CARVER LIVING NEWSPAPER: ORAL HISTORY

Interview with Mr. Waverly R. Crawley Jr.
Interviewed by Laura Plybon, VCU Graduate Student
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Interviewers question/comments are indicated by bold text.
Segments of tape not transcribed due to inability of microphone to capture voice.

Testing 1, 2, 3
Okay, first I'd like to ask you what your name is sir?
My name is Waverly Robert Crawley, Jr. Let me tell you something about my name. I'm named after my father. But my mother started calling me Robert all through my childhood up until I was 19. I didn't know my name Waverly existed until I went into the service, until they called Waverly Crawley, and I didn't never say nothing, and I told this guy Nick and he said "You mean to tell me your name is Waverly?" and I being using Waverly ever since. And when I went to New York and lived in New York, they didn't ever know my first name, they only knew me by Crawley, so I had a girlfriend of mine call me on the job, and they called me Waverly Crawley, and everybody stopped what they were doing and looked, and said "That's his name?"
So when I came back here, everybody started using Robert and I said Waverly Crawley, and residents who knew me years ago said you must have stole something in New York or killed somebody, his name is not Waverly. So that's the story of my name.

Does Waverly have a family meaning to you?
No, I'm just named after my father. And I'm junior and my son is Waverly III. So that's how that came about. When I'm in the city, my old friends call me Robert. The rest of my friends call me Waverly. My nickname is Doc. But most of the people call me Crawley.

Actually I'm here to ask you about what it was like to grow up in Carver. Did you grow up in Carver?
Tell you something, I was born on the corner of Kinney and Clay in 1932. And I'll never forget when I started school my brother pushed me down the steps and broke my tooth. I could have killed him. So we was going to a school called Elba School. And I really learned a lot from those teachers because those teachers were dedicated. And as I grew into maturity, I could never understand how so many teachers could be that good a group of teachers, where did they get the money from. Until I got older and I found out that they used to have, I don't know if you're aware of it or not, called Armstrong normal school. And teachers were only required to go there two years and they could be classified as bonified teachers. And believe you me, those teachers were more qualified than teachers going to school today. Because they taught us a lot. So when I was going to Elba School, I think we started school 8 o'clock or 8:30, something like that, kids used to like to run to ring the cowbell, that's what they called it. And we'd run down the street just to ring that bell. That was something exciting to us. The only thing that I didn't like about Elba School was that they had the bathrooms outside. We had to go right across the yard to the john.

Did they have outhouses?
Well, they considered them outhouses, but it had a regular bathroom. But it was so far from the school. And the girls were the same way. I'd feel sorry for those girls, though, when they went in the winter time. And had to pull up their dresses. Then when we went to Moore Street School,
that was in the 6th grade, no the 7th grade. See Elba School went from 1 to 6. Then junior high. We didn’t have no guidance counselor back in those days. “Crawley, what school you want to go to?” I said “Armstrong,” “What school you want to go to?”, “I want to go to Walker.” That was your choice. And the reason I chose Armstrong and I told people that when I had my radio show on, I said “don’t laugh at me,” but I made my decision. You know why I made it? Because I don’t like the colors of green and white. I’m telling you, I didn’t. But as I reflect back, I should have went to Maggie Walker because it was a trade school. They had barbering, tailoring, and so forth; everything you want that the Richmond Technical Center have. And then I went into the service. And let me tell you about growing up in the Carver Schools neighborhood. When I was growing up, Elba School was at the corner of Hancock and Clay, there used to be a restaurant called Joe Louis Inn. Have you ever heard about that?

No.

Well, you know who Joe Louis was? He was the greatest heavyweight champion at that time.

No.

I’m telling you Joe Louis was the model of all black people. He was the champion. And this Italian man named his restaurant the Joe Louis Inn. And back when Joe Louis used to fight, we didn’t have no tvs back then, so everybody was glued to their radios, and everybody would turn their radios on, and as soon as Joe Louis knocked the guy there was a celebration. I mean we had noise, beating washtubs and everything, no knowing that he was our first black hero. Understand? He was somebody that we could look up to. And we knew that Joe Louis could beat a white man. And we were proud of that. But we didn’t realize the significance of him had an impact on us. Tell you something else about Joe Louis. A lot of white people refused to bet on Joe Louis because I’ll tell you what they did. They took money and gave it to some black person. They called him the “house nigger”. And they’d say Look, I want you to bet this hundred dollars on Joe Louis.

