

[Silence]

**Stanley Grizzle:** Continuation of interview with Helen Bailey. Tape number six.

**Helen Bailey:** Mm-hmm.

**Stanley:** Uh, do you remember who the-the organizers of the local Ladies' Auxiliary were, by name?

**Helen:** Um, Brother Randolph and Brother Vinny Smith, when they came here to organize the Brotherhood, they organized the Ladies' Auxiliary.

**Stanley:** But you were- you were elected first president.

**Helen:** That's right.

**Stanley:** And after you were elected, then you, did you not go out and try and get more members or?

**Helen:** Uh, yes. Um, there was, I'm not sure if all the members were there at that first meeting or not, but, um, I give, I have given you a list-

**Stanley:** Yeah.

**Helen:** -of members and the executive, the executive was elected at that time. And then other members came in.

**Stanley:** I'm not sure if we got this in the last tape or not, uh.

**Helen:** I'm not sure either.

**Stanley:** What-what good- what good do you think the-the Brotherhood did, uh, in terms of, uh, elevating the status of the Black-

**Helen:** Well it- mm-hmm.

**Stanley:** porters and their families and Black workers, in general, in the community?

**Helen:** Well, it raised their standard of living because, uh, naturally, their working conditions improved as well as their, um, salaries improved. So, um, that in itself would raise a standard of living. I think men then became to even feel respect for themselves because then they had, uh, they were making a worthwhile living for their families.

**Stanley:** What year did you, uh, become president of the Ladies' Auxiliary?

**Helen:** I believe that was in, uh, the fall of 1942.

**Stanley:** Right. You can tell me the names of, uh, of, uh, some of the, uh, former and original members of the local Ladies' Auxiliary who are still with us, uh, may interview?

**Helen:** Um, let's see. Well, Mrs. Alba Mays was second vice president, but she lives in Vancouver. Well, Mrs. Helen Hudson was secretary-treasurer. She lives in Los-Los Angeles. Hmm.

**Stanley:** Helen Hudson's still alive?

**Helen:** Oh, yes. Mm-hmm.

**Stanley:** You got her address?

**Helen:** Oh, fine yes, I have her address.

**Stanley:** Okay. I'll get it from you.

**Helen:** I'll give it to you later.

**Stanley:** All right.

**Helen:** Mm-hmm. Oh, let's see. Who else is living? Mrs. Bessy Williams. She's living here in Winnipeg. She was a member.

**Stanley:** Mm-hmm.

**Helen:** Uh.

**Stanley:** Put a tick beside their names on the list.

**Helen:** All right. And Mrs. Yvonne Blancette was first vice president. She's still living.

**Stanley:** Right.

**Helen:** She lives in Montreal. And, of course, myself, I was president, uh, well, Florence, Florence Williams was, uh, an executive member. She lives in Edmonton, she's Mrs. Hamilton now. Edna Turner was an executive member, she lives in, um, Minneapolis. Ah, Mrs. Gill Berry, she lives here in Winnipeg. And I think that's the only ones.

**Stanley:** All right.

**Helen:** There's uh, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8. There's eight original members that are living.

**Stanley:** Thank you very much. Uh, Helen conclusion of interview with Helen Bailey at, um, 11:10, Oh, [mumbles] 12:10.

**Helen:** 12:10.

**Stanley:** AM.

**Helen:** Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

**Stanley:** Interview of Otis Brown of Winnipeg, Manitoba, on the 4th of November, 1987. Commencing at, uh, 12:4,39 AM. Yeah. Okay. Otis, give me your full name.

**Otis:** Otis Brown. Yeah.

**Stanley:** All right.

**Stanley:** Mm-hmm.

**Stanley:** And, uh, what's your date of birth?

**Otis:** January the eighth, 1923.

**Stanley:** Mm-hmm. And where were you born?

**Otis:** Uh, Newbern, Alabama. N-E-W-B-E-R-N New Alabama.

**Stanley:** Oh, what major city is that near?

**Otis:** Oh, it's near Birmingham. It's about-about a hundred something miles from Birmingham. Yeah.

**Stanley:** I see.

**Otis:** Up from Birmingham Avenue.

**Stanley:** I see. And when did you come to Canada?

**Otis:** Come to Canada. Uh, September 9th, 1944, September 9th, 1944.

**Stanley:** What were the circumstances which brought you here?

**Otis:** Well, it, there was some of representative Canadian City was in-in the Birmingham area.

**Stanley:** Mm-hmm.

**Otis:** And they was, uh, filling out applications for a job as a rail porter in Canada, so I filled out the application and was accepted.

**Stanley:** Where was this application filled up?

**Otis:** In Birmingham.

**Stanley:** Oh yeah.

**Otis:** Yeah. Employment office, like, you know?

**Stanley:** Employment office?

**Otis:** Yes.

**Stanley:** Mm-hmm. Who was the representative who down there?

**Otis:** Uh, I don't remember now, but we came back from, uh, guy met us in Detroit, uh, Mr. Woods, but he-he wasn't, he --

**Stanley:** You sure he wasn't a porter instructor [crosstalk] in Toronto?

**Otis:** Yeah. Yeah. But yeah, but he, but he wasn't the one that came to Birmingham. I forgot the guy's name who came to Birmingham. You understand what I mean?

**Stanley:** Mm-hmm.

**Otis:** Yeah. Yeah. Woods, Mr. Woods met us , uh, Detroit, like see and went down to Toronto.

**Stanley:** Mm-hmm.

**Otis:** Then some of us came to Winnipeg, 17 of us in all. 5 came to Winnipeg, 7 to Toronto, and say 15. It was 15 in all it--its 5, 5, and 7, so.

