

Name of Interviewee: Roger Terry and Sandra Terry

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Additional Materials: 10 Scanned Photos, and a number of additional digital photos.

Interviewer: Victoria Lizotte, Justin Millet and Donato DiGeronimo.

Date: 06/20/2018

Location: Clark House and Library

Introduction:

Roger Terry and Sandra Terry are siblings who were born and raised in Montclair, and both have worked to give back to the community. Roger became a police officer, and his 35-year career culminated in his role as Deputy Chief; he later served on the Montclair Town Council. Sandra worked in early childhood education programs to help teach young children.

Their grandparents had moved to Montclair in the Great Migration, to find better opportunities and better lives than available in the south. They discuss their family's early involvement in St. Mark's Methodist Church and the Montclair NAACP. Their father was a milkman for Rudd's Dairy and then a mailman. Their mother was one of Montclair's first metermaids. They recall growing up on North Fullerton Ave and the neighborhood around Rand Park.

They share stories of their aunt, Althea Gibson, a professional tennis player who helped break racial barriers in the sport, but was still subject to much prejudice. She had married their mother's youngest brother, William Darben. They remember playing football and other sports with the family and that Aunt Althea and their Aunt Rosemary were good at all of them.

They also talk about the fine education they received, both in Montclair and in college, and the other advantages of growing up in a town as diverse as Montclair. They discussed the introduction and impacts of the magnet school system. They also describe the important role that neighborhood parks played in the community, bringing everyone together especially in the summer.

Timestamps:

[0:00]: Roger S. Terry, Sr. (b: October 1949) and Sandra Elizabeth Terry (b: January 1952) were raised in Montclair; Roger is the oldest of his siblings. Their first home was 114 N. Fullerton Avenue, the house in which their father had been born in 1919, and then moved right next door to 110 N. Fullerton. Roger explains that his family and many Blacks moved into Montclair because of the work opportunities (butlers, maids, etc.) at the homes of the wealthy businessmen who, taking advantage of excellent transportation (train) access in/out of Montclair, built large homes here. Harriette Wineta Scott, their grandmother, was a college graduate with a teaching certificate, but ultimately worked as a domestic; she also tutored. Harriette's white father did not want her to go to college and move to Montclair, but she did so anyways, having saved some money and already having relatives in the north. Funny story about her grandmother's unfortunate mishap when the elastic on her old-fashioned undergarments ("snuggies") gave out as she disembarked the train in Montclair and "she kicked them under the train and kept on going. And the rest is history." She boarded at 228 Bloomfield Avenue; she may have already

known the man she would marry, but he was living in Brooklyn when she first moved to Montclair. Roger and Sandra's grandparents married in 1917. Their grandmother purchased the house at 114 North Fullerton, which was impressive for a young Black woman at that time, and she boarded people in her home. These boarders included Black people moving up from the south; they would board with her until they got on their feet with a job and their own place to stay. That was a way for her to give back to the community. *[Note: Harriette Wineta Scott is pictured in the large photo in the YWCA Boarder's dining room in the Crane House and Historic YWCA. She is in the top row, second from the right.]*

[6:11]: They both talk about St. Mark's AME Church on Bloomfield Ave. At that time, St. Mark's Methodist churches throughout the country were dedicated to helping African Americans. The first NAACP of Montclair started at the church. Their family was involved there, and Albert Terry, Sr., their grandfather, became the first treasurer of the Montclair branch of the NAACP. The original church on Bloomfield Avenue near Hartley Street burned down on Good Friday. Their grandparents later helped rebuild the St. Mark's Methodist Church located on Elm Street at Fulton Street. There's a small stained glass window in their grandparents' name located in the current church. Her grandparents conveyed a strong sense of working hard.

[7:45]: Their grandfather became a janitor at the Montclair Normal School, which today is Montclair State University. He also became a teacher there, and even taught white students. He was one of the first tennis coaches at the school and taught basketball, too. They spoke of articles from the time their father retired, with quotes from students saying how beloved their father was, and from their father indicating that the school was "like a second home."

[8:40]: They talk about professional tennis player Althea Gibson, who was married to their mother's youngest brother, Uncle William. Althea Gibson came to Montclair and lived with the Darben family at 69 Pleasant Way, their maternal grandmother's house. She had many practices and tournaments in New Jersey, and she needed a place to live. She used to play alongside another aunt, Rosemary, but only on African American circuits; they were not allowed to play in the USTA. Althea was eventually invited to play in the USTA and broke the color barrier. Nonetheless, she experienced a great deal of prejudice on the tours; she could play on the court, but not always use the locker room after the match, stay in the hotel with white players, or attend other events with the white players, etc.. The Darben home became a refuge for her from the racism. She could relax in their home. She was an incredible athlete. She also played basketball, baseball and even beat 15-year-old Roger at touch football!

