



The  
**Ladies**  
of **Oakwood**

The Power of the So-called Powerless

Edited by **Ciro Sepulveda** with **Lea Hardy**



# The Ladies of Oakwood

The Power of the So-called  
Powerless

Oakwood College Press  
Huntsville, Alabama

Copyright © Ciro Sepulveda 2003

All rights reserved

Printed in the United States

ISBN # 1-888867-16-7

# The Ladies of Oakwood

The Power of the So-called  
Powerless

Edited by *Ciro Sepulveda* with *Lea Hardy*



# Content

Introduction	7
Chapter One	13
Anna Knight	
Ciro Sepulveda, with Tia Graves and DeJuan Knight	
Chapter Two	31
Eva B. Dykes	
Ciro Sepulveda	
Chapter Three	45
Chessie Harries	
Natalie A. Griffin	
Chapter Four	55
C. E. L. Baskerville	
Camilia Rogers	
Chapter Five	69
Inez Booth	
Seneca Vaught	
Chapter Six	83
Alma Blackman	
Lee R. Cort	

Chapter Seven		91
	Jannith Lewis Lavinia Baxter	
Chapter Eight		111
	Williemae Erving Anita Dupree	
Chapter Nine		124
	Mineola Dixon Lavinia Baxter	
Chapter Ten		137
	Artie Melancon Nackecha Maddix	
Chapter Eleven		150
	Eurydice Osterman Angela Warden	
Epilogue		163
Index		167

# Introduction

When John Knight, elderly owner of a small plantation in the piney hills of south central Mississippi, arrived on horseback in Augusta, Georgia, in the spring of 1856, the small settlement boasted two stores, a blacksmith shop and a cotton gin, with an old courthouse at the center of town. On a high bluff above the landing, shaded by rows of sycamores and fragrant cedars, stood the inn at which Knight stayed. It was the trading season in Augusta, and dozens of visitors walked through the streets, taking in the sights and sounds of a bright spring morning.

The two stores in town had prepared for the season by bringing in unusual items to attract more customers. One store had a horse trader showing off his stallions and mares. The other was dominated by a slave trader. It seemed as if a country fair was about to begin.

The slave trader, a small time businessman trying to make it big, had herded his slaves into town the day before John Knight arrived. In the bigger cities like New Orleans or Mobile, slaves were sold on

auction blocks at the local slave market. In the 1850's, New Orleans had the largest slave market in the nation. Every year, thousands of slaves in chains traveled to New Orleans down the Mississippi River, because the highest prices for slaves could be attained in that city. The large slave-trading companies maintained teams of representatives in many northern slave states, who purchased, transported and sold slaves. In the small town of Augusta, the itinerant slave trader availed himself of any opportunity to sell his humans.

In the 1850's, the price of slaves was higher than it had ever been in the history of the United States. Although it varied with the economic conditions of the times, slavery in the deep South was passing through its golden age. And at the heart of the American slave trade was "King Cotton." When cotton increased in price, slave prices increased, and when cotton prices fell, slaves could be bought at relatively cheaper prices.

The most expensive slaves were strong young black males who could work in the fields. Light-skinned slaves, especially if they were white enough to "pass," were lower in price, because they usually created too much trouble for their owners. Many of the light-skinned slaves were constantly running away or taking their owners to court, arguing that they were free men. However, if the light-skinned slave had a trade such as blacksmithing or stone working, the price could be higher. Light-skinned women slaves were another matter. They were highly valued because in the deep South and particularly out on the frontier, they could be used as bar maids or prostitutes.

When he heard the commotion across the street, Knight was just mounting a beautiful white-stockinged sorrel mare which he had bought from the horse trader. He saw that the slave sale was about to begin. The bearded trader cracked his whip, tossing profanities in the air to attract attention and customers. A baby cried. Some people plodded toward the auction while others hurried away, uncomfortable with the scene of grief. Two husky black men rolled away a barrel of cider to make room for the display of human flesh. As Knight arrived, the whip cracked once again over the head of a young slave who carried a baby in her arms. The baby was light-skinned and appeared to be about a year old as the mother clutched her, tears streaming down her face.

---

---

The slave trader, irritated by the crying baby, shouted, "Get on up, you slut!"

The young girl hurried to the center of the platform, trembling and shaking. She was an unusual mulatto, beautiful with her tear-filled blue-green eyes. Her hair hung down to her waist, shining in the sun. She was really only a child herself, trembling at the thought that soon she would be sold and her baby would be taken from her.

"Make me an offer! What am I bid for the wench?"

For long, drawn-out seconds, there was no offer. The girl continued to weep in the silence. Her baby would not stop crying.

Sitting on his horse, John Knight barked, "Why don't you sell both of them for one price?"

The slave trader laughed. "The young'un is of little value – sick, and a she, and too white-mixed. But this woman has possibilities."

The slave trader strutted across the length of the platform, spat tobacco juice forcefully on the ground, and laughed loudly. His yellow-stained teeth glistened as he shouted, "Without the young'un, she'd sell high to the smart man who needs women for the brothels and saloons in the West. If only I had her out there!"

"Throw in the child and I will give you five hundred," spoke the old man.

"Oh, no, can't do that; each of 'em is worth that."

"You just said that the brat is worthless. But I'll give you six hundred for both of them."

The slave trader and Knight finally settled on six hundred for both mother and child. As Rachael, the mother, and Georgeanne, the baby, were being led away by John Knight, the young slave girl started to cry and beg for her other child, Rosette, a three-year-old girl who was being pushed out to the middle of the platform behind them. Rachael had caught John Knight on a good day, for on that April morning he bought her older child as well.

Knight rode out of Augusta proud of his accomplishments. He not only got the horse he wanted, but also Rachael, Georgeanne, Rosette, and a yet unborn child in Rachael's womb.

The story of Rachael Knight and her girls occurred and re-occurred hundreds of times. Female slaves were at the bottom of the social pyramid in North America. We cannot even imagine the pain,

humiliation, heartache and anguish that African-American women experienced in their effort to survive slavery and provide a better life for their children. This book is about the daughters of women like Rachael, Georgeanne, and Rosette.

Very little is known of the faceless African-American women, descendants of slaves, who have influenced the history of the United States. Since they are considered the least powerful, they are generally not included in the histories of the nation. Only the welfare mother, the junkie on coke, the prostitute, the entertainer, the athlete, appear in the limelight as the most common images of African-American females in our society today. These stereotypes frequently appear on television or in magazines and movies. None of the ladies found in this book fit, or come even remotely close to these categories.

What, then, did become of them? What roles did they play in the history of America? Why haven't their contributions to society been noted? These are some of the questions that pulsate at the heart of this book, pushing against the tide of commonly-held impressions. A superficial look might create the concept that African-American women have had very little impact on the course of the nation's history. *The Ladies of Oakwood* argues that such assumptions are dead wrong. It is the premise of this book that the so-called powerless are not so powerless at all. The influence that African-American females like the ladies of Oakwood had in shaping the history of their communities and the nation, has always been understated. Although these ladies do not fit the categories that we generally associate with power, their influence cannot be brushed aside as insignificant. *The Ladies of Oakwood* documents the impact that African-American women have had on the larger society in important and significant ways.

African-American women provide a good example of a type of power that transforms and alters the face of society continuously, yet goes unrecognized by historians. They are usually considered the least, the weakest, the ones with the smallest amount of influence in society, consequently not of much importance.

One of the underlying assumptions sitting at the bedrock of much of the history written about the United States argues that the past is shaped by rich, learned, Anglo-Saxon male leaders. Books about the great men of American history: John Adams, Benjamin Franklin, George

---

Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln, Andrew Jackson, Theodore Roosevelt and the like, line the shelves of libraries and bookstores.

In this volume, the reader will find the story of eleven ladies, all of them African-Americans who came out of modest and poor homes, grew up in the ghettos of the nation, and achieved adulthood in religious communities; to assume such persons are insignificant would be wrong and misleading.

If the history of the nation is to be understood with clarity, the roles of people like the *Ladies of Oakwood* need to be clearly documented and published. The powerless shaped the history of the nation in ways that are hard to measure, and generally not recorded, but their influence on their families, friends, and hundreds that came in contact with them cannot be ignored.

*The Ladies of Oakwood* is not about the suffering of African-American women, but rather about their power and how that power shaped the history of the United States. The book traces the lives of several women, descendants of American slaves who succeeded in taking their destinies into their own hands. It maps out how these ladies lived in a society that gave them nothing, showing how they turned hardships and misfortunes into successes.

The ladies in this volume are not atypical; their struggles and triumphs are like those of hundreds of other African-American women in the United States, and come from all over the nation. They greet us from Mobile, Gitano, Washington D.C., Kansas City, Huntsville, or Tulsa. The one factor that unites them is that they were all associated with Oakwood College, a small private liberal arts college in Huntsville, Alabama.

The book is the product of dozens of hours spent by upper division students in the History Department of Oakwood College as they talked to these ladies or their descendants. The interviews were conducted in the Spring Semester of 2001, with a few in 2002. The students who researched the lives of these ladies decided whom to interview, conducted the oral interviews, and wrote the chapters. For some of them, the ladies were complete strangers.

The first chapter of the book contains the life story of Anna Knight, the daughter of the sick baby who cried on the auction block

The Ladies of Oakwood

---

of Augusta that April morning in 1856. You'll read of Anna's varied career throughout the early and middle decades of the twentieth century. She continued to work well after her retirement. Although it would be impossible to calculate the number of people influenced by her teaching, there is no doubt that she shaped the world around her.

Most of the students whose research is contained in this book graduated from the college in the spring of 2001. Two are now in graduate programs, one is on her way to law school, and one has an internship in the capital of the State of California.

## *Anna Knight*

Ciro Sepulveda with Tia Graves and DeJuan Knight



With two pistols tucked under her skirt, thirteen-year-old Anna Knight tugged at the taut leader straps tied to the mules and struggled to keep up. The hot southern sun beat down on her laboring body as she left dark broken furrows behind the plow. Ever since she could walk, Anna had watched her mother plow, and when she turned thirteen she felt strong enough to believe that if her mother could do it, she could, too. At first the task nearly overwhelmed her, but Anna was not one to give up. Most girls her age would not have undertaken such a burden; however, Anna had an attitude which distinguished her from most thirteen-year-olds in the piney hills of south central Mississippi.

In the generation when Anna took to plowing, the state of Mississippi groped along, exhausted from the terrible toll taken by the

---

Civil War. More than a third of the 78,000 Mississippi soldiers who went off to war returned in caskets. And of those who returned alive, more than half came home with disabilities. In 1866, twenty percent of the state budget went for the purchase of artificial limbs for young soldiers who had lost arms and legs in the War.

Although Mississippi had been an ardent supporter of the Confederate cause, not all of the residents participated in the War or sympathized with it. In Jones County where Anna grew up, many of the Caucasians who were poor farmers believed that the War was a war to protect the interest of the rich. And since they were not rich, they saw no need to join the army. They were labeled Unionists. These farmers saw no benefit in fighting so that a few could maintain their slaves. Even after some were forced to join the Confederate Army, when the Twenty Negro Law was passed dozens of young males from poor families deserted and headed back home. The Twenty Negro Law stated that if you owned more than twenty slaves, you were not required to join the army; the law automatically exempted all plantation owners.

Newton Knight, Anna's white father, felt strongly that the war was an unjust war, and consequently did not join the army until forced to do so. On the battlefield he refused to fight, opting to become an orderly. When he got notice that his mother's horse had been taken by the Confederate forces, he deserted and returned to Jones County. There he led a group of deserters and established the Free State of Jones.

Newton was an illiterate Mississippian when the war began. He ". . . was a peace loving farmer, a house builder and a shoe maker who would work far into the night making shoes for his neighbors. . ." (Richard A. McLemore. *A History of Mississippi, Volume 1*. Hailliesburg: University College Press, 1973. p. 523.) His first wife, a white woman, taught him how to read. His second wife, Georgeanne (the little girl who cried in her mother's arms when they were bought in Georgia), worked for John Knight, a distant relative of Newton, on his plantation. Her grandmother Rachael raised Georgeanne on the Knight Plantation.

In the eyes of the authorities, Newton was just another outlaw who took advantage of the chaos caused by the War. However,

---

---

many of the slaves, including Anna's grandmother Rachael, fully supported the efforts of Newton Knight to take from the rich and give to the poor. The geography of the Mississippi hills created an ideal location for guerilla warfare. On many occasions during the Civil War, Rachael risked her life to protect and help Newton Knight and his guerillas so that they could establish the Free State of Jones. Many times Rachael poisoned Confederate hound dogs hot on the heels of Knight and his men.

By April, 1865, when the war came to an end, about half of the 400,000 slaves in the state of Mississippi were free. Many fled to abandoned plantations. Some, like Anna's mother Georgeanne, bought land which went up for sale at 50 cents an acre.

Anna's family – her brother, sisters and mother – worked 160 acres of cotton in Gitano, Mississippi. It was on that land that Anna was born on March 4, 1874. Because of cotton, dozens of Caucasian plantation owners had come to Mississippi at the beginning of the nineteenth century, and brought slaves with them. The most powerful plantation owners settled on the Mississippi Delta after the War. The less powerful found land on the hills of eastern Mississippi. Along with them came hundreds of "crackers," poor white migrants and immigrants, mostly from the British Isles.

The black Knights began to acquire land after the War, when Anna's mother bought 40 acres. With hard work and savings, in time the family bought an adjacent 40 acres. They added to their acreage by becoming sharecroppers, acquiring still another 80 acres which they worked while giving half of the profits to the owner. The work was hard, especially in the spring when the black Mississippi soil had to be plowed.

Shining in the sun, the pistols provided Anna protection. She knew many teenagers in Jasper County who had been raped by white males. The thought of such a thing was loathsome to the girl, and she determined that it would never happen to her. Anna knew the weight of the pistols slowed her down, but the stories told by her mother and Rachael were enough warning for Anna. She preferred to be safe.

Anna understood clearly at an early age that life was not going to be an easy journey. Her first job, only a few weeks after learning to walk, was carrying water from the nearby spring to the one-room

cabin the family built when they left the Knight Plantation. At thirteen, she knew the sting of discrimination based on skin color, and she clearly understood that there were no free rides. She frequently left the house hungry, not because her mother did not want to feed her, but simply because there was no food. Anna learned to survive in the piney woods eating wild berries, wild grapes, muscadines, persimmons, chinquapins, and hickory nuts.

However, even in difficult times the children of Jasper County learned to have fun and invent games to keep them occupied when they were not working. She loved to play school, probably because in Jones County there were no schools for African-American children.

Many whites in the South, and especially Mississippi, were not at all happy with the fact that African-Americans had achieved their freedom. Resentful of the aid that African-Americans provided to the Union Army during the war, they harbored deep-seated ill feelings. The slaves had been instrumental in helping Generals Sherman and Grant torch and burn several southern cities, and the whites did not forget.

Hundreds of black men were lynched in Mississippi as many white communities began lynching African-Americans as a way of releasing pent-up rage. The last ten years of the century registered a record 1,955 lynchings in the southern states. A professor at Johns Hopkins University expressed the feeling of many white southerners when he said, "The Caucasian and the Negro are fundamentally opposite extremes in evolution. It is useless to try to educate the Negro by education or otherwise, except in the direction of his natural endowments. Let them win their reward by diligent service . . ." (Herbert Aptheker. *Afro American History The Modern Era: A Pioneering Chronicle of the Black People in Twentieth-century America*. Secaucus, NJ: The Citadel Press, 1971, p. 107.)

In spite of the attitude of whites toward the education of African Americans, and the very clear feeling that blacks were not to waste time in such matters, Anna taught herself how to read and write through friendships with white children. While the white children of the county were able to go to school and buy paper, books, and supplies, she was unable to do so, but the obstacles did not squelch her desire to

---

learn. With the determination she exemplified out in the cotton fields, Anna grabbed every opportunity she could find to add one more link to solving the great mysteries of reading and writing.

By the time she became a teenager, Anna was reading everything she could get her hands on. At night after a hard day of work, she would get pine knots from the fireplace to use as a light. Through this means, Anna read into the early morning hours. One day, Anna found an old newspaper from New Hampshire which offered readers the opportunity to correspond with other people interested in receiving letters. She decided to write to the address provided by the paper. By the time Anna was 15 years old, she corresponded with 40 persons throughout the United States. The fact that a young black teenager was getting so many letters created quite a stir at the local post office. Many whites in Mississippi considered the education of African-Americans a contradiction in terms. They reasoned, why confuse African-Americans by raising false hopes about their natural humble station in life? A white Mississippi woman told a northern teacher who was trying to teach African-American children, "These country niggers are like monkeys. You can't learn 'em to come in when it rains."

By the time Anna was born, most white teachers had been run out of Mississippi. Among the Ku Klux Klan's favorite targets were white teachers. Many white northern teachers who came to the South after the Civil War were threatened, beaten, and sometimes put to death. By the summer of 1871, three years before Anna was born, almost all schools for African-American children in Mississippi had been closed or burned down.

Since Anna could not go to school, the letters and pamphlets she received through the mail became the route she took to the world of ideas. Two of her pen pals who became friends happened to be Seventh-day Adventists. They began to send her old copies of Adventist journals such as the *Youth's Instructor*, *Review and Herald*, *Signs of the Times*, and other Adventist pamphlets. With a voracious appetite, she consumed all of the literature sent to her; she also used part of what she earned in the cotton field to buy an old Bible from her uncle.

One of the two friends who wrote to Anna was a young lady

---

named Edith I. Embree, from Oakland, California. Since they were the same age, they wrote long letters to each other, discussing among other things, religious doctrines. One letter from Edith Embree contained 35 pages which explained the doctrine of the Heavenly Sanctuary. As Anna became more and more knowledgeable about the doctrines of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, she tried to discuss theological ideas with the local pastors and itinerant preachers who visited the town or her home every now and then. Many of them were taken aback by the questions Anna asked. Through such conversations she arrived at the conclusion that many of them did not know what they were talking about, and determined she would get a formal education.

After a cyclone devastated Jones County, Anna began to wonder about her life and future; what would happen to her if she were killed? That evening she was invited to a dance with her friends. She explained that she did not want to go, but her friend insisted. Anna finally consented, but announced that it would be the last time that she would attend a dance, as she felt very uncomfortable doing so. At the dance, another storm came up. The music came to a halt and all gathered in a corner, where Anna began to explain the many things she had found in the magazines and books that she had been reading. This experience motivated Anna to ask a family member, "What if I had been killed in one of the storms, would I have been saved?" The person explained that to be saved you needed to be baptized.

The desire to be baptized became a dominant force in her mind from that moment on. Edith, her friend in California, corresponded with her on the subject. Edith took the liberty to write Mr. Dyo Chambers, who was the Secretary-Treasurer of the Southern Missionary Tract Society in Chattanooga, Tennessee. This was an organization run by volunteers of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Mr. Chambers in turn wrote to Anna and invited her to come to his home in Chattanooga. He invited her to be baptized at the church they attended. Anna, haunted by the idea of not being saved, decided to make the trip to Tennessee to be baptized. Her mother and friends all thought she was crazy.

Although Tennessee was a southern state, many of the racist attitudes towards black, which was rampant in Mississippi, were not

---

as barefaced in Tennessee. Unlike Mississippi, which had almost a half-million African-Americans at the end of the Civil War, Tennessee had only about a quarter-million blacks in the state. Most of the black population was located in western Tennessee and not in the central portion of the state where Chattanooga was located. Even before the Civil War, the number of blacks owned by whites in Tennessee was very small compared to those on the plantations in Mississippi.

In the early 1890s, Anna climbed on the train in Ellisville, Mississippi, and made the 382-mile trip to Graysville, Tennessee, the week before Christmas, arriving during a week of revival and prayer. Mr. Chambers had sent Anna his picture so that she would recognize him when she arrived; he asked her to carry a copy of the *Review and Herald* so that he would recognize her, since she did not have a picture of herself to send.

The Chambers family received Anna like a daughter. It was difficult for her to understand why these white people she had never met before were being so nice to her. Their attitude left a lasting impression on her mind. At the end of the week, Anna was baptized.

While in the Chambers home, she was asked if she wanted to go to school at the Graysville Seventh-day Adventist Academy (which is today known as Southern University). Her eyes glowed at the prospect. The following day, she sat in a classroom with several other children. For years Anna had dreamed of getting an education. Becoming a student in a real school was the last thing she would have thought possible when she left Mississippi, but the door had opened for her to have a formal education, and she could not believe it was happening to her.

The first few days in the school were wonderful. She sat and listened to the teacher, and read her books with wonderment. However, several of the southern boys in the classroom were very uncomfortable with her presence. Although she was light-skinned, they knew she was not white. Bothered by her presence, they went to the principal and clearly expressed their distaste for having to be in a class with a "nigger." The principal asked Anna if she were a mulatto. She said that she did not know. Unwilling to lose the few students he had in the school, the principal made special arrangements for Anna. The following ten weeks, Anna stayed with a matron, isolated from the

other children, getting individualized training while the others were in school.

White Anna was at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Chambers in 1895, two important gentlemen arrived and stayed overnight. One was G.A. Irwin, the director of the Southern District of the General Conference, in charge of the work of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the southern states. The other man was O.A. Olsen, the President of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. Anna overheard the conversation and learned that they were on their way to Alabama to look over a property on the outskirts of the city of Huntsville. They had been urged by lay efforts to look for property to establish a school for African-Americans. Anna thought that a school for African-American children was a very nice idea, but it would be of little help to her, since she needed an education right away.

At the end of the ten weeks at Graysville Seventh-day Adventist Academy, Anna returned home a different person. She began to have trouble with her mother when she announced to the family that she would no longer work on Saturday, because Saturday was the real Sabbath. She tried without success to explain to her family members why it was so. No one in her family could read, and since they were all hard-working people, Anna's position was interpreted as one of laziness. But Anna, as might be expected, stood firm and would not plow or do any work on Sabbath. This created great stress between her and her mother.

Through letters, Anna explained to the Chambers family in Chattanooga the trouble she faced at home. They invited her to return to Chattanooga. It was not a difficult decision to make; she had been treated so well by that family and there were many opportunities in Tennessee as compared to those in Mississippi.

In Chattanooga, Anna and the Chambers family heard that she could get her high school education at Mount Vernon Academy in Ohio without having any racial problems. Mrs. Chambers promised to bake bread and cakes to help finance Anna's education in Ohio, and worked endlessly to get the money to send Anna to school.

One day Mrs. Chambers found Anna crying in her room. After being asked what was wrong, Anna explained that she could not understand why she was being so nice to her. Why was she helping her

---

since she wasn't even part of the family? Anna said she would never be able to repay Mrs. Chambers for all that she was doing. Mrs. Chambers smiled and explained that Anna would not be expected to pay her back, and that it gave her great joy and satisfaction to be able to help.

Through the aid of the Chambers family, and especially the hard work of Mrs. Chambers, Anna traveled to Ohio and enrolled in Mt. Vernon Academy. Because she was far behind the other students her age, she asked and received permission from the dormitory supervisor to stay up beyond the time lights were to go out, so she could continue to do homework. Frequently Anna stayed up into the morning hours. Fearing to slow the others if she asked questions, Anna stayed alert during class.

Mr. Chambers passed away after Anna's first year at Mt. Vernon Academy, and without money it was impossible for her to return to that school. However, she heard about an industrial school in Battle Creek, Michigan, where she could work and study. Several of the students at Mt. Vernon Academy planned to go there and finish the nursing degree offered. Her desire and determination to get an education propelled Anna to Michigan. There she stayed for several years until she finished her schooling, including a nursing course.

During those years in Battle Creek, Anna worked in the laundry. The work was hard, but Anna never lost sight of her goal to get an education. During the school year she worked six hours daily and went to school for four hours. In the summer months she worked up to 18 hours a day.

At the beginning of the course, she took an oath in the presence of John Harvey Kellogg, the director of the Battle Creek Sanitarium, that she would use her skills to serve others and not to make money. She had absolutely no problem with that oath. The examples of Mrs. Chambers and John Harvey Kellogg, and their desire to help others without expecting anything in return, never left her mind. She determined that she, too, would give her life in the service of others.

On the day of her graduation, Dr. Kellogg asked her where she wanted to go. Where would she like to use the skills that she had acquired in Battle Creek? Anna responded instinctively and without hesitation that she wanted to return to Mississippi and start a school

## The Ladies of Oakwood

for the African-American children of her community. Kellogg liked the idea. For years he had, with little success, encouraged his graduates to go into the South. Kellogg helped Anna get the funds for a train ticket and soon she was riding toward Ellisville, Mississippi, the nearest depot to her home.



Not all in the community of Gitano, where Anna founded the first school for black children in Jones County, Mississippi, rejoiced at her coming. Since she gave many lectures on the effects of alcohol on the human body, she soon brought down the wrath of the white males who supplemented their income through the production of “moonshine” liquor. They let her know in no uncertain terms she had better stop talking against liquor or the use of tobacco if she knew what was good for her. From then on Anna, who was an excellent rider, rode to school with a pistol and a shot gun at her side. She let the moonshiners know that whenever they wanted to see her, they knew where she

---

lived and worked.

One day, returning from a lecture she had given, she could see at the distance that the moonshiners were waiting for her on the side of the road. Since they had all been drinking and thought of themselves as being much quicker and stronger than they really were, Anna was able to ride through the group knocking several to the ground. Her determination and firepower eventually cooled off the moonshiners, and they never bothered with her again.

For two years, 1899-1901, Anna ran a one-room school for about 24 children in Gitano, Mississippi. She received no funding except from the parents and some donations. Anna and the children planted, raised, and harvested cotton in a field next to the school. The children learned to plant gardens and work the fields as part of their education.

On Sundays, Anna ran a Sunday school in the town of Soso, Mississippi, making sure that every time she took the trip she returned on a different road, protecting herself from the moonshiners. Since she also had training in nursing, Anna dispensed simple medical treatments in the evenings, extending her workday into the late hours of the night.

In 1901, Dr. John Kellogg asked her to be a representative at the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists in Battle Creek, Michigan. It was there that she heard of the needs of the poor in India, and how nurses were needed as missionaries. Speaking to a friend, she commented that she would be willing to go to India if someone would carry on the work that she had started in Mississippi. Apparently someone overheard the conversation, because the next day she was asked if indeed she would go to India. She again stated that she would, but on the condition that two people would be sent to replace her in Mississippi, knowing that one teacher could not do all of the work she had started in Gitano.

It took thirty days to travel from Battle Creek to India. Once there, the determined and level-headed Anna took control. When the children told her that the land of the school was not suitable for the production of vegetables, she set out to prove them wrong. And when one of the older men told her that the plow an American had brought to India was not suitable for the cultivation of Indian land, she

again determined to set him straight.

One afternoon, she took the old plow and showed the children and adults how it was done. She did not stop until the whole field was ready for planting. In the evening, she fainted and did not awaken for three days.

While in India, Anna got word that the school she had built in Mississippi was burned down and her work had been abandoned. However, she had just begun to work in India and she knew that it would not be appropriate to leave what she had started there, but the letters continued to come from her home state. A couple, Mr. and Mrs. Parker Atwood, had consented to continue the work Anna had begun in Mississippi; however, with the passage of time she received notice that they, too, had abandoned the school work because of threats on their lives.

During her stay in India, she spent much of her time selling books and subscriptions to the Adventist magazine, *The Oriental Watch Tower*. During one summer she traveled to more than 35 cities in northern India, selling books and magazines. Her most prized possession in India was a bicycle that helped her get around Karmatar, the city where she spent most of her time while in India.

One day a letter arrived from a former pupil in Mississippi. The child asked a question which left a hole in her heart. "Why don't you come back and teach us yourself? You understand us and you are not afraid. Why would you stay over there, trying to convert the heathen, while your people here at home are growing up into heathenism?" (Anna Knight, *Mississippi Girl*. Collegedale, TN: Southern Publishing Association, 1952).

When the time came for Anna to take her furlough to the United States, she immediately packed most of her belongings, leaving some things, including her bike, in storage, and headed home for a much-needed rest. At least that was what she was supposed to do. But Anna was Anna, and rest was the last thing on her mind. She was going home, all right, but not to rest.

After spending two weeks in London and a couple of days at the General Conference offices in Washington, D.C., she took a train to see Mrs. Chambers in Chattanooga. When she arrived, Anna discovered that Mrs. Chambers had passed away two weeks earlier.

---

---

After many tears, she boarded the train to Mississippi. The first time she returned from Battle Creek, her brother met her with an ox cart. This time when she left the train, over a dozen people from her hometown were waiting with several horse-drawn carriages.

In a few days, all of the children and their parents sat listening to Anna as she explained the conditions that would prevail while she was there. Twenty-two children enrolled in school. Each child was to pay one dollar per month. Anna began immediately to conduct classes five days per week. On Sunday, she would travel the six miles to Soso, Mississippi, and conduct a Sunday school class for several people interested in the gospel. In her hometown, she ran the local church, and six months after her arrival she organized the first Seventh-day Adventist group in south central Mississippi, with six baptisms. Among the number who were baptized were her mother and two sisters.

After two years of running the school in Mississippi, Anna prepared herself to return to India, knowing that her furlough had come to an end. She hated to leave her students, but she had made a commitment to the people of India. As she was preparing for her return, she received a letter from the president of the Southeastern Union Conference, asking her to visit him in his office. When she did so, he informed her that he wanted her to become the medical matron of a newly established sanitarium for the colored people of Atlanta, Georgia.

The work in Atlanta was difficult and exhausting, but Anna was not new to challenges. Most of the remodeling and preparing of the building for the sanitarium was supervised and executed by her. There was no money to do what was necessary, so she spent her own savings to accomplish the tasks. In a few weeks, the sanitarium was up and running, and Anna was getting acquainted with a new world.

Several of the black colleges and universities in the city, like Spelman, Morris Brown, Clark, and Atlanta University invited her to lecture at their institutions. Since Anna Knight had been the first black missionary to go to India, she became a popular speaker in Atlanta circles. There Anna found communities different from anything she had seen before. There she discovered many well-educated and wealthy African-Americans. Many of the people were descendants

of mixed marriages, who had inherited wealth and power from the white fathers or mothers. Since her father was white and her mother African-American, she found it easy to identify with the well-to-do African-Americans of Atlanta. They treated her well. These families had many educators, physicians, dentists, and other professionals who constituted an aristocracy of color in the city of Atlanta. Although Anna felt at home in this community, she never identified with them to the extent that she desired to leave the work she was doing among the poor.

Her work in Atlanta impressed the Union leadership to such an extent that a few years later they made her the Home Missionary, Education, Sabbath School and Missionary Volunteer leader of the Southeastern Union Colored Department. Anna continued to work from Atlanta and began to give Bible studies and visit the local churches and schools of the Union, which covered most of the southern states of the nation. At the year-end meeting, when the reports of the work accomplished during the year were given orally by all the workers present, Anna reported among other things that she had written 1,500 letters during the year.

“How?” she was asked.

“By hand,” was the reply.

Before the meeting was over, those present collected enough money to give Anna a portable Smith Corona typewriter.

It was during these years that Anna became the heart and soul of African-American primary and secondary education of the Seventh-day Adventist church in the southern states. Every year she would visit each school in the territory at least twice. She gave encouragement and help to the teachers, who by and large were running one-room schools. Once a year she would give a physical examination to each child. During the summer, for her “vacation,” Anna spent from six to eight weeks teaching teachers at Oakwood College.

In 1922, a group of teachers at Oakwood College founded the National Colored Teachers Association of Seventh-day Adventists. She became its first president and continued to serve as the president of that organization for 48 years. The association paid for the first cement sidewalk at Oakwood College. It started a student loan fund for students wanting to become teachers. It funded a water system so

---

that all of the dormitories and buildings of Oakwood College could get fresh water. Unlike other professional organizations interested in the welfare of their members, upward mobility, and power, the teachers' group reflected Anna's style: service.

From the early 1920s until 1945, Anna Knight was the de facto superintendent of African-American primary and secondary schools in the southern states. Since she was working with African-American children, she was given freedom to administer the schools, but very little money. During this time she headed hundreds of school board meetings, visited thousands of parents and children in their homes, pounded out thousands of letters to fellow workers, and traveled thousands of miles in an effort to keep the schools' heads above water, including the school she started in Gitano. When she finally retired in 1946, Anna Knight reported that during her tenure in the South she attended 9,388 meetings, made 11,344 missionary visits, wrote 48,918 letters, and traveled 554,439 miles.

But to say that Anna Knight retired is to misrepresent reality. She continued to be elected president of the National Colored Teachers Association of Seventh-day Adventists well past her ninetieth birthday. A few years before she passed away at Oakwood College in 1970, she was still putting out a newsletter for the organization. In her last years she still beautified the campus by planting flowers, and she continued to watch over the hundreds of students that arrived from all corners of the world to get an education.

Observe now as a young couple snuggle on a bench on the campus of Oakwood College, oblivious to the world around them. Spring is in the air and time has disappeared as they are lost in love, the only ones on the planet. Oh! Suddenly firm taps on the arm and leg of the young man bring him and his friend back to reality. In front of them stands an elderly lady, holding the cane which she used to pull the young man out of his dream world. It is Anna Knight, well into her eighties, staring at the two until they sit up and separate to a more respectable distance. She finally speaks, "Behave yourselves; remember who you are and why you are here."