**Stanley:** What were you doing at the time, uh, in Alabama? Were you working there, in school?

**Otis:** Yeah, yeah. Yeah. I was- I was working at the time. It was a small job in a bakery you know.

**Stanley:** Oh, I see.

**Otis:** I wasn't makin' much, a young fellow wanted to get away from home, you know, one of those 20.

**Stanley:** Can you recall the names of the other men who came or some of the others that came up with?

**Otis:** Yeah, that it was Preston Denning went to Montreal and it was R Smith who went to Montreal and it was, uh, me, it was the name. It was, uh, um, let's see. Beverly went to Toronto and I forget the others now. And RO Smith came here to Winnipeg with me. And, uh, to one guy passed, uh, name's Ross, I think his name was, they been so long and I forgot those [crosstalk] and I'm-

**Stanley:** Preston [crosstalk].

**Otis:** - Preston passed. He went to Montreal.

**Stanley:** Yeah.

**Otis:** He and Smitty, he went to Montreal. You see? Yeah.

**Stanley:** Well, that's fine, that's fine. Can you remember the others?

**Otis:** Yeah, it's been quite a while.

**Stanley:** It's not that very important, um,

**Otis:** But I'm the only one left in Winnipeg. Like, you know, they came behind, you know.

**Stanley:** I see. Who came to Winnipeg with you?

**Otis:** Uh, guy named Bill and, uh, R-R-RT-RT Rogers, RT Rogers.

**Stanley:** Rogers. I remember him.

**Otis:** Yeah, yeah. RT Rogers. Yeah. But he's gone back to States. [crosstalk] Yeah. Mm-hmm.

**Stanley:** He was a good friend of Ali Davis. Remember that?

**Otis:** Yeah. Yeah. I met Ali Davis some time. Yeah. Yeah. That's right.

**Stanley:** Oh, yeah. Now. Um, that was what year?

**Otis:** 1944.

**Stanley:** '44.

**Otis:** September 1944. Yeah.

**Stanley:** Oh yes. Yeah.

**Otis:** Mm-hmm.

**Stanley:** And uh, so you got a job with the Canadian Pacific Rail in '44?

**Otis:** Mm-hmm. Another guy, so we told another guy named RE Davis came here with me. I also RE Davidson, but he passed away after, mm.

**Stanley:** Did he pass here?

**Otis:** Yeah. Passed here. Got-got sick. Oh, he almost here about three or four years. And then he got sick and then passed away, mm.

**Stanley:** And how long were you a sleeping car porter?

**Otis:** Oh, 39 years all total, uh, 39 years. That's including CPR and VIA.

**Stanley:** Oh, I see.

**Otis:** You understand. Yeah-yeah.

**Stanley:** Were you a member of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters?

**Otis:** Oh, yes. Mm-hmm.

**Stanley:** Did you ever hold an office?

**Otis:** Yeah-yeah. I was on the org-organizin' committee and then I was on the authorized dues collectin' committee.

**Stanley:** What year was that?

**Otis:** Let's see now, that would be '48, '49, maybe '50. I'm just, I don't recall the exact-exact, and assistant secretary to-to JG Washington for a while too.

**Stanley:** Oh, were you?

**Otis:** To JG Washington. You remember JG Washington?

**Stanley:** Yes. I remember JG Washington.

**Otis:** Yes.

**Stanley:** You came here in '44?

**Otis:** 1944? Yes. Right.

**Stanley:** Before the Brotherhood signed the contract.

**Otis:** Signed the contract with CPR. Yeah.

**Stanley:** Were you organizing then?

**Otis:** No, no, no, no, no. I wasn't no, mm.

**Stanley:** I see.

**Otis:** Mm-hmm I-I wasn't one of the, uh, chartered members. No, I wasn't there.

**Stanley:** Remember what the dues were, the joining fees [crosstalk]?

**Otis:** I think it was 2- I think it was \$2. The dues were \$2, I believe. And I think the joining fee was 5. I cou-I could be mistaken now, it been so long. I forget now. I think the dues was \$2 for a month and the joining fee was 5, I think it was.

**Stanley:** Right.

**Otis:** Yeah.

**Stanley:** Did you enjoy the job of, uh, a sleeping car porter?

**Otis:** Uh, yeah. Well, I did, you know, and up- after about, uh, 20 years you get to, you know, started getting' to, you know, and then, well, there lots of, I like to buy lots of things, you did, you know, just like any type of job. Something, uh, always something about it, you know-you know, like, you know. [laughs]

**Stanley:** Mm. All right. Do you know who was the chief organizers of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Cars Porters were in the Winnipeg area?

**Otis:** The Winnipeg- I think it was, uh, Jack Wilson, Blanchette, and Doc Sled.

**Stanley:** Mm-hmm.

**Otis:** And, uh, who else? Did I say- I said Jack Wilson, Blanchette, Doc Sled and- and I think it was Gilbert too, I believe.

**Stanley:** Okay. All right. Um, can you recall who the leaders of the Ladies' Auxiliary were at the time?

**Otis:** The Ladies' Auxiliary. Let's see.

**Stanley:** [crosstalk] –of the Brother of the Sleeping Car Porters?

**Otis:** Yeah, the- the Ladies' Auxiliary, I guess, it was Olly Jamerson and, uh.

**Stanley:** Who?

**Otis:** Olly Jamerson.

**Stanley:** Olly?

**Otis:** Yeah, Bob Jamerson's wife.

**Stanley:** Oh, I see.

**Otis:** And, uh, the Ms. Hicks, we used to call her Poopy, like, you know, whatever, but her real name is Olivia Hicks.

