

This interview is part of the **Southern Oral History Program** collection at the **University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill**. Other interviews from this collection are available online through [www.sohp.org](http://www.sohp.org) and in the **Southern Historical Collection** at **Wilson Library**.

## **N.7 Undergraduate Internship Program: Fall 2015**

Interview N-0038  
Edith A. Hubbard  
22 October 2015

Abstract – p. 2  
Field Notes – p. 3  
Transcript – p. 4

## **ABSTRACT – Edith Hubbard**

Interviewee: Edith Hubbard

Interviewer: Alex Ford

Interview Date: October 22, 2015

Location: George Watts Hill Alumni Center in Chapel Hill, NC

Length: 1 .wav file, approximately 54 minutes long

Edith Hubbard was born in Dunn, North Carolina in 1944. She was one of the first African-American students to attend UNC. The interview begins with Hubbard discussing her childhood and family and growing up in Durham, NC. She discusses attending public school in a segregated school system. She talks about her experiences in the YWCA and recounted a time when she could not go into a restaurant with her group because it was segregated, and she describes how her group handled it. She discusses her educational experience as a gifted student and running in a city (student?) council election. Hubbard then talks about participating in picket lines related to Civil Rights era protests. She discusses her involvement in the Lenoir Foodworkers' Strike at UNC. She explains changes she has observed about UNC and her place in this process of change. Hubbard discusses transferring from Bennett College to UNC. She talks about an English professor who discriminated against her because of her race and other professors who helped her. She talks about her experience as a woman in graduate school at UNC and how UNC had changed between her undergraduate and graduate career. Hubbard discusses her academic interests and social experiences as an undergraduate. She talks about her involvement in the NAACP chapter at UNC and the Black Student Movement. She describes how she filed the first open housing discrimination suit in the country. She talks more about how UNC has changed and reflects on the integration process at UNC, and she describes her role in these processes. She talks about her graduation from UNC. Hubbard concludes the interview with a story about her friendship with her neighbor Frances, who was white. This interview is part of the Southern Oral History Program's project to document the life histories of the Black Pioneers of UNC.

## FIELD NOTES – Edith Hubbard

(compiled November 16, 2015)

Interviewee: Edith Hubbard

Interviewer: Alex Ford

Interview Date: October 22, 2015

Location: Library in the George Watts Hill Alumni Center in Chapel Hill, NC

THE INTERVIEWEE. Edith Hubbard grew up in Durham, North Carolina. She earned both her Bachelor of Arts in Psychology and Sociology and her Master of Arts in Education and Sociology from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. She was one of the first African-Americans to attend UNC after she transferred from Bennett College. She was involved in the Lenoir Foodworkers' Strike, NAACP chapter, and Black Student Movement at UNC. She also filed the first open housing discrimination suit in the country.

Ms. Hubbard's résumé is included.

This is a CNN article about Edith Hubbard from February 15, 2001:

<http://www.cnn.com/fyi/interactive/specials/bhm/story/edith.hubbard.html>

This is an article from the *University Gazette* about Edith Hubbard, her daughter, and her granddaughter, who all attended UNC: <http://www.unc.edu/spotlight/three-generations/>

THE INTERVIEWER. Alex Ford is an undergraduate intern for the Southern Oral History Program at UNC. She is a senior majoring in Middle Grades Education with minors in History and Philosophy, Politics, and Economics from Kernersville, NC.

DESCRIPTION OF THE INTERVIEW. Ms. Hubbard and I met for lunch prior to the interview and then walked to the library of the Alumni Center building. We sat across from one another at a table in the library. There was a quiet interruption at 19:08 when a woman walked into the library and whispered, "Sorry, I didn't know." At 44:25, a phone makes a notification sound and vibrates; this happens again at 46:24.

NOTE ON RECORDING. I used a Zoom H4n Handy recorder. The recording is audible and easy to understand.

**TRANSCRIPT—EDITH HUBBARD**

Interviewee: EDITH HUBBARD  
Interviewer: Alex Ford  
Interview Date: October 22, 2015  
Location: Chapel Hill, NC  
Length: 1 file; approximately 54 minutes

**START OF RECORDING**

ALEX FORD: Hi, my name is Alex Ford, and I'm here with Mrs. Edith Hubbard. It's October 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2015, and we're at the Carolina Club in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. Hi. So, start out. Could you tell me a little bit about your childhood?

