Transcript of an Interview with
Ethel Ray Nance
May 25, 1974
Interviewer: David Taylor

Mrs. Nance was born in Duluth in 1899 and now lives in San Francisco. She was assistant head resident of the Phyllis Wheatly House in the 1920's; first Black policewoman in Minneapolis in 1926; first Black stenographer in the Minnesota legislature; a member of the Minnesota Negro Council; and associate editor with Cecil Newman of the Timely Digest.

The interview contains information on her family background, the Duluth Black community in the early 1920's, the Duluth lynchings, the Moose Lake Fire Relief Commission, and other biographical information.

This is a verbatim transcript of a taped interview, edited slightly for clarity and corrected by Mrs. Nance. The tape recording is available in the Society's Audio-Visual library.
This is an interview with Mrs. Ethel Ray Nance of San Francisco, California. Mrs. Nance is seventy-five years old. She was born April 13, 1889 in Duluth, Minnesota. In the summary of present and past activities she was the associate head resident for the Phyllis Wheatley House for a number of years. She was also the first [Black] policewoman in Minneapolis in 1926. Mrs. Nance has served on the Minnesota Negro Council and has also worked with Cecil Newman on a magazine called the Timely Digest in 1931. This interview has been taken on May 25, 1974 at 7:15 p.m. in the home of Mrs. Victor Calloway, 1525 Virginia Avenue, St. Paul, Minnesota.

Mrs. Nance, as we are sitting here, several questions immediately come to mind. First of all, what do you know about your maternal and paternal grandparents?

Very little. My mother was born in Sweden and she came to this country when she was eighteen years of age. She lived on a farm at her home and came over here to join her brother. She met my father in Minneapolis where they worked at the same hotel. It was the policy in those days to import maids and hotel workers from Sweden primarily and they used Negro men for other jobs around the hotel, waiters and bussmen and that type of thing. There were a number of intermarriages during that period. And about my father. I just have a very faint recollection of things my father told me about his parents. He was
from North Carolina. They lived in the country. And one incident that he told me about that I remember. He spoke of there was a tense situation about white teachers coming into that locality and helping teach, or rather teaching the colored children. And some of the white people resented that, some of the southerners resented it. And they would find notes on the school door "be gone before morning" and so forth. And my father said that he overheard his father telling his mother that the men had decided if these people would come down to help educate their children, they were going to protect them. And he would take his shotgun and be gone all night and in the morning he said there was a little conversation but he'd hear them say a few words as to how things had gone. Either "they had got away" or "he got them" or something like that. But he doesn't know anything more. The parents didn't discuss it with the children. I don't know anything else about my grandparents. My grandfather's name on my father's side was Henry Ray. My father was William Henry Ray.

Taylor: Do you know about when your father came up to Duluth? Migrated to Duluth?

Nance: It would have to have been about 1889, in through there. There was apparently more employment up there at the time and several Negroes went up.

Taylor: And what type of work was your father in?

Nance: He was working on the boats, on the passenger boats out of Duluth, and then when he was in town he would get work at the hotels.

Taylor: So then your father married your mother about 1889?

Nance: About 1889.

Taylor: Okay. And how many brothers and sisters do you have?
Nance: There were four in the family, two boys and two girls.

Taylor: And what were their approximate birthdates?

Nance: The oldest son is William. He was born 1890. Ora was born about five years later, and Oscar five years later, then I came along in 1899.

Taylor: What do you recall of your early childhood in Duluth? Particularly your home, the community life, Black community life, anything of that nature?

Nance: My father was gone a great deal. When he would be on these trips on the boats and I remember there being a little sense of peace and quiet while he was gone, because he left strict orders as to all of our duties and expected my mother to carry them out. He had grown very antagonistic toward our white neighbors because they had shown that they were not friendly. In fact when he bought the house before we moved in. He had been at Two Harbors and there was an opportunity to buy this house [in Duluth] but people were living in it. He came down and was walking around the back of the house and the neighbor woman came to her door and stood there, arms akimbo, and he said he purposely walked slowly to give her a chance to get really riled up and when he came close enough, she said, "I hope you don't think you're going to live there." And he said, "Well, I was thinking about it." She said, "You won't live there," but he didn't tell her that he already owned the place. And there were certain things that happened. We lived the second house from the corner.

There was a large house on the corner.

Taylor: This was in Two Harbors.

Nance: This was in Duluth.

Taylor: Duluth.

Nance: I never lived in Two Harbors. I was born in Duluth.
Taylor: Do you remember the street that you lived on?

Nance: Yes, I lived at 209 East Fifth Street. The house on the corner faced the avenue. We were the first house that faced Fifth Street, and it was a one story house at that time. And these neighbors built what we called a spite fence so that you couldn't see out of the windows on that side. So as soon as my father could, a few years later he raised the house so that we had an upstairs. On the other side an English family lived. And I must have been very small because knowing my father's temper I never - probably never would have come in and told it, but it was raining and I came in and said, "Mrs. Richard moved the water pipe." At that time we had a family living in the basement and it meant by turning that water pipe the water would go into a window. Well, he always said that people were antagonistic and didn't want us there, and he didn't want us to run errands or do anything at all for them and really didn't want us to talk to them. And I suppose he had good reason. They had shown that they were not friendly. So it made him very bitter and I suppose he took it out on those who were closest to him, but he was determined that we were going to learn about the Negro race and all of our trials and he always took - he took Monroe Trotter's paper, The Guardian, and he took The Crisis, and we had to listen to him read all of these things and he used to dwell a great deal on the lynchings, the descriptions of the lynchings. He seemed to want to - to make us aware, to make us aware of these things. I don't think he wanted us to hate people, but he didn't want us to overlook the injustices that were going on.

Taylor: Were there any Swedish influences that your mother brought into the household? Any ways from the old country as it were that she ...?
Nance: She was ... just interested in her family and being sure that the house was immaculate and that the meals were on time and she was very frugal in her ways. But she was much more interested in being sure that the curtains were ironed, you know, and washed for Christmas and Easter instead of seeing that I practiced the piano or that type of thing, so when my father would come in and say, "Has she practiced?" we'd have to say "Yes". [Laughter] But I hadn't always practiced.

Taylor: What do you recall of the Black community? It was about what, two to five hundred people there or something?

Nance: About two hundred. It grew to be about two hundred. You could go days without seeing anyone. There was one family in the next block to us. But all of my playmates were white at that time. And you did run into the instance - the problem of new families moving in with children and there'd be name calling to the .... Now my brothers were fairer than I was. My sister and I were darker. My father always described my sister as coffee with cream in it. She died when she was about nine years old, had pneumonia. I just vaguely remember her. I was two or three years old when she died. But there was very little in Duluth for young people. There was one church at that time a [Black] Methodist church [St. Marks], but my father didn't mind my going there, but he wanted me to become regular in habits so he preferred our going to this Episcopal church which was about four blocks, because he said there we would learn regularity. Oftentimes there would be no one to teach the Sunday School at the Methodist church. But we could go there also. But that was more recreation when we got older and went there.

