

An Interview with

MRS. EVELYN CALDWELL

June 12, 1978

Interviewed by

Daisy M. Greene

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Scope Note: The Washington County Library System, with assistance from the Mississippi Department of Archives and History, conducted oral history interviews with local citizens. The project interviews took place between 1976 and 1978. The interviewees included long-term residents of the Greenville-Washington County area in their late 50's and older.

June 12, 1978. This is Daisy Greene interviewing Mrs. Evelyn Caldwell for the Washington County Library System.

Mrs. Caldwell, will you give me your mother's maiden name?

CALDWELL: Patricia Hardman.

GREENE: Let's begin by talking about your school days at Moorhead.

CALDWELL: Well, my mother entered me at the age of five and I remained there until I was twelve - summer and winter. It was the only home I had. She entered me there because I had no supervision and she had to work all the time. When I was twelve, the Wallaces took me and adopted me. They knew my mother because my mother rented a little house right behind in their back yard. I spent most of the time with the Wallaces, Lillie and Harold Wallace.

GREENE: Wasn't Mr. Wallace connected with a bank?

CALDWELL: Yes. There was a negro bank here called the Peoples Bank on Walnut Street, between Washington Avenue and Main Street. There were quite a few blacks here with money then. Like all in this area - the Straughters, the Raines, and the Shelleys, owned all this property in here and they had money so they put it in the bank. It seemed that the bank didn't do very well.

GREENE: Who were some of the other black officials?

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CALDWELL: It was Rubin Ware. Rubin Ware as the cashier and Harry Wallace, but I was so young then I really don't remember all about it, but I do remember those two.

GREENE: What about Willie Bell? Wasn't he connected with it?

CALDWELL: Yes, he was. I think he was from Natchez. He moved here. He wasn't an old Greenvillian.

GREENE: Do you have any idea about how long that bank lasted?

CALDWELL: I don't have the remotest idea. I was young and it was just because Mr. Wallace was my father that I knew that much of it.

GREENE: Well, when you were growing up, in your young girlhood days what about black professional men, like lawyers, dentists?

CALDWELL: Dr. John Overton was the first dentist here. His office was on Washington Avenue near the old levee.

GREENE: Near the levee.

CALDWELL: Not this levee, this is the new levee. The old levee. It was a building over there and on this corner was Joe Gow Nue's store. That old building I think is still there.

GREENE: That's Joe Gow Nue's Number One.

CALDWELL: Yes.

GREENE: So Overton had an office ---

CALDWELL: On Washington, right near the levee, right

at the levee, that old two-story building.

GREENE: I didn't know that.

CALDWELL: He was the first black dentist.

GREENE: Well, what did black people do for dental care before his arrival?

CALDWELL: I really don't know. They probably went to the white --- I really don't know.

GREENE: And what has happened to his family?

CALDWELL: They all moved away from here and I think there's only one daughter living now. She lived in New York, the youngest daughter. The rest of them died, Sadie and Granville.

GREENE: Didn't the Granville Carters adopt Dr. Overton's wife?

CALDWELL: Yes. The same time Mrs. Wallace adopted me - they were friends and both of them wanted a girl. Elizabeth Carter Overton came from Yazoo City and she was recommended by Mrs. Coleman to Mrs. Carter and Elizabeth was older than I. She was keeping company and I was twelve years old.

GREENE: Now, you forgot to tell me something about how life was at the school in Moorhead.

CALDWELL: It was beautiful, just beautiful. Our teachers all came from the East, from Massachusetts and around New York. They were all batchelor girls. They were really grown folk but not married. I can think of some of their names - Miss Roe and Mrs. Mine. Mrs. Emmerson was a matron and

Miss Kennedy, I loved her. She was just darling to me. My chore was to dust her room. She had a rabbit. It was a candy bowl in the shape of a rabbit. She kept it full of candy, and she would tell me that when I was through dusting I could get me some candy. I'd take one piece of candy and she didn't miss the candy. I could have eaten it all but she said, "I want you to take more than one piece. I mean for you to take more than one piece of candy, so I started taking two pieces, but I could have taken all of that candy because -- All my mother could do was to pay for my tuition and my music. I didn't have any -- I didn't know what nickels were.

