

OH. 78. 08

JACKSON STATE COLLEGE  
Jackson, Mississippi

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

INTERVIEWER AGREEMENT

I, Louella Robinson, in view of the  
(Interviewer, please print)

historical and scholarly value of the information contained in the  
interview with Edward Lee, knowingly and  
(Interviewee, please print)

voluntarily permit Jackson State College, Jackson the full use of this  
information, and hereby grant and assign to Jackson State College,  
Jackson all rights of every kind whatever pertaining to this information,  
whether or not such rights are now known, recognized or contemplated.

Louella Robinson  
Interviewer (signature)

OH. 78.08  
Interview Number

6/20/78  
Date

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.

I, Edward Lee, 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 know, recognized, or contemplated, to Jackson State University, Jackson, Mississippi.

Edward Lee  
Interviewee (Signature)

6/20/78  
Date

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES

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LEE, EDWARD ( - ) Native of Hazelhurst, Miss; Explains why he was determined to have a successful business. He is the first and only owner of the Edward Lee Hotel. He remembers there being only one other hotel in Jackson during the same time of his business. The Summer Hotel located on West Pearl Street. Mr. Lee gives a list of prices and how they have changed since he first given in 1925.

Interviewer: Louella Robinson

Tape 40 minutes.

INTERVIEW SUMMARY

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LEE, EDWARD ( - ) ; explain how hard it was for him to get started in the Hotel business. Mr. Lee has been in the same location since he first open in 1925. Since, 1925 he was entered into the housing development. Real Estate+Pool investments. He also explains why he enjoyed being in the Hotel business.

Mr. Lee advises young blacks who are looking to get started, to make sure they have some type of Partnership. Because, they will accomplished more. He also gives early Recollections of the Farrish-St, Lamar area. Explains why it is decaying.

Interviewer: Louella Robinson: Teacher

Tape: 40 minutes.

DRAFT

*Returned*  
*7-16-82*  
*(Lynn)*

JACKSON STATE UNIVERSITY  
ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM  
Farish Street Project  
Jackson, Mississippi 39213

INTERVIEWEE: Edward Lee  
INTERVIEWER: Louella Robinson  
SUBJ: History of Black Owned Business  
DATE: June 20, 1978 (Date of Interview)  
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- R: Mr. Lee, if you don't mind, can you tell me where you were born?  
L: Copiah County.  
R: Copiah County?  
L: Hazlehurst, Mississippi.  
R: You are not originally from Jackson?  
L: No.  
R: How long have you been here?  
L: Since 1925.  
R: 1925. Do you have any more brothers and sisters that. . .  
L: I have two brothers and one sister.  
R: Two brothers and one sister. Are you the oldest?  
L: I am the oldest.  
R: You're the oldest. Are they here in Jackson though?  
L: No, one is in Utica, one is in Hazlehurst, and one is in Los Angeles.  
R: Do you see them often?  
L: Quite often.  
R: Quite often. Are you married?  
L: I am.  
R: How long have you been married?  
L: (Laughter) You're trying to get how old I am?  
R: No sir. (Laughter). I am not trying to get. . .I just want us to know something about you.  
L: 1928.

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R: Well you can tell me how long you have been married. I put it like that.

(?) Fifty years.

R: Fifty years?

(?) 1928, this is 1978.

No.

R: Well we don't have to be concerned with the year.

L: I know it was 1924.

R: You got married in 1924?

L: 1924.

(?) So that is 54 years.

R: Like I said, we don't have to be concerned with the years since you are sorta hesitant in talking about it. Okay, you say you're from Copiah County, right?

L: Yea.

R: What town?

L: Hazlehurst.

R: Oh, Hazlehurst. Okay, what are some of the topics that interest you the most?

L: Like business is the only thing that's interesting to us. (Laughter)

(?) You're killing me.

R: What about your religion? Are you a very religious man?

L: I am Methodist.

R: You're a Methodist?

L: Central Methodist Church.

R: What holidays do you celebrate the most?

L: Christmas.

R: Christmas. That's the only holiday you are concerned with?

L: (Laughter) That's when I, that's when the presents come.

R: Presents come. Okay. Well could you tell me a little about the early history of the Edward Lee Hotel?

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L: I started at my beginning in business in Jackson. I opened a restaurant on the corner of Mill and Oakley on the 2nd of August, 1925. I opened the late, the Edward Lee Hotel the 9th of July, 1968.

(?) Not 1968.

L: ~~1948.~~ 1946

(?) Right.

R: 1948. 1946

L: I opened a recreation center which is the Crystal Palace recreation center on Parish Street in 1942. I ran the Penguin, I built the Penguin Driver Inn. *PENQUIN* *PENQUIN*

R: You owned the Penguin? *PENQUIN*

L: I did at one time in 1949.

R: It's the place we use to go when we were living on campus all the time.

