

**1121-086-GSM-gau (USMARC); GSG (OCLC/SOLINET)
City of Savannah Municipal Archives, Savannah, Georgia**

Record Series #: 1121-086
Name: Voices of Savannah collection
Dates: 2022-2024
Extent/Size: 17 interviews (79.5 GB)
Language: English

Project History:

The Voices of Savannah collection is part of the Savannah Community Memory Project (SCMP) initiative. The SCMP is a wide-ranging initiative of the City of Savannah's Municipal Archives to preserve and share a more complete history of Savannah's diverse communities in their own voices. Under the SCMP umbrella, the Municipal Archives: partners with neighborhoods to conduct community archiving events; partners with community organizations to preserve Savannah's LGBTQ+ history through the [Proud Savannah History Project](#); and hosts the SCMP residency to facilitate the creative collection and interpretation of community memory. SCMP collections primarily include oral histories, physical and digitized materials donated by community members, and written reflections.

Scope and Content:

The Voices of Savannah collection includes oral history interviews with community leaders, historians, and residents with different insights into life and history in Savannah and Chatham County. The collection is entirely digital in format. For each narrator, the collection contains an oral history recording, and may include a transcription of the interview.

Several interviews in the collection are part of the City of Savannah Leadership Oral History Project. These include interviews with former City of Savannah mayors, aldermen, city managers, and assistant city managers.

This collecting initiative is ongoing and the collection is expected to grow.

System of Arrangement and Ordering:

The Voices of Savannah collection is arranged chronologically by the date of the interview. The finding aid is arranged alphabetically by narrator's name. See the attached inventory.

Conditions Governing Access:

No restrictions.

Conditions Governing Reproduction and Use:

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Digital Access:

The oral history interviews and corresponding transcripts are available digitally online through the Voices of Savannah portal at: <https://www.savannahga.gov/3319/Voices-of-Savannah>. If you have issues accessing the material, please contact the Archivist via email at Archives@savannahga.gov or call the Municipal Archives at (912) 651-6412.

Access Points:

Arnold, Mercedes
Brown, Michael B.
DeLoach, Eddie W.
Georgia - Savannah
Jackson, Edna Branch
Jackson, Roy
Johnson, Otis S.
Lominack, Jerry
Mobley, Virginia
Monahan, Pat C.
Morrill, Christopher
Municipal Government
Noble, Elisabeth
Oglethorpe Marble and Granite Company
Rodriguez, Daniela
Stillwell, W. Brooks
Stokes, Cheyrl
Taylor, Gena
Vaquer, Michael

Preferred Citation:

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Processed by:

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Inventory (arranged alphabetically):

Collection available online at: <https://www.savannahga.gov/3319/Voices-of-Savannah>.

Narrator, Date of Interview (Item #) [hyperlink for interview and transcript]

Note: For each narrator, the collection contains an oral history recording and may include a transcript of the interview.

Arnold, Mercedes, September 12, 2024 (Item 1121-086-0017) [Interview]

Mercedes Arnold highlights the struggle for civil rights and racial integration in Savannah, Georgia. She recounts efforts by the NAACP and local activists to overcome discriminatory barriers in education, particularly focusing on Otis Johnson's entry into Armstrong Junior College and her husband's experience as a Black teacher during desegregation. Arnold emphasizes the support of allies from various backgrounds, such as Mason Gordon, Gertrude Javits, and Monsignor John Toomey, who helped challenge systemic racism. She reflects on the importance of solidarity across racial and religious lines and concludes with a hopeful call for Savannah to continue progressing toward equality and justice.

Brown, Michael B., April 4, 2022 (Item 1121-086-0011) [Interview]

Michael Brown reflects on his extensive career, particularly his long-term involvement with the City of Savannah. After stepping down from his city manager position, he went on to start a consulting firm and contributed to various urban planning projects. He returned to Savannah in 2020 during a period of leadership change, working on initiatives like Mohawk Lake and Project DeRenne. Throughout his career, he emphasized the importance of community engagement, addressing both the City's challenges and the rich history of its African American communities, and expressed pride in his role in Savannah's development. He also acknowledged the contributions of key local leaders and his family, who supported his work over the years.

DeLoach, Eddie W., January 24, 2022 (Item 1121-086-0009) [Interview]

Eddie DeLoach reflects on his time as mayor of Savannah, highlighting his efforts to improve the community, his work with fellow council members, and the challenges of City governance, particularly regarding the city manager role and the fire tax proposal. He also addresses the difficulties of navigating race relations in local politics and stresses the importance of unity and cross-community support for Savannah's success. DeLoach credits his family, especially his wife Cynthia, for helping him achieve personal and professional success, emphasizing the vital role of mutual support in achieving one's goals.

