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Farish Street: The Way It Was
Speech by Aurelia Norris Young
Farish Street Festival
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From the last part of the 19th century and until the middle of the 1960s, Farish Street was the center of the business, social and cultural activities for black citizens.

As early as the 1830s, Jackson had a cotton mill that employed 45 black people, including children. In 1838, the railroad purchased 140 slaves for \$159,000 to build a railroad from Jackson to Brandon. When the railroad was completed and after the slaves were free, many of them settled in and around Jackson.

At the turn of the century, there was a large group of craftsmen and tradesmen in Jackson: carpenters, plasterers, painters, brick makers, tanners, liverymen, and blacksmiths, ~~Tanners~~ and shoemakers. Most of the women who were employed outside the home were household cooks or maids, seamstresses and washwomen. It was the custom to hire black women to manage ^{white} rooming houses, known as "bachelor halls," usually located above white shops on Capitol Street. Most of these were between Gallatin and Farish Streets.

Women who did not work outside the home did weaving, spinning, knitting, crocheting, quilting and either sold or bartered these items. Almost all of them raised chickens "on the yard", as they called it. Many families with children had a cow, and some even raised a hog or two. (People had chickens in town as late as 1940.)

Black people had started to register and vote under the military government established after the Civil War. Political rallies were big social events. ^{These} Barbecues and picnics were integrated, with black bands and glee clubs entertaining.

As the population began to increase, the city limits expanded to the north and west. This expansion cut off Jackson College from the black populace, located then between State and West Streets where Millsaps College is presently located. In 1902, Jackson College moved to Benevolent Hall, on the corner of Farish and Griffith streets. When the college was moved to Lynch street, it still maintained branch studios at Lanier School on Ash Street and Martin School, and college students taught in the Sunday Schools on and around Farish Street.

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After World War I, Farish Street had become a street of businesses, owned and operated by black people, but was also a social gathering place.

Black men and women worked as maids and porters or as seamstresses in nearly all the Capitol Street stores, but since they could not eat in the restaurants there, they walked to Farish street at lunchtime. At one time all the letter carriers were black, and they too would eat on Farish Street. The King Edward Hotel, on the corner of Mill and Capitol, had a large number of black workers, ^{most} who walked to Farish Street, along with the redcaps who worked at the Illinois Central station across the street. Often they would gather in the restaurants and pool rooms, even on their days off, just to be with the other men.

There was no place to play golf, no parks, no organized sports activities except those at the schools and colleges. On Farish Street the men bowled, played pool, checkers, and dominoes. There were no physical activities for women.

Both men and women were active in fraternal groups. There were two branches of the Masons, then there ^{were} was the Elks, Knights of Pythias, and Oddfellows, with their women's affiliates: Eastern Star, Daughter Elks, Heriones of Jericho, Court of Calanthus. Before the men built their own lodge halls, many of the meetings were held at Hill's Hall on Farish Street or the Benevolent Hall. The lodges had their parades on Sundays with the streets lined with spectators.

During the 20s and 30s, most of the cultural events took place in the churches. ^{By the 30's,} Harmonia Club, organized in 1923, ^{ed} was celebrating a week of activities ^{which were} by the 30s, usually held in churches in and near the Farish Street area. Terrell Literary Club sponsored an Annual Race Relations Day in February, which was held at Central Methodist Church for many years. It was a formal program, attended by both black and white citizens.

Local school and college groups performed at the churches: Mrs. Jennis Johnson and the Campbell College Chorus; Dr. Frederick Hall and the Jackson College Singers, Miss Jennie Lewis and the Tougaloo College Choir, as well ^{as groups from} Prentiss Institute, Piney Woods School, and Utica Institute. Dr. G. Allen Price directed the City Male Glee Club and Mrs. Gustava Gooden had an excellent community chorus.

By the 30s, a group of social clubs had been organized:

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The Cosmopolitan Club and the Paramount Club were men's organizations, which gave a formal dance annually, usually at Hill Hall or across the street at the then called Paramount Club.

A few years later, a group of young women organized the Gay Thirteens and another group, Les Royales, both of whom sponsored elegant affairs. ^{at the new Capital Palace located above what is now Harmon's Drug Store.} Then for the women, there were the bridge clubs, the whist clubs, and among the older women, the sewing circles.

A very unique ^{Annual} affair was begun by Pearl and Chauncey Davis, a formal commencement for the graduates ^{from} the Davis Beauty School. It was usually held in Farish Street Church.

The "big name" bands often stopped over in Jackson enroute to New Orleans or Memphis, because they could not stay in the white hotels. They would play for a dance here; Andy Kirk, Duke Ellington, Fletcher Henderson, Count Basie, Fats Waller, ^{to name a few,} Ray Charles came often while he was with the Blind Boys group. In between visits by the touring groups, the most popular dance bands were Doc Parmalee, Duke Huddleston and Joe Dyson, who had a student group.

All of the professional men had their offices on Farish Street. The only hospital facilities for black people were Charity Hospital, which was taken over by the Dominican Sisters and the R. H. Green Annex, a wing of the Baptist Hospital. ^{black} Doctors could not practice in ^{any of} the hospitals. In the late 30s, several doctors bought a two-story building in the vicinity of Peoples Funeral Home and opened a clinic that they operated for several years. In 1940, Dr. Leroy Smith opened a private clinic across the street from Dotty Cab Company. It remained open until his death.

On Saturdays, the rural people all came to town, and Farish Street took on a festive air from early morning to late at night. People sold produce, artifacts, and home-made cookies, cakes, and pies. Others would attract small groups as they entertained by playing the banjo, guitar, harmonica, 'the bones, or "Hamboning". There would be the smell of food in the air: barbecue, fried chicken, chitterlins. The street was so narrow that there was barely room for the cars to pass, with traffic flowing in both directions. It was necessary to drive very slowly to avoid striking pedestrians, who crossed back and forth at will. We called this slow pace, "cruising". It was fun to park the car and watch the people.

^{Such}
This was Farish Street in its prime.