

Title: Key West Oral History Interview with Descendent of Guy Bradley

INTERVIEWEE: (Morrell?) Bradley

INTERVIEWER: Unknown1, Unknown2, and Unknown 3

DATE: November 7, 1967

TRANSCRIBER: Andrea Benitez

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INTERVIEW LENGTH: 00:28:52

Unknown1: This tape recording is a record of an interview made by myself and Mr. Bradley. (?) Key West, Florida. The interview took place at his home in Key West, 3:00 p.m., Thursday, November 7, 1967. In our search for the (?) museum at Flamingo we have been trying to find the story about Guy Bradley's life. The (question?) that we have been looking for (?). Reading in the (?) the account of Bradley's death. (Indicating the headline of the Key West paper initiated the criticism of?) (?) (who were angered?) as they learned the alleged killer Smith (?). Our hope was that perhaps the Key West paper would have the record of the trial and the public feeling at that time. We wrote to the Key West paper and in so doing, we made contact with the (?). The following tape recording was made at the interview. Some trouble was had in getting the tape recorder to operate because the microphone had to be placed so close to the tape recorder itself that feedback was noted. But much of the conversation was successfully recorded.
[audio cuts off]

U1: Do you have any recollection of the events-- [microphone feedback] -- following your father's death and funeral and so on? Bradley: No, I don't.

U1: (?). And do you have any-- what did you do when you-- after that happened? Were you still at Flamingo for a long time?

B: For a short while it seems, but not very long.

U1: That's when you moved in Key West?

B: Right.

U1: You've been in Key West ever since? How many children were you?

B: Two.

U1: You and another--

B: A brother.

U1: A brother. Is he alive now?

B: No. He's been dead-- he was-- died in '48, wasn't it? Forty-eight.

U1: He lived in Key West, too?

B: Oh, yes.

Unknown2: What was his name?

B: Ellis Bradley.

U2: That's E-L-L-I-S? That's a Welsh name?

B: Ellis Lewis Bradley.

U2: (?).

U1: Let's take him, though, way back from the beginning, get some information. Do you know your family background beyond your father? Further back? You know his-- where his parents--?

B: Well, I was told that both the-- my father's parents came from England. My grandmother Bradley, which I never did learn her first name- I always call her 'grandma'. But I understand she came from Westminster, England. My grandfather, he came from some part of England, I don't know, but he was Sergeant in the Army-- in the United States Army here. That's all I remember about that. Now, I had an Uncle Lewey, my father's brother, he died about two or three years ago; he lived in Miami. He was [pause] around eighty-four when he died.

U1: Would he then have been your father's younger brother, wouldn't he?

B: No, he was my father's older brother. He was a year or so older than my father.

U1: Your father was thirty--

B: Between thirty-five and thirty-six when he was killed.

U1: That's would have made him eighty-two, something like that.

B: Something like that now, yes.

U1: Alright, that gets us up to your parents. Your grandparents, they lived in--?

B: They moved down here from north-- from Michigan state.

U1: To Miami?

B: Moved down to the west coast of Florida, someplace along there. They lived in Marco-- on Marco Island for quite awhile. And they all moved down to Cape-- Cape Sable.

U1: And what did your father do before he became a warden?

B: That I don't know. I often heard my mother say that he was an acrobat of some description, whether it was in the circus, the carnival, or private concern or what but he was some sort of an acrobat before he came down south. What he did, I don't know except run around the coast in a schooner.

U2: (?) on the west coast?

B: He ran the schooner, I remember, from-- I don't remember but I remember them telling me. Well, he ran the schooner from Miami, took safaris all around to the Everglades, you know, the little outposts that they had there. And from Fort Myers back that was his route, you know. I-- other than that I don't know. I know the schooner he had was named the *Pearl*- big flat bottom sailing boat.

U1: They, of course, didn't have power in those days. (?) one way they had to do it was to sail in that water, shallow as it is.

B: Oh, there's good deep water all the way around there. U1: Yeah, but what they-- they used to sail Florida Bay and how they could dodge those bars and (?). It's interesting that they did it. I think the boat that Smith was on was a sailing thing, too--

B: Sailing vessel, yeah.

U1: That was a sailing schooner.

B: Mm-hmm.

U1: Have you heard anything of this man Smith since that time?

B: I saw him in 1919. He was a very old man and blind. Talked to him in Lemon City.

U1: Did he have anything particular to say?

B: That it was a most sorrowful day that anything like that ever occurred, that's all he said.

U1: That's all he said.

B: They were good friends before that happened. That's what I was told.

U1: It was just that your father was carrying out his duty.

