

SOUTHERN HIGHLANDS RESEARCH CENTER

The University of North Carolina at Asheville

Interview with Lucy Herring  
July 26, 1977 Asheville, North Carolina  
(First Session)  
Interviewed by Dr. Louis D. Silveri

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Side I,

Dr. Louis Silveri: Were you born in Asheville?

Lucy Herring: No, I was born in Union, South Carolina.

Dr. Louis Silveri: Oh, Ok. What year?

Lucy Herring: October 24, 1900.

Dr. Louis Silveri: Ok. Then you were the first of your family to come here to Asheville?

Lucy Herring: No, my parents--I came with my parents here. I was about fourteen when they came here with the health of a brother.

Dr. Louis Silveri: And you say you were born when? 19??--

Lucy Herring: In 1900; October 24, 1900. (inaudible)

Dr. Louis Silveri: (inaudible) You were fourteen, and the reason why the family moved was because your brother was in ill health?

Lucy Herring: Yes. I came here at the age of fourteen. I didn't say 1914.

Dr. Louis Silveri: But that was the same year--

Lucy Herring: Yes, yes. Because it was 1900, yes.

Dr. Silveri: Well, this area was known as a health (resort).

Lucy Herring: It was a health resort, then. It was very outstanding, and they had many sanatariums around within the city. But as the years passed, they were moved to the outskirts of the city, and today you don't have very many. (inaudible)

Silveri: That's how you got here, and you've been here ever since, since 1914?

Lucy Herring: Yes.

Silveri: Ok. What did--did your father have to quit his job in Union, and come and find a job here?

Lucy Herring: No, my father was retired at the time.

Silveri: So, it didn't make much difference, you could move anywhere. How many in the family?

Herring: Originally, there were twelve, but (only) nine lived to adulthood.

Silveri: What number were you in the family?

Herring: I was nine--I'm sorry. I'm very sorry. I was (seventh of the living children, really the ninth,

Silveri: Sometimes, that's not easy to remember.

Herring: Well, that seven stands out, but when I answered, "Nine." Yes, I was the (ninth) child!

Silveri: So, when the family moved to Asheville, all the children did not come to Asheville, right?

Herring: Well, there weren't many children to come, we were--my brother, of course, was here because he was the one who was ill.

Lucy Herring: (continued) Three of my sisters, and then my father came later. We first rented a house on Short Street, and after I finished school--we called it college, but it was really high school--in Union--I mean in Orangeburg, South Carolina. We finished what was supposed to have been high school in Union, and then went to Orangeburg. I rented a house from the principal, Professor [John H.] Michael, and brought my [entire] family here. I remember quite definitely, my brother-in-law, Dr. Robinson, sent me \$50 to help me have the family moved from Union, here. And we rented a house on Hill Street, on the corner of Hill and Gudger. It belonged to Professor Michael, and we stayed here for quite a number of years; in fact, until my father passed, and of course, later I left, and I can tell you about that--

Silveri: As we go along.

Herring: As we go along.

Silveri: Ok. You rented a house on Short Street, first.

Herring: Well, yes, that was temporary--

Silveri: Temporary. Then you moved to Hill?

Herring: Yes, we moved to Hill Street.

Silveri: Ok, and you also rented there, right?

Herring: Yes.

Silveri: And then--so, Asheville is where you continued your education?

Herring: No, my education is a very long story. I did some summer school work here, after I finished State A & M College in Orangeburg. And as I said before, it was really and truly then a high school. I did alot of summer work: some work here in the Asheville summer school; some at A & T College, Tuskegee Institute, several [years in] Fayetteville, an in-service type [program]. And then, I had my other years. I had my credits sent to Hampton Institute in Virginia. After they evaluated my credits, with the work I had done at State College, and the work I had done in state accredited institutions or summer schools, they gave me credit for one year. I was married at the time that I had my transcripts sent to Hampton, and I didn't plan to enter school during the regular term; see, they had the quarter system the year 'round. So I did nine consecutive nine-week sessions at Hampton. I think that's about equivalent to three years, and I got the B. S. Degree from Hampton, and then I continued my work. I was in supervisory work at that time in Harnett County. And after I finished Hampton, I went to [the University of Chicago].

Silveri: What year was that?

