

**Interview with
Josephine Morris Rayford
by Sharon Brescoach,
June 21, 1997**

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Marshall University
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Released Form signed by Josephine Morris Rayford,
June 21, 1997, at Camp Washington Carver, West Virginia

Transcribed by Gina K. Kates
PDF prepared by Lisle G Brown

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Note: In the original transcript there were blank spaces.
These have been indicated by [blank space] in the following text.

Josephine Morris Rayford Interview

Sharon Brescaoch:... Sharon, my name is Sharon Brescoach, and I'm with the Oral History of Appalachia Program at Marshall University. And we are here interviewing, and may I have your name, please?

Jospeh Moriris Rayford: I'm Josephine Marsh Rayford from Institute, West Virginia. I'm a retired school teacher, 47 years teaching in West Virginia.

SB: Wow, wow (**JR:** Uh-huh) wonderful. Well, let me ask you a couple of questions. And you've probably answered some of them already. But we'll get some of the basic information they use for the statistics and so forth. And then we'll get into the questions and all the information you have provided. I need your birthdate.

JR: I'm 93 years of age. I was born May the 1 at, 1904. In Pennsylvania. (**SB:** Wow! Wow.)

SB: Now, you attended the camp, correct? (**JR:** I did) And ...

JR: Three years I was at Camp Washington Carver.

SB: Okay. And where-, what was your hometown? Where were you from when you came to the camp?

JR: I was living then in Charleston, West Virginia and teaching at Garnett High School.

SB: Okay, so were you-, did you come as a counselor here?

JR: I came, first of all, as a business uh, manager. My first year. Now my second year here I was the camp director, and the third year a camp director. I resigned after that because of my mother's illness. She lived with me. And I at my home.

SB: Well, that's, that's..., sometimes we have to do those things

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JR: Oh, yes, yes, happy to do it.

SB: Yes, that's wonderful. Uh, and you currently live in InSTITUTE, and gender is female. And past occupation you have mentioned. And marital status, you said you were married, and children or grandchildren?

JR: Uh, my husband's name was George B. Rayford. He was the uh, elementary school principal and a teaching principal in West Virginia. We were married almost 32, 42 years when he passed on in 1983.

SB: Uh, and do you have any children?

JR: I have no children.

SB: Okay, okay. And educational background?

JR: I'm a graduate of West-, Wilberforce University in Ohio. I took the three year commercial teacher's course there and finished it in two years, because I'm a working girl. And I began teaching at Garnett High School in Charleston, West Virginia in 1924. I taught at Garnett High School for 32 years, until the coming of integration. With integration, I moved to Stonewall Jackson High School in Charleston, West Virginia, and completed 35 years teaching with that, Kanawha County Board of Education, and retired in '59. I worked then five years with the Kanawha County Board of Education in the adult program. And 7 years after that, Dr. Harrison Farrell, down at West Virginia State College, long distanced me. I was up in Pennsylvania enjoying my vacation, to come to West Virginia State College and teach a year for him. And you know what happens. One year develops in to two, to three, to four, to five, to six, to seven, until age retired me. And I've I retired twice now in the state of West Virginia.

SB: Wow, that's wonderful. What an accomplishment for-, I mean....

JR: I'm very happy with the experience. And the students have done so well. They've been so

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appreciative, I have a happy experience.

SB: Wonderful. When you were at State, what did you teach?

JR: My field is business education. I taught, shorthand, typing, office machines, methods of teaching business subjects. And in that course, I had to visit the local high schools and observe my practice teachers.

SB: Wow, that's very interesting.

JR: When I was retired from West Virginia State College, they gave me a certificate on outstanding educator in West Virginia.

SB: That's quite an accomplishment. Because it's difficult in those days uh, with race, as well as gender, being female, that's quite an accomplishment.

JR: I have a masters degree from Ohio State University, a bachelor's degree from West Virginia State.

SB: What an accomplishment. [blank space] I'm so impressed. If you don't mind, I want to pause for just a minute.... Okay, do you mind if I ask you just a couple of questions? (**JR:** Sure) Some of this information deals with campers. And since you were working here, uh, the questions, a lot of them will apply. And I'm sure you have some wonderful information here. Uhm, but I wanted to ask you a couple of things. Do you remember any adult activities going on at the camp when you were here?

