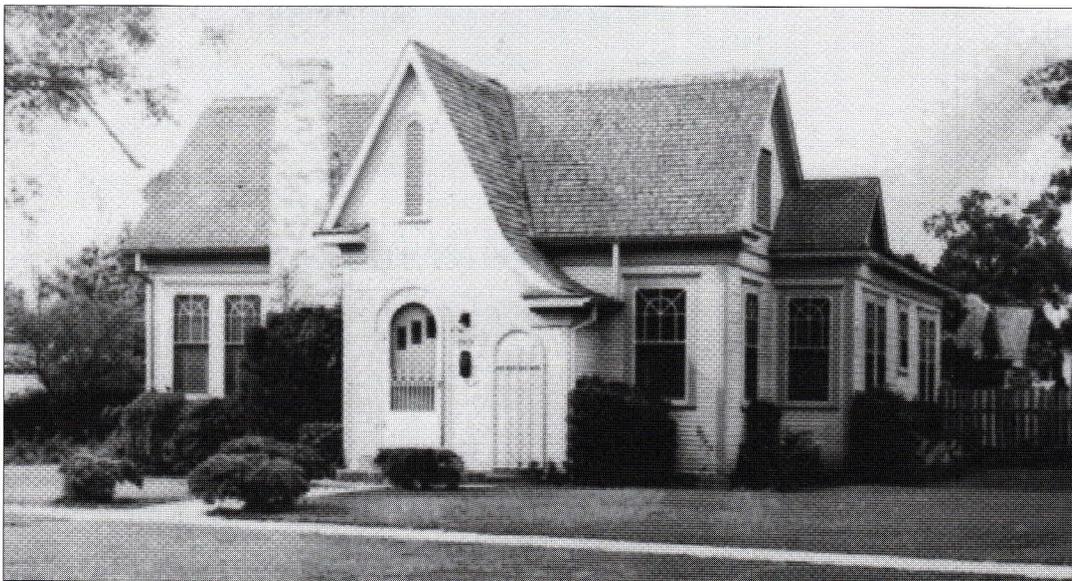


Thelma Scott Bryant: Memories of a Century in Houston's Third Ward

by Teresa Tomkins-Walsh

... through the years of listening to my mother's stories of her life, I have absorbed not only the stories themselves, but something of the manner in which she spoke, something of the urgency that involves the knowledge that her stories—like her life—must be recorded.

— Alice Walker¹



A young Thelma Scott Bryant loved pink. She and Ira Bryant built this house in 1932 on the corner of Holman and Nalle and painted it pale pink with bright pink trim. Courtesy Thelma Scott Bryant Historical Photograph Collection.

In 1932 at the age of twenty-six, Thelma Scott Bryant moved into the charming pink house she and her bridegroom built at 3319 Holman in the heart of Houston's Third Ward. At the age of ninety-seven, Scott Bryant lives in the same house with a few enduring pieces of the original furniture, clusters of family pictures, and displays of her husband's books. A card table temporarily erected in the middle of the living room a year ago is littered with Scott Bryant's memorabilia: tattered photo albums, crumpled photocopies, yellowed newspaper articles, and funeral programs. As she sits in her favorite brocade chair and sips Dr. Pepper, the diminutive Scott Bryant tells the stories of her life to visitors. She speaks confidently, head tilted forward and eyes closed, as she searches her memory and counts off sets of names and dates on her fingers to ensure that she has forgotten no one in an invisible genealogy.

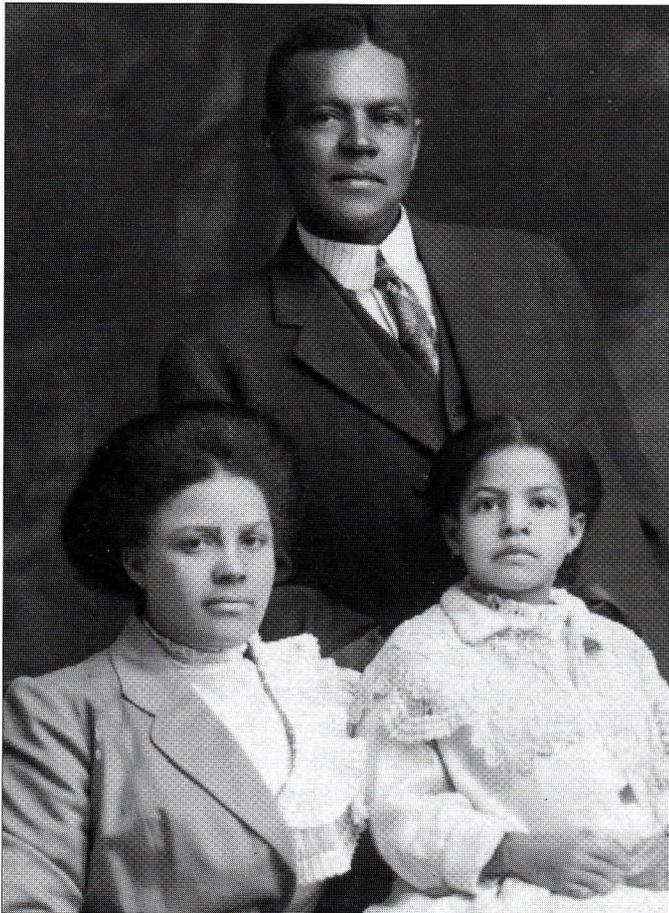
Her life stories reflect the history of Houston's Third Ward and broaden the history of Houston. Scott Bryant's stories reveal the

circumscribed but complex life of a black, middle-class woman who lived two-thirds of her life under segregation but graduated from college, taught in Texas public schools, married her ideal mate, and served her church and community. She gave unstintingly of herself to her family, her students, her husband, and her friends. Now, interested members of her circle gather round to hear stories of their past and sustain her with emotional and financial support. Houston's local historians, college students, and school children visit her home and listen to Scott Bryant's stories every day except Sunday. Each Sunday morning she worships at her venerated East Trinity Methodist Church. On Sunday afternoon, she always naps and reads the Houston newspaper. Sometimes she reviews a local historian's manuscript on community history. On Sunday evening, she prepares a special meal in smaller proportions than her mother made, perhaps baking a succulent chicken and simmering a pot of beans, and, following family custom, welcomes company to share dinner.

Scott Bryant revealed her life stories in a series of oral history interviews and conversations conducted over a year and half.² During the first interview, Scott Bryant began her life story predictably with her birth and continued more or less chronologically, but the sense of self she projected was strongly conditioned by her connection to enslaved grandparents: “Well, do you mind my going back,” she asked, “to my grandfather?”³ As she spoke, Scott Bryant’s voice trembled slightly and dropped in timber as she said, “going back,” suggesting that her oft told story still stirred her emotions. Her choice of incident and chronology emerged from her consciousness that she is a descendent of slaves who flourished after emancipation by creating lives for themselves and opportunities for their children:

My grandfather, in fact both sets of grandparents, were all brought to Houston as slaves, before freedom came for us. My grandfather on my father’s side was a trustee of the First Methodist Church in Houston, which was the first black church in Houston. He was also a founder of the first black Masonic Lodge in Houston. He was the second black mail carrier in Houston; he passed the civil service examination in 1889, and the post office has that on record.⁴

Depending on the length of each interview, Scott Bryant revealed stories in layers, giving her life chronology briefly in a short interview, but revisiting details of different past experiences as time permitted.⁵ She exhibited the assurance of an experienced interviewee as she seated herself in her favorite chair positioned in



Ella and Walter Scott with young Thelma Scott, photographed between 1910 and 1912. Courtesy Thelma Scott Bryant Historical Photograph Collection.

