

## **Shared Stories: African Americans in North Mecklenburg**

Interview with Annie Mildred Lowery, September 16, 2003

Conducted by Jan Blodgett

Transcript edited by Andrés Paz '21

**Summary:** In this interview Annie Mildred Lowery talks about her life in Davidson throughout the years and her deep involvement with the community. She gives valuable accounts about the beginnings of Town Day and the Community Development club, which later turned into the Piedmont Development Club. Lowery also mentions the William Werthis Club and other community members such as Reverend Pritchett and Ms. Maggie Smith. She similarly discusses many efforts to offer recreational activities for the Black youth of Davidson. After lightly going over her Torrence family tree. Lowery talks about the issue of non-integrated spaces in Davidson, and her personal experience working for fraternities on campus for over 30 years as well as raising children in the context of the 1950s and 1960s.

---

**Jan Blodgett:** So, you were a Mayhew?

**Annie Mildred Lowery:** My mother was Minnie Mayhew.

**Jan Blodgett:** Were you born in Davidson?

**Annie Mildred Lowery:** Yes.

**Jan Blodgett:** Where was your mom born?

**Annie Mildred Lowery:** In Davidson, out on the outskirts. You know where the gas tank is? You go up 77 and look to the right, and there's a gas tank? That used to be the Withers' farm and that's where she was born. Mr. Withers' great-grandson lived in Davidson in the white house across from the Methodist Church.

**Jan Blodgett:** Oh, ok. Because of the website that you've done ... When you went to school, did you start at Ada Jenkins or did you go to those two wooden buildings [the school before Ada Jenkins]?

**Annie Mildred Lowery:** No, Ada Jenkins School.

**Jan Blodgett:** So, you started in Ada Jenkins? You didn't go to any of the smaller schools?

**Annie Mildred Lowery:** No, started right here at Ada Jenkins. At that time there was a small White school...

**Jan Blodgett:** Down at the bottom of the hill?

**Annie Mildred Lowery:** Mm hm.

**Jan Blodgett:** When did they start calling it Ada Jenkins - after she died? Because you didn't call it that when you went to school as a student, did you?

**Annie Mildred Lowery:** I can't remember that far back. I only remember Ada Jenkins.

**Jan Blodgett:** I want to learn about your family but you've talked about that on other sites so today, I really want to talk to you about Town Day and the Piedmont Development Association and what you did there. So, let's talk about Town Day and tell me how we got that.

**Annie Mildred Lowery:** Have you seen a picture?

**Jan Blodgett:** I don't think I have a picture in here.

**Annie Mildred Lowery:** I might have a picture. It should have a date on it. If not, I have some other papers.

**Jan Blodgett:** Oh, here it is. No date on the back.

**Annie Mildred Lowery:** That was years after. I'll have to go through a drawer to get a date on that. You want to know how we started? I had been looking for a place to build houses. The man on North Main Street, he was in real estate, Mr. Slavish, and I went to Mr. Slavish and asked him if he knew where we could find land. After that, we started the committee and from then on it was a man named David C. Wayner, through the development crew. He met with us two times and so we started looking more for houses and this place right here - first of all, to start the ball rolling, I stayed where the post office is now, on Brady Alley. We got burned out one Sunday morning. And the preacher, Reverend Pritchett, he started getting people homes. At that time, I didn't get one of those homes. But that started and I kept looking.

**Jan Blodgett:** That was about 1950, so this is a little later that you were looking?

**Annie Mildred Lowery:** Right. After we started the club, we were looking for land to build homes. We brought the farm association into the act. We were talking about building homes and we had to clean up the place. I think they built one or two houses. I was the chairman and I worked at building the new houses. And so, one night at the meeting, I was telling them 'Y'all we need to clean up the community.' We asked the whole community. Our side was in bad shape. I wanted to ask some of the students about how would they feel helping us to clean up the community. And they were so glad. Two of them had moved into a house across from Ada Jenkins and one night at meeting we were talking about how could we let them know how much trash was over here in Davidson. So, when I asked the town of Davidson, would their employees help? I asked the College, their employees did, some students volunteered and then other people in the community volunteered. We started cleaning up; West side, East side, all. And then what we did off Main Street, we dumped all the trash that we collected in the vacant lot where the college depot is now, on Griffith and Main. That's where we piled all the trash, all of it. We planned before hand. We were going to pile all the trash and the College would get permission to have students help and provide trucks to move all this trash off when Town Day was over. And that Saturday we had Town Day. We sold hot dogs and fish and had cold drinks. And the money

we made, we had a treasury, and we put it in the treasury so when we would need it we would have it.

