INTERVIEWER: My name is Linda Henry. I'm currently at the home of Mrs. Arabelle Bryant. Today is February 8, 2009, at 1614 Washington Street in the Lotsfield section of New Bern, North Carolina.

Mrs. Bryant, I want you to begin by stating your full name and telling me a little about yourself and your family.

MRS BRYANT: My name is Arabelle Bullock Bryant. My family owned a farm about 8 miles out from Rocky Mount in the Kingsboro section. That's where I was born and grew up on, a farm. We were not farmers in the true sense of the word because all the farming was done by the people who lived on the farm, but my mother and father were both elementary school principals. I grew up in an educational background because both of my parents were active principals in the local schools.

At that time, especially in the rural section, every neighborhood had its own school and all the schools were supposed to be within walking distance and that made it a neighborhood school. And that was one of the advantages the children had at that time because by having a neighborhood school it kind of crystallized the community. It gave you a meeting place. The teachers knew all the parents and the parents knew all the teachers. That was one of the advantages of having a neighborhood school at that time.

By the time I was ready to go to school, we had in our neighborhood a Rosenwall School. Julius Rosenwall was a Jew who was befriended by Booker T. Washington and he was so concerned about the education of Blacks at that time, he donated most of his funds (he was a wealthy fellow) he built elementary schools for Blacks. All of the schools that had 4 or 5 teachers were schools that were built by Mr. Rosenwall in that area.

My mother was the principal of the school that I went to. There were no busses. We had no cafeteria or things like that in those schools, but we had a cook stove. Oftentimes, the teachers would fix lunch for the children. We were in school all day and some of them didn't bring lunch, so they would fix a little lunch.

After I graduated from the Rosenwall School, there was the Providence School.

INTERVIEWER: That was the name of the school?

MRS. BRYANT: Providence Elementary School in Edgecombe County. My mother was the principal and there were 5 teachers. It started with First Grade.

INTERVIEWER: Do you remember the teachers' names?

MRS. BRYANT: Not all of them. My mother's name was Mary Thorpe Bullock. Thorpe was her maiden name. Her father just happened to be one of the legislators from the last legislators in North Carolina for Blacks. That was during the time when Mr. White was active. That was the last group of representatives for Blacks that we had then.

INTERVIEWER: You're referring to George White?

MRS. BRYANT: Yes. We had no high schools for Blacks in the county. So the nearest high schools for Blacks were in Rocky Mount and Tarboro. My sister lived in Rocky Mount so I went to stay with her until I finished high school. I attended Booker T. Washington High School in Rocky Mount.

During that time, they added the 12th grade, so I graduated in 1939 from Booker T. Washington High School. I was second in my class. From there I went to North Carolina Central now (it was called North Carolina College for Negroes). Dr. James Shephard was the President. The school was small enough so that everybody knew everybody, even the President. You could walk around campus and everybody would call you by name. That shows you how small it was. Up until that time, as I mentioned earlier, Library Science was not a course in the school. They were just beginning to add it on. I had to minor. You had to major in something else. So I had to choose a subject I was interested in. My best grades were in mathematics, which was not the normal combination. Most of the combinations for Library Science were English or Languages as a major. But I preferred mathematics. You could major in anything you wanted to, and you could minor in anything. So I majored in Mathematics. I graduated in 1939 and my first teaching job was in New Bern, North Carolina. I was hired as a librarian. It was Mr. Daniels' first year, a year after Mr. Barber had retired. My husband, Leon Mozelle, was the band director. I was hired as a Math teacher and a librarian on the side.

INTERVIEWER: How did you get the opportunity to move to New Bern after graduation? Were you recruited?

MRS. BRYANT: That's right. Mr. Daniels knew my brother-in-law. He was telling him that he needed some teachers. So he hired my husband as a band teacher. But he told him that he would have to hire his wife, also. They go together.

He needed a math teacher but that was secondary as far as he was concerned. But, for the first few years, I did teach some math classes. Up until then, I was a fulltime librarian. After that, at North Carolina and at Chapel Hill they started a curriculum with Library Science as a major and you could get your degree in Library Science. So, I had to go back to school and take courses so I could get my degree in Library Science.

INTERVIEWER: So, you became the first full time African-American librarian for the New Bern School System?

MRS. BRYANT: That's right.

INTERVIEWER: What year was that? Do you remember?

