

Good People: A Family Tale of the 20th Century

A Presentation by Mark Johnson for the Covington Heritage Foundation Membership Gala

December 5, 2017



Young Covington Couple in the 1940's

The following picture shows the Covington Coca Cola bottling company about 1918. Notice the low-pitched roof. The two-story building was located on North Columbia Street.



This current day photograph shows the O'Keefe Feed and Seed in Covington. It's the same building.



Our story begins in 1918 in war-torn France, the war to end all wars. It brought death and injury to thousands of American soldiers. One of those was Claudis Simpson of New Orleans, who suffered severe leg injuries. He was brought to the U.S. Army Hospital in Fort McPherson, GA, where, over time, he gradually recovered.



He can be seen in the photograph on the left, lying down in the background with the sling around his leg. In the right photograph he is seen on the hospital grounds.



After he recovered, he went back to New Orleans and started a service station. At that time, operating a service station was a big deal and since it was located near a large hospital, it was very successful.



The service station featured classic gas pumps, displayed a Standard Motor Oil sign, and, as we can see by the fire hydrant in front, had running water, indoor plumbing, and electricity.



He got married and in 1924 had a daughter named Evelyn.

Doctors eventually told him that if he stayed in New Orleans, the pollution would kill him. So he traded the service station for 60 acres in Bush. He and his wife and his daughter moved to Bush and lived in a house where there was no electricity and no indoor plumbing.



The photograph above shows his daughter Evelyn in her Mardi Gras costume. She told about going to Mardi Gras in New Orleans, leaving Bush early in the morning, going to Slidell and then to New Orleans, seeing the parades, then coming back through Slidell to Bush, all to return home in time to milk the cows.

She told the story of when a new highway came through Bush, and since her father wanted the house to face the highway, he got together some of his friends, jacked up the house, put some logs under it and rotated it 90 degrees. Since there wasn't any plumbing or electricity, it was a pretty easy thing to do.

As she grew up in Bush, Evelyn studied by kerosene lantern, learned to play piano, went to high school in Covington, and joined the marching band.



Evelyn Simpson played trumpet, and she was so good at it the instructor would often leave her in charge of the group when he had to leave the room. She helped conduct the band.

Among those in the band was a junior high student named Ralph Menetre. He would walk from the junior high down Jefferson Avenue, past the St. Peter's Catholic Church under construction to the high school to take part in rehearsals. After high school he went to LSU, and became a running back for the LSU football team.

Also in the band was Claire Drinkard whose husband would later work at Zetz 7-up distributing company in Covington.

Evelyn's teachers all knew that she was a smart student and encouraged her to go to college. She graduated in 1940, but instead of going to college, she married Theodore Broughton "Red" Talley. Here's a photo of the young couple.



Shortly after they married, Red joined the army and went through basic training in Durham, NC. While he was away, Evelyn earned \$10 a week as secretary and lived in a rooming house for \$10 a week. Times were difficult, but as she recalled, she had a roof overhead, food, indoor plumbing and electricity. "Life was good," she said, recalling the hardships of her childhood home.

Red Talley was deployed to Europe, and Evelyn got the news that she was pregnant.

Red Talley was a member of Patton's 4th Armored Division, and was a part of Operation Bodyguard. He went on to France where he took a number of pictures.



Thirty-three months in Europe's mud and snow



He served on a howitzer team.



The photograph above shows him on his way home after the war.



Here is Red and Evelyn Talley on November 4, 1945, with him seeing his daughter Carolyn Talley for the first time.

Red Talley then went to work for the Great Southern Paper Mill in Bogalusa.



He hated working there. Evelyn stayed on the farm in Bush. She hated farming. But then Red bought a truck and modified it to deliver seeds to farmers to plant in their fields. He also delivered chicken feed. The name of the business was Talley's Feed in Bush, which operated between 1949 and 1951.

In 1951 Talley's Feed moved into an old building at the corner of Gibson and Vermont. Today that location is occupied Marsolan's Feed and Seed which is pictured below.



“Retail was much better than farm life,” Evelyn said.



In 1953 the business moved to old Coca Cola bottling plant on North Columbia Street.



The grand opening picture below shows the newly-repainted Talley's Feed and Seed building, complete with dock and people attending the opening ceremonies.



