

MEMORIES OF NEW BERN

MALINDA LAVINA HOBBS

INTERVIEW 1101

This is Thelma Harper Bryant representing the Memories of New Bern. My number is 1100. I am interviewing Malinda Lavina Hobbs, number 1101. The date is June 3, 1992. We are recording at 1604 Washington Court, the home of Thelma Bryant.

Thelma Bryant: Lavina, I would like to know all about you. Could you tell me about where you were born, and when, and who your parents were?

Lavina Hobbs: I'm Malinda Lavina Hobbs of 1105 Elm Street, New Bern, North Carolina. I was born January 2, 1913 in New Bern, North Carolina. My mother's name was Bessie Hobbs Martin and my father's name was Jessie Martin. My grandparents were Malinda Richardson Hobbs and Lewis Hobbs. My grandparents, my guardians, adopted me in their name Hobbs.

TB: Lavina, did you have any brothers and sisters? What about your household and your neighborhood that you lived in. I would like to know.

Lavina Hobbs: I was the only child. I lived in the same neighborhood all my life and it was a very quiet and religious neighborhood. All the neighbors were very friendly and caring.

TB: What about your early school life?

Lavina Hobbs: When I was of school age, I attended the Eastern North Carolina Industrial Academy in New Bern, North Carolina which was operated and built by the AME Zion church denomination. It was call Sutton School because the presiding elder, Rev. William Sutton was the first president. I was in the last class that graduated in

1930 before it closed. The school was located in Duffyfield area of New Bern. It was a boarding school. It had a girl's dormitory, a boy's dormitory, an auditorium, and classroom building.

TB: What grades were taught there?

Lavina Hobbs: At first it left until the elementary school and then later it met all state requirements of twelve years of high school.

TB: How did you get your books?

Lavina Hobbs: We had to buy our own books to attend school.

TB: They were not furnished by the state or the school?

Lavina Hobbs: No, our parents had to buy school books. It was a private school.

TB: Did you have any extracurricular activities like ball games?

Lavina Hobbs: We had baseball, basketball, the debating team, and glee club, and like that.

TB: What about the instructional program at the school? What subjects did you take there?

Lavina Hobbs: We took the average high school required by the state of North Carolina subjects; such as Math, English, Science. I think at that time they were still the most important subjects.

TB: What about your athletic program? Do you remember any of your teachers?

Lavina Hobbs: Some of our teachers were mostly out of town that was sent here by the denomination. They were Professor Todd who taught a while, his mother, Mrs. Todd, and Miss Phillips, and the Principal was J. R. Hill which is now living in Vanceboro, North Carolina.

TB: It's sounds interesting. Who were some of the important students on the campus, popular we might say?

Lavina Hobbs: Some of the important students in our basketball was Christopher Franks, and Dubois Edwards, Fletcher Barber, and Benjamin Allen. They were very, we call, champions in football for this area in the eastern part of North Carolina.

TB: Tell me about some of your activities. Did you belong to any organization on the campus?

Lavina Hobbs: I belonged to the debating team. I also played the basketball.

TB: What kind of dress did you wear? Did you have a special uniform for school?

Lavina Hobbs: At that time we played basketball, especially the girls uniform cause this a white middy blouse and light bloomers, we call a uniform.

TB: After finishing there, what did you participate in? What was your work? Did you go to college?

Lavina Hobbs: After graduating at Eastern North Carolina Industrial Academy, I attended and finished business school in New York City. After finishing and returning to New Bern, my first employment was under WPA. At this time I worked stock work in agricultural extension service and the welfare department which was housed in the same office.

TB: What year was this?

Lavina Hobbs: This was just about the year of 1933. R. E. Jones

was farm agent and Miss C. S. Rhone was social worker.

TB: I understand that you were a librarian here in the city. Tell me about that.

Lavina Hobbs: Working through the WPA we had many jobs. I was first placed as librarian, the first librarian in the West Street High School building. Later, this library moved to West Street and was called the West Street Public Library. Leaving this library, I was placed with the state agriculture extension service for full time employment.

TB: What did you do?

Lavina Hobbs: I was working as full time secretary and retired from here in 1973. In doing my employment here, we were integrated in 1966 to the extension department on Broad Street. Meaning, the black office moved to 409 Broad Street known as the agricultural building and here. From here, I worked completing thirty years of employment and retired in 1973.

TB: I would like to know more about Sutton School? Do you have any idea when it was founded?

Lavina Hobbs: The Sutton School, or the Eastern North Carolina Industrial Academy, was founded in 1895. At this time it was an industrial school where they made a lot of equipment like brooms and different articles to carry out the industrial part. I don't remember what other things were made there.

TB: How many classrooms did you have in that building?

Lavina Hobbs: In the building that I remember I can estimate

about eight classrooms.

TB: About how much was the enrollment there?

Lavina Hobbs: The enrollment varied quite a bit because students, since it was a boarding school, students from areas like Snow Hill, Jacksonville, Pollocksville, Maysville, Duplin County, Warsaw, Wallace, all those schools, kids were here because it was dormitory, boys and girls dormitory.

TB: Did you have any children from out of state?

Lavina Hobbs: There were quite a few out of state kids that was here various parts like Washington, D. C. and some from New York State.