Taylor: Did the Black community have any businesses at all or were these people in similar related occupations as your father?
Nance: They were. There were two men who ran elevators down in the First National Bank building. That was a good job. They had been there for years. People worked out at the Kitchee Gamee Club. That was an exclusive mens club on sort of the outskirts of Duluth. That gave a great deal of employment and there was a large hotel in Duluth there where people could work. But otherwise about the only occupation was running on the road, dining car service or pullman service. I think there was one Negro mailman that I knew about. Later on some of them went into the post office as clerks, but in my early life there was only one in the post office, and there was one Negro policeman my mother used to speak about and he had a reputation for being able to arrest people without showing his gun. He had quite a record. And when my father was away on boats my mother said she always felt safe because he would always pass the house at a certain time each evening on foot. I don't recall his name.

Taylor: Were there any types of community types of activities once a year, picnics or anything that the Black community got together with or is it just ...?

Nance: There were little gatherings. Now...going out over the aerial bridge over Lake Superior there, we called it the point, and we would go across the bridge and go out there on the point and have picnics. But aside from the Sunday School picnic, or a few families getting together, there wasn't very much for young people. It was a little bit better when they got up to be about teenagers, when you'd have little dances and houseparties. But that really evolved from the summertime when students would come up on the passenger boats from - students who attending Howard and Fiske and other southern schools. They would come...
up and they would be in Duluth during the day. So there would be these matinee dances and the mothers would chaperon them which was a very nice thing but ....

Taylor: I understand that W. E. B. DuBois used to come up to Minneapolis when he was attending Howard, I believe. He worked on some - in some hotel on Lake Minnetonka.

Nance: Yes.

Taylor: There is a lot of mention of young Blacks coming up from the South during the summer to work in the resort areas of Minnesota.

Nance: Some did come up but of course that would have been down in Minneapolis. That wasn't right in Duluth.

Taylor: Where else have you lived in your early days in and surrounding Duluth?

Nance: Oh, I lived in Moose Lake.

Taylor: Where is that?

Nance: About forty-three miles from Duluth. And I lived there about three years. I worked there after the forest fire. From there I went down to St. Paul. And I got a job there in the state Capitol during the legislature.

Taylor: You made mention earlier about a fire, a fire at Hinckley, I believe. Would you ...

Nance: Yes, there ...?

Taylor: ... like to elaborate on that, give me some dates on that.

Nance: I'm not sure of the date of Hinckley. I heard a great deal about it when the forest fires occurred in 1918. And that was the fire, the holocaust that gave me an opportunity to get a job, because stenographers were - there weren't many of them there. And I worked first in Duluth
at the main office, main armory, and then I had a chance to go down to Moose Lake, which was one of the cities hardest hit. About five hundred people lost their lives there. They told me there that this fire at Hinckley which is about half way between Minneapolis and Duluth, and they spoke of twenty years before, so I presume that had been around - it must have been around the turn of the century. It was a terrible fire and some Negro porter is credited with saving the lives of the people that were on the train because the engineer hesitated in crossing this bridge which was on fire and the porter went ahead on the bridge and signaled for him to come on and as soon as the train had passed over, the bridge fell. And there is a monument there and I understand his name is on it. I never got to see it.

Taylor: That's interesting. You made mention earlier also that Hinckley was noted for it being a town that didn't like Blacks.

Nance: Moose Lake.

Taylor: Moose Lake, okay.

Nance: Where I went to work. Of course coming in as I did with the Red Cross, it was the Red Cross and the Minnesota Relief - Forest Fire Relief Commission and people had lost their homes and there were temporary houses put up and they couldn't be too choosy about - they needed everything that the Red Cross was giving out. They needed the food. I didn't notice the discrimination so much until after things settled down and when people started having their little social events. There was a little club there called the Degree of Honor Club. It had some kind of insurance connected with it. I wasn't interested, I knew, I was just working there. It was something - I was quite lonely. I was quite lonely, but you worked - you'd have supper and go back to work at night
also. So you didn't have too much time. But when these women proposed my name for membership, there, the local barber said his wife couldn't join as long as there was a Negro in it, and he was supposed to be from Kentucky. That was the story.

Another thing I guess I'll never forget is when the forest fires - when the lynching occurred in Duluth. That was 1920.

Taylor: Yes, June of 1920.

Nance: My father had had me join him in a trip south in 1919. We were gone for about four months. And in talking to the people in the South, he was trying to encourage young people to come north, go North and go to school and he had a way of saying how white people don't favor you, it isn't that they like you, but you'll be sure of a fair trial. That's one thing you'll be sure you can get a fair trial. So this particular day I went to the post office to pick up the mail as we always did after the limited train came in and no one spoke to me.

Taylor: Was this ...

Nance: In Moose Lake.

Taylor: Moose Lake, um hum.

Nance: I thought it was queer because by this time I had been there - I'd been there over a year and people had a way of saying good morning and when I got to the post office, they - the postmaster would joke about the amount of mail I got personally because I had been on this trip and there was a lot of people writing me. And I didn't know what the silence was about. I went back to the office and my boss was on the phone with Duluth, and he swung around and he said, "There's terrible trouble in Duluth. They're calling out the National Guard." And I asked why and he said, "It's a race riot." And I couldn't imagine that because I
knowing the Negroes in Duluth are not that militant sort. But then he said then that they've lynched some Negroes. Well, I couldn't - I couldn't reach my folks by phone so I went through that day and then I realized what it was, the animosity in the town [Moose Lake]. That the feeling of - their reaction seemed to be that they would have liked to have been in on the lynching party.

Taylor: Did your parents relate to you any of the particulars of things that occurred?

Nance: My father was furious about it - of course he was very upset, particularly because ... it was happening about four blocks from our home, outside the Shrine Temple, and as he walked down the hill that next morning to work the bodies had been cut down and were lying there at the foot of this telegraph pole. And there was a circus in town and fourteen Negroes were taken off a train that was ready to pull out with all the circus paraphernalia late that night. And this white girl claimed that she had been raped by fourteen Negroes and she's supposed to have identified these four. They had a kangaroo court. The Chief of Police was out of town and the mayor was out of town. And I understand that they got their necktie party up by parading up and down the street from six to midnight, and no one stopped them. No one seemed to .... But I know that it was one of the things that my father deplored because ... he went out hunting and had shotgun and rifle and different things. He always kept them ready, they always - and I know that if he had had any inkling of it he would have tried to have done something about it. And I think he felt cheated in a way.

Taylor: How was it received by the rest of the Black community? I mean, were there any attempts at trying to take it out on those that had been
there all the time?

Nance: No. One good thing that developed. There were a few white people who ... wrote letters to the newspapers deploring it and ... my father was able to start an NAACP branch. He had tried before but the Negroes weren't interested and they said that he was trying to segregate them. Because we have no trouble here in Duluth, so we don't need an NAACP branch. But he had no trouble after this happened. And he brought - our first speaker that he brought was Dr. DuBois.

Taylor: When was this now?

Nance: In 1921. And the little Negro church was filled, about seventy-five percent white people.

Taylor: What was the name of the church?

Nance: St. Mark's.

