

Shared Stories: African Americans in North Mecklenburg

Interview with Shane Stewart, September 25, 2016

Conducted by Jan Blodgett at Reeves Temple AME Zion Church

Summary: To begin the interview, Stewart explains the deep connection that their family has had to the Davidson area over generations, best shown through the extensive list of local last names belonging to their family tree. They go on to briefly recap their early educational background starting in the 90's, noting that even though Mooresville schools had been integrated 20 years earlier, the lingering effects of segregation could still be seen in how their classmates socialized. Stewart then shares a portion of their family history, beginning with their grandmother who grew up where Highway 73 is currently located, then their father's side of the family, who were located near Carrigan Farms on Highway 115 in Mooresville. Stewart was the first person in their family to earn a college degree, and they speak about how their love of history motivated them to ask more questions about their own family's history. Stewart discusses the difficulties in gathering information from relatives, not because family members are unable to remember the past, but because of their tough attitude that keeps them from sharing the pain associated with some memories. Stewart concludes the interview by speaking about how the newer generations of their family have been growing progressively more apart, a trend that Stewart hopes to help change in order to keep their relatives connected and their family history alive.

Interviewer: And we are officially recording. So, this is Jan Blodgett interviewing Shane Alexander Stewart.

Shane Stewart: Yes ma'am.

Interviewer: Sunday, September 25th, at Reeves Temple AME Zion Church. So, thank you so much for being part of this program. And let's start with a little bit about you and your family. So, tell me a little bit about where you were born, who your parents are, who your grandparents are.

Shane Stewart: I was actually born in Statesville but I don't tell a lot of people that. April 20th, 1986. But I was raised in Mooresville, North Carolina my whole life, with the exception of college, when I lived in Cullowhee, moved to Salisbury for my Masters, and I moved to Atlanta for my second Masters. My family name is Stewart, but my family's makeup is so interesting, because we have so many different branches coming in and going out. For instance, me and my brothers, we have three different last names, because my oldest brother has a different mother than we do, so his last name is Howard, and then my younger brother has the same parents, but I have my mother's last name, which is Stewart, and he has my father's last name, which is Cowan. And our family is deeply rooted in this area. Stewarts, Cowans, Baileys, Torrence, Davidson, Alexander, Carson, Allison, Sturgess. Those are all names associated with my family, and those are all names that are historically associated with this area in particular. We mostly had been sharecroppers. Then, we became factory workers. I'm actually the first person in my family to go to college.

Interviewer: Congratulations.

Shane Stewart: Thank you. It's a big feeling, but it's a lot of responsibility. I'm pretty proud of that fact, taking the family forward.

Interviewer: Yeah. So, how long were you in Mooresville?

Shane Stewart: I lived in Mooresville until I was 18, then I went to college. So, I still considered Mooresville home. I moved away to Atlanta for two years in 2014 and moved back this past January, 2016. But I've lived here my whole entire life essentially.

Interviewer: Okay. So, where did you go to school in Mooresville? Elementary, junior high, high school?

Shane Stewart: I went to Park View Elementary. It's like it was so long ago now. But, yeah, I went to Park View Elementary, then Mooresville Middle School, then Mooresville High School. Of course, now you got all these different schools, so it's like you got intermediate school, you've got freshman academy. We didn't have none of this.

Interviewer: Yeah. But, now, schools would have already been—how long had they been integrated by the time you got into school?

Shane Stewart: By the time I went to school, it would have been about 20 years. Mooresville, I think, did a lot of integration in the early '70s, actually. So, yeah, it would have been about 20, because I started school in '91. So, about almost 20 years. But it was still—you could still feel that it was still this feeling of, like, I don't want to say you weren't welcome, but there was still this tension between the black students and white students in the '90s. Even in elementary school we knew, okay, all the black kids still play with each other, and all the white kids play with each other, and we'll play with each other when the teacher will make us, and then we'll start seeing we weren't so different. But when we first started school, it was like, okay, all the black kids over here, and all the white kids over here, and one random Latino kid would be over here like, "I don't know where to go." We had two Asian kids like, "Well, I guess we're sticking together." And until the teachers forced us all to play together, it was like, we still went along those lines of our own segregation.

Interviewer: Did people also live separately? Did you mostly live in different neighborhoods?

Shane Stewart: In Mooresville, it's long been known there are several areas where African-Americans live. One area is called King's Creek. There's Bell Street, which is also called Patterson Avenue; West End; Sedgefield; Kelly Street; and then the area I lived in was called Eastern Heights, but everyone called it Hike, because, you know, in the Southern dialect, Height becomes Hike. Yeah, so, it's like, everybody calls it Hikeville, but actually it's Eastern Heights. But those are the major areas where black people lived in Mooresville. And then, you know, it kind of formed a semicircle, kind of like a crescent moon in Mooresville, and then you got all the whites staying everywhere else, like Fieldstone and Downtown and, now, on the lake. But for the

most part, all black people lived in those little areas. Now we branched out, but for the most part, growing up, I remember those were the areas where African-Americans lived.

