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An Interview with Bulloch County Native Dr. Leila Daughtry Denmark

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BULLOCH COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

PRESENTS

AN INTERVIEW WITH

BULLOCH COUNTY NATIVE

DR. LEILA DAUGHTRY

DENMARK

BY

ANN HARWELL PARKER

OCTOBER 3, 1998
This is an interview with Dr. Leila Daughtry Denmark by Ann Harwell Parker on the third day of October, 1998.

Parker: First of all I would like for you to tell me your name again.

Denmark: My name is Leila Alice Daughtry Denmark.

Parker: Your date of birth?

Denmark: February 1, 1898.

Parker: Your current address and phone number?

Denmark: That's 395 Mullinix Rd., Alpharetta, GA 30004.

Parker: Where were you born?

Denmark: In Bulloch County, near Statesboro which is now Portal, Georgia. Yes! That is now Portal Georgia.

Parker: Where was your father born?

Denmark: He was born in Metter, Georgia.

Parker: Do you know what county?

Denmark: I think that was still part of Bulloch County, that was way back yonder.

Parker: And your mother?

Denmark: She was born in Bulloch County.
Parker: Do you know where your grandparents were born?

Denmark: The land that I lived on and was born on they tell me they got the grant from the King of England way back yonder. They were born in Bulloch County, she was born in Bulloch County.

Parker: Both of your grandparents were from Bulloch County.

Denmark: Yea! That's right.

Parker: Even your grandparents were from Bulloch County. That's interesting. That's unusual too. Do you know when and why your ancestors first came to Bulloch County on your father's side?

Denmark: They had been there for several generations.

Parker: And the same thing on your mother's side.

Denmark: Yes.

Parker: And you are married.

Denmark: Yes.

Parker: Is your husband from Bulloch County?

Denmark: He was from Bulloch County. He was next door there, close to where I lived--at Portal, Georgia.

Parker: Would you like to give his name?

Denmark: John Eustace Denmark.

Parker: Have you lived at other locations other than Bulloch County and Alpharetta?

Denmark: No. That's all.

Parker: Do you have any brothers or sisters?

Denmark: There was twelve children in our family. Six boys and six girls.

Parker: Do any of them still live in Bulloch County or the other vicinities?

Denmark: No, No. They are all deceased, except for the last two and they live in Portsmouth, Virginia.

Parker: One person wanted me to specifically ask you about your brother who was an official photographer at Pearl Harbor.

Denmark: That's right. That was Clyde Daughtry. He made all the pictures that were made at Pearl Harbor when that happened, when they were attacked.

Parker: Where did he live?

Denmark: He lived everywhere. He was in the Navy.

Parker: Do you have any children?

Denmark: I have a daughter, Mary Alice Denmark.

Parker: And who did she marry?
Grady Hutcherson.

Do they live in Bulloch County?

No, they've both lived in Athens, Georgia. That's Clarke County. He was one of the professors at the University of Georgia. He was an English Professor at the University of Georgia.

And, do you have grandchildren?

I have two grandsons. Steven Hutcherson and James Hutcherson. Steven is a businessman and James is a family doctor in Colorado.

In Colorado? How far away! So you really don't have any relatives, any close relatives residing in Bulloch County.

Well, all the Brannens are kin to us.

The Brannens?

All the Brannens are kin to the Denmarks.

O.K. What made you decide to become a physician?

I don't think people can know that. All my life I loved to see things live. We lived on a big farm and I always doctored the animals and I always like to pick up flowers that people had thrown away and see them live again. So, I don't know why. I didn't know there would be such a thing as a woman doctor when I was young.

Where did you get your training?

I went to Tift College for four years and graduated, then went to Mercer and took some science courses and then went to the Medical College of Georgia in Augusta.

And what year did you graduate?

I graduated Tift College in 1922.

And then your medical?

1928.

You started your first practice in Alpharetta or?

No, No I've always practiced in Atlanta, this is new. I haven't been here but just about ten years. I practiced in Atlanta from 1928 until just about ten years ago. Yeah! So, this is something new out here. We owned this land and this old house was here and it was time for me to quit so my grandson moved out here and fixed up this old house.

