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Interviewer: *Char Bah, Genealogist*

Transcriber: *Jo-Ann LaFon*

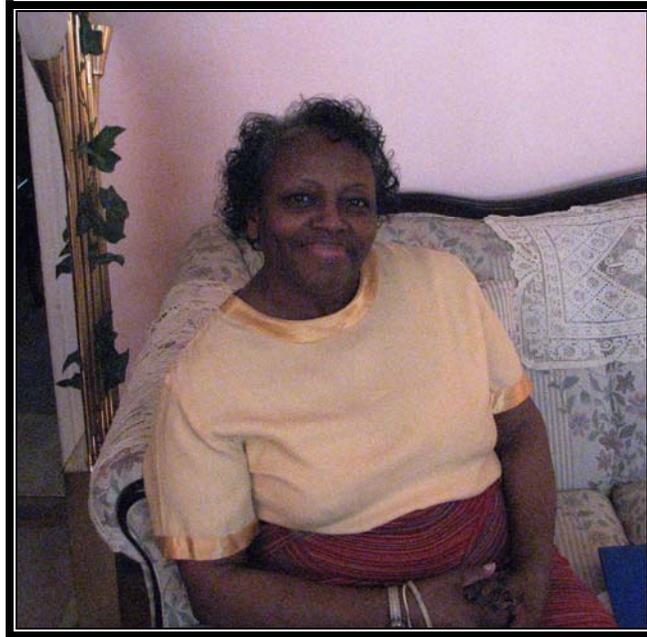
Abstract: Ms. Shirley Steele shares her memories of her maternal family members (the Wheelers), as well as the Lees and Craigs. She recalls many of the black-owned businesses in her neighborhood and childhood games. She describes the loving and secure atmosphere provided by her family and her neighbors in the area of North Henry Street where she grew up.

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Shirley Steele, 2008

(credit: Char Bah for Alexandria Archaeology)

Introductions	
Char Bah	Today is June 6, 2008 and I am interviewing Miss Shirley Steele. Can you please tell me your name including your maiden name?
Shirley Steele	Shirley Ann Gilliam. I married Mr. Sanders. He died. In 2000, I married Mr. Steele, so my full name is Shirley Ann Gilliam Sanders Steele.
C. B.	And how did you and your first husband meet?
Shirley Steele	I was his [?] school and he lived in the neighborhood and we just began talking.
C. B.	All right. And when did you get married?
Shirley Steele	We got married on September the fifth 1955.
C. B.	And how many children do you have?
Shirley Steele	I have three children.
C. B.	Where were you born?
Shirley Steele	I was born in Alexandria, Virginia at the old Alexandria Hospital on Duke Street.
C. B.	And what year were you born?
Shirley Steele	1940.
C. B.	Who were your parents?
Shirley Steele	My parents were Mrs. Helena Lindsay and Fulton Gilliam.
C. B.	And who were your siblings—your mother’s children?
Shirley Steele	My mother had one other daughter, Mary Lorene Lindsay.

C. B.	Where did you attend school?
Shirley Steele	Elementary School—I attended the old Parker Gray. It was on Wythe Street. Later on, they changed it to Charles Houston because Parker Gray was moved to Madison Street. After I completed Charles Houston, I went to the new Parker Gray on Madison Street.
C. B.	Tell me the different places in Alexandria you lived.
Shirley Steele	I lived in the projects at 812 North Alfred Street. Before that, I lived at 400 North Patrick Street, 312 ½ North Henry Street, 812 North Alfred Street. After getting married we moved to 1713 Price Street in Del Ray. After my husband died, I moved here on Patrick Street where I married Mr. Steele.
Black-Owned Businesses	
C. B.	How did you get to high school—did you walk or did you...? What were some of the businesses in your area—what kinds of businesses or stores were in the area where you were brought up?
Shirley Steele	Some of the black people had barber shops. Mr. Williamson had a barber shop on the corner and some of the other businesses --Little Jim-- he had a (fish) carry-out shop.
C. B.	On what street was that?
Shirley Steele	That was on Hilton Street. I used to work for Hopkins Furniture on King Street--at 810 King Street. [Name unclear] Furniture was right next door.
C. B.	Any other black-owned businesses in the area?
Shirley Steele	There were a lot of beauty shops. Miss Georgeanna Ray had a beauty shop on the corner of Alfred and Pendleton Street. Miss Michelle Williams—she had one on the corner of Cameron Street, where the Fire Department is.
C. B.	When you were brought up, did your family talk about their history?
Family History – Mother and Maternal Grandmother	
Shirley Steele	My aunt would. My aunt, Mrs. [name unclear] Wheeler—she would call me aside and tell me a lot of things—historical things. My grandmother, Miss Sandy Wheeler, worked for the Leadbeater family that had something to do with Stabler-Leadbeater Apothecary. My aunt would tell me things about my grandmother working for the Stabler family.
C. B.	Can you tell me who your maternal and paternal grandparents are – your father and mother’s grandparents? Who were their parents?
Shirley Steele	My maternal grandmother was Mrs. Annie Wheeler. I don’t remember her husband—my grandfather—he was dead when I came on the scene. She often told us he was a soldier in World War I. She was a good grandmother. She used to keep us when we got out of school and then she kept our children. My paternal grandparent was Mrs. Annie Gilliam. They used to live across Canal –

