

Biographical Sketch:

Mr. Walter Jones Stewart was born in 1909 on Davis Street in Jackson, Mississippi. He moved to his current address, 1112 Blair Street, on August 9, 1910. He has lived in Jackson his entire life except for a short time which he spent in Chicago, Illinois. Mr. Stewart's occupations are funeral director, executive for People's Funeral Home, People's Burial Association, People's Associates, and The House of People's.

Mr. Stewart's sister, Ethel Owens, taught at Smith Robertson School. His mother was born in Fannin, Mississippi.

Summary:

The interview was conducted in a rented house on Clifton Street in Jackson, Mississippi. Mr. Stewart was having the house remodeled and I and Bertha Jones met him there. We were in one of the bedrooms sitting on five gallon paint cans and much background noise can be heard. The interview lasted about 50 - 60 minutes at which time Mr. Stewart had to leave for another appointment.

Mr. Stewart is a very well-known person in the Farish Street area. His information on the tape is most valuable. Probably the most valuable information was his excellent description of the businesses which exist and have existed on Farish Street from Capitol Street to Fortification Street. Mr. Stewart also gave insight to the so called "Red Light", "Silk Stocking", and "Jungles" districts. His interpretations of these areas is rather interesting.

When listening to the tape one realizes the vast amount of knowledge that Mr. Stewart has gained in his many years in the area. Many names are mentioned that are very vital to the history of the area. Mr. Stewart has put on tape that which is extremely important to the black history of Jackson, Ms. The only regret is that the last five minutes of the tape were lost because of a mechanical failure in the tape recorder. Yet the only information lost was the conclusion of the interview and not any vital materials.

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.

Michael Luerich

I, Walter Jones Stewart, 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.

[Signature]
Interviewee Signature)

Oct. 25 1977
Date

Farish Street Oral History Program

Jackson State University

INTERVIEWEE: Walter Stewart
INTERVIEWER: Michael Leveritt
SUBJ : History of the Farish Street Area
DATE : October 25, 1977
OH 78-29 ↑

This is Michael Leveritt and ~~I am~~ ^{we are} interviewing Mr. Walter Jones Stewart.

L: What is your address?

S: My address is 1112 Blair Street.

L: 1112 Blair Street?

S: Yes.

L: Could you tell us ^{Mr. Stewart} your address and how long you have lived ~~lived~~ in that home?

S: I have lived at 1112 Blair Street since August 9, 1910.

L: What is your occupation?

S: My occupation is primarily the funeral director, and the executive of People's Funeral Home Burial Association, ^{People's Burial Association} and The House of Peoples.

L: What does that mean, what do you do?

S: Well, ^{lovingly} usually I tell people that in the funeral business that you do whatever ~~that~~ ^{that} comes up next and that's approximately what it is. However, we run ~~a~~ two Burial Association and a Funeral Home and that has been a means of my business.

L: How long have you been doing this?

S: Since June 01, 1921. ¹⁹²⁹

L: Do you know ~~about~~ a lot about the Farish Street area in Jackson?

S: Since ~~1925~~ 1925 or 1926, ^{we} what do you need to know?

L: Could you tell me exactly what changes you have noticed in the area?

I am ~~interest-~~ ^{interested} particularly interested in the geographical expansion of the downtown and lower downtown area. ^{Cover} Can you tell me any streets additions that ~~was~~ ^{was} made or any business that were put out ^{business} for that reason

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S: The main Negro block had completely changed over ~~that~~ especially on the west side of Capitol Street up to Lamar. The Federal building was over in there, ~~in fact~~, all the neighborhood business ^{practically} ~~was~~ ^{were} over in ^{particular} that block. Of course, all that ^{small} changes have erased that. In fact, I think there are only one or two ^{business} ~~am not sure~~ and I ~~don't know~~ how long they are going to be there. _____

L: What's the name of that pool room?

S: I can't say ~~to much~~ now. . . . Of course, Farish Street has really changed. Years ago just ~~below the laundry~~, ~~of course there is~~ Ferguson Furniture Company ^{pany} there was a small laundry of course, there is a vacancy in there ^{where} but Brown Furniture is ~~now~~ there right now. There was a ~~an~~ Acme Bakery Company plus a market. ^{there may still be one I can't say I am not certain but I don't think it is} Then on the corner of Griffith is Hill's Hall

^{which} it is a National landmark I am ^{sure}. The Grason use to meet there and they still meet there upstairs/ _____ in that particular ^{hall} home.

