Interviewed is a sixty-five year old immigrant to Savannah. He was a part of Savannah during the depression.

Interviewer: Twila Haygood

Interviewed: Ben Mitchell
(port'on of the tape inaudible)

Q: What is your name?
A: Ben Mitchell.

Q: How old are you?
A: 65.

Q: How long have you lived in Savannah?
A: Since 1934.

Q: Where did you come from?
A: From Sheldon, South Carolina  S-h-e-l-d-o-n

Q: What kind of work did you do in Sheldon?
A: In Sheldon I didn't work I went to school in Sheldon. I to young to work.

Q: When you came to Savannah you were a young man?
A: Young man. I did construct work, plumbing and I worked on the railroad.

Q: You work on construction?
A: Yeah and railroad in the area as a young man. Work on Southern railroad and the coastline railroad.

Q: What kind of work did you do working on the railroad?
A: Working No.2 steamer with the Coastline the other one I was placing tier. It was hard work but I was a young man.

Q: When you came to Savannah were a member of a church here?
A: Yeah. Central Baptist.

Q: Where was that?
A: It is in Hitch Village now but it was a road (long pause) Olethop, not Olethop, State not State, Ott not Ott, Jackson not Jackson, Hull.

Q: Where did you live?
A: Where did I live, on McDonald Street.
Q: On McDonald.
A: Yeah.
Q: Were there only blacks in this section?
A: Only back people.
Q: Did everybody around there work on the railroad?
A: No each work at there different jobs then some was on WPA. Some part in season and on the boats anyplace they could get a job. Something like that.
Q: What kind of work did the people on the W.P.A. do?
A: Clean out ditches and dig ditches and clean sewage and lean up on there shoal?
Q: Everybody trys to get by with something.
A: They was just retin' themself.
Q: In church, what kind of services did you have?
A: What did of services did we have, we had music choir and pastor preached that about all.
Q: Was it a larger in church in Savannah?
A: It was plenty larger church is Connor Temple was large, Tremont Temple was larg, Plenty was larger, larger member and larger building, too.
Q: Was Church consider central at that time?
A: What does that mean?
Q: Did everybody go to church?
A: Now I wouldn't say that either. Now everybody didn't go to church but the average of them was on the book but the average one didn't go until once in a while
maybe once a month maybe that every first Sunday
but you got a first, a second, a third you got a
fourth but some of them don't go then until communion
past or don't go.

Q: When you came to Savannah as a young man, what did you
do for recreation?

A: What?

Q: What did you do for fun?

A: Oh! so many things I can't name them all.

Q: Just name a few of them.

A: At that time they was going to nightclubs that's what
you mean by recreation.

Q: yeah.

A: Well night clubs and so forth and on I mean I don't
know they weren't like they is now thought (night clubs)

Q: What kind of people frequent these places?

A: I always deal with nice people. I all the time deal
with nice people. I never did like to deal with too
bad a people. Some of them was bad but I didn't know
it. I like to deal with nice people.

Q: What did you do in 1937?

A: Well, in 1937 I use to work the junk yard I got hurt
several times on the job and I went to the doctor
stay off maybe a week maybe 2 weeks go back stay off
another week. I use to work to Knight Junk yard
East Broad and maybe about Taylor.

Q: You said you got hurt?

A: Yes, I got hurt.

Q: Did they have workers compensation during that time?

A: No. The time being that was about 1937 or 36 they didn't
have too much compensation but they would let you live.

Q: Did they pay you when you were sick?

A: They gave you a little bit they didn't give you half
a fourth or a quarter but they did give you something.
Q: What did Savannah have that other places didn't have?
A: What did Savannah have to offer me. It didn't have anything I just when around looking for jobs. It didn't have too much to offer me but I stayed with my mama. Mama took care of me that being Hoover time you know you couldn't find too much.

Q: So Savannah didn't have too much to offer?
A: It didn't have too much to offer me.