GREENE: Well, who started this school in Moorhead?

CALDWELL: Mrs. Pond - at that time I think Mrs. Pond really owned Moorhead. She built the school. Evidently she and Miss Emmerson must have been pretty close friends, I don't know. Miss Emmerson was the matron. Well, she built the school and there was a bridge that went over a little stream of water from her house to where the school was built and we were allowed to go on that bridge in the afternoon and look at Mrs. Pond's house. I reckon we couldn't wait to do that.

GREENE: She was a Southern woman?

CALDWELL: I don't know. Well, I really don't know, but they said she owned Moorhead and she had a daughter who married a man here. Oh, Milton Smith.

GREENE: Oh, Milton Smith. He was the one connected with the newspaper here, wasn't he?

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CALDWELL: I don't know.

GREENE: Oh, that was Pink Smith.

CALDWELL: He had a shingle place or something out here in the northern part of town (staves), some kind of a factory. I've forgotten.

GREENE: Was the school well attended?

CALDWELL: Oh, yes. All the kids my age had the top story and they called it The Attic and they had little beds close together. The place was full and the second story was where the larger girls stayed. It was always full. We would have devotion and they had it down in the library - the girls could go down, the larger girls would go down and you could play the piano and we ate right in the dining room with the teachers.

GREENE: Was this school sponsored by the same organization that sponsored Tougaloo?

CALDWELL: Yes. American Missionary.

GREENE: And what eventually happened to it?

CALDWELL: It burned.

GREENE: It was of course exclusively for black girls.

CALDWELL: Black girls, no boys, and we had some day students - a few girls who lived there. I don't think there were over two or three stores in Moorhead then, little bitty stores, but we would go every Monday they would take the kids to the store if they had money. Of course I never had any, but Mrs. Kennedy would always give me a quarter and say, "Now, you go with them. I don't want you to feel bad."

GREENE: Didn't you tell me that one of the ladies wanted you to go home with her to Alabama?

CALDWELL: Mrs. Kennedy, but my mother wouldn't agree to it. She wanted to adopt me. A lot of those teachers did adopt those girls. They didn't adopt them as servants, they gave them a beautiful education. Oh, yes. They didn't adopt them to wait on them. Well, Mrs. Kennedy wanted me and I wanted Mrs. Kennedy but nothing ---

GREENE: Now, let's talk about your school life at Number Two School.

CALDWELL: Oh, I went to Number Two until I finished at sixteen and Mrs. Coleman would send us -- Well, I won't say I was so brilliant, of course I dug for mine - the smartest ones she would send to the Court House to take a teacher's examination, so by the time they finished the courses there in Number Two School they would be eligible to teach. At that time if you passed three straight years, passed that examination, you were eligible to teach. They didn't go away to school or anything, but when Mrs. Coleman finished training you, if you hadn't finished anything, if you hadn't taken any kind of examination, you would be eligible to teach because she certainly was a tough teacher.

GREENE: Was she a hard taskmaster?

CALDWELL: Yes, indeed. She was a mathematician. Oh, and Mr. Bass used to bring his problems there during -- They used to have summer normals. Mrs. Coleman had a colored normal

at her school and Mr. Bass would have the white students. We'd look up and see Mr. Bass coming. He'd be coming with a problem. "Here Lizzy, work this for me. I can't work that thing." They are there waiting on it and she'd work it out and he's go and take the problem back. No one could beat her in arithmetic and algebra.

GREENE: I remember she was good.

CALDWELL: Oh, yes.

GREENE: Who were some of the other teachers at Number Two?

CALDWELL: Well, there was Mrs. Kate Lewis and Professor Caesar Holmes. He was nice and Fred Johnson was there. He was young. I can't remember the others, its been so long.

GREENE: Garrett. Do you know anything about a Mrs. Garrett?

