

(Transcribed from Tape)

This is Mike Davis on April 6, 1977 interviewing Mary Lou Locklear, 214 Kennedy Avenue to discuss the Turrett House, 225 Kennedy Avenue, recently torn down after the tornado.

Davis: Miss Locklear, can you give us a little background?

Locklear: I was born in Green County and I am 48 years old. My father was a country doctor. My mother was a teacher. My uncle lived in this house 30 years. He was a lawyer. We moved to Louisville in 1960 and to this house in 1965. We were interested in this neighborhood and saw the house and saw different people who lived there. After the tornado, we became very interested in saving the house because we did not feel it was damaged that much. The roof was damaged and one wall was torn out a little bit. The estimates were about \$15,000 at that time to fix it, so all the neighbors were anxious to save it. The owner was very anxious to tear it down and build apartments so we started to try to find out what we could about the house and tried to find buyers who wanted to preserve the house and remodel. We found quite a few and each time the owner raised his price and decided he wouldn't want to do that. We kept on getting the history and different ones to help, but we need to get concrete evidence when the house was built and by whom. We got it back to 1855 when Mr. Kennedy bought it. We felt that we knew who built it, which was the Gray family, but we couldn't find the evidence. We really did a lot of research and looked a whole lot and finally found out that it was the Gray family. The man who owned it was John Thompson Gray.

Davis: Who was the present owner of the house?

Locklear: Mr. Gorman

Davis: Did he deal with Real Estate himself?

Locklear: No, I'm not real sure. He told us he was a writer at one time. I don't really think so. He did own some large old houses he rented.

Davis: What was his starting price that he was going to sell to the Community Council?

Locklear: It was a rather ridiculous price around \$3,000 or \$4,000, which of course, went up real fast. It finally went up to over \$20,000. I think the city finally

paid him \$22,000 for it and of course he also collected his insurance for \$22,000. He had gotten all his rent off it too and made at least \$44,000 from the sale of the house and his insurance. He didn't take care of the house at all. He let it sit in the rain and that did more damage than the tornado.

Davis: How many apartments were in the House?

Locklear: There was supposed to be 4, but there were 6.

Davis: Wasn't it fairly crowded?

Locklear: Yes --- There were large rooms and the apartments on the first floor and two on the second floor could have been really beautiful. I think there was one in the basement and I think one other on the second floor, but they weren't very large.

Davis: Was there ever any problem with parking?

Locklear: Yes, there was a parking problem, because the streets were narrow and there was a problem with some of the residents.

Davis: Did the Community Council find any buyers?

Locklear: We found lots of buyers. Even some of the people in the neighborhood wanted to chip in together and everybody would pay \$5,000 to buy it together and try to restore it, but we couldn't pin him down. There was one man who worked with Mayor Sloane's office who had written a check for the amount. I don't know what the amount was. He had to make a trip out of town and that was the weekend the house was torn down. He was astounded when he came back, because he thought the sale went through. His lawyer called him, somewhere from Texas, and told him that Mr. Gorman wouldn't accept his check and that they were tearing the house down.

Davis: What date was that?

Locklear: This was late in the summer. It was probably late July or August after the tornado. Everything had to be torn down by a certain time or the city wouldn't pay for the demolition and he got in just in time, within a few days.

Davis: Do you think that was his main emphasis?

Locklear: Sure, because he wouldn't have to pay for having it torn down. Really the wrecking company made lots of money on it. Mr. Gorman even went in and ripped out all the plumbing and pipes. We thought some vandals had been in, but he said that he had done it. The Wrecker was really infuriated because this was supposed to belong to him. But he got a lot out of it anyway, because the bricks would have built many houses. They were hand-made bricks and the walls were four bricks thick. The inside walls were two thick. It took a bulldozer two weeks to tear the house down. The man said he'd tear it down in about two hours. But he didn't. It took them hours to make any headway at all. The beams were hand-hewn. You could see the ax marks. The nails were square handmade nails. The woodwork wasn't fancy, not carved like Victorian. It was very simple and was not highlighted, and the stairway wasn't a spiral. It went around and up to the second floor. I think the ceilings were at least fifteen feet.

