

Charles Page

“Daddy Page” generously sheltered and cared for society’s most vulnerable members— orphan children.

Chapter 01 - 1:22

Introduction

Announcer: Charles Page was an important figure in the early history of Oklahoma and Tulsa. His most lasting act was the creation of the Sand Springs Home for orphans and widows. Along with his dream he founded the city of Sand Springs in support of the home.

Charles Page came to Tulsa during the oil boom at the turn of the century. After many oil well failures he was finally successful in 1905, when a discovery began producing 2,000 barrels per day, resulting in his first million dollars. Another of his wells hit natural gas in the Glenn Pool field.

Charles had never forgotten how his mother struggled in poverty to provide for her family after her husband died. Thus he developed a dream of creating a planned community where widows and orphans could live and become more productive members of society.

He rescued twenty-one orphans from a defunct children’s home in Tulsa, which led to the opening of the Sand Springs Children’s Home.

Charles Page died of influenza on December 27, 1926, but he is still remembered in his community. The main thoroughfare of Sand Springs is named “Charles Page Boulevard,” and it connects Sand Springs to Tulsa, where it becomes West 3rd Street.

Opal Moss knew Charles Page well and at 103 years old she is our storyteller, for she was one of his children. And now you can hear the Charles Page story on VoicesofOklahoma.com.

Chapter 02 - 5:32

Young Charles Page

John Erling: Opal, give me your full name, please.

Opal Moss: My name is Opal May Clark Moss.

JE: And what is your birth date, please?

OM: I was born May 20, 1912.

JE: And your age today is?

OM: A hundred and three.

JE: We are recording this interview where you live at the Broadmoor Retirement Community. And we should also point out that you were part of our one hundredth interview, along with Vida Culvern, who is 102. You're both centenarians, which brings in Richard Zigler.

So, Richard, tell us about your role with what we call "Needs of the Centenarians."

Richard Zigler: I am founder and the executive director of the Northeast Active Timers that has celebrated twenty years. And our main focus is giving the Adopt a Centenarian program and inducting one hundred-year-olds into the Centenarian Club of Oklahoma.

JE: And you've worked a lot with Vida, Opal, and many others?

RZ: Yes and had the privilege of three years with Opal. She came in on her hundredth birthday, which was the same as the birthday of Sand Springs.

JE: Opal, the reason you are with us as we tell the Charles Page story is that you lived in the Charles Page home. And you also wrote a book about Charles Page, *A Fool's Enterprise: The Life of Charles Page*. We can talk a little bit about Charles Page.

He was born in Wisconsin, and can you tell us a little bit about his life? He dropped out of school early on. Tell us what you know about Charles Page.

OM: He was born in Arnott, a suburb of Stevens Point, Wisconsin. I believe he was the next to the youngest of eight children born to Maryanne. But he was the tallest of the boys, and he considered himself the one who should make a living when his father fell ill with cancer. When he took over the job of trying to make the living for the family, he drove this freight wagon to the boat to gather the goods from other places and take it to the stores in the Stevens Point, Wisconsin, town.

JE: And he was pretty young, I think he was like eleven years old when his father died.

OM: He was eleven years old but he was a big boy. His father's people were large men and he was a large man like his family. That was why he appointed himself to be the one to make the living for the family.

JE: Right, and so then at that very early age he took care of his mother and the four younger siblings.

OM: Yes.

JE: So he took a leadership role at eleven years old.

OM: Yes. At first he didn't earn much more money than selling rabbits. He would set his traps at night, catch rabbits, and then dress them by early morning. He had a dogsled that he had bargained with a student at the country schoolhouse that he rode to town on. His dog pulled it, dogsled, and he sold these rabbits. And he thought he was quite a merchant.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

OM: He felt big about this, about the dogsled. He came home from school with this dogsled that he had to take his rabbits to the town. His mother said, "Where did you get the dogsled?"

