

of course, I would like to see a kind of a memorial at the Rosewood site. I have not emotionally been able to go back there because I know it does not reflect physically what it was at that particular time. I also know that emotionally, and psychologically, the community spirit that was there, was not there. Although I do feel that there would be something there that would let me know and also my family know that this is our roots, this is where we were. And so, I would like some kind of memorial set up there. I've even had a vision personally having a museum to tell the story, to say that we can take people through it and I don't know, I understand John Wright's house is still there, I don't know who owns it, but if the State could purchase it and make a museum out of it and to just kind of tell the story of what happened again so that we can prepare ourselves for the future. And of course, I would just like the Governor, somebody, just to say I'm sorry.

**Question:** Dr. Shakir, I would like to thank you very much for this interview.

**Interviewer:** Larry E. Rivers

**Interviewed Mrs. Lillie Washington** at the Florida A&M University Black Archives Research Center and Museum on September 24, 1993.

**Brief Introduction/Rivers:** Hello Mrs. Lillie Washington! My name is Larry E. Rivers and I am most appreciative to you for allowing us time to talk to you about Rosewood and what happened in Rosewood in 1923.

**Question:** Before we talk about Rosewood in 1923, I'd like for you to tell me a little bit about yourself, for example, when you were born, where you were born, your parents, and if you can remember, your grandparents.

**Answer:** I was born in Rosewood and my mother left Rosewood when I was very young. She went to a place called Wylly Florida that was two or three miles down the road. So she lived there for a time (a good while). I was around about nine years when she left there and went to a place called Lenin, Florida. That was not too far from Rosewood, and I was not in the riot. My mother got up one morning and she got to thinking about her family and she said, "The Lord has shown me where there was a riot in Rosewood - that something was happening in Rosewood." So, we were living with my brother-in-law and they had one of these telephones in there. It rings and so my brother-in-law says this telephone has been ringing all night and all day and I'm going to eavesdrop and see what's going on. So when they picked it up the white was calling from different places saying come on and help us to kill the Negroes out in Rosewood. My mother became worried and from time to time we would go out into the yard and play. It wasn't far from the road. It wasn't a highway, but it was a dirt road. We could see the white people in the trucks with their guns sticking up in the truck and cars right behind them. This went on all day and all night and we would standing out in the yard looking. As time went on my brother-

in-law would continue to eavesdrop on the telephone and the conversation on the phone would be that they killed some of the Negroes in Rosewood. Then the first one came, my brother came up to the house. It was Wesley Bradley. The next one was George Bradley and he came up. My brother-in-law gave him some clothes because his were wet. They left and went to the railroad and Brice would come and pick them up as they flagged the train down. He would come and pick them up and take them over to Jacksonville and other places.

**Question:** Now who was Brice? Was he a white man?

**Answer:** Yes he was.

**Question:** But he was in Wylly wasn't he? Did he own a lot of property in Wiley?

**Answer:** This Brice, he was the conductor on the train and so they (Brice and the train) had taken some Blacks on to Jacksonville and other places. Then it went on (the riot) and we began to hear all of those that were killed in Rosewood. Gene Carrier, he went to Sumner where his daughter was. She was afraid to let him in so she closed the door and these white folks grabbed him. So my brother says they (the white folk) carried him (Gene Carrier) on down to where this man he works for in Wylly.

**Question:** Okay, who was your brother?

**Answer:** Buster Burns.

**Question:** Now who did he save?

**Answer:** They asked the bossman (supervisor), and he asked them to let his hands go down there and bury the dead. So Buster Burns says the white folks brought Mr. Gene Carrier to the grave and told him to get down and pray. So he got down and prayed and when he did they shot him over in the grave.

**Question:** Did he dig his own grave?

**Answer:** No, they dug it for him.

**Question:** How old were you when the Rosewood incident occurred in 1923?

**Answer:** I was about nine years old.

**Question:** What can you remember about Rosewood in terms of the community, the homes, in terms of who owned what? Can you tell us a little about the day-to-day life in Rosewood?

**Answer:** Yes, my uncle George owned a two-story building right by the train station called the depot.

**Question:** Can you tell us about other structures?

**Answer:** Ed Bradley owned a large home with cows, a wagon and horse. My mother she didn't have anything down there. All she had was a house that she was washing and ironing for a lady called Ms. Daisy.

