

THE FUNCTION OF THE LYNCH STREET C.M.E. CHURCH IN THE COMMUNITY

JACKSON, MISSISSIPPI

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ORAL HISTORY 300

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by

LINDA OVERMAN

November 16, 1976

Date



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

I, Cora M. Pierce, 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 know, recognized, or contemplated, to Jackson State University, Jackson, Mississippi.

Mrs. Cora M. Pierce  
Interviewee (Signature)

November 16, 1976  
Date



The purpose of this interview is to ascertain information concerning the Lynch Street C.M.E. Church in the community. This interview is with Mrs. Cora Lee Hicks Pierce, a member of that church since 1927 and an active worker in the church throughout the years of it's existence.

A native of Bentonia, Mississippi, Mrs. Pierce has lived in Jackson for 49 of her 56 years. She is married and has no children. She graduated from Yazoo City Training School, Jim Hill High School (when it was on Lynch St.), and Campbell College (which was on Lynch St.). She has a bachelor of arts from Mississippi Industrial College in Holly Springs, Ms. and a Master of Arts from Indiana University. She is a school teacher and is in excellent health.

This interview is being conducted on November 16, 1976 at 4:30 p.m. in Mrs. Pierce's home at 1839 Dalton St., Jackson, Ms. Mr. Pierce, a retired truck driver, was at home but, left the room for the interview. The interviewer is Linda Overman, a history major at Jackson State University, conducting the interview for Oral History 300.



Interviewer: Linda Overman  
Interviewee: Cora Lee Hicks Pierce  
Subject: The Function of the Lynch Street C.M.E. in the  
Community  
Date: November 16, 1976  
Time: 4:30 p.m.  
Place: 1839 Dalton St., Jackson, Ms.

O:

O: Mrs. Pierce, how did you become a member of the Lynch Street C.M.E. Church?

P: My parents moved from Yazoo county to Jackson in January of 1927 and we became members of Lynch Street C.M.E. church the following Sunday morning.

O: Has your home always been in this neighborhood?

P: Yes, all these years, 47 to be exact.

O: What is your earliest memory of being at the church? At Sunday school perhaps?

P: I guess the most important thing that I can remember is that I was a member of the Junior class in Sunday School and Mrs. Idell Ryan was my Sunday School teacher and we were talking about sharing what we had. At that time most of us didn't have too much of anything. But she made it so simple. That just the least little thing you could do to help somebody God would smile about it. And so, from her teachings about giving and sharing I have been able to do that all these years. No matter how small you can always find someone to share something with. There are people that don't have what you have.

O: How old were you at that time?

P: About eight.



O: It stuck with you.

P: It stuck.

O: Did the church have much influence on you and your family life as you were growing up?

P: Yes, My mother was the president, in the later years, of the Missionary society and Lynch street to the left of the church was kind of slummy and the church didn't go about churning those people but they made home visitations and even bought things for little children to wear to come to Sunday school. And they have given food through the Sunday school to needy families and through the missionary society they have made funeral arrangements and paid for it by the month for people in that community. And the cafes there all those places were well we didn't have whiskey at that time legally but we had plenty of beer and home brew and plenty of feasting on the weekend. And my mother would go by and talk to those owners and she organized what she called a stay-at-home Sunday school class and those persons gave her donations every Sunday morning. And it didn't make any difference how drunk they were or nothing, if they saw Momma they said, "Here come Ms. Hicks. Get your money so she can go and we can finish". And it often tickled me. I said, "Momma, some of those folk gonna knock you down." And she'd say, "Aw baby, the Lord's gonna take care of me." And that was the attitude of the Lynch street church to be of service in that community. Although in those times there was very little. But, what was given seemed to have been appreciated by those folk who received it.

O: When you talk about to the left of the church, were you talking about toward Jackson State college or down the other way?



P: Down the other way. Down the other way. We have always had Jackson State College students coming to Sunday school there, and attending the eleven o'clock worship. We have had some of those young people to serve as assistant Sunday school teachers and some have sung in the choir.

O: Rev. Brown mentioned to me that when his daughters were living at home that there were quite a few people from the college who came down.

