

MEMORIES OF NEW BERN

MALINDA LAVINA HOBBS

INTERVIEW 205

This is Dorothy Bryan representing the Memories of New Bern Committee. My number is 200. I'm interviewing Lavina Hobbs, interview number 205. This interview is being conducted on November 13, 1992. We are at the residence of Dorothy Bryan, 1711 Dillahunt Street.

Dorothy Bryan: Lavina, would you please give me your full name and your birthdate.

Lavina Hobbs: My name is Malinda Lavina Hobbs of 1105 Elm Street, New Bern, North Carolina. I was born January 2, 1913 in New Bern, North Carolina. My mother, Bessie Hobbs Martin; father, Jessie Martin. Grandparents, Malinda Richardson Hobbs and Lewis Hobbs. My grandparents, my guardians, adopted me in their name Hobbs. I was the only child. Lived in the same house all my life AT 1105 Elm Street.

DB: This will be a short interview as you have been interviewed before. But we are trying to get information on the library for Black Americans here in New Bern. You were at the very first library, worked at the very first library.

Lavina Hobbs: Yes. After I returned home and started employment, the WPA was in progress. Through the social services, I was housed in the first public library which was housed in the front of the West Street High School building.

DB: That room that you used was formerly a Principal's office, is that correct?

Lavina Hobbs: Yes. It was right after the death of the Principal, Mrs. White, that the school loaned this library to the Association that housed me there through the supervision of Mrs. Whitford and Miss

C. S. Rhone. It was a WPA project.

DB: So, if that is the case, it was a very small room. Is that right?

Lavina Hobbs: It was a very small room which had only one table and a desk, and the shelving was built around, which included a very small space and few books at the time.

DB: How did they get their books?

Lavina Hobbs: The books were donated by different families and friends and organizations. The book club, a division of the Climbers' Club, was one of the donors. They donated monthly new books.

DB: Did you get books from any other source?

Lavina Hobbs: Yes, through other donations, books came in; like, encyclopedias and other reference books.

DB: Were they new books or had they been used?

Lavina Hobbs: They were used books.

DB: Do you recall about how many people used the library? Was it well used?

Lavina Hobbs: The library was used and attendance was great. As time moved on the, the building and books were so great, the room was too small to accommodate the public; at this time it was suggested to build or get a larger building. The building now that housed the library was called the West Street Public Library.

DB: Were there mostly children, or students, that used this library, or were there others? Did the adults use it?

Lavina Hobbs: It was both. Quite a few reference work that was

gotten through the encyclopedias and reference books, quite a few adults used them. But the story books were used mostly by the children, the elementary children and a few high school students.

DB: Were you trained for this work that you were doing?

Lavina Hobbs: I was placed in this library as a WPA worker with little training. They offered Library Science at the public library, which was then housed on Broad Street next to the telephone office, and at this time I was trained in cataloging, shelving, and repairing books, cleaning and servicing the books. That gave me the opportunity to know how to shelve the books, and etc.

DB: About how long did you work during the day?

Lavina Hobbs: At this time, when the library was first open, we only had a few hours on WPA to work, and I think my hours varied. They were about 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. or 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., which was about six hours per day.

DB: Which meant there were no Saturdays.

Lavina Hobbs: No Saturdays.

DB: About how much was your salary? Can you remember that far back?

Lavina Hobbs: I'm not sure, but it was around forty dollars per month.

DB: About how long did the library remain in this building?

Lavina Hobbs: Well, I'm not sure. After working there, I'm not sure how long. I worked there until I was given full time employment with the Agriculture Extension Department. At this time, the library

had moved. I did a few hours in helping to shelve some of the books and catalog according to shelving after they moved into the new building on West Street.

DB: You did not actually work at all at the new building.

Lavina Hobbs: I did not work there as a job. I only worked there as a volunteer.

DB: Was this done on a regular basis?

Lavina Hobbs: No. It wasn't on a regular basis. Just volunteering like one or two days a week.

DB: Who was in charge of the library at the new place?

Lavina Hobbs: The librarian at this time was Mrs. Sadie Lowe. She is now deceased.

DB: So, can you think of anything else about the library? How would you rate that library that we had up there on West Street? How would you rate, the first one?

Lavina Hobbs: I think it had a 90% rating at that time because the kids really didn't have places to read and get their research work after school hours. The reading hours, they had reading games. They had contest during the summer where they could read so many books and get a prize or read so many books and get a free trip or donation.

I think it was quite a project to New Bern.

DB: Is there anything else that you can think of about the early library?

Lavina Hobbs: No, I guess not.

DB: This library, I'm sure at that time, did not serve nearby

communities?

Lavina Hobbs: No, not openly.

DB: Well, you would not know about the second one.

Lavina Hobbs: No, I wouldn't know about their circulation of books and attendance.

DB: So, now, this library was started, you said, about what year?

Lavina Hobbs: This library was started about 1934 or 1935.

DB: So, that means, then, that they were there maybe at least seven or eight years. I think the new one was started in 1947. You had a good ten years probably there at West Street School.

Lavina Hobbs: Probably. I'm not sure of the dates.

DB: Well, I certainly thank you for this information. It's been a big help.

Lavina Hobbs: Thank you. I hope I've been of service to you.

END OF INTERVIEW