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In All My Years

Portraits of
Older Blacks in
Champaign-Urbana

by Raymond Bial

Champaign County Historical Museum
Champaign, Illinois

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In All My Years

Introduction

Champaign-Urbana can be divided in many ways. Wright Street divides the two cities politically; residents can be divided into groups depending on whether or not they are affiliated with the University of Illinois, and the division of land into agricultural and non-agricultural uses is readily apparent. And Champaign-Urbana still can be divided racially.

According to the 1980 federal census about ten percent of the population of Champaign-Urbana is Black. Like the other nine tenths, Blacks in Champaign-Urbana occupy every niche in the economic and social communities, and they have contributed significantly to the vitality of the two cities. Yet, their contributions have been largely overlooked. Except for a few doctoral dissertations at the University and the oral history project at the Champaign Public Library's Douglass Branch, the history of Champaign-Urbana's Black community has not been included in the standard histories despite the fact that Blacks have been in Champaign-Urbana since the 1860's.

Some may question our beginning with an exhibit of photographic portraits rather than with a more traditional overview of the history of this group. This particular project was conceived and carried out as an introduction to Champaign-Urbana's Black community. It was not intended to be a detailed research project. Rather we have intended to draw attention to a segment of society that has been largely overlooked.

The exhibit and catalogue are meant to acknowledge the contributions of Blacks to the community. The photographs

and captions are each intended to be a vignette, a glimpse of the person portrayed. A few of the photographs were made within the settings of homes and places of business. However, in most cases, we were interested in making black-and-white portraits, similar in form to studio portraits, but acting more as character studies. We were especially interested in evoking the strength and dignity of individuals who have not only endured but eventually prevailed through very difficult times. What has emerged is a composite picture – strikingly at variance with traditional stereotypes – of individuals who have valued family, church, community, and their own pride. We photographed people who successfully managed independent businesses when odds were decidedly against them. We also photographed articulate people who all their lives found themselves relegated to service occupations, but nonetheless excelled in those avenues available to them and, most importantly, maintained their essential humanity.

The advanced age and fragile health of many of the participants have lent an air of urgency to our actions as we believe they should in other projects with older persons. Many of the people we wanted to photograph have already passed away. They include George Pope, Sr., Alice Lee Pope, Ernest Cook, Edwin Cook, Herbert Nesbitt, Sr., Mel Winfield, Ernest Nelson, Sr., Helen Hite, Dr. Landel Dufay, Albert Alexander, Charles Phillips, Sr., and others. It should be noted that in the brief time since the photographs were made, two of the participants, Ruth Hines and James Algee, have passed away. Others were too ill or otherwise unavailable at the time the photographs were made, such as Mattie Burch, and Clifford Johnson, who, at age 103, is the oldest

person in the twin cities. Mr. Johnson entered the hospital the day before he was scheduled to have his picture taken. Still others could not be included simply because of space limitations. Their absence from the exhibit in no way diminishes the value of the contributions they have made.

As with any project of this nature, many people and organizations are responsible for its success. Special thanks go to the Illinois State Library and the Illinois Arts Council under whose auspices funding was provided to bring this exhibit into reality and to the Champaign Public Library for agreeing to serve as the financial agent for the project. Thanks too are due to The Urbana Free Library, the Parkland College Library, the Douglass Branch of the Champaign Public Library, and the Lincoln Trail Libraries System for their help, support, and encouragement. Enough cannot be said of the efforts of Charlotte Nesbitt who served on the project committee. Charlotte's extensive contacts in the Black community brought many interesting people to our attention; she provided extensive research for the project; and she gained valuable local support for it. Finally, we owe a great deal of gratitude to the members of Champaign-Urbana's Black community who opened their homes and their lives to us.

It is hoped that this undertaking will spur greater interest and research into the history and present condition of Blacks in the two cities. Our efforts are only a start; there is still much more to do.

Michael Cahall, Director
Champaign County Historical Museum
October, 1983

Bertha Gary

Born in Corinth, Mississippi, on Christmas Day, 1899, Mrs. Gary first moved with her family to Arkansas before coming to Champaign in 1917.

For many years she worked as a maid in dormitories at the University of Illinois.

She has always had a special love for children. Until 1981 she worked with the foster grandparent program and, as her nephew says, "she has spent years helping children – not just her relatives' children, but all children."



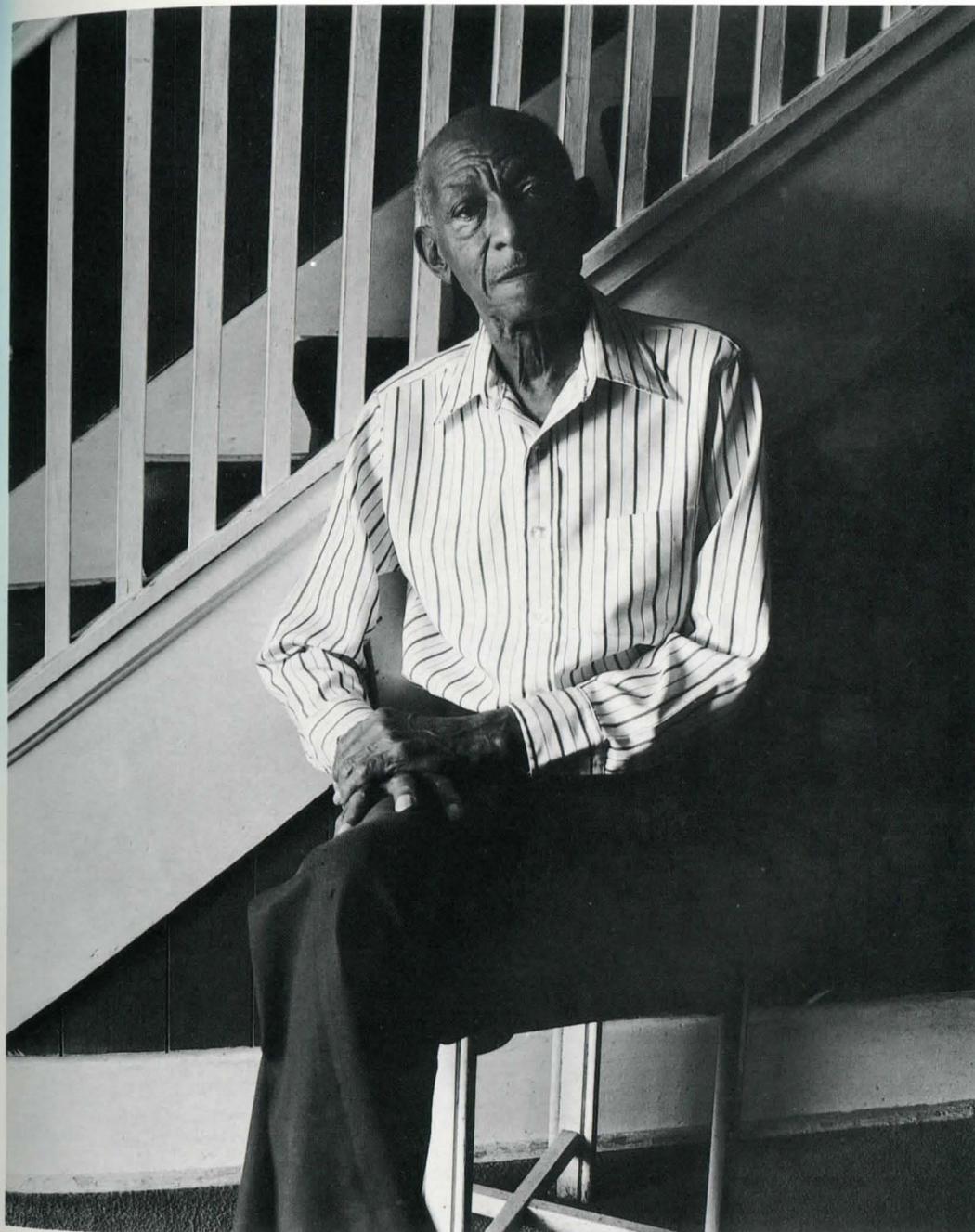
William McDuff

Since coming to Champaign from Warrensburg, Kentucky, in 1931 Mr. McDuff has supported himself through "odd jobs for private families."

He arrived in the heart of the Depression and says, "All I remember is work."

"I've been here 46 years," he muses. "I'm going to stay, I guess."

At age 88 he is most pleased to be "just sitting here livin'."



Pauline Nesbitt

In 1920, when she was seven years old, Mrs. Nesbitt came to Champaign from her home in Homer, Illinois, "because we wanted to live where there were other Black people. We were the only Black people in Homer."

For many years her husband worked at the Inman Hotel. They raised ten children (five boys and five girls).

When she came to Champaign, Mrs. Nesbitt recalls, most streets were unpaved and the North End was all white – mostly German.



Reverend James R. Wilson

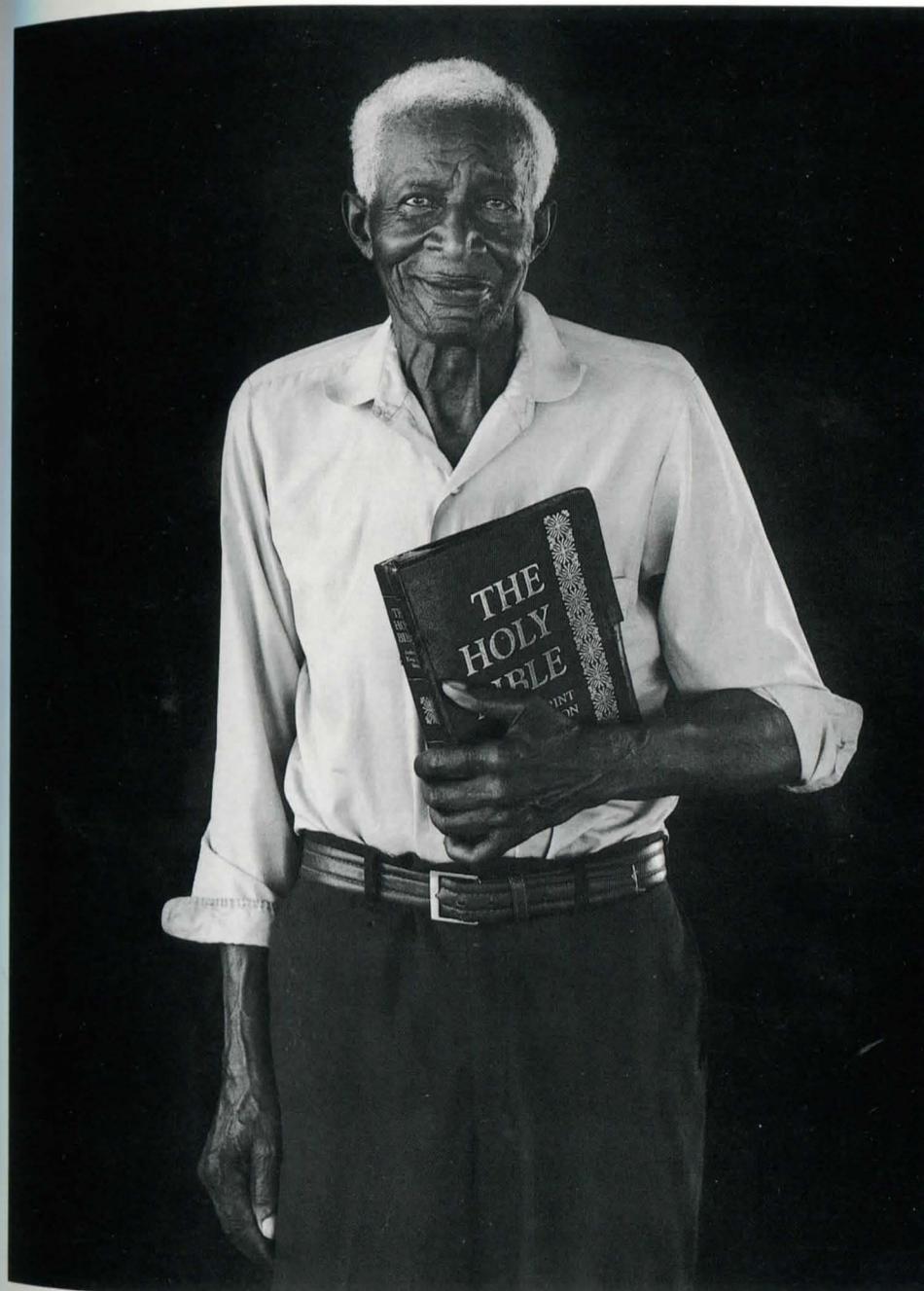
During his lifetime Reverend Wilson has done "janitor work everywhere."

In 1930 he went to school in New York City and became a minister for the Church of God and Saints of Christ.

Now 85 years old, he came to Champaign when he was sixteen "because there was work here." But he also found "restriction on where colored people could live."

His wife, Ida Octavia Wilson, now deceased, was the first Black woman to run for the Champaign School Board.

Mr. Wilson is both proud and thankful "that the Lord let me live this long."



Rosie L. Williams

During her lifetime, Mrs. Williams "worked in everything, worked night and day. I worked in the laundry for civil service for 21 years and 7 months." She also worked as a domestic. "I worked hard for nothing."

She is a member of Salem Baptist Church and several organizations including Eastern Star, Daughters of the Sphinx, and Daughters of the Elks.

Born in 1896 in Tiptonville, Tennessee, she came to Champaign in 1946 after her mother died. "I started out in the Ozark Mountains, then to St. Louis, then here."

In the nearly forty years she has lived in north Champaign, she has seen "houses torn down" and the neighborhood dramatically changed.



Reverend William H. Donaldson

Reverend Donaldson first came to Champaign in 1934 when he became minister of Salem Baptist Church. He is especially pleased by "the multitude of Black churches" in the community.

Born and raised in DeValls, Arkansas, he first worked at General Motors in Detroit before becoming a minister in Michigan in 1931.

He notes the growth of Champaign-Urbana and "the opening of doors for Black people" that has occurred in recent years. There was a time, he recalls, when the University of Illinois did not allow Black students to live on campus.

He is "most proud of my ministry. It has been my life – serving people and being called to Salem Baptist Church."



