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Mabel Scott oral history interview by Milly St. Julien, August 29, 1985

Mabel Scott (Interviewee)

Milly St. Julien (Interviewer)

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MABEL SCOTT

St. Julien: I am speaking today with Mabel Scott who is retired. She was in charge of the copy room for many years. This is for the USF Silver Anniversary Oral History Project. When you first came here, tell me how you got your job at the University.

Scott: Before I got here I was looking for a job at the University. I went to the employment place and at that time the employment office was looking for help at that time and I was one of the persons that they hired. I was the first maid that was out here. My first day out there wasn't any place here to work. There wasn't even a road to come from Fowler Avenue to the building. I had to come down 43rd Street and cut across the lot to get to the building. After getting here there wasn't anything here but the building here at that time. They didn't have any material to work with or anything. There wasn't any furniture. There wasn't anyone here who wasn't finished with their job but the painter.

St. Julien: Where was your job located? Was it in the Administration building?

Scott: The Administration building was the first building that was completed at that time. It wasn't really completed, but was more completed than the other buildings. There wasn't any furniture here. There wasn't any material to work with. I didn't know what I was coming into or where I was going when I left home.

St. Julien: So you had to get your own material to work with?

Scott: Mostly from Clyde Hill, I got my supplies from the plant manager, Clyde Hill.
St. Julien: How many other people were working with you?

Scott: At that time I was the first.

St. Julien: You were the only one?

Scott: The first one.

St. Julien: Did you have to take care of the library?

Scott: I did as they finished. They weren't completed with this building. There was the library and the UC. I had a number of the buildings where the students slept. Over to the Engineering building. I also had Arts and Letters, the theater, and the Science building. That was one of the first buildings. At first I was the maid over there. There wasn't anything to do but clean the floors and check the bathrooms on all floors. One time I pushed one of the bathroom doors open on the third floor, the top floor, I pushed the door, and I saw something run out. I pushed the door open again and I saw something go down a drain, I saw a snake! Then I went from door to door asking anyone if they had lost a snake! I thought maybe it had gotten out of one of the experiment rooms. He had been in the commode. When I swung the door open I frightened it out, he ran out. Then I went from door to door asking if anyone had lost a snake.

St. Julien: You didn't know you were going to have to do that when you got hired did you?

Scott: Things like that, as long as they keep their distance, they don't frighten me. When I swung the door open and flush the commode, I saw something run out, and I was anxious to see what it was. It was a snake. And it went right down the drain.
St. Julien: Did they catch it?

Scott: I don't know whether they ever caught it or not because he could have went further out.

St. Julien: I've heard that when people first started coming here that it was just sand and there was nothing out here.

Scott: It was mostly that way. They had plants around the Administration building. There wasn't grass or anything, just a plant here and there. Coming down from Fowler Avenue you couldn't come up the main drive to the building. You had to go across the sand over to the street that leads to Fletcher Avenue. I don't know whether it is 42nd or 43rd. But anyway, we had to go over that way. A little road was up that way. We had some kind of little animals and creatures on campus. That way I had another deal at that time. Until classes began, the first students would come in . . . You had a little thing, that sprinkler up there, Administration building. The students at that time were the kind that would pull tricks, they put all kinds of coloring in it. That would mean the guys on the ground had to come and scrub it out because they didn't want it in there. It would sprinkle all different colors on the building.

St. Julien: And with different colors in it.

Scott: And different colors in it. It made alot of work for them. So that went on for a long time. One day during break time I heard someone scream. It was a professor, and he was smashing about. I rushed out the door and there was an alligator. Someone had put it in the pond. They had been putting live fish in there too. Before they started putting fish in there
they used to put coloring in there and the yard person had to wash it out all the time. But anyway, the used to put live fish in there. This particular afternoon someone had screamed, and I rushed to the door and walked out to the banister upstairs in the Administration building and this professor, I don't know who he was, he rushed out there and grabbed the alligator by his tail and walked to the sidewalk and put it down and put his feet on top of his mouth. Then he caught and got a grip on him around the tail and then carried him away. He had to know how to handle that because he knew what he was doing. And then he got such a grip . . . It was such a thing at the new school. They began to threaten the students at what they would if they caught them . . . Then it began to clear out.

