

Interview

with

HELEN CURRIN AMIS

by James Edward McCoy, Jr.

Transcribed by Sally Council

The Southern Oral History Program
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

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[START OF TAPE, SIDE A]

HELEN CURRIN AMIS
FEBRUARY 1, 1996

JAMES EDDIE McCOY: ... finishing up with Mrs. Helen Amis. The last time we was together we was talking about the library, and we're going to finish talking about the library. She had thirty years or so with the library. And we're going to finish that and she's going to give us a little overview of her family. And that's where we're going to start this morning. And today is February 1, 1996. Address is 1304 Raleigh Street.

Mrs. Amis, I've been doing research in the library recently, and I think we need to involve more adults and more people using the library. Looks like our kids does a good job, but—the white kids, their parents come in and help them with their lessons. They go to the books and xerox and take it back home. Give me some ideas and some suggestions you think that we can do to get more adults and people involved in the library.

HELEN AMIS: Well, one thing I think we need to do is start through the churches, because most people—adults—will attend a church. And if we start through the church to get people involved in things—going to the library, looking up articles and things like that. For instance, a lot of people don't know, blacks especially don't know that the library has a genealogy room where they can come in and check their family. We also have history from the state department and it's a lot of things that they can get. We have all newspapers from around. A lot of people just don't know that they can do a lot of traveling by just reading books in the library.

EM: I did not know that you had a North Carolina magazine section with the magazines that comes out across the state. And I didn't know that when I went to work in the library and started doing research.

HA: Yes.

EM: And I was surprised.

HA: Sure. We have State magazine and we have all the different—we have a lot of magazines that come in and a lot of newspapers. And we do have a lot of people using those during the day. They will come in and check and a lot of people like the New York Times newspaper.

EM: But it's a lot of information in those magazines, too.

HA: Sure, it is.

EM: But, see, you have to be a person that want to be a—and want to know what goes on across the state and to be aware that they are there. And it's a lot of things that's in the library that people are not aware they're there. And what books and what things that you can't take out is very important that they could read.

HA: Yes, and we have—National Geographic is very good, also, because that's indexed and whatever subject that you want to write on, if you look in the index, it directs you to the magazine. And we have some of those from 1904, I believe, a few from 1904. And when you get up to, say, 1912, I think we have most all of those. And there are a lot of them that, from then on, we keep the magazines, the National Geographic. And you'll also find that index that's very easy to use. And anybody in the library will help you with it, if you ask them. If you go in and don't feel very comfortable with it, they should be able to help you in whatever magazine it is, or whatever you're looking for.

We also have a periodical guide to literature. And that tells you which magazine—what it's in. If you're looking up a certain subject, it will tell you—the magazines are usually kept at least five years, most of them are. But we have problems

with most black magazines, because the Jet and the Ebony are two magazines that we put them out in the morning and by the next day or so, they're picked up. Somebody has gone—I went in the other day looking for one magazine for about—about two months ago. And somebody had lifted that magazine, for Ebony magazine. And they were just—keep taking Ebony and Jet are two of the magazines that the people will walk out with. And I wish it was a system in there that we could find that—something to keep them from—maybe a scanner that would go off if they had the magazine.

EM: That magazine is very important, and since you mentioned it, I need to look at a Ebony magazine and I hope you people have that copy because back then I don't think someone was taking them. Mr. Samuel Boyd, I was told that he was featured in the Ebony.

HA: Well, he was featured in the Ebony. I remember it, but I don't remember when it was. Because he—.

EM: It was in the sixties because he was—.

HA: But I doubt we have it.

EM: Oh, OK. You might not have been taking Jet and Ebony back at that time?

HA: We were taking it. It's not that we wasn't taking it. But, see, after—for Ebonies and Jets, most of those, after five years, they're discarded. They're not kept all that length of time because there's no space there to keep them. And that's why they're not kept. All of them. Not only that, but most—Newsweek and what else? Life—it's only the major four or five magazines that's kept for, you know, ten years or longer. But a lot of those magazines are done away with because there's not enough space to keep them. But if you can find the year, it is a place that you can order it from.

EM: I can?

HA: If you find the year, the month, the article—the title of the article and the page, and you can get it from Inter-Library Loan.

EM: OK, so I can go to this friend's house and xerox from their magazine—

HA: Well, you go by the library and you get the form. There's a form for periodicals, that you can order periodicals.

EM: OK.

HA: So you go by and you take the form and look at it and you—well, you can get the form and take it with you to the person's house. And then you can write down what the form asks for.

EM: I'll do it today.

HA: Uh-huh. And then, they can order that through Inter-Library Loan.

EM: OK, now, you know how long I've been researching and see how you just told me something that I didn't know how you do or how you go about it? So that's—

HA: See, you can also do that for books.

EM: Well, see, that's very important.

HA: If a book—if you want a book and we don't have that book in the library, all you have to do is fill out a form and they will send all over North Carolina, through the library Internet, they will send all over the state of North Carolina and the surrounding states. We've gotten them from South Carolina, for instance, and Virginia, Georgia—places like that. If you want that book, you can get the book. But there are also some things that you get that are very important. And if they send it to our library, they will send a note with it that you can only use it in the library because it's a very rare book.

Some libraries don't let their rare books, but some of them do. But when they send it, if it's a rare book, they will send it so you can get the information you want but you cannot take the book out of the library. You have to use that book in the library.

EM: I was at Durham Library and the lady told me, and I wanted to, and no one at the library up there explained to me why I didn't get but one of those books and I didn't know what happened to the other one. So now you're saying, I go back to Durham in the Historical Room and find that book I want and use it there because they didn't want to release that one. They released one of them that I wanted, but they didn't release the other one.

HA: Are you sure that they didn't release it or they didn't have it?

EM: I didn't check. I didn't ask them.

HA: Because sometimes they don't have the book you may have requested. And it may be—it may have said that this library was holding—had that book. And we call it "holdings". They may have said that that book was supposed to be at that library, but then, when you go to that library, lots of times people go in and they may have taken that book. So, by the time you get ready for it, they can't locate it. So, that could have been the problem. It was some reason, if you sent in for two, and you only got one, there's some reason that you didn't get it. But usually they give you the reason why you didn't get it.

EM: I didn't do a follow-up. It's my fault. I didn't know, you know. You know. It was my fault. I didn't ask questions.

HA: Well, you should have asked if that other book was coming or why not. And then, they could have told you.

EM: Well, see, I was—you know, I didn't—you know. That's why—

HA: You just didn't know that. OK.

EM: I didn't know that.

HA: OK. Uh-hum.

EM: The library is a different world when you get to be my age and never was exposed to the library. And I just can't stay away from books and I enjoy what I do. I wish the county would—an individual like you that's retired—would give you a part-time job educating people about the library and what's in the library. Say, if you do it two days a week, so many hours a month that you would go out and work part-time just to go around educating people about the library. Now, I'm talking about the whole county, black and white, who really don't know what goes on in the library and what's there for them.

HA: Yes, but getting back to when I first started and had the bookmobile, we had a lot of blacks then that used the library. I found more people using a library then out in the county than the people in the city. Because there were a lot—we used to go out and you may put off thirty books at somebody's house. And when you come back, you could tell whether those people had read them or not. Because usually they were in a box and when you come back, you could tell that they had been reading the books in the box. So there were a lot of people that are out in the county, I think, that usually read a lot. And they did more reading in the winter than in the summer, and I guess it was because that most of them were farmers and they had more time in the winter to read than in the summer. Because they didn't read as much in the summer as they did in the winter.

EM: I have taken for granted since I've been doing research that whites knew everything because they was exposed to it and it was there for them. But by your experience, and you've experienced it more than I have, that a lot of them don't have the qualifications and don't have the know-how, but they have a way of getting around it and not feeling bad or having their feelings hurt because they don't know something or don't know where this book that they're supposed to know—and we tend, as I was—taking for granted. So, why did I take for granted that whites knew everything about libraries and books and things like that? And you've got a lot of people like me still out here.

