

Wiregrass Black History Project, RG 298

Charles R. Hayes Interview Transcript

Date Span: February 26, 2025

Biographical Sketch: Charles R. Hayes, born in 1944, is a life-long resident of Dothan, AL, with an extensive knowledge of the Baptist Bottom neighborhood. He graduated from Carver High School, attended Tuskegee Institute then later received his bachelor's degree in social science from Troy University Dothan Campus, served as a sergeant in the US Army, and retired from a forty-year career in the US Postal Service.

Organizational Sketch: The Wiregrass Black History Project is a collaboration between the Wiregrass Black History Channel on YouTube (by David "Mit" Kirkland) and the Wiregrass Archives at Troy University Dothan Campus. Funded in 2024- 25 by Troy University and the Society of American Archivists Foundation through its Catalyst Grant.

The Wiregrass Black History Channel will host edited versions of the interviews. The Wiregrass Archives will make the raw interviews available on its YouTube channel and create metadata records and finding aids that link to the project and to individual video interviews.

Scope / Content Note: Video interview transcript of Mr. Charles Hayes giving a tour of the Baptist Bottom neighborhood of Dothan, AL. He points out where roadways, alleys, housing, and businesses used to be in Baptist Bottom before the structures fell into disrepair and the neighborhood deteriorated to the point of dilapidation.

Provenance: Interview conducted by Mit Kirkland. Provided to the Wiregrass Archives as part of the grant-funded Wiregrass Black History Project.

Processing Notes: Transcriptions made by MS Word AI, then edited by Dr. Martin T. Olliff. Revisions planned to update and correct transcriptions.

Cite as: Charles R. Hayes Interview, The Wiregrass Black History Project, RG 298, Wiregrass Archives, Troy University Dothan Campus, Dothan, AL.

Transcript of Charles Hayes's tour of Baptist Bottom, February 26, 2025

00:00:00 - 00:00:39 = Mic set and sound check

00:00:39 Mit Kirkland

All right, tell me where you are.

00:00:41 Charles Hayes

Mr. Will Lee's house. He was one of the most prominent persons over in this area here. The street up here is named after him. He owned all the property back there, which is Lee's Alley.¹

He was also a trustee on a deacon at the First Missionary Baptist Church.

Originally it was a big white house here, a wood house, and he tore it down and put a nice brick house, which is his best looking brick house over in this area here.

00:01:14 Mit Kirkland

All right, let's take a walk down here. We'll talk about what's going on here. We're on Chickasaw St. which used to be W North St.

And if you look over to the right, we are approaching Lee's Alley, which actually no longer exists.

You can see the pathway to where Lee's Alley was here.

00:01:51 Charles Hayes

Yeah, that was more than 40 families that live up in this in this neighborhood here.

There was two-story buildings, juke joints, and everything else in this side of the Lee's Alley.

00:02:05 Mit Kirkland

And you can see the path here of Lee's Alley, and we're going to turn and walk. And if you can see in the distance, here's First Missionary Baptist Church.

And this is how it got the name the Baptist Bottom, because of First Missionary Baptist Church.

OK, what used to be here?

00:02:29 Charles Hayes

This was the White . . . the Whitestones.² They was educators. This was they . . . they built this house here.

¹ William Lee, barber and real estate agent, spouse Mary, r. 415 N. Alice. Polk's City Directory, 1956.

²

And they left and moved to New Jersey in the 1950s, I believe it was. And after that, different family moved into here. It was a house here that sits right here on this property here.

OK. The next piece of property here is right here. This . . . This is my friends live here. This was the Dumas [house]. David, Mr. Dumas, Mrs. Dumas, she was a school teacher. Mr. Dumas was the agriculture agent for Houston County.³ And Joyce, she was my classmate. She's a . . . she's a teacher up in Atlanta. And this was the Dumas. This . . . I spent most of my time up here with the Dumases and everybody, having fun.

00:03:39 Mit Kirkland

If we walk up the street, we see the neighborhood. Now, what was here?

00:03:47 Charles Hayes

Now in this area right here, this is Mr. Alonzo Paramore.⁴ He . . . he . . . they came from Slocum and Headland. I mean, Cottonwood and Headland. And he built him a house down on the far end of this street here, which is Alice Street.

