



City of Alexandria
Office of Historic Alexandria

**Alexandria Legacies
Oral History Program**



Project Name: Immigrant Alexandria: Past, Present and Future

Title: *Interview with Julie Brasfield*

Date of Interview: *April 14, 2021*

Location of Interview: *Interview was done via Zoom*

Interviewer: *Maryanne Beatty*

Transcriber: *Alessandra Ricci*

Abstract: Julia Hampton Brasfield grew up in Savannah, Georgia, and completed her education at the University of Georgia and at the Duke University School of Law in North Carolina. She talks about her involvement with The TWIG after moving to Alexandria, first as a member working on different committees and then as president of the organization in 2003. Julia, now living in North Carolina, recalls some memorable moments and contributions to The Twig.

Also present during the interview was Janet Hawkins.

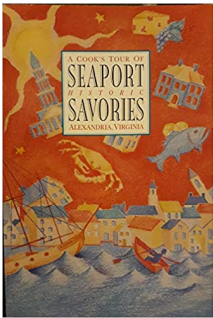
This transcript has been edited by the interviewee and may not reflect the audio-recording exactly.

Table of Contents/Index

Minute	Page	Topic
0:00	3	Introductions
1:08	3	Moving to Washington DC and Alexandria, Virginia
3:10	4	Joining The Twig
4:39	4	Involvement With The Twig Committees
6:50	5	The Casablanca Gala
8:12	6	Julie's Contributions as President of The TWIG
10:57	7	The Homes Tour and Hurricane Isabel
13:16	8	Activity in The TWIG and Moving to Morehead
15:35	8	Focus of The TWIG Organization
18:46	9	Thrift Shops and Special Sales
22:43	10	The Artisan Show
25:39	14	The Bush Tuxedo

Introductions 0:00:03	
Maryanne Beatty:	Good afternoon. My name is Maryanne Beatty, and I'm a member of the Twig Historic Preservation Ad Hoc Committee. And I'm here with my chair, Janet Hawkins. And I'm pleased to be able to interview Julia Hampton Brasfield, who is a former Twig member who has graciously agreed to be interviewed. She's with us from Morehead City, North Carolina, where she's retired. And thank you, Julie, for being with us today.
Julia H. Brasfield:	I'm glad to be here.
MB:	Thank you, thank you. So, I see that you were raised in Savannah, Georgia, and then went to the University of Georgia and went to Duke Law School, and then make made your way to the DC metropolitan area. My first question is just talk about how you got here and—you know, your life when you moved to the area.
Moving to Washington DC and Alexandria 0:01:08	
Julia H. Brasfield:	Well, I originally came up to DC after my second year of law school for a summer job. And I always assumed that I would go to Atlanta to practice law. So for that summer, I wanted to go somewhere else. And I spent the summer in DC—not in Virginia, but actually in DC—and I discovered it was a very livable city. I really enjoyed my time, my summer. And so—then, when it came time at the end of law school to look for a permanent job, I decided—I applied to some DC firms, and I was hired by one. My first few years—well, actually, I was originally hired to work in a DC firm, but it turned out they needed people in their Virginia office. So, they asked if I would work in Virginia, which I was not very happy about. [laughs]
MB:	[laughs]
Julia H. Brasfield:	It turned out great. But anyway, my first few years were just very busy practicing law.
MB:	Uh-huh. And then, you—when did you meet your husband? And did you settle in Alexandria or did—?
Julia H. Brasfield:	Yes. The office of, the Virginia office, at that time, was in Alexandria. So, I moved to Alexandria, took the Virginia bar, and moved to Alexandria. And my husband was a partner with the firm, so I met him as soon as I moved up. We did not become romantically involved until several years later. [laughs]
MB:	[laughs] Well, well. Well, it's nice that you raised your family in

