



Quindaro Oral History Project

Frank Hursh Interview, February 4, 2017

Interviewed by Anne Lacey

Transcribed by Anne Lacey

AL: OK, today is February 4th, 2017 and my name is Anne Lacey and I'm the Special Collections Librarian at the Kansas City, Kansas Public Library. And I am recording Mr. Frank Hursh and he's going to be telling us about his memories of Quindaro.

FH: I was born during the Depression and I lived at 17th and Georgia and every summer it was 106 degrees for three straight months, but I was a Boy Scout at the church at 17th and Yecker. ??? Memorial Church. As Boy Scouts we always went hiking all of the time, we always had canteens with us. We would hike out 17th street clear to the tracks by the water works then we would turn and go west to the Quindaro Ruins. North of the tracks was Quindaro Ruins where we would play in the old basements...I'm sorry, south. North of the tracks we would go down to the river and it was right at where the river curved, and we'd get naked and go swimming in the Missouri River. But we had a lot of fun in the ruins.

AL: How many buildings were there left at that time?

FH: There were a lot. Almost every basement was still there up the hill and we would go in the different basements and some black people lived in the area and they had gardens all through the area. We knew they grew corn so we would take our canteens and we would get ears of corn and we found an old bucket, we would cook the corn in one of the basements, in the, and eat it. The corn ears were only about five inches long. And one old black man came down and saw us and said "I see you're eating my corn boys, have fun". He was nice about it. But we just played in the ruins, that's where I first got interested in it. So later in life I decided I'd look up something about it. And I looked up and found out that it all started when the Wyandot tribe was in Ohio. And that uh Nancy Brown, well it's Qindaro Nancy Brown was the daughter of the Chief. And she was in love with Abelard Guthrie who was an Indian agent in Ohio, you got all that, but the government decided to send the tribe out here, they wanted the ground in Ohio, so they sent them to Wyandotte. And uh, her dad, who was a Chief didn't want any part of old Abelard. And so they all came out here but Abelard followed, he wasn't going to give up. Because she was pretty.

AL: He was persistent.

FH: And she got a piece of ground given to her, I forget how many acres, but that's where they built the town, was on her acreage. So really Quindaro owned the land but they made a city out of it. And Abelard was sort of a big shot in the politics at the time, he went to all the big meetings, ah the town, I actually read got to 5,000 people but I couldn't believe it, but it did have a hotel, and it had street names, I found some of this information by going up and reading the newspaper at the

AL: At the Historical Society?

FH: Well it's the Historical Society, it's in Topeka, yeah. But I wanted to tell you...well, it's not important. But I went through all of the elections that he went to, he went to all of the elections, went to everything. But they had a lot of problems with the Missouri ruffians, as they called them. They'd come over and wreck the town. It was a no drinking town, you couldn't have any drinks in that town, no drinking. I read an article where there was a German couple in the town, that had some kind of a shop in the town, they had a still in the basement and they were sneaking it and when the people found out, they came over at night, and broke in, the old lady came running out in her nightgown with her shotgun but they ran her off and they broke the still and they got rid of the whiskey. They didn't want any whiskey in that town.

[4:12]

AL: This was all in the paper?

[4:13]

FH: It was in the paper, that's where I found out about that. I found lots of stories about people who traveled through. And they would write their, they're not worth reading now, because there's so many of them, but people would travel through and tell the history of it. And of course, the town during the Civil War, the troops began to move in and take over the town. And the town was full of the Yankees, the troops, you know. And uh, the Confederates were in Missouri. The town, really the town died after the war. And then Guthrie and his wife packed up their bags, got on a wagon and went to Oklahoma. And I've always wondered if Guthrie, Oklahoma was where they went. I don't know.

[5:02]

AL: Ah, yeah.

[5:03]

FH: But that much I knew about it. I don't want to, I, I, I even had the town, the main street in town was called Kansas. Somewhere in here I got a list of who lived on it and what their names were. I'm gonna get some of it from the newspaper. The had two doctors and one lived at one, number one Quindaro and the other lived at number ten Quindaro. Every address was Quindaro. My dad, when he got his scholarship to go Park College, and he lived with that old gentleman the old gentleman told him that he was a runaway slave when he was a kid, that he had come up the Missouri River on a boat and they had it fixed where you get off, he said there was always two marshalls waiting on the landing, to get the runaways. So what, about a thousand yards down the river they'd get next to the bank and they'd tell him when to jump off, and there'd be a path there. He'd swim to the shore, go up the path, the first house at the very end of the street, at the north end would be you go through a hole in the wall in the basement he would crawl in and stay in the basement, till the marshalls were gone. Then he would get out and head across Kansas where he would be safe. But they said they all used a path. Now there was a rumor that there was a cave but my dad said that it was never he never mentioned a cave, he just mentioned a path leading into the basement and that's where they would get off of the boats and, and get into Quindaro. Uh, you know all the rest so I don't know if I need to get into that too much. Uh.