Herring: I finished Hampton; I got the B. S. Degree from Hampton in '27. Then--oh, I guess several years later, I decided to go to Chicago. I have a sister and brother-in-law there. It was easy of me to get my

Lucy Herring: (continued) training there, and so, I first entered the University of Chicago in a workshop, Core-curriculum workshop, and they were getting ready to initiate a program at the high school, and at that time I was teaching in the high school. I came back to Asheville; I initiated the Core-curriculum, and the following summer, I went back and attempted to register as a graduate student. I had a little difficulty.

There was no question about the Hampton Institute credits. Hampton was on their accredited list, and had been on there since '33. Many of the southern colleges were not on the list, and teachers who studied there had to make up deficiencies. And so, Dr. Russell was the dean. And when he looked at my transcript, he said, "You have a beautiful transcript, but we can't classify you as a graduate student!" I wanted to know why, and I said, "Hampton was on your accredited list, on your list of approved colleges, it's been on there since '33." He said, "But you are not a product of Hampton!" I said, "I am a graduate of Hampton!" He said, "But you are not a product of Hampton, totally!" I said, "What do you mean?"

When he saw what Hampton had given me credit for: that is the summer schools of Fayetteville Teacher's College and those other places, and one of them was Voorhees Institute, he said, "Well, you have some institutions on here that I've never heard of. And the University has a reputation to maintain; we just can't classify you as a graduate student." I told him, "Well, I wasn't willing to take any deficiencies; so, I guess I'd just go on over to Northwestern because I knew I could get classified over there as a graduate student, and it was possible for me to commute because I had a car, and Northwestern wasn't too far." As I started out of the door, it was near noon; he called me, and he said, "Mrs. Herring, it's almost twelve; if you have the time, if you will wait, I'd like to talk with you some more."

So I sat down and waited. He said, "I'll tell you what I'll do; if you let me select your courses, and if you make an average of 'A', I'll classify you as a graduate student!" I told him, "Very well, that was satisfactory!" So he picked out the three courses for the quarter, two were on the 300th level which was for the Master Degree, and the other was on the 400th level which was on the Doctorial level, and I had no business with anything up there. But that didn't phase me; I accepted the offer. One course was entitled the "Elementary School". Well, I felt that I knew that quite well with all of the experience I had had. The other course on the graduate level I studied, but I concentrated on the course that he should not have given me.

Lucy Herring: When the session was over, the quarter had ended. I knew that they usually mailed your grades to you at your home, but I went to the registrar's office after I knew the grades had time to be in from the instructors. And I asked the young lady there if she could give me my grades. She said it was against the policy of the University, and I said well this could probably be an exception! She said, "Is it a matter of life and death?" I said, "Yes, it's just about a matter of life and death! I'll just have to know!" She said, "I'm not supposed to do this." But she did give me my grades, and in the course I should not have had. (and there were all men in the class except me, and I was the only woman in the class) I had an "A". And in the "Elementary School" which I did not study--I didn't have time to study that, but I felt that I knew it sufficiently, I had a "B". And in the other course, I had an "A" which gave me an average of "A".

I met Dr. Russell coming out of the building several days later, and he said, "Well Mrs. Herring, you'll be getting your grades soon, and we'll see what we can work out about classifying you, "if" you made an average of "A". I said, "Well, I made an average of "A"!"" He said, "Well, you're not in a position to know!" I said, "But I do know!" He said, "Well, how did you find out?" I said, "I made an average of "A"; I made two "A's" and one "B". He said, "Well, somebody's done something irregular!" I said, "Well, I hope they'll be pardoned; I think they will!"

When he went to check, I was in the library, and he came to me. He said, "You know you did make an average of "A", and I want to admit I didn't have the slightest idea that you would have made an average of "A"!"" I was disappointed, and I think he could see the disappointment in my face! So, I said to him, "Dr. Russell, I'm sorry you told me that! I thought you gave me the courses as a challenge to prove that I could do it, not to prove that I couldn't do it!" He said, "Well, you made it, and that's the thing that counts!" And I said, "Yes, that's the only thing that counts! I made it!"

