Ernest S. Hite

A Transcription Of an Oral Interview

701 ½ N. 5th St.
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Interviewed by
Mary Wright

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Ernest S. Hite Interview

Tape One, Side A

Wright: Ernest Hite, Ernest. S. Hite, of 701 ½ N. 5th St. First, Mr. Hite, I would like to ask, we didn't talk about this before, but your birth date.

Hite: My birth date. My birth date. You want me to talk through this? My birth date is January the 25th, 1900, DuQuoin, Illinois. My mother and father moved from DuQuoin to Centralia and they, my father worked in the mines in Centralia, Illinois, for at least, that I'm quite sure, of about three years anyhow because I was just born. And they brought me right on up to Centralia and I do know that one of my brothers, William Hite, father was able to get him to go into the mines because mining was the chief occupation in Centralia and DuQuoin. And mother, she decided that she would go into the restaurant business since she was, both of them were from Virginia. And they walked from Virginia to Reeves, Tennessee, as slaves, or runaway slaves. And then my father got a job on the Illinois Central Railroad as a porter and, a baggage man rather, not a porter, but as a baggage man. And he had a chance to have the pleasure of meeting all of the elite people because he was so courteous. Well, you had to be or you'd catch yourself on one of them streets. So, he decided that he would come to DuQuoin and that's when I was born. And then from DuQuoin to Centralia.

And mother went into the restaurant business for the porters and the Pullman porters and the conductors all in Centralia. They, they, that was the division of the Illinois Central Railroad for the ones that changed and go further south and those that stayed there at my mother's hotel and restaurant that head back when the trains from the south come back north. And they stayed in business there until I got to be around about 4 years old. I happen to remember

a little of it because my mother contributed to the social life in Centralia because we just were gifted with being able to be musicians. And I had a sister, and her name was Mamie. Why she could just hear any, any kind of a piece that she got, I would say, around about five minutes just to let whoever it is that was playing by notes, let them play and she'd sit down and play it. She was just that gifted.

And it didn't take long for the people in that restaurant that my mother owned that she was entertaining as if she was selling music. And play the type of music that the members that come into eat or come into stay over the period of time and I'm taking in all of it because now I'm around about 3 1/2 years old. And I happen to remember that they sometimes, they would have chorus singing all around the piano. And then when my sister'd get through playing, I had another brother by the name of Bill. He would sit down and he'd play the blues 'cause that's mostly what the instrumentation was. At that time, it was just any type of blues which would tell you about your feelings, that I'm able to tell you now that I wouldn't be able to have told you when I was 3 1/2 years old.

Then my father and my brothers that were older than I, they began to promote dances up at the white halls or at the fairgrounds. Whenever they'd have fairs in Centralia, why my father would be able to, he put together an outstanding fish recipe which was practically, you looked like you had twice as big a sandwich but made with flour as well as cornmeal and other ingredients. What he put in it I didn't know. But when you got a sandwich from the Hites on the fairgrounds or around the carnivals or circuses, why, they paid for the space to the extent where you got a pretty big sandwich. And that's how they made other extra money. And they would travel from around with the fair.

Wright: Now, were you one of the, you were one of the youngest ones in the family?

Hite: Yes. Now there's some more under me. See, but, there's some more under me but, as, five under me. And they all dead. But I happen to be one of them that was somewhat pretty well educated as well as the ones under me until they passed.

Wright: Now what year did you come to Champaign?

Hite: I came to Champaign, in 1906, no, 1904. I beg your pardon. I made a calculation of two years. I came to Champaign when I was 19, I mean when I was 4. That made me 4 years old. And my mother stayed at the [Vess] Building on Water Street, which is now catty-corner away from the later date of the Elks. But it was a sort of a what they call a flat, and we came because Mrs. Yarber, she was a very, very good friend of my mother's in DuQuoin and Centralia. And of course when we got off of the train, why, it was right across the, we didn't have but about a two, oh about two blocks, or a block to walk to get to their flat. And that's where I lived until dad was able to purchase a house, or rent a home, over here on, on Columbia Avenue.

Wright: So you stayed with another family until you got settled?

Hite: That's true. And the Yarbers, in the Yarber family there was three. One was peg-legged, and we called him Peg. And then there's actress, the one that was near my age, which now I'm about 5 years old. And finally my father got a job with the Wagner's Coal Company, which was the same as being what he had been used to doing but unloading coal and putting coal in people's homes that had bought, especially wealthy people. But the majority of the colored people in

the community at that particular time, they bought their coal by the bushels. And they had somebody sometimes come by and _____. And then you'd go up on the railroad and you could pick up the slack coal. It wouldn't cost you nothing 'cause it come through the, the coal trains come through and you'd pick it up.

Wright: And this was called a slack.

Hite: Huh?

Wright: This was, you said, it was slack coal.

Hite: Yeah. Yeah. Slack coal. Now it didn't take the coal companies long to be able to put a chemical of some kind and change the slack coal that they used to give away and sell it. And, of course, they wouldn't make, it would cause the coal to burn faster and give more heat. But before that, why, we would. People'd go out and cut a tree down, a limb or something. Save it and season it. And they had wood stoves, burn it in their pot. They called them potbelly stoves. All right? Now . . .

You want me to repeat it?

Wright: Yes, please.

Hite: They, after we got, after they, the coal companies began to figure out that that coal, slack coal, was very good and keeping up quite a bit of heat, and then they found out they could put that chemical in there. And they could begin to design what we call stoker. They converted the furnace in the wealthy people's homes as well as the medium-class of people. And then the poor people, a little

later on they converted their stoves into burning the slack coal. And that's how we heated it clear on up until, oh, I think it was in the fifties or the sixties, when this was terminated. And then they began to have gas. But I'm getting ahead of my story because the real parts of my earlier life was in different from the time that I'm ready to carry you up to.

Wright: One of the questions I wanted to focus on, when you first came here, how, what was your feeling about Champaign?

Hite: Oh, I didn't hardly have any except that I wanted to help my father and mother pay bills and keep the rest of the family underneath me as well as those ones that was still coming. And those that were older than me, and they were there in the home. And there was eight of us at home when I came to town. There was that. There was that. Do you want that?

Wright: Right. Well, as you got a little older, how was, how was the town as far as the Negroes and the white relationship? How was that?

Hite: Well, I hadn't, hadn't fully got, got to that yet. See, 'cause I'm still, I'm still at school age. See.

Wright: What school did you attend?

Hite: Hays. Well, I've been ready to say that. Now, you got it on now?

Wright: It's on. It's on.

Hite: Then my father decided that instead of him renting the home where we were, he had a friendship with one of the real estate dealers here in the city of Urbana and to purchase a home. You practically almost would pay about $500 down, two or three hundred dollars with the promise that you going to pay it down before you be able to own your home. And my father and my mother, she did washing and ironing for the rich, between the whites that was able and of course including myself particularly because I was the one that was really very much interested in helping my mother and father to defray some of the expenses. I shined shoes after school and I went to Hays School in Urbana and I stayed there until I was, I was in the sixth grade. Then when sixth grade, why they said that those that were able to get out of the Hays School, they went to the old high school. They had transferred, they built a new high school in Urbana and converted the old high school to a departmental And they called it Thornburn School. And that's where I went to seventh and eighth grade. And I did not go to Champaign High School, I mean Urbana High School. I did not go there. I wanted to, I lived, I wanted to live in Champaign. And since I was, had a godmother over here by the name of Mrs. Yarber, as I told you previously, why, she said well she would take me and send me to Champaign School.

Wright: Your family lived in Urbana, right?

Hite: That's right. And she loved me. And I loved her and I was closer to where I had a chance to work, at Allen Green's panatorium. They called shoe shining parlors then in the basements of the business district downtown and he had one of the outstanding shoe shining panatoriums that it was in the city. And I had one of my brothers, it was one of them that worked there before he went to the Army.

Wright: Now, the panatorium, is that the name of the store?

Hite: No. That's . . .

Wright: Is that what they call the shoe? Is that what they call the shoe?

Hite: A shoe shining. It was a shoe shining and pressing and tailor. Bushelmens, they call it the tailors then if you didn't know how to make a suit.

Wright: And they called them?

Hite: They called them bushelmens.

Wright: And the panatorium, that was where they?

Hite: Where they shined shoes for all of, all of the people, some of them would bring them in and have you and pick them up after their offices closed and take them back home and wear them to the office the next morning.

Wright: And most stores had them in their basements, you said?

Hite: No. This one man. This one man. And he had a lot, about five shoe shiners, which is just the same as you go to a barbershop, to a certain extent, and instead of having one chair, why, barbershops in the city of Champaign at the time I'm telling you about, why, there was, they didn't have a barbershop that they didn't have three or four or five. And then we had one of our outstanding citizens here in the city by the name of Jordan. He had a son named Cliff

Jordan. I'll tell you more about him later. But Frank Jordan, that was his father, and he finally was able to, with the class of barbers that was coming up this way, or coming down this way from Chicago or some city, why, they were, they come here as barbers and they could get a job here as a barber in Mr. Jordan's barbershop.

Wright: I see.

Hite: And so he finally got to have, he finally had the biggest barbershop there was in this city, even with the, the white people.

Wright: Oh, he had, he had black and white people to come to it?

Hite: Oh, yes, that's most of them, very, very few colored. Now, the colored barbers that we had in town they did our hair. But that was out in a district where most of the colored people lived, although in the east side, but every once in while, some of our families would be able to get over on the other side of the tracks in a little bit better house where some blue shirt people lived. And then . . .

Wright: Was there a lot of prejudice during this time?

Hite: Well, if it was, we didn't notice it.

Wright: All the teachers white?

Hite: Yes, yes. All of the teachers over at Hays and Thornburn and at the high school here in the city of Champaign, why, they were all white.

I am not back to where I'm about 14 or 15 years old and after I get through school, why I would go down and shine shoes at Allen Green's shoe shining parlor. Or panatorium, they call them. And I made extra money. And then I had a brother that worked there also. That was the one, Harvey, he was a bushelman as well as a shoe shiner. We'd get busy on a Friday and Saturday over the weekend, why, we made a whole lot of money. Well, you only charge a dime for a shoe shine. And if you were very good, why, you'd get a tip. And finally this minded brother of mine, financial-minded brother of mine, which was the only one at that particular this area of time, why he decided that he would get him a panatorium of his own. And he did. And then he had all of us, all of his brothers, me as well as those that were above me, we worked for him.

Wright: So your brother started a business of his own?

Hite: Of his own, just like Mr. Green.

Wright: Now Mr. Green was white.

Hite: No, he's colored.

Wright: Oh, he's colored, oh.

Hite: Everybody's colored. We didn't bother them. We played against them or something on that order and we treat them all right, but that was all it was. As far as being, well, I didn't never know that I was colored or any different than a human being, white, except that I didn't have any money. I wanted all the potentials and I was lucky enough to be near the, as I said, there was five under

me, five children brothers and sisters under me, but I seemed to be the only one at that particular time that had the education or wanted to get an education because I thought that was what we needed. But I wasn't thinking too much about equality. I was just thinking that it was better for me to be able do some of the things that I had in my mind that I wanted to do. And I still ain't got to that goal, yet. (Laughs.) So, I have to laugh because my only limited financial status of today is limited. I worked under the first Social Security, carrying on, that they called it first OAB. And then they run from old age benefit to Social Security and that was in 1937. But I'm 37 years old then, but I've got a whole lot of stuff between 1919 and 1937.

Wright: Let's go back to your brother. You said that your brother was in the war.

Hite: Yeah.

Wright: And he was, why don't you talk about, there about 1914?

Hite: No. That was. Yeah, well, he's the first one that went. He's the first one that went in 1914. But in 1916, why he closed his shop and left it to me.

Wright: I see.

Hite: Now, see, I'll have to skip and come back, see. I'm awful sorry that I had to do that because. Now most of the people in the community at the particular time they had high regards for the Hites. Musically, because they didn't have none of us, didn't have no vision of being able to think that you might be able get a show, or get a, play for a, some artist that you'd have to be able to read the music. And

so, I was one of them that wanted to get in that category beside all the rest of my brothers and sisters, those that were older. I had one finally made it to the top, brother under me. But it took him to raise up before, before he got to his, got to his school.

Then, but I will now return back to my brother Harvey and a boy, Conrad, of his was the first two World War I veterans to leave Urbana, colored. And they went to Des Moines, Iowa, for their training, and their boot-training. And both of them went over and this brother of mine, he was a very, very good soldier. Honorable discharge and the Croix de Guerre and when he come back, as being a, I do not, I do not remember just how he was cited for bravery, but he was. Or I didn't hear him tell mama and papa. I wasn't there, but all I know is that he had it. And now he's able to get in a better business with the money that the United States government gave him for being in that category. So when he come back, he opened up a place over on Green Street and called it the Hite Brothers Shoe Shining and Pressing and Bushelmen Panatorium. And there's any numerous amount of new people that was coming to the city of Champaign, especially one boy that I happen to remember that . . . We would turn on the Victrola, the music, and we popped the rag, in time with the music.

