

Oral Memoirs
of
Carol Redding Cummings
St. Peter Claver, Macon

An Interview
Conducted by
Bettye Middlebrooks &
Katy Lockard
on
July 24, 2019

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Community Elders, Black Catholic Oral History Project

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General Policies and Procedures

A member of the Oral History Association, the Archives & Records Management Department of the Catholic Diocese of Savannah (A&R) supports and embodies the goals, guidelines, and standards of archival quality prescribed by the national professional association to ensure long-term preservation of memoirs. It is the practice of A&R to select narrators whose recollections, as participants or eyewitnesses, are relevant to the department's chosen research topics. Their recorded memoirs provide links between the immediate past and the present in a very human way. A scholarly but relaxed and conversational atmosphere exists during the interview. To encourage completely candid recollections, the narrator is asked to regard the oral history memoir as a highly personal journal. The transcribed historical document, which the finished memoir becomes, is the raw material used by historians and professional scholars.

In the interest of preserving these memories for future use, the narrator and interviewer must sign a deed of gift agreement. Generally, this releases their portions of the interview to the oral history archives of Catholic Diocese of Savannah for historical and academic research and public dissemination. The narrator may also choose to restrict the memoir by limiting access or by sealing the memoir until a specified date.

Oral History Procedure

1. Initial contact with the narrator.
2. Arrangements made for interview(s).
3. Recording of interview(s).
4. Transcribing of recording(s) in the A&R office.
5. Audit-checking and editing of transcript(s) in the A&R office. Abstract(s) created.
6. Review of transcript(s) by interviewer.
7. Review of transcript(s) by narrator. Due to edits requested, transcript(s) may not match audio recording(s) exactly.
8. Upload of draft transcript(s) and recording(s) to A&R's web portal.
9. Presentation of bound copy of completed oral history to the interviewee.

Legal Status

Scholarly use of the recording(s) and transcript(s) of the interview(s) with Carol Redding Cummings is unrestricted. The deed of gift agreement was signed on 11/1/2020.

Interview History

The recording(s) and transcript(s) of the interview(s) were processed in the offices of the Archives & Records Management Department, Catholic Diocese of Savannah, Savannah, Georgia.

Interviewer: Bettye Middlebrooks

Transcriber: James Wright

Editor: Stephanie Braddy

Collection/Project Detail

The Diocese of Savannah is collecting oral histories from members of the Black Catholic community to fill in gaps in the documentation.

Carol Redding Cummings, 85, was born in Macon, GA to Margaret R. Sullivan (1910-2008) and Horace Redding (1916-1982). She was one of five children, four sisters, and one brother.

In addition to working as a homemaker and raising her children, Carol did clerical work in the Bibb County School System. She also worked as a seamstress at R.S. Tharpe Men's clothing store for three years prior to joining the Bibb County School System.

Carol is a long-time member of St. Peter Claver Parish in Macon, where she attended school as a child and sang in the choir for over 70 years.

Bettye Middlebrooks is a longtime member of St. Peter Claver Parish in Macon, GA, and a member of the Black Catholic History Advisory Board to the Archives.

Katy Lockard is the Director of Archives & Records Management for the Catholic Diocese of Savannah.

Interview Transcript

KLockard Okay, can you start by telling us your full name please?

CCummings Carol Redding Cummings.

KLockard Okay, and can you spell it for us, please?

CCummings Capital C-A-R-O-L. Capital R. Capital C-U-M-M-I-N-G-S.

KLockard Thank you.

BMiddlebrooks Okay Carol, first I want to thank you for agreeing to this interview. And we're trying to put together some black history from the parishioners from our mouths, history as they remember it. So if you will go back, as far as you can and tell us what you remember about your days at the church and school.

CCummings All right. My husband kept that. [00:01:00] So, will you get for me?

KLockard Okay. Let me go grab it from your husband.

CCummings He asked me to bring it. It's something that includes my grandparents and the rock of the Christian religion for us. [Pause] And then you of course ask me questions too. [Pause] All right. Are you going to ask? Or what are we going...

BMiddlebrooks No, I want you to tell us.

CCummings All right. Thank you Ms. Middlebrooks, for giving me the opportunity to take a stroll down memory lane. [00:02:00] I have a rich religious history at St. Peter Claver Church and School. In the mid-1800s, my religious history began with the birth of my grandparents John and Sally Hughes. Eleven children were born to this couple. Six children died at birth and five survived. Each one of the children and later their families, were church members.

CCummings In 1904, the school on Ward Street¹ began a faith-based instructional school, [00:03:00] offering some academic courses. Children of all faiths were allowed to attend. Margaret, my mother, one of the five, was in the class of students who made their first Holy Communion in 1917. Her religious life continued throughout her lifetime. She died at age ninety-nine. According to church records, Margaret was the oldest senior member of the parish, the one that she had supported for over eighty-five years.

