This is an interview of Mrs. Agnes Brigdon, who grew up at Kilkenny in Bryan County, Georgia.

Interviewed by: Debbie Ulmer (Mrs. Brigdon’s niece)

Q. Where were you born?
A. I was born in Savannah in 1931, and then we lived there three years.

Q. Where did you live?
A. We lived out on the old 17, going into Savannah on the Savannah Highway.

Q. Okay, then where did you go?
A. Well, when I was three years old, we moved to Richmond Hill, and we lived in a place called Oaklevel.

Q. Where was that?
A. It’s about six miles before you get to the river, which is now known as Kilkenny. We had a large family, and my dad was a game warden for the Henry Ford Plantation. Because of this, he built us a house, which was a two-story house.

Q. Henry Ford built it?
A. Yes. And we lived there for three or four years. And then because of my father’s work as a game warden for Henry Ford we moved to a place called Kilkenny.

Q. What was Kilkenny?
A. Well, it was really a Civil War Resort. I guess you could say, because during the Civil War it was a fortress for the South. And there at Kilkenny, we have a clubhouse which is called the Kilkenny Clubhouse. Henry Ford has preserved this now, and you can see places where the ships had shot the cannonballs towards the inland and landed in the house, and the rafters which were broken at that time have been preserved by small doors doors that resemble the large doors in the house. It’s a two-story house. It has the original flooring in it which was there during that time which is made of fat light wood. It has a an adjoining kitchen which is out from the house, but the slaves did the cooking. And they had an upstairs which they lived in. And then they brought the food out to the clubhouse to serve the people who owned it.

Q. Who owned it?
A. I don’t really know who owned it at that time, but I suppose it was the Army of the South.
My grandfather had lived there for years before we moved there. We have a large family, and we all remember great days there as children. I remember the night in 1947, they had a terrible hurricane that came, and the water came up so high about two feet up on the land. Of course, this was an astonishing thing for us because we were used to swimming in the river and not seeing water on the land. We had a lot of fun chasing marsh hens. Because of all the water, they'd practically drown, and you could just chase them around with a stick and kill them. So, we had a lot of fun doing that.

I remember Henry Ford visiting us many times. My dad had an oyster house there which had people who shucked oysters and had a regular set up for washing them and preserving them and selling them. And he visited us, and we had a lot of chats with him. He was a wealthy man, for one thing. But yet he was very generous, too, because I know a lot of people, personally, that he's helped. One family was the Carpenter family. The child had eye problems, and they were very poor. Financially, he helped them, and also he helped with an operation for her eyes and getting glasses for her. And then another family was the Martin family which a child that was born with polio. He gave her an operation, built them a home, paved the sidewalk from their home to the school so that she could roll a wheelchair to school and wouldn't have to be carried or dependent on anyone else, and also made it possible in his will that she could have an operation at anytime during her life that it would be taken care of financially whenever she needed. We went to Richmond Hill School which was about nine or ten miles from where I lived. And we never had to pay for a lunch until 1948, because Henry Ford supplied all the food.

Q. For all the kids in Richmond Hill?

A. For everyone in that school. We had a grand lunchroom. We maple chairs and tables—just like a dining room suit that people would have today. It was just a blessing to a lot of people there, because everybody was poor at that time, more or less, right after the war. It was just unbelievable that other people had to buy food or buy lunches at school whenever we never did until 1948. I think, then, that's when he died or around that time is when he died. Of course, after his son took over, why this changed a lot of things. I don't know if you know it, but the boy who invented the peanut-get the oil from the peanut—he lived there; was a colored man. He lived over on Henry Ford's plantation there at those two iron gates that you enter from the highway on the left. I don't remember what his name was. It was a colored man.

Q. Carver? George Washington Carver?
A. Yes, I think so. Yes. And they also had a colored school there, too, which Henry Ford built as a memorial, I guess, to him. George Washington Carver school. All the colored children went to school there. It was a nice, huge, big school, had a teacherage that he supplied himself through his funds.

Q. Did you ever meet Carver?

A. No, I never did. I didn't know him. But I talked to Henry Ford two or three times, and he was just like you and I. All his money didn't make him any different from anybody else that we knew. I know I can tell you a lot of personal experiences that I had. Like we always liked to go hunting. This friend of ours lived there who worked for Henry Ford, and we would go on hunting at night. We'd go on the tractor. We just had lots of fun. We'd go mullet jumping at night, and then, afterwards we'd have a special place called Johnson Landing that we'd go and clean the fish and fry them, and we'd go swimming at the landing and have a good time. Lots of good memories.

