

JACKSON STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

THE FARISH STREET HISTORIC DISTRICT PROJECT

RESIDENT IN THE HISTORIC DISTRICT

O. H. 78.30

REV. GEORGE THOMAS

Interviewed
by

Michael Leveritt

on

November 8, 1977

O. H. 78.30

JACKSON STATE UNIVERSITY
JACKSON, MISSISSIPPI
ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

INTERVIEW AGREEMENT

You have been asked for information to be used in connection with the Oral History Program at Jackson State University, Jackson, Mississippi. The purpose of this program is to gather and preserve information for historical and scholarly use.

A tape recording of your interview will be made by the interviewer, and a typescript of the tape will be made and submitted to you for editing. The final retyped and edited transcript, together with the tape of the interview will then be placed in the oral history collection at Jackson State University Jackson, Mississippi. Other institutions or persons may obtain a copy. These materials may be made available for purposes of research, for instructional use, for publication, or for other related purposes.

Michael Luviet

I, Rev. George Thomas, have read the above and, in view of the historical and scholarly value of this information, and in return for a final typed copy of the transcript, I knowingly and voluntarily permit Jackson State University, Jackson, the full use of this information. I hereby grant and assign all my rights of every kind whatever pertaining to this information, whether or not such rights are now known, recognized, or contemplated, to Jackson State University, Jackson, Mississippi.

Geo. A. Thomas
Interviewee Signature)

Nov. 8, 1977
Date

INTRODUCTION

Rev. George Alexander Thomas was born in 1882 in Philadelphia, Mississippi, about four miles outside of town. Rev. Thomas left Philadelphia in 1891 and later came to Jackson in the 1900s. Rev. Thomas is the pastor of a church in Terry, Mississippi. Rev. Thomas has also spent a number of years in his profession as a carpenter and a contractor.

This interview takes place in Rev. Thomas place of resident at 232 E. Cohea Street. Rev. Thomas's greatest contribution to the study of the Farish Street Historic District is that he has several of the building plans in his possession of the early buildings in the area. Rev. Thomas discusses some of the buildings and businesses that were once in the Farish Street Historic District.

Biographical Sketch:

Rev. George Alexander Thomas was born in Philadelphia, MS. in 1882 about 4 miles outside of the town. Rev. Thomas left Philadelphia in 1891 and then moved to Jackson in 1900. Since 1900 Rev. Thomas has lived in several areas of Jackson with his latest residence being located at 232 E. Cohea Street. Rev. Thomas is the pastor of a church in Terry, MS. and is 95 years of age. In addition to being a pastor, Rev. Thomas spent many of his years in Jackson as a carpenter and a contractor.

Summary:

The interview was conducted on the front porch of Rev. Thomas' home at 232 E. Cohea St., Jackson, MS. Rev. Thomas was sitting in a porch swing and there also was a very high wind. These factors coupled with the problem of his speech prevented the interviewer from getting a clear sound on the tape. After about 40-45 minutes Rev. Thomas appeared to tire and the interview was brought to a close.

Rev. Thomas' greatest contribution to the study of this area would be the fact that several of the buildings in the area were built by him. He still has in his possession several of the building plans for these buildings. These plans for these buildings would be extremely important to the researcher of the area and an attempt should be made to obtain the plans from Rev. Thomas. It was suggested to Rev. Thomas on the tape that he donate the plans to the Jackson State University Archives.

At the age of 95, Rev. Thomas will probably prove to be one of the oldest people interviewed in the Lamar-Farish street area. His contributions to the area could be great if the plans are considered as a source of future research. The tape does not come out clear and the transcribing will prove to be difficult.

INTERVIEWEE: Rev. George Thomas
INTERVIEWER: Michael Leveritt
DATE OF INTERVIEW: November 8, 1977
O.H. 78.30

Leveritt: Would you state your name and spell it?

Thomas: George Alexander Thomas, G E O R G E A L E X A N D E R
T H O M A S.

Leveritt: Would you give us your address?

Thomas: 232 East Cohea Street, Jackson, Mississippi.

Leveritt: How long have you lived in Jackson?

Thomas: Since 1900.

Leveritt: Have you lived here on Cohea Street that long?

