

Henry Ligon
Interview 0121a
April 8, 1988
Jim Ligon, Interviewer
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Abstract: In an interview with Jim Ligon, Henry Ligon recalls living and working in Diboll as an African-American man. He also discusses the First Methodist Church and its members and pastors since the 1930's. Mr. Ligon also recalls the baseball team and names many of the players.

Jim Ligon (hereafter JL): Today, I am interviewing Henry Ligon. He lives at 209 Pine Street, Diboll, Texas. Today's date is April 8, 1988. With me is Henry Ligon. Right now I would like to get some information from him based on old times and some of the original people who were here to bring some of the churches, some of the old time hardships and good times they had here in Diboll. My name is Jim Ligon. Henry, where was your birthplace?

Henry Ligon (hereafter HL): December 11, 1914

JL: What were your parents' names?

HL: Walter Ligon, Melvinie Ligon.

JL: Did you have any brothers or sisters?

HL: Yes, he had eight brothers and four sisters.

JL: All right, did you have any brothers and sisters?

HL: I had three sisters, no brothers at all.

JL: What were their names?

HL: Elnora, Helen and Maurine.

JL: Are any of them still living?

HL: No, the last sister I had died in 1941.

JL: 1941? During the time you came to Diboll, what year was that, do you recall?

HL: Yes, I do – my first trip here was in 1929. I came back later to Diboll in 1932 and married here.

JL: Who did you come here with?

HL: I came with Jim Ligon, Sr.

JL: What kind of transportation did you use in those days?

HL: Oh, he had an old, I believe it was a '27 or '28 Chevrolet.

JL: During that time, Henry, what kind of games did you play as you grew up a young boy here, did you have any kind of activities that you did other than work that you might recall?

HL: Well, I wasn't exactly reared here in Diboll. Where I was reared was at Nigton, Texas, until 1932 and we only had basketball and baseball then.

JL: After you came to Diboll where did you first go to work at?

HL: It wasn't in '32, it was '36 when I first started work. I started stacking lumber with Mr. Thompson Broker with Big Joe Rogers out on the yard.

JL: How much were you making an hour during those days?

HL: I was making \$0.19 an hour for 10 hours a day.

JL: That must have been pretty hard work since they didn't have all the modern equipment like they do today. How did you stack the lumber?

HL: We stacked it by hand. It was really hard work.

JL: During that time how were you able to make it with such a small amount of money, how did you get along?

HL: Well, you take back then, the Depression was just beginning to lighten up on us. President Roosevelt of the United States and everything was cheap. You could get matches for a nickel a box. Soda water was a nickel. When I married you could get flour for \$0.40 a sack and everything was real cheap.

JL: Back in that day and time how many churches were here? What denomination were you?

HL: I've been a Methodist all my days. My grandfather was the founder for Methodist churches and I grew up in the Methodist church.

JL: What was your grandfather's name?

HL: C. C. Ligon, Sr.

JL: Is that the church that is named after him in the community of Nigton?

HL: Yes, it is, that's why it is called Ligon's Chapel. He built it way back, way before I was born. The first Methodist Church ever built, he built it.

JL: After you came to Diboll and joined the Methodist Church, can you recall who was the first pastor, or can you go back to the first pastor that was here in Diboll at the First Methodist Church?

HL: I can go back to '32. In 1932 Reverend Washington was here. He stayed here until he died. He died down here at Mr. Frank Morgans.

JL: After he died, who came next?

HL: Rev. Collins came next and he was here a couple of years.

JL: Rev. Collins was here a couple of years, and then to the best of your knowledge, can you sort of run down in chronological order the pastors that pastored at the Methodist church?

