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Interveiw with Pastor Andrew Wilson Woods

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Interview with Pastor Andrew Wilson Woods, February 15, 2002 in his home at:

The beginning of our conversation was rather awkward. Mrs. Woods did not wish to be a part of the conversation, but she did remain in the room for quite a while. I explained the release form; again, Mrs. Woods did not want to sign it because she was not participating, but while Pastor Woods straightened up some papers in the living room, Mrs. Woods and I made small talk.

Mrs. Woods: He did a painting of me in 1991. We didn't have it framed until after he died.

PT: It's so special that there are pictures of his daughter, Mrs. Mayo's daughter, that he painted. It's so special to have that.

Phone rings. Lengthy delay.

PT: I saw a painting of your son at the house.

Mrs. Woods: Yeah, and he did our daughter too.

Mrs. Woods takes a phone call from her doctor's

PT: Reverend Wood, can you tell me what your full name is?

RW: Andrew Wilson Wood.

PT: Great. Do you remember when you first met Mr. Mayo, Walter L.?

RW: I'll never forget it. Never. When we arrived here on the morning I came and it was really. I came just to preach for the church on this particular Sunday. A friend of mine who lived in West Virginia with us at the time had moved here. He carried me up to the church, and we got out of the car and went inside. Walter was the first man that I met. He met me in the foyer of the old Church. Introduced himself. He was Superintendent of the Sunday School at that particular hour. And, of course, after we made acquaintance with each other, he introduced me to several of the deacons, and then we went on to our morning worship. That was our first time of meeting him. And I don't know it was just like, even then, as if we had known each other for a long, long time. The longer I was here we became closer to each other. And when he introduced me to some of his artwork, I used to try to draw a little. I used to print quite well, and I told him. He said, "Well maybe we can kind of get together some time." And I said I don't know about that we'll have to think about it. But I wasn't thinking about it when I saw his work.

PT: What year was that?

RW: That was in 1960.

PT: And do you know why did he move from Mt. Vernon to Columbus, do you know?

RW: Well, I do not know exactly, but I have an idea it was because of his work. Now he showed

me on several occasions, I think, he used to drive a truck, and in driving the truck I do recall on one particular occasion that he drove the truck down, and for some reason I got in the truck with him. We didn't go very far but I think it was going to a little place outside of Columbus here, south of Columbus. I don't know what he was taking or what have you. We came back and I got in my car and went home. But I think it was more or less his work. His work brought him here and it was of such nature that he had to be here longer than he anticipated. So it wasn't that much longer after that I think that he went on and purchased a home here and moved in.

PT: Did you know his father? I know he brought his father here when he became ill in the last years before his death.

RW: I met his father in '62. It may have been '62. As a matter of fact I preached in his father's church. His father was a member of the Methodist Church if I make no mistake. There were two churches there at the time, and there weren't many members in. And yet that didn't matter to me because wherever God sent me that's where I went. I met his father then. His father showed me the Twenty Mule Team and the Six Mule Team of something of this nature (referring, I think, to the Mayo Special). He showed me some of his carvings and what have you, and we became enthralled at the work he had done. And then I began to think about this. That man took the time...How in the world could he do all of this carving; he had to trim, he had to cut, he had to connect, and as you stated, the bridle on the horses and everything it looks so real. It's just as if he had taken a picture of the whole thing. But I did not know him as I knew Walter L. The son...we were very close. I'd go to the home some time, just before he moved out to where he was now. He used to live just off of Verne Street, not too far from St. Anthony Hospital at that time. Now it's Mt. Carmel, I mean, know it is Ohio State University East. But we were very close. Most of the things that we needed pictures or drawings or things of that nature, that we needed around the church. He would see well, I'll see what I can do. He'd scratch his head and say, "I'll see what I can do." And he would call me maybe in a day or two and show me what he had done. And the interesting thing, now Walter didn't have all of the latest equipment and things of that nature. He made his own, what I would call, not a flannel board but the board that he drew on and printed on. And then there were times when he would lay his work down on the floor. And he would take it out in the back, especially when he was making banners for our pastor's conference. I served as president of the Pastor's Conference for 13 years, and each year we would have a long banner made for our Simultaneous Revival. We're getting ready for that now; it begins next month. And I would give Walter the information. Tell him what we needed, show him how I wanted it. And he would say, "Well I don't know. It's gonna take an awful lot of work." And I would say, "Well, it doesn't matter. You've got the time." And he would tell me, "Well, I don't know." And he would say, "I'll see." And anytime he said, "I'll see," I could forget it. And just know that he was gonna go on and do it. He would call me over and we would look at it, and I do not recall but one occasion when I had to make some corrections. And that was because he understood me to say one thing when I was really saying another. And we were going to put it up in the Memorial Hall downtown, on a Sunday afternoon. That banner was going to be 20 to 25 feet long. And I didn't want the wrong thing up there, you've got three or four thousand people up there, so he made that correction. And I asked him, I said, "How did you make this correction?" And he said, "Well, I don't know. I just did it. I just did it." And I said, "Okay." And that sold us on the idea. And as long as he lived he made our banners. I guess this must have been, oh, let me see. I became the coordinator in 1962, and from '62 up

