

**Interview with Mrs. Myrtle Gosnell  
with comments by**

**Interviewed by Susan Hawes  
Baltimore Neighborhood Heritage Project**

**Interviewed on May 15, 1979  
at 3020 Darby St.  
Hamden Community, Baltimore, Maryland**

Myrtle Gosnell: MG

Susan Hawes: SH

Grace

SH: Mrs. Gosnell, you told me that your parents came from somewhere outside of Hamden, can you tell me something about what they told you about their lives before they came to Hamden?

MG: O yeah, I knew she was born in Stewartsdale? [unclear] and he was born in [unclear].

Grace: That's in Pennsylvania.

MG: Yeah.

SH: And you said your mother had an interesting life before she came to Hamden.

MG: Well I don't know much about her life, see, because I was too little or hadn't been born when she lived.

SH: Ok, do you know why they came to Hamden, how they got here?

MG: Well, my two sisters came first, and got jobs in the mills and then they gave us half when they lived here.

SH: I know you said you grew up in this house right here. What do you remember about this house when you were little?

MG: Well it was hardly different then, we lived downstairs and all these rooms were shut off private.

SH: You said there were some conveniences that you have now that you didn't have then? What was it like then?

MG: We had a cook stove downstairs, a big one and in each room we had small round stoves with [unclear].

SH: What did you do about a bathroom?

MG: Well we mostly took a bath in the tub, as far back as I can remember.

SH: A big tub?

MG: Then we had a toilet in the backyard.

SH: What about doing the washing, how did you do that?

MG: We had a tub and a washboard, you know. We washed them out first and then we'd board them, then washed them out on the washboard, then she put them through clear water, then we put them through a blue water.

SH: Who lived in the house with you?

MG: Just my mother and my family.

SH: Were there any relations besides your brothers and sisters?

MG: No, just my family.

SH: You said you bought the house around 1920, how were you able to do that?

MG: I think my brother bought it first and then he turned it over to us. I think it was later than 1920.

SH: But how were you able to do that.

MG: Oh, it wasn't much, you know we did it through the company, the company helped us out.

SH: So it was a savings and trust, building and loan association?

MG: Yeah, a building and loan association.

SH: What do you remember about your father when you were growing up?

MG: Well he worked in the country a lot. Lots of times he would leave. Hard to say, I don't know too much about him.

SH: Well, what kind of work did he do?

MG: Well he used to drive a cart, you know, back when they had horses and carts. That the kind of work he did.

SH: So he wasn't home too much?

MG: No, he was not home that much. I don't remember too much about him.

SH: You said finally he and your mother decided he was supposed to stay away.

MG: Well he left when three of us weren't even old enough to walk. He worked so much in the country and he would stay longer than he should stay so my mother got tired of it.

SH: How did your family do without him?

MG: Well I had two sisters who worked and a brother old enough to work and they kept the family together.

SH: What can you remember about your mother while you were growing up?

MG: I cannot remember much. I know she was a good woman. She took us to Sunday school barefooted and everything. She went along too, she didn't stay at home. She was a hard working woman. She had a compassion for people. She never went out to work. She would white wash houses for people, took in wash but she never went out to work.

SH: What did she do around the house, to keep the house together?

MG: Well, she did everything she could around the house, all the housework and things like that.

SH: Do you remember anything special that she used to cook that you don't get any more?

MG: Well I cook just like her so I don't miss much. She made her own bread and would make pasta but I cook the same types of things so I cook just like her.

SH: Did she put things up?

MG: No she didn't put things up. [unclear] Of course everything then was a lot cheaper but I never put things up. [unclear]

SH: Did she raise you kids with any special rules to remember, any special way to behave?

MG: Well we were always taught to behave. She always told us to treat others as we wanted to be treated. She was a good woman.

SH: What chores did you kids have to do to keep the house straight and to help your mother?

MG: Well I would do dishes and do the lamp post [unclear].

SH: You did the lamp post?

MG: yes ma'am

SH: How did you do that?

MG: I would wash the posts, mostly shine them with newspapers.

SH: What did the other kids have to do?