Davis: What was in the house?

Locklear: There was only a portion of the house left because it had been burned partly before the Civil War. Around 1900 or late 1800's another part of the house burned. The first time, a slave had burned it because he was unhappy about something that happened before the Civil War. — Then the second time, I don't know what happened to it, but one whole wing burned. What was left was a small part of the house.

Davis: So slaves were housed there?

Locklear: It was originally built by slave labor, to start with.

Davis: There has been some talk about a tunnel under ground leading possibly to the house located on Crescent Court in the center. Do you know of any facts?

Locklear: We don't know except everybody thinks there was. Then there was a tale that the tunnel led to the river and the Kennedys hid slaves there and helped them to escape. It is very possible, but I doubt the tunnel went to the river because that's a long, long way. It probably did go to the house on Crescent, because the

Gray family built both houses. In the restoration process of the house on Crescent they found the secret panel. I don't know if it was secret, but they took this wall out and they found a door that led into a tunnel. It probably led into that tunnel. Mr. Gorman didn't do anything or do any looking, so no one know for sure if the tunnel was there or if it wasn't.

Davis: Did he plan to build some apartments? If he did, why didn't he take that action?

Locklear: He planned to build some apartments. That was his main idea in tearing it down. We had quite a long discussion with him. He said his whole idea was financial and I said, "Why don't you repair the house and really make two nice apartments, two gorgeous apartments and really charge a big price or even build on to the back if necessary and really have plush apartments instead of all these little dinky things?" He said that he could get more out of the new ones and have less upkeep and this stuff than if he did the others. He had some plans. He told the neighbors that they were going to be really nice and beautiful. His plans were very ordinary and weren't so nice either. He was really determined and the neighbors were also very determined after the house was gone that we didn't want the apartments, because the streets are narrow and there isn't enough parking anyway. We also worked and got the zoning lowered so it wasn't profitable for him any more to put his apartments up because he couldn't put as many up. He finally sold to the city after we had taken reams of petitions around. We presented them to Mayor Sloane. We convinced him and he said, "Well, you know, that's it" which was good.

Davis: Mrs. Locklear, where did you find your sources? Who owned the house?

Locklear: I interviewed some people who were descendants of the Kennedy family, some of the Helm family and Mr. Sam English, who grew up on the Kennedy's place. His father built two houses here and he used to play with the Kennedy family. I also did quite a bit of research at the courthouse and the Filson Club. Mr.

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Bentley gave me a book that was written by one of the original Grays and John Thompson Gray, the man who we thought built the Kennedy house. We later found out that he did build it in 1838, but we didn't find the documents in time to save the house. He was an editor of the Louisville Journal for 20 years and his family was very influential in Louisville. John Thompson's father helped found the original Episcopal Church on Second Street or the First Episcopal Church and also the Grace Episcopal Church. They did a lot of other things. Gray Street is, of course, named for them. Mr. Gray wrote a book about a house. We are not sure that it is the house known as the Kennedy house or one that was built in 1828 on Crescent. This was one big farm with two houses which were the original houses.

Davis: Who was the original owner of the house on Crescent Avenue?

Locklear: This was a Gray family also. I think John Thompson Gray's father built it. I'm not sure. I don't have the documents. Then John Thompson Gray is the one who built the Kennedy house here and sold it to Kennedy in 1855. But when this house was built originally, it was named for their ancestral home in Ireland. Later on, it became known as "Fairview" because the first State Fair was held where what is now St. Joseph Orphanage, across Frankfort Avenue. Frankfort Avenue was known at that time as the Frankfort Pike. Later the house was called the "Turrets". I'm not sure whether the Kennedys named that or whether it sort of came into usage through the neighbors or different people.

Davis: When was that name first used? Was it used in the first year of the State Fair?

Locklear: What, Fairview?