Interviewer: Okay, because I know, in Davidson, there's the West Side, and in Cornelius there was Smithville, and Huntersville had Pottsville. So, yeah, but I realized I didn't know that about Mooresville.

Shane Stewart: Yeah, because, and you can tell certain things. Like, if you go on what we call Bell Street, which consists of Bell Street, I want to say Lee Avenue, and Patterson Avenue, if you look at the houses, you can tell those back in the day where the middle-class African-Americans lived. But now, it's kind of like everybody lives back there now. I don't want to say it's gone down, but it's like, you can see there's a lot of different types of people who live there, whereas back in the day, it was like, okay, this is where all the professional African-Americans live.

Interviewer: That's interesting to know. So, where did you go to church?

Shane Stewart: Bethesda AME Zion in Mooresville.

Interviewer: Okay.

Shane Stewart: Yeah, that's where we grew up. My family's been going there for several generations. My great-grandmother was on the Stewards board, and my grandmother sung in the choir, and my aunt sung in the choir. And it was our family church for a long time. It still is.

Interviewer: So, how did you end up at Reeves Temple?

Shane Stewart: The pastor who was here before, Pastor Walls, me and her went to college, went to get our Master's of Divinity together, and me and her became very good friends. And I had actually left a different church I was attending, it was Pentecostal, and I was like, I don't really have a church to go to. She was like, "Well, just come visit." I was like, I haven't been to AME Zion in a long, long time. And so, I came here, and I've been in love with this church and the people, and it's such a welcoming and loving environment right here. It's like, I'm surprised that more and more people aren't here, because this is a church where you'll feel loved.

Interviewer: So, tell me about some of the stories that you heard growing up about this area, about your family, about what were the rules about where you lived.

Shane Stewart: Oh, Lord, because I know there's a lot of stories I've heard about growing up in the Davidson-Mooresville—I guess you would say kind of Kannapolis type area, because if you go straight down that way towards where Concord Mills and the Renaissance Festival is, that's where my—Highway 73. My family grew up on Highway 73. And my grandmother, my mother's mother, her name was Ophelia Stewart. She was born Ophelia Rice. She tells me a lot of stories about what life was like when they were sharecropping, about how there was nine of them—there were three girls and six boys, and the three girls were the oldest, and she was the youngest of the three girls—and about how, when they were coming up, they didn't ever stay in the same house, because they were so many kids and such limited space, the kids would go off to different people. Like, she stayed with her grandmother, who they called Big Momma, name was Zula Alexander. She stayed with Big Momma, and one of her sisters stayed with her Aunt Lizzie, and then another sister stayed with another aunt, and then one of the brothers would stay with their people. So, their parents raised them, but it was, like, on a limited basis, because they were in the fields all day. And so, she would be with Big Momma all day, cooking food for them while they were out in the field. So, then, she saw her parents every day, but it was like, she didn't stay with them. And it got to a point and place where, when she got older and it was time for her to move back with her parents, she didn't want to go, because she was like, "I've been with Big Momma all this time. Now I'm 11 years old, and you want me to go live with y'all." She's said, "I loved my parents, but I was just used to living with Big Momma." Because she was telling me stories about her and Big Momma and her grandpa would all share this one bed and this quilt, especially in the wintertime, to keep warm and stuff like that. But she said it was some good days, though, because she was like, "You know, in this area," she said, "you sense a lot of hostility from whites, but not like you did in other areas." Because she said that the poor whites were just like them, and they would share stuff with each other. They would eat with each other and cook for each other, and the poor white kids, sometimes they would say little things, but they would be friends real quick the next day.

And on my dad's side, they grew up on 115 in Mooresville, near what's called Carrigan Farms. I've heard some pretty rough stories about there. In particular, I have an aunt who, the white man they were working for, one day he tried to sexually assault her. And my grandfather found out about it, and he actually stood up, and this was in the late '50s, too, and told him, "Do not touch my daughter. You know, if you do, you will have trouble." And so, they burned the crops on their

yard two nights later. And my grandpa said that he stood there—my dad said he stood there and watched his grandpa, a man named Bill Cowling, dark-skinned man with blue eyes—that always stood out to me, dark-skinned man with blue eyes—he said he stood there and watched them burn their crops and did not flinch—him, his sons, and his brothers. And that sent a message to the white men: don't mess with our family. And they never did again. Like, the fact they just stood there and watched them light the crops on and did not say nothing to him. Like, he stood there—according to my daddy, they had guns, so that also was a big issue, too. Big guns, too. But that always stands out to me, that this was the late '50s, and people were being killed and all that for something my great-grandfather did and got away with, you know. But, according to them, it was rough, but it was not as rough as it was in other places. You had to work hard. Church was a big part of everything. They sung morning, noon, and night. My family is a singing family. That helped pass the time away. They made up songs—blues songs, gospel songs, spirituals, anything to help pass the time away. She said they had a good childhood, but she said, at the same time, they could tell that it was different for white kids than it was for them. And the things they heard and the things that people said to them, it just—it made them feel like they were less-than, but she said that her momma and her father—her mother's name was Lily Ada Lavinia Carson Rice.

