

Bridge Street on Saturdays

Excerpts from [*Oral Memoirs of Carrie Skipwith Mayfield*](#)
(click on title for the full text of the interview transcript)

Carrie Skipwith Mayfield worked in offices on Bridge Street in the 1920s, including the Farmer's Improvement Society Bank.

Interviewed by Vivienne Malone-Mayes on December 22, 1989, in Waco, Texas.

Mayfield: Well, on Saturday that was a busy day. Everybody from everywhere was on the square on Saturday. Everything buying and selling and visiting. And the different businesses—they had different cafes. Mr. Ashford—J. C.—they had two [Bridge Street Café]—

Malone-Mayes: That's right.

Mayfield: They had two Ashfords. There was Brightly(??) Ashford and then there was Dog(??) Ashford on Eighth Street—B. G.

Malone-Mayes: Yeah, B. G.

Mayfield: B. G. had the cafe, and then the bank, and then the next building—of course, there was space in there, but some of it—wasn't very much—in between that and our building. There was a Gayety Theater down there, two story. They rented rooms to people, and it was—had a theater downstairs, and they rented rooms to people upstairs.

Malone-Mayes: Kind of a hotel upstairs.

Mayfield: Hotel like. Um-hm, hotel like. And right off from that was—I don't know what was there beforehand, but Atlanta Life had their office right after that, almost over the Excelsior Insurance Company. Atlanta Life, they had theirs right up over there. Bessie Harmon and this other child Isetta was working there. That's all they had. They didn't have but just the two of them. And then under him was our—at least down there where the bank was. Well, when the bank was there, and I was working in the bank, right back kind of opposite like was a paper company, Smith Printing. Smith Printing was back there.

And peoples was down Saturday. All those places on Saturday, everybody went to all those different places to get their business attended to and what they wanted done and all. And you see everybody, across the street over here, was businesses and bars and undertakers. And the Gayety Theater—

Malone-Mayes: Was on the side with you.

Mayfield: Yeah. And the—on the corner of Second was the little Frenchman's fish place, where you could get lunches, fish lunches. On the corner right there by that—then coming

on down, next was the undertaking parlor. Then the next was—they had some offices there where the lodge would meet upstairs. Downstairs—I can't remember just what the downstairs from that was—oh, yeah, feed places—stock feed. Stuff to feed stock, and on down to the river. See, that ended that side of Bridge Street. And on the north side of the bank, Smith Printing. Kuykendall had a place somewhere down there.

Malone-Mayes: He had a resale place, Kuykendall.

Mayfield: Uh-huh, he had a place down there somewhere. I can't remember where Kuykendall's was now—somewhere down there, but below us. Some of those places were just old buildings, just left standing, nothing in them, just standing at the end of the street—First Street, River, I believe would be down there. . . . Up above Dennis & Boykins—no, there was a saloon downstairs. There was a saloon downstairs. Dennis & Boykins and then a saloon down there and something else. Somebody had a cafe down there, but I don't remember the name now of the person who had a cafe. . . .

Malone-Mayes: Where did you all eat lunch every day?

Mayfield: Ashford's cafe on Bridge Street.

Malone-Mayes: Was he on Bridge then?

Mayfield: No, they said Bridge Street, but it wasn't on Bridge Street. It was on Second Street. It was really on Second Street because he—the Mecca Drugs was right on the corner. Well, if you go right around the corner from down here, you come on up and go down to the corner and go around here to the Ashfords.

Malone-Mayes: About how much did it cost to eat?

Mayfield: Oh, you could get a—like if you would get a steak—a steak would be steak and potatoes, something like that—you would pay about fifty cents and stuff like that. And maybe, I don't know, I ate practically the same thing every day because I liked it. I don't know what it was I would get. It must have been chili because they made good chili. I think I must have gotten chili most of the time because I liked chili. But every now and then I would get a steak dinner.

Well, he had everything, fish and chicken and chili. . . . On Saturday the square was—you couldn't pass one another, just crowded. Because there were different cafes down there. And one of the cafes was owned by a Chinaman, and they sold fish—fish and something else. And colored people liked it. And that place was crowded every Saturday, packed and jammed that whole block from Bridge Street back to Franklin. That street was always packed. Because they were buying—getting this food. They said the Chinaman cooked such good food. They liked to eat when they were down there, getting it because the Chinaman cooked such good food. On Saturday nights, I've gone down there with—what's that girl's name? One of Mrs. Owen's daughters. I can't think of her name. They lived right across from me, and they had a car, and her mother would let her use the car whenever she

got ready. And we used to drive down there and get fish at night. Um-um, talk about good. That was really good fish.