HA: Well, I find that when blacks come in the library to look for things, very seldom one would come to the desk and say, "Will you help me? I can't find ..." whatever they are looking for. OK. When a white person comes in a library, the first thing they would do would walk up to the desk and say, "I need ..." thus-and-so, whatever subject they were on. "Can you help me to find it?" They would do that a lot and a lot of them used to come in and say, "It's been a long time since I've used the library. Can you help me find this?" And then, you go and help that person find the information that they're looking for. But a lot of blacks, I've noticed, I've seen them come in and I'll ask when they get ready to leave out, I would say, "You couldn't find anything?" And they would say, "No, I was looking for thus-and-so, but I couldn't find it." And I'd say, "Wait just a minute. Let me help you." And I'd go over and help them find it. They'd say, "I didn't know this was here!" But they didn't come and ask. That's why we were there, to help people find things that they didn't know where to find, or what to look for.

Then I've also found that if a person comes lots of times and they ask you for one subject—they gave you one thing and they said, "Well, I want this." But when you really talk to them and pull it out of them, that's not what they were looking for at all. They were looking for something altogether different, but you had to keep asking questions in order to find out what they were really looking for.

EM: I'm going to follow up on that one. I had the Webb lady that works over at Duke, and she works in research in the archives department. She's the secretary. And I would need things and she would look it up for me, but when she'd bring it back, it's like you say. It would be a whole page and it was more—I didn't know it was that much in what I'd asked for. You know? I didn't know it was—I thought it was, you know, two or three sentences and that was it. And then, she was doing it. I said, "Wait a minute. I need to go over there and learn how to use the archives at Duke, because I don't know what I'm doing. I asked for one thing and get the answer, or what I really need, and I was the same way as the individuals that you talk about that go in and out of the library.

HA: Yes. And I found out that a lot of black parents will not bring their kids to the library, you know, to help them. Even for a lot of them—just will not bring the kids to the library period. And the kids would call and say, "I need thus-and-so, and can you come by—if I come by, will you give it to me?" Then you can go and search and find things for the kids and the parents might bring them there, but they can't stay. And I find a lot of difference in the black and the white. The whites will come and ask you for what they're looking for and you will find it and the whites will xerox it and take it and give it to their kids. We've done a lot of work for a lady and her daughter was in college, but whatever she needed, her daughter would call her and tell her. She'd write it down and

then she'd call us and we'd get it. And I have another lady, the other day, that told me that she wanted me to come back to the library and help her look up something because she felt like I knew exactly what she wanted for her daughter and her daughter is in college. So, we have a lot of that.

EM: But I didn't know you could get on the telephone and I could call the library and say, "Mrs. Amis, I'm looking for something in the Gregory family." And I'll say, "It happened in 1952 or '58 and I don't know how to do it and where to go—if I'm shamed and don't want to be—feel like I'm being embarrassed. Because, see, I didn't know all I got to do is call you and you would ask me—if it's pertaining to the newspaper, you would say, "Well, what year do you think that was in the Oxford Public Ledger and so-and-so came out—as a death certificate or somebody died or obituary that's in the library?" I didn't know I could call and tell you that I need Mr. So-and-so's obituary and what year he passed, and you would say, "Well, I'll get it for you." And by the time you're here in a couple of days, I'll look that obituary up. I didn't know you could have it on microfilm and could pull it that quick.

HA: Yeah, we—but let me tell you this, Eddie. Everybody does not do it. Those were some of the things that I did when I was there. You may call there now, and they'll say, "I don't have time to help you," from what I'm understanding what they're going through with now.

EM: Yeah, have too much turnover.

HA: Uh-huh. Because they don't have that much help. But I always found, and there are two or three others that you could call, and they would do it for you. Now, [Fran Montague] is one that would do it for you because she's in genealogy. So, she

wouldn't mind doing it if you let her know and give her some time to do it, you know, two or three days. And she can pull it for you, or let her see if she can find it and call you back. But they just don't have that much help now.

EM: And the turnover—yeah, they have turnover.

HA: Yes, but they will have another lady come in March the first, a new director. So, I don't know how things are going to be then.

EM: OK. If you and I start educating blacks about going to the library, that's going to create a problem because then they'll be short-fused because they got so many coming in the library, which these people will continue to come, that they're going to find out that they need more help or need to get some more help that really understands what people are looking for and their needs. Because since you were the only black and you worked up front, now when they go in there, you won't see a black. That's going to be more of a problem on our families and our adults and our children now. And you knew kids that—you was a daycare center, too, a nursery in the afternoons. You knew whose parents to call and whose child was getting in trouble and shouldn't be in the library. And you saved our kids that way. Now, we don't have that.

HA: I know. There's nobody that—not another black on the front desk. And I think there really needs to be one there because when we have blacks coming in, I think a black child will listen to a black person if they tell him to behave. If they're running or something and the black person says, "Stop"—. But it seems as if a white person says, "Stop," there's an attitude between the black and the white. So it would be nice if there was a black person on the front desk along with a white person.

EM: Now, we're going to computers in the library. All right, I go in there almost every day and I does a lot of observing. I see the employees there spend a lot of time with white kids teaching them how to pull up their stuff with the computer, explaining how you use it. It's a manual there and you go right by the manual. But then sometimes, you hit the wrong key and you need to get out of it and how do I get back in it again? Now, that's going to be another problem for our black kids. It will be a white individual there and then they'll be afraid again. We're back to one again. What are we going to do when—?

HA: Well, what you need to do is talk to the County Commissioners and tell them we need a black person on the front desk. And it would be nice if we had a black Granville County person that would know the people. There's a black that works in the back but she is from Butner, and she does not know the Granville County people. It would be nice to get a black to work the front desk that is familiar with Granville County, that lives here and probably knows a lot of the people.

EM: It takes a long time to learn how the library functions. And I've been going in there and I live in there. And it's frightening.

HA: Well, it probably is to a lot of people, but after you start going in there so much, you'll find out that it's different, and it's easy to find things. For instance, if you go to the card catalogue and it has a number on it, all you need to do is go by that number. Say, for instance, it's 528.4, you go right in the stacks and you'll find that 528.4 and if the author's last name is McCoy, you look under McCoy. If the title you're looking for is Feeding Chickens, it should be the number, the author, and the title of the

book. If it's not there in that place, then it may be at one of the branches, so you can also fill out a card and request that book and they'll look it up.

EM: Now, you said branch?

HA: Uh-hum. I didn't know that you—explain how you transfer your books and when you need them, that too. I didn't know you could do that.

EM: OK. If a book is at a branch—we have four branches, which is at the community college. The library that is there at the community college in South Granville is part of our branch. It is financed by South Granville and—by the community college and Granville County. OK. All right, if we have a—we can't find a book at this library, at the Richard A. Thornton Library and the book is in the library at South Branch, all we do is—.

EM: Or Stovall?

HA: Or Stovall or Berea. All we do is call that branch, where it is, and they will send it to us or bring it to us. And then you'll get the book.

EM: So we have four—one main library and three branches?

HA: And three branches, right.

EM: OK. Blacks on the southern part—we have a large population of blacks on the southern part. How do we monitor them? Because I've gone down there and never see one but—all whites work in that library.

HA: They are all whites that work there.

EM: Why can't—?

HA: Well, it's not as—we have one person that's full-time there. We only have one full-time person, and two part-time.

EM: Well, if there was a part-time down there, kids or a black individual will learn when they are there and they'll feel comfortable about—it's just like I told you before. They don't know how to use the library and they're afraid.

HA: Uh-hum, you're right.

EM: Do you think that, as technology moves along, we're going to have to learn how to use the library and you're going to have to know what you're looking for when you go there because it's going to be more and more computers setting there and they're going to say, "You go to that computer and pull up this and pull up that." And we're going to have—we got a lot of kids that drag behind. The school can't—their computers is not—they can be used the same way, but you have to watch those kids. Because those computers we () the library be more expensive. And you have to watch the kids. You don't want to break them and different—you know, they have to be—.

