

PORTER ROAD COMMUNITY INTERVIEW

MAY 24, 2021

Interview of Louise Mosley Porter, Jean Porter, Renaldo Moore, and Derik Reinhart conducted by Marissa Howard for DeKalb History Center May 24, 2021.

LOUISE MOSLEY PORTER, *to Derik Reinhart, as she arrives*: It's been a long time since I saw you!

DERIK REINHART: Long time. I'll put my mask on so I can keep you safe.

LMP: [Inaudible] at the house.

DR: Good to see you.

LMP: Bless you. How you doing? [*To MARISSA HOWARD*]

[*Inaudible background comments*]

MARISSA HOWARD: Hi, good, good.

LMP: [*To MARISSA HOWARD*] I'm Louise. [*Inaudible background comments*]

MH: Hi, I'm Marissa Howard. Nice to meet you.

LMP: OK, OK. Well, just sit down. She said she'd come out. You want to sit here? There's a pillow in here.

DR: That's got a cushion in it.

MH: No, that's OK. That looks—you—

LMP: I can sit over here. I'll sit right here, and you sit there. OK, so what y'all got going on now?

MH: Well, I'm from the DeKalb History Center.

LMP: The what?

MH: Do you mind? I'm recording this. I'll just put this here, if you don't mind.

LMP: Oh, OK

MH: I'm from the DeKalb History Center. We're in the Historic Court House in Decatur.

LMP: Oh, OK

MH: And I'm just learning about this community--

LMP: Yeah

MH: --and learning a little bit, and, I don't know, seeing how we can help you get be in historic preservation status, maybe, and, I don't know, I just want to learn more about the community.

LMP: Oh, OK

DR: Just to get the info down so that they can go back and see what they can do to help keep things preserved. Remember when we were trying to get the cemetery kind of fenced off to block—keep people out of that thing?

LMP: Oh, OK

DR: And maybe fix up around the plantation house, do a little more for the church to preserve it? And just to—the nice thing about it is we've gotten it historically designated—what was it, two years ago? That would be happening over here.

LMP and RENALDO MOORE: Yeah

DR: And that was a big deal, because there's a lot of stipulations that go with it. If this is historically designated, there's only—it limits what they can do and can't do. Probably help preserve and protect it a little better. So that's what we're wanting do was to keep you guys' history safe, alive, and something that people—You wouldn't believe how many people come up to me. Probably every week I get at least five people, six people a week [inaudible], "You're [inaudible] the Porter Road community. I've heard about it. I don't know much about it. I want to go check it out." There's a lot of interest in the history over here. Yeah, but we don't really have any way to—

MH: Yeah

DR: --you know, to share it with anyone.

LMP: What was it? They said that they weren't going to put the traffic through for a road. Is that a really true thing, or what?

DR: Well, so far, they're holding up their end of the deal. You know, we'd told them that there's to be no delivery trucks going down this road. Remember they fed us all that B.S. at the commissioners' meetings? They were like, "Oh, yeah, we've got this company, this company, this company interested."

LMP: Yeah, I know.

DR: And I called the franchise managers in each one of those and found out they were lying.

LMP: Yeah

DR: So I busted them on that. So here's the person, here's the date and the time, the phone number I called, here's what they said if you need to follow up on it. These people said they'd never heard of them. And then they said, "Oh, we've got a—we won't allow any delivery trucks to use Porter Road."

And I'm like, "What kind of GPS system—diversion system do you have? Because I'm not aware of any that exist." I said, "I was in the military, and we didn't have GPS systems,

except in the military, that tell you where and where not to go.” I said, “We had a 7-Up truck that came up here and hit a car, because that’s where GPS told them to go.”

LMP: Yeah

DR: They couldn’t answer the questions. But we did get the signs put up where trucks are not supposed to go through it. It’s kind of worked for a while.” *Referring to a passing vehicle:* That’s the jackass right there. I believe that’s Ralston George that just drove by. I wanted to--yep. That’s the guy that is developing all that property. He’s not even a developer.

LMP: Well, I know they come through awful fast now. You know, I saw—

DR: Well, the speed humps were a big thing. And that’s what I was working on getting the county to take care of, because the deal was, it was the county said that said, “We need Porter Road connected to Covington [Highway].” The family didn’t want it. They just [inaudible] like, “Well, we wouldn’t mind having the road paved, but that’s it.”

And the county said, “Well, we need this to be connected for emergency services purposes.” Well, that’s when they cut up through the corner of the cemetery. And ever since they’ve made that an access road to make it easier for emergency vehicles, we’ve got people just hauling ass through here. And they said, “Well, if you want speed humps put up, you know, everybody in the neighborhood’s got to pitch in twenty-five bucks, everybody’s got to sign this thing approving it,” and so on and so forth.

And we’re like, “Why do we have to pay to make ourselves safe from something they did?” And they couldn’t get it. But if, you know, we were able to have this documented, prove that we’ve already [*Background noise; inaudible comment*] document, they’d have to do it; and they would put the speed humps in there. And if you put speed humps in, it’s going to change a lot of stuff around here. I had a few wrecks out here at the beginning [inaudible]. “Man, I was flying through here doing ninety, fricking went airborne, hit a tree, and took down an owl.” Yeah, well, you’re not going to do that anymore. [*To Jean Porter, as she arrives*] Hi, Jean.