DeLoach, Jessie Collier, November 4, 2024 (Item 1121-086-0018) [Interview]

In this interview, Mrs. Jessie Collier DeLoach reflects on her life as a lifelong resident of Savannah, Georgia, emphasizing her family's history, education, and community contributions. Born in 1929, she recounts growing up in a segregated Savannah, where her father ran a successful dry-cleaning business and her mother supported the family. After excelling in school, Jessie pursued a degree in mathematics and became an educator, eventually teaching at both segregated and integrated schools, while also serving on the Savannah school board for 20 years. She highlights the importance of community involvement, her dedication to Butler Presbyterian Church, and her commitment to various civic organizations, including the Savannah Symphony Women's Guild and Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority. Throughout the interview, Jessie expresses gratitude for her supportive family, particularly her father's influence, and reflects on the value of education and mentorship in shaping young lives.

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Jackson, Edna Branch, April 27, 2022 (Item 1121-086-0012) [\[Interview\]](#)

Edna Jackson reflects on her career as a public servant, emphasizing her ability to bring people together and her commitment to integrity. She is particularly proud of her role in uniting individuals across political divides, especially during her time in the Georgia state legislature, where she worked collaboratively to pass local bills and redistricting plans. Jackson credits her success to the guidance of mentors from both the Black and white communities, stressing the importance of listening, respect, and maintaining one's name and integrity. As she looks back on her life, she remains proud of the positive changes she helped bring to Savannah and beyond, always remaining humble and grounded in her roots.

Jackson, Roy, November 18, 2021 (Item 1121-086-0007) [\[Interview\]](#)

Roy Jackson reflects on his career and time in Savannah, emphasizing the city's potential for unity despite challenges. He highlights the community's ability to come together on projects for the greater good, citing examples such as the renaming of West Broad Street to Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard, where both African American and historic interests found common ground. While he notes that collaboration seems more difficult today, he attributes this to broader national trends, rather than specific issues within Savannah. Jackson expresses pride in the city's progress and the role of strong leadership in maintaining unity and growth.

Johnson, Otis S., October 25, 2021 (Item 1121-086-0006) [\[Interview\]](#)

In this interview, Dr. Otis S. Johnson reflects on his life and career, emphasizing his roots in Savannah's Gullah Geechee community and his early exposure to racial inequality during the Jim Crow era. He shares his activism in the Civil Rights Movement, including his involvement in desegregation efforts and his historic role as the first Black student admitted to Armstrong Junior College. Dr. Johnson also discusses his political career, including two terms as mayor of Savannah, where he focused on social justice, racial equity, and improving opportunities for marginalized communities, all while maintaining a lifelong commitment to servant leadership.

Lominack, Jerry, July 8, 2022 (Item 1121-086-0001) [\[Interview\]](#)

Jerry Lominack reflects on his experiences in the Troup Ward neighborhood, focusing on the construction of his home and its significance within the context of the area's architectural and social history. He shares details about the Housing Authority's involvement in revitalizing the area, the partnerships and challenges during the construction process, and the reactions from the community. Lominack reflects on the legacy of his house, emphasizing its role as a historical record and its importance in capturing a particular moment in time. He also highlights the collaborative nature of architecture and the need for a collective effort to create sustainable, livable environments.

Mobley, Virginia, March 4, 2021 (Item 1121-086-0003) [\[Interview\]](#)

In this interview, Virginia Mobley reflects on her family's long-standing business, Oglethorpe Marble and Granite Company, founded in 1907 by her grandfather, George Bernard Little. She discusses the evolution of the monument industry, highlighting her family's contributions to public and private monuments in Savannah, including significant projects like the Celtic Cross and Vietnam Memorial. Mobley also shares stories of her grandfather's entrepreneurial ventures, the challenges of maintaining traditional craftsmanship, and the ongoing preservation efforts in Savannah's historic cemeteries, emphasizing the artistry and legacy her family has left in the city.

Monahan, Patrick C., September 29, 2021 (Item 1121-086-0005) [\[Interview\]](#)

Pat Monahan reflects on his career in local government, particularly in Savannah, where he focused on enhancing the City's financial health through innovative revenue sources and fostering growth. He expresses his deep connection to Savannah's history, highlighting his personal research into the city's

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development and landmarks. Monahan also discusses his passion for woodworking and volunteering, especially through a construction ministry, while emphasizing his commitment to giving back to the community. Despite his retirement, he remains active in both personal and community projects, cherishing his life in Savannah while also spending time in North Carolina.