until the time he passed, he made the banners for our Annual Simultaneous Revival. Now the Revival was all of the Baptist churches in Columbus and vicinity that wanted to participate. We would get together and we would end up with anywhere from 40 to 62 churches. Now on one occasion we had as many as 62 churches involved in the Annual Simultaneous Revival. And of course you can imagine what it must have been like to have 62 churches, or even 50 churches, all worshipping at the same time. We didn't have a place in any of our churches large enough to hold the daytime meetings. The thing that we did we would have the kick-off at the Veteran's Auditorium. And if not there we would have it wherever. We did use the convention center for two years, and ...you going down?

PT: Shall we take a break?

RW: Let me just take her.

Brief break while Reverend Woods takes his wife to her room.

PT: How many years have you and your wife been married?

RW: Longer than you've been around. We are working on 63 years.

PT: Wow.

RW: Sixty three years. We're working on 63 years. The 29th day of September this year will be 63 years. We were married in '39.

RW: But anyway, I guess you can kind of get a picture of. Even if one church had 50 members or 100 members and then we need a place where all of those folk could gather. So we started using our larger churches. Well I thought that maybe our church would be sufficient, but it got to the place where we couldn't even use our church. We can seat right at a thousand members. We got to the place where we needed a larger place, and that's the reason why we starting going to the Veteran's auditorium. And after we started there, Walter made those banners, and the year he made the banner for the convention center, oh it was amazing how he put that banner up. He wouldn't trust no one to put that banner up unless he was there watching it. You know. The man down at the auditorium said to me, "Well, I can put the banner up." And I said, "Well, I'll watch you put it up. But let me get the man who made it and let him watch you put it up." Because he didn't like anybody messing with his work. It had to be perfect just like he had it and what have you. And so he did that, and well we had tremendous times together. Sometimes we'd meet up at the store and maybe he was getting groceries for his wife. And it has always been my, I guess my job or what have you, to go to the store. My wife has been here to the store very few times, because I do most of the shopping. See here at the shopping center, up to the grocery store, it's been very few times that she's been there. You know she became ill. We had made our 11th trip to the Holy Land. We are, she and I are tour hosts for Educational Opportunities out of Florida. It was our job to recruit people and take them to the Holy Land and help the guide. Well, they say help the guide but the guide had to guide us until we became really acquainted. And we had made our 11th trip there and we were back home one week, and she became ill on the 18th day of February in nineteen and ninety-three. And of course she has

not fully recovered from that. She has an aneurysm to burst in her head. And we thought we were going to lose her, but the Lord blessed her. There was an older doctor who had privileges at Grant Hospital, and we were told about him, so the head doctor at Grant secured him for us. And he sat down with the family, our daughter and myself, and he told us I've done all I can do. Now that pin in her head, I will be taking it out, but I don't know just what will happen. There is one many that I can recommend. He's not a doctor here, but he has rights, he has privileges here. And he came in that evening and he told us what he could do. He said now I have worked with patients who were in the same condition your wife is in. I can't guarantee anything. I tell you one thing I can do; that pin has to come out. It's just a big ball up here on top of her head. And when it comes out I can put in what they call a shunt, up over her ear behind there. And I will attach that to a vein that goes down into her stomach, and that will carry any blood that might be leaking right down to her stomach. It's just like a food being digested. And so we said go ahead, and the next day I think it was he came and took her into surgery and had her there, I guess, for a couple of hours.

He came back and told us that the work was done, and now we'll just have to wait. The one thing he mentioned that I loved was he said, "We'll just have to wait on the Lord." Now very few doctors wait on the Lord, you know they think they have arrived. He said, "We got to wait on the Lord." So we waited on the Lord, and of course the Lord has brought her this far.