JEAN PORTER: Hi

DR: How are you?

JP: OK

DR: I haven’t seen you since, like, the first time we went to a BOC meeting [*laughs*]. How have you been?

JP: Oh, OK.

LMP: She had to have a sack of [*Rest of comment inaudible*]. So that’s the reason [*Rest of comment inaudible*].

MH: I’m Marissa Howard. Nice to meet you.

DR: This is Jean Porter. And we used--

JP: You know, we was talking about speed bumps the other day, because cars come through here much too fast.

DR: Yeah

JP: Police [inaudible] everybody from DeKalb County, and when they getting off from work, I said, if we had a speed bump up and down the road, they wouldn't come through here that much.

MH: So I'm recording. I just want to hear— So you're Renaldo's aunts?

JP: Yes

MH: And so who is your father? Or mother, who lived with—

JP?: My mother—our mother and father's dead. We are the fourth generation from slavery times.

MH: All right here?

LMP?: Yes. Yes. Our great-granddaddy was Joseph Walker. He was a slavery man. And he had two sons. And back when—what you call it, what was his name? When they came through and—[inaudible].

DR: Sherman? General Sherman?

JP: Yes, see, and I—that's when he had his two sons. And he gave his two sons—his two sons had fifty acres apiece that was here and where the Davises is down the street, where the church is now. And so, then it was my father--my granddaddy was the second generation, and my—my granddaddy was third generation, and my father was the—oh—

?: Fourth?

JP: Which? No, my—

LMP: Wait, we—

MH: We need a family tree, a whole chalkboard to write all this stuff.

DR: What would be nice is to have something to kind of, you know—

JP: Well, you know, it's all up there in the courthouse in Decatur, so you know. Joseph Walker was the slave master.

LMP: Yeah

JP: Then, see, our granddaddy—our granddaddy was his son. And then my daddy, and then it was us.

LMP: He was third generation.

JP: Yeah, and we're the fourth generation.

LMP: We're the fourth generation.

JP: Yeah, that's been here.

DR: So did it ever say exactly—I mean, we've read some stuff about the church being built so you'd have a proper place to worship and so on. When was that turned over? He only—from what I understand, Joseph Walker only was the pastor of the church for—

JP: He was the pastor over here off of Indian Creek, Rockbridge Road, and Memorial Drive.

DR: Yeah, he was at a different church, and he built this one--

JP: For the slaves.

DR: --for the slaves, but then he came over to kind of get it going for, like, a short time, and then he turned it over, was it to Frank or Henry or—Y'all got this one.

JP: No, no. The church stayed—the church stayed for the slaves a long time. I don't know who the first preacher was there, but [rest of sentence inaudible].

LMP: No, he wasn't the first [inaudible].

JP: No, he wasn't the first, but my aunt said when she went, they had one the little building down there. It was a church and was a school to try to learn the kids stuff. And said she was a teacher, and she said at first that if you—some people could learn, some people couldn't. And she said at first, said the people learned—the children could say all their ABCs and count to a hundred, was a teacher, and said she was a teacher. And say, because she learned fast, and said then, when she learned how to do all hers, said then she would teacher another child how to spell. Say, you know, they had from the first to eleventh grade. But she said that was the way they started out teaching and learning down there at the church. And see, the cemetery belongs to the slaves, too.

DR: That's what Renaldo was saying, is that this was basically the school for the kids here at the time until they went to Hamilton or something, he said?

JP: Well, we went to Hamilton.

MH: You walked?

JP: We walked, mm-hm.

MH: I heard it was a long—

LMP, *laughing*: It was a long walk.

MH: Did you cut through any lawns or trails or—

JP: Well, sometimes we would go the way Northern Road go down through there? We would go across Rockbridge Road and go through the woods, you know, the back woods, we walked. You know, back then it wasn't nothing but woods [*voice trails off, inaudible*]. So like, you know, slowly they started filling up, up, up. Because see, over there where DeKalb County

Police Department, see, was a prison over there. You see, they planted, and they had all up and down through there, Camp Road, there was a chain-gang camp over there, and so they had hogs and cows and chickens and a lot of stuff. So see, and just like, eventually, you know, the road was dirt. See, Memorial Drive used to stop up there on Columbia Drive. From Columbia Drive on down to Stone Mountain, it was a—Memorial Drive was a path. So—

DR: It wasn't a paved road at all. [Inaudible].

JP: Was dirt.

DR: Yeah, I remember some friends told me that that's the way 78 was, going up through past Stone Mountain. They said it used to be a two-lane dirt road, basically, gravel, or something like that back in the '50s, was it? Forties?

MH: Seventy-eight came around '50s and '60s.

DR: Yeah

JP: See, up there where Wal-Mart's up there, on Memorial Drive, going up down Candler Road—not Candler, but Columbia Drive—see, it was a—people stayed where the Wal-Mart is up there. They stayed out there—was a cow field, a field with cows and—

MH: Dairy farm

JP: --horses all around, and then see, and on down just past, on down to Stone Mountain—we could sit here and see Stone Mountain, you know. We could look and see Stone Mountain and all them trees and things, because they'd had cotton fields. And since then, see, all them trees grewed up, and we can't see nothing now.

