ALWAYS HELPING PEOPLE



RECOLLECTIONS OF
EVELYN SMITH

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Evelyn Smith with one of her dogs, Missy, in front of their Hoboken home, 2007.

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A chapbook from the "Vanishing Hoboken" series
of the Hoboken Oral History Project

Vanishing Hoboken

The Hoboken Oral History Project

A Project of The Hoboken Historical Museum
and the Friends of the Hoboken Public Library

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Contemporary photo of Evelyn Smith, 2007, by Robert Foster.
Front cover (left to right): Sarah Lee Smith (seated), Leo Smith Jr., Leo Smith Sr., and Evelyn Smith, ca. 1950.
Back cover (top): Sarah Lee Smith and Leo Smith at an awards ceremony, ca. 1960s; (bottom): Sarah Lee Smith at the recreation center, Jefferson Street, Hoboken, ca. 1960s.

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In the duties she assumed at the church, my mother was always helping people. She and my father were always helping people — helping them with employment needs, clothing, housing, money. . . . Bailing folks out of jail. It got to the point that anytime anybody of color got into trouble in Hoboken — at 12:00 at night, somebody's knocking on your door.

Evelyn Smith
July 14, 2006



Cycle Soul Sisters on a trip to West Virginia, ca. 1975. Evelyn Smith is at far left.

INTRODUCTION

Evelyn Smith, a Hoboken resident for over fifty years, has lived a storied life: her adventures include running for mayor of our city (the first African American female candidate to do so), recreational travel with an African American women's motorcycle club called the Cycle Soul Sisters, and contesting in court (and successfully overturning) a "death sentence," under the Vicious Dog Statute, of Big Head, one of her beloved, rescued dogs.

The legal battle over Big Head was a big local news story during the 1990s, and interviewers Holly Metz and Robert Foster inquired about the trial when Ms. Smith was interviewed on July 14 and August 22, 2006, at the Hoboken Historical Museum. (Transcripts of the interviews have been deposited in the History Collection of the Hoboken Public Library.) Ms. Smith recounted the story in some detail, revealing as she did her passionate, life-long concern for animals, and her wry sense of humor. She shook her head in wonder when noting the voluminous, often sensationalized coverage of her dog's trial: "He has clippings! When the *Hoboken Reporter* did its top stories of the year, I think Big Head came in above some story with the mayor!"

But ultimately, after interviewing Ms. Smith at length, and then viewing her family's many photo albums and scrapbooks, it became clear to the editor of

the Hoboken Oral History Project chapbooks that the most remarkable stories shared by Ms. Smith were those centered around her parents, Leo and Sarah Smith, who dedicated their lives to helping people live with dignity and promise. Pioneers in the Civil Rights movement and trade unionism, advocates for education for African Americans in rural North Carolina and underprivileged families of all races and ethnicities in their adopted city of Hoboken, Mr. and Mrs. Smith, were, their daughter notes with a fond laugh, "over-achievers."

A brief (but by no means comprehensive) listing of their accomplishments proves their daughter's point — and then some:

A former professional baseball player in the Negro Leagues, Leo Harrington Smith Sr. was the first African American tradesman ever hired by the Emerson Radio and Television Company in Jersey City. He soon became head painter and treasurer of the company's 4,000-member local of the International Union of Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers (IUE AFL-CIO). In 1949 he was elected president of his local, one of the union's largest, and served in that position until his death in 1976. He was chair of the IUE's Board of Trustees, vice president of the Hudson County Central Labor Council, treasurer of District 4 IUE AFL-CIO, a member of the Black Trade Unionists Leadership Committee, and the Northern Jersey area representative of the Human Resources Development Institute. In Hoboken, Mr. Smith served the city as president of the Hoboken branch of the NAACP, a commissioner of the Hoboken Housing Authority and Redevelopment Agency (the first African American to serve in this position), and Vice Chairman of the Housing Authority.

An educator in her native North Carolina, Sarah Lee (nee George) Smith became the first African American woman to head a federally funded service program in Hoboken. She was the supervisor of Center No. 1 of the Hoboken Organization against Poverty and Economic Stress (HOPES), where she assisted poor residents with their medical, employment, and housing needs. Along with her husband (who was a deacon and treasurer) she also helped fellow residents through their church, Mt. Olive Baptist. Sarah Smith served as a deaconess, Church Mother, president of the Pastor's Aid Club, director of the Young People's Choir, founder of the Educational Fund, and director of the Summer Vacation Bible School.

During her interview, Evelyn Smith pointed out that her parents were featured in *Our World Picture Magazine*, a (now defunct) African American publication, and she also brought along a book, *America's Tenth Man*, devoted to the contributions of African Americans. Included in its pages, along with pioneers such as Mary McCloud Bethune and Thurgood Marshall, was Leo Smith.

