

Unified Committee for Afro-American Contributions
Oral History Documentation Project

PHILIP H. SCRIBER, SR.

Interviewed by Brenda Coates
October 28, 1996

At his home in Hollywood Maryland
Logged by Tania Jordon on December 12, 2007

A verbatim transcript is available
Original format is two cassette tapes
1 hour, 46 minutes, 28 seconds

Audio CD 1 of 2

Track 01

00:00 Where did you live and where were you born? He was born on a farm on what was formerly the Sotterly Plantation. The house was over 90 years old. His father was a share cropper so they never owned any land. He currently lives in a bungalow dwelling in Hollywood. It is located off Old Route 235 behind what was the Hollywood Elementary School. The house has three bedrooms and a full basement. He built the house in 1990.

2:00 How did your family live? They had adequate food but the living conditions were deplorable as it was with everyone. His father did the best he could with what he had. There were 15 children, but they did not all live in the house at the same time. He had a couple of nephews that were older than he was. His living conditions were about average. It was a step above the lowest.

90 to 95% of what they ate was raised on the farm. On Saturdays they would go to the store (about miles away) and buy the necessary things such as; vinegar, sugar, salt, pepper and coffee. If you didn't grow it, you didn't eat. His mother was a housewife.

Track 02

4:55 What is your earliest memory? He remembers his mother. He was born in 1928 and she passed away in 1935. He was in school but he remembers quite a few spankings she gave us. His father was a strict disciplinarian but he spent most of his time working so they could eat. After his mother died the oldest girls took over the cooking, cleaning, and all the house chores.

6:15 What church did your family attend? St. John's in Hollywood.

6:20 Did you take family trips as a child? “No they couldn’t afford it. Back then, we didn’t have an automobile. Wherever we went, we walked.”

6:45 Did you participate in community activities? No

7:05 Do you think that times were better then than they are now? “By no means, there was a lot more love, respect, and understanding back then. But beyond that, forget it”.

Track 03

7:28 What were your family’s health concerns? There were a couple of doctors around. They had a couple of doctor who made house calls. “My mother suffered with hypertension. That carried her away at an early age. She died when she was 49. They had home remedies that seemed to suffice. His father would give them a couple of drops kerosene on some sugar for colds. He also gave them cod liver and castor oil. They were given three sixes. His mother would use a plant that looked like tobacco to reduce swelling. She would boil the plant and saturated a cloth in the liquor and put in on the body part that was swollen. They would also use sassafras root and boil it to make sassafras tea.

There was only one hospital (St. Mary’s Hospital) were everybody would go. The accommodations were limited. There was only one room for the blacks. The room had two or three beds. No matter what ailment you had you were put in the same room (men, women, and children). It was like that until the late 1950’s when they built a new hospital

Track 04

12:20 Do you remember how senior citizens were treated? They stayed at home. The kids took care of their parents and grandparents. There was no other place for them to go.

13:05 How did black folks get new/information when you were growing up? In 1935 the Times Herald would be delivered by a man from Leonardtown named John Badell. He delivered them once per day. At the time the papers were three cents. He had a route from Leonardtown to Hollywood. He delivered them in his automobile. They had battery operated radios for news. In the early 1930’s most households didn’t have a radio. Most of the news was by word of mouth. One the weekends, the head of the household would go to the general store and discuss the news.

Track 05

- 16:50 What kind of games did you play as a child? They made their own homemade wagons. They weren't able to buy their own toys. They would get toys at Christmas that would be broken within a few weeks.
- 17:40 Describe your relationship with your siblings? "We were a very close knit family. We got along good."
- 18:10 What did you like to do the most when you were a child? He liked to go to the water and fish and catch crabs. They fished and crabbed for survival. He only lived about three minutes from the water.
- 18:40 What chores did you have as a child? We had daily chores. They raised their own chickens and hogs. Everyday after school that would do chores that would help them get started the next day. They would feed the chickens, fill the water buckets, and chop wood for kindling.

Track 06

- 19:56 How did your parents treat you? His mother died when he was seven and his father remarried when he was nine. He married Vernon Coates grandmother. He got disciplined for being mischievous. His father was very strict. His father never sat down and talked to you. He always physically disciplined him "with whatever he could get his hands on." A stick of wood or tobacco sticks. He would only do it in a rage of anger. In those days, parents didn't sit down to talk to kids about the things they did wrong.

Track 07

- 23:16 Do you feel that your parents prepared you well for life? "I feel he did the best he could do with what he had to do it with." I wanted to go further in school, but none of the children that stayed home had a high school education. His father told them that he didn't go to school so you don't need to go. The only reason they went to school at that time was because they passed a law that everybody had to go to school to get a basic education. He wouldn't let his three oldest brothers and oldest sister go to school. They did not pass the law for mandatory schooling until 1922 or 1923. "As far as he was concerned, you didn't need an education."