Wright: You have to tell them, popped the rag. What do you mean when you say pop the rag?

Hite: You know, make music, like a tap dancer.

Wright: Oh, a tap dancer.

Hite: But you're doing it with a rag on people's shoes.

Wright: Oh, I see. Oh, this is while you're shoe shining, and you popping the rag.

Hite: Yeah. Shoe shine boys. They would finally, somebody I don't know who it is, Fletcher Henderson or one of them big rangers of years gone by, why, he finally decided to make a whole lot of money by calling his song, "Shoe Shine Boy." And, well, we had been doing that for years, all of my brothers, as well as being able to play it by the music. And so we began to get citywide recognition for all of the football games and baseball games and say, oh, no, wait a minute, when the dances that the school boys would give, the proms, the freshmen frolic and sophomore cotillion and the senior ball. Why, if they wanted to go and have their shoes looking just nice, why, they'd come down to the Hite Brothers and we were in the College Hall at that time with the, there was a big dance hall upstairs and then there was a restaurant owned by Mrs. [Colwell] and her co-workers, you know dishwashers and cooks, and that's all that the most of the colored people in this community, this is how they made their living.

The women, those that didn't cook, why, or didn't help their husbands cook, why, all they could do was to do housework or wash clothes and they usually would get a manual, a mangle, or an electric, electric, it would take them quite a long while to pay for the tub, you know, but they would still get it. How they got it some of 'em, why, they'd solicit quite a few people that wanted their laundry done away from home. And my mother was one _____ where one of my sisters, Mrs. Anderson, but they all, both of those are deceased, so but, at the same time, they were so sweet.

And, I am now back to the, what my brother did after he got all the honors and got his bonus from the government, he come and gave mama. He had three sacks, three sacks of money that he had saved.

Wright: How long was he in the war?

Hite: Huh?

Wright: How long was he in the war?

Hite: As long as it started, from the time he first went until it was finished.

Wright: About 1918.

Hite: 1918. I think it was worse than that. It was around about 1919. It's got to be 1919 because I married in '20. I married in '21. Now, but when he come back, why he left the shop to me. And he also gave me away to my first wife.

Wright: You and your brother were very close then.

Hite: Oh, yes, this one, you see. I had, I had it up here and _____, a very, very _____ stayed out to her mother's home. And they lived over on the campus. Had a big house over on the campus and kept students that didn't want to go into the fraternities or wanted to, they were part Indians. Richard Edwards is in town now and Ora used to be our, used to be my brother's cashier in the shoe shining and pressing part of the panatorium. But she's passed now, and her husband is still living and their son.

Wright: Now, these are people you said you stayed with?

Hite: These are people I stayed with over on the campus, close by the shop, panatorium. Two brothers of mine.

Wright: So you weren't at home, now, this is before you got married.

Hite: Yeah. And working for my brother. My brother goes to, we didn't have no idea where he went. And he went to, he's back from the Army now, he's got plenty of money and he's open an account down at the University State Bank, which was over on the campus where [J.C.'s Restaurant] is now. That used to be [Brooks Bank], or what they called University of Illinois State Bank. My brother had, but he's losing his, I didn't know it at that time, but he's, by him being a, an outstanding soldier, why, his mind come and go.

Wright: You mean from his war experiences?

Hite: Yeah. Yeah. Some of his war wore off on him and so he goes, the president of the University State Bank happened to know him before he went to the Army and happened to know that he did get that kind of money, so he tells him he did not want his money. He just wanted to deposit $25,000. Okay? And so Mr. E.E. Stafford, Mr. Stafford take it. I mean as long as he didn't draw none of it out, I mean, he wasn't going to draw none of it out, why, he just, he just, he just took it, took the money that he said, and I'm going to Chicago. I'm going to Chicago and when I come back, why, I'm going to Salt Lake City, Utah. Now that's when he gave my mother that bag, he used to keep his money in the bag, bank bags, and so when he come back from Chicago, he stopped at Woods

Music Store and bought every instrument, bought every instrument that he thought that any of this brothers or sisters would be able to play. And when he come in, he put them all down on the floor, or on the davenport. And this one brother that's ...

[End Tape One, Side A]

Ernest S. Hite Interview

Tape One, Side B

Hite: Yeah, the [Thornhills] had, there was four, there was four children.

Wright: Now, the Thornhills are the ones you worked for.

Hite: No.

Wright: I'm sorry, lived with.

Hite: Lived with. On the University of Illinois campus.

Wright: Right.

Hite: And they had a large, a rooming house.

Wright: And _____.

Hite: Huh?

Wright: _____.

Hite: Indians.

Wright: That's right. You did say Indians. I'm sorry.

Hite: They were Cherokee Indians. But we stayed with three brothers. We all stayed there because it's close to our panatorium. And we stayed with them for about two years. And my first wife was attending the university as well as the Cherokee girl, Ora. They were pals and friends and attended the University of Illinois and she was a Kappa Alpha, Alpha Phi, Alpha Kappa Alpha. And the boys, one of the boys, was Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, which is a colored fraternity, exclusive, the first time they had been organized or near the chapter of their organization.

And my courtship through meeting my first wife, why, love at first sight I would say, all right? In the meantime, why, we used to, we used to go to school together at Champaign High School 'cause I transferred from Marquette and I went to Champaign High School and lived with Mrs. Yarber. And so my first wife, I met her up at Champaign High School and the reason I'm in high school is because that one of the bankers at the Citizens State Bank in Champaign is the one that, he used to come down to the shoe shining parlor and thought that because I was so obedient and so courteous that he just said, well, well, Ernie, how come you're not in school? I want to make that money, you know. And, I said, well, I said, well, I said, I wanted to help my mother and father out. So he finally talked to Billy Williams, who was the state man here, working for the state. It was his shop that I was working in. So he talked to Billy and Billy told him what kind of a mother and father I had. And, but he, I'm sure that she would be tickled to death if she thought that she was able to keep him in school. So, he said, well, if you know her that well, or know them that well, why, would you have her come to the bank? And maybe I can help her 'cause I think he's got some pretty good potential of being able to be a good citizen here in the community. And Mr. Billy Williams, he sent, I mean, he brought my mother over there to the bank. So my mother agreed to let him send me to school. He bought all my books, bought

my clothes and I was the hottest thing there was up in Champaign High School, see? So therefore.

Wright: What was the banker's name again?

Hite: A.M. Burke. Citizens State Bank. And he had a brother by the name of E.I. Burke. But he was the one that E.I. is the one that gave me any time I made over 75 in my classes or in my studies, why, I got $2. For 75. If I made 80, why, I got $3. And so on up until I got 100. But I didn't get too many 100s. I stayed within the $5 and $6 range. So, but, if I needed a new suit or new pair of trousers or a new pair of shoes for both winter and summer, why, he would get 'em for me. Go on over to Spalding Drug Store and get you a pair of shoes, Ernie. And go down to Kaufman's, J.M. Kaufman's Haberdashery and tell him I sent you over there. And I'd go over there and he'd give me a suit and give me a pair of trousers to go along with the, you know, casual. And so I went on to, I got so hot up at Champaign High School, and I had money to go in the cafeteria and eat and then take a couple of my, take my, my, my girl, which I called her, I was calling her my girl 'cause we're going steady, okay? And a couple of her friends. Carrie Nelson is one and Katie Gray is another one. And they didn't, they didn't ask me for it, but I'm, I'm _____.

Wright: What was your first wife's name?

Hite: Helen Johnson. Her name was Helen Johnson till I changed it. And mother of my four kids here in the city now. And she's living. And she's a member of the Salem Baptist Church. And we were married for 24 and a half years. But we got divorced.

Wright: This is about, this is about the year 19 . . .

Hite: 1919.

Wright: 1919. Okay.

Hite: And the only other part that I missed that I could pick it up a little bit later is that after my brother, after I married, why, then he's the one that went to Chicago and got the instruments and put them all down there, all different, coronet, all different kind of. And this young brother under me, he was so gifted like my sister, although we had music in our home after dinner every night. In our own home, just, wasn't nobody but the family. Mama, she played Jew's harp and then she could blow, take, and she could play piano, too. But church music. And I had a sister. She could play church music and marvelous singer. And then the other sister, she played all kinds of music, entertaining music, the one that was from Centralia I was telling you about. Then she played all of the people's parties and all.

Wright: So when your brother came back in 1919 and went and bought all the instruments.

Hite: When he bought all the instruments, and laid 'em there and said whichever can play this, play that, play it, see?

Wright: Now he had left, he had left . . .

Hite: He had gone to Utah.

Wright: Now he left the . . .

Hite: Instruments.

Wright: He left the instruments, then he went on to Utah?

Hite: Yeah, Then he went to Utah. Left us, left all them instruments here and this younger brother of mine, why, any time he'd be, he was just like owning them instruments and never had an instrument in his mouth before, see. And didn't take him long before he was playing _____ or something on that order on all of them instruments, see.

Wright: Which one did you play?

Hite: Huh? I'm a drummer.

Wright: Oh, you're the drummer.

Hite: See, I was the drummer and then xylophone player, same as Lionel Hampton.

Wright: I see.

Hite: But, they made an estimate, this fellow named Jordan, Cliff Jordan. His son, he's the one that organized us into an orchestra. Then his father, with a white conductor by the name of Shady, see all of this is before, all of this other

stuff come up, see, he, he organized what we call the Brewer's Band here in the city of Champaign. We had a band made up of nothing but colored.

Wright: Now was this before you got married then?

Hite: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. All of that, but I couldn't put it all in there 'cause I couldn't remember it, see, well, at the time that it happened. The same identical thing it is with those instruments that my brother bought. See, I had to skip from there, most of the, most of the organizations like KPs and Masons, whenever they have a parade or convention, why the Brewer's Band played. Now you get what I mean, see? And it would look good, see. And we played good 'cause we had a white conductor and his name was Shady. He was a German fellow and he'd, we'd rehearse.

Wright: What was his whole name?

Hite: I couldn't think of his first name now.

Wright: But you called him Shady.

Hite: Shady. Shady. Shady. Yeah. And he lived right here on Ash Street. And as soon as them, as soon as they began to, all this used to be, if it was a white family over there, there's a colored family over here, see.

Wright: You didn't have any problem in housing.

Hite: No problem, no problem. Now as soon as whoever it was that got in office, now that part I can't tell you because I was so busy in raising my family that I didn't have no time for no politics. Or I didn't even look to see what the other side of the people, on the other side of the track, what the people was doing over there, that didn't concern me.

Wright: I see what you're saying.

Hite: You understand what I mean. I was doing the best I could to do my own living.

Wright: Well, you want to stop here, then.

Hite: Yeah, now, I'll stop there. Now, when I come back, I'll come back to my earlier married life, see.

Wright: To the 1920s.

Hite: From 1919 on up until the next block which is, between twenty and thirty, see. Now then there was a whole lot happening because I took over. I got to be so good both by playing drums in the band as well as being able to play in the orchestra, xylophones. As for Jordans, the man that owned the big barbershop I told you about, why, there was four brothers, four brothers in the band with them instruments that my brother bought. But Cliff Jordan is, he was a trombone player and a violin player, see. And we played all these here country towns for all them square dances, you know, they call 'em round dances, when like the music that we originally could play in first-class condition, why, they called it

round, round dancing. But now we also could play, well you hear ‘em every Friday night or something like that down here by Buttons and Bows Club. They do the square dancing and they call, you know, they call the steps that they had the different people doing. All these country towns out here, around here. Well, we played ‘em all.

Wright: Okay. We’ll stop here then.

[Machine is turned off and then taping resumes the following day.]

Hite: What you really came to visit me about yesterday when you came, and I left out one of the main things that I thought that you really were very much interested in and that was what was the condition of the city of Champaign for the purpose of prejudiceness. Well, I, personally as well as leaders of our community, and we did not have what you may call first-class leaders, why, because they were being taken care of personally. They were some of the best families that there was here in town. George Person, for one, he was a leader and was quite a good speaker, but he didn’t do, he spoke about doing something for all of us colored people that were less fortunate. And then a Mrs. Daisy Jones and her family. They were all politic, politicians, or a class themselves to be politicians. And they received the money from the ones that were running, that is, if there was money involved and evidently because they were pretty good livers. So the rest of us, but they talked about it and we went to their meetings and so forth and so on like that and got what we could get out of it. But, after all, after they got in office, why, they were well taken care of but still we were just as bad getting along for ourselves. _____ or die. That’s the way that

we used to have a spray, I mean a saying around here in the community, so you did the best you could. So.

