

Interview with Miss Mary Cordelia Bounds at 532 N. Church St., Moorestown, NJ
08057. This is her home. Today is March 9, 2006.

RG: Mrs. Bounds, where were you born?

MCB: I was born in West Cape May, New Jersey. You want to know the date?

RG: Sure do, if you don't mind.

MCB: [Laughs] December 19, 1913.

RG: Okay, Mrs. Bounds, you said you were born in Cape May in 1913. Were your
parents also from Cape May?

MCB: Yes, they were from what was known at that time Lower Township in Cape May
Point. They were all together back in the early part of the century, beginning of the
twentieth century. My mother was born in Cold Springs and later, as a young girl, moved
to Cape May Point.

RG: Cold Springs in Virginia?

MCB: No.

RG: In New Jersey, okay.

MCB: And moved to Cape May Point. And that was her home, she grew up there. My
father was born in Baltimore, Maryland, and I'm going to refer to this activity a little
later, but he was part of the migrating groups from the south that came up in various
areas, and his father had brought him to Cape May, the whole family, when he was a
young boy. So he was not a native of Cape May, but he became a citizen of Cape May
Point. They were in Cape May when met and were married.

RG: What year was your father born?

MCB: Oh, I'd have to look that up.

RG: Okay. But he was born into slavery in the south.

MCB: Oh, no, no, no.

RG: But your grandfather was, I imagine.

MCB: No. I don't know about the grandfather on my father's side, but I know a lot about my mother's family. My mother's father was part Indian. Now I don't know how long, I haven't traced back the connection with slavery, but I do know that he and his family were possibly a part of the people who came up through the underground to South Jersey, because he was rooted in Cold Springs which was kind of upper on the Delaware, not quite down to the point. His mother was Indian, and he, I don't know about his mother's side, but I know my mother's father and some of her aunts in one thing were very, very much Indian. My Great Aunt Lydie looked just like Pocahontas; she had long hair she parted in the middle and had the braids... Now there is my mother, and you can see some of the Indian, you see the high cheek bones. So she was Indian. Now, on her mother's side, here we go, my mother's side, she was a product of French and Indian. I was always told that my mother's grandfather was a French person who was a dancing master. Now I'm not one for tracing generations back, I'm not real interested in this "Roots" business, it's enough to cope with living today, but, as a child, she would tell me many things. Now, her mother was quite, quite fair; she had beautiful silky hair, and her sisters and brothers could easily pass for white, so that's some of the roots.

RG: Now how did you get to Moorestown?

MCB: Because I met a young man who lived here, and eventually he asked me to marry him. It was... The war clouds were gathering and life was kind of uncertain, and there was a kind of, a well, you know, let's get married because we don't know what the future's going to be like. So that's how I got to Moorestown.

RG: And you met him in Cape May then?

MCB: No, I didn't meet him in Cape May. Are you interested in knowing how I met him?

RG: I'm just curious as to where you met him, going from Cape May to Moorestown.

MCB: Well, okay. This is a part of the black population social activities here in Moorestown. In '29, I went to Glassboro to become a teacher, and there was not housing for the black students at Glassboro, so we had to find lodging in the community. There was a lady who had a big farm house out along Ellis Road, it had several bedrooms, and she was approved by the college that we could live there. There were four or five girls with us, two or three from Atlantic City and there were a couple who were freshman. She had a daughter, also. We had a lot of social privileges that the dorm students didn't have. There was a group of young men here in Moorestown...one of the young men in Glassboro attended the Bordentown military, no not military, Bordentown Manual Training Institute, BMTI. Now, that was a school in Bordentown that the state had funded for black students, it was a residential facility... You're probably not familiar with Bordentown?

RG: No.

MCB: Well, it started as a gathering for the young people. Young men and women who did not care for the academic rigor of secondary education could go there and they

received training in automobile mechanics, hairdressers, seamstress, agricultural, and that sort of thing. My husband was one of the young men, he didn't care much for high school he went to high school here for a couple years or so, and he was interested in auto mechanics, so his mother and father sent him there. There were a number of youth here who have traced their lives and their educations from what Bordentown had to offer them. And it became the educational and social hub of this area for the youth. Okay.

RG: I just want to interject a couple things here; you're describing for me a very segregated society. You were accepted at Glassboro, which I guess was a normal school back then?

MCB: It was a normal school, yes.

RG: Yet, you were not allowed to live on Campus.

MCB: There was no housing for black students.

RG: They specifically told you that?

MCB: They specifically said we have no provision, and you will have to find... Now, one thing, at that time, in '29, it was mostly a commuting group, they commuted from Camden, they commuted from Atlantic City. Now, Cape May was too far, I could not commute, and we found out that this lady, and there were some other girls who did not want to commute from Atlantic City, most of us who lived in this, about four or five of us, they were from Atlantic City, I think I was the farthest away. All the rest of the girls, and the fellas, commuted. They commuted from Bristol, they commuted from Camden, and they commuted from Glassboro. So, anyhow, John Wallace, one of the citizens of Glassboro, was very sweet on a young lady, and he had also been a student at Glassboro.

So he would bring four or five, there were three of them from Moorestown, but they would drive, we would have parties and we would have our social, that was our social because we had no social contact with the school, and we would look up on Sunday afternoon and here, down the road, would come a car with three or four fellas in it, all coming on down to see those girls, and, oh maybe two or three times. Valentine's, we would have a party, maybe in the fall, Christmas, and in the Spring. She had a large house, and we would have a party, and that's how we socialized, and that's how I met him. Well, after I graduated from Glassboro, my life went one way and his went another, and it was quite a few years later after that that one of the teachers in Wildwood, we were in a teacher's association together down there.

RG: You had a teaching job in Wildwood?