His sons were killed in the military in World War 2. So . . . and they was nice people. Mr. Paramore and Mrs. Paramore was nice peoples. After they moved out, then Mr. Leonard moved here, which is [Name unintelligible] Leonard.

Now we're coming to the big part.

This is Mr. George Cochran's property.⁵ He worked for the [Atlantic] Coastline Railroad. He came from Georgia. This is . . . we kids used to come and sit on this right here and play [Showing a set of stone steps from sidewalk to yard]. But Mrs. Cochran wouldn't allow us to play too much over here. So this is where we was. This is Mr. George Cochran. Nick might, if you know him, he . . . this is his grandfather's property right here.

00:05:22 Mit Kirkland

This is First Missionary Baptist Church. Chickasaw Street.⁶ [unintelligible, possibly a statement about when the church was established]

00:05:33 Charles Hayes

Uh, 1912.

00:05:41 Mit Kirkland

So this is First Missionary Baptist Church. And that's where the Baptist Bottom got their name.

³ Dumas residence, 407 W. North Street, Polk's City Directory, 1956.

⁴ Paramore residence, 810 N. Alice. Polk's City Directory, 1956.

⁵ Cochran residence, 403 W. North Street, Polk's City Directory, 1956.

⁶ First Missionary Baptist Church, 322 W. North Street, Polk's City Directory, 1967.

00:05:54 Charles Hayes

Ready? Now, this little drive which you see right here. This is the driveway. Mrs. Cochran had a big old green car, and there was a shed back there. That's where she parked . . . and parked that big old green car right here. And right here, where . . . where I'm standing over here? This was the store. This was Mrs. Cochran's store. She sold cookies, ice cream, and sodas, that's what she sold. This is . . . this was her store right here on this corner.

And right there was a fire hydrant we used to stand up on him till our parents told us to get down from there before you go to jail, yeah.

Right behind Mrs. Cochran's was the Juke joint. I can't remember the name of it, but it's turn . . . it turned out to be Brady's Barber shop.⁷

There we go farther, we gonna see the Rocking Palace.⁸ The Rocking Palace is right inside the Masonic Hall right here? Yeah.

00:07:19 Mit Kirkland

[Unintelligible]

00:07:21 Charles Hayes

OK, right here was the other part of Lee's Alley. This is the other part that runs all the way back down and meet Lee's Alley over there.

Right here you had Miss Ruth's Cafe right here. This is her cafe right here.⁹

Right next to there you have . . . George Dixon had a house there.¹⁰

Then after that, then you had Brady's Barber shop and Oscar Williams's Barber Shop.¹¹

Across the street, there was houses along here.

Now, where you see the chains at, chains there, that was part of Frazier's Alley. It goes out and then goes all the way back over to Lee's Alley. There was people living everywhere over here.

Everywhere there was a place, people lived here. That was houses along here, too. Double . . .

00:08:36 Mit Kirkland

⁷ Brady's Barber Shop was, at first, Monroe C. Page's shop, 303 W. North Street, Polk's City Directory, 1956.

⁸ The Rocking Palace Café, 613 N. Alice. Polk's City Directory, 1956.

⁹

¹⁰ Dixon residence, 617 N. Alice St., Polk's City Directory, 1956.

¹¹ Oscar Williams Barber Shop, 619 N. Alice Street, Polk's City Directory, 1960.

[Walking north on Alice St.] This is Alice Street. It ran right into the church. And if you look over to the right, that is Hawk-Houston Youth Enrichment Center. It used to be . . . originally it was the Carver Theater which was built in 1946.¹²

00:09:26 Charles Hayes

OK, OK. This is McRae Homes built, I believe, in 1948. Originally, the church owned majority of this property here, but they sold it to the Housing Authority.

Right here was Mr. Theo Daniels grocery store right here. This was it.¹³

Originally at the church here, that was the downstairs, steps that went downstairs into the basement here.

McRae Homes, a lot of good people came out of here. You wouldn't think it, but it was a it was a privilege to move into McRae Homes, what we used to call just the projects.