the opening between living room and dining room. With a can of Dr. Pepper and a straw at hand, Scott Bryant demonstrated how she would signal if she wanted the recorder stopped. Scott Bryant knew what she wanted to tell and how she was going to tell it, but her retelling was never quite the same. She talked along a well-worn path, remembered a specific incident that she wanted her listener to understand, digressed to explain several related points, but returned to her original topic at the precise point where she had digressed from her story, stunning her fascinated listener who was lost in the narrative. Scott Bryant’s familiarity with her topic and her presentation, however, did not diminish the authenticity of her stories, and for those who have the opportunity to listen more than once, repeated anecdotes acquired dimension in a layering of details, names, and events. Her stories were both common and rare, common because she lived a life, like millions of other African Americans during the first half of the twentieth century, under the oppressive shadow of segregation, and rare because, as she said, “I have lived so long!” and she wrote, “I did inherit some super genes along health lines.”⁶

Following a demographic shift in early twentieth-century Houston, Thelma Scott Bryant’s parents moved from an overpopulated Fourth Ward, where they had lived with the Scott family, to a home they purchased at 3003 Live Oak in Third Ward, two blocks from Emancipation Park.⁷ At that time, life in the Third Ward was quite rural; there was no running water and the streets were unpaved, but residents, many of them homeowners, lavished attention on their homes located randomly by individual developers who lacked a plan for neighborhood development.⁸ Residents adorned their verandas or porches with plants overflowing from hanging baskets with red, yellow, and pink blossoms that scented the front entries and beckoned to friends and strangers as emblems of pride and welcome.⁹ Hospitality was part of their southern heritage and a social necessity in a segregated city for residents of this primarily black community.¹⁰

Olga Thelma Scott, Ella and Walter Scott’s only child, was born on September 26, 1905, in her parents’ home. The delivery was performed by Dr. R. F. Ferrell who arrived in a horse drawn buggy and sterilized his instruments on a wood burning stove. Scott Bryant’s mother, Ella Bell Scott was born in Fourth Ward, a residential and cultural center for nineteenth-century Houstonians.¹¹ Ella Scott was a daughter of slaves, both born in 1862. A slave child first in Mississippi and then in Texas, Ella Scott’s mother Lucinda Wall (1862–1942) did not learn to read or write as a child. Although she was to become a superb cook, she could not read a cookbook. Before she could write her name, she signed with an “X,” only later learning to sign her name on a check. After her husband died in 1912, Lucinda Calhoun Wall cooked for a wealthy family and traveled the country with them to residences in Asbury Park, New Jersey, Massachusetts, and Saratoga Springs. Scott Bryant speculated that Lucinda Wall’s association with an elite white family shaped daughter and granddaughter’s refined manners and love of fashion.

Ella Scott met Walter Scott, eight years her senior, while she attended Old Colored High in Fourth Ward.¹² When the Wall

family moved to Kansas, the couple conducted a courtship by mail. Ella Wall returned to Texas against her mother's wishes and married Walter Scott in Austin on March 8, 1903. She borrowed her lovely wedding dress from a prosperous friend, Rosa Beck Wilson, who would become Scott Bryant's godmother. According to Mrs. Wilson's account, Walter Scott serenaded his bride on the trip back to Houston with "By the Light of the Silvery Moon" and "If You Like Me, Like I Like You," as they sat in a dirty, segregated train coach.¹³

Scott Bryant's childhood was secure and sheltered. Like many of her neighbors, Ella Scott worked as a full time wife and mother. According to Scott Bryant, her mother spent her recreation hours visiting other women who were also housewives. Ella Scott was an excellent seamstress. She sewed for her family to save money, but she also taught neighboring women to sew clothes for their families, make quilts, and embroider. After a day of sewing, the women would cook and give dinners for the neighbors; they might make spicy gumbo, barbeque, or bread and fry fish.

By the time Scott Bryant was a young child, the Scotts had settled into separate lifestyles. Walter Scott, slender and wiry most of his life, was a taciturn loner who read the weekly sporting news and loved baseball. He and his friends attended almost every Houston Buffalos game, where they sat in segregated seats. He had played baseball as a young man and seemed to have few other interests. In contrast, Ella Scott enjoyed socializing and was a friend to everybody. Scott Bryant shared her mother's life. They attended neighborhood parties, picnics, and church functions, and Scott Bryant thrived on the love and attention her mother provided. Both parents enjoyed card games, but each played cards with his or her own friends. Occasionally, Scott Bryant played card games with her father, but she remembered only brief moments of tenderness with him, played out in a Sunday morning ritual. As she prepared for church, her father sat on the front porch reading his paper. When she had dressed in her Sunday best, he handed her the nickels she needed for the Sunday school offering, and she kissed him on the cheek.

Other Sunday rituals included a big breakfast consisting of chicken, rice, and gravy or pork chops, grits, and eggs. Sunday dinner was the only time the Scott family sat down to dinner together. Any and all were welcome to the Sunday dinners that Ella Scott prepared. Visitors or neighbors could drop by the house and feast on a tempting spread of food. Sometimes Scott Bryant's mother would make ice cream, served with dark chocolate, creamy coconut, or tangy lemon-filled cake. During the week, Scott Bryant's mother, with a fullness of figure that suggested pleasure in food, ate as soon as she finished cooking, so she could visit with neighbors. Scott Bryant ate dinner when she came home from school, often to an empty house, but her food was prepared, and she knew which house her mother was visiting through a neighborhood grapevine conveyed by shouted messages from neighborhood children. A little boy named "Pig" might yell out when Scott Bryant arrived home from school: "Thelma, your mama says you can eat all the bread pudding," so Scott Bryant would know which foods her mother intended for her to eat.¹⁴ Scott Bryant's father ate his dinner when he returned later from his job and then went to bed.

Walter Scott, Scott Bryant's father, was a strict disciplinarian, perhaps because he came from a family of achievers. Scott Bryant's paternal uncle, Emmett Jay Scott was the family's greatest success story. Their father, Horace Lacy Scott (1852–1925) and his wife, Emma Kyle Scott (1856–1900) had been slaves as children. They met and married in Houston and were living in the back yard of a white family's home on Main Street and Bell Avenue, when their first son, Emmett, was born. Another seven children survived infancy, but Grandma Scott died when she was forty-six years old, leaving the older children to raise the younger. Horace Scott was a founding trustee of Trinity Methodist Episcopal Church (Big Trinity), and he had been the second African American to pass the civil service test in Houston in 1889.¹⁵ Scott Bryant never learned the circumstances of her grandfather's literacy, and she admitted that as a youngster she had little interest in her family history. She suspected that, like many slave children, he learned to read along with his master's children. Apparently, neither side of her family discussed the childhood enslavement of her grandparents. Both grandparents and parents lived for the future, worked to provide well for their children in the present, and left the past to silence.

Of the eight Scott children, three boys and five girls, only Scott Bryant's father, Walter Scott, and another son, Quitman Scott, never graduated from college. When Emmett Scott went to Tuskegee in 1897 to work as secretary to Booker T. Washington, he sent for his five sisters. Emmett Scott employed the oldest sister, who was already a teacher, and he helped the other four graduate from Tuskegee. They all became teachers and were influential role models for Scott Bryant, especially during the summer hiatus, when they stayed with the Scotts in Houston.

Emmett Scott, the star of the family, worked hard for his accomplishments. He attended Wiley College in Marshall, Texas on a work scholarship. His first job at Wiley earned him about five dollars a month and required a one-and-a-half mile walk from the school to the post office, where he fetched the mail and carried it back to campus. One year he did not return early enough at the beginning of session, so someone else was assigned to his job. To stay in college, Emmett Scott took a more menial job feeding the hogs that the college raised for food. Over time, someone noticed Emmett Scott's intellect and abilities, and he went to work in the college president's office.

With such work, he was able to graduate from Wiley and return to Houston, where he could not find employment suited to his education, so he went to work as a janitor at *The Houston Post*. When the paper did not have a reporter to cover commencement at Prairie View, the editor sent Emmett Scott to cover the story. He showed such ability that he was promoted to copyboy, and thereby learned the journalism trade. Later, along with J.S. Tibbitt and C. N. Love, Emmett Scott established the *Texas Freeman*, first as associate editor and then as editor.¹⁶ His editorials in the *Texas Freeman* attracted the attention of Booker T. Washington. Emmett Scott served as Washington's private secretary, then as secretary of Tuskegee Institute, and finally for twenty-two years as secretary of the Negro Business League founded by Washington.

