Transcript of OH-00130

Mary Ellen Neal

Interviewed by

John Wearmouth

on

November 2, 1988 and December 9, 1988

Accession #: 2006.021; OH-00130

Transcribed by Shannon Neal on September 27, 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

The Stories of Southern Maryland Oral History Transcription Project has been made possible in part by a major grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH): Stories of Southern Maryland. https://www.neh.gov/

NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE HUMANITIES

Any views, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this transcription, do not necessarily represent those of the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Format

Interview available as MP3 file or WAV: ssoh00130_01 (1:35:28); ssoh00130_02 (1:35:47)

Content Disclaimer

The Southern Maryland Studies Center offers public access to transcripts of oral histories and other archival materials that provide historical evidence and are products of their particular times. These may contain offensive language, negative stereotypes or graphic descriptions of past events that do not represent the opinions of the College of Southern Maryland or the Southern Maryland Studies Center.

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 teachers
County school systems
Education
Indian Head (Md.)
Rural conditions
Rural schools
Segregation in education
United States Naval Ordnance Station (Indian Head, Md.)

Tags

One room school house
Oak Grove (Md.)

Transcript

[Tape 1]

John Wearmouth [J]: This is John Wearmouth Interviewing Mary Ellen Neal, Mrs. Neal, at her home on Maryland Route 227 about a mile from Bryans Road Maryland. The date is November 2, 1988. This interview is part of the Charles County Community College Oral History Program. It is also another in the series of history tapes done this year trying to capture the black history education aspect of local history and we have been interviewing retired black school teachers going back to the very early years of the century. If Mary Neal doesn't mind I'll just call her Mary through the interview. Would that be okay? May I call you Mary for this?

Mary Ellen Neal [M]: Yes.

J: Okay alright and she is married to Mr. Clayton Neal. She has lived in Charles County 59 years having come here about 1929. On the very threshold of the Depression years. We'd like to talk about the conditions she found when she was here and get a run down on her total experiences as a teacher and as an administrator in the Charles County public school system. Where did you go to high school Mary? Where did you get your diploma?

M: Monessen, Pennsylvania.

J: How is that spelled now?

M: M-O-N-E-S-S-E-N.

J: Okay and that's in what the southwestern corner?

M: That's in the western part.

J: Western part of the state. Not far from Washington union town?

M: No it's near Pittsburgh.

J: Okay is it south of Pittsburgh?

M: South of Pittsburgh.

J: Okay how many children were there in your parent’s family? You were—how many brothers and sister?

M: I had one brother and one sister. I'm the oldest.

J: I see. How long had the Burgess family lived in that part of the state do you know?

M: For years and years that goes way back.

J: Beyond your father's generation?

M: Oh yes, yes.

J: Do you know where they came from originally?

M: No I don't because I know they're from Pennsylvania, that area of Pennsylvania but now where they came from originally I don't know.

J: So you don't know whether or not they were from the deep south or freemen?

M: No not my father's people.

J: How did your father and mother feel about education for their children? What was their attitude?

M: Well they felt that since they did not have an opportunity to get an education when they were small they really insisted on educating their children. Now what I mean by that is my mother was born in Maryland and my father was born in Pennsylvania. Most all the Burgess's are born in Pennsylvania. Of course she went to a little one room school up there in Maryland.

J: Near Cumberland?

M: Yes near Cumberland.

J: So the far western part.

M: Yes because it really was Westernport is the—

J: Oh yes alright the south of Cumberland.

M: Yeah Westernport, Maryland. What she said because she didn't have an opportunity to get an education she certainly would like to see her children get an education.

J: So whatever interest you yourself had was supported and reinforced all the way through?

M: Yes all the way through.

J: And how about the other children in the family? Did they go as far as you did in higher education?

M: No neither one of them did because the girl wanted to be a nurse and this is what she did, nursing. And of course my brother did something different. He worked on the state—he worked

on the state road. He eventually became the supervisor of state road construction there in Pennsylvania.

J: In the state?

M: In western—Westmoreland County, Pennsylvania.

J: I see so he did very well. He did very well.

M: Mhm. Westmoreland County until he went to—he had that job until he went to Buffalo, New York. Rochester, New York I'm sorry.

J: At what time in your young life did you begin to be attracted rather seriously toward a teaching career? Do you recall?

M: Not necessarily a teaching career.

J: What did you want to do with your adult life?

M: Really what I wanted to do was work in a science laboratory. I had no idea of teaching at that time but I did not want to do a domestic. Did not want to do domestic work.

J: That you knew.

M: That I knew because I wanted to do something that was different. I thought the only thing that I could—well the reason that I said that was because I knew a person who was in Pittsburgh and worked in a science laboratory and I was interested in science. And this—

J: What aspect of it? What appealed to you?

M: Research. And this was why I thought I'd like to do—

J: A natural science or a physical?

M: Physical. So—

J: Okay the real hard stuff.

M: Yes. So this was what I thought that I was going to be able to do but what's not. I ended up but I was determined that on Saturdays—I had a job Saturdays where I went in town from our little community. In fact my father was a coal miner and we were in a coal mining and milling area.

J: This is Canonsburg now?

M: No, no, no he was born there.

J: Oh I see okay.

M: But he was born there and I was born there also but see they moved from there when I was just about a year old. But he always worked in a coal mine. One of the things that I thought this that—I forgot what I was talking about now.

J: Well your early academic and professional interests, your career goals.

M: Oh here's what I was thinking that I had this job that I worked every Saturday. And I went in to in town and it was domestic work and of course I earned enough money to do a lot of little things that I wanted to do. Especially when I was in high school. I went Monessen and I had to travel by streetcar and you had to have money for your streetcar fare. So these—

J: What was the streetcar fare do you remember?

M: Seven cents.

J: Seven cents.

M: Seven cents and you went from one zone into another for seven cents. Then when you got the other zone you paid another seven cents when you got ready to get off see. So that was really 14 cents for me to go from my house to school and 14 cents to come back. So that was 28 cents so I worked on Saturdays. I earned my own car fare for four years and of course with kind of dibbled with it and got an ice cream cone or some candy or something like that that my parents would have to subsidize me with that to help me out. But I was determined that I was not going to do that all my life. This was not the way I was gonna earn a living. So I wanted to go into science but my father took ill. And when he took ill my mother said there wouldn't be no way that we could afford to go four years. So this is how I happened to get into teaching. Because—

J: Economics again.

M: I could go to any of the colleges that gave your normal certificate. You went two years, you got your normal certificate and you could teach. This is what I had to do not that I wanted it. That this is the only thing that we can do. That if you wanted this then you'll have to take the two years. When you come out then you'll have to get a job and go to work and you'll have to go ahead and try to get your—well we thought—I thought I was gonna get a job and go to work and then I would take courses in science and do what I wanted to do. But then after I got in teaching and the first job I had here in Charles County I was making 65 dollars a month. Of course that was good pay at that time. Because I had a friend who was working in Fairfax Virginia who was getting 55. So yes and that 65 dollars was—or I could have gone to North Carolina and made 60 dollars a month. So you see Maryland wasn't too bad for us you know.

J: When did you get your degree at the normal school and what did they call it?

M: Normal Certificate.

J: Okay and that entitled you to teach through what level of school?

M: That in the elementary. Any grade in the elementary school.

J: Okay now when did you get that certificate? What year and how old were you?

M: You got your certificate when you came to, no. When I graduated. I graduated in 1926. Monessen High School.

J: At the age of about what 18?

M: Yes let me see. I was born 1908 and I graduated in 1926 so I was 18.

J: So you got started rather early. What was your grade average? How well did you do in school?

M: B.

J: Alright now was that—that was considered quite good?

M: Yes.

J: Alright and you worked hard to get a B average?

M: Yes because this was in elementary and high school. Because in the elementary and high school you had all white teachers. There were no black teachers but the student body was mixed.

