Ethnic Oral History Project, 1977-1978
Fresno Historical Society

James Seals

James Seals was interviewed on September 2, 1977 at his home in Fresno. Seals was born on April 17, 1886 in Texas. Seals came to Fresno in 1920 because there was a large fruit center. Seals says that during World War I, Fresno was extremely small that it was hardly a city yet. Seals recalls not running into too much trouble during the depression and that he got through it. Seals attended the Holiness Church in 1912 in Texas, and that he helped build a Holiness Church in Fresno in 1921. Seals' wife recalls that segregation in Fresno started during the school season in order to keep the black and white students separate. Mrs. Seals talks about how she would house abandoned children because there were no special centers for them to go to. Seals met his wife in 1937 when he returned to Texas, and they married when both came back to Fresno. Seals says that when Dr. Henry Wallace was sent to jail, he believed that some of the things that Wallace was accused of were true.

James Seals recalls that even though he went back to Texas in the 1930's, Fresno was still far better off than Texas. Seals claims that he was a member of the Socialist party and that there were several Socialist followers in Fresno. At the time of the interview, Seals says that he switched to being a Republican. Seals states that the only thing that changed in Fresno after World War II was the housing because more people were moving in. Mrs. Seals recalls how heartbreaking it was when the Japanese were put into the internment camps. Seals says that, during the Civil Rights Movement, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. helped the black community so much. Seals discusses old sayings and superstitions that were passed down in his family.

Interviewer: Vivian J. Jones
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FRESNO CITY AND COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

INTERVIEW WITH ELDER JAMES SEALS

SEPTEMBER 2,1977

Today is September 2,1977. I, am Vivian J. Jones doing an an interview with Elder James Seals in his home, at 1330 West California Avenue.

JONES: Elder Seals when did you come to California?

SEALS: In 1920.

JONES: Why did you come to Fresno?

SEALS: Because there was a fruit center here. There was no cotton.

JONES: Did you have a job when you came here?

SEALS: No, I got one immediately.

JONES: Where did you work when you came here?

SEALS: For the S.P. Company.

JONES: What was the salary like?

SEALS: It was very poor. I'll have to think back, to what it was. I can't remember now just what our salary was but it wasn't to much.

JONES: What year were you born?

SEALS: 1886.

JONES: What month and day?

SEALS: April the 17th.

JONES: Did your parents come here to Fresno with you?

SEALS: Did not.

JONES: Where were you born?

SEALS: In the state of Texas.

JONES: Did you come to Fresno alone, was there any specific reason?

SEALS: No, not exactly, I was tired of the South.

JONES: So you just chose Fresno on your own?

SEALS: I came to Fresno on my own?

JONES: After getting to Fresno and you have a job, how many people were here when you came?

SEALS: Of my people about seventy-five, I think.

JONES: Where were they living then?

SEALS: Most of them were living on the East, hardly anyone lived on the Westside. They lived on the other side. There was a few on this side, but you couldn't find them. They were spotty. They didn't live together like they do now.

JONES: So when you came here there wasn't anything known as segregation?

SEALS: No.

JONES: Did everyone work as fruit pickers at that time, or was it a fruit industry, or was it mainly cotton?

SEALS: There wasn't no cotton! Nothing but fruit.

JONES: When did the furit industry start coming through?

SEALS: Fruit?

JONES: Yes, like grapes and things like that.

SEALS: I found that they were doing that when I come to Fresno.

JONES: Where did you live when you came here?

SEALS: I lived on the Westside.

JONES: What address, do you remember the address where you lived?

SEALS: I lived on F street. 1964 F street.

JONES: Did you go to school before you came here? Were schools available here in Fresno?

SEALS: Yes I went to school before I came here. To the second question the answer is no.

JONES: For the black families that had children, what type of education did they receive?

MRS. SEALS: They had schools here. The children went to school.

JONES: Did the children go to school on a regular basis? Did they have a regular schedule for school season?

SEALS: Yeah, they saw to it that all the children went to school regularly.

JONES: Were you here when they built Edison High School?

SEALS: Well they wanted a high school and there wasn't one on the Westside. Then they built Edison High School.

JONES: Was there any opposition? Did they have any problems after building the school?

SEALS: No opposition and no problems that I know of.

JONES: Did the black community have any black community leaders here at that time?

SEALS: No.

JONES: What was your reaction to America's entry into the war?

SEALS: I wasn't in it. I was exempted.