B: Well, he was carrying out his duty as he saw it and as I understood it that everyone on Smith's boat was intoxicated so they didn't know what they were doing. That's the way I heard it.

U1: I know how I-- I heard that the-- that Smith had threatened him that if he ever came and tried to arrest him again-- did your father arrest him before?

B: That I couldn't say.

U1: According to the story--

B: Probably warned him but not arrested him.

U1: I think Smith was supposed to have said that he would never be arrested.

B: That's right. Well, that was a wild country in those days, you know? A man's word was law, you might say. He said he wasn't gonna be arrested, well then, that was it. I remember old E. J. Watson, you've probably heard about him. The man that-- [both speak at same time]

U1: Chatham Bend?

B: Chatham Bend. He lived at Chatham Bend River. In my estimation, that was a nice, mild-mannered old man yet they say he committed, I don't know, forty, fifty murders. He used to give me a dollar to buy cartridges with -shoot .22- when I met him. And that's the type of people that lived over there then.

U1: And you knew Watson personally, then?

B: I sure did.

U1: Have you ever been up to his place?

B: Oh, yeah.

U1: Chatham Bend?

B: Several times.

U1: You know his building is still there.

B: It is?

U1: It's being kept up.

B: I haven't been over there since, oh, I guess it been twenty-five years, hasn't it?

U1: Quite a plantation back then, wasn't it?

B: Yes, it was nice. Big place.

U1: What kind of trees were grown there?

B: He had all manner of fruit trees, big banana grove, and he raised a lot of sugarcane. Had his own mill there, boil it down, make (?). Hired the Negros to work for him, and there's the old saying that he paid them off in lead.

U1: Is that what they call it?

B: Yeah.

Unknown3: [laughs]

U2: Paid them off in what?

B: In lead.

U2: Oh! [laughs]

U1: These people locally believed that-- was there a general belief that he did pay them off in lead, or was this something that came--

B: Well, several of them were found floating in the river.

U1: So they worked for--?

B: Yeah.

U1: I'm told that you have an interesting story. I think that someday we may be able to make something out of (?).

B: You can get, oh, a lot of first-hand information from old folks that live over there, one in particular: Mrs. (McKinney?) that ran a store on Chokoloskee Island, she's still alive and I know she remembers all of it.

U2: There's a (folklore?), too.

U1: (?) the Chokoloskee Island people. As far as I know, there wasn't anyone there that happened to be home the night he was killed. Isn't that something?

B: That was--watched him killed?

U1: Yeah, none of them was (?) being there.

B: Well--

U1: Every one of them were indoors or something like that.

B: There was nobody there when Watson was killed.

U1: No, that's it, there was nobody there.

B: Nobody there at all. There was only forty of them.

U2: [chuckles] What connects Watson here with your father directly?

B: Nothing that I know of, except that they were good friends. One respected the other's judgment in a lot of things. They'd come to town with each other, if necessary. One on either schooner- both of them had a schooner.

U1: And 'town' was Key West?

B: Yes.

U1: When they came to town? I'd like to go back to Sable-- or was it Flamingo though that you lived?

B: Flamingo, yes.

U1: Did they call it 'Sable'?

B: 'Cape Sable' is the name of it on the chart; the little settlement was named 'Flamingo'.

U1: Well, now, we have Cape Sable today up-- the long shell beaches, they call that 'Cape Sable', but where Flamingo is- the town, the old town- was there. Now, which-- where did--?

B: It's the farthest one down this side coming towards Key West. There's a-- Mud Key sits out in front of the landing about a mile out.

U1: From-- where Flamingo--

B: Yes. Right.

U1: There weren't any-- at that time, there wasn't anybody living out on the shell beaches, were there?

B: No, none that I know of.

U1: Later, I think that developed into a colony or something like that. Was that the town of Flamingo (?) the furthest west, is that right?

B: Yes, I believe it was.

U1: The settlement.

B: The next to the-- the closest one to him was my grandfather's house and sort of a post office that he ran- a store, he took care of the mail.

U1: Now, which side of-- your father's house was west of the post office?

B: Yes.

U1: I think I know where that was. We have pictures of the old town, I think it was-- [both speak at same time]

B: There was one-- there was one old shack farther to the west than where our house was. Fella by the name of 'Clark', he was a very old man and as my mother used to say, he'd never take a bath. [laughter]

B: That's what she'd tell us children, you know, "You look like old man Clark." [laughter]

U1: Were the Roberts at Flamingo at that time?

B: Yes.

U1: They were there?

B: Yes, they were.

U1: And of course, the most numerous of (?) Flamingo are actually in the Homestead area now.

