

VIRGINIA COMMONWEALTH UNIVERSITY
JAMES BRANCH CABELL LIBRARY, SPECIAL COLLECTIONS
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT: TWENTIETH CENTURY RICHMOND, VIRGINIA

NARRATOR: DR. FRANCIS M. FOSTER, SR.

INTERVIEWER: KATHRYN COLWELL HILL

Place:	Cabell Room	No. of CDs: 2
	James Branch Cabell Library	No. of tracks: 2
	Virginia Commonwealth University	Length of interview: 115 minutes
Date:	January 23, 2006	Interview: 2 of 5

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[CD 2 of 2, Second Interview 1/23/06]

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[End of Second Interview]

Interview 2, Track 1,

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[CD 1 of 2]

0:00:05 Introductions

Kathryn Colwell Hill: This is January 23, 2006. This is the second interview with Dr. Francis M. Foster, Sr. We are going to talk today about aspects of life in Jackson Ward, and specifically about his family and his career. I am Kathryn Colwell Hill and I am the interviewer.

Dr. Foster we already started, briefly, before I turned on the tape, you were going to tell me about the Crusade for Voters that took place in Jackson Ward.

Francis M. Foster, Sr.: In the fifties, I had some friends who had come along with me. One was John Brooks, second black Eagle Scout in Richmond. I had a cousin named, James Jackson, who was the first black Eagle Scout in the South. Brooks along with William Ferguson Reid and Bill Thornton, a podiatrist, they got together and decided to form an organization. I remember one day my father saying a good name for that group would probably be something that we would be interested in. It just, sort of, popped out of his mouth, "A crusade." They wanted to go everywhere—blacks and whites—to get them to vote. The name was inspired by a club that he founded in 1901 called the Astoria Beneficial Club. In order to be a member of the club, you had to be a registered voter and you had to be twenty-one years of age. After they formed this beneficial club, they did a whole lot to inform people toward seeking the franchise. Well, some fifty years later, when the Crusade was formed, it just happened that he was one of the persons in the background, not seeking newspaper coverage or publicity. He is the one acknowledged to having given it its name, The Richmond Crusade for Voters. Now the first year, the most significant election was coming up for the city council. What they decided to do was to get out and get the vote. They decided to keep it secret. The Negroes would vote only for one

person that would be Oliver Hill. They would have this one shot. So, the chances are, with nine candidates in the field, if they got one shot it means that they would probably have a good chance. When the vote finally ended, he came in with a victory. Now, the next year he was—if I remember—he lost by about twelve votes. What had happened was people like Councilman George Allen, Esq. and others; they began to hire a number of Negroes to help them get out their vote. It could have been the loyalty of those few working Negroes who changed the situation and Oliver Hill lost. The newspapers acknowledged that he was the most effective councilman in their memory. One thing, he had a legal background and he was very effective. That represents the start of the influence of the Crusade.

KCH: What were their initial methods, their strategies?

FMF: They had this block-by-block in the different precincts. They were able to get people to just reach out.

KCH: Were people interested in voting? Was it a lack of—?

FMF: They found out that they were going to have a single shot and they kept it quiet. That is one time that Jackson Ward got together and hush, hushed everything. Nobody could effectively do what they wanted to do.

KCH: So it was, they saw the sense of purpose.

FMF: Right.

KCH: Whereas in the past, did they feel that their vote didn't count? I mean it didn't influence much.

FMF: Up to a point. That was true to a certain extent, but there was a little group of old timers who knew the value of the vote. You would have the whites beginning to realize that the Negro vote could make a difference. A lot of times, they would hire people and they would bring them in to their little group. (Chuckles) They found out, after he had won, that they really needed to bring a whole lot of people to work for them.

KCH: I have read that the minds behind The Crusade and Civil Rights actions were often the businessmen, the professional business community.

FMF: To a great extent that is true. You see, we had Dr. John Howlette, Dr. William Thornton, and Dr. Ferguson Reid. He had a brother who was a dentist and he had a father who, along with James West, forty years before, had taken a case before the Federal District Court that allowed Negroes to vote in the democratic primary. Had I mentioned that to you before?

KCH: No.

0:06:15 Civil Rights: Right to vote in democratic primary

FMF: William Ferguson Reid's father was Leon Asbury Reid, Sr. Anyhow, he was the brother-in-law of a very progressive dentist named David Ferguson, who helped to found the Old Dominion State Dental Society and the Peter B. Ramsey Dental Society of Richmond and Petersburg. He was a forward thinking dentist and businessman. He was a very strong influence on his brother-in-law. What happened was they got together with a fellow named Robert Wilder, who was Doug Wilder's father, who worked for the Southern Aid Insurance Society. My brother Wendell's first job was as an insurance agent under Robert Wilder, whose boss was James Oliver West, the supervisor. Leon A. Reid, Sr., the dentist; and James West, the supervisor for Southern Aid; and Robert Wilder; and Ralph Dorsey—a very fair skinned Negro who could pass for white—who happened to be the patronage person for the Byrd machine. He was in their pocket and so he wasn't liked at all by Negroes in town. But, whenever anybody got in trouble, they would always have to go to Ralph because he knew the folks downtown and anything like that. Anyway, he managed to get some absentee ballots and they sent them in. Somebody must have noticed and they threw them out. James Oliver West filed a suit and it ended in the Federal District Court. They opened up the democratic primary to blacks. Forty years later, Leon Reid's son was the first black in the House of Delegates and two years later Robert Wilder's son was the first one in the Senate, since Reconstruction. From then on, the Crusade played a strong role and its membership grew. There were many persons who got tied up in order to get some political

clout. They moved away from the original premise, which was to get an expanded electorate. It became a sort of pawn for those who sought ways to do things.

KCH: Some of the strategies used—. I would like for you to talk about what it felt like on the street. I had read that, in antebellum times, there was the tradition of one black teaching another, “Each one, teach one.” Then during the Crusade—the thought was—the “each one, teach one” became “each one, reach one.”

FMF: Right, right.

KCH: I thought it was interesting, how it was a tradition. I mean, it was a cultural thought process that this is the way we do business.

FMF: You must remember that there were a number of organizations in town. The moment that the possibility, situation arose, everybody got enthused about wanting to get Oliver Hill in. When they got him in, everybody wanted to be part of the picture. Then, a lot of the various organizations, they began to, within their group, trying to do what they can to expand their electorate, as far as people were concerned. By that time too, the poll tax had reached the point that it was becoming erased and so there was not the poll officer to stand in your face and make it hard and difficult for you.

0:10:48 Jackson Ward: Designated ward boundaries

KCH: The voting lines, the precinct or the ward lines had been redrawn, actually to limit the influence, initially. Am I right in this?

FMF: Initially, there was a ward primarily in the area, which was Jackson Ward. That was done to restrict—it was a gerrymander type of thing—to restrict the influence of the vote. Even though they were able to get one person in council, it didn’t matter because one person wasn’t effective. Originally, in 1871, starting at St. Peter and Leigh and going north to Lombardy; starting at St. Peter and Leigh going—I meant going west—north to Jackson; then down Jackson Street to Fifth; and doing a little catty-corner around to include what is now MCV, was Jackson Ward. From a factual point of view, in terms of ward lines, the Maggie Walker

House is not in Jackson Ward—some thought it originally was—nor was the Bo Jangles statue, nor was the First Virginia Volunteer's armory. Negroes considered everything north of Broad Street as Jackson Ward. That was, sort of a line of demarcation. Then around about in 1915 to 1919, Negroes started moving north of Broad Street, into those houses, and coming on up. We moved up on Clay Street in 1919, whereas originally we had been on North Fourth Street. So actually, two of the brothers were born in Clay Ward, but the rest of them were born in Jackson Ward. The technical thing was that my mother didn't live in Jackson Ward because she lived at Hancock and Leigh. See what I mean?

KCH: Right.

FMF: That was the dividing line. They just considered that area, wherever you were breathing black, you were in Jackson Ward.

0:13:19 Jackson Ward: Youth

KCH: Let's go back—. Shall we go back, chronologically, and talk about your youth in Jackson Ward. We have talked about where you went to school and some of the characteristics of those schools and some of the discrimination that took place within the Richmond Public Schools—. What would you like to tell us about family life at your house, some of the values of your father and mother, which were stressed?