But they wouldn’t do it?

No, they wouldn’t do it directly. I’m telling you what I’m saying is that money has no color.

During that time the curfew in the city was 11 o’clock.

You had a curfew in the city?

In the city. Beer gardens, you were allowed to drink until 11 o’clock, but they shut down at 11 o’clock. Also there was a Richbrau brewery at the corner of Harrison and Clay. Richbrau, they made good beer there. I didn’t like it but other people did.

When did that close down?

I don’t know exactly.

Yeah, it just seems to me that around Carver now there are so many warehouses that used to be something.

Now, over on the corner of Bowe and Clay there used to be a tobacco factory. They had round the clock shifts. So many people worked there it wasn’t funny. So that’s when the guys would stop at bootlegger{____?} and everybody was making money. He would get paid on Fridays. I mean I never seen so many people at night changing shifts. And this one guy used to sell bootleg liquor and sandwiches and he made a lot of money. Around here was a growing environment.

Did the Carver people work in those warehouses?

They were from all over. Let me tell you something else, it wasn’t called the Carver area either. It was called uptown, or Sheep Hill. The only reason they called it Carver was when Carver School was built. So they changed the name. We called it Sheep Hill during that time. During our era. I don’t think Carver came around until the late 50s or something like that. Now, when I
was coming up, we had segregation, but we lived in an integrated neighborhood. This black
family, the father was black as soot and his mother was pale complexioned, and his offspring
came out white. They lived on Clay Street in the 1300 block. A white family lived on the corner
of Kinney and Marshall Street, I’ll never forget it, they played with us, they ate with us. I’ll
never forget it, we had outdoor toilets, and I’ll never forget that my father went up there and got
the toilet seats, because my family couldn’t afford good toilet seats, and he put them in our
outhouse. And there was another family that lived behind me and they had a daughter. But they
all went to Armstrong school. And she was Miss Armstrong High. That’s why I said I grew up
in an integration neighborhood during the age of segregation.

Did you have, I know that there were like Jewish shopkeepers.
During that era, there was a Jewish store on every corner. Sometimes there were two on a corner.
On the corner of Norton and Clay there were two Jewish stores, get the picture? Since I was
{__?} black, the only friends we had was the Jews. Because my grandmother didn’t have no
money, she said she used to say “my chillum”, she said “mister, my chillum ain’t got nothing to
eat, can I get something?” And they’d say “sure”. They had a notebook and they’d write the
price down. Of course he cheated us. But grandma didn’t care. She got what she wanted, he got
what he wanted.

How did he cheat you?
Nobody added it up. They didn’t have no calculators back then. Five cents would buy five
pounds of potatoes. Two cents worth of bologna would give you that much. So you’d think they
were your friend. And they’d have Jewish holidays, oh my God. You couldn’t even buy a loaf of
bread because they shut down everything. During World War II, they rationed food: sugar, oil,
shoes, everything. We had to go to Richmond and get some books. Stamp books. So if you
wanted to go buy a pair of shoes, you used one stamp. And they’d give you change in tokens.
Some people still have those same tokens. I think they disbanded about 1945. You ever heard of
that? Of course everything I tell you is my opinion.

I’m not from Richmond.
Where are you from?