**Stanley:** Mm-hmm.

**Otis:** And I think Ms. Turner.

**Stanley:** Mm-hmm.

**Otis:** Ms. QT Turner. I think she was in there at the time.

**Stanley:** Mm-hmm.

**Otis:** And uh, [inaudible 00:12:04] I think who else now, I can't- I can't reckon recall right now.

**Stanley:** Mm-hmm. What, uh, was the effect of having the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters?

**Otis:** Well, it.

**Stanley:** Uh, do you think that they- well, yeah. Tell me what the effect was.

**Otis:** Yeah. Well, the effect was you see like before the union, you know, well organized labour was the best thing, at least the Brotherhood seemed like the best thing that

happened to the porters' 'cause whenever we got, uh, on a contract and we receive, uh, better working conditions under the Brotherhood.

**Stanley:** Mm-hmm.

**Otis:** And, uh, as in probably people know this before that management, you know, whatever they said, that was it. And you had no recourse, but when the union came in.

**Stanley:** Mm-hmm.

**Otis:** Well, you-you had a committee to go up and talk to management, straighten things out with the right or wrong or whatever, you see.

**Stanley:** Mm-hmm.

**Otis:** So it-it-it-it helped the- it helped the porters 100%.

**Stanley:** All right.

**Otis:** At first we had the, uh, dues collectin'. You see, we had the, uh, then later on one of the contracts came, then they had the automatic checkoff system. You see, but that didn't come in until later.

**Stanley:** Right. Mm-hmm. Do you recall who the, um, leaders of the, uh, the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters were in the other districts? Calgary, Winnipeg, Toronto, Montreal?

**Stanley:** Uh, let's see. It's- was like Moose Jaw, that was a substitute as of Winnipeg, like, you know, and there's William [crosstalk].

**Stanley:** Moose Jaw, was what?

**Otis:** It was- it was kinda- it was, the Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan was like the same district in a way.

**Stanley:** Oh, yeah.

**Otis:** You understand what I mean. But, uh, Moose-Moose Jaw Sistrict was- at the ti- it was a district at the time. You see, but his- he had a committee there with Wilber Carney and I think it's, uh, [inaudible] and, uh, who else I don't think it was, uh, Count DeBerry, but that's just.

**Stanley:** Are any of those men living?

**Otis:** No, the- they're all passed.

**Stanley:** I see.

**Otis:** I think Wilber Carney's probably back in the States and then Calgary that was, uh, uh, Roy Williams and Odell Holmes, I think Dick Bellamy.

**Stanley:** Mm-hmm.



**Otis:** And, um, let's see who else in Cal-- in Vancouver was the-the Collins-Collin boys.

**Stanley:** Right.

**Otis:** Vancouver.

**Stanley:** Right.

**Otis:** And, uh, I think it was Jimmy Coal and Ernie-Ernie Lawrence.

**Stanley:** Right.

**Otis:** Both Vancouver, like, you know.

**Stanley:** Right.

**Otis:** But I didn't know too much of the-the about the Montreal and Toronto districts, like, you know.

**Stanley:** Mm-hmm.

**Otis:** Montreal and Toronto districts. I think Dash, he was- he was out-- he was the one out of Montreal.

**Stanley:** Right.

**Otis:** Like Chevalier out of Toronto.

**Stanley:** That's right.

**Otis:** And, uh.

**Stanley:** All right. Uh, do you remember these names, uh, as far as organizing the porters were concerned? I'm not sure that they if they were or they weren't.

**Otis:** Oh yes.

**Stanley:** Charles Baldwin. Do you remember him, Charlie Baldwin?

**Otis:** Uh, Chester Baldwin.

**Stanley:** No. This is his, uh, uncle.

**Otis:** Oh, I didn't know him. He was in Toronto, Montreal, I guess [crosstalk].

**Stanley:** Or his father. I just--

**Otis:** Well, it could be. I didn't [crosstalk] I don't know what, I knew there was some- there was Chester Baldwin, I knew him. That probably his nephew.

**Stanley:** How about Harry Gairey?

**Otis:** Yeah. I remember him from Toronto. Harry [crosstalk]

**Stanley:** Was he an organizer?

**Otis:** I don't know for sure. But he's from Toronto, you see. See, I never did work out- I was- I always worked outta, uh, Winnipeg, you see.

**Stanley:** Mm-hmm.

**Otis:** Yeah. I heard of the name. I-I've met him a couple of times. I didn't know him that personally.

**Stanley:** He became a porter instructor.

**Otis:** Yeah. Yeah, that's right. That's right. But, uh, I don't know whether he.

**Stanley:** Mm-hmm. Did you have any relatives in the Ladies' Auxiliary?

**Otis:** Uh, no, no, no.

**Stanley:** Mm-hmm. Do you think that having the Ladies' Auxiliary was a good idea?

**Otis:** Oh, yes. I think it was, I mean, it did- it depend at that time you see, we worked together sometime we put on tea or social or dance or something like that. And it was a dinner or something, try to raise a little money, like, you know, so they- it was very helpful to the, uh, to the Brotherhood. Yes. It was. Yeah. The Ladies' Auxiliary. Yeah.