**Jan Blodgett:** So, was the treasury for the Civic Club?

**Annie Mildred Lowery:** It was the Community Development Club.

**Jan Blodgett:** And that turned into the Piedmont Development Club?

**Annie Mildred Lowery:** Later. At the time, other than the trash and all, we didn't have any place to meet. We were meeting in houses. So, Dave McClain, a student at Davidson, had built a white building on Griffith Street and we called that the community center.

**Jan Blodgett:** And that was originally built near Ada Jenkins and it was used for scouting and there was another club.

**Annie Mildred Lowery:** But this man who went to the College...

**Jan Blodgett:** Yeah, they named it for him. He worked with the YMCA and then it got moved to Griffith Street. Where was it on Griffith Street?

**Annie Mildred Lowery:** You know where the town water works is? On the right-hand side? It was up above that. It was a nice building that white house. So we started to have meetings up there and the College gave us permission to use it. So we got all that trash moved up off that land after they took pictures. I still might have snapshots of that.

**Jan Blodgett:** I would love to see that.

**Annie Mildred Lowery:** I'll look for them. I have so many papers. After that, the next year, we had Town Day again, up there. After having the second year and coming up on the third year, we asked if we could have Town Day on the green and we had a committee and they gave us

permission. You might not have thought about that -it wasn't the town green then but that place was full of trees and you had to walk with your shoulders hunched. The first year we moved there, we had games and everything. Jim Martin was the governor and it was my idea to invite him. And they said, 'Ms. Mildred, he isn't going to come.' And I said, 'I asked him so he better come!' I wrote him a letter and he never answered whether he would [come] or not. But the day we had Town Day, about 12:30 everyone was saying, 'Ms. Mildred, he isn't going to come'. But I knew in my heart he would come and we looked out at about 1:00 and there was his black shiny car with the American flag on it. He brought some of his staff and he walked around and talked to people. And he had prepared us a flag; it is at the community center. And that's how we started Town Day and we kept it up for years until the club moved leadership and it stopped.

**Jan Blodgett:** I knew it had stopped for a while and then came back.

**Annie Mildred Lowery:** Yeah, we stopped doing it and then the town picked it up. They didn't take it, they picked it up again. It seemed like our people lost interest. These past years I've been dealing with my husband, so I didn't get to participate much. This last year they sent out letters. Two years before this last year, I couldn't get up there but I filled out the forms and everything - I would sell tea and cupcakes- and that year my kids sold for me, to keep the name up. Year before last, they were losing interest so this past year I checked with Annie to see what was going on for Town Day and Annie said no one was very excited and I signed my name [inaudible]. We have a club that would work together to save money if anyone had trouble. So, I signed up and Annie said if I signed up I had to go through the health department and I said that was no problem for me. So, this past year I got my son-in-law to help me. We sold filet of fried fish and some sodas, something else. So, when people from the community were walking - it isn't what it used to be; it's changed so much. It's not that people have changed it's that there are new people in the community who aren't familiar with the community and what it's all about. Our part is not letting them know and them not letting us know what can be done to help. If it comes down to health inspections, we can do that. We got ready this past year and when the health lady came, all she was asking for, we had that there. We had things on ice, washed hands, rubber gloves. Whatever the guidelines were, I helped them to come up to them. I sat there all day long helping with Town Day. [inaudible] was kind of disappointed and I said, 'Next year,

I'm going to get back into it and people will be back.' And they said, 'Oh, it's too complicated now.' And I said, 'Wait a minute, no, it's not complicated. You all get right understanding and do what you have to do. They tell you you can't make tea and bring it anymore but you can buy canned soda or gallon tea. There's games we can get.'

**Jan Blodgett:** Well, I hope you can get people back again.

**Annie Mildred Lowery:** I've already started selling.

**Jan Blodgett:** Oh, good. Tell me a little bit more about the William Werthis Club. I've seen their booth at Town Day and didn't really know who they were.

**Annie Mildred Lowery:** The William Werthis Club was for anybody who needed something done. Sometimes a child would come or an adult would come; someone needed their house cleaned, someone needed their medication paid for, if we had the money we would [buy some], someone who needed food. One time it was cold and a little boy didn't have good shoes - and you know, sometimes you have to be careful about that but we went and talked to the mother and she said it was all right - and we went and bought him shoes.