	Alexandria. And then, at what point did you become involved with Twig?
Joining The TWIG 0:03:10	
Julia H. Brasfield:	I think the date, and I wrote it in there, 1996 or something like that—is when I first joined Twig. I had a friend who asked me several times to join Twig. And every time, I said no because I'd had some experience with some women's organizations, and I was not interested. And then, she did sort of a sleight of hand, invited me to a coffee, didn't tell me it was a Twig coffee. [laughs] And I went there, and it was a Twig coffee. And there were a lot of people that I knew—you know, just from the neighborhood. And so—and there were—and the ladies were gracious, and there were so many who were pleased to see me. And it was sort of hard to not have a very favorable impression at that point.
MB:	Hmm. And who was your sponsor, do you remember?
Julia H. Brasfield:	Helenmarie Shipp. And I'm thinking there were—this is one of those things that unfortunately my memory is lagging; I'm sorry to say. I think I had another one, but I just can't remember for sure.
MB:	Um-huh. So then, you went and joined Twig, and then your first year was with the stock, I suppose. And then, what committees and other parts of the organization did you become involved with?
Involvement with The Twig Committees 0:04:39	
Julia H. Brasfield:	I think my first committee assignment after the year of stock was cookbook. And if I remember correctly, I was—Patty Hobson was the chair of the cookbook committee. And she was very, very effective at getting us out, doing things, selling at Market Square [Saturday market] and all over the place. And so, that is when I got to know Patty, from that experience,
Janet Hawkins:	Julie, which cookbook was that?
Julia H. Brasfield:	It was the <i>Seaport Savories</i> .

	 <p data-bbox="526 638 1105 667"><i>A Cook's Tour of Historic Seaport Savories</i> cookbook.</p>
MB:	That's a good one. And then, what did you do beyond that?
Julia H. Brasfield:	I know I served on communications. And I don't know the order of these; I'm sorry, I just can't remember. But I served on a committee for a silent auction connected to one of the galas that we held. For a few years, we did some galas. And I served on that committee with Anita Carson; I remember that very well. And Twig sort of got out of the business of doing that, which I thought was a good thing. [laughs] So, a silent auction, communications. Well, sorry, I'm having—I know there were some others, but I'm having a memory lapse here.
JH:	Did you—?
MB:	But you were a president of—oh, sorry, go ahead.
Julia H. Brasfield:	Oh, yes.
JH:	I was just going to ask this one real quick question. Could you talk a little bit about the gala? Because I know there are a couple that were sort of memorable. There was this Casablanca-themed one. Where were you involved in that one or the New York, New York one?
THE CASABLANCA GALA 0:06:50	
Julia H. Brasfield:	So, the one that was most memorable was the Casablanca one. And I think that's the one where we did the silent auction. And it was especially memorable because there was a live camel that was brought in to create this North African atmosphere. [laughs] And there were all kinds—I mean, it was really—the whole thing was <i>amazing</i> to look at; there was an incredible design that went on in creating this. And I have no idea how much money it made, but it was really something to look at. And what I really remember is the day after the gala going over and trying to move these cement posts and other things that had been part of the design. I mean, it was just—it was hard putting it together, and it

	was hard taking it apart. Yeah.
MB:	[laughs] When you were president during your tenure, what were some of the most memorable contributions that you thought happened under your watch, so to speak?

Julie's Contributions as President of The TWIG 0:08:12

Julia H. Brasfield: Well, we were raising money for the stroke unit, which I was convinced was a very worthy thing to create in the hospital. I really liked the idea of the stroke unit because it was a dedicated, a unit dedicated to bringing people in with stroke symptoms, catching that very early with a unit that had doctors and nurses that were very experienced in dealing with all those symptoms. And the whole idea was to try to catch people very early on before they had any other debilitating effects of stroke that might end up being long-term. I liked it because it—yeah, a stroke is something that affects both men and women of all—you know, I guess, maybe, mostly older people, but it could be, it can be younger people, too, and all ethnicities. And I mean, it really was something that could help the whole city in terms of preventive or lifesaving medical care. And we did a very good job that year. I think we were supposed to make—to—we had a pledge of, I think, around 80,000 to raise that year. And we—I think we came in with 110,000. So, we were raising money at a good rate.