But that's what drew so many of them down there, the good food. That was on the square on Second and Bridge, right on the corner. On down the block further there was a fish market, down the block.

Malone-Mayes: I remember.

Mayfield: But there across on this side of the square from him, they had a store where they sold groceries, different kind of groceries and things all over there, and different things along, but all the square from here—from Second Street up from Third Street back to the river, that looked like a circus on Saturday.

Everybody came to the square. Everybody went to the square and most of the Jews where they traded had their stores down there, and they would go down there and get cheap things—they thought were cheap. They weren't cheap, but they thought it was. They went down there to get those things. That was a palace with people. They'd go down there. They would eat. They would drink. They did everything.

I was in the building over here where the Excelsior Bank was on this side. I could see across the street a saloon. And one Saturday, I was working. I would get behind because we had so much work to do, and there was just two people to do it. And there was so much of it I was behind. I was trying to catch up and trying to keep up and see what was going on. (both laugh) That Saturday, especially, there were more people over there on that side of the street. Dennis & Boykins on that side. The lodge met over there. And this other man's cafe, big old cafe over there . . . Finally, my mind led me to get up and go to the window. And I got up and went to the window. Oh, yeah, I heard a gunshot. And I said, "Well, where's that gun?" It sounded near. And I got up, and the people were streaming out of this beer place. They were coming out like ants coming out of a hill. Those people really got out of there. There were Mexicans, and they were really just getting out of there. I was really looking. And finally, a guy come and the blood was just streaming. And someone got shot. There's a shooting. . . . And the blood was just streaming. I said, "Oh, Lord, they've killed him." . . . He ran down to the river. I don't know what he did down there. We didn't see him any more. But they came and got the one that had been shot and put two of them in the ambulance at one time and carried them to the hospital. Two of them they put in the ambulance and carried them to the hospital. . . . But the two—but the one that ran down to the river, I don't know what happened to him. And everybody was running behind trying to catch him. I guess they thought, probably, he might jump in. He might have; I don't know.

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Mayfield: As a teenager, I went down there [to Bridge Street] a few times. Elsie Hyson and Gladys Murphy—three or four of us went down there on Sunday evening. We knew we weren't supposed to go down there, but sometimes we would get together, and said we are going to do such and such a thing. . . . On Sunday we went down. Elsie Hyson's—Hyson had the grocery store.

Malone-Mayes: Yeah, Hyson's Grocery on Eighth Street.

Mayfield: Bert Jones, Elsie Hyson, and me, and seems like there was another. There might not have been, but, anyhow, we decided we were going to go down to the Mecca Drug Store and get some ice cream, and we weren't allowed on Bridge Street, not us, not teenagers. You didn't go down there. We were taking a chance. We got together, got our time together and got everything fixed, and we took out. Just as we got down on Sixth and Jefferson—just about but not quite on Jefferson, I looked up and who did I see coming but my father. Ooh, you could have bought me for a penny. I said, "Lord, if Father sees me, he's going to wonder where I'm going, and I can't tell him we're going on Bridge Street. He's going to wonder what we're doing down here on Sunday, this time of day." What you doing? I didn't know what to say. I was shivering like a leaf on a tree. Elsie was scared. (laughs) All of us were scared. Papa was on this side of the street and we were over here.

Papa wasn't in the plan. Papa didn't even look up. I believe he saw me off in the distance and knew who we were, but he didn't want to—Papa liked to play like he didn't know a thing and see how long you're going to do or what you're going to do. He kept going with his head in front of him. He didn't turn one way or the other. And when we passed him and we got beyond him, I looked back, and I said, "Elsie, Bert, Papa didn't even look. Any other time he would have seen us and knew who we were." She said, "No, he didn't see us. We're all right."

That was a time in my life that I was a happy soul because if he had seen me and asked me about it, and I was going down on Bridge Street, down to Mecca Drugs. Going to get us some ice cream but I seen the boys. Herbert Oliver and all that bunch was working down there. Elsie, I think, was liking Herbert. Bert was liking somebody else down there. I don't know, at that time, who my boyfriend was. But, anyhow, we were going—they all gathered down at the drugstore down there. Man, that was one time I thanked the Lord that Papa—I believe he saw, but he just knew that we were afraid, and he knew I knew what he was going to say to me. But he didn't say nothing to me. He just passed us just like he was going normal.