

INTERVIEWER: My name is Linda Simmons Henry. Today is February 19, 2009. I'm at the home of Mary Randolph at 1504 Cobb Street, New Bern, North Carolina.

Mrs. Randolph, it's such an honor to be here to interview you. I would like to start off by asking you a little bit about your family. Would you give me your full name, date, and place of birth?

MRS RANDOLPH: My name is Mary Elizabeth Davis Randolph. I was born here in Craven County on December 29, 1920. Two years before the great fire. I was born in the area of George St. My mother's name was Mary Ann White. My father's name was Charles M. Davis. He passed away when I was 8 years old. I have one brother that was younger than I was. His name was William Henry Venters. Although he passed away because he was afflicted with infantile paralysis which was later known as Polio.

I grew up in a neighborhood where people were very outgoing, good neighborly people. As a child growing up, we were not poor, but we were not well off. We had family members that worked. We all lived together. My grandmother helped to raise us as our mothers and fathers went off to work and we went to school. We went to West Street School. I started in grade school, West Street, in the year 1926. From then on, I went up as far as 8<sup>th</sup> grade. Then I quit school because I became pregnant and I had to get married. I stayed here and worked a while. Then I went away. Then I came back. I married Leon Randolph. He was from here too. He was born in this area. We lived together here. When they built the projects, we moved into the Projects. He was working with the cleaners. He was a hard worker. He worked for Johnson Cleaners all those years that we lived here. Then he was called to go to the Army. He went to the Army. He served 4 years. Two of those years he served overseas, in the European area, during World War II.

He was fortunate enough to come back with those that were able to get back and he went back on the same job that he left. But then we saw that we could do better if we moved away. So we decided to relocate in the North where we could get a better education for our daughter, which we did. While living away, I became involved in many things. I took up business courses. I got my high school diploma at Washington Irving High School. I went to several business schools but by this time I was already working. I worked in the corporate field. I worked with many organizations. I worked with many companies, like Royal Global Insurance Company owned by The Mother Queen of England. That was located around Wall Street, in that area. I worked for TransWorld Shipping Company. I worked for big

oil fineries companies. I worked for all these companies while I was away. Meanwhile, I got involved in politics. I supported all the representatives that I thought would represent the peoples, whether they were Republicans, Democrats, or Independents. We got out there and we supported them. When I returned here in 1973, I did the same thing. I returned here after my husband passed away. I returned back here to live.

INTERVIEWER: When you were growing up in the Dry Brybrough Area, Long Wrough Community, what were some of the activities that were in your community?

MRS RANDOLPH: Well, during that time, we had kids that were active in sports, like basketball, football, and boy scouts, and girl scouts. When they started out they were Brownies. My daughter was a girl scout. Also, they had different things going on, like after school things. We had a Hall, the Grand Army Hall. We only had a place for kids for recreational activities. But as time went on, things improved. When they came through and built Craven Terrace, they had a recreational room there for recreational activities. There were even social functions there too. This is where those things took place, The Jolly Makers.

INTERVIEWER: I see you have the group, the Jolly Makers. What were the Jolly Makers like?

MRS RANDOLPH: They were a social club and they had social functions like dances. They had different activities. They had things going on like any other social group would have, like picnics, and any other social functions.

INTERVIEWER: Can you name some of the people that were in the Jolly Makers?

MRS RANDOLPH: Yes. Thurman Morris, Leon Randolph, Curtis Witt, Moses Downing, Maceo Bragg, Hilton Reddick, Vernon Robinson and Simon Bonner, and Ed Richardson. There were many more that are not listed on there.

INTERVIEWER: What other social clubs that were during that time, early 20's, 1930's?

MRS RANDOLPH: I can't go back to the 1920's because that was the year I was born.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, that was the year that you were born?

MRS RANDOLPH: Yes. So I don't know what. These were things that I knew about. I learned these growing up as a teenager. Then, when I got older and was able to go out to work (I started working when I was 18). Prior to that, I would go over and work at J.T. Barber Boarding House. That was a Boarding House that the teachers used.

INTERVIEWER: John Thomas Barber's House?

MRS RANDOLPH: Yes. I'd go over there on Saturdays and help his wife wash dishes and help clean and do as a teenager.

