

JACKSON STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

THE FARISH STREET HISTORIC DISTRICT PROJECT

HOMEOWNER IN THE HISTORIC DISTRICT

O. H. 77.27

LEE WILLIAMS

Interviewed
by

Deborah McGlothin

on

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Williams, Lee
O. H. 77.27

Index

Alabama 9
American Bank 2
Amite Street 9
Armstrong, Louis 2
Ash Street 3
Assembly program 4
Atlanta World 11
Bachelor degree 4
Bakery shop 5
Banks, E. W. 12
Baseball 10
Basketball 10
Bilbo, Senator 8
Blacks 9, 10
Black History Week 4
Black movement 8
Black realtor 1
Brotherhood Bible Class 8
Brown, Rev. T. B. 8
Cade Chapel 7
California 8
Campbell, Lawrence 5
Candy Kithchen 5
Carver, George Washington 4
Cemetery 6
Chicago 8
Church Street 1, 7
Cleave, Van 9
Clouds of Joy 2
Civil War 6
Collins Funeral Home 2
College Park 10
Conic, Mr. 12
Crescent Laundry 5, 11
Crystal Palace 2
Davenport, Miss 2
Debating society 4
Doctorate degree 4
Dryphus Street 1, 11
Edwards's Hotel 2
Farish Street 1, 2, 5, 8, 10, 11
Farish Street Baptist Church 7
Football 4
George Street 1, 6
Grayson street 6
Green, Bishop S. L. 4
Hall, Carsie 8
Hamilton Street 9
Handy, W. C. 2
Harvey, Clarie Collins 2, 3

Williams, Lee
O. H. 77.27

Index

High Street	6	Moore, Frank	8
Homeowner	1, 2	Mt. Helm Baptist Church	7-9
Horse-n-buggy	11	Negro business	2
House/yard boy	11	New York	8
House parties	10	Paramount Barber Shop	2
Industrial Art Shop	5	Patterson, Willie Roy	4
Indiana, Gary	9	Pearlie Grove	7
Jackson State	6, 9	People's Funeral Home	12
Jim Hill	3	Prostitution	9
Johnson, Dr.	12	Rankin County	3
Johnson, Governor Paul B.	4	Realtors	12
Jones, C. P.	7, 8	Reddix, Dr.	9
Kirk, Andy	2	Red light district	9
Lamar Street	6, 7	Red Circle	2
Lanier High School	3, 5	Redmond, Dr. S. D.	1, 5, 10
Lanier, Professor	3	Reynolds, Sally	3
Martin School	5	Reynolds, School	3
Martha	5	Rhodes, Mrs.	2
Marshall, Mary	3	Rice, A. L.	9
Marshall School	3	Rowan School	3
Masonic Temple	5	Savoy	2
McKee Street	5	Sellistine	2
Mill Street	9	Security Life Insurance Company	8
Miller, Dr.	11	Smith Robertson	3, 5
Mississippi, Jackson	5	Speed, Leland	6

Williams, Lee
O. H. 77.27

Index

State Street 1
Stewart, Peter 12
Stewart, Walter 12
Sun-N-Sand 6
Washington, Booker T. 4

Whites 9
Whitestone Road 12
Williams, Duke 8
Zoo 10
YWCA, Marino Branch 3, 10

INTRODUCTION

Dr. Lee William is a homeowner in the Farish Street Historic District. He has served as an instructor and Vice President for Administration at Jackson State University. He attended Smith Robertson School and later went to Lanier High School. He is a graduate of Jackson State University.

Dr. Williams discusses owning property in the Farish Street Historic District. He talks about black realtors and homeowners in the area around 1924. He talks about the black businesses in the area such as barber shops, banks, nightclubs, etc. He reflects on going to Smith Robertson School, some of the teachers, and also some of the activities at school. He discuss how the various churches were formed through their involvement with Mt. Helm Church. He remembers when he worked as a yard/house boy and the first black person getting a car in the city of Jackson.