Union Chief's Wife To Be HOPES Head

MONDAY, Jan 19/72

Mrs. Leo H. Smith has been appointed acting director of the Hoboken HOPES Multi-Service Center, Joseph Iervolino, chairman of the executive committee of HOPES, announced today.

A permanent director will be appointed by the HOPES board of directors. The post carries a $10,500 salary.

Mrs. Smith replaces Jose Hernandez, who resigned to return to Puerto Rico. Her appointment takes effect immediately. She is the wife of Leo H. Smith, a Hudson County labor union leader.

Iervolino said the appointment was made on the basis of a recommendation by "one of the board members pending further study by the board of directors in choosing a permanent director."

According to Iervolino, the executive committee has directed that advertisements for a permanent center direcor be placedf in the newspapers.



SARAH H. SMITH
Appointed

The permanent position of center director is open to all who reside in the city of Hoboken.

News article announcing Sarah Smith's appointment as acting director of a Hoboken multi-service center, 1972.

From "Emerson's Mr. Smith," an article about Leo Smith and his family, Our World *magazine, November 1954.*



Leo likes to shoot pool with his pal Tony Capparelli in the Union's fine building. At Emerson, Capparelli is shop chairman.



For workers' convenience, the Local maintains an office right in the plant. Leo spends little time here, but other Local officers are available.



Leo doesn't mind helping wife Sarah with the big bags of groceries. Along with regular electric appliances, the house has big air conditioner.

Ed Franco (l) former All American tackle at Fordham, who has a sports goods store, is good friend of Leo's. They always argue over good old days.



Holding down a tough labor relations job, this ex-ball player has made an enviable record.

guard. That was in 1945.

Four years later, Leo had become head painter and was recreation officer in the Union. But Capparelli had other ideas. So he sponsored Leo, then treasurer, for president of Local 480, International Union of Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers, CIO, one of the largest locals in the entire union.

On the job, Leo roams the Emerson plant, hearing complaints, adjusting grievances, conferring with the bosses and helping keep Labor and management on an even keel. His smooth operations have paid off and as a result, Emerson hasn't had any serious labor troubles. But the job isn't easy. It has many problems.

Leo's approach to the workers' problems has won their admiration and the bosses' respect. They agree with Personnel Manager Certo who says "Leo has a level head, he's a good thinker. He knows how to work with people and get things done." Perhaps that's why Leo says he's lucky. But at Emerson 4,000 workers know better.

(Continued on next page)

From NORTH CAROLINA to HARLEM

My mother, Sarah Lee (nee George) Smith was born in Hallsboro, North Carolina, 1910, and my father, Leo Harrington Smith, was born in 1912 in Boardman, North Carolina. They met and they married in North Carolina, in 1934.

My father [had been] in the Negro Leagues — I don't know when. I know he ended his career playing for the New York Black Yankees. Again, I have some literature that lists the other teams. I know he played for the Brooklyn Royals, and for some team in Virginia [the Norfolk Giants.] It was prior to his moving to New Jersey. [But he didn't tell me much about this part of his life at all.] In fact, I only have one copy of a photo of him in a uniform. I have a few articles that were written about him and his baseball career, posthumously. My godfather, who was a very good friend of his, and who attended many



A young Leo Smith in uniform as a professional baseball player in the Negro Leagues, date unknown.



Sarah Lee Smith (far right) in North Carolina, around the time she was teaching, ca. 1940.

games, and who is still alive, would tell me about how, when it was time for a game, they would just close down all the shops in town — in Whiteville, North Carolina — and everybody would go to the baseball games.

In North Carolina, my mother was a schoolteacher. She taught in a number of cities. One particular school I happened to find out [about] from one of my cousins who's doing a lot of research and historical documentation. She told me my mother had taught at the Spring Hill [Elementary] School, in Whiteville, North Carolina. It was a Rosenwald school, three rooms — primer to the seventh grade.* They're in the process of declaring the remaining Rosenwald schools historic landmarks, and trying to

bring them back to life, setting them up as community centers.