AL: So, and did you grow up near Quindaro?

FH: I grew up at 17th and Georgia and I went to Bryant school. So to go to the, to get there I just went down 17th street across the woods and we hit the tracks right by the waterworks. Then we went west. And we went swimming and went into the ruins, every time, we'd go to the ruins. That was our hike, and we had a lot of fun. But that was how I got interested in it in the first place. As to the history and all

of the politics, you've already got all that. But I always wondered about what happened to the Guthries when they left.

AL: Yeah.

FH: But they left, I think, right after, within a year after the war they were gone. They packed their wagon and and went to Oklahoma. And I always thought I should go through, when I go through Guthrie I should stop and find out if that's him but I never did.

AL: So did you ever go back to the Quindaro ruins or the area as an adult?

FH: I went back about a few years ago just to see what it was like and we walked all the way down, it was nothing left, to me, from what I remembered. A lot of the lot of the basements were gone, there were a few left but it was nothing like what I saw.

AL: Most people just see the brewery now.

FH: Yeah, and uh, it's a nice place to have a park.

AL: So were the buildings still standing or was it just the foundations?

FH: No there weren't any it was all foundations but there were a lot of them. I mean they were right there, all the way up the hill there were foundations. We could just go into any one of them we wanted and have our dinner or play.

AL: And did people really know about the history of that area?

FH: I don't think anybody thought anything about it. There were some black people that lived closed that did the farming, or little patch farming, it wasn't big, little patches of beans and patches of corn around, around the outside of it. And uh, I don't think anybody ever went there but us scouts. And anybody, well uh, that's basically what I knew about it to begin with.

AL: Yeah.

FH: And uh, I don't know what happened after they left. I did no more studying after, I don't know if you did or not. If you did, I'd like for you to tell me about it, ok? (laughing)

AL: Uh, so are there any other stories you want to tell?

FH: That's about all I can think of. I had some others but I kind of forgot, remembered the bar room thing, and I can't think of some of the others. If I read my notes I might find something, I'll take a look here. Joel Walker was president of the town, Guthrie was Vice President, Robinson was the Treasurer and S. W. Simpson was the Secretary. That, you know all that.

AL: So here's another question for you. What would you like to see happen to preserve the history of Quindaro?

FH: Oh you can't do much with it. I would like to see something build down the middle, like a, even if it's asphalt. A way to get down and back easy. And maybe if they know, put a sign up, if they can figure out what was in each of those, they should be able to find out from the newspaper, what was in, if they can, well you see, the railroad tracks screwed it up. Because it went through the edge of the town. I mean, there was town north of these railroad tracks, all the way to the river. And now that's just woods. So, you don't know what was there. I think you could probably get a map of what the town looked like. Maybe you've got one.

AL: I think, I think I've seen that.

FH: But I think if they put a sign up on what few are left and what was there at the time, it would help. The, I think there was a, they might have had a sign where the hotel was, I can't remember. We just walked all the way down and back and then the guy told me, we picked up a relic and he told me, he said you've got to put that back. So we didn't get the relic we wanted from the, so that's about all I know about.

AL: So, so Western University was still there when you were...

FH: Oh yeah it was there. Yeah uh, and it, when I was a kid it was a very busy school yeah.

AL: So talk, talk to me a little bit about that. What...

FH: Well I used to go, I had to go out to Quindaro School a lot because my friend's dad was the janitor and I just remember that the University and we would walk by and see all of the black kids going to school there. They had a big school, pretty, pretty good sized college. And it was pretty well known because there weren't any around anywhere. It was about the only black school anywhere in the area. I just remember, well, I didn't pay any attention to it. I was a kid, you know. I mostly just wanted to get out to the river.

AL: Right (laughing) find some more relics.

FH: That's more fun, yeah. But that's how I got interested because we played in the park, and uh, that's pretty much it.

AL: OK

FH: I got uh, you know what I read, they were the bear clan of the Wyandot tribe, all that stuff...elected to the Congress and the treaty of 1855...he went to Washington with Walker and those guys. Got all that. Ok, I thought you'd have all that...history. And he wanted to be Governor I think but didn't have enough backing. But his wife owned all of the land.

AL: Yeah.

FH: I don't know if anybody, have you ever got a picture of her?

AL: We have a picture of her in, upstairs, yeah.

FH: Oh yeah, that's good. I never saw a picture of her. But they said she was pretty.

AL: Mmm hmm. We have a picture of Abelard too.

