

Unified Committee for Afro-American Contributions  
Oral History Documentation Project

**Sarah Evelyn Mason Butler**

Interviewed by Brenda Coates  
March 13, 1997  
At her home in Loveville Maryland  
Log is by unknown person  
A verbatim transcript is available  
Original format is two cassette tapes  
1 hour, 42 minutes, 31 seconds

Audio CD 1 of 2

Track 01

- 00:00 Where do you live and where were you born? She lives on Pin Cushion Road, just off of Sunnyside Road in Loveville, MD.
- 00:45 Where were you born? She was born 76 years ago in Mechanicsville, MD in a large gray house across from BJ's Liquor Store.
- 1:44 What year did you move to your current residence? She moved to her house in 1949.
- 2:20 What were times like when you were a child? They were tough times.
- 2:40 What did you parents do? Her father was a share cropper and her mother was a cook for the family that owned the farm that they worked on. When her father died, the youngest two sisters helped her mother take care of her.

Track 02

- 5:58 What church did you attend? When she lived in Mechanicsville, they attended Mechanicsville Church and when she moved to Loveville, they went to St. Joseph's. She was Baptized in St. Joseph's Church.
- 6:35 Did you take family trips as a child? "No, they didn't know what a trip was like. We had nothing".
- 7:05 Was your mother involved in any community activities? No

8:05 Her sisters told her she had a twin sister.

8:15 Were times better or worse in those days? It was worse but she and her siblings were happy. They didn't have anything. They had to wrap their feet in grass sacks because they didn't have any shoes. She was happier then she is now.

#### Track 03

9:08 How did you mother deal with health concerns? They seldom got sick. When they would get sick her mother would mix Vaseline with three drops of kerosene and one teaspoon of sugar. The cold would be gone the next day. She would put Vic's Salve on their chest if they had a bad chest cold. She also used Watkins liniment for her arthritis. She never went to the doctor as a child. They were all delivered by a midwife.

#### Track 04

12:55 How did black folks get news/information when you were growing up? They didn't get any news. Sometimes they would get a leftover newspaper from the lady her mother worked for. Most of the news was from word of mouth. After they finished looking at the newspaper or catalogs that came in the mail, they would use it as toilet paper in the outhouse.

15:30 What kind of games did you play as a child? They played hop scotch and dodge ball. They would make a ball from old socks and rags. They were tired when they came home from school because they had to walk so far.

#### Track 05

17:00 What chores did you have as a child? They would haul water from the spring and chop wood. They also made the beds and scrub the floors with rags. They didn't have a mop. They used a brown soap called Octigan Soap. It was made from old grease. They washed the floors, dishes, clothes and hair with this soap.

They went to St. Joseph's School. They had to clean pews at church and clean the chapel and help the cook at the nun's house to pay their tuition at the school.

20:15 How did you get to school? They walked about four miles to get to school. When they first moved to Loveville area, they lived across from Route 247. Her mother remarried 2 years after her father died. Her mother had a son when she was about four. They moved in Leonardtown in a little house on Green Hill across from the Sunoco Station. All they did was move from house to house.

#### Track 06

23:20 They moved with her Uncle Johnny Somerville's in Loveville. Her mother took care of her sister during that time. They moved several more times with her brothers

25:07 She left her mothers house to live with her grandmother when she was about 13 or 14 for about a year. Then her sister got sick, so she went to live with her to take care of her. Her sister had one girl and two boys. The girl was three years younger than Mrs. Butler.

#### Track 07

27:54 One Christmas her sister's daughter caught fire from some type of Christmas gift or decoration. "Her meat was falling off of her". She was burned everywhere except her face. She looked like a raw potato.

#### Track 08

31:33 Her sister's hands also got burnt because she had flour on her hands when she was trying to put the fire out. Mrs. Butler ran to Miss Sky's house for help. Miss Sky and her son took the child to Leonardtown hospital. They kept her at the hospital for two days. They sent her home from the hospital. They all moved back with her mother.

32:58 Dr. Bean and Dr. Cameleer told them that she would never have a child because her stomach was burnt so badly. She and her sister would saturate her body with linseed oil everyday. The doctors took the skin from the child's mother's and father's arms and transplanted it on the child's body. When her sister died, the children were taken care of by her grandmother, mother and aunts until children's father took them to his aunts house. His aunt raised the three children.

