

Unified Committee for Afro-American Contributions  
Oral History Documentation Project

**FLORENCE BAILEY LANHAM**

Interviewed by Brenda Coates  
January 16, 1997  
At her home in Ridge Maryland  
Logged by Tania Jordon on January 18, 2009  
A verbatim transcript is available  
Original format is one cassette tape  
58 minutes, 5 seconds

**CD 1 of 1 (Tape 1, side 1)**

**Track 01**

**0:00 Introduction**

**00:20 Where do you live. "I live at [redacted address] in Ridge, Maryland. She lives about a mile from Seaside View Recreation area. It is below St. Peter Claver Church".**

**1:00 Where did you live and where were you born? I was born in Baltimore and grew up in Wicomico County on the Eastern Shore of Maryland.**

**1:15 What were your parent's occupations? Her father was had a business driving school buses and dump trucks. They lived on about five acres. After she grew up and left home he bought two or three hundred acres. He is either renting it or selling it.**

**2:10 When did you come to St. Mary's County. She came to the county in September of 1951. She came to teach school at Banneker High School.**

**2:35 What were times like when you were a child? She grew up in area where children worked in the summertime. The black schools closed in the middle of May, two weeks before the white schools closed. When the schools closed they pick strawberries, blackberries and beans. This was called truck farming. Her father's bus would go through the communities and pick up people to transport them to the farms. The buses were packed with people. They would do this in May, June and July. In July the men would pick tomatoes while the women worked in canning factories. Most of the kids would be at home during that time because picking tomatoes was hard work**

and the baskets were too heavy for kids. They went back to school in September.

She remembers that some of the bean rows were so long that there were people at each end and one in the middle; you would never meet the other person.

## Track 02

**5:36** Did your father do any type of farming? Her father never liked farming. Her mother's parents had a farm so she was the one who took care of the garden. Her father purchased land for investment. He did have a lot of farm equipment.

**6:50** What is your earliest memory? When she was in 1<sup>st</sup> grade there were two girls and three boys. They attended a one room school. All five of them stayed together until they got to high school. One boy dropped out in the 6<sup>th</sup> grade and one moved to Philadelphia. Three of them graduated. "In those days, it wasn't are you going to college, but what college are you going to attend? That was the attitude of the people in the community. When she got to St. Mary's it was just the opposite. It was just a shocker".

When she came along, many of the older people had gone to college or they had moved to Baltimore, Philadelphia or New York to seek employment. They would send money home to help their families.

She and the other girl she went to school with went to college and one boy drowned in Ocean City. Another boy moved to New Jersey to work.

**10:00** What church did your family attend? They were Methodist.

## Track 03

**10:08** Did you take family trips as a child? She was lucky because she was always going some place. When her father had trips because he owned buses, they would go on these trips sponsored by churches or different groups. They went to Woodside Park in Philadelphia and Baltimore. Her father was the only school bus driver she rode with to school.

**12:00** Was your family involved in community activities? Yes, at that time most of activities were related to church or the PTA.

**12:20** Were times better or worse in those days? "I wouldn't like to go back to those times". It depends on how you look at it and what you got

accustomed to doing. She was fortunate because her life was easier than other kids because of her fathers business.

#### Track 04

**13:35** What were some of your family's health concerns? They went to the doctor or he would make house calls. They would go to the doctor's office in the summertime to get shots. All of the kids would be on the bus going to the doctor's office to get shots at the same time.

Every winter they would have to take castor oil. Every time she looks at the bottle it makes her sick. They would also take cod liver oil everyday.

**15:35** How were senior citizens cared for? They were cared for at home by their children or someone else in the family.

**16:00** How did black folks get news/information when you were growing up? Some people had radios and they also got a weekly newspaper. "If somebody black killed somebody, it would be on the front page".

#### Track 05

**16:31** What types of games did you play as a child? She played hop scotch, dodge ball, pitched horseshoes and rode bicycles.

**17:00** What chores did you have as a child? They had to clean the house, make up the beds, wash dishes, pump water, heat water, scrub floors and make the fires.

**17:20** How did you get along with your brothers? She got along fine with her brothers.

**17:35** Which games did you like the best? She liked them all.

**17:40** How did your parents treat you? If they did something wrong they would punish them. They didn't usually beat them. Most of the time their parents punished them by taking away their privileges. She would get punished if you didn't do what you were supposed to do.

**18:50** Do you think that your parents prepared you well for life? Yes they did. She remembers her mother saying that you never look down on anybody. Because when you are climbing the latter the same people you meet going up will be the same ones you meet going down.

#### Track 06

**19:30** Tell me about your formal Schooling? She went to a one room school house or elementary school (1<sup>st</sup> through 5<sup>th</sup> grade). They went to an elementary school in Salisbury for 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> grade. They also went to high school in Salisbury.

There were about 20 or 30 children in the one room school house.

Her first teacher was Miss Nutter. The next teacher was Agatha Gems Polk. Her first grade teacher didn't live far from her house. She only taught at her school for three years. The next teacher lived with her grandmother.

**21:45** What was your favorite subject in school? She liked English and loved Home Economics and Civics. Math was her least favorite subject. When she got to high school her mother taught her Geometry and her high school principal taught her Trigonometry.

**23:00** What did you dream of becoming as an adult? She didn't think about what she wanted to be until she got to high school. Her home economics teacher guided her into attending her alma mater. So she thought about teaching home economic in her senior year of high school.

#### **Track 07**

**24:02** Where did your parents approve of you going as a teenager? "It more like were did they take me". If you went anywhere, they had to go on her father's bus. She just went where the bus went. On Saturday evening they would get on the bus and go to the movies in Salisbury.

