

ABSTRACT: Susanna Cristofani Yatman was the last resident of Bostwick, in Bladensburg, Maryland. Her family had lived there for several generations. It was bought by the town of Bladensburg in the 1980s. The house was built by Christopher Lowndes in 1746 and the first Secretary of the Navy resided there. The house is one of few historic structures still standing in the Port Towns. Susanna speaks of personal memories and developments in Bladensburg. In her view, the town has changed a lot. She recently moved to Saint Leonard, Maryland, but fondly reminisces about her early days in the town.

Susanna Yatman on Bladensburg: You go there and there was a People's Drugstore and it had a counter. Mother would meet me there after school. We'd sit at the counter. And there was this woman called Mom, big fat woman with moles on her face with little whiskers. But everybody liked Mom. And we'd have a beef burger with cole slaw on top and a vanilla milkshake. That was a treat, but we did it a lot. The drugstore wasn't that big, but it was big enough to have a cosmetic section and a drug section and little odds and ends that drugstores carry.

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View of Bladensburg and Bostwick from a Watertower



Rear of Bostwick House



Central Hallway of Bostwick House



Susanna Yatman (right) and Susanna Cristofani (mother, left)



Susanna Yatman in the Bostwick Garden

Port Towns Interview Project
Suzanne Stasiulatis interviewing Susanna Cristofani Yatman
Interview at 1650 Parran Road, Saint Leonard, MD 20685
February 20, 2008

Suzanne: Can you state your name, age, and where you're from?

Susanna Yatman: Susanna Yatman, 66, and I'm from Bladensburg, now living in Calvert County, St. Leonard, Maryland.

Suzanne: How long were you a resident of Bladensburg?

Susanna Yatman: All my life, up until '97 when we moved out.

Suzanne: What is your occupation or previous occupation?

Susanna Yatman: I worked for the federal government, personnel and labor relations. I went to the University of Maryland and got my degree there.

Suzanne: And you lived at Bostwick. How long did you live there?

Susanna Yatman: From being born there until '97.

Suzanne: What is your favorite childhood story about Bladensburg?

Susanna Yatman: I don't know, because I was anticipating the interview and trying to think what can I tell you that is a really neat childhood memory. I'll get one and then three days later I'll think why didn't I think of this one. It's not a favorite childhood memory, but it's the one that comes to mind right now. Some of the pictures we were just looking at showed me as a five year old with a little boy who lived at the Market Master's house named Shaw Matthews. Shaw's mother was of the opinion that you shouldn't discipline the children, because it would break their spirit. My mother didn't have that approach to child rearing. So, he would come up to play and we had cucumbers and vegetables from the garden. And mother had picked a lot of squash and zucchini and cucumbers. And we had a Japanese Quince bush in the backyard. It's a huge bush. It has a little of stickers on it. So, Shaw proceeded to throw all the vegetables into the bushes. My mother was furious. She grabbed him and said, "You're going to go in there and get every one of them." And he said, "No, I'm not." And mother said, "Yes, you are. You're going to go in there and get them." So, I just remember that was a big emotional moment for that kid.

Suzanne: What about your horses?

Susanna Yatman: Always had horses. When I was born, my mother had a horse, Bunny. When I was born, the horse had a colt, the cow had twins, and mother had me. And they got a new car. It was a big year '41. So, she had the horse and we had the colt. We called

her Chip off the Old Block. So, she was Chippy. Then, mother and I would go riding. I would take the older horse and she would ride the younger one, once I got up to five or six. We would ride over to Cheverly, go kind the back way behind what is now...it used to be the Cheverly Movie Theatre. I think it's the Playhouse now. You can go that way. Sometimes, we would go all the way up to the railroad tracks that take you into, I guess it's called Kent Land or Kent Village. But my horse did not want to go over a bridge that had railroad tracks under it. Then, there were time I would go riding by myself, when they were building Kennilworth Avenue. Kennilworth Avenue was going to go all the way up to the Baltimore-Washington Parkway or up in that direction. So, when they were just building it, they were just grading it, it was wonderful to go galloping on the dirt, the packed dirt. That was great. That was probably in the mid-50s. Relatively speaking, it was not too long ago. That was fun to do. I always had horses. My first little pony was Champion. He was a Shetland. Then, I got a Chincoteague pony named Buttercup. We had little name tags. All the horses in the barn had their own box stall and their name tag. And we had two cows.

