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***"It Wasn't in Her Lifetime,
But It Was
Handed Down"***

**FOUR BLACK ORAL HISTORIES
OF MASSACHUSETTS**

*Edited by Dr. Eleanor Wachs
Commonwealth Museum
at Columbia Point*

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Office of the Massachusetts Secretary of State
Michael J. Connolly, Secretary

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"For 350 years, the Black community has been a vital component of the culture and rich historical heritage of our Commonwealth. This booklet emphasizes the spirit of the African-American experience in Massachusetts and brings those contributions to life."

Michael J. Connolly,
Secretary of State



"The lives of early African-Americans are extremely difficult to reconstruct because what they left behind has been ignored or suppressed. The first group of Africans to arrive in Massachusetts, for example, entered Boston Harbor on a ship named *Desire*. We know the name of the ship, its captain, and the place where the ship was built. We do not know, however, the name of a single one of its African passengers. If we want to learn more about our African-American ancestors, we can do so through the careful study of local history, archeological remains, and folklore."

State Representative Byron Rushing
*Co-Chairman, Commission on the
350th Anniversary of the Arrival
of Africans in Massachusetts*

*"It Wasn't in Her Lifetime,
But It Was
Handed Down"*

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Foreword

"It Wasn't in Her Lifetime But It Was Handed Down" is an appropriate title for this booklet of stories and reminiscences about Black families in Massachusetts. It is also a phrase that demonstrates the importance of oral history and tradition to the total understanding of a people's culture.

Along with the exhibit, "Creating Community: The African Experience in Massachusetts," and educational materials developed for classroom use, this booklet is the Commonwealth Museum's contribution to the 1988 celebration of 350 years of Black presence in Massachusetts.

"It Wasn't in Her Lifetime..." was produced to serve as a useful tool for a series of workshops offered throughout the state about how everyday people can collect and organize their own family history. Long after the exhibit has ended and the workshops are finished, the Commonwealth Museum will continue to make this booklet available to those who wish to use it as a guide to keep alive the stories of individuals and experiences of their own families.

Theodore Z. Penn
Director, Commonwealth Museum
February, 1989



Introduction

"Creating Community: The African Experience in Massachusetts," opened at the Commonwealth Museum in October, 1988. The purpose of the exhibit is to present an introduction to the history of three distinct Black communities in the Commonwealth (Plymouth, New Bedford, and Springfield) and to convey the fact that Afro-Americans have made a significant contribution to the culture and heritage of Massachusetts. An important aspect of the exhibit is educational outreach. Starting in August of 1989, the exhibit will travel state-wide. As a complement to the exhibit, a series of workshops on Black oral history will be conducted at several sites in the Commonwealth. This booklet was created for the workshops in the hope that it will inspire others to collect their own family and community history.

The history of Blacks in the Commonwealth is linked to both the history of slavery and the abolitionist movement. The struggle to find community began in Massachusetts against a background of injustice in an alien culture when African peoples were first brought to these shores 350 years ago by slave traders. Though slavery was never widespread in Massachusetts, it was not prohibited by law until 1783. Many free Blacks and runaway slaves fostered communities throughout the Commonwealth. The north slope of Boston's Beacon Hill in the 19th century was a well known example. Stories passed down by word of mouth generation after generation tell of many of these experiences, including slavery in the South and the abolitionist movement in the North.

One of the strongest links to an African past is through the spoken word. For it is in the words of those who have created history that we learn about the lives of Blacks in the Commonwealth. When a group's history is denied to them by not being written down, the breadth, vitality, and record of their history can still be carried on by the spoken word. Sometimes it is called "folk history", or "oral history", or "history from the

bottom up." Regardless of its name, the stories handed down in families tell of love, courage, perserverance, injustice, discrimination and other experiences, which help salvage the history of Afro-Americans. Today, many Black communities still remain linked to their homeland of Africa and/or to American geographic and cultural regions by customs, language, food, history and distinctive cultural patterns. The celebration of Kwanza, the giving of African day names, "ancestral" trips to Africa or making an Afro-American crazy quilt are just a few examples.

In this booklet, four people provide a glimpse into the lives of three families and one church. Some speak of the "movers and shakers" related to the struggles of Black people; others tell of their own experiences which reflect themes found in the saga of Black Americans all over the country. For example, Ruth Jones speaks of her relative Frederick Douglass, Robert Carter Hayden, Jr. shares information about his great grandfather, Robert Carter, a pharmacist, Carl J. Cruz tells about his relative, a decorated Civil War hero, and the Reverend Dr. Charles E. Cobb speaks of St. John's Church UCC and the turbulent 1960s in Springfield.

The main goal of this booklet is to provide its readers with a glimpse of Massachusetts Black history. It is also meant to provoke questions such as: "How are my experiences similar to or different from those I am reading about? How can I find out about my own heritage, my roots?" This booklet gives some understanding of how to go about collecting your family history by giving practical hands-on advice. Dr. Patricia A. Turner explains why collecting Black oral history is important to the Black community.

The four people who share their experiences in this booklet barely scratch the surface of the thousands of stories that could be collected in our great state. Throughout the Commonwealth, there are many stories waiting to be told. It is these stories that show us our common heritage and link us all to Massachusetts' common wealth.

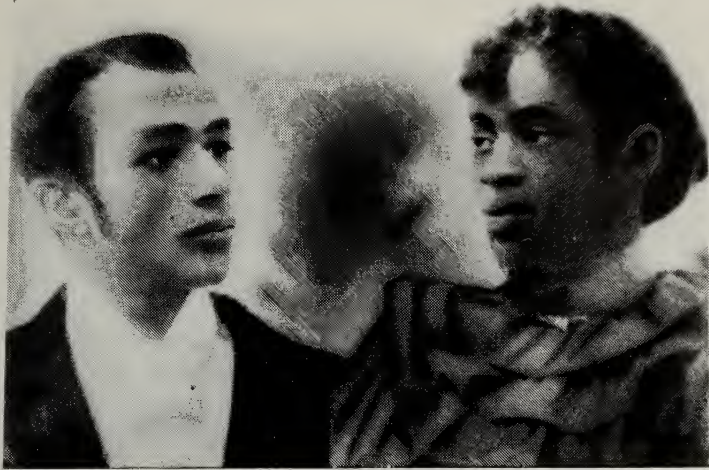
Dr. Eleanor Wachs
Curator of Exhibits,
Commonwealth Museum

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Ruth Veletta Jones



On the cover and above: Sydonia and John James Jones, parents of Ruth Jones

The Jones Family... 120 Years in Cambridge

by Kathleen Walcott

Kathleen Walcott is a member of Ethnic Foundations, Inc. of Cambridge. In 1983, she and three other women decided to collect the oral histories of Black people living in Greater Cambridge. Their grass roots approach to oral history provides a way to learn about history from "the bottom up." Her biographical piece is based on interviews with Ruth Jones, 93.

Ruth Veletta Jones' great aunt, Lucy Terrell, accompanied by her husband Alfred, left the plantation of their slave owner in Albermarle County, Virginia before the close of the Civil War. They walked to a Yankee encampment and offered their services as laundress and handyman. There they remained under the charge of Colonel Asa Morse of Cambridge, Massachusetts.

At the end of the Civil War, Lucy answered Colonel Morse's inquiry as to what she planned to do. She replied, "Where you'se goin' I'm goin." Both Lucy and Alfred wanted to leave the South and knew that traveling alone was unsafe. When Colonel Morse returned to his native Cambridge in 1868, Lucy and Alfred came with him. Morse purchased a small home for them on Pleasant Street where Lucy promptly set up a thriving laundry service.

Lucy petitioned Colonel Morse to send for her sister and brother-in-law, Hardenia and Hiram White and their six children: Martha, Mary, Rachel, Cornelia, Hiram and the infant, Sydonia, Ruth's mother. They arrived in Cambridge in 1870 from Rockaway County, located near the Blue Ridge Mountains in Virginia.

The White family was established in a twelve room house on Jay Street in Cambridge. The house soon became a sanctuary for Blacks coming North. Here, they were fed and trained for the work force. Many of them were employed at the White Laundry on Soden Street or at Hiram White's maintenance business, learning how to garden and take care of furnaces.

