

## Introduction to Interview

Pearl City is an African American Community located in Boca Raton between Northeast Tenth Street to north of Glades Road between Dixie and Federal Highways. Today, Pearl City is one of Boca Raton's designated historic districts.

This interview is one in a series conducted from 1984-85 by sociologist Dr. Arthur Evans of Florida Atlantic University. The information gathered from these interviews was used for the compilation of "Pearl City, An Analysis of the Folk History," by Sharon Wells, *The Spanish River Papers*, v. XV (1986-87) and the book *Pearl City, Florida: A Black Community Remembers*, by Dr. Arthur S. Evans, Jr. and David Lee (1990).

For additional information concerning Pearl City go the Boca Raton Historical Society's website [www.bocahistory.org](http://www.bocahistory.org), select the Boca Raton's History page, then select Spanish River, Vol. 15.

### **Alan C. Alford**

Interview on Pearl City – ca. 1984 - 85

### **Biography:**

In 1958 white resident Alan Alford and his wife, Lenore, established their home in Boca Raton. From 1960 – 66 Al served as Assistant City Manager of Boca Raton; 1966 – 1972 as City Manager; and held office as Mayor from 1973 – 1975 as a member of the "Three A's" in the city's government: Al Alford, Bill Archer and Dave Ashe.

### **Topics of Discussion:**

Boca Raton Army Air Force Base in Boca Raton, Police Chief Hugh Brown (Brownie) and his relationship with the black community of Pearl City, Pearl City and many of its residents, the small Bahamian community between Dixie and Federal Highways north of 51<sup>st</sup> Street (now Yamato), race relations and the creation of the Community Relations Board to assist in racial problems, housing needs and problems for both blacks and whites concerning the deterioration of the Dixie Manor Apartments and the Garden Apartments

I: Interviewer (Joyce Costomiris)

AA: Alan Alford

[Beginning of tape is missing. We believe Interviewer and Alan Alford were discussing Pearl City.]

I: . . . Manager?

AA Assistant City Manager.

I: In 1966 you were the City Manager?

AA: Yeah, from 1960 to '66 Assistant Manager and '66 to '72 City Manager.

I: No problem. I think he does give a date on here about when this is going on. Okay, let's see if he does. How he got into it he was talking about the war, coming here, and then building the barracks here, and then he wanted to know if that had an impact in Pearl City, and apparently Carswell [Archie] was in the service at that time. They were talking about how they had different living quarters for the blacks and those for the whites. He goes in here, "after the army" – it was right after that so it had to be in the 50s. He doesn't give a date.

AA: Well, when I was here there was a colored school over there.

I: Roadman School?

AA: Roadman School, where the Pearl City Project is now.

I: Right. He mentioned that quite a bit, but he was saying after the base closed; he was talking about...

AA: The base closed in the '50s, sometime.

I: When did you come to Boca?

AA: In '55.

I: Where did you come from?

AA: Well, I didn't move here until '58, but we used to come here. My wife's folks were here; we used to come up here every weekend while I was at the University of Miami.

I: Where are you from?

AA: New York.

I: Oh, you are?

AA: Right, Long Island, but I came here almost directly after I put five years in the service.

I: You weren't here in the service then, at all? You just happened to be in the service and you came here right after that?

AA: I came here not specifically to come here; I came here to go to the University of Miami.

I: And then you met your wife and ended up moving up here. Is she from Boca?

AA: Her folks bought here in 1954 -- bought a home here.

I: We should probably talk with her too at some other time.

AA: I don't think you've met her, but I'll give you a couple names.

I: Yeah, I'd like that and then I can go over some of the ones that we have. So he's talking about right after the base closed, and he says, uh . . .

AA: After the base closed -- there were two closings. The air force used to use it just as a touchdown for airplanes, to practice touchdown things. As a matter of fact, Lenore's cousin ran the base at the time of closing. And at the time of closing, I don't know whether that was in the early 60s or not. He was a Sergeant, Billy Bell, and he's not around anymore.

