

NAME: STEWART, Bessie
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INTERVIEWER: Mateo Osa
LOCATION: Boise, Idaho

INTRODUCTION: This is an interview with Bessie Stuart conducted on December 17, 1980 by Mateo Osa at 1319 River Street.

So when did you come to Boise area anyway?

BS: '43.

MO: 1943.

BS: In the spring of '43. I think it was the first day of March or the last day of February. I've forgotten that.

MO: Is that right?

BS: But I think it was the first day of March.

MO: Where did you come...

BS: From Tennessee.

MO: From Tennessee huh? Why did you end up coming to Boise?

BS: Well there was a man lived here, you know, it was the third man at Morrison-Knudsen at that time, Mr. Wallace Puckett.

MO: Wallace Puckett?

BS: Yeah and he was part of Morrison-Knudsen. He just never -- he wouldn't let them put his name there. But he was one of the men.

MO: He was hired for Morrison-Knudsen?

BS: He was what?

MO: He worked for Morrison-Knudsen?

BS: He was a part of it. It was the three men. Mr. Morrison, Mr. Knudsen, Wallace Puckett.

MO: Oh, I see.

BS: Was the reason we came. He was a third man, that we always called him, of the Morrison-Knudsen firm. He was a starter. He was born and

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raised in our neighborhood.

MO: Oh, he's from Tennessee?

BS: But he was a boy when my father was a boy, it was even before I got here . But we lived near his people, his mother and father.

MO: In Tennessee?

BS: Uh-huh. In Pomeroy.

MO: In which town in Tennessee?

BS: Well we lived in the rurals. It was a little place called Pomeroy although Clarksville was our city -- we was fifteen miles out of Clarksville in the rurals. That's not too far from Nashville either. But I was raised in the country on a farm and my father was a blacksmith, he didn't like the farming. He was a blacksmith in this little village. Every time he would come to see his people, he came to visit us quite often because that was the old people. And he kept after some of us to come out here. Then he wanted somebody to come and work at his ranch, you know, he had a ranch out Cloverdale.

MO: Puckett did?

BS: Uh-huh. Well it was his wife's -- he bought it for his wife. He hated the farm and he left the farm when he was seventeen, and I used to hear him tell it, he said when he got to St. Louis, now just from down there to St. Louis, he had twenty-five cents. That's how scarce money was. But he left home making his way out, you know, and he'd build up and fail and build up and fail until he joined in with Morrison-Knudsen, then he became a man of wealth, a millionaire. Anyway, my sister and her husband came, Emma's brother.

MO: Okay, Emma Niblett's brother?

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BS: Uh-huh, Monroe Fort -- he lives on the corner right by Emma.

MO: Monroe Fort?

BS: Uh-huh. F-O-R-T.

MO: Okay, I'll get that name down real quick.

BS: Monroe lived -- and my sister, he married my sister and he kept after us until... During that time in, well they came in '42, '41.

MO: '41?

BS: Yeah.

MO: They came ahead of you?

BS: Yes, they did. They were here when Pearl Harbor -- and we were home. Anyway, they came in '42 I believe, or '41 because that's the year -- over a year before we came, so they decided to come. You know, everybody was moving during that time. People were moving all over the country.

MO: I heard that a lot of people were moving from the countrysides to cities.

BS: Uh-huh, to cities and the far-away places, you know, to make it better. Only the farm was there, you just couldn't accumulate anything. You couldn't make money. We even left tobacco. We raised tobacco and we left it there and what they call the sosation [maybe association], that is, you know you keep it until you can get a better price. You can carry it to the factory and leave it there, then they would sell it and then they would get your money.

MO: What's that called, a sosation?

BS: That was called a sosation, yeah. But they had what they called a sosation -- tobacco men, you know, and the factories, and they said well you can put it into sosation. You know, you try to sell it and they give you such a little until you say "I'm not ready to sell

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that right now."

MO: So the sosition was kind of the tobacco grower's plan to get a higher price for his crop?

BS: Yeah, you could keep it, you know, if you didn't want to sell it right then, you already had it in tobacco. Well you know how they do it. You see, they sell it by auction, like, you know, you never could understand a man when he'd blib-blib-blib, you know. Then when you didn't want to take that price, you didn't have to. You could leave it in this sosition and later on when some of the tobacco moved, maybe it would . . . up to be more, get more for it. So you never even did get the money. The lady that owned the farm at that time, she lost her brothers and they were left to this woman -- it was three of them that never was married, the brothers, two brothers and one sister. We lived on that farm she had bought.

MO: Oh I see. You never did get the money for your crop?

BS: No, she got it.

MO: You had moved out and when the crop sold she kept...

BS: She kept the money. (Chuckles) She sure did.

MO: That must have made life real nice for you?

BS: Wasn't it now. That's something. But they were very church people and . . . but oh no. Anyway, she had taken real sick, she had cancer. I went home during that time and she was so sick when I was there. She didn't last very long, she passed. But then she got the money or some of her people. Her sister lived on the farm there. So this is how we came out. So we had sold some of our tobacco, but this part. But you had three grades when it come to tobacco. You had the good, the seconds and lugs, which was the bad leaves at the bottom that gets a lot of dirt on them and every-

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thing, they call that lugs.

MO: Lugs huh?