DR: That would've been something, to be able to sit here and see it. Now the closest you can get to seeing it is going to Camp Road, right past before the helicopter refilling station.

JP: Yes, so we could walk out there, just walk out this road, which we had dirt roads and stuff, but we could see on top of Stone Mountain over there.

DR: When did—who took over actually making it a community? Because I know Joseph Walker, when he turned the land over to y'all, then it got—became officially Porter Road Community in 1903, wasn't it? Is that right?

JP: 1903

DR: 1901? 1901 or 1903, it was on the sign. Did they ever bring that sign back? Did you ever get that back?

JP: It's been Porter Road ever since we've been out here.

DR: Where is that thing at?

JP: That was in '35. Well, it was really—well, we really had Route 2—what? Route 2—204?

LMP: 204

JP: It was routes, wasn't no, you know, you just had routes. We didn't have no names in DeKalb County.

LMP: Yeah, everybody's box—mail was in the same box.

JP: Yeah. We had a box out there at the end of Covington Highway, across Covington Highway, where we just got mail in the box. We had to go out there to get the mail, because we didn't have no turnarounds here. We go down to—everybody go in and go down into church down there and turn around and go back out. We had one way in and one way out, until we got here, we got up grown, started building houses out [inaudible].

MH: Did—was there water then?

JP: We had wells.

MH: Wells?

JP: We had wells and burnt wood, heaters.

DR: Which was the first house besides Joseph Walker's, the first one built on the land? Do you know?

JP: On this land?

DR: Was it Davises' house?

JP: Yeah, Davis had a house down here, yeah. It was two houses, though.

DR: I know the one that Donnie's got looks pretty old.

JP: Well, yeah, but it's—it's old, but we had, you know, we had a little house before. Our house, we set back in the woods over there. But when we were first born, we had a little house across the field down there.

RM: Yeah, there used to be a house right back up in the woods right there before they built these houses. We just built our little house back there, until it caught on fire then, and—

JP: Oh, that was Uncle Roy's house.

RM: Uncle Roy's house?

JP: But we was the first one. It was a house on—the house [inaudible—General?] Walker had. And the Davises had the house next. And then it was our house, what we had, was next, when we was in here. We had a good two-room house and what, seven of us? We stayed in a two-room house. And we got water out of the spring, but it was where a lake was down there. There was a lake back in there. We would just go down there and get water.

DR: It's still kind of there, too. It's right behind the house that's—

JP: Uh-huh, uh-huh

DR: You probably noticed when we were right across from the plantation, I said, "Well, there might be a house down there," right behind [inaudible]. Retention pond, actually.

JP: So it was a spring down there. And when we'd get sweet milk, get milk, back then and stuff like that, we would take it down there and set it in the spring to try to keep it cool. And so we would go down there and get water, and we would get water, wash clothes, we'd get water to drink. That's where our water came from, the spring. And then later on, as we got a little bigger, our daddy built a four-room house, and he dug a well, and we did out of that. But then, see we went for a long time. We didn't have no electricity in here. So we had lamp lights when we were going to school. So yeah, it's been—as things go, I don't see, even like now, everywhere you look, they're building apartments, apartments, apartments, apartments; so the people stay in one place. They ain't just going on down the road and expanding. They're expanding right around here in Atlanta and Decatur and out through here and on down to Covington. They just building, building, building, you know.

DR: Because they're trying to get more people into the one smaller area. But there's actually—that just actually increases the demand for houses.

JP: They want to be closer to Atlanta, because, you know, that's where everybody's going, downtown Atlanta. That's where the jobs and people having more business and stuff like that. So they come in, they take over, you know.

MH: So what would it have been like living on the same street or the same area with all of your family?

JP: Well, most of my family were here. See, when my granddaddy, he had about, what, nine children. And see, what, he had fifty acres of land. And so each one of his kids, he gave them what, about—

LMP: An acre and a half?

JP: No. I don't know how many acres he gave. He gave a lot of his kids so many acres of land. And so some of his kids went up the country, up to New York and around. And some of them stayed here. And so my father and his brother—his brother sold his land to my daddy. So my daddy had seven kids. And so when they got grown, my daddy gave each one of his kids a acre of land. So therefore they built houses, but, you know, they passed, they done died, you know.

DR: And [inaudible name—sounds like "Oprah" or "Rehoboth"?] was one of the ones that got that, right? Got an acre?

JP: Yes. So we all—you know, all his kids got a acre of land.

DR: So I should say his wife got the land when she was a child.



JP: Yeah, my sister, uh-huh

RM: Rosa

MH: So how would it have been growing up with all of your cousins and other—was it fun?

JP: Most of them was—they didn't stay here. They moved off Porter Road, and so most of them—some of them died, and some of them went up to Ohio, and you know, and they sold their land and went up there. So my daddy, he held onto his, so he was the only one that really held onto all his land. So that left us. So he had—he gave the seven of us the acre of land. So we built. We started building. But then they started improving the neighborhood, so, and you know they had the road cut all the way through down to Kingston Road down there. Had a church, we just had the road, and muddy, and just had one way in and one way out. So therefore, with DeKalb County, of course, they tried to get the community better, and that's the reason they started building houses through here. But see, we had went about fifty years with a garbage truck never came in here, and we were paying tax [*laugh*].

