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6. Holidays and Family Traditions

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Holidays and Family Traditions

WE EXIST

EVIDENCE OF MAINE'S BLACK FAMILIES from 1800 to the 20th Century



Mr. Edgar Anderson



"The kids' birthdays, that's a holiday to me. Christmas is probably one of the biggest. And also, for the last five years we've been doing Kwanzaa. Kwanzaa has been new for me to try and teach my kids, because my kids are Black and white. So they don't get as much exposure to Black people as they do to white people, just because of their friends, because of the high school my daughter's going to go to, and that whole thing."

"Well, Kwanzaa is one. Getting the gifts and the talking about the different meanings of each of the days and how we practice the different principles of Kwanzaa is something that we, all of us, have learned. Me and my wife also, we are all basically still learning about how to integrate those things during the year, not just at Christmas time."

"We had one last year, last August. All of my sisters came here, all except one. My sister from California came, my sister from Texas came with her son, my sisters from Chicago, both of them came, two of them came, and my mother showed up. Our next one's going to be in California next year. So we'll go to my sister's house out there... And the one before that, we had a family reunion for my grandmother's 90th birthday party. And we had that in Chicago, and, I mean, everybody turned out for that. My grandmother has 6 children, 26 grandchildren, and 56 great-grandchildren. My son, Jordan, is the 50th great grandchild. And then she has 16 great-great-grand kids. She's my only grandmother that's still living."

Mr. Edgar Anderson (Male; age 51; born 1950 in Chicago suburb called Harvey)

Keywords: holidays and family traditions, Black Families, Maine

Full Length Interview: [Home is Where I Make It: Anderson, Edgar](#)

Mrs Odessa Barret



"Christmas and Thanksgiving. Or Thanksgiving and Christmas. [laughter] Fourth of July. The regular ones I guess... Well, special traditions. We get together for Christmas Eve and prayer is a very big part of everything, and that was a tradition that was passed on. We pass on the tradition of food, preparing food for holidays. That's a big tradition."

Ms. Odessa Barret (age 53; born 1948 in Port Arthur, Texas; born in a middle-class, blue collar family; moved to Maine in October 1979)

Keywords: holidays and family traditions, Black Families, Maine

Full Length Interview: [Home is Where I Make It: Barret, Odessa](#)

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Ms. Beverly Bowens



"I love Christmas. My daughter was born on Christmas Day. I always loved Christmas, even as a child. Well, I like every day. I try to make every day a little meaningful; it doesn't always work, but..."

Well, like any New England family, for Christmas we'll have a turkey, went to church. I don't think it was any different than anyone else in Maine.

Not really. There will be a family reunion coming up on my father's side in Wisconsin, but I don't know if I'll be able to attend. I attend my husband's family reunions.

Ms. Beverly Bowens (born in Maine; age 67; left at 21 years old for about 35 to 40 years and then returned to Maine)

Keywords: holidays and family traditions, Black Families, Maine

Full Length Interview: [Home is Where I Make It: Bowens, Beverly](#)

Ms. Rose Jackson



"Most of the holidays what we celebrate were Thanksgiving and Christmas, because you be able to give gifts and you get together. And Easter is another time; Easter was, oh, a really good time, because I remember one Sunday we all looked dressed up coming home from church and it snowed. On Easter Sunday. [laughter] But that was okay. We were used to riding buses; that's the transportation that we had to getting back for the church. The church people wanted to know could they get a cab for us or something. I said, 'No, we'll ride the bus.'"

Mrs. Rose Jackson (age 66; born in Louisville, Mississippi; lives in South Portland for 39 years; married 34 years; has six children; had five children with her first husband; he died and she remarried and had a child with the current husband)

Keywords: holidays and family traditions, Black Families, Maine

Full Length Interview: [Home is Where I Make It: Jackson, Rose](#)

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Mrs. June McKenzie



"Well, I had a pretty nice childhood. Not as nice as my sisters and brothers, because when they were home my father was there, too. But he wasn't there after I was 13, I guess. We always lived in our own home and had a big yard and flowers and nice neighbors. We were the only Black family in the area, but we still got along well..."

"Well, we are very family oriented. So we celebrate everybody's birthday, and Mother's Day, Father's Day... On yes, naturally. Christmas and Thanksgiving. Still, even though the kids are all over, we pull names around Thanksgiving and everybody has a special person for Christmas... My oldest daughter is in Kwanzaa. And I participate in it, but the other kids- Ellen doesn't; the other children do not."

"Well, we always get together for Thanksgiving, as many as possible. Now that I'm older, I don't have to cook. If we go to my daughter's house or one of my sons' house, everybody brings something. Somebody does a turkey, somebody does a ham, you know. We always have more than our own family, so we end up about twenty, twenty-two people, you know, usually."

