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JOHN K OLB'S HISTORY

B: I'm visiting with John Kolb in the Trumbull Avenue Church building, 4203 Trumbull Avenue, Detroit, and I want to begin by asking about your roots beginning with your father, grandfather, etc.

K: My father's grandfather, I was near him, but I suppose he was dead by the time I was old enough to remember. I was the seventh child of my family and I have to take my information from my older brothers and sisters who knew him. My father's grandfather was German, as I understand it, and he had a child by a black woman making my grandfather half-white and half-black. I did not know him so well and I do not know his name. He must have been dead several years by the time I got old enough to remember anything. I don't remember anything about my father's mother except I have heard her name but it got lost in the shuffle of many relative's names. There were 12 in all of our immediate family. My father had more brothers but I didn't know but two of them--Uncle Mack and Uncle Judson.

B: Where did your grandfather live?

K.: Crenshaw County located SW of Tuskegee, South of Montgomery about 50 miles. That is where I was born on the farm of 900 acres belonging to Robert Kelly. He was an Irishman whom I respected and admired very much; he was like a member of our family. I worked with him as I grew up as cook until my mother died when I was 17 just turning 18 the day after she was buried. As I said, I was the cook and Mr. Kelly ate with us and spent much time with us day and nights. He ate the big meal which we called supper at our house. I stayed in Alabama about three years after my mother passed and then I came to Detroit.

My parents brought me up going to Sunday school and church, so when I left Luverne in Crenshaw County and went to Montgomery, spending 3 or 4 years there, I came on to Detroit. I've been faithful to the church all my life, so when I came here I looked for the church for over a year before I found it. I was told my many that it was just down the street from where I lived, but I went to many places and found that it was not the Church of Christ. It got to where I would just go and look in the window and see for my self in the summertime if it was the church or just a church.

I was visiting up in Lexington, Michigan once and ran into a lady who knew about the church. By that time I figured people did not know what the Church of Christ was. I had begun to ask people about the preachers --Brother Keeble, Paul English, Brother Bowser and others and she knew of them. I said, "That's the church." This lady was known as Bessie Zante, or she was Sims then, and it was through Sister Sims that I located the little mission on St. Antoine and Alexandrine. I had been living within two or three blocks of that place for many years (?) but there was not enough noise being made for me to find it. When I got there, I found a family living in one part of it and the worship place in front of the family quarters. At that time I was getting ready to go back South so only visited the church only once, after that month's visit at Lexington. I spent a few years back South and returned to Michigan in 1937.

At that time the little church had moved to Cameron Avenue but I didn't know it. When I went to the old address and found nothing, I had decided since there had been so few before, that perhaps the group had gone out of business. I felt sorry about

that and began looking again. I located the group at Cameron at Clay.

B: All this is good, but I'd like to go back and scratch around more among your roots. I want to make sure I get the foundation done.

K: Good. If I know I'll be glad to share it. On my mother's side, her name was Lizzie Bradley, she had a number of brothers. It was said of her she was one of the best in Crenshaw County. That was said by a white man the last time I saw him except he was more blunt: "She was the best nigger woman in Crenshaw County." Of course, we don't appreciate his term but you want the truth.

B: I don't know your father's name.

K: Roy Graham Kolb.

B: Did you live with your grandfather and your father was a young married man with him when you were born?

K: As far as I know, my grandfather never lived on the farm where I was born. It was a large farm and I know my father could stand on the back porch and shoot deer in the pasture. As I grew up I thought we lived at the end of the world. I was afraid to go much farther. But I enjoyed the hunting life and spent much of my life in the woods.

B: Where did your grandfather live?

K: In that section of the country, but I never knew where. His name was Charlie Kolb. I think his wife's name was Becky. I knew very little about their family except the Uncles Mack and Judson, as I mentioned. I did see a younger Uncle once but barely remember anything about him. These must have lived in the community, too. Either my father or Judson were the oldest of the children unless there was a girl in there, but I don't remember.

B: Where did your father meet Lizzie?

K: He met her in Crenshaw County. She was brought up with whites, but I don't know why. She lived with whites, and he got her from the Gibsons.

B: You mean she was a servant?

