

Interview with Erline McQueen for the YWCA of Asheville 100 Years Oral History Project by Jewell Gist and Dierdre Wiggins

MCQUEEN: --makes it very, very--

GIST: Hard.

EM: Hard.

JG: Yeah.

EM: So, people--. Now, let me get down--. Now we're talking, let me first tell you about me.

JG: Okay. That'll be good.

EM: Yeah. And this is what I tried to tell you. And now, now you listen to me very closely. I was raised--

WIGGINS: Put it closer.

JG: It's close enough.

EM: I was raised in Robeson County, Shima Rock area. They called it--. When I was raised they called it Uree, U-R-E-E. And the post office was about as big as right here. [Laughter] It was about as big as a room. Well, and the, and the, and the postmen that delivered the mail, we knew them. My daddy--. And we lived in [unclear]. But we lived close to their daddy. [Unclear] a daddy that was delivering the mail. And they were driving a--

DW: Postal truck?

EM: Horse, horse--

DW: Oh, wagon, horse and wagon.

EM: Horses and a buggy.

DW: Oh, okay.

EM: And papa looked down there and he said to my mama, he says, Lily, you know I believe that that horse is, [unclear]'s horse is running away with him. Papa went down there and stopped them horses to save them people. And that was the truth. Papa got in front of them horses and stopped them.

DW: That was dangerous.

EM: That was so dangerous. But papa put his life--

DW: On the line.

EM: On the line trying to help somebody. Now, he-. My papa was just that way. He was a [unclear] person. Okay. Now, I'll get through with that now and I just want to say this. My father and mother lived in a little cabin over in the mountains up where I was talking about.

JG: Uree?

EM: Uree. And my mama was a twin. My mama was Proctor, P-R-O-C-T-O-R. And, and, and papa did elope. He married mama. And mama wasn't but sixteen or seventeen years old. I'm getting hoarse.

DW: You want some water?

EM: No. And, well she took care of babies. So, see, then after one or two babies he took care of us. She didn't [unclear]. So papa got a lady to live with them and take care of mama.

DW: While she was pregnant?

EM: While she was pregnant. And so doing she [unclear]. And my name is E-R-L-I-N-E. That's the way they spelled it and that's the way I carry it. Anytime anybody says E-A-R, that's not me. My name my daddy and mama spelled it E-RL-I-N-E. So--

DW: Where'd you go to school Mrs. McQueen?

EM: I'm trying to get up to that. So, later on after my mama and, and her family, I mean my mama's sisters got married which was Patsy, Docy and [unclear]. Well, Patsy not Docy, was the ones that was married to Harry's mama. And they were having babies one right after another. So--

{Telephone rings. Tape stopped.}

EM: --to the point where my daddy and my mommy moved to Mary B. Moore, Mary B. Murrow School which was about sixty-seven miles from where I was born. And papa was the caretaker there. He [unclear] and all of that [unclear]. So papa didn't like that because papa wanted to be a farmer.

So now he, after he was there a while then he moved from there, bought some property from my granddaddy and moved into it. His brother had a little house about two miles from where Mary B. Murrow School was. So papa bought that property from granddaddy. And papa moved the three of the kids, me, Philip--that's Philip over there--Philip and Amos was born--Philip and me was born in that little cabin way over there. And Amos and him was born at that Mary B. Murrow School. Then the rest of them was born down there where papa bought that probably. And kept adding to it, to that property until it got a pretty good size.

Then later on, daddy built a beautiful house. It was a Mr. Manny built the house. And you would think somebody out of state did it because it was a lovely house with a porch all the way around, except one side. And it had a living room, dining room and one bedroom and a guest bedroom on the first floor. Upstairs where all of us children--

DW: How many siblings do you have?

EM: We had--. Papa had nine.

DW: Oh, my goodness. After he had problems with you, after you were born, he had no more problems, huh?

EM: No, didn't have anymore problems. He, the neighbor's name was Ann who took care of me. And when I was born papa was so happy glory hallelujah til he had a gold five-dollar--

DW: Gold piece, huh?

EM: And he gave it to the doctor what delivered me.

JG: Mrs. McQueen, did your father--? So your father actually owned a farm? Did he farm the land that he bought?

EM: I'm trying to get to that.

JG: Okay.

EM: Now, now, as papa kept moving on buying every piece of property he could buy that he could he had built--

DW: Accumulated.

EM: Accumulated at least a hundred, hundred and, hundred and seventy-five--

DW: Acres?