INTERVIEWER: What was his wife's name?

MRS. RANDOLPH: Maggie Fisher Barber. Dr. Fisher, they had his office on Queen Street. That was her brother. His wife, Mrs. Fisher, she was the Home Economics teacher at West Street Grade School and we had classes down there.

INTERVIEWER: Did she teach you?

MRS. RANDOLPH: Yes. By this time, I was in the 7<sup>th</sup> grade. Her name was Carrie Fisher and their home was on George Street, also. Dr. Mann was one of the black doctors here. We had several black doctors here during that time.

INTERVIEWER: Can you name some of them?

MRS RANDOLPH: Well, one of them was Dr. Martin. One was Dr. Mumford. I can't think of their first names. We had another doctor who ran a drug store at Five Points. His name was Dr. Hill, Hill's Drug Store. After that, Mr. Faison, he was very active during that time and later on he took over the drug store out there in Five Points.

INTERVIEWER: What was Five Points like? It seems as though there were a lot of black businesses there.

MRS RANDOLPH: Yes, along with some Syrians, they had some businesses out there also. Then there were fish markets out there, and things like cafes and restaurants. They had the Downing Restaurant and Sarah Murphy's Restaurant. Then you had the Palace Theatre, the first black theatre. I was a cashier at that theatre.

INTERVIEWER: So that was the first black theatre?

MRS RANDOLPH: That was the first theatre for the blacks. It so happened that in the 1930's, we were real young and our parents would give us \$.10 to go to the movies, and that movie house faced Kilmarnoch Street.

INTERVIEWER: Kilmarnoch Street?

MRS. RANDOLPH: Kilmarnoch Street; when the projects came there, it cut off half of the streets: Kilmarnoch Street, Carmer Street and Carroll Street. They cut those streets all the way off up through Miller Street. That project went all the way over to Cedar Street after it was completed. It took years before it was finally completed but it ended up at Miller Street, Cedar Street and Roundtree Street; those four blocks it took in. Also, during the war time, when I got hired, the manager who owned the Palace Theatre (we never knew his name; we called him Mr. Bowden) erected that theatre there. That theatre was erected in the 1930's and I remember 1932 and from then on through 1937, you naturally had to pay more than \$.10 to go in to the events. But in the 1940's, the early 1940's, he built another theatre down the street from that theatre which was on the corner of you would come out across from the Forbes Alley. They put this building there and the theatre was open on the Broad Street (it was called Broad Street before Highway 70 came through there). So you could sit there and look up and down the street; you could sit there; we had cashiers. I would be there some days and some days I would go to the Palace Theatre.

INTERVIEWER: So you had two black theatres?

MRS RANDOLPH: We had 2 black theatres. They got it in one of those books there; they list the Ritz as the first black theatre; but it was the Palace that was the first black theatre. I worked there. If anybody was living around that time, they would know.

INTERVIEWER: Who were some of the African-American builders that built these buildings?

MRS RANDOLPH: I don't know who the black builders were at that time. Unless they came about after the projects came in. You know they built Trent Court first for whites only. Then they came up with Craven Terrace for blacks only. We were

some of the first families to move in, in 1941. So when the Ritz Theatre closed down, the Elks, the Order of the Eastern Star, took over the building. When they took over the building, they changed the entrance and put it on the Queen Street side, but when it was a theatre, it opened on the Broad Street side. There were houses all on Broad Street. They had black business people selling food and other whatnot items. Mr. Steve Roberts had a big vegetable stand. There was a big fish stand across the street that was run by blacks. This fish market owner was originally from James City. They didn't have too many stores owned by private people. During that time, everything you could afford to buy. We would walk out to Five Points to do our shopping. They had meat markets and blacks working in there. Later, a black owned a meat market. His name was Frank Pollock. His son had two places out there in Five Points; a meat market and a little place that sold ice cream. There were quite a few black businesses out there where I could remember from a little girl growing up. I can't remember their names.

INTERVIEWER: I think Five Points was the place to be for the African Americans.

MRS RANDOLPH: Not only that, the owner of the restaurant opened right on the corner of Kilmarnoch Street and Broad Street. He opened up a beer garden. That's where blacks hung out. It was an eatery. The guy working behind the counter sold hamburgers and hot dogs, and stuff like that. They sold beer because they had their licenses. On the weekends, people gathered there for entertainment. They had a Piccolo in there; you played those records.

