I interviewed Cookie Heard in a small discussion room that I had reserved in advance at the Williamsburg Regional Library. I was assisted by indexer Michaela Wright. Ms. Heard was an enthusiastic, cordial, and forthcoming interviewee, and allowed me to learn a great deal about her life. We talked about her childhood in “White City”, her various professions, her relationship with Colonial Williamsburg, and her experiences as an union organizer and protestor.

--Arish Ali, April 28, 2015

Arish Ali: It is April 22nd at 2:18 PM. This is Arish Ali; I am accompanied by indexer Michaela Wright, and we are in Williamsburg Regional Library, interviewing Edith Cookie Heard, Cookie being her nickname [laughs]. Edith, we’re recording, would you please state your name in whatever form you prefer?

Cookie Heard: I am Edith Marie Kearney Heard. People in Williamsburg call me Cookie. My college friends call me Edith. So either name is fine, but I prefer Cookie.

Arish: Fantastic. Alright Cookie, would you tell me a little bit about your childhood, and where you grew up, and your family?

Cookie: I’ll start with my mom, who was born at the Naval Weapons Station on Charles Corner. And from that point, they moved out of the Naval Weapons Station in 1927 on to Grove, and, uh, so my mother and her siblings grew up in Grove. My mother met my father when Colonial Williamsburg came into town, and they started renovating for the historical city. My dad came in from Philadelphia, but his home was Henderson, North Carolina. He came to Williamsburg as a chauffeur, and he also worked at the commissary; he was the grocery man, mailman, and chauffeur for Colonial Williamsburg. It was a three-in-one job [laughs]. But Colonial Williamsburg had housing, in Williamsburg, on East Scotland Street, which no longer exists, because it’s a driveway now. And I grew up at 319 East Scotland Street; I was born there, and Dr. Blaton delivered me in 1941, October the 26th. So, growing up in White City, as they called it, was a treat for me because I was told that I was the only girl on that street; everyone else on that
housing development had boys. The first house was the Willis home, then there was the Howell house, and then, Chef McWilliams lived next door to the Howells. He was the chef at the Williamsburg Lodge. And then there was Helen Whiting; her husband was a chef at King’s Arms Tavern, then my dad, who was the grocery man, chauffeur, mailman, and next door to him was Captain Spades, who was a captain at the Lodge dining room. Across the street was Mr. Arthur Bui, and he was Mr. Charlie’s- the president of Colonial Williamsburg- chauffeur. And Mr. Charlie had a dog named Ganzer. I have to always talk about this bulldog because, as a kid, I always played with this bulldog; loved him. And all the houses there were white. So that’s how it got the name White City. So growing up in White City was a intrigue for me because I would walk down the street from where I lived, there was a man by the name of Mr. Springs, and he worked for brick masonry. And I was always intrigued by the horses, the mules, that would be put in this sad thing around to make the, the bricks. And, when he would finish at 12 o’ clock, because Colonial Williamsburg had a whistle that would go off at 12 to let everybody know that it was time for lunch, he would leave there and I would wait for him at the corner, and he would pick- he was, Mr. Springs, I found out after I got to be an adult, was 6’6- and I can remember him picking me up and throwing me in the air, and he would catch me, and he was my giant. And then he would give me a quarter, and I would go to the Toby Scott store, and I would put my dirty hands in the cookie jar and buy me a quarter’s worth of cookies. Now you have to wash your hands for everything. Nobody got sick [laughs]. No one’s dead. But now we are so clean. And I used to do that everyday, about 12 o’ clock, waiting for Mr. Springs. So I grew up in White City, which was an all-black community, and next to White City was Franklin Street, which was another all-black community. And there was a lady named Ms. White. She had a boarding house, and what we call today a bed and breakfast. And the chauffeurs who could not stay at the Williamsburg Inn at the time, which I learned as a adult, stayed with her. And I can remember as a kid, when we would go down the street, all these Cadillacs would be parked- jet black Cadillacs- would be parked in front of her place. And I used to think it was a funeral always going on there. And then come to find out it was the chauffeurs that could not live at the Franklin House, because it was segregated. Franklin Street also offered Mount Ararat Church and Union Baptist Church. Union Baptist Church is where my mom put me in kindergarten, and I went there until I went to school. And then, there was also Cook’s Beer Garden, that sat in the cul-de-sac of Franklin Street, which is now where the stables are. And that was where the people used to go and party, black people, used to go and party. They had music, and they drank beer, and they sold cookies too. So, I can remember going there with my brother, because I guess the second child is always aggressive, and I was the second child, and we went in to get some cookies from him. And this man told me he was gonna steal my brother. And I killed that man. I beat him to death with my balloon. And he fell all in the floor, dead. And I ran home with my brother to let my mother know that I had killed this man. And now that I’m an adult [laughing], I know he made a fool out of me, you know. But, uh, I can remember how panicked I was, because he was gonna steal him, he should’ve stole him though [laughs].

AA: Roughly, what decade was this time?

CH: I was about five or six, so that was what, 1945?

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AA: 1945?

CH: Mhm.

AA: How was growing up under segregation? Did you feel the effects very…was it very…very visible?