And I used to milk the cow in the morning and my father would milk them in the evening. He worked at the government printing office. So, even up until Junior High School, I'd be out there in the morning, head up against the cow's hindquarter, shoulder into her, milking the cow, smelling great. And then my father would milk in the evening. And we had chickens and ducks. We used to do major chickens. One of the outbuildings there is called the Upper Hen House. And it's cantilevered and I think it's kind of drooping, because certain kinds of insects have eaten up the wood pretty bad.

Suzanne: Did most people have farms?

Susanna Yatman: No.

Suzanne: Smaller houses and smaller lots?

Susanna Yatman: Yes.

Suzanne: Did a lot people work for the government?

Susanna Yatman: Yes. It then rapidly became a bedroom community. When cars came to be more affordable, then people could go out to the suburbs and drive in. Or as time went on they brought out the trolley car. When mother was going to school, she went to Central High School in D.C., and she would walk to Mt. Rainier and get the trolley there and ride to school that way and come home in the evening and walk. So, that's a pretty good walk from Bladensburg to Mt. Rainier.

Suzanne: What is your favorite memory of Bostwick House?

Susanna Yatman: I think my favorite memory is more of a recent one. My father passed away and then my mother was living there by herself and I was living in D.C. So, I moved out. My husband, knew my parents better than I did for years. I was off in the

Bahamas and he was there helping my father do stuff. So, you know, I got married and took care of mother. One of the things I miss most about it is every evening... We had four dogs, lots of cats, but four dogs. And we would take all four dogs, without leashes, and we would walk past the barn, through there, took a left to go up to the orchard, where we had a lot of pear trees at the time. My grandmother planted those. So, we would take a basic walk up there and come back down. And then this little dog was my favorite, Jake. He would come down and then run down the sidewalk and get on the back porch step. And turn around and wait for me to come, because as soon as I came around the corner, he would get his dinner. So, he said, "Are you coming? I'm waiting for you to hurry up and come." That was nice.

Another nice memory, I had a really nice vegetable garden. The garden was a different location than that Japanese Quince is. I miss the garden.

I miss Christmas in the Drawing Room. That was a great place for Christmas. Always had a fire in the big fireplace and sit in a semi-circle around the fireplace and open up gifts. So, I miss that.

Suzanne: Did your mother tell you any stories, or your grandmother?

Susanna Yatman: My grandparents were all gone by the time I arrived. So, I didn't hear any of their stories directly. Mother told a story about how they would go up in the attic. So, my father got some rockets and set off some rockets from the attic and they went right across the street and landed in the roof of the people across the street from us. So, that was kind of an oops thing there.

I don't know my grandparents were not too well off financially. My grandfather, who was a Civil War veteran, he got something like one-hundred dollars a month for being disabled. And grandmother took in cats and dogs. And they really had a hard time scraping enough money together to send mother to Goucher, which is where she went. So, with a hundred dollars he got on time, he went down to D.C. on the horse and buggy, and got mother a pony and brought it back. I think the pony's name was Billy. And that birdbath that may still be down there outside the garden was his head stone.

Suzanne: Do you think it was necessary to have a horse at that time?

Susanna Yatman: Oh yeah. My grandparents never had a car. They always got around by horse and wagon or walking. My grandmother did a lot of walking.

John enters

Suzanne: Who was that?

Susanna Yatman: That's John Keeny. He's from Massachusetts, but he moved down here. His wife worked at Galudet. He used to live near the arboretum. And then he was driving by one day and saw the Market Master's house and said he would like to live

there. My folks had just fixed it up after another tenant had moved out. So, he and his wife rented that for a number of years.

Suzanne: If you were writing a history about Bladensburg, what would you include?