**Jan Blodgett:** Who all are members and how did it get started?

**Annie Mildred Lowery:** It was Alice Grime, she was the president, and I was just playing along, and Ms. Maggie Smith. We would take the teenage children and there were about 4 adults. And that was the William Werthis Club. We still have the name but, like I told Alice, we just can't get a rep around here. We're always trying to help people. From the Town Day, we had recreation. They used to have it at Davidson School but it was all for White children. So Hannah Jackson, she and I had cars, and we would drive the children down to V.F.W. hut on different days for recreation. That was the William Werthis Club that was doing that. And one day I said I wouldn't take any more children down to Cornelius, we should try to get recreation for our kids. And {Tom]Scott, he was over the Davidson children, the man who used to be over football - the real old man and his son was named Scott- he was the football coach. He would help every year

with the children at the Davidson school. What he did, he knew it was against the rules, but he would offer us games and stuff and some days he would make it possible for our kids to come over there and play. But I got tired of that. At that time Jim Martin was in Charlotte, that congregation, he was something before he came. So, I never could get him on the phone, Jim Martin, but someone said if I would stand [outside] at 7:30 or 8:00, that's when he went to the post office and so I would go and try to get him. And I said, 'Listen, Martin, are you busy?' And he said, 'No, Ms. Lowery, what do you want?' And I said, 'It's a long story, do you have time?' He said, 'I don't have much time this morning, can I meet you another morning?' and I said, 'That's fine.' So, I met him another week and I told him that we were in bad need in Davidson for recreation for our Black kids. And he said, 'Well, don't they have it at the school?' I said no they didn't. He still said, 'What do you want me to do?'

**Jan Blodgett:** So this was after the schools were integrated but the recreation wasn't?

**Annie Mildred Lowery:** Right. So, he said, 'Well, I'll see what I can do. When I find someone, I'll have them call you.' So, he did. We got together. I used to go to a recreation meeting in Charlotte; I would drive myself, take my little green car and go riding down. At that time, [inaudible] Ms. Annie Potts, whenever they would have summer recreation meetings, planning for summer recreation programs. I would go down there for the set up that we had. We asked the bureau and the Charlotte recreation started giving us paperwork and ideas so that [we could start] programs where if you had to a job to fill people would screen children that were old enough to work on the job. We got work permits for the kids in Charlotte and created jobs. We went to churches and places to see if they would hire. At one point, we had 12 children hired out. They would have a supervisor and they would come and check the site and bring a time sheet and they would time them. And in the next two weeks they would bring them a check. And then we had recreation in that little white building and we had over 100 kids [at one time]. When we had recreation, we would go to town for different meetings. There was a man named Mr. Steinbeck, he helped us out and gave us ideas. And we found out that we could go on trips; it was a program that had transportation. I went to a meeting down south that they started [inaudible]. My daughter Jocelyn is in her fifties now, [and she went along], from her age down.

**Jan Blodgett:** How old was Jocelyn then?

**Annie Mildred Lowery:** About 14.

**Jan Blodgett:** Ok, and this would have been about '62, right before Ada Jenkins closed?

**Annie Mildred Lowery:** No, it was after that. Ada Jenkins was closed.

**Jan Blodgett:** They closed in spring of 1965.

**Annie Mildred Lowery:** So, it might have been 2 or 3 years before.

**Jan Blodgett:** Right around that time period, mid-60s. \

**Annie Mildred Lowery:** So with [that program], kids got to go on all kinds of trips.

**Jan Blodgett:** Did they go to Charlotte or [further] outside [the area]?

**Annie Mildred Lowery:** They went to Tracy, Cherokee, The Wizard of Oz, and Timberland. When Carowinds opened up these children were able to go. the first year. There was a program where they would finance these trips. You just had to sign up and they would provide buses. A year later, we found there was a program in Charlotte where they would provide lunches for the children but a parent or somebody would have to go and pick them up at about 4 or 5 'o clock in the morning. We even had volunteers to do that; Evelyn Carr, Phoebe Houston, her husband Harold Houston, they would go to Charlotte. That age group helped a lot with our trips. The minister - he's dead now- over at Reeve's Temple: Reverend Pope. He helped us a lot with the community. Another reverend was Reverend Martin from Gethesemane Baptist. And so, from there, we got into the housing situation. That's where the Piedmont Development Association got in and organized the club, the Piedmont Association, and people who were getting houses would attend and people who weren't getting houses would attend. Davidson won several prizes. You know, you would go to these meetings that would talk about your achievements and they



would have prizes, so Davidson won. The mayor won for decorating with flowers and all.

