

I N T R O D U C T I O N

This project is a study of the changes in Bridgeport neighborhoods from the viewpoint of selected Black residents during the historical periods of World War I, the Depression, World War II, and the 1960's.

By means of interviews, we have investigated the social and economic effects of each period on Black Bridgeporters. All persons interviewed have resided in Bridgeport during at least three of the targeted periods. We attempted to explore how their families, friends, and neighbors were affected during those turbulent times. We discovered the changes that occurred on their jobs, in their neighborhoods and in the city as a whole.

This kit contains a transcript and a tape recording of the interview along with suggested activities that are best suited for grades 5-8 and adaptable for high school students.

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PERSONAL DATA

Alice Gertrude Farrar

349 Wilmot Avenue, Bridgeport

Born: November 28, 1893 - Marshall, Virginia to
Samuel and Lillian Whiting

Spouse: Edward Langston Farrar

Children: Lillian, Edna, Geraldine, Doryce, Natalie,
Laurayne, Joseph

Education: Beauty School

Profession: Beautician, Church Organist

Travel: Europe and West Indies

Church: Walters Memorial A. M. E. Zion

Organizations: Stewardess Board
Missionary Society

"A Study of Bridgeport Neighborhoods"
A Black Perspective, 1900 -- Present"

Interview by: Juanita Wright
Interview with: Alice Farrar
Date: October 8, 1983

WRIGHT: Mrs. Farrar has just informed me that today would have been her seventieth wedding anniversary. Alice Farrar, would you please tell me something about your early childhood. Where you were born and where your family came from

FARRAR: I was born in Faquier County, Marshall, Virginia. My parents are both from Virginia.

JW: Tell me when did you come to Bridgeport?

AF: My family moved to Bridgeport in 1900.

JW: And you were born November 28, 1893?

AF: Yes.

JW: Alright. Your father's name was Whiting. When you came to Bridgeport where did you first live?

AF: I first lived on Lafayette Street right next door to the Warner Corset Factory.

JW: What was that neighborhood like?

AF: It was a very nice neighborhood at that time.

JW: Where did you go to church?

AF: My first Sunday school was the Bethel Church which is just a block away. But my family went to Messiah Baptist Church.

JW: Where did you go to school when you came here, Mrs. Farrar?

AF: I went to the Myrtle Avenue School.

JW: And that would be the Jefferson School we have now right?

AF: I guess so, yes.

JW: Could you tell me where did you go after the grade

school?

[tape interrupted]

After Myrtle Avenue School, where did you go to school?

AF: I went to Old Lincoln School on Stratford Avenue with Mr. Zinc as our principal. And I graduated from the Shelton School up the north end Wheeler Avenue I guess it was.

JW: Okay. And also I guess I understand from here that you say you were a hairdresser. Was that after you came out of high school?

AF: Oh no, you didn't ask me that before.

JW: I sure didn't but I see it now. I got it here.

AF: I wasn't a hairdresser until I was married and had a family before I took hairdressing.

JW: So when did you get out of high school?

AF: I went to the Shelton School we talked about. I graduated from there. I went to the old Congress High School.

JW: For high school?

AF: Yes.

JW: Right. Now what kind of activities did you take part in in school?

AF: I mostly played for the assembly. I played the piano for the assembly.

JW: And now could you tell me who taught you how to play the piano?

AF: I took music lessons from -- I can't remember the teacher's name -- piano lessons for many years from a

woman teacher. And many years I took from Professor Hugo.

JW: The teacher that came to your house was a white lady that taught you music. And you said how much it cost?

AF: Fifty cents a lesson.

JW: Fifty cents a lesson. So then how many years did you take piano lessons?

AF: I took piano lessons from, let me see, I'll say from about ten or eleven years old until I married. So most of my life I took piano lessons.

JW: Okay and we talked about your family being a member of Messiah Baptist Church.

AF: My mother and father were both members and I also was a member of Messiah Baptist Church.

JW: And you left Messiah and went to --

AF: I became organist of the Zion Church and at that time I joined the Baptist Church.

JW: You played for them for a number of years?

AF: I don't know, about fifty years. I played for Zion for fifty years.

JW: Could you tell me some things about the kinds of chores you had to do when you were a young girl at home?

AF: Wash dishes [chuckles]. I mainly washed dishes and did a little dusting.

JW: Was your main job?

AF: Was my main job.

JW: Would you explain to me some of the things that around holiday time that you did? The kind of things your

family did?

AF: The biggest holiday I can remember would be Christmas time. And we always celebrated each other's birthdays. Other than that there wasn't too much.

JW: Too much celebration. But you did have the traditional turkeys and hams and things?

AF: Oh yes. All the occasions.

JW: Now could you tell me about your father's job and what kind of work he did?

AF: My father worked for the Canfield Rubber Company and he was a trucker.

JW: And your mother?

AF: My mother was a housewife.

JW: Would you tell me something about before you got married? Like your courting time. How did you court?

AF: How did I court?

JW: Yes.

AF: Most of the time you went to movies. There wasn't much to do [chuckles].

JW: [chuckles].

AF: Maybe a few parties, a few picnics and movies.

JW: Yes. Mostly. When you got married, could you tell me something about when you got married? Your wedding and what not?

AF: I had a small house wedding. Married early in the morning and my mother had a breakfast for all my friends. And from there we took a honeymoon up to

Portsmouth, New Hampshire.

JW: And when you came back?

AF: We lived at 349 Wilmot Avenue where I still am.

JW: So you've been in this house all of these years?

AF: All of my married life.

JW: And you had all your children here?

AF: Right here.

JW: Could you tell me about the medical care at the birth of your babies?