FMF: Remember, we had six boys and one girl that were of my time. There was one girl who died, younger than I, in infancy. There was one who reached four years old and died from diphtheria, before I was born. So the six boys and one girl—. (Chuckles) Upstairs, five of the six boys lived in the second bedroom; mother and father lived in the first bedroom; and over to the side was a side bedroom. I was brought up, until I was about ten or eleven, and I slept with my sister. My father, eventually, enclosed the back porch. It was so that we actually could spread out a little bit. Otherwise—we had the two beds in that room—we were all clustered together. It was interesting because we had to be careful because there were stoves in each room.

KCH: Oh! Wood fire?

FMF: Wood fire.

KCH: No, wood or coal?

FMF: Coal. Coal stoves. The—I was trying to think of the year that we got steam heat—. It was the chilliest year, because, all of a sudden, we still had to go and get scuttles of coal and firewood and take them up. Then, we all had to bring the coal into the basement, into the kitchen room, where the furnace was.

KCH: Did you have chores? Did each child have a chore?

FMF: Yes, yes, yes, yes. We had some. All of us, at one time or another, would be going out and getting scuttles of coal out of the coalhouse. That was about, I guess, about eight by twelve feet with a roof on it. Around the side, there was a place, about so-big (holds hand five feet above floor), and it had a door that swung open. When the when the coal people would come up—they would back right up to it—they could shovel the coal into the coal house. You see. Next to the coalhouse, we had some chicken wire around there where we had some fowl. For a while, we had some pigeons as well. Later on, we began to wean away from the chickens. We raised chickens and we fed pigeons.

KCH: Did your mother garden?

FMF: No. We had a small area where they would have a few things, but we did have a grape arbor. We always had plenty of grapes on that arbor. By the time the boys began to be of some size, we were using the back yard more and more. Now because the house we lived in sat basement, first floor, second floor. So that meant that it was tall, but it wasn't long. The rest of the houses on the street were first floor, second floor. They had maybe one or two rooms added. That meant that we had the longest back yard.

KCH: And everybody congregated there.

FMF: Yes. Everybody congregated there. Usually once a year, they would whitewash the fence and Ebenezer Sunday School would have a lawn party. Then they would just hang out there. In later years, when my brother Richard bought the house next door—when he got

married—we tore down the fence between the two pieces of property. Most of us had grown, so that we weren't running around the back yard. They seeded the lawn and had a very nice lawn right on the back. That made the lawn parties, for the church, that much more thrilling and spectacular.

KCH: Describe a typical lawn party.

FMF: Well, at a lawn party they would have a number of booths and different things. People would have what you call a “grab bag.” They would put anything in it and you'd hook a long string onto it. For a nickel, you might end up getting a hairbrush or a comb, or some novelty, or some type of thing, or a piece of glassware of some kind. Sometimes some people would bring pies and things like that. Then, we could buy soft drinks. It was a little bit of everything. The biggest item there was the act of getting together and fellowshiping. The little boys and girls would have plenty of room to run and play. It just made it unique from that particular perspective. We had some special lawn party lights, some colored bulbs. They were just simple bulbs of different colors. Someone had gotten this extension line and they would put that up.

In the backyard, under normal circumstances, we would have a clothesline that would attach to the nearest tree, which was about two-thirds of the way down. They would go out there and hang up those clothes. On Monday afternoon, she or some of the boys would go and bring in the laundry. On Mondays, particularly, I would sort out the white things for her. I could always tell my daddy's shirts because they smelled of Nurica tobacco.

0:20:16 Jackson Ward: Youth - Experiences related to tobacco

KCH: Is that type of tobacco rolled?

FMF: No, it is a cigar.

KCH: Oh, so then it would have been in his pocket.

FMF: For years, he smoked Nurica cigars. At one time, he had tried Creamo because there was a guy on the radio named Crosby. Creamo cigars and Bing Crosby. (Laughter) But, he didn't stick with it. He got back to his Nurica cigars.

It was interesting. They would take that cigar when they got to church and they would turn it around with the end that their mouth was not on sitting right there on the stoop.

KCH: And just leave it.

FMF: Just leave it. Then come out after church, pick that cigar up, put it in their mouth. (Chuckles)

KCH: Now, when you say "they, their," there were other people doing this?

FMF: Yes. I guess there were about five or six of the deacons that smoked cigars. Of course, eventually he did get off of cigars. Just occasionally, he would buy one and just put it in his mouth. Lucy never did want him to smoke, but she never was very emphatic about it. By and large, I think my brother Kermit and I were the only ones who smoked, my brother Chris didn't, Wendell didn't, Richard didn't—he might have had a pack on him, just for show. You know what I mean. The packs that we had were just for show, because we didn't actually inhale. We would just take a mouth of it (demonstrates a shallow inhale) and blow it out. But, see the cigarette smokers, they'd go (demonstrates a deep inhale) and get that feeling way down in here (indicates lungs). I would—. If I tried to inhale like that, I would end up coughing. (Coughs) So I wouldn't want to—. When I think of all of the money that I spent on cigarettes—.

KCH: (Chuckling) —for show.

FMF: When I was in high school, they started—this was in 1936, I think it was in 1936—they started the Hit Parade, Lucky Strike Hit Parade. When they came on, they said, (speaking dramatically) "The fifteen top songs will be yours, for your pleasure and entertainment, every Friday night here on your Hit Parade." At that time, Benny Goodman—I think—was the band. They played these fifteen songs. Now, every Friday night at eight o'clock—. No, it must have been about seven-thirty. (Pause) Here is what happened. There was a family that lived on

the corner of Prentis and Clay, the Thomas family; there were two boys and two girls. They occupied the first floor. The second floor was occupied by a lady named Lillian—I'm trying to think of her—and Frank McWilliams. They had some children that were a little younger. That house was like the "Do-Drop Inn" for the neighborhood kids, especially on Friday night. We would jitterbug and cut-a-rug, as it was called. You see. What happened was they had this promotion. If you could name the three songs that would be number one, two, and three for the next week, they would send you a carton of Lucky Strike cigarettes.

KCH: (Laughing) Of course.

FMF: If you were lucky enough to get two out of three, they would send you a tin of flat fifties, which was about this size (uses hands to indicate size), made of metal, and had Lucky Strike on it. You could open it up and there were fifty cigarettes lying in it. After they'd disappeared, people would use it to put jewelry and stamps in, little things like that.

KCH: That is what, about five-by-eight?

FMF: Uh-hugh. What happened was my buddies and I, the five of us, would get together and put up a nickel apiece. We would get twenty-five one-cent stamps, because that was what a postcard was. On the back of that penny postcard, we would write—. On five cards, we would write the number one song for this week, which we knew. On five cards, we would make it the number two song for next week. On five cards, we would make it the number three song. Then we would take what was number two and put it up as the first, and the second, and the third. Juggle and juggle. If we thought of something that began to catch your fancy real quick, we would find a place. But, we ended up that we got on a little run. We were getting a winner at least every-other week, and they'd send us a carton.

KCH: Great strategy, very successful!

FMF: We would be going over to the schoolyard, you know.

KCH: Right.

FMF: —and we would be over there smoking. Then sometimes we would probably divide it. We would end up with an extra pack and I would probably find someone to sell it to. So as the Hit Parade began to grow, I could say, for cigarettes began to grow, it was a nice program that carried on through right down to the next generation. Eventually Frank Sinatra reached the point that he was the great figure on there because—since Richmond was the tobacco capital—when they started having tobacco festivals, the people from Lucky Strike would do a whole promotionally and other folks would, in terms of floats and all of that sort of thing.

KCH: It just occurred to me when you mentioning the tobacco festival, which was such a big deal, with queens, I believe, and a court.

FMF: Yes.

KCH: I assume that the blacks were excluded from much of the—. Well, from being nominated as queen and—.

FMF: Yes. There wasn't any participation. They didn't particularly expect to.

KCH: Right. Did you have anything—? It seems as though you often created your own event, which became extremely successful and important to you. Did you have anything parallel to, like the tobacco parade?

FMF: No. But you would have some organizations, like the State Elks Convention. Most Elk unit's had a band and the bands would come in. During the time of Maggie Walker, there were a number of bands in town for different organizations. They would always—. Whenever an organization was having something at a church, they would always have a parade in front that would lead up to it. Kids used to run and get behind, run up and down, and everything. In the early tobacco festivals, they handed out—I think the candy companies here had given them candy—they were busy throwing candy along the street. It ended up the kids would be grabbing and there would be fights over it. So they stopped that next year, from having any candy throwing. People would just look forward to lining up on Broad Street, seeing it, and hearing the music.