MRS. BRYANT: 1944. I finished High School in 1939. I finished North Carolina Central in 1943. I came to New Bern in the fall of 1944. That was just about the end of the Depression; World War II was just ending. Everything was very, very tight because the War was ending. Cherry Point was just being built and people were beginning to be employed in Cherry Point. My husband used to say that if it wasn't for Cherry Point, there wouldn't be anyone left here except grandparent and grandchildren because all of the able-bodied people had left New Bern. There were no other places to work; there were no factories or anything like that in New Bern.

When I came to New Bern at that time, they had a section called New Bern Housing Authority. They were brick buildings and they had central heat. Of course, the central heat was a big stove. They used coal to heat. Each apartment in the projects had a stove, a cook stove that would heat the apartment. Everybody had their own coal then. That was the only section where they had brick homes. Few people had private brick homes. Rent was reasonable and it was nice.

Then, you had to make at least $1000 a year to be eligible to pay income tax. If you made less than $1000, you didn't have to pay income tax. My first salary was $98 a month; I didn't have to pay income tax. You only worked 9 months a year. From June to September, you were unemployed.

INTERVIEWER: What was your community like when you first moved to New Bern?

MRS. BRYANT: Well, during the time of the Depression, there wasn't a lot of money, people socialized in their own homes. The only entertainment was a theatre, the Ritz. You had to pay only $.10 or $.15. There were a few restaurants but it was during segregation and you could only attend restaurants that were in the Black neighborhood. There were several restaurants in the neighborhood. Ms. Sarah had a restaurant in Five Points. The food was very reasonable.

When I think about that now, my husband got an extra $25 because he was the band director. He had his own swing band, too, that he would play for dances and things that would give him extra income. But, you might be interested to know that, in spite of that, everything was so reasonable people were able to save money.

We bought some lots and were looking forward to building our own home. I said that to say this: times were hard but people could get things cheap. We could buy eggs for $.25 a dozen, sugar for $.15. Everything was reasonable and that little money that you got went a long ways. We were able to budget. Some things you had to stand in line for, such as washing powder. Gas was rationed. You could get only 5 gallons of gas at a time.

INTERVIEWER: That was in the 1950's?

MRS. BRYANT: No, that was in the 1940's. Everything was rationed. You could only get so many pounds of sugar and so many gallons of gas a month. People used to get cards, and things, and people who didn't have, you had to share with friends. I know I had a friend who had two little girls and her husband was in the service and whenever I got coupons for washing powder and things like that, I would share with her because she didn't get enough to take care of herself and two children.

INTERVIEWER: In looking at the community [ ]

MRS. BRYANT: The schools were in need, not only the Black schools, but the White schools. Everything was run down. The Sun Journal ran a special showing how Central School (elementary and high school for the Whites) down on Neuse Street and Hancock or Metcalf. West Street was the school for Blacks, grades 1 through 12. They were all run down and needed repair. They were showing how bad the restrooms and things were. Mr. Smith got kind of embarrassed because he

thought they shouldn't be showing that. He didn't think you should be sharing your dirty laundry in the street. Naturally, our school was the worst, because the white schools got first choice. They got first choice in books and everything else; we got the hand-me-downs.

INTERVIEWER: Who was the first Principal at West Street?

MRS. BRYANT: Mr. Daniels. We came in together. That was his first year as Principal and we came there the same year. He had been teaching there before and he was elevated to Principal after Mr. Barber retired. Mr. Barber used to walk through the school during his first year after retiring. I guess he hadn't found anything else to do.

INTERVIEWER: And also, he lived right there on West Street, where his home is still manned.

MRS. BRYANT: The Black schools did not get a lot of things that they needed so we had to buy whatever we needed. Teachers paid so much and you tried to collect pennies from the students. I know we needed a curtain for the auditorium, so we raised money by selling cookies and candy and that type of thing so we could buy a curtain for the stage. We also needed an activity bus; so, we had to raise money. There were people in the city who donated too, businesses and all, helped to raise money. We had to raise the money and do everything we needed ourselves, other than buy books and things of that nature.

INTERVIEWER: The parents were really involved in helping to raise money through a strong PTA?

MRS. BRYANT: Yes, they would help too, we had a good PTA. They were struggling too; it was during the Depression. We did a lot of things that we needed. They were not given to us.

INTERVIEWER: And that was your first job, at West Street? So, how long were you at West Street before you moved to

MRS. BRYANT: In 1955, when they built J.T. Barber. J.T. Barber was completed. They were building it in 1953. In 1954 and 1955, they let the 8th graders go over there. In 1955, they actually moved the high school from West Street to J.T. Barber. Teachers who were teaching at West Street, but the high

school moved to J.T. Barber. The first principal was Mr. Booker. Later, Mr. Fields came in after Mr. Daniels left. Mr. Booker went back to West Street.