Interviewer: Oh, wow.

Shane Stewart: I know, right? She said that they pretty much made sure that they always knew that they were loved and that they would be taken care of and that they were never below anyone. Pretty much, it's kind of like what Michelle Obama said: when they go low, we go high. That's pretty much how their philosophy was. If they come against you, go over them.

Interviewer: Now, did they live more in the country? Like, Carrigan Farms, it wasn't a town necessarily.

Shane Stewart: They lived—what's the name of that road? It's right here in Davidson. It's not too far from Beaver Dam Plantation.

Interviewer: Rocky River?

Shane Stewart: Yeah, down that area. Yeah, down on that area. They lived right down there. And for them, she said it was good times, because they were out in the open. But she

remembered little things, like, her and her sister hated getting up in the morning to go milk the cow. She said the worst part about it is, they had to go find the cow, because they didn't have a fence, and so the cow would wander off, and they would hear it. But they would have to get up at 5:00 in the morning, in the dark, and looking for a cow. And they were terrified of what they called a 'made' dog. It's what we call a mad dog. But the way that they said it. "The 'made' dog may get us." I was like, "What is a 'made' dog?" They were like, "The 'made' dog..." My momma was like, "She's talking about mad dog, and she's calling it 'made' dog." But they were talking about dogs with rabies, foaming at the mouth. But, yeah, they lived out in the country. And I remember my uncle telling me one of the biggest memories he had was of them getting up in the morning, eating beans and cornbread, and still being hungry, and driving past the man who owned the farm, white man who owned the farm, they could smell this breakfast in there. They said they could smell his ham and his coffee and stuff. And they were like, here they are, going to pick his cotton, and he's eating off of them. He was like, that was probably, for him, one of the—that was my grandmother's brother, my Uncle Larry—he was like, to him, that was probably one of the biggest moments. That was the moment when he started realizing what injustice was. "We're picking the cotton and giving you the money, and you're eating good, and we're sitting here, as kids, six, seven years old, our stomachs are empty, and our parents can't even afford to keep all of us together right now." So...

Interviewer: So, when did your family move off? So, what did your parents end up growing up to do?

Shane Stewart: My mother, she does home care for elderly patients, and my father works at Freightliner Trucking Company. They pretty much grew up inside of Mooresville, because both of their parents left the countryside, moved into Mooresville to work at Brotherton Mills and Draymore Mills in Mooresville. And so, they pretty much were raised in the city, but pretty much, like, me and my brothers and my cousins in the '90s, they went back and forth between the country and the city. Like, we would spend our weekends in the country, and then we would spend the weekdays in the city, with school.

Interviewer: Going to school, working.

Shane Stewart: Getting all that set up. I think that my momma, she worked at Walmart for 25 years, but she got fed up with that. She didn't like the way they treated people there. And so, she

moved into doing direct care, but even that, she finds to be a hassle, because she feels like, at times, it's just modern-day Jim Crow, things involved, because the people have them come in, and they'll say, "Cathy, we just need you to get her meds. Give the patient her meds and help her bathe." But by the time all was said and done, they were expecting her to cook dinner, to clean the house, and run errands. So, she's like, "Well, this is not what we signed up to do." But because she loves what she does, she does it, but at the same time, she feels like the people are trying to get over on her and have her do more, be essentially a maid rather than an in-home caregiver. And so, it's a slippery slope back into those days.

Interviewer: Yeah, it is. And when you're dealing with an older person or someone who's ill, it's a little hard to say, "No."

Shane Stewart: Yeah, because they still refer to her as colored or a negro, and it's not from a place of hatred. That's just how they knew black people as, colored or negro. And they have some of the sweetest people, but you can tell they grew up in that time period, just by the interactions with black people.

Interviewer: Yeah. That's frustrating and hard. So, how did you decide to go to college?