It was from Ruth Jones' aunts, who minded her while her mother worked, that she learned of the family's relationship to Frederick Douglass, the great abolitionist and civil rights leader. Douglass was the brother of Ruth's grandmother, Hardenia Banks White. Ruth's great grandmother, Harriet Bailey, gave birth to Frederick (Bailey) Douglass in Maryland, a result of a union between a slave and a slave master. Sold to a slave master named Banks in Virginia, Harriet's name was changed to Banks. Because of that change it was not until years later that the Douglass/Banks connection was made by family members.

Ruth's father, John James Jones, arrived in Cambridge from Prince George County, Virginia via the underground railroad. The exact date of his arrival is unknown since he vowed never to reveal his escape route. Living on Upton Street with his uncle, Wylie D. Vaughan, he lived close to Sydonia White: they were destined to meet.

John and Sydonia married on May 10, 1894. On September 29, 1895, Ruth Veletta Jones was born at 4 Village Street. One year and nine months later, a son, Pleasant Samuel Jones II, followed. The Jones family moved several times in Cambridge and finally settled on Yerxa Road in 1916. Ruth Jones has lived on that street for most of her life .



INTERVIEW WITH RUTH VELETTA JONES

Oral history interviews often become a rich source for family history and folklore. Ruth Jones' stories tell of personal experiences with her family as well as events which relate to the historical experiences of Afro-Americans. The world slaveholders created was one that fragmented the Afro-American family for generations; but it was through a tenacity to hold onto family ties that many Blacks

learned about their past.

Ruth Jones learned as a small child that her family was related to Frederick B. Douglass. She explains how this happened during an interview in June, 1988. This and other stories below are excerpted from that interview.

Miss Jones also speaks of the discrimination against Blacks in the Boston work force during the early decades of this century which affected herself and her father. She stoically refused to let these barriers work against her. As she explains in her story, she wanted an office job, a position that was difficult for Black women to get at that time. Her determination was rewarded: she worked as a clerk and telephone operator for the Massachusetts Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals for 25 years.

"The Day The Stars Fell"-- a classic in Afro-American folklore--is a powerful story about the terror of white slavemasters meeting their Judgment Day when an eclipse was taken as a sign that the world was coming to an end. This event, occurring on November 13, 1833, has been passed on in oral tradition by slaves and their descendants. By sharing this story, Miss Jones reveals the relationship between oral tradition and the Black experience. (E.W.)

FREDERICK DOUGLASS

That is Frederick Douglass (pointing to a picture of Douglass on her mantlepiece in her home). He's related to me on my mother's side of the blanket. He is my grandmother's half brother. His mother had him. He was half white and when the mistress went out to weigh the children and record their birth, she discovered that this was a half white child and since her husband was the only white man there, she wasn't happy. So she sold his mother the next day and sold her twelve miles away. She never saw Frederick Douglass until he was four years old. She found out what farm he was on and the mother, my great grandmother, walked twelve miles that night to see Frederick Douglass. And of course being a slave she had to walk twelve miles back. Only your body doesn't do everything your head says so therefore she could not work. And she got ten lashes and they got her ready for the market. They sold her into Virginia out of Maryland. And that's how Grandma became Douglass' sister. He [Douglass] was born in Maryland and my grandmother was born in Virginia. 'Course her mother was born in Virginia. She told her children about this first child, cause she was really young when she had him. And she only saw him once for a very few hours. And he speaks of it in the book that he wrote. [*Life and Times of Frederick Douglass*]

Well, that's the story. And she wanted the girls [and her] two other sons...and she said, 'Always remember you've got a brother and his name is Fred Bailey.' So when he became Frederick Douglass and famous, they didn't think it was their brother. They were looking for Frederick Bailey. They didn't read or write and there's no communication like we have now so they didn't know that Frederick Douglass was their brother until their children were able to read and write. And he had married and come back from Europe, his wife had died, and he had been elected to go to Haiti by the federal government.

Frederick Douglass died the year I was born--1895. I'll never forget that date...So Gram and them didn't know until my mother and Aunt Lucy and Aunt Molly and all of them were in school and they knew that his name was Frederick--that Bailey and Douglass were the same man and then they found out that he had married his white secretary. So therefore they were ashamed to say that he was their brother...(His second wife) had been his secretary for 22 years. So what they did was to say to me, 'You're excused. Go out. Take your plate and shut the door.' And then they would talk about it. But, you know, they said shut the door but they didn't say go away from it! So I stood and listened. Otherwise I wouldn't know what I know.



JOHN JAMES JONES

My father was a good worker. He had never gone to school a day in his life...He died an engineer--he made himself one. But he was doing janitor work when I was born. And then he got a job as a fireman for four dollars a week. He was shoveling tons of coal a day then with three others. And this man that owned the place where he was working came in one day and he saw him stripped down shoveling the coal and he said to the man who was the engineer, 'What's he doing here?' Do you see the point? {ed. note: Jones, a light skinned Afro-American, was mistaken for being white.} And he said, 'Oh, that's the new man I just hired. He's very good.' And he walked over to my father and he said, 'Do you like your job?' And he was young you know and anxious to get four dollars a week. There wasn't much for you if you didn't have an education. And he [her father] said, yes, he did. He kept looking at him and he said, 'What would you like to be?'...He said he'd like to be an engineer 'cause that was the highest thing he had come in contact with. And he was good

at fixing things...Next day, he [the owner] came back and he said to my father, 'I need an engineer night watchman. Would you like to have the job? You can make twice as much money working nights.' And my father, of course, jumped for the money. And he said, 'Thank you,' and he told the engineer to get another fireman and my father was promoted then to work as a night watchman. He was then permitted to carry a gun because it was a big plant and people used to break in as they do now.

(He worked several restaurants down on Hanover Street in Boston. Twenty one to be exact and very high class so I'm told.) Anyway, my father said that at night great big rats walked in. Boston's infested with rats and it always has been. Of course 1890s-1900 is a long time ago. Anyway, my father shot them and they had them all lined up for the boss when he came in. He said, 'Did you have any trouble? Any break-ins?' Because that's why he had to have a night watchman and get a gun. And he [Jones] said, 'No, I killed them all and here they are.' He [boss] said, 'Why John, that's marvelous! I'm going to give you so much'--I forget the amount of money--'for each one of them.' He said, 'You'll be a good watchman.' So my father immediately started looking for rats instead of people. And he actually made more money killing those rats than he did on his job.



John James Jones



ON GETTING A JOB

A Boston department store was advertising for fair colored girls to run their elevators....That was in 1916....I had a lot of friends who would say, 'Ruth, why don't you try to get a job anyway.' They put the brown and the darker girls on the back freight elevators. Well, I didn't do that. I said, 'Oh no! I'm going to work in an office.' Wishful thinking! But the point I'm trying to stress is everything depends on you. I never was conscious of color and so I didn't try (for the elevator job)--I tried for an office job and got it and worked 25 years at it.

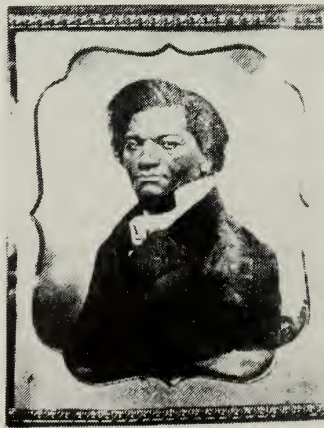
"THE DAY THE STARS FELL"

You ever hear the day the stars fell?...Well, Grandma (Hardenia White) said the mistress called all the slaves in. They were all praying. It was so dark. They never allowed them to come inside the house. They were always on the veranda or out in the yard. 'You all come in! You all come in! I've always been good to you. I didn't make you suffer. You had something to eat.' And it was getting darker and darker. And the stars fell and the people were singing and praying and talking about Jubilee. The man [slave owner] promised everyone on the place, 'You gonna be free. I'm going to set you free if the Lord will just spare me to live. I 'll set you free.' And so the sun came out and he immediately forgot to set them free. He said it was in [their] best interest to stay here, 'because you can't take care of yourself. I have to feed you. And I have to look out for you.' But he was better to them.

