

Samuel Proctor Oral History Program
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The Samuel Proctor Oral History Program (SPOHP) was founded by Dr. Samuel Proctor at the University of Florida in 1967. Its original projects were collections centered around Florida history with the purpose of preserving eyewitness accounts of economic, social, political, religious and intellectual life in Florida and the South. In the 45 years since its inception, SPOHP has collected over 5,000 interviews in its archives.

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-October 2013

MFP-074

Interviewee: Florine Carter

Interviewer: Candice Ellis

Date: March 22, 2011

W: This is Marna Weston, for the Sam Proctor Oral History Program in Sunflower Mississippi with Miss Florine Norman Carter, on March 22, 2011. And, as you'll find out, Miss Florine was born on the fourth of July, but I'm gonna let her introduce herself. You just speak into the air, Miss Florine, just like we talking normally. How are you today?

C: All right.

W: Thank you very much for letting me speak with you in your home. Would you please state your full name from birth?

C: Florine Norman Carter.

W: And when and where were you born?

C: Lula, Mississippi.

W: And what year?

C: I was born in 1918.

W: 1918.

C: In fourth of July.

W: Fourth of July. So, you are just a few months younger than my grandmother Lucille, who's—she's now passed away, but she was also born in 1918, in February. February 18, 1918.

C: I was born July 4, 1918.

W: So, you haven't always lived here in Sunflower?

C: I came from Lula, Mississippi with my husband. Moved together. Mr. Paul Wilson, he bought this place and so all us come with him, from Lula, Mississippi, here. So I been here, let's see—

W: Ever since. And what was your husband's name?

C: Robert Carter. Robert Roosevelt Carter.

W: Is he still living?

C: No.

W: He's gone on? Okay. Who were your mother and father?

C: Ida Williams. You know, the Williams fortune made my dad [inaudible 01:52] Norman. And my daddy was named Jesse James Norman.

W: Do you remember when they were born and where they were from?

C: I sure don't. I don't remember.

W: Do you remember anything about your grandparents? On your daddy's side, who was his mama and daddy?

C: My daddy was Walton Norman.

W: And who was his wife?

C: And his wife was named Eliza Norman. Before she met him, I didn't know what she was. Before she met him.

W: Do you remember your great-grandparents?

C: No, I sure don't. I can name grandparents, that's all I know.

W: How bout on your mama's side? Who was her mama and daddy?

C: They was Williams. My grandma on their side was named Matilda.

W: And where were they from?

C: Alabama. All them come from Alabama. Mama's peoples. They moved up here and I reckon she got acquainted with my daddy, my dad. And all them they married. And then I come up, and I married the Norman family.

W: Why did they come here from Alabama?

C: I don't know. They never did—you know, they never did talk about their past to me.

W: Do you have brothers and sisters?

C: I never had a brother or sister in my life. Mama had one child.

W: The only child.

C: And my daddy was named Jesse Norman, and mama was named Ida Williams, and so they married and then I come on. And they had one child.

W: Where did you live in Lula? What was your house like? Did you all live on a farm?

C: A farm. In Wilson Plantation.

W: And did you have chores growing up?

C: Oh yes sir. Don't wake up the chores.

W: [Laughter]

C: You know, in them times, they didn't build high like they do now. They own lots of stone, and you had to go up under there and get all whatever was in there, when I was a child.

W: What kind of chores did you have to do?

C: I had to clean up the house, I know. And Mama loved showing me how to cook.

W: What kind of things did you cook?

C: Greens, beans, and fried meat. I didn't like that, though. We used with pop, but I hated to do it, 'cause back in them days, they learn ya. You gonna have to learn how to cook. Chicken, steak, that's everything.

W: Now, did you have recipes? Or you just cooked off—you learn, you watch, and you just—

C: No, just go from what she told me.

W: So a pinch here and a pinch there. If your mama was teaching you to cook, what kind of stuff did she say to you?

C: What kind of what?

W: Like how to cook it, how did she instruct you?

C Well, she just sit there whiles I was doing it, and that's the way it was. She just sit there and tell me what to do, what to put in it. And I always have been a fast learner. It didn't take me long. Then when I married, I told my children the same thing.