MCB: No, at that time, I was teaching in Cape May, I went right back to the school system that I had graduated from, the high school. And one time I said to her, "Well, whatever became of Alec Bounds? Do you remember?" I said, "You know, he used to come down to Glassboro to see us, to see the girls down there for quite a while. Whatever happened to him?" "Oh!" she said, "He's there in Moorestown." And by the way, she was the lady friend of John Hall, I'm going to refer to him a little later, who lives right down Church Street there. "Well," she said, "John and all of them, they get together, and they play croquet, and oh, they have a nice time," she says. And I said, "Well sometime, tell John that I said hello." You know, just like that, and I dropped it for a bit. Well the next thing I know, her friend John had arranged a date for me with Alec, and it was during the Penn Relays. So I said... Well at that time, men were going off to war, and being drafted

and if one could get a gentleman friend, one was kind of lucky. So John arranged that we would meet the weekend of Penn Relays.

RG: So you came here to Moorestown for that, and then went over to...

MCB: We both had a neutral friend who lived in Philadelphia. She had been a classmate of mine, and my husband had worked for one of her relatives, the Terrys had had a funeral parlor over there. So we had this mutual friend, and I was coming up to spend the Relay Weekend with her, and that's where we met. So, okay, that went off, and then later on, as I told you, the institution at Bordentown was a hub of social activity. Because of the segregated school situation, the black teachers of New Jersey had formed an association that was called Black Teacher's Organization of Colored Children, and we had what they called "study centers", in Cape May, no, not Cape May... Wildwood, Camden, Trenton, Asbury Park, and Newark. And they would hold their annual convention every year at Bordentown, and there would be a big affair over this, and there would be a big dance. So, I was coming up to this dance, while here again, the intervener, John, arranged that my escort at the dance would be Alec. Well, I let that go by, and then somehow, from John, he found out where I lived in Cape May, and all that summer I would look up anytime and he was showing up. So that was the spring of '41, and the fall of '41, he asked me to marry him. So I did.

RG: And you moved to Moorestown?

MCB: No, I was a "weekend bride", because I was teaching. I was living at my home and teaching at Cape May City, so I was just a "weekend" for the whole winter, but the next

summer, I came up here and that was when I began to really find out about the community was in the summer of... that would be '42.

RG: So was your husband drafted into the military?

MCB: Yes, he was. Now, he was given A1 classification, so at that time he was working with Campbell's Soup, and because that was a food industry, they were, what are they called...

RG: They were vital to the war effort?

MCB: Yeah. But then after Pearl Harbor, that classification ended at the end of the summer of '42, yes, because our first anniversary he had already been sent out to Fort Lee (Wayne?), Indiana. Fortunately, he never moved from there, he stayed there the whole time.

RG: What was he doing during the war there?

MCB: He was assigned to the Air Force, and he maintained the planes, they had their field air base out there.

RG: Okay, because of his training at the Moorestown...

MCB: Yeah, he was a mechanic, you know, and he was in the squadron that serviced the planes, gassed them up, and kept them back and forth. And some of the fellas from around here were moved, but fortunately, he stayed there all the time until the war was ended.

RG: Did you stay in Moorestown while he was out in Indiana?

MCB: No, I was still teaching, I was living home, but after the birth of our first child in '43, my mother was taking care of her while I was teaching, and her health became very

poor, and I said, "I'm not going to kill my mother looking after my child." And I resigned, and then that's when I went out to Fort Wayne, and we stayed there until even after the war was ended, we remained there, and we didn't move back here permanently until '51.

RG: Okay. So most of the 1940's for you were spent in Indiana or down in Cape May.

MCB: When he had furlough, we would stop here a couple of days, and then go back and forth, so I was in an out. My observations of Moorestown were just jump-in; I knew some of the church activities and that sort of thing, but I really began to observe things here as a permanent resident here in '51.

RG: What was it like here, back in 1951?

MCB: What was it like here?

RG: In Moorestown. Being a Quaker-influenced town, did you feel it was better than the other places you had lived?

MCB: By that time, we had four children, and I was glad to come back here because I thought this was a good place to rear my children.

RG: Why did you think that, rather than your home in Cape May, or staying out in Indiana, or some other place in between?

MCB: There seemed to be a community closeness that I didn't sense in Indiana, at Fort Wane. We had a lovely life out there, but still this offered to me a better base for my children to grow up in.

RG: Was it because of the schools, and the environment?

MCB: Well, one thing, when we were out there, housing was not very...

RG: It was military housing.

MCB: Well, no, it was housing in the city of Fort Wayne. We lived in an apartment, a two-bedroom apartment, and that wasn't a very satisfactory future to raise four kids. The reason we got back here was my husband's father died; my husband was the only heir to this property, and for a year he tried to maintain it while we were still living in Fort Wayne, and we both said well, that's a hard thing to do, I don't know if you've ever tried it, but it is a hard thing. Yeah, long distance, and back and forth, and communications with his lawyer, and then he tried renting it, and it was collecting the rent, and that sort of thing. And, as I said, by that time, we had had our fourth child, and he said, "I'm going back home, a two-bedroom house...and this house has four bedrooms." So we decided to pull up stakes and come back here.

RG: And then when you moved back here you got the teaching position?

MCB: No, we had, let me see, that was '51, we had four rough years here.

RG: Why do you say rough?

MCB: Rough because employment at that time hadn't really recovered from the war impetus. When we came back, he had several jobs, because there were a lot of other soldiers looking for jobs, he worked a while on the beginnings of the Delaware Memorial Bridge when they began to lay that foundation, he worked in construction when these new homes in Cinnaminson were being built...what else did he do? He got with the School Board and he drove a school bus, and really things didn't really financially stabilize with us until R.C.A. came into town. I have notes here about the impact of R.C.A. on some of the community, the black community.

RG: Okay, tell me about that.

MCB: This is my grandson. [Grandson walks in, R.G. stops tape] Now we were doing pretty good when he was driving the bus for the school board, economically, for money. We had four kids, I wasn't working, and money was tight, but I'm a very prudent person, and he was very frugal, too, I mean, you know, we didn't waste money, but there wasn't a lot of extra; I made all my children's clothes. He still was wearing when he was ninety-some years old the same pairs of shoes he sported when we were courting, he was that kind. [Laughs] But really, things began to brighten up, and then, of course, in '55, when I got back into teaching, we were able to be a little...

