



Welcome to the fourth exhibit in the series of “**We Exist**”. In this section we have selected quotes that represent and explain how Maine’s Black residents’ create the processes behind their engagement in particular leisure activities. The quotes also highlight the particular types of leisure activities that Maine’s Black residents suggest that they are involved in. The quotes are taken from transcripts of the oral history project “*Home Is Where I Make It: African American Community and Activism in Greater Portland, Maine*”. The interview subjects are all native to Maine or are longtime residents of Maine. The original intent of the “Home Is Where I Make It” project was to highlight Black residents’ history and struggle for community in southern Maine in both their formal organizational memberships and day-to-day activities. The interviews unearthed pertinent information related to the Black residents’ participation in leisure activities.

The quotes center on Maine’s Black residents’ reflections on leisure activities that they participated in during childhood. Some of the interviewees participated in activities in Maine while other activities were linked to other areas of the United States. The quotes also centered on the types of activities that they engage in with their own offspring. A significant number of the leisure activities by Maine’s Black residents are linked to the church and are family oriented. But there are leisure activities that local to civic institutions in Maine as well as external activities that were part of the Maine entertainment landscape.

There is a brief biographical data description of each of the interviewees and a photo. The quotes that are attributed to the interviewees are arranged under the general theme, “African American Leisure”.

We Exist Series 4: African Americans, Maine, and Leisure Activities



Ms. Beverly Bowens

Interviewer: Vanesa Saric

“Actually, I’m a product of my environment. So when I went to New York, I had difficulty getting used to, for instance, going to a party, 8 o’clock. And even though in New York a party starts at eight, no one comes until ten. I go to bed early, and I get up very early. And this is something that I found a little bit different when I was in New York. I’m just not a New Yorker, although I enjoyed it very much and I miss it very much. But I’m still really more of a New Englander.”

“In the summertime, the neighbors used to take me to the beach every day. The Eastern Promenade. We were a very close neighborhood. I still see some of my classmates and it’s like we never had left, except that we’ve got a little older. But it was a close neighborhood. We used to have friends that we would play with. What we used to do is climb fences. Now this was a big thing, climbing all these back fences. And that was one of our things, climbing everybody’s fences.” “Well, the big thing I remember was St. Peter’s annual bazaar, which is still going. That was a nice thing. We had a public market which is not like the one we have now, but it used to be down on Federal Street, just behind Lincoln Park. And that was a beautiful thing to see. The farmers would come in, they would have everything. There are many pleasant memories. Very, very pleasant memories.”

Ms. Beverly Bowens (born in Maine; age 67; left at 21 years old for about 35 to 40 years and then returned to Maine)

Full Length Interview: https://digitalcommons.usm.maine.edu/aa_hiwimi/2/

**We Exist Series 4:
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Ms. Lucille Young

Interviewer: Anab Osman

"[Barbeque] Yeah. We have four picnic tables in the backyard, and chairs, and we have a grill. And I have a swimming pool, so they're always there. They're always at my house. Which I'm trying to get rid of half of them, but I know it'll never happen."

Ms. Lucille Young (age 73; born 1928 in Jackson, Mississippi; moved to Maine in 1967)

Full Length Interview: https://digitalcommons.usm.maine.edu/aa_hiwimi/6/

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Ms. Odessa Barret

Interviewer: - n/a

“Life for me as a child was bitter sweet. I was between the youngest boy and girl so I was never alone. Church was the focal point of our lives. It was a time of "White Only" restrooms and drinking fountains, but we were spared a lot of that because we owned our own car so public transportation was not a worry for us. Traveling food for us was a basket of fried sausage and biscuits if it was morning and fried chicken and bread if it was lunch time. We learned to use the bathroom before we left and take in few fluids because we had to hold it until we could find a restroom. We are talking about a 3-hour drive. We lived in a spacious 3-bedroom house on a corner lot where we grew vegetables and flowers on one side and fruit trees (orange, plum, fig) and flowers on the other. Our playground was the athletic field for the high school that was across the street from our house: the track run, the tennis courts, and baseball diamonds. We lived on the west side of the tracks, the whites lived on the east side. There was no public transportation for our side, so people who worked as domestics walked or were picked up by their employers. I was not affected by this when I was young because my parents were very protective. I became aware as I got older.”

Ms. Odessa Barret (age 53; born 1948 in Port Arthur, Texas; born in a middle-class, blue collar family; moved to Maine in October 1979)

Keywords: family demography, Black Families, Maine

Full Length Interview: https://digitalcommons.usm.maine.edu/aa_hiwimi/17/

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Ms. Rose Jackson

Interviewer: Hamida Suja

“And we would get together, like, have a fish fry on the weekend with our white friends, our white neighbors. And when we would get out and fish, my daddy and them would go down and get in the water and just muddy the water up with hoes-what you chop cotton with-and the fish would come to the top of the water. And they would get the fish out. And we would clean them and we'd cook them. And that's the reason I call it the good old days.”