Wright: Now you mentioned about going to the white, that you didn't feel that prejudice, you used to go to the homes.

Hite: Yeah. There's a many a, many a people that were white, that one of, one of them was a banker of the Citizens State Bank. Why, I went to his home many a times, not as a servant, but as a guest because he just was very much interested in me personally and thought that I should have been able to give, be given a better opportunity for being able to find out what my goal in life was. And so I happen to remember and I was quite forward in being to express to him what he was tickled to death to hear and that was I wanted to be a druggist. But I never got a chance to complete my goal for the simple reason why I had a reason for choosing to be a druggist because I would get all classes of my people to come. The children would come and eat ice cream sodas and stuff like that. And then patent medicines, I knew that most of the elders and most of the middle class that couldn't afford to, a doctor or they couldn't afford the high price that the doctors would charge for the prescriptions and so therefore I would get that class of ____ trade, providing that I went in a drugstore, as a druggist. But not for the purpose of being able to fill prescriptions unless I went to finish my schooling.

And so, well, by being able to have the help that I had from my banker friend, A.M. Burke, why, I just decided that, well, I believe I'll just go and sell patent medicines, like Sloan Liniment and Hadacol and stuff like that. But, I found out that it would have been all right but I wouldn't have never been able to have a druggist's license without hiring a pharmacist that would be able to take

care of the other end of the, and that takes some away, some of my profit away and I could see that far ahead of me so therefore I didn't get a chance to go into the drug business.

And, but as far as being prejudiced, white's being prejudiced, up here in the north end of town, clear up from University Avenue clear on back to Bradley and east as far as Wright Street or clear over to Goodwin Avenue in Urbana and way over to Elm Street in Champaign, that was the area with which both white and colored lived. We lived next door to each other and, but we didn't do too much mixing. If they were white living next door, outside of playing and going to school together, why, that was it. Maybe once in a while, we'd get a few, one or two, wanted to cross over the line, but we didn't pay no much attention to it except to put _____, see. He'd put his finger on us and we'd put our fingers on them. And it didn't take them long before they moved out of the area. But I wouldn't think that they moved out of the area because they weren't happy. It was because the families was getting mixed up.

Wright: You talking about inter-racial marriages _____?

Hite: Inter-racial, marriages and sweethearts, see. But we didn't have too much of that, like we can now. If you did have one of the other opposite set, that race that would want to join, you'd have to be called after dark. Both him and her, or her and him. But we didn't pay that much attention to it, to any great extent until after, I would say any time after, later on like it is now, why, which it should be. This is the way I look at it now but I'm too old to cut the mustard. So that was, it really just, I'm very observing, I don't, I don't appreciate it because. . .

Wright: Getting back to prejudice. One of the other ladies I interviewed talked about the movie theaters, where they were discriminated against, you couldn't sit where you wanted to sit.

Hite: Now, down at the theaters, after World War II, now all through before the world war, after World War I, this was where the beginning of prejudiceness in the theaters became prominent. Or became . . .

Wright: Noticeable?

Hite: Noticeable. But, now, here again, I happened to be lucky, one of the lucky colored citizens in the city, pretty well-respected. And I never had that trouble for the simple reason why that I noticed that when I paid my money to go into the theater and they gave me a ticket, well, I'd sit down there by the orchestra. So therefore, the drummer in the theater orchestra, why, I'd sit in, I'd sit in on the opening numbers before the plays or the shows come up.

Wright: Oh, I see.

Hite: Why, because, but I didn't read a note. But I knew the numbers that they, the opening numbers that they, they were playing and I never lost no time. So therefore, he was welcome to have me come and then it was a little funny, could have a been a little _____ as far as colored is concerned, but to me it didn't make no difference to the leader and it didn't make no difference to the drummer. So I sit in, many a times at the Orpheum and the Walker Theater that we had, but I noticed that the difference, why, as I would take some more friends of mine, maybe, we were at a party and then we'd all go down, one of 'em say we go to

the theater, well then, they say we'd have to sit up in the balcony. Well, I wasn't no, I didn't make myself no different from none of the rest of 'em. They sit up there, I'd sit up there, too. But I still didn't pay any attention why I couldn't go downstairs. I didn't ask. If I had asked, maybe somebody'd told me.

But, there was, after World War I, well, there was three of my very, very good friends here in town that went into uniform. After being discharged and they wanted to make them go upstairs, and they didn't want to go. And they didn't go. And they called the police. There was quite a little discussion as far as law is concerned and that was the beginning of the first time that I noticed that there was any prejudiceness in the city because they did have a little skirmish, both from verbally as well as physically. And they, the tickets didn't have no seats on 'em. The tickets didn't have where you should sit and where you shouldn't sit and no notification of it, so therefore, that was a matter of discrimination. It got over to the University of Illinois, where we had quite a few representatives, lawyers, those that were going to school and were learning to be lawyers or attempting to be lawyers and they began to notice that there was a little bit of, taste of prejudiceness even over on the campus for the simple reason why, that why should they have to come to a barber shop, even our colored barbers didn't take, didn't cut their hair.

Wright: Oh, they didn't?

Hite: The colored members, unless it was after hours. Meaning after they closed. But because the average, and one of the biggest barbershops in the city was owned by Frank Jordan. And he was quite popular and we had band meetings there. He turned his barbershop over for us for band, um, practice, yeah, practices, and our band was named after the leader who was white.

Wright: Shady that you were telling me about?

Hite: Mr. Shady. And then down at the church, at your church, A.M.E. Church, why Mr. Scott was a member of the Boy Scouts drum corps. And I was one of the leaders in the drum corps. Why, because he and I, he's a drummer and I was a drummer, and he, in the basement there, we had Tuesday nights after scout meeting, why we would, we would practice our drum corps.

Wright: Is this during, taking place mostly during the twenties?

Hite: Yeah, that's coming on up to the twenties. Yes. It's coming on up to the twenties. I'm not, see, when I, when I was 20 I got married. See. So I'm putting all this in between there as the things that did happen, Mrs. Wright.

Then, when they got the university faculty and leaders to come behind and see that they got some consideration about their ____ or their worries, why, there was a lot of barbershops still refused. They just said, well, we just can't. They'd either give 'em a bad haircut, particular haircut, or they was going to lose trade, their white trade that they had over on the campus.

Wright: Now what was a bare haircut? What was a bare haircut?

Hite: They didn't give a bad.

Wright: Oh, a bad haircut, I'm sorry.

Hite: Well, that's in order to keep 'em from coming back.

Wright: I see what you're saying. They used that to discourage them.

Hite: Yeah, yeah, to discourage. Well, you can't cut my hair right, see. And so therefore, well, you hear about it or you read about it but there still wasn't anything done about it except for the idea that they could go. And then again they would push customers ahead of you. Even after you come in there. They come in there after you come in. Well, you begin to notice it, that is if you paid very much attention to what was going on around the university and I for 56 years, I worked over to the university and I happen to know and then I happen to hear a lot of my boys that was fair-minded, why, they would come back and sit down in my room and talk to me about what was going on.

And did I know certain such a young man that was studying his bar examination and his name was Harold [Hartwood]. And, but he still didn't get what he wanted down here but when he got his bar examination, then he went to Chicago and the Nesbitt brothers, who were born here in the city of Champaign, why, then they all joined a law firm up in Chicago or a law firm where they could get further. And then they come back down here doing evictions and so forth and so on and see if they couldn't straighten things out a little bit more. Then people like, as I said previously, Mr. Person and Mrs. Jones and the mayor of the city was a businessman, Flynn, got to be the mayor of the city.

And the first thing that he did was put the first, to keep from having any unnecessary amount of displeasure, we have always had informers on the police force and give 'em a gun and the right to carry a gun, and one of them was Mr. Jordan. And then the other informers that come and shoot craps or play cards with the underworld and then all of a sudden open the door of the gambling house and let the police in. And he's in there gambling himself, see? And then, but when the police come well, he go out by the guy that's taking the rest of us to

jail for gambling and so forth and so on. And we found out who that person was. But he was being paid by the city to be able to keep it corrupt. But he's getting, he's doing all right. So, we didn't pay that much attention till it got to be three or four or five. I can name 'em. All, both of 'em dead now and God bless their souls. But I would like to have said something else. But as time went along after Mayor Flynn, the businessman, got in to be so popular . . .

Wright: Now this is still during the twenties?

Hite: Going on up. We were lucky enough to have him get in. And he's a little bit fair-minded as far, and he give us our first uniform police. And in the name of A.A. Rivers, Allen Rivers. And, well, he come with a little background from East St. Louis because his uncle was a patrolman down at East St. Louis and give him a little pointers. But he was just really too nice a police for him to be able to take care of all the situations. One incident which make me say that is for the simple reason why he still wanted to be a friend of the people and knew his rights as far as the police were concerned unless you give him trouble. Well, and we got one, one individual that wanted to show his strength. And _____ you put that gun down and I'll whoop. And well he didn't have to do it, but Al did do it. And of course that was, he got the worst end of it. But they arrested him, the individual that challenged him. He handled, he was a construction worker, and he was pretty good. Yeah, yeah, yeah. He's just, yeah, he's a pretty good fighter. And, well, they didn't take, they didn't take Al, well, Al was very, very _____. They made a, they made a, first they made a chauffeur, for the, that was near the first of the cars here in the community that police traveled in cars. But they used to travel used to travel on foot and Al during his time, he had to travel on foot up here in the North End on patrol, you know. So after that incident happened and

still his, his very, very good friend was the mayor, why, he allowed him the privilege of driving the patrol car, so he held it down for quite a long while because he was a good driver. And he was a good, but he never, he'd go in with you, but he didn't have to, he didn't have to put his life on the line. Right.

Wright: Because he wasn't walking the streets.

Hite: Yeah, yeah. And so now that _____, I mean that was during his period of time, well now, Mr. Flynn got so good after his second term and being able to be re-elected that I happen to be able to know, I liked him. But I wasn't in politics then. I wasn't making any, any idea or thinking of going in politics but I do know that what was going on before and what I would do and they came, the campaign manager of the, the, Goodell was his name, Hubert Goodell, he began to run against.

[End Tape One, Side B]

Ernest S. Hite Interview

Tape Two, Side A

Hite: Earlier years before I got into politics as I previously had said, which I will come back later, but I, there was an interview or an intermittence between the time that I left here, Champaign. I left Sigma Chi Fraternity, where I had been working for 26 years, and . . .

Wright: Now this is, when did you start working for Sigma Chi? When did you start working?

Hite: Oh, in about ’17, 1917.

Wright: About 1917?

Hite: 1917.

Wright: This is before you got married.

Hite: Yeah. This is before I got married.

Wright: And you worked for them for 26 years.

Hite: I worked for them 26 years, altogether before I, before I come back, see. I got this job in the summertime up to Chicago.

Wright: Now this is, now about what year was this?

Hite: Well, about sixteen or seventeen. About sixteen or seventeen years that I, I mean that's how old I was. I wasn't married, I wasn't married then, see. When I went to Chicago to get the job, then I come back because of the prejudiceness to my family, which I left here, see. And they wanted, the lady up at Park Ridge, the _____ in Park Ridge wanted me to live with the people that had the home in Park Ridge. And my wife didn't care to, I mean my girlfriend, see. She didn't care to want that hassle. And so I come on back home. And then I went back to the house, to the Sigma Chi House, with that small salary. Do you understand? Then I stayed 26 years. So you get them ages and how long I stayed there and one thing and another like that. I married to my wife when I'm in, in, got started in politics.

Wright: I see.

Hite: You got what I mean? I mean, you're adding up them years when, the way that I went to politics and then come back. And then here I say I worked 26 years over there, see. Well, I worked 26 years altogether under their, under their years that I was over there, not only didn't, not only did I get married, but I was going with the same girl. Now you got that?

Wright: I understand that. Now you say your wife, did your wife get married while she was in, you say your wife was a third-year student at university?

Hite: Yes, yes. She went three years over at the university. That's when I was staying with the, Mr. and Mrs. Thornhill. I was just going with her, see. And then we were, we were owners of the Hite Brothers Shoe Shining Panatorium. Now

you got what I mean? Them years of experience, I mean, and then I'm in school. I'm in school myself, in high school. But all of this come in after between them spans, them ten years. Well what ten years they were, I don't, I don't remember, but I do know that I had a many a year at the Sigma Chi Fraternity before I got the job up at Park Ridge. But I left my family here. But they did not want to come up there and live in Park Ridge and live in the basement of one of them big, swell apartment buildings. And then as the people moved out of the apartment, my job was to clean it up. See? And then re-rent it and then collect the rent from the rest of the apartment. That's all I had to do. If nobody never moved, I didn't have no cleaning up to do. Now you got what I mean, see? And that was supposed to have been a lifetime job but it didn't pan out because I didn't get a chance to move in with the people, that lady that owned that lovely home up there, colored lady. But it was only one family that lived at Park Ridge. So the rest of them was white. And Mr. [Gillett] couldn't go against the, the, too much against the council. He tried to tell them what caliber to, person I was and all and, so but he couldn't get it to, colored. So I just got me a job in Chicago and come on back home.