CH: You, you know, we all would like to think it was visible, it was harsh, but I’m sure, through the eyes of a child, it wasn’t. Because I was with my family, I was with my friends, and we played, and if you really look at it, Williamsburg blacks were economically stable. And when economics work for you, you really don’t care about the outside community, because you’re happy within that community. And that’s what so many people don’t seem to get. Because you could leave out of Williamsburg and go to Toano, where they have the sharecropping going on, and find a total different feeling and atmosphere. And education was a thing after, uh, I guess after the Civil War because blacks were very into getting educated. So there was a school in Williamsburg, the James City Country Training School, which sat right in front of Mount Ararat Church, where that church is now. And then, when the Rockefellers wanted that property, they built Bruton Heights in 1939…Fort-thirty-nine, they built that school. And Bruton Heights was a legendary school simply because it offered select courses, like you could choose which classes you wanted to take. It was one of the first in Virginia to do that. So as a student, at Bruton Heights, I grew up feeling that I was much better than white people because over at Matthew Whaley they didn’t offer that. So we felt we were much better than Matthew Whaley. And, uh, we had a new school, and it was beautiful. We had a lab, a physics lab, then we had a biology lab, and we had French— and I learned later, that she shouldn’t have been teaching French, but [laughs]— as kids, did it matter? No. Because all knew how to say [French phrase] and oui oui, you know, it really didn’t matter. I think, it was happy times. I really didn’t realize how segregated, or how segregation worked, until I was working 1966. I learned then, because I was the first black that worked at the Colonial Williamsburg Accounting Office. I was actually the second black, because Marion Ashby was the first one that they hired, because she did not stay. Why she left, I don’t know, but I came in right behind her. And it took me, what, two, three years, and I was supervisor of all Colonial Williamsburg’s cashiers. And there were no black cashiers at that time, just me. And I ended up hiring some other black cashiers, which integrated the system. And sometimes, I think about it; I used to have red hair, you know. And I am light-skinned, and [chuckles] sometimes I say they just hired me because I blended in. But, I don’t know, because I, anything that I tried to do or wanted to do, I got full support. And then, after that, I ended up learning to do the night audit, over the telephone. And I became supervisor of the night audit after that. So I moved through— and we’re talking ’66, when I went in there. And that was not even the beginning of the big marches and all that kind of stuff. But in ’61, I can remember, Lafayette Jones, my classmate, he told us that we were gonna go up to Woolworth and demonstrate, because they have a counter, they didn’t let black people sit at the counter. And so we all went up to the school, all up to the shopping center, to march. And the principal, DJ Monehue met us up there and told us that if we demonstrated in front of this school, this store, that we were not representing Bruton Heights. So we went back to school and didn’t demonstrate,
but, in the next couple of days, Colonial Williamsburg and others, I’m sure, told them they had to either integrate or shut down, and they just…Integration in Williamsburg was easy and simple, and I think I say that simply because it was about economics in Williamsburg. They did not want anybody to hurt that money coming in here, and they wanted people to see, I believe, that Colonial Williamsburg was a equal opportunity company. And my view of Colonial Williamsburg is that it was. Because in nineteen, uh, they opened up in 1940; Chef Crawford was the headman in Williamsburg Inn and he was black. He was the head chef. Mack Williams was the head chef-

AA: This is in the 1940’s?

CH: Yes, up until the 50s, late 60’s, when they left. Mack Williams was the head chef at Williamsburg Lodge. The two lodges: these were five-star, fine-dining hotels. Black people were in key positions in Colonial Williamsburg, except that there were pockets of places that they were not. But as soon as there was a ruffle or anything, they put people in; they had Mr. Deewitt in the Personnel office, whom was black. Then Dennis Gardner went into the Personnel office. They had managers…let’s see…Hubert Alexander came in as a manager. Harvey Carrol came in as a manager. Al Johnson came in as a manager. So the opportunity was there. I did not work in those positions with them, so I don’t know if it was difficult for them to manage and do what they wanted. But working under Warfield Wen in the Accounting office, I never had those difficulties. I think about some of the things we used to do that were crazy before I start having any blacks on my staff. I remember one time, we decided Kendra Hutton, Winnie Gettings, we decided that we were gonna take the bicycle, ‘cause we used to rent bicycles, and we rode out to Jamestown with two bottles of wine [laughs]. And then when we got back, Mr. Wen- it was a new cashier, holding down the fort until we got back- and Mr. Wen was a man that stuttered all the time. But this particular time, he did not stutter. It was like, he chewed our butts out for leaving the new girl on the desk. But we had fun with it. So it was, I was comfortable working with him, because I didn’t think he hired me because I was black, but he hired me because of what I can do. And I always remember him telling me when he made me supervisor: he said “Edith, do not hire family, and do not hire friends.” And he said it’s because it’s difficult to supervise them because you know too much about them. And you will have too much empathy. So I never hired any of my family or friends. And I can remember once [laughs], I was the manager of the George Washington Inn, Assistant Manager, and my daughter went in there- I went to Europe- and she went in and started working. And the man hired her, ‘cause her last name was [different from Cookie’s]; she was married. And when I got ready to come back from Europe, she went to him and bowled out of here, and told him she had to quit. And he asked her why. She said “’Cause my mother will be here next week.” [Laughs] “And she gonna fire me if she know I’m up in here.” I was not gonna go through that, so she left. But basically, I felt that Colonial Williamsburg, when I went back to Williamsburg in 1984, I felt they were more segregated then, that they were in the 50’s and 60’s. 1967, as a Night Auditor, I always remember Robin Deckter, he came to me and he was upset about the payscale, and he said “We should form a union. If we had a union, we would be making big money.” I said-

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AA: [Indicating with hands a need to adjust Cookie’s lapel microphone] Actually, can we adjust your microphone…

CH: (Jokingly) Oh, you can touch me.

AA: I’m just afraid that it might not catch all sounds. [Adjusts microphone] I think that’s good. Thank you. Ah yes, union.