Thomas: No. I lived in West Jackson when I first came here.
I moved on this side of town about twenty years later.
I began working at the carpenter's trade for fifty cents
a day. Ten years later I became a contractor in the
city of Jackson.

Leveritt: What brought you to Jackson?

Thomas: My brother who was a contractor lived in Jackson. I came
here because I wanted to learn the trade.

Leveritt: Where were you born?

Thomas: Four miles from Philadelphia, Mississippi.

Leveritt: When were you born?

Thomas: 1882.

Leveritt: When you first came to Jackson, can you tell us what the
city was like?

Thomas: Capitol Street was a dirt road. All the sidewalks was 1x12
planks. The old Edward's house was built with California
style planks. There wasn't any houses in this area except
the baptist church on Parish Street. All of this was dirt
road. There were no cars at all. We could hardly stand the

- Thomas: dust from the buggies and the wagons.
- Leveritt: What major businesses were on Farish Street?
- Thomas: My brother lived out there.
- Leveritt: Did you come down to Farish Street to do any shopping or anything like that?
- Thomas: There wasn't any shopping to be done because there wasn't any stores. All the stores were on Capitol Street.
- Leveritt: What were some of the stores?
- Thomas: McRaes, and I can't think of the others.
- Leveritt: Where there stores operated by blacks on Capitol Street.
- Thomas: No, except Dr. Redmond. He had a drugstore.
- Leveritt: When did the business build up on Farish Street.
- Thomas: About fifteen years later.
- Leveritt: What year would that be?
- Thomas: 1915.
- Leveritt: What were the first businesses along Farish Street?
- Thomas: There wasn't any businesses on Farish Street in those days.
- Leveritt: What were the major streets around 1900?
- Thomas: Pearl, Pascagoula, Capitol, and Farish Street.
- Leveritt: Were there very many people living around here?
- Thomas: The population was about 150.
- Leveritt: That's not very many.
- Thomas: It grew from 150 to 175 then up to 200.
- Leveritt: You have seen Jackson grow, haven't you?
- Thomas: It wasn't a house between here and Capitol Street. This was a sage field.
- Leveritt: What was the first thing you remember being build here?

Thomas: They began building houses.

Leveritt: Who was building these houses?

Thomas: Different people including myself.

Leveritt: Were they building these houses for rental property or for people to live in?

Thomas: Different purposes, some for rent and some for sale.

Leveritt: Was it all blacks in this area or did whites live here also?

Thomas: Not in this area. They lived on Capitol Street and out further.

Leveritt: Do you remember when they built High Street through this area?

Thomas: Yes.

Leveritt: Did it have a big impact on the area as far as traffic or people are concerned?

Thomas: I use to run rabbit quails between here and the depot to State Street. This was once what you would call a country town. This was a country town when I came here.

Leveritt: It's not country anymore.

Thomas: No, not any more.

Leveritt: What type of people lived here in this lower end of downtown?

Thomas: Like it is now.

Leveritt: Where did the wealthy blacks live?

Thomas: Dr. Redmond lived on Church Street.

Leveritt: Who were the major property owners here?

Thomas: The Hicks brothers. Old man Terry sold that property out there next to Jackson College. Where WOKJ is was called called Taylor's Addition.

Leveritt: Do you think the same type of people that lived in this area now lived here twenty-five or thirty years ago?

Thomas: No, there has been a big change.

Leveritt: What kind of changes?

Thomas: From ignorance to intelligence. It is a whole lot better now than it was then.

Leveritt: Do you think that is because there are more schools?

Thomas: Yes. School means a whole lot.

Leveritt: What black schools were in Jackson when you first came?

Thomas: Jackson College and Smith Robertson.

Leveritt: What do you know about the school?

Thomas: Smith Robertson grew to be a good size school.

Leveritt: Do you remember when the school burned?

Thomas: No.

Leveritt: I think it burned in the 1920's. What were the major meeting places in this area for blacks?

Thomas: They had a hall on Farish Street. That is the only one they had.

Leveritt: Would you say that most of the houses in this area were built by white property owners or black property owners?

Thomas: They borrowed money from the Magnolia Builders Savings & Association. They loaned money freely to blacks.

Leveritt: Where were they located?