MG: Well three of them worked in the mills, and I don't remember what my brother did. The younger brother, he brought in the coal and stuff because we had a coal stove.

SH: You told me a story about the kids going to get coal from the coal yard.

MG: Yeah, 5 or 10 cents a bag for the stove.

SH: There were different types of coal.

MG: Well it was mostly soft coal, but my mother would get some peak coal and start a good fire first then she would put the soft coal on top and it would last longer.

SH: Did you use wood too with the coal?

MG: Yea we had a chunk? stove and we would put wood in it.

SH: You said you went to School fifty five until sixth grade. Do you remember anything in particular about going to school?

MG: Only coming home for lunch and stuff like that. We didn't have it like the kids now, we would walk to school. I mean they didn't drive us. We had to walk and come home for lunch.

SH: What did you like about school?

MG: To tell you the truth I never did like it very much. [laugh] I always got along all right but I never did like it very much.

SH: How were you able to start mill work when you were only fourteen years old?

MG: You had to get a permit to work in the mills, I guess you weren't that old were you Grace?

Grace: I was eleven.

MG: My two sisters, they were only about ten and eleven when they went to work in the mills and I was fourteen. I had to have a permit.

SH: How did your mother feel about going to school and how did she feel about you stopping school?

MG: She needed the money so I guess nobody complained too much.

SH: Do you remember any of the games you used to play when you were a kid?

MG: We would mostly play boys games, [unclear] hide and seek and things like that. We played marbles and anything the boys did we did.

SH: Did you go swimming?

MG: No, I've never. We didn't even have swimming pools around, only Jones's Falls but we never had a place. We had a pond up here but I don't think anybody ever went swimming in it, not as far as I've known.

SH: What about winter sports?

MG: Sleigh riding but I didn't do very much of it because I didn't like walking back.

Grace: Jump rope.

MG: Yeah, jump rope.

SH: What was your neighborhood like when you were growing up? Was it different from the way it is now?

MG: Oh yeah. We had small porches and it was just like one big family. One person didn't have anything the other didn't. Everybody shared. There weren't any cars out at

any hour of the night. There ain't many of the old people living today. There are all new people around.

SH: Where did they come from?

MG: I don't really know. I think some of them come from the underworld [chuckle].

SH: Where did you shop or how did you get most of your supplies when you were little?

MG: Well we had a big apparel store. We got most of our things there. On Saturday we would go to the Lexington market and go to Kenny's store to get coffee, sugar, and tea.

SH: Did you like to go on Saturday?

MG: O yeah, we loved it.

SH: Was there any other way that you would buy things?

MG: A horse and cart used to come around the street.

SH: What kind of things would they sell?

MG: Mostly fruit.

Grace: Vegetables.

MG: Yeah, vegetables. Like [unclear] sells now.

SH: What did you and the neighbors do for fun in the evening?

MG: Well people worked so hard in the daytime they didn't have time for fun.

Grace: We had pan parties.

MG: Yeah, we would have what they call pan parties. Everyone would bring a pan of stuff and we would call it a pan party. That was a lot of fun.

SH: What about music?

MG: We didn't have any music.

SH: Didn't you say the man next door was a violin player?

MG: That was at a square dance the fellahs would have in the dining room.

SH: In your dining room? How did that happen?

MG: They would take the things out, put them wherever they could set them and have a square dance. The man next door played the violin for that. But nothing like that at a pan party. We never had anybody to play music.

SH: Would people drink and eat at a square dance?

MG: Eat and drink, yeah. Not alcohol, mostly lemonade or milk and things like that.

SH: Did your mother fix things for people?

MG: Lemonade she would make, they didn't have the kool-ades and all then.

SH: What did you like about a square dance? Did you dance?

MG: I was only a few years old. I square danced here at the house when it happened. I danced with my brother or something like that.

SH: Is there anything you remember about a square dance?

MG: When we had the square dances, there would be 8 couples on the floor at once.

SH: It must have been crowded.

MG: No, because we had everything out of the dining room, it wasn't cut up like it is now.