St. Julien: Do you remember anything else that they did in the way of practical jokes?

Mable: Give me some time to think about that.

St. Julien: Did they ever have any kind of demonstrations or protests that you remember?

Scott: They did have demonstrations, but I can't seem to recall any of them. Maybe it was just that I heard about it. I didn't get to see things sometime.

St. Julien: What about the graffiti wall? Do you ever remember that?

Scott: What?

St. Julien: The graffiti wall where students would go and write on. They had this special wall where students could write on it.
Scott: Where was it? It wasn't in the Administration building. It might have been someplace else on campus.

St. Julien: I think it was out on campus. Do you remember any bad storms that came up? Did you ever have any hurricanes or were there any floods that caused problems on campus?

Scott: If there was anything, it didn't linger; it wasn't that bad. At some buildings, water used to run into the classrooms. I'm not too sure about that.

St. Julien: You were saying that when the library first started that they had trailers or something?

Scott: It wasn't in this building, the library. Like all other buildings, they used trailers for the offices. When they completed the buildings they got rid of the trailers and when the faculty came they moved into the buildings. The trailers were out from the buildings. When I first arrived the only building that was completed was the Administration building. They were trying to complete the painting. There wasn't any furniture at all in any of the buildings. At that time all the departments and everything were in the Administration building until the other buildings were complete. The next building that was completed after the Administration building was the UC. When I was the maid we had to take care of the Administration building. There wasn't that much going on. Then we went to the UC. Now the UC I remember before it was complete. The first house mother was in charge of the girls who lived on the top floor. At that time the top floor of the UC was a dormitory, and Phyllis Marshall was the
house mother. I went through all the buildings that wasn't completed yet. There wasn't that much work to do. I had the Administration building and the UC. I used to clean out the girls rooms and things they would leave around.

St. Julien: So they didn't have to clean their own rooms?

Scott: No. After they completed the buildings, the furniture came in after that. Also the whole building. And the library, too. I worked through the Theater building and the Life Science building. I worked through them all before they opened.

St. Julien: So you were all over the place.

Scott: I worked in a number of buildings. And Phyllis Marshall was the first house mother. I think they had about 70 girls there then.

St. Julien: You said that you helped start the coffee . . .

Scott: At first we were then . . . I didn't realize that people drank coffee at that time.

St. Julien: That was over in Administration?

Scott: Yes, in the Administration building where we had a little burner and a little pot. I would make coffee in the little pots and the paper cups. We did that until we got the coffee lounge. We got seats, and it was a nice little place. And people would come one time and some would drop the money in and some wouldn't drop the money in. I wasn't responsible for that now. My job was to keep the coffee going and the doughnuts or whatever they had to serve with the coffee. It was on a trustworthy
system, the honor system. All I was to do was to keep the place lined up and to have the coffee on for a certain length of time until we drank it up and whoever was supplying the doughnuts, to be sure they were placed on the counter. That worked for a long time on the honor system until we found out that they were drinking more than they were paying for. So they began to pay for the coffee which was five cents a cup. It was the same everywhere. So it began and so they decided to seat chairs and tables. During breaks the professors would come in and take their work and some would get their homework out. The students weren't in their. It was just the office workers. Some professors had to make their office in one of these buildings in the Administration building. So it was just like . . . Everybody got along just like it was family. They would come in their break time and they would go over there and sit and chat. The professor would come out . . . It was a nice little family get together. It was much closer then than they are now.

St. Julien: What do you remember about Dr. Allen?