HA: I don't think they'll be broken and they're easy to do and it tells you—there should be a poster which is by the one in the library that tells you how to turn it on, you know. And then most kids nowadays, if it's school kids, they have a computer that they can use in the school system. So, when they come to the library, most of the time they are familiar, very familiar with the computer. They're not afraid of them, so they just go right on and use them

EM: What do you think about the libraries at the schools? Have you found that's been helpful that—do they have problems?

HA: Well, the schools usually get what the library there needs, but lots of times they don't have enough when they're working on certain projects. So, therefore, some of those kids from the school will come to the library to do their article or whatever they

have to do. But, see, with the computer there at the library, the Richard A. Thornton Library, it's very easy to use and all they have to do is type in whatever subject they want and they can pull it right up, if we have it. And it goes whatever subject and then it goes on down whatever else they want on that subject. So, it's very easy for them to use.

EM: Why that we—as me—we will have to encourage people to go into the North Carolina—I mean, to the history room to look at different books on blacks in North Carolina, blacks in Granville County. There's a lot of history in that room that blacks is not educated on or don't know that they are entitled to look into those books. And there's a lot of knowledge in those books and a lot of resources. That's how I taught myself, is by the theses that's in there that's written by whites.

HA: Well, we also have microfilm. And so, anybody that wants anything, we have all the microfilms on slavery and all that. So, you can go in and anybody there will put the microfilm on the reel for you. And you can go and look up your history, look your name up, your parents, the ages they were at certain years, and it tells you the month that they took the census. And it's just exciting for anybody that's in the library just to go and look at a—look and see what they can see that's on a microfilm.

EM: OK. Let me tell you what happened to me. You're talking about microfilm. I wanted the 1920 census. OK. I got started—I think I've got two more precincts to finish up, which is districts—Tallyho is one more, and Fishing Creek. And I wanted the Central Orphanage. But let me tell you how it's filed on the microfilm and you've got to have a—you've got to know what you're doing. Because this is why you need help. In there, it listed the four Oxford, and then it said, after the four Oxford precincts—districts—then it said the orphanage. It don't say the white or don't say the black. I

found the black orphanage census of their children is at the end of the Belltown and Fishing Creek. If I didn't know any better, Mrs. Amis, I would have had white orphanage kids as that's who it is on the census, and when I got back or something—.

HA: Well, the white orphanage—I'll tell you why. The white orphanage is in the city of Oxford. The black orphanage is in Fishing Creek Township.

EM: Well, how do I know that? I think it's in the city. I know I should—well, you know.

HA: Well, it is in the city because Fishing Creek runs—part of it runs in the city—but you got to go by the townships. That's what it is. You have to go by the townships.

EM: Well, I accidentally—.

HA: Found it, uh-huh.

EM: By me having experience in the—.

HA: And what was the name of it then?

EM: It was under—you was right. It said Fishing—Belltown-Fishing Creek Township. And under it, it said Oxford Colored Orphanage. But you just could read it. But if I sent someone out of the street—and we could take them there today and say, "All right, we're going to load—we'll put the 1920 census in there." And say, "We want you to find the Central Orphanage census." They would never find it.

HA: No, because the name has changed, too.

EM: Right. And you have to see the film—you can focus your microfilm up and down and they don't know that. But it goes back to the more you use it, the more you learn.

HA: Yes. You're familiar.

EM: The more you get familiar. The more you educate yourself. I enjoy it, but you have to be very shrewd and watch what you're doing.

HA: That's right.

EM: And I would argue with you is—well, most everybody in Granville County is in the city, you know, because you take for granted.

HA: It is in the city.

EM: But, now—but, you understand, why would it be—why would they do that?

HA: Well, Fishing Creek Township runs in the city.

EM: I know.

HA: OK. What township are you in? Oxford?

EM: Yeah.

HA: Well, see, on Windy Mill where my house is is in Fishing Creek.

EM: About how many know that?

HA: I know, but that's what it is. It's in Fishing Creek.

EM: It goes back—.

HA: Well, that's why I think a lot of people start at the Courthouse, to the Register of Deeds Office, you know, so they can get where your house is and your township. They look up the name. You know what I mean? And get it like that and then when they go to the library, they know exactly what township they're in.

EM: You're right, but when you go in there, and they'll go to those books and give them to you so quick and get you started. Leave you and go back upstairs and you say, "Wait a minute. If any of their writing has been changed that we discussed before

we got started, I'm lost again." I need to go back and get that same lady and I'm ashamed because I can't read it. And when she left me, I could read what I was—I could understand that writing. Now, I need another book. And a lot of times, she'll say, "Well, you take this book and when you're through, get this number." You'll go to the book to pull it, you'll get what you want. It's [the rank].

HA: Well, see, that comes right back from knowing how to use the library.

EM: That's right.

HA: Because that's in the same [way] that the library is.

EM: I'm going to end up back to the library.

HA: Uh-hum. Yeah.

EM: But I didn't know any better. But I learned about the Register of Deeds Office. But I know that I don't end up back at—most of the times, you'll end up back at the library. And it goes back to what you just said and alluded to: that we need a minority, which is black, on the front desk where it will take the fear and take the time to work with you and that will make it more, you know, make it more pleasant. Because Joyce up there, that white lady will bend over backwards for blacks but blacks don't know that! Me, you know.

HA: Well, that's—just like I said, you need to go see Mike [Berry] and the county manager and tell him what we need.

EM: I had Joyce helping me so much, the lady came and pulled rank and [cut her out of that eye.] But Joyce is not in that department and she shouldn't be helping me, but she don't know. Joyce was helping me and she knew what she was doing, but you know.

HA: She does. She knows what she's doing. She's been there—it'll be thirty-two years in May.

EM: But—

HA: She knows exactly what she's doing.

EM: I understood and Joyce understood that we—it was smoothed out, you know. It was fine. But if it was someone else, they wouldn't have liked what this lady said because Joyce gave them what they need.

HA: Uh-hum.

EM: All right. Then, blacks don't know Joyce will help them.

HA: No, they don't.

EM: They don't know that Joyce will bend over backwards for them.

HA: Uh-hum.

EM: Because that's what you done when you was there. When you had two or three blacks or had people, you'd say, "Well, go help her Joyce. We'll help you with your work or what you need."

HA: Yes, sure did.

EM: And then they found out, hey, this lady, she knows what she's doing. She don't have any problem. And I feel comfortable with her working with me.

HA: Yeah.

EM: But, I'm going to be honest. Going into the library now, it's—it used to be open, but now they carries that stuff on the inside of them, that discrimination. You can't pick it up and tell it. And it's just—you know, it's just hard. And it was a great lose to the community, and especially the black community, when you left, but then blacks don't

know how valuable you were to the white community that didn't know system that you was helping. Now, look at how many whites you have helped that blacks didn't know.

HA: And when I go there right now for myself, you know, to get a book or for something, the white people walk up to me right now and say, "Can you help me?" like I'm still working there. Of course, I go on and help them, but I mean, you know.

EM: I've seen you in the library—last week.

HA: Yes.

EM: But see, whites that can't read or don't know what they're looking for in the library—blacks don't know it—they get on the telephone and they ask especially for you. And they come and will you look so they won't be embarrassed when they get there.

HA: Right. You're right about that.

EM: But we don't know that you can do that.

HA: Uh-hum. Well, we need somebody on that front desk. We really do.

EM: And it's a very important place to be affiliated with. It's very, very educational if you're working in genealogy where I work at. You'll learn a lot. A world of information is right there at your hand if people—.

HA: And it's a shame not as many people use the library. Not that many use it. We should have a lot of people using it. But a lot of people don't understand that it's a place of education, that they can come in and I don't care what they're looking for—. For instance, we have a lot of people that want to go abroad—they're traveling—we have books to tell you what to look for when you're traveling.

EM: That's true.