RG: Before we had to stop the tape because your grandson came in, you mentioned R.C.A. and how it impacted the black community. Could you tell me something about that?

MCB: Well, some of the local people got pretty good jobs. My husband and a few others of the men here in the community, they got on as maintenance workers, and that was a very secure position. R.C.A. took on a group of black engineers who were benefits of the G.I. Bill of education and who had been trained, who were college grads, were engineers and that sort of thing. At that time, they were connected with the Camden branch, and they had married and had wives and children, and they were coming out here, and R.C.A. took on quite a few of them. I don't know the exact details, but I know the results. This Farmdale area...

RG: Okay, the area behind Church Street.

MCB: Yeah, Farmdale. All that area was vacant property, and the builder Ravikio, he seized that opportunity, and he developed that area, all those houses, Farmdale, were occupied predominately, not every one of them, but predominantly, by those young families who came out here and were employed by R.C.A. They were engineers, and that level of employment.

RG: Let me ask you a question, why did Ravikio have to build special houses for these men who were engineers, and obviously were making a good enough paycheck that they could afford a house anywhere.

MCB: There weren't any houses available anywhere.

RG: Okay, so all the houses in Moorestown were occupied?

MCB: Pretty much, pretty much. They would have had to have gone on their own and bought land and built.

RG: Now, if they wanted to buy a house in Moorestown, would they be able to buy a house? A black person?

MCB: No, there wasn't very much available.

RG: Available to black people?

MCB: I don't know whether it was a racial thing, or if it was just the housing...

RG: It just hadn't turned over yet.

MCB: As I said, they would have to have bought a vacant property.

RG: And then built.

MCB: And then build, all on their own. Well, they were young, and they had young families, this was an opportunity. Now, at that time, those houses went for 25,000 dollars.

RG: That was a good piece of change back then.

MCB: Back then, but it was affordable for them for the wages that they were getting.

RG: Right, they were professional engineers.

MCB: So that brought in that influx. Now, they pretty much kept to themselves, they did not socialize, they called from Farmdale, which is just the next block up, they called this “down in the village.”

RG: “Down in the village.”

MCB: They called this “down in the village.”

RG: And this was the older black community?

MCB: Oh, yes. [Laughs] And remember, a good bit of that land, at that time, was just vacant. Now I’ll have to back track some more about that land over in that area, because there was something that happened at the very time that I married my husband, which I’ll get to. To complete this impact on the black community, they would send their kids down to the school, but all of their contacts, if they were going to shop or anything, they went out that way.

RG: Towards Cinnaminson?

MCB: No, Flynn Avenue. You know how you can cut through to 38? They seldom came down this way, and I remember one engineer’s wife and this friend that had been instrumental in getting my husband and I together, she got confrontational and oh, she snapped at me. She said, “You know, you looking down upon us, you calling us ‘down in the village, and you’re not better than the rest of us.’” Now she, at that time, was a teacher in Beverly, and she was the wife of John Hall, who was a very prominent figure

in the black community when I married into the community. And that's another whole story, that goes with what I would like to say about the Quaker...

RG: Okay, I'm just going to back up a little bit here. What you're describing is that it was a dichotomy in the black community, with "down in the village," and the professionals.

MCB: Yeah, the professionals, and you seldom saw them. Now, later on that broke down.

RG: Did they attend your church, or did they go to a church somewhere else?

MCB: They continued their churches elsewhere. Now, a little bit later on, they didn't occupy every house, and as times improved, quite a few teachers from Philadelphia also bought them, as they built and houses became available. I know at least, oh, I can count at least five homes that were bought from teachers from Camden and Philadelphia. Now, a little later, they became, because one of them, I guess you know Ed Armstead?

RG: Yes, I do. Moorestown Improvement Society.

MCB: Yes, well, he was one of the engineer families. Now, he became very, they were Catholic, and he became very involved with the Catholic Church. As time went by, some of them, they clung to their old churches, then when they got tired, they did join and become active in the churches.

RG: Do you feel that broke down the social distinctions that were set up?

MCB: Yes, it finally broke down, and they became...yeah. River Jones (?), she got very active with the League of Women Voters, and Barbara Gough (?) became active in our church. Here's the thing, as their children grew up, you see, and mingled with the second generation, then they were drawn in, they became very active in these families and that

sort of thing. But when they first came, and those that did not have small children, they were very distant.

RG: When they built those houses that Ravikio built, was there still a segregated school system in Moorestown?

MCB: No.

RG: By that time it was gone.

MCB: When I came back here in '51, my eldest daughter was eight and entered the fourth grade. Between my marriage in '41, schools in this area were still, even though the state had mandated integration, local boards were dragging their feet, and I understand from what I was told that there were some influential black families here that really had to pressure the board to actually reinforce the integration. So when we moved back here, Cathy was in the fourth grade, and she went up to Baker, Baker had just opened, just been built, and faculties were integrated, teachers were beginning to integrate.

RG: Okay. Now, before we got onto the R.C.A. thing, you were wanting to talk about the Quaker influence in the town. Do you think it was a positive influence on race relations and just human dignity based on the Quaker philosophy?

