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Interviewee: Grace M. S. MacNeil  
Interviewer: Charlotte Capers

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interviewed by Charlotte Capers

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MACNEIL, Grace M. S.

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DEPARTMENT OF ARCHIVES AND HISTORY  
Division of Archives and Library  
Patti Carr Black, Director

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NARRATOR: Grace M. S. MacNeil  
INTERVIEWER: Charlotte Capers, Mississippi Department of Archives and History  
DATE: July 11, 1973  
PLACE: Natchez, Mississippi  
SUBJECT: The Fatherlands Plantation

MacNeil: I am Mrs. Douglas MacNeil and Miss Capers has asked me to record for you, Mr. Hilliard, what I may know about the Fatherlands. My information does not predate the 1820s. I believe in the record room in Natchez, information is extant that would probably record owners and probably original patents and deeds to the Fatherlands. In 1824-28 approximately, the Fatherlands belonged to a Mrs. Stocker - Susan Surget Stocker. We believe that Mrs. Stocker and her husband owned it. However, we've never been able to find out anything about Mr. Stocker. Adam Louis Bingaman, one of Mrs. Stocker's nephews, was one of her heirs and one of the executors of her estate. And from that point in the 1820s through Adam Bingaman's death, which I believe was 1868-69, the Fatherlands was run by him as a thoroughbred horse breeding establishment, and also cattle, and there could have been some row cropping on it, that I do not know. In the late 1860s my grandfather, James Surget, and his sister Katherine Surget Minor, either inherited the Fatherlands from their cousin, Adam Bingaman, or bought it from him. Of that I'm not positive. Those records are in the Surget papers. And from that point, through my grandfather's death in 1920, he and his sister administered the place jointly. And they brought over a family from Ireland, I believe, who ran the place. And in the Surget papers, there are any number of annual accountings on the running of the Fatherlands as a plantation. In 1920, at the time of my grandfather's death, he and his nephew had been using the Fatherlands primarily for thoroughbred horses, and there were some eleven unbroken young studs in the stable there, and most of them were sold to the Remount Service in 1921-22. And at that time, the old Fatherlands stable was not only still in use, but in very good shape. And it was one of the very lovely stables, with the big opening through the middle and every stall had a glass transom in it for fresh air.

Capers: Was it painted, or whitewashed?

MacNeil: It was whitewashed and had the very low-slung roofs, as I call it.

Capers: Yes. And a loft?

MacNeil: A loft, and with the pillars further supporting the roofs and feeding troughs on the outside. It was an extremely good stable. And from the 1920s, oh, up until, I guess the 1940s actually, the place was rented for row cropping, basically. Cattle were taken off it. The building was taken down. There were two big stables, the old one and a new one. They were taken down and there was a dovecote on the place.

Capers: Yes.

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- MacNeil: The manager's house was a very simple plantation house, one story or story and a half, and as far as I know, was not particularly old. And I do not know when that was taken down.
- Capers: You have said the Fatherlands - plural - I did not know, and I referred to it as Fatherland Plantation. What's the correct nomenclature?
- MacNeil: I believe Fatherlands.
- Capers: Fatherlands.
- MacNeil: Yes, but here again deeds ...
- Capers: Yes.
- MacNeil: The Department of the Interior calls it Fatherland Plantation. Yes, so I may be wrong.
- Capers: Well, they got the information from down here somewhere, so who knows?
- MacNeil: Yes, well, these are points that I find it very difficult to keep track of.
- Capers: Yes, but they're interesting.
- MacNeil: They're interesting.
- Capers: What part of the Fatherlands is now designated as part of the Grand Village? I mean, what was on it originally when Fatherlands was a plantation?
- MacNeil: I have an idea that it was mostly open pasture, and there was a tremendous herd of pure-bred Devons on the Fatherlands and all of the extra mules that were bought for all the plantations, jointly by the Minors and the Surgets, were housed or were kept at the Fatherlands. As children, when we would ride through there, going over to see the Minors at Oakland, we were never allowed to ride alone because of the mules. There always had to be an adult with us to fend off the mules. They were beasts, let me tell you! But remembering the growth on the Fatherlands around the mounds, it was small growth, so I have an idea it was pasture. There could have been a small training track there at one point. That, I do not know.
- Capers: Well, I thank you very much. Mr. Hilliard is interested in this for purposes of interpretation on the Site. When we get into planning, we should certainly have a visitor's center with exhibits which will interpret the story of the land from the earliest times and, of course, if there's anything particularly interesting ... I think everything is of some particular interest.
- MacNeil: I think everything is of particular interest, and I would love to see some digging in the records here, to see how far back they can trace that site, and when did it become the Fatherlands, or Fatherland, and ....

