

INTERVIEWER: Hello, my name is Shirley Guion and I'm here today to interview Mrs. Helen Henry concerning the *African American Voices Between Two Rivers* Project. The time is 6:20 p.m. Today's date is February 18, 2009. The address is 609 Bern St.

Ms. Henry, I'm going to ask you a few questions concerning your family, your family life, and your early childhood and also things about your educational history, religion, and questions I feel you could give me some good answers on.

Can you give me your full name?

MRS. HENRY: Helen Elizabeth Henry. Now it was Hargett.

INTERVIEWER: Were you born here in New Bern?

MRS. HENRY: Yes. I was born here in New Bern.

INTERVIEWER: Were you born in this house?

MRS. HENRY: I'm not quite sure on that. I might have been born at my grandmother's. My mother was quite young at that time and she could have stayed home. I'm not quite sure on that.

INTERVIEWER: Mrs. Henry, can you give us just a little information about yourself, about your pre-school memories, about your sisters and your brothers, your siblings?

MRS. HENRY: Oh, yes. Now, I was born on New South Front Street, by St., John's Church. I lived where my grandmother lived, at that time. After that, my mother got married to my father, Mr. George Hargett, and we moved down on Queen Street, here in North Carolina. My father was a pastor and my mother carried on a café ( we had a café) while my father was working, he was a Pastor. After that, I lived two places. I lived on Queen Street. My mother, after my brother, they moved on Bern Street, where I am now. I lived there until I got married. I moved to Elm Street for a while. That's where my husband was living. That's where the Kennedys, they lived right beside me. Did you know the Kennedys?

INTERVIEWER: I knew of them.

MRS. HENRY: I lived beside the Kennedys. They were on one side of the alley, as they called it; they were on one side and we were on the other side. We stayed there for a while and then my mother-in-law wanted to move on West Street, right across from the Christian church. I lived there for a while until we bought the home, right here, 609 Bern St. After that, I stayed there until now. Of course, it was different, because we fixed it up. My husband died after that. I never did get married again.

INTERVIEWER: Brothers and sisters, how many did you have?

MRS. HENRY: I had 7 brothers and one sister. I was the oldest. There were 9 of us.

INTERVIEWER: And your family, how many children did you have?

MRS. HENRY: I had six. I had 4 girls and 2 boys. One died, one still living. That's all about my family. I'm still living too.

INTERVIEWER: Mrs. Henry, tell me a little about your life here in New Bern. Where did you go to school, what memories do you have about the school? What memories do you have about the teachers who taught you? What were some of the things that you did, and what were some of the games that children played and did at that time?

MRS. HENRY: Well, we during that time we all were young females. We jumped rope on the schoolyard. We jumped board too. We jumped rope. That's what we did on the school ground. And after that, that was it.

INTERVIEWER: All right, Miss Helen, you were telling me about some of the games that you played. You said you played jump rope and you played springboard.

MRS. HENRY: You called it springboard? We just called it jumping board. One would jump up and when he came down, the other one went up.

INTERVIEWER: Okay, you told me about some of the activities you did in school. Who were some of your teachers? Do you remember what they taught you?

MRS. HENRY: Oh yeah, Blanche Rivers.

INTERVIEWER: What did Ms. Rivers teach you?

MRS. HENRY: We had home economics.

INTERVIEWER: She taught you home economics?

MRS. HENRY: Yes, and Ms. Gray. I was in her class and she was just a teacher.

INTERVIEWER: A teacher teaching what?

MRS. HENRY: 1<sup>st</sup> grade and 2<sup>nd</sup> grade, I think Blanche Rivers came in there somewhere, 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> grade. She was a young lady there and Adalaide Fisher.

INTERVIEWER: What did she teach you?

MRS. HENRY: I don't think I was ever in Ms. Adalaide's room. I was in Ms. Gray's.

INTERVIEWER: What was Ms. Gray teaching?

MRS. HENRY: She was teaching 1<sup>st</sup> grade, too.

INTERVIEWER: Okay.

MRS. HENRY: Adalaide didn't teach me. Ms. Gray taught me. There were a lot of children there. During that time, when there were a lot of children, they had to be divided up.

INTERVIEWER: Who was your principal?

MRS. HENRY: Professor Barber.

INTERVIEWER: Professor Barber was your principal.

MRS. HENRY: He was the principal at that school.

INTERVIEWER: Did you have music at that time?