MCB: What I'm going to say is my private impression of what I felt when I entered the Moorestown community. I sensed a feeling of paternalism. We will look after you, take care of you, look after you. Now, I know, looking back at Anne's history, of how the Quaker's concern for the dignity of the slaves, the underground, and the caring for them, and seeing that. Now, when I married and came here in '41, most of the elderly generation, the mothers and fathers of people my husband's age group, most of them

derived their livelihood from domestics of the big Quaker families, chauffeurs, maids, cooks, babysitters, and that sort of thing. My husband's father was a gardener for the Cadburys, and after I moved back here and became a teacher and got involved with some of the activities in the town, this friend who had been instrumental in putting us together, was very ambitious, she became a member of the Women's League of Freedom, and she would drag me to all these...and when she would say, "This is my friend, Cordelia Bounds,"..."Oh yeah, Alec Bounds? We know him, he was the Cadbury's gardener." That always rang a bell with me, that you identify me because of the name of your gardener. She became the wife of John Hall. John Hall was the political, economic, he was tight with the Stokes. If you wanted something, and if you had problem, see John, and if you wanted to borrow some money out of the bank, if you had a problem, he could get it for you. And to me that always rankled me because it seemed to be paternalism. Now, as progress went on, and as the next generation came along, that has not been so prominent, but at that time, in the '40's and '50's, to me, that was the atmosphere I felt when I entered the community as an outsider. Now, it may be true, and possibly, a lot of good things were done. If you had gone into the history of both the black churches, you would read how they were very instrumental in helping, they've lent a lot of monetary and influential assistance for them to get started. So, I just have to say, as an outsider, since you asked, that was my impression for a long time.

RG: Yeah. Well, I think you have a very astute impression, because you explained it very well, and it may be exactly as you said, because of the things that you just described, how

people were taking care of...demanding that attitude of, “you couldn’t do it on your own, but we’re not going to hinder you, we’ll help you.”

MCB: And we’ll help you, and we will speak for you. You want some money from the bank? We will speak and see that you get it. You want a job? Here, we will give references and see to it that you get it.

RG: Yeah, the paternalism almost is semi-equality. If it was true equality, you did it on your own, you know, or didn’t get it, but still on your own.

MCB: On your own. But I always sort of rankled at this one individual who said, “Come straight to me and I’ll do something for you.” Oh, he thought he was the big wig.

RG: Well, that’s an interesting observation. But things you feel now have changed.

MCB: Well, because of my own experiences.

RG: Okay. Like what?

MCB: Well. First point, when I came here in ’51, Cathy, my oldest daughter, was eight. When we left Fort Wayne she had been a Brownie Scout, and here’s an interesting thing about the change in my family experiences. When we lived out in Fort Wayne, my husband was a chauffeur and house man for a family out in the section of Fort Wayne that was occupied by fairly rich people, and there was a big school out there, and when Cathy became school age, she entered South... what was it called? South something...I’ve forgotten now, over 50 years ago.

RG: Oh, that’s okay.

MCB: She was the only black child in that school, and she was the school darling. And she was a Brownie, and I would go and take her to her scout meetings, and I would play

the piano and teach them. When we came back here, I began to inquire, you know, where there was a Brownie, a Girl Scout, and I was told, "Well, we don't have a troop for the black children here, maybe you would like to start one." And I told her, well, that didn't set too nicely with me. But anyhow, I did become a member of the Parish Committee, and by becoming a member, I got my girls into... That broke down, because by the time, I told you about these R.C.A. people, by that time, all of their girls, they became very prominent in the Girls Scouts. And her sisters also became members, and they would go camping and that sort of thing, but when we came here in '41, that was that atmosphere. "We don't have one." And, well, after that, not only that, but...

RG: How did that make you feel? Because you lived a life where you've seen a lot of change, but here they're telling you that because you're black, we don't have one. And then they just say, "Let her join, come on in."

MCB: And if you want one, you know, you can start one.

RG: How did that make you feel? How did you cope with that?

MCB: Well, I'll tell you. Hey, it's living. The time era that I was raised and grew up with, I have lived under a lot of segregation that we accepted as a fact of life. My whole early education in Cape May was on a segregated basis. When I graduated from Glassboro, teaching jobs were still on a segregated basis. So much, that most of us who had graduated from Glassboro had to go to Maryland and Virginia and North Carolina to get teaching jobs. I spent three years in Smithfield, North Carolina teaching school.

RG: Because you couldn't get a job anywhere else.

MCB: Black teachers who had the jobs, they held them until they died. The way I got into Cape May, the teacher died.

RG: That's amazing.

MCB: It is amazing. Now, I bridged a gap when I went into teaching in Cape May, the school was still segregated, and it was still segregated when I resigned and went out to Fort Wayne, but when I came back, integration had taken place. I have just been involved, just two weeks ago, I was on a panel down in Cape May discussing the education in Cape May pre-desegregating, and that was quite interesting. When you finish, I'll show you something about that. But that's how I cope, because we learned to cope. And it was not a shocking thing for us.

RG: That was life; that was normal in America. Now, you lived, obviously, during the 1950's, and you were raising your children here in Moorestown, and this is when the Civil Rights Movement really got started in earnest. Now, how did the community in Moorestown react to, say, Rosa Parks, and Martin Luther King, and others.

MCB: Oh, I could sit here and talk to you all night about that, because I was involved in a lot of that.

RG: If you would explain just a little bit in the time we have remaining, and perhaps I could come back and we could fill a whole other tape with it.

MCB: [Laughs] Well, it's up to you.

RG: Oh, that would be good.

MCB: Well, there are many facets of my observations that I would like to make. As I look back on it, Moorestown was very anxious to prove that they were... they wanted to

accept integration, and they wanted to put forth a very positive image of a community embracing integration.

RG: Could you give me an example of that?

MCB: A lot of that came from the religious population of the town.

RG: The churches?

MCB: Of the churches. Just before I came here permanently, when I was back-and-forth, my father-in-law was very active in the church down here and we always went to church. Okay, there was a black preacher, Reverend Greets, who came here from my home town in Cape May. When I came back here, he was one of the preachers who was instrumental in forming the Moorestown Council of Churches, which consisted of a representation from all of the nine member churches in the community. There began a communal getting together...

RG: I think they call it the Ecumenical Council now, is that what it is?

