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Orum Lee Trone, Sr. Interview - Transcript

R. Vernon Boyd

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INTERVIEW WITH O. L. TRONE, SR. March 14, 1975 in the Elmwood Park Church building, Detroit, Michigan

B: Can we begin first with your parents and their involvement with the church.

T: I am rather proud of my beginning so far as the Church of Christ is concerned, my mother and father came here from Birmingham, Alabama in 1921 and were strong members of the church at the time. We found that there was a church of Christ located at St. Antoine and Alexandrine, the ~~only~~ black congregation we had in the city. They immediately placed membership with the group. My brother, sister and I were not members as we were too small. There were about 21 or 22 members of the church at the time. Mind you, this was the only group meeting in the area at the time. Brother Claude Witty was working with the group, trying to fortify them. Brother T. H. York was the minister and being quite ageable and realizing that we needed a younger minister, he resigned and Brother D. M. English took over as minister and stayed with us a long time--I don't know how many years. During the course of his stay, I became a member of the church, around 1927 thereabouts, ~~thereabouts~~

Due to the fact that black were migrating from the South, the group soon outgrew the building and had to see other quarters. I remember rather distinctly that Brother Witty interceded for us in getting Cameron Avenue. The whites were worshipping there at the time and the neighborhood was changing as blacks were moving in; fortunately, they wanted to move out of the building and Brother Witty got them to sell us the building where the ~~group~~ continues to meet and Brother A. C. Holt ministers ~~now~~ now. The original group worshipped there until 1945. Brother D. J. Bynum succeeded Brother English who chose to go back ~~to~~ South. We outgrew that building

Due to the fact that blacks were migrating from the South, the group soon outgrew the building and had to seek other quarters. Brother D. J. Bynum succeeded Brother English who chose to go back South, so it was, as I distinctly remember, Brother Claude Witty who interceded with the whites who were ~~living~~ ~~living~~ worshipping at the Cameron Avenue building and got them to seal the building to the black brethren. In that neighborhood, blacks were moving in and the whites wanted to sell, fortunately. This is the same location which is still meeting and Brother A. C. Holt is the present minister. The original group ~~continued~~ continued to meet there until 1945 when we outgrew that building. and were able to buy the Joseph Campau building from the Roman Lutheran Church.

B: Roman Lutheran?

T: Yes. This is what they called themselves. They were Lutheran but I guess they held on to the tenets of the Roman Catholic Church more strictly than others. Because of the neighborhood being almost predominantly black, they left and sold us the building. Now mind you, we we left ~~Cameron~~ Cameron to acquire the Joseph Campau building, we did not leave out of confusion, but it was because we had outgrown 1725 ~~Cameron~~ Cameron. Fortunately, through the good wishes of the whites, we were able to purchase the building in six months, paying ~~\$~~ \$30,000 cash for it. We stayed there until Urban Renewal moved in on us, taking our property for re-development. That brings us up to the present.

B: I want to hear a little more about your mother and father. How did they hear about the church? Let's go back as far back as you know.

T: When my parents came here from the South, they found the church through B. P. Berry and Brother Berry found the church through ~~Brother~~ Brother George Yowell, and Brother and Sister Yowell found the church through W. C. Baldwin. Brother Baldwin found the church of Christ through Brother Witty, who was doing personal work, house to house in the black neighborhood. After Brother Baldwin was baptized, he and Brother Witty would go together in the black neighborhood looking for these members who were affiliated with the Church of Christ. That's how they found Brother Berry and Brother Berry, knowing my parents, helped them to locate the Church of Christ.

B: What was your father's first name.

T: Brazil. My mother's maiden name was Bessie Jackson. She was raised in the Church of Christ in Birmingham. You see, I was 6 years old when the ~~the~~ family moved here. I used to hear them speak of the Christian Church and the Church of Christ, both of which were in Birmingham. My mother was of the Church of Christ but they used music ~~xxxxxxx~~ (piano) until they came here. They never did fellowship the Christian Church ~~xxxxxxx~~ but rather pulled out of the Christian Church and went to the Church of Christ which had the ~~xxxxxx~~ piano.