SH: What kind of entertainment did you have, like when you wanted to go to town or on the avenue? What would you do?

MG: Walk the streets and talk to people. I mean there wasn't much to do. I think they had a vaudeville place there where Sander's store is. I went there once or twice. They just had vaudeville, they didn't have movies.

SH: What was the vaudeville like?

MG: It was good. People unlocking trunks and things like that.

SH: Did you ever go to Sunday at Cavaco's?

MG: Yes, there were lots of Sundays. Then we have another place, Murry's, it was on Forty-sixth street but then they moved to Thirty-Fifth. They had good Sundays too. I went there a lot of times.

SH: Are there any places you remember really well that you used to go to, or where you used to buy things that aren't there any more?

MG: Lots of the stores ain't there anymore. There isn't anything there now. I mean you can walk down the avenue now and if you see a half dozen people your doing good.

SH: What kind of holidays did you have?

MG: We had Thanksgiving, Christmas and Decoration Day.

SH: What did you do on Thanksgiving?

MG: We just had a big dinner. My mother would have, or I would have it. That was about all. We mostly went to church in the morning. Christmas Eve, just growing up as a kid, we were lucky to just get a dollar and a ball. While these other kids get everything.

SH: Did you look forward to a holiday a lot?

MG: I never looked forward to it too much because I knew that well, I thought his name was Sammy then, I was going to be real good that year. I went to my sister's for Christmas and after she put her little girl to bed she said, "now, you can help me put the toys out". My heart was broke because I was sure I would get something that Christmas because I had tried my best to be good.

SH: What about Decoration Day? What was that like?

MG: We used to go out in park and gather flowers, take them to the graveyard [motorcycle, cannot hear tape.] We mostly went to St. Mary's, my sister was buried there. Then Fourth of July all the churches marched out to the park for a Sunday school picnic, a luncheon, and slap baskets. All of us looked forward to the Fourth of July. All the churches did, each church marched out.

SH: What did you do when you got there?

MG: They played all kinds of games. They played baseball, the fellahs did. We had a boat out there, we used to go out in that. We always had a nice time out there. Until the colored got so bad, broke it all up and none of the churches go anymore.

SH: Did you ever go anywhere else for an excursion?

MG: Well we used to go down on [unclear] an all day excursions with my mother.

SH: Where would you go?

MG: Nokachoptank river, and all different places, just mostly stayed home and rest. [unclear]

SH: You started work pretty early, can you describe what you did when you first got to the Mills, when you were fourteen?

MG: I was a spinner, I learned to dock first and then I was a spinner.

SH: What was spinning like? How did you do that?

MG: The Dockers would take off full bobbins and put on empty ones, and then we had big rolls of rope that would come down release by the bobbin.

SH: And what did you do?

MG: When the Dockers, docked it, you could start back up, but you had to watch your head. Then at the end [unclear].

SH: Did you do that all day?

MG: We worked until it ended.

SH: Did you think it was a hard job?

MG: It wasn't so bad then as it was in the later years. It was run better in the beginning than they were in the end.

SH: The mills were run better in the beginning?

MG: I think they were, don't you? In the beginning they had better cotton.

Grace: They did have better cotton.

MG: Toward the end it was bad.

SH: Did you like your bosses?

MG: Yes, I had all good bosses. I wouldn't complain about them.

SH: How did you get along with them?

MG: Fine, they treated me all right so I treated them all right.

SH: What was a typical day like when you were working, starting from when you got up in the morning.

MG: We used to go to work about half past six. We worked till about five.

Grace: I don't know about you but I worked twelve hours a day when I started working.

MG: I don't remember if we worked from six thirty to five or till five thirty.

SH: Did you stop for lunch?

MG: Yes, a half hour.

SH: Did you have any other breaks?

MG: If you did you took it on your own. Then you would come back and work twice as hard.

SH: What about conditions at the there? Were you ever scared of fires? Did they have any fires while you were there?

MG: We had fires but I was never scared of them.

SH: How did they put a fire out?

MG: They had that stuff you put on, or they would throw water on it. It never was a great big fire, maybe one frame.