MCB: No, no. I can say a lot about... I'll take you through that. Our representative here at Bethel, and our ministers were very active, and so was Second Baptist, in this Moorestown Council of Churches. At that time, they met monthly, they did Ecumenical observances of Thanksgiving, Easter, and one year we had a summer vesper program at the Friends Church, because, by that time, I had become one of Moorestown's representatives, and I became very involved with the Council of Churches. Children became very involved in the Youth Council, which was the youth branch of the, now notice the title I'm giving it, Moorestown Council of Churches, which consisted of the nine memberships. We always had a Daily Vacation Bible School. Now, when I first

married and came here in '41, Bethel had to have its own little summer thing, because we went on Vacation at the Bible School, and I can remember very clearly what they tried to do. When I came back here in '51, the Council of Churches was sponsoring a Daily Vacation Bible School. I became a teacher, I became the supervisor of all the first grades, I became a supervisor, and for three summers, I became the director. I directed the whole Daily Vacation Bible School, two weeks at that time. The year that Saint Matthew was doing its first renovation...

RG: The Lutheran Church?

MCB: Yeah. I was director of the Vacation Bible School that summer. I had always been involved as a teacher, because I am a musician as well as a teacher. I was involved with the summer programs; that way I met a number of people in the various congregations, and as I said, in directing the camp, recruiting, and getting the curriculum and that sort of thing, I became acquainted with a number of the church people. In fact, I got to the point later on through the years... a couple of the ministers were presidents of the Council of Churches. Reverend Nars, Reverend Tinney, and one of our ministers was secretary, so we were quite involved, and I was always very outspoken, became very involved with their activities. I don't know if you were here when Adamski was a pastor at the First Baptist? That year we had what we called the University of Light, and we had night courses. I was always on the committees, on the boards. Now, when the Civil Rights came, Moorestown was very anxious to prove that they were very liberal. There were several meetings and there were several issues of the kids in high school and that sort of thing. NAACP, whose director of the south jersey branch lives right up here on North

Church in Cinnaminson, we addressed various issues of equality, issues that the teachers had in the schools, and there was always very positive issues. The critical year, the year that the flower children, and all that sort of thing, the Council Churches tried to be very acceptive of them, and we would have some hot meetings, because some of us didn't want to embrace this new...

RG: This was like in the 1960's.

MCB: Yeah. And this is when they wanted to bring the guitars and the rock music and all of that. Those were interesting times, but it brought the community together. Now, I've never said this to anyone, yes I have. [Laughs] Well, you know Midge.

RG: Ingersoll?

MCB: Yeah.

RG: Sure.

MCB: Well, she and my son were classmates. You ask her, I won't go into it, you ask her about Chuckie Bounds' influence on the four years at Moorestown High School.

RG: Okay. And this is an academic influence, an athletic influence, a political influence?

MCB: It was a political/social influence. I'll give you two examples. He was the first black student to have a major role in the annual school play. He was...what was that play? The character was a woman...oh, golly. She'll tell you all about that. He was also the first black to be elected president of Student Council. His friend, Gregor Smith, who just buried his brother, was the first student to become president of a class. There were days when I would go out and hear, "Are you Chuckie Bounds' mother? Oh, Chuckie Bounds, Chuckie Bounds." And I always said, Moorestown is using Chuckie as the token

example of our embracing equality. So, I'll drop that because Midge can tell you a whole lot about that, you ask her sometime. [Laughs] Tell her you talked with Chuckie Bounds' mother.

RG: Well Ms. Bounds, we've been here about an hour, and I'd like to come back, because I feel that you have a lot more to say, and maybe we can arrange another appointment?

MCB: Yes, indeed. I'm always free.

Second Interview
March 16, 2006

RG: Okay, Mrs. Bounds, at the beginning here of our second interview, I'd like to ask you what was the religious community's response to the Civil Rights Movement of the '50's and '60's?

MCB: The response was an effort to pull the community together in a, what's the word I want to say...I can't think of it now... positive. In a positive reaction.

RG: How did they go about doing that?

MCB: Really, they did that through the Moorestown Council of Churches that had a youth group called the Youth Council. That meant that the youth education leaders in each church congregation, of course each church congregation has its youth group, Baptists have BTU and we Methodists have Christian Endeavor, and RAME has YPD, which is Young People's Group. When I [inaudible] the Moorestown Council of Churches was a united effort from all nine churches that all of these other branches in the nine churches would pull together their efforts and their endeavors, and that way, bring in

all of the youth of the various denominations, which, at that time, would involve a number of high school youth, middle school youth, and that sort of thing. For example, every May, around Memorial Day holiday, the Youth Council would have a retreat at one of the camps in Medford and all of the youth in all of the churches would go out there and spend overnight at the camp, and I can remember my eldest daughter was quite active as a representative from RYPD with the Youth Council, and I can remember how they were all, and some of the Baptists...now these were high school age youth, and this had been several years developed, but I gave them a chance to participate, to go out and spend a night together with their various activities. As a parent, I was involved because I had to, not only I, but other parents...transportation. Each church was allotted certain things they had to contribute and who by, and we had to see that that was all gotten together, and here was an effort to show that we, as a community, were supportive of an integrated life in the community.

RG: Demonstrated by the kids, integrated at the kids.

MCB: Yes. And being the catalyst of bringing that together provided certain activities.

Another activity...

RG: Could you tell me some of the specific activities that the young people participated in that would bring them together like that?

MCB: Well, that would be one. They had their monthly meetings; I can recall one of their monthly meetings, this is the youth council, now, that was held here at Bethel. That same daughter provided a young speaker from our church and the church was just filled with youth from all of the participating denominations. Another specific instance I can recall

was UNICEF Collections. As a member of the council, I was in on the organization and the Moorestown Youth Council teamed up with the Section of the Church of the United that was pushing the UNICEF Collections. Now, one year, my second daughter was the treasurer of the UNICEF Collections by the youth, and she had to report that to Mrs. Kraft, who was the Church of the United representative for UNICEF. Another year, we divided the town into areas and I remember I chauffeured about four or five kids, because our area was out there, I would stop, you know, and they would poll the houses, and then I would take them another way. Now these were some of the things that the religious groups did, and we had many, many discussions, any council itself, about supportive activities in the community...one of them was quite a discussion at that time, about whether there should be baccalaureate services or not. Now this was not so much a racial thing, this was aimed at the...remember the youth movement when they wanted to not be so conservative and they wanted a lot of guitar playing and that type of music? And some of the churches, we discussed it, and I can remember in the Catholic Church one year there was a small guitar playing group, and discussions opened like that.