P: Right, Jackson State has always come to our church.

O: What do you feel like the church did for you yourself as you were growing up and going through different stages of your life?

P: Well, I think that basically the church helped me to face life, and a lot of problems that we had growing up in Jackson. It really was my guide, the church was. My friends, my activities in the community, my activities at school was basically governed by my teachings at the church.

O: Have you retained most of those friendships through the church over the years?

P: I sure have. I remember, I was about nine then, and I sang in the Senior choir. Never with the children with the older people, and they always loved me. You know, they'd say, "come on baby we're going to do this and we're going to do that". Even today in the new Lynch street church I am the president of the stewardess board. I am the youngest one ever elected and the older women I have them all the way up to 87 and they still say, "we want you to lead us." I have felt so ooo! (exclamation) I don't know how I felt because they have lived and they know more about life



than I do but they accept me to direct them in preparing the Lord's and visiting the sick and all those kind of things. It has made me more strong because of their faith and all of that through Lynch street church.

O: It has really enriched your life.

P: It certainly has.

O: What activities did you participate in church as a child?

P: Well, now this is going to shock you. From the time I was nine years old I taught the Junior class of the boys division. And I taught that class for 47 years. This year is the only year I have not taught that class.

O: You started at the age of nine?

P: At the age of nine and taught till this year. And I have always sung in the choir. I have been junior class leader and when I became of age I was promoted to a regular class leader. I sang in the choir until about ten years ago and high blood pressure and sinus was getting the best of me so I had to let some of it kind of lay it down a little bit. I have been a Sunday school secretary. I have been the Director of Christian Education in Lynch street church. Oh, what else have I been (laughing)? Oh, and I have worked with the young people in the C.Y.F. and I have served from my church as annual conference officer and district officer. I have also attended general conferences. Our church recommended me and the annual conference selected me. I have attended the Women's Missionary Council meetings and I have been to the general lay activity meetings and just everything, I want my hand in it.

O: Are some of those out of state things that you went to?



- P: Yes, yes. My first trip to Florida the church sent me to Miami. My first trip to Texas the church sent me. To St. Louis, to Cleveland, to Detroit just all around. to represent Lynch street.
- O: You have certainly gotten a lot out of your church.
- P: I certainly have. and I wouldn't stop for anything. I love it.
- O: It sounds like you really enjoy it.
- P: I love it.
- O: It is important in your life, I can tell.
- P: It certainly is.
- O: I was wondering, Rev. Brown mentioned something to me about <sup>a</sup> leadership training schools for young people and I didn't understand quite what that is?
- P: Alright. The leadership training school is for the South Mississippi conference. Every year young people (cleared her throat) from the Sunday school and the C.Y.F. go to Mississippi Industrial College if they have leadership abilities and if it appears that they will stay with the church then they are sent to leadership training school for a week. They receive instructions in certain areas of the church that would interest them most. And they get a certificate if they stay the whole five days and show interest in it. And if they are really interested they come home and put some of this that they have learned in leadership training school into practice in their local churches. And then they go . I went to leadership training school from the Presbyterian church. I was recommended by Mrs. Williams from the white Presbyterian church a long time ago and it was meeting at Jackson State College a week during the summer. I attended that school until it was moved to Mississippi Industrial College (Holly Springs, Ms. ). So I've been there times.
- O: Did you belong to C.Y.F.?



P: Oh yes. In our church we teach bible in C.Y.F. but we bring in things that concern young people-marriage and courtship, and proper dress, table manners and all that kind of thing. Proper dress for ~~for~~ young Christians and those classes are interesting. We have shown films and we had folk in to talk to the children in certain fields. We've had officers to come and talk about behavior on the streets and on the use of your car. We had the nurses to come about venereal diseases and all that kind of thing and discuss it with our young people. And we've had drugs lately those people have come and talked to us. And naturally the bible always. But these things come in too every Sunday afternoon from five till six for our young people.

O: To complete the whole thing (picture).

P: The whole thing.

O: What kind of social activities were provided for the members of the church throughout the years?