BS: Uh-huh. And then you had the good tobacco and what's called second, and the lugs. I don't know which one that was. I think he sold his good tobacco. But some of these seconds and lugs we left in that sossation.

MO: So when you arrived out here, you had work lined up?

BS: Oh yes, we lived with Mr. Puckett for four years out on the ranch.

MO: Out on Clover...

BS: Uh-huh, at Cloverdale.

MO: Cloverdale out there

BS: Uh-huh, there was just one mile north of the Cloverdale School, and I milked cows there, kind of around twenty-five, thirty cows. There was about thirty but, you know, part of them were dry part of the time, and then you have about twenty-five, twenty-seven cows to milk all the time. But you milk them with milkers and I get up four o'clock, go to milk. You had to have the milk out front by seven. Then I'd go home and eat breakfast, and catch the nine o'clock bus that come into Boise.

MO: For?

BS: For day work.

MO: For day work. Gosh, you were a busy person. And you came out by yourself, or?

BS: No, my husband and I.

MO: Your husband and you came out together?

BS: Uh-huh, we both came at the same time. Mr. Puckett came after us to come. He kept writing us to come, he wanted us to come, so we did. Of course, we wasn't doing very much then but we came with the

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idea, "We're going out there and we're going to save every penny we can make and come back home and buy a home there some place in Nashville or Clarksville or something like that." We got out here, we liked it. Except for our husbands. (Chuckles)

MO: What's that?

BS: Well, my sister and me, well we wanted to stay after we got here, Monroe and Virgil didn't -- they said we always said we were going to come, and we were going to make money and we went home, and we had real estate and when we had so much more then we'd ever had in our lives and we were putting it in the bank and saving it, you know. But just before we give we wanted to go home, they thought. So then we had a chance to buy this house after we were here about, oh, maybe six months, for twenty-two hundred and fifty dollars, for this house.

MO: Gee, that's pretty good.

BS: Well when you think of it now, you know, what property is now, and we had enough money just about to pay for this house, that we brought from home, you know, but we bought it together -- the four of us, see, my sister and her husband and me and Virgil.

MO: You and Fort and...

BS: Yeah, and my husband and me. So, our minister at the Baptist church down there, he called out there, the people had asked him to see if any of his people wanted to buy this place.

MO: Any of his people -- congregation?

BS: Congregation, yes. So this minister said "Well I knew you all had a good job and I wondered if you'd want to invest in that. When you get ready to go home, all you have to do is turn around and sell it." So, me and my sister, we was always dangerous like, and we

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said "Yeah, let's buy that." So we got after the men. "No, no, no, no, such thing." They didn't want no property. We asked this real estate man if he'd just sell it to my sister and me, 'cause we had worked with the men 'til we was sick of 'em. He said "You know, if you'd have asked me that the first day I was out here, I could have done it without a worry." But that had been about a week or two or good. He came out to see us. At that time they had passed a law that you couldn't do it that way, you couldn't buy property like that. The man would have to sign.

MO: The men would have to sign?

BS: Yes, they'd have to sign. You can't buy property like that.

He said "When I first came out here, you could have. You could have bought it just as easily without the man. Now the laws all passed that you can't buy without the man's." So he said "You get your husbands together, I'll come out one day at noon," 'cause they'd be at work otherwise. So he came out and he worked with them and worked with them and they still told him no.

MO: They told him no?

BS: Yes.

MO: For buying a house?

BS: They didn't want to.

MO: Why, 'cause he was colored?

BS: No, the real estate man was white, but this was our minister that he had talked to.

MO: Oh, I see, I see.

BS: So then the real estate man, I can't think of his name, I knew his name, I know his name -- Sam Kiser, I think it was Sam Kiser. Anyway, Mr. Kiser, I can remember. So he came on back to town. He said

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"I couldn't do anything with them, but you all work on them a little while." And we did and we had them to understand "whenever you're all set and ready to go back home, we'll go and we'll put the place up for sale." That'll leave us more money, because it would probably sell for more then we'd given for it. So they decided to go ahead. They was very reluctant though. And so we came in, made arrangements, bought it. Took a little money and carried it to him and paid it.

MO: That was in -- 1947, '48?

BS: Oh, it was closer to that. Let's see, we came in '43, that must have been around in '44 or '45, I could look at my thing and tell, my deeds I mean. But it was earlier then that. Anyway, I don't think it was '47. Anyway, we bought the place and then a month after we bought it, we could have sold it for double the money. He called us back out and asked "How are you liking your place?" Well we weren't living there, we rented it. 'Cause as I say, we lived out there for four years. My brother and my sister, they lived in.

MO: Oh, I see. You stayed out on the ranch, and Emma and Monroe came here?

BS: No, none of us came here. They lived in. Monroe and his wife, which was my sister, they lived in already, and we lived on the ranch, out there. We didn't none of us live here again. But we bought it and at that time there was four servicemen renting this house. Four different servicemen and their wives lived here. They had it all divided off and it was quite different then. I've had the kitchen worked over since then.

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MO: Was there a considerable Black population down here at that time?

BS: Oh, there was the servicemen and their wives. There was a whole lots of them here. People was making their garages into dwellings, you know, there was a lot. But now, when the war was over, when they all left, then we were very scarce. (Chuckles) 'Cause they left and went home, of course. But there was a lot of them lived here then around in every little hole, you could find somebody.

MO: So during World War II then there was more?

