

TMP-015

Interviewee: Cabot Hayes Williams and Joyce Williams

Interviewer: Jessica Taylor

Date: June 21, 2013

T: This is Jessica Taylor interviewing Joyce and Hayes Williams on June 21, 2013 at 9:25 AM in White Marsh, Gloucester County, Virginia. Mr. Williams, can you please state your full name?

CW: Cabot Hayes Williams.

T: What is your date of birth?

CW: September 21, 1933.

T: And where were you born?

CW: Hayes Store, Virginia.

T: What are your parents' names and occupations?

CW: My father's name was Preston Cabot Williams. His occupation was- worked for local oil companies for many years, and then business of his own general store in Gloucester. My mother was May Purcell Thornton. She taught school, of course, was a homemaker. There were three of us.

T: [Laughter] How many siblings did you- you had two siblings?

CW: Yes.

T: What did they end up doing?

CW: My brother worked for Esso Oil Company for many years, and my sister was basically a homemaker. She did work for, you know, a doctor's office for some years. She's still living.

T: Okay. What was your occupation?

CW: My occupation? I worked for the Amoco refinery in Yorktown, Virginia for thirty-nine years.

T: I know we're sitting there right now, but can you describe where you live within Gloucester County?

CW: Where I lived?

T: Yeah.

CW: You want to start from when I was born?

T: Sure.

CW: Okay. [Laughter] I was born at Hayes Store in the home. Lived there till we got married in 1956. We built a house at Gloucester Point, lived there for seventeen years, and built this house here about 1973. It's still here. [Laughter]

T: Well, I'm going to switch to Miss Joyce now. Can you please state your full name?

JW: Joyce Ann Belvin Williams.

T: What is your date of birth?

JW: May 26, [19]35.

T: Where were you born?

JW: Achilles, Virginia.

T: Okay, and what are your parents' names and occupations?

JW: My father's name is Avery Jones Belvin. He was a fisherman. My mother's name was Cary King Belvin, and she was a housewife.

T: Okay. Did you have any siblings?

JW: Yes. One.

T: One? What was his or her occupation?

JW: She was a schoolteacher.

T: In Achilles?

JW: Yes.

T: Okay.

JW: No. Abingdon.

T: Abingdon, Virginia?

JW: No, Abingdon Elementary School in Gloucester.

T: [Laughter] Oh, okay. Did you live in Achilles?

JW: Yes, until we were married.

T: Okay. If you wouldn't mind just jumping right in, what is your earliest memories of Main Street?

JW: Just a narrow street. I remember Gray's Pharmacy, and Morgan's Drugstore, and A & P Grocery Store, which the family went to occasionally to buy staples. It really wasn't very spectacular. [Laughter]

T: How often would you come up to Main Street as a child?

JW: Probably once a week.

T: Once a week. How about you, Mr. Williams?

CW: My earliest recollection of Main Street? I remember Morgan's Drugstore, Gray's Drugstore across the street from it. Car dealerships, a Ford dealership, a Dodge dealership-

JW: I remember those things. [Laughter]

CW: -an appliance dealership, the service station, the theater- Edge Hill Theater- what we called then Long Hill Ordinary, which we found out later wasn't correct.

[Laughter] I think Southern States was there in those days.

T: Well, tell me a little bit about the service station.

CW: I don't remember when it was built, but I worked briefly at the Esso service station there in the village. I've read that there was another service station at the north end of the village, but I don't remember it... [Laughter] Nothing spectacular about the Esso station. What I'm remembering was in the [19]50s, the Esso service station. Of course, the Edge Hill Texaco was there, I'm sure. In my youth, it was there.

T: Do you- either of you- remember anything, key moments or anecdotes about it?

CW: About?

T: The Edge Hill service station?

CW: Edge Hill service station. I remember that lighted sign in front of it. I think Andy James has it now. [Laughter]

T: Pretty sure.

CW: But there is one there again now, thank goodness. It looks better with that there. That's about all I remember about that.

T: Do you remember it because it was a lighted building and a lot of the other buildings weren't lighted up?

CW: No, that's-

T: That's not it.

CW: -not part of my memory. [Laughter]

T: No. Just wondering why it stuck out to you...

CW: I think because that sign was lighted.

T: What about you, ma'am? Do you remember the gas station at all?

JW: I don't remember anything about the station. Is that what you were asking me?
Except it was there. It was green- green and white.

T: Did either of you ever go inside of it?

JW: I didn't.

CW: I don't remember going inside of it.

T: Do you remember anything about Captain Jack or Howard Brown, the one-armed man that worked there?

CW: I do remember Howard.

T: Okay.

CW: The one-armed man. I vaguely remember Jack, but my father worked for the Brown oil distribution-

T: Wow.

CW: -for a short time before he went to work for Amoco distributor at Gloucester Point, where he worked for many years.

T: Do you remember anything about that time? Do you remember how the work was for him, anything he said about it?