W: So all the cooking was passed down from your mama to you, and then from you to them?

C: To them.

Anonymous speaker: And then to whom?

W: [Laughter]

C: That's one of them there.

W: Oh, yeah. So, do you remember when you first went to school, for the first time, where you went to school?

C: At a Sunflower—I mean at a Lula, Mississippi. It was a church house, back in the wall—big, old what do you call them? When they come in there and built them schools, but we was going in a church—to school.

W: You talking about the Rosenwald Schools? Yes, miss, so you went to one of those?

C: No I was married then, when they come in.

W: But you remember when they did it? Did you think that was good for the children, that they did that?

C: It was. It really was, 'cause being the church house, and you know how church houses back in them days, they wasn't like they're built up now. They were wood.

W: Yes, ma'am. Do you remember who your first teacher was?

C I don't recall now.

W: So, your first school, how far did you go in that school, what grade did you finish at?

C: The eighth.

W: Went to the eighth grade?

C: But that's as far as they was going, back in my day. You get your—you're doing everything, after eighth grade. So, I got hired at eighth grade, in that church, it was named like our church . . . What are our church names?

Anonymous speaker: St. Peter's.

C: St. Peter. That's what it was.

W: St. Peter's Church.

C: Yeah, in Lula, Mississippi.

W: When you finished eighth grade at St. Peter's, was that the end of your formal education or did you—

C: I didn't go to college.

W: You didn't go to college?

C: No. I done the wrong thing, so I had to marry. You know back in them days [laughter] your parents will make you mad and now one of y'all's, it ain't like it is now. See, they get babies and stay with the parents of when and where you wanna go, but you couldn't do that back in them days. They called it back in them days, breaking your leg. If the girl break her leg, she had to marry that boy, and that boy had to marry her.

W: The parents would see to it.

C: He'd see to it. Both parents, on both sides.

W: How did you first meet your husband?

C: Fishing. Me and him would go fishing. [Laughter] That's true, you know. They had bayous then and houses built along—on the bayou. And there was an old bayou at, in front of his house. So, when I come from school—me and him come from school, we'd go down there fishing.

W: And then just somehow sparks flew? Little attraction, while you was fishing?

C: [Laughter] No.

W: Did you catch anything?

C: Yeah, catch 'em. Sometimes we be on the bank, sometimes we run out there—you know how law used to be—in the bayou, back in them days. So you know you had to go out there and fish on that law. We'd catch fish.

W: What kind of fish did you catch?

C: Catfishes, perches.

W: And what was your favorite place to fish?

C: Well, in Lula, Mississippi?

W: Yes, ma'am.

C: Well, we'd fish down there. I forget the bayou, the bayou name. It had a name to it, but I can't think right now.

W: Well, now, you have a lot of family here, so there must be some children along the way. How many children did you have?

C: Fourteen—counting Jolene. Had to bring some of them chillun in here cause I had thirteen of my own.

W: Thirteen children?

C: Mm-hm.

W: So and they all have grans—so you got plenty of grans?

C: Oh, I got—last time I counted, I had three hundred and something.

W: Three hundred. Grans and great-grans?

C: Yeah.

W: Any great-great-grans?

C: I know it is by now. [Laughter] 'Cause, see, I had—

Anonymous speaker: You're not a gran.

W: Three hundred grans. I had

Anonymous speaker: You're the mother of fourteen kids.

C: Yeah—

Anonymous speaker: You have ten kids living, five girls and five boys. Now she ain't got but eight. Four girls and four boys.

C: That's my baby.

Anonymous speaker: Three hundred gran. 150 great-gran, and about 69 great-great grans.

W: That must be a big picture at the family reunion.

C: If everybody would come to pass.

W: Oh, they haven't done one yet?

C: No, they—they said they gonna do one this year, on the fourth, that's my birthday. They said all of them coming home and have a family reunion.

W: Well, we should stay in touch, 'cause I would very much like to come and see that.

C: Yeah, all right, all right. [Laughter] Here's some of them. It's some of them right around here. [Laughter]

W: So can you tell me your children's names?

C: I guess I need y'all to come back here.

W: Well, it's just—I'll talk to you first, maybe I'll talk to her later.

