190929_1429 Transcription

Interviewer: This is Justin Hawkins, 2019 History Harvest, uh, this is interview number 8. And who do I have with me?

Participant: Celeste Jordan [?].

Interviewer: And what is your connection to the town? I know you said you were from somewhere else originally.

Participant: I'm actually here because of my partner, he has a real strong connection to the families here in Longtown, but I have some suspicion that my family passed through Longtown, going from Virginia to Chicago.

Interviewer: Great, and, um, what, you're gonna send us some object, and what are those objects?

Participant: Okay, I have, uh, some silver pieces of a silver set that belonged to my grandmother. Uh, I also have some carving sets, as well as a cleaver that have unusual materials in them that are older. These were willed to me. I have, uh, wood, uh planer that's used for planing wood for carpentry. I have a beaded belt that has been ascertained through the Art Institute of Chicago as being authentic. It was given to my grandfather who gave it to me, uh, it's hand-beaded Native belt, um, that has, uh, poplin cloth on the backside, which, I guess they determined dates it to be early 19th century. Um, and then I have, uh, a number of photographs, quite a lot of photographs that evidently were part of the family archive that were deeded to me.

Interviewer: Now, what do all these objects mean to you personally? What is their significance towards yourself, your family, your community, your history?

Participant: Uh, my family, I would say, was melangien, or mixed with Scotch-Irish, and then Native and Black. Uh, this was always a part of the family history, uh, and a number of things were, uh imparted to me as a child to understand where we came from. Um, as far as being a *rally[?]* to the community, I think this recently has just come out that there has been quite a lot of mixing over the many many generations that have been since the early settling of the Americas. Um, there is also a contingent that there are other mixtures involved because there were many immigrants and many indentured servants who mixed together. So, I feel that it's a part of the history that has been unknown or ignored over the last 200 years.

Interviewer: Sure, uh, and what does "freedom" mean to you, your family?

Participant: Well, I feel that there's connection when you look at the census, because the census tells you what the occupations were of the forbearers, and I see from going through quite an extensive amount of my families history thus far, roughly five generations, that they were primarily tradespeople, ad it was because of being tradespeople that they prospered. And I think that it's more than perhaps someone training someone, this is something that was perhaps passed down, and they had those skills when they arrived so then they moved ahead more quickly than the other families. Uh, I've never seen any documents or anything that said they were other than free people. I'm still looking.

Interviewer: And how far back have you found, so far?

Participant: Uh, I believe that I've gotten, um, roughly back to 1790, and I believe I will be able to go back further, at least from this Dutch-Irish background. Uh,

Interviewer: And do you know…

Participant: As far as Native background, uh, I'm seeing things listed in a number of listings such as the Dawes listings that show that numbers of people within the family had been able to get certified, on the list. But then it peters out because it's so many generations removed, and it didn't pass down to me.

Interviewer: Do you know when your family would have moved from Virginia to the Chicago area? Or a general time?

Participant: Roughly between 1850 and 1970, or even 1880. I think it was prior to 1880 because this is my great-great grandparents moving, and not my grandfather who was born around 18?9, something like that.

Interviewer: So they were traders in Virginia, before that?

Participant: I believe they had property, I know they came from Gladstone, Virginia, which was originally Riversville, Virginia, along the James River. And, um. my snooping has come up with that I believe that my great-great grandfather had been involved with working on the canals that they were building from the, uh, ports in Virginia going West to the Chenandoa valley, okay? And so from that point on, they had access to that travel, uh, territory. So they were traveling the territory fairly easily. They were originally from Nelson County, Virginia. Um, and because of that, they had access to being able to go West.

Interviewer: And um, sorry. Is there anything else you would like to tell us that I haven't asked you about?

Participant: Well, in particular, in relation to the black settlements here, when you ask family members how the family decided to go to Chicago, how did they get there? Huh, interestingly enough, they would say "well, we took the railroad." And I always thought as a kid, oh, they just

got on a train and came. But in retrospect, I looked at it and said, "huh," all these different underground railroads stations were listed as stations. For instance, Lyle Station or other different places, that perhaps that was the way that people phrased it. "Oh yeah, I'm taking the railroad." And they were actually escaping.

Interviewer: And that's why you think they came through this community?

Participant: I think there's a possibility. And the reason I think there's a possibility that they came through Longtown is because my grandmother took me around in the community that I lived in, there were several members of the family there. And it was kind of unusual because there weren't that many black families there, and she took me around to an older couple, and I didn't know who they were. They were very old, in their 90's probably. They were older than my grandmother, and I thought my grandmother was old! So, they were probably in their 90's. And she said to me, "I want you to meet these people," she didn't tell me why, she just said "these people, early on, were very important to us." And I said "Okay, that's interesting." And, but the name of the people was Baker. And just recently, they've just published this book, which I haven't read yet, which is…

Interviewer: Can you read the title?

Participant: The title is *A Thrilling Episode of Antebellum Days and True Stories of the Oppressed Race among Friends and Foes,* written by Reverend Thomas Addington, published in 1898, and the person they're talking about is a man named Jim Baker. So, I'm very interested to see if these were actually the children of this person, or sibling. Because they were so much older. So, I look forward to that reading. But, I think that the people hid the fact that they were in the settlements because they were protecting the settlements, particularly after the episodes that

were occuring in the 1920's. So, there were a lot of lynchings, and so people just didn't talk about it. My grandmother had a steamer trunk in her home, in the basement, when I was young and I wanted to see what was in it and she told me "it's none of your affair, you are not to touch the steam trunk." And I thought, "oh there's something in there that's good, I know I wanna see it." And I was young. The next day, I went to visit my grandparents and the trunk was gone. So, she wanted to [?] all tell of how she came to Chicago. This was my grandfather's family I was talking about, this was his wife and she came up from Arkansas, and, uh, she was a part of a Quaker family. And it seems one of the lynch pins that I've been looking at is the fact that I believe these were Black, Quaker families who, after the dissolution of the Abolitionist movement in the Quaker community, because they were split by the Civil War, those Black Quaker families got on together with different communities to take care of each other.

Interviewer: So the Arkansas branch was Quaker, but was… what was the other branch, do you know?

Participant: My father's [?], I don't know the direct, uh, connection, but they were originally Quaker families. So, it's very interesting they were never a part of [?] organized family community that had to do with any other kind of religious community. So, but, after a certain period of time, they didn't participate in one[?]. They were religious at home, but they didn't participate. So, I, I'm very interested to go to Earlham College, which is around here, in Richmond. I know that at least one of the daughters, my grandmother's sister, was going to school at Earlham very early on. And, my grandmother was a part of Southland College, which was a part of a Quaker extension of the community in Indiana. So, there may be some sort of connection with, uh, places in Fountain City. I'm losing his name, uh, I can't think of.

Interviewer: It's alright…

Participant: You know who I mean? He was a Quaker, ummm...

Interviewer: Oh, a person?

Participant: Yeah!

Interviewer: Like, wh… [?]

Participant: No… uh, they call it Fountain Bays now, but that's not his name, um, he's a famous abolitionist, he's in Indiana, Fountain City, Indiana.

Interviewer: Okay.

Participant: Okay, but I'm thinking that they may have come through him.

Interviewer: Alright, if there's anything else, are we good?

Participant: That's what I can give you right now!

Interviewer: Thank you, thank you so much