



THE RUTH ANN OVERBECK
CAPITOL HILL HISTORY PROJECT

Interview with Esther Woodfolk

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TAPE 1/SIDE 1

HOUSE: We're here today as part of the Ruth Ann Overbeck Capitol Hill History Project and we're interviewing Esther Woodfolk. Today's date is Monday August 22, 2005. My name is Sharon House; I'm the interviewer and we're doing the interview at my home at 536 Sixth Street SE in DC. Mrs. Woodfolk, tell me your maiden name.

WOODFOLK: Manning [Spells it out]

HOUSE: So tell us when and where you were born.

WOODFOLK: I was born in Washington, DC at the old Garfield Hospital, 11th and Florida Avenue NW.

HOUSE: Where did you live then?

WOODFOLK: I can't tell you where I lived when I was born. [Laughs] But, we lived in the Northwest section usually the Foggy Bottom they usually called it then, the old Georgetown area. And I have a twin sister, her name is Ethel and I'm Esther and we were born to Alexander and Bessie Manning in 1925 August the 2nd.

HOUSE: Then you lived in Northwest; and do you know why your parents came to DC or were they also born in DC?

WOODFOLK: No, my mom was born in New York where she was raised in Berryville, Virginia, and my dad was born in Virginia, near the North Carolina border. And they came to Washington when they were very young and my dad used to tickle [meaning laugh]; he said he was walking through Logan Circle looking for a pearl and he found a ruby—that was my mom.

BOTH: [Laugh]

WOODFOLK: And they lived together till they died, passed away. And they had, there was 13 children in our family. My mom had three sets of twins, but two of them died at birth, so she raised nine and there are still six of us living. My oldest sister is 88 in November, my brother is 85, and Ethel and I just turned 80 the 2nd of this month and we've been celebrating all this month. And we live in Kansas at the present, Salina, Kansas. And I have a brother that's 76, another one that's 74. And there are six of us that are still living. And we're the Manning family.

HOUSE: Do you remember when the family moved to the Capitol Hill area?

WOODFOLK: In 1933 when Ethel and I were eight years old from 26th and M Street NW.

HOUSE: Do you know why your family moved to this neighborhood?

WOODFOLK: Now that I don't know, I really don't know why they moved, but...

HOUSE: What was your father's occupation?

WOODFOLK: He worked for the Navy Yard and then, he didn't retire from the Navy Yard, but he worked there for quite a few years. And then he worked for the city and he often tell us that he helped put the fence around the water flat [McMillan Reservoir] here in Washington right near Howard University, because he worked for WPA after then. I think that was during the Work Project Administration [Works Progress Administration] during the Roosevelt time.

HOUSE: So he worked for the Navy Yard before that.

WOODFOLK: Yes and afterwards, I think.

HOUSE: Well he could have walked to the Navy Yard from here.

WOODFOLK: No, I think worked afterwards, I can't remember.

HOUSE: But he could have walked to the Navy Yard.

WOODFOLK: Yes, because we were close.

HOUSE: So that might have been an incentive.

WOODFOLK: And his brother, which lived at Kingman Place NW at Logan Circle before when we were quite young, he worked for the ...they both worked for the government. I can't even think of, he walked to work too. I'm sorry I can't remember that.

HOUSE: It's okay. So I know you told me you lived in several different places when you lived in this neighborhood. Can you remember the addresses of some of those, or all of them?

WOODFOLK: Yes, we moved to 121 H Street, which was just one block Southeast at Virginia Avenue, Second and Virginia Avenue area. We didn't live there but for about a year and then we moved around the corner to Second Street which was 810 Second Street SE. Star building was across the street from us there and Andrew's Paper Company right in that same area.

HOUSE: So the Star building was there then?

WOODFOLK: Yes, right in front of us because there's a big lot that the trucks used to park, right in that area where the lot was there. And Andrew's Paper Company was right next to the Star building. And Garfield Park was to the right on Virginia Avenue right up from there.

HOUSE: So you lived in two different houses?

WOODFOLK: 121 H Street for about a year and then 810 Second Street, we lived there till we finished high school. And we went to Giddings Elementary School. Then we had to go to Southwest to Randall Junior High School because there wasn't a high school for us to go to near us, which was some there, but we couldn't go to them.

HOUSE: Because they were for whites only.

WOODFOLK: Whites only, uh huh. And then when we graduated from Randall we went to Cardoza at Ninth and Rhode Island Avenue where we had to catch a bus to go there. And we graduated from there in 1942, forty-something.

HOUSE: So Cardoza and Randall were the closest schools for African-Americans, for blacks, in this neighborhood at that time.

WOODFOLK: Children who lived in Anacostia had to go to Randall down in Southwest or either go uptown to Garnet-Patterson or Shaw High School at Seventh and Rhode Island, I believe it was.