EM: Well, it was a little less than that. I can't recall exactly what, but when granddaddy left, died, he, papa heired some of granddaddy's property. And papa bought a whole lot and then he added. And then my mommy when she died and her property joined [unclear]. And then my aunt, her daddy's property, joined my daddy's property.

DW: My goodness.

EM: So, when daddy decided to share all of this, of my mama's sisters and brothers, wanted to share their property, because, you know, there

wasn't much to it. Papa bought it, bought it all. And, he left the deeds into my mama's name. So that's how that--. Now that was sixty-nine acres joined my daddy and all. And the total amount ran in the neighborhood of two hundred acres.

DW: That's a lot of land.

JG: What year was this, Mrs. McQueen? About what year was this?

DW: What year was it?

EM: Now that is a hard thing for me to say because I can't remember--

DW: Right.

EM: --exactly how long that's been.

DW: Right. But the property's no longer in your family, is it?

EM: Huh?

DW: The property's gone, now. You don't have it in your family now, do you?

EM: I'm, I'm trying to get to all of that.

DW: Okay.

EM: So, now when papa--. When mama died--. First, let me say this first. Papa came over here [unclear]. I, I don't have--

DW: That's okay. I'm fine. No, I'm just--

EM: I don't have the air on.

DW: Hot flashes.

EM: Because it's so expensive.

DW: Yes, ma'am.

EM: And I just haven't turned it on.

DW: That's okay. I'm fine.

EM: So, now, when papa--. When my mama died my mama was sixty-six years old.

DW: Your mama was sixty-six when she died? Okay.

EM: When my mama died she was sixty-six. And prior to that my husband and I had bought an acre and a quarter of land out there on Tunnel Road. And we bought that in 19 and 4, no, 1939.

JG: So, Mrs. McQueen, when did you move up here?

EM: Huh?

JG: So when did you move actually up here?

EM: Wait a minute. Ninety sixty-nine. I got married--. Wait. Now let me get back a little bit. I'm going to where I was, went to school. I left home in, when I was about eight. Oh, no, I was about nine or ten years old. In fact, I was in the sixth grade. And my mommy had a, had a cousin who was a bishop of United, I mean, AME Zion Church. So, and he lived in Charlotte. And he needed somebody to help his mommy keep house and he had his office in his house at that time. So, and he told my mama and daddy that why can't you let her leave, come down here and live with us and we can send her to school. So I went down there when I was in the sixth grade. And, and, and, but I was promoted to seventh grade by being in the country and being a country person.

When I went to school I couldn't pass the examinations so I had to repeat the sixth grade. And the seventh grade, I repeated the sixth grade and the seventh grade I skipped because I knew everything in the sixth grade. And I helped the teacher teach the sixth grade.

So, then I had some cousins who went to Farmer Memorial Institute which was ten miles out of Greensboro on Highway 10, I believe it was. And so, so when I got ready to get to go to high school Bishop Walls and my cousin wanted me to go to Palmer where they

were. So that's where I went. And I got my high school education and one year of college at Palmer Memorial Institute.

JG: And what city was that?

EM: Greensboro. They had a junior college. Dr. Charlotte Hawkins Brown had a junior college. And that's where I got my education.

Now, me being from country and papa crazy about buying land he didn't care too much about education. He wanted land. So, I had to work my way [unclear]. I worked all the time. I cleaned bathrooms. I cleaned teachers' apartments to pay my way. And I also did a little hairdressing so that I--. And I charged the girls fifty cents to do their hair and all that sort of thing. So I didn't study as well as I wanted to. And whenever I graduated I graduated a C plus and I didn't like that. So I didn't continue with that.

I had met my fiance, my husband there. So after he, after--. With I living up here in the country, I mean up here in Asheville, I mean down home, which is about thirty miles from here, he came up here to visit me. And he found the mountain was so gorgeous to him. And he just loved it so. He went back home where he lived in the Greensboro area and gave up his job and came up here and got a job up here. So, so he could be close to me. So then with that after we courted for about two and a half years we got married. We got married in July the second 19 and 37.

And now, but we--. After we got married and we found our [unclear] in the Chimney Rock area. And he would work in [unclear] close by where he could come up to see me anytime, anytime he wanted to when he was off. So with that--. And I was, as I say, I was working up there at Chimney Rock [unclear]. And I wait tables and,

and by waiting tables and making good change they would pay me ten cents for every person we, who I served. And it was lovely. You know I made quite a bit of money that way. But I, I'm getting that mixed up a little bit because that was before I married. But anyway--

DW: Can I ask you a question--

EM: And I was working there--

DW: Let me ask you a--. Can I ask you a question, Mrs. McQueen? Was there a large population of blacks in the area of Chimney Rock?

