

T. Harry Williams Center for Oral History Collection

ABSTRACT

INTERVIEWEE NAME: Naomi Flowers

COLLECTION: 4700.2425

IDENTIFICATION: Centenarian, retired secretary, and native of Woodville, Mississippi; Wife of Charles Lesley Flowers, a cooperative extension agent who was also active with 4-H

INTERVIEWER: Chelsea Arseneault

SERIES: History of Louisiana Cooperative Extension Services

INTERVIEW DATES: Session I: November 20, 2014
Session II: February 4, 2015

FOCUS DATES: Session I: 1920s – 2014
Session II: 1930s – 1970s

ABSTRACT:

Session I

Tape 4361

Woodville Agricultural High School which Flowers and her future husband, Lesley, attended in Woodville, Mississippi; description of school buildings, classrooms, apartments, dorms, other spaces; school had a herd of dairy cows, Lesley worked milking the cows; Lesley severely burned as a child in a kitchen accident, his two aunts were nurses, came to check on his condition, took him to New Orleans where he spent two years in Touro Infirmary; after leaving Touro, he started at the school in Woodville; Flowers got to school by horse and buggy; interview is introduced; Flowers will be 100 years old in December; Flowers the youngest of six children; story about her siblings attempting to throw her across a creek when they were out picking plums; maiden name is McCraine, father was Daniel and mother was May Miller; few memories of grandparents, her father's mother had a gorgeous watch on a slide chain that she would play with; father was a cattleman specializing in Angus cows; he rented additional property to graze cattle; enormous barn on parents' property; also had sheep, goats, and dairy cows; her father sold Angus cows to local butcher; recalls when sliced bread became available, weekly coffee delivery; growth of her father's Angus herd; she was never able to properly milk a cow; Flowers used to help her mother around the house; Flowers' older sister, Beatrice, was like a mother to her; mother was a teacher for a time in Buffalo Creek, would take the elder four children in a wagon to school; family later moved to Woodville when her father was made sheriff there, that's where she and her older brother were born; four elder siblings looked after the younger two; memories of a the May Pole dance at the school and the orange costume she wore; teachers at the school in Woodville; her brother John had a clever way of fooling the Latin teacher; Flowers believes *The Woodville Republican* is the oldest paper in Mississippi; TV show

about school programs to prevent students from leaving the state after completing their education; she met Lesley on a possum hunt; a teacher who helped Lesley along and gave him some money after he graduated; they invested that money and there's now enough to donate to Lesley's church; her father had her register as a Democrat and she hasn't changed since; Lesley would catch a ride to Woodville to visit her; story about one of her sisters getting caught in the barbed wire of a fence and a black man notifying the other two sisters "girl hung"; one sister was endlessly entertaining and became a teacher; family home had a well; a woman came to wash their clothes once a week; Flowers good at making salads and desserts but never learned how to cook vegetables or meat; family stove had a back section for keeping foods warm; family killed hogs but bought lard; her mother made her churn butter on the back porch; strategy for saving crocks of unpasteurized milk in the storeroom pantry; their house had no attic, just a way to escape in case of fire; her mother bought lard in forty-eight pound tins, used empty tins to prepare turkeys for holidays; their icebox was in a hole in the ground near the kitchen; a favorite Christmas dish was oranges stuffed with sweet potato; her father only thumped her on the head once to discipline her; her mother once caught her using a slang word and punished her by having her say the word while jumping up and down; they had a tennis court on the property; father used the family car to salt his cattle, eventually the salt wore a hole through the car's floor; recent photograph of Flowers posed with a car similar to what her father had; her sisters took the car sixty miles to Baton Rouge to get their hair done, could only travel around 30 miles per hour; there wasn't a beautician in Mississippi, sisters began getting their hair done when they began working; memories of her high school's valedictorian, he lived at Bowling Green Plantation; Lesley was voted "most affable" and won other awards; Lesley had a twin who lived in Tennessee, Flowers gave the twin's son Lesley's instrument from when he played with the band at Louisiana State University; after high school, she attended Whitworth Female College, Lesley got a job as a flagman for Highway 61 construction; Lesley's aunts got him into LSU but he was underprepared for the curriculum, tried out for the LSU band and made it; Flower's older brother, also at LSU, got Lesley some work with animal science and a room in the barn facility; Flowers also attended Mississippi University for Women, recalls long trip from Woodville to Columbus, Mississippi; father gave her his check book and she used it responsibly; she has a degree in math which comes in handy when she plays bridge; betting and strategies of bridge; learned how to play cards from her mother's cousin who frequently visited family home in Woodville; desire to learn how to play chess; when Lesley got a job, she was alone a lot; decided to go to secretarial school and got a job soon after finishing; worked for Mayor John Christian starting in 1960, lost that position when Mayor Woody Dumas was elected and transitioned to work for city-parish treasurer; retired in 1978 and began doing aerobics; different studios and gyms where she took aerobics classes; had to start using a walker after waking up dizzy one morning and taking a fall; she now has caretakers that helps her around the house; discussion about scheduling a follow-up interview; poultry professor who sometimes helped Lesley; many chicken-themed artworks in her home, recalls where she acquired them; a painting by Norman Rockwell that depicts a scene similar to what Lesley's work was; Lesley's involvement with 4-H, many awards of his displayed in Flowers' home; piece of artwork with the names of Lesley's parents and all eleven siblings on it; conclusion.