CALDWELL: Well, she taught the primary grades.

GREENE: Yes. I haven't seen anyone or interviewed anyone who knew anything about Mrs. Garrett.

CALDWELL: Well, all I know about her was when I was going to school I saw her. After I finished I don't know. Evidently, Mrs. Garrett died or something. She lived right up the street from us, Shelby Street. She was a very lovely looking woman. She looked like your mother, very much like Mrs. Irene Miller, and she had charge of the primary grades.

GREENE: That was in the old fire station.

CALDWELL: Yes in the old fire station, but I don't

remember anything. She didn't teach in the higher classes at all.

Mrs. Lucas was our music teacher. She was a fine music teacher and had studied in England. She was fine and she taught piano. I took piano from her. If you missed a note, she'd hit you over your fingers with that ruler, better not miss a note. We sang beautiful songs. When I graduated I played "The Dance of the Demons", and that was a very intricate piece.

GREENE: Could you play the first five notes now?

CALDWELL: No, I don't even know where middle C is now.

GREENE: Well, where did Delila Lampton fit in the picture?

CALDWELL: Well, Delila came here from Washington. You know Bishop Lampton reared his children in Washington. After they finished he brought them here and she -- and eventually they built the Lampton building down there on the East End of Washington. She married a druggist and opened a drugstore. She was wonderful in music. She played the organ at St. Matthew. Gertrude was the Choirister. I sang alto in the choir. We used to have recitals and the white people would come in crowds to hear us sing. We sang beautiful classic songs, you know.

GREENE: Do you remember Joe Moody?

CALDWELL: Yes, he was our ice man. He sang in the choir and your father too, Dr. Miller. John Pinion had a beautiful tenor voice. He was just somebody they picked up who worked for the bakery. He delivered bread and he had the most beautiful tenor voice. Mr. Lindsey sang and Mr. Dan Alexander

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had a beautiful bass voice. He used to sing "Deep River" all the time. Oh, it was just beautiful.

GREENE: Well, were there any black lawyers when you were coming up?

CALDWELL: Yes. There were two, Winston and Taylor, Skinner Taylor and Maury Winston, we always said he was white. He was just as white as he could be but he was passing for a negro. He came here from Natchez and lived right across the street at Mrs. Raines, right across from where I was reared.

GREENE: Do you remember Judge Winston's first name?

CALDWELL: I've been trying to think of his first name but I can't. I can't think of his first name.

GREENE: Now we've talked about your earning your teacher's license. What did you teach, Mrs. Caldwell? How long did you teach?

CALDWELL: Well, I didn't teach too long because they didn't pay enough. I taught at Number Two School, right where I finished, and Mrs. Coleman had to whip children to make them call me "Miss". They didn't want to because some of them were older than I you know. After I married I taught at Number Seven School with Mrs. Lucy Webb. I taught out there a while. Well, I didn't teach too long because I married when I was eighteen, then too they didn't pay but \$25 a month.

GREENE: That's the worst yet.

CALDWELL: \$25 a month. Well, money has always made me tick so I said I've got to do something else. I dreamed up

this beauty work. I like beauty work and I read, I read everything I can find on that, so I learned to manicure - just taught myself - and I know the different muscles in the face and in the scalp. I gave scalp massages and facials and I started out like that. I made some cards and I sold them for \$5 cash. You'd get \$6 worth of treatment if you bought a card.

GREENE: You were a business woman.

CALDWELL: I had more work than I could do. Some of my customers' children are living now, like Miss Kitty Goldstein, Mrs. Earl Solomon and Mr. Solomon. His mother -- Oh, I just loved her, she was darling, and Miss Kitty was too. All of them were darling, some of them are still living and have grandchildren.

GREENE: Kitty Goldstein was one of your clients?

CALDWELL: Yes and her son is the one who has the Bookstore down there on Washington Avenue, Nathan. Oh, he was a darling little boy. I was just crazy about him. We all spoiled him. I also went to the Percys and the Waldauer's.

GREENE: William -- ?

