

## T. Harry Williams Center for Oral History Collection

### ABSTRACT

**INTERVIEWEE NAME:** Marie Towner and Lenoria Ambrose    **COLLECTION:** 4700.2595

**IDENTIFICATION:** residents of Mossville, Louisiana

**INTERVIEWER:** Chelsea Arseneault

**SERIES:** Mossville History Project - Field Interviews

**INTERVIEW DATES:** November 11, 2015

**FOCUS DATES:** 1940s-1960s

### ABSTRACT:

#### Tape 4546

Introduction; Marie Perkins Towner born in Mossville on November 14, 1938; born at home, but mother didn't give details; two youngest children delivered by C-section; lived by her grandmother, but only remembers living on Old Spanish Trail, and then Queensboro; moved to California in 1961; parents [Bernell?] and Grace Perkins; mother a Moss before she married; didn't know father's father, but mother was Minnie Miller; mother's parents Beatrice and Oliver Moss; grandfather Moss a farmer, and raised livestock; father worked at Conoco; mother ran a grocery store for a man; strange to see Mossville now, with no homes; people who lived along the highway sold their homes and moved; two-room school in Mossville; recalls it had three teachers: Ms. Washington, Ms. Philips, and Ms. Mitchell; father worked at Johnson's Funeral Home for Mr. Zeb after he retired from Conoco; Towner the oldest of four children, youngest sister passed away in 1986; didn't care for her great-grandmother Williams because she was mean; would whip you in a minute; had first telephone in Mossville; company every night because they had a TV; father's mother Minnie Miller a cook at Gable lodge, and mother's mother a maid there; grandfather Moss grew things like beets, mustard greens, and cabbage; Mosses on grandfather's side owned most of Mossville; father from Bayou d'Inde area; doesn't know how parents met; mother responsible for discipline; grandfather would haul water in barrels from deep holes; washed clothes in the dynamite hole; grandfather would haul water for fifteen cents for those who didn't want to go there; had an apparatus set up to fill the buckets; her brothers may remember more than she can, but she doubts they'd be interviewed; grandfather also sold his produce, and what he didn't sell grandmother canned; sold produce off his wagon, and would take women into town for shopping; smoking meat, butchering; awful smell from cooking chitterlings; pickling pig's feet; grandfather made moonshine, even police would buy a bottle; [Lenoria Ambrose shows up for a visit and starts talking about Mossville]; Towner and Ambrose discuss family names on the Moss side; James Moss gave the church their property; possible locations of a post-office; speculate if grandparents could read and write; grandmother Towner learned to read and write when she attended school with her father's children; old church

ledgers with rules and regulations, such as how far you had to be from the church to spit; ledgers burned because historical value not understood; grandparents from Bayou d'Inde; area changed now; Ambrose regrets not taking pictures; location of Low Top Inn; suggestion to interview Carl Rigmaiden; memories of Trousdale Road area, and who lived there; club Joy Hill may have been owned by a white man; Johnny Comeaux's paintings; Ambrose's grandfather a carpenter; additional speculation about post office and its location; local stores and store owners; Towner and her aunt first employees at a drug store called Purdy's, located near Bel Air subdivision; Ambrose's father Gradis Braxton owned several local businesses, and was the first black man to run for police juror; musicians featured at Valery Montgomery's club, the Paradise; Bubba Lutchter hottest thing on the radio at that time; *Lake Charles American Press* a source for local news; black hotels in Lake Charles; local musicians; popular dances; sawmill on Evergreen Road where everybody in the community worked; area known as the Brimstone; Sasol now using the tacks back there; vast stretch of property near the Vincent's; washing clothes, swimming, and hauling water from the dynamite holes; Towner's paw-paw had a truck with wooden wheels; sawmill probably closed in the mid '40s; sugar cane and rice farming in the area; people went from farming to working in plants; grandfather's five hundred foot well with sweet, good water; public water and sewage; Mossville didn't have a lot of problems with integration, but Lake Charles, Moss Bluff, Westlake and Sulphur did; crosses and homes burned; mother would canvas the area to make sure people were voting; eavesdropping on a white lady, Ms. Vincent's, party line; she called them "little chocolate boogers"; knew that if a white person got on the bus, they couldn't sit behind the bus driver; Ambrose recalls when she went to the tea room in [Muller's?] department store for the first time; riding the bus to McNeese [State University]; Towner recalls an earthquake in California the day Dr. Martin Luther King died; memories of President Kennedy's death; Ambrose recounts where she was when the planes hit the Twin Towers on September 11; medical treatment; doctors used to make house calls; Ambrose's mother diagnosed with cancer prior to 1950; husband died of cancer, as well; home remedies; matches on the forehead for nose-bleeds; spider webs for cuts; tallow and Vick's to make a salve; sardine oil for the mumps; certain root to help babies with teething; also silver dimes on their neck; different teas, such as mamou and pine; baking soda in the bath water to kill red bugs; burned wool rags to keep mosquitoes away; some possibly used palmetto leaves for headaches; homemade cough syrup recipe; closing.

**TAPES:** 1 (T4546)

**TOTAL PLAYING TIME:** 2 hours, 3 minutes

**# PAGES TRANSCRIPT:** 115 pages

**OTHER MATERIALS:** Biographical data form; Correspondence; Interview questions

**RESTRICTIONS:** none