

Unified Committee for Afro-American Contributions
Oral History Documentation Project

CATHERINE BLACKWELL TRAVERS

Interviewed by Brenda Coates
September 26, 1996

At Mrs. Travers home on St. George Island Maryland

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[Begin Side 1, Tape 1 of 1]

Brenda Coates: Today's date is September the 26th, 1996. Miss Catherine, I just wanted to let you know that if you are uncomfortable answering any of these questions, you don't have to answer them. Okay? First of all, exactly where you were born?

Catherine Travers: St. George's Island.

BC: Okay. St. George's Island. Okay. Could you tell me exactly where on St. George's Island?

CT: No. I mean, right.

BC: Oh, you were born right here where you living now, which is next to Evan's Seafood House on the Main Road.

CT: Where Evans Seafood House is now. Yeah.

BC: As a child, what did your family, what did your family eat and how did y'all live?

CT: We ate good. I mean, I mean. We ate just like. [laughter] We always had home-cooked

meals.

BC: Okay. Did your family have a garden or a farm or what? Did you live off the land?

That's what I'm trying to say.

CT: No, we didn't...and he have a garden...and eat oysters.

BC: Okay. So, do y'all eat -- Did you have to buy much of your food or did you, ate what you raised? I know most of the time, people have to buy sugar and salt and things like that.

CT: They bought most of it. They bought most. They didn't raise that much.

BC: Oh. Okay. Just tell me something about when you were growing up. Tell me something about those times.

CT: Well actually, as far as I can remember, we always had plenty to eat was always warm, had plenty clothes to wear. We never went without lights or anything. We had oil lamps and had wood stoves and then later, we had kerosene. We had anything. But as far as them days, I...

BC: So, you think that times were better then than they are now?

CT: Well, in one -- in one way, yes. I mean, I guess you'd say yes and no even though...as far as I know, we always had a car and go different places. From one thing to another. We always go to the store. But back then, the little stores around here wasn't that far... and place like that I can remember. Then of course, I always had everything because my aunt send me things, clothes for school, holidays and birthdays and everything.

BC: Describe your relationship with your brothers and sisters. Did y'all get along good? Did you play together?

CT: Yeah. We played. We played together. We got along fine because I stayed at my grandparents most of the time. I stayed with my grandparents, and my mother and father

lived right next door. But, I stayed, I stayed with my grandparents. But, we got along, we got along fine.

BC: What church did you attend when you were growing up?

CT: We attend the church on the Island in 1933 and went away. Then, started attending St. Luke's Church.

BC: What was the name of the church on the Island? Do you remember?

CT: [pause] I think it was Bethany.

BC: Bethany?

CT: I think it was Bethany Baptist.

BC: But it was the same denomination? What denomination was it?

CT: I think it was a Baptist church.

BC: Bethany Baptist Church?

CT: I think it was Baptist.

BC: On the Island?

CT: The name was Bethany. I mean, I got that all stuff somewhere here. I think it was Bethany Baptist Church.

BC: Okay.

CT: Bethany Baptist Church on the Island.

BC: Okay. And you said until what happened to it?

CT: It went away with the flood.

BC: Oh, okay.

CT: In '33.

BC: In 1933. Okay. So then after that, you started attending St. Luke's?

CT: St. Mark's?

BC: St. Mark's?

CT: St. Luke's in Piney Point.

BC: St. Luke's in Piney Point. Okay. Do you remember, as a child, taking any trips?

CT: Yes. We used to go to [pause]--What you call it up there the park before you get to...Do you remember growing up there? We used to go up there every year. All the time.

Joyce, do remember the park we use to go to. Last time Mamma went there when we were kids?

Joyce: Marshall Hall.

CT: Marshall Hall.

BC: Okay.

CT: We used to go to Marshall Hall...different place. And, we used to go on the boats and go to the Kinsale, Virginia on boat trips...Every Summer, we used to go over there...got the beach...Kinsale, we used to go.

BC: Okay. Did you take any trips further away or New York, or whatever? Okay.

[Short conversation was inaudible.]

When you were growing up, how were the senior citizens treated? What happened to them when they were too old to take care of themselves? Were there any nursing facilities available or what?

CT: I don't, I don't know. Not that I know of. I mean, so far as I know of, no.

BC: The people were taken care of in the homes?

CT: Yeah...I mean, so far as I know...And, I do remember...up here...but I don't know. You know. I don't remember any of that....

BC: Okay.

CT: [inaudible]

BC: What were your health concerns? How did your parents deal with health and illness?

You know, did they have any home remedies or what?

CT: We had home remedies when the doctor used to come.

BC: You remember the name of the doctor?

CT: Yeah. Dr. Brown and Dr. Bean.

BC: They used to make home visits?

CT: They used to. Um hmm.

BC: Okay.

CT: Dr. Lynch. [laughter]

BC: Okay. Okay. So, what did -- Dr. Lynch is the one that lives on Drayden Road?

CT: Yeah. That's the Dr....

BC: Okay. And Dr. Brown?

CT: Dr. Brown used to live up here just before you get to Leonardtown. I guess it was called Red Gate.

BC: Okay. Did you mother, father -- Did they have any home remedies that they used when they didn't use the doctor? You know, any special, any special serums or anything?

[pause] Do you remember--

CT: Yes! We used to use, for colds, Mom used to make onion syrup. We used salt and water for sore throats, gargling. You know...like headaches.

BC: What, they would just give you vinegar?

CT: No, they would, they would, take a cloth, something from around here, and they--

BC: Oh, that would be something better than that.

