

JOHN GEE BLACK

HISTORICAL CENTER, INC.

2018 Newsletter

February -September

Some times going through piles of papers reveals a golden gem that you have overlooked so many times. This is the case with the following article that I came across written by my mother, Arnetta Anderson Dexter, at age 94. I hope that you enjoy this piece of Gallipolis history. Italics for information.

ARNETTA'S MEMORIES

A Colored Girl's Memories About Living in Maple Shade, February 28, 2009

I was born in my grandmother's house in the Maple Shade area on July 4, 1914, to Ora Hattie Lee and Robert Anderson. I was their first child. I was raised at 1916 Chatham Avenue where my family lived until 1937. I am going to talk about my memories up to the 1937 flood at which time my family moved to Neal Avenue and then to Fourth and Olive Street.

In Maple Shade on our block, there were 5 houses, four 2-story homes and one 1-story home where I lived, my grandparents Sam & Eva Lee on one side and my great grandparents, Ben & Frances Lee on the other. My grandfather Sam had on his property in the back, 2 horses, cow, pigs, chickens, and a double team wagon. Later on he built a 2-story tobacco barn on the side. Also a garden spot. On Ben's property, he had a good cistern. You walked on a cement walk from the dining room. The top of the cistern had a turn handle to draw the water. It was very nice. We got our water from his cistern since we lived in the middle.

My grandfather was a fireman at OHE (*Ohio Home for Epileptics*). My father worked there as a coal hauler. Grand grandfather, Ben Lee, was a retired civil war veteran and got a pension. He also ran the OHE slaughter house. I always hung around my grandmother Eva who taught me to

sew clothes and cane chairs. My grandfather taught me how to harness a double team of horses to a wagon. Harnessing those horses was my proudest moment.

Colored families who lived in Maple Shade were John Stewart, Dandy Mitchell, Charlie Borden, Frank Lee, Sam Lee, Tom Dunsmore, Robert Anderson, Ben Lee, Charles Claytor, Ms. McGhee with her son Rev. Elbert McGhee, Caroline Lewis, and Shepherd Lewis with his two sons, Lester and Elwood. Lester and Elwood lived near Kanauga and were the only colored children who were allowed to ride the school bus. The rest had to walk to school.

Lincoln School Principal was Joseph L. Myers. My teachers were Lillian Steinbergen for 1st & 2nd grades, Edith Bryant for 3rd & 4th grades, Martha Cousins for 5th & 6th grades, and Mr. Myers for 7th & 8th grades.

On the first day of school, I was taken to school by my aunt, Edna Lee Casey. She was in the 8th grade. We road the street car that day. Street cars ran from Kanauga to Vine Street. Street cars parked at the Gallipolis Fairgrounds, which was located on Eastern Avenue where the old Bob Evans Steak House used to be. Children could only ride that day. After that, they had to be with an adult.

One of my memories from Lincoln School was when a strong wind storm blew off the corner bricks from top of the school. Electric wires and bricks were all over the front of the school yard. Not one child was hurt because teachers held the doors shut to keep the children from running out and going home.

The Lincoln School principal, Mr. Myers, organized operettas for 2 years. They were held in the Colony Theater and were well attended. Proceeds were spent on the school. The first year, hedges were put around the school. The 2nd year, the money was used for playground equipment--

swings, ocean wave giant stride and the sliding board. The building is now occupied by the Lifestyle Furniture Store.

When I was in 8th grade, all Gallipolis school children could write an essay on "Why Local Businesses Should be Patronized". I won first prize and Margaret Mitchell won second prize. I bought goulashes, a 4-buckled boot, to put over my shoes. They didn't last long because there was lots of snow and I wore them out fast, holding to my cousins, Howard and Robert Lee's coattails, pulling me to school sliding on the snow.

The Lincoln School was used to house flood victims in 1937.

The fairground had a big grandstand, a race track and a grassy centerfield and a baseball field. The fairground had 3 gates, a large one on Eastern Avenue, one on Chatham Avenue, where they took the elephants in and out and up the street in front of our house, holding their trunks and tails together to go to the river to play and swim. Another small gate was off Fourth Avenue by the railroad track where people could pay to get in. Circuses were held in the centerfield. Later, after the fairground closed, circuses were held in the lot where McDonald's is.

My father, Robert Anderson, was a jockey and rode race horses during the fairs. They also had sulky races there. They put off fireworks there but they were louder than today's fireworks. They were beautiful too.

Dances and revivals were also held in the big hall in the fairgrounds. School meets were held there in front of the grandstand.

For baseball games, they had a white and a colored team that played against each other. Also in the summer, hot air balloons were launched from the fairground's centerfield. There was plenty going on in those days--it was not boring

There was a lovely beach off Eastern Avenue where many people swam in the summer time. Gypsies, in their colorful clothes, would camp for a few weeks in tents. They were fortune tellers.

One day a plane fell in the Ohio River near the beach. There were two men in it, and I could hear them hollering "held, help, help" from my house on Chatham Avenue. People ran to the river and I saw the plane go under. A man in a row boat rescued them. Another plane tried to land in the fairground centerfield. Its tail got caught on the electric wires, and the pilot was rescued.

The railroad ran in those days. The railroad station for passengers was near the corner of Fourth and Olive; but the coal cars unloaded in Maple Shade, two blocks in back of our home, parallel with the flood road. They would unload coal there and people would pick up any coal that was left on the ground to use to heat and cook with.

Also the CCC (*Civilian Conservation Corps*) campground was located in the fairground during the depression.

This is only half the story. It will continue in the next newsletter.

Please send 2018 membership dues to:

Bobette Braxton, Treasurer
108 Pine Street
Gallipolis, OH 45631

Individual - \$20.00
Family - \$35.00
Nonprofit/Church - \$50.00
Business/Corporation - \$100.00

2018 FEBRUARY-SEPTEMBER NEWSLETTER

UPCOMING EVENT:

TIP OF THE HAT:

October 18 - University of Rio Grande nursing students, from 12:30 p.m. to 4 p.m.

- To the Superintendent of Gallipolis City Schools Craig Wright, John Gee volunteers and the Mitchell family for the outstanding presentation on the 100th anniversary of the Robert Mitchell lawsuit against the Gallipolis City School Board to desegregate Gallia Academy High School in 1918. The favorable decision for Mitchell closed the Lincoln Colored High School which was constructed in 1868.

- To the Black History Committee for another great Black History Program and to Paint Creek Baptist Church which host this program annually.

- To the John Gee volunteers who faithfully assist with the Washington Elementary School 5th grade Black History walking tour and the teachers who have supported this annual event.

- To Allie and Gina Austin-Braxton for helping with the John Gee Freedom Tea on July 4.

- To the Emancipation Day Celebration Committee for an outstanding program held this year back at the Gallia County Junior Fairgrounds. To the committee members and volunteers--a job well done.

TRIBUTE TO ROBERT DEAN GORDON

Our friend and historian Robert "Bobby" Dean Gordon passed away this month. He was one of the "younger" generation showing a great interest in Black History. He traveled to many places in the U.S. looking for artifacts to add to his Black history collection. He had a song to sing and a story to tell, and he delighted in sharing with people the plight and progress of Black Americans. He will be missed by this community, but what a welcome he got from the people he knew through history books when he met them face to face in the one place where there is no prejudice.