

UNIFIED COMMITTEE FOR AFRO-AMERICAN CONTRIBUTIONS

Oral History Documentation Project
The St. Joseph Parish Housing Project

Agnes Genevieve Carter
with Shirley Carter (her daughter)

March 3, 2006 at 2:00 PM
Interviewed by Michael McCauley
at her home in Mechanicsville Maryland
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[Recording begins]

Michael McCauley: Today I'm at the home of Joseph W. and Agnes Genevieve Carter, Joseph W. Carter, Sr. and also present is their daughter Shirley Carter. Mrs. Carter, tell me what your ... how you were living and what your family was like before you moved over here.

Agnes Carter: Well, we farmed. My husband farmed. We lived in Mills Point ten years. We lived and farmed down Mills Point ten years. From Mills Point we went to Johnny Guy's and stayed one year. From Johnny Guy's we went to Lawrence Hayden's and stayed one year. From Lawrence Hayden's we got us a home of our own. We moved over here in '53 and [unintelligible] we've been here ever since, a home of our own. [unintelligible] We got a loan through the bank and we paid every month 'til we paid ours off.

Shirley Carter: You showed them how to make....

MM: How many children did you have when you moved over here?

AC: Six. Youngest child was six years old, I think- No, the youngest child wasn't but a year old. [Unintelligible]

SC: [unintelligible] was about three. [unintelligible] I thought she was about three years old when we moved over here.

AC: Might have been three years old. [unintelligible] might have been three years old when we moved over here.

MM: Was it an exciting thing for you when you moved over here? AC: Unh?

SC: Was it exciting?

AC: No, no wasn't no excitement. My husband had to give up farming, and boy got him a job up to Indian Head and worked up at Indian Head ten years. And from Indian Head somebody got him a job at Maplewood Park apartments. He worked at Maplewood Park apartments until he retired, and he had a half and he come in the evening at 6:00 and eat his supper and he worked down at the day care center for ten years and he retired from that. Mr. Carter was his boss – had a man there had the same name he had, Joseph Carter. That's what, that's what that place down Lexington Park, [unintelligible] from that man's name, Joseph Carter.

MM: You must have been excited to get a place of your own.

AC: We was. We was. A place of our own and he went to work he didn't have to farm. He went to work and he worked until he retired. He come home in the evenings, he farmed, he worked tobacco, he worked corn.

SC: Out here.

AC: Out here, out here, out here.

MM: Well, when, when he got this place, when you all got this place of your own, is that what

enabled him not to have to farm any more?

AC: Well, no, he still farmed a little bit; he still raised a little tobacco and corn and finally he stopped, but he still, he just liked to work and he still raised a little tobacco and corn and a garden, he had his own garden.

MM: But he didn't have to be a tenant any more.

AC: No.

SC: That was it he share farmed, he share farmed, but when he came over here he was so enthused, he cleared all this off his self

AC: When we came over here all this back here was all woods but we cleared it all up.

MM: By hand?

AC: Back that way, that was woods. He cleared it all up. He cleared that land up.

SC: He got a bulldozer. First he tried to do that, but those roots were down in the ground. I don't care if he was 500 pounds, you can't and so he finally... and Mama saved up and he got a bulldozer and cleared all that stuff out from that house to that house, because that was all his land, five acres of land way back there.

AC: He worked down there ten years at the day care center until Reagan went in and when Reagan went in there he cut everything out...

SC: He cut off and they closed the day care center.

AC ...and that's when he retired and, and Mr. Carter told him not to draw his money, leave his money in there for sickness and it's a good thing he left it in there. Everybody else around here getting two three checks. He doesn't get but one. He left his money there to pay his bills and paying

SC: Unfortunately, he hasn't been well.

AC: He never drew his money like other people. He didn't draw his money and it's a good thing he didn't draw his money, sick as he has been, you see, insurance pays for most of his bills.

MM: Do you remember how long it took to get the house built here? Was it a long process or did it go pretty fast.

AC: They built these houses in about four or five years. You see they built them one house at a time.

SC: He want to know how long it took you to get your house. It didn't take four or five years to get your house built.

AC: Oh, no, no. It took about two years, I guess, to get my house built. We came over to help them on Saturdays—one thing or another.

SC: That was part of it.

AC: Part of it.

MM: Did things go along pretty smoothly? Were there any problems with the houses in here being built?

AC: No, didn't have no problems with it.

MM: Who was the person you dealt with most from the project side of it, was it Fr. Kavanaugh, or was it ...

AC: After Fr. Kavanaugh got him the loan, Jimmy Rustin and them went on and built the houses. All he had to do was make his payment.

SC: And you dealt with Scanlon Herbert.

AC: Huh?

SC: He wants to know who your contact people, Scanlon Herbert and John T. Sommerville.

AC: It was Scanlon Herbert and Alice Marshall.

SC: Those were the people who she dealt with.

AC Scanlon Herbert and Alice Marshall.

MM: What did they do?

AC They was the head of it. They was the head of it, you see. Head of it, they were the ones who were head of it.

MM: Un huh, so you had to ...

AC They would come around and collect the money until you paid for the land, take the money until your land was paid.

SC: They would come each week and collect the money for the land, not the house now, the land, the land was separate.

AC: You was paying on your house at the bank but all your land wasn't paid and see you had five acres and they collect the money every month for the five acres until it was paid.

MM: Did the land have to be paid for before you got the loan for the house?

AC: No, no, no.

MM: Oh, you paid for them both at the same time.

AC: Un huh. At the same time.

SC: You paid for the land separately.

MM: That was quite a job for them as volunteers, wasn't it, coming around?