And he said, "Well, I had a willow whistle that was very good and I traded it for the dogsled."

She wasn't so sure she liked to hear that. It sounded like he had cheated somebody. She says, "Tell me now, why would you do a thing like this? You're not telling."

He said, "Well, the dogsled needs a lot of work done on it." But he said, "I didn't exactly get the sled with my willow whistle. But I traded it for a dog. I thought the dog would make a better trade. So then I traded the dog for the dogsled."

Well, she shook her head, she wasn't sure that was honest but she guessed maybe it was okay.

So he was like that. He was thinking way ahead. And he was the most industrial of all the Hades children.

JE: Then he helped his mother cook?

OM: Yes, when his father died she took in boarders. Their residence was near the railroad and they had taken in some boarders into their home and cooked the meals for them. He believed being helpful meant if you had to cook that was part of the job you had. So he helped his mother cook the meals for the railroad workers.

JE: Hmm (thoughtful sound).

OM: He made the biscuits.

JE: He also worked as a lumberjack?

OM: Yes he worked as a lumberjack. And he began to work on the railroad. And he kept advancing. He got quite good at it. And then he got a job working in a store.

JE: And he was also a policeman?

OM: Yes he was a policeman.

JE: Became chief of police in Minnesota.

OM: Yes. He grew to be a big, tall man of sturdy build like his father's people. And he stood six foot three.

Chapter 03 - 4:45

Town Builder

John Erling: And then he married his first wife, Lucy, in Duluth, Minnesota.

Opal Moss: Yes and Lucy was a frail woman. She had a little son. She had let her husband have the son that she had borne. And when he married her he said, "Now get your son, he belongs with his mother." So she got her son back from his father. He lived with them then the rest of his life until he was married and had a home of his own.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative). And then they moved various places, Tacoma, Washington, he lived there. Tried as a hotel owner and a commodities trader.

OM: Yes. He was broke and all he had was a dollar in his pocket. And in Colorado, he happened to be there and he heard there was going to be an auction to auction off a hotel.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

OM: He didn't have any money, all he had was a dollar, but he wanted to see how they did everything. He wanted to learn everything. So he went to the auction and nobody showed up. So he said, "I've got one dollar," and they had to let him have it.

And so he had the hotel for quite a while and his wife became ill. Business was bad and he had to sell it.

JE: In 1900, he moved to Colorado Springs, Colorado, where he got into real estates, oil well drilling, investing in power plants.

OM: They were looking for gold and he went to the fields. There were so many people that were digging for gold there in Colorado. And he remembered when he was five years old, when he built a little town, he called it his town and he had houses made in dirt. He called his lumps of dirt houses, and he had a city with roads. He was so proud of it he called his father to see his town.

Some boys came by and he told them he had built a town and they just laughed and took their sticks that they were carrying and wiped it out. He cried and he said, "Some day I'll build a town that you can't tear down." And he never forgot it, he intended to do just that.

He started his town in White City, Colorado. He named it White City. I don't know if it's still there or not. But he started out by building small houses. And he had a friend that helped him. While the others were out digging for gold, he was building on a little town.

JE: Hmm (thoughtful sound).

OM: And then he went on from there to do other things.

JE: He moved to Oklahoma City in 1901, and they lived there until 1903. He came to Tulsa because it was a boom town and he began an independent drilling operation.

OM: Yes, but he wasn't doing any good. But he was still helping people that needed money and he wasn't doing very well. And Guthrie, he finally struck oil, after much work at it. He bought a piece of land.

JE: Okay, let's just point out that in 1905, his well began producing 2,000 barrels per day and it helped him make his first million dollars in 1905. And then another of his wells hit

natural gas in the Glenn Pool field. But then he had never forgotten how his mother had struggled in poverty to keep her family together. And as Lucy died of cancer in 1906, there were very few resources in the 19th and early 20th century that would help either widows or orphans. Then he always remembered firsthand how fatherless children had to forgo school education and all that. So that's where we're picking up on.