Q: So it wasn't unusual that you couldn't find a job?
A: No, No. Now you tape this and I would be glad for some body to hear it. Mama was even washing babies for a dollar and a half a week. Then, after all she would feed us. Not too much of clothing I had other people to cloth me. But that was it.

Q: You came from Sheldon to stay did your mother come with you?
A: Yes.

Q: Did you all have a farm in Sheldon?
A: Yeah.

Q: Did you have your own farm?
A: Yeah. For most of the time.

Q: What kind of things did you grow.
A: Oh, well we raise corn, vegetable, cherries greenies different things very little cotton. It was what you call a truck farm cabbage potatoes coalits. I mean they make living off that and they do it now. See. It was just what you call a truck farm.

Q: When you were in Sheldon did you ever come to Savannah.
A: Yeah. I come to Savannah with my uncle and I used to play in Savannah and I was a little boy that been around I say around 1920.

Q: Did you come to Savannah to sell vegetables.
A: No.

Q: Do you remember the centeral market (city)?
Q: Do you remember the central market?
A: Oh yeah.

Q: What do you remember about it?
A: Oh you could ride through city market we use to call it at that time.

Q: Oh!
A: Now you call it what market?
Q: Central.
A: That was the name of a fish market up there. Anything you want you go to the city. I don't matter if it was rabbit and oon or whatsoever you want you want you go to the city market you mos apt to find it there.

Q: Even fish?
A: Anything practically you want you find it to the city market like you have markets now fish, grocery, whatsoever then they had all dat in the city market.

Q: Oh, everything was combine.
A: Yeah, you use to could ride horses there and the street car use to ride right straight through it.

Q: I have heard that people staying in the country areas (rural) would come to sell produce?
A: Yeah, they would go straight in there selling vegetables. It would be just like this hall. I go off on one side and maybe you go off on the other side maybe your grandaddy or your mother or something maybe got a little stall some-like a groove call it a stall. You run that stall. They were close together just like this room here. If you didn't have what I want I go to the next stall and that's the way it was a stall they called it. It was just like these rooms (his home) one step over and you are to other place.

Q: Daddy Grace name comes up a lot in my interviews what did you think of him?
A: I couldn't say too much on that but a lot of people followed Daddy Grace and a lot of people was against Daddy Grace but I was for Daddy Grace because he hadn't taken anything from anybody. Anything he had most of the people give it to him, see. And Daddy Grace didn't go in my pocket and take my money he asked me and if I want to give to him I give to him. Now that's the
way it was. Now lots of people was against him but I wasn't against him because he was stealin' nothin', robbin' nobody and what evr I give you is yours. Whatevr you give me is mine. That's the way I feel about it. Now Daddy Grace didn't have a church like the one now. He had a church on 34th street with nothing but sawdust on the ground see. Now they got a nice church on Ogeechee Road but it wasn't like that one now then. It was sawdust just like this carpet on this floor if you feel like faintin' you could fall but you fall on the sawdust. See I remember that good I use to go there to hear the band.

The services in the House of Prayer were they different than in other churches.

yeah. It was different to me than in the other churches now the church I use to go to the one I was a member of didn't have that kind of music. Now the aver age baptist church didn't have it. Nothing had it but a few holiness churches see. Now the Baptist church didn't have anything but a piano maybe a organ, now days they got both and they doubt up and use it but them days could hardly afford one.

They had a whole band?

Yeah. Any kind of instrument particly you could name trumpet, bugel, oh I could name some more anyway he had a whole band. Praticelly any musical instrument you could name he had it.

The parade in September I heard that goes back a long way?

He didn't have the last parade did he?

No.

Now see that the first time I ever know it since I was in Savannah that he didn't have the parade. The first time and I wasn't in Savannah just yesterday. I been here a good little while. And I, everybody was looking forward for the parade but the news come out that they wasn't having any. I don't know if they say why they didn't have it but they have to have a reason.