JR: Well, I was in the early days now of the camp. See, that's 50 years ago or more. The surroundings and the offerings program was very meager at that time. Because we did not have the facilities.

SB: Well, what kind of programming did they offer?

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JR: Well, I can....

SB: Well, if you, would you ... how about this? Since you have prepared this wonderful piece, I'll let you go ahead and do that. And if there's anything that you haven't covered, so that way we won't cover it twice. Okay, just help yourself.

JR: Okay. In thinking about the, fifty years, I thought maybe girl scouts would be interested in even going back behind the establishment of the Washington-Carver camp. Because I was interested in that also. And so I, the first part of mine is Prelude. And I say [begins to read]:¹

Prior to the opening of Camp Washington Carver for girl scout activities, for Negro girls. There were meetings in the Charleston/Institute area of a group of interested women who were concerned the scouting for Negro girls was being denied to them because of their racial background. These women were actively interested in offering to all girls the advantages of scouting.

Among persons whom I remember, among these women were Mrs. Ethel Davis, the wife of Dr. John W. Davis, long-time president of West Virginia State College at Institute, West Virginia; Mrs. Theodore Faulkner Rutherford. She was chairman of the business department of West Virginia State College; Dr. Mary L. Williams, who was the teacher of English at Garnett High School in Charleston; Josephine Morris Rayford, myself, a teacher of business subjects at Garnett High School; Mrs. Mattie Martin Campbell, wife of Cubert Campbell, the undertaker in Charleston; Mrs. Franklin, Mrs. Beatrice Dunlop; Mrs. Bessie Smith Godley, and others who were interested in cultural and civic improvement.

I wanted to mention those ladies, because they laid the foundation for this.[continues reading].

¹Josephine M. Rayford begins to read a four-page typewritten document, entitled, "CAMP WASHINGTON CARVER 97: An Early Report By Josephine Morris Rayford," which she wrote on June 18, 1997. She essentially reads the entire document. A photocopy of the document can be found in the folder with the original transcript in Special Collections, Marshall University.

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These women worked assiduously and met regularly to set the stage for opening up the advantages scouting for all interested girls, regardless of ethnic background. The first camp for Negro girls, our first camp was held in the hills behind the residence of Mrs. Rutherford on her land, and...We had the bare essentials, a real experience that both the staff and the campers felt it was time well spent. We had cookouts, trail hikes and campfires, as well as good fellowship, singing and enjoying the great out-of-doors.

During the 1940's, when girl scouting for Negro girls was permitted, we were transported to the Washington Carver campsite in Clifftop, West Virginia, by bus, while scouting for white scouts went to Camp Ann Bailey nearby. Needless to say, the facilities of the two camps were separate and unequal. But it was a beginning for an established camp, and we made the most of it. I served on the staff for three-, on this staff, for three consecutive summers. One as business manager, and two summers as camp director, until my widowed mother who lived with me, became ill and incapacitated. I resigned as camp director, and left girl scouting to devote myself to my mother and her passing into the great beyond.

Early staff and campers. Fifty years later I am trying to recall those early days. Some of our early staff was: Mrs. Maude Page, camp director for one year, Josephine Marsh Rayford, business manager for one year and camp director for two years; Mrs. Evangeline Jones, camp cook and dietician, affectionately known as Cookie; Mrs. Olivia Straighter, camp nurse, who went by the camp name as Nursie; Mrs. Pauline Dodd, from Parkersburg, West Virginia; Mrs. Zenobia Martin from Dayton, Ohio, affectionately known as Zeedee. Martin.

A few of my early campers, whom I can recall, were Mary Julia Bowles, Leontine Jackson, Mary Julia Dunlap, now living in California, JoEllen Flagg—

Incidentally, JoEllen is retiring from the library tomorrow at West Virginia [continues reading].

JoEllen Flagg, who experienced her first trip with her own suitcase and clothing, which suitcase she unpacked every day and took everything out and laid it on

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her bed, and her counselor every day had to have her repack it.