RG: Did you see a change in the town because the young people were involved in this, those that were attending the church, as far as race relations, as far as understanding of each other?

MCB: It wasn't a very apparent thing, because there never has been a sharp division among the youth, I guess that was because of sports and athletics and that sort of thing that were fostered by the education system.

RG: Do you think it helped the adults? Or just the kids?

MCB: Yes, I do, because in some of the discussions we had...there were several movements later on that the NAACP got involved in, and I can recall discussions that we had about any instances of discrimination in the high school, and for about four or five years there were quite ongoing discussions with what was happening in the high school, and was it discrimination, and that was the time that I told you about my son being elected student council president, and about his being involved in the dramatics, and I forgot the name of the big production...do you remember the show Charlie's Aunt?

RG: Charlie's Aunt?. Vaguely, vaguely.

MCB: Well, he was Charlie's Aunt he had to dress up in drag. So, at that time, to summarize, I would say the community, between the discussions and the dialogue, that's the word I want to say, between those of us who were in the Church Council...and one of the years, that year the president of the Church Council was Laura Pierce, she's now dead, she was involved with the Pierce Business School, and she was quite an advocate for youth expression and youth freedom and, you know, all that, and those of us who were a little bit more conservative thought that that was something that we wanted to undermine. But there were efforts, and of course there was quite a lot of effort down at the assassination of Martin Luther King.

RG: In town, here in Moorestown?

MCB: There were parades and there were meetings, and there were discussions and the various churches, and both Bethel and Second Baptist...

RG: What was the mood of the people with that incident?

MCB: The mood was more supportive of the efforts to bring about equality. Now, it wasn't an apparent...not in my backyard, but there was a, "We will contribute, we will send money, we will do whatever we can do to help." Now, here's another incident of what happened, and this was sponsored by the Quaker Community.

RG: This involved the Martin Luther King assassination?

MCB: No, this goes back to the community being supportive of the whole Civil Rights, not specifically Martin Luther King, but that was all Martin Luther's push for Civil Rights, that was all within the same time frame. Now, if you recall the push for desegregation of schools, and some of the states, particularly Virginia, was dragging its feet, they weren't gonna budge from integrating. I don't know if you recall the Prince George, Virginia Chase?

RG: Yes, I remember.

MCB: Where the children didn't...the black wouldn't consent to them continuing and they desegregated, and the whites would not integrate, and for quite a while there was no schooling for the black kids at all. Well, I don't know if you ever heard about the American Friends Initiative here in Moorestown?

RG: No, I'd like you to tell us about it.

MCB: The American Friends commuted from Philadelphia through, again, our Quaker involvement in the Council of Churches, and one or two other involvements. They decided that they were going to bring some of those children up here to Moorestown to school them, and the Board of Education was very open to that suggestion. That meant

that they were not going to have to pay tuition for outsiders, and through the efforts of the American Friends Committee in Philadelphia, they brought, let's see...

RG: (At this point the battery was dying so we had to change the batteries and we're re-recording a portion)

MCB: Because the Quaker congregation here was very empathetic with the plight of those children in Prince George, Virginia, through the efforts of the American Friends Committee, they brought a few of the children here to Moorestown, so that they would not have a big gap in their education. Those children ranged from middle school age to high school age, and there were several teachers in the community that housed them. The School Board did not require them to pay any tuition, and, of course, all their education was free, and we offered our homes, we fed and took them in for all kinds of activities. They became a member of our family. Even after they got here, the vocal Friends Committee would have affairs that they would be socially integrated, we had meetings where we would council how to deal with the children and how to handle any problems. The children fitted into the community very well.

RG: They loved their experience here.

MCB: Yes. Sammy, the boy with Ruth Jenkins, at that time she was teaching in Moorestown Middle School, and Sammy went to the Moorestown Friends School. Some of the other high school children went to the Moorestown Public High School. They all did very well, they profited by the experience, and some of them went on to become quite well-educated and got good positions as they grew older.

RG: Did they correspond with the people back in Moorestown?

MCB: Yes, they did. One boy, Moses, came back several times to visit and formed a tight bond with his sponsor, and they became very friendly. I think Sammy came back once, some of the girls didn't come back, and the little girl that I had, she was not... well, let's say she was academically challenged, and found it a little difficult because of her earlier education. She had problems, but she was very eager to learn, and several years later I heard from her, corresponded with her, and she went back to Virginia and became a good wife and mother. But some of the other girls did go on into good careers, so there was a support that the community gave to the movement.

RG: That sure was, that was a big support.

MCB: Because that meant that there were about six or eight young people that benefited from that experience and were able to move on up in their lives.

RG: Mrs. Bounds you also wanted to talk about the admission of the second generation. That's the part that got messed up on the tape.

MCB: Oh, okay.

RG: Now, you mentioned before the second generation of black Americans who moved to Moorestown, moved here, and the ambition that they had for their offspring.

MCB: Yeah, they wanted their children to benefit from higher education and to be able to live a better life, and quite a number of them, in proportion to the population size here, sent their children onto higher education institutions. Both what the state afforded, such as Trenton, to become a teacher, or Glassboro to become a teacher. Some went to the traditionally black colleges, such as Hampton.

RG: That's in Virginia.

MCB: Hampton, Virginia, and then also Virginia Union, which is a black church-college. They became teachers in the area. The Jenkins family produced three teachers, one, Ruth Jenkins, who became an icon here in Moorestown.

RG: Did she teach at Baker School?

MCB: No, she taught in the middle school, when the middle school was up here, and then when they built the middle school that sat on Stanwick, she taught out there until she retired.

RG: When did she retire? Because her name is very familiar to me.

MCB: I can't recall exactly when she retired, but most likely you read in the paper of her death, because it was quite...