DR: Paying tax for nothing. So, see, you're taking care of the land, you've got your own plumbing, and [inaudible].

JP: And so by that, see, that's the way the land started going, you know, and people—some of the people was taking it.

MH: Was there ever an issue with MARTA coming through?

JP: Well, no, we—they came through here, checking for MARTA, but then they decided to go the other way [inaudible].

RM: Over there behind where I'm staying, what was over there? What kind of mill was over there?

JP: What kind of mill?

RM: Mill

JP: Oh, mill. I don't know, because that was back in the slavery times. And when we came along, we didn't know what kind of mill it were, but we know it was a mill, because all that sawmill—it had big holes deeper than these houses. You could drop houses tall as them trees there where they had a sawmill down in through there.

LMP: I'm letting her talk, because she know more about it.

JP: So [inaudible] we used to go there. We used to slide down in the—

LMP: I'd go in the pit, but not much.

JP: We used to slide down in through there. We were taking a chance playing. Somebody slid down through there—I mean, I slid down through there. When I looked up, all I could see the top, you know--

MH: The mill?

JP: Uh-huh, and all of the dust and stuff like that. And I said, "Golly, what if all that stuff come crawling—falling down here on me? They could never find me!" So we stopped. We wouldn't go down, you know. But—

DR: How'd you get out?

JP: Huh? Well, we'd go way down, we'd go way down, you know. You go so far down and come out. But, yeah, and you know, had your hair white all and everything back over in there. But we used to pick blackberries and stuff like that. And they had creeks and water, and we used to go over there and stop up a creek of water and make us a swimming pool there and jumped over in there and swim in. And that's how we did. We used to pick buckets and buckets of blackberries, and we made, you know, jelly and jam and stuff like that. They also had a—over there where the dog pound is, where the dogs' thing over there—used to be a cannery down there. And people had food, and they'd go down there and can their food, put them in jars and stuff like that. Yeah, we didn't have all these [inaudible] and stuff around. You could go up there, walk to Avondale. And we'd come out of Avondale and come down Kingston. And weren't too many houses around up through there. Weren't too many houses nowhere around.

So we were surrounded when Joseph Walker had the land, we were surrounded, because the Smiths [?] out there, where they're tearing up out there, they had land from there and all up there up to where McDonald's up on Covington Highway. And the Smiths have had land all the way down here on—what is it? Where the elementary school--?

RM: Redan?

JP: No, where the elementary school is.

RM: Glen Haven?

JP: Glen Haven and Towers. Smiths owned a lot of land. Then it was the Baileys, and they stayed out there at the end of the street, and they had that land over there. And then back up on this side, Johnsons and the Hawkins owned all the way around, you know—what is it, Redan Road?

RM: Redan

JP: Redan Road

MH: Were those all White families?

JP: Yeah, all those was White families, and we was the Black people in the midst, in the middle of all of that. And so, like people say how did we survive the KKK? [*laughs*].

DR: Did you guys ever have issues with them trying to do anything to your property?

JP: Well, yes. I ain't going to say we didn't, because we did. So that's how some of the property got away, too. So I don't know, but then—because a lot of—I always thought we was relations to, you know, to them, back in them days. But they wouldn't go for that. So the Smiths out here on the corner, my aunt and them used to argue, because they didn't want my granddaddy in here, which is so by him having two Black kids. They didn't want them in here. But the fact about it, they know that he is—that he had children, see. They used to fuss and go on, but they treated each other—my aunt and the Smiths out here—they treated each other nice, and so did the Baileys. The Baileys owned all that from the end of Covington Highway all the way over to what that church [or Church—?]*—up to 285.*

RM: Yeah, across the street from QuikTrip.

JP: They all—

RM: New Birth?

JP: Huh?

RM: Is it the New Birth one? Used to be New Birth?

DR: That's the one that's right there behind Honey Baked Ham [*inaudible*] the one that's behind it?

RM: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah

JP: Yeah, they got all the way over there. The Baileys own[ed?] that. So, I guess you know, they—he would give them—he gave his sons land, too, you know. There was so much land, they, you know, gave them so much—like father and the brothers and stuff, you know. They always was letting stuff go. Some of them was dying out, and some of them moving out. So, yes, I mean, it was a pretty big place. Yeah, we still stayed over here, so I can't [*inaudible*] from the KKKs, you know. We—some nights we—they would [*inaudible*] blackouts, so, everybody else had to turn their lights out, and they sit in the house with white sheets walking.

DR: They'd walk right through your property?

JP: Hm?

DR: They'd walk right through your property?

JP: Yes. I've seen them burn [*inaudible*] in front of people's houses and stuff like that, all down to Wesley Chapel.

DR: They ever do that on Porter Road?

JP: No, not as I know of.

DR: [Inaudible] right outside of here, though, right?

JP: Yeah. Uh-huh. Oh, yes, uh-huh.