Did the fact that you are a woman present any problems?

Not a bit in this world! I've never had a speck of trouble all these years.

What was your first surgery?

I never did any surgery. I went through all the stuff
people do in learning how, but I've been a pediatrician all this time.

Parker: Did you deliver any babies?

Denmark: No! I did when I was in medical school, but after I graduated medical school, my work's always been in pediatrics.

Parker: What do you think has sustained you in your practice all these years?

Denmark: I think first, liking to do what I do what I was doing. That's it!

Parker: How many patients do you see a day now?

Denmark: Well, see I don't make appointments. Some days there may be 15 and the next day there might be 25. It all depends. I don't make appointments, they just come when they need to come.

Parker: Okay. Going back to Bulloch County—If you could tell your grandchildren one thing about growing up in Bulloch County, what would it be?

Denmark: It was a wonderful farm country. It grew fine cotton and corn and it was a good place to live. The sun shines more in Bulloch County than anywhere else.

Parker: Okay! What do you remember as one of your happiest days of childhood?

Denmark: AH! They were always happy. My mother was never cross. I was one person brought up in a family where I never saw my mother slapping the kids or I never heard my parents argue. I never remember any bad days.

Parker: What was one of the most rewarding experiences or time of your life when you were in Bulloch County, if you have a most rewarding time?

Denmark: I don't know anything special.

Parker: What has been the most rewarding of you life after Bulloch County?

Denmark: Well, first I suppose getting married to Mr. Denmark and having Mary. Mr. Denmark had to be the first and then Mary. Rearing that child has been the most important thing in my life.

Parker: What would you say was one of the most difficult experiences or times in your life while you lived in Bulloch County?

Denmark: You know you asked me something I don't believe ever happened. I've never been sick and I've never felt there was a time in one area. Just seems like everything fell in place in my life. I have to say I don't think there was a time I had a real difficulty in my life. It was bad when I lost my family, deaths and things, but those are normal things. But as far as finances and heartbreaks and things like that, I never and none of my family ever got in any bad trouble or anything. No, it was just a wonderful life.
Parker: Well, that is remarkable! That is more remarkable than the fact that you have reached this wonderful age. Well, we have sort of touched on this, but how you met your husband. He was your neighbor. Is that right?

Denmark: We probably rocked in the same cradle! I helped him out with his girlfriends until we decided to go out.

Parker: What was your favorite time of a year when you were growing up in Bulloch County?

Denmark: Well, that's another thing! It never bothered me much. The whole year round was nice to me. I never worried about winter so much.

Parker: Do you remember a favorite story, joke or riddle that was a saying common in Bulloch County?

Denmark: I don't believe I do.

Parker: Do you think there was anything unique about the community you grew up in?

Denmark: There were wonderful farmers. They had big farms and they were good neighbors. When they built the railroad through my father's farm they built a little town they called Portal and my father was the mayor there until he died; for thirty seven years I think it was.

Parker: Were there any events that might have brought the community together?

Denmark: I don't think so, they were just always good neighbors.

Parker: Did the people in your community tend to think that their community was the best community?

Denmark: I don't think so. I don't think they ever had that feeling, but it was a wonderful place to live.

Parker: How did the local news get circulated in your community?

Denmark: We had the newspaper and we had telephones.

Parker: Did many people in your community have personal nicknames?

Denmark: I don't remember that.

Parker: Where did your family shop?

Denmark: Well, we had to go to Statesboro for our things until Portal was built and that was when I was six years old so that would have been about 1906. They built the railroad through there and then we had stores and my father had stores in Portal, but up until that time all our things had to come from Statesboro.

Parker: Did local merchants give credit or take foods on a trade or what?

Denmark: I think they just always paid for what they got. Most of the people always made everything except for sugar and salt and that kind of stuff. You never did do much cloth and shoes, hats that's about all we
bought.

Parker: Did you ever do anything from a mail-order catalog?