0:28:47 Rocky Mount, NC: June German

The blacks didn't have anything around here that was promotional, but we were aware of the fact that in June if you really—if you were seventeen, eighteen, or older—if you wanted to really have some enjoyment, you would go to Rocky Mount, North Carolina. Every year they would have the “June German.”

KCH: Oh! It is a little bit like a cotillion, isn't it, a formal dance?

FMF: Well that is a little different. They used to have a German here that I used to wait at the Commonwealth Club, which was a presentation of white young ladies coming out. At the June German, the tobacco houses' warehouses—they'd sold the tobacco (demonstrates auctioneering) “.....Sold! American....” Those vast things, about the size of a couple of football fields, were wide open. And so, some entrepreneur started the June German. They would bring in three bands. Someone like Duke Ellington, Count Bassey, Cab Calloway—

KCH: Big names!

FMF: Big names. They would be spotted in three areas through the hall. These guys would play a set for two hours, then these guys a set for two hours, the other guys for two hour. All night long, that would be going on. Now there in Rocky Mount, the mayor would have a moratorium on arrests.

KCH: (Laughter) Oh, my! Really.

FMF: They couldn't arrest anybody. A lot of bootlegging was going on and a lot of people were coming from out of town and bringing money into the city. As these things began to get bigger and bigger and bigger, for folks from the Midwest, it was like a big homecoming. But, then the war came. After the war came, that thing just gradually petered out. The June German was something special. The musicians that they had were always the top musicians and they were sort of special.

0:31:20 Jackson Ward Organizations/Clubs: National Elk's Convention, Richmond, 1925

The closest thing Richmond ever had that was of significance was in 1925 when they had the National Elk's Convention. They had thousands of people come here to the convention. At that time, there were no hotels but two for blacks, Slaughter's Hotel and Miller's Hotel. What they did was that they had a bunch of folks get together and strategize. They had a list. They solicited people; if you would take delegates just let us know. They would tell you how much you could charge. The fees were relatively modest. It was money for the person who could put them in their home. We had a guy that lived right across the street from us, Ellsworth Storrs. He was childless most of his married life. He had a big house and three extra bedrooms. What would happen is that whenever that hotel had a group coming and they needed to put somebody up, he'd make that money. Now also, if they would furnish meals for you, there was also the opportunity to earn some more cash. That was that essence.

The Elk's had their big convention—sometime I'm going to look up and see how many people, because it is staggering to think of the houses—and they had, oh, any number of bands come here. It was a big party.

KCH: What building was large enough to—? Oh, the Elk's—. Was it right next door to the Hippodrome, at that time?

FMF: No. That was the IBPOW. It was there and also, at Fourth and Clay Street, there was another Elk's building, across from Dr. Tennant's home.

It was big do-ins for Richmond, at that time. The guy who was in charge was J. Finley Wilson; he had been the head of it for a number of years. He had relatives in Richmond.

KCH: I don't recall if you said. Was you father an Elk?

FMF: No, he was an Astoria and a Mason.

0:33:43 Jackson Ward Organizations/Clubs: Astoria Beneficial Club

KCH: Prince Hall Masons?

FMF: Yes.

Carmen Francine Foster: (Addressing interviewer) Do you know much about the Astoria?

KCH: I do not about the Astoria.

CFF: Maybe that would be the story. He is one and there is a family legacy there. Do you want to?

FMF: Yes. 1901 there were twenty fellows— who had just turned twenty-one years of age—who decided to form a beneficial organization. At that time, there had been a great building in New York called the Waldorf Astoria, which was the scene for everything. The Astoria name was a name cast in style. They decided to name their club Astoria Beneficial Club. Astor means star. They got together, at my father's home on Fourth Street, on April 1, 1901 and formed the Astoria Beneficial Club. There were twenty-one members. All of whom had turned twenty-one and had passed the literacy test with the city so they could vote. They would help train people to take that test. They did everything they could to encourage people to use the franchise.

Down through the years, they would have programs at the time of their meeting. Usually, they would bring in someone from the city, the state, or the federal government. They rarely brought in people from the federal government, but sometimes they did. At those times, it was a public meeting. After the public meeting was over, they would have their meeting and transact their business. One of the outstanding persons that they had to come here was a guy, black, who was in charge of selective service, Campbell C. Johnson. There were a number of other of other people, in high positions, who would come in town. The Astoria's would give them some exposure.

Some years later—like I told you—when they got ready to form the Crusade for Voters, my father gave it its' name, Crusade for Voters. The emphasis on voter registration became very prime, very important. Every year, the Astorians usually give an award for the Astorian of the year, for the contributions that the person has made to the club. Then they recognize, in two or

three categories, persons in the city who have made significant awards. They usually have a Sunday afternoon recognition dinner, in November of each year.

KCH: I'm going to backtrack just a little bit. When, the Astoria Club—the Astoria Beneficial Club—in its' early years was bringing in these very important speakers, were you, as a child, were you invited to attend? I am thinking of the role models that they were bringing in to the community.

FMF: If you were old enough and somebody came in, you would be interested in going. The Astoria always supported some oratorical contests. There was always something going on to encourage people, as far as the schools were concerned. They ended up giving scholarships. In 1921, they started giving scholarships to college. My sister and a girl named Roberta Randolph were the first two recipients of the Astoria scholarship. After that, every year, they would give, at least, one or two scholarships.

KCH: Are you continuing that today?

FMF: They are giving scholarships in the high schools to—

CFF: In fact, the scholarship program had been named after his father, the Christopher Foster Scholarship Fund.

0:38:19 Jackson Ward Organizations/Clubs: The Astoria Beneficial Club, Bo Jangles Statue

You might also want to let her know about how the Astoria's developed the Bo Jangles statue, around 1970.

FMF: Yes, around '75. I'll get that pamphlet.

There was a fellow who was a friend of Bo Jangles—who was a member of the club—named Carol Anderson. This idea of a statue for somebody kept dwelling with him and he brought a proposal for a statue for Bo Jangles. The enthusiasm became sort of inflamed. They decided to see what they could do. One of the members of the club worked for Reynolds Metals Company. He said, "Maybe we could make it out of aluminum. I'll ask my boss." So anyway,

they decided that we would have an aluminum statue. They went on ahead with the planning. There is a person—, who is still living now—who, when they finished the statue, went up to Ohio and came back with it. His name is Wesley Carter. I think that Wesley is about ninety—.

CFF: Ninety-seven.

FMF: About ninety-seven or ninety-eight and he's still alert. He came back with the statue. They put it up right there at the corner of Chamberlayne Avenue and Leigh Street. In 1931, no 1933, I was a freshman in high school. The year before, Bo Jangles was at the National Theater for a week. The turnout, from Richmond, was so great that they kept him over for a second week.

KCH: This is the National Theater on Broad Street.

FMF: Yes. He did a number of little tap-dance training sessions at the high school. Some kids got the tap dancing bug. But one day, coming up the street, he saw a little girl almost run over at the corner of Adams and Leigh. He immediately went down to the mayor's office and talked to the mayor and said, "Listen. That little girl near got run over. That intersection doesn't even have any traffic lights or school guards or anything there." The mayor said, "Bill, this is the depression. We just don't have any money." He said, "You put the light up and I will pay for it." Sure enough, they put the light up and he paid for it. I think it was about eleven-hundred and seventy dollars. They had a dedication of the light. I remember because I only went to school, the first year in high school, from twelve until four. The schools were so crowded that we had to have everybody on a double shift. We didn't go that day because the ceremony was starting at one o'clock. They dedicated the light. Now, right across the street on the empty lot, they have put the statue of Bo Jangles. It is one of the few black statues that we have, except for the Arthur Ash statue, in the City of Richmond, and Oliver Hill's bust on Third Street Convention Site.

KCH: It is a striking statue.

FMF: It is. If you've ever seen him, do his up and down the steps dance?

KCH: Not in person, unfortunately.

FMF: It catches the flavor of what he was all about.

KCH: That exuberance. Do his descendants continue to live in the Richmond area?

FMF: No, I don't think that he has anybody living here now. His name really was Luther Robinson. Did you know that?

KCH: No.

FMF: My friend. I have a friend who is an icon in the field of psychiatry for the deaf and blind. His name is Luther Robinson, M.D., F.A.B.A., D.H.L.