	Fairfax/Royal Street near the river. That land was bought so they moved on Henry Street – [the] 100-block of Henry Street. It used to be an Arrow Chevrolet there. And later on, my father, Mr. Fulton Gilliam, he married another lady and they moved to Washington.
C. B.	And your grandmother, Annie Wheeler—her maiden name?
Shirley Steele	Her maiden name was Annie Lee.
C. B.	Looking at the family chart that I have prepared for you, tell me about your mother, Helena Wheeler. Where did she live? What other names besides Wheeler did she use?
Shirley Steele	That’s the only name I remember my mother using --Helena Wheeler. She was married to William Lindsay and they divorced. She had me by Mr. Gilliam.
C. B.	What was your mother’s occupation when you were growing up?
Shirley Steele	My mother worked for the school. She was a helper in the cafeteria and later on, as they built different schools, she became the cafeteria manager of the Lyles Crouch Elementary School on South Pitt Street.
C. B.	What were the different places that she lived until she died?
Shirley Steele	From a child, I remember they told me we lived at 400 North Patrick Street. As far back as I can remember, we lived at 312 ½ North Henry. When I was twelve, they built some projects and we moved in those projects at 812 North Alfred Street and I stayed there with my mom until I married. And then I moved to Del Ray --1713 Price Street.
C. B.	Did she stay there until she died?
Shirley Steele	She stayed there and she died January the fifth (my son’s birthday) 1975.
C. B.	Tell me about your grandmother, Annie Lee Wheeler. What kind of work did she do?
Shirley Steele	She worked in the white people’s kitchen, as far as I can remember. I think it was what I mentioned -- the Stabler–Leadbeater [family]. I think I remember that name Leadbeater more than Stabler. It seems like they had two names for that apothecary or that drug store. None the less, she worked as a cook... She would go there early in the morning. She mentioned some things.
C. B.	What was your grandmother’s occupation when you were growing up and you said she was a cook basically in their homes?
Shirley Steele	Yes. She came home and she cooked good food, too. [laughter]
C. B.	What about your other grandmother?
Shirley Steele	Mrs. Melvina Lee?
C. B.	Yes.
Shirley Steele	She was my great-grandmother.
C.B.	[speaking together] She was your great-grandmother. Your other

	grandmother.
Shirley Steele	My paternal grandmother on my father's side --Mrs. Annie Gilliam. She was a housekeeper. My father didn't live in the house where I was, but they lived two blocks down on 100-block of North Henry Street. I would go to my paternal father's house sometimes to see my father. He married someone else and I would go down there sometimes, just two blocks away. They had good dinners, too. [laughter] I would go there. She was a homemaker; she lived at home too.
C. B.	And your grandmother, where did she live until she died? I think you were talking about Annie.
Shirley Steele	Miss Annie continued to live at 312 ½ North Henry when we moved to 812 North Alfred in the projects. She died in 312 ½ North Henry. My paternal grandmother lived at 117 North Henry and she lived there until she died.
C. B.	Did you hear any stories about your grandfather Joseph Wheeler?
Shirley Steele	My Aunt Lil told me some things about Joseph Wheeler and she said he was a World War I soldier. She also took me to the soldiers' cemetery and showed me where he was buried.
C. B.	Did she say what type of work he did when he got out or occupation that he had?
Shirley Steele	No, she didn't.
C. B.	Can you describe your grandmother-- Annie Lee?
Shirley Steele	Yes, I can. The grandmothers today don't look like my grandmother. She often had aprons on all the time. (The grandmothers today look so stylish.) She was quite plump and she wore old fashioned-looking shoes and cotton stockings. That's what I remember about my grandmother. She wore her hair braided.
C. B.	You say "cotton stockings." I haven't seen cotton stockings.
Shirley Steele	They were brown cotton. They weren't nylon and she wore them below her knees. And she made [unclear]. [laughter]
C.B.	Was she tall or short?
Shirley Steele	I guess you would say medium. I'm five foot two and I think she was about five foot four.
C. B.	Did she talk about her life as a child?
Shirley Steele	Her work--most of it was cooking or taking care of white people's children.
C. B.	When she was a child—did she ever talk about that period of time?
Shirley Steele	Not too much. She had a sister --my aunt-- named Mary Taylor; Aunt Theresa we called her. They didn't live too far away, but I don't remember Grandma Annie talking too much about her childhood.
C. B.	And did you know all your Grandmother's siblings?

