

University of Dayton eCommons

Wright Brothers - Charles F. Kettering Oral History
Project

University Archives and Special Collections

2-16-1967

Interview with Eleanor E. Gerard & Marie Burner

Eleanor E. Gerard

Marie Burner

Follow this and additional works at: http://ecommons.udayton.edu/archives_wrightkett_oh

eCommons Citation

Gerard, Eleanor E. and Burner, Marie, "Interview with Eleanor E. Gerard & Marie Burner" (1967). *Wright Brothers - Charles F. Kettering Oral History Project*. Paper 14.
http://ecommons.udayton.edu/archives_wrightkett_oh/14

This Transcript is brought to you for free and open access by the University Archives and Special Collections at eCommons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Wright Brothers - Charles F. Kettering Oral History Project by an authorized administrator of eCommons. For more information, please contact frice1@udayton.edu, mschlangen1@udayton.edu.

WRIGHT BROTHERS - CHARLES F. KETTERING

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

UNIVERSITY OF DAYTON

Project Director, 1967: Dr. Wilfred S. Steiner
Project Director, 1975-75: Johannah Sherrer

Editor: Kathy Kelto

Eleanor E. Gerard
&
Marie Burner

Interviewed by

Susan Bennet

on

February 16, 1967

SB The Hall sisters are, I'm watching this, so I get the right speed on it, the Hall sisters were friends of Orville Wright, that right?

CB Of the whole family.

FG The family.

SB Today is February ...

CB Sixteenth.

SB Sixteenth, 1967, and the two ladies that I am talking with are Mrs. Frank Gerard, right?

CB Clifford Burner.

SB And Mrs. Clifford Burner. They live at 15 Forrer Blvd. and Mrs. Burner, where do you live?

CB 34.

SB 34. And at the time we're talking that the Halls were neighbors was in 1940, what?

FG 1940, until ...

CB 1940 till when Agnes die?

FG Two years ago?

CB Two years ago.

SB 1940 to 1960.

FG Of course, she was in a rest home for four years, I'd take about six years off. I'd say until '61.

SB Yes, well Mr. Wright died in 1948, so it was during those, about those eight years that that you ladies, you see him come to call on them.

FG Well ...

(break in tape)

FG That's right, that's right.

CB 19 that was 19...

FG '41.

CB '41.

FG Because we...

CB 1941.

CB Yes, the Hall house was empty for a year, and...

CB We moved in April and they moved in August.

FG That's right.

SB And there were three sisters.

FG Yes.

SB What were their names?

CB Lilah, Alice and Agnes.

SB Now, it was Alice whom Mr. Wright...

CB Alice was the oldest, Agnes was the second and Lilah was the youngest.

SB Oh, I see. Did he generally come to see Alice? Was it Alice that he came to see, do you?

FG I don't believe...

CB I don't connect them with this period in their lives. I think it was when they were down growing up on Main Street and during their earlier years, that they were associated with the Wright family.

SB Was, now somebody told me that Alice was once his secretary. Did she ever mention that?

CB No.

FG No, but I wouldn't doubt that at all. That could be. But I know Alice used to talk about Orville Wright and they knew Katharine real well.

SB Did she?

FG And when Katharine went out to Kansas and was married, her two brothers just about disowned her. It was a , it was a terrible thing to them to ever get married. I do recall that story.

SB Yes, would you tell us about it? What, what Alice Hall said, when when Katharine married?

FG Well, I can't go into very many details, because I just remember the story of how she recalled how disappointed Orville and Wilbur were when Katharine got married.

SB Well, see Wilbur was gone, so at this time, wasn't he?

FG Yes.

SB I think he was gone, and it was Orville was alone, oh, I see.

FG Yes, yes.

SB ...that she was gone.

FG But our library here just a block away is named after Katharine Wright. It isn't after the Wright Brothers, as so many people think.

SB Oh, I see.

FG And it was the library was established, built in 1939, and Orville Wright was at the opening of the Wright library and everyone took a book to donate to the library. Frank went, it was right after Betsy was born. I didn't go.

SB Was, did, was Katharine here at the time, when they dedicated the library to her?