Twice during his years at Tuskegee, Emmett Scott served the national government. First, President Taft appointed Emmett



Scott family at the dedication of the Emmett J. Scott School, 3300 Russell, in 1960. On the left, from the bottom, Ella Scott, Thelma Scott Bryant, and Anna Scott Cole (Atlanta). On the right from the top, Ethel Scott Maynard (Ft. Worth), Marie Scott Plott (Ft. Worth), Jimmie Price Gray, and Rhonda Higgins (center). Courtesy Thelma Scott Bryant Historical Photograph Collection.

Scott to serve on the American Commission, which traveled to Liberia to investigate political and financial problems in 1909.¹⁷ Emmett Scott later served as special adjutant to Secretary of War Newton D. Baker, during which tenure Emmett Scott researched and wrote *The Negro in the First World War*. After World War I, Emmett Scott served for nineteen years at Howard University in Washington, D.C. as secretary-treasurer and business manager. Emmett Scott maintained a connection with Houston, and played a major role in the funding and building of the Carnegie Library (also known as the Colored Library).¹⁸ Another important contribution to Houston was his publication of *The Red Book of Houston*, which detailed individuals, institutions, businesses, and population statistics about Houston's black population.¹⁹

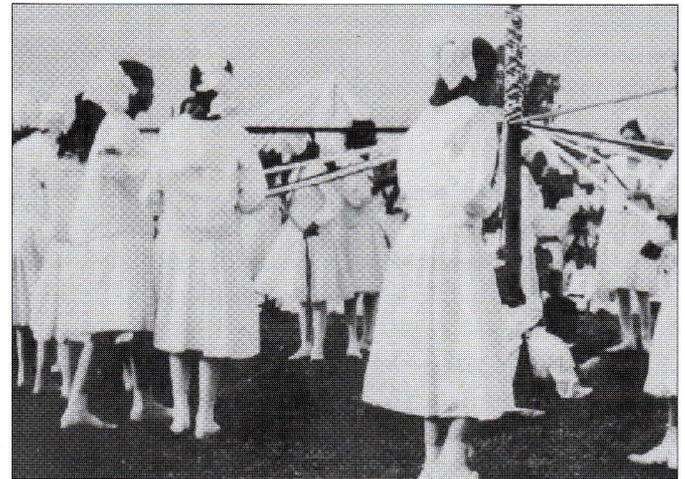
Emmett Scott was the oldest son and set a standard of achievement for the family that led to a lifetime of devoted teaching among the Scott daughters. Walter Scott had dropped out of high school and attended Prairie View College for a while, but he did not have the desire for the higher education that motivated Emmett Scott. Quitman Scott also had little interest in school and worked as a blacksmith in Houston until he moved to San Diego, where he lived out his life. During Scott Bryant's early childhood, her father Walter Scott worked in the tobacco shop. A few years later, he became a mail carrier after passing the civil service test, as his father had done.²⁰

Walter Scott was fortunate to deliver mail in the Second Ward to the homes of many elite white families. During the Christmas season, he would arrive home, laden with gifts such as homemade cakes, candies, and neckties. Scott Bryant conjectured that the white families liked her father because he had manners that made white people comfortable. When a baby was born in the Second Ward, the proud parents would invite him in to see the child, and he would coo and cluck appropriately. Walter Scott's ability to win the good will of the white people on his mail route would help Scott Bryant later on when she was ready to teach in Houston's public schools.

Scott Bryant was a cherished and smartly dressed child. Because her mother could embroider and knit as well as sew, Scott

Bryant dressed in beautiful ensembles that included embroidered dresses and matching hats. Once, Mrs. Chaney, a close neighbor, purchased a piece of red and green plaid silk from Goldberg, the peddler, who walked Third Ward with pots, utensils, and fabrics strapped to his body. After admonishing Mrs. Cheney for her generosity, Ella Scott turned the gift into a beautiful dress for her daughter's twelfth birthday. That first silk dress was a milestone in Scott Bryant's development. As an elementary school girl, Scott Bryant had worn gingham or calico during the school year. During Houston's hot summers, girls wore organdy dresses finished with layers of dainty ruffles. Although all the girls were eager to achieve a fashionable look, Scott Bryant was perhaps the best-dressed girl in her circle. She carried her love of finery into her middle years, when she decided that working on her husband's scholarship was more important than new and stylish clothes.

Scott Bryant was a good student, encouraged by her parents to study hard. When she finished elementary school in 1918, she was named the salutatorian of her class. At her graduation, she present-



May Day in 1922. Girls wrapping the May Pole at West End Park located around the corner from Old Colored High School. School girls made the popular hair bows from tissue paper to achieve the desired form and size. Courtesy Thelma Scott Bryant Historical Photograph Collection.

ed "America's Share is Our Share," an essay she wrote and filled with the expected patriotism of wartime. In high school, she disliked history because there were too many dates to memorize, and she found mathematics tedious because she felt a lack of accomplishment. Science courses were her favorites, because she liked the hands-on experiments. She also enjoyed English, as long as the stories were short.

Throughout Scott Bryant's school years, her family insisted that she work hard and expected her to attend college; her church and neighborhood gossip included news of others who had gone off or were coming back from college with their degrees. Although there were opportunities for "Negro" higher education in Texas at historically black colleges, more often young African American scholars in her circle went east or west to earn their college degrees. At her high school graduation in 1922, Scott Bryant was only sixteen because high school ended with the eleventh grade, but she finished third or fourth in her class, a position high enough to merit an oration and a place on the graduation program.

Scott Bryant's social world in the Third Ward comprised neigh-

bors, school chums, and Sunday school friends. She attended Douglass Elementary School, studied piano, and participated in neighborhood socials. By second or third grade, Scott Bryant had begun piano lessons, as had all her friends. She attributed her modest skills to her “ordinary” abilities and not to the failure of her teacher. Scott Bryant preferred blues and jazz to the classical music in her lessons, but her teacher did develop the talents of at least one successful concert pianist, Jessie Covington Dent, who attended Oberlin College and became the first black student admitted to Julliard on scholarship. Scott Bryant played well enough to play for her Sunday school or to substitute if the pianist could not make church services, and she played for her own pleasure at the upright piano that still graces her living room.²¹

Music was an important part of any celebration in Third Ward’s Emancipation Park. Her community celebrated Juneteenth with a parade that included automobiles decorated with brightly colored, handmade crepe paper flowers. Organizers elected a queen, always the newly graduated high school girl with the highest grades. Bands played in an open pavilion in the afternoon and there would be “rabble rousing” speakers. Then there was the food sold at different stands and booths, one with iced down watermelon; another with redfish, catfish, and trout fried in the open; and smoky pit barbeque in another.²²

Scott Bryant’s early years included regular church attendance at Trinity Methodist Church (Big Trinity) in the Fourth Ward, where her family had her christened when she was six months old. When she was eight years old, Scott Bryant began to follow the neighborhood children to East Trinity Methodist Church (Little Trinity) in the Third Ward, where she was welcomed as a member of the congregation at age fourteen. Her mother continued to attend church in the Fourth Ward, while Scott Bryant attended church with her friends in Third Ward.²³ Although his father had been a trustee of Trinity Methodist Church, Walter Scott rarely attended church.²⁴ Scott Bryant deepened her association with East Trinity Methodist Church over the years, an association that always included a strong social component.²⁵