INTERVIEWEE: Dr. Lee E. William
INTERVIEWER: Deborah McGlothlin
DATE OF INTERVIEW: October 27, 1977
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McGlothlin: I am interviewing Mr. Lee Williams, Vice President for Administration. The topic is the Historical Landmark in the Farish Street Historic District.

Are you a homeowner in the District?

Williams: Yes.

McGlothlin: Where is the property located?

Williams: 832 Dryphus Street and 209 George Street.

McGlothlin: Have you been a homeowner there for many years?

Williams: I have been at 832 Dryphus Street since 1924.

McGlothlin: During that time were there many black realtors or homeowners?

Williams: Yes. There were a number of homeowners in the District in 1924. It was more then than it is now. Some of that property has now become rental property.

McGlothlin: Was there a problem at that time with the black realtors compared with the number of white realtors that were in the area?

Williams: I don't recall if there was any problems. You had black property owners as well as white property owners. There were a number of black people who lived here and rented property as well. Dr. S. D. Redmond had a considerable amount of property which exceeded over a hundred or more houses. He was a doctor and a lawyer. He lived on Church Street. Mr. Conic lived on the corner of Blair Street and Church Street. He had a considerable amount of property in the area. His children still own the property.

So, many individuals owned property in 1924 and also had individual homes.

McGlothlin: Is this area considered a slum area?

Williams: Some people consider it as such, but the people who live here do not consider it as a slum area.

McGlothlin: Did any of the homeowners live in this area?

Williams: I lived in there from 1924 to 1954.

McGlothin: Were the homeowners considered in a separate class from the people who lived there?

Williams: There have been people renting in the same place for 10, 20, and 25 years. I don't think there was any feelings about a class difference between property owners against those who were not. I know that the owners paid more attention and appreciated it more than the people who didn't own it.

McGlothin: Do you recall anything about the American Bank?

Williams: Yes. There was once a black bank, but it went out of existence before I appeared here. You probably can find some information on it from Mrs. Rhodes in the library. She has a book that was published in 1912 on Negro businesses and etc.

Dr. Redmond's brother owned a drugstore on Farish Street. Claude Hodges was the first black to put up a filling station in the state of Mississippi.

There were several dance halls for Blacks on Farish Street. There was the Red Circle, the Savoy, and the Crystal Palace. *were* One of the dancehalls was frequented by blacks. They were often visited by W. C. Handy, Louis Armstrong, Andy Kirk, the Clouds of Joy, and Sellistine from New Orleans. All of these bands came down and played on Farish Street.

McGlothin: Did you ever go to any of those dances?

Williams: Yes, I started going there when I was in the third grade.

McGlothin: Were there any restrictions where children could go at that time?

Williams: There were no restriction. During that time blacks and whites were completely separated. It was no question about your going to the Edward's Hotel because you knew you weren't going. It wasn't until the 1960s that things began to change, but it was very clear where you could go and the things you could do.

McGlothin: Are those businesses still in the Farish Street area?

Williams: There are some of the businesses still there like the Paramount Barber Shop and some of the places that were owned by the Conic's. A few of the doctor's offices are still there and Collins' Funeral Homes is still there. It was started in 1917 by Miss Clarie Collins' father. It is still in operation today. She would be a good person

Williams: to talk to because she was born and reared in this area.

McGlothlin: Miss Collins?

Williams: Clarie Collins Harvey. She has received world recognition for her participation in women activities and organizations.

McGlothlin: How old were you when you were in the third grade since you had said that you were going to those places in the third grade?

Williams: I was ten years old when I completed the first grade. I got a double promotions several times which moved me up very fast. When I came from Rankin County and started attending the Jackson Public School, they started me off in the first grade instead of where I was suppose to be. I guess I was about thirteen when I was in the third grade.

McGlothlin: Was that practiced a lot in the public schools?

