

JACKSON Y. W. C. A.  
and  
MISSISSIPPI DEPARTMENT of ARCHIVES and HISTORY  
and  
JACKSON STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT  
THE FARISH STREET HISTORIC DISTRICT

HOMEOWNER IN THE HISTORIC DISTRICT

O. H. 81.55

LEE WILLIAMS

Interviewed  
by

Alma Cousin, Lillian Rhodes, and Alferdteen Harrison

on

September 30, 1981



ORAL HISTORY AGREEMENT  
FARISH STREET HISTORIC DISTRICT PROJECT

I agree that this magnetic tape recording of my voice made during an interview with Alma Cousin and Lillian C. Rhodes and a transcript made there-  
(interviewer)

from, may be catalogued and deposited in the Jackson State University library (and some designated place in the Farish Street Historical District) with the records of the Farish Street Historic District Humanities project. The tape recording and transcript may be made available for research use in the preparation of the final products of the NEH Humanities Project in 1983 and after 1983 for research by scholars. Any title or literary rights to this material are hereby relinquished to Jackson State University.

Lee E. Lillian  
Oral Author (interviewee) Signature

9-30-81  
date

Alma Cousin and  
Oral Recorder (interviewer) Signature

9-30-81  
date

Lillian C. Rhodes

O.H. 81.55  
Tape number



## INTRODUCTION

Mr. Lee Williams came to Jackson, Mississippi in November, 1924. He lived on Dryfus Street in the residence which his mother built in 1924. His education began at Smith Robertson and continued at Lanier High School and finally at Jackson State for a year. He worked at Jackson State as Vice President for Administration for a number of years before retiring.

Mr. Lee Williams was interviewed on September 30, 1981 on the subject of the social culture of the Farish Street Historic District.

They discussed the possible existence of a Blue Vein Society for Negroes with white parents or light skin complexion, (mulattoes and oct-rooms). He talks of the Alamo Theatre and dance halls such as the Red Circle, Savoy and the Crystal Palace. He also mentioned many names of people who contributed to the history of the Farish Street area such as the Redmond's, W. C. Handy, Mr. Luckett Dr. Miller, etc. Some of the entertainment that came through this area was Louis Armstrong, Fats Waller, and Duke Ellington.



INTERVIEWEE: Lee Williams  
INTERVIEWER: Alma Cousin, Lillian Rhodes, & A. Harrison  
DATE OF INTERVIEW: Septemeber 30, 1981  
O.H. 81.55

Cousin: Will you begin by telling us something about yourself and the social culture of this community?

Williams: I came to Jackson in 1924. I lived on Dryphus Street in a house my mother built in 1924. It is still there.

Cousin: We would like to know something about the culture.

Williams: I have been listening to you talk about the Blue Vein Society, what is it?

Cousin: I don't understand what it is.

Harrison: In many textbooks on Black History there is a discussion that among the black community those person who had white fathers or those who looked white, segregated themselves from the blacks. Not only did they segregate themselves, but the white society demanded you do it. This existed wherever there were blacks. Sometimes they had the qualifications for getting into these socities, proving how much white blood you had, see if you could see their viens, or because of the color of their skin. It is not an unheard phenomenom.

Williams: Their was talk of the Blue Vein Society, but whether it existed or not, I don't know. I was not a member of it. There were persons that could have belonged to the group such as Lawyer Moon and the Graystons. He had some children to go to Pittsburg and other places and change over to the white race.

Gus Redmond and his half brother, S. D. Redmond, a politician, could have belonged to this group. Mrs. Loveless, Gus Redmond's wife, might have been one of the person on the inside of the group. She may be able to tell you whether there was any such thing as the Blue Vein Society.

Harrison: I think this is a very interesting subject.

Williams: There is an undertaker on West Pearl Street that might have belonged to this group.

Rhodes: The Lanthams?

Williams: Yes, the Lanthams. I only know of one person that is living that might have been a part of that society and that is Mrs. Loveless.



Williams: My beginnings with Farish Street goes back to the Alamo Theatre which was located where the Federal Building is now. The Alamo Theatre use to have those silent movies where you read the lines at the bottom of the screen. It remained that way up until 1927.