I: He isn't?

AA: He's up north somewhere.

I: What's his name, Billy Bell?

AA: Yes.

I: And he was?

AA: He was a sergeant in the air force.

I: He was talking about going overseas, and then he came back and he was bringing in the issue about when you go over there, and you don't have any segregation in the army, and then you come back here and then you're segregated again. So he thought that was kind of unusual. This was Mr. Carswell speaking.

AA: He's a great guy.

I: This interview is great. You might be interested in looking at it. And then that's all he says, and then he asks about Chief Brownie. Do you have any feelings about Chief Brownie?

AA: Chief Brown. Yes, very definitely, so far as the black/white issue?

I: Yes.

AA: Chief Brown, early on, was responsible for the harmonious relationship of the blacks and whites. He treated -- at that time you didn't have to treat them very fairly; he treated them extremely fairly, respected them, and he was just an old southern boy. They respected him and he respected them. I don't think he treated them any differently than he treated anybody else within the city.

I: I have heard mixed sides, I guess, I've heard different feelings.

AA: On Chief Brown?

I: Oh, yes.

AA: Oh yes, you were either a supporter or nonsupporter of Chief Brown, but he did, during some troubled periods, he kept the harmony in the city of Boca Raton. When Delray was having problems, and Deerfield was having problems, and the only link between the two communities was Dixie Highway, we didn't have any problems.

I: Well I've heard that yes, in fact Peggy was saying that you used to go "Yes, Mr. Brown." People were very, they did respect him and . . .

AA: Well, the Police Chief at that point in time was a real figure of authority, and Brownie, Chief Brown, played the role to the hilt. But he did an excellent job with both the black youth, the white youth, of keeping things as a calm, well-run neighborhood in a city.

I: Well, he mentioned a little bit about . . . Mr. Carswell said he had heard about him, but really didn't have any contact with him. And that's when he went into, occasionally there would be a problem, and I guess the NAACP. . . I guess the interviewer asked him were there any organizations started out for the blacks. Now I've got two questions. Peggy found in the archives an article about a men's club -- a black men's club.

AA: The Knights of Pythias

I: Can you tell me a little bit about that? We'll go into that and then go into the other.

AA: I don't know that much about it but it was a men's club, and I think basically it was for funerals, something to do with funerals. But they were active within the community; they had a meeting place. Just a fine bunch of gentlemen that met and did whatever they did in the building that they rented. I guess they were active, back then.

I: Did they have any services, or any point? Did they have any projects or something like that?

AA: I don't know. Not within the community, but most of the older, respected people within the community -- the Pearl City community -- were members of the Knights of Pythias.

I: Can you give me the names? Can you remember any?

AA: Well most of them are dead, like Alex Hughes, Reverend Clark (I can't remember what his first name is). One of them who was a more modern activist up there is Dolphus. He was of the more modern, aggressive, active . . . "Why don't we have sidewalks and this and that and the other thing?" And active at that point in time . . . has anybody interviewed Roosevelt Boyles?

I: No, that name does not . . . no.

AA: Okay, Roosevelt is still here. Roosevelt worked for the city for about 30 years -- he's retired. Roosevelt is from Alabama and Roosevelt was going to get on the bus in Boca Raton after his discharge when the then City Engineer Prichard yelled across the street, "Hey boy, do you want a job?" And Roosevelt dropped his bag and came to work for the city and retired; and he and his wife (his wife was a maid for Myrtle Fleming, I think it was) Almeta Fountain . . .

I: Almeta Fountain; we've interviewed Almeta. I didn't realize that was his....

AA: His name is Roosevelt Boyles. I don't know how many names she's had.

I: Well Peggy really talked with Almeta a whole lot. In fact I think she's going to interview her again, so that's good to know. We haven't talked to Roosevelt, as far as I know.

AA: Nice guy

I: Okay, I'm glad you mentioned that.