JONES: Did you know any of the men ~~to~~ who left ~~leave~~ to go off to the war?

SEALS: Well not from here. I would have to go back to where I come from. You see the war when I come in 1921 was off.Really I come to California in 1920 but I did not come here until 1921. Billy Bigsby and the rest of them had all come home. I don't know any of them now.

JONES: After the war or during the war what type of work was available?

SEALS: Here.

JONES: Here in Fresno.

SEALS: Janitor work was here just as it is now. It was about the same I guess.This town was so small then. There wasn't but a thousand people here then. You couldn't hardly picture it seeing it as it is now. There wasn't no city. Every fellow could run his own truck. They cut that out though. That's the way it was then. Every fellow could run his own wagon and the city did not have nothing to do with it. They could run all the outdoor services, water, garbage etc. and the city had nothing to do with it because everything was outdoors. They stopped that long time ago.

JONES: While you were here in Fresno, how did you and your family make it during the depression?

SEALS: I did not run into no depression here. Oh, it was pretty tough but we made it. As we worked for outdoor places they would send out work for us and we would send a gang out to work in that place. We

SEALS:

We would send out work gangs to different places during the depression. There would be toomuch to tell that went on during the depression but believe me it went on. Through the hardest we worked a little but here and a little bit there and we lived through it.

JONES: Did your job also provide housing or did you have to do that yourself?

SEALS: Had to do it yourself! Jones: Had to do it yourself? (sigh)

JONES: Elder Seals, you are an Elder in the church know as the Trinity Church of God in Christ. How did you become affiliated with the church?

SEALS: Oh, you are going to carry me way back. By visiting the place where they were having a service. I paid attention to the bible. It drew my attention more so than where it was at. I could visit the place where I was getting the most gospel. That's how I became affiliated with the church.Now that I am in, I found out the other churches were not teaching me what I needed to make it in. That is teaching me how to live to meet Jesus. That's the reason I became affiliated with the church . They were teaching the truth to me as I saw it and then in my believing it. I found out there was not but one church and that church is the Holiness Church for us all to be in. There were some people who called themselves this and that and I pulled them out and affiliated them with the truth. This is not just the church of God and Christ but the Holiness Church. A man has to live holy. Wherever he lives he has to see God according to the book. I quit any people who did not believe that.

JONES: Elder Seals were you a young man when you started going to the Holiness Church?

SEALS: Well I should think so, in 1912 I was a very young man.

JONES: Did they have a Holiness Church here in Fresno when you came here?

SEALS: No, they were just fixing to start. They did start it in '21.

JONES: Did you assist in helping them build the church?

SEALS: I helped to build the first one.

JONES: Where was the first Holiness Church located?

SEALS: One "E" Street.

JONES: Who was the minister there?

SEALS: Rev. Henry Cotton.

JONES: At that time did you have a large congregation in the church?

SEALS: I didn't have any congregation at all.

JONES: The minister there, after the building of the church, did he have a large congregation.

SEALS: Oh yes. It run over with people.

JONES: So, there were people there who had strong religious convictions for the Holiness Faith when they came here, at that time?

SEALS: It was enough of them. There were those who were like I in the beginning but then they began to believe it. That brought them in droves. You couldn't get into the church because the truth was in there for them to receive.

JONES: As Fresno started to grow, what other types of positions became available for black men?

SEALS: Things were about the same but there was a few more jobs. It wasn't too small anymore. They began to hire us at the places where we needed to be. They found out the colored man could out work the other fellow and they commenced to hire him.

JONES: After other jobs started opening up did people still work in agriculture and in the fields , and in places of this nature?

SEALS: Oh ,yes. They come to this county after which they planted the cotton.It was pretty good but after they planted that cotton they started to come out here in the car loads. It took more church building more this and more of that because they rode here following the cotton.

JONES: When did they basically start to segregate the communities here in Fresno?

SEALS: During the school season I think. That's when they started to try it but the colored got there. They had no place to go but to the white school. They did not want them to but they never did try to stop them.

SEALS:

JONES: Did they have then what was know as a restricted covenant here in Fresno?

SEALS: No, I did not understand that term restricted covenant.

JONES: Well, I was trying to get into the later years when they started to segregate the community, when they brought the restricted covenant into Fresno. Did you know about that?

SEALS: Restricted Covenant? Has it ever been? Now?