HOUSE: Must have been a lot of children who had to commute then right?

WOODFOLK: Yes it was, but we didn't have to pay but three cents to pay for car fare each way, but that was a lot of money then. But it was very inexpensive, but it was, we thought nothing of it because we were used to it.

HOUSE: Are there any memories of Giddings you would like to share? That's just two blocks from here down the street.

WOODFOLK: Yes, I've been there since it's been renovated to this gymnasium.

HOUSE: Oh, you have?

WOODFOLK: Yes. And I think Mrs. Grimes was the principal if I can remember, but it was a lovely school. We had good teachers and I'll tell you our second grade teacher was (what's the blood plasma doctor?) Dr. Drew. . . . Mrs. Drew was our second grade teacher and we loved her to this day and I saw her about five years ago.

HOUSE: Is she related to Dr. Drew?

WOODFOLK: Yes that was her brother.

HOUSE: Oh.

WOODFOLK: And she married Gregory, she's a Gregory now, Mrs. Gregory. And we had some lovely teachers there.

HOUSE: So that school went from what? First grade through?

WOODFOLK: To sixth. At seventh we went to down in Southwest to Randall.

HOUSE: And that was seventh and eighth?

WOODFOLK: Seventh, eighth, and ninth.

HOUSE: So three years. And then to Cardoza.

WOODFOLK: And then when we left Cardoza we went to Margaret Washington vocational school and took up designing and tailoring. And Ethel and I made most of our clothes—coats, suits, lingerie and everything. And I sold for Lea Engel dress shop on F Street [NW] for about a year.

HOUSE: Where was this school, this design school, that you went to?

WOODFOLK: Right off North Capitol near Florida, but I can't remember the street. But we worked in, I worked for the 1950 census and I think I came back to Margaret Washington then and took designing and tailoring. And then from then on I worked in the government until I got married and my husband didn't want me to work anymore, he wanted me to be a housewife and that's just what I was. [Laughs] And I retired from the government.

HOUSE: When you went to Giddings, aside from your classes, were there activities there, clubs?

WOODFOLK: No, but we had Southeast Settlement House which we are so thankful for. It was at Third and G, one small house on the corner of Third and G. And then we bought, Friendship House on Virginia Avenue between Third and Fourth moved, and we bought the Friendship House.

HOUSE: The building.

WOODFOLK: The building, uh huh. And that's where we...between that and Capper's [pronounces it with a long a] playground, that's where our activities were. We had singing lessons, we took tap dancing lessons, we went to the Y up on Ninth and Rhode Island Avenue to Girl Scout meetings. We had Girl

Scout meetings, 4-H club, all of this was at the Southeast Settlement House. They had a lot of things that kept us very interested and out of trouble. We couldn't be in trouble because everybody was our parents, not like today, you can't speak to other people's children and you can't correct them. But then if anybody saw you out of order they would correct you and tell your parents. And we had a lovely life. And my dad was the type that every Sunday he would take us to the [Washington] Monument, the museums, and we had an amusement park out in Deanwood called Suburban Gardens and he would take us there on Sundays, so my mom could have a little break. But we had to go to Sunday school first. After Sunday school he would take us out and then would come back home and my mom would have dinner ready for us. But we had to go to Sunday school, to church on Sunday mornings. Which we love our parents and the way they brought us up. And to this day I'm 80 years old and I still, church is my first priority; love it.

HOUSE: Tell me just a little bit more, we'll go into church, but tell me a bit more about the Settlement House. Do you know who ran the house? The Settlement House? Was it government or a nonprofit group?

WOODFOLK: It must have been nonprofit, but I don't remember. I'm sorry.

HOUSE: Wasn't a church?

WOODFOLK: No, it wasn't a church. It was funded by the community, the government.

HOUSE: Probably something like the Friendship House, maybe, is today.

WOODFOLK: Yes.

HOUSE: Now Friendship House was operating at the same time?

WOODFOLK: Yes, but we were around the corner, but this was the nice place on Virginia Avenue, but had just a two, three story house, it was a small house. And we could rent doll babies for a week and take them back and it was really nice at the Southeast House. And when we moved around the corner to Virginia Avenue we had more space, more activities and everything.

HOUSE: Now at one time both Friendship House and Southeast Settlement House were in the same area right? Because Friendship House was on Virginia, right?

WOODFOLK: Yes.

HOUSE: And then the Southeast Settlement House was, where was it?

WOODFOLK: Third and G Street. But then Friendship House moved and that was white and we bought that.

HOUSE: Oh Friendship House was only for whites.

WOODFOLK: Yes.

HOUSE: Oh, I didn't realize that.

WOODFOLK: Uh huh, and they still called it Friendship House for a while, because people, but it was the Southeast Settlement House. We had a Southeast, Southwest and a Northwest House.