Shane Stewart: Well, I saw, after everybody stopped sharecropping, everybody went to the factories in the '80s and the '90s, and everybody in Mooresville worked at either Freightliner or Brotherton factory before it closed down. And I was like, this isn't the life for me, because I was—I actually, as a kid, and as an adult as well, suffer from ADD. And so, it took me a long time to find stuff that I actually want to do in school. But when I finally connected to history, it's like I took off. In third grade, me and history just—and because I liked history so much, my other subjects started to flourish, too, because I was like, "Well, I like history. Let me see what I can like about math." I hated math. "Let me see what I can find out I like about reading." So, reading definitely took off. And so, I said, well, I like going to school, so I might as well go to college. And plus, it was the added benefit of, no one else has done it. And I'm one person who likes to take risks. You tell me I can't do it, I'm going to do it. Because I actually had a teacher in eighth grade tell me I would never go to college, because I was filling out the forms for our high school classes in eighth grade, and one of the classes I chose was a college prep class, and she said, "Well, I don't think you really need that class." I said, "Well, I want to go to college." She said, "Well, you don't strike me as college material." I know, right? And it was like, when she

said that, it set something off inside of me. I said, okay, I'm going to prove you wrong. And so far, my graduating class, I've pretty much picked up more degrees than any member of my graduating class. I've gone further than almost any member of my graduating class. And I think that's—to me, that's something. That was a huge inducement to go to college, not only to prove people wrong, but just to prove to myself what I could do.

Interviewer: I went to high school where most of us were expected, but it was still—this was in the '70s—you were tracked. So, some people went Voc-Ed [Vocational Education]. It was like, you're going to go to these classes. And others were—but, yeah, my oldest sister was the first, actually, to—well, I had a grandmother who went to college, but then, on my father's side, we were the first group to have gone through. Yeah, it's an interesting feeling to realize that.

Shane Stewart: It's an interesting feeling, yeah, because when you realize that, wow, I did this, you're thinking, "Well, I'm just doing something I was always going to do," but it's such a significant thing.

Interviewer: Have you gone to any high school reunions?

Shane Stewart: I have not.

Interviewer: I went to one.

Shane Stewart: We had our tenth high school reunion when I was actually in Atlanta. I just started my Master's program. I couldn't make it back. And I was like, man, I hate it, because I really wanted to go back and just see how everybody was doing besides what they put on Facebook.

Interviewer: Yeah, and to show off, because it's like, "I got this degree. I did it too."

Shane Stewart: Pretty much that too. I can't lie.

Interviewer: So, what have you seen since you've been able to—you were here, and then you went off to school, doing other things, and then you come back. When you look at Mooresville, when you look at this area, what's the same? What's different?

Shane Stewart: What's different is just everything. Like, Mooresville and Davidson and Cornelius have just exploded. Like, areas now where you see all these people living, when I

grew up, it was nothing but fields. I still remember when there were cotton fields coming through what we call Mount Moore between Davidson and Mooresville, near what used to be the Reed Plantation. They still had cotton fields growing out there when I was in elementary school. But now I see all these housing developments. Where Lowe's corporate office is, that actually used to be—that was plantation land, and there used to be cotton fields out there. And it's just amazing me to see all the development that's taking place and all the people who are coming here. I meet more New Yorkers than I meet more native North Carolinians.

Interviewer: New York and Ohio. It's like—

Shane Stewart: Yeah. New York, Ohio, New Jersey, Pennsylvania. Everyone I meet in Mooresville is like, "Well, I'm not from here." I'm like, I can tell, because if you're from Mooresville, we have a distinctive accent. Back here in the back country, we have a distinctive accent. I can tell who is or who's not. But it's one of those things where, looking at everything that's changed, you see how Mooresville has grown and expanded and grown over itself, and looking at how Davidson has just exploded. Cornelius, where Cashions gas station is, in Cornelius, that was the end of it. There was nothing else in Cornelius. Where McDonald's is in Cornelius right now, that was the end of it, like where Torrence Chapel is, that was, like, the end of Cornelius. Mooresville ended where Walmart is now and Wendy's. That was the end of Mooresville, and now it's all the way up going towards the lake. And it's just interesting to see how the people who are moving in here, how they're changing the way in which this area, you know, is viewed as a whole. You know, we're becoming more progressive in this area. We still have a strong element of the Old South. Don't get me wrong. That's one of the things that does not change, is you still got those manners. You still got people who, you know—I guess you'd call them the Sunday porch type people. You know, Driving Miss Daisy type people. You know, you still have those people who live in this area. But for the most part, it's such a diverse mixture now, that it's like, you get both the best of the South, but also a unique taste of the North, too. And I think that's one of the reasons why, you know, North Carolina is becoming so much more progressive. You know, people are talking about this election, how it's a toss-up between Trump and Clinton. It is what it is. But North Carolina has become so much more progressive, and it's such a beautiful thing, because I really love living in this state. There's no other place I would want to live, besides maybe Georgia. But North Carolina is such a wonderful place to live, and

it's like, just seeing the way Mooresville was changing and adapting to it, and seeing Davidson grow and adapt to it, it's like, wow, this is all taking place before my eyes. Things I never would have thought to see as a kid having in Mooresville are taking place in Mooresville. You know, I think just a testament to that is the protest on Friday. You know, a lot of people who are involved are people from out-of-state apparently, who—

Interviewer: This is the one in Mooresville that they did?