Lengthy discussion about Mrs. Wood's work with National Interdenominational Minister's Wives Convention and his daughters battle with leukemia. Reverend and Mrs. Woods brought their daughter to their home for the last months of her life. The women of the Church assisted with her. Only connection to Mayo is that Mrs. Mayo's daughter was one of the women who took care of her.

And now there's just the two of us, and of course my son. He lives here too. He's following in my footsteps; he's the President of the Pastor's Conference now. And he's in his fifth year; he has one more thing to go. And that's the way things are.

RW: Mayo was a person who; well, he loved people, but he picked his people. Now he just didn't feel like you wanted to be Walter Mayo's best friend or anything of that nature. He didn't have that much time to really fellowship with others. Now if he were not at the church, you said that he was at home. Drawing or painting. And you perhaps have seen, or you will perhaps see, some of the work he did. He and his wife went with us on one of the trips to the Holy Land. He has a drawing over there of the River of Jordan, and I have yet to see it. I want to put a River Jordan over the pulpit in our church. I have one in the book here but I don't quite like it. It does not depict the river as I have seen it. I have baptized in the River Jordan 8 years. Eight years. Some of the people who went with us, and I've had several people who saw us baptizing to come and be baptized at that particular time. It's just been a real treat. And Walter's been right in the midst of it. Most of it. He had a little illness strike him. And I don't know. He may have missed a Sunday. Now it didn't matter how Walter Mayo was feeling. He was gonna be at church. And sometimes I would not have any idea of any particular thing, that a program, he'd come to me and say, "I think I'll draw such and such a thing." And I'd say, "Oh?" And he'd say, "Yeah, I think I'll see what I can do with it." Now he has in his mind a picture. And he will go back home with a picture in his mind and he'll draw it as it is portrayed in his mind. I say how in

the world can a man do something like that. I have to have something to look at. You know. And what happened, he'd come up with it and I'd say, "Walter, how do you do that?" And he'd say, "Well, I don't know." And I'd say, "Well, think about it." Just like that. He's fantastic. He was really fantastic.

PT: His wife said that he'd studied the bible a lot.

RW: Oh, he did that.

PT: Did you have a group that studied together at your church?

RW: Always, every year. We'll be coming into that after our Revival is over. Our revival starts on the 17th of next month, the Simultaneous Revival. And it will be one week. And I think about the second of April, somewhere along in there, we have always had, every since I've been here, a school of Christian training. I bring in several of the other ministers from the churches here, as well as employ three or four women from our church, who are very knowledgeable and can work with children. And we'll have anywhere from ten to 12 classes each night for six weeks and Walter was one of those persons who loved the bible. And he began to be a little hard of hearing as time began to draw close, I suppose, and sometime he said, "You know, I'm not hearing very well, and I thought I heard so and so say that." And I'd say, "Well, I expect you did.." But he would always work it out. And sometimes he'd come to me and say, "What do you know about this? Do you know that the bible says? How did this happen?" And I would say, "I don't know. You have to go ask the Lord about that because I was not there." But he was a very fine...he was a good student. A good student of the bible. He loved the bible, he loved the lawyer. Walter Mayo loved people. He really loved people. But just a few people could get really close to him. And all the members of the Church loved him. And we would have fellowship meals at the church, and he'd be right there. Eating and sharing and all that. But you couldn't get but so close to Walter Mayo. His wife, and his wife's daughter and her husband, they were. Well Walter kind of worked himself into that family by seeing Shirley and what have you. And it was just amazing and she called me the evening. Well, I knew he had been ill. As a matter of fact, he fell, and that was a miracle too. He had been down in his drawing room and for some reason, I don't know what happened. I don't know whether his wife called him or what, but anyway he had to leave the drawing room to go up those steps, you know there kind of steep. And he got about half way up those steps and fell backwards. And I don't know, I think she, I don't whether she called me then or if it was the next day she called me, and she said, "Walter fell." And I think he may have been in the hospital for a day or two. I think he hurt his arm, and his head in falling. And I said, "I don't think he fell backwards, you mean, maybe he tripped coming up. But he fell backwards. And I said I don't know why in the world the man didn't kill himself like that. But he may have been falling backwards and the fall may have been broken and he tried ot hold on to the bannister or something of that sort. But Walter wasn't hospitalized if one or two days that was it. And he came out of that hospital and went right back into that drawing room. Now, besides his wife, and I guess other than his wife, that drawing room was his next best friend.

PT: It's amazing how much work he has there. There are sketch books just filled.

RW: And it didn't take him all day to do that. He drew a picture of our son in pencil and he penciled two or three of me likewise. But the one he penciled of Jesse, I think Jesse has it now. And it was just like him. Caught him in a certain way, a certain pose, and everything.

