

MEMORIES OF NEW BERN

THERESA HOWARD

INTERVIEW 202

This is Dorothy W. Bryant representing the Memories of New Bern Committee. My number is 200. I am interviewing Theresa Howard, number 202 on April 29, 1992, 725 Bern Street New Bern.

Dorothy Bryant: Mrs. Howard would you like to tell something about your early life; such as your birth date, your full name, your birth place and that type of information?

Mrs. Howard: I was born in New Bern February 3, 1901. I lived in New Bern all my life. I was married to Anderson Guy Howard May 6, 1920. I am the mother of four daughters, one passed away three years ago, Gwendolyn. My daughters are Melba Howard Skinner, she is my oldest, Gwendolyn Howard Nellons, who has passed away two years ago, Bobbye Howard Butts and Lois Howard Robinson who are still living.

DB: Could you tell us something about your childhood memories, such as the street you lived on, your playmates, games you played, your classmates?

Mrs. Howard: I'm very sorry to have to say all of the people I played with as a child have passed away and gone. I was born on Cedar Street in New Bern. I played with just kids in the neighborhood who have all passed away.

DB: Do you remember any special childhood illnesses, events that are memorable?

Mrs. Howard: I can't remember anything that I had when I was a child. I do remember having the measles, but that is the only illness that I can really remember that I had. I seemed to be very healthy!

DB: What did your street look like, was it paved?

Mrs. Howard: The street was not paved. I can remember the number of the house I was born in, it was 38 Cedar Street. That was way back in 1901. That house was burned in the New Bern fire. I was practically raised by my grandmother, my mother's mother, in later years a relative moved to New Bern, my father's relative. I did not know my father, but my father's relative moved to New Bern from Boston, Massachusetts and she took me over. She built a home then right next to my mother's home and I was practically raised between the two houses; my grandmother's home and my relatives home from Boston, her name was Mrs. Matilda Sparrow. My grandmother's name was Anna Bryan.

DB: Were there others in the home with you aside from the ones that you mentioned?

Mrs. Howard: I had two first cousins; one was name Sarah Bryan, and the other was named Jonell, we called here Jonell, but her name was Ella Bryan. We were raised together, three grandchildren of Anna Bryan.

DB: What do you remember about the street cars of New Bern?

Mrs. Howard: I remember the street cars of New Bern. They would come from downtown, we call it downtown, to Bern Street. The street car track was on Bern Street and it ran all the way down to what we used to call the Acadamide Road, but it is now known as George Street.

DB: I think I've heard someone say that Acadamide Road was called that cause it was some type of hard surface. Do you remember anything as far as the fare was concerned, about how much did it cost to ride the trolley?

Mrs. Howard: I think it was ten cents; you could go downtown for ten cents. At that time we also had what they called transfers. They were like a carriage driven by a horse. You'd take two steps up, one person could sit next to the driver and two people could sit in the back. There were no cars at that time that I knew about. People had cars, but I didn't know about it.

DB: Were there any other types of transportation that you remember?

Mrs. Howard: Well, at that time you had to ride the train to go any place, no buses or things like that, even if it was just over to "Little" Washington or any of those little short distances.

DB: Do you remember the days of the ice-boxes?

Mrs. Howard: I do remember the ice-boxes! That's all I had until the later years. I remember ice-boxes. You had to have a man to come by maybe every other day and put a piece of ice in the boxes and at that time you had to drill a little hole in the house so that the water could drip down under the house.

DB: Do you remember any buildings and houses that are no longer here?

Mrs. Howard: There are no buildings and houses here now that were here when I was a child or when I was growing up. The neighborhood and all around where I was brought up was burned in the New Bern fire, even the church I attended was burned down. That was St. Peter's AME Zion church.

DB: Who are some of the people that you remember?

Mrs. Howard: I can tell you my doctor, Dr. Mann. I knew his wife very, very well. We were very good friends. I remember Miss Charlotte Rhone who was head of the "Climbers Club" when I joined, and Mrs. Esther Powell who was organist with the Episcopal church and just oodles of other people. I knew almost everybody at that day and time.