**Question:** Now what was your mother's name? I want to know both your mother and father's name?

**Answer:** Mary and Frank Burns.

**Question:** What did your daddy do? Some of the workers were employed in the Sumner sawmill, some were farmers, some were hunters who sold their game. I understand that some of the women would work as domestics in the homes of the whites by doing the laundry, which was not uncommon of a lot of Blacks during that period of time. But what do you remember your father doing?

**Answer:** Well I can't remember exactly what he was doing but he was doing some kind of work.

**Question:** Did your mother work for whites?

**Answer:** She would take in washing and ironing

**Question:** How many brothers and sisters, Ms. Washington, did you have?

**Answer:** It was ten of us. Buster, Andrew, Darcus, Vernon, Andrew, Marthy, Josephine, Henrietta, Flossie, Verley Burns.

**Question:** Where did you fit in the family? Were you one of the oldest, in the middle, or the youngest?

**Answer:** I am the baby.

**Question:** How would you describe Rosewood in terms of Blacks owning land, owning their home? Do you remember whether Blacks owned much in Rosewood?

**Answer:** On yes, it was mostly a Black place.

**Question:** Would you say that out of every ten people you could count four whites in Rosewood?

**Answer:** I couldn't count the white people but it wasn't many. It was just a few.

**Question:** So there weren't many white people in Rosewood in 1923? We have gotten different reports on the number living there.

**Answer:** Yes, I understand. I'm trying to tell-I will tell the truth. Now, Wright, he owned a big store there. And he was mostly for the Blacks. Ed and George Bradley owned a store but they did not have it when the riot started.

**Question:** Did Mr. Hall have his store when the riot started?

**Answer:** Mr. Hall?

**Question:** Mary Hall's father. They said that he had a two-story building that he sold caskets, ice cream, and he had the other store that was in Rosewood along with Mr. Wright in 1923?

**Answer:** I don't remember. I know he had a big place but I don't remember what it was

**Interviewer:** I understand he was big farmer and he was a minister of sorts and was in the Baptist church.

**Question:** Where would you say most of the Blacks in Rosewood worked?

**Answer:** Well, I could not tell you where they worked, but they were working.

**Question:** Was Rosewood a thriving community, that is, were people doing different kinds of things. There were very few people just sitting around idle. They did a variety of things. Was it a busy working kind of place?

**Answer:** No, but most of them didn't work in Rosewood because it wasn't any work. They worked in Sumner, Florida.

**Question:** So most of them worked at the Sumner sawmill, probably, right.?

**Answer:** Then there was a turpentine still mill to.

**Question:** Was that owned by a Mr. Goins.

**Answer:** The turpentine still mill, yes.

**Question:** Did Mr. Goins own a lot of acres of pine fields where he worked his turpentine still? Would you consider Mr. Goins to be one of the biggest land owners in Rosewood regardless of color?

**Answer:** Sure.

**Question:** Was there a place called the Goins Quarters?

**Answer:** Yes.

**Question:** Do you have any idea of the number of people that worked for the Goins family?

**Answer:** No.

**Question:** Were there any churches in Rosewood in 1923? Black churches?

**Answer:** Yes, there were two Methodist churches.

**Question:** But you don't remember any Baptist churches, etc.

**Answer:** No.

**Question:** Do you remember a man by the name of Mr. Pillsbury?

**Answer:** No, I don't.

**Question:** What about Polly Wilkerson, Henry Andrews?

**Answer:** No.

**Question:** Now tell me where you were at the time of the Rosewood incident? Were you in Rosewood?

**Answer:** No, I wasn't in Rosewood but we were not far from there. We could see where they were burning the houses. You know that we mustn't be very far when you could see the balls of black smoke from the houses.

**Question:** After seeing the burning houses, what was the basic response of your parents when they saw all of this? Was it to go to the woods? Try to protect the home? What do you remember happening after you saw the burning houses down the road?

**Answer:** We just stood and looked at the smoke filling the sky. You could walk there to where the burning was occurring but it took time to walk there.

**Question:** Were you a couple of miles from Rosewood?

**Answer:** Yes.

**Question:** Was the place where you and your family lived still a part of Rosewood?

**Answer:** No, it was one place where we first lived and it was called Wylly, Florida where my mother came to live and then we left there and went to Lenin, Florida.

