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### Anna Patterson

Anna Patterson

Black History Research Project of Tampa

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Otis R. Anthony African Americans in Florida Oral History Project  
Oral History Program  
Florida Studies Center  
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Final Edit by: Mary Beth Isaacson  
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**Anna Patterson:** . . .year of 1910.

**Herbert Jones:** Where were you born?

AP: Georgia.

HJ: What part?

AP: Stillman, Georgia.

HJ: When you came to Tampa in 1923, can you tell me what black folks were doing as far as living, working, this type of thing? What type jobs did they have for black people?

AP: Well, the one type of job they had for black people, it wasn't what it is today.

HJ: What type of things did y'all do?

AP: Well, most of us women people, we did private homes.

HJ: And the men?

AP: I can't think about the men.

HJ: Okay. Can you remember anything—what were some of the conditions of Tampa in the early twenties [1920s]? As far as the housing was concerned and social life and stuff like that?

AP: It wasn't what it is today; there's lots of difference. You could walk the street when I first come here but you can't now.

HJ: Can you remember when Dr. Benjamin Mays was here, with the Urban League? Can you remember anything that he did for blacks?

AP: I can't remember what he did for them, I can't remember.

HJ: What about police brutality? Did you have that? Where the police was really bad with the blacks during that time?

AP: Yeah, they was really bad.

HJ: Do you know of any lynchings of blacks?

AP: I didn't hear of any lynchings of blacks, but I'll tell you what I did hear. I heard it—now I can't prove it, but I heard when I first come to Tampa there were two white men, they tarred and burned them. They was on Dale Mabry Highway. One of them died. One of them got burned up and the other one, he didn't quite get burned up but he wasn't never able to tell them that.

HJ: Do you remember what year that was?

AP: No, I don't recall what year that was.

HJ: Can you tell me anything about the streetcars?

AP: Yeah, the streetcars was running and you had to pay five cents.

HJ: And where did you have to sit? Where would they let you sit?

AP: In the back. They had about four seats in the back, black on.

HJ: Do you remember anything about the land boom in Tampa?

AP: No.

HJ: What about the businesses on Central Avenue during the thirties [1930s], remember anything about that?

AP: No, because I didn't visit over there. I've always heard that that was a bad street and I never did visit over there.

HJ: You say you didn't hear anything about the blacks. Do you remember any blacks working on the shipyards? Do you know if there was a union for blacks during that time?

AP: Not when I first come to Tampa.

HJ: Do you know how much they were making?

AP: No.

HJ: How much were you making when you were doing—?

AP: When I first come to Tampa? I made five dollars a week, that was all.

HJ: What about living expenses? How did you live like—

AP: Well, I paid one dollar a week for rent and had the rest of the four dollars because I eat where I worked then, I didn't have to buy any—and that was it.

HJ: Do you remember anything about the Tampa riots in the forties [1940s]?

AP: No.

HJ: Can you tell me something about the churches that were first here? The first churches that were here when you came here?

AP: When I first came here the first place I went to was New Salem Primitive Baptist and they had a good service there, and good behavior.

HJ: Do you feel that more people went to church then or more people go to church now?

AP: I feel like most people went to New Salem than any other church in town, because you couldn't get a seat on the first Sunday night. Plenty of people went to church, a good service.

HJ: Do you feel that religion then was much stronger or the faith was much stronger during that time than it is now?

AP: Yes, I do.

HJ: Would you account that to our struggle that we were having back then than to now? Where everything now is really basically pretty good and back then we were having a hard time. Do you think this strengthened by our belief or our faith in God and make us want to go to church and do more, by, us having these hard times?

AP: Yes, I do. Don't you think so?

HJ: Yes. But I'm saying that like right now, we're not having that, so religion is more or less more relaxed, go when you want, it's not a pressing issue. Do you remember the Depression in Tampa? And the soup line?

AP: Yes, I do. Standing in line—but I didn't have to.

HJ: Do you know where the soup lines was located?

AP: No, I don't. They was talking about it but I didn't have that to do.

