

Sun Cities Area Historical Society
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Case # 206

Interview with Margaret C. Mulholland

September 20, 1991

Date of Birth: December 5, 1901

Place of Birth: Chicago, Illinois

Margaret was one of the early residents and very active in community affairs. After the death of her husband, she moved back to Illinois to pursue a career, then returned again after four or five years absence.

Synopsis:

- Parents probably born 1880s. Mother young housewife; doesn't know what father did.
- Mother high school education and perhaps one year of advanced education.
- I grew up and was educated in Chicago, then Jamestown, New York. Advanced education in Decatur, Illinois. Studied welfare of young people, sociology. Worked, married and had 3 children in Chicago.
- Husband became ill and I entered the government. Was with the Treasury Department, and Department of Army – 25 years with U.S. Government.
- I was not involved in any kind of community activity until I moved to Decatur, Illinois in the mid 30s. Then I was very interested in Order of the Eastern Star. All 3 children attended Milliken University and daughter attended college for women in Jackson, Illinois, McMurray College.
- In 1966, my husband and I traveled to Europe. Did Ireland then flew to England. Husband had heart attack, died 6 days later
- Went back to Illinois and interviewed with Dean at Milliken College. No job, but opening in sorority as Housemother. Spent 4 years with 38 girls every semester. Pleasant association.
- Oldest son lived in Arizona. Came out to visit him. Advised us to see Sun City. Only about 2,500 people when moved in. All from different states. Joy to gather around swimming pool. Joined Federated Women's Club. The interested in volunteering at hospital for about 5 years. Swim Club, golf course and golf club.
- Still living in same house; 19th house finished in Sun City.

- Dr. in Sun City asked me to be his medical secretary. I was upset by older people with gray hair and illness. Got away from the community. In Decatur wanted to be with younger people. Then decided to come back to home in Sun City.
- Want SC to be unincorporated. We governed city for the last 30 years. No reason for more expenditures, paying salary to Mayor, Fire Chief, etc. 75% of people here donate time.
- Paid cash for the house.
- Del Webb attended some meetings. Everyone respected him. Gave retirement world much joy. Delightful to speak with him. Very busy, I had friends move out here.
- Sun City thrived because of early retired people. Showed how to live leisurely. Early residents were models for those who came afterward. After 15 years, younger groups different, more advanced ideas. They earned more than we did.
- When new recreation center, I was never involved in contention. I wanted to run things, and I have. All groups were organized and you do go up the ladder. Instrumental in forming get-together Club; 30 – 35 people for book reviews; still meet once a month. Volunteered for 5 years with Northwest Hospital in Glendale. After husband's death not interested in that. Still very active in Eastern star.
- Tom Austin would come before groups and advise us, etc., very pleasant man, well-liked.
- After first year, company sent out questionnaires. What would you do to make improvements in your home? Husband filled them out. Didn't buy house directly from Webb. Neighbor bought 5 houses; we bought from him. Saw house as being built. House on golf course amount of space we wanted.

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SUN CITIES AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Margaret C. Mulholland – early Sun City resident

Interviewer Melanie Sturgeon 20 Sep 1991

Transcribed by Belva McIntosh Apr 2008

This is Melanie Sturgeon and on behalf of the Sun Cities Area Historical Association and the Arizona Historical Foundation. I am interviewing Margaret Mulholland, one of the early pioneers to Sun City, in her home in Sun City Arizona.

STURGEON: Margaret, can you tell me approximately the dates your parents were born and where they were born?

MULHOLLAND: Well, I will try. My parents were born in the United States and they were probably born in 1888 – in there some place.

STURGEON: What did your parents do for a living?

MULHOLLAND: Well, my mother was a young housewife and my father, well really I don't know what my father did because I was just a very small child then he was out of my life.

STURGEON: Do you know what your mother's education was? Did she go through school?

MULHOLLAND: Oh yes. Mother had a high school education and perhaps a year of advanced.

STURGEON: What about yourself? Can you tell me when you were born and where?

