# Transcription of OH-00013

## William A. Diggs

Interviewed by

John Wearmouth

on

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Transcribed by Shannon Neal on June 23, 2020

Southern Maryland Studies Center

College of Southern Maryland
8730 Mitchell Road, P.O. Box 910
La Plata, MD 20646

Phone: (301) 934-7626
E-mail: SMSC@csmd.edu
Website: csmd.edu/smsc

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## Format

Interview is available as MP3 file or WAV: ssoh00013 (1:35:45)

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## Typographic Note

- [Inaudible] is used when a word cannot be understood.
- Brackets are used when the transcriber is not sure about a word or part of a word, to add a note indicating a non-verbal sound and to add clarifying information.
- Em Dash — is used to indicate an interruption or false start.
- Ellipses … is used to indicate a natural extended pause in speech

## Subjects

African American History
Education
Teaching
African American teachers
School discipline
Segregation in education
Segregation
Racism
Lynching
Slavery
Sharecropping
United States Naval Powder Factory

Genealogy
Rural conditions

## Tags

William A. Diggs
Emancipation
One room school house
Food preservation

## Transcript

John Wearmouth [J]: This is John Wearmouth interviewing Mr. William A. Diggs at the Afro-American Culture Center just off Bumpy Oak Rd. at the end of Gwen Rd. at the old Nike site. Was that what this was at one time?

William Diggs [W]: Yes it was.

J: And we are in the museum although it's called a culture center. And the curator and I think founder as well?

W: Mhm.

J: Is Mr. Diggs. Looking around I see the results of many years of hard, hard work I'm sure. It's something he's had a great interest in but that's not enough. It requires a lot of effort plus the interest to pull things together. Mr. Diggs was born in Charles County in 1918 at Chicamuxen. He is a retired teacher. Lifelong teacher. You retired from Charles County Public Schools.

W: That's Correct.

J: And you taught here all your life?

W: No not entirely.

J: Not quite.

W: I taught here 37 years.

J: Oh, okay.

W: But, uh 46 years total in this state.

J: I see.

W: I started on the Eastern Shore.

J: Oh did you? Okay what county?

W: Dorchester.

J: Dorchester.

W: Somerset and Wicomico.

J: I see, okay. Mr. Cane, Erin Cane came from—.

W: Dorchester.

J: Dorchester, that's right.

W: His home was just above me. Just about ten miles above me.

J: Oh. I see. I see. Okay. Mr. Diggs is the son of Parker Diggs. His father was born in Nanjemoy in 1896. His mother's name was Rachel and her maiden name was Jordan: Rachel Jordan Diggs.

W: That’s right.

J: And she was born at Chicamuxen in 1896. Mr. Diggs is active in—. What lodges are you a member of at the moment?

W: The [Guest Seminary] Lodge and the Elks Lodge.

J: Okay, okay, I see. Alright. Now how many brothers and sisters did you have?

W: Well it was eight of us. Now it's only four sisters and myself makes five.

J: Well that's after the passing of quite a few years.

W: Yes.

J: Were all of those children born at home?

W: All of them were born at home. None born in the hospital because there was no hospitals or clinics here.

J: Right, yeah and you couldn't get to one anywhere else?

W: No because Amer—the Washington hospital didn't accept Maryland residents.

J: Oh, right.

W: So therefore we had to—. The mothers had to have the birth at home.

J: I see. Now, she was attended by a midwife?

W: Oh sure.

J: Always the same woman do you remember?

W: The same one that was my Aunt.

J: And what was her name?

W: Delcinia Jordan.

J: Delcinia?

W: Jordan.

J: Jordan, okay.

W: And my grandmother's name was Amanda. Amanda Diggs and she—that was my father's mother.

J: I see.

W: And she was midwife. She delivered me but my other aunt delivered the other children.

J: Okay, that's a group of people that contributed so much to society.

W: Oh yeah, oh yeah.

J: And we don't even know the names of most of them. I try every time I interview someone I try to find out whether or not children in the family were born at home and if so I try and identify the midwife.

W: Well we have a list of all midwives that were black midwives. Course the black did limited. They did not limit themselves to just black women. They did it for white women too who had the birth at home.

J: That's right.

W: And we have, if you wish to see them—. I didn't bring it down, but we do have a list of all the physicians in this county and the midwives in this county and the problems that they had encountered during that period.

J: Well that's a great addition to local history.

W: Well it certainly is because most of history that we have read from the various counties of this state does not include it.

J: Yeah, I believe it. Well and we're—. We're lucky to have it. Now when and where did you begin your formal education?

W: Chicamuxen.

J: At Chicamuxen?

W: Yes in a one room school.

J: Okay. And what was the name of the school?

W: Chicamuxen Elementary.

J: Chicamuxen Elementary. And who was your teacher?

W: My teacher was named Rachel Brown Ward.

J: Ward.

W: Mhm.

J: Okay. And do you remember the names of the other teachers you had in the public schools?

W: Oh yes.

J: Right down through the years.

W: Oh yes I do recall most of them but not all of them because I have to think back of the years. Now she taught—. We went to school in 1922 and she taught school there until 1927 or 8. And then after that we had a teacher from Washington to come down by the name of Alma B. Parks. And she taught there from 1929 through 35. And then we had another teacher named Alma Grant from Pittsburgh. Maryland did not produce enough black teachers in the state to educate the black people so they had to be recruited from other states to come here. But it was a very, very difficult problem for the black population to have such a situation as that. First place, most of the teachers that came from other places like Pittsburgh, or New York, or New Jersey—.

J: [Minnie Heel].

W: Yes.

J: Mary Neal.

W: Yes, they came from places that were not segregated. Then when they got here then it was different set up.

J: A new world.

W: Very new world and it had many problems connected with it. Now if they would just came in and went into the school house and taught and start teaching school and that was all to it, but it wasn't that.

J: No.

W: You see what happened when the new teachers came from those places to our very small impoverished community the people hardly had a decent houses for themselves.

J: True.

W: And then had to provide room for the teacher. And you can imagine how the houses were built. Had to go through one room to get to another room and no running water, no hot water, no central heat, and the stores were all local stores.

J: Which you walked to?

W: Which you had to walk to. The local stores would be just like you have at Port Tobacco. They had one general store, post office, everything connected in that one building. And we had the one church. Now of course many of the places other than the catholic communities had two churches. But many of the protestant communities had two churches. One for the white and one for the black.

J: Right.

W: And same thing existed for the schools. And they had—. In the catholic community they had that one catholic school, but it was the protestant community that had one white school and one black school.

J: Okay. About how old were you when you first heard people seriously discuss the separate but equal facilities in education.

W: Well I was a boy about five years of age and I heard my grandmother cry and my grandfather mourn because they had never had the experience of being free. And when they said, "We are separated but we still not equal and we still a foreign people to this own country where we were born."

J: That's true. And this is after, long after the Emancipation.

W: Long after Emancipation.

J: And they still felt that they were quite set apart and in some ways not much better off than they had ever been?

W: Well.

J: Was this their feeling?

W: They were set apart and they knew—even though they didn't have education but had good common sense—they knew that they were worse off in some conditions than they were as slaves.