HJ: What about the health care for blacks? In the early twenties [1920s] and thirties [1930s]? Where did blacks go to get medical help?

AP: Well, they went to— You mean where they had to get a Social Security card and things like that? Well, they had to go down on Tampa Street. What was the name of that—I don't recall.

HJ: But it was separate from where the whites went?

AP: The whites went too, but all of us didn't go in the same—the colored peoples had to go in this door, and the whites—you know how it was, we was separated.

HJ: As far as when you got sick, what type of help came them? Where did you go to get medical help?

AP: I didn't get sick and I don't know. When I got sick it was Social Security time and every doctor when I got sick gave an operation. I been treated very good ever since then.

HJ: So what about—do you remember anything about Miss Clara Frye? The Clara Frye Hospital?

AP: I know a little about it. It was real nice and I wondered to my soul, why did they tear it down. So many times.

HJ: Is there anything else that you can think of that you would like to tell me about? Your experience in Tampa in general?

AP: Yes. Well, my experience in Tampa, I tell you, if you try to do right, the experience in Tampa would be good. But when you don't do right it ain't gonna be good no way. I try to be aware that my experience in Tampa would be very good and I want to loved by everybody. But you know that ain't gonna happen.

HJ: Do you still attend New Salem?

AP: No, my church is out on Lake and 29<sup>th</sup> [Street]. Reverend Tared, before he got in his position, he was my pastor. Peace for Virtue Primitive Baptist Church.

HJ: Yeah, I know. Joyce plays the piano there. Dark skinned woman named Joyce.

AP: A lot of them joined a long time ago—I been out there about eight years, and the most of them have left. Some went back to New Salem and one or two is still out there, and we have a real nice service out there. A woman named Adger play the piano.

HJ: How do you like living here?

AP: I like it nice. It is not as nice here as it was when I first move here. Because when Ms. James was down there in the employment place, you couldn't move up here without a recommendation. I don't know how it is now because I don't be down there, but I don't believe it is like it was when Ms. James was here, because Ms. James didn't buy it. If the children come up here she would asked them, say "Where you children going?" If they say they going, to see their grandmother or any like that. she would always say, "Well, wait a minute, I'll close my office and I'll come along with you." And she'd bring them up here, and sometimes the children break and run. That's bad.

And for these old people that don't have anybody in the word in human form, now that's bad. An old man down there, he's blind, can't walk, and he live alone. Don't you know what that he ought not to be living there by himself? That's terrible. I don't think anybody that live alone and can't wait on yourself shouldn't have an apartment. They got to live somewhere, but still they shouldn't be alone. there are a lot of drunks. That's bad. but the is a nice to live if the people were nice. I love it up here, I wouldn't take nothing for my apartment.

HJ: Yeah, this is nice. How is your rent paid? Is it based on your income or what?

AP: Yeah, they base it on my income.

HJ: When you first come to Tampa, where did you live?

AP: I live on Blanche. Over there in front of Booker T. Washington [Middle] School. Only there's no more Blanche.

HJ: What school did you go to ?

AP: I didn't go to school here. I went to school here, but I went to learn to be a dressmaker. I went seven year. I went to Blake [High School] two year, I went to Don Thomas. That's where I first started, Don Thomas, I went there. Miss Carl was my teacher and she still was my teacher when I come down here to Blake.

HJ: So have you made dresses?

AP: Yeah, I made them until my eyes got red, now I don't sew any more. I'm gonna hem a pair of pants for that lady who just left here, because she's going to New York. But as far a sewing I don't do it anymore because of my eyes.

HJ: What year was that when you started sewing?

AP: 1927.

HJ: So when you were making garments for people during that time, how much were you charging?

AP: Oh, I didn't charge what I should charge. I charged them just like they charged for (inaudible) something like that. Some people I didn't charge anything because they wasn't making anything and I didn't charge them anything. Just done it to have something to do.

HJ: Did you get much business?

