

THE HISTORY OF THE LYNCH STREET C.M.E. CHURCH

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TRANSCRIPTION OF INTERVIEW

with

MRS. ELZENA HARRIS

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for

ORAL HISTORY 300

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by

Linda Overman

November 30, 1976

JACKSON STATE UNIVERSITY  
JACKSON, MISSISSIPPI

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

INTERVIEWER AGREEMENT

I, Linda Overman, in view of the historical and scholarly value of the information contained in the interview with Elzena Harris knowingly and voluntarily permit Jackson State University, Jackson the full use of this information, and hereby grant and assign to Jackson State University, Jackson all rights of every kind whatever pertaining to this information, whether or not such rights are now known, recognized or contemplated.

Linda Overman  
Interviewer (signature)

O.H. 1977-06  
Interview Number

May 12, 1977  
Date

The purpose of this interview is to ascertain information concerning the history of the Lynch Street C.M.E. Church. This interview is with Mrs. Elzena Harris. Mrs Harris' family moved to Jackson from Pierson, Ms. in 1892 when she was four years old. They joined the Lane's Chapel C.M.E. church on South West Street.

In 1909, when Lynch Street C.M.E. Church was organized, her family was one of the four families to change their membership to that church. She remained a member of that church until it closed, except for the eighteen years that she lived in Chicago. She is still a member of Lynch Street M.E. at it's new location.

She graduated from the eighth grade at Smith-Robinson School on Bloom Street, the only "colored" high school in Jackson at the time. She worked as a practical nurse taking care of old white people in their homes. Mrs. Harris is a widow and is in excellent health at age seventy-nine.

This This interview is being conducted on November 30, 1976 at 10 a.m. in Mrs. Harris' home at 1420 Everett Street, Jackson Ms. The interviewer is Linda Overman, a history major at Jackson State University, who is conducting the interview for Oral History 300.

Interviewer: Linda Overman  
 Interviewee: Elzina Harris  
 Subject: The Function of the Lynch Street C.M.E. Church in  
           the Community  
 Date: November 30, 1976  
 Time: 10:00 a.m.  
 Place: 1420 Everett St., Jackson, Ms.

Mrs. Harris began talking as soon as the tape was turned on and before I had time to ask her a question.

- H: I been going to church ever since I used to have to hold to my Momma's dress tail. Of course, she carried me when I was a baby. And then when I got so I could walk, I walked to church. I been going to church all my life.
- O: You moved to Jackson then when you were four years old (information gained in pre-interview conversation).
- H: Four years old.
- O: Where did you go to church? What was the name of your church at that time? Was Lynch Street C.M.E. there?
- H: No, we didn't have but one church here at that time and it was Lane's Chapel. Lane's Chapel then was down on S. West street and we used to walk from up there on Lynch street to Pearl and down to Lane's Chapel. Now Lane's Chapel is over on the other side of Main street (Memphis st.) They tore it down and moved over there when they tore West street up down there (what year). And then in 1908, it was eight or nine.
- O: I believe it was 1909 according to the records I've seen.
- H: Yes, see I was just a child then. And then they transferred all of us that lived out in this neighborhood (from Lane's Chapel to Lynch street. Then I was a girl but I confessed religion and joined the church in 1912. I joined the church the fourth Sunday, Friday night before the fourth Sunday in August <sup>1912</sup> and I was baptized, I wasn't sprinkled

H: (cont.) I was baptized in a pool<sup>that was</sup> in the church the first Sunday in September 1912. I never will forget that. That's how long I been a member of the church but, I been going to church all my life. Well now in 1909, before that time, before 1909 how we come by Lynch Street (church) cause we was going to Lane's Chapel. I just remembered now those white peoples name. But you see, back there then State Street and Capitol Street . Now where the Edwards Hotel is now Mrs. Mac Donald, my sister worked for her, she her house was there. And behind her house was a foundry. You know what I'm talking about? Where they build pipes and things like that. Her<sup>son</sup> rounded that on Pascagoula. It was off of Pascagoula street behind her house. Off Pearl, I mean. But anyway, houses was there all the way down, back out to where the zoo is now. That's as far as it went out there (city). That was the rich white people lived out there on those two streets, Capitol and State. White people then had servant houses on the yard for colored people to live in. This colored woman and man worked for some people named Ferguson and they was sanctified. They wanted to buy some land to build a church on. They was working for these white people had been there a long time. Well, Mr. Ferguson told them that they would give them a piece of ground to build them a church on. He deeded to them (for) church property only. Couldn't put nothing on there but a church and that is where that old Lynch Street church is down there (1024 Lynch Street). now across from the cemetery. Well, they gave that piece of ground to them and then there was a church on the corner of Capitol and Lemon Streets. <sup>Right</sup> Up there by the old Poindexter park where the Mississippi Valley Gas place is. There was a white people's church there. They was