J: Okay really mixed in that part of the state?

M: Yes oh yes.

J: Not simply black and white? Many, many ethnic groups. Czechs, [Inaudible], Polacks.

M: No, no, it was mixed oh yes. Because you see—yeah everything that's right. And—

J: I use those words because they were in use then. I come from Detroit in those years and I remember.

M: So you know. And you see we didn't know anything about segregation. We didn't know that we had segregation.

J: You'd heard it was somewhere else?

M: Yeah.

J: You knew it existed elsewhere.

M: But we didn't know, we didn't know we had it because you had no—back in those days they called them colored teachers—but I had not seen a colored teacher until I went to college. But I heard that in Chester, Pennsylvania they had some colored teachers and that in this little Washington, Pennsylvania they had an elementary school where they had colored teachers. But now in little Washington—we'd call it little Washington—all the colored children had to go to that one elementary school. When they finished elementary school then they went to the Jr. high school, which was mixed. Now that was the two places in Pennsylvania that had the colored teachers as they called them. And I know when I finished West Virginia I sent applications to those places. Well in fact I sent them to all even where I had gone to school too you know. I just thought well no problem getting a job after I got my certificate.

J: Did you have any reservations at all? Did you suffer any qualms about looking for a teaching job south of the Mason Dixon Line?

M: No because one of the things that I found out when I went to West Virginia for school that if you want a job to teach you were gonna—you would have to go below the Mason Dixon Line. This was what they let you know. Well we found that out in talking with the kids who were from different other places you know. They had relatives who were teaching in North Carolina, South Carolina and Virginia and Maryland.

J: Why was this? This is an interesting point. Why was this?

M: I don't know.

J: Was it perhaps because the south, the education systems in the south were beginning to make a real effort to get better qualified black teachers do you think in their segregated schools?

M: I don't think so. I think the thing that really was pronounced there was trying to get teachers period. Because see everybody wasn't—there wasn't a whole lot going into teaching. Because so many of them went into industry. Especially the coal mines and the mills.

J: Did the mines pay quite well?

M: Oh yes.

J: So when your father's health was right he was able to support the family reasonably well?

M: Oh yes very well.

J: And earning the same salary as anyone else doing that kind of work?

M: Exactly.

J: Okay was he a union member; was it union?

M: Yes it was union job [inaudible phrase]. It's on the [inaudible phrase].

J: Okay [he] was a real force wasn't he?

M: Yeah he was. He really was. But that's the way it was.

J: So how long did it take—

M: And when we got—when I got to West Virginia—

J: Where did you go now in West Virginia?

M: Institute.

J: In what city was this located?

M: Institute.

J: Oh Institute, West Virginia.

M: Yeah, yeah I went to West Virginia. West Virginia Institute they called it and the town was Institute.

J: Was this a four year establishment?

M: Four year and I could get the two years there too see. But I could have gotten the four years there. I could've gotten the four years there also. But my father wanted me to go to—you mentioned California. Well that was a California normal and this is where he wanted because I could have traveled streetcar every day. [California University of Pennsylvania] But I just wanted—but I said I wouldn't have any black teachers up there and I would just in the life time would like to experience that. There was another girl from Monessen who finished Monessen too who went to California. And see when she was in her senior year to do her practice teaching there was no place for her to practice teach. So what they did was—and see this is when they started—

J: Are we talking about a black or white girl?

M: Oh this is a black girl. And this is where they had some difficulty because they had no place where this black girl could teach.

J: Why was that?

M: Because there were no black teachers in that area whatsoever.

J: Are we talking about Pennsylvania?

M: I'm talking about Pennsylvania. There were no black teachers.

J: Think of that. In the 20's.

M: Yes sir. And so they had a lot of difficulty at that time because they offered her her diploma and her certificate without and were going to give her a grade in practice teaching but would not have had practice teaching.

J: They were willing to let her bypass hands on experience?

M: Yes. And so she would not accept it. So what they did in that particular town they put her in a school but they gathered all the colored children they called them then and put them in a classroom for her in order for her to get her practice teaching. And she eventually came down here and taught at Mount Hope for a year, see eventually. So that then you see I thought I had ammunition for my father and I said, "Since I can't be in science I'm going to have to go up there and what I have to take would be in teaching." And I said, "Look what they would have me to do." So you couldn't get your practice teaching. So she broke the ice up there for the practice teaching business.

J: Is she alive yet?

M: No she isn't.

J: How many different states did you apply to for a teaching position other than Maryland?

M: Other than? Oh North Carolina, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and of course many places in Pennsylvania. And then of course I applied in West Virginia because see at that particular time West Virginia was a very good paying state for teachers. They got a—

J: What was the pay range?

M: You know West Virginia was paying a 100 dollars a month. That was an exceptionally high salary.

J: Almost twice as much as some places.

M: Oh yes. But one of the things there was they took care of their own first. If you were West Virginian you'd probably get in. Unless they needed—unless they could not fill their quota with West Virginians. Then they would go outside the state and get—

J: When did you finish things up there at Institute?

M: 1928.

J: And this gave you what kind of a degree or a certificate?

M: No gave me a normal—no they called it a Normal Certificate. That's what I got. [Inaudible] And this is why when I came out I went back with the four, well went to Hampton and to Morgan and I eventually got my degree. A BS degree at Morgan.

J: How challenging was the work at Morgan and Hampton as you look back on it now? Did they really provide you with quality instruction at that level?

M: Yes especially Hampton.

J: A good faculty? Good sound curriculum?

M: Yes. You see there's one thing about—

J: Now are we talking about Hampton, Virginia?

M: I'm talking about Hampton, Virginia. Hampton Virginia.

J: Okay down at Hampton Roads?

M: Right that's what I'm talking about.

J: Across the river from Norfolk.

M: That's right.

J: Okay.

M: Now one thing about Hampton you found out this that—

J: Now this was segregated? Hampton was segregated now totally?

M: Oh yes totally. All black students but you had some white teachers. Now that was unusual at a college. It's because so much of their endowment came from the New England States you see. And the teachers and instructors that they had there most of them were from New England. Because I know when I went there in the summer—

J: White?

M: White. And they were accepted no problem at all.

J: So they fit in?

M: Yes, yes so that made a difference with there. Course now those—now see having a white teacher didn't make any difference to me because I had that in Pennsylvania.

J: That's true you would have been comfortable. Some weren't I suppose?

M: See some of those were from down south in North Carolina and Virginia and all that would come up there. It was really a touchy thing for them but they got along alright. They got along fine.

J: What was your very first contact with the Charles County Public Schools System and who were some of the people that you met initially during that first few months?

M: Well the first thing I did I wrote to—you know how they do in college they give you the names of different states where you can contact for jobs. We were in elementary so I'll never forget they gave me Walter Huffington in Baltimore. He was the state supervisor of colored schools. He was state supervisor of colored schools.

J: How was his name spelled?

M: Walter J. Huffington. Huffington. I can spell it [inaudible phrase] because he was a character. And this was the address the school had given me.

J: Now was he black or white?

M: White, white, white. Now but then in the counties you had the white supervisor and the black supervisor. See each county had a black supervisor and a white supervisor. But from the state department that was all white. So anyhow I wrote him just like I had used these addresses writing all these other departments I wrote him. And I got a letter from him saying, gave me the name of Mr. J. C. Parks here to contact. Or because see the supervisors here had to let him know how many, what schools needed teachers and how many they needed. See this information he would have for all of the colored schools in the state of Maryland because he was supervisor of all the schools. Of the colored schools in the State of Maryland. So I wrote to him and he sent me Mr.—no he sent me two names to contact. One was in Eastern Maryland, the supervisor in Eastern Maryland and one was Mr. Parks here. Well I had the—I wrote to the one in Eastern Maryland and I had a response from him and he had a school alright and I was to let him know whether I could accept it or not. So Anyhow we called the train station to get information on my directions over to the Eastern Shore and I found that I had to go to Baltimore and get a ferry. And that did it because I wouldn't take it. I said I cannot go for it and take that. So I wrote to Mr. Parks and then when he had a school and where it would be located then I called to find out the directions. Then I found I could go by land. I didn't have to go by boat, by water. And this is how I got in Charles County. After I got there—

J: So the Chesapeake Bay played a minor, a big role, in your decision.

