

R E S U M E

Name: Idessa Williams Redden Date of Birth: Novemebr 27, 1912

Education: St. John Catholic, Loveless Junior High, State Normal (now Alabama State University; received CED and Certificate in Typing

Church: St. Jude's Catholic under Father Harold Purcell, the founder of St. Jude Church and School. I began volunteering for community services at St. Jude in the 1930s

Work

Experiences: 1930-48---Reliance Manufacturing Company (a garment factory in making men's work shirts

1949-69---Trained in beauty culture and worked in several beauty shops until I opened my own shop.

Community services accompanied my work experiences; was a voting rights organizer and a citizenship teacher during this entire period

1970 to present---Social Services worker with Montgomery's Community Action Program

Movement

Experiences: See above; served as Voter Registration Coordinator for the Montgomery Improvement Association

Worked directly with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. during the Montgomery Bus Boycott Movement. This was the greatest challenge of my life. I am in Civil Rights to help my people. I have dedicated my life to help uplift my fellowman.

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Mrs. Redden

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Life went on in Montgomery's black community. Evidence of police brutality to blacks surfaced now and again. Sports figure Ben Chapman complained in May 1942 that police had beaten his pin boys, ages 14 to 18, on their way home from his bowling alley on Lee Street. Chapman, a well-known figure in the community and former major league baseball player, made his protest directly to the city commission, saying that the beatings had happened several different times despite his taking the matter up with the officer involved, Patrolman J. H. Daniels. Chief King defended Daniels, maintaining the pin boys had disturbed guests in a nearby hotel with loud noise and that the boys been beaten only after they used profanity toward Daniels. Chapman produced two white witnesses who had observed a beating just after they left the bowling alley. They testified that it was unjustified. Daniels was suspended for two days.

where located?

Idessa Williams worked as a machine operator in the white-owned Reliance Manufacturing Company that produced shirts for the Navy during the war. She was placed in charge of the floor on the night shift. One night she was called in to the manager's office and told that the women on her shift could do better work if they would quit going to B. T.'s, a black night club on the corner of Jeff Davis and ~~DANSON~~ ^{DANSON} Street. In response she said she would not discuss the private affairs of black women, who were not under the control of the company off duty. Slavery, she said, was no longer in existence. She pointed out that he did not discuss the private affairs of the white women who worked in the office. The manager

told her with her attitude she needed to go north. But he did not fire her. Williams married and became Mrs. Idessa-Redden. She left Montgomery and went a bit further north when her husband got a job in Tennessee helping to construct facilities to produce material for the atomic bomb.

On the positive side there was some evidence of progress in education for blacks. Edward G. McGehee, white director of the state department of education's division of negro education, addressed the annual meeting of local black public school teachers in September 1943. He congratulated the teachers on their striving and said "Your negro teachers are now selected on the basis of their collegiate professional preparation, and you are encouraged by your leaders to adjust the work with your pupils in the light of their needs." He pointed to longer school terms and higher salaries, which he did not mention were still behind the salaries of white teachers. Black teachers, he stressed, were full participants in the state's teacher retirement system.

In 1944 Alabama State sponsored an exhibition of African sculpture, curios, paintings, and literary works, on loan from Howard University of Washington, D. C. It was open to the public at large, in contrast to the exhibition of paintings by the Dutch Impressionist Vincent Van Gogh at the Museum of Fine Arts in 1943, loaned by the Dutch government-in-exile.

On the surface, until E. D. Nixon led a drive for a black USO club early in 1942, blacks lacked virtually any semblance of political leadership. Within his own community, however, Nixon had

September 16, 22, 25 and October 6, 1941, Margaret (Peggy) Penton Cravey Collection; Lee N. Allen, "Auburn Fifty Years Ago," Alabama Historical Association Newsletter, vol. 10, no. 1, March 1995, pp. 8-10; Baldwin-Hill-Matthews Interview, December 3, 1944; interview by author of Edward G. Brown, August 2, 1991; MA, January 22, March 17, May 27, 31, June 28, 1942, July 30-31, August 1, October 10, November 14, 1943, March 2, 1944; Author's Remembrances, WWII; A. P. I. Bulletin, 1942-1943; Certificate in name of William S. Robinson, given by Alabama Polytechnic School of Engineering, February 13, 1943, Paul Robinson Collection.

7. MM-CC, June 30, 1993; MA, January 1, 8, 14, 23-24, February 5, 15, March 27, May 1, 15, 29, June 11-12, 21, 28, July 10, 1942, June 18, 24, July 14, September 1, 15, 22, 30, 1943, February 6, May 27-28, June 2, 1944.

8. MA, December 13, 1942, June 23, 27, July 1-2, 1943.

9. Interview by author of Mary (Lett) Neeley, August 4, 1992; MA, July 20, August 6, 1942, June 3-4, 6, 10, 12, 20, 22-23, July 4, 11, 18, 25, 30, 1943, March 5, 1944.

10. Interviews by author of Idessa (Williams) Redden, August 18, 25, September 22, 1991; interview by author of Johnnie Carr, April 25, 1995; interview by author of J. Mills Thornton, III, June 22, 1995; Alabama Magazine, April 14, 1944, p. 12; MA, February 25-26,