

**AUSTIN HISTORY CENTER**  
**Oral History Center**

**Interviewee:** Isaac Chapman

**Interviewer:** Karen Riles

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**Key Names:** Bailey family, Houghton Brownlee, Fontaine family, *The Gold Dollar*, *The Silver Messenger*, Robert and Clara Chapman (parents)

KAREN RILES: This is Karen Riles from the Austin History Center. Today is October 1.

We're going to start in 1930, '31, with your first memories of Juneteenth. So go ahead and start.

Now, if you wanted someone to feel what a Juneteenth celebration was like, and there were no pictures to show people, how would you describe what Juneteenth was like back in those days?

ISAAC CHAPMAN: Oh, okay.

RILES: Go ahead.

CHAPMAN: Ready? My first recollection of Juneteenth goes back to about 1930 or 1931.

Usually there were barbecues in the neighborhood and then they would have a central barbecue in Austin. The original Juneteenth celebration took place in what was called the Emancipation Park.

RILES: Where was that located?

CHAPMAN: Emancipation Park was located where the present Rosewood Project is located, on the corner of Rosewood and Chicon. It was just an empty field and I guess the citizens would get together and furnish the meat and the ladies would bring vegetables and fruit and the drinks, and we'd have a barbecue.

RILES: What part of Austin did you grow up in?

CHAPMAN: I grew up in what is called Wheatsville, Texas, USA. This is the area west of the University of Texas, between 24<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> Street, and between San Gabriel and Shoal Creek. The Wheatsville Co-op was named for the Wheatsville all-black community.

RILES: And so what were some of the things that your family would do to prepare for Juneteenth? What did you do, you know, each year? What was you all's ritual?

CHAPMAN: My family did not barbecue. There were several people in the neighborhood that would barbecue and we would go there and get whatever we wanted. Usually, well, when I was small, I never heard of a brisket and all of the barbecuing was either from a sheep or a goat, and of course, they would have the sausage, but we would go and we would get what we wanted, and then we'd take it back home and eat it.

RILES: Okay. So, if you lived in Wheatville, which is in the west part of Austin, how did you get to the celebration grounds over in East Austin?

CHAPMAN: There was a streetcar that ran from 29<sup>th</sup> Street and Rio Grande to downtown Austin and when you got to downtown Austin, you would transfer to the East End streetcar. These are streetcars, long before we had buses, and the streetcar ran to 12<sup>th</sup> and Chicon only. It stopped at 12<sup>th</sup> and Chicon. And then we'd get off and then walk down to Emancipation Park which is on Rosewood and Chicon. Now, Austin has been, I guess, a friendly city. I am told that the food was furnished by white residents of Austin for the Juneteenth party, celebrations, and we would go there and they had tables and we would sit down and eat, and when we got through, we would go back home.

RILES: So when you were on the street buses, on the streetcars, rather, describe to me, what, you know, on Juneteenth, I hear that black people didn't work.

CHAPMAN: No, no, you usually had off that day. They would give you off—

RILES: Who would give you off?

CHAPMAN: Your white bosses would give you off and very few people worked on Juneteenth. It was really a holiday. So not only did we have barbecue in East Austin, some of the churches

had activities. They would have barbecues at the church and people were able to go over there and eat, but it was an elaborate celebration, far more than it is now.

RILES: Oh, my goodness. What about the parade? Were there parades?

CHAPMAN: They didn't have parades then. This is new. Having a parade, I would say, is less than twenty years old.

RILES: Oh, okay.

CHAPMAN: We didn't have parades.

RILES: Well, do you remember any stories that your parents might have told you, or your grandparents told you about early celebrations of Juneteenth in Austin? Do you remember any?

CHAPMAN: If I remember correctly, they didn't talk a lot about the Juneteenth. We knew what it was all about, but I don't ever recall them saying anything about that celebration, I really don't. I'm sure they celebrated in some fashion, but this was never discussed.

RILES: Well, what about once you got there? You know, you're a kid, and looking around—did they have an organized program where like you would have--?

CHAPMAN: Usually they would have some singing and one person in the community who was no doubt the leader in the black community would talk about the Emancipation Proclamation and how we got word in Texas. If you remember correctly, I don't know whether—but the Proclamation was signed on January 1st, 1865, by Abraham Lincoln, but the news never got to Texas until June 19th of the same year. And this was brought, I understand, by some white fellow, I don't know his name now, but he arrived in Galveston on a boat and he brought the message to Texas that the slaves had been freed. This was our emancipation, Emancipation Day. We knew nothing at all about January 1st. Only thing we knew was Juneteenth, June the 19<sup>th</sup>, 1865. So then it just continued to spread and I guess from then on, we would just celebrate what we called the Juneteenth.