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Capers: ...Why was it named the Fatherlands?

MacNeil: Exactly.

Capers: But you don't know that.

MacNeil: I do not know.

Capers: Mr. Hilliard wanted to know that.

MacNeil: No, I do not know, and I don't know what owner may have designated it that, because I do not know beyond the Stocker. I don't remember any ....

Capers: Well, was it so designated during the Stocker ownership?

MacNeil: Yes. Another thing that would be interesting would be whether it was a Spanish or English grant. The records a few years ago when the oil industry first came in here - so that is not digging too far back - that would be in the 1930s or 1940s.

Capers: Yes, that's right ... 1930s, 1937 ... or something like that. Would you say for the tape, would you make the suggestion that you made to me previously about the medicinal herbs?

MacNeil: Oh, I'd love to.

Capers: I'd love for you to do this. I think it's an excellent suggestion.

MacNeil: I have been reading some of the French diaries, the priests who came in here in the early 18th century, their listings of the herbs that the medicine men or women of the Natchez tribe used and where they found them, and a description of the hills that would be across what we know as St. Catherine's Creek. I've always thought it would be fascinating to establish some kind of medicinal herb area, whether you call it a garden or a plot, near the Fatherlands site. And if there is to be a small museum of any kind, it should be in conjunction with that. And years ago, before the state actually acquired the site, I had been in touch with someone at the pharmaceutical school at the University of Mississippi. I think he has since left, but he was interested in the possible use of herbs, in the use of herbs, and the natural herbs here. And I know from the country, that these herbs are still extant and it would be very interesting, I think, to establish a plot that would bring these to the attention of people, because people now are quite interested in this kind of thing. Fifty years ago they weren't, today they are.

Capers: You mean like marijuana?

MacNeil: Exactly! I'd love ....

Capers: Now, I'd love a medicinal herb!

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- MacNeil: Well, not only that, but ah ... you know, poke sally that everybody ate, at least I ate it as a child. It was not only medicinal, but it was used as a dye. The botanical name is poke berry.
- Capers: Spell poke sally. P-o-k-e?
- MacNeil: P-o-k-e.
- Capers: Yes.
- MacNeil: Well, sally is s-a-l-l-y, but you know it was salad.
- Capers: S-a-l-l-a-t.
- MacNeil: Yes.
- Capers: It was sallat.
- MacNeil: Sallat.
- Capers: Right. Well, that's what I thought.
- MacNeil: You know that's ....
- Capers: Poke sally.
- MacNeil: ... Strictly a regionalism.
- Capers: Yes, I like the regionalism, but when the transcriber gets to regionalisms, she has a spell....
- MacNeil: She's going to have trouble.
- Capers: ... So we spell a lot.
- MacNeil: I had thought, too, as I had mentioned to you earlier, I think it might be possible to get some kind of grant. I thought even a capital gift to establish and maintain such a plot. And, it seemed to me that either a pharmaceutical company, or else one of the ... I don't want to say conglomerates, one of the groups that's like the manufacturers' groups. There may be a drug manufacturers' group that might find this a very interesting project.
- Capers: I think that's an excellent suggestion and I thank you for telling me about it, and I thank you for repeating it. You did just fine the second time around and I shall certainly deliver this tape to Mr. Hilliard, and he'll be grateful. But that is a good idea, and we will, as I told you, seriously take this into our consideration in our pre-planning which we are involved in, and this is important.
- MacNeil: Now, with the pre-planning ... it gives you a chance to look at the Indian as a whole being, and not just his war-like side or his religious side. I mean, it's his everyday life ... and the things that happened to him.

