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Oral History Interview Transcript with Patricia Young

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UUID: 46EAFD38-2AF5-49C2-91FD-A3D043E2A52C

Citation:

River Hill Missionary Baptist Church. (2025, July 17). *Patricia Young, oral history interview, July 17, 2025*. (B. Hamer & N. Tucker, Interviewers) [Phone interview]. CA-015-003: Oral Histories, CA-015 River Hill Baptist Church Collection, Valdosta State University Archives and Special Collections. <https://hdl.handle.net/10428/7759>

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Interviewee: Patricia Young

Interviewer: Bonnie Hamer and Nehemiah Tucker

Interview Date: July 17th, 2025

Interview Location: Valdosta State University, Valdosta, GA (Phone Interview)

List of Acronyms: PY- Patricia Young, NT- Nehemiah Tucker, BH- Bonnie Hamer

Transcript by Aaliyah West and Bonnie Hamer

[00:00:00] Patricia Young: My name is Patricia Young. My birthday is May 27th, 1962. I was born in Valdosta, Georgia, Lowndes County.

[00:00:11] Nehemiah Tucker: What are your earliest memories of River Hill Missionary Baptist Church?

[00:00:18] PY: I was a little girl who didn't remember how old, walking down a dirt road to the church for Sunday school. My grandmother always goes to Sunday school. The church was down at the end of the road, at the end of James Road, at the time. Across from where Quick Trip, QT is, right where that rug company is now, that's where the church was when we used to walk to church.

[00:00:59] Bonnie Hamer: You mentioned that the old church was located between Quick Trip and the rug place. How do you know that for sure?

[00:01:10] PY: What was that again? My phone was buzzing. I'm sorry.

[00:01:14] BH: It's all good. How do you know for sure that it was between Quick Trip and the store?

[00:01:23] PY: I remember it being down there, and it was down there at first, and then they moved it to the current location. We walked to church every Sunday.

[00:01:35] BH: Did you live near the church?

[00:01:40] PY: Yeah, we did. Right down the road, not a mile away.

[00:01:52] BH: Do you remember when I-75 was being built?

[00:01:58] PY: I do, we just knew some work was being done, we didn't know it was going to be an interstate. There were some stores we used to go to; my mother used to go to a gas station down there, so we knew something was going on, but I, being a little girl, didn't know what.

[00:02:26] NT: What was the reaction among the congregation in general when you found out you were going to have to move the church building?

[00:02:37] PY: I don't know that. I was just a little girl.

[00:02:47] BH: As you grew up in the church, can you tell us some of the roles that you remember having or the people around you? What were the roles of men and women in the missionary church?

[00:03:02] PY: We had the pastor and the deacons. As a little girl, all I knew was that the deacons did the devotion and the collection. I didn't know the rules and everything about it, but just what I saw. The deacons up there are doing what they do and devotion, sitting on the side, taking care of whatever. The ushers are doing their part, keeping order in the church, keeping the little girls from taking, I say little girl because I was a little girl and I used to talk. We couldn't talk in church; we had to pay attention to the pastor, and we had the choir singing. To me, coming up in the church, everybody was close; it was pretty much family that was in the church that I grew up knowing, and everybody knew everybody. If we acted up, our grandmother had a sign that let us know that she saw us and was going to deal with us after church. Everybody was close, remember it being a good time with the children, everybody got along, I never saw any friction between families, it was like everybody came together and had a good time.

[00:04:40] NT: Did you ever personally serve in any specific role in the church like that?

[00:04:45] PY: As a little girl, I didn't but when I became a member and got baptized, I started on the usher board, and later on I joined the choir and sang in the choir. As a little girl, too, after doing that, we had like easter programs and different little things we would participate in BTU. As I said, my grandmother always made sure we went to Sunday school, had to go to church, had to go to BTU, and if it was an easter program, we had to do that. Whatever was going on in the church, my grandmother made sure we were actively involved.

[00:05:42] BH: Can you tell us more about the community events that the church had?

[00:05:48] PY: We had choir anniversaries where a lot of the choir came together, and they sang, which was really good. Coming up as a little girl, I enjoyed that; they had usher anniversaries, which was good. It was nice, I really enjoyed that. We had BTU in the afternoon, every Sunday evening, and had to go to BTU, and that was a good time. They had forgotten the name of it, but everybody dressed in old fashion and wore bonnets and long dresses and aprons, and they cooked food from way back. I remember my mother making something that was called sweet potato palm, and that was just a good time. It's like a family reunion to me now, but it was a

church function. That's all I can think of right now, but it was a good time; those memories are from when the church was moved to the current location.