AA: And, of course, the Jacksons have been here a long time.

I: We interviewed the Jacksons, and I'm trying to think of . . .

AA: That was a unique community up there, but there was always a great spirit of cooperation between the races. They didn't want any problems; I guess you gotta say the whites didn't want any problems, so everybody got along very well. At that point in time, in fact in the 50s and 60s . . . 50s . . . 55, I would have felt safe to have my wife walk through that neighborhood at midnight. There would not have been a problem.

I: I interviewed Carl Douglas, Carl and Carolyn Douglas; I'm sure you know them, and that's exactly what Carl said. He said, "You would never have to worry about a white woman walking through the streets of Pearl City, at any time of night."

AA: Now the newer youth, both black and white, that's a different situation.

I: That's a question that Art has asked a lot of the people on these interviews, to comment on what they feel the youth is today and how it's changing, and how their feelings are. Do you have any comments on that too?

AA: I think the youth, both black and white, have changed. They don't have the responsibility for their town, for themselves, for their families, for their neighbors, for their fellow man. I don't think it's just black. I think it's black and white. I think, perhaps, the black became a little more aggressive a little earlier on and they probably learned it from the whites; I don't know. But there came a point where I certainly would not have sent my wife to walk through Pearl City at midnight; but, also, there came a point where I wouldn't have sent her to walk through any neighborhood where there was a close congregation of people at midnight.

I: So it's not necessarily indigenous or unique to the Pearl City or the black area?

AA: No. There were naturally problems -- little problems, not big problems -- and as you got into the 60s race became more spoken of and thought of, whatever. We had some very good friends within the Pearl City/Dixie Manor community such as Reverend Clark, Alex Hughes; and if they ever got an inkling that there was a problem they would call, because they were interested in the city going on and everybody being treated equally.

I: Did anyone ever talk with you about Alex Hughes before he died, like the Historical Society?

AA: No, but I knew him; he was a fine gentleman. They named that park for him.

I: Right. His death, particularly his death I guess, is really what triggered a lot of the concern about interviewing some of these people because they had made such major contributions to the city. Let me just give you some of the names that we've interviewed, and if you can come across with some off the top of your head, just do. Bud Jackson, now this is a question. Did you know Bud Jackson?

AA: Oh, sure.

I: There was a name, QJ.

AA: QJ Jackson.

I: OK, is that the same?

AA: No.

I: Okay, because that was a question I had with Carl Douglas.

AA: There's a large contingency of Jacksons, and I know the name QJ. And I know a lot of these names because a lot of them worked for the city, and at that point in time I used to sign the paychecks by hand. So I knew a lot of them, and a lot of them used to come in and borrow money from me and whatever. There weren't that many employees, so I knew them.

I: So QJ was one that used to work for the city?

AA: Yeah, I think so.

I: And it is not the same person as Bud Jackson?

AA: No. That and Amos Jackson, and he still works for the city.

I: We interviewed Amos too. And a Ms. Graves, Mrs. Graves; now that, we think, is Adela. I think she was a Dolphus.

AA: Okay, could very well be.

I: Does that sound familiar to you?

AA: No.

I: Ulysses Brown?

AA: Oh yes.

I: We interviewed him. Lois Martin (she is now); that was a good interview too.

AA: Yeah.

I: Alvin Fountain; Alvin and Gladys, I think is his wife's name.

AA: Yes.

I: Henry James.

AA: That name I don't recognize.

I: George Spain

AA: Yeah. I don't know whether George is still around or not.

I: Yeah, we interviewed George.

AA: Okay.

I: We interviewed him, and I believe they had, the Spain brothers, they had a hotel or a bar or something or some type of gathering . . . Was that the one that was near Tom's, where Tom's is now?

AA: No, there was a Harlem Inn Tavern, the Dolphus' had one; there was a Moon Glow. The Moon Glow was where Tom's was and I don't know whether that was Spain's or not. That was the old Moon Glow.