Shane Stewart: Yes, ma'am, the one on Friday. It was led by a young lady named Raynisha Caldwell, who, she's from Mooresville, but there was a heavy element of people from out of town, both black, white, Latino, Asian. And they were like, "We want to be a part of this and put our voices in what's going on." Whereas in Mooresville in the '90s, you would not have seen that. Mooresville in the '90s, we were still having Klan marches. The Klan was still parading downtown Mooresville when I was in elementary school in the '90s. And I remember seeing it, to this day.

Interviewer: Do you? We had one in Davidson, that I know of, in 1986. They got a permit. And the college students did a festival on the court, fraternity court, and most people in town were there, and there was hardly anybody. But tell me about the Klan in Mooresville.

Shane Stewart: It was such—it was so—they didn't march in the streets. They marched in downtown on the sidewalks. And it was just more so—I want to say it had something to do with Rodney King, everything that was going on with Rodney King at that time. But I remember walking downtown with my grandma, and we were coming out of, I want to say, D.E. Turner hardware store. It's an old, old hardware store in Mooresville.

Interviewer: Still there.

Shane Stewart: Yeah, still there. Was coming out of there for something. I remember just seeing, it was like five of them walking down the street from that side, and I looked on the other side, and there were three other—I want to say about three or four other robed men were coming down the other side of the street. And it was just so interesting. I was like, "Grandma, what is that?" She was like, "Come on here, come on here."

Interviewer: Yeah, I bet she was scared.

Shane Stewart: Yes. Because I never knew why she was so—it was more so anger than fear. It was like, "Come on here, we got to go, we got to go." And I'd never seen my grandma get like that before, agitated like that. So, we got in the car, and I remember just going to her. I kind of knew who they were, but I didn't. I knew they were bad people. I didn't know—I knew they didn't like black people. I didn't know fully everything about them until later on. Back then, kids knew not to ask questions, because you're going to get sent outside or worse. That's grown folks' business. But being the type of kid I was, I picked up on stuff very quickly. And I remember, it was such an awkward experience. I remember just standing there like... My biggest question was, "Why do they have the hoods on? Why do their hoods look like that?" You know, just asking normal kid questions to myself. Also, it was scary, because, I mean, that was their clothes and stuff, and they have on these hoods and stuff. It was just, it seemed like they were just doing it as an intimidation thing, just because they could, because they knew in Mooresville, at that time period, you could get away with stuff like that back here. But nowadays, they can't. But back then, they knew they could pull that off and get away with it. I remember just thinking to myself, "Wow." Even looking back at that right now, it's like, wow, this town has come a long, long, long, long way. But it was a mixture of fear and just curiosity that day.

Interviewer: Yeah. It must have been hard, though, to go home and not ask, and not know until later when you were reading something, and it's like, "That's who those people were."

Shane Stewart: Yeah, because I first read—when I was in first grade, we were doing North Carolina history, and we were talking about Reconstruction, and we were talking about the actual Klan and how they founded. I was like, that's those people. Those are those people that were on the street that day.

Interviewer: Yeah. Wish we could have left them in the 19th century.

Shane Stewart: Yeah.

Interviewer: So, what else would you want someone to know about the history of this area?

Shane Stewart: I think one of the unique things about the history of this area, particularly for African-Americans, is that it's actually a little bit on the easier side to do your family tree in this area. And I know that's, like, a random fact, but the unique thing about this area slavery-wise was, you had several plantations that set in this area, and the slaves, after they were freed, took

the names of those plantation owners, and you still see those names here in Davidson, in Mooresville, and Cornelius, like Reed. They owned the big plantation in Mount Moore, where Mount Moore gets its name from. The Woodlawn Plantation, where the school is, that was the Stinson family. There are hundreds of Stinsons in Davidson. The Houston family, the owned the Greene Plantation that's a bed and breakfast now. There's a lot of Houstons here. Miss Ruby Houston, she goes to—

Interviewer: Davidson Presbyterian Church.

Shane Stewart: Davidson Presbyterian Church. Her family, all those other senior folks. Cedar Grove in Huntersville, huge brick plantation built by this man named James Torrence. I know about that one because that's where my people come from, on my dad's side.

Interviewer: Okay. So, you're a Torrence as well?

Shane Stewart: Yes, ma'am.