RILES: So in the 1930s, you know, there were still a lot of the former slaves, there were still a few in Austin that were still living, and I know it had been tradition in the past to allow them to speak about what it was like in slavery. Do you remember anybody speaking like that?

CHAPMAN: No, I don't.

RILES: Oh, okay.

CHAPMAN: I'm not sure, I'm not sure any of them were still living, any of the ex-slaves were still living then.

RILES: Yeah, there were—

CHAPMAN: That would be about '35—they would have to be in their eighties.

RILES: Yeah, they would have been in their nineties. There were some in their nineties.

CHAPMAN: Nineties, uh-huh.

RILES: The last of them died in the '50s, as a matter of fact. The slave narratives that were conducted, the interviews that were conducted in Travis County in 1937, they interviewed sixty-seven former slaves, and throughout the South, they had, during this time period, they had conducted over thousands, over two thousands of these interviews with former slaves. So there were still some living.

CHAPMAN: There were a few.

RILES: Yeah, just a few. And so you said there was music. What kind of music?

CHAPMAN: Usually you'd have a quartet or you'd have just group singing. And the songs that they sang were all black spirituals which were, I guess, outgrowth of slavery. For example, *Nobody Knows the Trouble I've Seen*, of course, was an outgrowth from slavery and *Everybody Talking about Heaven, Ain't Going There*, that is an outgrowth of slavery. So you'd have group singing, you'd have a quartet singing. We had a number of quartets in Austin at that time, and they would perform and we'd sometimes join in with them. And it was just a gala occasion.

RILES: So what about the kids? Did they have a part in, you know, the celebration itself? Did they have programs?

CHAPMAN: They didn't have anything special for the kids. If I remember correctly, I don't recall anything other than maybe a few swings in this park. I do remember there was a creek that ran straight down the middle of the park and if you got a chance to play softball, a ball would usually go into the little creek and get wet, and you'd pick it up and go back and play with it again. And when they built the Rosewood Projects, they put a pipe where the creek was, and the water goes in these pipes underneath the Rosewood Projects.

RILES: So I read in 19--, I think it was 1938, where a Mr. Bailey went before the City Council because he was upset and other citizens were upset because they wanted to take the Juneteenth grounds and put those projects there. And Mr. Bailey apparently was a storekeeper that lived up the street—

CHAPMAN: Up the street on Chicon Street, yeah.

RILES: So did you remember that man?

CHAPMAN: I remember, I remember his children. Yeah, he had James Bailey and—oh, what was the other one?—there was a whole family of Baileys that lived on 11<sup>th</sup> Street, 11<sup>th</sup> and Chicon. Am I right?

RILES: That's right.

CHAPMAN: 11<sup>th</sup> and Chicon, and they owned a store there, yes. But at that time, we had, we had, I guess you might call them now, a liberal City Council. If I remember correctly, they were usually give something for the purchase of food for the Juneteenth celebration and I remember in the '30s, Tom Miller, who was a mover in Austin, he was the Mayor, would always contribute something toward this celebration.

RILES: Of all the Juneteenth celebrations that you attended, are there any particular memories that stand out more than any other?

CHAPMAN: It is hard to say which celebration stands out as the number one. I guess, at my age, I was just crazy about eating the food and drinking the red Kool-Aid. Usually you could

drink all the Kool-Aid you wanted, and so we'd go back and get as much as we wanted. But, no, nothing really stands out.

RILES: With so many people there on the grounds and, you know, food everywhere, how did you all know when it was time to eat?

CHAPMAN: They would make an announcement and you'd have a prayer. Before you had lunch, you'd always have a prayer. A minister would get up and pray and then we'd all line up and go around the tables. Get your plate and go back—half the time we'd sit on the ground. They did not have a table for everyone and we'd sit on the ground and eat.

RILES: Did white people attend?

CHAPMAN: No, no. There were no white people there at all. There is something that stands out in my mind. That was the celebration in Wheatsville and there was a gentleman running for office. His name was Brownlee, Houghton Brownlee, I believe. Houghton Brownlee was running for office and I don't remember what it was, but I remember he came out and spoke. Evidently it was in the General Election because blacks could only vote in the General Election at that time, but he came, I remember this, he came out and spoke at this Juneteenth celebration but I don't remember—maybe it was Congressman, I don't know. I could look it up. Seems like it was Houghton Brownlee. That was in the early '30s.

RILES: Oh, and you remember that.

CHAPMAN: You might be able to look it up, you know, Houghton Brownlee—

RILES: I can look it up.

CHAPMAN: Houghton Brownlee—

RILES: As a matter of fact, I saw his grave at Oakwood Cemetery. That's what I was smiling because I saw his grave, and it is Houghton.