BS: Yeah, that's right, World War II. There was a lot of servicemen because with the two bases at Gowen Field and Mountain Home. Well they were allowed to bring their wives and children who a few of them had children. And they just lived in every little hole they could. It was as I say, a lot of people made their garages into a little dwelling. At that time. But then, it wasn't too long before the war was over and people left. But now, people are staying. Those that have stayed their time and getting out of the service, why, they're buying homes here. We have quite a few people here now that residential people. They're happy about it for our church because that's all we've had at our church, was people that were kind of transients, you know, they just move right on. But now we have a lot of people here, if you can find them. You'd think just come over here and find them. They live everywhere. They live all over, they really do.

MO: That's kind of what we find out. Earlier, I don't know, maybe you've heard there seemed to have been a concentration of Black people in this general vicinity, say, about...

BS: Well this area here was over here all right...

MO: ...the time you came and maybe sometime before?

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BS: Well when I moved here, we were the only ones, except there wasn't Mrs. Whiteman that lived across there on Fourteenth, where John Bertram lives now -- he just lived right across the street on Fourteenth. He's the first house beyond this apartment house. He bought Mrs. Whiteman's house and Mrs. Whiteman and my family, we were the only ones. See, this was all dwellings on both sides down Fourteenth, way on down Fourteenth back here. When the people went to work and got back home, there just wasn't no traffic, you know.

MO: You didn't have this through street?

BS: No, our kids used to get out and play ball in the middle of the street.

MO: When did this River Street go clear through, anyway? When did they change that?

BS: River Street's been going clear through to Sixteenth, but then, you know, then they cut Sixteenth, was the one that went on through, see. Americana or whatever you call it now, plus, it's Americana, and it was Sixteenth Street then.

MO: When did they do that?

BS: Oh I don't know just exactly the time, not to the day. But that used to be a church down there that we baptized in. In fact, it's a store down there now. It was Americana. It was a church. This lady that lived on the end of the house here, on this alley. Mrs. Johnson, well she owned that home and her husband was the pastor at the church down there. We don't have a baptistry in our church so he used to let us use it to baptise. Then he bought a home up on Overland and sold the church and Americana built it. It was a lovely church. He was a carpenter and he built it, Brother Johnson.

MO: Did Ellen Perkins live down here somewhere?

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BS: Uh-huh.

MO: She lived...?

BS: Well the street went right straight through her house. River Street, there where Erma lived, Emma was next door to her and it was right there on that corner, right straight through her house.

MO: So that's why she had to move?

BS: Uh-huh, that's right.

MO: Did you know any other Black families here when you came, I mean, can you remember any other Black families besides the Perkins and...

BS: Yeah, Mother Johnson, who's dead now. That was Mrs. Perkins' mother and she lived on Miller, and, let's see, that's it. Mrs. Whiteman lived over there, she lived alone on Fourteenth and the Hortons, they live on Thirteenth.

MO: The Hortons?

BS: Uh-huh, Andrew Horton, he lives on Fourteenth and they've been a long time. In fact, well, like Mrs. Hayman she was born and raised in Nampa.

MO: Oh was she?

BS: Uh-huh. And that's Mrs. Horton's sister. They lived on a farm over there. They were born and raised over there.

MO: Was Roland Crisp here then?

BS: Uh-huh, yeah. Roland Crisp, I was here, of course, when he built the grocery store up there, where the Center is, and then was here when he worked down at what you call Pioneer Grocery, down on Front Street. That was his father. I always get those two streets mixed up, as long as I've been here. Front Street and Pioneer, was just right back of, Pioneer Grocery, used to be a big grocery store behind the Owyhee Hotel.

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MO: Oh, right behind the Owyhee?

BS: Yes, where they built that Motor Court, well there used to be a big grocery store, I used to love to go there and shop. It was one on each side of the street, a grocery store and Roland worked there. He was quite a young man then, at that time. I've been knowing him and his wife for a long, long time.

MO: I'd like to interview with him. I called him and he said he's not feeling too well right now.

BS: He had a stroke -- or was it a heart attack? Which one?

MO: I don't know.

BS: Yeah, he's been very sick.

MO: Did you ever talk to some of those old timers and did they ever mention any...

BS: Doc Hanna that lived up on Bannock and the Buckners, you know, now that's another pioneer...

MO: Yeah, they live over on Bannock too.

BS: Yes, they live on Bannock. Now, of course, Doc Hanna's gone, but you was talking about do I know of anybody, now his wife if you go there she's aged like Brother Hanna.

MO: Is she still alive?

BS: Yes, she's in a home.

MO: She's in a home?

BS: Uh-huh.

MO: Is she pretty sharp yet, I wonder?

BS: No she isn't. Sometimes you can go there and she's very alert and then other times you go and she don't even know who we are. She's not, she's quite an old lady and they finally put her in a home. But Doc Hanna and the Buckners, now Mrs. Buckner, her father built this

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church. She has been here ever since pioneering days, really, both of them.

MO: Did you ever talk to some of those old timers and find out why a lot of the colored folk ended up coming to this particular neighborhood?

BS: No, I couldn't -- they didn't give nothing that was so very specific. They just kind of wind up here, got here for one reason or another and some of them was railroad men. I know one man, I think the railroad was the cause of him being here. That was Mr. Smith, he's been dead a long time. They was old people too. They lived up on Bannock.

MO: So you know that some of them were railroad men?