#### Track 09

36:43 The child that was burned went away to school, got married, and had seven children.

38:56 She would help her mother on the weekend cooking at the lunchroom. She would walk to Chaptico once a month.

#### Track 10

39:43 The white people would give her a bag of wheat and a bag of corn. She and her sister would put the bag on their backs and walk to Chaptico to get the corn and wheat ground. Her sister would carry the flour back and she would carry the meal. All they ate was cornbread and biscuits. Her sisters told her that they had chickens and cows when her father was living.

After her father died, they didn't raise any livestock. All the chickens they had were given to them. Her mother would help with "hog work" (hog slaughtering). After she helped with about twenty hogs, they would give her the feet and head. She would come home and grid up everything to make lard. They used the lard to make biscuits.

Her mother would cook a pot of beans on Friday's. They always had plenty of chicken because people always gave them chicken.

#### Track 11

43:35 By the time she was 15 she was still living with her mother and five brothers. However, she always remembers having to go and help one sister or another. She has always worked since she was nine years old. She made \$0.50 per day to cook, wash clothes and scrub floors. Then she would return home to help her mother cook because her mother was getting old.

Her mother later raised chickens. She and her sister would steal the eggs from the chicken and take it to the store to get candy.

47:10 How old were you when you left home. She never did leave her mother.

48:05 She has always cooked as an occupation.

#### Track 12

48:36 How did you meet your husband? When her mother worked at the lunchroom (Love's Tea Room), she would help her mother pick chickens at the lunchroom. A young girl (Katherine) that worked with her mother asked if she would let Sarah go to a dance hall with her. She went home and put on a Zoot Suit dress. They went in an old Model-T car.

52:07 The band was named Johnny Herbert. They had a chanter board and a harmonica. "You could have yourself a ball dancing". Katherine introduced her to her husband. He asked her to dance three times before she would dance with him. He came to her house the next Sunday to ask her out again. She went with him for four years before they got married. The dance hall was in Bushwood on the water.

#### Track 13

54:28 She got married in 1940. While they were courting, they went to the movie in Leonardtown. The black people would have to go up the back steps to see the movie, while the white folks went in the front door and sat in the front. The only recreation they had was dance halls, movies and church festivals. The church festivals were big functions. She looked forward to that event every year.

56:37 When she went to the church function, she would dress up in her hand-me downs. Her mother use to work for Dr. Cameleer. Their adopted daughter left to become a nun, so they gave her all of her clothes.

#### Track 14

58:15 She got married at St. Joseph's Church. Her sister was the bridesmaid and Philip Fenwick was the best man. Her mother cried when she told her she was getting married because she was the only girl left at home to help her. Father Murphy told her that if she wasn't at the church by 2:00 p.m. he would not marry them. When she got up that morning she didn't want to get married. Her sister was late so she got to the church late and the church was full of people. The priest fussed at her but he still married them. Her husband couldn't find the ring for at least ½ hour because he was so nervous.

### Audio CD 2 of 2

#### Track 01

00:00 They had a little dinner for a reception. She got married in October. Her friend Minette was responsible for fixing the dinner. When she got back to her mother's house her friend had fallen asleep and burned all the chicken. She later died of this sleeping disease.

2:35 Describe your relationship with your husband and children? It was very good. Her husband would "get evil sometime but never anything violate". He was a waterman who stayed with the people he worked with. He would come home on the weekend. After they were married for three years, he was drafted in the Navy. After one year (1945) the navy discarded all the married men. He came back home to work in the water again. He worked on the water since he was seven years old. When he got sick, he had to stop working on the water. He also worked at Calvert Cliffs and many other places. He died from Cancer.

#### Track 02

5:15 What part has religion played in your life? I have been through everything in the Catholic Religion. At one time, I was supposed to be a Nun. She was about 14 when she wanted to be a Nun, but she changed her mind because she couldn't leave her mother. She never missed a day of school or Sunday at church for 10 years no matter what the weather condition.

7:30 After she graduated from the 8<sup>th</sup> grade, she still worked for the nuns. She didn't make any money. They gave her some fruit or canned goods on Saturdays. They never paid her with any money.