L: I have been struggling with business every since.

R: You first opened in 1948?

L: I first opened the hotel in 1948. The restaurant was opened in 1925.

R: Were you the only owner, have you ever been the only owner?

L: Of everything but the Penguin. I had a business partner with the Penguin. *at Penguin*

R: Did you find it easier having partners than just being alone?

L: Beg your pardon.

R: Did you have it easier having a partner?

L: Well six in one *hand* had and half dozen in the other (Laughter). Sometimes you are trying to please your partner and you may or may not. I like private, *own* business better.

R: Private *own* business better? What about today?

L: Today we need Corporations. That's why we see where we made our mistake, by not incorporating in earlier days. Now a days you have to incorporate in order to survive. The Negro business can not compete with these White folks in my line. No way can my everyday hotel can compete with the Sun-N-Sand.

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- R: Do you think that's a vital problem among Blacks, trying to compete with White owned businesses?
- L: Well, you got to compete with some people in order to succeed. Almost if you're not up to them you have got to get as near to them as you can to survive.
- R: What do you think that it would take today for Blacks to start a business and really be cut there and really be successful being able to compete for instance the Sun-N-Sand or Holiday Inn or something of that nature?
- L: You are going to have to set up a Corporation.
- R: Corporation? Would you be for that today?
- L: Yes. I would but of course at my age I wouldn't dare venture into such. My boy, I have only one boy, has a better <sup>and</sup> bigger operation than I do. That's what it is going to take the younger people and I advise them to go into a Corporation.
- R: If you don't mind answering, how much money, about how much money did it take for you to first get started?
- L: (Laughter) Well, I'll tell you, when I came to Jackson I came here from Cleveland, Ohio exactly the 28th. of June, 1925. A lady had a restaurant down there and she wanted \$10.00 a week and I didn't have the \$10.00. I went and drove a transfer truck for a week and made \$16.00 and gave her the \$10.00. I told her that I won't be able to take the \$38.00 and I would go back next week and make another \$16.00 and put change in the cash register. . .that's where I got interested in business \$16.00.
- R: That's all the money it took in 1920?
- L: At that time.
- R: \$10.00?
- L: \$10.00 for my rent.
- R: Oh, just for rent.
- L: She stood for my groceries.
- R: What could you use \$10.00 today to get started in?



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- L: Nothing (Laughter), not even a taxi.
- R: Could you buy groceries with it?
- L: I have been very successful until the crisis hit us now.
- R: Now (Laughter) what reason, what's the main reason why you entered into this particular business?
- L: Well, when I was young I didn't want to do anything but plow. That's what my daddy had, a farm. He had <sup>240</sup>24 acres of land and all I ever <sup>did</sup> done around there was plow. So I fooled around and got away from home and I didn't do so well. I was working so I could go home but I didn't want to go home. I wanted to see if I could get something to do. That's what I ran into by accident.
- R: In other words you came into this type of business by accident.
- L: By accident.
- R: Do you serve any type meals here? If you don't mind my asking you, what were the first prices?
- L: The first prices?
- R: Yes.
- L: The dinners I get \$2.00 for today I sold for 15¢.
- R: Fifteen cents?
- L: That was back in 1925.
- R: 1925? What was some of the things that you were serving that you only got 15¢ for?
- L: Well you would have a meat, vegetable, desert and something to drink.
- R: And today it's \$2.00?
- L: \$2.00. Breakfast was one egg, grits, bacon and coffee for 12½¢.
- R: That's more than taxes today. Have you made many addition to this particular building?
- L: No addition here. This is what I built. I've redecorated but I haven't done any addition.
- R: How many rooms do you have?
- L: Twenty-four.

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R: It has always been twenty-four?

L: Yes.

R: No additions? Why did you choose this particular location?

L: Well, I had bought that block there between Church and Farish, rather Church and Oakley. That's where the hotel was suppose to be. So, I bought this house and it had so much land back there behind it and I landed up building in this house. I didn't know a hotel would go in Jackson and if it didn't go, well I had this front lot here on Mill Street that I could sell at a nice price. So that's how the hotel got here.

R: There's never been any other place?

L: No.

R: How many people do you have on staff?

L: You can ask her. She can tell you.

G: We have about thirteen people.

R: Has it always been thirteen?

G: Well no.

R: How many did you have in the beginning when you were selling meals for twelve (12¢).

G: Him and his wife and <sup>her</sup> ~~his~~ aunt.

R: That's all.

L: At that particular time we were working for 12 hours and we were getting about \$4.00 or \$5.00 a week for 12 hours a day.

R: Just three? Yourself your wife and . . .

L: One other.

R: You looked after twenty-four rooms?

L: Oh well, I thought you said that when I was serving meals for 12¢. . .

R: Well I was. . . I was . . .

G: That was at the cafe that he began, the Mill and Oakley cafe.