FG No, no, no.

SB She had gone out, she had moved to Kansas.

FG Yes, yes.

SB You were in the Wright home, at one time weren't you?

FG Yes, and so was my husband who was on the library board and had been for twenty years, that when Orville went off, why he took his place, went on it. And he'd tell about the library board being escorted through the house, and seeing all the inventions in Mr. Wright's home, oh, really queer shower baths and different things like that, that he had made. But my experience was with the Camp Fire Girls.

SB Oh, yes.

CB Oh, what years did the Wrights move to this place over here.

FG Now, I don't know. You mean on Hawthorn Hill?

SB It was fairly early. I think it was 1912, something like that. It was soon after, it was soon after they had, were established, the company was established as I remember. They came back from Europe and built the home. You want to go on?

FG (chuckles) Well, it was in 1944 when I was a Camp Fire leader at Edwin D. Smith School. We thought it would be nice if Orville Wright would buy the first doughnuts, during the doughnut drive we had each year in March. So Catherine Had^{eler}, who was then head librarian at Wright library, and the former teacher, or rather, she taught later after she was librarian than this. She was a neighbor of Mr. Wright's and a good friend. So she arranged for our Camp Fire group to visit Mr. Wright's home, one day when he came home for lunch. Carrie, his housekeeper, said that Mr. Wright was always very punctual, and allowed only a half hour for lunch. So while he ate, my friend, Anne Woodal, the other Camp Fire leader, and I along with a dozen of the Camp Fire girls, were perhaps ten years old, ten or eleven. We were taken into the library to just to the right of the entrance hall. The walls of the room were lined with books, and near the east window was a large overstuffed chair, very comfortable looking, but very worn. Over that, was a rack, which held his books, and there was a small reading light. My friend and I chuckled to ourselves when we looked at the ottoman. The pillow was held onto the ottoman with two large safety pins. (laughter)

FG And Carrie apologized and said there was simply no chance to sent that out to be repaired. Because Mr. Wright always used the chair. And he expected it to be there when he was ready to read. Incidentally, Carrie...I can't remember her name.

SB Was it Grumbach, wasn't it, G-R-U-M-B-A-C-H, wasn't that it.

- FG That's it, yes, she died in this last fall, and she was in her early eighties, and she had been with Mr. Wright ever since she was eighteen years old. I used to meet her at the meat market. In fact, I bought the book of the life of the Wright Brothers, Orville Wright, and had her take it home, and have Orville Wright autograph it. And I gave it to a cousin out on the West Coast. I only wish I had done that for myself.
- SB Yes, I should say so. Well she was, she was, she was fond of the family then.
- FG Yes.
- SB Was she sort of part of the family, do you think that he?
- FG I don't know, it would be interesting to know more about her. She was a very quiet little person. Very refined, and soft spoken, I do recall.
- SB Well, how were the furnishings in the house. Were they lavish, or were they just...
- FG No, they...the house was nicely furnished. I'd say on the formal side.
- SB On the formal side.
- FG His meals were served there in the dining room with a white table cloth and the furniture was, as I recall a mahogany type of, and it was very nice. Everything was just so.
- SB Is that so? Did he come out a speak to the girls?
- FG Yes, he came out and I have a picture of him, with my group. There was a high school boy who had a jeep, and we all rode on the jeep and had our pictures taken of the girls were on this jeep with Mr. Wright, who was buying the first doughnut.
- SB Oh, cute.
- FG And he was very, very gracious, and nice about it. He seemed delighted to be asked.
- SB Oh, that's nice.
- FG He was very cordial, to us.
- CB Katharine lived with them, didn't she? Lived with two brothers.

FG Now, I'm not, I can't say.

SB She did with Orville, see Wilbur died in 1912, and, but I believe that she, oh, when she was teaching here, she did live with Orville until she married. She married fairly late in life.

FG Yes, yes.

SB Do you have any other memories of what Alice said? About him?

FG I don't. I only wish we did have.

CB I do too. I never paid too much attention when they spoke of them, because you know, I wasn't too interested. I heard them talk more about Katharine than the two brothers.