C: Let me see. My children—that's one of them, that's Linda Carter. And I got Natasha Carter. And I got Viola Carter. And I got, did I call Linda?

W: You called her first, that's the baby?

C: Yeah, the baby good. And then I got, we called her Toot, but her name is—I forget her name anymore, but that's my oldest girl. She's in Milwaukee. And my son, Paul, he's in Milwaukee. And then I got Joe, Dee—Dee Dee, Joe, and I can't

say them, but Bo was named after his daddy, he was named Robert Paul. June, that's what she was named. Daisy Lee, Paul was my baby. And I had Viola, she's one of my girls. And one pass, Louisa passed. I had five girls and five boys, but I can't think of all their names.

W: Well, let me ask you this, Miss Florine. I wanna come back and ask you about married, and growing up, and your life, but—you know we have Barack Obama as the president of the United States. Is that something that you ever thought you would see?

C: I never thought I'd see that in my life. Well, yes we did. Back in somewhere, along in the thirties, we had a black man running for the president, but they killed him. See, he didn't live long enough to resign like he is. We didn't know what happened to him. We never did know how he got killed, but all we know—he got killed. And then this colored man come up, and so I just scared to death for him, but he made it.

W: Did you get to go out and vote for him?

C: Yes, sir. You know I was gonna vote for him.

W: [Laughter] How did you feel that day?

C: I felt wonderful. Wonderful.

W: Do you remember the first time that you ever voted?

C: Well I voted so many times. You know, when they wouldn't let colored folks vote. I think the first time I voted was here. You know—

W: In Sunflower.

C: Me and my husband both voted right here, in this town. But they had it out in town then. We had to go out there to vote.

W: So, there used to be problems with the voting? They wouldn't let people vote? What was that like?

C: Children wanted to vote, but voted no. So the next time it come around election time, it wasn't no problem. 'Cause we had—what that man name come in? Oh dear Lord—I don't know. My son know. He come here and broke it down, he got killed. You remember—what was his name?

W: Medgar Evers.

C: Yes, sir. He got killed. But he come here and trusted his life to help us.

W: You remember when he came here?

C: It was—I think was in the thirties, I think, when he come here. No, it was in the fifties. Anyway, he broke it down, him. 'Cause, you know, they wouldn't like us to vote nothin' and we couldn't vote and receive no votes, but he come here and talk and all around him went to the church out there, in town, and all of us went out there, and some of them liked it and some of them didn't like it but we went anyhow. And so, he had all us to vote. And so, that's when I got a chance to start the voting. Now, it ain't no problem.

W: So you and your husband got married. Where did you live?

C: When we first got married in Lula, Mississippi.

W: You had your own house, how did you—?

C: Yes, sir. Well, you know, see I come up pregnant with my oldest boy. Boy you know parents didn't like—you'd had to marry or do something—you was gonna

marry, in order to—so, me and my husband married before it was even born. And so then we got a house of our own. Little old, we had a bedroom and a kitchen.

W: And did you both work?

C: Yes sir, in the fields. You know we had—he—Mr. Paul Wilson was always wanting him to drive tractors. Well, then, he always give me a spot where I could tend to myself. And so that's the way we did. Mr. Paul Wilson was a nice white man.

W: So how long did you stay in Lula? When did you move from there to here?

C: I think it was in the—it was in the thirties. No, it was in the [19]40s.

W: And what made you come here?

C: Moving with him. They bought—he bought this place, called, both of them did now, him and his wife—he bought this. And he brought us here from Lula Mississippi, with him.

W: Was that before the war, or during the war?

C: Is it been a war?

W: World War II.

C: No, we was in Lula.

W: Still in World War II, okay. You remember World War II?

C: Yes, I remember that.

W: Were you still in the fields, or did you do something to help with the war? Or what kind of things did you do while the war was going on?

C: Well, I was on the plantation. So, I didn't do nothing but go to the meetings when they broke it down. Medgar Evers, that's the name, he broke it down while we

went to. to the meetings. So, that's the only time we went and had, after that, we could just go.

W: Do you remember Martin Luther King?

C: Yes sir.

W: What did you think about him?

