

SCOTTTDALE BLACK COMMUNITY

RECORDED AT THE SCOTTTDALE HAMILTON SENIOR CENTER

FIRST MALE SPEAKER [unidentified] rises from table, where he has been conversing with other people also seated at the table, including two ladies identified as JENNIE HENDERSON and PEARL NORMAN, and an unidentified lady seated between MS. HENDERSON and MS. NORMAN. Other people are seated in groups at other tables in the background. FIRST MALE SPEAKER, facing away from camera, addresses all assembled: I just wanted to let you that we're going to start our videotaping—

MALE VOICE off-camera, calling for quiet and attention: Ladies.

FIRST MALE SPEAKER continues: --and I—I just wanted to let you know. [Resumes seat at table and faces camera] As a part of the DeKalb Historical Society program each month they sponsor an activity called "I Remember Hour." The "I Remember Hour" this month is being held at Scottdale, Georgia, here at the Scottdale Hamilton Senior Center. We have five senior citizens of Scottdale who are going to speak to us today, and the first one is going to be Ms. Jennie Henderson.

Camera pans to MS. HENDERSON, who reads from notes: Well, I want to tell some of the beginning of the Scottdale history. In the early ninetens [hundreds?], nested in the north DeKalb, was a small mill town. The name of Scottdale was given by Mr. Orville [spelling?] of Conyers, Georgia, in honor of the late Colonel George Washington Scott, to the mill village surrounding the cotton mill, which the Scott Investment Company erected there in 1900. Colonel George Washington Scott also founded Agnes Scott College. The Scottdale Mill provided a large portion of the families with jobs. The Scottdale Mill closed its doors in 1982. Many of the black people had established their own businesses. Most of the residents of Scottdale depended on the mill for employment as well as for their livelihood. They worked in the mill performing minimal tasks. Others found employment through their skilled tradesmanship, such as rock mason, bridge stone mason, auto mechanic, cement finish [sic]. There was one doctor, Dr. Conrad Allgood, who served both black and white residents in his home for nearly thirty years.

Long before the town of Scottdale was established, and on the present site of the Scottdale Mill, lived a black family named Heard [sp?]. The Scottdale Cemetery was originally the Heard family cemetery. As the community grew and the families moved in, some of the first black families settled in the Scottdale community was the Heard, Moses, Lee, Shaw, Aiken, Kilgo, Umstead, Burns, and Rhodes [Rose?]. Scottdale was racially divided by the Georgia Railroad track. The white families lived on the west side in mill-owned houses. Black families settled in the pocket of the hilly east side. Ms. Norma Gay Winchester owned land throughout the Scottdale community. She was concerned about black people having someplace to live. In the early '20s she sold her land in lots. The lot size were 50 by 150, and she sold them for one hundred dollars per lot: five dollars down payment and one dollar per week. She made provision in the contract that the Eskimo Heights Subdivision, which was known as Scottdale, be sold to black only.

Throughout the community was named after families that purchased the land. Some streets was named, such as Robins [sic, Robinson?] Avenue, Pressley, Franklin, Green, Gibbons, and so forth. Throughout the community of Scottdale there was other known subdivisions, such as Guthrie Town [spelling?], Exchange Avenue, New Deal, Valley Brook, McLendon, Avondale black community, Ohm Avenue, Rockbridge, Mill Village, Scottdale Mill. In the 1800s the Ingleside community, which is known as Avondale, was established by the Englishman by the name of Dooley [spelling?].

In the time of need and problems, most black and white sought spiritual advice from Scottdale's Ms. Tobie Grant. She consoled many and handed out food and knowledge. A well-known fortune teller for both black and white, Ms. Tobie Grant was Scottdale's closest claim to affluence. In 1960 Ms. Tobie Grant donated forty acres of land to the Scottdale community for a community recreation center and library, which was named in her honor.

The first black church was established in the early 1800s, which was Williams Temple, later name changed to St. Stephen's A.M.E. Church. The second church established was Old Chapel Baptist Church in 1897 under the leadership of Reverend Kilgo, later changed to Chapel First. These two churches served as spiritual and education facilities to the Scottdale. There was many more churches; there are thirteen churches in Scottdale.