Wright: I see. How long did you stay up there?

Hite: I stayed up in Park Ridge around about a year and a half, see. I'd have to get up an hour in Chicago in order to get on the job on time over the "L." And then it'd take me an hour before I'd get, I'd be off at 4 o'clock or 5 o'clock since I was an experienced presser, clothes presser and cleanup man. And then I'd, I'd get through and I'd come, I'd catch the "L" and come back from home. Then when I did, why I'd come back to Chicago and then I went into nightlife, you know, that was in Chicago. Well, I didn't feel too much like getting up that hour

ahead of time in order to get to the job. It was as much my fault that we didn't stay in Park Ridge with them people as it was my wife. And so but her mother told me, come on back, for us to come on back here. But all during that time my wife was both in Champaign and in living in Chicago with my mother and family, see. That's where we, we had to have somebody to lean on. And they, it didn't turn out all right but my job was all right. Then when I come back the Sigma Chi rehired me, see, so that put them earlier years and them late years together. All together I worked there 26 years. Then they come back and got me again, give me a lifetime job. And I didn't, I taken it, but the trouble there was that it still didn't pan out for the simple reason why that the ASTP program over at the university during World War II.

Wright: What's the ASTP?

Hite: Students patrolled. All the rich, all the rich boys that I usually knew quite a bit about, why, they didn't have to go to the war until they got their necessary training over here at the university. And they, they, they took over all the fraternities and sorority houses and made barracks out of them. They took all the furniture and stuff out of the fraternity house and made barracks out of them just like you would in a camp of a, of a camp where soldiers go to train. And they had to get up, they had to make their own beds. Well, now when, if the boys had of been there, the fraternity boys that I worked for, if they had of been there, I'd of had to clean, you know, dust and all. But wasn't nothing to dust. But they couldn't, they couldn't take the house unless they took me. Now you got what I mean?

Wright: I see.

Hite: And they taken me. And Al Rivers before he got on the police force, he had one of them houses, too. But that was the only jobs that we had here in the community was porter jobs, custodians and mail. We had two mailmen, colored, over at the university distributing mail under President McKinley. And one of them was Ray Scott and other one was, I forgot his name. He lives over on Stoughton Street in Urbana. Now them two there did all of the mail that was handled by the Champaign and Urbana police, I mean postmasters, and they had good jobs. And they held it until, now you got about 20, about 20 colored mail carriers over there beside all of the other academics. But I'm ahead of myself now for the simple reason why you're more interested in what in the, coming on up to the politicians.

I come on back to Champaign and I got my job back. Then there was a little difference there in the house that came up. A very, very good fried of mine, the boys wanted a cook that, that like they had on the trains whenever football games or basketball games went on years ago, why, they would get an excursion. Or they'd put on extra cars for the students to go to Chicago or wherever they were going. And the food that was on the railroad, by the chef of the railroad, why was a lot better than what they got with the cook that they had down here at the, they hired for their fraternity house. So they decided that they, they would like to get a cook that, that had that training and which would've been, was a man cooking. Before that it was mostly women that did the cooking. But the job was too hard for about 35 or 40 boys and hungry, too. And so it got a little bit too much for the ladies, so they decided, the Sigma Chi's, they decided that they would like to have a man. And we did have one man here in town that catered to . . . The first water company after he got through working at the fraternity houses, why, he used to work for the manager that run the water

company here in the city of Champaign. His home. He just cooked for his family, for Mr. Amsbary's family, the water man. And they were crazy about him. And then I asked him how would he like to change and make more money 'cause you could more money cooking for a whole lot of people then you could for working for just the family. Now I didn't have to tell him that 'cause he was a great American, I mean a Mason, here in the city of Champaign and a very good friend of mine. And right now he's still living but he's up at the Mason's hospital in, in well wherever they are. And he's been up there. And his name is Fred Clay. And he come over and interviewed him and they hired him. Well, then, well, he was so good, both from the cooking angle, but he also was good with the man that, that, the meat, where he got the meat from. Every time the boys buy 40 chickens, well, they'd be one for, for Fred. They'd give him one, see. And he didn't steal it, but, the man give it to him. He just made a big sale and so . . .

Wright: Like appreciation.

Hite: Yeah. Appreciation would be more than anything else. Why he got one of them boys in there, one of them boys ahead of him, which is his boss commissary, and it didn't take him long to check and find out that instead of getting 40 chickens, there's 41. But there's one that's wrapped separate, see. So he thought that Fred was stealing, see. And reported it in, in the club meeting. And so they, they didn't not only, I'm the one that carried, I'm the one that caused them to hire Fred, I'm the one that brought Fred to work, I'm the one that took Fred home, when he went home 'cause I was one of the few people here in the city, black, that had a car. Why, there was others, but there wasn't too many. And so they decided they'd let both of us go. They didn't know whether I was in on it. Or so they let both of us go. So I went and got me

another job down there at Jew House, Jewish House, Sigma Alpha Mu, which is just the same kind of work, only more money. And so I stayed there until I went into politics.

And now, in the meantime, I married Helen. I'm back now where I started to head and then you told me you wanted to hear more about my earlier life before. My brother gave me away to Helen. And now I have my home and I'm back from Chicago. And I'm in my wife's mother's home over on Oak Street.

Wright: _____?

Hite: No, that's my wife's mother built that home over on Oak Street. And that's how come we come from Chicago and come back here and live in her home. And sooner or later would be ours and mine with two children, see. Now I got three see. I mean at the time I come back and moved in, why, we got three, we got three children.

Wright: Boys?

Hite: Two boys and a girl and one died, one died at childbirth. And, now, the campaign manager of the opposition for Mr. Flynn, by him being up with a whole lot of disruptable offenses that the state's attorney and the people of the community other than councilmens, why, that, well, they received it and they knew that he was in it, malfeasance and a whole gang of things was . . . Now the only reason the campaign manager come to me was because they had another boy that was campaign manager up there in the black belt that didn't know how to organize like I did. The people up here are together, get 'em up together, and talk for, the interest of what was good for the community, plus what I had

previously heard with all of this other prejudiceness and that was, that I could see in the limelight coming up. And then I had a little taste of it up in Chicago, so that's what made them think that I would be a good man, somebody that was straight with my people and was associated with them and socialized with them. And then they would be helping me instead of Mr. Person, who was on Mayor Flynn's side, see. And they decided, those, some of them, some of them, decided that they would come over but they was only spying on me and I didn't know it, see. What kind of a program did I have set up for Goodell? Well, the first thing I did was send one of our business managers over on the campus by the name of Chambers, Homer Chambers. And he's over there yet. But this boy, Goodell, when he was in school, he used to stay up over Mr. Chambers', Woody's Cleaning and Pressing establishment.

Wright: You said on Green Street?

Hite: Yes. Yes, still there. Yes. Still there. But he's got new, new Mrs., Mrs. Chambers, see. But, well, that brings in two more people, Mr. Woody and Mrs. Woody, see. But Mr. Woody and Mrs. Woody separated. He went to South Bend, Ind., and then Mr. Chambers happened to, Mrs. Chambers happened to pass and left him the whole plant. But he had the head on him to be able to make it bigger and so he went back and got his sweetheart of school days from Danville. He's from Danville but he went back and got his sweet, the girl, his sweetheart, but he still kept the name of Woody on his place of business. But it's really Homer Chambers' place of business with a new wife.

So, well, anyhow, that's enough of that except that for the idea that this man that I am now fronting for, why, I thought it was a good idea to let the people up in the north end of town know that he wasn't prejudiced for the simple reason

he would have had all them other rent, rooming houses that he could go to, and could, and had the money to pay there, but why would he come and want to stay with a Negro? Of course there was white, other white boys up there, as well as colored that roomed up over Chambers' cleaning establishment. So I thought that was a good point to bring out to my people up here in the north end of town that really didn't, didn't patronize Woody. Some did and some didn't. And but that was one of the mistakes I made that I didn't know that I made, although I thought it was good for my campaign, for my manager, for my mayor. And so then I had, I had several sweet people up here in the north end of town throw teas at his expense, Mr. Goodell's expense, to tea. And then she was a musician, Mrs. Goodell was, and she wrote a song for the benefit of the teas and prayer for the group that was there for that tea and donuts or as I come on down further and they give me a headquarters over here on 4th Street, Tisdale's. I just, they decorated 'em and put all of those campaign literature and stuff there and my wife taken over as secretary to receive and to tell in whose names they were down to help me because I'm working, see I had to make a living. And then after I get to, I'd come on back to the campaign office. And maybe we had a party on and there would be a nice crowd there to hear what we had to say, and hear what Mr. Goodell had to say, the man is running against Mr. Flynn.

And so therefore I, in other words, the names that I thought that was worthy in the city, I began to look the names over and give 'em to Mr. Goodell. And, and my campaign manager — there was a white fellow over me, see, [Byers] was his name. But Goodell knew me and he knew Mr. Byers was in contact with me. And so the first thing I did because I had a little crookedness in my heart at the time of being able to be given an opportunity and they come after me, or come to me, I just was getting me some of that backhand money. So I decided to ask him first for a loan. But now what did I, I ain't in the habit of

getting in the hundreds, so I just decided to ask him for $20, see. And, and the campaign manager, well, he did the wrong thing by giving me $20, 'cause next time I'm going to want $40, see. But I didn't go through that strong. I just told him I need some coal at home and instead of, we had coal houses over in my residence there on Oak Street. So, therefore I never had had that coal house filled up. Why, when I said I needed some coal, they told the campaign manager that I worked for Goodell, they told him, told him, Nogle and Black Coal Company, fill Ernie's coal house up. See? See? They did fill up my coal house, had it running all out, all out the windows. No, I never had so much good, lump coal in all my life. Well, now I got that, it didn't cost me nothing. And but it was, it helped me.

And then in meantime, why, that money that I owed him, he said, well, forget it. See? So, now, here I go, now, I had put my head on the block and the election came. Well, Mr., Mr. Flynn, Mayor Flynn, he beat that man, with all of the badness that he had did in the community that they said was bad, he still won it. And, a lot of, I had the Mr. Goodell's campaign manager gave me 12 cars, 12 cars, and I had at least about 30 workers, besides the 12 cars. That made 40, about 45, about 45 people that Mr. Goodell, that I promised that they would get some money, you know, because the man had been awful good to me, see. And come to find out, that this, this ward up here is the one that beat him, see.

Wright: Your own folks did it?

Hite: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. My own people, see. And that's the one that, now I got, them that hired, them that are hired, ought to be able to vote for him. Those houses that I gave to people money for having the parties, you know, and one thing another like that, I just did. This is my first time to enter politics but it's my

last time. I got out right then. But because when, this ward is the one that's the biggest, it's one of the biggest wards, up here in the north end of town for equal justice and consideration, but we got beat. And there was only about nine votes that he got up here anyway he had a got at least 20 votes, okay, why he would have won. But it was just that close. And this is the ward that beat him. Now, Mr. Goodell since he lost, he didn't pay none of 'em nothing. No, no more than them nine that I named that he thought that was entitled to it. And the rest of them there they come to my house that evening after an election and I had to leave my home. See. And but everything quieted down but, 'cause they wanted their money that they claimed that they had worked. I couldn't, I just picked out the ones that I thought that was really serious, you know, so but the rest of them, they, they give us an awful bad . . . Oh, darling, why don't you sit there?

Wright: I stayed up too late last night, that's what's wrong. I'm fine, though. I'm fine.

Hite: Well, anyhow, well, that ended my political career. I think that's enough on that subject. But, now, now, I'm married, but I was married during this period but I kind of had it, I jogged ahead of it, and then I, now I have to come back now.

Wright: Along with being a political campaigner you were also working at the fraternity house. So you were doing two things at one time.

Hite: Two things. And, but now I'm coming on back now to where I had left off on the other tape with the, let's see. Now, I'm almost positive that '35, between the years '35 and '40, or '35 and '45. Now World War II come up and my children was grown up. One of them is already been drafted and that's Ernest E.

Hite. That's my oldest son. They drafted him and he had just married, Louise [Banks]. And she stayed while he was gone in my home, which I owned, 510 E. Washington Street. My daughter had grown and she had married and her husband was Onie Pearson. And she also stayed with her child. And Louise [Banks] she also stayed with, with her child in my home with my wife and I. And that went on until finally my oldest son, the first one to leave for the World War II, why, he, he got a physical discharge and so naturally he was able to come back to home because he, he, well, they give him a physical discharge, that's all I know. And I didn't get a chance to get any, any other alternatives to it for the simple reason why before the end of the time, why, I had received a divorce from their mother. And he had decided to live over on Oak Street when he come back and worked out the Jacobs, Clifford and Jacobs, out, and he's been working there now practically . . .

