

Civil Rights History Project
Interview completed by the Southern Oral History Program
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Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of African American History & Culture
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Interviewee: Mrs. Louise Willingham Broadway
Interview Date: March 9, 2013
Location: Campus of Albany State University, Albany, Georgia
Interviewer: Will Griffin
Videographer: John Bishop
Length: 00:34:00

John Bishop: We're rolling.

Willie Griffin: Alright. Today is Saturday, March 9th, 2013. My name is Will Griffin, and I am a research associate with the Southern Oral History Program at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. I am with videographer John Bishop in Albany, Georgia, on the campus of Albany State University to conduct an interview for the Civil Rights History Project, which is a joint undertaking of the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture and the Library of Congress. We are here with Mrs. Louise Broadway, who played a prominent role in the local Baker County Movement.

Thank you so much for being here, Mrs. Broadway, and agreeing to share your story with the Civil Rights History Project.

Louise Broadway: You are welcome.

WG: Alright. So, if we could just begin by you giving your full name, your date of birth and your place of birth.

LB: Okay. I'm Louise Willingham Broadway. I was born in Baker County, Georgia, a little town known as Newton. I was born in 1930, 8/6, 8/6/1930.

WG: Okay. Alright. And so, let's talk about your childhood, growing up, your experiences, what you remember of your—

LB: Okay, my childhood experience in growing up, I was reared—my parents was farmers, sharecroppers. They did not have a farm of their own. And we did not have school buses at the time that I was growing up. We had to walk to school, to church—we had schools in church. And we had to walk to school in the cold every morning. Some mornings, it was so very cold you couldn't hardly feel your feelings in your—feel your hands when you'd get to school. But they had an old potbellied stove that they would fire up, and we would gather around it and soon get warm.

WG: Okay.

LB: And that was my childhood experience of school.

WG: Of schools? Did you just think that the schools, the conditions of your schools, those were normal? Did you notice the conditions of white schools? Did you know anything about the white schools in the area?

LB: The white—well, the children would pass by us on the school bus. They would ride to school. They would ride to school, and we would have to walk to school, regardless of your distance. Some children walked as much as ten or fifteen miles to get to a church. And yet, the white children on the white buses would pass by them, living in the same neighborhood.

WG: Okay.

LB: But we could not ride the bus in my childhood, growing up, at school.

WG: Okay. So, what about your experiences in school, your teachers? Do you remember any of your favorite teachers?

LB: Yeah. I remember my teachers. One of them was Miss Sallie Mae Terrance and one was Miss Mary Hawkins. We taught—in the church, and inside the church, you didn't have any partitions between the classrooms, you know. They would take about three pews, you know, for first grade, and they taught from the first through the seventh, all one—

WG: All in the same sanctuary?

LB: In the same sanctuary. One teacher—

WG: Wow.

LB: Not one for each class. And they would have a session for first grade, second, third, fourth, fifth, up through seventh.

WG: That's amazing.

LB: And you had to keep quiet, you know. You wouldn't be disturbing the teacher while she was teaching from one class to another. She had a time for each one, you know, time for the class.

WG: Okay.

LB: And that is the way—we really got a good education, though. Right now, I can appreciate those days. They were hard, not having heat, and, you know, having to try to be quiet and listen. But we made it!

WG: Okay.

LB: And I graduated from—left the seventh grade, then I went to high school.

WG: Okay.

LB: High School was down in Newton. They had—it was two high schools. One was in the east, and one was in the west for the black people.

WG: Okay. So, you had two Newton colored high schools?

LB: That's right. They had a—that's right.

WG: And which one did you attend?

LB: Well, I went to Newton *Colored* High School. They did not—when I was in high school, they just added the West Baker High School after my graduating from Newton Colored High School.

WG: Okay. And what was Newton Colored High School like? I mean, was it a—?

[05:00]

LB: We had—

WG: Do you have fond memories?