CW: No, I don't recall, but I have a Texaco sign that came from that business. They would replace the signs when they got shot up too much, and he got one of them and we used it at home to clean fish on for many years. [Laughter] A porcelain-covered sign. I've got that sign.

T: Wow. When you say shot up, do you mean literally, like with a gun? People--

CW: Yep. There are parts all around where the porcelain's broken off, where I guess a bullet hit it.

T: Just teenagers?

CW: I don't know [Laughter] but just about all the old ones you see are damaged that way.

T: That's just the strangest thing. [Laughter]

CW: Apparently, they didn't like to leave them up after they got too bad, and that one was taken down and my father got that one while he worked there. [Laughter]

T: But he spent his entire time in the oil business.

CW: No, no. My father left the oil business—I think it was about the beginning of World War II and bought a local store and ran that for some years.

T: Well, let's move on to that. What was World War II like in Gloucester?

JW: I remember some food was rationed. I was- wasn't very old then, but I remember dark shades at the windows- cool-down shades at night.

T: Why?

JW: So that we would be concealed to the enemy.

CW: So enemy planes couldn't spot our lights and attack.

T: You all were worried about that in Gloucester Courthouse?

CW: Everybody on the East Coast was worried about it, I'm sure. The top half of the headlights on vehicles were painted black so that they wouldn't shine out. There was a lot of worry about a physical attack on the East Coast.

T: Wow.

JW: I wasn't old enough to understand the seriousness of it.

T: Yeah. Wow. Do you all remember any people that went out to fight?

CW: Yeah.

JW: Oh, yes.

CW: She can tell about one close to her.

JW: There were a number in the family, in my family.

T: Yeah?

JW: They went to Europe and Japan and the Pacific Islands. Some of them were wounded, badly. I remember that there wasn't much communication. You would be notified that your son or husband had been wounded, but very slow information.

T: Yeah.

JW: I remember that part as being so sad.

T: Absolutely, absolutely.

CW: Her mother's brother was injured badly.

JW: And my sister's husband, several cousins, and I know of friends whose- who were killed- and there was a dilemma whether to bring the body back to the states or have it buried there.

T: Wow. Wow. That's incredible...During World War II in Gloucester did most people use cars- continue to use cars despite gas rations?

CW: They continued to use them. Tires were a big problem-

T: Oh really?

CW: -because tires were patched up [Laughter] way beyond what was reasonable because they couldn't get tires. They all went to the war effort.

T: Wow. Do you all remember little things like that that you missed?

CW: I remember well the rationing.

JW: Oh, yes. That was certain items such a sugar- was one item, wasn't it?

CW: Yeah. Oh, yeah.

JW: What else?

CW: An awful lot of things that went to the war effort were rationed: gasoline, tires in the automotive part. But food: a lot of foods. They were rationing stamps-

JW: Stamps.

CW: -and coins. I remember the blue and red coins that were made of a composite material for some of the rationing.

T: Wow.

CW: We played with them for years afterwards. [Laughter]

T: So you mentioned that one of your family members ran a store, right?

CW: My father.

T: Did he run it during the war, too?

CW: Yes.

T: Did it change his business at all?

CW: I'm not real clear on just when he bought that store, but he had rationing to deal with. He had to keep the records on things that were rationed and send the records in for that. A lot of things were just in short supply. You had to- had to divide it up among your loyal customers when things came in that were rationed, in short supply.

T: Wow. Yeah. When did his store close?

CW: I'm not sure. He sold it sometime during or shortly after World War II, and then bought another store right in the local area with my sister's husband when he came home from the war.

T: Where was that store?

CW: Wicomoco. Both of those stores were at Wicomoco.

T: Oh, okay.

CW: With just a couple of blocks distance apart.

T: That's funny. Did you notice any change over time in the general store business?

CW: [Laughter] Over a long period of time, drastic changes. When he first bought that store, it was catered to the very local customers, who could just walk to the store. Some would go every day [Laughter] to get a few things.

T: Right. How did it change after that?

CW: After the days of those stores in Wicomoco, it started into the progression to supermarkets.

T: The results of that...

CW: It just gradually changed from small business to big business.

T: Okay. Ma'am, you said that your father was a waterman. How did that business change over time?

JW: All right. He couldn't fish during World War II, because of the danger of subs and other dangers in the water.

CW: He was the captain of a trawl boat that fished in the ocean.

JW: In the ocean, and in the bay. During that time, the government offered employment—various types of employment—and he was a fireman. But he went back to fishing because he really enjoyed fishing.

T: Did he continue to fish until he was older?

JW: I think he went to- when he was young, I'm not sure.

T: Did his level of business change over time as suburbanization started happening after the war?

JW: They fished farther from home, and I suppose the boats got larger and...

T: How did that affect your family?

JW: I suppose it was hard on my mother because he was gone, some of the time, most of the time.

T: Was it different before that? Before the war, for example?

JW: Probably so, because it was probably more of a day- day fishing job, whereas after the war it was more of a five-day.

T: Where would he sell his fish?

JW: In Hampton. The market is still there.

CW: At Amory?