R: Oh I was speaking in terms of here.

L: Yes, that was later. We always had eight or ten people here. <sup>at the hotel</sup>

R: Oh, I was thinking about you speaking in terms of here that you had twenty-four rooms, right?

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- L: Yea.
- R: You said you always had twenty four rooms when you first started. That's what I was speaking in terms of . . .that you have . . .  
How many people did you have then?
- L: We had seven or eight people that's what we always had, seven or eight to ten people.
- R: What were some of the qualifications that it took in order for a person to work here? A lot of places you have to have certain qualifications that you must meet before they consider hiring you, even today.
- L: It is very good to have qualified help if they can obtain the price, but all I hire is the smile.
- R: Just a smile.
- L: Smile and I would rather train you <sup>over</sup> the rest.
- R: If you don't mind me asking how much were your prices when you first went into business here for a room? Would you rent by the week, night, month, or what?
- L: When we first opened up here . . .
- G: Was it \$1.88?
- R: What year was this?
- L: 1942.
- R: 1942.
- L: Well, no. It was 1946. Am I right?
- G: That was 1948 <sup>46</sup> because you didn't open the hotel until 1948.
- L: 1946. I opened in 1946.
- G: You did?
- L: See that was the Army program.
- G: Oh yea, World War II.
- L: Yea. You see we had a contract with the Army. That's why it was \$2.77. We had a very few rooms to rent. The Army kept us open here.
- R: The Army, World War II?
- L: World War II.
- G: Yea, World War II.
- R: And that was in 1946?

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- G: That's when it was opened.
- R: It was \$2.00 and . . .
- L: Seventy-seven cents. I never will forget. Everytime I see Attorney Jess Brown he kids me about it.
- R: That's one, other person that one of my classmates is interviewing.. Attorney Jess Brown, also all those people that are located within this particular area.
- L: He use to stay here. He paid \$2.77.
- R: \$2.77?
- L: He never did forget it. He hasn't forget it yet. Everytime I see him he would mention paying \$2.77.
- R: What are your prices today?
- L: My prices today are \$8.50 a day.
- R: Per day? You can't rent by the week, month?
- L: Forty-eight (\$48.00) a week.
- R: Going back to 1948<sup>46</sup> at \$2.77 a day. . .so that would be what per week if they rented by the week?
- L: I don't rent by the week.
- R: Oh, you didn't rent by the week? I see.
- L: No, I don't hardly rent by the week now.
- R: You don't. You find that you loose more money or what?
- L: Well I got a good over night trade. Like someone who just come into town or passing through or something like that. People or just ordinary renting by the week I don't.
- R: Do you have problems with vandalism, people destroying your property? You know this causes a lot of problems for some businesses. Have you ever had this problem?
- L: Excuse me. When I knew anything I was almost broke. I bought \$1500 worth of televisions. My helper<sup>s</sup> got careless and when I knew anything it was six months later. Even the sweeper, vaccum cleaner they stole. They stole everything that I had. This didn't happen until they turned all those people loose from Whitfield. <sup>and Parchman</sup> When I knew anything they had

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L: <sup>taken</sup> took me over.

R: What year was this?

L: Three years ago.

R: Wasn't your merchandise insured? Didn't you have insurance on it?

L: Well I didn't. I got fire insurance <sup>from</sup> form it. It is hard to insure a place like this. See I can hire somebody to do it.

R: You can hire somebody to take your property?

L: Yes. I could hire somebody to take it and go up there and collect for it. It's hard to get that kind of insurance.

R: In other words you would be out of a lot of money because of this you know. Have you taken any measure to prevent it?

L: Oh yes. We can't prevent a thief. He's thankful for it when you are not.

R: Yes sir. Do you remember some of the first Black owned businesses in this area besides the Edward Lee Hotel, that came into existence about the same time that you started operating?

L: There's no other business around in here. There was a place here where they opened a book store <sup>on Fairish st</sup>

R: How old would you say your business is?

L: How old?

R: Yes.

R: You know, thinking about when you first got started up until now.

L: I opened in 1925 until now. Ought to be about fifty some years.

R: Do you wish today that you never <sup>gone</sup> went into this particular business?

L: No.

R: You don't?

L: There has been a lot of mistakes but I still don't regret it.

R: Do you have any other future plans. Any addition or any thing else onto your business?

L: No, I try to get, stay the same. When you get 79 years old, ain't too much more you can do.