CHAPMAN: Is it Houghton Brownlee?

RILES: H-o-u-g-h-t-o-n,

CHAPMAN: Oh, God.

RILES: What a memory.

CHAPMAN: Gee, whiz!

RILES: Let's see—the barbecue pits—describe to me how they barbecued the meat. Because I saw a picture where the pit is in the ground or something and the meat's on top of something.

CHAPMAN: Most of the time, they would dig a pit and then have metal pipes run across the pit and they put screen wire on top of the metal pipes, then put the meat on top of the screen wire.

See, they didn't have barbecue pits as we know them today. They didn't have the drum types, and they would not have had the brick types down at this park, so they dug a hole and this was the way they'd do it in Hawaii. I imagine they still do it that way. They did it that way when I was there in the '40s. They'd dig a big hole, put pipes across it, metal bars, cover it with screen wire, put the meat on top of it. Now the hole was large enough so that you could put, at one end, put in the pieces of wood. I would imagine it would be as long as this couch, probably longer. That's the way they would barbecue.

RILES: Oh, okay.

CHAPMAN: You asked about the celebrations that I remember.

RILES: Right.

CHAPMAN: Of all of the celebrations that I remember the most was one put on by Texas residents in California. That practice has continued. People who left Austin years ago, about my age now, continued the practice once they got to California. I should never forget in the early 1950s, I went to Los Angeles during the summer and they said, "Okay, the Austinites are having a barbecue at Griffith Park." That's in Los Angeles.

RILES: Oh, my goodness.

CHAPMAN: And I went to Griffith Park for the first time—this was on the Juneteenth—and I got a chance to see many of the people who were in high school with me. They knew I was there and they invited me. We had a ball. It was nice. And that practice, as of the last time I was there, the practice continued. Whenever someone leaves Austin and they go to Los Angeles,

almost everybody in Los Angeles would know it within twenty-four hours. They would start calling each other, “Isaac Chapman is here now. We want to have a party.” And usually, they’d have a party. And I have been to two Juneteenth celebrations at Griffith Park.

RILES: Wow!

CHAPMAN: I remember those. Those stand out.

RILES: You talk about a good time. Now, did you all dance at the Juneteenth celebration?

CHAPMAN: No, no.

RILES: No? Why?

CHAPMAN: Well, you must recall that at that time, it was a sin to dance. The cardinal sin among blacks was drinking, dancing, fornication. They preached and preached and by the way, smoking was a sin. My father stopped smoking because of what some evangelist told that the body is the temple of the Lord, and you shouldn’t smoke, so he stopped smoking. And most of the leaders in our community at that time were the ministers. They stood out, they were the leaders, and we believed what they said. No dancing, no way.

RILES: No way.

CHAPMAN: In fact, there were some who didn’t allow their children to do folk dances in high school. Yes, they really believed that dancing was a sin. See, that was before your time, though.

RILES: Well, actually we weren’t allowed to dance either when I was growing up for that very reason.

CHAPMAN: Is that right?

RILES: Because I grew up in the Holiness church so we couldn’t dance. In Tennessee, I can’t dance.

CHAPMAN: Do they still hold to that?

RILES: Uh-huh.

CHAPMAN: They still hold—Lord have mercy.

RILES: No smoke, no drink, no messing(??)—

CHAPMAN: I thought that we had dropped that.

RILES: No.

CHAPMAN: Most Baptist churches have dropped that.

RILES: That's true.

CHAPMAN: When my daughter was presented as a debutante, and I don't know whether I should call this preacher's name, but he said, "I don't know what my members are going to think." See, he had to dance with his daughter. At the debutante, the father has to dance with the daughter at the debutante ball.

RILES: Right.

CHAPMAN: He said, "I don't know what my members are going to say." I said, "They're not going to say anything." And I never found out whether they complained, but the Baptists and Methodists and Catholics and Jehovah's Witness, all of them, were against dancing. Everybody was against dancing, and they believed that it was a sin. So you didn't have dances at Juneteenth celebration. You just went there, you ate, and the kids played. We played tag and what-have-you, and played a few games and then we'd go home, that was it.

RILES: Were they always peaceful?

CHAPMAN: Peaceful?

RILES: Yeah.

CHAPMAN: Oh, yeah.

RILES: I mean, you didn't have incidents or fighting or things like that.

CHAPMAN: No, it was always peaceful. We didn't have a lot of troublemakers then. I mean kids just had a good time, no gangs, we just ate. No drinking, the City wouldn't allow any drinking there. See, that's the Eleventh Commandment, Thou Shalt Not Drink. So you didn't have any drinking there.

