

LIFE EXPERIENCES OF SENIOR CITIZENS

TRANSCRIPTION OF INTERVIEW

with

Mrs. Elzena Harris

for

Oral History 301

by

Linda Overman

April 29, 1977

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 used for purposes of research, for instructional use, for publication, or for other related purposes.

I, Elzena Harris 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 known, recognized, or contemplated, to Jackson State University, Jackson, Mississippi.

Elzena Harris

Interviewee (Signature)

March 28, 1977

Date

Interviewee: Elzena Harris
Interviewer: Linda Overman
Subject: Life Experiences of Senior Citizens
Date: March 28, 1977
Place: 1420 Everett St., Jackson, Ms.
Time: 1:00 p.m.

Q: How old were you when you moved to Jackson?

H: When I was four years old, my mother moved from Rankin county, a place they call Pierson. But, now they have changed the name to Pearl and now Pearl and Jackson has combined it. Where we used to live, they changed that to Jackson, Ms. and we have a route, route 6. That's the route now out there where I lived. The old house is still out there what I lived in. and People are living in it now and it was built years ago. When I moved to Jackson, we moved on Lynch Street right across in front of the Masonic Temple. The house is there now that we moved in. Then we moved from there on Pearl Street. And from Pearl Street to Rose between Central and Deer Park. We moved from there here. (1918) That's how many houses I've lived in in Jackson. I went to school at Smith-Robinson over on Bloom Street. That was the only public school here for the colored people to go to. And then I went to Campbell College. Then I went from Campbell College to Jackson College, which is now Jackson University. They changed that name to that. Those are the schools. My teachers was Mrs. Lenny Redmond at Smith-Robinson. Professor Lanier was principal. Then when I changed and come over here on Lynch Street, what they called Jim Hill, where the Masonic Temple is now, Professor Brinkley was the principal there. The games I played was hopscotch, ball games, jumping rope, and hide and seek. I'd be countin and runnin, find your bases. I played that and I played checkers, I played dominoes. Momma didn't allow us to play no cards. We didn't play any cards. That was my main games that we played. We

H: played a game you called Post Office (delivering pretend mail). And we played a game which is called scarn (boys try to kiss girls and girls turn their head away and say "scarn"). Girls and boys played that. Then we played baseball. Different schools would play and my school would wear blue skirts pleated, white middy blouses with a blue collar that matched the skirt. The next school that we was playing against would wear red skirts, pleated around the waist, white middy blouses and had a red collar on it to tell the difference in the schools. The girls would play against the boys. We would win. If the girls won, we'd win. We'd play that school. Every Friday, we played those ballgames. And we'd cook a cake, carry it to school. My school would furnish the cake and the other school would furnish the ice cream. Whatever school won is the one that would get the cake (laughter) was the one that would win the cake. That's the games we played when I was goin to school.

O: You were the youngest of twelve children, is that right?

H: Yes, I was the baby of all the children.

O: And your father had already died before you moved to Jackson. Did your mother ~~work~~ then or did she remarry? How did she --

H: Yes, she remarried again after she moved to town. My stepfather was named Dan Jenkins. He was a little ole preacher and I just couldn't stand him. I didn't like him for nothin in the world cause she had no business marrying him. I didn't want to have no stepdaddy. I never would call him my stepdaddy . He died in 1908 and she never remarried any more. Yes, she washed. She washed and ironed for white people. Then you could bring their clothes home or go to their houses and do them. But, she had to work to make a living for us.

