

DRAFT

FARISH STREET HISTORIC DISTRICT

Jackson State University
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT
Jackson, Mississippi 39217

INTERVIEWEE: Gales Foster, Tailor (DOB June 5, 1895)
INTERVIEWER: Alferdteen Harrison
TRANSCRIBER: W. M. McClendon
DATE: January 27, 1982 (date of interview)
SUBJ: Farish Street Historic District
OH 81.69

In Mr. Foster's Office, we will be interviewing about his
life experience in the Farish Street Historic District.

H: ~~Mr. Foster, what are your earliest recollections of this area?~~

F: ~~Nineteen Hundred and Twelve (1912).~~

H: What was it like ~~then?~~

F: Nineteen Hundred and Twelve--it was something like a public road. We had
wooden bricks down at that time and we had a walkway across the creek. ~~On~~
~~one side was the plank and on the other side, the Colored people had to go~~
~~down in there and come up out of it. We couldn't walk across the plank.~~

H: ~~Now exactly where was that?~~

F: That was back in 19__ . . . ~~what now?~~

H: When you first came to Jackson was it like that?

F: When I first came to Jackson I was living up ~~there~~ at Madison, ~~and would come~~
here with my father, ~~I was a little kid then but when I got to the place~~
~~where I could come down and look and see for myself, that was around 1912.~~

H: ~~Now that was on Farish Street. Was it up near Capitol Street where you had~~
to cross on the planks?

F: ~~Crossed on the planks at Amite and Farish, On Capitol Street there wasn't~~
a plank across there, it was a plain good street there.

H: ~~So~~ when you first came here you worked at the Edwards Hotel?

F: ~~When I first came here I worked at Miss Ennochs.~~

H: ~~Now~~ who is Miss Ennochs?

F: She's the one who owned ~~the~~ the hotel.

H: Do you know what her first name was?

F: Her husband was named J. L. Ennochs.

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H: ~~Okay, that's J. L. Ennochs?~~

F: ~~Yes, J. L. Ennochs.~~

Foster: ^{In 1915} I told her I was 'fixin' to get married. ^{and} That was ~~1915~~. I asked her for a raise, and ^{she said} she said, "Gales, I can't pay you ^{any} no more, ⁺ tell you what you do, you go down to the hotel and tell them I sent you." ~~So~~ I stayed there until 1917. I opened ~~me~~ up a shop at the Royal Hotel and in 1919 ~~I came~~ on Farish Street.

H: What were you doing at the Royal Hotel?

F: I ran a ~~shop~~. ^{tailor shop. I've been on Farish St since 1919.}

H: ~~Was it a barber shop?~~

F: ~~No, I ran a tailor shop.~~

H: ~~A tailoring shop. . . so that's what you're doing now, tailoring.~~

F: ~~That's right. I been on Farish Street since 1919.~~

H: ~~Now~~ what was the Royal Hotel like?

F: ~~Well~~ it was just a little second hand hotel. It wasn't but two hotels here, ~~at that time and that was the Edwards House and the Royal Hotel.~~

H: Where was the Royal Hotel located?

F: It was just about half a block from Farish Street ^{east}. ~~That creek, Town Creek runs through under it. . . beside the Royal Hotel.~~

H: ~~Okay~~ So at this Royal Hotel you had a ~~tailor~~ shop.

F: ~~That's right, a tailor shop.~~ ^{yes}

H: Did you make clothes or just ^{do} altering?

F: ~~Altering clothes and press clothes, sewed clothes.~~ ^{altering, pressing and sewing}

H: ~~Now~~, why did you leave there?

F: ~~Well~~, I had the chance of getting in the colored district, ^{where I was,} ~~because there~~ wasn't ^{anything} ~~nothing~~ there but White people, ~~and I had a chance to get down there~~ so, I came and fixed ~~me~~ a place in City Barber Shop, since then, I've owned everything.

H: ~~Now~~ who owned it at the time that you came down here, when you first came?

F: ~~When I first came here~~ ^{she} Conic owned the ~~Barber Shop Department~~ and I had the ~~tailor Shop Department.~~

H: ~~So~~ since that time you've acquired this whole building? Is the building yours?

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F: ~~See~~ the building at ~~that time~~ was down in the 100 block of Farish where they put ~~that~~ Federal Building, ~~in there~~. That's why I had to move ~~away~~ from down there ^{to} up in here. ~~When I came up here~~ I bought this up here.

H: ~~Oh, you bought this building?~~ *I own everything*

F: ~~Yes.~~

H: ~~You bought this building?~~

F: ~~I own everything.~~

H: ~~But~~ when you were down there, whose building were you in?