**Question:** At the time of the burning, what was the place called where you lived at the time?

**Answer:** Lenin, Florida.

**Question:** There were Black women and children escaping into the woods in hopes of saving their lives from what was happening. Do you know of or recall who called the train to pick them up to take them to Gainesville?

**Answer:** Mr. Wright, the one that was running the store. Some of them went to his house and he carried them out to the train. Mr. Brice on the train said for all those that could come out to the railroad, he would pick them up and that's what he did. He stopped the train and picked them up.

**Question:** Were just women and children allowed to board the train? Were there men on the train?

**Answer:** Women and children. The men mostly escaped through the woods.

**Question:** Most of the men escaped through the woods, they did not board the train?

**Answer:** No, not that I know of. Some of them came to our house. I think about five or six of them came to our house. The next morning they went on out into the woods.

**Question:** How do you remember the whole Rosewood incident getting started? How did it began? We have talked about the burning, some of the Blacks escaping with the women and children boarding the train. Let's back up and talk about what happened and how it got started?

**Answer:** Well, it was white lady that claimed that someone had raped her. So that's the way it started. I couldn't tell you if the person that did the raping was white or black. Some say black, some say white.

**Question:** After that alleged attack was well known, what happened after that, in your memory?

**Answer:** I can't remember.

**Question:** What do you remember about other people who wanted to get out of Rosewood? Were there a lot of people who had to leave? How many people, Blacks that is, lived in Rosewood in 1923?

**Answer:** I couldn't tell you how many lived there but mostly it was my people the Carrier's, the Bradley's, Edwards', and the Coleman's, who were of no relation to us.

**Question:** Do you remember any of the Coleman's

**Answer:** Oh yes.

**Question:** The Goins? Where did most of the people from Rosewood settle after the incident? I know some of them settled in Gainesville. Did they spread themselves out over the state of Florida?

**Answer:** Yes, some of them are in New York, Jacksonville, Hillard, Mississippi, Washington, Miami, and others.

**Question:** Ms. Washington what do you remember about Sylvester Carrier.

**Answer:** Sylvester, was in his house at the time the riot started. A lot of people were in their home, but Sylvester was in the house and they had shot him the next morning. My cousin, his mother, they hadn't shot her so they asked her to come out. She said no I am not coming out because I'm going to die by my son. So they killed her too.

**Question:** Who were the two individuals that died?

**Answer:** Sylvester and Sara Carrier

**Question:** Did Sylvester kill any of those who were shooting into his house before he was killed?

**Answer:** Yes, he wasn't the only one. Some more Blacks killed those who were shooting at them also.

**Question:** As far as you can remember, how many people were killed in Rosewood, both white and Black, by the time it was over.

**Answer:** I couldn't tell you about the whites but Sylvester, his mother, and Sam Carter were the first to be killed. There was a lady called Ms. Lexie who was killed at her table.

**Question:** Do you know Ms. Lexie's last name?

**Answer:** No.

**Question:** Some people feel that Sylvester Carrier got out and wasn't killed and that he lived in Louisiana until 1964. Now your recollection of the death of Sara and Sylvester Carrier, is that based on what your mother said?

**Answer:** No, my brother told me.

**Question:** How old was your brother at the time?

**Answer:** He was about 20+ years old.

**Question:** And he is the one who told you about Sylvester?

**Answer:** He wasn't in the riot but he was not far from there. They asked him to go and bury the dead and he went down there.

**Question:** What was your brother's name again?

**Answer:** Buster Burns.

**Question:** As far as Blacks were concerned, do you think five or six Blacks were killed and no more than that?

**Answer:** Probably, yes.

**Question:** We have heard people say there was a mass grave as though there were quite a few Blacks killed but unaccounted for. Have you heard this?

**Answer:** Most of them were whites. A lady came down looking for her husband and she never did find him.

**Question:** The first two whites to die, were Henry Andrews and Polly Wilkerson, who were sheriff and deputy and they opened the door to Sylvester Carrier's house and he killed both of them and other whites were killed on the outside. Have you heard this claim?

**Answer:** Sara Carrier killed the sheriff.

**Question:** Did she killed both the sheriff and deputy?

**Answer:** She killed one of them.

**Question:** Who killed the other, Sylvester.

**Answer:** I was told that Cousin Sara shot one of the officers, I don't know who shot the other one. She was in the house. They were all in the house because they didn't want them to take what they had. What happened is that the shells ran out and that's why they had to get out because they didn't have anything left to shoot with.