The number one star was William S. Hart. He was the greatest of the western stars. A lot of people thought that he was real. Anytime that he was in a movie, people would come from near and far just to see him.

The Proctors owned a cafe which was considered one of the better cafes in the city of Jackson. On the corner of Farish and Amite was a dance hall called the Red Circle. It was upstairs and Jitney Jungle was underneath it. Later on the McClinton's had a clothing store there. I only recall being at the Red Circle one time and that is when W. C. Handy was there.

Harrison: What was the Red Circle?

Williams: It was a dance hall at the corner of Amite and Farish Street across from Ferguson. If you come up between Amite and Griffith, you would pass Acme Bakery. It was the most distinguishing feature in that area. They made stage planks and nickel loaves of breads which we made the saradine loaf out of. You would get the sardines, put the onions on top, and cut the loaf into as many parts needed for the number of people in your party. Acme Bakery also made jelly rolls, apple pies, and a lot of other good things.

Dr. Miller's mother and father had a building in that area. If you look at the top of the buildings you will see who owned them and what year they were built.

The store over on that side that belonged to the Hill Family. They were related to James Hill who use to be Secretary of State. In one of those buildings either on the south or north side is where Jackson College was located for a period of time.

In the next block between Griffith and Hamilton Street was the Savoy. The Savoy attracted artists like Victor Oliver Selistean of New Orleans, Andy Kirk of the Clouds of Joy, Bennie Moon Stomp, and Bud Scott. Piney Woods had a girl band that use to play there also.

Harrison: Did you ever attend dances there?

Williams: Yes. They use to wax the floor so you could sail around on the floor with ease. I remember Victor because he was



WILLIAMS, Lee

3

Williams: a very huge person. He was a great trumpet player.

Just across the street from the Savoy was the red light district.

Harrison: Was this at the corner of Hamilton and Farish Street?

Williams: In the block between Hamilton and Griffith. Instead of having the ladies up and down the streets, they confined themselves to that area. Those who wished to enjoy the pleasure of the ladies of the night, went into that area.

In the next block was Miller Mosley's Shoe Shop. That is where I went to get my shoes repaired. Those with a bit more money went down on Capitol Street.

Next door to that was Collins Funeral Home. Mr. Sampson and Henry Denton pulled together and set up People's Funeral Home and later on Collins built their place across the street. Most of the houses in this area were shotgun train built houses.

Harrison: What year was this?

Williams: From 1924 up until the 1930s. In the same block Fannie Harris had a clinic which was operated by Dr. Leroy Smith. He had a great clientele. I have always thought he tried to see too many people.

There use to be a filling station where Dotty Cab is now. Claude Hodges had the first filling station owned by a black in the state of Mississippi. He had a grocery store on Bloom Street. He bought a lot of the houses in the area and built the Crystal Palace. The Crystal Palace attracted person like Louis Armstrong, Fat Waller, and Duke Ellington to name a few.

Harrison: When was this?

Williams: In the 1930s and 1940s.

Harrison: Was this during the depression?

Williams: Yes. I guess people didn't realize that they were in the depression. Upstairs was the Crystal Palace and downstairs was a cafe. Mr. Huddleston set up the cafe. The cafe eventually went out of business because it didn't have any customers.

The sororities and fraternities use to have parties at



Williams: the Crystal Palace. They use to charge a small fee to get in.

Harrison: How much was it?

Williams: About fifteen or twenty-five cents. Willie Stevenson, the man who played for the Alamo Theatre, played for house parties.

Harrison: What kind of people had house parties?

Williams: Many parties were given by students at Lanier High School. Mr. Shephard had a cafe across from the Crystal Palace. Willie Stevenson's wife operated the cafe. At one time Hunt and Whitaker were located on Farish Street right next door to the cafe.

Harrison: What is Hunt and Whitaker?

Williams: A store in the Jackson Mall that sell guns and fishing equipment. The man who set up the Farish Street Baptist Church was Mr. Topp. I think he was one of Jackson State first graduates when they were at Natchez. He went to Africa as a missionary which was unusual at that time.

At the corner of Farish Street was Adam's Grocery Store. On the other side of Farish Steet was the Conic's Barber Shop. The Scott's building is where the Universal Life Insurance Company use to be. Farish Street was the show place for the black businesses. Before Crescent Laundry started, most of the black women did the washing over on State Steet for the white people.