J: Right, yeah.

W: Now, the Emancipation you see was a twofold thing. It wasn't just a one sided thing where let all black people out of slavery. Now here in the State of Maryland where I was born and lived all my life, see Lincoln's Emancipation did not reach Maryland even though Maryland territory ran to the District of Columbia where Lincoln sat and wrote the Emancipation Proclamation.

J: Yeah that's true.

W: And of course you see when they looked at it and saw the injustice in the Emancipation and could look and figure out why Lincoln was really killed when the—. After the civil war, see, the Emancipation was the thing that killed him. But the historians and the history books will not as of today claim it's true. But we have sense enough to know that any man would sit down and write a piece of paper to, as a—. Write a piece of paper to get back at another group of people fighting him. Now here's what I'm saying when I say get back and fight another group. Now the southern people were fighting Lincoln. They didn't want nothing to do with him. Now Lincoln then wanted to win the war because the southerners had already divided themselves and he couldn't do a thing about it. So since he couldn't do nothing about it and they asked him to come together as one as they were at first and they said, "No." Because they bought the blacks, owned the backs, sold the blacks, killed the blacks, and they could do what they wanted to do in the same place that they called the United States. So they called themselves the Confederate States of America.

J: Right.

W: Now what in such a situation is that now they voted in the State of Maryland to go on Lincoln's side to help to win the war. But when the black and white went on Lincoln's side to help him win the war, then Lincoln wrote this Emancipation Proclamation January, uh, September 22nd, 1862. But he, it was not his intention to include black people as free people. He then said if he could bring the white people of both sections back like they were without freeing one black slave he'd do it. If he could bring them back and free some of them he'd do that. Well when you hear such a situation as that you know it's, "If you do this I do this for you," "If you do this I do this for you." He didn't do it intentionally for black people.

J: It was a political thing. It was an expedient of the moment to help him carry out his war goals.

W: Well, that's true too. But when you carrying out the war goals and you supposed to have guarded mine and you supposed to do right by all, well he didn't do right by all. And what happened? Well then he then said, "All you white people that's fighting against me I'm going to take the blacks away from you, and when I take them away from you, you better not do a thing about it. And all of those able bodied black people that you got down there fighting me, I'm gonna take them on my side and help them fight you."

J: Which he did.

W: He certainly did. Well you see now what school do you hear somebody sit down and explain it like that? Very few if any.

J: That's true. But I know that I went beyond high school.

W: Well.

J: Quite a bit beyond high school. In Northern states and at Georgetown University which is primarily a southern school even today.

W: Oh sure.

J: Even today. Okay. What was the attitude of your mother and father toward education for their children? What feelings did they have?

W: They had great feelings about it. Not only my mother and father, but my grandfather and grandmother who were—.

J: Your father's parents?

W: My father's parents and my mother's parents.

J: How long did your father's parents live? How old were you when you lost the last of them?

W: Of my the last one that I lost was my mother's mother.

J: I see.

W: And my father's mother we lost her in 1925. She lived from 1865 up until 1925. Now, you see all of them were very, very old. Some of them was 100 and some nearly 100 when they passed on. But they could have good sense to sit and talk about the cruelty of mankind to another.

J: Oh yeah.

W: And they felt that since there's such cruelty, it was administered to from one man to another, there was no Christ in it.

J: What white families were involved in the backgrounds of your family? You've heard the names of some of the white families who owned members of your family?

W: Mhm.

J: Who were they?

W: Well, on my father's side was the Diggs's right here in La Plata.

J: Okay.

W: See my father, my grandfather on my father's side was a slave on the Diggs's plantation.

J: And where was that plantation located? That one?

W: That one was, they say, was near where the Idaho farm is now. I don't know but it wasn't right into what we know now as La Plata. Because there was no La Plata then, see.

J: Okay now a Dr. Diggs did live at Plenty.

W: Mhm.

J: After the Mathews were there. So that's, that's true he did live just on the outskirts of Port Tobacco. And he was an M.D. so that must have been a farm area.

W: It was true. It was true and these people that William B. Mathews too was one of the slave masters at that time.

J: And that and he lived at Habre de Venture. William—.

W: B. Mathews.

J: Oh William B., no, lived at Plenty. That's right and he was a lawyer. William Briscoe Stone lived at Habre de Venture.

W: Yes that's right.

J: Mathews did live at Plenty.

W: That's right. That's right. And these people remember they are slave masters and we have—. I hope I have it here. I didn't know that you were gonna ask for it, but we have a, the list of the slaves some of the slaves that William B. Mathews had and some of the slaves that were on the farm of Diggs's farm. And these people when, I don't know when they're [seen], these documents were not what—. I hope, I hope that I have them here to tell you about them with accuracy. Now to talk about a thing and to see a thing is another thing. But I don't have that one, one here that I'm looking for. At the same time I wanted to show you the list of slaves that were on these plantations until I get the one that I want to show you. How they went about as calling themselves freeing the blacks in Maryland and especially Charles County after Lincoln published the Emancipation Proclamation. But here is a list of the slaves.... And they got the ages about on there.

J: Oh yeah....

W: Well I got the [Bills of right] in myself. Lots of the papers are at home but I didn't know this question would come up. If I did I would have brought it down....

J: Well maybe we can get into that in another interview and just concentrate on your teaching career today because this would require a completely separate session I would think.

W: Well.

J: That'll give you a chance to pull the things together.

W: Well it is—. But—. Yes, but into the document it is plainly lists William B. Mathews and his slaves. It appears in the list the Diggs's connection with slavery and therefore we can speak boldly about the situation of slavery of my family and other blacks here in Charles County.

J: So of your grandparents, which ones were born before the civil war ended?

W: All of them were born before.

J: All were born—.

W: Before the civil war ended.

J: Into slavery. Well as you know the reason that Maryland blacks were not freed was that Proclamation applied only to slave holders in states that had left the Union.

W: That's correct.

J: And unfortunately, Maryland was neither here not there. Maryland had not officially left the Union but about 50 percent of the people were sympathetic toward the Confederate cause.

W: That's right.

J: And here probably 98 percent in Southern Maryland

W: That's right because they did not want to lose their investments.

J: That's right, oh that's right it was a property thing.

W: Sure and money.

J: Yeah and money. That's right. That's true that's why so many of the big farmers and plantation owners here were in desperate straits when the war ended. They lost their labor supply. Their free labor supply.

W: Well most of the less fortunate ones that had just started and gotten into the business of slavery when the, after the civil war they were worse off than the slaves themselves.

J: I believe it.

W: Because they gave the orders to plow the fields or cut the clear the fields or whatever and then the slaves had to do it. But when the war was over then he had to do it and he knew not how to do it. Now, if he didn't know how to do what he ordered others to do then that made him poor too.

J: You can bet it did.

W: And then some of them had invested so many thousands of dollars into the purchasing of black people and then they had to let them go.

J: Yeah, and there went their money.

W: Went all their money.

J: There went their investments.

W: And then after the civil war and had to let them go how did they get them back to work.

J: Huh, they didn't have any way of paying them.