[00:07:30] NT: You mentioned BTU. What exactly is that?

[00:07:36] PY: It was in the afternoon that we would go and study the Bible and play games to learn about the Bible.

[00:07:45] NT: OK.

[00:07:56] PY: I don't want to get it wrong. I'm thinking about what BTU was. They still have it today, but I'm not involved with it.

[00:08:04] BH: [Laughing] That's okay.

[00:08:06] PY: They call it a BTU Congress or something, but I don't participate in it.

[00:08:14] BH: Do you know about any of the churches' continued traditions?

[00:08:19] PY: They had union meetings where different churches come together, maybe ten churches have a representative come to one church, and they have services for three days. They still do that. I think after COVID, it kind of knocked a lot of stuff like anniversaries and getting together off. A lot of churches, especially River Hill, haven't started that back, but when they do, they have it on the 5th Sunday. They still have Sunday school, Church, and Bible school, and a great pastor. They have a Christian education, a class where members can get degrees in the Bible, and they have different classes that are taught.

[00:09:43] NT: So, will you be attending the event this Saturday?

[00:09:47] PY: I will, I am on the committee.

[00:09:51] BH: Oh wow.

NT: Fun.

BH: We will definitely see you there.

[00:09:55] PY: Hopefully, this is our third year doing this, and every year it gets better. We work hard to try to make it nice.

[00:10:11] BH: This Saturday, the Jones cookout is for the whole Jones community?

[00:10:17] PY: Yeah, I mean, anybody can come that's in town, but it's mainly for the people that were born or raised out there.

[00:10:32] BH: Can you explain what the Jones community is?

[00:10:36] PY: It's Joanne's family; she came up with the idea of wanting to do something to bring the community together, and she told her nephew, Wesley, about it. Wesley got a committee together and told us about what her vision was, and we put it together three years ago. People laughing and having fun, and we have had people come home from out of town just to see people that they haven't seen in many years. It's a fun thing that we do, we go out and get donations, and we sell tickets, and the hotel would donate a night, and we do like a basket with a bottle of wine and gift cards to eat out. So, you get a free night hotel, dinner for two, and a bottle of wine, and we might put in some other stuff. We sell the tickets for a dollar. We do the drawing at the event on Saturday, and that's how we raise money, and we get donations from businesses in the community to help us out. It's just a fun day for people to come and have a good time for a little while.

[00:12:26] BH: From what we previously talked about, it sounds like the Jones community has existed for a while. Do you know some of the history behind the Jones community?

[00:12:37] PY: I do not. Just a bunch of families loving each other, like one of the ladies was saying a couple of nights ago, we used to be able to go around and eat at everybody's house. Just the type of community where everybody knows everybody, back when I was a little girl, grown up now, people moved in that I don't know. Way back, we used to be able to go to this person's house, and if I got in trouble somewhere, they could whoop my butt and call my grandmother and tell her they beat me, then I get another whooping for acting up. [Laughing] It was like you had a grandmother and a mother somewhere else.

[00:13:45] BH: Well, I could definitely tell that a lot of people around here have close ties to the community. Can you tell us a bit about the project that you are working on or trying to work on?

[Laughing]

[00:14:02] PY: I started out getting the pictures of the church from way back, as far back as I could. I went to the historical museum in Valdosta, and I got some information from them. I got a book that was written by a person whose first name was Thomas. I have that book, and it has information in it about the Black churches on black schools in Lowndes County back in the day. River Hill had a school, so that was in that book, and he gave me some more information. I went to this company, and I told them what I was looking for, which were pictures of the church as far back as I could go. He didn't have a picture of the church, but he had a map, and I guess it was

before we had cars that could drive down the roads to tell you what streets and all that. He explained to me that they had plans to map out the road, and he had a star where River Hill was, and the location that I told you was where River Hill was. So I do have that map, and he highlighted and showed me the streets that ran across it, and you know that the church sat right down there. I have some other pictures of what the church looked like in previous years, and what I wanted to do was put them on a banner and present it to the church at the anniversary. With everything that was going on, I was working full-time and had a lot of things going on, so I haven't gotten to it yet, but I plan on finishing it this year.

[00:16:12] BH: When is the next anniversary?

[00:16:14] PY: It's in September, I forget which Sunday, but it's in September.

[00:16:23] BH: How many years would the church community have been together?

[00:16:28] PY: I'm thinking this might be, I'm guessing, 153 years old.

[00:16:42] BH: So we can definitely say that even though the church location has moved, the community has been going strong for 153 years.