Scott: I remember Dr. Allen used to come to my house and take me to the club dance and the Women's Club. I used to help Michael, his son, when the Women's Club met at his house. I would go when they organized that. The opening that you come in from the UC, the Women's Club was organized there. I was the one who set up and fixed up everything there. Then they would have little events, and anytime they wanted to fix something up; she liked for me to go. She had a maid too. She couldn't . . . What is the name of that place where that old house is, that old building is? Chinsegut? Well, there is a building that they have the school or something in that area now. It is where you go for a retreat and things. I
can't remember the name of it. This person used to live over there, Margaret, and she worked there first. Margaret turned into a maid afterwards. Margaret was well known. She was born and raised or something around that area. But Margaret became somehow the maid for her. And her grandmother was from the slave people there. Maybe it was her great grandmother I heard her talk about. So they were family there. I haven't seen her in a long time. She used to know Margaret pretty good. She used to know everybody's name and everybody that was part of it. So anyway, Margaret was working for them at the time. At that time Margaret was maid for the Allen's. When Margaret couldn't, she would call into the job, my boss, and say she wanted Mabel. My boss didn't like that too well. He didn't think that I should go. But you know, I felt that I should go. She said I should go. If anybody else, and she doesn't... And when she had her club on Sunday and she needed me. She would come to my house and pick me up and take me back home.

St. Julien: You probably know Dr. Allen better than some people I have talked to.

Scott: Not really, but I did know him pretty well, and I respected him for who he was. Margaret didn't come for the weekend she need me at any time and she could call and said she needed me. That is the way it went. I know and he would find somebody to take me there. That is the way I was. Anytime I would go shopping after a long, long time she would know me and I would be shopping she would grab me and hug me. I haven't seen them since he retired. I was to leave here regardless of what I had to do. She needed me there. I had to go there.

St. Julien: What do you remember about Dr. Mackey? Do you remember him?
Scott: I remember him. I was here at that time. We never really got in touch with each other. Even when the kitchen and the . . . I know when the first furniture got here for the president's office, dishes, and every-thing, and the first secretary was there . . . well . . . She thought she was the boss around here. She was a nice person. We all got along around here. Everybody's their own person. People have their thoughts about me and I can have my thoughts about them. So nobody's perfect.

St. Julien: But things were alot closer when Dr. Allen was here? People were alot more open and . . .

Scott: Yes. I didn't have no contact with the new president. I didn't have close contact after that . . . Dr. Allen was the first one. There wasn't anything in his office. He needed furniture and all that had to be set up and I was the maid in that deal at the time and did the janitorial servic-es. And so I was a little bit closer at that time, of course I didn't work just there, and I worked in all the buildings. I just like people.

St. Julien: Do you remember saying anything about the University when it first started out in your community? Did they think it was a school they could go to?

Scott: Everybody thought it was a good idea to have one so close because we didn't have one. We didn't have a private one. Everybody thought it was nice to have something and they still think so because the black students were going to Tallahassee and I think the whites were going to Tallahas-see, too.

St. Julien: Were they going to Gibbs Junior College?
Scott: It was Gibbs Junior College. It was a black girls' college. It wasn't doing too much at that time. It wasn't real big. It was more on this side of the river and easy to get to then over to St. Pete.

St. Julien: Was this school integrated when it first opened?

Scott: Segregated when it first opened. All white kids came here. Let's see . . .

St. Julien: I think it was integrated. I don't think there were very many black students though. I think there might have been . . . I remember they were talking that the University Restaurant wouldn't serve a black student and then all the faculty and students boycotted the restaurant. Then they said that a couple of weeks later they changed their policy. Do you remember anything about that?

Scott: Well, when they first opened up there wasn't a University Restaurant. It was a couple of years coming in there. The first black student and that wasn't the first year here. I can't recall his name. He came from across the river in the west Tampa area. He was very smart. We didn't have . . . I am trying to think if we had a black student. It was a couple of years or maybe five or six years really, before a black person came. It may be longer. Because it was a little doubtful . . . I'm trying think who was the first student. I can't remember names right off hand. It wasn't too integrated then. I can't seem to remember what happened when the first black came out, but I think it was a year or two before any came out here.
St. Julien: Did you have any problems of discrimination or attitudes towards you?

