

A2087

Through the Eyes of a Child Oral History Project Transcripts, 1998-1999

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REPOSITORY

Missouri Historical Society Archives

P.O. Box 11940

St. Louis, MO 63112-0040

314-746-4510

archives@mohistory.org

HISTORICAL SKETCH

The Through the Eyes of a Child Oral History Project was part of the Missouri Historical Society's African-American history project on growing up black in St. Louis. In 1998 and 1999, researchers conducted interviews with people who grew up in four diverse communities—the Ville, Carr Square, Kinloch, and the south end of East St. Louis—from 1940 through the 1980s. These neighborhoods had an African-American population over 70% and the residents who were interviewed represented a diverse cross-section socially and geographically. Portions of the interviews were used in an exhibition, which opened at the Missouri Historical Society in 2003.

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

This collection consists of the transcripts of the interviews conducted for the oral history project. The transcripts are divided into the four different neighborhoods and then arranged alphabetically by the last name of the interviewee within each neighborhood. The papers include a summary and context report, an index of topics discussed, and transcripts for each individual. In some instances, there is additional material as provided by the interviewee. Each person provides biographical information, residential history, work history, and a discussion of the community in which they lived, focusing on his or her life between the ages of 7 and 12. This inventory highlights remarks about the neighborhoods. The collection also includes a folder of background information on the project, neighborhood histories and project brochures (Box 1/folder 1).

FOLDER LIST

Box 1

folder 1 Project material: project background, neighborhood histories, and brochures

Carr Square

- folders 2-5 Campbell, Hari “Sky”
 Campbell was born in 1948 and discusses his family’s move from Mill Creek to Carr Square, focusing primarily on living at Pruitt-Igoe from the mid-1950s to 1960. He says the Igoe complex felt isolated and alienated with few businesses and no economic support in the area. Campbell remembers that the neighbors kept to themselves and he envied the friendly relationships between neighbors at Carr Square Village.
- folders 6-10 Chunn, Michael N.
 Chunn was born in 1957 and lived in Carr Square in the 1960s. He discusses his work as a refuse collector for the city, his school days and his family relationships. He describes the cohesiveness of the neighborhood where he felt safe with a large surrogate family of neighbors and their children. The neighborhood began to change in the late 1960s.
- folders 11-14 Diggs, Kenneth
 Diggs was born in 1942, and his family was one of the first to move to Carr Square Village. He discusses the stability of Carr Square where neighbors were like family and children felt safe. He also describes the impact of Pruitt-Igoe on the neighborhood.
- folders 15-19 Jones, Evelyn
 Jones was born in 1940 and lived in Carr Square from the mid-1940s to mid-1950s, and again from 1961 to the 1990s. She says that Carr Square was considered a model community with modern and well-kept housing. She also discusses the relationship between neighbors and changes in the community.
- Box 2**
- folders 1-5 Mtendaji, Imani
 Mtendaji was born in 1956 and lived in Carr Square with her family for 17 years, and on her own for three years. She describes the neighborhood as a safe, stable community with active churches, schools and businesses, until it began to change in the early 1970s.

- folders 6-9 Ray, Carol Strickland
 Ray was born in 1942 and lived in Carr Square until 1954 when her family was forced to move out because their income exceeded the housing authority maximum. In 1955, Ray was one of the first African-American students to attend a previously all-white school. Ray has pleasant memories of Carr Square and describes a close community where neighbors looked out for each other.
- folders 10-14 Robinson, Darby
 Robinson was born in 1939 and lived in Carr Square Village from 1942 to 1957. She discusses close friendships with peers and neighbors, and her years at Sumner High School where teachers were close to their students. Robinson moved back to Carr Square in the early 1970s, and she describes the changes in the area.
- folders 15-17 Thompson, Betty L.
 Thompson was born in 1939 and her family lived in Carr Square Village from 1940 to the mid-1950s when, due to a policy of the housing authority, the family moved to Pruitt-Igoe. Thompson describes the active community life where neighbors were extended family and the church and community center were the center of activity. She believes changes in the area were due to less rigorous screening of tenants.
- Box 3**
East St. Louis
- folders 1-4 Burns, Vondell
 Burns was born in 1947 and lived in several homes in the south end of East St. Louis until 1990 when she moved to Belleville. She discusses the importance of church and the absence of community centers. Burns also describes racial discrimination in the neighborhood.
- folders 5-8 Fuller, Esther
 Fuller was born in 1957 and lived in the south end of East St. Louis in the late 1950s and early 1960s. She remembers that all amenities were within walking distance including the Mary E. Brown Center. Her family only left the neighborhood to buy clothes or go to the drive-in. She never felt poor, but saw the area differently after attending Purdue University. Fuller also describes the businesses in the neighborhood.
- folders 9-11 Gibson, Thomas
 Gibson was born in 1971 and lived in East St. Louis during the 1970s and 1980s. He describes kids' activities in the area and says his neighborhood was middle-class. Gibson liked the neighborhood because everyone knew each other.

