

UNIFIED COMMITTEE FOR AFRO-AMERICAN CONTRIBUTIONS

Oral History Documentation Project
The St. Joseph Parish Housing Project

Vincena S. Dickerson
Mildred A. Gross
James A. Somerville

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[begin digital recording]

Michael McCauley: Introduction by Michael McCauley: This is Wednesday, May 27, 2009 and I'm speaking to Mildred Gross and Vincena Dickerson about the St. Joseph Parish Housing Program. [Deacon James A. Somerville, who arranged the meeting, was also present and contributed to the comments.] So, Ms. Dickerson I saw in the records that you were an officer of the St. Joseph Housing Project. How did you first get involved in that?

Vincena Dickerson Well, I got involved in it through my parents, I guess. And at that time I was on spring break and so he was asking me to go sometimes, "We are having a meeting, and I want you to go with me," he said, "because sometimes," he said, "my vision is not good and I need somebody to help me." And I said, "Ok," just like that and so I would attend the meeting and take down the important things that were said.

MM And the --. Mrs. Alice Marshall was the first secretary.

VD Yes.

MM And did you kind of work with her or take her place as things developed?

VD As things developed because most of the time she was busy in school and could not be there and I would take down notes for her.

MM One thing that I wondered about was how the people paid for the land up there at St. Joseph Park, because someone told me – it might have been Mrs. Carter – that, that Scanlon Herbert would come around like once a month, or even once a week and collect the money for the payments for the land.

VD True. That is true, and it was like a big family, one would look after the other one, and wherein in those days many of them could not read or write or, but they always had help, and it was very, very close, just like a big family. The leaders, they had leaders for carpentry work. They had people that would volunteer, free, to go and bring the materials in. They were doing away with Ft. Meade, some of the buildings there, and they would take the trucks up there and load it up with material and bring it back to Kavanagh Estates [?] and they would do to the best of their ability. And they had so much, so much help from the They really did. Because I can say this when it came to taxes and property time and everything, they gave them, you know, time. It's not like they were going to this foreclosure thing, they gave them time to come up with their share and everything like that. And it was not a nerve wracking situation. It was family. And Father Kavanagh, he was chief of staff, we called him...

MM Chief of staff?

VD Uh huh.

Mildred Gross He was a wonderful man.

VD Yes he was. And so everything just came along beautifully. And it was the first time some of them ever had a home you could call home, and it was great.

MM Your father [John T. Somerville] then, wasn't he one of the board members?

VD Yes he was. He was the one that mostly donated help because he was into roofing and spouting and he was one of the first ones in this county to do that. Yes, and so most of his material was half price. And then, when those who couldn't afford the half price, give it to them anyway. Would give it to them anyway.

MG Would give it to them anyway.

VD So it was really like a big family, brothers and sisters. Children would come in and help. They didn't pass by, "See you later." "What can we do? What am I going to do today?" And Deacon Somerville can tell you, his father made many a trip for to bring that material. And nobody didn't holler, "Who's paying for gas, who's doing this?" No, we all pitched in. Yeah, it was great.

MM I wondered what, what gave Scanlon Herbert his motivation to come around every week, like that must have really eaten into his own time and his own projects?

VD Well he would get off the bus, he would make his rounds, getting the kids to school and everything. He would return, he would go to this ones house and sit down and discuss things, you know, what you're able to donate, what you're able to give and everything. And it was just a beautiful situation, there was no arguments there. And then he would put it down on the books, "You gave so much toward taxes and this, that, and the other. It wasn't that, "I can't do it now, you just have to get it the best way you can." It wasn't that kind of notion, no. "Well, we're doing the best we can." And Mr. Scanlon Herbert with his patience and everything, he would go around and see and everything, take the

money, what he could collect, from this pew, I call it, to the bank and the bank really – it was just so much different than what it is now. People were really

MM Which bank did they use, do you remember?

VD Was it, I think it was County Trust, the bank on the corner.

James Somerville I believe

VD County Trust of St. Mary's.

MM It's not around anymore.

VD No it isn't.

MM I saw where your, it seemed like your father and Scanlon Herbert and McKinley Herbert, that they together, because the money to buy the land didn't come down from the Archdiocese on time and the contract was running out and it seemed like they used their own money to purchase the land.

VD Yes.

MM And then two months later, when the money did come down, they turned around and sold it to the St. Joseph Project.

VD Yes.

MM So that was really an act of faith for them to put that kind of, their money into it.

VD It was. You see at that time people trusted each other because it was just like somebody had come down from heaven and said, "You're going to have a home," you know, and everybody pitched in. And that's the way it went and whether they had the money to get roofing and spouting, my father, when I was around, I pretty much didn't even have my license, and I had to go with one of his workers - you remember Edward Young, Ed Young?

JS Ed Young, yeah.

MG My lord! He was

VD And Franklin Hebb? So it was right up on M St., Northwest, I'll never forget, spouting and roofing, but he [her father] said to me, because I was always following behind his steps everywhere he'd go, and so he said, "Well, she'll go up there with you and show you all how to get there. [laughter] And so Ed couldn't drive, Franklin could drive, you know, tractors and things on the farm and everything, so when we got up there to Bryantown, coming down that hill on the old [Rte.] Five road, and that was the first light, you know, we had, [laughter] so he stopped at the red light, and so, when the light turned green, so he said, "Alright, I'm not going through there." [laughter].

JS He say, "The others are going through that." [laughter] [Helen Somerville, Deacon James' wife enters the room briefly to say that she has prepared lunch, but she has to go out for a while.]