You know we always identify him with Shirley Temple and all that sort of thing. He was quite a person, during his time.

0:43:05 Jackson Ward Organizations/Clubs: Club 533

KCH: Another organization that I am wondering about is the 533 Club.

FMF: Club 533.

KCH: Club 533. When was that club begun?

FMF: (addressing first Carmen, then the interviewer) We need to call Skip for the date. I have an older brother named Skip Foster, Wilbert Skip Foster.

A bunch of guys—who had finished Virginia Union and Virginia State—who were mostly teachers working here in town and were sports enthusiasts, they used to hang out in places like Slaughter's. They decided one day to get them a little club of their own. There was a place being vacated at 533 North Second Street. They went into it and had it redone. Somebody had a club, of some kind, there before. They started calling it the Club 533. Eventually, after they had gotten their membership organized, they built a place down at the corner of Jackson and Second. It was spacious and doing very well. But then, when the city came in and took that area over, they gave them enough funds to rebuild. They rebuilt it a block down Leigh Street and enlarged it. It is right at the entrance when you come into the city of Richmond. Club 533.

KCH: Are they primarily a social club?

FMF: Primarily a social club.

KCH: I have read that some of the strategy sessions during the Civil Rights era took place—. This is when men would go there for lunch and figure out what the next step was going to be.

FMF: It was sort of a—. What would you call it?

CFF: Kind of—. A different version of the Commonwealth Club, but not as elitist.

FMF: Not into any depth of sophistication and expansion. Just not

CFF: —wanting attention

FMF: —attention at all. But it was a just nice place to hangout and you'd always find somebody there who was willing to listen. Of course, they were always talking sports because we had people from Virginia State and Virginia Union and Hampton—who had gone to those schools, who had worked there. They had a commonality. It was just, really, a social club, social activity. Of course women—. You could bring women there as well. It served as a centrally located place where we could have a meeting, but big enough for a small group to do something.

CFF: Sometimes, people wanted to have a party there, have a reception or—

FMF: In the club, you also would have people who were in diverse occupations like caterers and the like. One of the unseen heroes of the Crusade for Voters was a guy—(Laughs) I'm trying to struggle with one of these senior moments, what is his name—Arthur Brown was his name. Now Arthur Brown was the—I guess you would say—the popular waiter at the Hermitage Club and then the present Lakeside. Arthur was the treasurer for the Crusade and when the funds were low and everything, he'd go into his pocket and take care of everything. Ethel Overby and husband collected old newspapers and sold them for, to give to the Crusade.

KCH: My.

FMF: He was quiet and didn't receive a whole lot of publicity. Then he also had a lot of insight into what you would call the "white psychology"—having worked around white folks—and he knew a lot of outstanding men, because see Lakeside was basically Jewish. He knew all of those folks and he had a good rapport. He was one of those special guys who played

a significant role in the Civil Rights time. Most of the guys that got all of the newspaper publicity were the Doctors Howlette, Reid, Thornton, and Brooks.

0:48:03 Civil Rights: Strategies for elections

At that time that they were coming along, there was a white politician, who had gotten into council by catering to Negroes. The Negroes sort of put him in there, because he was busy giving the white folks hell. His name was Howard Carwile.

KCH: Carlyle?

FMF: Car-wile.

CFF: C-a-r-w-i-l-e.

FMF: But then, after he got in, and kind of got situated good, he began to change his colors. Then he—. (Chuckles) He used to refer to Dr. Thornton as, “that frustrated foot doctor.”

CFF: I have memories of us listening to Howard Carwile on—Sundays.

FMF: Right, on Sundays.

CFF: —when he would have his radio show. Daddy and I would always get together. He’d say, “Come in here, listen to this man!” That got to be a little ritual. (Sentimental sigh)

FMF: Right.

KCH: For the two of you.

FMF: He’d be giving the folks in the city hell. Just to hear a white man giving the city hell. And then, he generated a great following among the Negroes. Then, when he ran for the city council, he got elected. (Laughed) But once he got in, he began to calm himself down.

CFF: One thing that happened—that I know we were all fascinated about—was people were doing split voting. The one who had the highest number of votes—because this was before the ward system, this was an at-large system—would be typically, traditionally become the mayor. If you were the top vote getter, then you would become the mayor. When Howard Carwile began to gather everyone, naturally we’d expect, “He’s going to be mayor.” Somehow, the city fathers fixed it so that Carwile did not become the mayor. I think that that is when he got

a little “come-up-ance” there. It was quite interesting to see him. He was a part of Richmond’s aristocracy, in terms of the guys that typically would run the Virginia Historic Society, he—

FMF: He was a lawyer.

KCH: He was a lawyer?

FMF: He was a lawyer. I made the mistake of serving as an expert in a case for him. The guy who had, who became very close to him, was a guy named Isaiah Jackson, Jr. Whose son later became one of the outstanding conductors.

CFF: Isaiah Jackson, III.

FMF: Isaiah Jackson, III. But, Big Jack, he would be an expert witness for anybody. He liked to do it because the money was quick and so forth and so on. After my dealing with Carwile on a case, I decided that I would never again be an expert witness for anybody else,” because I didn’t want to stretch any points. But, this guy Jackson, that was his thing.

CFF: An entrepreneur

FMF: Entrepreneur.

0:51:33 Jackson Ward: Jewish grocers

KCH: You mentioned, as you were talking about the Club 533 and the gentleman that worked at Lakeside.

CFF: Arthur—

FMF: Arthur Brown.

KCH: Arthur Brown and that Lakeside was a predominately-Jewish country club. The last time, when we talked, you mentioned the interaction between the Jewish families and the blacks in Jackson Ward.

FMF: Um-hum.

KCH: Could you go into that a little bit more?

CFF: I think it would be great if he could start off, maybe, by talking about the next-door neighbors and the grocery store that was at 501.

FMF: Well. Next door to where we lived, there was a grocery store. The person in charge was named Wouf Mazer. Wouf Mazer. He had two or three daughters. I was ages two, three, four, and five, and six about the time. My main fascination was to go in the store and look at the little glass things that had different types of cookies, like ginger snaps and lemon (unintelligible) and then look over the counter and seeing the candy. My sister Ada loved Hershey bars. You could get a Hershey bar about this size that had a little slant on the top and side. They were for a penny.

KCH: Okay, basically the size of a finger for a penny at that time.

FMF: Ginger snaps were three for a penny. Ginger snap were about that big (indicates double the size of a fifty-cent piece) and scalloped, three for a penny. When you'd open that glass thing to reach in to get your three, when you opened it that gust of ginger would hit you. At that time also, they had slot machines in the store.

KCH: Slot machines?

FMF: The slot machines would give out the lifesavers. On the side, there were lifesavers. You would put in your nickel, you pull it down, the thing comes up, and you get lifesavers.

KCH: So you always got something.

FMF: Yes. The strategy was—whomever it was that had arranged for them to do that—they said you actually weren't gambling; you were buying lifesavers. Do you see what I mean? Then we would hang around, hoping when the guy put the next nickel in, he wasn't concerned about the lifesavers, he was just putting it in to see if could get some more nickels. They'd always have children hanging around in there because of those lifesavers.

The fascination with the store, aside from the fact that there were a number of Negroes on the block, the block was full. At the next corner, there was another Jewish grocer named Friedlander. He had a son who married a girl that later became involved in a big scam that

knocked the Standard Drug Store boys for about a million dollars and a number of other big people. She ended up going to prison.

KCH: May I ask a question? Did the families live above their stores?

FMF: Yes.

KCH: So the Jewish family was living in the neighborhood.

FMF: Right, and so did the Friedlander family. They had about four boys. We could relate to them because the youngest boy was a little younger than I and the others were the same age as my older brothers. Sometimes they would play on our ball team.

The people next door had these three girls. On Saturdays, my father would arrange for my sister and my older brother to go get groceries. Most of the time, they ended up at Brook Avenue and Clay Street at the Greater Atlantic and Pacific Tea Company, the A&P. The reason for that was they had White House milk and the Ann Page products, all of which were very cheap. When they did get through, they would come up, stop at the grocery store, and buy a number of items as well. When it would come time to check out, he had this little machine that he punched the numbers and then, when he got through, it would show him what it was. By the time he got ready to pull that, she would say, "I believe that would be two dollars and seventy-eight cents."