Track 08

- 25:50 Tell me about your formal schooling? How did you get to school? He went to Phyllis Wheatley Elementary School in Hollywood. The building is currently a private dwelling on the road to Sotterly. It is the large building on the right near Lorain's house. It looks like a house but it was a two room school house when he went to school. It taught students from the 1st to the 7th grade. There were approximately 30 to 35 students at one time. The average class was

five to seven kids. They had two teachers. One taught 1st through 3rd grades and the other taught 4th through 7th.

In the morning the teacher would instruct the 1st grade class while the others did their work, then she would instruct the next grade on another subject, etc. The teachers had a heavy job to maintain the kids and teach three grades with several different subjects at the same time. He walked a total of seven miles round trip to school and home.

- 30:15 Who were your favorite Teachers? What was your favorite subject in school?
His favorite teacher was Miss Estelle Bell from Frederick, Maryland. She was a very sweet teacher. She taught 1st through 3rd grade. Henry Lee taught 4th through 7th. He was from Stevensville on the Eastern Shore. Alice Freeman Young taught him for one year and Brent Thompson taught him for two years. His favorite subject was world history. He also liked math.

Track 09

- 31:48 What did you dream of becoming as an adult? “There was never anyone to motivate me, so I never had any desire to be anything in particular. The only role models they had in those days were Joe Louis. Everybody wanted to become a boxer.

- 34:10 As a teenage, where did your parents approve of you going? We would go to visit other kids in the neighborhood. “You had to walk everywhere and you could only walk so far.” You had to be back home by sundown.

Track 10

- 35:37 What was it like when you first went out on your own? When he left home he went into the Army for eight years. He went in the Army to get away from home. All of the rest of the kids had left home and he was the only one left at home with his father. He father was about to stop share cropping. He lied about his age to get a social security card to work on the base. He was shipped to New Orleans, LA. That was where he had his first experience of being called a “Nigga” to his face. He was getting ready to get on a train in New Orleans in his military uniform and he was getting one first when a white man told him, “get back Nigga, where the hell do you think you’re going.”

The man who owned a grocery store near his house was nice. “As far the store owner was concerned, a man was a man. There was no difference in color.” Blacks and whites socialized together in that store. “He didn’t stand for no hankie panky.”

Segregation didn’t bother him when he was a child. It wasn’t until he became older that he realized that they were being treated different. We didn’t have any problems with hate groups.

Track 11

42:03 What was segregation like? What do you feel about the racial problem in the county? Racism is more deceiving now. Racism will never leave and it will always exist. It won't be as bad as it was. "As long as you keep a person uneducated, you can control him. It will cost you three times as much to take care of a person who is not educated. It cost \$25,000 to \$35,000 per year to incarcerate a man. If you spend \$8,000 to \$10,000 to educate the same man, he will do for himself. But when you deny him these things, putting him in jail will not solve the problem.

Track 12

46:54 His basic pay rate when he joined the service was \$50 per month. For what was available at the time, it was more money then what you get today. Wonder Bread was \$0.07 to \$0.09 per loaf.

48:20 What kind of work have you done to support yourself? He did construction work. He was a supervisor on Patuxent Naval Base until 1983. He has also done all types of work. He and his brother were one of the first blacks to work on the Rescue Squad in 1964. At the time Leonardtown and Hollywood (3rd & 6th District) were combined. They gave them a hard time. "He can recall one night when a white lady took sick and the ambulance was called and she didn't want them to touch her." They would act like the blacks wouldn't show up on the scene. They didn't want them there anyway. He is very community minded so that is why he joined the rescue squad. He is the only black on the County Fair Board. He is the general manager, but he is having problems because he is the only black person. They have been working on projects behind his back. He joined the rescue squad because they always say that blacks don't do anything. He tried to join the fire department, "but that was a no, no."

Track 13

54:19 When you first came home from the Army what were you doing? He was doing construction and seasonal work. He started out as a labor cleaner and took some class and worked his way up. He started on the base in 1956. He was making \$1.16 per hour. He built his first house on that salary. He is living in the third house he had built.

Track 14

56:35 How did you met your wife? He met his first wife (Hazel) when he was in the service. She was born in West Virginia but her parents were living here. He met her when he was home on leave from Korea. He met her in Leonardtown. They were married six months later. They were married on June 6, 1953. They had a

small wedding at Immaculate Heart of Mary Church. She was not Catholic. At the time you could not get married at the altar if you weren't Catholic. The priest at St. John's would not marry them because she wasn't Catholic. His best man and maid of honor were Alfred and Delores. They couldn't afford a honeymoon. He got married the second (Diane) time in 1983 by the Justice of the Peace. "It was a waste of money." They didn't have a honeymoon either.

59:58 What was your family life like? My son is in the military and I only get to see him once every two or three years. He is stationed in Alaska. His marriage has ordinary problems

1:01:30

What part has religion played in your life? He was born and raised a Catholic. His mother always preached to them to always remain a Catholic. Almost all of his siblings have stayed in the Catholic Church. There are a lot of deficiencies in the Catholic denomination based on what they preach. But there are problems in other denominations. "There is only one God, so I go to church, kneel and say my prayers and go from there."