F: ~~Well I was in~~ Dr. McCoy. *It was* Dr. McCoy bought it from Atwoods. *He had the*

H: ~~Atwoods?~~ *So* you've been down here ~~about~~ how many years?

F: About seven. *o*

H: ~~Seven years. . .~~

F: ~~Six, yea 'bout seven years.~~

H: ~~Now~~ has your business changed very much since you've been ~~down~~ here?

F: No ma'am, *just about the same*

H: ~~It's been about the same?~~

F: ~~About the same.~~

H: You were in business ~~up there~~ where the Federal Building is from 1919 until the middle ~~seventies~~ (70's)?

F: ~~That's right.~~ *ye*

H: Who were some of your earlier customers?

F: My ~~earlier customers~~ were, *she* Westbrooks, *and* McClains,

H: Who are these people?

F: ~~Them~~ were White people.

H: ~~Oh, I see.~~

F: *d* Westbrooks, McClains, Stevensons, Greens, and Hesters. ~~... come on down. . .~~
~~(let me see if I can think of some more)~~

H: Even when you left the Royal Hotel you kept your ^W White customers?

F: *ye* I kept my White customers. I ain't ^{haven't} never lost one of them. ~~All of them~~ *she one*
I lost died, ~~didn't none of em.~~ .I made the first suits that Jackson State College owned, ~~out there.~~ I was the one made 'em. I taken measure-
~~ments for em, they sent the order in for 'em.~~

H: What suits were these now?

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F: The blue suits, way back in 1912.

H: The students had to wear blue suits?

F: No, the band.

H: ~~Oh, I see.~~

F: You buried a man here not long ago . . .

H: ~~Who was that Pop. . . Pop Davis~~

E: ~~You buried him here about three or four months ago.~~

H: ~~I know who you are talking about. Davis?~~

F: ~~Yes, Davis.~~

H: Pop Davis. ~~So~~ you made those uniforms for him.

F: ~~I made those uniforms for him.~~ Yes

H: ~~Now~~ who were some of your earlier ~~Black~~ customers? You know, once you got into . . .

F: ~~Well,~~ I'm trying to think ~~now.~~

H: Would it have been the lawyers and doctors or just everyday people?

F: Dr. Smith was one.

H: Which Smith is that now?

F: ~~He was a Doctor.~~ He use to be right up there on the corner up there. Dr. Smith was one, ~~and Atwoods was one,~~ ^{the} ~~Moon was one,~~ ^{the} ~~Conic was one,~~ and Proctor ~~was one.~~ *were some of my black customers.*

H: ~~Now~~ how did you get into ~~this~~ altering of clothes? Who taught you?

F: My mother was a seamstress, ~~and~~ I was chief porter at the Edwards House, ^{and} the customer would come in and want their clothes cleaned, ~~or~~ pressed or fixed and I would take ^{them} ~~em~~ down to the laundry every night after I get through working, (after twelve o'clock) and fix 'em ~~at~~ up and send ^{them} ~~em~~ back ~~up~~ to em in the morning when they got ready to get up. . .

~~Now that's the way I started and after that. . .~~

You can't see God's face when you work in a hotel so I ^{came} ~~come~~ out of there.

H: What do you mean you can't see God's face, I don't understand.

F: You don't never hear nobody say, Lord have mercy, everybody is using bad language. So I ~~come~~ out.

H: ~~So~~ your mother taught you how to alter clothes?

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F: I looked at my mother do the work and I saw how it was done. She didn't have ^a no shop, she just ~~worked~~ ^{sew for her 16 children} on her children's. . . see it was sixteen of us.

H: ~~Oh!~~

F: I saw her fix the ^{children} chilin's clothes, and after I got in the hotel I didn't forget it.

H: ~~Now~~ were you one of the younger, ^{or older of the} sixteen children ~~or older ones?~~

F: ~~Let's~~ see. I'm bout the sixth one.

H: ~~The sixth one?~~ So there were a lot of ^{them} em under you?

F: Yes ~~am~~.

H: ~~Now~~ are any of your sisters and brothers living?

F: I'm the only one living. All my issters and brothers and aunties, they all dead. ~~Nobody living but me.~~

H: ~~About~~ how old are you?

F: I was born in ~~1895 on the 8th. of June.~~ ^{June 8, 1895. I am 86 years old}

H: ~~Eighteen-Ninety-Five,~~ that makes you. . . ~~ninety.~~ . . .

F: ~~Eighty-Six.~~

H: ~~That's right, eighty six and one half.~~ So you've seen a lot of things happen here. ^{yes}

F: I've ^{yes} seen a lot of things happen here. I ^{have seen,} ~~saw a lot,~~ have heard ~~a lot,~~ and taken a lot. ~~That's the way it goes.~~

H: What kinds of things other than the language, did you find most distasteful when you were at the Edwards Hotel?