RILES: Well, I know that, I know that like I think there was a split in the association, the Emancipation Juneteenth group because one faction wanted to celebrate where they could sing

and dance, do worldly things, quote-unquote, so there was a split between the old-timers and the young people.

CHAPMAN: That's correct. We had two associations in Austin.

RILES: What were they called?

CHAPMAN: In fact, we ended up with three or four: St. John, St. John Regulars—they were called St. John Regulars, this is the one that has the tabernacle in St. John now, those were St. John Regulars; and the other St. John were called New St. John, and then finally, my minister organized his own association, called New Hope Association, and he made himself the moderator.

RILES: And so they would celebrate Juneteenth different.

CHAPMAN: Different type, different places. Reverend Black was instrumental in keeping the St. John Regulars together. The others were more or less younger men and sort of resented Reverend Black who was a good leader.

RILES: Wasn't he the moderator of the association?

CHAPMAN: He was the moderator of the association. He was a man among a bunch of boys and he resisted the temptation to change. He was, I guess, conservative, but he resisted the temptation to change the association, so they broke off.

RILES: So what year, about, what decade was this where all this change started to happen?

CHAPMAN: In the early '20s, I guess, maybe '19 or early '20s. But I knew about it. In Austin, some of the churches stayed with the Regulars, but New Mount Olive and Olivet and First Baptist, all those churches left the association and they formed their own association.

RILES: Oh, okay. So then, today, looking at the way they celebrate Juneteenth today over at Rosewood Park, how has that changed from the time that you were a kid and you were enjoying running around, having a good time?

CHAPMAN: I haven't been to any of them at Rosewood Park. I have read something in the Nakoa(??) about what they do, but they tend to stress achievements of blacks now, what this

person did in science, and what this person did in music, and politics, and so forth. And they have a lot of speakers to go down there, and they do have dances down there at night. I think they do at Rosewood. But sometime ago, they had some problems, I don't know, they had some fights down there, so I don't know whether people go down there any more now.

RILES: What about in the '30s and '40s—I read where they used to take trains on excursions to like Dallas to celebrate Juneteenth in Dallas. Did you ever go on one of those excursions?

CHAPMAN: No. The only time I ever went, we went to San Antonio once. Had an excursion—this was in the '20s, this was—I was a little kid. I must have been eight or nine years old, but I remember they had an excursion, we went to San Antonio, and it seems as though we got off the train close enough to go to some park. I don't remember the name of the park, but we went to the park and we stayed there, and we had the same thing there that you had in Austin.

RILES: So you were celebrating Juneteenth down there?

CHAPMAN: Yes.

RILES: You were celebrating Juneteenth in San Antonio. I remember reading about San Antonio people coming to Austin to celebrate their Juneteenth here in Austin and their Queen or something spoke.

CHAPMAN: They started having Queens, too.

RILES: When was that?

CHAPMAN: This, I believe, would be in the late '30s, they started having Juneteenth Queen and Juneteenth King. I don't know whether this was a money-making event or what. I don't know how they voted. It may have been the one that raised the highest amount of money became the King and the Queen.

RILES: So you all had a King and a Queen.

CHAPMAN: Yes, they had a King and a Queen.

RILES: Well, back in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, they called her the Queen, the Goddess of Liberty.

CHAPMAN: Is that really? I didn't know that.

RILES: Then I guess as years went on, they started calling it the Juneteenth Queen. Things have changed.

CHAPMAN: Let me ask you something. Do you all have copies of the old black newspapers?

RILES: Yes, we do.

CHAPMAN: Okay.

RILES: We do.

CHAPMAN: Because there should be a lot of them. *The Informer*—

RILES: Well, we don't have national newspapers, we only have Austin—

CHAPMAN: Well, *The Informer* was—

RILES: It came locally, but it was not published—

CHAPMAN: Published in Houston, but there was a lot of local news because Mr. DeWitty was the publisher for *The Informer* that took care of the Austin area. In fact, this was even in the '50s when he ran for City Council. Admiral, not Admiral, who was his brother? I can't think of his first name, but he ran for City Council. But he was the publisher of the *Austin Informer* which was the Austin paper run by a man in Houston, I've forgotten his name.

RILES: So that was a popular paper here then?

CHAPMAN: *The Informer* was the paper for years, but before that, there was one by, Mr. Fontaine had a paper after the Emancipation, Jacob—

RILES: Jacob Fontaine and my mother and them knew him, because he started this newspaper in Wheatsville and printed it at his store. He started a newspaper there and his son just passed, his son just passed. But he had the first black newspaper in Austin.

RILES: What was it called?

CHAPMAN: I've forgotten.

RILES: *The Gold Dollar*?

CHAPMAN: I can find out because he has some great-great-granddaughters that I know. And he has a book out.

