

JACKSON STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

THE FARISH STREET HISTORIC DISTRICT PROJECT

FORMER PRINCIPAL OF THE SMITH ROBERTSON SCHOOL

O. H. 78.05

A. N. JACKSON

Interviewed
by

ROY WELCH

on

June 19, 1978

JACKSON STATE COLLEGE
Jackson, Mississippi

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

INTERVIEWER AGREEMENT

I, Roy Welch, in view of the
(Interviewer, please print)
historical and scholarly value of the information contained in the
interview with A. N. JACKSON, knowingly and
(Interviewee, please print)
voluntarily permit Jackson State College, Jackson the full use of this
information, and hereby grant and assign to Jackson State College,
Jackson all rights of every kind whatever pertaining to this information,
whether or not such rights are now known, recognized or contemplated.

Roy Welch
Interviewer (signature)

0.4.78.05
Interview Number

6-19-78
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, A. N. Jackson, 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.

Aaron Jackson
Interviewee (Signature)

June, 1978
Date

Introduction

Mr. A. N. Jackson was born in Hermanville, Mississippi in Claiborne County near Port Gipson. He came to Jackson in the early 1920s. He received his college education from Jackson College and Northwestern University. Mr. Jackson taught school at Newton High School, Newton, Mississippi; Lanier High School, Smith Robertson School, and Rowan, all in Jackson, Mississippi.

Mr. Jackson talks about how his grandparents came from Virginia and North Carolina as slaves. He talks about Smith Robertson School, and some of the problems he faced as principal at the school. He also talks about the people on Farish Street.

INTERVIEWEE: A. N. Jackson
INTERVIEWER: Roy Welch
DATE OF INTERVIEW: June 19, 1978
O.H. 78.05

Welch: This is an interview with Mr. A. N. Jackson for the Jackson State University Oral History Program. My name is Roy Welch. Today is June 19, 1978.

Mr. Jackson, what is your age?

Jackson: Seventy-one.

Welch: Where were you born?

Jackson: Hermanville, Mississippi. That is in Claiborne County, near Port Gibson.

Welch: What is your occupation?

Jackson: I am retired from the Jackson Public School.

Welch: Where did your family originate from?

Jackson: My maternal grandfather and grandmother came from Virginia as slaves. My paternal grandfather came from North Carolina as a slave. My maternal grandfather had about ten or twelve children. My paternal grandfather had two girls and seven boys.

My maternal grandfather escaped from his master and joined the Federal Army during the Civil War. He helped fight the Battle of Vicksburg. They gave him a pension for the rest of his life for fighting in the Battle of Vicksburg. He walked fifty miles from Claiborne County to Vicksburg to join the Federal Army. From that walk, his feet froze and they had to keep him in the hospital. That episode lasted the remainder of his life.

I was named after the drummer in his regiment, Aaron. My father's name was Everett. He was a railroad fireman until his eyes became bad. He then became a *worker* at the cotton gin in Hermanville. I have three sisters that are deceased. I am the only boy in the immediate family.

We moved to Jackson in the early 20s. I got a good job

Jackson:

and I was able to take care of my mother and sister after the separation. I was encouraged to go back to school my Professor Martin. I entered Lanier High School when it opened in ~~1911~~ I remained there for two years. I came to Jackson College and finished high school and college.

I came back to Newton in 1933 after working in Chicago. I got a job in Newton as the assistant principal. I came to Lanier in 1935 as a teacher of English and math. I taught there about fifteen or sixteen years. After that, I became principal of Smith Robertson in 1950. I hold a Masters' Degree from Northwestern University. I have received further training at Tougaloo and Mississippi State.

After I became principal, I had the privilege to look back through some of the records. I found many of the records of the older people that I know and many of those that I didn't know. Smith Robertson is called the "Mother School," built in 1894. This was the first school building erected by the City for Negroes. This building was named after Mr. Smith Robertson, a member of the Board of Aldermen for the city of Jackson.

Professor P. A. _____ was the first principal of the school. He died during the early part of 1931. He was also the principal of Rosenwald School in Warren County. Professor Martin was the second principal of the school. He served until 1911, when he was elected president of Alcorn A & M College. He died in 1914.

Professor W. H. Lanier was the third principal. He took charge in 1911 and served for the remainder of his life, a period of eighteen years.

Professor O. B. Cobbins became the next principal. He remained there until he was elected supervisor of negro schools. He held that position until 1950.

Professor Lanier died in 1959. He was the first negro director of colored education in the history of Jackson. The building has undergone several changes. At one time the building was a seventeen teacher school with an enrollment of 1500. It was remodeled in 1929 at a cost of \$20,000.00. It was changed into a two-story, twelve teacher school with a principal's office and a library. The library consisted of two sets of encyclopedias and one set of "An Outline of Knowledge," donated by Mrs. Lettie Young, a teacher at the school.

Jackson: I became principal in 1950. At that time we had twenty-one rooms and twenty-one teachers, two men and the others were ladies. When I became principal, there was a combination of elementary school and junior high school, grades one through nine. We had as many as 1300 students to be housed in twenty-one rooms.

When I was younger, Smith Robertson was the only black public school in the City. Most of the students who attended high school in Jackson had to go either to Tougaloo, Jackson State, or Campbell College to get high school training because Smith Robertson only went to the ninth grade. At one time the school burned. The year it burned it was a frame building. The children had to be housed in a hall or some other place until it was rebuilt. After it was rebuilt, it was built as a brick building. Part of it is still standing.

Most of the people in Jackson my age and older, attended Smith Robertson because it was the only black school in the City. We don't have many of those left to tell this story. We do have some children who attended under me, but they wouldn't be counted in the outstanding history of Smith Robertson. After intergration, they dissolved the school and sent the children to other schools. During that time, Mr. Randolph was principal of the school.