M: It certainly did.

J: So you were really timid about the thought of being out in the water.

M: Oh yes, yes, yes. Well my parents thought that was the worst thing they ever heard. They were anxious to go ahead and get in a school. Because the girl that was my roommate, we finished Monessen together and she was my roommate, she had gone to Eastern Shore. You know so she couldn't see why I wouldn't. In fact she said, "I'm going over there." But I didn't take it and I found out too that I got 65 dollars a month here in Charles County but over on the Eastern Shore you got 60. See there was a difference in the amount of money you got over there. And then there was a difference in what county you taught in as to how much you got. But the basic salary was 65. Now the counties could go under that but you didn't go over it for no colored teachers.

J: I see now you found out that the pay here in Charles County was not bad comparing it with other states?

M: Oh no. I couldn't get in West Virginia because see they paid a 100 dollars a month.

J: This would have been of course first choice?

M: Yes that was my first choice but I didn't get in there because they took care of their own first. And anything that was open you got in there then?

J: What was the lowest monthly pay figure from the states that you had corresponded with?

M: Oh 55 dollars. No, South Carolina was 50 dollars. South Carolina was 50.

J: So this looked pretty good to you?

M: Oh yes.

J: Besides you weren't far from home.

M: No. And then as so many people did it's surprising. When I got here it was surprising, as Mr. Parks was telling me, it was surprising of the number of teachers from the south who had applied. But what he was trying to do was trying to get some teachers—it was he said it was very difficult to pull teachers from these northern states. And he was attempting to do something a little different.

J: With what in mind? Why did he lean toward?

M: I think it, well it was because of—I'm not too sure but he said he wanted to try those people who were coming from those schools that had all white teachers. Did this make a difference in the background of the person who was coming. Did it really make a difference. He had at that time Ohio, Indiana, Pennsylvania. He was trying all those places and see how it was going to work out.

J: Do you think he felt that in those states young black people wanting a teaching career had an easier time getting into good schools?

M: I don't know.

J: That would have been—

M: And you see there's another thing too. In Charles County and there weren't that many. He was trying to look after the county students too but there weren't that many going to college. See that made a difference too.

J: What did you think of Mr. Joseph C. Parks?

M: I think he was a wonderful person.

J: Sounds like he was a very progressive.

M: He had some wonderful open ended ideas for the operation of schools. Because he did a lot of things that other superintendents didn't do with what he had to work with.

J: Did you feel or do you feel now looking back that he got above average support from the white superstructure of the education system? Did they let him kind of have his own way?

M: Well most all the black supervisors in Maryland ordinarily you just had, you did what you thought you needed to do.

J: Okay so they had some real influence.

M: Yeah you see there wasn't that much restriction on what the black supervisors did. Because I know they had us visit another county with some of the things that this supervisor had done within his schools that they felt was real good. And this was with, Mr. Parks made arrangements for us to go visit one Saturday to Easton, Maryland.

J: You did take a boat across the Bay?

M: Yes and I'll tell you I was so amused because when I had—when I knew Mr. Parks better I told him about my experience. I said I'm going right over here to Easton where I mean the, over there to that particular county that I wouldn't take a school for because of the water. And he said,

of course nobody could understand me being anything like that you know. Well you see this is so much water around here and people were traveling by ferries to Virginia and over to the Eastern Shore so that was their means of transportation so this wasn't anything unusual for them.

J: Who was the superintendent of the schools when you arrived?

M: Oh when I arrived? Let's see who was here. Oh what was...Fred, Fred, Fred...as well as I know that man's name. He has a cousin up here in Prince George's County now who's—

J: Gwynn?

M: Gwynn, Gwynn, Gwynn, Gwynn. Yes because we have a school here that's named for him.

J: Did you ever meet him?

M: Mhm.

J: What sort of a man was he? What was your opinion of him at that time?

M: Very distant, very cool. Now here's what I, you know you make your own opinions, as I thought now to me I thought now, "You do not like black people." Because he was very aloof to me and I had been around white people all my life. So you see I couldn't understand him so very well. Well at that time maybe not because the black and white didn't mingle together like they do now.

J: Was there ever a reception at the beginning of the school year for the new teachers? Any get together of any kind?

M: Not then. No not then. You got your assignment through mail. Your directions how to get there and you went right on to your school.

J: How did you get here? What transportation?

M: I came by train from Pittsburgh to Baltimore. Then I got this—

J: By way of Philadelphia?

M: Oh no, no, no. I got the, the Pennsylvania came through by way of Harrisburg, see. The Pennsylvania line came through here. See you had to be in the [work] Pennsylvania. See back in those days you had your selection. Pennsylvania Station was near so I came by Pennsylvania Station because this was a Pennsylvania line coming down into La Plata. And it came to Baltimore and I got that train that came from Baltimore and brought me to La Plata.

J: The old Pope's Creek line.

M: And then Mr. Parks met me at La Plata.

J: What's your memory of that train ride down here from Baltimore? Was it a fast, smooth, clean. quiet trip?

M: Well to tell you—yeah it was. Because you see at home we traveled by train a lot too because going into Pittsburgh we'd go down and get the train go into Pittsburgh. Or we'd get the trolley and go into Pittsburgh. Either one we want. Or if we were going to [Denore] or [Clareton] so we'd go down and get the train. Or [McKee's Sport] we'd get the train and go. So we rode the train an awful lot. And to get to Brownsville only way you'd get there you'd go downtown get the train and ride on up to Brownsville. So that didn't—I didn't pay much attention to that ride.

J: What was your impression of La Plata when you got off the train there? Did you think you were in the wild west?

M: Well, I'll tell you one thing when I got off the little train station was as cute as can be. I hadn't seen one that small all though they have train stations in all the little towns up and down the Monongahela River at home. But none as small as I saw here in La Plata. So when I got off in La Plata they had this man there and he had his [truck to roll up there. Didn't put the trunks on. Of course I had—when I got off there and looked around I didn't see Mr. Parks and so—]

J: What month of the year was this?

M: This was in October. Because you know—

J: Pleasant weather.

M: Yes, yes and because you know schools here, the elementary schools used to start in October.

J: Black and white?

M: I don't know about white because see you didn't know that much about white. See I wouldn't really know what the white did but I know the blacks started October on account of cutting tobacco and corn see.

J: Probably was county wide.

M: See because in order to—so I came in in October. And he met me. I had of course I called where I lived at that particular time I lived in a mining town [Priceville] and we called that country you know. But boy when we got down here. That was city to this. You know when I was, had to write home I said, "We call [Priceville] country but you got to see where I am." I said, "Because you don't see anything but trees." And I said to Mr. Parks when he was taking me

to down to my place—and see this was another thing supervisors did then. You met your teachers and you found them the boarding places. You had to take them to your boarding places and then take them to the school and let them see the school and all of that. You did all of that yourself. The supervisor did that.

J: Well where did he take you? Where was your first stop?

M: To Oak Grove.

J: Oak Grove?

M: Oak Grove and that's in the Nanjemoy area. And the school was way back in the woods, a one room school. And came down and I said Mr. Parks, "I've never seen so many trees in all my life." And he said, "Oh yes this is a beautiful countryside." And we kept going and well it seemed like a lot.

J: What road was that on? Was that on Holly Springs Road?