OM: Well, he had already been helping people. He helped a widow who was going to go to her relatives that lived in Tulsa. But she said, "I need to have a new dress." And he gave her money to buy a new dress and the fare to go to her mother when she needed help.

He did little things like that.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

OM: That they laughed at him and they called him a fool for giving his money away. He was still a poor man, he hadn't made it rich in oil and had worked fervently trying to get rich because he wanted to realize that city that he intended. He didn't give up on it. And so he finally made a good well.

JE: Yes.

Chapter 04 - 2:54

Sand Springs

John Erling: And then in 1908, that's when he purchased land west of Tulsa.

Opal Moss: Some of the Indians came to him because they had more land than they needed. And what they wanted was money. A lot of the Indians heard that he was wanting to buy land, and so they came to him and they were around in the area that later became the city of Sand Springs.

He bought the land and he wanted people, because people, you know, make the city, and the city brings the people. So he brought them together by offering a dollar to anybody who come and buy land from him.

So people began to come. When he got a sizeable amount of building done, they say, "Well, now you've got a town, what are you going to name it? Pageville? Page City?"

He said, "No." He put his name on anything that belonged to God. He thought everything belonged to God and you shouldn't put your name on anything. And he never did.

JE: Hmm (thoughtful sound).

OM: On all of the things that he did for charity and for himself and everything, he wouldn't say they were his. Because he said, "I'm just a steward of his finances." He thought that if he claimed anything that really belonged to God that it would displease the Big Fellow

up there. And he said, "I can't afford to make him mad at me because I've fifty-one little children that I'm trying to take care of."

JE: Well—

OM: At that time he had fifty-one of us, and I was one of them.

JE: He wouldn't put his name on it while he was alive, but after he died, it became known then as the Charles Page Home.

OM: It was called that anyway, whether he made it that or not. People talking about it would say, "The Home," and then also, "The Charles Page Home."

JE: He was very generous with various charities in Tulsa, including the Salvation Army.

OM: Yes.

JE: He formed the Friendship with somebody from the Salvation Army.

OM: Mr. Breeding came around getting collection from him. He liked Mr. Breeding. He seemed like an honest man who was trying to help people who were down and out, as they called it. So he gave him some money, he didn't have much but he gave what he could.

Mr. Breeding liked him, he said, "He's a good man." And they became fast friends.

And he became the financial end of the Salvation Army and Mr. Breeding was the other.

JE: We should mention that July 22, 1909, Charles married his second wife, Lucille. They also adopted a baby girl named Maryanne in 1912.

OM: Who was really one of the illegitimate children of a young girl that was related to them.

Chapter 05 - 2:50

Sand Springs Home

John Erling: In May of 1909, Charles Page rescued twenty-one orphans from an orphanage in Tulsa.

Opal Moss: They were a collection of children that people had brought to them. Some of them had mothers that felt like they couldn't take care of their children and work and leave them there in their home alone. And they were too young to go to school.

Some man in the town started a little orphanage and he had twenty-one children in a house that was close to Swan Lake. The lake was not called Swan Lake then, it was Alcott or something like that. But the home was near there.

When Mr. Page heard that they were in trouble and that they were going to turn the children out on the town, he went to see what he could do to help. And when he went there he fell in love with these little children. And he had one of them in her arms. He had swung her around and the other children were hanging on to him, "Swing me, swing me!"

He talked to the children and he found out that there were a lot of them sisters and brothers and that they were going to be separated and be adopted. And he said, "I just have to take them all." He told the man, "If there was a one child and had no brothers or sisters then it needs to be adopted. It will be better off with an adopted mother and father than to be in a home." He didn't call it an orphanage. And he said, "But I'll take the rest of them."