K: No. They felt about her as if she was a member of the family. Some of the slavery ideas must have still been around, too, but it appears that this Gibson family had her and brought her up. She seems not to have known much about the community in which I was raised, but perhaps she was born there originally. There were not too many people black or white living in that community and most of the blacks were relatives of mine.

B: What about your mother's parents?

K: My mother's mother lived with us. Her name was Harriett. I was a very small boy when she died. She was a very fine lady. I did not know her husband but I understand my mother's father was Indian. My mother had a brothersby the name of Lee, Jim

and Joe whom I did not know. They, too, were separated but through some preacher the family was located years later and had some contact but did not get back together. Many of these uncles and first cousins I never met but just heard of them. I think they might have lived within 50 miles of my home. There were three Bradley brothers -- Uncle Henry, Uncle Jim and Uncle Lee lived in the Bradley community. That is where we lived and also attended the Rodenwald school there. These three brothers owned most of the land which went as far as the river. After their deaths most of the land fell into other's hands.

B: What river?

K: Patsylagree, I believe but I can't spell it. This is 4 or 5 miles out from Luverne. But I was born in the next community which takes up where the Bradley lands end. It was on the Kelly farm. The next place was owned by Pat Massey who was also a friend of my father's. This land was owned by these men and their friends. The school, church and cemetery was all on the Bradley brothers' land and it remained that way until late 30's or 40's. As the young people began to grow up and move out they weren't interested in anything and we lost our land. We were all young except my older brother, but we didn't have the type of knowledge to move to protect it. So it fell into other hands for nothing, just to give to somebody.

B: How did these blacks come to possess this land that near slavery times? They usually did not have that much money.

K: I don't know. But they did own it, and still do some of it. One of my cousins bought a plot where Uncle Lee lived and where Uncle Jim lived, the boys still own a plot. Uncle Henry had more land than any of them but we couldn't get it out of him. He promised but never fulfilled his promise. He had two children Thelma and James. Thelma married and went to Pennsylvania and owned property there and claimed no part of it. James died. All that Uncle Henry had he wouldn't turn loose. His wife tried to get him to give it to some of the family but he wouldn't and eventually lost it.

B: What about the religious beliefs of your grandmother Harriett? Was she a member of the Church?

K: I can't say. Possibly she could have been, but I was too young to know. My mother Lizzie was a member of the church. My mother and father were members of what was known as the Christian Church in the Bradley community. Before that, my mother belonged to the Baptist Church. So did one of my sisters and my father. I remember in 1908, when I was just a little boy, I recall my mother asking the preacher about her baptism. I visited there at the branch where we used to baptize with my brother and a cousin named Siphrow Bradley last September. The preacher had said "Your baptism is not safe". He said the same thing to my sister. So they both were baptized the same day I was in 1915. The name of this preacher was Giles Edwards. We considered him to be a man well-informed and with a good education. An excellent songster, both he and his daughter. He taught music, too. I don't know where he got his education. Montgomery and Tuskegee were not too far away and had good schools. Lomax Hannah College was in Greenville, a short distance away. But in my county there was no highschool for blacks.

B: Who came into the church first? Your father or your mother?

K: My mother did after she had been attending the church at Antioch in the Bradley community (the post office for all this area was Luverne). She had not been satisfied with her previous baptism in the Baptist church. I believe it was September, 1915. I was born September 13, 1907. I was 8 years old at the time.

I remember this incident caused me to reflect on it many times afterward and spurred my interest in the Bible. I never was interested in worldly things such as going into town to the show or carnivals which came in once in a while but I did like to get my gun and go down into the swamp hunting. I used to could go down as far as the bridge over the river but was not allowed to cross it. I went to town very few times. I never cared for the city and still don't but I'm stuck here and will have to stay.

B: Do you know anything about the life of Charlie and Becky Kolb?

K: That far back I am not able to go. I know nothing about their religious life, either.

B: How did your father hear about the church?

K: He was always connected with the Christian Church. In later years we went back and emphasized more the name of the Church of Christ. The same included the rest of the family. All this change in emphasis was in the Antioch church. There was another congregation a few miles out known as the Valley and some of my relatives attended there and they had a cemetery there, too. I had an uncle who attended there and it was a Baptist settlement, whereas the Antioch settlement was known as the Christian settlement. I don't know when Antioch was started. It was there when I was born. It was a good old building. I went there many a day as a boy and preached. Just me and the birds around there. People knew it was me if they went by and heard a noise. The building was built out of cyprus wood which was of good quality, even fancy material.