00:10:38 – 00:10:50 Mit Kirkland

[Unintelligible]

00:10:50 Charles Hayes

Right here, on this side right here, this was the Carver bar. There was an ice cream stand inside of here. Milkshakes, ice cream and anything else you wanted to have, you would come to the Carver bar right here.¹⁴

00:11:10 Mit Kirkland

OK, here's the driveway here. What did this lead to?

00:11:13 Charles Hayes

This is Keyton Alley. No, wait. This is Keyton; this is Keyton Alley right here. It goes out . . . as you can see the truck over there, that's . . . that's the other part of it, yeah.

00:11:30 Mit Kirkland

Now, do you remember what was all located in this area here?

00:11:34 Charles Hayes

Yes. First, we're going to C.W. . . . Wright had a shoe stand right here, on this side of the street right here.¹⁵

¹²

¹³ Daniels Grocery Store, 612 W. North St., Daniels residence, 618 W. North St. Polk's City Directory, 1956.

¹⁴

¹⁵

Then you had the Cafe Levi building here.¹⁶

Then you go on . . . later years, you have the Tea House.¹⁷ It was a four-section building over here. You had the Tea House. Then you had some other [garbled, but in essence, “kind of contraption”] there. Now I think Billy Ray Brewer had a shoe shine stop in here.¹⁸

Then you go into the two barber shops over there. You had . . . Charlie Clark had his barber shop over here.¹⁹

Now, originally back in the late 50s, early 50s, there were café’s all along here.

00:12:51 Mit Kirkland

How about the building we’re approaching?

00:12:53 Charles Hayes

OK, well, the one we’re approaching now. This, it was . . . was a pool hall. Lois Armstrong’s Pool Hall.²⁰ You can come in this door here, or you can go in there, there was another door, but this was the pool hall, right here. Spent many days up here shooting pool as a young . . . young man.

00:13:30 Mit Kirkland

How about this building?

00:13:30 Charles Hayes

Now this is the Blue Front.²¹ That’s why I know it as, The Blue Front. But . . . and . . . OK [answering stage directions] . . . in 1903, I believe it was somewhere there about, this was the original Hawks Funeral Home right here. That you come through this door right here. All it was there’s just a section that you could go in and view the bodies. There was no embalment or anything done in there. But this is was original Hawks Funeral Home right here, in this door right here.

This is the Blue Front, which was the . . . a café . . . restaurant, they called it a restaurant back in the day. This is the Blue Front.

Then you go farther. This one . . . this is our barber shop right here. J.T. Clark and Amos Sheffield, number one barbers in Dothan. This was it right here.²²

¹⁶ Sons & Daughters of Levi Fraternal Insurance, 311 W. North Street, Polk’s City Directory, 1956.

¹⁷ Tea House Café, 311 W. North Street, Polk City Directory, 1970.

¹⁸ Possibly Jack’s Shoe Shine Parlor, 311 W. North Street, Polk’s City Directory, 1970.

¹⁹ Clark Barbour Shop, 311 W. North Street, Polk’s City Directory, 1956.

²⁰ Idle Hour Beer Bar, 621 N. Lena Street, Lois Armstrong, proprietor. Polk’s City Directory, 1967.

²¹ Blue Front Café, 625 N. Lena Street, Polk’s City Directory, 1956.

²² Clark & Sheffield Barber Shop, 623 N. Lena Street, Polk’s City Directory, 1956.

Then this is the entrance to the pool hall I was telling you about. The front entrance right here. To go back into the pool hall right here.

This door is to get you upstairs into the American Legion.²³ That's what they was all across that American Legion club up there. [Unintelligible name]. He was . . . he was in charge of that. He run that American Legion right there.

Now we'll get right. OK. Now we'll get right here. That school that's right back there, that's new.

Dothan Cab Company, this is Dothan Cab right here. Had a cab stand right here.²⁴

Then we'll go farther. That's Bouier's Lounge right here, where you see that, that sidewalk right there, that's Bouier's Lounge. That was the number one thing going on here in Dothan. This was the big club right here.²⁵

Next to it over here, was Mr. Rubin Turner's restaurant.²⁶

And then on up there, you had houses there, little shotgun houses, all the way up to Powel St.