When his friends heard about it, he said, "Well, Cap Breeding tried to get you all to help with those children so they wouldn't be just thrown away, and none of you wanted to be bothered with kids. You were in the oil business, you said. And you didn't want to be bothered with kids. So he had to come to me."

They said, "Well, what are you going to do? Had you thought about the cost of feeding twenty-one orphans?" He had already taken five children, and their father and their mother, who was dying with cancer, and he took all of them out to his one piece of land that he had bought, which was the first piece that would be Sand Springs. He had already taken them out there because the mother was in bad with cancer.

JE: So this then is the way the children's home really got started?

OM: Yes.

Chapter 06 - 7:31

Visit with Charles Page

John Erling: Let us talk now about you and why it is you came to the Charles Page home.

Opal Moss: I was born in a little town called Benefield Town. My grandfather owned a lot of land. And my father married my mother when they were both sixteen years old.

JE: Your mother's name?

OM: Daisy Saunders, she married Joseph Benefield. They bought a little land and it was called Benefield Town because my grandfather owned so much land. My father was killed in an accident on his horse.

JE: And then your mother became ill.

OM: Well, my mother had all of these children.

JE: And how many children did—

OM: She had five children. She tried doing people's washing but country people do their own washing. There was no way she could make a living. Five children was too much for her.

She had a woman stop at her house and ask if she could get a drink from the hydrant that she had in the backyard. They said they were going toward the town called Sand

Springs because their mother and father had died in the flu epidemic. She had two younger brothers and she was surrounded by fourteen or fifteen. And she heard that there was a man who was taking care of children that had nowhere to go. She told Mother all about it.

Well, my mother was struggling with five children and she was trying to do a little crocheting. They used to wear yokes in their dresses and she could crochet. And all the money that she could make was doing washings. And I can still remember the washtubs along the side of the house on benches.

I can remember the house, it was a shotgun house, as they called it.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

OM: About three rooms in a row and you could see the back and they called them shotgun houses.

JE: Right.

OM: If you could see from the front door to the back door. My mother got sick though because she was doing the washing when it was too cold for her to be out. And she took pneumonia.

Neighbors came to help and they were going to take the children because the doctor said she wasn't going to make it. She was run down and he said, "She's not going to make it."

We had the baby and me, I was three, and the baby was just new, pretty young. My sister Gertrude was the oldest and then my brother Haskill. And they were very good to help Mama because they had to, she had to have help. And they were good and helped.

One of the ladies said, "I'll take Haskill because my father could use him in the fields."

And one of the women says, "I'll take Gertrude because she'll be good to take care of my young 'uns while I'm ironing and she can help me with the canning and things like that."

And somebody would take Beulah because they didn't have any children. But nobody spoke for me because at the time I had yellow jaundice. I was frail, I was ugly, of course. Nobody wanted me because I looked like a doctor bill. I was yellow with the yellow jaundice.

My mother had gotten ill but she could hear what was going on. It broke her heart that they were going to separate her children. So she prayed that she could live to get them to this place that she had heard about that Charles Page had. And God granted it. She did get better enough that she got one of her sister's daughter-in-laws to go with her to take the baby, which was Lois, younger than me. They left us with her sister and they got on the train.

But she wasn't well, she just was well enough that she could do it before she died then they were separated. She was going to do it, she was going to make it there.

When they finally got on the train, well, she was too sick and she passed out. The conductor stopped at the next stop and called the Salvation Army and said, "There's a woman here with a baby. She has passed out. Come and get her."

And the Salvation Army man carried her off of the train. They took her with her baby and her niece to their home and kept her for three days until she was able to get back on the train. And then she went to see Mr. Page.

She went to his office. The niece told me what it looked like. The niece said it was just kitchen chairs around in his office. And he had a light bulb hanging from the ceiling. He had a big desk, and at his side lay his dog, Jim. Every time anybody came in, Jim raised, he was ready if anybody got funny with his master.