W: Had no way of paying them but they had—. The work had to go on.

J: That's true.

W: Now what did some of them do?

J: Well some of them left the area completely and some went hungry and most of them survived but it was difficult. I've read letters from members of the Hamilton family explaining what life was like for them after the war and it was extremely difficult. If they were lucky they would hire two or three black families—the entire family—and divide up the land and let the black families have a portion of it to farm. And in return they would have to contribute a certain amount of their time to maintaining the plantation or farm owner himself. Times were tough but they, they did survive all of them.

W: Well that's true but you see some of them, just as you said, some of them resorted to that technique in survival and some of them used other techniques to get the blacks back on the farm so they could survive and wouldn't be opposed. Now some of them went into contract agreement, "If you came back to me and work for me I will do such and such a thing for you." Now have you seen such an agreement?

J: No. No, no, I haven't. I have not...

[Sound of paper being moved]

Okay here's the wording of one of those contracts executed between white plantation owners and black families some of whom had been slaves on these plantations up through the end of the Civil War. This is a contract between a Mrs. Tompkins and a black family and I am guessing somewhere down in the Tompkinsville area because that's where the Tompkins plantation was. It reads as follows:

Articles of agreement between Mrs. [Yulda] Tompkins of the first part and Frank a colored person for himself and wife. Any of the second part who witnesses first the said Frank for himself and wife agrees to serve the said Mrs. Tompkins faithfully, honestly, and diligently, as laborers for and during the year 1866. Second the said Mrs. Tompkins for and in consideration of the services above agreed to be performed agreed to give the said Frank weekly, five pounds of meat and half bushel of meal to furnish him quarters and to pay him on or before the 25th of December next 50 dollars in cash.

Okay and we can imagine that this was typical of the relationship after the civil war here in Charles County with respect to farm labor and they were no longer working for just a roof over their heads.

W: And after the contract they were still working for nothing. A bushel, a half a bushel of corn meal per week and they had to labor like that. And if they didn't and they ate it all in one day then they would have nothing.

J: That's true, yeah. That's right.

W: Now you see wasn't much love there.

J: No. Well, one would hope that along with the shelter the black family would have had a garden plot of its own which was usually the case and they would be able to support themselves with some vegetables. Certainly they could not survive on this. Rations such as this for a whole year that's for sure.

W: Well that's true but you see, he's going to devote most of his time for the ex-slave-master to make a living. He wouldn't have much time to have to devote for making a living for himself.

J: Yeah, that's true.

W: Yeah. And that would be fine if I could see you again I'd like to bring down folders and show you just how it was. I don't know about the other people that you have interviewed about the situation of black people in Charles County or in the State of Maryland but what I'm telling you is the truth. And documentation of it and no one can destroy it because we can go back and get the source from which it came.

J: Okay, now I have concentrated on the history of black education. Only and I have interviewed retired black teachers because I felt they knew more than anyone else what was going on in black homes here during the twentieth century. I have not using this medium been able to go back before 1900. Of course and we've done a lot of documentary research and we have known about some of these things but I am only one person and I'm doing this as a volunteer. I get nothing out of it whatsoever not even gasoline money. So I have had to limit myself and I've done about 250 interviews in the past 20 years—.

W: Well see that—.

J: Black and white.

W: Well this is what is wrong with integration. Now you have forced almost integration on both groups white and black but there's still resentment. And it's only the black history [if this interview is called black history] but there's nothing called black history. Just what you read about the contract that is a mix between white and black agreements. And all of history mixed in with blacks, doesn't matter what it is, is blacks mixed in there somewhere.

J: That's true.

W: So therefore we don't have a thing called black history.

J: No.

W: And we don't have a thing called white history. And we got to as civilized people and people [will] have sense locked up in our heads stop that kind of foolishness.

J: Yeah.

W: But you see, people are still clinging to the old way of thinking a 100, 200 years ago.

J: Yeah.

W: It's a terrible, disgraceful thing. To have smart white children and smart black children and we want to still impose on them that old way of thinking. And they got sense enough to figure it out.

J: Well they are figuring it out. True.

W: Well then that makes us—. That makes the old ones a liar. See?

J: Yeah.

W: Oh yes. Oh yes. [As a matter of fact] we talking about the Emancipation Proclamation. Now they say, "Well Lincoln wrote the Emancipation Proclamation to free the blacks." Well you see that's a lie.

J: Well people who know realize that's not the way it was.

W: Well if it's not right it's a lie.

J: Yeah. Yeah we live with lies all our lives. For generations.

W: Well I'm glad that you're doing the interview. And I pray much that other people will be able to read and hear this tape.

J: Well they will be. It'll be in the public domain once we do it I have no more control over it. It becomes the property of the college. So young black or white people will be able to go over there and quietly sit down and listen to it and take notes and use it in putting together school papers or term papers. I just don't want someone to come in from the outside and take all these tapes that I've produced and publish them and make a profit on them.

W: How're you gonna stop them?

J: Oh I stopped them. I have an agreement with the college. I have to agree with how they're to be used. Now if your organization for the public good can raise money to have all of these tapes typed and printed in booklet form that's fine. That's a different matter. But to have someone come in and say, "Well I like what John's doing. I'm gonna use all of his work and then I'll find a

publisher and we'll print it and we'll put it on the market and I'll make the money." No way. I'd be a darn fool to let anybody do that.

W: Well then you see it'd have to go beyond the community college in order to register these things in the Library of Congress and copyright it.

J: That's right.

W: Now if it's not done that way then they certainly could do it.

J: Yeah, well I talked to the copyright office myself about my stake in this so we came up with a special agreement on some of my major series including the lives of the Watermen, retired black teachers, and history of tobacco culture in Charles County, and the history of the Stone family. So we're interested in a lot of things and while we may not be doing a lot of these things perfectly at least we're doing them.

W: Mhm.

J: And I really resent criticism from people who themselves have never done anything to record history. And you get it yourself don't you?

W: Well you see that is the—. That's the reason why that you see many of the documents here and hundreds and hundreds more in my house.

J: Yeah.

W: Now you see people are always willing and ready to tear down something.

J: Oh yeah.

W: And make it a lie if they can.

J: True.

W: But when people of this county who are trying their [level] best to make better people, better citizens, then they will have to have the documents that the children and the young adults have never seen and would never see because some of them are not gonna take time to go back and research it.

J: Yeah. That's right.

W: See. Now, you see this here man that lived before Lincoln wrote the Emancipation Proclamation by the name of Roger B. Taney. Now his philosophy and his thoughts are still well alive today.

J: Good Maryland man. Roger Brooke Taney.

W: Well I don't know that he was so good or not.

J: From his point of view certainly he was.

W: Well his point of view you see could be rotten and influence others.

J: Oh sure.

W: They say one rotten apple certainly can ruin the whole lot of them. And I think a lot of the rotten part of him is still alive today. But you see, our history books—since you say you have read quite a bit of history and have gone to these universities—you know what Roger B. Taney said and you know what he did. And you know how we honor him.

J: I don't. Who honors him today really?