That is all she says, then turns and slowly walks to the women's dorm.

Although many of the young students at Oakwood College in

the 1960s were frightened by her presence, she was always respected and carried an air about her that made her one of the treasures of the institution.

A few days before she passed away, she talked to Elder Dudley about her funeral. She wanted to be buried in a cemetery in Soso, Mississippi. But she wanted Elder Dudley to know that there were two cemeteries in Soso, one for whites and one for blacks. The whites of Soso had never allowed people with even a drop of black blood to become part of their community. And it was in the Caucasian cemetery Anna Knight wanted to lie. Could it be that even in death she wanted to give the Caucasian members of her extended family, who had discriminated against her and her close family members for many generations, the privilege of becoming part of an integrated community?

## References

Aptheker, Herbert. *Afro American History: The Modern Era*. (Secaucus, New Jersey : Citadel Press, 1971).

Belisarry, Constantine, "The Rise of Industry and the Industrial Spirit in Tennessee, 1865-1885" *Journal of Southern History*. Volume 19, #2 May 1953.

Gatewood ,Willard B. *Aristocrats of Color: Black Elites, 1880-1920*. (Bloomington, Indiana: University Press, 1993).

Knight, Anna. *Mississippi Girl*. (Collegedale, Tennessee: Southern Publishing Association. 1952).

Knight, Ethel. *Echo of the Black Horn Mississippi: An Authentic Tale the Governor of the Free State of Jones*. (Unknown Publisher. 1951).

McLemore, Richard A. *A History of Mississippi*. Volume I. (Halliesburg, Mississippi: University College Press, 1973).

McKenzie, Robert T. "Freedmen and the Soil in the Upper South: The Reorganization of Tennessee Agriculture 1865-1888" *Journal of Southern History*. Volume 59 #1 February 1993.

Oakwood College Archives. Several folders that are housed in the Archives have information on Anna Knight.

Oshinsky, David M. "*Worse than Slavery*" *Parchman Farm and the Ordeal of Jim Crow Justice*. (New York: The Free Press, 1996).

The Ladies of Oakwood

---

Peterson, Frank. *Climbing High Mountains*. (Washington D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1962)

Reynolds, Louis *We Have Tomorrow: The Story of American Seventh-day Adventist with an African Heritage*. (Washington D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1984).

Woods, Clyde. *Development Arrested: Race, Power, and the Blues in the Mississippi Delta*. (New York: Verso, 1998).

# Eva B. Dykes

Ciro Sepulveda



When little Eva walked to the Lucretia Mott Elementary School in Washington, D.C. in 1902, she bubbled with curiosity about the world around her. She was an alert, happy child who bombarded her neighbors, friends, relatives, and fourth-grade teacher with questions. The fact that she lived in the most powerful city in the United States only increased the intensity of the interrogations. The sights, sounds, and smells of the world kept her mind active and curious. For Eva, life was wonderful and delicious, ready for the picking. When she walked through the doors of her school, she arrived with an insatiable curiosity and desire to learn.

The city of Washington, D.C., at the beginning of the twentieth

---

century held the houses of thousands of African-Americans who had made the nation's capitol their home. The District of Columbia had become an excellent place for young black children to live and learn in America. The most important institution of higher learning for African-Americans in the United States, Howard University, was located there. In a sense Washington had become the capitol for African-American life in the United States. In spite of the many obstacles that black children faced in the first decade of the twentieth century, the doors to the world of opportunities were not totally shut; they had been cracked open, if only a few inches, by the many who came before Eva.

Before the Civil War, the city had been a slave-trading center. Eva's maternal grandmother and grandfather had been born slaves on a plantation in Howard County, Maryland. After the War, when slaves were set free, her grandparents migrated to Washington, D.C. Before their arrival, thousand of African slaves had been bought and sold in the shadows of the capitol. Washington had become one of the many cities in the upper South that distributed slaves into the cotton plantations of the deep South. Many visitors from other lands were puzzled at the slave pens in a city that bragged about the equality and freedom of man. They wondered why even in the Supreme Court of the land, most of the men of justice who sat on the bench in their long black robes were slaveholders themselves.

After the Civil War great hope surfaced in the African-American community that the city would become an integrated community where men and women of all colors lived in peace and harmony. Several African-American congressmen from the different states of the nation lived in the District of Columbia. Black Representatives and Senators sat in the Congress of the United States making laws for their constituents. Important and wealthy men like Frederick Douglass, the famous abolitionist and former slave who had become the counselor of presidents, had their homes in the city. Even Mississippi had a black senator who lived in Washington, D.C.

By 1880, there were 57,000 African-Americans living in the city. Those numbers continued to jump every year so that by 1900, when Eva was just beginning her formal education, there were 90,000 African-Americans living in the District. Eva entered elementary school

---

when almost one out of every three persons in the nation's capitol was black. After the Civil War, many prominent African-Americans felt that a new society would emerge in the capitol of the nation, thanks to the abolishment of slavery. Such illusions slowly evaporated by the end of the century.

When Eva sat listening to her teacher, she and her African-American schoolmates could not enroll in the white schools of the city. Her teachers were black and usually were paid a salary far below their white counterparts. In most of the colored schools, the heads of departments were all white, and although those schools produced dozens of African-American scholars, the same teachers could not find housing in the white sectors of the District. The color line that had appeared to be crumbling in the 1860's, during and after the Civil War, gained in solidity with every passing year so that by the time Eva graduated from elementary school the color line was well-defined and drawn.

In the 1880's, the community boasted of a hundred African-American doctors practicing medicine. Almost as many black dentists practiced their profession in the District. The city also bragged of the fact that there were 90 African-American ministers of the different faiths and churches in Washington, D.C. However, in spite of the high level of education that many African-Americans achieved, segregation continued to crawl, spread, and subdivide the nation's capitol.

In the great city African-American doctors could not belong to the white professional association of medical doctors, the AMA. They were forced to form their own. Teachers could not rise above the level of the classroom into administrative posts. Businessmen were limited to certain businesses and could function in only certain sections of the city. And although there were dozens of African-American lawyers, the jobs and positions they could attain remained limited to the stone walls established by the color line.

By the turn of the century when Eva had fallen in love with knowledge and was soaking up information like a dry sponge in the presence of water, white leaders in the capitol had forgotten that in the 1870's black leaders in Washington commanded respect. In 1888 the "Elite List" of Washington, D.C., which listed the most prominent persons in the city, had five or six African-Americans listed. By 1892,

all African-Americans had been dropped from the list. In the 1860's Sojourner Truth could walk into the White House and speak with the president of the nation; by 1900 an African-American could not walk in the front door of the White House; the few who entered had to go through the side entrances.

With the passage of time the press became more and more critical of the "shiftlessness" of African-Americans in the city. More and more stories about crime and the African-American appeared in the tabloids and fewer and fewer stories about the role of African-American leaders in the Capitol. By the end of the century the city had become totally segregated.

Although the African-American community continued to flourish in the District of Columbia, the disproportionate distribution of jobs and positions in the city's infrastructure became more and more blatant. The policemen, who took special delight in arresting and taking African-Americans into custody, hired only one African-American for every 50 white policemen hired. In 1891, there were 23,144 federal government workers in the city. Although a third of the residents were African-Americans, only 2,400 Negroes held such jobs. The Department of the Interior employed 6,120 persons; only 337 were African-American.

The growing disdain that Caucasians in Washington, D.C. had for African-Americans crept in and contaminated the feelings and attitudes of even the Black community. At the turn of the century, the African-Americans subdivided into three castes. First there were the Negroes who were almost white, usually sons or daughters of white and black marriages; they sat at the top of the African-American pyramid and usually controlled the most powerful positions held by blacks. They had the higher-paying jobs and positions of prestige. Below them sat the mulattoes, darker in skin color, who generally had lower-paying jobs and positions. And at the bottom of the totem pole sat the working class who lived in poverty and survived in substandard housing in the worst sections of the city. Such distinctions became more and more evident as color became the standard used in the District of Columbia to measure the worth of African-Americans.

By 1900, it had become difficult for even a light-skinned Negro to get served in a restaurant, get a hotel room, or even get a hair cut.

---

In some parts of the city, black barbers would not cut the hair of African-Americans for fear of losing their white clientele.

In the 1870's, when African-Americans began to see the many limitations being erected in the Capitol, many blacks began to leave the city thinking it was no place to live or raise children. They saw the city as the center of hypocrisy, full of men who spoke about justice and freedom for all, but practiced something different in their daily lives.

A young African-American named Booker T. Washington, determined to help the lot of his people, left the city in 1879 because he was convinced that if he were to help the African-American community, it would not happen there. He felt that even the Negro pastors and churches had stopped caring for the poor and were more interested in building Black cathedrals

One of the sanctuaries for African-Americans in the District of Columbia, especially those who wanted an education, was Howard University. Started after the Civil War, the school was originally designed to accept students of all colors, but by the end of the century it was an all-black school. By 1898, most of its students were secondary level students with only a small portion of the student body taking college level courses. The Ivy League Universities of the nation who took the leadership of most American universities allowed few, if any, persons of color into their corridors. Howard became one of the few schools in the nation where African-Americans could get an education of university caliber.

Eva and her friends in elementary school did not understand all of the fine political patterns that were knitted into the fabric of the nation's capitol, but they did get a sense of the world that they lived in. Eva knew that she was black. She also knew that through education her lot in life could improve. However, in a child's mind, other issues took precedence; Eva and her friends were more interested in the joyful things in life.

One of the high points in the African community in the District of Columbia occurred on April 16, the day of the Emancipation Day Parade. It was at such events that the children of Washington exhibited their zest for life. The parade brought to the city one of the most festive days of the year, and hundreds flocked to watch the event.

The prominent leaders of the District of Columbia, black and white, showed up at the affair. The parade was about a mile and a half long. Ten or twelve African-American marching bands blasted music into the air. There were dozens of floats, and many celebrities joined in the festivities. It was a time of pride and celebration; Eva loved it.

In the spring of 1906, when Eva, enamored with learning, sat in school listening to her teacher, the world around her was full of possibilities. Her father was a graduate of Howard University. Her mother had attended the university but had been unable to finish because of illness. In Eva's home, books and magazines were scattered in all corners. She loved to read and her father and mother encouraged the love she developed for books. When her father left the family, her mother continued to foster a spirit of learning in the home.

That year, only a few miles from her classroom, the students of George Washington University debated the hottest issues of the day. In one debate, the proposition, "Whether Jim Crow laws should be adopted by the city of Washington, D.C.," raged for several days. Another hot issue was, "Should Negroes be forced to sit in different sections of public transportation or in restaurants in the city?" The students of the university decided that yes, indeed, it was time that the city should adopt such laws.

Even the churches had embraced the color line by the time Eva graduated from elementary school. In the middle of the century, many of the churches of the city welcomed and felt comfortable with blacks worshipping in their sanctuaries. However, by the 1870's the change was well on its way. The seventh-day Adventist church, which Eva would join while in graduate school, had started as an integrated congregation in the 1880's; however, when the General Conference of the Adventist Church moved to Washington, D.C. at the turn of the century, the administrators of the church started a new congregation out in the suburbs, closer to their offices, and in turn created one white and one black congregation.

The tenor of the times was clear. The Bishop of the Congregationalist Church, Henry Satterlee, referred to African-Americans as being a weaker race morally and intellectually; he felt that racial antagonism would become stronger and more sharply defined if Blacks should become wealthy and educated.

---

---

In a way Eva was lucky that she was not a member of the white churches in the city. In the African-American community she was sheltered and did not have to listen to the wisdom being peddled from the pulpits of the churches in the District. In 1910, when the Sixth World Sunday School Convention came to town, Eva was in high school and probably only read of what happened at their opening ceremony. Fortunately for her, she was not a delegate, because when the colored delegates to the convention walked into the hall, the white Christians refused to seat them or recognize their presence. That year, Eva graduated from the "M" Street High School, which would become Dunbar High School, the school in which she would become a teacher.

By 1910, Eva had become an outstanding scholar. She loved school. Her grade point average in high school was exceptional. Schooling for Eva was something natural and expected. It was fun. There was no question as to what she would do after high school. No one even asked her such a question. There were not many options concerning where she would go to school, but the fact that she would go to college was undisputed.

Eva entered the halls of high education at a very fortunate time. The elitist nature of American education had slowly been crumbling since the middle of the nineteenth century. The President of the University of Michigan expressed well the feeling of the times. He could not conceive of anything more hateful, more repugnant to the natural instincts, more calamitous at once to learning and to the people, more unrepugnant, more undemocratic, more unchristian, than a system which should confine the priceless boon of high education to the rich.

During the colonial era and early years of the republic, higher education was designed to train the children of the powerful. The poor had no options if they wanted an education. Most of the schools were controlled and managed by a select few on the eastern seaboard. But changes brought by the Industrial Revolution overwhelmed the nation and forced the mushrooming of dozens of new colleges. These new colleges developed on the frontier where democratic values spring to life with more vitality. From the land grant colleges and universities came the idea that education should be for all, even women. Although not in great numbers, some African-Americans and women

started enrolling in the western schools. .

The changes made by the schools on the frontier forced changes to spread into other schools on the eastern seaboard. By the 1870's even Harvard professors, who at one time thought the brains of women were too small to burden with education, started teaching women in the outskirts of the university. By the turn of the century, they organized a female college right outside the walls of Harvard so that the classrooms where men were trained would not be contaminated by their presence. It would be in that institution, Radcliffe College, that Eva would earn her Ph.d.

When Eva reached her senior year of high school, higher education for women was not common, but neither was Eva. Because of her family, the doors to higher education opened wide for her. When Eva entered the halls of Howard University she did so with a confidence that left a mark on the institution. She began accumulating A's from her freshman year, and did not stop getting them until she graduated in April, 1914, with the highest grade point average in the history of the school.

Eva B. Dykes started working as an English teacher immediately after getting her degree at Howard. In those days, women did not go to graduate school. She already had more education than most African-American women were expected to get. However, Eva was not done. Although everybody around her expected her to stop, she was not about to do so. She taught English for a year at Walden University in Memphis, Tennessee, and then applied for graduate work at Radcliffe College.

Radcliffe did not accept the validity of her undergraduate work at Howard. She therefore enrolled as an unclassified student. In 1917, she was awarded an A.B. degree in English, the under-graduate degree she already had, and completed all of the requirements "magna cum laude." After jumping that hurdle, she went on to do graduate work, obtaining an A.M. Degree in 1918. Most young ladies of the age would have called it quits with a master's degree in hand. Not Eva. She kept pressing toward the Ph.D., and on March 21, 1921, Eva defended her dissertation entitled "Pope and His Influence in America From 1715 to 1850." She had chosen Pope because of the positive images of African-Americans which he paints in his work.

---

Eva was the first African-American in the United States to finish all of the requirements for the Ph.D. degree.

During her stay at Radcliffe College, Eva returned home frequently, and on one of those visits, in 1920, she attended an evangelistic meeting with her mother. Her uncle, Dr. Howard, who was a medical doctor and a Seventh-day Adventist, invited them both to attend the meetings as he had invited them many times before. For some reason they both accepted this invitation. Eva and her mother became members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Although Eva at the time was in love with a young man who was also interested in her, her religious convictions got in the way. The young man was a medical doctor who eventually asked her to marry him, but he was a Methodist and his father was a minister of that faith. When he proposed, she turned him down because of the conviction she had that in a marriage both partners should be of the same faith.

Most Caucasian ladies would have several doors of opportunity open to them with a Ph.D. in hand, even at the turn of the century. However, Eva was an African-American and the only place she could find a job was a black high school in the District of Columbia. There she taught for nine years, garnering an impressive reputation as one of the best teachers in the school. Her reputation came to the attention of recently elected Doctor Mordecai Wyatt Johnson, Howard University's first black president. He wanted to strengthen his English Department, which could claim eleven professors, only two of whom had a Ph.D. He sent for Dr. Eva Dykes and offered her the position.

Before accepting the offer, Dr. Dykes said to the dean of the college, "There is something you must know about me. I do not know if after you hear this you will still be interested in giving me the job. I am a member of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, and from sundown Friday to sundown Saturday I will be unable to do any work for the university. During those hours my church is the most important thing in my life, and I will be unable to do any work for the university during those hours."

The dean immediately rushed to the president and explained that they would not be able to give Dr. Dykes the position they had offered her. He explained to him the limitations that she was placing on her time, and stated that for those reasons they would not be able to

give her the job. The president immediately responded by saying, "Any woman who has the center of her life so dedicated is worth keeping," and insisted that the dean should not run the risk of losing her. He stated that there was no doubt in his mind that she would be just as loyal to the university the other six days as she was to her church on Saturday.

From 1929 to 1944, Dr. Eva Dykes was a committed and outstanding professor in the Department of English at Howard University. During those years Dr. Dykes received many awards and wrote extensively for several journals. In the classroom she was respected for her knowledge of the subject matter and her care for the students. Outside the classroom she became an active researcher and proponent of social justice. In 1931, she co-edited *Readings from Negro Authors for Schools and Colleges* (New York: Harcourt Brace), years before the advent of the Civil Rights Movement. In 1942, she published *The Negro in English Romantic Thought* (Washington, D.C.: Associated Publishers). She was published extensively in *The Crusader*, *The Negro History Bulletin*, and *The Journal of Negro History*, among other periodicals, and in 1934 she began a monthly column in *Message Magazine*, a column she continued to write for 50 years.

In 1944, James Lewis Moran, the first African-American president of Oakwood College, called on Dr. Dykes. He had written to her many times during the 1930s trying to get her to come to Oakwood College. At that time Oakwood was a two-year junior college, and it was Moran's dream that Oakwood would become a four-year institution. Oakwood did not have any professors who held Ph.D.'s and the presence of Dr. Dykes if she came would provide the ingredients necessary, thought Moran, for Oakwood to better its status.

When the first invitation to leave Howard University and teach in Alabama came to her, she did not see much light in the matter. She felt that there was too much work to do in Washington, both at Howard University and also in her church which was desperately struggling to establish a school for children in Washington, D.C. She had been advocating schools for black Seventh-day Adventist children for several years. In fact, she mortgaged her home in Washington, D.C., and used the funds to build a school for African-American students in the

District of Columbia. On several occasions she sat down with the president of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists with the same request. The results had always been the same: a nice reception and the lament that there was no money.

The thought of leaving Howard University was a difficult one to accept at first. However, with the passage of time, she grew to like the idea more and more. She knew of the hardships that awaited her at Oakwood College. She had been there several times. In 1940 and 1944 she had given the commencement addresses.

Making the change was made easier because Howard was becoming an elitist institution for children of the well-to-do. Most of the students at Howard were African-Americans of means. Light-skinned blacks got into the school with more ease than dark-skinned blacks. As she saw more and more of the inequities that surrounded her, the idea of going to a small school that had no accreditation and that accepted the poorest of the poor seemed to warm her up.

With a salary of forty-two dollars a week, Dr. Dykes left the comfort of her surroundings in Washington, D.C., and moved to Huntsville, Alabama in the summer of 1944. As she and her mother waited in the segregated railroad depot waiting room for someone to pick them up, they drank water from a water fountain for Negroes. At that time there were 14,000 persons living in Huntsville. There was a hospital for coloreds and a small one-room building for a Negro library, since African-Americans were not allowed to visit the white library in town.

When Dr. Dykes arrived at Oakwood, besides arriving at an unattractive, unaccredited institution with an enrollment of 344 students, she found many of the students looked at her and were not impressed. They certainly did not expect Howard University's learned doctor to look and dress so simply. With her mother at her side, she began her residency at Oakwood College, the place where she would spend the rest of her life. For ten years after her arrival she was the only person on the campus who held a Ph.D.

When bells began to ring on the fourth of December in 1954, everyone discovered that the president of Oakwood College, Garland G. Millet, had called a special chapel. Students began to take their seats as faculty and staff looked at each other and wondered

### The Ladies of Oakwood

---

what was going on. This was not the usual time for chapel. Dr. Eva B. Dykes sat in the audience and listened after the preliminary functions had taken place and the president stood up to make the announcement, finally coming out with the reason for the assembly. He wanted to let everyone know that at 10:30 that morning, Oakwood College had been granted full accreditation by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. Dr. Dykes smiled. Most of the students in the audience had no idea what that meant, but Dr. Dykes, who had headed the committee for several years striving to reach that status, knew exactly what it meant. She had given hundreds of hours, days and nights of tireless work to achieve it. As chair of the committee which prepared for accreditation, she had sacrificed her personal life for several years. She felt good. It had taken a long time, but it was finally a reality.



Eva B. Dykes not only gave to the college the full range of her academic and professional talents, but also poured her energies into the institution in many other ways. As a little girl, Dr. Dykes had learned to play the piano and had become an accomplished musician. Some considered her “a musical prodigy, amazingly proficient at the

piano.” (Taken from a manuscript by Lela M. Gooding, “The Achievement of Eva Beatreacie Dykes,” August, 1980, found in Oakwood College archives.) She even managed to take a music course while at Radcliffe. She loved to sing. And when she became a member of the Seventh-day Adventist church she not only joined the choir but also became one of the best choir leaders of the church in Washington, D.C. The choirs she conducted in her church gained an enviable reputation in the area and traveled extensively to give concerts. That talent did not go to waste at Oakwood, where she became active in the musical life of the college. In 1942, she started a tradition that has lasted to this day at Oakwood College, the performance of Handel’s *Messiah*.

The impact that Eva B. Dykes had on the world around her is difficult to gauge. However, the thousands of students who passed through her classroom at Walden University, Dunbar High School, Howard University, and Oakwood College were pushed to the limit, forced to think, caught up in the wonders of learning and discipline. Could it be that Charles Drew, a young African-American who pioneered research in blood plasma preservation and saved innumerable military and civilian lives during World War II, got his critical discipline from her while at Howard? Or how much discipline and persistence did William Hasties learn from her before he became the Dean of the Howard University Law School and then Governor of the Virgin Islands in 1946? Or did Joseph Jenkins, the highly respected English professor at Tuskegee Institute, develop his style of teaching after watching her in action in the classroom?

People who spend their lives in service to others generally do not get noticed with the fanfare allotted to entertainers and politicians. Consequently, the assumption is made that such people do little in the shaping of history. Historians love to create supermen who mold history as if they were the architects of all great and wonderful things. In the final analysis, the influence of a person such as Eva B. Dykes, who dedicated her life to service, can never be measured. But can anyone with an ounce of wit doubt that the power and influence that a person of unassuming humility like Eva B. Dykes has no match in the shaping of history?

## References

Apheker, Herbert. *Afro-American History: The Modern Era*. (Secaucus, New Jersey: Citadel Press, 1971).

Cary, Francine Curro, Ed. *Urban Odyssey: A Multicultural History of Washington D.C.* (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1996).

Gillette, Howard, Jr.. *Between Justice and Beauty: Race, Planning, and the Failure of Urban Policy in Washington D.C.* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1955).

Gooding, Lela M. "The Achievement of Eva Beatricie Dykes." Typed written research paper found in the Oakwood College Archives, 1980.

Knox, Ellis O. *Democracy and the District of Columbia Public Schools*. (Washington D.C.: Judd and Detweiler, 1957).

Peterson, Frank L. *Climbing High Mountains*. (Washington: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1962).

Reynolds, Louis. "She Fulfills the Impossible Dream." *Review and Herald*, January, 1973.

Rudolph, Frederick. *The American College and University*. (Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 1962).

Smith, Jessie Carney. *Notable Black American Women*. (Detroit: Gale Research Inc. 1964)

United States Census.

Williams, DeWitt S. *She Fulfilled the Impossible Dream*. (Washington D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1962).

## *Chessie Harris*

Natalie A.Griffin



Chessie guided her 1949 Buick through a rundown neighborhood of Huntsville, Alabama, looking in all directions. She was on one of her “think drives.” Every week or so she would leave her duties, get in her car, and drive into downtown Huntsville scouting the streets and looking for needy children. On this trip, Chessie had not gone far when she spotted a small boy shuffling into a corner market. Fascinated by his disheveled appearance, she stopped the car, got out, and went into the store. Chessie watched the child as he spoke to the man behind the meat counter. In a few moments the butcher tossed the youngster a package. The boy clutched it in his skinny arms. Not

wanting to frighten him, she stole away behind the store keeping a safe distance. As she got closer to the boy, she saw that he had a #10 tin can.

“What are you doing, Sonny? Cooking?”

“Yes’ m, I ‘tended I had a dog, so that man gave me this,” he said, pointing to a few meager scraps. “I ain’t had nothin’ to eat since day ‘fore yestiddy.”

“Come on, son. Mama Harris will get you something to eat.”

“Think drives” were a hobby for Chessie Harris. And on the streets of Huntsville, a segregated northern Alabama city, there was always a black child to be found without food. It was not uncommon for her to find needy, homeless, hungry children wandering the streets. Chessie Harris had a special burden for children, especially those who suffered without a place to live, some having abusive or neglectful parents.

Huntsville had become a large city in Alabama mostly because of the needs of the United States Army during World War II. Thousands of men and women had been attracted to the city when the Army Chemical Warfare service decided to build a 40-million dollar plant to make bombs, munitions, and all kinds of chemical warfare devices. Thousands of workers were needed to man the plan, and by 1944 there were over 6,000 men and women working in the Huntsville Arsenal. Since many of the men in the nation were off fighting the war, 37% of the workers were women. This left a lot of children unattended or abandoned. Black children, especially, were left to fend for themselves.

Although a large percentage of the work force in Huntsville was black, the fact of the matter was that only 11% of the workers in the factory, both male and female, were African-American. Since African-Americans were not always able to find jobs, many of the children in the community did not receive the best from their families. Blacks were usually the last to get hired and the first to be fired. Although in the white community in Huntsville there was plenty of employment during and after the war, in the black community that was not the case.

The scenario was too common and the end result was always the same. Black men, unable to work, hustling to make it in whatever

---

way they could, mothers who worked as maids, cooks, and housekeepers, barely making enough to survive. Parents who were unable to cope with their responsibilities abandoned their young ones, hoping others would do a better job. Once gone, the parents seemed to forget about the unwanted youngsters. If the authorities were fortunate enough to track down a relative, the family members would often point to their own circumstances and refuse to take the children. The constant struggle for survival drove the neglected children to beg and steal their way through each discouraging day.

The experience of a poverty-stricken childhood and discrimination was one with which Chessie could identify. Chessie was one of two children born to John "Tom" Thomas Walker and Lilly Belle Walker. She was born on January 15, 1906. Her father was a sharecropper. He worked hard all year long only to find out that he had not made enough money to pay his debt. The family lived in what was known as "Little Texas," eleven miles from Tuskegee in southern Alabama, commonly known as the Southern Black Belt. The region was called the Black Belt because of the fertile black soil and the large black communities, made up of the descendants of slaves who worked the large cotton plantations of the South in the states of Georgia, Alabama, and Mississippi.

Although the plantations were gone by the time Chessie was born, the conditions had not changed much. In theory, African-Americans in the Black Belt were free, but in reality they continued to be enslaved by a socio-political system that kept them at the bottom of the social ladder. They were no longer called slaves; after the Civil War they became sharecroppers. Sharecroppers worked the cotton fields to make ends meet, but they never seemed to break out of the cycle of poverty. Although in Little Texas most of the residents were black, the people who controlled the town and economy were white.

Chessie had her first encounter with the harsh world of the Deep South at the age of eight. She had accompanied her father into town and took in the sights of lavish mansions with expensive verandas and manicured lawns. At one place she saw white children playing in the front yard, girls with frilly dresses and boys with crisp short pants. It was a birthday party. Chessie wished she, too, could celebrate like that. However, an ice-cream cone would do just fine to soothe her

desires. She'd been anticipating that new taste sensation of ice-cream, for weeks. Her father went into the general store; Chessie ran along with her nickle in hand, skipping toward the drug store. Lightheartedly she burst through the front door.

"I would like an ice cream cone, please," Chessie said politely to the man behind the counter.

"I'll serve you this time," the man said, "but next time you come in the back door, nigga-gal."

"Yes, sir," she replied. There was pain on her face and contempt on his.

It was from that day on that Chessie's level of awareness and curiosity about her status in life intensified. She began to see and experience the segregation of Jim Crow and contrast the difference between white people in town and her life experience at the age of eight years, the reality of life in "Little Texas." Chessie wondered about her future and what assurance she had of a better tomorrow. While walking in the cornfield she prayed to God and tearfully bowed, "Oh, Lord, if you'll let me live to be grown and get an education, I'll do something to make children happy. I'll feed them, clothe them, and let them know I care."

Tom Walker, Chessie's father, wanted a better life for his daughters. He encouraged intellectual pursuits to free them from the mire of poverty. As a result, in 1918, at the age of twelve, Chessie enrolled in Tuskegee and two years later her sister Gertrude joined her. They loved school and loved the teachers at Tuskegee. A young teacher named Booker T. Washington had started the school right after the Civil War. At that time it was one of the few schools in the state of Alabama which accepted and taught black children. Although Chessie only spent a couple of years at Tuskegee, she treasured many memories from the institution.

Mr. Walker decided that he was tired of working so hard with nothing to show for it. He needed to make more money if the girls were to stay in school. Walker decided to move north to find one of the industrial jobs that had begun attracting millions of southern blacks during the war. Jobs – dirty, low paying, but regular – were available in the thriving urban industries of the North for anyone with the mind to work. About six months after the Walkers moved to Cleveland,

---

they wrote asking for the girls to join them. Gertrude left, but Chessie stayed behind because she had found a full-time job and could attend school. In time, Chessie also took the trip north to Cleveland.

Cleveland was the biggest city that Chessie had ever seen. Blacks had lived in Cleveland from its very settlement in the early part of the nineteenth century. By the time of the Civil War, Cleveland had grown to 43,000 people with 799 Blacks living in the city. When Chessie arrived in Cleveland in the middle of the twentieth century, she was part of a mass migration in which thousands of African-Americans left the South and made their way to northern cities. By 1940 there were already 85,000 African-Americans in Cleveland and twenty years later that number had risen to a quarter of a million. A few years before she arrived to join her parents, the Black community in Cleveland had elected a Black representative to the state legislature, and a Black woman had been elected to the city council.

Although she did not like it, gradually Chessie adjusted to city life, but she hated Ohio. The northern ghettos, reserved for Blacks, were generally dirty, crowded, and nothing like the fresh green fields of Alabama. For Chessie, lack of trees and fresh air made life seem very sad. She longed for the open space and country-fresh atmosphere she had left behind. She prayed daily for the Lord to make a way for her to go back to Alabama. However, Chessie soon became aware there were also deprived children in Ohio. The big city with its polluted environment housed hundreds of men, women, and children who had to hustle for survival, and in her heart she felt a burning desire to do something to help the destitute Black children living in Cleveland.

Chessie convinced her parents to take in foster kids. In Cleveland, there were always children who, because they were either abandoned or had gotten in trouble with the authorities, needed a foster home. Because of Chessie, the family became licensed to care for homeless and neglected girls. Chessie befriended and helped care for the girls who were placed in their home. By helping children who needed support in Cleveland, Chessie felt a slight easing of the burden she carried for destitute children living in "Little Texas."

In 1931, when Chessie was twenty-five years of age, she met a young man named George Harris. George, a Southerner who was

born in Memphis, grew up in Arkansas and served in the army during the First World War. After the War his family moved to the North. In Cleveland, Chessie and George dated for two years, then in 1933 drove across the state line to Sharon, Pennsylvania, and were married by a Justice of the Peace. Soon the daughter and son of sharecroppers worked themselves into a comfortable middle-class neighborhood near stores and good schools.

All seemed well in the Harris home. Chessie, a constant go-getter, started a catering business, and then obtained a real estate license. George did well on his job for a Cleveland galvanizing company, and after their first child, Goerge, was born, they bought a house in a Cleveland suburb. In spite of this, Chessie still longed to raise her family far from the vice of city life, and in a place large enough to accommodate foster children. The couple prayed for God to help them get a farm. Before long they were able to sell their little house and move to a 105-acre farm an hour's drive from Cleveland, with their family which now consisted of four children: Goerge, Chester, Marilyn, and Joan.

The natural beauty of the land, the many birds and wild animals, made it a delightful place to live. Soon they began inviting youngsters from the city for visits and picnics. Some of the children had never seen farm animals, and Chessie and George were determined to teach them about nature and expose them to the natural beauties of life. In the warmer months, the back slopes of the farm became a picnic ground, a place to sing, pray, and learn of God. "Perhaps God has a work for me to do here in Ohio," Chessie thought, and for the moment, she pushed the desire to return to Alabama out of her mind.

In 1949, George, Jr., needed to continue his education and the Harris family wanted him to go to a Christian School. Since they could not find such a school in Ohio, he was sent to Oakwood Academy in Huntsville, Alabama. He was now fourteen years old. In the weeks prior to making this decision, a farmer in the area had threatened to harm the boy if he ever caught him with his daughter again.

One sunny day in July, 1950, the phone rang at the Harris home. Mr. Paul Ashford from Oakwood College was on the line. "We're in dire need of a food service director for our college cafeteria, and a grounds superintendent and farm manager. You and your husband

---

seem to have special abilities in both of these areas. Would you consider moving to Alabama and working for the college?" The call was totally unexpected. .

