

ORAL HISTORY AGREEMENT
FARISH STREET HISTORIC DISTRICT PROJECT

I agree that this magnetic tape recording of my voice made during an interview with Mary Street and a transcript made there-
(interviewer)

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Willie Devine

Oral Author (interviewee) Signature

10/1/81
date

Mary Street

Oral Recorder (interviewer) Signature

10/1/81
date

O.H. 81.63

Tape number

DRAFT

FARISH STREET HISTORIC DISTRICT
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT
Jackson State University
Jackson, Mississippi 39217

INTERVIEWEE: Willie Devine
INTERVIEWER: Mary Street
DATE: October 1, 1981 (Date of Interview)
OH 81.65

S: Today is October 1, 1981. I'm going to interview Mr. Willie Devine of 101 Brown Circle, Jackson, Mississippi.

Mr. Devine, what are your earliest recollections of the City of Jackson?

D: Lynch Street. I worked at the drugstore out there on Lynch, Jones Pharmacy. I worked at the nickle store out on Lynch Street.

S: When and where did you attend school?

D: I attended Jim Hill, Sally Reynolds, Smith Robertson and Martin School.

D: Do you recall any good things about your early years in grade school?

D: Yes. Some good things and some bad things.

S: What were some of the bad things?

D: The bad things was these whites were harassing these little boys up and down the streets. They always would pick you up and take you home. If you were going to the show they'd pick you up and take you home and say you had stole something.

S: What would they do? Would they carry you home or carry you to their house?

D: They would carry you home.

S: How did you have fun as a teenager?

D: Well, they opened up a little swimming pool behind the center there on Farish Street.

S: Do you remember what year that was?

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- D: That was around 1938 that they opened up that little swimming pool behind the center up there.
- S: Blacks were able to attend this swimming pool?
- D: Yes. It was right behind the church. I think that they ^{were} ~~was~~ baptizing there.
- S: If you were to enjoy yourself during the historical days, which would you prefer, Big Band or Ragtime or Blues?
- D: I like some of all music.
- S: Do you know anything about the Crystal Palace?
- D: ~~Yeah.~~ ^{Yes}
- S: Could you tell us something about it?
- D: That's the first place I ever went to a dance, at the Crystal Palace.
- S: Could you tell me about some of the buildings that was on Farish Street, but ^{are} ~~they're~~ not on Farish Street now, and where they were located?
- D: ~~Well, now~~ ^{are} the Jackson Advocate was located on Farish. ^{street} It was located in the four-hundred block of North Farish and it's torn down now. The Home Dining Room was located in the four-hundred block of Farish and Hamilton. It's torn down now. Strause's drugstore was right there on the corner where that boutique shop was many years ago.
- S: Before ~~it was~~ ^{it} a Home Dining Room, were there any other buildings there?
- D: ~~Yeah.~~ ^{Yeah.} Before it was Home Dining Room, it was a little grocery store. Across in front of it was the Wimpy's Inn, right there on the corner of Hamilton and Farish.
- S: What were some of the things you enjoyed doing on the weekends?
- D: Swimming, that's about all you could do here. You could go to the kiddie matinee show.
- S: That's when you were growing up, right?
- D: Yes.
- S: Do you know anything about the good times and the banjos or bottle playing that once congregated on Farish Street?
- D: No.

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- S: Can you recall anything about the Opera House that was located on Pearl between Minevera and Rose Street, Capital and Gallatin Street?
- D: Opera House?
- S: This was during the early 1900's. It was an Opera House somewhere?
- D: No, I don't know about ~~no~~ Opera House. That must be before my time.
- S: ~~Alright~~. Do you know anything about the flood of 1927?
- D: No, I was one year old then.
- S: You were one year old. What was your family like?
- D: My mother was a Christian woman. ~~My father, you know him?~~ (Laugh)
- S: Do you recall any of the following activities in the area that are in the City of Jackson; like the washer women, quilting-bees or canning or the sugar cane mill? Do you know anything about any of those?
- D: No. The Blacksmith shop use to be on the corner of ~~Mill and Oakley,~~ no Mill and Church.
- S: In your earliest recollection, what was the business community like?
- D: The business community was fine up until Farish and Pascagoula Street was where all the Colored hung out at, and Mill.
- S: Do you know anything about Simms Bakery or Fisher's Bakery?
- D: ~~Now~~ ^{space} Fisher was the old man ^{who} used to have a bakery shop right there where the drugstore is location right across the street. Some years ago on the west side of the Silver Savers.
- S: Can you tell anything . . . ^{space} Black business like Atwood's Constructor's Company? ^{he}
- D: I don't know any of that.
- S: Do you know anything about Dr. Redmond?
- D: ~~Yes~~. I was born in his house.
- S: What kind of man was Dr. Redmond?
- D: (Laughter) He was a son-of-gun. You might . . .
- S: How has the business changed since then?
- D: Business has changed a lot because it is a challenge now and it didn't
- . . .

