

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, Mrs. Alma Cousin 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, Mississippi, 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.

Mrs. Alma Cousin
Interviewee's Signature

6-16-1932
Interviewee's Date of Birth

9-26-82
Date Agreement Signed

OH 81.52A
Oral History Number Assigned

DRAFT

JACKSON STATE UNIVERSITY
Jackson, Mississippi

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT
Farish Street - Project

INTERVIEWEE: Alma Cousins
INTERVIEWER: Cheryl Payne
TRANSCRIBER: W. M. McClendon
DATE: September 28, 1981
OH 81.52A

This is an interview with Mrs. Alma Cousins for the Jackson State University Historic District Project, taken by Mrs. Cheryl Payne at the Marino Branch YWCA, on September 28, 1981, at 7:05 P.M. Mrs. Cousins, will you tell us exactly where you live?

C: I live at 146 East Monument Street.

P: And this is located where?

C: Jackson, Mississippi, in the Farish Street Historic District.

P: How long have you been living here in the Farish Street Historic District?

C: Well, I been living in this District for twenty-eight years.

P: What type of occupations have you held?

C: Well, I've worked as a restaurant owner and I also worked in a restaurant and now I am employed as a maid.

P: Where was this restaurant?

C: It was on North Mill Street, . . .next corner, and the other one was the Three Sisters Cafe.

P: Have you always lived on Monument Street?

C: Well most of the time I lived on Monument. Before that, I lived on Rodney Court, and it's all in this District.

P: Tell me something about the area when you first moved here.

C: When I first moved here it was much different than it is now. It had more stores and restaurants and businesses and it was a much cleaner

COUSINS, Alma
September 28, 1981
OH 81.52A

- C: place than it is now. It could use a lot of cleaning up and remodeling of the buildings and stuff like that, and it would be a better place.
- P: Exactly what year did you move here?
- C: I moved here in 1953.
- P: What were some of the activities going on around here?
- C: There was the Home Dining Room. It was a nice place to eat and Shephard's Kitchen, The Snack Bar, Stevenson's, and Dotty Grill. All those places were real nice.
- P: Did you belong to a church in the neighborhood?
- C: Yes, I do. I belong to Mt. Helm Baptist Church and it is the oldest Black Church in Jackson.
- P: How old is Mt. Helm?
- C: One hundred and thirty-five or something like that. I can't recall exactly, but I believe it is one hundred and some years old.
- P: Where is it located?
- C: It is located at 300 East Church Street, Jackson, Mississippi.
- P: Has it always been at that particular location?
- C: No, when I first joined Mt. Helm it was on the corner of Lamar and Church Street, it was the old building.
- P: So the present Church, is it very far from the original site?
- C: No, it's only a block from the original site.
- P: What was the reason the church moved from the original site to the present site?
- C: Well, in order to build another church we had to move because we didn't have enough parking space and they require you to have adequate parking space. That's the reason the church moved.
- P: Were there surrounding businesses around the old site the reason why you all couldn't purchase the land?
- C: Yes it was. During that time I believe Bingle's had a furniture company on the corner and we couldn't buy that land and also those houses

COUSINS, Alma
September 28, 1981
OH 81.52A

- C: behind it belonged to Dr. Williams, those old houses back there.
- P: Was Dr. Williams a Black man or White?
- C: Well, Dr. Williams was Black and the furniture store owner was White.
- P: Did the Farish Street Historic District have any community organizations or organized communities or blocks when you first came here?
- C: No, they didn't, not to my knowledge.
- P: What role do you think the churches here in the neighborhood played in motivating the people that were living here?
- C: Well to my knowledge they didn't play too much of a role in the community like keeping it up. A lot of churches (when the NAACP was looking for places to have meetings) wouldn't even let them have meetings at their church 'cause they were afraid that something would happen to it. So I don't think they played any kind of a role.
- P: As a whole I am asking your opinion. What impact did the re-designing of the streets, remodeling of the buildings and white businesses moving into the Farish Street area have upon the people that were living here in the area and the businessmen that were there before them?
- C: In a way it's really bad on the rest, When Whites started moving in that just really pushed the Black businesses back. People are gonna trade with the Whites before they will trade with their own color, and that's what happened with this. That's the way I feel about it.
- P: As far as the housing situation comparing it with the years that you first moved down here and today, is there less housing or more housing? What is your opinion on the housing situation?
- C: Well it's lesser houses down in there now than it was when I first came here. They have torn down a lot of houses around here and it's just empty spaces. It really has changed in the housing.
- P: Can you sort of pin point places of where houses once were, maybe a building or business that existed before?
- C: I know it was some houses there where New Deal Grocery Store is now when I first came to Jackson.

COUSINS, Alma
September 28, 1981
OH 81.52A

P: Speaking of New Deal, how long has the white business been in the area?

C: Well he was here when I came to Jackson. He was on Farish Street and later moved to Monument where he is now. So he's been here every since. It's the block on the corner of Church and Farish Street in that building.

P: At the time that you came to Jackson, you talking about 1953, was he the only white business down in this lower area? (We talking about say from Amite to what is presently known as High and Monument).

C: No, it was Payne's Grocery Store, and it was a little drugstore on the corner where now is the cafe. It was a little store there. There was another little drugstore (white drugstore) a Van's Drugstore I believe in the next block, I believe right below here.

P: In speaking with people that didn't live in this area in the fifties, what was their attitude towards this area?

C: Most people loved it because they always would come to Farish Street. They looked forward to coming to Farish Street.

P: At any time did you have an opportunity to use any of the Lawyers and Doctors that were in this area?

C: Yes. I used Attorney Carsie Hall on several occasions.

P: What was your opinion of him as a Lawyer?

C: Well, in my opinoin he was very nice and honest. He did what was right. He was real nice and I enjoyed using him.

P: If you feel that I am asking a personal question, you don't have to answer it. Did your business with him require you to go to Court?

C: Yes it did.

P: What was the . . .

C: At that time it was no Black Judges, therefore the Black Attorney had to go before a White Judge and other White Lawyers. . .

P: What was the attitude of the Court when Attorney Hall presented your case?

COUSINS, Alma
September 28, 1981

C: Well, they were real nice because he had always been handling cases down there. He was one of the older lawyers and it really didn't . . . During this time they weren't as prejudice towards Black folk as they were in the past. So they were really nice.

P: Were there other Black Lawyers?

C: Yes, Attorney Young, and Sidney Tharpe, I can't think of the others right now.

P: When you found out that you would require a lawyer to handle your particular situation, how did you go about finding a Black Lawyer?

C: Well, the way I did was, we was at Court and I had known him in the past and so he came in and so I asked him would he represent me and he said yes.

P: So you didn't go out and maybe try to find the names of other Black Lawyers and maybe where their location was?

C: Right.

END OF THIS INTERVIEW