



City of Alexandria
Office of Historic Alexandria
Alexandria Legacies
Oral History Program



Project Name: *Alexandria Legacies*

Title: *Interview with Louisa Smucker*

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Location of Interview: *Mrs. Smucker's home on North Quaker Lane, Alexandria, Virginia*

Interviewer: *Charles Ziegler*

Transcriber: *Charles Ziegler*

Abstract: Mrs. Smucker was born in Lynchburg, Virginia. She moved to Fairfax County in 1946, and the portion of the county in which she lived became part of Alexandria a few years later. In this interview Mrs. Smucker relates something of her family background, her early memories of Alexandria, changes in her neighborhood, the annexation of the portion of Fairfax County where she lived to Alexandria, and some of the people in her neighborhood.

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

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Introductions	
Charles Ziegler:	Today is May 24, 2006. My name is Charles Ziegler, a member of the Seminary Hill Oral History Project. I am at the home of Mrs. Louisa Smucker on North Quaker Lane, Alexandria, Virginia, to conduct an oral history interview. I should say at the outset that Mrs. Smucker has been very kind in permitting the Seminary Hill Oral History Project to copy some material in her possession that is very relevant to the background of her family and to the property at which we are conducting this interview, and this material will be placed on the file.
Birth and Family Background	
C.Z.:	Anyway, Mrs. Smucker, thank you for participating and being so generous with your material to the Seminary Hill Oral History Project. If we could start with you and ask where and when you were born.
Louisa Smucker:	I was born in Lynchburg, Virginia, on March 9, 1925, and I lived there until I was 21, until we—the whole family—moved back up here. My family consisted of my sister, who was already living in this area with her aunt and uncle in Alexandria and working in town in the war effort, that sort of thing, and my mother and father.
C.Z.:	Now the war effort, so this was during World War II?
Louisa Smucker:	This was World War II.
C.Z.:	Uh-huh.
Louisa Smucker:	My family had lived in Alexandria—my father's family had lived in Alexandria, I know, really, in Fairfax County, right here. This place was called Cameron, that my great-grandfather bought, and he bought it in 1839, I believe. And so—my father was born here, and...
C.Z.:	When you say here, in Cameron?
Louisa Smucker:	At Cameron. My father was born at Cameron. That, as I say was in Fairfax County. We were not annexed by Alexandria until, I believe, [19]48, 1948. My mother was born in Fauquier County, in a place called Waveland. She was a Washington, and her grandfather had sold Mount Vernon to the Mount Vernon Ladies Association, and with that money they had bought this place called "Waveland" in Fauquier County.
C.Z.:	So she was a real Washington.
Louisa Smucker:	Yeah. And when she was seven years old the family moved to Alexandria, where she grew up and—she was educated in a little private school there in Alexandria. My father was educated...

C.Z.:	Which private school was this, if I may ask?
Louisa Smucker:	Miss Chandler's, I believe it was called, Miss Chandler's. My father had been taught by some ladies. I think the Hooffs. Miss Carrie Hooff, I believe, perhaps was one of them. They lived up a path that ran from our house here at Cameron, which is now 108 North Quaker Lane, up to the seminary. The road itself was a dirt road, and this was just a path that went along Quaker Lane. Everyone referred to this path as the Boulevard.
C.Z.:	Now the dirt road was—later became Quaker Lane?
Louisa Smucker:	It was already Quaker Lane, but it became macadam.
C.Z.:	It was a dirt road at that time?
Louisa Smucker:	It had been dirt, yes. And my mother worked as a secretary for the American Historical Association for some years, and then, when my father and she were married, she worked as a dietician for about 14 years at the Virginia Episcopal School in Lynchburg, where I had grown up. My earliest memories of living—or rather, of visiting—here as a child were of staying with my aunt and uncle in their house, which was built on the site of the house of General Samuel Cooper that had been torn down. That material will be included after this oral review with some copying.
C.Z.:	Oh, appropriate material that I'm going to place on the file. Yes.
Louisa Smucker:	Yes. And I think I said I just lived here with my sister and my parents for several years.
Early Memories of Alexandria	
C.Z.:	What's your earliest memory of living or visiting in Alexandria, or some of your early memories?
Louisa Smucker:	Some of the—
C.Z.:	Yes. Sights, sounds, smells, activities...
Louisa Smucker:	One of the things that we always did when we stayed with my aunt was to go visit Miss Carrie Hooff and her sister, who lived next door. They were always expecting us, and had little presents for my sister and me, and that was always something we looked forward to. And we always, of course, went to church while we were here...
C.Z.:	Which church did you attend?
Louisa Smucker:	We always went to the seminary chapel. In the very early days, when my father's family had lived here, the seminary had opened the chapel on Sundays to the people in the neighborhood who were Episcopalians, or wanted to attend church there. And so, although the Coopers were members of Christ Church in Alexandria, they found it