W: Well, they got statues of him in Upper Marlboro. They got schools named after him. They got all kinds of books wrote for him, [inaudible phrase], and the great big supreme court in Washington got his picture and statues there.

J: Yeah, yeah.

W: If that's not honor what is it?

J: Seems to me he was involved somehow in the Dred Scott decision, was that a possibility?

W: That's what it's all about. Have you seen Dred Scott and his wife and his children and what Roger B. Taney said?

J: No, no....

[Tape Breaks]

J: What did your earliest school look like? What was the physical condition of it inside and out? Do you remember?

W: I certainly do.

J: As a young boy this wouldn't have bothered you much, but what did your poor teacher have to put up with there in that first building?

W: The first building looked like that.

J: Oh, isn't that isn't that great. What year do you put on this photograph?

W: 1922.

J: Uh huh. Okay and this is the Chicamuxen Elementary?

W: Yes and we have many, many pictures of the school conditions, the double desks and some with no desks.

J: Oh yeah.

W: And not with old wood stoves anything and outside toilets and no playground equipment. That's what we're talking about.

J: Well the interior of this school indicates that it was—.

W: That's a [frame] old building.

J: Yeah, yeah at least, it looks like it might have been a cut above average. Really, at least you had interior sheathing, vertical probably [tie and grooves].

W: Well you see, [inaudible] with little blackboards were very small.

J: They were yeah.

W: And most of us that went to school had slates.

J: Uh huh.

W: And slates weren't as large as that picture.

J: Now could three children sit at one of these desks?

W: If they were small three could sit there.

J: I see, uh huh. Is that building still standing do you know?

W: The building has been torn down and numbered piece by piece and is stored in the barn of the community college.

J: I see, uh huh. Well, so you hope it will go back up some day?

W: Well we hope that Mr. Dyson then will fix us some kind of law and regulation that we can get it back and put it back on a we got five acres of ground right down here on 301 highway waiting to restore that building and put it back like it was. Since people have gone to Port Tobacco—. I mean McConchie and gotten that old McConchie school and dragged it down to the fairground to show white children what a one room school house looked like for them but black school's just the same.

J: Right. Yeah. Well I take photographs of them every time I find one. So I'm too late for this one apparently.

W: Yes.

J: Anyway it's been, it's been saved. Do you remember how many children were enrolled there at Chicamuxen Elementary?

W: Yes.

J: When you were going there?

W: Yes there were [inaudible] my first year there, there were 35 children.

J: 35.

W: In all grades. Went from—.

J: Okay.

W: Went from one through seven. And we had to be six years old going on seven before we got into the first grade. Then that brought on a problem for the teachers because we had a problem called over-age-ness. Now some children lived a long ways from the school and only could make it during passable days when they could walk to school and there wouldn't be no snow and ice. The roads were bad for the children to walk and was no paved roads here all gravel roads and dirt roads. Therefore the children sometimes made 30 days in the year. Well then they already seven before they got to the first grade. When they got through the third and fourth grade they were already twelve and thirteen years old then. When a teacher came to a school and children twelve and thirteen years old in the third and fourth grade and those in the seventh grade were sixteen and seventeen years old. It made it very difficult for the men teachers to go into a situation like that because within the training of teachers at that time in the normal schools—what they would call the teacher preparation called normal schools—they did not tell the young men the weaknesses and sicknesses of women and young girls and problems connected with young girls. And I am still in, under the shame-ness of what I did to young women that I taught in the seventh grade when they said, "Mr. Diggs I don't feel well. I can't do it." And I thought they didn't want to do it or lazy and punished them. And all the same time they were really sick. But I just had no knowledge of that. See that's the problem. And the same thing with young women that came to the county and a boy sixteen and seventeen years old already feeling mannish.

J: Yeah, yeah that would be tough. Very difficult.

W: Well see in a—. You just take for example Port Tobacco down there. Now you had a young woman come here to Port Tobacco. Well she been used to the company of young men. Now to come into a place like that no young men. And not, see, that's a part of life.

J: That's true.

W: And she denied that. And said she got back home. Well when she got back to her home what it was once a year twice a year. That's the thing. And I doubt very seriously if any of the teachers that you interviewed brought that part out as a problem.

J: No, no. Women teachers especially would not have mentioned it.

W: Well that's the absolute truth. Absolute truth and some women teachers were so hard up for men companion till they sneaked around with some of the big boys because some of them were nice looking, strong, and able. And some of caught with, were caught with [babies].

J: Just think of that.

W: Fact.

J: Yeah you don't get that told to you very often.

W: The record will shoot you down there. The Board of Education dismissed white and black teachers on that account. And men too. Not just women.

J: [Inaudible].

W: Oh yes.

J: What was your academic record like in elementary school? Were you considered a good student?

W: Troublesome, troublesome.

J: Troublesome.

W: Troublesome because always I could get the work but I was full of questions at all times.

J: Oh yeah.

W: And they didn't want a student to ask them no questions about nothing. "Whatever I say is the gospel and don't ask no questions or [be] questioning me about it." Therefore you see I had a very difficult time all the way through school because of the women appearance in front of me. Because from one day old till I got to six years of age going into school I was under my mother's jurisdiction and what she had to say. After I got to school then ran up into another woman and [inaudible] right on through the elementary. After finished that and went into the high school there were some more women had to fool with them. That's and see and you dared not to ask any questions. And they punished you and did everything to you and the [pastor] went, "Well you must've done something." I said to her, I said, "Listen, I haven't done a thing to them. I want to ask them questions that I want to know." And I said, "They better not hit me."

J: What was discipline like during your days in elementary school? Was the teacher allowed to use a stick or a book or a strap?

W: Yes. Some of them went to the excess.

J: Oh yeah. Have we leaned over backwards today? How do you feel about discipline today?
W: Well here's the thing about the discipline.

J: Corporal punishment.

W: Yes, yes, corporal punishment. Now here is the thing what brought it on faster than anything else. When we find prejudice locked into any group of people. Black who are prejudiced against black. White were prejudiced against whites. That's locked in prejudice. Now if a white teacher got into a poor neighborhood of poor white people and their home weren't any better than blacks

and they had no more money than blacks. They had no better job than blacks. Therefore they were just as ignorant as blacks and then when they came to school and they didn't meet their requirements and the minute they got out of hand they severely whipped them on the hands around the legs and kept them in deprived them from their food, lunches and things. They had gotten up early that morning, packed their little lunches and books and bags and things and then got to school and was hungry anyway and they were supposed to eat it at 12 o'clock and then the teacher took it away from them wouldn't give it to them.

J: None of that today is there?

W: Well.

J: That we know of.

W: Well see that, that was called locked in prejudice and it existed now just the same as the child missed the day from school. Then he may miss tomorrow. The next day came to school. The teacher want to know, "Why have you been absent two days? What happened to you? I gave you this work and now you came back to school and now you don't know nothing about it." How could the child know anything about it? Mother couldn't read, father couldn't read. No one to help the child, and then the child got—.

[Tape breaks].

J: At what point in your young life did you begin to think seriously of teaching as a career?

W: When I was about five.

J: Really? That early?