Mrs. June McKenzie (age 72; born 1929 in Portland Maine; fifth-generation Mainer; lived in Maine all her life)

Keywords: holidays and family traditions, Black Families, Maine

Full Length Interview: [Home is Where I Make It: McKenzie, June](#)

Mr. James Mathews



Mr. James Mathews (age 59; born 1941 in Portland Maine; married with five children; lived in Maine all his life – lived in South Portland for over 26 years)

Keywords: holidays and family traditions, Black Families, Maine

Selected Audio: [Series 1: Family - Recordings](#)

Full Length Interview: [Home is Where I Make It: Mathews, James](#)

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Mr. Rupert Richardson



"For me the most important holiday is Christmas."

"Well, the only tradition is that we get together and we eat. I prepare the traditional food for our family. It's something that, you know, something my wife or my mother prepared; it's something, a recipe that I've learned and passed that on down to the family. So, that's about it. It's the idea of just getting together and just enjoying each other's company."

Mr. Rupert Richardson (born in Portland, Maine; living in Maine for 71 years)

Keywords: holidays and family traditions, Black Families, Maine

Selected Audio: [Series 1: Family - Recordings](#)

Full Length Interview: [Home is Where I Make It: Richardson, Rupert](#)

Mr. James Sheppard



"Well, I would say, I would say Easter and Christmas, simply because it's a religious thing. My wife's the religious one; not myself as much as my wife. But Easter and Christmas, those religious holidays. Birthdays, naturally, if that's on the list. Always. Always. I remember my father and mother would never allow a birthday to go by. And we were always on the poor side. I didn't mention that before; that was in New York City. We were poor people in New York City. After they came to the United States, the kind of job he had really didn't pay that much money, you know. My father never let a birthday go by without a cake. On the day of the birthday. If it fell on Tuesday, there was a cake there on Tuesday when he came home. Didn't wait until Saturday to do it, it was Tuesday. And you learn a lot that way, you know, when you see that sort of thing. And we still do it. And when we're traveling and when someone's birthday falls while we're away, we pick up a little souvenirs, little things, so when we come back home to Portland we say, 'Here's something for your birthday.' You know, something worth five cents, ten, fifty cents, nothing expensive, that sort of thing. That's important. You've gotta let the kids know that you're there for them, that you care what they're doing. It doesn't mean you have to hang around them all the time; they just have to understand that by doing this sort of thing." [cont. on next page]

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Mr. James Sheppard (cont.)



"As far as the services in church go, just attending the service and attending. Christmas Eve. We used to attend church on Christmas Eve; not any longer. But that's one of the things that we used to do on the day before Christmas. Take the kids along. But so much has changed since the kids have left and on their own that we don't have these things any longer. That's why I'm trying to remember what it was we used to do with them. But we used to gather together and go as a group, you know. Even back in the New York City days. It was a larger group because it was my parents had four of us. There was six of us that went to all these things: Christmas, Easter services in church. I'm still talking about church. But in addition to that we'd have lots of summer events: picnics and that sort. But that's separate; that's a different thing."

Mr. James Sheppard (born in New York City in 1924; both his parents immigrated from Antigua in the West Indies to Canada, then they came to the United States in 1923; moved to Maine in 1971)

Keywords: holidays and family traditions, Black Families, Maine

Full Length Interview: [Home is Where I Make It: Sheppard, James](#)

Ms. Lucille Young



"Well, we have Fourth of July. We have that every year. And we have Labor Day and Christmas; we always have that at my house."

"[Barbeque] Yeah. We have four picnic tables in the backyard, and chairs, and we have a grill. And I have a swimming pool, so they're always there. They're always at my house. Which I'm trying to get rid of half of them, but I know it'll never happen."

"Most of the things I share with my family I try to get them to get right with God. That's the every important thing; I try to get them all to do that. Around the holiday we just have food...we just cook, barbeque, and make all kinds of stuff and just have fun."

Ms. Lucille Young (age 73; born 1928 in Jackson, Mississippi; moved to Maine in 1967)

Keywords: holidays and family traditions, Black Families, Maine

Full Length Interview: [Home is Where I Make It: Young, Lucille](#)

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Dr. Lance Gibbs is the curator of this exhibit and served as the research lead for the project, providing historical background from news and scholarly references, and authoring the short contextual catalogue essay entries which complement the photos, written, and audio galleries. Dr. Gibbs is a lecturer in Race and Ethnic Studies and is currently the director of the Race and Ethnic Studies program at the University of Southern Maine. Dr. Gibbs is also the Talbot Fellow for the Gerald E. Talbot and African American Collections. Dr. Gibbs' research interests focus broadly on the family, in particular in father involvement/fathering/fatherhood, among immigrant fathers from the African Diaspora. For more information, contact Lance Gibbs, at lance.gibbs@maine.edu



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