F: ~~Well,~~ popping their fingers and calling you nigger, ^{that was} ~~that's~~ the worse thing.

H: Tell me about their popping the finger.

F: ~~See~~ when the manager got ready for you he popped his finger (gives example) and call you, "nigger, do so and so" that's the way it was at that time.

H: ~~So~~ that was the thing that you just didn't. . .

F: I didn't like that ^{be} cause when I was at Miss Ennochs they treated me just like I was one of the family. They didn't abuse or scorn ^{me} you. But after all, he was just that kind of man, he was just ignorant. He just didn't now no better. He didn't know nothing about the respect for nothing or nobody. He had never been married and didn't have ^a no family, I ain't calling

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F: his name, 'cause of the . . .

H: You must have known I was gonna ask you that.

F: Oh I can. . . he's dead, it don't make no difference with me.

H: Well who was this person?

F: Johnny Ware.

H: ~~Johnny Ware?~~

F: ~~Yea~~, and before he died he kept sending for me, but they didn't tell me 'til after he was dead. ~~Yea, John Ware.~~

H: Why do you think he was sending for you?

F: I don't know. I waited on him all the time, he wouldn't let nobody else wait on him but me.

H: That's when you were working there?

F: ~~Yea.~~

H: When you started your own business, what did you do other than working at tailoring? What other kinds of things were you involved in?

F: ~~Well~~ before I came here, I was ~~up there~~ in Madison. That's my home, ~~up there~~ in Madison. I was on the farm, and you do everything on the farm.

H: ~~Right.~~

F: ~~So~~ that's where I came from. ~~Madison, west of Madison there.~~

H: You all own your land up there?

F: ~~Owned it.~~ *yes*

H: Is it still in your family?

F: I sold forty acres of it here not so long ago, it bought me a heap of money.

H: ~~I say, I bet it did.~~

F: ~~I got some up there now.~~ *I still have some property there now, and some* I got some land over in Rankin County, ~~I got some~~ right there below Jackson State ~~there.~~

H: ~~How about your. . . I asked you about your social life, right, you were saying~~ that you didn't, you ~~talked about~~ you didn't go out very much. One time you *you* ~~mentioned~~ came down here to the Crystal Palace.

F: ~~That's right.~~ *was one of the clubs out* I was invited ~~from~~ Jackson State ~~out there.~~ One of the clubs out there, I don't know which one.

H: ~~Let's see, when would that be?~~ *was* In the 1920's or 30's or before the war or after?

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F: That was after the war.

H: After World War I ^{or} before World War II?

F: After World War I. (About 20 minutes not recorded after this point)

H: ~~So~~ we were talking about your involvement with the fair, ~~you were talking~~ about the fair.

F: ~~Well,~~ about the fair. . . what happened about the fair, . . . Colored people having a fair ground of their own, but it ain't never done nothing. I lost money in it alright, buying shares, but it ~~ain't~~ ^{is} never done ~~nothing~~ ^{anything}. That fair gorund out there on Highway 49.

H: ~~Okay.~~ Then we talked about this place that we had down here on Hamilton ~~and,~~ ^{where they} what's that, ~~Hamilton and~~ Mill Street, use to have those Rabbit Foot shows.

F: ~~Rabbit Foot,~~ that's right. That's on the corner of Hamilton and Mill.

H: What did you refer to that area as? ~~Or did you refer to it?~~ Did you call it anything? Some people have said that they called it the Greens. ~~You~~ ^{Have you ever} ~~ever heard it called that?~~ ^{heard it called that?}

F: No.

H: ~~Well,~~ we are talking about the buildings that were here. You had given me the names of some businesses that were here on Farish Street, like yourself and Mr. Conic, ~~and you all worked together?~~

F: ~~Well~~ you want them names, ^{and} places?

H: Yes.

F: Conic and myself, Proctor, Moon, Cooper, Dr. Barnes, Dr. Christian, and Dr. Johnson.

H: ~~Now~~ what kind of business did Dr. Johnson have, ~~I don't remember~~ . . .

F: ~~Dr. Johnson was a Doctor. He was~~ . . .

H: ~~Medical Doctor?~~

F: ~~Yea,~~ ^{He was a} Medical Doctor from the Army. ^{had been a DR in the Army} ~~He was with the Army, a Doctor in the~~ Army.

H: Do you remember the hospitals that they had along Farish Street?

F: They had one right over there. ~~That all use to belong to Dr. Smith. He~~ had a hospital right over there.