MULHOLLAND: I was born in Chicago, Illinois on December 5, 1901.

STURGEON: Did you grow up in Chicago?

MULHOLLAND: I grew up and I was educated partially in Chicago. The rest of my education was in Jamestown, New York and I finished advanced education in Decatur, Illinois. In college I studied the welfare of young people, sociology. I worked in Chicago, Illinois and I was married in Chicago. My working with young ladies was later in my life. After I finished college I was out in the business world in the Chicago Loop. It was clerical work that I did and then I was married and I had three children. My husband became quite ill and then I entered the Government. I was with the Treasury Department and also I was with the Department of the Army. I spent twenty five years with the Government.

STURGEON: I would like to go back a little bit in your life. Did you have any brothers and sisters?

MULHOLLAND: One sister who was eight years younger. The neighborhood where I grew up in Chicago was on the south side, probably most of the people were Irish, German and I suppose there was some Polish also and it was in the early 1900's. We lived in a house. Of course I was quite young when I lived there. This was my grandfather's house and they had what they called a flat upstairs. My grandfather was a tin smith and he had his business in the basement of the house. The people who lived there were naturally all working people. They consisted, as I have said, Irish, German, probably some Polish mixed in with them, but mostly Irish.

STURGEON: How did you get to Jamestown from there?

MULHOLLAND: My mother married Mr. Kyle who was a telephone man and he took my mother and myself to Jamestown New York. I graduated from high school there. After I had worked with the telephone company then we went back to Chicago and I met my husband and I married him and my life took on from there.

STURGEON: Did you stay in Chicago the rest of your married life?

MULLHOLLAND: I stayed in Chicago probably sixteen years. I went to Decatur Illinois. I started with the government in Chicago and I worked for probably four years. Then I transferred to the Department of the Army and spent the rest of my government years with the Department of the Army in Decatur.

STURGEON: That must have been hard working and raising three children at the same time.

MULHOLLAND: When one is young one doesn't see all these hardships.

STURGEON : When you were a child did you ever see your mother involved in any community activities?

MULHOLLAND: There was always church, well really I don't remember that particular time. But I knew she was always there and devoted as much time to me as a young mother does.

STURGEON: What about yourself? Did you get involved in clubs or community activities?

MULHOLLAND: Do you want to know that I did not become involved in any kind of activities until I moved to Decatur Illinois, when I was probably about 33 or 35. I became very interested in the Order of the Eastern Star and I became very involved in their background. All three of my children, two boys, attended Milliken University and my daughter attended the college for women at Jacksonville, Illinois, McMurray college. I wanted her to learn how it would be to live with women.

STURGEON: How did you get involved with young women?

MULHOLLAND: In 1966 my husband and I went to London. We went to Europe. We did all of Ireland and were flying over and arrived from Ireland to London. On our transportation from the airport to our hotel my husband had a heart attack and he spent six days in London hospital and of course he expired on tenth of June 1966. I had him cremated and brought his remains back and my doctor here in Sun City Arizona asked me to be his medical secretary which I was for perhaps five months. I got very upset with living in Sun City. I needed to become interested in the business world again. I just could not stand these old people because I was much younger. At that point in my life I went back to Decatur Illinois and I had an appointment with the Dean of Women at Milliken University. Then she advised me that she did not have anything in the administrative office but she did have an opening in one of the sorority houses as a house mother. So I had a very nice interview – that is the alums interviewed me for the position and I was accepted and I spent four years as a house mother with these young girls - 38 every semester. It was not a rude awakening, it was a pleasant association with these young women. The girls I had were about 18 until they graduated. It was a delightful four years. If I told my daughter earlier that I wanted her to become acquainted and learn how to live with women, I learned how to live with women.

STURGEON: What did your husband do for a living when you were first married?

MULHOLLAND: My husband was a college graduate and he was also quite – he had an illness that caused him to be not too active. His illness was consistent of his lung and his heart. My husband was the manager for the unemployment office. So that was his job. He was the manager of this particular office in Decatur for probably sixteen years with seventeen employees under him.