AF: Dr. Bradley was our first Black doctor in Bridgeport. So he delivered all of my babies and my mother was my nurse.

JW: So your mother didn't trust the hospitals?

AF: Didn't trust the hospitals. Didn't trust the nurses [chuckles].

JW: Well it sounds like you've had a good life. Could you tell me something about your husband's employment? What kind of work he did?

AF: My husband was an engineer at the Bridgeport Brass for fifty years. He was honest. He had many gold buttons during those years for the service.

JW: So let's talk about the depression years. It didn't affect you very much?

AF: Not too badly because he had three days work all during the Depression. So we managed to get along on that.

JW: So you didn't have too much economic decline during that time?

AF: No it wasn't too bad. Because at the time I always

sewed. I made all of my children's clothes. I never bought them a coat in their life. I made everything they wore.

JW: When did you learn to sew?

AF: My mother was a good seamstress and she taught me to sew. I took some sewing lessons to get all the fine points. So I never went to the store to buy them any clothes.

JW: Well it sounds as though you were very busy during your young life --

AF: Very busy.

JW: You took piano lessons. You learned how to sew.

AF: That's right.

JW: So you were quite busy. Now do you remember, could you tell me something about this neighborhood here when you moved here?

AF: This was a very good neighborhood because all the persons who lived here were homeowners. But as they died and moved away, why it has changed.

JW: Now when you moved to this neighborhood were you the first Black on this street?

AF: The first Black on the street.

JW: Did it take many years for other Blacks to move into this area?

AF: A few years before they started moving in.

JW: When you were married and as a young woman what friends did you and your husband have and what kind of activities did you do besides church?

AF: The names of the friends?

JW: No, you don't have to, just what did you do. You had told me about a Miss Holly I believe?

AF: Yes, Miss Holly was my close friend. Well most of our activities was the activities of the church. Whatever was going on in the church. He belonged to Messiah and I belonged to Zion. And so what ever was going on in the churches we attended.

JW: I'd like to ask you -- did you have alot of church suppers and things like that in your young --

AF: Yes they used to have suppers at the churches. Concerts -- they'd have what they called concerts. And we did alot of that.

JW: Okay, well what about the other activities that you did with the church like with the young children? The drama groups you were telling me about.

AF: I had a junior choir and we had alot of plays and made money for the church. Always a Christmas play and maybe an Easter play. We enjoyed that.

JW: Like tell me, we're going to go onto World War II. Did you have anyone that served in World War II?

AF: I don't think so.

JW: None of your family. None of your children or
Were you involved with making bandages and doing those kinds of things?

AF: No I didn't do that.

JW:

AF: I was so busy. I had so many girls to sew for. I

didn't have time to make bandages [chuckles].

JW: Do you still sew, Miss Farrar?

AF: No I don't sew anymore. I keep things together but I don't sew anymore but I did alot of sewing.

JW: Okay so you really didn't do very much work outside the home?

AF: No, never.

JW: Let me ask you about these travels then, all of these different travels. If you would just explain some of that to me.

AF: My first trip was across the ocean there. We went on the Queen Elizabeth from New York to London and that summer we spent seven weeks going across Europe by bus. And we came back from Italy I believe it was to New York on the Queen Mary. So that was our summer.

JW: Oh so you were on two boats that summer?

AF: Yes.

JW: Oh. And how did you start with this traveling?

AF: Shall I call her name?

JW: Okay if you want.

AF: I had a daughter who was very anxious to travel, Geraldine. And she couldn't find anyone to travel with her. And I made the mistake in telling her that I would go with her because I felt so sorry for her. She wouldn't let me back out. And after that we traveled for a good many summers.

JW: Seemed like you've done some extensive traveling.

AF: We have. We've done alot of traveling.

JW: Right, right.

AF: We've taken alot of cruises.

JW: Now tell me something about your friends that are around now. Do you have very many of your friends still around? Do you see many of them?

AF: Very few friends around now, old friends. Mrs. Holly is about the oldest friend. We were girls together. We went to Lincoln School together. We were baptized together at Messiah Church.

JW: Oh you were. Oh I'm telling you, you go back a long ways. Do you remember anything about the social upheavals of the 1960's?

AF: The what?

JW: The social upheavals. Did they affect you any at all or anything else?

AF: No I don't think so.

JW: None at all. Okay would you just tell me about those movie theatres again and where they were?

AF: There were three movie theatres on the east end. The Hippodrome on Stratford Avenue and there were two others. I don't remember their names. And they was only a nickel so every week we went to the movies. And when my children came along they used to go to the Hippodrome and sit on the front seat every Saturday afternoon.

JW: [Chuckle]. So that was a good activity for the kids.

AF: That was their activity, to go to the Hippodrome.

JW: Now do you remember anything about any Black/White

conflict in Bridgeport at any time during your lifetime that you've been here?

AF: What do you mean, like a fight or something like that?

JW: Yes, any kind of conflict say with the government or the city, in any way?

AF: No it isn't on my mind now. Probably there was some but I can't quite remember.

JW: Yes it didn't affect you too much?

AF: No it didn't.

JW: Could you tell me about some of the changes you've seen in Bridgeport since you've been here, since you've lived here that you might know anything about? Besides your neighborhood are there any other changes that you have seen?

AF: Well all the neighborhoods have changed.

JW: Yes, for sure.

AF: No I don't think I can say any. Alot of changes but not important I believe. My neighborhood because I live here [chuckles].

JW: Yes, yes, I know. Well is there anything else we might not have covered that you could remember that you'd like to share with us?

AF: No I don't think so.

JW: Okay. I want to thank you very much. I really want to thank you. I double thank you for allowing me to do this.

End of Interview