[13:50]: They explain that their mother's side of the family, the Darbens, came from Edgefield, South Carolina. Family stories indicate that it was very, very difficult for Blacks living there. Their maternal grandfather decided to move up north, and secured a job as a butler in the home of the Blondel's [owner of coal yard] of Montclair, and their maternal grandmother was a cook in the same household. Back then, their last name was Doggett, but he didn't want anyone to call him a "dog" so he changed the last name to Darben. That's how they came to Montclair. Originally they moved to Fairfield, NJ then moved down to Montclair for better opportunities, ultimately working for the Blondel's. The Blondel's were a big family and lived in a very large home on South Mountain Avenue. Roger remembers visiting and playing with some of the Blondel children that were his age. The story behind the move north is that their grandfather was in line for a carnival game (the one in which you use a sledge hammer to propel an object up a

pole to ring the bell at the top) near Aiken, South Carolina, and kept getting cut off by white people skipping the line. He let it go many times, not making an issue of it. Finally, he ended up hitting a man with the sledge hammer, and thought they killed him. They left north that very night, with his brother George heading farther north to Boston, Mass.

[18:00]: The Doggett family was given 500 acres of land by the plantation owner following the end of the Civil War and the end of slavery. The Doggett father took all of the siblings out of school, borrowed \$100 from the plantation owner and worked the land to repay that in one year. The property is known as 'Promised Land' even today. Even now, they only allow Doggett family members to live there and purchase property there. The matriarch regularly drives around to monitor the land to make sure they do not lose any of it to squatters. Roger and Sandra visited the family property during a family reunion held in Augusta, near Aiken and Edgefield. They even have a cemetery on the 500 acres of property.

[21:45]: Returning the conversation to Montclair, Roger likens the area in which they lived, 114 North Mountain and 110 North Mountain, to being "like Camelot." Roger remembers that his father used to be a milkman for Rudd's Dairy, a black-owned milk distributor, a rarity in the day. Everyone knew their father, and it was a very diverse area that he serviced with many different nationalities (first generation Irish, Italian, Scottish): Forest St., Walnut, N. Fullerton Ave., to Grove, etc. Roger used to ride on the truck with him. Afterwards, his father became a mailman.

[23:30]: Sandra remembered the huge gardens on deep, narrow lots on Walnut St. near Park Street, near their North Fullerton home, where people of various ethnicities grew everything growing from pears, peaches, mulberries, walnuts (which they called stinkbombs when they were green), crabapples and vineyards. They used to climb the trees and get chased out by the property owners.

[24:30]: Roger talks about how the older generations used to make wine, including his grandfather. At 114 North Fullerton, their grandfather, who died one year before Roger was born, used to make dandelion and grape wine in two large vats in the basement. People always told Roger about his grandfather, knowing him from his job at Montclair State, and commenting on how athletic and beloved he was. He remembers Ms. Lombardy who used to explain all sorts of food to him, and she was a good cook.

[26:27]: They mention that racism was not as prevalent in Montclair. Roger and Sandra felt sheltered from racism, for the most part. She remembers her mother was yelling and screaming at a PTO meeting because Sandra found a 5th grade textbook at Rand School with a stamp on it with the names of many Bradford School students listed, who had used the book before. They got upset that they received the older books while Bradford School got brand new textbooks. Rand was a school with mostly African Americans, Jews, as well as Irish and Italian Catholics who were not enrolled in Immaculate Conception Catholic School.

[28:28]: Mr. Blumayor was a teacher who had been in the Air Force, who used to sprinkle 'fairy dust' into your hair if you were not paying attention. That was really just sand.

[29:24]: Sandra mentions that she was not able to say that she was targeted by prejudice, but there was an unspoken agreement that you do not go to some places. Roger mentions that you

could not go up to Upper Montclair in his younger days, but things started to change in the 1960s. The 1960s was simultaneously one of the worst times to grow up and one of the most fun.

[30:36]: Sandra talks about how some people should have been in Rand School but somehow got into Watchung School or Grove Street School. She remembers a former classmate of German descent, Marina Gruman. She used to draw horses for Sandra, and Sandra got upset because she thought she moved out but just changed schools.