**Jan Blodgett:** So, this Piedmont Development Association, was it tied to the Community Relations Task Force that you and Daniel Rhodes were on? Because they also did housing.

**Annie Mildred Lowery:** No. Mm hm. They did housing but Dr. Rhodes would come here. The task force got into helping get the money to build the houses. And the Piedmont Development Association taught people how to get as much house for your money, take care of their yard - mostly teaching. Mr. David Rhodes, he was all over manned. He would show you how to get more house for your money, how to manage. Dr. Rhodes was one that helped us to get along, he was very helpful. And from the housing on, that's when we got the community center over here in Davidson. While we were in the Davidson community center, it didn't have very many toys to play with. So, the man who's from East Mecklenburg school still, Dick; he was a coach. I saw him one day down at the recreation in Charlotte. I said, 'Em glad I met you, where are you from?' and he said, 'I'm a coach at East Mecklenburg.' And I said, 'You might not know but I've got a crowd of children working up in Davidson and we don't have much material to deal with for the summer and I've been trying to find where we could get some. You might not be the man but maybe you could tell somebody who would buy us [supplies].' And I gave him my address and telephone number, [inaudible] I thought he wasn't going to get anything but about 2 weeks after summer started, I had a phone call one day and it was Dick asking me if I was Ms. Lowery. He said, 'I found a few little things that the children can play with: balls and bats. Would you accept them?' and I said, 'Anything you can bring us, I sure will.' And I waited about three weeks and I thought that man must have been kidding or something. Then, one day, a big truck came up with basketball goals, footballs, and all kind of games, horseshoes. There was more than I knew. And the kids had a lot of games for three or four summers because we kept them up and saved them. And he was nice enough but he coaches at Davidson at camps in the summer, so I expected to meet him again. But he was nice. We divided what we got with Davidson school recreation, [inaudible] He shared with us when we didn't have anything and then we turned around and shared with them. And so we got along fine. And from there is where we heard about them wanting to make Ada Jenkins School for drugs.

**Jan Blodgett:** A drug rehabilitation program.

**Annie Mildred Lowery:** That's what they wanted. But we started talking about that until we thought we would go to Mary Jackson and we sat down one day and talked it over. And we were supposed to vote on it, but in the meantime we asked [inaudible] from the Piedmont said if we could get the school and make it into an educational [facility] and she said yes. So we met with Mr. Steinbeck and a couple more people and then we asked Mary Jackson. We said we would like to have a meeting to ask Mr. Robert, could we have a community meeting at the Davidson school. So, that didn't go well. And the next time we had our meeting, we got up and said we'd like to have a community center outside of recreation. But we didn't have enough money. But it went ok. Mr. Ralph got up, I wasn't mad at him, but he got up and said he didn't want the drug place over there. They did not put it over there. It was surprising, though, he didn't want us to have a community center.

**Jan Blodgett:** This was Ralph Johnson who said this? Because I heard Irving McClain was on the side of saying we don't want it because they would bring people in from Charlotte it wouldn't be a treatment for people here in Davidson.

**Annie Mildred Lowery:** Right, right. So, we got that. In the meantime, we met, we had to save because we had no money. When we met with the town, we wanted somebody to get money for us and we would run the program. The town paid the dollars and took it from there. The Piedmont set us up with typewriters. [We had] upholstery classes. We had different people come in. A young man came after that [and started] the ball program. So we had all that at the community center. We had cooking. We had a lot. We worked with flowers. It worked all right until the churches were going to do something. Rev. Sherry was going to do something and he fired out. He was supposed to get the ministers from all the other churches and have a meeting to make a board. So, Reverend Sherry and his crew had it at Davidson Presbyterian Church but you could never get over there if you weren't a member. It went for a while but it [died out]. Then they found out he wasn't paying the bill, [inaudible] So, the town of Davidson paid the bill, [inaudible] But we helped him redecorate the center.