	a lot more convenient, since we were only a mile from the seminary, to go to the seminary chapel—Immanuel Church-on-the-Hill. The society in those days revolved around the seminary. This whole area was referred to as Seminary Hill.
C.Z.:	This would be the 1920s, 1930s?
Louisa Smucker:	No, it would be earlier than that. During the days before the Civil War my grandparents were part of this society. Their associations were with the people in the neighborhood and the seminary professors, and they all felt very much at home with each other, I gathered. My grandmother played the piano and the guitar. I still have her guitar, which is in very bad condition—although it had been a pretty good instrument—and she apparently played by ear, and she would entertain people if they came to call. Once my father told a tale of how they were gathered around at some Seminary professor's house, and she was asked to play the piano. Some other professor immediately spoke up and said that as Ginny played entirely by ear, and very imperfectly, he really hoped that she would not play. Some other, kinder [laughter] professor spoke up and said, "Well, since I hear entirely by ear, and very imperfectly, I hope she will." [Laughter]
C.Z.:	A good story, yes.
Louisa Smucker:	My father was born in 1880, and after his early education with the ladies and with a Seminary student who taught in what is now called the Gibbs Room in Aspinwall Hall, Virginia Theological Seminary, he joined his brother as a student at the Episcopal High School, which he attended until 1900. He walked up there, and then home for lunch, and back for sports—about four miles a day.
C.Z.:	What type of—oh, do continue.
Louisa Smucker:	Well, I was going to tell you some of my memories of visiting my aunt and uncle at their house here at Cameron, as that's when I would start remembering things. My aunt had a refrigerator that made ice cubes, which I was unfamiliar with, since we had an icebox at home.
C.Z.:	Now this was...
Louisa Smucker:	Around 1930. These ice cubes that my aunt had were a surprise for me, I think. My aunt always made my uncle a little bowl of oatmeal every morning. That was what he began his breakfast with. One thing that my aunt always made a point of having, I think it was called pickled herring, kippered herring, I don't know what it was called, but it smelled terrible.
C.Z.:	Kippers, yes. Kippers.
Louisa Smucker:	Well, they smelled horrible as far as I, as a child, was concerned, but

	my mother liked it very much, and they would always serve it to them for breakfast. I made some bad remark at breakfast one day about how it smelled. They liked to remind me of that. Mother, who grew up in Alexandria, said that the people hawking herring had little chants that went, "Herring, herring, two for a penny. Ain't you 'shamed to eat so many?" as they went around the town hawking this fish.
Neighborhood in 1946	
Louisa Smucker:	When we lived here from [19]46 on there were no houses to the west of us, and if we looked out of our upstairs window the only lights we could see, the only light we could see, was some kind of signal on the train line that went eventually down to Richmond—it was heading west at this point, but must have turned south later. And, of course, that's completely changed now. And when I visited here this house was here, my aunt and uncle's house was up on the hill, and in about 1936 the Wieckings built the house next door to us. My...
C.Z.:	How is that spelled?
Louisa Smucker:	W-I-E-C-K-I-N-G. But, I think one of the questions was how had the land changed.
C.Z.:	Yes.
Louisa Smucker:	Well, of course, as I said, when this property was bought by my family in 1839, it was in Fairfax County, and then the City of Alexandria annexed it. So that, right now, it's geographically almost in the center of Alexandria.
Current Residence	
C.Z.:	How old is this house?
Louisa Smucker:	My father built it in 1924, and I have a paper that will be—I think you will look at and perhaps copy...
C.Z.:	Put it in the file, yes.
Louisa Smucker:	He rented it from [19]24 until [19]46, until he left the Virginia Episcopal School in Lynchburg and came back here to live, and someone asked who might have rented it. Well, the first person that rented was a first cousin of my mother's, Bishop Tucker, and I know the names of some of the others. The Ernst Wieckings, who eventually built next door, rented it for some years, and the Philips. Sky Beaven was a child in that family. She now attends Immanuel Church-on-the-Hill. I know that during the Second World War my father rented this house and property—he owned three acres at that point—for \$75.00 a month, which—they had rent—what do you call it, you couldn't exceed the rent unless you...?
C.Z.:	Oh, rent control.