Susanna Yatman: If I would do a history about what I went through...It was a time a lot of people my age can relate to. It was a time when you could walk the streets at night. You could be out playing with the kid across the street. You didn't really worry about getting hit by a car or getting abducted or shot. It was a much more relaxed time. People got together. We had picnics in Decatur Heights, which is up beyond the Elementary School, as you head north. Two or three times a year, you'd have a picnic and everybody would bring their favorite thing. One lady brought homemade bread. She had four loaves. You had to get there early for that, because it was nice and warm. It seems like every year people would bring their specialty. And when you went to school, you went to school with people you lived next to. Later on, they started bussing, so you didn't always go to school where your school was located. And I think that was too bad. I used to be able to walk to High School. So, I would write about that. I would also recall where the skating rink used to be was a vacant lot. And maybe twice a year the carnival would come. I might get a dollar in change. I would go to the carnival by myself and meet my friends from across the street and we would spend an evening at the carnival, and never worry about being supervised or being afraid. We weren't afraid back then...freedom to walk and to play and to ride your horse wherever.

Suzanne: If you were writing a history of Bostwick, what would you include?

Susanna Yatman: I had a certain affection for it. It was a person. It has a certain charm about it. It's got its certain foibles.

Suzanne: We were talking about some of the components of the Bostwick House. The addition (kitchen) was built at the same time as the buttress was built. And that was a jail?

Susanna Yatman: Yes. Mother knows of a letter somewhere, but I've never come across it. I think it was Benjamin Stoddard, the first Secretary of the Navy, he was up in Philadelphia or wherever they were having their meetings. He wrote back to his brother to put an addition on Bostwick. He wanted an addition on the south side of the house. The house went straight up. It needed something. A lot of old houses had buttresses even if it's a low buttress to keep it from giving out. So, he asked for the buttress to be built on the south side of the house in the form of a two room jail for his unruly slaves. And on the opposite side he was going to have a kitchen attached to the house. Before that the kitchen was not attached, which was the way you built back then. But luckily it was brick kitchen, the old one, because a lot of times the kitchens would catch on fire. But if you take that kitchen and get rid of the bathroom and the pantry...my mother told me the fireplace is back there, that they used to cook on. And all the utensils are there, the pots, the arm that came out to hold the pots. It was all there and they just sealed it over. You

know, as you got running water, you had to create a bathroom that was handy, so you had to sacrifice part of the kitchen. So, the kitchen was a lot bigger.

Suzanne: And there was an icehouse?

Susanna Yatman: Yes, an icehouse not far from the outside kitchen. It had the shape of a fish. Back then, you recycled stuff. So if you needed brick to build something else, you took down that building and did something with it. So, they did something else with that brick.

Suzanne: And all the barns are currently there were there?

Susanna Yatman: Yes. They are there but reconfigured. The roofs have changed and I think my grandfather added a second floor. But when you're in the barn, you can see the difference between where the horse stalls were and if you go further back where the newer workshop is, that's where the carriage was kept. Then, it became the maternity ward where the horses had their calves.

Suzanne: We want to know about history and development in the community. What were your experiences as a child or young adult?

Susanna Yatman: Development wasn't a big issue. It didn't seem like things developed as rapidly as they do now. I guess development would be...when in the beginning all of 48th Street was houses. Then, this corner got sold and a gas station went up. Then, this corner turned into a plumbing store. Then, little by little you had the eroding away of a street that was lined with residential single family homes. The domino effect, they all went down. There are really few left. And Annapolis Road was the same. You'd go out 48th Street and take a left to go toward Peace Cross and there were houses on each side of that road. They were narrow lots, but decent sized houses. That was development.

Suzanne: Did people move elsewhere?

Susanna Yatman: I guess. I think property value went up and commercial real estate became more valuable than residential. They passed on. The children didn't particularly want to stay there. They wanted to go somewhere else.

This was something I was thinking about. When I was going to school, and even Elementary School, not till Junior High, everybody stayed there. I had this girlfriend of mine, Peggy. She moved away. I didn't even think it was in the realm of possibility that people moved away. My mother always lived in her house. It just seemed that people stayed and that was it. And when Peggy moved, I'm like, wow what a concept. They're moving and they're taking everything out of the house, and they're going somewhere else. It was just hard for me to fathom. So, I guess that's kind of development. Then, it became more and more of people not staying in one place anymore.

Suzanne: How did Bladensburg change during the time you lived there?

Susanna Yatman: Drastically. It just became like a lot of areas. You had D.C. and then you had the suburbs. It's like dropping a pebble in the water and it has a ripple effect. Certain people in D.C. go to the suburbs and the people in the suburbs go out further and then those people go out even further. You get a different mix and a different income bracket as time goes on. I have to say, it went kind of downhill.

