



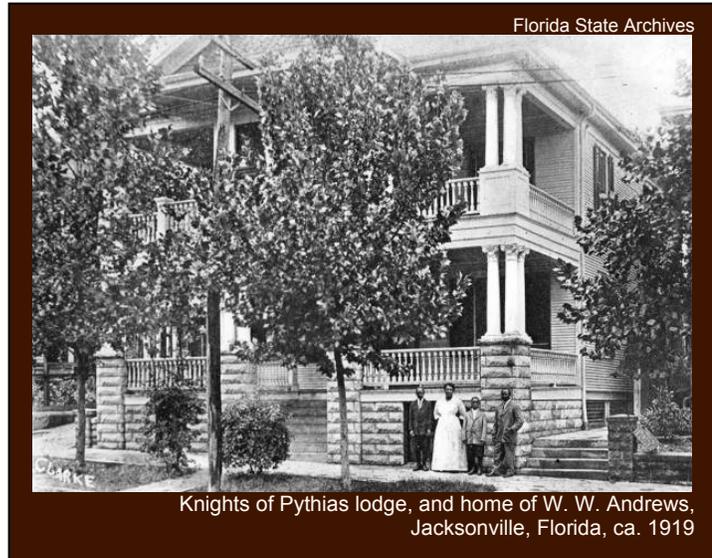
Narrative of A. I. DIXIE & SAMUEL DIXIE

Florida, 1920s

◆ Ages 81 & 75 ◆

Interview conducted 1994, Tallahassee, Florida

Behind the Veil Project: Documenting African
American Life in the Jim Crow South, Center for
Documentary Studies, Duke University



In an exchange with his brother, Samuel, Florida native A. I. Dixie shares his thoughts about the social history of lodges and fraternal organizations. Such organizations offered not only the financial means to bury the dead and avoid the humiliation of seeking assistance from landowners, but also offered relief during times of economic crisis and physical illness.

A. I. Dixie: [The Knights of Pythias] was strong [in the twenties], all the mens that thought of themselves as anybody joined it because it was told that is was going to be a brotherhood. They had a song that they used to sing, “[David is your master] and steward for right against the wrong.” Meaning if your brother was wrong, you were going to stand with him; if he was right, you were going to stand with him; but with the wrong you would do it under cover. [White people back then didn’t want them to have secret meetings.] For a long time [black people] couldn’t have church at night. Have it in the daytime, but at night everybody was scared.

You had about all the colored folks [joining the lodge], because [the lodge] was giving you [help]. If a person of the Knights of Pythias would die his widow got \$500, and they buried him. They had their own [funerals], and they would have a long march, and once a year they would have a celebration called a turnout. And they had a big temple in Jacksonville. And the man, his name might come to me, but anyhow, I was [in their grand lodge], and they said that they covered Florida “like water covered the sea.” And [the lodge leader] had a lot of money. It’s going on now, but it’s no more strong like it used to be because they don’t pay a \$500 policy no more. They used to pay \$500 and bury you. [In the 1930s Depression] folks got to where they were making 75 cents a day, and you was paying \$2 a month [to the lodge] and sometimes you didn’t make but two days and wasn’t but 75 cents [for the whole month]. It was rough in Hoover times. There’s a lot of things that went [under like the lodge]. The American Woodmen used to be strong here too, but it went out; it went out way after then.

I joined [the Order of the Emancipated Americans] in the thirties. It’s strong now because I hold a gathering now. It’s not strong as it used to be because folks [are] making more money. See, you just paid 75 cents a month, [and they] give you \$200 in cash when you die. But when it was start[ed] up, it wasn’t paying that. If you was a farmer and your mule died, and you belonged to the Emancipated Order, everybody that had a mule had to give you a day’s work, until they could get you another mule. And if your house get burned down, they would chip in and help you get shelter. It wouldn’t be a fine house, but now with the folk making money, we ain’t got the members we used to have. “That ain’t enough money