C: He was a fine man. [Laughter] He was a fine man. All them men, coming here, we were kind of scared to go. But my husband wasn't scared of nothing. So then I followed him. And we had a good time at them meetings [Laughter]. We learned a lot that we didn't even want to know.

W: Did you ever do the freedom songs or work with the students when they came through?

C: No. I had babies, I couldn't.

W: That's true. You had a whole family. Okay. Were you a singer when you were—?

C: Yes, sir. I sang. I sang solos.

W: What kind of stuff do you sing? What kind of songs do you sing?

C: *When the Storm Would Rise, To the Rain, and Stand By Me. And This Little Light of Mine.*

W: Could you sing a little something now? Anything you wanna sing?

C: Well—in this storm, light, life is raging, Lord, stand by me. When this storm is light, life is raging, stand by me. When the world is tossing, oh, like a ship I'd upon the sea. Stand, stand, stand, stand by me.

W: That was lovely, thank you. Where did you learn that song?

C: I laid down one night and *Stand By Me* come to me, and then I got up the next morning and got me some voices, of another song that was in there. And I had a little song work at that time, and I come up with about two, three verses. But that song come to me, when the storm of life is raging. *Stand By Me*. I always, when I get them songs, you know, they come to me at night, and I put me some verses to them. See, I had a song book, and I'd go in there and get them verses out of there. And that's what I did.

W: Do you still have your song book?

C: No, they—my house got burned.

W: Oh no. What happened?

C: I don't know what happened. When I come back, the house, my chillun was in—they just had got out, they got out, just burned down. And this the new one. Know the old one, my husband and I had, this the new one Annie's got. I built this.

W: As you think back on your life and who you are now, and where you came from, being a little girl, if you were going to give advice to somebody like you today on how to live their life, what would you say to them?

C: I'd tell them go to church and don't forget Jesus, because He's your all in all. He brought me this floor and I know He'll carry me home. Now, I'm ninety-something years old and still alive. I can do everything but cook. I can't cook. [Laughter] That heat—see, I try to cook twice, and I fell out, down there by the stove, and the children got me up, so they don't let me cook. I don't cook, not now. I'm scared, but I'm mad if I—tell Jesus about it, I can cook.

[Telephone rings]

W: Did you ever see yourself, when you were younger, being ninety-four years old?

C: No, sir. No, sir. No way. [Laughter] No way could I see myself getting that old, but I'm sure that old, the Lord blessed me. Many people have gone on and I'm here alive.

W: Are many of your friends still in the area, or have they—they've gone on?

C: Well some of them—some of them still here.

W: Do you still go to church?

C: Every time I can get a chance. [Laughter] My grandson he takes me—I got a grandson, he good to me. He won't miss summer camps, Sunday School, and everything, 'cause he know I like it.

W: And what kind of things, what are the things that you take pleasure in now? What do you enjoy at your age? Being almost ninety-four.

C: Home.

W: You like being home? Mm-hm.

C: Sometimes I go out. I never was the woman that go out—

W: All the time

C: No time. 'Cause, see, I had a house of kids, I had six of 'em. And then my daughter died, and she left some children, and obviously I had all them to tend. And I stayed at home when my husband was living. I didn't go nowhere. When he died, I still didn't go nowhere. I don't know how Sunflower look. Then I just, I passed through that the other day, I said there's Sunflower. [Laughter] Sure did. I always have been, just home. Stay there and raise chicken, hogs, cows. When my husband was there and ten of them kids, I liked it there.

W: Well, Miss Florine Carter, thank you very much for letting me speak to you today. And I like to conclude my interviews just by again, thanking you, and then asking you if there is anything you want to say or something you wanted to talk about. Go ahead and say that, and when you finish saying it is, that's going to conclude our interview.

C: Okay, well, one thing, I'm glad to meet you today, to have this interview. Because or a—you know, that's telling my life, how I lived. I didn't do nothing but stay at home and I had a house of kids. See, and plus my daughter died, and then I had her children, you see. Well, I ain't never had no time, for to go out and—nothing, just stay there and raise them children. And, back in the days—I don't do it now—I raised chicken, hogs, and a cow.

[End of Interview, Part 1]

W: All right. This is interview part two with Miss Florine Carter. She's gonna talk about some of her work experiences, and I guess first we'll talk about the bank. How did you find out about that job and get it?