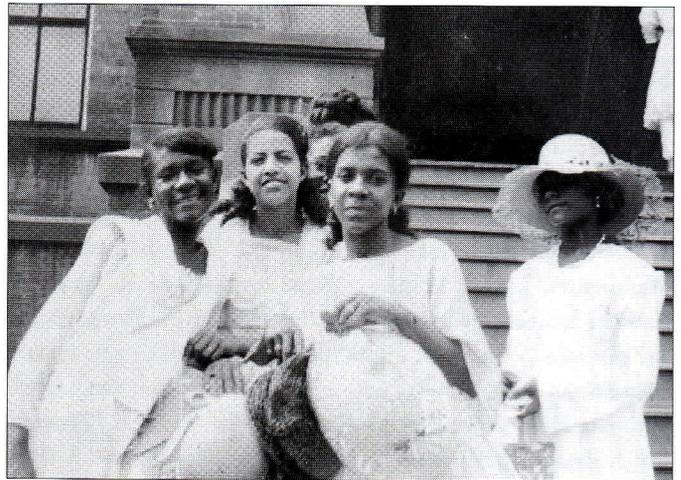
During those first years at East Trinity, Sundays after church were special times when Scott would go for a soda and gather with her friends without her mother’s supervision. Queen Esther’s Circle was a group of girls who met once a week at someone’s house, served a little food, and listened to the pastor’s wife conduct discussions of interest and concern to adolescent girls; chastity and abstinence were frequent topics.²⁶ Also during her high school years, the national YWCA was testing a model branch for



Lela White (left) and Thelma Scott in their Sunday ensembles after church on a muddy, unpaved Dowling Street (1921). Courtesy Thelma Scott Bryant Historical Photograph Collection.

African American girls, and Scott Bryant attended a weekly session, where she learned calisthenics, dance, and deportment.

Although her parents allowed her to select a separate church at a relatively young age, Scott Bryant’s parents strictly monitored her interactions with boys. All the while, she was “trying to look at some of them and smile, if they would look at me.”²⁷ She described herself as timid and skinny, a girl the boys did not seek out. She liked the football games, played by a Houston team against rival teams from Beaumont or Galveston. A teacher might drive a group of students to the out of town games, where Scott Bryant flirted with boys from the opposing team. Romance did not develop, however, until the ninth and tenth grades, and then only in the context of the social life of her high school group. Sometimes friends would gather on Friday night at someone’s house where they played the piano and danced. Her parents did not know she was dancing with boys, for that was a forbidden pleasure.



Marie Wood, Thelma Scott, Lela Brock, and Ida Belle Donnally (left to right) dressed for Promotion Day, the last day of the school year, on the steps of Old Colored High in 1921. Courtesy Thelma Scott Bryant Historical Photograph Collection.

Saturday was the day for movies at the Lincoln Theatre, on Prairie between Milam and Louisiana, the part of downtown developed by African Americans for black commerce and culture.²⁸ Scott Bryant and her friends watched silent westerns, or maybe, *The Sheik of Araby* with Rudolph Valentino, as a pianist played the piano to accompany the movies. Sunday was a special day for Scott Bryant. She attended church and Sunday school, “where strong, talented adults were there with their positive influence to train and guide us.” Sunday afternoon was the time for “Kodak parties.”²⁹ All the friends in her group owned little box cameras that cost about \$4.95. They would pose in groups, in boy and girl couples, and the girls would strike glamour poses to flaunt their fashionable Sunday clothes. Scott Bryant described herself as shy and ordinary, but during her last year in high school, she joined a social set a couple of years her junior, because “they were more stylish.”³⁰ It was at these Sunday parties that she would meet her young beau, dance, and pose in pictures with him without her parents’ knowledge, for “in those days I did not receive company.” By eleventh grade, teen romance proved elusive, however, and Scott Bryant graduated from high school without a boyfriend.

After high school, Scott Bryant decided to attend Howard

University in Washington, D.C., where her successful paternal Uncle Emmett Scott was secretary-treasurer. Because her maternal relatives lived in Kansas, Scott Bryant had traveled to the Midwest as a child, but her trip to the nation's capitol was an adventure. She traveled north on a train with classmate James McNealy as an escort. They took the southern route, a trip that involved railroad workers disconnecting the railroad cars on one shore of the Mississippi River, loading the cars individually on a ferry that conveyed them across the river, and then reassembling them on the opposite bank.

Emmett Scott met the young students at the station in Washington. Uncle Emmett accompanied the young man to Clark's Hall, the men's dormitory, and then escorted young Thelma to Miner Hall where she shared a room with a girl from Virginia and another girl from Detroit. That first night she dined at Emmett Scott's home with his family, but she did not continue to socialize with the Emmett Scotts who moved in Washington, D.C.'s circle of elite African Americans. She felt a little like "country kin," and she soon became distracted by the Howard social scene and her first serious romance. During her years at Howard, she visited the White House and Mt. Vernon, and she stood for hours in the cold to witness the inauguration of Calvin Coolidge. Riding a roller coaster for the first time was the dream of a lifetime, until she realized that she was "frightened to death and didn't have any business up there!"³¹

As a student at Howard University, Scott Bryant experienced a distracting and perilous independence. After the first year, her grades slipped so that she was prohibited from initiation into the sorority she had pledged. Finding college chemistry too challenging, she changed her major to biology. Letters of reproof from home did not improve her study habits. Her mother, who had never worked outside the home, had taken a job at a department store making alterations to help pay for college. Godparents Rosa and Sam Wilson contributed money to help the Scott family keep Scott Bryant at Howard. Scott Bryant felt guilty but loved too well the society she found in college. She preferred the company of her dashing college beau to the discipline of study.

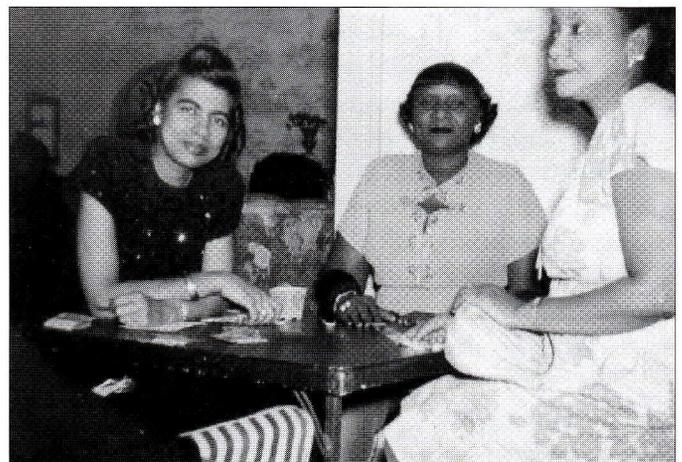
Despite her average grades, Scott Bryant found at Howard University new opportunities, both social and academic. Having been protected and restricted by her parents, Scott Bryant reveled in the social life that Howard offered, including a degree of personal freedom she had not experienced at home. Accompanied by a chaperone from the senior class, freshmen went to the movies on Friday night. Close to campus was a vaudeville theater that produced plays with celebrities such as Ethel Waters. Howard students attended certain operas in the area, including *Madame Butterfly*, but in the early 1920s many public facilities were still segregated. A color line separated the theatrical and social events that Howard students could attend. A music teacher at Howard had tickets for a "white opera," which she gave to Nancy Davis, a light skinned student, who "dressed white" and attended the opera without incident.³² Scott Bryant attended football games and the dances that followed them, as well as the dances given by fraternities and sororities.

Along with the whirl of social activities at Howard, Scott

Bryant found romance with a young man who planned to become a physician. He was an extrovert and a charmer, according to Scott Bryant, who thought she had found the "knight in shining armor" of her adolescent fantasies. She blossomed at his side, learning self-confidence and enjoying lovely dinners and exciting entertainments. Her infatuation with her young man and her freedom from parental restraint contributed to the deterioration of her grades. As she approached graduation, Scott Bryant realized that their romance was not the lasting love she wanted, so she left Howard to return to Houston with her biology degree and resolved to use her experience to find a man with the kind of character that would give her a lifetime of love.

After graduating from Howard, Scott Bryant returned to Houston, where she intended to enter teaching as so many of her family had done and as one of the few career paths open to educated African Americans. When Scott Bryant returned to Houston in 1926, a white superintendent, Dr. E.E. Oberholtzer, ran the segregated Houston Independent School District (HISD). African American teachers could find employment only in black schools, and there were far more qualified candidates than positions. An African American teacher could only secure a teaching position through a ritual of apprenticeship and ingratiation.