Denmark: I think they used to use a Sears and Roebuck, I believe it was. It was one of them, but I can't remember the name of it. We never did do much of that. We always bought the stuff we needed from Statesboro.

Parker: How do you think Georgia Southern University has affected the county?

Denmark: That's where I finished high school. It was a high school when I was there. I think it has done worlds of good. They needed it. I finished school there in 1918 and the building is still there.

Parker: Can you remember or recall any legends associated with the community?

Denmark: I really don't remember. I really actually left that community to go to Statesboro to school when I was in the tenth grade, and so when I left there I went on to college and then from college and college and college until I got into medical school.

Parker: When you were in college, what was the ratio of women?

Denmark: You mean in medical school?

Parker: Yes.

Denmark: I was the only girl in my class. There was one other girl in the school.

Parker: Did any of your grandparents work in Bulloch County?

Denmark: I think they were all farmers.

Parker: Your parents, they did own their own land?

Denmark: Sure.

Parker: The cash crops were cotton and corn?

Denmark: Mostly cotton.

Parker: Did you raise livestock?

Denmark: Oh, everybody had livestock.

Parker: Did you grow your own food?

Denmark: That's right.

Parker: Could you describe a typical workday of your father?

Denmark: Well, we had a lots of corn and stuff on the farm and most of the plowing was done by tenants. My father supervised everything but that's all it was.

Parker: Did you do chores as a child?

Denmark: I think all the children did that. Yeah.

Parker: Your neighbors, were they kinfolk or?
Denmark: Well, as a child our neighbors weren't within five miles of us and I think that was my mother's sister. That's right.

Parker: Where did you go for your first tractor, your mechanical tractor. Do you have any idea?

Denmark: We never had a tractor.

Parker: Do you remember any particular hard times your family had making ends meet?

Denmark: I never remembered at all. You know that's a funny thing though. In those times people never talked about hard times. People just worked and they never talked about hard times.

Parker: Could you describe the house you grew up in?

Denmark: Well, the first house I was born in my grandmother wanted a house built and my father contracted to build a house so he built that house when my mother was about twelve years old. Then ten years later he came back and built some more on the house and he married my mother. That was a very nice country house. It had a big dining room, living room and bedrooms and we had all kinds of outside buildings for horses and cows and then that house burned down when I was six years old and then he built us a six bedroom house there in this town of Portal. That's where I lived.

Parker: Did you have indoor water and plumbing.

Denmark: No.

Parker: Of course, you had the outdoor toilet?

Denmark: Yes.

Parker: How was cooking done?

Denmark: It was all done in the kitchen. Now, when my grandmother was living they had the kitchen away from the house, but that was not in my time. It was always a big dining room and the kitchen.

Parker: Were any of your streets or roads paved?

Denmark: No.

Parker: Did they get muddy and hard to travel?

Denmark: They were kind of sandy.

Parker: When did that change?

Denmark: I don't know. I left home before there was any paved roads.

Parker: Did you travel much before you left to go to medical school?

Denmark: No. I didn't go anywhere. There was no such thing, there was only horse and buggy and you didn't go very far.

Parker: That was your transportation, the horse and buggy?
Denmark: Yes.

Parker: Do you remember who might have been the first person in your community to get an automobile?

Denmark: Well, it might have been my father.

Parker: Did that change your life somewhat?

Denmark: Well, it got a lot easier for us then. Of course, there were no roads for us to travel on then except sandy roads, but it made it easier to get places.

Parker: Describe the schools you attended in your county.

Denmark: Well, the first school I went to in the county was a two room school, called Bradwell School. It was about two miles from the little town of Portal. Then they built the school in Portal. Later I went to Statesboro.

Parker: How did you go to and from school?

Denmark: I walked.

Parker: How far?

Denmark: The first school was two and a half miles. The other one was in town and we didn't have to walk it.

Parker: Did they give homework?

Denmark: Oh, sure!

Parker: Was it very much?

Denmark: Mothers did most of the work anyway. We took our book home at night and our mothers helped us.