Now, this is Hawks Apartments right here.[pointing out a multi-unit apartment building across the street] My friends Bubba and Shack, they stayed over here, right here. Mrs. Houston, which is Mrs. Hawk's mother, she stayed in that one down on the end there. That was Mrs. Hawk's mother down there. Yeah. And so many other people live in here. This was the only nice apartment over in this area here.²⁷

Now when you . . . Now we are walking towards the funeral home property. [Shows a vacant lot] Hawk's Funeral Home . . . Hawks and Son Funeral Home.²⁸ This was it. This this area right here. This is where he parked his ambulance right up through here, and his car. In the front . . . on the side over here, he had an apartment. That's a little ol' bitty apartment where people stayed.

Other side of this fence right here. That's the Rambo's property, who is the mother-in-law . . . the in-laws of Doctor D.V. Jemison. That's . . . this is where his wife was raised at, in a big old pretty house right there, on that side right there.

This is it. This is it. It was a house. But only you. Come in off of West North St. to view the bodies. Visit, visitation. You come on this side. If you just come to visit. Which a lot of people. That's all they did. They come.

00:17:41 Mit Kirkland

²³ American Legion Post No. 328, 623 ½ N. Lena Street, Polk's City Directory, 1956.

²⁴ Dothan Cab Company, 619 N. Lena Street, Polk's City Directory, 1956.

²⁵ Bouier's Lounge, 617 N. Lena Street, Polk's City Directory, 1967.

²⁶

²⁷ Hawke Apartments, 614-616 N. Lena Street, Polk's City Directory, 1956.

²⁸ Hawk & Son Funeral Home, 215-217 W. North Street, Polk's City Directory, 1956.

This was the Hawk's Funeral Home property right here. It was built like a house. It was a house.

00:17:39 Charles Hayes

It was a house but on the . . . you come in off of West North Street to view the bodies. For the visitation. You come on *this* side if you just come to visit. Which a lot of people, that's all they did, they come sit on the porch right here, facing . . . facing the Bottom over there and sit down and just entertain. That's what they did right here.

00:18:22 Mit Kirkland

Across the street here, is the Club Capri building, and Doctor Greenfield's office.²⁹

00:18:31 Charles Hayes

That's correct. This is . . . his office was right over here. The first one.

00:18:44 Mit Kirkland

And this is a pretty famous building, so many entertainers performed in here.

00:18:52 Charles Hayes

So true, so true.

00:18:53 Mit Kirkland

Everybody from the Manhattans, Al Green, Funkadelic Parliament, Ike and Tina Turner, and we can go on and on with the different groups that perform here in the Club Capri.

00:19:11 Charles Hayes

You ride that bus up and down the street right here.

OK, let's . . .

00:19:20 Mit Kirkland

Now this . . . this is a church.

00:19:24 Charles Hayes

Yeah. Now let's go to this alley right here. This alley *right* here. There was an alley right here. I can't tell you what the name of it, but it was an alley. And it was *more* than enough people living back in there. You just had houses stuck up on top of houses back here, right through here.

Now, right here also, we'll say from here. this was the Sterling Hotel.³⁰

²⁹ Club Capri and Dr. William Greenfield, 210 W. North Street, Polk's City Directory, 1967.

³⁰ Sterling Hotel, 216 W. North Street, Polk's City Directory, 1956.

This original [unintelligible] . . . Back in the 40s and early 50s, this was the Sterling Hotel and eventually it converted to the William-Washington Hotel.³¹

Come on down. Originally, Miss Catherine Baker had a shop right in here in this area, but then our good friend Shack Thompson, he opened up a place and called it Shack's Grill. Right here.³²

Now in this building right here now, that we were talking about, it was building all the way down to the street. And it was two-story. Up on the top, you had apartments up there. People stayed up there.

And and then they had to walk around to the back, that's where the porch was, on the back, to get up to the apartments there.

Now we're going to move on to our good friends. [Cheap's Kiss Pig] Shop right here. Nobody in the world know what kind of business CHISPIK had right here. But everybody wanted to come by and holler at CHISPIK right here. He was a fixture right here on this section . . . in this building right here.³³

00:21:25 Mit Kirkland

He'd sit out here on this sidewalk and when they'd come by he said "Choo, choo!"