Wright: What is Clifford and Jacobs? What do they do?

Hite: They, that's the foundry out in the north end of town. That was the first, one of the first industrial beside Colwell's Electrical Shop that was for the benefit of anybody that got up out of the, from construction work and portering and security guards in the banks, all the banks in the city of Champaign had some colored janitor and a security guard. Now you understand? But now those were what you call pretty good jobs at that time, above broom, but that, all of that happened, all between '35 and before and then after World War II. But I'm in that year now in particular to let you know just exactly what kind of occupations that kept our people busy. It was either cook, porter or out to the university, and there was only two of them jobs, that was good enough to what you call, a good job, and that was the mailmen, and then chauffeurs for the big businessmen

downtown. G.C. Willis had a nice chauffeur. Bilderback had nice chauffeurs. And W. Lewis had a houseman and chauffeur and a cook.

Wright: Now these are all the rich white?

Hite: All these are all rich people, see, the best fathers in the community. But now if you didn't have the qualifications, you didn't, you didn't, you didn't have no relatives, if you didn't have the qualifications for being a good baby-sitter, you don't sit with their children, see. If you a good maid, well, you don't clean up their house, see? But you got to be practically like a, well be able to get, come from good recommendation or come from a good family. So therefore that's all that, that's the only kind of occupation that the coloreds had here in town and I named the outstanding jobs. And those were really the ones that give you some money and give you a nice Christmas present or nice birthday present and remembered everything so you kept thought that you were getting along all right but you wasn't, see. You didn't, you couldn't demand anything 'cause all you knew is lose your job, see, and if you lost the job, you thought the longer you stayed on the job, the more honest and dependable you were, the longer you stayed. So therefore that's what we built our, our usual situation that kept us so well pleased here in the community, but look how many people there were unfortunate that wasn't working.

And then that come in with, I would say, that come in with the, the Depression, previously. Bread lines, but I never was on none of 'em. I happened to be working at the Sammie house, which I had left the Sigma Chi House and went down to the Sammie house and those boys which was Jewish boys, they, they knew that this was coming, Depression was coming, so they took all their money out and put it in, put in a safe in the house. So therefore,

and I'm working for them so whenever my check come for a day, why I, not for a day but for a week, why, I never had any trouble. And they, my friends up there in the north end of town, I helped them whenever they were in distress in order to gain back some of that prestige that I lost when I was trying to be a politician, see. And that made me a good _____ in the community, see, with the ones that are grown up now and they are very respectable toward me. And they still are.

Wright: So your prestige was . . .

Hite: Well, building up all the time but it wasn't because of me personally. It was because of the help that I . . .

Wright: Was able to give.

Hite: Was able to give them. And so therefore this is what makes me be able to give this interview without any stumbling blocks. I'm able to get help from the government now.

[End Tape Two, Side A]

Ernest S. Hite Interview

Tape Two, Side B

Hite: I now at the particular time, why, I happen to receive my age limit, now I am trying to stay within but I have to go a little bit above between 50 and 65, and those years. Now finally 10 years ago, I finally retired. And but I'm now, I'm not working at Sigma Chi and I'm not working at the Sigma Alpha Mu. But they had been taking my money out ever since 1937 for paying in for O.A.B. and that stood for Old Age Benefit. And then when they discontinued it with who it was under whose administration it was, I don't know now, but 1937 whoever was president, well, that was the beginning of being able to take to take 2 cents of the employers' money and a penny of my money. And call it Social Security. And I've been in there ever since clear on up until I was 64 and two more months I'd of been 65. But I had a very, very good lawyer friend of mine in the fraternity house where I was working to tell me it takes them at least two or three months in order to be able to fill out my application for Social Security. 'But Ernie you ought to get your Social Security, see. It's your money.' And so I went down and put in my application and the lady that I was talking to when she told me that it wasn't, more, there wasn't much more that I would be able to receive except the honor of that next two or three months that I had before I be 65, that when, I said Well, how much? How much difference? How much difference is it? And it was only about $2 difference.

Wright: Two dollars difference.

Hite: Two dollars difference if I wait until I'm 65 and I don't know whether I'm going to live three more months, see, 'cause I wouldn't of been going up there

putting it in if the boy don't tell me, see. And so I said, well, no. I said, well, you put it in. No. I just, I didn't know nothing. That's small change, you know. Two dollars and some cents just wait three more months and by that three more months, there was a whole lot of old people didn't never get, get to be 65. So I thought, well, I better get the bird in hand while it sits in the bush, see. And I got it. And it was through the one, the lady that worked, that worked for the government that I did get it. And then around about, why, I would say it was sometimes after I got to be 65, that I got the letter that, that, that I had been received and I got a bonus, what they call a bonus, well to me that, that bonus was quite a little help, see, because I'm living right here when I got it.

Wright: Okay. I wanted to go back to right after, right after the world war. Did you notice any new people coming in from the South maybe, Negroes from the . . .

Hite: The South. Yeah. Yeah. Well, now that's between, that was after . . . I'm now trying to stay within the period of 1942 to 1952. I may get a little bit ahead of myself at times, so public if you please accept this with, with, I'm going a little senile because . . .

Wright: I think you're doing a wonderful job.

Hite: But anyhow before World War II you began to see new faces in the community. And they were a little bit indifferent to get acquainted with other than the people that had always been here that you knew from childhood or you knew from my childhood and then noticed that in, since you growed up you began to. But there began to be new faces. Well, they, they were, they didn't say hello.

They acted like they, they couldn't talk. Or they were afraid to talk. But the only thing that you would notice that there was, they were human was on account of a dance or a social or a clique of people. This family here, they would come up, just like I came up here from Centralia. But I had to have somebody to lean on outside my mother and father and that was a lady by the name of Mrs. Yarber. I told you that about her earlier. Well, now they had to have somebody that was a friend of theirs from their hometown, wherever they're from, Tennessee, Arkansas, southern states, I know that. So much so that these hard jobs that average citizen in the community wasn't used to unless they paid a whole lot of money and they wasn't used to it so they had to take it, they had to work under somebody and then they were able to get it. But here these people that's been used to, been used to even driving trains down South, they knew how to drive trains and hostlers, we called 'em hostlers up here, all they did was bring 'em from the roundhouse down here to the station and then catch the dinkey and go back to the roundhouse.

Wright: What was the dinkey?

Hite: The dinkey was the car, I mean, a two-car that switch engine on it that these here new people come in town built the railroad that run from the station to the roundhouse. And they called it dinkey, see. And they'd run around about just like a streetcar of today. They'd run every hour, different shifts at the roundhouse. Well, the roundhouse jobs were the main jobs that was, but none of the, none of the citizens of the city of Champaign, none of them didn't care too much about, they didn't mind working at the roundhouse, but they didn't want to work on a section and, and, and . . .

Wright: Now the roundhouse was where, that's where the . . .

Hite: That's where the engines turn around and come back. But there was a very few of our citizens that worked on it. They worked in oiling or walking the tracks to see that the, there was no breaks in the, thems the kinds of jobs that the citizens of the city of Champaign that was old members that are retired now. But the new jobs is the ones that these people were migrated and they were brought up here from the South. I think that one, one gentleman that I know of is responsible. He got, he got, what they did in down South, I don't know, but I think the majority of them had to get, had to leave the South. Or the white people down there would've killed 'em. So, they had a chance to be smuggled from the South up here. I do know of at least 15 or 20 cases of how they got up here 'cause they still noisy, see. And but the majority of them as they come, they, they had to lean on one of their relatives until they got a little better. But the jobs didn't get too hard for them to be able to make that money that they had been making down South.

Wright: Now there was one period when it talked about the shacks they had to put up for the, they didn't have any houses. They just had these shacks. Do you remember that?

Hite: Yes. The government stepped in, the state, and they, they called, they put in, they bought the lot. And they put in these here shotgun houses they called 'em and tin tops in order to help to house these people because each house that was up here in the north end of town, they were on their way down because they transferred the, everybody that had homes up here had to put their toilets on the inside. Wasn't nobody up here hardly that had any toilets inside, except the

houses where some of the white people that were, had pretty good jobs all their life. And if you moved in one of their houses, or bought one of them houses, why then you had an inside toilet. So naturally the council and the, and the government or somebody, I don't who it was, all I know is you can't go out to the backyard no more. You had to put your toilet on the inside, which made a plumbing bill. And the average one of us didn't have money to hire a plumber as high as plumbers, plumbers is high now, but they, they were high for us then in those days. So that made everybody had to bring, well, brought it inside the house. That's your toilet and your bath. And before that period came, why, and that law was passed, why, the majority of the people up here in the north end of town took baths in the washtub and didn't think nothing of it. And none of the pools in the city of Champaign didn't care too much about the Negroes coming to the pools. So they finally built the one huge, huge pool out here to Crystal Lake. Well now until on that one day, then they drained all the water out of it.

Wright: They drained all the water.

Hite: After the colored used it.

Wright: Oh, I see.

Hite: And then put in fresh water and then, then they had one day, one day, they could take. Now that's one of, one of the, one issues that I had when by hiring, by worked for Mr. Goodell 'cause that was one of the first things he was going to put up here to Douglass Park was swimming, a wading pool. He didn't call it a swimming pool but this for the ones that were a little bit growner they, he wanted to give classes for learning them how to swim as well as the little ones, that tots,

that it run down that he was really build it if he got to be the mayor. And but he got beat. So we, and then he was going to put in an obstacle course for the benefit of the boys that was in that class for being able to develop themselves, physically. And I was in charge of the park at that time as a recreation leader.

Wright: Of Douglass Center?

Hite: Douglass Park.

Wright: About what time, what period of time?

Hite: That was in the, that was in the early '40s. Yeah. Thirty, thirty, thirty, from '35 in that span between '35 and, and '45 or '50 because some of the boys that are now young men are here, I mean in town now, why, they used to play ball under my guidance. And then we also had our girls entertain the Chanute Field the 122nd and 99th Pursuit Squadron when they were up at the university, I mean when they were up at Chanute Field when it was first built. And I was in charge of the games as well as Kathryn Humphrey, my sister, and Mrs. Wesley, Odelia Wesley. We had, they had games and dances and acquaintances but now what they did after that, why, that's how, that's how it made some of their differences. You didn't stick your nose in nobody else's business. You, all you did, you had your job to do and you did it and it was done on the up and up. And I did it. And so then they, we were in, what years were, '42, anytime after World War II, I'm thinking from my children's standpoint as well as . . .

Now the migration of the people from the South, I would say, that they off side after they got here awhile, why, I would say it was good for the community. Those that, that had potentials of being able to live better and do better and have

a freedom but it didn't it take it long to go to their heads. Because they wanted more than the people here in the community intended for them to have. And all at once they wanted to make 'em take it a little bit slower. Well, that was more properties bought because they wanted something for their own. They didn't have nothing with the money that they made, big money on the railroad was more money than they made down South on the railroad and if they were cotton fields and one thing another like that well now these people up here, they began to pay 'cause they were good workers. And the majority of the homes and the businesses that we owned now here in the city of Champaign, which ain't very much outside of the, the, businesses that is corrupt that is owned by the ones that didn't have the education to advance theirselves. So that's the, the bootlegging joints and the, and the dancehalls that are, well, they call it the P.H. and K., which is poor people's kingdom.

Wright: Now you said your wife came up with one of the . . .

Hite: That's your mailman.

Wright: Your wife came up with, one of those that came up with the migration.

Hite: Now . . .

Wright: Your second wife I mean.

Hite: Yeah, my second wife. Now in the meantime which was a very, very sad occasion in my life for the simple reason why that's some of the friends _____ personality that I had in the community, why, I was very much, I was very much

lost for being, being wrongly, or I judged her wrongly in being able because I always had her on a pedestal. That's my first wife. So it didn't take me long to be, have, the first thing unfaithful go wrong that I thought that was unfaithful although I didn't see it. But I do know that one of the men from the South was one of the first electricians that worked for the city, and, well, he stole my wife, love. And so therefore I didn't know it but never till after it was well and developed. And some of the church members that, Salem Baptist Church, was the ones that . . .

Wright: That's the church you belonged to?

Hite: Yeah. She belonged and I did too at the time but I had previously left it for her exclusively because she was still in it. And she still is a good church worker but the man that stole her from me, why, he's dead now. But he was the first black electrician that fixed these lights up all up there in the north end of town.

Wright: What was his name?