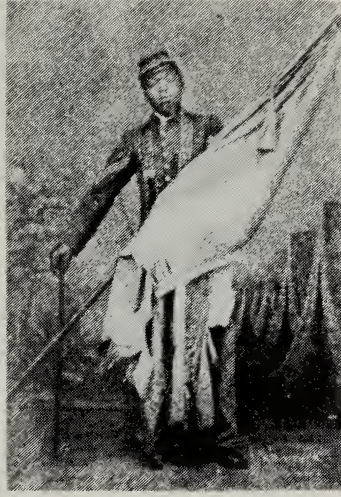
My grandmother told me that story. It wasn't in her lifetime but it was handed down. You know the slaves had long memories because they didn't have a written history. They would tell them (stories) just like the stars fell. God was punishing these white people. Jubilee is coming and we're going to be free. Lincoln signed the Proclamation of Emancipation.

By the way, did you know who wrote the Proclamation of Emancipation?

Frederick Douglass.



Frederick Douglass



Sergeant William H. Carney, Civil War Hero

by Carl J. Cruz

Carl J. Cruz of New Bedford is the great, great, great nephew of Sergeant Carney. Cruz has taken a great interest in the the history of his family as well as the Black community in New Bedford. He has pursued his interest in the Black community in the Commonwealth by participating in military re-enactments representing the Black soldier.

Using Carney's own words about the events at the Battle of Fort Wagner, Cruz shows how an eyewitness account (and primary source document) helps present part of the record of Black Americans.

Having arrived at Hilton Head, we were ordered up the river to Beaufort, S.C.. We were here only a few days, however, before we were ordered to St. Simon's Island. Upon arriving there, we found it deserted by all but one man, and we took charge of him. From here we made a successful raid to Darien, capturing a lot of supplies--vessels--loaded with cotton and cattle--and the city itself. Thence we proceeded to James Island, S.C., staying only four days, during which time we were engaged with the rebels [and] successfully repulsed them. Thence the charge and

attack on Fort Wagner. On the 18th of July, 1863, about noon, we commenced to draw near this great fort, under a tremendous cannonading from the fleet, directed upon the fort. When we were within probably a thousand yards of the fort, we halted and lay flat upon the ground, waiting for the order to charge. The brave Colonel Shaw [Commander Robert Gould Shaw] and his adjutant, in company with General Strong, came forward and addressed the regiment with encouraging words. General Strong said to the regiment: 'Men of Massachusetts, are you ready to take the fort tonight?' And the regiment spontaneously answered in the affirmative. Then followed three cheers for Colonel Shaw; three cheers for Governor Andrews of Massachusetts, and three cheers for General Strong.

We were all ready for the charge, and the regiment started to its feet, the charge being fairly commenced. We had got but a short distance when we were opened upon with musketry, shell, grape and canister, which mowed down our men right and left. As the color-bearer became disabled, I threw away my gun and seized the colors, making my way to the head of the column; but before I reached there the line had descended the embankment into the ditch and was making its way upon Wagner itself. While going down the embankment one column was staunch and full. As we ascended the breastworks, the volleys of grapeshot which came from right and left, and of musketry in front, mowed the men down as a scythe would do. In less than twenty minutes I found myself alone, struggling upon the ramparts, while all around me were the dead and wounded, lying one upon another. Here I said, 'I cannot go into the fort alone,' and so I halted and knelt down, holding the flag in my hand. While there, the musketballs and grapeshot were flying all around me, and as they struck, the sand would fly in my face. I knew my position was a critical one, and I began to watch to see if I would be left alone. Discovering that the forces had renewed their attack farther to the right, and the enemy's attention being drawn thither, I turned [and] discovered a battalion of men coming towards me on the ramparts of Wagner. They proceeded until they were in front of me, and I raised my flag and started to join them, when, from the light of the cannon discharged on the fort, I saw that they were [the] enemy. I wound the colors round the staff and made my way down the parapet into the ditch, which was without water when I crossed it before, but was now filled with water that came up to my waist. Out of the number that came up with me there was now no man moving erect, save myself, although they were not all dead, but

wounded. In rising to see if I could determine my course to the rear, the bullet I now carry in my body came whizzing like a mosquito, and I was shot. Not being prostrated by the shot, I continued my course, yet had not gone far before I was struck by a second shot. Soon after I saw a man coming towards me, and when within hailing distance I asked him who he was. He replied, 'I belong to the 100th New York,' and then inquired if I were wounded. Upon my replying in the affirmative, he came to my assistance and helped me to the rear. 'Now then,' said he, 'let me take the colors and carry them for you.' My reply was that I would not give them to any man unless he belonged to the 54th Regiment. So we pressed on, but did not go far before I was wounded in the head. We came at length within hailing distance of the rear guard, who caused us to halt, and upon asking who we were, and finding I was wounded, took us to the rear through the guard. An officer came, and after taking my name and regiment, put us in the charge of the hospital corps, telling them to find my regiment. When we finally reached the latter the men cheered me and the flag. My reply was 'Boys, I only did my duty. The old flag never touched the ground.' " *



Sergeant William H. Carney, born on February 29, 1840 in Norfolk, Virginia, was the son of slaves. His father, William, escaped from slavery by the underground railroad. He arrived in New Bedford in the 1850s. Soon after, he purchased his family out of slavery.

In his fourteenth year, Carney attended a school secretly kept by a minister in Norfolk, Virginia. In his fifteenth year, he embraced the gospel. Like his father, who was engaged in the coastal trade, Carney worked for a short time at sea.

Upon his arrival in New Bedford, Carney became a jobber for stores. At this time, he also joined the Salem Baptist Church, a Black church, where he soon became a trustee.

In 1863, Carney heard the call for Blacks to join the Union Army. On February 17, 1863, he enlisted as a private in the Massachusetts 54th Regiment as did the son of Frederick Douglass, Lewis Douglass. Carney was one of 46 volunteers from New Bedford who comprised Company C.

*Leonard Bolles Ellis, *History of New Bedford and Its Vicinity 1602-1892* (Syracuse, New York: D. Mason & Co. Publishers, 1892), pp. 348-349

Sergeant Carney's mark on history can be traced to the assault at Fort Wagner, South Carolina on July 18, 1863. For his bravery beyond the call of duty, Carney was promoted to the rank of sergeant and was given the Gilmore Medal of Honor for gallant and meritorious conduct. He would later receive this nation's highest honor, the Congressional Medal of Honor, thus becoming the first Black American to receive this medal.

Carney was discharged on June 30, 1864. In 1866, he was appointed superintendent of street lights for the City of New Bedford. After a few years at this job, Carney moved to California. In 1869, he returned to New Bedford where he took a job at the postal service, the first Black to do so. He worked at this position for 32 years. In 1901, he was asked by Massachusetts Secretary of State William H. Olin to take the job of messenger at the State House, a position he held until his death. He was the second Black to hold the position. The first was abolitionist Lewis Hayden of Boston.

On October 11, 1865, Sergeant Carney married Sussannah Williams of New Bedford. They had one child named Clara Heronia who would later become a well known music teacher in the New Bedford area.

Sergeant Carney died on December 8, 1908 as a result of an elevator accident in the State House. Carney's funeral was well attended by state officials. As a final tribute, all flags in the Commonwealth were ordered at half mast, marking the first time it was done for a Black man and an "ordinary" citizen.



INTERVIEW WITH CARL J. CRUZ

Below are excerpts from an interview with Carl Cruz recorded on June 16, 1988 in the Genealogy Room of the New Bedford Free Public Library. (E. W.)

EW: I am talking with Carl J. Cruz of New Bedford. I am interested in knowing how you got involved in looking at your family history.

CC: I guess I started when I was about 13 years old. We had to write a book report and I decided I'd rather write something about my own family. And so I asked the teacher rather than read a book could I do some investigative work about my family because I felt my relative was one

who probably should be written about. He consented and that's how I started my journey.

EW: Were there stories in your family told about Sgt. Carney?

CC: Not a lot of stories. But there were stories like he was the first Black man to receive the Congressional Medal of Honor. He was a war hero. It would always be mentioned that he was made famous by his words, "The old flag never touched the ground." Those kind of things have been passed down in my family for generations.

EW: How is he related to you?

CC: He would be on my mother's side. My mother's great, great grandmother was Sgt. Carney's sister. Her name was Mary Carney. She married a man from the Cape Verde Islands named Joseph Mindo.

EW: Why don't you tell me about how you unearthed this information about your relative?