Family History – Lees and Craigs	
Shirley Steele	I know two of them. I know her brother, George Lee and her sister, Mary Lee Taylor. We called her Aunt Trixie. They lived near to us. Uncle George lived on Queen Street and Aunt Trixie, or Aunt Mary Lee Taylor, lived on Princess Street near where the Hopkins (?) House is today.
C. B.	What church did your grandmother attend?
Shirley Steele	She went to Third Baptist.
C. B.	Your family's been in that church for a long time?
Shirley Steele	Yes, they have.
C. B.	Do you think they were original members there?
Shirley Steele	I don't know. My Aunt Lil passed me a lot of information. I know it [unclear?]. . . You need the history of that Board when it was first established. But...for a long time they were members.
C. B.	Did your Lee family own property?
Shirley Steele	No, not to my knowledge.
C. B.	Prior to me contacting you, how far back on the Lee family could you go?
Shirley Steele	I think to three generations.
C.B.	Which is?
Shirley Steele	Senious Lee and Melvina Craig Lee.
C.B.	Tell me about your Lee and Craig relatives. Are you in contact with any of your Lee and Craig relatives?
Shirley Steele	Not today. I don't know if they've all died off the scene. My Aunt Lil did. She used to go up to Warrenton to contact the Craigs.
C. B.	So there's no other Craigs that grew up during the time that you were growing up in Alexandria?
Shirley Steele	Not to my knowledge.
C.B.	And what about the Lee's outside of your cousins?
Shirley Steele	I had some of seniors in Melvina. I have a cousin Michael Lee. He's a descendant of one of their children. They had one son, Robert Lee; and, Michael Lee is their great-great-grandson.
C.B.	And he lives in the area?
Shirley Steele	He lives on South Fayette Street.
Childhood Neighborhood	
C.B.	During your childhood, what type of entertainment was there for African-Americans?
Shirley Steele	We would play hopscotch. We would take crayons and write on the sidewalk and play jump rope, jacks and we would go to Hopkins House or boys would go to Boy's Club. But we didn't hang [unclear]. It was just my sister and I.
C. B.	Can you describe your childhood neighborhood? For example, who were your neighbors?

Shirley Steele	On Henry Street, it was Miss Dorothy Frye. She took me into her backyard and named all the flowers and I learned that I could start from January to December and [unclear] for the year. I think about March—the crocuses, daffodils. April, the tulips. May, the roses. June, the snowballs. [laughter]...the crape myrtle.
C.B.	Did you have other neighbors?
Shirley Steele	On the other side, there was a lady named Miss Angeline. And then Miss Martha Sawyer used to do hair. That's some of them. The neighbor on one side, the lady who taught me about the flowers, she had an aunt. And that aunt had a boxer. The dog was a boxer. And the dog [unclear] [laughter] But they were good to us. But you'd better behave 'cause they would tell your Mama if you didn't and you would get a beating. They would spank you and they would send you home. [laughter from both]
C. B.	Your father, John Gilliam, what was his occupation?
Shirley Steele	My father's Elton [sp?] Gilliam.
C. B.	So your father's Elton Gilliam?
Shirley Steele	My great-grandfather was John--Johnny. That's my great-grandfather
C.B.	Okay, so your father was Elton Gilliam. What was his occupation?
Shirley Steele	I believe he was a chauffeur. He and my mother not marrying, I really didn't know what he did, but he worked down Fort Belvoir.
C.B.	And you said you visited your father –you went to his home or he went to yours?
Shirley Steele	I went to his home at 117 North Henry Street.
C. B.	If you had to describe your childhood to what children have today as far as opportunity and financial support, how would you describe your childhood?
Shirley Steele	I felt secure because of being loved. The neighbors loved me and the people took care of the children. When somebody worked at home, they watched out for the children. People talk about abuse -- what is it when somebody in the family mess with the children?
C. B.	Incest.
Shirley Steele	Yes, incest, that's the word. I didn't know what that mean because we felt secure. There were a few men, but I never experienced it. Thank God, I am thankful, never experienced it. We felt very secure and safe. We were poor and didn't have much, but I felt secure and loved. I often wished that my father was in the home, but he wasn't so I made the best with God's blessing.
C. B.	Mr. Lindsay was your mother's husband for a short period of time before you were born. Were you [unclear]?
Shirley Steele	Well, not really. I was so small. My sister was about two when I was born; we are two years apart. You hear all these things, but [as a

	child] you didn't know. I see children today with different sets of parents. You sat around hearing grown folks talk...but I didn't know and understand [as a child]. I felt secure and loved and taken care of.
C. B.	Do you have any pictures of your Lee and Craig families?
Shirley Steele	No, I don't.
C. B.	Do you think your cousin have any pictures?
Shirley Steele	I don't think so because he's much younger than me...
C. B.	You're also related to Craig Wheeler—was it 'Whelan' or 'Wheeler?'
Shirley Steele	Wheeler. Pronounced 'Wheeler.'
C. B.	Okay. And Gilliam. [END]