Scott: I was born and bred in Tampa. I always felt that when I prepared myself I was living in this type of world, and I understood where I belonged and where I didn't belong. One time we had a white maid here, and classes was in the building. Now who do you think... She come to me crying, because a white student... telling here she was just a colored... That boy really wasn't anything coming this way and the way I had arrived coming this way and so she get the job coming... And she was a maid, and classes was in this building and that wasn't too long because classes didn't remain in this building that length of time. She would come in and cry on my shoulders and it wasn't black students, it was white students.

St. Julien: Why were they bothering her?

Scott: She was out of place. They didn't think a white person had any business being a maid. And they did that and it hurt me. Really, I never had any problems with the students. I remember... It was a... or something. I never did get his position. He was a scrub or something. He wasn't nice. Let's drop that. I can't place his face right now. There was something about him that I remember.

St. Julien: His attitude?

Scott: His attitude. He was that way with students, because the guy who did the yard work and the guy wasn't doing like he wanted, he gave him a hard time.
St. Julien: So he got onto anybody?

Scott: Not anybody. He wasn't supposed to bother the students that was working on the grounds, and I thought he was _____________. The guy came from downtown, see when it was really the University of South Florida at Plant Avenue. The guy that was supposed to do the night watch there, he came out here and he didn't work out. They got rid of him. And so it was in between them and it didn't work out. I found some whites work real hard and so it is the position they thought they deserved. I always tried to ... We had a ... I was born and raised in Hillsborough County. You know, what to do and what not to do. I came from places where you sit on the street cars, one where you know like that, where you sit at and what bathroom you use and all like that. I came up during those times. And I had a son. He had a friend. He could have had a black father, he was just as white. But his mother was black. She wasn't a real dark women, but she was black. But he ... E.J. was treated like a white man. He had been a black student and so anyhow, he was named E.J. E.J. would get to sit in the white section. We had separate seats. My son would say E.J. sat in the white section, but I said and you know what color you are. You're not going to jail and I'm not going to get you out if you get in trouble because you know yourself better than I know, because you know what color you are. I told him not to let E.J. to encourage him to do anything that he wanted to, but if he follows that is his business. E.J. tried to encourage him. I told him that I meant what I said. Blacks sit in the back of the bus or the streetcar or whatever. You don't sit there. And I think he knew I meant it.
St. Julien: Did it get better? Did you notice, even here at the University, did it get better in the late '60s or '70s?

Scott: In the late '60s. When I first came out here . . . on the first Christmas party, the second Christmas party, the third Christmas party. Then it was segregated.

St. Julien: So it was segregated . . . you had separate . . .

Scott: Where they had the ballroom, you went over there. Have you ever been to the Christmas party in the University ballroom upstairs on the . . .

St. Julien: I think I have seen it. In the Arts and Letters building?

Scott: No, it is in the UC. It is where they have the Christmas party all the time. At that first Christmas party, it was so long ago--what was the guys name who was vice president? But anyway whoever they were . . . It wasn't completed downstairs where the cafeteria was. But anyhow on the wall on that side in the hallway is where we had our party. So we insisted we had decorations, we had trees and lights, and the food they brought down. I'm trying to think of everybody who was . . . Mr. Rogers was one, the business manager, Mr. Allen was president. I'm trying to think of the other person that was vice principal. Dean Battle was the one. Then there was Hardaway, a short, smiley little fellow. There was another one. But anyhow, they would come in downstairs where we had the rooms that wasn't finished off. We insisted we would have decorations. It wasn't that large, but we had enough room. We could sing. There was a guy who played the piano. I can't tell you how many there was of us. So this little committee would come downstairs. They gave us the decorations. Whatever we had we made use of. And they gave us what they were serving.
We had everything. We had to have a piano. We would select a place where the recreation area... We went downstairs for that. We actually couldn't do ten... We had a man that was ordered... a man named Sam Dunn. He noticed that we was taking the piano and we would talk with Mr. Blake, Mr. Lake, the men was... And, anyhow, he thought that was the worst thing. He said we had to put the piano back. We insisted that we weren't going to put it back and we didn't put it back. He left us down there. He would come back and say hi...