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H: ~~That's over there~~ on the corner of Oakley and Farish?

F: Somewhere over there, but that was the only one.

H: That's the only one you remember? *this is over where Dr. Britton's office*

F: ~~Yes.~~ *is now?*

H: ~~Over there where Dr. Britton's office is now?~~

F: ~~Yea~~

H: ~~In that same area?~~

F: ~~Yea.~~

H: I was asking you what areas ^bBlack folks lived. You said there were some rooming houses, ~~and on Oakley and Hamilton Street~~ ~~was~~ where the White people lived, right?

F: ~~Yes.~~ Right down there close to Mill and Oakley ^wWhite people were staying in those houses ~~in there.~~ ~~That~~ was back in 1912, ~~back in there.~~

H: When did ~~Black~~ folks start living in this area?

F: ~~Well, you see after the. . . it~~ got so rough up in there they sent them out there ^{to} in Shady Oaks, . . . ~~this place way out yonder.~~ They call it the pottage field, ~~out there~~ where they buried a lot of folks. ~~Well~~ these people ~~here~~ that was down on Hamilton ~~and that street there,~~ they had to get out of town, ~~they had to leave.~~ That's where they moved, ~~out there.~~ ~~Well~~ see ~~it's~~ ^{was} a lot of Colored people up and down this street but ~~that~~ ^{it} was the White district, *white Redlight*, ~~White redlight and down there on . . . let me see what street is that. . .~~ West Street ~~down there,~~ ~~that~~ was the Colored District.

H: The colored redlight district?

F: ~~Yea,~~

H: On what street was this? ~~West~~ . . .

F: Roach.

H: ~~Roach?~~

F: ~~Yea, it come right up on . . . I think Roach Street crosses on . . . yea, Roach Street.~~

H: Roach runs into Amite?

F: ~~Yea,~~

H: ~~Up~~ in that area?

F: ~~That's right.~~ *ye*

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H: ~~Now~~ who were some of the Blacks that lived on Farish Street? ~~Can you think~~
~~of any of their names?~~

F: ~~Dr. . . .~~

H: ~~Well?~~

F: ~~Yea, if I can think of 'em, I know 'em.~~ I just can't think *of their names*

H: Some of the Doctors lived down there?

F: Yea, Dr. Reddic. . .

H: Barnes?

F: Dr. Barnes ~~lived on there~~ and Dr. Smith lived on Farish Street. . .
~~up there.~~

H: ~~Now, 1917, can you think of . . .~~ ~~see~~ what I need to do is to know who lived
here at that time and what they were like.

F: ~~Back~~ in 1917 ^{Dr} well Barnes and ^{Dr} Smith ~~they~~ lived on Farish Street. ~~Matter of~~
~~fact, them the days I'm talking about now.~~ They lived on that street in
~~them days.~~ But you see, ^a it wasn't ~~no~~ lot of houses up and down here then,
this was just a big road ^{the} Upper end of Farish Street, ~~there.~~ ~~I forgets about~~
~~them things.~~ Upper end of Farish Street there, I'm trying to think what the
people's name . . .

H: How about the Farish's? Do you remember them?

F: They lived out south or something.

H: South Farish?

F: ~~Yea~~

H: Did you ever hear anybody say how Farish Street got it's name?

F: ~~Never~~ ^{no} heard 'em say. Naw, I ain't never knowed how it got the name. I'm
~~trying to think now.~~ It's several streets I know that was named ^{after} ~~from~~ people
but I cant' think of them now.

H: ~~Well~~ I tell you what I'm going to have to do. We are wasting a lot of time
today ~~all of your time this afternoon.~~ I want to come back another day and
sit down and talk with you. ~~Perhaps one Saturday.~~ Are you down here on
Saturdays? Are you down here on Sunday afternoons too? Well, I just like

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- H: ~~to~~ thank you for this interview ~~first~~ of all. ^{May we use} I'd like ~~to have~~ you tell me whether we can use ~~this~~ ^{information} for our research project at Jackson State. ~~Do you mind if we use this information that you have given us?~~
- F: No, I don't ~~care.~~ ^{would}
- H: ~~You don't care?~~
- F: ~~No.~~
- H: Well, I just have to ask you that because. . .
- F: I sew for Conic's now.
- H: You do?
- F: Sho!
- H: What do you make for them?
- F: I fix up all the uniforms ~~and~~ keep all the clothes ^{I help} up and you know, the ~~police~~ ^{also their} and keep Crescent clothes up. ~~They clothes~~ ^{all} come here.
- H: Oh, I'll say, I didn't realize that.
- F: Sho!
- H: Well, that's interesting to know. Well, I appreciate your time.

END OF INTERVIEW