DB: You knew a Dr. Kennedy?

Mrs. Howard: A Dr. Kennedy who had a drug store in what was called as a "Frog Pond." I worked in Dr. Kennedy's drug store as a child. I also worked for Dr. H. S> Moore, who as a doctor. I worked in his office just to take his telephone calls. I was just about fourteen or fifteen years old when I was working there. Dr. Burden was the dentist. She was the only dentist that we had then. Since then, we've have several other dentist. A Dr. Daves came later, but Dr. Burden was one of the oldest dentist we had in New Bern.

DB: Do you remember if there were any characters when you were a child or as an adult? By characters, I'm thinking about people that sometimes did what we refer to as outlandish things and were usually known all over the neighborhood.

Mrs. Howard: I don't think I remember anybody that was considered as an outlandish character.

DB: Could you tell us more about the Climbers Club?

Mrs. Howard: Our motto is "Lifting as We Climb", and that was in 1926. I remember distinctly when that was organized, because I was confined with one of my daughters. I lived on Johnson Street and

that was organized at Miss Carrie Smith's house. One Sunday somebody came here from away, I can't remember who that was, and organized the Climber's Club. I can name a lot of people who were Charter members; Mrs. Annie Day Smith who was Ike Smith's wife, and Miss Charlotte Rhone, Miss Carrie Smith, Mrs. Esther Powell. It was just a bunch of teachers and doctors like Mrs. Mann. The reason I remember so well it was organized in 1926 was I had just had a baby.

DB: What were some of the activities of the Climbers Club?

Mrs. Howard: The most activities we had were meeting and trying to get it started in the very beginning, because we were interested in girls who were kind of wayward. That's where we got the name of what we were trying to do - "Lifting as We Climb." Maybe girls who had babies and were not married and girls who were out in the street, we were trying to get those girls into something that they would be interested in, and this is how it all started. That was the main reason for the Climbers Club and from that day until now it is still in full bloom. We are still having meetings, we still are doing what we can for girls and for anybody that needs help, we are suppose to do what we can for them.

DB: Were there any other activities that you engaged in for recreation?

Mrs. Howard: I don't remember anything that we had except just a little ordinary things that people would have. Maybe little plays or something through West Street School. Other than that, I don't know about any big recreation. We didn't have a place then for people

to go. Way back then you just had "home affairs." Even your little parties would be just in a home. We didn't have a hall or someplace you would go, and no night clubs, nothing like that at that time! If they did, I didn't know about them, I never frequented them!

DB: Did you have any hobby of any kind>

Mrs. Hoard: The biggest hobby I had, I married when I was very, very young which meant I start right out having children. The most thing I ever did was I did a lot of crocheting. I loved to crochet and things like that. It wasn't really a hobby, my hobby was raising those kids! (Laughter) I was seventeen years old when I got married and at eighteen I had a baby, and at nineteen and twenty I had a baby.

So, that was really the biggest thing in my life was getting married young and having children! Thank God, I got the chance to get all my children educated which was a struggle. It was a pleasure for me because they were kids who wanted to go to school. My husband had the stroke in December and that September coming was my oldest daughter's first year going to high school, which means all through high school I had to struggle to get her through. Then, they started graduating from high school one right after the other. At one time I had three kids away in college because they graduated one right after the other. It was kind of hard on me because my husband wasn't really able to help. During that time is why I had to go away to work, to help to get my children educated. I was lucky enough to get them all through college and they are all now still working except the one who passed away. She was in Dot's class.

DB: Tell me something about holidays? I understand that Memorial Day used to be a big thing.

Mrs. Howard: On the 30th of May, we had a lady named Mrs. Staten who would get a bunch of children together and we would meet and march down what was then Acadamide Road to the Soldier's Cemetery, every 30th of May. The kids would carry a little flag. During that time there would be different people along the way selling lemonade. You could go by and buy a little cup of lemonade for maybe for a nickel. the kids just looked forward to that day, it was a big day! It's not like it is now, because it is just another day, but then, it was considered a BIG day- the 30th of May! They didn't do much bothering for the Fourth of July, it was just the 30th of May with us that was a big day.

