

Booker T. Sherrill

Side 1:

[T. stands for Taliaferro]

He was named after Booker T. Washington. His people came from Sherrill's Fort in Catawba County, NC.

[14] He was brought up by his mother, but in 1920, came to Asheville to live with his father. He went to high school at Bennett in Greensboro, NC (which was co-ed until 1926 and then became a seminary for girls) and two years at Livingston College in Salisbury (see enclosed). He was sorry he couldn't finish but went into the hotel work. Booker T. Washington's philosophy was "drop your bucket wherever you are," and he has done well.

[36] Asheville was hit hard by the Depression. Work was hard to find, but he worked in the Langren Hotel from 1930-1933 and the Battery Park from 1934 until it closed in 1972.

[56] His father ran the elevator at Grove Park for 31 years. He died in 1945. He was hit on the head and robbed. The murderer was never found (see enclosure). [David Sherrill]

[71] He had a "hotel reputation." During those times there weren't many jobs open to blacks - chauffeuring, working at Oteen or in hotels. It was hard getting work in the railroad unless one had good connections (see Erlene McQueen tape). He could have gone with the railroads during the War but chose to stay here.

[96] His father started working at Grove Park in 1919 and said it was open all year round though the winters were slow. Straus was connected with the paper mill and stayed there. [John Garland said it was closed in the winters - see his tape. Elmer Ownbey said he delivered mail there in the winters.] [David Sherrill, Mr. Strauss]

[107] Many blacks were on WPA but he was always employed. Bellmen were paid \$1 a day and depended on tips and didn't anticipate Social Security, where benefits were based on how much they had paid in.

[150] Only one hotel man went with the government. He had worked for "Captain Book" (nickname for Sherrill) - now works in the Church Street parking lot. [John R. Hemphill]

[160] When he worked at the Battery Park for 38 years, blacks couldn't go in the front door - now he is living here [Battery Park Hotel] (snap shot-pictures on wall showing him moving in and paper article are found at the hotel).

[168] He describes the Langren Hotel which was one of the largest in the area in the 20's catering mostly to business men. Green, of the First Baptist Church stayed there and was a member of "the ring" (politically). A good room cost \$1.50 a night and a corner room \$3. The price was

comparable to the Battery Park but the clientele was different. The Vanderbilt and Battery Park catered to tourists.

[208] In 1933 he lost his job at the Langren and went to Florida for the season. He returned to his wife and daughter and, after applying around, came here and worked under a famous, widely known bell man who died in 1935. [Charles Sisney]

[229] His first wife was 16 when they married, and the marriage broke up. His wife's niece, L teaches fourth grade at Randolph School. His daughter Fredricka is retired from working as assistant principal at a school in Columbus, Ohio. [Claudia Hallum Sherrill, Lydia Hallum, Fredericka Sherrill Miller]

[250] In 1936 he remarried a lady with the same name as a character in "Amos 'n' Andy" radio program. [Ruby Taylor]

[255] They were married on Saturday, August 1936, and the following day Moore confessed to murdering Clevenger who was visiting the hotel with her uncle in room 224 (see enclosure). [Martin Moore, Helen Clevenger]

[266] The sheriff hired a detective from New York who found a weapon in Moore's house. Moore was tried, convicted and executed. [Lawrence Brown]

[270] People in the hotel were reluctant to go on the 2nd floor. In a fire in Atlanta, a resident of Asheville was killed in 1956 or 57. Because of this, guests wanted rooms on the lower floors. [Thomas Beard]

[291] He was off duty during the time of the 1936 murder and was not questioned but there were bad feelings about this. Some think it was never solved. Some think the son of the manager was to blame. It upset this city and it took 8-10 years for the people to relax [a black and white situation]. Room #224 was permanently blocked. Although he kept his thoughts to himself, he doesn't think Moore, a relatively new night janitor, had the mentality to commit the crime. [Joe Eurie, Pat Branch, Martin Moore]

[334] He lived at 153 Hill Street but had to move when the highway came through. The Hill Street Baptist Church was not disturbed and houses on either side of his remained.

[360] He feels that moving was for the best. Many houses were not in good condition. Most dislocated people bought houses on French Broad or Bartlett. He built a nice place on 1 Dalton (see enclosed snap with Doris Brewer who lives there now. See her tape). The house was prefab construction by Heritage. He had to move because of finances and applied to come here.

[421] He remembers the Stanards and Hugh's talks to groups (see Stanard tape). Bridge Club, under the direction of Mrs. Crawford, met twice a month for several years. Civitan met on Tuesday, Lions Club on Wednesday, Rotary on Thursday and Kiwanis on Friday. [Hugh and Wanda Stanard, Mrs. Crawford]

[458] Puckett, owner of the Vanderbilt Hotel, bought the Battery Park. There was controversy regarding this, and the judge ruled in favor of Puckett. The Grove Park was also bidding on the hotel. There was no competition in the downtown area, and both hotels went down. Puckett didn't care about anything but himself. [Maurice Puckett, George L. Chumbley Jr., Judge Jerry Nettle]

[518] He was in charge of all the black help [except for the kitchen, I believe]. He hired, trained, and fired. There were so many wins it was hard to get good help. The salary was low - they had to make it on tips. He wrote down less than he received which made benefits from Social Security low.