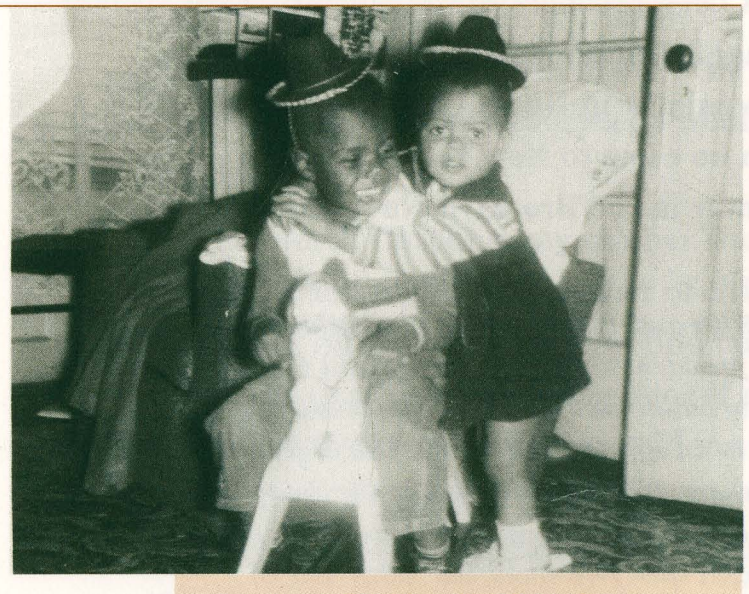
[But my mother didn't talk about her Rosenwald School experiences.] Not at all. In fact, when we went down to a family reunion, I believe in 2001, one of her former students, who was like sixty-eight at the time, came to visit her down there. She told me a lot about how she felt like she was a prize student because she would get to go home with my mother. Then they would come in early in the morning, put the wood in the potbelly stove, and get everything ready for the students. But [I didn't learn this from my mother. She] just said, "Yeah, I was a teacher."

When my parents left North Carolina, first they went to New York City, probably in the late '40s. [My father was looking] for employment opportunities. He had been a house painter in North Carolina, as his father was. When he came to New York, he began working as a painter in the Brooklyn Navy Yard.

** Between the late 1910s and 1932, Chicago philanthropist Julius Rosenwald, president of Sears, Roebuck and Co., established a fund to build more than 5,300 schools from Maryland to Texas in an effort to redress the lack of proper educational facilities for African Americans in the South. Few of the schools were actually named after Rosenwald, as their benefactor discouraged such references, but many shared architectural features (such as a central meeting hall for community-building and large banks of windows for natural light) that made them recognizable as "Rosenwald schools."*

[My mother didn't teach when she got to New York.] Shortly after that, my brother was born — Leo Harrington Smith, Jr., named after his daddy — so my mother was a homemaker for a while. [I was born two years later.] Both my brother and I were born in Harlem, where we lived.

[In 1948, my father left] the Brooklyn Navy Yard [and] began working for Emerson Radio and Television Corporation. The company then moved [from New York] to Jersey City and many of its employees relocated. By that time he was in the union. He was hired as a painter. He was the first black tradesman to be hired by that company. Since he was working in Jersey City, he was looking for someplace closer to his place of employment, and that's how we got into Hoboken, in about 1953. [I was] about three years old.



Leo Jr. and Evelyn Smith in their family's Harlem apartment, ca. 1952.



Leo Smith (left, depicted with longtime union colleague Tony Capparelli) started out at Emerson Radio & Television Corp. as a painter, ca. 1949.

A HOME in HOBOKEN

When we moved from New York to Hoboken, my mother and father purchased 77 Madison Street, which is where I still am. It's changed a lot, but it's still home.

[It was mainly a residential block, but there were businesses there in the past.] When I was a child there was a coat factory on the corner of Madison and First. There was a meatpacking house, I guess you would call it. They didn't slaughter the cows, but they had the whole carcasses and they cut them up. There was one of them on the corner of First and Madison. Then a few doors in from that was the plumber's shop, and the family resided in the back of the shop. They had tenants above. Their name was Freinch (pronounced "French"). An elderly German couple, and the wife was a homemaker. I used to go by there when I was an adolescent, and she taught me how to knit. After she taught me how

to knit, she taught me how to crochet, and after crocheting she was getting ready to teach me how to weave. But we didn't get that far.

Hoboken, way back in the day. [*Sighs.*] I can remember on our block we had the LeCounts and the Basilicatos. Other people on the block were the Bates family, the Gilliard family, the Mongan family — all of whom have relatives in Hoboken to this day. We had Mrs. McCloud and Miss Cambridge — the first black property-owners on that block. They were there when we arrived already. Emma McCloud and her daughter, Emily Cambridge.

And we had tenants. [*Looks at photograph in scrapbook.*] That's Nicey and Darell Allen. They lived on



A visit to Santa, ca. 1965. Clockwise: Leo Smith, Jr., Evelyn Smith, Nicey Allen and Darell Allen.

the third floor. We occupied the first and second floors.

Of course, in the middle of the block, across the street from me, was Francone's candy store. And right next to the candy store was Francone's Bakery. They really didn't sell to the public, but they sold to various stores and restaurants. Down at the other end of the block there was also another meatpacking house. That was on the corner of Madison and Observer Highway. On the other corner of Madison and Observer Highway there was a bar. So we had a lot going on.

One of my very good friends was a little Italian girl named Amy LeCount, and her brother Jimmy. They lived like two doors away from us. We were always over at each other's houses. The Basilicato residence housed three generations of one family: Mr. and Mrs. Basilicato, their unmarried son, Sam, and then their daughter, Ann, who married Mr. LeCount, [and] then their children — Amy and Jimmy. Amy and I were very good friends. We used to sleep over at one another's house. She was a red-headed girl, with all these freckles. Her brother was a redhead, too.

