

HUMANITIES INPUT IN A NEIGHBORHOOD'S
Discovery: Farish Street
Oral History Program

INTERVIEWEE: Mr. London Moffet OH. 78.04
INTERVIEWER: John R. McIntosh
SUBJECT: Night Life in the Farish Street Community
DATE: June 21, 1978

This is an interview with Mr. London Moffet for the Jackson State University Oral History Program, The Farish Street Community by John R. McIntosh on June 21, 1978, at 11:47 A.M.

McIntosh: Mr. Moffet, before we get into a discussion about night life in the Farish Street Community in the late twenties, and thirties, I would like you to tell me a little something about yourself. Could you please tell me your age?

Moffet: I am sixty-three.

McIntosh: When and where were you born?

Moffet: I was born in Laurel, Mississippi, in Jones County.

McIntosh: Do you have any brothers and sisters?

Moffet: One brother. He is the closest to my daddy's mother. I retired in the State of New Orleans.

McIntosh: Are you married sir?

Moffet: Married, three children; one of them is in California. I have a girl and two sons. The youngest son is in the Army with Jackson State's ROTC, Captain and a Company Commander. The other son is traveling with Little Milton and his band.

McIntosh: Oh, you've got a musician in the family. What is his name?

Moffet: Its' London Moffet, III.

McIntosh: He's the one with Little Milton?

Moffet: Yes.

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McIntosh: Could you tell me a little about your educational background?

Moffet: Well, I finished at Jackson State and had advanced _____ at Roverton, Indiana and also at Jackson State College.

McIntosh: What about before your College, your undergraduate, your high school days, your elementary?

Moffet: I went to school at Piney Wood School and also at Lanier. I finished the 12th. grade at Lanier, here in town.

McIntosh: What is your present occupation?

Moffet: Teaching.

McIntosh: Where do you teach?

Moffet: YCO High School

McIntosh: What subject?

Moffet: Mississippi History.

McIntosh: Okay, do you know, when did you come to Jackson?

Moffet: I came to Jackson in 1931.

McIntosh: Did you come with your family?

Moffet: I came with my Mother and Father.

McIntosh: Do you have any idea why your parents moved to Jackson?

Moffet: For Better employment and better schooling and more money. My mother would not let us stay where there was not good schooling, that's why she came to Jackson, one of the reasons and we enrolled at Lanier. We were living about a block from that area during the same time in the school year 1931-1932.

McIntosh: How old were you at that time?

Moffet: . Around fourteen.

McIntosh: And you enrolled at that time in what school?

Moffet: Lanier, on Ash Street.

McIntosh: That's not the same location of Lanier today is it?

Moffet: No, Roann is there now .

McIntosh: Roann High School?

Moffet: Eight, Junior High

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McIntosh: What was your parents' occupation?

Moffet: My daddy was a Lumberjack, during the time and my mother was a Beautician.

McIntosh: Did she own her own shop?

Moffet: Yes, she did.

McIntosh: Where was her business located?

Moffet: On Humlet Street, one block from Lanier, next block over, directly behind the Catholic School.

McIntosh: Were there many black owned businesses during that time?

Moffet: Not too many.

McIntosh: Who do you think was the chief disciplinarian in your family?

Moffet: My dad.

McIntosh: Was that typical with most black families?

Moffet: Well, it varied during the time, some families you found the Mother the chief. She gave all the orders, but my daddy gave all the orders. But when it came down to schooling, my mother gave all the orders there. As I said before, she did not stand for us to go to a no good school. But we were in a town where there was not a school, some towns you could find them during that time.

McIntosh: Okay, do you think that your mother and father played an equal role in rearing the child?

Moffet: Yes.

McIntosh: Do you think this is true today, about the disciplinarian question also. Do you think it is true that both parents take an equal role or do you think that one takes more of a role than the other?

Moffet: Nowadays it's different, usually you will find that one will take the role more than others because I've seen some families where you can hardly find a family. Quite a few families now are one parent families and usually it's later the man has gone somewhere and they don't know where he is.

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- McIntosh: That was not the case in the early days.
- Moffet: Not in the early days, you will find some but not too many.
- McIntosh: Then they were more stricter on their children and most of them stayed together more than they do now.
- Moffet: Did you find many of them moving North back then. You know, moving to the North to find a land of opportunity, so to speak?
- Moffet: No, not too many. The migration North started in later days for better employment and so forth.
- McIntosh: So when people moved in the twenties and thirties it was basically to find employment, right?
- Moffet: Right, better employment.
- McIntosh: Okay. About what age did you start experiencing the night life or entertainment in this particular area?
- Moffet: Well, I was about fifteen or sixteen and most times I had a brother three years older than I was and most of the time we would be together because we just didn't run around by ourselves like they do today.
- McIntosh: What kind of entertainment was available for a fifteen year old at that time?
- Moffet: Well, there would be a school party or something like that. Some special entertainment at certain places around Farish Street. It wasn't as rough as it is now.
- McIntosh: Did any of you ever go to Farish Street at a young age?
- Moffet: We would go over there when there was a dance or something like that, and ^{two} ballrooms you might call it. We would go to different places at different times.
- McIntosh: You mentioned two ballrooms. Would you name them?
- Moffet: The Savoy, larger than the Crystal Palace, was located on Farish Street across from where that new construction is now, upstairs. I believe in the corner it's Raymond's store, on the corner there of Farish and Amite, it's upstairs there. That's where the Savoy was.