[32:00]: When asked about the movie theaters, Roger mentions that they did not see any sort of racism at the movie theaters they went to: Wellmont, Clairidge. Then, they both talk about being involved in athletics. Roger played football, baseball, ran track. Sandra became a twirler. In the years before she joined, there were very few Black girls involved, but a few years later, in her final year, the twirling squad was 7 African Americans, 7 Italians and 1 Jew - it was very integrated. Yet she remembers different treatment in the guidance office during high school as the College Fair approached. Despite having good grades, A- or B+, and her guidance counselor noting that she had done very well, he still recommended only state schools and community colleges to her. Instead her mother encouraged her to consider all the schools. This was 1970, and there was a lot going on with equal opportunity. Roger remembers that the situation was different for men; if you did not do well in school and did not get into college, you were going to Vietnam. His lottery number was 38. He remembers thinking that he was going to Vietnam, where the reported deaths were very high every day. It was unfortunate for kids who didn't have an educational deferment or came from towns like Newark or East Orange or Irvington – they were going to Vietnam. He went to Montclair State and remembers a friend of his from Walnut Place joined the Marines, became an M.P., but got killed by friendly fire. They both remember men returning from war with PTSD, which was not yet a diagnosed condition at that time.

[37:50]: Roger remembers his mother was one of the first metermaids, working out of police headquarters, and it was quite significant at the time. He became a police officer at 22. He remembers just how much the African American community hated the police for the violent treatment African Americans were subjected to at the hands of the police, especially in the south. He remembers being confused, because while he had many officers in his life as coaches and mentors who were good people, he also saw a different side to some officers that was very “ugly.” Roger mentioned to his mom that he might join the Black Panthers. She hit him, and encouraged him to join the police force instead if he wanted to help people. So he did join the force, at age 22, and found it to be an excellent way to give back to people in the community. They remember influential officers such as Mr. McGill, Mr. Page – and they went to school with those officers' kids.

[39:45]: They remember that if anything happened at the high school, their mother would show up in a police car – having been driven there by one of her colleagues from the police department because she didn't drive – and everyone would know Mrs. Terry had arrived at school. They believe their mother could have been a police officer. They also explain how school was different back then, with teachers having a lot more authority, and parents supported the teacher's role by insisting on children's good behavior in school. She remembers some silly traditions at Rand School, like First of May, Shoelace Day (kids would prank each other all day by finding opportunities to untie each others' shoelaces) and Second of May, Petticoat Day Sandra (boys would pull up the girls' dresses). Sandra remembers that she came prepared for

Petticoat Day, wearing a pair of shorts beneath her dress, and when a boy lifted her dress she replied, “Nah, nah.” Unfortunately, the principal interpreted that as Sandra provoking the boys to pull up her dress, so the principal called the Terry home to report that. In this instance, her GRANDmother came to school with a switch – a green stick commonly used for slapping kids’ legs as punishment.

[42:00]: Sandra recalls that historically, a high percentage of Montclair graduates went on to college and Montclair’s reputation was well-known nationwide. Sandra applied to Stanford, Harvard, and (sp?) College for Women, taking advantage of the time of equal opportunity. She got accepted to all of them and remembers visiting them. She said Harvard had really small, uncomfortable dorm rooms. Sandra received a social psychology degree [from Montclair State] and wanted to work with children. She began as an assistant teacher in the Montclair Public School Systems in an early childhood education program, which was indicative of how progressive Montclair was because those programs were not common in public schools in the 1970s –many districts didn’t have such programs until after the Abbott decision in the 90s. She recalls that in those early years, the courses for early childhood education were taught in the Home Economics Department rather than Education Department. Her program was in the Neighborhood Center across from Glenfield School. Sandra also talks about the implementation of the magnet school system in the 1970s. She remembers that all the African Americans signed up for magnet school choices really early when it was open enrollment, and it completely changed the demographics of those schools. Many white children ended up attending Glenfield School for the first time. She remembers in the first year of the magnet schools seeing very expensive cars waiting outside the school at dismissal to pick up the students because white parents were afraid for the kids to ride on the bus or be walking in the area of Glenfield, but she and Roger noted that behavior didn’t last long. They recall that from the mid-1960s to the late 1970s, everything changed, even though the public school changes didn’t impact them personally as they were no longer students in the district. They remember that where students went to mattered more to their parents than the students. Sandra also recalls that in middle school, kids were in “tracked” classes, where an A or B in a lower tracked class translated to a C on the transcript; her mother was wise to the impact this would have on the high school classes open to Sandra and she made sure Sandra was in the higher level classes. Roger confirmed that when he was in middle school, there was no such awareness of the impact of the tracked system, and he was in the 3rd track classes; this low track ultimately hurt him in getting into college, as it impacted his cumulative average. Many kids and their families were not aware of the tracking impacts.

[49:35]: Sandra remembers that the early education program in the public school system got changed and they wanted the parents to pay when it previously had been available for free. So she worked at a childcare center in Newark, Newark Day Center, and later on in East Orange at a large Head Start program.