The first school was Avondale Colored School, which was built by Julian Rosewater in 1924. And yes, as years passed by the eighth and ninth grade was added. As progress was made, the school was renovated; and the name was changed to Avondale Colored High School. This school served one-half of DeKalb's black community. The Avondale white high school had a conflict in the mailing address, so the Avondale Colored High School was asked to change its name. The name was changed to Hamilton High, in honor of the late Ms. Maud Hamilton Dawson, one of the first principals.

As the community grew and families moved in, there was an increasing need to expand schools. Recognizing the need for land, Mr. Robert Shaw donated, in the mid-'40s, the land for the new school building. In 1954 Robert Shaw Elementary School was built and named in the honor of Mr. Robert Shaw. Robert Shaw [Elementary School] and Hamilton High was the first two black institutions named after black citizens of DeKalb County. In 1969, by court order, to achieve racial balance [integration?] throughout the county, all DeKalb County black schools was closed. For Scottdale, Hamilton High and Robert Shaw Schools was closed. Somehow the community would never be the same. The very lifeline of the community has been served [sic—severed?]. The only stabilizing force left to hold the community together was the council. The community consisted of several different organizations. The Scottdale Planning Council was organized in the year of 1959 with the participation of the entire neighborhood. The officers at that time were Ed Fowler [president?]; George Cooper, vice-president; Mary L. Barber, secretary. And Ms. Riggins [spelling?] was principal of the Robert Shaw Elementary School. The meetings was always held at Robert Shaw School. The committee finally was unable to enter the school; the meetings was held outside of the school. The lights of the committee's cars was used to see how to conduct the meetings. After some discussion and planning, it was decided that a light would be placed outside of the school. In order to meet the goal, it was agreed that the committee would pay dues for one dollar per month, twelve dollars per year, in order to have funds for the light bill. After making two payments on the light bill, the [inaudible—account? council?] was taken over by the [inaudible—county? council?]. The next goal project was to have some means of recreation for our children. Ms. Tobie Grant donated forty acres of land in order that a park be constructed. The donation of the land was discussed with the county officials and was

asked that a recreation center and swimming pool be built on the property. The Scottdale Planning Council was very instrumental in various other additions as improvements to our community, such as street lights, paved roads, sidewalks, sewer lines, mail delivery, and traffic light at the intersection of Glendale and North Decatur Roads. However, we was unsuccessful in our attempt to keep our school in the community. With the assistance of [DeKalb?] Community Development and various citizens of the community, such as Ms. Doris London [spelling?], Ms. Annie Pearl Cooper, Mr. John Cooper, Daisy Bickford [spelling?], Ms. Frances Lucas, Pauline Moore, Mr. John Lewis, Mr. and Mrs. Frank [inaudible—Pope? Pohl?], Ms. Pearl Norman, Ms. Mary Lucas, and many more. [Looks up briefly and then back at notes.] That's about it [inaudible].

FIRST MALE SPEAKER [off-camera]: OK. If it's all right with you, we'll left [inaudible—sounds like Sharp?] share a little bit of her experiences.

CAMERA PANS RIGHT TO LADY AT JENNIE HENDERSON'S LEFT

FIRST MALE SPEAKER [off-camera, to next intended speaker]: Is that OK? Are you—would you like to share—

JENNIE HENDERSON [off-camera, to lady at her left]: It's OK with me. I mean, OK with me.

LADY AT JENNIE HENDERSON'S LEFT: [Very soft-spoken, difficult to hear] Well, it seems like—I don't know.

FIRST MALE SPEAKER [off-camera]: OK.

LADY AT JENNIE HENDERSON'S LEFT: When I moved into this community in 1938, there were no paved streets, no running water, and if you [inaudible]--like if you were going to church—you always took two pair of shoes, because one pair would be muddy [difficult to hear—sounds like “from the street if it was raining”]. And that's the way it was. [Laughs] But the history was there [inaudible].

FIRST MALE SPEAKER [off-camera, to next intended speaker]: Ms. Pearl Norman.

