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I wish I still lived in Tucker's Town At 97, Helen Wainwright is the oldest survivor of one of the most contentious episodes in our history

Simon Jones, Senior Reporter

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Friday, October 14, 2011 4:29 AM

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 14: A smile still flashes across Helen Wainwright's face every time she mentions her beloved Tucker's Town.



Helen Wainwright is now the last of the original Tucker's Town residents still alive in Bermuda. The 97-year-old shares her fondest memories with the Bermuda Sun of growing up in the "most beautiful part of Bermuda" before her family had to move out. *Photo by Simon Jones

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She was just seven years old when her family was turfed off the land they had worked for centuries.

But her happy memories of life growing up in "the most beautiful part of Bermuda" are as vivid now at the age of 97 as they were when she was a young child bunching vegetables.

Today Ms Wainwright is the last of the original Tucker's Town residents still alive, after Etta Courtney, 88, and Mai Smith, 93, passed away within the last two weeks.

All three were born on the land and their families forced to leave their homes when government passed a compulsory acquisition order on Tucker's Town in 1920 to attract rich American businessmen to Bermuda.

Ms Wainwright has many fond memories of helping with the harvest and fishing with her friends.

She said: "I was born in the house. There was no hospital or anything like that back then.

"Our house was close to the public wharf down at the end of Tucker's Town and we used to go fishing on the docks with the sun on our backs.

"We had a fire in the house and I remember every day after school we would have to pick up wood on the way home to keep the fire going so our parents could cook our meals.

"As children we were not allowed to run all over the place we had to stay in the home.

"But no one got in any trouble. Nobody wandered into other people's homes.

"People were just nice and got on with each other.

"It was the best part of the island. It was quiet and peaceful place with a real feeling of community.

"It was beautiful with cedar trees, fields and livestock everywhere.

"Our parents worked on the farm and we used to sell the extra vegetables to America.

"In the summer the children would help. I remember bunching parsley, onions, carrots and beets as a child.

"It was hard work but everyone liked it."

Ms Wainwright and her family begrudgingly left Tucker's Town in 1923.

They settled a few miles up the road in Knapton Hill.

She went on to have one son, Joseph Wainwright, who has given her ten grandchildren.

Ms Wainwright said: "I was very young when we moved out of Tucker's Town. I think I was only around seven.

"There was my step-father, Ashton Smith, my mother, Josephine, and my two brothers James and Fred Richardson.

"But I remember my stepfather was not happy to leave at all but they told him he had to go. None of us wanted to leave our home.

"Everyone was happy in Tucker's Town. It was a great place to grow up.

"I know I felt sad to leave Tucker's Town and I have wanted to go back home ever since.

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"To me what happened back then was out of order.

"But I still tell people I am from Tucker's Town.

"That is my home and I still wish I was in Tucker's Town.

"When I look at Bermuda today and see what is going on I sometimes wish I was not here to see it.

"The thing that hurts is when we go to Tucker's Town these days you have to show a pass to get to where I was brought up. Most of the houses there today are empty and that is a real shame."

Asked what it means to be the last of the original Tucker's Town residents she replies: "It is difficult to say what it means to me.

"All I can say is I am still here until the good Lord takes me. What I do know is that I wish I was still living in Tucker's Town."

Danny Richardson, deputy chairman of the Tucker's Town Historical Society, said that Ms Wainwright represented "a tower of strength".

He said: "She has had to live with those challenges from a little girl and she will take them to her grave.

"We are coming to the end of an era now and Ms Wainwright is the last of the original Tucker's Town residents who was born on the land.

"We should not forget our history.

"There were around 600 people living in Tucker's Town before they were forced to leave in the 1920s.

"They were cheated out of the homes and the future they deserved.

"We can trace their families back to 1811, before the abolition of slavery, to the days when the residents would go out and pilot the ships in.

"This was a significant community in Bermuda's history."

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