Suzanne: Economically?

Susanna Yatman: Yes. Economically. That shopping center...I call it the lower south side. It's where Ramadass Drugstore. It used to be like a mall. You go there and there was a People's Drugstore and it had a counter. There's a memory. Mother would meet me there after school. We'd sit at the counter. And there was this woman called Mom, big fat woman with moles on her face with little whiskers. But everybody liked Mom. And we'd have a beef burger with cole slaw on top and a vanilla milkshake. That was a treat, but we did it a lot. The drugstore wasn't that big, but it was big enough to have a cosmetic section and a drug section and little odds and ends that drugstores carry. But now you have one that is 10 times as big. But at the time it seemed fine. Then, we had a women's clothing store and a men's clothing store. And down at the end you had an Acme. And then across the little street you had the old Safeway. And all that seemed like wow, this is wonderful. We were so close. I could just go over the fence and be in the drugstore or shop for my father's day present at the men's clothing store. So, I guess that was the first thing of development and that was OK. The lady sold out her shop and the guy sold out his. Tina's went in, which was a place to eat, to get a sandwich. If I look at what's there now, I've got to say it's went down hill. You've got your "We cash IRS checks." It's not the same variety. And then across the street, I guess where the Checkers is now. That was still a residential area for a long time. Then, they put in a Giant grocery store in where there is a Mexican place there now. And then the Safeway moved up to where the Purple Heart is now. I mean you got a Safeway and you got a Purple Heart. I think that defines how the place is now.

Suzanne: Why did your parents move to Bladensburg?

Susanna Yatman: My mother's father and mother decided to move there.

Suzanne: And why did they move there?

Susanna Yatman: He wanted to be near the White House, near the capital. He wanted to go down and see the debates. He was just really interested in government. But my mother would say, once he got here the house kept him so busy he never got to go down to hear the debates. That's in one of her interviews. We felt bad for him. When we redid the steps that go from the house down to 48th Street, we were fortunate to get, I think it was Vermont marble, and they were the marble steps from the capital. So, we got the capital steps. So, we joke, he may not have gotten to the capital, but the capital steps came to Bostwick. So, that was really, really nice to get those steps. I forget which side of the

capital they took them out of. They were redoing it back in probably the late 1980s. That was quite a little feat.

Suzanne: Why did you and your parents decide to stay there?

Susanna Yatman: My mother would have never left. She loved it. It would be unheard of. And where would she go? She was very active in the historical society and historic preservation. She was mayor of the town for 10 years, on the council for 30. It was her life. My father would have considered moving to New York State. That's where her family came from and he loved it up there, dairy farm country. Mother...it would be unheard of to move. I didn't move, because I was taking care of Mother. And I can't say, "Guess what Mom, we're moving." That would have been too much to do to Mother at her age. After she passed away, and I lost my election by two votes, I said well time to move on.

But the quality of life there was getting bad. We had a person shot and killed in our yard. We had a for sale sign up in our yard. We were trying to sell the house. Meanwhile, we had this house, this little square house on this property, and we decided we were selling and leaving. We put the wall up and put the wrought iron fence up and the gate. We felt good, once you got in Bostwick, it was wonderful. But once you got outside, people were all mad at you're taking a left hand turn on 48th Street. And people are honking at you. You got your blinker on. You got your arm out. You're taking a left. And people are honking at you. Then, I go to Safeway. It's in Capital Plaza. People are parked where there not supposed to park, so I couldn't pull up to put my groceries in the car. It's just irritating. I came home grouchy. Down here, we had this little place and came down on weekends. You know and I'm saying, why are we staying up in Bladensburg? There's no reason to keep us here anymore. We moved away. As much as I miss Bostwick and the walks with the dogs and the garden and being in there, every morning I come out and say I'm glad I'm here. We are sleeping till 2 in the morning and we hear this, "Pow, pow, pow, pow, pow, pow, pow, pow." Like 50 rounds went off. Timmy and I both hit the floor. We were in the little outside kitchen, and we hear, "Yeah." So, man what was that all about. So, we got on the scanner right away. The police called to make sure I was OK. Two men from D.C. did a drive-by and were trying to escape the D.C. police. They came down 48th Street and Quincy, didn't quite make the turn, crashed, bailed out, jumped over the wrought iron fence, and started running right passed the outside kitchen up toward the orchard. The one got shot in the driveway and the other escaped. I don't know if they got him later or not. So, then we had to stay in the house and get our dogs in the house. They brought the dogs. So, here's this for sale sign. I don't know who was selling it. Here's the news media. Oh, this is great. Thanks a lot. I miss the excitement.