EDITH HUBBARD: I grew up--. I'm a North Carolinian, a native Tar Heel, born and bred. I was born in Dunn, North Carolina, and then, very shortly thereafter, we moved to Durham. So, I grew up in Durham County, bordering Orange County. So, we had a Chapel Hill address most of my growing-up years.

AF: Can you tell me about your family a little?

EH: My mother was a nurse. My stepfather worked as-- did custodial work at the university. He did a side-business of custodial work, cleaning and that sort of thing. I have one brother, younger--six years younger--and a sister who is almost nine years younger. I have two children, five grandchildren, and one dog, and a husband.

AF: Thank you. What was it like growing up in Durham?

EH: Good. I had a very happy childhood. I had good friends. My best friend growing up was a neighbor. Her name was Elizabeth Alexander, and her mother was a ballerina, and Elizabeth couldn't dance, and I couldn't dance. But we did. We spent most of our summers together. We had dolls, the typical growing-up things. They moved away during my high school years. So, I lost contact with her. But, growing up was good. We had church. Lots of good things. Childhood was good. Childhood was good.

AF: Was anyone else especially influential at that point in your life?

EH: Oh, I had lots of good influences. At the time I grew up, we were in a segregated school system. So I got lots and lots of special attention. And teachers, when they recognized that a student had potential, they nurtured that. They challenge you. We had opportunities. Probably my busiest extracurricular activity ended up being on the YWCA. So, I went to YWCA camp all over the state. I was in a leadership role during the summers and participated heavily in YWCA growing up. I sang in the choir. I think that had something to do with my mother being the pianist and, "You're gonna do it." But, I enjoyed that. Growing up was good. Growing up was good.

AF: Can you remember any experiences you had in the YWCA?

EH: One summer, we were going up to Camp Tacoma in a station wagon with four other girls. It was a long trip leaving Chapel Hill, Durham to go up to Camp Tacoma to go up in the mountains. About midday, there was some discussion about--. With the other girls, "We're hungry." And, the director-- the driver, who was not the director but who was one of the head counselors, prolonged stopping for as long as she could. Then, everyone got real insistent, "We're hungry." So, she stopped, and I remember her saying, "Well, why don't I go in and get us something and bring it to the car?" Which was perfectly logical and normal to me, but not to

the other girls who were very accustomed to going in. It ended up that she had to explain to the girls that I was not allowed in. We were going to get the food, but we were going to eat it in the car. They were annoyed, and rightly so, but I remember being struck by that. I remember being pretty struck by that, because I had a very sheltered life. Things like that that could have been, I think, very stinging, she handled with a great deal of wisdom and grace. But, that kind of racism was very prevalent, but in many instances I had been sheltered and was oblivious to it. I remember that, and I remember thinking that was one of the reasons that the Y was so important to me.

AF: So, you've already mentioned this a little, but could you tell me what school was like for you when you were a child, and also when you attended high school?

EH: I was considered gifted. So, we got--I think there was about a class of eighteen. We had accelerated everything. So, high school for me was wonderful. I do remember running for city [student] council against a very dear friend, Charles Day. It was a very, very close race. Charles beat me by one vote. The one vote was mine, because my mother had always said, "You show grace by voting for the other person." And, I did. I voted for him. He didn't vote for me. So, I remember some lessons, while very noble, can bite you. I really enjoyed school. I can't think of any really, really bad experiences I had. I do remember that while I was in high school, it was the height of the civil rights movement, or maybe the beginning. Those were the early stages when there were picket lines. I had a tremendous need to participate. After school, I would stop off in Durham and walk on the picket lines. At that time, our neighbor was a barber on Federal Street. So I always had a ride home. So I could do that. I remember one day, I'm on the picket line in front of Woolworth's in Durham. The building is still there. There were a lot of picketers, protesters. I remember this man coming out of nowhere and he put his cigarette out in