CT: What you call them...[laughter]

BC: Okay.

CT: I know we used -- And then, they used something called, for a chest cold, they used to make something like a plaster...What did you call that stuff they used to use? You don't know.

BC: Mustard? Mustard plasters?

CT: I don't know. No, no this thing would go on your chest. What's it come from? It comes from?

BC: What, the cloth?

CT: No, the, the, the, something they used to use. They used something called mutton. I don't know. My grandmother used to take this...[pause]...Oatmeal syrup? Yeah. Used to...and she used that...take it. Rub your chest. We had to put a piece of flannel.

BC: Oh! Uh huh.

CT: I can't remember, but I know what she used to do. What the stuff's called now, I can't think of. [chuckle] What comes in a sheet? Mutton, ain't it? What comes in a sheep?

BC: Yeah. I guess so.

CT: You know, them old people. If you got sick, you didn't know the before and after time, but I think -- Anyhow, I know -- I know that you used to put that stuff on you. They cover you up real good. They almost smother you and that cold would gone. Your chest be broke. Just break it like clay.

BC: Like they do with Vicks now.

CT: Yeah. Just like that. Amazing cold stuff they rub you now...It's called mutton powder.

BC: Mutton powder. Um hm.

CT: Some kind of name, they used to call it mutton powder. But I think, what it was, it was, I think it was sheep fat...okay. Sheep fat is ..., right?

BC: Yeah, right. It wasn't...

CT: This comes from the...

BC: Oh, okay. Okay. What other the medical facilities do you know of that were around at that time? Did you go to the hospital often, or did you use the hospital?

CT: No. Not, not that often.

BC: Okay.

CT: The doctor just come in. So, you got real, real sick, I guess you just died. I don't know! [laughter] They just died. I don't know...I don't know what...just old. You died from guess what, I guess?

BC: Okay. What types of things did you do as a child?

CT: What did we play?

BC: Um hmm [yes].

CT: The games. We had all kinds of games we played: jump rope, steal good, and--

BC: And what?

CT: Steal Good.

BC: What is that?

CT: Just a game we play. You have somebody on each line, and you have piles -- piles of sticks down here. And, you would have two kids. One would be on one side and one be on the other. The pile of sticks would be in the middle. You would go and get one up and bring it back in your pile. I go pick one up and bring it back to my pile. And, the

one who got all the sticks first won the game.

BC: Oh! Okay. I'd never heard of that one. [laughter] Okay. And, did you play baseball?

CT: Yeah, baseball. Yeah, baseball. We played baseball, dodge ball.

BC: Okay.

CT: Hop, skip and jump. What you call that?

BC: Hopscotch.

CT: Hopscotch. And, we played with jacks quite a bit. We played jacks.

BC: What kind of chores did you have to do?

CT: I had to do dishes.

BC: Okay.

CT: I had to do the dishes; fold clothes...clean the house. You know, clean the house.

BC: Okay. So, you didn't have to do any chores outside.

CT: No. No. I never did chores outside.

BC: Okay. But the boys did have to?

CT: The boys was bringing wood.

BC: Okay. Water and wood?

CT: Water and wood.

BC: Feed the animals and all?

CT: They didn't have any animals because when floods... We didn't have any feed for anything...

BC: Okay. So, most of the time when you were coming up, you didn't have garden --You still had a garden.

CT: Had a little garden, yeah.

BC: But you didn't have any animals?

CT: No. We may have had a few chickens, but not any, never did have a whole flock.

BC: So, what meat y'all ate, y'all had to buy. Okay.

CT: And, like, in those hogs in the farm.

BC: You mean when y'all went out to other peoples to kill hogs?

CT: My papa used to -- mamma used to have a couple hogs. Two, you know. But, it wasn't enough. We always bought meat.

BC: Okay.

CT: And they had two chickens. One for the eat, to eat...You raised a few, but not many.

BC: Not many? Okay. How did your parents treat you? What did they do with you that you remember best? Did they used to play games with y'all or did they read to you? Or, they always took you out on boat trips, or what? What do you remember that they used to do with you?

CT: Well actually, my grandmother, grandfather, we used to go on boat trips and different things. But, he'd always sit down and tell me stories about what he did when he was a child. This and that.

BC: That was your grandparents?

CT: Yeah. Different things, but as far as reading to me and stuff, we never did that much reading. But, he knew a lot about different things and all. And then, just...And as far as playing games and stuff, I mean, they didn't that -- play games. Kids did, but not the parents.

BC: Not the parents.

CT: Not the parents.

BC: Okay. Did they have to discipline you?

CT: Not really.

BC: Uh huh [yes].

CT: Not, not, well, I mean, wrestle and things like, but I never had -- I mean, I never, I never had no problems. Everybody said that they spoiled the daylights out of me. When they told me to do something, I'm likely to do it. I didn't -- I mean, if they told me something about -- I probably wanted to go some place and get something I had no business doing, I didn't go or something like that. I never had any problems.

BC: Okay.

CT: Because I'm always the one that I don't anger nobody! I ain't...stuff like that.

BC: [laughter]

CT: I just never -- That's not the way I do things...

BC: Okay. Do you think that your parents or your grandparents, because you said they the ones that raised you -- Do you think they prepared you well for life?

CT: I think they did. They did. Yeah.

BC: Now, you told me that you went to St. George's Island School and then you went to Piney Point School, for your elementary school education. And, I know that the Island, St. George's Island School was about where Evans is now.

CT: Maybe down a little further, right down the road... I know the school's back there somewhere.

BC: Okay. So, about how long did you go to the Island School?

