

DTB 031 Brenda Patterson
Down the Bay Oral History Project (DTB), Acc. 757
Interviewed by Kern Jackson on June 15, 2022
55 minute audio recording • 40 page transcript

Abstract: In this interview, Brenda Patterson is interviewed by Kern Jackson in Mobile, Alabama. Ms. Patterson describes her experiences growing up in the Africatown community, and some of the people and places that comprised the community. One institution in particular that she focuses on is Mobile County Training School. She also describes her family's move to the Maysville neighborhood of Mobile. At the time of the interview, Ms. Patterson was a member of Prince of Peace church, which is located Down the Bay.

The Down the Bay Oral History Project focuses on the historic Down the Bay neighborhood on the south side of Mobile, Alabama. Led by Drs. Philip Carr and Kern Jackson of the University of South Alabama, in collaboration with the McCall Library, the project took shape in conjunction with archaeological mitigation work for the I-10 bridge expansion. Down the Bay is a historically Black and Creole neighborhood, and a central focus of the project has been to document the constant threat of gentrification and the legacy of urban renewal.

Preface: This is a transcript of an oral history recording archived at the McCall Library of the University of South Alabama. Readers are asked to bear in mind that they are reading a verbatim transcript of the spoken word which has been minimally edited for readability.



Use Rights: This interview is provided under the terms of a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International Public License. The interviewee(s) retain copyright, but the recording and transcript may be used for noncommercial purposes (research, education, etc.), so long as the narrator and archive are appropriately credited. This interview **cannot be used for commercial purposes** without the express written consent of the individual(s) providing the content for the interview.

DTB 031 Brenda Patterson
Interviewed June 15, 2022

This is a verbatim transcript of an oral history interview recording, composed and formatted in accordance with the McCall Library transcription style guide.

Verbatim transcription is a style of representing as closely as possible the exact wording and phrasing of the speakers on the recording, though false starts, repetitious phrases, and other minor edits have been made as needed only for the sake of clarity and readability. Readers of this transcript are strongly encouraged to listen to the recording.

Please note that if any text is **bolded** in the transcript, this indicates uncertainty of either spelling or accuracy of transcription regarding what was said. Italics indicate emphasis, or are applied to titles and similar proper nouns.

This interview was transcribed by:

Draft transcript:	Alondra Mabien on June 21, 2022
Audit-edit:	Terrion Thompson, June 23, 2022
2 nd audit-edit:	Ryan Morini, November 3, 2022
Final edit:	Ryan Morini, October 5, 2023

DTB 031

Narrator: Brenda Patterson

Interviewer: Kern Jackson

Date: June 15, 2022

J: First, this is Kern Jackson doing an interview for the Down the Bay oral history project, and also the Africatown oral history project. And I'm here with Mrs. Brenda Patterson. Ms. Patterson, if you would for the screen here, give us your full name.

P: Okay, my name is Brenda Edwards Patterson. I'm from Plateau, which is Africatown now. And I was living in Africatown area since I was born.

J: Oh yeah?

P: Yes, I was born in Africatown.

J: Where at? Where'd you live at in Africatown?

P: On Jakes Lane.

J: What's the address?

P: It was 658, but they changed it to 1109 Jakes Lane.

J: Hold on, why did they change the address?

P: Because there was so many streets had the same address just about, so they re-did it.

J: Okay, okay, okay. Now who in Africatown were you related to? Who are your people, your parents?

P: Will Edwards and Creola Wells-Edwards.

J: Creola Wells-Edwards, okay. And Mr. William, is he the one who is the Clotilda descendant?

P: Yes—not really. Yes, I guess so, yeah.

J: Or was it Ms. Creola?

P: No, Ms. Creola, she was from Montgomery.

J: Oh, she was?

P: Yes.

J: Okay, okay. Tell us about Mr. William. What did he do for a living?

P: He worked at Scott Paper Company.

J: Really, doing what?

P: In the paper mill.

J: Mhmm.

P: In the mill part.

J: In the mill part. And your momma, what did she do?

P: She was a teacher.

J: Where at?

P: At St. Stevens.

J: Where is St. Stevens at?

P: That's a little past McIntosh. Right between McIntosh and Jackson, Alabama.

J: So, what grade did she teach?

P: She taught from first through high school.

J: First through high school, wow. And how many of y'all was there?

P: It was five of us.

J: Name them.

P: William Jr, Deloris Edwards **Bauer**, Mary **Andretta**, Andrew, me—Brenda Patterson, and Ernest Edwards.

- J: Okay, all right. Now, in addition to y'all and your parents, was any of your extended family in Africatown, too? Like grandparents or—?
- P: My grandparents—she was living there for a while. Because she was living in a place called the New Quarters that was across the ditch from Plateau.
- J: In New Quarters. What was your grandmother's name?
- P: Hester Edwards.
- J: Hester Edwards. Do you remember her address in New Quarters?
- P: No, because when they—she moved in with us after my mother passed.
- J: Mm, mm. Okay.
- P: And she lived with us till she passed.
- J: Okay, okay. And she was born there and raised in Plateau?
- P: No, she was raised in Whatley, Alabama.
- J: Where's Whatley?
- P: [Laughter] It's up 45. It's a little town, like I say, in between Jackson, Alabama and McIntosh.
- J: Wait, does LeAndre know about all these little places y'all people come from?
- P: Little bit, but not all of them.
- J: You don't take him up the county?
- P: Well, I took him to up there in McIntosh and Jackson, and take him to Montgomery and Mount Meigs. And I showed him where the boys' home used to be in Mount Meigs, because it used to be right next door to my grandfather' house.
- J: Oh, what was your grandfather's name?

