This is an interview of Mrs. Laudess James, who lived and worked in and around Savannah for about sixty-five years.

Interviewed by: Debbie Ulmer (Granddaughter of Mrs. James.)

C. When did you come to Savannah?
A. In 1925.

C. How old were you then?
A. 17.

C. Where did you live before that?
A. Waycross.

C. Why did you come to Savannah?
A. I was married, and I come here for my husband to work. He went to work in the railroad shops.

C. What did he do?
A. Mechanic.

C. Did you work anywhere?
A. No.

C. Did he always work in the railroad shops?
A. No, he worked everywhere.

C. Like doing what?
A. In the fertilizer plants and he was a scale man where he'd overhaul scales in the fertilizer plants. One time he worked at the Chapman Sacks Ice Cream Co., and at Steel Products. I don't know. He just didn't seem to get on to one job anywhere that he'd work at very long.

C. Did the Depression affect you'll very much?
A. Yes. Part of that time the biggest money he made was 14 dollars a week for 5 children — 7 to live on. 14 dollars a week.

C. Do you remember much about WPA?
A. I just remember how they used to kid about people how they'd be standing up leaning on the shovels — walking by and say, "There's the WPA workers — leaning on the shovels."

C. What kind of people were on WPA?
A. Anybody that wanted to work. It wasn't a punishment job. It was just a job something like the welfare would give them the jobs or something like that you know so they could earn some of their keep. They didn't get paid much.

Q. Did very many people have cars during the depression?

A. No. Not very many.

Q. How'd they get around?

A. Well, they rode the buses back and to work. Way back yonder when I came here to visiting Savannah before I got married they had jitneys.

Q. What was that?

A. Later on they called them taxis. But you could go all over town for a nickel in one of them jitneys. The didn't have buses it was streetcars - them big old electric things on the wires up over them and the tracks were electrified. They rode on them tracks but the electric wire was up top that was the thing - called them streetcars. You could ride a certain distance, on the streetcar for five cents or seven cents or something like that. But you get one of them jitneys and just go all over town.

Q. Did a lot of people ride the jitneys.

A. Yeah. They just make regular runs just like the buses. You just wave one down when you see him a-coming or something he'd stop and pick you up and go. But - uh, if there was certain places you wanted to go and it weren't on his route, he'd take you that-a-way. Then they quit with the jitneys and started the taxis. And later on they quit with the streetcars and started city buses. But, uh, way back yonder when they had the city market, every morning nearly all the women all over town they get into one of these jitneys or something and go to the market. They'd have to go to market every day to buy fresh foods and all cause they didn't have refrigerators. The ice men came around everyday, you know, but it didn't keep foods like the electric refrigerators do now.

Q. Was the city market like the farmer's market?

A. No. It was just that one big building right up town there and you could drive through it. Well, the Bernard Street just went around the city market. It was like a square. But you couldn't go through it. It was between Congress and St. Julian on Bernard. But you could go in there and you could buy anything edible that you could mention. They'd have Negro women there with big old baskets of cooked crab and shrimp and they'd put them on their head and load up in there and they'd walk the streets hollering, "Yeah Crab! Yeah Shrimp," going on like that. People'd run out to buy the crab and shrimp. And they were already cooked. You'd go in the market and get any kind of fish you want, any kind of vegetables, watermelon, sugar cane and just near about anything you could mention. And then way later years, I run a restaurant in the corner of the city market. And lot of these truckers they'd go out and get a load of produce and they'd come and park around outside of the market, or some of them had stalls inside the market, and they would sell that stuff they had on their trucks, whatever they had, and they'd stay up there day and night - somebody on them trucks. Maybe they'd lay down in the cab and go to sleep - somebody would - while
Q. About what time was this?