BS: Well he was, I think, at first. Maybe I got it wrong, I don't know whether Smith was. Yes, he was, I think he was a railroad man. But he was an old man when I got here, anyway, and he wasn't well and he died, and she moved to Portland, Mrs. Smith did. But now, Brother Hanna, what did he do at first? The Buckners could tell you that -- I don't know. I'm afraid I'd be giving you the wrong story. I get the men mixed up, with what they've done. Mr. Buckners been at that place where he works right down below our church, he's been there I think ever since he came here.

MO: He came in '32 didn't he, something like that?

BS: Maybe, yeah. Yeah, 'cause there was a write-up about him not too long ago in the paper. You know, he's in his eighties and still working, you know. Then I think he's worked there ever since he's been here.

MO: What other jobs did Black men and women here, or particular Black families here...

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BS: Well, you see, not being too well educated and hadn't studied for no specific job or what-have-you, they hadn't -- now Mrs. Hayman's girls, they did well. They went to high school and on to studying to be a secretary or what-have-you and worked, her oldest girl worked as a secretary here. She has a job now with the government in Portland. She's always down here. She's working for, anyway, it's the government, but I can't say -- it's about this housing thing. She's on that. And my daughter worked in the Owyhee Hotel when she came. I left her home -- she liked to finish high school, she wanted to finish there, so she did. I let her stay with my dad until she finished high school. Most of them did housework. They catered parties and the people that I met and knew, they catered parties and done things like that, worked housework.

MO: Here in Boise -- was work hard to find?

BS: Yeah, it was kind of. Of course, you could do housework if you wanted to, but they didn't want to pay you very much. Well, they just didn't pay very much and one lady I worked for she wanted me to pay her fifteen cents for eating. (Chuckles)

MO: After all the work. Do you remember any salaries or wages of so much for day or hour?

BS: Yeah, they paid from fifty cents an hour to a dollar. But when I wanted to work, we got a dollar an hour. First started in '75, and then they began to pay us a dollar an hour, but getting from a dollar, do you know what you pay now?

MO: No, I don't.

BS: Four dollars an hour.

MO: That's an improvement.

BS: You better believe it. But that was more then we got back an hour,

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we didn't get that much in pay. We'd barely get a dollar a day, a dollar a day for real hard work, you know, worked all day for a dollar.

MO: Yeah, in tobacco...

BS: Well, even if you did housework.

MO: Oh, even housework?

BS: Uh-huh, of course, that's what I was doing. We'd get a dollar. But I did work for the superintendent's wife. She was from North Carolina so she said she couldn't pay me, give me my lunch and then pay me to eat. (Chuckles) Her husband followed me to the bus line that afternoon, he said "Bessie that's wrong, that's very wrong." So she says "I know where you're doing where you work over there and I said "I don't. Mrs. Schumaker go to bed, lay down and go to sleep." And she said "Bessie fix your lunch out of anything you want out of the refrigerator." And her refrigerator was loaded because she had And she said "There's plenty in the refrigerator so you get what you want for your lunch, and don't go back to work as soon as you eat -- go read the paper. And she was one that paid me a dollar an hour. She said "I know Mr. Schumaker know you've done because ," and I said "I'll fix my own lunch Mrs. Schumaker." Well whatever I want out of the refrigerator and its loaded all the time. It was, because he worked for Morrison-Knudsen also.

MO: Oh, I see.

BS: She said "I just don't believe it." Anyway, that's why and so I was helping her husband wash walls -- he'd wash overhead and I'd wash down low, so she went away and he says "Will you come back next Thursday. I don't have a penny in my pocket right now. I'd give it back to you but I don't have a penny in my pocket. When

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you come back next week, I'll give you fifteen cents." I said "I doubt if I'll be back." "I'm sorry Bessie." he said "that leaves too much work for me to do. My day off if I don't get up and

I have to do the rest. Would you please come back." But when I went back and I told Mrs. Puckett about it, she said "I dare you to go back, don't you ever go work for people that do you like that." She wouldn't allow me to come back. I don't think I would have gone back anyway, 'cause I didn't want to -- 'cause nobody on that, I've worked for three different people on that street and this is how she had finally gotten me to come to her. She was the only one that said anything about that, fixed me a real nice lunch and most of the time they'd say "Sit down and eat with us." I didn't like to, but I did. But she fixed my lunch and charged me fifteen cents. "I think I should take at least a penny a minute." Fifteen minutes to eat, and she counted it and I was fifteen minutes to eating my lunch, a little sandwich and a cup of tea, and she charged me. (Chuckles)

MO: She charged you for your lunch huh?

BS: For the time, for the time I ate my lunch.

MO: As far as some of the men's work, what are some of the things that the men from your community did?

BS: Mostly janitorial work. My husband worked at city-county health for twenty years, city-county health. He worked for city-county health and the art gallery and he still works at the art gallery. He worked for city-county health for twenty years until he retired and then he retired and -- but he kept the job at, he still worked at the art gallery. Janitorial work. Of course, there was always a demand on the farm, but you know, a lot of people

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didn't want to work on the farm. I love to work on a farm.

MO: You prefer that?

BS: Yes indeed, any day to housework. I milked the cows, though you see I get through with the cows, then I wanted something else to do. But I liked it, working on the farm.

MO: Did you know any of the men that worked for the railroad?