The Harris family gladly accepted the offer, though it meant they would have to sell everything and start anew in Alabama. Upon their arrival in Huntsville, the family was unable to find a place to live. Chessie and the two girls moved into the women's residence hall, and George Sr., took rooms in the boy's dormitory. In the fall of 1950, the Harrises found a reasonably-priced house that would accommodate the family.

Returning to Alabama rekindled Chessie's desire to help the homeless. After finishing her duties at the college, Chessie roamed the streets of downtown Huntsville. Since she was in charge of the cafeteria at the college, she always took food with her. In this way she could feed hundreds of children in Huntsville, which was only eight miles from the college. Some of the children whom she encountered needed more care, and Chessie would take them to her home to bathe and clothe them. Being able to serve young children who needed clothing, food, and attention brought great joy to her. But she still felt that she could do more.

In 1953, asking the Lord again for guidance, she prayed that God would help her find a legal way to care for the children. Her next move was to contact the local Welfare Department. Chessie prayed long and hard before approaching the all-white staff. Never for a moment did she forget that she was black and that most of the children she cared about were black. Jim Crow culture and segregation of the 1950's were evident everywhere in town. There were still "white" and "colored" benches in the municipal parks, a library for whites only, special sections of the train depot for Blacks, and restaurants with takeout service windows cut out for "colored only." Blacks were not allowed inside many places in Huntsville, Alabama.

Chessie decided to approach the Child Welfare Services of Madison County and explain the problem to them. Chessie's first encounter was with a woman named Mrs. Foxworthy, whose response was, "Our child welfare services are more than adequate to investigate and service children. I'm sure that if there were problems as you describe, our caseworkers would have brought them to our attention.

---

Perhaps if you provide me with the names and addresses of these needy children you've found, I can assign our caseworkers to talk with the parents."

Chessie tried to be persuasive with Mrs. Foxworthy. "Surely there must be a place in Madison County where neglected children can be cared for, given something to eat, a bath, or whatever they need,"

"We have no need for that type of care in this county," Mrs. Foxworthy spoke sternly. "I'm sorry, at this time I'm afraid I can't help you."

Most people would have accepted the decision of the person from Child Welfare Services, but not Chessie; she had to regroup. She decided to approach the Huntsville Welfare Department. There she made a bit more progress. "My department will give study to your request and get back to you at a later date." Then Mrs. Godson continued, "Chessie, in order for anyone to be licensed, someone from our office must do a home study. They will come check out the facilities and determine how many children a home can accommodate. There is also an evaluation as to a person's capability of being a good foster boarding mother."

Chessie encountered no trouble getting a foster boarding license in June of 1954. That summer the Harris Home officially opened its doors. Chessie continued feeding street children, but now she could take them into her home, give them baths, and provide a clean bed for them. Once or twice each week, when her work was done at the Oakwood College cafeteria, she loaded into her car as many servings of biscuits, grits, and scrambled eggs as she could carry, and posted herself under a tall elm tree on Church Street, looking for the abandoned or homeless children. More children came. Chessie patiently bore with the personality traumas the children encountered until they began to feel safe, secure, and loved.

As more children came to the Harris Home, the need for a bigger house increased. George and Chessie decided to sell their North Elm Farm in Ohio, rather than renting it. With the money from the farm, the Harris family built a larger house. In 1955, in order to care for more than five children, Chessie would need a child-care institution license. Harris was told that she would require a board of direc-

---

tors, a sponsoring organization as well as an annual bank statement showing she had enough money to care for these children. By this time, more than 140 children had been cared for at the Harris Home.

Chessie's life objective was to make society better by serving. During her stay in Alabama she not only held a full-time job at Oakwood College, she also studied at Oakwood College, Alabama A&M, University of Alabama, and University of North Carolina. She was constantly trying to improve her skills and abilities to serve the children in her home. And with each class and seminar she took, she applied her new-found knowledge to her work. The ability to serve the children in her home was not only exciting, but also a joy.

Because of her dedication and commitment to the children, Chessie Harris received an honorary doctorate in the humanities from Andrews University. The Senate of the State of Alabama proclaimed July 6, 1986 as the "Chessie Harris Day" in Alabama. Mrs. Harris was honored by *Woman's Day Magazine* as one of its five Unsung Heroines of America for 1987. On April 11, 1989, President George Bush honored Mrs. Harris with a presidential luncheon and ceremony. Harris was one of eighteen people to be so honored; she received the President's Volunteer Action Award and a silver medallion. About 2,000 people were nominated for that award. That number was reduced to 66, the president narrowed it to 18; three were selected for most outstanding sacrificial service to the nation.

Chessie was impressed and honored by such recognition, but she did not let that kind of honor and fanfare distract her from the work she was doing. She wrote in *Oakwood Magazine*, after visiting the White House and visiting with the President: "We made a lot of noise about this earthly invitation and recognition. This is good; now we have an invitation to dine with the King of Kings. Are we excited about it?"

Harris retired from active foster parenting and as the director of the home in 1980 because of a succession of heart attacks. In the years before her death in 1997, she organized volunteer transportation service for the elderly in Madison County through the Alabama Commission for the Aged. Today the Harris Home runs seven cottages and serves over 40 children.

It is virtually impossible to measure the impact that Chessie Harris had on the society in which she lived. Hundreds of children were changed by her influence and example. How many homeless children would have ended up in prison had it not been for her serving hand? Had it not been for her kindness? How many children would have been born into homes where the mother herself as a child? How many respectable citizens did she create because of her willingness to dedicate her life to the poor and powerless? The impact she had on Ohio and Alabama will never be known, but there is no doubt that hundreds were touched and transformed by her dedication and willingness to serve the homeless children that came into her life.

## References

Baker, D, and D. Wellesms. *Profiles of Service* (Hagerstown, MD.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1990).

Hamblin, Madlyn. *Promise in the Cornfield*. (Boise, ID: Pacific Press Publishing Assoc., 1989).

History of Cleveland . Internet at <http://ech.cwru.edu/ech-cgi/article.pl?id=AA>.

Rogers, William Warren, Robert David Ward, Leah Rawls Atkins and Wayne Flynt. *Alabama the History of a Deep South State*. (Tuscalossa: University of Alabama Press, 1994).

Washington, Booker T. *Up From Slavery*. (New York: Gramercy Books, 1993).

# Christine Elizabeth Leak Baskerville

Camille Rodgers



On January 20, 1913, Christine Elizabeth Leak was born to Gunther Fane Leak and Smitty Leak in Fort Smith, Arkansas. At the time, approximately 3,500 African-Americans lived in Fort Smith, not in one separate district, but grouped in various parts of the city. Work in factories enabled many of them to enjoy a living standard somewhat higher than that of other African-Americans who resided in the cotton towns. Substantial brick residences owned by African-Americans occasionally appeared among the more common two-and three-room frame houses. There were a number of African-American churches, amusement and recreational centers, and a swimming pool.

Christine's mother, Gunther Fane Leak, was of mixed heritage;

her mother was Cherokee Indian and her father was mixed Cherokee and Black. Gunther later resided in Fort Smith, which had been founded for the distinct purpose of keeping peace between the Osage further up the Arkansas River and the Cherokee who lived downstream. Gunther's father was from the Ozark Mountains of Arkansas. Not much is known of Gunther's mother, who died before Christine was born. She had one sister, Weeter Fane, and an aunt by the name of Beulah Netherlands. Gunther was an attractive woman; she was very petite, had dominant Indian features, high cheekbones and long flowing hair. She would often find herself fighting off the African-American as well as Caucasian men on her way home from work.

Christine's father, Smitty Leak, was from Fort Smith, Arkansas. He also was of Cherokee ancestry. His mother, Lucy, was a seamstress who in her spare time would sew some of the most beautiful quilts ever made. Not much is known about Western, Smitty's father. Smitty had three brothers: Butch, Bill, and Chapoka, and one sister, Esie Leak. He also had an Aunt Frances. Smitty was a long-distance mover, a business that had been in the family for quite some time. In later years, he worked for the Milwaukee Journal in the custodial department.

Gunther passed away in her early 30's, not long after her second daughter, Olamae Piero, was born. The cause of her death was dropsy, also known as edema, an excessive accumulation of serous fluid in the tissues, which causes the body to swell and drown in its own fluids.

Christine was only ten years old when her mother died. It was a devastating time for her. Her grandmother Lucy and her Aunt Frances, who were her father's relatives, took care of Christine immediately after her mother's death. Her sister Olamae was taken to an orphanage. Olamae and Christine were sisters, but were the children of different fathers.

Christine, being the precocious little girl that she was and having presence of mind, notified her Aunt Weeter who lived in Tulsa, Oklahoma, that Olamae had been taken to an orphanage. Christine did not stay with Grandmother Lucy and Aunt Frances for a long period of time. They were both older women and could not necessarily take the best care of her. So Beulah made the trip to Fort Smith to get Christine and take her back to Tulsa.

---

---

Christine spent much of her time in Fort Smith, Arkansas and Tulsa, Oklahoma even before her mother died. Her Aunt Weeter moved to Tulsa many years prior to her mother's death, and her Aunt Beulah resided in Tulsa long before that. Christine would spend many summers with her aunts in Tulsa and for some time lived with her Aunt Beulah even while her mother was still alive.

On this bright day, Christine ran along the sidewalk taking in all the scenery that she possibly could before it was time to return to her home in Tulsa. The sun blazed far off over the clear waters of Lake Hamilton and Lake Catherine as they rose from the Quachita River which meanders in S-loops toward the lowlands and curls among the wide valleys toward the southeast. Christine often visited Hot Springs, Arkansas with her aunts. Their family owned a hotel in the southeast section of the city where the majority of the African-Americans resided. They would spend much of their time like the many other vacationers, shopping at the local department stores and spending a relaxing afternoon at one of the bathhouses.

The standard bath consisted of about fifteen-minute immersions; during that period of time the bather drank hot water to assist with perspiration. Then came a vigorous massage, followed by a rubdown administered by an attendant. The bather rested in several rooms of successively cooler temperatures before going outdoors. Partial baths were also available, but Christine much preferred the total immersion bath even though she could not stay in the water that long because of her age.

Behind bathhouse row was Hot Springs Mountain, from the depths of which the 47 springs arise. The springs are sealed to prevent contamination to the daily flow of about 1,000,000 gallons to the pipes that deliver it to the bathhouses through conduits that are carefully insulated so virtually none of the constant 143 degree heat is lost.

As Christine walked a little further down the street, she found herself preoccupied with the hustle and bustle and amusement of the city. Outdoor photograph studios crowded the sidewalks, and small shops serving fresh seafood, fruit juices or goats' milk cluttered the corners

Stands displayed crystals, curios, souvenirs, and trinkets. Christine longed to play with the other children but she knew her aunt would

---

scold her if she found her playing in her nice Victorian dress and matching gloves.

Christine became so engrossed watching the activities of the day that she almost lost track of time; with the streets filling up with people, she soon realized that it must be close to noon and she'd better be getting back to Malvern Avenue and Pleasant Street where her aunts would be expecting her for tea. Many of the homes located along Malvern Avenue and Pleasant Street reflected a stable and fairly high-income level of the Negro residents who owned and occupied the substantial brick houses located there.

Oklahoma was once known for its mass production of cotton, but by the 1920's Oklahoma had made a name for itself in the oil industry. Oklahoma's oil wells produced about one hundred million barrels of oil per year, more than California and Texas, which were the numbers two and three states in oil production. The oil boom affected Oklahoma as dramatically as the land rushes of the preceding century. Many oil towns vanished quickly, but Tulsa, with no oil of its own, became the most permanent of the oil booming towns, changing from a tough cow town in Indian Territory to the petroleum headquarters of the world.

While Tulsa as a whole was making a name for itself and becoming affluent, many black Tulsans had already prospered in the city. They knew what it meant to have some of the "finer things of life." Christine grew up as a member of this affluent black society, and often referred to her family as well as other Blacks as aristocratic Negroes. Greenwood was where a lot of the black businesses were located and in that vicinity many of the well-to-do African Americans resided

According to Attorney B.C. Franklin, the father of the famous historian Dr. John Hope Franklin, Gurley, one of the wealthiest men in Greenwood, bought 30 to 40 acres of land, plotted it and had it sold to "Negroes Only." This shattered the notion of Blacks being forced to live in this section of town. The division appears to be self-imposed. Before statehood some Blacks saw this territory not only as a promised land but more like the nation's first all-black state.

Greenwood, in Tulsa, was referred to as the "Black Wall Street of America." Centered along busy Greenwood Avenue, which ran

---

---

north for more than a mile from Archer Street and the Frisco yards all the way past Pine Street, Tulsa's African-American commercial district was a bona fide American success story. It was home to literally dozens of black-owned-and-operated businesses, including the Stradford Hotel, a modern fifty-four room establishment that housed a drug store, barber shop, restaurant, and banquet hall. Near the Stradford sat the Red Wing Hotel, Gurley Hotel, Midway Hotel, several grocery stores and meat markets, clothing and dry goods stores, billiard halls, beauty parlors and barber shops, restaurants, several professional buildings which housed many of Tulsa's black attorneys, realtors, and other professions, as well as the Economy Drug Company, William Anderson's jewelry store, Henry Lilly's upholstery shop, and A.S. Newkirk's photography studio. Clothes purchased at Elliot & Hooker's clothing emporium at 124 N. Greenwood could be fitted across the street at H.L. Byar's tailor shop, and then cleaned around the corner at Hope Watson's cleaners at 322 E. Archer. These were also a part of this affluent Negro district.

Several family-run businesses, from mom-and-pop stores to the Dreamland Theater could also call Greenwood their home. "Deep Greenwood" could also lay claim to a public library, a postal substation, a Y.M.C.A. branch, Jack's Funeral Home, Osborne Monroe's roller skating rink, and the offices of two black newspapers, the *Tulsa Star* and *Oklahoma Sun*.

Christine's Aunt Weeter lived in this affluent Greenwood community, at 621 Oklahoma Place, a street perpendicular to Greenwood Avenue. From time to time Christine would spend the summer there with her Aunt Weeter and Uncle Sam. Weeter Weaver was a tall, stately woman with blue eyes, high cheekbones and long hair; she could almost pass for white. She was a homemaker, but she also did domestic work in the homes of some Caucasians. Weeter's husband, Sam Weaver, was a baggage man; he hauled and moved the baggage from the train station to various locations. Besides the main house at 621 Okalahoma Place, which was termed "the big house," Weeter and Sam owned houses at 619 and 623 Oklahoma Place.

The house that Christine would soon call home at 621 Oklahoma Place was a three-bedroom house with a fireplace, and was furnished very elaborately. Sam also had a large smoke house on his

---

property. It was filled with his own cows and hogs, which were cared for by people who lived in the country.

Aunt Beulah, Christine's great aunt, also lived in this affluent Greenwood community. Aunt Beulah, as Christine said, was "well-to-do." Beulah and her husband Claude Netherlands lived at 542 North Elgin in a two-story brick house. A beautiful winding staircase led to the upper level of their home, which was furnished elaborately with mahogany furniture and a piano in the living room. Beulah did not work, but earned some extra money by renting out rooms to teachers; she catered more to the males. Claude Netherlands, also known to many as Reverend Netherlands, was the minister at a Baptist church in Sand Springs, Oklahoma, and he pastored First Baptist Church in Tulsa. He also owned his own business, BBB Barbershop, located on Greenwood Avenue. Christine for a period of time lived with her Aunt Beulah and Uncle Claude before she went to live with her Aunt Weeter and Uncle Claude.

While living with her Aunt Beulah, who was a very proper and particular person, Christine had to be careful with whom she associated. If they did not meet the approval of her aunt, which meant they had to have the right economic status, Aunt Beulah would reprimand her for her association with them. As Christine put it, "I could not be caught with certain people, those that did not have as much as we had financially, and if they did not live the way we lived, in big homes, etc."

Christine recalled one incident in particular when she played with a little girl one day and brought her home. Her aunt did not know the little girl was there, because Christine hid her in the greenery in front of her aunt's two-story house, and after she finished eating her lunch she and her friend "sneaked on back" to where they were playing. She knew that if her aunt found out she would be in big trouble. Christine also remembered an experience she had with her aunt's car. She and her friend got into her aunt's car with intentions of driving it, but just as the car started rolling back out of the garage, a neighbor saw what was happening and was able to intervene and stop the girls from seriously hurting themselves and destroying the car.

Christine spent the summer of 1921 with her Aunt Weeter and Uncle Sam in Tulsa. This particular summer would be like none other,

---

---

etched in her memory forever. May 31, 1921 and the next two days would never be forgotten; Christine's life would be turned upside down in a matter of three days.

On May 31, 1921, Dick Rowland, a young African-American man who dropped out of high school with the expectation of making a fortune in the lucrative shoe-shining business, lay in jail, accused of raping a white woman named Sarah Page, on a public elevator in broad daylight. Rowland was arrested on Greenwood Avenue by two Tulsa police officers, Detective Henry Carmichael, who was white, and patrolman Henry C. Pack, who was one of the handful of Blacks on the city's approximately seventy-five man police force.

With the news of this incident spreading quickly through town by way of newspapers and word of mouth, a mob of angry white vigilantes gathered at the courthouse by 7:35 p.m. with the intentions of lynching Rowland. Armed Blacks attempted to hold the mob in an effort to protect him. There was a scuffle between a black man and a white man, a shot rang out, the crowd scattered, and by 10:00 p.m. a riot was developing and a more chaotic and violent scene began to unfold.

Christine and her Aunt Weeter were not aware of the events that were taking place. They were at the movie theater watching, *Out in the Streets*, a movie that depicted what was soon to take place on their side of town.

While darkness slowed the pace of the riot, periodic fighting took place throughout the night and early morning hours of May 31 and June 1. The heaviest fighting occurred alongside the Frisco railroad tracks. From approximately midnight until 1:30 a.m., scores of black and white people exchanged gunfire across the Frisco yards.

During the early morning hours, long before daybreak, armed mobs of whites including some police officers and national guardsmen assembled together to plot the demise of "Black Tulsa" and the Negroes living there. Around 1:00 a.m., the first signs of major catastrophe were already present along Archer Street, and by 4:00 a.m., more than two dozen Black-owned businesses, including Midway Hotel, had been torched. By daybreak, storms of white rioters descended upon "Black Tulsa" with malicious intent.

Christine recalled scenes of the riot. She explained what she and

her family experienced during those early morning hours of June 1, 1921.

There were three groups of white rioters invading the area in which we lived. One group of whites would go into the houses and take what they wanted; they stole anything of any value. Then another group dropped some type of ignitable fluid and other times it appeared to be fire from planes on the houses. Then the third group would set fire to the houses. The whites chased the Negroes out of the community.

Many people left their property, but some stayed. My Aunt Beulah, for example, stayed right there on her property trying to protect the things they had. Whites did destroy many houses on her street, but they were only able to set fire to my aunt's curtains by distracting her attention, but not much damage besides that was done because the house was brick. On the other hand, my Aunt Weeter, Uncle Sam and I thought that when we left and came back everything would be okay and that it would not be long before we were able to go back home, but that wasn't the case. We vacated the area; we did not know what they were planning to do. We had no idea that they were going to burglarize and set fire to the houses. So we left things as they were. I put my doll and anything of any value to me and all the money I had, which was a nice sum, in my little trunk and boxed it up, thinking it would be there when we returned. I had no fear of them because they were white.

They had guns, and I took my hand and said, "Take that gun out of my face." That frightened Aunt Weeter, but I was angry and I was a little girl and I didn't have any fear. We went out the back way between the boxcars. The white people took us to the ballpark (baseball field) and my Uncle Sam was taken to the fairgrounds, but at the time my aunt did not know where he was for a couple of days. Some of the wealthier Whites and those that received services from the Blacks came to the ballpark, called their names, and took many of their workers to their houses for protection until things settled down and got to where they could handle it again.

By the time the state national guardsmen arrived and martial law was declared at 11:30 a.m. on June 1, the race riot had nearly run its course; approximately 300 people lay dead. Scattered bands of

---

---

Whites continued to loot and burn African-American homes, but many were simply going home, some for the first time in 24 hours.

Within a week of the riot, nearly all the Blacks that had been displaced in the various internment camps that were set up to house the black Tulsans were able to win their freedom. Many of them, now homeless, in many cases penniless, made their way back to Greenwood, but found that what used to be Greenwood was now gone. What they found was a blackened landscape of vacant lots and empty streets, charred timbers and melted metal, ashes and broken dreams. Where the African-American commercial district once stood was now a ghost town of crumbling brick storefronts and burned-out automobiles.

What used to be “the Black Wall Street of America” was now “the Black Tragedy of America.” Gone were literal lifetimes of blood, sweat, and tears, given to achieve the American Dream – all taken away from them within a matter of ten hours. Hundreds of homes and more than half a dozen African-American churches went up in flames set by White invaders, leaving approximately ten-thousand Tulsans, the majority of the black community, homeless. Thousands of black Tulsans were forced to spend the winter of 1921-1922 living in tents.

Eventually, they began to recover from the riot. An ordinance to prevent the rebuilding of the African-American commercial district was passed but overturned. Salvaging what they could from their burned homes and businesses, the Black community began to re-emerge.

Christine and her aunts remained in Tulsa and soon recovered from the devastation. She later attended Booker T. Washington High School in the Greenwood section of Tulsa, where she competed with many students, including her classmate John Hope Franklin, who, she noted, was a very brilliant man. E. W. Woods was the principal at Booker T. Washington at that time. Christine was a very meticulous and focused student who excelled in such subjects as English, algebra, geometry, Latin, art, and history, graduating as the valedictorian of her class on June 19, 1933.

Christine received a full scholarship to college, but chose not to take it because she wanted to spend time with her father in Milwau-

---

kee, Wisconsin. Smitty came to Tulsa to take Christine home with him.

First developed as Juneau Town on the east bank of the Milwaukee River, by 1850 Milwaukee had been transformed into Wisconsin's urban center. Commerce was the key to the city's initial growth, just as manufacturing became key to its future. During the 1850's, flour milling would gradually centralize in Milwaukee. As wheat farming moved north and railroads connected Milwaukee to areas across the state, it soon became the largest flour milling city in the West. By 1860, Milwaukee contributed more than 27 percent of the state's nearly \$30 million in manufactured goods. By 1907, Milwaukee boasted the two largest steel foundries in the country, and by 1910, Wisconsin had become a prosperous and diversified state, ranking eighth nationally in industrial wealth.

Wisconsin's black population was primarily urban. Many of Wisconsin's first Blacks had arrived as slaves of Southerners migrating to the region during Wisconsin's territorial days. In 1900 there were only 2,486 Blacks in the state, but the 1920's saw a new influx of Blacks from the South. Wisconsin's heavy industries in Milwaukee and Beloit encouraged migration during the 1930s despite the Depression, and there were nearly 9,000 Blacks in Milwaukee just before World War II.

Many times Blacks had only the dirtiest jobs such as blast furnace work; usually immigrants were promoted to higher positions rather than Blacks, once they learned English. Labor unions were not agents of change for Blacks until the 1930's. During the Great Depression, Blacks and other minorities would become first-class union members. The surge of unionism during the 1930's gave Blacks better pay and benefits, but they were still given the least desirable jobs.

When Christine arrived in Milwaukee in the 1930s, she did not go to college right away; instead, she worked at Midway Lunch Counter, a restaurant that her Aunt Esie managed. It was there that Christine met Walter Baskerville from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Walter frequented the restaurant quite often, and talked to Christine's aunt about his many excursions as a drummer with Cab Calloway's band. A closeness soon developed and grew between Christine and Walter.

---

A woman named Ida Jarreau, the Seventh-day Adventist grandmother of Al Jarreau, gave Bible studies to Christine and Walter, sometimes with both of them attending, and sometimes just one. Christine had, for most of her life, been a Baptist, belonging to First Baptist Church in Tulsa and later the Paradise Baptist Church, where she sang in the choir and was active in many other capacities, including being a Sunday School teacher. This background made her somewhat apprehensive about accepting the new message she was hearing from Ida Jarreau.

However, after a period of time spent in Bible study, Christine accepted the Seventh-day Adventist beliefs and A. A. Cone baptized her on December 1, 1937. Walter also joined the church, but not until 1941. They were members of Company One, a Seventh-day Adventist Church on the west side of town, which would later be known as Sharon Seventh-day Adventist Church.

L. J. Kinner founded Sharon S.D.A. Church in the early 1930's, originally as a company of six members. Under the leadership of Elder Manor, the company was formed into a church and its membership grew tremendously. The church made several progressive moves. Christine and Walter became active members of this congregation, where Christine served in such positions as Sabbath School Superintendent, Church Clerk, and Church Historian.

In 1955, the members purchased their first large church, at 1830 West Hadley, for \$30,000, and paid it off in less than two and one-half years. The pastor of the church at that time was W.G. Mills. The president of Lake Region Conference during the period of this move was Elder H. Kibble, and Elder F.N. Crow was the Secretary-Treasurer of the conference. Mayor F. Zeidler attended the dedication. Also present were F. L. Peterson, Secretary of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists; Elder Church, the pastor of Central, the white S.D.A. church located on the east side of town, and Pastor Nachreiner, who was the pastor of Concordia, the other white S.D.A. church in Milwaukee, along with many others.

As their love grew, Christine accepted Walter's proposal, and they were married on October 25, 1942, at St. Marks A.M.E. Church. They relocated to the northwest side of Milwaukee, where they would live until Walter's untimely death in 1985.

Their first child, Brenda Maria Baskerville, was born in November, 1944; their son, Wallace Brenford Baskerville, was born on July 29, 1948. During her children's early years, Christine stayed at home. She believed that being with her children at that time would give them the best chances for their future. When the third child, Shirley Anne, reached the age of six, Christine started to search for a career. She had been a homemaker for several years, but found that staying at home was too tedious and routine for her; she needed a challenge, and would not be satisfied until she received some type of mental stimulation.

Christine went to work in a law office in Milwaukee as a legal secretary for Attorney George. She did quite well there. Her philosophy was "excellence." She was a perfectionist in all that she did, as was reflected in the way she kept her home. It could also clearly be seen in the way she dressed. Her boss was so impressed with her diligence that when she decided to move on to something new, he did not want to let her go. But in spite of his desire to keep her, he knew Christine had other plans and that he could not convince her to stay. He wrote an excellent letter of recommendation that proved to be very helpful in her pursuit of a new career.

Christine soon found work as a bookkeeper for the Sears and Roebuck Company. At first the job stimulated her and she was happy, but she never felt totally fulfilled with this job, either. Deep within, she always had an affinity for learning and a desire to assist others. She wanted to teach; that is where her true joy lay. She began working for the Milwaukee Public School System in 1965 for their Head Start program. From there she became a reading specialist and later specialized in working with disabled children. Christine finally found true happiness career-wise; her dream and hope of being an educator was now being fulfilled.

In 1975 Christine retired from the Milwaukee Public School System, but this did not stop her love for teaching and being an educator. After retirement, she served as the interim principal of Sharon Seventh-day Adventist Church School. She also chaired the school board.

Christine was very involved in the community. She would continue her passion for teaching, but now by volunteering her time tutor-

---

ing. She also served in many capacities in various organizations such as Treasurer of the Christian Women Organization, which was predominately White. In later years, she became a member of the Senior Citizen Guild.

In her lifetime she received many accolades and rewards. She received a certificate for the Leadership Development Training Program at the University of Wisconsin in Milwaukee. She also received a certificate of completion from Marquette University in the area of child and family development.

After Walter died in 1985, Christine relocated to Huntsville, Alabama in 1987, but her involvement did not end here. She volunteered at Rolling Hills Elementary and Oakwood Elementary where she tutored the students in various subjects. She also assisted Ms. Zeola Alston with her Oakwood Elementary class.

Christine resided at First S.D.A. Towers until her death on September 1, 2001. While living at the Towers, she managed to keep herself busy as president of the Young at Heart Club, and participating in several organizations such as the HARAW Club.

Christine was a member of the Oakwood College Church, and served as a deaconess. She loved to listen to the music and the powerful sermons of Eric Calvin Ward, then pastor of Oakwood College Church.

Christine's life and legacy will forever live in the hearts of many. She touched hundreds of lives as she passed through this life. After surviving the riots in Tulsa, she knew she could live through anything. Excellence was her motto and perfection was her aim. Although she did not have the opportunities to get the kind of education she would have liked, she took all of the opportunities that were at her disposal and made the best of them. She firmly believed that through education anyone could improve his or her lot in life. Her later years were spent helping children develop skills so that they could attain a good education because she believed that education was the key to success..

## References

Carmody, John, C.G. Hall, H.O. Hunter, F. Kerr, and Floyd Sharp. *Arkansas: A Guide to the State*. (New York: Hastings, 1948).

Halliburton, R. "The Tulsa Race War of 1921" *Journal of Black Studies*, 1972.

Morgan, H. Wayne, and Anne Hodges Morgan. *Oklahoma: A History*. (New York: W. W. Norton 1977).

Oklahoma Black Dispatch 2001. *Tulsa Race Riot: A Report by the Oklahoma Commission to Study the Tulsa Race Riot of 1921*.

Personal Interviews with Christine Baskerville, 2001, her sister Olamae Piero, daughter Shirley Rodgers, cousin Thomas Fair, a/k/a Baby Brother.

Reaves, Sheila. *Wisconsin: Pathways to Prosperity*. (California: Windsor, 1988).

Sharon S.D.A. Church Historian Notes.

Smith, Alice. *The History of Wisconsin: From Exploration to Statehood*. (Wisconsin: Worzalla, 1973).

# Inez Booth

Seneca Vaught



The barred doors slammed behind Inez as she walked into a dark world. Every weekend for forty years she had visited this place. Within this world, sunlight was replaced by a glimmering bulb in the darkness. The humid air was dank and musty. This was the Huntsville Alabama Penitentiary.

Among the clamor of inmates' voices, Inez was led from corridor to corridor, going deeper into the darkness until she approached the last grid. From their cells, the prisoners watched the elderly black woman in her heels, elegant hat, and church attire as she slowly walked into their world. Only bars separated Inez from them, and she peered

through those bars as the inmates watched and awaited her arrival.

Finally, as the last grid opened and she stood in the midst of the men, no fear was seen in her gaze or stance. They could see only that she wore a big smile. For a few minutes, 89-year-old Inez Booth talked and visited with hardened criminals who referred to her as "Mama." They listened and nodded as she spoke to them. The inmates of the prison usually communicated by shouting and cussing, but when Mama entered their world, they changed.

Where does an eighty-eight year old woman get the energy, conviction and determination to visit criminals week after week? Shouldn't she be somewhere quietly enjoying her remaining years? Why not dozing in a world of memories such as old people have? Shouldn't she be saving her energy and enjoying her loved ones during the last days of her life? Why would Mama be visiting jails when most everyone else her age played Bingo?

Mary Inez Lang Booth was born on July 26, 1913, beginning her long and wonder adventure in Mobile, Alabama, where she grew up surrounded by people she loved and respected. When Inez was one year old, her mother passed away, and her great-aunt, great-grandmother, and her father took the responsibility of raising her and her older brother until her father remarried six years later. Her great-grandmother, a light-skinned woman who had been a slave when she was a child, often told Inez of experiences she had in her master's home. She showed Inez two red bumps on one of her legs, results of a beating she had received from her mistress.

Inez remembers playing in the pebbly street of Mobile at night. Inez and her friend got shoe boxes and placed candles inside them. They referred to the small boxes as floats, and they would parade up and down the streets like stars skipping through the night. Maybe they were trying to imitate the floats used in the Mardi Gras that had been part of the Mobile tradition for many generations. Mardi Gras had been celebrated in Mobile even before becoming a part of the New Orleans culture.

Children of color played in the cobblestone streets of Mobile for over two hundred years before Inez joined her friends there. The French founded the city in 1702. The city passed from French control to English in 1763, then into Spanish hands in 1781. After 1812, Mobile

---

---

became an American city, but it was not the typical city of the new nation. During more than three centuries, Creoles, Africans, Indians, and Europeans mixed and intermarried in Mobile, creating a very strong and prominent community of people of color. It was probably from one of those mixed marriages that Inez's great-grandmother came.

African slaves began to arrive on the Gulf Coast in large numbers at the beginning of the eighteenth century. Between 1719 and 1731, twenty-two ships with over 5,000 slaves arrived in the region. The residents of Mobile bought many of the slaves brought to the city; the others were sent to other slave markets in the deep South. But unlike Maryland, Virginia, and the Carolinas, where tobacco and rice plantations flourished and prospered, in the area of Mobile all attempts at plantations failed. Consequently, the culture that evolved in Mobile was very different from that which evolved in other parts of the South.

In Mobile, slaves became very independent. They often bought their freedom and became part of the Mobile society. The Spanish and French authorities who ruled the city for several years created an attitude toward slavery and slaves that was quite different from the culture that evolved in the English colonies. A large community of free Blacks and Mulattoes helped shape this unique culture. Many people of color owned their own businesses and their owners expected them to care for themselves. During the Spanish rule, provisions were made so that the masters could set slaves free or the slaves could buy their freedom. These conditions created a large community of free people of color in Mobile.