After a while, because he had noticed that in her, one day he says, "My children have a lot of difficulty learning how to add and do arithmetic. Could you come over and help them with their homework, sometime?" She said, "Alright. What nights?" She said, "We don't want to make it a Friday because, if I taught them anything, by Monday—." She was going over, probably, a couple of nights a week. She could see ahead what was going on. After about a week and a half, two weeks, he said to her, "Ada, when are you going to tell me how much you are going to charge me?" She said, "Oh, I'll get back to you." She went home and Papa came in. She said, "Listen Dad, how much should I charge Mr. Mazer?" He said, "Ada, how much would you charge Mrs. Clara Booth?" She said, "I wouldn't charge anything." He said, "They're

neighbors just like Mrs. Booth and you don't charge your neighbors. You don't know when you'll need them. If something happens to us, the first person over here would be Mrs. Booth. Same thing would be if you got in a clinch as far as the Mazers are concerned. Go and tell them that you can't charge anything."

She thought about that thing and she finally decided to go ahead and talk with him. She didn't say anything, but then he asked her again. By that time, she had come up with an idea. She said, "Mr. Mazer, I will continue to help you with your children. A lot of times, if I might happen to need a book I can't get over at my library, if you get a library card, I'll send you child in. I'll get books for them that will help them along, too." He went along with that. So whenever she needed a book, she'd just call the library and say, "This is Mrs. Mazer, my daughter is going to come in and she wants 'such and such a thing.'" Then she would walk on down. How many blocks is that? One, two—.

CFF: About seven or eight blocks.

FMF: —to the library.

KCH: To the public library.

FMF: The kids would go in, get the books, and she'd come on out. Now, when she'd come out with her books, her books would be because of an assignment she had at Union-Hartshorn.¹ She would get together that afternoon with her study team. Then, after awhile, the teachers wondered how they could up with all this stuff so quick and so sure. So finally—they didn't broadcast it—but then finally they told one of the professors, "We use a friend." Then they started doing the same thing. That was the story as far as the relationship with them in the early days.

Right after Mazer left—he had probably made enough to go into another business—another guy came in and then another, who had a wife and, I think, one child. They lived down-

¹ Thomas Henderson and Lyman Brooks became Presidents of Virginia Union University (VUU) and Norfolk State. Ada, Lyman, and brother J. Murray Brooks were honor graduates of VUU Class of 1929.

stairs in a room back of the store. They lived in the storeroom. They rented out the upstairs, where the nice toilet was. There was a door to the side, where they could go outside. Because of that the problem of—. A toilet was a problem. What would happen is—I was only seven or eight years old at this time—you would hear their back door slam and, then after a while—if you just happened to be passing by the fence, (Laughs) through those tiny little spaces between you would see someone squatting down, at the sewer. It had reached the point, when you were that young, you would always be peeping when you heard. You'd know that was screen door time. (Laughs)

KCH: Oh, yeah. Curiosity.

FMF: One day—I never will forget—my father was standing there at the front gate, the grocer came up to him and said, “Your children are out there peeping at my wife, in the backyard.” My father—I never will forget it—he said, “You know, a man would go on and buy himself a toilet.” I was a little shocked, but he did say it. But he said, “I’ll talk to them.” He told us that he didn’t want us peeping through that slot in the fence.

As much as you really want (Laughing) to give them hell, at that particular time, they were trying to do the best that they could under the circumstances. It was just one of those things that we also began to realize that there are some people who put the dollar—you see—ahead of all other things. They probably ended up better off than we did. (Laughter) He did, he did. After he had been there for a while, he started investing in some properties and ended up putting up one or two places over by Monroe Park. Of course, when he died, he was well off.

KCH: Did many of the Jewish grocers want to invest in Jackson Ward properties, other than their store?

FMF: I imagine quite a few did. They were on the lookout for any rental properties. Let’s see now—before we got off on that Ada thing—the routine was, since you worked in a tobacco factory, you didn’t have any cash. He would put your name in a book and he’d write down what you bought. Then, when you got paid, you came in and you paid the amount on the book. There was some slick Negro, who realizing what the system was, he’d probably had some

experience in housebreaking. Or sometimes a guy can, when you close your door, unless you turn your lock, there is a way that you can slip a card or something like that and open that door. He came in, went back there where that book was—he probably took a flashlight and saw where it was, probably took a little razor—and cut that page out. You see.

KCH: My that's—. It is a different type of theft. (Laughter)

CFF: Like putting it on someone else's credit card.

FMF: I remember someone telling us about that and that did happen.

CFF: I remember you telling us that one time one of Wouf Mazer's daughters had a seizure and your mother took care of her.

FMF: Yes, she did. My mother came over—I don't what she did—but anyway, she worked hard and long and brought her around. Because some years later, I was in the area of VCU and they had a laundromat near a shop.

KCH: Okay.

FMF: They sold clothing.

CFF: Clothing for young women. They were right where the Village restaurant is now.

FMF: The day before, there was an article in the paper about the manager of the laundromat, who was a great philanthropist because he allowed art students at VCU to display their art in his store, free of charge. When sales were made, he didn't charge a commission. He said that he and his wife, the former Libby Mazer, had been doing this ever since they had started. One day I stopped by, went in there. I said, "I just wanted you to know that I appreciated that article on your and your spirit of philanthropy." I said, "I noticed in the article, they said that your wife was Libby Mazer." She stuck out her head and said, "Yes, that's me." I said, "Is that right?" She said, "Yes." I said, "You wouldn't remember me because you were a little girl when you left Clay Street." She said, "Oh! You're from Clay Street. You're one of them boys that lived next door." I said, "Yes." She said, "I never will forget. When I was a little girl, my mama

said that I had a fit or something and your mother came over and she saved my life.” I was glad to see her.

KCH: It doesn’t sound as though there was very much just social contact, informal social contact though between—.

FMF: No. No.

KCH: —Jewish and the black communities.

FMF: No. You see, they went to white schools and that type of thing. Very little—.

CFF: Could I just add this? I think what is fascinating about it, generationally, is Libby Mazer’s daughter was a young girl named Wendy Steinberg. Wendy Steinberg and I went to high school together, when TJ became integrated. We became friends; we used to share James Brown forty-five records and stuff like that. I think that is when you were at Sunny Day with me, because I was trying to get him to buy something, for me. That is when they had the conversation. It is quite interesting to know that our parents knew each other as children. We didn’t know that as we were having our friendship. Seeing that and both of us ended up going to VCU. Wendy was an art student. That is why her father did that.

To see that generational connection—. What has always fascinated me is that he tells those stories about Jackson Ward and many of the Jewish families in Jackson Ward. I went to high school with Norman Friedlander. Seeing the next generation and then knowing that—.

I think that we’ve mentioned that Gilbert Rosenthal had Standard Drug Store. Dad knew Gilbert that way. Gilbert’s son, Gilbert, Jr. was a year ahead of me in high school. That whole interconnection, I found was an opportunity for me to feel a little more comfortable with people that I knew had that tie within the community.

KCH: Right, right

CFF: I’ve always appreciated that—that part of his experience—because it helped me to make friends and connections a little bit easier in the sixties.

FMF: Then two additional blocks up the street, there were two boys. One named Isidore and one named Sam. Then, in fifty-four or fifty-five, I took a course, at the John Marshall Hotel, on psychosomatic diagnosis and such. This guy was sitting over there. After we got getting ready to leave, he—. She said, “I’m Mrs. Sam Kane.” She said, my husband thinks he remembers you. And, I’m trying to pull his name.

CFF: Robinson?

FMF: No, they were all the way up at 800 W. Clay St. Kaminski, that is his name, Sam Kaminski. See this was just about the time when McCarthy was, the Red Herring was, smearing everybody. He—being Jewish and he was down at the school—he changed his name from Kaminski to Sam Kane. See what I mean?

KCH: Right.

FMF: I remembered his face then. We used to go past that store going to Union, back and forth every day.

KCH: At what point did the Jewish population pretty much move out of Jackson Ward and, I assume, that those stores were replaced by black storeowners? Or, did their presence stay there?

FMF: No. They stayed there until a number of years ago. A guy named Kang, who must have been maybe Korean. My brother Kermit used to have the nickname Kang and when we saw the name on the side, Kang’s Grocery—. You see around the late thirties, there was a group that got together and called themselves the Red Circle Stores. It was a cooperative. They managed to mount two stores, one at Harrison and Leigh Street, and another one at about Baker and, St. Paul and Baker. They tried to make it as a grocery store but the Richmond food stores they hindered their ability to get stuff. They finally, after a while, they petered out. They did give Negroes an opportunity to try something like that.