SH: What were the working conditions like?

MG: I thought then when I first went to work was nice.

SH: What happened?

MG: Later, as I said it got bad in the later years.

SH: How did it get bad?

MG: I think the cotton wasn't as good or something. It put too much speed on the frames. That would make the work really bad because of the speed on it.

SH: Did dust in the air ever bother you?

MG: No.

SH: Did you do anything to help deal with it?

MG: I would chew gum or suck on a piece of candy but it never bothered me.

SH: You said in the beginning there was no union there.

MG: Not in the beginning but in the later years they started one.

SH: You were a member of the union, what did it do for you?

MG: It gave us a raise once in a while.

SH: Did it help you if you ever had trouble with a boss?

MG: They didn't need to but I think they had others. I never fought.

SH: What did you think of the Mill owners?

MG: The managers always seemed nice. They would speak to you when they came over but that's about all I know about them. I don't know that much.

SH: Do you remember how much money you were making when you first started?

MG: I don't know about six dollars a week, for six days

Grace: When I first started, for a whole month I made seven dollars and fifty cents.

MG: I don't know, I think I just don't remember I thought it was six dollars, six dollars a day. My two sisters worked for seven and eight dollars a month.

SH: When they first started?

MG: Yes, that what she got a month.

SH: What were you making by the time you retired?

MG: I worked at the store for a bit but when I left the mill down here, I forget. The regular wage was what they were paying at that time.

SH: Did you think it was a good job?

MG: Yes, I always liked it.

SH: What do you think makes a good job?

MG: I'm not sure I know myself but you work hard and do what your supposed to do, I guess that's the only thing I know.

SH: You were telling me a lot about your family and the Salvation Army church, what can you tell me about that?

MG: I went to Sunday school, and went to all the meetings. My mother would take us. I joined Salvation Army and spent all my life there. Then Dewey and I had some children

SH: What does the Salvation Army church do that you like?

MG: Everything about it.

SH: What does it do for people?

MG: Well whatever families needed, they'll help them out. And not just a charity organization, they had Sunday school, they have eleven o'clock service, and we have seven-thirty at Sunday nights, and then on Wednesday nights we have prayer meeting and then we have what they call Home League just for women.

SH: When you were younger, what did they have that you participated in?

MG: They had things for younger kids like, now they call it Sunbeams for girls, we used to call it [unclear], the Sunbeams are like the Brownies for the Girl Guards.

SH: And you said that you started seeing young men around that time or you started seeing your husband and he'd walk you to church sometimes

MG: Well he went to church, he'd walk me home.

SH: What other kinds of things did you do?

MG: [unclear] sit out in the moonlight, you know, things like that

SH: Did everybody do those kinds of things, all the other girls?

MG: Well I don't know about other girls, there would be about six or seven of us and about six or seven boys, [unclear] there wasn't much going on.

SH: You said, Dewey, who later became your husband was sent away in World War I as a soldier.

MG: Before we was married, I was only about seventeen when he was sent away to war.

SH: Can you tell me how you felt about that and what you remember about it?

MG: We wrote to one another and he'd send me little gifts, that's all I can remember.

SH: What kinds of places did he go?

MG: [unclear] when Tommy was stationed in Georgia he sent me a little bit of cotton, I don't remember too much about the war. My brother-in-law died and another man who had two sons who died, that's about all I remember about it.

SH: Did lots of other people around you stick? [unclear]

MG: It happened around here, but I don't remember too much about it.

SH: You talked to me a little about the Depression, you were married and starting a family then. How did you deal with the Depression?

MG: Well in one week he got paid in half, I think that was only about twelve dollars, but we lived, we didn't go on welfare. And the my two sisters, one of them dressed one of the little girls and the other one dressed the other, so we managed.

SH: Did you live here then?

MG: No

SH: Had your father come to live with you then?

MG: No

SH: Was your mother living here with you?

MG: Not yet

SH: What about other people around you, did you see how they got along?

MG: Well most of them were on welfare, livin' good.

SH: What did you get when you were on welfare?