With the independence that people of color enjoyed in Mobile, it was difficult to push them back into the kind of slavery that was practiced in other parts of the South. On many occasions slaves in Mobile escaped into the interior and settled in Indian communities or established communities where Indian, Spanish, French, African, and English mixed freely. Many of the residents of Mobile and surrounding areas during the colonial period and well into the era of American control, were bilingual or trilingual. Soldiers of Spanish, French, English, or American descent frequently married women of color, having children who would sometimes become free persons. By 1805, 36% of the population of Mobile was made up of free people of color.

When Mobile came under American control, Alabama passed several laws to limit the freedom of slaves in the state. Laws were passed that slaves could not bear arms or trade among themselves. The Alabama legislature made an attempt to force all free people of color leave the state. But in Mobile such laws were not enforced. For example, a law was passed in Alabama to prohibit the education of any person of color. However, the Legislative Council of Alabama, in 1833 made an exception in the cases of free people of color in Mobile.

When the legislature of the State of Alabama tried to abolish schooling for the people of color, they succeeded in doing so in all the other cities and regions of Alabama, but not in Mobile. The African-Americans of the city had always had considerable influence in the doings of the city and the state, and since the city always had free people of color who owned businesses and had money, it gave Mobile a special status that could not be easily ignored.

Inez still remembers the first grade antics of her class. Long before the days of Maytag and Whirlpool, laundry was done by means of boiling water and clothes and soap in a large black pot. During recess, Inez recalls marching into the back yard of the house where she went to school and prancing around this pot during "physical education". The school was a private one-room school with about twelve other children in grades kindergarten to third. The teacher, Mrs. Locket, owned and lived in the house where the children met.

In a happy-go-lucky land of hopscotch, jacks, and jump rope, Inez and her friends played in the streets and in the back of the schoolhouse, oblivious to war ranging in Europe. In 1914, a year after Inez was born, Archduke Ferdinand of Austria was assassinated, toppling the major European powers into war. At first it appeared that America would not get involved but in time hundreds of American soldiers marched off to Europe and became part of the brutal war. But to children, especially children in Mobile, Alabama, war was nothing more than an opportunity to make up new games to play.

By the time the War was coming to an end, when Inez was six, her father moved to Pensacola, Florida, where he got a better job and met the young woman who would become his second wife, Inez's stepmother. Her father worked as a handy man for a hotel in Mobile

---

---

and when he was transferred to do the same kind of work in Pensacola, just over the Alabama state line, he became very good friends with his boss, who appreciated the work that he was doing.

Some time after the transfer to Pensacola, his boss got transferred again, this time to Santa Barbara, California. Mr. Herbert asked Inez's father if he would like to work for him there. The idea of starting anew ignited the imagination of the young couple, so they married and headed west. Two years later, when Mr. Lang and Pearl were on their feet financially, they sent for Inez and her brother.

Mobile, Alabama became nothing but a memory as Inez boarded the train and headed west to California. She remembers herself as a child riding the train through the South and Southwest. The Lang family settled in Santa Barbara, a small community about 80 miles north of Los Angeles, along the Pacific Ocean coastline. When the Langs arrived, Santa Barbara, originally a Spanish Mission where Franciscan friars Christianized local Indians, had become a city which catered to the needs of the well-to-do, well on its way to becoming the American Riviera. With the coming of the rich there also followed music, opera, dance, and theater year 'round. While thousands of Americans were freezing in the northern states of the nation, in Santa Barbara a perpetual spring kept flowers in the gardens and sunshine in the sky. Since Santa Barbara enjoyed some of the most pleasant weather in the land, the city attracted the wealthy from all over the nation. In Santa Barbara, Nelson E. Lang, Inez's father, worked as a porter in the San Carlos Hotel. When the Lang family settled in Santa Barbara in the early 1920's, there were fewer than 1000 African-Americans living in the city.

By 1920, the population of the United States exceeded 100 million. Unlike the previous century when most of the people lived on farms, by the 1920's most of the population lived in urban areas. The Lang family, moving from a southern city with a large population of African-Americans to a western city where the number of African-Americans was insignificant, went through major changes. Unlike most Blacks, who at the turn of the century were moving from the rural South to the urban North, the Langs moved westward to unknown territory.

Cities always provide a difficult environment in which to raise

children, and although Santa Barbara was not a large city, it did present problems to parents who wanted the best for their children. Left to roam the street, children and teenagers could always find a way to get into trouble. Inez's father and mother always took this responsibility seriously. Inez recalls that her parents "were very religious". I was brought up in the Methodist A.M.E. Church and there were certain things we could and couldn't do. My parents wouldn't allow me to associate with any children if they knew that their parents didn't live a good lifestyle. We could not associate with them because they did not want us to take up their habits."

Inez's parents did not think themselves better than others, but they tried to protect their children from any harm. In high school, Inez became friends with a girl of whom her father did not approve. He told her that she was not to be with her new friend any more. Inez could not understand why her father was so intolerant, but she obeyed. Many years later, Inez was walking down the streets of Santa Barbara when she saw a woman stumbling toward her, obviously drunk. When the woman came closer, Inez saw that she was her high school friend. That left a deep impression on her; maybe her father wasn't so wrong after all.

Also in Santa Barbara High School, she formed a friendship with Laura Harris, who would prove to be a long-time friend.

Unlike the segregated school of Mobile, Santa Barbara High School had White, Mexican, Asian, and African-American students in all of the classes and some activities of the school. Although the ethnic minority students were few, they bonded together and usually stayed with their own in the cafeteria and playgrounds. One of the extra activities in which Inez took part was tennis, where her natural athletic ability enabled her to become very skilled.

Inez's mother and father were her role models; she was most impressed that both of them always found time to do volunteer work. In Santa Barbara, a group of volunteers called Mother Helpers appeared in the African-American community. There were many young African-American mothers in the city who had small children needing constant care. Consequently, they could not work to help support their families. The community banded together and established this baby-sitting service for mothers who were unable to find childcare for

---

---

their children. Inez found lasting joy in baby-sitting, knowing that she was helping someone.

The Langs wanted all of their children to grow up to be nice girls, and nice girls are what they got. Inez excelled as a student and was honored with the George Washington Carver Club Scholarship, a grand total of \$45 to use at any college she pleased. In 2001, Inez was flown back to the high school in Santa Barbara and honored for being the first person to receive that award.

Inez graduated from high school during the Great Depression of the 1930's, and felt that the nation's disaster would destroy her dreams of attending college and developing her already blossoming musical talents. From a child, she had played the piano in Sunday School and as a teen for the junior choir. Her stepmother encouraged her and enforced practice time. During high school, Inez aspired to be a nurse and her dream was to go to Howard University in Washington, D.C. However, by graduation she had discovered a horror of blood, and decided to commit to her love of music.

In the 1920's, the United States had enjoyed a booming economy, but the prosperity of the nation came to a stop after the stock market crash of 1929. On Thursday, October 24, the price of many stocks hit a record low, leaving sellers in a panic. President Hoover spoke of the "fever of speculation," but a reality of devastation settled in as the economy deflated. Over 1300 banks failed, and there were over four million unemployed. Health deteriorated as swiftly as morale in an era that epitomized American agony.

It was during these times that Inez's father began to bring home food from his job at the hotel, not only to feed his family but the people of the neighborhood as well. The neighborhood where the Langs lived was made up of African-American, Mexican, and Asian families, many of whom were left without jobs. Inez watched with delight as her father helped the neighbors. He never forgot the grateful faces. Through these tokens of kindness, the community grew to respect the Lang family, especially Mr. Lang for his generosity.

Despite the circumstances and advice from friends of the family, Inez's mother decided to send her to college, not knowing from where the money for the tuition would come. Through the advice of her mother's friend, Alice Jones, a Jamaican lady who was the only

---

black Seventh-day Adventist in Santa Barbara, Inez decided to attend Pacific Union College, a Seventh-day Adventist college in Angwin, California, about an hour north of San Francisco.

With great sacrifice, Inez's parents allowed her to leave for college. The tuition was \$45 a month, a lot of money for most families, who usually earned about \$65-70 per month. She remembers that when in college, many of her friends received telegrams from parents who were no longer able to pay the tuition. They had to drop out of college or work long hours to be able to stay in school. She never got that kind of telegram, and regarded herself as blessed.

Inez did not plan to become a Seventh-day Adventist. Having a firm Methodist heritage, she was quite comfortable in that church. Her father considered Adventism somewhat strange. So in college, Inez focused on getting an education, but she became quite knowledgeable about the Adventist faith and beliefs. Not only was she introduced to it before she entered PUC, but while there she attended a Bible study group for three years. Plans were made for a baptism, and Inez's English teacher encouraged her to be included. She replied negatively, thinking that she would remain a Methodist until the day she died.

That evening as she knelt beside her bed to pray, she whispered, "Lord, I know Saturday is the day of worship. If I am supposed to keep that day, please let me know tonight in a dream. But if I don't see it tonight, I will never accept it." Climbing into bed, she slipped off to sleep. She dreamed that she died. She could peer into the coffin and see her own motionless body. "Is this woman saved?" she asked. Someone she could not see replied, "No."

"Why not?" Inez argued, "She did not smoke, drink, go to the shows, dance, or cherish any sinful practice."

Silence reigned until the body in the coffin rose up and said, "I knew about the Sabbath, but I didn't keep it."

Early the next morning, Inez went to the Dean's office and told her that she would be baptized. All the Dean could do was cry. After graduating from PUC, Inez played the organ for Bethel Methodist A.M.E. Church, a large congregation in San Francisco pastored by Bishop X.E. Runyon White. Bishop Runyon White had been pastor of the church Inez attended in Santa Barbara. Now that the Whites

---

were in San Francisco, they took Inez into their home, where she lived for two years. She taught piano students to help meet expenses. White bragged about his skilled organist, proclaiming, "We are the only church in the Bay area that has a degreed organist."

While in San Francisco, Inez applied for different positions throughout the United States. Among the several offers that she received was an offer to teach elementary school in Huntsville, Alabama. Bishop White counseled her to take that position since the school was affiliated with Oakwood College. When she arrived at Oakwood in 1939, she enjoyed the country atmosphere. After living for two years in one of the largest cities in the nation, she was now in a small town, teaching at a small school.

Inez began teaching in the elementary school. However, her musical talents soon became apparent and she was asked to join the faculty of Oakwood College in the music department. While there, she continued her education and obtained an M.A. in Music Education from Columbia University.

As the choir developed its repertoire and grew in popularity, they were asked to perform in many churches and congresses, and Inez became their official accompanist. Their first long trip was to Chicago, Illinois. During these years, Inez taught and also became the head organist at the Oakwood College church.

Each summer the faculty and staff of Oakwood College were required to participate in evangelistic campaigns somewhere in the South. Of course, Inez was called upon to be a pianist and Bible worker during the meetings. She spent one summer in Laurel, Mississippi working in a tent effort.

A handsome young man, Albert Sidney Booth, took a liking to Inez Lang, and she undeniably took a liking to him as well. He was dark and handsome and in addition to those qualities, he had a brand new Chevrolet; that was impressive. It was a beautiful romance, but after spending some time together that summer, Albert was off to serve in the army. During his service years they wrote letters to each other.

Inez remembers her first prison visit, which took place in Laurel, Mississippi in 1945. The prison was segregated and as she paced along the median between the racially divided prisoners, she felt the despair and agony of both African-American and Caucasian alike.

That memory has never left her.

After the war, the couple married and went to Huntsville. There they were blessed with two daughters, Iris and Letitia Ann. The Booth family was able to live quite comfortably on the salaries of a teacher and a photographer. Mr. Booth was the only African-American photographer in the city of Huntsville. Like some of the other teachers, he had received an education on the funds of the GI. Bill.\*

Pleasant trips provided a retreat from the rigorous demands of college life. Inez and her husband enjoyed visiting family and friends in California. These trips were taken at night because of the heat during daylight hours.

At night they would press through the desert with the temperature reaching as high as 112°. Albert and Inez used what was called *Coolerator*\*\* in an effort to keep the car cool. The heat was so intense during this time that Inez stood in front of a fan while dressing so the perspiration would not soak her clothing.

When possible, Inez and Albert stayed in the homes of friends along the way. Hotels often refused to admit them because of their color. So whenever they arrived at a place where they knew someone, they would go there rather than try to stay in a hotel. Joe Louis was refused accommodation at the San Francisco Hotel, which charged \$12.50 per night, an outrageous sum at a time when the average hotel stay was \$2.00. Even though he could afford to pay the high price, he was barred because of the color of his skin.

Huntsville, Alabama, was notorious for its segregated practices. One day Inez, Professor Garland Millet, and his wife went to get some ice cream from a local parlor in downtown Huntsville.

---

\*The GI. Bill provided veterans of the armed services the needed funds to attend college. Inez remembers that even the books were paid for by the government. It enabled many faculty members to obtain degrees which they might not have received otherwise.

\*\**Coolerator* was an ice that was placed in the window of the car to bring cool air into the car. No cars had air conditioning, and even train travel was a miserable experience.

---

Huntsville, Alabama, was notorious for its segregated practices. One day Inez, Professor Garland Millet, and his wife went to get some ice cream from a local parlor in downtown Huntsville. When Mrs. Millet, who was visibly a Negro, went to purchase the ice cream, the cashier refused to acknowledge her presence. A few moments later, Mr. Millet, who had a light complexion and Caucasian features, was served with no problem. Mrs. Millet returned after her husband had gotten the ice cream and asked why she had been refused. Inez held the Millet's baby in her arms while the room resonated with silence.

Those were the days when a pint of ice cream cost five cents. Gasoline was 40 cents a gallon. There wasn't too much concern with students interacting with the outside community, as only one student owned a car. Inez's salary was \$60 a month and Dr. Banks, the president of the college, received \$80.

Inez Booth started the prison ministry in 1952. At that time, the jail in Huntsville was segregated and the Caucasians were placed in the upstairs cells with the African-american occupying the lower level. During the early days, Inez took many people into the jail to visit with the inmates. On one occasion, the speaker of the radio program *The Voice of Prophecy*, Elder H.M.S. Richards, Sr., along with the Kings Heralds Quartet and Del Delker went into the jail with her.

Mrs. Reynolds, who was the leader of the Oakwood College Church jail band, asked Inez to join her in visiting the inmates with a group of students. Because of her previous exposure to the ministry, Inez was pleased to participate in this capacity, and made her first visit to the Huntsville jail. After the death of Mrs. Reynolds, Inez was asked by the Oakwood College Church to be the leader of the jail band. She took the symbolic mantle from Mrs. Reynolds, and has carried it more than forty years.

Over the years, Inez witnessed violence and aggression. On one occasion she stepped between two inmates who were fighting. They quickly claimed to be playing. On another occasion, there was an outburst of disorder on the ninth floor of the prison. Mrs. Booth soon made her way up and in a motherly voice that demanded attention, she asked, "What is happening? What is happening?"

Instantly a hush fell over the inmates and they replied that they

needed to have the jail official address some of their needs.

Inez boasts that during her 40 years of visiting the prison, not one riot has ever occurred.

Mrs. Booth ministered fearlessly among such offenders as Steven Thompson, one of the most sinister murderers in Alabama history. He was sentenced to death for the slaying of a friend's girlfriend. She was murdered in such a brutal manner that the trial was halted because a juror was unable to continue. Inez saw these men as God's children, and loved them.



Inez Booth has made such a profound impact on the men's lives in this prison that they have sent over 2,000 letters to her, stating gratitude and concern. A typical letter might say:

You come to give us words of prayer and also words of encouragement. You come to visit every two weeks so we can see your smiling face. You are the other mother that we have, one who at times helps many when it is our time of need. Really, words cannot express our feeling toward you. If there were that many words there would be nowhere to put them. I hope these words will do.

In addition to visiting inmates or their families, Inez gives private piano lessons to many children. The young people influenced by her kind and gentle manner are too many to mention.

So Inez Booth enters the dark world weekly. She descends deep into the recesses of an undesirable penal complex. Faithfully, she delves into the gloomy solitary confines of the prison halls. Oblivious to fear, oblivious to danger, she enters. It is there she enters, not as a convict, but as a messenger of hope and as an angel of light, that she might set the captives free.

## References

Booth, Inez. *Forty Years Behind Bars*. (n.p. 1994).

Doss, Harriet E. Amos. *Slavery in Alabama*. (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 1950).

Dorman, James H., ed. *Creoles of Color of the Gulf South*. (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1966).

Gould, Virginia Meachan. *The Free Creoles of Color of the Antebellum Gulf Ports of Mobile and Pensacola*. found in Dorman, James H., ed. *Creoles of Color of the Gulf South*.

Hamilton, Peter J. *Colonial Mobile: An Historical Study Largely From Original Sources of the Alabama-Tombigbee Basin and the Old South West From the Discovery of the SpiritiiSanto in 1419 Until the Demolition of Fort Charlotte in 1821*. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1910).

Interviews, Personal, with Mrs. Booth on Oakwood College Campus, 2001.

Norton, Mary Beth, Ed. *A People and a Nation: A History of the United States Third Edition*. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1990).

Rogers, Warren, et al. *Alabama: The History of a Deep South State*. (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1994).

Sellers, James Benson. *Slavery in Alabama*. (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 1950).

# *Alma Montgomery Blackmon*

Lee R. Cort



As the sun began its descent toward the Alabama horizon one August evening in 1972, Alma Blackmon, with her daughter Brenda in tow, approached the door of Mr. Harold Anthony, the Chairman of the Music Department at Oakwood College. Alma and Brenda had readily accepted an invitation to the Anthony home for dinner. Alma was a brand new faculty member in the English department, and Brenda was a freshman at Oakwood. The dinner invitation was a welcome slice of hospitality, but Alma had the sneaking suspicion that she was

walking into a trap. They had been at Oakwood only two days; what could he possibly have in mind?

Little did she know that her reputation as an accomplished musician had preceded her, and Mr. Anthony had big plans. During the dinner conversation, Mr. Anthony said quite matter-of-factly, "I have been hoping that you would assist in some of the choral responsibilities here."

He then continued, "There is the college choir which sings for church services; there is the Showcase, a small group of soloists who can fit into a station wagon and travel to nearby places to present programs; and there are the Aeolians, whose responsibility it is to go on concert tours for public relations purposes. Mrs. Pierre-Louis used to conduct the Aeolians, but the group has been dormant since she left for Pacific Union College. Could you help with one of these?"

Alma, reluctant to take on the responsibility of reviving the Aeolians, due to her recent bout with cancer, decided to choose the college choir, but Mr. Anthony said, "Oh, I'm disappointed. I would prefer that your type of music go on the road." He assured her that the tours would last at the longest only ten days in the spring. His confidence in her ability to take on such responsibilities impressed her, and she eventually relented.

Alma Blackmon left that dinner table with the responsibility to revive the Aeolians and the destiny to bring them to national prominence and international respect. The selfless manner in which she took up the responsibility of the Aeolians had already come to characterize her life. Alma Blackmon, a woman of extraordinary talent and unwavering discipline, had always dedicated her life to service for others.

Alma was born on July 25, 1921, the second of two children born to James and Martha Montgomery. The Montgomery home was one where religious conviction, educational excellence and musical discipline were all given great importance. Both James and Martha were teachers. When the children were born, Martha elected to stay at home until their schooling was complete. Both of Alma's parents helped to create a nurturing environment and instill the values that would lead to her future life of service.

In the first decades of the twentieth century, Washington, D.C.

---

had the most African-Americans living in any city in the United States, and was quickly becoming one of the most segregated communities in the nation. In 1913, Woodrow Wilson signed a law which formally segregated the federal government. So by the time Alma was born, the people in Washington rode on different parts of the bus, played in different parks, went to school in different schools, and ate in segregated restaurants.

From a very early age, Alma demonstrated proficiency in music, and her father recognized this. James Montgomery was an accomplished musician himself. He had been a bass violinist with the Little Symphony in Washington, D.C. before he gave up that job to commit himself to the Seventh-day Adventist lifestyle. He died as a 30-year veteran of the D.C. schools. It was his educational discipline as well as his music discipline that he drilled into Alma as he placed her on the piano bench in their Washington home and conducted strictly regimented piano lessons. The lessons learned in the Montgomery home, musical and otherwise, would surface repeatedly in Alma's life.

Alma Blackmon was fortunate to grow up in an area of the country where there was a thriving black community with many outlets for her talents. The Washington, D.C. area was a bustling cosmopolitan metropolis at the time. Despite the fact that blacks were shut out of most mainstream culture, in D.C., Blacks had a flourishing culture all their own. The presence of Howard University had made D.C. a mecca for black intellectuals and the black culturally elite. The city proved fertile ground for Alma's educational and cultural pursuits.

By the time Alma was born, Washington had developed a powerful middle class that attracted talented intellectuals from all over the nation. This community developed a strong society, enriched by churches, newspapers, business and civic institutions. Many of the black schools in the city had some of the best teachers in the nation. Many of the teachers at Dunbar High School, where Alma attended, had Ph.D's. Parents of black teenagers from all over the country sent their kids to Washington because they knew the caliber of teaching that went on in the schools. During these years the graduates of the school were scoring better in standardized tests than the white schools in the city.

The educational preparation that was received by Alma Blackmon was as multi-dimensional as she is. She was trained in three disciplines: early childhood education, English, and music; she served exceptionally well in all three during her lifetime.

Her musical education began under the tutelage of her father who taught her how to read music and play the piano at the age of six. He always conducted his piano lessons in grand gestures, and insisted on proper phrasing and dynamics for even the most simple, one-finger songs. The discipline, musicianship, and commitment instilled in her by her father repeatedly surfaced throughout her life.

Alma graduated from her father's tutelage into the instruction of others, more well-known teachers. Her principal piano teachers were Cecil and Thomas Kerr of Howard University School of Music. She also studied voice with Fredrick Wilkerson and Paul Chandler Hume, renowned music critic for the *Washington Post*. Her musical preparation continued with Warner Lawson, Dean of Howard University School of Music. She served as accompanist and assistant conductor to the Washington Community Chorus led by Lawson. It was from Dean Lawson that Alma learned her conducting techniques. Her teachers were very demanding and attempted to get the most out of Alma. In fact, Paul Hume had a reputation for being a very unforgiving critic. Hume, music critic emeritus of *The Washington Post*, drew a famous and furious rebuke from President Harry S. Truman when he panned a singing recital given by Truman's daughter.

Alma Blackmon's educational preparation was not confined to music. After attending Paul Laurence Dunbar High School, she entered the District of Columbia Teachers College, where she earned the Bachelor of Science and Master of Arts degrees in Early Childhood Education, with a minor in English on both levels. After graduating with her Masters degree, Alma began teaching first grade, and later kindergarten. By the time she retired from the school system, thirty years later, she was supervisor of Early Childhood Education for the educational system of the District of Columbia.

The Seventh-day Adventist community in Washington, D.C. was never isolated from activities and events of the larger community. Many of the members of the African-American congregation in the city were also active members in many of the social and cultural activities of the

---

city. There were many churches in the area loaded with talent. Many of these congregations established musical traditions that shaped and formed the young people and children. Out of these churches has come a long line of musicians and educators. The city was ripe with opportunities. It was in this environment that Alma perfected her skills, utilized her talents, and developed a legacy of service.

Since Alma had been reading music and playing the piano from the age of six, by the time she was ten years old she became the organist for the First Seventh-day Adventist Church in Washington, D.C., and held that position while she lived nearby.

Her parents would later move their church membership to what is now the Dupont Park Church. There, Alma sang in the choir, substituted on the organ, and eventually became the director of the highly respected Dupont Park Choir. The General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists recognized Mrs. Blackmon's musical abilities, and she was asked to serve as Associate Choral Conductor for the General Conference sessions in Cleveland, Ohio, in the 1950's, and in Atlantic City, New Jersey in the 1970's.

Mrs. Blackmon had a full career as an educator and garnered national respect as a musician by 1972, before joining the faculty at Oakwood College. She was a 30-year veteran of the D.C. school system and an accomplished accompanist and conductor. After visiting Oakwood College to play in a concert, she accepted the call to become part of the faculty. She served in two departments at Oakwood. In the English Department she taught Freshman Composition, and in the Music Department she taught courses in music theory, humanities, voice, piano, as well as French, Italian, and German diction.

Alma built the Aeolians into a greatly respected choral organization of international significance. During the twelve years of her active service, 1973-85, the Aeolians sang widely throughout 32 of 50 states, the District of Columbia, Canada, the Socialist Republic of Romania, England, Scotland, Wales, Bermuda, the Bahamas, and St. Thomas and St. Croix of the Virgin Islands. It was with the Aeolians that Alma Blackmon made, perhaps, her most indelible mark.

She gave selflessly and worked tirelessly for the Aeolians and Oakwood College. The group rehearsed on Mondays and Thurs-

days while the college choir rehearsed on Tuesdays and Fridays. Aeolians had one-hour sectional rehearsals on Sundays, so that she was working with a choir on a daily basis. Her efforts were rewarded with opportunities to travel to places she had only read about but never dreamed of visiting. One of the most memorable was Romania.

The Aeolians participated in the General Conference Session of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Dallas, Texas in 1980, where thousands of delegates from all over the world attended. The session closed the North American Division report with the *Battle Hymn of the Republic*. There followed a five-minute standing ovation by the delegates. After the benediction, the Polish delegation rushed forward shouting, "Come to Poland!" They wanted the Aeolians to visit their homeland and share with their countrymen the music the delegates had heard. They explained to Professor Blackmon that she needed to ask Dr. Rittenhouse. "She will tell you how to do it! Come to Poland!"

In response to the reaction of the Polish delegates at the General Conference Session in Dallas, the Aeolians applied for membership and were accepted into The Friendship Ambassadors Foundation. The underlying philosophy of this organization was that more friendships could be made oftentimes through music than through diplomacy. The slogan of Friendship Ambassadors was *Friendship is the Message; Music in the Medium*.

The Aeolians and Mrs. Blackmon joined the foundation with the intention of answering the call, "Come to Poland!" But civil unrest broke out in Poland, so they were rerouted to Romania. Accompanied by Dr. Rosa Banks and Dr. Lance Shand, the Aeolians flew to Romania on June 10, 1981. Because of the restrictions of communism and of Nicolae Ceaucescu, the Romanian despot who was in power at the time, the Aeolians were not allowed to perform any sacred music while behind the "iron curtain." Negro spirituals, however, were considered to be folk music. The Aeolians traveled all over communist Romania singing, "Give Me Jesus."

Mrs. Blackmon tells the story of how she and the choir found a way to have worship while in Romania. She explains, "We found a huge building, concealed ourselves behind its massive pillars, and began to sing, "Don't Forget the Sabbath" in hushed tones. The stu-

---

dents requested hymn after hymn, and although we were whispering, a crowd gathered at the foot of the steps. Behind the crowd, which grew to be about ten rows deep, we saw two bayonets emerge as soldiers patrolled the park with their weapons pointed toward the sky. They went past but returned, and then the bayonets stopped. I began to pray to God for the protection of my students. This was frightening, because without intending to do so, we were breaking the law.

“In Romania, in those days, it was the law that no more than three people could assemble without having previously applied for the written permission of the state. When the bayonets moved away, I was so relieved. We soon went down the stairs of the building and moved through rows of appreciative Romanians in order to make our way back to the hotel.”

Alma Blackmon and the Aeolians found a way not only to witness for Christ, but also to make a difference on a global scale. Concerning their work in Romania, Harry Morgan, President of the Foundation, wrote: “The lasting impression made and friendships won by the Aeolians in their tour to Romania in 1981 are a genuine tribute to the long hours of hard work and sacrifice on the parts of you and your students. Your journey of Friendship has made a real difference in the lives of those you met and the hearts you touched through your performances. You have taken the opportunity to help determine and shape the kind of world we all want, people knowing and understanding people, friend to friend.”

Alma Blackmon has been relentless in her pursuit of excellence, both in music and in academics. She has dedicated her life in service; she continues to serve. After retiring from Oakwood College, she has served as minister of music in churches such as the First Seventh-day Adventist Church in Memphis, Tennessee, and the Berean Seventh-day Adventist Church in Atlanta, Georgia.

In June, 1988, Andrews University awarded the honorary degree Doctor of Music, for Alma’s musical contributions to the world church of Seventh-day Adventists. In May, 1990, Atlantic Union College recognized the international contributions she had made through the Friendship Ambassadors Foundation behind the Iron Curtain and in other European countries, by awarding the honorary degree, Doctor

Alma Blackmon now resides in Atlanta, Georgia, where she continues to give of herself through teaching piano in her home studio. She has also taught piano at Greater Atlanta Adventist Academy. Dr. Alma Blackmon's life and legacy stand as testimonies that one person can make a big difference.

## References

Malcolm, Roy E. *The Aeolians: Directors Recall Precious Memories*. (Alabama: Oakwood College Publishing Association, 1999).

Morales-Gudmundson, Lourdes E. *Women and the Church: The Feminine Perspective*. (Michigan: Andrews University Press, 1995).

Oakwood College Archives, The. Staff File: *Alma Blackmon*.

Smit, J. Y. "Critic Paul Hume Dies; Drew Truman's Wrath." *The Washington Post*, November 27, 2001, p. B01.

# Jannith Lewis

Lavinia Baxter



Jannith sang and moved with rhythm and joy as the morning service of the Baptist church in Kansas City, Kansas, got into the Spirit. The chords of Christian hymns, adapted to the rhythm and beat of an African-American worship style, filled the air. Church was serious business for Jannith, her brother, and their mother. She loved to go to church, and spent several days of the week in the services and activities of the congregation. From an early age, she had been an active and willing participant. Her whole life revolved around the church community. As a little girl she admired the young leaders of the church and how they took on leadership roles. She kept a watchful eye on them as her body moved to the rhythm while the music filled

the building in the early 1940's.

For thousands of African-American young people growing up in the first half of the twentieth century, religion opened avenues that were not opened to the previous generation. Jannith hoped to leave her mark on society, and the worship services in the Baptist Church inspired and fueled those feelings. Her desire to excel gained strength in those worship services; creativity and determination crept into her thinking as she sang and listened.

By the time Jannith finished her elementary school education, Kansas City had gained the reputation of being the "Paris of the Plains." Although the river divided the city into two cities, one in Missouri and the other in Kansas, actually they were one and the same. When Jannith began to work, she worked in Kansas City, Missouri, and lived in Kansas City, Kansas.

Jannith was beginning to walk and talk when the nation suffered the pangs of the Great Depression. However, she did not feel the ravages of the times because Kansas City was booming. Thousands of people were coming to the city every week. African-Americans from the South poured in to the city daily. The streets were full of cars with people rushing to and from work. Hundreds of young African-Americans from the South heard of Kansas City and the opportunities open there. Like a gushing stream, they flowed into the city during the 1930's.

At night, Kansas City came to life. The worship services at the local churches were not the only places where African-American music flourished. In the evening, music became one of the unique products that Kansas City gave to the nation. At the turn of the century, Scott Joplin, one of the first African-American composers of Ragtime music, wrote from Kansas City. James Scott, the famous African-American composer, wrote the "Little Professor," another ragtime hit. By the time Jannith was born, the neighborhood of Eighth and Vine Streets on the Missouri side swung all night long to the music of African-American musicians. Nightclubs had some of the most famous African-American entertainers in the United States. Some musicologists even believe that the syncopated rhythms of African-American music in the twentieth century had their birth in Kansas City.

The famous African-American musicians in Kansas City were

---

---

many. For the young and talented, this was the place to be in the 1930's. Even teenagers noticed that doors would open for musicians. Maybe it is for that reason that music became one of the most popular areas of study in the black high schools of both cities. Lincoln High on the Missouri side had one of the most famous marching bands in the nation. And both cities had municipal marching bands that entertained their citizens on the weekends and holidays.

Much of the joyful music that poured out of Kansas City came from the fact that most African-Americans found employment there, making life a joy. Holidays were celebrated to the fullest. Some of the best Black baseball teams in the nation got the patronage of the people of the city who had the money to go out and watch them play on the weekends. Kansas City was one of the most important stops for the Black teams. The Kansas City Monarchs were considered the best African-American team to play the game. Before going to the Brooklyn Dodgers, Jackie Robinson, the first African-American to play for the all-white professional teams, played for the Kansas City Monarchs.

Jannith came into this world only two days after Christmas, December 27, 1931. By then Kansas City, Missouri had become the nineteenth largest city in the nation with a population of 399,746. However, if you add to that population those who lived on the other side of the river, the number was really much larger. The Great Depression hit the rest of the nation with a devastating blow; however, in Kansas City the growth and expansion seemed to ignore completely what was happening in the rest of the country.

It was during these boom years that Jannith started school. By the time she was nine years of age, Kansas City, Missouri, had become the eighth largest city in the United States, jumping to a population of 815,048. Almost half a million people had come to the city in the first years of Jannith's life. The city was a magnet that pulled tens of thousands into its orbit.

Centrally located with excellent transportation routes on the river and through the railroads, the city became one of the most important hubs in the nation. All the live stock and grains of the prairies passed through the city and gave life and vitality to thousands of families.

Kansas City had not always been so vibrant, and the opportuni-

ties for a better life for African-Americans had not always flourished. Although by the 1940's African-Americans came in large numbers, they continued to be a minority in the city. Perhaps this was the reason that there was more toleration for the presence of Blacks. Unlike some southern cities where Blacks constituted a majority of the populations and Caucasians felt threatened by their presence, in Kansas City they were still under five percent of the population.