M: No, no, no it was this Route 6, that is Route 6 now. This is where we went down. Straight down Route 6 through crossroads and on down there.

J: Crossroads used to be tracks?

M: Yeah and after we got up there—

J: And crossed the Nanjemoy Creek.

M: Yeah then we got up the top of the hill we had to turn to a right on a road. See all these roads were just gravel. There were no blacktop roads.

J: Had you ever even seen roads like that?

M: No, no, no. So then he took me by the school because they had a lady who was substituting in my place until I got there. And when we drove up to that I said, "This can't be the school." Now they in Pennsylvania there are some one room schools but you know they're brick. And I had not seen—well you know we used to ride out in the country and see this little school out there it was brick. And I hadn't seen anything like this. And of course you know in the home you had the coal and gas. I'd never seen wood before. And we came and I got there that—

J: So the building itself was rather nondescript, rather decrepit looking would you say?

M: Yes it looked like that shed my husband had built out back in the garage. And I said, "Is this the school?" And he said, "Yes." He said, "Come on get out." I know how supervisors—how he felt then. Taking a teacher into some of these schools because even after I became supervisor and

would take the teachers to look at some of the beautiful schools we were in they were so far in the country you know for these people who were coming from different places to see. And you know they'd say, "I'll let you know." Well anyhow we got there and this lady was there. She had been substituting that week because I couldn't get there any sooner and I looked at these big boys I had. My goodness.

J: What grades?

M: All of them. First through seven.

J: First through seven?

M: First to seven

J: Through seven okay.

M: You had one to seven.

J: What was the age spread from what to what?

M: Now I had some—the thing about there I didn't see such small children in the first grade. She told me that she didn't have but five children in the first grade. And I said, "They look mighty large for [first grade]. But I found out this: That in that particular area in law the area's especially in the black areas in the county they didn't start their children at six years old. And some of them were seven. I had one little boy in the first grade who was eight years old. It was his first year in school. Because see nobody to make him get in there and they came when their parents sent them so that made a big difference.

J: How many students in that school when you arrived?

M: My first year I had 60. One teacher. Now the day that I went there to see them I didn't have 60. There wasn't 60 there that day. But then I went to school on Monday see—this was on a Friday when I got there. I went to school on Monday and because there were some seats that were vacant but I just thought you had extra seats you know. And we came in there that morning and I got to school they kept coming in and coming in. And I had 60 children.

J: One room?

M: One room.

J: About how big? Could you estimate the dimensions of this building?

M: Well no. It may have been like my kitchen and dining room together. See with 60 and you know the kinds of desks that they had then were different because they had—

J: 36 feet by 24. Were these two student desks?

M: Yeah. I was getting ready to tell you they were twin desks. You know they built them where they were attached together. They had two people at them.

J: Was there any organization to the seating arrangements? Did everyone know where he was supposed to sit.

M: Yeah but they came in that morning and they took, evidently she had already had done this because they came in and took a particular seat. That seems to be where their books were in there. But then I saw that she them arranged first grade over here and I don't think there were about three or four in the second grade and the way she had them arranged in the classroom.

J: What were the qualifications of this woman that you found there teaching? Substitute teaching? Did she have much academic background at all?

M: No this is why she was substituting and not teaching. We came in at the time when the state was requiring you to have this elementary certificate. You would need not because there were a number of teachers in the county who had graduated from high school and just came on in teaching. But then they when I came you had to have this elementary certificate. And then after a number of years then they went on and gave you a certain length of time when you had to have your degree. Well a lot of them didn't have an elementary certificate and she didn't. And this is why she would—but she had taught—

J: What was her name do you remember?

M: Ward. Ms. Hannah Ward. Yeah Ms. Hannah Ward.

J: Well how did you get through that first day? Were there times when you thought you might not?

M: Oh yes. I mean not that first day but a number of the days there I was ready to go home.

J: Did Mr. J. C. Parks have any feeling about the impressions that this was creating?

M: Yeah now one of the things in later years when I knew him better he said, do you know one thing he said, "You kept talking and talking and talking." And he said, "Did you notice I had not much to say?" He said, "Because deep down in my heart I was hating to think that I was gonna put you way down there."

J: Yeah so he knew. He was sensitive.

M: Yes he was very sensitive. Now when he wrote me a letter, that's a peculiar thing, when he wrote me this letter telling that he did have a vacancy and where it was. And I know when my

mother read it she said, "You know if I after reading this I wouldn't even think about going down there." I said, "Why?" She said "It's so depressing." And he said, "I decided I was gonna tell the truth of exactly about where you would be going?"

J: How did he describe it? It upset your mother. What did it say?

M: He described it about but see and she was born and raised in the country. Well she knew about country that I didn't see. And when he was saying about how far you were from the state road and the state road was gravel. And that how far back there there were no houses around there. And the children how many. But he didn't tell me I had 60 children. But that's one thing he didn't. But he said the children walked to school the distance some of them had walked a distance as much as five miles. This is what he told me and he was saying about the building was in need of repair and they hoped that they were going to be able to next year put up another school.

[Tape Interruption]

J: What were some of the physical conditions that you ran into in this building? This structure? Heating? Water? Lights? How backward was it? What did you have to deal with that you really didn't expect to find?

M: Well to tell you the truth we had a woodland stoves to burn wood. See I hadn't seen that kind of—I called them [roll the did cuts] all the trees down you know and cut it up into small logs and this is what you burnt for heat. You had a water bucket and a well and you're going out and you draw your water up and bring it in here. You had your water bucket and your dipper.

J: Who normally did that?

M: Children. Children.

J: Were they pretty good about it?

M: Yes because you had a schedule. After I got there to find out what I had to do then I just thought about now we'll give each person a duty to do. And then you had to sweep your own floor you know.

J: Was there a difference between what the boys were expected to do and—

M: And the girls because I didn't expect—

J: How did you divide the chores?

M: Oh I took the first grade boys, the first grade boys they had a little, what was there, a little pale or bucket. They went up and picked out up chips and brought them in. That was for me to

make the fire the next morning. See that's to get the fire started. I learned that after I got there. But she told me what you had to do. Said now, "Oh now that bucket over there," she said, "that's for your chips." And the chips—

J: Where did you find the chips?

M: Outside you had a wood pile.

J: Right there where the wood had been split and cut?

M: Yes. Then see that was the chips from the wood and you picked that up and you put it in there and see you had to have something nice and dry to start your fire.

J: But what did you actually put the match to? Directly to the wood?

M: No, paper.

J: Scraps of paper okay.

M: You had to have paper and you rolled your paper up and then you put your chips on top of that and any piece of dry twigs on top of that. And then you had some split wood that was dry you put that on. Oh I learned. I had never seen it before. And then—

J: You really were a big city girl compared to what you ran into down here.

M: Coal and gas was all I knew. And when they talked about you burnt you know the only thing that I saw that you could burn and when you went to the grocery store and they had these crates of oranges in wooden boxes I thought that was maybe the wood that they burnt. I didn't know it was trees that you cut down and burned, but I learned. I learned fast.

J: What was the floor like? Was it a double floor or just a single layer of board?

M: Single layer of boards, rough, splintery.

J: Not painted?

M: No.

J: What was the interior decoration like?

M: Wait let me get back to the floor. But it was splintery but you oiled it. You had floor oil that you put on to keep the dust down.

J: I see. What kind of oil was this?

M: Well I don't know what kind of oil it was because there was a certain store in La Plata where you bought your oil and all the schools went there. When I got there, there was this big can of oil was already there and then you had like a mop and on Fridays when you swept up on, when the boys swept up on Friday, well I had girls sweeping up too. And then you used this and you'd go before it and that laid the dust and made your floor look so pretty.

J: How did you dip the oil out of there? Were they mop type? Rag mop? Broom?

M: Yeah no with the rag mop.

J: Oh for heaven's sakes.

