## IT STARTS WITH MEMORIES

Stephanie Mills Trice | AASIG Black History Program | February 8, 2020 AAHGS – James Dent Walker Chapter

This is a tale of serendipity, oral histories and the F.A.N. club all wrapped up into one. Each of us have memories to share whether it's an ancestor, a personal experience of living in a particular place or during an eventful time in history such as the Civil Rights Era or DC's 1968 Riots. (memories= a story then oral history) As a historian, oral histories are naturally interesting to hear, wanting to know the truths behind the story and the journey of discovery are even more exciting.

Tracing African/Native Am. Ancestors

1. Oral History

2. Trace Family in Federal Census

3. Learn Historic Geography of the Region

## HOW DOES ORAL HISTORY AND SERENDIPITY INTERTWINE?

In the genealogical world: 1. <a href="mailto:serendipity">serendipity</a>: is a blessing, godsend, luck, luckiness, break, chance, coincidence, whim, powers to be and perhaps ending the discovery with a happy dance; 2. <a href="mailto:sorall-like-interviews">soral history (OH)</a>: for me it has been a collection of recordings (audio/video) that contain information about the past obtained from in-depth interviews concerning personal experiences and reflections; 3. the <a href="mailto:friends">friends</a>, <a href="mailto:associates and neighbors">associates and neighbors</a> (F.A.N. Club) are those living in a neighborhood (for me it is the Fort Totten Community which is located East of the Fort Totten Metro Station in Washington, D.C.).

## My serendipity intertwining moments:

**Story #1 -** Childhood memories as told by my parents of my great aunt <u>Emma</u> <u>Lee Harris Procter born in Warren County NCarolina on January 12, 1876</u> (1st generation after slavery) who in 1950 lived with her in the Foggy Bottom area

of the D.C., was college educated and didn't like to visit them when they moved to the Fort Totten area because it was too far to travel and when I traced her and Uncle William M. Proctor(d. 1942) in the: **Sixteenth Census of the United States (1940)**, it revealed:

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34	, Emma L. 0	wife 17	neg 60 m no 6-2 50 7	1. Carolina 11 Same House	no	no no no H	5

- They rented 2219 E Street NW in Washington City in D.C. and further states they have since April 1, 1935
- 90% of their neighbors rented and were indicated as "neg" or Negros
  - Column 14 for the Highest grade of school completed indicated C2 confirming Aunt Emma had 2 years of college
    - The photo shows the park mentioned by my parents and since May 1947, the State Department has been based in the Harry S. Truman Building in the Foggy Bottom neighborhood of Washington City.
    - ~ Old State Department building in D.C., c. 1865

Why the visits to my parents' home was considered so far for my great aunt and the **truths about that area in 1956** leads to: **Story #2** -THE JOURNEY of the VOICES OF THE DC FORT TOTTEN STORYTELLERS PROJECT.

**Fort Totten was:** 1 Jewish neighborhood with no diversity; 2 once considered Washington County, inhabited rural area in farms and undeveloped organized in 1871 to form D.C.; 3 the Fort Totten community was initially protected from black encroachment by racial restrictive covenants (overturned in May 1948) and 4 feeling unwelcomed.

However, memories of the F.A.N. club interviewees felt that the Fort Totten community was a very special place to grow-up. It's nestled between Fort Totten Park, Old Soldier's Home and the Rock Creek Cemetery. Many referred to it as "utopia, suburbia, a village and an island".

As a product of Fort Totten, Jules Johnson and I wanted to tell the truths of our childhood fun and the history of African Americans in the 1950s beginning to enjoy the equal opportunity of purchasing homes in the community developed by Morris Cafritz.

- > 2011 ~ We met at the PG County Library on September 19<sup>th</sup> and the idea was born
- 2017 ~ I received an email from Marion Woodfork Simmons written on my birth date March 10 to AAHGS members about oral history training and funding opportunities for individuals with family in DC to partner with DCOHC to conduct interviews.
  - 1st interviewee Arnetta Missy Barnes, DC native, 2nd cousin, 94 years young shares OH
  - Missy's father, Frank worked at Hotel Harrington when he passed in 1925 and in her possession was the original 1925 bereavement donation list on the hotel letterhead with the address 11<sup>th</sup> & E St NW which still is within of walking distance to the Foggy Bottom area.
- ➤ 2018 ~ After a 7 year hiatus and on a whim, I put in for a DCOHC grant detailing what was envisioned back in 2011 and the powers to be or serendipity itself I was awarded the grant

Through the journey, we were able to create a network of friends and neighbors who wanted to share their untold life experiences of living in Fort Totten and to-date the collection totals 20 oral histories and still growing. Even more exciting was to end the project with a community celebration at The Modern at Art Place thanks to the Cafritz Foundation the owners and descendants of the developer, Morris Cafritz.

**Learned:** It's a given, you as family researchers have a story to tell (a)

Remember U ARE CHOSEN TO DO WHAT U DO And genealogy is a life journey. It takes memories, a F.A.N. club and a team of resources to pull it off.

## Resources:

NPS Fort Totten Then and Now

https://www.nps.gov/cwdw/learn/photosmultimedia/then-and-now-pictures-of-the-civil-war-defenses-of-washington.htm

- Fitting Times https://youtu.be/w9IMhK3Xafo
- **Keep the Story** <a href="https://youtu.be/\_JWDc1FFRsk">https://youtu.be/\_JWDc1FFRsk</a> (Held @ The Modern at Art Place owned by Cafritz Foundation)
- Chocolate City A history of race and democracy in the nation's capital by Chris Myers Asch and George Derek Musgrove
- Lost Farms and Estates of Washington, D.C. by Kim Prothro Williams
- DigDC <a href="http://digdc.dclibrary.org">http://digdc.dclibrary.org</a> (repository for DC oral history projects) Wikipedia <a href="https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/United\_States\_Department\_of\_State">https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/United\_States\_Department\_of\_State</a>