CH: [Laughs]. But anyhow, 1967, he came to me and said “Let’s form a union.” I said “Okay.” And then we talked about it, and then we met- had a year’s worth of meetings with a union rep, named Howard Mathison, from Memphis, Tennessee. And we organized the union, secretly, for one whole year. We signed up over a thousand people for the union. My mother worked at Colonial Williamsburg’s laundry; she was the worst person of all the people I had to sign up, because she felt that I was crazy, wanting to hurt Colonial Williamsburg. And, but we went on with it. We organized, and we had our elections in January, ’67 I think it was. We lost the election, because Colonial Williamsburg came in for Thanksgiving and gave everybody a two weeks’ free paycheck with no taxes, just flat rate what they make. And the December paycheck was the same way. So instead of getting two paychecks in November, they got three. Two paychecks in December; they got three. So who was gonna vote to have a union and cut those goodies off? So we lost the election. And it was well-planned, because Colonial Williamsburg knew that their staffing was short in January, and they set the election up for January, and it was less people there, and more of their people they knew that would vote for them. The engineers for Colonial Williamsburg were very strong, in that, but we lost. And one year to the day, that they, we lost, they came back and fired Edith Heard [laughs].

AA: I’m sorry to hear that.

CH: They called me up to the office, and they said it was a reduction in staff. And I guess the saddest part about that was, they were top executives. Now that I look back on that, they were like little kids. They really didn’t know what to do with me. So anyhow, they sent me home packing with six months of severance pay. And I went home, and there, I didn’t know what to do. So after the six months I sat home and spent my money, after the six months was over, I decided to sue Colonial Williamsburg. And I won, and I was able to educate my kids, because I was a single parent after ten years of marriage. My husband was disgusted too because I decided to unionize, ‘cause he was a chef. So anyhow, I sued them; won; and I did not have a lawyer. I did this all on my own with EEOC. Had I a lawyer, I woulda gotten lots of money! But I didn’t but it was ok. And, uh, I educated my kids with that. And then I found a job working for Phil Richardson, at the Howard Johnson’s, which is on Richmond Road. So I worked there with him, that’s where I met my German girlfriend Josephine T. Han, and that’s how I got to Germany. Josephine did not speak very good English, but she was working ‘cause her husband had left her with two kids. And she and I became good friends, ‘cause she would come in at six and we would chat, and she told me about her personal problems. But anyhow, we chatted. And then Don Parnes purchased the Holiday Inn. He’s on our city council now. That’s his son on the city council. He fired Josephine ‘cause he said she didn’t speak very good English. And she was
stuck between a rock and a hard place, ‘cause she lived in a rented apartment, and she didn’t know what she was gonna do, with two kids. So I said, “Well, I’ll fix him for you. I’m gonna quit the night audit. She said, “Quit? You have six kids to take care of.” I said “Who cares?” So I quit my job that night. And she cried and was mad at me because I had quit my job for her. I said, “I’ll get you a job in the morning.” So that morning, I called Captain Green over at the Inn and told him about Josephine, ‘cause I still had pull at the Inn, and he hired her that very same day, and she was happy. She had a job, and then I had a job as a Night Auditor the same day too; it was no problem finding a job as a auditor; who wants to work eleven to seven? Nobody. So we all went back to work, and we became very close. We looked out for each other all the time. But she always called me the crazy lady [laughs]. I didn’t even know her, but I quit my job for her. So we had to each him a lesson. And I knew he could not find an auditor. I knew it.

AA: Did you go back to work at the same place that you quit from, when you got another job?

CH: Oh no, that’s when I went to the George Washington-

AA: So this was punishment for this guy.

CH: [Laughs] Yes, punishment.

AA: So, when you were organizing the union, why did you feel that it had to be a secret? Did you know, did you get a premonition that Colonial Williamsburg would not approve?

CH: Of course, oh we all knew that.

AA: It was very explicit?

CH: That was explicit.

Michaela Wright: And Virginia is a right-to-work state.

CH: That’s correct. We knew that, and the people that got involved; I always will remember, they were a little afraid too. And it wasn’t until we had over 500 signatures that they were willing to step out.

AA: Was it a part of Colonial Williamsburg’s written policy, that there can’t be a union?

CH: No. No.

AA: They just made it explicit through words and actions?

CH: Action. More action than anything else, more action that anything else.

AA: And are you fairly certain that’s the reason you were let go?

CH: Oh I know. They didn’t fire me because I was black. No, no, but that’s what I said they fired me for.

AA: I see.

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CH: When I filed my charge with EEOC, I told them they fired me because I was black, but that was a lie. They didn’t- I, maybe I’m fooling myself, but, I never believed that it was because I was black. They fired me because of that union. And then I, after I sued them, that was even worse, you know, so, but it was ok, with me.

AA: Hey, everything turned out ok.

CH: I was young, dumb, and wild [laughs]. You know, who cares, you know, [indicates toward Michaela] just like your sister (referring to Michaela’s earlier description of her sister.) So anyhow, I worked at the George Washington for a Dutchman, Bo Ladaviere; I just found him the other day on Facebook. And uh, I enjoyed working there. And then he left and went to Atlanta. And then I told my girlfriend and said, “You know what, I’m gonna find me a boyfriend.” So I was seeking a boyfriend; found this tall, good-looking black guy. And he was just what the doctor ordered, I thought. But then he drank, he ran women, and he liked to gamble. I said, “Well he’s just like my kids’ father. What do I wanna do with him?” So I dropped him. And I said to her- Olivia- I said, “I think Imma go to college.” She said “What?” I said, “Yeah, I think that’s what I’m gonna do.” So I applied at Chris- at William and Mary. They told me that I was too old and that I needed to go to a junior college. I said “I’m not going to no junior college.” So I went on down to CNU; and they were happy to have me. They enrolled me. I had two college courses and two remedial courses. But it didn’t matter. And I graduated from CNU in ’89. I did my student teaching in Guadalajara, Mexico.