An organ sat in that church many years but it was never used as long as I can remember. I don't know what ever happened to it.

B: Where was the next nearest Christian Church or Church of Christ?

K: I don't know of any among the blacks. They had the Christian Church among the whites in Luverne but I never knew much about that. They had a school in Lum, Alabama known as the Alabama Christian Institute. That was over 100 miles from us. They had another school in Edwards, Mississippi known as Southern Christian Institute. I knew about these because the president of the Southern Christian Institute came to the church, Joel Bager Lehman was his name. I was very small but he came to our home and tried to get my father to send some of us to school. After the death of my mother, he gave me the privilege of coming there even if I couldn't bring \$25 for the fees I might need. I could work my way through school. I thought that was very nice.

B: Why didn't you go?

K: Well, I met a girl and I changed my mind.

B: Did you have any contact with anyone from Lum?

K: Yes. A fellow by the name of Cephus Brayboy. That was a powerful family of preachers--the Brayboys. After things had settled down, I never knew of them forsaking the mechanical instruments, but other than that, they taught what I considered to be straight doctrine. I couldn't agree and didn't agree with things done when it comes to mechanical instruments of music and other things but as I look at it today, some of us known as the Church of Christ get further off than I think we should and still say that we are holding to the truth.

B: Who else preached at Antioch?

K: The Brayboys who were powerful preachers, and in later years, Lovie Johnson from Montgomery, Owen Laker, a friend of mine who was preaching when the sheriff came in to arrest us. The Church of Christ was identifying itself to some things so as to clean up the Christian Church and a fellow by the name of Authur Jeffreys came down and objected to it. He was a member of the Christian Church and was preaching there, coming down from Birmingham. He objected to what Brother Laker was doing and the people who were responsible there decided to go along with him even though we had it set up for Brother Aker preach. The first thing we knew the sheriff was standing in the door listening to the gospel. The sheriff said he was teaching the truth and they had better obey it. Then he told us that if it was him he wouldn't have service on the grounds if the people didn't want it. We thought the property belonged to us as much as it did to anyone else but we didn't want any kind of confusion. We then moved the benches out in the yard and continued services. The preacher said you can't have it out here, so we moved on into the school building.

B: Are you saying the church split at that time?

K: I would have to say that the people who wanted the truth did leave Antioch. They went to Luverne and later built a new building there. It was just a few miles away. Finally, it all switched to Luverne and Antioch became an empty building sitting there. Later, a relative of mine sold the property Uncle Henry owned next to the building and the road into there was closed. Now the road only goes in as far as the cemetery. The last time I was there was a few years ago for the funeral of one of my sisters. If the building is still there, it must be in bad decay. Now the funeral was held in the Church of Christ in Luverne and I then saw the building. When I call the name of these places, don't think long distances are involved for Luverne was just a few miles away, Montgomery only 50 miles, Tuskegee 30 -odd, and Troy near-by, too.

B: You said your father and mother had a total of 12 children and they farmed all their lives. You grew up on the farm and went to Bradley school. How far did you get?

K: At that time the school was only permitted to reach the 9th grade. I went beyond that but it was not official. I could stay in school and be promoted. The system

then allowed one to go to the state teacher's college and take an examination. If you had been promoted to say the 11th grade, then if you passed the test for that level then you could start at that grade. But I didn't go to the state teacher's college. I went some place else for my high school and all the college work I have taken. I have studied quite a bit, and all my college work was done right here in Michigan. I took night school here. When I left for Montgomery, education was not too important for me and I didn't take any there. Once I started making money, it would have been an insult to me to have quit for more schooling. I didn't have any older person to advise me about such. I had to grow to be old enough to know the importance of education.

B: Were your parents religious-minded?

K: Yes. Indeed so. My mother was a woman well thought about by everyone who knew her as far as I know. I've never known her to do anything wrong. She was respected by white and black to be a woman who believed in right. I've never known her to endorse anything that was wrong. My father was known as a good man, but he was a little more radical in some cases. He wouldn't take every thing. He would sometimes get a little rowdy and take some drinks with the boys. My mother was the primary religious influence in the home. She instilled that in the hearts and minds of the sisters and brothers older than I was. There were three sisters and three brothers older than I was, and this attitude was handed down to me. Most of the children have practiced religious lives since then. The ones that are living I would have to say is farther off. There was one older brother who was religious but I'd have to say was a little contrary, too, from what the Bible teaches.