- P: William Wells.
- J: Up there in Montgomery, up there in Mount Meigs.
- P: Yes.
- J: Was he a farmer? What'd he do?
- P: He was a farmer. He used to raise cotton, pigs; everything.
- J: Did he have his own land?
- P: Yes. Because, matter of fact, they took part of the interstate from him. Part of his land for part of the interstate.
- J: Oh, you mean, what's that? 85, or—?
- P: That was 85.
- J: Yeah. Yeah, okay. And does the family still have the property?
- P: Yes, we still have the property.
- J: Okay, okay. That's important. I always have to ask, because sometimes that property, things happen, blah blah blah.
- P: No, we still have it. Matter of fact, me, my sisters, and brother have it.
- J: What are y'all doing with it?
- P: Right now, we not doing anything. So it's, the trees and one of the houses still on there. Just sitting there. So, we just holding on to it.
- J: Well maybe LeAndre'll go to Auburn. Y'all will have to—. [Laughter]
- P: No, he got his set going to Alabama.
- J: He wants to go to Alabama, for real?
- P: He want to go to Alabama.

J: Well, let him go then. You know, you got to let them go where they want to go.

P: Yep.

J: Okay, so back to Plateau: now, who was from Plateau? Who in your family was already from Plateau, or did everybody in your family move to Plateau? I'm confused.

P: My daddy' momma moved to Plateau, because like I say my grandmomma was staying in the New Quarters; that was, like, across the ditch. So, my daddy came here and built the house where we stayed in, from top to bottom.

J: He built the house on Jakes Lane?

P: Yes.

J: Okay. Is that house still there?

P: It's still there.

J: We might have to go by there and see it. Who live there now?

P: Nobody, we saw—I went by there a couple—what, last month? And I was looking at it, and they got the grass grown up a little bit, and I was trying to—I went downtown to see who really own the property now. And they told me some—Anthony **Horace**, somebody owned it. So, I was trying to—I'mma try to get in touch with him so I can buy it back and everything. Because we still have the whippet up on top of the house.

J: The dog?

P: The dog.

J: The mascot for Mobile County Training School?

P: Yes.

J: Y'all were hardcore!

P: Yes, because my brother made that dog.

J: Did he?

P: Yes, my older brother made the dog.

J: At the school?

P: At the school, when they had a workshop there.

J: Who was the teacher in that shop? Who taught shop?

P: Mr. Withers.

J: Mr. Withers? Tom?

P: Mmhm. Tom Withers. Yeah, but he taught it. He did that dog, and then we put it on top of the house and it's still there.

J: At 60—what was it?

P: 1109 Jakes Lane.

J: 1109 Jakes Lane. Did you know a Mrs. Aurelia Craig?

P: Yes.

J: How was she connected to y'all? Or was she just a neighbor?

P: She was a neighbor.

J: And so, did you come up with her kids? Or were y'all the same age, or—?

P: No, my sisters and brother came up. My older sister and brother came up with her kids.

J: With her kids, okay. Because she was a big Africatown lady. I remember when I first came to Mobile, she was putting on a festival with another Ms. Edwards, who I thought you was connected to. You know who I'm talking about? Tall lady. I don't know.

P: That might be—Willie Edwards stayed on Lincoln Street; his wife. I forgot her name.

J: That house that sat back off the street?

P: It was set back off the street, a upstairs house.

J: Yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

P: Yes, that was my cousin.

J: Let me see.

P: He stayed on Lincoln Street.

J: Okay. No, I'm thinking about the Edwards that stayed on Green Street.

P: No.

J: Okay, all right. Now, so there was no one in your family who was born in Africatown.

P: No. Nobody but the children.

J: Just the children. Wait, y'all were born at the house?

P: Yes.

J: Who was the midwife?

P: Mrs. Thelma Shamburger.

J: Shamburger was y'all's midwife?

P: Yes.

J: Well, I guess she was everybody out there's midwife.

P: [Laughter] She was.

J: Did you know her? Did you know her and talk to her?

P: Yes.

J: What was she like?

P: She was a really nice lady.

J: Yeah?

P: She had a lot of wisdom.

J: What do you mean by that?

P: She was always telling history about Plateau and everything.

J: Wait.

P: She would tell us, who did she delivery and everything, and where they was at. Now, her house is still standing up out there in Plateau.

J: Where was—I don't know, where's her house at?

P: Her house is on Front Street. That's almost near Bay Bridge Road, like a couple street over from Bay Bridge Road, behind Union Baptist Church.

J: Okay, Front Street. Got it. Let's shift Down the Bay. Now, how long you been coming here to Prince of Peace?

P: Oh, I been coming here to Prince of Peace, let me see, about 30-some years. I started coming—I got, after we married, me and Cleveland got married—we were married in a Baptist church.

J: Oh, which church y'all get married in?

P: Yorktown.

J: Oh yeah? Was that your home church when you lived in Africatown?

P: Yes.

J: Okay.

P: And then found out that, after I had my first child, my daughter, and I wanted her to be baptized, they told me she had to be baptized under Catholic. So, we got her baptized here.

J: Why did she have to be baptized in a Catholic church?

P: Because she had to be raised in the Catholic church because Cleveland was a Catholic.