Thomas: At one time they were on Terry Street. They moved to another location and have been there ever since.

Leveritt: I understand there was a black bank called the American Bank?

Thomas: Yes. They had a colored bank there.

Leveritt: Do you remember where the bank was?

Thomas: Capitol and Pearl.

Leveritt: How long was it in existence?

Thomas: About fifteen years.

Leveritt: Did it do a lot of business?

Thomas: Yes, a right smart.

Leveritt: What do you say the attitude of the people who lived here was about intergration and segregation?

Thomas: I think they were real nice. There was a lot of trouble were I came from. Neshoba County was the worst place on earth for blacks.

Leveritt: I was told by someone else that there was an area off Farish Street called the "Jungles." Do you know anything about it?

Thomas: No.

Leveritt: What about the "Silkstocking area?"

Thomas: No.

Leveritt: You were the pastor of a church at one time, right?

Thomas: I am a pastor now.

Leveritt: Where?

Thomas: Hazlehurst and Terry, Mississippi.

Leveritt: Have you ever pastored a church in this area?

Thomas: Yes.

Leveritt: How long have you been pastoring and preaching?

Thomas: Around 50 years.

Leveritt: Do you enjoy it?

Thomas: Yes.

Leveritt: When did you move on Cohea Street?

Thomas: I have been here about 40 years or so.

Leveritt: You said when you first came that all of this was sage field, right?

Thomas: Yes.

Leveritt: When did they start paving the streets?

Thomas: About 25 or 30 years ago.

Leveritt: Do you think there was more poeple living here now than it was 20 years ago?

Thomas: Yes, twice as much.

Leveritt: Do you think this is a poverty area or just a transistional area?

Thomas: It has changed a lot for the better, but there is still room for improvement.

Leveritt: Do you think the people that live here are people who come to stay or people who will move in and out?

Thomas: They do that regularly. Sometimes they move in one week and out the next week.

Leveritt: Do you think there are alot of property owners here?

Thomas: Yes.

Leveritt: Do you know any persons who have lived here for a long time?

Thomas: No. If they are not dead, they have moved away. I don't remember anyone who has been here a long time.

Leveritt: Do you remember the first black that was buried in the cemetery on Lamar Street?

Thomas: No.

Leveritt: Someone told me

Thomas: Dr. Redmond was buried there. I think they moved him from Pascagoula.

Leveritt: Who was Dr. Redmond?

Thomas: A colored doctor.

Leveritt: How old were you when you moved to Jackson?

Thomas: 16 or 17.

Leveritt: How old was Dr. Redmond when you got here?

Thomas: I don't have any way of knowing that.

Leveritt: Would you say Dr. Redmond was a very influential man around here?

Thomas: Yes.

Leveritt: I understand that he owned quite a bit of property.

Thomas: Yes, that is true.

Leveritt: Are there any people that you know that could be considered to be influential that lived in the Farish Street area?

Thomas: C. C. Simms, Charley Coleman(?), and Dalton all of these were contractors.

Leveritt: Did you build some of these houses around here?

Thomas: Yes.

Leveritt: Where?

Thomas: Lamar Street, Mount Zion Church, just plenty of them.

Leveritt: What do you think was the biggest project you worked on?

Thomas: The largest building I worked on was Collins Funeral Home.

Leveritt: How many years did you work building houses?

Thomas: About 40 years.

Leveritt: What do you think that has affected the people more than anything else; the cost of living, the type of people living here or the city building and getting larger?

Thomas: - Anybody can live here. They have no respect for each other or anyone else. The children would make up so much noise.

Leveritt: Who built those duplex style houses?

Thomas: I don't know.

Leveritt: Do you know when they were built?

Thomas: About 10 or 12 years ago.

Leveritt: Do you think that had a great influence on this area?

Thomas: It might have.

Leveritt: Do you remember any of the major grocery stores in this area?

Thomas: No.

Leveritt: Were there any little food markets on Farish Street when you were living in West Jackson?

Thomas: I don't know.

Leveritt: There was a theatre on Farish Street, right?

Thomas: Yes.

Leveritt: Was it the Alamo?

Thomas: Yes.

Leveritt: Didn't they move?

Thomas: I don't know? I haven't been on Farish Street in a long time.