Mrs. Basilicato's and Mrs. LeCount's authentic Italian cooking was to die for. When I was in my twenties, I can remember mentioning to Mrs. LeCount how much I loved her eggplant *parmigiana*. Well, a few days after that, she came to my house with all the ingredients and taught me how to make

the dish. And Mr. Basilicato used to make wine in the basement.

It was a racially mixed group of families and kids. Everybody played together, and everybody went over to everybody's house. And if you were doing something you weren't supposed to do, Mrs. LeCount was going to get on you, and when you got home your mother was going to get on you, too. It was like that for all the kids. Everybody was everybody's keeper; everybody's mother was the keeper of all the children.

You know, both my mother and my father had an affinity for children. A lot of kids in the neighborhood, and even outside the neighborhood, kind of adopted them as parents. Over the years, my father became close to a Hispanic boy named Willie Ramos, and my father took him to get his driver's license, let him practice in his own



Evelyn's neighbor and friend, Amy LeCount, ca. 1959. This photo and the one on the adjoining page are courtesy of the LeCount and Asciukiewicz families.

Neighbors and friends, ca. 1959. From left to right: Sam Basilicato, Jimmy LeCount (seated), Mr. Basilicato (Amy and Jimmy's grandfather), Amy LeCount, Mrs. Basilicato, and Mrs. LeCount (Amy and Jimmy's mother).



car to take his driver's test. My brother was a Boy Scout, and we have — for Hoboken standards — a pretty big back yard, so his Boy Scout troop would camp in my backyard. So that brought in kids from all over the city, who belonged to the troop, which used to be centered in public housing in Hoboken. Back then, you know, the population of public housing, was more white than black or Hispanic. So it was really a diverse group.

Although Jimmy and Amy [LeCount later] moved out of Hoboken, I remained close with their parents until their deaths. By the time I reached my forties, Mr. LeCount was the only family member living on the block and I would shovel the snow from his steps and sidewalk — because although he was capable of doing it, I knew it was less stressful for a woman of my age than a man of his advanced years [to perform such a task.]



At Emerson Radio & Television Corp., Jersey City, ca. 1949. Left to right: John Avazano, Leo Smith, Tony Capparelli.

A VERY BIG MAN

[Describe my father?] Well, I think a lot of people might have been fearful, initially, because he was a very big man, about 6'4". I don't know what his weight was, but I know he was a heavy guy with *huge* hands. Very big hands. But he was a very kind man, with a very big heart. He had a good, strong voice, a very commanding presence.

[And he was a staunch union man.] After being at Emerson for a few years, I think [he became] union treasurer. Then he became president of the labor union — Local 480 of the IUE AFL-CIO. He represented the workers at Emerson Radio & Television — which did radio, television, air-conditioners — which, of course, we always had the benefit of having a lot of. [*Laughs.*] That was one good thing about him being where he worked. We had plenty of TVs and air-conditioning. Oh, yes. [We may have been] one of the first in the neighborhood [to have an air conditioner.] [*Laughs.*]

It was one of the larger unions in the Hudson County area. Even though most of the operations of the company did move overseas, he remained the president of the labor union until his death in 1976.

[What did he do? He was involved in] bargaining — collective bargaining with the management for wages, and things of that nature, for the employees — better conditions. He organized and conducted social and recreational activities for the employees of the union. And, all because of his union affiliations, he came into contact with a lot of politicians. I've got pictures of my dad with Harry Truman, Adam Clayton Powell, A. Philip Randolph, Bobby Kennedy, Teddy Kennedy, Lyndon Johnson, Hubert Humphrey.

At a convention of the International Union of Electrical, Radio & Machine Workers (AFL-CIO), St. Louis, Missouri, September 1956. Former President Harry S. Truman stands to the left of Leo Smith.



Here's one: "Leo Smith, attending labor-union convention; First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt at podium."

[And here's a picture of my parents at a hotel in Washington, D.C.] attending President Lyndon Johnson's Inaugural Ball. [With dad's union position] we got to go to all these nice, dress-up affairs, with gowns and stuff — even myself, as a child. There always used to be an annual convention down in Atlantic City. That was a definite perk of being a union president's daughter. [My parents went to a lot of fancy dress events] and I'm proud to say I made a couple of gowns for my mom, down the years.



Leo Smith shaking hands with Senator Robert Kennedy, 1964.



Leo Smith pictured next to Civil Rights leader and organizer of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, A. Philip Randolph, 1964.



Leo Smith listens to a speech by former First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt at an AFL-CIO convention, undated.

GETTING DONE WHAT SHE HAD to GET DONE

My mom was little, about 5'5", 5'6". (Isn't that always the way with big guys? Big guys marry the little women, and all the little men want to talk to me!) She was more diminutive, but she was effective in getting done what she had to get done.

