

An Interview with
Barbara (Mrs. Philip R.) Reeves
April 1, 1980

Interviewed by

Terry White

MISSISSIPPI DEPARTMENT OF ARCHIVES AND HISTORY
Post Office Box 571
Jackson., Mississippi 39205

AU 522
OH 1979.08.23
MHSOHP 1-21

Interviewee: Reeves, Barbara (Mrs. Philip R.)
Interviewer: White, Terry

Title: An interview with Barbara (Mrs. Philip R.) Reeves, April 1,
1980 / interviewed by Terry White

Collection Title: Murrah High School Advanced History Class Oral History
Project, Easter Flood of 1979

Scope Note: Murrah High School students, with assistance from the
Mississippi Department of Archives and History, conducted oral
history interviews with local citizens about the Easter Flood of
1979. The interviews were conducted during the 1979-1980
school year.

AU 522

- WHITE: This is Terry White interviewing Ms. Barbara Reeves on April 1st, 1980, about the flood of 1979. Ms. Reeves, what was your involvement in the flood?
- REEVES: Well, we approximately got about four and a half to five feet of water in our house and they came in and stripped down out six feet of sheet rock, and really stripped the house of the two by fours. We only had a shell of a house after the damage was completely taken out of the house.
- WHITE: What about your personal goods? Were you able to get them out or did you lose a lot of them?
- REEVES: Well we had enough time that we had some help moving out our furniture and the only mistake we made was not moving out all the valuables that we had. We put a lot of things on the top of the counters and shelves, but we thought the water would just come in a few feet and it came in much higher, and we lost things due to the fact that we left them, you know, too low for the water.
- WHITE: Do you feel you were adequately warned of the seriousness of the flood?
- REEVES: We were warned in plenty of time to move out our possessions, but due to the fact that we had never gotten this many inches of rain in this few days, the city had no way of really judging (inaudible) the water, so because of that, we experienced, you know, a lot more water than we were anticipating.
- WHITE: How soon did you become aware that it might flood before it actually did?
- REEVES: We became aware on Friday night, April the 13th.
- WHITE: And then it flooded your house?
- REEVES: It came in the morning, Saturday the 14th, it was inside the house.
- WHITE: So only a day warning at most?
- REEVES: Mhmm.
- WHITE: Did it really gradually come up? Or did it just suddenly?
- REEVES: It gradually came up, but after the Pearl was reaching its crest, it would come in gushes of maybe two or three feet at one time.
- WHITE: How did you think the weather service and perhaps the authorities did their

job in predicting the flood?

REEVES: I think they did the best that they could do, but the knowledge was just so limited because we had just never had this much water, this much rainfall.

WHITE: Absolutely, it was just like a new experience for everybody, they had never...

REEVES: Uh huh it was a new experience for them and for us too.

WHITE: Were they helpful in their actions? When the flood waters started to come in, did you receive any help from....?

REEVES: We didn't receive any personal help from any city officials or policeman or anything like that. Now, we did receive help after we moved out, and in the cleaning up process after we came back into the house. The city did a very fine job of picking up debris and trash. In fact, the trucks came by, approximately every two hours and hauled away, you know, debris and trash and kept the streets clean. And that helped our morale, you know, to see it cleaned up.

WHITE: Was your residence one of the first to be flooded in your neighborhood?

REEVES: Yes, it was one of the first. We are real close to the creek, probably 50 yards from the creek.

WHITE: When did you first decide you would have to move your things? Was it Friday?

REEVES: We decided Friday night. In fact, we were eating supper out that night and our son was here and he realized that the water was coming into our street and he tried to contact us and fill me in on where we were, but we came home early, at nine o'clock that night, we were home, and he told us, you know, that we were going to have to start moving our furniture out. So we just immediately started calling people that had trucks and that we knew could help us. And then by one o'clock that night we had our furniture out.

WHITE: Did you spend the night in the house?

REEVES: No, my husband and son spent the night in the house because the house was open and there were lots of people coming in and out.

WHITE: You received a lot of assistance then, from friends and....

REEVES: Umhmm, from our friends and from our neighbors too, helped us.