The first African-Americans to arrive in Kansas came after the Civil War. During this period of frustration and uncertainty a modern day Moses emerged to lead his people to the Promised Land. Papa Singleton, an ex-slave from Tennessee, learned of the availability of cheap and abundant land in the mid-west. He reported to his friends back home that there was enough land for every Negro man who desired it. Hence, just like the men that Moses sent to Canaan to spy out the land, Singleton, with a handful of men, went to view the land in Kansas around 1870. Papa Singleton, excited by the homesteading possibilities, became convinced that there was enough land in Kansas for anyone who wanted it.

Singleton worked untiringly campaigning to round up as many interested Negro families as possible. Singleton built interest in a movement that became Known as the Great Migration, in spite of the fact that many of the Whites in the southern states dreaded the thought of having their tenant farmers leave the region. In order to organize the migration, Singleton helped form the Edgefield Real Estate and Homestead Association. The association, which regularly held informational meetings with working class Negroes in Nashville, eventually spread its message to other cities in the South. By 1878 the association began to take Negroes on trips to Kansas, and in 1879, the first colonies of Negroes were already living in Dunlap and Morris Counties, Kansas.

After the first colony left the South, curiosity served to fuel many others to make that westward trek As could be expected, the numbers of Negroes migrating became quite alarming to Whites who depended on their labor. The *Exodusters*, as alarmed Caucasians called them, generated overwhelming attention. This group had set out knowing virtually nothing of Kansas, trusting entirely in what skeptics called "the Kansas Fever."

---

Because the Negroes had kept quiet about it, outsiders viewing the whole phenomenon had no understanding of why and how this mass Negro migration had begun. Not surprisingly, Whites who had relied on the Negro to further their economic purposes were angry and loudly voiced their concerns. Terrified that their cheap labor would disappear and cut into their "bottom line," they used all the available energy to put a stop to the migration. Newspapers documented the phenomenon with speculative theories in order to make sense of the upset.

"The Exodus started among black people themselves, how or when nobody knows, and the Negroes keep their own counsel about it. Persons of limited intelligence are often not unlike unreasoning animals in the way of following blindly on a given direction in which they have been started, like a flock of sheep jumping over a fence." (Irvin Painter. *Black Migration to Kansas after Reconstruction*. 1976, p.34 ).

Another observer noted that it would not be easy to tell where the migration of the Blacks might end, comparing it to a panic having set in.

Still others weren't quite as dignified about the "fiasco" that was taking place. A northern White stated bluntly, "The timid learned that they could escape what they have come to regard as a second bondage; they flocked together to gain moral support which comes from numbers." (James Runnion. "The Negro Exodus." *Atlantic Monthly*, Vol. XLIV, No. 262, 1979). "The Exodus seemed a sort of religious exaltation during which they had regarded Kansas as a modern Canaan and the God-appointed home of the Negro race." (F.R. Guernsey. "The Negro Exodus." *International Review* Vol. VII, No. 4, October 1879, p. 375).

In part it was the dedication and audacity of the first African-Americans who risked everything to head into the unknown world of Kansas which opened the door to the hundreds who followed. They opened opportunities for a vibrant African-American community to emerge on the Great Plains. Without the trail blazing audacity of people like Papa Singleton, the African-American community which emerged in Kansas City would never have been started.

Jannith's family reaped the blessing of the early African-American pioneers who settled in Missouri and Kansas. Her grandfather was the first to arrive in the region, right after World War I; however, he did not come from Tennessee, but rather Arkansas.

In Hope, Arkansas, at the turn of the century, John William Dillard, Jannith's grandfather, was born into a loving and close family, the only son of his parents. John's mother was part Black Hawk Indian, while his father was African-American. During those days it was rare for a black person to complete schooling, so John and his siblings went to school for only a few years.

At the age of 18, John met and married Mandy Bogin. Mandy worked for a white family in the town, cooking, cleaning, and doing domestic work. At the turn of the century, most of the work for African-American women who were not working in the field, centered around domestic duties. John worked for a market and drove horses delivering goods. Because of his job, he would see Mandy periodically on the street or at the house where she worked. Once she noticed his broad smiles and attentive gestures, she enjoyed his interest. The smiles and greetings grew to a friendship and eventually a courtship followed by marriage.

John and Mandy brought their first child into the world, Johnnie Mae, Jannith's mother. The couple tried to be good parents to their child by keeping active in their local Baptist church and teaching their daughter in the way of the Lord. Their second child was another girl, Mildred. Weakened by the birth, and with no available cure for the pneumonia she contracted, Mandy died when Mildred was only one year old. Devastated, John found himself with two daughters, no wife, and no help.

In an attempt to rear his children the best he could, John sent his older daughter to live with her great-grandmother who was also part Black Hawk. John's younger daughter, Mildred, went to live with his sister Rosie, who lived in a section of Hope called Tin Row. The name came from the fact that most of the homes had tin roofs and were poorly constructed. Like many residential areas for African-Americans at the turn of the century, Tin Row was located on the opposite side of the railroad tracks from the Whites.

In time John met and married Lucy Williams, a young Negro

---

woman in Hope. John was eager to pull his family back together; Johnnie came to live not only with her father and his new bride, but also Lucy's two children: Jannie, a few years older than Johnnie, and her sister Marie, a paralytic who later died.

Although World War I began in 1914, America did not join the conflict for several years. At first it appeared that the war would not impact the lives of people in Hope. However, by 1918, young men were recruited by the thousands and taken to the killing fields of Europe. John William Dillard was one of the hundreds of thousands of young men forced to leave their families. For two years, John served his country in Europe.

While John was away, Lucy and the children faced hard times. They had to cope without a man in the home; however, they pulled together and managed the best they could. Similarly, all across the nation many families, both black and white, moved to adjust to the terrible financial strain of a fatherless home. Hundreds of women began to find jobs newly created from the wartime industrial boom. The Williams family rallied to help Lucy support the four girls.

During the war, not only wartime production but also hate boomed all over the country. At this time the Ku Klux Klan (KKK), which had emerged the previous century in Pulaski, Tennessee, made a popular comeback. Under the leadership of William J. Simmons, Atlanta insurance businessman, the new Klan rivaled the old. Simmons, with the help of Edward Young Clark, organized the Klan into a pyramid business with representatives sent to find out who was hated in a given community. Once the unwanted people in the community were identified, a successful propaganda scheme was created to rile up mostly White Anglo-Saxon Protestant males (WASP) against the Blacks, Jews, Catholics, and immigrants.

Initiation fees, uniforms (white hoods), and a power hierarchy helped to make the KKK into a full-fledged secret organization. Not restricted to the South, the KKK claimed five million members in the 1920's.

The hatred and violence of the Klan in time made its presence felt in Hope, Arkansas. Violent actions taken periodically by the Klan terrorized Black families who feared for their lives. On one particular day, a notice was placed on the door of Lucy's home. Lucy's sister's

husband walked on the wrong side of the sidewalk on his way home from work. Two White women happened to be walking home on the same sidewalk. He did not notice them until it was too late. The Klan demanded that the family immediately leave town. The year was 1918, and John was still at war.

Having learned of his family's misfortune, John returned to the United States with a plan that would move them out of Arkansas. In the army, John had met a fellow soldier who lived in Kansas. The soldier gave John glowing reports about Kansas, and this sparked John's interest. When the war ended, instead of returning to Arkansas, John went directly to find work in Kansas. To his surprise and delight, he found work at an Armour Packing House, a local business in Kansas City that provided many jobs for Blacks who immigrated there.

At State Line and Central Avenue in Kansas City, Plankinton & Armour erected a small slaughterhouse in 1871. This was the era of the famous cattle drives from Texas. Thousands of head of cattle were driven into Kansas yearly. Growing industrial cities of the East were clamoring for pork and beef. John Plankinton retired from the company in 1885, and the Armour Brothers bought his half of the business. By 1908, Armour was one of the largest slaughterhouses in the world. A local newspaper described the operation: "Five thousand people, men and women all working together under practically one roof and all directed by one man! It is men and the system, humanity and the machine, that makes an enormous business like that of the Armours move like clockwork." (Web Site of the Kansas City Public Library).

At Armour, John worked hard trying his best to save as much money as possible so that he could send for his family. In 1923, like many other black families who came together after the war, the Dillards gathered their few belongings, packed everything, and moved to Kansas City, Kansas. As the *Exodusters* had done many years earlier, the Dillard family made the trip north to their new home. Johnnie and Jannie had just turned ten.

Kansas was no Canaan when Negroes descended on the state, but it was a far cry from the South. When John and his family arrived just after World War I, the exodus which had begun as a rural to rural

---

migration had subsided. The later migration after World War I was rural to urban. Jim Crow laws had become unbearable, and African-Americans who had not taken the trip in the late 1880's and 90's now more than ever felt the need to leave the "ole dirty south."

In order to support his family, like other able-bodied men John took on a second job as an auto mechanic. John's future granddaughter Jannith recalls, "I have a brother three years younger than I and we used to go past the garage to church because we went to church about seven or eight blocks from where we lived. And sometimes my brother and I would go over there just to see him and visit him on our way to some activity."

Grandpa John, as he was affectionately called, worked at that little garage well past retirement. "I don't remember details of when he died or about how many years old I might have been when he died. But I believe he may not have been alive in my high school years."

In contrast to children left behind in the South, John's daughters had the opportunity to attend public elementary schools. Johnnie attended Grant Elementary School in Kansas City, while her stepsister attended Douglas Elementary School. The girls learned to read and write, a high privilege for black children, who were still not supposed to be educated.

The Dillardards quickly settled into their new home, Kansas City. As it had been during slavery, religion and the church served as the cornerstone of the black communities all across the United States. At church, families came together not only to worship, but to fellowship and identify with each other's common experiences. Job availability and opportunities for business became known through church friends. Educational opportunities were public knowledge at the church. John led his family to join the First Baptist Church, where Jannie sang in the choir and Johnnie was an usher. Church became a vital part of the Dillardards' life in Kansas City.

In time, John's daughters attended Northeast High School on Troup Avenue. By 1931, as bright young ladies, Jannie and Johnnie Mae graduated from Sumner High School, the only black high school in Kansas City, Kansas. They had accomplished a feat of which their parents had only dreamed. This opened the door for opportunities that had not been available to their mother.

After Johnnie finished high school she set out on a course that was very similar to other young black women in the 1930's: she fell in love and married. On March 18, 1931, Johnnie married William Calvin Lewis. Full of excitement and plans, they began their new life. On December 27, 1931, they had their first child, and named her Jannith Louise Lewis. A boy whom they named John William Lewis was born two years later.

The couple took up their duty as parents and worked hard to provide for their family. Johnnie Mae followed in her own father's footsteps and took a job at Armour Packing House, the largest employer of Blacks in Kansas City during the war years. The job was one of the best-paying jobs in the city for African-Americans.

World War II rolled around with a vengeance, and in 1939 threatened to drag the United States into Hitler's deadly onslaught. After Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, President Roosevelt finally consented to again send America's sons into war. The Lewis's happy union was cut short when William joined the army, never to return.

As a single parents, Johnnie needed work, which she quickly found with the Internal Revenue Service. In the course of her life Johnnie took on many jobs in order to help her family survive, but eventually she was licensed as a practical nurse and worked in several of the hospitals in the city through her career, which lasted well into her eighties. Before her retirement, she worked for the city government in a program for seniors. For almost twenty years she supervised a program called telephone ministry.

At an early age, Jannith Lewis realized that the key to rising out of poverty, dead-end jobs, and ignorance, was education. Her mother knew the effects of being uneducated and made sure that Jannith would not fall into the pit of poor training. She made sure that homework was done and that grades were kept up.

Jannith Lewis attended elementary, middle, and high schools just as her mother had years before. When she was not in school, she was with the equivalent of Girl Scouts for the African-American community. In those years, black children could not belong to the white Girl Scouts. If Jannith was not with her group, she was involved in some church-related program.

---

---

“My early remembrances were of going to school. School was very important, and I enjoyed going. I had beautiful teachers. I also remember very clearly that from age five until now I have been very active in my religious faith.”

As a teenager at Sumner High School, Lewis knew grades were important and she did her homework diligently, but also became involved in student government and participated faithfully in most school activities. In 1949, Lewis graduated and joined a large number of her peers who went on to college. “Large numbers of them did go to college after finishing twelfth grade. And I know that many of them became professionals in various areas,” she states.

After graduating from high school, Jannith was not satisfied with just having a high school diploma. Although she had accomplished this, she decided to take her education a step further. During the war years, very few Blacks, especially women, chose a college education; rather, they went to work in large factories that furnished World War II and the booming industrial economy. Yet Jannith saw the need to create choices and options for her future. In 1950, she eagerly accepted an opportunity to attend the University of Kansas in Lawrence.

Unlike the southern universities that simply did not allow African-American students to enter their classrooms, the University of Kansas had no problems in that area. However, the University of Kansas was not heaven. The racial prejudice that saturated the nation was also present in Kansas.

Lewis said, “At that time they did not have housing in the dormitories for African-Americans, so the black fraternities and sororities created a framework and family group with which Blacks on white college and university campuses have been able to identify.”

In order to knit herself into this Linus Blanket, Lewis joined the Alpha Kappa Alpha (AKA) sorority. AKA was founded in 1907 by several students at Howard University. In 1926, they had become nationwide, and their chapters appeared in many colleges and universities in the United States. In an effort to support first generation Blacks going to college, Blacks near the campus rented out individual homes they owned to the fraternities and sororities. Through the help of African-American families in the black community in Lawrence, and the AKA, Jannith was able to live close to the University and earn her

Lewis majored in language arts. She enjoyed her stay at the university and did well in all of her studies. Although some of the students and teachers were cold and indifferent, or just outright hostile, to black students, Jannith survived. She excelled in all subject areas and maintained high grades. During the summers she returned to her home in Kansas City, where she found work.

For two summers, Lewis worked as a lab technician at the University of Kansas Hospital. In the summer of her junior year, she was disheartened because the hospital gave the job to someone else. A friend from Sumner High School learned of her plight and recommended her to a gentleman named Harold Baker, a black contractor who needed a secretary. After meeting the gentleman, who lived in Kansas City, Missouri, Lewis accepted the job. Since she had always been very dependable and diligent, her boss liked her. Soon Jannith became acquainted with his family, who were interested in young Jannith and invited her to visit their church.

On the Saturday that Jannith attended church with the Bakers, she was also scheduled to attend an AKA meeting. She struggled with the conflict because she felt that both were equally important, but in the end she decided to go to church. That morning the pastor of the church, Elder Reed, delivered a sermon that left a profound impression on Jannith. She recalled, "It seemed as if he covered the Bible from Genesis to Revelation and everything in between."

At the end of his sermon the pastor made an appeal. While sitting in that pew she was torn. She says, "I couldn't get up, but I couldn't stay seated."

Over and over the minister called for the members to take a stand. Jannith felt he was speaking right to her. Someone behind her, sensing her fear, touched her and said, "You can do it." Jannith finally got up from her seat.

She recalls, "The main thing that I became convicted on was the Sabbath, the fourth commandment."

When Jannith got home from church and her AKA meeting that Saturday afternoon, her mother was waiting with ham, especially prepared for her. Since Seventh-day Adventists do not eat pork and they worship on Saturday instead of Sunday, the afternoon grew tense

---

and turbulent. Jannith told her mother that she could not eat ham. Excited about her newfound joy, she also told her mother that she had taken her stand for Christ at the Seventh-day Adventist Church. She would not be attending church on Sunday.

Her newfound joy didn't please her mother. Johnnie had grown up as an active member in the Baptist church, and she found it hard to accept her daughter's new faith.

Jannith remembers, "Mother was furious. How could I abandon the church that her whole family had attended for years? For a whole month my mother and I were not talking."

Determined to straighten Jannith out, Johnnie went to her pastor and told him everything that had happened. As a concerned minister wanting to seek the lost and convinced he could put her back on course and eliminate her confusion, he offered to visit Jannith in her home and appeal to her. What he didn't know was that Jannith knew he was coming and that she was ready for him.

Her new pastor at the Seventh-day Adventist Church gave her many books which she read in order to get a deeper understanding on the topic that would be most contentious: the seventh-day Sabbath. After weeks of preparation, the Baptist minister arrived with the plan to change Jannith's mind and drive the Sabbath ideology out of her mind.

Jannith remembers that she immediately asked him if in fact the Seventh-day was the Sabbath. Caught off guard by her assertiveness, the minister reverted to the argument that the commandments had been nailed to the cross. She shot back at him a series of arguments that left him in awe. Frustrated, he reluctantly admitted, "The Seventh-day is the Sabbath." Then he left.

Johnnie was impressed by her daughter's determination and grasp of the subject. She had never seen Jannith react with so much conviction and passion about anything. They started talking again. However, life that summer continued to be strained. Jannith, although happy in her faith, also felt the pain that her divided home brought. Her mother was visibly upset and disheartened by her daughter's position. Jannith wished that her mother could also see the world the way she saw it.

Responding in conviction to her newfound faith, Lewis began

attending a Seventh-day Adventist church eight blocks from her home. Her mother was furious. In an effort to derail Jannith, Johnnie asked her daughter to attend meetings about the life of Christ at a white Methodist church.

Out of respect for her mother's wishes, Jannith did attend the meeting held a few blocks from a tent meeting held by the Seventh-day Adventists. After sitting through the services with her mother at the Methodist church, Jannith would exit the bus when it stopped at the tent, leaving her mother to ride home alone.

"I had asked my mother to attend with me, but she wouldn't even consider it," remembers Jannith.

Finally one night after Jannith's persistent invitations and heartfelt prayers, Johnnie got off the bus with her daughter. "Elder Thomas preached about everything that night. After one sermon, Mother was willing to come every night, and at the end of the summer she joined the church."

In 1953, Jannith completed her Language Arts degree at the University of Kansas. When the leaders of the Seventh-day Adventist church discovered that she had a college degree, they quickly moved to find her a place in the church. Elder Charles Bradford, with the President of the Central States Conference of Seventh-day Adventist, recommended Lewis to President Frank Peterson of Oakwood College. The college needed an English instructor.

When Lewis arrived at Oakwood College in 1953 at the age of 21, she was eager and ready for a career as an English instructor. She loved the classroom and became completely immersed in her work. Her dedication and total commitment caught the attention of the Department Chair, Eva B. Dykes. One day Dr. Dykes explained to her that the current librarian, a white male, was leaving the college, and there would be a need for someone to fill that position.

Dr. Dykes felt that she could hire an English instructor more easily than a trained librarian. As the chair of the accreditation committee of the college, Dr. Dykes was deeply concerned with the personnel of the institution. She knew that the college would never be accredited without properly trained staff. Dr. Dykes saw the dedication and persistence of Jannith, and became convinced that the young instructor would make an excellent librarian. Dr. Dykes painted the

picture clearly in Jannith's mind and convinced her that this was a good opportunity for her to serve in a more specialized position.

Then Dr. Dykes convinced the president of the college, Frank Peterson, that Jannith Lewis should be trained to fill the position of college librarian.

Jannith did not have to give the opportunity a lot of thought. In the fall of 1955, Lewis left Oakwood to earn a master's degree in library science at the University of Indiana. In the 1950's only twenty schools in the nation offered degrees in library science, and the top school was the University of Indiana at Bloomington. She was accepted there.



Jannith faced graduate school with determination and attained excellent grades. Although she was only one of very few African-Americans at the University, and the only one in the graduate school, she worked hard and ignored all distractions. Like a dry sponge she soaked up the information that would make the library at Oakwood College adequate for a top academic and research institution. She learned how to catalog books, purchase and build a collection, and make a library a friendly place of learning.

Upon returning to Oakwood, Lewis immersed herself in her job with a fresh perspective and lots of energy. The library was located in

---

Green Hall, a small building that not only housed all of the literary collection of the school but also the administrative offices. Lewis remembers that there was very little room and very few books. She had returned from graduate school with a Master's in Library Science, eager to face the monumental task before her.

As the head of the library, Lewis consistently fought for the budget she needed to make the library a college library. She built up the books rapidly and it was soon obvious that there was no longer space in Green Hall to hold the collection. Her success had brought on a whole new set of problems.

By the 1960's, Oakwood College was growing like the book collection in the library. The Blake Center, a new administrative building, was under construction. The enrollment of the college was growing steadily as more African-American students from all over the nation and the world applied for entrance. As the college went from a junior college to a senior college, in Jannith's opinion the greatest need was the need for a new library.

In time even the administrators of the institution realized that the appeals from the small librarian were essential. The president of the college, Dr. Frank Hale, realized that the person most acquainted with the needs of the library was Jannith Lewis, and since she was the main protagonist for a new library, the administrators assigned her to work with the architectural firm designing the building. "They hired an outstanding company and I was able to, with the treasurer, Adele Warren, develop what we wanted in the library," she recalls.

The result was one of the finest library designs in the United States in the early 1970's. The work which began under President Hale was finally completed under President Calvin Rock. Lewis chose everything from the carpeting to the furniture. And remarkably, when the building was completed in 1973, this tiny black school was the first in the country to house a media center area complete with viewing screen and advanced communication technology. Dedicated as the Eva. B. Dykes Library, it was also the first to operate from the basement to the mezzanine floor.

Since the early 1970's, the library has grown from a few thousand books cramped in Green Hall to well over 125,000 volumes. The library now houses the Oakwood College Archives where are

---

found hundreds of documents on the history and development of the Adventist Church among African-Americans. The library also maintains excellent data bases so that its students and professors can do research in hundreds of journals and periodicals through computer searches.

In the absence of a campus church, Lewis and a friend usually attended church in the college gymnasium, but one bright Saturday morning in the 1960's, they decided they wanted to visit a traditional church with stained glass windows and padded pews. Lewis told her friend, "I want to go to church today and really feel that we are in a sanctuary."

Central Seventh-day Adventist Church was located on the other side of the city in the white area of town. Lewis and her friend were quite aware of this, but saw no problem in going to worship with the congregation in that church. What ensued from their visit was a shock to them and the church members who were there when they arrived.

When they arrived at the door, a deacon of the church rushed to their sides. He greeted the pair, but insisted that there was another church in town for Blacks. Lewis and her friend of course knew that but thanked him and continued into the church. Upon entering, they recognized two Caucasian faculty members from Oakwood College, both on the platform with the pastor speaking from the pulpit. The minister, who had begun his sermon, suddenly stopped when he saw the pair, and before Jannith and her friend could sit down, he requested from the podium that the two colored women would please leave.

One of the faculty elders on the platform indicated to the minister that the two women were faculty members from Oakwood College. However, the pastor was on a crusade and no one, not even his influential elder, was going to deter him.

The minister went on to point out that in the *Testimonies*, Ellen White indicated that black people had their own churches and that white people had their own. The pastor had misquoted Ellen White, a pioneer of the Adventist Church who is respected by both black and white members.

Lewis remembers that it became very hectic. One or two people spoke up from the congregation and stated that although the writings

---

of Ellen White suggested that people should have their own churches, that should not stop colored people from visiting white churches. The wives of the two faculty members rushed to Lewis and her friend to console them, as members of the church began to weep and cry out.

“We went back to campus and were not planning to say a word to anybody about it, because it was so unexpected that they would want to bodily remove us from their church,” says Lewis.

As a result, the event took on a shape of its own. The two faculty elders were so embarrassed and sorry, that they contacted the Academic Dean at Oakwood College and explained what had happened. In turn, the dean contacted the General Conference, which issued a statement in the *Review and Herald* that churches should not exclude worshipers of any race. It was shocking that the incident also caused some members of Central Church to be disfellowshipped. This resulted in the split and eventual closing for a time of the white Seventh-day Adventist Church in Huntsville.

Jannith’s innocent desire to worship in a church with stained glass windows and padded pews turned into an incident that she never imagined. She certainly did not want to interrupt the church service, and she did not expect the kind of greeting that was given. She had no idea that her visit would turn into a wake-up call to a denomination that up until that time had not addressed the issue of race. In a sense, Lewis became a Rosa Banks in her own right, forcing the administrators of the church to take a stand on an issue they had preferred not to touch.

Although Lewis made many strides in her career, including the building of a new technologically and architecturally sound library, she was not satisfied.

At an age when most women are settled in the careers, standard of living and accomplishment, Lewis in her 40’s was not. She could have left well enough alone and remained director of the library for many years, but twenty years after graduating with her Master’s in Library Science, Lewis took the challenge of attaining her PhD. In 1978 she went back to Bloomington, Indiana, one of the then most racist towns in the Midwest.

Indiana University had not changed much since she had last been there. Not only were there very few Blacks enrolled, but she was the

oldest and only black person in her area of study. Lewis, who described this time in her life as her greatest challenge, took hold of it bravely. As director of the library at Oakwood College, she continued to perform her job by phone, and traveled to Huntsville and back nearly every month.

After almost three years of intense study combined with the task of running the library, Lewis now had to pass a final test. The study of statistics had been threatening to keep her from getting her degree. The teacher had truly been supportive, supplying her with a personal tutor, and together they worked hard to solve enormous problems step by step. A woman from Korea was also struggling, but with the language problem. The woman became Jannith's friend. Lewis offered to help her with English, and discovered that her new friend was a mathematician who had no problem with statistics. As a team, the pair battled through the semester.

On June 10, 1982, Lewis became the first woman in the Seventh-day Adventist Church to obtain a Ph.D. in Library Science. Her thesis was, *Strategies for Attaining Quantitative Adequacy in the Collections of Selected Undergraduate Liberal Arts College Libraries Evaluated by College Library Standards*.

Dr. Jannith Lewis became actively involved in professional organizations including: President of the Adventist Library Organization, member of the Alabama Library Association, the American Library Association, Beta Phi Mu (an international Library Science Honor Society), Southern Library Association, and American Association of University Women. And for the recent years, Lewis has been selected to be evaluator for the Southern Association for the Accreditation of Colleges.

Undeniably, she has been a major catalyst for excellence and achievement to dozens of students who have come under her influence. Her work at the library, her service to her community, and ultimately her church, have left visible marks that will be forever recognized.

Lewis sums it up: "I have enjoyed my work and feel that I have only been able to make the contribution to the institution and college because the Lord has blessed me."

## References

*Cincinnati Commercial*, March 26, 1879

Guernsey, F.R. "The Negro Exodus." *International Review VII*, No. 4, Oct. 1879, p. 375.

Interviews with Jannith Lewis and those close to her, conducted Spring, 2001.

Kansas City Public Library Web Site.

Moss, George Donaldson. *America in the Twentieth Century*. (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 2000).

Painter, Irvin. *Exodusters: Black Migration to Kansas After Reconstruction*. (New York: Norton, 1976).

Rose, Lawrence C., Jr. *The Divine Nine: The History of African-American Fraternities and Sororities*. (New York: Kensington, 2000).

Runnion, James "The Negro Exodus." *Atlantic Monthly*, Vol. XLIV, No. 262, 1979

United States Census, 1930

United States Census, 1940.

# Williemae Erving

Anita Dupree



“Woof, woof, woof!”

“What is it now, Buck? Lord, have mercy, can’t these chil’ren stay put for one minute!”

Exasperated and tired from picking cotton all day, Williemae Erving walked off the field and headed for the one-room cabin. In the 1950’s, hundreds of African-American families worked the cotton fields a few miles from the city of Huntsville in northern Alabama, as had their parents, grandparents, great-grandparents, and great-great-grandparents before them. Williemae had little energy as she headed for the cabin which lay several hundred yards from where she had been picking cotton with her older children.

It was hard work, and she could not afford to leave the field too often. Williemae and her older children worked in the fields picking cotton, sharecropping, while the household dog, Buck, baby-sat the younger ones.

Williemae's husband, who worked for the military, was an expert dog trainer, and had taught Buck well. Whenever the younger children strayed from the cabin, Buck would nudge them back to their places. He was gentle and was a trusted baby-sitter. However, when any of the children started to cry, his job was to go looking for Williemae.

Williemae was born on January 16, 1932, in New Market, Alabama, a small rural community about ten miles northeast of Huntsville, and she grew up in northern Alabama, the second child of a traditional Cherokee Indian, Richard Leslie, and her African-American mother, Minnie. She admired and adored her parents.

Richard was born in Toney, Alabama, only a few miles from the Tennessee border. Although he attended school to the sixth grade, he could not read or write, and would often sign documents simply by marking an X. Williemae saw her father sign several documents that way, and noticed that he seemed uneasy when signing in the presence of his children. He wanted the best for them, and would always care for them the best he could.

Richard Leslie, part Cherokee Indian and part African-American, was typical of many blacks during the early 1900's. Although Richard could not read, he had strong mathematical skills. His grandmother, a full-blooded Cherokee, taught him math by scratching rocks on the ground, devising equations for him. She played an important role in his upbringing and instilled in him the values and traditions of his Cherokee culture.

Minnie, Williemae's mother, was from Capshaw, Alabama, and was educated to the seventh grade. Richard and Minnie met each other picking cotton on farms near their homes. In those days, most of the cotton in northern Alabama was picked by hand, and hundreds of workers were needed in the fall of the year to pick the cotton fields. Richard would throw cotton bolls at Minnie to get her attention, but soon realized that Minnie's dignity was not to be tampered with. On their first date, Richard tried to sneak a kiss, but was rewarded for

---

that effort by a good slap from Minnie!

After dating for awhile, Richard and Minnie married. To this union five children were born. The Leslies lived along Hesters Creek near a Cherokee Indian settlement. Richard always wore a headband, allowing his long hair to hang to his shoulders. He often took his children to Hesters Creek where they had fellowship with the tribe, catching fish and cooking bread. A fire was created in a hole similar to a barbecue pit, and there the community prepared their food. When the cooking was complete, all of the people present would sit together and eat out of their hands as if they were bowls. Williemaë remembers those years fondly.

Tepees surrounded the site, but the Leslies never slept overnight. Most of the Indian traditions that Richard treasured had been slowly disappearing as many members of the Cherokee community married outside the tribe and began to be assimilated into the larger society. Richard was a good example of that.

For over a hundred years, the Cherokee had kept their traditions alive with some success. Most of northern Alabama where Williemaë was born belonged to the Cherokee Nation at one time. They had owned the land for generations before the arrival of white men, but at the beginning of the nineteenth century their territory had been slowly yet violently taken from them.

After the arrival of the first Europeans in the 1500's, the Cherokee had traded and survived alongside Spanish, French, and English people. Through this contact they had attained many European ways. They had become cattlemen when cows, pigs, goats, and sheep were brought to the Southeast by the Spaniards. They had learned to dress like the Europeans, and used the technology of Europe during the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries. They even developed their own written language. For these reasons, when the first Englishmen arrived in the last half of the seventeenth century, they labeled the Cherokee one of the civilized tribes of North America.

Richard was very proud of his Cherokee past, and wanted his children to be proud of it, also. The Cherokee survived the cultural encounters with the Spanish, the French, and the English; however, they did not do so well with Americans. The Americans dealt the most devastating blow to the Cherokee culture when the slave societies of

the eastern seaboard began to crumble. The tobacco economy of the Chesapeake region, and the rice economy of the lowlands in the Carolinas, could no longer sustain slavery, because plantation owners had exhausted the land through generations of cultivation. The solution to the dilemma, which evolved and came to the rescue of the economies of the east, was the creation of the cotton economy of the old South, especially Alabama and Mississippi.

To establish slave plantations in the deep South, the Cherokee needed to be removed. The Cherokee, along with the Chickasaw and Choctaw, among others, were in the way of the cotton economy. It started with Thomas Jefferson, who devised a plan to push the Cherokee into indebtedness, and ended with Andrew Jackson, whose army raided native villages, killing men, women, and children. His reward for the weakening of the Cherokee culture was the presidency of the United States. The most devastating blow to the Cherokee came during the presidency of Jackson when he ordered their removal.

Even after this long and tragic history, the Cherokee continued to live in Alabama, and men like Richard continued to preserve their past. Their memory was not abolished by the "Removal Act of 1830" (signed by President Andrew Jackson), nor by the fact that the Cherokee, Creek, Choctaw, Chickataw, and Seminole nations were driven to Indian Territory, now known as Oklahoma. The "Trail of Tears" that murdered hundreds of Cherokee who were forced out of Alabama, only served to burn the memory even more permanently into the minds and lives of those like Richard and his family.

Richard often insisted that his family should wear tribal clothing. As a child, Williemaë was ashamed of the clothes she wore, which were either tribal or else were made by her mother. Williemaë sometimes hid another set of clothes in her school bag, and changed while walking to school. When she did wear tribal clothing, the kids would make fun of her and call her names.

During the Great Depression, hunger and poverty swept through American, and millions of Americans were hurt financially. The poor suffered most. The Leslies felt the sting of the Depression. When the crash occurred in 1929, unemployment stood at about two million, climbing after that year to an average of 100,000 workers losing their

---

jobs weekly during the first three years. To survive these years in northern Alabama, the Leslies hunted in the forests and mountains. A typical meal in the early 1930's, when Williamae was but a baby, would include rabbit, squirrel, dove, or hog. Whatever Richard brought back from hunting, they ate. Richard was employed at 25 cents per day, making a yearly income of about \$93.

The average yearly income in America in 1929 - 1933 was \$300. Williamae grew up unaware that most people in America had things she would consider luxuries. The Leslies did not have electricity while living in Alabama in the 1930's and 1940's, and the lack of employment at that time forced them, like hundreds of other cotton pickers, to move to Tennessee. There Williamae discovered electricity. In Alabama, Minnie had cooked on a wood stove, their light source after nightfall was a kerosene lamp, and they had their own well.