I: What was the one you said before Moon Glow? Dolphus? Harlem Inn?

AA: Harlem Inn.

I: Harlem Inn. Where was the Harlem Inn?

AA: That's where the church is now on the corner opposite the uh . . .

I: On Glades?

AA: No, I don't think so. On Dixie.

I: And then there was The Dolphus; where was that one?

AA: That was a little south of..., it's where his building is now. Did you interview a White?

I: No.

AA: I don't know if he's still living, it's where a little sandwich shop is now, he had a little sundry store. I can't remember what his first name is.

I: One of these mentioned a little grocery store that was south or near where Tom's is. I wonder if that's the name of it. White's was a sundry store?

AA: Yeah.

I: I'll have to see on that one. Do you know his first name?

AA: No, I can't remember.

I: Then there was Archie and Irene Carswell and Jacqueline Harvey.

AA: I don't remember her.

I: That's all that we've interviewed at this time. What I'm trying to do is to interview some white people to get some more ideas and to hear their ideas. One thing that... I'm dragging, going off in different directions, but one thing that I have found when interviewing Lois Martin, when I was reading Lois Martin's interview, was that her father worked for the Japanese. Do you know any other people that worked for the Japanese? That was unusual, we didn't hear a lot about that.

AA: Well the Japanese owned the land that the air base was on, and they took it during the war and they had Bahamian communities, and they had black communities.

I: Did they have Bahamian communities here?

AA: Not specifically in Boca. But we had up where the K-Mart is, there was a community of blacks in there in the 60s. No water between Dixie and Federal; no running water, no sanitary facilities, no nothing.

I: When you said Bahamian community is that what you mean by that or did you mean people from the Bahamas?

- AA: People from the Bahamas and this group of people did work for Morikami or whatever, and just never left. They shifted their interests in farms west of Delray, but they stayed there.
- I: Okay, when I started this in Key West, in that area, there were a lot of black Bahamians that settled in Key West, and there are some that are down near Coconut Grove. There's a section right behind Coconut Grove that's predominantly Bahamian and I was curious if there were people from Bahamian decent here. But what I found was that most of them were from Georgia and the South, and I really haven't found in reading these interviews any Bahamians in Boca.
- AA: As I recall, that little settlement were the Bahamian blacks, and when the Board of Health closed that area down because it was without any sanitary facilities, no running water, no nothing, they relocated in Delray somewhere.
- I: Okay, that's why we don't have any of them here. That's the Hidden Valley area? Where K-Mart and the driver license place is now?
- AA: Right. It was between Dixie and Federal and north of 51<sup>st</sup> Street. There was a mess, and quite truthfully many people never knew it existed. It was heavily overgrown with big trees, etc., and they were just back in there.
- I: People just didn't go back in there to find out what was back there?
- AA: Yes, I was astounded when I went in there that it ever existed, because I went up and down the highway a million times and I never knew anything like that was in there. And they did away with that in the early 60s.
- I: How did they get rid of it, is it just that there was no more work and people went ...?
- AA: Well, number one, they were doing their work in Delray. There was nothing really left in Boca Raton that they were doing, but that was their home and it was hard to transport them. There were makeshift buildings in there, and whatever.
- I: Back again to the NAACP and Urban League or anything like that in Delray. They seem like they're two different towns, essentially. And I live in Delray now, and I know that little area. Delray has always been known to have certain racial problems and people to be concerned with, and that's kind of why it was kind of interesting that we never did have anything in Pearl City and then...

AA: Well the only reason, and the biggest concern back in the 60s when these racial problems were being had in Delray, they were also being had in Pompano and Deerfield and the only link between the two was coming through Boca Raton. And that became a concern for the safety of our people, black and white, along Dixie Highway, which was predominantly black at that point in time. That area was the concern of the safety from these groups, more violent than anyone in Boca Raton, but there was not much of a problem.