CT: It wasn't, it wasn't too -- It wasn't too long because I think that when -- when -- when we were in Piney Point, [pause]...I don't know.

BC: Well, let me ask you: How come -- why did you start going to Piney Point School rather than the Island School?

CT: Because right after the flood, they didn't use the Island School anymore.

BC: That was in '33, right.

CT: Yeah. And then, we all went, a couple of kids went to Piney because there wasn't many, many kids going to school from over here, from down here because it was Lolli and myself and that's about it.

Child: [in background?] Grandmamma? Grandmamma?

CT: And, that's about it because you didn't know no one going here. Because we moved away, we only had three or four black kids on the Island...?

BC: Okay. Where was the school at Piney Point?

CT: It was good. Like you was saying where St. Luke's Church is.

BC: Oh, okay.

CT: The school's was there.

BC: And you had to walk to school?

CT: We had to walk in somebody's house...We walked. Most time, he carried me. Either he carried me or Dad carried me. One of them.

BC: Okay. Now, what the bridge there at the time?

CT: Yes, yes.

BC: Okay.

CT: Yes. There's always been a bridge there, so far as I can remember.

Child: [in background] Grammy, someone wants you on the phone.

BC: No problem.

CT: The bridge has been there because the first bridge went away in the flood, from that flood. Then, we had to go back and forth in the boat because...It didn't pay to...we didn't have -Hazel -- It wasn't for long, then we had to go back again. You know, cross over.

BC: Okay. And then, you said you went to Banneker High School.

CT: Yeah. On the school bus.

BC: Okay. You had a school bus. About how long did it take y'all to get to school? Did it have to make a whole lot of--go all around round-robins barn to --?

CT: Yeah. Yeah, because the bus, I used to get on the bus in the morning and it wasn't but Dan Morgan and myself. And what happens, see, Grace -- then Grace came and Grace had been up in Baltimore...I don't know! I don't think it was that long because...I think it was early, but I don't know when it...

BC: Okay. And then, after you went to Banneker for a short while, then you went to Jarboesville and you caught the bus there, too.

CT: Yeah. Over there...because the bus go there...and then, the bus stop go straight up...

BC: Okay. So, you would have to walk up to Swans because it wasn't -- it wasn't enough kids on the, the Island for them to bring the bus across --Okay. Okay. Do you remember any of the teachers when you went to school? And, of all the teachers you can remember, who was favorite one?

CT: I have enough of them. In elementary school, I can remember Miss Hancock, Ascot, Miss ... and Miss Butler. And that's, I guess that's about all them.

BC: Yeah.

CT: ...elementary teachers, I can't remember all of them. I'm trying to think. I think Miss ...n was average teacher.

BC: Okay.

CT: I think it was Miss Jason...[pause] it must have been Miss...

BC: And because Ascot

CT: And, we have Miss

BC: Until down here, they had Mrs. Green?

CT: I think that was ... School.

BC: Miss Jason?

CT: I think Miss -- I think in the past time when we had this discussion. I don't know if I had Miss ...Miss Butler was Louise Butler from up here.

BC: Oh, okay.

CT: Yeah, so, I don't remember...I can't remember who I had first before I had because I had some of them in...

BC: Okay. As a young adult, what did you dream of becoming? What did you want to do?

CT: I had said I wanted to be a nurse. And then after I grew older and I seen how people, you know suffer so and all...

BC: Change your mind?! [laughter]

CT: I mean, although I did a lot of nurse's aide work and I took some Nurse's Course...I just wanted -- I just wanted -- I didn't have nothing special I wanted to do, or just a housekeeper. And, I work some domestic work...

BC: Okay. As a teenager, did your parents let you court? And if you did, where did you go and what did you do?

CT: We went -- we just going to the movie once in a while, but I thought I went with older, with the older, my older friends and my older cousins, something like that. They let me

go to different places. Even went to church, the movies, to a dance once in a while, stuff like that. But actually, there wasn't no, really no place to go but to the movies or out.

BC: Where was the movies? Where did you go to that?

CT: In Leonardtown.

BC: Okay.

CT: [inaudible]...And, it's not the movie theater that they're have there now...Just tickets for, the...video now...

BC: At the top of the hill?

CT: What new movie theater there now? They had a movie in Leonardtown now.

BC: No. The old one is over by the drug store.

CT: What was the one before the one by the drug store? Wasn't the same place now?

BC: Oh, I don't know. I don't know.

CT: Seems to me, it was somewhere close to that hill. Seems like we went just to the top of the hill, but I don't know...

Male: ...the one by the drug store.

BC: Okay.

CT: Was that drug store...over by the drug store?

Male: [inaudible]

CT: It seems to me --I can't really say for sure because we didn't--I mean, we didn't go to the Leonardtown place that's--I mean...

BC: Okay. What was it like when you first when out on your own? When you first moved away from home? Where did you go and what did you do?

CT: Well, when I first went away from home, I lived with my cousin. And, she had gotten a

job in Washington...go home on the weekend. I mean, she seen that I always did what I was supposed to do, behaved myself.

BC: Do you remember how much you got paid when you were doing that work?

CT: When I first started working, I worked for a family of people down on Piney Point Beach and I got, I think it was \$5 a week. [pause] \$5 a week.

BC: Okay. And, this was doing domestic work.

CT: Uh huh [yes].

BC: Okay.

CT: ...That was for summer work. They use to come to the summer cottages here in the summertime...

BC: Now, when you went to Washington with your cousin who got you a job, do you remember about what you were making then?

CT: Because Helena knew these people, and Ellen and I worked for them...family...And she gave us--They paid her and she paid us.