**Stanley:** What did you think of the practice of tipping.

**Otis:** Well, some people think it's just demeaning, but it's technically the type of job, you know, serving like a waiter or waitress or something you expect a tip, you see. Well, for services rendered, if you-you- they don't box it like you try to help a man, lady or whatever, you do something a little extra for them. Well, you kinda expect a tip, but you cannot, uh, solicit, you understand what I mean?

**Stanley:** Mm-hmm.

**Otis:** So, I mean, but, uh, yeah, the tipping was well, how you compare, but it was- it wasn't bad though, in some cases, you know.

**Stanley:** Mm-hmm.

**Otis:** But if you didn't ha- we didn't have the tips at the time. I was- the lots of time I don't think porters could have made it, you know. [laughter] Well, oh yeah. Some people demeaned it, but you take a waiter, waitresses, or whatever. In the service industry, you kind of expect a tip.

**Stanley:** When you started on the CPR, what was your monthly salary?

**Otis:** Uh, I think it was approximately- wasn't quite \$80 per month. A-around, I'd say about \$80 per month, per month like you see.

**Stanley:** Did your tips ever exceed the \$80 a month?

**Otis:** The odd time.

**Stanley:** Yeah.

**Otis:** If-if you would keep track, you knew, you could- you could sometime they would. I would- I would equal it anyway.

**Stanley:** Mm-hmm.

**Otis:** Yes. Because at that time you put it- you put in sometime i-is- we didn't have an eight-hour system. So you-you used to get on a train work-work till the man lets you off or someone take over your car or something.

**Stanley:** Mm-hmm.

**Otis:** Sometime you- we weren't on the 40- in other way, we weren't- we were not on the 40-hour week.

**Stanley:** Right.

**Otis:** You understand? You would make so many trips, many trips. And some of that the longest I-I stayed on once about 32 days. I mean, you know, back and forth, back and forth, back and forth.

**Stanley:** Before you could go to work?

**Otis:** No, no. I stayed on the road.

**Stanley:** Oh.

**Otis:** You know, making trips straight across, straight across, straight across, straight across.

**Stanley:** Before getting any layover?

**Otis:** Yes. Yes

**Stanley:** This was before the union?

**Otis:** No, the union was in at the time.

**Stanley:** All right.

**Otis:** I mean, but see, we-we-we weren't on the 40-hour week then, you see.

**Stanley:** Oh yeah.

**Otis:** See like by workin' outta Winnipeg, see you'd go to Toronto and Montreal--

**Stanley:** Yeah.

**Otis:** --come back, go straight through to Vancouver and straight back through again, like you see. You do have to try to pile up en- on enough hours where you could get a bigger cheque.

**Stanley:** Oh yeah.

**Otis:** You understand? Yeah.

**Stanley:** Yeah, yeah.

**Otis:** Because it wasn't a 40-hour week at the time.

**Stanley:** Right. Right. Did you ever attend a porters' convention? The union's convention?

**Otis:** No. N-never got a chance to go to a convention. No. See, we would always e-elect, uh, someone to-to go to one of the conventions, you know, one or two men.

**Stanley:** Can you think of any nicknames of porters? Trying to add a little- a little touch or light touch to the book.

**Otis:** Oh, well I guess, oh well, oh jeeppers. Oh, it's called [crosstalk] Doc, [inaudible 00:18:53] I knew a fella named Doc.

**Stanley:** Doc Sled.

**Otis:** Yeah. Doc Sled.

**Stanley:** Mm-hmm.

**Otis:** And, uh, Cou-Cou-Count, uh, D- I don't fu- where the name of originated, I couldn't say for sure. The name of Count DeBerry from Moose Jaw, probably heard of him.

**Stanley:** Where did the term Doc come from? Why'd they call him Doc?

**Otis:** Yeah. It maybe he went to medical school. I'm not for sure and I don't know.

**Stanley:** Nicknames of port- I have nicknames. Anecdotes. Anything humorous that happened to you or any other porters?

**Otis:** Oh, dear. Been through for 39 years I've quite a few, but just right off the top of my head, you know what I mean. Yeah. Jeez...

**Stanley:** Well, if you think of anything during the time where you're here [crosstalk].

**Otis:** Yeah, I can.

**Stanley:** Thanks very much. End of interview with Otis Brown at 1:00 PM. Interview-interview of Aurelius Leon Bennett.

**Aurelius:** Mm-hmm.

**Stanley:** Secretary-secretary-treasurer of the Winnipeg CPR division [inaudible 00:19:50]. At approximately 1:45 PM, please.

**Aurelius:** Aurelius Leon Bennett.

**Stanley:** And Aurelius, uh, where were you born?

**Aurelius:** Memphis, Tennessee.

**Stanley:** And what is the date of birth?

**Aurelius:** September the 16th, 1925.

**Stanley:** And, uh, why did you come to Canada?

**Aurelius:** To-to escape uh, discrimination.

**Stanley:** Discrimination on account of race colour?

**Aurelius:** Right.

**Stanley:** Uh-huh. What was the first job you-you got when you came to Canada?

**Aurelius:** I was im- I was hired by the CPR in Memphis, Tennessee.

**Stanley:** Oh, I see. Uh, when was this?

**Aurelius:** 1944. February, February the 5th, 1944.

**Stanley:** I see, uh, do you remember the name of the person who, uh, hired you?

**Aurelius:** Oh my goodness. I think her name was Savage, I think, on my memory. Not too well though now, but I think yeah.