HL: Yes, I can. After Rev. Collins, Rev. Green came here and stayed four or five years. After Rev. Green left Rev. Gardner came and stayed one year. After him, Rev. R. B. Moody came here and he stayed until 1948. He started the construction of the building we are worshiping in now. After Rev. Moody, Rev.???? came here, he stayed a couple of years. Of course, as you know, the conference moved Methodist preachers quite often and after him, Rev. M.C. McClamore came here and he stayed six years. Rev. Alexander followed him, then K.P. Phillips came. He was here in '61 when my father died. After Rev. Phillips, M.C. McClamore came back and stayed a couple of years. Then he had a nephew that came here, Claude McClamore came and stayed six years and following him Rev. Ferguson came and stayed a while, the McClamores came back and stayed a couple of years and Moore and Rev. Baron followed him. That leads us down to Rev. D. L. Robinson, which is our Pastor now. During that time, from the early '40's, Jim Henry Garrett organized the male chorus and I have a picture with Mr. Temple on it. We did a lot of singing and he also bought us some uniforms. I would like very much for Mr. Temple to see this picture. There are four of us singing a song that was his favorite.

JL: Well, I am sure we can arrange that if you have the picture. I'm pretty sure Mr. Temple would just love to see that. As a matter of fact, it brings us to another point. We have photographic compiled list of photographs in the library and they are trying to accumulate as many of the old photographs that they can and to make them a part of the archives on the history of Diboll. Maybe if you will let me have that I can either copy it or they will copy it and we will make sure that he sees it.

But now, in the mean time, after the Methodist Church, during all these years, can you give some of the names of some of the people who were faithfully working in the Church? You know, a lot of times, there are just a few people holding up the banner, in many cases, that or working and doing things in the church. It don't take that many, naturally, but you will find some people will just work relentlessly for the church. Do you have any in mind that you recall?

HL: Yes, I really do. Very faithful members. We will begin with Dave O'Neal, sister Evie Goldman, Mrs. Emma Jackson, Frank Smith, Smith was the President of the Mission, very faithful. Ladies, my mother, Melvinie Ligon, Walter Ligon and it works on down. Jim Henry Garrett. When they all moved on, passed on, it fell my luck behind Dave O'Neal, who was the Chairman of the Steward Board. After Dave passed we have Roosevelt Clark, he lived two or three years and he was Chairman of the Steward Board. When he passed it fell my luck to be appointed Chairman of the Steward Board. In the meantime, we were singing, however, I have given this burden in the church myself because the old timers were dying out and the young ones had to step in and carry on. For twenty-three years I taught the No.1 Sunday School class. Then I got them to get someone else. I had to come back and five more years I taught and that made 27. The last time I taught was two years, that gave me 29 years of teaching the No. 1 class. In the meantime I was carrying on other duties in the church. At my age now there isn't too much I can do but I still do my best.

JL: Well, that is real good. I was just noticing some of the old timers that you named. Of course, I know most of them myself, growing up in this small town and having been able to know some of those people. But being small and young during that time I didn't know about some of the activities that were going on, but I knew they were here. But I would like to get from you again, about some of the other social activities. Was there anything other than, say the male chorus in the churches that you were doing? Were you traveling any place, anywhere and singing out of town? Who did you sing for other than the church?

HL: We went practically all over Texas, from Galveston on back to Henderson, Nacogdoches, Lufkin, Kilgore even out to the Gulf. Mr. Temple was very much aware of that because he bought and furnished the uniforms for us.

JL: I see. Is there anything special that you remember, any particular special day that you sang anything that stood out more in your mind on any special occasion other than the one you told us about in the photograph?

HL: I can remember several occasions, whenever I sing, to me it is within my heart and it stands out. If it doesn't stand out with anyone else I'm just wrapped up in singing in my heart.

JL: In those days did you have someone to accompany you by piano music?

HL: No music whatsoever. We just sang vocal. In other words Jack Ligon and I was brought up under where we had to sing notes and today I can still sing notes. They had a man who would come out in the country and teach us singing notes, like Frank Smith down here in Diboll – (We were just boys) – and that is what started us out singing.

JL: I see, and that is more or less a lot of harmonizing and you filled in all of your background music?

HL: We definitely had to because there weren't pianos everywhere you went then, people weren't able to buy them.

