

EARLY BLACKS IN McDADE

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My name is Jewell Hudler. I was born here, went to school here, grew up here and finished high school, then went to the University of Texas. I majored in history and government. When I first went, I thought I was more interested in history, so I got into the field of history and that was my major for my bachelor's degree. When I started to work on a masters, I decided that I was going to make political science my major so I majored in political science or government, then I also had a minor in history and economics too. I got my Master's Degree with a major in government and minor in history and economics. Then I started out to work for a Doctoral Degree, a Ph.D in government, I never did finish that, but I did over a year's work toward it. I was teaching school in the meantime and I thought it wasn't advisable to give up a job in those days, if you had a good job you better keep it. So, I never did go back and get my Doctoral Degree.

I have always been interested in history and in government and today I still read the paper to see what happens. The first thing I usually read in the paper in the morning is to turn back and look at the editorial page to see what the editors are writing about. I got that habit from my father. He always read the editorial page. The editorial page is where you get the drift of what is happening at a particular time. I've always been interested in local history. As a youngster, I always listened to what everybody had to say about the past. I always like to hear them tell about who lived here and what they did and about the colored community that was in McDade.

As a child there were a number of colored families here and they were of a high class group from the past. Most of them took their names from their former masters. They were very industrious. They had been brought up and taught to work and they did. The men in the community usually farmed or in the days when they had the pottery shop, or as people often call it, the "Jug Shop", some of them worked there. The wives of the colored people helped in the homes of the townspeople, if they hired extra help, and the older colored wives were called by the children "Aunts" and the men "Uncles."

This story is of my own family. Steve Price was a good cabinet maker, he did all kinds of work, and my mother wanted some chicken coops made. That was in the days when everybody had chickens and you had coops for the chickens. So, she asked my father to take her down to see Steve so she could see him about making some chicken coops. My sister, Dempes, who is now Mrs. Paine Williams, was a youngster and she went with them down there and Mama talked to Uncle Steve about making some chicken coops. When they came home she said to my mother, Mama, is he really our Uncle?" So, the colored families in those days were really usually well known and well liked. There wasn't problems that we face today with the various and sundry people in our community. They represented a staid conservative, industrious group. I can remember Steve Price was a fiddler as well as a carpenter and he played at the dance down at Blue Branch, when they came in and took some dancers from the floor and took them out and hanged them. Steve's daughter was George Ann, his son-in-law was Cisco Bishop, and this was some time after Steve died and I ask Cisco, I had grown up and was trying to find out some history about McDade and was writing a paper for the Historical Society in Bastrop. I ask Cisco if Steve ever talked about the dance. He said "Oh, I've heard it a thousand times. He was scared to death. They played and played. They learned that they had come in and ask men to go on the outside and they knew trouble was brewing and that was at the Airhart Place.

The ones I remember were Steve and Laura, his wife. Laura's husband was Isom and they are buried out in the Oak Hill Cemetery. George Ann was their daughter and she married Cisco Bishop. Both Cisco and George Ann had worked for our family. Cisco worked for the brickyard for many years, I think he probably worked for the "Pottery Shop" too before then, but Cisco retired from the brickyard and he worked in yards and helped families who needed it and George Ann had worked for my sister and her husband, Mr. and Mrs. Paine Williams. She was a nurse. She worked for us too, especially when my father got sick for the last time. She was a very capable person. In that time when the colored people got sick they couldn't just walk in. There was not a place where they could walk into a hospital like today. In Elgin, they had a hospital and they finally built a little separate building from the main hospital and there the colored patients were put in that hospital and that's the way it was in those days, but that has all long since changed. In her last illness, George Ann was in that hospital in Elgin.

George Ann and Cisco's children went to California to live and to work. They would come back to visit. I recall there was a little script in the Elgin Courier by George Ann's daughter when she passed away, the daughter wrote to the Elgin Courier to say how well she was treated. She said "My Mother was treated just like a Queen" Dr. Morris was the Doctor and I am sorry I don't have that clipping, but she would praise the attention that her mother received.

Things have changed now, colored people are accepted in all hospitals if they have the money, as everybody else is required to have. Times have changed, in those days in the street cars in Austin and cities in the south, colored people sat in the back of the streetcar. They just didn't sit any place in the car. There was a designated place and there was a place in the train for them also. They sat in a separate part of the car from the whites, so those were things that were accepted for a long time, but we have seen with the changes in the attitudes and people rights that has all passed behind us. They have the same rights as others in hospitals and in public places, also this business of colored restaurants, now I think there is still a selectivity in that probably partly brought about by custom and by changes that were made, but we can go into a cafeteria and we see colored people there as well as white, there is no difference, but that's one of the changes that came about.