- folders 12-15 Gregory, Harold Kent
 Gregory was born in East St. Louis in 1936 and remembers a neighborhood with strong churches and schools where everybody had a job, including his father who owned a grocery store in the area. Gregory worked for McDonnell Douglas and Southwestern Bell in the 1960s and he describes race relations in the work place and East St. Louis as a whole.
- Box 4**
- folders 1-4 McCoy, Marcheta
 McCoy was born in East St. Louis in 1956 and lived in the south end to age 13. She describes the area as a poor, self-contained, safe neighborhood. McCoy also discusses discrimination at St. Mary's Hospital and the tense relationship between residents and the police.
- folders 5-8 Patton, Linda Ann
 Patton was born in 1951 and lived in the South End from 1953 to 1982. She returned to the neighborhood in 1996. Patton discusses segregation in the area, the strength of the church and school in her community, and Rush City.
- folders 9-12 Prude, Lillie
 Prude was born in 1933 and has lived her whole life near her birth home in East St. Louis. She discusses the importance of churches and schools, the number of factories in the area, including Monsanto Chemical, the demographics of different neighborhoods in East St. Louis, the businesses in the neighborhood, segregation and changes in the area.
- folders 13-14 Redmond, Eugene (Interview 1)
 Redmond primarily discusses the current situation in East St. Louis including race relations and how to improve the community.
- folder 15 Redmond, Eugene (Interview 2)
 Redmond was born in 1937 and lived in East St. Louis until 1958. Redmond discusses various jobs he had as a child, including relocating outhouses since most homes did not have indoor plumbing.
- folders 16-17 Smith, Bettie (Interview 1)
 Smith was born in 1931 and raised in East St. Louis. She primarily discusses her family life, including area lodges for women, her father's role in the community and her life, and playing in Lincoln Park.
- folder 18 Smith, Bettie (Interview 2)
 Smith describes the demographics of the neighborhood and the style of the homes, the interaction between teachers and parents, contact between whites and blacks, and her encounters with racism as an adult.

folders 19-21 Terry, Millie
 Terry was born in 1951 and has lived in East St. Louis since 1956. She discusses the appearance of the neighborhood, the stores, and class and racial differences. Terry recalls treatment by kids in school based on what she brought for lunch, and areas that she could not go because of her race.

Box 5
Kinloch

folders 1-4 Boyd, III, Samuel
 Boyd was born in Kinloch in 1964 and lived in the neighborhood until the airport buyout in 1985. His grandfather and father were both well known in the area. Boyd primarily discusses institutions and events that instilled a strong sense of community including the schools and churches, the civil defense fire fighters, high school athletics, picnics and early Martin Luther King celebrations. He believes that the neighborhood started to change in the mid-1970s after Pruitt-Igoe closed.

folders 5-8 Butler, Earline
 Butler was born in 1947 and describes Kinloch primarily in the 1950s. She believes that the church and school were the backbone of the area and it was a tight-knit neighborhood where everyone knew each other. Butler discusses the school plays and May Day celebrations, teachers, and segregation briefly. She says the neighborhood started to change with the merger of the Kinloch schools with Ferguson-Florissant, and the airport buyout. Folder 5 also includes photocopies of church, biographical and family reunion material.