J: Oh, your husband was Catholic.

P: Was Catholic. Yeah.

J: Okay. Is Cleveland from Down the Bay?

P: Yes.

J: Where from?

P: On Scott Street.

J: On Scott Street.

P: Mmhm.

J: I need to interview your husband, too! [Laughter]

J: But let's go back to Africatown. Now, where was—where'd y'all shop at? Like, for food and groceries, and meat and vegetables, and things like that?

P: Well, we shopped at Long Grocery, but we had two little neighborhood grocery stores: Hubbard and Kevan store.

J: What you mean? Mr. Eddie Lee Hubbard?

P: Yes. His store was right there on the corner of Green Avenue and Front Street.

J: And Kevan, where was that at?

P: It was on the corner of Green Avenue and Edwards Street.

J: Now, take me there. What were their stores like, and were they there all the time?

P: Yeah.

J: Okay. And, what'd they sell—what did Mr. Hubbard sell?

P: Mr. Hubbard sold some of every—he sold vegetables, meats, fruits, canned goods; everything a little small grocery store would sell.

J: And did Mr. Hubbard and Mr. Kevan—did they do stuff on credit at all?

P: Kevan didn't, but Hubbard did.

J: He did?

P: He did credit all the way up to about [19]85.

J: That late?

P: Yeah, 1985.

J: No kidding?

P: Yes, because he was—because he was, my daddy was still doing credit with them in 1981.

J: Unh-uh! Well, that's important, because that's how people can make it, you know?

P: Yeah, because we really did most of our big shopping once a month at Long Grocery store.

J: On Springhill Avenue?

P: No, that was on Telegraph Road.

J: I don't know; where was that at, Long Grocery store?

P: Long Grocery store, it was between Telegraph Road and Papermill Road. Now it's a church there where Long Grocery store is now.

J: Oh, wow okay. Same building?

P: Same building, it just a church.

J: Wow. Okay, okay. Let's go back. What was your first school?

P: Whitley.

J: Isaiah Whitley Elementary?

P: Yes.

J: Do you remember a principal, or teachers, or—?

P: I remember one teacher, Ms. Ansley.

J: Susie Ansley?

P: Susie Ansley, yes.

J: Tell me about Mrs. Ansley, because you got a street named after her.

P: Yes, we do. She was a strict teacher.

J: What does that mean? Because, you know, people don't understand when you say "strict."

P: She knew your parents. And if you go wrong, she would have that phone call waiting, calling your parents and telling your parents what you didn't do in school, and what you did in school.

J: And so, she would get y'all straight early?

P: Yes.

J: Mmhm. Who else was at the school besides Mrs. Ansley at Whitley?

P: Let's see, I can't think of who's my other teacher. I can't think of no more of them. Ms. McCants was at County; Mr. Seals was at County.

J: Mmhm. He was the music teacher?

P: Yes, he was the band director.

J: Band director, got it.

P: And Ms. McCants was the history teacher and the guidance counselor.

J: Mmhm. What year did you come out of County?

P: [19]70. Our class was the last year to graduate from County.

J: Okay. When was the last time y'all had reunion?

P: We just had one last year.

J: Where was the big activity at? Where'd y'all have it at?

P: We had most of it at County in the Den, Whippets Den, and we had at the—what's that? Marriott, over there on Airport Boulevard. Banquet and everything. It was our—we were celebrating our 50 year. Because we supposed to have it in 2020, that's when the banquet—so we had to put it off till last year.

J: Who is on the committee for the reunion? Who headed up the reunion?

P: Larry Jackson, Leroy Williams, Edna Dinkins, myself, and Massey White, and Belinda Harris, and Brenda Mabien. So we—

J: You want to know how small the world is?

P: Huh?

J: Brenda Mabien's niece is one of my students who's recording these interviews—who's transcribing these interviews. And Brenda Mabien's, I guess, sister in-law was his third grade teacher.

P: What!

J: That's how small the world is. Mobile ain't but this big.

p: Yeah. I know! [Laughter]

J: Sure is. Mmhm. Her brother. Yeah, anyhow. So, okay. So, Whitley and Mobile County Training School. Who was your principal at Mobile County Training School?

P: Mr. Holt. Richard Holt.

J: Mmhm. Did you know a Mrs. Esther Lang?

P: Esther Lang? I've heard that name.

J: Vice Principal?

P: I heard of her, but—.

J: Okay, I'm just checking. So, what makes County so special? What makes Mobile County Training School so special?

P: County was like a family.

J: Talk to me.

P: Every teacher knew your family. Matter of fact, I had one of my teachers, her name was Ms. **Beards**; my momma taught her algebra.

J: No!

P: Yes! And she had taught my sister a couple years before, and I went and took algebra, and the only way she found out that me and my sister was sisters: my sister came in, gave me my lunch money. And she asked me, "Was that your sister?" She said, "Yeah." Then she told me, "Your momma taught *me*."

J: And that just meant what? What did that mean?

P: I know I had to get on my game! [Laughter] I had to stay on my game.

J: Because you were found out, then!

P: Yes!

J: [Laughter] Oh, my goodness! It sounds like the key to education in Africatown with Isaiah Whitley, and with County, was the fact that people knew each other. And they knew who you were, where you were from; your background. They knew everything about you. So, there was no room for you to mess up.

P: No, because Ms. McCants stayed on me.

J: No, she didn't?