It was such an enjoyable situation, having a chance to get a new school; it had an auditorium, a music room, and a cafeteria.

INTERVIEWER: And it had a library?

MRS. BRYANT: Yes, it had a full library, which I didn't have before. There was a study hall at West Street and they used it as a library.

INTERVIEWER: What did you like most about the educational growth here in New Bern, as it relates to African-Americans?

MRS. BRYANT: That was a big step forward, when we were able to get J.T. Barber. We were able to add extra classes and things of that nature. We were able to add a gym, which we did not have on West Street. It was an improvement, because we had things that we did not have before, a cafeteria, library, music room, gymnasium, and all of those things were added in the new school.

INTERVIEWER: How long did J.T. Barber remain a high school?

MRS. BRYANT: Until 1969; when the schools were fully integrated. The last class to finish was 1970. In the fall of 1970, it became a 9th grader. As a result of integration, things were not as bad in New Bern as they were in a lot of places. We didn't have any real problems changing. One thing that helped, they integrated all of the schools. The 5th grade went to Danyus and all of the 9th graders in the city went to J.T. Barber. There was no choice. That was one thing that made the transition smoother. The two middle schools were H.J. McDonald and Grover C. Fields.

INTERVIEWER: Was it Grover C. Fields at that time?

MRS. BRYANT: Yes. Then of course, all of the high school went to the same school. That's one reason they didn't have that much of a problem. It made it easier for them to make the change.

INTERVIEWER: What was the most memorable event that you can reflect on during your career as a librarian and being a part of the school system here in New Bern?

MRS. BRYANT: The most memorable thing to me was back when J.T. Barber, which had been a high school, became one grade, 9th grade, when we were used to having students from 9th through 12th; you had a variety of students. All of a sudden, there were only 9th graders. They didn't see a reason for walking when you could run; didn't see a reason for talking when you could holler. We had to adjust to having all of those 9th graders running all over the building. That was one thing I remember about the change. I think it was because the white children were not used to doing things as the black children and the black children were not used to doing things that the whites were doing. It was a period of adjustment.

INTERVIEWER: Do you remember the sit-ins in New Bern?

MRS. BRYANT: Yes. I remember when they were trying to effect integration. They would go to Kress's store and sit and several of the stores like Moore's Barbecue and places like that where they were strictly segregated and you couldn't go in them. Food was handed out the window, and that type of thing.

I didn't really feel the sting of segregation as bad as some people because I didn't use public transportation. We had our car and went on the car. During segregation, I was brought up in that and was kind of used to it. My father did and that was the first time I rode the bus. I would go to visit him on weekends and that was the first time I rode the back of the bus.

INTERVIEWER: How did you feel about that, sitting in the back of the bus?

MRS. BRYANT: It rubbed me the wrong way, but I had been drinking black water for so long until I was used to it. For the most part, I learned not to drink water in public. I drank water at home.

INTERVIEWER: Looking at the changes in New Bern, during the 1940's and 1950's, what are some of the major changes that occurred in New Bern?

MRS. BRYANT: One thing I observed was when I first came to New Bern in the 1940's, everything downtown and uptown were run down; it was during the Depression, they needed painting. They had an old wooden bridge that would go to Bridgeton and the planks would creak. In the early 1950's, they built a new bridge going to Bridgeton and after that, they built one going to James City. That improved the appearance of the city. People started painting their houses and remodeling. New Bern, the way it looks now, it didn't look anything like that.

INTERVIEWER: Let's talk a little about your religion, joining the church here in New Bern, a little about the history there.

MRS. BRYANT: When I came to New Bern, I joined Ebenezzer Presbyterian Church. My husband had graduated from Johnson C. Smith University. It was a Presbyterian School and I went with him to start going to Ebenezzer Presbyterian. My father belonged to the Baptist Church. My mother had graduated from St. Augustine and it was Episcopalian. So I had both. I had been going with my mother at her church and my father at his church. It was just easier to go with my husband where I didn't have to make a choice. I would just go and sit and no one knew that I was not a member. They accepted me. As soon as I got there, I started working with the youth. One day when they opened the doors of the church, I went forward to join and someone said they thought I was already a member. After I started going, I enjoyed it and I am still going there today. I've been all the way up to Ruling Elder. I've been there over 50 years as a Ruling Elder.

INTERVIEWER: In terms of the Presbyterian Church, where is it located?