Side 2:

[We discuss the house on 1 Dalton Street owned by Brewer - see her tape] [Doris Brewer]

[2/15] He was glad to get away from the Hill Street neighborhood. The development of Hillcrest housed people of low circumstance. He never talked much to his neighbors, feeling he had "two eyes and two ears so you can learn twice as much."

[2/24] He doesn't mix much downstairs in the Battery Park but accepted the job of being treasurer for the tenants' association. He has done this for 9 years. He has also been the treasurer of the Asheville District Methodist Men's Association for 10 years.

[2/37] When his Hill Street house was to be razed, he wanted to get money from the bank, buy a second-hand house, renovate it, and put the rest of the money in the bank. His wife was against this. He had to have a court hearing to get a variance on Dalton Street because of the lot size. He was given priority because he had been relocated. Benson was shocked. [Dr. Benson]

[2/56] In the Battery Park people have to wait a year or more to get a space, but he was given priority. The building under HUD is only for people with a minimum income. Any increase must be reported.

[2/68] The hotel has gone through complete modernization. Floors 6th to 10th were made into apartments. The rest were doubled up - two bedrooms with bath made 1 bedroom with bath and living room with kitchen (bath plumbing for kitchens).

[2/89] The President of the resident's association is one of the residents and a volunteer. She has a committee which is in charge of bingo and birthday parties. There are meetings the 1st Tuesday of a month and dues are \$3 a month. Not everyone joins. There are 70 members. One hundred and 10 people live here - about 15 of them are black.

[2/126] He feels that Asheville went about the integration transition with very little problems.

[2/138] I mention the sit-in at Woolworth's. Robinson wrote an article. Bob was sports editor for the paper. The baseball teams stopped in the hotel and Bob gave him passes to the game. He was an avid fan. [Marjorie Lockwood, Henry Robinson, Bob Terrell]

[2/155] He shows trophies his grandson won (see photographs in the Sherrill collection). He attended St. Charles High School in Columbus Ohio and Ohio University. His mother, Sherrill's daughter, married Manual Miller. (see photo). Marquis left a job at Ohio State and got a job with the United Negro College Fund in Arlington, VA. Stephen is in Atlanta, GA, and Carlton is a musician in CA. [Marquis Miller, Fredericka Sherrill Miller, Manuel Miller, Stephen Miller, Carlton Miller]

[2/213] He has been a member of the Berry Temple United Methodist Church for 60 years and has held several positions - president of the men's group, a leader and a member of the administrative council (see enclosure).

[2/231] Jesse Ray was chairman of the Finance committee 25-30 years (see his tape). Lonnie Burton took over the position (Jesse died this past year). His wife Lucille Burton taught at Allen School for years (see Erline McQueen tape). Burton retired 6 months ago. He also retired from the opportunity corporation. [I was going to interview the Burtons, but there was a political upheaval - see collection of papers included in Karpen file]. [Jesse Ray Sr., Lonnie Burton, Lucille Burton, Erline McQueen]

[2/245] Julia Ray was a Presbyterian. She was active in UNCA. [Julia Ray]

[2/253] He won't let anything interfere with Sunday at 11 am. He has the best attendance, is a faithful member, and takes care of the collection. James missed two Sundays in a row (the notices). [James Gibbs]

[2/276] When the hotel closed in 1972, he drove for Jesse Ray. He also drove for Joe Wilkins. Two cars are provided for a funeral. Big cars are also rented out for weddings. [Jesse Ray Sr., Joe Wilkins]

[296] Black undertakers take care of blacks in Canton, Waynesville and Swannanoa. There is the Violet Hill Cemetery and Sunset Cemetery off Sweeten Creek Road. In general whites are burying blacks, but few blacks are burying whites. Penland and Son (125 South Ave. Swannanoa) had several black funerals. Jesse had one or two whites at Brooks-Howell Home (266 Merrimon Ave.) [Ray, Jessie Sr.]

[2/324] He hasn't seen John Baxter for a long time. He knew him when he went to New York to learn the mechanical trade (transmissions). (see Baxter tape by Silveri). [Baxter, John]

[2/338] T. B. was not discussed much. It was down-played.

[2/364] The army took over the hotel for recreation and relaxation from 1941-1943. This was a good period in his life. There were no tips, but the government gave a decent salary. The army took over everything. They kept the manager and did not disturb the personnel - except for the kitchen - they had their own cooks.

[2/394] The soldiers amused themselves with pool tables and dances. There wasn't much going on in the City. The ABC stores were not open until 1947. Liquor could be gotten - always a way

to find it at a price. [he was not about to tell me anything more. Captain Branson had suggested Sherrill as a good source for "that side" of life - but that was it!] I mentioned Branson.

[2/432] He knew the police and spoke highly of them (see Branson and Best tapes). [Capt. Robert Branson, Capt. Newsom, Capt. John Best]

[2/456] He knew Tomes at funerals. His pastor has been with the church 3 years. Avery was with the Hill Street church 40 years. [Rev. O.T. Tomes, Rev. Carl Arrington, Rev. Nilous Avery]

[2/475] He has enjoyed life. The Lord has been good to him. He never smoked [not smoking has been a big issue socially across the country for the last 10 years].