“I was a tomboy mother; there were so many sons. We would play ball and I would throw the ball just as hard as they will, bat the ball. And when you're living in a place like Sagamore, you got this whole big field out there to play in, you got room for everybody.”

Mrs. Rose Jackson (age 66; born in Louisville, Mississippi; lives in South Portland for 39 years; married 34 years; has six children; had five children with her first husband; he died and she remarried and had a child with the current husband)

Full Length Interview: https://digitalcommons.usm.maine.edu/aa_hiwimi/16/

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Reverend Albert and Clemmie Jackson

Interviewer: Maureen Elgersman Lee

“Well I like it. You know, I describe it as, ah, a place where you can shop. I notice when it rain, a lot of people go out to eat. They like to eat here in Maine. And I've noticed -- I've (inaudible) --but this is a good area to live in.”

Interviewer: “Are there any events in Lewiston and Auburn's history that stand out in your memories? Some people talk about when, um, Mohammed Ali came to fight in Lewiston. Is that something that, ah, either stands out in your memory, or is that something that still people talk about?”

Rev. Jackson: “Actually, when, ah, um, ah, um, Cassius Clay, as that was his name at the time...It was in the '60s. He actually put Maine on the map. And, ah, ah -- and -- and that's, ah, about the only -- actually event that I -- I can really, ah, ah, acquaint myself to thinking...I didn't have a chance to go inside the, ah, building -- I was there though...But it was, ah -- it was so crowded. Ah, people, you know -- but I did -- I did -- I experienced that -- that highlight at that time. I can get -- get into the building but I was -- I was on the outside...It was very exciting. It was -- it was something that -- that Maine wasn't, you know, accustomed to and -- and everything was just -everyone's excited and the people, you see, that they interviewed. Some people working with their cameras and they were flashing and people were excited. And it was just an exciting event at that”

Reverend Albert Jackson (born in Slabfork, Virginia; age 61; lived in Maine for 43 years) and Mrs. Clemmie Jackson (born March 1948 in Marengo County, Alabama; age 55; lived in Maine for 3.5 years)

Full Length Interview: https://digitalcommons.usm.maine.edu/aa_hiwimi/8/

We Exist Series 4: African Americans, Maine, and Leisure Activities



Mr. Edgar Anderson

Interviewer: Amber Panzella

"I just spent last weekend down in Massachusetts with-as I said before-with my daughter who played in basketball tournaments Saturday and Sunday, so we spent the weekend in Massachusetts playing basketball. This weekend her mom will spend time with her in Hudson, New Hampshire, playing softball. She's also a softball player...Yeah, and two weeks from now we're gonna be in Connecticut, and the week after that we'll be playing basketball in D.C. So we're very involved with our kids, and they get a chance to see other places, too, besides Maine, which is good." "Not really. My neighborhood didn't specifically, but the city of Chicago had big food fests and rock fests, things like that. But our neighborhood, our neighborhood was so small we didn't have a lot."

Mr. Edgar Anderson (Male; age 51; born 1950 in Chicago suburb called Harvey)

Keywords: family demography, Black Families, Maine

Full Length Interview: https://digitalcommons.usm.maine.edu/aa_hiwimi/1/

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Mrs. Emma Jackson

Interviewer: Maureen Elgersman Lee

“Because it wasn't ever in the - the -- the, ah, club scenes, or any scenes like that. Actually, we live, ah, a really sheltered life. We went to church. We were involved. But the church was our main focus and our main goal. And I -- and -- and our lives were wrapped -- revolved around that. So that might be -- which would be a reason why we didn't--”

Mrs. Emma Jackson (age 62; born 1941 in Atlanta Georgia; lived in Maine for 46 years; has three children)

Keywords: children's experiences, Black Families, Maine

Full Length Interview: https://digitalcommons.usm.maine.edu/aa_hiwimi/9/

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Mrs. Joanna Boley-Lee

Interviewer: Maureen Elgersman Lee.

“I think my closing reflections would be that when I came to Lewiston I remember walking across the bridge that goes across the Androscoggin, the extension of Main Street, just sort of looking out, and there was a black man with a camera and I thought, good, there's a black person. So I went up to him and I introduced myself, told him I was new in the area and he tells me he was visiting. I don't think I saw another black person for at least a month, and I was going out to the supermarkets, et cetera. But within the, maybe three or four years after I moved here, or maybe less, I saw a marked increase in the presence of black people, and this is before the Somalians and the Togolese.”

Mrs. Joanna Boley-Lee McKenzie (age 66; born 1937 in Newark, New Jersey; lived in Maine for 8.5 years)

Full Length Interview: https://digitalcommons.usm.maine.edu/aa_hiwimi/7/

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Mrs. June McKenzie

Interviewer: Aretha Williams

“Oh, yes we do, and they're really big. My sister in Connecticut has, what, seven children, and my sister in the islands has three, and my other sister has one. And all our families and our grandchildren and everything, we all get together on Fourth of July and have a picnic at Sebago Lake, which started out as a big church thing. Our church did it every year, and we've just kept up the tradition.”