VD And so, Ed couldn't drive, of course me, I was driving around the house and everything you know like that, and so I say, "For heavens sake, Franklin, you have to drive." "I'll have to call to get somebody to come up here and get you all." [laughter]

MM Why didn't he want to go through the light?

VD He was just, he had never been that far outside of St. Mary's County.

MG Really, you should be writing a book about her, because Franklin was kind of like - his elevator wasn't going all the way up. Anyway, Vin [Vincena Dickerson] always took care of him. He was a nice man, but he just didn't have everything about him. Every little something new would frighten him so bad. And Vin would say to him, "No indeed, come on Franklin, you're going with me, you're going to go with me." And you know,

eventually he started doing real good. But I remember him well. You took him right into your house.

VD Yes, and so I said, I'll have to drive. And he say, "Turn this car around, we're going back." I said, ok, I'll have to go way up there to turn around, so I kept right on going and so we went to the roofing and spouting place and got the material and came on back. We had to have those things you put around the spout, what you call those? I don't know.

JS I know what you're talking about.

MM Ferrules or spikes and ferrules?

VD It was about two boxes of them. They had around 200 of them or something like that in a box, you know, and at that time, I don't know what you call them. What you say?

JS I was thinking, I was going to say, was it the things that go across that you strap the, fasten the tin down?

VD Exactly. So then we came on back and didn't have to worry about anymore lights. We came on in St. Mary's and then he would drive. But he was just, he had never been out of St. Mary's County. Uh uhh. And that red light

MG What about that time you took him down to Lexington Park for the first time?

VD Yeah, for the first time.

MM Oh my gosh!

VD But, you know, kids, I say they are beautiful, they are wonderful. That's why I say, I know he was loading the truck with wood. Uncle [?] was running the saw mill, and he was loading it to take the wood to somebody and, course me into everything, and he was throwing it on and I was on the outside, throwing it off on the other side. [laughter]. Me and my brother, John T. And so my father came outside, he said, "Franklin, you haven't

filled the truck up yet with wood?” just like that, and, so he said, “Darn.” And he looked and seen all the wood laying on this side of the truck. [laughter]

MG You just had the devilment.

VD But that’s the way this whole situation was in this organization here. Everybody --. Nobody fought, nobody got angry. You make a mistake and they’ll check it and we’ll find out where the error was. And the people were beautiful: Scanlon Herbert, Mr. Harry Fenwick, Mr. Johnson, oh, there was many a one. They worked hard to get Fr. Kavanagh to organize the place there

MM There must have been some people who got left out.

VD Well, when they got out of land, they just couldn’t come in. They only have, there was just, I’ll never forget, I think it was just Mr. Holt, Mr. Holt’s farm, Mrs. Marshall’s farm, and who was it, that man, Mr. Dorsey, where they had this place, you know, where they have open house there, she donated a lot.

MM Summerseat?

VD Yeah. She donated a lot.

MM I noticed in this booklet, one of the Barrack’s houses it says went to a Dickerson over at Oakley.

VD Oh, that was, um, uh.

JS Was it George? No.

MG Aubrey?

VD George, no. It was - not Aubrey.

JS No, no.

VD No, it was, what was his name?

JS Herman?

MD No, you know the little short man.

JS Ok, short man, Dickerson Collins?

VD Dickerson Collins farm, that they put a house there, one of his sons or somebody. I don't know what his first name was, but anyway he built the house there after the material came from ..., and all.

MM That was the name of the owner of the farm, was Dickerson?

VD Dickerson Collins, I think. They called him Dick.

JS No, Endicott, no wait a while, let me think a minute. The Collins farm, I'm just trying to think now. I'm going to say

MG You know the woman lived on the corner, what was her name, Mrs. Branson?

JS Maggie Branson.

MG Maggie Branson.

JS Maggie Branson.

MM Because in here he just says, "Mr. and Mrs. Dickerson at Oakley."

VD Oakley, they call that Oakley? I don't know of any Dickersons that live in Oakley.

JS In Avenue.

VD In Avenue.

MM Oh, yeah? Maybe he means [?]. So his first name is what?

VD There are so many Dickersons down there it's hard to tell. My husband's people, they were all Dickersons, and seems like to me they all were related, too. Francis Dickerson and Collins. They owned the whole waterfront down there, you might as well say.

MM Do you think that house is still standing?

VD Well, it, it's - I don't know if it's Collins' house, but the Dickerson's house, if it's George. Did they give any first name?

MM No, they didn't give the first name. It just said two adults and five children.

VD No that wasn't Ms. Betty. She didn't have that many kids.

JS No.

MM Maybe she didn't have that many yet.

VD Maybe, maybe so at that time.

MM Her name was Betty?

VD Her name was --. They called her Betty, but her right name was Elizabeth. But her name was Betty and she was a very dignified lady. Miss Betty, yea, and her husband's name was Albert Dickerson and they lived right on the waterfront at the end of Avenue. But Oakley is up

JS Well listen, I was wondering, where Mary lived, was that ah

VD Mary lived right beside; she built right in front of Miss Betty.

JS But I mean that wasn't no barrack home, because she and Joe they were young, probably just starting out.

VD That might have been their house.

JS That's what I was thinking, it could have been their house. Mary and Joe Dickerson.

VD I don't know for sure.

JS I don't know for sure, but I would soon think to be a Dickerson it would be. Or Herman, no Herman, he was up here on Sunnyside Rd.

VD That was Aubrey. Aubrey was on Sunnyside, but all of them when they got married lived at Ms. Betty's first, before they got started on their own. They were right down the line on both sides and they call it Dickerson Lane.