CALDWELL: No, old lady Percy, Mrs. LeRoy Percy. She was one of my regular customers, see I went every week. I had customers for every week but I went to her twice a week. She was a French woman but I think she came here from New Orleans. New Orleans was her home.

GREENE: So you know many of the older families of Greenville through your beauty work.

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CALDWELL: Oh, yes.

GREENE: And you found that it paid better than the teaching.

CALDWELL: Oh, I was making more than Caldwell at the post office. I really was, and oh, they were so lovely to me at Christmas time. I was loaded down with beautiful gifts. The Alexanders, the lumber people, there was Otto Wineman and the Erlichs, the Hirschs were my customers. Many more - the Bergmans and Waldauers.

GREENE: You stayed with one of the Hirsch's almost until he died, didn't you?

CALDWELL: Yes, Mr. Arthur Lazarus. He was Mrs. Hirsch's brother.

GREENE: Well, why was it that you went to ladies' houses for manicures rather than a beauty shop?

CALDWELL: Oh, there were beauty shops but it was just an idea and I didn't have any money to open a shop, so I said, "Well I'll do better this way", so I bought a portable hair dryer and I bought all my other equipment and went to the homes. They were so delighted. They wouldn't have to dress to go out and it just worked out fine.

GREENE: Cars weren't as plentiful as they are now.

CALDWELL: I went on the street car.

GREENE: Oh, I mean the white ladies, not as many had cars as they have now.

CALDWELL: Oh, no. Plenty of them had cars because

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those folks had money, you know. All those people I named were moneyed people.

GREENE: Who was the first black to have a car here?

CALDWELL: I really don't know.

GREENE: Well, tell me something about these morticians John Straughter and J. D. Smith. Do you know anything about them?

CALDWELL: Well, yes. I knew John Straughter as a child. He owned all this area up here on North Shelby. It was named for him but they have the name wrong, they have Slaughter's name, but it's Straughter. They named it for him because he owned all this property from here back to Nelson and all the way through this lane.

GREENE: Was he a Greenville man?

CALDWELL: So far as I know. He was here when I came here, I don't know, and then Smith came later, you know. John Smith came later, and Stalsworth. All of those came later but Mr. John Straughter was the first one.

GREENE: And, there was another one - Dave Willis.

CALDWELL: He took over the Straughter business. Mr. Dave Willis - what was his wife's name? Mr. Bradford took over Mr. Straughter's business and then after Mr. Bradford died, Mr. Dave Willis took it over. Willis was working for Mr. Bradford and he married Mr. Bradford's widow and he took it over.

GREENE: Did you know the first black letter carrier here?

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CALDWELL: Yes, Mr. Lewis.

GREENE: Which one was that?

CALDWELL: Bud Lewis. There were two brothers who lived on North Theobald.

GREENE: Now, let's see, his real name was ---

CALDWELL: His real name was Beverly but everybody called him Bud.

GREENE: Now, let's talk about your husband, Mr. John Caldwell. Did you ever hear him discuss his work load at the post office?

CALDWELL: Yes, it was pretty heavy. It was very heavy. Caldwell went to work, he wasn't due to work until seven o'clock but he'd go at six o'clock every morning so he could get his mail cased and you know, help those who were slow, so I'm accustomed to getting up at five o'clock. I still get up at five. I'd get up and cook his breakfast so he could get off and it was heavy. They had no transportation then for the mail. You had to carry it on your back. He'd be loaded down.

GREENE: I am looking at his picture. He looks like Santa Claus, he has so much mail. Now postmen don't have that much.

CALDWELL: He had all the downtown district. All those stairways to climb. He had to retire after he was there 35 years. He went in when he was young and so therefore he wasn't in there when they started paying the big salary. He was

still on that little salary when he retired on disability.

GREENE: How many years did you say he worked in the postal service?

CALDWELL: Thirty-five.

GREENE: Your husband was involved in a funeral company.

CALDWELL: Indirectly he was. He opened it but his two nephews, William Caldwell and Burrell Caldwell, operated it. Working for the government he could not be in it. He just opened it for them. They were the ones who owned it. It was on Walnut Street.