Interviewer: On your dad's side, okay.

Shane Stewart: We're Torrences. And then, there was a plantation called Alexandriana. There's a road down to Charlotte named Alexandriana. It was connected to the Revolutionary War. That's where my mom's side comes from, Alexandriana Plantation, the Alexanders. And you still see a lot of them up and down this area, too. And I would say that, you know, if I would tell anyone, especially if you're African- American or if you're white, regardless, and you're from this area, it is very easy to look up your family tree, because when you start putting those pieces together and you start seeing how interconnected we are here in Davidson, because everybody's kin to everybody. You know, I might have a little bit of your blood. You might have a little bit of my blood, white and black. And, so, it's one of those things where I say, I would encourage anyone, do your family tree. Look it up. See where you come from, because when you know where you come from, it helps gives you a better footing going forward in life. Because I'm proud to say that maybe somebody will look back and say, "Well, Shane went to college back in 2004, and he was my great-great-grandfather. So, maybe I should go to college." And it's just, you'll be surprised what you'll find. But other than that, I'll say that this is a very good area to live in. Very, very family-oriented. The people are full of love, and I think it's shown in so many different ways I never would have expected to see. Like, when they passed the North Carolina LGBT Bill,

you know, this being an area of black Christian Evangelists, you be like, "Oh, they're probably going to be in support of it." No. They were like, "People are people, and we love all people, regardless of whether they're straight or gay or black or white." And even my church here, they're like, "Yeah, we love all people." You know what I'm saying? It's not about how you identify. It's just about you being a person and God breathing life into you. So, I would say, anyone who's listening, that's one thing about this area. It's an area full of love. It's an area full of fiery people who will let you know about yourself, too, but it is an area full of love. And it's good to be a part of this community in particular.

Interviewer: Yeah, a couple things that have intrigued me as I've learned about the area—I've been here since '94—is that, like, Davidson-Cornelius, that the white communities, you can tell a lot of tension between the college and blue-collar. But the black, the families cross the line, and you don't see the same kind of tension between African-Americans in the cities. They don't identify with the blue-collar, white-collar, college kind of thing. That just doesn't happen that way. And I think, real quick, because you were talking about—well, one, also, is how the lake affected things. It was here in '63, but it was after '85 that people started seeing the lake, in part because, apparently, in Charlotte they started hiring bankers who came from the Northeast and were like, "There's a lake out there." You know, there was a late shift in bringing more people in and sort of changing that.

Shane Stewart: In Mooresville, like, for instance, Mooresville used to be 28115. Now you have 28117, and there is conflict in Mooresville between 28117 and 28115.

Interviewer: The zip codes.

Shane Stewart: The zip codes. It's like, 28115 is what they used to call Old Mooresville. That's where you find a lot of the old money, and that's where you find a lot of people who lived in Mooresville their whole entire lives, where everybody who's moving into Mooresville from other places live in 28117. So, you get two different feels. You know, people know where they split apart at. Highway 21 is where 28115 becomes 28117. They call it the Lake District. But it has such a heat, because Mooresville only had, like, 9,000 people in 1990. Now we got near, like, 45,000 people in 2016, and it's still growing. And it's amazing how the lake has affected that town in particular. Everyone wants to live on the lake.

Interviewer: Davidson, it's their phone exchange. If you're old Davidson, you're an 892 number. Anything else is... Cell phones are messing that up, but that used to be the—I know the other thing I was, the thing that's also struck me about this is that this area has not had a lot of civil rights activities. There weren't a lot of local leaders who stood out. Now, in Davidson, it makes some sense, because most people worked for the college, and they were in genuine fear that if they did something, not only could they lose their job, but entire families could be affected. I don't know that the college would have, but that was clearly the perception at the time. It also struck me that, in some ways, there's never been a whole lot of outward protest. And I don't know if that's made it easier over time for people to shift, because there aren't angry memories that are holding on, or if sometimes the fact we haven't made as much progress as we could because the community has been held back. Everybody's done that way-too-polite, no-harm-no-foul kind of behavior.

Shane Stewart: And I think that's part of it, because one thing about this area, if you look from Monroe all the way up to Statesville, up to Caswell County tucked away in the western part of the state, people didn't pay a lot of attention to what took place in this area. And so, it was very dangerous to be a black person living in Mooresville or Davidson, because the white community may have had relations with one another, but if they see a black person stepping out of line, they're going to come together at that moment, back in those days, and they're going to put that person, quote-unquote, in their place, because you still have lynching trees in places like Mooresville and Salisbury. Salisbury's lynching tree is still definitely standing. But it was definitely violent back then.

Interviewer: Do you know where Mooresville's tree was?