FG Yes.

CB They seemed to be very fond of Katharine. I always kind of had the feeling that they weren't too fond of either one of the brothers, I may be wrong about that, but that's the general impression I got.

FG Well, they may have been a little eccentric and drawn to themselves during that time they were inventing and everything.

CB I always imagined that in their younger years, the Wright family perhaps were not on the same social level as the Halls.

FG Right, I think the Halls, the father of the girls, had financial reverses, back there from what they said.

CB That's when Alice went to teaching.

FG Yes, Alice taught for thirty-five years, at Steele High School.

SB Oh, my goodness, oh well, Katharine taught there, and I suppose that's where they formed their friendship.

FG Oh, that's probably...

CB She teaches still?

SB Yes, that's where she taught. So that's probably where they formed their friendship with Katherine.

CB Well, their father, the Hall sister's father, was educated to be a military

man, and their mother didn't like military life and talked him into going into business and he was not a business man, and that was the reason he lost everything they had. And that's when Alice went to teaching then.

SB Oh, I see.

CB Now, I think she was always rather touchy about that too. Because at that age, the women in the higher social brackets did not earn a living.

FG That's right.

CB And I know she said more than once that they just simply dropped away from all their contacts because they felt that they weren't up to keeping up with them.

SB Of course, the Wright, the Wright family, well, the father had been a bishop in the church. Of course, bishops in the church are, that's a nice title, but I don't imagine that's money. And they were in fact, until they were able to sell their planes, they did have a fairly hard time financially.

FG Alice always told me the story because I'm from Washington State. Her father was located at Vancouver, Washington when she was born. And she, they came on a ship down by around the canal. And she was baptized by a Catholic priest on board ship, until they came home. And they were very active in Westminster Church.

SB Oh, is that so?

FG The early Presbyterian church. But she always laughed about that. And...

SB There was quite a difference amongst the ^{Presbyt} priest...

FG Yes, right.

SB ...and the, yes...

FG But they didn't, as far as the Halls are concerned, they really made [?] poor boulevard, I mean everybody was so neighborly and everybody had one cause to keep them happy, and to visit them and they mingled with the neighborhood in a social way.

CB Well, they brought the neighbors together.

FG Yes, they did.

CB Something that we haven't done much, since they're gone.

FG No, and that gets us.

CB But, they would have teas and little get togethers just for the neighborhoods.

FG Yes.

CB And it was all done or used to be done years and years ago.

FG Yes.

CB You know, it was very nice. And they also, do you remember Agnes used to have tea parties for the little girls in the neighborhood?

FG Oh, yes.

SB Oh, how nice.

CB They dressed up and she'd have her tea party, very proper.

FG Put on their old dresses, satin and what-not, get out their very best china.

SB For the little girls, that's nice.

FG And serve the tea to the little girls. I know my daughters have nothing but fond memories of the Halls.

CB Oh, I know Tom has too, loved them.

SB There's a picture of, Mr. Hossendorf has, of Orville Wright in a plane with the Prince of Wales and on the back of the, of the picture, he had written the first time that royalty flew. That he had given to Miss Alice Hall. Do you remember seeing the picture in the home? It was a picture of him.

FG There, we probably saw it. They, their house was lined with pictures and curios and what-nots; it was like a museum.

SB Is that so?

FG And, I recall that hall was connecting the parts of the house, was just lined with pictures of that kind.

CB Yes, it was.

SB Pictures of early days in Dayton or...?

FG Yes, yes.

SB Early family, the early families, and all.

FG And lots of family portraits around.

CB They had some beautiful family portraits. Alice and Agnes, or Alice, Lilah, and Esther, just those.

FG Yes.

CB Everything had a history to it, that they could tell such interesting things about maybe just some little knick-knack that they had sitting around, you know. It all had a story to it.

FG My choice, articles, art objects are from the Halls. I have that little picture up there from England, she gave me one time. And the jug from Spain on top of the refrigerator.

CB Yes.

FG Another one. And the little copper tea pot out there I cherish.

SB Were they big, big women or small women, or handsome women or...