BC: Okay.

CT: I mean, I really think--I mean, she gave me, I guess, about \$15 a week because we stayed with her...We didn't -- That's just about--It wasn't--Maybe two much for the summer. That's all.

BC: Okay. What kind of work have you done to support yourself? You told me that most of the work you've done is domestic work, and then you went to Harry Lundeberg School a little further up the road and you were in the Housekeeping Department. What other kind of work have you done?

CT: ...That's all

BC: Okay. Why did you choose this kind of work? You said you've always like doing it.

CT: Probably, I don't know. I used to think about doing this--Doing days work like this, you meet all these people and stuff. And, I've always been—I've always liked people.

BC: Okay. I never asked you about your wedding. Do you remember--Well, first of all, how did you meet your husband?

CT: I don't know. [laughter] I don't know. I guess just grew up together like something. I mean, I don't know. Going with – to church. I guess you just go with -- I always did, went to church functions. You know I always went to church functions here and there and different places.

BC: Okay. So, where did he live?

CT: He lived in Drayden.

BC: In Drayden. Okay. And, you met him at church functions.

CT: I guess I did.

BC: Okay, and why did you decide to get married?

CT: [laughter] Well, I guess--I don't know. We starting loving each other and got married. That's all! [laughter]

BC: Okay. When you got married, what was your wedding date?

CT: [laughter] everybody is suppose to remember that.

Female Voice: It was Christmas Eve, I can't remember the year. I might have been Christmas day.

[Pause]

CT: Reverend, what you call them, Reverend Maggen.

BC: Okay. You got married down on the Island?

CT: Yeah. Got married up at St. Martin's in the parsonage.

BC: Okay. Do you remember anything about your wedding?

CT: Not really. I mean, it was in my brother's, Rosalie. And, [long pause] That was it.

BC: Okay. And, you got married on a Christmas Eve, but you don't really right now what year it was? Okay.

CT: I think it was [pause]...I mean, I just don't...

BC: Okay. Well, let me ask you: Did you have a honeymoon?

CT: No.

BC: Okay.

CT: No honeymoon.

BC: What was your family life like? Describe your marriage and your relationship with your husband and with your children and with your grandchildren.

CT: It was fine. We had any fights here. We never had big problems. Doing alright.

BC: Okay. Your relationship with your children and your grandchildren.

CT: Good. [laughter]

BC: Okay. What part has religion played in your life? You told me attend St. Luke's. Is that UMAE Church, okay, here in Piney Point? What does your church mean to you?

CT: Well, tell you the truth now. The church means a lot because I figure, if it wasn't for the church, I wouldn't be as pious as I am today of learning about new rules in the church, ways of the church. And, come in contact with different, oh -- a lot of different organizations that can help you really if you need help, when you need help. And, I think the church plays a good part in a person's life.

BC: Okay. Do you -- how do you participate in the church? Are you a member of the Board

or usher --?

CT: Yes, I'm a member of the Stewart Board and the senior choir and the kitchen committee and assistant secretary.

BC: Your church travels --

CT: Quite a bit.

BC: So now you do travel outside the—the area[laughter]?

CT: Oh yes. Oh yes.

BC: Okay. What kind of activities do you participate in? Do you belong to any clubs or organizations?

CT: Not really. Not really. Just for my church. Because the church, within the church group, we have different societies like the St. Luke's Society and stuff like that. And, that's about...

BC: Did you work with the 4H or any groups like that?

CT: No...dealt with 4H...

BC: How do you feel about life in general today in St. Mary's County, and in what ways is it different from what it used to be?

CT: Well, there's more opportunities if you want to get any. There's plenty of opportunities in life where to get involved, -- who has the time to get involved with over here. If you get involved with this stuff, a lot of stuff, especially if it's not all in town, then you always, going some place or have to do something. It requires a lot of your time.

BC: Well, so, back when you were coming along, how is it different from how it is now because they did have a lot of groups like that? A lot of people volunteering then, too.

CT: Yes.

BC: So, it's not that much different?

CT: It's not that much different except you wanted to get involved and you have the time to do and to do this. There's plenty of things you can get involved in.

BC: Okay. The question was, How do you feel about life in general today? Now you have better transportation and running water, things like that.

CT: Yeah. We didn't have that. Well, I'm going to be flat and tell you the truth. Now, with doing church work and being involved with all these kids and grandkids and grand-grandkids, I don't have time for nothing else, because the mother's at this place or that place or here or there. You're going to pick this one up or you're going to take that one somewhere or you're going to babysit for this one today or drop that one to the doctor tomorrow. And, it's just, it just keeps you busy and I really enjoy it!

BC: Oh, you enjoy being busy like that.

CT: I enjoy being busy and I enjoy doing things because as a child, and after I grew up, I always had somebody I could depend on. Even though, I grew up with my grandparents and uncles and, I mean, and all and everything. I was growing up like this in the right way, or the right spirit or something because I was always taught to keep being right because you never know when somebody has to do something for you. And, that's one thing that stuck with me...Every job I worked on, I can go back to work, if I have to go back. I mean, I left because I wanted to leave, not because I had to or nothing like this. And every job I worked on, everybody I've come in contact with, I've done something, they always say, Well,... and I don't have any problems.

BC: Okay.

CT: So, I can't say anything about jobs or nothing. In fact, about nobody because I am trying

to do right.

BC: Okay. Do you think people are different from what they used to be in the county?