KCH: Did the community support those stores?

FMF: Yes. But not—. They couldn't compete, price wise, with the Jew down at the corner. See, they had lower prices. That is what the A&P used to do, they'd come in and lower a lot of prices and take away from the Jewish groceries. Then, they could keep them under control. Then that forced the Jewish grocers to get together and become the Richmond Food Stores.

CFF: Richfood.

KCH: That's where Richfood comes from!

FMF: Then Richfood began to do that stuff.

CFF: Now it is Performance Foods.

1:13:34 Family: Mother, Lucy Jackson Foster

KCH: Yes, yes. Interesting. Let's go back to your youth. We haven't talked too much about your mother. You've mentioned her. Can you describe your mother?

FMF: She was originally a schoolteacher. She finished normal school.

CFF: In 1903.

FMF: Right. She had two sisters. One who never married named Fanny. And, one who married Dr. J. H. Blackwell, Jr., who was from Manchester. See, the city hadn't changed over to that side. They were all beautiful young ladies. They lived in a neighborhood where there was an outstanding seamstress names Fanny Criss. She would teach them embroidery and she would teach them how to sew. They reached the point that they could make their clothes and everything. She became quite an outstanding seamstress. She ended up in New York and used to work for Gloria Swanson. She was a strong influence on them at that time. They used to have a lot of sewing circles around town. My mother was in a sewing circle. Frequently, when I was around say three, four, and five years old, instead of leaving me with the kids, she would take me with her. I'd go over there, sit down in the corner, and be quiet. Because I knew—after the first one, I'd gone to—that when they got through with all of their talking, they were going to serve something good. You see.

KCH: (Laughing) Yes.

FMF: We didn't see much ice cream during my childhood or anything like that, rarely a lot of cake or stuff. Anyway, I would be sitting in there waiting until that time. I never will forget the second time; they had what looks like a little orange slice, with a candle and a lifesaver for a handle.

1:15:34 [End of first CD]

(Approximately three minutes not recorded)

Interview 2, Track 2,

Track Time: 39:42

0.00.00 KCH: —so interesting. Okay, we were going to talk a little bit more about your mother.

FMF: Yes, she had been a schoolteacher. She had three brothers. There was William, who was a clerk in the post office with my father; there was Richard, who was a railway mail clerk; and her oldest brother was named James. He left Richmond and went into pharmacy. He went to Washington and eventually became a pharmacist and came back to Richmond. He had a drug store within four or five blocks from where they grew up. He ended up with three kids, two daughters and a son. All of them made their mark. William Jackson had a daughter that became an outstanding person with an organization that did a whole lot to support the Richmond Urban League. She ended up teaching at Virginia Commonwealth University. She had a brother who was in the Merchant Marine in World War II. He ended up with a grocery store in Philadelphia. My uncle Dick had no children, but he married a lawyer, in Washington, whose name was Jackson, Estelle Cardoza Jackson. That was the brothers. Now, Fanny stayed at the family home, more or less, until she died. She served as the one who looked out for her brother, who was in railway mail service. She prepared his meals, looked after and took care of him. Eventually, she ended up living with Charlotte, after her husband had died, in south Richmond.

One night, when Charlotte was washing dishes, a police was chasing a felon and he fired three shots. One of the shots came through the house and struck her while she was standing up behind the sink. When the police officer went back, he ended up with the Major saying, “Did you write down in detail where your bullets went?”

KCH: Exactly.

FMF: So, he went back, double-checked, and saw that one of his bullets had gone through the wood of this house. He wanted to check and so he went around and knocked on the front door. Fanny was so old and feeble upstairs. She couldn’t hear him. He went around to the side door, knocked, and he looked and he could see some feet on the floor. So they broke the door down and took her out, to the hospital. I got a telephone call from my brother saying, “Frankie, go down to MCV Emergency Room. Aunt Charlotte is there.” I said, “What is she doing there?” He said, “She’s been shot!” I said, “Shot by whom?” He said, “Somebody shot her.” I went down to the hospital. She was there. They couldn’t give me too much information, but the bullet was in a position where they couldn’t operate, at that time. Eventually she just, she passed. So, those were the sisters and brothers of mother’s.

Now her father’s name was Moses Jackson. Moses was married to—

CFF: —Charlotte Jackson. He was from West Virginia.

FMF: They were Jacksons and they married Jacksons.

CFF: This is according to James. James’ daughter Alice was born on the third floor of the Cunningham-Archer house. Charlotte was—. Charlotte’s family came from West Point, VA and was supposed to be from the Pamunkey tribe. Moses was a maitre’d at the, which hotel?

FMF: Jefferson Hotel.

CFF: —at the Jefferson Hotel.

KCH: A very responsible position.

CFF: We do have a walking stick of his. I have it at my house. Oh, I also have Moses' deed to the home that he purchased that was on Hancock Street. I think he purchased it around 1879, somewhere about—.

FMF: Um-hmm

CFF: —about there.

KCH: That was quite a feat—I would say—to have accumulated enough money to purchase a home.

CFF: Yes, because the deed, Carneal and Sons—. The Carneals were the ones, evidently, who established it. It was wrapped up in an envelope from them. Moses' family, there is a lot more in terms of family history I think that is there, that is real interesting. I will just leave it at that for now. That is all related to his Mom.

0:06:02 Daily life in the Foster home

FMF: She naturally had to leave her job when she got married. She was busily birthing babies and doing the chores of the happy housewife. Where they lived on Fourth Street was next to the Hebrew Cemetery. It was a building with steps up to the front. There was usually a parlor there and probably the kitchen was downstairs; somewhat like the house that we had. Then they left there in 1919 and came to 503 West Clay Street. She got on with the job of doing her duties. The first daughter, Ada, was, when she got big enough, she was quite a bit of help. She and the next brother, my oldest brother, they were very close. Then the next brother, there was another big triangle. You see.

KCH: Yes.

FMF: Then about the time that the fourth brother came along, the sister and oldest brother were closest and the two next boys were closest. We had a large yard and they used to play baseball out in the yard. Then the next brother, by the time he came along, he was closer. Then he there was another brother, and I was the last one. Me and the last brother, Kermit, we became very close.

KCH: How did your mother instill discipline?

FMF: I tell you what. I think discipline came down from the top. It was known that Ada's word was mama and father's word and you had to behave. Then, when Chris came along, he was very responsible. We looked to him because he had the answers to anything that we wanted. It just passed right, sort of, down the line.

KCH: Somehow your parents—. I mean, your—

FMF: Very early, I think, it was a silent influence due to my father. Very early, they started taking newspapers. All of the first five brothers took the *Richmond Times Dispatch*. That meant that they got up at about five o'clock in the morning, carried their papers, came back and ate, and went to school. They came from school—they could play for a little while—they had to come in and get on their homework. By eight-thirty or nine o'clock, because they had to get up early, they'd go to bed.

At dinnertime, when we would sit down together to eat, my father would always have read the paper. He'd come in, pick it up, and go right to the editorial page. He'd read what was on the front and the editorial page. He would make some comment about what was in the paper and then he would bless the table. He would, probably, make some comment about what he had read and then ask us what we thought. There was always plenty of conversation. Now remember, at this time, we didn't have a radio. Conversation was very important. In the meantime, Mother was silent but just as soon as we got through, if we needed any help—. You see, they would give us what help we needed. It reached a point that the help would always come from the brother or sister nearest you. That made it easy and simple.

0:10:09 Family: Father, Christopher Foster

My father worked for his dad when he was in grade school and high school. He would come down in the evening and be a little go-fer. So anyway, the people in the Tredegar, they knew Chris. Well, by the time Chris was ready to, must have been his second or third year in high school, his father died. When his father died, they called him in and said, "Chris, we want to

give you sympathy for the loss of your father. We want you to tell us, in a day or two, if you would be willing to take his place. We will give you the same pay.”

KCH: And how old was he?

CFF: Seventeen.

FMF: Seventeen

CFF: 1897.

