

T. Harry Williams Center for Oral History Collection

ABSTRACT

INTERVIEWEE NAME: LaSalle Williams

COLLECTION: 4700.2509

IDENTIFICATION: LaSalle Williams lived most of his life in Mossville, Louisiana. He worked in education for forty-two years – twenty as a coach and twenty-two as a principal. After retiring, he worked at the sheriff's department. An important community leader, he served on the Calcasieu Parish Planning and Zoning Board and was president of the Calcasieu Parish branch of the NAACP for thirty years. Coach Williams Drive in Mossville is named after him.

INTERVIEWER: Chelsea Arseneault

SERIES: Mossville History Project - Second Meeting

INTERVIEW DATES: March 27, 2015

FOCUS DATES: 1930s-1980s

ABSTRACT:

Tape 4431

LaSalle Clarence Williams was born in Houston, Texas, on June eighth, 1931; he was adopted into Williams family, who also raised his biological mother; much of his biological family moved to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; knows little about his grandparents; adopted father owned a wood yard and sold wood for a living; earliest memory is learning to use a crosscut saw; description of school; chores; played sports with rag balls and broom handle bats; other games included marbles, Tarzan, and cowboys and Indians; enjoyed crawfishing; description of family home; wallpaper made from newspaper; father raised fowl; mother always had a car, worked in Sulphur in restaurant business; raised chickens; Williams killed many chickens; collected muscadines in woods; grew fruit trees; Garrett's Grocery was the only grocery store in Mossville; people caught the passenger train from Mossville; other businesses in Mossville; Shoaat's Prairie named for wild hogs; people hunted the shoats; Williams was raised Methodist but is now Baptist; church attendance was mandatory in the Williams family; only three churches in Mossville when Williams growing up; churches supported each other then; Mossville school went through sixth grade; because they were outside the city tax base, had to use a relative's address to establish residence in Lake Charles to attend only black high school in area; Williams excelled in running, went out for football; had to pass white-only Westlake High on way to Lake Charles; got scholarship to Grambling; colleges integrated during his second year, a coach recruited him to McNeese in Lake Charles; got three degrees at McNeese; taught and coached at Westlake High School; Senator William Rainach passed law banning blacks to compete against whites in sports while Williams at McNeese; coaches had to teach social studies; countering belief that whites were smarter than blacks; lessons he learned from teachers; considered teaching in Philadelphia where his biological family lived, but disapproved of undisciplined

teaching style there; difference between north and south sides of Mossville; played softball on Sundays while adults barbecued and gambled in the woods; stores and canteens in Mossville had slot machines; made bows and arrows out of rattan vines; Daddy whipped him for swimming in dynamite hole; leeches in swimming hole; cities aren't for Williams, he likes small town Mossville life; likes to lounge on porch in his pajamas, which isn't acceptable in city; remembers watching TV through neighbor's window; segregated movie theater in Westlake; closeness of community; disciplined each other's children; friend who trapped muskrats and raccoons for fur; got whipped for stealing and eating somebody's chickens; stealing especially reviled by parents; mother worked for Cagle Brothers car dealership; Williams bought new Savoy Plymouth; wife has always been in charge of most of their money; story of God punishing him for dishonesty; strong belief in honesty and fairness, whether students were black or white; block voting in Mossville; pool built while Williams was recreation leader in Mossville; Williams instituted free days at pool; otherwise, large families couldn't afford admission for all the kids.

TAPES: 1 (T4431)

TOTAL PLAYING TIME: 1 hour

PAGES TRANSCRIPT: 30 pages

PHOTOGRAPHS / PHOTOGRAPHER: Six photographs taken during and after interview at the Rigmaiden Recreational Center in Mossville, Louisiana. Photographer Kyle Tanglao.

OTHER MATERIALS: Biographical data form ; Interview questions (2 pgs); Correspondence; Biographical commemorative card titled "Honoring a Community Champion: LaSalle "Coach" Williams

RESTRICTIONS: none