Session II

Tape 4412

Introduction to Session II; her husband was Charles Lesley Flowers, they were married in June

1937; Lesley died in 1999; her earliest memories of Lesley at Woodville Agricultural High School; sports at the school; her siblings also attended the school, got there by horse and buggy; incident where their horse was struck by lightning but recovered; buildings that were part of the school grounds; Lesley was from a rural area north of Woodville; he was burned in a kitchen accident as a child; his two aunts were nurses, came to check on his condition, took him to New Orleans by train and he spent two years in Touro Infirmary; he returned to Woodville at age twelve, aunts enrolled him at the agricultural school; worked at the school and a local farm milking cows while he was a student, lived in the school dorms; Lesley helped local children to raise a calf; he got involved with 4-H through his work with cooperative extension; odd jobs that Lesley held as a high school student; his aunts got him into LSU, but he was not prepared for the curriculum; auditioned and became a part of the LSU band; Flowers' brother was at LSU and helped get Lesley a job in animal science; Lesley helped take care of horses for the [Reynolds'?]; memories of attending Governor Richard Leche's inauguration, she couldn't handle the crowd; Lesley majored in animal science; description of Lesley's accommodations on campus, he ate one meal per day, all you can eat, for twenty-five cents; Lesley attempted to register for the service in World War II but was turned away because of his burns; Flowers attended Whitworth Female College then Mississippi University for Women; she didn't like being so far from home; was responsible with her father's checkbook in college, she only spent on necessities; married Lesley at age twenty-three; her father suffered with diabetes, died in the 1950s; her wedding with Lesley was a double wedding ceremony with her brother and his wife, Martha; honeymoon consisted of several stops in Mississippi; settling in Mansfield, Louisiana, they had an apartment with T.B. Hernden's mother; her love of antiques came from visiting elderly people's home with her mother through church outreach efforts; the home she grew up in had acetylene lights, they got electric lights years later; collection system for water run-off from the roof; house had an underground cistern; she isn't sure who built or designed her family's home; Lesley started working with animals in college; later became an assistant county agent in DeSoto Parish, also worked with 4-H; timeline of Lesley's work in Desoto and Claiborne Parishes, the county agents he worked under; Lesley worked for two years in the state poultry division, decided to return to county work; Lesley belonged to various associations related to agriculture as part of his job, also was very involved with the Lions Club and Kiwanis; Lesley was always out helping people and he enjoyed it; it didn't matter to him who the person was, he helped everybody; Flowers describes some of the chicken-themed artwork in her home, recalls where she acquired it; many of Lesley's awards are displayed in Flowers' home; a painting of a cow and butterfly that a friend of hers copied from a postcard, the woman decided to learn how to paint after several of her family members passed away; a statue of a Black Angus cow on her mantle; piece of artwork with the names of Lesley's parents and all eleven siblings on it; Lesley was very devoted to his work, enjoyed 4-H because of the children; conclusion.

TAPES: 2 (T4361, T4412)

TOTAL PLAYING TIME: Total: 3 hours, 14 minutes

Session I: 1 hour, 49 minutes

Session II: 1 hour, 25 minutes

PAGES: Total: 44 pages
Session I index: 10 pages
Session II transcript: 34 pages

OTHER MATERIALS: Photos (67); Interview question lists (2 pgs); Blurb (3 pgs);
Correspondence (1 pg)

RESTRICTIONS: None