Louisa Smucker:	Yeah, rent control, unless you did something to the house, which he never did, so it was always rented for \$75.00 a month.
C.Z.:	He owned it, but he rented it out?
Louisa Smucker:	He owned—he built it and rented it out for almost 20 years or so, from [19]24 to [19]46, 22 years. Well, let's see...
C.Z.:	Well, when you say—speaking of the house, have there been any major changes in the structure over the years?
Louisa Smucker:	Yes. When my husband and I left Michigan, where we had lived for 14 years, and we came back here to live in 1972, we added two rooms and a bath downstairs, and then some years later we added a two-car garage to the north, beside the house itself, not attached. And, remarkably enough, this house has the same roof on it that was put on when it was built. It's made out of overlapping shingles made out of tin, I think. They are painted. We have to keep them painted, but they're still okay.
C.Z.:	That's remarkable.
Louisa Smucker:	I think it is, too. The tar paper that was between the wood roofing that they put up and the tin covering has all disintegrated, and there's no way to replace that without removing the whole roof and putting on something new, which eventually, I suppose, will have to be done, but as long as you keep it painted it seems to hold together. Remarkable.
C.Z.:	As long as it keeps the water out.
Louisa Smucker:	Yes, it does. [Laughter]
Changes in the Neighborhood	
C.Z.:	What are some of the changes that you've seen in the neighborhood over the years? I mean—I'm sure there are quite a few. You mentioned that Quaker Lane was a dirt road, and now, of course, it's a busy, paved...
Louisa Smucker:	Four lanes.
C.Z.:	Yes, yes. Just some of the changes that spring to mind in thinking back.
Louisa Smucker:	Well, I think that my mother, when she lived here from [19]46 on had most of her groceries delivered from Chauncey's in Alexandria. They would bring it out, oh, once a week, or something like that, and eventually I think Chauncey's went out of business, and then there was a co-op up Quaker Lane where the Fairlington Shopping Center is now.
C.Z.:	Okay.
Going Into Washington	

Louisa Smucker:	And, I think that—well, I don't know. You asked, when I was a child, if we went into Washington. Well, we did. We would come up each year in August for two weeks. My father would drive us up in his [19]29 Model A Ford, and if we went into Washington to visit my mother's mother, who lived at 1738 Lamont Street, we drove in. My mother was one of twelve children. Her two sisters—maiden sisters—lived there on Lamont Street and took care of their mother, who lived to be almost 97. My mother used to talk about the streetcars that went in from Alexandria all the way, you know, over to—there was an amusement park—I used to know the name of it. I can't think of it now. But she would take her little brother...
C.Z.:	Is this the one in Glen Echo?
Louisa Smucker:	Yes.
C.Z.:	You had to go all the way out some distance.
Louisa Smucker:	Yeah. A long way. And one of her little brothers had a tendency to get car-sick, which wasn't too happy an experience [laughter], I'm afraid. But anyway.
Local Stores	
C.Z.:	What are some of the stores—you mentioned Chauncey's and the co-op up here. I mean, were there any drugstores, special drugstores, or clothing stores?
Louisa Smucker:	Yes, there was a drugstore down in Alexandria, Timberman's, that my mother and father always went to. But also, there was a Shuman's Bakery that everybody used. My aunt was very fond of that jellyroll cake, which I personally didn't care for much, but...
C.Z.:	Is it still in business, that Shuman's Bakery?
Louisa Smucker:	Yes, I think it is, yes. It moved to Washington Street.
Annexation to Alexandria	
C.Z.:	Well, you mentioned earlier—as we both know, this part of Fairfax County became a part of Alexandria in the late 1940s. You were living here then. Was there any controversy about that annexation that you can recall, or did it just happen, and not much discussion?
Louisa Smucker:	I was working as a secretary for Howard Smith, who was the Commonwealth Attorney in Alexandria at that time, and I always met for lunch a girl named Athlyn Williams, who was working for Dr. Colin McCrea, and we would walk up and down King Street in Alexandria. I can recall bumping into Armistead Boothe, who was a neighbor, and also a legislator, and complaining to him bitterly that we were being absorbed by Alexandria City. I think he just laughed, but I think that—people here were sure that our taxes would go up,

	and that sort of thing, and we weren't entirely sure that it would benefit us a bit.
C.Z.:	After it happened, what was your—what was your experience in terms of—did it improve your life here, or did it pretty much stay the same, or what were the repercussions of that absorption by Alexandria?
Louisa Smucker:	I don't really know.
C.Z.:	So it must not have been too bad.
Louisa Smucker:	I don't think it affected me personally very much. I think our taxes probably did go—I know they've gone up now. Well, let's see...we were much more restricted about our trash, probably a good thing. Our mail delivery is still one-tenth of a mile from our house—a bad thing!
Seminary Hill People	
C.Z.:	Who were some of the people that you remember in this area? You've mentioned some, but some of the people who stand out in your memory from this area. Alexandria generally, Seminary Hill in particular.
Louisa Smucker:	Well, I don't know. I mean, I was—I was very much interested in young men in those days. I was more interested in that than [laughs] somebody that might have been—like Keating Carrier's father, Mr. [Walter] Karig. I didn't know him very well. I knew him a little bit. He used to tell a wonderful tale about how you would go down to vote at Vernon Cockrell's hardware store down here on Duke Street, and Vernon and a couple of his cohorts would be sitting behind the bags of feed, and you would cast your vote, but you didn't get to put it in the ballot box; you handed it to them, and no one was sure what happened to it. [Laughs] That's [inaudible] a tale he told.
C.Z.:	Good story.
Louisa Smucker:	But—there were tales my father told about when he was a child...
C.Z.:	Oh, that would be of interest, yes.
Louisa Smucker:	Well, this was really a little farm. I was amused because the people who came out here to dig up the Civil War bullets and so forth here in our front yard not long ago—Pam [Pamela J.] Cressey and other archaeologists from Alexandria Archaeology—always referred to it as a plantation, which it was not at all. It was a small farm, and...
C.Z.:	This is when General Cooper was living here, it was a small farm?
Louisa Smucker:	That's right. But also when his daughter, my grandmother and her family, lived here. And there were many outbuildings. There was a stable, there was—they kept horses, they had chickens. My father had