JS It could have been Herman, it could have been George, it could have been Shine.

VD Shine, Aloysius, but it couldn't have been Paul because when my father took lumber down there for me to build a house. I said no way. [laughter] He said I got to take all this stuff back up the highway, she done changed her mind. But I never did like the water.

MM Who would still be, live down there now?

VD Well, that still lives down there, they still have many Dickersons. It's a lane, it's a lane about as far as from here up to Third Base [a nearby country store], isn't it?

MM I think I was down there once, but who would be living down there, do you know any name of any person that would be ...?

VD Aloysius, let me see, Elizabeth Dickerson that married Aloysius Dickerson, Mary and Joe Dickerson.

MM They're still down there?

MD What Earl's wife's name?

VD All of them's still down there. Either the husband's dead or the wife's dead, but they're still Dickersons. Louise Dickerson, she married Herman Dickerson, Mary Dickerson who married Joe Dickerson, the other one married George Dickerson, and Shine, he married Estelle Hebb, but he moved out, and, gosh, it goes around, too, Rita Purnell Frederick. But it's all Dickersons, you might as well say, and that's why the name, Dickerson Lane.

MM Ok, well, Ms. Gross, what do you remember about it? What stays with you about your family getting this house?

MG What stays with me is the house that was built for us, and we were six of us, six children, and we were just as happy about that as you could be. And it was just so nice because we were all together. And I think it was near Christmas when they finished up, you know finished building and all. And we walked about a block or so down and you picked your own running cedar and your own Christmas tree and all. We had our first Christmas there in that house, and we popped pop corn and put on the tree, and, we were, you know, we were just as happy go lucky. I can't explain to you how happy we were as a family. And we got a television about two or three years after we moved in there. And you couldn't turn it on during the day. Daddy said, "Oh no, no, you can look at it after you finish your homework. And I'll never forget, it was batman, was it Batman, Long Ranger, or one of them fellows. And we would do all our work just to be able to go in there, sit down, and watch that television. Oh my God! But if you didn't do your work, you didn't get to watch television. You just had to go to bed. But sometimes I just wish it was like that right now, but I guess it will never be. But I appreciate all the people that helped us. Like I said, I was a little girl, but I remember Vincena's father, Mr. Johnny, I called him Mr. Johnny, and he would come by and check on us every day just about. And just people, we always had company. The people would always stop by and come in and see you and Momma was always at the stove it seems like, cooking. And you know we used to have a wood stove in the kitchen, you know, for to cook, and we never got hot. Now you can't, I mean [laughter], if it gets up to sixty degrees everybody's

complaining. We never complained about the heat, that's a funny thing. Never bothered us.

MM Even in the summertime?

MG No, it didn't bother us, no, unh unh.

VD But you know that's the way Kavanagh turned out to be. The people, they were so lucky and glad to have a home.

MG It was, It really was.

VD I'm telling you. It was beautiful, and then they had the rec center there and all. They used to have a ball diamond there.

MM And a skating rink.

MG Yes, a skating rink, oh my! [loud exclamations]

VD Skating rink, we used to go there [laughter]

MG I used to get my work done so I could go to that skating rink. And you go in there and get your size skates that you want and go round and around and around. That was, oh that was a thrill.

VD It was so beautiful when Fr. Kavanagh opened it up with a Mass on the grounds near the statue.

MG And I never forget Ms. Gertie, Mr. Scanlon's wife, used to sit in there and sell the skates to you, get you a pair of skates, rent you a pair of skates. What was it ten cents, fifteen cents? [laughter] But it was, it just was so much fun. I mean, that's what you did for fun, and it was really nice.

VD Kavanagh organization, Kavanagh opened up a many a door.

MG Yes, yes, yes he did.

- MM Ah, two things that you said, ok, did they have a grand opening that you remember?
- VD A Mass.
- MM A Mass in the park, the park where the St. Joseph statue is?
- MG A fish fry, they had a fish fry, remember, a fish fry..
- VD Yeah, right.
- MG [laughter] I don't know where they got the fish from, but I think somebody said, somebody called. They had this cookout thing, not a barbecue, but stones, and then they had this big frying pan, a great big round frying pan, and they just fried fish all day long, all day.
- VD And they had things for grown-ups, bingo and everything.
- MG Oh yea, I remember that, we were all over there in the park. Now to tell you when it was, I can't tell you that now. I don't remember that. But I remember that fish. [laughter]
- MM What kind of circumstances did your family have before you moved into that house over there on Sunnyside?
- MG Well, my father, he believed in work, he used to, what they call it, he was a fisherman, really. They called it hauling, seine hauling, hauling.
- MM Seine nets?
- MG Something like that. And he would go out and catch fish or whatever, and they would sell them. So one particular day, I would, we would go down to meet him to bring it home, you know, because he would stay the whole week. And this particular Saturday they had caught all these fish. Had this big net, oh it was bigger than this house. And it was full of fish and everybody was selling great and I thought to myself, why is everybody getting excited about catching fish. They were selling the fresh fish to the

people. And, of course, when they paid daddy, you know that was, in those days that was big time. And my mother would go and get me a dress. My cousin, she used to live with us, get us a dress just alike. And we'd go to church with it. I mean just --. So many things happened and we all used to pitch in and did the best we could. Now there were some weeks when he couldn't, you know, he wasn't making anything.

MM The fish weren't there.

MG Right, but you know my mother used to say all the time, if you've got salt and sugar and flour in your house, you could cook, you could cook. [laughter] She would make us what they called a bannock bread, a big round piece of bread. It wasn't a biscuit, but it was a big piece of bread.

