

Unified Committee for Afro-American Contributions
Oral History Documentation Project

GRACE CECELIA LAWRENCE BLACKWELL

Interviewed by Brenda Coates
April 21, 1997
At her home in Piney Point
Logged by Tania Jordon on December 22, 2005
A verbatim transcript is available
Original format is two cassette tapes
1 hour, 56 minutes, 25 seconds

DISK 1

TRACK 01

0:00 General introduction - Pinpointing the different residencies where she lived when growing up (moved to Piney Point in 1938, near to the Seamen's School - then moved to the Piney Point elementary School, which had a residential building - in 1945 to Valley Lee - back to Piney Point in 1946, near ST Services on Blackwell Court which used to be called Old Rte 249). Born off Great Mills Road behind where Oriental Express (Emily's?) is today. Moved to Callaway property sometime during early childhood.

TRACK 02

8:30 Occupation of parents: Father worked a sawmill for Callaway and mother was domestic - a good seamstress, lived across from where Smith's & Sons is today. Lived with grandparents.

TRACK 03

11:29 Churches family attended: Little Angels or Holy Angels? (the little church by Cecil's Mill) and Holy Face when it was built in about 1949

12:50 Trips family took, went to the circuses, family visiting over in Jarboesville, never took long trips

14:25 Religious teaching: Summer bible school, catechism – St. Nicholas Church

TRACK 04

- 15:10 Community involvement: Mother attended everything to do with the church and schools when she was able
- 16:22 St. Francis Society: Big 4th of July celebration - held at the St. Francis Hall in California
- 18:00 Mattress making at ? (St. Peter Claver, St. James, or St. Jerome) mother liked to help with community projects to help others - was much like a quilting bee, group came from Washington DC to teach/lead mattress making

TRACK 05

- 19:39 The importance of family, extended family being closely knit: visiting, going on vacations, caring for children and elderly

TRACK 06

- 25:40 Health Issues: Dr. Bean and Dr. Brown (lived where Winters Sheet Metal is now), parents believed in doctors and called them to the house, came in horse and buggy, babies born at home, home remedies - castor oil, sassafras root tea, (something else for sores), never went to the hospital
- 28:20 Elders stayed with their children who took care of them, parents took care of each other until mother died, Margie Thompson also lived with them
- 29:15 Means of getting news: no radios or newspapers (father could not read); knew of the Beacon and The Enterprise, got news at work or visiting family and friends, card parties and - "pound parties" they called them where you would bring a pound cake

[END OF SIDE 1]

TRACK 07

- 31:04 Games - cards, house, checkers, hop scotch, baseball, sledding tree climbing; relationship with siblings, she was bossy, went to Baltimore, was mother to younger siblings after mother died, mother died at age 46 when she was 21, chores - firewood, washing dishes, carrying water from the spring, cooking, cleaning house, mother came home from work or shopping and did nothing cause the children did the work at home, "county chores", make the fire, taking turns doing chores

TRACK 08

36:46 How parents provided for and prepared them for life, father had little patience and so let things to mother, mother made their clothes, mother held chicken raffles and cake raffles to raise money to pay for bulk material for clothes, bought four (100-pound) and sugar (25-pound), mother looked in the catalog to see the clothes and then made them herself from the pictures. Took coat apart and turn it inside out and re-sew it together. Aunt Catherine (mother's sister), Aunt Maggie, Aunt Helen, and Aunt Bernie could all sew. Aunt Helen also made quilts. Mother could make a meal out of nothing. Pear pies and huckleberry pies. Made jelly and preserves, canned apples.

TRACK 09

41:08 Discipline -story about getting spanked for "sassing" her mother; mother made use of everything; she was a cry-baby and was scolded for this character; taking care of neighbor's sick child (7-year-old); always was afraid of getting sick, moved a lot through out childhood and got a good upbringing

TRACK 10

46:18 Formal schooling: Little Jarboesville (stayed with Great Aunt and Uncle Francis ?) at age 6 for 1 1/2 years. Then at about age 9 (old enough to walk) she walked with sister to Great Mills #1, walked on an old ox-cart dirt road which came out to the back of the school. If the road was muddy, they had to walk all the way around the roads to school. Graduated from Great Mills #1 in 1933. Then to Great Aunt in Baltimore to enroll in public high school - registered but they would let her attend since she was not a resident (tuition was required so she did not go).

TRACK 11

50:57 Came back to St. Mary's and enrolled for fall 1933 semester (eight grade was first year high school) at St. Peter Claver. Then in 1933 - 34 she walked to Callaway to catch a bus to Banneker. Jarboesville opened in 1934 - 35 and she then went to Jarboesville for three years and graduated in 1938. Cardinal Gibbons (night & day school with Father Rock) after high school for night courses in typing, office skills, and vocabulary.

