



Access World News

Georgie Hicks, 92, grew up in Milford during the 1920s. Milford woman reflects on growing up in '20s

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MILFORD -- As a teen-ager, Georgie Hicks dressed up and danced the "Lindbergh Hop," the "Collegiate" and the "Charleston," like many others did during the Roaring Twenties.

Sometimes she wore shoes that resembled today's slip-ons. The loafer-like flats had a flap on top with a slot where she would place a coin.

"Pennies," she says. "Had no dimes."

Ms. Hicks, 92, spent her high school years at a trade school in Petersburg, Va., and was able to experience life outside rural Sussex County.

But when she returned to Milford after the school year, things were quite a bit different.

"As far as Milford was concerned," she says, "there wasn't too much going on. Everything was rock bottom."

Born in Ellendale on Feb. 4, 1907, Georgie Ross was the youngest of 10 children born to Enos R. and Celia Ross.

Her father, an independent produce farmer, was making arrangements with Trust Co. Bank in Milford to buy land the day she was born.

"When he came home from Milford -- it was horse and carriage then -- he ran into a snowstorm and the snow was up to the middle of the wheels," she says. "When he got home, he had to turn right around and go back into Milford and get the midwife and bring her back out to deliver me."

Her father built a house on the Milford property and the family moved there when she was 1.

Mr. Ross worked his farms in summer and gathered holly during the winter months for added income. He supplied two Philadelphia cemeteries with holly wreaths. Sometimes he traveled as far as North Carolina to find holly.

"He bought 50 acres of Ellendale Swamp that had holly in it," Ms. Hicks recalls. "The first year he bought it he got enough money out of it to pay for it."

Between Thanksgiving and Christmas, Ms. Hicks would work for her father in the evenings.

"I made those big holly wreaths that they put on the cemeteries," she says. "I got \$1 apiece and I could make four or five every night. All I would get (as a housekeeper in Milford) was \$8 a week."

Mr. Ross owned 30 to 35 acres in Ellendale and another 25 acres near what is now South Marshall Street between Milford and Lincoln. He grew peaches, apples, pears and various vegetables. He had a contract with a man who made wine from his strawberries. A Lincoln man made molasses from Mr. Ross' sugar cane.

"I used to shell lima beans," Ms. Hicks says. "My father would be in town at 7 o'clock in the morning and deliver his stuff to stores. What was left he had customers that he sold to."

"My mother sold butter and eggs on Saturday nights," she says. "We stored sweet potatoes and apples for ourselves."

My mother canned everything. We were like the Mennonites are now."

After school, Ms. Hicks and her friends walked out and checked on the ongoing construction of Du Pont Boulevard. They would also go to the train SL: GEORGIE13

"It was a big thing for us to watch the trains come in," she says. "We had plenty of trains. That was excitement."

Ms. Hicks attended church three times each Sunday. At Bethel A.M.E. held a service at 11 a.m., Sunday school at 1 p.m. and a final service at 7 p.m.

Ms. Hicks attended Milford School No. 2 at West and Fifth streets through the eighth grade. At the time, that was the end of the educational line for black students in Milford. They were forced to travel to Dover or Wilmington if they wanted to complete their schooling through 12th grade.

Ms. Hicks' brothers and sisters did just that to further their education. Some went to Wilmington and stayed with relatives during the school year.

"My father sent the older ones away to go to school because he knew they weren't getting quality training," Ms. Hicks says. "The president of State College let my oldest brother till his farm up there and my sister stayed in the house and kept house and cooked to go to school."

Ms. Hicks was in the first class to graduate from the new Milford Colored School, built during Pierre S. du Pont's school-building project of the late teens and early '20s.

The new principal there, J. Graham Scott from Virginia, felt the students weren't ready to move on to high school and held them back a year. He encouraged Ms. Hicks' parents to send her to Virginia Normal and Industrial Institute, a trade and boarding school. Mr. Scott had a son and a daughter enrolled there.

Ms. Hicks says her father became a du Pont supporter after reading an article in the newspaper.

"DuPont said they'd rather have one educated black person working for them than 10 ignorant ones. It was a statement that he liked and followed it through. His children were going to have an education."

Ms. Hicks and her sisters spent summers in Atlantic City working as a housekeeper for wealthy families.

"I had to work," she said. I worked for \$12 and a half a week. I saved the 10 dollars and spent the two dollars and a half. The \$10 a week would pay for my tuition come September."

She graduated in 1927 and married Wellington O. Hicks in 1929. They moved into a house on West Street, where she still resides today.

"This was all farmland," she says of the area, which is now surrounded by neighborhoods, streets and scores of businesses. "We didn't have any sewers back here or running water or anything at the time."

The couple had seven children. Mr. Hicks passed away in 1963.

"When I got out of school, I was working in Atlantic City making \$25 a week (as a housekeeper)," she said. "They offered me \$5 a week here."

"That's the way it was in the '20s, I can tell you. Especially here in Milford."

Caption: Georgie Hicks, 92, grew up in Milford during the 1920s.

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