DR: Fortunately, you guys kind of keep this—basically what makes this such a gem is that this is probably the biggest plot of land existing that's [inaudible] part of all of that whole area, and this is the only one that is still here that historically still has a lot of its originality and is preserved. And I think that's another reason it needs to stay that way, to keep being preserved; because when you've got that much, and it's still here all these—over a century later, century and a half, it's—it needs to be there for future generations [inaudible] and learn from it. How are they going to learn from the past if they don't get to see it, you know?

JP: Well, yeah, but you know, that's it. You can't [inaudible—compete?] with the people, and the population is going, going, going, to have a place you hold onto. And, you know, you can hold onto it for so long, but everybody coming in, and they're seeking a way to get to you, and they're seeking a way to take what you've got, and the people are not educated enough to have sense enough to know what they've got, you know. Like, that's just it. So, there ain't nothing like it used to be.

MH: So is the first house you lived in that two-room, or is that where you were born?

JP: Two-room

LMP?: Mm-hm

MH: Were you born in that house?

Louise and Jean: Mm-hm

LMP: Yes, across—on the other side of that house there.

JP: Yeah, they're still trying to buy us out.

LMP: Every day we get letters wanting to buy this house.

DR: I hear people want to buy my house.

MH: I get people trying to buy mine, too, so—[laughs]

JP: Oh, really?

MH: You're not alone.

JP: Yeah

DR: If they [inaudible] my little property, I might think about it, but—

MLP: No [Several people speak at once; mostly inaudible.]

MH: It's the best way to pass down, you know, wealth and family, and it's passing it—

LMP: Yeah!

JP: You know, they come—I had a guy that came by, telling me, you know, said do I want to sell any of this. And they said, well, you know, just like that little field out there, the

terraces and field, he said, "Well, if you put an apartment out there, and with your house standing there, you can live here, and you can—be surprised how much money you can make off that apartment."

DR: You'll be surprised how bad your property will be tore up because of the people in that apartment. [Inaudible] yeah, we know, there's three, and you see what's happened. So no, you can't—

JP: So, yeah—

DR: When that mushrooms [*laughs*].

JP: So, yes, I tell you, but, just like I said, after a while, people's got kids and stuff, sell their land, sell what they got, after a while they ain't going to have nowhere to go and nothing, you know. It's just like downtown Atlanta, peoples laying around, nowhere to stay, and, you know, and they can't go back to their family, because family done sold everything they had. So it's going to be—and with kids—I was telling my sister—she wanted to have her grandkids' graduation. I said, "Can you imagine how many—how many kids—how many kids graduate every year from high school?" We got thousands and thousands of kids graduating from high school. Some of them go to college, and then, even after high school, they start getting married and having kids, and some of them don't even go to college. And then we got others that do go to college. Then they start their family, a compilation of people. That's what it's doing it, you know what I mean?

DR: Well, the thing that make this also pretty special is this is family property. The more it's maintained and preserved and kept that way, your future generations have a guarantee of somewhere that they can live on proudly, and you know, again, the whole story of this whole property is pretty incredible, and it's something that needs to be told. And I think if there was a way to get this historically designated and sealed off to where it was safe from any of that kind of development, it's a win-win for everybody; because the history will always be here, the property will be here, you're here, your future generations will have a home [inaudible], and they'll be able to keep perpetuating the story.

LMP: Well, it looks like they want to put everybody in an apartment, to stop [inaudible] homes.

DR: Yeah, they want to stack people, you know.

LMP: Yeah

DR: This—this kind of thing is starting to disappear unless you go further out in the country. Homes and—property the only good thing that came out of Covid is people wanting houses now. They don't want to be six inches on the other side of the wall from somebody else.

I've never liked it. I've seen too many fires happen, where one person does something stupid, and thirty people are out of their homes. And I'm a musician, so it's not like I can play drums in an apartment. Makes it a little—they're going to hate me! *[Laughs]*

JP: You know, I don't see how they do it. I mean, the price.

DR: Yeah, I know people that are paying three to four times as much as I am for my house for a little tiny three-, four-bedroom *[sic—maybe means “three- or four-room”?]* apartment that just happens to be in a nice little area where they can go downstairs and be in restaurants and coffee shops. But why? *[Next comment inaudible, as he and one of the sisters speak simultaneously.]*

JP: Well, you know, like I said, they want to stay right around close to Atlanta.

DR: Yeah

JP: Because you get on out by McDonough, as far as McDonough and all around, they've been in McDonough and down in Covington, they filling them places up like crazy.

DR: Yeah, McDonough, Peachtree City's continuing to build up. So's Newnan.

MH: Are you all familiar with Flat Rock?

JP: Yeah—well, yes.

MH: It's a similar story to here.

JP: Say what?

MH: It's a similar story in the history—to this—this history. And they're part of Arabia National Heritage.

JP: Flat Rock?

MH: The Flat Rock community

JP: Oh, yeah. You know, I don't know that much about Flat Rock. But I thought about that, too. Because peeps in Flat Rock saying that they is *[inaudible—sounds like “selling”?]* the same thing in Flat Rock in *[inaudible—sounds like “retail”?]* here on Porter Road.

DR: You find that in *[inaudible]* different places.

JP: But see—

MH: It's similar, yeah.

JP: --so, because you know, they said over here in DeKalb County was the oldest, you know, plantation. And so that—I don't know how much land Joseph Walker had, but they say he had all the way over to Clarkston.