Taylor: St. Mark's.

Nance: St. Mark's Methodist Church.

Taylor: Methodist Church. And it was filled over to capacity. Do you remember the subject of his talk or anything of that nature?

Nance: I don't recall it. I was selected to introduce him.

Taylor: I was wondering is there any other personages that came through Duluth.

Nance: Yes, my father brought Dr. C. B. Roman who had been at Fiske. He was an historian. He brought Roscoe Conklin Simmons from Chicago, who was on the Chicago Defender at that time. I don't recall - I don't recall any others.

Taylor: Your father seems like a very progressive person.

Nance: He was. He read a great deal and he was very much interested in history. He had a rather good library for that time. He would never loan his books. You could come to our house and read them. But he had lost some books. He had one choice book which I have now on slavery
that was printed in 1858. I think it was compiled by a W. O. - what's his name? - Blake, B L A K E.

Taylor: Yeah, that's interesting. Were there any social clubs, any literary societies, any you know some of these things that people like your father who was interested in history and different works and who met regularly to discuss things?

Nance: There were some women's groups, but I was too young to become a member and then you see at this period I'm away from home now. I go home weekends but I'm away. My father was very active in the Masonic Lodge and in the Oddfellow Lodge.

Taylor: Was that integrated or Black?

Nance: No, no, Black. And for a time he even went into the Elks Lodge because he felt he wanted to spread the word and he felt that if people would just organize for anything, you could get them interested in something else. But it didn't work out that way. And he was very lonely because he had to just read his books by himself. My mother wasn't interested in reading.

Taylor: What was your mother's name by the way? We never ...

Nance: Inga Nordquist.

Taylor: Inga Nordquist.

Nance: Inga Nordquist.

Taylor: That's interesting. Did she have any relatives there in the city or in the United States?

Nance: No, she had a brother in Minneapolis, and that's why she came. He sent for her and then she was going to send for her mother but her mother died in the meantime so she never got here.

Taylor: Where was - what town was she from? What ...?

Nance: She was from - it was in the country but Varmland was sort of the
Taylor: That's interesting. Do you have any heirlooms that were passed down, that she gave you or gave the ...?

Nance: I had a watch and a pen, but they have gotten lost in my very frequent moves.

I was very lonely in my teens in Duluth and actually looked forward to the time when I could go away and I had made some contact with - with Howard University because a girl from Duluth had gone there to work for the government and she had taken some courses at Howard. And I'd gotten a half-promise that if I came and enrolled that I could do some stenographic work and I took civil service examinations every time they came up and I'd always check the little blanks that said, "will you accept jobs in Washington or anywhere", I always checked those. While I was at Moose Lake, I also got an opportunity to go to Boston University. That was because I was active with the Methodist Church. I was Episcopalian but the minister only came there once a month and the few young people went to the Methodist Church and it was interesting, but this young man came through who was in charge of Sunday School work for the State of Minnesota and the superintendent of Sunday Schools had him talk to me. They must have had a preliminary interview, because when I came in, things seemed to be cut and dried, that there might be an opportunity for me to go to Boston University, but to the religious school, and I didn't think that was my cup of tea. So when I went home that next trip and showed my parents this letter saying that I should make application. They didn't encourage me because they didn't want me to go away. They didn't want me to go away from home. And of course my mother said to my father, "Well, you took her away one time, and that's why she wants to
go again." He had - when he took me on the first trip ....

Taylor: Where did you go on that first trip?

Nance: We went to Chicago, to ... Philadelphia, Detroit, ... Rochester, New York, Boston, New York City, Washington, Richmond, and then on to Raleigh. That was our destination, to Raleigh. We got as far south as Atlanta, Georgia. He had hoped to take me to Cuba, but I got chicken pox in North Carolina and he was very - very put out with me for interfering with his travel plans. I had to stay there about three weeks. We had to conclude our trip in Atlanta. And strange as it seems, people would ask me if I knew this person or that person in Minneapolis or St. Paul. And I had never been to Minneapolis or St. Paul, because we had gone directly from Duluth to Chicago. We were gone about four months on that trip.

About this time, I think it was 1926, when I got a letter with a promise of a job at Phyllis Wheatley House which had just started in Minneapolis. I had met the director, Miss Willie Gertrude Brown, at a recreational conference in Chicago. I don't remember how I happened to go to that conference, whether it happened on our trip through there, or what it was. But anything to get out of Duluth and I was very happy to have the chance of going down there. So - but in my mind all the time I wanted to go further away. While I was at Phyllis Wheatley House, there was an opportunity for young women to go on the police department. They wanted to establish a women's bureau. So our board decided that they could loan me. I hadn't really accepted, I hadn't said I would even take the examination, but they were going to loan me for six months until they got someone else. So I found myself on the police department and I stayed there about four and one-half years until I came down with acute arthritis.
Taylor: What was your position with the police?

Nance: I was in the women's bureau. It was supposed to be a preventive and protective program for women and children. We had the power of arrest and our duties covered runaways and dance halls and then crimes against children. And there were only three of us for the whole city of Minneapolis, so it kept us quite busy. And although I presumably had been asked to go on there as a Negro policewoman, there weren't enough of us to take care of the city and so I would be sent out on almost any calls that came in.

Taylor: Did you have any problems with that?

Nance: Sometimes there would be a question. I remember one woman that we had her husband picked up for something, it was marked my case. It was one - one of those - I think it was an incest case. This young white woman wanted a warrant charge sent out for her husband so when he was brought in, he was marked held for me. Well when the case came up to the grand jury, we sat out in the hall waiting and she turned to me and said, "Are you Indian?" And I said, "No." And she said, "My husband hates Negroes." And I said, "Did he have some difficulty with one at some time?" And she said, "No, but he just hates them." So that terminated that conversation.

Taylor: What were your responsibilities at the Phyllis Wheatley House?

Nance: When I first went there, we were on Bassett Place and it was called the Heart of Bassett Place. It was a building that once had been some kind of a factory, so it was inadequate. Our gymnasium didn't have the regulation ceiling, so when other teams came there to play, they always found fault. The boys had trouble making the baskets. But we did
have a good exchange of schedules and that type of thing. We had — we had to do everything, we went down to juvenile court when some of the children in the neighborhood got in trouble. We didn't have a regular day nursery but we would keep children there whose mothers had to go to work. We had classes for mothers and then we had classes like millinery classes and dressmaking and that sort of thing. And outside groups could hold meetings there.

Taylor: Do you recall the names of any of your officers and things?

Nance: Well, Miss W. Gertrude Brown was the director. She was the director. I recall a few of the people on our board. Miss — I can't remember their first names — there was a Mrs. Luce who was — the board was made up of a group of women who called themselves the Women's Christian Association. Not the YWCA, but the WCA. And they were mostly people who were in fair — good circumstances and wanted to do something for colored people.

Oh yes, we had athletics, we had basketball, football, volleyball, and you had your junior teams, intermediate, and senior. And Miss Brown encouraged even the men as they say from the avenue — Sixth Avenue — to come in and to use the gym, and we had certain nights set up — set apart for them.