JL: We, that's real good, so much for our church activities and it is nice to know the good history and the way that had been put together through the years. But I would like to know, too, from you – how do you feel about some of the old home remedies that they used to use when you got sick. I know we used to hear a lot about when you got sick they would make all kinds of teas and things. I used to hear my mother talking about it. Can you recall anything that Melvina might have given you that was more or less her own recipe as far as medicine goes?

HL: Yes, I can. Back before we were reared when I was quite a kid, doctors didn't have, the only doctor we had for a long time we had to go to Alcedo. Dr. Evans was the doctor there and we used a lot of home remedies. We used teas for different things they would give you. If you cut yourself they would get some smut and something and mix up and it would heal over, it would be a little black place there but they would cure you. People didn't have all this stuff and what not back then. I never heard tell of it and all the old home remedies were really good back in those days.

JL: Looking at it from now and comparing today with those days I guess you might say those were, in some sort of way, "The good old days". You really didn't have the hustle and bustle that you have today, in order to do just anything like getting from here to there. You didn't have any traffic jams, you didn't have any long lines to stand in. But what you do miss about that was that you didn't have much money, but a lot of things came easy and therefore it probably took a lot of stress off of you. You didn't have to worry about some of the things we have to worry about today that causes high blood pressure and everything else. I have another question. Looking back, tell us what was a typical day. You recall some of the old timers like Mr. Jesse Taylor, the Red Stand? Do you recall at one time it burned down, didn't it?

HL: Yes, it did.

JL: Do you know the circumstances surrounding that?

HL: Well, I would be afraid to say in one way. I could be right, I could be wrong. Jim McQueen was running the Red Stand. He and Ruth McQueen. It was several different things they said, but really now, I couldn't say just exactly what caused that place to burn

down any more than Jim was a pretty rowdy fellow, bless his heart, and he has gone on now, but maybe Jim was digressing too much with somebody.

JL: It has always been a mystery about that place and that's why I thought I would ask. I know I can just remember the Red Stand, seems like it was just there and then one day it was gone. I didn't see the fire but I saw the ashes and I never thought too much of it because it wasn't a place where kids hung out. But I do know that many times I used to pass there going to school and the old timers would be sitting out in front on a bench there just talking. We always thought there was some place where they could all get together because we would always see Mr. Jess Taylor there. Ben Bivens was there, he didn't live far from there, the Goldmans – sometimes I would find them there. Sometimes when I would go looking for somebody and they weren't at home I would go up there and look. Another thing I would like to find out from you – you know, during those days, there were a lot of people just working for a little bit of money, maybe whatever they could get. When people didn't have any money what did they do, go to people's houses and get a hand-out or something, do you ever recall anything like that?

HL: People were very friendly back then, more friendly than they are now. You could go to anybody's house and get a meal or something to eat. I recall your father, Jim Ligon, he fed many a person. He was always running a boarding house hall, or something, whatever you call it, but I remember, I've seen lots of people, I hung around him because he was close kin to me. I've seen that man feed many a hungry person. After we got large enough to work we would work sometimes two days, three days out there and other times we would go down to Emporia and plow for a dollar a day, come back and go back out on the job the next morning. You had to make it some kind of way.

JL: I see, well, that was one way of making it. I can remember my dad doing a lot of things. I was a small kid. I know he had the Foggy Bottom Café and there used to be a lot of activity going on around there. He had bands come in and play and he had a prizefighter come through here one time. I'm trying to think of his name, I'll have to find out who that was. He was going to fight somebody here in Diboll. I think it was Leonard Aldredge or somebody.

HL: Hicks

JL: That was his name, Hicks, all right. Anyway I think Leonard backed out of the fight before the fight took place but he was just willing to fight anybody. Then he was a famous fighter but I don't know if he got any matches here that time.

HL: He didn't get one here but he got on in Nigton with Leonard Dixon. Leonard was reared about three or four hundred yards from where I was reared. He went to Philadelphia back in Joe Louis' time and he was Joe Louis' sparring partner. He made a fighter after he went to Philadelphia. Hicks came out there and Leonard tried to get him to pull a sham fight. Hicks said, "No we are going for blood". And Hicks didn't hardly last two minutes with Dixon. Dixon knocked him out before he got started.