DR: That's what I was going to say—Clarkston was what I've heard.

JP: Yeah, and so I don't know about Flat Rock, but what I know—what's that old guy's name? Chris Rock? Was it Chris Rock?

MH: Johnny Waits—are you familiar with Johnny Waits?

JP: Yes—

MH: He's the—yeah—

JP: He's in the family.

MH: Mm-hm

JP: In our family. Yeah, and I knew a guy named Charles Walker, and I was trying to get in touch with him before he died, because he—this man was Charles Walker. And when it—and I don't know what all it consists of, but they names over there, these are similar to us going on here, Flat Rock.

MH: Yeah, they—there was a plantation house, the Lyons owned this property, and then gave it to the slaves, and then they farmed a community and school—

JP: And church

MH: --yeah—

JP: And everything

MH: Mm-hm

JP: Uh-huh, it's similar to the same thing here. And, like I said, we don't know, but we was—everything was Route 2, Route 3, and, you know, we was doing routes. But as for DeKalb County, Decatur was the main source here, was downtown Decatur. But then, when they started calling DeKalb County, you know, they went so far around DeKalb County till we didn't know—I said, well, you know, this is DeKalb County, but this hasn't always been called DeKalb County. We called it Decatur, Georgia.

LMP: That made me think about the police stopped me up there in Avondale, but he asked me, he said, "Why does your license say 'Decatur, Georgia'?" [*Laughs*] That's what they called it, you know, before they called it "DeKalb County." So my license was from Decatur, Georgia, you know. I said, "Well, it's been a long time there. I'm an old woman. When I was getting my license, all this was called Decatur."

[*DR and MH speak simultaneously; inaudible.*]

DR: Decatur—that's the city. The county's DeKalb.

JP: Mm-hm. See, Ellenwood and Lithonia, down in Lithonia, and, you know, just different little spots. And I say, you know, most of it was plantations. All around, you know, was plantations. And so, you know, just like Flat Rock, yeah, I used to [*voice trails off*].

LMP: Porterdale had--

JP: Well, see, Porterdale is in Conyers, right there.

MLP: Yeah

JP: You see, Porterdale, I don't know. That was a plantation, too.

MLP: Yeah

DR: Seems to me that the research we were doing two years ago, particularly for the cemetery, has some stuff. We started finding four different areas that had—it was blatantly obvious that they were trying to cover up African-American history, paving over somebody else's cemetery not far from here. And the stuff that they tried to do over here and a place in Virginia—I still can't remember off the top of my head what the fourth one was. I've got it documented on file somewhere, but there's at least four places I found in my research where it was pretty obvious they're trying like, "OK, let's just go ahead and pay these people off and take their property. Let's just cover all this history up, and nobody'll know anything about it, remember anything about it." And that's really bugged me that they would want to do that. Why would they want to—with this history you guys got, which is an amazing story, they say, "Well, yeah, but you know, it'd be nice to have a bunch of condos over here and coffee shops" and forget about it. That's wrong.

JP: Well, this is what they may have did down through the years. Yeah, Flat Rock have [inaudible] down there. Yeah, just like I said, and see, and even back then, I guess the slaves up here was going—as my daddy and them had said that back then, say, when you had a girlfriend, it takes you all—half a day to get there and half a day to get back, so they didn't have time to have a population of children and stuff like that. And so, even over there in Scottdale on North Decatur Road, see, Miss Tobie Grant, you see, she held onto a lot property over there, and so, yes, there was—mostly everywhere you went, when one place ran out, another slave had another place. So when they came in and claimed the land, I guess they claimed so much land, and that was it. So, you know, but the slaves weren't supposed to go off their property onto nobody else's property. They supposed to kept within this land they hand. But a lot of people down in Flat Rock is kin to the people on Porter Road.

MH: So how does it feel, living here, being so tied to the land and the history of it and, you know, you're sitting on a porch where you've, you know, you and your ancestors have lived?

JP: Well, I guess you just feel at home and that's all. I had a—I see a write-up in the paper, this woman said her husband had died, and said he lived for eighty-two years and said he hadn't been a mile away from home. I said, "Oh, God, I think that's pitiful to me." [Laughter] What she means, he was born there, and he stayed there. He never went, you know. Never moved off the land, he just stayed on the land. So he didn't go nowhere away from home.

MH: Have you spent any time away from home?



JP: No, I haven't. I've been here all my life. The one little spot, my little spot [*laughs*].

DR: You've been over there and a little over here [*laughs*].

JP: Yeah, when I was born, I was born right down there on the other side of the house right there, in the two-room house that went a little further back up in the woods. Well, my daddy built [*inaudible*]. Then I did move out and move to Scottdale over there in the Tobie Grant, when they started building them apartments over there. Then I moved from there back here. I just got spending enough to make enough money to come back here and start [*inaudible*].

DR: That's got to be good. You're staying close to family, so—could be good and bad, I guess.

JP: Yeah, well, you know at the time, I wanted to get out of the apartments, I was going to build me a house. So the house I was going to build, you know, it--I didn't make enough money to build. By now, I had to buy a little plank house. And so that was all my money could afford, you know. So my mama told my daddy, well, says, since I wanted to buy a house and everything, he'd give me some land to build me a house, so he gave me the land here.