BS: Yes, Lee Deal down here.

MO: Lee Deal was a railroad man?

BS: Uh-huh, he lived right down on Fifteenth.

MO: As a matter of fact, I think I've got his name.

BS: Yeah, I bet you have. He's retired too from the railroad. Let me see, what else, he's dead now. He Perkins when she was a Stevens, and he was railroad man.

MO: Oh yeah. Was the majority of the men railroad men or would you say the majority of the men were transients, or?

BS: Yeah, more or less transients, you know, just any jobs that they could get. Some of them would come in here and would be painters or that already knew the trades, you know, would get a job like that, painting.

MO: That's the way it was at least, in '43 when you came?

BS: Yeah, back in the 40's.

MO: Right.

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MO: In the 40's did you notice an imbalance, say in the male-female population in your community? Were there more males than females, or vice versa, did it seem like?

BS: Uh-huh, more females.

MO: More females?

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BS: Uh-huh.

MO: I wonder why that was?

BS: I don't know, I don't know but it was. Well, to me, I know at our church we had all

MO: It wouldn't be just because women went to the church more then men?

BS: Well that could be part of it, but to me it's just always been more female. Of course, there's many couples. Most of them is couples. I guess there was men, they just didn't go to church. But we've always had a shortage of men. But we've had quite a few more now.

MO: What do you think the reason for that was?

BS: I really don't know, just more people, more women then men, I guess. Well, I don't know what the cause of it, but it was just always . There's always been a lot of women here that lived a long, I guess someone told you about Mrs. Green, she was an old one, so she's dead and gone. Mrs. Green was an old person that was here, like Brother Hanna. Brother Hanna and Mrs. Smith, they were the old couples that were here

And some of those people lived alone.

MO: Did you notice, when you came here, were there any other concentrations of Black people in any other part of the town, or mostly say, down in this area?

BS: Well as I say, when we moved here, we did finally move in, we lived out there four years and we were the only colored family besides the Hortons and -- the Hortons live on Thirteenth and Mrs. Whiteman lived over there on Fourteenth. And all the rest of them was white.

MO: Even on Ash and clear through Eleventh to Ash?

BS: Yeah.

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MO: Is that right?

BS: No colored on Lee -- no colored.

MO: Yeah, I've heard that before.

BS: No.

MO: Willa Mae told me that, and Buckner told me that and everyone told me that there were no colored on Lee at that time.

BS: For a long time there wasn't anybody on Lee. But now the Hortons, they was on Thirteenth when we moved here, they lived on Thirteenth and then Mrs. Hayman, at that time she lived on Grand, I believe.

MO: So if you consider Grand Avenue and Pioneer, and Eleventh...

BS: I call that Korea -- it was so rough at one time. It's such a mixed group over there. I told them, I didn't even go down that street, that's Korea instead of Pioneer.

MO: Korea huh?

BS: At that time the Korea war was on. I named it Korea instead of Pioneer. People moved there and then moved out and move in and move out, you know, it was kind of a bunch of people there.

MO: So there didn't seem to be too many other Black families really in this area?

BS: Like I say now, Mrs. Perkins mother lived down on Miller -- she lived there for a long, long time and finally they had to sell it and take her because she was living alone. Her husband died, but they weren't living together 'cause he lived right on, and they lived about a block from her house, down on Grand, you know, the house that used to be right on the corner. Well he owned the two houses there and one house over on Miller.

MO: So considering Grand Street, Pioneer Street, Ash, Eleventh, and Lee -- there was a definite white majority as far as population?

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BS: Yes, oh yes, definitely. Sure was. For a long time, people, they began to settle in over here.

I mean the Stevens had to move, Perkins and Emma moved because they wanted that right-of-way there.

MO: How about among your community, what kind of social activities did you have in the Black community?

BS: We didn't have much of a social -- we were just going to church and our church activities, really. We didn't have it much other. We only had such a few in our church at that time, of course, for a long time.

MO: Approximately about how many did you have in your church?

BS: Oh, it was a long time before we could get up to a hundred enrolled. Then, with them being transients, some would stay with you for a year and then you wouldn't have them anymore. They'd move on, you know, because they was like servicemen wives and so on, you know. Our church was made up of people like that. Oh there was a very few, you'd do well to have thirty-five people.

MO: Thirty-five on an average Sunday maybe?

BS: It wasn't many all the time. There just wasn't.

Our pastor then there was Reverend E. E. Banks and we'd known him at night. He couldn't 'cause we come in from the country and he'd always tell his wife, "Come on honey, there come my church." We had an old truck that we used to drive in, for a long time, from the ranch and we'd ride in this truck. So my brother-in-law fixed, from the back of it, you know, and made seats inside. And my daughter and then another girl came out here with my daughter from Springfield, Tennessee when they finished high school and she came, to better herself, get a better job. So they both worked at the

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Owyhee Hotel and I had the two oldest girls, colored girls. So the boys wanted, there was two boys, Brother Johnson's son and Jeff Taylor's step-son, was finishing high school and they wanted a girl to take to the prom. They'd just got here. And so they came out and got these two girls to take to the prom.

MO: So there was not very many younger Black girls went to high school?

BS: No, there wasn't, no there really wasn't. They didn't have a girl, there wasn't a girl in the high school. But these girls just finished high school, my daughter come out here and so this girl came with her. So they were the two girls that they had to take to the prom. My daughter went back home for her high school reunion this summer.