my hair. Because we were taught to be nonviolent and not to do any confrontation, some of the other protesters pulled me out of the way, got me out of harm's way, brushed my hair, took me back to the church. We were at St. Joseph's Church at the time. I don't think I remember being angry, but really confused. I'm still confused by that kind of hatred. I don't think you ever come to understand that. It's just there. I was one of the fortunate ones, because there were so many others who were beaten. So, I was fortunate and being small of stature, people wanted to protect me, which was a good thing. I remember that. I remember my neighbor, who was friendly with the sheriff's department, coming down and saying to my parents [that he] thought it would be a good idea for me not to be involved in that kind of thing. I remember my parents saying, "We don't really want you to do this." I remember pleading my case. I remember my parents saying, "Well, we've told you what we think but if that's something that you really think you want to do, OK." I took that same tact with my children. I would say, "I don't know about this, but if this is something that you really are committed to doing, OK," voicing my reservations, but always giving them the option to reach. That served us all well.

AF: How old were you when you were picketing?

EH: I was fifteen, and I went to college when I was sixteen. So, that was my senior year. That was in 1962, because I started college in [19]62. That was my senior year.

AF: Do you remember if you were picketing a certain thing?

EH: That was during the sit-in demonstrations—Woolworth, bus boycotts and all of that. Then, coming back to Chapel Hill, talking about picketing, when I came back to graduate school, the cafeteria strike was in full swing. I had a car. I was asked to go pick up Floyd McKissick, because he was going to speak to the cafeteria workers in the cafeteria. I went and picked him up and brought him on campus. My task was to escort him into the building. Walking

up the sidewalk of the door, there was a solid line of highway patrolmen with bayonets. We walked past that. While it was maybe the distance of Lenoir Hall to the door, I think that was the longest walk of my life. Nothing happened, but to this day, I can close my eyes and see our highway patrolmen standing with bayonets in a solid line on campus. That was a cause that I was deeply committed to. Then, talking about cafeteria workers--when I was here as an undergraduate, I ate in Lenoir. All of the cafeteria workers were black. Going through the line, I always got more than enough. When I got to the end of the line, that was my time for seeing people who smiled at me, who knew what I was going through, and sometimes, I would be in Lenoir, and I would sit down. And the people at the adjoining tables would get up and move. That has changed. That's the part of the history of our transition from the old way to a far more progressive and civilized way of behaving. Now, you look at the campus, and it's beautiful to see black students, white students, Asian students, Indian students, everybody together. There is no hostility or animosity. We have become what we were supposed to be. That's the thing that I'm proudest of for our university. We have grown to treat all people with mutual respect. That I love about my university. That's one of the reasons that I chose to stay, because this is a state university. It's funded, back then, primarily with tax payer dollars. Yet, it was limited admission as to who could come. Given the fact that taxpayer dollars paid for that, I figured I had as much right as I had to be here as anyone else. So I refused to give up that right. My thing was, "I'm going to stay here," so I stayed. I'm so glad I did, because in some small measure, that was one of the first steps toward what we have now. I like that. I smile every time I'm on campus, and I see--. You go and it belongs to everybody. That's such a great feeling.

AF: So, how did you make the initial decision to come to college in general and UNC specifically?



EH: Actually, I didn't. Well, I went to Bennett. What would have been my junior year, the president, Dr. Willa Beatrice Player, said, "I think you need to live in the President's house," because some students lived in the President's house. Those were students that she considered to have high academic potential. I pleaded and said, "You know, I really don't want to do that. Can't I just--?" And, she said, "No. If you stay here, you will live in the President's house." So, my thing was I don't want to do that. So, a real good family friend, William, he said, "Well, you know you should apply to the university." So, I said, "OK. What the hell? I applied. In those days, it was a black and white photo, so you could fudge it a little bit. I got an acceptance letter. So, I went to Dr. Player and said, "You know, I've been accepted here. If you could just see your way not to making me live in the President's house, we're good." I should have known better. Dr. Player said, "No, my decision stands." I was so sure that she was going to relent, but she didn't. I certainly couldn't. So, I said, "Well, I'm going." So, I came here totally unprepared. Even though I'm from Chapel Hill, I had been sheltered and loved and coddled in high school and at Bennett. When I got here, it was like, "Why are you here?" That was hard. The transition here was hard. First, I didn't know anyone. My first semester here, I had an English class in Bingham. I went to class, and I sit on the front row, because I wear glasses. I don't see well, so I always try to sit on the front row. So, when class started, the professor said, "You have the wrong class." I took out my little notebook, looked at it, the building, the day, the class. Everything was--. So I said, "I'm supposed to be here. This is it." He said, "No, you're not." He, essentially, said, "You're not going to make it." Something clicked in my head, because I remember saying, in very colorful language, "If I don't make it, nobody else in this class is going to make it." There were two professors here, associate professors. One of them was Leon Rook. For all of the assignments I had, these two professors agreed to review them and make