M: Yeah with the rag mop.

J: Was there any odor to this oil at all?

M: It didn't smell at all but made the floors look pretty. It made the floors—but see it was dangerous. You know you building fires and a piece of paper could drop on that.

J: And the nearest fire department was—

M: Oh it didn't have any.

J: You didn't really have one that far away.

M: Fire department no not down there. Didn't have any fire department.

J: What did you do for lighting on dreary, dismal, wintery days?

M: We didn't have any lights. After I got there we did buy some lamps. Dreary days you just worked just the same. When it got too dark you did another kind of activity. See when it got too dark for you to see but we had lamps.

J: Kerosene?

M: Kerosene and lamp shades.

J: Had you ever trimmed a wick before in your life?

M: Yes.

J: So you knew about those.

M: Yes I knew how to trim a wick.

J: And clean the chimney.

M: Yes and clean the chimney's because we had done that. I had done that so that wasn't anything out of the ordinary. But some of the schools didn't have any lamps. So that's what you—

J: Was it a drafty building in cold weather?

M: No I couldn't say it was a drafty building although it wasn't built so tight but for some reason or another it really wasn't too drafty.

J: So your heating equipment did keep you comfortable.

M: Was just that stove yes. And those—and you see those—

J: Where was it placed on the floor?

M: Well ours was in the middle and the seats were on both sides see. And of course the children by living in the country they knew how what to do about keeping [fire].

J: They would have been wiser than you.

M: Yes and the people with whom I boarded, when I went to my bedroom that's what they had a woodland stove in my bedroom.

J: Now what do you mean by woodland stove? Can you describe it?

M: It's a long stove [inaudible]. It sits on legs but it's a long iron [that sits on legs].

J: Okay how long a piece of wood would it take?

M: Oh listen you cut a tree down and put that and put the whole.

J: Up to what 16 inches in diameter and what three feet long?

M: Yes, every bit. And you see that'd burn all day. That's why you had the woodlands. Most everybody had those woodland stoves.

J: Did you ever use the surface to prepare lunches or anything hot for the kids?

M: No.

J: You could've I suppose.

M: Oh yes. Course it had a nice surface on there so I could have.

J: How many hours long was the school day at this time?

M: Oh that was from nine to four.

J: That's a pretty long day.

M: Yeah nine to four.

J: Did most of the children bring lunches?

M: Every brought lunch.

J: If they wanted lunch they brought it okay.

M: Yes, yes.

J: What was the nature of some of these lunches? Did you ever get a chance to find out?

M: Most of them were biscuits.

J: Okay homemade?

M: Oh yes all the bread was homemade. And this was another thing I couldn't get used to that they had biscuits every meal see where I boarded. You didn't see any loaf of bread. What we called. And of course my mother made our own loaf of bread.

J: Loaf bread.

M: Yes we made our own loaf bread. See these are the kinds of things that I'd go home with the holidays and talk about. I'd hold them spellbound telling them about these things. "Really! What did you do?" But—

J: How was your diet at the boarding house? Were you satisfied with the kind of food and the amount of food?

M: Well the amount was alright but I had to get accustomed to what she gave me.

J: What was different?

M: The, a variety they had you know it was on a farm where they killed their own hogs. And he killed these beef. And you had one of the two or chicken. Most of the food was fried food.

J: Any seafood from the river?

M: No I couldn't remember the—

J: Oysters weren't popular?

M: No, no I didn't have any oysters.

J: What was the name of the family where you?

M: Ross's.

J: Ross's. Do you know Madeline Ross?

M: Yes.

J: I interviewed her.

M: Madeline Ross?

J: Yeah with the group. The citizens, senior citizens group.

M: Oh yeah I taught her.

J: Is that right?

M: I taught her.

J: And Albert Jackson from that part of the woods too? Well anyway.

M: Well yes Madeline. I taught her. She was a Madeline Carol see when I taught her. And she married the Ross. The Ross she married was the son of the man where I stayed.

J: Oh isn't that something. How long were you at Oak Grove school? How long?

M: Two years.

J: Two years. What was the importance of those country schools to the community? What was their role in supporting society and helping? What influence did such a school have on the lives of the people whose children attended it?

M: Now down there was different because the school was situated in such a way it was a long distance from the homes. So it was unlike some of the other schools in the other communities that made use of that school even at night. But we didn't.

J: I see. Nobody could get there in the dark.

M: They walked. And the same way it as at church. They walked to church. Very, very few people, I could count the people there who had cars back in those days. Back there in 29. I know

I had one way to get to the—Mr. Parks had his teachers meetings on Saturday and you had to find somebody to take you to that meeting who didn't mind staying that day see until the meeting was over to bring you back. Now where I was was very few cars. I could count them all on one hand. So that was a neighborhood that did not make, did not use the school. We had one entertainment there.

J: Any active PTA at all?

M: Not the two years I was there. Not the two years I was there.

J: Any bazaars or money making?

M: No one activity that we had and see when they came to the activity they had so far to walk if you'd look out here you'd see a lantern coming this way, a light coming this way, coming to the school.

J: All out with their kerosene lamps.

M: And you're coming with lanterns you know. And after they had, you'd usually try to have the entertainment on a Friday night or on a Saturday. Well Saturday they had an awful lot to do down there because they weren't out in the field working they were doing other things that they had to do you see.

J: Survival. Just survival.

M: Yeah and this was when the pig pen had to be fixed. The chicken coop had to be done. And see these were the things, extracurricular things that they had to do on a Saturday that they didn't take time out of their making their money to do.

J: Was this standard of living somewhat shocking to you?

M: Yes because see—

J: And the universality of it. It wasn't just an isolated poor house was it?

M: No.

J: How many families whose children went to Oak Grove would you consider to have been really poverty stricken? What percentage?

M: I couldn't say but maybe only one family and that was for, they had a large about eight or nine children and the father was dead. They kept the children out to work. They cut wood and the children had to stay out to work to have money for to live with.

J: Again survival. Just survival.

M: That made a difference. But one thing about down there practically which was so different from that at home because practically everybody down there had a piece of land and owned their own home.

J: That's interesting.

M: Practically every person down there had a piece of land and owned their own homes. Had some kind of home.

J: And were self-supporting in one degree or another.

M: Yes right.

J: And at least had food.

M: Now I look at it and I'm looking at now and back there then there was no welfare but every house had chickens, they had pigs, they had food to put on the table, they had the clothes to put on the children, and the only type of work down there was cutting wood, you know, something like that. Well in the fall of the year they had an apple orchard down there and the fall of the year all of the children's parents would go to the apple orchard and work and see they were picking apples [inaudible]. Picking apples and culling them and see that went on for two or three months.

J: Did any of the fathers gain an income from water activities? Fishing as far as you know?

M: Well everybody fished in the spring of the year. When shad cod came in. Now everybody—

J: Nanjemoy Creek?

M: Yeah everybody fished. Everybody would have plenty of fish in the spring.

J: Herring?

M: And shad, cod, [inaudible].

J: That was a new experience for you wasn't it?

M: Yes.

J: Did you enjoy it?

M: My yes to go down on the water with them and watch them hauling seine. I'd never heard of that before, see. And as I said and I used to tell the children you know, you the parents one night

told me in church that were see my father was a coal miner and when we got in the area of social studies and were talking about occupations and we talked about mining. Well I used to always have them send me the miners cap, his bucket, and everything. They'd send a big box of things down there.

J: The lamp?

M: So yeah and see then I used to when I taught and got in the coal mining business they hadn't seen anything like this you know. And I told them and they were so excited. But then I told them this, you can do the same thing to me with tobacco because I had never seen tobacco grown before. And I had never seen tobacco barns. And I didn't know what they were talking about. "I didn't come to school today because I have to strip tobacco."

J: About what percentage of those children came from tobacco producing farms? A pretty large percentage? Pretty high percent?