B: Of the 12 children, how many remained in the Luverne area?

K: Only 2 of my brothers in Luverne, one in Birmingham. Of the rest, there is one here, one in Chio, all of the sisters are now dead.

B: Was there Bible reading in the home?

K: It wasn't in a systematic way, however the Bible was emphasized, fairness was, too. Christian principles as we know them were taught. All wrong opposed. I grew up under that influence and it automatically became a part of me.

B: Would you describe a typical worship service when you were a child?

K: We had prayer, singing, Bible reading and teaching much as it is today. It was taught not to add to or to take from the Word of God, just as I try to teach today. Strict faith. Old fashioned in it. If we didn't have a preacher to come we'd teach the Scriptures with some man giving the lesson. We would have Bible class and then the worship. We usually had one or two men who were able to bring us a lesson. Some were better able than others in this. I don't think that would ever get too far off. One particular man would lead the singing. At that time they had hymn books and Giles Edwards, who also preached and a very able man, led the singing. He lived a little below where we lived. He or one of my older brothers would lead a song like "Amazing Grace" or "A Charge to Keep I have" and then one of the men would get up and quote two verses and the church would sing it. He'd quote the next two and they would sing it. It sounded like they meant business, much more so than does the singing today. If someone wanted to

be baptized they would take his confession and take him to the branch. We had a special place where we baptized which was about a mile away, or less. Everybody would walk down to witness the event. The Lord's Supper was on the first day of the week, only we used wine, as we do today. My aunt made it, as well as the bread. After she died, my sisters looked after it. They had on that place a lot of fruit trees known as scuffnog arbor and that is usually where they made the wine. That fruit is a little larger than the white grape, and had a better flavor. It grew on a vine and was cultivated. My aunt always had this and from it she made very good wine.

B: Did they use this as a table wine?

K: I never knew of them using it in this way. It was only made for communion. Of course I was small and don't remember anything else. I left when I was 18.

B: Up until you left, did you travel much?

K: Only in the swamp hunting. Night and day. We had dogs which would do the job. Even though I was afraid, I hunted just the same. I hardly went to town and didn't care to go. As to farm duties, at one time I was the oldest boy and had charge of a three-horse farm. We grew corn, cotton and peanuts and other crops. I had two of my younger brothers to help me while the other brothers worked out. It was my father's farm but I was in charge of it before I was 18. My father worked around the community and sold a lot of timber to the mill. My three older brothers helped him. They would get so much a log.

BREAK

K: I learned in the Antioch church to stick to the Word and some today my think I am a little rigid. Part of that was instilled in my young days. Giles Edwards was a good Bible teacher. A strong man. A scholar. He was not much of a farmer but seemed more like an educator who traveled somewhat but I can't say more as I don't remember. I was a little different from the rest of my family because I spent so much time in the swamp rather than going to town. By the time I left home people hardly knew me.

B: Did Giles Edwards have much connection with the white brethren?

K: Not that I know about I rather suspect not for there was not much contact with whites. He was one of the more respected leader in the church but he seems to have been more connected with black educators for in some ways they seemed to have operated stronger in some ways than they do now. A lot of things were different then because of oppression. Negro spirituals grew out of the heart because of that oppression. I know he did not teach at Tuskegee. He may have taught at one time at Alabama Christian Institute, but before I knew him he had gotten his education from some place. He was married, had a daughter and 2 or 3 sons. I don't know what he did for a living. I know he always went presentable, had very little land and did a lot of traveling. I am not aware of his selling anything. If another church in a different county needed him, he would go and stay a while to help. He may have grown enough for the table at his place. I don't remember. He was a smart man and likely good at whatever he put his hand to do.

B: Whatever happened to him?