SC: Well you know if you couldn't read and write you couldn't really understand what you were reading. I guess these were people that were entrusted. I think they were in that book. They were the people that were in that book. To do this and you know I think they told you about this, how you went through. Tell them about

AC: Mary Martha Carter, she was the first one that built over here and then came down and told be about it and we came over here and checked and we got a lot.

SC: Because they didn't know how to go about doing it and she told them.

AC: They told me about it at a meeting ... and then the down payment.

MM: You had to make a down payment?

AC: Had to make a down payment.

SC: How much was it, how much was it mother? I forget exactly. It was a small amount of money.

AC: A small amount of money. I think it was \$500. It was \$500.

SC: I think you told me that. [laughs] Can you believe that?

AC: [unintelligible]

MM: Who was Mary Martha Carter?

AC: She on that hill, she died--

SC: But she's not alive now.

AC: She's not alive now. She was from Bushwood. She was the first one that got a house over here.

SC: We knew her, that's the only reason we..., 'cause we lived over at Bushwood, so we didn't know anybody. Mary Martha Carter's husband was the sexton at the church for Fr. Kavanaugh. So he can speculate. He was the one who told them. She was the first person on here. So, we didn't know how to go about it, she told them all the things. That's because Johnny was the sexton – you know what a sexton is?

MM: The one who takes care of inside the church.

SC: Yeah, anyway he was the guy that, year, the one that took care of the church. And she

was married to the sexton's brother, Mary Martha was.

MM: Ah, Okay.

SC: She was married to Frank Carter and Frank Carter was Johnny Carter and Johnny Carter was sexton to Fr. Kavanaugh. Am I saying it correctly?

MM: S-E-X-T-O-N.

SC: Yeah, sexton. And that's how I guess she knew and so when we heard about it I tell you when we worked.... It was exciting. I don't know about now, the area have changed.

MM: When you moved in the house did it have electricity?

AC: Yeah, it had electricity, but it didn't have it only on a pull string. We had ours rewired. In those days you had a pull string. We had our house rewired, got Bernard Drury, the electrician, and he come and rewired our house.

MM: Did you have running water when you moved in?

AC: Not when we move in, no. We had water outdoors for a right good little while before we had running water.

SC: We had a sink where you could pour in the kitchen.

AC: There was a sink in the kitchen with running water, it run right out there in that field, in a hole out there.

SC: You could pour the water outdoors.

AC: Outdoors we had a pump. But we did have a sink in the kitchen.

MM: What was Fr. Kavanaugh like?

AC: Like? Well you see

SC: He just loved people. You see people, he liked poor people.

AC: Nobody had nowhere to live... He bought the land so much, so many acres of land from

somebody and then got the loan for people to build the house.

SC: Poor people. Anybody could have lived through here. People got so upset when they took him...

AC: Nobody didn't have no houses. People needed somewhere to live, they didn't have no where to live and he got houses for them and everything, got them a loan.

MM: You said he was so upset ...

SC:: Well the people had him moved. You know you can have a pastor moved from a church and there were people here who said he was giving the money to the people, but he wasn't giving it to anybody, he was just trying to help poor people.

AC: They took him and sent him away from here. Said he was giving the money to the people, but he wasn't giving the money to the people. The people had to have their own money. Got them a loan is all, got them a loan.

SC: He put in to go to India. That was his thing to help poor people. He was like a missionary, you know. He wasn't a missionary, but he was like a missionary. I also went to St. Joseph's school where he was the pastor there.

SC:: [talks about a recent pastor of St. Joseph's who she likens to Fr. Kavanaugh]

MM: Was there resentment? Did the white people resent what was going on? Do you think he was moved out of here because of complaints? Based on

SC: I don't think... You can go to the Archdiocese and get any priest moved.... You understand what I'm saying?

[An extraneous conversation ensues about current church issues for about 15 seconds]

MM: Do you still have the five, the whole five acres?

AC: No, no.

SC: You do have these, these five acres.

AC: I have it but it don't belong to me. I give ... we still go the five acres. Still on it but it's not all the money.

SC: You gave some of it.

AC: I still have it but I don't own it.

SC: How much did you put in Doris name? I forgot, this house was built on it. I forgot, this house was built on it, yeah.

AC: An acre and a half, I think.

SC: That's family.

AC: You see, that's family.—and that house across the road that's also built on our land.

SC: But that was on another thing-- [Shirley continues to talk in background]

AC: But the five acres was on this side, five acres.

SC: Their children built houses.

MM: It seems like that's what's happened to a lot of the lots here, is that children and grandchildren have built on them. Did you ever have any regrets about moving over here?

AC: None, not a bit. Not a bit, home of you own is better than paying rent. MM: A home of your own, what?

AC: Better than paying rent. We didn't pay much rent because we farmed. We never paid rent nowhere we lived, everywhere he farmed....

SC: Believe me your labor paid.... And you still, still got to give the guy half, you got a third

of the corn, a third of the wheat, and you, all you got was half of the tobacco. And if there was a bad year and there area lot of the years that I can still remember... Cause he had to pay people to help and [unintelligible].

MM: It was a hard life.

SC: It was a hard life... my dad, course he worked from sun up to sun down, you gotta...

AC: [unintelligible]

MM: It was a strong community feeling?

SC: Years ago you really had nothing.

AC: Joe Forbes was a sexton that summer there and for a long time.

MM: Uh hmm, something missing that was there before?

SC: It's all of that.

MM: You said family members came here?

SC: Yeah.

MM: And they what?

SC: Family members came and they—all this land. Oh, may grandfather had in all fifteen children, but the young daughter went to go to work. But she was used to...

[unintelligible] I mean I can remember her aunts coming from ... [phone rings]

[recording ends]