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- Capers: That is so fascinating, and it's got to be almost a lost story because we have the artifacts and that's all we have.
- MacNeil: Yes.
- Capers: And they've got to be interpreted and there's such a breadth of possibility.
- MacNeil: Yes ... I have been wondering, and I haven't talked about this at all, but I'm wondering whether in the Cherokee Nation there are any bits and pieces of songs ....
- Capers: Written things? They had an alphabet.
- MacNeil: Anything that might refer to this ... now these weren't Cherokees, were they? They were Chickasaws, weren't they?
- Capers: These people at the Grand Village? Well, they were Natchez.
- MacNeil: They were Natchez, but they were a sub-tribe of something.
- Capers: I don't know what they were.
- MacNeil: But, I've just been wondering if somewhere in their archives there might be something that referred to this ....
- Capers: They're mysterious people, though, when you get to fooling with the Natchez.
- MacNeil: That's right.
- Capers: I'm not an archaeologist, but I don't think anybody knows. You know they say, "Well, they came from Mexico."
- MacNeil: Well, the Natchez wouldn't have come from Mexico... their forbears might have.
- Capers: Well, yes, but nobody knows where they came from, and nobody knows where any of them came from much. You get them coming in, theoretically, over the Bering Straits, and then dispersing.
- MacNeil: I'm not convinced that all of our Indians came that way.
- Capers: No. Well, you see, I don't know.
- MacNeil: I don't either.
- Capers: I just don't have any idea. I mean, I think there is a theory, but I don't know that much about it. The different archaeological theories and designations have given me some trouble in my work.
- MacNeil: I bet they have.
- Capers: You know, we have the Mississippian People and we have the ... some other people, the Woodland people, and then we have ... goodness!

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MacNeil: Well, those people are all so much older than the Indians ....

Capers: I know. Well, when we talk about the Natchez, we're talking about historic tribes. And we have all these prehistoric souls who rushed in and out.

MacNeil: What caused them to rush in and out?

Capers: I don't know. The Indians kind of eluded me. But I don't think there's a real firm theory about where the Natchez people came from or what tribe they came from. I think there's a firm theory about what tribes they joined after the massacre.

MacNeil: Sure, I think they know that. That's almost recorded history.

Capers: But ... that's a little bit out of my area.

MacNeil: I'm sure it is.

Capers: I can't speak with much authority there, but it's most interesting.

MacNeil: Yes, it's fascinating.

Capers: I'm so wild about the Emerald Mound, I don't know what to do. I just love to go stand on top of it. Isn't it amazing to think about people carrying that dirt. Of course, they had some kind of mound that they filled in.

MacNeil: Oh, sure. And ... the engineering, the sense ...

Capers: It's beautifully done, isn't it?

MacNeil: Oh, it's just absolutely lovely. They say the one ....

Capers: And our engineers now that have built the new highway, built it so that if a truck weighs over a certain amount it just falls right over on its side. I mean we haven't learned a lot.

MacNeil: I tell you one thing we haven't learned, and that is how to handle this soil.

Capers: Do you have ....

MacNeil: We're Loess.

Capers: We have this terrible thing in Jackson, you know, the Yazoo - gripping, grabbing, tearing up ... terrible!

MacNeil: Yes, like the Croatan clay. The highway department and I have been in an argument, and they won.

Capers: Well, I'm sorry, because I have more confidence, by a long shot, in you.

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MacNeil: But that's neither here nor there. But I have a great concern about the kind of water control that the highway department doesn't use. Because, you turn water loose in these bayous here and where you've got it concentrated and it's running very swiftly and its great volume concentrated, it's going to dig a hole.

Capers: That's right.

MacNeil: You can't avoid it, you know. And they swear up and down that it isn't going to dig a hole. I know what's happened since Highway 61 went through, years ago. I know what's happened to the bayous that run into the creeks here. They've changed completely. But then, I can't argue with an engineer.

Capers: Set me off on architects and engineers and it will ruin my trip.

(End of Tape)

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