

James Buckley

A Transcription Of An Oral Interview

1508 N. Mathews
Urbana, Illinois
July 12, 1983

Interviewed by
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Champaign County Historical Archives
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Introduction

This interview is with Mr. James Buckley, a retired janitor. Mr. Buckley has lived in Champaign since the Second World War. This interview is being conducted on July 12, 1983, at 1508 North Mathews, Urbana. The Interviewers are Melinda Roundtree and Patrick Tyler, representing the Urbana Free Library Archives Department.

James Buckley, Oral Interview

Buckley: I didn't go to school. I had to work, and along about that time _____ cleaning, helped make the _____. They'd hire me out to work and they'd work me. (Laughs.) _____ till I got big enough to work for myself. (Laughs.)

Roundtree: Did you live on a farm or did you live? Live on a farm?

Buckley: My father did.

Roundtree: Your father did?

Buckley: See, he'd hire me out to get money to work his farm. (Laughs.)

Roundtree: Oh, he owned the farm?

Buckley: Yeah, he owned a farm.

Roundtree: What did your mother do?

Buckley: She worked in the fields, too. She was black. (Laughs.)

Roundtree: Do you have any brothers and sisters?

Buckley: Uh huh, yeah, had a lot of 'em. Had several, let's see, there's four brothers, five of us, four boys and five girls, I believe.

Roundtree: Do you remember their names?

Buckley: Well, the first one's name is, [Irma Sara Jane], [Irma Sarah Jane], and the other's name, _____, um, can't think of it. [Irma Sara Jane], that's most the names, Mattie, something. Gladys.

Roundtree: Gladys?

Buckley: Gladys, nah, she's the younger one. She's up here now.

Roundtree: Oh, she's here now?

Buckley: Uh huh. One named Loretta. One named [Mark Anthony]. [Mark Anthony].

Roundtree: [Mark Anthony]?

Buckley: That's three — Lettie, _____ Lettie, [Mark Anthony]. Gladys, Gladys McKee. She the one that had the buck-teeth. Buck-teeth. She married Randy. She's dead. All of them are dead, except Gladys. That's five of 'em.

Roundtree: Three. You said Jane and Gladys and Mark Anthony.

Buckley: And Lettie.

Roundtree: Lettie?

Buckley: _____ Riley. Sherman. [John Isaac].

Roundtree: Johnny?

Buckley: [John Isaac]. That's four, ain't it? With me. (Laughs.)

Roundtree: Yes, that's four. Okay. Were you ever in the service? Do you remember that?

Buckley: 'Bout the time I got old enough to go, they all quit, so they never did call me any more. _____.

Roundtree: Do you know about what time you came to Champaign?

Buckley: Huh?

Roundtree: What year? Do you remember what year you came to Champaign?

Buckley: Not exactly. It was when they had the extra gang on the railroad. I come up here on that gang.

Roundtree: When they had what?

Buckley: Extra gang on the railroad. You know, they used to have extra gang. Not these railroad men that's on there but extra, extra gang. That's why I come here to work, stayed up there at the roundhouse.

Tyler: Roundhouse?

Buckley: Um hum. That's why I came up for.

Tyler: You don't remember what year?

Buckley: No. If my sister was here, she might could tell it. I forgot what year it was. Well, she was up here when I come up here.

Tyler: Was it before World War II?

Buckley: Ya. No. It was _____.

Tyler: It was after World War II?

Roundtree: You didn't go to school while you were here, did you? Had you been at school? How long did you work at the railroad?

Buckley: _____.

Roundtree: Five weeks?

Buckley: Four or five weeks, something like that. _____.

Tyler: The extra gang?

Buckley: Ya.

Roundtree: When you came to Champaign, how were the people? How did they treat you?

Buckley: They treated me pretty good. I had a pretty nice time with 'em 'round here. They treated me pretty good.

Roundtree: Were the people close? Was the community close? Did they mingle a lot, everybody? Did they talk to each other, go see each other _____?

Buckley: Yeah, yeah. They seemed to be getting along all right. They seemed pretty close, would talk good to you. I had plenty of friends _____.

Roundtree: Did you join any clubs?

Buckley: Church.

Roundtree: Church? Mount Olive? Alone? When did you join Mount Olive?

Buckley: When it was down there on 4th Street.

Roundtree: On 4th Street? Have you been there ever since?

Buckley: Uh, huh. Then they moved it up here.