W: Yes. Because I could see no way black people could make a living other than preaching, teaching, or farming. That was all they were supposed to do. Now, I didn't want to be no farmer and I didn't want to be no preacher. Now what is left for me?

J: The way you went. The way you went. Now when you were growing up, how many black families that you knew that went to school and church depended on the Indian Head Powder Plant payroll? Were there a few that—?

W: That went on to college and—.

J: That actually were hired on at Indian Head? How important was the federal government payroll at Indian Head to the black families in your neighborhood?

W: Now that's a good question and I'm glad you asked because the government of these Unites States was prejudiced. Locked in prejudiced. Now my father worked there until he died, retired and then died. Now the black families only received 17 dollars and 52 cents a week. I didn't say an hour and I didn't say a day. I said 17 dollars and 52 cents a week and they had to provide his own transportation to get there and provide his own food while he was working there and then

provide his food and shelter for his family. And he could not be promoted to do nothing else than a labor job and if you complained about that you were dismissed from that.

J: So many of them including your father had to do a little farming—.

W: Had to do. That's the only thing they had to rely on.

J: Produce food there at home.

W: Yes.

J: Now did the family keep chickens—.

W: Now that's the only way [inaudible]—.

J: And hogs.

W: If we wanted chickens then you had to raise them because there was no such thing as A&P, Safeway, and Giant.

J: That's right. If you wanted fresh meat you better produce it.

W: Better produce a good [inaudible].

J: Yeah. What—. Did your father butcher hogs on occasion?

W: My father butchered hogs twice a year.

J: I'll be darned.

W: He butchered hogs in Thanksgiving time and then they butchered hogs but they last till March.

J: Did you help him with that as you grew up?

W: Oh sure.

J: How many brothers did you have now?

W: I had three brothers but all passed on [inaudible].

J: Oh so you really got the brunt of it as the only male child left in the family?

W: Yeah.

J: What was your father's favorite recipe, let us say, for preserving pork?

W: My father's recipe for preserving pork was salted.

J: Okay.

W: Salted or canned meat. My mother preferred much of the meat canned, especially the lean part. The lean part of it. They would cut the hams up since they had so many of them. Sometimes they killed four or five hogs. And then they'd cut all the meat regardless of [what it were] meat whether hams or shoulders or what it would be and grind it all up into sausage meat. And then fried and put it in jars.

J: Oh, cook it first and then can it.

W: Yes.

J: I see so that was a double protection wasn't it?

W: Yeah. And then you see it wouldn't spoil. And then it was already cooked and all you had to do is sit it on the stove or put it in the oven and it became hot and then you had the hot bread or preserves or molasses or whatever you had and you soon could get a dinner ready. But you see a lot of the white people who lived in Chicamuxen butchered oxens.

J: Oh did they?

W: Yes. Butchered oxens and you see much of the early meat we didn't get the hog meat. We had the—. We couldn't buy but the two parts of the oxen. We could buy its tail and could buy its head. And sometimes they would let you have his old hooves.

J: And tongue occasionally?

W: Well if you bought the, if you got the head you got the tongue.

J: That's right yeah. Yeah that tongue was a delicacy.

W: Well it certainly was because I—. If you could—. If I could carry you by magic now through my home in Indian Head I have a big pot that you could sit down into as large as you are.

J: Good lord.

W: And they could put sometimes four and five ox heads in there.

J: That's a big pot.

W: Oh yes, oh yes.

J: What was your mother's favorite way of flavoring sausage? What herbs did she put in?

W: Well she would put red pepper, sage, and thyme.

J: Thyme. I've heard that once before. And salt and pepper in addition.

W: Yes, yes.

J: Okay. Did that give you a sausage that was a touch on the spicy side?

W: It was a bit spicy and a bit mild.

J: Okay.

W: The red pepper gave that spicy but she didn't put too much red pepper in it. But that sage, that sage was the main thing. Course we raised our own sage.

J: Oh did you?

W: We raised our own sage. And you put as much of the sage in it as you wanted. And we made the sausage [inaudible] with the intestines of the hog and grind it up into sausage meat. And then you had a stuffer. I don't have a stuffer here.

J: I have seen one.

W: Well here it is over here in this room here.

J: Well anyways was your mother a good cook? By today's standards would you say your mother knew her way around the kitchen pretty well.

W: Well I say so because we ran the first restaurant and hotel in Charles County for the government workers or anybody else.

J: Now there's a nice bit of history right there. When was it opened?

W: This hotel was opened in 1926.

J: Uh huh and where was it located?

W: Indian Head.

J: Did it have a name?

W: We called it the Progressive Hotel.

J: The Progressive. Oh for heaven's sake. So it was a family business?

W: Yes. And of course the whites could stay in the government hotel but the blacks had nowhere to stay.

J: And where was this located exactly? I know Indian Head pretty well.

W: Good for you. Well it's on the old road. See it wasn't [inaudible] route. I'm not talking 210.

J: No I know you're not.

W: 210 wasn't there.

J: Old Livingston Rd.

W: Yes. See it was on the old road. Well just before you go into Woodland Village. Now not on the left, not on neither one of those corners there going in but on the opposite corner that tall big yellow house there two story house there. That's where it was.

J: Now how far was it from Hancock store?

W: Well it's about a mile toward Indian Head.

J: Toward Indian Head, okay.

W: Yes. Yes on the opposite side.

J: Near, near the hill?

W: Well it's just before it joins Eli's shopping center.

J: I see, okay. Yeah.

W: Mr. Eli, after my sister passed and all of them passed on then the property fell to me. And Mr. Eli and I own that whole section in there.

J: So you and your family knew the Eli family pretty well didn't you?

W: Oh sure, sure. Then when Mr. Eli used to put needles and thread and buttons and things on his back and in bags going from house to house selling them.

J: For heaven's sake. Was he considered a friend of the black community?

W: He certainly was.

J: Good. See I wanted to interview them but they wouldn't talk to me. They wouldn't go down on tape. Both of them. I thought I had them at the point one time where I could go over there and sit down in the store but first thing I knew it was too late. They were gone and their daughter called me one day and said, "I appreciate what you're trying to do but it's too late. Too late for them." Anyway.

W: Well you see the reason why I said that they were friends to blacks after he got had—. He had two stores and he didn't own none of them at first but he rented them.

J: I see.

W: Of course he and his wife and his oldest children worked the store. And then when he got enough money to buy where he is now then he said to the little town of Indian Head and the people surrounding it, " I'm gonna open up a big shopping center. That's be for Waldorf. And I'm gonna open it up." And then he did open it up. He had everything that came up in Indian Head today and he said, "I'm going to hire black people to help me as clerks and things in the store."

And many of the people said, "Mr. Eli if you hire niggers in the store we won't patronize you." So he said, "If you feel that way we don't need your [inaudible].

J: Well that tells you something.

W: And he hired lack people in there and continued to have them until he got too old and had to close his doors.

J: Yeah we were there just before he closed his store.

W: Well you see, well that tells you that there was a [inaudible] being of Jewish decent himself. He knew and felt the pain of prejudice and hate. He knew it.

J: Yeah. So it made a difference in the way he treated everybody else.