**Stanley:** Uh-huh. And, uh, did you come to, uh, Winnipeg directly?

**Aurelius:** We came from, we-we came directly to Toronto.

**Stanley:** I see. Then what happened?

**Aurelius:** Then they divided us up and kept some there and sent-sent the sent-sent the rest here.

**Stanley:** Did you come up with Otis Brown?

**Aurelius:** No.

**Stanley:** No. I see. And you started to work in Winnipeg in 1944?

**Aurelius:** Yes, mm-hmm.

**Stanley:** Mm-hmm.

**Aurelius:** My-my, uh, seniority uh, date started Fe-February the 5th, 1944 here.

**Stanley:** And how long did you work at the sleeping car porter?

**Aurelius:** Till 1986, January in 1986.

**Stanley:** Mm-hmm. Uh, did you hold any office, uh, with the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters?

**Aurelius:** Yes.

**Stanley:** When did you join the union?

**Aurelius:** Uh, at, uh, um, boof, I'd say at '45.

**Stanley:** What office did you hold with the union?

**Aurelius:** Uh, Secretary-Treasurer.

**Stanley:** Mm-hmm, and you held that office from what date to what date?

**Aurelius:** Well, from 1966 to un-until the union folded up.

**Stanley:** Was that the first office that you held with the union?

**Aurelius:** First and only.

**Stanley:** Right. Yeah. Now, um, you joined the CPR as a porter before the, uh, Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters got on the property, arrived on the property of the Canadian Pacific Railroad.

**Aurelius:** I think I did. Yes. Mm-hmm.

**Stanley:** Um, so you would've been here then during the organizing of the union, the initial organizing.

**Aurelius:** Um-um, in the last stages of the- of the or-organizing.

**Stanley:** Did you have any role in the organizing?

**Aurelius:** No, I didn't.

**Stanley:** Right. Um, before the arrival of the Brotherhood of the Sleeping Car Porters on the CPR, uh, the porters had a committee, which I understand was called the Porters' Welfare Committee. Do you know anything about that?



**Stanley:** I see. Um, can you remember what changes in the working conditions took place, uh, upon the, uh, arrival of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters' Association?

**Aurelius:** Was the hours reduced?

**Stanley:** Hours of work?

**Aurelius:** Yeah, I'm, um, I'm not quite sure, um, about that. Um, well, we, uh, I think the management didn't, um, couldn't get away with that much stuff, uh, being as they had before.

**Stanley:** Mm-hmm. Alright. Can you be more specific?

**Aurelius:** To go into details? Let's see, well, they didn't, you wouldn't- you wouldn't written up as much, and I don't think the-the inspections or anything was as harsh.

**Stanley:** Right.

**Aurelius:** Was as harsh on you then. Yeah.

**Stanley:** Right. Um, do you, I understand that the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters set up a Ladies' Auxiliary to the union? Are you familiar with-with that situation?

**Aurelius:** Well, slightly.

**Stanley:** Mm-hmm. Do you have a lady, uh, who was involved?

**Aurelius:** No.

**Stanley:** Or lady friend who was involved?

**Aurelius:** No, I didn't.

**Stanley:** All right. So, you don't know who the organizers or the leaders of that?

**Aurelius:** Not, no. I don't know.

**Stanley:** A couple of names have come up with respect to the organizing of the porters' union, about which there is, uh, the facts are not clear. Um, can you tell me if you recall hearing the, either of these names as organizers, of the porters' union? The names are Charlie Baldwin and Harry Gairey.

**Aurelius:** I do not know those names.

**Stanley:** All right. Um, what do you think of the leadership provided by men like Arthur Blanchette?

**Aurelius:** He was a good man, a very good man.

**Stanley:** A. Philip Randolph?



**Aurelius:** He was a very good man.

**Stanley:** Mr. Benny Smith?

**Aurelius:** Uh, they all of 'em good men. Mm-hmm.

**Stanley:** All right. So you were satisfied with the leadership?

**Aurelius:** I was satisfied with their leadership.

**Stanley:** Would you like to, uh, to, um, tell me, uh, do you remember the names of the hours of the-the first executive of this local union?

**Aurelius:** The fir- the first executive of this local union?

**Stanley:** Who were the first officers of this union in-in Winnipeg?

**Aurelius:** Well, Jack Wilson, I think he was the first president.

**Stanley:** Mm-hmm. And any other officers?

**Aurelius:** Bob James was vice president, I think at the time.

**Stanley:** Right.

**Aurelius:** And who-who was secretary? JG Washington?

**Stanley:** I see.

**Aurelius:** Um, well, the secretary-treasurer I'm not quite sure who he was at the time.

**Stanley:** Uh-huh. I see. Would you like to, um, give me some concluding comments, uh, or observations, uh, about the role of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters in Canada?

**Aurelius:** Well, first it was only Black label union that I knew of here.

**Stanley:** Mm-hmm.

**Aurelius:** And that, um, it, um, made us conscious that, um, we needed a union real bad, 'cause we were comparing our predicament with, um, the Pullman porters. And they were getting better wages than we were at the time. And, I think their working conditions were better at the time.

**Stanley:** Mm-hmm.

**Aurelius:** So we were, uh, I heard that, uh, the b-boys up here sought after br- uh, sought after Randolph to open up- open up a, a division up here.

**Stanley:** Oh yeah.

**Aurelius:** And he did and we-we was all glad of it.

**Stanley:** Do you think that the presence of the Bre- Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters in Winnipeg, uh, had any effect on the respect given to the Black community locally?