AA: And you majored in history?

CH: Yes. I wanted to be a football coach [laughs]. Because I got mad at the coach over a football game. But after Calculus II, I decided that they didn’t want me there, so I had to go find something different. So I majored in history, and I loved it. And then, it got difficult doing night audit and working. So, I waited- a lawyer friend of mine told me to wait tables. I said I’d never waited tables before! He said you’ll make enough money you won’t have to worry about working all week and you’ll have your classes. So- he said “But pick a good house. That’s to be important.” So I go back to Colonial Williamsburg, 1985, and apply for a job, as a waitress. And I put on my application, ‘cause they ask if you ever worked for them before, and I said “yes”. And they wanted to know why I left, and I said “reduction in staff.” That’s what was on my termination papers. So they hired me. However, the union had reorganized, and it was in. They had won the election, and it was a union company. One year later, after I had been working there, one of the old managers came by, and he saw me. And quote, this is what he said to me, “How in the hell did you get back up in here?” I said “They hired me” [laughs]. And he was so disgusted, that I was there. But anyhow, they, Andrew Stood, who was involved in the union then, tried to convince me to come back with the union. But I had done my student teaching in Guadalajara, Mexico and I was determined that I was gonna teach school, because I was sick of the Mexicans laughing at the American students being dumb. So I was gonna make all American students smart. They kept picking at me and picking at me, and I ended up back in the union. I never got in the classroom. And they didn’t give me a refund on my certification money either [laughs]. That was $75 I blew.

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AA: That’s a lot of money.

CH: Anyhow, we started organizing, re-organizing under the leadership of Minor Christian. And Minor was determined that he was gonna bring Colonial Williamsburg down, and he was gonna make them pay people. So we did an extensive ground root of trying to sign up everybody, and we started with getting shop stewards, and giving everybody a mission, something to do, and they were all responsible for their department, and not so spread as it was before. So we worked in small groups; everybody had a hotel, and we had a head person in each hotel, and they had maybe ten or twelve people working under them. And I think that’s why we were successful. December 31, 1989. Longsworth was having his Christmas party at the Williamsburg Lodge. And we were marching in front of the building.

AA: And Longsworth is…?

CH: The president of Colonial Williamsburg. Mr. Longsworth the president, he had his Christmas party. He had the nerve to come out from his Christmas party- this is how cocky Colonial Williamsburg was- and he just laughing; he was like “You are a freak. You’re gonna hurt us? You can’t hurt us.” He said “I hope you don’t get too cold,” because it was a little chilly that night [chuckles], and he thought we were a joke. So, January 1, we organized the big march, which took place down Duke of Gloucester Street. And we met in front of Matthew Whaley School. But prior to that, we were going to do a demonstration in front the Wren Building, at that little deli thing. And we went to the city to get permission to do it. And, uh, I can’t think of his name now; he was the city manager. He’s still the city manager. He must have alerted the state police and all those people. And they had their little dogs waiting, and the state troopers waiting for us, but we didn’t show up. We had an office on Jamestown Road, right there by the College, where the church now, where they put that extension. That’s where our office was. And we just walked down the street, a lot of us, and we just looked at them and laughed, because they- I guess they would like probably turn the dogs on us, because they had already said that this was a black union, and which it wasn’t. And I think, they felt it was a black union because Minor Christian was black, and I was black. But the engineers were all white except two, because they didn’t give those jobs to black people. Because the average engineer at that time was making 14 dollars an hour. So, I think that’s what they, why they tried to label us as a black union.

AA: Do you remember roughly the percentages of union members who were black or white or another race?

CH: I would say, that there was probably 60 percent black, because the employment was predominantly black. You could almost count the white people that worked for Colonial Williamsburg in the restaurant department. Now like you’re front desk, that was predominantly white. Maybe one or two blacks, but predominantly white. Your accounting office was predominantly white, except for when I was in it. And some of the- I hired about five different black people, but basically they’re predominantly white. So I always said the key jobs with the money were predominantly white.

AA: And this Union was called the Food and Beverage Workers’ Union?
CH: Mhm.

AA: So, yeah, this protest sounds like a life-changing experience. Could you like walk me through it? You tried to get permission, but they blocked you? You couldn’t get permission?

CH: To do what?

AA: To march?

CH: Well no one tried to block us from walking in Duke of Gloucester Street, because it had never been done. What’s the city manager’s name? He’s still there. Crackpot. He had just come up there from Florida too, and started as our city manager. But anyhow, they (Colonial Williamsburg) said we couldn’t walk, we couldn’t march. It would be a disruption. They went before the city council. And because CW, Colonial Williamsburg, said they owned the street, and then there was a dispute between the city council and CW, who owned the street. And that’s when it was verified that the city owned the Duke of Gloucester Street, it was a public street. So they couldn’t stop that. And then, uh, when we planned it, they also had people that came in here from DC to march with us, so we had a little over a thousand people here, carrying signs and screaming, and the guests were upset that Colonial Williamsburg would be working people for nothing, for as much as they charge for a ticket to come see it. So we got a lot of guest support; we got a lot of loose people that were interested in what we were doing. And we worked the press. We really did work the press. And Colonial Williams- Longsworth realized then that we were not to be played with and so he called everybody back to the table right away to settle this debate. And then, within six months, he was retiring, because I thought the Board had pushed him out because he could not reason with us. But we didn’t get a big raise, but we made ourselves known, which was the most important part. And we got the respect of the city and a lot of people. But you would be surprised though, at the black people that had worked for Colonial Williamsburg, and the poor whites, that were upset because we were fighting Colonial Williamsburg. That- it was ingrained in ‘em. So that’s why we used to call it, we used say that the people that worked for Colonial Williamsburg had a plantation mentality. And they had that; they did not understand that Colonial Williamsburg could not function without them. And they were under the belief that they couldn’t function without Colonial Williamsburg, but they could. They could.