Taylor: Was Sixth Avenue supposed to be a rough place?

Nance: Yes, Sixth Avenue was the ... well, sort of State Street, you know, night clubs and pool halls and that type of thing. And it was sort of under the "jurisdiction" or shall we say police protection of a man by the name of Wilson. They called him the "Black Mayor of Minneapolis", but he always showed us a great deal of respect for the settlement house and for example when I would have to go around to find some of my senior girls for our basketball team, when we were going to leave
the house and go to a game if I – I could go around any of these places and round them up, and they were always cooperative. It helped me a great deal when I went on the police department later.

Taylor: Was there any sort of organized vice?

Nance: There probably was, but I wasn't aware of it, because when I went on the police department and we had our initial interview with the chief, all of the new policewomen, he turned to me and said, "Do you think you know the North Side?" And I said, "Well, I've lived there for three years." And he said, "I'm sure in ten minutes I could show you more than you've seen in ten years." But as I say it was pretty well controlled. And you didn't – you didn't see the evidence of a lot of crime.

Taylor: Was the Black community on the North Side of Minneapolis very large at that time? Was there a great demand for the facilities?

Nance: Yes, and there were a number of intermarriages. And at that time if you lived on the North Side of Minneapolis, the people on the South Side sort of were aloof from that, although they would come to affairs at the Phyllis Wheatley House.

Taylor: What were some of the other institutions and churches in the neighborhoods?

Nance: I remember Border Methodist Church. I can't remember the names of the other churches.

[Tape recorder temporarily turned off]

After I became ill and couldn't continue to work on the police department, that was in 1931, we moved to Duluth and then we went east where my oldest son was born in Washington, D.C. And we came back to Minnesota a year or so later and my younger son was born in Duluth, Minnesota. I came back to Minneapolis because there was no work in Duluth, and again
was able to get a job during the legislature in St. Paul. Some of the same people that I had known before happened to be Representatives and then during that period we started a little organization we called the Minnesota Negro Council. I believe Clifford Rucker was the president. It was supposed to be an organization to help Negroes get jobs, to get placed in state departments, state agencies. And we had a very grandious plan of one Negro in each state department, but we were determined that they would be efficient. We couldn't take the jobs ourselves, none of us, but we wanted to see that other people did. There was quite a bit of interest in Negroes and we would be asked to go and speak at churches, at white churches. (They would want anybody. They'd ask Negro minister or ...) When I was at the settlement house they used to ask us to come and speak about the situation with Negroes. So we got this little organization going. We'd try to gather facts and be ready. I know one of the things that we said that they'd always want to know and they'd always ask was how many Negroes there were in Minnesota. And our pat answer was 10,000.

Taylor: Whether there were that many or not.

Nance: Well, I think at that time there might have been - the largest city of course was Minneapolis, there might have been 5,000 and St. Paul was a little less, so in adding up those the people would say, well, where are the rest? And we would intimate that they were not visible and that always ... we got sort of delight out of the worried expressions on some of their faces. [Laughter]

About this time, Cecil Newman had his newspaper and we ...

Taylor: Which one was this?

Nance: The Spokesman, the Minneapolis Spokesman, and I don't know how we decided to do this but we started a little magazine we called the Timely
Did it have much circulation or ...?

I don't think the circulation was too - was too large.

Was it designed to inform the Black community about literary and social things or ...?

It was primarily to let them know what was going on outside, outside of Minnesota - in other states.

[unclear]

Well, it was more for information, information about things going on. About this time we did have a little reading group at the Phyllis Wheatley House, and I know that we wrote to Dr. DuBois and asked him to suggest a list of books and he did.

Were there any other organizations functioning at the same time as the Minnesota Negro Council that was trying to upgrade Blacks in that area?

There were a number of groups that met - that is, there were the - there were the lodges, of course, and there were women's groups. I think they had one reading group out south. There was a pretty strong American Legion post. There was an NAACP. William Smith was the president and there were a number of cases that they handled.

Just by chance did you know anything of the Spanish-American War Veterans groups, with Charles E. Young encampment?
Nance: No, I didn't.

Taylor: Was there much interaction between Blacks in Minneapolis and in St. Paul?

Nance: Well, ... I don't believe Hallie Q. Brown had started yet at that time. But there were a number of people from St. Paul who came over to Phyllis Wheatley House. We had members who came over, and people who came over to work with our various groups.

[Tape recorder temporarily turned off]

In 1923 in the legislature I was secretary to three committees. I was secretary to the Committee on Education, Apportionment, and Banks and Banking. And one thing that I found, I was the only one, I was the only secretary that wasn't a wife, sister, or relative of a representative, and the girls were very curious as to how I got my appointment. I had happened to come down to visit St. Paul to visit Ida Mae Murphy and her father took me sightseeing. He took me to the Capitol where Billy Williams was messenger in the Governor's office. So in looking through the Capitol and Mr. Johnson said now you should work in a place like this. I agreed that it would be very nice to work in a place with thick rugs on the floor, so Mr. Williams told me to go home and talk to my representatives and senator, and although it was late in the fall - he said they might have made all their appointments - that he knew that they were able to group together and make an appointment and that possibly because I was - possibly no other Negro in Duluth had asked for any recognition. So I was fortunate in getting in that way. The second time that I worked down there, I just went directly to Mabeth Paige who was in the House of Representatives when I had been there before and she was the one that succeeded in getting me on again.
Whenever some crime or petty crime could be—was committed the police had a way of driving up to the pool halls and emptying them, taking down twenty or thirty Negroes. And there was one case—some social worker became involved. I don't know whether it was a rape case, but feeling ran very high and the police were honeycombing the area to find him and the—it had gotten so tense that there was a threat that he would be killed. And Miss Brown was a very strong person and she sent out the word that if he—if he was in danger of his life he could come to Phyllis Wheatley House and she would assure him safety there. One thing that we were rather amused at... somebody in the sheriff's department had heard of her prowess as a marksman. She used to go out hunting, hunting ducks and she loved to go out on a weekend jaunt and so they probably gave her a little more credit than she was due, but it—you had the impression that she would be sitting at the top of the steps when you opened that front door with a rifle waiting for the authorities to come and try to take someone out of Phyllis Wheatley House. I think they would have had trouble though. She was from the South and she was militant. One thing that happened at Phyllis Wheatley House which I think describes her. These were the days when Philip Randolph was organizing the pullman porters and a meeting had been arranged there. Someone on the community fund called up and asked her if it was true that there was going to be a meeting of the pullman—Randolph's pullman porters. She said yes. And he said, "Do you think that's wise since the pullman company makes a very generous contribution to the United Fund?" Or Community Fund, whichever it was called. And so she said that she had given permission and the meeting would be held. So...
he went on to - almost, he did say even if your position was in jeopardy? And she said yes. She said, "Now if you want to come out and call off the meeting, you can do so. I won't do that. And when you come out you can pick up my resignation at the same time." So then he said, "Well, would you have any objections to the Pullman porters union meeting there?" And she said no. Any group that feels they're bettering themselves is welcome to meet at the settlement house. And those were instances of the woman and her strength.