JS Size of a

MG Yeah

MM What did you call it?

MG She used to call it bannock, bannock bread.

MM How do you spell that?

MG I don't even know, bannock, bann....

MM O-C-K?

MG Something like that.

MM I never heard that term.

MG That bread used to be a great big, round piece of bread and you didn't cut it, you broke it off, see, cause Momma said you can't use a knife on bread because it make it raw inside. Now, I mean this is what she said. And we used to break off pieces. Momma used to break it, give this one that piece, another one a piece. That was the best.

MM So the whole thing would be put on the table.

MG Oh yeah, oh yeah.

MM And then you'd break off pieces. Was it soft or hard?

MG No, it was just like a biscuit really, but, you know, and you'd put jelly on it. At that time we used to have apple butter, used to use apple butter quite a bit. My mother used to make it. And we were just as happy. If you had a hot dog on a Sunday, oh my God, oh, oh, oh, Lord, I mean you had a dinner! [laughter]. A hot dog? Oh my goodness. Now you serve a hot dog and they look at it like

VD I know I used to go up to Deacon Somerville's house, and Catherine [James Somerville's sister], we were very good friends, very, good close cousins, too. And up at Miss Susie's, we would go in the other room and straighten it up, straighten it up and everything, and so she would holler in the kitchen, "Open the oven, let's see if the bread's done." "Yes, M'am." We done already ate about half of it. She came out in the kitchen, went over, "Where - don't tell me you all ate it. [laughter] We were having it for dinner and you sitting here eating up all the bread." That's all we wanted was the biscuits. [laughter]

MG That's not as bad as Daddy, at Christmas time he would, every week he would buy a bag of candy or apple or whatever and put it in this trunk that was at the foot of the bed.

MM To save it.

MG Yeah, for Christmas, had a lock on it and everything. Old Daddy would come in there and take the key and unlock it and put that little bag of candy. So we got real smart, we went to the back of it and took the board off it [laughter]. I mean, you know, and had all the candy we wanted. We would take a little bit out of each bag [laughter] and we had ourselves a ball. Well, when Christmas came around, and he opened that trunk up all the

way, and he going to take out the . . . , and he saw that candy, half of that candy missing, I don't need to tell you all what happened. I mean, and you think, when you're a kid, how do you think of all those things? Because my cousin was living with us and so I couldn't go to school that day. Something was wrong and I didn't go to school, so we had our lunches. Momma used to pack a little, one sandwich and something or another in a little brown bag, and so somebody had come by and gave all of us a fifty cent piece. Oh man, you had money then. So I wasn't satisfied, I wanted her fifty cents. [laughter] So I stole it and guess where I put it at, inside the bread inside of my sandwich. [laughter]. So look, she's smart, she said to me, "Let me search you." She patted me all down and everything, "Take your shoes off, I know you got Take them socks off." I took off everything just as nice and let her see I didn't have.... "I don't have, I don't have it." And she looked around, "Somebody's got my fifty cent piece." Well look, I had it between the two slices of bread, and wrapped it right up with paper, I mean we had old wax paper then, wax paper, put it back in the bag and took it on to school, and when I got to school, I had a fifty cent piece, child, you couldn't tell me nothing. But I think about that thing all the time. I stole that fifty cents, that was robbed.

MM It's still on your conscience.

MG It's still, it's still, but you know that was, I don't know, fifty years or better, but I did tell her about it, I did tell her. I told her, yeah, I said I owe you fifty cents and you'll never go broke. She laughed, she said to this day she tried to figure out what happened to that fifty cents. But she searched all of us.

MM Do you remember, what was the house like before you moved over to the new house, over there in Sunnyside?

MG Oh, the first house, where I was born, it was just a regular house. My grandmother, it was my grandmother's house. I really don't even remember who it belonged to, but I know they had to pay rent. I think the rent was like twenty-five dollars a month or twenty dollars a month and it was my mother and my father and maybe one, two, I guess about three children at that time and the uncles, my mother's brothers, they all lived there, too. And the house was kind of crowded, it was overcrowded, I put it that way. So Momma used to always say, "Oh, I would love to have a house, I would love to have a house." So finally, Fr. Kavanagh came by, they talked it over, and next thing I knew, they were building the house. And Daddy got the land from her [VD's] father, Mr. Johnny, Mr. Johnny Somerville.

MM I saw the deed for it, it was fifty dollars.

MG Is that what it was? [laughter] I knew it wasn't very much. And, child, they built that house and my father, you know how you clear the land off and you got these great big stumps, you know big, and every day when he came home from work, he'd dig on them stumps, and he got every single one out that ground. I mean when they come out, they would be great big

MM Did he have a horse or something?

MG No, he did it himself. He did it himself with his axe and hoe, and different things, and cleared it up just as nice, and smoothed it down. He used to drink a lot, he was a very heavy drinker, but he always was a good provider. But when, after he started working in that house, taking care of that poor outside and all, he changed, he became a different man altogether. Yes he did, and of course he quit drinking. He never touched another drop. And it's amazing, you know, because then, you know if your father came in and he

was tasting or whatever, your mother said, “Ok, go in the room.” He would get loud and just out of But it just, it just, it was marvelous. I mean he worked hard, I do know that. That man worked very hard. And then every time he would get paid or something, he would go up and get us a little something, you know, and, you know, you just couldn’t tell us nothing, we were just literally living it up. I mean, had a nice house.

MM Did you go over there when they were working on the house?