INTERVIEWER: What was the name of this business?

MRS RANDOLPH: They called it the Beer Garden. A kid had his restaurant next door.

INTERVIEWER: Did a lot of entertainments come to New Bern?

MRS RANDOLPH: Yes, like Dinah Washington, Ruth Brown. Ruth Brown came to the Armory. We had an Armory down where the police department is now. That's where the big bands would come and bands beyond that like Count Basie and all of those other bands (they were coming as far as Kinston). A group of people would get together and go to Kinston to those dances over there. But Dinah Washington and Ruth Brown and quite a few blacks came here.

INTERVIEWER: The entertainment was at the Armory?

MRS RANDOLPH: Yes, the dances. I remember we went over to Kinston to see Jimmy Langston, Erskin Hawkins, and several other bands.

INTERVIEWER: Sarah Vaughn ?

MRS RANDOLPH: No, I didn't get to see her. That came later. I think I had gone away from here by then. I was raised in Clinton Chapel. I'm a Methodist. I was raised in Clinton Chapel.

INTERVIEWER: How long have you been a member of Clinton Chapel?

MRS RANDOLPH: I would say that I am not as active now as I was but I grew up in Clinton Chapel when it was a wooden building. I was a member there when Rev. Ewing and them decided to tear the old building down. I got a picture of the old building. The reason it is not in the archives is that they had to take the whole building away and renew it and make it as it is today. So they can't call it a historical church now. Rev. Ewing is the one while he was a minister there, he helped to rebuild it, back in the early 1960's.

INTERVIEWER: As a little girl growing up, who was the pastor that you can remember, the earliest one?

MRS RANDOLPH: I would have to look in my books. I have the Clintonians and all those ministers. Rev. Garrett was the earliest one (discussion trying to remember first name); Rev. Mumford was before Rev. Garrett.

INTERVIEWER: When you returned back to New Bern in 1973, what did you see as some of the major changes in New Bern, in terms of this community, in terms of African-American development?

MRS RANDOLPH: When I returned here, I didn't see too much of any development (goes back to early ministers of Clinton Chapel and remembers Rev. Mumford who was before Rev. Garrett. They are listed in a book that celebrates 100 years of the church). All of my family members who were Methodist belonged to that church: parents, grandparents, aunts.

INTERVIEWER: So you had strong family ties with Clinton Chapel?

MRS RANDOLPH: Yes. Carolyn Bland knows my family. She knows my family members. She knew my uncle well because her father and Heath Bell and W.T. Lewis (Saddie Adams father) were his mentors. My uncle taught (back then they called it a Christian Endeavor) Sunday School. My uncle was Carolyn Bland's brother's mentor.

INTERVIEWER: When you returned back to New Bern in 1973, what changes did you see from when you left as a young girl?

MRS RANDOLPH: Well, a lot of changes I saw when I came back in the community because a lot of those people that lived in the projects had moved out and brought their own homes. Because of that, when C.C. Cam was down there in the Cherry Point area, when they closed down the conservation camp, and built up Cherry Point, people were able to move out and get better jobs because they went down to Cherry Point. They worked down at Cherry Point as civilians during the war. They were able to move out of the projects and buy their own homes. So, New Bern came up and I could see the difference. It looked as if every other person had a car. When I left, it was not that way. We had to use cabs.

INTERVIEWER: There were cabs?

MRS. RANDOLPH: Yes. There were cabs. There weren't too many people who had their own cars. We walked a lot. We used to walk downtown. We all had a job down at the Green Door. It was a cafe, opened up by a white restaurateur. She opened this cafe first by making up sandwiches. Then she built her business up to a nice cafe. She had girls working there as waitresses. There were 4 of us. Each one of us had 2 tables. We were making only \$8 a week but soon we were making tips. We worked there for a while. After that, I got a job working with the theatre. All of this happened before I went away. When I came back, all that was gone, the Green Door was gone, down on Middle Street and Broad.

INTERVIEWER: The Green Door was a restaurant?

MRS RANDOLPH: Yes, down on Middle and Broad. There was another café across the street called Hamilton café. It was all white. Both of them were owned by whites, but both of them hired blacks to cook, and waiters.

