



City of Alexandria
Office of Historic Alexandria
Alexandria Legacies
Oral History Program



Project Name: *Alexandria Legacies*

Title: *Interview with Helen Miller*

Date of Interview: *March 25, 1999*

Location of Interview: *Mrs. Miller's home on Queen Street in Alexandria, Virginia*

Interviewer: *Mitch Weinschenk*

Transcriber: *Jeanne Springmann*

Abstract: Helen Miller proudly traces the history of civil rights for African Americans through her own family. Her grandfather, himself the son of a slave owner, was one of the first black residents of Aurora Hills. Her father was a cook at the Capitol and “kept his place” in spite of the many famous people he saw each day. Because of his steady job he was able to buy a house for his family when his children were small. Helen, and many others, marched and participated in sit-ins in order to open libraries, restaurants, banks, and ABC stores to blacks, as customers as well as employees. She marched for city jobs in the Fire, Health, and Police Departments. She pioneered as one of the first black graduates of the Police Academy. Her daughter was one of the first black bank tellers in the City. In addition, she tells us delightful stories about her childhood—swimming in the Potomac, the fire at the vinegar factory, and bootleggers during Prohibition.

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Introductions	
Mitch Weinschenk:	Today is March 25, 1999, and I will have an interview with Helen Miller at her home at 1301 Queen Street in Alexandria, Virginia. My name is Mitch Weinschenk and I'm an intern at the Lyceum in Old Town.
The House at 1301 Queen Street	
Helen Miller:	Yes, we came in this house in 1956. We've been here 43 years. And when we were kids we visited the church across the street [inaudible] Sunday school children. And we used to come over here and watch this couple working the flowers, never thinking one day that we would live in this house. And, it's a big house; it's an old house, but it's what we needed because we had five girls and a boy. Then we took in another one so it was just what we needed. And we done a lot of changes to modernize it a little more because it is 100 years old. City records [inaudible] it was built in 1900.
M.W.:	1900?
Helen Miller:	Yes, it was built in 1900. I've got the papers.
M.W.:	This whole section here?
Helen Miller:	No, it was a strange thing about that. When I learned that...when we were learning about that chimney, all these years we've been here, it started popping out like you see it here...
M.W.:	Oh yes, right.
Helen Miller:	...and we couldn't figure out why because we don't, we didn't, don't use the chimney. So I got a roofing company come and look at it, and, of course, they didn't know too much about it. Then they came back and they painted half of the chimney on this side. And then it was still doing the same thing. So then when they came back again, they told me it was a "shared chimney." I said, "Shared what? I've never used that chimney since I've been in this house." I didn't know why it was there. But I paid for it because the way they talk like it was my chimney. But why? I got a basement. They don't have a basement next door. So we're good neighbors so I went on and I paid for it. And it still kept acting up and that's when I found that's what they call a "shared chimney." That's what they built a hundred years ago. Back in those days, that's what they built. Because their house don't have a basement, but this one does. I don't know whether he had it dug after he bought the house or just what. Because this house next door wasn't built until [19]25. And that's another thing I didn't understand. I guess it was just one house but I think that the man who built this house evidently he built that one, because he put the two of them together. And this chimney shares both houses. But this house don't use the chimney. We've been here 43 years

	because we've got a basement here. My furnace in the basement. And they got everything still. They remodeled the house but they still is right there in that corner—the heater, furnace, and all. I think back in those days that's how they built property and especially if the land was yours. Evidently the lot belonged to the man who built. So later on he just probably decided to build another house.
M.W.:	Maybe he used that as rental property.
Helen Miller:	Yes, and then he evidently built it on to this house and that's the reason why he didn't need but the one chimney. You understand? We never used it, but they use it because they don't have a basement. But when we came here, the first thing I said when I looked in here. I told Don, "Who's going to mop that kitchen floor?" But my husband was doing it anyway. But it was just the whole idea, considering the kitchen in the house that we left, you know.
M.W.:	Which was where now?
Helen Miller:	We lived 1017 Princess Street, right back here down two blocks from Hopkins House.
M.W.:	Okay, now this was a house that you rented?
Helen Miller:	No, it was their house. My husband's father died and he bought his stepmother and his two brothers out in 1946. We remodeled it. We put in...at that time they had hot water...tanks. It was a big tank sitting beside the stove and you light it. It was gas because we had gas put in the house. Wasn't no gas in the house. So we had my husband's father passing and his stepmother moving back to the country, so we had gas put in the house. And that was in [19]46. And they had a big tank and you open the door. You wouldn't know what it is because you can't even imagine. And you open it and you light it and that's what heated the water. And my husband's father's sister was a carp...her husband was a carpenter so he built us a bathroom in the house, something people didn't have a lot of then.
M.W.:	Is that right?
Helen Miller:	Oh no.
M.W.:	[19]46?
Helen Miller:	Yes, it was still a lot of houses without bathrooms, yes.
Growing Up in the 1000 Block of Pendleton Street	
Helen Miller:	And when we were kids growing up on Pendleton Street, in the ten hundred block of Pendleton Street, my father bought the house that we were living in. And Daddy had a place built on the back of the house and he had at tank put in it and you pulled a chain to flush the toilet! It was fun because everybody, most people had outhouses.

M.W.:	And this was actually a...almost like a building?
Helen Miller:	Sure, where we were raised there, on Pendleton Street, we lived right next door to Mr. White. Mr. White was the first principal of Parker-Gray School. And we felt we were fortunate because we would go next door and Miss Emma, his one daughter, and Uncle Jim, when he came, they would help us to do our lessons. So we thought we were fortunate...
M.W.:	Do you remember, or do you know what year Parker-Gray was built?
Helen Miller:	Parker-Gray was built either in [19]21 or [19]22. It was either [19]21 or [19]22.
M.W.:	So he was the principal there for twenty years?
Helen Miller:	No, he was the first principal.
M.W.:	They didn't have a principal then when it first opened?
Helen Miller:	Oh, well, they didn't have, they didn't have a school. They had a Hollowell School and a Snowden School. The boys went to one and the girls went to the other one. My mom went to the girls' school, she did. They came from Warrenton, my people did. They lived on a plantation.
M.W.:	You probably wouldn't recognize it now-a-days.
Helen Miller:	Oh no.
M.W.:	I mean it's developed to such—so developed. Have you been out there lately?
Helen Miller:	I haven't been there in a long time. But I never did go where they lived. But from what I understand that area, it's still there.
M.W.:	It's built up.
Grandfather's House in Aurora Hills	
Helen Miller:	They came from Warrenton, but they lived on the land that belonged to my grandfather's descendents. I was talking to the historic people. I called them the other day about Aurora Hills. Somebody left a lot of black pictures at the office of the historic department and they're trying to find out who left them, in Aurora Hills. And I called her and she was going to call me back because my grandfather was the only black that lived there then. That's right!
M.W.:	So it could be your family!
Helen Miller:	It could be somebody or somebody that my grandfather knew, or somebody that we knew. Because across Jefferson Davis Highway, back in them days, it was a brickyard. And that was Arlington County. It was a lot of black families lived in row houses called the "Brick Row." My grandfather used to go there and visit friends. So, it's a possibility that it could have been some of the kids of those families that was living in the

	Brick Row up [inaudible] Jefferson Davis Highway. But when you got up to corner, it used to be Virginia Highlands. And of course, they changed the name and give it a street. But back in them days it was Virginia Highlands. And you get to Aurora Hills because you went on the streetcar. We were kids you go for about eight cents, something like that, on the streetcar. And we would get on the streetcar and the guy would never put us off in Aurora Hills because no blacks lived there. But my grandfather lived there. He was a caretaker; he had a house. But they didn't know that.
M.W.:	So they didn't...
Helen Miller:	And they took us all the way up to the corner to Aurora Hills. It was a fire engine house in that building. There's a place there now—I think they call it Zaparella's. They sell all kinds of music, because my son-in-law has a gospel group and he goes there and buys music. But when we were kids it was a fire engine house and it was Virginia Highlands. So I was trying to contact these people to get some...so I gave her my name and my telephone number because I would like to know. Because the land that was there belonged to the family of my grandfather's father. Because my grandfather and them—their father was the man who owned their mother. And that's why Papa lived there. And this fellow, Mr. Morris, we remember him—he lived in Washington and he was like the overseer. He built my grandfather a house and had a big stable, and horses. Like he had big red mules! You would not believe it over in Aurora Hills when you see it today, because the streetcar used to go out there. And there's a streetcar station picture in City Hall that was sitting out there at that time. The picture of it is sitting out there. And the guy would never let us off there because he knew that blacks didn't live there. Wasn't no more than four or five houses there anyway. But he'd take us on up to Virginia Highlands. Because across from there...
M.W.:	Then you had to walk back...
Helen Miller:	Then you had to walk back to my grandfather's house! But we enjoyed it. And he had a big stable built on to the house. And gardens. First time I ever saw persimmon tree was in my grandfather's yard.
M.W.:	What does that look like?
Helen Miller:	Persimmon is a little round thing. It look like a peach but it doesn't have fuzz on it. It's called persimmon.
M.W.:	What did they make out of those? Do you recall?
Helen Miller:	Wine, I think. Yes, they made wine.
M.W.:	They weren't good for making...?
Helen Miller:	But you could eat it. It was a fruit.
M.W.:	Like, make pies out of it or something?