In Elora, Tennessee, a white landowner permitted the Leslies to live on part of his land, where they moved into a barn. This move opened opportunities for the Leslies. For the first time, they experienced a table with chairs, and electricity!

Williamae never wore a pair of shoes until she began to attend school in Tennessee.



Even in the middle 1950's after she married, when times got tough for Williamae and her own family, she often reverted to wrap-

ping burlap around her feet for shoes. By doing that, she could squeeze other things from the budget to meet her children's needs.

In Tennessee, the Leslies began raising chickens and eating salmon. In her later years, Williamae would no longer touch dry beans or boiled corn, because in her childhood that was all she had, and she never knew that there were other things to eat. The new food staples that came into her diet intrigued her. These were all great improvements for her life, but two mules hitched to a wagon were still the Leslies' mode of transportation.

Williamae's family worked for their "Boss man," Nolan Walker, as tenant farmers while living in Tennessee. The Masons, a white family, moved to Tennessee from the north and had no place to stay. Richard, seeing their poverty and need, opened his house to this family with six children. The Masons lived with the Leslies for four years.

When it was time for school to begin, the Leslies walked to school, because the buses would not run for Blacks in their community. The Mason children, faced with the option of taking the bus or walking with their friends, chose to walk. Every day the Masons and Leslies walked to school together, and their bond grew stronger and stronger. Williamae was especially close to Vivian, one of the Mason daughters.

With segregation still strongly enforced in the early 40's, and southern Tennessee being the birthplace of the Ku Klux Klan, it was strange indeed to see Blacks and Whites living in the same house. Even in Tennessee where segregation was not as strong as it was in Alabama and Mississippi, segregation was a fact of life. Segregated facilities for Blacks and Whites, approved by the United States with the 1896 case of Plessy v. Ferguson, was a daily reality for the Masons and the Leslies. But the poor do not always follow the rules of the larger society. Although in most of the nation the decisions of the Supreme Court convinced most Americans that separate facilities for Blacks and Whites were equal, in the minds of some that was pure nonsense.

During the middle 1940's, Williamae left her beloved friends the Masons when her family moved back to Alabama, nearer to their family members. However, the Masons stayed in Williamae's memory

---

---

for the rest of her life. Years later, while living in Huntsville, Williamae called every Mason in the telephone directories in an attempt to contact her childhood friends, but had no success.

However, fifty-four years after the Leslies left Tennessee, a white lady walked into a doctor's office off Pulaski Pike in Huntsville, stepped up to the receptionist's desk and stated her name. The receptionist's attention was caught when she heard the name Mason. She was a cousin of Williamae and knew of her cousin's search. After several questions and answers, Vivian Mason pulled out a photo of Williamae when she was seven years of age. She had been searching for Williamae for as long as Williamae searched for them. This encounter connected Vivian and Williamae after all those years! Today, Williamae and the two remaining sisters of the Mason family keep in touch daily, calling themselves "sisters." They all live in Huntsville, Alabama.

Williamae attended elementary and high school in Pleveny, Alabama, in the 1940's. The school had three teachers instructing in sections of one classroom. Most schools for African-American children in Alabama fared no better. Even the schools for white children in the state received very little support, making the education system to this day one of the worst in the nation. However, Williamae's parents stood firm behind their children receiving an education. Williamae did not enjoy attending school in her elementary days, due to the crowded rooms. There was too much distraction and it was difficult for her to concentrate on what the teachers were saying. The crowded classroom held all grade levels, and numbered 25 to 30 students.

Williamae's more memorable years were in high school. She recalls playing baseball, kickball, or basketball every day. She and her peers would cut the bottom out of a tub or bucket, hook it up to a tree, and shoot balls through the tub as their basketball hoop. Unlike the white children of the town who received the cream of local funding, such as it is, the African-American children had to make the best of what they had.

In high school, Williamae had a crush on a boy. One of her best friends also took a liking to the same boy, and became jealous. Williamae decided it was best to leave things alone. She never had intentions to fight or lose friendship over a boy. She never got excited about things, and learned to be patient.

Looking back, Williamae remembers the numerous jokes played by her fellow students and herself to agitate their teachers. Sometimes the students placed gum or tacks on the seats of chairs of their teachers and found that very funny.

Williamae considered one of her teachers, Maryra Howard, to be the meanest teacher she had ever seen. If Ms. Howard disapproved of something a student did, that student would suffer a switching at the hands of Ms. Howard. During Williamae's last year in high school, Ms. Howard swung that switch at Williamae. Now, Williamae was not a saint, and often caught the wrath of her teacher. However, she felt that the teacher took undue pleasure in whipping her, and vowed that it would not happen again. The next time such an occasion arose, Williamae grabbed the switch and told Ms. Howard that she would not allow her to hit her again. Williamae held the switch until she knew that Ms. Howard would not beat her anymore; this was the last time Maryra Howard ever hit Williamae.

In high school, Williamae and her siblings still wore clothing made by their mother. "Old timers' stockings with ridges," as Williamae puts it, were in her wardrobe until she was 19.

No men were permitted to visit Williamae or her sisters until their parents knew the history of each gentleman. The criteria to being permitted even to talk with the Leslie women included: the man's parents' family history, their occupation, and the men's intentions. Once this information was in place, the men had to come and ask permission. Once the petition was made, the caller had to leave and wait for Richard and Minnie to talk things over. If the men were allowed to enter the house, they could sit in the living room, where they were under surveillance, but they could go no further than that. Williamae and her sisters were always embarrassed about how their parents treated their male friends.

At eighteen years of age, 1950, Williamae was allowed to date for the first time. Thomas Erving was her first and last boyfriend. At first Williamae was skeptical of her mother's approval of Thomas, but as time passed their relationship grew as they tried to uphold high standards and Christian morals. When Thomas asked for Williamae's mother's blessing her response was, "Go ahead." Williamae felt that

---

---

her mother never really gave her blessing. But despite that, at age 19 Thomas took Williamae's hand in marriage.

To this union 13 children were born. One died at birth, and one at 18 months, a result of pneumonia. As Williamae's children were growing up, she worked picking cotton, and each child as soon as he or she was able to walk, joined the workforce. Buck, the family dog, baby-sat the younger children.

One day when Thomas was terribly sick, Williamae tied a note around Buck's neck. On her command, the dog went to the neighbor's house. Minutes later, the neighbor was there with a treatment for Thomas' sickness. Thomas had bad bouts with asthma, placing an even larger burden on Williamae. Being from the country, Thomas used natural remedies to heal sicknesses or ease symptoms. He enjoyed climbing various mountain peaks in northern Alabama to hunt or just enjoy nature. He also climbed mountains to calm his asthma when attacks came. He found the air at the top to be medicinal for him.

While Thomas was busy hunting or working in the military, Williamae was also busy raising the kids and working to keep things intact at home. Williamae became known as a touch mother. Her children nicknamed her "Will Power," as she did her best to keep them in line. When she was too tired to punish her errant children, Williamae never forgot about the punishment due to them. It may have been two months after the incident happened that Williamae would waken a child at night to reprimand him.

Stacy Baker, one of Williamae's younger daughters, remembers one day when the kids from the whole neighborhood were lined up to receive punishment from Williamae for something they all had done. Williamae was lovable and deeply admired by her children, but when she meant business, she did not play. Williamae proudly states that not one of her children has been to jail or in any trouble with the law.

Williamae's service and kindness were known throughout her community. Neighborhood children called her "Mom." When health problems appeared, Williamae usually ran to help her friends, no matter what hour of day or night it was. Even as a child she learned many of the remedies used by the Indians to take care of illnesses. Those skills made her an excellent mother and a valued member of her community. She was often called by her neighbors to come to their aid.

---

During the 1950's and 1960's, Alabama Blacks had a system in their neighborhoods that helped keep children out of trouble. Anyone could spank a neighborhood child without fear of being arrested. They all looked after one another, and the adults corrected the neighborhood children when they needed it. Everybody's kids were basically property of the community. Adults called parents and reported behavior of their kids. Williamae seemed to always find out if her kids did something wrong. The saying, "It takes a community to raise a child," held true in the 1950's in the cotton picking communities of northern Alabama.

It was the May 17, 1954, *Brown v. Board of Education* reversal of segregation that gave Blacks the opportunity to have an education equal to that of Whites. Williamae clearly knew of the benefits, and although Alabama was not the best place in the nation for black children to be educated, Williamae was ever vigilant concerning her children's education. If they missed a day of school she would scold them unless, of course, they were sick. Her children knew that you did not fool around with school; it was serious business.

At age eight, Stacy, one of Williamae's children, was almost killed. She tried to catch the school bus, but saw it was about to leave her. She dashed out into the street without looking, and a car picked her up and she went through the windshield. When Williamae went to the hospital, she looked so hurt and was crying. Her children could not stand it to see their mother hurt. Stacy felt more hurt for her mother than for her own pain..

To enable the family to feed all of the children around the table, the Ervings grew their own garden. They raised chickens to eat, and had a smokehouse. During the summer months they stored food for winter. By saving all they could, and not wasting anything, the Ervings were able to survive and educate all of their children.

Williamae was similar to her parents when her children reached dating age. Men came and sat in the living room to speak to her daughters. They went no further than that. She had to know their family before they came in at all.

In the 1960's, after most of her children had grown and were on their own, Williamae attended Alabama A & M University for one year and eight months. While there, she saw people planting, and

---

---

found that to be interesting. She looked into jobs with planting plants and trees. She enjoyed it so much that she quit school and worked at Chase Nursery for 19 years. At the nursery, Williemaë learned how to propagate and graft peach, apple, and plum trees. She loved to work with plants, and learned many things about planting and designing lawns and gardens.

In 1980, at almost fifty years of age, Williemaë was offered a position in the grounds department at Oakwood College where her skills became a valued asset. She even managed to grow a banana tree inside the greenhouse. Special care is needed to grow banana trees. It is rare to grow the trees without 12 hours of bright light and porous soil mixture. To the surprise of her co-workers, Williemaë soon had little banana sprouts coming up. The banana trees still grow.

Williemaë was always a caretaker. She constantly gave food to people who were hungry. While at Oakwood College, Williemaë cared for students who came under her watchful eye, just as she cared for her children. The students who worked in her department became like her own children. Dozens of them have worked under her and probably learned many things about life that were not taught in the classroom.

Michael Hamilton arrived on the campus of Oakwood College in the 1990's with the hope of enrolling. He came from a poor working family in Florida, and had very little money to finance his education. Unable to enroll, he moved into the city mission and shelter in downtown Huntsville, living day-to-day, eating berries on Oakwood property for meals. Sometimes he would sleep in the woods adjacent to the college without anyone knowing of his condition. However, Williemaë noticed. When she understood what was happening, she took Michael under her care. She made sure that he had food every day, got him a job, and with her motherly care Michael not only was accepted at Oakwood, but he graduated with a high grade point average in 2000. He received some of the highest scores in the history department on his exit exams.

The year Michael Hamilton graduated, he was also captain of the Oakwood College Bowl team. College Bowls are academic games where students are asked questions on the different disciplines of study, and compete against other college and university teams. In 2000,

---

Michael received several thousand dollars from the Honda Corporation of America because he answered more questions at the College Bowl games in Orlando, Florida, than any other student. More than 50 colleges and universities competed, and Michael took his team to the finals, unable to compete on the final day because Oakwood College does not participate in the games on Saturdays.

Williemae worked for Oakwood College for the last two decades of the century, retiring after 20 years of service. If you ask anyone with whom she worked, they can tell you how phenomenal she is with planting, growing, and sustaining the life of a flower, tree or plant. Most college students who go to and from classes rarely notice the neatly manicured grounds of the campus, the flowers that grow year 'round, and green lawns. They are generally too busy to enjoy the beauty that surrounds them, or think about the people that make that beauty possible. At times they may even look down at people like Williemae who have their hands full of dirt and wear worn overalls. None of this ever bothered Williemae because she loved her job and the opportunity to beautify the campus.

Her creative landscaping is seen daily by students and staff. The students who come from many urban ghettos of America learn to love the beauty that Williemae helped maintain on the campus of Oakwood. In fact, many of them would rather never go back to the city. Stacy, her daughter, summed up Williemae's work best when she stated, "You'll see my mother's work before you see anybody else's work when you enter the campus."

## References

Theda Perdue and Michael D. Green. Ed. *The Cherokee Removal: A Brief History With Documents* (New York: Bedford Books of St. Martin's Press, 1995).

William Warren Rodgers, Robert David, Leah Rawls Atkins and Wayne Flynt. *Alabama: The History of a Deep South State* (Tuscalusa, Alabama: The University of Alabama Press 1994).

Robert V. Remini. *Andrew Jackson*. (New York: Haper and Row Publisher, 1966).

James Benson Sellers, *Slavery in Alabama* (Tuscalusa, Alabama: The University of Alabama Press, 1950).

Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr. *The Age of Jackson* (Boston: Little Brown and Company 1946).

Sarah Woolfolk Wiggins. ed. *From Civil War to Civil Rights: Alabama 1860-1960* (Tuscaloosa, Alabama: University of Alabama Pres, 1987).

# Minneola Dixon

Lavinia Baxter



The world seemed to stand still as she stared at the \$500 check made out in her name. It was hard for Minneola to think. From out of the blue, an unknown woman not far from the Southwest Region Conference office where Minneola worked the summer of 1950, decided to write her a check. Who would have thought that the long hot summer pounding Dallas pavements selling *Message Magazine* would have ended with one person writing a check so she could return to college?

---

Minneola had worked all summer to earn enough money to return to Oakwood College. She had walked the streets every day selling her literature. But as the summer came to its end, it seemed as if she would never get the money necessary to get back into college. The tuition at Oakwood was much more than she could possibly earn selling magazines on the streets of Dallas, but she never gave up. Then the lady walked up to her with a check. Minneola could not believe what had happened. Her own mother, Alberta Sanders, who lived in Big Sandy, Texas, about 50 miles from where Minneola was standing, could not have dreamed of her eldest daughter receiving such a sum of money to finish her last year of college.

Minneola's mother, overwhelmed and happy, could only give thanks for what had just happened to her daughter. Alberta had been born in September, 1900, in the little town of Big Sandy, Texas, not too far from the better known town of Tyler. Alberta's parents, Georgia and Jim, were the children of slaves, and had the good fortune of being born just as President Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation brought the hope of freedom to a whole generation of slaves.

Alberta and her 13 siblings helped their parents farm the small property they owned in Guthrie, Oklahoma. After the Civil War, opportunities to acquire land opened the door to many African-Americans to become landowners. The Sanders family purchased several acres in Guthrie and began to farm with their children at their sides.

African-Americans had been coming to Oklahoma since the time of early explorers. Several black conquistadors under the Spanish flag marched through the Great plain in the sixteenth century, looking for gold and a passage to the far east when the Spanish explored the territory. Blacks were among the French and English who explored the region in the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries.

The first Blacks to settle in Oklahoma territory arrived with Native Americans who were pushed off the land east of the Mississippi in the first half of the nineteenth century. Some, who had intermarried with Native Americans, walked the Trail of Tears and were transplanted across the Mississippi when President Andrew Jackson signed the Indian Removal Act in the 1830's.

After the Civil War, the migration of Blacks into Oklahoma territory took on renewed vigor. Many Blacks who discovered that land

was available in Oklahoma, left the drudgery of tenant farming and headed west. Still many others flocked during the Territorial days of the 1880's to join 12,000 freed men who had been slaves of the five civilized tribes: the Cherokee, Choctaw, Chickasaw, Creek, and Seminole nations.

When Minneola's grandparents arrived in Oklahoma with their daughter Alberta just after the turn of the century, they came like many others both white and black to seek their fortune with dreams of owning land and establishing wealth. Unlike the hundreds of Blacks who had migrated into Oklahoma territory from east of the Mississippi, Minneola's grandparents migrated northward from Texas.

Oklahoma provided a great opportunity for homesteading after the Civil War. The land openings in Indian territory approved by the government in 1889 increased those opportunities. When the Sanders family arrived in Guthrie, it was one of 15 all-black towns that had formerly been Indian Territory. Tullahassee, the oldest of the all-black towns, has records that date back to 1850.

Guthrie is located along the lines of the Santa Fe Railway, which connected Texas ranches to Oklahoma farms, generating an expansion in interstate commerce and trade. These towns were established by the so-called '89-ers, who came to seek their fortune after Reconstruction. "The story of black towns is the story of the Negro's effort to make a place of permanence and worth for himself and his family in a restructured American nation." (Ann Hodges Morgan and H. Wayne Morgan. *New Views of the 46<sup>th</sup> State*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1982, p. 182).

During Reconstruction, plans for "forty acres and a mule" had never come to pass, but proposals caused many Negroes to flock to the newly organized territory. When the official United States census was taken just after Oklahoma became a state in 1907, it was found that the Negro population accounted for 8.3 percent of the total, surpassing that of the Native Americans.

The Sanders and other families who settled mostly in the southeastern portion of the state tilled flat, good land capable of supporting farming and ranching. Many of them were sharecroppers. Former slaves and the children of former slaves worked long hours to succeed in their newfound situation. But with the passage of time, they

---

discovered that despite the hard work, they were unable to better their lot in life. After years of “freedom” they discovered that they were still frozen into an economic order similar to slavery.

Alberta had a sharp mind, but her obligation to help her family would not allow her to go to school beyond the eighth grade. Further education was considered a luxury that African-American children could not afford. White children could go to middle and high school, but black children were required to help their families in the fields. It seemed as though Alberta was destined to the same lifestyle as those around her in the sleepy town of Guthrie. Her future appeared to be fixed in stone, becoming a wife, mother, and maid – in that order.

However, one day something happened that changed her life forever. A well-dressed lady knocked on the door and offered to study the Bible with the family. The friendly family invited the lady, at whom Alberta looked in awe, into the home. The lady called herself a Bible worker.

Alberta was already a teenager. She listened attentively as the teachings of the Bible were shared, and since the lady had found a place where people listened to her, she continued to visit the Sander family. By the end of the studies, Alberta was the first in her family to boldly accept the Seventh-day Adventist message. It was 1924, and her life would never be the same.

With a new lease on life, Alberta set out on a course that would later heavily influence her future daughter’s enthusiasm. Alberta plunged herself into telling her friends and neighbors about the things she had been taught.

From 1936 to 1941, the Works Project Administration was a huge contributor to the city in the area of the arts and education. Programs operated by federal funds directed money for music, museum service, recreation, library service, and art. These were available to both Whites and Negroes.

The year 1947 dawned as a year of promise for Blacks. The civil rights movement had begun to swing into action, thanks to mobilization efforts by many young, brave leaders who were willing to risk their lives for the cause of justice. Likewise, the world paid respect to Jackie Robinson’s efforts as he broke the color line, becoming the first Negro in the major baseball leagues. But 1947 meant something

else to a young teenager in Oklahoma City. Minneola moved forward to grasp the opportunities that awaited her. After graduating with high distinction in 1947 from Douglas High School, several offers and awards awaited her. Ruby, Minneola's second cousin and a high school art instructor, pushed her to accept scholarships to a public college, but Minneola was committed to attend the college her mother attended in Huntsville.

In order to go to Oakwood, Minneola needed a lot of money that her mother did not have. Encouraged by the publishing director of her conference, who told her about scholarship opportunities to Oakwood, Minneola agreed to sell literature full time for the entire summer of 1947. In high school she sold magazines as a means of having a little money, but now she was committed to the work as a means of reaching her goal.

When Minneola stepped off the train in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, she was met by an overwhelming stench from the many beer breweries that dotted the landscape. She stared up at the tall buildings as people whizzed by going here and there. Milwaukee was a big city compared to Oklahoma City, the only urban area she had experienced in her life. She would have to adapt to the people and the pace. Yet there was excitement that coursed through her veins, because she knew God had a lot in store for her; she just didn't know what it was.

Two sisters, friends of Minneola's mother, watched her grow into a fine young lady, all the while promising to do something special for her as she made her way to college. Finding that Minneola had graduated and was planning to do literature work for the summer, they invited her to their home where they helped her in every way they could.

After she arrived at their lovely three-story home, Minneola was shown to her very own room which Mrs. Matthews and Mrs. Owens had prepared for her. Coming from a very crowded home where there was little privacy, Minneola could not have dreamed of this dainty room. The two women, widows, had lived in Oklahoma City, where they had known Alberta. After their husbands died, they moved to Milwaukee where they bought property.

Not long after her arrival, the literature director for the Lake

---

Region Conference, out of Chicago, arrived to help familiarize Minneola with her new surroundings. From one end of the city to the other, Minneola learned every point in Milwaukee where she could sell magazines; then with brave determination she set out on her own. Each day for three months she walked the streets of the city, personally greeting people on street corners, at shopping centers, downtown, night clubs and bars at night.

“I left the house at seven in the morning and took a bus to my corner location to sell magazines. I came back on the bus at noon and these dear little ladies had my lunch sitting on the breakfast table. They would say not to worry about the dishes, and I went right back out, took the bus to wherever my corner was, sold until 5:30 or 6:00, and then came home where a nice little meal would be waiting. I was treated like a queen,” she recalls.

Minneola had a goal to sell one hundred magazines per day at 25 cents per copy. The ladies would always be waiting at the end of each day to help Minneola count her change. At the end of that summer, Minneola had reached her goal, and she received the literature scholarship that matched her earnings.

“I had no grants, and little help from my mother, but I was able to raise enough money through the scholarship program, and a little gift of money from the people who kept me. When I left their home, they gave me a trunk full of clothes: blouses, skirts, linens, and everything I needed for school,” Minneola remembers gratefully.

For four years, Minneola paid her way at Oakwood with the help of matching scholarships from her literature work, part time office work at Southwestern Region Conference the summer of her junior year, and working as an assistant instructor of typing during the school year. Her hard work paid off when in 1951, Minneola graduated with a bachelor’s degree in business and associate degrees in both music and English.

During Minneola’s sophomore year, she met a man whom she thought would be her soul mate, James P. Williams, who attended Oakwood from Key West, Florida. The couple decided to get married a year later.

After graduation, Minneola returned to Dallas, Texas, where she worked part-time for the Southwest Region Conference and the Board

After being away from her mate for almost a year after their marriage, Minneola decided that this was not the correct way to begin their relationship. She worked her post graduate summer in Dallas, and then moved back to her hometown where she worked as registrar for her old school, Douglas High. Never had she expected she would work at the place she had left four years earlier.

In the 1950's, as Dwight D. Eisenhower was elected as the thirty-fourth president of the United States, war loomed in Korea. Communism was the watchword as paranoia about security ran rampant among government leaders. Toward the end of Truman's administration, the president had committed U.S. troops to the war. By the time Eisenhower took office, the war had turned into a major disaster in which three million U.S. military personnel were sent to Korea to stop the advance of what was considered evil communism.

In 1952, Minneola's husband James was drafted, among the many men who would be sent to war. Basic Training was scheduled at Camp Pickett, a small town northeast of Roanoke, Virginia. Minneola found it a blessing to have work at the public information office right there on the campgrounds where her husband trained for eight weeks.

"I was the first black office employee to work at that campsite in the years 1952-1954. I was the only civilian in the office. It was my job to be secretary to Captain Ralph Anderson."

One day after her husband's basic training had ended, Minneola was summoned to the major's office at the main military building. Anxious and nervous, Minneola arrived at her appointment with no clue as to why she had been called.

She says, "My heart was pounding so fast as I sat there at his desk, and he sat back in his chair with all his credentials on and all those ribbons. In my heart I said, 'Oh, Lord, what is this?'"

The major's face showed no sign of what he was about to discuss with Minneola, but in her heart she knew God was in control. As he held up the papers in his hand, the major explained that he had been sent orders for all of the men who had finished the eight week training camp. It was now up to him to deliver assignments to men who would be deployed to Korea. He went on further to say that her husband's name was listed among them.

---

A gasp escaped her as Minneola struggled to comprehend the information that she had just been given. She and James had only been married two years. Knowing the intensity of the war, how would she handle her husband's going off and maybe never returning?

Still and quiet, Minneola sat and reflected on the words of the hiring officer who several months earlier had warned her that she might not keep her job very long. The time had come.

In 1952, it was most unusual for Blacks to be hired for office positions rather than janitorial or grounds work. As Minneola drifted back to the reality of the matter, the major went on to describe how well-liked James was among the officers with whom he worked in the accounting department. He expressed an appreciation for his work and even more for Minneola's. Her position, he felt, was very helpful to their operations. Because of all this, the major informed Minneola to her delight, he would not send her husband to Korea. She was so grateful.

The Williams couple stayed at Camp Pickett for another two years before their duties were over. Those two years at the camp brought many fond memories to their lives.

In 1954, James was discharged, and they returned to Oklahoma City. Minneola was transferred to the very large Tinker Air Force Base where she became an Administrative Assistant for the Personnel Division. Good ratings and considerable commendation followed her to the Air Force. From 1954 to 1970, Minneola moved up the ladder of success in civil service.

After leaving the Air Force, Minneola was promoted to become an income tax analyst for the Internal Revenue Service in 1958. The Federal Housing and Urban Development Office called Minneola in 1960 to act as a wage requirements officer. All of these opportunities for advancement came as a surprise to Minneola, who knew the racial tensions plaguing the nation. Who would have thought that a young black woman from a little-known school could advance in the professional field so rapidly?

Minneola's life was progressing better than any black woman could have expected. Despite the racial climate, her career was accelerating rapidly, launching her into a position of which few black women could have dreamed. Yet all was not well.

In 1969, unexpected trauma hit the Williams home. Minneola's husband of ten years decided to leave the family, which now included four children, and file for divorce. Minneola was devastated, alone, and confused. In the prime of her career and the midst of family life, the man she thought would be her soul mate opted to leave.

One afternoon, sitting on the living room couch feeding her suckling newborn, Minneola tried to grapple with her future. So far, she had spent nine years at HUD with a magnificent salary and the promise of advancement. She would trust God to lead.

Minneola was brought back to the present when the phone rang. Frank Hale, then President of Oakwood College, was on the line, with business manager Adell Warren; their call came as a total surprise. Without much hesitation, the president described the position they desired to see filled by someone who had talent to do the job they had in mind. After searching and asking, they had agreed that the best person to fill the position of office administrative assistant business manager was none other than Minneola. "He just shocked me so that I could not move; I almost dropped the baby I was feeding!" says Minneola as she remembers that day.

The task seemed more than Minneola felt she could handle, so she humbly expressed her feeling that she wasn't qualified, but the president would not listen. He went on to tell Minneola that he had not only reviewed her Oakwood College transcripts, but had also contacted her previous employers.

In awe of what she was being asked, she told the president that she would think about the offer. With a looming divorce, a great career, and four children to handle, leaving Oklahoma City did not seem like a good option. So in spite of Minneola's delight over the job offer, she told the president that she would think things over. She asked him to mail a letter containing the offer. Two days later the letter arrived special delivery.

"I was fascinated that this was what Oakwood was going to offer me, and it was wonderful provision. I could not turn it down. Even though there wasn't very much money, not comparable to what I was earning in government work, but there were all the benefits and blessings in the letter . . . I was just thankful," she states.

From discounted tuition costs and shopping for her four chil-

---

dren, to housing for the family, every worry would be covered. Minneola was dumbfounded and just as she had in high school when someone told her she could do something she thought she couldn't, she accepted the challenge.

One Sunday Minneola packed up her four children in their old family station wagon, and made their way to Oakwood College, fifteen hours away. The Mayflower Moving Van Company spent four days packing their home at Spring Lake Drive, paid for by Oakwood College. The children mourned leaving their lovely ten-bedroom home, but Minneola knew it was blessing in disguise.

Transition to her alma mater was not a hard one, and quickly Minneola dug into the task of thoroughly organizing and making efficient the services provided by the business manager, Adell Warren. His job was to oversee almost the total operation of the school. The work was challenging, and Minneola soon fell in love with it.

"I was busy twelve and fifteen hours a day. It was wonderful work, because I was still grappling with that divorce that took me by surprise. I glory in the fact that I had such a responsible position; it kept me from grieving," she says in retrospect.

At a time when many would have given up or run from the hurt and pain caused by a failed relationship, Minneola stood the test of heartache and trial much as her mother had many years earlier.

She explains, "My mother was the first to show me a dynamic woman. She was not necessarily as aggressive as she was dependent on God to solve her problems. She was a tower of strength facing those problems. Very few tears did I see her shed, but I would often see her praying."

While Minneola adjusted to life at Oakwood College, her children struggled in their new environment. The children missed their friends in Oklahoma City and even more, missed their lovely home. It took time for them to meet and make new friends at Oakwood Elementary School.

The Oakwood faculty and staff also welcomed Minneola to Oakwood. President Frank Hale oftentimes came by, commenting on how blessed they were to have her. Likewise, the faculty and students who had oftentimes had to wait in long lines to get things done would come to voice their thankfulness for the new efficiency of the

business office.

For nine years Minneola was the proverbial super mom. Each day she dressed her four children for school, went to the office, and after an eight hour day once again pick up the task of parenting them alone.

On February 17, 1979, Minneola met the man who would make her happy for many years. Pastor D.J. Dixon fell in love with her and asked her to marry him. After years of being alone, finally she had someone on whom to lean.

Responsibilities at Oakwood College continued to come Minneola's way as her abilities flowered. Her boundless energy, incredible insight and creativity, were desired by every department and office on campus.

It seemed that Minneola had the wit and knack to work with students. In an effort to take a load from the business manager, the office of student employment was created to organize student labor. In 1978, the new president, Dr. C. B. Rock, asked Minneola to become the first director of student employment. During seven years of service in that capacity, Minneola set the foundation for what would later be called the office of work education. She set up and designed the systems of employment application, student contract, student evaluation, and supervision.

Oakwood College by the eighties had expanded and grown beyond anything that could have been imagined by its pioneers. Students from all over the world flocked to the campus. Enrollment had doubled since Minneola's arrive in 1947, and thus the task of operating the institution was much greater.

Over seven years, Minneola was called on by President Rock to operate in several capacities. In 1984, Minneola took the role of Director of Alumni Relations, her most cherished job. As Director of Alumni Relations, Minneola put into action many programs which are still being used at the college today. She created the "Gift of Love" offering plan for alumni attending commencement, along with the President's Reception, and Alumni Directory.

Using her remarkable talent in public relations, Minneola brought prestige and excitement to Oakwood through her offices. Not surprisingly, under her leadership Alumni Weekend became such an event

---

that it was held in the Von Braun Civic Arena, the largest meeting and convention center in Huntsville, Alabama.

Then in 1988, a new man, Benjamin Reeves, took over as president of the college. After 14 years of leadership, C. B. Rock had stepped down and moved on to become General Secretary of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.

With new leadership and different views on how things should be run, President Reeves asked Minneola to head the fledgling office of Archives. As in earlier years, her willing spirit was evident. Although Minneola enjoyed her role in alumni relations, she was willing to take on whatever she was asked. If someone believed she could do it, she would.

Once again in a new role, Minneola, who was now 59 years of age, reached out to grasp the tools that would be essential to her new position. It had been forty years since she had been in school, but Minneola felt that an education was essential in order to know as much as possible about the task of archivist. So with determination and the excitement of a child, Minneola enrolled at the University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa, a three-hour drive from her home.

She says, "I was thrilled with the opportunity to go back to school, although I did not ask for it. I wanted to have confidence in building the institution through historical preservation."

Going back to school after such a long time was a task that might have frightened the bravest person. Sitting in a class with twenty-one year-olds who had just gotten their bachelor's degrees was very different for Minneola. It took two long years, but in May of 1990, on a bright Sabba                      th morning at a little Seventh-day Adventist church in Tuscaloosa, Minneola took the platform in pride.

The sanctuary was filled with family, friends, and church members who were there to celebrate another of Minneola's victories. Her eldest son was speaking that morning as a special prelude to the conferring of her degree. When the special Mother's Day service was over, Minneola's beaming family stood to support their mother as she appeared before them dressed in her graduation regalia. Earlier she had gotten permission to be excused from the exercises in order that she could worship in church. Now as her son and the pastor of the little church gave her the MLS degree, she beamed as

the whole church applauded.

Today Minneola, who has passed her seventieth birthday, continues to work full time as the Archivist of Oakwood College. She spends countless hours preserving the past, organizing historical tours, and maintaining an Historical Museum that is housed in the library of Oakwood College.

## References

Gibson, Arrell Morgan. *A History of Five Centuries, Second Edition*. (Oklahoma: Harlow Publishing Corporation, 1965).

Goble, Danny. *Progressive Oklahoma: The Making of New Kind of State*. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1980).

Interviews, Personal with Minneola Dixon.

Morgan, Anne Hodges and H. Wayne Morgan. *New Views of the 46<sup>th</sup> State*. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1982).

Moss, George Donaldson. *America in the Twentieth Century*. (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 2000).

Perry, Thelma Ackiss. "The Availability of Education in the Negro Separate School." *Journal of Negro Education*, Vol. 16, Issue 3. Summer, 1947.

Wise, Celia. *Oklahoma's Blending of Many Cultures*. (Tulsa: Rodgers Lithographing Company, Inc., 1975).