MH: Well, I don't want to take any more of your time. I don't know if you've already had dinner. I don't want to keep you. But this is wonderful talking to you. And actually, may I just get your full name, so I can—

JP: My name is Miss Jean Porter

MH: With a J?

JP: J-E-A-N

MH: And your name?

LMP: Louise Mosley Porter

MH: And how do you spell Mosley?

LMP: M-O-S-L-E-Y

DR: I saw "Elizabeth" on this headstone down here. Is that your mother? Elizabeth Mosley?

JP: Oh, no, no. No, it's somebody went to church, you know, down there, you know. They was—when they built the cemetery, he built it where the family out here, but yet still the people came and joined the churches, you know, back then. And when they died, you know, the church had a cemetery, and they would bury them in the cemetery. So it's members of the church down [*inaudible*].

MH: Are you members of that church?

JP: Well, we were.

MH: Is there no service or [inaudible]?

JP: Well, no, and see, pastors of the church—some of them, you know—been messing up, you know. They've been having different pastors and stuff like that, so it has been—but my brother, I had a brother, you know, that was [inaudible] the church, Frank Porter. And he was [inaudible] the church. So when he died, you know, everything just went haywire, so--they held onto the church, the Porters have. One to my daddy, and from one to the other one. But then back, you know, in the '50s, you know, I had an uncle, he was the pastor of the church down there. And he—the pastor down there was Reverend McGuire [spelling?]. And he held the church together for a long, long time. And so when he died, you know, they started having other pastors. But then each [inaudible]. And back in the days, you know, of that, the people [inaudible] were different, they had more love for each other, and they--

MH: I keep coming across the name of Frances. Is that someone who was involved with the church or the family of—

JP: Frances

RM: Aunt Frances

JP: She was the one—she was my granddaddy's daughter, my daddy's sister. She lived in the house up there.

MH: OK

JP: Yeah

MH: Well, thank you so much.

DR: Any time

MLP, to DR: Well, how's them little girls and boys you got?

DR: They're doing great, getting big as can be. Vivian just had her twelfth birthday a few days ago.

MLP: Now, what was it, a girl?

DR: Yeah, Vivian's my daughter. She's the one—she's up to here on my now. [Laughter] Of course, I'm short anyway. My son, Chuck, he's already about up to here now. He's eight.

MLP: Oh, I know, I know.

DR: He's a funny little windmill of energy.

MLP: I got great-grandsons that have graduated. I got a granddaughter going to graduate Friday. And you can imagine how long we've been here.

DR: You've been waiting for that.

MLP: It's not a grandson, I mean a great-grandson.

DR: Oh, wow. That's an achievement. [*Several people speak at once; difficult to distinguish individual threads of conversation.*] I probably won't live that long. I probably won't get to see grandkids. My dad didn't. He died before my kids were born. [*Several people speak at once; difficult to distinguish individual threads of conversation.*]

RM: [Inaudible] thirteen on Thursday, fourteen on Friday. I came home late Friday. I was [inaudible]

MH: Lots of kids for Christmas

[*Several people speak at once; difficult to distinguish individual threads of conversation.*]

MH: We also have a—we have an archives and a museum, so we [inaudible]. So part of this will go into like an oral history collection, but we also have a physical paper storage and photographs, and—

MLP: So you want to do the history?

MH: Yeah, I think I want to do more history and, you know, that's what was part of meeting the people who've lived here. So, I don't know. We'll see and do a little bit more digging and research, and hopefully we can, you know, start working and see what historic we can get for this area, too.

DR: We would really help [inaudible]. See, we [inaudible] fifteen-year history and thirty-six projects [inaudible] Harvard Law graduate [inaudible—Battle?]. We ended up beating them after a two-and-a-half-year fight because what they wanted to put in—this guy, Ralston George, [inaudible] no representation, seven things in his sales pitch, you know, we found were complete lies, busted him on that. And it took five months, and they got approved. And we were hoping just to get that land [inaudible] the Porter Road Historical—Porter Road Community Historical [inaudible]. We thought it'd be neat because, with all the schools around here, they could come here, see artifacts in their designated area, we'd come out and see the plantation house, the cemetery, and all those things in the church, you know, that would make it something that people could come see, and in one way, too, generate some income for the Porter family here. I think they could be the tenants [?] of it and the dossiers [means docents?] of it, and have, you know, something where you could stay here and show people around, you know, let it speak for itself. But [inaudible].

MH: That's a lot to take on.

DR: Yeah

MLP: My sisters hear some things that I don't even remember, you know, because I was younger, I'm next to the baby. And Rosie, you know, she passed, so I was, you know, next to her. So they tell me things that—I just have to read.

MH, *laughing*: And you almost start thinking, “Was I there?”

MLP: Yes!

MH: “Was I? Was?”

MLP, *laughing*: Oh, I tell you!

MH: Well, we have—I mean, I don’t know what sort of artifacts, but we also have, you know, storage and archival storage and subject files and all these different things to store it in and to keep them. We actually have an exhibit right now on Flat Rock in our museum. So we’ve worked with Johnny, and he’s put some of the artifacts into our museum, and we bring tours and people through there, so—

DR: That’d be cool.