Helen Miller:	I don't ever think so. My grandfather—he wasn't that good. He used to cook cabbage and stuff like that. But we used to just eat them; they're sweet. It's almost like a peach. You would think it was if you saw it. But they're not; they're called persimmons. And there was a lot of those trees all around. My grandfather had these great big mules because the stable was built onto the house. You could just walk right out of the house into the stable. Mr. Morris, he had the house built for Papa. Because my grandmother was dead. And when my grandfather got old—he was 90 something by then—Mr. Morris brought him to my uncle on Alfred Street, 612 North Alfred.
M.W.:	You mean for your uncle to take care of him?
Helen Miller:	Yes. And he gave him, oh, like four or five hundred dollars. That was a lot of money then. That was in [19]43 my grandfather died. They did away with all of that then. Then they started selling the land and building up Aurora Hills. I wouldn't have no idea now because they moved Jefferson Davis Highway over where that—it almost runs through Potomac Yards—that Jefferson Davis Highway. That's that old road that runs adjacent to the new road that takes you up to the hotel—Marriott, before you get to the bridge—that little road, that was the Jefferson Davis.
M.W.:	That was it?
Helen Miller:	Yes, yes, that was it. There's no way now for horse and wagons and buggies and things like it was when we were coming along. And so they moved it. I mean it's there but they cut another road. Because there was a lot of open land there because there was nothing but woods and trees. Because that's a long time ago. Of course the streetcar was running out there across Four Mile Run. The streetcar was running where the bus terminal is now, up on Jefferson Davis Highway. Well the railroad track was in there. There was a lily pond there too. The railroad track went across the lily pond.
Dad's Job in Washington, D.C.	
Helen Miller:	We used to ride the streetcar to Washington. You go for 8 cents.
M.W.:	8 cents. And what did you do when you went into Washington?
Helen Miller:	Meet my dad. My dad was a cook, and on Sundays—there was an amusement park in Washington back in those years called Suburban Gardens. I don't think this generation, they never heard of it.
M.W.:	I never have.
Helen Miller:	And my dad had a hot dog stand out there and we used to go over on Sunday on the streetcar and Daddy would meet us at 12th and Pennsylvania Avenue. That's where you got off—at the Post Office. And then he would take us over to the Suburban Gardens and we'd just

	stay over there and play. Mother didn't go; that was one way of getting rid of us. And so we'd stay over there and play until time to go home and then my father would bring us back on the streetcar.
M.W.:	When he was finished with work you mean?
Helen Miller:	No, this would be on the weekends...
M.W.:	Oh weekends. Okay.
Helen Miller:	...Daddy would go. Yes, on the weekends he would go because he cooked at the Capitol during the week. And this is the weekends he would go over there because he had some guys running it for him. But on the weekend he would go...
M.W.:	So he worked in the Capitol and then he had this business besides?
Helen Miller:	Yes, oh yes.
M.W.:	Did he ever tell you stories about some of the...any of the famous people that he used to meet? Or was...
Helen Miller:	No, because back in those days blacks weren't as sensitive to politics and things of that sort as we are today. And another thing too, they had a poll tax, the state of Virginia.
M.W.:	But I'm saying...so you're saying even if he met somebody, he wouldn't be impressed with the person?
Helen Miller:	No, no, no. Because it was just one thing where blacks hadn't come to that and those that voted was in another category anyway. My father worked from sun up to sundown. And when Daddy came home he bought something for every kid in the neighborhood. That's the one thing that the kids are left in the neighborhood that my friends whenever we get together all we talk about is how we came up as children, my father, and how we'd sit around on the porch waiting.
Home Owners	
Helen Miller:	'Cause we owned our own house. My father bought that house from a lady named Miss Mary...I'm trying...Mary...it will come to me. Anyhow, he bought it for \$1100. That was a whole lot of money then. She came from Asbury Park, New Jersey. I remember that. And Daddy bought that house and then we moved there from the house we were born in. We were born in the house on Columbus Street, 508 North Columbus Street, me, my sister, my two brothers. And Daddy bought that house, which was unusual back then for blacks to buy houses. But if you had a job like my father had, he probably wasn't making a whole lot of money, but it was a lot of money then; because \$1100 was a lot of money then. Daddy bought that house and we moved there. And that's where we lived until we all got grown. My father died. My mom stayed there until she got sick and we had all just about moved out. We were all

	grown. So my cousin, we moved her to his house, and we sold the house because nobody was really going to live in it and it took a lot to keep houses going and all. And everybody was out for themselves, just about, at that time.
M.W.:	Trying to make their own lives you mean?
Helen Miller:	Oh yes, sure. And the good part about it was we still got friends, a few childhood friends, and lots of times we get together and we sit around and we talk about when we were children and all the fun that we had and all the things that we did. And it's really amusing because children are different now. There wasn't a whole lot of jails and juvenile courts and all that kind of stuff. They do silly things. Like my father bought a horse. My brother and Hawk, bless their heart, both of them are gone, they would hook up the horse and go up on Washington Street. And my dad would be working; my mom, she didn't pay that much attention. So Wesley Snoops, he was a policeman at that time we were coming up; he lived on Oronoco Street. And my uncle worked at the laundry on the corner of Alfred and Oronoco—it was called the Banner Laundry. And my dad worked there; I mean my uncle worked there. So he'd go and tell my uncle to tell my mom to keep my brother and Hawk and them off of Washington Street. There wasn't no more but ten cars up there then but that was a lot of traffic. So finally my dad sold the horse to Baker Jackson. Baker Jackson lived on the corner of Henry and Pendleton. The house is still there. And his daughter, she turned it into a rooming house. But it was a bakery shop. And when my dad used to get off from work at night, he would go around and sit with Baker Jackson while he made pies.
Alexandria's Small Shops	
Helen Miller:	Alexandria—I used to tell them all the time. To me, Alexandria had more mom and pop businesses than they have today. They had more small businesses. They had more lunchrooms. They had more...there was a hotel, a black hotel on King Street where that Coca-Cola plant is. Jackson's Hotel.
M.W.:	Jackson's Hotel.
Helen Miller:	Yes, on King Street, where that Coca-Cola plant was. It was a hotel. There was a tornado. I think the tornado was in [19]27 because we just...
M.W.:	Yes, I believe so. I heard [inaudible] told me it was.
Helen Miller:	Because we were in school. That's when it kind of ended, the hotel, Mr. Watts's Jackson Hotel. But the building itself is still there; that's where that Torpedo, I mean that Coca-Cola plant was. There's something else in there now. They're selling something in there. But anyhow...

The Vinegar Factory	
M.W.:	I believe that was the same year...1927 was the same year that the people have told me about the vinegar factory caught fire.
Helen Miller:	<p>OK, I'll tell you about that. The vinegar factory was on the corner of Henry and Pendleton and we lived right...the bakery shop I just got through telling you, was over here. The vinegar factory was across the street from it. Because over her was Hodge, H-O-D-G-E, Alexander Hay and Grain; it was a feed mill. All right. And Corrinne and them lived here. There was a little Seventh Day Adventist church on Pendleton next to them. Then it was two houses next to them and then we were in the third house. And Mr. White was in the fourth house. And right here, though, is the vinegar factory. All right.</p> <p>I was sleeping on the front porch and my mother had my brother's tooth pulled out. And he was kind of like laying in the chair on the front porch. And I was sleeping in front. And all of a sudden, BOOM! The windows just blow right out. And I threw the broom down and ran in the house and called my mother, "Come here. Come here." Something had exploded and it caught fire. All right. Under the ground, it crossed Henry Street and it went through Pendleton Street, in the 1000 block to the corner. And they had vinegar vats on the corner. They were built on great big cement pillars. And they had an underground line that funneled the vinegar from the vinegar factory right on down past our house, only it was on the other side of the street, because we were on this side of the street, and it was underground, to the tanks, to the vats. Understand? That's where they stored the vinegar. My aunt had a picture of the vats and I've never seen one. And I tried my best to get my cousin to find it, but he can't find it. My aunt's a hundred years old. She's still living. We went to see her.</p>
M.W.:	Is that right?
Helen Miller:	Yes, we went to see her in November and she lives...and I'm almost sure she will because she is not sick; she's just old. In November she'll be 101 years old. Because we went to see her and the first thing she said, "What you all doing down here?" So we knew right then she knew who we were. That was my uncle's wife. But anyhow, those pipes run under the ground to those vats. And they sit on, I would think it would be about four pillars, that high, cement, that they sit on. And that's how they stored the vinegar.
M.W.:	This is outdoors?
Helen Miller:	Yes. Yes, it's right on the corner. That was on the corner of Patrick and Pendleton, in our block, the ten hundred block.
M.W.:	Did it smell like vinegar?