Q. What kind of dancing program did Henry Ford have?

A. Well, it was a free program. He had a place called the Community House there - the Richmond Hill Community House, and he had this teacher named Mrs. Thompson which came from Savannah once a week on Wednesdays and taught. Everyone took dancing lessons there, and it didn't cost anybody anything. We had a huge banquet hall down in the same building and a nice large kitchen where you prepared the food. Upstairs you had about four or five bedrooms that people who were visiting Henry Ford or some important people, why, they could stay there. It had all Chippendale furniture. We had home economics over in this one building. And then if you wanted to take toe dancing or tap dancing or any special kinds of dancing, why, you could do that also. He had classes for people who wanted to do that.

Q. Was it free?

A. Yes. It didn't cost you anything. The school always used it like when we had our junior-senior prom or any special affair or something like that, we always used it the Community Building. It had a huge living room. It had - oh, I don't know, I can just remember about four or five couches in this room. And I just couldn't imagine one room having so many seating areas and everything so nice. But they did. It was really rich and didn't know it. I suppose, at that time, because of Henry Ford supplying this place. We had a chapel there, and this is one thing that has really stayed in my mind, because every Friday, we would go to Chapel. We called it, and we sang hymns, and we had prayer, and then we had a Christian program. And during that time, I can remember once when we were in Chapel that Roosevelt died. This was an experience that I can remember, because every-
body was real broken hearted about it because that's when we were in war, and he was really the head of the ground of the country, and everybody was looking up to him to do the right thing about the war. And I can remember that one incident which was really mobbing.

I can also recall a Mr. Newman which was an overseer of the Henry Ford plantation which was a real good friend of my dad's. He was from Cedar Rapids, Iowa. He always had a lot of interesting people there. Once I remember this guy that came. I can't remember his name, but he came, and he wrote a book, and he lived with us. He stayed with us about three weeks while he wrote this book. But I don't remember what his name was. I wish I could remember. Back then those things wasn't important. Now they're important. But anyway, I know that he really enjoyed himself.

We did lots of things. We always liked to go swimming there. We had a lot of work to do. We worked in the field a lot. Then afterwards, we'd always get to go swimming in the after-noon. One time my dad had left some corn for us to plant, and he was almost through. He had already opened up rows on the field. And rather than plant it like we should have, we sowed it. Of course, we didn't figure he'd ever find out, but when it came up, why, he found out. We had to go and pull it out every other stalk so far apart, and we didn't enjoy that so much. But we enjoyed the swimming whenever we got through in such a hurry by sowing the corn.

We had lots of pets when we lived down there. One time we had this little pet deer, and his name was Bucky. He was trained that the other deer wasn't like him, because they would never come up to the house. But he would go off in the woods, and we would hear them fighting or something. And he would come home and have his little horn torn off - his little prong torn off - because the other deer didn't like him. And we always called him Bucky. And the boys would tease him so until you couldn't hardly go out the house, because if you did, he'd just ram you right wherever he could. He'd see you walking off, and he run and just butt you with his head. Oh, it was a lot of fun. We had a couple of coons that were pets and a lot of squirrels.

I remember this friend of ours, Goethe. Mr. Goethe had a shrimpboat, and he would always come by there. And we thought that was real interesting, 'cause back then, you didn't get to go too many places other than to school and back and maybe to the store. But we always liked for him to come by and tell us the things he saw and where he went and all the places that he would go.

My dad had a sawmill, and because shipping the wood was so much cheaper by water, why, he built a pulpwood dock, they called it. And that's the one that's there now at the fishing camp. That's the dock my dad built there. And they would bring in the big barges from the ocean. They'd have to have tug boats bring them in. They'd bring them in, load them, and then they'd take them on to Union Bag or some place like that which was then, a booming business. In fact, that was the first time that I can ever remember any timber being cut
out of the forest there as far as that part of the country was concerned. I guess, you'd call it, was a virgin forest, because to my knowledge, no wood had ever been cut out of there. It was a paradise, really. We always rode the bus to school, but then we'd have to walk home in the afternoon. We'd have about three miles to walk home. Of course, sometimes it took us twice as long to get there while we stop to play awhile. We had a lot of fun doing that.