HA: What to eat, what not to eat. Where to go and where not to go. All of those different things, but—.

EM: Well, see, I didn't know that.

HA: But people don't realize that.

EM: I call AAA, or I'll call someone booking me for a cruise and find out where—and where I'm going, you got the books. You have the magazines.

HA: And we got the Atlas, the Road Atlas that tells you what road to take. We even got a book there of hotels with the 800 number and if you're looking for a Holiday Inn, it tells you where it is and it tells you a lot about it. Back there where the atlases are, on that stand, there's a book. You go back there and look. And it tells you, for instance, if you want to look up New Orleans, it tells you the hotels in New Orleans, where they are and it gives you a little brief history about it. You have a lot of things that people don't know about.

EM: How do we educate our people that they have to spend more time in the library like I do? Because it takes a long time and I learn something every day when I go in there.

HA: I know you do.

EM: And I didn't know that we had a—I had seen one old book that had hotels and different things, but I didn't know we have a up-to-date one. You get one every year or every quarter or however.

HA: Yes, we have. But that's a real thick one and it tells you about all the hotels, all that. We've got books with 800 numbers, all that stuff.

EM: And I've got a book at home I zeroxed out of Black Heritage that tells you all the different blacks that's—.

HA: Oh, we have a book that, if you—have you noticed our display we have there?

EM: Yeah, I looked in it.

HA: OK. We haven't finished because—now, we're trying to find Granville County people to put in there for this month. Because Bessie McGee and I worked for January and February, but we looked in the book, The Black Almanac, and found all these inventions that blacks had made and then we came home and found the material. If you look in the display case—.

EM: I'll look back up there today.

HA: And you will see what black people invented. We have black inventions in there. For instance, the shoe lathe, and who would have thought that a black person would have invented the golf tee?

EM: You've got to be kidding!

HA: No, there's a black person that invented the golf tee, the egg beater, the basin—you know, where you wash your hands.

EM: I've seen that section.

HA: OK.

EM: That—I didn't know that basin—.

HA: Well, you go there and look. They invented the mop—just look at all that stuff. We have the person's name and the date they invented it, right there by it. They invented the—what else was it?

EM: Red lights for Washington, DC.

HA: Yeah, but we didn't have any red lights, so we couldn't put any red lights there. But you'll see everything that we could find and put there that they invented. And the person's name and the date that they invented it is right by whatever they invented.

EM: Did y'all start early doing research, or you could come up with that material between families, or what?

HA: No, we came up—most of it came up between our family and Mr. Washington. And Bessie McGee and—did you know a black man also invented the horseshoe?

EM: No.

HA: I know it, see? There a lot of things that we put out there so people would look and see. I think it's very good, myself, because it's teaching people what blacks—it has the year that they invented it, the month, the date and the year. And we found all that in The Black Almanac.

EM: How long are that going to be on?

HA: For two months.

EM: This is the last—?

HA: For January and February.

EM: OK. I'm going research—I'm going to go up there and write down all the different things. And the almanac is in the library?

HA: Uh-hum.

EM: OK. You'll show me the one that you people worked out of?

HA: Yes.

EM: And I'll xerox out—do some work out of that, too. I think that we could talk a little bit about black history since it's February and this is Black History Month. I think the school kids should focus more on their own county, what blacks contributed, what blacks did. Blacks moved houses, how many schools, different things that you'd be surprised of what blacks have contributed.

HA: Well, you might enjoy—I don't know who would have it, but I know the radio, WCBQ, this morning announced about the menu for the schools. And on the back of that, they have different questions for Black History Month that you match, you know. And I do know one of them, they talked about who was the first black county commissioner. And they had the answer, you know, Dr. Colson. And then, they had who was the first black—I think it was—I'm not sure if it was who's superintendent of schools? Now, I know they named Hubert Gooch as associate superintendent. I believe he was the first black associate superintendent. And they just had different things, you know, like that. And I thought that was good to start off this month with.

HA: A lot can be done and it's a lot of work out here for—. People tends now—these talk shows, Mrs. Amis, has gotten where stories—these talk shows on TV now, every time you turn one on—. I don't have any problem with ladies, but we have saturated our talk shows. I look at them at twelve o'clock at night. You can get your talk show. And we won't turn loose those televisions and things and take an hour or two to go to the library or in our church to get them to talk about these things. But since you brought up the idea of the church, I'm going to start going from church to church to start talking about blacks using the library.

HA: Well, if you want to do that, if you get a name or get them and set a certain time, I'll come up and show the blacks how to use the library.

EM: OK. OK, I'll mention that down there to Cathy at the Senior Citizens because I go through there every day. And I'll tell her that you don't mind doing a tour of the library with those ladies because eighty percent or ninety percent of them are [blind] and they will enjoy that.

HA: If she'd get a list of them—you know, if you can work it out with her. I don't mind showing them.

EM: OK. And as I move around, I'll get a few people, if they want to—.

HA: And in the different churches, because you'll find—if you talk to the ministers, I think, because the ministers mostly—the people will do, the members will do whatever the minister say, lots of them.

EM: Yeah, yeah. He will have some support.

HA: Yes.

EM: Right. And another thing that I'm working on, that I found out that in my research—that—when I finish—ninety percent of these churches, blacks came out of white churches into their church.

HA: Sure.

EM: So, that's something I'm excited about that I found out. What happened, they—I asked blacks for their church history. They give it, some of them wrong. They don't answer, let me help them. They won't do it because they feel embarrassed. I was talking to [George Allen]. We had lunch () and I hit him on the shoulder. You know, everybody comes in the store. He came to store and was talking with me and I told him I

wanted to go down to his church. They spent a lot of money on their church refurbishing, restoring it. And they have where the ladies sit on one side, the men was on the other side. They have a balcony where the slaves sat. They have the whole thing intact and it had never been touched. And I told him I'm going to process or sent out letters to all the white churches. I want to come in and look ...

[END OF TAPE, SIDE A]

[END OF INTERVIEW]

[SIDE B NOT TRANSCRIBED]

Uncorrected Transcript of

Interview

with

HELEN CURRIN AMIS

15 FEBRUARY 1996

by James Eddie McCoy, Jr.

Transcribed by Wesley S. White

The Southern Oral History Program
The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

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BEGIN SIDE B**HELEN CURRIN AMIS
2/15/96**

EM:visiting with Mrs. Helen Amis, we were talking about the library at the last time I interviewed her, and we have finished that, we are going to talk about her family, this morning, and this will be the last interview, her address is 1304 Raleigh Street, today's date is February 15th, 1996. Mrs. Amis, uh, I need your name and the date.

HA: Helen Currin Amis, and February 15th 1996.

EM: What, did your community call when you was coming up as a kid?

HA: Call it Antioch community.

EM: Did you go to school in your community?

HA: Yes.

EM: What school did you go to?

HA: Angier B. Duke school.

EM: Give me some history on Angier B. Duke, please, about the principal and the teachers, at that school.

HA: Mrs. Lina Smith was principal of the school, and Mrs. Errol Littlejohn worked there. Mrs. Rossetta Amis, Mrs. Willie Gibson, uh, Mrs. H.P. Cheatham, Mrs. Catherine McGee, Charles Gregory, Boman Burton, uh, let's see, what was it, Beachie Gooch.....

EM: H.P. Cheatham, explain, who was H.P. Cheatham?

HA: Mrs. Cheatham, Mrs. H.P. Cheatham was Mr. Cheatham that was at the orphanage, it was his wife, he was the congressman, for uh, a long time ago.

EM: Okay, so tie, the school is tied in with the, the school was built for the orphanage and they let the kids in the community.....

HA: The kids in the community went to the school, the school was a large school, and it was, it was on the orphanage campus.

EM: Um, I heard that that, and most of the children that went to that school turned out to be real good students as they went into the high school, why? Uh, classes were smaller, the teachers?