K: He died in Detroit I believe in recent years. Perhaps the last 10 or 12 years. He has one granddaughter, Mary Lizzie Edwards, she was then, I don't know what her name is now. She lives in Detroit. She had a brother named, A. J., and I believe he is dead. A. J. and I kind of grew up together. Mary Lizzie was attending Elmwood or some place on the East side. The first time I went to town I remember they promised me a goat and a wagon if I picked 500 lbs of cotton. Well, I did it. I got the \$1.50 wagon and perhaps we already had the goat, but I thought so much of that. When I got back home, A. J. turned my wagon over. In town when anyone saw me they would give me a nickel and I would invest it in candy--and you got a lot for a nickel then. I had a lot of candy when he turned the wagon over playing with it. He didn't hurt the wagon, but it hurt my heart. I got after him and all you could see was the bottom of his feet. I must have been about 5, 6 or 7 at the time. He was about the same age, but a little larger. They started children early on the farm. I started plowing early, too. When my brother-in-law went to the army in WWI, I managed a one-horse farm. I was about 8 or 9 years old. I worked one of his mules with the help of an older man. I was plowing one day when the plow struck a root and scraped it making a noise that scared the animal. He went taking off across the field dragging me behind him. I worked cotton, corn, peanuts and velvet beans which was fed to cows. I remember us making so many peanuts but couldn't sell them so fed them to the hogs. That was years before Carver's day. He really helped the farmer in the South. I remember the cotton was his money crop and in 1914 I was paid a penny for each boll weevil I caught. I used to bottle them up and get a dollar's worth, which was a lot of money, then. When Carver found all the uses for peanuts, then it became the main crop. I remember the last year before my mother died and the last year on the farm we made 26 bales of cotton and my mother made my school clothes out of the bags in which we bought fertilizer. She had a sewing machine. I couldn't see myself being a farmer at that rate. When those 26 bales were sold, we almost got out of debt. My father had his own mules and rented land from Mr. Kelly. Mr. Kelly was a cooperative man and would share-crop or rent land, however you wanted it. He was a good man. I don't remember the business part, but I know my father did not own the land. I don't believe my father ever share-cropped with anyone. I don't think he rented any land from the Bradleys, either. Farmers worked together helping one another with crops in the community. I remember when my father built our house, a nice 6-room country home, that the neighbors came and help in the construction. The Comptons and the Bradley came every day just as if they were paid and worked along with him and my older brothers. It was built out of good material. I don't think it is still standing. I left in 1926 after my mother died. They didn't stay there too long afterwards.

B: Growing up there, did your father tell you about the facts of life?

K: I don't remember my father telling me anything about sex. Neither my mother. I had an aunt who told me more than I found out from either my parents. They didn't have to tell us anything but don't do thus and so or don't spend too much time with this girl, etc. They didn't properly inform us but it seems they got better results than is done today with our teaching. The only thing I learned was

that it was dangerous for you to fool with these girls because you might get some kind of venereal disease. I was pretty ignorant about sex. I didn't know what a girl was when I was 20 years old. I was about 20 or 21 before I knew anything about sex life.

B: What caused your mother's death.

K: They said it was cancer. Others didn't know. She suffered more than a year. I left home because I couldn't see myself staying on the farm and not getting anywhere. I went to Montgomery because I was a free man to do whatever I felt like doing. In May 1929, I was with the North Carolina Mutual Life Insurance Company, known as the largest and strongest Negro company in the world. I can show you a letter where I sold more ordinary insurance than any agent the company had in the United States. I was in Montgomery representing the district office. A man who knew my parents knew me. He stopped by my house, found out about me and just drug me in the job. I didn't want it. He knew I was in Montgomery and had me come into the office, carried me around with him and just started collecting money and stuck it in my pocket and wrote me up. I went ahead and stayed there three years. He did not know I was looking for a job but he could see that I could use a job. I was staying with a cousin of mine who made an extra room for me. My aunt Lou Bradley's sister, and I was welcomed like her own son. They had one son. I had been doing construction work, just anything I could find. But when this man, J. C. Hall, learned that I was in town he came out and invited me down to the office and carried me out with him. He wanted me to work with him as an agent. This was door-to-door collecting or writing insurance. They had some good contracts. I got to where I was selling it everywhere to anyone. That is when I broke their record. It got to where I couldn't do anything but sell and I decided I had been in insurance long enough. My heart was into selling too much and it put a lot of physical pressure on me. Too, the pay went down. We were under contract to where we had to produce or we wouldn't make anything. There were times when you might not be able to write a policy. You had to continue to increase your debit. You could not fall back for six weeks, for instance, or you wouldn't get your pay. We weren't on a salary at that time, just worked on commission.