FG Well, Lilah was a little more stocky.

CB Lilah was a pretty good size woman. Agnes was very tiny. I don't think she ever weighed much over a hundred.

FG Very petite. Not as short, but just of average height.

CB But Alice was a very shy shorter.

SB And they never married.

FG No, but they had two brothers who married in the...

CB There was the two bro...two boys and three girls in the family. The two brothers married but the girls never did.

FG When their mother died she evidently left them a little money. And what did they do, but take a trip to England, during the summer...

CB Scotland.

FG Of '20 Scotland?

CB Scotland, yes.

FG Oh.

CB See, they're of Scottish descent.

FG Oh, that's right.

CB On both the Hall, and the mother's side, too. That's where they went. To Scotland, with the money that they inherited.

FG And they talked of London and everything.

CB Much to the displeasure of their relatives of the family.

(laughter)

They didn't think they should spend that money. Because I don't, they had not too much at the time.

FG No, no.

CB But they took the money and away they went to Scotland and enjoyed it thoroughly and I think they relived it over and over again.

FG And I so, too.

CB All the rest of their lives.

SB That was a good investment, then.

FG Somehow, I connect the year '22 with that trip.

CB I don't know.

FG I was, I believe, it was because I thought then it was the year I graduated from high school. I tried to place people with events in my life.

CB My husband is from, of a Scotch descent. That delighted all of the Hall sisters. They gave him quite a few things pertaining to Scotland.

FG Well, no wonder, Mr. Burner went over there every time anything needed fix, needed fixing. He was there, and oh, they used to just sit and say oh, "That Mr. Burner, what a wonderful person he is." They really did.

CB Well, I don't know. There was something about them. You just felt like you wanted to take care of them.

FG Right, right.

CB You really did. You just felt like you should take care of them. Of course,

they were quite a bit older than we were.

FG Yes.

CB Yes, they were so appreciative of everything, of everything Cliff did for them. And he did. He done a lot of nice things for them. Well, we all did. The whole neighborhood did. Ellery used to take Agnes to the grocery store every week.

FG Oh, that's right, I forgot. I know I did, do some stencil work and made her some kitchen curtains. Had appliques on them. They hung up for years, and years. But she used to come over. Agnes especially used to come over. Oh, I'd be working. But she'd, I'd put on some good records and she'd sit and listen and listen to those lovely records. I always thing of her when I play certain records of that period.

CB Remember one tea party they had. They had, was it a record play or what was it Alice, Agnes danced.

FG Oh, yes.

CB Do you remember the old, the old lady, and she got up and she danced, to the records. They were delightful people.

FG Agnes taught in the Philippines sometime during her life and she used to sing so many songs from the Philippines.

CB They did one thing, though, that always kind of puzzled me because I don't think its the thing to do, and that's walk in your house without rapping.

FG Oh, yes.

CB Did you remember they, anytime of the day or evening, they just walked in, that's all.

FG But they were always welcome.

CB And Alice, if she couldn't find you on one floor, she'd go up to the next floor looking for you.

(laughter)

SB That does seem kind of inconsistent with the ladies doesn't it.

FG Oh, yes. But Alice always, she was the one who drove the car. They had, what was that a little Chevy or Ford, what was that little black car?

CB I don't know.

FG And when she, they first moved here, Alice was the driver. And they'd take trips around about. But she always said, when she went downtown to park, that there'd be great big burly cops come along and say, "Right here, Miss Hall. Right here, Miss Hall." And it would be her former pupils. Very often. But one day she came in and threw down her keys, and said, "I'm through driving. Nobody knew why but..."

CB Oh, I know why. She took her car, her old Ford down to have it repaired and where she always takes it. The man told her, he says she should not be driving. Well, she was thinking of herself; she didn't care what happened to herself. He said, "I don't care about you." He said, "I'm thinking about what you might do to somebody else. And that she came home; she told us that.

FG I see.

CB She came home; she said she wasn't going to drive anymore. She never had thought of that, that she might cripple or injure someone else. Oh, our daughter went downtown with her one day. And boy, pretty soon they came back home; she said, "Never again."