I’m from West Virginia. So it’s a very different way of growing up.
When I was in the army, let me tell you about West Virginia, I couldn’t believe how some people
lived. I’d never seen such mountains and I thought how do you get up there? So, for
entertainment, just a minute I was going to say something else. So the church was the focal point
of the community. I attended Moore Street Church. We children, our forefathers and mothers
indoctrinated us in religion whether we wanted to or not, because if they hadn’t instilled it in me,
I wouldn’t be around here today. So we had to go to Sunday School and church. And Sundays I
used to hate it because we couldn’t do nothing. We weren’t allowed to play football or baseball.
We couldn’t even do nothing. All we could do was walk to the Capital Square, and feed the
squirrels with our {__?} money. We couldn’t play ball until Monday morning. So Sundays
during that time, I just hated Sundays. But we didn’t have no television. 1948, that’s when I
bought a television. My father couldn’t afford it. I had a job after school making nine dollars a
week. I saw an ad in the paper for Sears and Roebuck. They had a television for nine dollars
down and nine dollars a week. And I bought it. We were the only ones that had a television for
about ten blocks. It was about this long, and this wide, with a little screen and one channel. The
thing about it we had wrestling on it, and all the kids used to come to my house. And my
grandmother used to line them up like movies. And my brother, he was one year younger than
he, he wanted to charge them two cents to get in. My grandma said no. And when Joe Louis had
a fight on, I’ll never forget it, the whole neighborhood had to be at our house to see Joe Louis. People started crying if Joe Louis won. We were the first ones to get a tv. I couldn’t understand why businesses was on Marshall Street. In a residential neighborhood. Freeman Marks made clothes and the material, and I used to see up on the pole, it looked like soot, and I couldn’t understand it as a kid, but as I look for it right now, I bet they made em move because of the density, the fumes and the sawdust, and a lot of people died in our community. And my sister, she lives in Boston, she told me Robert, that’s why I moved. And then I look around all the parking spaces. There is a field up by Kinney and Marshall. And we couldn’t wait to play ball when those people got off. But some of the people parked there cars there all the time. And people would lock their cars and you know what we used to do? We’d put our hands together and push them out of the way so that we could have a ball game. Everybody in the neighborhood, especially the elderly, used to come watch us play ball because that’s the only form of entertainment. And then we used to play soldiers. When I was 16 I’d march into the street, When I’m a man, I’m going to be in the army. Let me tell you something else. You couldn’t tell if you walked down the block, all these houses are fixed up and look gorgeous, you couldn’t tell the renters from the buyers. In other words, a poor family lived here and a school teacher lived next door. And a doctor lived next door to her. Then a poor family. But the poor family kept their house up better than a lot of the people. They did, and I got pictures to show you. That they all kept their property up. My mother used to whitewash our fence. In the back all the time. Then the rain would come and wash it off. And my mother would go out and whitewash it again. Now my mother, you’ve heard of Maggie Walker, right? My mother didn’t know who Maggie Walker was. But she instilled in the kids in our neighborhood to save their money. I don’t care what you saved, a penny, two cents. And she could call me and try to embarrass me in front of my friends. She’d say, Robert Jr., for the whole year, you saved ten cents. Everybody would go “Ooooh, Robert, you should be ashamed of yourself.” Then she gave us like a picnic. It wasn’t no big deal, but it was something for the neighborhood. And we’d eat peanut butter sandwiches, and me and my brother used to throw them over the fence, and she caught us. It was something else she did to bring the neighborhood together. And I think really that grew off on me, because I’m doing the same things today as my mother did. But we couldn’t see that as youngsters.

Was there anybody else in the neighborhood that you can think of that was like a figure? Maybe in your church?
During those days, Reverend Hancock, Gordon B. Hancock, we idolized him. Because he made promises to put in a swimming pool, and social center at the church. You wouldn’t believe what he did. So we looked up to him. And all our activities we had were in the church. Let me tell you something else, the church was so {____?}. Here I couldn’t get ten cents to save my life, and you know what she’d do? She’d go to church on Sundays and lock the windows so we couldn’t get in. (not transcribed due to inability of microphone to capture voice)
You asked me if there was anyone I idolized. There was a lady named Miss James who supervised the Moore Street School playground that was our entertainment. Back in those days, whatever clothes you wore to play in, you would go home and your parents would make you put on clean clothes and you’d play in the playground. Miss James, there should have been a monument for her as far as I’m concerned. Because she would make the kids idolize her. And a man in Newtown, Andrew Moore, used to do something for the kids every 4th of July. I think they should have made him a monument. I even suggested it. If I had the money there would
have been a monument. A stone or something in memory of them. Those are two role models. Some famous sport legends came out of here. I remember a guy, he wasn’t too well known, but people remember him, by the name of Clifford Smith(?). He didn’t go to school, but he could swing at baseball, basketball, the whole thing. And he was our role model. And we had a baseball player who played for the Richmond Clubs back in the segregation days. And when he played for the team, boy (not transcribed due to inability of microphone to capture voice). So, who else can I think of. Oh, we had clubs in the neighborhood too that our mothers and fathers were into. But we couldn’t go there. But I couldn’t wait until I got old enough to go to that club. And I was disappointed.