**Jan Blodgett:** The community center has had an amazing life.

**Annie Mildred Lowery:** And the daycare. They were talking about more people would get jobs if they had somewhere to work. So the community center was scouting around for a daycare. A lady took that in hand and the president of General Time, he presented us with the first check for the daycare center. I didn't say anything, [inaudible] Our development club got the first check and that's how we got the day care because we needed somewhere.

**Jan Blodgett:** For the children, so [parents] could work.

**Annie Mildred Lowery:** Mm hm. And the committees in Davidson.

**Jan Blodgett:** How many town committees have you been on? You were on the Human Relations Task Force, right?

**Annie Mildred Lowery:** Right. The Mayor's Committee, I was on that before they got turned into the Human Relations Task Force, [inaudible] The Ordinance Committee. Community Planning.

**Jan Blodgett:** Did you work with the Parks and Recreation Committee?

**Annie Mildred Lowery:** Yes.

**Jan Blodgett:** How did you get to go down to Charlotte? You said that you would go to the Charlotte Parks and Recreation. Did you just show up? How did you get invited, how did they know who you were?

**Annie Mildred Lowery:** I would drive my little green car. After I got in there, people would call and let me know. I would see the newsletter and invite myself. And then they would have different meetings.

**Jan Blodgett:** That must have taken a little bit of nerve to just go into those meetings.

**Annie Mildred Lowery:** You don't know. I would go out and be in a meeting about every night. Sometimes I would be writing and sometimes I would be speaking. I would be there and talk so much; you would never know who was going to be there. If I wasn't helping Davidson I was working for Smithfield. [inaudible] I would help her with the scouts. When they said we could use the school to open the community center and the town paid the dollar to open it up, you should have seen that school -all that dirt.

**Jan Blodgett:** Yeah, it had been closed up.

**Annie Mildred Lowery:** The children that we had working for us, they found out they were getting paid, we asked them and they were willing to help us clean it up. Then we called the school board to ask about the stuff in the school; if they didn't want it, we wanted to use it to start recreation for our boys and girls. They said, 'There's not much in there but you can use whatever's in there, you're welcome to it.' They didn't know what was in there. Oh, the tables and the chairs! We cleaned up that school until the children were so dirty. We worked on different days. Some of that furniture is still in there. See, the downstairs was nice. I would go to the meetings down there at Charlotte but I would do this in the summer.

**Jan Blodgett:** Was there ever a PTA for Ada Jenkins?

**Annie Mildred Lowery:** Yes. I can tell you the presidents: Julia Donaldson, Mr. Eddie Houston, and Ms. Frances Houston's father was president sometimes.

**Jan Blodgett:** But you were never president?

**Annie Mildred Lowery:** No. That was in my Mother's Day. I was on the board of [inaudible]. And I was on the Parks and Recreation Committee; that was when Matthew McConack was on it. The playground down there at the lake? When the Parks and Recreation was trying to get enough money to fix that park up, they sat there and said, 'We don't have enough money to fix

the playground up.’ Well, I went to the place where the people go to interview at the town. It was waiting to get approved to get funds. So, I asked the lady and the man, ‘Are you talking about, like, you have a program where you’ve spent a lot of money but it wasn’t cash money and you had receipts for thousands of dollars?’ Like taking children on the trips, they’d got the buses but they gave us receipts like it was money. And she said, ‘Yes, this is all Davidson needs, a receipt like that.’

**Jan Blodgett:** Just a receipt in kind?

**Annie Mildred Lowery:** Yes, and we had spent about \$65,000 over taking trips and different things. And that’s how Davidson qualified for the grant, when they found out we had spent that much. See, I was on the committee for the 10- year planning, and ...

**Jan Blodgett:** Oh, so this was the very beginning when they were trying to fix it up. Back when it was the pond.

**Annie Mildred Lowery:** Mm hm. That was going 10 years and I was on that since it started. And our community development code ended up spending \$10,000 on trips, food, material, all that. That’s how they were able to get started on the pond. And yes, McCollet was at the head then.

**Jan Blodgett:** What happened to the community center building? When did it go away, the one on Griffith Street?

**Annie Mildred Lowery:** It’s been 10 years or more that it’s been gone because they couldn’t keep it up. When you change organizations you have to want to keep things going. Not think you can just be there, you have to put out some work. And people think they can do a better job than you can and then when they get the job, it’s too much for them. I was on the board with Dr. Carr who wanted to build that big hotel.