HOUSE: At least the Southeast Settlement House was all black?

WOODFOLK: Yes.

HOUSE: Oh, I didn't realize Friendship House was segregated. Now I remember you told me once before, you went to the library and.

WOODFOLK: Seventh, . . .right off of Pennsylvania. . . We could use the library.

HOUSE: The library was integrated?

WOODFOLK: It evidently was because that's the only library I remember anywhere in this area.

HOUSE: How did you happen to use, or how did you use, that? Did you check out books? You did homework there?

WOODFOLK: Yes, we did because we loved to read because our parents insisted that we read. And Christmas that's what we mostly got—books. And we had to go to...didn't have much money, but we made our bulbs for the tree out of paper and then we'd come up to the Fifth Precinct at Fifth and E. . . and at Christmas time they would give us toys, oranges, apples, candies, and that was the most toys we got because it was given to us. I don't know if it was Salvation Army or what they had then.

HOUSE: But it was out of the police precinct station. Well that's interesting, I hadn't heard that before.

WOODFOLK: We had a very interesting life because Southeast House closed at nine o'clock and we had to be home at nine o'clock. Two or three minutes after nine we had to be at our door.

HOUSE: You told me the other day that you had an outing with the Southeast Settlement House where you danced with somebody very famous?

WOODFOLK: We danced with Mrs. Roosevelt. We had at Glover's estate (I don't know if anybody remembered that Glover's estate) we had a display of crafts, arts and crafts that we had made, different children, because they had taught us to weave baskets, and also Mrs. Cappers at the Cappers playground. and we had a lot of display of things we had made. And then we, Ethel and I were tap dancers then, we had a nice Mrs. (can't remember her name) but anyway Mrs. Roosevelt was there and we tap danced for her and we did interpretive dancing. She enjoyed that and I was just about as close to Mrs. Roosevelt as I am from that wall to here. She was very nice; at Easter time they would send candy to the Settlement. One time there was a big chocolate egg about this, about eight inches thick and they would break it up and give the children parts of the candy. The Roosevelts was nice to black people at that time.

HOUSE: You mentioned that recreation center that Mrs. Capper had. Now what was the name of that? Did it have a name?

WOODFOLK: Well, they call it Arthur Capper's I think now, Arthur Capper's Center. But that was the only swimming pool we had, if you didn't go to the Potomac River where we had three of our young boys who lived in our neighborhood drown in the Potomac River swimming because it didn't have, this little swimming pool wasn't deep enough for the boys because they liked to dive and liked to swim. And we would go there to cool off in the water. There was a swimming pool right up the street from us, but we couldn't go to that, at Garfield Park.

HOUSE: And so this one was located, did you say where it was located?

WOODFOLK: It was Sixth and L, I think between Sixth and L or...

HOUSE: But around there, around Sixth and L.

WOODFOLK: Uh huh, and it's still there.

HOUSE: Oh it is?

WOODFOLK: Because I read in this paper today that they're going to tear it down, it's still there because I rode past it. But I don't know what they're using it...

HOUSE: And Mrs. Cappers ran this. How do you spell her last name?

WOODFOLK: I thought we had it with one 'p', but I see it's with two 'p's in what I'm seeing. Cappers [spells it], Arthur Cappers, but evidently that was her husband, I don't know who the Arthur is.

HOUSE: So we don't know why they called it Arthur Capper.

WOODFOLK: I was talking to a lady, somebody who said they went to her funeral. She just died about seven or eight years ago. Just recently. I wish I had known about it.

HOUSE: Tell me about the church, you said the church was very important to you. What church did you and your family attend when you were young?

WOODFOLK: We went to the Way of the Cross Church at Fourth and Virginia Avenue. Way of the Cross Church of Christ. Bishop H. C. Brooks was the pastor then and his son is the pastor now, A. D. Brooks.

HOUSE: Is that still located?

WOODFOLK: No, they tore that down for the freeway. We're at Ninth and D NE, where it is today. Uh huh, it was at Fourth and Virginia Avenue, but they tore that down for that freeway. But we're at Ninth and D NE. It was at Fourth and Virginia Avenue, but they tore that down for that freeway that went through.

HOUSE: When did these places get torn down? Do you know? Was that in the early 60s? It was after you left.

WOODFOLK: Left?

HOUSE: Left this area.

WOODFOLK: Yes, so I was living in the Northwest section then. Yes.

HOUSE: Because you left this area in '55, right?

WOODFOLK: Something, I think it's similar to that. Something like that. And when we moved uptown to Northwest, but I lived in 1010 (after I got married we moved on Kansas Avenue.), and then I got married and I moved with my aunt on 1010 Independence Avenue right here now is the house that's still there. I rode past it the other day. But before then I lived at 512 Virginia Avenue SE right after I finished high school. 512 Virginia Avenue and then we moved uptown in the 50s.