Williams: Yes, because the public school was assuming that they were better than the schools in the country. The same thing holds true if a person from the Jackson Public Schools goes to Chicago, they were put back because they felt that you had not received the fundamentals they had received.

McGlothlin: What school did you attend?

Williams: Smith Robertson.

McGlothlin: Did you start there in the first grade?

Williams: Yes. Mrs. Lanier, Prinicpal Lanier's wife, was my first grade teacher. Miss Davenport was my next teacher. She has been retired for 15 or 20 years. My next teacher was Miss Sally Reynolds. The Sally Reynold's School is named after her. My next teacher was Miss Mary Marshall. The Marshall School was named in honor of her. The next teacher I had was Mrs. Betty Marino. The Marino Branch YWCA is named in honor of her. Those are a few teachers that I had at Smith Robertson School. Professor Lanier was the prinicipal. Lanier High School was named after him.

McGlothlin: Did you attend the eight years there?

Williams: No, I attended six years at Smith Robertson and the seventh grade at Lanier High School. Lanier use to be located on Ash Straet where Rowan school is now.

McGlothin: How many choices did you have in terms of attending a particular school?

Williams: It wasn't any choices regarding the school that you had to go to. You could either go to Jackson State University or the Catholic School. It wasn't but one public high school for blacks in Jackson and that was Lanier High School. It was no more than three black high schools in the state of Mississippi in 1920.

McGlothin: What type of activities did you have at school?

Williams: The same type as now. (laughter) We had football, basketball, a debating society, and visit from distinguish lecturers like Roscoe C. Simmons and Bishop S. L. Green. We had a Chapel, assembly programs, and some very dedicated teachers. They were very dedicated to moving the students forward.

McGlothin: You said that all of the instructors had degrees and that they were self taught.

Williams: All of them more or less had degrees. During that time people could finish the eight grade and start teaching. The bachelor's degree was rarer than the doctorate's degree is now. You could be certified by the County Superintendent to teach if you finished the twelfth grade. It wasn't until 1954 that they started requiring that everyone who taught in the public school have a bachelor's degree. Most of the people who taught college only had a bachelor's degree. It was very unusual for anyone teaching college to have a master's degree.

McGlothin: Did they have the same standard system and books as the white school?

Williams: They had the same standard system. They started giving free textbooks during the time of Governor Paul B. Johnson's administration. There might have been a few cases in which everyone didn't get enough books, but all of them were free. It was a very few isolated situations that the white folk would take all the new books and give the blacks the used books.

McGlothin: Did you all study black history?

Williams: We have always had black history week. We had to study black history because we had black history week. A lot of emphasis was placed on outstanding blacks like Booker T. Washington and George Washington Carver. I personally had the opportunity to meet Dr. George Washington Carver. He had made some kind of an extraction that would cure athlete's feet. He gave some to me to see if it would do

Williams: my feet any good.

McGlothin: Did it work?

Williams: I don't think it worked. It was a very rich experience for me to meet him.

McGlothin: Do you remember a baker that was influential in this area?

Williams: I can't think of his name. There were some people on Farish Street that had a bakery shop between Farish and Church Street, but I can't remember their names. It was right across from Crescent Laundry. It was two men who had the bakery. They sold candy and that sort of thing. Dr. Funchess might be a good person to talk to. He has lived in this area since 1924.

Williams: He might be able to help you with recollections of some of those events. I think the bakery was called the Candy Kitchen or something like that.

The only person I know that was involved in politics was Dr. Redmond. Willie Roy Patton whose involved in the Industrial Arts Shop was born on McKee Street. Mr. Lawrence Campbell also works in the Industrial Shop was born in that area and lives on Dryphus Hill.

McGlothin: Did any of these people attend Smith Robertson?

Williams: Yes, they all attended Smith Robertson and Lanier High School. Mr. Patton and Mr. Campbell were my high school classmates. We finished school at Lanier at the same time.

McGlothin: Do you remember when Smith Robertson burned?

Williams: I don't remember when it burned.

