

Odell Clanton And Family

Hundred-Year Heritage Retold

As Chronicle researchers went out in search of information about blacks in the early 20th century, all roads led to one man -- Odell Clanton of 3652 Carver Road. Numerous persons called him the single most knowledgeable person in the city about local black history.

We soon found out why during an oral history interview with Clanton. He

memory for people, places and dates and a vivid descriptive style that made the history come to life.

Clanton was the third child of John Clanton [Clanton, by one account], reputedly one of the strongest men in the city. The elder Clanton's strength caused the Reynolds family to bring him from Virginia to work in the tobacco factories in approximately 1800.

Odell Clanton went to work in the tobacco factory at the age of six. By the age of eight, he had begun working fulltime, a job held until joining the U.S. Army at the onset of America's involvement in World War I.

All told, Clanton spent 30 years in the factories, before joining the Veterans Administration following the Second World War. He retired from the VA in 1960.

Excerpts from the interview follow:

Q. When did your family come to Winston-Salem?

A. I was born here. My father came here in 1879.

Q. When were you born?

A. May 20, 1894. About my father, R.J. Reynolds' brother brought my father here from Patrick County, Va. His name was H.H. Reynolds, Harvey Harley Reynolds.

Q. Had they worked together in Virginia?

A. Yes. He worked in Spencer or Horse Pass, Va. I've been there twice.

Q. Was your father a slave there?

A. No, my grandpeople were. Now, my father was a slave. He was born in slavery I guess. My father was born Dec. 13, 1859.

Q. Where did you live in Winston-Salem?

A. I was born on Broad Street, right below the Modern Chevrolet place. You know where that is? They tore the house down about 15 years ago. I used to carry my nieces and nephews out there to show them where their father and mother were born.

Q. Was it behind Modern Chevrolet or towards the old Sears building?

A. The graded school was right on the corner of Fourth and Broad. It was on the north side. I was born on the south side of Broad Street.

Q. Records show that there was a Clanton who was part of the black fire company.

A. Well, it was organized in 1890 but I didn't join until 1914. My older brother, William H. Clanton, joined in 1912.

Q. You had responsibility for what part of the city?

A. It was all over the city, both parts of the city. We were in Salem. You see, we moved to Columbian Heights. My father moved there the second day of March, 1902. It was when the riot was over there, Slater School. Had just one little brick building.

Q. How many men did you have in the fire

wagon. We had a reel and I reckon it was about 18 of

us. It was me and my friend -- I had a house on Vargraves Street, 519 Vargraves -- his name was Archie Scales, he lived beside me at 521. He and I are the only two living of our company.

Q. When did you end the volunteer company?

A. 1915 for Winston and 1916 for Salem.

Q. When you moved over to Columbian Heights, you

the Slater Institute and the Slater Hospital? Where was the hospital located in relation to the present campus.

A. Do you know where the library is? It was south of the library, about 150 yards.

Q. Could you describe the building?

A. It was a frame building. I remember a lot of the floor was cement. It had two stories. Every doctor in town practiced there, both colored and white. It was very nice, the yard and everything. It was just pretty scenery. They kept it up nice.

Q. Did you say there were black and white patients there?

A. No, they didn't have any white patients, just black and white doctors.

Q. Back in those days, people weren't entirely used to the idea of going to the hospital...

A. Colored people especially. Colored people wouldn't go to the hospital. They wouldn't go until the city hospital was built over on 4th Street in 1914.

Q. Who would go to the Slater Hospital.

A. Any colored person. **Q. They wouldn't go voluntarily, they'd go when they got sick?**

A. There were a couple of other hospitals over there. Dr. Williamson had one and Dr. Ray had one on 13th Street. Dr. Williamson's was on Stadium Drive and Vargraves Street. It was a boys' dormitory when we moved there. Dr. Williamson got out and a young lady who graduated from Slater School bought it and turned it into a home.

Q. Is it still standing?

A. Yes. The house number is 930, I think. Now, let me explain to you. My father came here in 1879. This hospital was at one time a hotel. I don't know but one person alive now who could tell you the name of it. His name is Enus Wright, the oldest member of Mt. Zion Baptist Church. He got a plaque some time ago for being a member of their Sunday School in 1872. Bethel Hotel, that's what it was.

Q. Which black doctors used the Slater Hospital?

A. When we moved to Columbian Heights, I don't remember but three doctors then. There was Dr. Hall, he was the first one. Dr. W.A. Jones and Dr. Hargraves. Hargraves didn't stay there long, he went to Wilmington. Dr. Bruce, he came here in 1907 or 1908.