So in '44, I received the Masters Degree. I took it in absentia, just as I took the B. S. Degree in absentia--I didn't go back to either. But I was admitted to Phi Lambda Theta. It's a National Honor Society, and I haven't seen it in so long, and I haven't been active in it in so long that the real name doesn't come to me. But it should suffice to say it was a decided honor to belong. There were ten people, students, who were initiated. There was one person from India, a woman from India. There were two blacks; I was the one from North Carolina, and

Lucy Herring: (continued) there was a young woman from Maryland; the others were white. And of course, I received congratulations from the Lambda faculty members. They knew the hardship that I had because I had to work my way through school. I had a son, and he worked in the "commons". He worked in the dining room, and he helped his mother to get through school. He said this, "I'm helping my Mother to get through the University, and she's going to send me to Tuskegee when she finishes." And that did materialize. we did--I did work that out.

Silveri: [inaudible] Let's go back now to the time you came to Asheville. As a fourteen year old, what were your impressions? What did you see here? I wonder if you could remember that.

Herring: I remember very vividly. I thought and still think from the standpoint of physical beauty, Asheville is one of the most beautiful places I've seen!

I've been to eight countries in Europe. We went on an independent tour; my son was there in the service about ninety miles from London near the sea [in 1953]. He had a little British Ford, and we traveled. The trip was planned by the Royal Automobile Association, and we traveled to eight countries. Switzerland was the most beautiful country, and of course, I was fascinated by Switzerland because of the cleanliness and the beauty there. I took a sixteen-year-old girl with me to England. My son and his wife, the sixteen-year-old girl: Wilma Helen Ray, and I were on this trip.

After we got back to England, we stayed there for awhile. Then we flew back to New York; we got on a train in New York into Asheville. We got sleeping accommodations, and as we were coming into western North Carolina, I raised the window, and said to Wilma, "I've seen a lot of places, but western North Carolina still looks good to me!" And that's the way I feel about it! I have found in these mountains a kind of--I don't know what it is--but beauty. There's something about the mountains that is satisfying or soothing! When I applied for a place here in the Vanderbilt, I told Mr. [Joseph] Morris the manager, "I have heard something like this; I don't know if it's accurate or not: Beggars must not be choosers. Something like that, but please give me an apartment with a view!" I've always said, "There's no point in being in Asheville if you don't have a view!" And I was just delighted that I got the apartment with the view. I find very much--I get great satisfaction, you see. If you raise up, pull that blind up, you can see. I can see the mountains, and I can wake up in the mornings and look at the beautiful mountains.

Lucy Herring: They're beautiful in the spring, with all the different colors; they are beautiful in the fall with all the multicolored leaves, and in the winter, you get a different kind of beauty when the sun shines on the icicles and the snow! So in every season of the year, it's beautiful!

Silveri: When you came to Asheville, your father was retired?

Herring: Yes.

Silveri: Did you attend school that first year you came, or were you finished with school in Asheville?

Herring: Well, I finished in Orangeburg in 1916. I went back--

Silveri: Oh, you went back. so you never attended school in Asheville at all?

Herring: I never attended the public schools here, no. I attended only the summer schools, but summer school was founded by a Professor John Henry Michael in 1917 under the auspices of the Winston-Salem Teachers College. It was the only summer school available--made available for black educators in western North Carolina. I have some pictures I would like to show you; I have a--in fact, I have a--I think this class was about 1918.

Silveri: Oh, are you in there?

Herring: I am on here, and a sister, my younger sister is on there. Hundreds of teachers received their credits which enabled them to renew their certificates, and some of the credits since it was a State Institution and was fully accredited--got credit toward certificate renewal and undergraduate degrees, I'm sorry, I meant to say.

Silveri: Where are you on this picture?

Herring: I am there.

Silveri: And your sister?

Herring: And that's my sister. And this is one of my best friends, Miss Vivian Cline; she's Mrs. Cooper now. She's working very hard with me on this project, this research project. I like to think of her as my right hand.

Silveri: Where was this picture taken?

Herring: In front of Mr. Michael's home, and this is Professor Michael here. That was--this is his wife. These were the instructors. This man was from Tuskegee, and this one is from Livingstone College in Salisbury. This person comes from Knoxville. I don't recall her name; we're trying to find out her name now.

Silveri: Where is this house located?

Herring: On Hill Street. 77 Hill Street.

Silveri: And all of the classes were held in the house?

Herring: No. The classes were held in the school building, Hill Street School. It was a big school. But I want to tell you something about this house here. This was Professor Michael's first home. Then he built