MH: Yeah. Here’s this information.

DR: Is that something you think that could be done for the Porter family, Porter community, or—

MH: Yeah, I mean, we’re a repository for your—I mean, for your stories and your archives and—I’m not sure [inaudible] [*laughs*]. No, but we’re here, and you know, as a resource and trying to share stories and share DeKalb stories. But, you know, we’re also a storage—you know, we hold onto these materials, digitize them—[*in response to DR’s inaudible question or comment*] yeah, essentially, and digitize them, and sometimes they get shared, you know, like, on our blog. You know, we might write a story about it or make an exhibit, you know, might be part of that. So it’s just, you know, it’s just a way to preserve things. You’d be amazed about how many people come and research and, like I said, I was hoping our archivist would come, but she actually just got back from vacation and had some things to do. So if you want to talk more about that, she’ll be happy to reach out.

DR: That would be cool if there was a way for that to happen, for you guys to have, not only your history preserved and get it historically designated to right here, you know, and—[*Several people speak at once; difficult to distinguish individual threads of conversation.*] you guys made income off of that, you know, [inaudible] retire—well, you’re already retired, but I’m saying, you know, generate something for this community, to keep it up and for future generations, too, where they would have, you know. All the stuff that the Porters have been through in their past and their history, it would be the big pay-off to be able to keep it and live from it. I think that’d be awesome and well-deserved.

JP: Well, yeah, be like Flat Rock now. I mean, when I go through there, you know, so much done went on, [inaudible] just don’t know.

MH: And Flat Rock is part of the Arabia Mountain National Heritage Area, so they're kind of looped into that, and so Arabia Mountain does the larger interpretation and preservation, and Johnny also has the Flat Rock Archives, which is similar to what it sounds like what your idea is. And he does tours and has all of their family history there.

DR: What's his name?

MH: His name is Johnny Waits.

DR: Johnny Wait?

MH: Waits

DR: Waits?

MH: Mm-hm. It's the Waits family, is the big family from Flat Rock. But like I said, he's kind of worked in partnership with us, and so we have, like I say, we have an exhibit based on that.

DR: Well, based off what we've been researching in those communities, [inaudible].

MLP: [Inaudible] kind of guy he is? Johnny Waits.

MH: I'm sorry?

MLP: About how old—Johnny Waits, how—

DR: He's a good-looking rich man [*laughs*].

MH: Johnny, he's fifties or so? Yeah. He's—you'd mentioned Chris Rock—or Chris Tucker is part of the family. He likes to share that he's from Flat Rock.

MLP: OK, [inaudible] Johnny Waits, his daddy, that must be his son.

MH: Yeah, there is Bryant—the family is also the Bryant family, the last name. Oh, yeah—the Waits, Bryants, and there are some others. It was lovely meeting you, and thank you so much for coming here.

JP: [Inaudible] The Wait [sic] family is connected with the Porter family, and we got families over there in Flat Rock, and you know, some of us, we don't know them. We haven't been, you know—

RM: That's what Mama was trying to do before she got sick. She was working on doing like a big family reunion for, you know, the Porter family, including the Waits family and Smith family—

DR: She was the one who was actually working on documenting—documenting—the book--

RM: Mama had wrote a book. [Inaudible] got the book, but [inaudible] I don't know where the book is. But she had—

JP: Yes, she had went to Johnny Waits's funeral. And he's a older guy, he was older than I was.

RM: OK

JP: Johnny Waits. So this must be his son.

MH: I think it is. I think it's—yeah. And yeah, because he's fifties, sixties, I think?

JP: Yeah, he's—he's his son.

LMP: Yeah, you know one way you look at it, we just one big family.

MH, *laughing*: It's a small world, too.

LMP: You know, people [inaudible] color, you know, and—[*To DR*] Don't you fall, Rik!

DR, *laughing*: I know, I said, "Where's the back of the seat?" I leaning—

LMP: You know, like [inaudible] Walker. You know, we come from slavery. He was a White man. So we all—you know, I don't see what the race is about. We all related some kind of way, you know. We was brought up in slavery, quite natural, you know, and one was Black and one was White, just like they getting married today.

DR: Yeah

LMP: You know, what is the big problem? People don't like each other, you know. It's a [inaudible—"raceless"?] thing, you know.

DR: I've never understood that. But the other thing—

LMP: It's crazy

DR: --when you put it together, is the past that they've all been through, the same. Just like you have Navajo, Iroquois, Sioux, and various Indian tribes, Apache, so on and so forth, that are—but yet they've got the preservation of their history. But we'll just have that here with different slave families, their past—the Waits—

LMP: Yeah

[*Several people talk simultaneously; difficult to distinguish individual threads of conversation.*]

DR: We've all been through the same thing. It kind of keeps a nice chain to keep the history, where we can go back to there's this family here that went through it, one over here, and you can kind of see the pattern [inaudible].

LMP: Yeah

DR: So future generations can know what happened.

LMP: Now, either you can go down—

MH: Well, thank you so much. It was wonderful talking to you. [*Many voices in agreement.*] And you might see me again, I don't know. We'll see what this turns into. I hope, you know—

DR: Any time

MH: And reach out—and just—

END OF RECORDING

*Transcribed by CS*

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