00:21:28 Charles Hayes

Yes, Sir, absolutely. He was . . . he was a character. He was a character.

Then we'll come down here. Originally, that was Miss McKenzie. She had a shop here, a little old restaurant type thing here.³⁴

Then we go on down. We're getting into the nitty gritty of it now.

Coleman's Barber Shop right here. Next that one, you had Grimsley's Barber Shop [unintelligible, sounds like Archibald] right there on the corner here.³⁵

Now you're going to take a little trip *around* the corner to the hot spot for the old folks. [Walking west on Chickasaw St. turning north onto Lena St.]

00:22:17 Mit Kirkland

That was buildings all in here which is a parking lot now.

00:22:18 Charles Hayes

³¹ The Sterling Hotel burned on October 29, 1957, killing its owner Mr. Warren Smith. "Hotel Fire Burns Owner to Death," *Dothan Eagle*, October 29, 1957, 5. The William-Washington Hotel is not listed before the Polk's City Directory, 1960, at 216 W. North St., managed by G. Marion Hawk, café managed by Alveta Hawk.

³² Shack's Grill, 218 W. North Street, Polk's City Directory, 1967.

³³

³⁴

³⁵ Willene Coleman's barber, 220 W. North Street, Polk's City Directory, 1956; Herman Grimsley's barber shop, 222 W. North Street, Polk's City Directory, 1960.

Yes, Sir. Yes, Sir. Yeah. These are all building. Yes, Sir, you come round this corner right through here, and you're going to get *riiiiiiiiiight* here. You going to walk through all them washer machines coming around that corner there and you're going to get right here. And this is the favorite Citizen Club. Shelly Jacob . . . Citizen Club. Aunt Helen . . . Citizen Club. All of them hung up here at the Citizen Club. This is it. This is where the old folks place right here.³⁶

Further down then you had houses down, down through that all the way to the green, but otherwise this was the entertainment center right here. Anything you need, you could get it just about in these two blocks right here.

I mean, when I say that, [unintelligible], chitlins, hot dogs, hamburgers, you name it.

00:23:22 Mit Kirkland

Fish plates.

00:23:22 Charles Hayes

Fish plate. Yes, Sir. And there were the catfish now. That mullet, they were sending the mullet back here, this is it.

As I say, all these is houses, I mean you have people's houses all along here. It was . . . it was a wonderful community. It really was. Everybody knew everybody. People sit on the porch over here, at the Martin Holmes on this corner right here. And they can see everything that's going on in Baptist Bottom back there. McRae, yeah. [This is Hayes correcting "Martin Homes" to "McRae Homes"]

00:23:55 Mit Kirkland

Say that part again, how people used to sit on the porch.

00:23:55 Charles Hayes

People used to . . . they sit on these . . . these porches right here, these porches, and the three on the other side. They sit here, they look, and observe, and know what was going on in Baptist Bottom, because it was really going on in Baptist Bottom.

OK. Ready?

OK, if you look at the incline of the hill here, all the way down to where the church is at. If it flooded on the east side of the track, over there where the railroads are, then all the water would come down here and flood out the Black neighborhood. And that's . . . that's where the Baptist Bottom actually came from. The water run all the way down to the Baptist Church there.

Every little place had a Coca-Cola sign out there and a door that said Colonial Bread. That was how they recognize each . . . each cafe that was here. That was advertisement for those companies there.

³⁶ Citizen's Club Beer, 704 N. Lena Street, Shelly Jacobs, proprietor, Polk's City Directory, 1967.

And this is [unintelligible name] place right here, the Tea House.³⁷ That's what, he loved to work, at the Tea House. He was the bouncer.

Yeah, Mother worked there as a . . . she worked at the concession.

00:26:11 – 00:26:18 Mit Kirkland

Unintelligible stage directions

00:24:18 Charles Hayes

You want to go by the bushes?

00:26:19 – 00:26:38 Mit Kirkland

Unintelligible questions and discussion

00:24:38 Charles Hayes

1930 something, Mit?

END OF TAPE

³⁷ Tea House Café, 311 W. North Street, Polk City Directory, 1970.