JL: That's amazing I didn't know that. There were a lot of things that went on here during that time. I would like to say again that we are interviewing Henry Ligon and some of the old time things that went on in this small town of Diboll. There is a lot of history here to be told, I'm sure.

I want to ask you a little bit about Diboll and some of the baseball players. I understand that Diboll had a real good baseball team here at one time, as a matter of fact, for a long time. Did you have any knowledge of some of the players that used to play here for Diboll?

HL: Yes, I remember quite a few of them, they go back to Tet Pearson; he was a pitcher. He was really good and he could have gone anywhere in his days as a pitcher with any major league team but it wasn't like it is now. Tim Davis, Larrie Davis, Willie Jones on down to C.P. Griffin, Fred Randolph, Amos Randolph, T. J. Person, Q.T. Bussey, George Andrea, Temple DeBerry, on down to Oree, he came in '38, Oree Hubbard, Alec Hubbard, Shorty Hubbard. Maxey Lee Overstreet, Chalk. Everybody is acquainted with Chalk – Hardy Williams was his name. I don't know, Alex Hubbard. When the war started in '41 it took – it broke up most of the baseball players. Willie Trimble – I guess after – Oree and Hall came here they were glad to play with Diboll because Diboll always had a good baseball club up until the war years in '41 and most of them drifted out after that.

JL: Wasn't there a pitcher also by the name of Oree Brazil?

HL: He went by Brazil and Hubbard.

JL: That's the same man?

HL: Yes, the same fellow, sometimes he would tell you his name was Oree Brazil but the next time he would tell you Oree Hubbard. He was really a Brazil by birth, but he told me after his mother died, the Hubbards took him and reared him and that's why he went by two names but he was really a Brazil by birth. He was reared up by Hubbards.

JL: That clears up a big mystery. I didn't know that. Do you remember any more episodes that took place?

HL: Yes, I remember somewhere between '35 and '39, Mr. Fred Nelson took this ball club and carried them to Wichita, Kansas to play ball. I never could get the straight of who won up there but they had an awful good ball club. I remember "Big Jim" was really Willie Hall; he was playing with them then some of the time. Willie Hall is the one that went up, the Black Spiders, that was the Negro Professional Ball Club and he stayed a few years but he came back and we used to go – we scheduled a special train out of Houston to carry us to Shreveport and played ball up there. I happened to go on that trip, that was my first trip to Shreveport and I was raring to go. I think we paid four or five dollars for a round trip from here to Shreveport and back.

JL: I see. During that time there was a pitcher who could throw the ball awfully hard and I understand some how or another, one day he threw the ball so hard it broke his arm. Do you recall who that might have been?

HL: No, I can't recall just who that was but I have heard that told here in a number of times but I really have forgotten the man's name.

JL: There was a first baseman here – I think his nickname was “Tanker”?

HL: Yes, his real name was Earl Belton, as good a baseball player as you have ever seen in his days. He was very much missed when he left here.

JL: I understand when he left here he went on to Beaumont to become on the staff with the newspaper called *The Father Time*, Beaumont or Houston and he used to write articles in this paper.

HL: Yes, he did. I met him on several occasions down in Beaumont and even after I sent my kids down there to go to school he would visit them. But Belton passed on now but he was very much active in writing.

JL: Now, the next question I have is concerning the schools in Diboll. When you came here how many – well, where was the Black school located?

HL: It was located right in front of my house out there. They have a ballpark here and the school was over yonder but it was located in the same vicinity but on over farther.

JL: Do you recall who the principal was then?

HL: The first principal I remember was Professor Hurdle.

JL: All right. Well, Henry it has been real nice having this interview with you. Now what I have here is, you've read it, it is the Diboll Historical Society History Project that is going on and I have an interview agreement. Of course, you have to sign that. It is just an agreement that you will allow them to do these things on these documents to use as the library chooses to use it in that way. It has been nice interviewing you and we will let you know what progress is being made with it and we'll have this typed up and let you know when it will be available for your access.

END OF INTERVIEW