Q. Did you ever hear anything about the riot of 1895?

A. Well, that was before my time. I wasn't born then. But from what I heard, there was a family of people here by the name of Tuttle. They were pretty tough. They didn't bother anybody, but don't bother them. Now, I'm just telling you what I heard.

There were three or four men killed. One man killed one of them, so I was told. Something happened and one of the Tuttle brothers

was arrested for it. A white man was killed and they tried to lynch him.

A policeman named Vickers, now somebody shot him, and there was another policeman named Frank Martin and Vickers said, "Aw Mr. Martin, you shot me." and Martin said, "No I haven't shot anybody." Well, the man who had the pistol. They were standing along side of the street. A big crowd of people, the Negroes just passed that pistol on like that.

Now, I was told that to be a fact. They were united better than they are now. You used to couldn't run over Negroes in Winston-Salem, no kind of way. Even after I came here, after I was born, I knew that.

They arrested this fellow Tuttle and were trying to lynch him. His sister, now I saw her in my lifetime, son, she was a great big woman and would fight you in a minute. The Negroes got together and went down to

the jailhouse and run the white people away.

One man named Sam Mitchell got up on the top of the jail where he could see the white people coming. They kept the jail guarded. They kept him here. You see, Charlotte was the only city with a mob-proof jail. The Home Guard they came out.

A bunch of men, real stout men, stood the military off with rocks. Now, my daddy was said to have been one of them. I know my daddy was said to be the stoutest man in Winston-Salem. I never saw a man any stouter than he was.

Q. How tall was your father?

A. How tall are you? 6'1". He had you by two inches. The most he ever weighed was 211 or 213 lbs. He could carry... where the Graded School was on Fourth and Broad Streets, they cut down some trees in the Graded School lot. Oak trees. They were great big, tall trees. They trimmed them up and said that if the colored people could haul them away, they could have them.

Q. How was it that Clemmons almost became mayor?

A. He was smart. He was a school teacher, I think. He came up with so many good thoughts that they were going to make him mayor.

Q. What were some of the ideas that he came up with?

A. Well, I can't give you that because that was before my time. I was born in '94.

Q. What did the blacks do in the factories?

A. Everything except boss and they're bosses now. You know that plug tobacco that they make. I made that for 30 years. It's made by machine, but it used to be hand work. They got the machines, but they kept the handworkers on until just a few years ago.

Q. Back in the 1900s, what was the process that they used to turn the leaf into chewing tobacco?

A. It's just like it is right

now, with one exception. Men prized the tobacco then.

Q. Prized it?
A. Yes, prized it. They put pressure on it and put it into shapes. A lump about six inches long and three and a half inches wide. The men made that with their hands. Now, they had shaping of steel and wood and they would put that pressure on it and that made the plug.

Q. Was it treated?
A. My grandfather, he cased tobacco. Casing it was treating it with licorice, peach flavor, and they had some stuff to drink, make you drunk, rum. Now, Reynolds started making cigarettes. He started out with Reyno. He made that about 1907 or somewhere along in there.

They had a park over there on Happy Hill named Reyno Park, after that Reynolds cigarette. The next thing that came out was Red Camel and they changed that to Camel. The started making Camels sure 'nough then, and now they make everything.

Q. How many blacks worked in the tobacco factories?
A. In 1900, it was a good many blacks. Of course, there were more whites here than there were blacks, but he worked more blacks. Not many people know this, but Reynolds and Ford worked more colored people than anybody else in the United States.

Q. Henry Ford?

A. Yes, Reynolds had

9,000 and Ford had 11,000

Q. Was that 9,000 workers or 9,000 black workers?

A. 9,000 colored workers, at one time.

Q. How did Reynolds recruit the workers from Virginia, eastern North Carolina and South Carolina?

A. I was told that R.J. Reynolds had a freight train brought from South Carolina with Negroes in box-cars. In 1900, when I first went to work in the factory...

Q. In 1900? When you were six years old?

A. I was six years old. It was at the main plant at 5th and Church. I remember when they were building that. I went there and stayed about three days. The next time I went I stayed a week. The next time I went I was seven years old. When I got eight years old, I stayed in there practically until I went to the war.

Q. How much did blacks who worked in the tobacco factories make?

A. Those that did the same kind of work I did, they got the same kind of wages I got. Now, the foremen got \$12 a week. We only paid off every two weeks at that time. They would draw \$24. There were very few colored, people making \$12 a week.

Q. How many blacks worked in the tobacco factories?

A. Those that did the same kind of work I did, they got the same kind of wages I got. Now, the foremen got \$12 a week. We only paid off every two weeks at that time. They would draw \$24. There were very few colored, people making \$12 a week.