Hite: Hamilton. Mr. Hamilton. Well, I tried to sue him but, but out of alienation of affection but that law went out before I got divorced, see, so therefore there's nothing but my _____ said let her alone, so I let her alone. But she's still a good woman in my heart. So, it don't take me long to be lonesome, with the kind of a disposition that I had and so therefore a very, very good friend of mine from Paducah, Kentucky, told me that I got a very, very good friend of mine that wants to come up here and stay with us in the city of Champaign and work. And Ernie, I'm almost sure that you and her could make it off good. So I, bring her on up, bring her on up, Hindu, we called him Hindu 'cause he looked like an Indian and

so him and his wife, they, they brought her up here. Well now I do not care to jump right off and marry without me not being able to find out something about your disposition or whether we can make it or not. Well, we hit it off clear from the first night, engagements, both in dancing and then entertainment from drinking angle. She don't like no drunk. I didn't either. Well, let's go home. We go home. And I happen to be acquainted with some people that allowed me the privilege of, of coming and visit her, or meet her there. And it didn't take long before we jumped up and we got married.

Wright: Now, were you still playing in the band, too?

Hite: Oh, yeah. Oh, I was in band, I had been, I hadn't started on me, I quit talking about me. And my, my own band, see. I mean I hadn't got to that. I mean, I had been on it when I met this girl.

Wright: All along?

Hite: All along. I had the band with my first wife. Then I also had it all during my married life with her and that's where we did most of our rehearsals in my home. Well now, but I still attached because I didn't, that was my band to get started. Now, well, that was a pretty good important part of my life during my marriage and after my marriage and before I had the pleasure of getting the name around in the community that I was a musician. I got, I told you how I got started. And then I told you me going to school and playing, I didn't tell you about me playing in the band at school and then in the plays that they had in the school, in the pits of the stage for the benefit of the kids that went to school in their stage activities.

Well, I was good, better than the ones that they had that were drummers also in the band.

Wright: Well, a lot of times you were the only Negro there?

Hite: Yeah. I'm the only one, I'm the only one that was in the orchestra and in the band _____, I was the only one. And I was well voted upon of being accomplished. But I learned to read in school, read music, see, see. So this is why they were very much interested in me. Then I was able to fill up where the rest of the dots didn't tell you. But I got back to the dots. But I mean I didn't mess up the other drummers, see. That is in the drum corps or in the band, and there was more drummers than me in the band, but they, but they're playing, they're playing the dots. And I was playing 'em, too. But I'd also add something to it, see, and that made them like me because that put them back as to how to count them rest. And one thing, I'd fill up the rest, see, and then get back in time to the dots, see.

Wright: How long, how long did your band last? How long did you keep your band?

Hite: I had my band for around about 12 years around in the community here. There's no fraternity house or sorority house I didn't, I didn't play in. I also played in the opening of Prehns over on Oregon.

Wright: What was that?

Hite: That's just a meeting place for the students to have like coffee break or sodies and stuff like that. They come and then if there was one of the sororities, one of the fraternities, if they decide to come and hear my band, they could hear my band at Prehns or Feldkamps on these certain, on certain nights out there on the campus because I played, I got paid, the boys got paid, but we also are advertising for the benefit of getting to play for their occasions whenever they made up their minds they's going to have a dance, see.

Wright: Your band was all Negro? Did you have any whites? You said Mr. Shady was your leader. _____.

Hite: No, no, no, this, see now that's, that's, that's the, that's the, that's the what-do-you call it, a, that's earlier. That was, they were all colored, too. That was a band, a marching band. You know what I mean. And then there's the band that we called dance band that was owned by Jordans. And there were four brothers of mine that played with them and they played both a round dance music and square dancing. And now here I come along with my band and now there couldn't be a student that registered over at the university, unless he, he made mention, 'Do you play? Do you play any kind of an instrument? In your high school, wherever you come from, Texas, or anywhere?' We had out-of-state students attend school here or I wouldn't have never had the boys out of St. Louis like I did if they had attended any other university.

Wright: So you had a lot of university students.

Hite: I had all university, all university students, both boys and girls and one of them, my best accomplished piano player was Eileen McRoberts was her name.

And her name, she, one of her, her husband married her. And he was just back here for homecoming here last year. And he come by the house 'cause I didn't go out to the homecoming. So he wanted to see, they wanted to see me and one of my boys here in town that met him. And he said, 'Well, yeah, my wife used to play with Ernest's band.' And she was good. She was the one that introduced on the campus "The Man I Loved." And she, she still with the man that she loves. And that sold, my, that one number, that one number while we played on advertising for Mr. Feldkamp, another confectionary place over on Wright Street, and Prehns, on Green Street, then Prehn opened up his swell villa over on Oregon in Urbana. And a white band leader by the name of, one of the outstanding bands, was Bill [Donoghue]. And he was the one that really was hired to play the opening but he got him a job over in Decatur, for Orlando Hotel in Decatur, paying more money than he could have made by playing the opening engagement for Prehn so Prehn let him know, 'Well that's all right. I'll get Ernest.' See. And he got me and I opened up 'cause the, the, his restaurant and over there in Urbana. So that was an honor and a feather in my crown in order to make me continue to be popular. And the boys, I didn't have to dress them. They dressed theirselves on account of their mothers and fathers sent 'em to school, see. And this is the best, this is the best, colored blood we had because they were bettering their condition and they come clean and they wanted to be clean and they looked nice. So finally I decided that we would like, and they decided, helped me to decide, well, we ought to get some kind of uniforms, see. So we got uniforms.

Wright: Now what year did your band, what year did you stop?

Hite: Well, I would say I stopped in about '65.

Wright: About ’65. So you had the band up until ’65?

Hite: See, now I, let’s go back to about ’62. See, ‘cause it was during them two or three years that the band broke up. And the reason it, and the band broke up was because of the boys, as they graduate, I’d have to fill in with new members that could play the repertoire. By the time you play over a span of, I’d say, nine or ten years here in the community, you got a stack of music that was really that high. Well now you can play all of it for one engagement, one engagement, but at the same time you pick the ones out for your program for that evening for that affair and the kind of music that they might like. Well now you have to have somebody to come in to sit in to play it. So where did I do? I’d have to arm up my band from going to especially Danville. There’s Jimmy [Rachel], and [Nannie Rachel], his brother, Dr. Rachel’s children, and they both were sax players and very good. And then [Johnnie Dyer] from Danville and [Colfay Turner] from Danville. He was a guitar player. Scottie was a guitar player. When Colfay quit, when Colfay died, why, I got Scottie. And same way with Decatur. I got Roy. I got [Mac Willis]. I augmented with all different one of them boys. But the majority in my band, was originated, other than with my home boys, I would fill in with other home boys as the graduate students would leave or flunk out. And but, but I would say that my band went in to, was in its heights and I made the most money and they had the most jobs was when, built that around and about the students, was made up of the students. So, that kept me in good with them and made extra money for them to spend on their parties and one thing another like that. Then when they, then I began to go into the hole when I become into transferring and transporting boys from Danville, Decatur and also from Chicago to _____. And then the responsibility of taking care of ‘em. Well, I didn’t

mind it ‘cause I, the bill would be high enough so that I’d be able to take care of them. I put, I put that in the expense.

Wright: Now, I was going to go back. Now your second wife, when _____?

Hite: Well, I had this band when I, when I had the pleasure of meeting her, and playing in Paducah and Fulton, see. And then I met her and then she said, well, she’d like to come to Champaign sometime. And she told . . .

Wright: So you met her in Paducah, Kentucky.

Hite: Yeah. I met her at a dance in Paducah, Kentucky, and also Fulton and visited her in Mayfield, from a dance that was promoted from here down there for me playing. And, and then I had the pleasure of meeting her folks. And then I, I finally decided to come and take the chance of having her come visit and she did. Now that’s how I met my second wife. And then we were together at least four years, and in the four years, why, why, she happened to be in family way. And I had her under pre-medication visiting the doctor at least once a week ‘cause I remember I had to pay the bill. And, but, she was unable to bear the child and herself. Why, I do not have any idea at the particular time because I was so shocked at the time with all of that time before carrying the nine months, why, when she counted her dates and all, why, there was at least one or two days that was, it was late. And she still didn’t have any pains. And so therefore, why, I decided, well, he, the doctor decided that he needed to check on her and had her go to the hospital. And she stayed two days in the hospital. And then finally he got in touch with me and told me that, that she’s going to have to have some more blood. And so, I happened to know a lady, a very good friend of mine, Mrs.

Valentine, she was a musician, too, also, a music teacher here in town, piano, and her son was in, up at Chanute Field and he was in charge of the blood bank, up at Chanute. And so I was lucky in that way, although I did have my own relatives to furnish pints, half-pints of blood, or pint maybe, that's they were, pints. And friends, but I finally didn't have no more to have to worry about because Mrs. Valentine's son brought six soldiers down here to help to . . .

[End Tape Two, Side B]

Ernest S. Hite Interview

Tape Three, Side A

Wright: This is a continuation of the oral history interview with Mr. Ernest Hite. The last tape we left where he was discussing his second wife and her death. Now we're going to, now we're going to go back and he would like to bring up some points concerning his band, auditioning and the prejudice after World War II. All right, Mr. Hite.

Hite: Right here? While, or after World War II, I had two sons in the World War II, and one of them had to have physical discharge but my second son he stayed over until the end of World War II before he came. And he now is in, well he came home and he attended Bloomington-Normal College.

Wright: Is that Illinois State University now?

Hite: On the government's program. And he happened to meet his wife over there in Bloomington and she was a daughter of a minister in Chicago and her family. And so they were able to contribute, or she was able to contribute for her love for my son, and which what little contributions that I had to offer him, it really was not, really enough with what the government give him. And so he run short before his next allotment come in. So I would, I was working at that particular time at the Sigma Chi house and I would box up a whole gang of stuff that was, goodies, for any child. But he's a man now, and a good man. Well then we would do the Bloomington up with my second wife and come to find out, why, why, we had such a lovely time, and then finally they, they, married. And her

name was Corrine but I forgot her last name now because I knew, I remembered it then but I don't remember it now, and . . .

Wright: Now while you was on the campus in Champaign, had it changed? You said while you were growing up you didn't, you didn't experience much prejudice.

Hite: No.

Wright: Had it changed? After World War II, did it, could you see it more then with more, more Negroes coming to Champaign? Or could you?

Hite: They hadn't got here yet, you see.

Wright: Oh, I see.

Hite: Not at that particular time. Can I go now?

Wright: Yes, go ahead.

Hite: Well, immediately after World War II and the boys came back home from World War II, why, then the University of Illinois campus, colored, had enlarged their population as far as colored students were concerned. And they added another sorority so that made two fraternities and two sororities. Before World War II, they only had one sorority. And that was the AKA. And after the World War II, why, there was other girls that couldn't get in AKA, they organized another sorority. I used to remember the name of it, but I don't remember now at this particular time.

Wright: Was it, was it the Deltas?

Hite: Delta Sigma Thetas? Is that the name of the other sorority?

Wright: No, I'm asking you. Does that sound like the name?

Hite: Well, it does sound like it but those Greek names to me now really don't mean anything at all but when I, right now because of my, my age and my thinking faculties. But Delta Sigma Theta sounds like the other sorority. And the girls that didn't make AKA, which was the tops and the oldest, why then they, they would go Delta Sigma Theta, if they contained to. I mean, if they decided that they wanted to go sorority, be in a sorority. The boys had already had Alpha Kappa Alpha, Alpha Phi Alpha and Kappa Alpha Psi. Why, they had those that didn't want to go Kappa Alpha Psi, what their program was I didn't know, because I just played their dances for them. And that's all. And it was quite a treat to play one of their affairs or one or two of their affairs. Their social informal affairs and then their dinner dances. Why, they decided because most of the members that was members of my band were also students on the campus so they knew each other and they wanted to help each other out and so they did. And so therefore I got, I got the contracts to play the jobs. Well, now it's just about now most of the members that I had in the band, why, they were students so they were well-groomed, come from some of the best homes in the state of Illinois and if they come from out of state, why, they also were very well thought of. Whether they come here on scholarship or not but if they played any instrument at all, the dean of men at the university assured them how they could make extra money.

Wright: By playing in your band?

Hite: By playing in my band. And they'd come and introduce them to me. And if they looked like they could handle the repertoire that I had and was very, very accomplished musicians, why, I'd sign 'em up.

Wright: Now, back to, you said there were more students coming to the university. Now, what, how did this change the relationship between the whites and the . . .