There were a number of colored families in this area. Some lived in town some worked for families on the farms or they rented property and farmed individually for themselves. The Reese Family was one of them that lived here. Then there was Cisco Bishop's family. I don't know what his father's name was, but there was a large number of the Bishops. I think one of them worked as a porter on the Pullman car on the railroad. I know there were several of them who worked on the Pullman cars and they would come to McDade to visit and see their families and the white folks that they knew as youngsters.

The colored people had a church in McDade. I don't know when it was established, but it is still at the same place that it was and on the same land as the early church. The early church served as a church and schoolhouse.

The children had separate schools and they went there. When the supreme Court came with its decision that there would no longer be a separation of children in the schools, well then provisions were made for the children to go to the white schools, but that was a slow go after the Supreme Court decision, but eventually that came about and the colored school was closed. One of the things that happened with the population, and there were once a sizable population of colored people in McDade, but finally the colored population virtually almost disappeared so we have a few, just a couple of families now left, but one of the things that brought that about was World War I, followed by World War II. The colored went into the military service, others left McDade and went where there were jobs, where the industrial plants, made munitions and where they made automobile equipment for the war. Then the colored people left. That was responsible for the growth of the large colored areas in cities in

the Eastern, Western and Central parts where there were centers of colored population that grew up as the result of people seeking jobs elsewhere during the wars.

When the school issue came up, the end of segregation, it soon came about as a result, but before the law was enforced some colored children in this area couldn't go to high school because the colored school didn't have high school classes, and to graduate from a good high school you had to leave McDade because McDade just had 10 grades. Then a child had to go out of town to go to school. They didn't have money for transportation and the same thing for a time was true for white children. They didn't have transportation, now children finish up grades here and we no longer have 10 grades. Transportation is provided for them but it wasn't for the colored people. I remember very well asking in Bastrop, about provisions for a certain colored girl who had finished school here about her going to school elsewhere. He very curtly said to me "Well, she can go, all she has to do is come up here." But then she can have means for transportation and none was provided.

About colored people voting in McDade—they were allowed to vote—now, there was a time when we had a poll tax and you had to pay your poll tax to vote. I think it was \$1.75. It was said the poll tax was put in to bar the Negro from voting and the poor white too. As long as the poll tax was a qualification for voting, the Negro couldn't vote unless he paid his poll tax, and that was sufficient to disqualify them, but when laws were passed outlawing the poll tax as a qualification there was voting in Texas. As I can remember then there was no effort made to keep the Negro from voting, but most of them didn't vote. I know only in the last few years are they voting. In McDade my brother, who was election officer for many years, would urge the Black qualified people to come and vote, but most of them didn't—that was an issue throughout the South on voting. In many states it was impossible for them to vote. It was not until the Civil Rights Bills were passed and in lot of controversy in various southern states was the Negro free to vote and of course some people say they are not free now, but I think that any of them that wants to vote can vote now. In a lot of places they are glad to have them because issues in question at the time of election people want their votes, but Negroes I think today certainly in this state can vote if they want to.

The colored traveled in wagons and they could ride the train and the bus, but they sat in the back of the bus and in the back of the train. I can recall going to Houston on the Houston Texas Central Railroad, which came to be owned by Southern Pacific, and many times I went to Houston on the train to Victoria where I taught school, that was the best way to go and on Sunday afternoons when you got to Hempstead, that was an area where they have a lot of colored people and right out of Hempstead there is the Negro College, State College, Prairie View, young Negroes would get on the train at one of the stations there and then just walk back and forth back and forth, through the trains. They did that in the beginning of their, you might say, protest or showing that they had the right to do that if they wanted too. Conductors on trains would be very antagonized with them. Maybe they would ride ten miles or so down the road to the next station. They would be all dressed up going back and forth, back and forth, showing that they didn't have to sit in a certain place. That was the beginning of the resentment of the protests against the transportation problems.

The Negro workers went into industry and learned a lot and became a very qualified worker in the southern industry and the local industry also they learned skills and began raising their standards of living many colored people worked in the factories making automobiles in the beginning of the auto industry. Slavery ended in 1865 before there was a McDade, Texas.