McGlothin: I don't recall the year myself. The structure that is there now was rebuilt since the first structure.

Williams: It has been modified three or four times. You can probably go to the city of Jackson and get the records of whatever changes that have been made to the building.

It was the first building for blacks to go to school in Jackson. Jim Hill was next door to the Masonic Temple. It was the next school to be built in Jackson. Following that was Martin School in South Jackson.

WILLIAMS, Lee

McGlothin: Did you ever teach at any of those schools?

Williams: No. I have not taught any place except Jackson State. I received my diploma in May and I was hired to work here in July.

McGlothin: Do you remember anything being in that area by Lamar Street other than that grave yard?

Williams: No. The cemetery goes way back to the Civil War. On the south end are grave sites of blacks and on the north end are the grave sites of whites.

McGlothin: Do you remember the intersection always being like that where the street curves back on George Street?

Williams: No, it hasn't always been like that. George Street ran through. It has just recently--see that street use to be named Grayson Street, but when they decided to extend Lamar from downtown, they brought it through here and changed the name to Lamar Street. Lamar Street did not connect with Grayson Street. Where the Sun-N-Sand is, all of that use to be black residential and rental property. When the City got ready to build the State Office Building they made the street so it would go all the way through.

McGlothin: It was just a part of expanding the City when that change came about? I understand that High Street wasn't there either, do you recall?

Williams: No, High Street was not there. To get out of the city people had to come down North West Street to George Street then turn right on Lamar Street by the cemetery, go up to Monument Street and then turn to the left. To make it convenient for the city employees they decided to come through that section and curve around there.

McGlothin: Do you remember the streets always being paved?

Williams: No, the streets haven't always been paved. In 1924 none of the streets were paved. We didn't have gas, lights, or water during that time. There was a common hydrant for the community to use. Everybody from the neighborhood would come there to get their water. Later on they fixed it so you could have a hydrant on the inside of the house or on the back porch. It wasn't until Leland Speed was mayor that they eliminated the outside toilet. The men who specialized in this type of work would come around and dig the holes and clean out the toilets.

McGlothin: Was Mt. Helm Church there when you were a kid?

Williams: That church has been here since 1867. It was originally part of the First Baptist Church. The blacks had to worship in the basement and the whites worshipped upstairs. When the Negroes were set free, they made so much noise until they put them out. They then came down to the corner of Church and Lamar Street. Someone gave them a peice of property so they could build their own church.

McGlothin: You are saying that the blacks and whites used the same facitilies, but just different parts?

Williams: Black used the same facility, but you understand that in slavery time blacks couldn't hold any kind of church services except if there were at least three white people of standing in the community present when they worshipped. They carried on their services under the supervision of whites until after the Civil War. The church had its beginning in 1835 under the supervision of whites then in 1867 they started operating it on their own.

McGlothin: How do you recall it being when you were a child?

Williams: I went there first in 1924. It was like it is now except now there is far more members. People came from all over the city to Mt. Helm. Mt. Helm is more or less the mother church for a number of members. Pearlie Grove, Cade Chapél, and Greater Clark Street were missions out of Mt. Helm. Farish Street Baptist Church is a split from Mt. Helm Church. The Church of God is a split from Mt. Helm Church.

C. P. Jones was trying to make Mt. Helm Church into a Holiness Church. They took him to court and the judge ruled that that section of land was given to them for a Baptist Church. It has remained Baptist thus far. Mr. Jones went over to the next corner and started the Temple Church. He was a very powerful leader. He would be singing and praying, he would tell the people he was talking with Christ.

McGlothin: Did you believe him?

Williams: He would get a very warm reception from the people.

McGlothin: So, he was sort of a leader?

Williams: He was a leader. Thousands of people quit other churches to join him.

McGlothin: Did he do anything to organize the church on a different structure?

Williams: You would have to get the history on the Holiness movement to know what he did. Mr. Frank Moore can give you the book which will tell you the history of the Holiness Church.