MG Oh yeah, oh yeah, we, my mother went over there every day and my father. Yea, they went over there. And they cook over there and bring food and stuff for the men that were doing the work. Of course we were kids and got in the way and they’d say, “You all go ahead on, get out the way, get out of the way.” So then we would go down in the woods and play. And now you can’t pay me to go down in the woods. [laughter] Because I’m afraid of snakes. I go crazy if I see a snake. And then you were children, you didn’t even pay it no mind, just go on down there. But now I go, I walk out on the patio, I get nervous, I might see a snake or something crawling up on me.

VD You’re not by yourself.

JS Ok, let’s get onto the houses.

MG I got carried away.

JS I saw that Miss. Ella Hebb, and said that’s right, she was in one of those houses, too, on Morganza-Turner Rd., on that hill. Morganza-Turner Rd. that house on the hill.

VD You talking about Jack Dorsey Hebb, you talking about them?

JS No, Ms. Ella Hebb, in fact

MM She’s the one that played the accordion?

JS I don’t know, she probably did. I don’t really remember.

MM Mr. Mason said, “She played the ‘cordeen,’” he said.

JS I don’t know about that but she lived down there, let me see, you know where the project, the new project is being built now up on the Morganza-Turner Rd.

VD Yeah.

JS It’s on that last big hill, she had a house put up right on the right side, before you go down that bottom where the deep, the largest run is on that road. She was up on the hill before you go down into that bottom.

MM Was it past the road that hooks up to Kavanagh road?

JS Yes, it’s past that.

MM Past that, up towards Oraville?

JS Towards Oraville, that’s right. Her name was Ella, Miss Ella Hebb and she had --. Her daughter married, married a fellow [Bill Reed] from over Scrabbletown, Scrabbletown as I call it, that had a bunch of children, twenty some children.

MM Oh, I know who you mean, used to go to our church.

JS Right, right, right, right, well anyway, that’s right, because when he died, he was, I think he was, studying to become a Catholic or something.

MM He used to walk up to church.

JS Yes, he used to walk up to church.

MM That was about six miles.

JS That’s right.

VD He was from St. Joseph’s church?

JS No, he would walk to Mechanicsville church, because they lived over, as I called it, Scrabbletown by the road going down to

MM The crab house.

JS The crab house, yea., Copsy's crab house, on the road way back over there. But Ms. Ella Hebb and the girl, she had two granddaughters, there were two granddaughters living with her, I can't think of their names, but I recognize the face [from a picture in the booklet]. There were --. One of them married a Mr. Holt.

VD I know who you're talking about, but I can't remember, a Holt married one of them and he was a custodian over at the school at Oakville, Josephine Hebb, one named Margaret Hebb. They were named after their elderly relatives. Most of them were. Oh gracious, John Hebb.

MM Ella's daughter married

JS Granddaughter. This was her granddaughter. Miss Ella was raising her granddaughters. That house was built there for Ms. Ella, but her granddaughters were living with her and her daughter, to me, to the best I can remember, she lived either in Washington or Baltimore and worked, but she couldn't handle the two children, you know, and working. She could be more support to Ms. Ella with Ms. Ella raising the children and she'd be away and working and helping to finance, you know.

VD You know, they were some kin to me.

MM So it was one of the granddaughters who married the man down in Scrabbletown?

JS Yea, one of the granddaughters married, yea, the man down in Scrabbletown and that bunch of children. In fact, I've seen her picture in here. Yeah, I saw the girl's picture. [Looking at booklet] No, it's on that, it's on that. [looking at a picture that VD had brought]. Ok, let's see, this is the girl, right here, if I can make her out.

VD The picture turned out so dark.

- JS They're all that color. [long, emphatic laughter].
- VD I know who he's talking about.
- MG Is this Rudolph or is it Jim?
- VD That's Jim, and Doris' sister. Was she at Banneker or over at Oakville?
- JS Over at Oakville.
- VD Yea, she was over at Oakville. I can't think of the girl.
- MM Do you remember what the event was when this picture was taken? [looking at a picture brought by VD of a parish event, in which Fr. Kavanagh is shown with parishioners] Everybody was very dressed up.
- JS I don't know whether it was a school program, or what. I would think it was a school program.
- VD It was in the hall. You see the aisle that they walked down, you know, the windows.
- MG I remember the windows.
- VD You know we used to give plays. "Oh, Danny Boy" we gave that play and it was, turned out so great. We were raising money, too, you know, and then we went down to Ridge and gave the same play.
- MM You were in it?
- VD Yes, and they made a lot of money, it was a lot of money in those days. We would have festivals and everything. Different ones would bring in donations and things like that, you know.
- MM What was Fr. Kavanagh like?
- VD He was a wonderful person. I mean you could call him up. I remember when Grandmother Somerville died, you know, and everybody was at school. All my sisters

were at school teaching. The only one that was One was in nursing school, one was in college. Of course, being the baby, I was left home so my mother and father had to go somewhere. They went to somebody's funeral, or something, and so left me home with Grandma Somerville. And so anyway, of course, she was a sweet person and she took real sick, you know, and so I'm there by myself, and so I, to this day I don't go to many grave sites. And so, the only person I could think of was Fr. Kavanagh. I called him. I said, "Father, I'm here by myself, and I'm scared . . .my Grandmother dies." He came, he rushed right on down there, and he stayed with me until one of my sisters came home. Yes, he did.

MG That's how he was.

VD He stayed there with me because, my father used to tell, and you're father [JS's] used to tell all kind of scary jokes, you know, [laughter] and see that's what I say, I tell my kids, don't you never tell your kids what will scare them. My father would come in at night and flick on the windows outside, you know, and then he'd say, "You see that horse coming down the highway?" He would do those kind of things, you know, and then it preys on your mind, you know, and everything. And I was very scared, I'm telling you.