DB: What about the religious holidays?

Mrs. Howard: On Christmas and Easter, now those were two big days with everybody. You had to have new dresses for children for Easter, and you had to have your doll babies and your carriages and your toys for Christmas. Everybody, I don't care how poor you were, your children had dresses for Easter, something new, and at Christmas they had toys like other people. I don't care how poor, they got them for those children at that particular time. So, it's always been Christmas and Easter were big holidays for us. I remember one time my husband took out a Christmas savings just so the children would have what they wanted for Christmas. There used to be a bank right next to the bakery (Kafer's) not when it was on Broad Street but when



it was on Middle Street. One Christmas, when he got his Christmas savings, he said, "Now here is the money for the children's Christmas," and I ordered from Spiegel. That was quite an event! Bib little carriages, and colored doll babies is what they had that Christmas.

Every kid in the neighborhood was rolling their babies out, but they were pretty colored dolls. I remember I ordered from Spiegel and Spiegel is still going because my daughter still orders from Spiegel.

Did you remember Ambrose Hargett? He was one of the ones that worked at the bakery a long time. He was one of those old ones; Ambrose Hargett, Ed Brown, Guy Howard, Johnny Hughes and some more that I didn't know as well. There were some more younger people than these men, these were older ones.

Marea Foster: They're the ones Daddy relied on. They knew the recipes by heart.

Mrs. Howard: Right! Let me tell you one thing. There really wasn't anybody who had as good a bread as Kafer's Bakery - anywhere!

I'm telling you, they had what they called a "jelly doughnut"! they had another roll when I was a child in school, it was candy but it was in little pieces and they called them "sugar top buns", and they would bring them out here to West Street and the kids would buy them.

I think they cost three cents! Everybody waited to get a bun. Kafer's Bakery, the bread was so good! He had something else called the "little butter biscuits". they would melt in your mouth! When I was having one of my children, my Aunt was staying with me. I was having Lois, my younger child, and she would go and get us some bread and they'd

said, "I'm sorry but we want a butter biscuits" because Guy would bring us those butter biscuits. Ed Brown was the head baker. Blanche Rivers' uncle, Miss Hettie Sparrow's brother.

DB: In you interview of the fire of 1922 I remember you said you had cried all day because you could not find your parents. Then, when you learned about the burning of St. Peter's, you said that you really did cry. How long have you been a member of St. Peter's church?

Mrs. Howard: I was brought up in St. Peter's church as a little girl. As I told you, my grandmother and all of my people were members of St. Peter's church and i started there as a very young child going to Sunday School. I am 91 years old now and I can truthfully say I've been there for 89 years!

DB: What was church life like when you came along?

Mrs. Howard: You really wanted to go to church. I remember as a young, young person, I don't even know why, but the people in my church at that time were older people and they would get up and they would shout. One lady I remember, her name was Miss Lizzie Edwards, she would shout across the front of the church, and I would sit there, and I don't know why I cried, but I would cry. it did something to me as a child. People would call it now "you feel the Spirit", but I don't know what they'd call it then, but I'd sit up there and see those old people and it would make me feel so god until I would cry, and i was nothing but a child. Right now, believe it or not, when I go to a church and people are clapping, it makes me feel good! I really do! I grew up with that feeling. Right now, we have in my

church, I guess about four years now, what they call a Gospel choir, and when they come down the aisle they are clapping, and when I know anything I am up clapping and I'm the only one in the congregation that's joining in! So, this is the way I grew up in a church. We shouted and everybody would pray and the choir would sing. Sometime the choir would get so happy they would throw the hymnals all over.

This is what I grew up with as a child. Now, it is more dignified, nobody is throwing no books around, nobody been up there crying, but I cry just the same. I enjoyed it! I am as Methodist!