Audio CD 2 of 2

Track 01

0:00 What community activities do you or have you participated in? He is on the County Fair Board, Christmas in April, Big Foot Hunt Club, Jolly Gents Club, Treasure for Lott. He had a Little League ball club.

2:00 How do you feel about life today in general in the County? "It is a lot different than it used to be. It is better. The living conditions are better. People are better. If the whites had maintained the feelings that they had towards us, we wouldn't be where we are. The majority of the people are sensible thinking people, the rest are idiots that we don't need anyway." After WWII, a lot of blacks left the south (Chicken Box Express) moved north for better places. If they had remained and had been educated they may have been better off.

Track 02

5:55 The quality of life is better for those that wanted it to be. There are certain percentages who don't want a better life. Back in the old days people worked together and loved each other. They didn't have agencies to help people. People

would help each other. From Christmas to New Years no one did any work. They spent the whole holiday socializing. They made homemade cakes and root beer. In those days you didn't have the money, but you had the love.

Track 03

11:10 Do you think the teenagers are different now? They have so much leisure time and they don't appreciate anything. They always want something. His wife purchased a new car for his son. That caused problems his marriage.

Track 04

15:18 So many parents today are putting themselves in financial difficulty trying to give their children what they want. Parents need to put some kind of control and restraints on their children.

Track 05

18:14 How do you feel about living in the county? He never liked metropolitan living. "I'm a plain ole' country boy, I don't like congested living." In the cities now, you are a prisoner in you own home. Before he got married the second time, most of the time he never locked his doors. Now he can be outside working and his wife locks the door. She grew up in the city. That is the difference between yester year and today.

Track 06

20:50 Do you believe there is a difference between people who were born in the county and people who were raised other place but now live in the county? Yes because were you are born, your traits will follow you. Most of the majorities of the people follow what they enjoy.

You could probably distinguish if they were raised in the county or came from some other place. He doesn't socialize with a lot people who weren't raised in the county.

He associates with people from all over the county.

Track 07

24:40 What do you feel has the biggest changes in this county in your lifetime? The influx of people. The standard of living is higher.

25:35 What are you feelings about the Navy Base? Where any of your people moved off of their land to make room for the Navy Base. His stepmother lost her land and she was hostile about the move. "Just about everybody who lived down there

at the time it took place was hostile. A lot of her friends and associates still living down there were forced to leave. Most of the elderly ones moved to other areas of the county. The younger ones moved to the city.

26:55 What are your feels about the changes that are happening on the base now?
“Personally, I welcome it, it going to improve your living conditions. However, other problems will follow the changes such as an increase in crime. The only unfortunate thing about it is that the un-educated will not benefit because all the jobs are high tech. “You’ve got to get your education.” “Overall it’s an asset to the county.” The new develops are more expensive and the property taxes are increasing.

Track 08

30:20 What do you think of the direct that the county is going in today? Do you think that they will become more urban or rural? They are too far out to become urban. The county is isolated. Waldorf is quite a distant. It may change over a period of time.

32:10 How have you contributed to the county? He thinks he has contributed a lot to the county from volunteering and belonging to various committees. He has received a couple of letters of appreciation from the Christmas in April organization.

33:10 What do you consider is the most valuable thing you’ve ever had that you could not have done without in your lifetime? There are so many things that he is grateful for. He can’t pick out a particular one.

Track 09

34:59 Have you done everything in life that you wanted or planned do? “Pretty much so”.

36:00 If you could go back and change anything in you life would you? He guesses that we all would do a 180 in life if they had the opportunity.

37:00 What was life like for you? About 30 years ago he would go to his sister’s house for Thanksgiving. He has had a fulfilling life. He enjoyed the Jolly Gents Club. They had a lot of fun and enjoyed their trips.

Track 10

39:45 Biographical Information

Philip H. Scriber
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Hollywood, MD 20636

(301)373-2549

Date of interview 10/28/1996

DOB 3/4/1928 in Hollywood, MD

Education – Phyllis Wheatley Elementary

Received GED

Employment – Construction and Supervisor of the Supply Department at Patuxent Naval Base

Retired 4/8/1983

Marriages

1st Wife – Hazel Tapp Scriber

2nd Wife – Diane Banks Scriber

Maternal Grandparents - Alice Poke Lyles and Edward Lyles

Paternal Grandparents – unknown

Mother – Nettie Lyles Scriber

Father – James B. Scriber

Siblings (in birth order)

James Edward Scriber

Mary Benita Scriber Kelly

James Sanders Scriber

James Victor Scriber

Virginia Scriber Chappell

Stransberry Scriber

Clarence Scriber

Douglas Scriber

Anna Scriber Adams

Nettie Scriber Stevens

Estelle Scriber Collins

Frank Scriber

Savella Scriber Anderson

Crawford Scriber

Philip Scriber

Spencer Scriber

Children (grandchildren)

Philip Scriber, Jr. (Philip III and Steven)