LB: They had barracks, Army barracks. Maybe, I guess, they were brought in by the state, you know. And they had barracks that we would go in from class to class. And they had one little building that they called our chapel in the Home Ec department. And that's where we had chapel and Home Ec department in one building, and then, the other barracks we had different classes. The teachers had them at different times.

WG: Okay. So, were you an only child?

LB: No. I'm the youngest of four.

WG: Of four? Okay. And so, what was your relationship like with your older brothers and sisters. Did they watch after you, since you were the baby?

LB: [Laughs] Well, I think they spoiled me because I was the youngest. I only had one brother and two sisters. And growing up, the second child, which was my sister, she never did

want me to do *anything*. Every time it was time for my chores for anything, she would always like to do them for me, because she loved me so. And I think it kind of spoiled me. When she left home, then I had chores to do that she used to do for me, and it was kind of hard. But we were a lovely family and we lived in a one-room country shack.

WG: Wow.

LB: We had a bed for Mother and Father, a bed for the girls, and one for the boys. And one kitchen, one kitchen, no dining area.

WG: Right.

LB: But, believe it or not, we made it. And had an open fireplace. You would burn up in front, [laughs] and freeze behind—but we made it through! We had a joyous childhood together under the circumstances.

WG: Right. So, what do you remember about your parents the most, besides them being hard workers? What type of lessons did they seek to instill in you?

LB: My parents instilled in me that we had to learn to endure with what we had. Regardless of what somebody else had, what they could afford to give us, they learned us to appreciate that. We had to go to Sunday School. We had to go to church every Sunday, and we had to put church first, regardless of school activities or whatnot. You had to go to church before you go to school activities. And they had us—you know, it might have been just meat and bread, but we never went hungry. We never went hungry. My father worked at a gristmill, you know, where they grind meal.

WG: Gristmill?

LB: Yeah, that's where they would take corn and grind it up to make meal.

WG: Okay.

LB: And that's where my father worked. And my mother worked as a maid from house to house.

WG: Okay. So, let's go back to high school. You graduated from high school in what year?

LB: 1948.

WG: 1948?

LB: Um-hmm.

WG: And what were your plans? I mean, did you know?

LB: Well, really and truly, my plans were to go to college. But at that time, my father, I told you, worked as a sharecropper, and my mother worked, and they was working for from fifty cents to a dollar a day. And at that time, no way in the world, you know, they could send me away, and away to school. So, they just—they were not able to send me away to school, so my first job was working as a maid in the kitchen, working for a dollar a day.

WG: Okay. Who were you working for? Do you remember the family you worked for?

LB: Ah?

WG: Do you remember who—what was the name of the family that you worked for?

LB: Oh, the name of the family was Mamie McCorral.

WG: Mamie McConnell?

LB: McCorral. M-C-let me see, M-C-C-O-R-R-A-L, I believe.

WG: Okay. Okay, so—

LB: Well, Mamie White! I'm sorry. No, it was. Her name was Mamie White. I'm sorry.

WG: Mamie White?

LB: Her name was Mamie White, not Mamie McCorral.

WG: Okay.

LB: But she was named Mamie White. That's who I worked for.

WG: And how was her treatment—their treatment of you?

LB: Yeah.

WG They treated you well?

LB: They were very nice. I had to walk. We lived about five miles from where they lived. And I would walk every morning [10:00] to clean house and fix dinner and, you know, do whatever house chores there were to do.

WG: Okay.

LB: Um-hmm. But they were very nice people.

WG: Um-hmm. And how long did you do this, I mean, for how long?

LB: I worked as a maid for about a year after I finished high school.

WG: Okay.

LB: And then, I got married. I finished high school in 1948. I got married in 1949.

WG: Who was your husband?

LB: My husband was Grady Broadway, Jr.

WG: Okay. And how did you meet Grady? How did you meet Grady?

LB: How did I meet him?

WG: Um-hmm.

LB: Well, now, [laughs] the way I met Grady, I had a cousin—I guess the name's been called, Carl Broadway?

WG: Um-hmm.

LB: He married my cousin, one of my cousins.