Taylor: Asa Philip Randolph never came to the Twin Cities did he?
Nance: Oh, yes.
Taylor: He did?
Nance: He was there.
Taylor: And he was instrumental in organizing ...?
Nance: He came to speak, you see, that was when they were organizing, and the men, you know, the men just thought so highly of him and they, they stayed right with him, they'd never let him go around by himself. Threats had been made, little traps had been laid for him. So they never let him travel by himself, even after he was in the cities, there were always about two of the porters. Many porters lost their jobs in Minneapolis during that period.
Taylor: But they finally succeeded in organizing?
Nance: Yes, they did.
Taylor: Did your father ... were you really tuned in to say the Garvey Movement in the '20's?
Nance: No, but when I was in New York, there were parades of the Garvey Movement, but most of our group just laughed at the idea you know. This was somebody just wanted to dress up and we didn't know the real
significance of it you know, that we were too busy living our lives and... being interested in the... in the movement there then. Which they now call the [Harlem] Renaissance.

Taylor: Was there much... were people into the [Harlem] Renaissance here?

Did they read poetry by Langston Hughes and others?

Nance: In Minnesota?

Taylor: Right.

Nance: We... we did at the Minnesota Negro Council... we did read quite a few. Mrs. Annette Calloway and Lena Mae Minor, I remember them especially. We used to love to sit and... and we would read poetry and that would be part of our meeting. And we also... we also discussed books. We were very serious about trying to keep up with things that were going on.

I recall Countee Cullen, Langston Hughes, Marian Anderson, Dr. W. E. B. DuBois and Zora Neale Hurston visiting the Twin Cities.

Taylor: A lot of recitals and concerts and things?

Nance: Yes, they had those and I think St. Paul had a little more of a literary, a literary feeling than Minneapolis. I think this was... the older community in a way, I mean there were older groups. I know there was Adelphi Society here, I think it was called, and there were women's groups who got together [socially] and... I think some of them are still in existence, probably.

[Tape recorder temporarily turned off]

About 1883-85 my father went to Two Harbors, which it might be a hundred miles north of Duluth on Lake Superior, and he and Charles Colby from... from Duluth started a Delmonico Restaurant there. I'm not sure whether it was just a restaurant or a hotel, but they, they ran it on such
a high scale that they lost money, so I don't remember how long they were able to keep it going but I did find a newspaper clipping in a Two Harbors newspaper where they said that they were very sorry that the hotel had to close because it had been of high caliber. My brother Oscar was born in Two Harbors. My father used to talk about the Indians coming in and he treated them fairly, apparently, more so than some of the other ... establishments around there. They drove these dog teams which most of the dogs were part wolf. My oldest brother would have been around five or six years old I guess at that time. My mother spoke of looking out the second story window one day and seeing my brother down on the ground and these dogs licking his face and that was supposed to be ... one of the steps before the dogs really attack a person because the wolf in them and so she persuaded my father that they couldn't stay up there in Two Harbors very long. They did speak of a John Beargrease and his sister Mary who delivered mail. They delivered mail by dog sled and they would come in to eat, so my father said why don't you bring your mother in sometime? They brought this old lady in, but she would not come indoors and she sat out in front of the hotel and was covered with snow. When my father saw him, he said, "Well, where's your mother? I thought you were going to bring her in." He said, "She's here." My father went out and said you couldn't see her because there was so much snow over her, but she still would not come in. My father liked to go hunting for deer, bears, and he wanted to go with the Indians. He finally persuaded them. They put him off a long time and finally they said that he could go with them the next day at sunrise. My father is an early riser, always has been. He was up and I know that he was up and he was all ready and he was walking around indoors and fuming because
he didn't see them, and wondered why, what held them and suddenly someone told him that the Indians had hit the trail. He caught up with them and he was exasperated. He said, "Why didn't you tell me that you were leaving?" And John said, "We tell you last night we leave at sunrise."

He told about being — being pursued by wolves and having to build fires to keep them off. I remember in Duluth in later years, maybe, it had to be before 1920, that he came in with a deer head and also a baby bear that he had killed and he cooked it. My mother wouldn't have a thing to do with the food — cooking the bear meat, and it was very fat and I remember that because when I went to North Carolina shortly after that, they gave me possum and it was very similar. It was very fat also.

Taylor: What were the white-Indian relations at that time in Duluth?

Nance: Well, this was in Two Harbors, you see, this was north of Duluth. Well, apparently the white people didn't care about them too much. And they were, you know, this ... this story that the Indians can't carry their liquor and so on and my mother claimed that she heard them with some of their war dances. I don't know how much of it was fear and how much of it really happened.

[Tape recorder temporarily turned off]

I like to remember the pictures that my father had of Desdemona and Othello because I saw the exact picture, exact replica in Frederick Douglas's home in Anacosta when I visited there last year.

And I asked my father one day how he happened to get this [same] picture and he said that on one of the passenger boats that he had worked he had always admired this picture in the dining room. It was in a beautiful frame with red velvet and gold inlaid around the picture I guess, about twenty-four by thirty inches, something like that, and he
had inquired I guess about where he could get one, nobody knew anything about it. Then years later he happened to be down near Lake Superior in Duluth when they were dismantling this ship and he had walked aboard to see if he knew anyone and saw this picture still hanging there. And he asked one of the men what they were going to do with it. He said, "You can have it if you want it." And my father used that instance to tell me that if you set your mind on something that in all probability you'd get it. He had that picture on the wall in the parlor and he also had a large picture of the San Juan Hill engagement. It was a very large picture and then during World War I he had a very large picture of the world and he used to follow the battles on that.

Taylor: Were there many Blacks from Duluth that fought in World War I or were recruited to go?  
Nance: Yes, there were. Both of my brothers went, although my oldest brother had been out in Portland, Oregon before that. But he came home and stayed home for awhile and worked in the shipyards out at Gary. But he went back West to leave with that contingent out there.

[Tape recorder temporarily turned off]

Taylor: Do you recall any names of the ships your father worked on?  
Nance: I don't recall the names of the ships my father worked on, but some of the ships that came up during the summer when the students were on them, the Juanita, and the Kionesta. They came, I think they came by way of Detroit, and they would bring a whole boatload of passengers to Duluth. And it was a pretty sight to see the boats arrive and leave because Duluth is on a hill, and they used to say it was one mile high and fourteen miles long. So after you left the main street [Superior Street] then it went up the hill and we lived on Fifth Street so that meant that we
were five blocks from the main street.

Taylor: At that time, the Mesabi Range hadn't been developed yet or ...?
Nance: Oh, yes, the Mesabi Range was going ... was going full blast and my father said that's what drew ... a number of the southerners there. Duluth was populated by ... people in strategic positions were from the South. I know the superintendent of schools was from Kentucky. You didn't always know the birthplace until they died and then you saw it in the paper. There was a great deal of difference between Duluth, Minnesota and Superior, Wisconsin. They were called the Twin Ports. Superior was just across the bridge. That was ... populated mostly by Germans and there was supposed to have been a better feeling toward Blacks over there.