P: Well, we had a softball team. We didn't have basketball in those days, no where to play it. But, we had a softball team and we had a volleyball team and we had croquet and occasionally they would let us play some music outside so the children could kind of dance. But, we didn't make it a habit because of the feelings of the older members that you should not dance. But, some of them were a little lenient and <sup>said</sup> we'll let them dance a few minutes because if we don't let them dance here they're going to dance where we don't want them dancing and with people we don't want them dancing with. And picnics, /hikes we'd have a good time in that. A lot of hot dogs and ice cream and lemonade. The children would play ball, run in and out of the sun and drink cold lemonade and eat a hot dog and go back and play some



- P: (Cont.) more. And the members of the church would furnish the transportation for the children. We didn't have parks then as such. But, we went out to Mrs. Francis Alexander's church out at P at Ebenzer and they had a large open place out there and so that's where we would have all our picnics.
- O: What kind of religious activities were provided? I know about services but how often did they have services?
- P: We had Sunday school and eleven o'clock worship and five o'clock C.Y.F. and 6:30 night worship every Sunday. We had them every Sunday night and Tuesday night we had prayer meetings, on Wednesday night we had the Sunday school teachers meeting and on Friday choir practice.
- O: Did you have . . .
- P: Oh excuse me, I'm forgetting the laymen's meeting. The laymen meet twice a month second and fourth Sunday afternoon from five till six. They discuss our Discipline and evangelism and things like that.
- O: You had revivals too and . . .
- P: Oh yes, revivals every year. Sometimes we'd have a spring revival and a winter revival and sometimes we'd have what we called a youth revival. The young people would select a young minister and invite choirs of the city to come each night. A new minister each night and a new choir each night. That way they would have complete charge of their openings and everything.
- O: Because of your membership in the church, did you ever feel motivated to take part in political activities or social issues outside of church?



- P: Oh yes. I was sure enough one there (laughing) Now that kind of hard because at that time we were not permitted to vote as such.
- O: When are you talking about? ~~At~~ <sup>at</sup> what period of time?
- P: In the thirties and in the early Forties. We paid our poll tax but we could not vote. And because of that we would just get together and say the ones that could vote we would let them know our opinion and they would do it for us. But now it's no problem. All C.M.E.'s are head over heels in politics. We feel that the church must be in politics because if the church is out of it then the folk that are elected will probably be out of the church also. And we feel that if we are going to have a leader this person should be a Christian. And if he's ~~is~~ a Christian we believe ~~that~~ he will deal fair by all people. And so we do take an active part in politics.
- O: Did you feel like, as you were growing up in the church, that you could get counseling if you needed from any of the ministers?
- P: Yes, our ministers have always made it very clear if there is a problem, any type, come to me. ~~and~~ you could feel free to go because you wouldn't hear it anymore. We also had counseling services. Our pastor and several of the stewards and several of the stewardess. If you don't want to go directly to the pastor, then you can come to a stewardess or you can go to a steward and if it's too heavy or too hard for us to handle then we go to the pastor. He is eager to do what he can.
- O: What ~~doe~~ the stewards and stewardesses do in the church? What is their function?
- P: Their main function is to take care of the finances. What is needed for the church and what's needed for the pastor and his family,



P: (cont.) and the visiting of the sick and shut-ins and those without jobs and to try and bring members into our church. We have a fulltime job if we can all get around to doing it.

O: Do you think then that your church did a good job of meeting your needs as you grew up? Spiritually and socially?

P: Yes, yes.

O: In your estimation, well I guess you answered that for me. You feel that you talked about the church drawing the neighborhood together. About how people going out into the neighborhood and working . . .

P: Yes, yes.

O: What then do you feel was the function of the Lynch Street C.M.E. church in the community?

P: To set the right Christian examples and to draw all around it to God by services, by our attitude towards men, and by our lives. We have tried to be what God would have us be and to bring others into the church. Not necessarily Lynch street. If you don't want to join Lynch street well and good just so you get in the church and give services.

O: You mentioned to me some of the organizations you belonged to in the past.

