

**Interviewer:** David Colburn  
**Interviewee:** Mr. Earnest Parham  
**Place:** Orlando, Florida  
**Date:** November 10, 1993

Questions concerning Rosewood.

**Mr. Parham:** Do you know the dates?

**Mr. Colburn:** Yes I do, of Rosewood. January 1-5, 1923.

**Mr. Parham:** 1923?

**Mr. Colburn:** Yes sir.

**Mr. Parham:** Well of course, they had the rape of this white woman that took place on the last day.

**Mr. Colburn:** Of December 31, 1922?

**Mr. Parham:** That's right. Now you want to interview me or what do you want me to do?

**Mr. Colburn:** What I would like you to do is simply take it from--how old were you at the time?

**Mr. Parham:** Well, I would have been eighteen in July of the following year. I'm eighty-nine at this time.

**Mr. Colburn:** Tell me what your parents did in Sumner?

**Mr. Parham:** My parents ran the hotel there for the Cummer Lumber Company. My father had a meat market at that time and of course this was during the school holiday and I was working in the confectionery there for the Cummer Lumber Company. This took place early in the morning as this lady, her husband was the mill lighter or engineer at this mill. He always left early in the morning. Around before day light, he had only gone just a few moments and she -- there was a knock on the door and she thought it was him coming back for something he forgot. As I understand it this fellow

came and raped her. So all day that day they were tracking -- they got the bloodhounds and they were trailing.

**Mr. Colburn:** Now this was Fannie Taylor, right? Her husband was a mill lighter, who fired the mill up in the morning. Is that what he did?

**Mr. Parham:** Well what he did was what you call the oiler. He oiled all the equipment before the others came in. He leave early in the morning way before day light. And of course this rape took place the last of December and then I was in the confectionery working all day and the manager of the store went with the group. So after we closed that night, I and the other clerk left and followed the group and they were several miles up toward Rosewood. They were not in Rosewood, this group that was tracking this man. They had an idea that it was colored man who had a wagon and picked up this fellow who allegedly raped this woman and of course the bloodhounds couldn't follow them. They found the tracks of the wagon and decided that's whose it was. When I caught up with the group they had him strung up and trying to make him tell them where he put this fellow out of the wagon. They were choking him and somebody let him down. He told them he would tell them. This one particular man had a hold of the rope and was holding a double barrel shotgun. He told the man with the wagon if he didn't tell he would shoot him. Well the fellow took them to where he thought he put the man out and the bloodhound didn't pick it up so the fellow was shot. So that was the beginning of the problem.

**Mr. Colburn:** Do you remember the name of the man that was shot, or the man that shot him?

**Mr. Parham:** No, I do not but I do know the name of the man who shot him. I would rather not tell because of the families that have come along since then. As a matter of fact, I was standing pretty close by when it took place.

**Mr. Colburn:** Was this a resident of Sumner that shot him?

**Mr. Parham:** No, he was not. That was the problem. Most of this work with the shooting and killing was not local people particularly the people that worked for the Cummer Lumber Company. Although one of the employees that was killed did work for the lumber company. They stirred up things pretty much for several days and then about the second or third day the people in Rosewood had gathered at one particular place and had heard there was going to be trouble. They were gathered at one of the homes - a two story home. There is where the shooting took place. These people tried to flush them out so they shot back to protect themselves. That is where the two men were killed at that particular time.

**Mr. Colburn:** Were you there at the scene when the shooting occurred and the exchange of gunfire or did you hear about it?

**Mr. Parham:** This is all hearsay as far as I'm concerned. Although some of the wounded were brought to our hotel.

**Mr. Colburn:** Were the men that were wounded police or sheriffs or deputies. Or were they just white men who were around?

**Mr. Parham:** Well, they were not the law. One of the men who was killed had been a deputy sheriff but he was not at that time. He had been replaced. They walked down to this house and they hailed them, but they wouldn't come out so they kicked the door in. When they did one black man was sitting at the top of the stairs. He shot the two white men and then the shooting began. It lasted for quite a while. This is all hearsay as far as I'm concern since I wasn't there.

**Mr. Colburn:** At that point, after the exchange of gunfire and subsequent days, quite a few white men came into the community armed. Where did they come from:

**Mr. Parham:** Well, some of them came from up around Taylor County and out in the neighboring areas. Now you see, the Cummer Lumber Company, Mr. Pillsbury was superintendent of the mill, and he gave instructions for none of his men to take part in it and they didn't. He told all the black people to stay in their homes when they

finished working for the day. He told them to go home and stay there until this was over with. After that first night the local people did not take part in any of the shooting.

**Mr. Colburn:** I gather, in fact, the mill protected a number of the black families.

**Mr. Parham:** That's right. In other words, there was a railroad that came right down through the town and Mr. Pillsbury understood that a group was coming down to clean out the mill quarters of the blacks. They had to come through the white section in order to do that. So he got enough white men around there and lined them up and did not let these people cross the railroad.