B: Yes, they are. I haven't seen (Mugs?) or Jim in about twenty-five years, neither one of them.

U1: One of them-- one of the (Clarks?) or the Roberts I think is on the police force in Homestead as I recall.

B: He is?

U1: Yeah.

B: Well, that must be one of the younger--

U1: Yup. [both speak at same time]

U1: --I think so. We speak affectionately other than the old poachers--

B: Uh-huh. Although, to my knowledge, I don't think they ever did any of the poaching.

U1: They didn't.

B: No, they're-- I believe they were a little bit too young. They were still way down in their teens, you know, when that happened.

U1: They were (?)-- (?) plume (?).

B: Yeah.

U1: Yeah. I think that pretty well ended about then. They ran out of birds, that's what stopped, it wasn't it?

B: No, they didn't run out of birds but after my daddy was killed, there was so much furor about it from the-- they took (out?) a few more officers down in there, a few more men down in there, look out after things.

U1: It became more dangerous.

B: Yeah. I think Peter Knight was our sheriff over here at the time and I think he sent a deputy over there. Now, this is all talk that was told to me, I have not had any proof of it.

U1: So now, another story that I'm wondering about: Smith's house was burned at Flamingo (??)?

B: According to what I heard, yes.

U1: You never saw the house burn?

B: I never, no. Never saw it burn at all.

U1: Never heard any direct conversation about that?

B: None at all.

U1: You don't know (that saw?).

B: I have heard a lot of supposition about what happened but nobody had any proof of anything. Might have been a complete accident as far as anyone knows.

U1: The house burning?

B: Yeah.

U1: Yeah. And then there's another tale of interest always I'm wondering about. As near as I can tell from the writing in Miami, the general feeling is that time toward a game warden or the warden of that type was not at all in great sympathy. They were, as game wardens- or revenue officers later in the prohibition days- they were not completely popular with the--

B: Well, they were (?) just like the revenue officer was in those days. [microphone feedback]

U1: Yeah, that's why they probably-- they had difficulty in (?).

B: Right.

U1: I think that's probably why-- [microphone feedback]

U1: -- the Miami papers are so-- are-- were noncommittal about the whole thing at the time, the feeling at the time. You think that was probably true?

B: Nothing else. Had to be that way because I know there's some of that feeling here in Key West right now. [laughter]

U3: With the shrimps. (?)

B: Not only that, with the crawfish, with the duck-shooting, all of that. People resent being told that they can't do something.

U1: Well, that of course is in America all the way.

B: Oh, yeah.

U1: It's only when the species is threatened with extinction and they're really in danger that people will sympathize. And even then you get some who won't. They go to get their rifle.

B: Have you been through the lower Florida Keys?

U1: No.

B: I understand you're an activist.

U1: That's right. But I'm not very-- I haven't been here very long. I haven't even been all the way through the park. I've only been there for two and a half years.

B: Well, the long white herons that the girls go crazy about with the plumes on them, you know? Egrets they're called, we call them long white. There are thousands of them in these Keys.

U1: That's the American egret, the one with black legs?

B: Right.

U1: The one with the yellow legs is the great white?

B: Yeah. Both are here. Both of them are here, plenty of them.

U1: Oh, we have lots of them in the park, too, especially the American egret, they're very common. They have the black legs and they very bright orange beak. A great white is a bigger bird with the yellow legs.

B: Yeah.

U1: Tall yellow legs.

B: Well, down at (?), there's quite a few of them.

U1: All down in there?

B: Well, I'd say hundreds of them.

U1: I don't think they're in danger anymore, neither one of the birds.

B: Nobody shoots anymore.

U1: The great white heron was almost extinguished by the hurricane of 1935. By the way, do you have information on that one? Did you experience, see it, or anything?

B: Well, I did a rescue work up there. I got up there-- it happened on a Monday, I believe, and I got up there Wednesday evening. And I did rescue work and I ran doctors back and forth. I had a speedboat, belonged to a local baker here by the name of Walter Maloney- I used his boat. And I stayed up there nine days and night, slept in that open boat and did what I could until the engine broke down.

U1: That was an awful mess.

B: I don't want to experience anything like that anymore and I wasn't even in it, I just got there after it was over.

U1: What do think of the building of houses down in that area, on the low Keys, today?

B: There won't be any if they get another hurricane. [laughter]

U1: That's inviting disaster, isn't it?

B: It sure is. I saw a railroad iron- ninety pounds (of the?) foot- swept up over on one of the beaches- and I believe its East Cape where my daddy's buried- came off a Long Key viaduct.

U1: It was swept straight across.