We have had bank robbers running through. Citizen's Bank used to be not far away. They would be running through our property. When we were putting up the wall, they were pouring the concrete. It was a time when all the east coast, the electric was out. So, the electric at the Teacher's Credit Union, they had police there, because the alarm systems weren't going off. And then someone robbed Citizen's Bank. And he's running through the property. My husband is over at the Town Hall doing something. I'm supervising the

workman. We have a big black shepard. And this guy is running up the driveway. And I think this is one of the folks that's late coming back from lunch. So, the dog goes running after him. The next thing you know, the police are coming around the corner, "Halt." So, I go running after the dog and the guy. And police say, "Halt. Don't attempt to pursue." Then, the guy took a left, went all the way up the hill, and passed the springhouse, up to the top. Meanwhile, all the town police and code enforcement, they arrive. The one guy, Tim, the code enforcement guy...He is something else. He runs up on the hill and jumps over the fence, not realizing that that's where we've been throwing all of our brush. He went up to his armpits in brush. He couldn't move, which was kind of amusing.

Suzanne: Did they get him?

Susanna Yatman: I don't know. They should've. They certainly had everything surrounded. We used to get a lot of people running through our yard. We used to hear gun shots. In the beginning, we used to report them, but it just became, well there's someone else shooting. You just live on your own little island.

Suzanne: Did you go to High School in Bladensburg? What were your experiences?

Susanna Yatman: I went to Bladensburg High School, which they've torn down and put up another one. And it was good. I wasn't really a big student. I was in the band. I was more interested in boys than studying, going to the prom. Even before high school, they had the Teen Hop. It used to be up where the elementary school is now. That was the junior high. My mother would go with me and other mother would and they'd sit at the door and smell your breath to make sure no one was drinking to go into where the basketball court was, where they had the sock hop dancing. And then to high school, where there were more refined sock hops up there. And going to basketball games. Northwestern was our big competitor. I was in the band and performed at the half time in the pep band. High school was good.

Suzanne: What community activities did you participate in?

Susanna Yatman: Girl Scouts and piano lessons. And later on I took clarinet lessons and I took dancing lessons, tap dance, and hula. My mother kept hoping it would make me graceful. I don't think it did. Girl Scouts, that was something else. One of our Girl Scout projects was to paint mailboxes. One of my friends Patti, who lived on Taylor Street in Sunnybrook, she and I were painting a mailbox on Annapolis Road. And I don't know why, but we put paint on this man's car. I don't remember getting caught for it. I remember doing it. We didn't paint a whole lot of it, but we were annoyed because his car was parked right close to the mailbox. And there wasn't supposed to be any parking there. We thought he deserved to get some paint on his car. That's kind of childish, but. We did a lot of little Girl Scout projects and brownie projects. And going door to door selling cookies, which probably can't do now unless you have an adult in the car. Or else you're afraid to eat the cookies.

Suzanne: What's your favorite spot in Bladensburg?

Susanna Yatman: Up on the hill.

Suzanne: Behind Bostwick?

Susanna Yatman: Yes. You can look off and see Hyattsville and sometimes you can see St. Jerome's Church, which sets up higher. I loved that corner.

Suzanne: What is your favorite historic site or landmark?

Susanna Yatman: I'd have to say Bostwick.

Suzanne: How do you feel about the term Port Towns? Is it effective in drawing attention to history?

Susanna Yatman: I understand the reason behind the Port Towns. But it makes it sound like the other towns were there when it was a port, which they weren't. It's kind of really stretching history to say Port Towns. Cottage City and Colmar Manor were definitely bedroom communities of the 40s. I'm not keen on it, but it's a hook to get funding. So, it has to be.

Suzanne: Did you identify with the concept of the Port Towns?