**Mr. Colburn:** Were there any armed troops, national guardsmen that came to Sumner or Rosewood?

**Mr. Parham:** They may of come later on but not during this time.

**Mr. Colburn:** Did Governor Hardee come down?

**Mr. Parham:** No.

**Mr. Colburn:** How large of a community was Sumner?

**Mr. Parham:** Sumner was just a sawmill town. The employees of the sawmill. There was the post office. A small town of about 400 people.

**Mr. Colburn:** Would it be about half white and half black?

**Mr. Parham:** Well, the local people that lived there it was about 60% white, and 40% black.

**Mr. Colburn:** Did any blacks that lived in Rosewood work at the mill?

**Mr. Parham:** Yes, they did. Some of them did. The Rosewood people were very frugal people. They kept nice homes, their yards were nice and had gardens and they did not bother people. Whenever they finished their work they did not go down in the mill quarters, they went on back to Rosewood. The younger people were exceptionally clean and well dressed.

**Mr. Colburn:** Did the railroad stop at Rosewood?

**Mr. Parham:** Not often. It was just two or three miles east of Sumner so they stopped at Wylly, which was four miles up the road from Rosewood and at Sumner. It was a flag station.

**Mr. Colburn:** How large would you say Rosewood was at that time?

**Mr. Parham:** Rosewood - of course that was 71 years ago. I delivered ice. My father was in the ice business and I delivered ice up there. I knew all of them and a lot of respect for them. I would imagine about 25 homes at the most.

**Mr. Colburn:** I guess there was at least one white family in there?

**Mr. Parham:** Oh yes, Mr. Wright.

**Mr. Colburn:** Was there more white families there besides him?

**Mr. Parham:** I don't know of any right in Rosewood but Mr. Wright. He had a store and had family scattered around in the neighborhood but not right in Rosewood. It was predominately black.

**Mr. Colburn:** What kind of business did Mr. Wright have? Did he have a store and what did he sell groceries?

**Mr. Parham:** A general store.

**Mr. Colburn:** Was it as large as your father's store in Sumner?

**Mr. Parham:** No it was a small store.

**Mr. Colburn:** Did people come from Rosewood to shop in your father's store?

**Mr. Parham:** No, they did not. They worked there, the younger ones did. The women, our cook was one of the Bradleys and they come in and do their work and leave.

**Mr. Colburn:** What was the name of the Bradley woman was came to work for your family?

**Mr. Parham:** I can't remember her name.

**Mr. Colburn:** Was it one of the Bradleys that was accused of assaulting Ms. Taylor?

**Mr. Parham:** No, it was not people in Rosewood at all. People in Rosewood had nothing to do with that part. I understood it was an escaped convict. The Rosewood people were not in on that at all.

**Mr. Colburn:** Did you know Sylvester Carrier? How would you describe him?

**Mr. Parham:** Yes I knew him. He was a little bit different than the rest of them. He had been in and out of Rosewood quite a bit and happened to be back at that particular time. He was aggressive kind of fellow. He considered himself the protector of the family which he had a right to. Sylvester is the one who shot these two white men.

**Mr. Colburn:** When the black community was burned to the ground, what were the buildings that were destroyed? Were there churches?

**Mr. Parham:** No I don't remember anything other than the homes.

**Mr. Colburn:** I gather a lodge and a couple of churches.

**Mr. Parham:** Yes, but I don't recall just where they were. I know they burned their homes. Now these people that burned the homes were not local people. They were outsiders. They just come in there looking for trouble and shooting every black fellow they could see.

**Mr. Colburn:** Were they drinking at the same time?

**Mr. Parham:** Well, I sure they were.

**Mr. Colburn:** Mr. Johnson also said they were outsiders. They were not from Sumner.

**Mr. Parham:** Oh yes, they were. They just set fire to all the homes and anyone that ran out of them they would shoot them. How many were killed I don't know. You see it was right of the edge of Gulf Hammond and they escaped into Gulf Hammock. Several years after when we went over into Gainesville we would see some of them there around the courthouse.

**Mr. Colburn:** How did they get out of Rosewood?

**Mr. Parham:** This cook we had we smuggled her out. My father did and got her up to Bronson and from there I don't know where she went. I left in 1925 as soon as I got out of school.

**Mr. Colburn:** It wasn't Liza Bradley was it?

**Mr. Parham:** That's right. That name is familiar.

**Mr. Colburn:** How did they smuggle her out?

**Mr. Parham:** She was put into the back seat of a car and two of the younger men covered her up and drove her out.

**Mr. Colburn:** Was this your father that drove them or someone that worked for your father.?

**Mr. Parham:** No, it was two young boys. Liza worked for the Pillsbury family and the Bradley woman that worked for us, I don't remember her name and do not recall just how my dad got her out of town.

**Mr. Colburn:** Sumner was a fairly business oriented community with a good mill. What other businesses were there and how many churches were there?

