

Nancy Donnell Radcliff oral history interview summary

MT State Historic Preservation Office Project--- African American historic places in Helena, MT

With funding from the National Park Service

Total interview time 44 minutes and 52 seconds

Summary developed by Alan M. Thompson, Morrell Creek Associates, PO Box 9737, Helena, MT 59604

July 2016

Helena residence affiliation: 212 South Beattie, Helena, MT

1:14 minutes-10:20 minutes---

- Born October 30, 1931 at 210 Miller Street, Helena, MT
- raised at 212 South Beattie until she left Helena after graduating from Helena High school in 1949
- George Albert Donnell (uncle) occasionally resided at 212 South Beattie
- Childhood memories- playing with friends
- We walked most places- home was conveniently located for her grandmother
- Black population lived throughout the city
- going to East Helena was a day trip with a picnic lunch
- Visiting the Munday family up Dry Gulch with her grandmother- panning for gold
- grandmother and family came to Montana when around 1888-1889. Grandpa Donnell was a coachman and came from Minneapolis/St. Paul MN
- Attended Jefferson School, Central School and Helena High graduated HHS in 1949
- closest childhood friends Waterman, Jensen, Peterson

10:20-20:00 minutes---

- Beattie house details
- playing on Sugarloaf hill—wood ticks
- Lange's Riding Academy on south Beattie Street
- annual Christmas tree cut near residence

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10:20-20:00 minutes (continued)

- railroad box car garage-Helena earthquake
- gardening- making victory gardens- chickens, turkeys, rabbits, apple trees
- Beattie House details
- coal furnace
- recollection of moving piano in winter from the living room (heat conservation) spent much of winter months in Kitchen
- no refrigeration-used iced boxes-remembering the ice delivery man
- Grandma Irving did linens for the Catholic Church

20:00-30:17 minutes

- when visitors would come they would often said "Oh Irving don't take your ironing board down that is your life."
- Mr. Walton's death (crime towards a black person)
- people treated her grandmother Irving with respect
- recalling the Chinese lottery on State and Main Streets
- recalling feeling safe with her grandmother and her encouragement
- feeling embarrassed by grandmother portraying Aunt Jemima at a local grocery store promotional event
- Mr. Julian (neighborhood grocery owner) encouraging Grandma Irving to have Nancy attend Swedish Mission Church (Helena) and become baptized as young girl. church picnics and grandma's lemon pies
- attending MT Federation of Colored Women's gatherings
- Family friend Liza Stitt and sons. Obtaining beer pail for Mrs. Stitt and her grandmother from local taverns.

30:17-44:52 minutes

- throwing pigeon eggs at other kids on errands for her grandma Irving
- Christmas treat of homemade ice cream

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30:17-44:52 minutes (continued)

-recalling grandmother helping to serve homeless meals at a Main and State Street Mission run by a white woman and African American man.

-Grandmother Irwin was raised in Minnesota and knew German fluently. She would enjoy visiting Mrs. Craig to speak German and drink beer enhanced with a red hot metal poker

-recalling McDonald Pass picnics with other black families from Butte, MT

-wearing long dresses to dances as a 13 year old

-recalling attending a Dr. Quintard Taylor lecture in the Seattle area. She was able to identify members of a group picture that Dr. Taylor was using during his lecture on the MT Federation of Colored Women.

-remembering as a youth taking the Greyhound bus to numerous MT Federation of Colored Women's gatherings.

-Mrs.Christian and Gram Irving driving to Butte to visit

-Bridgewater, Sols and Freeman black families lived out toward Ft Harrison (near Appleton's Furniture Company)

-gardening and flowers were important to family

-Recalling visit from Sephonia Freeman to 212 Beattie > Women's husband disrupted the visit by sprinkling red pepper on a hot stove.

-Grandmother Irving was a person that people gravitated to her residence. None were turned away according to Nancy Radcliff

-recalling other Helena black family names. Harrell, Banks, Anderson

-Transition from Montana to Seattle. Mary Mahoney Nursing Organization. Seattle University was accepting black students. The University of Washington was not yet accepting black students

End of interview session