**Aurelius:** Uh, oh yes, mm-hmm. I think, uh, uh, very-very much so. And, um, it-it, uh, it made people look at- look at us twice and made the company respect us more.

**Stanley:** Right.

**Aurelius:** So, um, it was a good thing that-that it, um, started here.

**Stanley:** Right. I had that photograph that you gave me and remind me to, uh, go over the names with you.

**Aurelius:** Oh, yes, Mm-hmm.

**Stanley:** I brought it. It's in my bag.

**Aurelius:** Mm-hmm.

**Stanley:** Um, you attended how many conventions at the point of view?

**Aurelius:** Maybe it was two or three.

**Stanley:** Two or three.

**Aurelius:** Mm-hmm.

**Stanley:** How did you find the conventions?

**Aurelius:** [laughs] Um, I enjoyed 'em, but, uh, it was one thing that I, um, was displeased with after the CNR union, um, was got promotion for the porters, our union didn't um.

**Stanley:** Mm-hmm.

**Aurelius:** Um, I didn't fight for that. And I sent a resolution down there. They were my own resolu- a resolution that I sent down there to be discussed at that, uh, convention. It was- it was bypassed or vetoed or something. It never really came up for a discussion.

**Stanley:** What year was that?

**Aurelius:** '68 or something. '71 or something.

**Stanley:** Do you have a copy of that resolution?

**Aurelius:** No.

**Stanley:** Alright. Can you recall, uh, any humorous or story that you might like to share with us, uh, which happened to you as the porter. Or which you as a porter were involved or any other porters were involved?

**Aurelius:** Oh boy. I-I wouldn't attempt to try to thank because my-my memory is kind of a blur. I know-I know this something of what you'd- would really like me to do, but I just can't recall it right now 'cause-'cause it on the spur of the moment.

**Stanley:** Right. Uh-huh. How about nick-nicknames of porters? Can you recall any nicknames of porters?

**Aurelius:** [laughter] Goodness. Well, everybody called Otis Brown, Snake and called-

**Stanley:** Why?

**Aurelius:** [laughter] Are these just coming out?

**Stanley:** Oh yeah, seriously,

**Aurelius:** Uh, I mean, uh, well, I mean, and this wasn't, uh, mentioned before?

**Stanley:** Oh no, this is the first time I've heard this one.

**Aurelius:** Yeah. Yeah. I was in there. They called him Snake.

**Stanley:** Like to know why, where-where did the name come from?

**Aurelius:** Well, that's it, I heard it and the name stuck with him for a long time.

**Stanley:** I see.

**Aurelius:** Then a matter of fact, every now and then we do still come up with that name though.

**Stanley:** But you don't know where-where it originated or why?

**Aurelius:** No, I don't.

**Stanley:** I'll talk to him.

**Aurelius:** Yeah. You-you-you-you ask him that question.

**Stanley:** Mm-hmm.

**Aurelius:** Junior, there's Junior Hopson. We called him Big Boy-

**Stanley:** Mm-hmm.

**Aurelius:** -cause he's big, large in size.

**Stanley:** Mm-hmm.

**Aurelius:** Who else?

**Stanley:** Mm-hmm.

**Aurelius:** Um, well, one-one, Knowle Brown. We used to call him Farmer Brown 'cause he owned the farm.

**Stanley:** I see. Oh, anything that you'd like to say in conclusion that we've reached the end of the interview? Is there anything you'd like to say?

**Aurelius:** Um.

**Stanley:** Or would you like to be included in this book that I'm [crosstalk].

**Aurelius:** Yeah, I would like to say there what- I'd like to ask what is the purpose of this book or ho-how will it be- how will it be distributed? Is this for financial gain and, um, your efforts in it? Um, is this, um, are you being paid for it? Are this- you doing this on your own time or as a hobby or what?

**Stanley:** Very good questions. Alright. [**conversation thread ended**] Um, Brother Bennett, uh, would you like to comment on the attitude of the white porters of two of this, uh, Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, an all Black-led union?

**Aurelius:** Well, they, it was a lot of resentment and, um, they didn't pay the union and they didn't pay the initiation fees and they never joined up officially. And, um, when assessment request by them not being members, they didn't, uh, have no, they had no, uh, representation about us, uh, in case there was a- in case there was a problem. Um, you know, in case they had problems.

**Stanley:** Mm-hmm.

**Aurelius:** And when we had social events, they were, um, they weren't supposed to come because, um, they weren't paid up members. And, um, of course, there was no White officers in there because, um, naturally only-only the members could vote and, uh, so naturally they couldn't be-be in there. All White officers and that they resented-resented. And um, friction, uh, wasn't no pers- well, it wasn't no- well, it was friction sometime when we've- when we, uh, tried to get them to join. It wasn't friction there when we tried to get them to join. They- we bailed and they- some of 'em was outspoken and-and, um, see, they didn't feel good that we was qualified to defend them in case they did have a problem with the company. They didn't feel that we was capable of doing it. And so, and then, um, as you said about it being an all-Black union and-and these, most of these boys were Ukrainian boys. And, um, they- that's-that's another ethnic-ethnic group and we were an ethnic group and usually two ethnic groups don't get along too well together.

**Stanley:** How many-how many, uh, Ukrainian or White porters are you speaking of?

**Aurelius:** I'm speaking of 50% of the, at least 50% at the time of the- of the-the membership.

**Stanley:** Well, give the actual number, approximately-approximately.

**Aurelius:** Uh, 50, uh, when I say 50, the-the-the we had, um, a membership roster of 100 porters at the time and at least 50-50-50 in numbers of them were White.