Helen Miller:	No. Because I think because it ran underground.
M.W.:	But I mean even the vats outside? You never smelled it?
Helen Miller:	<p>No. No. You travel and you see those big oil vats—great big oil...and by that time they didn't have a lot of metals and they were made out of stuff like...brown stuff—like with big things around them to hold them together. No, no. It was about...I would say it was about six of them sitting on that corner on those great...I would think it would take about four, three at least, pillars for each one of them. Because after the vinegar factory burned down we used to go over there and play on them. We used to sit on them. Yes, we used to go over and play on them. Because after the vinegar factory burned down, they tore the vats down. And we used to play in the field. They had a little office house there. The little office house is still there. It's been remodeled and somebody else that bought it put a fence around it. All right. Then from that corner, Henry and Pendleton where we lived, and here's the vinegar factory, and they had a [inaudible] because there was railroad tracks there. Railroad tracks was from all the way up through Potomac Yards where we are now, all the way through the town. So our friends, they lived right there on the railroad track. And so this trough they had, they used to bring like the open gondolas and they would dump the apples into that trough outside. It was a trough. And that's what washed the apples. And then the apples would go into the crushers. And we would go out there in our dresses and get them apples. Them apples were so sour, you couldn't eat them. We were just children. They were fascinating. You know. My God! All them apples! And they dumped out of those gondolas right into that trough with water in it. And that is what was supposed to be washing them off.</p>
The Ice House	
Helen Miller:	<p>And there was a man named Mr. Schaeffer. Mr. Schaeffer, he was the boss. He used to work at the lumberyard. That's how we knew him. Because up further on Henry Street, they had a lumberyard at Wallace and Hearn's Lumberyard. Because the ice house was up there. The Mutual Ice Company it was called. It was more like...it was like residential and commercial, but we didn't have all them fancy words then. You lived up there; that ice house. And one time there was an ice cream [factory] up there because my mother's cousin worked in that ice cream factory. And there was an ice house; they made ice. And we used to go over there and get the apples out of the trough. And Mr. Schaeffer said, "You all get out of there. You kids get out of there." We didn't eat them because they was too sour to eat. It was just the idea of all them apples going down that trough! Fascinating! And they went into...somewhere along there they went into the building that made the vinegar. Yes.</p>

So the ice house was back up there where they made ice. Well, back in them days they [had] ice cars because they didn't have refrigerated cars like they do now. And they had a little shanty up there. Some of the men used to live in them. My husband's brother used to live in [one]. And he used to drink. If he got sick we would take him. And as soon as he got better my husband sent him right back up there. Yes, because he never got married, had no children, nobody. But Uncle Joe—we buried him last year. Be a year, yes, be a year this October, November. Sixteen years. We put him in a nursing home. I trudged [to] that nursing home for sixteen years taking care of Uncle Joe. And Uncle Joe used to be up there in the ice house with the rest of them.

And they had these—it's like a chain, on the platform, and the boxcars went up under it. And, at the end every box car had a wide thing like this [inaudible] go down in there—that was like an ice box and they ever pushed them big blocks of ice down in there and that's what would keep perishables until they got where they were going. And of course they let some guys live there in the ice house. Trains came in all hours of the night. Uncle Joe was one of the tenants, my husband's brother. Yes, because Uncle Joe had nobody but himself. He was the oldest brother. Because my husband was the baby. We used to have to go up there every now and then rescue Uncle Joe. Take him to the hospital or something of that sort. But it was a haven like for men that didn't have a lot of responsibilities up there—the ice house was.

We used to go up there and if the ice had dropped on the ground, they would let you take it. Because back in those days people had iceboxes. Some people had Frigidaires. But the majority [of] families had iceboxes because they used to have the ice man that came around sold ice. Zells, they sold ice. [inaudible] Zell and his brother Charlie. They had regular ice men that sold ice. One fellow there in the senior building, if he's still alive, his brother used to work on the ice truck and used to bring ice. So they would give you the ice that fell on the ground, because it would break up anyway.

And so they had the ice cream factory up there. Because my cousin's father—he worked at the ice cream factory. It was up there. And then they had the Wallace and Hearn's Lumberyard. That's where Mr. Schaeffer was working; that's how he knew us as children. And when they did away with the lumberyard he went to work for the vinegar factory. And when he saw us getting apples he knew exactly who we were. But he didn't never really...he just say, "You kids get out." You know there's a whole lot of water and stuff running down that trough. And he knew we weren't going to eat the apples; they were too sour to eat! You couldn't eat those things.

So eventually they did away with the ice house. Hammond Middle School is named for one of the fellows. I think...I don't know whether it

	<p>was Mr. Harry Hammond's grandson or what, but they were living on Glendale Avenue. And the school was named after him. And he, Mr. Harry, was one of the affiliates with the ice house. Harry Hammond and Hammond School was named after, I think it must have been a grandson or a nephew, but I think it was a grandson. Because I used to babysit some kids over there across the street from them on Glendale Avenue. I remember when...he got killed in the war—the Navy or something—and they named Hammond School after him. And the Hammonds, they were, they had parts in the ice house. Then, of course, when things got more modern, you know, they did away with the ice house. And then they built...they had a baseball diamond up there. Call it Lafayette's. My uncle—he with the hundred-year-old wife (of course, he's gone)—they were the ball players. My uncle and them were. And they used to play ball up there. There was a baseball diamond. It's almost self-made. But that's where everybody went—to the baseball game. We used to have a lot of fun up there.</p>
<p>Swimming in the Potomac (and the Neighborhood There)</p>	
<p>Helen Miller:</p>	<p>Then finally when the Johnson kids got drowned, because we didn't have swimming pools for black kids. And we used to swim in the river. Down there where all this very, very, very property is now that's so valuable—that river was black children's swimming pool. Ours. We used to go down there every day. And they had rocks, big rocks. And you'd go to the first rock, second rock. If you couldn't swim, you wouldn't go past the second rock. That's right, because you couldn't swim. Cross the canal where all this expensive stuff is now was the dump, a carnival ground back up this way, hogs, chickens, cows, and the city dump. Smoke going up you could see. Okay. All that was across the canal where all that valuable stuff is now, you know. And families. Lots of families because I used to go to school with a lot of kids over there. We used to go through there and go to the swimming pool, which was the river.</p>
<p>M.W.:</p>	<p>Which was the river!</p>
<p>Helen Miller:</p>	<p>Yes. My aunt lived over there. Most of those people back in those days, they owned the houses but they didn't own the land. Because from what I understand they had what they call squatters' rights back in those days. And they just go back there and build a house. But most of them, when the house burned down, like my aunt's house did, well, that was it, because she didn't own the land. And then eventually they cleared it off. They got rid of the canal. All the houses. But a lot of kids were over there. I went to school with a lot of kids from across the canal. And we were down the river shore and I was sitting on the first rock. And I heard—it was like grass breaking, sticks breaking. And I'm sitting there. And I looked around like this. Here come a man with about 12 cows, bringing them cows down to drink water. I jumped up running out in the</p>