I remember when my brother left to go off to the service. It was during the war, and he left to go off to the Navy. Of course, to be in the Army or in Air Force or service of any kind then was an honor. It wasn't like it is now. Of course, we thought that was something real big for him to go off.

Q. Which brother was that?

A. It was my older brother, Melvin. He went off; I can't remember where he was stationed at on a ship over in the war zone, but it was just before the end of the war, and he actually wasn't in any combat, but his ship had gotten shelled two or three times, but he, himself, was not on land in any combat or anything. But then, my dad's brother was in the service while we lived there. He was stationed, I think, in Tennessee, but actually he did not go. Because he was a cook in the mess hall, he didn't have to go off to service or anything. We had a lot of colored folks working for us or rather for Henry Ford, but my dad was the overseer of it. And I can tell you an incident my brother did once, if you want to know that.

Q. Sure.

A. Because he got mad at this colored man - he wouldn't let him drive the tractor and let him do what he wanted to do. So, he waited that morning. The colored man came, and he took his lunch and took it in this one little room, and he just took it out bit by bit and put it in all four corners of the room. Of course, they never did get mad at him, 'cause he was little. We had lots of hogs and cows. During the war when we had rationing of the food and sugar and gasoline and stuff, we never had to worry because we had such a large family that we had gobs of stamps. We always would share with the people that didn't have any. And I remember the hog killings that we always had. I didn't like to see them come, because it'd be cold weather, and you'd have to get out there and help scald the hogs and fix the sausage and stuff like that. I guess at the time it was really good that we had it, because there was a lot of people that did not have things like that.

Q. Isn't there a certain time that you're supposed to kill the hog so he won't bleed to death or bleed too much or something like that?
Well, I don't know about that, but we usually waited until it was real cold, like in December. And then you didn't have to worry about the flies so bad, because at that time, you didn't have any refrigeration like you do now. And you had to salt your meat down and have it sugar-cured or sugar-cure it yourself. And this was done in a smoke house. You had a special house built, and you had racks that you hung your sausage on and your hams. Then you dug a hole in the middle of the room and built a fire there with oak wood, and you would smoke it for so many days. And I think the reason for that was because of the flies. At that time, the blow flies were real bad. And they didn't know the way of getting rid of them at that time. I think this is why they did that. If not, I don't know. I know once we had a lot of friends come to see us, of course we didn't mind, we always enjoyed seeing people come. It was my husband's brother, at that time he wasn't my husband, but anyway it was his baby brother. My dad had to round up some yearling, it was in the fall. And we always liked to sneak off down to the barn and ride them, and Mom didn't like for us to do. This one night we lit a lantern and we snuck off down there. Harry was with us and he wanted to ride and so being like kids we were real mean, you know and we put him on there and my brother got a hold of the cow's tail and twisted and made him buck up and down and threw him off and threw him up against the fence and slammed his back—ah on his arms, we got scared there and didn't know what to do about that, so one of us sneaked off to the house and got methiolate and put it on it, so that made it twice as bad. So there wasn't a happy day that day. But everybody had lots of fun. Then once, we always had to invent lots of things to do because at that time you didn't go downtown and buy toys and games and things like that, so we had to invent our own fun that we had. So we made this flying ginny. It's a railroad cross at the tie really, down in the ground, then you take a huge nail and you drive it in the middle of the board and you put it down on top of this railroad tie, then you get someone on each end of the tie and someone gets in the middle and gets you going around real fast and the whoever is turning it around will get down on the ground and slide out without it hitting him. One day my brother was going to do it real fast and he was just going to stand up and show us he could do it and when he did it it struck him under the arm and knoc ked him out, course we never told my mom about it because if we did we would have gotten in a lot of trouble. Those things we didn't tell. We always enjoyed Judge Harry coming down. He was the administrator of Hog County Telfair Hospital which is a Methodist supported hospital. We always enjoyed him coming because he liked to visit with you and he was real friendly. I had a sister who went into nurses training there and finished her training and nursed there for a while before she went to John Hopkins in Baltimore, Md. You might want to know too that now where the International Paper Co. is used to be a kindergarten and Henry Ford supplied everything that was used there— he built the building and he had a white board fence around it and also paid the teachers to work there. I had one young brother who went to school
there – kindergarten rather. And one morning when he was getting off the school bus – why a truck came by and didn’t stop for the school bus and it hit him. He was unconscious for 13 days and nights and we didn’t know whether he was going to live or not. But we were thankful that he did. And of course this is one of the things Mr. Ford has done for other people and I don’t know if you know but it also – over at the mansion where he lived when he came down here and stayed he has a tunnel that leads from mansion into a little club house about a quarter of a mile long that leads out to another building over by the mansion. At one time they used to ship a lot of lettuce out there. They had a regular shipping shed – right – fields, lettuce fields that they had flood gates to and they flooded them. They grew a lot of lettuce when I was there.