JW: Amory.

CW: Amory Seafood in Hampton.

T: Do you find that that's still a viable livelihood for people in Guinea?

JW: It's a viable livelihood for a lot of people today. They fish out of different ports. They fish out of Hampton, and Chincoteague, and maybe even farther north. They would take their catch in that port.

T: That makes sense.

CW: Your father sold fish in Gloucester, Massachusetts at times, didn't he?

JW: Yes.

CW: He'd be offshore. It was closer to go to Gloucester, Massachusetts and sell them instead of this area.

JW: He would spend the summers there.

T: Uh-huh. How often would he go to Gloucester Courthouse with your family?

JW: I don't know. Well, after the war and the grocery stores became larger, we went to Gloucester Courthouse a lot because we had more selection and things. It was like a Saturday night out also. There was a store at White Marsh that sold clothing and materials for sewing clothes. What was the name of that? Booker.

CW: John Booker.

JW: That was an important place.

CW: It really was.

T: Why was it important beyond, you could buy sewing stuff there?

JW: Because we didn't have anything like that, I suppose. Whatever we got, it must have been ordered. I don't know; I was really too young to know.

T: That's okay.

JW: I remember you could buy hats, gloves, and buy clothing or buy fabric to sew your own.

T: Did you find that you bought fabric to sew your own clothes more than you would just buy clothes?

JW: Probably- my mother wasn't a good seamstress, but [Laughter] there are- there were people- seamstresses around. She probably bought fabric. It was nice quality fabric, and the seamstresses were well-qualified, and you felt good about wearing.

T: Definitely. But before the groceries stores and the general stores got a bigger selection, in the time when you had to order them, did you take trips to Richmond or Newport News, places like that?

JW: That came a little later, didn't it? Yes.

CW: I remember when I was pretty young taking trips to Richmond maybe once or twice a year. Before Christmas, we would take a trip to Richmond to- to see the decorations and the stores.

JW: And to see Santa Claus

CW: See Santa Claus, [Laughter] and to nab some things for Christmas, too. Richmond seemed to be the place to go for that, although we- we rode the ferry to go to Newport News.

JW: The stores in Newport News were a sort of second place to Richmond.

CW: Right, exactly.

T: Walk me through- because I will never experience this- so, walk me through what Richmond looks like at Christmastime to you.

JW: I remember as Broad Street- a wide, it was broad- I don't know if that's how it got its name. [Laughter] Maybe six lanes wide and the windows in two of the stores—Thalhimers and Miller & Rhoads--were always dressed elegantly.

CW: That's what sticks in my mind, is those windows in those two stores at Christmastime.

JW: Oh, and they had a candy shop with the best fudge. [Laughter]

CW: And a nine-layer chocolate cake.

JW: His mother liked the cake. I don't remember too much about that. [Laughter]

T: Where was Santa?

CW: Miller & Rhoads, I think, wasn't it? It may have been in both of those stores, but we were only exposed to one at a time. [Laughter]

T: That's good. [Laughter] So you'd get your picture taken?

CW: I don't remember pictures, do you?

JW: I don't remember any.

CW: No, no. I don't remember anything about taking pictures with Santa in those days.

T: Okay.

CW: This is before World War II.

T: That makes sense. So, contrast that with what Christmas is like at home in Gloucester and Guinea.

JW: Okay. Christmas was always a big Christmas tree, the really pretty ornaments which both of us- we have some of each of our family tree's. You couldn't open a gift until Christmas morning. They'd hardly let you touch it. [Laughter] It was really more family-oriented because so many in the family sort of lived close by. We were a close community, you know? We used to go to everyone's house to see the toys that your cousins received. Then we went to our grandparents' for

this huge meal, and we went to both houses that day. I never have figured that one out yet- two big meals. [Laughter]

T: You could walk there? You didn't drive to it?

JW: No. I always remember my father having a car.

T: Since the beginning.

JW: Uh-huh. Where I lived, it was within walking distance at most- most of my mother's people. I walked to school. I was very close to Achilles.

T: Yeah, and that's a privilege a lot of kids now don't really have. What about Hayes Williams and Christmas?

CW: That's a typical thing: big gatherings and the grandparents' home. All the cousins, aunts, uncles, cousins. It was a big thing, having a family. Contrary to her experience, my grandparents lived far enough away we had to drive.

T: Where did they live?

CW: We lived at Hayes Store, and my mother's family came from Guinea, and that's a few miles. Had to drive there, go through the muddy road- had a long, long driveway which was typically very muddy. [Laughter] Questionable, sometimes, whether you could make it. My father's family was a little closer, up on York River. My grandmother was a Hogge and they had property on York River there. We would go there to visit my grandfather. My Grandmother Williams died, I think, when I was about three years old, so I don't remember her. We would go to visit Grandfather there. He farmed and raised watermelons a right many years in my memory.

T: I was talking to someone else that mentioned there were Main Street traditions at Christmastime, where they would, during Prohibition- which is before your all's time- move from one house to the next and just drink on Christmas. Do you guys remember any Main Street traditions or Gloucester traditions that are really unique to this community, Christmas or otherwise?