MG: Well they got all of their flour, all of their sugar and everything else they could get. I know one family even had the doctor paid and everything. They did good them that was on welfare. I know one family, she even got new teeth and everything. She dressed every night and went out, had four or five kids. [Unclear] of course things wasn't high then as they are now, I guess twelve dollars runs as far as sixty or seventy now.

SH: You had three children, what you remember about those births and how you managed?

MG: They was all born at home with the midwife, the first one was only about two hours and twenty minutes, and the others weren't more than two hours and a half, Anita I didn't have no pains with her, doctor come give me a needle, but I never suffered then. Anita weighed ten pounds and a half.

SH: Did you have a needle or anesthesia with the other two kids?

MG: No, not with the first one it weighed six pounds, I think the boy weighed eight pounds, Anita was big. I thought she was three or four months old when she was born.

SH: Is there anything particular about having a baby that stands out, that you would tell somebody else if you were trying to describe giving birth?

MG: Well, I don't know I worked hard all though mine, I think I worked in the mills with Joel probably until seven months.

SH: How did you take time off, were there any problems?

MG: Well Joel wasn't too old when I went back to work 'cause my mother was there [unclear]. I guess Anita was about nine or ten months old before I went back

SH: You always got your job back again?

MG: Yeah, most every time

SH: And that was perfectly alright?

MG: They did for me, I don't know about anyone else.

SH: Why do you think that was?

MG: I don't know, maybe they liked me, they never showed it if they did.

SH: You never knew if they liked you or not?

MG: They always treated me alright

SH: Did you talk to your bosses like they were other people? Like you would anyone else?

MG: They would talk to me sometimes

SH: You said that you had a real sadness happen with your little boy?

MG: Yeah he took sick, he was only sick three days [unclear]

SH: You called it something else too?

MG: They said he had what they called stomach complaints like I think diarrhea and vomit, you know, but they called it stomach complaints then.

SH: What happened?

MG: He took sick of vomit and he fell out of his bed and woke up with a fever that claimed his life.

SH: When you had a funeral for a baby, did you have that at home? What has that like?

MG: Yes, just like any other funeral

SH: Well, we don't have funerals at home much anymore, so could you describe that?

MG: Well my mother was buried at home too, they put a crate on your door and you put white and other people put black or grey and the undertaker would come lay them out at home, and they had the funeral service right at home, just like a funeral parlor.

SH: Would that go on for a couple days?

MG: It mostly went for three days.

SH: Have you been to a funeral in a funeral parlor?

MG: Yeah I just buried my husband.

SH: Did you like it better at home?

MG: Well in some ways I like it better than the funeral parlor, because at home somebody's comin' all the time, [unclear] and it's all the cookin' and coffee all night long. So really at the funeral parlor, it does give you time to relax, but I like the funeral parlor.

SH: Did you raise your own children with any special rules? Anything you wanted them to learn particularly?

MG: I raised them just like I was raised, be good and respectful and treat others as they wanted to be treated.

SH: Is there anything you remember about raising them that was particularly hard?

MG: It was hard for me working and trying to raise them, but I always had time for them. And there was Sunday school and church. I feel like I did a good job with the two girls.

Grace: You have. If I had two daughters I'd love [unclear]

SH: How did you cope with your father coming to live with you?

MG: Well after he come to live with me, I had to [unclear]. I had him for twenty years and not a penny from my father. He was sick for nine months and we took care for him until he passed away. I feel like I got more than my share. I think the way you treat others is the way you're gonna' be treated back. [unclear] But I don't ask too much and don't complain too much. My daughter who was here today, she takes me everywhere, of course the other girl don't drive, she does, that makes a difference. She always goes with us anyway.

SH: What do you remember about the first television you saw?

MG: Well I think my father liked it better than I did. I didn't have too much time to watch it, he loved it. I don't know what was the first thing on the television but he liked it. Oh he'd get in front of that and sit all day looking at it. I liked it for certain things, same way now. I don't care for everything on the television now.

SH: What about radio, do you remember the first radio?