RG: Oh, okay.

MCB: Now, she died up here at the Brandywine, and yes there was quite a...

RG: Yeah, that's probably where.

MCB: Now, she had begun in the primary black school up here, Number 7, and then when integration came she was moved up to the middle school, and then when they built the middle school out on Stanwick, she was out there. She taught my son, Matt. So she stayed right here. Her sister, Anne, taught until retirement in Philadelphia, and her other sister, Bernice, became a principal in Trenton, and all of them worked until retirement.

RG: Okay. So the experience of Moorestown, then, was a good one from the first generation that moved from Virginia and Maryland to Moorestown, their children benefited from the atmosphere that was here.

MCB: Yes, and from the ambitions that their parents had for them, and the sacrifices that they made to send them, because other than either being a domestic or having worked at Campbell's Soup, which was one of the main employers of the area at that time, or in the agricultural world, that was their sources of income. They were frugal, and those that couldn't afford a college education sent their children to Bordentown Manual Training Institute, which also was in the vicinity, back and forth, you know. I'm not too sure...as far as I know, if there was a tuition it was very minimal, because I have a nephew that came up from Cape May and went there just at the outbreak of the war.

RG: This was World War II.

MCB: Mhm. So there were the opportunities. Mr. French had two daughters, had three daughters, and Dot became a teacher and taught in Mount Holly, and his youngest daughter Lucy he sent to Hampton, and she became a teacher in Philadelphia. They both remained in the community but worked otherwise. Mr. Anderson, who had a very good job at Campbell's Soup, his son, Willis, became a teacher at Mount Holly and taught for years until retirement. The Grace Family, later on there was a movement when a number of postal workers from Philadelphia came over to New Jersey and property, land was not too expensive, and they came over and they built...

RG: And this is all in Moorestown?

MCB: In Moorestown. At that time, there was a movement in a lot of South Jersey, the same Philadelphia people were going to Glassboro and buying pieces of property and going back and forth every day to work, and we had several postal families, and the Grace family was one of the outstanding families. Mr. Grace was a postman; he had

something like four or five girls and a couple boys. His wife, that he met when he came over here to Jersey, had been a teacher. She had taught in what is now Cinnaminson along with Mrs. Yancy, who was also an elderly teacher. Okay now, from the Grace family, every one of those children they sent to college. Most of them went to Hampton, and that family produced three or four, they ended up with doctorates.

RG: Wow. That's quite an accomplishment.

MCB: Yeah. All of them ended up with doctorate degrees. Carolyn became an administrator over in Philadelphia. Catherine became a teacher in Moorestown Middle School, she earned her doctorate. Caroline earned her doctorate. Ruthie became a gym teacher, came right back to Moorestown and taught up at the Junior High, she went on and got her doctorate. The boys, two of them were very musical, they didn't come back to Moorestown but they went elsewhere, they didn't stop until they had doctorate degrees in music. One of them is still, I guess is still teaching down in Virginia somewhere. Let me go back to this Grace family. Henry was very ambitious for his children and he would fight for them. Now this is the family that was caught in the crux of making Moorestown make its move when the state said integration, and they were walking on their heels.

Henry Grace and Olive Grace, who became quite a personage in the community, oh I'll tell you about that too, they pushed, they were able to attend many of the meetings because he wanted his... Now, there were young kids when I came here in '41, some of them were still in the junior high, and in high school, but by that time, integration had been accomplished. Now, his wife was still quite a personage in the community by way of her association with Lydia Stokes.

RG: Oh, okay, the lady...well the Quaker lady.

MCB: Yes. Doctor Stokes, Lydia Stokes, who has been quite a benefactor to Moorestown Friends, the school, and to the community, and who was one of the founders of the Churchmen United Group here in Moorestown, into which Olive, Mrs. Grace, played quite a part, and her counterpart, Becky Krebs, they became Valiant Ladies, which was quite an award, and that sort of thing.

RG: Valiant Ladies, that was an award within the...?

MCB: For the Churchmen United. Olive was a well-educated person, and she had a beautiful disposition. She really has been my mentor when I moved into the community, because of her sweet demeanor, she never said an ugly word; she would always just smile sweetly and never would take sides. Deeply religious, and had endured some really testing circumstances, because one of her sons, her oldest sons, had been lost at sea during the war.

RG: World War II.

MCB: Yeah. He had become lost at sea.

RG: Was he in the Navy or the Merchant Marines?

MCB: I don't know which it was. At that time, my experience with the branches of service at that time...But anyhow, how she remained a staunch Christian and how she always had good advice to give me. Olivia doted on her, but now, I always had a little reservation in my mind, because every time Olivia Stokes talked about Olive Grace, she would refer to how Olive nursed and tended her daughter. She had that little, you know, "You work for me." Now, she also for years was the attendant to Mrs. D'Olier, who at

that time was living at the Perkins. They're doing now a history of the community house, and she was one of the movers that, she and Ellis Johnson, are the movers of that. Well Olive nursed her and tended her until she died, and at the time I came here, she was working for them. Now, besides being ambitious for his children, he was sort of an entrepreneur. When I married, at the time I was engaged and first married to my husband, he and John Paul and some other people were putting together a group of men to buy some vacant lots just up here, on both sides of Walnut, on this side of Church Street, and John wanted my husband to join in and invest some money in buying this property, and Alec wouldn't do it. Well, the effort went on, and Henry Grace, when I first married they were living right on by the railroad tracks. Now, the land over here, on the other side of Park Boulevard...

RG: Farmdale is it called?

MCB: No, no no, around this way. It would run up to Flynn.

RG: Mrs. Bounds is pointing to the westward side of the town here.

MCB: [Laughs] Yes, it was the western area. On Park Boulevard, on the east side, of course, where the two houses here, I think Mrs. Harris has one of them now, then there was vacant property, and then there was just that little farm house there, all the rest of that was vacant land. Now, on the west side of Park Boulevard, that was all vacant and that property, down right off of this Parker Avenue that cuts in there, that parallels right up against the railroad, so Henry Grace built his house there, because they had big lots and they sold those lots. That was when all that area became...people began to build, and some of the people who built their properties over there were employed by RCA.