GREENE: Walnut Street seemed to have been a very popular street.

CALDWELL: The first shoemaker was Mr. Bivens, Henry Bivens on Walnut Street. All of them there were colored businesses. That's right.

GREENE: Do you remember the name of the man who repaired umbrellas?

CALDWELL: Yes. Wait a minute. I tried to think of it - Idella was his daughter. Now if Florence was living she could think of that man's name. He used to go around with these old umbrellas and, you know, I wish he was living now to mend your umbrellas. I have some beautiful ones that I can't get mended.

GREENE: And there was a man who would repair your cooking utensils.

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CALDWELL: I don't remember his name. Oh, I do remember. After we sold our house on O'Hea Street we moved with Mrs. Coleman and he lived there with Mrs. Coleman. His name was G. C. Rowe. Yes, he was a tinner. He called himself a tinner.

GREENE: Did Mr. Caldwell take part in civic affairs?

CALDWELL: Yes. He'd take part in all kinds of civic affairs. In fact, he organized the YMCA for blacks, and it had to be called the Nelson Street YMCA because the white YMCA objected to him opening it, so he just named it the Nelson Street YMCA. He had this little reading room. That's the beginning of the library, Miller Memorial Library. A little reading room where every Sunday he would speak to the boys, talk to them, you know, and they would gather there and read.

(End of Side 1, Tape 1)

GREENE: How did Mr. Phillip Williams fit in with the "Y"?

CALDWELL: Well, Mr. Phillip Williams owned all that property. Every fall they would have a big bazaar in Number Two School yard. They would sell candy and everything, and auction off stuff. They had a fortune teller; Bertha Jefferson was the foretune teller. Bertha Jefferson was a teacher who came from Jackson, and you know, she could really tell fortunes. People were flocking to her. I think she charged a quarter. Caldwell had the street blocked off and had a street dance. Once or twice he had a street dance, Leslie was young then, in his teens but he was playing with Little Win's Band, and he

sang "Stormy Weather." People just kept calling for Stormy Weather.

GREENE: Who is Leslie, Mrs. Caldwell?

CALDWELL: Leslie is my son, Caldwell's son.

GREENE: And he was singing ---

CALDWELL: Yes, ma'am. Stormy Weather had just come out and he had been in Chicago with my mother and had learned it, so he was spending the summer here. He spent his summers with me and he sang and every girl in town, they just kept him singing "Stormy Weather" at the dance all night. The street was blocked off from North Street to Theobald. All that was blocked off. You could dance all the way, nothing to disturb you.

GREENE: Were the streets paved then?

CALDWELL: Yes, they were paved because I don't think we could have danced on those bricks. It was paved then. The street car was running through there.

GREENE: So Mr. Caldwell worked with the YMCA and helped inspire the boys.

CALDWELL: Yes, and inspired the boys, and that's when he started the little reading room. We took books and he asked his white friends for books and he built book shelves. He bought magazines for them and they could go there on Sundays, it was always open, and read and he would talk to them. So that's the beginning of Miller Memorial Library. Many times they couldn't meet their note and Dr. Overton and Caldwell would go on a note at the bank to meet it to keep from losing it. They

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didn't intend to lose it, so they finally got it paid for.

GREENE: Now there was a redlight district in town when you were coming up, Mrs. Caldwell. Will you talk about that?

CALDWELL: Well, it was on - they called it Blanton Street, and they said that the girls were very fine and well educated girls. They say they were from a popular black college. Mrs. Blanton -- Greenville used to belong to her - and so she named the street for her. That was Lyne Starling's grandmother, Mrs. Lola Forte. That's her grandmother and I know some of the others too, I can't think of them, but after the street just got so noted, they changed the name to North Street.

GREENE: It was embarrassing.

CALDWELL: Yes, it was embarrassing.

GREENE: Now you said that most of - some of the ladies on Blanton Street were college girls. Does that mean that they came down here to ply their trade for the summer and went back to school in the winter?