P: Yes, she did. Because my older brother, she had—my grandmother went over there and told her about my older brother.

J: Which grandma was this? What's the grandmother's name again?

P: Hester.

J: Hester?

P: Edwards.

J: Edwards, okay.

P: Yes, because one day my brother shined his shoes; you could see his face in his shoes and Mrs. McCants stood on his foot with her heel. And my grandmother went over there and told her she better not never do that no more. Because he sit up and shine his shoes every day to go to school. And since that day, Mrs. McCants knew the Edwards family.

J: [Laughter] Everybody had to get on the same page.

P: Yes.

J: Hey Gabriel, where do you go after school? Where do you go after school? Say it out loud please.

GJ: To Aunt Valena's.

J: What's Aunt Valena's last name?

GJ: McCants.

P: Oh! [Laughter]

J: Four days a week.

P: Ooh!

GJ: It's terrible.

J: It's not terrible.

P: [Laughter]

J: But guess whose grades went up?

P: His! She make you get those grades up.

J: And that was the thing. Now, what did you do after you got your diploma from County?

P: I went to Bishop State for two years, and got my BS degree in business.

J: Oh wow.

P: And then I went to Mobile Business College, and got my degree in business. And then I worked for a while, and then I went back to school, got my degree in the culinary arts.

J: In culinary arts. Why'd you change?

P: I was teaching for four years with pre-K, and I say—the school closes, and I was changing schools; I say, "This not going work."

J: What school was that that closed on you?

P: Saint Monica.

J: Oh, over here on DIP?

P: Yes.

J: Okay.

P: Because then I left there, went to Revelation Baptist church, and I was teaching pre-K there.

J: Mmhm.

P: Until me and the supervisor got into it. Because she wanted her—because I had her grandson in my class, and he thought he could do what he wanted to do.

J: No.

P: I said, “No.”

J: Mm-nm.

P: And we got into it. I say, “I can't—unh-uh. It's not worth it, for me going to jail over this.”

J: [Laughter] Did you—for your teaching, where did you get your values? I mean, were you trying to teach the kids in the same way you was brought up at Whitley and County, and with your momma at the house?

P: Yes.

J: Like what—I been talking to Mr. Anderson Flynn about this, right? And I been trying to figure out: okay, when you say that, what does that include? What is the unique flavor of that? What is the thing that is the carryover from your momma teaching up at St. Stevens?

P: St. Stevens.

J: And the teachers at Whitley, and the teachers at County. What is that thing? What is the philosophy there?

P: They say that you have to have an education to get a good job, and know everything. It's a—

J: Did they talk to y'all about jobs coming up?

P: Yes, when I got to County, yeah. In my junior and senior year, they said, "You'll be out on your own. So, you know you got to get you a job," and how to go about getting and everything.

J: So, is it fair to say that it's a lot about being aware that it's preparation?

P: Yes.

J: Okay, that's interesting. That's real interesting, Ms. Patterson. Now, what year did you and Mr. Patterson get married?

P: 1974.

J: 1974 at Yorktown Baptist Church, and who all was there?

P: Okay, who was all there? It was his family, my family, Mr. William Wells Jr and his wife, my daddy, Mr. William Edwards, and my family, and some of the church members from Yorktown was there.

J: Did y'all first live in Plateau, or did y'all move to—?

P: To Maysville?

J: To Maysville, yeah.

P: We stayed in Plateau for a while with my daddy. And then we found us a house in Maysville.

J: Who was your neighbors when you were coming up? Who were some of your neighbors?

P: Ms. Irma Jackson, Ms. Parker, Ms. Lettie Stiell, Ms. Maddie Mitchell—which is Charles Mitchell, Ms. Alberta Davis, and Ms. **Buford**—oh yeah, she one of my teachers, Ms. **Buford**.

J: Okay, and she lived in the neighborhood?

P: Yes. Most the teachers lived in the neighborhood.

J: Did they?

P: Yes.

J: What was sort of the benefit of that?

P: Well, they knew the parents and everything, and if we did something at school, we know we was going get it before we got home.

J: Well, I mean, coming up, what did y'all do for fun, besides go to school?

P: We played in the street. Played hopscotch, baseball, jacks, paper dolls.

J: Did y'all do anything on the water, since you were so close to the water?

P: No, we went to the beach on some Sundays.

J: Which beach was that?

P: Edgewater.

J: Where's Edgewater at?

P: Across the Bay, over in Daphne.

J: Oh, in Daphne. Okay. Because that's like a Black beach, or it was a Black Beach.

P: Yes.

J: Where did Yorktown have its church picnics at?

P: On the grounds. And sometimes we went to Edgewater, or either Faustina Beach.

J: Oh, y'all went out on the island too?

P: Yeah.

J: Okay. So Plateau's pretty self-contained. It didn't really have to—it seems to me like you didn't have to leave the neighborhood much for much of anything.

P: No.

J: Like, what other things besides the grocery stores, when you were coming up, were around? So, you had Hubbard's store, you had Kevan, and what else?

P: We had Long Groceries, and that's—we had Circle K on the corner of Papermill Road.

J: Was there a gas station with Circle K?

P: Yeah.

J: Okay. Was there a post office in Africatown?

P: Yes, we had post office on—what is that? Bay Bridge Road.

J: Bay Bridge Road. Now when y'all were coming up, did y'all ever hear about the Clotilda ship?

P: No.

J: So, this is something all relatively recent.

P: Yes.

J: Okay.