W: Well, the whites gave him all the hell he needed in Indian Head. Even down to the town managers and everybody else. They would send the water everywhere else and wouldn't even give him water. They thought that that he were gonna run that store and open up that shopping center and he spent all kinds of money digging wells and stuff there to have his own well. And then at last they had to give water down that route and he were hooked onto what [inaudible] a thousand dollars he spent to get the water in there. And then this is locked in prejudice see? He's fighting other whites.

J: Yeah that's right.

W: Yeah. And—.

J: Sad story, I'll tell you.

W: Oh yes.

J: Sad story. Well was the Progressive Hotel a success as a business?

W: It was, it was.

J: Okay. Did you have to help out from time to time as you were coming along?

W: Well here's what happened. Now before it really did get down to really profit making we had a bakery and we baked pies, cookies, gingerbread, and everything.

J: On the hotel premises?

W: Yes and put it in baskets and I put it on my arm. One basket on this arm one basket on this arm and went from house to house selling bread, buns, biscuits and everything else.

J: Isn't that—. So you were doing that as a young man during the depression era?

W: I was eleven and twelve years old.

J: Yeah think of that. Who were some of your closest black friends as a child? Who do you remember now?

W: I had none.

J: You had none. Why was that? I think I know but why do you think so?

W: Well the thing of it is we had locked in prejudice and hate. And one didn't want to view one group use more sense and could get ahead of the other and therefore they did everything they could do to discourage you to make you on equal quality with them they had nothing and you tried to do something and they tried to bring you down to it.

J: That would've been my guess. That would have been my guess and isn't that tragic?

W: It's really tragic and we still have the same situation today.

J: So they knew that you were struggling to be as much as you could be in this world?

W: Well I was first male to graduate of the high school from my area. First one that ever graduated from college of my area.

J: Now there's an achievement. There's an achievement. Okay now where did you go to high school?

W: I went to Washington after I—.

J: Oh did you.

W: After I called myself finished in Pomonkey High School. Now Pomonkey High School was not really a high school that prepared me with these questions and backgrounds of experiences I wanted. And when it came to trigonometry, geometry, language, and English my mother felt that I was deficient in it and she said, "You are so young and yet pushed you all the way through school because you knew the material but the teachers did not give you the background of experience."

J: And she knew that? She says that?

W: She says that. So then she sent me away to Washington to graduate from high school over again. So then when I went to high school in Washington I went from first year right on through for four years.

J: What high school did you go to?

W: I went to Dunbar High School.

J: Dunbar. The best and I'm afraid it was a lot better then than it is today.

W: Oh yes. Oh yes [inaudible phrase] of mathematics, geometry, trigonometry, all kind of thing. When I asked a question somebody knew all about it and could explain it in detail to me. When

we as American people, black, we still hear a deficient and foolish language. We can't speak it, and we can't write it, and we can't spell it.

J: And it's a must isn't it?

W: It's a must.

J: You're crippled. You're crippled without the facility to read, or write, or speak it.

W: Well it's crippling to both white and black people—.

J: Oh yeah more so to black because they have more to overcome.

W: Oh yes. Oh yes and you see, now you said you've been to college in Illinois and college in Georgetown, but the hardest subject I imagine that you had to encounter with and of today is English. You got to be very careful with English. If you writing anything or making a speech about anything you got to be very, very careful.

J: That's what I did for a living for 25 years.

W: Yes well then you know what I'm talking about.

J: Oh yeah. And I'm also very sensitive to the lack of and the facility, the aptitude in the schools today among teachers and students in the handling of English language.

W: Well.

J: It's pretty sad.

W: Well the reason why my mother said to me, "You are deficient in language and we're not satisfied with your education at Pomonkey." Now if you said now we are talking about the English language and she said, "We have given you dictionaries and things to look up these words. Tell me what did Webster look like? Did he have jewelry? Was he married? What kind of farm did he live on? Did he have brothers and sisters? How long did it take him to make this big unabridged dictionary? And how did he get so many meanings for the same word? And how—. Who told him that the pneumonia supposed to start with a 'p'? Pneumonia. Now and what laws did they use to stop the Old English like in Beowulf? When did they stop that into all of the modern English that you know today?" Now if you ask the same question to anybody of these high schools they won't be able to tell you.

J: No, no that's true.

W: Well then now how can we say that we are 100 percent sure of the English language and here Webster now and who has done more for the English language than anybody in America and we don't even have one day, half a day, no kind of minute to honor this man called Webster.

J: That's true, nothing.

W: We have Valentine's Day, St. Patrick's Day, and any other day but you don't have Webster day. Now that man did all that. Well why?

J: A real scholar in a day when scholars were very, very rare.

W: Well doing that and everybody to write a speech, and the President's, they had to convince [their New York] and they had to write speeches but they had to rely upon Webster's, both his spelling of words and then uses of language and still no one knows nothing about this man.

J: That's true that's kind of a sad thing.

W: Well there's something wrong, something wrong with the schools.

J: Yeah, that's true, that's true. So what year did you graduate from high school in Washington now?

W: I graduated from high school, Dunbar High School in Washington, in February of 1936.

J: They had a class reunion recently didn't they?

W: Dunbar you mean?

J: Yes. Were you there?

W: No, no—.

J: For what year was that reunion for?

W: I think it was for the class in the 30s, early 30s, 31 or 32.

J: The first perhaps graduating class?

W: No, no, no. Dunbar High School went way back in the 20s.

J: I see. Okay. Yeah I remember reading about that. About some of the achievements of those who graduated from Dunbar. They're commiserating on the deterioration of teaching quality. So what was your first teaching assignment and how did you get it? How did you hear about this job on the Eastern Shore?

W: Well after I had finished Pomonkey High School and my mother said, "You're deficient and we're not satisfied with it. Now we are poor and your father not making much 17 dollars and 52 cents a week and you have a large family and we don't have money to send you anywhere else. But I'm gonna ask my sister to let you go and stay with her and we will do the best we can for you and you see if you can do something to help yourself." And my first assignment was a reading teacher in the public school system of Washington in 1934. And I taught there from 34 the whole time I was going to high school up until 36. Then I wasn't qualified then so I went over, started Howard but was too expensive for me and my father so then I went to boy normal school. And then finished in normal school preparation. And at that time in this book here that I've shown you, *Maryland Public School Law,* all, since Maryland was not producing enough black teachers and white teachers they gave them reduction into the fee in going to the normal school preparation for teachers. When you finished you had to sign a paper that you would teach for two years to pay them back for the reduction they had given you. So when I finished the two years and the paper was already on file and they needed black teachers everywhere. So we sent

out applications to the various counties asking if there was any vacancy within the school system there and the first one that came back was Dorchester County. And then I went on down and accepted the position in Dorchester County.

J: How old were you at this time?

W: 18.

J: 18 think of that. What did you find in Dorchester that might have been a little different from Charles? Were there any surprises there was life in the black community different at all?