Welch: Who is the oldest member of your family that is still living?

Jackson: The oldest member of my family still living is my cousin, the one who lives in New York. I have many relatives in Chicago, most of which are younger than I am. I have a cousin in New York that is older than I am.

I have four sons, Dr. Aaron Gordon of Jackson. He is the Assistant Chief of Neurology at Howard Medical Hospital and Chief of Neurology at D. C. General. My second son was connected with HUD until President Carter came in and relieved him of his job. He went back to the Urban League where he had previously worked. He then transferred from New York to Boston where he was in charge of the Urban League there. The third son is a health and physical education teacher at Provine. My fourth son is working for Jackson Transit.

My wife was a home economics teacher. She was born in Magnolia, Mississippi. She received her education

Jackson: from Tuskegee and Columbia University. We met in Newton, Mississippi. We came to Jackson and she got a job at Jim Hill. After working three years at Jackson State, she went to Lanier and remained there until 1970. She transferred to Callaway and retired in 1974. I retired in 1972.

As I said earlier, my son in, Washington is a member of the Kidney Transplant Team. They have had about 75% success with it.

Welch: When you first came to Jackson, did you rent or own your home?

Jackson: We rented because when we left Hermanville, we left our home. The lady sold it so we had to rent.

Welch: When you came, what part of Jackson did you live in?

Jackson: I lived on Monument Street.

Welch: When you came to Smith Robertson, you came as principal, right?

Jackson: Yes.

Welch: Where did you live in the Smith Robertson area?

Jackson: I lived in the area, but it was the northern part of the area. I lived on the corner of Lamar and Sidway Street, which is on the northern boundary of Smith Robertson School.

Welch: How large was the school area?

Jackson: The southern boundary was Capitol Street, the northern boundary was McTyre, the western boundary was ICKR, the eastern boundary was under the hill.

Welch: What did you like about the Smith Robertson area?

Jackson: I practically lived in the neighborhood.

Welch: In other words, it was like being at home?

Jackson: Yes. I knew all the teachers, they were former classmates of mine. It was quite thrilling to know people where I worked.

Smith Robertson is where many low income children came

- Jackson: to school. It was quiet an experience and a pleasure. I worked with many of those children who later became honor students. While I was working there, we had one doctor and several lawyers to come out of that district. As you know, Smith Robertson was just one block from Farish Street, which has been for many years the area of negro businesses. Most of the outstanding businessmen in the area concentrated on Amite and Capitol Street.
- Welch: When you came here, what do you think was missing?
- Jackson: Space because we had to house 1300 students.
- Welch: How close were the people to the school? Did they support the school?
- Jackson: We had good support from the citizens, which was typical for an elementary school.
- Welch: Can you remember any hard times in the area while you were there?
- Jackson: Other than space, we had a problem with equipment. We didn't have much equioment. The playground was dusty. Sometimes the dust would cover your shoes. The overcrowdness, dusty playgrounds, and the lack of equipment were the most outstanding problems. Other than that, I think we had a good school. We had a very outstanding faculty.
- Welch: What subjects did you teach compared with today?
- Jackson: We had about the same curriculum in the elementary and junior high school as we do today. We had all the basic subject; English, math, science, and history. We had no foreign languages. We had basketball for boys, but not for girls. The cafeteria served as a meeting place for activities such as PTA and other functions. The present cafeteria was rebuilt in 1952. Lunches were 10¢ or 15¢, including milk. We got the milk through the government. Many of the children didn't like milk, but eventually they learned to like it. Some of the boys would buy three or four cartons a day.
- Welch: Did the school offer any special programs for the community such as adult classes or things like that?
- Jackson: We had adult classes. It was first housed at Jim Hill,

- Jackson: but something happened and I had to come to Smith Robertson during that time.
- Welch: What was the happiest moment you had connected with Smith Robertson School?
- Jackson: When I received a letter from Northwestern University.
- Welch: What was your unhappiest moment?
- Jackson: Seeing those 1300 kids housed in one building.
- Welch: Who was in charge of the maintenance work at Smith Robertson?
- Jackson: We had one janitor.
- Welch: What about the up-keep and the building repairs to the school?
- Jackson: We had the maintenance department. It consisted of an electrician, a carpenter, and a plumber. They were all paid by the City. Thanks to Superintendent Walker, we had a pretty good maintenance staff.
- Welch: Did you have any special problems with the school other than not having enough space?
- Jackson: Being overcrowded and dealing with the kids from low income families, we had quite a few problems. The kids coming from different sections of the area, whenever that happens, you can look for problems. I left the school in 1954.
- Welch: Did you have any special problems with the community?
- Jackson: No. The only problem we had was we were so close to downtown, we had to lock the doors from the inside. The children could go out, but they couldn't come in.
- Welch: Was there any problems with the school system, the administration or anything like that?
- Jackson: No problems. They did everything they could to help.
- Welch: After Smith Robertson, where did you go?
- Jackson: Rowan. We combined the elementary school with Smith Robertson.
- Welch: How long did you stay there?

Jackson: 1954 through 1972.

Welch: 1972 is when you retired? What do you plan to do now?

Jackson: My wife and I plan to visit our children. We have *ten* grandchildren. I plan to do some writing.

Welch: Would you mind us using this tape at Jackson State Universty of scholarly purposes?

Jackson: No. If anything I said could help, I don't mind. I might say this, the children that finished at Smith Robertson are excellent writers.

Welch: Mr. Jackson, I sure do thank you for all of this information.

Jackson: I was glad to do it.