Morrill, Christopher, December 6, 2021 (Item 1121-086-0008) [\[Interview\]](#)

Chris Morrill reflects on his career in public administration, highlighting his impactful work in Savannah, including budget reforms, police department consolidation, and efforts to address poverty. After working internationally in South Africa and later as city manager in Roanoke, he transitioned to the executive director role at the Government Finance Officers Association (GFOA). Morrill praises Savannah's beauty and progressive history but notes challenges such as political polarization and the need for greater regional collaboration on issues like climate change and poverty.

Noble, Elisabeth Maria, May 18, 2023 (Item 1121-086-0014) [\[Interview\]](#)

Elisabeth Noble reflects on her life, discussing her love for walking, her brief return to Germany, and the bittersweet memories of leaving her homeland. She reveals the struggles she faced in her marriage, which was strained due to her husband's infidelity and his mother's disapproval of her. Despite these challenges, Elisabeth took advantage of opportunities, such as earning a degree in Latin from the Gregorian University in Rome, and achieving academic success. She also shares her appreciation for living in historic Savannah, especially enjoying the city's beauty and the economic impact of institutions like Savannah College of Art & Design.

Rodriguez, Daniela, October 20, 2020 (Item 1121-086-0002) [\[Interview\]](#)

The interview centers on Daniela Rodriguez's role as a young member of the Hispanic Outreach, Leadership, and Advocacy (HOLA) Task Force in Savannah, where she advocates for immigrant rights, particularly in areas like immigration policy and social services. She speaks passionately about the need for immigrants to be treated with dignity and respect, despite facing numerous challenges and injustices. The conversation also touches on her contributions to the community and her efforts to make lasting changes through advocacy and leadership.

Stillwell, W. Brooks, September 15, 2021 (Item 1121-086-0013) [\[Interview\]](#)

Brooks Stillwell reflects on his time in Savannah, discussing his role as city attorney and his broader contributions to the city. He highlights the impact of long-serving leaders like Jimmy Blackburn, especially in the Civil Rights Movement, and shares his pride in Savannah's transformation into a world-class destination with improved infrastructure and better race relations. He also recalls working on major public-private development projects like the Plant Riverside and Eastern Wharf developments, which he believes will shape the city's future. Stillwell expresses gratitude for his career in Savannah, noting how fortunate he feels to have contributed to the city's growth and success.

Stokes, Sheryl, December 20, 2023 (Item 1121-086-0015) [\[Interview\]](#)

The conversation centers on the life and legacy of Sheryl Stokes' parents, particularly her father, Sammy, a beloved coach in Savannah. Sammy's contributions to his community were significant, including having a field named in his honor and being recognized by the Greater Savannah Athletic Hall of Fame. The interview also highlights Sheryl's mother's accomplishments, including her career as a teacher and postmaster. The family was deeply involved in their church, and Sammy was known for his humility, never complaining about his health struggles despite being a triple amputee. Throughout, Sheryl reflects on the important life lessons taught by her parents, their close-knit family values, and their impact on the community.

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Taylor, Gena, February 20, 2024 (Item 1121-086-0016) [[Interview](#)]

In this interview, Gena Taylor reflects on her role as Executive Director of Greenbriar Children's Center, a nonprofit dedicated to supporting children and families. She shares emotional stories of how Greenbrier has positively impacted former residents, some of whom have gone on to lead successful lives and even return to give back to the organization. Taylor emphasizes the deep connection and respect the community has for Greenbrier, noting its longstanding staff and dedicated volunteers. She also highlights the center's upcoming 75th anniversary celebrations, including a Walk to Greenbrier and a gala, to honor its history and contributions.

Vaquer, Michael, April 13, 2022 (Item 1121-086-0010) [[Interview](#)]

This interview provides an in-depth overview of Mike Vaquer's career and involvement in local government and development in the Savannah area. He discusses the evolution of City politics, particularly the shift from a largely unified City council to a more district-based system. Vaquer reflects on key challenges, such as affordable housing and attracting industry, as well as his contributions to major projects like the Truman Parkway and the harbor deepening. He also touches on his work with Union Camp (later International Paper) in land development and environmental stewardship, emphasizing the complexities of local governance and the dedication of elected officials in the region.

RESTRICTED UNTIL 2070 (Item 1121-086-0004)