

T. Harry Williams Center for Oral History Collection

ABSTRACT

INTERVIEWEE NAME: Wilhemenia Williams DeCuir

COLLECTION: 4700.1209

IDENTIFICATION: Daughter of prominent minister, Reverend Freddie Williams. Port Allen High School librarian for four decades.

INTERVIEWER: Judy Boyce

SERIES: West Baton Rouge Parish Remembrance Project

INTERVIEW DATES: December 30, 1999

FOCUS DATES: 1940s-1960s

ABSTRACT:

Tape 1768, Side A

Description of Remembrances oral history project; introduction of narrator; father, Freddie Williams, was a Baptist minister; father in charge of four churches; frequency of visits to each of his churches; started out with one church, New Pilgrim, in Zachary, Louisiana; father organized Boy Scouts, participated in other activities at New Pilgrim; father's membership in NAACP and organization of West Baton Rouge Parish Voters League; contrast between personalities of her parents; father born in Erwinville, Louisiana; father died of lung cancer at age fifty-two; father's family of origin; father didn't see his older brother for many years; father grew up on farm; parents married early, lived with father's mother; moved from Erwinville to Poydras Bayou to Port Allen; father finished seventh grade, mother, eighth; father exempted from military because he was the sole support of his family; father called to ministry at early age, ordained at twenty-one; father's nickname was "Charm"; father liked to sing and hunt; parents sang a cappella together; imitation of father singing; mother's father only wanted her to date dark-skinned men; father was dark; mother described her husband as "nothing but a devil"; Wilhemenia had one sister who survived infancy, and two brothers who died; father's sermons: "My dad was from the old school. He was very long-winded."; father's seminary education; father's cousin was minister of one of the largest churches in Shreveport; Wilhemenia check the grammar in her father's sermons because he wasn't well educated; parents knew the Bible well, frequently quoted and recommended scriptures; Rosa Haney, father's teacher who is still living; size of congregations in his four churches; relocation of Sunrise church after father's death; mother's childhood; Mother was an immaculate housekeeper, she even pressed Father's underwear and handkerchiefs; grandfather was a farmer and basket weaver; mother's birth and death dates; mother was disciplinarian in home; grandparents' names; grandfather's family; mother liked to dress flashy; mother got jealous of other women in the congregation.

Tape 1768, Side B

Mother's ways of interacting with people; Wilhemenia or her mother accompanied father on night calls to distant churches; mother's direct communication style; family home that father built in Port

Allen; father was carpenter as well as minister; sister Mamie born 1940, died 1996; Wilhemenia born 1937; Wilhemenia is librarian at Port Allen High School; Wilhemenia's elementary and high school education; masters in English, minor in library science from Southern; further library science work at LSU; father typed report for her one night when she was sick of schoolwork, feeling sorry for herself; father accompanied her to Southern football games; importance of education to parents; black ministers not salaried then, only paid from collection; father didn't want her to work while she was in school; brief stint at cleaning tables; sister finished high school, then went to secretarial school; sister worked at bank in Scotlandville until her death; visiting mother's people in rural Lottie, Louisiana, for holidays; eating meals together on Sunday; father insisting she eat faster so he could get to church on time; parents included her in decision making as teenager; transportation to Southern; parents' garden; father got up early to meditate and read the Bible, or sometimes to hunt; father's membership in NAACP; Baton Rouge store boycott in 1950s; father's work with voting rights for blacks; father was president of West Baton Rouge Parish Voters League; father taught classes to help people learn to register to vote; father accompanied people to register at Port Allen courthouse; church's role in helping people gain voting rights; important people in Voters League; father good friends with Judge Kimball, who was white; other white people he worked with on projects; interviewer reads from article about Wilhemenia's father testifying to police jury regarding needs for recreational facilities for Negro youth; first recreational facilities for blacks in Port Allen.

Tape 1769, Side A

Park named after her father and Richard Lee; park cornerstone is missing; park temporarily closed after vandalism in '60s or '70s; some people in black community didn't want park named after her father; Williams family's relationship to Lee family; description of photo of her father with other prominent men; Reverend T. R. Provost also active in voters registration; other voters registration luminaries; looking at more pictures together; size and stature of father; father's illness; father's proudest accomplishments; father helped take care of his ill grandmother; father voiced his pro-equality for blacks opinions, but didn't attend protests; some blacks in neighborhood boycotted Sunrise Baptist Church, which hurt her father.

TAPES: 2 (T1768, T1769)

TOTAL PLAYING TIME: 1 hour, 23 minutes

PAGES TRANSCRIPT: 50 pages

OTHER MATERIALS: Interview questions (3 pages); Compiled information on Rev. Freddie Williams (5 pages)

RESTRICTIONS: No release forms. Joint copyright is retained by the interviewee and interviewer and their heirs.

NOTE: This interview is also deposited at the West Baton Rouge Parish Library under the title "Celebrating our remembrances. Reverend Freddie Williams: personal accounts of the history and the contributions of the African American community in West Baton Rouge Parish in the twentieth century"