Shane Stewart: Mooresville's tree apparently was, I believe, near Highway 21, not too far from where I live. And apparently, there was one also going between Mooresville and Salisbury on, I want to say, Highway 115, maybe. Maybe 115 or 801. I can't remember which one it is. Between Mooresville and Bear Poplar.

Interviewer: 115 was parallel with 21, but 151 runs east-south, so 115 is the north-south road. But 21 and, I think, 151 is an east—or 150—ah, I'm not good at road numbers.

Shane Stewart: I know it's 1-something. But it's the road that runs in front of Carrigan Farms. It goes through a little area called Bear Poplar. There was several historic lynchings that took place there. One involved black people actually lynching a black person. These black men hung a black man back in the '70s because he killed another black man, and these white people weren't doing nothing about it, so they said, "Let's take the law into our own hands." But, yeah, that's another interesting story you might want to hear about it. I'm actually descended from a lynching victim, too, actually. In I think it must be 1901 or 1903, this lady named Cornelia Benson was found dead, lying face-down in a creek in Salisbury. This lady wrote a book about it. Teacher's where I got the story from. They blamed her neighbors, these two young black boys, age 11 and 13, named Harrison and James Gillespie. And so, they put them in jail, and they went and they took them out of jail late one night, and they wanted to lynch them. And usually, when they lynched someone, they would torture them beforehand, but because they were kids, I guess they would call that being humane, maybe. So, they marched the two boys to the lynching boys to the lynching tree. And the older one, the 13-year-old, they say, by the time they got him there, he was nearly dead from fright, so they just hung him, and they got it over with. But the younger one, they could tell he was a little bit more plucky. So, they tied the rope around his neck, and they made him climb up the tree himself. And they said that as he was climbing, they heard him singing a song. It's an old spiritual called I Want to Go to Heaven When I Die. "I want to go to Heaven when I die, I want to go to Heaven when I die. Lord, have mercy on my sou. I want to go to Heaven when I die." Something like that. And he got to the top, and they told him to jump, and he said no. And so, they said, "Either you jump, or we're going to make you jump." He said no. So, they shot him until he actually lost his footing and actually fell to his death, rope around his neck. Because their grandfather and my grandfather's grandmother, I want to say it is, were brother and sister. Interesting enough. And so, I found out about that in 2013, and it's haunted me ever since. And I asked some of my older family members about it, and they said, "Yeah, we knew about it; we just don't talk about it." It's just one of those things that still, even here in 2016—or it was 2013 then—that was over 100 years removed, but it's still something that's hard to talk about. You know, this actually took place and happened in our family, that two members of our family were lynched. You know, people didn't talk about it. They knew about it, and they made mention to it when it was needed, but for the most part, nobody talked about it. So, it's one of those—and this took place in Salisbury.

Interviewer: So, have you winnowed any other stories out of them? Because, you know, when we lose that generation, the people who know but didn't want to talk about it, I think the ways they told the stories before, working—you know, I think when you were working the fields, when you were doing some stuff, some of those stories got told in ways that now they don't sit your grandson down and say, "I want to tell you these stories."

Shane Stewart: And as I'm getting older, because when I was younger, like I was saying earlier, I like to ask questions, and they were always, "Oh, that's grown folks' business. That's grown folks' business. You don't need to know about that. Just go play." But as I got older, they started seeing how persistent I was in asking about these things. They started letting me know more and more things about where the white blood comes from in our family, how we had—we're descended from what you would call—I forget what you call it, but it's where you have a white man who has a white family on one side of town and a black family on the other side of town. My great-grandmother, my daddy's grandmother, Momma Emma, she was descended from—I think it was her mother was the result of a relationship like that. This is in the Torrence family. Yeah, it was just one of those things where he had this white family who everyone knew about, but on the other side of the tracks, you got your black family. And so, it was like, he took care of both families, apparently. And they were very proud of their white blood, to where my great-grandmother told me a story about how when she was going to meet my great-grandfather—my great-grandmother is probably about the color of your hat before she passed away. She was about Miss Maggie's color, complexion. Looked like a full-blooded Native American woman. Whereas my great-grandfather, the one I was telling you, with dark skin with blue eyes, her family didn't want her to marry him, because he was too dark. And they were like, "If you marry him, you're going to disgrace the family." And so, she was like, "Well, I love him." So, she married him, and they had kids who were, like, brown-skin, and they caught hell. My grandmother told me stories about her light-skinned grandmother didn't like them because they were too dark. She always favored the other kids because they were lighter and closer to white, and she would blame them for little things to get them in trouble. And she asked her momma, said, "Why do you let grandma treat us like that?" She's just like, "Oh, that's just how your grandma was raised." And this is back in the '40s or '50s. And so, it's one of those things where, when you ask them questions, I realize now a lot of stuff is painful for them. It's not just that they didn't want to talk about it. It's just that that stuff was painful for them to experience, you know,