Davis: Yes

Locklear: I'm not real sure. The house was here before that time and maybe it was along that time it was called "Fairview". But, of course, the bus that goes out you know is Fairview, I don't know if there is a street named Fairview. I'm not real sure when it was started to be called that. In my research and

travels there were several other people, Mrs. Pricely who helped look for documents. We kept running into the name of a young girl who lived in the Kennedy House. Her name was Barbara Peters. She lived in the front apartment in the part that was damaged most by the tornado. We looked for possibly a month or two before we finally found someone who knew where she worked. That was Mr. Bentley of the Filson Club and they said she had just been there. I found out where I could reach her. She worked nights at the Seelbach so I called and luckily I hit the right place. They told me where she lived and she called me. She came over one day and we were talking about the house. She had become interested in it when she first moved in. I think it was in February before the tornado. She's a horticulturist. She's also interested in drama and works in Shakespeare in the Park in the summertime. She worked at the Seelbach just to support herself in between. She's very interested in old houses so she moved into this place in a small apartment. She had a cat and a dog. She said when she first moved in it was cold and a brother and a friend moved her in. I'm not sure she had heard the house was haunted. There's been a general tale for years that it was haunted.

Davis: Yes

Locklear: At any rate, the day they moved in, the friend went into the basement to throw away some trash or something and when they came back out and got into the car he said, "Who's the joker in the basement in the Civil War Uniform?"

Davis: Was it a Rebel uniform? - Or a Yankee?

Locklear: I think it was a Rebel uniform because Barbara always called him her favorite ghost. He was Johnny Reb so I'm sure it was a rebel uniform. She had heard tales from other people that had either seen him or knew someone else that had seen this same ghost. At one time he appeared to someone and then just faded into the wall. At any rate she told her brother's friend that there wasn't anybody there and he said, "There was. There was some guy down there with a

uniform on just acting silly and he wouldn't say anything". She said, "No, that was a ghost" and he said, "It couldn't be. It was too realistic, he was too lifelike." She asked Mr. Gorman later about the house being haunted. He said, "Oh, yes". He had heard about the Civil War ghost who was there. He said there was a duel fought and one was a northern soldier and one was a southern soldier and that one was killed. We don't know which one, of course, but evidently he must hang around down in the basement more than any other place.

Davis: You don't know who the two soldiers who fought were? You don't know their names?

Locklear: No, she did some research and I think that they possibly were related to the family. I'm not sure but there was a fight there and we don't know whether they were cousins or whether it was some other soldier who came through because there were encampments in the neighborhood during the Civil War and it could have been just a soldier who was passing through. I didn't go into that part that much. There was another ghost which she told me about that I thought was very interesting.

Davis: Which story is that?

Locklear: This is the story of Ada. When she first moved in, she kept late hours because she had to work at the Seelbach on the switchboard. She came home about 2:00 o'clock one morning and was taking her little dog out to walk him and it was cold in the morning and she was up at the end of the court and her dog started to bark and she turned around and there was a woman standing on the front porch. It was a stoop rather than a porch. She had on a long white dress with a full skirt. It looked like the type of dress someone would wear in the summertime instead of being out in the cold on a winter morning. At any rate, the dog was just barking and carrying on so she said she walked around waiting for the woman to go inside. Finally she just had to go back in. It was too cold. As they got a little bit closer, the dog broke away from her and ran up to the woman. He was in a very agitated state. He was a little dog but he was

really having a fit.

Davis: Where did the woman go?

Locklear: The woman evidently fell into or ran into the bushes so she ran after the dog to try and catch him and make him leave the woman alone. She looked because, of course, she thought the woman would be lying there in the bushes and there was no one there. She looked all around and there was nowhere she could have gone. There was no one there at all. She picked the dog up and went inside and the dog was still very nervous and upset. Barbara went on then got all settled for the night and went to sleep. That night she dreamed and this woman came to her in her dream, dressed the same way and looked the same way. She said the woman wore her hair in a part down the middle and pulled back in a bun. She was a very distinctive looking woman with maybe a large nose but a very different looking woman and it was the one that she had seen outside. She told her that her name was Ada and that she had been married to one of the Kennedys who lived there. She didn't say too much about her life or anything. Barbara became more interested in the house and decided that she would start doing some research.