AP: I would have if I just (inaudible) I had pretty good business when I was living on Nassau [Street]. I lived with my daughter and her husband on Nassau and I sewed there, but I haven't sewed much over here. I sewed some up here but not too much; now I don't sew any.

HJ: How long you been living here? Eight year, you said? You enjoy it?

AP: Yeah, I enjoy it. Nobody bother me and I don't bother nobody.

HJ: How many children do you have?

AP: One. She's grown. She lives here, she's grown, married.

HJ: You said you didn't know if there was any organized unions here. Can I ask you how old you are, Mrs. Patterson?

AP: I was born the second day of May, 1900.

HJ: So you remember things about 1916? 1919? You remember little things. Do you remember your childhood days?

AP: My childhood days I had it good. I was almost born with a silver spoon in my mouth. My peoples was well livers. Had everything that we needed and everything we wanted. My grandfather had cows, hogs, and we was just nice living people. I never had a hard day, just like all the rest of the peoples, I took a notion I wanted to come to Florida.

HJ: Do you remember anything about World War I?

AP: Sure I do. It was sad to the people in Georgia because their sons were going, crying and all that. I was going with a boy named Willie Hill and I'd rather have died than to see that boy leave because he was a nice boy. He never did come back home.

HJ: So a lot of blacks were in World War I?

AP: Yeah, yeah, World War I.

HJ: How did the wives survive? What did they do while the men were off at the war? Did they work?

AP: Yeah, little jobs that they could do, and they husbands send them money, and they got along pretty good.

HJ: Was your daddy in the Army?

AP: No, my father was dead. My father died when I was a child. I don't know anything about my father. My grandfather raised me and he was a good grandfather.

HJ: He wasn't in the Service?

AP: No, he was too old.

HJ: How long did World War I last? How many years?

AP: I don't remember how many years.

HJ: Was there a shortage of food and stuff like that during the war? Were you rationed out food?

AP: We wasn't because my grandfather raised everything he could. He had his own hogs, his own cows, everything, his own corn, made meal. Carried his corn and had it ground. The meal then was better than it is now because it was water ground then. He had wheat, he carried that to the mill and thrashed it, make your own flour. Kill the hogs. We didn't have it hard.

HJ: In World War II you were in Tampa then, right? How were things during World War II?

AP: It was all right. The soldiers and the white didn't make it so good.

HJ: Where there any troops to come, any black troops came through Tampa in the '40s? You don't remember any black troops?

AP: No.

HJ: Did life still go on as if nothing was going on? During the Second World War?

AP: The only thing I can remember, one day us coming home from work. I kinda got scared that day. There was an old poor white man, he was the bus driver. Him and the soldiers got into it one day.

HJ: On the bus?

AP: Yeah. The white soldiers and colored soldiers were sitting together and he stopped the bus and say "We don't allow niggers to sit together on this bus," and those white soldiers said, "We going overseas, we gonna fight together, we gonna sit together and we got a right to sit together. We got sleep together, we got to eat together, and we gonna ride the bus together." And he said, "You ain't gonna sit together on this bus." One of the soldiers said, "Give us our money back."

HJ: Did he give the money back?

AP: You know he didn't give that money back. I wouldn't tell you what those soldiers said, it was bad. Another lady said, "I tell you what let's do. Let's die together. If they do something to them soldiers, let's get them." I said, "Well, that's the thing to do, stand up for your cause." And so this old bus driver, he drove on. Well, we said we gonna help fight and the boy says, "It—don't catch that on tape—"

HJ: Can you tell me some folklore that they had when you were a child? We have them now that you don't walk up under a ladder, that's bad luck. Do you all have anything like that when you was children?

AP: You talking about signs and things like that? Yeah, they said that never split a pole. If you with somebody, if they going, you go the same way they going. Never split, it's bad luck, and all like that.

HJ: A black cat—

AP: If a black cat crossed, turn your back to him when he crossed, cause it's bad luck.

HJ: You have anything else you want to share with me?

AP: When children didn't have the privilege to go to school like children do now, because they didn't know how to do and know what to do, they didn't have the privilege of school like they do now. They had to work, kept the family.