First she had to raise me and my brother. At one point that became kind of daunting, because we were both bigger than her. But we still were fearful, because she was the one who was going to deal out the corporeal punishment. We knew that. That wasn't my father's job, that was her job. So she handled us quite well.

But, you know, once she came to Hoboken, and we got to be a certain age, then she began to work in Hoboken. Her first position was as a school-crossing



Leo and Sarah Smith at an AFL-CIO convention with other union leaders, undated.

guard, and she was posted on the corner of Second and Monroe. [That was] about two-and-a-half blocks away [from where we lived, so she was our crossing guard at the Connors School.] [*Laughs.*] We couldn't get away with anything, right? You know, I don't remember it being a bad thing. I was a good little girl. I didn't get in any trouble. I was a good little girl.

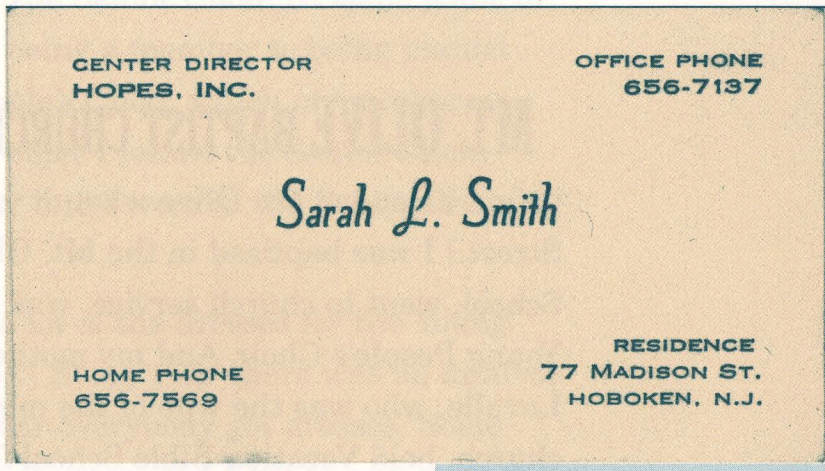
Then after that she became, I guess, a recreation aide, I think it's called, for the City, [at] what is now known as the Boys' and Girls' Club. The Jerry Malloy Center used to be called Recreation Center #1, and we kids used to go there. There were so many activities. We did flower-making, clay-sculpting, and the painting of plaster molds. There used to be a choir that practiced, and sang every year at Christmas, over the PA system at City Hall, and throughout the city.

She worked there for many years. I don't know exactly how many. Then, after that, when H.O.P.E.S. was established, she was one of the original case-

workers. After being a caseworker for a number of years, she eventually became the director of Center #1, down on Grand Street, and she retired from there.

ALWAYS HELPING PEOPLE

I don't think [my mother's position as a caseworker] was much of a departure from what she was doing on her own, in affiliation with the church, Mt. Olive Baptist Church. She was a member. Everybody in my family was a member. [From the 1930s until the late 1960s Mt. Olive was] located at 67-69 Jefferson Street, which was right around the corner from my house — two buildings and a lot.



Sarah Lee Smith's business card, ca. 1973.

In the duties she assumed at the church, both there and when we moved up to 721 Washington Street, my mother was always helping people. She and my father were always helping people — helping them with employment needs, clothing, housing, money . . . . Bailing folks out of jail. It got to the point that anytime anybody of color got into trouble

in Hoboken . . . . At 12:00 at night, somebody's knocking on your door.

And my father, with his connections at Emerson Radio & Television, was always in a position to help people get placed in jobs. He made a conscientious effort to get people of color placed in positions. So many of my cousins, when they graduated from school, they would come up here [from North Carolina] and "Uncle Leo" would get them a job. They would live with us for a little while, and then they were out on their own, doing other ventures.

And there were other people who came, other people in the city of Hoboken, who came, looking for employment — and he was able to help them.

MT. OLIVE BAPTIST CHURCH

[I first attended Mt. Olive when it was on Jefferson Street.] I was baptized in the Mt. Olive Baptist School, went to church service, was a member of the Young People's Choir. And my mother, with Sister Lavalle, who was the wife of the minister of another church, held Vacation Bible School for a couple of weeks at Mt. Olive every year. So we would all go to the Vacation Bible School.

As I became older — well, my mother became director of the Young People's Choir; I became the pianist for the Young People's Choir. My father was



Mt. Olive Baptist Church moves to Washington Street, 1969. (From left): Leo Smith, Reverend W.L. Craddock, Mayor Louis DePascale, and Cecil Vincent.

the treasurer of the church. He became a deacon, my mother became a deaconess. My mother was in so many auxiliaries: the Pastor's Aid, the Nurses' Unit, the Usher Board, the Senior Choir. At some point in time I went from being a member to being pianist for the Young People's Choir, which my mother directed. As I got older I joined the Senior Choir, so both my mother and I were in the Senior Choir at the same time.