RILES: Right. We have his books.

CHAPMAN: My mother's name is in that book and my father's name.

RILES: Oh, I know, I've seen it.

CHAPMAN: Yeah? No kidding.

RILES: I have that book in my office, as a matter of fact, because I use it for reference. It was called *The Gold Dollar*. And then his father, Jacob, the one that just passed away, his father had a newspaper called *The Silver Messenger*.

*(End Side A; begin Side B)*

RILES: This is Karen Riles and I'm talking to Isaac Chapman in his home at 6707 Bryn Mawr. Mr. Chapman, when were you born?

CHAPMAN: I was born on December 15, 1921.

RILES: Where?

CHAPMAN: In Wheatsville, Texas, USA.

RILES: And where is that located?

CHAPMAN: Wheatsville is located between 24<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> Street, and between San Gabriel and Shoal Creek.

RILES: Who were your parents? What were their names?

CHAPMAN: My father was Robert Chapman and my mother was Clara Chapman. I was the only son. My mother had one son by her first marriage, Harry Gordon. My father had two boys by his first marriage and they were Robert and Will Chapman, William Chapman. They were older and they moved to California, I guess, when I was small. And it was around 1930 before I saw my brother Will Chapman. He came here from California and he took me to the movie for the first time.

RILES: What did you see?

CHAPMAN: It was a western movie, no sound. You had the writing below it, and it was a black movie, black theatre on 6<sup>th</sup> Street. I don't know the name of it. But this was long before the Ritz Theatre was on 6<sup>th</sup> Street and the Carver, but when he came from California, he took me to this movie. And of course, most of the movies there were either cowboys or love stories, and so I remember correctly, if I remember correctly, there was some writing. There was no sound at all. You could see them move their lips, but that was it. You could see them shooting the gun, but he took me to the movies for the first time. And he was older than I was and I guess he must have been twelve years older than I was. But I remember I was a little kid and I was so happy.

RILES: So what did your parents do for a living, your father?

CHAPMAN: My father worked for the Highway Department. They were building roads and road maintenance and planting trees and flowers along highway 81, which is the highway that ran from San Antonio to Dallas, and 290. There was no 71, if I remember correctly, then. But 290 was there. And my mother worked for a judge for years. His name was Judge Rogan and she was the cook and the maid and, I guess, took care of the kids and everything. After I was born, my grandfather was getting feeble and my mother stopped working for him. She wanted to take care of her father, so she started taking in washing and ironing and when I was small--this is supposed to be a true story now--I was, I guess, four or five years old, and he lived about two blocks from us. I wasn't in school, but she stopped working to come home to take care of me and her father. She wanted to be with me. And my responsibility, before I started school, was to carry his meals to him. And it was said that I said--this was cruel--"I'm glad he's dead, I don't have to carry the meals to him." That was cruel of me, but my mother often told me that's what I said, that I just hated carrying meals to him. I'd carry meals to him and bring the dirty plates back from breakfast, three meals a day I was carrying food to him, and I just disliked it.

RILES: Were you afraid of him though?

CHAPMAN: No, I wasn't afraid of him.

RILES: Just didn't like—

CHAPMAN: Just didn't like walking up there. At that time, I had a little red wagon, and I just loved to play with the wagon. I just disliked stopping what I was doing, and I would play in the yard, because we had a large lot, very large lot and my mother would be washing out there and I would be with that wagon, just playing with that little red wagon. I remember as though it was yesterday when I got it for my Christmas present, but it was quite a treat to have a little red wagon.

RILES: So what was the neighborhood like back then? Were there very many white people that lived in that community?

CHAPMAN: The white people lived on the fringes from 24<sup>th</sup> Street south was all white, and between San Gabriel and Rio Grande (*pronounced Ryo Grand*), as we called it, not Rio Grande, *Ryo Grand* Street, we had a mixture of white and Mexicans. Strange thing about it, the relationship between whites, blacks, and Mexican was excellent. I mean, there was no problem. When I even, when I got out of high school, we played together. We played football together, we played basketball, we played baseball, and when we formed a team, the team was made up of whites, blacks, and Mexicans. We would go to South Austin and play. We would go to Pflugerville and play. We would play anyone. But the relationship was good. The McCullough family, white family, owned C&S Sporting Goods and they had three boys, Hank, Bill, and Bucko. But we were in their house, just daily. We were playing out there and if we wanted to go in the house to get some water, they didn't give a darn. They didn't care. They were rich. Mr. McCullough married Mrs. Wooten. Her daughter was—she is the son to Mr. Wooten that owns that big house on the corner of Martin Luther King and Rio Grande. That large house still sits there. It was there before I was born, and it's still there, Martin Luther King and Rio Grande. Now, she was rich, her husband was a football player, had been at UT, so she married him. He owned C&S Sporting Goods, but they money. But they didn't give a darn about us going in their house, eating out of the refrigerator. We played together and then there was the Holman family—

RILES: Now, wait a minute. Let's step back a minute. Now, what year are you talking about?