Davis: How long did Barbara live there?

Locklear: She lived there from about February to April. Maybe the first of January. I'm not sure.

Davis: Was that 1973?

Locklear: Yes and then around April 3, that's when the tornado hit and that's when she had to move. She did start doing some research and she did find that an Ada did live there or had married a Kennedy and did live there at one time. I'm not sure what the woman's name was before - I've not gone into that research and at the time we were trying to find concrete documents that we could use with the historical society and try and save the house. Mr. Gorman didn't want to save the house and every time it rained the house began to deteriorate a little bit more and we didn't have too much time. I think we had 90 days leeway before anything could be torn down but we looked and we couldn't find any concrete documents



before 1855. We probably weren't looking in the right places. We were making headway but, of course, we were running out of time and so they decided to tear the place down.

Davis: Were any of the tenants present at the time of the tornado?

Locklear: Yes, there was a man in the basement, a teacher, and he saw the whole thing happen. I'm not sure about anyone else. He was standing at the basement window as it tore down.

Davis: So Barbara Peters wasn't there?

Locklear: No, she worked at the Seelbach and, of course, they put up a curfew and she couldn't come home so she had to wait until the next morning before she came home. It was her apartment that was damaged most. Her dog and cat were there. I'll tell you a little bit more about Ada too. After she dreamed this she told some of her friends and they sort of regarded it as a joke. She told Mr. Gorman. He really told her it was a big joke, that she should have more sense and not be so susceptible to such tales and everything. Anyway, this friend decided that he had a ouija board and they would try and use it and call Ada to come and join them and ask her questions. They tried and the ouija board just went crazy and didn't do anything at all. Barbara felt a little funny about it but she tried anyway.

Davis: It didn't spell out any names?

Locklear: No, it didn't spell anything. It just went crazy and didn't do anything at all. That night when she went to bed she had a tamberine that hung on the wall with her work in the theater. The tamberine bounced off the wall. There was no wind. The windows weren't open. When she went to bed at night, the rooms were rather large and the wiring was rather strange. She turned the light off and lighted a candle. She took the candle over to her bed and then she would blow the candle out and it would come back on. Finally, she took her fingers and mashed it until it was really out. She went to sleep and Ada appeared to her in her dream and Ada was very angry and told her that she must not try to treat her as a joke, that she must not try to summon her with the ouija board and that she was very, very aggravated with her. Barbara used to go down on the river and get silt for



plants as she was a horticulturist. Her sister's boy friend worked on a barge.

Davis: What was his name?

Locklear: I don't remember his name. It think it was Lloyd. He would bring her the silt for her plants too, but at any rate Ada in this dream told her that she must not go to the river that weekend. She said something terrible is going to happen and she told her several times, "Don't go near the river. Don't go there at all." Barbara thought more of maybe somebody might be waiting to try to rob her. She thought of her own safety but she took Ada's word and didn't go. That weekend her sister's boyfriend was drowned. He either fell off the barge or whatever happened. We're not real sure about that but I do remember reading about it in the papers. At any rate, that must have been what Ada's warning was about. She felt rather strange about this too. A few other times I think maybe she had seen Ada and one time she had a dream that she was living there at the time of Ada and wore a long dress and the house was a little different. It was decorated in a different way and was built a little different. She was frightened. She was looking out the front door and a man on a horse came riding up the driveway. He rode clear on up and onto the porch and almost entered the front door.

Davis: Did he have on a Civil War uniform?

Locklear: Yes, he did. I don't know whether it was a northern uniform or a southern uniform. I think the dream ended. It didn't go on that far, but anyway she was frightened in looking at him.

Davis: Did anyone else have any of these dream about Ada?