Harrison: Did they ever organize?

Williams: Not to my knowledge. It was not unusual to see women with baskets of laundry on top of their heads.

Harrison: I didn't know that they did that in America.

Williams: Yes, they did. Before they even had a No. 10 people platted their hair. They were doing all of this because they worked so hard and they didn't have time to fix their hair everyday so they platted it up and wrapped it up.

Harrison: Who was No. 10?

Williams: The woman who was supposed to be the perfect 10. They didn't have private facets in the homes, so the women who did the washing had to go the public facets.

Harrison: I didn't know that.



Williams: It wasn't until 1940 that people began to have water and sewage put into their houses. In 1924 they had business men to go around to dig outdoor toilets and come by to clean out the containers. Only a few men were willing to take these jobs.

Harrison: Did they work for the City?

Williams: They worked for themselves.

Harrison: Did the wash women congregate near the facet to wash or would they carry the water home?

Williams: Most of them carried it to their homes.

Harrison: Was this unionized?

Williams: No. Jobs were very limited, either you were a maid, yard person, chauffeur, wash woman, or a cook.

On up further on Farish Street was Candy Kitchen Jones. They sold a variety of candy. I don't recall the details, but he killed his wife, I think.

Across from Monument Street was Paris Cleaners. Mr. Luckett set up a store over there. L. E. Binder had a shoe shop just up a little further from where People's Funeral Home use to be. Dr. Christian had a hospital somewhere in there.

Harrison: Did they call it something else?

Williams: Yes. It was a two-story building, I think they tore it down to build People's Funeral Home. Across the street from People's Funeral Home is where Dr. Leroy Smith lived. In the next block, I think that Mr. Wells and Dr. Barnes lived in there. There was a Christian Church in here that merged with the one on Florence Street.

Harrison: May we use this tape for scholarly purposes?

Williams: No, I don't mind. I am going to be like Percy Green, if there is any money in it, I want some of it. Percy Green was a noted figure on Farish Street for a long time.

Harrison: Thank you for the interview.



Williams, Lee  
O. H. 81.55

Index

Acme Bakery 2	Ferguson 2
Adam's Grocery Store 4	Filling Station 3
Africa 4	Florence Street 5
Alamo Theatre 2, 4	Graystone 1
Amite Street 2	Green, Percy 5
Armstrong, Louis 3	Griffith Street 2
Barnes, Dr. 5	Hamilton Street 2-3
Binder, L. E. 5	Hill, James 2
Bloom Street 3	Harris, Fannie 3
Blue Vein Society 1	Hart, William 5
Candy Kitchen Jones 5	Hodges, Claude 3
Christian Church 5	Huddleston, Duke 3
Collins Funeral Home 3	Hunt & Whitaker 4
Conic's Barber Shop 4	Kirk, Andy & the Clouds of Joy 2
Crescent Laundry 4	Jackson College 2
Crystal Palace 3-4	Jackson Mall 4
Dances 4	Lanthams 1
Denton, Henry 3	Loveless, Mrs. 1
Dotty Cab 3	McClinton, The 2
Dryfus Street 1	Miller, Dr. 2
Ellington, Duke 3	Mississippi, Jackson 1-2
Jones Candy Kitchen 5	Mississippi, Natchez 4
Farish Street 2-4	Monument Street 5
Farish Street Baptist Church 4	Moon, Lawyer 1
Federal Building 2	New Orleans 2



Williams, Lee  
O.H. 81.55

## Index

Paris Cleaners	3	Scott, Bud	2
Pearl Street	1	Segregation	1
People's Funeral Home	3, 5	Selisteau, Victor Oliver	2
Piney Woods	2	Silent movies	2
Pittsburg	1	Smith, Dr. Leroy	3, 5
Public water	5	Stevenson, Willie	4
Red Circle	2	Stomp, Bennie Moon	2
Red light district	3	Topp, Mr.	4
Redmond, Gus	1	Undertaker	1
Redmond, S. D.	1	Wash women	4-5
Sampson, Mr.	3	Waller, Fat	3
Savoy	2		
Sardine loaf	2		