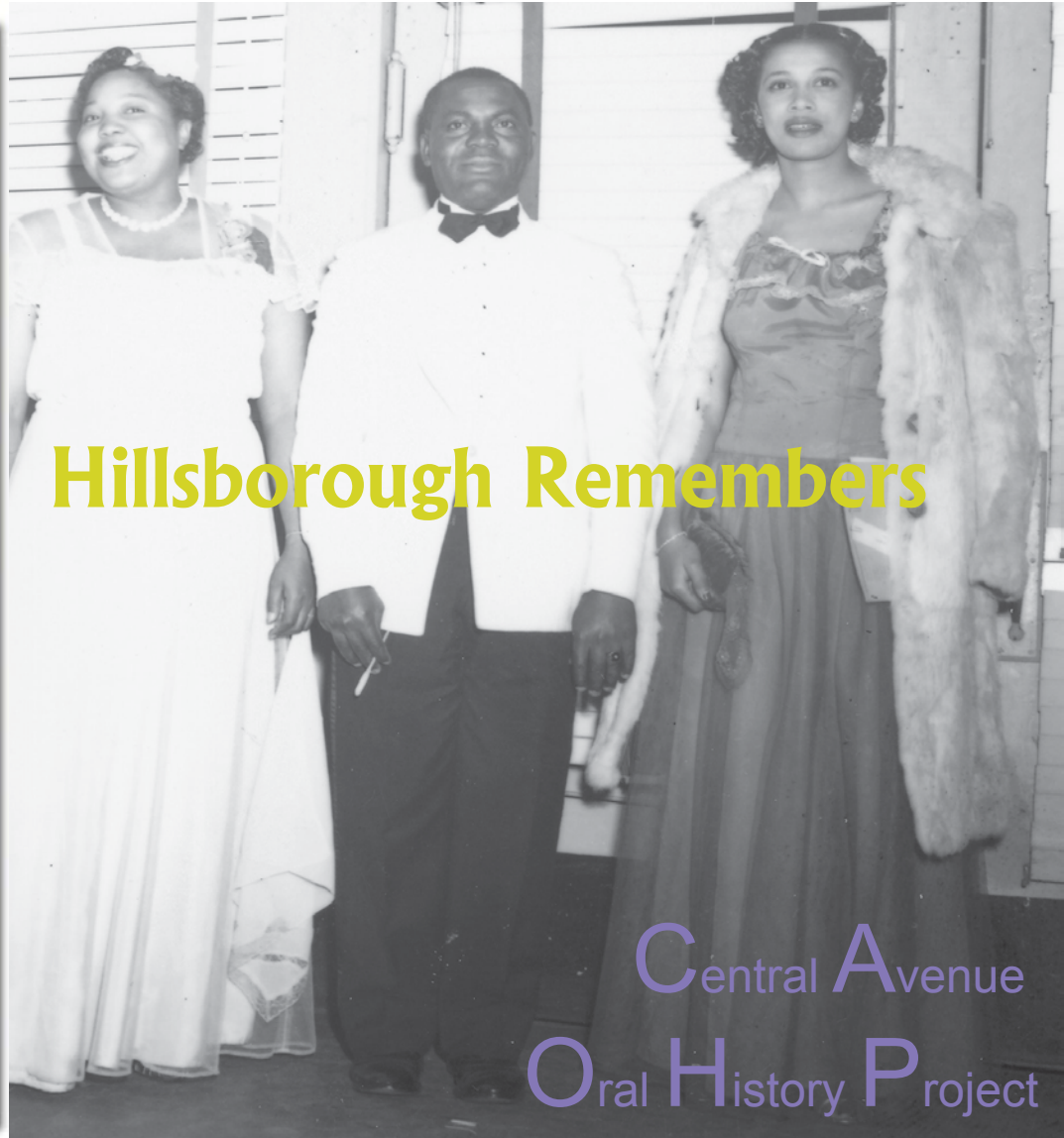


*Sarah Jackson-Robinson*



**Hillsborough Remembers**

Central Avenue  
Oral History Project

*This is an interview with Sarah Jackson-Robinson (SR) of Tampa, Florida. This interview is being conducted at the Ybor City Branch Library on October 30, 2003. Mrs. Robinson will tell us about her memories of Central Avenue and the Jackson House.*

*The interviewer is Carrie Hurst, Librarian (CH) representing the Central Avenue Business and Entertainment District Oral History Collections Project.*

CH: Ms. Robinson what are your earliest memories of Central Avenue Business and Entertainment District?