CAMERA PANS RIGHT TO PEARL NORMAN, who speaks: Well, Ms. Henderson, she has just about covered everything. But around '28 or '29 I lived right up there on

Cedar. And we was all mixed in up there, because it was white and black. Right above us was white—and there was a little white store, Mr. Anderson. From there on, up to where the funeral home—that was white. All of us lived together then. I think that was '28 and '29—'30, because I had a brother born in '30. We lived and got along fine in here at that time. And there wasn't any paved street. There wasn't hardly streets—the way I [inaudible] it was where the wagons—some of these streets in here, where the wagons and horses had made the streets, and then they cut them [the streets] in years to come. But now, because I know, over on Franklin Street, there was just a small—where I used to live—a small, narrow street. They cut it, later in years to come. And after [inaudible] we had sewer line, we got in gas and everything. We signed a petition for all of that. So we got everything that we really signed for, we got it. [Sits back, indicating that she is finished.]

CAMERA PANS BACK TO LADY BETWEEN MS. HENDERSON AND MS. NORMAN: I'd like to say something about our—we had a [inaudible] supervisor in this community. Ms. Narvie Harris, and I think everybody loved her.

MS. NORMAN [off-camera]: Mmm-hmm.

LADY BETWEEN MS. HENDERSON AND MS. NORMAN: But she had a—the Board of Education had their own—these were white people—their own building. And she had to work out of Cox Funeral Home in Decatur to have her meetings. If they were having a funeral, that meant she couldn't have a meeting at the time. But she worked real good with this community, and everybody loved her. And I always feel bad because something was ever named for her. You know, I always thought that something should have been. She should have been honored in some way.

FIRST MALE SPEAKER [off-camera, to LADY BETWEEN MS. HENDERSON AND MS. NORMAN]: What kind of things did Ms. Harris do in the community in terms of [trails off, inaudible].

LADY BETWEEN MS. HENDERSON AND MS. NORMAN: Well, she worked not only this community, but she worked with the whole county. And she would go from school to school. Well, you know what a supervisor does—for the teachers and so forth, like that. But she made herself personal with the people in this community. And everybody loved her.

FIRST MALE SPEAKER [off-camera]: Mr. Fred T. Sterling.

CAMERA PANS TO FRED T. STERLING, seated at the right of MS. HENDERSON. MR. STERLING speaks: You [inaudible] a lot—you know some about Scottdale. When I moved in here, you couldn't get up here to a car. What I mean, it was just a gully, gully. They had to drop me up here in a truck, and I bought that house right there [points]. And they didn't have light, they didn't have gas, and they didn't have mailmen. And I got out on my feet and went around from house to house; I never will forget it, to get gas, lights, and mailman here in Scottdale. So it was just gullies. And the lots in Scottdale was selling—some of them was selling for twenty-five dollars a lot. Some of them was selling for fifteen dollars, because I could have bought—I could have bought [points] that house there and another house out there for fifteen hundred dollars. But I didn't have the money. You know, fifteen hundred dollars then was some money. But I never will forget it, you know. Because it was--in Scottdale, what I mean, it was just hilly and hills. You couldn't—there wasn't no road, just like they said, there wasn't no roads. If you went down through that way [points], going down toward [inaudible], you had to walk down a little path. And you—I never will forget, Ms. Witherspoon—y'all remember Ms. Witherspoon—she lived in a two-room little old log house set up on a bank right down here. I never will forget it. But I done a lots of walking through Scottdale to get gas, lights, and mailman. [Sits back]

FIRST MALE SPEAKER [on camera]: We have one other person, who is going to be celebrating his birthday this month, and that's Mr. John H. Lewis. [Moves aside so that Mr. Lewis can be seen.]