Taylor: Were there many Blacks in Superior?
Nance: There weren't too many but there weren't too many Blacks anywhere and as they grew up, you see, you know when they ... young people went away because there was nothing much for them to do.

Taylor: Do you recall any long ore ship or things going in and out of the port there?
Nance: Yes, there were ... always ... and then you see that was only during the open season in Duluth, there is a long period when Lake Superior is covered by ice, and ... many times ... the ice didn't melt but it would break up and float out and there were times when the winds would turn and bring it back in. I can remember one June because that's the June I graduated from high school ...

Taylor: What year was that?
Nance: In 1917.

And the ice caught a number of ships. Some companies would send
their ships out early although they weren't covered by insurance hoping they could make it. I don't know just when the insurance started but that was ... it wasn't a period when they'd be covered. And at nighttime when they were blocked in the ice blocks, all these ships out there were lighted, you know a very pretty sight from the hill.

Taylor: Were there a lot of sailing craft then? Or was it more steam powered craft?

Nance: There were a lot. You see we had a very deep canal there and there were a lot of tugs that had to go out to ... to bring the big ships in. And there were some bad storms. There was a storm back that they used to talk about in 1906. The Mestapha?, I think was the name of the ship, that couldn't make the canal and broke against the canal, broke the ship and they couldn't get the men off and they - they - the storm - the waves were so high that the rescue ships couldn't get to them. And my oldest brother had gone down there. He would have been around ten or twelve at the time. Mother told how he cried because these men were out there pleading you know to be taken off.

Once during a storm I went down one time, but by this time they had perfected a system of baskets that they shot out and they would bring in big huge baskets and they would bring one man in at a time. Instead of making that canal, they'd break up by hitting the abutment sideways, you know. The storms came up so quickly on Lake Superior. You could be down on the beach enjoying a picnic on Park Point and it would be very warm in the middle of the day, and then way out you'd see this dark cloud, the water getting real dark, and by the time it came in you needed your coats. We would move our picnics from one side of the point [on Lake Superior] to the other, the bay side [St. Louis Bay] and it would be
pleasant there yet, except cool. You needed some covering at night as a rule. It could be very warm in the middle of the day but usually at night you were glad to have a little covering.

Taylor: Did you have anything to do with any Black Canadians during ...?

Nance: No. I didn't - I didn't get to Canada from Duluth because - except by train when I went East one time I took the Canadian Pacific. But I didn't stop in Canada.

When I was working at the State Capitol in St. Paul, I got newspaper publicity as being the first Black stenographer and the different organizations were very kind about - about giving little teas and luncheons for me. And I started getting letters, the information had been reproduced in other Negro papers, and I got job offers from several places. I remember one was Sedalia, Missouri, and one was Bluefield, West Virginia, or something, and - but just about that time I got the offer of a job in Kansas City from the Urban League. It was the Community Service Urban League, which meant that there were two organizations. I had met this Fraser Lane who was the director in Chicago. He was with the YMCA when my father took me on my first trip South and East. And he had remembered me, so he told me later on that my father seemed to be so stern, and was trying to make me absorb so much history and everything around Chicago that dealt with history, and he said I seemed to be getting so tired and so bored with it all, I think he thought he was trying to rescue me by offering the job. So I went to Kansas City and was working there at the time of the National Urban League Conference and there was also a conference of National Social Work. And it brought people from all over. It was the first time that I had met Charles Johnson, Eugene Kickle Jones of the National Urban League and C. C. Spaulding was there from North
Carolina Mutual, and I was young at the time, I was in my twenties and I got offers from all over. But I liked the idea of the New York offer because of the letter that Charles Johnson wrote. And the letter told about the young writers ... and their meetings there, and how if you wanted to write that was the place to be, and that they were making contacts with publishers and they were showing interest and he also mentioned the fact that people who had already arrived were there to give advice to the young people like James Weldon Johnson and Dr. DuBois and so on. Countee Cullen was beginning to be recognized. But it was hard to get a decent salary and the National Urban League didn't have a great deal of money, but Mr. Johnson was very persuasive and he continued pointing out these advantages so I decided that that's what I would do. I went to New York. I got there in time for the first ... Negro Opportunity contest given by the Urban League. The luncheon was at the Fifth Avenue Hotel downtown where not many Negroes were accustomed to going. And we wanted the affair to be a big thing, and he [Charles Johnson] was trying to get a notable chairman so that it would draw a crowd of people. And in going over names I just said offhand, "Why don't you invite George Bernard Shaw?" And he said, "That's a good idea," and he cabled him. He didn't come but he did send a cablegram to the effect that he - it was dangerous coming to the United States where they lynched people, and then he didn't see why Negroes couldn't write as well as anybody else. Why should you have to have a separate contest for them? It was a marvelous opportunity for me because we had ... people submitted things, short stories, and plays, and poems, and essays. Mr. Johnson had made some very good contacts. Fannie Hearst was one of our ... novel judges and he had me take these manuscripts around to these people so I had an opportunity of meeting ... I took them
to James Weldon Johnson for poetry and also Witter Benner and there was another man. There were two women at Columbia University, Dorothy Scarborough and Blanche Colton Williams - and who else was on that list? - Edna Worthley Underwood, a linguist, a woman who knew eleven languages. And then there was a man who wrote *The Nigger*, let's see, Clement Wood. Clement Wood was one of our judges, and Dorothy Canfield Fisher was another of our judges. And I also met Frank Munsey of the *Munsey Magazine*, now was it Frank Munsey? Anyhow it was the editor of *Munsey Magazine* and when I came to him with these manuscripts, at first he told his secretary to just take them but Johnson had asked me to try to see the person themselves and to give them directly to the judges. He said well he only had a few minutes but I could come in. So when I went in, I noticed over his desk pictures of young men and one of them was Eric Walrond and I said, "Oh, you know Eric." And he said, "Do you know Eric Walrond?" And I sat down and we had a long conversation and he told me that ... how he met him. Eric had come in to try to sell a story he'd written and he had said ... he had told his secretary to accept it and he would talk with him later and then he heard Eric talking to his secretary and he had such a marvelous vocabulary, this young man had, so he invited him in and bought a story and took him to lunch. So I did have some very interesting experiences as far as my stay in New York and my initial entry. I lived with a girl, Regina Anderson, who was a librarian at the 136th Street Library. She came in contact with a lot of the young writers who would come in there. She would arrange for space so they could write. She was ... she was trying to find out who had won these prizes at the Opportunity Dinner. Of course they were all numbered. The tables were all reserved and we had place cards and she kept on asking will we have
any of the prize winners at our table. I wouldn't tell her. We had both
Langston Hughes and Countee Cullen at our table. So that was a memorable
- that was a memorable evening.

Taylor: What was the date on that?
Nance: 1925. I have the writeup on it. I wrote it up for [unclear] Negro 
-The Negro Bulletin of the Association for Study of Negro Life and History.
I was very upset because everybody was getting credit for helping the
young writers except Charles Johnson. They were giving a great deal of
credit to Carl Van Vecten and that provoked me. Alain Locke should have
had credit. He was also one of our judges. He should have had credit
because he was - he was very important to the movement.