^{of course} Old Man _____ on the block of North Farish Street is still popular but there is not ^{very much} you can order, in fact, he is ~~is~~ gone now all it is now is a ^{barber} ~~box~~ shop. ^{that's about the size of that.} When you cross over to Hill Hall that is in the 300 block of Farish Street, ^{you} ~~do~~ still have some homes ~~in~~ there

It is still rental homes in there. There is the old washer _____ Home that is still standing _____ on the left side of the 300 ^{is} block. ^{of course} the cafe and the Alamo Theatre. The real landmark is Alamo Theatre ^{which} was down in the 100. ^{when you come in which is Frazier} The ~~of~~ 400 block was ~~the~~ Collins Funeral Home, Central Church, the YWCA ^{+ of course} ~~and course~~ ^{just they had} I just want to add that the first night club down there, what was the name of that club?

Background: ~~North Avenue~~ _____

S: ~~then~~ ~~the~~ on down there passed ^{then} . . . the Dotty Cab, and the Old Crystal Palace, ^{it} then you come to and Steven's Place and ~~the~~ Farish Street Baptist Church ~~that~~ on the east side of Farish Street and Crescent Laundry on the other side.

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S: Then you pick up ^{the Park} ~~the~~ Parish 'Cleaners' and ~~the~~ YMCA and the ^{Negro} ~~neighborhood~~ business were there and on the far side of the street/was, the west side there were a grocery store. I guess that ~~is~~ is what the Negroes have in the 800 block of Farish Street. You have a ^{washerette} washerett you come into a few rentals of course you come into ~~the~~ ^{People/s} ~~the~~ ^{Home} ~~the~~ Funeral. Across the street, there is a landmark up there in a sense _____ in the 700 ~~block~~ ^{It was in} block. It was the first printing shop, I understand, in Jackson. ^{The old} ~~The old~~ ^{for negro people} W. A. Scott building, that little two-story ~~building~~ just ~~North~~ North of Church Street. His sister is still down ~~off in~~ there now. At one time it housed the Universal Life. It is a cafe right now. ^{He} ~~They~~ had a printing shop really it was the base for ~~the~~ Atlanta World. The man who started the Atlanta ~~World~~ was ~~the~~ son of this particular man, W.A. Scott. W. A. Scott was a minister. ~~His~~ son went to Atlanta, ^{Um} Georgia and they opened this place. Sometime if you want to talk about the Atlanta World you ought to talk to ~~them~~ Banks(?) Banks and W. A. Scott were all classmates at Jackson State College. I reckon he is still running it for a living. W.A. got some other brothers, you ~~know~~, running and operating the Atlanta World. By the way, the Atlanta World is the beginning of the Jackson Advocate, and also the Mississippi Enterprise. A funny thing about it is the Jackson ^a World ^{is} part of the Atlanta World and it was started by President ~~B.B. Dansby, E.W. Banks and Walter Stewart, and A.J. Sampson.~~ ^{Dansby} ~~We~~ ^{went} into the newspaper business in 1932. ^{That was the beginning of this paper.} I thought they were joking, I said yea I know what a galley is. ~~Yp~~ Of course, a galley make up a ^{complete in newspaper of com} big page. Then you come up to Davis Street and the rest of it is ^{now} ~~rental~~ rental property up to Fortification.

L: Do you know ^{the} any names of any major land owners?

S: Going way back I would say Redmond, Atwoods, ^{Cooley} McCoy, those ^{are historical} ~~a couple~~ of names as far as that is concerned. Dr. Miller's father build ^{a building in the} 200 Block of M. Farish Street.

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S: ^{where} There was Brown's Furniture and I think Kermit Holly, don't you remember Kermit Holly? ^{Hill}

L: Hill

S: Hill's Hall is owned by a ^{Hill} man named Hill. I forget his name. Kermit Holly inherited every bit of it. At one time the block where the Old Home Dining Room use to stand ^{was} ~~is~~ owned G.F. Frazier. That is where ~~People's-and-Frazier~~ and Collin's came from. In a sense it is obligated too. Because from that funeral home that is how he opened one for ~~himself~~ _____. Collin's bought it from Frazier ~~because~~ it remained Frazier and Collin's for a long time and finally they dropped the name Frazier. ~~of course,~~ ~~Shepard never did own it. It~~

Of course ~~Shepard was a land owner~~ ^{man did own} and there was a man name Clauded Hodges H O D G E S now ^{he was} ~~give us~~ another name of a landowner. Of course you can't leave out Dr. Redmond. Redmond, I guess, own more ^{in Fourth Street} than any other Negro

Later on W.H. McCoy. Coming on up further you come into _____ come back down to the cleaners you have Redmond, Atwoods/ all back here.