I: When they created it at this point, you said you were not going to take credit of creating the Community Relations Board. Do you recall who was involved in the Community Relations Board or do you recall any of that at that time?

AA: Oh, you can get that from Pam or Candy Bridgewater from the archives, who was the original on there; but I think it was probably just created because times were changing, and the newspapers were . . . you know it was all black and white and problems. And we didn't have it here; and it was just another safety valve to forestall any problems. And if any of the blacks or, it was the Community Relations Board, or anyone, had a problem, at least they had a sounding board to go to. And back then the blacks would not come before the City Council just . . .

I: They were afraid or they just . . .

A: No, I think because they were not attuned at that point in time to coming before an authority board . . .

I: To express any concern that they might have?

A: Yes, to express any concerns that they had at that point in time. I was surprised that many of them . . . they would call me or they would call Chief Brown or they would call somebody that they knew and let us know what was going on.

Well, that's fine and sort of an old fashioned way to do it, but that didn't work as time went on because new people moved in that you didn't know, and they wanted immediate answers and whatever. So the Community Relations Board was a good sounding board for them. And at that point in time, we only had (I think) three Jewish families here, and then as the IBMs and the University came, there were more and more that came in. They needed a sounding board, or anybody else that felt aggrieved or had a problem, they at least had a place to go. And I don't remember how

active they were. Lois Martin was a member for a long time. I don't think they were very active, and I think basically they weren't very active because at that point in time not a heck of a lot of people had complaints. Pearl City got street lights and whatever. The biggest problem in Pearl City was the old Dixie Manor Apartments owned by George Sogg in Miami Beach.

I: Is he still living?

AA: No, I would think he could not be. He owned the [Kiawaga?] Wrecking Company up north in Chicago, or somewhere; but no, well, I don't think he could be.

I: And he's the one that owned Dixie Manor but he didn't live here?

AA: He did not live here.

I: So they had the absentee landlord problem?

AA: Yes, it was a constant problem, but no more of a problem than the Garden Apartments across from the old City Hall. They were white, so the plumbing problems and the rat problems, and every other of the problems, and it took a lot of doing to get rid of them at Dixie Manor.

I: One thing that has been kind of interesting, and we were looking while talking to some of these people, you can talk to one of these people and they may say well (if you ask them about another individual) they say "she doesn't really -- she hasn't been here long enough -- she's only been here 35 years", and from what Sandy was saying, it sounds like some of these people are really concerned about the new people that are moving into the new Dixie Manor project, in terms of their destroying...

AA: Yes, because all that land up there at the Dixie Manor has basically been handed down through the families. There's no mortgages or probably very little mortgage; they took great pride in ownership. A lot of the houses just plain got run down because the people just plain got old, but most of those have been taken down and the ones that are there, you can see, they are in basically fine shape, but yes certainly there is a concern because for all those years it was a tightly knit community absenting the Dixie Manor Apartments that was always a problem within there, because it was rental and it was transient and I would assume Dixie Manor is the same way now. People do, particularly the older folks, have great pride -- great pride of ownership of something. It's like the insurance guy, the old Debit Man, going around for a quarter a week. Those people wouldn't have missed their quarter a week payments for anything. They were very

proud that they had a \$5,000 or \$1,000 life insurance policy. They were also very proud that they owned property.

I: Well, that's coming through in a lot of these interviews. Because it is interesting, that was one of the other reasons why we wanted to interview that too, because they're right in the middle of prime commercial property and nobody has sold. Essentially they have not sold out to a developer or any commercial interest whatsoever.

AA: And I don't know whether that will come. That may come with education, where a family member gets transferred somewhere else and loses interest in the property, and the same thing as any other neighborhood. I don't know, I suspect not for a long time.

I: Can you think of any other names or any other people, even white people who were involved or were very close to the blacks?

AA: Well, Myrtle Fleming, but I'm sure somebody has interviewed her. There's not a heck of a lot of people who were here, because when I came in there were only a couple of thousand people.