CC: I guess primarily because only certain aspects of Carney were shared with us, and that was pretty much Carney himself and not the rest of his family, I began doing some investigative work in the Genealogy Room at the New Bedford Free Public Library looking at old death records, looking at city birth records and newspaper articles. One of the first things I did was look at one of the articles that was written about Carney when he died. Plus there was one article that we had in our family for the longest time. It's not in very good shape. This started me on my journey. A *Boston Globe* article just prior to his death. His death was in 1908....One of the clippings that we had in my family for a long time which helped me to other sources was a *Boston Globe* newspaper article that's dated Monday, November 23, 1908. It was at this point that they were talking about Sgt. Carney being injured in an elevator at the State House. At the time, he was working as a messenger for Secretary Olin who was then Secretary of the State. As the story goes, he was leaving the elevator to step aside to let some women off, the elevator moved and crushed his leg. Two weeks later he died from injuries from this accident.

EW: Why don't you tell me a little bit about Sgt. Carney's life. Was he

born in New Bedford?

CC: Sgt. Carney was born in Norfolk, Virginia in 1840, Feb. 29th. So he is a leap year baby. Came to New Bedford around 1854....At the time the Carneys were working on a plantation in Norfolk, Virginia. They were working for a family of the name Twire. Mr. Carney, this would be Sgt. Carney's father, was led to believe that after the death of the master, all the slaves were going to be free. That did not happen. So in 1854, he began his journey by leaving through the underground railroad. Eventually, he came to Philadelphia. That was one of the main stops on the underground railroad and there were a lot of Quakers who were very concerned about Blacks at that time and their freedom. After he left Philadelphia, he went to New York, then came to New Bedford, and the Carney family has been in New Bedford ever since. First the father, then Sgt. Carney, then Carney's other sisters and brothers arrived in New Bedford.

EW: Why did he pick New Bedford?

CC: At that time, New Bedford was considered to be a place where slaves could really be accepted. There was a great anti-slavery movement here. The abolitionists were strong here at the time. Plus, Carney's father worked on the wharves, worked on the sea in Norfolk, so this made it a place that was a little more congenial to him, rather than, perhaps, Philadelphia or New York where others were going.

EW: Tell me a little bit about Carney's participation in the Civil War.

CC: There was a call for the Black community...because this was going to be the first conscious effort to have Blacks participate in the Union forces. So Frederick Douglass, along with other members of the 54th, came to New Bedford to recruit. Sgt. Carney heard the call for recruits and in 1863 decided to enlist. Went to the training in Readsville, Massachusetts, then fought in several battles, the most famous of the 54th being the assault on Fort Wagner at which time he was a private, but because of his heroic duties later became a sergeant. He saw the color bearer who was holding our colors, saw him injured, saw the flag about to fall. Although he had been injured twice, once in his leg and once in the head, he was still able to capture the flag and did not surrender that flag until the end

of that battle. [He] would only surrender it to his own men and as a result of him surrendering, his words were immortalized. And his words were, 'Boys, I only did my duty. The old flag never touched the ground.'

Although it doesn't sound too significant today, it is very significant. First of all, this was at a time when people felt that if you gave a gun or a sword to a Black they would only turn it on you because most of the officers of the 54th were whites--Blacks were not given that opportunity. But they showed that they loved their country. For Carney to save the American flag--a flag that didn't really mean an awful lot to its Black citizens-- says something about him as an individual having just left the South through the underground railroad. For him doing that said a lot to me as to the type of man he was.

EW: When did he come back? Did he return to New Bedford?

CC: He did return to New Bedford. He had several jobs in New Bedford. Because he was considered a hero, he was made superintendent of street-lights. At that time, for a man of color to have a job that he was over other whites was significant. Then for a short period, he went to California....There were several efforts for the gold rush. He was looking for some gold at that time, the story is told.

EW: How did you hear about his going out to California?

CC: My grandmother. She was always telling me that there were several things in my other great aunt's, her sister's house, that...were so beautiful. She told me that my uncle brought those things back from California when he went out there for the gold rush.

EW: What were they?

CC: They were Japanese things. There were teapots. There were stands for umbrellas that were decorated. He went to San Francisco. Japanese imports around that time were heavy.

EW: Did you ever hear stories about his success or misfortune?

CC: He didn't make as much as he had hoped. He was gone about two or three years. And was sending money back and forth to his family at the

time.

Then he came back to New Bedford and was hired as the first Black postal person in New Bedford. And then worked at that job until his retirement. And then after his retirement, he was asked by then Secretary of State Olin to work as a messenger in the State House which he consented to do. And then he died....I know that he had participated on several occasions in Boston. He was considered for any type of memorial or grand army affairs. He was always the person asked to participate. He was always given the courtesy. To win the Congressional Medal of Honor was unheard of for Blacks and it was almost second to being a United States senator or even the president of the United States.



Sgt. William H. Carney, with the Gilmore Medal of Honor

EW: How did it come about that he won the medal?

CC: Initially, the first medal he was given was the Gilmore Medal of Meritorious Award which was basically given right on site. Many of the pictures that you see, you'll see the medal. It's round....

EW: Right on site?

CC: At the conclusion of the battle....A lot of medals were given out during the Civil War. A lot of them were named for different congressmen and governors....He was also awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor. The tragic end of the story was that he got it late and did not have a formal ceremony. He received the medal in 1900. It was awarded to him in 1863. He did not receive it because there was an oversight in the papers. There was a gentleman by the name of Christian Fleetwood who also fought in the 54th and was putting together the 1900 Exhibition in Paris that was going to show Blacks. He asked Carney for his medal and some other documents. They later found out that he did not get the medal. So Mr. Fleetwood petitioned the War Department along with Luis Fenollosa Emilio, who wrote *A Brave Black Regiment: A History of the 54th Regiment of Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry, 1863-1865*. So along with

sending in those documents, the medal was sent to him with the acknowledgment....

I believe I told you what happened as a result of an accident that he had stepping aside to let some ladies out of the elevator at the State House. His leg was crushed, he entered into the hospital. Two weeks later, he died. From all the documents that I have been able to read, he probably had one of the most...how can I say this? I guess his funeral was a great tribute to a man who gave a lot to his country and also to the state. He was really memorialized in those days. He was one of the first Blacks to have the state flags in Massachusetts lowered. That was left for other dignitaries. But the governor at the time felt that here's a gentleman who gave to his country that the least we could do would be to lower our flags in his honor. He saves the flag from touching the ground because he just felt that this was his country and he felt so good about it. In his honor they lowered the flags. It was a high honor and a fitting way to thank him for what he had done.

EW: What kind of man do you think he was? What was his personality like?

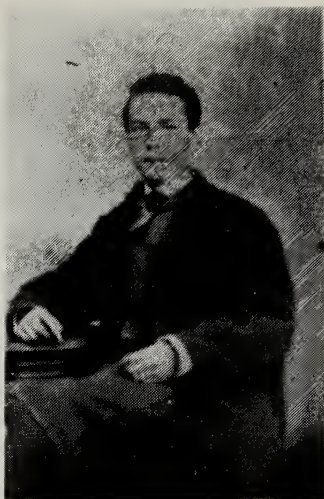
CC: I think about that often. My grandmother, who has now since died, had some vague memories. But what she told me was that he was a very quiet and very unassuming man even though all this attention had been given to him he was not a person who wanted all of this. He just hap-



Re-enactment of a battle; Carl Cruz is in the foreground.

pened to be in a place, did what he thought was his duty. As a result of that, he was considered a hero for it. It was nothing that he looked for. He was very shy, although he was a very religious man and worked very hard in the church. He was one of the founders of one of the early Black churches in New Bedford. Two churches merged with one another. The Salem Baptist Church and Second Baptist Church. Today, it is known now as the Union Baptist Church. Carney was instrumental in the merging of the two churches. He had been a member of the board of the trustees. He was also a choir master. And he was also involved with the William W. Logan, Veterans of War, Post 1, in New Bedford. He was an officer at one point. He was also a member of the Odd Fellows, which was a fraternal organization at the time in New Bedford.





Robert H. Carter (1847-1908)
A 19th Century
Afro-American
Pharmacist in Massachusetts

by Robert Carter Hayden, Jr.

Robert Carter Hayden, Jr., noted educator and historian, who has published widely in the fields of Black history, science, and culture, writes about his great grandfather, Robert H. Carter, the first Afro-American pharmacist in Massachusetts. Hayden uses a combination of sources to write his portrait. These include materials such as the obituaries of his relative and oral history provided by his grandmother. He also uses artifacts to recreate Carter's life story, including Carter's pharmacy certificate and his personal notebook for compounding medicines.

