

BLACK HISTORY MONTH 2016

IN LEXINGTON, VIRGINIA

A SERIES OF INTERVIEWS WITH PROMINENT MEMBERS OF THE
AFRICAN AMERICAN COMMUNITY, SPONSORED BY THE
HISTORIC LEXINGTON FOUNDATION



MARGARET SCOTT

*Conducted by Beverly Tucker, Board of Historic Lexington Foundation,
at The Mayflower, Lexington, Virginia, March 5, 2012*

BT: Margaret, I want to ask you when and where you were born.

MS: 1908

BT: So you are 104?

MS: Will be in July.

BT: Where were you born?

MS: Fairfield, Virginia.

BT: How long have you lived in Lexington?

MS: I was married when I was eighteen . . . no, no, when I was nineteen.

BT: So was that when you moved to Lexington?

MS: My husband was from Blacksburg, down south from here. I moved to Blacksburg.

BT: Let's go back to your family before you were married. Tell me about your parents. What were their names?

MS: My mother's name was Betty, B-E-T-T-Y, Have you heard of the Haliburtons? My daddy was a Haliburton. We were Haliburtons. She was a Dickson. She had nine children. She has two still living. Me and my sister.

BT: And how old is the other living child, your sister?

MS: Eighty-four. She was eighteen years younger than me and I didn't know that people could have children for eighteen years.

BT: I guess they can. So how many children besides yourself?

MS: In all, seven. I was the third up.

BT: Where did you go to school?

MS: I went to Fairfield.

BT: They have a lovely school out there now.

MS Oh, I don't mean nothing like that!

BT: Was it an all-black school?

MS: No. I had a niece, I never shall forget it, she was the first black girl child that went out the Blacksburg school. She finished. Her name was Nancy.

BT: Did you ever go to school in Lexington? Did you go to high school?

MS. I didn't go to high school.

BT: How far did you go in school?

MS: Around the seventh grade.

BT: What did you do after that?

MS: I got married. *[This must have been a point of confusion for Margaret, as she was not nineteen when she finished the seventh grade.]*

BT: How old were you then?

MS: Nineteen years old.

BT: Do you remember how your family worked? Did the children help? What did your father do?

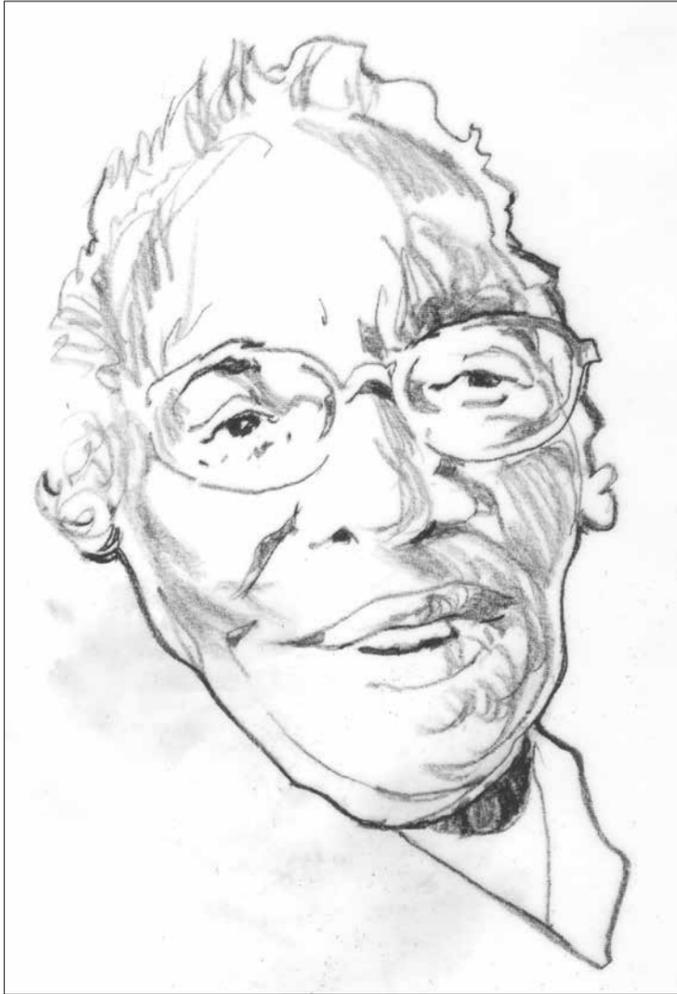
MS: Yes, we all helped, and my father was a farmer. Not much coming in. The people who owned the farm furnished a house, a cow, two hogs to kill, chickens to raise. That's how we lived.

BT: Did you have a garden?

MS: Oh Lord, yeah.

BT: How did you wash clothes?

MS: *[Margaret gestures as if scrubbing on a washboard.]*



Margaret Scott

BT: The hard way!

MS: Yeah.