Locklear: No, not that I know of. Other people saw the Civil War soldier in the basement. One man said that he said something to him and he just faded into the background or through a wall. If anyone saw Ada we don't know. We haven't talked to that many people who had lived there. I have heard for a long time that there were ghosts there but I didn't know any particular stories about them. Anyway, she was at the hotel and she couldn't get back out that night. The next morning she came out and her apartment was the one that was damaged. Really it was the

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roof over the top of it. One part of the wall had pulled loose. It was not really a great deal of damage considering the others. She went in and found out that her dog and cat were all right. Her apartment was completely demolished. She had wicker furniture. It was all torn up. The clothes were all gone. Her cat and dog were real frightened. She picked them up and found a towel and wrapped the cat and dog in it and started to leave. The door slammed shut so she undid the door and started to go out and it slammed in her face again.

Davis: Was it windy?

Locklear: Yes, it was windy because after the tornado there really was a lot of wind. That was easily explained because the day was very windy after the tornado but three times the door slammed. She turned around and looked -- I'm forgetting one little piece too. When she looked back there was a mirror hanging on the wall and she saw Ada's reflection in the mirror and her hair was all disheveled and her face was all sooty and dirty and there were tears running down her face. It was a very disheveled, unhappy Ada. The part I forgot when Barbara was looking for what few things she could get together that the tornado hadn't blown away, she noticed that part of a wall had pulled out and she found this little cloth package that was all sewn and was very old looking. When she picked it up, she felt it and it had something inside. She broke the stitches and looked inside. It was a pair of gold ear rings with opals and I think pearls. She did take them to one of the stores and have them evaluated. They told her that they were very old and they were very good stones. We told her that we figured it must be a gift from Ada to her. As far as I know she hasn't heard anything about Ada. Neither has anyone else that I know of since that time.

Davis: Where does Barbara live now?

Locklear: For a while she lived downtown. I had a card from her last summer and she was living in another old house not too far from the area. She was working in Indiana. I'd like to look her up this summer and do a little more research together and find out if she's seen Ada or maybe we can find out if Ada has moved

in with any of the neighbors. I really did ask Ada and Johnny Reb to move in with Mr. Gorman and see if they couldn't do him a little harm over there.

Davis: How much damage was done to the house and to the trees?

Locklear: Most of the trees went down, the really old trees. There are a few left standing, but nearly all the large trees near the house went down. We really didn't think the house was damaged enough to be torn down because the walls were very thick and all the beams were hand-hewn. I think the house would have stood forever the way it was. The roof was old to start with. Part of it was slate and part of it had been covered over. One section of the roof was really torn up and then one section of the wall was pulled out. One man gave about a \$15,000 estimate which would have been a small amount considering the size and age of the house. One great big tree fell right in front of the house and went all the way across the porch. We took pictures the day afterwards. We didn't do it with any point. We knew that later we would want to back up our story, but we were in a tornado and in a state of shock and just wandered around and took whatever we saw. The next door neighbor's son-in-law and grandchildren came the next day and took pictures. We looked at the trees and we were in front of the house. We really didn't notice because all the trees were uprooted and the roots were really taller than we were. We really didn't examine and we really didn't notice and if we had seen it because we were in a state of shock. When the films came back we really were surprised because in two pictures Mrs. Jones' grandchildren are standing in front of the Kennedy house in front of this big tree and the roots are exposed and in one spot you can very clearly see three skulls. We didn't see them and by the time we got the pictures back the tree had been chopped up and hauled away because they took the pictures back to Cincinnati and had them developed.

Davis: So very likely they had a grave cycler in the front yard.

Locklear: It could have been. Maybe it was some of those people who were in a battle there of maybe it was an old burial ground. Who knows? It may have been before the house was built because this tree had to have been over a hundred years

old or maybe older than that because it was an enormous tree and these were definitely on the under side of the roots so we had no idea. We didn't see any other bones but those three skulls really were very distinct. We looked at two different pictures of them. One was more of a side view and you could see them from both views. It's really very easy to tell what they are. By that time, of course, it wouldn't have done any good to have said anything about it but they had to have been there a long, long time.

Davis: Are these the pictures right here?