WG: Okay.

LB: And I would often go spend the weekend with this cousin. And Grady's oldest brother was rearing him, because their parents passed away early.

WG: Okay.

LB: And way back in the—and we were very young. We would see one another and smile about it and never thought one day we would get together to be husband and wife.

WG: Right.

LB: Now, that's how we first started, you know, just being around one another. And his father would bring him to church, and my mother would bring me to church. We'd just smile at one another. So, in the late '40s, he moved up in the community where I lived. And that's how we got back together, just old friends got back together. And one day, he asked me to marry him, and I married him, [laughs] and we had five children together.

WG: Five children?

LB: Uh-huh. Our second children were twins.

WG: Oh, wow! Okay.

LB: Um-hmm.

WG: So, you had a house full?

LB: Yes, yes, but we maintained.

WG: So, talk about the racial conditions in Baker County. When did you first start noticing or, you know, begin to—?

LB: Well, really, as a child, I noticed race, so far as the whites being able to ride the school bus.

WG: Okay, that was the first thing.

LB: And blacks walked in the cold. And they would, you know, pass you and throw out spitballs or whatever. We were walking from the school. Now, I noticed that, you know, as—in my childhood.

WG: How did you feel about that? Did you think that that was just the way it was? Or did you feel it was unfair?

LB: *Oh*, at the beginning, I *knew* it was unfair! You know, but it wasn't anything I could do about it.

WG: Right.

LB: It wasn't anything I could do about it, but I knew that was unfair. But, you know, that was the way it was then, and we had to accept it. And so, going to high school, well, they had the Newton High School, that was the white school, and Newton Colored High School. So, you know, we never crossed each other's paths at that time.

But then, later on down during the years, when the Civil Rights Act was passed, and time, you know, for children to desegregate the schools, I would say it like that—okay, then my family—I had married then and had children of my own when this got started.

WG: Okay, 1954.

LB: So, at the time, my husband was working for James Robert Rose as a sharecropper.

WG: Okay.

LB: And we signed our first child, which was the eldest, Jesse Lee Broadway, to the all-white school. So, when James Robert Rose heard about we had signed the child to go, then he told my husband that if he didn't withdraw his name, then he was going to have to pay him everything he owed him before the end of the year. You see, you got your pay at the end of the year.

WG: Right.

LB: So, we had to withdraw our eldest son from the white school, you know, register from the white school until the end of that year.

WG: Right.

LB: At the end of that year, my husband stopped working for this farmer. The next year we were able to send [15:00] three children to the integrated school.

WG: Okay.

LB: But it was not easy.

WG: So, do you—yeah, do you think that was sort of a widespread intimidation tactic?

LB: Yeah, it was. One of my sons was beaten so bad that he had to be hospitalized.

WG: At school?! I mean, can you—?

LB: At school! At school! They brought him home that evening. We had to bring him up to the doctor, and he had so many bruises that he had to be hospitalized.

WG: So, what happened? Do you know? Did he ever talk about what exactly transpired? I mean, what happened?

LB: Oh, they—just a gang of the white boys just jumped on him and just beat him up, stomping him and kicking him! And he had to be hospitalized for a few days. They would follow our children—at this time, you know, it was buses then, but they would follow our children home. A gang of whites would follow our children home when they'd get off the bus.

WG: Okay.

LB: They would attack them. One day—and I worked in Albany. One day, they attacked them at school, and I got a call at work. And I was driving an old Plymouth and I was driving so fast the speedometer chain broke, trying to get home to my children.

WG: Right.

LB: You know, to protect them from the group that was attacking them.

WG: Okay.

LB: And it was very hard for us, you know, to see your child—you didn't know whether or not they was going to make it back home alive or not.

WG: Right.

LB: But we know somebody had to stand up! You know, if all of us had backed up, you know, we wouldn't have had—we wouldn't be as far as we are today. We're not where we should be, but it's better than it was, you know, at that time.

WG: Sure, sure. So, did anything ever happen to the group of boys?