**Stanley:** What year was that?

**Aurelius:** That was back in early '70s.

**Stanley:** I see.

**Aurelius:** The early '70s, late- the late '60s.

**Stanley:** Did they? Uh, so they-they didn't socialize with the Black men?

**Aurelius:** They didn't. Uh, not really, no.

**Stanley:** When you travel out of town together, did they?

**Aurelius:** Oh, I mean, on the rai- on the road, we socialized so many, yeah. Mm-hmm. We used drink together on the road-

**Stanley:** Yeah, right.

**Aurelius:** -and, um, we drank together and ate together, and slept together in, um, in the bunk houses.

**Stanley:** Right. Right.

**Aurelius:** And there wasn't no friction arise there, but only when they had to put money out, that was when they backed off.

**Stanley:** I see. They'd rather put up money for beer than-than for the union?

**Aurelius:** Yeah. Mm-hmm. Yeah. Yeah and yeah.

**Stanley:** Was there any, um, did they put into words any reason why they didn't wanna join other than what you've already said, they thought that you weren't qualified to represent them? Any other reason?

**Aurelius:** Um, not really, no. 'Cause that-that, uh, that was the only reason that they would talk about. And if there was another reason, they didn't and talk about it but they were quite outspoken on, uh, our-our capabilities, you know.

**Stanley:** Really?

**Aurelius:** Yeah. Mm-hmm. Yeah.

**Stanley:** I wonder how they arrived at that opinion.

**Aurelius:** Well, one porter, um, he's a friend of mine right now. He said that I can do-do the job just as well as you can. And-and then when he-when-when-when he got into trouble, he went up and defended-defended him-himself rather than have one us to go up there-there with him. Yeah.

**Stanley:** How did he make out?

**Aurelius:** Sometime he won, sometime he lost.

**Stanley:** I see. Anything else you'd like to say on this ra-race relations question?

**Aurelius:** Um, for the CPR porters?

**Stanley:** Yeah.

**Aurelius:** Mm. No, I guess I've said it- said it all there.

**Stanley:** Thanks very much, Brother Bennett. You've been very, very helpful. And as I say, you've said some things that have never been said before in my interviews, so it's really been helpful. Thanks. Another question, uh, Brother Bennett, uh, was you- the Winnipeg CPR Division of the BSCP affiliated with the Winnipeg Labour Council?

**Aurelius:** Yes, we were.

**Stanley:** Do you know how- for how many years?

**Aurelius:** Well, I was secretary for- I was secretary, uh, I started being- I started secretary in '66 and I think it was prior to that that they had joined- that they had joined it.

**Stanley:** And you maintained your membership [crosstalk]?

**Aurelius:** We-we-we maintained it right up until the end, I think, yeah.

**Stanley:** Did you ever attend any of the meetings?

**Aurelius:** No, I never attend any of-of the meeting, no.

**Stanley:** What good do you think the affiliation did [crosstalk]?

**Aurelius:** Well, um, I-I guess it must have helped the Pullman porters down there and we both belong to the same Brotherhoods. So we just did it just out of, uh, know, well, you know, well, we-we just paid it because- a-actually, I don't know why they joined because like I said, they had joined in it before I became se- uh, secretary-treasurer. So, I don't really know what benefit we reaped-reaped from it, but we paid into it though.

**Stanley:** Well, at least by paying in the, uh, the, uh, Labour Council knew of your existence.

**Aurelius:** They knew of our ex- of our existence, yeah, they knew. Yeah.

**Stanley:** It was important, yeah.

**Aurelius:** Yeah.

**Stanley:** End of interview of, uh, Brother Bennett. Interview of Jesse Samuel Hobson, uh, former President of the Winnipeg CPR Division of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters. Interview commencing at 6:23, uh, 6:26 PM, on the 4th of November, 1987. Give me your full name, please.

**Jesse:** Jesse Samuel Hobson.

**Stanley:** Right, and your date of birth?

**Jesse:** September the 4th, 1918.

**Stanley:** And you were born where?

**Jesse:** Danceyville, Tennessee.

**Stanley:** Spell that for me.

**Jesse:** D-A-N-C-E-Y-V-I-L-L-E.

**Stanley:** Uh-huh.

**Jesse:** Tennessee.

**Stanley:** Alright. Where is that near? What major city?

**Jesse:** Uh, Brownsville.

**Stanley:** Brownsville. I see. And when did you come to Canada?

**Jesse:** Uh, March the 25th, 1944.

**Stanley:** And, uh, why did you come to Canada?

**Jesse:** On a loan from the me- uh, American government.

**Stanley:** On a loan from the American government?

**Jesse:** Uh, man shortage, during wartime.

**Stanley:** Oh, I see. How did you come to come here.

**Jesse:** Through, a ad in the paper?

**Stanley:** Which paper?

**Jesse:** Uh, jobs, uh, what you call it? I guess you would call it job, uh, manpower, job shortage.

**Stanley:** I see. And, uh, you came to Canada 1944?

**Jesse:** Yeah.

**Stanley:** Which- where did you arrive at? In Canada?

**Jesse:** Through Windsor.

**Stanley:** Windsor?

**Jesse:** Yeah.

**Stanley:** But would [crosstalk]-

**Jesse:** I originated from Jackson, Tennessee, through the ad in the paper.

**Stanley:** -and you went to Windsor from?

**Jesse:** From, uh, left Jackson.

**Stanley:** Mm-hmm.

**Jesse:** And came to- we were hired in Jackson.

**Stanley:** Mm-hmm. And, uh, from Windsor, where did you go?

**Jesse:** To Toronto?

**Stanley:** Mm-hmm.

**Jesse:** And to- from Toronto, they sent, uh, you know, it was, uh, 20 guys, 10-10 stayed in Toronto and 10 came to- came west.

