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A Five Points Portrait: Alma Goodson

Debra Brasher

On a gorgeous, windy March afternoon, I had the honor of meeting and interviewing one of Five Points’ residents of longevity, Mrs. Alma Naomi Englebert Goodson. There are so many stories that could be told about this beautiful woman of 90 years. With two of her three children also in attendance at her Clinton Avenue home, it was obvious this was a family with a lovingly preserved sense of place.

Mrs. Goodson was born in her family home on Bosses Row—now Oakwood Avenue—in the Dallas Mill area. Her father had been a foreman at the mill and needed to live nearby. Alma and her future husband, Houston, knew each other growing up, but it wasn’t until “The Picnic at Fagan Springs” that they knew they were meant to be together. Mr. and Mrs. Houston Goodson eloped to Fayetteville, Tennessee in 1929, but kept it a secret. They both taught at Rison School, and, in those days, a husband and wife could not teach in the same school. Up until it was apparent that their first child was on her way, the secret was kept. Mary Lou was born in the house on Bosses Row.

The new family moved from the Dallas Mill area into Five Points on McCullough Street in 1937, and then to Clinton Avenue in 1940. At this time Clinton Avenue ended just beyond their home at the corner of what is now Grayson Street. Prior to 1940, behind the home on Randolph Avenue, was a private high school called Wills Taylor, and a ballpark was located where the family home now stands. During his youth, Houston had played baseball in this park, and used to tease that their home was “out in left field.”

It was an eclectic mixture of folks living on Clinton Avenue then. Russian immigrant Jewish, local Protestant, and Catholic families lived side-by-side, and all got along. “It was a real neighborhood.” remarked Alma’s son, Bill. The whole neighborhood would take chairs outside every evening to visit and keep an eye on the children playing games such as hide ‘n’ seek. Mrs. Goodson said that “Five Points was quite different” in the 1940s. Alma Goodson, her daughter, Pat, and Bill
agreed that the invention of the air conditioner did away with much of the interaction and socialization of the neighbors.

In their early married life, the Goodsons owned a grocery store located at Bierne Avenue and Fifth Street (now Andrew Jackson Way). It is still standing and is used as a surveyor’s office. The building once had another section, an L-shape, which is where the family lived for a short time. They went on to own five neighborhood groceries—one of which was the Wells Avenue Grocery—in Five Points and surrounding neighborhoods. The neighborhood grocery stores went out of business when the larger stores like Star Market set up shop.

The Goodsons purchased Zesto’s in 1950 and ran it until 1975. Mr. Goodson coined the names of the famous “Dip Dog” and “Zesto Burger” for the menu items previously known as a “quickie dog” and a “turtle burger.” From 1955 until 1975 the family also owned Goodson’s Variety Store, a Five and Dime, which Mrs. Goodson managed. She got to know many people from the neighborhood this way. The store was located behind Zesto’s where the clock shop used to be. The smaller stores and five and dimes closed as Parkway City and strip malls were built. Mr. Goodson went on to be City Councilman for three years, and presided as President of the Council during the last term, 1964-68.

Debra Brasher, known by some as the “Mother of the Five Points Historic District,” was a driving force in establishing the Five Points Historic District and Association. Ms. Brasher is Vice President of the FPHDA and chairs their multi-media committee. She feels that living in and preserving a historic home is an honor and a pleasure.