JONES: No, it's not in effect now, the supreme court ruled against it. I was wondering if you knew of any cases or of any time that it prevailed here in Fresno?

MRS. SEALS: Now, you remember when the people from the south started to move here and then they built the school and they started with the restricted covenant.

SEALS: Yes I remember. They built that school to segregrate but when they went for a teacher they would not give them one. Because they came from a segregrated place, Oklahoma, Texas, mixed crowd. They said they would go back before they would send the children to a colored school and some of them did. They went back ~~from~~ TO where they came from.

MRS. SEALS: Basically the schools were never quite segregated. What happened is they moved. The people of other races who lived on this side moved to the other side of town. Everybody who was going to school together lived in the area.

JONES: So in other words they went to school in districts?

MRS. SEALS: It took many years before they were really confined to districts On the other side of town where hardly anyone went to school was Fresno High. Later when I came here permantly they were confined to the districts.

JONES: Mrs. Seals how did you start keeping children for the welfare?

MRS. SEALS: Somebody asked me. This was when World War 11 broke out. This lady was keeping a couple of little boys and she was giving them up because her son wasn't in condition and it was disturbing her so much that she couldn't keep them any more. A friend of ours knew me

and asked me, " how about keeping some children". I said well I don't know but we thought about it . Then she remarked that she had these two little boys who needed a home desperately. She wanted me to try so I said okay. That's how I started housing children and I have been doing it ever since.

JONES: Were there many children being abandoned at that time?

MRS. SEALS: No not at that time but later on there began to be scads of children.People began to go and work in the ship yards and they needed work and so they left the children.

JONES: Did they have any other special center that was set up for the children besides private homes?

MRS. SEALS: No. They did not have any centers.

JONES: Who was in public office at that time?

MRS. SEALS: Do you mean of the black people?

JONES: No. Public Officials?

MRS. SEALS: Reed Clegg was one. He was a Parole Officer for the California Probation Dept. I can't remember all of the names but I remember Clegg.

JONES: Were you able to get aid for the children you were keeping?

MRS. SEALS: Yes. It was not much though. It was only $22.00

JONES: Twenty-two dollars per month for all of the children?

MRS. SEALS: No, it was twenty-two dollars per month per child.

JONES: What year did you and Elder Seals get married?

MRS. SEALS: In 1937.

JONES: How did you meet him?

MRS. SEALS: I met him when he came back to Texas.

JONES: Elder Seals, you went back to Texas and met you wife?

SEALS: Yes. She is my wife now but the she wasn't thinking about me and I wasn't thinking about her. I moved around quite a bit but we kept in touch by mail. I finally went and told her that I thought we really had a chance. So in a few months she was on her way out here.

JONES: Did you get married here in Fresno?

SEALS: Yes. We were married here in Fresno.

JONES: When your wife came here where did you live then? I mean after you were married where did you live?

SEALS: I had a little place on F street. 1964 F Street.

JONES: Did she work while she was here?

SEALS: Oh yeah, she worked. She was a good speciality cook; I know that much. Worked as a laundry woman too and she couldn't be beat. She was a seamstress too, she could make anything.

JONES: Mrs. Seals, where did you work?

MRS. SEALS: Well, when I first came here I began doing domestic work. There wasn't any available work much more than that for women. There were college graduates who was doing the same thing that I was doing because there was no employment for them at that time. Every once in a while you could find a black lady who could get into the Welfare department. I think Mrs. Maude Hunter was the first black lady that I can remember that got a job in the Welfare Department. I do not know how long she has been there but it has been many years. Office work here in Fresno , there was no openings for blacks. If there was anything they didn't keep you from, it was field work, all kinds of field work you know. Nail work, pin work, pail work, contractors in the field, all the fields. All that you could do if you could handle it you could do it. This is the kind of work that we could do or we were allowed to do! Unless, they got into bigger things like maybe a barber shop, or a beauty shop, or a restaurant or something of that nature.

JONES: How much were you being paid an hour?

MRS. SEALS: Thirty-five cents an hour.

JONES: What year was this?

MRS. SEALS: This was in 1938.

JONES: You also sewed, did you do for other people or just for your home?

MRS. SEALS: I would sew a little bit for myself when I had the time. After

SEALS:

I had all of my children I started making clothes for them. I didn't do toomuch for others then but I did at one time. I remember when we had to make some chuch choir robes. I made them, all of them. Then I had tomake time to sew for other people. After a while I just didn't have the time to sew for other people.