folders 9-12 Butler, Michael
 Butler was born in 1964 and lived in Kinloch until 1985. He lived with his mother in a public housing complex in Kinloch, but also lived in Bridgeton with his older sister Earline. Butler discusses living in both Kinloch and Bridgeton and his experiences in the different schools. He briefly mentions the Kinloch civil defense fire fighters. Butler believes Kinloch started to change after Pruitt-Igoe was razed and the airport buyout.

folders 13-16 Jackson, Raelene K.
 Jackson was born in 1964 and moved to a public housing complex in Kinloch with her family shortly after birth. She explains that her grandparents originally moved to Kinloch from Mississippi due to problems with the Ku Klux Klan. She discusses summer activities for children and changes in the neighborhood, which she believes were the

result of neglect by city officials, new people moving to the area, and the airport expansion.

Box 6

folders 1-3

Mitchell, Sr., Milton L.

Mitchell was born in Kinloch in 1953 and lived in the area until 1988. His family was socially active and had some status because his father was the founder and pastor of a local church. He describes Kinloch as strong, with stability coming from family, neighborhood, church and school. Mitchell says he never saw himself as poor or as a minority. He briefly discusses segregation including protests at Holiday Hills amusement park.

folders 4-8

O'Guin, Howard

O'Guin lived in Kinloch from his birth in 1935 until 1968. He worked with the fire department in Kinloch and other areas. He discusses his genealogy and family history extensively, and also mentions Boy Scouts in Kinloch, community activities including the Pow Wow, and his sense of segregation in neighborhoods other than Kinloch. O'Guin believes that change came with incorporation and the airport buyout.

folder 9

Ray, Donald (Interview 1)

Ray was born in St. Louis in 1941 and his family moved to Kinloch from the Ville in 1943 because they could afford a bigger house in Kinloch. He discusses the appearance of the neighborhood and some businesses in the area. Ray also mentions the chores he had including getting water from a nearby funeral home since his house did not have indoor plumbing.

folder 10

Ray, Donald (Interview 2)

Ray discusses important institutions including the churches and schools and area hangouts such as Uncle Dick and Aunt Rosie's and Farwell's bakery. Ray says that people in the neighborhood got together to provide services that the city could not afford, including activities for children. He believes the neighborhood started to change in the mid-1960s when Kinloch lost its school system.

folders 11-14

Squires, Dorothy M. Turner

Squires was born in St. Louis in 1945 and lived in Kinloch until 1971. She worked as a teacher in Kinloch and the city schools. Squires discusses the sense of community in Kinloch, the importance of the churches and schools, and her memories of her neighbors on Monroe Street. She also describes areas outside Kinloch where blacks could not shop, including Wellston. Squires believes the neighborhood began to change in the early 1960s with the construction of public housing and the end of legalized segregation.

folders 15-18 Squires, Edmond
 Squires was born in 1942 and lived in Kinloch from 1950 to 1970. He describes the area as all black but socially and economically diverse with a rural feel. The local YMCA, churches and schools were the centers of community activity. Squires worked as a principal for several schools and discusses at length efforts to maintain the Kinloch school district and his work with Concerned Citizens of Kinloch. He believes the neighborhood started to change in the mid-1960s due to broader social changes.

Box 7

folders 1-4 Williams, Harrietta
 Williams was born in 1932 and lived in Kinloch until 1952. Her father was the founder of Memorial Tabernacle Baptist Church, so her activities were primarily focused on the church. Williams repeatedly describes Kinloch as an area with large families who all knew and took care of each other. She believes the neighborhood started to change in the 1950s due to an influx of city residents.