**Stanley:** I see, uh, [coughs] excuse me, the man- are any of the men who came west with you still alive?

**Jesse:** No.

**Stanley:** Oh, I see.

**Jesse:** They aren't here.

**Stanley:** Oh, I see.

**Jesse:** If they're alive, I don't know where they are.

**Stanley:** I see, so how far west did you come?

**Jesse:** To Winnipeg.

**Stanley:** And they, what is- what is your starting date with the CPR?

**Jesse:** Uh, on-once we landed in Winnipeg, that was March the 25th.

**Stanley:** Is that the day you started with the Canadian Pacific railway sleeping car porter?

**Jesse:** Yeah. Yeah.

**Stanley:** I see. And, uh, how long were you a sleeping car porter?

**Jesse:** Uh, 30- 36 years and 10 months.



**Stanley:** Mm-hmm. Uh, did you ever hold office with the- with the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters?

**Jesse:** Yep.

**Stanley:** How long? What office.

**Jesse:** First was, uh, on the Entertainment Committee,

**Stanley:** What year?

**Jesse:** Uh, that would be in the early-early '50s.

**Stanley:** And then?

**Jesse:** After that, I was on a Grievance Committee.

**Stanley:** Right. Mm-hmm. Next.

**Jesse:** First Vice-President, and President.

**Stanley:** What year were you, President?

**Jesse:** Uh, '74, I think it was.

**Stanley:** Uh-huh. Um-

**Jesse:** Is it in the early '70s anyway.

**Stanley:** How long were you, President?

**Jesse:** Until, uh, it disbanded, until we transferred over to VIA.

**Stanley:** I see. That's when the-the Canadian Pacific [crosstalk]

**Jesse:** And, uh-

**Stanley:** -sleeping car service travelled through VIA [crosstalk]?

**Jesse:** Yeah.

**Stanley:** Uh-huh, uh-huh. And, uh, [clears throat] the Brother of Sleeping Car Porters merged with which-which one?

**Jesse:** BRAC was it BRAC?

**Stanley:** The Brotherhood of Railway Airline Clerks?

**Jesse:** Yeah. That was- that was BRAC.

**Stanley:** BRAC, yeah. Capital B capital R capital A, capital C. Right. Um, so you were here then before the unions, the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters sign a contract with the CPR. Were you involved with the organizing of the union?

**Jesse:** Not involved without, I joined, as soon as they-

**Stanley:** I see.

**Jesse:** -you know.

**Stanley:** Mm-hmm.

**Jesse:** When they started the union, well, they said, "Okay, pay your union fee, uh, initiation fee," and--

**Stanley:** I see. So you-you didn't do any active organizing on the union?

**Jesse:** No, I didn't have, no- I didn't have no, uh-uh, participation in the organ-organization, like, you know, organized.

**Stanley:** Right. And why did you join this the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters?

**Jesse:** Because I-I left the union when I came here.

**Stanley:** Which union was that?

**Jesse:** Steelworkers.

**Stanley:** Uh-huh. And, uh, so, uh, so why did you join the union here, because you did- you were a member of one there.

**Jesse:** Because together we stand, divided we fall.

**Stanley:** Alright. Mm-hmm. Um, do you remember what the joining fee was, the monthly dues when you joined?

**Jesse:** It was 50 cents a month, I think if I'm not mistaken. Was 50 cent, I think it was union dues then was I just recall, but I know it was- it was 50 cent a month, I think, uh, if I'm not mistaken.

**Stanley:** I see. What was it joining your fee?

**Jesse:** It was \$10 or \$10 or \$20 or \$15, something like that.

**Stanley:** Mm-hmm.

**Jesse:** I'm not quite sure.

**Stanley:** All right.

**Jesse:** It's been so long.

**Stanley:** Can you recall who the chief organizers of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters were in the Winnipeg area?

**Jesse:** At that time, it was Brother Blanchette.

**Stanley:** Mm-hmm.

**Jesse:** Oh, Brother Sled.

**Stanley:** Mm-hmm.

**Jesse:** Uh, Brother Archer.

**Stanley:** Mm-hmm.

**Jesse:** If I'm not mistaken.

**Stanley:** Mm-hmm.

**Jesse:** Brother Eprehienan.

**Stanley:** Mm-hmm.

**Jesse:** Uh, Brother Turner.

**Stanley:** Mm-hmm. How do you spell brother Eprehienan name?

**Jesse:** E-P-R-E-H-I-E-N-A-N or something like that. Yeah.

**Stanley:** And, uh-

**Jesse:** I got it at home, but it's in another- in a different category.

**Stanley:** All right. Can you compare for me the co-conditions of work and the rates of pay, ah, before the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters signs of the agreements with the CPR and after?

**Jesse:** When I started, you worked for, I think it was \$80 a month.

**Stanley:** Mm-hmm.

**Jesse:** I think it was \$80 a month.

**Stanley:** Alright.

**Jesse:** That's a regular-regular salary. And that was 31 days a month.

**Stanley:** Right.

**Jesse:** And... [sound cut]