HOUSE: So were all two or three of those homes that you lived in torn down for the freeway? The one on Second Street, the one on H Street.

WOODFOLK: Second Street, H Street and also Sixth and Virginia Avenue. [512 Virginia]

HOUSE: They were all torn down for the freeway?

WOODFOLK: Yes..

HOUSE: What were those houses like? Were they brick houses or frame houses, do you remember?

WOODFOLK: On H Street they were two story houses, they were brick, small. Second Street they had apartments and houses on Second Street, the 800 block of Second Street, Virginia Avenue and I [Street]. And Virginia Avenue was apartments and houses, but they tore that, the Star building took that whole area where we lived on Second Street and built the Star building. It's there now I guess. Virginia Avenue and Second and I...

HOUSE: And they tore down the church and they tore down the Settlement House.

WOODFOLK: The Settlement House on up, yes for that freeway.

HOUSE: The freeway, I'm sure you know, is a big dividing element in the community now. North or south of the freeway. When you were growing up, the freeway wasn't there. Was there anything else that divided the community the way that does now?

WOODFOLK: No, we had projects, on the other side of I Street were projects, but I don't know the name of it. They're still there, unless they've torn them down in the last few months. But they were boarded up the last time I went past there. St. Paul Church right there, is still there, too, at Fourth and I Streets. The projects were on the other side of I to M, all the way down to M, with some houses in between. There was a school somewhere around there, but I don't know.

HOUSE: Was the area around Virginia and the area they tore down, was that an integrated neighborhood? How would you describe that neighborhood?

WOODFOLK: No, it was mostly black.

HOUSE: Mostly black.

WOODFOLK: On this side of Virginia Avenue it was whites.

HOUSE: So was Virginia a bit of a dividing line even then between black and white, or no?

WOODFOLK: To the south of Virginia Avenue was black, but as you went up there were mixed white and black, coming up this way.

HOUSE: I see. But when you were young the neighborhood was a large neighborhood for you because you didn't just go down to the Sixth and M, you also, a part of your social activities, you mentioned you

went to the library north of here. How about other things—when you played and places you shopped? What kinds of things would you go to Pennsylvania Avenue for?

WOODFOLK: This street right here, Sixth Street, we used to walk from Sixth and Virginia Avenue up to Pennsylvania, all the time, to get frozen custard after church, and then we'd walk back because we lived on the corner of Sixth and Virginia Avenue. And the frozen custard was so nice, and we just walked up there. There was nice little shops, dress shops and things on Pennsylvania Avenue. And I remember Ethel when she used to say this is my store and one was mine. We had a Safeway there on Pennsylvania, I think it was about Fifth...there was a Safeway on the corner of Pennsylvania and this area, but I can't remember exactly what corner it was.

HOUSE: What was the shop you got your frozen custards in, do you remember?

WOODFOLK: It was an ice-cream store, I can't remember.

HOUSE: Ice-cream store, anyway, go ahead you started to say, about Peoples, did you say?

WOODFOLK: People's Drug Store right at Seventh, and it's still there I think, Seventh and Pennsylvania Avenue. We used to come there, and there were little shops on Pennsylvania, we couldn't afford the clothes. They had nice little dress shops and things on this part of Pennsylvania Avenue, but we didn't buy too much—we'd just walk past. We'd walk to the Capitol and met quite a few interesting people when we were a little older going to the Capitol. And we used to go to the...

HOUSE: You'd go to the Capitol just to take a walk?

WOODFOLK: A walk, uh huh. And they had the waterfalls and we'd put our feet in and we could cool ourselves off.

HOUSE: Did you go in the Capitol?

WOODFOLK: Oh all the time. Riding the train underground. And I'm trying to think of some of the people I met. And I would take pictures of them, but now I've learned to have somebody take a picture of me with them, with anybody of importance. Shirley Chisholm, this was later years. And I had pictures of her... And the man that ran for president, and I said: May I have a picture of you? And he said, "Sure." If I think of his name, it'll come to me after a while. But anyway, Ethel used to watch Truman walk every morning because she worked at the Commerce Department. He would walk all the time. We met Eisenhower. We'd go to all the parades when he was general, when he was given keys to the city. And now we're living right near Eisenhower's home in Abilene, Kansas. And we visit his home frequently every time we have visitors. And we've met quite a few dignitaries and try to take picture of them. My

daddy taught us this. And he always told us to read, and he insisted that we go to the library and I appreciate that, it helped us. And our children, my husband was in the military and everywhere I'd go I'd take my children to places of interest—art galleries and museums and we loved music. Can't play anything, but I'm taking harp lessons now.

HOUSE: Harp?

WOODFOLK: Yes. Love music. We belong to the Salina Symphony Guild. Helping children get their instruments and go to school. We take donations for them and we meet once a month.