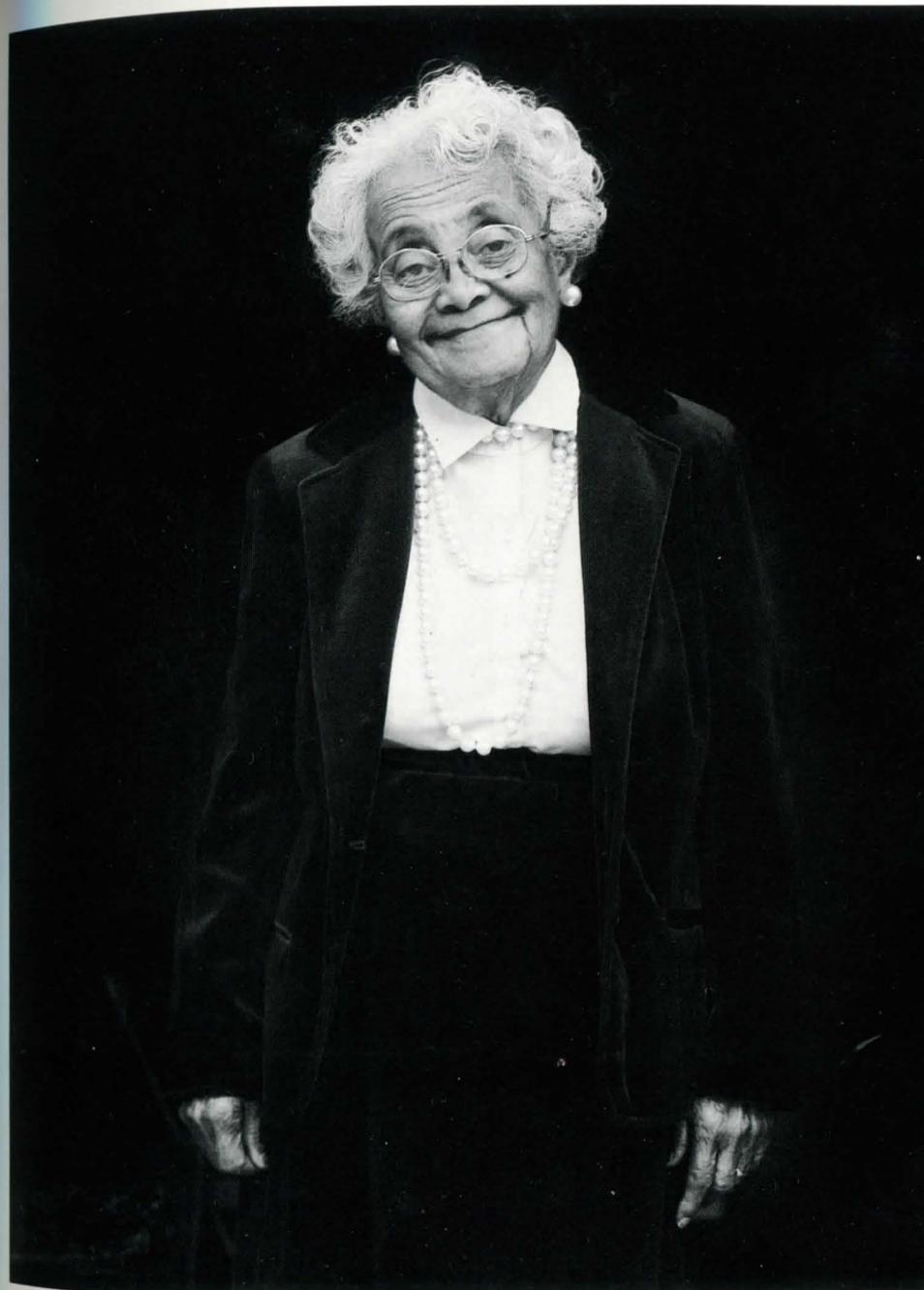
Sarah Scott

Now 91 years old, Sarah "Muddy" Scott came to Champaign in 1911. "My dad died and I went to live with my aunt while my mother came here to find work. Then she sent for me." Her fondest memory is of meeting Alice Lee Pope with her mother at the train station when she first arrived in Champaign.

For nearly fifty years Mrs. Scott did housework. "I raised my two children when it was very hard to do so. They grew up and had children and raised my grandchildren well. My grandsons are famous jazz people."

She was dubbed "Muddy" when her son couldn't quite pronounce "mama." She is now affectionately known by the nickname not only to her family, but her many friends in the community.

When she first came to Champaign, she recalls, "There was a lot of segregation. You couldn't eat anywhere in town but the Illinois Central railroad station. They had a cafe, but Blacks had to stand or sit at a bar. They couldn't sit at a table."



Ruth Hines

Born in Champaign in 1893, Mrs. Hines spent her entire life in the community.

A mother and housewife, she raised nine children (five girls and four boys).

For many years she boarded Black students at her home on East Park Street at a time when they were not allowed to live on campus.



Taylor Thomas

Mr. Thomas has worked for the federal government in Indianapolis. He has taught in Danville and he has worked at Douglass Center. But he is best known as a teacher and administrator at Urbana High School from 1956 to 1977.

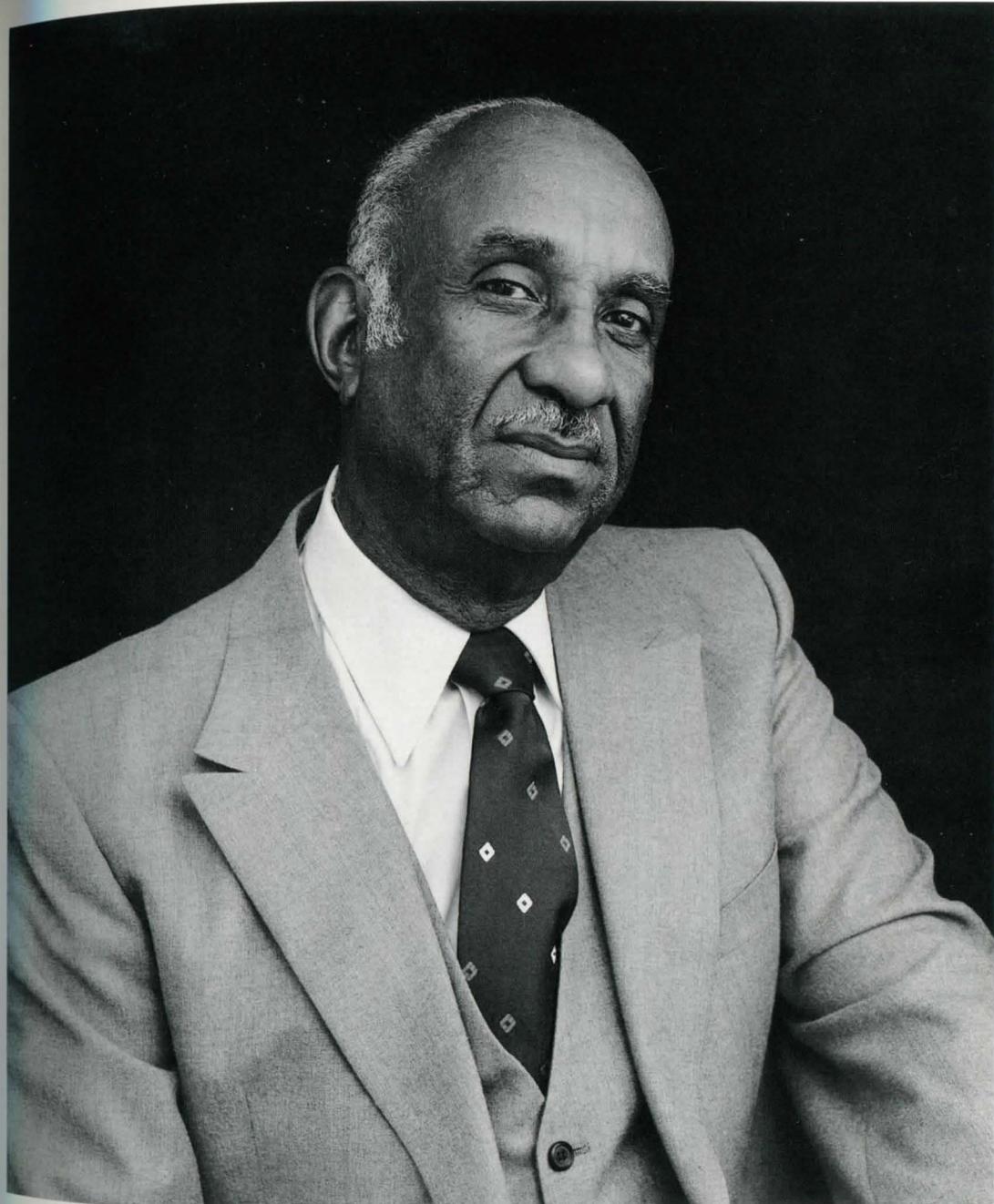
During the 1940s he was President of the local branch of the NAACP and he remains actively involved in volunteer work with the United Way, Family Service, and other service organizations.

His grandparents came to Champaign in 1880 and Mr. Thomas was born and raised in the community. As a youth he remembers the KKK marching down Neil Street to a cross burning.

He also recounts how when he was in school he was not allowed in the band and, although he played football, he could not join the "C Club." He had his first milkshake on a trip out of town because Blacks could not go into Champaign drugstores.

He has seen the community grow and certain changes made, but acknowledges that discrimination still exists.

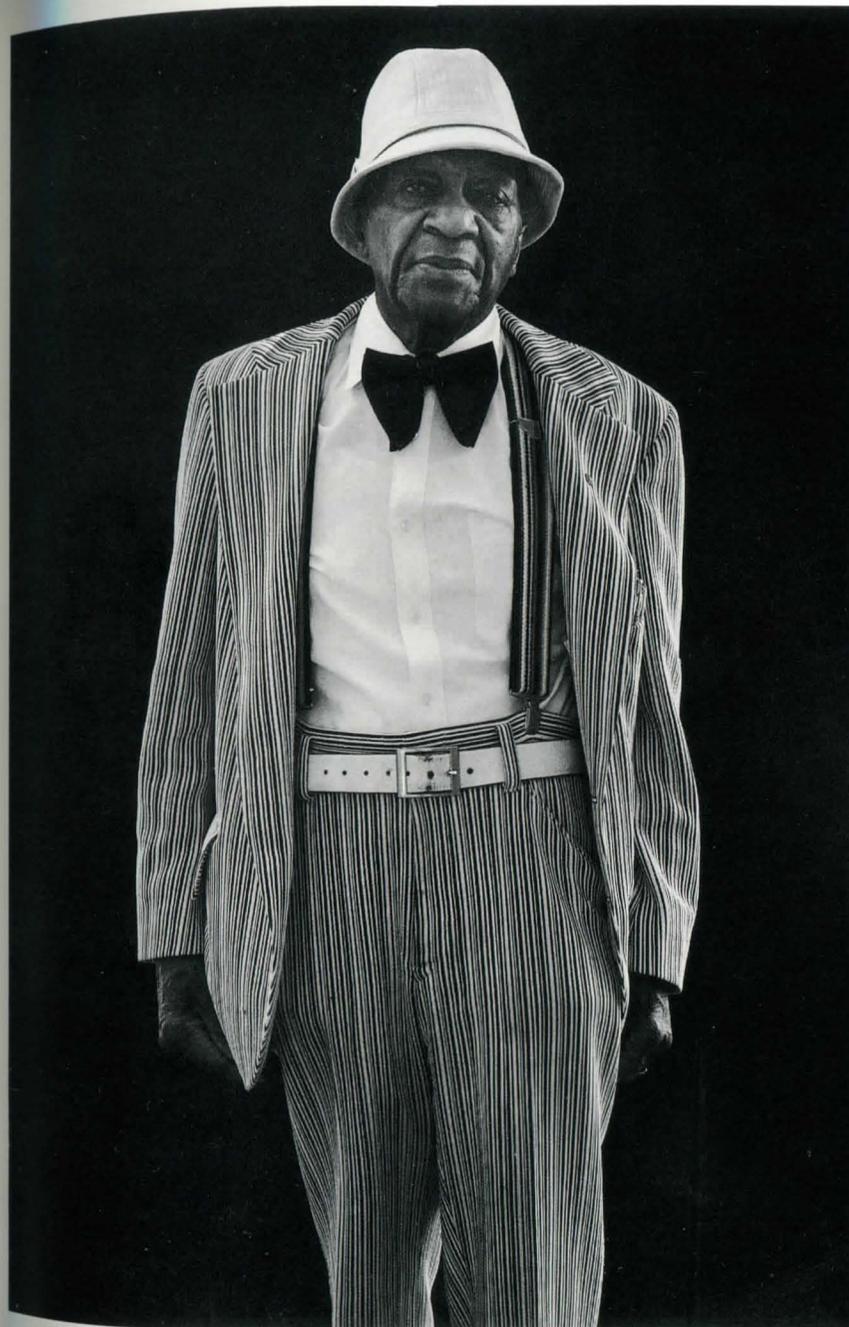
He is most proud to have "a good marriage" and to have received recognition from the Black community.



Clarence Hill

For many years Mr. Hill, a self-employed janitor in downtown Champaign, went about his work always dressed in Sunday best. As usual he dressed elegantly for this photograph.

He came to Champaign from Centralia in 1928 and recalls the irony that Blacks could not eat in the same restaurants in which they were employed as cooks, dishwashers, and janitors.