	river. My brother was hollering, “Sis, come back.” Because he knew I didn’t swim. But it was just the idea—you were a kid...
M.W.:	It scared you, huh?
Helen Miller:	And seeing the cows, about 12 cows coming to your swimming pool you know! Just running—that’s what I did. My brother start hollering and I stopped. And I went way up on the other end and came out of the water. So I was ready to go home. Can you imagine? You’re a kid and you’re in the water and here comes about 12 cows coming down there to drink the water! So, it...we never thought about it. You know, it didn’t bother us. Back in those days children were different.
M.W.:	Well there’s a...I think there’s a degree of innocence too, don’t you think?
Helen Miller:	Yes, oh yes. Well, we didn’t know any better.
M.W.:	Exactly.
Helen Miller:	We weren’t hostile because our parents was not...our parents- well, they figured that we’re black and this is what black people do.
M.W.:	So you never learned any different?
Helen Miller:	That’s right. That’s right. Men worked. There was a lot of men worked at the feed mill; they had jobs. Most of them were black men but they had jobs. They worked for the railroad company. That’s how my husband came to Alexandria—Potomac Yards. His father got transferred from Richmond to Potomac Yards. He was twelve years old. So his mother had passed away and he lived with an aunt. So the father met a lady on the train and he married the lady. He never knew his mother, my husband didn’t, because she died before he—when he was a baby. And so it was so funny. He met a lady on the train, and he married the lady!
Prohibition	
M.W.:	That gets me to another point. You are talking about the river a lot. I’ve heard some stories during the Prohibition about a lot of activity that was going on the river. Can you tell me about some of [inaudible]?
Helen Miller:	Well down in what they call “the Berg” now, where all the public housing units is, used to be a lot of bootleggers.
M.W.:	That’s what I’m thinking about.
Helen Miller:	They were good people. They weren’t people who rob and kill and shoot. They weren’t that kind of people. That was their profession. They were professional bootleggers. I know several of them. They used to get...they used to bring the whiskey to them on little boats. Used to come up the river at nighttime. And they would go out there and unload those boats at nighttime. Because I knew a guy that used to work for—they’re all dead now. And one night the police was there. And he ran

	away and he got killed on a freight train. He came from North Carolina, yes. And I often wondered, you know, whether his father, his parents ever got his body or not. Yes. But back in those days, that was not the cardinal sin—to be a bootlegger. You know what I'm saying.
M.W.:	This is what I've heard. A lot of people told me didn't even bother with them.
Helen Miller:	No!
M.W.:	They just kind of left them alone.
Helen Miller:	No! It wasn't a cardinal sin. That's how a lot of people...I'm not saying all of them. That's how a lot of people made their living. Of course I think they didn't get no more than thirty-five cents for a drink. But thirty-five cents would buy, oh, I would say, a pound of hamburger fifteen cents. A loaf of bread was five cents. And you could get five cents worth of potatoes. Thirty five cents would almost buy a meal. And so it never was all the confusion that—
M.W.:	It certainly wasn't looked at as being criminal?
Helen Miller:	No, no, no, no! No, indeed. No, you were just a professional. And they were the ones had the good cars. And they were the ones that had the pocketful of money. [inaudible] full of money. If it was fifty dollars it was a whole lot of money because everything was cheaper. You could rent a house for fifteen, twenty dollars a month. And I know when we, everybody, all of us used to live up on Madison Street. A man named Mr. Blunt. He was the real estate agent. And that man used to go around every Saturday and collect his rent. We had a six-room house. We paid five dollars a week. But you see, back in those days people didn't [inaudible]. Every Saturday Mr. Blunt...because a lot of them kids who lived up there...we're all still in the same church. And Mr. Blunt would go around to all them places and collect his rent every week. And there was bootleggers, sure. And that's who lived in a lot of his houses. But he didn't care as long as they paid.
M.W.:	They paid the rent. Sure they did.
Helen Miller:	It wasn't a cardinal sin if you...back in those days if you were a number writer, you had a nice car. You were a big shot. It was just a horse of another color. As time passed, human nature changes, you know it does. People change. They carry things too far—some people do. And now we're living in a whole new world. But back in them days, people didn't look down on you because you was a bootlegger. Because they just didn't. Because, I mean, there was no violence to it, you know. And there wasn't a lot of robbing and stealing and all like that, like it is today. It is almost like a whole new world you're in now. You take a lot of those people—they were the ones that you could depend on to do something for you. The ones that were bootlegging had a few extra

	quarters. But nowadays some of these people don't give you nothing.
Disappointment with Alexandria Today	
Helen Miller:	<p>People are so self-centered now. Because you know I do community services one hundred percent. And I see a lot. It's just that I've been fortunate enough to see a change there. I can see a change, with people, with our young people, people in general. And it bothers me, like when I go to my church. My church is real lively, fiery, Baptist church. I sit there and I look at them. It bothers me. Makes tears in my eyes when I go to courthouse and see all our kids, our black kids, coming into the court with "Prisoner" on the back of their clothes and coveralls. Understand what I'm saying? It bothers me because I have sat in courthouses with kids. I know nothing about them. "Go get Mrs. Miller. She'll help you out."</p> <p>I worry Randy to death, the Commonwealth Attorney. I worry everybody—the lawyers. I worry them all to death. Not for my kids. Like I tell people all the time, "I thank God for my kids." Not because my kids are not out here don't mean that there is nothing going on out there. Because the problems are. I go to the City Shed [inaudible] I worry Reverend [inaudible] to death getting jobs for kids. One boy came in and said, "Mrs. Miller, can you help me get a job?" I said, "What kind of job do you want?" He said, "I want to work on a trash truck." I said to him, I said, "Well if I can get you a job it wouldn't be no more than something with the city or something." And he said, "Yes." I said, "Well, why do you want to work on the trash truck?" I said, "Reverend [inaudible] might have something for you. Let me talk to him." Because he was up here day before yesterday. I worry him to death. He said, "Yes, but they get off early." And I said, "God, you're trying to get off and you haven't even got started." He wanted to work on the trash truck because they get off early.</p> <p>And see these are the kinds of things that shows you time, time has moved on. And Alexandria is just like any other city. Alexandria has got a lot of Johnny-Come-Latelys that don't know Alexandria grass roots. They come. They get into these things. They want to be on the School Board. They just hit the door and they want to do this and they want to do that. They don't want to reach back. They want to talk about what should be done.</p>
M.W.:	They probably want the power too.
Helen Miller:	Exactly. Some of them fall by the wayside. And then, of course, some of them they're pretty sincere because I got a lot of friends that I work with in the community that are sincere because they are the same people that you see every time you go to a meeting. When the people and the parents we would like to see at these meetings with children—like the city is getting ready to redistrict the school system and all like that. We had a

	<p>big meeting about—it's been about two weeks now—two Saturdays ago—over at Mount Vernon School. Majority of people in there didn't have no children, especially [inaudible]. You understand? And these are some of the things that bothers you. Because we didn't have all that problem when we were coming up. So our parents didn't have to deal with who's going here and who's going there. They didn't have but that one school. And then, in the later years, they remodeled the old shirt factory for Charles Houston, I mean for...What do you call it, out on the hill? We was glad to get it until they built the new building and stuff like that. But it's a lot going on with schools, jobs.</p>
<p>Marching for City Jobs for African Americans</p>	
<p>Helen Miller:</p>	<p>Like when I go into City Hall, I tell the girls working in the Finance Department how they got their jobs. How we walked in front of that City Hall until that job as Finance Treasurer job was an elected position as director. And of course, they wouldn't hire no African Americans, because you were state employed as a director. Because you were elected. So you don't have to. Understand? Now, so we felt it was time for this to change. So we got our people that we sent to Richmond to take that position out of an elected office position. And when we took that out, then you put it over here in personnel. And then of course, they have to hire some African Americans. You understand? I was telling a girl about it yesterday.</p> <p>And so when I see our people, I am proud of them, in City Hall. Because I used to go there as a child; that was the Health Department. You go in that front door right down on Cameron Street. That was the Health Department. That's where they took you to get you vaccinated and all that stuff. The health inspector's name was Dr. Schaeffer. He used to wear a white coat. I think he must have been a Navy man. Now, since I'm older, I thought he was just wearing white because he was a doctor then. And they would take you right there Cameron Street where you go in City Hall. That was the Health Department. Then in the later years they set up the well baby clinic in there. Because I used to take my oldest child down there.</p> <p>So when you look at all those things, how City Hall has changed, you see, Police Department. We had, we really had, a time with that for years. And then we got to a point where the new generations started waking up and we were getting to have riots and a lot of things going on with the Police Department between African Americans and the white people and everybody. So finally when they had the Gibson murder, we were in the street for about a week and a half because they almost burned Alexandria up. Kids did.</p>
<p>M.W.:</p>	<p>This was in 1970? Is this the one you're talking about?</p>
<p>Helen Miller:</p>	<p>Yes, the Gibson murder.</p>