**Mr. Parham:** There was one community church for the whites and one for the blacks. There was no other business but the mill business. Of course there was the post office a couple of miles down where the depot was. There was small businesses down there.

**Mr. Colburn:** Were there any turpentine businesses in the area?

**Mr. Parham:** That was in Wylly, yes.

**Mr. Colburn:** Did they do that in Rosewood as well?

**Mr. Parham:** Wylly was about four miles from Rosewood. Mr. McKenzie owned and operated the turpentine still. He employed some of the people there and of course some of them worked for Cummer.

**Mr. Colburn:** Where did the black families go to? Was it mostly to Gainesville?

**Mr. Parham:** I assume so, yes. That is where I saw some of them in later years.

**Mr. Colburn:** Who did you see in later years that you knew?

**Mr. Parham:** I just recall one of the Bradley men. I can't recall his name. I would see him every once and awhile. He seem to be around the courthouse square when we would go to Gainesville and he would come over to the car and talk to us. Of course, at that time we would talk to him about the rest of the family but I don't recall how many there were and who all was living at the time.

**Mr. Colburn:** Did you or your father have anything to do with grand jury hearing that was held?

**Mr. Parham:** No, no.

**Mr. Colburn:** Neither one of you testified before the grand jury?.

**Mr. Parham:** No.

**Mr. Colburn:** I understand several people did testify before the grand jury. Who from Sumner testified?

**Mr. Parham:** I couldn't tell you. It was held in a small building and I was on the outside and I heard them say that it was a killing by a man unknown. That was the first killing. The others I don't know.

**Mr. Colburn:** Did they ever capture Carrier, Sylvester Carrier?

**Mr. Parham:** Sylvester was killed in that house that night.

**Mr. Colburn:** Do you know how many blacks were killed?

**Mr. Parham:** No, there was no way of really telling. It has been exaggerated in several articles that I have read. It was not as near as many as some of them say. But I couldn't tell you how many it was because I don't know how many of them got away.

**Mr. Colburn:** They say there was a mass grave. That is some of what was reported in the news. Did you have any knowledge of a mass grave?

**Mr. Parham:** Well, I was told. My father had one of the few trucks in that part of the country. They had him or his men to pick up the dead and they buried them.

**Mr. Colburn:** Did they tell him how many were dead?

**Mr. Parham:** If they did, he didn't tell me.

**Mr. Colburn:** Did they say where they buried them?

**Mr. Parham:** I don't recall.

**Mr. Colburn:** Was it in a cemetery or someplace else?

**Mr. Parham:** I don't think it was a cemetery. I don't think it was near as many indicated when you say it was a mass burial. It wasn't what you would think of 25-30 or anything like that. It was a few at the time.

**Mr. Colburn:** Were they killing women and children?

**Mr. Parham:** Yes, I know of some women who were killed.

**Mr. Colburn:** Do you know the names of the women who were killed?

**Mr. Parham:** No, I do not. I did at the time of course.

**Mr. Colburn:** How did this effect you? How did you feel?

**Mr. Parham:** It was terrible situation. I was working in this store during the school holidays at the first of the year and these outsiders would come in and want buck shots/ammunitions and we would put it up on the counter and they would just take it and walk out. My parents at the hotel - these outsiders would come in and eat and walk out. It was terrible situation. Of course we put up with a lot that you normally would not put up with.

**Mr. Colburn:** Where they Klansmen or just citizens?

**Mr. Parham:** I don't think so but I have seen articles that say so. I know for sure they were not local Klansmen. I think it was just people that heard about the situation through others.

**Mr. Colburn:** Did you know about the racial violence in Perry that occurred about three weeks before Rosewood?

**Mr. Parham:** No, I did not. Of course, when you say Perry, that is where most of the people that did the shooting come from. Perry was in Taylor County.

**Mr. Colburn:** You have been very helpful and help to fill some gaps in my own knowledge. Is there anything perhaps that I haven't asked you that you would want to comment on?

**Mr. Parham:** Of course I have always wondered what was the property that these people had. I have idea that it was picked by tax deeds later on. I don't know.

**Mr. Colburn:** Mr. Wright acquired a considerable part of the property. We have gone into the court records and looked at that and he acquired a fair amount of the property.

**Mr. Parham:** Were they reimbursed for any of that property?

**Mr. Colburn:** That is not clear. It doesn't appear that they were, but you really can't tell from the court records. All you can tell is that he ended up with the property. The impression is that they were not compensated. He might of had difficulty finding them too. I don't think he acquired all the property at once. I think he acquired it over a period of time.

**Mr. Parham:** He was right there all that time. In fact, his home is still there in Rosewood. They had a grape orchard. As a kid we use to go up there and get grapes. I knew the Wrights real well. They were fine. The blacks were good and vice versa. It was just a good black community and it was just a shame that they were run out. And they had nothing whatsoever to do with it themselves.

**Mr. Colburn:** I want to thank you and would it be alright with you if I had this tape transcribed and a copy made. I would be happy to give you a copy.

**Mr. Parham:** That would be alright.