suggestions. The work was good but I never got a real good grade. I got a C out of that course. The only saving grace with that C is I brought the curve down. If you gave me a C, the next semester, the university chose to offer him some more options. My confidence would have been shattered had I not had the support from other faculty members who knew that I could do it, knew that I had time. That really boosted my confidence. When I came back here for graduate school--. Fast-forward. Race, for some of us, had taken a back issue, and it was a woman's issue. I'm in graduate school, and I'm taking a course, and the professor--we're graduate students--he's going around. There was a nun in the class that was absolutely fabulous. We're going around, and we're saying who we are and why we're here. At that time, I was a military spouse. My husband was in Southeast Asia. So I introduced myself, "I have two children. My husband is in Southeast Asia, and I'm here working on my masters. The professor said to me, "Well, you're just taking up the space that a man needs." There was dead silence in the room. So, the nun--I was in shock--the nun said, "Well, let's see how it works out." That mentality is still, I fear, somewhat prevalent today that men are supposed to have the opportunities and the privileges. It amazes me that people have the audacity to articulate it. It amazes me. That was, what, 1969? Go figure.

AF: Why did you decide to come back for graduate school after feeling isolated as an undergraduate?

EH: Economics. My husband, actually, suggested that I find something interesting to do. So, I said, "Oh. I'll go back to school." And I got in. I really didn't expect to get in, because it was really at the eleventh hour, but I got in, and you're in, so you've got to do it.

AF: Was that experience any better since it was a few years later? With a different crowd maybe?

EH: Oh, it was much, much better. There were more black students on campus. The black student movement was well-formed, high membership. There were a lot more black students on campus. The atmosphere had changed. There wasn't this open hostility. I knew more people, so I had matured. The country had changed. The country was changing. So, that was a lot easier. So much easier. Again, when I came here, initially, I was a fish out of water. I was totally, totally unprepared for the isolation.

AF: Did you ever say anything back to that professor or anyone who got up and moved? Did you ever say anything against people who were treating you that way?

EH: For the people who got up and moved, no. What are you going to say? To the professor--. You mean in my English class? That's embarrassing, because yes, I did. It's too colorful to say again. Suffice it to say, even I was amazed at the four-letter words that came out. I was amazed. I wasn't confrontational. I think, now, some fifty years later, I'm not confrontational. But, I feel strongly that I have a moral obligation to speak up, and I do that. I had to grow into that. I'm firm now. When you see an injustice, you have to speak up. You have to take a stand.

AF: I'm interested. How did you find those professors who helped you with your coursework and everything? Were they other professors that you had, or did they approach you?

EH: The good thing about Carolina when I was here as an undergraduate, there were some marvelous, marvelous professors. There were professors who were not racist at all. I truly believe that those who were, were in the minority. I would dare say, today that sort of behavior is almost nonexistent. Back then, it was a different time, a different social climate. Now, I know it's much different. There are some things that will not be tolerated. The university has been

open and receptive to all kinds of diversity. So, again, for that, I applaud the university. We are growing with the times. That makes me happy.

AF: Just something I was curious about--. Why didn't you want to live at the President's house at Bennett?