Susanna Yatman: Well, they were just doing the Port Towns when I was exiting. So...no banners and all that stuff. No it didn't catch on yet. But if it works it's fine. They used to have Bladensburg Day. Now, they have Port Towns Day. If it's a way of bringing three communities together, that's good. Bladensburg needs help, if they want to revitalize or bring focus to the area. Just like Hyattsville and that whole Route 1 corridor has done quite a lot to fix that up, because that got kind of shabby too. Probably is a little shabby still. But that was an endeavor I kind of snickered at. But it seems to be coming along. And the hiker/biker trails, that's a good thing.

Suzanne: What was it like growing up as a woman in Bladensburg?

Susanna Yatman: Never thought about it. I'm just a person. It never dawned on me about being a woman or Black or White, until I went to work. And I was just about discriminated just as much as the Blacks were as far as trying to get ahead. My father always wanted a boy, but other than that. I didn't feel that women or men or little boys or little girls were any different. I could play with little girls or little boys.

Oh, I have another memory. When I was a little kid and there were older boys living on Quincy Street...in the winter time we seemed to get more snow than now...we would either toboggan or sleigh ride down the hill from all the way at the top all the way down. We didn't even have a wall or post-rail fence then. We had some kind of cattle wire. You could slide right under and go across Quincy Street. But a lot of the neighbor kids would come over for snow sledding. That was a lot of fun. One day, a toboggan fell off on the

corner of 48th Street and Quincy and so the family across the street grabbed and brought it over. So, we'd get about six of us in the toboggan and go down the hill. That was a good memory.

Suzanne: Was there racism in Bladensburg?

Susanna Yatman: I wouldn't say there was, because at that time the Blacks lived in the lower part of town and they went to their own school. It seemed to me this is where we are and this is where you are. They hadn't got to the point of we want to be where you are. We knew the people in the Black part of town. They had been there for ages, 100s of years. They had their own community, their own little restaurants and night club. And they kept things under control. The police didn't have to go down there to deal with any rowdiness. It was their area. Until the road to Hyattsville started developing, and then they put this up and they put a drycleaners up, Bergman's Drycleaners, and little by little it drove them out. And sometimes I think they got a raw deal, about getting driven out. When I went to school and graduated in '59, I didn't go to school with any minorities. I don't think there were even any Hispanics. When they started integrating, the principal of the Black school in town came to Mother and said, "Do we have to do it? We don't want to do it. We don't want to send our kids up to Bladensburg High School or up to the junior high. We're happy here. We've got teachers. The kids can walk to school. We don't really want to do this." But Mother said, "Well, it's out of my hands." The impression that I got, at least from the school, is that they really wanted to stay where they were. But change is difficult sometimes. They knew their area. They felt comfortable with their teacher and being able to be so close to school. I think the school is still there. They turned that area into a parking lot for school buses. I haven't been down to that industrial area in a while. It's too bad they haven't turned it into something significant now.

Suzanne: How do children fit into the story of Bladensburg? Do children who grow up in Bladensburg stay there?

Susanna Yatman: No. The only one I know of is Larry Pumphrey's son. Most of them moved on and moved out. Some of the ones Marion gave you are still there.

Suzanne: Why do you think they moved out?

Susanna Yatman: Jobs, perhaps. Their spouse didn't want to live there or they weren't from there. Development you know. A new house always seems better than fixing up the old one. A lot of them are not only children, you know. Somebody's got to go.

Suzanne: How is the town connected to other communities? Did you have a car? How did you get around?

Susanna Yatman: I was fortunate. I got a car in high school. It was Christmas morning and we used to open our stocking in bed. My bedroom was the closest one to the buttress, the back bedroom in Bostwick. So, I had this car in my stocking. And my Father taped

the keys to the car. I looked out the window and there was my '57 Ford convertible. That was it. I got dressed, ran downstairs, called my friends, "I'm coming to show you my new car."

Suzanne: Did you make road trips or drive locally?