L: I understand there was a bank ^{on that corner}

S: It was. The bank was on ~~the corner~~ corner of Pearl and Farish Street

L: On the corner of 0 Pearl?

S: Yeah. I believe the name of it was the American Bank. My uncler was a teller there at one time.

L: What is his name?

S: M. S. ^{Stuart Stewart} Stewart. His name was ~~Stuart~~ S T U A R T. They had a hall were from French end. ^{National} ~~The American bank were was~~

right there. They had a hall right there on the corner of Farish and Pearl.

The School ^{is Draduation} Federation use to be held in there.

I remembers that property because the

L: Do you know the name of that particular hall?

S: I can't tell you, I am not sure. ~~I don't know.~~ Banks might remember it.

I am not sure ^{he} who will remember it, but there are some people who ~~will remember~~ it know it. The American Bank was on the corner of Farish Street and Pearl, Over on the west side by Pascogula. They have torn them all down down now they have a new street there now.

L: Where were the major meeting places for Black ^{always} to go on Farish Street?

S: If you are talking about entertainment, _____ Hall was the main one. ~~and~~ Hill Hall was always dedicated to the society group. ^{down of em} Claude ^{who} Hodges built the Crystal PALace in the 20's about 1927 he took over the _____ Hall.

L: What~~s~~ was the Crystal PALace?

S: The Crystal Palace was a cafe and poolroom ^{downstair} upstairs and a dance hall ^{upstairs} downstairs

→ They have offices up there now. ~~It is still up there but~~ ^{they don't use it the school is}

L: What about when Smith Roberston School burned they moved ~~it~~ to Farish Street ^{do} you know the building ?

S: I don't recall it ^{burning} burning. I don't think it burned. I could be wrong .

L: I think it burned 1927 or ¹⁹29.

S: It could have.

L: Do you know anything about Smith Roberston School?

S: Yea, I know where it stands. I have attended Smith Roberston School. My sister taught there for God know how long.

L: What is her name? she was just part of the . . .

S: Ethel Owens. Betty C. Marino was there ^{Marino} and Professor Lanier was the first Professor I know being there. Of course, at one time Lanier was the president of Alcorn College, but he came here and he took over. ^{At} that time I don't think they had, in my recollection they had Smith Roberston and a school down there in South Jackson that is still in operation today and Jim Hill. Jim Hill is out here beside the Masonic Temple on Lynch Street. Those ^{late} were the three Negro^s School. ^{L:} Can you recall any of the rest of them? ^{S:} In '29 I beleive it was they had moved they tore away part of it and started Lanier High School.

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S: I ~~don't think~~ ^{have} been trying to get them to ~~change~~ they have changed the name all of this time. . . .

L: What would you say life was like for people living in this area now and then?

S: You had a social side. You had mostly laborers type of people. At that time Pearl Street was what you call the Silk Stocking section of our people, Pearl Street, Pascogula, part of Lynch I think that is ~~the~~ most main line on this end.

Most of the people that lived up in this district. Well, Dr. Redmond lived in this district. . . .

L: Was there a lot of rental property in this area?
There

S: Well, most of ~~it there~~ were some other people on Farish Street too, but I can't recall there name. They were kind of big shots too. I know them but I can't call there names. Of course there was an old man there, he was kind of renown. He wasn't a highly educated man, I don't think. His name was Kaya. He had rental rental property and he was bit of a manuever. He was kind of a man similar to

someone in construction . He mule teams, cows and oxen. He had all that kind of stuff. He was a operated. He tried several things. ~~Alvin~~ Alvin Cox was his father's name.

You remember ~~Alvin~~ Alvin Cox who is married to that ~~woman~~ ^{They} lady up there? They had ~~all~~ all those type of people I can't think of all there names. If you want to why don't you come ^{up} there and talk to Earle and another man name ~~Earle~~ Straughter. Of course, Davis ^{Shop} Shop came in there later and really he was really the most outstanding men of all the Negro business ~~in Farish Street~~. He ran a cafe. There was another man down in the 100 Block of Farish Street named Proctor. All types of people made up the real bas, s of of the Negro life in Jackson at that time.

L: What would you say it is like now?

S: I wouldn't like to ~~say~~ ^{Well we are} tell you? (laugh) It is going through a complete change I would say. That is my ^{conception} perception of what is happening right now. . . .