Scott Bryant's experience was no exception. First, she found employment at the Houston County Training School, six miles east of Crockett, Texas. She had her degree in biology, but the school assigned her to teach English. She worked at the training school for a year, before returning to Houston. To obtain employment in HISD, after serving in an outlying school, an African American candidate had to acquire a letter of recommendation from a reputable white citizen, addressed to Dr. Oberholtzer, regarding both personal and family character. Because her father, Walter Scott, delivered mail and was both liked and respected in the Second Ward, he solicited such a letter for his daughter from a Dr. Slattaper.³³ After receiving this letter, Dr. Oberholtzer interviewed teacher candidate Thelma Scott, who sat in front of him knowing it was not her education, qualifications, or merit, but a letter from a white man that won her the job. Scott Bryant remembered that it was so important for potential teacher candidates and



Members of the Cinderella Bridge Club gathered once a month. From left to right, Eunice Johnson (teacher), Princella Milligan (teacher), and Janie Lights (homemaker) enjoyed cards and food in a private home around 1940. Courtesy Thelma Scott Bryant Historical Photograph Collection.

their families to get those letters in front of the superintendent that they often brought homemade cakes and pies to sway the superintendent's secretary and the subject supervisors. Through a network of black maintenance workers, the families learned that the supervisors would often throw the offerings in the trash, unwilling to eat food prepared by African Americans.³⁴ Dr. Oberholtzer hired Scott Bryant, and she began teaching at Phillis Wheatley High School in Fifth Ward in 1928. The following year, the district completed a new building on the campus, so Scott Bryant had a classroom and a biology laboratory. She taught biology at Phillis Wheatley High School until 1941.



Thelma Scott (age 25) posed for this portrait by A. C. Teal, photographer, as a gift for her fiancé, Ira Bryant (1930). Courtesy Thelma Scott Bryant Historical Photograph Collection.

Upon her return to Houston, Scott Bryant resided with her parents in their Third Ward home and attended Trinity East Methodist Church. By the late 1920s, most of Scott Bryant's friends worked; few of her peers stayed at home like the women in her mother's generation.³⁵ Those who had gone to college taught school, if they could get positions, or they became nurses.³⁶ Some college graduates were able to work as pharmacists, and there were a few female doctors. One of the first African American female physicians was Thelma Patten Law, who set up her practice in downtown Houston. She also had attended Howard. Although she was a general practitioner and not an obstetrician, Dr. Law delivered many babies into Houston's black community.³⁷ Young women who had not attended college worked in retail downtown or as hotel maids or domestics. Friends among Scott Bryant's high school class divided after high school along educational and professional lines. A college education created cohesion among those with degrees but alienated those who traveled a different path.

Among her teaching colleagues, Scott Bryant found an active social life in dances and movies, cards games, and shopping.³⁸ As a young teacher, Scott Bryant joined the Cinderellas, a social group of 16 women who played "five hundred" and bridge once a month in private homes as members took turns hosting card games and "putting on a big feed." They also gave a yearly dance at the Pilgrim Auditorium. Scott Bryant's participation in this women's club was largely social, but there was an important component of community consciousness as well.³⁹

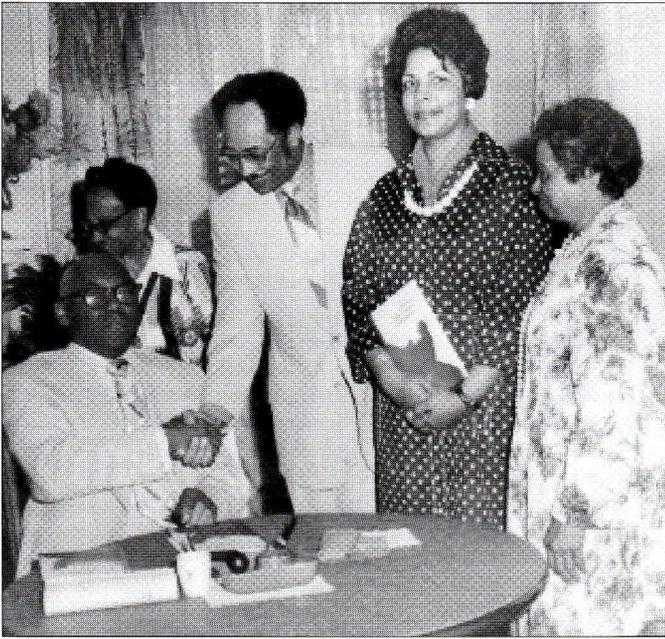
As a young teacher in Houston, Scott Bryant dated a few dif-

ferent fellows, mostly as escorts to social activities, but did she not discover the kind of enduring love that she had hoped to find. In April 1929, a friend introduced her to Ira B. Bryant, a young man who had attended her high school but about whom she had known little. He had been in a different grade and worked after school. After graduating from Fisk University, during a visit to Houston, he called on Scott Bryant daily. A few years of maturity and some shared experiences created a mutual attraction the second time around. Scott Bryant described herself as preoccupied with new clothes and social activities, in a drifting pattern, where she spent her money as soon as she earned it, until she connected with Ira Bryant, who was different from the other men she had dated.⁴⁰ He had launched a plan for success that she found herself wanting to share. After he finished his master's degree, he wanted to buy a house before he married, and then complete a doctoral degree after marriage. Before long, they announced their engagement, and a now-serious Scott Bryant was planning for their future by saving her money.

Ira Bryant was a well-liked and humorous fellow, and Scott Bryant's parents were well pleased with her choice. Besides the young couple's plan for Ira Bryant's education, they planned for their house. By the summer of 1932, Bryant was finishing his master's program at the University of Kansas. Many of the couple's friends saved money to buy sporty cars, but while they were still engaged the Bryants contracted to have their house built. They moved into it on their wedding day, September 8, 1932, after an intimate wedding ceremony in the Scott's family home. For all of her Kodak pictures from her teen years, Scott Bryant never thought about photography for her wedding. With the excitement of buying a simple but elegant dress, getting the furniture into their house, and the other arrangements, no one took a single photograph. Her godmother gave her a chest of silver, and her parents gave her a set of china and a Frigidaire refrigerator when they themselves still had only an icebox.⁴¹

As a young married couple, the Bryants settled into a cozy life of teaching. Each morning, they rushed from the house to the streetcar line, rode downtown, and changed lines to go out Lyons Avenue to Fifth Ward to Phillis Wheatley High School, where she taught biology, and he taught social science in the history department. Social activities were an important part of their lives as young, middle class blacks in Houston during the depression.⁴² In the early years, they attended dances and participated in the activities at their school, but they lived within the limitations of their budget, and the humiliation of segregation also restricted their entertainments. Scott Bryant remembered an occasion when the musical *Porgy and Bess* was coming to the Music Hall. Because Ira Bryant refused to sit in a segregated theatre, Scott Bryant accompanied her husband's aunt. Scott Bryant acknowledged that her husband had the resolve to forfeit pleasure for principle, when she had more difficulty denying herself a special experience.

In 1936, they bought their first car, a green Chevrolet that would take them to California, where summer after summer Ira Bryant took courses toward his doctorate. Texas universities barred African Americans from graduate study, but the State of Texas paid a stipend to those who pursued graduate degrees in other states.⁴³



A book-signing event in 1975 for Ira B. Bryant's *Texas Southern University: Its Antecedents, Political Origins, and Future*. Seated is Ira Bryant (deceased 1989); from the left Claudia Hunter; Judge Thomas Henry Routt (deceased 1991); Senphronia Thompson, State Representative; Pearl Suel (deceased 2002), Houston chapter president, Association for the Study of African American Life and History. Courtesy Thelma Scott Bryant Historical Photograph Collection.