**Question:** Was this after the whites had gone and came back again? I understand they came first and the two white men were killed and then the whites gave out of bullets and they went back for reinforcements. Before the whites returned the second time to the Carrier's house did the women and children escape into the woods for the train to pick them up while Sylvester stayed in the house. When the whites were first at Sylvester's house, was his mother killed then, or was it after the whites came back a second time?

**Answer:** A second time.

**Question:** So she was not killed when they came the first time even though they were shooting into the house?

**Answer:** No.

**Question:** It was on their second trip that they gave out of bullets that she was killed along with Sylvester?

**Answer:** Yes

**Question:** What did the governor and those who could have stopped this do. Do you remember how they dealt with this? Wasn't it Governor Hardee at the time?

**Answer:** I don't remember his name but he came up to the house late that evening and he told us that he wasn't going to hurt us. He just come to help us. So we had a long back porch where you come in at. The house wasn't far from the roadway. He said that when he come he wasn't going hurt us but to help us. He sat out on the back porch and took out some papers that had my brother-in-law to read them. He said he was there to stop the riot. If they didn't stop they would send troops into Rosewood. So he sat out on the back porch all that evening and all that night until the next morning.

**Question:** This is the white man.

**Answer:** Yes, and he got up and he didn't come in the house and lay down or anything. He stayed out on the porch. The next morning he said I think the last car has come out from down there but I got to go back down the road to be sure because if it's not the last car then we will have to send in the troops. He got up and went out to the railroad and the last car came along and picked him up and carried him back down the road and we didn't see him anymore.

**Question:** Was he a law enforcement officer?

**Answer:** Yes.

**Question:** But he wasn't a part of the sheriff's department.

**Answer:** No, no. He was the United States Protector

**Question:** United States Marshall. But you don't remember his name?

**Answer:** Well, he told us his name but I can't remember.

**Question:** What do you remember about the attack on Fannie Taylor? Was it by a Black man or white man?

**Answer:** Well, I don't know. Some say white, some say Black.

**Question:** But the one thing you remember very clearly, is that Rosewood was burning and you could stand at your house and see it. Now when you were standing at your house were whites in cars passing by where you were living, going further down into Rosewood.?

**Answer:** They were going back and forth all day.

**Question:** But they didn't bother you?

**Answer:** No, they didn't bother us but they would look at us. The fact of the matter is they could have shot us because we were just standing in the yard looking at them and they saw us.

**Question:** They didn't say anything to you?

**Answer:** No.

**Question:** Were your family members afraid at that time?

**Answer:** No

**Question:** When did you all realize it was important for you all to leave the area because of what was happening in Rosewood.

**Answer:** We didn't leave there until my mother moved to Gainesville.

**Question:** So, you stayed through the whole ordeal?

**Answer:** Yes, we stayed and didn't leave.

**Question:** So you all did not leave Rosewood?

**Answer:** It seems as though they were not going to bother us and they didn't bother us.

**Question:** This is interesting. Why did the whites seem to be so adamant about the Carriers. It seems as though if they had allegedly gotten Jessie Hunter, then the killing should have stopped. They had avenged whatever happened or at least said happened to Fannie Taylor. Why would they seem like they were going after the Carriers?

**Answer:** Well, at that time see you don't know about it. You could not even look at a white woman. A Black man couldn't look at white woman even if they were just standing

up and be thinking about it. If the whites feel that a Black man was doing that, they would kill him or beat him up. What happened when this man did that (the rape) whoever he was, he went to Samuel Carter's house. Samuel Carter took him in the wagon to Aaron Carrier's house. When he back the wagon up he got out of the wagon and his feet didn't hit the ground. He went into the house and Aaron took him in the wagon and carried him down into the woods because that's all the far the dogs could track him. And that's why they were after Carrier. At that time they would kill the little babies also.

**Question:** You mean children?

**Answer:** Yes, they killed them to. The whole family.

**Question:** Just everybody was wiped out?

**Answer:** Everybody in that family. They could have did us the same very way if they had known we were family people. They just didn't bother us.

**Question:** Just didn't bother you? That's interesting because I thought that people in and around Rosewood had to get out of the community in order to save their lives. You have just said something that is absolutely fascinating in terms of watching them go in and out of Rosewood and looking at you physically and not harming you. Thank God they didn't, but it is interesting none-the-less.