MO: Oh really, how many years?

BS: Yeah, maybe thirty. But this is the first one they've had and they had it for 1970 -- it was quite an affair. Three hundred came for it and then they didn't -- there was a whole bunch. But it was over three hundred that came.

MO: What other activities evolved around the church besides just the Sunday worship? Did you have other functions?

BS: Our church tried to keep a choir, they sung at the Pen for years. Every fourth Sunday they went to the penitentiary and sang in their services. That was when Reverend Styles was the chaplain.

MO: At the penitentiary?

BS: At the penitentiary. You probably At the pen up there.

MO: Well you have a lot better idea than I do.

BS: Well it was way before this one was built, out here. They sang out there and we also went to the Veteran Hospital and sung. I don't know what Sunday, it was every second Sunday evening I believe,

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every second Sunday evening. Now they've done that for not just one year, they did it for several years, the choir did. I used to go with them to be on the program and have a reading and do something, you know. I got tired of going to the pen -- we went out to the pen and Reverend Styles wanted us to go sing for a man that they was fixing to die right away. He had cancer and he took us around to the hospital when he shouldn't of because it was -- what do you call it, inmates working in the flowers, it was in the spring, and oh, they had such lovely, so pretty back there and so many flowers and they just stepped aside and let us march on by. But that was very dangerous because they could have caught one of us, for, and I said "You would have had a dead one on his hand." if he'd have caught me.

MO: He would have had his hands full, huh?

BS: Oh they would have scared me to death, if they would have held me for a hostage. But he would always tell us, our chaplain, "stay close together" and we would. We'd often nearly run over each other and he carried us through there. And everybody who ever went you had to -- see, I wasn't part of the choir but I went with them a lot of the time, to make up the group, and when everybody went we'd have to sit on the stage, right where he was. But they was nice. In fact we knew some of them.

MO: I bet they really appreciated that.

BS: They seemed to, yeah, they really seemed to enjoy that. That's why they kept going.

MO: Well this Reverend Styles, was he a colored man?

BS: No, Reverend Styles lives here right now.

He's white. He was a chaplain for many, many years and we was so upset when they dismissed him from the pen as chaplain, because

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we thought so much of him.

MO: Sounds like he did a pretty good job.

BS: I thought he did and many men came to Christ through him, many of the prisoners. We also went and sang for the women, you know, they were just around another little department.

MO: You'd usually sing for them after you finished singing for the men, or at the same time, or?

BS: No, no, we'd go out there, because you see by the time we'd get through there, it'd be time for that same choir to come back to it's own church. So we sang for the women on Saturday. We'd go around to them on Saturday. On Saturday afternoons we'd go out there and sing.

MO: Were there any other functions?

BS: We had a Missionary society and I think that's about all we had. The missionary society we kept up and supposed to have missionary society now but we hardly ever meet. But we had a good mission at that time.

MO: What's that, to acquaint young people with the doctrine?

BS: The word of the church, uh-huh, of the church. I was president for years and used to be president of the senior women. Trying to bring about a change. So many of the ladies that were so interested in the missions have passed, you know. But those was two good activities they had, they done a real good job of, I thought.

MO: How about among your Black community, or your Black friends, did you have sort of a good relationships among yourselves so that, say, you took care of the aged or sick or poverty people?

BS: Yes, we really did. We've done that all right. It was always someone coming into Boise, we always said it seemed to be the

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jumping off place and coming to our church for some help, and you know, there was just always somebody like that here that we had to help. We'd have many, many boxes of food, you know, we just make it up out of our own pantry and go on to see the sick and

we've really done a lot of that. Our missionary society did. But you know, like they'd come here with children and different ones of them, they don't have no support and they think they can just come walk right into Boise and get onto welfare, but you can't do that. They've got a system. We've had to support one girl, we've supported her and four children for a whole year until she could get on. She came to church every Sunday because we took up money and gave it to her. And the minute she got on welfare, we haven't seen her since. That's how things, when they're not grateful she was. She still lives here, all her kids are grown now and gone. But we did that for her in fact, we've been taking care of a lady right here now, that's been getting money from the church. I think she's got a job now. I don't think she got on welfare, but she's been getting support. She has -- just this one woman and her daughter and, I think she's got two children, I don't know I believe she told me she has two children. I haven't seen her for so long. But we do quite a bit of that even now.

MO: But you seemed to have done more of that in the earlier days?

BS: Yeah we've done quite a bit of it - we've done quite a bit of that.

MO: A lot of probably more transient people.

BS: Moving around. We call it a jump-off place.

MO: Jump-off place.

BS: Yeah, I call it a jump-off place because it's like they run out of money here and so then there they are.

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MO: Here in Boise?

BS: Yes, they're always getting here and then not having nothing. What do they leave home like that for, not having enough money to go where you're going. They're on their way here, they're on their way, I mean, to another place...

MO: Jump-off place?

BS: Well, it seems like that. My friend and I we always say well maybe somebody jumped off and put in Boise without anything.

MO: How about among your friends here just in Boise, is it common for you to have luncheons or banquets or parties among your friends?