DB: How much was the church involved in the social like of the parishioners and community life?

Mrs. Howard: The churches way back then would have a little "social" maybe to raise money. Someone in the church would have a little social in their yard and make home-made ice-cream and they would sell you a little dish of ice-cream for a nickel. This was the way that they raised their money. We had what we called the Usher Board that would be men. They would have Usherette Board for women. People who could take up the collection during the service. We had a Stewardess Board. That was suppose to help to take care of the Pastor and his family, they were women. Then we had the Steward Board which helped to run the church, and we had what we called Trustees which is really head of the Stewards, but they worked together in working for the church. We still have that, that still came from way down, that still goes on in the Methodist. Easter Sunday would be a big day in the Methodist church because we would have special Easter offerings and

give the children little boxes, they called them "little galenas" to put their special Easter offering in. In Sunday School you reported how much money you had taken, it would be nickels and dimes. They still have that in St. Peter's.

DB: Have you seen any change in church during your life time aside from what you have just mentioned?

Mrs. Howard: Not really. The only thing I notice is people are not as emotional as they used to be. I tell them all that "this church is dead", because even I, as a child, would feel, I guess I would feel the Spirit or something because I would cry. It was the feeling that I had that would make the tears come, but I don't know what they'd call it back then. The churches now, to me, are dead, even the one I go to. Every time on a fourth Sunday then they had the Gospel choir down there, I hate to miss that, because there is something for me.

Everybody in church knew it and they would say, "Mrs. Howard, I know you are glad to be here today," and I would say, "I certainly am!"

I'd admit it! Those kids would come in like this (clapping) you know, and this is just me though. They had another little ensemble that sang at something that we had and Mrs. Smith said, "Mrs. Howard, how did you like it?", and I said, "It was alright." She said, "But it wasn't the Gospel choir?", and I said, "No, it wasn't the Gospel choir!"

So it's just one of these things that changes with the times, it's a different day, just a different day...

DB: Is there anything about the town life of New Bern that you could think of that we haven't covered?

Mrs. Howard: As I can remember, we have new people, new generation, and each generation as the Bible says is "weaker and wiser." So anyway, the new generation is nothing like when I came up. So, I can see a difference, like even the kids of today are so different even from when I brought my children up. My grandchildren are not like their parents. Melba said to me one day, "Mother, my children are not like that," and I said, "No, they are not." If you told your child, on my day, to be back home at a certain time, that child would be back home! What time is it?! Mother said be home!! Now they stay out as long as they want and nobody cares to ask. If you do ask them they tell you, "I'm eighteen or I'm sixteen," but children didn't tell the parents that back then cause you know how old they are! I used to tell my children to be home at a certain time and if they weren't there at a certain time, I said, "Bring that switch right along with you cause you know you're late!" I would feel so sorry for them trying to reach up and get the smallest switch they could get. Sometimes I wouldn't whip them when they'd come in because I knew it wasn't that late because they hadn't been anywhere but up to Aunt Sudie's. That's the only place they had to go. So, it's a different day and a different time. We expect the children to be different because we are living in a different day.

Marea Foster: I would greatly appreciate you telling everything you know about the Bakery, because you know the history of it and I don't. I never wrote it down when daddy told me.

Mrs. Howard: The only thing that I know really is my husband

started there as a bicycle boy taking orders. Later, the bakery bread truck; it wasn't called a truck, it was that thing that people would take the bread in, it would come around and deliver the bread that my husband had taken orders for that day. Everyday this was done.

Later years after the Wonder bread came in and Merita bread, then that's when he put a truck in the country. My husband would go to work at five o'clock in order to get ahead of those other trucks, which means he sold more bread than they did because he was ahead of them.