Taylor: Was this before his book The New Negro came out?
Nance: About that time, about that time.

But I didn't like Carl Van Vecten and I really had not much reason
for it except I resented whites coming to Harlem.

Taylor: What was Harlem like during those years?
Nance: Well, there were - there were lovely homes. Strivers Row was lovely
as you came along there. There were two or three very nice restaurants
where you went. One was Flo's Tea Room on the first floor of - of one
of the homes. But ... I don't recall now the names of some of the other
eating places. But we really had no fear of being on the streets. Maybe
we didn't have sense enough you know being dreamy and young people. But
we lived - one time we lived on Edgecomb Avenue, 102 Edgecomb Avenue.
I remember that address because Langston Hughes wrote me - no, Arna
Bontemps wrote me and asked me if I remembered the address. And that was
when Langston Hughes came back to this country. He had been to Africa
and it was his first evening back. Arna Bontemps mentioned it in an ar-
ticle in Freedom Ways. He had gone by to see Countee Cullen and Cullen
said, "Well, come with me. Langston Hugis is back." And he brought them up to our house. And there were a number of people there that night. And as I said, with Regina in the library, it gave us access to a lot of people and they, Charles Johnson, they really used our home if there was some people in town because we could get a group together very quickly.

Taylor: Did you have anything to do with Claude McKay?
Nance: No, he wasn't there at that period.

Taylor: Oftentimes people mention the Harlem era and as you have mentioned people like Carl Van Vecten began to write novels ...

Nance: Nigger Heaven.

Taylor: ... in the same vein that the Black writers were. Was there much evidence of whites coming down to Harlem to "slum" as it were, "slumming"?

Nance: Oh, yes, well they really kept up most of the larger nightclubs. And there were some nightclubs where it was said that Negroes were not too welcome but they were expensive too, you know. And our favorite was the original Smalls which was over on 5th Avenue, down a flight of stairs. But we went there and we were known, our group was known and I never felt at all worried, nothing untoward ever happened. That's where the Singing Waiters were.

Taylor: The Singing Waiters?

Nance: That's when Coverubias, the Mexican artist Miguel Coverubias made the picture of the Singing Waiters. I think Aron Douglas did something on them too.

Taylor: Yeah, I was about to ask you about Aron Douglas. Did you have any traffic with him?

Nance: I met him first in Kansas City. I sort of take credit, some credit for his coming to New York, because I had some of his sketches. He was
head of the art department there at the high school in Kansas City. After I had gone to New York and we were working on ... a special issue of ... the Survey Graphic magazine that came out, Harlem issue. There was a German artist Winold Reiss, REISS, doing some sketches. He was with the group that came to Harlem that particular evening along with the editor of the Survey magazine. Well Charles Johnson had brought them up there and so they brought them to our place because with - you know you could ... you could talk and have some ... have some exchange. Winold Reiss said, "But I should not be making these pictures. It should be done by a Negro." And I showed him some of the sketches by Aron Douglass and he said he should be here. Bring him here. He should be here in New York. So we started writing letters to him. But Douglass was quite secure there and he wasn't too interested in coming. I know before I left Kansas City he had said, "No, I'm not interested in going to New York. I want to go to Paris." And I said, "Well, you can go through New York to Paris." But he didn't see it. Anyhow we kept hammering on at - on Aron and finally in exasperation I wrote one letter and said, "It's better to wash dishes in New York than to be president of the high school in Kansas City." Then one day the telephone rang and Doug said, "I'm over in New Jersey." I said, "What in the world are you doing in New Jersey?" I said, "What in the world are you doing in New Jersey?" There was a train that comes in that way. So he came to Harlem and we had to find a place for him to live. We went down to Dr. DuBois with our troubles and he got him a job in the shipping department at the Crisis. Dr. DuBois, by the way, used to take us to dinner. We three girls who lived together were only paid once a month. Our salaries weren't large and we paid $85 a month rent and that was a great deal for the three of us. So toward the end of the month usually that
last week we would call him and ask him how he was, (Dr. DuBois) if he was in town, and he would say, I presume you're hungry. [Laughter] Then he would take us out to dinner. He was very nice about that. He got quite a kick out of us.

We said we've got to do something for Aron, he did. He took him down there and that's when Aron made contact with James Weldon Johnson and Johnson asked him to make a sketch for God's Trombones and that was the beginning of recognition for Aron there.

Taylor: What other of the Harlem set do you remember? This is really history.

Nance: I have some - I have some group pictures of some people that we took - we went up on the roof of after this Opportunity Dinner that we had. I guess we went to Smalls Cabaret after it and then afterward they wound up at our house and we went up on the roof and took pictures and I have one picture that is ... sort of famous now. It was Langston Hughes, Charles Johnson, Franklin Fraser, Rudolph Fisher, Hugh Delaney. It's quite a good picture. I was a little put out because Regina let them use it down at the exhibit at Metropolitan Museum last year. They did give us credit for it, but I didn't like their putting it on a postcard for sale.

Taylor: When was this exhibit?

Nance: A little over a year ago.

Taylor: Well, now, I was in Washington D.C. and I saw an exhibit called "A Glimmer of Their Own Beauty" ...

Nance: No, this was in New York.

Taylor: ... at the National Portrait ... National Museum of Art in Washington, D.C.

Nance: Oh, I think I saw ... I think I picked up a booklet on that.
Taylor: Yeah, I have a booklet. I was out there and the display had pictures of Ma Rainey, the typewriter of Claude McKay, and they had the pictures of Arna Bontemp and Langston Hughes and they had ...

Nance: Did you see those big pictures at the Smithsonian? There were a whole series of pictures, they were by Winold Reiss, those were done while I was in New York in the Twenties. In fact I took two of those people down to sit for the pictures for him. I took Spaulding down there and I took a woman from Bermuda. It - I don't know, it was a feeling I had. I've never felt better than I did for a young person, you know, being away from home and all, I really felt that anything could be accomplished there in New York. You felt - I had to do a lot of research for Charles Johnson and he gave you long assignments and tough assignments and he never explained anything, and he expected you to work it out. But it was wonderful training. I had to do all the proof-reading for the *Opportunity* magazine.

Taylor: Did all this come to a stop with the Depression?

Nance: No, my mother became ill and I had to come home. And ...

Taylor: When was that?

Nance: Twenty ... I think it was '28. And as I look back you know you can't say it was ... a mistake, because you have to - have to meet things as they come. But I really felt that I was developing into - I was learning something, those were the ... people were coming in all the time and you were discussing things. You were writing people to get articles for the magazine and then we had the contest, we started a second one while I was there, I wasn't there to complete it, but I would do the first reading and then ... Johnson had confidence you know in my judgment and I appreciated that.
Taylor: So you came back here in '28.