The TWIG Thrift Shop on North Columbus Street

Most of that money came from the thrift shop. We had two really great thrift shop chairs that year. Cheryl Holt and Barbara Vost. And they were both very inventive in their thinking. I mean, the thrift shop had been going on for a long time. And sometimes,

	people get entrenched in their ways, so they don't want to consider doing things differently. But Cheryl and Barbara had gone out in the summer, visited all these different thrift shops in the area, a hospital thrift shop, as well as other ones, and came back with some ideas on how to make our shop better. And I think it made, it makes people more interested too when you're changing up how you're operating. So, I think that was a good year for the shop as well.
MB:	Uh-huh. So, any other memorable moments or projects or—?
The Homes Tour and Hurricane Isabel 0:10:57	
Julia H. Brasfield:	Well, we had a homes tour that year. And the homes tour, that was the year of a hurricane that hit a week or so before the homes tour. And also, Janet, was that when we had the [DC area] sniper? Was that the same year?
JH:	The sniper was, I think, Patti Hobson's year.
Julia H. Brasfield:	Okay, all right. So I'm getting—I'm getting that mixed up.
JH:	It was Hurricane Isabel [in 2003] that you're thinking of. And that happened just a couple of days before the homes tour. And we lost power, et cetera, right?
Julia H. Brasfield:	Right. And there were so many—I mean, actually, it's amazing. The—one of the areas of the city that had their power was Old Town, which is where our home store was. We could not have, you know, have the tour if people didn't have power. So, we were really lucky with that. And there were people who came to the tour—I mean, Twigs, who came to the tour to do their jobs as hostessing or whatever. And they didn't even have power, or they hadn't been able to take a shower or whatever. I mean, it was amazing. And people showed up to do their job for the tour. Shelley Annand was in charge of the tour that year. I mean, this is sort of amazing. Her husband had some emergency surgery right in the middle of the hurricane. And by the time of the tour, he was back home, but she left him recovering from this surgery. And I'm not sure if she had power at her house or not; I can't remember. But she came and led the tour and, you know, didn't want to cancel it. It was just really a great effort of people making do with all that going on.
MB:	How long were you inactive, and did you progress? And how long have you been—when did you move to Morehead City [North Carolina]?

Activity in The TWIG and Moving to Morehead 0:13:16	
Julia H. Brasfield:	Okay. So, I—I'm sorry, I don't remember the year that I went sustainer, and I don't remember the year that I went honorary. I think I went honorary before we actually moved here. We moved here in the fall of 2015. And I think, by that time, I was no longer really active in Twig. After being president, I was on different committees for several years, and then I started to just sort of slowly reduce my time as a Twig.
MB:	Uh-huh. What do you think is so special about the organization as a whole?
Julia H. Brasfield:	I really think it's the people. I've always been so impressed with the way that these women come together to do a job, to raise money for the hospital. But the—Twig is also a very social organization. And I don't mean that in a bad way. I mean that people really like each other and like being together. And to be honest, it amazed me that you could have so many women involved in something and have so little strife or disagreements or—you know, call it what you will. I mean, people, generally, were just there to get the job done, and then, you know, go have a glass of wine after or—you know, whatever the occasion was. And I just really like that. I like the women a lot.
MB:	Uh-huh. And I guess my last question would be, what do you think the focus of Twig moving forward should be? Should they continue or change with the times or—?
Focus of The TWIG Organization 0:15:35	
Julia H. Brasfield:	I—it's hard for me to answer that question because I haven't been involved in Twig for, maybe, ten years. I mean, it's been a while. I definitely think the organization—I mean, so long as women are interested in giving their time, then yes, I would think it should continue. It's a little bit difficult because we have a charter that says that we're—that Twig is there as an adjunct of the hospital, and so the main purpose has to be the aid at the hospital. And I don't want to cause any ruffles here, but I'm not always sure that Inova [organization] is where I would want to put my healthcare assistance. I mean, there's just a lot of people out there who have a lot of healthcare needs. And I think it's something we were grappling with when I was there. It's—you know, is the hospital the best place? Would they be able to afford things that we're providing for them, even if we weren't there? Which I think, in most cases—or maybe all cases— is yes. If that's the case, are we