The Ville

folders 5-6 Allen, Julia
 Allen was born in 1949 and lived in the Ville from 1949 to 1971 and 1979 to the present. She describes her neighborhood as tight-knit with strong schools and churches. Allen discusses her experiences with segregation, which she primarily encountered when she went downtown. She believes the Ville started to change in the early 1970s due to integration.

folders 7-9 Brown, Halcyone
 Brown was born in 1959 and lived in the Ville from age 2 to 16. She discusses her family history in the area, class-consciousness, and the importance of the Herbert Hoover Boys Club and the hospitals.

folders 10-13 Coleman, Bert and Charlesetta
 Charlesetta Coleman has lived in the Ville since 1934. Her son Bert lived there from his birth in 1950 to 1975 and again from 1992 to the present. Charlesetta describes the neighborhood as it was in 1934. They both describe the Ville as a neighborhood of professional people. The strong institutions were churches, Sumner High School, Poro College and Tandy Community Center. They also discuss the Annie Malone Parade, segregation at Forest Park Highlands, and the changes when people started to move out of the neighborhood.

- folders 14-16 Elrod, Jr., John
 Elrod was born in 1954 and lived in the Ville until the early 1970s. He describes the Ville as a stable neighborhood with strong churches, schools and hospitals. Elrod discusses the businesses on Easton Avenue. He believes the neighborhood started to change in the 1960s when schools started closing and new people started to move into the area.
- folders 17-18 Harris, Mark
 Harris, the son of John Elrod, Jr., was born in the Ville and was raised in the area by his paternal grandparents. The main institutions in the neighborhood were Tandy Park, Sumner High School and Homer G. Phillips Hospital. Harris believes the Ville started to change in the mid-1980s as older residents died, and Homer G. Phillips Hospital closed.
- Box 8**
- folder 1 Hudson, Michael (Interview 1)
 Hudson was born in 1950 and has always lived in the Ville. This interview focuses primarily on family relationships and activities. Hudson also briefly discusses leaving Arlington elementary school because the teachers and administrators were racist. He also mentions several businesses in the area, including the Velvet Freeze on Easton Avenue.
- folder 2 Hudson, Michael (Interview 2)
 Hudson primarily discusses racial identity, including his first encounter with racism at Howard Johnson's and the impact of seeing Malcolm X when he came to St. Louis. He also mentions how the end of restrictive covenants affected the neighborhood.
- folders 3-5 Hudson, Stephanie Starks (Interview 1)
 Hudson was born at Homer G. Phillips Hospital in 1950 and lived in the Ville from 1950 to 1962. This interview focuses entirely on biographical information including residential and educational histories, and family relationships and activities.
- folders 6-7 Hudson, Stephanie Starks (Interview 2)
 Hudson discusses her mother's work at Homer G. Phillips Hospital, the appearance of the neighborhood, treatment of light-skinned students in school, and the impact of desegregation on the neighborhood. She describes the Ville as a place where other people wanted to live and says that desegregation destroyed the unity of the area.
- folders 8-9 Jordan, Beverly Childress
 Jordan was born in 1938 and lived in the Ville until 1959. She describes the Ville as a well-kept and stable neighborhood. Jordan also discusses important institutions, such as Tandy Community Center, churches and

Homer G. Phillips Hospital, the Annie Malone Parade and the effects of integration on the neighborhood. She believes that changes in the Ville were due to crime.

folder 10

Scales, Laura

Scales was born in 1936. She describes the closeness of the neighborhood, where teachers lived in the same area as their students and strong institutions included the schools, the Poro building, and Homer G. Phillips Hospital. Scales briefly discusses treatment of students with lighter skin in the schools and discrimination at White Castle and Kresge's department store. She believes the area started to change in the 1970s.

folder 11

Scott, Rosalynde (Interview 1)

Scott was born in 1944 and lived in the Ville until 1965. This interview focuses primarily on family relationships and activities, including her mother's beauty shop, Rose-Kay Beauty Salon, and visiting elegant homes for meetings of a beauticians club.

folder 12

Scott, Rosalynde (Interview 2)

Scott discusses the importance of churches and schools in the Ville and also her experiences with discrimination at the University of Missouri-Columbia and at Beaumont High School. She believes the neighborhood started to change with the end of restrictive covenants when people started to move out of the neighborhood and the Ville lost many of its important institutions.