STURGEON: What did you do for the government?

MULHOLLAND: My first job was with the Department of Commerce in Washington D. C. A very uninteresting job. Then I was asked to come back to Chicago because this was going to be a permanent position, which I did. It developed that I was a telephone operator for the large Post Office in Chicago for two years and then I transferred to the Treasury Department and worked for them for five years. Then I worked for the Department of the Army and worked there until 1961.

STURGEON: When you were growing up, you probably would have been about thirty when the depression hit. Do you remember what it was like during the depression?

MULHOLLAND: No, really. We always had enough food to eat, we had enough money to pay our rent and it wasn't anything different than I am probably living now. Both my husband I had very lucrative jobs during that time.

STURGEON: Do you remember, not necessarily the date when Social Security was passed but do you remember the Social Security Act, when they were debating it?

MULHOLLAND: No, really I didn't. None of my family was affected by it. I think it was a very good act. It did a lot for the country. People had a little more security. We all complied with the rules set up.

STURGEON: When you were thinking about retiring what were your plans for the future?

MULHOLLAND: Well, it was nigh on to twenty five years and I was certainly going to get my twenty five years in. But my husband, no I will have to go back a little bit further, our oldest son lived in Arizona and we came out to visit him. He advised us that we should come out to see Sun City because it was a new retirement development. We did come out and there were things that were very dear to Mr. Mulholland, especially the golf course because he was a golfer. Then to the climate was very conducive to his health. It was a dry climate and it was a great help to him.

STURGEON: Sometimes when you stayed in a community for a long time were you at all concerned about making new friends or things like that when you moved?

MULHOLLAND: It is very simple to make new friends in a place like Sun City because after all when we came out here there were probably only about 2500 people. We all came from different states and we were interested in retirement and it was a joy gathering around the swimming people. I went into the Federated Women's Club which brought me in contact with many women from all walks of life. Then I became interested in something that I had never had the opportunity to do and that was to volunteer myself the hospital of volunteer work and I did that for five years. Your time was always taken up with some kind of recreation which contributed to the friendship that I had carried on with all these many years.

STURGEON: When you were thinking about retiring you would have had Social Security benefits, were there any other pension or monies that you could depend on to keep yourselves going once you had retired?

MULHOLLAND: Yes, I was very fortunate to have other incomes. I had my pension from my Government job and of course my husband was an employee of the State of Illinois and I had an income from his position.

STURGEON: You must have been, as you said earlier, a little bit concerned about his health. Did you ever think about your health as you got older? Did you ever worry about that?

MULLHOLLAND: I never worried about it. I was always able to do eight hours every day. I am still living in the first house we bought. This house was the 19th house that was finished in Sun City. We came here in 1960 and we visited Sun City and we also knew that there was a golf course which my husband was interested in. We saw this particular model and we came back in March of 1961 and bought this house and moved into it in August and that is thirty years ago.

STURGEON: When you became involved in the community did you have some idea of about what the community was before you moved in and was it any different from what actually happened?

MULHOLLAND: Oh, heavens yes. I had no idea of course what the community would be like and who would be living here and I had absolutely no idea about the entertainment or the volunteer work that one could do if one so wished. It agreed with me and I certainly contributed many hours and I am still contributing hours to volunteer work in Sun City.

STURGEON: You had mentioned that when your husband died you decided to go back to Illinois because it was hard for you. Was that because there were so many old people and you didn't feel like you belonged?

MULLHOLLAND: Yes. I was employed by my Doctor for about five or six months. I got so upset with these old people, these gray people, and everyone was more ill than the next one that I just had to get away from this community. So I did go back to Decatur Illinois and went out into the business world. It was a great joy really to not have to be with these older people. I had to be with younger people and I was. I was housemother for a sorority at Milliken University and so I learned how to live with girls from seventeen to perhaps twenty one in this environment. In fact, I suppose it took off twenty years of my life and really I think any person who has the desire to get into the business world, the older person, involve herself with the younger people. It is great.