Ira Bryant studied at the University of Southern California during the summers, when the Bryants could afford the trip and time off from teaching summer school in Houston. He completed his doctorate in education in 1948, a goal that the Bryants had shared and worked toward together. In 1938, the school district promoted Ira Bryant to assistant principal of Booker T. Washington High School (formerly Old Colored High), where both Bryants had attended high school. In 1940, he became principal, a promotion that made him supervisor of teachers who had taught him and some of his high school peers. In 1957, Ira Bryant accepted a lateral transfer as principal at Kashmere Gardens High School.

Ira Bryant was an outspoken advocate of opportunities for blacks in Texas. His doctoral dissertation, "Vocational Education in Negro High Schools of Texas," noted that Texas prisoners received better vocational training than state or city standards made possible for black students in high schools. Bryant's challenge to the status quo in Houston education circles created problems for him when he presented his ideas at a publicized conference, but his public stand made his wife proud. Ira Bryant worked as a principal with HISD until 1968.⁴⁴ As a high school principal, he also taught as an adjunct at Texas Southern University, Bishop College, and Prairie View College. After retirement, he devoted himself to scholarly pursuits. He taught for two years at Dillard University in New Orleans before returning to Houston to teach part time at Texas Southern. Even in retirement, Ira Bryant continued to develop himself professionally by attending academic meetings in the United States and abroad.

Scott Bryant credited her reintroduction to Ira Bryant as the real beginning of her life. She lived with him, in the house they built together during the depression, for fifty-seven years as they

shared their commitment to education, community activism, scholarly pursuits, and a companionship that surpassed all her young dreams for a "knight in shining armor."⁴⁵ During their marriage, Scott Bryant joined Ira Bryant in his community activism, such as his work on the Board of the Houston NAACP. She did more, however, than follow her husband; she was on the Board of the YWCA, volunteered with the Lighthouse for the Blind and the Florence Crittenden Home for unmarried mothers, and later developed an interest in and commitment to the Houston Chapter of the Association for the Study of Afro-American Life and History.⁴⁶

Scott Bryant retired from teaching in 1941 to help her husband with his scholarly work and because the stress of teaching and the difficult streetcar ride were taking their toll on her. Through Ira Bryant, Scott Bryant developed a love of history. In their retirement, they worked together to produce several books.⁴⁷ Scott Bryant loved their work together as she helped research, organize, and type his papers and speeches. A frivolous and fashionable young girl, Scott Bryant was willing in her middle years to forego new clothes and other extravagances to make it possible for husband and wife to pursue scholarly work together. Her work with Ira Bryant opened a new world for her, and she began to take an interest in her own history, the history of her church, and the history of her Houston community. After 1984, as Ira Bryant's health failed, Scott Bryant cared for him for five years as he slipped into increasing physical dependency.⁴⁸ Having wept for him secretly during his long illness, Scott Bryant had no tears left when Ira Bryant died in 1989 at age eighty-five. However, she felt his death keenly and remembers him wistfully, still promoting and protecting his causes and his books.

Scott Bryant and her husband never had children of their own. In a sense, his historical research was their offspring. While Ira Bryant was alive, Scott Bryant devoted herself to his histories of individuals and institutions. After he passed, with the encouragement of others, she began to write about Houston's Third Ward, her church, and her own life.⁴⁹ Scott Bryant is still lively and exhibits an encyclopedic memory. After nearly a century in Third Ward, she is a community resource valued by Trinity East Methodist Church, Texas Southern University, out-of-town visitors, local school children, and anyone who hears her name and wants to hear first hand the stories of Houston's black community. One of her monographs, *Pioneer Families of Houston*, won a Good Brick Award in 1993.⁵⁰ Although she never gave birth, at age ninety-seven, Scott Bryant is a matriarch of her community.⁵¹

Because she sometimes feels weak, she attends community events only occasionally, but she receives almost daily visits from "her children," those she taught in public and Sunday school and those she took under her protective wing, and from locals and travelers who come to hear her stories. "Her children," drive her to church, help her with marketing, and council her on financial matters. Neighbors bring her favorite freshly baked chocolate cakes, help her with household chores, and check on her health and comfort. Eloise Matthews was a student of Scott Bryant's who became a teacher. A long time retiree herself, Matthews checks on Scott Bryant daily. Willie Lee Gay, a community historian, is another

special caretaker. A former appointee of Governor Ann Richards to the Texas State Library and Archives Commission, Gay promotes Scott Bryant as a historical resource. Scott Bryant's life is full, and she is eager to share her memories with anyone who wants to listen, but she is prepared and waiting for her third meeting with her beloved Ira Bryant.

In Scott Bryant's life stories, or narratives of personal experience, a sense of self emerged from her relationships with others, including grandparents who had been enslaved children, a connection illustrated by Scott Bryant's words: "before freedom came for us."⁵² Emancipation occurred forty years before her birth, but she identified with that historical group experience. Community standards and family achievements set expectations for her character, and segregation established limits on her aspirations. Scott Bryant embraced the legacy of her family's success, a legacy that translated into a pride in their remarkable accomplishments in spite of dreadful conditions. Her connections to community and family revealed a life cultivated upon a lattice of relationships that sustained and shaped her. Scott Bryant described herself as a follower, as someone who contributed to family, church, and community, but who was unwilling to assume leadership roles or step up and make a speech. Her family relationships and her church connections shaped her formative years. In college, she benefited from the social stimulation of her gregarious boyfriend, but without the supervision of family, her grades foundered. When she met her husband, a serious man with drive and social awareness, she focused on his plans, believing that "if she made her husband look good, she made herself look good."⁵³ Her definition of a successful life was contingent upon a satisfying marriage and her partnering role in her husband's academic career. In Scott Bryant's view, Ira Bryant's scholarly influence provided her with the tools she needed to emerge as a historian of her community after his death.

Retrospective life stories can suffer from distortions in interpretation, but Scott Bryant emphasized understanding her life in proper perspective. She did not project herself as a participant in historical events. Instead, she presented herself as an ordinary woman with human flaws: a bit of vanity, a little silliness, and not too much ambition. She insisted that she had little consciousness of historical moments as she grew up, taught school, married, and bonded with her husband. That she was a witness to remarkable and memorable times became evident to her after her husband died when she was in her eighties.

In retrospect, Scott Bryant is keenly aware of the historical significance of improvements in opportunities and conditions that occurred during her lifetime. At the time, the building of the "Negro" Hospital was less a historical milestone than an improvement that meant her friends and neighbors might not die from illnesses that required hospitalization. Getting a real name for Old Colored High School when it split into two schools, the original becoming Booker T. Washington High School, meant less crowding and more teaching positions for African American teachers. She welcomed quality of life improvements for herself and for her family and friends, but she did not perceive those changes as historical events when they happened. Scott Bryant's life stories