[00:16:59] NT: That's impressive

[00:17:01] PY: The map that I got from the guy on it, the date on this paper is August and September 1915.

[00:17:26] NY: So, what was the 1915 date specific about that?

[00:17:30] PY: This was when the church was down there at the bottom, I'm not sure, but that's on the paper.

[00:17:42] NT: So, when the church was moved, was the building or did they have to build a whole new building at the new location?

[00:17:49] PY: No, they moved the building. It was a wooden church that they moved to.

[00:17:57] NT: Okay, I think we heard about that in a pre-interview we did, that the original wood was still in the walls.

[00:18:16] PY: Yup, they built around all of that, so from what they moved to what they built now, it's still the old church. The only thing that they don't have is the bell, well, I don't know if the bell is still up there or not.

[00:18:46] NT: Were you baptized in River Hill Missionary Baptist Church?

[00:18:52] PY: I was baptized at another church because River Hill didn't have a baptism pool at the time.

[00:19:00] NT: Okay, because that reminds me of when, in our pre-interview, we heard about members being baptized in the river.

[00:19:13] PY: Oh yeah, my sister was, but not me. [laughing] My sister and my brother were, but I wasn't.

[00:19:30] BH: You said you were born and raised in Valdosta, and I know that the cemetery is relatively far from the church now. Do you have any family members who are located in the cemetery?

[00:19:50] PY: Yes, I do. It's really not far, you just have to turn where it used to be: the college campus, the grove, the apartment by I-75. Those apartments that sit next to 75 off of Exit 18, it's the Grove that used to be a college campus, right beside that, it's a road, and if you keep going, you'll run right into the cemetery. My mother, sister, grandmothers, uncles, aunts, and my family are back there.

[00:20:50] NT: If I may ask, is Young your married name or your maiden name?

[00:20:56] PY: That's my marriage name, my maiden name is Hinds, Patricia Hinds.

[00:21:06] BH: You were saying that the church community is trying to do something with the cemetery.

[00:21:12] PY: Yeah, my cousin Claria and I met with a guy yesterday because the place is so grown up, and people go down there with four-wheelers, it's a hiding place. They were told that a helicopter landed down there, and it was a drop off for drugs, and somehow the law got involved with it. It's still a hiding place for somebody because we see signs of four-wheelers. We were down there Saturday cleaning up, and a truck came back there, and when they saw that we were back there, they hurried up and left, so it is some crazy going on. We are trying to get the bushes cut down. I don't think we can afford to get the trees cut down, but if we can get all the vines and bushes cut down, and the cemetery can be seen by 75 drivers, and maybe put a light up down

there. That will keep people from going down there and hanging out. In the years passed, it was vandalized and I don't want my mother or any of my family's graves like that. We are trying to get it cleaned up so it doesn't become a hiding place for whatever people are doing back there, and we know something is going on because they tear the fence down every time a fence is put up, they tear it down. We are just trying to keep our cemetery from being vandalized and being a hiding place for no good people. As I said, we met with a guy to see how much he was going to charge us to cut back all that stuff and try to clean it up a little bit.

[00:23:23] NT: Well, we definitely hope that it works out that you can get it to stop being vandalized like you said.

[00:23:31] PY: Yeah, you just got people that want to hang out at a cemetery, I don't understand. But it's probably a mile from the church, even if you turn by Starbucks and go back there.

[00:24:04] BH: Do you know any of the history behind the church's school?

[00:24:09] PY: I do not. I just know when I was a little girl, a lady used to play the piano for the church, Mrs. Butler, she was a schoolteacher. I believe my uncle and my aunt went to school there, but I'm not sure.

[00:24:33] BH: What schools did you go to?

[00:24:35] PY: I went to Lowndes High School.

[00:24:38] BH: Did you go to Westside Elementary?

[00:24:41] PY: I did not. I went to Park Mathis Elementary. PG Williams, then, when they integrated, I was in the first group to go to Park Mathis.

[00:24:58] NT: So, how long was the church's school closed before you started going to school?

[00:25:05] PY: I don't know. I don't remember it being a school; there were desks and stuff in there, but I didn't know anything about anybody going. That was before my time, I guess. It may have been going on when I was born because I remember the building behind it. When they had church functions, like church anniversaries, they used to go in there and serve the food in the school, and they had to move around the tables. I remember that very vaguely.

[00:26:11] BH: You mentioned that you were the first to be integrated into the schools.

[00:26:19] PY: Yeah, I went to PG Williams Elementary school in 1st grade, and then the next year, we had to start going to Park Mathis, which is when they integrated.