Parker: Are there any teachers you especially remember?

Denmark: Yeah, there were several of them, but they've been gone so long. There was Mrs. Temples and one was Mrs. Lee. They were my first teachers. And then there was several down at Statesboro, but I can't remember their names now.

Parker: Did your teachers live in your community?

Denmark: Oh yeah! When I was a child they boarded at our house. When I went to Statesboro the teachers lived there on the grounds.

Parker: Was Statesboro like a boarding school?

Denmark: Yeah, that was a boarding school there.

Parker: Were you involved in any clubs, athletics or other groups at school.

Denmark: No.

Parker: What kind of skills and knowledge did you gain outside of school?

Denmark: I played tennis.

Parker: Are you affiliated with the church?
Denmark: Yes, the Baptist church.

Parker: What church did you go to as you grew up in Bulloch?

Denmark: As a child it was a regular, what you would call a first Baptist Church, we call it a Primitive Baptist Church. As a child, till I was thirteen years old, I attended the Primitive Baptist Church and then we had a Baptist Church built in Portal and I joined the Baptist Church there.

Parker: Did you have a regular minister or did you have a visiting minister?

Denmark: We had a visiting minister. Most places had a visiting minister, you know.

Parker: Did you attend revival meetings at campgrounds?

Denmark: No.

Parker: Is there a particular baptism, wedding or funeral that you recall.

Denmark: No, I can't think of any.

Parker: If you were a member of a denomination or a religion that was not popular in that community, how did people react?

Denmark: I wasn't.

Parker: Were there any beliefs in stories about ghosts or things like that.

Denmark: Not that I know of.

Parker: Where did you play when you were growing up and who did you play with?

Denmark: Well, when I was growing up we had big yards to play in and we had tennis courts and we had softball places to play.

Parker: Did you have a particular toy or game that you like to play.

Denmark: Tennis was best of all.

Parker: Did they have fairs, movies or theatres or anything like that?

Denmark: They used to have a fair around Statesboro at that time. I don't remember any movies in Statesboro until I was about a teenager.

Parker: Was there any place you could go to hear live music, like people play guitars or banjos.

Denmark: Not much.

Parker: Did you ever take the train trip to Tybee Island?

Denmark: A lot of times!

Parker: Would you like to describe any of this?

Denmark: It was just very nice to get on the train and the windows were open and ride down. First you would go
down to Statesboro and catch the train and go to Savannah then get on the train and go to Tybee.

Parker: Was it a resort area? Did they have play areas?
Denmark: It was very nice. They had hot dog stands, places where you could rent bathing suits and they had a pavillion. It was very nice. Tybee Beach was a wonderful place as I think back as a young person. I think it still is.

Parker: Did neighbors and kin get together socially often?
Denmark: Not too much.

Parker: Did men meet socially apart from women or?
Denmark: The churches I attended were Primitive Baptist, the men sat on one side and the women on the other, but after that it was hardly anymore.

Parker: Did women have clubs?
Denmark: I believe they had sewing clubs.

Parker: Did you have any specific boyfriends or girlfriends?
Denmark: We were all friends, like my husband we were very good friends from the time we were little children. We were all friends, nothing special.

Parker: Did they have political rallies?
Denmark: Yes they did. The suffragettes had those.

Parker: Okay. Could you tell a little about those.
Denmark: What's that?

Parker: The suffragettes.
Denmark: The suffragettes used to come to Portal and bring a tent and they would put that tent up in Portal. And they would always put on what they called Ten Nights in the Bar Room. Mother didn't like to go to that type thing. She was a little too sophisticated, but my father was the mayor so he had to go to the meetings. So we'd go to those meetings and they'd put on that thing Ten Nights in the Bar Room. Oh! It was such a sad thing. They'd show us how the father drank and how they were mis-treated. It was a sad thing cause I had never heard of but two murders in my life until I finished medical school and that was the Hodge family near Statesboro and a girl died in a pencil factory but it was a ... we didn't that type thing in that day, but they put this show on showed how horrible it was. I had never seen anything like that and it would make the people cry a little and when the show was over this lady would come out with that beautiful black taffeta skirt on, white blouse and a watch on her shoulder and say, "You've seen what happens to the lady. When once we get the vote you'll never see this again, this will be the end of that." Boys were smoking coffin tacks. They begin to wrap baccer up in paper and call it coffin tacks. You saw how this man was drunk and mis-treated his family, there'll be no alcohol when we get to vote. And we'll pass laws, we'll pass laws that will make it a new world.
I was a teenager and boy I was all for it. But now we've had the freedom since 1922. What has that freedom done for me and the country of America. It's wrecked it.