AA: So there, uh, the march itself was, you couldn’t go very far, correct, because the police and the dogs were blocking it?

CH: No, the dogs and the police weren’t here for the march.

AA: They weren’t here for the march?

CH: Uh-uh (signaling no). There were not here for the march. That was another demonstration we were gonna do.

AA: I see.
CH: We were gonna do a sit-down in the street, and we canceled that because they brought the dogs and…

AA: Right before you were about to, you saw the dogs, and…

CH: Yes, yes, yes.

AA: And the march on DOG Street..

CH: Was in May.

AA: May?

CH: Mhm.

AA: And that was not blocked?

CH: That was not blocked. Nobody was out there but CW Vice President looking, the Williamsburg City Council in shock, because we were doing this to Colonial Williamsburg.

AA: That’s the one that about a thousand people showed up to, right?

CH: Mhm.

AA: Great.

CH: And we walked from the Capitol, all the way to the Wren building.

AA: That was the final march of the…

CH: That was the last one. Colonial Williamsburg say you ain’t gonna do that again to me!

AA: Could you tell me a little bit more about what else you did in the union? Does it still exist?

CH: Yes it still exists. I, um, I hate to say this, but I feel that the union would have stayed strong, but they gave, um, they took Colonial Williamsburg from Minor Christian, and gave it to this Spanish guy that runs it now...[struggles to remember] John Boardman. They gave it to John Boardman. And John Boardman came to Williamsburg, I ran the union from ‘ninety-one up until ‘ninety…

AA: Seven? (Known from prior research)

CH: Seven, yeah. By myself. Did the contracts, everything. And my- and people that worked for me, and people that worked at Colonial Williamsburg knew the two golden rules of Edith Heard: Come to work, be on time, and don’t abuse sick leave. If you do those three things, and you get fired, don’t call me. So I never had a problem with that. Some people didn’t like my idea of that, but that was me. So John Boardman, when they took the union from Minor Christian, and gave it to him, I felt, that they wanted the white boy to have this big, five-star, fine dining hotel and restaurant, because we had over a thousand people in the union. And they took it from the black boy. ‘Cause he had raised so much hell, made so much notoriety for himself. That’s how I felt.

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And, um, John Boardman comes in, right around contract time, and he decides that they’re gonna be walking the streets, yelling, 6 o’clock in the morning, disturbing the guests, and saying ugly things through this microphone. And when we got back- went to negotiations, he cursed so bad at the table, and CW’s lawyer- we had became friends; we had a working relationship- and…

AA: And the year was around?

CH: ‘Ninety- ‘ninety-eight?

AA: Mhm.

CH: And he was so ugly to them, that when we got back to the office, I told John Boardman that “You know, it’s one thing to disagree, but it’s another thing to be downright nasty.” I SAID Colonial Williamsburg and this union has a working relationship, a good one, and I started telling him about the things that we had done, together. And you know, how we have saved people’s jobs, and what I asked them to do, they pretty much did. Because I had one worker, got called for stealing. They couldn’t really prove it but they knew it had happened. And I told her, you know the only we’re gonna have to do, we’re gonna have to go to Sue Green, you’re gonna have to fall down on your knees [chuckles] and pray and tell her to give you your job back, and you didn’t mean it. She didn’t have to do all that, but we went to see Mrs. Green, and Mrs. Green, who was the Vice President then, put her back to work, provided she would go through a second training, which she did. And she ended up retiring from the company a good worker. So, Barkley, was Colonial Williamsburg’s lawyer. He was- John Boardman was so nasty. So anyhow, he told me, when I told him that we did not relate to each other that way, and he told me that if I didn’t like the way he talked to Colonial Williamsburg, that I could quit. And I said to him, “I would be a damn fool to quit!” I said “I can’t draw my unemployment if I quit! So you’re gonna have to fire me.” So he did. And I promised him that he would never ever be able to organize another union in Williamsburg, and he hasn’t been. Because every time one has come here, they ask for me. And I will never let him come back in this town. Because of the way he treated the people.

AA: John Boardman?

CH: Yeah. Because he was ugly, he was rude, he was nasty, and I said “We don’t abide around the guests like that. 6 o’clock in the morning, you standing around somebody’s room yelling”? No way! Because it’s not them. So he didn’t like the way I did things, so he fired me. I continuously get fired [laughs].

AA: They’re the ones left out in the cold in the end.

CH: So anyhow, they came into Williamsburg trying to organize the housekeepers. And as soon as they sat down to talk to the housekeepers at William and Mary, the housekeepers asked them did they know Edith Heard. And they (the union) said “Yes.” And they (housekeepers) said “Well, we want her here at this meeting.” And they just never came back. Because they knew I wasn’t gonna let them do that to them. It’s one thing to have a dispute and another thing to wanna better your lives. But you have to respect people too. And you gotta be able to think out the box. Because big business don’t wanna lose no money, you wanna gain some money, so we
have to meet ‘em in the middle. It’s not that it’s all about you, I take everything. And they take every-thing. No, you have to meet ‘em in the middle. And most unions now, and I think that’s what has happened to the unions, they became bigger than corporations. And not really representing the people. And that’s why they have lost. That’s exactly why they have lost.