EH: I don't know how much you know about Bennett College, but Bennett College is a woman's college. Back then, you were expected to behave like a lady. You wore your pearls, your gloves, and you behaved appropriately. Alas, I was a free spirit. Sometimes, colorful language came out, which would have shocked her. That was a pressure--I didn't want to conform, I guess. Looking back, I think she saw potential that needed to be corralled and molded. I wasn't ready to be molded. To this day, she is truly one of my idols. She was a sort of, lady--if she had a meeting--now, you've got to remember the times. We're talking in the [19]60s. If she had a meeting with a potential donor, before she would get whatever she was wearing wrinkled, she would walk sixteen--whatever it took--to get to the meeting, so that she would be pristine. She is the only woman that I know where I never, never saw a strand of hair out of place. She was immaculate at all times. She was composed at all times. She was an amazing woman, absolutely amazing. In hindsight, I probably should have stayed there, but I had other callings. She truly was an amazing woman.

AF: As a woman at UNC in the earlier times when they first started admitting women, did you have certain rules that you had to follow here?

EH: No. No, I just went to class. I got the assignments.

AF: Did you live in a dormitory?

EH: No, I lived off campus.

AF: So, what subjects did you study here?

EH: I was a psychology major. Because I kept getting mixed signals on what I needed, what was required to graduate, I took everything. I was, "Oh, my God. I need this. Oh, my God. I need that." So, I ended up graduating with a double major. Somehow, in order to make sure that I had what I needed to graduate, I had taken enough credits to qualify as a double major. So I ended up graduating with a double major. Initially, back to where I stayed, I stayed in Whitehead for a while during orientation. That proved not to be a good mix for me. I lived off campus.

AF: Were any students friendly?

EH: Oh yeah. Not very many females. I can see why. It's conformity. So, no, I had very few white female friends. I did have good friendships with the black male students on campus at the time. There were seven of them. Oftentimes we studied together. That was helpful. I also had another good friend, Charlie. Charlie had multiple sclerosis, but was brilliant. So, Charlie and I developed a friendship. He was a good study partner. We had the same courses. We ended up graduating together. So I was gun shy. Charlie was my main friend, and then, there were some of the women who were active in the black student movement my senior year. I was friendly with some of them. For the most part, it took all I could do to study and keep my head above water.

AF: Were you involved with the NAACP or the Black Student Movement on campus at all?

EH: Yeah, both.

AF: What sort of things did you do with them?

EH: There were demonstrations. The Black Student Movement's primary focus, at that time, was the cafeteria workers. So, there was heavy involvement with that. There was some protests. I did not have a leadership role in that, but I was an active member.

AF: What do you remember about the food worker's strike? Any incidents with that or anything like that?

EH: I guess, earlier, when I talked about the incident with the highway patrol and the bayonets, that was probably the most vivid thing that stands out in my mind. The cafeteria worker's strike was--. The cafeteria worker's support was probably an ongoing thing, because the administration did not want to move on that. So, that is a thing that stands out most in my mind. The Black Student Movement did bring, on campus, Martin Luther King, Malcolm X, Stokely Carmichael. I remember Johnny Mathis performing on campus. The reason I remember that is because they were looking for some black students to go with him to go with him to dinner or whatever. So, I got asked. I went and met Johnny Mathis. That was wonderful. That was wonderful.

AF: What about the town of Chapel Hill in general? Were they receptive of you? Were restaurants receptive of you?

EH: I was a student, honey. You don't go to--[Laughter]. The hangout for my group was the Rathskeller. So, sometimes, you'd have meetings in the Black Student Movement, then we'd all go to the Rathskeller. The other restaurants--not as an undergraduate--we did almost all of us go to the Rathskeller. Remember, on a student's budget, a poor student's budget, some things--. I didn't eat out a lot, but I did eat at the Rathskeller quite a bit at the evenings and stuff. Then, back to the town of Chapel Hill. When I was a graduate student, I lived in the black community. Like I said, my husband was in Southeast Asia. I had two small children, and I was a graduate student. One morning, I woke up, and I noticed that the screen in my bedroom was cut. I became nervous, talked to the police, and they said they would patrol more. Then the next night, an eighty-seven-year-old woman was attacked, and they caught the perpetrator. It turns