B: These were the days of the Depression. Did that have an effect on it?

K: Yes. Very much. People aren't going to buy a policy if he needs that premium price for a loaf of bread. You can't collect from a family that does not have a job. I did this for three years. I had moved away from this Aunt to a lady whom I had met, Mrs. Lula Phillips. I had lived with one of my last school teachers, learned about her place. All of these people were very nice. Being just a young fellow, they were more like a mother to me. I have to give a lot of credit to these people. I left the farm ignorant, very ignorant, and I can't say now I am too far from the same thing, but I have learned much since leaving home 50 or 60 years ago.

B: Tell me about your spiritual progress in Montgomery.

K: At first I located the Christian Church on Ross Street. I felt my parents had made a mistake in religion. I went to Dexter Avenue Baptist Church a few times

and I saw these people singing in the choir and Father Grant there could sing-- he had a wonderful voice--back home we had no organ or piano. That was a big church. I ran into some old friends who had come down to Luverne to visit with us and they carried me to Ross Street Christian Church. While attending there, I sang in the choir. That was a step up. After a few months there, I was going over on the West side and I saw a tent on West Jeff Davis and South Holt street. Someone told me that the man holding the meeting was criticizing the denominations, fighting churches, etc., so I decided to go and investigate it for myself. Brother Marshall Keeble was the man running the meeting. He spent 30 days there. I saw him put a chart up called "The True Vine". He showed me where I stood as a member of the Baptist Church or the Christian Church or any other church because he told how peanuts, corn and potatoes didn't all grow on one vine. He said each vine produced its own fruit. That opened my eyes. I saw where I stood religiously and from that day I followed. I've been firmly set toward my duty to the Lord as a member of His body.

B: Was he identified to the public as a member of the Church of Christ?

K: Indeed he was. The tent was located not too far from where the church is today. Brother Burton in Nashville, as I understand it, was paying Brother Keeble's way to preach the gospel. This was in 1927. I know there was no one there paying him, unless it was the white brethren. For 30 days he taught the truth. I was older and it was from there that I was truly and deeply established. From the first I heard about it until the conclusion of the meeting, I attended every service. And I have remained faithful to the church ever since. Later when I moved out 10 miles into the country I still walked back to go to church. I never did like city life and wanted to be in the country. My brother rented a place out there and was farming so I moved out there with him. After he married I generally stayed or roomed with them where ever they went. I quit selling insurance in 1930 and went with the government on the river. When I left the government work, I came straight to Michigan.

B: Back to your spiritual development in Montgomery, why did you go to Dexter Avenue to begin with?

K: I went there because I wanted to be like other people. I wanted a big church and a lot of excitement. I could do a lot of things I had not been able to do. The lady where I roomed was a member there and she invited me. I continued to go there until some of the brethren that knew of my people found me and invited me to the Christian Church. I knew of the Christian Church but I didn't know where it was nor any one who was a member there. It was some of these church members who had visited Antioch that found me.

B: How large was Ross Street?

K: It was under 150. Maybe 100 would be in attendance. It was a good sized building. They had a regular preacher. I don't suppose I went to Dexter over 2 or three times. I remember old Father Grant singing "Life is Like a Railway" and "An Unclouded Day" and Dr. F. W. Jacobs being the minister and living near me. He was a very fine man, very respectable. He had time to spend with a little fellow like me. That means quite a little bit. I try to spend time with the little fellows when most people pass them by. I wasn't interested in girls then.

B: Would you describe their worship? How was it different?