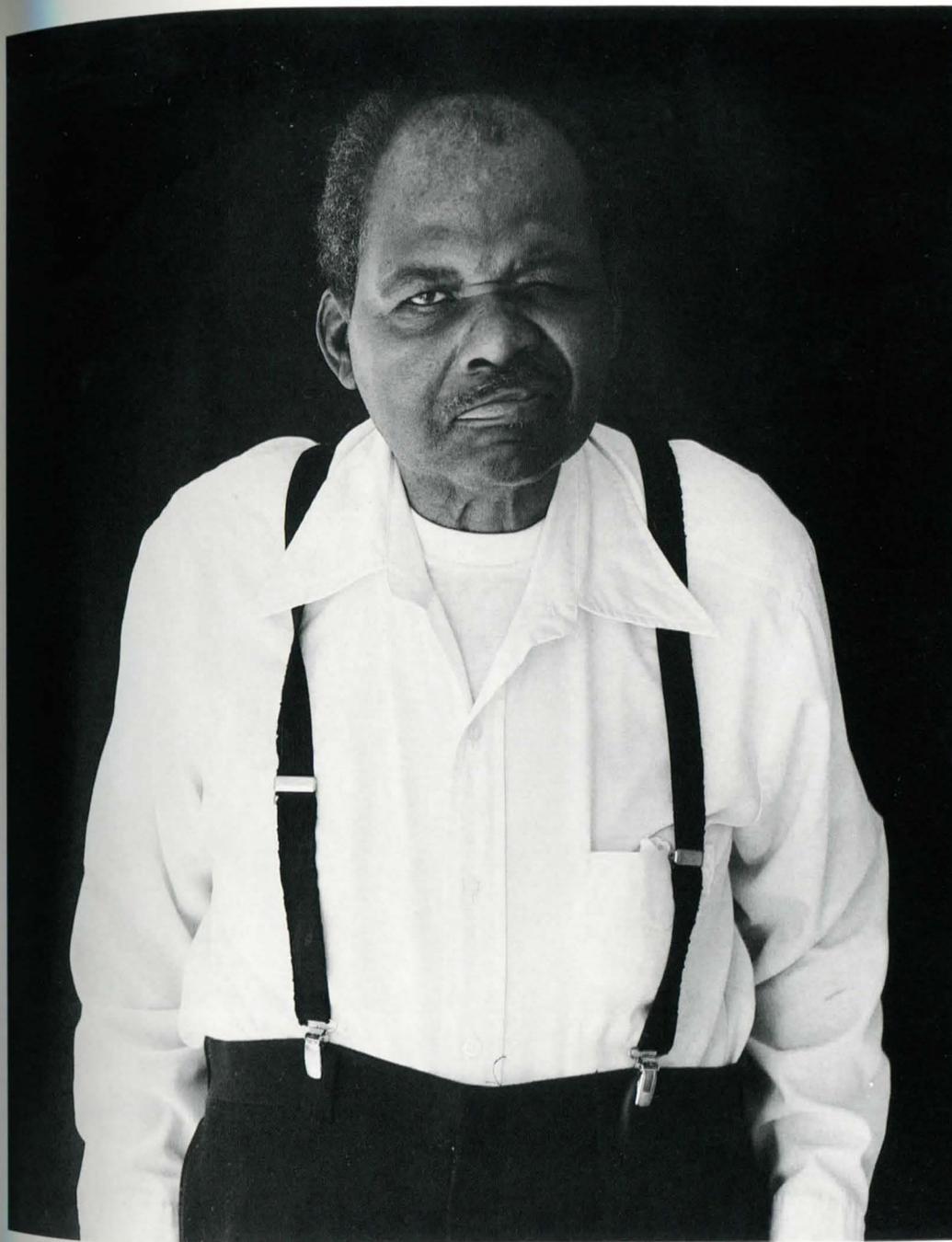


Wardell Jackson

Born on a plantation in Mississippi in 1907, Mr. Jackson came to Champaign in 1927 after living briefly in Memphis.

He has worked in a garage, on the railroad, and on a boat on the Mississippi River, but is best known as the owner of the Champaign Eagles, a Black semi-pro baseball team.

Now retired, he still loves the game. "If you don't turn on the baseball game, he gets mad," his sister says. "He wants to watch baseball on TV all the time."



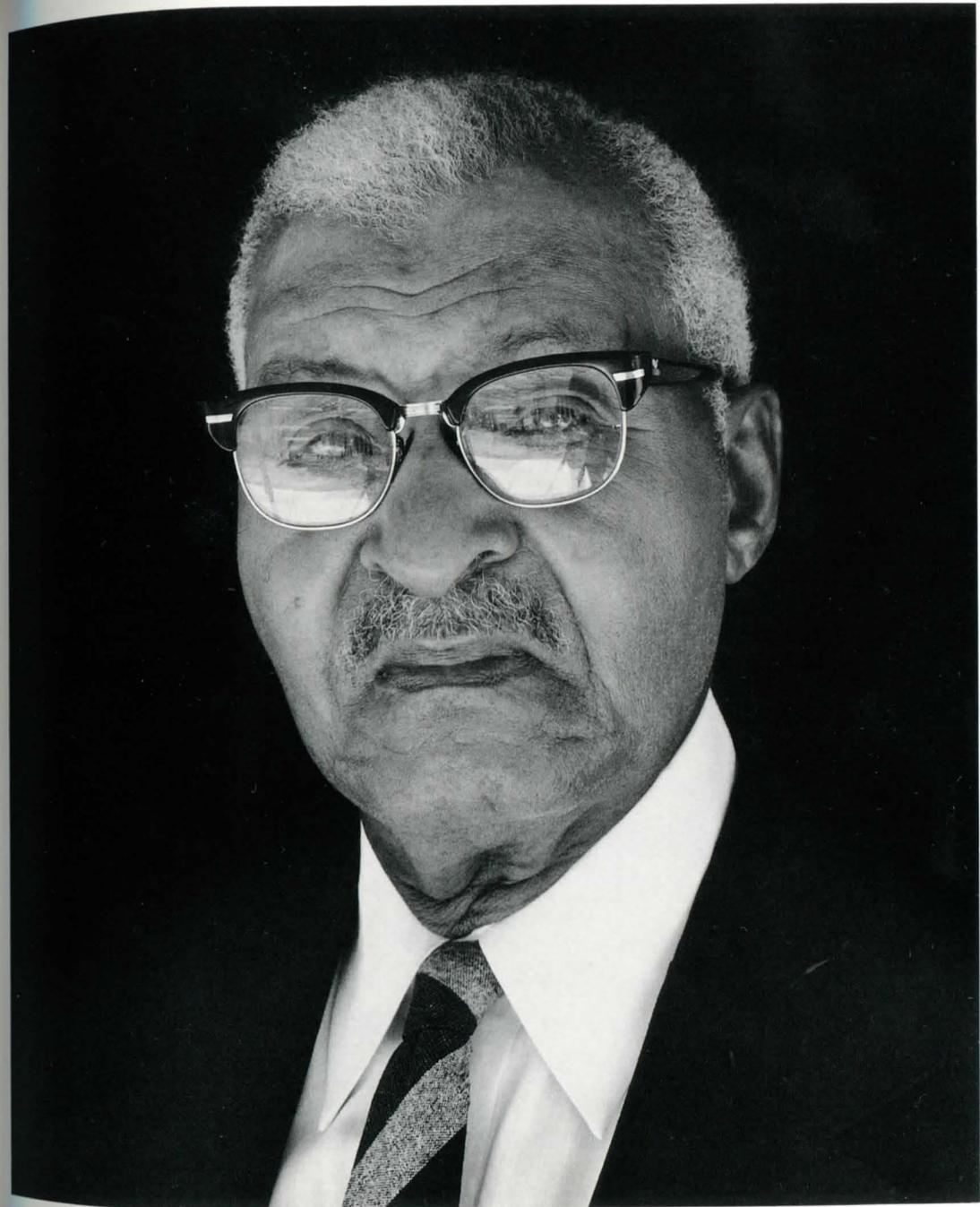
Allen Rivers

In 1919, when he was seventeen, Allen Rivers came to Champaign from Cairo, Illinois, with two aunts who were raising him after his mother died. Retired school teachers, they opened a beauty shop in Champaign.

Years later, in 1935, Mr. Rivers became the first Black police officer in Champaign. "I made \$140.00 a month when I started, then \$150.00 after a six-month probation," he recalls. "That was a lot of money then."

He says he had no difficulty getting the job. "I applied, passed the exam, and was hired."

He remained with the force until his retirement in 1960.



Blanche Harris

Born and raised in Champaign, Mrs. Harris is best known as the editor and publisher of *Illinois Times*, a weekly Black newspaper well known in the Black community.

Mrs. Harris and her husband, Edgar Harris, published the newspaper out of their home from approximately 1949 to 1967.



Les Jamerson

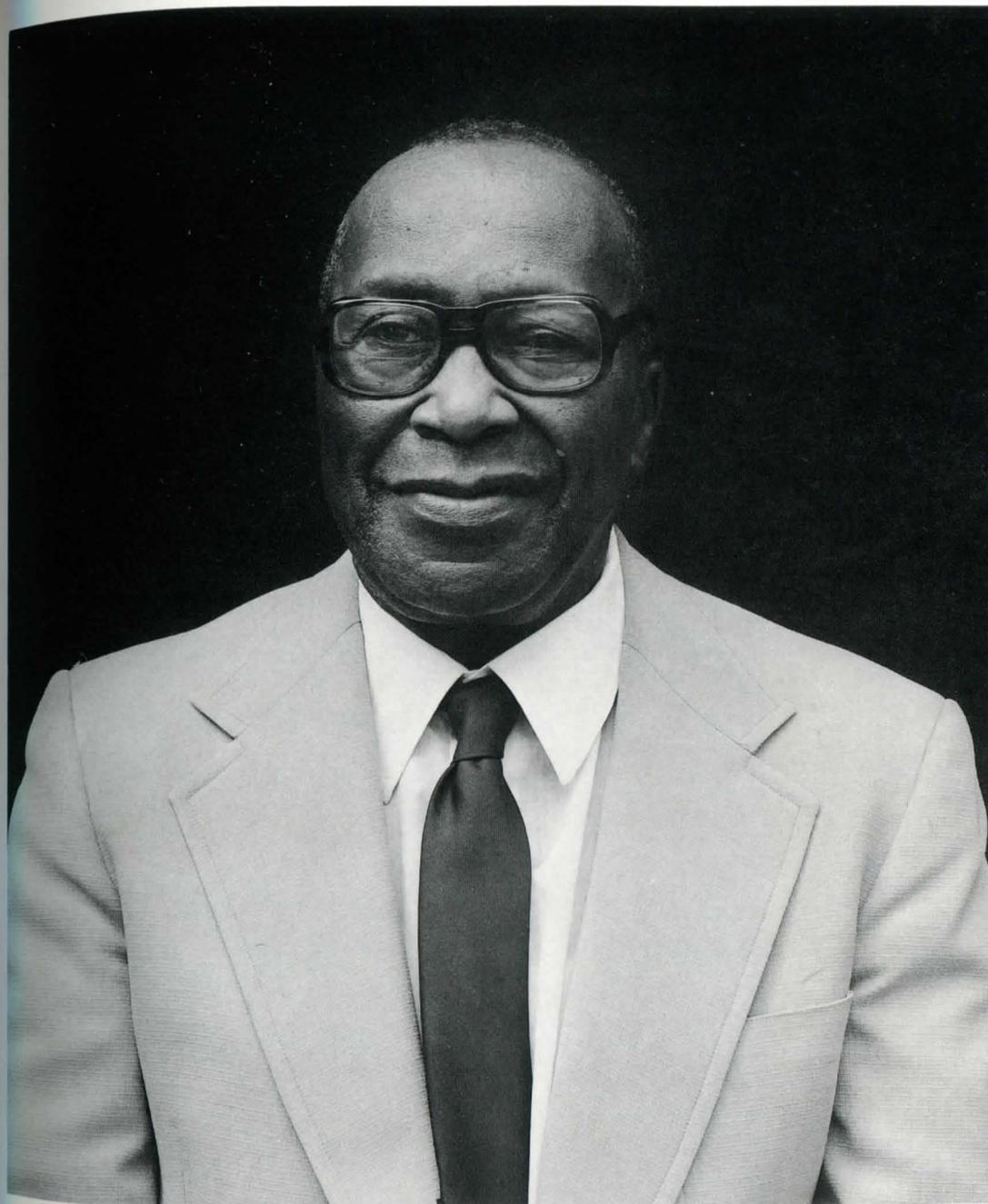
A left halfback for the University of Illinois in 1927, Les Jamerson was once the fastest man in Champaign-Urbana.

He played his freshman year at the U. of I., but when he and the other Black player on the team did not receive their numerals, he transferred to A & I State College, an all-Black school in Nashville. He played quarterback for three seasons there.

Following his football career he returned to Champaign and checked baggage at the Illinois Central railroad station from 1943 to 1975.

He has been involved in a number of community service projects with CETA, the Urban League, and other service organizations.

Born and raised in Champaign, he is especially proud of his family's long history in the community.

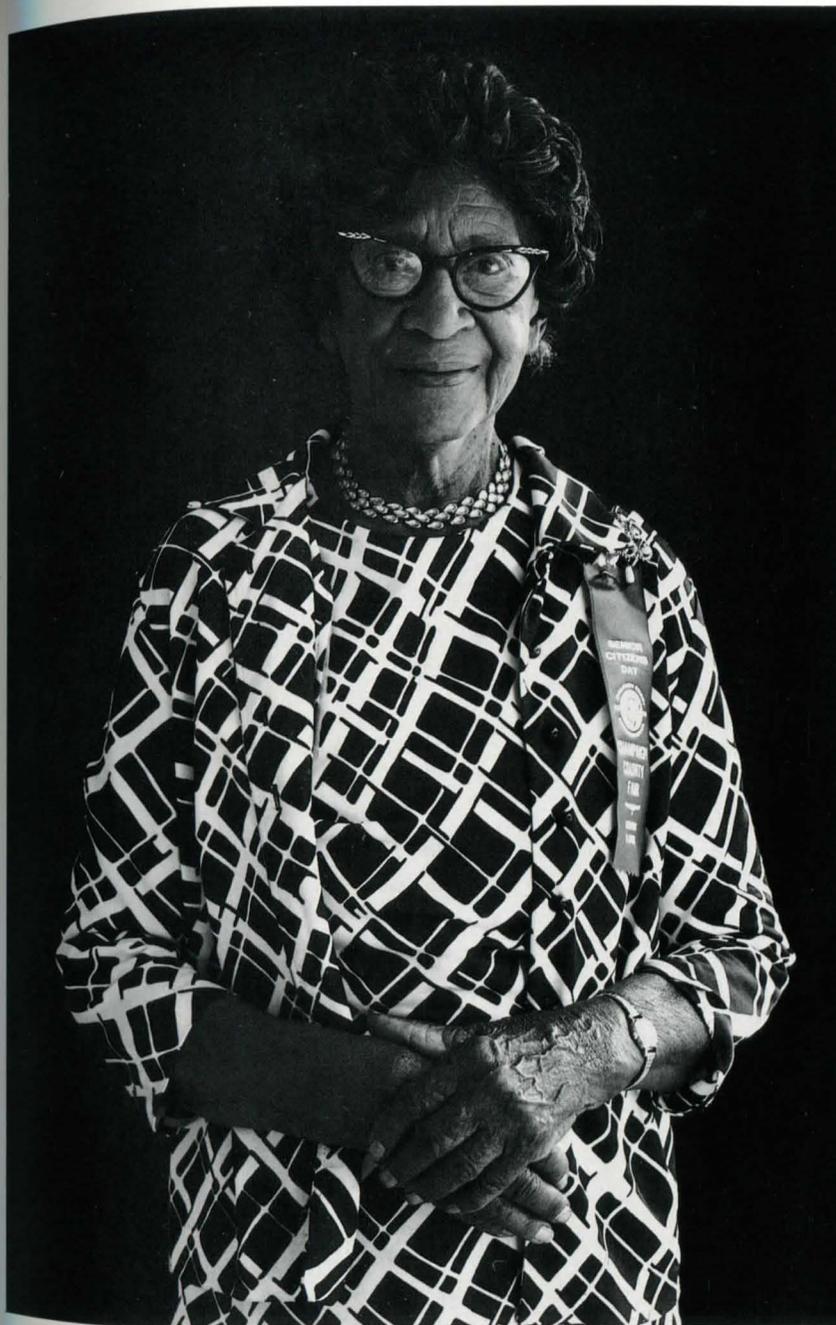


Ella Washington

Now 98 years old, Ella Washington came to Champaign "when I was a young girl." Born in Mississippi she came here to live with her sister.