M: Well not too many from the Oak Grove area because that's one thing about it, those people who, those individuals who had farms had their own. And if you worked on farm you worked on your daddy's own farm. But when I went to Bel Alton it was different. They were tenant farmers so you see this was something different. They were working on tenant farms, but down on Oak Grove each person had his own little plot which made a difference.

J: Now among these black children living in that part of the county at that time where some of them probably lived half a life time without getting into conversation with a white person. What were their feelings? Did they ever discuss this?

M: You know back there in those days it was here these colored people are here and these white people were here and the twain did no mix.

J: Okay it was two worlds.

M: Yes. Now the only way you, now you go to the store. And most of them somebody from the family would go to the store on Saturday. And of course wherever the store was that's usually where you picked up your mail. Well you would go there to pick up your mail and you would converse with whoever was there.

J: What was the nearest post office now during your first two years?

M: Let me see from about three miles from me. And I used to walk that. See I was—

J: What was the name of this post office?

M: Nanjemoy. Nanjemoy Post Office. And I used to walk down there in the evenings after school to get my mail and that was a long ways. And it'd be dark. This time of the year it'd be dark when you got back home.

J: This is interesting. You said earlier that when you were a youngster going to school in Pennsylvania you didn't know what prejudice was. Now coming way down here into Southern Maryland for quite different reasons those youngsters also may not have known.

M: No.

J: They hadn't encountered it. They hadn't even been able to get close to it. It's interesting isn't it.

M: It certainly is.

J: It's two distinct sides on that—

M: Well now—

J: Who were some of the better known white families in that neighborhood?

M: The Linton's, Wheeler's, that's about the—

J: Now you have just placed it because I know exactly where they are.

M: And the lady had a post office. I forget what her, what their last names were. But you didn't, you'd never come in contact with—

J: Both of the Linton's were teachers. Of course he farmed.

M: But you see it really makes a difference because you—now I'll tell you I had a cousin to come from Pennsylvania and one Easter and she came down there. And you know what she didn't see nobody but just us. She went to church and she didn't see anybody. And you go out on the highway you didn't see anyone. And we went to the post office. We walked to the post office and you know and she walked in and she spoke and they looked around and knew she was new and you know they just look at you when you were knew and they had nothing much to say. But you know when you're usually not home you meet somebody and, "Hi how are you." You know, "Hi." Everybody speaks. Now down here that was different. And she said, "What's wrong with those people?" I said, "Why?" She said, "What do you mean why?" She said, "I went in there and I said good evening and nobody said. They just looked up and down."

J: In the post office?

M: In the post office.

J: White and colored?

M: Just—there wasn't any colored in there.

J: Okay so.

M: So I went, "Nobody had anything to say to you." "So what kind of place is it?" I said, "[Inaudible phrase] what kind of place is this." She said, "Well [home ain't nothing] to do with this." I said, "Well you must remember you're not home. You're not in Pennsylvania. You're down here and it's a little different."

J: Tell me something. You as a black teacher in this community must have been viewed as a strange outsider particularly because of your speech. What was the attitude of the little black children? Did they respect you as a person as well as a teacher?

M: They probably did in that—

J: You must have been very different.

M: You notice a lot of little things that they would do and you would say something and go...you know. And [inaudible phrase] you know and I was wondering what why do they do that? And the next thing you know and I wouldn't know. I didn't know why they did some of these things until I went to church. And I went to church on Sunday to meet the people and they came up all were glad to meet you so and so is my son and so and so do this. And none of—and the lady told me. She said, "I can see what he was saying telling me." And I said, "What who was telling me?" And she said, "You know my little boy came in and he said, "Momma I can't help from laughing at Ms. Burgess." She said, "Because she talks so funny. She talks so funny." And she said, "Well what do you do?" He said, "Momma I put my hand over my mouth and laugh." She said, "I don't want you to. She said the rest of them do it. That's what the other children do." And then that I said, "That's what they're doing." And I wondered is it because I talk funny. To them I talk funny.

J: Did you have a bit of difficulty attuning yourself to their speech?

M: Yes because some of the things that they said I didn't understand.

J: Like what were some of the pet sayings? Common sayings that puzzled you?

M: Now they corrected me on this. I mean myself. You know at home we used to, they'd say give me a poke. You know what I mean by poke in Pennsylvania?

J: Give me a poke?

M: Yeah. Hand me that poke over there.

J: No.

M: I'm talking about a bag.

J: Oh for heaven's sakes see I—

M: Brown bag.

J: Oh, oh. Now if I had said that where I was born and raised they would've hit me. That's a poke.

M: Yes, yes down here's it's a poke.

J: Well that's the way it is in Michigan.

M: Yeah now that's a poke. And I said to them there was a and we were fixing some apples. And I said, "Hand the poke over here." And they you know [feigns snickering]. I said, "Did you hear?" "Yes Ma'am." So [poor guy] he said, "Ms. Burgess what did you want?" I said, "The poke." And he just [laughs]. I said, "Did you hear what I said?" You know then I thought boy you need to get yourself together because he doesn't know what you're talking about. And I wanted [inaudible]. I said, "Oh what do you call this?" He said, "That's a brown bag." "That's a brown? Oh yes." Well the same thing happened to me when we went to, when I went to West Virginia to school. They used to laugh at those kids from Western Pennsylvania. And we you know it had me so conscious of what I was saying that I would want to say something and I would have to think about how I was gonna produce it. So it really made it different. And something that they used to say...oh what was that they used to say. The lock wouldn't get that to save my life. Well I came home and told a man where I boarded about what they what they said. He said, "What's wrong with that?" He said—what was I can't think of what that was though. It's been so long since I've been down there that I have—

J: What church did you go to there?

M: The Baptist church.

J: Okay. That's also called Oak Grove Baptist isn't it?

M: That's right. That was it. And see I had it took—well I guess I could walk to it from where I lived it was about 20 minutes. About 15, 20 minutes.

J: Well where did you go after Oak Grove what was the next move? The next school?

M: Indian Head.

J: Indian Head Elementary?

M: Mhm.

J: And where was it located then?

M: Now that was down, as they called it, down in the Neck. You know Indian Head had an area for all of us lived. See you went past all the white dwellings down in—well they call it down the Neck it's called. And down there they had these houses built for nothing but us lived down there.

J: What was the name of that neighborhood? Does it have a separate name?

M: No it was Indian Head. Except you had a street drawn there and it was Swan Court.

J: Swan Court.

M: Swan Court was the name of the street.

J: Are the houses still there?

M: No. All the houses have been torn down. Just like they have on the other up on the [post see out there] where the green is. All those used to be houses out there.

J: Where was Swan Court relative to the green?

M: You went right straight—you know where the...now what can I? You know where the Captain's house is? The Commander's house? Do you where—you don't know where it's located.

J: Is it on the reservation? Is it in the—

M: Oh yeah it's on the reservation. Yeah this is on a reservation too but you go all the way through past where the white people were way down on the end. And it was like [why] they called it a court was because it was because a round circle here and there were whole houses all around there and they called that Swan Court.

J: This was what in the government grounds?

M: Yes this was on government grounds.

J: Sounds like it was way back toward where they used to fire the guns in the early days of Indian Head. They would test them way down at the end.

M: Yeah but they tested them further down than this.

J: Oh okay.

M: Yeah further down than that. This was where we were.

J: Well how determined that you were to go to Indian Head? Mr. Parks? And why? Did he ever tell you?