JW: For a time, there were Christmas decorations- say, the Christmas door decorations or outside decorations that were judged.

T: Really?

JW: Yeah.

T: When was that?

JW: I don't know.

CW: I think it went on during World War II, as I remember. I won some kind of prize one year for decoration. I home-made the nativity scene out in the front yard.

T: What'd you make it out of?

CW: I think it was a large box, [Laughter] a large paper box, my memory says. I remember that the judges ran into the ditch across the road when they stopped to look. [Laughter] I had music set up to play outside. That was after World War II. That was when I graduated from high school.

T: Who judged that?

CW: They were local people. I remember one of the judges was Dr. Clemmons' wife. I don't remember who else was the judges.

T: Okay. It was just a-

CW: It was many years that they had that. I think it probably stopped during World War II. I don't remember anything about it before World War II. It ran probably from the mid-forties up into the [19]50s, that went on every year.

T: Mm-hm. That's wonderful. Someone also mentioned Halloween traditions to me. Did you notice anything like that?

CW: Yeah. We had some Halloween traditions. The boys would go out and scratch on people's windowsill and run, [Laughter] on window screens and run, until we got caught.

T: Mrs. Williams does not approve. [Laughter]

JW: I don't remember much about Halloween. I don't think my parents would let me go out. [Laughter]

T: Do you remember the Daffodil Festival, when that started?

JW: It was very, very vaguely.

CW: Yeah, I remember it starting but I don't remember the time frame of when it started.

T: Okay.

CW: It's really been a tradition for many years.

[INTERRUPTION IN INTERVIEW]

T: Since Mr. Williams is taking us there, let's talk a little bit about teenage years. What did you all do for fun on a Saturday night?

JW: Very little. [Laughter] There was nothing much to do.

T: No? You wouldn't go to Main Street or go to the high school or anything?

JW: That was too far away, Main Street.

T: Yeah.

CW: I don't remember going into the village for- well, the movie theater. We would maybe go to the movie theater- the Edge Hill. That's about the only thing for entertainment we went to.

JW: We lived near our church, which was next door to the school. We could- if we didn't have transportation from home, we just walked to activities at the church. There were some activities for youth.

T: Like what?

JW: Well, we had some different organizations, missions organizations primarily- helping others in need...I don't remember anything else.

T: Okay. Do you remember- I talked to Ronnie Stubblefield. I don't know if that name means anything to you- and Andy James- and they went cruising for chicks together in the [19]50s. [Laughter] Does that sound familiar?

JW: Who was that?

T: Andy James, the man who owned the gas station, and Ronnie Stubblefield. I guess they were both on the football team they went cruising for chicks together. [Laughter] Does that- was that a certain group of people that did that, or was it- that a pretty common thing?...Not in Guinea?

JW: No. [Laughter]

CW: I don't remember any of that back then.

T: No?

JW: No.

T: No. So how does dating work if you don't pick a girl up at the Tastee Freez?

CW: I went to her house to pick her up. [Laughter]

T: When did you all meet?

JW: In high school.

T: In Gloucester High School?

CW: Achilles High School.

T: Achilles.

CW: When she went from seventh grade into eighth grade in high school, that's when I first saw her. She made an immediate impression. [Laughter]

T: Why's that?

CW: She was pretty. [Laughter] Still is.

T: So where did you go on dates?

JW: Football games and church activities.

T: Was that the standard thing to do?

JW: Movies. Yeah.

T: Did you ever go outside of Gloucester?

CW: Yeah, yeah we went- go to Richmond sometimes, Newport News. We went a lot of places when we were dating. We took day trips up in the mountains of Virginia.

T: Oh, really?

CW: Before we were married.

T: That's really interesting.

CW: We could go up and cover the Skyline Drive and back home in one day.

[Laughter]

T: Wow.

JW: That was recreation for families, not just boy and girl-

T: Right.

JW: -but for the families. There wasn't any lodging if a family wanted to go, looking for- looking for a night.

T: This is the second time this has been mentioned to me, but what attracts you to the Skyline Drive, where you're willing to drive that far and then drive back?

JW: The same thing that attracted us last week to go up there. [Laughter]

T: What is that?

JW: Nature.

T: Mm-hm.

CW: Beauty of the mountains. My father liked to go up there. I think the Skyline Drive was open sometime very early in my life- I forget the exact time it was open. I was born in 1933 and I think it opened somewhere around that era. But I knew about it from family trips up there. We keep going back because of the beauty of the mountains.

T: Absolutely.

JW: A lot of wildlife. It's just a beautiful place.

T: Do you remember any key moments from the [19]50s going up there that you can remember?

JW: There? On the Skyline Drive?

T: Mm-hm.

CW: I don't. We'd sometimes make a point to go in the fall season when the leaves had turned. We've done a lot of trips in the fall over the years.

T: Wow.

CW: Just because of the beauty of it.