→ over

SX He like to drink whiskey, of course he was about half drunk when I got out there. When I opened up the gate and got ~~out-the-earthy~~ had a picket fence there and he opened the door and said, Pearl, old Caldwell check done bounced again". And of course she would say Lord have Mercy Mr. Caldwell ain't changed that money over. Of course, the next day I would run it and it would be good. Basically, sometimes I think the Negro people are ^{evidently} the smartest people in the world. They can ~~can~~ take nothing and do something with it, and they had to. The ^{average} home then, I would say you were getting along well if you had a \$100.00 a month coming in from whatever source it was. You were doing real well. I left here in 1927 and went to Chicago because I could make more money. If I could make twenty cent an hour here I could make forty-three cent ^{Sup} there. That made the difference and I am not kidding. So basically, I think right today not ~~a~~ only in Jackson but all over the ~~world~~/your social and economic things somewhere along the line ^{that's} got to ~~tip~~ unless they do you ^{can't} get out with no record to the ^{crisis} race thing. ~~But~~ back in Mississippi back in those days the white ratio income and the negro ratio income was so far a part that if it held the whites back you couldn't see it. The Negro was the best person to sell to but they didn't have nothing. White man had the goods but he could sell it to a man that was broke.

L: I understand that a lot of the ^{rental} ~~rental~~ property in this area ~~is~~ was built by white landowners. Could you verify that for me?

S: I would think that 88% ^{of it} was built by whites a lot of it was built by negro people.

~~Th~~You could get by it because ~~they~~ didn't have any building codes. You would go out there and build it. Up on Lamar Street, I believe they call it Lamar ~~Palaza~~=Plaza, but they use to call it Boston Apartment it was ~~owned~~ by ~~a man Paul Laekey~~ it was a dude hear name Boston he built the whole thing. A fellow that worked for us built these things for him on a part time basis. He built it and manufactured all the material. He built what we call "shot gun houses" for a hundred dollars a house.

- S: They stayed there up until the ¹⁹40's. I have to check that.
- L: Do you think building the low income rental houses have imbeded the outcome of the neighborhood.?
- S: Not really. Back in those days that was actually almost a must. Money was just that tight. I think Mississippi have the lowest per capital income but back in those days it was so low I don't think you could even count it. What is remarkable to know is how people who ~~had nothing~~ would take nothing and do something with it. That is the only objection I have to Welfare. It take ~~th~~ away the real initial initiative of the people because they know they were going to get ~~ahead~~ ^{a hand out} they aren't willing to put forth any effort.
- L: Could you say, you remember when they put High Street through?
- S: Yea ^{yes}.
- L: Would you say that was a good move or bad move or did it make any difference?
- S: You want your part of it?
- L: Both -
- S: I would say basically~~y~~ they had to have traffic relief. I think it was helpful and still ~~think~~ think it is helpful. I think it is a very good street. ^{How} The joking part was they say the only people it benefited was People's ~~Ferguson~~ ^S = Funeral and Wright and Ferguson which was no truth in it. I think it was a good move. I disagree with a lot of things that they, well, the ~~old~~ ^{the} in which they are tearing down Downtown Jackson ~~and~~ I think is ~~distasteful~~ ^{as a whole} disgraceful. ^{the is} Spread it to high and you have too many person going around and if you spread ~~if you spread it~~ ^{they want to} what you need is coverage. The song that came out ~~not~~ ^{old} two or three years ago when it said too many chiefs and not enough Indians. I think it reflects on minority groups. We have too many people telling the poor people how to do it. ^{for instance} Since 1933 or 34 the ~~goodwill~~ ^{good will} give away program they had then under President Roosevelt they say ~~they cut off the~~ it cost~~d~~ the government seventeen dollars to give a poor man one. I think it might cost more now to give him one. When you take the initiative away from a man you have crippled him and I don't care about color.

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S: There's ^{only} difference between the underprivileges of the ^{white} negro and the ^{negro} white is that you have more negroes than you have whites. The basic problems are the same. You take the place across the street, The Salvation Army, it is a beautiful thing they know their job. The same amount of money ^{something create thing white} that ~~is~~ that people will be able to carry on their own that's what we really need.

L: What about racial tension in this area? Was it much?

S: At one time, Jackson never ~~did~~ had a lot of racial clashes but we had some.