K: The only difference between there and Antioch was mechanical instruments of music. Everything else was about the same and that is true on down to the present. I didn't object to music because I didn't know it was a sin. It did not bother me to go to Dexter Avenue until I heard Brother Keeble. I began to be faithful at Ross Street. Most of the friends in the choir were my friends -- Susan Annie Williams and several my age. It didn't take me long to make friends. We became the very closest of friends. I attended there three or four months until Brother Keeble put up a tent on Holt Street. I was prejudiced. I wouldn't go in the tent but stood on the outside. I had heard that he was fighting other churches. I heard that at Ross Street, but some there agreed with him, although the leadership talked against him to me privately. I lived near where Brother Keeble was preaching. I lived 381 W. Jeff Davis and that was just a few blocks away. My brother went down there and told me that there was a fellow down the street that was preaching the truth. He wouldn't go to none of the churches in Montgomery. That was my older brother. He turned them all down because he didn't know anything about where the church was and he wouldn't accept Ross Street. He didn't think it was what it ought to be; they were not teaching what the Bible called for. There wasn't enough difference in my mind for me to turn Ross Street down and I accepted the Baptists. He was a good Bible student and he couldn't go along with them. So when he told me about this fellow in the tent, I went to hear him from the outside. I don't remember if he went in. Later on he came back to the church and was very faithful. After Keeble preached his first sermon for me to hear, then I went on in and I accepted what he was teaching. From then on I began to grow straight.

B: Besides hearing him preach, did you have a chance to visit with him?

K: Later, when I was living in Detroit, I went to Nashville when he lived on Jefferson and visited with him there. I got to visit with him some during the meeting also. I used my car to help transport people to the baptizing. I had bought it shortly after I had come to Montgomery. I was working in the insurance business. If there was any work to be found, I did it. I was not a lazy man. If you couldn't find other work you could usually go to some rich people and find a warm welcome into their kitchens or homes to work. You had friends when you sold yourself to them. I could do any of it--yard, kitchen, house. I worked for the government a while, too. There, I was with a crew that was cleaning the Alabama River. I was known as a striker, driving a big steam boat, and with a survey crew surveying the river. At that time I worked in the kitchen. I could cook. I could go into the homes of private families and teach a lot of women and did. I worked for the Blue Moon Tea Room which was the main place which served men like the President. I served the President personally. I stood up over him with a plate in my hand and looked him over good. Franklin Delano Roosevelt. He made a visit to the governor's mansion and I was one of the special men called to help wait on their party. I was in my 20's at the time. Early 20's.

B: Occupation-wise, when you first came to Montgomery, what did you do?

K: Construction work. From that to insurance work, to government work driving a steam boat--the boat was known as "Montgomery"--and from that I left and came to Michigan.

B: I presume you were getting increases in your income all this time?

K: The government wouldn't make you hump-back carrying all the money they gave you. I made \$45 a month. I'd make more than that a week in insurance but it would cost me more money. You see the government fed me and I slept on the boat. I had no expense. I had to dress and take care of myself in insurance. I might have to change my shirts every day. I was very particular and if I got dirty, I might change twice a day. I have to say I didn't have sense enough to be conservative in buying my clothes. I wanted the very best. If the sock was selling for \$3, that was the sock I wanted. I had a Whippet Overland car with a rumble seat. I thought it was a cute little car. I didn't have many boy-friends as it seemed I was better getting along better with the girls. They were just friends, but they were good friends.

B: Did you make very many trips back to Luverne from Montgomery?

K: Yes. Maybe weekends. While in the insurance business I might go down there and work the weekend. If school was going on I would meet the school teachers. I remember the time when another agent and myself sold the preacher for the large church and then went on to sell to all the teachers in the school \$1,000 policies. That was everyone we talked to that weekend. He was known as a "special" and I have gone behind him and re-sold. He was powerful. I might sell or not but I was very thorough.

B: What happened to you church-wise after Keeble left?

K: I went to Holt Street to church, over near W. Jeff Davis Avenue. Later it moved down in the next block to where the present Holt Street church building is now located. That is the oldest church among the blacks in Montgomery. That is where I started preaching 47 years ago. There was no church among our brethren before Keeble came there. He began the work with that meeting. It was a fairly small group which began--just a handful of people, like any other beginning. They first met in a small building--not a store-front, however. When they moved down the street they built a nice frame building there. That was in the 20's.

That first meeting held by Keeble did not result in more than 20 baptisms and was the nucleus that began the church. My brother and I worshipped there, Thomas Owen, Boisy McQueen, John Poole, Bro. Tyree, Lovie Johnson, James Thomas and Brother Bennie Arms. There might have been a few more, but these were the leading brothers. Brother T. H. Busby, an old preacher, came and stayed there a long time. Lovie Johnson preached some. I was young and did not know much about things of the church. It may have been that Brother Keeble got Brother Busby to come there. I don't know. Later I did preach and got more involved in the leadership. I was then ready to do anything that needed to be done.