TB: Did you have any from Oriental? It was close to Pamlico County.

Lavina Hobbs: Quite a few from Oriental. All parts of Pamlico County was here.

TB: Do you remember any of their names?

Lavina Hobbs: Beatrice Holt and her sister, Annie Holt, and Annie Mann. I think there was three sisters here, Mann. I think the Principal of J. T. Barber's sister was here. I think he had three sisters from the Mann family.

TB: What happened to that building? How was it used and who used it after it closed? Why did it close?

Lavina Hobbs: I think the building after it was closed, I think it was financial through the church, through the denomination, I think they probably I don't know whether bankruptcy or what, but they closed, and this building was used by the city.

I think it housed the fifth grade after it was closed. The first building, the wood building, was burned and a new building was placed which was a brick building. At this time that's when the city or the county, I don't know which, housed and used the building. I don't know what happened or why it was torn down.

TB: Was that the time that West Street School was built and you integrated with the whites?

Lavina Hobbs: No. I think the West Street building just was crowded and they had a limit that they divided the New Bern districts and all kids in the Duffyfield area attended in the grades. It was the fifth grade I think.

TB: Let's think about your community a little more. Do you know any interesting people that was outstanding in the community?

Lavina Hobbs: Yes, quite a few. I remember a little fellow they call "Buddy." Buddy was a very friendly person. He was dressed very neatly and clean always. When you would meet him or speak to him, he'd turn round and round in a very nervous stance before he could speak to you. I think at that time we called his nervousness the St. Vitis Dance. But he was a very, very nice person to know. I remember Prophet George, the fellow they called Prophet George. Prophet George was round and about New Bern prophesying. He would too dress neatly. He was always dressed in white with plenty of jewelry, with pins, and necklace, and the rings. We would refer to him as a prophet. We'd walk up to him as children and say, "What's the weather going to be like?", and he would always prophesy the weather and then he'd

prophecy the future, what was going to happen in the future like storms.

I don't remember if he prophesied the fire that broke out in the later years, but he called himself a great prophet.

TB: That's interesting. What about music? Do you know anybody here that was gifted in music or dancing or anything like that?

Lavina Hobbs: Well, no I can't remember anyone right now. Maybe I'll think of somebody.

TB: Lavina, what has been your experience with clubs and churches? Have you been active?

Lavina Hobbs: Church, I guess, was next to home as growing up in that day and a church was your next outing. We didn't have too many things to call us. In my church affiliation I served in church all my life. I joined the club chapel, Sunday School, and the cradle roll which as you know was very small, very young, and still working in. church. I had many active parts. I served as secretary of the church for about thirty years, Sunday School secretary, teacher, and district officer for the conference and local church.

TB: Did you belong to any clubs? How about your recreation?

Lavina Hobbs: For our community activities, I think I was a member of the Climber's Club and served as secretary of the Climber's Club which is a federated club. I was president of the music department of the Climber's Club and also a Girl Scout leader.

TB: Lavina, I hear that you're active in working with the youth also. What type of work have you done with the youth?

Lavina Hobbs: I've worked as I said as a Girl Scout leader

community wide. Most of the youth is through the church as our Vacation Bible School, and Sunday School.

TB: What years did you work with the Girl Scouts?

Lavina Hobbs: At first I think it was probably in 1946 and the next Troop I had was in 1960.

TB: Lavina, have you done much travelling and what type of trips have you been on?

Lavina Hobbs: Yes, I acquire of travelling. Working with the senior citizens at the Stanley White Recreation Center, I made quite a few tours with the senior citizens educational tours. We went to Niagara Falls, Quebec, Canada, Disney World, Epcot Center, New York tours, Holy Land, USA in Connecticut, Independent Hall, the Bicentennial in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and government tours in Washington, D.C. Through the church activities, through general conferences, as a district officer and a missionary, we went to Buffalo, New York; St. Louis, Missouri; Los Angeles, California; New Orleans, Louisiana; Hartford, Connecticut; and Washington, D.C. Of course through the Sunday School, the general conferences of Sunday School, as delegate I served Cincinnati, Ohio; Louisville, Kentucky; and Columbus, Ohio. And four years to Salisbury, Livingston College as delegate for the church Sunday School.

TB: Lavina, would you like to tell me something about the Depression, in what year it was? Do you remember the Depression? What happened here in New Bern during the Depression?

Lavina Hobbs: Well, in the 1930's was right in the midst of

Depression here in New Bern. The welfare department was in charge and they gave out food to needy people, and they had soup lines, and bread lines, and clothing, new and donated, that they gave to the needy people.

TB: Lavina, can you tell me anything that's going on now in the city of New Bern that's similar to what went on in the Depression period?

Lavina Hobbs: Yes. We have soup kitchens now for the needy and shelter for the homeless. Senior citizens have activities to keep the aged from staying home alone. They have games for them. Those that quilt have quilting parties. We play Bingo and the men usually shoot pool in order not to be at home lonely. They can come out to the Tri-County Senior Citizens on George Street and benefit from all these activities.

TB: That's wonderful, Lavina, and I think that you have covered this very well, so this will end our interview. I hope you have enjoyed it. Thank you very much for your participating.

Lavina Hobbs: Thank you. I hope I have accomplished your program.

END OF INTERVIEW