P: And Scott Paper Company used to have a Christmas party for all they employees, during Christmas. And they would get the kids presents; I mean, hair dryers, anything. They had—every age, they had different stuff for kids to do.

J: And where would the Christmas party be held?

P: At Scott Paper Company, in the parking lot. They had a gift for every child from birth all the way up to 18.

J: Oh wow. Okay. And did most of the folks—people work at Scotts, most of your neighbors, and most of the children you came up with, their parents?

P: Most of them worked at Scott, and some of them worked at International.

J: Okay. You and your brother and sisters, y'all ever go fishing?

P: I didn't. My brothers did.

J: Where did they go fishing at?

P: They went down in the creek across the street from the—it's down in the ditch, like. Between Papermill Road and Jakes Lane, it was like a little creek down up in the hill.

J: When you were coming up, and they had—who was pastor of Yorktown when you were coming up?

P: Motley.

J: Did they have—did they do the Baptisms in the church, or outside the church?

P: In the church.

J: Okay. Okay, okay. And what else do I want to ask you about? Talk to me about what y'all ate for dinner, and breakfast, and lunch. You were talking about your sister brought you lunch money one time, but give me a typical breakfast meal.

P: Grits, eggs, and bacon.

J: Okay.

P: And biscuits.

J: And biscuits.

P: Mmhm.

J: And give me—who did the cooking?

P: My grandmother. And sometimes she had us—the girls—in the kitchen cooking.

J: Did she teach you how to cook?

P: Yes.

J: What's the favorite meal that you still cook today that you learned from her?

P: The gumbo.

J: Talk to me. What is—first of all, what is gumbo? Is it a casserole? What is gumbo?

P: Gumbo is like a soup. And you can put—it can be chicken gumbo or seafood gumbo. And she taught me how to do both, mix it up.

J: Where'd you get your filé from?

P: We did it from a roux flour meal—flour and that season, and mix it up, and let it cook in a skillet until it got brown.

J: How do you—okay, this is completely off topic. How do you do that without burning it?

P: You have to cut the fire down real low, and keep stirring it till it get real brown. And then you take it off the fire.

J: Because I'm good for burning it. [Laughter] I'll burn it every time! And then your gumbo tastes burnt, and it throws off the whole thing.

P: Well, you have to be very careful about doing that.

J: Patient.

P: Yeah.

J: What do you put in seafood gumbo?

P: You put onion, tomato—

F: You use the Trinity.

J: The Trinity.

P: Yeah! [Laughter]

J: And so, the trinity is onion, garlic and—?

F: No, it's, bell paper, onion, celery.

P: —pepper, onion, celery.

F: And you sauté that before you put it in the pot.

J: And where'd you get your seafood from?

P: From the seafood store.

J: Where was that?

P: Sometimes Long's have seafood. Sometimes we go downtown, bought seafood over Water Street: Southern.

J: Southern?

P: Mhm. But most of the time, we did chicken gumbo.

J: Why?

P: Because that's what my daddy used—most liked it.

J: Did people in Africatown raise they own chickens and stuff?

P: Yes.

J: Did y'all?

P: Yes, we raised chicken, pigs; we had gardens, and hogs. And so, when we get ready to kill one, my daddy get out there and build a big old fire, and have all us out there, cleaning the chitlins and the other part of the hog.

J: Did y'all share with neighbors?

P: Yes. You get all the neighbors together, and they come over and help you clean the hogs and chickens, whatever.

J: Mmhm, mmhm.

P: That's the reason right now I don't eat chitlins.

J: You had enough?

P: I didn't eat them when I was young! He told us what it was? I said, "No."

J: You were through with it.

P: I was through with it. After I got through cleaning it, I was through with it. [Laughter] But my grandmomma would cook a big pot of it, and she talking about, "Y'all going eat?" I say, "I'm not eating anything." And I would go—"So you going go to bed hungry?" I said, "I'll go to bed hungry." I would not eat no chitlins, and I don't eat it now.

J: What else do you want to—what do you want people to know about Africatown that maybe they don't know? Like back when it was Plateau, Magazine Point, No Man's Land?

P: Well, in Plateau then, it was like a village. You could chastise a child without the parents fussing and telling you, "Don't touch my child, this and that." Because we do something wrong on one street, before we get home, my grandmomma knew; and my daddy be at work, he done already knew before he got home. He'll tell us, "What you do around such-and-such, round there fighting, or doing this?" We'll say, "How did you know?" "That's all right; I got my eyes."

J: Why do you think they were so strict like that? Why do you think they were so protective of y'all like that, trying to train you, get your mind right and all?

P: Make us grow up to be strong and dependable.

J: Mmhm, mmhm. Where'd everybody go to vote?

P: We had—at County, and before they moved Whitley, some of them went to Whitley.

J: Wait, they moved Whitley? Where was Whitley before?

P: Whitley was right there where Robert Hope Center.

J: Oh, where the Rec is?

P: Yes, that was Whitley Elementary School. Because Whitley went from first through the sixth grade, and the seventh through the twelfth went to County. Then in [19]65, they moved Whitley. They moved Whitley. They moved the smaller kids, first through the eighth, back over to Whitley, and then ninth through twelfth at County. And then some years later, up in years, they moved Whitley over there where Prichard Elementary School used to be.

J: Was there a barbeque place in Plateau?

P: Yes, the Elks.

J: The Elks. Talk to me. Who ran the Elks barbeque place?