WPA Guide to 1930's Oklahoma: Sooner State.

# Artie Melancon

Nackecha Maddix



If she could be an animal, it would be a giraffe, which she considers artistic. Besides, she is fascinated with their long necks. She, too, is tall. In primary school she always stood in the back row in class pictures, or had to stand in the same row as the taller boys in her class. She took a lot of “stuff” from the shorter people in the world, but that helped her to become patient, a one-word description of herself. She feels that patience is a test of character and “good things come to those who wait.”

If she could meet one person and ask one question, it would be Mahatma Gandhi, who made the first impression on her of what a leader should be. It was during her youth that Mahatma Gandhi faced

down the forces of the British Empire with a non-violent stance. With all the British power and might at their disposal, the English authorities in India could do nothing to stop Gandhi. This left a lasting impression on Artie. She would like to ask him, "Why did you choose that way to go about setting your people and country free?"

Artie Melancon's life spans over seven decades, through which she experienced some major events that shaped her world, including 13 American Presidents, the Great Depression, World Wars I and II, the Vietnam War, the Civil Rights Movement, and most recently the September 11, 2001 attacks.

Her parents, Clarence and Edith Smith, grew up in Texas where Artie was born. Like hundreds of African-American couples from the Lone Star State, her parents grew up, got married, and worked on farms and in the cities of Texas. Her father worked hard to keep their family afloat during the early days of the Great Depression. Clarence and Edith always worked as a team. He supported his wife in all of her plans. Edith was a deeply spiritual woman who made church the center of her life. Although her husband never joined the church to which Edith belonged, he never opposed her attendance or raising the children in that tradition. He uttered no words of complaint when Artie's mother converted to Seventh-day Adventism in the 1920's.

During that decade it became harder and harder for African-Americans to survive, despite the fact that many Americans were becoming very wealthy. To find work, the family moved frequently within the state. Artie remembers the highly populated city of San Antonio, and the more reserved El Paso. Migrating from city to city and county to county became commonplace for the poor in the 1920's and 1930's. African-American and Mexican-American families moved wherever there was promise of a job or better living conditions. However, with the Depression the tension for hundreds and thousands of families became almost unbearable.

Almost immediately after 1929, the horrendous blow of the Great Depression left thousands without jobs. More than 350,000 Texans were out of work by mid-1932, and at least 25% of them had no resources to survive the trauma of unemployment. Furthermore, Texas lies in the southern portion of the Great Plains, a region that was pass-

---

ing through a devastating drought that turned fertile lands into dust. Oklahoma and portions of the surrounding states were swept up in the Dust Bowl Migration that drained the region of thousands of its population.

In spite of the drought and the economic crisis, the Smith family survived and eked out a living in Texas in the first few years of the Depression. However, California emerged as an attractive escape where hundreds of thousands from Texas and other parts of the nation migrated during the 1930's. In this period, California received nearly two million migrants, most of whom went to Los Angeles. Among those who made the long dusty journey to California were Artie and her parents, although not for quite the same reasons.

Edith's agenda opened the door that swept them out of Texas. Unlike most migrants headed to the west who were pushed by poverty and hunger, the Smiths moved because of educational reasons. Earlier in 1936, prior to their leaving Texas, Edith attended the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists in Los Angeles with her pastor, Elder Kibble. There she learned that the Seventh-day Adventists were starting an academy in Los Angeles for African-Americans. Edith was enthused with the idea of sending Artie and her siblings to a Christian Academy.

She knew that in Texas, African-American children would never have such an opportunity. She wanted her children immersed in the principles and beliefs of the new faith she had adopted. So in 1936, the Smith family packed their bags into their car and joined the exodus that led them to a new home on the west coast. California would become their new home, and there the family would stay for the next 58 years. Artie, only five years old, remembers her father driving out of Texas and leaving her dearly beloved grandmother.

Relocating necessitated that Clarence should find a new job to provide the basic essentials for his household. The odds were against him because jobs were practically non-existent.

Unemployment . . . soared from 3.2 percent to 24.9 percent, leaving more than 15 million Americans out of work. Some remained unemployed for years; those who had jobs faced major wage cuts, and many people could find only part-time work. Jobless men sold apples and shined shoes to earn a

little money.(Great Depression in the United States.”  
Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia, 2001, p. 200).

According to one author, “Blacks were the last hired and the first fired.”(Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia 2001, p.200) But Clarence arrived in California prepared for the worst and ready to maintain his position as breadwinner as he had done countless times before. By the time the Smiths moved to Los Angeles, Franklin D. Roosevelt had already enacted his New Deal plan, with the primary purpose of lifting the nation out of the abyss of despair. With great confidence and charisma, Roosevelt assured the United States that the only thing they had to fear was fear itself. Roosevelt instituted work relief programs that helped bring the nation back to economic viability.

The Smith family was lucky to get to Los Angeles without much difficulty. In 1936, the city of Los Angeles took steps to stem the tide of people entering the state. City fathers were afraid too many Americans were moving to California. During that year, 130 police officers were sent to the California-Nevada state line to prevent hitchhikers from entering the state. The city fathers feared that services would be severely damaged if more continued to pour in. The Smiths, however, arrived in Los Angeles with no incident.

When the Smith family rolled over the mountain pass that led to the valley by the ocean, Los Angeles had become one of the fastest growing cities in the nation. The flood of migrants that poured into Los Angeles had begun at the end of the nineteenth century. The little village that had come into existence at the end of the eighteenth century mushroomed in the twentieth century. By 1910, there were already 319,000 people living in the city. In 1920, that number had grown to 576,673. In that decade the population of the city almost tripled so that by 1930 there were 1,238,048 people living in Los Angeles. Even during the Great Depression, the human flow continued, so that by 1940, when Artie was nine years old, there were 1,504,277 humans living in the city.

Artie’s father was not one of the nine million people employed by the federal relief, recovery, or reform programs. Instead, he found employment in several places doing odds and ends. Realizing that the

---

---

job he had taken at a delicatessen would not suffice, he found other jobs as chauffeur, delivery man, and as cleaner at a barbershop. Clarence needed to work several jobs to be able to provide the necessities for the household. He also took a bold step when he agreed with his wife that she should work as well. In a male-dominated society, working females were not common, but it was something they had to do if the children were going to go to private school.

“Many men argued that women, especially married women, should not be hired while men were unemployed. Yet the percentage of women in the workforce actually increased slightly during the depression, as women took jobs to replace their husbands’ lost paychecks or to supplement spouses’ reduced wages.” (Great Depression in the United States. Encarta)

In Los Angeles, Edith took a position as a home health nurse, a job she enjoyed and kept for many years. This second income enabled the family to send their children to private schools. With both of the parents working, the brothers and sisters had to take on more responsibility. In this way the family survived the economic crisis. In 1938, the problems that the people of Los Angeles were passing through became more acute when flash floods killed 78 people in the city and caused more than 25 million dollars damage. The Smith family was not affected, and Artie’s world was kept intact. In Artie’s own words, “We always had enough to eat and my father always had a job.”

Life was made easier for Artie in those elementary school years because her paternal grandfather lived a few blocks away from her own home. She loved to play in his yard. Her grandfather raised poultry after finishing his work at the sheriff’s office, and she loved to watch and play with the chickens. If she were not there, she would be at home playing with her older brother’s dogs. It was common for poor families in Los Angeles to raise chickens, ducks, and other farm animals in their backyards. Los Angeles was growing rapidly because of the migration into the state, and many areas of the city that had only a few years earlier been farms and pastures became part of

Artie stayed away from cats, because the friend with whom she walked to school in the mornings had a phobia about cats. Artie had developed a caring personality, being very sensitive to the feelings of others. Because she cared so much about her friend, with whom she spent a lot of time playing and doing homework, she stayed away from cats.

The Smiths had six children, of whom Artie was third. The family was a close-knit one, and they learned to value and protect each other. "The older sibling would take care of the younger," she explains. She experienced "middle child syndrome" though it was not excessive. Like her other brothers and sister, she wondered if their parents distributed affection for their children evenly. Now she laughs about it and says, "The younger needed her parent's attention more." Her mother ensured that her children actively participated in church activities. In fact, Edith was a Sabbath School teacher, and Artie was active in the youth programs.

When Artie was nine or ten, she told her mother that she wanted to be baptized. Her parents offered no resistance; they supported her decision. Her father showed his support by attending her baptism. This meant a lot to her, as he never was baptized. From the day of her baptism, Artie has committed her life to the service of others. Artie has always had a probing mind and loved to solve mysteries. "I can remember as a child thinking that God must have started somewhere; I couldn't conceive of something not having a beginning," she says.

The Los Angeles neighborhood where Artie's parents resided was primarily African-American. They lived in a society where Jim Crow laws made it legal for the races to be segregated in every facet of public life. Although Los Angeles was originally settled by Latinos, Mulattoes, and Blacks, by the 1930's it was firmly in the hands of Caucasians, and the city was visibly segregated into ethnic neighborhoods. Artie's family was primarily of African-American descent, except her paternal grandmother, who was a mixture of Indian and Hispanic. Her black heritage forced the family to live in sections of Los Angeles allowed to African-Americans.

The first time that the question of racism surfaced in Artie's life came in an incident outside her neighborhood. The impact was greater

---

---

because it involved one of her favorite teachers. Artie remembers when her seventh-grade teacher, Garland Millet, called for reservations at a hotel, but the receptionist denied him a room simply because of the area from which he was calling, a place called Century City, an African-American neighborhood. As he listened on the phone he overheard the receptionist say to her supervisor, "He sounds white." Mr. Millet, never got the reservation.

Dr. Millet later left the school in Los Angeles and went on to become the President of Oakwood College in Huntsville, Alabama during the Civil Rights era. During Dr. Millet's tenure at Oakwood, Dr. Martin Luther King arrived in Huntsville. Dr. King's aides wanted him to speak to the African-American community of the city but could not find a public place that would allow him to speak. Dr. King was not a popular person in those days and was seen by many Whites as an outside agitator. It was Dr. Millet who opened the doors of Oakwood College so that Martin Luther King, Jr., could speak in Huntsville. Dr. Millet was officially recognized at the Democratic Action Convention in October, 2001, for this kind and courageous gesture toward King.

Artie remembers not only the incident with Dr. Millet, but many similar incidents in her own life. She remembers being targeted merely because of her complexion on several occasions. In Los Angeles, African-Americans were barred from many public offices and services of the city. It wasn't until Artie was 19 years of age, in 1955, that the city hired its first African-American policeman. She was once issued a traffic ticket for illegally passing a truck laden with dirt. Even now she vividly recalls that incident, claiming her innocence. Artie could have contested the ticket, but decided against it because it was simply not in her nature to do so. She did not like conflicts or confrontations. It didn't help that her friend with whom she worked had received several of these tickets and contested them, but rarely won any of the cases.

When Artie left Dr. Millet's elementary school classroom she went to high school, where she received the news that would have an immense impact on her life and the world at large. American life was bound to change, for that fateful day in 1945 would mark the end of the life of the beloved President Franklin Delano Roosevelt. The

news of the president's death flooded every means of communication, shocking the people and leaving pain in their hearts. Roosevelt was crippled by polio and his health had deteriorated; he eventually died of a cerebral hemorrhage.

Franklin D. Roosevelt was one of Artie's favorites and he served as a role model for her, simply because he had a kind and caring spirit. She admired him because he kept his promises. At his first inaugural address he promised, "This great nation will endure as it has endured, will revive and will prosper." (F. D. Roosevelt: Inaugural Address, 1933). When he died, America had recovered dramatically from the worst depression that had ever struck any one country. Upon reminiscing, Artie couldn't help but highlight some facts about Roosevelt's administration and accomplishments. He was the first president to appear on television, the first and only president to hold the presidency for more than three terms, and the fact she is most impressed with, the first president to appoint a woman to his cabinet, in 1933. Above all, she emphatically stated that he was a friend to the people and everyone mourned when he died.

The time soon came for the now 18-year-old girl, a stunning and intelligent woman, to venture into the arena of higher education. She had always been serious about her schoolwork, making good grades. She listened keenly to the advice of teachers and elders, for she knew that they were experienced, and she believed that wisdom is a by-product of experience. Her parents had struggled to send her to a private academy. Her repayment was seen in the exceptional grades that she brought home.

When it came time for Artie to attend college, she looked into schools outside of the state, but finally decided on Pacific Union College, which had been the first Seventh-day Adventist College on the west coast of the United States, and was only a day's drive from her home. Her father, with whom she was very close, was happy that she was staying near home.

Among the things she would miss most was going on picnics with her family and church. The family had developed a strong and lasting relationship with each other, where family ties were an integral factor and the bonds were maintained throughout anything they encountered.

Family worships strengthened her love for God and for others around her. Her mother ensured that Friday evenings were devoted to God. Artie's father was rarely present at these worships because he worked at these times.

But at night, Artie's father sat by her bedside to read her a story, lulling her to sleep with the melodious sound of his voice.

In college, Artie majored in English and minored in German. English had always been one of her favorite subjects, and she was good at it. She had decided before entering college that she wanted to teach. Artie loved children and had a knack for dealing with them. It helped that she was a patient individual. "Work hard and you will succeed," echoed in her head. To her, there was no excuse for not trying. If she tried her best and still failed, then that was okay. She believed that God had given her special talents and abilities, and if she didn't maximize them He would minimize or totally eradicate them. So she worked hard and expanded upon her gifts, especially her gift for handling children.

Her sophomore year was unforgettable because it held a treasured moment in her life. By the early 1950's, Artie had become more conscious of the racism that saturated the society in which she lived. That year she met Marian Anderson at a banquet sponsored by her college. This was an unforgettable encounter. What made the meeting special comes from the role that Marian Anderson had modeled in her life prior to meeting Artie, giving Artie a keen interest in Anderson's life and what she had accomplished.

Like many black artists, Marian Anderson was a victim of segregation. When she applied to music school she as told, "We don't take colored." In spite of the opposition, Marian had saved whatever she could and scraped her way through music school. She gained wide recognition in Europe, but was not accepted in the country of her birth. The great conductor Toscanini told her, "Yours is a voice such as one hears once in a hundred years." (Found in <http://www.greatwomen.or/profs/anderson.m.php>). Despite that fact, in 1939 the Daughters of the American Revolution canceled her performance in the Constitutional Hall in Washington, D.C. Artie was indignantly aware of that incident. She also knew that Marian Anderson, instead of weeping for what had happened, sang on the steps of the

---

---

Lincoln Memorial, where 75,000 people watched in awe, clapped and cheered as the musical notes floated on the air like butterflies.

Although Artie was not present to hear Marian sing, she knew about her life, her troubles, and her accomplishments before they met at Pacific Union College. This was a momentous occasion for her. She was extremely delighted to have met the singer who paved the way for many black artists and shattered the color lines in music.

When the Daughters of the American Revolution canceled Marian's concert, another important figure in history took center stage. Eleanor Roosevelt, a liberal and humanitarian, ardently supported African-American causes and the Civil Rights movement. She thought that what the Daughters of the American Revolution had done to Marian was shameful, and to endorse racial equality, Mrs. Roosevelt publicly resigned from the organization. Artie replays these incidents in her mind. She describes the meeting with Marian as the high point of her second year in college, a thrill and an inspiration.

Before Artie realized, it was time to graduate from college. She enjoyed learning and going to school; reading and writing brought a special joy to her life. Having reached the goal of a college degree, she now moved on to continue her education at the University of California in Los Angeles, where she earned additional teaching credentials. Artie taught in California for fifteen years. Finally she was able to be around children every day and was immensely satisfied. She had chosen the right career; each time she walked into the classroom her senses came to life.

Then a preacher named James H. Melancon came to her church. He saw her eating her lunch and wondered who she was, then found her phone number and contacted her. A year later, they married.

James is a person who likes order and efficiency and keeps himself busy. Artie is the sanguine type who is very humorous and finds time to relax; she does not like to be in a crowd all of the time. She likes to read and recite poems to herself when she has the time. She declared, "I like to sing, though I don't have a singing voice; I do it mostly in the shower."

The young woman found the transition from single to married life relatively easy. They were both professionals with careers of their own and had much in common; they greatly enjoyed their own com-

---

pany. They were able to afford a decent apartment and a good car. Artie states as she thinks of her marriage, "I am glad I married the person I did and married when I did."

When the couple met, James had recently finished his education and was teaching school in South Central Los Angeles. During World War II he had worked on airplanes, but could not board the aircraft carriers because he was black. When the war ended, he studied aeronautical engineering at the University of Southern California for a brief period, his love for planes having taken him that direction. However, his interests were diverted when a friend became an Adventist. Because of this friendship, James enrolled in Oakwood College and earned his degree in theology with emphasis in Biblical languages. From Oakwood, he went to the Seventh-day Adventist Seminary in Washington, D.C. where he did further studies in Biblical languages. He taught several years in Los Angeles before he met Artie.

When James was offered a position in Lincoln, Nebraska, the Melancons moved, and Artie began to teach in the public schools. While at Lincoln, she took graduate level courses in education. In 1972, she received a Masters in Education from the University of Nebraska. She enjoyed graduate level work, so continued taking classes and working. In 1975, the year of the bicentennial celebration in the United States, she was granted a Doctorate in Education.

That year the Melancons were also asked to take positions at Oakwood College. She joined the Department of Education, and her husband joined the Department of Religion. Anna Knight Hall<sup>6</sup> has virtually been home to Dr. Melancon. Her coworkers affirm that she can be seen going about her daily teaching exercises still exhibiting a pleasant personality. Artie Melancon has a lot to smile about, because she has a lot for which to be thankful.

The eras in which Artie Melancon lived were great and terrible ones. Not only did she and her family beat the ravages of the Great Depression, but observed how her parents survived the horrors of World War II. She remembers how vicious Hitler was, and the 320,000 people killed in Hiroshima by the atomic bomb. She can recall when the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor in 1941. She passed by the camps where Japanese were incarcerated for being Japanese. She witnessed the signs in Chinese stores that read, "This is a Chinese

store and not a Japanese one.” She saw the rationing of sugar and shoes and other items that were scarce during World War II. Her relatives were drafted to war, and her father worked at defense plants. It disturbed her when President Kennedy was assassinated, but even more when the World Trade Center collapsed.

Today you can find Artie in a classroom where she trains teachers, or sitting at her desk in her office preparing for class. Her life has been rewarding and gratifying. No regrets come from her lips though she acknowledges that her mistakes served as building blocks for her own betterment. The faith her mother carefully instilled in Artie has lasted through the years and is only growing stronger. She has found that during hardships or disappointments she is able to have peace of mind. Today she is a full professor in the Department of Education at Oakwood College.

## References

Anderson, Marian: <http://www.greatwomen.or/profs/anderson.m.php>

Los Angeles Almanac, as found on internet.

Melancon, Artie. Personal interviews conducted by the author.

Microsoft Encarta Standard Encyclopedia, Article on the Great Depression and Article on Texas

Oakwood College Archives. *Past Present of Oakwood College*.

Roosevelt, F. D. Inaugural Address 1933.

Schwartz, R. W. *Light Bearers to the Remnant: Denominational History Textbook*. (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1979).

Stein, Walter. *California and Dust Bowl Migration*. (London: Greenwood Press, 1973).

United States Census. 1930.

United States Censis. 1940.

# Eurydice V. Osterman

Angela Warden



The girls ran out through the doorway and across the playground in the back yard of the one-room elementary school. For Eurydice, recess brought joy and excitement; it was a time to be free, to laugh, to sing, to be merry, and to play exhilarating games with friends. Excited with the thought of recess, she and her friends ran to form a single file line as the game began in the back of the yard. In their white dresses, with ribbons in their braids, they eagerly waited for their turns, standing at the edge of a huge, wide, long ditch. To all of the girls, it looked gigantic. Eurydice watched her classmates and waited eagerly.

When her turn came, she jumped with all of her energy and all of

---

her might. The children called the game, "Jump Over the Ditch." Those who fell into the ditch were out of the game for that round. Eurydice V. Osterman and her friends loved to play this innocent home-made game in the back yard of an all-black school in Darlington, South Carolina.

Eurydice enjoyed not only this game, but several other games they invented or learned, such as hopscotch. The small school she attended in Darlington had absolutely nothing in terms of playground equipment, no swings, no jungle gym, no expensive slides. It was a privately run school where most of the budget was met by the parents of the children attending classes. No luxuries were available. When the children wanted to play baseball, they made do with what they had; the bat was a simple board.

One day, Eurydice waltzed through the kitchen and picked up her lunch bag on her way to school. Her mother always made the lunches, using some of the bread that she had baked, filling the house with a delicious aroma. When lunchtime came at school that day, Eurydice discovered that she had picked up the wrong bag. She sat there looking at a loaf of bread, then burst into laughter. Eurydice and all of her friends ate lots of bread for lunch that day.

All of the children at the school were African-American, like most segregated schools in the United States in the early 1950's. Although a court ruling, *Brown v. the Board of Education of Topeka*, May 17, 1954, decided that public school segregation was unconstitutional, the small South Carolina town had not yet felt any change. The court case had reversed the "separate but equal" decision in *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) when segregation received the blessing of the highest court in the land. That ruling made possible segregated schools as well as hotels, theaters, restaurants, cemeteries, and many other public places which kept Blacks separated from Whites in South Carolina. Later in Supreme Court, Thurgood Marshall, chief counsel for the NAACP, presented a legal brief which was used extensively to abolish the long-standing decision.

However, Eurydice would not be one of the children who would see the fruits of that ruling in elementary school. Eurydice came into this world only two years before the decision, on the fifth of April, 1950, to Francis Alexander and Ella Louise Locket Osterman in At-

lanta, Georgia. They must have known that their darling daughter would become a well-known musician, because her name, given to her by her godmother, comes from Greek mythology. Eurydice was a goddess and a musician. Her husband was Orpheus. She was bitten by a snake and died, going to the underworld. Her husband lamented her death and began to play his lyre. His music pleased the gods so much that they granted him a request; he asked for his wife to be restored to him. Eurydice is also the name of the very first opera ever written.

Eurydice's father, Francis Osterman, was born in St. Thomas when the island was part of the Dutch West Indies. The United States bought the Island as one of the Virgin Islands from the Dutch in 1917 for twenty-five million dollars. Before this date the young Francis made his way to the United States, living up to his last name, which means "Man from the East."

As a young man, Francis Osterman was an avid Lutheran and had not thought of changing his religious persuasion. However, in St. Thomas he met a Seventh-day Adventist missionary who encouraged him to give up his job and finish school. He had not planned to go for further education, but as he talked with the missionary, new possibilities began to come to his mind. The missionary told him about Oakwood Industrial School in Huntsville, Alabama, and suggested that it would be an excellent place for Francis to receive his training.

Francis, after much coaching from his mentor, decided to go. When he arrived at the school there were very few students or teachers. The school stood on the site of a former slave plantation where Andrew Jackson, before he became president of the United States, bought slaves for the Hermitage, his estate in Tennessee. By the time Francis arrived, the plantation had turned into a school that was training young African-Americans to become nurses, preachers, or one of a dozen other occupations. The students at Oakwood went to school in the morning and worked on the farm in the afternoon to pay for their schooling. The industries, run by the school for the sole purpose of providing work and experience for the students, opened the door for many young men and women who wanted an education but could not afford to pay for it.

Francis Osterman liked his experience at Oakwood so much

---

---

that he stuck to his studies. In the afternoon, he worked on the Oakwood farm. It was there that he first caught sight of Sadie Abrams, one of the nursing students. The friendship developed into a lifetime relationship. They eventually married. At Oakwood he was also baptized into the Adventist faith. On the sixteenth anniversary of the school, in 1912, he became the first ministerial graduate of Oakwood Industrial School.

After his graduation Francis Osterman, with a burden to teach others the things he had learned, moved to Atlanta, Georgia. There he began his ministry, employed by the Seventh-day Adventist Church. In the 1920's and 1930's, the Adventists congregations of African-Americans in the South were small and few. He received the territory that covered the state of Georgia and South Carolina. During the year he visited several congregations in those states and baptized those who were interested in becoming members.

In his travels, preaching the gospel, he found considerable interest in Darlington, South Carolina, a small town about seventy miles east of Columbia, the state capital. The Town of Darlington had grown because most of the tobacco farmers of the region brought their tobacco into Darlington at the end of each summer. Many African-Americans worked in warehouses sorting the tobacco leaves before they were shipped to cigarette manufacturers.

A family in Darlington had been listening to a program on the radio called "The Voice of Prophecy," and had asked for Bible lessons. Pastor Osterman was given the name and went to visit the family at the home of Ella Louise Locket. Francis Osterman and his wife studied with her, subsequently becoming good friends with Louise and her husband. The friendship grew close because Francis' wife was also from Darlington. As time went on, both spouses became ill and passed away, leaving Francis Osterman without a wife, and Ella Louise Locket without a husband. They eventually married. Francis and Louise had three children, and with the one child from Louise's first marriage, the family was complete.

As the number of members in the churches Francis pastored began to grow, he was given a smaller territory to cover. But Darlington became a special place for the Osterman family. After retirement, they moved permanently to South Carolina. When Eurydice was

three years of age, her father reached retirement age, but he remained active doing church work in Darlington and surrounding towns. He was asked after retirement to pastor the small Adventist church in Darlington, which actually was located next to his property.

Eurydice received the blessing of her father's hard work and his desire to provide an excellent education for his children. He had improved his lot in life through education, and firmly believed that this was the only way African-Americans could better themselves. Since the town of Darlington was so small, a Christian school did not exist there. Her father decided that he would not rest until one could be available for his children and the children of the church he pastored in his retirement years. His determination paid off and a one-room church school materialized. It was in that school that Eurydice jumped the ditch so joyfully and obtained her early education.

In 1944, the Seventh-day Adventist Church founded the first Conference to operate under African-American administration. Until then, all Seventh-day Adventist churches were under Caucasian administration. In the 1950's when Eurydice began her schooling, the work of the Adventist Church among African-Americans had begun to grow rapidly. More and more churches mushroomed in all corners of the nation. In the years following the establishment of the first African-American Conference, several new conferences were founded by African-American administrators.

In 1950, there were 5,588 workers in the Seventh-day Adventist Church in North America, with 2,878 churches and a total of 250,939 memers. By the mid-1950's, Adventism was growing even more rapidly outside the United States, and the Seventh-day Adventist Church had become a worldwide religious body. One of the strongest branches of the church was the educational system that had schools all over the world. Many of those schools were one-room school-houses in the southern United States.

Eurydice grew up attending a segregated Adventist school, not knowing what it was like to play with children who were not black. Darlington was very segregated, yet as a little child Eurydice did not feel the hatred and prejudice that usually accompany such conditions. Darlington was a simple family-oriented town; although it was segregated, there were not too many problems as long as the Blacks re-

---

mained on their side of town.

However, all across the United States hundreds World War II veterans would no longer stand for the discrimination that flowed unchecked, especially in the South. Not all African-Americans were as patient as the inhabitants of Darlington. A bold new spirit crept in, and the winds of change began to blow. Southern Whites, on the other hand, were not going to hand over power on a silver platter, and they certainly were not going to roll over and play dead. In 1946, several black war veterans were killed in Georgia for having the audacity to go to the polls and vote. An “uppity” Mississippi tenant farmer was flogged to death for the same “crime.” A young soldier in South Carolina was blinded for refusing to sit in the back of the bus.

Eurydice felt very little of the pain other African-Americans suffered in the 1940’s. Her childhood years were wonderful, full of warm and caring people. She lived in a black community that took great care to nurture the young in their midst, sheltered from what was going on around them in the world.

When Eurydice graduated from junior high the population of Darlington and the church she attended had grown, but not enough to support an Adventist High School. Eurydice attended Mayo High School, a public school in Darlington. She loved it there and was able to learn more about what was happening in the world, in a place conducive to expanding her knowledge in a safe learning atmosphere. In Mayo High School and in Darlington nurturing was a core part of the curriculum.

On November 22, 1963, her world was suddenly changed. Eurydice remembers that it was about 2:00 in the afternoon, and the students of Mayo High were going to their homerooms. Bradley, the class instigator, asked to go to the restroom. When he came back he said, “Oh, the President got shot!”

The teacher, knowing that Bradley was a jokester, responded, “Oh, Bradley, stop playing around and go sit down.”

However, Bradley insisted that it really happened so the teacher went to check it out. It was true; John F. Kennedy had been assassinated. Eurydice felt as if she had experienced the death of someone in her own family. She had never in her life had an experience like that. She remembers being glued to the television for the entire week-

end. It was the first time in the history of television that a story was covered from morning until night.

The year 1963 was a turning point for Eurydice. That year the Civil Rights Movement began. Martin Luther King, Jr., led a demonstration in Birmingham, Alabama, and the March on Washington in support of the Civil Rights bills. But most important of all for Eurydice, it was the time her own family began to fall apart.

First of all her father passed away. Adding to the loss of such an important figure in her life, she then went to live with her sister, who was a teacher in Indianapolis. The sadness was compounded as she left an all-black high school of 800 students and entered an integrated high school of 2500 students. The new school was not a friendly place. There she became a number with no identity and few friends. After school she would walk home alone with her eyes full of tears.

In Indianapolis Eurydice finished her secondary years in Shortridge High School, where they followed the lead of Central High in Little Rock, Arkansas, which had been integrated in 1957. Not everyone was delighted by the move. Many of the white students and teachers at Shortridge did not see the black students as part of the family, but rather as unwanted intruders. It was a hard time for Eurydice. The teachers were more like sergeants, not like the teachers in Darlington. And the school felt more like a factory, with thousands of students being pushed to completion.

Eurydice had always been fascinated with music and in a sense music saved her. Her mother played the piano, and Eurydice loved to listen and play. In church she was always involved with the music activities. She knew that after finishing high school she would go to college and major in music. In her family, going to college had always been part of the plan.

In a time when African-American Seventh-day Adventists believed that Adventist work among blacks would be much more successful if carried on by people of the same race, Eurydice wanted desperately to attend Oakwood College. Her father had been a graduate of the school, and she thought it was her destiny to go there also. She had heard about Oakwood ever since she could remember. However, for some reason she ended up at Andrews University, a predominantly white institution in the state of Michigan.

---

Although all music had enchanted her from an early age, what really caught her attention was the organ. One day she was asked to play for a wedding, and in the church where the wedding was to be conducted sat an organ. Offered the opportunity to play it, she did. That hooked her. She would never get over the organ and the myriad of sounds that could come from it. The sounds and texture of the organ held her spellbound.

She arrived at Andrews during a time in American history when the Vietnam War became a pivotal sore spot on the fabric of the nation. Because she was a black student in a white school, she felt the sting of discrimination in many subtle ways. During this time the Black Panthers in Oakland, California, gathered nationwide attention as they established breakfast programs for African-American children and called the policemen in their neighborhoods “pigs.” Malcolm X was getting national attention for his attacks on “the white devils.” On the other side of the coin, Whites reacted with equal anger and hatred toward Blacks who didn’t know their place in society.

Eurydice determined that such incidents and attitudes would not mold her life. In college she found her calling, and blossomed into her own person. Perhaps because she was on the brink of adulthood and away from home, she was able to enjoy herself immensely. She liked her classes. She loved the Department of Music at the University and discovered that she could always lose herself in music if things got rough.

One of the experiences that boosted her love for life was the people in the music program at Andrews University. There she learned how to play the organ with the aid of a mentor who became her friend. She felt that she had one of the most wonderful organ teachers to be found, Dr. Cecil Warren Becker. He didn’t see her as an African-American but rather as the talented student she was. Unlike the music teacher where she did her student teaching who had trouble treating her with the respect she merited, Dr. Becker treated her as a friend. Her respect for him grew so much that when she sat and listened to him playing, she looked at him as if he were a god. His abilities on the organ left her in awe. His mentorship played a key role in giving direction to her life.

As Eurydice learned the wonders and mysteries of the organ

---

and began to master the instrument, developing her musical preferences, the world was also going through musical transformations. The Beatles from England had crossed the Atlantic and begun a revolution in music that would change society. New musical groups came to the fore. Many of the standards that society had embraced in the 1940's came tumbling down. With the change in musical tastes came a series of social transformations in all areas of life. A love for drugs flourished in the younger generation and a dislike for the values of the "old folks" surfaced.

The social revolutions taking place in the larger society also impacted Andrews University. Although the conservative values of the University continued to play a central role, a new way of looking at the gospel and Jesus began to take form in and out of the classroom. Of all her experiences at Andrews, belonging to a group of Christian activists gave her a new sense of identity. Eurydice joined a group called Collegiate Action for Christ (CAC), part of the Jesus Movement that swept the country.

The stress between several sectors of society grew more and more tense. In 1969, Woodstock became a symbol of the extremes that many young people embraced. It became known as the most immoral music festival of the age, where women were raped and the attendees used drugs freely. During this time communes where free love was practiced appeared in many areas. There was open immorality, "streaking" and many other practices that demonstrated a blatant rebellion against the morals of the society, and especially the way religion was practiced.

The Jesus Movement on the Andrews campus not only questioned the values of the larger society but also the new fads that were taking control of the world around Eurydice. With all of the foolishness that was taking place, the consensus for some Christian young people at her school was that after trying the wrong, why not try Jesus?