CT: I don't know. Maybe yes and maybe no because I...contact with the...people. I mean, I know things change. You know that. The times have changed, so I think that some people, the young generation of today, didn't see the things they had to go through so that they can...I guess they just don't realize the change of times, I guess. I don't know.

BC: Well, do you think the teenagers are different than they used to be when you were coming up? And then, you look at the teenagers today. Do you see a big difference?

CT: Well, yes and no because the teenagers of today has more outgoing and more stuff to be more busy with or busy about or can do than what we did. And, I guess when we were coming along, the things that we used to do, that we were satisfied doing, now the teenagers just not satisfied in doing that kind of stuff because when we came along, we had hay rides. We used to go hay riding and different things. I mean, like Halloween, we'd go out on the -- and this and that. But now, you can't do that kind of stuff. So, I guess it's just change of times I guess, I don't know.

BC: And you said because they could more easily...the kind of things that--

CT: We like --Where's that fly swatter? Dang gone flies. I don't know where the devil it is.

BC: [laughter] Okay. Are race relations different today than they used to be?

CT: I don't know. Like I said, I don't--

BC: Do you see any changes or are you, yeah, or do you see any difference between the way people treated you then and now?

CT: No. I don't--I mean. I don't know...perhaps get in my face anytime [laughter]--I don't -- I mean.

BC: You personally don't see any difference.

CT: I personally don't see that much difference, much difference. I don't. I really don't see that much difference from now and then because the ones I used to know...hate blacks. Like I said, you don't get involved with this new generation that's coming. You don't know anything about it, so what can you say about it?

[End of Side 1, Tape 1 of 1, Copy 2]

CT: ...generation that's coming. You don't know anything about it, so what can you say about it?

BC: Okay.

CT: I don't know anything's...you know...and all. And, it's like all these boys that come down...I don't have a problem with it. They come in here...and going about your business and that's it...Every time he come over...and all them other boys, they all young...

BC: How do you feel about living in the county? I know you said you lived for a short while in Washington. Which did you like better: living in the city or living down here in the city?

CT: Well, I don't know. I can't say. I never loved the city that much. I never liked it. I'd rather be around here. [laughter]

BC: Because it's crowded or what?

CT: It's too crowded. It seemed to fancy. I don't know, I never liked the city that much.

BC: Now, do you think there's a difference between the people that were born in the county and people who came to the county later on to live?

CT: Yeah. In one way, yes I think so because a lot of people that come here -- a lot of them now, they--I don't know how to put it, because they are more outgoing, I guess. I don't know.

BC: The ones that came from outside.

CT: Yes. The ones in the county are--I don't know. I mean, the younger ones that come into the county. Like I said, I don't know. I don't have that much...It seems like the people that come here are more, some of them--I know some of them--is more...

[End of Side 1, Tape 1 of 1 (interview ends 76 seconds prior to tape end)]

[Interview is paused to turn tape over, yet one minute and sixteen seconds of another interview continues on until the end of side 1, tape 1 of 1. Likewise, when the tape is turned to side 2, there is one minute and sixteen seconds of another interview before the Travers interview picks back up. These extraneous interview fragments are not transcribed.]

[Begin of Side 2, Tape 1 of 1 (interview begins 76 seconds after tape begins)]

BC: So, the people from, the people who came to move to the county, you saying that, you feel that they are more outgoing than the people who are natives? Okay.

CT: Yes...A lot of them come here and if they think they can do a job better than what you been doing or this or that -- they'll tell...And say, won't don't you for try this or that or something. But the people in the county are not going to tell you nothing. ... I mean,

that's the way, that's the way I look it. I mean, you know. Actually, I don't have much outgoing people in the county or in the city.

BC: Okay. So, you don't interact with people from outside, you know, the outsiders? Well, people who moved to the county after they were grown, or whatever. You don't have a whole lot of dealings with anyone like that?

CT: Right. Right.

BC: Okay.

CT: I don't ever...

BC: Okay. Now, you said, for a short while you lived in Washington. For about how long, just over the summer?

CT: Just doing summer...summer jobs.

BC: So that was the only time?

CT: Yeah.

BC: That was the only time and that was enough for you? Okay. How about, do you interact with people in the different sections of the county, you know, like in the Ridge Area, in the 7th District, Mechanicsville?

CT: Not really. I don't. No...7th District, I mean, you know...

BC: So probably, if it's not dealing with the church?

CT: Yeah.

BC: Is that the only time you, sort of, interact with other people is through the church?

CT: Just about. I mean, just, just about, in the church, with the school for the kids.

Something like that. I mean, as far as going this place or doing this or doing that, it's too many places. It's very seldom that I go anywhere unless I'm going to church. If it ain't,

no place to go now no more. I mean, you know? I mean, for --for whatever. As far as I go is home, church and back home. Except if there's something going on in St. Peters or something at a church, still involved with church. Actually, I mean, as far as I go.

BC: Do you think people are different in the different sections of the county?

CT: I think, yeah, I think in some sections of the county that people are more friendly with each other because I know once or twice, I've been to...and I don't care for that. Hollywood or Ridge because the white people on down there so friendly and all...

BC: Okay. What are your feelings about the Navy Base, especially when it first came in the '40's? What did you, what was your reaction to the Base?

CT: Well, I think the Base would be--I liked it because it gave--It went, the domestic wages went higher and you got to meet more people in the area because then, there was a lot of open jobs domestic work. A lot of people in the Union meet people from the 7th District and down the Ridge and all. All were working together, laughing and talking. You would see, ordinarily, later once a month or twice a year or something like that.

BC: Because of the Navy Base.

CT: Because of the Navy Base, yeah. That brought a lot of people together. I mean, black people, especially. Going back and forth to work and all.