HJ: Do you think children are better today then they were before?

AP: No! You know, children are not as good now as they were when I was a child. When I was a girl, boys didn't drink. No, sir, if a boy drank, a girl didn't go with him. And if a girl had a baby, the other girls didn't notice her. They call that, she have broke her leg. My mother wouldn't allow me to go with her or pay any attention to her.

HJ: That was your friend before?

AP: That was my friend. I didn't care how good a friend she was, if she had a baby, we wasn't allow to go with her because she wasn't a nice girl.

HJ: My aunt is about your age or older and she was saying something about a bastard child brings problems, something like that. She believes this. If a child is born out of wedlock, this child is going to bring you bad luck.

AP: I don't agree with that, because I'll go back to the Bible with you on that. Because Jesus himself—his mother, when his mother had him, he didn't have a father.

HJ: So why is it that the parents during your day felt that a young girl was bad if she had a baby out of wedlock?

AP: Because she was. She should obey her parents and did as she was told. That's why. During them days they had to do as they were told.

HJ: What did you do for social life when you were a girl coming up? Where did you all go?

AP: Oh, we had parties and we had picnics, just like they do now. On the twentieth of May<sup>1</sup>, that was a big day at home. Had picnics and ballgames, I just loved to go to them ballgames, and all like that. Dances, they had the same thing people have now, but it's a little different than what it is today.

HJ: A family effort. Everybody would come. When you all would have your parties, would your parents be there too?

AP: Sure, they'd take their daughters.

HJ: Just the parents of the daughters would come, not the boys?

AP: Yeah, the boys would come. Just like you got a daughter and the boys would always have to ask your parents could they take your daughter to this party. If your father didn't agree that boy to go with his daughter, he would just tell him no. And he would tell the boy the reason that he couldn't do. Just like if a girl going with a boy and had the misfortune and had this out wedlock baby by another girl, well that was a crime to a young man. That he had to be a father, the girls didn't go with him. They'd poke at him, they wouldn't go with him. I don't care how pretty he was or noting about him. They was very careful in my days about boys and girls. They don't pay no attention to them now.

HJ: That's about it Mrs. Patterson. If there is anything else I need to get back to you with, I'll notify you to that effect.

AP: Nice talking to you.

***pause in recording***

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<sup>1</sup> Emancipation Day in Florida.

AP: . . . mother changed her job to see about the pastor when he come in, sees his collar right, his tie right. If you know anything wrong that your pastor do, go to him and tell him. Don't tell him out in public, walk up to your pastor and talk nice to him. If he's a young preacher, put your arms around him and help him.

My job is to see about the linens of the church. We wash feet, you know. See about the linens and see if they're all kept good, tablecloths are ironed nicely and see about the sick ones. Just like if you got sick, it's my place to go and see about you. And it's the pastor's place to take me, to go and see about the sick. If it's a woman, it's my place to go in the house ahead of the preacher and see if it's desirable for him to come in. If it's not, I'll tell him to have a seat on the porch until I get things straight. That's my job. If the preacher go and it's a man sick, he supposed to go in ahead of me and say "Mother Patterson, you have to have a seat out there for a few minutes." If the preacher can't get it straight, he'll come back and tell me, "Mother Patterson, it's a job [you] can handle." I'll go in and handle the job because the man may need bathing, putting on clean clothes. It's my place to go in there and handle the job. If any of the members have disturbed me, it's my place to go to the members to talk to them. Don't go and make a disturbance. I'm supposed to be (inaudible), talk to them, tell them the way to go and how to live in this world. Never heard an old persons speak, cause you're in danger.

I don't worry about nobody talking ugly to me, I leave them in the hands of God. Sometimes I get up here in the morning and I pray for this whole building. I say "Dear God, I thank you this morning for keeping me all night long. Jesus, you kept me and sent an angel down and watched over me, and you woke me up this morning with blood still running in my veins and I want to say thank you. If there is anything I can do for any of these people in the building, I'll go and do it." I went up there and rubbed a lady one day, she was sick, and she told me "Mrs. Patterson, your hands rubbing me done me more good than the doctor did." I went back another time, she's handicapped, and I bathed her and put some clean clothes on her and she just loved me to death. I'll do any of that, that's my job, seeing to the sick.