**Jan Blodgett:** What happened to that? What’s your story on why that didn’t work?

**Annie Mildred Lowery:** It just didn't. It didn't pass the committee and when they called in the vote for the committee, they didn't vote for him. [inaudible] Did you know Dr. Ward's wife had died?

**Jan Blodgett:** No.

**Annie Mildred Lowery:** She did, I saw the name. I was on a committee with him.

**Jan Blodgett:** Who was he?

**Annie Mildred Lowery:** Dr. William Ward.

**Jan Blodgett:** Oh, I didn't know them. I have run across a reference to an A.E. Torrence who attended Johnson C. Smith and they lived in Davidson in 1875-76. Do you have any idea who this might be? Could they be related to Lee Torrence? They would have been somewhere between 12-18 years old in 1876. All I have are their initials and that they were from the town of Davidson. There probably are other people from Davidson who attended Johnson C. Smith before 1900.

**Annie Mildred Lowery:** I don't know but I could find out for you.

**Jan Blodgett:** Because your sister Evelyn gave me a copy of the family tree for Lee Torrence but it doesn't really have his parents or who his brothers and sisters were. So, I was wondering if it could be one of their relations. How many Black Torrences would there have been? Was it all one family?

**Annie Mildred Lowery:** No, it was two sets of Torrences and they're not related.

**Jan Blodgett:** Oh, ok. Who's which group? You're the Lee Torrence group?

**Annie Mildred Lowery:** Right. And the other Torrence is in Cornelius. Do you know Gertie? That's Gertie, [inaudible]

**Jan Blodgett:** Tell me about the barbershop.

**Annie Mildred Lowery:** Well, it wasn't only the barbershop. It was the Coffee Cup. In our meetings we were talking about places that weren't open up [integrated].

**Jan Blodgett:** Right, so this would have been when the schools were integrated, the College was integrated, but the stores weren't?

**Annie Mildred Lowery:** Right. The stores weren't.

**Jan Blodgett:** Which group is this that you're talking about?

**Annie Mildred Lowery:** This is the Community Development Group. Not the Piedmont Association, we didn't get that involved.

**Jan Blodgett:** And that's still going, right? It was going before the Piedmont Development group?

**Annie Mildred Lowery:** Mm hm.

**Jan Blodgett:** So, they're actually separate. Ok.

**Annie Mildred Lowery:** So, we had about 10 members. What it was, you know how people get to talking and saying how come we can't do so and so and make it better? Well, we kept talking about it and then we decided to try and see if we could get in and make it better. At the time, we stood our ground, organized, and we had a few people go and ask at the Coffee Cup, Ralph's barbershop, wherever. They said, 'No, we'll do it when we get to it.' Mr. Hood at that other barbershop said he would cross that bridge when he got to it. So, we would have meetings and it

wasn't long until some of the people found out we were doing this. And even a young man who used to be in Durham and used to travel around, he came down and met with us. We had different people. It was our idea so we would invite people in to give us guidelines and have some support, too. If we had trouble, it's good to have someone stronger than you who knows what to do. So, we met; Rev. Pole let us meet at his church and the housing depot, we met there sometimes, we met at some of the professors' houses. We had some of the professors with us and some students.

**Jan Blodgett:** Which professors?

**Annie Mildred Lowery:** You know the man who's Dean of Students now?

**Jan Blodgett:** Tom Shandley?

**Annie Mildred Lowery:** When he was talking about Ralph Johnson and stuff like that. He was one that was meeting with us, he knew exactly what we knew. He was a student at Davidson at the time. And him saying he didn't know is bull, I think. I started to ask him but he was a young student, [inaudible] They closed the barbershop. He was one of the students that if they closed the barbershop they would put him on the campus, [inaudible] So, after meeting the young man from Durham and they would going around with us sometimes, we saw we weren't doing anything and that's when we took the time to go around in person and we planned to do it right, go to Davidson and get a permit and everything. And the people that were marching with us. The book said, my son, he was a big guy - he was a small guy. A couple of men took their children in [to the barbershop], and he said no. He would always say, 'I'll cross that bridge when I get to it.' But Ralph would always say, 'No way, I won't cut Black people's hair.' And so at meeting one night there wasn't anybody to go so they said to me, 'What about you and your son?' And I said, 'Sure, I'll try.' And I took my son in and sat there. I couldn't say whether he would say yes or no but I was trying to make it better. And people were talking about it - Joe McCain had a shop at his house and people would have to take their children after they got off [work, at night]. The people in the community were sort of complaining.