JONES: Mrs. Seals, what is you full maiden name?

MRS. SEALS: Twelma Pegues.

JONES: Mrs. Seals what year were you born?

MRS. SEALS: February 18,1909.

JONES: Is Fresno your longest place of residence?

MRS. SEALS: Oh, yes.

JONES: How many years have you been here now?

MRS. SEALS: It will be forty this Oct. 19th.

JONES: After you and your wife came here and the both of you were working, by now the community had started to grow. Do you remember if they had started any black businesses at that particular time? They didn't have black businessmen when you first came to Fresno but later on did the town start to have black businessmen here, like doctors, lawyers, etc.?

SEALS: We had a doctor but no lawyer. It was a doctor that come here first.

MRS. SEALS: Doctor Wallace was the first one here and Mr. Cooley was the first mortician. The first lawyer was Goodwin but that's been recently.

JONES: Dr. Wallace, was he a nice man? What did you think of doctor Wallace when he came here? Was he in need here in Fresno? Did Fresno need a black doctor at that time?

SEALS: He was a very nice doctor.

JONES: Before he came was medical care available to you and the people in this community?

SEALS: Yes it was.

JONES: Who treated you before Doctor Wallace came?

SEALS: I haven't had a doctor before in my life, all my life my health has been good.

SEALS:

JONES: For the people in the community that needed a doctor's care, where did they go?

SEALS: Out to the county general if they didn't have any money. It was all free out on that end.

JONES: Elder Seals, I know you didn't go but do you know if they experienced any problems in getting treated at the general hospital?

SEALS: I never heard of any problems because they say the care was awful good.

JONES: It was awful good at that time! After Dr. Wallace came here then what happened?

SEALS: Well, they give him plenty of trade. He had plenty work to do. He had plenty of work to do until the next one come. He had a good practice because he had both white and colored patients. He was pretty well occupied.

JONES: Do you remember when Dr. Wallace had to go to jail? What did you think about that?

SEALS: Well, I thought that he was about the only doctor that I saw that would do anything like that.

JONES: Did you believe all of those things were true about Dr. Wallace?

SEALS: Those and some more.

JONES: After that, did that have any affect on the community?

SEALS: Yes. Because he was the first black doctor here and to have that happen like it did almost killed us. Everybody looking up to him because we needed one so bad. He came at the right time but the wrong doctor came to us! He was a sport. Everything that was going on, he was in it or involved in it. His luck just ran out and we sure was sorry.

JONES: That sounds awfully sad. I would like to ask you about Mr. Cooley now. Was Mr. Cooley here when you came?

SEALS: No, I think I got here first.

JONES: What did you do for morticians before Mr. Cooley came?

SEALS: Had to use otherwise. I was glad when we got people here with the ability to do things. Instead of leaning to the white all the time.

SEALS: When the doctors and things began to fall in here I was glad. I was glad because that is all we knew about and because that is all we had. I am still glad, especially because of the doctor of today; he's right up to date.

JONES: Before Mr. Cooley came here with his mortuary, did you have any problems in getting black people burried? Were there many deaths?

SEALS: Yes, there were quite a few deaths. The white got all the trade so there was no problem. The problem started when they called for you to come get him. I was glad when somenne came here to do something for all of us and not only for the whites.

JONES: After Mr. Cooley came, do you know if he had any problems getting started?

SEALS: I don't think he did. He got some push-ons . He got some money from somehere. I do not think he had such a bad time.

JONES: Now Elder Seals, Fresno has a black doctor and a black mortician, after these people started to come in, could you see the change in Fresno then?

SEALS: Yes, you could see the change.

JONES: Did more people start to come in?

SEALS: Yes, there was a great big change.

JONES: Did they have a black owned newspaper at that time ?

SEALS: No, they didn't have a black owned newspaper.

JONES: You were here when the men got back from World War 11, what was the reaction after the war had ended, and the guys were coming home?

SEALS: Well, they were already here when I got seattled. Bigby and the rest of them were already home. There wasn't anything going on exactly. Things were low, awful low. Jobs weren't to good at that time because I come in on July 31. That's way back.

JONES: Seeing as though you left Texas to come here, even though you had the problems and things that you were experiencing here in Fresno, was it still better here than it was in Texas?

SEALS: Yes! It was a heaven! It was heaven.

JONES: Where were your parents born?

SEALS: One of them was born in Alabama and I think the other one was born in Macadous County.

