

The Waco Messenger

Excerpts from [*Oral Memoirs of Lonnie Belle Hodges*](#).
(click on title for the full text of the interview transcripts)

In the 1920s and early 1930s, Lonnie Belle Hodges was a secretary for the Knights and Daughters of Tabor and she and her husband both worked for the *Waco Messenger*.

Interviewed by Vivienne Malone-Mayes on August 30, 1990, in Waco, Texas

Malone-Mayes: . . . We are going to discuss Bridge Street and early days, events of Bridge Street at this time. Mrs. Hodges, would you confirm what I've said by giving me the name of your husband again.

Hodges: My husband's name was Mack Henson Hodges. . . .

Malone-Mayes: And he passed in what year?

Hodges: December 12, 1971.

Malone-Mayes: Nineteen seventy-one. And we're going to talk first about him because he held a position in the establishment on Bridge Street. Is that correct?

Hodges: Yes. He worked with the *Waco Messenger*.

Malone-Mayes: In what capacity did he work for the *Waco Messenger*?

Hodges: He was the advertising manager.

Malone-Mayes: . . . I think before we talk about *Waco Messenger*—that was the name of the newspaper, but it was located in the Smith Printing Company?

Hodges: Yes, it was.

Malone-Mayes: And we've had some other people tell us about the Smith Printing Company. Could you give me some idea about who Mr. Smith was?

Hodges: Well, all I know, his name was A. T. Smith. He owned that establishment at first. He had the first printing office there. And he sold out to Mr. L. J. Rhone. But they maintained the name of Smith Printing Company. And the *Messenger* was printed under the auspices of Smith Printing Company.

Malone-Mayes: Did Mr. Smith begin the *Waco Messenger*?

Hodges: No. No, Mr. Rhone began the *Waco Messenger*. . . . I don't think Mr. Smith had a newspaper when he was there. He just did printing.

Malone-Mayes: I see. Do you happen to know when Mr. Smith might have begun his business of printing?

Hodges: No, I do not. I knew him, but I don't know when he began his business.

Malone-Mayes: I see. Do you remember when your husband began to work for the *Waco Messenger*?

Hodges: In the mid twenties.

Malone-Mayes: In the mid twenties. And incidentally, do you mind telling us what your age is today, August 30, 1990?

Hodges: On the twenty-fourth of last July, of this July, I was ninety-two. . . .

Malone-Mayes: Beautiful. Now, back to the *Messenger*. Do you remember the events in the—were you ever there often, in the *Messenger*?

Hodges: I would go there two or three times a week after work. I helped fold the papers and I helped my husband collect advertisement for that hectic period of the year.

Malone-Mayes: I see. Was it a prosperous business?

Hodges: Yes, it was. . . .

Malone-Mayes: Could you tell me approximately what year Mr. Rhone bought Mr. Smith out?

Hodges: No. I don't know that.

Malone-Mayes: But you know it was before 1920?

Hodges: Oh, yes, it was before 1920. Or around the first of 1920, anyway. . . . Mr. Rhone also operated the *Waco Messenger*, a weekly newspaper about the happenings and goings on of the Negro communities. Mr. F. M. Johnson, Mack Harvey operated the machines, Mack H. Hodges was circulation manager, and L. B. Hodges was society editor.

Malone-Mayes: Now, L. B. Hodges is you.

Hodges: That's me.

Malone-Mayes: So you were the society editor of the *Waco Messenger*?

Hodges: Yes.

Malone-Mayes: Your husband was circulation manager and advertising manager at the same time.

Hodges: Yes. Yes. . . .The *Messenger* helped serve boys and girls get an education at Paul Quinn College by selling the *Messenger* on the streets. White business advertised very diversely in the *Waco Messenger*. . . .

Malone-Mayes: But tell us about the life on Bridge Street when you were there. And how long—first tell me when you went—do you remember what year you began to work on Bridge Street?

Hodges: I really worked on the corner of Third and the Square for Dr. H. L. Smith as a secretary. There were four of us that worked there. He was the grand secretary of a Negro lodge, Knights and Daughters of Tabor. And we had to come to Bridge Street to catch the streetcar to come home. But now, I worked on Bridge Street on Thursday afternoons for the paper, when we folded the paper to mail it out. . . .

Malone-Mayes: Now, something I didn't ask you. How did your husband get in the business of being the circulation manager for the *Messenger*? In other words, how did Mr. Rhone know him? How did he know Mr. Rhone?

Hodges: They knew each other beforehand.

Malone-Mayes: Where had they met each other? How did they get connected?

Hodges: They met here.

Malone-Mayes: In Waco. But how?

Hodges: Well, I don't know. Some of these meetings.

Malone-Mayes: Oh, I see. They just more or less met at—

Hodges: I see they had a some kind of businessmen's organization or something. I don't know. And they met and he used to go down to his printing office and have things printed. He was head of this Baptist association out here, and I don't think the circulation was as good as it should have been. And he asked him if he would like to try to be circulation manager of the Waco part-time because, see, he had a regular job. He said, "Yes, I'd be glad to." So he started out and just built it up.

Malone-Mayes: Yes.

Hodges: And then when he couldn't go, I would go. Because sometimes he couldn't get off his job to go pick up ads. And when I'd get off I'd go.

Malone-Mayes: Now, what other job did he have at the time?

Hodges: Oh, he had several jobs.

Malone-Mayes: I'm sure. (laughing)

Hodges: He worked for, let me see—he worked out to Blackland. He was working Blackland, that was during World War II.

Malone-Mayes: Oh, yes.

Hodges: See, I had quit teaching. I taught three years and I resigned and accepted the job at the post office as charwoman.

Malone-Mayes: Oh, yes.

Hodges: And I worked there five years. And he was working with the *Messenger* then. And I would get off. I'd go to work at four o'clock in the morning and get off at nine in the morning. And then I'd go around and get up the ads, and if—unless they called me to do substitute work. And when they called me to do substitute, I'd have to wait until the afternoon.

Malone-Mayes: Picking up the ads.

Hodges: Yes. I'd help with the ads. . . . I wouldn't go to the *Messenger* until I collected all the ads. I'd go up and down these business places and collect the ads, then carry them to the *Messenger's* office.

Malone-Mayes: I see.

Hodges: And then I'd come on home. But if I worked, you know, at the school, I couldn't go until after three o'clock.

Malone-Mayes: I see.

Hodges: I would get the ads then bring them down there because Mack was working out to the Blackland and he couldn't get them.

Malone-Mayes: Yes.

Hodges: Every place would be closed when he got in. That way when you stop working with Blackland and started working with the school it was different.

Malone-Mayes: Right.

Hodges: He could get some on his lunch hour. And then what he didn't get I'd get.

Malone-Mayes: Um-hm. And you'd be a teacher in the Waco public schools?

Hodges: He was the first Negro to be elected as visiting teacher. . . I was the second substitute, Negro substitute teacher to be put on in the Waco system. . . . And Erline Henry was the first one. . . .