

MARGARET WALKER ALEXANDER NATIONAL RESEARCH CENTER  
JACKSON STATE UNIVERSITY

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 has been made by the interviewer and a transcript 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 be placed in the Oral History Collection at Jackson State University. Other Institutions or persons may obtain a copy. These materials may be used for purpose of research, for instructional use, for publication, or for other related purposes.

I, Minnie FARISH, have voluntarily given an interview on and in view of the historical and scholarly value of this information. I knowingly and voluntarily permit Jackson State University, the full use of this information. I hereby grant and assign all my rights of every kind whatever pertaining to this information, whether or such rights are now known, recognized, or contemplated, to Jackson State University, Jackson, Mississippi.

Minnie Farish

Interviewee's Signature

5/2/94

Date of Interview

Jeffery D. Williams

Interviewer's Signature



OH 94.13 in those days, we called the Italians "Big O's". I don't  
INTERVIEWEE: MINNIE FARISH that expression or not. They ran the  
INTERVIEWER: TIFFANY D. WILLIAMS they lived in the back. They were  
TRANSCRIBER: SHONDA L. WALKER know any difference. Nobody paid  
SUBJECT: FARISH STREET HISTORIC DISTRICT from us, there was a

little house; it was kind of a store-built house that was  
TD: Today is May 2, 1994. I'm Tiffany Williams, and I'm here with  
Ms. Minnie Farish. We're going to discuss her experiences  
through the Jim Crow Era. First, I like to begin with asking  
where were born? all around the neighborhood. My mama had a little  
bell. I will never forget it. She'll ring the bell for

Farish: I was born on Farish Street in Jackson, MS. Named Farish  
and lived on Farish Street. My father was named Ralph  
Lincoln Farish, and my mother was named Willie Fayman Farish  
If you look up there you can see it, hose. Our yard was the  
yard where all the children in the neighborhood on Farish

TD: Did both of your parents work?ing streets you know around  
across Farish like Cohas and Monument. They gather in our

Farish: My mother didn't. She was a housekeeper. It was four of us.  
I was the only girl with three brothers. I'm the third child.  
My father was a foreman at an ice plant. He was an electric-  
ian on the side. He was a self-made person. He had his set  
of electric books, and he studied them. There's a many, many  
old house in communities that my father wired. He did that  
as a side to add to our family's income. Farish on up Davis.  
They had two houses: the Farish Family Home, the hose that

TD: What would you describe your family as? it's still standing  
there on the corner of Davis and Short Farish. It's real

Farish: I was a happy child. We had a very happy family. When I  
was growing up, we had the same bed. We had a seesaw. These  
things my father made. We had the merry-go-round, and we boys  
had the swings. We had a huge yard. We didn't own the  
house; we rented it, but it was huge lot. Great big backyard  
because we had a garden year round and my father raised hogs,  
a cow, and a calf. Naturally in the neighborhood with that  
much in the yard with sandbeds and all like that, all the children  
in the neighborhood stayed in our yard. On the corner from  
our house was a grocery store. It was run by Italians. Back



in those days, we called the Italians "Big O's". I don't know if you heard of that expression or not. They ran the market in the front and they lived in the back. They were just like us. We didn't know any difference. Nobody paid attention to color. Across the street from me, there was a little house; it was kind of a store-built house that was a pressing shop in one. Next door to it, there was another little shop; the Mexicans lived there. They made hot tamales. They had children and they played in our yard. Then there were children all around the neighborhood. My mama had a little bell. I will never forget it. She'll ring the bell for dinnertime; all the chilfen would come in. I heard her tell papa one day, "I'm getting tired of feeding other folks' children." He said just like this, "You're feeding yours and you know where they are. They're at home." Our yard was the yard where all the children in the neighborhood on Farish Street and the other surrounding streets you know around across Farish like Cohea and Monument. They gather in our yard because it was a big yard with a fence around it. That's where we played. There was no issue about race not then. See that was 1910. There was no race or nothing. We knew that we were black. What did they call us then? Colored. They called us colored people then. They called us colored. My father's mother and father lived on Davis Street and the property started from Short Farish on up Davis. They had two houses: the Farish Family Home, the home that they had to rent was on the corner and it's still standing there on the corner of Davis and Short Farish. It's real old. The house next to it was the family house, and there was a family of seven. Papa Farish and Mama Farish had seven children. My father was the oldest. Then there were three boys and four girls. My father didn't go to college, but uncle Arthur was the second boy; he went to Tuskegee. He learned to brick mason. He's a brick mason. My next uncle was Uncle John. He went to Alcorn. I don't know whether Uncle John finished Alcorn or not but I know that's where he went to Alcorn when he was older enough to go. He left Jackson and went to Chicago worked in the post office department. He