AA: Yeah. In 1994, the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation raised some controversy because they decided to recreate a slave auction. Do you remember any of that event and what kind of reaction it prompted?

CH: Oh Lord, I was sitting on the steps of the King’s Arms Tavern with my dashiki on and my head back, looking very Africanic. I was ready to fight; everybody in Williamsburg was ready to fight. And the day, it had been all on the news- CBS News, NBC- Colonial Williamsburg was gonna sell some slaves. Sell slaves? They lost their minds! So the day of the slave- they tried to clean it up. But the more they tried to clean it up with the news people, saying it wasn’t a sale, it was a transfer of slaves to another plantation, because the master had died, they tried to clean it up. So anyhow, when they had the slave auction, right there by King’s Arms Tavern, it had to be 2,000 or better black people here [laughs], I’m serious. I’ve never seen so many-

AA: Do you know if anybody came from outside Williamsburg?

CH: Outside Williamsburg, outside Virginia too. Buses was pulling in here. People were angry. And they ended up doing a nice auction. And I, I think that’s kind of what happened to Rex Ellis, too. I think that bothered him. But he learned that he didn’t have any say-so, not really. You know, they give you the title but you have no real say-so.

AA: Was he Vice President at that time?

CH: No, he was just the Director of the African America group (program). So I think he learned then that CW is the ruler because when he left, and came- they were trying to court him, to get him to come back- he came to me and told me what they were trying to do. And I said, “Let me tell you this: get as much money as you can out of them, expect to work four years, and YOU leave, not have them leave, relieve you. You leave.” He said “Don’t work for four.” I said, “You do five, at least you’ll get invested.” I said ‘But, other than that, don’t go beyond that. Don’t give them the opportunity to push you out again.” And he did that. So he’s back at the, he did his little tenure as Vice President, and he took off. So never do that again. So, but, he, it’s like- were you at the Lemon Project thing when Steven was talking about all his dreams and what he expect to do with Colonial Williamsburg? And I told him at the Lemon Project thing that I was excited that he wanted to be excited about doing things for Colonial Williamsburg on the Africana history side. But how much of that is gonna be a reality for you? How much of that do you think Colonial Williamsburg is gonna allow you to do? And he said to me, they were gonna allow him to do whatever he wanted to do. And I said, “Really?” He said yes, because they had closed the Peyton Randolph house down, and allowed him to retrain his black history storytellers. And he only asked for two weeks and they gave him a whole month.

AA: And this is Steven…? Is he the Director of the African American Program?
Ch: Mhm, mhm. [In response to Michaela’s description] Big guy, mhm. So anyhow, he said, so I told him, I said, “Just remember, they have a good way of baiting you in. And they’ll cut your legs from under you.” I said “But, since you are in place, maybe you’ll give all of us a tour of the Peyton Randolph house.” [Laughs] So I locked him right in that. So he offered everybody at the session a tour, and gave out his extension number for us to call. So I’m hoping that they will set it up, one in the summer, and one in the fall. And everybody- sending emails out so everybody can sign up, so he can do two tours, instead of trying to do individual tours.

AA: At the 1994 thing, and the reaction to the recreation, and like you said, a lot of people coming is from other places, was there an organized protest or demonstration against it, or was it like, individual…?

CH: There was somewhat, from my end of it, in Williamsburg, there was not an organization that took a stand. It was just people. Angry black people that came. And I think most of the colleges and things had pushed their students and all to come. There were thousands of people here. Colonial Williamsburg made money in their restaurants ‘cause they had to eat [laughs]. Excuse me. Think about it! I don’t know if that was their alternative for making money that year, but they had to, because everybody had to eat somewhere. And I always look at Colonial Williamsburg, I guess, ‘cause I worked in the management with ‘em, they are about money. They do not care about black, green, orange- I mean, I take that back. They don’t care about brown, red, or black. Everything is green, with a George Washington or a Bill Franklin on it. That’s how they think. And that’s how we got duped with Busch Gardens. And I know monopoly is not good, but Colonial Williamsburg had a great monopoly. And Homer Sign got greedy, and sold that 970 acres to Oliver Busch, who courted him well, because he even pulled his yacht into the Yorktown Basin, and had cocktail parties for everybody, 6,000 people. The Foundation went one week, the restaurant people went one week, we had red caviar, black caviar; we had everything, all the beer, whiskey, wine you wanna drink, food, everywhere. They got property to stay at the Williamsburg Inn and Lodge; as soon as he acquired that 900 acres of property, he never spent another night in Colonial Williamsburg’s hotels. He bought a [car] and parked it down where the brewery is.

AA: That’s great. Yeah, you were speaking about the Lemon Project earlier. Can you tell me a little bit more about your personal relationship with that project? Like your contributions?

CH: I think it was the first Lemon Project that they had. I spoke. And the president then asked me why kids from Bruton Heights didn’t wanna go to William and Mary. Why we didn’t think about William and Mary when we finished. And I told him, jokingly, that “Who would wanna go to William and Mary?” You’re talking 1960’s. You hadn’t won no football games. You couldn’t play basketball. You didn’t have a track team, and your choir couldn’t sing. So why would we wanna go to William and Mary? ‘Cause we could do all those things. And everybody laughed. I said you were giving out free tickets to get people to even come to a game. So why would we wanna come there? I said we were looking, and I guess it’s because we were trained as kids, to look at Tennessee State because that’s where Wilma Rudolph came from, she ran track. We looked at Howard because that was the great dental school and medical school. We looked at

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Hamptons University because they had one hellacious choir. You’re talking about a choir with 500 people in it singing, and black people like to sing and dance, so why wouldn’t we? And there was nothing to attract us to William and Mary.