McGlothlin: Did you get involved in any of these organizations?

Williams: No, because I was a member of Mt. Helm Church.

McGlothlin: I am talking about a leadership role?

Williams: My leadership role in the area has been in relationship with Mt. Helm Church. I have been associated with Mt. Helm since 1935. I have been a member of the Brotherhood Bible Class since 1935. I have served as a Trustee of of Mt. Helm Church and President of the Brotherhood Bible Class since 1954. I was instrumental in the selection of Reverend T. B. Brown as pastor of Mt. Helm Church.

Mr. Duke Williams who lives in this area is President of Security Life Insurance Company.

McGlothlin: That's across the street.

Williams: He lived in the area until about three years ago. Mr. Carsie Hall has lived in the area for 15, 20 or 30 years. When Senator Bilbo was running for the Senate, he was talking about tar and feather and shooting all the Negroes who went to the polls to vote.

McGlothlin: Is this the same Bilbo that is on the statue?

Williams: Yes. He was the governor of the state on two occasions. He was a senator from the state for several years.

McGlothlin: What was the controversy with him in the black community?

Williams: He didn't want anything black around him. He wore white clothes and drove a white oxen. He was a spokesman for whites in terms of their relationship to Negroes. Anything he had to say about Negroes was not complimentary.

McGlothlin: How did the campaign against him come out?

Williams: Some of the blacks left the state because they were unhappy. As a result they went to Chicago, New York and California so that they could vote for people that were going to speak up for blacks in areas that were oppressed.

McGlothlin: Were you ever involved in movements for blacks?

- Williams: No, I was not involved in politics. My thoughts has primarily been that of an educator.
- McGlothin: Would you say that there were a lot of illerate people in and around the Farish Street area?
- Williams: I think most of them attended school, but many of them were dropouts.
- McGlothin: Do you remember Mt. Helm Church having any relationship with Jackson State?
- Williams: Yes. Around 1883-1885, Mt. Helm was the campus for Jackson State for two years. A number of persons who were chaplain at Jackson State were the pastors at Mt. Helm. A. L. Rice was one of them.
- McGlothin: Do you remember Dr. Reddix?
- Williams: Yes, I was here when he came.
- McGlothin: Did he attend Mt. Helm?
- Williams: No. Dr. Reddix was born in Van Cleave in South Mississippi. He left there and went to Alabama from there he went to Gary, Indiana and from there he came to Jackson.
- Rev. Rice became pastor of Mt. Helm Church in 1927. He passed in 1958. President Reddix came to Jackson State in 1940 and stayed until he retired in 1967.
- McGlothin: Do you remember a place called the red light district?
- Williams: Yes, it is in the same area as the Alamo Theatre, right across the street from Myer's Peanut. That whole section between Mill, Hamilton, and Amite Streets were considered the red light district.
- McGlothin: Why did they call it that?
- Williams: I don't know. I guess it was because of the activities that were going on. It was generally the area that prostitutes operated.
- McGlothin: Did the blacks and whites have a good relationship? Did the whites ever come down in the red light district?
- Williams: I don't know if you would call it good relations or not. The whites have always come there in search of black women.
- McGlothin: Did they just hang in the red light district or did they go

McGlothlin: to any clubs?

Williams: The number who attended the clubs were few. They were not clubs, but dance hall. No drinks or anything was sold. They had to pay a fee to get in.

McGlothlin: Do you recall anything being on the corner of Farish and Monument other than the "Y"?

Williams: It use to be a cleaners and residential area there.

McGlothlin: Was the swimming pools always there?

Williams: No, the swimming pools were built in conjunction with the YMCA.

McGlothlin: Did you ever swim there?

Williams: No. It was put there in 1950.

McGlothlin: Did you ever go swimming when you were a kid?

Williams: We went swimming in the country.

McGlothlin: You left the area . . . ?

Williams: I came to Jackson when I was 10 years old. The only swimming hole in Jackson was near the Zoo and it was only for whites. There was no place for Negroes until they built the one over behind College Park.