LB: Nothing happened to the group of boys. But they did start patrolling the campus better around the school, you know, have someone outside to try and keep these kind of events from happening again.

WG: Okay.

LB: Um-hmm.

WG: Alright. So, now, you said that you were working in Albany when this happened.

LB: Yeah, I worked for a medical doctor.

WG: Okay.

LB: As a doctor's assistant for thirty years.

WG: Oh, okay!

LB: And this same doctor—the Saturday during the marching and the demonstration down in Baker County, they had what you call this “Bloody Saturday.”

WG: Bloody Saturday, um-hmm.

LB: And some of these civil rights workers and some of the citizens that was beaten up so bad, they brought some of them to Dr. J. L. Shirley, Jr.'s office, where I worked, to be treated. He treated several, just treated them for free, several of the Freedom Riders and the citizens who was beaten by the mob on that Bloody Saturday.

WG: Okay.

LB: They carried some to Camilla, and Camilla refused to take in all of them. So, they had to bring them to Albany or take them to Arlington or some other place other than Camilla.

WG: Um-hmm. And so, you were there when they were bringing these people in?

LB: Oh, yes! I was working for the doctor at that time. Sherrod was one of the persons that they brought in, you know, all banged and bruised up.

WG: So, did you know Sherrod at that time?

LB: Well, only by—yes, because I, you know, lived in Baker County, and the Movement was in progress at that time.

WG: So, what did you—I mean, how did you respond? What did you think? I mean—

LB: Oh, I just thought how cruel it was! You know, they said they had ax handles and knives—

WG: [Sighs]

LB: And baseball bats and guns.

WG: Uh.

LB: And St. Matthew's Missionary Baptist Church, where I'm a member, this is where they had to regroup and go back to the church. And they had to lie down under the pews and things, because they was firing shots at them at the church on that Bloody Saturday.

WG: Right. So, and a lot of the churches around Baker County were attacked because they were holding meetings?

LB: That's right. That's right, because that's where we had our meetings.

WG: Okay.

LB: I was one of the secretaries of the Baker County Movement.

WG: Okay. So, talk about that. I mean, in your position as secretary, beyond taking notes, what else did you do? What type of inside information do you have that could help us understand a little better?

LB: Well, what I would try to understand—what each and every one of the citizens would get up and express themselves [20:00] about certain things that happened to them, you know, during the day or the night. I would have to take notes of the happenings.

WG: Okay. And what did you do with these notes? What happened to them?

LB: Believe it or not, I have some of them!

WG: You do?

LB: And I have some of them down in the library at East Baker Historical Society down in Newton right now.

WG: Okay.

LB: I was looking at some of the notes that I took where one parent was saying one of his children got hit, side of the head, with a stick or all this kind of stuff. And then, we would have, you know, the civil rights people, some of them, to come down—[Department of] Justice, I would say—and listen to some of the complaints and all of the citizens, how badly they were treated, in order to try to make things better. We just wanted equal opportunities.

WG: Right.

LB: See, we had to use the books that the whites used one year. Then, the next year, maybe, or when the books were worn and all, torn, those are the books that we would get at our schools. And we just knew that wasn't justice. And the only thing we wanted is equal opportunity. It wasn't so much to integrate, [laughs] you know.

WG: Right.

LB: But if they just only had given us a chance to have materials to work with our children that they had, we figured we would have had better, you know, better opportunities to become better men and women and educated men and women in the society.

WG: Okay. So, [whispers something off-camera]. Alright, so you talked about the Bloody Saturday and civil rights workers being brought into the doctor's office. So, I take it the doctor wasn't one who was against what was taking place. Do you think that he supported the Movement? You said his name was—

LB: Dr. J. L. Shirley, Jr.

WG: Shirley, Jr.?

LB: Um-hmm.

WG: And so, do you think he supported what was taking place? How do you feel about— I mean—?

LB: Oh, I think he really supported, you know, treating the ones that was injured on this Bloody Saturday.

WG: Okay.