M: Mr. Parks. Well he never said. They were moving this teacher Ms.—I'll tell you who I followed. Mayme Ransome. Mayme Ransome was at Indian Head and there was some difficulty. You know back then in those days if they had a difficulty you'd just see the supervisor and he'd move you onto someplace else you know. And so they were complaining about Ms. Ransome and they wanted a change. So and I didn't know this until years afterwards when I knew Mr. Parks much better than I did my third year. So I was at my second year at Oak Grove I went to Hampton that summer and he was down there. That was his school too you know that's where he graduated from. He happened to be down there for some meeting and I saw him. So he was talking to me and he said to me, "How would you liked to be changed?" Well I didn't know where the other schools were located when you know I'd only been there two years. And the only way I got out of there was to go to La Plata for these meetings that he had. So I hadn't seen any other schools. So he wanted to know, "How would you like to be moved?" "Moved I don't know? Moved where?" He said, "Well—

J: Were you kind of contented at this point? You were comfortable?

M: Yes. You know why I was? Because of the people. I don't know if I've often said to them and I've often been back there to church and I've spoken in church and I've told them had it not been for the people of Oak Grove I would not have been in Charles County now. I would not have been in Charles County. Because they were so hospitable. I think they looked at me and felt sorry. Poor little thing. And I didn't way but 108 pounds when I came down here.

J: 108?

M: 108.

J: 108. How tall were you?

M: I was about 5 foot 5 then. And they thought that and the man with whom I boarded [inaudible] "I don't what Professor Parks sent you down here for. You got boys there that are larger than you are." And he said, "Ms. Burgess are you in good health?" I said, "Yes I am." But that's what he asked me about. "Well," he said, "I think I'm going to have a spot at Indian Head." Well that didn't mean anything to me because I didn't know where. And he said, "This is way up there. This will be farther up in the county than what you are now." And of course I said, "Well I guess so." I didn't even know any other school so I didn't know [what was up.] So and you didn't know where you were going to teach until you got the letter from him you know. And [inaudible] and didn't know whether you had a job or not. And then you got the letter from him saying that I

was at Indian Head. And in the letter he would tell you the person with whom you'd be boarding and how to get to their place and how much your board would be. And see this is what he had to do. He'd get around here and have to find all these places for these teachers to stay.

J: He coordinated the whole thing.

M: Yes everything had to be coordinated and see back in those days you'd talk to seventh grade. See and from seventh grade you went to eighth grade but all seventh graders had to take a test and he gave it the test to the seventh graders.

J: Personally?

M: Yeah. And he set the dates for giving the test and then you'd know whether your children passed or not. So they could go to. So that's where it was it's different now. It's really different now. So that's how I got to Indian Head.

J: Well was that quite a change?

M: Oh my. It's like moving to Washington from Nanjemoy. At that particular time that was like moving to Washington.

J: Was this a mixed school?

M: No.

J: Still segregated?

M: Segregated. I had a little one room school. See the second year I was down there it was a two room school. I had the primary grades and a Mr. Slater had the upper grades. See because they built this school during the summer out on the road. But when I came here I was back to a one room school again but I didn't have many children. Because the only children who went to that school whose parents lived on the base and worked at Indian Head.

J: I see was there a difference in the academic ability of these children?

M: Oh yes, yes. They were see they had access, the parents worked at Indian Head, they drew a check every week, they had cars, they had the use of the boat that went from here to Washington. Much, much different. My lesson plans were different. I had to plan differently for up here. They had these children were their parents they had relatives who lived in Washington. Now down there the relatives mostly lived in Pennsylvania. Marcus Hook; I never heard of Marcus Hook before I came down there. And that's why they thought I maybe wasn't from Pennsylvania. I have a son in Marcus Hook and I have a daughter in Marcus Hook, but I had never heard of Marcus Hook before.

J: Where on earth was it?

M: Out near Philadelphia. But I had never heard of it and when they got [it growing] down there everybody went to Marcus Hook because it was an oil industry. The oil industry because some oil company was up there and they left and that's where they built up there. I'd never heard of it. And I didn't know until later the lady said, "You know we talked [and] you said you were from Pennsylvania and you didn't know where Marcus Hook was." I said, "No I never heard of it." I never had any reason to. Yeah it was much different.

J: How many students?

M: Where here?

J: Indian Head.

M: Oh at Indian Head I had 21 students. What a difference. I had 21 students. Now the last year that I left there I didn't have but 19.

J: Now you yourself as a teacher found additional resources on the base to work with? The library? Were you able to use the library?

M: No. It was segregated. I didn't have any—

J: On a government installation it was segregated?

M: Yes, yes because—

J: What did you do if you wanted to go to a library? Where did you go?

M: Well you know one thing before when I came here they didn't even have a library in La Plata. And see one of the things that we did, the people with whom I, I could get around better in here in because the people with whom I boarded the lady drove. She had a car and she drove.

J: Now what was their name?

M: And their name was Queen's.

J: Queen's.

M: And what she did like on the weekends she had a daughter in Washington and I would go up to Washington and then I had some friends in Washington and I'd go up on the boat.

J: What was the name of that boat?

M: [I can't]. And one of the things up there you'd go up there and you'd have the use of the—I didn't have a library card but my friend had a library card and there were a lot of things that I needed to look up. So we'd go there and look these up up there. And this was—the schools didn't have libraries either you know and there wasn't a library in the county when I came here. There wasn't I can remember when they were talking about wanting a library, wanting a library. I can remember that so distinctly and they used to have that library over in the courthouse you know. A room over in the courthouse where we used to go.

J: And in the old jail at one time too.

M: So it really made a difference.

J: So you were much better off here at Indian Head in a lot of ways?

M: Oh yes and a lot of ways now. The lesson plans that I had made at Oak Grove I couldn't use here.

J: Why?

M: The children were too advanced you see.

J: Okay alright. Were there changes in attitudes toward learning between Oak Grove and Indian Head?

M: Yes because some of the families here had people in college where nobody down there had anyone in college or high school. But you see these people up here who were near to Pomonkey cause that was the only high school and you had to send your daughters up—you had to send your because of the girl—you had to send your children up there to the dormitory to stay see in order to go to high school.

J: To what town now?

M: To Pomonkey. To right here to Pomonkey.

J: Oh there was a dormitory there for the girl students?

M: If you had to use it. They used to have a dormitory for the teachers and the students stayed in this dormitory. And that's how you got to if you lived—now those that lived around here walked to school. But if you didn't live around here you couldn't. You'd have no way to get to school, high school. So a lot of them sent their children off to relatives in the city. And this is what they did in Indian Head. Lot of them sent their relatives right on into the city and then they had—some of them had cars and they used to transport their kids up here to school in the car and come back for them in the evening. Where in Nanjemoy look where that was in Nanjemoy way down

there they couldn't do that. No so you see back in those days there was no way for those kids to get an education unless they went some place with some relatives.

J: So here at Indian Head your PTA situation was just another world away.

M: Oh we had electricity up here. See wasn't any electricity down there at all.

J: Did you have to chop wood here for heat?

M: No they burnt wood but it was altogether different.

J: It was done for you?

M: Yes.

J: There was a janitorial service?

M: Yes there wasn't a janitorial service but the PTA had a man to come and make the fire. And then later on the PTA went to see the commander up here and then he let one of the men come down and when we got here in the morning the fire would be made. So we didn't have to bother with the sweeping and making the fire.

J: Didn't worry about the chips then?

M: No didn't have to worry with the chips.

J: Well what was next? Where was the next school?

M: And from there I went to Bel Alton.

J: About what year did you start at Bel Alton?

M: I stayed 10 years. Wait let me I just was reading something.

J: What were the years that you taught at these first three schools?

M: Alright Oak Grove 1929 to 31. Indian Head Elementary 31 to 41. Now Bel Alton School 41 to 43 as teacher. Bel Alton school 43 to 44 as teacher in charge under the direction of Mr. Swann who was principal of the Bel Alton High School. Now wait a minute and 1944 to 49 as teacher at the Bel Alton School. And 49 to 52 as Principal at the Bel Alton School. And then I went to Port Tobacco in 52.