INTERVIEWER: Did you serve blacks in this cafe?

MRS RANDOLPH: In the restaurant downtown?

INTERVIEWER: Yes.

MRS RANDOLPH: No, the blacks didn't come down there to eat. Because what happened, they only served 2 meals a day: lunch and suppertime. Most of the servicemen and their families came to the Green Door to eat because they liked that Southern cooking, because they had black people working there and the black people were doing the cooking.

INTERVIEWER: Were there African-American servicemen that came in there to eat?

MRS RANDOLPH: Yes, these were service people. But just the ordinary people, they didn't come down town to eat. People stayed home and ate. They didn't eat out like they do now. People, I guess they had money, they could go out on an evening. They could go to Sarah Murphy's and eat and they would go to George Downing's Café. More people went to George Downing's Café and ate because he had a regular café that made food like people cooked in their homes. When people got off work, they would go there to eat.

INTERVIEWER: I guess there were more black businesses like that in the Five Points area that catered to African-Americans, so you really didn't have a need to go downtown.

MRS RANDOLPH: No, there wasn't. Then there were small businesses down town in the Frog Pond. George Dunson had a filling station down there, in the Queen Street area, near Bern Street. New Street came at the end of Bern Street, so there was a filling station down there.

INTERVIEWER: Also, when you returned, you became the first African-American tour guide for Tryon Palace?

MRS RANDOLPH: Yes, that was later on in years. That was in the 1980's that I went there to work. I was the first black hostess.

INTERVIEWER: Did you encounter any kind of discrimination during the Civil Rights Movement just prior to you going to the Tryon Palace?

MRS RANDOLPH: I was not here in the 1960's during the Civil Rights Movement. We left here in 1952. We relocated in the north. But during the Civil Rights Movement, we supported it. When Martin Luther King, Jr., spoke at the

Lincoln Memorial, my uncle at that time was living in Washington, DC. My daughter and her family (by this time she had married – George Dudley; he was in the Korean War. They were childhood sweethearts so they got married and they had children. Then there were the grandchildren and the great-grands). We went down there to be there but we couldn't get anywhere near the Lincoln Memorial. But we did get to meet him in person. When we lived in Brooklyn, we went to Rev. Sandy Ray's church, a Baptist church, and we got to meet Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in person. He and his sister were there. And he spoke. That was the first time I had laid eyes on him. Then, later on in years, after I returned here to live, my daughter and her husband, my grandson (my granddaughter was still in college) came down here and we went to Atlanta and visited his church. I have a picture of me standing at the church and my grandson also have pictures.

INTERVIEWER: During the 1960's?

MRS. RANDOLPH: Yes, when we went to Atlanta before I moved back here.

INTERVIEWER: I remember you saying that you were 2 years old when the great fire of New Bern. What did your family or your mother tell you about the fire?

MRS RANDOLPH: My grandmother told me that the fire started at one of the mills over on Craven Street, the Rutgers Mill and Slater's Mill, one of those Mills. I went to the Firemen's Museum when I saw a picture of my grandfather in the Sun Journal paper. I came back home and went through my records and found my grandfather's picture and compared it with that picture and what made me recognize my grandfather was that he had on white gloves, his uniform, his hook and ladder. When I saw that five years ago, I went to the museum to find out more information on it. They didn't have anything else on it. They couldn't tell me the company that he was involved with. This was in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and he drove the fire wagon, driven by horses. To this day, I haven't been able to get any more information on it. I don't know what happened. That's all I could get.

INTERVIEWER: And the name of your grandfather?

MRS RANDOLPH: Thomas White.

INTERVIEWER: Thomas White.

MRS RANDOLPH: I don't know if he was the first black firefighter, but all I know, he was one, if there were more, I don't know. I do know he was a

firefighter in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. He drove the fire wagon here in New Bern. My grandmother told me about it. My mother told me about it.

INTERVIEWER: They told you about the great fire in 1922?