C: Well, I don't know. The Lord just always, just, I really had—me on their mind, you know. That's all I can say. 'Cause, one day I went up there and Mr. Charles asked me, did I want to work at the bank? And I told them, yes, I'll turn up the bank for you. And so, he says, okay. 'Cause he's seen me, I go. I work for so many white folks, it's my card, isn't it? All of them, work for them, all—the whole family then. I went from house to house working for them. And so, I guess they give me a good reputation. So, then the bank wanted me. And so I went there and worked at the bank, I think it was twenty-two years, I worked at the bank.

W: And, what was it like working there?

C: Just cleaning up, dust, water, and dust, and a mop, and a sweeping mop. Get all the spider webs. And if it was a summer, that door would have water, would come and get them. Kept it nice and tidy.

W: Were the people there nice to you?

C: Yes, sir. Everybody, all white folk were nice to me. I ain't never had no trouble. They were always nice to me.

W: Did you ever talk to the people when they came into the bank?

C: Yes.

W: What did you all talk about?

C: We talk about, hi, Florine, how you doing? I'm doing all right today. Like that.

W: Did you work anywhere besides the bank?

C: Yeah, I work for Mr. Abner Carter, and Mr. Paul Wilson.

W: What did you do for Mr. Carter? McCarty, pardon.

C: Well, I helped clean up the house and helped their children.

W: So, what was that like? And you were a mother, so you had a lot of experience taking care of kids, but these weren't your kids, so what was it like taking care of somebody's children that weren't yours?

C: It was fun, because they loved me. The children loved me, and their parents in front of the children love me, see, so I didn't have bitter soul. I had a nice family that I worked with.

W: As they grew up, did you still keep contact with those children, or did your relationship change?

C: If I see 'em, they hug me—hug me.

W: So, they would say hi?

Anonymous speaker: They bring stuff now, too.

C: They bring stuff to me.

Anonymous speaker: The grandkids, the grandkids—

C: Sure do.

Anonymous speaker: The great-grans, they the great-grans.

W: Okay, terrific.

C: I ain't never work for no mean people. It was like the Lord blessed me. 'Cause when I'm going to a job, or whatever I'm doing, I pray. Always have been like that. I put the Lord in front.

W: Now, why is that?

C: Because if you put the Lord in front, things will go smooth with ya. You recognize Jesus Christ first, and so I always have been that way. I love the Lord.

W: Now, you had one song already, do you have another one?

C: [Laughter]

Anonymous speaker: Yep.

C: It's been so long since that song.

Anonymous speaker: Sing—

C: [Inaudible 32:19] like the radio.

Anonymous speaker: Sing *Just Over the Hill*.

C: Just over the hill. Just over the hill, just over the hill, I'm on my way to the land of the days, just over the hill, someday, Lord help, I'll see you around, but I shall

under stone, I make my way to my happy home, just over, just over, just over the hill.

W: That was lovely. So, have you ever thought about going back and putting all these songs together, and making you a CD and getting on the radio or something?

C: I thought about it—

W: You should. All you need to get is, like, seven to eight of them. If you got seven or eight—yeah.

C: Oh, I got plenty.

W: Well, you have a lovely voice. For a person in their twenties and thirties would love to sing as good as you do.

Anonymous speaker: Ain't she good? Ain't she good?

W: Well, thank you for sharing your time and your talent.

C: I always could sing. When I was a girl, they would stand me up on the table and I'd sing. I always loved to sing. But I got old, and now they won't let me.

W: But you can sit.

C: [Laughter] Well, getting to the place, you see so I can sing, you know.

W: I have a hard time going to church, getting up in the cars and things, but I make it. Sometimes my sons, they come out there and just pick me up, you know and put me in the car. They have a little truck. They put me in there. But I don't miss it, no I don't miss too many Sundays. I'm there. I know ya ain't, when I cross the railroads, but I was [inaudible 34:52] on the Frost Plantation.

Anonymous speaker: When I take you, we still have to—I'm gonna talk to the library,
and then somebody would show me.

W: Well, thank you again, Miss Florine.

C: You're welcome.

[End of interview]

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