P: What's this guy name? Bubba, I can't think his name. I had it on the tip of my tongue, but I can't think of it. I can't think of his name right now. But who is that? It used to be a lot of guys down there. I can't think of his name now.

J: Honeybee?

P: Yeah, Honeybee. I can't think of his name for nothing.

J: I don't know Honeybee's actual name.

P: I don't either; that's all I knew.

J: That's all I know, too. That's—okay.

P: Honeybee.

J: Were there any barbers or beauty parlors in—?

P: Yes.

J: Where? Who were they?

P: It was—on Jakes Lane it was Hughes, Ms. Hughes. She used to do hair in her house. And they used to have a barbershop right on Bay Bridge Road. Next to Bryans Filling Station, Virginia Filling Station.

J: Which filling station did your dad use?

P: He used to go to Virginia, and sometimes he used to go to Circle K. Because he go to Virginia because it's closest to Scott.

J: When y'all were coming up and you wanted to go to the movies, where'd you go?

P: We didn't go to the movies. Daddy said, "No movies. You got TV right there; that's all your movies."

J: Okay, okay. Are your people buried in the graveyard there in Africatown—in Plateau?

P: No.

J: Where are most of your folks buried at?

P: My father buried at Oaklawn. My grandmother buried Oaklawn. My mother, she's in Montgomery Cemetery.

J: When I go to Oaklawn, I can never find my people. I, you know, I try to keep it cut or whatever, and every time I go out there, I get lost. Like I don't know—I think there's a tree there; I have to figure out which tree, and it's hard for me to figure it out. And so, I put up these PVC pipes and tried to build a chain-link around it so I can find it. And then I go back there, and it's fallen to the ground and overgrown, and I have a hard time keeping track of my people in Oaklawn.

P: My father's buried—it's right there by the tree and you come in that street as you come up—what's that street? That side street? Come up there, and he buried right there under that tree. And my grandmother buried over on the other side.

F: Stone Street?

P: No, she's off of Stone Street. She on the other side. She's right—she not too far from my daddy grave and everything. So, both of them buried in Oaklawn. My momma's buried in a cemetery in Montgomery.

J: Is that Holt Road, or Whitney Street?

P: I guess Holt Road. That street right there where the house—?

J: Where Cemetery Lane turns that corner? I got you. Yeah.

P: Right there by that church and stuff. There's a house right there. Got to go down that street to that house, turn up in there by that house, I can keep straight to his grave.

J: Yeah, there's two entrances over there. The main one where the soldiers and things are buried, people who served. And then there's one right in the bend there, off of Cemetery. I can't find the graves from the main entrance, but that other entrance, I can find it. Fairly—I can find my people fairly easily, but it's not always open. So, yeah.

P: And sometimes when I go up there in May, it's hard for me to find back there, go back there where they buried at.

J: Yeah, a guy by the name of Irby had a crew of folks out there. They were out there cleaning it recently. I was real appreciative. I can't think of his name, he's a retired service member. He had a bunch of guys out there—you know, volunteering and stuff. What else do I want to know about Africatown? Now, when you first came to Prince of Peace, what were the big activities throughout the year? What were some of the big fundraisers and stuff?

P: They were doing the festival.

J: Talk to me about the festival. What is the festival?

P: They had a big festival. They had games for the kids, food to eat, a DJ and everything, and horses for the kids to ride. And it was nice, I enjoyed it.

J: So, it has stayed pretty much the same, then?

P: Just about.

J: Just about. Okay, okay. Who was the priest when you first came over here?

P: Father Dan.

J: Father Dan. I don't remember him.

P: Father Dan. Bas—I can't pronounce his last name, Father Dan.

F: **Basanelle.**

P: Yeah, **Basanelle.**

J: I don't remember. A white guy?

P: Yes.

J: Wow, okay, okay. Now, tell me about your family. Tell me your husband's name again, and then talk to me about your children's names.

P: My husband is Cleveland Patterson Jr. He was born Down the Bay, on Scott Street. I have two children, Deloris Patterson, and my other—my son, Cleveland Patterson the third. Deloris, she's a manager out at Town Place Suites. She has one son, LeAndre Miller, which he'll be a sophomore at McGill this year, playing football.

J: You going to go to one of those games.

P: Yes, and he's altar service at Prince of Peace. And my son, he's a lawyer for Mobile County. Well, really Mobile city, because he's in Environment Center.

J: All right. Let's see. What else I want to know? I mostly wanted to talk to you about Africatown; I think we've covered it. We pretty much covered it. Who was the—at the post office, who was the postman?

P: Mr. Days. Joseph Days.

J: Now, what makes up the neighborhoods in Plateau? You got, I guess that's—to the north is Plateau—

P: And to—

J: Across—go ahead.

P: And to the south is Magazine Point. And then, to your west, you have Happy Hills and Prichard. And to the west, we have water. [Laughter]

J: Okay, all right. Well listen, Mrs. Patterson: I want to thank you for sharing your memories about Africatown, and also about Down the Bay. And I think it's really interesting: Whatley, Saint Stevens, Mount Meigs; those are important places to connect to. Did your daddy ever tell you why he came to Mobile, or explain—?

P: To get a job. Because they had no jobs up there in Whatley, so he came to Mobile.

J: He didn't want to farm?

P: No, he just want a job. So he was farming in Whatley. So, he came here and he got a garden across the street from the house.

J: What did he grow?