EM: Quite large.

DW: Really?

EM: Yeah. But not--. Yeah. Cause, the Freemans and Logans and Ledbetters were farmers and they did--. They brought all their vegetables over here. And they had [unclear].

DW: They brought it to Asheville?

EM: Yes. Brought the produce to here. And my daddy was the type person who he raised so much vegetables and all, he even went to Charlotte and sold a lot of his.

DW: That's a long way.

EM: And over into Tennessee. Not Tennessee, but--

DW: Yeah, Tennessee.

EM: No, Tennessee [unclear].

JG: Virginia?

DW: No. That's just the next state. Tennessee, probably. You're probably right.

EM: Yeah, maybe, maybe it was Tennessee. I can't remember.

DW: Now, the next would be Virginia.

EM: Virginia was next to North Carolina.



DW: Right, yeah.

EM: I want to say Virginia, but papa drove a big truck and carried all of his vegetables to Charlotte, to Asheville and to that other little place where I'm trying to find, tell you the name of it.

DW: It'll come to you.

EM: Yeah. So, so that's how we--. And then all of his children wanted an education but papa didn't see that. So I'm the only one at that point that got that much education. Then, now let me name my family. Erline's first, Philip was second, Amos is third, Naomi is fourth, Ulysses--. You know Ulysses?

DW: What's his last name?

EM: Logan.

DW: No, ma'am.

EM: Well, Ulysses is the fifth. Dennis is--. No, Rose--. Do you know Rose?

DW: What's her married name?

EM: She's a Walker now.

DW: Yes, ma'am. I do. I saw her Sunday. You look like her. She does hair, too.

EM: Rose, and then Dennis and Karen. Now, now that was eight of them.

So, I was still going to school and papa said to me, Erline, you can't go to school this year. I said, papa, why? He said mama's going to have a baby. And I said, well, why do I have to stay from school? And he said you have to take care of mommy. And mama was forty-five years old then. And he was afraid mama wouldn't make it. So I had to stay home and--

DW: Take care of--

EM: Uh-huh. And Sarah--

DW: Was the baby.

EM: Was the baby.

DW: Now, you're the only one--

EM: So, I had to stay home. And I don't let her to forget that I had to leave--. I had to lose a whole year not going to school.

DW: Taking care of her.

EM: And I, and I won't let her forget that.

DW: I don't blame you.

EM: And she lives in Atlanta.

DW: Okay.

EM: Okay. Now, now I'm telling you all of my sister's and brother's names.

DW: Now, did a lot of people from Chimney Rock move to Asheville, Mrs. McQueen? Do you think there are a lot of people from there migrating to Asheville?

EM: Yeah. There's quite a few. Yeah, quite a few. And they was moved to different places. Now Uncle Newburn, Uncle Newburn's oldest daughter, Rosa Lee, married a minister. And she moved to Salisbury, North Carolina. And in so doing, that's where she got her education because she went to Shaw University and got her education. And Uncle Newburn wanted to educate every child he had. And, but what happened, after Rosa Lee got her education, she helped her other sisters and brothers to get--

DW: Educated.

EM: Get themselves ready for life, too. So, but, I, being the oldest-. And then I was much younger than them that I didn't have the, the

education to help my sisters and brothers like that. But, now, in later years I helped every one of my sisters and brothers in different ways, not big help. But whatever I could do.

DW: Right. Now, you said you--. Jewel, stop me if I'm usurping your time. But you said you bought land on Tunnel Road. What did you do with that land?

EM: Well, we bought an acre and a quarter right across the street from Battery, I mean from--

DW: Okay. On Tunnel Road, let's see--

EM: Beverly Hills.

DW: Okay. Yeah.

EM: Yeah, Beverly Hills.

DW: Yeah. Mrs. Greyboy used to live out there.

EM: Huh?

DW: Mrs. Greyboy.

EM: Greyboy? My property joined Greyboy.

DW: I know where it is then. Right--. There's a library there now, just passed the library.

EM: No. It's across the street from the library.

DW: Okay. Yeah. Now, can I ask you--? Jewel's really the one who's getting this information. But we want to do something later on also with what Jewel is getting. I remember when you had some restaurants on Eagle Street.

EM: No, Market.

DW: On Market, okay.

EM: Well, then--. Now, let me say this.

