

Florine B.Coe 1988 Interview

Transcribed by Gene Wood, Park Volunteer, April 4, 1997

I--Stands for Interviewer

FBC--Stands for Florine B.Coe talking

Names of places and persons are spelled as heard, but not necessarily correct.

Words which are not clearly understood are in brackets[]

Tapes are identified by writing on actual tape

Tape marked "Florine B.Coe, Masseuse", side A

I---This is May the 5th., 1:50 in the afternoon at the Buckstaff Bathhouse up on the 3rd. floor in the north writing room and our interview is with Miss Florence Coe, [FBC--Florine] I---Florine, I'm sorry.

FBC-Well, lot o' people call me Flo, Florence, but it is Florine.

I---Why don't you tell us how you got started working in the bathhouse.

FBC-Well, the first time I worked in the bathhouse, I was 18, and I was still in High School and I worked a half a day at the Ozark in the office. An'um', I just loved bathhouse work, I enjoyed meetin' all the different types of people that come in, an'ah, then I worked there about three years an' then I quit an' raised my family an' didn't go back to work at all until my baby was 9 years old. An'ah', I wanted, needed to go work then, so I said if I could work at the bathhouse, it would be okay. An' there wasn't any openings openings in the office so I went back to school, trained to be a masseuse, and went right to work. I've, let's see, the first place I worked was at the Maurice bathhouse, Len Smith was the manager there then, an'that

was 27 years ago an' I've been workin' of an'on ever since. I worked steady until I got the children all through school, an' on their own. Then I stopped for about 12 years, an' I've been back now for 5 years at the Buckstaff, just workin' part-time.

I---Did you go to the spa school here in town?

FBC-Yes. Ah, we had up at Libbeys an' Fred Vermier was the instructor then, an'

took about, about 4 months training. I was glad we had one here because at that time I couldn't have left, couldn't have left Hot Springs to get

my training,so I trained right here an' I went to work just the very next Monday after I passed my exam at the government office,so I.

I---[Ah,what did] when you were at the Ozark,starting out in the office,what did you do exactly ?

FBC-Ah,most,just waitin'on customers,oh,I also helped with the book keepin', I,ah,would,ah,help,help a little,we had a regular bookkeeper though,but I assisted with that but mostly it was just waitin' on customers,took some dictation,an'sendin' out letters,an'just general,general office work,but my main job was clerk,I waited,sellin',sellin' bath tickets an' massages an' just loved every minute of it.It was real,real interesting to me,well I've always loved people an' this is one place you really get to meet a lot of people.

I---Just in the short time you were there,were there a number of people that you recognized that came back year after year?

FBC-Ah,not then,of course after I started in the [masseur],well,we just had, I assume got to recognize some people,year after year,that would return. In fact,I'm massagin' a lady now that I started,um,workin' on when I was at the Maurice. An' when I left the Maurice,she followed me to the Quapaw,an' I gave her massages all the time there,an'ah,then when I left to go,we traveled in construction work for a while,so while I was gone, she came to the Buckstaff then,so now I,I'm massagin' her again when I'm work,Miss,it's,ah,Miss Shermer from Illinois,an'she been comin'all o',all of these years,ever since I've been workin'. 'Course,there lot o' others that come,but she's the one that I remember so clearly because we kept in touch all these years.

I---You said you like people,that's why you like to work at the Bathhouses. What,is there any part that you,you don't like about the job?

FBC-Well,the heat.Other than that,I really like the work.It is hard work,but I enjoy it,but now I'll have to admit,the heat does bother me.It jus',ah, gets next to me,but,thats,thats the only part that I really dislike,is the, the heat.But I'd rather do this,even in the heat,than any other kind of work.

I---Ah....When you started at the Maurice,doin' the massage,was it,were they on the minimum wage yet or were they still on [piece work]?

FBC-Ya...it was,ah,well let's see,it was still piece work.I can't remember

exactly, but I know it was somethin' over \$2.00 a massage that we got when I first started, I can't remember the exact amount, but ah, it was all commission, an' we were guaranteed a, a small amount, because we had to be

there, whether we were busy or not, I mean, someone had to be there, but I can't even the amounts we were guaranteed, we never did drop that low. They all, I always did enough that, ah, paid, paid my way.