McIntosh: It no longer exists, the building?

Moffet: The building is still there and the upstairs is still there too. They haven't bothered that part. That was the second dance hall. Now the first dance hall was the Crystal Palace. It was located on Farish Street where Oakly comes into Farish Street, upstairs. And that was the main up-to-date, what they call ballroom. On the inside it has the place where the people sat down, and stairs that go up space all the way along our bench or our platform, a platform where anybody could sit down if they wanted to and at the end there was a space about twenty feet wide from there to the stand where the bands would play. We had two important bands at that time, Doc Palmer, which played loud music what you might call it. His house is still there on Farish Street.

McIntosh: These are local bands that you're talking about?

Moffet: Local Bands, two main local bands here in town. It's, on Farish Street, two houses right behind the entrance of Seale Lilly. One of the houses I was looking at yesterday, Doc Palmer's House. The other was Dunbar, he played what you might call Waltz and such as that and all soft music. Those were the two most important bands.

McIntosh: Now you have described the ballrooms, what was in the bottom. You've mentioned the ballroom in both of these to be upstairs, what usually existed in the bottom, the first floor?

Moffet: Now the first floor was the old business. In fact, they are now at the Savoy. Crystal Palace comes downstairs it was a drugstore on one side and a Barber Shop on one side of the stairs, downstairs at the Crystal Palace.

McIntosh: I'm going to ask you a question you may not remember this too well, but you mentioned the band. Do you remember any of the popular songs at that time?

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Moffet: No, but I do remember the dances what we use to do.

McIntosh: Yeah, that's good.

Moffet: It was the old fashioned Two Step, Fox Trot, and the Waltz and also the Slow Drag, everybody does it.

McIntosh: Yeah, that's still around.

Moffet: They're still around, those songs, the Waltz like we do now is still around.

McIntosh: I don't think the Waltz is ever going to go out of style. I never learned it though.

Moffet: Right, some of the same Waltz they paly now were played then.

McIntosh: Did any of the big bands ever come to Jackson, any to the Crystal Palace or the Savoy?

Moffet: They had some out of town bands to come but we didn't go to them.

McIntosh: Was there any reason?

Moffet: No, we just didn't go, but it was seldom that they would come.

McIntosh: Oaky, you mentioned that one of the clubs still exists, what about the other one, the Crystal Palace, is it still there in any form?

Moffet: Yes. It's still there. In fact, both of them are still there but they are not using them now.

McIntosh: If you would, would you give me the address, I'd like to see the building.

Moffet: Well, you know where Oakly comes into Farish Street, the service station on the corner, upstairs and upstairs is the Crystal Palace. Mr. Hodges did own it at one time, but that's where it is, it's upstairs... Now I think they have a law office there now.

McIntosh: Is that next to Dotty Cab in that area?

Moffet: I believe it is, there's a dining room next to it.

McIntosh: Okay, I just wanted to check these palces out to see what they look like now.

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MOFFETT: The Savoy, you can look upstairs there over Raymond's Drug Store still there, Ferguson is on this side of Anderson and the Dry Good Store is on the south side. It's upstairs.

McINTOSH: Do you recall an Opera House anywhere in the area for Blacks at any time?

MOFFETT: Maybe so. I don't remember an Opera House. We had two or three theatres.

McINTOSH: What about the theatres? Were they black owned businesses?

MOFFETT: No, they were white owned businesses. Blacks would go to the Alamo Theatre. It was located on Amite Street at that time. The Central Theatre was located on Capitol. You could go upstairs there and Whites went downstairs. The Alamo Theatre, the owner was a friend of the finance company and some of us, whenever we didn't have any money, all we had to do was go down there and get a pass. I've been down there several times to get a pass. If I didn't have any money and there was a film that I wanted to see, he would give it to you.

McINTOSH: How much would it cost?

MOFFETT: The pass?

McINTOSH: No, just to see the movie?

MOFFETT: Twenty cents or fifteen cents.

McINTOSH: You still had to get a pass? Fifteen cents was evidently hard to get those days.

MOFFETT: Yes it was. You could go down there and get enough groceries for a dollar and a half to last you a whole week, two bags.