Parker: How has it wrecked it?

Denmark: Well, there's more women smoking than men, more women drinking than men, they've passed the law that you can kill your baby. A man doesn't ever pass that law. They've passed the law you have to send your kid to school at five years old. That's too young. Women have wrecked the country. They have left their babies and they're all getting divorced. So I think our freedom has played wrong, maybe it's like politics.

Parker: This is changing the subject a little when it goes back to talking about you as a child. Were you ever sick as a child?

Denmark: We had things like measles and whooping cough. That type thing. We didn't have a lot of bad years sick with colds, because we didn't mix with anybody. But today, when I started in Atlanta in 1932 we had thirty-two pediatricians here in Georgia. Today, we have exactly 1,400 pediatricians. We started in Atlanta, when I was young we didn't have immunizations, we didn't have clean food, we didn't have clean milk. We've got everything on earth today to keep em well. We can even breed new hearts, new kidneys but the world is sick. Eighty-five per cent of our kids go to day care today when they are six or seven years old.
Denmark: No, I sure don't.

Parker: And these questions are pre-made, so forgive 'em. Do you know anyone who ever got arrested or went to jail in Bulloch County.

Denmark: I sure didn't. Oh, I reckon I'll change that. When those colored men killed the Hodge family, they lynched those people, but that's all I know about that. That was a big thing in Bulloch County.

Parker: I bet.

Denmark: Yeah.

Parker: Did the civil rights movement affect politics, local politics?

Denmark: No, not as far as I know.

Parker: Ah, Could you describe the effects that World War I might have had on your family. Did you have anyone that fought.

Denmark: I had a brother that fought in World War I, yes.

Parker: Did he go overseas?

Denmark: Yes.

Parker: And the great depression, can you remember anything?

Denmark: Oh, I reckon people talk about that, but seems that everything moves along. I never did remember that being a bad thing. We never did do without much. I think that maybe I just didn't expect a lots.

Parker: And then the World War II?

Denmark: Oh, now that was a big difference. People began to change then. Women began to get into the thing. It seems after that, after World War II, people began to kinda leave home and it was, the world it seems that after World War II there was a big change in people's attitudes.

Parker: Did the Korean War affect you?

Denmark: Not especially. I had a brother that fought, that was in the Korean War.

Parker: And the Vietnam War, did it affect you?

Denmark: No.

Parker: Ah, is there anything you would like to say or?

Denmark: I don't think so.

Parker: Okay. Ah, well.

Denmark: I, I hope thata..Statesboro has really gone a long ways, hasn't it? Boy! Use to there was kind of a difference, use to boys around in my section, if they'd go with the Statesboro girls, it was something special. It kinda felt like you'd have to go with those girls, they were a little bit different. Statesboro girls in that time
were really kinda society type people. They got kinda uppity you know.

Parker: Well now, would you mind telling me your age?

Denmark: On February 1st, I was 100 years old. (1998)

Parker: That is just wonderful! And I'm going to say that you look very young and you look very healthy. Do you do anything specifically that?