I---Were they, ah, open 6 days a week then?

FBC-Umm, no, oh yes, they was open 6 days a week, they did close at noon on Saturday. But now, when I was workin' the first time in the office, they were open 7 days, they was open 6 full days an' a half a day on Sunday, but when I

started givin' massages, 27 years ago, it was 5 an' a half days, so, ah, 'course I liked, liked that better, I never did like the Sunday work.

I---Ya'....Did, ah, did a lot o' people that, ah, when you had been doin' the massage, do you notice that alot of 'em come with the rheumatism or somethin' or just to relax?

FBC-AH, a big majority, when I first started work, I think the majority of our people come with the arthritis an' now I've noticed a trend though, the last few years, that we get more and more young people for tension an' we still get the arthitics, the rheumatism, and the rheumatoid arthritis, an' we still get a lot of that, but in addition to that, there's a lot of young people come for tension. We have honeymoon couples, an' then, lot of college students, they get all tensed up with their finals, an ah, we've, we've noticed a change that we get more young people than we did when I first started.

I---Do they tend not to stay quite as long?

FBC-Usually not as long. Now I used to have 'em that would come, oh, we got lot

o' books for 18, that come an' stay at least 3 weeks. But we get a lot o' younger people now that come an' maybe take one or two, but usually, you can depend on em' comin' back again, the next year or sooner if they can, but they don't take quite as long, the ones that are, that are not rheumatoid or arthritic.

I---Do you know, by any chance, about where people would come from?

FBC-Well,at different times of the year,in the winter,a big lot of ours,of course,come from Illinois an',an' the other northern states. The ones that, that can,they like to come an' stay during the coldest part of their weather, an'ah,an' of course,during our racin'[unclear],we get more an' more people from Texas an' Oklahoma,the surrounding areas where they can come for a weekend,but we still,still get more people from the north,I believe,than just about anywhere else.

I---What seems to be the busiest time of the year?

FBC-Well,I've noticed the last year or two that I've worked,we have been busy all summer,seem like it starts with the [racin'] an' they start gettin' busy probably the latter part of February,an' then we have maybe just a, a let-up a little bit between the time the races leave and school lets out,and then we get the summer group an' we're busy all summer.It starts, FBC-ah,slowin' up just a little in November,then 'course December and January are our slow months,but that's when we get lot o' people though that come an' stay,eh,they like the slow,easy pace of a slow season. So we're, there's always 2 masseuse stay pretty busy,even in the winter.

I---Was it like that when you started,or was there more of a dropoff?

FBC-There was more of a dropoff when we started,it seems that,now when I first started,I know we could always expect it just be extremely busy in October but seem like the summer wasn't nearly as busy as it is now,but always the help,course we were always busy even when I first started,sometimes we'd have as many as 4 an' 5 masseuse busy at the Maurice,but,um,the summers didn't seem to me like they was quite as busy as they are now.

I---Were they using the pool in the basement of the Maurice when you worked there?

FBC-No..Uh,Uh,They,they told me about it,ah,but I,they wasn't usin' it when I was there.I don't know long it had been since they had discontinued.

I---What do you remember about the stained glass or the decorations in the Maurice?

FBC-Now I don't remember too much about that because we worked upstairs,

an' ah, I think most of that was probably on the mens' side, the, seem like it was fancier, I would hear, an' I never did get on the mens' side, but it seems from what I could hear that it was, ah, had the most decorations in the fanciest part, because that's where we were, the very first place I worked [well, there at the Maurice] we had 3 masseuse all in one room. Didn't even have partition, no curtains or anything, we just worked three together in there, an' ah, I'll admit I was glad when I changed to the Quapaw, an' we had the partition where it was a little more private for the people, but I really don't remember too much about the decorations or anything at the Maurice.

I---Do you remember what they were using the [props room up on third floor with the skylight, did they use that for a gymnasium, er?

FBC-Oh yeh, uh-huh, they did. They had the gym up there when I was there, 'cause

ocassion'ly my daughters would have to come with me to work, an' ah, if there's someboby up there to supervise, well I'd let them go up there, I didn't unless there were, but, they had the gym up there when I was, ah, workin' at the Maurice.