for me,” but I tell them every year, “What money?” It was the strength that you help me, and I help you. It was originally if a member got sick the lodge just send a brother, two brothers to sit with him if it’s a man, and if it’s a woman, they would send two ladies, because [we] didn’t have hospitals, just had to sit around. This here was a demand from the lodge; this was out of their ruling. He could say, “You go stay with so-and-so.” They would send a different person every night, two different people every night. I had went and stayed from first dark to five o’clock, time enough to go home and get my breakfast and get prepared to go to work. When we went there and the family then could go on to their room and sleep, because they had to [stay and care for] him all that day. Some of them [lodge members] would go there every night. But now they got hospitals so — as I was telling the people — I say, “You all don’t understand it like I did.” That’s what they were doing. If a man’s mule died, and he was a member, and his crop need plowing and he’d make it known, and this brother go down and give him a day. That’s how that thing got started. See, folk on a tobacco farm, they’d have to go up to the boss to get a casket for their people. And one or two wise men said, “Why can’t us put us little might together, and save us from having to stand around somebody else’s [the bossman’s] house, when somebody die?” So then they would give you that cash, and you could go get your casket.

SD: Back in those days people was more considerate.

AD: Well they had everything in common. But when folk went to prospering they . . .

SD: They [swung] away from that.

AD: Yeah. You could join [the lodge]; they got folks what didn’t own nothing to join just for their protection if somebody got sick. See, if you was on the farm you was a laboring man, and it had been time when folk would say, “Put him in the bed and come on to work. I got to get my tobacco.” There were certain times they wanted you to work. I knowed a man was sick, he said, “I need you to work, yes sir,” because [he] was sitting in the house, laying in the bed.



I joined a lodge when I was a young man. But, as I take it, in the Depression, our president, he built a temple there. He had an undertaker, barber shop, and a store. And he was running that under the lodge name and running it so many years that when the city filed on it for taxes for what he was doing that killed that concern. And he runned away by night. Now I wasn’t living [there], but I know that he sold this insurance to a white company and the white man drove to my house and wanted me to take up the money and send it to him. But I didn’t know nothing about him because he just come to my house, and I told him that I wouldn’t take a part in that. There were several lodges, and a lot of folks lost their place because of bad crops and you had to give up.

The [white people] burned down [the Knights of Pythias’s lodge in 1920?]. That was in River Junction. The man that was the head of that [lodge] was named T. S. Phillyaw. He was a preacher. They got on their knees and take an oath to stand by a brother [in] case something happens to him. Get in

distress, they would go to him but it wouldn't be openly. See, if they helped a brother get away that was just agreed to be betwixt them. But Phillyaw told me that when [the white people] told him they don't meet no more in private meetings, he called the members; he said, "We took oaths brothers. Let's have lodge meetings." [They] had an inner guard at the door, and then they had an outer guard [and] he just walked around the building. But he [Phillyaw] told me the outer guard sold him out, because they [the lodge brothers] give him a gun and said, "If you see anything coming, you shoot and get out the way." But he told me this outer guard run, and they saw the bottom of the fire. So when they looked and see'd it [their lodge building] was on fire they couldn't go down the stairway; they had to leap out. And Phillyaw lived in the country further than any of them, and they [the whites] caught him before he got home that night, and they put a good whupping on him. Well, he had to leave, but well he was of [mixed race], and he went before the governor [of Florida], and he went back and he stayed there until he died because the state bought his farm. I was a small boy in the twenties when that happened.

I started in the church when I was 14 years old and T. S. Phillyaw was about one of the [few] with education because he wrote up a paper for us. [When] he wanted some deed made to some property, [that] we [Union Missionary Baptist Association] bought, the lawyer told him [why didn't] he make out the deeds, and he say "If I was a lawyer I would, but it require that a law man must." But he had it all copied out. And the man said, "You got it." Typed it and put his seal on it. They bought some property and they still got that property out on south side of Chattahoochee and they named it. They build a private school there; well, it was a [denominational] school. Didn't have a high school then in the county for black people, and these churches decided that they would build a high school, but it had to be a boarding school. And the next year after they built it, they built a high school here in Quincy called Dunbar, so then folks said, "Why [should] I send children to pay school when they can walk to school here." [T]hat property [of the Union Missionary Baptist Association] is still there. I went [and got] the abstract of it a few years ago because some of the folks wanted to sell it, and I told them as long as I live it would never be sold, it had to stay in that association name.