LB: He was—did it with all—he wasn't reluctant at all about treating them, like some of the doctors. Because, see, like I said, they took them to Camilla, but they would not treat them.

WG: Okay.

LB: No, he was glad to be able to—

WG: Help. And did he know that you were somewhat involved in the Movement?

LB: Yes, he knew. And during my time working with Dr. Shirley, they offered a course down in Baker County, the commissioners offered a free course to take on emergency care, to ride on the ambulance, you know, to help to see about our people. And no blacks worked on the ambulance at that time.

WG: Right.

LB: And I would work at Dr. Shirley's office, get off at five o'clock, and at night, I took this course in emergency medicine. And I was, you know, one of the first—I was the first black, really, to complete the course in the county, and would work at night. Sometimes I was called on duty, maybe at eleven o'clock and had to be at Dr. Shirley's office around nine in the morning.

WG: Wow.

LB: But I just felt like we needed to try to help our people. And since the opportunity was offered to try and help—other than other people having to help your people all the time, whether or not—don't know whether we was going to get *justice*, you know. I felt if we had someone of our color to help *with* our color and all other colors who had emergencies, it would be a whole lot better in the county.

WG: Okay.

LB: And I would—

WG: And so, he was the one who recommended you for the course?

LB: No, no, no.

WG: Or you just took it?

LB: No, he didn't recommend me for the course. After I heard they were offering the course free, and this was an opportunity—now, we worked for free. We worked on the ambulance free. You took—they offered the course. They paid for the course, but you had to work free.

WG: Oh!

LB: And I worked on the ambulance, you know, [25:00] getting up all times [laughs] of night, day and night, but—until that free service went out. I worked until that free service went out on the ambulance in Baker County.

WG: Okay. So, what year did you start working with it? Do you remember? Do you recall?

LB: The course was offered in 1983, August of 1983, and it was a six-month course.

WG: Okay. And what were some of the encounters—what were some of the more memorable encounters that you had working with EMS, being the first black? And how were you treated by the other—I imagine the other workers were white? Did you ever—?

LB: Now, the workers, there were some—very nice, you know, didn't discriminate and all. And there was others kind of stood their distance. But, in all, they were fairly nice about teaching me how to ride the ambulance and, you know, certain things about the ambulance and all of this. Some of them was very nice.

WG: Okay.

LB: Um-hmm.

WG: Okay. I can't really—is there any other thing about the Baker Movement, about your involvement in it, that you would like to share?

LB: I really think I've about covered the most—the Bloody Saturday was one of those most—most [laughs, then sighs] horrible days you have ever heard of in your life or seen, you know, how they were just beating people down to the ground. And one of the ladies covered Sherrod's body to keep them from killing him. They probably would have killed him. That was Josie Miller. I know you have heard that story over and over again. Now, that was mostly—one of the most unjust Saturdays that I could remember during the Movement time.

Now, I can remember one time, though, we marched from First Pleasant Grove Baptist Church down to the courthouse to get some people registered to vote.

WG: And this was in Newton?

LB: And our sheriff—you've heard of "the Gator" [the county sheriff]?

WG: Um-hmm.

LB: Okay, and he was down there that day. And Sherrod was with us. And when we entered, he told Sherrod that, you know, he was not supposed to be there. He was not a citizen; he was an outsider. And, you know, he started telling him, "Well, we brought people here to get registered to vote." And, in a split second, he hit him and knocked him over in a corner.

WG: Wow.

LB: And I was so afraid that, you know, he was going to kill him. But he got up, and he told him he had to leave. So, we all left. When he left, we all left and went back to the church. But don't think that stopped us! We were right back down there that next morning!

WG: Okay. [Laughs]

LB: And we kept going until things got a little better about getting people registered, you know, to vote.

WG: Um-hmm. When did you finally get registered? Do you remember?

LB: When did I—?

WG: Yeah, when did *you* finally get registered to vote?