B: How did you get started preaching?

K: Well, I know most of my brethren would feel different about this. But I had had

a lot of sickness and trouble and had been close to the Lord. I prayed and got results when the doctor told me that there was no chance. I got results within 24 hours.

B: What was your sickness?

K: It was my wife--my first one. She's dead. My wife at that time was sick enough that the Catholic Hospital gave me a free room to spend the night in so I could be with her. The doctors told me the same day that they had had a conference, they were doing everything they could, but she was sinking, going fast. They were the best medicine in town. They gave me six minutes in the room with her which I spent in prayer. The next morning she began to talk, which she had not done in more than a week. She even got up and helped to dress herself. When I walked in she told me what the Lord had shown her in a dream.

I got afraid. I had decided not to preach because she did not want me to. We were married at the time. I had felt that I wanted to preach before I died for I believed the Lord wanted me to. When I continued to dream after she died that I was going to die. I just got up and went on to church. It was announced that I was going to begin preaching Wednesday night. Brother Busby announced it. I was only going to try to do what I felt the Lord wanted me to do before I died. I dreamed of my wife wherein she said "I am coming back for you in a few days." I decided I wanted to beat the deadline if she did come back. I had wanted to preach before I died and I was afraid I might die soon. That's what pressed me into preaching.

I always, since I was a child, had a desire, a strong desire to preach.

B: Tell me about meeting your wife and getting married.

K: I told you about getting ready to go to college down at Edward, Mississippi--to Southern Christian Institute--Brother Lehman had come to Luverne to recruit students and that is when I met him. He came to see my parents before my mother died and I was still living at home. I knew some people from that school and I knew I could work my way through. It was known to be a good school. I didn't have any money. Of course, when I met this wife, all arrangements had been made to go. A friend of mine was writing an insurance policy for her when I first met her, since I was with him. When I looked at her standing there upon the step--why that was something which didn't happen to me. She brought a different thought to me. I tell you, everything else left! Yes, sir, it was love at first sight. At the time she had on an engagement ring. This special agent had wanted me to go out with him to keep him company. I usually went out at first with different people in the office, but before I left the company, the manager would call agents in from a wide area and have them train under me. I got to be rather powerful when it came to selling insurance.

We went out that day to the Blue Moon Tea Room to sell insurance to this girl who worked as a waitress. The owner thought the world of her, I later learned. I discovered also that she had finished Tuskegee, a very intelligent girl, she looked as clean as a person could be and was just as attractive I

would ever care to meet. That brought another thought in my mind: I decided I'd rather talk with her than to go to school. So that's where it started. I seemed to have a little more power than the fellow who gave her the ring. Up until that time I wasn't interested in girls. I did not care whether they said 'good morning' or 'good evening' as they walked by. After I met her, everything changed! Before that, I had been approached by a girl for a date for a girl had said she wanted to talk to me. That did turn the picture around a little. But when I met my wife, I told my friend on the way back to the office that I liked her. I contacted her and went back to talk with her. I found out that she was engaged. I asked her to consider me as a side-line track when she was not on the main run. She agreed to it. It lasted that way for a little while. I was a powerful salesman.

B: She wasn't very much committed to the other guy, then.

K: Well, I don't know how committed she was. When she came back, finally, she hadn't told me she was engaged. It was after I sat down and wrote her a letter--she was then in Michigan visiting a sister--she saw that I meant business and she said 'wait until I come home.' That's when I told her she didn't have to quit the other fellow, just go along with me on the side. She'd stand up and talk with him at her church. I went along with it for a few weeks and then I told her to make up her mind and that's when things changed. She admitted that she had not treated me right and fair, wrote me a long letter, she broke up everything with everyone else and we got to be very close. Our courtship then did not last but a few months before we were married. She was a Methodist and it hurt me that I did not get her out of it before she died. We weren't married too long until she had this sickness that I've been talking about. That lasted for a while and after that, her brother lost his mind and cut her throat in two. That's the way she died. What a lot of people don't know, I went through these things as a young man. I was 21 or 22 at the time. She was killed in '32.

She was not a waitress, but a special girl who helped out in many different ways. She finished Tuskegee, she was a seamstress, taught school, and was well-liked by the lady who owned the Tea Room. She couldn't have been thought more of by the lady. She was her friend.