8:20 Did you ever work in any church organizations? No

8:30 Do you participate in any community activities. She never had the opportunity because she was always working.

#### Track 03

9:05 How do you feel about life today in St. Mary's County? People now would not be able to survive now if they had to do the things they had to do in the old days. Children now have hot running water and nice cars and they still don't seem satisfied.

#### Track 04

11:52 What was segregation like? They always had to go to the back door. There were a couple of nice white folks. The Love's who owned the lunchroom didn't mind them coming in the front door. She made \$3.00 per day working on the base.

#### Track 05

15:56 When she started working at Ryken High School she made \$19 per week. She worked there for 40 years. She only got two years of retirement money after working for them for 40 years.

17:25 Do you think there is a difference between the people who were born in the county versus the ones that came to the county from other places? "I think they feel they are different". They don't think that everybody had a little difficulty in the old days like the locals.

#### Track 06

18:56 She had seven sisters, five brothers, father, step father and mother and none of them ever owned a house except Mrs. Butler and one sister that lived in Texas. She got a home because her Uncle Johnny Somerville gave her a piece of land because she was a hard worker. He said he would give her the land if her husband would build her a house. It took her two weeks to convince her husband. Her uncle gave them 1 ½ acres of land on Pin Cushion Road. "He gave them the land wrote \$50 on the deed to make it look right."

22:55 After that when her husband came home on the weekends, he would order a pile of lumber and build a room. He did this until the house was complete. They started out with four rooms and built another two rooms a couple of years later.

After they had a house, her husband was happy as a lark and would come home more often.

24:10 When they lived with her mother who was renting her house. They paid the \$30 per month rent. Mr. Harry Fenwick built the house. The house was free and clear when the finished building it.

#### Track 07

25:13 What do you feel has the biggest changes in this county in your lifetime? Everything has changed including people and stores. People shop too much and spend too much on clothes. People use to stop and talk to each other and play cards. Now they don't want to talk to you but are ready to knock you in your head.

27:20 Are you affected by the changes that the Navy has made in the county? No

27:35 Have you done everything in life that you wanted or planned do? No, I always wanted my mother to have a home of her own and to be happy. She wanted her be able sit down without having to worry about surviving. Her mother was not happy with her second marriage. She wanted her to come live with her but she wouldn't because she didn't want to leave her boys at home. They were old enough to take care of themselves. When she returned in 1994 she still worked for a lady in Breton Bay until she went to a nursing home. She would like to have peace of mind. She is not satisfied.

#### Track 08

31:25 What was life like for your parents? Her mother was a hard worker and was never happy. She worked until she died. She did not feel her step father treated her mother right. When she came home from work in the snow she still had to cook for her family.

33:25 Tell me about your formal Schooling? She would walk to school everyday and would also have to walk the eight miles to her sister's house in Mechanicsville. She didn't have any problems walking and nobody would bother her. Now you can't walk anywhere. When they finally got to ride to school, they would all ride on one bus all over the county.

#### Track 09

37:18 Biographical Information:

Sarah Evelyn Mason Butler  
P.O. Box 24400  
Leonardtown, MD

(301)475-8540

DOB 4/7/1920

Born in Mechanicville, MD

Attended St. Joseph's Elementary and Banneker High School

Occupation: Cook (retired in 1994)

Husband – James Edward Butler

Maternal Grandparent - Joseph Woodley Somerville and Mary Somerville

Paternal Grandparents – Unknown

Mother - Helena Pauline Somerville Mason

Father – Joseph Mason

Siblings

Josephine Handley

Elizabeth Hensley

Mildred Duke

Helen Fenwick

Agnes Hazel

Sarah Butler (self)

Sandra (Sarah's twin who died at birth)

Leonard Mason

Step brothers

Joseph Edward Berry

James Berry

John Berry

Paul Berry

Joseph Walker Berry

Children (grandchildren)

Mildred Gross (Stephanie, Leslie and Jerry)

James E. Butler, Jr. (William, John, Marvin and Joe)

David Butler (... and David)

Rudolph (deceased)

Francis Butler (Craig)

Agnes Mason (Kimberly and Angie)