HA: No, the classes weren't that smaller, we just had good teachers. The teachers at that time were interested in the children, and everybody that was in the community, lived in the community, and the teachers knew the parents, and the parents and teachers worked together to help the children to learn to see that they got their lessons out at night, and it was always you could go into the school and talk to the teachers about your child, and you very seldom found any children giving trouble in that school, and I guess it was due to the discipline, the teachers had for the students at that time.

EM: And, it was a good school, because, for kids that was orphanage kids because the teacher was their mother and father, and they nursed them along and looked out for them, and gave them, treated them fair, and everybody was included in all the activities, and things like that, and they didn't have any pressure on them about the kind of clothes they wore, or what they had.

HA: uh, yeah.

EM: How many of your sisters and brothers started out there at Angier B. Duke?

HA: All of them, everybody went there.

EM: Do you want to name them all?

HA: Well, at first it was Helen and Doris, Rose, Ernestine, Flora, Calvin and Jean.

EM: How far did the school go to?

HA: Eighth grade.

EM: So, everybody, you had graduation so too?

HA: Yes, we had a graduation exercise, and then, you would leave there after graduation, and go to Mary Potter, and during that time, we had, we could walk down the street about uh, two hundred feet and get a bus, because at that time, you could not ride to school on a bus unless you were two miles away from the school, and we liked a little bit of being two miles away from school, so we would walk down the street, 'bout two hundred feet to get the bus to go back to school, to go to school, to Mary Potter.

EM: So, orphanage had their own bus, to transport kids....

HA: Yeah, they had their own bus, to transport their children. But this was the county bus that came through Fairport and Antioch and all around to pick up students and take them, and at that time we only had one bus in this area, and that bus carried a load, the first uh, first and then it go back and get a second load to, across the county.

EM: You kidding.

HA: That's right. Uh huh, and?????????????

EM: What it carry, young kids first in the morning, or older kids?

HA: Huh uh, everybody from in that community rode the same bus.

EM: Okay, so it would go drop you off, and then come back.....

HA: Drop us off, and then he would go another route, and get those.

EM: Oh, okay.

HA: Uh huh.

EM: Oh, okay, that's the way they did it.

HA: Yeah.

EM: Uh, what about Antioch school, as you was going to school, did you have friends going to Antioch school and you was going here?

HA: They didn't have Antioch school when I was, they didn't have school over in Antioch, when I came along.

EM: It was closed down, that early?

HA: Yes.

EM: Oh, okay, didn't nobody tell me that.

HA: Uh huh, they didn't have a school, where that school that was over there, evidently was long time ago, before any of us went to school. Because all the people from Antioch ran in this area to.....

EM: They would walk over here.

HA: Uh huh, they would come over here to school. The Hargroves' George Hargrove, and all of them came to school here.

EM: I didn't know, now, from Dickerson too? Because that wasn't but two miles nowhere.

HA: I don't know where they went from Dickerson, I guess they caught the bus and went to Orange St., I think a lot of them. But a lot of them used to come here, because the buses used to pick 'em up and put them off at Angier B. Duke.

EM: Yeah, 'cause all my friends that was, that started Angier B. Duke, that moved over to Henderson Street in that area, they could continue to come back to the orphanage. But I couldn't, they wouldn't take me in, because I never....

HA: Yes, well we, the bus would bring them on around to the school, like they bus students to the schools now.

EM: Um, tell me about, what did you, everybody carried their own lunch, or.....

HA: No, at first, we had a cafeteria for a long time.....

EM: You would eat at the orphanage cafeteria?

HA: No, had a cafeteria in the school, on the second floor, uh huh, had a cafeteria, had people cooking in it, you could buy your own lunch.

EM: The orphanage kids walked back over to their.....

HA: They came back over to their....

EM: Building?

HA: Yes, for lunch, they came over to, back to their cafeteria.

EM: But you had enough kids in the community....

HA: In the community to have a cafeteria there.

EM: Oh okay. Was that, the state paid for the teachers, and the orphanage maintained the upkeep of the building?

HA: Yes. They paid for, they paid the teachers, and they also paid the janitor. But the building was kept by the orphanage.

EM: What about your supplies and things like that?

HA: They came from school, just like the others, they went on the same order as Orange Street, or any other school, Mary Potter, or any other school like that. And see, those buses would come through, and come through and here and drop a load off, and then they keep on like until the highest schools like Mary Potter and those.

EM: Let's talk about your father first, tell me a little history about your father, where he came from.

HA: Well, my father was born right in the house where they live now, right on west Antioch drive, where my mother lives now. He was born there. And uh, my grandfather, they call him Time Currin, and he was a great politician, he used to walk twenty miles just to cast his vote, and you didn't find that many people, blacks voting at that time, but uh, when it gets back to the Currins, my, uh, Robert Currin and Carolina Cooper Currin, uh, got married in the year, about 1856, and Caroline was born something like 1840, 'cause she was approximately 16 years old when she married, and then, uh, Caroline, it was recorded in the books that Caroline and Robert, in 1866 marriage to the free people books. And in 1870 Caroline and her children, Spencer and Lucy Currin, were listed in the household of Manson Breedlove and his wife, Patsy Cruise Breedlove. And, they were in Oxford Township, now, Lucy Currin, was my, uh, great, was my great aunt. My grandfather's name was Spencer Currin. And Spencer and Lucy were sisters and brothers, and then from Spencer Currin was born, uh, Lucy Currin and then Spencer Currin and then Agnes Currin. And all of them lived right in this area, now, and then from Spencer, Lucy Currin, didn't have any children, and Agnes had a son that died as a baby, and Spencer Currin, was my father, had seven children, and it was Helen, Doris, Rose, Ernestine, Flora, Calvin, and Jean, and of those children, Calvin died in 1992, October the 2nd. And my father died January 23rd 1990. And that was Spencer Currin.

EM: Okay, I knew Mrs. Agnes Currin, 'cause this, that's your aunt, and you presently live in her home, in her home. Where she was, how long did they live here? All, after she left home, they came here and lived? Her and her husband, or where did they go?

HA: No, they lived in the house up there, the uh, where Mrs. Hicks lives, when they first got married. And then they had this house, this house built here, but all this land in here from back from West Antioch drive, all the way back to the Cheatham's, and all the way back down here, was Mr. Kittrell owned it, and Mr. Kittrell was my uncle Jack's uncle, well his grandfather. And his mother was Mrs. Clory Currin, and Mrs. Clory Currin, when he, he gave all the children land, his children, land and this house, he built the house, they built here on West land.

EM: Um, Mrs. Agnes, you going, you will describe all your father's brothers and sisters, but I just know her, she were always quiet as a cat, and uh, always mild, didn't never get loud or anything?

HA: No, and she worked at the orphanage for about 26 years over in the dining room, and the children, just about the year before she died, they honored her, and they talked about how good she was, and how nice she was to them, and how much they enjoyed her, and how much she taught them how to live, and things like that, and how she taught them how to cook.....

EM: It's kind of like home economics, a little bit like that. Okay, and the kids helped, worked in there, washed treys, and did stuff like that?

HA: Yeah, washed dishes, they did everything, cleaned....

EM: I did that too.

HA: And they had to cook.....

EM: You could get a free lunch when I was at Mary Potter, at Orange Street, at Mary Potter if you worked in the cafeteria. When they got out there, you could get a free lunch, and they give you a dollar, or something for, yeah.... uh, we didn't miss no days 'cause that incentive, for a free lunch and a dollar was lot of money. You know, for us, so I can understand that, uh, what about her husband, I never seen, I wasn't old enough, where did he come from?

HA: No, he died, but he came from here, he, they lived in this community, right here, that's where, see, his grandfather owned all this land.....

EM: What was his grandfather's name?

HA: He was a Kittrell

EM: He was a Kittrell, okay. Oh, okay, uh, tell me about another one of your uncles and aunts, on your father's side, I didn't know anybody....

HA: My aunt Lucy was the oldest one, and she never, she was very quiet, but she worked at the Imperial tobacco factory for many years, in the office there, at that time, she carried mail, and did things like that, around the office....