She raised three boys and helped to support her family by doing "housework, laundry, and field work."

Over her many years in the community she has seen significant changes. "Black people can eat anywhere. They can live anywhere they want to if they have the money."



Virginia Steward Rodgers

Mrs. Rodgers was born in Danville in 1911. When she was just a few weeks old her family moved to Champaign.

She has worked as a stock girl in retail stores and as a cook in fraternity and sorority houses. Over the years she has seen people's attitudes change. "Jobs are opening up, but not enough."

She recalls that when she was in high school in the 1920s Blacks couldn't use the swimming pool during school hours. They had to wait until four o'clock. As a result she says, "I never took swimming. My parents taught me that nobody was better than I. So, if I had to wait until four o'clock, I said the hell with it."

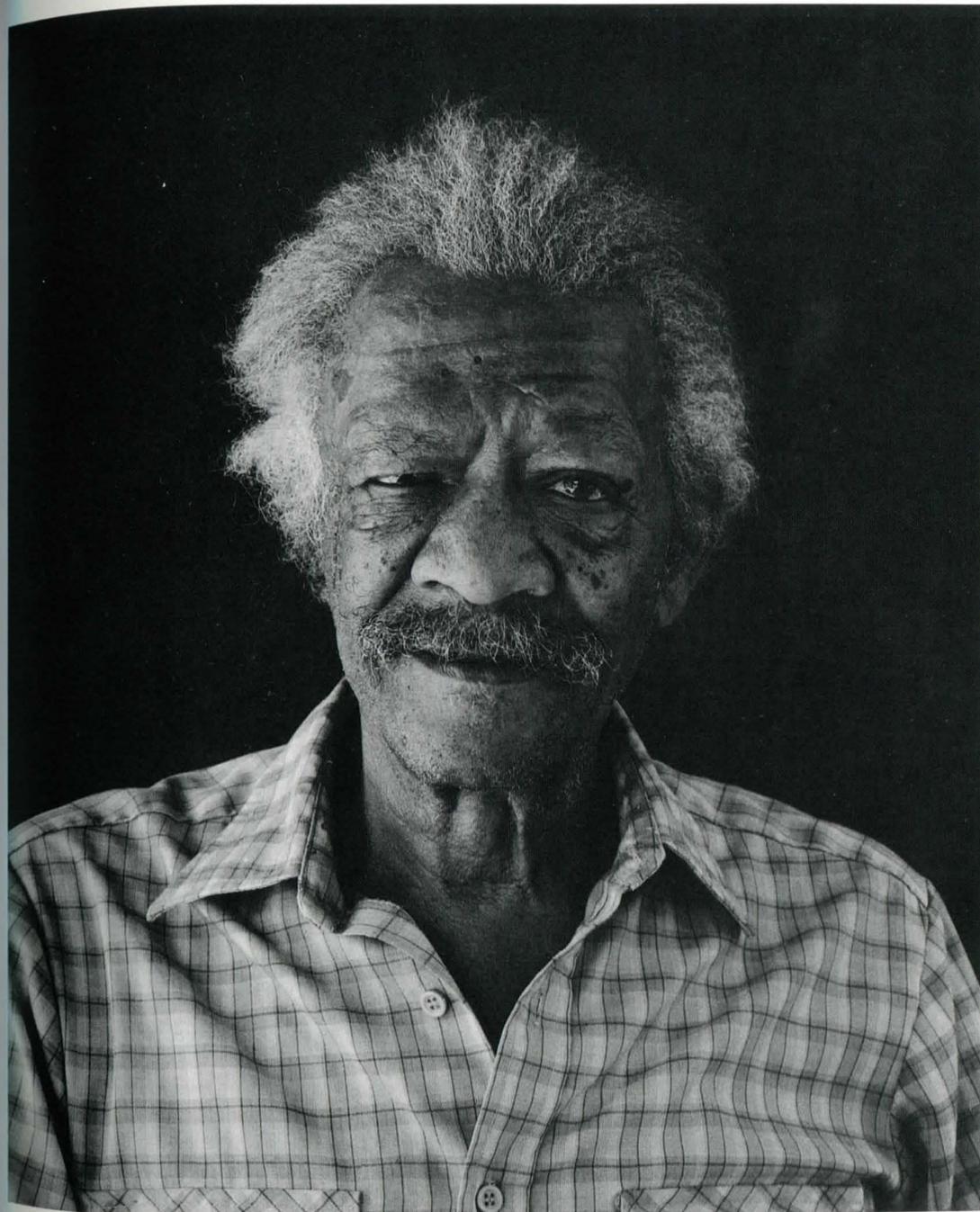
She is especially proud of her background, that she came from a good home and a good family in which she learned to value her heritage.



Ohren Houston Clark

Born in Paducah, Kentucky, in 1902, Mr. Clark first came to Champaign in 1916. "My father got a job at the Illinois Central Roundhouse, then sent for my mother and me."

For twenty-five years he worked in a garage before becoming a truck driver in the late forties. For the next twenty years he worked in Wisconsin and South Dakota hauling coal in a five-ton dump truck and "lumber, furniture, whatever" on a stake-bed truck.



Grace Hensley

Born in Henry County, Tennessee, in 1899, Mrs. Hensley first moved to Fulton, Tennessee, where she and her husband farmed until 1948. "Farming got to the place where you couldn't make nothing. After World War II they began putting all the land into pasture." So she and her family moved to Champaign when one of her sons got a job in a body shop with a war buddy.

From 1948 until her retirement in 1968 Mrs. Hensley did housework to help support her family. She is happy "that I raised six children and never had any problem out of them. They all have professions."



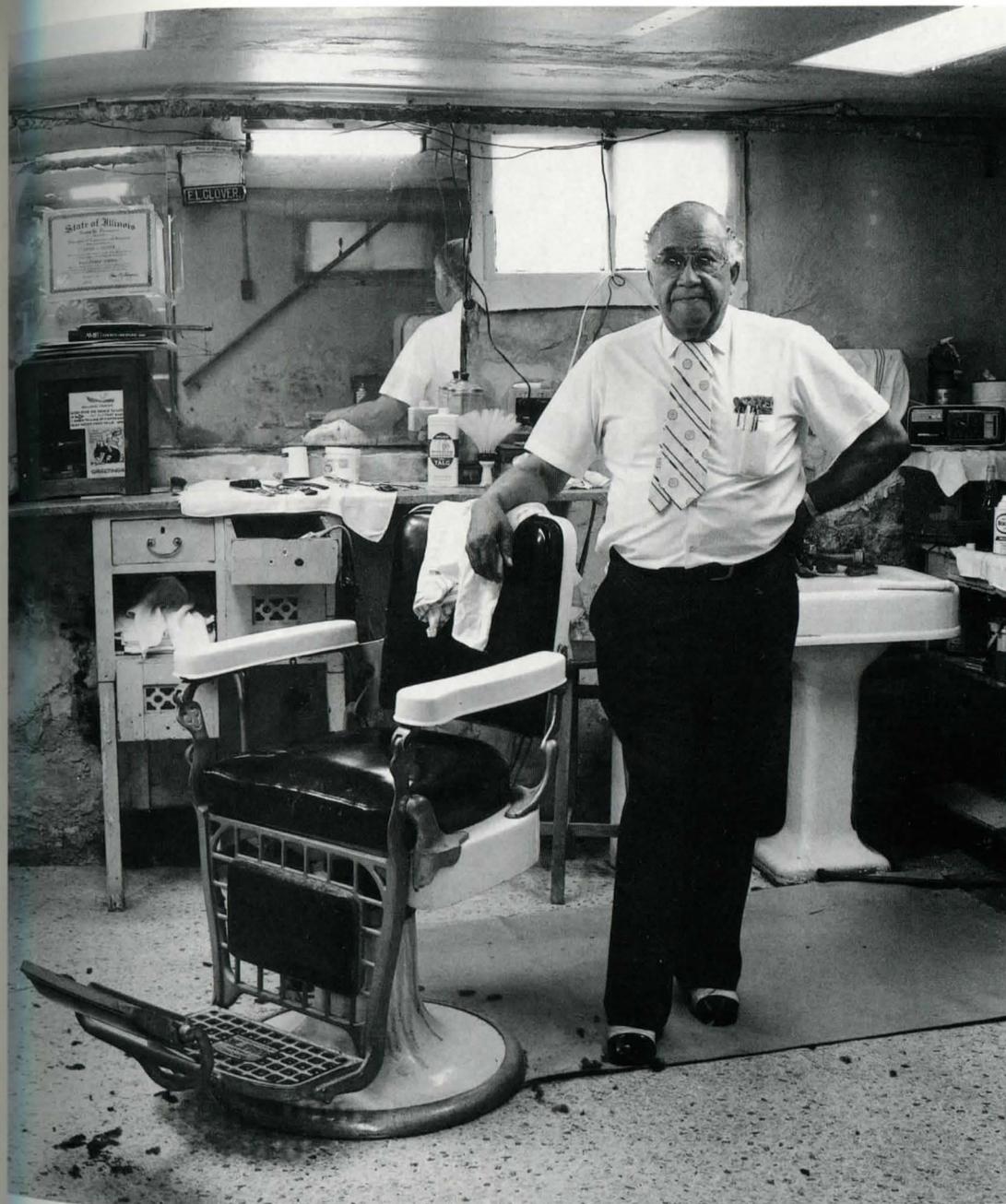
Eddie Glover

Since 1922 Eddie Glover has been a barber. He has worked in various locations including the Waldorf in Toledo and Jordan's Barber Shop, a twelve-chair shop located across from Kuhn's clothing store in the 1920s.

From 1941-1946 he was also owner and coach of the Champaign Colts, a Black semi-pro baseball team that played teams from Seymour, Buckley, Royal, Gifford, Flatville, and elsewhere in the E & I League. Their first year in the league they won the championship.

Mr. Glover recalls the days when 5th and Goodwin were the only north/south streets that were paved in Champaign-Urbana and University and Park the only paved streets running east and west.

He has operated his own barber shop out of his home since June, 1936, and is especially proud to be an established member of the community.



Samuel McHaney

In 1931 Mr. McHaney went into partnership with Mr. Joshua Parker who, at the time, had the first Black funeral home in Champaign. In 1933 he started his own business on Dublin Street in Urbana. He later moved to East Vine.

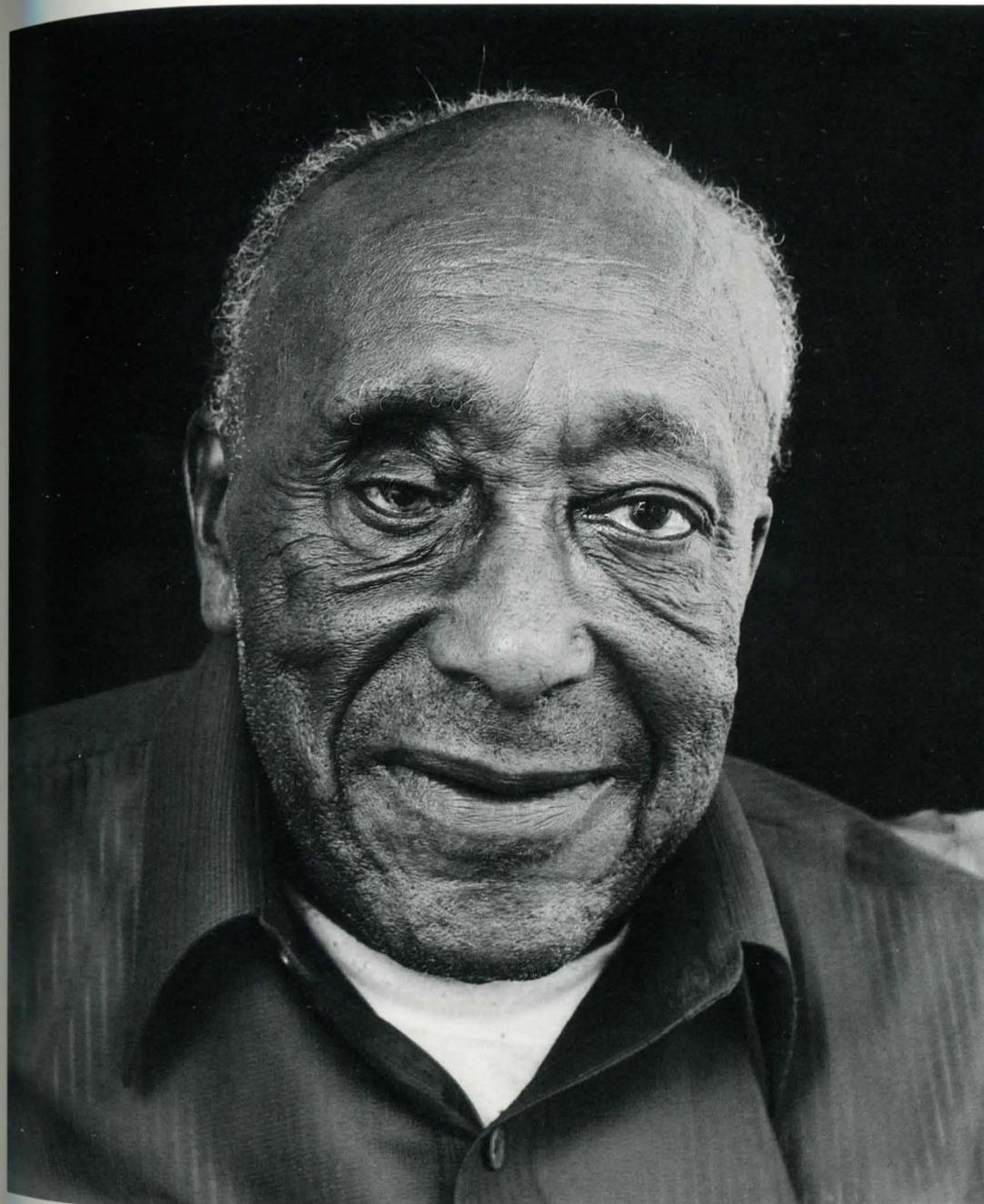
He operated the funeral home for nearly four decades. Over several years he gradually went blind and finally sold the business in 1972.



Dawson Banks, Sr.