DW: Okay.

EM: I was pregnant with my son in 19 and 43. He was born in 1943. And, after he was born and he--. And I had to give up my work because I was working with Sealys, Sealy on the mountain at Sealy's Castle.

DW: Oh, yeah, okay, okay.

EM: And after he was born Mrs. Sealy helped to pay, I mean did pay for his, me being pregnant and getting the doctors that she wanted--

DW: To deliver him.

EM: --deliver, yeah. And, so--. And being, too, a little later on--. Now, some years later--. We lived out there for twenty-seven years until that property went so high in taxes that we had to give up. And so we sold that property. And he had already bought this property here. And, so, after buying this here and then we, when we got that sold we built this house in 19 and 66, 19 and 66, that's when we built this house. So, that was, that was when we left Tunnel Road.

DW: Okay. Now when did you buy--? When did you--? Tell me a little bit about Eagle Street and Market Street.

EM: I'm getting there. I'll get back a little bit.

DW: Okay.

EM: I was--. After me being pregnant with Harry--

DW: Um-hmm. That's Harry right there.

EM: That one there.

DW: That's Harry, Sr.

EM: Huh?

DW That's Harry, Sr.?

EM: Yeah. Yeah. Well, I was working over there in Beverly Hills cleaning peoples' house. And they would pay me a dollar a day. So, and then my husband had become a pullman porter.

DW: Okay.

EM: And, so one of my, our friends called me this particular evening and said, Erline, Erma and I can buy a restaurant if you will go in with us because he knew that I knew something about food buying and all of that. And, so, they got--.

And I said, now, Max, my husband, whose named Newman, but we called him Max, because we didn't like Newman. So, I said, Max, is on his way to California with a load of soldiers, and, but, if you want me to, to join, I mean, to buy with you, go in with you with rent, I mean with buying that restaurant, I said yes. I'll go in with you because I'm saving money for my brother who's in service. And he keeps telling me that any time I want to use a little of his money I could do that. So I borrowed--

DW: What was the name of that--? What was the name of that restaurant?

EM: It was at that time the restaurant was named Wilson's Cabin. And it was on the corner of Eagle and Market.

DW: Was that next to Mrs. Bredem's? You remember--

EM: No. Bredem was up the street some.

DW: Up the street? Okay.

EM: Yeah.

DW: Now, what year was that that you bought this, bought into this restaurant?

EM: That must have been about in '45, 1945 is right.

DW: Okay.

EM: Now--

DW: Can I ask you how many, how many businesses were on either street during that time in that area? I know the Y--

EM: At that time that was restaurants, tearooms, barbershops, doctor's offices--

DW: What doctors were there? Do you remember?

EM: Dr. Mills, Dr. Holt, Dr., his name was Jones, I believe, and he was a dentist. Dr. Jones was a dentist, but the others were physical doctors, I mean.

DW: Tearoom?

EM: A tearoom.

DW: Now, what went on in those tearooms?

EM: Huh?

DW: What went on in those tearooms? What, what kind of activities in the tearooms?

EM: Just serving lunches and doing little stuff like that.

DW: Oh, like a little mini café kind of thing.

EM: Yeah, like a mini café, yeah.

DW: Okay. And, and [unclear] the street?

EM: And the barbershop and [unclear] flowers.

DW: The La Bonnet.

EM: Huh?

DW: The La Bonnet Beauty Shop, La Bonnet, the La Bonnet.

EM: Yeah. Well, it came later.

DW: Oh, okay.

EM: It came later where I, where we bought the, the Wilson's Cabin which is on the corner of Eden and Market.

DW: Now, where was that Mrs. McQueen in comparison to the jewelry shop, Mr. Rollin's Jewelry Shop?

EM: Mr. Rollin's Jewelry Shop was up the street from, from, from that corner up the street going up--

DW: Toward the theatre.

EM: To the theatre on the opposite side.

DW: Oh, opposite side, okay.

EM: Yeah. And, there was a little hotel in there, too. I can't think of the name of it, but a little hotel was in there, too. And it had a little mini shop, a mini eating place in the basement of it on Eagle Street. And it was--. But it faced Market Street.

DW: Now, can I ask you about the YMI. The YMI had a library. Do you remember the library used to be in the YMI?

EM: And, now, may I say this. That, at the, when we bought that, the, the Wilson's Cabin, it was three of us who bought it. Okay. Now, and we do the contract where if one wanted to sell you'd have to, to, to--

DW: Buy the other two out.