W: Life in the black community was different. You see geographically different, and mentally different, and work conditions differently. Now here at Chicamuxen we knew nothing about oystering. We knew nothing about tidewater muskrats and things like that. We knew nothing about other means of survival here. After I got over there see then it was a new mood of living. I had never eaten a lot of oysters. I had never eaten—. Of course we had fish here but not every day. And crab was not every day and we had a difference in work. Now in Dorchester they had contract labor for farm produce. Now they had contract for cucumbers. All the farmers that wanted to grow cucumbers they went on a contract. And then all the cucumbers when they became mature enough they put them in baskets and carried them right on out and sold them—.

J: Tomatoes?

W: Tomatoes too. And they had canning factories there and we didn't have canning factories here. I had never seen a canning factory. They'd can tomatoes, and corn, and beans. I'd never seen it but over there you see that's the way they made their living.

J: What were the first challenges to you as a very young teacher in Dorchester? What things did you find a wee bit difficult to deal with during that first year?

W: My first year and the whole time I remained in Dorchester was the lack of appreciation for the two groups of people. I find that the prejudice and hate was greater than we have ever known here in Charles.

J: Really?

W: Never known. I had never experienced it in my life. Going to a store and you'd have to bow and, "Will you please give me a pound of cheese and will you please do this." And then if we got it and you standing waiting for a bus to carry you from where I was at [Crape] Hope to Cambridge which is 30 miles then you had and you wanted to eat a piece of your cheese or something other and it was winter time you had to go indoors and eat it. I never experienced that here in Charles.

J: And they've had some serious problems there in recent years between the races. Riots.

W: Yes, yes and you see those things like that greatly influenced me because I never experienced it before. Racism became very, very, very discouraging to me.

J: A big part of daily living.

W: Yes.

J: Just keeping these things in mind. What was expected of you as a black person.

W: And then if something happened and they took advantage of you, nothing at all you could do about it because all the lawyers were white, and the courthouse was white, and their laws with whatever excuse that they had for arresting you or doing something to you they had a legal excuse to satisfy the agreement.

J: Well how many years were you there in Dorchester?

W: I was there from 1936 to 42.

J: That long you survived in Dorchester. What was your highest annual salary there?

W: My highest annual salary total was 450 dollars a year.

J: And your entrance salary was what?

W: That was the entrance and the last.

J: Not any increase at all during that six year period?

W: No, no increase.

J: So was your next charge here in Charles County?

W: No the next one was in Worcester.

J: Was that any better?

W: Worse than Dorchester.

J: Worse?

W: Worse than Dorchester. When I was at a place called Snow Hill.

J: I know where it is.

W: There you have more of this tenant farming, more of this cannery, more of this prejudice because Worcester joined the southern part of Virginia on that side. And the Virginians were very hostile to the Marylander's. And of course naturally when that happened the whole time I was in Worcester. There was—. They had two lynching's there. And—.

J: 19, early 40s, would you say?

W: 39. 39. When this lynching took place, this white girl said that these boys whistled at her and said a sexual remarks to her. Said it now, didn't do it, but said it. So they apprehended these boys and went to a hardware store in Snow Hill and broke open the doors and got new paint out of the store. These people that were harboring these boys [inaudible], they said they hid them and the news got around that they were gonna harm them. And so these people who were hiding these boys and so they couldn't find them at first but word got out that these women were hiding these boys. So they took these women to the jail house and into the square there at Snow Hill.

J: Now these are black women we're talking about?

W: These are black women and tied them up by their heels and turned them upside downwards on the tree limb and poured new paint down into them. New paint. Now you know paint is

heavy. And they poured that down in them. And then they died of course. And they left them so others could pass and see them.

J: And you saw them yourself?

W: Looked at them just like I'm looking at you. And I have a collection of all the lynching that ever took place in America. And the last lynching that we had in Maryland and what they did. Have you—. Did you ever read that one?

J: No, no.

[Tape Breaks]

J: Between the time you left elementary school at Chicamuxen and came back as a teacher had any significant changes been made in black education in Charles County?

W: Yes certainly.

J: You would think so but—.

W: Yes quite a change had been made.

J: What were the most significant changes?

W: The attitudes.

J: To—. Okay.

W: Attitudes. See when the attitude changes everybody changes.

J: Are we talking about a good change?

W: We're talking about a semi because it was a long time and a big fight and a court battle here to accept integration. And has not been accepted as yet.

J: No and it'll be a while yet, [inaudible].

W: See we take children and by body and carry them by bus and then body them in a building and we give them play periods and we babysit them until the bus is ready to carry them back and put them all in the same place where we put them on.

J: What was the physical condition of Oak Grove when you turned up there to teach? The building itself. What was it like? No running water?

W: No running water, no electricity.

J: No electricity.

W: No heat other than what you could by the wood around local.

J: What road is Oak Grove on?

W: Oak Grove is on Route 6.

J: Right on Route 6.

W: Right on Route 6. It was but they've torn the building down.

J: Is it near—. Was it near [Graton] by any chance?

W: It was beyond [Graton] about three miles beyond [Graton]. Near Riverside.

J: Okay.

W: Near Riverside. And of course Mr. [Linton]. [Buddy Linton], delicate [Linton] then had a sawmill and he supplied the wood for the schools.

J: Okay I was there just two weeks ago. At his sawmill. I interviewed him a year ago.

W: Is that so?

J: Politics of Charles County. Did you know of a little old lady, Bertha, who ran the store there at [Taylor's] Neck Rd.?

W: Sure, Bertha Gaines.

J: Right. I interviewed her two years ago.

W: She's 90 something too.

J: Yes she is. Two of her daughters were there the day I interviewed her so that was a remarkable experience. How many children were there when you reported for work? What was the enrollment?

W: 42.

J: 42 all grades?

W: All grades.

J: This time through eight?

W: Seven.

J: Through seven still. Okay.

W: Then we took on more children and then they added the second room to it and divide the children up.

J: I see. I see.

W: And then the children ran from one through three. And then I took on four, six, and seven.

J: Any discipline problems for you? As a man teacher you were remarkable in the fact that you had a lot of experience outside of Charles County. You graduated from an excellent High School and you'd gone to Bowie State. Did this impress your students? The way you spoke English for example? What did they think of you?

W: Well I don't think they—. I don't think the English impressed them but I think probably the family ties with the community was greater than any other experience I could have had.

J: I see.

W: See my father's people were right from that area.

J: Ah okay.

W: And my father's sisters and brothers married within those groups you see and some of them were cousins and distant cousins and what have you right there.

J: So they, they knew that if they misbehaved in school you might just talk to their daddy who was a distant cousin or their mother?

W: Well—.

J: Was this important?

W: Well that was important in one respect but the association getting along with the children, which when you go back down quite naturally they will tell you I never had not one moment of disciplinary problem with the children. And when we got down there to improve the conditions, see there was nowhere for the children to go other than to Sunday school on a Sunday and to church. No other activity at all. So then I bought a 100 and some acres of waterfront property at Riverside, not at Riverside, Maryland Point. And there the children could come after school's over every day and crab and fish and swim.

J: Could they walk to it from the, from the school?

W: Yes. And then those that didn't walk there caught rides with other people and they had I guess a closer tie with the community.

J: Who were a few of the major white families in your neighborhood of the school down there? Linton’s?