MRS. HENRY: Yes, Mrs. Powers.

INTERVIEWER: So, Mrs. Powers was the music teacher.

MRS. HENRY: Yes. She was the music teacher. And she taught me in the 5<sup>th</sup> grade.

INTERVIEWER: What were some of your subjects?

MRS. HENRY: We had English, Arithmetic, that's what we called it, Arithmetic, Reading. Then we would always go out for activities. Oh, yes, we had to go down to lunch, to the basement, with Ms. Fisher. Dr. Fisher was her husband. They stayed on George Street, right were the hospital is they made a hospital, St. Luke on that corner. And on the corner was the shoemaker (I can't think of his name). He had 4 or 5 children, but they were older than I. 5<sup>th</sup> grade history, I think I went to Blanche Rivers. I had Powers in 4<sup>th</sup>. I went from the 4<sup>th</sup> grade to the 5<sup>th</sup> grade. I went from Ms. Powers to Blanche Rivers, because she was a 5<sup>th</sup> grade teacher. But she came and we got out of school. And they taught at West Street School. All of the teachers lived with Mr. Barber or either with my husband's aunt.

INTERVIEWER: What was your husband's aunt's name?

MRS. HENRY: Phoebe Hatcher. We stayed there. They stayed there to her house.

INTERVIEWER: Oh.

MRS. HENRY: Mr. Barber was on one corner there. Blanche Rivers and Mr. Barber lived one corner there. Blanche Rivers, her husband was an Sparrow. They lived on the other corner of the same street. One time I was living right across the street from Blanche at that time. Rivers had his undertaking parlor over there too. Ms. Rivers had a little candy store but she lived over the candy store she had there. Rivers had an undertaker parlor right between there, and that church West Street Christian Church. Blanche Rivers was on the corner.

INTERVIEWER: Was that the Sparrows' house?

MRS. HENRY: Yes, the Sparrows' house. Her husband took people to different places. He was a taxi driver. His daughters taught school too. They taught in the rural section of New Bern. His name was Bud Reed. His family stayed over there in that house. Mrs. Patrick, she took some of the teachers in the next house. Then, there's the church, and there was Rivers the undertaker.

INTERVIEWER: All of this is on West Street?

MRS. HENRY: All on West Street. Ms. Rivers, she had a little candy store. And she stayed up over the candy store. The Barbers were on the other street, on the other end and in between there, we had kind of an amusement park in between there and we would go to that. People would always have something going over there. Then across the street, I stayed with Mr. Barber, then there's the hospital.

INTERVIEWER: What was the name of the hospital?

MRS. HENRY: Good Shepherd Hospital. And the next house was. It's been so long. But I knew everybody from one end to the other. And then there was Queen Street. Mr. Downing was right beside me at the end. Across the street was, he worked down to the railroad station. We had a train coming in and out even down Queen Street one time, but they cut that out.

INTERVIEWER: Was it a passenger train?

MRS. HENRY: It was a passenger train and a freight train.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, okay.

MRS. HENRY: When the war first started, I wasn't but six years old.

INTERVIEWER: Which war, World War I or World War II?

MRS. HENRY: World War I.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, World War I.

MRS. HENRY: And all the soldiers were on the train to go down to Morehead. They come from Wilmington down Queen Street and they took those cars and they took them down to Cherry Point and Morehead City. We had a train coming out of there coming up to New Bern and going to Wilmington; and also going north, New York. At that particular time they tore up that whole street so that they could put a heavier railroad because so many cars and trains were coming through there, they tore up that street and put another track down there for those trains to come from Wilmington and New York to come down here. After a while, they finally (after the war kind of got on), they took that track up because they weren't using it much.

INTERVIEWER: Did you ever have a train ride?

MRS. HENRY: No, we went down to Morehead on the train. We went down to the beach because the beach was down in Morehead. They would run excursions down there and everybody would come down there and get on that train and go to Morehead to the beach.

INTERVIEWER: Mrs. Henry, do you remember anything about your family and their involvement in the community?

MRS. HENRY: My mother and I had an uncle that sang in the choir at Clinton Chapel. My grandmother, they all went to Clinton Chapel church and they all were out doing for the church like I did. Everybody knew Henry Hargett and my grandmother's pastor, David Lees. A lot of people on each side of the street (it was a short street) but it had a church on that corner and it would go all the way down. I used to know all of the people on that street but I've forgotten them. The river was right over there and we were right here, I mean on South Front Street. Not on this street. We were near water here, we've always been close to water. That's how it was.