JW: There are a lot of wildflowers there. We're really into native wildflowers. That's a place we can go and find lots of them.

CW: That's the spring season, for the wildflowers, and the fall season for the leaf colors. We've evolved into pretty serious birdwatchers over the years.

JW: She's laughing at us. [Laughter]

CW: Right here is a good place for it, and we've been places all over the world, really.

T: Wow.

CW: Birdwatching and enjoying nature, too.

T: That's wonderful. It's sort of strange because we take it as a given now, but in, you know, for example the 1880s people hated nature and they didn't want to go anywhere near it. So, where did you both inherit this love of nature?

CW: That's a good question-

JW: Yes.

CW: I've got to think about that.

T: Sorry.

JW: I was born with the love of nature.

CW: I remember walking through the fields behind where I lived at Hayes Store, just to see the various wildflowers blooming, pick blackberries, and walk back to York River, which was probably about three quarters of a mile behind where we lived.

JW: It's so important to me, just about every day, I thank God that he gave me that love of nature, because I can just see it so many places.

T: That's really beautiful.

CW: Something just came to my mind that made me start my interest in birds. There were a lot of giveaways done early in our lifetime: Arm & Hammer Baking Soda gave away bird cards. It's like a little package of playing cards, but they're pictures of birds and an inscription of each on the back of them. I've still got that package of bird cards, and I remember going over them many times when I was growing up-

T: Wow.

CW: -identifying the birds around that I could see at home.

T: Wow.

CW: It evolved from that, I suppose.

T: Yeah.

CW: When we lived at Gloucester Point we soon identified all the birds that came there. We put feeders out, I'm sure, soon after we built the house. Our parents fed the birds at home, attract them close to see.

[INTERRUPTION IN INTERVIEW]

JW: We've always had dogs and cats.

T: That's wonderful. But it's not nature that attracts you to Richmond, as a young couple.

CW: To Richmond?

T: Yeah.

CW: No.

JW: No.

CW: No.

[INTERRUPTION IN INTERVIEW]

T: So, you're going to Richmond as a young couple. What do you do?

JW: We don't go to-

CW: No, we didn't go to Richmond a lot-

JW: No.

CW: -when we were first married. We more went to Newport News for shopping in general.

T: Okay. Just general shopping?

JW: We go now about twice a year to the Ginter Botanical Gardens. Wonderful gardens. You're familiar with them? Our son and his family gave us a pass, a yearly pass, every year.

T: Where did you take your children, when they were old enough?

CW: [Laughter] Now you've opened up something.

T: Oh, okay.

CW: We fell in love with traveling early on, when for our honeymoon we traveled to New England up to Maine over to Niagara Falls. She planned it all. We really fell for traveling.

T: You're the architect of these trips. How do you choose where you're going to take your kids?

JW: We generally now decide where we want to go and we have a travel agent that takes good care of us.

T: Mm-hm. Okay.

CW: Let's go back to the beginning of our trips though.

T: Okay.

CW: As soon as our two boys were old enough, we started to travel with them. We took trips by car to all forty-eight contiguous states, and our little dachshund went with us. She was a good traveler. [Laughter] She also went to all forty-eight states. [Laughter] I feel like that our two sons got a lot of education from that traveling. We concentrated on our national parks and other places of natural beauty much more than man-made things. We did go to Disney World in California. The concentration was really on natural beauty things and the national parks.

T: Right.

CW: We went to most of them, in those- those few years when our sons were old enough to travel and hadn't gotten to the teenage years when they'd rather be doing other things.

T: Did your parents travel as much as you did?

CW: No.

T: No.

CW: Our parents didn't travel very much. The greatest extent I can think of my parents traveling-

JW: The Skyline Drive. [Laughter]

CW: Well, they went to Skyline Drive, but they went to the World's Fair in New York City.

T: Wow.

CW: I think it was 1939. I'm not sure about the date, but it was when the World's Fair was in New York City.

T: Right. Did you all go to that?

CW: No.

T: No.

CW: They went; children didn't go then. I don't remember how old I was, but we didn't go.

T: Right.

CW: That was the greatest extent of my parents traveling.

T: Why did they go to that?

CW: Something about the show of the World's Fair.

T: Yeah. Did you notice people traveling to Gloucester to come see the waterfront and nature, that kind of thing?

JW: I didn't understand that.

T: Did you notice tourists coming to Gloucester to visit the historic places or nature or anything like that in the [19]40s, [19]50s, [19]60s?

CW: People would come to the Daffodil Festival.

JW: That draws people.

CW: Yeah. Of course, people came to the historic things: Rosewell ruins, Garden Week, visits to historic homes in Gloucester, bring people here.

T: When did you first notice people coming to Rosewell and historic homes like that?

JW: Always. [Laughter]

CW: Yeah, always. Back as far as we can remember, people wanted to see Rosewell.

T: Wow. That's really interesting. Can you think of any anecdotes about that? I'm just really interested in why people would drive out here to see a ruined house.