M.W.:	Right, you told me about that.
Helen Miller:	Right, yes. That's when we organized CAT teams, and we meet every second Saturday in the Police Department. We still have them; we haven't been meeting too often now because the same people is in everything. But it's been since 19...in the [19]70s, yes, 1970. They wouldn't hire black police officers. It was...I don't think...I think it was the sensitivity of whoever was at the head of it. And so we marched, and marched, and marched, and marched. So one night Council was meeting. Me, Len Calloway, Bernard Hunter, Bobby, about ten of us, Kay...we were marching. We were trying to hire black policemen. And every time we got one that we felt would be a good candidate, somebody would go out and try to...where were we?
M.W.:	We were talking about the Police Department—the hiring practices of the Police Department.
Helen Miller:	<p>Yes. Right. So, one might we picketed. They were having Council meeting. I think Wayne Allison was our City Manager at that time. Because Vola [Lawson] used to work with us. Vola was one of us. And she still is, even though she's the City Manager. But she still is one of us. She's a beautiful person. She's my sister. I'll show you all the beautiful things she's given me down through the years, because we came up through the ranks, she and I. She didn't forget who her friends were. So, anyway, after we walked awhile, Bernard (who is dead and gone) went over to Marion Barry's place and got some of the guys from PRIDE.</p> <p>Marion Barry has not always been the mayor of Washington. And Cat—Catfish Mayfield—came over and bought some old guys. And evidently somehow or another they got whiff of it. And we went in the Council chamber. I sat down on the front bench and Major Hodge was sitting right there. And then, the guys, the rest of them are standing up in the back with their signs. And so a white gentleman got up. I never did know who he was. And he said, "You know what? I think it's a shame. It's policemen over there on top of that building with riot helmets and rifles on because those people are out there walking for what they feel is right." Well, the Council chamber got in a uproar. Oh boy, everything. Oh, everything was just going round. He's sitting there like the cat that ate the canary. So the Cat gets up and goes up and asks the chairman of the board if he could speak. And he said, "Yes." He said, "[inaudible] he needs to be fired." And he turned around and go right back and sit down. So we got up and we just went on back out. And of course, everything was in an uproar then. To think! But these are the things that we went through as a group. And when I look at it now...like I went to the memorial service for our two officers that were killed. It was ten years ago. And I was one of the first. I'll show you my pictures of the graduates of the Police Academy. They had seating for everybody who</p>

	was affiliated with the department in any way. They had seating for the Academy students. I learned a lot going to the Academy, although as much as I [inaudible], because I was on the task force to build that new facility, the jail. The cover says “Corrections Center.” When you open the book it says, “This is a jail.” And so, we’ve come a long ways when I see all those guys working together, being promoted. You understand what I’m saying? We got a black assistant chief; Chief Cook, he’s sweet as he can be. They’re making headways—captains, lieutenants, [inaudible]. Something that you never thought would happen. And you were blessed to live long enough to see it happen, because this is what you have always prayed for. You understand?
M.W.:	Yes, you’ve lived long enough to see it.
Changes in Alexandria	
Helen Miller:	Yes, yes. And it’s like before and after. And it bothers me when the newcomers come to town and know all about Alexandria, and when they go to the meetings, they got all these bright ideas, like everybody else was so stupid they had never thought of them before. We still end up with the same thing. So I just sit back. I don’t have a problem.
M.W.:	You sit back but you know better!
Helen Miller:	They know I know better, if anybody knows it. They thought about so many things that we need to do now in our schools. Because when we had segregated schools, a lot of parents seemed to feel that black parents were more involved. And sometimes, I feel like it. I do. Because we had a PTA [Parent-Teachers Association] that met once a month. We had PTA conventions every year. And our black parents went to the conventions. I bet you two to one I couldn’t find ten black parents [inaudible]. I don’t even know if they have them anymore. Because since then all my kids got out of school. And my grands don’t go to school here. Those that I have; great-grands I’ve got. So, it’s a lot of changes. And then you got a lot of new people has come into the city from north, south, east, west, and they got all kinds of mentalities. And that is another thing. You know if I buy a house the whole city is mine. I don’t want this. I don’t want that. I don’t want the other. Because I bought one house. You understand? And Old Town! Old Town wasn’t Old Town. It was “the Berg.” Just like where them public housing units are. All of that was “the Berg.” Those houses all around there, after you cross Washington Street, when I was coming up, you was in “the Berg.” When I was a child it wasn’t the Old Town.
M.W.:	You’re talking about...
Helen Miller:	Just what you said, Old Town.
M.W.:	West of Washington? I mean Washington Street?
Helen Miller:	Yes, all down in there. All back in that area where it’s supposed to be

	<p>Old Town. A lot of those houses on the south side—blacks lived in them. And them great big old cold houses, they didn't have the money to fix them up with. They couldn't wait to get out of them. But what happened is, as like anything else, they started researching them houses, finding out when they were built, finding out how old they are, finding out how valuable they are. And they had enough of them to change it, to name it Old Town. Understand what I'm saying? But it was "the Berg."</p> <p>And across King Street was "the Hill." If you cross King Street, you lived on "the Hill." You cross King Street, you lived on "the Hill." And you lived in Old Town. Understand? And they got Old Town West, Old Town, all that kind of stuff. You lived on the south side, like Columbus Street, Gibbon Street, all of them, you lived on "the Hill." And there are all those people out there, when they realize the value down in "the Berg" where the projects is, all the houses down there, you was in "the Berg." A lot of blacks lived in those big old cold houses. Can you imagine it? But they couldn't keep them going. They move out and then the landlords sell them. And then they start researching how old. The next thing you know you got Old Town. You ain't got nothing but "the Berg" as far as I'm.... So far as I'm concerned, you have got "the Berg." So where are we now?</p>
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Protests Against Racial Segregation

<p>M.W.:</p>	<p>I basically wanted to talk about the...in 1939...about the sit-down protests in the library.</p>
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<p>Helen Miller:</p>	<p>Well, you see, we didn't have a library. My kids were in school then. We didn't have a library. We had libraries in the schools. And at that time the school was supposed to have so many books per child. And of course, everything was segregated then, not only libraries. We had a white music teacher—old Miss Monroe. Every time she comes, the kids laugh at her. We had a white gym teacher that came. My home economics teacher was black. She Dr. Durand's wife. The Durand Center, down here on Cameron Street, was named. He was a black doctor. And the Durand Center was named after Dr. Oswald Durand. And Mrs. Durand, his wife, was my home economics teacher. Okay.</p> <p>Then they had...they had some books, like I say, in the school. But the library that they had up there—black kids did not go to the library. It's just like anything else; people were waking up. People realized that blacks were beginning to be taxpayers. They did away with the poll tax, because, you know, they had a poll tax. If you didn't pay the poll tax, you couldn't vote. They did away with that. So that started to show that things were changing. And of course, those guys that did the sit-in at the library...Itold was in my room. Tucker, who's Sam's brother, he sat in front of me, he was very smart. He turned out to be an attorney. I always teased him. A question come down the aisle and I didn't know it. Itold got it; I didn't have to worry about it because Itold knew it. On the</p>
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	<p>picture—he's on the picture. Itold was in my room. Morris Murray was in there. He was a little small short guy. He used to walk me home from school every day. Morris Murray was in my room. Okay. But Strange and Shimmy Carter. We called him Shimmy because [inaudible]. And Buck, no, that wasn't Buck Strange, it was somebody else on that. Five of them. And Buddy Edmonds. Yes, Buddy, because he died last year. Buddy died last year. He was in my room.</p>
M.W.:	<p>He was the last survivor, wasn't he?</p>
Helen Miller:	<p>Right, yes, he died last year. And from what I understand, Sam got them together. Now Sam is Itold's brother. Tucker. Because a lot of people say, "Oh, that was his cousin." Cousin! But these are people who don't know nothing about just what I'm telling you. He was his brother! Because Itold was in my room, sitting in front of me—had more knowledge than there was in them books. They were the ones that put the sit-in together at the library. But sitting in the library to me wasn't the biggest thing that ever happened in Alexandria. And they finally built a little building. It was a little old building, a little frame building up here where the Resource Center is now.</p>
M.W.:	<p>Exactly. 1940 they built it.</p>
Helen Miller:	<p>Yes, oh yes. It was a little old frame building then. Because I used to take my kids there—to the library. We had a lot of sit-ins. And that's the one thing that bothers me, because that wasn't the only one. We had restaurant sit-ins. Mr. Shuman's Bakery. It's up there now.</p>
M.W.:	<p>They wouldn't serve blacks either?</p>
Helen Miller:	<p>No. No.</p>
M.W.:	<p>And they're very famous. Very famous.</p>
Helen Miller:	<p>And a bunch of kids went and sat in. And this little girl, Katrina Dunlop. She's back here now, in a nursing home. And she's the age of my second daughter. But something happened to her leg. She can't walk. Beautiful, brilliant little girl. She was working for HUD [U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development]. I think she was working. Anyhow, she had a good job. And she took sick. Her brother took her to Texas and then he moved back here. So she is in a nursing home and I think people like that kid. They sat in. This guy slapped her in the face in the restaurant. Yes, Shuman Bakery.</p> <p>And we have picketed everybody from the Fire Department, banks, Health Department, because we tried to get the methadone program. I got the whole story of that because I was just one of the people who was on the committee that was against it and everything else. We have talked about that. We had the panel [inaudible] we marched to. The library sit-in they want to feel like it's the first one in the whole country. But I don't know. I have my doubts. And then I tell you, another thing, with</p>