She said there was nine chairs in a row and that there were people needing help. Nine chairs already filled with people needing help. And they pulled in another two chairs for them.

He started with number one and went around the ring and asked them their name and what did they want.

They told him what they needed. And when he came to them—

JE: To your mother?

OM: Yes. Then she told him her plight. She didn't know what to do. That she had heard that he was helping widows with children.

They didn't say a thing to any of them. They just went to nine chairs and then he came back. He remembered everyone's wishes and went through and helped them.

JE: Hmm (thoughtful sound). All nine of them.

OM: Helped everyone of them with their problem, whatever it was. Then when he came to her, he said, "Little mother, you had courage enough to ask God to help you. So I'm going to help you too." He said, "You came all this way and I'm going to help you. I have a colony for widows and their children." They didn't call them orphans. They didn't like that name. He said, "I have a row of houses. I'll get Cap Breeding to find you a place in the colony so that you can have your children cared for and get you a job and be self-supporting."

He didn't want to give them a handout. He said, "That robs you of your self-esteem." He wanted them to have a job, if he had to help them to get it. And he explained to her that you have to make your own living. And that he'd have a nursery where you could leave your children. "But I want you to have self-pride, so I want you to work to earn part of your keep."

Chapter 07 - 5:43

Daddy Page

John Erling: When you first came to the home, tell us your first impression.

Opal Moss: When my mother went to see him, she was sick, and so she was still sick. And we were left with a woman in the colony until they could make room for us in the home.

When they had room for us, I remember Mr. Breeding came with a buggy and took us up to the home. He let us out in the back of the building of the first home that they had built. The children's home was not very big then. It had been built to house thirty-five people and it had more.

And I remember the big stairs, oh, the front, it was beautiful. I just thought that was a castle when I saw it. It was a beautiful place. The white tablecloths and the vases of flowers in the center of the table. And there was a little, bitty, long, low table that just fit me. They had little chairs.

Mr. Calloway, who was making the furniture for the home made the wooden lounges and the wooden chairs. And he had made a little, low table for little folks.

JE: Nineteen fifteen then, is really when you went to the home. You were three years old.

OM: Yes.

JE: Charles Page would refer to the orphans as his kids?

OM: Yeah, we called him Daddy Page.

JE: Tell us about Charles Page, what you remember about him, seeing him. And when you first met him.

OM: When I first met him. Okay, I remember that it was Sunday and the kids began to run. I heard them saying, "Daddy Page, Daddy Page, Daddy Page!" I didn't know what they were doing but I knew something was happening and I ran after them. My sister Beulah did too. We were running after them, I don't know where Gertrude was, she was with the older group. So I ran with the crowd.

And I saw this big man sitting in a wicker chair on the front porch. He reached out to me as I came because I was the youngest child there and I had just come. He reached out to me like this, he took me up on his knee, and he talked to me. He began to jump his knee like that and jumped me up.

And I giggled. I was fascinated with his watch that he had under his coat. All I saw was the gold watch. As he jiggled me on his knee, it moved and the sun glistened on it and I was so fascinated.

When he looked over at Beulah, she had her arms around his neck and hanging on. And my sister Gertrude was standing there. When he looked at Beulah, and I didn't know he was seeing what I was doing, but I had to reach out and touch that sparkly thing. He saw me and he pulled the watch out of his pocket and he put it to my ear. And he said, "Can you hear that noise?"

And I said, "Um-hmm (affirmative)."

And he said, "That's a June bug in there."

And I looked troubled. And I said, "Can't it get out?"

He saw that I was concerned about the little June bug, and he said, "Oh, it's not a

June bug.”

And Beulah said, “It’s a clock.” She had never seen a watch but she said, “It’s a clock.”