just to see, you know, "Hey, my grandmother is light-skinned, doesn't love me because I'm dark-skinned," or, you know, "My family's going to tell me I can't marry somebody because he's too dark," or, "So and so almost got raped." You know, one of the sisters, my grandmother's sister, she was a very light-skinned woman with long hair. These five white men from South Carolina came and kidnapped her one night and gang-raped her and took a beer bottle and cut all her hair off with it. And stuff like that is like—those stories, you can tell why they're so painful. And this took place in Mooresville. And so, it's like, you can tell why it took them a long time to answer these questions, but it's starting to come out more and more. And especially with a lot of them passing away and getting older and memories not what they used to be, we're trying to get as many stories right now as we can in the family, me and some of my cousins, just to have a solid understanding of where we come from and what life was like for them and why they act the way they act, because they are tough people, and they take no mess from nobody. But I see now why, because they had to be like that, growing up in Jim Crow North Carolina.

Interviewer: Yeah, it's fabulous that you guys are doing that, because, as painful as it is, we need to know that. And for all the people that can't understand what's going on in Charlotte now, sometimes hearing those stories, understanding what people have gone through helps them understand what's going on now, and why people—like, it's all over again. You know, people are like, "None of this happens." It's like, "It does happen, it did happen, and we carry that in our bodies." And so, I'm glad that you guys are doing it. I know it's not easy, and it can't be easy to hear it.

Shane Stewart: Oh, no, it's not easy, especially when—

Interviewer: But to lose that, to lose—you know, to honor the strength that they—what they did, is important.

Shane Stewart: It tells me why they have such strong faith, because that's all they had, was faith in each other, because Lord knows that's what—what my grandma says, what carried them through was their faith in God and their faith in each other and love for God and love for each other, because, you know, somebody might not have flour one day, and somebody might not have sugar one day, or if I got flour and you got sugar, then I'm going to give you some of my flour, you give me some of your sugar, and we'll make it till tomorrow. And if we run out tomorrow, we'll both find somebody else. I'm sure somebody else will bring more flour and

sugar. It was just one of those things where the community was huge. You know, it wasn't about the individual. The individual had room for themselves in their own way, but it was more about the community, taking care of everybody. When your daddy's sick and I know you got to go to the field today, I'm working in the house today, so I'm going to check on your daddy while you're out in the fields. And then, when I'm out in the fields and my children are home and you're working in the house, you're going to check on my children. It was one of those things where everybody played off each other. It wasn't just about, "Oh, I'm a Stewart and you're a Cowan, or you're an Alexander." We were all in this together.

Interviewer: What is it like in this generation where you don't live near each other anymore? I don't know how often you see your cousins. But you have to have different kinds of community now. Everybody's scattered. You're off to college. You work someplace else. You come back. How often do you see cousins? How does your family work?

Shane Stewart: All my cousins, we live within 30 minutes of each other, but we still don't see each other as much as we should. I might see them maybe two or three times a month, just because we're all busy and doing our own things. And I think, the whole thing about social media now, well, since we're on social media, we don't have to have that physical contact. But I do miss it, because we're trying to plan a family reunion just so we can—because family reunions are now starting to go out of style, I guess. We used to have huge family reunions, but now you're seeing the older generation, we used to put these together. Now they're dying out or getting older, so it's like, the younger generation, well, we don't really want to do it anymore. But I feel like, as time goes by, those who are in their 40s or 50s right now who are about to become the older generation, who are in their 40s and 50s and 60s, now everybody's becoming the elderly generation. I can see it in them, they're wanting to start it back up, because now they're starting to see, "Okay, now I see why momma and daddy were so big on us having family reunions," because it keeps the family together, and it helps us to be connected, you know, who is who. This is my cousin. Well, how are you my cousin? Well, you're my cousin because your momma and my momma are first cousins. You find a lot of that in Mooresville. It's like, there's so many people I grew up with who I did not know were a third or a fourth cousin. They were like, "Oh, yeah, that's my great-grandmomma. How is that your great-grandma? That's my great-grandmomma." "Well, her daughter is my aunt—is my grandmomma." "Well, your

grandmomma is my aunt, so that makes you my cousin then." "Yep." I've had conversations like that quite often, at work, at school. I've been finding cousins, like, over the past 30 years of my life, I have found cousins everywhere, everywhere, Mooresville, Davidson, Kannapolis, Concord, Statesville. It's amazing. And that's why we're trying to keep the communication going to the family history open, so we know who is who and why we do certain things and why we live in certain places in Mooresville.

Interviewer: Well, thank you.

Shane Stewart: Thank you.

Interviewer: Going to shut this off.

End of recording.