HOUSE: And you've mentioned earlier that there were shops on H Street [NE] that you frequented?

WOODFOLK: Yes. Rappaport's Shoe Store. . . , and a drug store. They had a theater there, but we couldn't go to it. We had to go down Southwest.

HOUSE: Because they didn't admit blacks? Even to sit in the balcony?

WOODFOLK: No, we couldn't go. We were told we couldn't go, so we just didn't go.

HOUSE: And how about the shoe store. Was there any problem?

WOODFOLK: The shoes were real nice. There was a Five and Ten or something there, too. I can't remember what it was called. But we could get dry goods and things, like stamps, I mean not stamps, anything you wanted to buy—shoes, socks, handkerchiefs and little gifts and things.

HOUSE: Did you ever eat out?

WOODFOLK: We didn't eat out too much because my mom was the type that cooked at home and we had children and people every Sunday. She cooked as if she had about twenty children because we'd bring people home with us; and we had a small home, but we'd invite people to eat. And we always kept the house clean. She didn't work until we got out of junior high school. My dad didn't let her work either because he wanted her to be home with us. But then she worked for the WPA sewing. She didn't get her salary, but she could get food and clothes at John Marshall Place where the courthouse is. That's where she sewed and brought in food and clothing from them. They didn't pay them money then.

HOUSE: What kind of sewing did she do?

WOODFOLK: They made clothes for people.

HOUSE: Oh I see, I didn't realize that was part of WPA.

WOODFOLK: And she was very gifted at sewing and she taught us to sew. I think that's why we liked sewing. She did a lot of sewing. We never was on relief; we never lived in projects because my daddy told us to save. We went to the Post Office and he said, "Pennies make dollars—save them." So we'd buy little stamps from the Post Office and he taught us to save then. And even today I've had two husbands and I didn't have to work while I was with them because I knew how to manage my money.

HOUSE: So this was during the Depression; your father either worked with the WPA or Navy Yard, he always had a job during the depression.

WOODFOLK: Yes, and then in between that he shined shoes at a shop at Seventh and Pennsylvania Avenue NW. And then he would go at nighttime to a big apartment house and bank the furnace. He would bank the furnace so the fire could come on. He always had two or three jobs.

HOUSE: So he worked hard.

WOODFOLK: Yes, he was a hard worker. And his brother and sister never had any children and they were a big help to us at Christmas time. My Uncle James would have Griffith coal company give us, I forget how many, tons of coal every year—it would last us half of the winter. We dreaded it because we had to take it the shed in the back, they dumped it in the front.

HOUSE: How did you do that?

WOODFOLK: We had little buckets and we put it in the buckets. All of us had to take it and we dreaded it, but it kept us warm.

HOUSE: A lot of trips.

WOODFOLK: Mm hmm. And at school, when school opened up they would buy us shoes and things. My aunt and uncle they didn't have any children; he worked in the government in the Veterans Administration. He lived on Kingman Place between P and Q and he used to walk to work, my uncle. And he was kind of well off for a black person. He owned a home ever since I've known him. . . . They were good to us.

HOUSE: Did you ever, this is a little bit different, but you were talking about some of the boys drowning in the Potomac. Did you ever walk down, was that near here?

WOODFOLK: We lived at Second Street and they would walk, my brother was with Shepard Turner and I can't think of the other little boy that drowned. Because they couldn't, they wanted to swim, in the

summer. And it was sad and my twin sister and I sang at the funeral. It was walking distance; they had to walk almost everywhere you would go, but they had to go to the Potomac River.

HOUSE: How about fishing? Did people go down to fish?

WOODFOLK: I guess they did, I don't remember.

HOUSE: That wasn't something you did. How about down to the Navy Yard, did you ever go there?

WOODFOLK: Oh we'd go every Navy Day when it was opened up we'd always go to the Navy Yard.

HOUSE: Tell me about Navy Day. I've read about it, what happened on Navy Day?

WOODFOLK: We'd go and they'd show you different things. The equipment they made and... I can't remember.

HOUSE: It's like a fair or something?

WOODFOLK: Yes and they'd show you the ships and the ammunition and different things and they explained it; but that's been a long time ago, almost eighty years ago. But anyway, every Navy Day we would go and that was a big day to do something different.

HOUSE: That's interesting. Were there other events like that, that would be unique to this neighborhood that you remember? Because Navy Day would be something special that only happened here.

WOODFOLK: Yes, once a year they had that. Didn't have too much to do.

HOUSE: How about this, did the bands, the Navy bands have concerts and all?

WOODFOLK: Yes, we used to go up there and listen, up at Eighth and something Eighth and I, Navy Band we'd go up there to listen to them play. Also to the Capitol, we'd go there and listen to the music because they'd play—the orchestra or band or whatnot. But we'd go there.