CALDWELL: No, they were living there. They had finished. That's the way rumor had it. I know they were beautiful women, just beautiful and intelligent. They were not ruffians.

GREENE: Once you told me about the girls taking their walks to the levee.

CALDWELL: You see they'd come straight out O'Hea

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Street. We lived at 109 O'Hea, right on the corner of O'Hea and Shelby Street I'm living on now, and as I said, they'd take their walks to the levee as my foster mother and I would sit on the front porch every afternoon. She would make me turn the chair. We sat on a double chair-like rocker, you know, regular porch furniture. She'd get up and she'd say, "Let's turn this" and we turned our backs to the street. She didn't want me to see these women passing. We turned our backs.

GREENE: Did you ever peep?

CALDWELL: Yes. (Laughter)

GREENE: Curiosity got the best of you. Well, that finally died out then.

CALDWELL: Oh, yes.

GREENE: Do you have any idea why they called it "Redlight District"?

CALDWELL: I don't. Now this is my idea. They had a red light on all of those houses so you could tell which was which and I think that was what it was. It's been so long ago. That was when I was a child.

GREENE: Well, Mrs. Caldwell, do you remember any Ku Klux Klan activities in Greenville?

CALDWELL: No, I really don't. Greenville was the most liberal town in the South. It has always been. Of course, they did some unfair things here but it was pretty liberal.

GREENE: Now, what about the stores on Washington

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Avenue? Are any of those old stores left there?

CALDWELL: Well, Hafter's store, because that's where my mother bought her clothes and oh, he had high class clothes, and Greenley's is an old store and of course, Blum's came a little later, but I remember Hafter's.

GREENE: What about Leyser's?

CALDWELL: That was there a long time. That's one of those old stores and, by the way, Latcher's Alley was named for Mr. Latcher. He owned all that. You see, colored people in here, and all these and owned a lot of property and all these lanes they owned they named them for these colored folk, so Mr. Latcher was a bricklayer, and he built all those old buildings down town, so this alley was named Latcher's Alley. That's the last Alley you come to before you get to Alexander Street. Latcher's Alley was named for him because he owned all that property. Big Mother, Mrs. Wallace, owned all that behind her and she owned two or three little houses too.

GREENE: I understand that at one time Mr. Latcher was quite a wealthy man.

CALDWELL: Oh, yes, and Dr. Brown lived on Poplar in a beautiful home. He was one of the old doctors. His daughter became a doctor. Her name was Daisy, Daisy Brown. They were well-to-do people. They belonged to Mt. Horeb Church. Mr. Raines had the woodyard. Raines Lane was named for him, and they were well-to-do people.

GREENE: This area has changed considerably.

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CALDWELL: Oh, yes. It's real crumby.

GREENE: Do you vote, Mrs. Caldwell?

CALDWELL: I was the first negro woman to vote in Washington County.

GREENE: Well, did you have trouble registering?

CALDWELL: No, not with Caldwell. Caldwell wrote his ticket, because he was voting when none of the other negroes were voting when he came out of school here, he was voting.

GREENE: I should have asked you this: What were some of his hobbies?

CALDWELL: He liked -- Well, his real hobby was helping boys and trying to guide boys. One hobby was bridge. He was a fine bridge player, and, of course, he liked to build. He built everything, even the house when I married him, he built that house. He liked to build houses during his spare time. He built for himself. He didn't build for anybody else, but he was an expert bridge player. He loved music but he didn't play an instrument.

GREENE: What was one of his favorite pieces?

CALDWELL: Oh, he was crazy about "Blue Heaven".

GREENE: Blue Heaven. That was in the days when there were no radios, but he had a record player.

CALDWELL: That's right. He had a record player.

GREENE: Listening to "His Master's Voice."

CALDWELL: Right.

GREENE: Now tell me about this lady, you said she

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couldn't read nor write.