FMF: He came back and he told them that, without any question, that he would like to have the job. They encouraged him. Soon there after, they encouraged him to take a civil service exam. He did and he became a clerk in the post office. Well two or three years later, the Underwood Convention came about with the Constitution changes to really get segregation back in place. He was among the last, the last colored clerks who were hired. Down through the years, he and another guy named Matt Harris, were the last two colored clerks left. They were living at the time—we were, the—they were dedicating the new post office. I got Scott Henderson who was my brother-in-law’s, my oldest brother Wendell’s brother-in-law—he was a retired photographer for the Afro newspaper—I said, “Listen, get a picture of Carmen and my father at the flag out there. She is so proud that she has the same initials, C. F. Foster.” He did and we came in and we had the ceremony. We got up from our seats when it was over, and Carmen said, “Somebody’s calling you Grandpa.” There was a guy calling, “Chris, Chris.” He walked on over and he introduced us. My father said, “This is Mr. Childers who was superintendent of the mail.” He said, “This is my son, Dr. Foster, and his daughter, Miss Parcel Post—.” What was that?

CFF: Henry Gonner—who used to be the Central Education Association—used to get teenage girls to be little hostesses, have little banners. We had little Miss America banners. I was part of that Miss Postal Service stuff. That was when they especially tried to mix it with the black girls and white girls for this. It must have been around the early 1970s.

FMF: The little boy was standing beside him. He looked up and said, “Grandpapa, is this the colored man that you said taught you everything you knew?” (Everyone smiles)

KCH: Oh! Oh!

FMF: Carmen gave me a little sweet twist of my hand. She would have given a million dollars for that. He said, “Yes, this is the one that taught me, and a whole lot of others, everything that they knew.”

KCH: Oh, that—. Such a wonderful story. Such a wonderful story.

0:13:52 Family: Sister, Ada Foster Fisher

CFF: One thing that you asked earlier—and this might help as you ask about family, his mother, his father. I think that the influence of his sister Ada, in some ways as a surrogate mother, is clearly profound in terms of her influence on him. I have always looked at her as a surrogate grandmother, in that way. As people confer his knowledge of history, I would choose to think that he picked it up because Ada really was the pinnacle of knowing all about Richmond history. When she passed, it was a wonderful signal to see him pick up the baton from her. She knew so much about history that she shared with him and they would talk about it a lot. She’s a sister and a mother to him, in so many ways. I think. Am I right?

FMF: Yes. She knew so much about Richmond proper per se. Not just black history. Because see, the families were tied up, the prominent families in Richmond, and all of that stuff that she would hear, she would have an understanding and an ability to relate it. Then, when she was little, my father used to take her up to the Confederate Woman’s Home. As a little girl, I think, when Sally Tompkins was still living and if I’m not mistaken. I know that there were other people out there. See, Captain Sally was my father’s great aunt. She was related. Christopher Tompkins was my grandfather’s half-brother. That was the connection. She was strongly in contact with those people. She knew the lineage, and the genealogy, and all that sort of stuff. There were stories that were passed before, that she would get from her mother and from Aunt

Ada—for whom she was named—who used to do all of the going back and forth down there. She knew so much about the early, early Richmond families.

KCH: Did she write any of it down?

FMF: No, but I tell you—. She went on and went to Hartshorn after high school. She was the first one to go to college and she later taught there. It was there where she met her husband. They formed a team. He went into the ministry in Huntington for two years and then to Durham for forty. Well, he did a PhD in Religion at the University of Chicago and did a book called *Negro Slave Songs in America*. It is about the rites and spirituals and that type of thing. She, sort of, acted as his researcher, typist, and everything. They worked together as a team.

Then they worked together as a team of pastor and wife in Durham. When they got to Durham, the first thing that he did was to go to Duke University and introduce himself to the librarian. He told them what he was interested in. They told him he could utilize the facilities. His wife, she would be—. People in Durham would call and say, “Mrs. Fisher, I know you’re not from here but my friend and I are arguing over something. When did that church down at (unintelligible)? Do you have any idea who is in front of that one?” She would say, “Let me get back to you. I am tied up.” She would hang up, get on the phone, and call the Duke librarian. She’d say, “Look up ‘blah-blah-blah’.” Then, when she would get back to her, she’d say, “Oh Mrs. Fisher, you know everything.” It established her reputation.

I never will forget there was a time when I was on the board of the Virginia Museum and I had met Miss Bocock. One day I was there, Ada was with me, and I introduced her to Ada. Miss Bocock introduced her to [Rabbi Calish’s daughter]. I will think of his name but he was rabbi, the Temple Beth-El. His daughter’s name was Edith Lindeman. For about forty years, she was a movie and theater critic for the *Richmond Times Dispatch*. She said, “I want you to meet my friend Edith Lindeman.” Ada said, “I know a dear friend of yours.” She said, “Who is that?” She said, “Ella Knox.” She said, “Oh my gosh, she is like a mother to me.” Edith said, “She lived across the street from you?” Ada said, “She would call me over, and I used to hate to go,

and she would show me some of your dresses that you were getting rid of, but they were just too small for me.” She said, “I would just almost cry.” That struck a little note with her.

So then, Miss Bocock said, “I really would like to get together so that you and Miss Mary Wingfield Scott could meet.” One day, she did make those arrangements.

0:20:26 Edith Lindeman: “Little Things Mean a Lot”

Now in the meantime, underneath me, in the building that I was in, an antique store moved from Second to First Street. The guy’s father’s name was B. F. Stutz, antiques. His name was Carl Stutz. He was a personality on the radio who brought the first FM: station to Richmond. Because he had the only station that you could turn on that, you didn’t hear any static. More people started listening to FM. He helped to raise the cultural level.

What happened was this same Edith Lindeman and he got together on the tune. She gave him, hummed it to him, and he wrote the music. It was called, “Little Things Mean A Lot.” (Singing) “Throw me a kiss from across the room, Say I look good when I’m not, A line a day when you are far away, Little things mean a lot. Don’t have to buy me diamonds or pearls, ‘ta, ta, ta,’ Give me a hand when I’ve lost the way, Give me your shoulder to cry on, Whether the day is bright or gray, Give me your heart to rely on. La, la, la... Little things mean a lot.” It was heading the charts for about five or six weeks. Like I said, her father was the rabbi at Temple Beth-El.

But, before I sang that we were talking about the

0:22:10 Sister Ada, Mrs. Bocock, and Mary Wingfield Scott

CFF: How Ada had a chance to meet Mrs. Bocock.

FMF: Mrs. Bocock and she had a chance to meet Mary Wingfield Scott.

She said, “Listen, tomorrow I am going to take a ride in Jackson Ward with Mrs. Bocock; she and Miss Mary Wingfield Scott are going, and Mrs. Pearsall.” Ada said, “That would be nice.” So the next afternoon, I said, “How was the thing today?” She said, “It was all right. We

went out and after a while, Miss Scott wasn't feeling well, so they brought me back. Just think, I'd never rode in a Mercedes before." We just let it go at that.

Now about—what year was that?

CFF: It was in the seventies.

FMF: About five years ago, there was a little article in the paper. Mrs. Pearsall's daughter and her husband had bought the Ellen Glasgow house.

KCH: The which?

FMF: The Ellen Glasgow house. What they had done is they have offices in there. But, they have some section of it that the public can still see. I called her to express my delight in seeing the article on her about the Glasgow house. She said—I'm talking to her mother now, Mrs. Pearsall—she says, "Oh, I haven't seen you Francis in so long. I can't get out much now." She said, "Do you attend many of the museum affairs?" I said, "Occasionally." She said, "I never will forget your sister. Boy, she was the most elegant lady. I am telling you that was really something." I said, "How's that?" She said, "Oh, you remember we went with Mrs. Bocock?" She said, "Yes, we went with Mrs. Bocock and Mary Wingfield Scott became very rude to your sister. Mrs. Bocock just abruptly said, 'I'm going to take you home. That was very impolite'."

So what I think what happened was (Laughing) that there were two or three places, apparently, that Ada mentioned that they had changed the name of—because they changed blocks and street numbers and then there were some houses that were down there that weren't something. Some how or another, I think Mrs. Scott said, "No, I know"—I am just presuming—"I know what I am talking about. You know. I have a PhD from the University of Chicago." I think that Ada might have said that my husband also did his doctorate at Chicago. Apparently, then she began to become, apparently, rude. So apparently, Ada never said anything back or anything. She never said anything to me about it.