	<p>serving a—you know, I don't know. I don't have the answer to those things. But I think those are questions that people have raised over the years. That being said, I think that it is an organization that does help a lot of people from throughout Alexandria and, I mean, beyond Alexandria, other parts of, you know, Northern Virginia come together. And I think that's a good thing. And so, yes, I would hope it would continue, you know, as long as possible.</p>
<p>MB:</p>	<p>Uh-huh. Right. I don't think I have any more questions. Janet, do you want to—?</p>
<p>JH:</p>	<p>I do have just a couple of things, Julie, I was hoping you would touch on, and particularly since I know this is something Maryanne has been talking about being interested in, in Twig. We were, back when Julie was president, and I was also involved in the thrift shop for a while, we kept getting all these amazing items that would come into the shop that we knew we could make more money selling them in some other way. And Cheryl Holt started trying to sell some of these items on eBay. Then, we sort of moved into the special sales and also had an opportunity to rent a small space next to the thrift shop to sell some items. And Julie was very involved in setting up special sales with the pink tags. And I was wondering if you could just touch base on how all that evolved.</p>
<p>Thrift Shops and Special Sales 0:18:46</p>	
<p>Julia H. Brasfield:</p>	<p>Yes, I think that was during your presidency, Janet. Weren't you present? Right. So, I had been doing eBay sales; I think that had been my committee assignment for one year. And then, we decided to rent this [extra] space. And it was a short-term lease; it was not a long-term thing. But we took the spaces right next door the thrift shop. And we were able to make it into some semblance of a shop. And we put, I don't know, does the shop still use pink tags on things? Okay. So, we took all the pink tag items—the more expensive, the newer, the special designer things—and we put them in special sales. And we had a few special nights, as I recall, where people could come. I think we—maybe, the first one, it was sort of a "come and have a glass of wine and shop and mingle." And, you know, we sold a lot of things. And it seems like—and then, we—it wasn't just clothing, we got in some pictures or some special books or special items that might just get lost in the shop, the Twig shop. We could price them more appropriately and sell them for more in this special-sales shop. So I don't have any memory of how much we raised with that shop;</p>

	<p>Janet might know that. But I do remember we tried to keep it open through the summer for, maybe—or we tried to have it open on weekends; I can't remember exactly. But we decided to just ask Twigs to volunteer their time, and it would not count against their Twig shop obligation because we—you know, still needed them in the Twig shop. And it was amazing to me how many women said, "Sure," and they showed up, and they were willing to give even more time for that effort. So that was another example of just people being willing to step forward. I think ultimately, we lost the lease, so that was sort of the end of that experiment. But it was one more—you know, I think throughout the years, there had been efforts to see—is there another way to make money other than just the thrift shop that is—that does not put a huge time commitment burden on our members? Because you always want, you know, you don't want to overburden your members. And so, that was one of those experiments. And it was fun. [laughs]</p>
<p>JH:</p>	<p>It was fun. And then, once the shop closed, we still had all these wonderful pink tag items. And I think it created awareness, Maryanne, with Twigs that we needed to be separating some of these goodies. And that's sort of how special sales kind of evolved from that and doing the special shopping nights and so on. The other thing I was wondering if you could touch on just quickly is, several years we also did something called an Artisan Show as another way of raising money. And Julie, you participated in that. So would you—could you touch base on that too?</p>
<p>The Artisan Show 0:22:43</p>	
<p>Julia H. Brasfield:</p>	<p>Yes. I don't have a great memory on how that came about. I wasn't in charge of anything as far as I know. I did—I had started knitting. And so, for the first one, you know, they were asking, "Does anybody have anything where they could set up a little booth and sell?" And so, I thought, "Well, I can, you know, sell some knitted items." So, I made some baby hats, and maybe some other things; I can't really remember. But I did sell those there. And I can't remember, Janet, how many—did we do that? I guess we did it more than once. Did we do it more than twice?</p>
<p>JH:</p>	<p>I think it was two or three years we tried doing this Artisan Show. It was also, Maryanne, a way of raising money. Marilyn Handy had some experience doing decorator show houses for the National Symphony. And they had sort of like a boutique, so we were trying to do that. And so, we did it a couple of years. We did</p>