BS: We have a mixed group. We have a mixed group of ladies that we go to dinner with, my daughter and me and Erma, are the three colored people, and the rest of them are white. It's grown now to about ten of us. We just started off about four or five of us, and the lady, Mrs. Welsh, her birthday is in the end of March too so we always go out to dinner, so we kept doing that and then we'd invite somebody else until we formed this little group, and now there's a whole bunch of us, there's nine or ten of us now. But my daughter and me and Erma are the three colored and the rest of them are white women. We have affiliation in the church work, and we just kind of started doing that and we go out to lunch and some things and then we belong to some of the, my daughter and me, senior citizen groups and Christmas, like Christmas coming up now, they've planned a Christmas party and then and we go to that -- we did last year. We went to the Sea Galley -- our Christmas party was planned there.

MO: Were relationships like that, inter-racial relationships pretty common like that when you first came here?

BS: No, they weren't. It just wasn't -- but it's become that way. I've

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been affiliated with Church Women United -- that's a Christian group of churches. Oh, I've been to Idaho Falls and Twin Falls with them, stayed all night there with the ladies, whites, I'd be the only colored. We have quite an affiliation that way, with the Church Women United. I don't do too much now, but my daughter do, she went to all kinds of --- Los Angeles in the summer, well in the spring, you know, to a conference. Yeah, we have quite an affiliation with each other.

MO: How about in the earlier days, what was your relationship with the white community -- how was it?

BS: Well the biggest thing we done then was exchange, like, the Missionary Society. Now First Baptist over here, white First Baptist, well they would always invite my ladies and we could go and be on their program, they'd ask you to do certain things on the program, and you'd have that kind of affiliation.

MO: Within the other Baptist Church?

BS: Yes, this was First Baptist. But we also had quite an affiliation with the Second Baptist. The new church now, they had a church right up here on -- can't even think of it. But I know when we had our convention, came down, a board meeting and they let us use that church. They let us use the whole church -- Second Baptist.

MO: When was that?

BS: Oh, I think it's been about seven, eight years. This was our convention, big convention of the West. The delegates all come, but they let us use that church. We thought we was going to buy that church, but they asked so much for it, and they wanted the money so it just dragged out too long. Our congregation is too small to do much like that. But we did thought

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we'd was going to get help from the ADC -- that's the Baptist Congregation convention, which is a very religious . They have lots of money. But they couldn't do it because we didn't have no collateral. That is, our congregation is too small. But we've had quite affiliation with the First Baptist and the Second Baptist, and we have been to the Methodist Church, the big Methodist. They fixed dinners for all our church , we've had privilege to cater dinners. Our church used to do that too. We used to have the wives of the CA meet every other Thursday, of course, they wanted us every Thursday, but most of my ladies work, and we would serve a luncheon, dinner luncheon every other Thursday. At the Y [YWCA].

MO: Was that most of your contact, then, with the white community -- evolve around the church activities?

BS: Uh-huh, that's right, yeah. We had NAACP, was organized, we've been organized here a long time and different times, you know. We'd go down, the president would move away, or something, then you'd have to go and do it all over.

MO: When was that organized -- do you remember?

BS: Oh I don't -- I couldn't give you too good -- but it was first organized out of here. First organized NAACP out of here. But it was organized then by a white lady.

MO: Oh, is that right?

BS: Uh-huh, Mrs. Ruth Tillis -- she's dead now. She and her husband, they helped organize it. The pastor that we had then, he wouldn't have nothing to do with it. Most ministers, they don't

MO: They didn't?

BS: Huh-uh.

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MO: I wonder why?

BS: Well, he would help, but they don't become a part, they don't become a...

MO: They think it was too much of an activist type group?

BS: Yes, this is it -- that's... The pastor that we had then, he wanted it organized, but he -- don't put him on for anything and whatever he could do, he'd do it, he'd push it that way, but not executive office or anything. But I was here when they organized it.

MO: Did you have any problems like, when you first came to Boise or in the early years around 40's or so, did you have any problems getting any services or any goods, any housing from the white community?

BS: We had trouble at the stores.

MO: At the stores huh?

BS: Because sometimes they wouldn't want to wait on you.

MO: Grocery stores or...?

BS: No.

MO; Any kind of stores.

BS: I got a lady fired at Pennys. I didn't mean to, but she was white -- I didn't do it. You know, when the commodities were so scarce, materials, you know...

MO: During the war maybe?

BS: Uh-huh. We went to the store, we said "Hurry if you see a line, get in this line, because there's something going on at the end of this line." You know, like you'd buy something that you couldn't get. So my sister and I came in from the country out there, when we lived out there, and we came down the street there at Pennys, we said "What's all the people lined up here at Pennys for?" So

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we went and they said "They got a lot of new material." You know, different print materials and different materials and it was clear stacked up and they had hired this girl, different people to help out because there would be a little rush on. So we joined the line, said "Well I'd like a little piece of material, three or four yards, whatever you can get." So we joined the line and when it got to us, this girl just talked and talked to another girl there, she just wouldn't look at us, she would not wait on us at her counter where we were standing -- we just stood there, and we're going to give her a chance. She would not wait on us. And we had noticed someone had told the head lady up on the balcony there at Penneys at that time, Pennys had a balcony, we noticed, just kind of looked around, there was a woman standing there. She was just standing there with her arms folded, just looking at the girl, she was just looking at her. We'd look at her, we'd look at the girl, and the girl never seen her. She just kept talking to another girl that was at another counter there. The girl kept looking at her and she knew she should be waiting on us, but she just kept folding the material and putting it back. Finally she didn't have nothing else to do, she just stood there. This lady said "Do you ladies want something?" We said "We'd thought we'd get some of that material if we can get waited on." She said "I thought so." So she got after the girl and the girl "I didn't know they wanted anything." "Well, they stood right there, they were standing right there." And she just ignored us. She simply ignored us. But we seen a lot of that.