Born in 1898 in Monticello, Georgia, Mr. Banks came to Champaign in 1925 and got a job as a fireman at Clifford and Jacobs Steel Mill where about 15 Black men were employed.

He worked there to support his wife and six children until 1952 when he opened Banks Bar-B-Q, a hang-out especially popular among teen-agers.



Idabell Banks

Mrs. Banks came to Champaign from Atlanta in 1925, shortly after her husband got a job here. She was born in Monticello, Georgia, in 1898.

A housewife, she raised six children and occasionally worked with her husband in Banks Bar-B-Q.



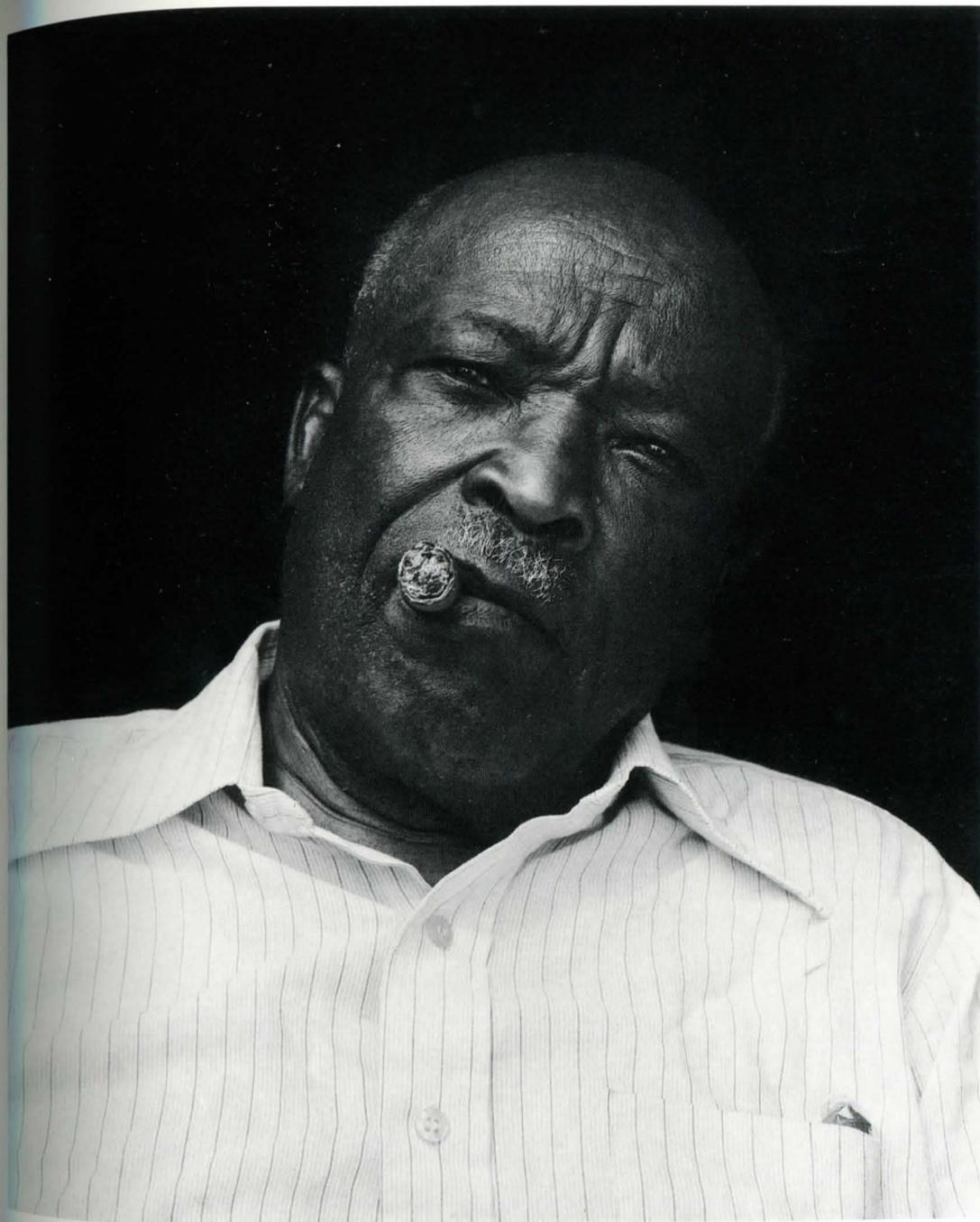
Frank Hendricks

Mr. Hendricks came to Champaign from his home in Columbia, Mississippi, in 1931 looking for work as "a body and fender man."

He first worked at White Motor Sales before opening his own business, Hendricks Body Shop, at 602 East Vine (now a vacant lot) in 1941.

At the time Mr. Hendricks recalls, "They said a Black man couldn't do this type of work. There was no other Black body shop between here and Chicago. This was the first one in this town, I know."

He is most proud that he was "able to keep my shop going for all these years – for 42 years."



Ruth Hendricks

When she was eight years old Mrs. Hendricks came to Champaign from Little Rock, Arkansas.

For a number of years she worked as manager of cafeteria food service for the University of Illinois dormitories.

She has also been active in community service and church work at Salem Baptist Church. She is currently President of Douglass Senior Citizens' Center.

She is encouraged that job opportunities and living conditions for Blacks have improved. "When I was a girl Black people all had to live in one section – the North End. No matter how qualified we could only get jobs in the service areas as maids and cooks."

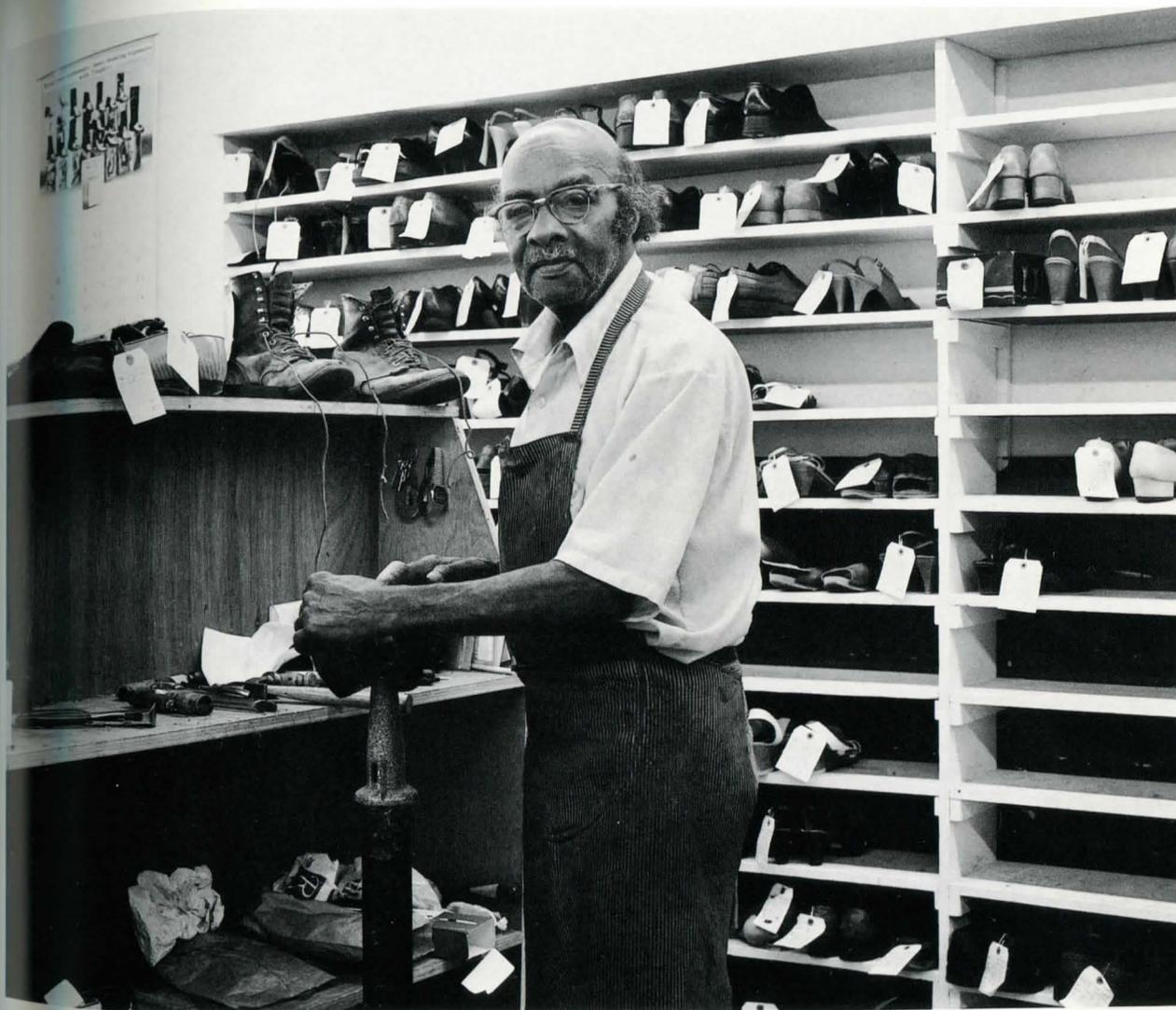


Willie Caraway

In 1924, when he was twelve years old, Willie Caraway came to Champaign from New Orleans to join his mother.

He first worked as a dishwasher, then second cook, at the Inman Hotel. In 1929, after attending school in Decatur, he was employed as a shoe repairman at Brownies Shoe Repair where he still works part-time.

"Everything has changed," he says in reference to the twin cities. His strongest memory is of the "Inter-urban on west Church Street and south on Neil Street. I miss it."

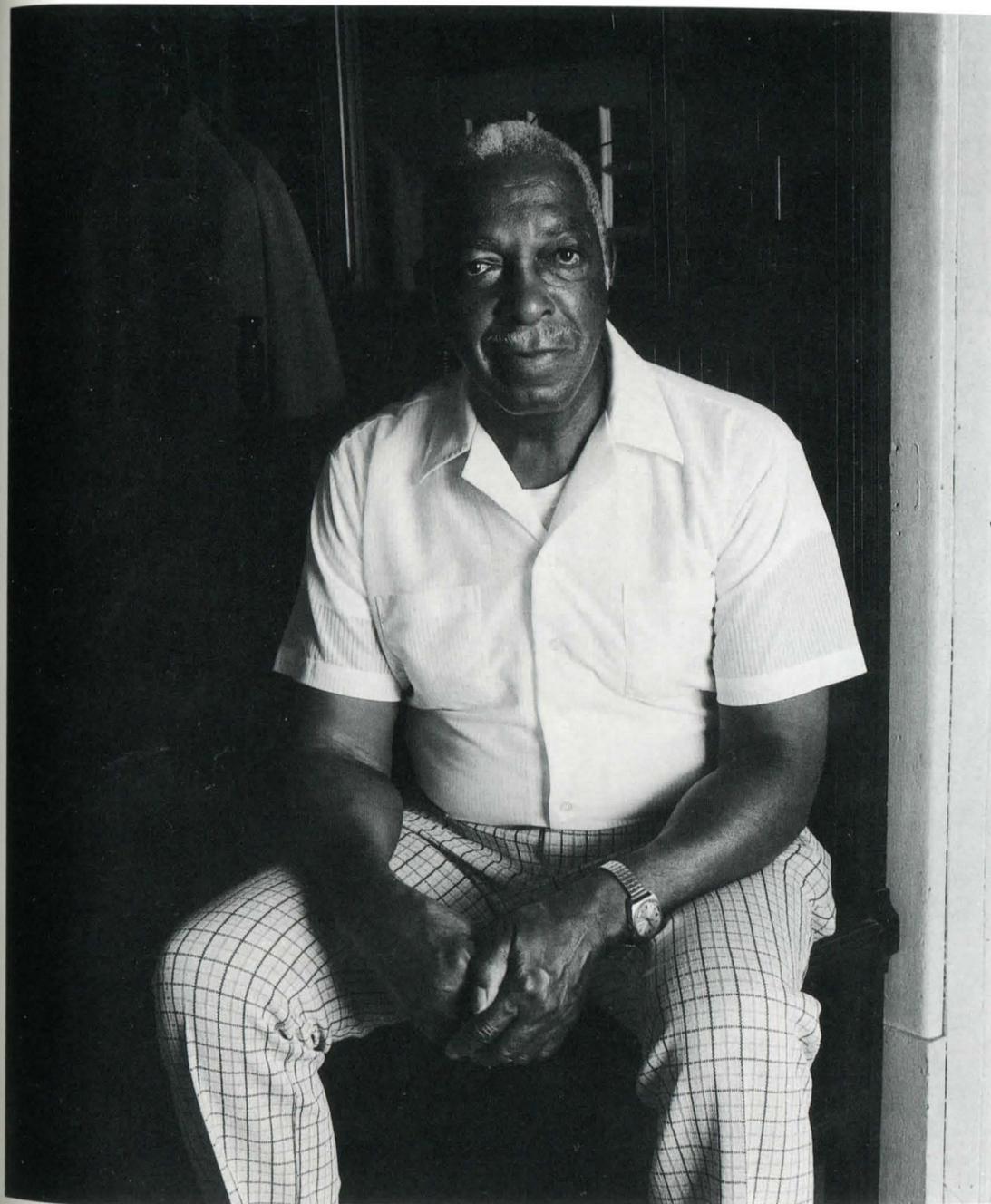


Clarence Jackson

In 1922, when he was twelve years old, Mr. Jackson came to Champaign from his home in Alton, Illinois. His father died in an oil explosion in Wood River and his mother came here as a cook.

From 1933 to 1940 Mr. Jackson was a maintenance man at D'Andre Beauty and Barber Salon on north Neil Street. During World War II he served in the Army, after which he became head custodian at Willard School for sixteen years and then at Marquette School until his retirement in 1976.