	<p>all due respect, because a lot of people wouldn't know Wilbur Tucker, because after this kind of blows over, Wilbur lived in Richmond all the time. And he used to come up now and then with some civil rights lawyers and things once in a while. But Wilbur lived in Richmond. They call him Sam. He said whenever anybody call him Wilbur, he know they came from Alexandria.</p>
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Integration in Jobs and Schools

<p>Helen Miller:</p>	<p>To me it was a lot of efforts made where we walked picket lines. We got people to work in places they never had jobs before. My daughter was one of the first black bank tellers in the City of Alexandria. The first black bank teller in the city! That same one up there in Hopkins House. Because I went and asked the man for a job. She was a business major. She had just come out of college. And I felt that she knew just as much about 1,2,3 as the rest of them. I went and asked the man for a job for her. My husband and I, we was getting ready to go to a convention in South Carolina. And he said...I said, "Have you ever thought about hiring one of our girls?" When you go up against something like that, you got to have something right there. You can't say, "I'll be back." But my daughter had just come out of college and she was a business major. In fact, even in high school she was. She's been at Hopkins House 33 years, because she started off as a bookkeeper. So he said, "Well you know what? It's the age old story. We never had any to apply." And so I said, "Well, I've got one for you. My daughter is out of school. She's in college now." He said, "Well we don't have no summer jobs." I said, "No, she's out of it." I said, "And she's looking for a job." He couldn't say no because I had my two, three little [inaudible] in there. And so he gave me this paper and said, "Give it to your daughter and tell her to fill it out and bring it back." So, that Sunday my husband and I, we left. And I said, "You take this paper and show them Monday." She took it and they hired her!</p> <p>But when I got to know her supervisor well enough that he was comfortable. Some people don't like to talk about race but it's real. Okay. And he said, "You know what? " He said, "I told Lucretia when her application came in, they had thirteen girls that applied for the job. She was the only one with a college background in business administration." But she was black. He said, " I told them you all are going to have to stop hiring people according to race. You are going to have to start hiring people according to their abilities. Here you've go this lady that's got a business major. She just came out of college. And you sit here pondering because of her color." And he said he thought they got it just a little bit, you know, the conscience starts bothering them. And they hired her. And she worked...it was United Virginia then; it wasn't Crestar. And she was the first black bank teller in the City in one of them cages in Alexandria. That's right. Then finally, when Hopkins House was going to hire a real bookkeeper, because they used</p>
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to have some people just put the stuff in one of them twenty-five cent composition books. I told her about it. And so that's when she went to work for Hopkins House and she's been there 33 years. Oh, she's doing a little bit of everything now. But at that time she was a bookkeeper. And of course, all through the building of the new building and all.

I saw where they were talking about naming a new school out in Cameron Station. But I saw another name that they brought up, but I didn't write it down. At the time I just was reading the paper. And they were saying somebody was suggesting somebody to name the new school in Cameron Valley, Cameron Station. And I think that was, some people had in mind, this little group that I met with, the one to name it after Wilbur Tucker. So, I don't know, but...he's a native Alexandrian, but he spent 90% of his time in Richmond, Virginia. And when he died, I think the only people that knew him was the people who was born and raised in Alexandria. Because, like I say, Itold was in my room and his sister, Elsie, was in my sister's room. He worked with those guys—Henry March and all those guys—in Richmond as a lawyer. And they did a lot of good. They did a lot of good jobs.

But the sit-in, so far as I'm concerned, is not the whole picture when you're talking about integrating jobs. Because the Police Department got black police officers because somebody walked. You understand? The Fire Department got black firemen because somebody walked. Understand? That's what I'm talking about. The library was just one phase of it. Understand? We picket banks. We picket ABC stores. We picket city managers.

We tease Vola every time that we get to talking. I said, "Now, Vola, you better be nice, because you know we picketed a few city managers too." Because she was right out there with us. Oh, Lord, yes. She was on the EOC [Equal Opportunities Commission]. You name it, she was out there. We used to have meetings at her house. Peter [inaudible] little boy like that. Peter's grown. He lives around the corner [inaudible]. So we're having this affair for her Sunday. And I'm hoping it turns out because we're working very hard. It's at the Houston Center at three o'clock. If you get time, you might want to drop by.

So my feeling, I mean, naming the school wouldn't be the end of the world to me whoever got it. But when I think about it, I mean, it's the first person for everything. Because the fact of the case, you could name it after my daughter because she was the first black in a bank as a bank teller. And some of the banks ain't got nothing but black folks in them now. You understand what I'm saying? And so everything has to start somewhere. But if they put his name in, I'll be comfortable with it. Because he's an Alexandrian. But he went to Richmond. And he stayed in Richmond. He used to say any time, I think it was somebody called him Sam, he knew they were from Alexandria because he had been gone

	<p>so long. But if they...I don't have no objection. I don't have nothing against it. But I just think about all the things, that the library was just one of them. Like I'm saying we have...we got black vice-mayors on City Council. I seen the time we didn't even have blacks on City Council. You understand what I'm saying?</p> <p>So Alexandria was not born with a black here and a black there. Everybody had to fight for it in some kind of way. You understand? Even integrating our schools. We got rid of Parker-Gray as a high school for the same reason—there was nothing there because they had started integrating the schools. And I put my baby girl—she graduated from GW [George Washington High School]—there was a high school then. My son was GW. And my cousin's little girl that we raised. So I have no...you know, I don't have no...no ill feelings or nothing about it, but it's just that there's been too many people who've given of themselves, that hung in here until the last. You understand what I'm saying? But, I don't object to it either. When I think about all, like Chief Cook is our first black Chief of Police, assistant chief of police. We've got black assistant principals. Now we've got black principals in schools and things. Got a lot of people. I mean...and I mean people who hung in here.</p>
M.W.:	Paid their dues.
Helen Miller:	<p>Yes, paid their dues. That's right. That's right. So I don't say anything because, you know, it's just not nothing...I mean what I'm saying is, "I have paid my dues to this city and haven't asked for nothing in return." You can go up there and say, "You know where Ms. Miller lives?" Like my kids say, "Mom, you know Miss So and So?" "But she knows you." Some of these people die; I can't afford to know nobody else. And that's the way I feel about it because I didn't run in when my kids got out of school and say, and look up there and say, "Lord, ain't it a shame!" I will go out there. And I will go to church up there. Anytime I get to that corner...I walk because the light is out in my garage. But I got lights in the yard but I can always get a ride back home. "Ms Miller, we're going to walk with you up to the church." You understand? But it's not that, because there's plenty of light, but it's just the way you treat people.</p>
Newcomers to Alexandria	
Helen Miller:	<p>You'd be surprised at the people that come to this city and get in our group because they want to be on the School Board or they want to be here. Or they want...you know, and not really want to first get in here and find out what's going on. Oh no, no, no. Then when they fall on their face, I laugh. They just kind of eat crow so they can be here and be there. I tell you too, I sit back lots of time when I go to meeting and just look at them because I can't stand a lot of talking. Because, you know, they always come [inaudible] now, "I've got a solution. I've got an idea." Because all these people who have burned their bridges...oh, they</p>