BT: Many people made their own soap.

MS: We did make our own soap, but I've forgotten what it was.

BT: Did you get to take a bath very often? Did you take turns on certain days?

MS: Well, Momma would say "You look dirty, and you smell dirty. It's time for a bath." I had a good momma.

BT: Tell me about your mother.

MS: She was just a good woman.

BT: How old were you when you lost your mother?

MS: Oh, I was a full-grown woman.

BT: What was your father like?

MS: The Haliburtons, have you heard of the Haliburtons?

BT: Yes, I have.

MS He was a fine, hard-working man and he

didn't take much foolishness.

BT: That's a good thing. So how about *your* children? How many?

MS: *Didn't have a child!* I adopted two, but I don't see much of them.

BT: Where are they?

MS. I don't even know. My granddaughter is in Hawaii but I don't even know where my grandson is.

BT: Do you get to see your eighty-four-year-old sister very often?

MS: Not very often. I haven't seen her for two years.

BT: I think I remember your 100th birthday celebration.

MS: She might have come for that. I think she did.

BT I remember seeing your picture in the paper with many people around you.

MS: I think she was here.

BT: Rosa Wiggins, who suggested I come to see you, says that your mind is very sharp.

MS: It's dull enough.

[Both laugh]

MS: You know Rosa Coleman?

BT: No, I know Rosa Wiggins. Perhaps that is part of her name.

MS: Rosa is the daughter of Belle.

BT: The Rosa I am speaking of lived in New York for many years.

MS: No! That was Nancy.

BT: O.K.

MS: She's been dead for a long time.

BT: Let's go back again to the time you got married. Tell me how you lived. Where you shopped for groceries, who did your hair, what did you do for fun? Were you religious?

MS: I went to church in Fairfield. I still attend there. I went to church with my husband in Blacksburg.

BT: Did you go to church in Lexington?

MS: No, never — Fairfield! Never here.

BT: Did you know Edlow Morrison?

MS: Yes.

BT: He's ninety-four and I have also talked with him.

MS: Yes, it's been a long lonesome old drive.

BT: Did you have hobbies? For example, did you sew?

MS: *Yes!* That's what I lived for!

BT: Oh, really?

MS. Yes I went to sewing school — I sewed!

BT: Did you sew for the public?

MS: M-m-m. I sure did.

BT: You sewed at your home?

MS: Yes, because that is where I was living, being at home, so I'd sew the things up right.

BT: Did you experience prejudice and discrimination?

MS: You mean my family?

BT: Yes, what kinds of things did you experience?

MS: Well — *We were seconds! Seconds regardless of where we were or what we were doing. The people seemed to think awfully light of us and there were certain things we did not do!*

BT: Like what, Margaret?

MS: I don't know.

BT: Certain places you didn't go?

MS: Yeah, there were places I did not go. To sit down and eat with anybody could be counted against you. But most of those people — those black people — with some exceptions, were good people. The boys might get out and do something, but in general they were good.

BT: Where did you live in Lexington?

MS: Never lived in Lexington!

BT: Oh you haven't? You always lived in Fairfield ?

MS: Nope. I lived in Washington, I lived in Baltimore, I was sewing, you see.

BT: You sewed then?

MS: Yes.

BT: Did you actually make Baltimore your home?

MS: Well, at that time I wasn't married.

BT: Oh, so those were your young adventuresome years.

MS: You see, I didn't have any children. But I have grandchildren.

BT: Do your grandchildren come to see you?

MS: I own my home. Other people live in it. But it didn't pay much because they broke up as much as they paid.

BT: What did your husband do?

MS: He worked at VMI.

BT: What did he do there?

MS: I forgot.

BT: Did he work there a long time?

MS: He was a hard worker.

BT: Margaret do you remember Main Street when there were many businesses that were owned by black people?

MS: There was a barber shop, a butcher shop, Then there was a pool hall. Oh yes McCoy, M.S. McCoy — he also ran a store, a grocery store.

BT: Did you buy groceries there?

MS: Yes, but not often, because he was supposed to have the very best meat — and he charged for it.

BT: Do you remember any family traditions? For example, how did you all celebrate Thanksgiving and Christmas? The holidays?

MS: Usually workin'. There were several good jobs at Christmas so my daddy would end up workin'.

BT: And your mother?

MS: You know what she did with nine children.

BT: Who are these people in the pictures on the wall? Tell me a little about each one.

MS: That first one is my oldest brother.

BT: He is quite handsome.

MS: Godfrey — my second man, I've got to think. I can't see it from here.

BT: Well, he is handsome too and he has a tiny little mustache

MS: Oh that's my *first* husband.

BT: Oh, O.K.

MS: Don Crumble, the one from Blacksburg

BT: What did he do for a living?

MS: He worked at the lumber mill.

BT: Do you mind if I ask what happened to him?

MS: He died — early.

BT: What happened?