AA: So, other that the Lemon Project, have you been involved in any other organization that focuses on African American rights, memories? NAACP, All Together, anything like that?

CH: I joined NAACP but I ended up finding out NAACP to be just one big social club. And they do not do anything for black issues, in this town. And we still have some issues in this town, with the Williamsburg-James City County schools, because I’m working on some things there, with the disciplinary action of black kids as opposed to white kids. And we had a white teacher at William and Mary- I mean, Lois Hornsby school, that told the class- black and white kids- that white kids were whiter than black kids, and the NAACP and nobody else has done anything about it. So, I’ve been working with Reverend Davis and Reverend Whitehead and others-

AA: Yea, I met Reverend Davis at a NAACP meeting.

CH: Right. So, I don’t deal with the NAACP at all, because they are nothing but a big social club. I’m going to the banquet. They’re giving me a ticket. I said, “Why do you want me to come?” I haven’t been in twenty-some years, I think. Even longer than that, probably. But I’m also involved in HIV. I was on the planning council for HIV for 16 years. And believe it or not, Christine Cole just called me the day before yesterday, inviting me to lunch Friday, because the planning council has fallen down and she wants me to come over there, to get back on the planning council. I told her I don’t think I can get back on the planning council because it might ruin my reputation [laughs]. I felt with a good rep, now she wants me to come back and help her rebuild it. But I had never worked with HIV before, and I’d only known two gay people in my life, for Williamsburg, I’m sure there were more, but only two known gay people, but working with HIV was very interesting for me, and it was the first time in my life that I had seen- here I’m 6--some years old, 63 I think- I’d never seen a transgender; I’d never seen a man dress like a woman and look like a woman before. So I was in Norfolk going “Ahh! Wow.” And I always gasp because that was stuff I’d never seen. I was on the board for the child thing on Old Town Road, Areva Bolden’s Kindergarten. And I was president of the Bruton Heights Alumni Association. But being the president of that, it got in the way of my Saturday conferences and things like that, because I enjoy the history stuff more. And I’m always involved in something. And I campaigned for Marty Mason, Terry McAuliffe, Jim Eisenhower, so I get political, too.

AA: Oh, and that young guy, Obama?

CH: Obama, yeah, Obama. Yeah I campaigned for my son. Yeah that’s my son.

AA: And did you campaign in Williamsburg?


AA: Did you specially, make flyer- what exactly did you do?
CH: I knocked on doors, and I registered people to vote. And I, I guess the reason a lot of people know me is because I do absentee ballots for seniors that I know don’t wanna go out to vote. So I drive my car to their homes and register them. And if they need help with the vote, I help them with it. And sometimes I try to convince them to go to the polls, and let them come to the car, so that’s what I do during election time, period. And one time there, I had, I guess around 30-some people, and I also campaigned for a Republican. My best friend, Paul Joust. He lost the election though.

AA: And with Obama, it was both the first and the second presidential election cycles?

CH: Yes, yes.

AA: Ok. What do you think about the Black Lives Matter movement, which is relatively new? Have you, I mean, we’ve attended events together, but do you contribute to them in more behind the scenes level?

CH: I had not. And I guess, one reason I hadn’t was because, that’s my break time [laughs]. But I met with him, Travis, and I told Travis, if he’s really gonna kick this thing off, he’s gonna have to kiss up to some of these local ministers. And he hasn’t really done that yet. Because, you might not wanna admit it, but all of them have their egos off the roof. And all ministers think that they’re important. And they’re not. And yet they hold a group of people that you need, so you have to kiss up to them, so you will get the platform that you need. And he’s gonna have to do that. That’s the only thing that I see. But I will stick with him. I went to the thing (earlier Black Lives Matter event). I will work with him some more. But he’s gonna have to kiss up to them. It’s hard, but he’s gonna have to do it. Because the first thing the community feels is that, “Who is this stranger coming in here telling us about our town? What do you think? He don’t even live here? So he has to kiss up to some of them.

AA: From you experiences as a Williamsburg resident, is there a discrepancy that you feel between William and Mary students who come into the community and you know, try to start a movement, try to start an organization, anything like that?

CH: I don’t think so.

AA: So the College is pretty intricately related to the town?

CH: Yeah. Now before, I think the thing is that Colonial Williamsburg made the College feel like they were nothing, and that they were the king of the roost. And it wasn’t until they had the fight over the Wren building, that William and Mary said like, “Hey, we’re important too!” And then they had been putting forth an effort to show the city that they are important, because they are.

AA: Earlier, last time we met, you told me a story about, you had, you visited the Deep South, with your family…?

CH: [Laughing] The first time I went to Alabama?
AA: Yeah, can you tell that story again please?