Do you know anything about the K.K.K.? you

No. I will tell of I did. I was a little boy then I was in Savannah they used to I remember. I was around 7 or 8 year old. They used to come and kidnap. They use to come carry you. The Klu Klux Klan.

Do you anything they did?
Q: Do you know of anything they did?

A: I remember I don’t know if you remember this city or not they call it lumber city, Ga. You ask your daddy he will tell you about it. I remember they had a bridge block one night a new bridge block by the Klu Klux Klan in lumber city Ga. And I was a pretty young man but a good size young boy anyway. And I remember it good.

Q: Why were they blocking the bridge?

A: Well, nothin’ happen they didn’t done anything you see black and white they didn’t mix then see and they feel like some-thin’ was gettin’ wrong between the black and the white. I remember it good in lumber city, Ga. The bridge was over the river called Ocmulgee River I remember the river good.

Q: In one interview there was talk of a lynching of a Philip Graver. They said he attacked a white girl on the way from the railroad station she was on her way home do you remember anything about that?

A: I don’t remember right now but maybe if I think for a couple of days?

Q: You were in Savannah during the ’60’s did you take part in any of the demonstrations?

A: No, I did not. The young people is what help me I paid a little money to the N.A.A.C.P. and I helped with it. The financia But I never did lay down in the street. No, I didn’t.

Q: But you believe in what they were doing?

A: Yeah, I did. I sure did. The fact about it they help me where I am now the fact about it the average man and woman the age of me didn’t claim what the young people did lots of them went to jail. Lots of them was precusted see they handle it all kinds of how but they stand up to it. I couldn’t do it and I didn’t do it. But they help me. Now where so every we at now the older folks didn’t done it. The young people done it. You won’t find near a one my age that did go and lay down in the street. They say run over me if you want to kill me, see. Maybe I would of lay there, maybe I was to scare of dying, wee. But they young people didn’t.

Q: But you through it was necessary?

A: Yeah, I feel like it was necessary. Then it was necessary I see it did help.
Q: Can you see it in the education?
A: Yeah.

Q: You can see the benefits of the demonstrations?
A: Yeah. I do I feel like it help 100% least for the older people. For me it did help. Not only me but it help you and all the rest of them.

Q: Do you feel the black militans they are right?
A: I don't agree with that neither now after you firht for one thing I feel you ought to through. I have a white friend going to school now you don't have to miss talking to them. I feel like you ought to treat them nice and I feel like they ought to treat you nice in school, in the street I feel like they ought to do it. We fight for right. For mix. I feel like you shouldn't look over the whites and the whites shouldn't look over you if they your help you should help them. If you need they help they should help you. That the way I see it that's what they fightin' for and I agree with it and I like that I'm 100%. I met several white folk. I have some white neighbors here and they are much different than it was back anything I want he call me and give him some and when my car break down he work on the car maybe. I say what I owe you and he say nothing and he is a machine now. I feel like he trying to live neighborly. He is my next door neighbor if he leave town he come tell me to lock out for his place went I leave town for a day keep a eye out on the place. He agree with it. I feel like that is the way to live.

Q: Do you feel the police are more brutal in the ghetto than in the white neighborhoods?
A: Sometimes it do happen. Now what I see is I'm driving a car say I take you home maybe Marie and the law pull me over. And he is not the law and he want ask me a question say hand me your drivers license and say I would like to known what I done wrong and if I violated the law they should tell me what I done. Maybe I run over the center line or maybe I done somethin' wrong in his sight. But the law is a something we all need to learn. I have set in court and listen to the law all day. And lots of things that I had in my mind was right according to the law it was wrong you see. You got study I'm not a lawer you see. The person study the law should know the law. In your field what you study mayb you don't know it all but down the road you should know it.
A: You should know some of it if you don't know it all. The fact about it we never know it all. No matter what field we in it's always something for us to know. People think they know it all but went you think you know it all you don't know nothing.