HOUSE: That was in the 30s and 40s?

WOODFOLK: Yes. And we used to walk to the monument to the Sylvan Theater to watch plays. That's where we could go to see plays. Have you ever heard of the Sylvan Theater?

HOUSE: Yes.

WOODFOLK: Oh we used to go there. We always did something, but life wasn't too bad, I don't guess.

HOUSE: You talked a little bit about the Depression and the effects it had on your family and maybe the neighborhood. How about World War II? Do you remember any effects of WWII on the neighborhood? Or things you did?

WOODFOLK: We really had to turn the lights out so we kept it dark in the winters, because the least little candle they could see the lights and they'd come around, and if they could see a light they'd let you know they could see a light. And I had a brother in the Army in WWII, brother-in-law in the Navy...my sister's husband's brother-in-law was in the Army. And I had a nephew, my brother, he was in the Marines. After WWII, I think, because he wasn't in Korea. We had them in all branches of the service. Navy, Marines, Army and Air Force. My nephew was in the Air Force. But it was kind of sad, we had to, sugar and everything was rationed. You couldn't get but so much of anything, coffee.

HOUSE: Were there volunteer efforts to collect things on the Hill? Do you remember that? For the war effort, I don't know, maybe that was WWI only where they did the iron and rubber and things like that.

WOODFOLK: We used to keep cans and bottles and we could turn them in because they needed the soda cans and things like that. But a long time ago they had more milk in bottles and not things that you could throw away. That's why we have so much trash now because everything is throw away stuff. But we would save our cans and get bottles and turn them in and get two cents off the bottles because they wanted you to turn them in. And boy, we saved as many as we could so we could make money. And even old rags and things, we'd save those and add them up and clothes, and you could sell them by the pound.

HOUSE: Who did you sell them to?

WOODFOLK: I can't remember that, but I know we did it. [Laughs] I don't remember. But we did it. We did everything to be independent.

HOUSE: Now, when did your family leave this neighborhood and why? Do you remember?

WOODFOLK: Well we wanted to better ourselves; and my twin sister and I bought the first house for my mom and dad to live in. From Second Street SE we moved to 4404 Kansas Avenue. We started working in the government. We worked in the government; we sold in the evenings; and we worked for the family we bought this house from. [tape ends in mid conversation]

END OF TAPE 1/SIDE 1

TAPE 1/SIDE 2

HOUSE: So, I'm sorry. You were saying your sister and you were thinking about what you would do if you had that house?

WOODFOLK: We said if we had this house what we would do—we'd remodel because they hadn't done anything. It was in good shape, but it was just, still, just old looking. Then anyway Mr. Hill, bless his soul he's dead now, but anyway ... after about five [years] we tried to stop working for him because Saturdays we wanted to go to the Patrol Parade they used to have all the time. And we couldn't go because we were working on Saturdays; all the other children could go to the Patrol Parade.

HOUSE: Safety Patrol?

WOODFOLK: Mm hmm. We tried but we didn't stop. If we missed a day or Saturday (we didn't have a telephone) he'd write, "Girls I'll see you next week." Both of us worked because he was a widow, his daughter lived in the house. And we'd go there, she'd get five dollars, I'd get five dollars and car fare. Then, after a few years he said if we knew anybody who'd want to buy this house he'd give us \$500. But Ethel and I said, "We want to get this house so we can get that \$500". And so we did buy the house and he took the \$500 off it for \$12,500 and that was in 1950 something. And we bought that house for \$12,500 and my dad didn't want to move away from Second Street; so he kept the apartment down there for about a year because he wasn't sure what we were doing. [Laughs] And so anyway we got the house and before they moved there, we bought the first refrigerator they had, electric, because we used ice boxes and we bought them the first nice set of china dishes, my mom and dad. And then later on we stayed there until I got married, with my mom and dad Ethel and I did. And when I got married I stayed with my aunt on Independence Avenue for three years.

HOUSE: That's 1010 Independence Avenue.

WOODFOLK: Yes, 1010 Independence Avenue. And then Mr. Hill married, remarried because he was a widow, and they moved to Arkansas Avenue. And I told my husband, "Save your money we're going to get this house, too." Because I notice when black people move in, white people move out. And we noticed that one black family moved across the street and I said, "They are going to be moving soon, so, save your money because we're going to get this house." And then I noticed Mrs. Hill asked my information for everything she wanted to get done in the house. She had paper. "What kind of paper would you put in this room, Esther?" But I didn't know she was thinking about it for me. I was thinking about it for them and I would've done it a little different. But anyway we bought that house for \$13,500. My husband and I. And so that's how we got our first two houses in Northwest. [1010 Independence is in Southeast.]

HOUSE: Oh good for you. Tell me a little bit about your house at Tenth and Independence or your time there.