MG One of my little brothers used to call Fr. Kavanagh Santa Claus, you know, because he was white and had white hair and my brother used to say [imitating a child] "Oh here comes Santa Claus, here comes Santa Claus." Fr. Kavanagh, he was an angel, though, I swear he was.

VD He married me. Because when we were rehearsing for it, asking different questions and everything, how to walk up on the altar and what to do and everything. Of course, me, I was a person who never did take anything too serious, you know, and so, Father, he was

standing there at attention, nice, you know. I was laughing, I was telling Catherine, his [JS's] sister, we were laughing, and Fr. Kavanagh said, "Look, Vincena, this is no joke. [laughter] Are you going to come here and get married like you got any sense or are you going to act crazy?" But he was just a regular guy.

MG He was. He was a priest, but yet he was a man. Whatever he thought was the right thing to do, he did it, no matter what.

VD I recall my nephew, Leroy, George Dickerson's son, Leroy, you know he was sort of off you know, so we went to confession that Saturday evening, he stayed in the confession box so long [emphatically], so what in the world was going on in that confession box, and I say, Fr. Kavanagh hasn't come out or nothing, what is going on. And so Paul said, "Who knows?" So, Fr. Kavanagh had dozed off to sleep. [laughter] Paul went there and pulled the drapes back, you know, and said, "Leroy, come on out, come on out, Father's not going to sit here all day listening to you." And he said, "If he wasn't going to say nothing to me, I wasn't going to say nothing to him." [much laughter]

MG That's Leroy.

VD That's Leroy, for sure. "If he wasn't going to say anything to me, I wasn't going to say anything to him." [more laughter]

MG Oh, good Lord!

VD Oh, Lord, umm umm, umm.

MM What was Scanlon Herbert like?

VD Well, he was very sociable and outgoing, and He may have a hard time explaining what he want, you know, but you just had to have the patience listening to him say what he wanted to say, but he was all for the people and he would always try to reach out to

help. Very kindhearted and everything. And those people were beautiful, they really were.

MG The only thing I remember about him was driving that school bus. He had everybody's attention and you can believe what I tell you. [laughter]

MM How did he get their attention.

MG You didn't --. I'm going to tell you one thing, if you showed off a little bit, and if he heard something going on or somebody too loud, "Bring it up, bring it up front, bring it up front." [laughter]

VD He'd make them sit up front.

MG You didn't try nothing on him. You might try it once, but you didn't try it twice, I can tell you that.

MM Well, when Fr. Kavanagh left around 1953 and there was still a lot of work to do with the project

VD It seemed like to me, after he left, and then it seemed like to me, sort of, you know, other priests came in and then the elderly people thought it was time to let the young people take, you know take the responsibility, taking care of running the situation and everything. And so, which they started off pretty good and then it seemed like to me they started having, you know, just couldn't agree on different things. And slowly, slowly after the elderly people sit back, you know because they weren't able to carry on like they used to, you know, having functions and raising, and having different entertainments and everything, well it started falling downhill and everything, and of course some of them even today still try to keep things going you know and everything. And it's hard when

the system, you can see the system changing, you know, as far as being, working together.

MM The culture is changing, itself.

VD Yes, very much, very much.

MM But it's still going, you know, that's remarkable.

VD Yep, but they're letting a whole lot go down, when it could be still going up. Because it seems to me that a lot of the young ones, they don't have, they don't care, they don't hang together. "And well I, come on let's have this entertainment or lets raise money for this." "Yeah, I'll be there." And when you look for them to come up and do, you know, and to helping and ways and means, and doing things and repairing a whole lot of homes, you know, whereas the beginners have gotten older, which are living and everything, and they are not able to respond to different things like they used to do and everything. And today it's so many activities going on and everything. "I can go down to this place, I can go down to the gym and work out, I can go down to this place. What have I got to be bothered with that." The discrepancy comes among that situation. In deed it does. I hate to see it. I rode through there, I guess it was about three weeks ago, I rode through there, and some of the homes that those adults worked hard for and everything, and most of them deceased and everything, and its been changed from hand to hand, generation to generation, it's going down, it's going down. Trying to get it situated so that they will cooperate together, come together and think about how you got here and what your parents did for you and everything and the situation you can see it dropping, you know. And it's hard on those that are still trying, you know. And at that time, well, they say they're going to try to have a bingo game or something, and everybody would come, the

elderly ones would bring their children and everything like that, but today modern life has taken over.

MG You're right.

MM When they were working on your house [addressing MG], were there people like a paid carpenter to supervise it, or?

MG Well Mr. Harry Fenwick built the house.

MM Mr. who?

MG Harry Fenwick, he built the house. He had help, though, there was some of the guys and things, would come and help him. But he was the carpenter, himself, because my uncle, I got an uncle and he helped.

VD Snack Berry

MG Yeah, my only uncle living.

MM Who was he?

MG John Ernest . He got one of the houses, too.

JS "Snack"

MM Oh, oh, oh.

VD Have you met Snack Berry over by King and Kennedy?

MM No, he won't talk to me, for some reason.

VD He won't? I guess he's at this point where he can't remember too well. He's not a well person, and he's had different stuff happen and everything, and he's been left alone a lot.

MG Maybe he just doesn't realize, you know, who you are.

VD No, he doesn't. He was a hard worker, he worked and worked, putting the spouting. See he used to work for my dad and he was one that would put on the spouting and he and Luke, Dick, Punk

MG Yes, they did.