Robert H. Carter was the first Afro-American to practice pharmacy in Massachusetts. Between 1869 and 1907, he was a pioneering pharmacist and drugstore owner in both New Bedford and Boston, Massachusetts. The Board of Pharmacy was established in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts in January of 1885. The certificate that Carter received from the Board on January 5, 1886 read, "This is to certify that Robert H. Carter is a registered Pharmacist, and having been recorded as such by the Board is hereby vested with the authority to conduct the business of a Pharmacist by law."

Robert H. Carter was born "on the upper end of Elm Street" in New Bedford, Massachusetts on January 12, 1847. Both of his parents, Robert Carter, a baker by trade, and his mother Sarah (Taylor), were born in Virginia. He was educated in the public schools of New Bedford and graduated from its high school in 1866.

While attending New Bedford High School, young Carter worked before and after school at a drugstore owned by William P.S. Caldwell, a well-known pharmacist with a business at the corner of William and Purchase Streets in New Bedford. His chores were to keep the store clean, to "fix the fire" in the early morning hours before the druggists arrived and to shovel the snow during the winter months.

One morning his snow shovel uncovered a wallet containing a large amount of money. He turned the money over to his employer, Mr. Caldwell. For his honesty, Carter was rewarded with a job assisting Caldwell in the preparation of medicines. It was through this tutorship under Caldwell that he was introduced to his life-long profession of pharmacy. At the age of 20, Carter had mastered the practice of compounding medicines. When his apprenticeship ended, he became head druggist with five assistants in the Caldwell firm.

In 1869, Robert Carter was married to Parthenia Harris, born in 1849 in Norfolk, Virginia. They had a family of six children, Robert L. (b. 1871), Estelle (b. 1873), Charles (b. 1875), George (b. 1877), Caroline (b. 1881), and Parthenia (b. 1885).

In 1869, the same year that Carter married, he entered the employment of E. H. Chisholm Apothecary at Middle and Purchase Streets in New Bedford where he worked as the managing druggist for about a year.

In 1870, Robert Carter struck out on his own. He went into business by purchasing a corner store space in the newly built Dexter Building at North and Purchase Streets in New Bedford. His wife and children lived in an apartment above the drugstore. Carter operated his first business until the early 1880s when poor health forced him to stop working. For three years, he gave attention to his health and during this time, he traveled to Boston to take refresher courses in pharmacy. When his health improved, Carter owned and operated two more drugstores in New Bedford between 1883 and 1895.

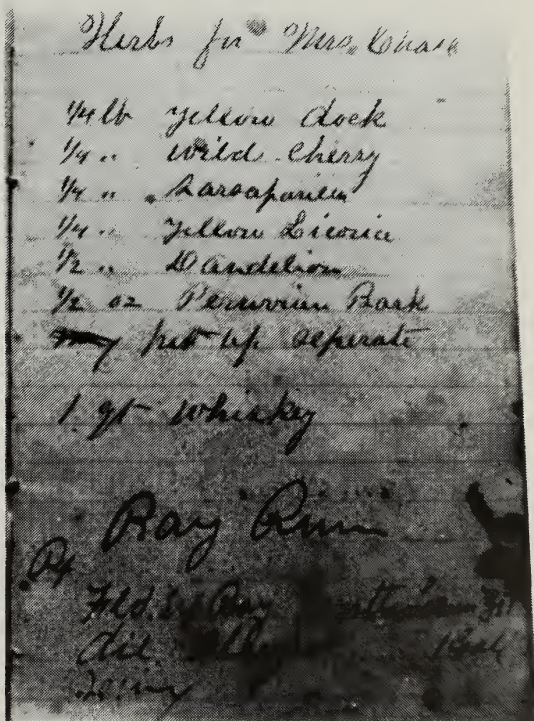
In 1896, he moved with his family to Boston where he purchased the drug business of H.A. Blackington on Western Avenue in Boston's

Allston section. His apothecary was the first to be owned by a Black person in Boston. He operated this business for about two years and then, joining in a partnership with a Captain Deveney, Carter opened an apothecary on Tremont Street near Parker Street in the Mission Hill section of Roxbury.

What kinds of medicines did this early and pioneering pharmacist prepare for his customers? From a small notebook kept in his own handwriting, [passed down to family members] here is a sample of one of 25 prescriptions. "Herbs for Mrs. Chase" contained yellow dock, wild cherry, sarsaparilla, yellow licorice, dandelion, Peruvian bark and whiskey. Besides each ingredient, Carter listed the amount of each to be added to the preparation. His notebook also contains medicines to treat rheumatism, diarrhea, whooping cough, and diphtheria. Also in his book was a preparation including chalk, orris root, sugar, oil of gaulth, and cloves which was labeled "Carter's Toothache Powder."

"The Roxbury drug business didn't pay and he eventually lost the store," according to Carter's youngest daughter, Parthenia Carter Hayden, when interviewed at age 92. He then went to work for a Black man who had purchased a drugstore on Cambridge Street in Boston's West End area near Beacon Hill. Most of Boston's Black citizens lived in this West End-Beacon Hill neighborhood at this time. The store owner was not a pharmacist so he needed one with Carter's experience.

Living with his wife and six children in an apartment on Main Street in Cambridge, Carter walked daily across the Longfellow Bridge



Robert Carter's prescription: "Herbs for Mrs. Chase."

to his West End drugstore job. The Carters then moved to Northampton Street in the South End where they resided until 1906, when they returned to New Bedford. A year before, Carter left the Cambridge Street pharmacy and had worked briefly for a druggist in Charlestown before returning to New Bedford. Back in his native city, Carter then went to work in a pharmacy owned by Harry Church on the corner of Pleasant and Union Streets.

Illness in 1907 forced Carter to leave his position at Church's Apothecary. In October of that year, Carter and his wife, Parthenia, headed south to North Carolina to regain his health. Upon reaching Washington, D.C., he was stricken with a severe hemorrhage and had to return to his home on Foster Street in New Bedford. He remained confined at home until his passing on January 12, 1908--his 61st birthday. His funeral was held at Union Baptist Church where he had been an original, active and long-time member. At the time of his death, Robert H. Carter was a well known citizen of New Bedford. He was one of the first members of the Massachusetts Pharmaceutical Association. He was also an active member of the Masons, the Knights of Pythias and the Odd Fellows.

Robert H. Carter was survived by his wife Parthenia and his three sons and three daughters. Today, he is survived by six grandchildren, eight great grandchildren, twelve great, great grandchildren and two great, great, great grandchildren.



INTERVIEW WITH ROBERT CARTER HAYDEN, JR.

These excerpts are from an interview with Robert Carter Hayden, Jr. recorded on December 23, 1988. (E. W.)

EW: How did you get started in collecting material about Robert Carter?

RCH: Let me start by telling you a story that I used to hear as a youngster growing up in New Bedford from my great aunt. Her name was Estelle Carter. She was one of the daughters of Robert Carter. As a young boy I would often stop to visit with my great aunt and spend a few minutes with her. She was quite elderly, in her late 70s, and had always been a collector of, a teacher of, and disseminator of Afro-American history in New Bedford, Massachusetts. She would often

tell me, 'Did you know that your great grandfather was a druggist and that he was the first "person of color" in Massachusetts to practice this profession?' I acknowledged this information but I don't recall that I asked any further questions. I just remember her continuing to tell me this from time to time. I can't say that I thought much about it during my teen years or during my twenties. But my own career in my late-twenties and early thirties led me to writing about Afro-American history in Boston and particularly in Massachusetts. That, of course, got me looking at family history and quite naturally I became very, very interested in my own family history, and, particularly the bit of information provided by my great aunt.

In my thirties I finally got my grandmother, Parthenia Carter, the youngest daughter of my great grandfather, to agree to a tape recorded interview. And we arranged to talk about both the Hayden family history and the Carter family history. It was during that one very precious interview with my grandmother that she recounted how her father became the first Afro-American pharmacist in Massachusetts.

At that time, all I had was the tape recorded interview and my great aunt's recitation of the fact. My grandmother was 92 and was failing healthwise but she still had an excellent memory and could remember details for dates, places, names, and events. I am quite sure that what she was telling me was accurate; but, I had no documentation and I had no artifacts. I did not ask my grandmother what remnants, documents or artifacts she did have. I was simply excited that I finally got her on tape.