A. Well, it's when, ah, Lamar and Agnes got married we had a truck up there loaded with produce, and Linda was born just a night or two after they married or right along the same time. (Explanation: 1950) And, uh, we had a fellow working up there with us on the truck, just a straggler from way off somewhere - didn't know much about him, but we'd been letting him sleep in the truck, so he stole the truck that night while we was gone to the hospital to see Linda - first time we'd seen her. (Explanation: Mrs. James's first granddatther) And, uh, course we thought he was there in the truck all night, but time we left, he left. So, we didn't miss it till next morning and he stole the truck loaded with produce - used to have a big two ton truck and a canvas over it and all. It was loaded with watermelon, cantalopes, and tomatoes. And he drove that truck to Pennsylvania. He was up there on the streets in Pennsylvania with a flat tire and no spare and a Georgia tag on that truck, and the police noticed that, and they thought he ought not to be way off from home like that and not even a spare tire, you know. But he had sold all the produce and picked up a bunch of hitchhikers on the way up there - there was a whole truck loaded with hitchhikers he had picked up. Sold the produce, sold the spare tire - everything he could get off the truck to sell to buy gasoline to keep a-going. But I think it was Hagerstown, Maryland where your Grandpa had to go to pick up the truck. And there he got up there and had to buy a spare tire and all. I don't know what he had to pay at the police station, but he drove it back home then - empty - lost all that produce and stuff.

Q. Do you remember much about what the beach was like - Savannah beach?

A. Well, I didn't go there too much. We went on a train to go to the beach. Only way you could get down there was on a train. And you didn't drive cars down there then, at first. And they'd have railroad station up on East Broad Street. I think, where you'd go to catch the train to the beach. And then had a little stop or two on the way where they'd pick up more passengers or something and then go on to the beach. It left Savannah at a certain time and then it would leave down there at a certain time to come back. Maybe it was 2 buses a day - 2 trains a day went there and came back. But they had certain times to run.

Q. Was the beach built up a lot more back then?

A. No, it weren't near nothing. It weren't nothing much down there but beach. Went down there and went swimming - play around like that.

Q. Wasn't there a recreation area?

A. I don't think so. I don't remember if there was. First thing I remember being down there was that skating rink upstairs over the pavilion.

Q. What about schools? Where'd you go to school?

A. I didn't go to school here. I was done married when I came here. But I visited here two or three times for I ever got married, but I went to school at Pearson and at Uvalda.

Q. Do you remember when televisions came out in Savannah?
Q. Did ya'll used to have radios?
A. Yeh, I remember when we got our first radio, and we sat up all night long. All the neighbors that didn't have one would gather at our house or we'd go theirs or somewhere before we got ours and listen to that Grand Ole Opry playing all night long on Saturday nights. Now, that was something new.

Q. What about the radio programs like "The Shadow"? Did you ever listen to those?
A. Well, I listened to everything I could, I reckin', on there, but I don't have too much time to just listen to the radio because I had so much housework and tending to children and things like that to do.

Q. How about in Savannah, the areas where did the Blacks live and the Whites?
A. Well, most of the Blacks lived down in Yamacraw on 2 or 3 other areas like that. They weren't scattered all over town and mixed together like they are now.

Q. Where was Frog Town? (Explanations: a predominantly Black area in Savannah).
A. Wasn't that down there near Old Fort? I don't remember just where Frog Town was. I remember there was a Frog Town around here, but I guess that was a nigger area there, but I don't know where it was. But, uh, Old Fort - there was an old fort down there on St. Julian Street, and East Broad and Price and in there. It was section they called Old Fort. There used to be a fort there where they would go and shoot the cannons out at the boats going up and down the river. They called that old fort. That's where your mama was born.

Q. During the wars - World War I and World War II - did a lot of people move in from the farms into the city - during the Depression?
A. Not like they do now-a-days. So many people have left the farms now and moved into the city. But the farmers would get exempted from going to the service on account of them being farmers cause they needed farmers so much.

Q. Did World War I and World War II effect Savannah very much?
A. Well, I was just a small kid myself whenever World War I ended. But I remember the day it ended. I was living at Pearson then. One time a troop train came through there. It was loaded with soldiers. It was in the summertime, and everybody had watermelons then, and they'd gather them up in a wagonload of watermelons and give them to them soldiers on that troop train. Lot of the young girls would scratch their name on the watermelons - their name and address - so one woman in particular, Lula Ricker, she scratched her name on there. So the fellow got her watermelon. Later on, he wrote to her, and whenever he got out of the service, he came back down there, and they got married. They had one child, and lived together several years, and then they separated, and he took off for parts unknown. I don't know what ever happened to him, but she stayed around there right on them. His name was Rigger.

Q. What about World War II? Do you remember more about it?
A. Well, two of my brothers was in World War II, and my husband, he was just a little bit too old to go or had too many children or something. But he missed. They had Fort Benning. It was open down there at Tybee.