MO: Oh, is that right?

BS: Yeah, we seen a lot of that. Then we went to the bus station and

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they wouldn't serve us there. I hadn't had much chance to go to there, because as I say, I was living in the country and we'd come in and you'd be hurrying trying to catch a bus. You know, I was trying to catch a bus out in the country. But I never wanted to eat, but I seen others. But even came in on a bus, and they would not serve.

MO: Still wouldn't serve -- even though they was riding the bus, company.

BS: That's what I'm talking about -- people that ride the bus. I said, "Well if they done me that way, okay, but I think they ought to serve the people that's traveling." But I seen a colored go in there and they wouldn't post a clerk that would want to serve you but they'd say "I'm sorry, they has a law," and you know, they had quite a lot of little trouble there for awhile. But somebody straightened out, because they had to serve you -- they was supposed to. They changed, there so much. Because that wasn't a bus company, you know, it's always someone else that runs the cafe -- it's always someone else that runs the cafe. So, you couldn't get served there for awhile, we'd have trouble. But anyplace else around in town we went, we was served real nicely. But we had a lot of trouble in the stores. We did, and the Japanese people, they couldn't get served, and the Chinese people -- they couldn't get served. We'd all stand there looking, we couldn't get waited on. But that's all over.

MO: Are you familiar with any, what they call covenants? Supposedly it's the idea of certain neighborhoods have it written in their charter, for example, that no people of some specific ethnic extraction could live in that neighborhood. Those are called covenants. Are you familiar with any covenants around Boise?

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BS: No, but I've heard of them. You know, signed up like that to keep, you know, a group of houses.

MO: But you're not familiar with any?

BS: No, we never had trouble like that. We lived out in the country and then when we left out there, why we came here. We had already bought this place, so we moved here. My sister, when she didn't quit, she bought -- she had two houses, Mrs. Puckett bought her one and then she bought her house herself over there, next to the post office, that big house that used to be there, was her house. Her husband sold it to this guy. He sold both houses.

MO: And he didn't have any trouble buying houses, just because of the color of his skin or anything?

BS: No. We never tried to buy no place that they didn't want us. My grandson did here since he's been here -- he was a Marine. He went to Viet Nam -- he lost an eye, so he had some trouble. He chose a house and wound up, found out they didn't want him to be there. But he's bought a brand new home now out there, I don't know what that -- off of where you turn there at Cole.

MO: Cole School?

BS: Uh-huh, turn right -- back in there where that new subdivision is -- all that building back in there, he bought a new house. He bought a place and, he was trying to get that place and they didn't want him to have it, then he bought a place in south Boise, out on Amy Street, kind of a dead-end street. I liked that place out there so much, but he didn't -- he just never did like it. But I think it was because they wouldn't let him have the one he wanted. He was so outdone not getting that place. Then they told him about this one, well, he went ahead and bought this place out there, so

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now he's sold that and bought out there.

MO: Was there a certain, as far as your relationships with say, the reinforcement people, did the city police enforce this area beings that there was Black people out here -- did you sort of discipline your own people or, was there?

BS: No, the police the police would some of them would. The white and the Blacks, some of them would call the police if you snapped your fingers. But no, we didn't have any. Oh, we done what we could, you know, to keep it quiet. We don't have too much trouble over here. After, it was one or two places here, houses that, and after they were closed down, and we'd gotten out of here, tore 'em down and all of that, well we don't have a ghetto -- don't call this a ghetto over here because we don't like it. It is not a ghetto. Not anymore, it's not -- if that's what they thought. Now when Pioneer was over there, it was horrible.

MO: Pioneer there was some gambling or something...?

BS: Everything went on over there on Pioneer Street. You couldn't even drive through there, which I didn't want to.

MO: That's where the gambling and the ladies-of-the-night and whatever...

BS: Yeah, yeah. Strippers they say.

MO: Oh really?

BS: Well I just heard this, 'cause I wasn't over there, believe me.

(Chuckles) I wasn't over there, but then I've heard of that and the late nights and some of the people on Warm Springs, some of the aristocrats' daughters would be found over there, because we had a whole acre of servicemen. I've been down past through there like

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coming from someplace, or something, and you couldn't get through there. You couldn't come through Pioneer Street, you had to go around and come through Miller, you know.

MO: Why is that?

BS: Just because all was in there, having a good time, they just park in there til you couldn't pass, you couldn't get through there, is what I'm talking about, you know, there'd be so many of them in there. On Pioneer Street when you come down in here, we learned to come around to Grand -- you couldn't get down through there. Especially after 12:00.

MO: Just after midnight?

BS: Uh-huh.

MO: How many nights of the week?

BS: Oh, it wasn't bad until the weekend. It was bad enough, but it wasn't real bad until the weekend, the servicemen would come in by the truckloads.

MO: When was this, mostly in what years?

BS: Well, that was kind of in the last of the 40's, and entering into the 50's.

MO: Sort of the exciting part of, jumping part of town, huh?

BS: Right.

END OF TAPE

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