	<p>a goat, and he had a goat cart. And his goat, apparently, at one point, much to his sorrow, fell down one of the trench-type things that the Federal soldiers had built here when they built that Fort Williams. And in those days they were very steep-sided—there're still some here. You can see the remains, but they're all sort of mellowed out, they're flattened down.</p>
C.Z.:	They've been eroded over the years.
Louisa Smucker:	<p>Yes, some by weather and some by people. But this was a very steep bank, and the goat apparently was unable to get back up and choked itself to death on the cord around its neck. Terrible.</p> <p>In later years, say—my father's sister-in-law always had an Easter egg hunt here for the children up and down Quaker Lane, and at the seminary and the high school. I never participated in these. I heard about them from friends I made who had gone to her Easter egg hunt.</p> <p>Another thing that my father did was to play baseball here with his friends on a field that is now turned into a flower garden, which the Logans now own. The Kennedys, who owned that place before the Logans, had changed the contours of the land by bringing in truckloads of dirt and raising the level of the land, and building a barn. Originally, however, it had been a flat, level field. My father, his brother, Cooper Dawson, Charlie Hooff (who lived up Quaker Lane at "The Cottage"), Edgar Snowden (who lived in Alexandria), and others I can't name had all attended Episcopal High School, where they played baseball. Today, if you go into the powder magazine built with bricks from my great-grandfather's house, which the Federals tore down, you will find the initials of all the neighborhood boys scratched into the bricks. My father had no middle name, and his "P.D." is still easy to find. This powder magazine was built next door to Cameron. When my father moved back here in 1946, he joined a group of these same men who had gone to EHS [Episcopal High School] for picnics on Memorial Day, the Fourth of July, and Labor Day. They took turns being the host, and I don't believe that the ladies were ever invited, except to work behind the scenes!</p> <p>When we came here in 1946 the Second World War was just over, and we were not able to get a telephone instrument—a scarcity of the war. One evening, my mother and her sister were in Alexandria at a play, and my father and I were at home. I was upstairs and heard a commotion downstairs, and a yell from my father. He had put some paraffin on the stove to heat in order to apply it to his rheumatic hands, as directed by his doctor. He dozed off in his chair, and it caught fire. He awoke from his nap, and rushed into the kitchen to carry the burning pan out the door, as he was afraid the house would catch on fire. The breeze caught the flames and severely burned his hands and face. I read my first-aid manual, and put his hands into a</p>

	<p>mixture of bicarbonate of soda and water, or whatever it was the book recommended, and, over his objections, ran down to the Wieckings to use their telephone to call Dr. Roberts. In those days doctors still made house calls, and everyone we knew went to Dr. “Jack” Roberts. He quickly appeared, bandaged my father, and about the time my mother and sister came home, took him to the hospital. He eventually had skin grafts on his hands, but his face healed without grafts. Dr. Roberts told the phone company that we were isolated in the country and needed to have a telephone. It was promptly produced. We all loved Dr. Roberts.</p> <p>Well, another story was about Janet Wiecking. My father had more than three acres at one point, but when he built this house, he couldn’t keep up the payments on it during the Depression, so he sold off some of his land to his brother, keeping three acres. When we moved here from Lynchburg there were three houses on the original 21½-acre lot: our house, my uncle’s house, and the Wieckings! Behind our house was an open field where the Wieckings and we burned our trash.</p>
C.Z.:	So you didn’t have trash collection at this time?
Louisa Smucker:	No, no. And my—so Janet Wiecking, who was in between my age and my parents’ age, was burning her trash, and the fire got away from her. I guess she must have called someone here to call the fire engine people, and they called, and the fire engine—that looked very much like a jeep—arrived from Bailey’s Crossroads in five minutes and put out the fire. They were—I mean, they were here in a big hurry. I don’t think I know anything else to tell you.
C.Z.:	Thank you very much for participating in this project.[End]