out, that that was who cut my window screen. He said, "Yeah, he cut the window, and he looked in. He saw this skinny woman with two small children in the bed." Because that's how I studied. I put the kids in the bed with me, and then I studied. He looked in, saw, and decided that one wasn't worth his energy. Then, I decided, "Well, I probably need to move." So, talked to some of the students in the Black Student Movement, one, James Cofield, and some others. So, I went to Tate Realty and said, "I'm looking for an apartment. Do you have anything?" They said, "No, we don't have anything right now, but we'll keep you on our list." The next day, Cofield said a young, white woman who said she was looking for a place, and they said, "Oh, we've got right now. You can move in immediately." So I ended up, with the assistance of the Black Student Movement, following the worst open-house discrimination suit in the country. Needless to say, despite the fact that we proved our case, we lost the case. Roland Gettis, who was one of the town fathers, right after the trial was over and the judge had rendered his decision, called me in the back room and said, "We're going to let you move into the apartment." So, I moved in and stayed there for the duration of my graduate program. What I remember--. The reason Roland Gettis had worked this arrangement out with John Cates is because first, we were the first open-housing case filed in the state. While they won, it was very obvious what was going on. So, I moved in. For a while it was not a happy scene. Jesse Helms did a commentary on--. I needed to do better things on filing a suit. So, we did that. I'm a backgrounds person. I could have chosen not to do that. But, I did. I'm glad I did. That's one more issue that we've pushed a little bit further down the road. Then, I came back to the university to work. Oh, but when I graduated I said, "I will never give this university one dime of my money. Never. Never. Never." But, I've grown since then. I'm a member of the Carolina Club. I'm a lifelong Tar Heel. I'm a lifetime member. I support my university, because I see it's capable of growing and change. So, it's not

the place that I came to. So, I love it. I love everything about it. I'm happy I was in the place that I was to come here. I'm hoping having come here has been a small part of the change. So, the university and I have a history.

AF: Do you wish that UNC had done more as an institution when you were a student here and when students were integrating in general?

EH: Oh, absolutely. But, I also realized that somebody has to initiate change. Given the time, I was one of the tools. In my rebellion, during that time, the one thing that I deeply regret having done when I graduated--you walk across the stage and they shake your hand and all that--Luther Hodges was the governor. I walked across the stage, and I refused to shake his hand, only because the cafeteria workers, the way I had been treated--not by him, but just the anger that I had--I didn't shake his hand, and he looked at me. You have eye contact. On a human level, I knew I had hurt his feelings. That always bothered me. I wish I had shook his hand. I could close my eyes now and see that look. What I did to him was what others had done to me. So, I've said, "I never want to do that again to another human, because I know how deeply it cuts."

AF: Do you have anything else you'd like to talk about?

EH: I'm glad you're doing this.

AF: I'm glad you're doing this. Thank you so much for agreeing to talk with me. Do you have any other stories you want to tell or topics you want to cover?

EH: To bring the race question full circle, when I was in graduate school and I had moved to Brookside Apartments, all my neighbors, of course, were students. One of my neighbors was--. [Pause] Oh, my God. Her name went out of my head. I think it was Frances. She was the granddaughter of a former governor. We spoke. We became friendly. When I



graduated, the first thing I had said I was going to do was get a puppy. So, Frances said, "Oh, I own a sire. You can have one of his puppies. He's a black a lab, and he's champion material." So, I said, "Really?" She said, "Yeah. My aunt will probably have a heart attack, but it's my dog. You can have it." So, we drove to South Carolina to pick up this gorgeous dog. The aunt was very gracious. She gave us the runt of the litter who turned out to be a gorgeous dog. We named him Shaka Zulu Warrior. He was a marvelous dog. He went with us to Texas--to California--poor dog rode everywhere. Then, we shipped him from Texas to North Carolina, and he was stolen. Frances, who was by all standards, a gentry southern Belle, was a very dear friend. What I know to be true, friendships know no color lines. I wish more people could figure that out. I'm sure I rambled. For that, I apologize. If you have questions that you want to--.

AF: You covered most everything that I had, so I'll turn this off.

END OF RECORDING

Transcribed by Audio Transcription Center July 14, 2016

Edited by Lauren Bellard, October 3, 2016