JONES: What was your parents' names?

SEALS: Annie Elizabeth Seals and John Seals.

JONES: Where were you born? Were you born in Texas?

SEALS: Yes I was born in Texas. Jacksonville Texas.

JONES: Were your parents living when you left Texas?

SEALS: Yes. They sure was living.

JONES: How many children were in your family?

SEALS: Eleven.

JONES: Were they upset when you decided to move to Fresno, California?

SEALS: No. I didn't come straight here. I left there in 1914. So I had been gone, but I really didn't come to California until 1921. They didn't get to see me at all till I finally went back to Tyler, Texas where I was reared up. They have not seen me since 1914 because my folks and I have not been together socially since 1914.

JONES: Do you have any relatives here in Fresno now? Did any of your brothers or sisters come?

SEALS: Daughter and a first cousin.

JONES: How many children did you have?

SEALS: Two.

JONES: What were there names?

SEALS: Flourel and Jimmy D. _____. Jimmy is living now. Jimmy is living on Holly now.

JONES: When did you stop working in the cotton and fruit industry? When did you stop doing this type of work?

SEALS: I didn't work in the cotton fields toomuch. I weighed for the Wetbacks. I worked for the contractors and I weighed cotton for them. I could speak Spanish enough to weigh the cotton in. They paid me to get the bales weighed because most of them could not speak to the Spanish-speaking Wetbacks.

JONES: Did they have many Spanish-speaking people here then, when you were weighing in the cotton?

SEALS: Oh yeah, they let them in but they neglected them. They let in about one thousand to help pick the cotton. They don't need them now because they have the cottonpickers.

JONES: How much were they paid at the time, do you remember?

SEALS: How much were they paying for cotton picking, I believe it was about a dollar or something like that.

JONES: If you were paying them for their bales, than you would be higher than them, were you a foreman or something over them?

SEALS: I was working under a big contract. He hired me to weigh and pay. They had a foreman that they were working under. I was hired by the man that they were working under. He couldn't speak Spanish and couldn't pay off in money. He couldn't weigh in and those that could weigh in Spanish quit looking at the scales. Those that wasn't looking at the scales, I would tell them what it was and they would put it down. Then when it came to the money they thought they knew about that but they couldn't tell them what they had in pounds in Spanish so I got a good job doing that.

JONES: How long did you do that?

SEALS: Only a couple of seasons.

JONES: After you left there what did you do?

SEALS: Well, when I left there I started to work out a church. I had decided to quit while I was there and we wanted a free place. I told my wife that I thought the Lord wanted me to work out a place of my own or someplace that I would be happy. She said, "Go Ahead", and I started out right here. I started out to work on a church and I did. I Brought the property, built the church. It has four hundred and fifty-two seats in it now. It's a big church. The lord let's me do it and that's all I have been doing since.

JONES: You have been working for the church and in the church; working for God. Let's talk about the property you purchased to build the church. At that time how much did you pay for that property?

SEALS: Fifteen hundred dollars, I believe.

JONES: Was it hard for you to get the materials and things in order for you to get your church built?

SEALS: Fresno Lumber Company, Joe Lo Forti offered to build it free of charge and so I let him build it.

JONES: And he really did?

SEALS: He put the lumber down and I built the foundation and everything, ficed and started this.

JONES: Joe Lo Forti, how did you like him, what type of a man was he?

SEALS: He's Italian and he's tough alright but I knew how to handle him. He thought I was the best man in the world. I had a sixty-six dollar balance on the church left without missing a payment. He was quite a man. He lost his son not long ago and I went to his funeral. He was a very sensative boy but he was dead and burried before I knew it.

JONES: Do you remember when Joe Lo Forti shot and killed a Negro soldier here in Fresno?

SEALS:

JONES: Do you remember that? What did you think about that?

SEALS: I had to think deeply and sum it up in my own mind because I wasn't there. Of course, with him being of my people, I would mostly put the blame on Lo Forti when he might not have been at fault. I didn't think too much of it but I never did forget. I treated him nice, it was his son who offered the church building. He was the backbone, the backbone that I knew so well. He come by one day and he said to me," let me furnish your lumber". I said, "Okay", and that is the way it started. I got the building and the lumber signed up.

JONES: What was Mr. Bigby's role in the community? Do you know what Mr. Bigby did in this community? What was his roll? What did he do? Why was he popular in the black community ? What type of position did he hold in the black community?