Roundtree: How many members were there? Was there a lot of members?

Buckley: There were a lot of members, yup, a lot of members.

Roundtree: How was the church then?

Buckley: It was pretty nice, yes.

Roundtree: Was the service the same? Did ya'll get out at the same time?

Buckley: Yup, yup, about the same time. Yeah.

Tyler: Who was the pastor?

Buckley: Reverend. I can't remember his name. He died. He was the pastor. He was our pastor named Graves, yeah, Reverend Graves. The pastor I've got now is Lundy Savage.

Roundtree: How were, you know, the songs? Are they the same, the choirs, do they have young choirs?

Buckley: Yeah, young choirs and old choirs. They have two choirs.

Tyler: When the church first started did they sing more out of hymn books? Or what kinds of songs did they sing?

Buckley: Yes, they did sing more out of hymn books when they first started but, well the songs they sing some out of hymn books now.

Tyler: Can you tell us any big difference in the church now than it was in the past?

Buckley: Well, yeah, you used to get up there and read the hymn, read and then sang, then sing the hymn. Now they don't read them much now.

Roundtree: Do you think that's a good change or a bad change?

Buckley: Well, it seems like a good change, seems to me like it is.

Roundtree: So, you like it better now?

Buckley: Yeah. There goes one of the deacons going along there now in that red car.

Roundtree: When you first came here and you worked on the railroad, did you get the job right off, or did it take you a while?

Buckley: I had the job when I left down Jackson. We left Jackson and come up here to Kankakee.

Roundtree: And you got the job then?

Buckley: Yes, I had the job _____.

Roundtree: How were the job opportunities then?

Buckley: Well, then, you could get a pretty good then, _____ but you can't get 'em now. (Laughs.)

Roundtree: How would you say the community is now? Are they more close or do you think they've drifted apart a lot? The people.

Buckley: Well, some of them saying they like us drifted apart. Well, it seems like the peoples, some of them, stick to it now, some of them they don't pay you no attention. (Laughs.) Some of 'em.

Tyler: Well, I'm interested in how'd you feel while you were here in Champaign during the civil rights movement? With Martin Luther King?

Buckley: Well, I just want, it didn't feel right. I didn't think they done him right. That's just not right. I thought it was kind of good work.

Tyler: How did people in the community feel?

Buckley: Well, some of them they thought he was doing good work, too, but some of them didn't pay it no attention.

Tyler: Is the town open up to you, to your liking, any more after the civil rights movement?

Buckley: No, it didn't seem like they did very much more, I couldn't tell it, so I just went on.

Roundtree: Did you have a car when you were first here?

Buckley: Huh?

Roundtree: Do you remember the first car you had in Champaign? Your first car?

Buckley: I ain't never bought no car. Never had bought one.

Roundtree: You walked most of the time.

Buckley: Most of the time, or get in somebody's car. I got out and walked.

Tyler: I would also like to know how has crime changed since you first came in to the community?

Buckley: Seems like it's changed a whole lot. For one thing, you could go anywhere you want to and wouldn't be scared. (Laughs.) Now, I don't get out no more at night. (Laughs.)

Tyler: What's the reason? I mean, why is that?

Buckley: Well, there's just some of these boys around here love no _____ that's right. They'll do anything to you in the dark.

Tyler: Why would you say that people have changed like that now?

Buckley: Well, I think they just ain't, it ain't right. You can't be right, they'll catch you in the dark and knock you out and take what you've got.

Tyler: Is that because people are not as much as loving, they aren't going to church or _____?

Buckley: No, they ain't. It's families that ain't going to church I think all the time. They think you've got money and they knock you out and take your money.

Roundtree: Do you remember the gangs, the gangs that they used to have around town? The gangs, how bad they were during the 60s? Do you remember anything about that?

Buckley: Yea, I remember them. I never did be out where they were, but I do remember them talking about the gangs.

Tyler: Can you tell us some of the things that the gangs did?

Buckley: Well, they'd catch you if you had any money on you they'd take it off of you. Sometimes they might kill you if they think you'd say something about it. That's right.

Tyler: Do you know anybody that got robbed or beat up?

Buckley: Yeah, there's several folks that told me they got robbed, but I didn't see them, now they said they got robbed. That's right.

Roundtree: Can you think of anything else you want to tell us about that you can remember?

Buckley: No, that's about all, I guess. I ain't got it together no more, I guess.