HJ: So Mrs. Patterson, how did you become the mother?

AP: I had to live right, do right. The deacons watched me for a long time. Just like if you want to come to be a deacon, you can't just say, well, we gonna put him on the deacon board. They go to watch you. You go out there in the streets, raising sand and drinking, cutting up, having fusses, you can't make a deacon. Well, if I had arguments with the members and, fussed with people, I couldn't have made a mother.

HJ: So you really don't know when they are watching you?

AP: No! You don't know when they watching you.

HJ: That's just like with God. You know God is everywhere, you don't know when he's there, where he's looking at you from.

*Side 1 ends; Side 2 begins.*

AP: . . . I caught everything in one Bible that's not in the other one. It's in there but it don't be just alike. I'll read one a while and then I go back and get the other and read it a while.

HJ: So how long have you been a mother in church?

AP: Oh, about nine years.

HJ: Do they have mothers in all churches? I'm United Methodist and I've never—

AP: No, no. The Methodist people, they have deaconesses. They're not like us.

HJ: You have one mother, or you all got—

AP: Oh, no. We have a heap of mothers. I'm over all the mothers. I'm next to the deacons. I'm next to the senior deacon. I can't get no higher. I've never had an argument in my church, I never with the members or nothing. When they want something done, they always call Mother Patterson. I handle the bread and wine, I see to the bread, I see to the wine. Do all those things. These hands has got to be clean. I'm a clean mother, I'm in charge. I'm proud of myself, I sure am. Everybody don't get where I'm at.

HJ: (inaudible) working and going for yourself. That's very good.

AP: I thank God for every day I have lived. I have been here a long time. I have always—I was twelve years old. I'll tell you a summer, I was about twelve years old, somewhere along in there. This preacher preached and said, "I'm gonna preach this morning." He said the Truth and a Lie, if the Lie went in the lily pool and Truth, she stood on the bank and watched the Lie. The Lie swim and dive, went down in the water, she come up, she dive back down in the water and old Truth stood up there on the bank and looked at her.

When Lie come out, Truth stood there and looked at her and said, "You has a good time in that water?"

Lie say, "Yeah, you could have one, too."

She looked down and said, "I'm scared, I might get drowned."

"Oh, no, come on, I'll learn you how to swim."

Okay, old Truth, she stood up there and looked at Lie and she went in shallow water—she wouldn't go in that deep water—and she come out and said, "The water feels good."

She said, "Yeah, but dive down."

And Truth took a notion to dive down. Old Lie come out and put on Truth's clothes, and

Lie told Truth, "When you dive, go way down, come up."

By the time she dived down and come up, old Lie had on Truth's clothes and was gone. When Truth come out of the water she said, "Where is Lie? I don't see my clothes, Lie left me." And she went on up through the quarter and everywhere she go she would ask, "You all seen Lie, she got on my garments?"

And he said, "Today, you can tell a lie and here and he can't catch it to save his—" He said, "That's just the way it is; you can't catch up with a lie." That was his sermon.

Another one. There was an old man who taken a wife, he'd been a member a long time. That old man had three weeks of prayer meeting and preaching, trying to convert him. Finally he come through with his religion and he said— On a Friday night, that Sunday morning she say, "Jesus, keep me. Jesus, you been keeping me a long time. Jesus I know you was gonna help me."

That old man come in and say, "What have you done?"

She say, "I'm still praying for you."

He say, "Well, why you praying?"

She say, "Nigger, for a few more biscuits. I'm gonna make your biscuits up, but you will never eat them."

He said, "Put some jelly and some butter in them and I'll show you." Because you know when colored folks go to church they don't know when to go home.

She said, "Okay, old man, I'm gonna do just what you said."

The old went and they baptized all the candidates until he was the last one, and when they baptized him, the preacher said, "I baptize you in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost."