WOODFOLK: I stayed there three years with my aunt. This is my daddy's aunt [father's sister, Woodfolk's aunt] I told you who never had any children; she married but her husband passed away, he was in an automobile accident. And so she lived up in Southeast near St. Elizabeth's for a while and then she bought this house.

HOUSE: Was that a nice neighborhood at the time?

WOODFOLK: Tenth and Independence. It's still the same. It was just two black people on that block that I know of. That was the next door neighbor and everybody stayed right there until my older sister sold her house, I don't know how many years ago. But it was a very nice neighborhood and it's still the same because I ride past there every now and then.

HOUSE: So you were in your early twenties then.

WOODFOLK: Yes. And so I stayed there three years until I had my first child and he was nine months old and that's when we moved on Arkansas Avenue.

HOUSE: Was there anything particular about that neighborhood that you remember, businesses?

WOODFOLK: 1010 Independence? Lincoln Park was close by, was real nice. And I used to walk my baby in a stroller around there. And People's Drug Store was right at 11th and something, right by the park. And it was a nice neighborhood. And then I think they put, what's the lady's name that's in the park now? Good friend of Mrs. Roosevelt.

HOUSE: I'll think of it in one second.

WOODFOLK: I can't think of it right now, but I remember when they put her statue in there, very good friend of Mrs. Roosevelt.

HOUSE: I know, I can see her, picture her and everything. Bethune!

WOODFOLK: Mary McLeod Bethune. So we would go there quite often.

HOUSE: So that statue was fairly recent.

WOODFOLK: I said I remember when they put her statue in there. But that was after I moved. I came there for the dedication service when they put her statue in there.

HOUSE: Yes, I was there too. It was nice. We could have met! [Laughs]

WOODFOLK: Didn't know each other.

HOUSE: This has been very interesting. Is there anything else you'd like to add about your time on the Hill.

WOODFOLK: They didn't call it the Hill when we lived here.

HOUSE: What did they call it?

WOODFOLK: Just Southeast, but it wasn't the Hill then.

HOUSE: Just Southeast, because Anacostia would've been Southeast too, but I guess they call that Anacostia.

WOODFOLK: Uh huh, Anacostia, Congress Heights and all that.

HOUSE: So this was just Southeast.

WOODFOLK: Southeast, that's all, because it wasn't called Capitol Hill until recent years, I guess. And because my sister sold my aunt's house and the real estate, we went to see about a will, and he said: Do you know how much that house is worth? I said, "Yeah about \$100,000" which was a lot of money then. He said, "Yes you're in the ballpark" (Now being a million dollars.) But I don't know what she sold it for; she never told us.

HOUSE: It sounds like you have good memories from, fond memories, of this time.

WOODFOLK: We really enjoyed our life in Southeast. We had lovely friends. In fact, we enjoy ourselves everywhere we go because we love people. And we always think, this is our motto: Nobody's any better than I am and I'm not any better than them. And everywhere I go I always try to get to the president or the mayor. When I was living in California, I said, "This mayor spoke so nice" I told my husband, "I want to go meet her." He said, "You're going to spend your [not clear]?" I said, "Why not?" We talked for about a half an hour and she said. "It's because of people like you that I have this office" You have to like everybody, regardless of their race, creed, or color. Isn't that right?

HOUSE: Mm hmm.

WOODFOLK: And there's good and bad in every race and you can't judge any race just by the color, can you? Or the nationality because we love people and we've just had a wonderful life. And our 80th birthday we just celebrated. And our church gave us a beautiful banquet and a big long limousine came

and picked us up, took us to the church and just showered us with gifts and a money tree and nice things. I said, "Ethel we have had our funeral already."

HOUSE: Was this in Kansas?

WOODFOLK: Kansas. And they sent us away so nicely [to Washington DC where she was at the time of the interview] and lovely and we told them we were going to be away for a month and we've been enjoying ourselves. 80 years old.

HOUSE: Well I've enjoyed talking to you very much and meeting you; and thank you for this interview.

WOODFOLK: Thank you.

HOUSE: Right after we turned it off, you had a few more comments that I thought were interesting so I thought I would turn the recorder back on again and put a couple of these on the tape. One of the things you mentioned was someone called Mighty Mouse Stevenson. Tell me about that.

WOODFOLK: Yes, Mighty Mouse Stevenson. I don't know if his name was Mighty, but that's what we called him, Mighty Mouse Stevenson. He had one leg, was in a wheelchair, for the black children to have some entertainment, once a week he would have boxing on the Star building lot at Second and I Streets. And he would teach them how to box. And one fellow in particular, we called Smuggy Hersey, he came to be a very popular, well known boxer; he taught him. That was something we looked forward to in the evening, to watch these boxers that he had trained.

HOUSE: Just out on a vacant lot?

