

Joan Duncan oral history interview summary

MT State Historic Preservation Office—African American historic places in Helena, MT

With funding from the National Park Service

Total interview time 48:00 minutes recorded face to face on August 16, 2016 at 1700 Fifth Avenue in Helena, MT. A Marantz handheld digital recorder from the Montana Historical Society was used to capture the interview

Summary developed by Alan M. Thompson, Morrell Creek Associates, PO Box 9737, Helena, MT 59604
August 2016

Butte, MT residence affiliation: —715 West Park Street; Site Number **24SB0990**, Silver Bow County; grandfather also owned 711 West Broadway

1:01 minutes-24:00 minutes—

- Joan describes her thoughts on information on the MT Historic Property Record for 715 West Park Avenue (**24SB0990**)

- Joan was born in Butte, MT on September 8, 1939 and resided in the 711 West Broadway residence and 715 West Park Street while growing up

-Father— Walter E. Duncan born in Butte, MT on March 1, 1909

- Mother—Alyce (Driver) Duncan born in Anaconda, MT on April 16, 1917

-Joan's brother Walter Duncan Jr. was born in Butte, MT on August 11, 1940

-Grandfather Dr. John W. Duncan was born in 1873, in Texas Indian territory; Grandmother Armeta E. Smith (Duncan) as born April 12, 1885, only 15 miles from Appomattox, VA

- Joan recalls Grandmother and Grandfather Driver were born in Illinois

-After WWI her Grandfather Driver's military end of service was in Helena, MT

- Joan recalls her Butte school experiences

-Her Grandmother Duncan preferred the term of "Nana". They owned their residences in Butte, MT

- Joan grew up in the 1950's and 1960's —remembers the "March to Selma, AL" and the death of John F. Kennedy as significant national events

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-Reflects on those events as influencing her positive feelings of being a black American in Montana and being proud of her heritage

- “Everybody in Butte, MT knew her as Dr. Duncan’s little girl”

24:00-48:00 minutes---

- Joan gives credit to people of Butte, MT as being her protectors. She also noted being told when she was an adult on the Helena, MT City Commission that people protected her.

- Joan expounds how in 2016 that it “takes more than a village but a nation to learn the love of one another”

- Joan mentions the importance to her of Butte’s July 4th parade---an event she participated in from third grade through her high school years “Such great fun”—recalls many MT Governor’s and political figures attending the event

- Describes her mother being an X-Ray Technician—Mother was state wide President of MT Association of X-Ray Technicians, father was on MT State Board of Podiatrists by appointment of the Governor of Montana; Grandfather Duncan helped create the MT Podiatric Association

- Mother and father participated in community festivities in Butte and Anaconda

- Grandmother “Nana” Duncan was active in the MT Federation of Negro Women

-Joan describes her grandmother was a good Christian woman

-Joan’s mother was from the Roman Catholic faith

-Joan doesn’t recall speaking much about family heritage when growing up; Joan remembers many of her dear friends were from Catholic schools

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24:00- 48:00 minutes (continued)

-Joan's brother, Walter Duncan Jr will be returning from Maryland to reside in Helena with Joan in September 2016. A group of his high school friends had a club that was nicknamed "The Pagan Babies" Joan recalls that when her brother Walter would visit Butte after high school that he would collect rocks from mines to eventually use in a fireplace in his Maryland home

-Joan recalls that she didn't ask her Grandmother Duncan many questions about her faith (she remembers that her grandmother was affiliated with the Methodist Church

-Joan was born in the Butte Catholic Hospital and attended Girl's Central

-Walter Duncan Sr.'s brother John was close friends with many of his Butte childhood peers; one was a Montana Congressman and she recalls that they would visit each other during their time in Washington D.C. Uncle John resided in D.C.

-Joan's uncle Paul J. Driver (Anaconda) attended college in Portland, Oregon and taught at the college level in Florida

-Her uncle John Duncan was on the Board of Directors at Virginia Union University in Richmond, VA

-Joan recalls during her youth that the MT Federation of Negro Women was an active group statewide "When I was young I really learned a lot from those women. "Nana" and other Montana Federation of Negro Women (MFNW) women were very astute—Taught me the importance as an individual to "put my feet and nose in issues of citizenship"

- "Becoming involved" was an important theme to her

-Joan recalls using information about colleges from the dictionary to help her make her decision about applying to Syracuse University in New York.

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24:00- 48:00 minutes (continued)

--Joan remembers “missing good old Montana” and returned to finish college at Carroll College in Helena

-During her Carroll College experience she worked seasonally in Glacier National Park

-Later Joan worked at the Good Shepard School (school no longer exists)

-Joan held leadership positions in the Montana State Government in the MT Foster Grandparent Program, Women’s Bureau and hosted radio interview and local television programs. Joan also was a member of the Helena City Commission

End of Interview session