Why?
Because it wasn’t nothing to look at. See, back in those days our parents wouldn’t let us go into the places where they went into. But we were dying to go into that club. So when I got to be 18, I couldn’t wait to go up there. I was ready for some fun. And another thing. All the parents would forbid you to go on 2nd Street, because 2nd Street was taboo. But all the clubs were on 2nd street, and our parents would go on 2nd Street, but they wouldn’t allow us to go on 2nd Street. But we went on 2nd Street just to go to the movies. And after the movies you’d better come home. Because if anybody questioned you, you’d better find something to say, and everybody knew better than to go on 2nd Street. But our parents went down there.

What was going on down there?
A lot of people might disagree with me, but 2nd Street was nothing but women, booze and numbers. That’s why when they interviewed me I said (not transcribed due to inability of microphone to capture voice).

Yes sir.
Some of the people like to dress it up. But one time, by the swimming pool, (not transcribed due to inability of microphone to capture voice) do you know where that is, that used to be the only black swimming pool that we had. Black kids from all over the city used to go there. But some blacks they went down to city pool, doctors kids, but they’d go on a separate day. But our kids would go, city pool turned them down. And they closed the pool.

Completely?
And I feel (?) when I say that, but they don’t like me to say that.

If there was issues, did Sheep Hill have a Civic Association?
There was no Civic organization. Not that I know about. The only paper we had was the Afro Americans. It was the city paper. Do you know about the Free Press?

Yes sir.
Well the editor at the Free Press used to work for Afro. The name of it was the Richmond Planet, and it was for Afro Americans. Do you know why they left? The editor of the black paper. Later on, I think about five or six years ago, they got a white editor. I’m telling you. We need a second opinion. It’s a good thing we have a Free Press. That’s the only paper we have. Some people call that a disgrace. So whenever we want some news or anything like that, we get the Free Press. It only comes out on Thursdays. The Library we had was right on the corner here, of St. James and Clay Street, now known as the Black History Museum. You ever heard of that?

Yes sir.
Well that was our only library. I’ll never forget the lady who ran it. We couldn’t even sneeze in there. And you better not talk. By the way the name of it was the Rosa Brown (?) Library. Rosa Brown was the first black woman teacher in this city. My daughter always comes to me for black history. I don’t know all of it but most people consult me. Like VCU students, or University of
Virginia people. They want to know about black history and they call me. I don’t know why. But somebody ought to tell you about me. I used to be a bootlegger.

Really?

I used to be a bootlegger. Everybody knowed that. Well some people still sell liquor now. And the people say “Why you mention that, Mr. Crawley?” And I say if I want to reach another level, they can’t scrutinize me because I already told you.

So how does that work? On 2nd Street were you?

Yeah. See what happens, a lot of people just like to go home on a Friday afternoon, drink and play music and all that stuff.

Let me ask you this. A lot of people drank, and you seem pretty honest. I guess we haven’t got a lot of that. What do people think about that now, and has it changed? And what do you think about the youths in Carver and why do you think change has occurred?

I really made a statement, and a lot of blacks don’t think that I should. But the truth of the matter is the reason why Jackson Ward and Carver have deteriorated because of one thing. Integration. I say that, and a lot of people scream at me. Segregation was equal opportunity. (there is a lot of information about 2nd Street but the microphone is unable to capture it). I say 2nd Street reminds me of Count Dracula. At night it comes alive. You see thousands of people down there. That’s what the kids do. You can’t get no jobs, but we had our own. In this country here, they don’t allow a lot of black companies to be here. I try to get them to invest in 2nd Street. But they won’t. (not transcribed due to inability of microphone to capture voice). Carver area is like that now. And Jackson Ward.

And all our history would be lost.

That’s right. And another thing, busses keep coming around here but I don’t know for what. I try to give some money to somebody to do a history on Jackson Ward and Carver, but I can’t find anybody who is interested. A lot of people say “what’s going to happen when you’re gone Mr. Crawley?”