CW: I remember hearing about people exploring the underground tunnel from the house out to the river or to the creek.

T: Wow. Must have been a fun thing.

CW: Dangerous, too, I'm sure.

T: Yeah.

JW: The architecture was very grand, except that it deteriorated during the years.

T: Right. You grew up in the [19]40s and [19]50s. Did you notice anyone that didn't have a car during that period?

CW: Yeah, I know of some people that didn't have cars, even in that period.

T: Like who? You don't have to give me names, but-

CW: I remember people coming to the stores that my father ran in Wicomoco that would walk to the store to get groceries. I can remember some of them who didn't have cars.

T: I think it was Roane Hunt that told me a lot of those people that didn't have cars into the [19]50s that came to his parents' store were black farmworkers. Was that your experience?

CW: No.

JW: Where was this?

T: Roane Hunt's store in Roane?

JW: Oh.

T: Yeah.

CW: Drove by that every day.

T: Yeah.

CW: Was sad to see it's not being maintained.

T: Yeah.

CW: No, the people I remember that didn't have cars were both races.

T: Did you notice people getting more expensive cars as time moved on? Cars that couldn't be bought in the area?

JW: I suppose so.

CW: I don't have much memory of that, no.

T: No?

CW: No, not really.

T: You suppose so? You said, you suppose so? Like, do you- can you think of something?

JW: Well, nothing anything in particular, but people are always upgrading everything they did or had or bought. There were new models being made.

CW: At the time we were growing up, I think the greatest, most expensive car anybody would have would be a Cadillac. As far as those who imported expensive cars, I don't remember any contact with it there. There are people that I was not routinely in contact with that owned that kind of thing.

T: You don't have to answer this if you don't want to, but what- who had a Cadillac?

JW: I don't know.

CW: [Laughter] I don't remember anyone specifically.

JW: Ford, Chevrolet, and Dodge: the only three I remember.

CW: Yep.

T: Okay. That's totally fine.

CW: I mean, if you wanted to buy an Oldsmobile, you had to across the river
[Laughter] to Newport News.

T: Right, and there were people that did that, right?

CW: Yeah.

T: Okay. If you had a car in the [19]40s, how often would you use it?

CW: [19]40s? Constantly.

JW: You didn't walk as much. [Laughter]

T: Yeah. Did you notice people walking on Main Street?

JW: Walking on?

T: Main Street in Gloucester Courthouse. No?

CW: No, I don't remember people walking there. We didn't spend much time there. I worked briefly for a couple of businesses in Gloucester Village, right after I got out of high school. That's my most intense contact with things in Gloucester Village.

T: Which businesses did you work for there?

CW: I worked for a short time for Fernholt Appliance business, and I worked for a short time at the Esso station.

T: Dave and Thane said that you might have specific memories of the Edge Hill Service Station, the one on the corner of Main and 14? I was hoping you could maybe think back for a second.

CW: When I was working at the Esso station, it was a competitor. [Laughter]

T: Right. Friendly competitor?

CW: Everybody was friendly then. [Laughter]

T: Yeah. That makes sense. But did you notice what kind of people would go there, or would they hang out? What's the sort of dynamic of a gas station in the [19]50s?

CW: Gas stations were not a hangout place.

T: No.

CW: You went there to do your business and moved on. In contrast, the grocery stores were a hangout place.

T: Really? Even the bigger ones?

CW: There were no bigger ones. [Laughter]

T: Oh, okay.

CW: Some of the local grocery stores, the men would go in the evenings and sit around the fire and talk.

T: Was that the case at your parents' store?

CW: It was the case at the parents' store. My great-grandparents had a store at Achilles. Rowe—Benjamin Rowe—owned the big store there at Achilles by the time I was grown. Before my time when he owned it, other people owned the same store later not in my family. But it was a gathering place, mainly for the men in the evening. Sit around the stove and talk.

T: I'm also really interested in- because I keep getting mixed responses about it- how segregation worked in Gloucester Courthouse. It seems like you're in a position to tell me because you worked at a store there.

CW: How segregation worked.

T: Yeah. You have to remember, you know, I wasn't there. You've really got to break it down for me.

CW: Well, segregation was practiced in the restaurants. I remember that well, and thought how unfair that was.

T: You did.

CW: I don't remember specifically where there was a store for blacks—I mean, a restaurant for blacks—but I remember there were some in Gloucester.

T: Would they be on Main Street or would they be outside of that?

CW: I don't remember one on Main Street, but there was one somewhere close to the village.

T: That's really interesting. Do you remember if it might have been black-owned or...?

CW: Yes, it was black-owned.

T: Did African-Americans work on Main Street?

CW: I don't remember-

T: No.

CW: -specifically any on Main Street in my earliest recollections of the village.

T: Yeah. Do you remember any from later?

CW: I remember some black businesses starting up. A cleaning business, I believe- clothes cleaning.

T: When would that have been?

CW: I believe it was during World War II- in the early [19]40s.

T: Interesting.

JW: I have something interesting, too. I can't wait to tell you.