Locklear: Yes, and there are pictures of the house with what damage was done. It shows that most of the walls were in tact and the pictures of the skulls and the big tree that fell right in front of the house. We tried to save the house but then we ran out of time so we worked with our community council and the neighbors worked with the Board of Aldermen. Mayor Sloane was very kind and very cooperative with us. We managed to get the zoning law lowered. Mr. Gorman decided that he wouldn't build the apartment after much pressure, after we took a lot of petitions around and got all the neighbors to sign and all the church people. We had hundreds and hundreds of names, maybe a couple of thousand. I'm not real sure. We had lots of solicitors and the Petersons had lots of solicitors and so did a lot of others who did a lot of walking and asking people to sign. Everybody was cooperative.

Davis: What became of all the petitions?

Locklear: We gave them to Mayor Sloane at one of our community council meetings. I think we really won him over at that time because we had had battles on and off with Mr. Gorman about the apartments. The streets are very narrow and the traffic is about all the street will bear and if he had built as many apartments as he wanted to build it would have put a lot more people in the area and it really would have been dangerous and it would have really been terrible. Finally, we did convince the City Council, the Mayor and whoever decides such things, the Board of Aldermen, actually, to buy the property so they convinced Mr. Gorman. I'm not

sure just how. Of course, the money they paid for it helped some. He did sell it and it is to be a small city mini park. At the moment the plans have been drawn and it will be a passive type park. There will be a play area for children back in the back side and it will be secluded and there will be resting furniture, resting playthings for them and there will be walkways and planting and some seats and not a great deal of other things because it's not that large of a place.

Davis: Do they plan any buildings on it? Any pavilion-type structure?

Locklear: No, we had thought once maybe a gazebo but everybody thought that might draw too many people for other purposes -- like overnight. It's really not that big. It doesn't look large from outside. It looks like from inside and the house looking out and, of course, at one time that part was just a small part of the farm. The Court itself isn't that big. It'll be a nice green spot and a place to relax and I think it will add to the community. There are not many parks around this area for people. I guess the reservoir serves as a park and the little park up by the waterworks too. There's a fountain. We had hoped to have a fountain but I don't know whether we're going to be able to have that or not.

Davis: Isn't there a fountain up at the waterworks?

Locklear: Yes, there is, but we had hoped to have one out here but I don't think that's in the working right now.

Davis: Are there any other projects that the Community Council in Crescent Hill is working on?

Locklear: The Community Council at this time is trying to get together enough information to write a book on the history of Crescent Hill and we had planned to interview older citizens who really have a <sup>l</sup>walth of information that they could hand down to us from things that their parents have told them and things that they remember like Mr. English. He grew up in the neighborhood I think around '78 and he saw the whole place develop from the time he was a little boy. He saw most of the streets built that were not even there when he was a little boy. All these things have come about in a lot of these people's lifetime. We plan to interview them and take their ideas. Different ones are working on different facets



of the book and who will actually write the book. We hope to get it published.

Davis: That sure is a fascinating story about the Turret Building. Is there anything that you would like to add to what you have already said.

Locklear: Well, not a great deal. I didn't do any research on the other house -- the companion house on Crescent. It was almost demolished. The whole upper story was torn away. It belonged to Dr. and Mrs. Henry. They were very conscientious. They wanted to save the house. Mrs. Henry wanted to rebuild it but most of their children were grown and they decided that they wouldn't but they didn't let the house be destroyed. They tried to protect it. There was a lot of controversy because the whole front was torn off, but finally they found a buyer who was willing and financially able to restore the house and they must have found the original plans because it is restored exactly the way it looked before. It's a beautiful thing to see and it's very sad to know that the Turret House went when it had such little damage and this one had so much damage. In the process, the people who restored this house on Crescent found behind a closet door that had been closed in an opening that led down and back into the wall and had probably led to the original tunnel that we think led to the house over on Kennedy Street. There must have been a tunnel there afterall.

Davis: Well, I'd like to thank you for your time.

Locklear: Thank you. I've enjoyed it.

Davis: This is Mike Davis interviewing Miss Locklear. Thank you very much.