[00:26:33] BH: We've talked a little about River Hill Missionary Baptist Church. What are your hopes for your family and your church?

[00:26:52] PY: My hope is that River Hill Missionary Baptist Church will stand strong for many years to come. It's in a good location right there on the side of James Road, and people will hear about the good works or the word that's going on in there, and want to come in and be a part of the church, and that it keeps growing.

[00:27:38] BH: How has the church been a home for you?

[00:27:47] PY: Even though I'm not there every Sunday because I'm at another church. When I go, it's like coming home or like I never left. The love that's there from the pastor on down, the members that are family to me, and members that are not family to me, is a warm place to be. Anytime that I get a chance to go, I just enjoy the service, and I enjoy being there among family and friends.

[00:28:29] NT: Does the church still have any outreach programs?

[00:28:35] PY: I know of one, and I went with them last Tuesday, and they did the nursing home elementary, and I was told the pastor does a prison ministry, and I know they are involved in the clothes closet. When, like on the 5th Sunday, when they have the union meeting, each church will be responsible for taking something to the clothes closet to help needy families. The last time we had to do uniforms, I don't know what River Hill had to do. They are responsible for keeping clothes in the closet for needy families. The clothes closet is located in Hudson Dockett. I believe they rent the apartment where I have volunteered down there before. People can come in and get clothes or all kinds of stuff, like home goods. They just go in and shop and get what they want, and all they do is write down how many tops they got and how many bottoms they got, and then they walk out the door; it doesn't cost them anything. I know River Hill is involved in those three things.

[00:30:16] PY: Let me rewind back to when I was a little girl coming up, we had one of the deacons in the church, his name was deacon Roberts, and every year the church would pay for us to go on a trip. I remember going to Silver Springs for the first time, seeing the boat we had gone to, I forget the name, but it was a beach with fun stuff on it. They did those types of things for the kids once a year.

[00:31:04] NT: Sounds fun

[00:31:12] BH: It does sound fun. Are there any other memories of the church that you would like to talk about?

[00:31:22] PY: I can't think of anything.

[00:31:24] NT: You did mention that you moved out of being an active member of River Hill when you got married, so at what age did you get married?

[00:31:30] PY: I was 19, I was married 40 years, and in August this year, it will be 3 years since my husband died, but I'm still at the church that we were members of, and it's right down the street from my home church. River Hill is on one end, and I'm on the other end. As a matter of fact, when I leave church every Sunday, I pass by there. I do it intentionally because I don't have to, but I just pass by.

[00:32:07] BH: Is this church also a part of the Jones community?

[00:32:10] PY: It is. We are in vacation Bible school this week. It's three churches, and it's held at my church, but River Hill is there and SilverRun, and we're all fellowship together with vacation Bible school this week.

[00:32:55] BH: I only have a few memories of vacation Bible school.

[00:32:59] NT: I don't have any.

[00:33:02] BH: Hope it all goes well, I'm sure it will. Can you tell us a little about the missionary churches? I'm sort of familiar with missionary churches, but I didn't grow up in missionary churches, so what makes it a missionary church?

[00:33:27] PY: I'm going to have to pass on that one. I guess it's going out and doing the mission work, and they do that with different ministries like nursery home ministry. Just doing missionary work and trying to tell people about the lord and draw them close to Christ. If I had to say that's what the missionaries are supposed to be doing.

[00:34:08] BH: Yes ma'am.

[00:34:10] PY: I see it being done because I know the pastor there is very active in trying to spread the word. He not only does the nursing home and the prison, but you can call him, and he will come to you; he's visible.

[00:34:41] BH: Do you have any roles in your church that you're involved with?

[00:34:52] PY: Yeah, I sing in the choir and do whatever else they ask me to do. I did the welcome last night for the vacation Bible school and worked in the kitchen two nights so I'm a gofer, so I just do whatever is needed.

[00:35:08] BH: Yes, ma'am. Is it okay if I ask you two more questions?

[00:35:26] PY: Go ahead.

[00:35:28] BH: What's one piece of advice you would give to the new generation? What would it be?

