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Marion F. Holt Interview - Transcript

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May 23, 1973

INterview with Marion F. Holt at Thelma Holt's home on Muirland in Detroit.

B: Brother Holt would you try to recall for me some of you earliest remembrances of the church?

H: I got interested in preaching in the church through the encouragement of D. M. English and G. P. Bowser. ~~Is~~ Sister Annie Tuggle gave me a lot of encouragement, also. I met brother ~~JB~~ Bowser in Louisville. I met brother English in Tennessee and Sister Tuggle in Louisville. I was in Louisville, had just gotten married. I was working in the church on Liberty street, as minister, since they didn't have ~~w~~one at the time. I served also at the Burnet Ave church.

B: How did your parents hear of the church?

H: My father was a devout member of the church of JC hrist. He was an elder for the church at ~~IB~~ Belfast, Tn. That's where I got church -minded. As usual, he wanted some e of his boys to be preachers and two ~~x~~did, and ~~he~~ a host of grandsons are preaching. As far back as I can remember, he ~~a~~ had been a member of the church. My mother was ~~ap~~ Presbyterian but she was converted through our influence and that of D. M. ~~x~~English. That was when we were young. ~~IB~~Brother English came through there holding a meeting. I know that most all of our Colored work was ~~stated~~ through the work of Whites churches. Brother Ijams did a lot of work that way and I ~~knows~~ ~~innow~~ know other did the same. All of my early work was paid for by Whites who ~~would~~ would get ~~xxx~~ me to go down and hold a meeting at some place where they were interested. Of course, the Whites would attend, pay the expenses of the meeting, pay for the tent and generally take charge of everying thing. But they knew that we were preaching the truth and that's how the churches got started.

B: Was your father born in salvery?

Conversation with Marion F. Holt. May 23, 1973, In Thelma Holt's house. He was visiting there along with G. P. Holt when Thelma was in the hospital with surgery.

We are going through Annie Tuggle's book of biographies and he is giving some information regarding different persons.

"Our Ministers and Song Leaders of the Churches of Christ" published in 1945 approximately.

B: Brother Holt, the first name is J. L. Anthony of Toledo. Did you ever know him?

H: Yes, I knew of him but never met him personally. When I first came to Indianapolis, he had just ~~he~~ moved back to Ohio someplace. Perhaps it was Dayton or Columbus as mentioned in the book. He ~~xxxx~~ had worked for the church in Indianapolis. He and Milo Jones were old pioneers. ~~xxxxxxx~~ Milo Jones goes way back, too. I don't know how the two of them got together. One of them was from Tn, I believe. The two of them had had a discussion and Brother Jones was of the opinion that women should keep silent in the church, meaning not read in Sunday School, etc. I called his attention that he allowed them to sing. He also used to hold street meetings whereby he would preach and his wife would do the reading of the Bible on such occasions. I ~~calledxxxx~~ pointed out this inconsistency. I don't know how ~~he~~ he worked that out but I do know she continued to read for him when he preached on the streets. He also did not believe in literature. He wouldn't read from anything but the Bible. He had some curious ideas. He was a good friend of mine, but he had some peculiar ideas as to how the fellows ought to pass out communion. He would direct them as to where they were to start passing the emblems out among the audience. He had them under his control.

WB: Who started the church in Indianapolis?/

H: I think they both started it. But I came in later so can't be sure. We were worshipping in a little house.

H:

B: Can you tell me more about them?/ Brother Jones was married but I don't know if Brother Anthony was. I guess he was.

B: How large was the church when you came there?

H: About 12 or 15 members. There was only the one church for the colored.

B: Was Brother Milo related to the other Jones listed?

H: Not that I know of. Tommy Jones was from Chattanooga. Brother Alonzo Jones was in Atlanta. I just preached for Tommy a time or two passing ~~xxxxx~~ through.

Brother Milo and Brother Anthony disagreed on several things--they didn't set horses too well. I won't say that's why Brother Anthony left.

B: The next older name checked in the book was Elder J. E. Buster, Gate City, Va. What do you know about him?

H: No. I've never met him. I just know he was an old-timer. "One of the oldest preachers" it says. 83 years old then.

B: The next name here is D. J. Bynam.

H: He was one of our leading preachers, too. He worked with Brother Bowser and Brother Womack, Brother Campbell. There are some, you see that were beyond me and I can't ~~xxx~~ tell you too much about them. Brother Byman came to Detroit. Perhaps, Clarence, my brother, could tell you more about him 'cause he worked with him. ~~He~~ They both came to Detroit at the same time.