STURGEON: Have you done that a lot since you have been back here then?

MULHOLLAND: No, I just was a housemother for four years and then I decided that I was going to come back to my own home and resume my retirement. I have very lovely neighbors and I have a very pleasant home to live in, lots of friends.

STURGEON: I know in the early days of Sun City they were thinking about incorporating. Did you have any feelings about that at the time?

MULHOLLAND: Heavens yes! I still want Sun City to become not incorporated. After all, we have governed this city for the last thirty-one years and I see no reason that we have to have more expenditures going out of the pocket book because you have to pay these people who are going to be the Mayor and the Fire Chief and what not, a salary.

STURGEON: So the people who run Sun City are all volunteers, is that right?

MULHOLLAND: I would say that perhaps seventy five percent of the people do volunteer their time.

STURGEON: When you first came here and bought your house, how were you able to finance it? Did you pay cash, did you get a mortgage, how did you do it?

MULHOLLAND: I am just so delighted to tell you that this house was a cash deal. This is my house and nobody else.

STURGEON: Did you ever have any dealings with Del Webb, the person?

MULLHOLLAND: Del Webb would attend some of our meetings and he was always the speaker and everybody always respected Del Webb and felt that he probably did the retirement world much joy. He was a very delightful man to speak with, of course, being as busy as he was always, one did not spend too much time chatting with him.

STURGEON: After you moved out here do you have any friends come out here because you told them how wonderful it was?

MULHOLLAND: Oh yes. Perhaps I was a very good salesperson. There were friends of ours who came out, but they didn't come here immediately to live, perhaps after five or six years they made up their minds that Sun City was a good place to retire to. Of course they missed the opportunity, most of them, in not buying in the early days because real estate was set up for the retired person and it was most reasonable. After a few years things did soar, prices did go up, materials went up, so therefore your finished house was far greater than what the first people paid. This is Phase I. In fact the area that I live in is the very first area and it was called New Life. Del Webb wanted these people who had always worked, and when they reached the age of 65 that this was the place for them to retire and enjoy the friendship, the sunshine and the wonderful weather that we have here the year round. We liked the active retirement. It means that you are not sitting in your four walls and grieving and feeling sorry for yourself, you get up out of that chair and you are really just wanting to give all you can to the community. I think Sun City has thrived and has become as popular as a retirement community because of the early retired people. They were the ones that showed the newcomers the way to live leisurely. After about maybe ten or fifteen years there were the younger groups that came in. Of course we were fifteen years older at that time and the younger group had different ideas. More advanced ideas and their ideas were advanced because they had been earning more money than the people who came here in the very beginning.

STURGEON: I read in Jubilee, the history of Sun City, that when they built Phase II and they built the new recreation center that there was some unpleasant feelings between people on one side of the road and on the other side.

MULLHOLLAND: Oh yes, we had some of these people who said, I live on the other side of the track, and my reply to them was, isn't that funny I live on the other side of the tract too and isn't it strange, the same breezes that blow, the same sun that shines, shines on both side of the track. I didn't have time to get involved in those conflicts. My dear, I didn't have time because when I went into any kind of an activity to give of my volunteer service, I didn't want to be just sitting on a chair listening, I wanted to do things, in fact, I wanted to run it, and I did. I have never been in one organization that I have not been the president. The groups were all organized and you do go up the ladder to become a guiding light to it. But I suppose I was instrumental in forming a little get together club. That club really did expand itself. We had about thirty five people and it is a book review and that group is still very active and we meet once a month. We have a vacation from this from June until October. Most everybody is away in the summertime so you have to take a rest. I was a volunteer for five years at the Northwest Hospital in Glendale and after my term of presidency was over my husband died soon after that. After I came back I just was not interested in that particular phase of volunteer work. I am still a very active member of

the Eastern Star and we have two separate clubs right here in Sun City which is connected with the Eastern Star. Only yesterday I selected, well I was on the nomination committee and naturally I obtained the officers that they needed. I didn't need anybody at all in the background to help me. I didn't get involved in any of the civic organizations. I always put my name down as a volunteer but I wasn't too interested to take that particular intimate job.