Nance: Yes, I came back, I had to go back to Duluth, my mother was sick and ... and then my father wrote me and said, "You're 1500 miles away from home and if anything happens to your mother you'll always regret all your life that you were so far away." What can you do, you know? But after I came home and I guess I wasn't very pleasant to be around. My mother said that I was so morose and all, so one day in exasperation she said, "Why don't you go back to New York, because when you're here if you get mail you're sad, and if you don't get mail you're sad." So I went and packed my bag and I wrote Charles Johnson and said that I could come back but by that time I had just written him the week before and said I would have to be home at least a year. In the first place I had told him. I was home about a month. By that time he had to get someone and promise them a year's work. Well, in the mail shortly after that I got this note from Dr. DuBois offering me a position in the Crisis office, and I wanted to go so badly, but I, being youthful and all, and trying to be halfway honest about my life, I wrote to Johnson and told about the offer and what did he think I should do? He wrote back and he said, well, he had hoped that my loyalty lay with Opportunity magazine. And at this time the Crisis was also having a literary contest and he "trusted that any of the plans that we had made for Opportunity wouldn't be transplanted to Crisis." So my father said, "Well, it's up to you to make your decision but he said it looks like it would be difficult if you went," you know. So I didn't. But ... I just wish there had been someone that could have advised me to have gone back.

Taylor: When did you parents pass away?

Nance: My father died in 1947. I went to Duluth and brought them out to
San Francisco.

Taylor: How old was he?

Nance: He said he was one hundred, but he was in ... I think he must have been in his nineties. He wasn't sure of his birth, birthday and he - he took December 31 as his birthday. I hope that I can spend some time in North Carolina and see what I can find out about his background. I know that his father's property is listed there and it might be ... I don't know whether they had birth records.

Taylor: That would put his birth back before the Civil War began.

Nance: And that hardly seems possible. I think he must have been born after. I would think he would be somewhere ... he could have been a little older than Dr. DuBois. My father worshipped Dr. DuBois. There was God and then there was Dr. DuBois in his life.

Taylor: When did your mother pass away?

Nance: Six months after my father. My father wrote and said that she wanted to come west because she had lost her hearing and thought maybe a change of climate might help her. So when I went back to get her he said he was going too. But he had two or three strokes. He was on a cane and he had me take her to a doctor and see if she could stand the trip. And he was supposed to have gone to a clinic but we found out later he had not gone, because the doctor said that no one would have ever approved his travel. So he died at San Francisco. But he did live long enough to see some beginnings of changes. We had a good little group there in San Francisco, an interracial group. I was in the Regional office of the NAACP there, which attracted a number of visitors, and a white woman from South Africa who spoke on the radio with our director was a part of the group. There was a man from Denmark who was
with the consulate, the Danish consulate, and there was a sociology teacher from Melbourne, Australia and it just seemed that I don't know, people were just attracted I guess to - they wanted information on Negroes and they came to our office.

Taylor: When was this, what dates?

Nance: That would have been - I went there in '45, so it would have been oh, '47, '48 and like that, '49. And it was a good group. It was a good group and it was a group that when people came you had your group set up, because I know one evening we had something for Dr. DuBois and all you had to do was to call a couple of people and then you had your group. And they were all people interested in books and interested in things that were happening.

Taylor: So you were active in community affairs in San Francisco?

Nance: Yes, I was with the regional office of the NAACP for about nine years. Then I went down to - went down to Fisk. I got this offer there and I worked there only a year. My sons were both in Korea at the time and somebody had to be at home, so I came back. I always wanted to go back to Fisk, but didn't. I planned to, but Dr. Johnson died suddenly.

But then I did have another opportunity. I went down to Houston, Texas, with Dr. Lanier who was president of Texas State University. I had met him at Hampton.

Taylor: Hampton Institute?

Nance: Yes. I went down to Hampton in 1940 with Dr. Malcolm MacLean when he went down from the University of Minnesota as president. He was the first educator that Hampton had.

Taylor: Stepping back a little bit, if I recall, speaking of Hampton,
Booker T. Washington comes to mind, I recall reading in the Appeal that Booker T. Washington made several trips to Duluth. Do you recall anything ...?

**Nance:** No, I don't recall ... reading anything of him—except that my father spoke of when he was out at this Kitchee Gamee Club which was a very exclusive men's club there, and naturally he'd be interested in conversations of the members and he recalled these men discussing Booker T. Washington and saying, "Now he is a good nigger, and you can work with him. But that firebrand in New York, you can't do anything with him." Father knew he was referring to Dr. DuBois. So Washington probably had been there. But I don't know what would have drawn him except that this white group would have brought him.

**Taylor:** There was a group in Duluth which was helping to raise funds for Tuskegee's endowment I believe, at the turn of the century and it might have been when you were very young.

**Nance:** Yes. When we were going to raise money to build the Phyllis Wheatley House, I'm sure it was a $100,000 and Miss Brown was very active, going around to white people with money. She went to Dayton's store, I don't know which Dayton, it must have been the father of these sons now, but he said he wouldn't give one cent to encourage Negroes to come to Minnesota. He thought they should stay South. But we knew at the same time that they—the store was helping some school in the South. Now whether it was Tuskegee, I don't know. And that was sort of the feeling ... you know ... I think around Duluth. Even the Episcopal Church there, when they learned that I'd had this opportunity to go to Boston University, that minister got in touch with me and said, "Ethel, if I'd have known that you were interested in social work, we
could have sent you to our Episcopal Institute in New York for the training." And he said, "The next time that the bishop is in this area, I'll have him stop at Moose Lake to talk to you." But this was a new bishop that I didn't know and I think - he acted like it was a chore that he wanted to get over with as quickly as possible. So when I asked him where I would get work after I took this training, he said either among the Indians in northern Minnesota or in Asheville, North Carolina. So I didn't ... I didn't ....

[Tape recorder temporarily turned off]

Taylor: Well, listen, don't be surprised, I might end up on your doorstep. I had some friends last year, Africans that were touring, and I hosted them and got them honorariums speaking at the colleges and they said if I was ever in Senegal or Mali, look me up, and I did. Last summer I just decided I was going to Africa for a trip and I took off and spent some time with a lot of educators there [unclear] and they were surprised. But I told you, I said, you know you should never ... if you give me an invitation I'll be there on your doorstep you know.

But it's probably one of the most worthwhile things I've done. I had landed in Africa the morning of my twenty-eighth birthday and it was just like dawn was breaking and the plane was descending and it was like a spiritual thing. Here I am, the first of the family ever to go back you know, to see what the whole experience was about.

Nance: It almost felt like Alex Hailey.

Taylor: Yes. And they referred to me as the one that had returned. I had gone back into the ... the inland there on a trading expedition. Not expedition but the people I was with were professional traders and educators and they'd go into the hinterland and they'd get these artifacts
and get them out of the country and they'd sell them to museums and private collections throughout the world. And we went up a few miles just below - 300 miles just below Timbucktu. It was Mopti and in the country of the Dogon and Fulani people lived, and that's where I finally broke down and used my hands. But once I got over that barrier and everything, they ...

Nance: You had to do what?
Taylor: Eat with my hands.
Nance: Um hum.
Taylor: Because I'd never you know, I saw how it was done and ...
Nance: How about the food? Could you - could you ...? It's ....
Taylor: Most of the stuff was rice.

[End of interview]