EM: What was her name?

HA: Lucy...

EM: Currin?

HA: Yeah, she was a Henrihand, she married a Henrihand.

EM: Oh, and uh, she walked to work and back, or.....

HA: No, she, her husband took her to work, she didn't drive, but he drove, so he took her to work. And it's H-e-n-r-i hand.

EM: Thank you.

HA: Uh huh, there is a lot of people who spell it wrong.

EM: Yeah, I did too, I should have asked, that's what I supposed to do. And the Hand is H-A-N....

HA: Yeah, it's h-e-n-r-i h-a-n-d

EM: Okay, tell me another, and how many years you think she did that type of work?

HA: I guess about 25 years.

EM: She went to school then?

HA: Uh huh.

EM: Did, what school did they go to, your, your father and them go to?

HA: Well, see when, they went to Mary Potter, when you finish Mary Potter, you could go on out, some of them went to what they called a normal school, I don't know what that was, like a year or so.....

EM: I have, I've got research on that.....

HA: Uh huh, but they could go on out and teach and do whatever they wanted to.

EM: Where did they go, your father and them go to school at when they, in Antioch or....

HA: Uh no, they went to Mary Potter.

EM: In the first grade?

HA: Oh, no, when they were in the first grade, they went to the school that uh, Mrs. Annie Rogers had.

EM: Thank you. I have it down, and people ask me, uh, they didn't know anything about that, but yes, you verifying it for me.....

HA: Uh huh, Mrs. Annie Rogers....

EM: Where was the house at? I got it

HA: I don't know uh, it was somewhere back down in here, I mean, you know, back down by, where my sister Jean and Roy live, somewhere back over in there.

EM: What was that, Annie.....

HA: Annie Rogers.

EM: I got the house in the wrong place, I put the house in front, over there at Doc Chavis, cross in front of Doc.....

HA: But that's her house, that's where she lived, but they had a little one house school back in there, somewhere. She didn't teach in her house, she had a one house school, that's what I understood....

EM: She taught at Bridges Chapel.

HA: Maybe that's what it was.....

EM: That's what it is, uh huh...

HA: Okay, uh uh, I know she had, it was a school back there, that Mrs. Annie Rogers talk about, you see.....

EM: Okay, she must, she was in charge of the whole school....

HA: Uh huh...

EM: Uh huh, that's Bridges Chapel.

HA: Okay. Well, where was it, wasn't it back down in here? It wasn't at her house.

EM: Right, right where they, uh a postage shop is, right back in there about, about fifty feet, 'cause it drops off, if you go down and come in where the sewage treatment plant is, it's a hill there, and uh, the reason they uh, I can tell you a story about that school, Mrs. Picket didn't go, but her oldest sisters and them went over there, Mrs. Rachel Faucet, and Mrs. Chavis went there, but Mrs. Chavis, she wasn't, when I was interviewing her, she wasn't, she couldn't tell me....

HA: Well, see my daddy, and Mrs. Chavis, I think, was about, I always heard dad say, was about fourteen months older than my daddy, Mrs. Chavis was, so all of them went to school over in that section, but, that's where I thought was back down in there somewhere.

EM: Well, what happened, there is too much red dirt in there, and when it rained it was muddy, and you can't get in there, you know, and it.....

HA: Well, is the building still there?

EM: No, huh uh, it's gone, and that's how Antioch church came, that's, what they did was, it was too bad over there for walking and getting in after the weather was bad, so, what they did was, they decided to build a school over here where Antioch, where Raleigh Road Church is, and after they built the school, you wouldn't believe this, uh, a minister came along, and talked them into having prayer service, or having bible study, on Wednesday nights, because the school wasn't being used, and so the members went along with it, but he was a minister preaching in houses, like he had four, two or three different denominations, and what happened was, he, he got where they believed in him, so he talked them into using the school on Sunday, said because the children don't use it. And then, when he got his foot in that door, then he said look, let's let the children walk to Mary Potter, walk to Orange Street, because the orphanage is building a school, and they can go there, and they lost the school, on account of the minister, and they didn't agree with it, Mrs. Picket say, but, you know how the minister, he's right, and so that's the story behind that, and that's why my research is what come first, the church or the schools, that, that was a school of Bridges Chapel, but the minister take it away from them. And so, that was one of the problems we had, of, back then, our parents, for parents had, 'cause a minister would preach over in one side of town, with fifteen or twenty people, he'll be a Methodist, he'll be a Baptist, he'll be a Presbyterian, or whatever, and then when he get a hold on everybody, he'll decide what he want to make the church.

HA: huh, I didn't know that...

EM: Yeah, and then he break up the denominations, everybody had to go with him, so, um, that's the story behind where your father went to, went to school at. It was called Bridges Chapel.

HA: Yes, uh huh.

EM: And uh, Mrs., did, tell me something about Mrs. Annie **Payton**?? What's her name, what was her name? Wasn't that the lady's name that used to live down here, uh, you, uh you ...????, what was the lady's name?

HA: Harris.

EM: yeah yeah.

HA: Lucretia Harris. Uh huh, um, all I know is Lucretia Harris, she taught in a school....

EM: Yeah, she taught at black ground school....

HA: Uh huh, that's all, I didn't, I just knew her, her husband was a minister....

EM: Oh, okay...

HA: Uh huh.

EM: Where about, just from anywhere, did he ever have a church?

HA: I don't know, I thought he, I think he used to preach at Raleigh Road. Over on Raleigh Road, I believe that's where he preached, 'cause he used to come by walking, going up to church, so it must have been Raleigh Road.

EM: He might have been that minister.

HA: I don't know.

EM: You are, you can check around the facts.....

HA: Well, it's a whole lot about that...

EM: Yeah, I know...And that's uh, Mrs. Amis, I can tell you I, reading about Stovall, you keep going in there and keep going in there until you get the right piece, because all whites control the material, and uh, I got a same piece of uh, I got over to the real history too, and there was a problem there about the school and the church too, and I was reading through the history, it supposed to have been a church, and it took it for a school, took the school for a church, and they, uh, who was the strongest in the community cannon.

HA: Yeah.

EM: You know, took a bad....

HA: Did like they wanted to?

EM: Yes, if you call it, so whites had that same problem in Stovall, that's the only area that I found out, but yeah, we had it, but they had the same problem that we had, with people taking their, their community over, and, and those people thought they was right.

HA: Yeah, uh huh.

EM: Uh, you got another one?

HA: Oh, now, that was all of my daddy's side, well, he was married, my daddy's mother, which is Spencer Currin that I was telling you about, the one they call Time, he was married to Mamie Owens, Time Currin was my grandfather, and he was married to Mamie Owens, and Mamie Owens, you remember the man that we call Uncle Joy, now used to be at church, Joy Owens, used to be down there at first Baptist? Well, that was his sister.

EM: Uh, you got to spell that Owens, 'cause Mrs. Gregory said.....

HA: O-W-E-N-S.

EM: Okay.

HA: Uh huh, that's how they spell that.

EM: Mr. Gregory said get a dictionary. I said, when you spelling.....

HA: The Currin side is very small, 'cause it was only three children, and, my family, see it was my daddy, and my two aunts.....

EM: So, your father was the only one that had kids, huh?

HA: Yes, 'cause my aunt Agnes had uh, a child, but the baby lived about a month.....uh huh, and so my daddy was the only one, and he had enough for all of them, there was seven of us.

EM: Okay, let's.....

HA: So, now on my mother's side, my mother, my mother's mother had eight children.....

EM: What's your mother's, what was your mother's full name.

HA: My mother's name was uh, Ethy Currin, she wasn't Ethy Currin, Ethy Davis. And her name name was Ethy Jane, she married Robert Davis, and she had Lula, James, Robert, Johnny, Herbert, Beatrice, Rosetta, and Gladys. And those were her children.

EM: So, your mother had how many sisters and brothers?

HA: It was, my mother, it's eight of them.