I---Do you remember anything about what kind of equipment they had [word inaudible]?

FBC-Really, I don't think, I think it was a little past its' prime, because I would go up there ocassionally at noon an' work out a little, an' they did have the stationary bi-cycles an' the weight liftin', but not um, not a lot of our modern day gym, things like we have today, it was, I don't believe that it was at its' prime when I was workin' there.

I---Do you remember anybody ever, ah, a well known business people or a famous

people comin' through, that you know about?

FBC-I've been tryin' to think of that, now last ,um, oh, it's not been but a few months ago, when, ah, Rosemary DeCamp was here, an' I know I was massagin' her

an, ah, I saw her last name an' it didn't dawn on me for quite a little bit who she really was, an' we kept talkin' an' I realize that it was the Rosemary DeCamp, an' I've since seen her in several old movies, but 'um, I haven't massaged as many of the famous people as a lot of the others have.

An' we've massaged, 'course, some of their television personalities from

Little Rock,an',but,um,I guess Rosemary DeCamp was the only movie star that I remember,workin' on.But now,we've had others here,I know,ah,the men would speak about,I think Bill Cosby was here,one time,an' then they named sev,several others that were here,but Rosemary was the only one I've worked on.

I---Did you ever have any duties beside just goin' in doin' massages at different places?

FBC-No,the first bathhouse I worked at,at Maurice,that was all I did,we didn't even have to check on our ladies,they,they had a maid that did all of the cleanin',they took care of all of the dirty linen,everthin' they kept in there,an' then they also kept our numbers an' would give to our customers an' bring 'em up when we were ready for 'em. So I guess that was the easiest we ever had it,we didn't have to do anything but just be right there,and we did fill our box,you know,an' keep,a' see that they were kept warm,things like that,that pretained to massage. Then at the Quapaw we,um,

it was practically the same way,we didn't have any duties except given a massage,we hardly ever went back in the bath department at all. Now here when we get real busy,we,we don't give bathes,I mean,we're not trained to do that,but if the girls are real rushed,we'll get out there an' help 'em clean a tub or take one of the ladies up,with their permission,the attendants permission,give 'em a shower,but um,we don't do any,you know,

the actual checkin' their time,we,we check with the attendant before we do any,anything,but if they're extremely busy,well we don't mind gettin' out there an' scrubbin' a tub real good because ah,they'd,they'd do the same for us.

I---Do you have to clean your massage area or do the maids have to clean it?

FBC-Uh,Yah....we're,we keep our massage areas clean,now maybe a part time worker,will,Helen does most of that,but if I'm workin',you know,several days at a time,or several weeks,well,I make sure that the massage area is clean.

I---What would be the biggest changes that you've noticed over the years from when you started 'til now?

FBC-Well,that'd sure be hard to say. I've just ah,like I say,of course,the

change from the different bathhouses,the difference in the,in the way they did for,we's all together in one an'we each have our own private booth now with,ah,complete privacy,but ah,an' I'm sure that this bathhouse had that all the time,so that wouldn't be a,a,real change over the time.

I---What,ah,lets go back to the Quapaw,about what year did you start workin' there?

FBC-Let me think. You know,that'd,that'd be hard. I worked at the,I'd have to remember the date I started,27 years ago,an' I worked at the Maurice about between 3 an' 4 years,then went to the Quapaw. Now I'd have to figure that in my head to see what,what year it was.But then I stayed at the Quapaw about,I guess,about 4 years,an'ah,an' that's about the time we got our children,grown,an' my husband went into construction work,so I was,we's on the road for several years.

I---Do you remember if there's anything left in the Quapaw,in the bath area?

FBC-No,I can't remember anything left,that's why,now most of that is in the Fordyce,is it not? The.....

I---[Well it's] that's why the Quapaw has a little bit but we don't [intend to hang it over,just hang it over,and put a false ceiling under it, sometime.

FBC-That musta' been,I mean,they must have already done that because I know we

were so,admired the Fordyce so much,with all o' the stained glass in it, an'ah,so they must have already painted over that or I believe I would have noticed it. Now we worked on the main floor there but I don't remember seein' any of the,an' never once did tell us that the mens' side was the, was the fanciest tho,that thats,that they got most of the decorations [an' things].Well,I can remember way back when a,lot more men came than women,it was the thing that men just did,they,they needed the relaxation and women finally come to realize that they needed it too.