B: I notice here that the Union Avenue church in Memphis helped him. Do you know anything about that?

H: I know that church helped my brother, I guess it was in Memphis.

B: Which church in Detroit ~~ix~~ did Brother Bynam work for?

H: Joseph Campau. Cameron is the oldest. I can't be positive about the starting of the church here. Clarence, my brother, can tell you just exactly about this because he worked at Joseph Campau some. Brother Trone is there now. He worked with my brother when he was there. Turn over to "A. C. Holt" and see what the book says. It just says he is working for Mt. Clemons and ~~xx~~ doesn't say anything about Jos Campau.

J.

B: It says he was baptized by A. ~~E.~~ Kelsee.

H: ~~K~~ Kelsaw is the way I pronounced his name. Maybe I was wrong all this time. Yes, I know him well. He's one of the older preachers, too. He's a ~~x~~ Tennessean who used to come and preach under an arbor at Belfast holding meetings for us. I used to think he was the one who baptized me but after I got to thinking about it, it was Brother English.

B: Brother Kelsee is not listed in the book.

H: There were some that she didn't get. Frank Fishback was another elderly preacher she didn't mention. He was a pioneer that did a lot of arbor preaching because we didn't have churches. He walked to his appointments. He was much older than I was. I met him there and presumed he was a native of Tennessee. I was just a boy. He could have been born in slavery. Since there wasn't many of our churches that were not started by whites, I presumed that is the way he heard about the church. That's about the only way we had to get started.

B: The next person is Alexander Campbell.

H: He was a Nashville man, at least, I met him there. I don't know if he lived out of Tennessee or not.

B: It says he was baptized by the older Marshall Keeble.

H: I think that is the first time I've heard of him. Seems like I did hear someone mention ~~xxxxx~~ the famous Marshall had an uncle that was a preacher, but I never knew him. He would have been before my day.

B: I recall Marshall Keeble came from Murfreesboro. Does that ring a bell?

H: I know when I was working with the church there in Murfreesboro, there was a brother to the Marshall, whom we know so well. He was not a member of the church is how come I remember. He was a kind~~x~~ of a rough fellow, in a way. There was such a difference in the two boys--one such a good preacher, the other not even in the church. I remember some Keebles around there.

B: Back to Alexander Campbell. Did you have much personal experience with him?

H: Not too much. I did attend some of his meetings. I was kind of a young man just becoming interested in the church, maybe doing a little preaching and he was an old man then.

B: What did he do for a living?

H: As far as I know, just preaching. I don't know of any side line that he had.

B: I didn't think a man could make a living preaching back then.

H: Well he seemed to do quite a bit of it. His wife was a very thrifty woman, I remember that. Probably she played a big part in it. Brother Campbell and Brother Keeble were contemporary there in Nashville. I remember Brother Marshall ran a grocery wagon but I know of nothing but preaching for Brother Alexander Campbell.

B: It says that he established the church in Blackton, Arkansas. What took him there?

H: No. I imagine that he was doing more traveling. We know Brother Marshall got to working with the white church quite a bit. It may have been that Brother Campbell was assisted like that. That is one thing that the white church would do. If~~x~~ they knew of a destitute point and ~~xxxx~~ they thought the church could be established and they had a colored preacher who would go down there and do the work, they would pay his expenses. I just don't know what took him to Arkansas.

B: I see the name A. L. Cassius, not an older fellow, but is Cassius Clay related to him?

H: Not that I know of.

B: It says Robert Childs was trying to get a home for the aged in Nashville.

H: He did, in Nashville. He was a young preacher, younger than I am, perhaps 60 years old today. He always had big ideas, they were good. He worked with David Lipscomb College and while there tried to organize a union and strike. He seems to have lost out on that account. He didn't succeed. He was a favorite out there and had a shrewd mind, and they realized~~x~~ it. If they hadn't gotten rid of him they would have had trouble. He's still preaching some around Nashville. I think some at South Hill. He gets around the country. If you were to hear him talk you would think he was a professor at some college. I'm not sure just when he tried that organizing, maybe in the 40's.

B: Next is J. T. Daniels.

H: I don't know too much about him. He was from Nashville and for some reason went to Chicago. He seemed to be like Brother Jones--plenty of peculiar ideas that didn't set well with the other churches. Perhaps that's why he left.

B: Is that why Brother Levi Kennedy split off from the original church?

H: I don't know. I heard that he worked with a church even before I went to Nashville out in South Nashville.