Susanna Yatman: As a family, we would go up to New York State every summer for two weeks in August, and stay with my mother's relatives. And once in a while at Thanksgiving, we would spend a long Thanksgiving time up there. And then we would have side trips. We would go to Ocean City or go to some beach, North Beach, Chesapeake Beach. They had slot machines. As a little kid, I was just standing and watching as kids do, and when it paid off, I grabbed the coins. I had to give them back, but I had a car. Each one of us had a car. My father had a car. My mother had a car. I had a car. We were car people. One of my best friends in town, her father didn't let his wife drive a car. She wanted to. She wanted to get around. She wanted to do something. She didn't want to stay at home. He didn't want her to work, because that was a reflection that he couldn't provide. He didn't want her driving. So, eventually she got a job at the library and had to walk to work. So, that was a compromise.

Suzanne: Were there co-operations with other towns? Like the Port Towns?

Susanna Yatman: I wasn't aware of it. As time goes on, you need to band together with Cheverly or something else, if you want something that is going to benefit all of you. But I don't remember any working together. My mother was very involved in the Maryland Municipal League and in the county. Every night was a meeting. She was all over the county for meetings. She was involved. I was not.

Suzanne: Were family members living in the general area?

Susanna Yatman: No.

Suzanne: What were the major political issues when you lived in Bladensburg?

Susanna Yatman: I don't know of any major political issues. One issue was they wanted to put in a biodegradable blah-blah outside of town. Supposedly, you get stuff from the hospitals and then you put it in this thing and it zaps it and it's all perfectly safe. That was fine with me. It was an issue for a month or so. Seems to me, most of our political issues were on the small side. It's not a political issue, but the train going through town. I came back from being out west. And they had this adopt a highway program out west. So, I came back and said, "This is a great program. Why don't we adopt Annapolis Road?" What's the businessmen group it's a bunch of initials? The Bladensburg Local Development Corporation, I think that's what it is. I said, "Why don't all the businessmen...we'll all volunteer an afternoon and pick up trash from the train tracks up to BW Parkway." So, the first time we had donuts. Everybody turned out. Our handyman, we paid him to help pick up. Then, the next time, it got less and less. It was eventually just me and my husband picking up trash. After the first or second initial trash pick up,

Joe Osterman, who still lives in town...I was announcing at one of our town meetings some positive things, "We just had our adopt a highway pickup. The BLDC." Joe Osterman says, "You can pick up all the trash you want. It's not going to make a damn bit of difference. As long as you have that train going through town, no one is going to want to live here." So, then shortly after that, Paul Pinsky came as our representative from the state. He said, "What can I do for you." Well, I said, "You can have a tunnel or a bridge, so that the train doesn't stop traffic anymore." Well, I thought that was bizarre. That was what we need, something to stop the trains in Bladensburg. And now it's happening. It's unbelievable. All because Joe Osterman irritated me in the council meeting.

Suzanne: Were they noisy?

Susanna Yatman: And they're worse now. They used to run so often. Then, it got to be every two hours. And the traffic would back up to Ft. Lincoln Cemetery. I used to go to work at 7:15 so I could get off by 4 to beat the train so I could get home. There was 120 cars. I used to count the cars. I had to count the cars. I loved to hear the train. But the thing I didn't like was the airplanes. The only time it was really nice was when it snowed. Everything was so quiet. The only thing you'd hear would be the snowplow on Kennilworth Avenue. But other than that it was the constant wheeeeer of the traffic.

So, I don't know if that's a political issue. But you have four council members and a mayor and five people never get along. I guess one of the big ones we were all against was the disruptive youth program that they plopped in our town without even letting us know. That was wrong. Hendershot was on the school board, and he practically did it. And when we found out...How can you say, "Let's put it in this old Bladensburg Elementary School. Let's put this disruptive youth program in there." But not even running it by us? Granted it's your property and your school, but it's our community. To me, all of us were on the same page. But we had it rammed down our throats anyway. That was the biggest thing I can think of that irritated everybody. I don't think it was political. We really weren't political. We weren't liberal vs. conservative, republican vs. democrat. We ran just as an individual. I didn't have to declare my party when I ran for Mayor and Council. That was just it, you ran. There wasn't, at that time, really any difference in political parties. It was just issues.

Suzanne: What was the economic atmosphere of Bladensburg?

Susanna Yatman: It went downhill. It dwindled. As time went on, you got malls. So, little mom and pop stores clothing stores couldn't survive. So, they had to give in to the Hechts and department stores. It's just an evolutionary thing.

Suzanne: Do you think history can contribute to revitalization?