PT: Now did he ever, I know you said he was the Superintendent of the Sunday School, did he ever teach any art classes at the church?

RW: No, no, he never taught any art classes. Now what he would do, he would meet us sometimes and we were talking artistically, he would always make his input. But you know I would think it would look better here, or better there, and maybe you ought to do this, or you ought to do that. And I'd tell him, I'd call him, well I called him Walter most of the time. He was about ten, no nine years older than I, but, I would tell him, "Now look, I'm a preacher and I don't allow anyone to tell me how to preach. Even when we're doing seminary work. You know each one of us has our own style and all of that. I said now you are an artist. And God forbid I try to tell you how to do this thing or what to do. You take it and you do what you think is best. Whatever you do, I'm going to be satisfied with it." And anytime I said that, he'd call me sometime and say, "Well, Pastor, I want you to tell me what you think of this." I'd go over and look at it and say, "It's amazing! How do you do it in so little time." But he would just put his time in and eat, and go down, he'd eat for a while and go right back down. Now I don't know how late he would work at night, trying to get things done.

PT: Now what were the homecoming banners used for? Were they for an event at your church?

RW: Well, not always. I don't recall any particular drawing of the church for the homecoming banner. What he would do, he would get imaginary pictures from the bible, like the prodigal son coming home, or maybe Jacob going to meet his brother, and that meant he had to go back home. And different things of that nature. I'm pretty sure you saw the one where he had, I think there were camels and horses. There may have been camels. I think a man was riding the camel. And in another one there were cows, and they seemed to be driving these cows toward home. Things of that nature. He would always associate the picture with a home or something of this nature. Put people on there. Sometimes it was gatherings and things of that nature. He was just amazing, and the ideas he would come up with. I mean of his own. I carried him a picture on one occasion, and he said, "Well, I don't know if I can do anything with that." And I said, "Well, take it and try." And he said, "Well, I'll see, I'll call you." And then he called me and he said well I thought about the pictures you brought me, but I want you to look at this. And I told him, "I want you to forget what I brought you, and just use what you have here.

No anytime I would tell him to go, that was it. I don't know any other minister in the city who could tell Walter, you go on and do such and such a thing and it would be alright. But he would always tell me sometime, well you know that fellow came here and told me to do this and do that. What do you think about it? I need some direction. I need some directions. And I'd say, "Well, I don't know. He may not like it if I give you directions." And he'd say, "Well, you just tell me."

PT: So after you were no longer the head of the Pastor's Conference, did they still continue to ask him to do banners?

RW: Yes, they'd still ask him. Now last year and the year before, both of those years he was quite ill. Now the year that he died, I don't think he did the banner for that particular year. So we're talking about the last banner that I know he did may have been '99. And, have you ever been in the Memorial Auditorium here? That banner was stretched all the way across the stage. They'd have a choir behind the curtain sometime 100-125 or 150 people behind the curtain, and when I'd give the signal for the curtain to be open, it would open with the choir singing, and it was tremendous. A lot of people talked about his banners, and there were men who wanted the banners, on several occasions there were ministers who wanted to buy the banners. And he'd say, "No, they're not for sale. Now if you want to use the banner in your church during the week of the revival, you can do that, he said, but if he wants them, he'll have to find a place for them. Otherwise, I'll have them at home. They're not for sale." He never charged us anything for a particular banner, but I started giving him honorariums. And each year, I'd try to make it a little more and a little more. And each year he'd try to do a little more and a little more. And several of the ministers said, the local pastors decided if I would tell him to do a banner for them, they would appreciate it. And so I would tell him, and he say's, "Well, if you think I can do it." And I'd say Oh you can do it, you go on and do it. And several of them have gotten banners made by him. As a matter of fact, the man whose wife died, they are probably at his church eating now after the burial, Rev. Cleofus Clee was his name. After I gave up the job of coordinator of the conference, I put Clee in my place, and he'd say, "Now, Dr. Woods I talked to Mr. Mayo, but I don't know if he's going to do that. Can you talk with him?" I'd say well I'll call him and just see if he'll go along with it; and Mayo would go along with it. Now when he got the banner done with just the names not on there, he would call me instead of call Clee. And once I said, "Mayo, uh oh, you've got to do your work all over. He had some names, see, that don't belong on there. He thought my name should be on there. Now I was president longer than any pastor in Columbus, I became president in 1970 and I served for nine years than, and one pastor served for four years and another one served for six years and then they brought me back for another five years. But, this fellow Clee, it was just amazing what he would do. Now he was a person who was methodical, but he just didn't take a lot of things, seemingly, too seriously. He'd say, Doc I want you to talk to Brother Mayo for me. And I'd say, "Well, what do you want?" And he said, "I told him to go ahead and get our banner started." And I'd say, well what did you give him. And he said, well he said he was going to go ahead and talk with you. And I'd say, Okay, I'll call him. And I called him to give him the lay out. And once you give him the layout he'd go and do it. He'd put the names on there and one year he had the banner just perfect, except one name. And he only had one night before the convention, before the revival started, to get that name off and put it back on . And that man went home, I don't know if he stayed up all night, but however he did to get that name off. I think it's pretty hard to hand paint something on a banner and then you get it off overnight. It would seem to me you'd have to have a lot of treatment, but he knew what to do. And when he called me that Sunday morning, no Saturday morning, he said, "Now this banner should go up at the auditorium today." And I said, "Well, we can't get it up until it's ready." And he said, "Well, I got it ready I think." So he brought it here and I looked at it and I said, "Mayo, I don't know how you did it." But he did it, and put it up and everything went well. Oh, it was amazing.