are personal narratives that reflect the history of nearly a century of first person experience in Houston. Her stories are invaluable because they bring sounds of memory to the silences and the luminosity of recollection to some of the empty spaces in Houston history.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Alice Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1967), 240.
- 2 Linguist Charlotte Linde described the life story as "an oral unit that is told over many occasions." Her definition makes a distinction between life story and autobiography, which is a written form and therefore static. Scott Bryant wrote a short autobiography but shares it only with a small circle of associates. See Charlotte Linde, *Life Stories: The Creation of Coherence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 3–11. Linde's concept of life story included a compounding of detail, because an utterance is never twice the same. To understand the linguist's bases of revision and the importance of determinate cultural contexts, see Mikhail M. Bakhtin, "The Problem of Speech Genres," in *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, eds. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, trans. Vern W. McGee (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986), 88–89. Linde also developed a concept of "coherence" that she described as a normal part of a life story. Historians often see coherence in retrospective life stories as a sign of self-editing and a distortion of memory. Linde suggested that such self-editing is part of human experience and essential to human understanding. For the historian's concerns, see Paul Thompson, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History*, 3rd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000) and Donna J. Spindel, "Assessing Memory: Twentieth-Century Slave Narratives Reconsidered," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 2 (1996): 247–61.
- 3 Thelma Scott Bryant, interview by author, tape recording, Houston, TX, July 26, 2001. Linde suggested that chronology and sequence are expected attributes of a life story, as are assumptions of causality, accident, and reasons. Conventionally, it includes certain kinds of landmark events such as choice of profession, marriage, divorce, and religious or ideological conversion. See Linde, *Life Stories*, 3–11.
- 4 Scott Bryant, interview by author, July 26, 2001. Linde described the function of life stories to those who tell them. A life story expresses a "sense of self" by explaining how that self came to be. According to Linde, both the content and structure, the teller and the story are products of a culture. Linde, *Life Stories*, 3–11. Scott Bryant's sense of self derived from her understanding of connection with people who survived enslavement and negotiated successfully the complicated terrain of segregation.
- 5 Oral history as a method of historical investigation requires more than one interview so that the permutations of a recollection can be collected, compared, and verified if possible. Anthropologist Catherine Bateson suggested that a life story is a product of the storyteller's choice of anecdote and facts and a production of selective memory that is subjected to a second filtering by the person who recounts the life story. Mary Catherine Bateson, *Composing A Life* (Atlantic Monthly Press, 1989), 33.
- 6 Thelma Scott Bryant, conversation with author, April 12, 2002. Thelma Scott Bryant, "Autobiography of Thelma Scott Bryant" (Houston, TX, 2000, photocopy), 21.
- 7 For an introduction to residential housing patterns in Houston under segregation, see Howard Beeth and Cary D. Wintz, eds., *Black Dixie: Afro-Texas History and Culture in Houston* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1992), 87–102. For a discussion of the purchase of Emancipation Park by Houston's ex-slaves and its importance in Third Ward life, see Beeth and Wintz, *Black Dixie*, 25. Also see Christopher Silver, "The Racial Origins of Zoning in American Cities," in *Urban Planning and the African American Community: In the Shadows*, eds. June Manning Thomas and Marsha Ritzdorf (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1997).
- 8 Sociologist Robert Bullard labeled Houston's black community "invisible Houston" because the white elite segregated the city in varying

- degrees throughout Houston's history. African American communities were a dynamic but hidden part of the Houston portrayed by white city boosters in brochures and media campaigns. See Robert D. Bullard, *Invisible Houston: The Black Experience in Boom and Bust* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1987).
- 9 Thelma Scott Bryant, conversation with author, February 3, 2003. In Houston's Third Ward, the single family dwelling, purchased by the resident as the first owner was an important symbol of cultural autonomy. Proud maintenance of homes including neatly clipped lawns and adornment with shrubs and flowers was a potent symbol that often distinguished Third Ward from other wards where African Americans lived. Historian Luisa Passerini suggested that oral history was a useful tool in the study of subjectivity, "what it means to be the subject of one's own history," within a context of the "daily cultures of ordinary people" (163). She also suggested that the historian must examine the "psychological and symbolic dimensions" of experiences of living witnesses and not only the facts of events" (166). See Luisa Passerini, "Lacerations in the Memory: Women in the Italian Underground Organizations," *International Social Movement Research* 4 (1992): 161-212.
 - 10 Lorenzo J. Greene, "Sidelights on Houston Negroes as Seen by an Associate of Dr. Carter G. Woodson in 1930," in *Black Dixie*, 134-54.
 - 11 See a discussion of Houston's Wards and Third and Fourth Wards in particular in Beeth and Wintz, eds., *Black Dixie*, 13-31, and throughout. Also see Barbara Karkabi, "History Lessons African-American Preservationist, Teacher, Journalist Give Their Perspectives," *Houston Chronicle*, February 28, 1994, 1, 2 Star edition, for the role Scott Bryant has played in recovering the history of Fourth Ward.
 - 12 Old Colored High received its appellation from one of its principals, because the Houston school district did not name the only high school designated for African American students until population pressure required a split. In 1926, "Colored High" became Booker T. Washington High School in Fourth Ward, and Jack Yates High School opened in Third Ward. Thelma Scott Bryant, conversation with author, January 31, 2003.
 - 13 Thelma Scott Bryant, interview by author, tape recording, Houston, TX, December 8, 2001.
 - 14 Thelma Scott Bryant, conversation with author, January 20, 2003.
 - 15 A Register of Persons Employed at the Franklin Street Post Office in Houston lists H. L. Scott, age 40, hired as a carrier effective December 12, 1889.
 - 16 According to Scott Bryant, the *Texas Freeman* merged with the *Houston Informer* in the 1930s. See Scott Bryant, "Pioneer Families," 63. Marguerite Johnston, *Houston: The Unknown City, 1836-1946* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1991), 314, claimed erroneously that Carter G. Woodson rather than Emmett Scott was the third founder of the *Texas Freeman*. Carter G. Woodson worked in Virginia and Washington, D.C., not in Houston.
 - 17 See Benjamin Brawley, *A Social History of the American Negro: Being a History of the Negro Problem in the United States* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1921), 200-01. According to Brawley, Emmett J. Scott was one of three members of the American Commission that traveled to Liberia in 1909. Afterward, Emmett J. Scott published a book entitled, *Is Liberia Worth Saving?*
 - 18 Scott Bryant, "Pioneer Families," 64. Emmett Scott arranged for Andrew Carnegie to pay for the library building when Carnegie was giving money to Tuskegee for their library. Carnegie agreed to put up the money, if the black citizens would provide the site. J. B. Bell gave most of the money used to buy the site.
 - 19 Scott Bryant, "Pioneer Families," 63-65.
 - 20 See Clifton F. Richardson, Sr., "Houston's Colored Citizens: Activities and Conditions among the Negro Population in the 1920s," in *Black Dixie*, 128-33. According to Richardson, postal work was an accessible employment option for black men; by the 1920s, there were ninety African American postal carriers in Houston.
 - 21 During one conversation, Scott Bryant played "St. Louis Blues," to demonstrate the pleasure that her music and her piano continue to bring her. Thelma Scott Bryant, conversation with author, January 20, 2003.
 - 22 Scott Bryant, "Pioneer Families," 70.
 - 23 Although her husband, Ira Bryant, attended Good Hope Baptist Church, Scott Bryant continued to attend Little Trinity throughout their marriage. When her husband was ill toward the end of his life, Scott Bryant dressed him, took him to services at his church, brought him home to rest, and then attended services at her own church.
 - 24 For a brief history of Trinity United Methodist Church and its role in Houston's African American community, see Clyde McQueen, *Black Churches in Texas: A Guide to Historic Congregations* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2000), 150. For statistical analyses of black churches, ministers, and congregations during the first quarter of the twentieth century, see Benjamin Elijah Mays and Joseph William Nicholson, *The Negro's Church* (New York: Institute of Social and Religious Research, 1933).
 - 25 For Scott Bryant her religious affiliation had from the beginning a dynamic social foundation. Her faith translated into a practice that thrived on social relationships and activities, and she never experienced a crisis of faith. At one point Ira Bryant considered changing to Scott Bryant's church, but she never wavered from her church or her beliefs. Scott Bryant's constancy is significant because at crucial points in African American history, the "black church," suffered from periods of lost confidence. To understand two major periods of membership decline, see Thomas G. Poole, "Black Families and the Black Church: A Sociohistorical Perspective," in *Black Families*, eds. Harold E. Cheatham and James B. Stewart (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1990), 33-48, who suggested that the black church was and continues to be the "single most important organization in African American life," and the "oldest social institution in African American history" because it is controlled by African Americans, 43; and Gayraud S. Wilmore, "Black Religious Traditions: Sacred and Secular Themes" in *Upon These Shores: Themes in the African-American Experience, 1600 to the Present*, eds. William R. Scott and William G. Shade (New York: Routledge, 2000), 285-99.
 - 26 See Beverly Guy-Sheftall, "Black Feminism in the United States," 356.
 - 27 Thelma Scott Bryant, conversation with author, April 26, 2002.
 - 28 Thelma Scott Bryant, conversation with author, August 30, 2002.
 - 29 Scott Bryant, "Pioneer Families," 71.
 - 30 Thelma Scott Bryant, conversation with author, February 15, 2002.
 - 31 Scott Bryant, interview by author, July 26, 2001. Scott Bryant remembered Playland Park in Houston, which admitted African Americans only one day a year on June 19, "Juneteenth." Her parents forbade her to go to the amusement park because they refused to patronize a segregated business that opened to "blacks only" on one day of the year.
 - 32 Thelma Scott Bryant, interview by author, March 8, 2002. Scott Bryant still communicates with Nancy Davis Williams who now lives in Charlotte, North Carolina. See Nella Larsen, *Passing* (1929; reprint, New York: Arno Press, 1969), for a profound fictional treatment of women passing for white in elite circles.
 - 33 Scott Bryant was not sure of the spelling, and it could not be confirmed through other sources.
 - 34 Thelma Scott Bryant, conversation with author, January 20, 2003.
 - 35 For an understanding of the expectations for African American women who were directed toward college, see Stephanie J. Shaw, *What a Woman Ought to Be and Do: Black Professional Women Workers during the Jim Crow Era* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 164.
 - 36 Jeanne Noble, "The Higher Education of Black Women in the Twentieth Century," in *Women in Higher Education in American History*, eds. John Mack Faragher and Florence Howe (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1988), 87-106.
 - 37 For a history of Houston Negro Hospital, see *Foundation for Research & Development in Health Activities, Houston Negro Hospital: Its Mission and Its Future, A Staff Report, 1956*, 16-17. Before the "Negro" hospital was built in 1926, when Houston's black population was about 54,000, there were no medical facilities for African Americans except for ninety-eight charity beds reserved in sub-standard conditions. Black doctors set up private practice without access to the white-only hospital facilities. In their offices black doctors had limited equipment and supplies, and only a narrow range of drugs. White doctors, usually specialists, saw black patients in separate waiting and examining rooms. See Barbara Karkabi, "Black Historian Preserves Past for Future," *Houston Chronicle*, November 10, 2002, E10, for an anecdote involving Scott Bryant's

