood of Durham. A series of black men were hired to chauffeur Mena's mother, to do yard work, and at times to serve the dinner in the role of a butler.
- 48:12; p. 22 College and driving. Carpooling was necessary after the family moved to Hope Valley—driving to Durham High School (1927-1931), to Duke (1931-32) and to the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill (1932-1933). After begging one of the young men to teach her, Mena learned to drive easily. In addition to her father's car, there was one for the children. Mena and Carolyn often waited in Durham for her brother Bacon to drive them home.
- 52:19; p. 23 Hope Valley living. Mena loved the swimming pool in the summer and walked the golf course with Anne Mebane, discussing the future—falling in love and getting married. Any negative aspects of family life were treated as a “stately dance that everybody did around forbidden subjects.” Humor was predominant in her family, especially her father and Ralph, Jr. Grandmother Wilhelmena was known as a wit and Mena's sense of humor may

have been attractive to her husband, Mack Webb. It certainly eased any difficulties during their marriage.

59:16; p. 25

The Depression. The family, like most families lost the servants and Mena's mother took charge of the home and the meals. Mena remembers the horrors of the stock market crash. Her father was often home during the day from the insurance agency office. President Roosevelt was considered a hero during the worst years of the Depression.

01:01:14; p.27

Art School. When Ralph Jr. lost his job as a commercial artist in New York City, he returned to Durham and taught art with several friends for over a year. Mena begged to take lessons, but was completely surprised by seeing "my first stark naked model."

END COMPACT DISC 1 of 2

START COMPACT DISC 2 of 2

00:15; p. 28

The Depression. The Fullers were talented in painting, singing, and writing. No one could sell their home in Hope Valley. The Hope Valley Country Club almost went bankrupt, until Dr. Davison, bought memberships for young doctors at Duke Medical Center.

1:20; p. 29

Leaving Hope Valley. After Mena was married in 1936, her parents sold the house and returned for a while to the Main Street house, then lived in a smaller house near Forest Hills.

2:07; p. 29

Engaged to a Naval Officer. For Mena this high romance included a white naval uniform, a military wedding with crossed swords, long distance courting between Frank's sea duty, and a two year wait to marry. During that time, she met Mack Webb and was smitten. She wrote a "Dear John" letter to Frank and received a scorching letter back.

3:48; p. 30

Meeting Frank Marshall. At a dance at Duke, where Frank's best friend was graduating. Invitation to visit him in Norfolk, VA with her mother. They toured the cruiser, *Portland* and stayed with Mrs. Ship. She and her mother were swooning with the romance of it all.

9:42; p. 32

She felt like Cinderella, receiving gifts and letters. She kept the letters after she was married, but has burned or lost them since.

She is amazed that this romance has been so forgotten, although she told her daughters and her grandchildren.

- 11:07; p. 33 Mena's mother, Caro. Her disappointment over the end of the romance was short-lived; she adored Mack Webb. At times, she stayed at the Webb's after her husband died. She loved her granddaughters, was considerate and good company. Once in a while her innocent, but optimistic comments became a source of amusement to Mack and joined his repertoire of witty stories.
- 14:02; p. 34 Vacation travel. Mack's illness, [throat cancer during the 1970s to 1986] often kept them from traveling abroad. Trips in the United States were easier.
- 15:12; p. 35 St. Croix. Mena describes a trip to St Croix with her oldest daughter, Carol to visit her older brother, Ralph, Jr. She remembers noting a difference between the handsome and proud, black people of St. Croix compared to the Negroes of the U. S. South.
- 18:13; p. 37 Memories of her father. Throughout her childhood, her father had been a strict disciplinarian and was not inclined to a lot of kissing and hugging the girls because of his susceptibility to germs. As an adult she became aware of how affectionate and emotional her father really was, often tearing up when told that they loved him. Only once did Mena receive a thrashing.
- 22:06; p. 38 Fishing with her father. Mena begged her father to take her fishing, like he had with her brothers. The trip was short lived, however, probably because Mena was jabbering.
- 23:52; p. 39 A dream about her father. A recurring dream after his death showed her father at a party in a tuxedo, handsome and happy. At the party only she and her father knew that he was really dead. The mysterious dream eventually subsided.
- 26:13; p. 40 Thoughts of Heaven. Mena thinks about it without any certainty, but she and her daughter, Carol believe that Heaven will be wonderful.

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