I: Are there any people who have gone up to Delray? We interviewed one of these people; who was it who lives in Delray or Deerfield? One of the Jacksons or Browns, I don't remember. One of these people don't live in Boca anymore.

AA: Yes, I'm sure because housing became just extremely... No I can't, but something will come to me and I'll call you. I know I'm not much help to you . . .

I: No, you have been. It's interesting to hear your perspective on it too.

AA: But the Community Relations Board was not established because it was an acute problem.

I: I don't think -- I probably should not have made it sound like that.

AA: It was a sounding board for if somebody had a problem.

I: This is how he's (Archie Carswell) describing it and he says, "Well, we went to any disturbance or arrest, and then we would look into it and report back to our headquarters which was in Delray at that time, and we

would take it from there; and Boca has always been a place that didn't like headlines. So one time it was an arrest in Pearl City due to the policeman, and they had a march here, and Boca didn't want any headlines about the march, about the arrest, so we were still over at the NAACP" and he kind of runs on . . . " . . . so Alan Alford, he was the City Manager then or City Mayor; but anyway he got some of us and asked us if we would come down to City Hall and talk. So we went down because he had heard about the NAACP and it was going to investigate what was happening up here in Pearl City at that time. But they didn't want NAACP coming in Boca, not Boca Raton because they didn't want that kind of publicity. So we went down and Alan Alford asked us if he organized a Community Relations Board would we serve on it, and we told him yes".

AA: Oh God, yes; now I guess I do recall it! Yes, yes!

I: He said that you said that you'll have some recognition up in Pearl City so that when an arrest comes they can bring it to the Community Relations Board and they can investigate it and turn it over to the City Council, and City Council will handle it from there.

AA: Archie was an original member, I think.

I: "...Alan Alford organized the Community Relations Board so I served on that, and I became Vice President for the Community Relations Board and I served on that for quite a many years and I retired from that and I received a certificate for serving on the Community Relations Board for so many years. There was a lady Mayor at that time in City Hall". Dorothy Wilken, I guess.

AA: No, it was Roberta McHenry.

I: Oh, okay, that's interesting.

AA: It was probably Roberta McHenry. That's long before Dorothy.

I: I was thinking she was like in the 70s wasn't she?

AA: The 60s.

I: Roberta McHenry?

AA: She's an attorney.

I: Is she still alive?

AA: She was the City Attorney, and Carl McHenry was a teacher out here at the school. I think Roberta was Mayor. I know she was the City Attorney but there were no other lady mayors that I know of.

I: When was this then?

AA: In the 60s.

I: Mid-60s? Now were you the City Manager then, not the Mayor? Weren't you Mayor?

AA: Yes, but I wasn't Mayor until '73; I got fired as City Manager.

I: You went through the same story everybody else went through.

AA: Back in '72, and I was Mayor in '73, four months later.

I: Was that why you were fired -- so you could be Mayor?

AA: No, I just disagreed with Norman Wymbbs and some of that little crowd, and took great delight. That's when the three A's came in.

I: The what?

AA: There was Norman Wymbbs, Willie Thompson, and I don't know who the other one was. They fired me and four months later I was elected Mayor, and Dave Ashe and Bill Archer were also elected and we cleaned all those little rascals out.

I: That's interesting. Who was in office when you were Mayor? Was David Ashe?

AA: Have you ever heard the expression the three As?

I: The three As?

AA: Well, that's what it is. Alford, Archer and Ashe.

I: Oh. How long were you all in office?

AA: For two years.

I: When you were City Manager then, who was mayor, Norman Wymbbs?

AA: Norman Wymbbs -- a very short term there. He was the only mayor who was ever removed from office by his fellow peers. He was only mayor for a short period of time.

I: Why was he removed from office?

AA: Why was he removed from office? I don't care to . . .

I: No, it doesn't have anything to do with Pearl City and I really don't need to keep this going on for that.

AA: No, you don't.