T: Okay.

JW: Lindsey got 1930 on her SAT.

CW: Oh! [Laughter]

T: Wonderful!

CW: That's our younger granddaughter.

T: That's wonderful! That's a hard test, and now it's going to be recorded forever for the University of Florida. [Laughter]

CW: She's quite a student.

JW: She's a senior in school. Our oldest granddaughter is getting a degree in nursing from JMU.

T: Wow.

JW: She graduates next year.

T: That's hard stuff right there.

JW: She's going to get her Master's degree.

T: That's wonderful.

JW: Sorry, I couldn't hold it in. [Laughter]

T: No! No, I'm really glad. No, that's wonderful. Interviews are like this all the time, including this guy here. Looking forward to how Main Street has changed over time, what's the biggest change you've seen?

CW: This renovation of Main Street I think is the biggest change that's happened.

T: Really?

CW: I don't remember when it was not paved, but this recent years' renovation of the streets, the sidewalks and the storefronts.

T: Absolutely. How do you feel about it?

CW: It's a good job. All the businesses haven't gotten upgraded, but I won't get in that in detail.

T: Okay, fair enough. What about you, ma'am?

JW: Such an improvement. It's really pretty now, and it's decorated at Christmas and decorated for the Daffodil Festival. We're getting some little shops and bookstores. It's a big improvement and people want to come down on past the circle.

T: Right.

JW: Want to be included in it.

T: Right.

CW: The flowers that are maintained so well on Main Street really is a high point for me when I go through.

T: Because you like flowers!

CW: I like flowers. [Laughter]

JW: Here we go again. [Laughter]

T: Yeah.

CW: That goes back to my mother. [Laughter] She liked flowers.

T: She did?

CW: And I got an interest in them, too.

T: Did she grow them out in Hayes Store?

CW: She grew them there in our yard. That house is still there. Doesn't have the flowers in it like it used to, but it's still in good condition.

T: Yeah. That's wonderful.

CW: That's the house I was born in.

T: What road is that on?

CW: It's Hayes Road.

JW: Old 17.

CW: Yeah. We always called it Old 17 because Route 17-

JW: -our road-

CW: -went through there. The name of it now is Hayes Road.

T: Okay. That sounds good.

CW: We lived there, right on the road, and we'd know when the ferry had come in because we'd hear the traffic go by. [Laughter]

T: I've heard that from multiple people, actually.

CW: Have you?

T: It kind of- it makes you witness time pass differently. Looking forward, how would you like to see Gloucester Courthouse grow or not grow?

CW: I would like to see the Walker—Thomas Walker—home renovated and put in use. There's a big plan now, I think. That will be a high point for me.

T: Did you know him while he was alive?

CW: I did know him. When I worked at the Esso station there, he was driving his Buick up the village. I would put gas in his car and service the car.

T: Oh. What was he like?

CW: He was a fine gentleman.

T: Yeah.

CW: I have rather vivid memories of him coming here to the service station.

T: Well, tell me about him. Like what?

CW: [Laughter] Just always very polite and just gave the general impression of being a fine gentleman.

T: Okay.

CW: I would really like to see his house renovated and used as a museum. Of course, his house is right across the road-

T: Right. Yeah.

CW: -from the service station.

T: Right. I'm wondering if- how you felt about segregation at the time has anything to do with getting to know Mr. Walker.

CW: I graduated from high school just as the movement started to desegregate the school system. It didn't progress much until after Joyce had graduated two years later in 1952.

T: Right. What was that conflict like?

JW: Bitter.

T: Are there moments that stand out to you? It seems like it might be painful, but-

JW: I went to Achilles School, okay? And there was Botetourt School. Those were the only two schools in the county, weren't they?

CW: Only two high schools, yeah. There were other elementary schools.

JW: The day that the blacks were coming to Achilles was terrible.

T: What happened?

JW: They were going to hang them.

CW: There.

JW: Has anyone told you that?

CW: There was a-

JW: -big tree.

CW: -a big gathering of people at Union Church, which was just up the road from the high school. We knew that there was a- a bus bringing a lawyer along with the black students to try to integrate Achilles High School. It was known that the plan was to tie the lawyer behind the pick-up truck and drag him around Guinea Circle. Fortunately, Joe Thomas was the state trooper in Gloucester at the time—the only state trooper in Gloucester—and he somehow persuaded the people in the bus not to go to Guinea. I'm sure he was well-credited for turning that situation around.

T: Wow.

CW: He knew it would be bad.

T: What year was this?

CW: I think it was 1950, wasn't it? The last year I was in school. We were both in high school at the time. I think 1950 is right.

JW: That was so sad.

CW: It was a very sad time.

T: If you don't mind me asking, how did your parents feel about it?

JW: I think they felt the same as I did.

CW: Yeah, how sad it was that it had to come to that to force the issue.

T: Wow.

CW: I think both of our families taught us to have respect for other people regardless of their race. They really concentrated on it, don't you think?

JW: Oh, yes.