[I did make a lot of the dresses for the Young People's Choir, too.] Every year there was an anniversary, and every year everybody got dresses. Some people had to sew dresses, and I got to sew quite a few of them. A few people in the choir would get together, and they would go pick out a pattern, decide on the color, and then say, "Okay, this is what we're going to wear this year. Everybody get busy on their sewing machines." Every year it was something.



NAACP dinner, Jersey City, New Jersey branch, undated. Clockwise: (standing at left) Charlie Green, with one hand on Leo Smith's shoulder, Evelyn Smith (seated), Edward Johnson Sr. (standing), Sarah Lee Smith, Edith Smith, George Smith, Curtis Mills, Geraldine Chase, Ardenia Westbrook, Mrs. Bill Melvin and Bill Melvin.

ACTIVISM NORTH and SOUTH

I guess you could consider both [of my parents] to be founding members of the NAACP in Hoboken. Eddie Johnson — he was the first president. You know, being a kid, the type of things I remember is what they did for the children, more than anything else. I remember they had a boys' basketball team, they also had cheerleaders, and I can vividly remember being in my kitchen, with my mother and some other people, dyeing crew socks gold — because the colors were blue and gold — dyeing crew socks for the cheerleaders, and things of that nature.

[Yes, I was chosen Miss NAACP of the Hoboken branch. But that just meant] raising the most money for the organization, and I got to ride in some parade, sitting on the back of a Cadillac convertible, going [*waving hand*]. It was basically a fundraising event for the organization, to help them carry out the different projects.

Sometimes I got in the paper, riding on their coattails. *[Laughs.]* The only time I made the paper was if I made honor roll or something.

But my father was very active in the civil rights movement. I can remember walking picket lines [with him] in front of the Woolworth's here in New Jersey, over in Jersey City, when there were a lot of boycotts against Woolworth's, because they wouldn't serve blacks at the luncheon counters in the South.

LOCAL 480 IUE AFL-CIO RE

Vol. 6—No. 12

A June 1963 edition of the union local's newsletter, featuring Leo Smith's column.



Speaking Out

By LEO H. SMITH, SR.
President

I am deeply disturbed about Birmingham, Alabama; about Jackson, Mississippi; about Danville, Virginia; about Lexington, North Carolina, the latter my home state. I know from having lived in the South for twenty-eight years, just what is going on down there. I know the hell that each Negro is going through in his fight for first and not second-class citizenship. I know what's going on, do you?

If you don't and I have had several indications that some of our fellow workers just do not realize the plight of one-tenth of the population of America. To those of you who have said that the Negro is trying to go too fast, that it is best to wait, let me say that you have never felt the stinging darts of segregation when you have seen vicious mobs lynch your mothers and fathers at will and drown your sisters and brothers at whim; when you have seen hate filled policemen curse, kick, brutalize, and even kill your Negro brothers and sisters with impunity; when you see the vast majority of your twenty-million Negro brothers smothering in an air-tight cage of poverty in the midst of an affluent society; when you suddenly find your tongue twisted and your speech stammering as you seek to explain to your six-year-old daughter why she can't go to the public amusement park that has just been advertised on television, and see tears welling up in her little eyes when she is told that Funtown is closed to colored children, and see the depressing clouds of inferiority begin to form in her little mental sky, and see her begin to distort her little personality by unconsciously developing a bitterness toward white people; when you have to concoct an answer for a five-year old son, asking in agonizing pathos: "Daddy, why do white people treat colored people so mean?"; when you take a cross country drive and find it necessary to sleep night after night in the uncomfortable corners of your automobile because no motel will accept you; when you are humiliated day in and day out by nagging signs reading "white" men and "colored"; when your first name becomes "nigger' and your middle name becomes "boy" (how-

(Continued on Page 2)

[I carried a sign on the picket line in Jersey City, too.] I was right there. I'm Daddy's little girl. You know how girls are with their daddies. Anywhere he went, I wanted to go, so I can remember walking with my daddy, carrying my picket sign. [There were about fifty other people there, too. The Woolworth's in this area wasn't segregated like those in the south, but since it was part of a corporation chain, it was a way of sending a message.]

My father was always going away on trips, participating in marches. He was in Alabama, he was in Mississippi, he was in jail! At the end of his career, when he was working with the Human Resources Development Agency, which was a part of the union, he would have to give speeches. I have a speech of him on tape, where he's making reference to where he was jailed, and some of the things he went through. [And when] the union published their own little newspaper, [my father] had his own column. [He wrote about going down south,] about mob lynchings and things of that nature.

SUMMERS in the SEGREGATED SOUTH

And you know something? I guess it's not unique to me, but it's unique to some black youth. During the summers, I did go to the South. I spent the summers in the South for many years, and segregation still existed. So I was used to being brought up in an integrated society, but when I went down to North Carolina, everything was different, and I had to adjust, and act accordingly — which kind of ticked me off! You know?