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- S: How is ^bBlack business today different from ^{what}they were in the past?
- D: Well, ^{now} the Black business is a lot better now than it was years ago because a Black person now have a little say. At that time he didn't have no say.
- S: Can you recall the first experience you had with the telephone?
- D: Yes. My sister had a telephone in their house. One of them ^{of} kind what you just ring like you crank up a car.
- S: Do you know what year this was?
- D: I think that was in 1933 or 1934.
- S: What was your family's source of water as early as you can remember?
^{Did you all have}
~~Y'all had~~ running hydrant water?
- D: ^{Yea}Yeah.
- S: When did your family first get electricity?
- D: We have had electricity since 1941.
- S: What are your earliest recollections about the services, the health service in Jackson when you was a child? Were there Black doctors, and who were they?'
- D: ~~Well, now~~ the Health Department didn't have any Black doctors, ~~_____~~
- S: ~~Well~~ do you remember any Black doctors?
- D: ~~Yea~~Yes.
- S: Who were they?
- D: Dr. Pryor was a dentist and Dr. Smith.
- S: Were there any Black nurses or public nurses?
- D: Yea, there was one, her name was Flo.
- S: Do you recall the opening in 1940's of the Sally Harris Clinic at St. Mark Episcopal Church on Pearl Street?
- D: Yes.
- S: What did you konw about it? Did you ever go there?
- D: No.

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S: Mr. Devine, would you tell me something about the 4:00 o'clock Tea Room?

D: Well, that was a nice spot where you could go out and have fun in the No. 2 sub-division, wouldn't be bothered too much about being harassed by the police or nothing then.

S: Do you know anything about the Silas Green Shows?

D: Sure. I use to go there all the time when they come in town. I use to have a lot of fun though.

S: What were they like and what did you do?

D: Nothing, sit down. It was sort of like a carnival. They would have different acts in the shows, people dancing, singing.

S: Where were they located?

D: On Hamilton.

S: Do you remember the State Fair in 1915?

D: No, nothing.

S: Where did you attend dances?

D: I went to the Crystal Palace and I use to go to the Rankin Auditorium and to the Blue Flag and dance.

S: What sport did you have a knowledge of as a child?

D: Well, I use to play ball.

S: What kind of ball?

D: Baseball.

S: What sports was played in your school?

D: We didn't have ^{no} sports in school except we use to play crab apple football, as you call it. We didn't have activities like they do now for kids.

S: Could you tell what was the most popular sports in Jackson in the 1940's 1950's and 1960's?

D: Well, baseball was probably in Jackson in the forties. In the fifties colored started to playing a little golf.

S: Can you tell anything about hay rides? Did you go on any hay rides?

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D: I've been on two in my life.

S: What were they like?

D: It was a lot of fun.

S: In your earliest recollection of a public park were you allowed to go there?

D: Nope. We use to go through it.

S: Do you recall the opening of the Jackson Zoo?

D: It was opening when I was a young boy.

S: Do you recall anyone actually jumping over a broom to get married?

D: No (Laughter)

S: Out of six kinds of environments I will list, which two did you have the best times in: Musical, Religion, Work, Home, doing some social recreation sports, or cardgames?

D: As a kid coming up I liked to go to church. I use to love to go to church and see those sisters shout and holler.

S: What recollection do you have of Black-White relationship when you were a child?

D: I didn't have any. There was one couple stayed there on Griffith Street. They were the Spiros. They was pretty friendly with Colored people because they stayed in the Colored neighborhood. Josephine Spiro, Gus Spiro and Mary Spiro. They were raised up with us.

S: As a young adult, the relationship between Black and White, what was it like?

D: Well, it wasn't ^{any} no where until about 10 years ago, that's when it started mixing.

S: Do you know anything about the lynching of Frank West from Bolton, Mississippi for rape in 1928?

D: No.

S: It was in 1928. Do you recall the Albert Lee Rape Case in the 1940's?

D: Who did he suppose to have raped?

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S: It doesn't say.

D: That sounds like Robert's cousin. I think, I'm not sure, ~~I think~~,
I believe they put him in the electric chair.

S: Do you recall the murder of Emmett Tills?

D: ~~Yea~~ ~~Yea~~. I remember when they found Emmett Tills. They had
done killed him and threwed him in the river.

S: When did you first hear of Martin Luther King?

D: ~~Hint~~ In the early fifties.

S: Thank you, Mr. Devine, for your information.

END OF INTERVIEW