CHAPMAN: I'm talking about the years of the late '30s and '40s. Now there was very little playing when we were little kids, but when we got to be of school age, there was a number of kids that attended Austin High School the same times that I attended Anderson.

RILES: Which was at that time segregated?

CHAPMAN: Yeah, uh-huh. You've heard about Francetti's(??) store. Well, Louie Francetti(??) attended Austin High School and we played together every day. And Richard Holman attended Austin High School. We played every afternoon when we got home from school. We played football. I don't know when we studied, but we played football. And Sunday we played football, football almost all day long.

RILES: So when did you start to school and where did you start at? Did you go to Wheatville?

CHAPMAN: I started school when I was six years old, evidently that was in 1927. We had a one-teacher school in Wheatsville, one teacher.

RILES: One teacher.

CHAPMAN: And her name was Laura Gordon. Laura Gordon—you've seen the picture, you have it, because Pauline, I think, gave you the picture. Laura Gordon had grades one through six. And one-two-three was in one room, four-five-six was in the other room, and she was moving from one room to the other. But the thing about it was that the older kids would come over and work with the younger kids. A sixth grader would work with a first grader. A fifth grader would work with a second grader. You didn't have but one teacher, Miss Laura Gordon.

RILES: So how many kids went to school there?

CHAPMAN: No more than thirty, thirty-five. I've got a picture somewhere. I know that Pauline has given you a picture because I got it from her. But we had about thirty, maybe thirty-five students, in this wooden, two-room building. They closed Wheatsville School when I was promoted to the fifth grade. And some students, they left Clarksville School open. Some students went to Clarksville.

RILES: Which is in what direction?

CHAPMAN: Clarksville is near MoPac, 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> Street. That's Clarksville. You know where—how can I tell you? Oh, God—

RILES: So what is Clarksville?

CHAPMAN: Clarksville was an all-black community.

RILES: Oh, like Wheatville.

CHAPMAN: Like Wheatsville. It was all—but the Clarks, there are still some Clarks live out there. But it was an all-black community, and it ran from 10<sup>th</sup> Street over to about 12<sup>th</sup> Street and from West Lynn back to O. Henry Junior High School. People scattered—it was larger than Wheatsville and there are more people lived there. They had a larger school in Clarksville. They had a two-teacher school in Clarksville.

RILES: Who were their teachers?

CHAPMAN: Miss Hamilton was one. Miss Hamilton was unique.

RILES: How so?

CHAPMAN: If you came to her left-handed and a person who was left-handed, she would hit you across the knuckles and stop you from using that left hand and make you use the right hand. So my parents would not send me to Miss Hamilton.

RILES: Are you left-handed?

CHAPMAN: No, I didn't go there. My parents sent me to Olive Street School.

RILES: Where's that?

CHAPMAN: Olive Street School is located between 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> Street on Juniper and Olive Street, corner of Juniper and Olive. It was named Olive Street, which is just south of Ebenezer Baptist Church.

RILES: Oh, okay.

CHAPMAN: That was Olive Street School. Now I went there when I was in the fifth grade and I stayed there through the sixth grade.

RILES: What did that building look like?

CHAPMAN: It was just an old wooden building, barely maintained.

RILES: Was it two-story?

CHAPMAN: Yes, two-story building. You've probably seen it.

RILES: That used to be the old high school, wasn't it?

CHAPMAN: That was the old Robertson Hill High School. How's my history going? It was named Robertson Hill High School before it became Anderson High School. So I went there and I was just amazed. We didn't have self-contained classrooms. You marched from classroom to classroom. You didn't stay with one teacher all day long. I went to one teacher for spelling, one for music, one for math, one for English, one for P.E., and the bell would sound, and you would pick up your books, go to the next class. Well, I wasn't used to that. You stayed in one room. And so I enjoyed it, it was a lot of fun, and—

RILES: How did you get to school then?

CHAPMAN: I had to ride the streetcar, and I would get on the streetcar on 24<sup>th</sup> and Rio Grande, ride to 6<sup>th</sup> and Congress, exchange, get on the streetcar, go out 6<sup>th</sup> Street to—what's the name of that street? It's not Lydia, Waller.

RILES : Waller?

CHAPMAN: Go over Waller Street and when I got to 11<sup>th</sup> and Waller, I would get off and then walk down to Olive Street School, which was only about three blocks.