“Well, my neighborhood now is not too nice. There's only three houses on my side of the street. And across the street there's a big apartment house and the people tend to move frequently. But they're all friendly. They're kinda noisy in the summer time because their apartments get hot, and they sit on the sidewalk. But where I grew up, just down over the hill, which was Anderson Street, they tore our house down to build Kennedy Park area. But we had great neighbors there. And some of them have passed on, but we remained friendly, you know, all through our lifetime. We had, we had really great neighbors.”

“You know. After school they'd go and play sports at the police station or they'd be in sports at school. And they had a system. You had to be home every night for dinner.”

Mrs. June McKenzie (age 72; born 1929 in Portland Maine; fifth-generation Mainer; lived in Maine all her life)

Full Length Interview: https://digitalcommons.usm.maine.edu/aa_hiwimi/3/

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Mr. James Mathews

Interviewer: Maureen Elgersman Lee

“Well, when we talk about the Mathews family reunions and also the Fisher family reunions, because they're a part of our family. We all evolved from the Mathews really, and, of course, my name is Mathews. We had a family reunion in Nova Scotia that I went to in 1998. It was July; I think it was the 14th thru the 16th, or something like that, that we had a reunion up there in Nova Scotia. Shelbyville, I believe it was.

And that's where our family came from. And then we had a family reunion in 1995 also; it was the first Mathews reunion that we had, and that was held in South Portland at the Sheraton. [side B] Okay, like I said, we had our first reunion in 1995, and then we had another one that was held in Shelbyville, Nova Scotia in 1998 in July. And that one was very good because we had to all go over on the Scotia Prince to get to Nova Scotia. So that was an interesting trip.”

“I live in a very nice neighborhood. I enjoy it very, very much. Like I say we moved there twenty-six years ago-October of '74-and, you know, we had a new house built and so on. We've added some rooms and so on that we did ourselves. We have another unattached garage. I love it. My wife has a beautiful garden and animals and stuff outside; just quite the thing. We have enough room where we can have a lot of people over there. The kids like to play basketball; I like to play basketball myself. You know, so we got a hoop out. But the area that we live in: once you get off Broadway into there, it's like another world. You know, there's a lot of trees there; still really sticks. [laughter] It's really nice. I like it all year long, but I really like it in the summer time.”

Mr. James Mathews (age 59; born 1941 in Portland Maine; married with five children; lived in Maine all his life – lived in South Portland for over 26 years)

Full Length Interview: https://digitalcommons.usm.maine.edu/aa_hiwimi/4/

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Mr. James Sheppard

Interviewer: Sanela Zukic

"But in addition to that we'd have lots of summer events: picnics and that sort. But that's separate; that's a different thing."

"Between my wife and I, we saw to it that they did a lot of reading. And we did a lot of traveling. We did a lot of traveling to the Caribbean and South America, and we took them with us."

"We're spread out so far around, we're spread out so much so that we have little reunions, little itty baby reunions. This past Christmas, my wife and I went down to Antigua, the same place where my parents were born. And while we were there we spent two weeks gathering all our relatives together, and we all got together on Christmas Day. We went down there at Christmas. I have one aunt that's still alive; she was born in maybe 1915-somewhere around there. So she's still alive, up there in age. And the cousins, their children. I have a lot of cousins there in the Caribbean. And we had a couple of get-togethers down there. Christmas and that. We plan to do it again this year. Whenever any of them travel to the United States, we try to set up a date where we can get together and everyone can see each other. So we do have that sort of family reunion. But they're not formal. These aren't things when you send letters out a some families do. They have reunions in nice, you know, rented places, ballrooms, and all that sort of thing. But we don't do that."

Mr. James Sheppard (born in New York City in 1924; both his parents immigrated from Antigua in the West Indies to Canada, then they came to the United States in 1923; moved to Maine in 1971)

Full Length Interview: https://digitalcommons.usm.maine.edu/aa_hiwimi/14/

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Ms. Rose Jackson

Interviewer: Hamida Suja

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Full Length Interview: https://digitalcommons.usm.maine.edu/aa_hiwimi/16/

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Mr. Richard Tarrence

Interviewer: Rachel Talbot-Ross

“And, you know, raising my children is interesting in that as they grew older and as they noticed the very differences, they were starting to mix in very well. They were making friends, and, you know, they were involved in sporting activities and community.”

Mr. Richard Tarrence (age 57; born 1945 in Cleveland, Ohio; moved to Maine in October 1975)

Keywords: family demography, Black Families, Maine

Full Length Interview: https://digitalcommons.usm.maine.edu/aa_hiwimi/5/