O: I want to ask, you mentioned a little bit about this, but how did you personally feel about all the numbers of bars and clubs on Lynch street? Did you ever feel it was detrimental to the neighborhood and the church?

P: Well we thought that the church would be a help there. Several times it had been discussed that <sup>let's</sup> we should get off of <sup>this</sup> that corner



P: (cont.) more junks and things are getting built around it let's just get off of it. But, most of us thought that if we were to leave then what kind of shape would the corner actually be in? So let's stay let's stay and do all we can to help these people. To let them see that all of the things they think are fun now is not fun and show them that it isn't fun. Because so many of them we have seen lose their health, lose their jobs, families broken, little children hungry and clothesless almost. The church has helped that corner a great deal by the services that it gave to it. Oh, we've had drunks stumble on up in there and we just treated them as if they were would sober. Invite them in and they sit back, some go to sleep and we wake them up when it's over. But we didn't ever close our doors to any of them and so they say I like Lynch street those folks know how to treat you. I like Lynch street.

O: I hadn't thought of it in that way. I was thinking of it more in some ways as more of a detriment but if you had left, as you said, it would have brought it down more.

P: And we tried to stay there white we couldn't. We couldn't

O: The church was what it was getting too small right? And I know there was a parking problem.

P: No parking. No parking and that was our problem couldn't park. Now (new location) plenty of space.

O: Can you tell me anything about the early history of the church? Are you familiar with it at all? Anything that people have talked to you about.

P: Well they have told me that it was once a little white frame building and it (the property) belonged to the Baptist church.



P: (cont.) They were in the process of losing ~~that~~ church and Elder Sanders, Tom Sanders (Sr.) found out about it and called Bishop Cottrell who lived in Holly Springs ~~and~~ told him about it. If he would come down here ~~could get~~ the church <sup>and</sup> ~~(or~~ property ~~)~~ cheap. And so Bishop came down and bought that <sup>little white</sup> church <sup>and</sup> ~~(or~~ property ~~)~~. And the membership soon outgrew it. and Tom Sanders, Jr. built the building that you saw in the picture (the Lynch st. C.M.E., a brick building shown before it was remodeled on the outside and before the stucco was put on it). Then Odom came and remodeled it kept it going till it couldn't keep going any more .

O: Do you remember when they put that stucco finish on it? Was it in the middle sixties?

P: Yes, the sixties.

O: Do you know why they put it on?

P: Because it was cracking and we ~~couldn't~~ tear ~~it~~ down and built and we had to hurry up and do something so we put ~~the~~ finish on.

O: I know the church is two story, right?

P: Yes, we had a basement.

O: So the services were held in the top?

P: In the top and ~~then~~ we had a basement downstairs where we held official board meetings and then we had family dinners and our recreation. Our official board meetings were held down~~st~~airs too. And of course, on Sunday our Sunday school classes were held in the basement of the church.

O: Did the room where services were held take up the entire floor?

P: No, we had a room right at the very front for the men's Bible class and of course we had the pastor's study down in a side room. and restrooms for women and men both.



O: Do feel like there was as much opportunity for women to take part in services and in organizations in your church as there was for men?

P: Yes Women have always outnumbered the men in our church and because of this we have had to use women. But in recent years however men can always fill their rightful positions. But there was a time when we had to count on women to serve in certain positions. And even now anywhere a woman wants to serve and she's capable she can do it.

O: Do you have any women pastors?

P: Yes, honey we have some preaching women (laughing). We have one Mrs. Oneda Jackson that has built a beautiful church in Carson. It's beautiful. She's been pastoring about ten years and she's a fine minister. She really is. We have a church here, St. Mary's that Rev. Mrs. Minnie Roarkes organized. She's dead now. But we have several women all of them church.

O: Is there anything else that you might like to mention?

P: I don't know. We have had about four preachers to come out of our church. Our present pastor came out of our church and the pastor of Lane's chapel came out of our church. The pastor of  
 came out of our church. And the pastor of Holly  
 springs in Bassfield came out of our church. So and Rev. Robinson.  
 Do you know Dr. Robinson (Jackson State Music Dept.) her brother  
 is the assistant pastor at our church.