MS: I knew then but I don't know now. Don't remember. Not sick for long. Then, after that, I didn't have a fella. He was a good man.

BT: So then you met your second husband and remarried?

MS: No, the was my first husband. Don worked for some people named Gilliam, very rich people. So we bought lumber for this house we were going to build. And we built it. We lived there a long time — no, not long.

BT: Who did you marry after Mr. Crumble?

MS: I'm trying to think. *[Laughter from both]*

BT: Was it Mr. Scott?

MS: Yes

BT: Well, tell me about Mr. Scott.

MS: He was from Blacksburg.

BT: And what did he do?

MS: I've forgotten but it was a good job. He was a good man also.

BT: You were lucky to have two good men in your life weren't you?

MS: No.

BT: No? You weren't lucky? You just deserved it?

MS: Yeah.

BT: It wasn't luck then.

MS: I didn't have any children by either one of them.

BT: Speaking of children and going back to your own childhood, did you play games?

MS: We would play with anybody that would play — black, white, anybody. Any child that came along. We played hide and go seek, we had board games. We had a good time.

BT: Margaret, what are the major changes you have seen in your lifetime? For example, television. Do you watch television?

MS: Yes.

BT: Do you leave this room and go downstairs?

MS: Yes.

BT: Tell me about this newspaper article on the wall. That's you. It says that you are a wonderful cook.

MS: Oh, my Lord! I used to sell bread for the town. Did you ever know anything about salt risin' bread? You can't get it anymore. I have tried to find it. I don't understand why we can't get it.

BT: Maybe it is because you are not making it anymore. Maybe it is a lost art.

MS: Salt risin' bread was the best thing I ever ate, and I sold so much of it.

BT: When did you cook and when did you sew? Did you do both at the same time?

MS: At times, uh-huh.

BT: Well this is you *[picture on the wall]*. Who is the soldier?

MS: Oh, he's my grandson, I don't know where he is.

BT: Do you remember your father talking to you about religion?

MS: Yes.

BT: What did he say?

MS He said that we made our own religion. Once his daughter said she wasn't going to church. We went to Sunday school and church in Fairfield. She said she wasn't going 'cause her dress was dirty and her shoes no good. Daddy said, "Well, its early Saturday, and you can wash your dress and I'll patch your shoes." She said she still wasn't going and he said, "When you find yourself, you're going to be there." He was real strict. He loved everyone of his children, but I'll tell you, It was a rough life.

BT: Tell me about that. What made it so rough?

MS: He said, "You can wash your dress and as far as your shoes are concerned, you can go barefooted." She done it.

BT: What did you have to eat for your Sunday dinner?

MS: Chicken.

BT: Fried?

MS: Some way. I don't know.

BT: Did you learn to make salt rising bread from your mother?

MS: My grandmother. I don't understand why we can't get it anymore.

BT: Surely there is somebody that makes it.

MS: No there isn't! Back then, so many white people made it.

BT: Do you remember any of the special things your mother told you?

MS: Always, always treat people right, regardless of how they treat you. God will take care of you. We had a good life. We knew what we were supposed to do and we done it. If a person was white, you didn't bother white people.

BT: Did that make you feel resentful? Did you resent that?

MS: You know, I didn't do so much, but as I grew up I knew it was smart to keep my mouth shut. Because God would take care of it in due time. God done that. We didn't do that. And Mama didn't allow any one of her children to talk back to white people.

BT: Well what would *you* say if someone was going to read what you believe? What words of wisdom would you share?

MS: Treat your neighbor right! It's not what your neighbor does, it's what you do. Do your best for whatever job you are on.

BT: Well, Margaret, I don't want to tire you out. You really did so well and I so enjoyed being with you. Just sit back and relax the rest of the day.

MS: Well, I enjoyed it very much.

BT: Thank you.

MS: Now who are you? ■

Illustration

Portrait of Margaret Scott: Bruce Macdonald

About this series

Quietly nestled in the heart of the Shenandoah Valley in the Blue Ridge Mountains is a small town called Lexington, Virginia. It is a relatively quiet place, a village in its nature, a college town that attracts a wide range of interesting people. History is the culture of Lexington; two of its well-known sons are Robert E. Lee and Stonewall Jackson. There are others: its sons and daughters, artists, musicians, professors, coeds, cadets, many such as George C. Marshall, who have gone to take their place as citizens of the larger world. Equal parts of pride are recognized in its heroes and those who are not so well known, Many of those deserve our recognition and admiration, for they guide us with their stories from the past. They are our caretakers of memories that reveal what many of us never knew, yet too valuable to remain unrecorded. The Historic Lexington Foundation, under the guidance of its Executive Director, Don Hasfurthur, with this project makes some of those memories available.

These oral histories comprise the substance of the book *The House on Fuller Street* by Beverly Tucker with illustrations by Bruce Macdonald (Mariner Press, 2013; available on Amazon.com)