SR: From a child, I was about eleven or twelve, we were going home. The businesses on Central Avenue, we was the first black to own the Jackson Cab Company. You see my father ran from us, from my mother and brother lived on Central Avenue. I mean Harrison off of Central Avenue, right around the corner, and he lived there. He didn't stay with us but he ran the cab stand for us. And I remember Central Avenue when there was a Central Hotel. Jane Butler and Rudolph Butler ran the Central Hotel. They had a daughter named, Ruby Butler. And on Sundays we would go by and pickup Ruby Butler and carry her to Sunday School. And our church was right around the corner where the union hall is on Harrison. That's where Beulah Baptist Church was and we would take her to Sunday School and bring her back. Take her upstairs to the Central Hotel to her mother and father.

CH: Now you said that your earliest memories went back to when you were a child, eleven years old. How was it then, were you as a child, were you allowed to go on Central Avenue?

SR: No, I wasn't unless I went to the cab store. My mother took in washing and ironing for the judges and the lawyers and sometimes she would send me, my baby sister and I to carry clothes to my brother and he would deliver them. Sometimes he would see us coming and the cab, he be sitting out in front of the cab stand him and some of the cab boys, and they would tell him Sarah's coming and he would hide. Then my baby sister and I would have to carry them load of clothes to the courthouse. It was a wooden courthouse on the corner of Franklin Street and Lafayette, years ago.

CH: What years did you spend time on Central Avenue?

SR: After I got to be adult. I used to work in the barber shop. ( ) and there was nice oak and I used to cut hair and then my husband owned a hair ( ) and he was in partnership. Marshall's Barber Shop on Central Avenue.

CH: Do you remember what years that was? Can you think of what years that you started spending time down there as an adult?

SR: OOO, goodness! I was around twenty-five and ( ).

CH: Are you a relative of a Central Avenue business owner? If so, who were they and how are you related, and can you tell me about the business?

SR: My brother, he was Earnest Jackson, and he owned the Jackson Cab Company and he was my brother. He had a nice cab company. That was the only cab company. And he done it for eighty years. He sold it to Wade Cabs. Mr. Wade was the man who ran on the trains, he was a fire man. And he turned it over to ( ).

CH: You said the only cab company, you mean the only black cab company?

SR: The only black cab company. It was the only black cab on the train station, it was the Union Train Station, that I was born in. They would have hacks, they cars that pick up people and take them different places. You know, you couldn't stay in hotels not in a white hotel. That's why my mother and father invented the rooming house to take in roomers. And then the hacks were kept in different places and ( ) some time or not, you know. So then my mother and father decided that they were going to be the Jackson Cab Company.

CH: Do you remember how many cabs they had?

SR: No, I don't, but I know they had a lot of cabs.

CH: Can you tell us about the Jackson House?

SR: Yes, yes I can. That's where I was born. I was born in the Jackson House. I expect the whole entire family was. There's four girls and there was two brothers, boys and my nieces was born there and one nephew. When Johnnie Saunders was born there and her mother, which was my sister, the girl was born right in the Jackson House. And the lady that delivered me, the midwife delivered me, her name is Ms. Enbanner. She lived on 1010 Second Avenue. Second Avenue right across the street but north Second Avenue. That's the midwife delivered me. And we was all born right there. I'm still there.

CH: So did your father build the Jackson House, his self?

SR: He did, he built it. With the hands his self. He put it together and built it cause he was a construction worker, a carpenter and he helped to build the Union Station ( ) the Union Station Building.

CH: Was there always, was it built as big as it is now or was it added on to in later years?

SR: ( ) a big roomer family house. Then in later years when we got rid of the roomers then we added on ( ) you know, make it up or added up to the top cause there's twenty-four rooms in all.

CH: Can you describe for us what the Jackson House looked like inside? Tell us about it.

SR: Well, we have a nice living room. We have bedrooms but the house ceilings, years ago they built houses with high ceilings, which it makes it kinda difficult to keep it warm in the winter, now. When I was coming up as a child, you didn't need any heater. You had quilts, my mother did quilting, and then you would use fireplaces. I have three fireplaces and I didn't need any heat. Then later years when you closed your doors in the winter your house stayed warmer. Then in later years it began to get cold and then the heaters came in. My mother never used a heater. My mother died in 1937.

CH: What about air conditioning, did you have air conditioners?