**Jan Blodgett:** You took your son in to Ralph Johnson's and then it was several weeks later that the student's picketed?

**Annie Mildred Lowery:** Mm hm. And it wasn't only students, there were community members and we asked for admittance. And it wasn't all Blacks. And we picketed not only the barbershop but also Coles Cafe. What it was, they had a certain side for Blacks.

**Jan Blodgett:** They just had a coat rack down the middle, right?

**Annie Mildred Lowery:** Yeah. And that wasn't the only place.

**Jan Blodgett:** Did you picket Coles? Were people really walking in front of it?

**Annie Mildred Lowery:** Yes. We were there and at the barbershop. There wasn't anywhere else to picket. Everywhere else you could walk in and be served whether they thought about it or not but you knew the places where they said 'no.'

**Jan Blodgett:** What was it like for a Black woman to work for Kappa Alpha? You worked for them for 30 years, they're the old south, and they had confederate flags. What did you think?

**Annie Mildred Lowery:** They told me what it was all about, [inaudible] we said, 'We are here to make money, you treat us as humans, that's your way to live but don't think you can be that crazy [to us].' So, we never had any problems. And to tell the truth, they didn't act like we were Black, the attitude they had. They couldn't be nicer guys. I worked at Sigma Nu, not that long, but Kappa Alpha worked better than Sigma Nu.

**Jan Blodgett:** I don't know if you know this but two years ago, Kappa Alpha and the Black Student Union did a joint dance. They did some parties together to sort of break barriers and get students to mix. Some people were surprised.

**Annie Mildred Lowery:** [inaudible] I worked all those years and then [my husband died] and I

knew I would get part of social security so I signed up for that and started working [inaudible]. But there isn't a better job than they were, [inaudible]

**Jan Blodgett:** Would they come to your home?

**Annie Mildred Lowery:** Yes, and take us out to dinner. Mm hm. I worked at No Name. When I worked at K.A., they wanted some Black boys to join but they were hesitant. They had some guys come down and they would eat free and I didn't want them to eat free. And at Sigma Nu, before I went to Kappa Alpha, they could join but they wouldn't. The time they started taking Black students, they didn't want to stay. Ray Sinclair, back to basketball, he will tell you that Ms. Lowery helped him. When his mother couldn't come, I went with him.

**Jan Blodgett:** To the Hall of Fame?

**Annie Mildred Lowery:** Mm hm. Then the next year he came with something else and took me to it. Ron Williams, the doctor, he was over there, helping out. [inaudible] A lot of the Blacks didn't want to stay. Sinclair and Ron Williams, they weren't members of KA but by them knowing me, they treated them nice. They didn't tell them that they couldn't come to me; they could come anytime, [inaudible] Anytime somebody new came, a new president, they would say we know what you say stand for, but we're here to work and treat us nice and it's your business what you stand for. I worked 30 years there and didn't have a problem, [inaudible]

**Jan Blodgett:** What was it like raising children in Davidson in the 50s and 60s? Being a parent? I'm sure you had to work very hard to create opportunities for them.

**Annie Mildred Lowery:** Yeah. To me, it was all right. I liked it. [inaudible] I worked at the fraternities: K.A. and No Name. I worked at the guesthouse. [inaudible] It wasn't hard. I got up early in the morning and I saw them late at night. When they were at school, I made sure my children were taken care of and I saw them at nighttime. I found time to help them with their lessons. People say it's hard now. It's not hard. And to go to church; I used to go back and forth to all the meetings. Helping. And at school at the PTA. Whatever I had to do, I would do it.

**Jan Blodgett:** What was it like when the schools integrated? Some of your children must have gone to North Meck?

**Annie Mildred Lowery:** They did. My daughter Mary and my son Lewis. And I had grandchildren, a lot of grandchildren. That's what I told them, 'Don't create any problems. When they call you Black, you know you're Black. Don't go off.' We didn't have any problems, I never had to go down there or go uptown for anything, [inaudible] They had some programs for the young people that they would come to.

**Jan Blodgett:** That seems to me to be something that is missing now, here in Davidson. That there aren't people like you who are able to create programs and have a community organization and keep it together.

**Annie Mildred Lowery:** And the church, why can't you open the church to some teenagers? Like the Teen Canteen? [inaudible] Once they didn't have the money to deal with the teenagers, they closed the doors.

**Jan Blodgett:** Yeah.

*End of Recording.*