SEALS: I do not want to comment on the role of Mr. Bigby or Mr. Calhoun or any of the other gentlemen that were here at that time.

JONES: Did you belong to any political party?

SEALS: I vote all of the time.

JONES: What party did you belong to?

SEALS: I belonged to the Socialist. They thought it was nothing. That is the best party yet.

JONES: Were there many followers of the Socialist party?

SEALS: Oh yeah, Gabe Gardner was the president of the party. I voted for him. He believed like I believe that this land was not made for the rich. It was made for the poor, they were to till the soil and make a good living out of it. It was not made to run him off of it. That's the reason the rich did not want him in office.

Jones: What party do you belong to now?

SEALS: Republican.

JONES: May I ask why you joined the Republican Party?

SEALS: Well, when I come along it was a disgrace to be a democrat. It was a full against the black man. The segregation sign on the

SEALS: train, if they keep that sign up there, Negro, Negro until the train passed the Mason Dixon Line, then they take it down. Then you can go forth. Anyplace on the train you wanted to but back down the line you couldn't go no further. Now the lawyer had to squeeze in somewhere for lunch and the other fellows had to squeeze into a nice place or they went in the back together. I like taking a ride on the bus and there is no segregation signs, it isn't that the whites must sit in the front seats or they must eat the best food and this should have been like this all of the time.

JONES: Is that what made you decide to join the Republican Party?

SEALS: Yes, you see at the time it wasn't like it is now. To tell you, that is just about all there is. It ain't much difference in it now. The free party, I will always stay with and the Republican was a free party. Just like the Mason Dixon Line, I will always stay on that side. I won't go radical. Of course it's changed, both the Democrats and the Republicans, but I will stay on the Republican side.

JONES: Did you know a June Walton while you were living here in Fresno, he was suppose to have been the first black police officer that they had here in Fresno?

SEALS: Jean Walton, no I didn't know him.

JONES: Did you know a Mr. Ed. Jones?

SEALS: I never knew of Ed. Jones.

JONES: Did you know Reverend Edward Lindsey?

SEALS: Reverend Lindsey, I don't think so.

JONES: Let's go on just a little bit further, the war has declined and the people are coming back from the ship yards. People are coming in from all over. What happened then? Did the town start to grow? What happened to Fresno after the war?

SEALS: Not much of anything except the housing changed.

MRS. SEALS: Yes, we did not have the projects but then there were a lot of new projects being built. They did not have enough houses to

MRS. SEALS: house all of the people.

JONES: Who started to put in the housing projects here?

MRS. SEALS: I am not sure but I guess it was the city. When all of those people moved in, the city needed housing for them.

JONES: At this time, was the community still mixed? Was everybody still living where they wanted to after the war?

MRS. SEALS: Not necessarily. There was quite a bit of people who was moving from the West Side to the other side of town. Everyone one Fresno street who was Italian or White finally began to move out. When new colored families moved in they moved where the colored people lived and that was here on the West Side.

JONES: When the city started to build buildings and public places do you know if any black people worked in the construction trades , or as brick layers or anything like that?

MRS. SEALS: Not necessary a brick layer, they were probably what you would call a Hod Carrier.

JONES: What did they do as a Hod Carrier? What type of work was Hod Carrier?

SEALS: Carrying bricks, and mud. Especially bricks that were hard to carry. They used to put the pack on your shoulders and load it up with sixteen bricks . You had to carry those bricks up a ladder sometimes but you didn't have to carry the mud up. You could send the mud up by rope but you had to carry the bricks up and hot tar up that is where the hard work came in and the name Hod Carriers. It was hard work. The people here, when I come here, did not know anything about segregation. They were all foreigners, farmers, not Southerners, not until the cotton come. We were all here and you lived where you wanted to live. After the cotton come the Southerners came and they wanted to put the segregation between us and that is how segregation started here. It started after the Southerners come to pick the cotton. When I first come here the people didn't know what I was so they called me a Hindu,

SEALS: The word Nigger wasn't even heard of around here. Even words used pertaining to vegetables such as black eyed peas, they didn't know what that was.

JONES: So when you came here there was no prejudice?

SEALS: None at all.

JONES: It came in later years?

SEALS: Yeah, after the cotton. We were setting on porches together and eating together.

MRS. SEALS: In 1941 when the Japanese lived here they used to call it Japanese Gardens. Then when the war started and they put the Japanese in concentration camps then they moved out all those buildings. The concentration camps were out there by the Fair Grounds.