	<p>didn't think of it. Or, they didn't do it. We have hustled. We picketed. There ain't nobody picketing now. We picketed the Police Department, firehouse—you name it.</p>
<p>Confederate Flag in the Council Chambers</p>	
Helen Miller:	<p>We used to go out to...[the] City Manager's house on Saturday—he'd be watching the football game. I know the neighbors were glad when he moved and we [inaudible] his house. Yes, he did. It was a Confederate flag! On the wall! Behind the Council's desk! Nobody never told you that, did they?</p>
M.W.:	<p>No.</p>
Helen Miller:	<p>Yes, it was.</p>
M.W.:	<p>What year are we talking about?</p>
Helen Miller:	<p>Way back in the [19]60s and [19]70s. A Confederate flag...where that picture is. It was a Confederate flag that covered the back of that wall. But by the time we got through...</p>
M.W.:	<p>It wasn't hanging anymore, right?</p>
Helen Miller:	<p>It wasn't hanging anymore. Where was all these people who they want to name everything after? They wasn't helping us get that Confederate flag off that wall. Because [inaudible] this guy worked for Urban League. And Vola and all [inaudible]. He brought a Confederate flag and tore it up in little bits and everybody got a piece of it. And I threw my piece in my glove compartment of my other old car. And you know, I could never open that door again. We always laugh about it. When my husband traded that car, he still....</p>
M.W.:	<p>Left it in there?</p>
Helen Miller:	<p>...still couldn't open the door. And it was a piece of a Confederate flag.</p>
M.W.:	<p>Somebody got that and they didn't know what it was.</p>
Helen Miller:	<p>That's right. When they got that door open. A fellow named Leo Bird. He was a, like the social director. Leo got that Confederate flag from somewhere and we tore that thing up down there in Tavern Square one Saturday. I threw the piece I had in my car [inaudible]. And, I could never open the door again. So when we traded that car I guess they got it out...then we marched from that house—I'll never forget—all the way out to Al Hare, the City Manager. We marched all the way out to his house; it was one Saturday. And the neighbors...I know they was glad when he moved. So that's the reason we tell Vola, "Now Vola, now don't forget that." [inaudible] She is so sweet. I love her to death. She's my friend. We'll always be friends. She said, "Helen, we'll always be friends regardless of what I do and how I do it." And we are. I don't go to her office. If I have something, I go to see Nancy. Nancy's [inaudible]</p>

	<p>secretary. She's sweet too. I don't go to Vola's office. I don't bother her, and I think she appreciates it. I don't bother her job. Like sometimes she comes. I cook and we'll eat and talk, and I'm a little worried because she's got to go back to the office sometime at 10 o'clock or 9:30, things like that. But, she came through the ranks. And everything that that lady gets, she deserves. Because she was and still is, one of us. And I think that is why she has made it in this city the way she has. Because she knew the city. You know we bring in so many Johnny-Come-Latelys and the next thing, you know, they're gone. She knew the city. [inaudible] And when we sit down and started talking, you would not believe it. It's so much fun! When you go back over it. You understand? And then she knew everybody. But now you got them, as soon as you get off the bus or the streetcar, or however they came, they go to some meeting and stand up whole lot of talking like nobody ever did anything until we got here. So I don't pay no attention to them. I just sit back.</p>
<p>Personal Witness and Commitment to Alexandria</p>	
<p>M.W.:</p>	<p>I guess, maybe, in a sense, you are very proud of that, but in the same token, the group of people that you're with are all getting older now. And one day you're not going to be here. Doesn't it...in a sense, doesn't that make you feel bad that there isn't going to be somebody to carry that on? That tradition? Or, are you just happy—</p>
<p>Helen Miller:</p>	<p>Right, right. It's like to each his own. Everybody has [to] just move on. Because you've got a lot of young people, like Howard Bird and them, those kids ain't nothing but kids up in that Resource Center, because I'm always fussing about some of the material that comes out of there. But Howard Bird and them—they ain't nothing but kids because their mothers was coming...like Fred said, a lot of it is hearsay. Now, see, Fred and I, we were in school together. Me, Fred, his brother, all of us was in the same room—my husband, all of us—</p>
<p>M.W.:</p>	<p>Your husband?</p>
<p>Helen Miller:</p>	<p>Yes.</p>
<p>M.W.:</p>	<p>You went to school with your husband?</p>
<p>Helen Miller:</p>	<p>Oh yes, I met him in fourth grade. Yes, yes, yes, [inaudible] sure, [inaudible] we all went to school together. So we're in another generation and a lot, like Fred says, a lot of it is hearsay. And when I read stuff that came out of there, sometimes it bothers me. And I tell her about it. Once they had naming all the black doctors. And, my God. The doctors, there were black doctors who were really doctors when we were kids—they didn't name them because they didn't know nothing about them. But sometime, like I told you, they act like they don't want the elderly people to tell them. Because they want to know everything. And it bothers me.</p>

M.W.:	You have to learn it from somewhere.
Helen Miller:	You have to learn it from somewhere. Yes, I know I was up there one day and they had a list of areas where it was mostly black concentration.
M.W.:	You're talking about [the] Black History Museum?
Helen Miller:	Yes, because a lot of young people in there—I worked with their moms in PTA. Because they were children in school. You understand?
M.W.:	What about Louis Hicks? Do you know—I mean was—
Helen Miller:	Oh, no. He just come here from somewhere. We just got him. Nice little fellow.
M.W.:	Yes, he is.
Helen Miller:	Very nice little fellow, he really is. But I know I didn't know him. They just got him as a new director. But all them other kids up there, their mothers did PTA [inaudible].
M.W.:	Audrey and all those people?
Helen Miller:	<p>No, not her. She came from somewhere. You take Howard Bird and [inaudible] I know him. But they lived over there in Arlington. I don't know whether his mother ever went PTA or not. But I knew his mother. Real nice people. And of course, Roger Henderson was there. Roger's sitting there. He's not there anymore. But it is just that...what I'm saying is when you talk about black history, it's hearsay for them. You understand what I'm saying? Because they were in school themselves, or they wasn't even born. They couldn't been, because those guys that did the sit-in is all my age. Understand what I'm saying? Because we were all were in the school together. Because Itold, that's Sam Tucker's brother, sat here, and I sat here. You understand? Morris Murray sat over there. Okay. Buddy Edmonds sat over there. You understand? And the other two, they were in my sister's room. And my sister is just two years younger than I am. So they didn't know that much about them kids because they themselves was in school. You understand what I'm saying? Because all them guys is my age. And they're all gone now. And so it's just, like Fred said, a lot of hearsay.</p> <p>Well of course we work with them. Because that's what you need, young people, because nothing lasts forever. So you need somebody to carry on. But sometimes I get the feeling they [inaudible] nothing because they want to know everything, and it doesn't always come out. Like they had a little card on there—black concentration where families lived, where you could go and know that's where blacks lived. Alexandria's not like that anymore. They had about five or six places where back in them days blacks lived. I said, "Where is Bear's Gap? You don't have that on there." She said, "What is that?" Bear's Gap is now Yates Garden in Old Town. Understand? When I was coming up Bear's Gap</p>

	was a neighborhood where nothing lived but blacks, and they were the ones who really ruled Bear's Gap. But she didn't know where it was. But she's working—
M.W.:	They need to rewrite that I think.
Helen Miller:	But she was at the Resource Center. You understand? But, they'll learn as they come along. They'll learn.
M.W.:	Well that's why I think part of this oral history thing that we're doing for the city, I think, this in itself—you sitting here and talking with us, that is why I think it is vitally important. Because it's got to get down somehow for the future generations.
Helen Miller:	Like I say, I tell you what I know.
M.W.:	Right. It's not what you hear.
Helen Miller:	I tell you what I know because I was here. Not what somebody told me. Understand? Now, you want to talk about what George Washington did because I don't know what George Washington did. But if we're going to talk about Alexandria, I'm going to talk about Alexandria from the time that I grew up in Alexandria up until now. You understand? And the things that I know, I know. Because a lot of them, they weren't no way, they wasn't even born. And what they know is hearsay. Because every one of those guys on those pictures is my age. Buddy Edmonds—he was the last one that died—I know that he was born in 19...I was born in 1916. He was born in...I was 2 years older than he was. So he's 80 years old; he's still living. You understand what I'm saying? So ain't none of them up there 80 years old. Understand? So, those guys were not their generation people. Itold is the same age I was because me and him were in the same room. Okay. Morris Murray was my age. These are the guys that were on the picture. Shimmy Carter is my sister's age. Buddy Edmonds. My sister is two years younger than I am, when my sister was living. My sister is gone. I only had one sister. So, they are all in their eighties now. You understand? So, what I'm trying to say is that these guys, all they know is what somebody told them. Understand? Because I went to school with them. But they wasn't even born. All they know is what somebody told them. Now you take Wilbur, and all. They were in another generation. They were older than we were. Wilbur and them was because Wilbur was Itold's older brother. But Itold just happened to be my age. You understand? And all them kids up in that Resource Center, you know they wasn't born! Sometimes it bothers me. But I go there all the time. Oh, yes, I go there all the time.
M.W.:	I've done a few interviews there. We use that room right there.
Helen Miller:	Yes, yes, I go there all the time. I know that you get a lot of information out there but a lot of information that you get out there about Alexandria, it ain't nothing that they can vouch for because they weren't nothing but