B: The book says they found mineral waters on his property and he prospered as a ~~XXXX~~ result.

H: I know he was prosperous and considered a man who had a little money. I didn't know how he got it.

B: Samuel Davis is next.

H: Whatever she says is all I know. He lived his life around Nashville.

B: D. M. English. What relation was he to Paul?

H: D. M. was Paul's Uncle. I don't know who Paul's father was. He was a dynamite preacher, x he was a smart fellow like Childs. He established the colored work in New York, until he was killed. D. M. English had a brother, Dewitt English, he used to preach in Louisville and I worked with him there.

B: The book says they came from Hickman County.

H: Seems like that is right but I know nothing of the family background.

B: D. M. came to Cameron Avenue here in Detroit.

H: I guess that was before my brother was down here. I was in Nashville when he was serving Jefferson Street. I believe I succeeded him there. I stayed there 13 years. I don't know how long he stayed. He left there and went to Khondike in Memphis. He was a real preacher, too.

B: Why was Paul killed?

H: Well, to be frank about it, his ~~xxx~~ wife was unreasonably jealous. You know a preacher has to meet everybody and be friendly everywhere. I don't think Paul was doing anything that was wrong. She was a Tullahoma, Tennessee girl, from the country when she married Paul. Paul was a very popular preacher. I was in New York, just after it happened. I followed Paul work there, with the church. Do you know Brother Ward of New York? He came to me in Nashville and wanted to know if I could go up there and take over the work Paul had started. It was a great set-back for the church because it was in the papers. She killed him with a gun. They went through a trial but I don't think she put any time.

B: Elder George E. Hoagland. This is one of the few names that has 'elder' on it.

H: He's the one that came from the Christian Church and a minister with them. I think that happened in Nashville before he came to Detroit. He was a good preacher, too.

B: "He was baptized in Berea, Ky, moved to Normal, Ill and united with the Christian Church as their minister. Said it was the same as the Church of Christ."

H: And most Christian Churches say that now.

B: "In 1925 he moved to Detroit, Mi and identified himself with the Church of Christ."

H: That's the way it was.

B: He was not re-baptized was he? When he changed churches?

H: I don't know but I do know there was a lot of discussion about that subject at the time. I know that Marshall Keeble was not re-baptized. Old man Wes (~~Lewis~~) Smith, he worked on that argument somehow or another. He was one of our old ministers. I think we mentioned him as from _____, Tennessee. I know he is not in the book. I haven't seen his picture. He ~~xxx~~ might have been the one that was _____ Savannah ~~Gibbs~~ Gibbs and those fellows that had not been re-baptized. _____

B: Was "Elder" the typical way the Christian Church identified themselves?

H: They ~~xx~~ used that word instead of "Reverend". They wanted to stay away from "Reverend~~xxx~~"

B: Did you ever meet him?

H: Oh, yes sir. He married the daughter of old Brother Yowell of Jos Campeay who was my second cousin. ~~She~~ She just passed here recently. It was the son of this man who became the funeral director.

B: Is Cathey Locke related to the Lockes here in the city?

H: I don't know. He's a Texas man. ~~xxxx~~ I've never seen him but once. He's one of the leading preachers down there.

B: It identifies him as coming from Tate County, near Thyatira, Miss, baptized by Marshall Keeble, moved to Memphis and that's where he was at the writing of the book.

H: Phillip, didn't Cathy Locke move to Texas to work?

GPH: Yes, he's in Dallas.

B: That must be C. C. Locke.

H: It is.

B: Luke Miller

H: He's one of Brother Keeble's products and he was a real preacher. I've heard him preach.

B: Talk about brother Vaughner.

H: He did the most of his work in Florida. He's a product of Brother Keeble.

He got to the place where he had control over Florida. I've often ~~had~~ thought about how encouraging Brother Keeble was in this. ~~If you like Brother Keeble you'd like Brother Vaughner.~~ If you wanted an appointment you'd better write Brother Vaughner, not Brother Keeble. He had the whole state. I went down there and made a tour. He was very unusual. All you had to do was let him know the dates ~~xx~~ you would be available and he would get a man to drive you around over the state and speak at the appointments he would make for you. They accepted that. I was for two months! He baptized a lot of people. I don't know anything about his origin.

GPH: He was the associate editor of the Christian Counselor, a paper started by brother Keeble which lasted about 8 or 10 years.

B: T. H. York

H: He was a pioneer preacher. He did a lot of traveling. I guess he did more traveling than any preacher of his age. I've seen him and heard him preach. He was a good preacher in his day.

(end of tape)