JONES: What did you think about that when they put the Japanese people into the internment camps. What was your reaction to that?

MRS. SEALS: Well, it was heartbreaking. You see some of them lived right next door to us and we would go out there and get vegetables and things and it was really sad. It was sad, it was so very sad. All of the Japanese families were separated and they were made to live in big pens. It was heartbreaking. A lot of families lost their homes and all of their possessions. I hope there is never another war.

JONES: After you had started to vote and you had rejoined the Republican Party, where were the voting headquarters located?

MRS. SEALS: They are in different places now because we have different precincts. We voted in the precinct that we were living in. Sometimes we were moved. Now, we have voted over at the airport. (Chandler Airport) Later we voted over at Franklin School. I think we have voted at Edison School and then we voted in Sunset Garden in the basement of the church and just everywhere.

JONES: Did you have a problem in getting transportation to go and vote?

MRS. SEALS: No. We always furnished our own transportation.

SEALS:

JONES: So at that time they didn't have anyone coming around to get you to go and vote? You did it on your own?

MRS. SEALS: I imagine they did but we never had to use their accomodations.

JONES: Now, did they have any female leaders in this community? Any black female leaders who would talk about politics or talk about women's sufferage after the amendment was signed? Did you have anybody really outgoing?

MRS. SEALS: Not that I can remember. I tell you, I didn't work toomuch with the social part because of the church. Now the Bigby's, they have always been involved. More or less even in the Black Women's Groups, one lady whose name is Mrs. Wallace was involved. I worked for the school on the PTA's.

JONES: Did the Fresno Bee do any particular write up on anyone in this community? They had the Republican and then the Bee. The Bee bought them out in 1932 or around that time. Did they do any write up on any significant person here?

MRS. SEALS: Now, I wouldn't know because I wasn't here then?

JONES: Would you know ~~that~~ Elder Seals, how receptive was the Bee, as far as the black community was concerned here?

SEALS: It wasn't so. There was another one, there were two papers then. The Republican came in the morning and the Bee. The Bee boutht out the Republican or bought out their printing rights or something. After that, we got the next days news because we no longer had two papers. Things are about the same way today, all of the news that goes on today we do not get it until tomorrow.

SEALS:

JONES: Did they have any black newspaper men?

SEALS: No, they did not have any that I know of here.

MRS. SEALS: Later on they did.

SEALS: Are you talking about when I came here?

JONES: You can elaborate. Maybe they didn't have any when you came here and later on in years they did.

MRS. SEALS: The Pittsburgh Courrier. You sold that remember, you sold that here. What year were you selling the Pittsburgh Courrier? It would have to be already here for you to be able to sell it and that was long before I came here. Elder Seals, when was it that the black newspaper first started here in Fresno?

SEALS: It must have been in the early 30's when I had the courrier. Yes it was the 30's and the reason I quit was because they wouldn't give me the whole job. We didn't have that many subscribers and they would give me hardly any work and I did the subscribing. This one would have ten and this one twenty and maybe one would have forty and then I would have to ask them for work. I quit!

JONES: Did the paper last long?

SEALS: Oh no, not long after I quit. All we did when I was there was to have the people put the news of Fresno in the Courrier same as any. After I quit they lost a mess of folks.

JONES: What would you say your equivalence in education was then? You said you would go to school about five or six weeks and then to work for six or seven months. About what grade did you complete?

SEALS:

SEALS: I completed about the fifth grade.

JONES: When you came to Fresno, that was really something wasn't it? You could speak Spanish, wasn't it unique for yoyou or didn't it seem unique to the people here that you would be able to do these things here in Fresno?

SEALS: Well no, (laughing) I will tell you why. I didn't use my Spanish at first unless I was out on the rode and a Mexican was all I had to talk to. Everything was so different. I later found out if I could speak Spanish I could buy me something to eat and always something to wear. I was almost forced to do that and I did! I could even count my money in Spanish and knew how much change I was suppose to receive and most folks couldn't do that. Those things worked in my favor because everyone else was looking at you and no one understood what they were talking about but I did. (smile)

JONES: After you and your wife have been here withstanding a lot of stress and making it. With the years gone by progress has been made. Everything has changed so much. What was your opinion then of the Civil Rights Movement of the 60's when Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. led the Civil Rights Movement?

SEALS: My opinion, I was with Dr. Martin Luther King one hundred percent. He helped so many in such a short time. I prayed for him and his leadership and the success of the movement.