I---Is it more equal now?

FBC-It's a lot more equal.Now,some days the women 'll be much busier than the

men an' vice-versa,so it's,it's lot more equal than it used to be.When I worked as a high school student,when I was at the Quapaw,I mean at the Ozark,well,just very few ladies 'd come,but,but the men were always busy,

so its a,I,that is one change that's taken place over the years,more and more women are takin',now than used to.

I---Do you remember the,a,spring in the basement of the Quapaw?

FBC-Uh,huh,oh yes.That I remember real well.We,ah,took the children down there

several times to see that spring. It's real interesting an' they took visitors on tours down there regular,when,I don't know whether they still do that or not,well [I---We do do that], you still,still do that.Yah,that was very interesting to me,was that spring down in the basement.

I---What did you do with the communities regard for the,for instance,business's of bath-houses?

FBC-Well,as a whole here in Hot Springs,I don't think the community knows very

much about it.That's jus' the,the ah,the way I feel about it.Now the ones that do,I mean,a few of our local people that do come,they love 'em,an'they really,really take 'em regular,but it's such a few of the local people, they seem to think that jus' somethin' for the visitors.And I have honestly run into one or two local people that didn't know what,what I was talkin' about,when they saw that television program where I was given a massage,

they said that's the first they'd ever realized that we ever had a bath-house here that was [in] operation,so I,I think our local people need to be informed a lot more what's goin' on here in the bathhouse.

I---[We need to inform more people,uh-huh].Say,I meant to ask,do you remember any [words inaudible] people that were coming with arthritis,took your cure,
[see what miracle].

FBC-There's one,but now I can't 'call any names,that's been a long time ago,but

this little lady,um,came that had her hands so crippled up that she had the,the maid had to dress her and undress her,she couldn't feed herself, an' in massagin','course we're trained not to do heavy massage on Rheumatoid Arthritis when it's active,an' oh,her hands were so hot and so swollen an' for several days there,I would jus' barely rub over her hand but she's got to stay two weeks an' by the end of two weeks,I was massagin'

her purty, purty well an' she was able to dress herself an', an' ah feed herself an' then the next year she came back, I can remember her so well, an' her hands, she could still use 'em. They had, now they were deformed, I mean,

it left, it left their mark on 'em an' she still had arthritis, we don't, we don't claim it's gonna cure it, but she, it was in her shoulders more, an' her hands, she would show me, she 'as so proud that she could dress FBC-herself, an' I remember that one particular case, a lot of 'em we seen, 'course they, where they put their cane aside an' can walk, it limbers up the joints enough that they can walk alright without their cane, we've seen that happen so many times, an' even, even crutches they can get, they don't throw 'em away, they know that it's subject to comin' back, but we have seen so many people helped with it. 'Course I'm a gre', I'm a great believer in our water here, an' we feel like the massage really helps too, but ah', I feel like the waters very important.

I---Do you find any people, in recent years, that have come under doctors' [recommending][at this point]?

FBC-Ah, we do get a few, yet that come. When I first started, now that is a change too. When I first started, jus' 'bout every other one would have doctors' instructions, but now we only get a few, jus' one once in a while that comes with their doctors' instructions. An' ah, I feel like that's one reason that the bathes are not busier than what they are, because the doctors don't recommend it. They don't, um, they don't talk against it, I don't mean that but they jus' don't recommend it like they used to. An' we, but we used to get jus' worlds of people with their doctors' instructions, jus' have t' give 'em the massage and their bathes, jus' what they needed.

I---Well, I don't have any more questions, ah, anything that you wanna' add about, [FBC-Well, I, I don't] your position?

FBC-I don't of anything, only I know that these bathes really make me feel good. When I have time, I get out there at noon an', get my whirlpool an', an' if I've got aches an' pains, well I can take myself, we don't impose on the attendants unless we're really bad shape, but we can, we get those hot packs an' I'm a great believer in 'em.

I---[How many more years you gonna' be washin?]

FBC- Well, that's a good question.