Q. How much did blacks who worked in the tobacco factories make?

A. Those that did the same kind of work I did, they got the same kind of wages I got. Now, the foremen got \$12 a week. We only paid off every two weeks at that time. They would draw \$24. There were very few colored, people making \$12 a week.

Q. How many blacks worked in the tobacco factories?

A. Those that did the same kind of work I did, they got the same kind of wages I got. Now, the foremen got \$12 a week. We only paid off every two weeks at that time. They would draw \$24. There were very few colored, people making \$12 a week.

Q. How much did blacks who worked in the tobacco factories make?

A. Those that did the same kind of work I did, they got the same kind of wages I got. Now, the foremen got \$12 a week. We only paid off every two weeks at that time. They would draw \$24. There were very few colored, people making \$12 a week.

Q. How many blacks worked in the tobacco factories?

A. Those that did the same kind of work I did, they got the same kind of wages I got. Now, the foremen got \$12 a week. We only paid off every two weeks at that time. They would draw \$24. There were very few colored, people making \$12 a week.

Q. How much did blacks who worked in the tobacco factories make?

A. Those that did the same kind of work I did, they got the same kind of wages I got. Now, the foremen got \$12 a week. We only paid off every two weeks at that time. They would draw \$24. There were very few colored, people making \$12 a week.

A. It's just like it is right

Ferrell Realty Co.

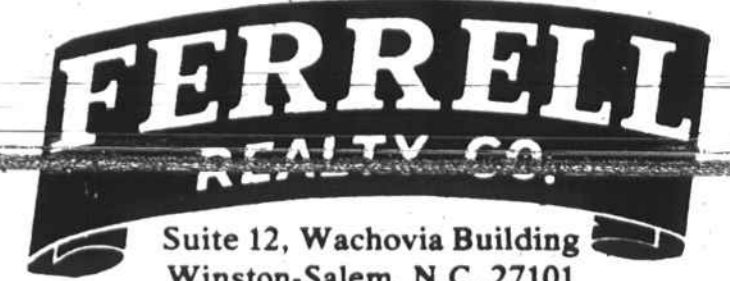
Presents NEW HOME in Beautiful

Winston Lake Estates

LOT # 25 WALLINGFORD ROAD

Fashionable Tudor-style Ranch Home in one of the city's finest residential areas.

Featuring Living room with slate decorator fireplace, formal dining room, kitchen-family room combination with fireplace, 2 1/2 baths, and one-half basement, 2-car garage, lovely lot.



Suite 12, Wachovia Building
Winston-Salem, N.C. 27101
723-3641

Ray Whitley, Agent 766-5680

Roots of Progress

As the black members of Western Electric's employee force in Winston-Salem have contributed appreciably to the progress of this company and the telecommunications industry, so has the black community of Winston-Salem played important roles in the progress of this city. We applaud the Winston-Salem Chronicle's current series on "The Roots of Black Winston-Salem."



Western Electric

Equal Opportunity Employer



CROWN DRUGS, INC. ANNOUNCES

THE OPENING OF ITS

Ostomy care center

IN CROWN DRUGS, HANES MALL

CROWN DRUGS OSTOMY CARE CENTER WILL OPEN MONDAY JANUARY 22ND TO PROVIDE PROFESSIONAL PATIENT CARE FOR AREA OSTOMATES. THE CENTER WILL BE STAFFED BY MARY PULLIAM MATTHEWS, R.N., WHO IS A CERTIFIED ENTEROSTOMAL THERAPIST, AND HAS OVER 17 YEARS EXPERIENCE IN THE NURSING PROFESSION. MRS. MATTHEWS WILL BE AVAILABLE FOR PROPER OSTOMY APPLIANCE FITTING, COUNSELING, AND TREATMENT OF SKIN OR APPLIANCE PROBLEMS ON A FEE BASIS.

ALONG WITH THE CENTER'S SERVICES, OSTOMY SUPPLIES WILL BE AVAILABLE THROUGH ANY CROWN DRUGS.

THE CENTER WILL OPERATE MONDAY THROUGH FRIDAY AND DOES NOT REQUIRE AN APPOINTMENT, ALTHOUGH AN APPOINTMENT, FOR THE PATIENT'S CONVENIENCE, IS SUGGESTED.



CROWN DRUGS OSTOMY CARE CENTER

LOCATED IN HANES MALL Winston-Salem

OPEN MON.-FRI.

PHONE (919) 765-3180 FOR APPOINTMENT

