

# Mildred Spearman Discusses Apple Festival

## 2022 interview (edited clip)

### TRANSCRIPT

#### Speaker abbreviations

MS: Mildred Spearman

JJ: Josh Johnson (interviewer)

LH: Leslie Hagerty (interviewer)

**JJ:** When you first moved here what are your first memories of apple growing in this area, do you remember orchards all over the county, and the first apple festival you went to.

**MS:** The apple festival then, the Jaycees put on the beauty pageant for that and so we were immediately involved because at that time, as strange as it sounds now, the original one had just local queens but then they started in because the Jaycees also put on beauty pageants in towns all over the state, they were the ones that sponsored the pageants. So it fit in that we have girls from all over the state come, and they did, but then where would you put them up, where were they going to stay? They stayed in private homes. So when they came, people here were kind enough to take in one or two young ladies, and you really got to know them or, they got to know a lot more about westminster than they would have known otherwise so it was really PR that back then they didn't talk about it too much, but it was great PR for the town and the area. We always went to the apple orchards and that was a very very important part of the festival because we picked an apple grower of the year each year and that person was celebrated, of course all of them were, and then through the years there were just so many funny things that happened that nobody would believe.

(18:16) One time that they did the Jaycee beauty pageant they were gonna have someone who still lives here play the organ instead of using a piano well that was gonna be really "uptown" I guess you'd call it. They moved her organ over there to the old school and she said well somebody is gonna have to spend the night with it. So my husband and one of my daughters slept onstage at the College Street School so nobody would steal the organ. So there are a lot of stories that don't have anything to do with anything but they make a good tale, and they're true.

**LH:** So what would you say the obvious goal or purpose of the apple festival was early on?

**MS:** I think it was, Mr. Sandifer and the group that started it, he was not alone. He was already in politics statewide and I think he knew that we had something that other people did not have and was willing to go the extra mile to tell our story. At that time, apples was, we were world famous, and of course the Groucho Marx story fits in with that because he owned an orchard there are rumors as to whether he set foot on Oconee soil but I do not know that, I wasn't here then.

**LH:** How do you think the growers felt about Apple Festival?

**MS:** Well the growers at that time were hard working people. And the growers as we laughed about them through the years and it wasn't a funny laugh. It was comical in one way. Is that every year they would say, no I don't have a good crop, no it's not a good crop but they stayed with it so you know every year there were problems but they had to make money or they couldn't do it the next year.

**LH:** Right

**MS:** Then they got invested so heavily that we had a niche and the niche was that we could get apples out a week before a month before other areas so you get a fresh apple not a stored one.

**LH:** Yeah ok. Did they feel like Apple Festival was helpful to their business?

**MS:** I think they did because the visits to the orchards really showed a lot of people and the county agent at that time was Charles Morgan's daddy and he knew his stuff and he was willing to tell it.

**LH:** I've seen him in a lot of write ups

**MS:** And so the girls went there, we got pictures of them, they always ate apples. One time we took the apple queen to Florence to a Jaycee convention. She was from Florence and I was so we went and we carried 6 bushels of apples or something to share with the Jaycees. That poor girl ate apples so long that she was not a happy camper but at least she got to go home to her own house so (laughter)

**JJ:** Do you have any other favorite memories from all the festivals over the years?

**MS:** Well my children always enjoyed it and there are some stories about that because back in the early days we had I can't tell you the name of the town but we had a lady that made floats and she came out of North Carolina and a big part of the festival was putting it together getting sponsors for the floats and getting people to ride on them. Well because the Abbotts always had one and their girls and mine were the same age they would ride on the float every year and on some others too but one of my children told me when she was about five years old and i Have a picture of her in a it might have been a Christmas parade but she had never seen a parade.

**LH:** Ohh

**MS:** She had been in every one.

Laughter in the group

**LH:** I love that we have some parade footage and that's always what's so impressive to me is the scale and all the people involved in that parade. So was that a big emphasis early on the parade?

**MS:** The parade was really big because we got out of school early. You quit at noon on that apple festival Friday and then we had the bands from the three high schools at that time that would always perform but that would give them a way to perform.

(23:23)

**LH:** Right. What other big elements were the focus early on?

**MS:** Well one thing that was always interesting was that they would have the state judging of apples at the state fair and so our apples won a lot of awards through the years and people could brag about that also

**LH:** They still do

**MS:** So the bragging rights for that were good and then we also had the baking contest that still goes on and it gets kind of funny because there's some people that have won it so many that is like don't come back you want them not to come back. One year this might have been later because I helped with that in later years but a lady and a man came in and the baptist, I think it was called the Baptist Courier used to have a recipe in it every week. And uh this couple came in and they were from another county and they had come in on a motorcycle carrying a cake

**LH:** Ahhh (laughter)

**MS:** Well you would assume that would be the lady and her husband. It was not. They were neighbors and she had read an article on the cake baking contest here and he was a good cook and his wife was handicapped and she had just ridden up here to hold the cake.

**LH:** (Laughter) that was nice of her

**MS:** And he won

**JJ:** That's great

**MS:** When he came back he brought his wife also and the three of them came in the car. Things like that do stand out in your mind and I'm sure other people have other similar or different things that was hilarious. Because she, the lady that was his neighbor, had shown him the recipe and he made it and he read about the she had read about the Apple Festival and said why don't you go and he did.