It seems to me that people develop some attachment. I hear your stories about this neighborhood that you all looked at.

We did. We didn’t need no policemen. If a thief was in here during that time, we would put him out ourselves. We didn’t need no police.

And that seems to be going away.

That’s right. I remember when we got black policeman. And the fellow was a big fellow. He couldn’t touch no white people. I’m telling you. He walked on down 2nd Street, and he could take a stick and beat a black man, but he couldn’t touch a white man. And an all black fire department. And we gave them all these duties like cleaning toilets and all that stuff. But now we have a black fire chief. So we have come a long way, but we still have a ways to go yet. Right now we don’t have a grocery store in this community. I am right now something called the people’s man. Because I take all the problems I can get my hands on to the public officials. And I ask myself is God telling me to do this?

God works in mysterious ways.

That’s right. I’m not saying it happens, but I know what I’m doing.

Let me ask you about, more like in Richmond. I guess with the other entities we haven’t talked about like Thalheimer’s and some of the other stores. Is there a story about some of them.

Okay, let me tell you about that. I wish I had paper. I got a paper on Thalheimer’s in the basement. You’d be surprised at some of the prices. Shoes for a dollar. Stockings a quarter. A lot
of people they could go in the store. They could not try things on. They had segregated restaurant. A segregated bathroom. That’s why I say to myself (not transcribed due to inability of microphone to capture voice). They had four sets of bathrooms. Colored men, colored women. White men, white women. Same thing with the water fountain. And I couldn’t understand the term colored. You know black was supposed to be black. But you don’t know what we are.

**When did it switch?**

I think it switched in the 60s. I think Jessie Jackson. I can hear him now the first time he called us African Americans. (More on this issue but not transcribed due to inability of microphone to capture voice). They said black is beautiful. But I’m black and I’m still ugly. That’s what I say to myself. But Broad Street was a bargain place. They would give you credit, but you could not go in those stores. The Jews, and I said the Jews were our friends, we could but the Jews couldn’t go in. There was a store at the corner of 1st and Clay called Troy’s.

**Was it a clothing store?**

Yeah, a clothing store, very economical too. My mother on Sunday mornings used to, she’d try to pass something, she’d give me the sign and she’d say give this to the man. She knew a guy down there named Mr. Rosco, and she knew all his customers. I would ride on my bicycle, and I used to be up there for all my friend’s mothers. He did more business on Sundays then they made during the week. And the Carver community, on 2nd Street, and Jackson Ward, all the country people used to come in on Saturdays. All the people had shopping baskets, and the kids used to go to the movies. The mothers would go shopping. And their husbands used to go drink beer. And we used to have a horse and buggy on every corner. Plus, there were two movies here. Richmond used to have five black movie theaters. Did you believe that?

**It’s been mentioned to me before.**

Five black movies. Two was on Broad Street called the Booker T and the Maggie Walker, two down here called the Grove and the Hippodrome, there used to be a skating arena right over here in this parking lot. Another one was on the southside, another one on Church Hill, and one was in the (___?), and all of them did fine in business. Because movie theaters (not transcribed due to inability of microphone to capture voice). But it was the strangest thing. Black people could go into a white movie. If a black woman was babysitting their kids, they could go anywhere they want. A black woman with white kids could go anywhere.

**But if it was a white theater, you could not go in there.**

No. The women could, but only if they were babysitting. They would not ask them a question. And some white kids that grew up, when these people die, I have seen them cry at the funeral. Even today. They say She raised us. It was like in the days of Nat Turner, some white people is literate because they taught them how to read and write, but they couldn’t let anybody know they do that. And what about that story about Thomas Jefferson’s Sally? That was embarassing to some white people. But I see that all the time. Because there’s some of our women that are light skinned – he wasn’t the only one. Thomas just got caught. I read in the paper the other day that some Norfolk people say that they’re descendants of George Washington. Did you know that?