FH: South line at old town was Brown Avenue. 29th Street was Levee Road. You got all that? Ok. So you've probably got more than I've got. Rock landing at Quindaro, founded on a rock. Town site was surveyed by O.M.W. Bassett. See, I figure you've got everything I've got. So. OK. Joel Walker, brother of the Governor Walker induced a member of the old town company (?) It's all about that stuff. There was a steam sawmill, a town newspaper called the Chindowan. In June 1858 they had 100 buildings.

AL: That's amazing.

FH: Yeah. That's just odds and ends. The Lightfoot of Quindaro was the first boat to go from Quindaro to Lawrence, Kansas. For what that's worth. Charter was repealed in 1862 and it was named Quindaro Township. What all this is.

AL: And these are all of your notes from...

FH: Well...a whole lot about Lincoln being in Leavenworth. They thought he might've come to town to look at it for some reason but I wasn't sure about that. But he was at Leavenworth on some kind of a trip because Leavenworth was a big famous fort. But there was something at one time indicating that at one time Lincoln had gone to Quindaro, just to take a look at it. I don't know if you've got that or not. Something about Dunmore's War. Abram Brown captured by a Wyandot at Greenbriar County, Virginia. And Dunmore's War. Whoever he was (laughs). And there was Governor Walker's journal, have you got that?

AL: I believe we do.

FH: July...oh, you do. Ok.

AL: If it's not here then it's at the Historical Society.

FH: Yeah. This is all history about...you've got this. You've got what happened and all of that stuff. They had a fight.

AL: So when did you do your research on Quindaro?

FH: Oh....about twenty years ago or more. More than that, it's been a long time. In 1855 they dissolved the tribal customs and became U. S. citizens and took the land in sovereignty. I was looking to see...for some of the statements of people passing through...

AL: Oh, yeah.

FH: They had a Green Corn Festival as their national holiday. Tuesday, August 9th, 1853.

AL: Wow.

FH: Delegates came from other tribes to that...whatever it was (laughs).

AL: It would be interesting to go back and read those old papers.

FH: Oh yeah, most of, a lot of this probably came out of the paper. Council House meeting was in Kansas. Guthrie was unanimously elected to something. They didn't like it so they called a new election and they, a guy named Barrow, from Leavenworth opposed Guthrie but Guthrie won 54-16.

AL: And they sent him to Washington.

FH: That's right. See, I knew you'd know more about it than me but I just wanted to...

AL: I'm, I'm still learning, all the history.

FH: Then I had, at one time, it was a lot of stuff, people would pass through, they would go to...what the heck is the name of that house on the Kansas river? They would always go there and they would go to Quindaro.

Mrs. Hursh: Grinter?

AL: Oh yes.

FH: They would stop at Quindaro and they would stop at Grinter House, because he had a ferry. To get them across the river.

AL: Have you been to the cemetery? The old cemetery up on the hill?

FH: Up here? Oh thousands...when I was a kid

AL: The one over in Quindaro.

FH: Oh, the I haven't been to the new one, I haven't been to anything in Quindaro except for the park.

AL: Ok.

FH: And of course, I was at the north end playing, but I don't think I ever got up to the top. We played down around the tracks. I don't know that I got much else that would help you. A.G. died of heart failure in Washington in 1907...big deal. Elizabeth Ainsworth married James...James Guthrie in 1813, whoever, whatever that means. Abelard Guthrie was born five miles north of Dayton, Montana County, Ohio. I guess you knew that.

AL: No, I don't have that.

FH: His sister was Irish, persistently something. Trans...uh, I can't read it. I can't read my own writing. That's just the history. Wyandot Shawnee girl, Big Turtle Clan, was born in Canada.

AL: Was this Nancy, or?

FH: I don't, uh...that's a different girl. I don't know who she is.

AL: Ok.

FH: He married Nany Brown...Quindaro Nancy Brown...A. married Quindaro Nancy Brown in 1844 but he couldn't have...they weren't here yet were they?

AL: It was right around that time.

FH: About that...he married her on...in 1844.

AL: I don't know if he married her there or if he married her in Kansas.

FH: So I guess that's right. A. G. that must be Guthrie, died of heart failure in Washington City on one thirteen of 1873. Ok, you got all that. I haven't got much more. I did have a whole bunch of stuff about the people travelling through and what they had to say about it. But I'd be forever finding it probably.

AL: That would be interesting.

FH: A lot of soldiers went through there too. Grinter...you got the Grinter Place, I got these...John Brown, Grinter Place and Wyandot...Uncle Toms' Cabin. Oh, what's this? Mrs. Nichols lived in Quindaro and edited a paper there, the Chindowan. Mrs. C. I. H. Nichols was head of the paper.

AL: Yes, yep, yep.

FH: You got all this? So you've got everything I've got.

AL: Well, we were, I really enjoyed hearing your personal story, about your connection to Quindaro.

FH: Yeah, it was fun, we were kids.

AL: Yeah. Well thank you so much for coming in and talking with us.