Q. What was the tunnel for? Just a passageway?

A. A passageway more or less and in case anything happened it would be a secret get-a-way as far as being able to leave the house or to get into the house without anyone knowing it. This is more or less what they used it for. I think you could park there and go into a secret door and go down through. I know my class went there once and that’s how I found out about it. The game there was plentiful. I guess you could really call it a sportsman’s paradise because it had been protected all these years. My grandfather had worked for years as a game warden there and then my dad had also worked there. It was anything to to drive down the road and you’d see turkeys just standing in the middle of the road and deer standing beside the road and you’d have to wait for them to get out of the road, but you sure couldn’t go down there today and do that. It’s really heartbreaking when you go there because the memories have been just changed about so. Everything has been taken away.

Q. When did they open it up for hunting?

A. After the International Paper Co. bought the property and they’ve also sold all the waterfront lots to a company and they in turn sold them to all the people. Different people have bought them. And now there is no really private forest or anything there as far as I can understand.

Q. Well then, Henry Ford preserved it himself?

A. Yes, right. He paid the people who worked there. Of course, they worked with the federal game warden also. The two of them worked together and this is how they were able to preserve the game so well, but all that’s in the past now, since the International Paper Co. has bought it out. There’s lots of good fishing there. There used to be fishing docks. Now they have a house down at Kilkenny and you can leave there and go out to the ocean and fish. It used to be an old swimming hole where we would go swimming rather than fishing. We didn’t think fishing was important at that time.
Swimming was more important! There used to be a lot of alligators there. I remember my granddad had walked down to the river one day and found a sixteen foot alligator. I think that was about the largest on that I had ever seen.

Q. Was it alive?

A. Yes, he was alive, but he didn't stay alive very long because we killed him. But at that time it wasn't against the law to kill alligators then, see. You did a lot of trapping. It wasn't anything to see an otter or a mink walking across the lawn or riverfront. Then my brother and my husband used to trap there - they'd set out coon traps and mink traps in the river and in the marsh and they did a lot of trapping.

Of course, this was enjoyable to them, but yet you sell the hide to Kirchner Furs. Furs in Savannah and get money too. But since then my dad moved away and my family moved in 1952 and moved up to Richmond Hill and from there moved to Florida. And I moved to Savannah and started my family and I have three boys and one daughter. One boy out of school, and then I have one that's in Carlisle Military School which graduates in June. Then I have one that goes to Central Effington High now - he's in the ninth grade and then I have a daughter that goes to Rincon Elementary School. And of course being water lovers, we moved close to Ebenezer - Savannah River - where we have access to water-skiing, hunting.

Q. What is Ebenezer?

A. It was an establishment when the first immigrants came from Germany. They came here through the Savannah River and built a fortress there and at Ebenezer they have Ebenezer Jerusalem Church was known as the oldest church in the state of Georgia. And at one time during the war it was turned into a hospital for the wounded because of not having a hospital nearby and they used it as a hospital. But now they remodeled the inside of it and they use it as a church now. And there's a lot of German people here - ancestors that have built their homes and have just stayed here. A lot of them have moved on into Savannah and some further on the inland. And most of the families here are German descent. People whom their families came in during that time.