STURGEON: I know in the early days of Sun City, or maybe it was a little bit later, there were really some strong feelings about getting involved with other school districts and school taxes. Were you involved in any of that?

MULHOLLAND: No. Of course I contributed any time they needed any school monies because I have three children and I have grandchildren and I have great grandchildren and I feel that they need to have support on a voluntary basis of course.

STURGEON: So rather than paying school taxes you feel that you should get involved in some way to support the school district.

MULHOLLAND: That is the way I became involved in donating freely.

STURGEON: When you look back over Sun City and your long history can you see any ways that it has really changed a lot since the early days when you were here?

MULHOLLAND: Oh yes. Sun City has changed. It has changed for the better. If we didn't have far thinking people we wouldn't have all the activities and the different places of entertainment nor would we have the ASU come in here with their branch, so I would say it just has loads – we have really developed, I should say.

STURGEON: Did you ever have any interactions with Tom Austin?

MULHOLLAND: I didn't have anything that he and I would do together, it was just that he would come before the group and talk with us and advise us what was going on and how we should be in back of the project and so on. He was a very pleasant man and well liked throughout the Sun City history.

STURGEON: Do you remember ever participating in any surveys that Del Webb did or Sun City did in the very first few years you were here asking you questions about Sun City or what you liked?

MULHOLLAND: Oh yes, after the first year he sent out these questionnaires. What would you add to your house? What would you do to make improvements on your house? You answered those and sent them in to the proper department and that was the extent of any type of interview about the growth or the likes or dislikes of your home.

STURGEON: Did they ever interview you before you bought your house? Did you fill out one of those?

MULHOLLAND: That was my husband's job. My husband took care of all of that. Now we did not buy this house directly from Del Webb. One of the neighbors two doors away bought five houses, and this house was one of the houses he bought and it was he that we bought the house from. We came to Sun City on a Monday and had dealings with Sam, who was the owner of it and the next day we went into Glendale and consummated the deal.

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STURGEON: Now when you first bought the house and came in did you have the key given to you, was there a ceremony, or what happened?

MULHOLLAND: Oh no, because we did not buy it from Del Webb, we bought it from Sam. Sam Turnbow was his name. So it was just an exchange of signatures and the turning over of the check for the house because it was a cash transaction.

STURGEON: Now you said you never looked at a model home but did you see this house as it was being built so you knew what it would like?

MULHOLLAND: Oh yes. We saw it and of course, for me, whatever pleased my husband pleased me. It pleased him because it was on the golf course – it was within the amount of space we wanted to have and it had many potentials that really developed. We have put a lot of money into this house.

STURGEON: Can you tell me something about your children?

MULHOLLAND: Yes, I have three children, two boys and a girl. Both boys graduated from Milliken University in Decatur, Illinois. My daughter, who is the youngest, graduated from McMurray College, that is a woman's college. The three are married and are very successful in their marriages – they still have the same spouses. My three children were responsible for me having ten grandchildren and those ten grandchildren have given me great pleasure by presenting me with twelve great grandchildren. I don't see these great grandchildren often. I only have one living here in Arizona because great grandchildren have another strain of blood in them. My pride and joy, of course, were my ten grandchildren. I have six granddaughters and four grandsons. My first grandson is a Doctor, my second granddaughter is a lawyer, and my next to my youngest grandson is an architect and the rest of them all have their own business. My oldest son is a banker, my second son was connected with Illinois Central railroad and my daughter is a wonderful housewife and she is a constant companion to her husband and he is a very successful businessman with interests in Europe. My youngest son and my daughter live in Illinois. One son lives in Arizona.

STURGEON: Can you think of anything else you would like to tell me about Sun City?

MULHOLLAND: No I think I have told you about all I think is of interest.