

Brenda Timmon-Gunter
Current and Historical Rose Hill Gardens Resident
Route 9 Oral History Project

Interviewed by: Michael Emmons, Center for Historic Architecture and Design, University of Delaware

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Abstract

Brenda Timmon-Gunter is a current and historical resident of Rose Hill Gardens, a community along the Route 9/New Castle Avenue corridor. Having previously lived in Millside, a nearby public housing project built during World War II, Timmon-Gunter and her family moved into the Rose Hill Gardens community around 1962. Having lived there until 1976, before leaving for college and returning roughly 10 years later, Timmon-Gunter offers some perspective on the social relations and physical layout of Rose Hill Gardens, as well as community interactions with other local subdivisions. To date, Timmon-Gunter remains an active member of the Rose Hill Gardens Civic Association, providing insight into the changing status of home ownership and demographics in the community.

In this interview, Timmon-Gunter recalls life in Rose Hill Gardens from 1962 intermittently through to the present day. She remarks on how many young families owned homes in the community when she was growing up there and how that has changed to predominantly renters in the community. Like many others in the neighborhood, Timmon-Gunter's family relocated for her father's work with Chrysler. She recalls a sizeable number of individuals who also worked for the company and how they moved to Delaware from Detroit as a result. As she describes it, her home in Rose Hill Gardens was small for all six family members, but the homes in Dunleith were even smaller. She remembers feeling a sense of differentiation between people who lived in Rose Hill Gardens compared to those in Dunleith but couldn't understand, at such a young age, why that was.

Describing her childhood home, Timmon-Gunter says that owning a home was a big deal for her parents. Having originally moved from Natchitoches, Louisiana, which she described as "poverty stricken" at the time, Timmon-Gunter's parents took immense pride in their home. Over the years, Timmon-Gunter recalls her parent's making changes and alterations to the house, most notably, the addition of a screened-in back patio that the family used as a TV room. She personally recalls not enjoying the house very much because it was not an independent structure, and there was not much room to run around and play. She notes that many families in the neighborhood had installed chain-link fences around their property, which she has always despised. She attributes the prevalence of these fences to a fencing company located near the community.

Although there is now Rose Hill Community Center, Timmon-Gunter recalls that as a child, the baseball field in Dunleith functioned as the center of the community. She recalls that everyone in the community would come out for games, which were "really, a big deal." She notes that the area around the baseball fields were used for cookouts and community events, but her recollection of

the area goes back to before it had been cleared out and formally established with other game fields, paved paths, and gazebos. Timmon-Gunter adds that life in Rose Hill Gardens was centered around people's homes, as well. As she remembers it, "Everybody knew everybody," gathering on porches was a common sight, and all of the kids would play together despite the occasional neighborhood fights.

Describing recreational opportunities for herself and other children, Timmon-Gunter says there weren't many formal activities. She recalls her parents being strict about where and with whom to play, not often letting her and her siblings venture outside the front yard. She notes that most families had access to cars as well as public transportation; however, her family primarily relied on their car to get around. When speaking about racial demographics, Timmon-Gunter recalls that neighborhoods such as Rosegate, Dunleith, Simons Gardens, Eden Park, and Hamilton Park were generally considered Black neighborhoods, whereas Swanwyck and Collins Park were white neighborhoods. Of the local communities, Timmon-Gunter only remembers Garfield Park as being integrated in the late 1960s and early '70s. Brenda attended both Dunleith and Rose Hill schools for her elementary education and later attended De La Warr High School in the late 1970s, remembering it as being predominantly Black. She recalls much of her early education being shaped by access and progressing desegregation efforts.

In the final 10 minutes of the interview, Timmon-Gunter discusses the stores and shops in Rose Hill Gardens and how they have changed hands over time. She recalls taking trips with her family to visit relatives in Louisiana or Texas when she was younger and staying behind as she got older to watch her siblings while her parents made the trip independently. She notes that neighbors would keep an eye on her and her siblings, back when there used to be a real sense of community. Now, Timmon-Gunter laments that that feeling of togetherness has declined over the years as the community changes from mostly family-oriented occupants to older/individual residents. Timmon-Gunter tries to remain an active member of the Rose Hill Gardens community despite these shifting attitudes, acting as president of the civic association and attempting to revitalize community interest in local affairs.