Hite: Now, with the amount of dis-consent that was previously, that the students that went to the University of Illinois, they thought they were either a little better than the Negroes up here in the city to the extent whereby they didn't socialize. One or two of the families in the city housed those that considered them equal. But the majority of them, established these fraternities and sororities because they thought they's a little bit better than even the ones that had to work here in the city, for one way or the other. And the church is the only one that causes them to put on their programs in different from the programs that the church had on. Now, I had noticed the difference there for the distaste from this, yet it was good to be able to know what our young bloods that were in college was thinking. And I began to notice the, quite a little bit of variation between good and bad, or I'm better and I didn't know that before. If you had money or you come from a wealthy family, you had a little bit more prestige. And those that stayed in the rooming houses that was, had lovely homes, why, I began to notice that they'd either take girls or boys. And which was in competition to the fraternities and sororities. Those that had financial backings, why, they were able to join a fraternity or sorority. And their brothers and fathers paid the expenses. They

had a chaperone for the girls anyhow, as, and then they, they had their rules and regulations of a sorority and the girls ate at the sorority house. Well, now they could eat on the campus but they was a little bit in differences according to boys that was on the campus. Why, they'd have to come either downtown in Champaign and eat in the restaurants downtown more so than eat in the campus restaurants unless they wanted a snack lunch. And there was quite a few little stands that served hamburgers like McDonald's do now in this day and time, a fast food, sandwiches and malts and stuff like that. But when it come to a real meal, why, the fraternities did not have a cook. But the girls did have a cook.

Wright: Couldn't they, couldn't afford one?

Hite: Well, that part, I would not know for sure. Whether or not that they, the boys, would rather take the money to take the girls out or to assist the girls out to the, to the lunch on their date nights. Or, either, they just wanted to hold onto the money that their mothers and fathers sent 'em and for other things in the city that they might want to pertain to.

Now, they began to fight for some of those seniors, or juniors and seniors, of the boys, I happen to notice, that they were fighting for their, their rights that they didn't have over on the campus like the white students. They didn't have to come downtown to get a haircut. They didn't have to come downtown to eat a good meal. They didn't, if they like Chinese food, why, they'd still have to come downtown to get it from the Chinese downtown. We had a couple of Chinese restaurants, exclusive restaurants, and that's where you found most of them that was financially able to take care of their dates and so forth and so on like that. But the white boys, they could go right around the corner from their fraternity or sorority house and they would be able to. Now, they began to notice that the

colored students that was out there that was financially able, why, they wondered why. They noticed that it existed but they didn't know why that they either had to go to the kitchen or either sit way over on one end at the corner. It's the same way with the theaters. Why, they, they didn't, couldn't sit on main floor. They had to go up what they call . . .

Wright: The balcony?

Hite: It was the balcony but they called it peanut heaven. Peanut heaven, that's the . . . Well, I'm not going to sit up there. And the students when they'd come to town, the colored students, and wanted to go to see a good show or outstanding run in a show, why, they wasn't going to sit up there. And the theater owners, they, they'd wonder why because previously it didn't make any difference to the citizens in the city of Champaign. If they wanted to see the show, they'd go on up there and sit. Why, most of the, most of the theaters had what they'd call Jim Crow balconies because most of the people up there, unless some whites wanted to come up there, why, then they would come up there and sit. But all downstairs was the main floor was all white people that wanted to go to the show. And they had seats. But the seats were not marked. Then after our boys came back from at least three of them. I happen to know the three that raised all cain beside the student seniors, juniors and seniors, they went, decided they would go down to the Rialto and the Orpheum theater and get their tickets. But they sit downstairs. They came here for that purpose to be able to see whether they were segregated or not. And the tickets didn't have anything on the, the tickets did not have, you just take 'em off of a roll. They had numbers on the tickets but for the benefit of the manager who owned the theater to find out whether he got the right money to correspond with the amount of tickets that

were sold. So there was no seating capacity like seat number three or four or something on that order. You just sit anywhere. But it wasn't nothing like that on the ticket. So that was a good point in their favor.

And then it didn't say, well, that was the difference between main floor and balcony. So they said, well, no we want a main floor ticket. Well, the ticket seller who possibly was a very experienced ticket seller but, you say you wanted one for the main floor, well you got it. And she would give it to you. And then this is what brought up another program dissatisfaction. Well now these boys with the uniform that had come from World War II, they had made it possible for the theater to even continue to be open for the time they get back. So how come I have to be ostracized and I fought?

Wright: What, after they fought for their country?

Hite: Yeah. They fought for their country and they come back and they get more discriminated against than they did over in Europe. And so they had a little skirmish.

Wright: Was it really fighting?

Hite: Yeah. The police. The manager of the theater, manager and all and bouncers, if they had one. _____. Well, they kind of insisted, well, you can't sit there. And then they'd stand in front of you. And see that you couldn't see the picture. Well, you could sit there if you want to but you ain't going to see the picture. And the skirmish like that, it was minor but yet still there was a lot of talk. There was a lot of talk about why they do that when I'm not paying my money to have you stand in front of me and I can't look through you. So, if they,

if he didn't move, why, probably one of the boys, either one of the soldiers or one of the students, it didn't make them any difference, they'd slug him. Or push him out of the way so if he push me, I'm gonna push you back. So, this is the beginning of, of an indifference about the theaters and the restaurants and the barbershops.

Well, the barbers, they decided that they couldn't cut colored people's hair. And so that's why I went to barber school and I couldn't cut it. The students had to come downtown in Champaign or Urbana and get their hair cut. And when they had about three or four, they had about three or four, barbershops on the campus where, which was near, and if they wanted to keep well-groomed, why, that's where they went. But they got, well, they won the case as far as, well, you, you, a barber so well you could try. Well, one or two of the barbers was in favor with the students and so they said, that well, yeah, you a barber, you ought to be able to cut it. But if you don't cut it like he like it, well, then don't go to him. Don't go back to him, see. And so the boys began to realize that that's a battle they lost. But they were able to enter the barbershops but they didn't get served on like they should've and the barber wasn't the least bit interested. If I give him a bad haircut, he ain't coming back no how. So, therefore, that was the beginning of the barbershop episodes. I told you about the theater.

Wright: Now, this is all, all this is taking place.

Hite: All this is taking place right after World War II. But how many months or years, it wasn't but over three years anyhow that that span we're in. Now the next indifferences that we had in the community was that the migration of our colored people from the South on account of the machinery that had taken up any numerous amount of work that the blacks used to do. Or I like the word

colored or Negro better than black but I've got here in the last past 20 years I've got to recognize black is me. And so therefore I go along with the majority. But ordinarily I really if they ask me my personal opinion I like colored or I like Negro. I never did like the word nigger because in my word analysis when I was in school, they told me word analysis said that a nigger is one who steals. That's either white, black, _____ green or red. But in the encyclopedia, or in the dictionary, why they tell you, they explain it a little bit more explicit. They say that a nigger got black nose and thick lips and black. Well, now anybody know that's talking wrong 'cause we got more colors in our race than any other race. Whites got to stay the white. Blacks got to stay mostly with the black ones and your Indians got to stay with the red and the Chinese, Japanese, they were considered the yellow race. And, but the Negro, you got all colors of the rainbow. And, so we got all mixed up. So, some of them say they're Scottish, Swedish. But we can all, we can do is just say that we colored. And we were a colored race of people.

Wright: Of different colors.

Hite: Yeah, now the migration came from the South on account of that's where most of our forefathers and great-great-great-grandfathers and mothers came from. And they put them on, they sold them on the blocks and that because, or wherever they was selling the blocks, and they brought them over landed them either in Virginia or Carolinas and whoever it is that had one of them cotton farms or tobacco farms they sell 'em to the master.

Wright: Now, most of those who migrated up here after World War II, where were they mostly from?

Hite: South. The South.

Wright: Was it like Mississippi, Arkansas, down there?

Hite: Well, that's where they migrated to, but they, when they come over, why, they. (Words cannot be deciphered. The rest of this side of the tape is blank.)

[End Tape Three, Side A]

Ernest S. Hite Interview

Tape Three, Side B

Wright: [Remarks joined in progress] . . . of the teachers and the situation in the schools.

Hite: Education.

Wright: Now this is about what time?

Hite: I would say that it would be between the years of ’55 and, oh, let’s stop at ’60. For the simple reason why that during this period of time we had just begin to get acquainted, well it had previously been in construction, the Chanute Field. Citizens of the city of Champaign that was qualified, they, the money was good, by the government and we had painters and carpenters and cooks and bartenders for the officers. And good time for our young girls and boys to the different programs of different people in the community that was capable of chaperoning a bunch of girls, good and bad, and take ‘em up to Rantoul to entertain the boys away from home. And, which was a good program ‘cause some of the girls are still married to some of the boys that they met. They wouldn’t have never met them boys if they don’t be up here for Chanute Air Field. And now the, the Lawhead School had practically been condemned.

Wright: Where was Lawhead School located?

Hite: Right here at the corner.

Wright: At the corner from?

Hite: On the corner of Grove and Fifth was the Lawhead School. Now that's one of the first colored schools that really, but now we had as many white students in there that lived in this area. This is for years before '45 but now as they, as the white kids begin to branch out, or move out of the district, they went to school in their district. And so naturally there wasn't nobody much up here at the Lawhead School but our own race. And therefore they had two teachers, but they still had a white principal. And, but now then they cut the school down as the kids growed up from, but they didn't go any higher than the fourth grade and then they would send them to Marquette School. And then if they still wanted to continue into school, why, they began to figure out that they would put Willard School. And then now they really did get some, I mean some teachers, that I didn't know, where they got them, where they came from. Because I'm now in around about the sixty, sixty or sixty-seven years of my life.

Wright: Wasn't there an incident that happened either at Lawhead or Willard School about a janitor?

Hite: That was at the Lawhead School.

Wright: That was at the Lawhead School.

Hite: Yeah, that was at the Lawhead School for one of our girls here in the city.

Wright: Is that when they decided to get the first black teachers there when that all happened?

Hite: Maybe, maybe, maybe so but now, now, that was a part of the program that I knew that it happened, and I know the lady and I happen to know her husband who is at Chanute Field, an airman. He's one of the cases that I, that I decided that I would use in accordance to the conversation that I said about Chanute Field and some of the girls are married to that boy. That was at Chanute Field, when he got out of, when he got out of the Army, or out of the field, why, he stayed here in the city of Champaign and he was a painter up there. Also, being a student in the Air Force and then he has now got an accomplished job as a painter around town for all these new homes and all. And he's getting along very fine and he's married the girl that was assaulted.

Wright: Oh, I see. He married, he did marry the woman?

Hite: Yeah, he married the girl. And to the family, they had three children. And they are all doing all right but one of the girls has got, what do you call it? What Louis, what does, the?

Wright: A disease?

Hite: Well, he'll come on here now and then and stay up around about I can't think of the names now like I used to, Joe Louis, I mean not Joe Louis. He stays up all night long and has . . .

Wright: Johnny Carson?

Hite: No, not Carson, but a guy like, as big as Carson. Lewis. Just a moment. Turn off the tape.

Hite: Why, I think that's enough about the young lady her child has that disease.

Wright: Muscular dystrophy.

Hite: Yes.

Wright: Jerry Lewis is the one you were trying to _____.

Hite: Yes, that's who I was trying to say that raises that money and she gets quite a little bit of change.

Wright: Now that incident made it so that the people, from what I understand protested and that's when they started getting more black teachers after the incident happened and everything.

Hite: Right.

Wright: Now this is taking us up, and you said about in the '60s.

Hite: Yeah, that's taking us to around about in the '60s. Or '65. Now, I'm, on all of these, all of these occasions, I'm still working on the campus. But I was able enough to be able to observe what was happening in the community even before I had the pleasure on the other outfit of being able to tell you about I had, I had a little experience in being a, being a politician myself. But I'm quite sure I made

mention of it, but if you want me to go back and tell you about my experience as a politician, which I got out of it just as quick as I got in it.

Wright: Yeah, I think, I think you told us about that when you were a campaign manager.

Hite: Yes, that's right. That's right. That's right. But I thought I did, but on one of the other tapes but I got out because we were not together enough to be able for me to stick my head out and I didn't have full control of my own people. So therefore, rather than to get hurt, I got out. But still went ahead but another very, very good friend of mine, Richard Edwards Sr., he and George Person and now the first uniformed policeman, A.A. Rivers, they, they three got their heads together and kind of put the colored people that was up here together, a little bit more, a little bit more than I did. But I was doing mine singly, as to why I failed. Then the man that hired 'em, I had 54 workers that promised me and pledged me that they would work.

Wright: Now this is taking place in the '30s.

Hite: Yeah. Now this is back and this is back in the '30s or '40s. And they, since they, this is the precinct, the colored precinct is really the one that caused the man to not get elected. Although he would have been a very, very good mayor, although Mayor Flynn won the election because he was more enable to bind our colored people together by having the first uniform policeman on the street.

Wright: This is Mr. Rivers.

Hite: This is Mr. Rivers, see. And George Person and Richard Edwards is the ones, and well, there was a couple or three more, three more boys that was in politics and had been. LeRoy Pickens and well, he got to be a constable here. Joe Sommers. Why they were political minded. And they helped Mr. Person and told Mayor Flynn who had been in one term and he had done such a good job for the colored people as far as being able to advance, other than being house maids and porters and stuff like that. But that's all of the jobs that was open for hired girls and boys. As they got out of school, they had to go somewhere else in order to get the jobs that they qualified themselves for doing. And so, therefore, I am now coming into the '70s.