H: (cont.) gonna sell it. And the Coca Cola plant setted there by that church. Then the Coca Cola plant moved over here where it is now.

O: On Highway 80.

H: Yes, on Highway 80. Mr. Ferguson told these colored people that that church was going to be sold cause the Valley place (Ms. Valley Gas) was gonna buy it. The Coca Cola plant had moved. He said now I can get that church for you'all but you'all have to have it moved. A frame church, white people's church. They moved it over there on Lynch street where it is now (the building was replaced with a brick building in 1926 at the same location). Well, they had it and they (sanctified) was gonna lose it.

O: That was a Baptist church, wasn't it?

H: No. I'm gonna tell you how it was. Sanctified, it was sanctified. The white people give it to them sanctified people and the sanctified people didn't have enough members after they stayed there awhile to meet their notes. Well, then that's how the Baptist people come into it. Mrs. Gussie Simon had a girl named Iota and a boy named Lowezy Dixon and they dived up there on Evans Street on top of Lynch street. That's where they lived and they were Baptist. They heard that these Sanctified folks was gonna lose the church and they took up the note where they left off. But then they couldn't meet the note. Well, then a man livin over on Pascagoula street, a preacher named Hardaway. He heard about these Baptist folks was gonna lose that church. Rev. Tommy Sanders was our presiding elder and he lived on Lynhh Street across from where the Masonic Temple is now, a vacant lot, they tore the old house down. He was living there. He <sup>(Rev. HARDAWAY)</sup> went and told old man Tom Sanders, our presiding elder, that they (baptist) was gonna lose

H: (cont.) that Church. Well, we had a bishop in Holly Springs named Bishop (Elias) Cottrell. Rev. Tommy Sanders, our presiding elder, he and old man Rev. Hardaway called Bishop Cottrell and he come down from Holly Springs and they went up to the court house and bought took up the note where the Baptist left off and that's how we come by the church. They paid \$1300.00 for that old frame church and that piece of ground where that church used to stand. And that's how we come by the church. And then they transferred the Mc Craines, the Sanders, Whitfields and the Wells, all the people, you know, the families that was gonna to Lane's Chapel. Barnes' stayed up here on Morehouse Street and they transferred all of us (including her family) out to this church. From Lane's Chapel to Lynch Street. That's why they organized Lynch Street(church). Then different members come in and that's how our church got organized.

O: I had a little bit of the story but this the most complete. I'm glad to get that story ...

H: And, of course, now I left here and stayed twenty years and a lot of members joined. And they had a lot of pastors that I don't remember. We had a pastor named Rev. D. M. Montgomery, Rev. Tommy Sanders, Sr. after he come down as presiding elder, he pastored. He had a son named Tommy Sanders, Jr. He was out pastor. Rev. Epps was our pastor and we had <sup>(presiding elder)</sup> a ~~man~~ named Wright, one named Vogel? , Rev. Brown, P.H. Brown, was our pastor.

O: Yes, I interviewed him ...

H: (cont.) and our presiding elder. And Rev. Cole? was our presiding elder.

O: I want to ask you about the street itself, that general neighborhood. How has that changed over the years, from the time when Lynch Street

O: (cont.) C.M.E. church first began. What was that street like? It was dirt I know, right?

H: Oh, yes.

O: What kind of places were around? Was it mostly houses?

H: Nothing but houses down there all along Lynch Street from Dalton on down to the corner of Rose Street. And over on this side (south) over where them cafes are them was there then. Cooper's was on no, Cooper's wasn't there then.