MRS. BRYANT: Over on Bern Street. It was burned in 1922 and they rebuilt it in 1925. While they were in the process of rebuilding, we were able to attend a church down on New Street. I wasn't here at that time. First Presbyterian let them use their church until they finished getting this church built.

INTERVIEWER: Who was the Pastor when you joined the church?

MRS. BRYANT: Rev. C.H.C. White. He was here for 39 years. He was here longer than anyone else as Pastor.

INTERVIEWER: So your current Pastor is ...?

MRS. BRYANT: Reverend Robert Johnson. He came in 1980. After Rev. White died, we didn't have a pastor for a little while. One of our Ruling Elders, Mrs. Eliza Dudley, kind of carried the church on. The Presbyterians' naturally sent an ordained minister to do all of the baptizing and communion and that sort of stuff, but she kept the church going. She held us together as a church. We would hire speakers to come in on certain Sundays. Some pastors who were not active on certain Sundays could run to another Presbyterian church until Rev. Johnson came in 1980. He has been here ever since.

INTERVIEWER: How involved were the churches in the community during the 1960's and 1970's on Bern Street?

MRS. BRYANT: I don't know because I was not here at that time. After I came, we had a scout. Mr. Allen Dudley was the scoutmaster. We had scouts. There also was a group called Westminister Fellowship. That was a youth group that was pretty active. We had members of our church and also outside members who were a part of this group.

INTERVIEWER: In terms of Cedar Street, working in the community there, I know Ebenezzer was right close by; they were having activities going on in the community there as well as West Street.

MRS. BRYANT: Our church was small and sometimes we didn't have a big gathering so we used Cedar Street Recreation Center.

INTERVIEWER: In terms of the changes that you have seen occur in New Bern since you have seen since 1940 up until now, what are some of the major that you see have occurred?

MRS. BRYANT: The major changes were, well, when I first came to New Bern, New Bern didn't really want to change; wanted to keep the history; was strictly historical; they didn't encourage a lot of businesses to come in, like Moen and all those things. But as times went on, we got several manufacturers like Moen and yacht companies and Weyerhaeuser. All of those things came later and New Bern became an industrial town and had small businesses like the mill. The mill was the biggest thing. After the fire, it was not as important as before but it was the only outside business I knew. Holiday Inn started down at the waterfront, but they went out of business. There was not a major hotel until the Sheraton. There were two or three restaurants and hotels and things of that nature and several businesses that hired a lot of people and that helped the labor force in New Bern. Before that time, there were no jobs and they had to go somewhere else to get a job.

INTERVIEWER: What were some of the traditional customs during that time, 1940's, 1950's, that were here and during your educational career? I remember as a student we had May Day.

MRS. BRYANT: May Day used to be on the 30th of May. It was called the 30th of May but now is called Memorial Day. They had a big parade, bands, and different marches, different organizations marching. That was one of the big days. People used to sell punch and things all along George Street going to the National Cemetery.

INTERVIEWER: What were some of the social clubs that were organized here in New Bern?

MRS. BRYANT: The big thing was that there were different lodges: Eastern Star, and during my generation there were Sororities. The first one was Alpha Kappa Alpha. I was a member. Afterwards, the Deltas became strong. They started a chapter here. Then there were the Zetas. But the strongest one was the AKA. The Fraternities here were the Omegas and there were a small group of Alphas. They weren't large enough for a chapter here but they served on the District: Greenville, Washington, Kinston; members of the same chapter and they went from city to city.

INTERVIEWER: So, the AKA's were the first Sororities here?

MRS. BRYANT: Yes. We were a part of the Kinston Chapter: Kinston, New Bern, and Williamston. That chapter actually was in Kinston but they had members in New Bern. Later, we became strong enough to have a Chapter here. he

INTERVIEWER: In terms of the social clubs, there was also the Climbers Club, the Jolly Macons.

MRS. BRYANT: The Jolly Macons were a different group of people. That was the biggest social club. Organizations like the Kwanis Club, they were more of a service organization. The Owlets were another Social club They were mostly teachers. They were strong up until last year. The present president left and moved to Durham. After that, it kind of died.

INTERVIEWER: The Owlets? Okay. The Kwanis and the Owlets, were they the strongest clubs?

MRS. BRYANT: They were different types. The Kwanis Club was more of a community organization but the Owlets were a social club.

INTERVIEWER: Who were some of the members of the Owlets, the teachers in the community?

MRS. BRYANT: Yes; teachers and nurses. Miss Morris was a nurse but most of them were teachers. They played games and that type of thing. And they had dances once a year.

INTERVIEWER: Does that organization exist today?