Then I was interested in it and he showed me and he said, “No, it’s a clock. There’s no little bug captured in there.” And I was satisfied. Then he put me on his foot. I straddled his foot and he held my two hands and he rocked me back and forth. And he talked to me and he sang. And this is what he sang to me, “Oh Opal’s the girl that I’d have you to know, she’s well educated and high tonal. She bakes a cake, but she makes no mistake, for there’s no other girl like Opal.”

Anytime he sang a song it was the same one.

JE: But that had to make you feel so good.

OM: Oh yes, we loved him so much. And he came every Sunday night. He told Mr. Breeding, “The gift without the giver is nothing, so I have to be there. I want them to know that somebody loves them.”

Mr. Breeding, at first, he was very severe, he was strict, you know, at the start of the orphanage. He whipped the boys with a peach limb because they stole the horses at night and went riding. They were teenagers and they’d run around the Indian village, you know, and they had the work horses.

Mr. Page called his attention one day and he said, “Cap, I hate to say anything to anyone when I give them a trust. I trust them to do what is right. I hate to say anything to them, but you’re too hard on these children.”

Mr. Breeding was a preacher, see. He said, “You don’t need to make preachers out of these children, just let them grow up normal boys and girls.”

Chapter 08 - 4:27

Christmas

John Erling: How long did you live at the Charles Page Home?

Opal Moss: Till I was fourteen.

JE: Fourteen years old.

OM: Um-hmm (affirmative).

JE: And that was a wonderful experience for you. Any stories that you might have?

OM: Oh it was wonderful. I didn’t know anything else.

JE: Well, what was Christmas like at the Charles Page Home?

OM: The first Christmas I remember, it was wonderful. We were in the building that he had finally built. It was beautiful. And the boys and girls were hanging out mistletoe in the

living room. The girls were giggling and the boys were sneaking over and kissing them, because they were hanging mistletoe.

But the matron, if any of them came near her, they would get busy hanging wreaths and all of the decorations. Oh it was really decorated, all along the walls, and then the big living room, hanging down. I don't know how they did it all, it was so beautiful. There was a lot of hustle and bustle and we got to write a letter to Santa Claus. And we could ask for two items.

Christmas evening Mr. Page came. That night they had a program especially for Daddy Page, so that he could see all his children. We had learned little pieces of songs to sing for the program. They had me to sing a little song and I still remember it.

JE: What was it?

OM: I had a little basket, "Apples for a penny, here's your fine strawberries, peaches, plums, and cherries. You may taste before you buy. I have a poor sick mother and a little baby brother and I am just a bother unless I help them some. So I'm selling prudent flowers and I sometimes stand for hours in sunshine and in showers, but I'll guess I'll now go home." And then I'd bow and go.

JE: You remember singing that song one hundred years ago.

OM: Sure.

JE: That is pretty remarkable.

OM: And I remember some of the pieces that the others sang. I knew them all.

JE: About your mother then, is she coming to visit you?

OM: Oh yes, she came to see us. She had kept the baby because it was nursing.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

OM: And my little sister Lois never did go to the home.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

OM: Then later my mother got married and she went to Daddy Page to get her children. I think Mr. Page was very wise. He evidently looked at the expression of my stepfather, because he advised to wait. She wanted to take us because she was married and she could afford to keep us now. She didn't have any babies by him yet, she did later.

But Mr. Page talked her out of taking us. He said, "Why don't you wait a while and see how things work out with a stepfather?" Because he said, "I've had to make rules because I'm thinking of the child. And I don't want a child to be put in the home and taken out and then put back in. Because I had that happen, and this woman did it twice. She came with a man and said she wanted to take her children out again because she was married. And she introduced the man as their father.

"Well, she wasn't there about three weeks and she brought them back." So Mr. Page said, "Well, things sometimes are like that and they don't work and it's okay." So he took them back.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

OM: But when she came the second time with another man and introduced him as their new father, Mr. Page put his foot down. And he said, “Nobody’s going to leave this home. They have to really be married long enough to know that it’s going to work out. Because I’m not having my kids jerked around from one to the other.”