Q. When did they come? When did they build the fortress?

A. I don't really know. There's a market at the church that gives you all this information but what it is I don't know. I've read it before too, but I don't remember. It was seventeen something. I used to live in Savannah, out at Montgomery Crossroads and at that time it was really known as the country. But after about 5 or 6 years people started moving out and building homes and then it became part of the city. Now you have the expressway which goes from downtown all the way out to 17 going south. There was one school in that area at that
time and then they built a few housing projects and now I understand that there must be at least three or four schools there in that area. In 1960, we bought a tract of land on the Ebenezer road which goes to the river up in Rincon, Ga. in Effingham County—again it seemed like people wanted to get out, away from the city and away from the high taxes which you had in Chatham County. And now Effingham has grown tremendously in the last six or seven years. We built onto the school or built a new school rather altogether and tore down the old school. We have approximately 350 pupils at the school.

Q. Which school?

A. Rincon Elementary. We have a housing development that has started since I moved to Rincon which is known as Westwood Heights and also another housing development which is Goshen Terrace. Down at the Ebenezer Church, which is located near the river, a lot of people go there for recreation—go fishing, skiing, swimming. The Falls owned the land there which has been a family that came here from S. C. years and years ago. A lot of the hunters use this as a place where they go to their boat in to go over into S. C. to go hunting. The Lutheran Association has built a museum down near the river there and you can make an appointment to go in and they have a caretaker who lets you in and takes you around and shows you the different things that are there. It's real interesting. The Boy Scouts have gone down and cleared the land and cut away a lot of underbrush and trees and made some steps going down to the river itself. They take an interest in this, trying to build it up and make it important for the people here in Effingham County. We also have the Savannah Electric and Power Co. who's developing a plant there on the Savannah River in the same area, and now they're talking about building a bridge from Lottner Creek over across to the Savannah Power Plant. So it would be easier for people to launch their boats and have a place to go in and out of the river.

Q. What is Blendford?

A. It's just an area out from Rincon called Blendford where people lived and did a lot of farming and there's a lot of farming done there now.

Q. Is it part of Rincon? Or is it a different city?

A. No, it's a part of Rincon. It's not in the city but it's adjoining—right outside of the city limits and they limit and they do most of the farming there. I was trying to think of the way Rincon got its name. A railroad guy came through here. Anyway I don't remember exactly how it
came to be named Rincon, but I remember Mioheal had to do a paper on the History of Rincon or how it got it's name one time.
But over in Springfield, which is about seven miles from here. We have the Springfield Herald which is a paper which is published throughout the county each week.
And then we have also Central Junior High which is located in Springfield. This used to be the colored school but now since we've integrated why this is the central located school and both black and white go there. They have a colored principal which is very capable of his job. He's really straightened out school out and straightened out some people who are there too.
Clyo is a small town just before you get to the S. C. line near the Savannah River and we know it's friend of ours, his name is Billy Ekley and his dad is rather wealthy but there located near the river is the world's largest privately owned shipping outfit in the world. And he has a large operation. He works two shifts and a lot of people work there that would not have jobs otherwise.

Q. What exactly do they do?

A. Well, they have really hardwood mostly that they take there, but they do take pine. And loggers cut the trees and haul them to the mill and then they have these different outfits that they put the loop in and it has water running down to help the chips to flow and they have a chipper and it chops it up into small pieces of wood which is used in making paper, shipped to paper mills and also used in stores where they have meat markets and different industries like that. They also have a lumber system there now that they added onto in that they cut lumber and ship it from there across ties for the railroad. It's a large industry for this part of the country.
Most people that live in Effingham work at the Union Bag or Union Camp Corp., now it's known. And because it's not far from there that they have to go and travel and a lot of the timber is cut and shipped from Effingham County to the Union Bag. The Union Camp owns or has an experimental station here in Rincon that they plant trees and take care of the forest from this area or in this area from this station that they have. They've also given five acres of land right on highway 21 and the Jaycees here in Rincon are developing it into a Roadside park which they have picnic tables there and a picnic area and they are also working on two tennis courts and a football field for the youngsters who would like to particpate in that. This real good friend of ours which is Mr. McCumber and he has a McCumber Pulpwood Co. in Pt. Wentworth. He owns a lot of land here and he too has really helped the community because he's
financially a help to many people in this area to build homes and finance the housing and the land by him. And he also has donated this piece of property which we now have a Rincon ball park located on, for 99 years, as long as we want it for nothing. Well, little boys and girls, too, as far as that goes, who has enjoyed the ball park and the freedom to play ball there which we would have not had if it had not been for people like Mr. McCumber.