MRS. BRYANT: Yes, up until this last year. They disbanded. We couldn't get the group together. There was a time when the socialites in New Bern would have an annual dance and you would hope to get invited. The Alphas had an annual dance. The Sororities had an annual affair, but not like that. Sometimes you wouldn't feel like going but you went, because if you didn't go, next year you might not get invited. You would dress up in your finery.

INTERVIEWER: I'm going to ask you about two events. What was going on in the city of New Bern during the time when Martin Luther King, Jr., was killed?

MRS. BRYANT: Well, it just so happens that we were having our State Teachers Association in Raleigh when that happened and we had gone to Raleigh. That was just before the assassination. I had taken the kids with me and I was going to get their Easter outfits in Raleigh. While we were in Raleigh for the meeting, word came out that Martin Luther King, Jr. had died. And everybody was trying to get out of town; they had closed the roads. I remember my son, he was very tall and he had gone somewhere to get him a suit. We kept waiting and waiting for him and my daughter was having a fit. Finally, he came up and said, "Let's go, let's go, let's get out of town. Somebody said somebody had killed a child." I think that was a rumor. We got to the car and I said, "Let's go, let's go." He said he couldn't go; he had to go back because a man had measured him for a suit. I finally became condescending to him and let him go back to get his suit.

INTERVIEWER: What do you think about the election of the first Black American President ... Barack Obama?

MRS. BRYANT: Well, naturally I was all for it. I want to admit, you know, I didn't think he would make it. I was one of those skeptics who felt like something would happen, something that would make him not get it at the last minute. It kind of worried me, somebody would find somebody would dig up something that would make him so people would say he couldn't be President. But I was thoroughly excited about it and I was hoping he would. But the most exciting thing about that was that the young people got involved and pushed for it and I'm hoping it will have an effect on young people; even those who were not pushing; that they would realize that things can improve, and things can happen, and just as he said, we can, we must. We have responsibility, everybody. He can't make it by himself. I'm hoping they will push and make the change; pick up the gavel and work and do that.

INTERVIEWER: Since your retirement, what have you done?

MRS. BRYANT: Well, I have been very active. The first 2 or 3 years after, I went to the elementary school to help with the library, one or two days a week. Then it got to be a burden because I couldn't do the things I wanted to.

Then I worked with the Voters' League. During that time, we were trying to get blacks in office, not only blacks, but what we considered some of the better people active in the Voters' League.

INTERVIEWER: Voters' League?

MRS. BRYANT: Yes, Voters' League. I was Treasurer of that for a long time. That was our main thrust. When candidates were running, I went around knocking on doors and getting people out to vote. My biggest activity was with the Voters' League but I was also active in Kensington Park Senior Citizens Club.

INTERVIEWER: Were you active when Lee Morgan became the first African-American Mayor of New Bern?

MRS. BRYANT: when Mayor Morgan was running, we wanted to get some more people and I worked with Mr. Rainer and Mr. Parham and Mr. Sampson. They were running and were very active. I got honored at an Arabelle Bryant Day because I was so active.

INTERVIEWER: An Arabelle Bryant Day? My goodness, that was quite an honor. I want to take this opportunity to thank you for allowing me to come in to interview you and for you to participate in the ***African American Vocies Between Two Rivers Project.*** If there is one thing that you would like to share, as words of wisdom that you would like to say to future generations or to future residents of the city of New Bern, what would it be?

MRS. BRYANT: One thing, as a mother, I had two children: a son and a daughter.

INTERVIEWER: Their names?

MRS. BRYANT: My daughter was Madeline Bryant and my son is Harold Bryant. I was very anxious to get them prepared to be able to live in this 21st century. I encouraged them to go to school and to do the best they could. It seemed to work with them. He started out with Xerox. He's an engineer. My son

went to A & T. My daughter went to East Carolina. She's an Assistant President at a community college down in Columbus County. He's working with some big firm now as an engineer.

My point I am going to make is impress on them to get themselves prepared to live in this 21st century; if you don't , you'll get left behind. You can't tell people, "I can do anything." You've got to be specific. You can't fit in and unless we can get these young people to stay in school and prepare themselves, they aren't going to be able to enjoy what Obama is pushing for. He wants them to become responsible citizens so they can take his place. If you don't stay in school, you aren't going to make change. You're going to stay in the same rut you're in right now.

Parents have to work with their children; need to get them to change so when opportunities arise, they will fit in and not be left out. That's the main point I want to make.

INTERVIEWER: Thank you. And that ends our interview. Thank you.