The old man's biscuits jumped out of his pocket, and he saw the old lady was standing on the bench, and she said, "Oh, Brother, Pastor, my God, dunk him again."

So they dunked again, and the rest of the biscuits come out and she say, "Old man, I told you that you never would eat them biscuits."

He said, "Old lady, you got yours and I got mine. Jesus give you yours and Jesus give me mine."

But the one thing about colored folks, they beg God too much. They want God to feed them. And that's the end of that.

HJ: Do you have any more? That's what I was talking about, things like that.

AP: There was an old lady, she was old. She had on a—I used to make old folks dresses; it was wide, and the slip was wide, and they starch them real stiff. The old lady was standing on this bank, had on that dress standing out like that, and so she stepped too close to the bank and she stepped off in the water. Them slips and that stiff dress had her floating on top of the water. You know how boys is, said, "Oh, look yonder, it's Mother Mary! She's floating on top of the water! I declare, that's Jesus' mother. She ain't sinking, look at her, she just float." They got the old lady out of the water and she wasn't wet nowhere. Her dresses weren't wet.

HJ: They weren't wet?

AP: No. This is true. All standing on the bank, looking at her. They pulled her out—they didn't let her stay long—they pulled her out and the water was just dripping a little bit from the tail of her dress. Them boys said, "That's Mother Mary, Jesus' mother, Mother Mary. You can't tell me it ain't." Them boys made a song of it. I don't remember now how that song went. But they said it was Jesus' mother, Mother Mary. I don't know how that song went, but it was pretty.

HJ: When you all were being baptized before, before they put them into the church, would you go to a river?

AP: No, I was baptized in a creek, on a Monday. I was baptized as a great big old snake coming down the creek. Course you know I was scared, but the preacher wasn't scared. He said "Don't worry, Sister, I'm with you. That snake isn't going to bother you." That snake got right by us he held up his head, just like that, and went an down the stream. One man said kill him, he's too big to get away, but they didn't do nothing.

HJ: Why did he baptize you on a Monday?

AP: It was because they didn't have nothing to do and they was all sitting around that Sunday night, and announced we'd have our baptizing Monday. It had rained Sunday night and they couldn't pick cotton—the cotton was wet—and so they had it Monday. It was cold out Monday night. We had a time.

HJ: So would the people seize that baptism? Like bring food and stuff? Or would you all just go to the baptism—

AP: Oh, yeah! They'd have baskets of food. Sometimes they would start the barbecue on Friday night, whole hogs. It was just a feast. You gonna be there all day Sunday.

HJ: People would just come from miles and miles around?

AP: Sure did.

HJ: And just meet at one central location and just—

AP: We had services at our church once a month. One preacher preached at four churches, but they were good preachings. They were good just like your mother—I'd be standing out in the yard, hanging up clothes, and Ida be out there in the yard singing. Well, your mother was getting and singing. She used to come to the fence and she'd join. And she'd stand there and sing, talk about what a time they had Sunday, all that there. It was nice. (inaudible) They sing this song now, but they don't sing it (inaudible).

HJ: So, in Tampa, when you came to Tampa, they were baptizing in the creeks too?

AP: Yeah. Reverend Scott—they had a pool in the church, that's where they were baptizing; they had a pool in the church.

HJ: Did they have the same gathering that they had when you was a little girl? Like when they had the baptism here, did they come with the food and stuff like that too?

AP: No, they don't have that here.

HJ: When you first came to Tampa?

AP: No, no they didn't. We do that at our church, we have food at the church. Like when we have Women's Day (inaudible). They have plenty of food. The Choir Union, they have plenty of food. They do that at all churches that have Choir Union.

HJ: Are you in the choir?

AP: No. I don't sing in the choir. I used to belong to the number two choir, but I don't now. But I still pay my dues, but I don't sing. When they go out and there's not a lot of them, I sing.

HJ: So, again, Mother Patterson, I say thank you. If I need to get back in touch with you I will.

*end of interview*