Denmark: The only way to stay, well now when they had that big party, it wasn't suppose to be a party but my daughter said there would be a party and I said this is one party that's going to be different for older people. Usually, ah I had a, she was a first cousin of mine that lived in Statesboro. She lived to be a 100 and something, I don't remember what, but we went down to her party she was dressed so beautiful. She had a great big orchid on her shoulder and they had a great big fat cake. I said now Mary, I'm not gonna look like that yonder. I'm not gonna buy any orchid. I'm not gonna buy any special dress and I want you to make the cake, so that's where the party was put off. But, instead of a little party, news got out. She was just gonna ask the family, but it got pretty big. All the television programs, all over the whole country showed up. So they put it on television and people, it was heard all over the world. And after that people called me from England, called me from Russia, called me from Germany, they called me from all these places wanting to know how in the world a woman could live a hundred years and still play golf, still practice medicine, still climb mountains. Well, the only thing I could say was what I know was true. The only thing is you eat right and love to do what you are doing. That's the only way to make it. But today that's the curse of the nation, is glut eating. People will not eat right. There's so much to drink, there's so much to eat. And obesity, there's a world of people dying with horrible things with their knees but they carry thirty pounds I mean three hundred pounds that's knocking that knee everyday. They have pains in their backs if they'd take off that front they wouldn't have any problem. But it's so hard not to eat right. They've got to have three meals a day, they've got to have a protein at every meal and they should have vegetables with two meals. And they should have five and a half hours between their meals if they want to live and cut out all drink except water. There's so much to taste today, but I've never had anything but water. I don't even have a coke.

Parker: Well, that, that's just wonderful. Ah, would you like to tell more about your daughter. What does she do?

Denmark: Mary finished college at Georgia. Phi Beta Kappa and then she went to Emory and got her masters degree in English. Then she went to the Constitution working, writing for the paper. She met one of her professors at the University of Georgia and she married Grady Hutcherson. And they got married and she had two degrees and she was, she was like her father, she was a very smart woman, she wasn't like me. But she gave up everything on earth except being a wife and a lover. She reared two of the finest sons that ever went up full shell. I never saw her smoke a cigarette or drink or do anything like that.
One's a big business man now and the other is a doctor, practicing medicine in Colorado. But Mary didn't have to, her husband retired from the University. He taught English. He died. He dropped dead in the back yard. So Mary's left alone. And Mr. Denmark went away in '91. So we were both left without our husbands. Mr. Denmark did everything for me. I never had to practice medicine. He paid my way. And he paid the bills. I had help. But when he went away, I was a helpless person. But it happened that Mary just took over. And so she's been really a, she does all the work on the business and law and everything we have to do. Every Thursday she spends all day long seeing that I have the right food, the house is run right and everything is right.

Parker: Does she live here with you?

Denmark: Oh! No. She's still in Athens. She does a lot of things in Athens. She helps with the poor and at the University. She's the choral leader in the choral society. She's helped a lot of students. She takes every Thursday to come help look after me. So it's been working very nice.

Parker: So, one grandson is in Colorado and where is the other grandson?

Denmark: He's in Atlanta.

Parker: And you still play golf?

Denmark: Well, I didn't play this year because we've always gone to High Hampton, North Carolina. For years and years our family would meet there at High Hampton at Cashiers, North Carolina. And as years went on and on they've died off and died off and there's only two brothers left and they were here at the party and we had our big plan to go, we always go the day after Labor Day and spend a week or ten days playing golf and just having a good time at High Hampton. But the two brothers were here for the party, the one went back to Portsmouth and in forty-eight hours he had a stroke and was paralyzed. And the other one developed cancer. So that kinda messed up our trips back to High Hampton, so there's nobody to go with this year. So, I didn't get to play golf.

Parker: Well, I don't suppose you still play tennis?

Denmark: No, I don't. In fact, I wish I'd kept that up. No, when I went to intern in Atlanta and admitted the first baby at Eggleston, I was there two years and then I went to the Children's Hospital in Philadelphia and when I was there I gave up the tennis business and I never played again.

Parker: Well, I suppose then that we've gone through the questionnaire and I really do appreciate this Dr. Denmark.

Denmark: Well, you did a good job.
Alma Hopper, former President of Bulloch County Historical Society, arranged for her cousin Ann Harwell Parker of her Harville/Harwell Family to conduct this interview with Dr. Leila Daughtry Denmark.