CALDWELL: Well, she was a friend of Caldwell's and she'd been nice to Caldwell when Caldwell was a kid coming up. When she moved here, she was a fine cook, Caldwell opened her a restaurant on Walnut Street, right on the corner of Walnut and that little alley where the Police Station used to be, around that corner, right off of Washington Avenue. She couldn't read nor write but she could cook anything. She was a beautiful cook and white people would come to her restaurant. Charlie Davis had a restaurant farther up on near the Southern depot on Walnut Street. He was black and he was the only man who made ice cream. He furnished the town ice cream. So there were quite a few black businesses on Walnut Street at that time.

GREENE: Walnut isn't so popular now.

CALDWELL: Oh, all that's built in, other things --- those buildings have been rebuilt. They were old buildings.

GREENE: So you remember the circuses on South Broadway?

CALDWELL: They came every fall of the year before school opened and we kids would get our new clothes, you know, and would be so hot. My mother would buy me a new suit, some new shoes that hurt my feet. I just had to wear it to the circus. We'd wear all our new clothes that we had gotten to go to school in and walk to the circus. You had to walk then. You walked everywhere.

GREENE: South Broadway.

CALDWELL: There were no taxis. Finally, they got the

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street cars on. They went down on South Broadway. I think that was the end of the line.

GREENE: Were there food stands on the side, on the street?

CALDWELL: Oh, yes. They'd have big parades up Washington Avenue and everybody would go. Of course, Greenville was small then. It wasn't 50,000 like it is now. And it was a much more beautiful town when it was small. Everybody knew everybody and was friendly with everybody. It was a wonderful place to live.

GREENE: Mrs. Caldwell, will you identify Charlie Reed so that our readers will not confuse him with Charlie Davis who also operated an ice cream parlor?

CALDWELL: Well, Charlie Reed is the one who made the ice cream and furnished the ice cream for Greenville, but he also had a restaurant. Every night he made this ice cream and delivered it ---

GREENE: And evidently, from what you say, he was a generation ahead of Charlie Davis and Steve Davis.

CALDWELL: Right.

GREENE: And his nephew operated a filling station on the corner of Broadway and Nelson until quite recently.

CALDWELL: Bennie Reed, his nephew. He passed on.

GREENE: Yes.

Do you remember a black fellow who used to sell vegetables named George?

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CALDWELL: Yes, we called him "Vegetable George." All the whites bought from him. He had beautiful vegetables and when my foster father died in 1910, my foster mother married a man named Mr. Dan Alexander. Well, George came by one morning and Mrs. Wallace - we still called her Mrs. Wallace - wasn't on the front porch but her husband was. George said, "Mr. Wallace where's Mrs. Wallace?" and Mr. Alexander said, "My name is not Mr. Wallace, I'm Mr. Alexander." "Well, you married Mrs. Wallace, didn't you?"

GREENE: That was cute.

GREENE: Mrs. Caldwell, how did the white ladies treat their domestic help?

CALDWELL: They treated them very good. Most of the white ladies during that time, they had maids and cooks, and they permitted their cooks to bring all of the food that was left from the table home to feed their children and all of the cooks had big white pans. You could tell them when you met them on the street that they were cooks, they had these medium size white pans that they carried the food home in.

GREENE: Mrs. Caldwell, your friend, Mrs. Mary Esther Bowman of Canton, Mississippi has this to say about the George you mentioned in your story, "Vegetable George."

She says, "I remember George quite well, when he used to go around saying, 'Sweet potatoes, ripe tomatoes and squash, squash, squash.' The children used to follow him and keep up the chants "Sweet potatoes, sweet potatoes and ripe tomatoes."

He lived directly behind Mt. Horeb Church on North

Broadway. I remember too this incident about Vegetable George: One hot summer day he made a fire to keep the mosquitoes away. He went in to take a nap and one of his good neighbors called the fire department that there was a man trapped in a burning house. George said, "My, gracious, a man can't make a little skeeter smoke and take a good nap without some busybody calling the fire department."

Mrs. Mary Esther Bowman of Canton, Mississippi is the daughter of the late Mrs. L. W. Coleman.

(End of Interview)

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7-13-78.

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