P: Corn, peas, okra, tomatoes, sugar cane.

J: Y'all wasn't wanting for nothing, then!

P: Nope.

J: Do you still garden?

P: No. [Laughter]

J: Well, but also—did they have trucks that come though, vegetable trucks and stuff like that?

P: No.

J: No?

P: They had a man come through selling spreads and stuff like that. Spreads, and pots and pans.

J: Oh. Off of a truck?

P: Off of a truck, and in the trunk of they cars.

J: Okay, okay, okay. All right. Again, thank you very much.

P: You welcome.

J: Appreciate your time. So, what we're gone do is, we're going upload the video to the internet and I'll share the link with you. I got yours ready. [Laughter] And—

F: I talked too much!

J: Unh-uh!

J: And then, we going to type this up and let you see it before anybody else see it. The typed-up versions, so you'll have control over that.

F: I got to bring you those pictures.

J: Yeah, I mean do you still have pictures of where you used to live?

P: Yes.

J: Yeah, we would really like to see those pictures. Maybe we could all get together and—what we could do is, just we can lay them on the table and we can scan them right here with my phone.

P: Okay.

J: And everything. And that'll be a part of—this'll all go into the archives at the University of South Alabama. And so, yeah. You contributing to Mobile history.

P: Okay, I will get the pictures.

J: Okay, cool. Thanks again.

P: You're welcome.

F: What are you going be doing July 2nd?

- J: July 2nd? I am not going to be doing anything to my knowledge, unless my wife got something planned that she ain't told me about.
- F: Okay, well I would love to get you to come and drive the train that they're going to have for the children.
- J: That seems to be becoming my job. [Laughter]
- F: You enjoyed it so much! [Laughter]
- J: Well, what I didn't understand, is the big kids like the train as much as the little kids!
- F: Well, you know what? They don't ever want that type of stuff to touch them, you know; they are too big for that. But they rode on it more than the little ones.
- J: Than the little ones! "Can we go again?" [Laughter] "You 14 years old; what do you mean?" Yeah, that's on the second?
- F: Uh-huh, that's when they're going to have that drawdown.
- J: Drawdown.
- F: Yeah. So, I got up there on the altar and I preached about them making the statement that the children don't want to do anything.
- J: Shoot!
- F: And I said—I got up, I didn't mean to say it, but I was like, "Now y'all know that we were trained. We were made to feel welcome in the church."
- J: Yeah.
- F: I said, "You have got to raise them up and show them; ask them and then show them." I say, "You know what? We need to start practicing what we preach."
- J: Yeah, because I think they be just as happy when you, you know—
- F: Oh, they was up here Saturday from the third grade on up. Helping with the—

J: That's what Mrs. Thomas said. She said she had good support from the children for that.

F: The main people was telling her, "Oh, they ain't going to come. They're not going to come."

J: They came.

F: They came. And I told Ms. **Munsell**, I said, "You have to remember: those kids don't drive." They have to wait till their parents come, you know?

J: Nah, she said—and she also told me that—like, they were able to get rid of a lot of the food.

F: Uh-huh.

P: Uh-huh.

J: Because who was it? Somebody called me and was asking—.

F: They gave away 164 boxes.

J: That just tells you how much need there is.

F: It's a need. It's really a need!

J: But I didn't know that the church paid for the food, like a discounted price or—

F: Mmhm.

P: Mmhm.

J: But it seems to me, those people probably need to get rid of that food anyway if they don't sell it.

P: Yeah.

F: Yeah.

J: And—

F: They usually give a majority of it to these food pantries and stuff. And a lot of the churches have gotten up a food giveaway program and stuff like that. So I think, really, what they use that money for is to probably pay those trucks and things that bring it in to them, and stuff like that. You know, the gas is so high, and really the food pantry is a non-profit.

J: I'mma tell you a secret: we have found out at the University of South Alabama, 60 percent of our kids are in need.

F: Mmhm, mmhm.

J: Like they got all these jobs and working, and then it turn out by the time they get through paying they bills and all that—

F: They ain't got nothing.

J: They ain't got nothing. I mean, and this—I'm always blown away at how hard them children work. I mean, they got two jobs, and some of them got kids, and I'm like, "How are y'all doing it?" "We just do what we got to do, Dr. Jackson." You know. But a lot of them are in need. And so, they set up a food pantry on campus.

F: And I bet you it had a good response, too, didn't it?

J: Man, look; them kids came and got that food.

G: Dad?

J: Yeah, go on and wait for me outside on the bench, I'll be there in a second.

G: I want to go home.

J: Okay. You want to go home.

F: You gone go in a minute.

J: He going to the library, get another book.

F: Oh, okay.

J: But anyway, yeah. I'm glad it had a success. Do people still use the variety store real well? They coming though?

F: They coming through.

P: Mmhm.

F: Yep.

J: Okay. Anyhow. Yep, so on Fourth of July, we're going to go to the big Down the Bay thing over there at—

[Break in recording]

F: At the Elks, which was still open.

J: Get acquainted night at the Elks.

F: Uh-huh. For people to come, you know, meet up and—

J: So, it was like the initial activity?

F: It was the initial activity. Mmhm.

J: That's highly organized.

G: Dad, is the door to the outhouse?

J: No, it is not. It is locked.

F: You know, I don't fool with nothing unless they—

J: No, that's—

F: —they have an A-B-C order.

J: Yeah, that's a serious—

F: **Mickey Matthews** was the president.