O: There were some of those there though when the church first...

H: They were all there then, all those places was there then. And the house right next to that building on that side of the street was called ~~it~~ ~~then~~ Drummer's Corner (laughing). That's what everybody called that corner down there, Drummer's Corner.

O: Why did they call it that?

H: Well, it's a long story. Drummers used to be way up there nearly bout to Clifton Street on Lynch for they cut that highway through there. There was houses all along there where that ditch is. Now Drummer used to be up there and he sold whiskey homemade whiskey and stuff. He (laughing). And the first patrol that was put on the city he was the first one that rode ~~in it~~ and they named it Drummer's Patrol. When in it (laughing). Then he moved from up there down there on that corner on that side (south) on Rose street, short Rose. Is there a house there now?

O: No there are houses down from it but, not on the corner.

H: Well, that was where he lived and that was his cafe on that street and they called it Drummers corner. Over on that side of Rose street on the left (~~east~~ <sup>north</sup>) going down from Rose street on down to that corner...



O: Toward Terry Road?

H: Yes, on that side where that ditch is above that all the way to Clifton street there was houses. Back there where Poindexter street is, that was below street that was widened out and that lot run from Lynch back to Rose back to Poindexter clean on up to where that ditch is wasn't nothing there but a vacant lot. That's where Drummer raised <sup>a</sup>vegetable farm. He raised peas, greens, and you know, vegetables. He had a wagon and a horse. He had a horse that just pranced all the time and he'd stop and get his vegetables off the wagon and the horses feet would just be prancing. That's what was on that corner up there. From the corner of Rose and back thisaway...

O: Toward Dalton?

H: Dalton, yes. <sup>(All along there)</sup> That was houses from where that old church is now (C.M.E.) that vacant lot (west of the parsonage) that was houses there but they rolled ~~them~~ back and finally they sold them. That's why there's no houses there but houses was all the way up thisaway. People lived in there. Course now. We lived on where I told you Tom Sanders lived it's a brick building now and in the front is a house sitting back behind that Have you noticed that?

O: On Everett Street?

H: On Lynch Street.

O: Yes, I know where you mean.

H: Well, I lived right in that house that my mother did. That house there. was built for my mother but she was renting at that time and Rev. Anderson was our pastor. He came here from Alexandria, Louisiana. and he was going to buy that house he said. buying it and

H: (cont.) that's why mother moved out. And she moved out on Pearl Street and then she moved <sup>(from Pearl)</sup> down on Rose and then she moved down here (Everett Street) and said she was gonna move where the white folks wasn't gonna bother here no more. And she moved right here in this house.

O: Your mother bought this house?

H: Yes, I inherited this. She died and left it to me. All of us was raised <sup>(with)</sup> Christian values. I had a Christian mother and she brought all of us up. I had a lot of sisters and a brother. All of my sisters and my brother, I had one brother, are dead.

O: How many sisters did you have?

H: There was eleven of us and one boy. I'm the baby and I've seen all of them put in the ground.

O: How important do you feel that the church has been in your life?

H: Ah, lady don't ask me that. I wouldn't take nothing for Jesus Christ. I ain't talkin about no church. The church is right in here (put her hand on her heart), ~~the~~ is right in there. You, you ~~the~~ church. That building down there is for us to go in there and mingle our voices together and praise and serve God. Whatever that building is, the church is you. If you don't go in that building they don't be nothing in there cause anybody don't have nothing in there <sup>and it</sup> just sit and fall down cause people don't go there. But you the church, you carry the church in that building yourself. God is all in all. God is all in the world I can depend on. All my life I've trusted God. Every morning I get up I say thank you Jesus thank you for letting me get up, for the blood in my veins and I'm able to walk, thank you. I go to bed at night, I say my prayers. I crawl up in this bed I say, "Lord, watch over me all night long, watch over me."

H: (cont.) Don't let no harm come up<sup>(up)</sup> and then wake me<sup>(up)</sup> early in the morning." That what I tell him. I talk to the Lord all day. If it wasn't for the Lord lady, what would I do?

O: I don't know what any of us would do.

H: Nothing, nothing.

This is incomplete, I didn't finish transcribing this tape.