**Answer:** We could stand on the back porch and look at them passing by and they would be looking at us on the porch.

**Question:** Can you remember when you actually left Rosewod?

**Answer:** When I left Rosewood I was very young and can't remember my exact age.

**Question:** Do you think it was after 1930?

**Answer:** Sure, because after we left Rosewood, I went back down there to school.

**Question:** After the Rosewood incident, the burning of the homes, did most of the people move out of Rosewood?

**Answer:** Oh, yes.

**Question:** Were there many Blacks outside of Rosewood in places like Wylly?

**Answer:** Well there were quite a few.

**Question:** They still lived in Sumner and Wylly?

**Answer:** Yes

**Question:** But no one wanted to live in Rosewood, per se?

**Answer:** You couldn't live there. You had better not go back down there.

**Question:** If they had gone back down there, what would have happened to them?

**Answer:** They would have gotten killed, I'm quite sure.

**Question:** Was Rosewood just vacant for a while?

**Answer:** Yes, it was.

**Question:** No one tried to go in and farm and do anything?

**Answer:** No. It was a few of them that went down there.

**Question:** When you say a few, who were they?

**Answer:** Susie White, she went down there and sold her property.

**Question:** A few went back after the riot?

**Answer:** They went back down there to try and sell their property. I think they sold some of it.

**Question:** They sold it to whites?

**Answer:** Yes. I was very small. They stayed in Wylly and Gainesville until they got half grown. From Rosewood, Wylly was about two or three miles, and Sumner was about five miles from Wylly.

**Question:** Rosewood itself was sort of vacant with very few, if any, Blacks living in that community but there were Blacks in surrounding communities of Rosewood that continued to live there. None of those Blacks were searched out to be killed, were they?

It seems that the whites were after the Carrier family?

**Answer:** The Carriers and the Bradleys.

**Question:** How did the Bradley's fit into this? I know Aaron Carrier was responsible for carrying away whoever this person was that allegedly raped Fannie Taylor. How did the Bradley's fit in? Why were they upset with them?

**Answer:** They were related to the Carrier's.

**Question:** If they were related they lumped them all into one group and went after them.

**Answer:** Right.

**Question:** You can't remember how many whites were killed?

**Answer:** No, I can't remember.

**Question:** You know there were at least five or six Blacks killed?

**Answer:** Yes.

**Question:** The whites. You say they were coming back and forth all day. Were they coming from Sumner and Cedar Key you think?

**Answer:** Who, the Blacks?

**Question:** No, the whites who were going in and out of Rosewood.

**Answer:** I don't remember.

**Question:** The whites you remember as you saw them going in and out, they were driving Model-T cars and were they in trucks?

**Answer:** Yes, old time Fords they use to drive.

**Question:** How many did you count at one time going in or out? One, two or three cars loaded with people?

**Answer:** You just hearing the cars rolling by. At that time cars made a loud noise and you could hear them going down the one behind the other in trucks and cars.

**Question:** Would you say there were more than four or five?

**Answer:** Yes.

**Question:** Just a bunch of them. Were any of the faces of those people familiar? Had they been in Rosewood before?

**Answer:** No. They came from different places. Gainesville, Jacksonville, any place they called for them to come down there.

**Question:** Do you remember any of them wearing any white uniforms.

**Answer:** No.

**Question:** They just dressed normally. The Rosewood survivors resettled all over Florida and that interesting. Ms. Washington, how many of your brothers and sisters are still living today?

**Answer:** None, I'm the only survivor.

**Interviewer:** I think those are all the questions I have and you have done an excellent job of helping me to piece this incident together. I have spoken with others, and all the information that I have seems to point to some common things that occurred in Rosewood, and I am glad we had an opportunity to talk. I am extremely happy that you are here, and I hope we have made your stay here as pleasant as we could possibly make it. This tape will be here in the Black Archives at the Florida A&M University and students in the year 2010 will come and listen to what Larry Rivers and Mrs. Washington talked about as a part of Florida's history. We are going to make sure as much as we can to include what happened in Rosewood and the surrounding areas in the history of Florida to make a well rounded balance history of Florida. You will be a part of that history, you are a part of that living history. Students who will come from miles around at this great university will know that a Mrs. Lillie Washington was a part of the Rosewood incident and that she had something to say based upon her recollection of that, and we are extremely happy that you have shared your recollections with us. I thank you again and your family members for making sure that you were able to be with us over the last couple of days.