Of course, then Mrs. Pearsall was surprised when I told her that she had told me that they had a ride up there and that she wasn't feeling well. Then they came back. She was kind of

shocked that she didn't say anything. But, that was her nature. She had been brought up—. She wouldn't have wanted to have told me something that would serve no worthwhile purpose, as far as prejudices are concerned. Right soon after that, I mentioned that story to Bill Simpson, who was a research librarian at the City Library. He said, "I appreciate your telling me this Francis. You know, she'd come in here some time and raise hell." She lived right across the street, which is no distraction from her scholarship at all. She was somebody special and she did a whole lot in terms of preservation.

KCH: Yes. In her preservation efforts, I think she is known as really going after what she wanted and staying—. I wondered, because she includes Jackson Ward in her *Old Richmond Neighborhoods* book, I wondered was there contact between some of the local residents and Mary Wingfield?

FMF: I'm going to tell you two things that I know from personal experience. One day I was getting ready to go to the library. I got out of my car and I saw this colored lady with a hose watering the grass. I laughed and I said, "Girl, you do that like Joe Monroe." She said, "You knew Mr. Monroe?" I said, "Yes Mame, I knew Mr. Monroe." She said, "Yeah, I work for Miss Scott." I said, "Where do you live?" She said, "I live at 813 St. Paul Street. She bought that house for me."

CFF and KCH: Oh.

FMF: She said, "You remember Joe Monroe?" I said, "Yes, I saw him out here watering the lawn, just like you, one day. I just stopped by and said hi to him. He said, "I'm ninety-five years old."

KCH: Ninety-five.

FMF: He says, "My name is Joe Monroe." I said, "Where do you live?" He said, "Up on Leigh Street. I got a nephew, you may have heard of, named John Kinney." Well, John Kinney was the lead singer for the Johnson's Happy Pals, which was "the" orchestra during the late thirties, forties, and fifties. He said, "Of course, his life style was his business." One might

tend to say that he was probably of the gay persuasion. But if he were, you wouldn't know it because he was a handsome fellow, handsome fella. He was a great musician, a lot of talent. So I said, "I'm not talking out of school, but I had the pleasure of doing some work for his mother." He said, "You fixed her teeth? Well, they sure look like real teeth." So that was my contact with some people that she—. I do understand that he lived in the back of one of those—I don't know whether it was an out house or not.

KCH: A what?

FMF: Out house. Sometimes you will have a little out-building. Sometimes you can take a little out-building and somebody can make it real neat, particularly if you don't have anyone but yourself. See at ninety-five years old, him being out there being glad that he could water the lawns and everything. That was the only other thing that I had known about, other than Bill Simpson saying that sometimes she would come in there and she raised cane.

0:30:21 Richmond Public Library: Clipping file, Foster family

CFF: When you mention Bill Simpson, it is interesting when Dad and I, when we reviewed our conversation on Friday, Bill Simpson is the one that had started the Foster file. I had wrongly made an assumption that Dad had done it, but it was Bill. Dad would help by contributing to it, once Bill started it.

FMF: Right. Unbeknown to me, when any thing would come in the paper that he would—. I think the reason that he did it was because when I was president of the library board, he probably felt that it was his duty. But, I didn't know that he was—. I was surprised at the number of letters that I had written.

KCH: Was the clipping file, the general clipping files, were they already established at that time? Or did he start clipping files partly because he was inspired by, you know—.

FMF: They had clipping files for different things. I was surprised for me. See, he also read *The Afro*, and he read the black newspapers. I was surprised how much, over a period of years, those things would have. Then there were items he had pulled on Carmen; one or two

items he had pulled on Frankie; some items on Leila, my brother Kermit's daughter, when she got some recognition; Miles Fisher and others that were part of the Foster file. Then he had a file about the Foster file.

0:32:24 Jackson Ward: Movement of residents to Northside and Byrd Park

KCH: Did your parents continue to live in Jackson Ward after the children had all grown?

FMF: No. See, they—technically yes—but see they lived in Clay Ward from 1919—
(Carmen and interviewer laugh.)

CFF: See, he will correct you in that way!

FMF: Yes, they come up there in 1919 and Kermit and I were born in '19 and '21. Now, we went to—. I went first to Monroe School, which is the old armory. They called it the “chicken coop” because of the chicken wire. From there—

CFF: I'm sorry. May I interrupt you for a minute?

FMF: Yes.

CFF: It may be interesting since she is asking that question, because I know that you shared with us the school stuff, I'm thinking that it might be helpful for her to know that your parents moved from 503 West Clay over to 413 West Clay. They just moved a block, in the next block in, I guess, the fifties. Your mother died in 1961, in April of sixty-one. So they moved to that next block in the fifties.

FMF: In the fifties. Because after I married, we moved next door. That was in fifty-one so it must have been about fifty—; Skip would know.

CFF: —maybe around fifty-seven, fifty-eight, in there. They stayed in the neighborhood.

FMF: Yes.

CFF: They didn't move far.

KCH: Did I also hear you say that you lived next door, you and your wife?

FMF: Yes. When I first married, we moved upstairs in my brother Richard's apartment.

CFF: It was a duplex.

FMF: My brother Kermit was already renting from him, the down-stairs.

KCH: Oh, a family affair.

FMF: Yes. They had moved to Northside and gotten a place on Fendall Avenue. Then he rented that place out, first to Kermit and then to another couple upstairs. At the time that I was getting ready to get married, it was vacant and so we moved right on in, in fifty-one.

KCH: And you had started your dental practice, just about six blocks down.

FMF: Right.

CFF: I think that one of the things that is interesting is, in the fifties, you could really begin to see some transitioning from the neighborhood. As you had begun to ask, where were people in the Jewish community living. Some people in the Jewish community—not necessarily the ones that owned the stores; I don't know that history—there was a Jewish community, of sorts, in the Byrd Park neighborhood. As they began to leave in the mid-1950s and moved out to where Thomas Jefferson is, then African Americans started to leave Jackson Ward. That was also at the time when Interstate 95, the Richmond-Petersburg Turnpike, started to open up. You could start to a lot of movement of that younger generation that had grown up in the Ward, had started to stay there, but then as things began to change, they moved out to Northside. He and his wife in 1954—is that right.

FMF: 1955.

CFF: Was Frankie born then? Fifty-five, it was right after he was born. In 1955, in maybe the spring, because my brother was born in January of fifty-five, they moved over to Rosewood Avenue in Byrd Park. You could see a lot of different folks, from his generation—that could have carried on the legacy of Jackson Ward—everybody started to move. There was much more mobility.

KCH: Yes, you had options.

CFF: Yes.

KCH: Was there any resentment or hard feelings when—? I mean, when a community has been so emotionally self-sustaining and close and focused, then as individuals started moving elsewhere, were there any hard feelings or—. “Hurt” I guess maybe. “Hard” is too strong a word.

FMF: No. I think most of the folks that wanted to move, were looking for the opportunity, feeling like they were being upgraded, you see.

CFF: Upward mobility.

FMF: They were, they were aware (Chuckles), some of them—.

CFF: Social status.

FMF: You see, so often what happened was when a person—like a black physician or a black professional—would be one of those that broke the neighborhood. Once they got in there, then everybody else came along. When they got ready to decide that they wanted to move, they wouldn’t get the type of price that they would want. There weren’t the buyers out there. Because there weren’t no white folk that were going to buy back, you see. That would always take that little burden and the brunt for being a pacesetter and a pioneer.

KCH: But the community supported them. Actually then, when you talk about the Club 533 and the meetings at Slaughter’s and all of that that was going on, in the fifties and sixties, many of those individuals lived outside the Ward by then.

FMF: Right.

KCH: They became even more important—

CFF: For sure.

KCH: —because that was the time to connect.

FMF: The great thing was that the Ward, and Church Hill, and, to a little extent, the West End.

CFF: But most of Church Hill was white in the fifties, as blacks started to move over from Jackson Ward to Church Hill. I would choose to think that many, who were seeing themselves as more socially and economically more mobile, as they became teachers and professionals, typically moved over to the Battery Park section of Northside. That was really the place to go. That is where Dr. Howlette lived, Dr. Thornton lived, Ferguson Reid lived. A lot of them moved over, further north. That was still close enough to get downtown.

KCH: Easily.

CFF: Because typically, their parents, for many of them, still lived in Jackson Ward. With parents, you would still come to the homestead.

KCH: Is this a good time to stop? It has been two hours. That time goes so fast.

FMF: It does go fast. As long, (Chuckles) as long as you will do it, I'm ready

0:39:42 End of second CD

End of Interview #2