CH: Oh that was, that was, that was really a trip. Let’s see here… See it was ’62, ’63, ’64, 1966, ’67 I think. When George Wallace had stood in the college door. And I had never met my husband’s family, ‘cause he never took me home. He came from Fairhope, Alabama. Colonial Williamsburg had stolen him and his cousin from the Grand Hotel, which was George Wallace’s like, Williamsburg Inn. And I wanted to see Alabama. And, so I told my mom I was going to Alabama. I made good money, my husband made good money. So I went to, we flew Eastern Airlines, from Richmond to Fair Hope, Alabama. And when we got to Alabama, with my kids, dressed up, looking like the Kennedy kids, ‘cause you know, everybody’s was trying to dress like John-John and Caroline, so all my kids were looking like that too. [Laughs] And we landed. My sister-n-law, her boyfriend, came to airport to pick us up. You have to remember now, I’m from Williamsburg. This old car, and when decided to leave the car was smoking like no tomorrow. Looking out the back window and I’m like, “Oh my God, everybody knows we’re smokin’! [Laughs]. But anyhow, we ended up to where, my mother-in-law lived, and there was cornfield in front of us, behind us, and on both sides. And it was like “Whoa, people live like this?” They didn’t have running water, nor did they have a bathroom. We had to go outside. And I remember getting upset, because my little boy got bit by these ants, with his little John-John white pants on [laughs]. And they lived in what a Williamsburg person like me would call a shanty, instead of a home, because the door never closed, the door was always open, and when it was time to go to bed, they would shut the door. They were very, very poor. And they would get up every morning, 4 o’clock every morning and go to the potato fields. And my kids and I, we got left at the house because we didn’t know about picking no potatoes. We’ go to ANP and get potatoes. So I used to walk from her house down to the corner, which is about a mile, and that is where they got water, and they used to get their water and put it in the big, tall milk cans, that they used to put milk in, and bring it home, because that was their only means of having water. And I said, I had been there a week and done absolutely nothing. And I said, I was so disgusted I was about to go to the potato field. And then I, the lazy girl changed her mind [laughs]. She didn’t go to the potato field. But one night, I was asleep, and I had hit the radio incorrectly, and it came on. The alarm came on and the radio came on. And I could hear these people talking. And my heart began to race, because I felt the KI Klux Klan was in her yard and were coming to get me and my kids. And the more I listened, I could hear this radio just talking, I can’t tell you what they were talking about, but it was white people talking. And I said, “They’re coming to get me and they gonna kill me down here in Alabama. What is my mom gonna do?” You know, you start having this- And then I realized it was the radio. I probably broke out in a sweat and everything; I was scared to death. So I walked, the next day, I walked to a store, and a black man was the manager of this store. And he said, “Hey, who are you?” And I told him, I said that I’m Jackie Heard’s wife. And he said, “Does Anna Lee know you’re here?” I said “No.” He said, “I’ll tell you what, I’ll tell her you’re here.” So that day, about 4 o’clock, Anna Lee pulls up in the yard, dust flying, because it was a dirt road, and she said, “Pack your bags! You’re going home with me, you ain’t stayin’ down here!” And I packed my bags and I went to live with her. And she had running water, she had a bathroom, they had a bathtub [laughs], and all the things that I was used to.
AA: So from your various experiences spent outside of Williamsburg, you know, Alabama, DC, do you think Williamsburg is distinctly different in terms of the living conditions of African Americans, or race relations, from other parts of the country?

CH: Williamsburg is totally different. And one of the reasons Williamsburg was totally different is because of economics. Everybody that wanted a job had a job. And it might not have been the highest wages that were paid to them, but when you really look back at this, a lot of people say I shouldn’t say this, but Colonial Williamsburg allowed people to pillage from them. You know, they would take food, they would take linens and laundry, so when people can live off of you, that meant that paycheck went totally to the luxury. So that’s why you never found slums in Williamsburg, that’s why you never found homeless people. Because everybody who wanted to work, worked. And a caddie, I can remember my brother used to caddie on a golf course; he would make a hundred and some dollars in one day, just caddying. And the average waiter—that’s why my son quit college—because the average waiter made over 60,000 dollars a year just off of tips from the Inn and Lodge. So it was big money here. There were school teachers that waited tables here in Williamsburg, because the only place was the Inn, the Lodge, King’s Arms, Campbell’s, and Chowning’s Tavern. They were your fancy places of eating, and people paid well for service.

AA: That’s great. So, one last question, especially as you look at our, where we are in history, you know, the past year, the police brutality, various murders of African Americans have become publicized in the media and protests and the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement. Do you think we are entering a new chapter, as a nation, and even within Williamsburg, in terms of race relations?

CH: First of all, you have to remember that Williamsburg-James City County is different. You have to remember that. Because we can go right to Newport News, and the police brutality and stuff would be totally different. It’d be like “WOW!” Williamsburg policemen are different. They are not as hostile; the only problem I have sometimes with the Williamsburg police is the way they do the college kids. I don’t think it’s fair the way they teach the college kids, because I think they’re pushy, and they make demands out of them that other people don’t have to worry about, and this thing about the music, come on guys, weren’t you ever young? You know? So I think the College has more problem with the policemen that black people in Williamsburg. Because, here recently, since all this stuff has been going on about (police brutality), they had an incident in Grove, at one of the clubs, where a lady punched a policeman in his face, and also bit him, which I found out later, that she bit him. And I think, he could have killed her. He could have shot her very easily. Because she was in his face. But he didn’t, and they didn’t arrest her until the next day, which I thought was really smart. Because had it been done there with all of them black people there, it would have been totally distorted. The reason and all, it would’ve been, probably said, “She hit him in the face because he did this, this, this” because nobody witnessed it, what she might have done to him. So Williamsburg has been different. They did have one lady that was in the James City County police force that was rude, that would stop people, and I think she did a lot of profiling. But other than that, all you have to do is go talk to the sheriff- not the sheriff, what’s his name, the chief; you’d get results. You’d get results. So James City County’s okay. Williamsburg is okay too because they talk to people. And that’s important that they talk to people. But as far as, I don’t think, like I said, the only issue I have is

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sometimes the way they do college kids. And I’m not being prejudiced about this, or I hope I’m not being cocky, and not seeing the true story but, it’s you all that have the problem. Seriously. But it’s true, but it’s true.

AA: Yeah. And on that note, I think I’ve taken up enough of your time. Thank you so much.

CH: Ok, that’d be 275 dollars. Consultant’s fee.

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