JE: Okay, so then your mother, how long did that marriage last?

OM: Oh, well, she was married for the rest of her life.

Chapter 09 - 1:34

Daddy Page Funeral

John Erling: Daddy Page died of influenza on December 27, 1926. Did you attend the funeral of Charles Page?

Opal Moss: Yes.

JE: Can you tell us a little bit about the funeral? Were there a lot of people there?

OM: The home was built upon the hill and they all around, it seemed to me it was a block long, all around the green grass where we played.

JE: And is that where the funeral was?

OM: No but that’s where I was.

JE: Yeah.

OM: We couldn’t get in. The people had come from near and far and I couldn’t even get to the door. I was so squeezed I had to put my hands here so I could breathe.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

OM: Because they were so tight-squeezed—

JE: Yeah.

OM: ...from all the towns all around. And the bells rang and the horns blew. The first page of my book, I couldn’t tell you how much of a disturbance it was when he died. People came from all around and the motorcycles directing factories—you know there were a lot of factories in Sand Springs—and every horn and bell that was around was making noise. It just gives you cold chills.

The funeral was at two in the home. It was six o’clock by the end of the pa—

JE: Session.

OM: It was six o’clock before the last car went by.

JE: You were very, very sad.

OM: I was—

JE: You were fourteen years old when he died.

Chapter 10 - 3:06**Tulsa Race Riot**

John Erling: During the race riot in 1921, Charles Page tried to protect some of the people.

Opal Moss: Yes.

JE: And what did he do?

OM: He told Cap, "I feel so sorry for those people. People have come in, they have torn down some of their homes, they've burned their homes." And he said, "They're holed up at the Mohawk Park." The blacks had built beautiful homes and churches and schools and things, you know, and they were on fire.

JE: In Greenwood.

OM: And he says, "Go to them. They won't find anything to eat out there in the Mohawk Park." And he says, "I've got fifty-one little mouths to feed and I can't afford to get any retaliation from helping them." But he said, "Those poor people need help. There's nobody unless we help." He got money and he said, "They won't bother you because you're Salvation Army. I want you to go out and take care of those people. See that they get fed." And he gave them a place where they could go to get safety that was on his own land. It became a little colony there and it's still there.

JE: Hmm (thoughtful sound). He was nervous because of the Jim Crow law.

OM: You could hire a black person to work for you, but you don't marry them, and you don't fraternize with them. When they came to get on the streetcar, he let them ride his streetcar back and forth, people complained when they saw black people moving into the Sand Springs area that he was building into a city. And they said, "Why are you letting the black people come in here?"

He had sold them a piece of land to build a house on for one dollar. To get people, you have to have people to have a town.

JE: And he didn't care if they were black or white.

OM: No he didn't care, but they did, and so he had a certain place for them that they had to be. But they were needing a place to go.

JE: Right.

OM: He let them have a colony of their own people down on the south end of the town. And he built some of the homes to get them started. They didn't have anything. He was already building homes there.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

OM: He thought that if a man had a 25 by 130 piece of land he could get a house on it.

JE: He also ran a streetcar from Sand Springs to Greenwood district so they could go back and forth.

OM: Yes.

JE: And he wanted the people in Greenwood to know that they're welcome.

OM: And the white people complained because they didn't want to have them mixed. And he said, "Well, you can hire them to help you do your laundry and things. You can give them a job. They will do a task for you."

And they finally, "Well, yeah." They thought they could get them cheap because that's the way things were then.

JE: Yeah.

Chapter 11 - 2:15

A Fool's Enterprise

John Erling: Your book, *A Fool's Enterprise: The Life of Charles Page*, how long did it take you to write that book?

Opal Moss: I don't know. I was doing other things.

JE: But you were going to school.

OM: I was in school.

JE: At Tulsa Community College.

OM: Tulsa Community College.

JE: And that's when you started writing this book.