(25:56)

**LH:** So what were other events at Apple Festival early on that we don't do any more or don't do as often.

**MS:** Well we had the race.

**LH:** Yeah the 5k or foot race

**MS:** Yeah and that was a lot of fun. And looking back you think of things that used to be now I don't think you could do it is way because most the churches used pre-written sermons but back then Sunday was a very important part and they asked each of the churches to some way include our culture God's gift to us and most of the people did some way include it.

**LH:** Oh ok.

**MS:** And ours changed it something completely which you could do that then

**LH:** I guess I didn't know about that. That's neat. I know some of the other things we've seen in the programs that I know we've done in the past not too long ago but the window decorating contests and

**MS:** The window decorating contests that was a really special thing because you know everyone was trying to out do their neighbor all the way down Main St. And at that time my father who had moved here was working in one of the stores and he put together a nice one and it won and he was so excited and of course whoever won was excited but that one kinda rotated around because one year someone would say i got the best idea and i'm not going to tell you about it.

(Laughter)

**LH:** I think that's the neat thing. I think last year or year before we brought back the street dance.

**MS:** Yeah

**LH:** I think that's a neat one

**MS:** Those are a lot of fun and had been through the years

**LH:** Who else would you say was really involved heavily over the years other than Cecil obviously?

**MS:** Louise McClure. She has stayed on there or come on and off through the times. Brian White when you go back to the beginning Mr. Sandifer and he has stayed with it for all of these years and there were others that had moved away even that were very important at times.

**LH:** How does the work actually get done? That's a lot of work.

**MS:** Well the good thing about it was that each thing was mainly sponsored by a group you know you had a group that did this and a group that did that.

**LH:** Kinda like the Jaycees?

**MS:** yeah and then you would have a committee that did the judging of the street the window decorations Carolyn Harris they always did that through the agriculture department.

**LH:** oh ok. Um.

**MS:** And that was her job she did it for years.

(29:15)

**LH:** yeah. Do you think at its height how would you have described it?

**MS:** Well it was an event that everyone came from miles around people don't do that anymore and of course for the last few years you haven't been able to so and the other thing was that we were the oldest without a skip in a year agricultural festival in the state and i know that was true in the early 70s. And the peach festival skipped a year but part of the reasoning in my head that we never hired anybody to do anything and when they got messed up was when they let industry run the show and it didn't work and they went back but other people hired professional people to come in professional people that don't live here don't know how a rural area works and most of them were from cities and that's just not small town South Carolina no matter where you are small town South Carolina in all over the state is pretty much equal. I mean you can find...

**LH:** Well i think you can tell the thing about it that's lasted is the community focus. It's the time when everybody really comes together.

**MS:** And they always have. And people that didn't participate in anything else would show up for the apple festival. It was kinda like Christmas but on a different scale.

**LH:** Yeah. What. I know it's important to recognize that it is the South Carolina Apple Festival. A lot of people associate with Westminster for obvious reasons but I noticed in those early parade videos every state official you could think of was in the parade.

**MS:** Ohhh we used have everybody. Now Strom he showed up every year and we had dignitaries um well we had the luncheon but to begin with the luncheon was at night it wasn't a luncheon it was a banquet they called it at that point and time. And when you recognized the

people half of the people were not from here but they had some kind of title in front of their name besides Mr. and Mrs.

(31:55)

**LH:** So their role was to really, they saw the festival was a way

**MS:** They saw it as a way to be known and be seen.

**LH:** And also show that they supported

**MS:** It was a very good thing because one time in the last few years the man that's over the agriculture state agriculture man came here and i brought him to this building (General Store Museum)

**LH:** Yeah I remember him being here.

**MS:** And I talked with him at the luncheon and said he would like to see it. So he came on over here. I walked him over you know showed him where it was.

**LH:** Well thanks

**MS:** And now then the other thing I know we are gonna miss because Mr. Sandifer has always closed the luncheon or the banquet with "God Bless America"

**LH:** It's impressive.

**MS:** And it is impressive. It brings tears to my eyes every year.

**LH:** He's remarkable. When I see him do that I always think that's something

(33:01)

**LH:** So how do you think we've talked a little bit about how it's changed over time, where do you see it going?

**MS:** I just hope that we can keep the same small town atmosphere and include the things that have happened through years you know it didn't happen overnight it's not nearly as big as it was at one point in time. But everything changes you know cotton was the king and that went away. Apples have gone away to a degree and now they have storage for everything and you shipped things all over the world. And of course we did have things shipped from here and that was very important at the time for fresh apples and they came out of here and went all over. But uh times have changed and the nice things the prettiest place that we went every year april the 15th the same day you had to get rid of your money would be to go and see the original where the where the building is built now there was the beautiful top barn and you could just go right there and you would have thought you were in paradise because it was nothing but the pink apple blooms.

And just to see it was spectacular and it didn't matter which way you looked they were there. And we don't have that any more but I can remember it so it's a nice memory to have which we've had to live on in the last few years pleasant memories.

**LH:** So where was that exactly? Do you remember?

**MS:** It's where that new place is the

**JJ:** Chattooga Belle?

**MS:** Chattooga Belle yes

**LH:** Yeah it's gorgeous. I can imagine. He's done a good job

**MS:** And he's done it. And that's one other thing. That's a business that came in through the apple festival and because more than likely he wanted to do that but he has continued with the agriculture and now has added to it. A very impressive place to go.

**LH:** I know we've done a lot of research about the growers and the history of the industry and I think apple festival that's its obvious purpose was the height of the apple industry that it supports the growers it's still an important thing.

**MS:** It is an important thing

**LH:** We still encourage them