JOHN H. LEWIS: [Inaudible] . . . everything just about what I know [inaudible]. I'm a native of Decatur. I married my wife, and I came here in '42. And after I stayed here for a while, well, for a long time, [inaudible] we didn't have no lights, didn't have no lights, didn't have no water, didn't have no gas, the roads were muddy. I used to walk tip-toed through the mud [inaudible] my shiny shoes on [laughs]. Ride the streetcar down here for a nickel. And in later years we found a community of [inaudible]. And we started working on lights and gas and water and mail. And we got all of that now [inaudible]. And we used to—I used to walk all around here, look over these hills, stand on this side and look all the way across over there on the red hill— [inaudible] we called it back then. It was just an old country place back at that time. I

came—later I started working at the mill, working the mill for a pretty good—for a long time, about [inaudible—sounds like “sixty-seven” or “six or seven”?] years running [inaudible—sounds like “cotton machine”?]. And in later years they began to venture out, Scottdale began to start growing [inaudible]. Then I left the mill when I started working for the—working for the government out in Conley, [inaudible] warehouse. [Sits back; camera pans back to FIRST MALE SPEAKER.]

FIRST MALE SPEAKER [on camera]: It seems like you had a real active community organization in Scottdale. [Camera pans to PEARL NORMAN.]

PEARL NORMAN : Well, they did. Because my children, when they used to go to school, had to cross the branch there. And if it came a real hard rain, then they couldn't get across the branch. They'd have to come in and go around. And if that branch [inaudible], my children have to turn around and went round; because I always told them that if that little creek get up, don't cross. And they'd go all the way around so they could stay on solid ground to get home. We've had our—it has been hard in here, but we made it. And we're still making it, and we're going to continue to make it. [Sits back; camera pans to lady seated between Ms. Henderson and Ms. Norman.]

LADY BETWEEN MS. HENDERSON AND MS. NORMAN: I would like to say that during the schools—when the schools were here in the community, the PTA was a big force—

PEARL NORMAN: Yeah.

LADY BETWEEN MS. HENDERSON AND MS. NORMAN: --of helping people. We had a beautiful PTA. And we worked—everybody worked together. And that's one of the things—the PTA kind of went over to the Planning Council. That meant everybody in the community was involved—not just a few people, everybody. [FIRST MALE SPEAKER speaks; camera pans back to him.]

FIRST MALE SPEAKER: Well, we do appreciate your time. I would like—I don't want to leave without making sure that you've said everything that you'd like to share with us. And so I'd like to ask you, is there anything at this point that you'd like to share in closing that maybe it might be some information that you think would be valuable for your children and your grandchildren?

JENNIE HENDERSON: Well, I'd just like to add [reading from notes] that Scottdale is usually a striving community with many social and service organizations, such as the Scottdale Child Development Center, Scottdale Senior Citizens, the Tobie Grant Tenants Association, Oak Forest Tenants Association, Hamilton Community Center, Tobie Grant Recreation Center, Tobie Grant Library, and the Concerned Citizens—they're a very active organization of Scottdale. They work with the police department. They are working with them to help make our community safer from drugs, burglars, and other things. And we have a lot of help from a lot of the organizations of Scottdale. So we—I forgot to mention the Athletic Association. We have one of the greatest athletic associations and a winning team, our football team.

LADY SEATED BETWEEN MS. HENDERSON AND MS. NORMAN: I'd like to thank you— [Camera pans to her, then to MR. LEWIS, who has also begun to speak.]

JOHN H. LEWIS: Our Community Planning Council, we are fixing to build two houses coming up in December. That's going to be out of our community.

JENNIE HENDERSON: I would like to add a little bit to that. [Camera pans back to Ms. Henderson.] DeKalb Community Development have helped us a long ways. They've helped us to get this building done, to open our office in the Hamilton Building, and they are also funding our program for the houses. And so we depend greatly upon the DeKalb Community Development. [Camera pans to Ms. Norman, as she begins to speak.]

PEARL NORMAN: And another thing we found, before we had this school here, I think what really pushed us out real fast, our PTA, we was going to raise money and build us a school. But then DeKalb County came and built the school. We had started working; we was going to work and build us a school. We did come in and—and we've done a lot of work around here, not only a few people, but a lot of them. The whole community has worked in here, not a few people.

UNIDENTIFIED OFF-CAMERA SPEAKER: It sounds like it, too.

FIRST MALE SPEAKER: I sure do appreciate your sharing your time with us.

END OF RECORDING

Transcribed by CS