	it in conjunction with the homes tour too. Always the issues with these things; the staffing, which was another reason why the 106-a-half [North Columbus Street] space didn't enter. But by selling your knits the way you did, Julie, you also now have another career, which is—.
Julia H. Brasfield:	[laughs] Well, that's true because I have to—I do remember that first Artisan Show. And I was truly surprised at how many people were willing to pay for my stuff, which actually, looking back on it now, was not very good. [laughs] You know, I just sort of started the hobby, and I wasn't as accomplished as I am now. But then, I remember the first time a Twig called me and said, "I just found out I'm having a grandbaby. Do you have any hats?" And I was kind of shocked by that, but—like, "Sure." Anyway, so yes, that did start me on a hobby. And now, one of the things I do is I do some craft shows; not a whole lot, but I do some where I sell knitted baby items. [laughs]
MB:	That's nice.
Julia H. Brasfield:	So, I thank Twig for that. Yeah.
JH:	I have given them as gifts to friends with grandchildren, and they just really like them a lot. They're lovely, really nice things.
MB:	Yes. That's wonderful.
Julia H. Brasfield:	Janet's been one of my best customers.
JH:	Wow. Well, it's great. And they're all washable. And you know, they look really amazing. So, let's see. I'm trying to think if there was anything else. I don't think so. Oh, I know. One more thing is, would you mind talking about the Bush tuxedo?
The Bush Tuxedo 0:25:39	
Julia H. Brasfield:	Oh, yes. You sent me that letter to remind me of that. This was awkward. I mean, truly awkward, which sometimes that happens. But we got a donation of, I think, three tuxedos, and then, maybe, a jacket or something. I can't remember, but several items. And somebody, in looking through it, saw the name George H.W. Bush as—you know as a label.
MB:	Oh, my goodness. [laughs]
Julia H. Brasfield:	And so, we're all, you know, we all, and then, we realized that one of President Bush's family members had dropped a tuxedo along with some other donations. So we thought, "Well, we can't just, you know, price this as a tuxedo." So—but also, you know,

	<p>we didn't want to publicize this without getting permission because, for one thing, we didn't know if—the tuxedo was actually very small. I mean, not in height, but very small waist. I mean, so this could have been as a young man, I mean, it was hard to tell. But—so maybe a son had worn these? I have no idea. We never got an answer to that because I did, I wrote to the donor, well, first I tried to call her. I never got a call back. And then, I thought that I'd better—so I wrote to her. I wrote her a letter and tried to explain, and tried to be considerate, but also tried to let her know why we wanted the provenance because they would be worth more. Never got a response. Nothing. And then, I think, maybe, I went to someone who knew her and, anyway, she wanted nothing to do with this. So, there was a Twig member who had a teenage son who was going to a prom or something. And the greatest thing in the world for this mom was for her son to wear George Bush's tuxedo to his prom. So, I know, I can't remember who that was, but I remember that that is who bought one of them. And I'm not sure. I mean, we sold them all; I'm not sure who we sold them to. We did price them, obviously, we priced them higher than we would have just, you know, a tuxedo that came in. But we didn't publicize it in any way or, you know, we just thought, "Let's preserve the privacy." [laughs]</p>
MB:	Yeah. Well, that's interesting. Wow.
JH:	That was a real dilemma as I recall because there was part of us who said, "Oh, well, let's just donate it like to the Smithsonian or something," because we were the ones that had it, not—you know, Bush Sr., they weren't interested in our stuff, but it was pretty funny.
MB:	Yeah. Yeah.
Julia H. Brasfield:	Yeah. [laughs] It is amazing what comes into that shop.
MB:	Yeah.
Julia H. Brasfield:	I mean, that's the one thing that I learned through all those years; just had no idea what's going to come in on any given day.
JH:	Okay. Well then, I think we're done.
Julia H. Brasfield:	Okay.
MB:	Okay. Well, it's nice meeting you virtually and—.
Julia H. Brasfield:	Nice meeting you also.
MB:	Yeah. Yeah.

JH:	Thank you, Julie.
-----	-------------------