In December or early January either late 1971 or early 1972, I



Parthenia Harris Carter

traveled to New York City to join some cousins to help clean out an apartment of a recently deceased relative (Gertrude Franklin). She had passed just before Christmas. She was my father's first cousin and one of the grandchildren of Robert Carter. Cousin Gertrude was a librarian all of her life, first at Lincoln University at Jefferson City, Missouri, then in the later years of her life at Columbia University. While there in her apartment after Christmas with my cousins--one from Chicago, the other from Delaware--we were pulling things out of the closet. Cousin Fred Franklin came up with a little notebook in his hand. He said, 'Gee, look at this! This was Grandpa Carter's!' I took a look--'Yeah, this contains a listing of all his medicines and the compounding of the various prescriptions.' I had a quick flashback to the days when my great aunt, Estelle Carter, used to tell me about Grandpa Carter who was a druggist.

My cousin Fred, knowing of my interest in Black history and family history said, 'Bobby, you take this, you keep this.' I was excited to have such a precious thing in my hand. I brought it back to Boston and showed it to my relatives. I believe it was my mother who somehow remembered she had a picture of Robert Carter, which she uncovered. On a piece of paper attached to it was written: 'Robert H. Carter, the First Colored Pharmacist in Massachusetts.' Now I had a picture of Robert Carter....Then my father, who really didn't have any information about Carter, said, 'There is something down cellar in a brown paper bag related to the Carter pharmacy. I said, 'What is it?' 'I'm not sure what it is, but it has been down there for a while,' he said. I said, 'I'd like to see it.' So he got the brown bag and he brought it up to me in Boston and in that brown bag was the certificate that Robert Carter had received from the Board of Pharmacy, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts in January of 1886. There was the real proof that he was a certified pharmacist....

I believe that when my great aunt, Estelle Carter, passed away and my father helped clean out her apartment, he took the brown bag with the framed certificate. I'm not sure that he really knew what he really had....So, I have been very, very fortunate to receive these artifacts: the book, the picture, the pharmacy certificate. It seems like they were just waiting for me to discover them.

When I was asked by the Commonwealth Museum to pull the information together on Carter, I then of course went to talk to my Aunt Stella Hayden to learn more about the story. And she proceeded then

to locate in my grandmother's house several obituaries on Robert Carter that appeared in the *New Bedford Standard Times* and the *Boston Guardian*. With the obituaries, I had even more detail and was able to put together a complete chronological account of the life and work of my great grandfather.

EW: You have had a lot of experience collecting oral history. What kinds of problems can you identify in collecting Black oral history?

RC: Sometimes, as it was with my grandmother, people are reluctant to share certain aspects of family history. They don't realize the importance of what they know. Sometimes older people do not want to be recorded on tape. I think my grandmother was reluctant, and, I was--to be honest with you--a bit reluctant to ask her because she was a rather closed person. But I was patient and talked with her several times before using the tape recorder. She began to feel more comfortable each time I talked with her in brief non-recorded interviews.

I think the first step for anybody who wants to begin to research and understand their family history is to get a tape recorder and tape record the oldest living members of the family. That's where you start....That's how I got started. Secondly, I found the [Carter] obituaries--three or four different ones--to be extremely helpful since they helped to tie everything together. They corroborated some of the things my grandmother talked about, naming the five drugstores that Carter owned. It identified their locations. It gave years and dates. From that, I was able to put together a chronology that I think is fairly accurate. So I think obituaries are extremely important sources.





St. John's Church UCC of Springfield: A Rich History of Church and Community

St. John's Congregational Church UCC of Springfield was founded in 1844 by free Blacks and abolitionists. First known as the "Free Church," it is the city's oldest. In its early days, frequent visitors to the Church spoke about the abolitionist cause, including the famous orator, Frederick B. Douglass.

Abolitionist John Brown is inextricably tied to St. John's. While living in Springfield and working as a wool merchant in 1846, Brown often worshipped at the Church. When the Church was reorganized in 1888, its present name was selected. Some believed that the change showed the members' reverence for Brown. Not only was the Brown name connected to the Church's, but Brown gave the Church its Lectern Bible which is still used today for special occasions. Brown's defeat at Harper's Ferry in 1859 has been "immortalized" in one of the Church's beautiful stained glass windows which reads "In memory of John Brown, Hero of Harper's Ferry."

The minister of the Black church is more than a religious leader,

but also a spokesperson for social, political, and economic causes in society. While St. John's has had several distinguished ministers over its long history, two are exceptional: the Rev. Dr. William N. DeBerry and the Rev. Dr. Charles E. Cobb.

Dr. DeBerry, who became minister in 1899 and stayed for over a quarter of a century, was a follower of Booker T. Washington. He believed that Blacks could make economic strides in society by learning skills, and so he established classes in different trades taught at the Church's parish house. Under DeBerry, not only were the church members' spiritual needs met on Sunday morning, but during the week their social and practical needs were met as well.

During the turbulent 1960's, both Black and white Americans participated in the civil rights struggle in which many religious leaders played a prominent role. In Springfield, the Reverend Dr. Charles E. Cobb ran a campaign for mayor that received national attention. (E. W.)



INTERVIEW WITH THE REVEREND DR. CHARLES E. COBB

The Reverend Dr. Charles E. Cobb was minister of St. John's Church UCC of Springfield, Massachusetts from 1951-1966. During his ministry, Cobb promoted higher education for Blacks, fought discrimination in the public schools, and, like many other Black leaders in the turbulent civil rights era of the 1960s who used the political process to effect change, Cobb ran for political office. After his tenure at St. John's, Cobb worked at the national headquarters of the United Church of Christ in New York City where he held the position of Executive Director of The Commission for Racial Justice. He is retired and now lives in the Washington, D.C. area.

Below are excerpts from an interview with the Reverend Dr. Cobb recorded on May 8, 1988, in which he reflects upon his days at St. John's. (E.W.)

EW: Would you tell me a little about your background. Are you originally from Massachusetts?

CC: I am a North Carolinian. I was born in Durham, North Carolina, a son of a man born in slavery....My father was born in 1862. I was brought up in Durham. I went to all of the schools there from grade school right

on to college. That gave me a background which helped me in many years of my ministry. I have appreciated that experience because it gave me a content...that I would not necessarily have had if I had been born elsewhere.

North Carolina never did make up its mind during the Civil War as to whether it was going to be slave or free. There was some residue of that indecision by the time I came along, so that's why we were segregated....It wasn't a complete divorce from the white community and it gave me a perspective that I considered unique.

EW: What college did you attend?

CC: I went to North Carolina College in Durham. At that time, it was called North Carolina College for Negroes to distinguish it from North Carolina College for whites located in Raleigh. My diploma reads North Carolina College for Negroes.

EW: When did you decide to enter the ministry?

CC: When I think about my youth...it was in my thinking somewhere all along the way....I don't think I could have stayed in the ministry all these years if I had not had any calling. You know, there was a time in my life when I was a teenager when I wanted to be anything but a minister. Ministers in those days were considered the "holy ones." However, it's been in my life for a long, long time.

EW: How did you get to St. John's?

CC: I was brought up in two churches, two denominations. One was the Black Baptist church, I went to Sunday school there. But I always attended church services at the African Methodist Episcopal Church where my mother belonged. When I grew up and I went into the ministry, and got myself trained at Howard University Divinity School and Boston University School of Theology, I became an AME minister (African Methodist Episcopal), a full time AME....But I had a thing about bishops, and bishops are an integral part of the AME hierarchy. Bishops were tyrants in those days. I had a bishop who was not kind--let me put it that way. He thought we young ones had had it too easy in our training and he resented the way congregations responded to us....

In 1944, I went to Boston to go to school and subsequently became the associate minister of St. Mark's Congregational Church on Townsend Street in Roxbury. There I directed its community center. I became enamored of the congregation polity and the minister, a Reverend Samuel Laviscount. He was a tremendously community conscious minister and spoke out on social issues, and God knows there were many social issues in the Roxbury-Boston community. He was a great preacher and a great minister. I became his son, so to speak, and he was my mentor... and I became enamored even more of congregational polity. We had not become the United Church of Christ at that time. The Congregational Church then was a singular denomination which didn't have bishops. Nevertheless, I stayed in the AME Church. In fact, I was assistant pastor at St. Paul's AME Church in Cambridge at the same time. During that period, I was ordained at the Charles Street AME Church in 1946.