When she was in high school the guys could come to her house to visit, but she was not allowed to go any place with them.

**25:50** What was it like when you first went out on your own. When you're in college, you learn how to manage and how to handle yourself.

After college you have to learn to manage your own money. You can't call home for money like you did in college.

**27:00** What did you do for entertainment? We went to movies or went to a bar. The first time she ever went to a bar was when she moved to St. Mary's County.

They didn't go to bars on the Eastern Shore because she was afraid of her high school principal. He would go into the bars on the weekends and bring the students out. That was embarrassing and it would be spread all over the county. That would curtail most of the kids from going to the bars.

## **Track 08**

- 28:28**            **What was your first job? She picked fruit and vegetables in the summer as a child. In college she worked at a canning factory. She inspected the tomatoes that were being process for soup. Her first job after college was a teacher at Banneker. Her salary was \$2,200 per year in 1951. She taught for seven years.**
- 29:55**            **Why did you decide to teach? That’s what she was trained to do. She majored in home economics.**
- 30:15**            **How did you get to work? She carpoled with other teachers. At the time she lived with the Conway family on Leonardtown Hollywood Road for a year. Mr. and Mrs. Water built a house that she shared with two other teachers.**

## **CD 1 of 1 (Tape 1, side 2)**

## **Track 09**

- 31:15**            **What did it mean to you to leave home and go to work? It something that she looked forward to and that’s what everybody did when she was growing up.**
- 31:45**            **How did you meet your husband? “I meet him at a carnival. He worked on the base during that time”. She was introduced to him through a friend. Her husband was raised in Washington. She met her husband when she was 23 years old.**
- 32:50**            **Do you remember anything about your wedding? She didn’t have a big wedding. They got married on a Tuesday night at the Water’s house. Her parents came from the Eastern Shore. One of her roommates was her maid of honor. Some of the teachers came and they had punch and cake. “She went to work on Wednesday and he had to do some flying”. They got married around Thanksgiving. They went to her parent’s home for Thanksgiving. His parents had a family reception for them in Washington during Christmas. They didn’t have a honeymoon. He was a civilian employee.**
- 34:45**            **What has your relationship been like with your husband, children and grandchildren? “It has been nice. Like every other family they’ve had their ups and downs but you just have to roll with the punches”.**

## **Track 10**

**35:05** What part has religion played in your life? She attends Zion Methodist Church. At one time she was the Chairman of the Administrative Council. Now she is the Vice President of the Methodist Women.

**35:45** What does your church mean to you? It means a lot to me for spiritual guidance and she enjoys singing. She enjoys the fellowship.

**36:15** Are you involved with other religious organizations or churches? All her religious activities are through her church. She does attend community activities at other churches.

**36:40** Do you participate in community activities? She serves as a volunteer for the United Cerebral Palsy. She is chairman for ... She works with the AAUW, League of Women Voters and the Cancer Society.

**38:25** Has life changed in St. Mary's county? It has change quit a bit. She has seen people change and a lot of growth in some people. People are more friendly now then they use to be. The quality of life has improved and is improving each day. There are still some things that still need more attention.

**40:00** Are teenagers different now? There is a definite difference. "I would have been scared to death to do the things that teenagers do now".

#### **Track 11**

**40:15** Are race relations different? "Somewhat, but we still have a long way to go. There are some people who are genuinely trying to do better and others are snakes in the grass. It works both ways for blacks and whites".

**40:55** Where you ever afraid of a person or group practicing hate? No, she doesn't know anybody personally who practices hate.

**42:00** Is there a difference between county people and outsiders? Yes, there is a difference. They have had a lot of relationship with people who weren't native to the county and a few friendships with people who are native to the county. When you come into the county, you are looked upon as a foreigner.

**44:05** Do you interact with people from different sections of the county? Yes with people all over the county. She feels that "blacks up the county are more community minded then in the area she lives in. They are always involved in NAACP or the Extension Program. "It is like pulling teeth to get group activities in this part of the county".

At one time there was a 4-H in her end of the county. Miss Bertil Bryant was the leader.

#### Track 12

**46:44** What do you feel has the biggest changes in this county since you've been here? People buying their own homes. She was so glad to see that. The schools have changed.

**47:15** What are your feelings about the Navy base and the new growth? It is fantastic and county can only prosper from the growth.

**47:30** What do you think of the direction the county is going? Since there are more jobs coming to the base more people will be coming and staying. No matter how much people try to stop the growth, people will still be coming. Some of the areas in the county will become more urban. A lot of the people coming here to work live in Calvert or Charles County.

**48:40** How have you contributed to the county? She has hopes that her 30 years at the Extension Program have helped the county. Her work with United Cerebral Palsy has been a plus for the county by coordinating programs and classes.

**49:40** What awards, certificates or recognition have you received? She received a plaque from the Cancer Society for fund raising. She has received numerous of awards.

#### Track 13

**51:08** What is the most valuable thing you have ever had? Her family is her pride and joy.

**51:45** Have you done everything in life that you wanted or planned do? No, she always wanted a fur coat. Every time she got ready to buy one, she would wonder where she would wear it and "start stepping back".

**52:25** If you could go back and live you life over again, what would you change? She doubts that should would have moved to St. Mary's County. She probably would have moved north.

**53:00** Do you remember any of the kids from her originally class at Banneker? She taught Mary Baines Somerville, Delores Spears, Rose Bankins Holly and Julia Hebbs. She also remembers Helen Somerville.

#### Track 14