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- R: Seventy-Nine! You just told it. In other words you have enjoyed, I'm sure you have enjoyed all the years you have put into it.
- L: I really have never had any regrets.
- R: If you had to do it all over again would you go back into the hotel business?
- L: Probably but I would go into it in a more modern scale.
- R: Modern scale.
- L: You see, it wasn't but one Black hotel in Jackson when I went into business. He was having trouble with the City (that's Summer), he didn't know whether the Black hotel would go over or not. It just wasn't no such thing as a Black hotels back in those days. So we just took a gamble. He bought a White hotel out there and the City tried to picket him out there, course we were Black and it was a White hotel. I'm building one over here and they said let them <sup>two</sup> Niggers go out (that's what they called us). We didn't know whether it would work out or not. We just took a gamble.
- R: In other words, this hotel and Summer are the two oldest Black owned hotels in Jackson. What about today, do you think of any others that are run or completely owned by Blacks beside Summers and you?
- L: Blackstone on Lamar Street.
- G: Graystone?
- L: Graystone and Cooper's Hotel on . . . I don't know the name of. . . it's on Lynch Street.
- R: So it's only really about what, five or six?
- L: No, all these are owned by individuals and also they are all owned by individual Blacks.
- R: No partnership.
- L: I doubt it very seriously. They have about, let's see . . .
- R: Is this particular building used for meeting purposes?
- L: Meeting?
- R: Yes.

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- L: No, the lounge isn't large enough. They have had small meetings here. See, in the day of the building, the lounge was big enough but since then every thing has grown. It's got more modern and now it is not large enough.
- R: Do you think if it was large enough to have meetings it would bring in more people?
- L: Oh yes.
- R: You ever thought about making an addition?
- L: Not now.
- R: Not now, you keep saying not now.
- L: They may do it but . . .
- R: Do you have Black and White customers?
- L: Yes.
- R: Is there anything else that you would like to tell me that I haven't asked you about your business? Anything that you can think of?
- L: I think you about covered everything.
- R: How would you compare your business to other Black owned businesses around here?
- L: We're all about the same.
- R: About the same.
- L: I think all Blacks are about the same.
- R: Meaning what?
- L: We need to improve.
- R: Well you've been here for what, well over thirty-five or forty years. So it means you must be doing something that the public is pleased with.
- L: Well, I could do more.
- R: But not now, (Laughter). You know it tells you something when you find a business that has been in business for a long period of time in the same location, that tells you that the public is pleased with it. You said if you had to do it over again you wouldn't go in, you would go into this hotel business again.

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- L: In the same business I got.
- R: What about locations? Same location?
- L: Well yes. I'll go into the same location. I would expand, I got plenty of land for expanding now.
- R: This whole area or how far does your property extend?
- G: That corner to this corner and down that street.
- R: Church Street?
- G: And across the street.
- R: In other words Church street is yours.
- L: (Laughter) Not all of it. I got about eleven houses around here.
- R: Well this is not the only business that you have then?
- G: No, he has real estate. He has a pool room on Farish Street, he's leasing a cafe on Mill Street and then he's operating this business.
- R: Have these been in operation as long as the others been in operation?
- L. D. D.* G: Sure.
- R: That's amazing! Who financed your business? In other words who is helping you finance your business today, nobody?
- L: Nobody.
- R: You own it. In other words you are into business by yourself?
- L: My own financing.
- R: Do you think that's helpful today? I know you said you know when you first started you were driving a truck.
- L: You see, if you can finance, if I can finance it you see, like something happens to me. . . a new look for the City.
- R: Well they have started on Capitol. Don't you think it is only going to be a matter of time before they get to this area?
- L: Oh some day about ten or twelve years.
- R: I don't think we can wait that long.
- L: Well they have in the making from Hamilton Street to Lamar to Fortification to Gallatin, which will take in all you can see. So when it happens. . .
- R: What do you think or what reason do you think why Farish Street has started to decline?



DRAFT

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L: Well, I would think one thing that caused them to move out is because it was so bad. When I first came to Jackson they would walk to a door and tell you to come out and would beat you down just for nothing. The people began to get out. I had a lot of trouble when I first came here. Finally I touched the right man and he got them off me. I've seen them come to my door when I ran the restaurant down there and say "Come out by me nigger." They'd just beat them down to the ground for nothing. I mean nothing. They hadn't done nothing.

Some White merchants were here we were buying from and I gave them the store and it stopped. Some of the rest of them like Shephard and all of them on Farish Street had to do the same thing. I was on Mill Street selling dinners for 15¢ and they were up there selling them for 30¢. They sold them on Sunday but I sold mine 15¢ less all the week and on Sunday. It shows I was lucky with mine.

R: Do you think they might have been looking for a pay off?

L: Well I don't think they thought about a pay off. They didn't even know anything about a pay off. They were just mean. They didn't know nothing about a pay off then.

R: What about today?

L: Well, I don't have no trouble with them today. I don't have no trouble with them whatsoever.

R: Why did you name it Edward Lee?

L: Well, when. . . I had a problem with the people when I came, when I moved to Jackson and I wanted them to know who Edward Lee was.

END OF INTERVIEW

*D.K. Edward N. Lee*

*7/16/82*