Most of it came from not the people who lived or born in JACKSON, ~~but it~~ . . . ^{The ones from down from South Mississippi, the whites would} ~~folks that lived here since 1970~~ ~~The Negroes had to do harder things for survival.~~ ~~they would~~ come in and they had to do harder things for survival. Cotton is a questioning thing. You got to raise cotton, back in those days they had to do it in the barn, but now you ~~do~~ can do it with machines/ because you couldn't afford to pay for it. President Dansby this is one of his triumph stories. He came ~~from~~ from a little place called Millin, Georgia. He had an uncle whose IQ was very low and Dansby was telling the story. He was very confident in the way he was telling it. ^{he says} His father asked him, "Son, what's cotton selling for?" ~~at~~ He said, "I was downtown this morning and they said that it was two cents a pound. My mother, who was born in ^N Caton, Mississippi, cotton up there was selling for a nickle a pound. Basically, as I have said before man is smart, he is as smart as he can be. By the way, there was a man on t.v. this morning talking about the orgin of man?, did you see that? I ^{intended} ~~was~~ ~~meaning~~ to get the name of the book so I could buy it. He said that man has been here 40,000,000 (forty million years). When you stop to think, I think we have been here that long. A lot of people talk about the end of the world ~~with-the-association-of-death-~~ . . . I can't imagine the Lord actually destroying the whole ~~un~~ universe/ because ~~that~~ No one knows the vastness of it until they actual travel it. I don't know the vastness of it, really. In ~~the~~ America alone I have been through the Rockies, I have been over in Pennsylvania . . . When you see those Mountains

S: especially the ~~Rocky~~ Rocky Mountains, it is impossible to visualize what somebody way above did. They got to go through a lot of things and they can't do that. ~~Down~~ Down in Colorado Springs they have a rock sitting up on a little thing just about like that. (gesturing to interviewer) Of course, they made mountains up in ~~Colo~~ Pueblo, Colorado. ~~A=lot-of-times-you-are-in-the-mou-~~ After you stay in the mountains for a length of time, you don't even know you are in the wountain. You get out of the car, you ~~will-be-thinking-that-you-a-e-on-flat-ground-and-y-you-~~ had better get on flat ground or you just assume roll back or roll forward. That's true. I think man is quite as ~~not~~ smart as we think he is. I think the energy crisis is like they say it is, but those smart boys sitting behind ~~the~~ ^{desk} he-haa-kept-himself has to keep ~~the-~~ themselves amused.

L: What you say was the religious Aspect of the Negro life?

S: Basically, Mississippi has always been primarily Baptist. It is changing now, probably. My mother is ^{was} a CME Methodist finally she moved to Jackson and joined the Methodist ~~United~~. But the basic of all of it is Baptist. I am Catholic. I have been Catholic since I was four. I am not the ~~best~~ best in the ~~world~~ world, but I am Catholic that is what my belief is. I followed it ~~because~~ because it follows the is follows the history. In the history book the Catholic Church _____ . The Catholic Church is on the corner of Lamar, by the way that is in your neighborhood, too. On the corner of Lamar and Monumnet Street, that design is all over America. On the corner ~~down~~ ^{now} is Mt. ^{Helem} Church. The Temple Church ~~of~~ sprung from it. They got the prettiest church in ^{you can find} Jackson, I don't care where you go. History was one of my favorite subjects. From the Catholic Church all the other churches started because they didn't like the rule of the Catholic Church. I am still Catholic to the extent that ~~they~~ I am use to it being in Latin. To me, it ~~is~~ is child play to do it like they do it now. It is nice, but grown peple, people who have gotten out and knew they think it is ~~phetic~~ // emphatic.

L: Did you have very many meetings-- religious meetings that went on in this area? ^{Renval}

S: Yes, I go the Baptist Convention practically every year. I was in Miami last month, ^{as} for the National Baptist Association

S: Thy have three association now. The man that is president of Baptist Convention is Earle Banks' brother. Wilbert JACKSON is a very ~~ptd~~/ renown person. . . .

L: What would you say made the biggest change in this area? Is it economic, or inflation?
in 1900's

S: I think it was inflation. I think the greatest change came ~~in 1933~~ during the depression/ with all the gov't things like they were. They had to open up new opportunities through plans they were able to do this President Roosevelt ~~began to do~~/ They began to venture out. This is part of JACKSON's history. During the 20's ninety percent of the grocery ~~industry~~ business was done by Negroes. The wholesaler were White, but the other stores were Negroes. There were about two big White stores, J. M. Black was one of them and Jake Rundles I believe was the others and both of them was on Capital Street. One of them is in the Deposit Guaranty Building right now.

INTERVIEWEE: Walter Stewart
INTERVIEWER: Michael Leveritt
DATE: October 25, 1977

Leveritt: What is your address?

Stewart: My address is 1112 Blair Street.

Leveritt: Could you tell us how long you have lived in that home?

Stewart: Since August 9, 1910.

Leveritt: What is your occupation?

Stewart: My occupation is primarily the fun