CW: To instill in us that--not any hatred for another race.

T: Where did their ideas come from about that?

CW: Christianity.

T: Interesting. Because the meeting was at the Union Church to-

CW: That was just- that was the gateway to Guinea, was Union Church.

JW: I don't know. I don't think the church as a whole really supported that. That was probably just a parking place.

CW: That was probably just a convenient place to meet.

T: Yeah.

CW: The church had nothing to do with that gathering.

T: I mean, it seemed like there would have been violence if people were ready for violence, had the state trooper not shown up. Were there moments where he- other people also threatened violence or carried out violence in that way?

CW: Right here locally I don't know of any. Do you?

T: Do you know of any beyond locally?

CW: I mean, it was all in the news, all over the South.

T: That's pretty true. How did people take that news like, for example, when Birmingham happened or the Selma to Montgomery march- things like that?

JW: I don't remember.

CW: No, I don't remember any great sympathy for people who were carrying out violence to resist it.

T: Yeah. Absolutely. Did people get on board with the civil rights movement here?

CW: I don't remember any widespread resistance to or support for resistance.

T: Interesting.

CW: Do you? I think it was just generally accepted that that was the way things should go.

T: That's really interesting.

JW: The Achilles School was near Bena—Bena Post Office, you know that—and there were lots of black people who lived in that area. They shopped at the store there. There was a post office there. They couldn't do business with them and have such hatred for them.

T: Makes sense, and that's why I wondered about- if country stores, like the one at Bena, were places for black and white business owners and customers to

interact, what happens when those die and the supermarkets come up in places like where the restaurants are next door and the black people can't go in them.

And they're white-owned. That's more of a statement than a question, but I'd love to hear your thoughts.

CW: I don't think I really comprehend the question.

T: Okay

CW: What is the question? State it again. [Laughter]

T: No, it was just more of a- the country stores are places where people can interact biracially, and the post offices are the same, right?

CW: Right.

T: Those exist on like a very local level. But Main Street draws everybody from all these different places, but Main Street is also one of the more segregated places in the county, because it has the restaurants that black people can't enter in the [19]50s. When Main Street becomes a place that's more accessible, does that affect segregation- or race relations in general, I guess I should say?

CW: Segregation was not practiced in the general stores.

T: Right.

CW: When my father had the general stores at Wicomoco, had black and white customers regularly.

T: Right. Right.

CW: Why it was such a practice in restaurants, I don't know.

T: Yeah. That's really interesting. You all have given me a lot to think about. Do you have any other anecdotes about Gloucester that you'd like to share?

JW: I'd like to see the Main Street reconstructed. I'd like to live to see that.

CW: It's getting closer all the time, to be complete.

T: That's right. That's wonderful.

JW: The county offers really nice activities now and organizations. That's increasing, and that's good.

T: Yeah. I'm glad to see you all are happy. Okay.

JW: We have a new library- two libraries.

T: That's right! Yeah.

JW: I think there's peace except for the board of supervisors and the school board.
[Laughter]

CW: The school board! There's always a lot of give and take.

T: That's right.

CW: Different ideas and different viewpoints. It all gets worked out but there's some real disagreements on things.

T: That's democracy.

CW: Yeah, it shows the strength of the system. All kind of differences can come up. They finally come to a conclusion, and move on with it.

T: Yeah, absolutely.

CW: We both go back to colonial days in Gloucester.

JW: Way back.

CW: Her father's mother was a Robbins, which goes on back-

JW: Yeah, you should make a note of that. [Laughter]

T: Okay.

JW: We're proud of it.

CW: The Robbins family goes back to the original land grant in Robbin's Neck in Gloucester. I've got the records of her family going back to the- the John Robbins that got the land grant there.

T: Wow.

CW: My mother's family—the Thornton family—goes back to- not to colonial times, but well before the Revolution. The Thorntons were not in favor of the Revolution and went back to England [Laughter] during the Revolutionary War, but then came back to the same land and are still here.

T: Wow. That's incredible.

CW: We've got a lot of history right here. We've been to all the continents of the world in our travels, and never lived anywhere but right here in Gloucester.

JW: We went to the Gloucester Museum in England. So many of the early day artifacts there are identical.

CW: Specifically the fishing equipment-

JW: Fishing equipment.

CW: You could see that the fishing equipment in this area came right from- from Gloucester, England. [Laughter]

JW: Especially if you go to a museum here in Gloucester, see the same stuff.

T: So then why did you go to England?

JW: Why?

T: I mean- it was a joke, but- [Laughter]

JW: We like to go on lots of trips.

CW: We just wanted to see England.

T: Yeah.

CW: And, of course, we wanted to see the birds there, too. [Laughter]

JW: We went on a wildflower trip to England. Then we stayed another week and rented a car and just went wherever we wanted to.

T: Oh, wow.

CW: We wanted specifically to go to Gloucester, so we drove from London to Gloucester, and stayed in places along the way.

JW: It was nice.

CW: Very nice to see it.

T: That's wonderful. Thank you both so much.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

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