VD Yes siree.

JS And Uncle Mitchell. [laughter]

VD The first time I saw him when he come from the ship, you know, come from the war, you know, and nothing but mouth. And I say, "Who in the world is that foul talking man?" And whenever I thought I would say, my father, "Shah, that's Ernest's brother from off the ship. And I said, "What?" I had never met him before, I had never seen him. He walked in the house, "That's the . . . , what check is that?" [laughter] So I kept on, ran up stairs. [claps hands]

MG He was very bossy. Very bossy.

VD I say, "He must think he has an army here or something, that he has to"

MG My, uh, things that have happened to me, I was very sick about five years ago, very, very sick. And Deacon Somerville would come down on Sundays to give me Holy Communion. I never missed a Sunday. And I was enjoying it, I'm telling you the truth, because I would sit back, I knew he was coming, and I said to him one Sunday, I said, "Deacon, I think I can make it to church now, you know, my daughter can take me to church." And I said, "You can go around and give communion to somebody else." And Father and Jim sent me a Christmas present, you know I was telling you about it last night [to VD], St. Joseph's, it had St. Joseph's on it, but it was a bag, you know, you could take to the grocery store, or whatever. And in all of those things it made me think

more about what I was doing than before. Before I had gotten to the point where “Oh, well I’ll go to church today if I want to, but if I don’t, I ain’t got to go. And, but now I want to go. And he was the one that told me, he said, “If you can’t make it to church, you can turn on the Mass,” and I look at the Mass every morning, clock work, at 8:00 o’clock I look at it and I think about, I think about Deacon Somerville.

VD My sister, boy, she know, she know exactly what time you’re [speaking to JS] supposed to be there and she’s ninety-one years old.

MG Dorothy.

VD Yea, Dorothy, and she peeks at that window. She see a car go up the highway, she peeks, she’s looking for, and so, [the one] they call Harold, he can’t hear, and so he got, paid all that money for that hearing aid [unintelligible] and so when you ring the door, hit on the door, he can’t hear you, and she pointing toward the door, and he’ll raise up and, “What, what you talking about?” Because he can’t hear, and everything, but he look, and when she sees Jim, oh boy, she’s happy then, she’s happy, yes, and I mean he is a blessing to our family. He really is. Deacon Somerville, yes siree. I remember when her [referring to MG] mother was dying

MG He used to come over to the house every week, too.

VD That’s when she took sick.

MG And Momma would hold him there for hours, telling about old times. I know I was sitting in the other room, but I knew what she was doing.

VD This is something that people really may think is not true, but, you know, but when Tom [her mother’s nickname] was dying and Deacon Somerville was on his way down there, which, when he came and he left, and she and I were sitting in the room in the hospital

down there, and she said, “Go answer the phone.” And so she said again, “You answer the phone.” I said, “Mother, there’s no phone ringing.” She reached over, she grabbed that phone. She said, “How are you?” And she talked, I’m not lying, she talked for about half an hour. She told all about her back history, who she had married and everything, and where he was living. “You remember when me and Momma used to go down to Mr. Gough’s [?] store and cook down there for his restaurant? Yea, and everything, oh, yea, and JB....” And I said “who in the world is Momma talking about?” Said, because she was two years old when her father died. I said maybe she’s talking to her father. And “Oh yea,” she said, “Oh yea, well she passed, she passed you know.” That was Agnes, her sister. “Yea, she passed, yea, yea, I’m telling you.” And she talked I know about an hour or more and then she reached over and she put the phone back down and she laid --. I mean you know how hoarse her voice was and everything and when she was talking on that phone it was just as clear as anything.

MG Yes it was.

VD Yes sir, and I said she is talking to her father. She never did get to meet him and to know him. She would always bring it up, you know. “I tell you some people are lucky, but I never did know my father.” And everything like that. But that was the truth, yes siree. I said now, when she died, that’s when you [MG] had that aneurism. They had to fly her away. Yes siree.

MG But there’s a group --. Everybody prayed for me, they prayed for my mother. And I said, because I was up there feeling sorry for myself, you know. Didn’t want to do right, didn’t want to do what the nurses said. And I said to myself, “Think about all these

people that care about me and praying for me to get well, I'm going to stop this, I'm going to get out this place.

JS Thank you. I think there's a message in that while I've been listening in between.

MG That's what I say about --. When you're with a group of people, your people, and people that know you and treat you nice

JS Do you all feel like getting up and stretching and then coming back?

MM Ok, let me ask just one more thing. Were Wilson and Alice Marshall, were they important players in this?

VD Yeah, they were really, they stuck with the program.

MM What was there role in it?

VD Alice Marshall was the secretary and advisor and helped to explain the different terms, you know, that would break it down so that they would understand. And she was a retired principal and her husband was a bus driver for public school. And she was very, very cooperative, she really was, and she never hardly raised her voice, I never heard her, and she talked to a person so that there was nothing for you to do but to sit back and listen. She was a lovely person, an advisor.

MG You know there's an old saying, you catch more flies with honey than you do with vinegar, so that would explain her very easily.

VD And she lived I guess to be about ninety, wasn't she?

MG Like Deacon Somerville's dad, never a harsh word have I heard him say.

MM I remember meeting her, but I wish I had talked to her.

VD You wasn't born, I guess, when she, [unintelligible] but she was a wonderful person.

MG Yeah.

VD I never did know who her mother was; she was raised as an orphan.

MG She organized a girl's club, too, you know.

VD Oh yes, she, yes, uh huh.

MM She had a girl's club?