EM: Eight?

HA: It was eight of them. Okay, my aunt Lula died and James died, Robert, and my uncle Johnny just died, he was ninety years old, he just died last October. And Herbert died, and aunt Rosetta died, and momma, which is Ethy Beatrice, and Gladys, are the only two living, the baby, and the near baby.....

EM: Now, Mrs. Ethy Beatrice.....

HA: Ethy Beatrice is my momma, Currin.

EM: Oh, okay, okay...

HA: yeah, Ethy Beatrice is the Currin, that's my momma.

EM: Uh huh...

HA: Uh huh.

EM: And what about the other two, where do they live?

HA: Okay, Gladys is, lives out at Olive Grove, right across from the church, Olive Grove Church, and she married a Satterwhite. And this is Margaret that works at uh, central bank, that's her mother. Okay, and Margaret married Harvey Howell.

EM: Okay, now tell me about that one.

HA: Rosetta has one son that lives in uh, Connecticut, and his name is uh, Robin, and my mother had eight children, that was Ethy Beatrice, and then Herbert had one child, that's named Louise, and lives in California, now, Herbert married uh, wait a minute, what's that child's name, somebody from here, he married uh, Louise, Julia Bridges. And the Bridges are related to.....

EM: How you spell that Bridges?

HA: B-R-I-D-G-E-S And they are related to uh, what's the dog catcher?

EM: Roberson?

HA: Yes. Well, his momma and Louise are, I think they were sisters.

EM: Now, uh, it was a black man in Oxford about two months ago, looking for the Bridges, the blacks, and they told me it wasn't any.....

HA: Uh huh, Julia was a Bridges, and they had one daughter and her name is Louise, and she lives in California.

EM: Where did these Bridges come from?

HA: Right up there at uh, go all the way up Linden Avenue, and run into, on Broad Street, where you run out up there, um, where that fish market is on the corner up there, and it goes, Alexander, and it go right across there, and it's the first house on the left, that's where the bridges live.

EM: Where?????? and them live now?

HA: Uh huh. Go out, is it the first one, wait a minute, is it another house there, the next house?

EM: Josephine Grimm own that

HA: Huh uh, no, not Josephine.....

EM: Mr.???????

HA: Yeah, well, is it another house in there? Yeah, it's another house there, that's, one of the girls live there now.

EM: Okay.

HA: She could tell you that the Bridges lived there. And that's where uh, what's his name, you just called his name, Roberson. Roberson's family came from that house up there.

EM: Yeah, that's next door?

HA: That's next door, that's where they lived. And see my uncle married one of them. They were Bridges.

EM: That's why you do research, ain't it?

HA: Uh huh....

EM: 'Cause I didn't know, I never ran into any Bridges since I been out here.

HA: Uh huh, well, they were the Bridges, that was my uncle Herbert, and then my uncle Johnny, married a Winston, married Lillian Winston. Uh, Scrap Bass, you know Scrap Bass? From out at Olive Grove? They live on Hancock Road.

EM: Okay, yeah, uh huh.

HA: In uh, you probably know uh, Matt Davis, that live on Summit Avenue, well, that's their family.

EM: Uh huh, 'cause he married into the Kittrell, one of Davis boys married uh.....

HA: No, that's uh...

EM: That's a different?....

HA: That's the same Davis, that's uh, Lord, let me get the boys name, there is so many of them, let's uh, Kenneth, Kenneth married a Kittrell girl.

EM: Right.

HA: Uh huh. Well, that's the, those are my first cousins too.

EM: Now where do Red????????? and them come in at.

HA: Okay, I'm getting to that, let me see, that was Johnny, Robert Davis, was, his, his daughter is Debra Siton, that worked for Dr. Chavis. That's my momma's brother's child.

EM: That come from out at Olive Grove?

HA: Uh huh. They live out at Olive Grove. And see that was all, that's where my momma was born, and that's where all that land out in there. And it was my uncle's land. Okay, and then you come back to James Davis, was Red's daddy.

EM: Okay.

HA: You know what I'm saying, that's my other uncle James.

EM: Okay.

HA: Was Red's, that was momma's brother, that's Red's daddy, Red, E.L. Sabera, and Johnny. John died.

EM: Right.

HA: Uh huh. And then, he, my other aunt was Lula, and she had one child, and he died a long time ago. And that's my mother's side of the family.

EM: Okay, any of her brothers and sisters went to the service? Was any of her brothers in the service, do you know?

HA: I don't think so, huh uh.

EM: How many of them finished the eighth grade, on your mother's side.

HA: Okay, uh, I know Lula went to Mary Potter, and I think all of them finished the eighth grade. I think they did.

EM: Okay, your, your father's side, how far did they go?

HA: All of them finished the eighth grade....

EM: All of them, and then the went, the ones that, who else taught school besides Mrs. Annie?

HA: She didn't teach, talking about Lucy.

EM: Did your father have anybody teach school, in his class, in his family?

HA: Huh uh, no.

EM: Okay. Uh, did your father have anybody go to service? On his, any of his brothers?

HA: Uh huh.

EM: Okay...

HA: He didn't have any brothers, only three of them.

EM: Uh, your father was always free?

HA: What you mean?

EM: His family was never in slavery?

HA: Huh uh. My father's father, they were mulattos, so he wasn't in slavery.

EM: Uh huh, mulattos.

HA: Uh huh, mulattos, yeah.

EM: Okay uh, that's what they were, okay your mother was uh....

HA: My mother's mother was part Indian.

EM: Okay, tell me a little bit about what you, what about it, or why, how did she know her mother was part Indian, what did she say?

HA: Well, 'cause my grandmother always told us about uh, her family, and she, her people were Burwells, her father was a Burwell, and her mother was Lucretia Williams. And she always told us that her uh, some of her people her, died, and she was reared by it, her mother died when they were young. And they were reared by their uh, aunt, or something like that. She used to tell us, but, I forgot her aunt's name that she was saying.

EM: Where did they come up at, out there in the same area?

HA: Uh, yes, they were in that same area.

EM: Were they sharecroppers? Or, they own their own land?

HA: They own their own land.

EM: Your mother and father did, your, your mother's.....

HA: Uh huh, my mother's father.

EM: Was your mother any related to Mrs. Bibby? Didn't she used to live out there?

HA: huh uh, no, she wasn't related to Mrs. Bibby. Mrs. Bibby didn't live out there.

EM: Where was your mother's home church at, first?

HA: She used to go to uh, they lived, when they, she came when they were younger, they lived there though, before they bought the land over here on, in uh, Bell Town area, not Bell Town, what is it?

EM: Oak Grove?

HA: No, not Oak Grove. Olive Grove.

EM: Okay, oh, Olive Grove.

HA: Uh huh, Olive Grove. They, she, they lived out at uh, I think her father was sharecropping, whey they lived out at uh, what is it Horner's Crossing over here? By Joey Wright Funeral home.

EM: Okay.

HA: Whatever that was. And so she went to that church out there. The Methodist church, what was it, what was it?

EM: She went to the white Selma church?

HA: huh uh, it's not white, they???????????

EM: A.M.E. has been changed two or three times.

HA: Yeah, uh huh, well, that's where she first went to church.

EM: Okay, now let's go back, your mother was born out at Horner's.....

HA: Somewhere out there. Uh huh.

EM: That's where the Davis was born at?

HA: Uh, yes. I think so.

EM: Okay, we'll talk about that after we finish, 'cause I'm doing some research on that area. Okay, how, when back then your mother, your mother's father had how many children was it?

HA: Eight.

EM: Eight children, and did the granddaddy buy the land, or did her father buy the land?

HA: Her father moved out there and started buying the land, and he died, and so then their brother, finished it.

EM: Uh, that was....

HA: So, they own the land now, they have, some of the children have sown.....

EM: How many acres was it in all, at one time?

HA: 'Bout sixty some acres.