St. Julien: You mean that if there was a white man or a white custodian they could go upstairs to...

Scott: No, that wasn't right. There weren't any white ones then, not actually the first, second, or the third.

St. Julien: So there wasn't any whites?

Scott: No, not then.

St. Julien: So that means that you all had to...

Scott: Stay down on the bottom. So when we had the party, they would come down. The dignitaries came down and this was the president or someone... Mr. Rogers, and others.

St. Julien: They came down to visit?

Scott: To see how we were making out. We had a tree. We actually decorated our place up. We had the piano there so someone could sing and play. One guy played, he did what he could. They came up and said that there was more...
going on down there than there was up there. He said everybody was just standing around looking at each other. You all got something . . .

St. Julien: Going on down here.

Scott: Three times.

St. Julien: Did they ever do that any other time?

Scott: About three times.

St. Julien: Did you ever notice any discrimination in any of the other areas like pay raises or promotions?

Scott: I don't know. I thought that I had been here long enough for it to have gotten better, but I didn't fight it. I got what I did. I was able to live right! I'm not a fighter. I just keep on living.

St. Julien: Do remember any problems concerning women? Promotions or anything?

Scott: We didn't have any white women in our area, but I have seen it all over. I've seen people have climbed up. There were many people that started at the bottom and climbed up. I thought I had worked, but I did try. I'm going to keep living.

St. Julien: You ended up eventually moving into the copy room?

Scott: Well, Mr. Rogers. I told you about him.

St. Julien: Tell us about how you got into that.

Scott: For one thing, I was placed in the coffee shop where people come in. I was sure to put coffee on. That is the first thing you do. The coffee
was ... You dropped your money in yourself and you go in and help yourself. I set up the whole thing. I put the coffee on and when it was ready you would go in and get your own cup. He came in one day and he stopped in to get his coffee and said Miss Scott, when you get time to come into the office. So anyway, I went in. I was anxious to go and hear what he had to say. He was a really nice person. So he said that they were going to open up another position. And I been thinking and thinking about who would do the job. He said, "Your name came up." He said, "Mabel Scott, you think you want to try it?" and I said, "I'm sure willing to move from where I am at." He said, "OK, it's yours and if anyone said anything thing about it to come and see me."

St. Julien: When you said that you were working in the copy room that you had to do work for St. Petersburg.

Scott: At that time. They had just built the place, the new building. And when everybody transferred over there we weren't set up for that building. So my job was to get the jobs ready. Whenever they sent a job I tried to have it ready for the next time. I said I. We have a press person, but my duties was to see that the jobs came in and that they were going out. I would try to ask the person ... It was not good to demand them to do anything, but I would ask them will they have the job ready to go out the next day or they knew that they needed it at a certain time. We worked pretty well together.

St. Julien: So you were actually xeroxing work for St. Petersburg?

Scott: No, we had a press. We had a fellow that operated the press.

St. Julien: But you were still doing ...
Scott: Still doing that. They didn't have the facilities. At that time when they first got over there they didn't have all the services there for awhile. Then we had to carry them. He would come and at certain times to pick it up when he goes over there. It was understood that he was to come in and I was to have the job ready and he did come and if it wasn't ready he would come back another time because we do have break downs now and then.

Hewitt: As the paper work and publications of the University increased . . . It seems now that every time you turn around you get a new piece of paper or a new publication or something. Did the copy office expand or did you just keep trying to do more and more . . .?

Scott: They had been larger before I left there, but they have other facilities around here too.

Hewitt: So you were the first one that they started opening up?

Scott: Started to make it . . . The first time we had . . . It was ridiculous. The first xerox machine it had some kind of scanner. It goes over and over and you've got to slap down as many pieces of paper as you can. They kind of brought us up.

St. Julien: That was your first machine?