BC: But now, did you work on the Base? You didn't work on the Base?

CT: Yeah. I did domestic work on the Base.

BC: Okay. Okay. That's what I was misunderstanding.

CT: When it first, when it first opened up. The Base, worked on the Base.

BC: Okay. So, the people that you associated with, none of them were hostile to the idea the Base coming down? Everybody liked the idea of the Base.

CT: So far as -- so far as I know. I mean, I wasn't...

BC: Okay. So, you weren't involved with. None of your family was involved with--None of your family lived on the land that the Base took?

CT: No.

BC: Okay. Okay. Now, what are your feelings about the changes in the county because of the new growth on the Base?

CT: I don't know because, I mean I don't know more remember...the old Base...

BC: [laughter]

BC: Okay.

CT: I wouldn't know.

BC: Okay. Well, what do you think about the direction the county's going in today? You know, the growth of the county. You know, the expansion of 235 and all those things.

CT: They going to do all this, and now--I don't know.

BC: Do you think it's, like, the county's getting too big for itself?

CT: Well, I don't know. I really don't because, I mean, it's, it's really growing. It's giving you...It's big. You live in each other, each other's land, you know. It's getting a...I mean--It's just, I guess--I guess, as time changes, we'll be just like a city instead of a--

BC: Than a country, yeah.

CT: And when you see a tree, you'll say, "Oh, look. That's a tree." I mean it. I don't know if I like it. I don't know if it's good or bad or what! [Chuckle] I don't understand that now.

BC: What do you think has been the biggest change in the county in your lifetime? [Pause]
Okay, like in the Seaman's School. That was a big change down in the--

CT: Taking the ferry. Um hmm. Yeah.

BC: Well, you were here when they were building the torpedo base.

CT: Yeah. Yeah.

BC: How did that affect your family?

CT: That really didn't affect us that much -- too much. I mean, like I said, maybe brought people a little bit closer home...different things. And, it really made more, the planning of the Base, of the torpedo station and then the Base came. And then when the Seamanship School came, it really, just built this end of the county up. But, I don't know now what they'll need. What's next? Like I said, it gave lot of people more jobs, more work to do and more jobs and really, it benefitted people...

BC: Okay. How have you contributed to the county with your work as a, if you've done any volunteer work?

CT: Yeah. I hear you...I did volunteer work for someone who's ... their house, and I've did quite a bit of volunteer work around here with the babies...Whenever, you know.

BC: Are you involved in politics? Okay. Have you ever received any awards or certifications of recognition from any organization?

CT: No. Only thing I got was the certificate from the Gray Ladies, something like that.

BC: Oh. Okay.

CT: I don't volunteer no more too much.

BC: When you were coming along, how did the black folks get their news? What newspapers were read and things like that?

CT: We used to get the--

BC: The Grit?

CT: The Grit, yeah. We would get that. And then, there's another one. What was that

called?

BC: What, The Afro?

CT: Yeah. We used to get that: The Afro. Yeah. We used to get that.

BC: But did you -- did they have--What local papers did you have?

CT: We didn't have no local papers. We didn't have no local papers.

BC: No local papers?

CT: No. So far as I know of.

BC: Okay.

CT: Only local paper I know of they had was --

Child: Grammy!

CT: Bye! Okay. Bye-bye. I'll see you. Bye.

BC: What did you listen to on the radio?

CT: We use to listen to.

BC: What, Amos & Andy and those types, or--?

CT: Yeah. That's right. What was that radio...from around here? Was it, wasn't WPTS, was it? It was something else. There was another one before that. What was it? I don't know.

BC: Okay.

CT: He get the book?

Female Voice: No. Because we didn't read it today, he didn't take it.

BC: Okay. Can you share any old -- any story about what life was like for your parents?

CT: No. Really. I can't. I can't, I can't think of any...blank.

BC: Okay.

CT: What was that on the radio? A Tall Reggie?...Every night he would say, A Good night, Mrs. Calabash. Good night, Mrs. ...

BC: Was it Jimmy Durante? I think Jimmy Durante used to say that.

CT: I don't know. My mommy and daddy used to listen to that every night. That's about it.

BC: So, the family used to gather around the radio at night and listen. Okay. What do you consider to be the most valuable thing you have ever had? Something that you could not have done without in your lifetime.

CT: What do you mean? Like what?

BC: Well, some people will say, good health or--Since you said that you definitely didn't like the city, knowing that you had a home in the country. Something -- what do you think is the most important thing to you? It could be that you have a good relationship with your children and grandchildren.

CT: I would say, I would say my family. I would say, I would say...relationship, love of the family...My family. That's it. And, we don't mean anyone else...I mean, you hear people say, ..."I'm glad you're left and gone." But, I'm glad to have them around, close by, too...Family.

BC: Family. Right.

CT: Family counts.

BC: Have you done everything in your life that you ever wanted to do or planned to do?

CT: Well, no. [Chuckle] I've done lots of things in my life. ...because the things that I wanted to, I've accomplished them. I'm done. But, I like being involved with different things, with people and things, different things, and I like going. I mean, I like to--Well, I'd like to see some more of the world.

BC: Okay. That's what I meant. That's you've always wanted to do: see, go outside the country.

CT: And different things? Because, three years ago, I went to Bahamas, and I like seeing most of the things there, things I've never done before down there and everything. But, I enjoy traveling. Like I said, I enjoy people. I enjoy family. I enjoy--I enjoy different things. And most of all, I mean, like I say, I like family, family members and other people, friends. And, I just like, too satisfied with ways down here. I would take it down the road! [laughter]

BC: If you could go back and change your life or live your life over again, would you and what would you change?