MG It was something like the NAACP, but that wasn't even out then, but we would all get together, you know, and she would just be our mentor, you would say. You know telling you right from wrong and what you should do and shouldn't do, things like that.

VD She'd come by your house and she'd hold conversation, talk to people, and try to explain to those, you know, what's going on and we want to keep Kavanagh's presence going on and everything and pitch in and do our best when we're having festivals and everything. Donate to this and everything like that. So she was dignified and she knew how to handle it. She really did.

MM So of this whole project who were the most important people? We know Fr. Kavanagh, Scanlon Herbert.

VD Well, the important people was the congregation.

MM The whole congregation.

VD They pitched in too, but I mean the main members that started it all was

MG You had to have a few.

VD Mr. Scanlon Herbert, Uncle [?], my father [John T. Somerville], Mr. Harry Fenwick, who was the carpenter, and Mr. Jimmy Rustin

JS That's right Jimmy Rustin was the, little Jimmy, I don't know whether he [MM] knew little Jimmy, you know Paul Rustin.

MM Paul's the one I

JS Ok, Paul's father. Toward the last Paul was helping with his father, too, but his father was to a great extent.

VD And the Holts, and they really did work together beautiful, they fixed things for good, they knew what they were doing.

MM We need to take a break, but the other thing that occurs to me though is, was there any opposition to this project at all?

JS The greatest opposition was in acquiring the land, I think was the greatest opposition because they didn't want the blacks to be owning anything or to have any security, you know. In fact, a lot

VD They got a lot of advice from the lawyer, who's dead. Before he --. After he was a lawyer he became a judge, Judge Dorsey.

JS Judge Dorsey, Phil Dorsey.

VD Yea, he was a good advisor, used to give them good advice.

MM So he stuck

VD Stuck behind them, giving them advice and then the one, the clerk, the manager, the head one down at the County Trust Company. He was a Fenwick.

JS Charles Fenwick?

VD His father. What was his father's name? He was the head of the County Trust. You would go in there, he would check

MG That was the man that counted all them pennies and made you sit? My mother used to say that.

VD I don't know, but I know he was a Fenwick.

MG He passed away in

VD And his son had car places.

JS Let's see, I thought it was Well, it was Fenwick anyhow.

MG He was at that bank, I know.

VD But, I mean, if you would go in there with a problem, he wouldn't say, "I can't help you today, I don't have time" or something. He would sit there and listen, "Come on in here, come on in here, let's talk this out." He was a person like that. I know I went down there one time with Mr. Scanlon [Herbert], there were four of us, Mr. Scanlon, Mr. Lee Price, who was the other one, they were hard of hearing all of them [laughter]. I had to write down some things for them. Who was the other one, did I call Fenwick?

JS Harry Fenwick.

VD Harry Fenwick, yea.

MM This was on business for the project?

VD Yea.

MM Do you know what the issue was?

VD Well the issue was that what kind of basis could we get from you to help us out, and we had, wanted to know what we could do to pay back. How much, you know on those basis, you know. Because they had to get the electric lines to go through there. They had to have, there was more of that sort of thing. And they needed money of course, you know, because you had to pay for those things. That was not a donation, you know, Nobody could do that free, you had to be licensed.

MM That was probably after Fr. Kavanagh left, maybe.

- VD Fr. Kavanagh was there but he went on a mission, what do you call it, I don't know, on a retreat or something. He was not there, Father, you know they got the priest that came up there twice, Fr. Johnson from St. Johns down here at Hollywood.
- JS Yea, Fr. Johnson, ok.
- VD Fr. Johnson, he was there two Sundays as the priest.
- MG Is that the one where Momma said you came two minutes late and he would, woo, woo, and Momma and then had to walk to church, and yet if they were two minutes late he would get on them.
- VD That was Fr. McCarthy.
- MG Oh Lord, because you would be scared to come in the church, that's what she said.
- VD Yeah.
- MG That's what she said, that's what she said.
- JS When Fr. McCarthy was there, that was ahead of this. That was totally ahead of this.
- VD That was totally ahead of this, when our grandpa died
- MG When you say things, it makes me remember what my mother used to say.
- VD I can't think of the Fenwick man, but he was good towards us.
- MM But it was successful, though, whatever it was, he agreed to help?
- VD Yes, and the NAACP, they were wonderful, they really were, and because at that time black people didn't have as much law education understanding, you know what I mean? Because they had never, so many of those people had never known what it was to own a home. They didn't know what it was that after you own it you've got to keep it up and you've got to pay taxes. You know, you had your goods and your bads; you had to think about it how you going to solve the situation and this was very explainable from Mr.

Fenwick. And it was really--. And they stood their grounds. What they say they were going to do they would do it. We are going to work together and they did it.

MG I must say, I was a little kid, but I remember it.

JS Fr. McKenna was an inspirational help.

VD Yes, from Ridge.

JS Fr. McKenna.

MM Did he come up?

JS Oh yes, he would come up here, any functions he would always be in attendance.

VD He would be right there. I know I took a night class under him. And he would always give us these big words to remember, you know, big words and everything and I would say, "Great day!" [laughter] It was me and Catherine and Bernard Somerville's wife, what was her name, Elizabeth, and who else was it, and of course me, I was driving, you know, down there and we would go in the evening after we get home from school and go down there to his night class. And he was jokable, he would say jokes, but in the meantime, "Did you get the word, do you understand what I'm saying?" And some of these words, I'm telling you, I never did forget, no siree. He was wonderful, too.

MM Alright, well, do we need to take a break? Let's take a break. [recorder turned off]

[end of digital recording]