When I finished my studies, I stayed in the AME church and I was in the first Episcopal District of the AME church. The bishop of that district, whose territory also encompassed Kentucky, took me from Boston, Massachusetts to Frankfort, Kentucky. I was willing to go, of course, because I wanted to find out what it was like to pastor my own church and congregation.

After four years, that ministry ended. I got a call from Rev. Laviscount telling me about the opening at St. John's Church in Springfield. When I was in Boston, I had gone over to St. John's to preach, so they knew me. In the summer of 1951, they invited me up to preach again and subsequently, on November 4, 1951, I delivered my first sermon as pastor. I stayed in Springfield fifteen years. Quite a long time but a wonderful time.

EW: When you first came to St. John's, what was the relationship between the church and the community?

CC: When I got to Springfield, St. John's was a divided church and they were hurting, really hurting. They were hurting...and pained...in the church. Programmatically, there was no goal although they had had marvelous programs for the young people, community activity and all of that. When I came, the people were divided but longing for community. That was my main goal. How could I bring these people together so that we could work collectively, so we could work on the things that needed to be addressed in the community and the needs of the congregation.



The Reverend Dr. Charles E. Cobb

That was my first goal.

EW: What were some of the changes in the community you wanted to see at that time?

CC: At that time, it was obvious, especially since I was born in the South, [that] there was discrimination and segregation in this New England community. There was limited economic opportunity. The education for Blacks needed some infusion of encouragement so that young people could aspire to higher goals. There was only one young Black person in college when I went to Springfield. Just one!...This was Rachel Clarkson (now Stockton) who still lives in the area. Of course, college and higher education had always been present in my life. I had just left a college campus where there were five hundred people or more that were in higher education. I wanted to see not only the young people at St. John's, but the young people in the community at large going into college. I had come from a progressive state. When I graduated from college in North Carolina, that state had 13 Black colleges, which to this day is a phenomenon.

EW: Did this surprise you when you got to Springfield?

CC: This didn't surprise me. I had always known that discrimination and segregation were as operative in the North as they were in the South.

EW: What I meant was that you must have been surprised that there was only one person enrolled.

CC: Yes, you're right. I was surprised. When I was in college, there was what was called the so-called "Springfield Plan" that was supposed to deal with this problem.

EW: Was the Springfield Plan a plan that was more on paper than action?

CC: The Springfield plan was a paper plan and it was never more evident to me when I brought my family there in 1951.

EW: When I was looking through the history of the church materials I came across the "School of Civic Responsibility." Could you tell me how that came about?

CC: Early on it became obvious to me that there was lack of involvement, a lack of interest on the part of the city and all its officials for improvement for the Black community. The ghetto was a reality....The Hill neighborhood was a ghetto even though there were whites nearby. We had one Black person involved in city administration, a city councilman by the name of Paul Mason. Attorney J. Clifford Clarkson had been a councilman before him. Both of them were Republicans because, at one time, that's where most Blacks were --with the Republican party. They had the white establishment supporting their candidacy for city council, and thus they became councilman.

But it was obvious to me that the Black community was not involved in the political process which determined so many aspects of their lives, such as the school. The school is a political operation. And there were very few Black teachers in the school system, very few. Anyway, I wanted to address this. So I decided I would start the School of Civic Responsibility to make people aware, to get them involved in the administration and the implementation of services in the city.

EW: Was the goal of the program to get people to take some political action so that they could get some control?

CC: Yes. Political action, not only civic action. To become involved in the political process. Everything is political. You drink a glass of milk in the morning and some political decision somewhere has affected your drinking that glass of milk. So I firmly believe in being involved in the political process as did my predecessor, the Reverend Albert Cleage. It was to make the community aware, because when they are made aware, they become involved in determining what services are wanted and needed and made available to them.

EW: Did you find through enlightening the people in the church and the community that they did achieve more political access?

CC: I can't say that all of a sudden they became politically more aware; but, it certainly opened their eyes to the need for leadership. I was joined

in this effort by the other ministers of the city, including the Reverend Paul Fullilove of Third Baptist Church, the Reverend Hezekiah Hutchings who was at Alden Street Baptist, the Reverend George T. Sims at Bethel AME Church, the Reverend James Hamer at Faith Baptist Church and the Reverend D. Edward Wells at Mount Calvary Baptist Church. These ministers joined with me in sponsoring the School of Civic Responsibility.

EW: Where were your meetings held?

CC: In the various churches. At St. John's, I had a series inviting public officials to come and address the people and to be questioned by them. I had school committee persons and councilmen and whatever. Unfortunately, the mayor at that time did not come to any sessions of the School of Civic Responsibility.

"Let's get smart. Let's get involved." Of course, you only get smart when you get informed. That was the whole idea behind it. I saw it as a success.... I would like to see every person, Black or white, become more civic minded or civically involved as a result of such an effort. But when I look back, it was a success..

EW: Could you tell me about the School Board challenge?

CC: The School Board challenge grew right out of the School of Civic Responsibility because we had a Black woman on the school committee at that time. Her name was Mrs. Esther McDowell. And she was one of those who participated in the School of Civic Responsibility ,who came to discuss the schools. Esther had some reservations about the discrimination that was taking place. So early on we asked, "Why is it there are so few Blacks and minorities in the public school system?" She had difficulty seeing that the cause was a racial attitude.

So we began to document the people in the community who were eminently qualified to teach in the Springfield public school system but who were working at Westinghouse or the Springfield Armory or at other things when they could have been teaching. It was true enough we had Miss Rebecca Johnson, the sole Black principal. And that was great. All of my children went to school under her leadership.

But that wasn't what we were talking about. We were talking about the Springfield system. There were very few Blacks. Yet there were

enough Blacks residing in Springfield to warrant having more than the number of teachers that they had--fewer than ten. This was crucial not just for the Black children. Having more Black teachers in the school system in Springfield would actually be beneficial to white children who would never have been exposed to these kinds of teachers. To say nothing of the role models that Black teachers would have been to the Black children in the schools.

As we began to document the problem and to raise this question with the school committee, it was obvious that the roadblock to change was the superintendent, Dr. William Saunders. As we began to document the case, Dr. George Sims, and the newly hired first Black high school teacher, Albert Pryor, Jr., and I raised these issues and challenged the School Board. Our challenge grew out of the obvious discrimination that was taking place in the administration of the public schools and in



Education Day (The Reverend Cobb is at far right)

the public school system. It grew out of the discussions from the School of Civic Responsibility.

We, as ministers, had a responsibility to challenge the situation as I think we do today. Wherever there is discrimination we have a responsibility to challenge it and bring it to the attention of the community and to those who can make some changes.

EW: What was the result then when you brought it to the attention of the

community?

CC: First of all, the Superintendent resigned. He resigned and took a job as commissioner of education for the state of Connecticut. That was exactly what happened. One day, I was getting out of my bed, and my wife got up and we got the newspaper and opened it and in front of me there it was "Deputy Saunders Resigns." Not for greater pay, not at all. In fact, the newspaper pointed that out....Now what happened after that is what always happens. The situation began to change. They began to get Black people from all over into the Springfield public schools. It was a very effective campaign that brought about significant changes in my day in the educational process.

EW: Was your mayoralty campaign an extension of your interest in political events?

CC: There was no question about it. I have always been a political animal. I've always believed that you get much done through the political process. My entering into the mayoralty campaign came out of frustration, frustration with the mayor and with the political system which refused to recognize and deal with police brutality against Blacks that was taking place in the city of Springfield.

This is what happened. This is the incident that triggered it. There was a night club. This is the club in which Black and white couples, men and women, used to go. It was called the Octagon Lounge. You would go there on the weekends and hang out. Black and white couples would go. Of course the city did not like this. They did not like this interracial dating. This was in the early 1960s. One Friday night, the police went to the disco and they beat up these interracial couples who were socializing at the Octagon Lounge. On the Friday night when that occurred, I was in the hospital. I was to be discharged the very next day. The next morning, I opened the paper and there was the whole incident. This was on Saturday. My wife was supposed to come and pick me up after my release from the hospital. And I had read this thing. When I got home, low and behold, here were these youngsters who had been beaten up sitting on my front steps waiting for me to arrive. They had gotten a rally together...and I'm coming home and I'm looking at their bruised bodies and

heads. They asked me to come and speak to them and to the city administration. I forgot that I had just come out of the hospital and I got immersed in this issue. We went to the Police Commission. We went to the mayor. For the community, this was a very sensitive issue which was still being denied. The business people didn't want to become involved. It became a public thing.