McINTOSH: You mentioned the seating arrangements. In other words, this sort of balcony like part of the theatre. What was it like? You said the Blacks sat upstairs?

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MOFFETT: Central, you went up a fire escape outside and came inside.

McINTOSH: You stayed so the White people would never know you were there, right?

MOFFETT: Right. We could . . .there was another way we went up the back.

McINTOSH: I mentioned races here. Did Whites ever attend events here at the Crystal Palace?

MOFFETT: No, they never did attend there unless a policeman came by and we hardly ever say him.

McINTOSH: I understand that at one time there were different names for different parts of the community. Did you ever hear of this when you were growing up, say the Silver Stocking District?

MOFFETT: No, I never heard of that one.

McINTOSH: What about Jungle or Heart's Alley?

MOFFETT: I know where Heart's Alley and Adams' Alley and all such as that.

McINTOSH: Do you have any idea where they got these names?

MOFFETT: No, I don't.

McINTOSH: Okay, I have one more here. . .the Red Light District, you ever heard of that?

MOFFETT: No, but I tell you one thing. There was a section of town that you just didn't fool around. You didn't go to a certain part of town unless you knew somebody in that part of town. For instance, people in West Jackson didn't go in South Jackson too much. I don't know whether I told you that or not. They had a gang in each part of town and you go down there they would run you out. If you knew somebody down there you could be free to go down there because they wasn't going to bother you.

McINTOSH: In the 1920's and 1930's, I'm sure of that. From what little I know about the state, liquor was not legal in no part of Mississippi. Now you have talked about night life

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McINTOSH: and entertainment and ballrooms. Did they have alcoholic beverages in these places?

MOFFETT: No, wasn't any alcoholic beverages to be found openly. You know what I mean by openly?

McINTOSH: Yes. Well could you just sit it out on your table like they do now?

MOFFETT: No, you couldn't.

McINTOSH: Was the liquor what we call bootleg, without a seal?

MOFFETT: Yes, most entertainment I would go to would be something pertaining to school or something like that. For instance, house parties and that was in style. We had about two good pianist at Lanier, the Sanders boys. Whenever we would make an announcement at a house party that Sanders was playing, then we would have a crowd. There were quite a few house parties. Mostly we would go down to the Crystal Palace on a special occasion such as a special affairs or something like that, that's where mostly we would go. The adults wnet down there mostly all the time. Our main hangout was on Drummond's corner, you might call it.

McINTOSH: Just a corner?

MOFFETT: We called it Drummond's corner. That's on the corner of Lynch and Rose.

McINTOSH: You all just hung out on the street there?

MOFFETT: Mostly adults.

McINTOSH: Oh, adults?

MOFFETT: But our hangout place . . .the adults would walk over cross the river. They called that the gold coast.

McINTOSH: Do you know why they call it that?

MOFFETT: That's the place where you can put your liquor out and go there and buy it. They call it the gold coast. All the

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MOFFETT: adults would go there and get drunk and what not. Still it wasn't legal but it was there and nobody bothered it.

McINTOSH: It would be an indication that it was organized?

MOFFETT: It was organized true enough. Nobody bothered it.

McINTOSH: Say an outsider like me from Simpson County couldn't bring my liquor in there could it?

MOFFETT: Oh, anybody could bring it, go out of town and order what ever you want, just like you bought it today.

McINTOSH: Okay, I've mentioned maybe I didn't, but what about the Law? How did they treat Black people in the community?

MOFFETT: Well, it was kind of rough in a way I say. They call you everything, all kinds of names. They would tell you to stay in your place.

McINTOSH: Did you know your place, well you practically had to know your place then.

MOFFETT: That's true. Stay out the way of them. Of course I never had any trouble with them because I always stayed out the way of them at home.

MOFFETT: I tell you what now, during that time most times when you go out, say the movies or something like that, you had to be back at a certain time. Sometimes you had to be back before dark. If the young lady had a brother, you had to pay his way in to.

McINTOSH: As an escort?

MOFFETT: Right.

McINTOSH: Well, how did you get around?

MOFFETT: You walked everywhere you went. My brother for instance would take a young lady out. Her mother would trust me and nobody else. She lived next door to me and I talked to her and take her to the show. I was the only one who could take her to the show.

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McINTOSH: Do you remember any of the old movies?

MOFFETT: Tommix. That was the Saturday night special. I would go there and pay for Saturday and come home. Saturday afternoon--Tormix, William Boyd, Tex Row, all of them was my favorite. Antother time all through the week I didn't think about going to the movies. I went there Saturday night and I saw the movie twice.

McINTOSH: Were there any Black characters in any movie?

MOFFETT: No, didn't see a one. You may see a maid or a cook or something like that and that's about all.