EM: --to, to, one or the other or who owned it. And when Bertrice decided and Erma his wife wanted to sell--. Now, Wash Burton and Mae Burton wanted to sell first because Mae didn't want to work like we had to work. She didn't want to operate the cash register. And Wash saw that there was a friction there. So he and Mae decided to sell their share and the two of us bought their share, Erma and Bertrice and me.

DW: Okay.

EM: Because my husband didn't want any part of it for fear if he got laid off he could draw unemployment.

DW: That's why it was in your name only.

EM: My name was on it, but it was his, too, but his name wasn't on it.

DW: Right. That's so he could protect himself.

EM: Yeah. So, now, after all of that was cleared and up and we--. And after I thought that I had paid them all out. And I thought that now I'll start doing what I want to do. So, and we--. And, and I thought we was going to move on up.

One Christmas morning the Steeles called me and said, Mrs. McQueen, are you warm? I said, what difference does it make to you? Because by me being warm I own this, I mean I [unclear] so don't ask me questions like that because we bought it. We bought the property from Dr. Montgomery. And, they gave us a [unclear] amount of time--. They gave us six weeks to move. So, now meantime, I am the person who named the Rigg's Restaurant. We had to find a name. So, I said to them, to my partners, I said, why don't we call it the Ritz Restaurant? Using restaurant gives a new--

DW: Status.

EM: Yeah. And they all agreed with me. So we named it the Ritz Restaurant. And, but now when I moved, then I had to move. And I moved down there where the Ritz Restaurant is now. And we've moved there because of what I'm saying.

DW: Right. You had to buy another building. You had to find another building to move in.

EM: And then the masons, the black masons, built the Ritz building. And they were masons. And the masons means they were--

DW: Masonic Lodge.

EM: Builders, builders.

DW: Oh, okay, alright.



EM: Yeah. They were builders. And they built that, the Ritz from scratch. And, and, and they were, there were a number of the masons, but when we bought it it had gotten down to about eight or ten because the rest of them pulled out. So, we rented from them to about two or three years and they put it up for sale.

And I was saving a little saving on the side that I said whenever this saving mature it will be fifteen thousand dollars and that will help me when I get to draw social security. And we decided, my husband and I, decided that we would draw two thousand dollars out of that savings that I had. And we put it up to buy the Ritz Building. And we had to go two years before we could buy, I mean, before we got the deed straightened out. And then, then at that time it was 19 and 53 was when my husband and I started paying for the Ritz Building.

And, so we got a man to, to--. It being a mason building it had on the second floor was some type of meeting place for music and stuff like that. And then the third floor was their office where you had, always had to have the masons' office on the third floor.

DW: Now, there was also a time where the baseball players--

EM: They were on the second floor was where the baseball players--.

Because we got a man to divide that second floor in all them rooms. And by getting in rooms we had six rooms to rent and one larger for the rooms for them to play, I mean, them to, for music.

DW: Okay. Now, did you ever own that building outright, Mrs. McQueen?

EM: Say what?

DW: Did you ever own that building, solely own that building? Did you ever buy it? You--? What happened? What, what ended up with the building after you closed your restaurant there?

EM: Well, I was so tired and wore out. My husband said to me, said Erline, you're so tired. Said I believe that I can make enough money to pay for everything and you come home.

DW: What year was that, Mrs. McQueen?

EM: That must have been about 19 and 60, I mean, it must have been about '62 or '63.

DW: Did you sell it? Did you sell your interest in it?

EM: What a minute now? We, we leased it out.

DW: Okay.

EM: We leased it, leased the building out. And we leased it to--. In the first place, I cleaned the building up good. Cleaned it everywhere and got it in good condition and then we leased it to Shuley James. And we leased it to him in about '73. Well, I leased it to more that. But I, I--. This was the last leasing that I did. So, with that, they began to do ugly things in the building. I didn't like it but there wasn't nothing that I could do about it.

DW: Because he had a lease.

EM: Uh-huh. So, they finally, the city finally padlocked the building.

DW: Yeah. I remember that.

EM: And then after that [unclear] for a good little while I got a chance to sell it and I sold it to a lawyer. And when I sold it to the lawyer, he was a wonderful man, but he loved chitlin. But he paid me two thousand dollars--. I mean, no, twenty thousand down payment, twenty thousand down payment, but he never did pay me much anymore. And so I finally had to take it back. So then after I took it back he kept it a while. Then, now what's the name of these lawyers?

DW: Gene Ellison.