- mother and the medical establishment in Houston when Scott Bryant was a child. A description of medical facilities for blacks in Houston appears in Salatheia Bryant, "Historic Designation Reflects Hospital's Legacy of Aiding Blacks," *Houston Chronicle*, February 14, 1999, MetFront 37, 4 Star edition. A general discussion of the history of African American hospitals appears in Mitchell F. Rice, "Black Hospitals: Institutional Impacts on Black Families," in *Black Families*, eds. Harold E. Cheatham and James B. Stewart (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1990), 49–67.
- 38 See Claudia Kolker, "Bus Tour Highlights Famed Sites/Houston Trip Honors City's Black Landmarks," *Houston Chronicle*, February 3, 1997, 13, 3 Star edition, for Scott Bryant's description of shopping in a segregated Houston.
- 39 See Thelma Scott Bryant, "Our Journey through Houston and U.S. History" (Houston, TX, 1996, photocopy), 57, for a list of Houston black women's clubs; also Beverly Guy-Sheftall, "Black Feminism" in *Upon These Shores*, 353–55, for a description of the structure and purpose of black women's clubs.
- 40 Viewed retrospectively, Scott Bryant's life can be divided into distinct phases, each of which was contingent on significant others. Her early years reflected a parental influence that directed her toward achievement. A distracting romance influenced her college years, and the few years she spent teaching as a single woman she described as following a drifting pattern because she did not have direction. When she met her husband, she met a directive force that she welcomed and which shaped the rest of their years together. After her husband died, Scott Bryant responded to her grief and depression by writing down her history. Bateson, studying the lives of professional women, discovered that women's lives are both fluid and discontinuous, and that historically women's lives have been contingent on those others with whom they form relationship, with the result that even women committed to a goal "shift from one preoccupation to another," divide their attentions, and improvise in response to circumstances. Scott Bryant's life follows that pattern. See Bateson, *Composing a Life*, 13.
- 41 Scott Bryant, "Pioneer Families," 77.
- 42 Middle class status in the black community comes more from education and quality of life and less from income. Thelma Scott Bryant, conversation with author, September 7, 2002. For more, see Mary Pattillo-McCoy, *Black Picket Fences: Privilege and Peril among the Black Middle Class* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999); and Robert Gregg, "From Black Bourgeoisie to African-American Middle Class, 1957 to the Present," in *Upon These Shores*, 319–32.
- 43 According to Scott Bryant, this arrangement was a part of the early strategy of University of Texas to prevent admission of African Americans to institutions of higher learning. After the successful U.S. Supreme Court case, *Sweatt v. Painter*, in 1950, federal mandate forced Texas schools to admit African Americans to graduate and professional programs.
- 44 "Dr. I. B. Bryant: Veteran of 39 Years in Schools to Retire," *Houston Chronicle*, March 13, 1968.
- 45 In her interpretations of her long and happy relationship with her husband, Scott Bryant exhibited what linguist Charlotte Linde described as "coherence," wherein past tense events precede and predict outcomes. Narrators make their lives coherent by predicating one event on another to find the meanings in their lives. Scott Bryant's interpretation of a disappointment in love during college as preparation for her the true and lasting love of her husband demonstrated Linde's structural and interpretative coherence. Projecting cause and effect onto a lost love followed by her meeting Ira Bryant for a second time, Scott Bryant created meaning from an experience that enabled her to identify the worth of her future husband. Scott Bryant created a coherent interpretation of events that explained her satisfying relationship with her husband. See Linde, *Life Stories*, 220.
- 46 According to historian Gwendolyn Etter-Lewis "the issue of self in relation to group" was a recurrent theme in the lives of black women, both working- and middle-class. Within her connection to the black community, an African American woman can be both "a stabilizing force from within the community and an agent of change" (53), but Etter-Lewis countered that even though a black woman is strongly linked to the black community, she does not disappear into the group (54). For more see, Gwendolyn Etter-Lewis, "Black Women's Life Stories: Reclaiming Self in Narrative Texts," in *Women's Words: The Feminist Practice of Oral History*, eds. Sherna Berger Gluc and Daphne Patai (New York: Routledge, 1991), 43–58.
- 47 Ira B. Bryant wrote histories of Houston's Negro churches and the development of the Houston Negro schools. After retirement, he wrote *Texas Southern University: Its Antecedents, Political Origin, and Future*, 1975; *Barbara Jordan from the Ghetto to the Capitol*, 1977; *Andrew Young: Mr. Ambassador*, 1979.
- 48 Scott Bryant, interview by author, July 26, 2001. Scott Bryant also cared for her ailing mother whom she brought into the Bryant home and nursed for about five years.
- 49 Scott Bryant's monographs can found at Houston Public Library, Texas Southern University Library, and the University of Houston Library. They include "Pioneer Families of Houston (Early 1900s)" (Houston, TX, 1991, photocopy); "Our Journey Through Houston and U.S. History" (Houston, TX, 1996, photocopy); "Methodism in England, In America, and at Trinity East" (Houston, TX, 1998, photocopy).
- 50 Ann Holmes, "Good Bricks/Eight Honored for Preservation Work," *Houston Chronicle*, January 21, 1993, 2 Star edition, 6. Scott Bryant was honored for her social history of the black community.
- 51 See Bernita C. Berry, "Life Satisfaction and the Older African-American Woman," in *Black Women in America*, ed. Kim Marie Vaz (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1995), 337–53, for an analysis of the high levels of satisfaction among many elderly African American women because of family and community support that comes from their lifetime enmeshment in relationships.
- 52 Narrative of personal experience is another term for life story that suggests the narrative represents actual events and that such representation is as illuminating as details of actual events. See William Labov, "The Transformation of Experience in Narrative Syntax," in *Language in the Inner City* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1972), 354–96.
- 53 Thelma Scott Bryant, conversation with author, February 5, 2003.