[00:35:35] PY: Trust God, learn to know who he is, and to trust him. Trust God, let him be everything. Let me tell you why I say that, everybody has been bad, there is not a good bad or a bad bad, but I've never been a bad bad, but I've been bad. In October, I got sick, I got really sick, and I was in and out of the hospital and in and out of the ER, and nobody could find out what was wrong with me. I'm just sick, wasting away, losing weight, and nobody knew what was wrong with me. My husband was a minister, and even coming up in the church, I've always tried to do right, and you know I'm doing right and trying. After I got so sick, there was a doctor she had never seen me before. The first time she saw me was when she came to tell me what was wrong with me out of all the time I had been there. I found this out. I went to the hospital on New Year's Eve, and the day after New Year's Eve, is when this doctor came in and told me it was my thyroid. I had been sick since October, and nobody could tell me what was wrong. I was so sick that when I got over that sickness, I don't trust anybody but God because he was the one who brought me through. My children and my family have never been sick. I told them the only sickness I had was 5 children and being overweight, that was it. I have always been healthy, but when that came on me, and I got sick, and when I got through it. I know it wasn't nobody but God who brought me through it. That's why I say that he is my everything, and I trust him, so that's what I would say, you don't have to go through anything to live right and trust him. I helped raise my granddaughter, she doesn't live here anymore, and I told her the same thing. I got more than one, but she doesn't live here anymore. Just learn about him and trust him and let him be your everything. That's what I'm doing now, since I've been through what I've been through. I don't trust anybody but him and praise him all the time.

[00:38:21] BH: Are you okay now?

[00:38:23] PY: Oh yeah, I'm seeing my doctor, so I'm going to Mayo Clinic. I have a trust issue here, so I got into Mayo Clinic, and they got me on medication, and I'm doing well. I went back to work, and the Lord put an excitement in me to retire after 35 years.

[00:38:50] BH: Oh, wow.

[00:38:52] PY: I'm excited, and I'm doing good. I'm doing great!

[00:39:03] NT: That's good.

[00:39:05] BH: That's great, we are glad to hear that thyroid is no joke.

[00:39:08] NT: You mentioned yesterday that you are starting another job, so what is that?

[00:39:13] PY: I retired from the Lowndes County school transportation department, and I was offered a job with the Valdosta city transportation department. He wanted me to come and work with them to get their compliance for their state stuff, so I accepted the job with our rivals. My husband was a die-hard Wildcat; he played football, so I told him I'm supporting my husband. That was it, I didn't go looking for a job because I was going back to Lowndes County just to drive school buses just to have extra money, I'm too young, just do nothing. I believe that this is a job that the Lord opened up and sent to me, so I'm excited about it.

[00:40:17] BH: Now we have to wait thirty-something years.

[00:40:18] NT: Yeah, so excited.

[00:40:25] BH: I love that.

[00:40:27] PY: I think that this is a good thing that's being done on behalf of River Hill, and I do hope and pray that it goes far beyond the expectations of any of us.

[00:40:40] BH: What specifically do you hope will come of the preservation project?

[00:40:45] PY: I would hope that just like any other historical site in Valdosta or Lowndes County, they would put some funds to help keep it up, and hopefully the cemetery would go along with the church and help preserve the church and the cemetery. If not the cemetery, but most importantly, preserve the church and keep it up and running and in good shape.

[00:41:27] BH: We are definitely trying to do all of that. I have sent a link to a couple of people who are in charge of the project for reservations and stuff. I think in the future they are going to try to indicate that process.

[00:41:45] PY: Well, if you don't ever start the process, you can't get it done. I'm one like this when I go ask somebody for something, I say, "Well, all they can do is tell me yes." I say I'm a positive person. I'm just going to believe it's going to be done.

[00:42:00] BH: Yes, ma'am.

[00:42:02] PY: Whether I'm here or not. I believe it's going to be done.

[00:42:10] BH: Yes, ma'am.

[00:42:14] BH: Do you have anything else that you want to talk about?

[00:42:19] PY: I can't think of anything. I have been thinking for the longest time about what I could say. I know when I get off the phone, I'm going to think, darn, I should have told them this. [laughing] But I can't think right now.

[00:42:32] NT: Yeah, that's totally fine.

[00:00:34] BH: Okay, so that's all, then we can definitely...

[00:42:43] NT: ...wrap it up there.

[00:42:46] PY: Yeah. Well, I just want y'all to know that I appreciate y'all taking the time and taking on this task to make River Hill historical.

[00:42:56] BH: Of course.

[00:42:56] PY: Good luck to both of you in your studies in the year to come.

[00:43:03] NT: Thank you.

[00:43:04] BH: Thank you very much, and I hope you keep your health.

[00:43:07] PY: Yes, ma'am. I will see you both at the anniversary.

[00:43:10] BH: Yes, ma'am, I am looking forward to meeting you.

[00:43:14] NT: Me too.

[00:43:15] PY: Will we see you both this Saturday?

[00:43:16] BH: Yes.

[00:43:17] NT: Yes, we will be there.

[00:43:20] PY: I will be one of them running around in the committee.