J: Who?

F: Mickey Matthews, Mrs. Fournier's brother, okay? And Vernetta Green was the secretary. We used to meet at Bethel.

J: Are they still around, Matthews and Green?

F: Uh-huh, Mathews is in California.

J: Okay.

F: And Vernetta Green—that's Bookie Green's wife.

J: I don't know him.

F: From, that used to own—

P: He had a club. Reverend Charlie Green?

F: Charlie Green, that's her dad.

J: Okay.

F: Her mother used to be with the Hundred Black Men. She used to be the secretary of the Hundred Black Men.

J: Wow, it's a small world. Okay.

F: Uh-huh, so, now you can kind of—

J: Figure out how to access them.

F: Uh-huh.

P: Yep.

F: Yeah, well you know that—

J: Well, that was a successful festival that's still going on today.

F: Mmhm.

J: Because we've been having—they have a Facebook page.

F: A lot of the—well, I guess it's the young people and stuff like that.

J: So, tell me again who started it.

F: Mickey Matthews.

J: Okay, because—

F: The people that was on that [inaudible 52:46]? We have a charter, we have a charter. I don't know who have the charter, but we had a charter.

J: Huh!

F: Yeah.

J: I didn't know it was that highly organized.

F: It was highly organized. Now you know, all these teachers and stuff, they weren't going let it go like that.

J: No, no, no.

F: I'll tell you who you can really get in touch with, maybe Samuel Howell.

J: Samuel Howell? Okay.

F: That lives over on Charles Street.

J: Okay.

F: And I'll give you his number and stuff. Maybe he can tell you—

J: Who's running it now?

F: Uh-huh. Bernice. What's the lady' name whose grandson played—Bernice, they named a street after her?

P: Bernice. What was Bernice's name?

F: She still living. She lives over there on Marine Street. What is Bernice's last name? God! Her son played for Williamson. Her grandson played for Williamson.

P: Talking about—Cousin, it's not Cousin—.

J: Go stand outside.

G: Dad.

F: Yeah, Marcus—Marcus.

P: Yeah.

F: His grandmother.

J: Oh, the football player? Yeah.

P: Yeah.

F: Yeah, and her son was a DJ for the radio station.

J: Okay. Yeah, the Dive, yeah.

P: Ray-Ray.

F: Ray-Ray.

J: Ray-Ray.

F: His mother, she was on there. The lady lived up on the hill. Gosh! I don't know if these people are still living or not. But all of us—

J: But you didn't tell me Bernice's last name.

F: What is Bernice? Oh, man.

P: That's her grandson, Marcus.

F: Russell? Bernice. I think Russell is her last name. Bernice Russell.

J: Okay.

F: Yeah, Bernice Russell. They named one of the streets after her. Yeah.

J: And they were all a part of this committee with the charter for the event on Texas Street?

F: We had a charter, yeah.

J: Okay. Well, that's—

P: Learn something new every—

J: Look, Mobile ain't—

F: Listen, I told you I'm a history buff, and I remember all of those things.

J: And this is why we're trying to document it.

F: Yeah.

J: Because you married into Down the Bay.

P: Yeah.

J: That's what happens.

P: And I met him when I went to Mobile College.

F: Get out the way.

J: I didn't know that. What was that like going out there to go to school? That's the Baptist college, isn't it Baptist?

P: Yeah.

J: University of Mobile now.

P: Yeah, it's nice.

J: Were there any Black teachers out there?

P: Yes.

J: Who?

P: I can't think of the name right now. Because I know her maiden name was Flowers, Laura Flowers. And I don't know if she still here in Mobile or not. Because she graduated from County.

J: Oh, she did? Ahead of you?

P: Yeah.

J: No Man's Land.

F: It's a lot of people that you could interview and stuff.

J: Well, and what I'm finding, Mrs. Francis, is that they want to be interviewed. They're happy, just as happy to be interviewed.

P: Mhm. Because we have history.

F: We have a history.

J: And it's rich. And Lord knows, y'all have applied Roberts Rule of Order to everything.

F: That's right! [Laughter] That's what you do, mhm.

J: You know this is not—like you said, this not no fly-by-night.

F: I don't know—let me see. The reason why I'm saying that is because I think Mickey Matthews might still have the charter, because when he left here and moved to California—they have a group in California where he and they get together and

stuff. It was always done on the Fourth of July weekend and stuff. And we toured, we had—we had school bus service, and we used to have a tour all around here.

J: Of Down the Bay?

F: Of Down the Bay. Yeah. I mean, it was a organized thing.

J: It was a thing, yeah.

F: It was a organized thing.

J: As a child, I just remember it being so packed! It was just like a huge activity.

F: Uh-huh. And see, we left from that field there because they built that church, and then that's why they moved over to Texas Street over here.

J: Well y'all, thank you for coming over here after exercising.

P: Oh, that's all right!

J: And Mrs. Francis, I'm probably going to give you yours next week. Okay.

F: Okay? I'm going to bring you the pictures.

J: Why don't you bring the pictures too?

P: Okay. I'll get them for you.

J: We'll do a picture thing. Just put it in the car, son. All right guys, I'm going back out to the school.

F: Oh, okay.

[End of recording]

Transcribed by: Alondra Mabien on June 21, 2022

Audit-edited by: Terrion Thompson, June 23, 2022

2nd audit-edit by: Ryan Morini, November 3, 2022

Final edit by: Ryan Morini, October 5, 2023