W: Yes, Linton’s.

J: Wheeler's? At that time?

W: No, was no Wheeler's there.

J: Okay they went back earlier.

W: Yeah. Mrs., [Buddy] Linton's mother Ms. Emily Linton, now she was a teacher at one time at one time or several. And Mr. Linton, Mr. Sam Linton, that was his father, he at one time was a teacher. And we would sit and talk you see then about the school and conditions of people and things because they are right from that area.

J: How'd you like them? How'd you get along with them? Were you comfortable communicating with them?

W: Yes—.

J: There was a lot of respect there among you?

W: Yes because, [Buddy] Linton himself was a boy when I got down there.

J: Oh I see.

W: He was a boy about my own age.

J: Yeah, huh.

W: You see [Inaudible phrase] not my own age he was in the age bracket, there were ten or twelve years difference—.

J: And he was overseas in World War II.

W: Yes, yes well when he came back you see then he married a teacher.

J: It was Jane.

W: Yes, yes. It was Jane that he—. See Jane then was teaching at Milton Sommers. You see? And then she was helpful too. And then we had [Buddy] Linton's Aunt who kept post office and store at Riverside. Her name was Mary Harrison. So she owned a lot of property down there.

J: That's an old name there too isn't it? Harrison.

W: Yes.

J: Were the Williams around at all? Preston?

W: Preston Williams was living there at that time. He too would come by the school and sit and talk and sometimes I'd go down to his house. But Preston Williams when I was a child his sister taught at Chicamuxen. And we had to pass his sister's school to go to our little black school down in the woods.

J: Oh for heaven's sake.

W: And white children black children played all the way to school. And then played all the way back home.

J: What an experience.

W: Yes but see when I was on the Eastern Shore it was different, you see.

J: Yeah. So there was an easy, kind of an easy going relationship between the youngsters in both schools in those day?

W: Oh yes, oh yes, you see they had no—.

J: Has that changed any now? What do you see now?

W: Well I see a drastic change because of intermingling with other people other than those immediately around them. When the war started in 1940. When the Japs struck Pearl Harbor then the whole country was in upset. Then the boys went to various places and met other people from other places and their ideas and attitudes changed too.

J: That's true.

W: And then when the war was over, you see, then they had bitter attitudes from the press and other things that made us look down on the Japanese as terrible people, you see. Well then they had met other people from maybe Alabama, Mississippi, and all into the Army, Navy, Marines and they came into it with bad attitudes and bad thoughts and influenced others. And then we have never gotten straight yet from that 40 war. See after had dropped that kind of attitude. But what happened? We took on a very vicious attitude about killing. And from that time on we've been having problems with people taking guns and knives and no regard for a person's life and

killing people. What we say we don't know why people are doing it. We did it because the United States made people think that way, made people kill people, made people have no regard for other people's lives. And quite naturally you can't break it up now. Look what they did to Vietnam. Went in there and slaughtered the thing and carried bombs in by the tons and bombed the people up and did everything. And a lot of other places they've done the same thing. And they say now that should not have any influence on people.

J: But it did didn't it?

W: How could it be it wouldn't have any influence? If you poor sugar into a bowl of blackberries you know that sugar gonna have some influence on them blackberries.

J: You better believe it.

W: [Laughs]

J: You better believe it. Well how many years were you at Oak Grove now?

W: I was at Oak Grove from 1947 through 53.

J: Okay six years. What changes occurred in that neighborhood during those six years? Anything worth commenting on? Better transportation? That was always a big problem wasn't it? Out in those areas.

W: Well it's a problem there now.

J: Yeah, I think you're right.

W: See, if they wanted to leave there and go to a shopping center they had to get from—. They're 15 miles from La Plata through Nanjemoy.

J: What—. Did you have an active PTA? At Oak Grove.

W: We had active PTA.

J: Who were your leaders in the PTA there?

W: Well we had Richardson, James Richardson. And we had another man named Cotter, Bryan Cotter. And had another man by the name of Emery Holmes. And—.

J: Well, that's Bertha's brother.

W: Bertha—. Bertha Gaines brother.

J: Brother, yeah.

W: Yes that's—.

J: Ran the little store.

W: That's right.

J: That had been his mother's store.

W: Yes, yes, yes that's right.

J: Okay.

W: And then his wife is still living Mary Frances Holmes.

J: Yeah, I need to interview her.

W: And then we of course had active PTA and the PTA was very active in the school.

J: How did they support you as a teacher?

W: Well, now if you would take one of those books up that you have then I'll show you. The PTA went as a spokesman for the teacher to the Board of Education.

J: Okay so they were—.

W: [If you needed a stove] the PTA would go and ask for one. Would, they'd ask for it. Whatever it was they would ask for it.

J: Were they influential as a group? Did the board listen to them?

W: They had to because you see at that time it wasn't but three people in La Plata that ran the Board of Education.

J: And who were they?

W: Mr. Bernard [Wynn], Mrs. Julie Totten, and Mrs. Farrall. Cecilia Farrall.

J: Cecilia Farrall. Okay I have interviewed Mrs. Totten recently.

W: Well she'll tell you. There were the three in that order. And then the outside the office they had two others. They had Mrs. Parks and Mrs. [Buoy]. Lucille [Buoy] she was supervisor of white schools and J.C. Parks was supervisor of black schools.

J: I've had a nice talk with Mrs. [Buoy] about a month ago. Dr. [Buoy].

W: Yeah, Doctor, Doctor Lucille [Buoy].

J: So what about changing attitudes in the families. Did most of the black families still insist on getting the most out of school?

W: Well—.

J: Were you supported as well as you would like to have been by the families in the community?

W: Oh yes, oh yes because, you see, when I was a small child as I said before I was full of curiosity and wanted to know this. And everyone would say, "He would make a good preacher. He would make a good preacher." But I didn't want to fool with no preacher. But then they said—. And I didn't want to fool with farming. So then there was nothing else for me to think about other than trying to help black people in education.

J: Right. Do you feel you left your mark Mr. Diggs? How do you feel about what you have contributed?

W: Well—.

J: What did you not do that you wished you had a chance to do?

W: Well the thing that I wished I—. That I should have done was to establish—. And since I've been here in Charles County since 47. I wish I could have established a YMCA and YWCA in La Plata. If I could have established a YM, YWCA both combined in La Plata, then the people would not have been divided as they are now. Now if you and I wanted to sit and talk any religious matters or we want to just sit and have a conversation like we doing now, we could go to the Y.

J: That's true.

W: If we wanted to have a speaker to come speak to us, we could go to the Y. But in La Plata where can you go? Right now?

J: Not even today and nowhere in Indian Head either. No common ground for people to get together.

W: No. See without we are strictly attached to some religious organization like the Catholics, or Methodists, or Baptists, but YMCA, YWCA it wouldn't be strictly connected with no overly strict organization, church organization.

J: How many of your students that you taught at Oak Grove went on to college level education?

W: We have about 15 or 20.

J: That's pretty darn good for a small, any small country school.

W: And they still teaching today.

J: That's marvelous—.

[Tape Ends]