[50:44]: Roger took the test to become a police officer when Butch Fortunato was the Commissioner of Public Safety (he’d also been the football coach and math teacher), and when the scores came out Fortunato presented Roger with the choice of two badges: a fire department badge or a police badge. Roger chose to become a police officer. Starting as a patrolman, he moved up to detective, became one of the first Black Bureau Commanders (in the Juvenile

Division, which he loved because he really enjoyed working with kids), and eventually made it all the way to Deputy Chief – it took 35 years. Sandra remembers Butch Fortunato fondly, when he used football plays to teach her Algebra, as she walked with him to Woodman Field for his football practice! Roger remembers that as Butch Fortunato was ailing late in life, it was important to Roger to tell him how much he loved and appreciated him, thanking him for all the help he'd given Roger over the years growing up – he even had helped Roger get to Montclair State.

[53:50]: After retiring from the police force, Roger continued to give back to Montclair, as his parents had and they'd instilled the focus to do something for your community. He got involved in local politics and was elected as a Councilman for Montclair. He mentions that it had a lot of drama, but he did it anyways, even though he never really enjoyed politics. He remembers back in 2008 having a debate over whether or not to cut fire and police department budgets to address a budget shortfall; Roger supported public safety, urging them to find other places to cut.

[56:40]: Roger wanted to stay in Montclair because for 35 years it was near his job in the police department. His wife was also born and raised in Montclair and worked for Montclair Child Development. They are both Mounties, and love working in their communities, giving back. They both wanted to give back to the community they grew up in.

[57:20]: Roger talks about how he met his wife: they went to prom together and have been together for 57 years now.

[58:00]: Sandra left Montclair, but mentions that she still keeps track of Montclair and returns often – for Fourth of July, etc. Everyone knows Montclair. She comments that their grandparents knew to come to Montclair because it was a place they could be successful; it offered unique opportunities. There's something about Montclair – giving you an opportunity to excel, no matter who you are.

[1:00:46]: Roger comments that many of his current neighbors came from New York and elsewhere, coming for many of the same reasons people before them came. They are good people, good neighbors. He hopes that the special “flavor” of Montclair's schools and parks remains. Roger talks about the park system, and how great they were and key to his childhood. He mentions that the neighborhoods were significant, people stayed together in their neighborhoods for generations. If you live on certain streets, you go to that specific neighborhood park. He recalls that the Montclair Parks Department, led by Mr. and Mrs. Hiel (sp?), had a great idea to entice all the children to report to their neighborhood park in the summer, and they would have teachers on staff all summer. They mentored you and organized trips, activities and helped with many sports (softball, tetherball, volleyball, knockhockey, basketball, box hockey, paddle tennis, etc. Roger remembers being so excited for school to finish so he could go to the park as a child. They also competed in sports against other playgrounds and they had a big boat regatta where you made your own boat and sailed against all the other playgrounds at the Edgemont Memorial Park pond. And there was a big soap box derby. Many kids were there, young kids, and it was safe – sometimes with 100, 200 kids being there at once. Sandra talks about their councilor at Rand Park, Rose Grieco, who dressed in traditional Italian costume and told ghost stories from Italy. They were about cemeteries, devils, demons and more. The kids would get scared, even if the stories were in the middle of the day! Roger adds that

Rose Grieco was an Italian American woman with about 200 kids, mostly all African American, and she had everyone's respect and attention. Kids loved her. [*See the oral history from Barbara Grieco for more information on Rose Grieco, who created a theater group.*]

[1:06:14]: Roger expresses appreciation for the opportunity to share this history. When asked what being from Montclair meant to them, Sandra reiterates that being raised in Montclair was like living in Camelot. The Terry's grew up in an extended family, just like the large Irish, Italian and Jewish families did. Sandra looked back and remembered just how much their parents sacrificed for them; they thought they had everything they needed. Roger says giving back was most important to him. Recognizing what Montclair did for his ancestors—Albert and Harriet, Robert and the Doggetts—that he has given back to the community that helped them. Sandra talks about all the different activities afforded them in Montclair, the great education system, the athletic accomplishments, the museum, the YM and YWCA. Sandra remembered applying to Ivy League schools and they knew about Montclair High School; she also recalls chatting poolside in Aruba with a woman who enjoyed seeing plays in New York City, who knew about Montclair's excellent reputation, walkability, urban flavor. When Roger was at Montclair State, meeting kids from less diverse areas of NJ, they had a harder time getting along with a new, diverse group of classmates; he also felt that although he wasn't a top student at Montclair High School, he excelled at Montclair with greater ease than peers coming from other districts.

[1:12:00]: tape ended