JONES: Elder Seals, what type of a repoir would you say that

SEALS:

you had with the people of this community? At one time when you came here, everyone knew everyone else. You said it was very small at that time. Did you still maintain that type of repoir with this community?

SEALS: I had to reposition my role with the community. The rode was to wide and the community grew toofast.

JONES: Do you remember if your family, your mother, your father, do you remember any stories that were handed down to you from them? Something that maybe you related in the church to the congregation, something that was joyous or something that was sad that your family told you about when you were a young child?

MRS. SEALS: How about, you mean like slavery?

JONES: Yes.

SEALS: I can only remember what my dad told my when I was coming up and I hated it so bad I always hated to talk about it. What he said was very, very bad. It bought so much hatred in me, I wish he hadn't told me. It remained in me foryyears and I had to ask the lord to take the hatred out of me. I could be on a job with the white man and the hate was in me so deep I couldn't take nothing from him. So that's about it. No more!

MRS. SEALS: Elder Seals, she wants to know what it was that he told you, so go on and tell her.

SEALS: Oh Lord, he told me how much and how bad he would hear the whippings going on before day, this is what she wants to hear; that whip was falling and men would be hollering Do Master.

SEALS:

That's what they called them. The limit for the licks were five hundred and when they whipped you, you had to holler Do Master! Sometimes they would whip them for nothing. All the Master wanted to do was to get him out in the field so he could crawl in bed with one of the gals. Oh, it was awful. He knew that's what he was beating him for too. My father told me how many pairs of shoes they would buy. When the shoes would wear out during the winter they had to go without. Regardless of the weather they had to go barefoot. Through the snow and harsh weather it caused the bottom of your feet to become so tough and calloused it was like a leather shoe. My grandfather stepped on a snake and the snake bite couldn't get to the quick. His foot was just that thick and calloused. That's the way it was. It really was! Later on I saw things with my own eyes that you wouldn't believe in the South. I saw two men burned, they burned them up, they let the ashes stay until we got to town so we could see it. The fire would be so hot, _____ iron would start to bead and bend over. Now that is what I saw and not what my daddy told me. Then you would have to stay indoors two or three days before they would let you leave again. They wouldn't hardly let you stick your head out of the door. I had been wanting to leave there since I was twelve. Finally, I got a chance to pull out. What they done is still in me.

SEALS:

JONES: Do you remember any songs that was handed down from your family?

SEALS: Yes. One of them was Going Across to Jordon in the Morning. It goes like this, One of these mornings sooner or later, I am going to hitch up my reins and _____ there because I am bound across the Jordon early in the morning. There are a lot of songs they are singing now that they were singing when I come along. I was the Voice of Jesus is one, also, Come under me and rest. Lie down thy weary one, lie down. Lie thy head upon my breast. You Better Get Your Ticket. You better get your ticket because the train is coming and you better get your ticket. That's when I was a boy.

JONES: Do you remember any old sayings, they were like superstitions?

SEALS: Good luck saying and bad luck sayings. We had both here. One was, Don't cross the broom. Don't cross that broom!!

JONES: Why, because you would get married if you did? (laughing)

SEALS: No! They would put you in jail if you did. Another one, A dog howling all night or day for nothing. That goes now. That's the truth now and it still goes on today. That's bad luck shore enough. If your left eye starts jumping, it's a sign of good luck but if your right eye jumps it is bad luck.

SEALS:

JONES: Elder Seals, I see you have a piano here,do you play?

SEALS: No, but my wife does.

JONES: Mrs. Seals, where did you learn to play the piano?

MRS. SEALS: I learned to play at the Technical High School. I went there to learn to play the piano, that's where I took my classes. You know it as City College.

JONES: On behalf of the Historical Society , I would like to take this time to thank you for allowing me to come into your home to tape this interview. Thank you very much.

SEALS:

"BY MY SIGNATURE, I MAKE THIS TRANSCRIPT AVAILABE TO RESEARCHERS IN THE FRESNO CITY AND COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY ARCHIVES."

Mrs. Velma Seals — 3-30-78
MRS. THELMA SEALS, NARRATOR — (DATE)

Elder James Seals — March 29, 1978
ELDER JAMES SEALS, NARRATOR — (DATE)

Vivian J. Jones — March 30, 1978
VIVIAN J. JONES, INTERVIEWER — (DATE)