I recall staff and other campers slept upstairs in the main lodge, and the older girls slept in the tent outdoors. I recall their first experience, when they discovered a snake. The bravest among us was Cookie. She took a hoe and killed the snake and had her picture taken holding the snake, so we could view it and her.

Prior to becoming camp director for two years, I traveled to Camp Metamora in Michigan, where I took the camp director's training course to prepare myself for overseeing and planting for the Washington Carver camping experience.

During my term as director prior to the opening of camp in Clifftop one summer, I fell from the top of an outside wall behind my home and broke my right arm at the elbow. I went to the hospital, where a cast was temporarily placed on it. And I was instructed to return the next day for an x-ray. When Dr. Kennedy read the x-ray, he ordered the cast removed and told me he would have to operate. Because there was a little chip there.

"If I don't remove the chip," he said, "you'll have a stiff arm."

I asked the question, "And if you do remove the chip," and he said, "I can't promise you anything, except that if I don't remove the chip, you will have a stiff arm."

I replied, "Doctor, I teach typing and make my living at typing and all I ask is that you give me the best chance you can."

Needless to say, the operation was a success and the doctor permitted me to go on and direct the camp that summer, with the stipulation that during the season, I must come back to the hospital for him to note the progress.

Meanwhile, Nursie at the camp, had me keep on the stove, a vessel in which was warm olive oil. And each time I passed that way, I was instructed to stop a minute and massage the elbow with the warm olive oil.

When Dr. Kennedy saw me at the close of the camping season, he asked, "Missus, what have you been doing?" When I told him what I had been doing, he said, "You have done more for yourself than we could do for you. You

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won't need the heat treatments."

I recall my two sisters come, I recall my two nieces coming from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, to join other Negro girls in securing the benefits of living in the great out-of-doors. I recall my sister's instructions to me to look after her daughters. I completely ignored Justine Johnson and her sister, Irene Johnson, during the camping season, and let them enjoy the and the experience of living in the out-of-doors and appreciating nature in the rough. The experience was character-building for them, too.

I am certain I have some memorabilia, which I will be happy to donate to the Washington Carver camp, when and if, I can lay my hands on it. However, since the '40's, I have changed my residence twice. I've been in employed in four different school buildings and I have retired twice. I gave Meals-on-Wheels ten years of service, the Kanawha County Association of Retired School Employees twenty-one years of service as treasurer, the St. Paul African Episcopal Church of Charleston, West Virginia seventy-three active years, and I'm still treasurer of Church Women United in West Virginia, after serving them now for the past eighteen years.

With this brief report, I hand you two pieces to add to your memorabilia.

First, *The Established Camp Book*, copyrighted in 1946. (I have already given that to Karen.)

And second, *Minimum Standards for Girl Scout Camp*, a pamphlet published in 1942. (It, too, has been given to Karen.) [Ends reading]

SB: That was just marvelous. It was absolutely wonderful.

JR: It's easier for me to sit down and write things out.

SB: I understand, I understand. I love to write myself. That is, actually I am a journalist, so that's why I am doing this. May I ask you a couple of questions? And then we'll.... I just wanted to ask, when you were talking about activities, what sort of activities do you remember at camps?

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JR: We did have a little swimming. We had hikes, we had cookouts, whatever we could manage on the facilities in the '40's.

SB: Okay. And then one other question. You uh, remember-, have you been back after integration besides this time?

JR: I have not been back to Washington Carver camp since 1940-something. I was happy to come up to see the facilities, [blank space] at 93, my knees have about given out.

SB: Well, they do have a gold cart out there, so....

JR: Oh, yes, I'm waiting to take the ride.

SB: Well, I will let you go. I just wanted to see if you had noticed any difference, did you see any of the children interact today?

JR: I did. I got here just in time to see the last of the formal this morning.

SB: Talented

JR: Yes, talented people.

SB: So, was it different to see the white children working with the ... the ...

JR: oh, just being people.

SB: Yes, and that's exactly ... that's wonderful. Well, I really appreciate I'll go ahead and stop this.

END OF INTERVIEW