SR: Well, I have air conditioner and fans but I don't care for air conditioning. It keeps me hoarse and I don't like air conditioners. I'm used to the fresh air.

CH: So back then you didn't have air conditioning?

SR: No. No fans either. Remember when we was going to church you had to fan with a hand fan. Go into church they'd be passing them out, giving to the churches.

CH: Do you remember how much a room rented for back then?

SR: Ah seventy-five cents a week. Twenty-five cents a night.

CH: Did they get anything with that room? Like today we have bed and breakfast, did they get a meal or anything?

SR: They did. One porter, that I can remember that my mother would cook for, he was a train porter. And ah his story name Chrisoff, and my daddy he would, I mean he would come in and like he would stay overnight and go back the next day. My mother would fix breakfast for him. But I had to clean up the room and I had to help my mother washing, not washing the clothes, but iron the pillowcases when I would come from school. And we didn't have any electric lights, we had lamps. Kerosene lamps and then in the later years we got lights and then my daddy he would always use the ( ) lamp. ( ) seven o'clock when it was dark, nine o'clock he would walk down the halls saying "on the lights, on the lights, lamps going on" and then he would turn the lights out at the same length of time. We didn't have any electricity until the later years and I didn't really want it. And we didn't have any bathtubs. ( ) toilets out in the yard, out in the back yard, that's where they was.

CH: And the Jackson House location is where?

SR: It's to Nebraska and Zack Street.

CH: And the address?

SR: It was 835 at that time. Zack Street.

CH: And now?

SR: It's 851. When they made it a commercial zone then they changed addresses.

CH: It was considered part of the Central Avenue Business District?

SR: That's right, it is considered as a part of the Central Avenue Business.

CH: What other kinds of businesses were on Central Avenue and who owned them?

SR: Well, White Lee Barber Shop, that was Dr. White's son. He had an office over the Greek Stand on Scott and Central and he had a barber shop. Kid Mason. Our cab stand was right across in front of Kid Mason's. You walked out of Kid Mason's and you could hook across the street at the cab stand and the cab stand was across from Kid Mason place. And on that corner there was um Charlie Moon. He run a business on that corner, at that time.

CH: What were some of the people that you remember from Central? Some of the business owners.

SR: Oh, I remember Johnnie Gray, and Rudy used to run the Pressing Club. I remember Mr. James Butler run the Central Hotel, and I remember Dr. White and I remember some of his children. At least his son Jake White. And Slim was working in the barber shop, I remember Watts Sanders came in ( ) on Central Avenue.

CH: Do you remember seeing any celebrities, did any celebrities come through?

SR: Oh, yes! That's all we would take in the celebrities, cause they couldn't stay any place else at that time.

CH: That's at the Jackson House?

SR: At the Jackson House.

CH: Can you name some of them that came through?

SR: Ted Well, the Bolton Boys, Jimmie Laugher, his sister Joan Laugher. His sister had a band and he had a band. And a Cab Calloway, there's a lot of them came in. They didn't have any other places to stay.

CH: Did I hear a story about Ella Fitzgerald?

SR: Yes, she wrote a Tiskit a Taskit, I Found My Yellow Basket, right in the Jackson House.

CH: Did anything especially reckonable happen to you in relation to a celebrity, other than Ella Fitzgerald? Did you have anything of significance happen to you?

SR: And James Brown he was there. James Brown came. The Louis were in the pawn shop, he showed him where to get a room and he came and got the room. James Brown had really got any fame, he was trying to. Then he got drunk and I let him stay with you all, you know what I'm saying. And he wrote home to his mother's for money. He left and when he came back he was in fame. My husband, who run the barber shop, he used to process his hair. Every time he would come into Tampa, he would go to the barber shop and my husband would do his hair.

CH: And when you were at the Jackson House did you have common conversations with him did they come around?

SR: Yes, they come around and also gospel singers used to live there with us. The two black, the first two black policemen was jailed there. ( ). And as a child, we used to have a white policeman who used to walk the beat. He would walk around, you know, around the corner and up and down Zack. He had a club, he didn't have any gun, I guess he didn't need them at that time.

CH: What represented some of the best times on Central that you can remember?

SR: Well, the best times, Nathan used to have nice affairs. The Palm Dinette and different clubs would have nice affairs. And we would go there. Fashion show to the Central Theatre some body have a fashion show. To the catholic school, upstairs to the dance hall in the catholic, I mean a, a fashion show and dance.