During this period a revolt within the Christian community also surfaced. Bumper stickers saying, "Try Jesus," demonstrated a tension within the Christian community. André Crouch, one of the fathers of gospel music wrote a song, "Jesus is the Answer," which became a national hit. For many conservative Christians, the world

---

seemed to have gone into a tailspin of immorality, yet some Christians embraced the changes as a time of opportunity. Eurydice believed this was the best of times to tell the world about Jesus and His love.

Music once again played a central role and became a changing force in her life. "Oh, Happy Day" took music in a whole different direction. There was no longer a clear separation of the religious, sacred music from the rest of the music in society. The clear cut lines that existed in the 1950's disappeared. Many of the moral values of the age were questioned or ignored. Music was an issue. Many churches debated the role of music in the worship services. Perhaps it was for this reason that Eurydice wrote her first book, *What God Says About Music*.

After college, Eurydice obtained a position at Mount Vernon Academy, a private high school in Ohio. There she taught piano and voice, and directed the choir. She loved her work. It was also during these years that she met a young woman who played the guitar and wrote her own songs. Eurydice said to herself, "I can do that." Through that experience she decided that she would write a song, and thus began a long history of writing her own music.

After spending two years in Ohio, she accepted a position in Louisiana. It was while she was in Louisiana that she was offered a position on the faculty of Oakwood College. Since her father had graduated from Oakwood, she considered this to be a great and joyful opportunity. At Oakwood she found incredible talent among the students who came from all over the United States and other parts of the world. She loved her new job and quickly lost herself in the world of teaching and mentoring musicians.

In 1981, after being on the faculty for three years, she was asked to participate in a seminar at a Youth Congress in Detroit. Because of this presentation, she began collecting information about music. From that congress, she became better known and began to present music seminars at several other meetings, workshops, and conferences. In 1992, she was invited to go to Budapest, Hungary, to do a workshop for music teachers. She spent her whole summer in the library preparing for the event and formulating her thoughts on music.

In 1994, Eurydice continued organizing information about music in a Christian community. It was during this research that the idea

came to her that she should write a book on the subject. So in her spare time she worked on the manuscript. By then she had become the Chair of the Music Department at Oakwood College, and she did not have much extra time. In October of 1996, the same time Oakwood was celebrating its centennial, as she crossed the threshold of her home she heard an audible voice that said, "Finish the book." She knew what she needed to do, and in a few weeks the book was done. She says::

"My philosophy for music is that it is one of God's creative gifts that He has given to us. And it depends on whom our allegiance is to as to the type of music that we create or replicate. I have a definition of music that I have coined and which, even in its state is still deficient because music is so many things. But I was looking for something to try to express and capture what music is all about. Music is organized sound that is governed by time and space. It is influenced by one's background and culture, and creates and influences one's feelings, ideas, emotions, moods, and behavior. In that definition I was trying to cover the gamut of everything. It takes in the scientific aspect of it, the cultural and social aspects of it, and it takes in the emotional and spiritual parts of it. That which creates and influences can create or influence for good or for evil. I feel that music is a wonderful tool; it can take one to places where other media cannot. It is indeed a universal language; one can communicate through music where our words cannot. My philosophy of music is that it should represent who we are and Whose we are."

When Eurydice completed her Masters in Music Education in 1975 at Andrews University, she thought that she was finished with school. Only a few years before Eurydice arrived in the state of Alabama, the governor of the state, George Wallace, stood at the doors of the University and vowed that "niggers" would never enter the halls of the University of Alabama. In his famous speech, surrounded by white students and an applauding audience he stated, "Segregation now, segregation tomorrow, segregation forever." Fewer than twenty years after George Wallace swore that no Blacks would enter the halls of his alma mater, Eurydice applied to enter the doctoral program in Music Composition and Theory.

In 1988, at the graduation ceremonies, Eurydice became Dr.

---

Osterman, the first African-American to earn a doctoral degree in her field from the University of Alabama. Even the huffing and puffing of the Honorable George Wallace could not shut the door of higher education in the face of an unassuming, quiet, and persistent Eurydice. And although she did not march because the graduation was on Saturday, the day she worships her God, she still obtained the degree.

On any given day, one can find Dr. Eurydice Osterman on the campus of Oakwood College teaching students, composing music, preparing for seminars. Few people know the talent and achievements bottled up inside this woman. She loves what she does and has no need to tell the world about her accomplishments. On Sabbaths, the inside of the church at Oakwood College rings with the harmonies that she and her students produce on the organ. Like the music that floods the air on any Sabbath morning, the life and talents of Dr. Osterman continue to bring joy and wonder to the people around her.



## References

Boyer, Paul, et al. *The Enduring Vision: A History of the American People*. (Lexington, MA: Heath and Company, 1996).

Interview with Dr. E. Osterman conducted 2001.

Knight, George R. *A Brief History of Seventh-day Adventists*. (Hagerstown, Maryland: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1999).

Moss, George Donelson. *America in the Twentieth Century, Fourth Edition*. (Upper Saddle River NJ: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1994).

Warren, Mervyn. *Oakwood! A Vision Splendid*. (Collegedale, TN: The College Press, 1996).

# Epilogue

Today, you will find Oakwood College nestled on the side of a hill in the Tennessee Valley at the southern tip of Appalachia in northern Alabama, a place usually not associated with power and influence. Surrounded as it is by hundreds of acres of land, the college appears to exist in a rural setting, while in reality it is located in the center of Huntsville, Alabama. In the years since Oakwood was founded, well outside the city limits, Huntsville, like many other American cities, has grown and expanded and encompassed the college.

The buildings on campus snuggle amid dozens of oak and magnolia trees, a combination which gives the grounds a special charm and dignity. The grounds are beautifully landscaped; the students stroll, go to classes, and chat in an atmosphere that promotes learning. In the preceding chapters I took a trip into the different eras of Oakwood College represented by the ladies of this book, a trip through history to place myself in their settings. I had to leave the Oakwood of Williamae Erving's campus expertise, and travel back to earlier days.

I rode through the Mississippi hills with Anna Knight as she courageously founded schools for black children where none had existed and none were wanted. I watched as she brought education to the hill country, education that went far beyond academic achievement and taught the people how to live. I took that 30-day voyage to India with Anna, and I saw the sights that greeted her, the lack of practical living knowledge. I saw her pour out her strength and wisdom to make their conditions better, and I sold books with her on the streets. But the Mississippi hills called her back, and from there I traveled with her through her exhausting career in the variety of roles she successfully filled. In her life, which spanned nearly a century, Anna saw world changes, American changes, and certainly Oakwood changes. Her influence on others she contacted over a wide expanse of territory, vocations, and years, is immeasurable. It has been a hard journey for me as I watched from a safe perch through her history. Who could call her powerless?

I followed Eva B. Dykes through her high school graduation in 1910, and never came close to her at Howard University, where she graduated in 1914 with the highest grade point average. Earning her M.A. in 1918, and three years later becoming the first African-American female in the United States to procure a Ph.D., Ms. Dykes astonished her peers, and I stayed back out of her way as she spent 15 years as an English professor at Howard University, caring for students, advocating social justice, writing textbooks and articles, making her quiet mark on her world. In 1944, she added her prestige to Oakwood, and ten years later saw the accreditation for which she had labored become a reality. Active in other areas, such as music, Eva Dykes left me behind to watch in wonder. Was she powerless?

While Eva Dykes presided over the English Department at Oakwood, other women entered her world and left their own marks. Chessie Harris, always on the lookout for homeless, hungry, dirty children, established her first foster home. I basked in her shadow as she received an Honorary Doctorate from Andrews University for her outstanding service. I rejoiced on her behalf as she was recognized on June 6, 1986, by Chessie Harris Day in Alabama. I read the article written in her praise for the *Woman's Day* magazine. They certainly did not view her as powerless.

---

---

I was there in 1953 when Jannith Lewis graduated from the University of Kansas and subsequently was called to Oakwood where Dr. Eva Dykes recognized her abilities and challenged her to become the new librarian for the college. By 1973, Oakwood boasted a new library, due to Jannith's perseverance. Having followed her through the busy days of her life in my imagination, I can now be proud of Oakwood's library. I imagined the hundreds of students who sat in the those carrels, browsed through those stacks, and researched the topics that prepared them for medical school, law school, and dozens of other professions which they now execute. Was she not influential?

Let us not forget the outstanding influence of Inez Booth in the lives of hundreds of inmates who passed through the Huntsville Penitentiary. Perhaps my greatest joy was when Inez caught the vision of prison visitation and ministry, for my real life reflects that passion as well, the desire to be a messenger of hope to men whose hope is almost gone. Certainly the hundreds of incarcerated men whom she befriended would not classify her as powerless.

Moving through history, I see Alma Montgomery Blackmon as she joins the Oakwood faculty in 1972, leaving behind her 30 years of teaching and supervising in Early Childhood Education in Washington, D.C. At Oakwood, I was delighted to see many of her other talents come into use as she taught Freshman Composition, as she used musical expertise to propel the Aeolians to international significance. I shivered with both excitement and fear as we brought the blessings of music to Romania. I exulted in the Honorary Doctorate given to Dr. Blackmon by Andrews University. Can the power of her presence be questioned?

Now, I enter the depression era home of Williemaë, where her mixed heritage parents provided the best they could during those all but impossible years of privation in the United States. I follow her through a life of struggle and hardship, through the births of 13 children, through wearing burlap bags for shoes, until the last of her children were grown, and in the 1960's, Williemaë Erving was able to attend Alabama A & M University. Spending 20 months there convinced her of her calling: planting trees and shrubs and flowers, designing landscapes. She didn't come to Oakwood until 1980, but the next twenty years were packed full of grounds work – and work with

---

the sponsoring and saving of students. Williamae's creative landscaping is the first thing we notice now as we enter the campus, but how many talented adults owe their opportunities to the power of Williamae Erving?

There were other ladies who have had a lasting impact on Oakwood, on the state, on the country, and internationally. Some of them you read about in this book; some of them you may never read about. But their impact is there, for they all share certain traits that transformed, molded and fashioned the world around them. The character of the nation in large part is the character of the so-called powerless who have influenced the lives of hundreds of young men and women who now hold leadership positions in all of the states of the nation. They were all talented. Determined to face the odds – and win. Creative. Persevering. Caring. Unselfish. They were all of these, and more. *They were powerful!*

Lea Hardy

---

# Ladies of Oakwood

## A

Action, Democratic Convention 143  
Adams, John 10  
Aeolians 84, 87  
African-American 10  
African-American policeman 143  
African-American women 10  
Africans 71  
Air Force 131  
Alabama 47, 54, 72  
Alabama A & M University 53, 120  
Alabama Commission for the Aged  
53  
Alabama Library Association 109  
Alexander, Francis 151  
Alpha Kappa Alpha 101  
Alston, Zeola 67  
Alumni Directory 134  
Alumni Weekend 134  
AMA 33  
American Association of University  
Women 109  
American Library Association 109  
American Riviera 73  
Anderson, Marian 145  
Anderson, Ralph 130  
Andrews University  
89, 157, 158, 160  
Angwin, California 76

Anthony, Harold 83  
Archduke Ferdinand of Austria  
72  
Anna Knight Hall 147  
Archer Street 59  
Archivist of Oakwood College  
136  
Arkansas 96  
Armour Brothers 98  
Armour Packing House 98  
Army Chemical Warfare 46  
Ashford, Paul 50  
Atlanta, Georgia 89, 151, 153  
Atlantic City, New Jersey 87  
Augusta, Georgia 7

## B

Bahamas 87  
Baker, Stacy 119  
Banks, Rosa 88, 108  
Baptist Church 92  
Baptist, First Church 65  
Baptist, First Church in Tulsa 60  
Baptist, Paradise Church 65  
Baskerville, Brenda Maria 66  
Battle Creek, Michigan 21  
Battle Creek Sanitarium 21  
Battle Hymn of the Republic 88  
BBB Barbershop 60  
Beatles 158  
Becker, Cecil Warren 157  
Berean Seventh-day Adventist  
Church 89  
Bermuda 87  
Beta Phi Mu 109  
Bethel Methodist A.M.E. Church  
76  
Big Sandy, Texas 125  
Birmingham, Alabama 156  
Black Belt 47  
Black Hawk Indian 96

---

## The Ladies of Oakwood

---

Blackmon, Alma 83  
Black Panthers 157  
"Black Tradey of America" 63  
"Black Wall Street of America." 58  
Blake Center 106  
Bloomington, Indiana 108  
Board of Education in Oklahoma City  
129  
Booker T. Washington High School  
63  
Bogin, Mandy 96  
Booth, Albert Sydney 77  
Booth, Inez Mary Lang 70  
Bradford, Charles 104  
Brenford, Wallace Baskerville 66  
British Empire 138  
British Isles 15  
Brooklyn Dodgers 93  
Brown v. Board of Education 120,  
151  
Budapest, Hungary 159  
Bush, George 53  
Byar, H. L. 59

## C

California 58, 73  
Calloway's, Cab band 64  
Calvin, William Lewis 100  
Camp Pickett 130  
Canada 87  
Capitol 35  
Capshaw, Alabama 112  
Carmichael, Henry 61  
Carolinas 114  
Caucasians 142  
Ceaucescu, Nicolae 88  
Central Avenue 98  
Central High in Little Rock 156  
Central States Conference of Sev-  
enth-day Adventist 104  
Chambers, Mrs. 20

Chandler, Paul Hume 86  
Chase Nursery 121  
Chattanooga, Tennessee 18  
Cherokee 112, 126  
Cherokee Nation 113  
Chesapeake region 114  
Chickasaw 114, 126  
Child Welfare Services 51  
Choctaw 114, 126  
Civil Rights bills 156  
Civil Rights Movement 138,  
146, 156  
Civil War 14, 19, 32, 33,  
47, 94, 125  
Cleveland 48, 49  
Cleveland, Ohio, 87  
Collegiate Action for Christ 158  
Columbia University 77  
Communism 130  
Cone, A. A. 65  
Confederate 14  
Constitutional Hall 145  
Coolerator 78  
Court, Supreme 116  
crackers, 15  
Creek 126  
Creoles 71  
Crouch, André 158  
Crow, F.N. 65

## D

Dallas, Texas 124, 129  
Darlington, South Carolina  
151, 153  
Daughters of the American  
Revolution 145, 146  
Deep South 47  
Delker, Del 79  
Department of Education at  
Oakwood College 148

---

Department of the Interior 34  
 Depression, Great 64, 114  
 Development, Leadership Training  
 Program 67  
 Dillard, John William 97  
 Director of Alumni Relations 134  
 District of Columbia 32, 34, 39,  
 41, 87  
 District of Columbia Teachers College  
 86  
 Dixon, D.J. 134  
 Douglas High 130  
 Douglas Elementary School 99  
 Douglas, Frederick 32  
 Douglas High School 128  
 Dreamland Theater 59  
 Drew, Charles 43  
 Dunbar High School 37, 43, 85, 86  
 Dupont Park Church 87  
 Dutch West Indies 152  
 Dykes, Eva B. 104, 106  
 Dyo, Mr. Chambers 18

**E**

Economy Drug Company 59  
 Edgefield Real Estate 94  
 Eighth and Vine Streets 92  
 Eisenhower, Dwight D. 130  
 El Paso 138  
 Elite List 33  
 Ella Louise Locket 151  
 Elliot & Hooker's 59  
 Ellisville, Mississippi 19, 22  
 Elora, Tennessee 115  
 Emancipation Day Parade 35  
 Embree, Edith I. 18  
 Emancipation Proclamation 125  
 England 87  
 English 71, 113  
 Eric Calvin Ward 67  
 Erving, Thomas 118

Williamae Erving 111  
 Eurydice 152  
 Exodusters 94, 98

**F**

Fane, Gunther Leak 55  
 Fane, Weeter 56  
 Federal Housing and Urban  
 Development Office 131  
 First Baptist Church, 99  
 First Seventh-day Adventist  
 Church in Memphis 89  
 First Seventh-day Adventist  
 Church in Washington, 87  
 First World War 50  
 Fort Smith 56  
 forty acres and a mule 126  
 Foxworthy, Mrs. 51  
 Franciscan 73  
 Franklin, Benjamin 10, 58  
 Franklin, John Hope 58, 63  
 Free State of Jones 14, 15  
 French 70, 71, 113  
 Frisco 61

**G**

GI. Bill 78  
 General Conference of Seventh-  
 day Adventists 135, 139  
 General Conference of the  
 Adventist Church 36  
 George Washington Carver Club  
 Scholarship 75  
 George Washington University  
 36  
 Georgeanne 9

## The Ladies of Oakwood

---

Georgia 47, 153  
Gandhi, Mahatma 137  
Gitano, Mississippi 11, 15  
Godson, Mrs. 52  
Gooding, Lela M. 43  
Grant 16  
Grant Elementary School in Kansas  
City 99  
Graysville Seventh-day Adventist  
Academy 19, 20  
Graysville, Tennessee 19  
Great Depression  
75, 92, 93, 138, 140, 147  
Great Migration 94  
Great Plains 138  
Greater Atlanta Adventist Academy  
90  
Greek mythology 152  
Green Hall 106  
Greenwood 63  
Greenwood Avenue 58, 60  
Greenwood community 59  
Gulf Coast 71  
Gurley Hotel 59  
Guthrie, Oklahoma 125

## H

Hadley, West 65  
Hale, Frank 106, 132, 133  
Hamilton, Michael 121  
Handel's Messiah 43  
HARAW Club 67  
Harris, Chessie 46  
Harris, George 49  
Harris Home 52, 53  
Harvard 38  
Hasties, William 43  
Head Start Program 66  
Henry Satterlee 36  
Hermitage 152  
Hesters Creek 113

Hills Elementary 67  
Hiroshima 147  
Historical Museum 136  
History Department of Oakwood  
College 11  
Hitler 147  
Homestead Association 94  
Honda Corporation of America 121  
Hope, Arkansas 96, 97  
Hot Springs, Arkansas 57  
Hot Springs Mountain 57  
Howard County, Maryland 32  
Howard, Dr. 39  
Howard, Maryra 118  
Howard University  
32, 36, 40, 43, 75, 85, 101  
Howard University School of  
Music 86  
HUD 132  
Hume, Paul 86  
Huntsville 11, 111  
Huntsville, Alabama  
11, 41, 45, 77, 78, 117  
Huntsville Alabama Penitentiary 69  
Huntsville Arsenal 46  
Huntsville Welfare Department 52

## I

India 138  
Indian, Cherokee 56  
Indian Removal Act 125  
Indiana University 108  
Indians 71  
Internal Revenue Service 100 131  
Iron Curtain 89  
Irwin, GA. 20  
Ivy League Universities 35

**J**

Jack's Funeral Home 59  
 Jackson, Andrew 11, 114, 125, 152  
 Jarreau, Al 65  
 Jarreau, Ida 65  
 Jasper County 15  
 Jefferson, Thomas 11, 114  
 Jenkins, Joseph 43  
 "Jesus is the Answer," 158  
 Jesus Movement 158  
 Jim Crow 48, 99, 142  
 Johns Hopkins University 16  
 Johnson, Mordecia Wyatt 39  
 Jones County 14, 16  
 Jone, Alice 75  
 Joplin, Scott 92

**K**

Kansas 92  
 Kansas City 11, 92, 93  
 Kansas City, Kansas 91, 92, 98, 99  
 Kansas City, Missouri 92, 102  
 Kansas City Monarchs 93  
 Kellogg, John Harvey 21  
 Kennedy, John F. 155  
 Kerr, Thomas 86  
 Key West, Florida 129  
 Kibble, Elder 65, 139  
 King Cotton 8  
 King, Martin Luther 143, 156  
 Kings Heralds Quartet 79  
 Kinner, J. L. 65  
 Ku KLux Klan 116  
 Knight 8  
 Knight, Anna 11, 13  
 Knight, John 7, 9, 14  
 Knight, Newton 14  
 Knight Plantation 14  
 Knight, Rachael 9

Korea 130  
 Ku Klux Klan 17, 97

**L**

Lake Catherine 57  
 Lake Hamilton 57  
 Lake Region Conference 128  
 Lang, Nelson E. 73  
 Latinos 142  
 Laurel, Mississippi 77  
 Laurence, Paul 86  
 Lawrence 101  
 Lawson, Warner 86  
 Leak, Smitty 55, 56  
 Leak, Elizabeth Christine 55  
 Legislative Council of Alabama 72  
 Leslie, Richard 112  
 Letitia Ann 78  
 Lewis, Jannith 100, 109  
 Lilly, Henry 59  
 Lincoln, Abraham 11  
 Lincoln High 93  
 Lincoln Memorial 146  
 Lincoln, Nebraska 147  
 Little Professor 92  
 Little Symphony 85  
 "Little Texas," 47, 48  
 Locket, Mrs 72  
 Lone Star State 138  
 Louis, Joe 78  
 Louise, Ella Locket 153  
 Louise, Jannith Lewis 100  
 Louisiana 159  
 Lucretia Mott Elementary School  
 31  
 Lutheran 152

**M**

"M" Street High School 37

Madison County 51, 53  
Malcolm X 157  
Malvern Avenue 58  
March on Washington 156  
Mardi Gras 70  
Marshall, Thurgood 151  
Maryland 71  
Mason, Vivian 117  
Master's in Library Science 106  
Matthews, Mrs. 128  
Mayflower Moving Van Company  
133  
Mayo High School 155  
Maytag 72  
Melancon, James H. 146  
Memphis, Tennessee 38, 50  
Message Magazine 40, 124  
Methodist A.M.E. Church 74  
Midway Hotel 59  
Midway Lunch Counter 64  
Mills, W.G. 65  
Millet, Garland M. 41, 78  
*Milwaukee Journal* 56  
Milwaukee, Wisconsin 63, 128  
Mississippi 14, 47  
Mississippi Delta 15  
Mississippi River 8  
Missouri 92  
Mobile, Alabama 7, 70, 72, 73  
Montgomery, James 85  
Montgomery, Martha 84  
Moran, James Lewis 40  
Morgan, Harry 89  
Mother Helpers 74  
Mount Vernon Academy 20, 159  
Mountains, Ozark of Arkansas 56  
Mt. Vernon Academy 21  
Mulattoes 142  
Music Composition and Theory 160

**N**

NAACP 151

Native Americans 125  
Negroes 34  
Netherlands, Beulah 56  
Netherlands, Claude 60  
New Hampshire 17  
Newkirk, A.S. 59  
New Market, Alabama 112  
New Orleans 7, 70  
North Elm Farm 52  
Northeast High School 99

**O**

Oakland, California 18, 157  
Oakwood Academy 50  
Oakwood College  
11, 77, 104, 121, 122, 133, 147  
Oakwood College Bowl team 121  
Oakwood Elementary School 133  
Oakwood Industrial School 152,  
153  
Oakwood Magazine 53  
"Oh, Happy Day" 159  
Ohio 49, 54, 159  
Oklahoma City 128, 131, 132  
*Oklahoma Sun* 59  
Olsen, O.A. 20  
Orpheus 152  
Osterman, Eurydice 151, 161  
Osterman, Francis 152, 153  
Owens, Mrs. 128

**P**

Pacific Ocean 73  
Pacific Union College  
76, 84, 144, 146  
Packing, Armour House 100  
Pack, Henry C. 61

Page, Sarah 61  
 Paris of the Plains 92  
 Pearl Harbor 100, 147  
 Pensacola, Florida 72  
 Peterson, Frank 65, 104, 105  
 Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 64  
 Piero, Olamae 56  
 Pierre-Louis 84  
 Pine Street 59  
 Plankington & Armour 98  
 Plankington, John 98  
 Pleasant Street 58  
 Plessy v. Ferguson 116, 151  
 Pleveny, Alabama 117  
 President's Volunteer Action Award  
     53  
 Public, Milwaukee School System 66  
 Pulaski Pike 117  
 Pulaski, Tennessee 97

**Q**

Quachita River 57

**R**

Rachael 9  
 Radcliffe College 38, 39  
*Readings from Negro Authors for  
 Schools and College* 40  
 Reconstruction 126  
 Red Wing Hotel 59  
 Reed, Elder 102  
 Reeves, Benjamin 135  
 Removal Act of 1830 114  
*Review and Herald* 17, 19, 108  
 Richards, H. M. S. 79  
 River, Arkansas 56  
 River, Milwaukee 64  
 Roanoke, Virginia 130

Robinson, Jackie 93, 127  
 Rock, Calvin 106, 134, 135  
 Romania 88  
 Roosevelt, Eleanor 146  
  
 Roosevelt, F. D. President 100, 140,  
     144  
 Roosevelt, Theodore 11  
 Rosette 9  
 Rowland, Dick 61  
 Runyon, X. E. 76

**S**

San Antonio 138  
 San Carlos Hotel 73  
 Sanders, Alberta 125  
 San Francisco 76, 77  
 San Francisco Hotel 78  
 Santa Barbara 73, 74  
 Santa Barbara, California 73  
 Santa Barbara High School 74  
 Santa Fe Railway 126  
 Scotland 87  
 Scott, James 92  
 Scouts, Girl 100  
 Seminole 114, 126  
 Sears Roebuck Company 66  
 Senate of the State of Alabama 53  
 Seventh-day Adventist Church 39  
 Seventh-day Adventist Seminary in  
     Washington 147  
 Seventh-day, Sharon Adventist  
     Church 65  
 Shand, Lance 88  
 Sharecroppers 47  
 Sharon, Pennsylvania 50  
 Sherman 16  
 Shortridge High School 156  
*Signs of the Times* 17  
 Simmons, William J. 97  
 Singleton, Papa 94, 95

Sixth World Sunday School Convention 37  
slave trader 7  
Smith, Edith 138  
Smith, Fort, Arkansas 55  
Socialist Republic of Romania 87  
South 71, 73  
South Carolina 153  
Southern Association for the Accreditation of Coll 109  
Southern Black Belt 47  
Southern District of the General Conference 20  
Southern Library Association 109  
Southern Missionary Tract Society 18  
Southern Whites 155  
Southwest 73  
Southwest Region Conference 124, 129  
Southwestern Region Conference 129  
Spanish 71, 113  
Spanish Mission 73  
Spring Lake Drive 133  
St. Croix 87  
St. Marks A.M.E 65  
St. Thomas 87, 152  
State of Alabama 72  
Stradford Hotel 59  
Sumner High School 99, 101, 102  
Sunday School 65  
Supreme Court 151

## T

Tennessee 89, 94, 96, 112, 115, 116  
Territory, Indian 114  
Testimonies 107  
Texas 58  
The Crusader 40  
Tin Row 96  
*The Journal of Negro History* 40  
*The Negro History Bulletin* 40

*The Negro in English Romantic Thought* 40  
The Voice of Prophecy 79, 153  
the white devils 157  
Thompson, Steve 80  
Tinker Air Force Base 131  
tobacco leaves 153  
Toney, Alabama 112  
Toscanini 145  
Town, Juneau 64  
"Trail of Tears" 114  
Truman's administration 130  
Truman, Harry S. 86  
Truth, Sojourner 34  
Tallahassee 126  
Tulsa 11  
Tulsa, Black 61  
Tulsa, Oklahoma 56  
*Tulsa Star* 59  
Tuscaloosa 135  
Tuskegee 47, 48  
Tuskegee Institute 43  
Twenty Negro Law 14

## U

Unionists 14  
United States Army 46  
University of Alabama 53, 135, 161  
University of California in Los Angeles 146  
University of Indiana 105  
University of Kansas 101, 104  
University of Kansas Hospital 102  
University of Michigan 37  
University of Nebraska 147  
University of North Carolina 53  
University of Southern California 147

V

Vietnam War 138, 157  
Virgin Islands 43, 87, 152  
Virginia 71  
Von Braun Civic Arena 135

W

Walden University 38, 43  
Wales 87  
Walker, Lilly Belle 47  
Walker, Nolan 116  
Walker, Tom 47, 48  
Wallace, George 160  
War, Civil 49  
Warren, Adell 132, 133  
Washington, Booker T. 35, 48, 63  
Washington D.C. 11, 34, 84  
Washington, George 10  
*Washington Post* 86  
Watson, Hope 59  
Welfare Departmen 51  
*What God Says About Music* 159  
Whirlpool 72  
White Anglo-Saxon Protestant 97  
White, Ellen 107  
Wilkerson, Fredrick 86  
Williams, James P. 129  
William, John Dillard 96  
William, John Lewis 100  
Wilson, Woodrow 85  
*Woman's Day Magazine* 53  
Woods, W.E. 63  
Woodstock 158  
Works Project Administration 127  
World War I 96, 97, 99, 138  
World War II 100, 101, 147, 148  
World War II veterans 155

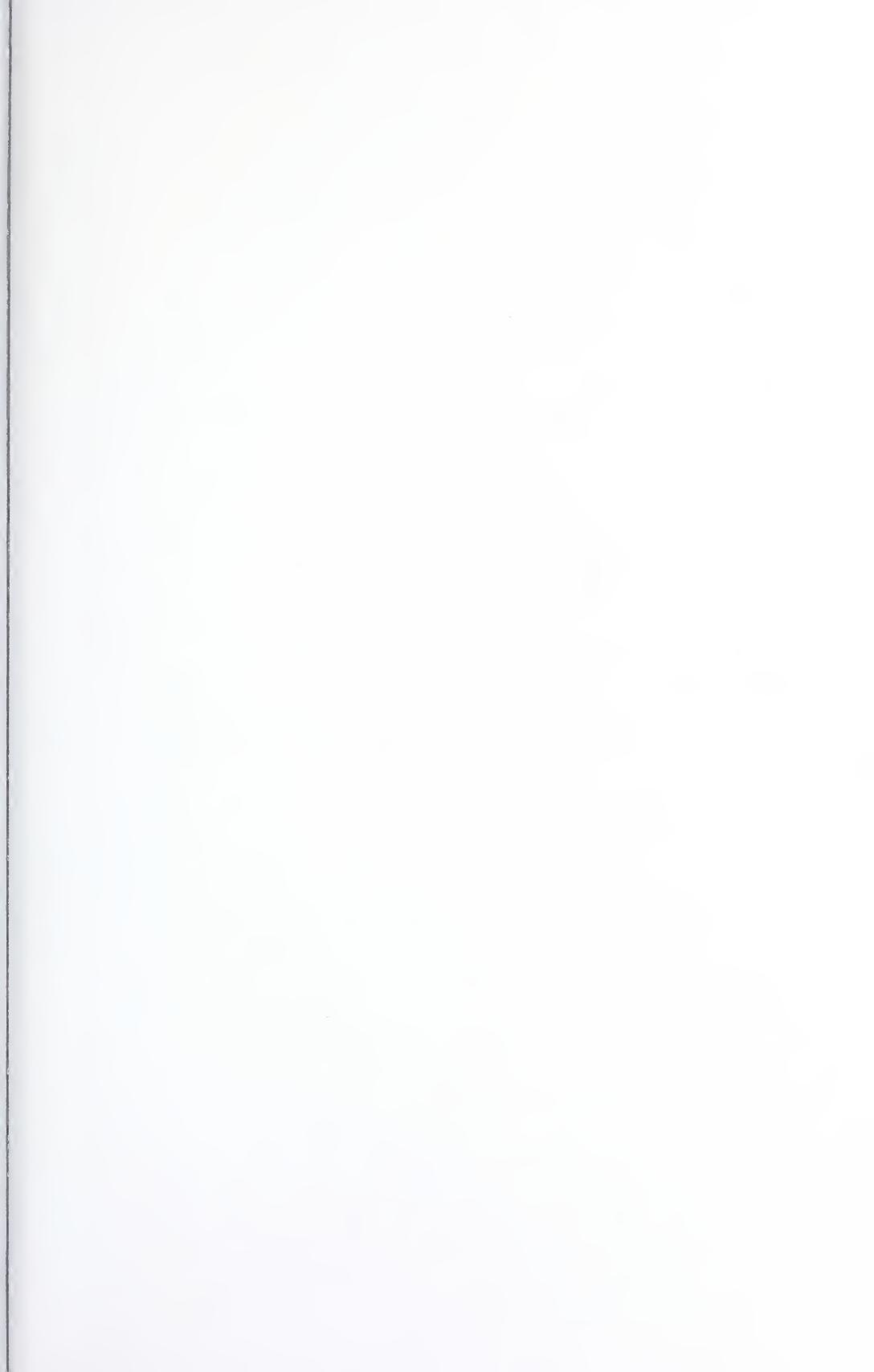
Y

Y. M. C. A. 59  
Young at Heart Club 67  
Young, Edward Clark 97  
Youth Congress in Detroit 159  
*Youth's Instructor* 17

Z

Zeidler, F. 65





Very little is known of the faceless African-American women, descendants of slaves, who influenced and shaped the history of the United States. Considered the least powerful, they are generally not included in the histories of the nation. More than often the welfare mother, the junkie crack cocaine, the prostitute, the entertainer, and the athlete, appear on television or in magazines and movies as the most common stereotypes. None of the ladies found in this book fit those categories.

*The Ladies of Oakwood* argues that the assumptions that African-American females are powerless are dead wrong. It is impossible to gage the power of the women found within the cover of this book or how important they have been in the molding and shaping of our society. However there can be no doubt that they transformed their world in many and silent unseen ways.

## About the Editors

Ciro Sepulveda is the chairperson of the Department of History at Oakwood College and Lea Hardy is a retired freelance writer living in Lexington, South Carolina.