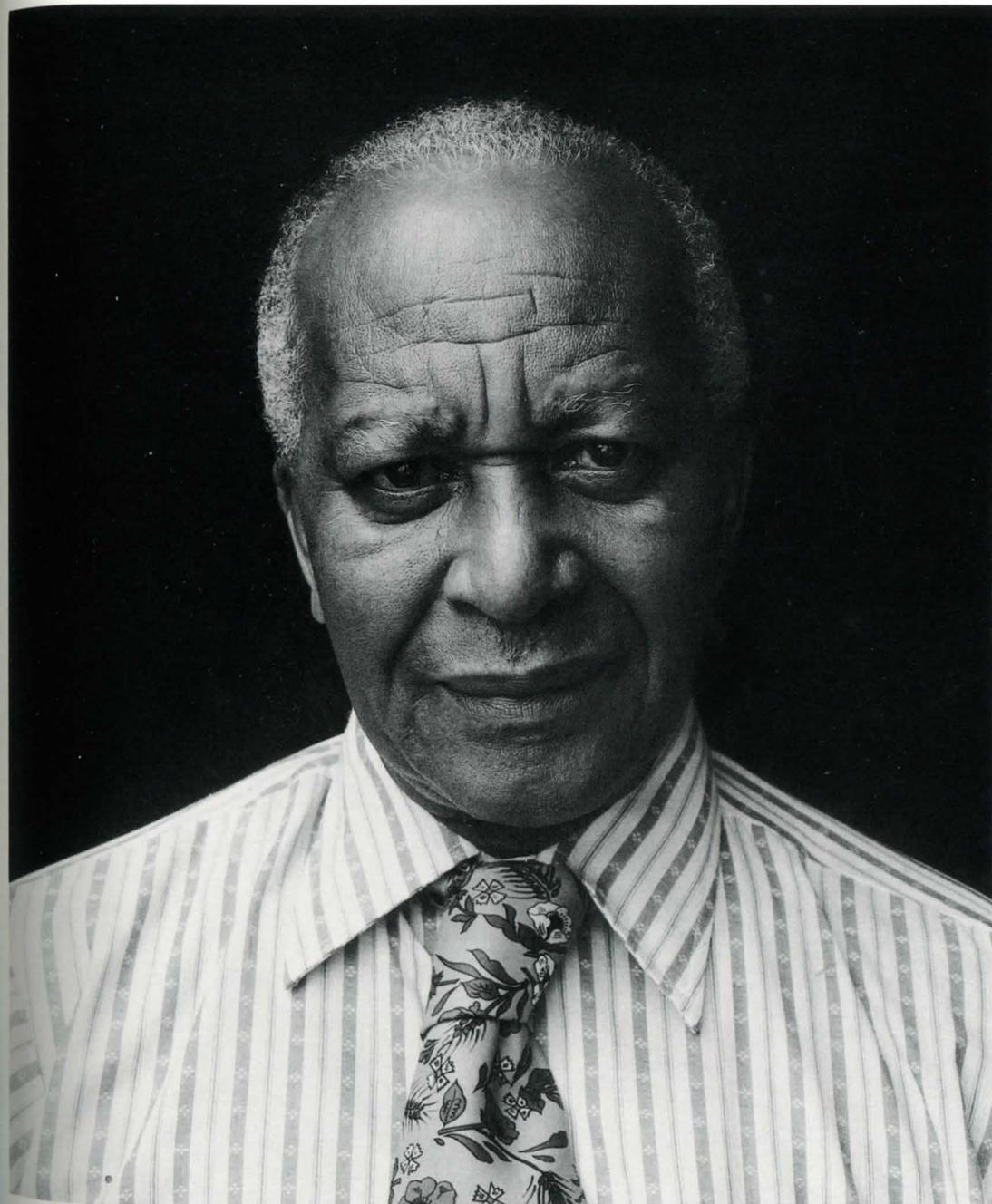
He remembers "downtown Champaign used to be really nice. There used to be trees down there. It was real pretty - used to be a meeting spot for people on Saturdays."



Millard Gray

Millard Gray worked briefly on the railroad and on a farm before coming to Champaign in 1943. For 35 years he then worked as a kitchen laborer in University food service.

He enjoys church work and until recently sang in the choir at Salem Baptist Church.



Ruth Gray

Mrs. Gray came to Champaign with her husband in 1943. She has been an active member of Bethel AME Church and is also interested in politics. In the 1950s she was Urbana committeewoman for the Republican Party.

In noting the changes that have occurred in the twin cities, she recalls, "It was very prejudiced when we came here. Housing was segregated. We couldn't eat in a lot of restaurants. Black students couldn't live on campus."



James Lewis Algee

Born in Atwood, Tennessee, Mr. Algee came to Champaign in 1933 when he was twenty years old.

For many years a highly regarded chef in the Champaign area, he worked at the Urbana Lincoln Hotel, Katsinas Restaurant, Jumer's Castle Lodge, and the Lamplighter.

He especially valued his family and his reputation as a fine chef.

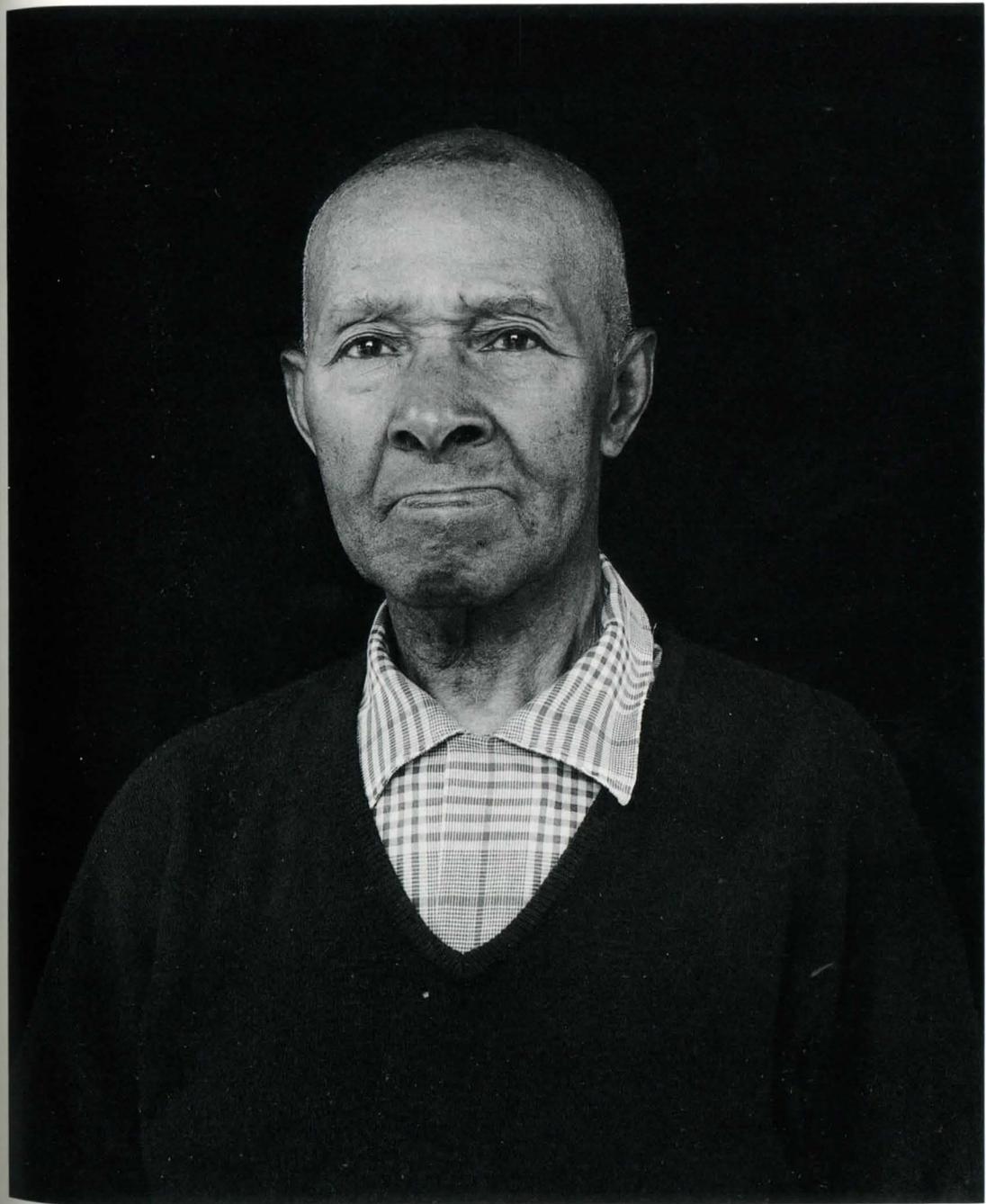


Willie Holt

Born on Christmas Day, 1900, in Paris, Tennessee, where his family farmed, Mr. Holt came to Champaign in 1921.

He's done "all kinds of work," first at the Illinois Central Coal Chute and then at Clifford-Jacobs forging plant. During the Depression he worked in the WPA and from World War II until his retirement in the mid-sixties he had his own sanitary hauling business.

All these years he says, "I was always able to work and support my family."



Effie Holt

In the thirties and forties Mrs. Holt worked for "private families" to help support her own family. "I raised five children during the Depression." She is especially thankful that she's lived to see her children grown.

She enjoys fishing and recounts warmly how her children bought her a rod and reel and "told me to go fishing."

Her family came to Champaign from Tennessee in 1924 because they were "trying to do better."



Homer Chavis

In 1920, when he was twenty years old, Mr. Chavis came to Champaign from his home in Danville and opened Royal Cleaners which is still the only Black-owned business in campustown.

In order to establish the business, his wife recalls, "He rode on a bicycle and knocked on people's doors. Business just doesn't fly into your hand."

A respected member of the community, he was for many years active in campus business organizations.



Luvata Bowles

Born in Henderson, Kentucky, in 1896, Mrs. Bowles came to Champaign with her husband in 1928.

In order to help support her eight children she worked as a cook on the University of Illinois campus for twenty-five years. "I'm most proud that I was able to work and put my children through school."

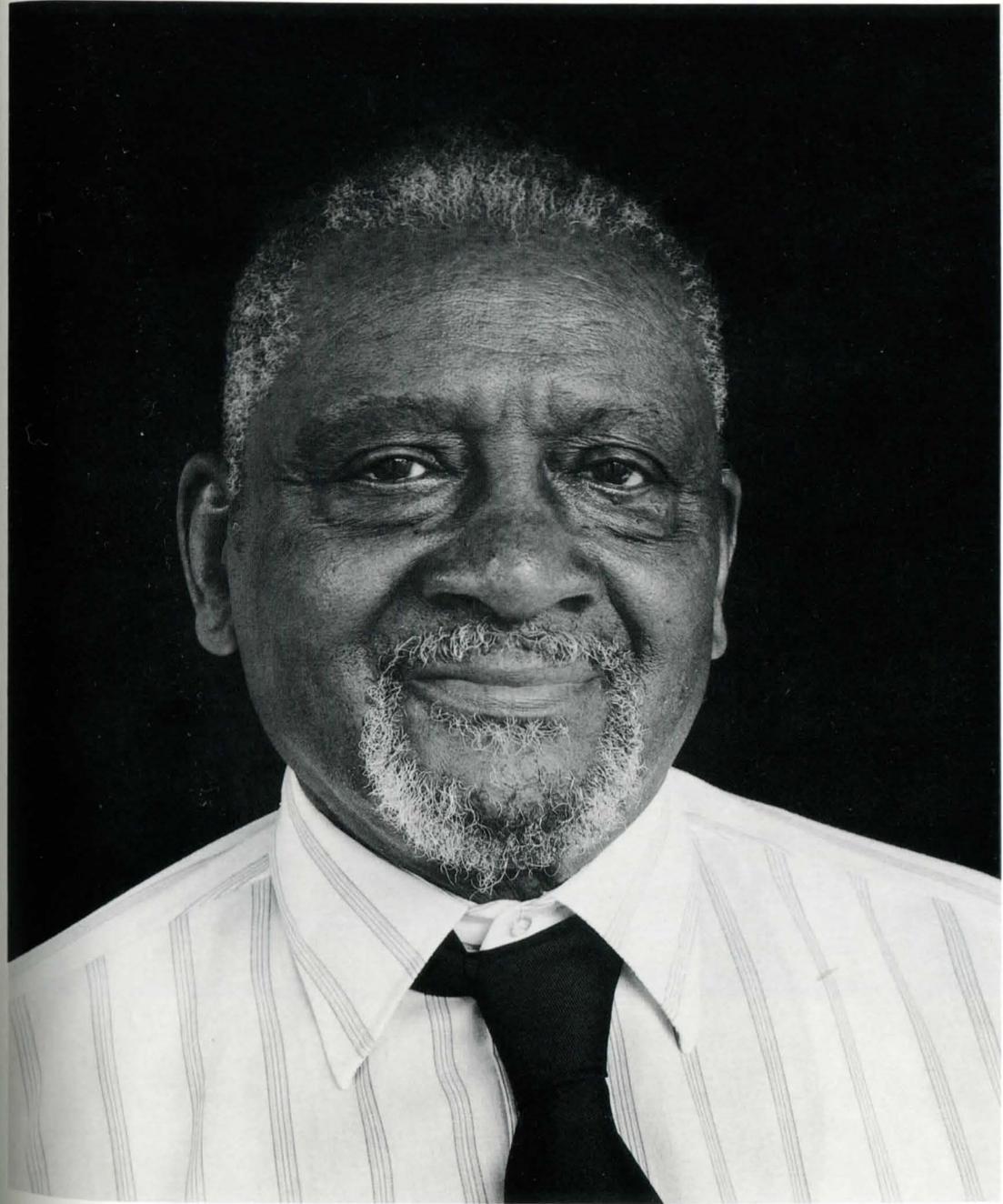


Theotto Bowles

Born in Madisonville, Kentucky, in 1900, Mr. Bowles came to Champaign in 1928 to take over his father's shoe shine shop in the Beardsley Hotel.

In 1931 he became a custodian and worked at various businesses in Champaign and at Chanute until his retirement.

He and his wife raised eight children. One of his sons became the first Black high school teacher in Champaign.



Al and James Baker

The Baker brothers have owned and operated the Blue Island Tavern since 1952 when they acquired the establishment from their uncle Mel Winfield who had started the business in 1935.

Originally at 605 North Poplar (now a vacant lot), the Bakers moved the tavern to its present location in 1962.

During that time they have, in Al's words, "seen the whole neighborhood cleared, whole families move away." The Blue Island Tavern now stands in a lone building at 514 North Poplar Street.