worked there until he retired. He came by here and lived until he died. I had four aunts. Junior and my mother were buddies. She left here when she was quite young, and after she she married she had three children along with us. She and my mama look like they made up their minds to get pregnant at the same time. Her first three children was born the same year that my mama's first three children were born. Then finally she and her husband left here and went to Baltimore. She just died in 1981. I'm going to show you her picture. I was looking at it no longer than the other day. I was looking for something and came across a little box with picture in it. My Aunt Liza went to Utica Institute. She left Utica Institute and went to Meharry Medical College. That where she graduated in nursing. She was the first black registered nurse in the state of Mississippi. She worked the first private doctor's office, and finally she opened up her own clinic. My second aunt, she taught her and worked with her. My mama assisted her and it was called the Mercy Hospital. That's where the black patients went because they had those special hospital for blacks at that time. They had to go there or to go the charity hospital. They had to go to the Jackson inferment which is now St. Dominic's. It was uptown and they had to go in the basement. Anyway, Aunt Liza did that work for years and finally she gave it up when other hospitals began to open up up to blacks. She gave up the clinic and started working for the State Board of Health. If you ever get a chance to go out to the State Board of Health office, when you go into the front door. There's a picture of my aunt hanging up in there. Her name was Eliza Farish Pillus. The first black nurses club was named in her honor -- the Liza Pillus Nurses Club. They have a state's charter; it's organized over the state. They have their annual meetings and give scholarships to girls. My second aunt was a licensed practical nurse. She died in 1975. Aunt Liza died in 1970. My younger aunt was a graduate of Tougaloo. She didn't work; she married early and had children. Her children finally left her. One daughter finished Dillard, and she's a nurse. The year she got her B.S. degree, she also got her nursing training in New Orleans.



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The second girl went to Tougaloo and Dillard. One lives in New York, Long Island, and the other one lives in New Jersey. They have families. That's the story of my father's family. Papa Farish had a grocery store. That's where my father and Uncle Arthur, the two older boys, worked. Not only did they have a grocery store, how in the hell he got to be a postman I don't know. They didn't call them postman then; they called them mailman. He delivered mail on a horse. When he left his liquor, I often tell this because this is the way it was told to me, on the days that he was in his liquor Papa Farish made the two boys separate the mail. One of them delivered the mail on the street that had the even numbers, and the other one delivered the mail on the odd side. While he rode the horse he said, "Walk up boys!" Get that mail out!" That kind of disturbed them. The things that I can remember so vividly was that he had a two-seated buggy back in those days. They called them sometimes now. On Sunday Uncle John, being the youngest boy, would have to hitch up the team and take all the grandchildren riding. Me being the little, I was always the one who had to sit in his lap. Then he took the Farish children riding. My father died in 1925, the year that I graduated from Smith Robeson Grammar School. Then we lived on Farish Street three years longer, and Farish Street is beginning to be more commercial. Mother didn't want us to continue living there; she bought this lot and during the last year that I was in high school, she built it. I graduated, I don't remember the date, the first week in June. Two weeks after I graduated, we moved out here, and we been out here every since.

TW: What high school did you attend?

Farish: Lanier. It wasn't down there then. It was on Fair Street right where Rowan School is now. Right where Rowan School now was Lanier High School, and to me Lanier High School been the prettiest. It was pretty than any of the schools. The thing that was so pretty about it was the front of it was beautiful. On the inside, it had a courtyard. It had a



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courtyard on each side. The auditorium was in the center. Everyday when school opened, we had to go to the auditorium to get instructions. The principal talked to us. The classrooms were around the courtyard. You understand what I mean? It was a large courtyard, and all the classrooms were on each side. It started from the second grade through the twelveth. Beautiful building. The girls' restrooms were downstairs on the basement on the left side of the building, and the boys' restrooms were on the right side of the building down in the basement. We had a cafeteria that was back of the auditorium. Back in those days we never had anything but pork and beans, soup. You had to be somebody to work in the cafeteria if the cook liked you. She was Ms. Young. Attorney Young, he's dead now, but he has a son that's an attorney. It was his grandmother that ran the lunchroom. She only let children work with her whose parents had went to school with her. Of course she went to school with my daddy, so I worked in the cafeteria. We didn't have to do nothing but serve the stuff out to them. It didn't cost over a nickel or dime. And cookies, that's all we served. It was like chicken to us back in those days. It was a happy life. In Lanier High School, I never took an exam. I stayed on the Honor Roll. My name stayed on the Honor Roll. There was a classmate of mind that stayed on the Honor Roll. It was from her to me. I graduated; I was salutatorian of the class. I had a classmate that beat me by one point.