OM: That's why I went. I wanted to write the book. He took no glory for what he did. I was a recipient of his good graces.

JE: Yeah.

OM: And I wanted to thank him for all he did for me and mine.

JE: Yeah.

OM: My sisters and brothers. I thought somebody ought to tell what he has done.

JE: Yeah.

OM: And so I said, "I'll go to school because it has to be professional."

JE: So you knew you wanted to write the book but you wanted to be doing it in the right way and you went to school. How old were you then when you went to Tulsa Community College to start this book?

OM: Eighty. I was eighty years old.

JE: So eighty years old you start to learn how to write a book.

OM: Yes. But I had been writing poetry—

JE: Right.

OM: ...and all that stuff all of my life. I made rhymes to make the kids laugh when I was in the home. I would say, “Lance, Lance, he tore his pants.” Just stuff like that. It just was given to me.

JE: So you were a writer anyway, but you wanted to learn how to write the book.

OM: Right, I wanted to write it professionally.

JE: Right.

OM: And I wanted the very best paper you could buy. I said, “He deserves the best.” And I couldn’t afford it but I did.

JE: You couldn’t afford what?

OM: I really couldn’t afford to pay for very many books. But I was determined that he was going to get the best paper that I could find. He deserved the best.

JE: Yes. And I see it’s manufactured in Oklahoma for the Dexter Publishing Company.

OM: That is me.

JE: You paid for the publishing of this book.

OM: Yes.

JE: And now it is on Amazon and you can buy it on Amazon. So I don’t know if you’re getting credit for that or not, but they’re selling it on the Internet.

OM: Yes I get paid.

JE: Good, I’m so happy to hear that.

OM: I have two grandchildren that are writers.

Chapter 12 - 1:59

Thirty-five Years Old

John Erling: Let me just say, I have interviewed about 170 Oklahomans now. And I’ve never been as impressed by anybody as I am by you. Here you are sitting at 103, and you could go on for another couple of hours talking like this and you don’t seem to be tired. And you did a wonderful job.

Opal Moss: Well, thank—

JE: So thank you for telling the story. And this mind of yours and your health. I think you told me you don’t take any medication. What a miracle this is and God has blessed you in so many, many ways.

OM: Well, I'll tell you what the doctor said. The last time I went to the doctor about four weeks ago. She says, "You've got the health of a thirty-five-year-old woman." She said, "A thirty-five-year-old woman would love to have your health."

I don't have anything wrong with me but my ears and my eyes. And my tongue.

JE: You are remarkable. Thank you, Opal. Thank you so much.

Richard Zigler: Oh that's great.

JE: This is wonderful to talk to you.

OM: I used to pray, when I drove my car out of the garage, I prayed, "Lord, don't let me have an accident or hurt anybody." And when I was in church I had a sharp tongue. I'm plain spoken.

JE: Yeah.

OM: And I tell it like it is when I shouldn't. I should gloss it over, you know. My husband said, "Well, you tell it like it is."

And I said, "I'm so ashamed. I need my tongue cut out."

JE: Well—

OM: But anyway, I was too much that way. And I prayed about it, I said, "Lord, don't let me hurt people." I love people, I don't want to hurt them.

RZ: We love you too.

JE: And we love you, so thank you, Opal. Well, you helped us understand the mind of Charles Page and what a great man he was.

OM: He really was.

JE: And I'm so glad that you at 103 years old can remember all of this from 100 years ago.

OM: Thank you. I guess wanted me to.

JE: Thank you.

Chapter 13 - 0:33

Conclusion

Announcer: This oral history presentation is made possible through the support of our generous foundation-funders. We encourage you to join them by making your donation, which will allow us to record future stories. Students, teachers, and librarians are using this website for research and the general public is listening every day to these great Oklahomans share their life experience. Thank you for your support as we preserve Oklahoma's legacy one voice at a time, on VoicesofOklahoma.com.