CT: I don't know. I really can't say. I mean, I really can't say because, really, I've had a good life, and I consider myself very, very lucky to have a family like I have and not have been, had to depend on, really no one...I mean, the people I can call friends.

BC: Now, I'm going ask you a couple more questions about the Harry Lundeberg School and the torpedo, the testing range because that's just right up the road from you. And, I'm going to ask you some more questions about the flood that happened in '33, and any other bad weather that you remember, that really affected the Island. And also, about the fact that your father worked on the water and made his living from that. Right? Okay. Did he do that all his life or did he have other jobs to support the family? Or, was just -- he was on the water?

CT: He didn't. He worked on it. He did...the water...because he fished, oysters and crabs and did all that stuff back then. And, my grandfather, he was on the water and then he was a--She was a waitress at the ... Hotel...Then, he was caretaker of the place for him.

[It seems as if there was another person in the room adding information, but the conversation was inaudible.]

BC: Oh, okay. So, working on the water, at that time, he could--It wasn't just a seasonal thing because he did different things for different--

CT: Different seasons.

BC: Different seasons. So, he had money all year around, and it wasn't the kind of restrictions that are on now.

CT: No.

BC: So, he made a good living off the water.

CT: Yeah. So far as I know of. I mean, yes.

BC: Okay. Did you husband work on the water, too?

CT: Travers up in the water, partly, but not--I guess--I mean, I don't know about that because he worked on the water for awhile. Then, he got the job on the Base...And, he had...in no time before...As a child, he lived -- they lived on Drayden. He worked on the farm. He worked on the farm and the water, I imagine. I mean, he worked the farm anyway.

BC: Okay. Now, the torpedo Base, you said that base a good thing because it brought more jobs down--

CT: Yeah.

BC: In this section of the county. But, did it have any kind of impact on your family? Did any of them work there?

CT: No. No. Uncle worked there, but he...then he was transferred, and that closed down and he was transferred over to Pax River Base.

BC: So, how long was the torpedo Base here?

CT: Oh, that torpedo Base was here [pause] at least 10 years or more.

BC: Okay.

CT: At least 10 years or more.

BC: Did it employ a lot of people from this area?

CT: From all around the state come to this area. Yeah. And, it brought a lot of women to do day's work, especially in the houses that was occupied. It employed quite a few people. Yeah.

BC: So, when the torpedo Base was here, when it first came down, they built houses--

CT: Houses.

BC: Okay. And because of that, it was a lot of work for the people --

CT: Yeah.

BC: On the Island and Piney Point.

CT: That's right. All throughout the county, people going down here. And then, when the torpedo Base closed, then the Navy moved their people down there. A lot of them went over to Patuxent River to work. And, that's where you have that Base --Morris Blackwell and Richard Jones. I don't know who else. The guy from Valley Lee ... Mr. Fred Barnes. I don't know. Quite a few of them went, I mean.

BC: At the torpedo Base.

CT: Down this way...

BC: To work.

CT: To work. I mean, you know. A lot of them left from over here and went over there.

BC: Okay. Now, let me ask you questions about the Harry Lundeberg School. Do you remember what year that opened? About what year? You don't have to be exact.

CT: Must have been '60, I mean '70. 1968. '67, '68. I mean '67 or '68.

BC: Okay. So when -- that has brought a lot of activity down--

CT: It could have been 1965.

BC: The late '60's.

CT: In the late 60's. Yeah. I think the late '60's. That brought a lot of work here, and everything. And then, it brought a lot of work in the county because, you see, a lot of people came down to work here to these houses and now there were different people living on the Base, a lot of them transferred to the Base. A lot of...But when that Lundeberg School, that opened up another.

BC: So, once the torpedo Base left, then a lot of the houses were empty.

CT: A few of them were. Yeah.

BC: But when Lundeberg School took over where the torpedo Base was, then they brought some of their own people down.

CT: Yeah. Some people came down.

BC: Okay. And, they moved into the houses and that gave more work for--

CT: Yeah. They moved to a few of them, but then they built these other houses themselves, and they built a lot of homes...stayed over there because they build up on that. I mean, they gave more of their...over their land.

BC: Still asking questions about the Base. So because that brought in a lot more work, especially for this part of the county, the Base is a good thing.

CT: I would say so. Yeah.

BC: Do you know of any resentment against Lundeberg School for one reason or another?

You know, maybe, because of the Base, there's more crime in this section of the county

or because of the Lundeberg School, there are more accidents because of the upgraders who get drunk and drive and have more accidents down in the county? Do you have any negative feelings about this?

CT: No. I don't have any negative feelings about this because I don't see--I mean, I think it helped the county, myself.

BC: Okay. Well, I think that ends our interview.

CT: [laughter]

BC: Okay.

CT: I'll tell you, it makes you think.

BC: I wanted to get a good feeling about, how life was down here as far as working on the water. Oh, I know. No, the interview is not over. I wanted to ask about the weather. Now, you said in '33, you remember what hurricane that was?

CT: In '33, was that the hurricane? And, then come Hazel. In '33 was the flood.

BC: The flood? Oh, it wasn't a hurricane?

CT: Now, '33 I think was the flood.

BC: Okay.

CT: Or it was a hurricane, too. I don't know if it was a hurricane with the flood or what, but I think the second thing was...At first, they claimed it was a flood. And then, the second thing that came up, they said it was a hurricane. I think that's the way it was.