EM: Gene Ellison and MacLohorn came up there. They called me and said that they're interested in the building. And interested in the building and then we want to see in the building. So, I met them up there and they went in there. And they said, well, now, we are interested in the building but it's run down so. But, we're going to see what we can do. And so they finally decided they would buy. And, now--. But they paid me--

DW: Ain't a drop in the bucket, huh, for what they got out of it? Yeah. I know. Mrs. McQueen, I want to, please, if you will be so kind, to--. Jewel needs to get some information about the Phyllis Wheatley Branch of the YWC, the YWCA that was on, it used to be on Ashland Avenue. You know where Ashland Avenue is?

EM: Yeah.

DW: Do you remember? Can you help us, please, with the mystery about that?

EM: Now, let me tell us this. That--. Down the street here where it was--

DW: Where was it, exactly?

EM: It was off of--

DW: That was the original one, you mean?

EM: Yeah. The, the Depot Street was on the corner of Depot and Walton Street.

[end of tape 1, side A]

JG: Did you--? Did any of your children actually attend the Phyllis Wheatley branch?

EM: No, because I didn't have no children then. See, I wasn't married.

DW: You had one child. You had Harry in 1945, right?

EM: And he was born 19--

DW: Forty-three.

EM: Forty-three.

DW: Okay. So, when you're talking about--. Jewel, is that on? Push it.

JG: It's on.

DW: Oh, is it?

JG: Yeah.

DW: Okay. And you're talking about the original Phyllis Wheatley YWCA was on the corner of Depot and Walton Street?

EM: Walton Street.

DW: Now, is that on--? What side of the road was that on? Was that on the one where--? You know where the pool is now?

EM: It was on, on Depot Street.

DW: Right. But was it at the top here? It had to be because Walton Street. The top, was it at the top of Depot?

EM: What?

DW: The top of it, the top of Depot, right down the hill here.

EM: Yeah.

DW: Now, where--? On what side of the road was that?

EM: What?

DW: What side of the road was it on? Do you know where--? Okay. You know where the Lombard Street--

EM: Coming up from Depot it's, it was on the left.

DW: Okay. Was that where the pool is now?

EM: Huh?

DW: Is that where the swimming pool is now? The swimming pool.

EM: No. They're not--. It's not down that far.

DW: Not that far.

EM: It's up--

DW: On the corner.

EM: Up on the corner.

DW: Where houses are now?

EM: Huh?

DW: Where houses are now? There's houses right there.

EM: The Housing Authority started building--. The Housing Authority started building houses in there for the lower income people. That, that must have been--. Shoot. I've already forgot when that was.

DW: Well, when the housing project came up down here, Walton Street Apartments is what you're talking about, Walton Street Apartments, Walton Street.

EM: Yeah.

DW: That's when the Housing Authority put those apartments in. Now, before that, was the Phyllis Wheatley branch of the Y, was it there when the apartments were, Walton Street--?

EM: Yeah. Jessie Ray owned it.

DW: Yeah. Now, finish--. Forgive me for interrupting there. We had to turn the tape over but you started to tell us that Jessie Ray, Sr., that would be--

EM: Yeah.

DW: --Jessie, Sr.

EM: And Uncle Joe and Uncle Linn lived in that, in that--

DW: Building.

EM: --building, I think. I think. I'm not sure, but I think. But, anyway, they owned it later, I know. Uncle Joe and Uncle Linn--

DW: Now what are their last names? These are your uncles and aunts?

EM: Huh?

DW: This is your uncle and aunt. Your uncle and aunt? Uncle Joe and Aunt Lynn? They're related to you?

EM: We called them Uncle and Uncle Linn, but they're--

DW: They weren't related to you?

EM: No.

DW: Now what were their last names?

EM: Hmm?

DW: What were their last names? That's okay. Don't worry about it. I'm just trying to get a little bit as much as I can. Now, when that building was built, was it still standing when the apartments came, when they built the apartments?

EM: Yeah.

DW: They were.

EM: They, they, they tore it down and built a smaller house in that area right there where that property--. I don't know, but I think they still own that property.

DW: Do you know how big it was, how many rooms it had, what it looked like on the inside?

EM: No, no, because I--

DW: Never go in there?

EM: I was working so hard, honey, I don't remember.

JG: Mrs. McQueen, do you remember whether or not that there were rooms there for young ladies to actually rent when they come into town? I know a lot of the other branches of the Phyllis Wheatley that were around the country like in Chicago and different places.