RILES: Just a few blocks. So early in the morning did you get on the streetcar?

CHAPMAN: Huh?

RILES: How early in the morning did you have to get on the streetcar to make all those exchanges?

CHAPMAN: School started about 8:30. I would leave about 7:30, I would leave about 7:30 and I'd get there on time.

RILES: And what time did school start?

CHAPMAN: Eight-thirty. I would get there.

RILES: What time did it let out?

CHAPMAN: Three-thirty.

RILES: Did you all have recess?

CHAPMAN: Oh, yes. I enjoyed it. And we had our own little cafeteria there. We had one old building which was the gym; boys and girls went to gym class together, just like they do now in the elementary school. And we had a little long building was the cafeteria with one cook who was the cook and the manager, Miss Willa Thompson was the cook.

RILES: So it's Willa? How do you say her name?

CHAPMAN: Camilla Thompson, Camilla Thompson.

RILES: Camilla.

CHAPMAN: Yeah, Camilla Thompson was the cook and manager. So part of the cooking was not done by her. They would do—we had soup every day. In the '30s, you know, everybody was—they would set a big container, enough to give everybody in there a bowl of soup. That was done when the central office was downtown. See, the Administration Building for AISD was on 10<sup>th</sup> and between, 10<sup>th</sup>—what is this? Where that station is, Channel 7? Oh, God—

RILES: Fox 7?

CHAPMAN: But it was on 10<sup>th</sup> between Congress and the next street over, whatever—

RILES: Brazos, it's on Brazos.

CHAPMAN: Brazos, between 10<sup>th</sup> and, on 10<sup>th</sup> between Congress and Brazos was the AISD Central Office. That's where the Superintendent's Office was.

RILES: Oh, okay.

CHAPMAN: So they cooked the food there for the, didn't have many black schools then, but they cooked enough soup so that you'd just have soup every day. Every day—she'd cook the rest of the food by herself. If I remember, she didn't have any helpers but she cooked everything by herself. And when I became a member of Ebenezer, then we would talk about days in Olive

Street and I used to take her home from church a lot of times. But Miss Camilla worked there for years, yeah.

RILES: So then at school, around June—well, school would be out.

CHAPMAN: School would be out at that time.

RILES: Well, did you all talk, did you all have a Black History class where they talked about black history?

CHAPMAN: Unh-uh. No.

RILES: Just American History.

CHAPMAN: Just American History and most of it in the elementary schools was about Texas History.

RILES: Texas History, right.

CHAPMAN: Then when I went to junior high school, we had more about American History but you never heard anything about black leaders or blacks like Crispus Attucks, you never heard of Crispus Attucks and people like that . So, it was all about this white person, what he did, and so forth.

RILES: So if you went to Olive Street School, then you weren't too far from Samuel Huston College, were you?

CHAPMAN: That's right, that's right. You go down the hill. When you get to the bottom of the hill, Samuel Huston College was located there. When you go down the hill from Olive Street, it's right where—you know where Longhorn Barbecue is?

RILES: Yes.

CHAPMAN: That's where Sam Huston ended, at that street. That's Branch, isn't it?

RILES: Right, it's Branch Street.

CHAPMAN: Okay. Well, Sam Huston ended there. All of the classes were between 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup>, between East Avenue then, and Branch, except for a few classes that they had across the street on 11<sup>th</sup> Street.

RILES: On the 11<sup>th</sup> Street side?

CHAPMAN: On 11<sup>th</sup> Street, between—and that was long before they put IH-35 in there.

RILES: Oh, okay. I was just looking at a photograph yesterday of the Eliza Dee Home.

CHAPMAN: That's right, that's the name of it. It was a dormitory.

RILES: Yeah, but there was something we couldn't figure out in the picture, there was something that looked like a stand or something. I don't know what that was.

CHAPMAN: Oh, let me tell you about that, let me tell you about it. East Avenue was the main thoroughfare. They divided East Avenue in such a way that the cars going north would go on this side of the street, those which went south would go this way.

RILES: On the left side.

CHAPMAN: In the middle was a tall hill—

RILES: A hill?

CHAPMAN: A tall hill, right in the middle of the street between 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup>. There was like a little bandstand—I don't know whether they called it a bandstand, but it stood at the top. You could stand on this bandstand and see South Austin in the distance. You could see almost in any direction. This was a tall hill, almost as tall as Eliza Dee Dormitory.

RILES: Wow!

CHAPMAN: Now, kids would go there when school was out, just stand there. They had some little old benches around the sides of it, just go there and sit down and talk, but this was—you could see at a distance—and that stayed there until they tore it down for Interstate 35.

RILES: When did that happen? In the '60s or the '50s?