INTERVIEWER: Well, Mrs. Henry, I'm going to ask you another question about the great fire of 1922. What can you tell me about the fire of 1922?

MRS. HENRY: I can't tell you too much about that. I was 6 years old.

INTERVIEWER: Have you heard family members or anyone talking about it?

MRS. HENRY: They talked about it and all I can remember is that we never got burned out.

INTERVIEWER: Where were you living then, when the fire happened?

MRS. HENRY: I wasn't on Bern Street or was it Queen Street. I lived between Queen St. and Bern St. When I was six I lived on Queen Street.

INTERVIEWER: So, your family wasn't affected by the fire?

MRS. HENRY: No, they weren't affected at all. It was over where Jimmy Bryan, Dr. Bryan, stay. That's Dr. Bryan's people. It started in that area. It may have started at their house. I'm not sure how that was now. Seems like to me (I'm not sure of that). But that fire started on Elm Street and it started to spread and it went the other way instead of coming to where we were. And my grandmother, it didn't go that way either. It look like it just got in the middle and burned out people. I

wasn't but 6 years old. I don't know much about the fire; I was small. But they had a park over here for the children to play and it seems as if the people went down there. And some of the people that took all of their furniture and stuff; the railroad train was going up and down and they never did get their furniture back. I guess they never knew where it went. It only burned in little spots, more happening on that street where the Bryans were; seemed like it stayed right in that area; it didn't ever come out from that area, from what I can remember as a child. It just stayed in that area. It didn't burn all of the area it was in. So a lot of people still stay there after that fire.. A man had a grocery store up there, a white guy, and he still had his store and he still let the people have food and stuff. That's all I know about that.

INTERVIEWER: What church do you attend and how long have you been attending?

MRS. HENRY: I was at Clinton Chapel first with my mother. But after a while, we moved from that area were my grandmother was, we started going to St. Cyprian, and I was going there when I was 6 years old.

INTERVIEWER: So, you've been going to St. Cyprian since you were 6 years old. How old are you now?

MRS. HENRY: 93.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, you said that very proudly

MRS. HENRY: I'm happy to be living; so many people are gone that I knew.

INTERVIEWER: Okay, Mrs. Henry, we're just about to end this interview. I would like to ask you what kind of racial issues confronted you when you were growing up?

MRS. HENRY: To tell the truth, I didn't seem to have many of them.

INTERVIEWER: You didn't see any prejudice things going on or activities taking place while you were growing up?

MRS. HENRY: Not too much. It just wasn't too much. New Bern didn't have much of it. They had some of it. But it wasn't too much of it.

INTERVIEWER: So, you're saying you and your family got along very well with people.

MRS. HENRY: We got along well with people, all people. I didn't know anything about that racial mess; I was wondering where it came from. And a lot of people didn't have any problem with racial issues.

INTERVIEWER: Okay.

MRS. HENRY: My grandmother worked for people, she always helped people out, my mother's mother. She was always around, I didn't know any different. I didn't ever go through that part of it. I don't know whether it was because of the part of town that I was in; I don't know if that had anything to do with it. Maybe people were putting more to it than what it was. I don't know. But we didn't have any problems with people. I worked downtown with them. I worked downtown where I ran the elevator down there. I didn't have much trouble until sometime they would get out of order. This one girl got on; she picked up her foot so I said "don't kick me; I'll grab your leg and throw you to the floor and beat you to death, so don't hit me; don't you never kick me. Don't you ever kick me, don't you ever pick up your foot to kick me because I'll beat you. I don't play that. I don't play kicking. God didn't give you but 2 feet. He gave a horse 4. He's the only one that's supposed to kick." I didn't have any more trouble.

Every time I'd go to clean up an office, they used to leave money on the desk. So I got tired of it. So I wrote a note on there and told them to leave a million; I'll take that. This is too small. I didn't have any more trouble with them leaving money on the desk.

So one Saturday, looks like everyone uptown here was down there in City Hall. I said "Oh my gosh, what is happening uptown?" So, I went down to clean the windows in one of the men's offices. He was in, and said, "I thought you were out there". I said "wait a minute. What made you think I would be out there? What made you feel within yourself that I would be out there? Have I acted like that?" (He said) "I didn't mean it like that". (Mrs. Henry): "Then don't say it like that. I don't know anything about them people out there". I didn't have any more trouble.