EM: Well, now, what I'm trying to say is they moved into the Phyllis, I mean, the Yeamouth Culture Center--

DW: While they were taking--. Right when they got rid of the one down here they moved to the Y?

EM: YWCA.

DW: YWCA.

EM: I mean, Y--

DW: YMI.

EM: YMI, yeah.

DW: When did it go to the Phyllis Wheatley branch on Ashland? Do you remember when it went over there?

EM: I have no idea.

DW: Did you ever go in it?

EM: Huh?

DW: That, the branch on Ashland, were you ever inside that branch?

EM: No, I don't. I didn't get--. I didn't have time to do.

DW: Oh, I understand.

EM: I was the only--. The only thing I was doing running my business and my, my restaurant.

DW: Do you remember that was once a school, the Phyllis--? Do you remember when it was a school on Ashland? It was a school on Ashland in the Phyllis Wheatley branch of the YWCA. Do you remember that?

EM: I can't--. I don't remember that. But, you see, my son went to St. Katherine's School right there in that area, too. And when he--

DW: You're talking down here.

EM: Uh-huh. And he went to school when he was five years old and sat with the black folk because they wanted to put their children in school earlier than the city schools.

DW: So ahead of time. Yeah.

EM: So, that's why that my son was ahead of, ahead of--. And none of the other children was ahead from the high school, I mean the city school, because the Catholics taught earlier in years than--

DW: They taught them at a younger age.

EM: Uh-huh.

DW: They taught them at a younger age. Do you remember anything about the Phyllis Wheatley branch?

EM: Down there? Nothing no more than I remember the building. But I didn't [unclear].

JG: Mrs. McQueen, do you remember anything about when the Phyllis Wheatley branch merged with the YWCA, like in the early seventies? Do you remember anything of that?

EM: Well, you see, what happened, the Vanderbilts built the Y building for the black community because they couldn't go to the white community wherever. So, they built the YMI Culture Building for the blacks--

DW: For the laborers. They built it for the laborers on their estate.

EM: Huh?

DW: The laborers on the estate, Biltmore Estate.

EM: And they built it for the black community to have a place to, to, for the children to go to school, I mean go and exercise and all that.

DW: Recreation.

EM: Recreation, right.

DW: Okay.



JG: So, women and men could go there.

EM: What?

JG: Men and women were allowed to go there?

EM: I think so. But I remember so distinct as one man who lived there in that building because they didn't have nobody living there. They had rooms in there. But then they had the one man who lived in that building for a number of years. But now the YMI Culture was--

DW: You had the drugstore.

EM: Yeah, the drugstore.

DW: Fit and Harrison.

EM: Well, Fit and Harris and, and, and another doctor ran it.

DW: Dr. Holt.

EM: No. Dr. Wilson. Dr.--I'm trying to think his name of him. But, Fenton Harris, old man Fenton Harris and Mrs. Harris. Yeah. And they, he rented and--. I can't think of the other man's name. But anyway, they ran it for years. And then they got to a place where they couldn't do it. And young Fenton had gone away to college and got his degree and all that. And he was a wonderful person, but he, he started running the restaurant, I mean the drugstore, and he redid it and it was gorgeous. But, he decided he would play a little numbers and this stuff. First thing you know he started going down the hill. So, now I'm finished with that.

JG: Mrs. McQueen, does the name Thelma Caldwell mean anything to you?

EM: Thelma Caldwell?

JG: Um-hmm.

EM: Yeah. Thelma Caldwell is a wonderful person. And he, she just died.

DW: About two years ago.

JG: I understand she was the executive director for the Phyllis Wheatley branch when they merged with the YWCA.

EM: Yeah. Right. That's right. And then to the city--. The city had Dr.--

DW: Michael?

EM: No, Dr. Hendrick. Dr. Hendrick was a dentist doctor. And his wife was the, was over the, the library, the city library. And she walked back and forth to work everyday. She had a beautiful style of walking. And she had beautiful legs. And he would just watch her come down because she was just gorgeous.

DW: She had a nice gait on her, huh?

EM: Huh?

DW: Nice stride, huh?

EM: Uh-huh.

DW: Do you remember when Mrs. Caldwell, Mrs. Thelma Caldwell, when she first took over the Y, what year that was?

EM: Yeah. I don't know when it was but--

DW: Does she have children?

EM: No.

DW: Mrs. Caldwell have children?

EM: Well, she had some--. She didn't have children, I don't think, but she had some--. She had some relatives that took care of her to a point. And when she--. Wait a minute. Mrs. Caldwell built a house in the, right around the corner from the YMI, I mean from South French Broad. They cut a street in the back there to go to her.