CHAPMAN: In the '60s.

RILES: Yeah, because we couldn't figure out what is this thing? For one thing, we couldn't figure out what is so high that it's on the same level as this tall building? You know, it looks like some kind of hold-down—

CHAPMAN: That's right, and cars would come up and go down, because it was so high.

RILES: So they really had to grade it a lot when they put I-35 in.

CHAPMAN: I would imagine they would have had a lot of work to do.

RILES: Oh, my goodness.

CHAPMAN: Move out all of that dirt and pavement and everything, the sidewalks and everything. That was a favorite spot for the college kids from Sam Huston. They would go and sit up there and kid around up there, but that was a favorite spot.

RILES: Now, was that the same thing as the Gazebo?

CHAPMAN: Yeah, that's the same thing, what we call a gazebo now.

RILES: Oh, okay. And then, didn't Samuel Huston College also across, have some kind of science building?

CHAPMAN: Right. The science building and the P.E. Department had a large field there, and P.E. classes were held behind the science building. They even had a softball court, diamond, there, and when I went to Tillotson, we played Sam Huston. We played Sam Huston softball on this diamond which was behind the science building. This was a red brick science building on the corner of 11<sup>th</sup> and Interstate 35, and behind it was a softball field.

RILES: Wasn't there a white school right there somewhere?

CHAPMAN: Down the street was—

RILES: Bickler?

CHAPMAN: Becker, B-e-c-k-e-r.

RILES: Oh, Becker.

CHAPMAN: And that was there until they finally made that the Administration Building. When they moved the Administration Building from downtown, that's where they put it, in the old Becker Elementary School. And it stayed there for a long time.

RILES: Is that where, is that where the—

CHAPMAN: Hotel is now.

RILES: Hotel is now.

CHAPMAN: That's where the hotel is now.

RILES: Oh, okay. The Hyatt? Is that the Hyatt?

CHAPMAN: Whatever it is. I know it's a hotel.

RILES: Eleventh and I-35.

CHAPMAN: But that Administration Building was there up until they moved it to the building out here on Guadalupe. It stayed there, in fact, when I started teaching, it was there, it was still there.

RILES: So let's talk about you teaching. So what college did you go to?

CHAPMAN: Well, I finished from Tillotson in 1946 and then I went to summer school at the University of Southern California. Then I came back to teach at Anderson.

RILES: Oh, you did?

CHAPMAN: I came back to teach at, my principal sent me a note—I was in California—he sent me a notice, wanted me to come back. And oh, I was happy to go back home. So I came back and I started in 1948, September of 1948.

RILES: That's when it was Tillotson?

CHAPMAN: It was still Tillotson, then became Huston-Tillotson in about '52, '52 or '53. Yeah, but they were still separate schools. They were beginning to have cooperation between the two. At one time, it was a cardinal sin. They didn't associate with each other.

RILES: Because it was two different churches.

CHAPMAN: One was Methodist and one was Baptist and they really didn't have—the ones that really brought them together was President Downs from Sam Huston—

RILES: Carl Downs?

CHAPMAN: Yeah, and Dean Jones, who was President of Tillotson. They came together and they started working together and then they decided to combine or merge the two schools.

RILES: Well, what did it do? The schools having financial troubles?

CHAPMAN: They were not growing. They still have grown any. Each one had about six hundred students, about six hundred, and now they still have about six hundred over here. So they really haven't grown any. But that was the reason why they merged, hoping that—see, what they did when they merged, they had buses to carry the kids from one campus to another. And so this worked out pretty well. Gradually, when they sold land down on Interstate 35, there has never been a substantial increase in the enrollment. We have about six hundred and thirty-some odd now. I think it's a little less now, the last report that I got, but it never grew up to at least twelve hundred. It should have grown to twelve hundred, two schools six hundred some odd each, but it never grew.

RILES: That's sad.

CHAPMAN: Of course, the kids started going to the University of Texas and then Texas Southern came into being.

RILES: Was it '48?

CHAPMAN: Huh?

RILES: Nineteen forty-eight when Texas Southern, when was that, when did they become--?

CHAPMAN: I don't remember, but I know it was Houston Junior College and then the State bought it and changed it into Texas Southern. Was it Texas Southern first? Or Texas State?

RILES: Texas Southern, I think it was.

CHAPMAN: Okay, okay. That's what happened.

RILES: When did you get married? What was your wife's name?

CHAPMAN: I got married the first time in September 1946.

RILES: Who did you marry?

CHAPMAN: Her name was Maggie Chapman. And then my present wife is Mabel Chapman.

We were married in 1976. We've been here since 1976 in this one house.

RILES: It's nice over here.

CHAPMAN: So this is it.

*(Interview ends.)*