MRS RANDOLPH: She told me about the fire in 1922. She said that when the fire came, it came in December and it was windy and the wind took the fire and it was going across the city and wherever it fell, it set fire, like the people's homes. Even the director in the fire museum (I was down there asking all these questions; I went out there on Broad Street first to find out from the fire house there. I was instructed to go to the fire museum there on Hancock Street. I did but they didn't have enough information. I showed them the picture in the newspaper and I showed them the picture that I had of my grandfather; the person down there that was in charged helped me. He went through everything. He said they had two fires. Another one started uptown about 10:00 but the one that started at the Mill started at 8:00 in the morning. A lot of those people who lived on George Street lost their homes, lost furniture and stuff. The Red Cross had to come and put up tents. She told me she had an organ that they treasured. They put it out. Somebody came by ((they were looting)) and took it. I don't know whether or not she played it but they lost it. Seems like that was a treasure of hers. But, people lost a lot. After that, we found other areas to live. We weren't able to buy our own homes. We just rented but they were good neighborhoods. I noticed an article that Mr. Geoge had in the paper ...I think it was Sunday before last, we were living two doors from where he is talking about. We lived on Cedar Street right next to where he had the article)

INTERVIEWER: Okay. Let's talk about the greater Duffyfield, this community.

MRS RANDOLPH: Well, this community, since I have been living her (I've always lived on the other side of town). When I came back here to live, I ended up in this area. But I was renting before I invested in this house. After I invested in this house, I felt all right. I felt that I didn't have to continue to rent anymore. I purchased a home through the Farmers Home Administration because I was able to get a loan. They don't just put out money for anything. They are very particular about who they loan to. And, since there was nobody but me, I could only get through there for what I wanted because I was on a low, a fixed income, and I wasn't here long enough to establish credit. So, my daughter and son-in-law came down and co-signed for me so I could get this loan. So that's how I got over here. But, for 25 years, I had been fighting the city, fighting City Hall, the county and

everybody else, to try to do something about the neighborhood, clean it up. If it had looked like this before I invested in this home, I would never have invested in it over here.

INTERVIEWER: So, this community has changed?

MRS RANDOLPH: It has changed and is changing because of that Canal that runs through all of these communities and is causing these areas to deteriorate. Over there on the Kinston Street side, the ground is sinking right into the canal. And my property would go down in it too, if I hadn't had the city to put a Bulk Head out there to support it. But it still hasn't kept it too much.

INTERVIEWER: What was it like in terms of you voting for the first African-American President?

MRS RANDOLPH: Oh, I was so overjoyed, I didn't know what to do. I stayed up day and night and I tell everybody I guess I've become a political junkie. Even though my health has deteriorated (I've lost weight and I have so many things wrong healthwise), I prayed night and day for him to win that election. I prayed for him. And do you know what? I just love him. Anytime I see him, I just ... anytime they call his name, if I'm in the kitchen, and hear him on the TV in the livingroom, I go in there because I never thought I'd live to see ... well, they call him a black man when he'd run for the President, or when he won the Presidency. He's more than just a black man. He's bi-racial because his mother was white and his father was black. He's from both sides coming together, like he's trying to do now: bring the people together from both sides. But, he's going to have an uphill battle because there's so many people against him. Even some of the blacks, I've heard make negative remarks. I can't accept that. I don't know why. I just don't understand why some of them would be against him, especially, after 200 years, 200 years now, we've got a black man as President of these United States, reaching out to bring the people together all around the world. It seems like the people are not listening. But I'm listening. I think that's why I got sick.

INTERVIEWER: Well, Mrs. Randolph, I want to thank you for having given me this opportunity to come into your home and to enjoy the wisdom of stories about New Bern and the African-American community and just hear your voice and to tell the story. It's has been wonderful.

If there is one thing that you would like to share with the younger generation or future generations from New Bern, what would it be?

MRS RANDOLPH: I would tell them, we have now a person that we can look up to, to let them know that you can be anything that you want to be. You don't have to be rich to become the President of the United States. You say to yourself, "I can do that. I can be helpful. I can become the President of the United States." Don't look upon yourself as what you're doing now and where you came from. Some of the poorest people have become up in the world and have become great artists, have become great. I know that for a fact. You don't have to be black. You don't have to be white. You can be any color you want to be. And you can be anything you want to be. The change has come now. When he was out there on the campaign trail, he was fighting for a change. The change is here. Let's take it and go.

INTERVIEWER: Thank you. This ends our interview.