CCummings [00:04:00] In 1934, I was baptized in the new church and entered school at age five. Every school day was fun because I could walk home with my grandmother, Sally, who worked in the convent² caring for the nuns.³ The convent became my second home after a hard day of study.

¹ Mrs. Cummings is referencing St. Peter Claver School, which is located on Ward Street in Macon.

² Convent of the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament, located on the St. Peter Claver Church campus.

³ The term "nuns" is commonly mistaken for "sisters". Nuns are cloistered religious women who physically set themselves apart from the world, and whose "work" for the Church is prayer. A "sister" lives an apostolic life (working and usually living in the community). They are the ones you would see more often at schools and parishes. It is rare to see a nun anywhere but her cloister. It is common, but technically incorrect, among the older generations to refer to

The miracle on Ward Street was still working. Entering the seventh grade, I joined the church choir. This was one way I could become an active member of the church family. [00:05:00] I sang with the church choir over seventy years. The Catholic experience continues to grow within me, and in my children. Each of them are in some way involved or have been involved in school and church life. The year is now 2019 and the miracle on Ward Street is alive and well. Thanks.

BMiddlebrooks Okay, Carol, is it my understanding that either your mother or your grandmother met Katharine Drexel?⁴

CCummings Yes.

BMiddlebrooks Who was that?

CCummings [00:06:00] My mother, Margaret.

BMiddlebrooks Margaret. OK. She was actually a member here when Katharine Drexel was here trying to get everything started.

CCummings Yes.

BMiddlebrooks Okay, now, you went from kindergarten through the eighth...

CCummings Eighth grade.

BMiddlebrooks And during the summers, you all had a summer enrichment program? What was that?

CCummings One...

BMiddlebrooks What did you all do?

CCummings One particular summer, while the nuns were getting ready to go to Philadelphia⁵, they conducted a little summer session. There were people who came in, taught us how to knit, how to crochet, how to play ping pong, and how to play volleyball, you know, in the yard. And sometime we did some coloring and painting, just something to help [00:07:00] occupy us.

BMiddlebrooks And how long did that — did it last the entire summer?

CCummings No, just until the end of June.

BMiddlebrooks Okay.

CCummings Cause then they were ready to go for the summer.

all religious women as “nuns.” However, those who are living out the vocation of “nun” get really annoyed when an apostolic religious woman is called “nun.” Both also use the term “Sister.”

⁴ Katharine Drexel is one of the few American saints who had a relationship with South Georgia’s Black Catholic Community, and was the foundress of the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament (for Negroes and Indians). For more information: https://www.katharinedrexel.org/st_katharine_drexel_overview/

⁵ Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament Mother House is located in Philadelphia.

BMiddlebrooks Okay. Sister Marcella⁶—

CCummings Marcella

BMiddlebrooks ...that is the one who had a special relationship with?

CCummings Yes, Sister Marcella.

BMiddlebrooks And what grade were you in then?

CCummings She taught sixth and seventh grade, one year and then they changed — they transferred her to the seventh and eighth grade. So, my familiarity with her was well built.

BMiddlebrooks Okay. All right. Now everybody in your family was Catholic.

CCummings Everybody.

BMiddlebrooks Nobody converted, everybody, they were cradle Catholics or whatever.

CCummings Exactly.

BMiddlebrooks Your parents.

CCummings Yes.

BMiddlebrooks Where did they get it from — your parents?

CCummings My parents got it from their parents.

BMiddlebrooks Okay. [00:08:00] So it's always been?

CCummings Always been. Um-hm.

BMiddlebrooks Okay.

CCummings From the 1800s, and I think the particular year was 1844 and 1846, my grandparents were born. That's why I said the mid-1800s would cover that period of time.

BMiddlebrooks Okay, so now, right now, do you have any sisters and brothers?

CCummings I have four sisters, well I had three sisters, one brother.

BMiddlebrooks Alive now?

CCummings No. Two are dead now, one sister, one brother. My oldest sister is alive and of course, me. We all were Catholics and we all participated and graduated from Peter Claver School.

BMiddlebrooks All right, Carol. Thank you so much.

⁶ Sr. M. Marcella Keegan, S.B.S. was born Alice Marcella Keegan in Philadelphia, PA on April 6, 1900 to John B. and Alice Doyal Keegan. She was one of five children, including John, Joseph, Gerald and Frances Keegan. Sr. M. Marcella served at St. Peter Claver School from 1934-1945 and 1946-1948. She died on June 13, 1988 at the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament Motherhouse in Bensalem, PA and is buried in the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament Cemetery in the same city.

CCummings Thank you. [00:09:00]

[End of Interview]