(laughter)

You know, she didn't see, she didn't see too good. And I don't think she knew just where she was driving. It was time for her to quit driving.

FG Yes, it was. Well, she was, what seventy-five, seventy-eight.

CB Oh, at least that old.

FG At least.

CB They took a lot of nice trips in that Ford. They used to go up to the Smokies, I think almost every fall.

FG Right.

CB And they loved to go to Berea.

FG Yes.

CB They'd go down to Berea time and time again. That's another thing they had in common with my husband. That's where he went to school. So they had enough to talk...

SB Mr. Wright left a lot of money to Berea. I wonder if he had any...

FG Oh, did he?

SB Yes, I don't know much from his estate. I wonder if they influenced him on that. If they could have.

FG That would be interesting to know. Oh, as I look back, I only wish we had taken, had a tape recorder and gotten some of those stories right from them. It's a shame. I know Jim McConnhee (?) and Ralph Burgess (?), often talked about it. Jim was the writer. Well, Kirchner was too. And they thought of writing a book about the Hall stories. And oh, it would have been a gem.

CB If they could have taken tapes of the things that they told about all the older families.

SB In Dayton.

CB In this locality. And they knew their history...

FG Yes.

CB Of what had passed, and knew what they had done and what they hadn't done.

FG That's right, that's right.

CB And it was interesting.

SB Well, thank you ladies.

FG Well, I...

SB You've been very helpful...

(end of tape)

INDEX

- Berea, Kentucky, 13
Burgess, Ralph, 13
Burner, Clifford, 10, 13
- Camp Fire Girls, 3, 4
- Edward VIII, Prince of
Wales, 8
Edwin D. Smith School, 4
- Gerard, Betsy, 3
Gerard, Frank, 3
Gerard, Mrs. Frank, 1
Grumbach, Carrie, 4, 5
- Hadeler, Catherine, 4
Hall, Agnes, 1, 2, 8, 9,
11
Hall, Alice, 2, 3, 6, 7, 8,
9, 11, 12
Hall, Esther, 9
Hall, Lila, 2, 9
Hall family, 1, 6, 7-8, 9
- Hall sisters, 1, 6, 8-13
Hawthorn Hill, 3, 4, 5
Hossendorf, Mr., 8
- Kirchner, 13
- McConnhee, Jim, 13
- Smokey Mountains, 12
Steele High School, 6
- Westminster Church, 7
Woodal, Anne, 4
Wright, Katharine, 2-3, 5-6,
library, 3
Wright, Rev. Milton, 7
Wright, Orville
character, 4, 5,
mentioned, 1, 2, 3, 6, 8, 13
Wright, Wilbur
mentioned, 3, 6
Wright family, 2, 6, 7
Wright Library, 3, 4

INDEX

- Berea, Kentucky, 13
Burgess, Ralph, 13
Burner, Clifford, 10, 13
- Camp Fire Girls, 3, 4
- Edward VIII, Prince of
Wales, 8
Edwin D. Smith School, 4
- Gerrard, Betsy, 3
Gerrard, Frank, 3
Gerrard, Mrs. Frank, 1
Grumbach, Carrie, 4, 5
- ^{eler}Hadley, Catharine, 4
Hall, Agnes, 1, 2, 8, 9,
11
Hall, Alice, 2, 3, 6, 7, 8,
9, 11, 12
Hall, Esther, 9
Hall, Lila, 2, 9
Hall family, 1, 6, 7-8, 9
- Hall sisters, 1, 6, 8-13
Hawthorn Hill, 3, 4, 5
Hossendorf, Mr., 8
- Kirchner, 13
- McConnhee, Jim, 13
- Smokey Mountains, 12
Steele High School, 6
- Westminster Church, 7
Woodal, Anne, 4
Wright, Katharine, 2-3, 5-6,
library, 3
Wright, Rev. Milton, 7
Wright, Orville
character, 4, 5
mentioned, 1, 2, 3, 6, 8, 13
Wright, Wilbur
mentioned, 3, 6
Wright family, 2, 6, 7
Wright Library, 3, 4