Actually, my aunt and uncle — they were my cousins, but because they were so much older than me I called them my aunt and my uncle — they owned a grill. And I couldn't understand why, if I went to the soda fountain in the [white] pharmacy, I had to stand at the end of the counter and wait for somebody to come over and wait on me, while white people would come into my uncle's grill, and sit anywhere they wanted. That took a little bit of adjusting.

[My parents explained to me what I had to do when I was in North Carolina.] It was "for your own protection." They taught you, "Okay, this is how it has to be down here," as well as my cousins, who were a little older than me, whom I hung around with. There was no specific explanation; it was just, "This is how it is down here."

I went down there every year, probably, from the time I was maybe five until fifteen, sixteen. So I

did see the change, where I was able to go in. [When things did change,] well, I guess it didn't seem that monumental, because it was what I was used to for nine months of the year. So I guess it seemed more normal to me now, but it was a change that was a long time coming. I guess it probably had a more profound effect on my cousins, who lived like that twelve months a year, for all those years.

One thing I haven't been able to do, that I keep on saying I'm going to do when I go back down there and I just never find the time, is to go to the theatre. Because the last time I went to the theatre in North Carolina, it was segregated. The black folks had to enter at the side, and go directly up to the balcony. If you wanted snacks from the concession counter, you had to come back down the stairway, and there was a little window cut in the wall (the counter was on the other side of the room) that you could look into, and you had to wait for somebody to come over, find out what you wanted, take your money, go back, and bring it to you.

So one of these days I'm going to take the time and actually go see a movie — downstairs — in that theatre.

ANCESTORS

[Were a lot of the people who went to Mt. Olive originally from North Carolina?] A large percentage of them, yes, but not necessarily from the same area. There was a period in our history when a lot of people — there was a mass exodus up to the north — better wages, better living conditions, things of that nature. They would come up here, attain property and work. Then they wanted to retire, and go back someplace where it's a slower, calmer lifestyle.

One thing that's bad about keeping in touch with where you live and where you're from is that both my mother and my father, [when they died], they had two of everything. They had two wakes, they had two funerals. And that was rough, [one in Hoboken and one in North Carolina.] But my father had it, and my mother always insisted she wanted to do exactly the same thing, so we did exactly the same thing.

[There were so many tributes. *Points to a thick stack of papers.*] Here are newspaper articles and obituaries from when my father died. On the program: the mayor, councilmen of the city... Notices in a lot of different newspapers in North Carolina and New York. Of course, Hoboken, Jersey City papers. Labor papers. The *Afro-American* — that's a New York paper. *Jersey Journal*, the *News Reporter* in Whiteville, North Carolina, the *Star-Ledger*. . . A resolution . . . .

There are plaques up the ying-yang.

Both of my parents were over-achievers! They make it hard for a kid. My brother always says, "It's really hard to live up to the name Leo Smith" — because he's a Junior. "It's really hard." But they were over-achievers, as far as I'm concerned. [*Laughs.*]



Union Club Testimonial Dinner, undated. Standing (left to right): Four unidentified, Evelyn Lanier, Johnny Vel, Mr. and Mrs. Jeffrey Hadley, unidentified, Geraldine Chase, unidentified, Bill Funches. Seated (left to right): Unidentified, Bill Nelson, Leo Smith, Sarah Lee Smith, Hoboken Mayor John Grogan, Ardenia Westbrook, Nick Fieola.

The Hoboken Oral History Project

"Vanishing Hoboken," an oral history project, was initiated in 2000 by members of the Friends of the Hoboken Public Library and the Hoboken Historical Museum in response to dramatic physical, social, and economic changes in the city of Hoboken over the preceding twenty years, and to the consequent "vanishing" of certain aspects of public life.

For much of the last century, Hoboken was a working-class town, home to many waves of immigrant families, and to families who journeyed from the southern regions of the U.S. and from Puerto Rico — all looking for work. Hoboken, close to ports of entry in New Jersey and New York, offered a working waterfront and many factories, as well as inexpensive housing. Each new wave of arrivals — from Germany, Ireland, Italy, Yugoslavia, Cuba, and Puerto Rico — found work on the waterfront, at the Bethlehem Steel Shipyards, Lipton Tea, Tootsie Roll, Maxwell House, or in numerous, smaller garment factories. Then the docks closed in the 1960s; and factory jobs dwindled as Hoboken's industrial base relocated over the 1970s and '80s. Maxwell House, once the largest coffee roasting plant in the world, was the last to leave, in 1992. In the go-go economy of the 1980s, Hoboken's row houses, just across the river from Manhattan, were targeted by developers to young professionals seeking an easy commute to New York City. Historically home to ever-changing waves of struggling families — who often left when they became prosperous — Hoboken began in the mid-1980s to experience a kind of reverse migration, where affluent condominium-buyers replaced poor and working class tenants, many of whom had been forced out by fire, through condo-conversion buy-outs, or through rising rents. More recently, building construction has further altered the face of Hoboken, as modern towers are rising up alongside the late-19th century row houses that once spatially defined our densely populated, mile-square city and provided its human scale.