WOODFOLK: Yes.

HOUSE: Did he charge them?

WOODFOLK: No, not at all.

HOUSE: Was he a boxer? He must have been a boxer.

WOODFOLK: Yes, I think he used to be a boxer.

HOUSE: That's interesting. You mentioned a couple other businesses that I thought were interesting. You mentioned Shnider's grocery store.

WOODFOLK: Right in the 100 block of H Street, where it wasn't but one block that H Street—which they called "Smokey Canyon", because the trains was right across the street. You'd go down a little hill

and trains would run past the houses all the time. Mr. Shnider had a grocery store and when we needed sugar, bread, anything like that, milk, we could go there and get it. If you didn't have money, he would write it down, what you owed him, on a little piece of paper. And then on payday my parents would pay the bill, the people who lived on that street. There was quite a few families there—the Fords, the Wares, Reeders, Briscoe and the Coffey family. Don't forget the Mannings; we lived there at 121.

HOUSE: On H Street?

WOODFOLK: Uh huh.

HOUSE: You also mentioned this Epstein store. What kind of store was that?

. . . [Ed. note: There was confusion about the name/owner of the grocery and drug stores. This was checked in several City Directories and with Mrs. Woodfolk after the interview and incorrect information has been deleted as confusing. Corrections have been inserted in brackets, as necessary.]

WOODFOLK: . . . [Epstein] was the drug store at Third and Virginia Avenue. We used to go there. He had a little bar that you could get ice cream sodas and things. He always let, well we were his only customers, blacks, so we could go there and buy anything we needed, medicines; it was a drug store. But he had this fountain, that's what they called it. We could get ice cream sodas and little cookies or cakes, whatever he sold there. It was that little restaurant for us.

HOUSE: Were there only blacks that would go there?

WOODFOLK: Yes, because only blacks lived there. I don't ever remember anybody else.

HOUSE: Was... [the owner of the drug store] black?

WOODFOLK: No, he was a Jew.

HOUSE: I see. Then... [the grocery] store?

WOODFOLK: That was in the middle of the block.

HOUSE: Where you could buy on credit? That's the grocery store.

WOODFOLK: Yes. At the corner of Second and H was Virginia Beer Garden. Where people that liked to entertain on weekends, go to the beer garden, play the music, and drink the beer. That was like a restaurant and everything for black people to go. Mr. Grimes was the owner of that; he was black.

HOUSE: Would there be dancing there?

WOODFOLK: Yes, they would dance. They had a nickelodeon thing that you put the coins in. We were too young, but our older sisters went there. We couldn't go there because it was a beer garden.

HOUSE: Beer garden, I guess, would be sort of like a night club?

WOODFOLK: Yes, but they called it a beer garden a long time ago.

HOUSE: Because it was only beer?

WOODFOLK: Yes. That was interesting for the older people. We couldn't go. We could stand on the outside and listen to the music if we wanted to, but we couldn't go in.



Alexander Manning Sr., father of Esther Woodfolk, around 1947-1948. Taken at the corner of Second and I Streets SE, standing on the Star Building lot. The name of the restaurant across the street is unknown; it is *not* the Virginia Beer Garden, which was at the other end of the block, at the corner of Second and H Streets SE. A portion of the house where the boxer Smugger Hersey lived is at the far left of the photo.

HOUSE: Now you also mentioned where you got your medical care. You said.

WOODFOLK: Providence Hospital. It was at Second, I think, and E, I believe it was. Providence Hospital was torn down. It's now at Varnum Street, 12th and Varnum Street NE, now. That's where we went for all our medical care, Providence Hospital.

HOUSE: You went to Providence just to go to a doctor? You wouldn't necessarily be admitted? You had doctors' appointments there?

WOODFOLK: If we had to be admitted, I think, but we never had to be that I know of. That's where we would go to the clinics.

HOUSE: So there was a clinic there?

WOODFOLK: Yes. Some people had babies [there]. But most black people went to Gallinger Hospital; the babies were born there if they couldn't go to.

HOUSE: And where was Gallinger?

WOODFOLK: Near the ball stadium, I can't tell you, near the jail house. But it's closed now. It's DC General.

HOUSE: Why would they go to Gallinger?

WOODFOLK: Because it was inexpensive. I know if white and black went there, but I know it was where black folks could afford to go.

HOUSE: But Providence Hospital, both whites and blacks went there, right?

WOODFOLK: Yes. I don't much about why we didn't go to the hospital. But I know my mom had a couple of children born at Gallinger. We were born at Garfield hospital at 12th and Florida Avenue, but I don't know. I wish I had asked more questions.

HOUSE: Anything else?

WOODFOLK: I think that's about all I can remember.

HOUSE: Well those are good stories. I'm glad we got those. Alright, thanks again.

END OF INTERVIEW