Leveritt: Do you remember the Crystal Palace?

Thomas: I have heard about it.

Leveritt: Was that a nightclub?

Thomas: I don't know.

Leveritt: Do you remember any major black politicians that had any affect?

Thomas: No. They are all dead.

Leveritt: A lot of years bring on changes.

Thomas: Yes.

Leveritt: What do you think of making this a historical distict?

Thomas: I imagine there should be some landmarks like Birdland, Collins Funeral Home, and People's Funeral Home.

Leveritt: What about the printing office on Farish Street?

Thomas: I don't know where it was.

Leveritt: Do you know a lot people on this street?

Thomas: No.

Leveritt: Were there many people living on Hamilton and Amite Street then?

Thomas: Quite a few.

Leveritt: Do you remember when they were torn down?

Thomas: Many changes are going on and made for the better since I have been here.

Leveritt: Do you remember the churches in this neighborhood?

Thomas: Chirst Temple, Mt. Helm, and Farish Street Baptist Church were around in this area.

Leveritt: What class of people lived here?

Thomas: There has been some good and some bad.

Leveritt: The first car driven in Jackson did it have a big impact here?

Thomas: Anybody that bought a car, they were it!

Leveritt: Were there many blacks with cars?

Thomas: Very few. I think Dr. Redmond was the first to have a motor car.

Leveritt: Did they have the money to buy cars?

Thomas: No, they bought them on credit.

Leveritt: What was the average wage made in the 1900's?

Thomas: I worked for 50¢ a day when I first came.

Leveritt: Can you name some of the homeowners in the area?

Thomas: I built many homes for different people.

Leveritt: Your house plans might be something you should consider turning over to the Jackson State Archives.

Thomas: Someone contacted me to build a house for them.

Leveritt: Who was it?

Thomas: I would build houses for Mr. Stewart's father regularly.

Leveritt: How much did these houses sell for.

Thomas: I don't know, I just build them.

Leveritt: What could you build a house for then?

Thomas: \$2,500 or \$3,000 depending on the size.

Leveritt: What was the largest house you built.

Thomas: About \$4,000 or \$5,000.

Leveritt: Did you build any houses on Pearl Street?

Thomas: I don't remember. I built some houses on Pascagoula Street.

Leveritt: Do you remember where?

Thomas: No.

Leveritt: Do you remember what it was like for blacks when you were young?

Thomas: One morning my sister and I were on our way to Sunday School and we saw a black man hanging dead in a tree.

Leveritt: Do you know who hung the man or for what?

Thomas: No.

Leveritt: Times were tough.

Thomas: If you went into Philadelphia the white men would run you like a rabbit.

Leveritt: Was it that bad here in Jackson?

Thomas: No.

Leveritt: Were there more blacks or whites in Jackson when you came?

Thomas: I don't know.

THOMAS, George

11

Leveritt: Mr. Thomas you have been a big help to me. Thank you for the interview.

Thomas, Rev. George
O.H. 78.30

. Index

Alamo Theatre 8

American Bank 4

Breland Funeral Home 8

Capitol Street 1-4

Carpenter's Trade 1

Cementary 6

Christ Tmple 9

Church Street 3

Cohea Street 1, 5

Coleman, Charley 7

Collin's Funeral Home 7-8

Crystal Palace 8

Dalton's, The 7

Edward's Home 1

Farish Street 1-2, 4-5, 8-9

Farish Street Baptist Church 9

Hick's, brother 3

High Street 3

Hunting 3

Intergration 5

Jackson Sate 3, 4

Jackson State Archive 9

Lamar Street 6, 7

Lynching 10

Magnolia Builder's Saving
Association 4

McRaes 2

Mississippi, Hazlehurst 5

Mississippi, Jackson 1, 8, 10

Mississippi, Philadelphia 1, 10

Mt. Helm Church 9

Mt. Zion Church 9

Neshoba County 5

Pascagoula Street 2, 10

Pearl Street 2, 4

People's Funeral Home 8

Redmond, Dr. 2, 6-7, 9

Rental Property 3

Sage Field 2, 5

Shopping 2

Silkstocking area 5

Simms, C. C. 7

Smith Robertson School 4

Sunday School 10