When I married him he was still working in the bakery; so, all I know is that he worked there as long as he lived. These three men that you named; Ed Brown was the head baker Johnny Hughes, Ambrose Hargett, and Guy Howard, those were the three men in that Bakery. I used to go there and Mrs. Sadie Kafer would be in the front. One day Gwendolyn, my daughter, was going back to school and I didn't have her tuition and I went down early that morning to see if Shorty (A.A. Kafer, Jr.) would go on note and borrow some money for me because it was time for her to go back to school. When I went in this child was in the front, Mrs. Sadie wasn't there, it was early in the morning, and Shorty was back there in his office. I asked her where is Mr. Kafer, and she said he is in the back, Theresa. I said "ask him can I come back there" and he said, "yeah." When I went back there I said, "Shorty, I've been after Guy to ask you to go on a note for him which you could take out of his salary every week because my daughter is getting ready to go back to school and I don't have her tuition." Everyday when Guy would come home, he hated to ask Shorty for anything, I said, "Did

you ask Shorty?", and he'd say, "No." I said, "She's gotta go to school and I don't have her money!" He said, "I'll get t it." So, that morning it was near about time for her to go to school, and I didn't have that money, and I got up and I went down to that bakery. Anyway, Shorty said, "Theresa, I haven't got to do that Guy has got some money coming to him from an insurance. I just haven't been to the office to get the check." When he (Guy) caught his hand in that machine, they had paid all his men insurance and the insurance had come and Shorty just hadn't been to get it. I was so worried that he said he would get that money for me today. I said, "Okay, I can depend on that?", and he said, "Yeah." Do you know what? I got out of that bakery, so glad, and I was leaving home and that child was standing on the porch and she said, "Good luck, mother." I said, "Okay, Gwen", and then I got out of the bakery and do you know what I did? I was so persevering I turned around, went back and said, "Now listen Shorty, if he don't get that money, will you go on a note?" I was going to be sure! (Laughter) I've always been like that. Shorty said, "Yeah, he's got the money, I know he's got it!" So, he went and got the money for me, and of course she went on to school. I just think about so many things that happened during that time. I went in there one time and Mrs. Sadie Kafer made me mad. I'm quick to get mad. I went in there and she said, "I heard that you got a daughter in college." I got scared that she was going to say, well Guy couldn't work for me. People used to tell you that if you got a child in school, "you can't work for me." You weren't getting anything but that little bit they were

paying you which was not much. I said, "Yeah," and she said "I have a child in college," and she didn't say no more. After Cherry Point opened up I came back to New Bern to try and get work so I could be here with my children. I couldn't get any work to do so I went down to the employment office. It was down on Pollock Street. I went in there that day and I had been working in New York and of course I looked nice and neat. I told the lady what I wanted and she said, "Mrs. Howard, what kind of work do you do?" and I said, "I'll do any kind of work that I can." She said, "Wait a minute, I have something I believe that you would like to do." There was a Clark's Drug Store there when I came back home to work and so she said "Clark's Drug Store wants someone to work at his counter where you come get sandwiches," This was during the war. Cherry Point had just opened up. Any way she called and told Mr. Clark that she had a lady in here who looks very intelligent and she's just been in the North working and she is back home and I knew you needed somebody. He said, "tell here to come down here." I went down there and I got that job. I got the job supposedly to wash dishes out in the front. He had a white girl who made the things for his sandwiches. We made pimento cheese sandwiches, bacon, lettuce, tomato sandwiches, and chicken salad sandwiches. Every time Mr. Clark would come back there in the kitchen, instead of that white girl being back there doing this stuff, I'd be. He gave me the job!

He said, "Theresa, I'm going to give you this job, that white young woman ain't doing nothing but sitting out there with Marines." I said, "No, Mr. Clark." He said, "Yep, I'm going in there right now and turn



here off, she's out there and you're in here working." So, I got that job and I'm going to tell you the truth, he started me off with twenty dollars a week, which was BIG money at that time. I got twenty dollars that one week, after that he kept raising me every week. He said, "When I notice a person's work, I don't ask them, I raise according to their work." I ended up getting something like forty-five dollars a week at Clark's Drug Store! That is just how I got by with my children.

END OF INTERVIEW