You heard of Richard Wright; he was in our class. He was in our class. He was in my class, but he did not finished with us. He left Lanier High School during the eleventh grade. His family moved to Memphis I think. If he had stayed there, he would have been the valedictorian of the class because he was super smart in everything --- history, geometry, everything Richard was excellent in. He could hold the whole school student body spell-bound with the stories he could tell fiction, western stories, all kinds. He was extra smart, extra smart.

He always wore knee-length pants that came here. I can remember so well most the boys were beginning to wear long



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pants, but Richard wore knickers. He wore his first white pair of long pants in the eleventh grade. We all teased him. He lived with his grandmother I think out on Lynch Street. If he had stayed here, he would have been valedictorian of the class of '28. Our class was the second class that finish.

When I finish Smith Robinson 1925, that fall Lanier High School was ready. So my class went in there in the very beginning. The class that finished ahead of me, their first year of high school they had to go to Jackson State. At that time, Jackson State was Jackson College. So they went in and they finished a year ahead of us. Our class was the smallest. It wasn't but nineteen in my class. Fifteen girls and four boys. Those boys were worth anything. We girls in order to keep them we did their homework, their book reports, and everything to keep them in the class. I had the four year scholarship to Tougaloo.

In the mean time as I told you, my father died. Mother I guess, I know she did it for extra income because my two older brothers had stopped school. My oldest brother was a butcher; I guess it was born in him. My uncle that I told you were a brick mason, was also a butcher too. He learned two trades at tuskegee. He didn't live here. He stayed here awhile, and you know how people rush off, he lived in St. Louis.

My oldest brother went to learn this butcher's trade under a fellow named Mr. Frank Bolton. Frank Bolton and I can't think of the other fellow's name, but anyway they had a market on Farish Street. That's where my brother worked. My two brothers worked. My two older brothers and my second brother who was two years older than I was, worked at a grocery and bakery shop. He learned to cook. From there he worked at the candy shop, and he ended up bieng a professional cook. When he died in 1989, he was a professional cook.

They kept him out of the army because he cooked. I can't think of the name of the restaurant; it's not there now. It's right across the street from the war memorial Building. He cooked for cornels and things like that. They didn't let him go to the army because they kept him there. They said that he was needed, and in the mean time he ran a poultry. All my



brothers were very ambitious. He had a poultry yard. He raised brewers; he sold those brewers to the cafe where he worked. You understand? He had a wife and three children.

My oldest brother was in the meat market business. He was drafted and went into the service also my youngest brother who is living now and lives here with me. I cook for him. There he is. That's him. You can pull that out and look at it. That's him. He's four years younger than I am, but he doesn't get around as well as I do. Is there anything else? You ask anything I don't mind answering if I can.

TW: How would you describe the community on Farish Street?

Farish: It was nice. We knew everybody, and everybody knew us. On the side of the street that I lived starting at Davis Street on down, there was a Dr. Barnes. He was a dentist lived on our side of the street. Next door to him there was a famous Scott family. Coretta Scott King's grandparents own that property. Her mother and all of them were born in that house. That house is still there. It's not pretty as it was then. You know property deteriorates and when it becomes a rental property, it's not taken care of. They lived there and next to them was the pastor of Farish Street Baptist Church. Next to them was Mr. Sims Scott who had a cleaning business down farther on Farish Street closer to the Capitol. That was the corner.

On the opposite corner where Peoples Funeral Home is now, was a house there and Dr. Turner, looked like a white guy, was a medical doctor and that was his office. He lived on the opposite side of Farish Street but in the next block. On that side of the street, Dr. Turner, the Washingtons, and then the Italians store. They were \_\_\_\_\_. The name of the Italians were the \_\_\_\_\_. There were two brothers-- Mr. Tony, Mr. Sam. They both had their families and they all lived in the back of that. We got along fine. The next house on the corner, across from where Peoples Funeral Home is now. The house is still there. It has the same design. Dr. L.A. Smith --- that was his family's



home. He was not a doctor at that time, that was where his family lived. He was a graduate of Alcorn. Next to his family's house was a store. He and his wife (she was a graduate of Alcorn) they ran the little grocery store. Their house was next to that. While she was running the grocery store, he went to McHarry Medical School and graduated. He was one of our best doctors. He's dead now; he had a clinic down farther on Farish Street. You know where Y.W.C.A is? There is a red hot hamburger stand, Dr. White's office, Y.W.C.A., and Dr. Brittain's office. Dr. Smith's clinic was right along in there. This is making up Farish Street and the type of people that lived on there.

The house next to Dr. Truner's clinic was a lady and her daughter named the Newmans. They worked in private homes. Back in those days, it was nice to have a job in a private white home. In those days, you worked in the private home. You rode the street car. We didn't have buses and rode the street cars. The street car went down Capitol Street, came up Mill, and crossed the railroad track. Cohea and Mill, came on up to Bailey, and went down. That's the way it was then because I know if we wanted to catch the street car to go to town or the zoo, we would go down to Cohea and Mill and catch it.