One day I was downtown. I think I had just left the Police Commissioner's office to make sure that this burning issue would be discussed. I said to myself, I know what I'll do, I'll walk over to City Hall. On the spur of the moment I walked over to City Hall and I signed up to run for mayor of the city of Springfield. And you know, what happened the next morning? The headlines on the front page of the newspaper read, "Civil Rights Leader Runs For Mayor."



Collecting Oral History

by Dr. Eleanor Wachs

Oral history involves the collecting of reminiscences about events by those who have experienced them. It also involves capturing these experiences by tape recording. Oral history has become a popular technique to collect information from both the "movers and shakers" of society as well as the common folk. It has become a valuable technique to learn about people who have been left out of history, especially minorities, including Blacks and women.

Almost anyone can be a subject of an oral history interview, from a child to a senior citizen. What's important is that the oral history interviewer have a clearly focussed project from the start and be interested in collecting information that is reliable and valid and can be corroborated through written sources. Conducting one interview with a relative does not make you an oral historian; but, you are on the way to learning about how an oral historian works.

Collecting your family history will start you on a journey that can last a lifetime. Carl J. Cruz mentions in his interview that he began to research his family history as a teenager. Like Carl, a good place to begin your own family history is with yourself. Think about the stories you have heard from family members and other relatives and note them down. Find the oldest relatives you have and plan on interviewing them, as Robert Carter Hayden, Jr. suggests. Since written records and other documentation for many people are often hard to obtain, it is vital that older relatives are interviewed. They often have excellent memories, have had experiences unknown to younger generations, and are many times flattered that their experiences attract interest. Ruth Jones was 93 at the time of her interview!

As you begin documenting your family history, it will be worth your while to read about oral history. Seeing how someone else accomplishes the same task should inspire you. Review the bibliography at the end of this booklet for some reading suggestions.

Just as the people in the preceding pages describe, you'll need to corroborate your information by using both oral and written sources or even photographs and artifacts. Consider interviewing two relatives (at separate times, of course) about the same event or recollections about the same person. If you do that, your results will be more reliable. Carl J. Cruz spent time in the Genealogy Room of the New Bedford Free Public Library looking for written documents so that he could learn about his relative, Sgt. Carney. Robert Carter Hayden, Jr. was fortunate to have in his possession an important artifact, Robert Carter's prescription book. Reverend Cobb provided the Commonwealth Museum with photographs of himself.

The techniques for interviewing are simple to master, but a good interview takes practice. Use a tape recorder, preferably with a separate microphone. Buy high quality tape of 60 minute duration, since longer tapes tend to tangle and tear. Practice with the tape recorder by doing a mock interview with a friend. Get used to your own voice on tape so it will not distract you later when you transcribe your interview. To prepare for your interview, practice by asking short, simple, and direct questions.

Before you set out on your interview, make sure your equipment is in order. Carrying an extension cord and extra batteries is important just in case you will need them. Test out your microphone and see how far it can pick up sound by placing it on a table and walking several feet away to estimate the microphone's pick up capacity.

Prepare for your interview in other ways. Sending your interviewee a list of questions ahead of time helps him or her gear up for the interview. Tell him or her also that you plan to tape record the interview. Call ahead of time to set up a specific appointment time. If the interviewee is elderly, try to keep your session as close to an hour as possible; if your interviewee has more information, then schedule an additional meeting.

When you are at the place of the interview, remind the interviewee of your purpose and what you plan to ask. Make sure you have permission to tape record. Always reveal the intentions of your interview and place equipment in full view of the interviewee. Never hide your equipment. Remember to interview only one person at a time since this will

make transcription easier. Try to record in a situation where there will be as little extraneous noise as possible. For example, ask that a television or radio be turned off while you are recording.

It will be necessary to bring along a pad of paper and a pencil with you so that you can write down some essential reminders for yourself for later, such as the names and addresses of others your relative thinks would be important to contact. If you can, bring along a camera. A photo of the person you are interviewing is also part of the documentation process, an appropriate reminder of the event. Also, you may come across family memorabilia that your interviewee may have which could be photographed on site to supplement your information about your family's history.

Once your interview is completed, you will want to transcribe the tape word for word. While this is an arduous task, it is a very important one. Once you have done that, send a copy of your interview to the interviewee so that he or she can make any corrections or changes. This final version serves as your document.

When you have a finished version of your typed interview, you might want to add some additional information about the interview, including when and where the interview took place. Giving your relatives copies of the interview and photographs is a wonderful and cherished gift. Your local historical society might appreciate a copy, including a transcription, a copy of the tape and photographs. To insure against accidental loss have more than one finished copy and put one in a safe place.

There are some specific concerns related to Black oral history. While written documentation may be scant, some written sources may be useful. For example, the 1870 census listed all Blacks by name and can be found at many public and university libraries. Birth and death records are available for many towns in New England. Church records, military records, and town and county records are helpful. Also, there are several organizations which can help you with your search, including the Afro-American Historical and Genealogical Society, Box 13086, T Street Station, Washington, D.C. 20009.



The Significance of Collecting Black Oral History

*Dr. Patricia A. Turner
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...all human ancestry goes back to some place and some time when there was no writing. Then, the memories and the mouths of the ancient elders were the only way that early histories of mankind got passed along...for all of us today to know who we are.

Alex Haley, Roots: The Saga of an American Family

In 1976, Alex Haley's epic tale of one Black family's journey to America was published. Soon after it was made into the most successful mini-series in television history. Haley's family contained no heroes in the conventional sense of the word. His ancestors were not presidents or heads of state: they were hard-working Black people who raised their sons and daughters to take pride in who they were and where they came from. With each generation, his people improved their level of education, their occupational status, and their overall lifestyle.

Since the success of *Roots*, many Black families, churches and social organizations have set themselves to the task of recording the oral histories of Black Americans. They realize that their own sense of family history is limited, and Black history is all too often overlooked in their children's education. Yet, more than anything else, Black children seem to thrive when they are provided with a sense of personal history. Knowing where they came from allows them to sharpen their sense of where

they are going.

Most families will be unable to trace their family tree back to its African roots. The impact of frequent migration and haphazard record keeping has prevented many families and groups from investigating past one or two generations. But in one hundred years documents that detail our lives and those of our parents and grandparents will be important to our grandchildren and great grandchildren. Worthwhile interviews can be collected from young people as well as old.

Recording oral Black history is not always easy. Many older Black Americans are reluctant to talk about their early lives. For some, the memories are too painful. Oftentimes they are afraid that young people will blame them for the impoverished conditions of their past. Often our senior citizens know very little about *their* parents and the world they lived in. Others find it difficult to accept that ordinary lives deserve to be chronicled with the same care that is devoted to the lives of the powerful. Over and over again they will try to tell you that what happened in the past doesn't matter.

In spite of these challenges, collecting Black oral history is still a very worthwhile enterprise to undertake. The equipment is inexpensive and easy to master. Conducting interviews can be a delightful way to spend a couple of hours. Once they get started, many interview subjects don't want to stop talking. Many family reunions have been organized as a result of oral history projects. The process benefits both the interviewer and the interviewee. Often we learn new things about people we have known our entire lives. Most importantly, we are contributing documents that will be important components of the historical record and that will be cherished by future generations.



For additional information about oral history, Black family history and Black folklore, see the following books:

Blockson, Charles L., Fry, Ron. *Black Genealogy*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc, 1977.

Dance, Daryl Cumber. *Shuckin' and Jivin' Folklore from Contemporary Black Americans*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978.

Ives, Edward D. *The Tape Recorded Interview*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1980.

Linder, Bill R. *Black Genealogy: Basic Steps to Research*. Technical Leaflet 135. Nashville: American Association for State and Local History.

Morgan, Kathryn L. *Children of Strangers: The Stories of a Black Family*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1980.

Piersen, William. *Black Yankees: The Development of an Afro-American Subculture in Eighteenth Century New England*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988.

Puckett, Newbell Niles. *Folk Beliefs of The Southern Negro*. New York: Negro Universities Press, 1926.

Wiggins, William, H. Jr. *O Freedom! Afro-American Emancipation Celebrations*. Knoxville, University of Tennessee Press, 1987.

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