TRACK 12

54:50 Working: David Smith at Banneker School hired her to do office work. Extension office (1958 - 1959); day work when children were young; Board of Education; Social Services

END OF DISK 1

DISK 2

TRACK 01

- 0:00 Employment continued and retirement options. Great Mills Elementary School was a white school where the high school is today. The white school was called Great Mills #2.
- 1:48 Aspirations as child: wanted to be a teacher. Had good teachers when she grew up. Mr. Mears was good math teacher (geometry and business math) - also taught science and social studies. Home economics was not offered back then. Had second-hand books at Great Mills. Education: hardships in getting education. Graduated in 1933 during the Great Depression and college was too expensive so she did not go into teaching. Also needed money so had to work.

TRACK 02

- 4:48 Where teenagers could go for social life – house parties, picnics. Parents let them go anywhere they wanted. The lack of transportation kept her near to home. Went to her first movie after she was married.
- 6:14 Working: housework and typist. Salary: paid \$1.50 a week (age 13) to do housework. After the Base opened, pay was up to \$5:00 a day (age 25). First typing job paid \$1,800 a year (Banneker for Board of Education). Got periodic raises and left that job at \$2,900 per year. Social Services started at \$3,600 per year.

TRACK 03

- 9:20 Courtship and marriage - set on not marrying a farmer cause the work (share cropping) was too hard. Married August 1938 at Holy Face Church. Aunts made the three-layer wedding cake in a lard-boiler pan. -- small wedding and no honeymoon.

TRACK 04

- 13:57 Marriage/ Family life/ Husband converted to Catholic religion. She was always bossy. Didn't drive until she was 35 years old (1955). Husband and relatives took children to ballgames and other events. Sometimes she rode the school bus to get places. Husband always took the family to church but he stayed outside. Sometimes took the children to movies.
- 17:11 Asking husband for money - maybe 30 cents at a time. Husband was frugal. If she saw something she wanted, she found the money for it.

TRACK 05

- 19:40 Religion played an important role in family life. Always went to events at St. Peter Claver and St. George's. Was chairman of the Social Concerns Committee (St. Peter Claver). Went to bible classes and whatever at her own church (Holy Face then St. George's). She liked gospel singing. Pays NAACP dues but does not get involved.
- 21:36 Community involvement: mostly with the church - volunteered to work at dinners. Volunteer work with Office on Aging and does tax counseling for the elderly (1988 until present)
- 23:01 Life in general in St. Mary's: Integration was not all the best. Black students resented white teachers. White people resent the black people still today. Better than it was. School children have more resources and opportunities but they need more black teachers. Life is better though: got electricity in 1949, running water in 1964 and central oil heat in 1972.

TRACK 06

- 26:26 Positive presence of Outsiders - more development, new churches, new industry and services.
- 27:15 Race relations: Better now because the "old guard" has died off. Newcomers are positive presence. Young black people moved away to get better jobs and that's how black people lost most of the land.
- 28:40 Living in the country vs. the conveniences in the city: Husband wanted to stay in St. Mary's County. That decided it. But she did like the convenience of city life.

END OF SIDE 1

TRACK 07

- 30:21 Differences between outsiders and locals especially concerning race relations. White outsiders were more tolerant of black people. Black outsiders were more forward thinking and uplifting than local black people - also better educated. Brought locals along with them (up the social ranks). She did not interact with the outsiders much although the children did.
- 33:13 Biggest changes in the county happened because of the Base, Steuart Petroleum, and Lundeberg School. Electricity, television, paved roads, larger stores (no longer need to order from catalogs), higher wages, better living. Farms are becoming new developments.

TRACK 08

37:08 She has more than she ever thought she could do in life. Attending night school to prepare for better job. Learning was more difficult at age 35 when she had teenage children. Children went on to college - most had scholarships. Always thought she would die young.

TRACK 09

40:58 Naval Base: recent growth at the Base is a good thing although she avoids Rte. 235 due to all the traffic.

42:06 Tell about her grandfathers' farms (sharecropping first in Medley's Neck and later at Riverside) and working Dr. Bean's farm. Raised the best watermelon and corn. He caught the biggest hardheads ever. Grandfather inherited his father's farm on Great Mills Road. But there was more money to be made at other farms. That land and Dr. Bean's land were very poor soils. Then bought a farm on Blake Creek in Valley Lee but after his wife died in 1938 and he was too old to work, he sold that farm in 1942. Was a prosperous farmer and he did a little bootlegging on the side.

45:18 Grandfathers Mason and Lawrence both liked the water and fished. Had the best turkeys.

TRACK 10

46:36 Great Mills School #1 had one class of first through seventh grade. She started in the fourth grade with Mrs. Jaimeson. Soon after they moved grades 1 - 3 to the "Picnic" shop down the road. Then they build an addition to the school and #1 was a 2-room school. Mrs. Mercer taught grades 1 - 3. And Mrs. Jaimeson taught 4 - 7. Old dump used to be here. Miss Marie Smith taught her at Jarboesville. Tied grass sacks around their feet to walk to school in the snow.

TRACK 11

50:39 Biographic Data for Grace Cecelia Lawrence Blackwell

END OF DISK 2