	<p>kids themselves. They wasn't even born, some of them wasn't. Alexandria has its do's and don'ts; its has and has not's. But it's not the worst place in the world to live. And I think people are beginning to get more sensitive and they're beginning to work together. Because they're beginning to see that we're going to have to whether you like it or not. We still got some forces over here, that still think we ought to be over here and they ought to be over here. But that's not going to happen anymore. And they shouldn't lose sleep trying to wait for it to happen. They'd be like Rip [Van] Winkle; they'd never wake up! And I am glad to see that area because I put a lot of my time in the city and never looked for nothing in return. You understand? I've always been independent. I've brought my kids up the best that we knew how. Like I tell the guys up at the department (I go up there a lot). I say, "You all better be glad because if all the children in this city were like Mrs. Miller's children, you all wouldn't have no job." And they like me, the guys do. And I go up there. [inaudible] I go upstairs where the chief is because I got all my ID stuff. Even if I don't, it don't make no difference. I can always work with them. I put my nephew in the Academy. They just started a new class. It's a nine week class. And they just started a new one so I put my nephew in it. He's the fifth person from my church that we put in the class.</p>
<p>M.W.:</p>	<p>Oh, is that right? Good, very good.</p>
<p>Helen Miller:</p>	<p>He's a nice fellow. He works for the city during the day. And he works for Giant at night. Been there twenty years. He's about to leave there because they're cutting back on his hours. So he said he may just take a buy-out. Because he's got a day job. He works for the city. So I enrolled him for the Police Academy. We were the first class in [19]95. It was a pilot program. They were doing it mainly to see how it would work out. And the city, I mean the Police Department, they picked people out of the community for the first class that they knew. If it turned out all right, then they were going to continue with it. There was a lot of other jurisdictions read about it, and saw it, then they started calling into Chief [inaudible] about the classes. So Fairfax County has one. Arlington has one. And this is our eighth year for it. Because they got all the pictures on the wall, and this is class number eight. They have two a year. That's how they do it. They have two.</p> <p>And now, last year, last summer they started now with the youth. They do youth for one week. They do it in August because most kids have summer jobs and they try to do it when the kids' summer jobs have come to an end. Last summer they had about 30 kids. And I told, "You all didn't buy us nothing to eat." Because while I was there they took the kids in a van and carried them somewhere to eat. I said, "Wait a minute. I came here for nine weeks. You didn't even give me a hot dog!" "Mrs. Miller, we gave you some cookies." I said, "Thank you." I get along with all of them, I really do. Because they know I don't play. Because I</p>

	<p>don't owe this city anything, and that's my independence. If I got to go to the Housing Authority, and I want to raise Sam with somebody, they can't say, "Well, you know Mrs. Miller, we helped you." If I go to Social Services, the woman say, "If Mrs. Miller comes, see what she wants because she's coming for somebody else." Because some of them are so nasty. So she let them know I'll turn her place out. Because they ain't never fed me nor my kids. You understand what I'm saying? And it takes, I find that it takes those kind of people to go to bat for people. Because those people that work in those kinds of places, you would be surprised how arrogant some of them is. You understand? You go into Social Services, you got an old gal sitting there at the desk. "Can I help you?" And she's got five or six children home [inaudible]. She's sitting at that desk. But she's going to give this other girl who comes in there a hard time. You understand? You have a lot of people like that. If you are in the middle, it's just something about it, just something about some people. They just do it. But don't nobody give me a hard time nowhere I go. Because I know my way around. "Oh Hi, Mrs. Miller, how are you?" "I'm fine." Because I know how to treat people. I do anything I can.</p> <p>A girl was telling me yesterday—I was at the station house yesterday—yes, because I carried them flyers for the chief to make some more to put up for Vola's affair Saturday, Sunday. And she was telling me her son was over in Arlington. He got locked up. He bought a stolen gun from somebody. He keep hollering, "Go get Ms. Miller. Go get Ms. Miller." She said, "No, I ain't going to get Ms. Miller because Ms. Miller ain't going to be bothered." Because she told me that's the third time he's been locked up. It's so sad. The girl worked in the government, bought a house, and retired, and now she works part-time in the Police Department. And he's the only child she got. And he's over in Arlington [inaudible].</p>
<p>M.W.:</p>	<p>Getting in trouble?</p>
<p>Helen Miller:</p>	<p>And say he kept hollering, "Go get Mrs. Miller." So she said, "No, I ain't going to get Ms. Miller because she ain't got time to be bothered with you. " She said, "Ms. Miller, I didn't bother because he got a long record." I don't mind going to bat for them kind of kids because it's kind of hard to convince that Commonwealth Attorney [inaudible] you know. I can do it, you know. I go and talk to Randy because one thing I appreciate them. They all listen to me. I go and talk. If I've got something I want to talk to Randy, I talk to Randy. If I got something I want to talk to the Commonwealth Attorney, he and I talk. It's just one of those things because I've always done what I can do for anybody regardless of who they are. And they know if I come, I'm sincere. I'm not coming with a lot of foolishness. You understand? And it's somebody else's children. You understand? That's the reason why it bothers me with my church. There's too many problems out here. So you don't see these people nowhere but at church. Our children. You</p>

understand? I'm honest about it. Our children. I talked to Randy about the coveralls. He said it was a state law. The only time they can wear civilian clothes [was] if they go before a grand jury. Ever seen them all dressed up when they go to court? They have to wear. I guess that's to keep them from making them look worse than they really are [inaudible] better than you think they are.

But from the jail—I sat in there two days with this guy. He got five years. But mostly his is drugs. I got him in the Sober Living class. Then after he got out of there, they put him back in jail. They sent him away. Boy, I was a little upset because he wasn't supposed to go nowhere because we're trying to get him to Second Genesis. So I called the Commonwealth Attorney and he said—he had his record and all—but he didn't have nothing about him going away. And so they brought him back. And when they brought him back, they put him back in the Sober Living program. So I put my resume in his papers that his lawyer gave the judge. He had a court-appointed lawyer, no, a public defender, because there is a difference between the two. And the public defenders you have to stay with them. You almost have to move into the house with them. And it's so sad. Because [inaudible] do get paid one thing. The difference between the public defenders [is that] they are paid by the state. And they don't have private practice. They are just what they say they are. They are public defenders. Their job is to defend the guys that are already incarcerated.

And I've had them tell me, "Mrs. Miller, you know what? I ain't seen my lawyer." Sometime they don't show up until the day of the trial and all. Yes, yes, yes. And the guy's all frustrated. They haven't seen their lawyer. So this guy had one. And half the time I call his office, he's at the jail. But when I called the jail, they hadn't seen him. So then I found out from Randy the Commonwealth Attorney who his supervisor was. So I called her and I set up a meeting with him and her. I talked from eleven o'clock 'til quarter to one. I would talk a little longer but I didn't want my meter to run out in my car. I didn't have but \$35 for the city. After that, well, he started. He got on the ball, he did.

So when we went back to court, the judge asked me about some Willy Williams. He said, "You've been getting around a lot, Ms. Miller. You've met Willy Williams." "No, your Honor, I haven't met him." I didn't know this kid. But after he told me who his family was, I knew his family. So they let him go to Second Genesis. His attorney got some money—this year's money, because all the last year's money was already taken. So he got him some of this year's money. Because after I went to his supervisor and sat down and talked to him, he didn't want me to be real nasty to him in front of his supervisor. See, there ain't nothing they can do to me. That is for sure. So, he did. He managed to get some of this year's money for him for last year. So he's out now and he's working. I had already been out there to solid waste to see Reverend

[inaudible] about getting him a job. See, Reverend [inaudible] belongs to my church so I leaned—I lean on him. He belongs to my church. So, sure enough, he's working [inaudible], you know, people cleaning sewers, put the [inaudible] pipe in the sewer. So he stayed in Second Genesis for six months. And then he came out. And then he got a job at [inaudible]. He's working there. His wife works Social Services. Got two kids. So I think he's doing fairly well.

That doll in there sitting on that thing, his mother made that for me, and brought it, and thanked me for it because she said she never had nobody to really help her with him. They were nice people. They didn't know nothing about courthouses and things. And she made that little doll. Told me to put it on the bed. I told her, "I hate to throw my cat out the window." That cat [inaudible] tearing up that doll. So I just let it sit there. So it bothers me when I go to church and all the hooting and hollering, shouting, and praise the Lord. I talk about it every, all the time in church. Our children's going to pot. You understand? It's further than that door. We got a jail ministry in our church. They go down there on Sunday night, I think, about two Sundays a month or something like that (I don't even bother with it) and sing and pray. That ain't helping them people none. You got to make personal contact with people. You understand? I had one little girl, she had...[tape ends]