Evelyn was very skilled in arranging flowers, as shown below in this interior grand opening picture with the Grand Ole Opry singers providing the music for the festive occasion. Notice the milk cans lining the wall on the right, a sign of the active dairy industry in the area.



St. Tammany Parish was still quite rural in nature at this time with many poultry operations, cattle ranches and dairy farms. In fact, the area now occupied by River Forest Subdivision was the location of two dairies.



Claire Drinkard wound up working at Talley's Feed and Seed, and her husband Everett Drinkard is shown above with the Zetz-7up truck, with Troy Jackson and his son Troy Jr., who grew up to become a principal of a Covington area elementary school.

In 1955 Talley's started mixing their own feed after constructing a two ton feed mixer and elevated storage tank.



Oscar Franklin, pictured above, was an important part of their operation for many years.



Oscar, Red Talley, his son Ted, and Evelyn shown behind the counter of the new feed store.





This picture shows the Talley Brothers truck parked on the scales in front of the store, heading out to fill chicken feed tanks at poultry farms.



The truck could pump feed from the storage area on the bed to a hatch in the chicken house feed storage area.



In 1960, Talley's switched from Ful-o-Pep Feeds to Purina Feeds.



Not long after, another building addition made room for a clothing section and western wear store.



When the courts ordered the de-segregation of area schools, Red Talley, as a member of the school board, worked for the peaceful integration of the two separate school systems. As a result, those who vehemently disagreed with his efforts repeatedly smashed the windows of his store, roofing tacks were spread over the gravel of his parking lot, and his phone would ring all hours of the night, with no one on the line when it was answered.



The photo above was taken in December of 1974.

The picture below shows the Talleys celebrating the store's 25th anniversary.



Talley's Feed and Seed Co. celebrated their 25th Anniversary Saturday with a gala open house at the store on Columbia Street. Family members pictured above, left to right are Mrs. T. B. Talley, Susan Talley, Mrs. David Pearce, T. B. "Red" Talley, Ted Talley and David Pearce. (Staff photo by Bob Taylor).

Theodore “Red” Talley died on February 1, 2012.

In October of 2013 Covington High School celebrated its Centennial, 100 years of serving the community. Special guest was Evelyn Talley, and she was given the opportunity to “ring the bell” that had been saved from the 1984 fire that burned down the school building on Jefferson Ave.



She showed off her Class Ring from 1940.





She is shown above with her daughter Carolyn Talley Pearce, at left.

Evelyn passed away on [July 19, 2017](#), at the age of 93.

Mark Johnson ended his presentation by reading a newspaper column written by Ted Talley Jr. detailing his final Father's Day visit with his dad Red Talley.

"They were our parents, the greatest generation, they were good people," Johnson concluded.

Following the presentation, Carolyn Talley Pearce thanked Johnson for doing the research, and telling the story of her parents. She went on to tell the audience: "This has been really special for our family. My mother and dad, they were not in the old Covington family group, but we were part of St. Tammany Parish for eight generations. That's pretty incredible.

We enjoyed being a really big part of this community, and I think our parents taught us to contribute and to be a part of everything that was going on around us. I'm so glad Ted and Susan are here tonight. The presentation surprised us. He (Mark Johnson) and mother had some great visits, and mother was so happy when she got to go ring the bell at the Bell Tower dedication ceremony. I took her out to Covington High, and they looked at her and asked can she ring this bell? CHS was such an important part of her life. Thank you all for being here and sharing all these memories with all of us tonight."

Ted Talley Jr. said, "There's been a lot of new things going on in Covington in the last couple of decades. You see art galleries and music going on and at the Trailhead. The photo shows this couple standing in front of seed sacks on a dusty floor in the old feed and seed store, but in

1955 (when the store was just three or four years old), they became part of a community effort to bring cultural arts to Covington. The little theater Playmakers began that year, the St. Tammany Art Association was getting underway, and my dad helped support the Covington Symphony Society in its attempts to hold concerts for the students and adults of the area.

Talley's Feed and Seed was one of the first guarantors of the efforts to fund the New Orleans Symphony Orchestra when it came to Covington for annual concerts. He and other businesses made sure that the symphony would have the money to make the trip in the event ticket sales were not quite enough. Mother and father were both a part of symphony arts appreciation and development.”



Carolyn Talley Pearce, Ted Talley Jr., and Susan Talley were in the audience at the Covington Heritage Foundation Membership Gala 2017