The Hoboken Oral History Project was inaugurated with the goal of capturing, through the recollections of longtime residents, "Vanishing Hoboken" — especially its disappearing identity as a working-class city and its tradition of multi-ethnic living. The Project focuses on collecting the oral histories of residents who can evoke Hoboken's vanished industries through their recollections of employment in the city's many factories and on the waterfront, and those who can capture for present and future generations the ways in which Hoboken's rich ethnic and cultural diversity was once evident in the everyday life of the city. In 2001, with the support of the New Jersey Historical Commission, a division of the Department of State, the Hoboken Oral History Project transcribed and edited several oral histories to produce a series of "Vanishing Hoboken" chapbooks. Since 2002, fifteen chapbooks have been published in the series, with the support of the Historical Commission and the New Jersey Council for the Humanities, a state partner of the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Vanishing Hoboken Chapbooks

The editor of this series chose to call these small booklets "chapbooks," a now rarely heard term for a once-common object. And so, a brief explanation is now required: A chapbook, states the most recent edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, is a

> ...small, inexpensive, stitched tract formerly sold by itinerant dealers, or chapmen, in Western Europe and in North America. Most chapbooks were 5 x 4 inches in size and were made up of four pages (or multiples of four), illustrated with woodcuts. They contained tales of popular heroes, legends and folklore, jests, reports of notorious crimes, ballads, almanacs, nursery rhymes, school lessons, farces, biblical tales, dream lore, and other popular matter. The texts were mostly rough and anonymous, but they formed the major parts of secular reading and now serve as a guide to the manners and morals of their times.

Chapbooks began to appear in France at the end of the 15th century. Colonial America imported them from England but also produced them locally. These small booklets of mostly secular material continued to be popular until inexpensive magazines began to appear during the early 19th century.

Although some of the chapbooks in the Vanishing Hoboken series are considerably longer than their earlier counterparts, others are nearly as brief. They are larger in size, to allow us to use a reader-friendly type size. But all resemble the chapbooks of yesteryear, as they contain the legends, dreams, crime reports, jokes, and folklore of our contemporaries. One day, perhaps, they might even serve as guides to the "manners and morals" of our city, during the 20th and early 21st centuries.



Left and bottom: From "Emerson's Mr. Smith," Our World magazine, November 1954.



Leo, no matter how often he has heard same story.



In front of Union's 3-story building, Leo chats with other officers (l) Johnny "Vee" Vizzacchero, recreation director, Tony Capparelli, Frank Curci, vice chairman Shop com.

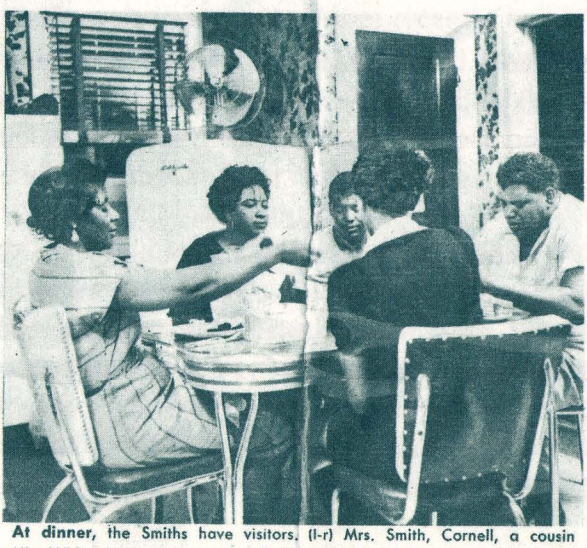
more than luck when he sits down to negotiate contracts for his union.

is carefully met. Yet they live well. Feeding Leo is no problem — he eats anything, but he's strictly a "lima bean" man, his wife says. "No matter what I have, he always wants lima beans cooked with fat back."

Still sports minded, 40 year old Leo who weighs 230 and stands 6 feet 4, played on Emerson's fine baseball team.

Right now, their chief concern is the youngsters' future. "We want them to go to college," Leo said. "It is up to them."

That's typical of the Smiths. In this family, he sets the pace, but behind the scenes, Mrs. Smith quietly manipulates affairs. It has been reported that the IUEW national office wants Leo. This promotion would mean even more and longer absences from home. But like everything else, Mrs. Smith takes it in stride. If it means another step-up for the family bread-winner, then she's all for it. END



At dinner, the Smiths have visitors. (l-r) Mrs. Smith, Cornell, a cousin Miss White, Leo and Anne. Mrs. Smith is good cook, but says Leo is better.



A PROJECT OF THE
Friends of the
Hoboken Public
Library
and the Hoboken
Historical Museum