McGlothlin: What did the blacks do beside go to the pool halls?

Williams: Went to dances at the dance hall, had house parties, and had picnics. A lot of people played baseball.

McGlothlin: Did you play baseball?

Williams: Yes.

McGlothlin: What is the one thing that has influened you as far as living in this area is concerned?

Williams: I suppose the church has influenced me the most.

McGlothlin: Is there anything worth preserving in this area?

Williams: Yes, there is a lot worth preserving. Dr. Redmond's home is worth preseiving. He was the first man in the city of Jackson to have an automobile. He had to get special permission from the mayor and commissioner to take it off the railroad track and drive it on the streets.

- Williams: There is a club on campus named the Sidney Redmond Law Club. There is a building that was built by the Scott's that I think is worth preserving. They published the Atlanta World. Dr. Miller was a physician over there.
- McGlothin: Is that the same one that owns property in this area?
- Williams: Yes. His mother and father were both doctors. I think they had offices down on Farish Street.
- McGlothin: Were there any jobs for children at that time?
- Williams: Yes, but they were not the kind that we have now. I was more or less a yard/house boy. I had the responsibility of cutting the grass for a family on North State Street. I had to make the fires for the family. I had to come from Dryphus Street in the cold, rain, and sleet to come over there to make a fire so they could be warm.
- McGlothin: How much did they pay you?
- Williams: About \$3.00 is the highest amount I received.
- McGlothin: That's average amount for boys who did this kind of work?
- Williams: Yes. I got extra money from the woman who was head of the house. She always saw to it that I got plenty to eat and extra money. Before the textbook law was adopted, she always bought my books.
- McGlothin: Did many boys have jobs doing similiar things?
- Williams: Every white family on North State Street had a black yard boy and a maid and cook.
- McGlothin: Was the maid and cook more or less the parents of the boys?
- Williams: Most of them were parents who lived in that area. Before Crescent Laundry opened, the women were doing either three things, a cook, maid, or wash woman.
- McGlothin: Was teaching the only skilled jobs?
- Williams: Yes. There were a lot of people who had jobs as porters, truck drivers and that sort of thing.
- McGlothin: Did your family own a car?
- Williams: No. When we came to Jackson we had a horse and buggy.

McGlothlin: Was it common for people to have a horse and buggy?

Williams: Most people had a horse and buggy. There were a few people who had cars.

McGlothlin: Blacks?

Williams: Blacks and whites.

McGlothlin: Did any blacks have cars?

Williams: There were a good number of blacks who had cars. I think Dr. Redmond and Dr. Johnson had cars.

McGlothlin: Do you consider yourself as a businessman?

Williams: I am not a businessman. The property that I have in that area is family property. I have kept it because so much inheritances is tied up in it.

McGlothlin: Did the white realtors and homeowners out number the black realtors and homeowners?

Williams: I don't know if the white property owners would out number the black property owners. I think the whites might have more rental property than the blacks.

McGlothlin: Do you have thoughts of buying more property in the area if they are willing to sell?

Williams: No, because I am not in the Real Estate business. If you want to talk to someone in the Real Estate business you need to talk to Mr. E. W. Banks of People's Funeral Home. Mr. Stewart owns quite a bit of property.

McGlothlin: Is it Peter?

Williams: Not Peter Stewart. I am talking about the Stewart that is associated with People's Funeral Home, Walter Stewart.

McGlothlin: Since you moved out of the area, I gather you have no reason to want to go back there and live again?

Williams: No, I don't have any plans to go back and live there again. It would be no great problem for me to adjust to live in that area.

McGlothlin: Where are you living now?

Williams: 6325 Whitestone Road.

McGlothin: You are now a homeowner?

Williams: Yes.

McGlothin: I really appreciate this interview with you.

Williams: Thank you very much.

McGlothin: I am sure that this will be valuable to our project.

Williams: I appreciate you coming.