Q. Fort Benning?
A. Fort Screven, That was it, Fort Screven.

Q. It was open during World War II?
A. This was during World War I when that was open and going so big. But I Think it lasted right on for awhile. I'm not sure now about it. I know one of Harvey's brothers was there in World War I - Quilliam.

Q. How did World War II affect Savannah? Did it affect the economy or the people working and stuff like that?
A. Well, they opened up the shipyard here, and the men and the women and everybody went to work - big one, little ones, old ones, and young ones. And it kind of was booming a little bit for awhile - long as they had them shipyards a-going and building them - ships.

Q. Do you remember much about Franklin Roosevelt?
A. I remember the day he died. It was on your Mama's birthday (Explanation: April 12, 1945) and she was in the bed with the mumps.

Q. What did that do to the people when he died? Wasn't he really highly respected?
A. Oh, yes. Everybody was sorry and hurt about it.

Q. Do you remember much about any other famous people or political leaders or anything coming to Savannah?
A. No. I just know John Wilder was one of the most famous men around Savannah that I'd ever heard of. Long as he lived he was here and pastor of Calvary Baptist Church till he died. But he was just one of the best men there ever was in political life and religious life and every kind of way.

Q. Why was he so famous - so important?
A. Well, just for the good he done to the people and for the people.

Q. What did he do in politics?
A. I don't know, but he was just good every way.

Q. Do you remember anything about Daddy Grace?
A. Oh, yeah. Boy, them niggers just thought he just God Almighty. Them Black people would hear Daddy Grace was a-coming to town and, I mean, they'd roll out the red carpet. And they'd just take up the most money for him you've ever seen in your life - people that need money theirselves and weren't able to do without. They'd just pile it up there by the tubs full and give it to Daddy Grace.
Q. Wasn't he a native Savannahian?

A. I don't really know. But he didn't live here all the time; he'd go off some-where else, but he'd come back frequently. And, boy, everybody was looking forward to Daddy Grace - all them Black People. They used to have a big water carnival - they called it - out there at Daffin Park on the Fourth of July.

Q. Who did? Everybody in Savannah?

A. Everybody. Mostly just the Whites.

Q. What did they do?

A. Well, they'd gather out there. Maybe all day they'd some kind of entertain-ment going on - swimming contests, and I don't know what all. But then at night then they'd have fireworks and just shooting all kinds the most different looking things up in the air - the fireworks. And we went out there that afternoon to whatever entertainment they had, and we hurried home and fixed supper and came back out there then to see the fireworks. I got out there and noticed - I had on a black dress and it had a row of rick-rack braid and a row of lace with a skirt all the way down. It was kind of full skirt. And I got out there and looked, and I had my dress on wrong side out.

Q. Was the pool at Daffin Park then? Or was it just a big park?

A. It was a pool there, but it wasn't near as big and it was later on.

Q. Were there any other things like that? Big picnics and things?

A. Well, when they'd have that water carnival, they'd have kind of rides and all kind of things like that out there for entertainment. But it wasn't there all the time.

Q. How about circuses and things like that that came to Savannah? Was there much of that?

A. Yeah, they'd come and go. And mostlay out there to that same fairgrounds, I think.

Q. Did a lot of people go to them?

A. Yeah, if they could get the money.

The first time our house burn, I was about four years old. It burned plumb down to the ground. But then after I was married and moved to Savannah, I had about 3 children then, I think. One night, we left here to go back home for a visit to Parsons, and all the way there seem like I had the funniest feeling that something was wrong at home, and when we got there then, it was done after daylight; we'd rode all night in that old jitney - in that old car we had. (Note: Today that trip takes about three hours.) We drove up to Papa's house and there stood two chimneys. And we didn't even know the house was burned. It had burned on Sunday evening, and this was about Tuesday or Wednesday. So, I didn't know where none of the folk was or nothing. I had a brother that was married - Howard - so I went around to his house and Papa and Era and then were staying around there. Susie - her and her husband had separated and she was staying back at home, and all her clothes was burned up. All their clothes, except what they had on. Papa had on a pair of old
overalls. Everything was burned.

Q. Where did they go after that?

A. But somebody ran out there and told Doris or Susie wherever they was or something or other that the house - Papa's house was burning up, and, I think it, was Susie, just fainted right there on the sidewalk.