CH: Do you remember a the parades?

SR: Yes. We seldom went to the parades because ( ) classic would come down Central Avenue that would be a big day for us in Tampa. Football game and all.

CH: What were some of the worst times that you remember on Central?

SR: I don't really remember any worst times except maybe now. Since they done did away with Central. I don't know why they did away with Central.

CH: You don't remember the riots?

SR: Yeah, I remember that.

CH: Do you know what happened, why did they riot?

SR: I really don't know. I sure don't. 'Cause see I was a person I just—( ) there was a business thing that I had to do. I did that and went home 'cause I had work in the barber shop and I had a beauty shop. I had a beauty shop at home and I used to work on 630 Nebraska and visit in these beauty shop. ( ) I stopped in the beauty shops ( ). And then from the barber shop I go at night and I worked by appointments that's how I could handle it better.

CH: So you don't remember the Martin Chambers incident? Martin Chambers?

SR: Um um.

CH: What were some of the changes you saw on Central Avenue a few years before the closing of the street? How did it change?

SR: I didn't see any changes. I usually think that most of the people that had businesses died. You know, died or was sick.. The last couple of people ( ) in retirement they just got old and stopped. In their later years then they started retireing. There was no retirement when I first came up and I came up in a depressive time, too. It was the depression.

CH: Do you remember when Central started declining?

SR: No. I had two brothers fall in the war. World war both ( ). I had two brothers.

CH: Where did you go typically for entertainment after Central was closed?

SR: Well, I don't hardly go any place. I go to church. They come home and I go out of town, I have a visiting, I have friends. But I visited going to the Bahamas and I ( ) different places visiting. That's where I go.

CH: I mean when Central Avenue was closed, and you talked about having gone to the fashion shows there and other places. When Central Avenue was no more, was there another area of town that you typically went to for entertainment?

SR: No, no 'cause usually I have house parties. Friends here and there have a party for ( ).

CH: We've been hearing quite a bit in the news lately about the Jackson House. Could you tell us a little bit about what's happening with the Jackson House now?

SR: Well, my niece and I wanted it for a landmark, historical because the train station is historical. The building on the corner, right across from the train station are historical and the fire station is historical. And I think we entitled to have it historical because I'm in the center. And the fire station was there when I was a child. 1702 and I and my baby sister would go there to pickup mulberries off the ground ( ). And sometimes when you be very nice ( ) slide down the pole system. There was a ( ) on the corner and also there was a lot of live entertainment, too for children. We had a group, where the old courthouse burned down, and I used to go there to clean up, I told you I took clothes there for my momma.

CH: So, you have made an attempt to have the Jackson House established as an historical site?

SR: ( )

CH: But you've taken steps toward doing that?

SR: I am. Yes, I'm working on that.

CH: The Jackson House is in need of some refurbishing or some repair?

SR: Yes, we need repairs.

CH: Are you getting any assistance with that?

SR: Not yet. I think I'm entitled to it. The house is over 100 years old. And I was born there, I lived to 87 ( ) so I think that he is entitled to that. And my niece, Donnie, is in her 76 and I think you entitled to that.

CH: So you have been interviewed by –

SR: Every station.

CH: Every TV. station

SR: Yes.

CH: Local

SR: Tribune papers, Tampa, Shoeman, Times and Tribune and all the stations.

CH: So your Jackson House is one of the only lasting businesses from the Central Avenue Business District area.

SR: That's left.

CH: So you hope to make it be a historical landmark so that it will be there forever more.

SR: Forever more.

CH: That's wonderful.

CH: Is there anything further that you would like to tell us about Central Avenue or your memories, anything that we did not cover?

SR: Well, Central Avenue it was a quite business district at the time. You know as a child where I was concerned, mother wouldn't want you ( ) three girls, you know where the boys go. My brother had the cab stand ( ). Like we couldn't hand on Central like ( ). And then in later years, when Mr. Joyner came, Mr. White, during my early years they wasn't there. There was other businesses on Central Avenue.

CH: So you've seen Central evolve from –

SR: One generation to the next for over thirty years.

CH: Were you there when the train station came or was the train station there before you came?

SR: The train station was there before I came was in 1912 and I was born in 1916.

CH: Are you planning anything special for your birthday?

SR: Well, years back I should have passed on by. But since I was a big girl now, I would appreciate a nice ( ).

CH: Thank you Ms. Jackson. That concludes our formalized interview. Thank you for sharing our memories with us and your time.

