

JACKSON Y. W. C. A.
and
MISSISSIPPI DEPARTMENT of ARCHIVES and HISTORY
and
JACKSON STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT
THE FARISH STREET HISTORIC DISTRICT

BUSINESSWOMAN & HOMEOWNER IN THE HISTORIC DISTRICT

O. H. 80.04

STEVELLA ADAMS

Interviewed
by

VIRGIE ELLA BARNES

on

July 8, 1980

JACKSON STATE COLLEGE
Jackson, Mississippi

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

INTERVIEWER AGREEMENT

I, Virginia Ella Barnes, in view of the
(Interviewer, please print)

historical and scholarly value of the information contained in the
interview with Stevella Adams, 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,
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Virginia Ella Barnes
Interviewer (signature)

Interview Number

July 8, 1980
Date

Introduction

Mrs. Stevella Adams was born January 6, 1906, in Tallulah, Louisiana. She received her educational training from Rosawald School in Coahoma County and Rust College, Holly Springs, Mississippi.

Mrs. Adams is a retired store operator and property owner in the Farish Street Historic District.

In this interview Mrs. Adams talks very little about her personal background. She discusses her experiences as a black business owner in the Farish Street area; educational training; community support of her business; reasons for retiring.

INTERVIEWEE: Mrs. Stevella Adams
INTERVIEWER: Virgia Ella Barnes
DATE OF INTERVIEW: July 3, 1980
O.H. 80.04

Barnes: This interview took place in the home of Mrs. Stevella Adams, 240 East Cohea Street, Jackson, Mississippi.

Mrs. Adams, would you give a personal background about yourself?

Adams: My mother was born in Kellog, Louisiana. My mother later met my father, Henry Williams. They were married and went to Tallulah, Louisiana, where I was born. Later they moved to Sharrand, Mississippi, near Clarksdale. They were share croppers. I went to the First Rosawald School in Cohoma County and stayed there and completed the eighth grade. In the ninth grade I went to Rust in Holly Springs, Mississippi. I finished high school there, working part of my way. That summer, I worked with another girl, Bessie Walker, cleaning rooms, cooking and eating fried biscuits when the oven didn't work. That was my first summer school at Rust. I worked my way through college and finished on May 10, 1932. I got married before graduation. I came to Jackson, Mississippi on September 28, 1932. Being a newly married person my husband asked me to come home after his father's death. They had a small business on Monument and Blair Street on the south side.

I wanted to teach school. Mrs. Ellen Hines told me to see Dr. Smith on East Cohea Street. I was told how you had to give the black superintendent so much of your check each month. I told Dr. Smith about this. I carried my diploma and license to him. "Oh, you have heard about the system," Dr. Smith said. "Well, go over to Lanier and tell Cobbins I sent you." I did just that. He registered my name and later I was called to teach whenever some teacher was sick. That was good but, some would wait until the last minute to notify you and that was rough. I did this for four or five years, until my mother-in-law asked me to come and take over the store.

Barnes: What motivated you to become an operator of a grocery store?

Adams: Well my mother-in-law asked me to come and take over. Her son was there sometimes and sometimes he wasn't. So someone had to see after the business. Later we bought a lot on the north side of Monument. It was a train built house. We had it lowered and operated it until the first part of 1952. Later in 1952 we built the present building on the corner of Monument and Blair. We did pretty good business for awhile. I tried to run a store where you could buy a variety of things. I had mostly anything in it from underwear, cooking utensils, you name it and I had some of it. I operated in such a way

- Adams: until my salespeople were kind and tried to give me a break. Whenever they came they did not have to wait all day to get their money. I had the invoice out ready for them. Two or three salesmen told me I wish you could tell Mrs. Lizzie Wilson how to do this.
- Barnes: What was your family attitude toward this business?
- Adams: Well, since I had made my own decision in so many ways until they thought I was able to make my own decision there.
- Barnes: Well, could you tell me what kind of response did you get from the people in the community?
- Adams: Well the people were very good at times. Some of them would wait until you got ready to close the store and they would come running. I would re-open and sometimes make \$5.00 or \$6.00. That was big money at that time. So, I got smart. We would have the back light out and when they knew anything I would be locking the doors. They would come and talk about things and say you were high and you were this and you were that, but yet I did a good business. So, I found out that talking didn't hurt you.
- Barnes: What was your working hours?
- Adams: My husband would stay open until 11:00. That is because the biggest of the time he wasn't there. I got smart and began to close at 10:30. Later on I would close at 9:30 and as years past on I would be at home at 8:30 because I found out that money wasn't all of it.
- Barnes: What year did you retire and why did you retire from operating a store?
- Adams: I retired March 11, 1973. I had been robbed four times. I had been knocked down, hit right behind my ear. I felt that from head down to my toe and the man kept on demanding money. I told him to look in the cash drawer and I continued to say the same thing because that's where the money was. He got out of the door and when I knew anything there was a young Black woman coming in there and she said, "Mrs. Adams, are you hurt?" She came around and helped me off the floor where he had knocked me. My head just did miss the meat block. I broke my wrist and my left arm.