Scott: One of the first machines. It was an old one, but the scanner and the lights come over then and you got to come over and try to make as many copies and get us much of that scan as you could. It was old too.

St. Julien: Was it old when you got it?
Scott: We don't buy anything, we rented. And you know the price the state put into things.

St. Julien: Do you remember the Johns Committee? That was the committee that was looking for communists.

Scott: I remember something about it, but I wasn't deeply into that.

St. Julien: Do you remember hearing anybody ever say anything about it?

Scott: During that time people would go on breaks... in the classrooms in the Administration building, the people during their breaks would come in at three o'clock. I wouldn't be in there at three o'clock. It was a good gathering place to talk things over.

St. Julien: Did it seem that teachers taught more of classes then...

Scott: I really can't say what was going on in the classroom, but it seemed like they were there more. I didn't know what was going on. Classes were in the Administration building. That is all I know. When it first opened, it seemed like everyone was there at that time. After they completed the other buildings the departments went into the buildings they were supposed to go into. They didn't move out at the same time, but they all got out of the Administration building. I worked in several buildings, but that was my main building. Even the teachers had their own office in that building. They finally moved out.

St. Julien: They used to register there also. Do you remember anything about that?
Scott: Well, the bathrooms would be busy. Students would line up, and line up and line up. It wasn't anything out of the ordinary. You expected that kind of situation at that time.

Hewitt: Do you remember when the first black teachers and students came?

Scott: There was a black student ... There was a student named Ernie Boger. He came from out in the west Tampa area. Oh, how many years was it before the first black student came? It wasn't the first, second, or third year. I only saw one black student who was treated really well here. His father must have been proud of him. There was also the first black student body president. He was dressed up all the time. You would never see him with another black student. He was always with white people. I don't know if you heard that his name was Les Miller. He married a black girl, though. He's a handsome guy. And a smart student, too.

St. Julien: Was there a union formed for you all? Was there any effort?

Scott: I think the effort came up, but I can't say. I didn't go to the meetings. I never took part in that. I had to work, you know. I don't think it really came to pass. The person who was over that was Mr. Dunn. You see he used to work at Rafer, see that's what I always heard, after he worked with those prisoners at Rafer ... He came from that area.

St. Julien: What do you remember about having sports or not having sports? Do you remember any comments that were made about not having sports activities?

Scott: I heard them complaining about it. We have basketball. It was late coming in.
Hewitt: We never got football.

St. Julien: I was wondering if you ever heard that it discouraged students from coming to the school.

Scott: What the white students? Any students? No. It is more of education than sports. But most students they demand what they want to have. So that is what the school is for and that is the remarks that I hear. Anything they wanted they thought they should get.

St. Julien: What about affirmative action? Have you noticed any difference in hiring procedures since the beginning?

Scott: I have been watching it, but I have never been in a position to take a part in it. I guess I shouldn't have felt that way, went along with it that way, but I did. I don't know very much about that. I never came to any of the meetings or anything. After I had been here that length of time I knew that there wasn't going to be that many more days, so I really didn't get involved.

Hewitt: Do you think that a young black women coming to work here now would have more opportunities to move up?

Scott: Sure. You would hire one now as a maid, she is going to stay a maid, anybody that wants a job in that position now. If they had the skills to be in a better position, though, to be in a higher education position, they wouldn't come in as a maid now. A person with a degree wouldn't come here as a maid. But the maids would stay maids.

St. Julien: Thank you for talking with us today. We really learned alot.
Scott: I did try to take some classes, but my work came first, and I couldn't finish them. I did take classes to try to finish my high school degree. But then something came up, and he said I had to work, he said I should have been there. . . . It was on my lunch hour what I was taking. . . . I guess I should have had more input. . . . Speed reading, that's what I was taking, to read better. But he said I was late; and it just discouraged me, because I've given more time. . . . And the state supposed to give you these courses. . . . but I just couldn't take that argument. . . . and on my own time. But I didn't go any further.

Hewitt: Thanks very much for coming to speak with us.