B: On an area line that's thirty-five miles. How'd it get there? I don't know. I saw a lens out of a lighthouse that's right off Matecumbe, weighed 600 pounds; it was on the beach at Matecumbe. No telling how hard it blew.

U1: Well, they have that hurricane recorded. It had the lowest barometer reading of any hurricane on land in the world compared to a typhoon.

U3: Twenty-six point something.

U2: I was in Miami when that (?).

U1: And the wind velocity was in excess of 180 miles, probably close to 200 and the violent (turmoil?).

U3: Do you remember a flyer named (Dick Merrill?) who now flies I think the Eastern Airlines, there was a (?) desk job thing. He brought-- he took a plane out-- my ex-husband was working for Eastern Airlines and he (?). They only had one airport in Miami, so Eastern Airlines flew a plane down to estimate the damage and (Dick Merrill?)- a hard man from World War I- came back in tears after he saw that. He came in the office, I remember that.

B: I saw several fellas- good hardened fishermen- break down, start crying, and I'd have to put them in the speedboat and bring them back. One of them to No Name Key, you know, and put him on a cart and bring him home. The doctor told me- the local doctor that was up there, he's dead now- that ninety percent of those people weren't drowned or battered to death; they just died from lack from lack of air. There was no air, there was a perfect vacuum. You know-- if you know anything about engineering, you know that twenty-six inches is considered a perfect vacuum to pull steam out of a boiler.

U1: At sea-level.

B: Yeah.

U1: Of course, twenty-six inches on a mountain top is high pressure.

B: High pressure.

U1: Yeah. That'd be about equivalent to about 5000 feet in the air.

B: Well, he claimed that it was-- asphyxiation is what he said.

U1: Now, I heard that a lot of these fellas down there wanted to see the storm and latched themselves up in a mangrove tree so they wouldn't blow down and then the water caught them there and they were tied to the tree and couldn't escape. Do you remember that? Did you hear any of that?

B: No, I found several of them that were latched to the trees. But they were latched to the trees to prevent being blown or washed away.

U1: But then the water came clear over the top of them and drowned them in this case.

B: I can name you one man- he's alive today- that spent the night-- spent the storm on the water tower. His name is Frank Harris and he works on the wrecking (club?) down there. U1: We have some interesting background of where they found people, you know, afterwards. All over. (?) Cape Sable. And they washed in from weeks afterwards.

B: Yeah, I went all through that country in that small speedboat. We'd pick up bodies, oh, fifteen miles away from there.

U1: We're also, incidentally, in our museum doing a story on the hurricane- pictures, figures and facts, the train blowing off the tracks, and so on. That's why I'm asking you this, that's another one of the stories we're telling of Flamingo (?) hurricane.

U2: I was riding a horse in the Labor Day parade when the news came through and they sent the train out but it didn't get there. So the parade just disbanded and the storm started moving up into Miami and, of course, everybody went home a boarded up 'cause we thought we were going to get it, too. It never did get to Miami but they brought some of the bodies up to Miami and put them in a cemetery not far from where I lived and evidently they took cardboard boxes-- they took boxes and they started to fill up and they built a stack and they just put kerosene on and burned them.

B: They stopped that while I was there; they stopped shipping the bodies north because we used to have to take the bodies on a barge and tow them to Snake Creek, see, to where the road ended so they could get them out and they had stop it because the Miami authorities didn't want it anymore.

U2: To me it (?) burned about two blocks from my house, ugh. [laughter]

B: (I'd throw up for you?)

U2: (?)

B: I saw forty of them stacked up and burned. Laid rails over a depression in the ground and put wood under it, sprayed diesel oil on them, and burned them. I stood there and watched that.

U3: I heard a song (?) brother wrote about the '35 hurricane.

U1: What was that?

U3: A song. His brother wrote a song about it. It tells all about it. I have it at home, it's about the '35 hurricane. It's never been published or anything like that, just, you know, words to it.

B: Incidentally, her husband drew that picture of my daddy from the photograph.

U1: It looks just like the that photograph, I thought maybe it was a-- [indistinct chatter]

U2: --do it in oil.

B: He is going to do it in oil. He told me he was. He's a carpenter-- contractor. I tell him he ought to throw his tools away and start painting. [indistinct chatter] [audio cuts off]

U1: At this point in the interview with Mr. Bradley, the photographer from the *Key West Citizen* entered the room and made it impossible to continue with the interview. I think probably that most of the information that Mr. Bradley has of his father is contained here. Apparently, nearly everything that he knows, he was told by his mother and others and is of course hearsay. It was altogether an interesting and worthwhile interview. [audio cuts off]

END OF INTERVIEW