EM: They worked hard to get that. Uh, Mrs. Amis um, let's talk a little bit about sacrifice, I always ask uh, people to compare sacrifice to then, you and then, now, comparison, all the sacrifice those, uh, your, foreparents did, and they talk about it on tv too, a lot about sacrifice, about school, the conditions and the sacrifice, and what they gave up, those people gave up, you know they sacrificed a whole lot.

HA: Yeah, sure...

EM: Why was they so strong and everything?

HA: Well, they, when they came along, back then, the parents didn't, our parents didn't have as much. So, as usual, they will say, well, I want to do this, and let my daughter go to school, and, because, when I came along, I couldn't do it, you understand what I mean, so they want to leave more for their children, than they inherited when they came up. That's the main thing....

EM: But it was nickels and dimes and quarters now, the ones listening to this tape, it weren't no dollars and....

HA: Oh, no. Well, you think about it, when you went to school, sometime ago, whereas it cost so much now, they go to college, when you went then, you paid something like.....

EM: Three hundred....

HA: Yeah....you know, nothing now.....Yeah....

EM: Pay it when you want to.....In the sixties, yeah. Yeah, it changed in the seventies, but you are right, all the way up through the sixties, you could go to school for four or five.....

HA: Yes, but, now you go to school, it's going to cost, some people don't make as much a year, as you have to pay to go to college.

EM: Right, but what we was just talking about, was how much they gave up and sacrifice, and, and these kids don't know that they, used bags, sacks, they did everything that sew, on their hand....

HA: Oh, sure they did. 'Cause farmers used to get uh, then they made seed sacks, in flowered material, and after they finished the feed, they would make you a dress out of it. You know, things like that. And people didn't throw away things like they do now.

EM: And what they do the next year, people say they take the coat, and take it all the way down, and change it, reverse it, and turn it, they take the inside that was this year, and put it on the outside, and take the outside and put in on the inside, like you got a new coat.

HA: People did more things then than they do now anyway. Because now we can buy things, okay if we go to the grocery store and buy our sausage and things, I remember when I was small, my momma, when they killed hogs, they can that sausage, just like you can string beans and things, she take her sausage and cook it up, and fry it like you know, and put it in the jar, and then in the winter you had sausage to eat all winter, but people don't do anything like that now. That's not done now.

EM: Alright, we, our garden is the Food Lion, ain't it?

HA: Yeah, that's right. Uh huh, yeah.

EM: That was, you gave me a real nice overview of your family, and uh, I learned a lot, and some things that I have been working on, uh, came out, and everything, so uh, you, you, let's talk about the sacrifice your mother and father did, sending y'all to college and to school. Talk a little bit about how hard they had to work doing that.

HA: Well, when they stopped farming when we got older to go to college, and momma and daddy left here, and went to New York, and worked to put uh, my sisters and all

through school, through college, because they could make more working there, than they could here farming. So, they just left, and rented the farm out to a white man, called Bernum Stalther, and he took care of all our tobacco acreage and everything in the farm down there, while they were away working, and he paid them for the tobacco, you know, uh huh.

EM: Now, somebody was left back here, you was left back here to run the house.

HA: I was back here, I was about the only one that was here. Uh, I stayed back here and take care of the house and everything. 'Cause see it was two houses, we rent one house out. On the farm. Uh huh.

EM: Okay, so uh, what year did you go to school, you started?

HA: After, I went, you mean to college?

EM: No, your elementary school.

HA: Um, I don't remember the year that I went to elementary school. Uh, uh, I finished Mary Potter in '54 though.

EM: Where did you go to business school or college.

HA: Oh, I went to uh, through East Carolina, library science school, from East Carolina, what happened, they did not have enough certified librarians, in this area, so, we went to Louisburg College, uh, during the summer, and we went during the week, once, one night a week, to get our, Violet, and myself, and Joyce, and Henrietta.

EM: All of y'all carpooled together?

HA: Uh huh, we carpooled together, and then during the summer we would go from nine to one, you know, all during the summer. And, but it was a lady, Mrs. Quickmore, that came up from East Carolina, and taught the course to us. Library science.

EM: Okay, that's....

HA: And then I had to call reference, I had to go down to East Carolina, and stay for a week, all of us, and uh, use the library down there, for our reference department. To get a reference certificate.

EM: That's the, now, what you just described, that's what norm school is about too, it's the same way, they went to school that way too. And uh, they would work there, that's the way they worked it, uh, the orphanage kids, their church, they, they had their own church on campus, am I right?

HA: yes.

EM: And you people had y'all's out in the street.

HA: Well, not, no, I think they used to bring a lot of them to First Baptist, they had Sunday school there, they had their Sunday school at the orphanage, but, when they got ready to go to church service, they would take them to different churches within the area. They used to come to First Baptist, and go to Antioch, to the Presbyterian, and the Methodist church, they would take them around to different Sunday's you know....to different churches. But they always had the Sunday school up there.

EM: How many, explain this to me, how many, when you was going over to Angie B. Duke, did they have two rooms for first grade, two rooms for second.....

HA: No, we only had one room for each, first grade through the eighth grade, they was just one room.

EM: Okay.

HA: I mean, when I say one room, all the first grade was in one room. All the second grade in one room, and like that.

EM: Okay, so none of your kids, nobody had to be divided up?

HA: Huh uh.

EM: Okay.

HA: No, they taught all first graders in one room, and all second graders in one, and on through the eighth grade. But it was a, Mrs. Rosa Cousin taught me too.

EM: Tell me about your books, uh.....

HA: Our books were just like the other books, they were state books...

EM: Were they used? Somebody else had had them, like I had them?

HA: Yeah, just like the rest of them.

EM: The white kids that had them, you didn't know the names, and was outdated. That's one thing, uh, when I came up, like integrated neighborhood, I tell people, the only different I knew, the white kids I played with went to their school, and we went to ours, but by me knowing everybody, when I got a book, I knew it was whites that had it, because I knew, most all the blacks, and when we got that book, it has been used for years, three to four years before we got that book. And so people don't understand,

that's a setback for us to. And uh, you had quality teachers when you was at Angie B. Duke, 'cause they were kind of like hands on.

HA: Um, yes, uh huh.

EM: And they, that's the advantage of learning, because, y'all had to.....?????????? in each classroom, or the four school, or you read bible...

HA: We had devotion in each classroom but once a month, I believe it was, or once a week, we had devotion together, the whole school, and we used to walk from the school building, up to what we call the chapel, up here to have devotion, I believe it was once a month that we had devotion. And we'd, everybody would come from the school up here, and have overall devotion, you go back, and each teacher would be responsible for that devotion, you know, this time, and we would have people to get up, and sometime they would put skits on, you know, things like that.

EM: Did y'all have a chapel in your school?

HA: Huh uh...

EM: Where did you have.....

HA: We came over here to the chapel.

EM: Okay, y'all had y'all programs?

HA: Uh huh.

EM: Little different things, May Day, and different programs, and stuff.

HA: Well, May Day was always on campus.

EM: What about your current events, did y'all order, the school order.....

HA: Oh, yeah, we had things just like the library, we had a library over there.

EM: You did?

HA: We always had a library, when I was young and went to school there, we had a library, and each class would go to the library, a certain hour, you know, on a certain day, like our might have been Tuesday from, ten 'til eleven. You know, something like that. But if we needed something extra during the week, we could always go back at a certain time. But one class was going at a certain time, every week. And then when I went, when I finished school and went back to uh, work over here, I was in the library and we did the same thing.

EM: Uh, it's one thing you uh, I know you appreciate it and everything, but, since I've been doing research and everything, I tell people, I wished I'd have been brought up around books, you, you don't, I don't know how to say it, I guess you could describe it, you don't know how to, you don't know what's in it, or you don't know, uh, books, if you are around them, you'll like them, or some, how did you get hooked with books, per say, not as many at home, as you got into the library, how did you.....

HA: Well, I find that books is, anything that you want to know, is in a book. And you can find it. Anywhere you want to go, that you have heard about.....

END OF SIDE B