RG: That's where all those houses are that were built for the engineers who worked for RCA?

MCB: No, no, that's Farmdale.

RG: That's Farmdale. Okay, I want to get that straight.

MCB: Yeah. That's Farmdale. That was still field, and Henry and this group were beginning to build over there.

RG: Do you remember how much they paid for those lots?

MCB: No, I never did find out because Alec, he just wouldn't have no part in them, he just wouldn't say what they were going for, but the brick house up here, those two homes on Walnut as you go in, they were John Hall's lots, and he bought several lots because he had one for each of his children.

RG: Who did they buy these lots from?

MCB: I don't know.

RG: Did they pay cash?

MCB: I don't know, all I know is that Alec was fussing and said that John wanted to go in with some scheme to buy a lot of property, and he wasn't going to have any part of it.

RG: You called it a scheme though.

MCB: Yeah. Listen, you had to know my husband. He was very suspicious of a lot of things. He's skeptical of a lot of things.

RG: Well, it's good to be that way.

MCB: Yeah, well, at that time, there was a war going on, and as I told you before, his chance of being, which he was, drafted...so he didn't want any association with...but I

can remember him, those two or three months right after we got married, telling me about John was pressuring him to be a part of this group. Now, well, I don't know at that time, because at that time, as I said, I was a commuting wife, I was only up here Friday night, Saturday, and Sunday, because I was still teaching down in Cape May. I really didn't become a part of the community until we moved back in '51.

RG: Speaking of the community, I think you mentioned before the church as a core of social life for the black community. What kind of things did the church provide socially for the people?

MCB: They were combined with money raising activities. There would be teas, oh, that was a great thing, when either one of the church's committees would perform a tea, that would be a wild thing.

RG: What was a tea? I know the beverage tea, but what else was involved?

MCB: Well, when they put on a tea...okay, let me give you a for instance. In our church, we had a group, Pastor's Aid. The ladies, they would decide that they were going to have a tea. They would put together a program, because many of the times, I was asked to play a selection, or to play for someone who sang, or they would bring some friend in to sing, or they would have some of the young people...they would have a program, and our group caterers and cooks, oh, they would have the dainties and they would set up the table. It was most of the women's ambitions in this community to own a silver tea set, and this was the time when they could bring it out. You could go into one, two, three, my neighbor over here, my neighbor back there, and they had acquired a silver tea set with the pitcher. And you would go in their house and it would be sitting on...

RG: Prominently displayed.

MCB: Yeah, on their sideboard. Now, they had acquired a taste and appreciation for these things from what they saw up town there, and they wanted those things for themselves, they acquired beautiful linens...My mother-in-law, Alec's mother, had a gorgeous dinner set, and she had a lot of beautiful silverware, which I have fortunated to the kids in one thing or another. The whole thing was gonna be that everybody dressed up, and you came out to the tea, and this was quite a thing. There would be fashion shows, there would be hat shows, suppers.

RG: This sounds like it was a lot of stuff for the women; what were the men doing?

MCB: The men would have, for social life, the men had ball games, and they had teams that competed with Merchantville and Pennsauken.

RG: Softball games?

MCB: Softball games. And that was quite the thing. Right behind a portion of now, what is the park, and I guess Mrs. Harris told you about the West End Center, well back there was the field. Every evening in the summer, I got so provoked with my husband, because here I was a new bride, and when he came home from work at five o'clock, I didn't see him until it was dark. They'd gather back there and they'd play croquet. Oh, they loved their croquet games!

RG: That was a big game back then.

MCB: Yeah, and for the youth, ball games. That was when all the youth got back there.

Now, a lot of the light social things were affairs sponsored by churches. You know, Sunday afternoon there was always something at the West End. Women's club, they

would use the churches, there would be a baby contest, there would be, as I said, hat shows, suppers, and things like that. The social life evolved around those activities.

RG: Because the church was so active in the social life of the community, did most people belong to either the Baptist church or the AME church?

MCB: Yeah, and families...Family groupings.

RG: Okay, we just said almost 100% of the black population?

MCB: No, I would say maybe 80%. Maybe 80 or 90%.

RG: Okay. So the other 10% didn't bother going to church or belonged to another church?

MCB: Some belonged...

RG: Catholic Church?

MCB: No, no, there was very little membership integration. You were either Second Baptist or you were Bethel.

RG: Did anyone from the African-American community belong to the Society of Friends? The Quakers?

MCB: Not that I know of.

RG: Okay. Do you think if the society itself was more integrated, do you think that there would have been an integration of the churches as well, but because the churches provided a social environment, even if say, a member of the black community wanted to join the Catholic church or the Presbyterian church or the Quakers, they wouldn't simply because they would be excluded from the social atmosphere?

MCB: If I were to put it from my observation, we had been so indoctrinated in having our own, that there really wasn't any kind of an effort to even want to. Later on, when we did have a few members who wanted to become and did become members of First Methodist, and we had one or two who became members of the First Presbyterian, we kind of said, you know, "what's the matter with them? What's the matter with what we had?" And there again, remember that we were still rooted in the pressures of having our own and being our own, and don't cross the tracks syndrome, it never really caused any push to really make an effort to break down a door. We were happy in proving, you know, and bettering what we had. When Bethel was just a little church, and when we made an effort to renovate it, and we made another effort to renovate it when we decided to pull down what we had and build a new one.

RG: So it was a symbol of your community pride.

MCB: Yeah.

RG: Okay, what I'm going to do is just stop here. This concludes our second interview with Mary Cordelia Bounds at her home in Moorestown, New Jersey.

Two interviews conducted on March 9, 2006 and March 16, 2006 by Richard Garvin of the Historical Society of Moorestown with Mary Cordelia Bounds at her home on 532 North Church Street in Moorestown, New Jersey.