DW: Okay. I know where you're talking about.

EM: And, Mr. Caldwell was a--. He was a stockbroker. And he made his heavy money with stock. And I mean heavy. He was just a gorgeous man and made heavy money. But he started drinking quite a bit. He kept going down. And he finally passed. And Mrs. Caldwell was the, kept it til she got to the place where she couldn't. And so she moved in to--. Now, why I can't recall of his name?

DW: That's okay. Don't [unclear].

EM: But anyway, she just passed--

DW: Two years ago, about two years ago

EM: Yeah.

DW: Maybe we can get some information about if we can find some relatives of hers that would know more about what--

EM: Wait a minute. My sister, Rose Walker, lived in front of her when she was in the back and she can tell you a whole lot about her.

DW: Okay. Thank you. We'll do that.

EM: Now, you know Rose.

DW: Oh, yes, ma'am, I do. I saw her last Sunday in church. She goes to St. James.

EM: Rose, now, she's having--

DW: Y'all look alike.

EM: She's having a lot of breathing problems and I haven't talked to her today. But she's having--. This air is hard on her.

DW: Oh, she has allergies.

EM: Yeah. But anyway, you talk to her. You can get that information.

DW: The baby girl that took a year out of your school.

EM: Huh?

DW: The baby girl that took a year away from your school?

EM: No. She--. Sarah is that one.

DW: Oh, that's the baby.

EM: Yeah.

DW: Okay. I'm sorry.

EM: No, Rose is not the baby.

DW: Okay.

EM: She's in the middle of the family.

DW: Okay. I'll ask her. We'll, we'll follow-up with her then and may be she can give us more information.

EM: She can give you all kinds of information about Mrs. Caldwell.

JG: Does she know about the--? Does she know about the YWCA, as well?

EM: Thelma Caldwell.

JG: Does she know about the YWCA?

EM: What'd you say?

JG: Does she know about the YWCA and the Phyllis Wheatley branch?

EM: She knows--. No, I don't think she knows anything.

JG: Okay.

EM: She's not old enough for that.

DW: Yeah, cause she's about seventy.

EM: Huh?

DW: She's about seventy-nine or eighty, isn't she?

EM: She's eighty-two. She was eighty--

DW: Well, she may be able to pull--

EM: She was eighty--. She was eighty-two in January, Rose.

DW: She knows my father.

EM: Yeah.

DW: Now, when you talk to her, if you'll tell her--I'll leave my card with you. When you talk to her, tell her that Jewel and I will be calling on her to ask information about this Phyllis Wheatley. Okay?

EM: Yeah. If I forget to tell her, you tell her yourself.

DW: I'll do that.

EM: Cause [unclear].

JG: Mrs. McQueen, let me ask you something else. Do you--? When the Phyllis Wheatley branch kind of merged and it became the YWCA, do you remember anything that the YWCA--?

DW: She can't hear you, Jewel.

JG: Do you remember anything that the YWCA did in the community as far as health and--

EM: Yes. Now, yes, of course. See, the club that I belonged to, the Eli, we had a room there. And we supported them there. And so they had exercises and a poolroom and all that sort of thing. In fact, they kept telling me they wanted me to come back to the pool. And I didn't like it because all those old folk in there. And I said, ooh, they may not do what--. And I didn't want to get in there. So, I didn't get--. I joined it but I didn't go.

JG: Do you remember when the YWCA actually started doing programs for the youth in the town, especially the black youth, in Asheville?

EM: Well, now Rose can remember. No. I don't know if Rose can remember that or not. But, it was--. See, they decided that they would have a YM, YWCA for the blacks. And, and Caldwell, Thelma Caldwell, was the first one who did it.

JG: And that's when they merged together, right? And then she became--

EM: And, and--. Now, you can get that information from the library uptown cause we did a lot of [unclear] and everything in the library uptown. And you can get some little data by me up there, too.

DW: We've got it in our library, too. We have that information at UNCA. We have your oral history in the Highland Collection at UNCA.

EM: Yes.

DW: That's my card.

EM: You know this Wiggins is coming to me.

DW: Good-looking man.

EM: Huh?

DW: He's a good-looking man.

EM: Yeah. Right. Uh-huh. Well, at any rate, have I give you any information?

DW: Oh, yes.

JG: Yes, ma'am.

DW: Beautiful. And I want to ask you--. We want to do a program with you, too.

END OF INTERVIEW