LB: Oh, I got registered during this time. During this time, I got registered to vote during this time. Because, I guess, let me see, I was in my—well, I was married at that time. But I guess I had not gotten registered to vote until they really started talking about it, because it was so complicated, we thought, you know, all the questions they asked and everything. But I got registered during this time.

WG: Okay. So, you took one of the literacy tests to get registered? Did you have to take a literacy test, or did they just allow you to sign your name?

LB: They allowed me, at that time, to sign.

WG: Okay.

LB: Um-hmm.

WG: Okay.

LB: Yeah. I didn't have to take the literacy test.

JB: [Clears throat] When I was here two years ago, I heard several really appalling stories of what Gator did to people, just incredible cruelty, like hitting a man in the face, a young man in the face with a nightstick. And the lawyer, whom I think was King, Mr. King—?

WG: Yeah, King. C. B. King.

JB: He had to go to make sure he was getting some care in jail. But I wonder what happened to all these people who got beaten up and injured. You know, you hear about the day it happened, but what happened to them afterwards?

LB: What happened to the people?

WG: Um-hmm.

LB: Well, after their injuries, you know, they still—we still worked with the Movement and [30:00] worked in, you know, Baker County still until we got people registered to vote and things got a little calmer. He finally got a little bit calmer than he was at the beginning, in that there was—you know, people used to be afraid to even come through Baker County, because he was going to stop them, and you surely was going to get a ticket, you know. [Laughs] They would go around miles, like around Camilla if they wanted to go to Bainbridge, to keep from coming through Baker County.

He was just—he was just a mean—he just was a mean man, all I can say. He had a service station and he put up signs saying, you know, during our demonstrations and everything, that he only wanted white business. He didn't want black business. But he finally took ill, had—I don't know, he had a stroke or something—and he stayed down for years before his death.

WG: Oh, wow, so he suffered a long time.

LB: And that's how, you know, things kind of got a little better in Baker County.

WG: Okay.

JB: What about the people who were injured? Did the Movement help with medical care and stuff for people that got injured?

LB: Say did the Movement help?

JB: Did the Movement help with that?

LB: Oh, yes! It really gave us the right to speak. You know, a lot of things we used—you used to couldn't—if a white person said something to you, you weren't *allowed* maybe to say what you thought. But now we speak freely, whether, you know, [laughs] we speak freely and say things that we *want* to say, you know, where we used to couldn't respond to them. You just couldn't say anything to the white man! Don't, he would—you know, they'd knock you down or

hit you or kick you or do anything. But now, you have your freedom of speech. That's one thing we have, our freedom of speech, and we really use it when it's necessary, [laughs] when it's necessary to speak our opinion.

WG: Right.

LB: And the Movement helped! It helped a lot. It did, because it helped to get people registered to vote, you know, and it helped in the desegregation of schools. It gave people more courage and more wisdom to stand up for what was right. It helped a lot.

WG: Okay. So, I guess, one of the questions I guess we're trying to get to is Dr. Shirley, and this Bloody Saturday again, and the students coming in and needing to be treated. How did they get their bills paid? Did he charge them?

LB: He did not charge them.

WG: He didn't charge them? Okay.

LB: He did not charge them.

WG: Okay.

LB: He didn't worry about the charges for those that had gotten beaten up and bruised up. That was his gift.

WG: His way of giving to the Movement.

LB: That's right. That was his contribution, um-hmm.

WG: Okay.

LB: Yeah.

WG: Okay. Well, I thank you, Mrs. Louise Broadway, for sharing your story with us. We are very grateful that you have taken the time out, and we appreciate it.

LB: You are welcome. [Laughs]

JB: Let me get your microphone off and let's free you up.

WG: Yeah, you're free to go roam the hallways. [Laughs]

LB: Alright. Thank you.

WG: And you filled out your—?

LB: Oh, my forms?

WG: Yes, ma'am.

LB: Okay.

JB: Thank you for sharing those stories.

LB: You're welcome!

JB: We greatly appreciate it.

[Recording ends at 34:00]

END OF INTERVIEW

Transcribed by Sally C. Council