The house next door to us was a two-story building that was originally built by Dr. Miller's father. Dr. Miller been dead six or seven years. His father and mother were doctors. They ran the hospital. Two-story. Our house where I was born was right next to it. Next to our house was Mr. and Mrs. Selma. They lived there.

Mr. Selma was a postman. They called them postal clerks I think. He rode on the railroad from Jackson to Clarksdale in handling the mail. They don't have that now. Next to him was a railroad man, a fireman. His house next to that was one of our first shoemaker, Mr. Binaman. His wife had a lovely home. Their two daughters were along my age. That was what Farish Street was made of.

On down farther was three houses kinda shot-gun. That's what they called them back in those days. They were very nice



people that lived in them. I know the first house the lady named was Ms. Brown. The second house was Mr. Cox. His father was my mother's stepfather. The house next door to that was the Dansons. The Dansons had a daughter that was named Margaret. She was younger than me, but she played with me and my younger brother. She ended up being a college graduate. She taught at Jim Hill High School, and married one of our leading ministers in this city. She's still living, but her health is real bad.

Her husband is dead. He had a stroke. He was a pastor of Mt. Helen Baptist Church. Married for a long time. They called him Dr. Brown.

Next door to that was a man and wife named Mr. and Mrs. Polk. He worked for the city, and she was seamstress. On the opposite side of the street, there was Dr. Smith I told you. His wife had been in the store. They had a big field there. You had the tennis court there. All the children in the neighborhood played tennis because Dr. Smith and his wife taught us. Next to that was a pressing shop. The man by the name of Thomas Henderson had a beautiful home round on the next street that he and his wife built. He wasn't married then; he was courting her. We lived across the street. Next door to that, that property belonged to the Smith family.

The property next to the Smith family was the Topp family. Rev. Topp was one of leading black ministers in the city. He went to Africa as a missionary and bought back a man that ended up being a minister. His name was Randle; I think I got that right Randle because his son lives around the corner from me and writes articles up and down Farish Street. What's that Black papers name?

TW: THE JACKSON ADVOCATE?

Farish: Yes. Well, the author of that article up and down Farish Street, his father was Rev. Randle. They came from Africa with Rev. Topp. Rev. Topp was the pastor of Farish Street Baptist Church. He had own Dr. Smith's property to a little alley that was called Leonard. They called it Leonard Street now, but it's Leonard Alley. He had two or three little



shops. The first shop his son had a studio there. The Mexicans used to live there. Rev. Topp's son was named Albert, the only child he had. He was musician; he had a studio and taught music there for awhile. Then after he moved out, somebody else moved in.

Next to that was the alley. Then another two-story house where Dr. D.K. Johnson lived. He was a dentist. Next to them was a brick mason and his wife; he as Mr. and Mrs. Coleman. Next to them was a woman that was a teacher. Her name was Ms. Maude Thompson. She taught out in the county because it's not in the county now. Of course it's right out there on Delta Drive. She had a horse and buggy. It would just do you all the good in the world to see her hitch up that horse and buggy and see her on her way to school every morning.

Next door to them were the Whites. They were big members of Simpson United Church. The next house on the corner was the Willises. Now that made up that neighborhood where we lived. It was nice. They're very nice. In the next block was commercial. From Monument Street on down on on both sides of the street was more or less commercial. Simpson Cotton Oil Mill's Office was on the corner, the mill, and then the ice plant where my father worked. Listen, my father had a whistle; he could get out on the front and whistle. Either one of us could hear that whistle and answer it. We knew that that meant Papa wanted one of us to come back. We would run down there to see what Papa wanted.

Then there was a little church that was called Farish Street Christian Church. It is the same christian church that Dr. Mosely who was head of Smith Robeson Museum belong to. They weren't in Jackson then. Rev. Scott, the Scotts that I was telling to you about, he was the pastor of that church and it was on Farish Street at that time.

Across the street were a lot of shotgun houses. I don't know whether the Jews or the white people or something like that own on the corner of Church and Farish because I didn't know anything about that. That was before I was born. I do know there was a store on the corner of Church and Farish. The



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The Farish Street Church was across the street. It was nice, everything was nice. On Farish Street from Church Street on down on the east side of the street, there was a great big building. There was a fella ran a candy store there. We called him Candy Kitchen Jones. His name was Mr. Jones. We called him Candy Kitchen Jones. Of course, the only kind of candy you could go and there and buy was creme candy, peanut candy, and hohound. You ever heard of hohound?

\*\*\*\*\* Ms. Williams did not complete this interview with Ms. Minnie Farish. The tape suddenly stops when Ms. Farish was talking about the Farish Street neighborhood.\*\*\*\*\*