BC: But now, you said the church--

CT: In '33, that's when the houses went. That was the flood. That's when the houses went, the church went, and--

BC: The Bridge?

CT: The Bridge.

BC: About how many houses?

CT: Oh, God. It was two and three down the Island.

BC: Down to the lower end of the Island?

CT: Yeah. And, the...went. Miss Annie's was all tore up...Miss Annie Maddox. Ours was all tore up.

BC: This one here? In this spot?

CT: Yes. In this spot over here. And, Mama's was all tore up over there...Them two trailers up there. And, the houses on both sides. It was all messed up all over. All this part of the Island was a mess. And down further because, Miss Mary Ann...It was, I mean, the Island was almost --especially from here down to the Catholic Church...just, I mean, like you would say--

BC: Under water?

CT: Yeah. And then, down further, down on the Island ... was under water. Those houses down there went, especially the Morris. I think it was Morris. '33...

BC: Okay.

CT: And then, Hazel tore up a lot. I think after Hazel, that's when we had the flood in '33. Then came, I think they next day, they call them hurricanes. You know how they change things from one day to the other. And, I think the next thing that happened was they thought it was a hurricane. And, that was Hazel. And, that was in--

BC: The early '50's, wasn't it? Okay. Now, how often do you remember having to leave the Island because of the bad weather? Or, you were told to leave. Some people may leave because they just didn't want to go through it, but -- how many times were told to leave

because it was dangerous?

CT: Oh, we've been told quite a few times. We were told that quite a few times.

Sometimes...I mean. Well, when you see water coming up over the bridge like it did the other day, and it's not as bad coming over here as it is up further up because when it comes up further up, then cars can't get through. And so, and then...So, that's when we usually. Other than that...

BC: So, about how many times have you actually left the Island because of the weather?

CT: What you mean from in my life or what?

BC: Yeah. In your lifetime.

CT: Oh golly. Well, I say about maybe 10 times.

BC: About 10 times you had to leave because--

CT: Maybe nine. It might not be that many.

BC: But the worse one that you can remember was in '33?

CT: The worst one I can remember was '33. That was on the water line.

BC: But, the other times, it was some water but mostly the wind and?

CT: Yeah.

BC: Okay. Has, the weather, has it ruined anything since '33? Have you lost your house or anything because of the weather?

CT: Yes. Because in '33 and then in, we lost. How many times? Three times, Joan? I mean, we haven't lost the house, but we lost a lot of food and flooring and all that sort of stuff. Oh gosh. I've had water coming in...When Hazel come along, when Dolly? I don't know. We lost quite a bit of stuff..

[The other person in the room contributes information which is inaudible.]

BC: Oh, okay. The Red Cross came in.

CT: The Red Cross came in.

Female Voice: That was in '84.

BC: That was in 1984 because of--What was it, a hurricane that came through?

CT: That was another flood.

Female Voice: ...came after the same flood...

CT: Because one time they'll say it's a flood and the next time, they say it's a hurricane.

Really, it was a flood or it was a hurricane. We've been under water, I guess, about at least--Well, it has come. When we had to get out of the house, it came in at least six times, five or six times, but it didn't do so much, you know--I mean, we'd lose carpeting and stuff like that, but three times we had to be living in a bag. We had to put all the flooring, I think, back, this and that. And '33, that's when the water was up. Inside.

BC: About 4 feet?

CT: At least 4 feet inside our house.

BC: Oh goodness. Yes. And, that was about the same all down the area that it was flooded: about 4 feet inside of a house is about how much water?

CT: Down the lower end in different places, I think it was--

BC: It may have been more?

CT: Yeah. It may have been more. In the flood, it was way up there. It was up to your neck. When I was fighting it, we went from here after that, went in trailers and was up in there when it rose even higher, and, more or less, had to get out of the way.

BC: But you always come back.

CT: Yeah. Oh yeah. No other place like home! [laughter] No place like home.

BC: Okay. Okay. Well, that will conclude our interview. [laughter]

BC: The biographical data information on Catherine Naomi Blackwell Travers.

Address: PO Box 39 or 16874 Piney Point Road

Piney Point, Maryland 20674

Telephone #: 994-2517

Date of Birth: May 23, 1919

Place of Birth: St. George's Island, Maryland

Her education: She went to the Island School, the Island Elementary School and to Piney Point Elementary School. She then went to Banneker High School and later, to Jarboesville High School.

[Employment]: She worked as a domestic and for 18 and a half years, she was in the Housekeeping Department at the Lundeberg School. She retired from there in 1985.

Her husband's name was John Cornelius Travers. Her mother's parents were Mary Catherine Thompson Blackwell and Henderson Samuel Blackwell. She does not remember her paternal grandparents. Her mother's name was Hattie Mae Blackwell Clayton and her father's name was Ross Edward Clayton. Her siblings are: She is the oldest. Next is Floyd Clayton, then Ralph Clayton and Betty Clayton Mason. Her children are Bill, Henderson, Joyce and Ronnie Blackwell and Evangelyn Blackwell who is deceased. Her [grand]children are Bill's one child, Terrell. Henderson's children are Robbie, Joyce, Crystal, Wayne, Valerie, Kathy, Marvin and Jamie. He also has other

children, Brenda, Lisa, Karen and Michael. Joyce's children -- Joyce's two children are Judy and Billy. Ronnie does not have any children, and Evangelyn's children are Marsha, Darrell and Jarrell.

That ends the biographic data on Catherine Blackwell Travers.

[End of Side 2, Tape 1 of 1]

[The tape continues for about twelve more minutes with the other extraneous interview.]