- WHITE: You feel that neighbors supported each other throughout the flood?
- REEVES: I really do. I think that was one of the good things that came out of the flood, that we got to know our neighbors, and appreciate them in a way that we had not, you know, known before. And people stuck together. They really helped each other in any way they could and it was a time when people pulled together.
- WHITE: Do you think it drew them closer together than they had been before?
- REEVES: Umhmm.
- WHITE: When you were forced to evacuate, how long was it before you were able to get back into your house after the water had gone down?
- REEVES: It was a week, a whole week. We thought, when we first left that night, we'd just be gone for a day or two, maybe have to have our carpet replaced, we had no idea it was going to be extensive damage.
- WHITE: When you started to clean up and everything, how long did this take? Was it a long process?
- REEVES: No, it really went by fast. We'd had a lot of people just volunteer, like from our church and from people that we just knew from all over Jackson that came and helped. The first thing that had to be done was the carpet had to be taken out, because it was just saturating. And then everything had to be washed off, the walls and shelves. The house had to be, everything packed up and taken out just like you were moving out, every little item had to be packed and we didn't have a lot of water that day because our water facilities, you know, they were in danger of going out and so we had to cut back on water. So, things that were packed up were just packed up dirty, and then later had to be washed.
- WHITE: In your opinion, in north Jackson, as a whole, were things pretty much in a state of chaos and disorganization?
- REEVES: Well, it wasn't when we came back in the house, but those few days that we didn't know what the water was going to do, we didn't know if the dam was going to hold. There were some rumors out that the dam had broke. In fact, the first night, no the second night, after we moved out of our house, we were staying with some friends and policemen came like at 3:30 in the morning and told us we would have to evacuate where we were staying. There was a danger that water would be coming in there and we would be trapped to where we couldn't get out to the highways, and so that was the worst time of the whole flood was the anxiety that we felt. We thought that all of northeast Jackson would be flooded, and we didn't really know where

to go, so it was pretty much chaotic that night.

WHITE: Was your husband's office or anything flooded?

REEVES: No.

WHITE: Were a lot of businesses around northeast Jackson flooded?

REEVES: A lot, umhmm, all the businesses on Lakeland Drive and some of the downtown businesses were flooded and offices too, but his office was not flooded.

WHITE: Were these stores out of operation? Did any close down? Make it hard to get things?

REEVES: Well we didn't really do without anything because of stores closed down, because there were enough, you know, stores like the ones that were closed down that we didn't run out of anything that we needed, but a lot of places had to close down for repairs.

WHITE: But there were stores in south Jackson where you could get stuff?

REEVES: Yeah.

WHITE: About how long did it take before the businesses began to re-open?

REEVES: It was a short time. I was surprised because I would say, maybe three weeks and they were back in business, some of them.

WHITE: How did your neighbors react to the flood as a whole? Were they angry at officials or did they just accept it?

REEVES: We heard there was some anger at the officials and even blame put on different authorities, but we felt like that our mayor did a terrific job, and he was to be commended and I think because of his, you know, being able to keep his head, like on Sunday, Easter Sunday, he came over the air and assured everyone that the dam had not broken, and that everything was under control. I think because of his assurance, and his calm manner, that, that helped the morale of the people.

WHITE: So you felt he did a good job?

REEVES: He did a good job.

WHITE: Do you think this flood had any effect on maybe preventing future floods? Did this cause them to make any improvements in the water control or

anything?

REEVES: Their working on, in fact, I got a letter today from the mayor and I haven't read it all but they have, you know, lowered the water level in the Ross Barnett Reservoir, hoping that this will help to take care of some of the water in the Pearl River.

WHITE: With the possibility of, perhaps, other floods, would you do anything differently this time? Would you react differently you think? (inaudible) or anything?

REEVES: Well, we're, you know, watching the water very carefully these few days right now, and we would have plenty of time to move out, just like we did before, the difference would be that I would just move everything and I wouldn't take the risk of leaving valuables in the house because you just can't tell. The water will rise more than you expect.

WHITE: Do you have any suggestions how the city might prevent future flooding? Do you think maybe the creeks are a danger spot?

REEVES: Well, all of the water has to flow through a very narrow opening at Lakeland. The bridge there is very small, and of course, they've built up a lot of the flood area there, and we feel like that that should be stopped, and that they should let the flood area be there, and that man should not interfere with this, because I think it's a result of us trying to fill in what was there, for the water to go off and to move on out of the city, and I think that we are experiencing backup water, because it doesn't flow out like it should.

WHITE: Overall, what were your reactions to this flood after the trying times were over? How'd you view it?

REEVES: Well, I viewed it like a nightmare, I guess, and a lot of hard work.

WHITE: Well, thank you for the interview, Ms. Reeves.

END OF RECORDING