B: What was your Mother's mother's name? ~~xxxxxxx~~

T: Laura Jackson. I never knew my grandfather's name. Laura was in the Christian Church and liven in a town by the name of Lum, Alabama. That 's about 100 miles East of Birmingham. The Christian Church, according to hearing my mother and father talk, was pretty much like the Church of Christ. The only difference being the instrument--the piano. Sometimes the Christian Church called themselves the Disciples of Christ but the Church of Christ never did

B: How many children did your grandmother have and did she raise her family by herself?

T: Yes, I think she did. She had three boys and three girls. I knew some of them. They were all members of the Christian Church or the Church of Christ. None of the ~~xxxxx~~ boys were preachers. As far as I know, my grandmother was born in Lum. It was a little country town. She was born in slavery. The only thing I ever

heard about slavery was when my mother and father talked about how kind the whites were to them. They, of course, were born after slavery and had been helped by ~~wikk~~ whites with farm equipment, etc. I do not know how my grandmother heard about the church. ~~xxxxxxx~~ My mother said the Disciples of Christ ~~xxxxxxx~~ (Christian Church) was the first church they knew in Lum. I guess they had some preachers to come in and tell them about the Church of Christ and that's how they got started without the piano in the worships ervice.

My parents came North when I was about 6 years old and my brother 8 and my sister about 4. They did not talk much about these things so I didn't learn about the family until I was old enough to ask questions. Back to the church, I heard; my parents talk about Cephas and Jack Brayboy, two prominent preachers at that time, a father and son combination who came there to preach. They lived there at Lum.

B: What about your father's background?

T: They were all in the Christian Church in Lum, too. I do not know his mother and father, but I did see his father one time, but never my grandmother. Jim Trone was his name. He was old and feeble and it seems my grandmother was alive, too. I've been back to Lum only one time, but several times to Birmingham when lectures were held there and I've held meetings in the city and Titisville. I believe my grandfather was a member of the Christian Church but I do not know how he heard about it. My grandfather had 4 boys and three girls. One uncle came to live here and eventually died here. There were a couple ^{of} who went to California. My father and mother grew up together. My mother had two years of college and taught school some. In fact, back then if you finished high school you were qualified to teach, that being equivalent to a college education. She taught for a long time in Lum. I'm not sure where she went to school beyond high school which was available there.

B: I've talked with Brother Sam Holt and he says he remembers your mother coming to school in the Christian Church college in Mississippi where he and his brother attended.

T: Then it must be so. Negroes at that time did not keep much records and I regret it. My ~~xxx~~ parents never made a picture of us when we were small. Perhaps it was too expensive. We had a time trying to get birth certificates. I had to prove my age by the schooling I got here in Detroit. They did not bother to write down information about the family tree. Our family used mid-wives to help in births. There were no hospitals. These were some mothers within the neighborhood.

B: Did your parents have experiences with the whites that might have effected their racial attitudes?

T. Yes. Some ~~who~~ whites would come in and want to let their cows graze on our property. ~~like~~ There was no respect for property rights of blacks. If ~~they~~ whites wanted to cut a road ~~through~~ through, they wouldn't consult the blacks. My grandmother, Laura Jackson, owned some property, about 15 or 20 acres and my uncle lived across the road and ~~owned~~ owned about the same amount. That was one reason my parents were motivated to come North. They wanted to get away from segregation and to gain some of the advantages of the North. My father farmed for a while but was undependable so he moved to Birmingham to work in the mines. He heard of the \$5 a day for ~~a~~ working in Henry Ford's factory--that news spread like wildfire--and he wanted to come North. A lot of ~~the~~ black families began to come here to work. That was a

fantastic wage in those days! compared to what they were making down there in the mines. So we came North in 1921. He came to work for the Hupmobile and then to Packard Motors from where he retired. He was in in the mines for about 10 years, and he attended the Church of Christ there. I do not believe ~~h~~ my father was in WWI because of a disability. I ~~h~~ think he was called and turned down. He had two major surgeries on his head and it may have been the reason. We used to think it was due to his working in the mines.