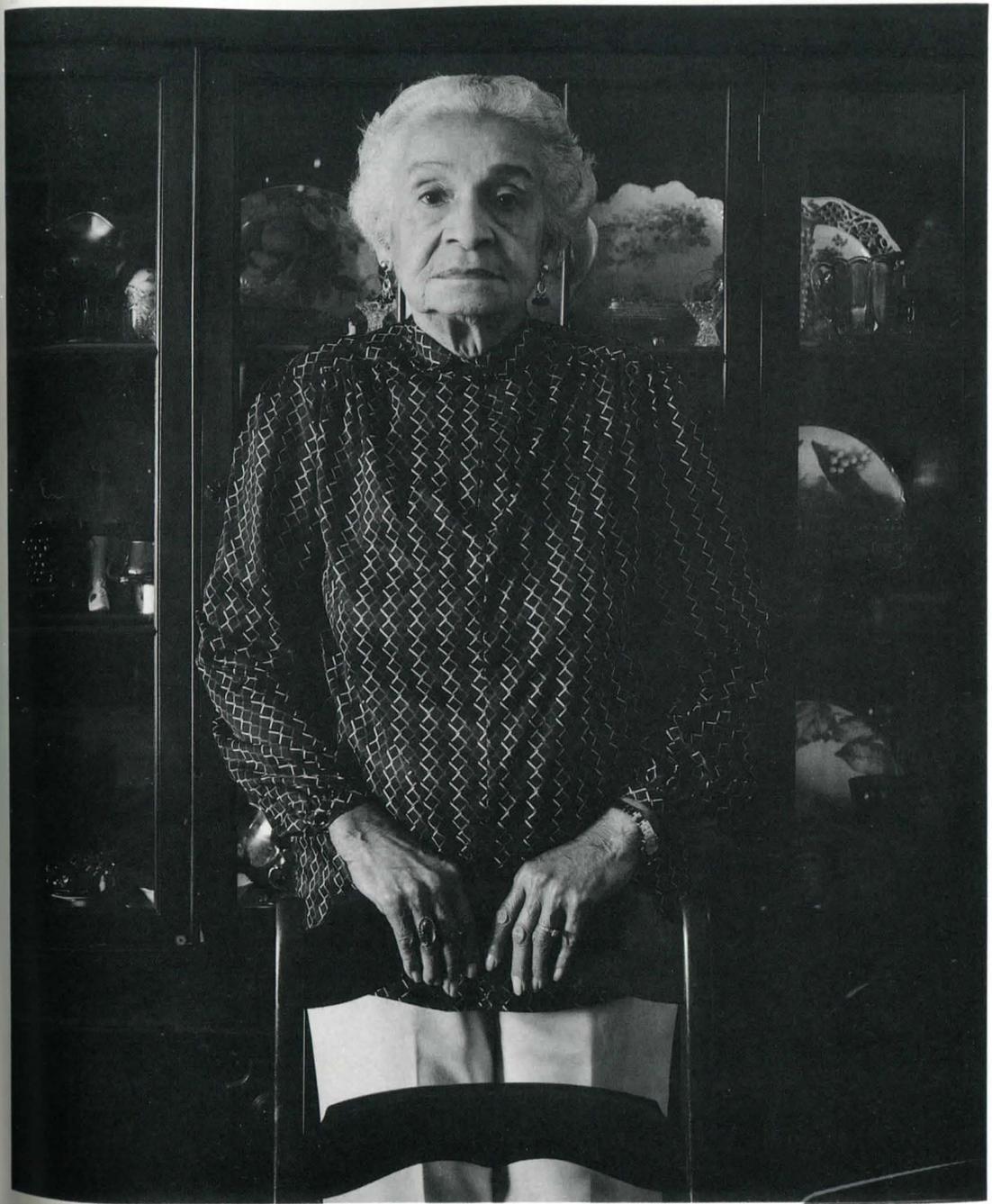


Mabel Bell

Although a relative newcomer to Champaign, Mrs. Bell owned and operated Bell's Catering Service from 1976-1981.

A native of Tuscola, she has lived in Decatur and Blue Mound where her husband was a high school principal.

She came to Champaign in 1975 to help raise her sons' children.



Ehmer Bracy

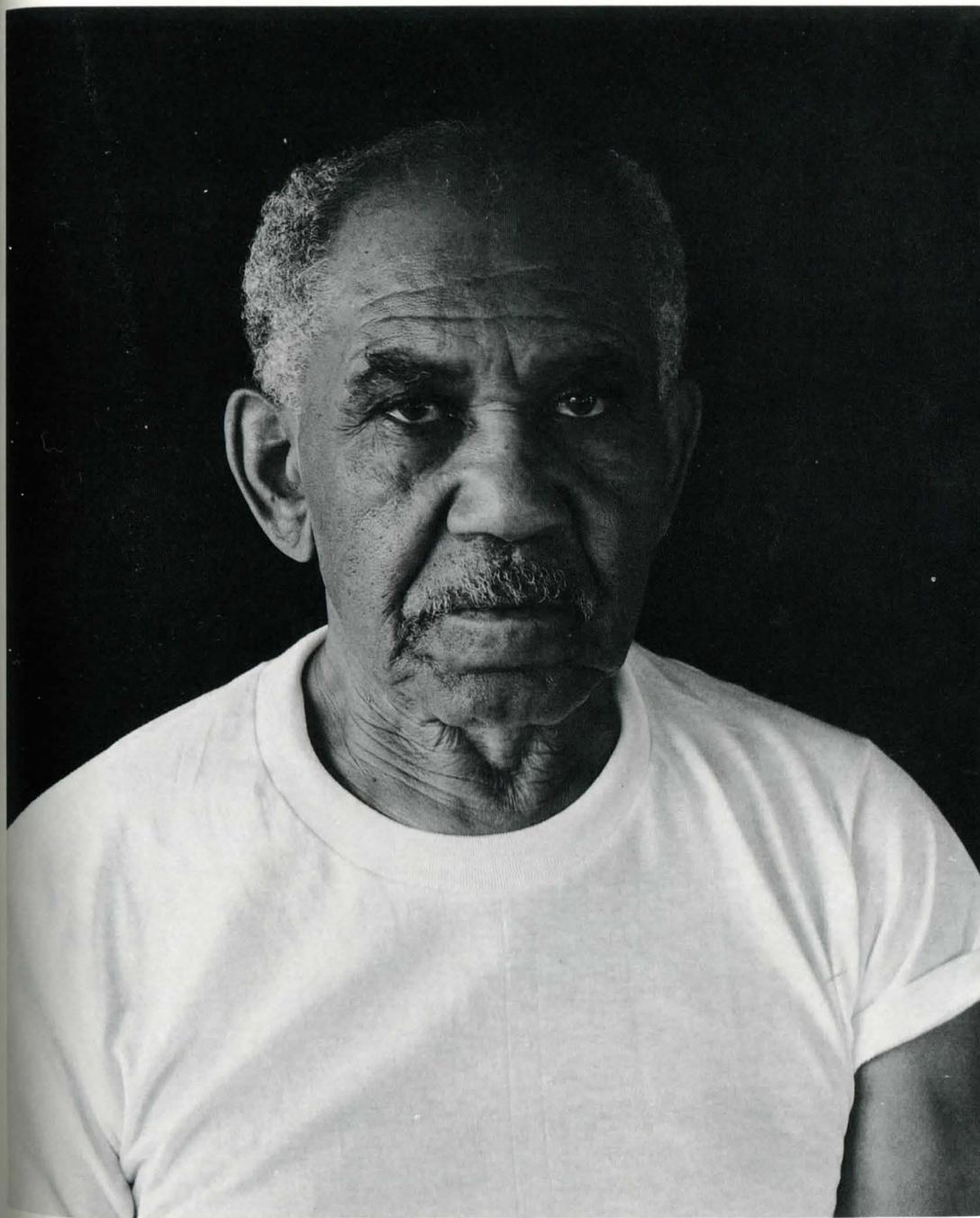
Born in Wilmot, Arkansas, Mr. Bracy came to Champaign in 1923 when a friend wrote to say "things were booming."

"But I couldn't get a job except on a section gang," he says.

In 1927 he finally went to work "cleaning and pressing" at Libby's Press Shop. He worked there until 1946 when he started his own business, Bracy's Cleaners.

After successfully operating the business for ten years he sold it in 1956 and became a carpenter. "I've been self-employed since 1946. I didn't have to work for anybody. I worked for myself."

When he came to Champaign he says, "I couldn't go no place to eat. But black and white have changed. It's a lot better town than when I came."



Minnie Bracy

Mrs. Bracy has lived in Champaign since 1915 when she came here with her mother to join her father who had just gotten a job.

She herself has worked as a cook and housekeeper.

She is a member of Bethel AME Church and involved with Douglass Senior Citizen's Center.

For nearly sixty years she has seen the community grow from muddy streets and scattered houses.



Vennie Johnson Britt

In addition to raising ten children (five boys and five girls) Ms. Britt also did day work for other families. "Washing, cooking, and housecleaning."

"They didn't always pay in money. Sometimes they would give you clothes for your family."

She didn't have the education to pursue any other occupation, but has been deeply involved with the Mt. Olive Baptist Church and is well-known in the community.

Now 89 years old with five generations of her family living in Champaign, she is most proud of "my children, my home, and my church."



Marvin Starks

Since coming to Champaign from Madisonville, Kentucky, in 1939, Marvin Starks has worked in a variety of jobs including headwaiter at the Champaign Country Club and maitre d' at the Lincoln Room for 22 years.

His strongest memories are of the people he's served. "I like the general public," he notes, "but it takes a lot of patience."

After over forty years in the community, he sees better opportunities for Blacks now, "but not as much as they should have." He sees lots of room for improvement in jobs, housing, health, and places of entertainment.



Iva and Henry Matthews

Over the past 71 years Henry "Harrison Tutt" Matthews has done "a little of everything." At age twelve he opened his own bicycle shop. From 1930-1937, he owned and operated Matthews Coal Company. Then he ventured into the scrap yard business with Consolitated Coal and Salvage and later ABC Wrecking, a nationwide demolition company based in Chicago.

Since returning to Champaign in 1963 he has worked with his wife, Iva "Big Honey" Matthews on a series of volunteer projects.

Mrs. Matthews has notably been involved in Anna Tutt Honeys, a senior women's group that she organized in 1969. She has also started a club for Black girls.

Over the years the Matthews have been most interested in offering "love, care, and concern for others, and doing something about it."

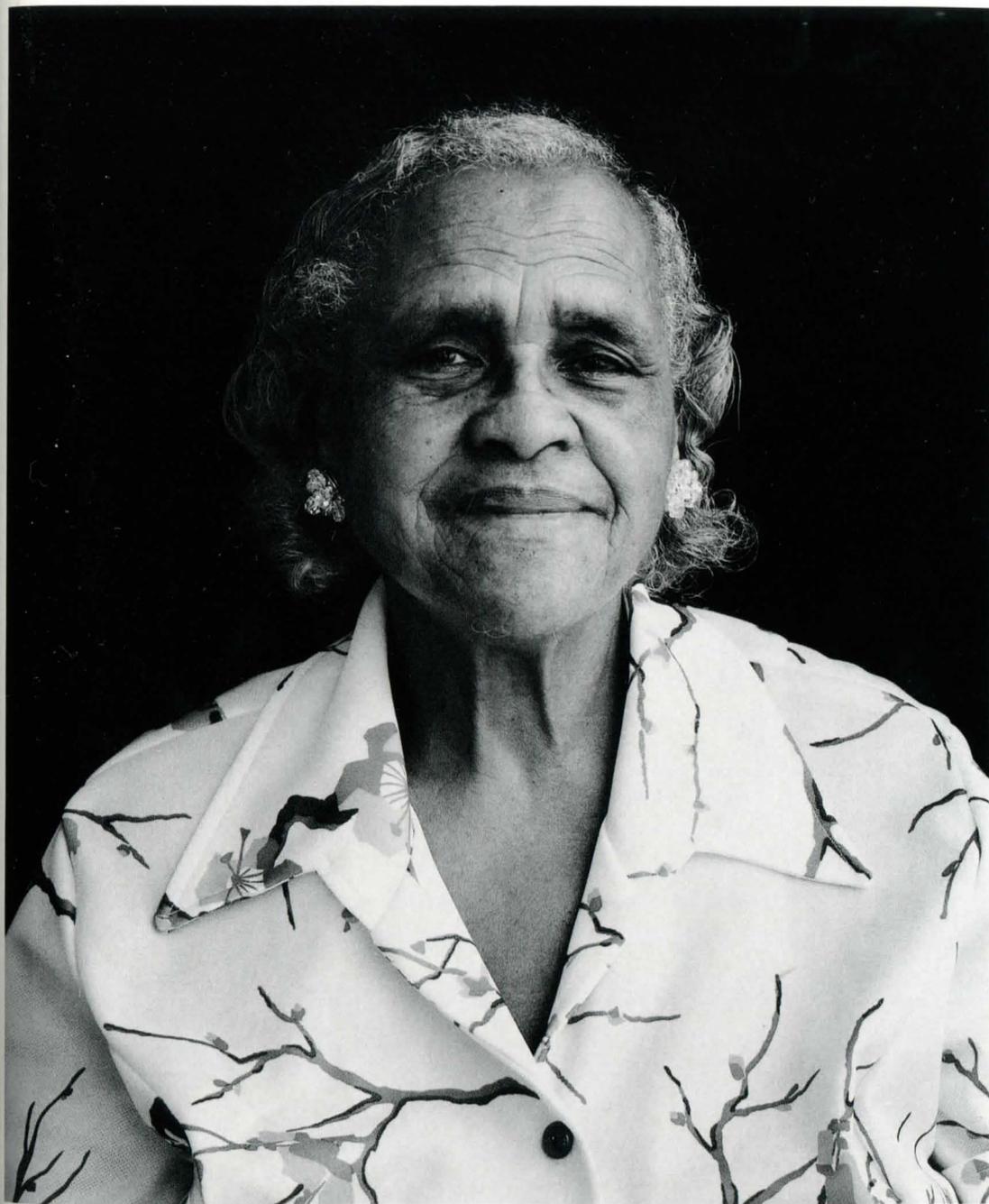


Erma D. Clark

The mother of nine children, Mrs. Clark spent a good deal of her life "just taking care of my kids." She also did day work – for over twenty years with one family.

She came to Champaign from Mackly-Morrisville, Tennessee, in 1925 when her husband got a job at the round-house coal chute.

She is especially proud of "the fact that I raised my family to be self-supporting, responsible, and good citizens of the community."