INTERVIEWER: What was happening? What were they having?

MRS. HENRY: I don't know what happen up town. They had cursing and fighting and things like that. I don't know what was happening. So I asked "what happened up town this weekend?" Lot of them didn't know but it looked like a lot

of them were out there. So I didn't have any more trouble with that. The girl that worked up stairs in this office, this is the time she picked up her foot to knick me. I said god gave you two feet he gave a horse four feet. I said if you knick me I will throw you to the ground and bust your head open. Don't you never knick me.

INTERVIEWER: Let me ask you something about health care. Tell me what you remember about doctors and what kind of health care you received when you were growing up.

MRS. HENRY: Dr. Mann and Dr. Fisher were our doctors; another doctor, too. And they were all in the area. Dr. Fisher was near me and Martin, he had more. And another man, he married one of the teachers. In fact, all of them married teachers. We had 4 doctors: Martin, Fisher.

INTERVIEWER: You called Dr. Mann ...

MRS. HENRY: Dr. Mann, and there was another man.

INTERVIEWER: Dr. Mumford?

MRS. HENRY: Mumford, yes, that's right. Good.

INTERVIEWER: What about nurses and midwives? Was the hospital where babies were delivered Good Shepherd?

MRS. HENRY: Yes, they stopped doing them at home. But all my children were born at home.

INTERVIEWER: Do you know any of the midwives?

MRS. HENRY: I'm trying to think of that lady's name, there were 2 of them.

INTERVIEWER: Was Mrs. Dudley one?

MRS. HENRY: Yes, but she didn't ever come to me. I'll have to give you her name later.

INTERVIEWER: Mrs. Henry, as I said, we're getting close to the end. Is there anything else you would like to add to this interview, questions that I may not have asked you. Was there anything else that you would like to say?

MRS. HENRY: Well, our town was so nice and easy; we never had any problem with the whites. We had more problems out of the blacks than we had out of the whites. New Bern was just different. We never did have any problems with the people here in North Carolina.

INTERVIEWER: Do you have any wisdom that you would like to share with us concerning New Bern? What are some of the things that you would like to see happen in New Bern that have not happened?

MRS. HENRY: Well, right now I can't think of any. New Bern is just all right with me, not all right with everybody, but all right with me. I've never had any trouble or anything else. My mother and father were married here and I had uncles. I had an uncle that was an Elk. My family, I had a nice time. New Bern was just a nice place to stay, to tell you the truth. We never had no problems. It was just a different place. When them soldiers came down here they were glad to get here. I said, every town is not the same, don't look for every town to be the same. This is just a town you can live in and have a good time. They fight here too sometimes.

INTERVIEWER: Well, thank you so much for sharing your memories with us. Your voice has empowered this project and, again, thank you, Mrs. Henry.

There's one other thing I would like to ask you about. And I apologize for ending the interview without asking you. But tell me about the business you used to run.

MRS HENRY: Oh, I ran a teenage shop and it wasn't but 6 children who came in there and we all got along fine.

INTERVIEWER: What kind of things did they do in that teenage shop?

MRS. HENRY: They could only buy sandwiches and sit down and talk. They would get out on the street; they were on it more than inside. They would come and buy the ice cream and sandwiches that I had and when they got out of line, I would ask "hey, what're you all doing" and they would say Uh, huh, Mrs. Henry; I'm sorry".

INTERVIEWER: Where was your shop located?

MRS. HENRY: Right there at Five Points.

INTERVIEWER: What was it called?

MRS.HENRY: I called it the teenage shop, that's all. A lot of the children just came down and visited.

INTERVIEWER: So that's where the entertainment was for the young children?

MRS.HENRY: Yes, they'd come out there and stand, yes, that's all.

INTERVIEWER: What about the music and dancing?

MRS. HENRY: Oh, at school, we always had teenage parties; we had teenage parties at the homes. The children's mothers (I had it twice) and Mrs. Jenkins, the school teacher, her mother let us have parties there. Another lady, Mrs. King, she is dead now, would have the children to come. They just had a quiet, a nice place but we had a good time. We couldn't stay out no later than 12:00. All of the children had to come in at 12:00. Mothers would send us home. They would not allow children to stay after 12:00.

INTERVIEWER: Thank you so much Mrs. Henry.

MRS. HENRY: You're welcome.