

## **Ruth Parker McLendon and Wade Parker oral history interview summary**

**MT State Historic Preservation Office Project--- African American historic places in Helena, MT**

**With funding from the National Park Service**

**Total interview time 33 minutes and 92 seconds**

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

Great Falls residence affiliation: 618 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue South; Helena area affiliations: homes of Pleasant Hour club (MT Federation of Colored Women's Clubs) members; Rimini camp ground and various Lewis and Clark National Forest Service campgrounds

**1:00 minute-12:00 minutes---**

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-Ruth Parker McLendon—born May 13, 1936 Great Falls, MT; Wade Parker—born September 19, 1937

- Mother-Agnes Mary Williams Parker—born March 21, 1908- Great Falls, MT; Father- Beatrice “Bea” Parker – born April 1888- Jackson County, Missouri

- Ruth recalls Mary Agnes Williams Parker’s father was a butler for the last Territorial Governor of Montana in Helena. Her father came with Samuel T. Hauser from Kentucky. After his employment her father then moved to Great Falls, MT

-Wade recalls that his mother was a homemaker and did not work out of the home. His mother would “do hair” in their home for many people from across the state of Montana.

- Wade and Ruth’s father “Bea” Parker was a janitor at the First National Savings Bank of Great Falls, C.M. Russell Museum

-Ruth recalls her father moving to Iowa around 8-9 years of age. He worked in Iowa until he was 21 years of age

-father purchased lottery tickets for land around Kalispell, MT. He arrived in Kalispell but was not chosen for the property in Kalispell and came to Great Falls, MT

-Wade and Ruth’s father loved to hunt and fish

- their parents didn’t talk a lot about how they grew up. Ruth recalls that her parents wanted her siblings to view things through “rose colored” glasses and focus on the future.

-seven siblings—Jane (oldest), Dorothy, Ruth, Wade, Phyllis, Steven and Alice raised at 618 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue in Great Falls, MT

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**1:00-12:00 minutes (continued)**

-family owned residence- described as a big house with garage and large yard. Bedrooms for kids in basement

-Out of town family members visiting included Armeta (from Seattle), Alice (Agnes Parker's sister), Lucille-Agnes' sister that took care of her with her grandfather when Agnes was a child (Agnes' mother died when Agnes was around 3 years of age according to Ruth)

-Ruth and Wade were only blacks in their classes all through high school

-Ruth felt they were put on a pedestal because they were popular and held class student offices throughout education

-Wade recalled his father Bea's involvement as an employee of the Arlington poker club, many of the town leaders held regular poker games at the Arlington

**12:00-24:43 minutes (tape MHSA-1013 ends)**

-Wade recalls "if you were black and traveling through Great Falls and questioned by Great Falls Police the police would often contact the Parker family to invite the travelers to a family meal"

-Ruth recalls many city leaders "loved dad"

- Wade discusses his experiences of feeling safe in his environment

-Ruth recalls her brother Steven being sent to Pine Hills at the request of her father

- Wade left Great Falls in 1956 to attend college in Chicago, IL

-Wade recalls receiving Great Falls newspaper clipping from his mother about Malmstrom Air Force service men being refused service at a local restaurant

-Ruth and Wade remember family involvement in Union Bethel African Methodist Episcopal church in Great Falls

-Wade and Ruth recall Great Falls MT Federation of Colored Women's Club members meeting with other women's clubs in Kalispell, Billings and Helena. Often Wade and Ruth and their siblings would accompany their mother to these out-of-town meetings

-Wade recalls family meals and family interaction – "first grade baby" meal time game

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**24:43-34:39 minutes (MHSA tape 1014 begins)**

- Ruth remembers Maxine Ladd Howard moving to Helena from Great Falls
- Wade recalls driving through Wolf Creek Canyon to Helena from Great Falls
- Ruth and Wade recall Octavia Bridgewater from Helena
- Wade recalls vegetables and rhubarb from their garden
- Ruth speaks about her father Bea's hunting guide experiences. She recalls "we were well known for sharing game meat for other produce" with neighbors and people who were hungry
- Wade recalls "Jackrabbit Charlie" a black trapper that would visit with his father and share meals with family when he was in town
- Wade recalls taking his mother, Emma Riley Harris Smith, and Mrs. Oren Green fishing at the Loma, MT Ferry— "unbelievable wonderful lunches"
- Ruth speaks about attending college in Missoula
- Wade speaks about his involvement with the YMCA in Great Falls, MT and college at George Williams College in Chicago, IL
- Wade speaks about his professional experiences in the Illinois Child Welfare and Foster Care system
- Ruth speaks about her 28 years in California High School Education system
- Wade recalls his 1969 nomination to "Ten Outstanding Men in Chicago Award"

**End of Interview**