**No. But it doesn’t surprise me.**

And I tell you something else. In about five more decades, when they do the census and they ask what nationality, people won’t know. They don’t know now. That’s a result of mixed marriages, that’s all. But the history is good, you got to look back at the past. Somebody might tell you something different. Let me tell you something else. Neighborhoods, like the 1400 block, down around Chamberlayne, there were so many kids in the 1400 block, we could organize a football or baseball game and play the kids in the 1300 block. That’s right, we had our own teams. We
used to practice. Oh man, it was something else. At Christmas time, boy I tell you, there were so many kids on bicycles out there. One family, I’ll never forget, they was poorer than we were. And the father would cut grass. Somebody gave him a bicycle that didn’t have no seat on it. When he rode it we’d make fun of him. He went to school the same way. Told me I wouldn’t have no lunch. I have a friend of mine that brought collard greens with him on some days and nobody would tease him. I’d sit right there and eat it. We laugh about this now. I’m serious. Sometime we didn’t have no lunch. But Maggie Walker during those times they taught cooking. And they used to make us a really big pot of soup. And we rode in the wagon, and you could always tell it was hot because it would slosh. We didn’t have no refrigerators. We’d have to put food outside in the winter.

Do you think the Carver residents were happier than they are now?
Yes, I do, definitely. Definitely. I’ll tell you why. Because during those days we used to be all the same. But some people now have elevated themselves. Some people can’t afford that. And some of them, not all of them, look down on other people. That’s why I feel for the poor people. See, I grew up on the rough side of the mountain. I used to go to school with cardboard in my shoes. But our teachers taught us not to steal. And I’ll tell you something else. You could always put out the 23rd Psalm. And bible verses. They didn’t harm us. We knew them before we started school. I loved my childhood. I wouldn’t take nothing away from it.

Did you have siblings? What were your parents like?
My parents are dead now. And I couldn’t, I’ve had other friend’s parents die, I couldn’t believe my parents were ever going to die. They went like seven years ago. Something like that. It was five of us. It was three of us for a long time. Twelve years later when I was 12 years old my mother decided to have another one. I told my mother I’m a teenager I need to work, so you better get him a playmate beside me. And guess what? She did. So there were five of us. I lived in New York for twenty five years, my sister is the only one who lives in Boston. And I call her every month.

What did you do in New York?
I wound up living in the Bronx. I lived in Brooklyn, Manhattan, and the Bronx. I lived in all four Boroughs. But I tell you what made me come back here, because I was married, and I probably hurt my wife, I said “Oh come on back,” and when I come back home, my mama said “What’s wrong?” She knew there was something wrong. And I been here ever since. So I try to make a difference.

Do you live in Carver?
Yeah, I actually live on the corner of Kinney and Clay. You know that building you’re talking about? There was a lady who used to make clothes there. I lived right behind them on the corner. (Some discussion but not transcribed due to inability of microphone to capture voices). Maggie Walker School used to be open at night, and we used to play basketball there.

What do you see Carver like in the future?
I have to say I don’t know. I don’t know what to expect. I believe VCU is going to take over. You can’t stop progress. You know. See I follow this issue closely. See I couldn’t speak on it because I don’t have no identification. But Miss Hawley and Miss Abernathy are very close, and I tell them, and they know it. Because Carver use to be a pretty neighborhood, but now its getting just like Jackson Ward. I predict that they are going to (not transcribed due to inability of microphone to capture voice) That’s what’s going to happen. We can fight them all we want, but that’s just the way it is.
If you can think of one bad story and one good story in your childhood?
Oh. One of my playmates, I think we were about 16 years old, we used to play football and we didn’t wear no helmets, and we used to play on the hard sidewalk, and somebody tackled him, and he died. His name was Oscar Logan. I forgot what year he died. But he was so close. And the best was when my sister was born. I said I got a little sister. And when she got to be two years old she got to following me everywhere.

How old were you?
I was about 13. And I’d hold her to sit on my lap. And you know the rest of the story. She did SSSSSSS. All over me. But I was happy to hold my sister though. Back in those days when we had a death in the family, you’d put a wreath on your door and the body lay in the house. Did you know that? I don’t know how they could do that, but we did it. And the whole neighborhood would take up donations. But they don’t do that anymore. Plus the widow, she wore black everyday for a year. And widowers wore black armbands on their suits. Well I hope you have enough?

Yes sir. I thank you. Thank you very much.