- O: As the youngest, which one of your sisters or brothers were you the closest to? Was there one that was more of a favorite to you?
- H: I liked all my sisters but, I had one favorite sister. Her name was Lena and I was the fifth child under her. That was Mary Jane Pace's (her niece who lives with her) mother. She died in Chicago. Forty what, Mary? What year did Doll die? (she called to her niece in another room) 1945. (her niece answered) She died in Chicago in 1945. And our mother died in 1943, wasn't it? (to her niece) Yes. (her niece answered) Our mother died in 1943, May 20, Tuesday after Mothers' Day. That's when she died here. *[I have since found that she died in 1940]*.
- O: I know you grew up in this area around Jackson State--
- H: I told you where all I lived on Lynch and Pearl, and Rose and moved from there down here. But, then I was a young lady when we moved down here. We moved right here in this house, my mother and I and Mary, that child there, (pointed to her niece) And my mother died in that room right over there, in that bed where I sleep in now. Wasn't nobody here but myself and her. I was living in Chicago and I came home to visit her and she asked me to stay with her till after Mother's Day. I stayed and she died Tuesday after Mother's Day in 1943. *[1940]*
- O: Did you have any pets when you were a child?
- H: I remember dolls, nothing but dolls. I didn't like no cats and dogs.
- O: You played with dolls?
- H: Oh, I had plenty dolls. And, you know, children have little plates, cups, and then you had a wash stand and you know doll toys for me to play with and I'd play with doll toys and make me a room and played with em.
- O: Did you have homemade dolls usually or did you buy them?

H: I made homemade dolls out of rags, stuff them with sawdust, stuff them with rags. But, my mother bought me dolls. She'd buy me dolls every Christmas and I would keep them, I would keep them dolls. You saw that big ole doll. I showed you that big ole doll.

O: Was that one of them that she bought you?

H: It looks like a baby.

O: Yes.

H: I'd keep my dolls. Children would want to take them but I'd keep them.

O: Do you remember street cars in Jackson?

H: No, trailers. Trailer cars and they had the thing like the railroad tracks and they had a thing up there (points up) up high and the thing hitched to that.

O: Like a trolley?

H: Yes, trolley cars. That's what it (the city) had and then it took away trolley cars and made street cars and then they changed from that that to these buses. They had buses but, it changed three times.

The trolley car went from down on Robinson Street far as where Magnolia Street is now and went out far as where the University Hospital is now. That was the Asylum at that time. That was as far as it went and turned around and come back. Then when they put buses on, not these kind of buses, but, another kind of bus like the Greyhound. A big ole bus like that. And that's as far as it went, cause that's where the white people lived and people had to ride the buses that away to go to work. Then those that didn't want to ride the buses had to walk to work. People that worked.

O: How long did you go to Campbell College?

H: I went to Campbell College about three years and then I had two girl friends that was going to Jackson College, Louella Cox, Diamond Cox's

- H: daughter, Louella. She lived there where the Masonic Temple is now. That was her daddy's house and then Bessie Sanders, she lived over across in the front of the Masonic Temple. And she was going to. . .
- O: Jackson College?
- H: Jackson College. Mary ^{Campbell} ~~Came~~ lived next to Diamond Cox's house. Her mother lived there. They were going to Jackson College and I wanted to go to Jackson college too cause they were my friends. I switched from Campbell and started going to Jackson College.
- O: Smith-Robinson went to what, eighth grade?
- H: Eighth grade. At that time eighth grade was high school. When you finished eighth grade and went to twelfth grade, you could finish college.
- O: So you went the three years at Campbell college , an equivalent of college then?
- H: Yes, and I went to Jackson college and I went as far as the ninth grade, no the tenth, at Jackson College and I stopped going to school.
- O: What kind of classes were you taking? What kind of courses did you take there?
- H: You know they didn't teach like they do now. They just took the whole class like Reading, Arithmetic, English, History, and Geography. That's what they took then and Spelling. Now in the afternoon, you would have Reading, Spelling and Geography. In the morning, you would take that Arithmetic and English. You'd have certain classes in the morning and certain classes in the evening.
- O: That was mostly a teacher's college at the time, wasn't it?
- H: One teacher teach all the classes. Just like you was going to graduate, you was going to finish twelfth grade, like what they call practice teaching. Like you going to different schools. If you was going to