PT: Now he had studied, from the brochure that they gave out at the Columbus Art Museum, it said that he had studied commercial art via a correspondence course. Do you think that he

regretted not having a career in art? Do you think he would have liked to have a career if the opportunities had been available to him?

RW: Well, knowing Walter as I did know him. I don't think he would have wanted it any different. Now Walter was a church man. When I say a church man, Walter was crazy about his church, and he was crazy about his home. And there were a few people in the church could just about get Walter to do this or do that or what have you. But I don't think, my personal opinion, I don't think he would have taken it out. He told me about the art school taht he had taken some courses from. And I told him I had taken some courses from Federal Art School, and that's where I began to do a lot of my painting. I did a lot of drawing in high school and what have you. But my printing came from elementary school .

TAPE ENDS. PASTOR WOODS KEEPS TALKING. He states that he doesn't think Walter was the kind of man to look back with regret. That he had his church and he had his family and he wouldn't have it any other way.

PT: There's was an African-American man who I interviewed in Mt. Vernon who said he was like family to the Schliaret family. That's good to know. You know when you do a sociological study like this, you worry that he did not have the opportunity to pursue a career in art that he might have wanted to pursue because he was an African-American man in Columbus in the forties and fifties, and to see the work that he continued to produce all his life, the sketch of Joe Louis I just love.

RW: I'll tell you what, the people were surprised, down town, when they saw his work. They were shocked. That's one of the reason they wanted to put this thing on display down at the art center. Right now, they wanted everyone to see that. And look at theat Twenty Mule Team. I don't see how in the world his father did those things, but he did them. Now his father did the carving, and Walter did the drawing, Walter did the painting. Now you put the two of them together, I would have loved to see the two of them working in art and a commercial shop together. It would have been tremendous. Walter's son died in an airplane crash and I don't know whether his son had any artistic idea or any of that nature. Now his daughter Christine, she did not demonstrate anything of that nature. Well, women just don't generally take to things liek that like a man does. I have a drawing out inj the foyer of our church of a woman who, and if she walks in here right now I wouldn't have known her, she heard us talking about our church's work in Africa.

Lengthy discussion of the connection to an African man studying in Columbus and local church leaders support of this man which lead to an extensive ministry in Africa. Ends with an analysis of Rev. Wood's son, Rev. Jesse Woods church in Columbus. Useful if someone is interested in studying either African American churches or the connections between African American churches and African churches.

PT: The only thing I had not realized, was that Walter L. had a son. Was his name Walter too?

RW: I believe he was Jr. I believe he was, I'm not positive.

PT: And do you know when he passed away?

RW: I don't know exactly.

PT: Mrs. Mayo might now.

RW: Yes, she would. It's been about oh my goodness, 10 or 12 years ago. For some reason or the other his plane went down. I don't know if he was trying to make it back into Charleston. He was flying back here from somewhere and he had the plane must have had trouble. And he must have been the pilot, and he ditched it in the Ohio River. It wasn't too far from where the river has the gates in it. But that found his body, oh, I guess it was over a week or more before they found his body, and they found his body near the gates there, where the floodgates were at the river.

PT: That will be interesting to know if he had some artistic talent too.

RW: I think he was a soldier. I don't know what branch of the service he was in, but I'm sure Mrs. Mayo would know.

PT. Well, thank you so much. It has really been wonderful to talk to you.

RW: Anytime...anytime.