MG: Yes I remember the radio more than not. We used to have a radio and listen to Shadow and we'd get a church service on the words of God, same way as the television. On Sunday nights we'd put it on at eight o'clock and not take it off until eleven, one preacher after another. [unclear]

SH: Do you remember the first car you ever rode in?

MG: I think the first car we had was a Maxwell

SH: Did you ever learn to drive?

MG: Yes

SH: Where did you go when you first drove in a car?

MG: Mostly went up to the country, we had some friends up there

SH: Can you tell me what you like about Hampden?

MG: I like everything in Hampden, it's a neat place to live

SH: What don't you like about Hampden?

MG: Well I like it because most everybody's nice people, course there's some rough ones now that wasn't here years ago, but if you ever live in Hampden, you never want to live no place else.

SH: What don't you like?

MG: I don't think there's anything I don't like about Hampden. Its built up now unlike what it used to be, like Thirty-sixth street. It's a shame about Thirty-sixth street because you could always go down and see people, every store was taken and everything. And now as far as Hampden is concerned I don't think I've ever found a place I liked as well.

SH: How do you think Hampden has changed? You said Thirty-sixth street changed, did anything else?

MG: Oh only the houses where the built all around and the stores around where there used to be all trees. Up there on Chestnut Avenue that was two rows of trees, one on each side and no houses at all and this place up here was just a big field with a pond and creek; lots of changes in that way. I think everything around here is the same, porches are different.

SH: And the people?

MG: I think it's all good people, but I don't know them. I don't know half of them, but the older people, with the older families there are only about five or six living around. It's mostly newer families, of course some of them are children who have grown up and they keep living here, but they're still young. Either way they've built some beautiful homes, but I don't think any of them compare to Mama's. I wouldn't want to live no place else.

SH: When you say Hampden, what boundaries do you think of?

MG: Well it has been a big change.

SH: Is Woodbury part of Hampden?

MG: No, I think that's a town to it-self. Isn't it.

Grace: No, Hampden only runs as far as the railroad tracks, some people don't call it Woodbury any more Myrtle. I don't know what they call it.

MG: But, it's not part of Hampden.

Grace: No, it was never part of Hampden.

SH: When you were little did you think of Remmington as close kin to you?

MG: It never concerned me. I never went to Remmington.

SH: Let me ask you just a few more questions about you. Do you think that you had a hard life?

MG: I have had it hard but I had a good life. I don't know of anything I am not satisfied about. I didn't always get what I wanted but I got what I needed. It was hard but I enjoyed all of it. I'm not complaining about my life.

SH: You told me something once about how things have changed. You told me that there are a lot of conveniences now.

MG: The convenience is much better.

SH: But you said there was something different about living now compared to living when you were younger.

MG: Well we had it hard of course but we enjoyed it because we didn't have anything better but now I like the electric and the gas and all those thing. I like them now. But when we used the others I think we were all as satisfied then as we are now. But its much easier.

SH: You said something about things being slower and more relaxed.

MG: We liked the cook stove because it cooked better. It was different world than kids now. But I like the conveniences of the gas, electric and the bath.

SH: What do you think has helped you to survive when it has been really hard?

MG: I always trusted in the Lord. I think when I was my weakest he gave me strength. Sometimes I could have done with a bit more strength but I always made it

SH: How did he give you strength?

MG: Just like he gives me strength now. I had to have faith and believe he was going to do these things. I couldn't have gone through what I went through without his help. Of course I think that when you lead a moral life and he'll answer all your prayers. If you live between sin he will give you what he thinks best for you, not what you want but what he thinks best for you.

Grace: What about when you help others, he will help you?

MG: Well, I think that's a pillar.

SH: Last question, what would you do if you had a chance to live your whole life over again and you could add anything you wanted or subtract anything you wanted? Are there one or two things.

MG: I don't think there is anything I would change.

SH: Anything you wish you had gotten done that you haven't?

MG: Nothing too much, I have been very well satisfied with my life.

SH: You don't want to be a movie star?

MG: No. I would never make it as a movie star I would just be wasting my thoughts and wondering.

SH: Thankyou very much.

MG: Your, welcome.