McINTOSH: Seems like the first Black I can remember, say on television, was Amos and Andy. Did they ever make a movie?

MOFFETT: I don't know. That's just about the first that I heard that those people were not colored people. Some of them were made up.

MOFFETT: Made up. I can't think of the name now. It's been too long a time. Paul Ropes came on the scene. . .

McINTOSH: Do you remember the years, say early 1930's here in Jackson?

MOFFETT: That's when I came. I came here in 1931.

McINTOSH: I've forgotten how old you said you were.

MOFFETT: Thirteen or fourteen.

McINTOSH: Suppose in 1931 I wanted to have an evening of entertainment at the Crystal Palace, I wanted to eat and then I wanted a room. How much money would I need back then?

MOFFETT: To go in the Crystal Palace you would need about 50¢ or 25¢. You could go to the movies for 30¢. To eat you would need around about 50¢ or 75¢. I don'g know how much a room would be.

McINTOSH: I was thinking of an outsider coming into town for one of the big shows. What were some of the hotels available for Blacks?

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MOFFETT: Summers Hotel here on Pearl Street and the Ebony Hotel down on Cohea Sreet I believe it is.

McINTOSH: What about this. . .

MOFFETT: You could rent a room around here on Farish Street, mostly anywhere. One night, three or four.

McINTOSH: Summers Hotel, was it in existence then?

MOFFETT: I'm not sure, I believe so.

McINTOSH: So you wouldn't know how much it costs you to sleep?

MOFFETT: No, but the rooms, they weren't too much.

McINTOSH: I've heard some people who lived in the 1930's tell about Ministrel stories some type.

MOFFETT: I don't rmember any Ministrel shows here but I was at Piney Woods, they would have movies and Ministrel shows to come there in large tents. I don't remember the price because mother always paid my way in. We would stay there for about a week or so and some of those characters were colored.

McINTOSH: Did they ever have what you call tent revival to move into the Jackson wehre they may hold service for a week or so? Was there such a thing back then?

MOFFETT: Yes. It was tents going around but I don't remember any coming close around because we always stayed in Church.

McINTOSH: One event that happens now-a-days every year and I wait for it every year, is the fair. Did you attend the fair?

MOFFETT: Yes. The fair then was separate. It was held for colored over there on Bailey Avenue along there there there's now a _____ Church. Billups Service Station is there. It wasn't there then. We use to walk from Lanier, that's where Rowann School is now. We had a parade all the way from there to the fair. That was a thrilling time. It was the band, football team and so forth. They would play there where Billups Service Station is. There was a ball park and they

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- MOFFETT: played special games in there on Friday afternoon. They didn't play at night because there wasn't any lights. The fair was on a simple basis, the merry-go-round and so forth.
- McINTOSH: The price was just different?
- MOFFETT: The price was different. Around about twenty or twenty-five cents, something like that. I can't remember.
- McINTOSH: Did you play football or were you in the band, either of those?
- MOFFETT: No, I did not.
- McINTOSH: Okay. I want to ask you a question. If you were asked to compare the night life entertainment in the Farish Street community today with what it was when you were growing up there, what would you say?
- MOFFETT: I would say it's gotten a lot rougher now. Some of the things you see walking around here now you just didn't see it then. Everything was a lot stricter then. Some of the things open like today down there it wasn't there. Anybody could walk on Farish Street and you wouldn't hear a lot of cursing like you walk on Farish Street now. You walk on Farish Street now and you will hear anything and see anything.
- McINTOSH: What about the little clubs down there? Do they compare to the Crystal Palace or the Savoy?
- MOFFETT: Well. . .
- McINTOSH: I don't know whether you frequented them or not. If you didn't maybe the outside appearance or something?
- MOFFETT: Well they are more addressive now, modernized.
- McINTOSH: Jet set, I believe you mihg't call it. They appeal to a certain class.
- MOFFETT: Right. The only difference that I can see is that they have just modernized themselves.
- McINTOSH: Do they use some of the same buildings?

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- MOFFETT: They are still using some of the same buildings. Some of them have been torn down and built over. For instance, where the Home Dining Room is now it was over cross the street. That building had been torn down and they had moved in another building. It was a little more decent and that was about all. All along there were mostly residents. Some of that across side of Farish Street had been torn down and modernized. For instance, they had a clinic down there. Dr. Smith had a clinic there on the corner. It's about on the corner of Oakley and Farish Street, it had been torn down.
- McINTOSH: Okay. Thank you for your time. It's been quite enlightening to interview you.
- MOFFETT: Thank you very much.
- McINTOSH: Mr. Moffett, are you aware that this tape is being used by the Jackson State University Oral History for the purpose of scholarly and educational purposes?
- MOFFETT: Yes I am and you can use it too.

END OF INTERVIEW

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