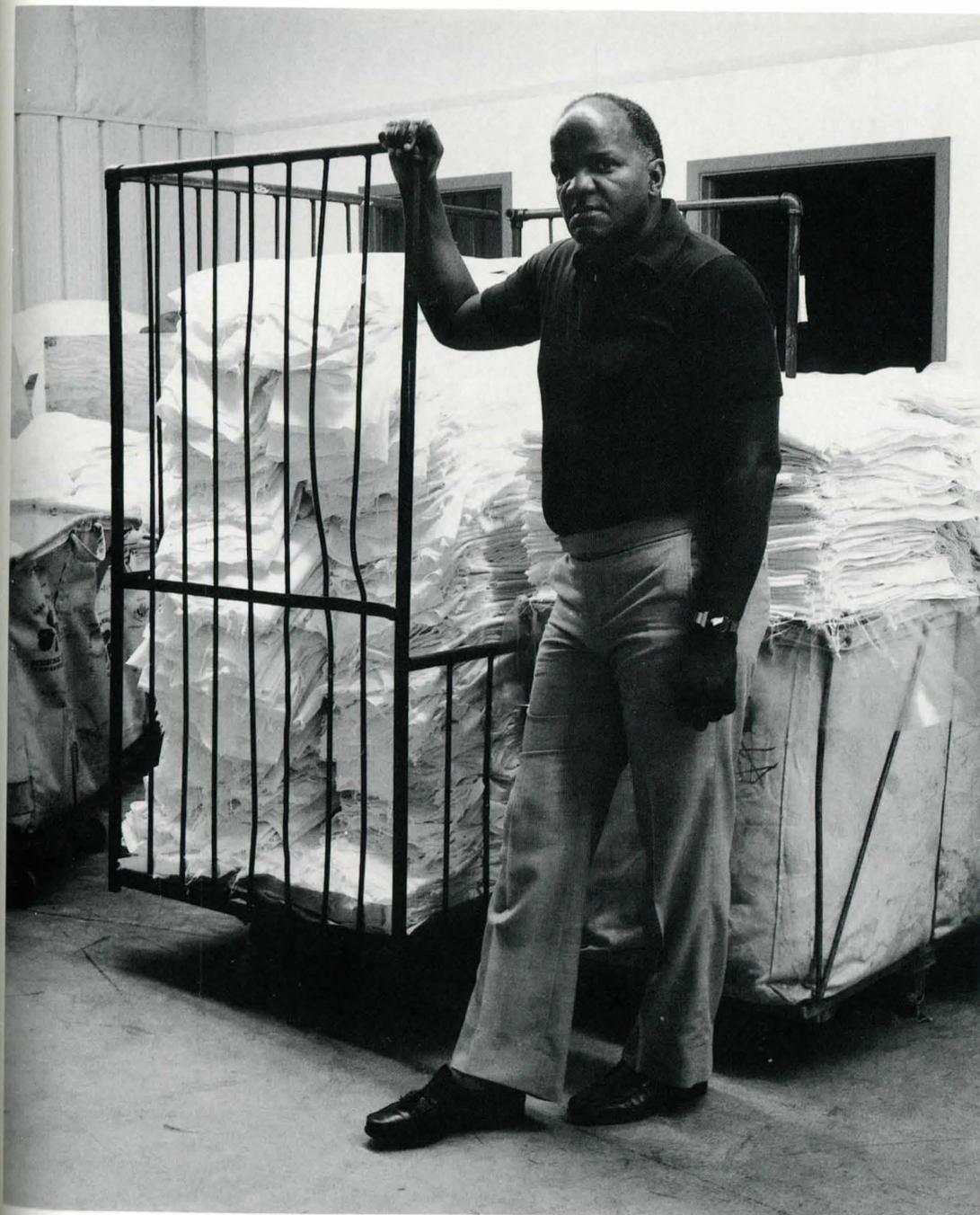
Albert Shelton

Since 1952, when he graduated from University High School, Albert Shelton has worked at Shelton's Laundry. In 1972, he purchased the business from his mother.

The business got its start in 1942 in the basement and backyard of the family home when Mr. Shelton's mother began to take in laundry to help supplement the family's income.

In his office Mr. Shelton still has the iron kettle that his mother used in the first days of the laundry.

Shelton Laundry has since grown into a two million dollar business, but Mr. Shelton is most proud that it is a family enterprise. "It came out of good relationships with family and friends."



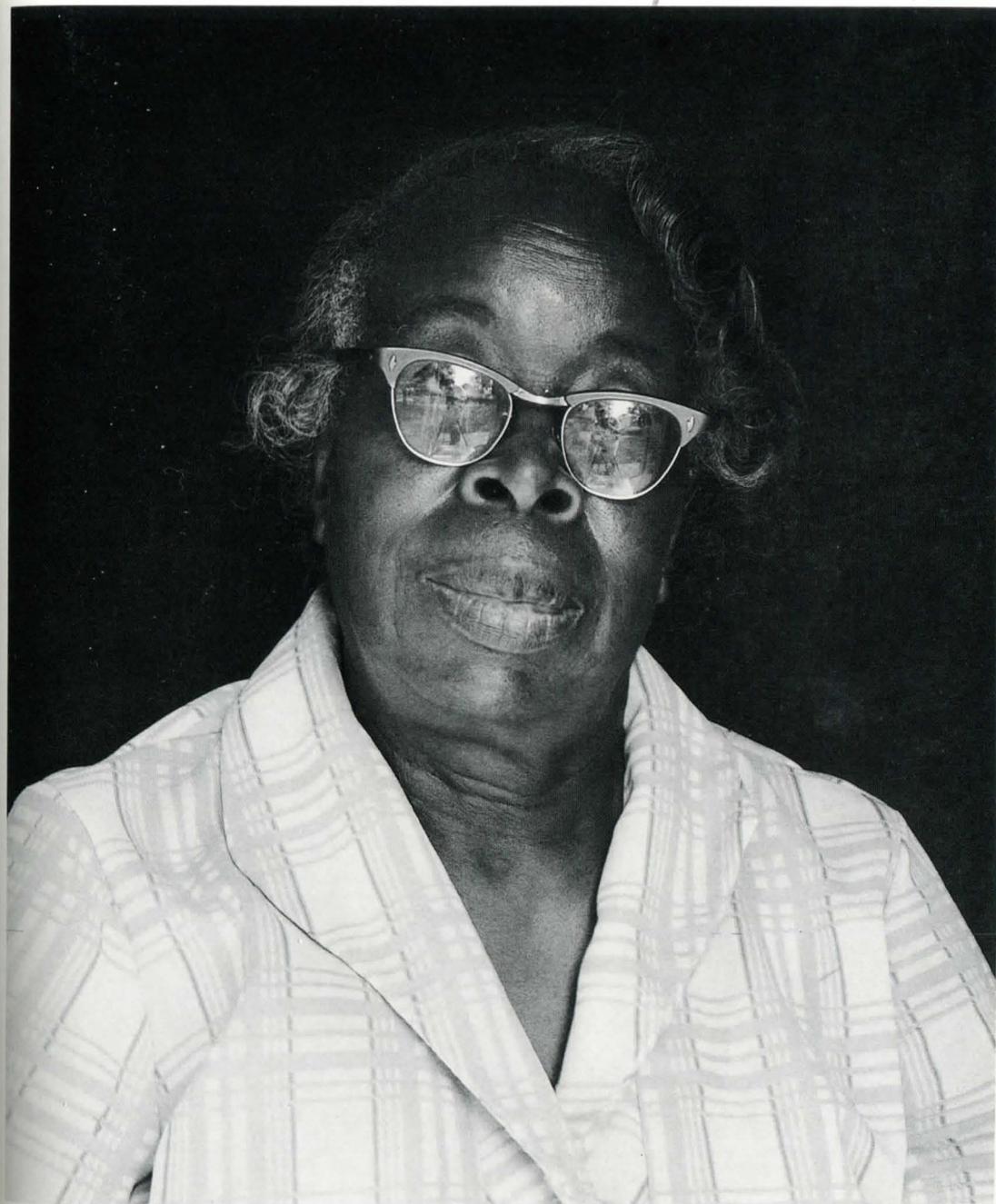
Belva McKinley

Originally from Springfield, Illinois, Mrs. McKinley first worked at Alton in 1941 as an aide to mental patients.

After brief training, she went to Manteno State Hospital in 1944 as a dental assistant. She was allowed to work only with a Black doctor and Black patients.

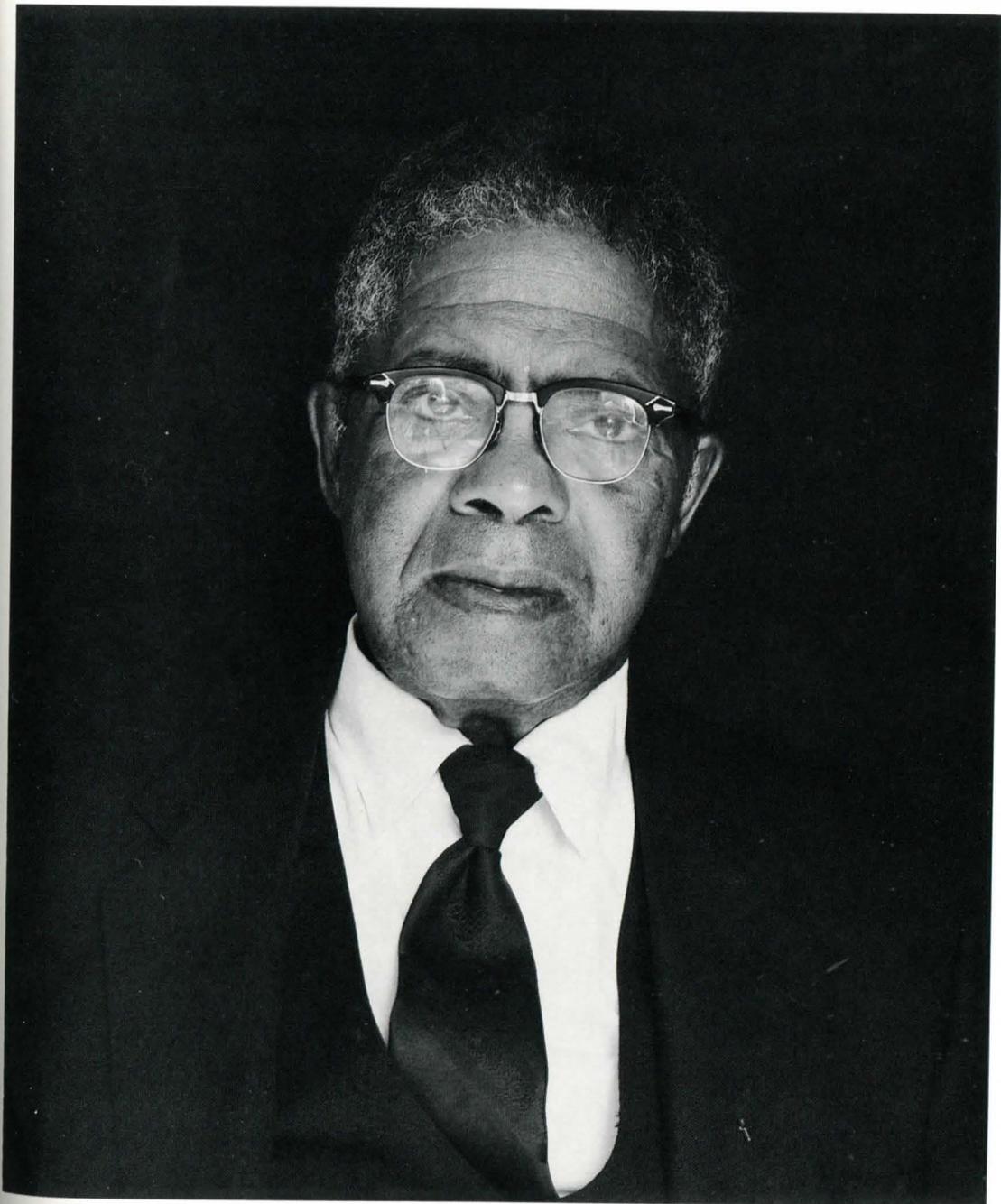
She next worked at Fort Sheridan after which she came to Champaign with her husband in 1963.

She says, "My mother taught me how to work. There were seven brothers and sisters. We worked side by side with my mother. She taught us to cook, clean, can, and garden."



James A. McKinley

Mr. McKinley came to Champaign from Mississippi when he was twelve years old. He attended school here after which he became an aide at a VA Hospital and traveled extensively. In 1963, when he retired, he returned to Champaign.



Odelia Wesley

From 1946 to 1954 Mrs. Wesley was an elementary school teacher in the Champaign public schools. From 1954 to 1972 she was principal of Washington School. She was one of the first Black principals in Champaign-Urbana.



Mattie Tinsley

At age 76 Mattie Tinsley enrolled in the teacher's aide program at Parkland College. A month later she turned 77 and a year later, when she was 78, she graduated from the program. She then went to work in the public school system.

She recalls vividly how difficult it was, throughout her life, to get jobs. "I'd walk and walk, but at the stores they used to look at me as if they didn't know what I was."

For most of her life she did light domestic cleaning. Her afternoons off she says, "I'd treat myself to a movie, but at the local theatres, we had to sit upstairs."

Mrs. Tinsley came to Champaign in 1898 when she was four years old. She is especially proud, after her many years in the community, to have earned her teacher's aide degree from Parkland.



Katheryn B. Jones

Since coming to Champaign nearly forty years ago, Mrs. Jones has done "a little of everything."

For many years she has been a foster parent and has been involved in a number of community service projects. She is presently a volunteer with the preschool at Salem Baptist Church.

She has received several awards, including Black Mom of the Year of 1982 at the University of Illinois, and is "proud that I can help others."



Nettie Cook

Shortly after the Civil War Mrs. Cook's grandmother came to Champaign, most likely to find work. Her father was born in the city and graduated from Champaign High School in 1885. Years later she herself graduated from the same high school.

"When I was a little girl things were a lot different. There were only two or three colored families in town. There was no prejudice then, only later when more colored came to town."

She has worked as a keypunch supervisor in Springfield during World War II, and later at Chanute.

Her husband of 41 years, Ernest T. Cook, operated Cook Brothers Cleaners and Alterations with his brother Edwin, for many years.

During the thirties the business was located on Walnut Street. The cleaners was closed briefly during World War II while both brothers served in the army, then re-opened on Taylor Street from 1945-1982.



Carrie Nelson

Born in Chuckey, Tennessee (now under water thanks to TVA), Mrs. Nelson moved with her grandparents to Homer in 1902 when she was two years old. "My grandparents were slaves, freed in 1865."

"They hewed cabins for themselves in Tennessee." But after a flood in the region, the government transported them to Illinois.

When she was sixteen Mrs. Nelson moved with her grandparents to Champaign so they could be near an uncle (also raised by the grandparents) who entered the University of Illinois. After his freshman year at the U. of I. the uncle found himself in the Army and, during World War I, was the first man killed in his company.

Mrs. Nelson has worked as a maid and a cook. After her retirement she studied early childhood education at Parkland College for one year in 1977 and then worked as a teacher's aide in a day care center until 1982.

She raised six children, all of whom attended college. Her oldest son, a commercial artist, graduated in the upper 10% of his class at the U. of I., and one of her daughters is now principal of Washington School. "My children are all doing something worthwhile."



Mary McKinley

Mrs. McKinley came to Champaign with her husband when he got a job on the Illinois Central railroad in 1923.

She has worked as a maid, but was primarily a mother and housewife. She has also done church work at Salem Baptist Church.

Her husband died on New Year's Day, 1969. They had been married for 64 years.



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