Susanna Yatman: Yes. It seems like it has in a lot of areas. I don't know how many millions they spent on fixing up Lincoln's retreat, where the Soldier's Home is. So, that was a long time coming. But, it's nice to have. It's a lot of bucks to spend. But they say,

“You have to know where you came from to know where you’re going.” And a lot of times, I don’t think we know where we are going. But the trouble is with the history of our county, the politically correct way to try and go forward... You can’t always tout our history from the 1700s, because it’s not pleasant to the Blacks. They don’t want to be reminded about slavery. You know, the slaves were brought here and auctioned off. But they had indentured servants. Christopher Lowndes got stuck with two little girls, whose parents died on the way over. And it was his ship, so he got these two little girls. He had to get custody of them. And he had to raise them, because not everyone survived. Sometimes, the husband, who you were really trying to get here, as a carpenter or something didn’t make it, but his wife and two kids did. It wasn’t just slaves arriving. There were a lot of indentured servants who had to work off their five years or whatever, before they could be free.

Suzanne: Do you know about, I’m going to list a couple of organizations: The Port Towns Community Development Corporation, the Bladensburg Local Development Corporation, the Anacostia Trails Heritage Area, the Prince George’s Historical Society. What do these organizations do for the community?

Susanna Yatman: It brings an awareness of what surrounds. The only thing I don’t know much about is the Port Towns CDC. The Prince George’s Historical Society, my mother is one of three people who founded it back in the ‘30s, I believe. I don’t know if it’s had its run or not. It was good to bring people together and identify your history. My mother was active. She was the President. I’ve not been...after I got off of the Town Council...I had had enough meetings. I don’t know what the mix is now. I’ve been to a couple of the Historic Preservation Commission receptions. And there aren’t that many minorities attending. There are more old ladies like me, white haired old ladies. I’m afraid unless they get an infusion of 40 year olds or something, its going to have a hard time finding a reason to keep going along. Except the library is a big wonderful source. And people come and use that. And that’s fantastic that the historical society has that. And Riversdale has done a great job of having dances and herb gardens up at Montpelier. Some of your major historical homes have docents and people who are very committed to that one particular location. It is just a matter of getting minorities interested in our past history. And Whites too, Hispanics, Vietnamese, whatever, they’re here for a while. They might not be here forever. I was with my parents and a lot of people in the historical society, they were born and pretty much raised in the county and have an attachment to it. But if you move somewhere else, suppose I moved to Daytona. I might go to a few places. I might not be there 10 years and I might go somewhere else. I mean if I were younger. I don’t know if you really plant your feet in a place.

Suzanne: What were your satisfactions or dissatisfactions with the community?

Susanna Yatman: I can’t say either way. Certain things dissatisfy me, but that’s life. I’m dissatisfied I felt I had to move to get a better quality of life. And a lot of people don’t want to say, “I’m being driven out by a lower income group.” They don’t want to feel like the Hispanics are driving them out or the Vietnamese or the Blacks. “I’m staying here nobody’s driving me out.” That’s the way I felt for a long time. This is my home and

I love it. It means everything in the world to me. It's a part of me. It's a big part of me. It's like a marriage. Some part of you dies when you move out. But life has got to be better than it is. And I'm glad we're here, but I do miss it.

Suzanne: In what respects is Bladensburg unique?

Susanna Yatman: Well, it's unique because, and it wasn't our fault, in 1812 when the British came through. They came from Pennsylvania perhaps, other places. We just couldn't hold them back. Our political people didn't take it too seriously or else didn't think the British were going to come all the way up there. Commodore Barney was dynamite in trying to defend as much as he could. He ended up in Ft. Lincoln defending the hill. And he dragged his cannons. He was here in this creek. He got cut off. The British came up and he was waiting in St. Leonard Creek to jump out and pounce on them. And they said, I don't think so Barney. They just blocked him off. He just came up here with his little boat and then unloaded the cannons and schlepped them all the way up to Bladensburg. That's history I don't think everyone relates to. And I think once a year they try to follow the trail of Commodore Barney. It's an August event. No other town can claim that the British walked all over them. That's unique. Supposedly, the cock fight, the first cocktail, the first hot air balloon. That makes it a little unique. The history, the firsts make it unique. I don't know if anything else makes it different from other towns.