Wright: Well, I want to go back into the late '60s, talking about, you know, the gangs that were here in Champaign. Could you tell us something about them?

Hite: Between '65 and '70, I would say, even a little bit earlier than '65. Now, I told you about the migration of the Southerners from the South coming here and they raised so much confusion and calls, but yet some of them, all of them, was not, those that worked on the railroad, yes, they were uncouth. But, some of them that followed their families that were, that were in pretty good shape down South. And they lived pretty good down South. They really didn't care. Their mothers and fathers, some of them didn't never come up here, even though their children wanted them to come up here. The land up here was a lot more fertile and the money was right – for them a lot more money and they didn't take them and they were quite thrifty. They began to buy houses that they could, and they were capable enough to be able to reconstruct the homes and they did is what they could for the betterment of being able to live a little bit better, considerably more than, better than what they did down home. And they had bank accounts.

And their bank accounts were, were swollen so that more money that they had, why, they would be able to send some of it back home and those that sends it so, since you able to send me $100 or $50 or $200 in accordance to the construction work that they was doing which paid good money, why, they were able to, say, well, I believe I'll go on up there and get me some of that money. Okay? And then they, the good, the good Negroes from the South, they begin to come. And make this money. Now most of the things that are in the city of Champaign now between '62 and '70 is owned, most of the homes is owned, by Southerners. And they, the citizens, like myself and considerably quite a few of 'em, those that were able to have bought, why, their homes were so dilapidated, and they couldn't, they, they, they are so old now, they only had their, they only had the money that their home brought in. If it was a big home, they took in roomers. And if it was a little home, why, they was able just to pay the taxes and be lucky to stay there.

Wright: What about the gangs? How did the gangs come into that?

Hite: Oh, okay. Now, we got a bunch of children that come up out of that category. I mean, out of that era. And they were able to organize and I want things better from my child than I had for myself. I don't want him to . . . Now some of the kids that was graduated and had schooling, they were able to see that, well, things have got to change. And Martin Luther King is the one that caused them to start thinking and I would say, he started me thinking. That I could believe that we better get ourselves together a little bit more closer and see if we can't get along with one another instead of chewing and, and fighting each other. It's almost like the Southerners from the South they got a whole lot of good logic but it doesn't make, it doesn't sound so well, but if, if you really

observe how they know how you put about five crawdads in a bucket of water and one of them crawdads will act like he's going to come up to the top, gonna come out. He's trying to get out. But if you just watch it, just as soon the crawdad or almost get out, all of them other fall back down there. They pull him back down. So, this is exactly what the young people vision of years, oh, I would say, later 17, 18, 19 years old. And some of 'em was 20. And they able to see that vision. And they ganged up. Those that lived on the other side of Washington Street, they, they, would gang up and have their headquarters. And if they catch any of these here on between Hill Street on back to Grove Street or they catch any of them over there after dark or out of territory, either girl-wise or dating, the girl lives over on that other side, they didn't want them to go with these girls over here. These boys over here. And the boys over there, didn't want, we didn't want 'em to come over here and bother our girls, see? In the same way from here on up to the end of the Bradley.

Now the same way from Wright Street over to the railroad. Well now, they beat, if they catch you over there, well, they, what you doing over there? Right. Well now, you, you, if you free, and you in a free city, why, you just as well get ready to run or fight. And so you can do either one. Now that's where the gangs come in. Then they begin to fight each other. Then as the people begin to remember that the Korean War and then the Vietnam War lasted so long and children that was 16, 17 years old went, got into training to Vietnam War and when they come back they had them little Saturday Night owlheads and then shooting starts, instead of fighting. Pardon me. Instead of fighting like we used to fight an individual, well, you win, we shake hands and then we be friends, see. But that's when I come along. And then clear on up until end of '60s, well, then, there wasn't no more of that. If you, you either, when you fight somebody now, you better fight them to kill. And they use that as _____ because anybody, I

don't care where you come from, all you had to do was come over to Champaign or Urbana and if you, if you, if you kill somebody and you one ours, you _____, why, you can kill somebody over here and get out of it.

Well, now, it has happened so much that it's got the, it's got the program that if you, if you wanted to kill somebody, bring 'em to Champaign and kill them and you can get out of it in about five or ten years. Didn't you hear? But there's no violence. The lawyers will fight your case till the end.

Wright: Now how did the people feel during this time?

Hite: They, they didn't like it. 'Ain't that awful? They done killed that man for no reason at all.' Now they kill 'em for, I remember one incident, I was on my way down to the club and a very, very good young friend of mine seen me and he spoke. He said, 'How you doing, Mr. Hite?' And I said, 'How do you do?' And he said, 'Do you know whether, do you know whether Sam, my friend Sam, (I can't think of Sam's last name) Charity, yeah. Do you know whether Sam Charity was in the club or not?' And I said, 'Yeah.' I said, 'Yeah. Yeah, he was in there.' Why? Because both of 'em were friends of mine. I thought. But if I had friends like that, which I'm about ready to tell you about, that's one incident from me. Why, Sam owed the boy 20 cents and I told him, I said, 'Sam, Tom,' (I'll just use the name Tom). I said, 'Sam, Tom said he wanted to see you. He wanted to see you.' And he said, 'Okay. Okay.' So, I was on my way, already on way home, and come to find out, I went back to tell Sam what Tom said and when I got back out there, they were arguing vigorously, to the extent whereby, Tom said, 'I want my 20 cents.' And I said, 'Is that what you're arguing about, Sam?' And he said, 'Yeah, I owe him 20 cents and he can't wait until my sister come so I can give him his 20 cents.' And I said, 'Well, here.' No, no, Tom

wouldn't take my 20 cents. I had a quarter, I said, 'Well keep the whole quarter.' That's to keep down any unnecessary. You know that boy kill that boy.

Wright: He did? Right there and then?

Hite: Right there over 20 cents. Now we've had something worse than that. A very, very good older, elderly person here in the city, which just happened since you've been here, and his name is, a very, very good citizen. He came up with that migration from the South and worked over, worked out at the Round House, and his father had two homes, bought two homes here in the city of Champaign and was a very, very good carpenter. And he married one of the large families of girls and boys of about 14, the [Chipmans]. And he married one of the daughters, one of the girls. And they accumulated and he got hurt on construction work by coming from off the railroad and trying to do the construction work where he could get, where he could make a lot of money. And, but he worked there for quite awhile, I'd say around about 10 years. And, but his name was Bob, Bob Taylor. His name was Bob Taylor.

Bob Taylor was a wonderful, well, I mean he was a champion, one of the champion checker players and also one of the champion Coon Can players, or card player. And him and a boyfriend from his part of the country, the southern part, but now, both of them were pretty well liked in the community since they had lived here that long. But now, Bob was supposed to be, able to be treacherous with a knife, quick on the draw of a knife. Well, Lucky, that was the other man's name, he was good on the pistol. And, but they were, they and he was a good checker player. When Bob Taylor lost his life over a dollar game of checkers. 'Cause the boy said, 'Well, all right, keep the dollar.' Then he went on out in his car and got his pistol and shot Bob Taylor over a checker game for one

dollar. Now, those are some of the incidents that happened that caused the people in the community to realize it's kind of treacherous to even go out after dark unless you got you a pistol.

Wright: So now what you're trying to say is that time's have changed?

Hite: Time's have changed within 70 years from 1970 until this is 1979. Well, I noticed that change. I do not go out at night unless I got a car, I'm in a car, and now they got here so lately, they shooting in the car. If they think you in there, and they want you that bad, see.

Wright: So the way you view Champaign now is not being safe, not being safe.

Hite: I would say that it's not safe for anybody that is, value their lives. Now, anytime you step out of your home now, you just liable, you don't have any, you may get a stray bullet or you may get a bullet that's supposed to be at you, for you, if they don't like you. Now, nobody has the disposition of who it is that you like and you don't like. All you can do is to try to live the life that you think is within yourself. Now, if you, if you want to put your life out there on the line, go out! Go out, stay all night if you want to and walk home. But if you do, you ain't nothing but a fool. According to me. Not because I'm blind, but I wouldn't go out now. I'd go to some special occasion and try to get, make it out and come back home, but I wouldn't go out and stay all night with these young people nowadays.

Wright: Okay. Now, we're just about coming towards the end, Mr. Hite.

Hite: That's the end of mine, unless there's something you want to hear.

Wright: Right. Okay. I just want to make one mention of one fact. You talked about your second wife. When did you and your present wife get married?

Hite: We married in 1920, 1930. Clementine and I, we married in 1930. And she was here to help me to bury as a friend, bury my second wife.

Wright: I see.

Hite: I had that 'cause that's the first one. That was the first, that was the first death I had to have anything to do with.

Wright: I remember you saying that you had never experienced . . .

Hite: I never experienced, my mother or my sisters, they used to take care of all the previous deaths out of our family. And there was 14 of us and I'm the only one left, out of 14. Mother and dad's gone and my sisters and brothers are gone.

Wright: Now, you had four children.

Hite: And I had four children and three of 'em living.

Wright: How many grandchildren do you have?

Hite: Well, I have to count 'em. On my side, I have to count 'em. Do you want me to count 'em?

Wright: You can. We've got plenty of time.

Hite: Well, I . . .

Wright: Maybe we better not. All right.

Hite: I'm trying to think of all 'em that's in there now. Jay's got, Jay's got one. He had two, a girl and a boy. But he got a girl now. The boy drowned in California. And Ernest has got five. That's my oldest son. He's got five, five grandchildren. And Margaret has got, she had three of 'em but she's got two, Bobby and Susan. And she is now married, her second marriage, and her husband is Earl Schmidt, and he's got, she's got one child by him.

Wright: You have great-grandchildren?

Hite: Yeah. I'm naming the great-grandchildren.

Wright: Oh, you naming, I thought you naming the grandchildren.

Hite: Huh?

Wright: I saying great-grandchildren, also.

Hite: Well, grandchildren.

Wright: Grandchildren.

Hite: Grandchildren is Bobby and Susan and then Ernest has got five grandchildren, five, four boys and one girl. And Jay's got, he had two, but the boy died. And Terry, Terry is still living.

Wright: Oh, two boys.

Hite: Huh?

Wright: You said you have two boys.

Hite: I got two boys. Yeah, that's true. That's true. Well, I got, Jay has got two. He had three but one is passed. I didn't count the ones that's dead. But nevertheless, I guess that's right. And now, Jay married a girl that he liked real well and the girl that used to help him over at Bloomington, why, they decided to get divorced. And satisfactory on both sides. And so he married [Vera Pride] and to that union, and they're both out in California now, why, they had one child. And so that's my other grandson, that's the one I missed. And now that's all that I know that's on in my direct decent. Now I got nephews and nieces galore and then, now, they have all got great-grandnieces and nephews for me to claim. So I don't go no further than niece and they all call me unc and they all call me grandpa or popo, see, those that couldn't talk so well, they call me popo. And, but I, but they are really the ones that does that, why, they are really my great-great-grandchildren, see, on my nieces' and nephews' sides.

Wright: I see. All right. Mr. Hite we really appreciate the time that you've taken. It's been quite an experience.

Hite: Well, I'm awful sorry that I didn't tell you at the present time since she is quite considered, I've been with her and her name is Clementine.

Wright: This is your present wife?

Hite: I been with her for 28 years.

Wright: Well, then 28 years, you married her during the fifties?

Hite: During the fifties. See, when we, when we married and this, my second wife, I only lived three years with her before she died. Well, that was a, a grandchild. I mean that was my child, my other child but I didn't name him because he died. See, I lost her and I lost the baby, too. So therefore, both of them was in and they out. So I didn't name them. _____. If you going to write that book you have to scratch that out, if you want to. And she was from Mayfield, Kentucky. Clementine is from Louisville, Kentucky. And that's where we married in Louisville.

Wright: In Louisville. I see. Okay, well we really appreciate the time that you've given. This has really been very experiencing. And thank you very much.

Hite: Well, that is, but I guess I wouldn't have been able to name that last six or seven years of my life if you had come any earlier because I, I would of have been able to remember more incidents than I do here in the last, last seven. These last past seven years, I notice that outside of my eyesight, which is glaucoma, I haven't lost it all, but one of these days there is a possibility I will be completely blind. But now, I don't know, so far, I may die before I go blind. But

I'm able to see, I'm able see Miss Wright. And I'm able to see that chair but to make out, if I didn't know you, by coming here visiting with me, I see you on the street tomorrow, and I wouldn't know you. You'd have to say, you'd have to know me. 'Well, how you doing, Mr. Hite?' Or Ernie or . . .

[End Tape Three, Side B]