J: This was the new school in Port Tobacco? The new building?

M: The new school. The new building at Port Tobacco. Now let me tell you about this now they had, at Bel Alton, they had the high school and the elementary school but the principal of the high school was principal also of the elementary school. And they needed a teacher in charge. See when I first went there wasn't a teacher in charge because when you became a teacher in charge you got a 100 dollars more a year for being teacher in charge which meant that you were responsible for all the monthly reports. You had to collect the monthly reports, check them, see if they were right. You and anything went wrong in the school—well you were just something like a principal but they called you teacher in charge and you got a 100 dollars a year. A year.

J: Was it worth it?

M: You didn't know you were getting it, you know, a 100 dollars a year. And then after that then they decided that they would have a principal of the elementary and a principal of the high school. And see that was a little—then you were responsible for everything in your particular school.

J: Did you also have to teach?

M: Yes. I was a teaching principal. I was a teaching principal when I was at Port Tobacco. The only thing that I did was that Port Tobacco was a new school when we moved in after Christmas, after New Year's.

J: Of what year now?

M: In Port Tobacco 1953 if I'm not mistaken let me see. Principal...yeah 52. Port Tobacco was there in 52. And now what you had to do there. I had six—and I taught sixth grade. But what they let me do when we moved in till we got organized was that I didn't have to teach that sixth grade. Ms. Minnie Heel had that sixth grade. And somebody else—then the other two teachers had the fifth grade until we got organized. We went in January, February, and March. January and February. They allowed me two months and in March I had to take me class. And of course I had that sixth grade class until I went into supervision.

J: When did you go into full time supervision?

M: 52. No not 52 I'm telling it wrong. I was there at 61. I went in Mr. Parks retired in 61 and then I took his job in 1961.

J: And what was the title of that job?

M: Supervisor.

J: Of instruction?

M: Supervisor.

J: Of Instruction.

M: No Supervisor of everything.

J: The Supervisor.

M: Not only of instruction because it wasn't labeled that way then.

J: What were your total responsibilities then?

M: Everything. Now look I was responsible for—

J: [Black] colored schools now.

M: Huh? Oh, yes. Oh yes.

J: Okay you really took over the same job that J. C. Parks had.

M: Right.

J: Did you get the same money?

M: I don't know whether I did or not. Because see he was supervisor for so many years and I wouldn't know what his salary was. The only thing that I know if I got the same as he did was you got 50 dollars a month for traveling expenses because of where you had to go. You got 50 dollars a month.

J: You had your own car at that point?

M: Yes.

J: When did you get this first car now? That was quite a significant event sure.

M: My first car I got eventually when I taught at Indian Head. It was the first car I got. We had to go—although I was at Indian Head most of the people had cars but those people who had cars worked and we would have to sometimes go to meeting as soon as we dismissed. We'd dismiss early like three o'clock and had to be in such and such a place for a meeting that Mr. Parks called and you had a very difficult time getting there because these folks worked at Indian Head. You didn't have any problem on Saturday's and on the evening in getting any place because everybody had cars here. But you did with the time that he used to call these meetings. So that's why I got a car.

J: It was a real necessity wasn't it?

M: A real necessity because you couldn't get anywhere unless somebody took you.

J: When you became supervisor how did that effect your standing in the community as a whole and in the education community? Did people begin to let's say look up to you a little bit more? Did you get a little extra measure of respect and consideration?

M: Yeah well you see one thing as a principal and in the operation of the school at Port Tobacco we set some real precedents there and really did a lot of things to have good teachers.

J: For example?

M: Yes. Alright now the kind of meeting that we had. The kinds of plans that we would make for these particular meetings. The meetings weren't just a gab session but it was something specific as to how you could teach something better.

J: Where were these meetings held?

M: Right in my school. Right in that school.

J: Right in Port Tobacco?

M: Right in the school. Now it was different then than it is now because see these teachers they belong to an organization and we—you could only—

[Tape 2]

J: Was this Swan Court a segregated neighborhood?

M: Mhm.

J: Of all black families? About how many?

M: Let's see. Johnson's.

J: And that's a good idea. Name them if you can.

M: Johnson's, [Poole's], and the [Coffer's], and the Harrison's, and the Swann's there. And over on the other side I forget that man's name. And the Harris's and the Key's. That was eight houses. That was eight houses in that section, in that circle. In that semi-circle there were eight houses that came right around like this.

J: Were the houses identical?

M: Yes. They all were three bedrooms, dining room, living room, and kitchen, and your bath.

J: What was in the kitchen? How well furnished was it?

M: Well now when I went there—

J: We're talking 1932.

M: Yeah now when I went there and most everybody else did the same thing after they lived down there. Now I don't remember the people who lived down there before I came because as you retired you had to move. See it was government owned and as you retired you moved. There were some people that lived down there before I came that had moved. But you had to work for the Naval Ordnance Station. Now when I came they had in our house it had not been remodeled they had a stationary tub and then they had a counter top there. Well when we moved in we took the stationary tub out. They wouldn't do a lot of things and a lot of things and a lot of [for you] because I [inaudible]—

J: What was the tub for? A laundry?

M: A laundry tub. That's your laundry tub.

J: Okay a one unit?

M: Yes, yes that was your laundry tub stationary.

J: Right in the kitchen? There were no basements?

M: Yes. No, no basements. But then I wanted cabinets because we had lived before we moved to Indian Head. I mean before I—when I went I didn't do this when I first went because I wasn't married then. But later on when I married Mr. Neal who worked at Indian Head we lived at [Perry Wright] first and then when a house got vacant we moved down to Indian Head.

J: Where did you live first?

M: [Perry Wright] well it's Woodland Village.

J: Oh okay right here in Indian Head over toward the Mattawoman.

M: Yeah that's right. Right down here at Indian Head and it's called the yeah Woodland Village now.

J: That's right I know where it is.

M: Woodland Village and you see you used to be then they were built as long as you worked for the government you could rent one of those houses. So that's what's there.

J: Did you ever hear anyone say what it was worth to them to live in a house like that? If they had had to pay rent for such a unit anywhere else what do you think it would've cost?

M: Oh it would have cost so much more than what it did then because one of the things there you found—now see I don't know what it was. I don't know what rent those people paid when I went to Indian Head but later on in the years they begin to talk about the government was gonna do away with all the houses. They were getting a lot of feedback, a lot of flak on that.

J: From the realtors in the community and the construction people?

M: Yes but other people who lived down who's husband's worked at Indian Head but there wasn't enough houses for them [that they lived here]. So then they were saying they were gonna condemn the houses. This is the first thing they said, "We condemned the houses and because we condemned the houses why your rent's only gonna be so much." Now we paid only 10 dollars a month.

J: What years now the late 30's?

M: Now when we were married we went there in 47. We went there in 47 and stayed there until we built this house.

J: Down on that same court?

M: Right in that same court in 47.

J: So you were there quite a while in that neighborhood.

M: Yes [inaudible] and of course they were gonna do away with the houses, do away with the houses, eventually they did because out on that green those were houses. Those were nice houses.

J: They were that's right I've seen pictures of them.

M: Out on that green were really nice houses. And these were nice houses out there and they and every—

J: Did they look much like the ones on the green?

M: No because all them were just one story. On the green they—

J: Bungalow style?

M: Yes out on the green they had two story houses see and down there they were all bungalow. Except for the houses that were on this road coming down there. They were you see the Swann's and the Queen's and the Proctor's.

J: Were any of these families of the Wesort type?

M: Yes, yes. See the Queen's, the Proctor's, the Swann's, and the Mason's.

J: The names are there.

M: Now they owned that property down there before the government bought it and they had built these nice homes themselves. Not down in this circle here now but along this highway going down there. Nice great big homes well you see what they did—

J: What road were they on? Strauss Avenue? Main Strauss Avenue.

M: Yeah. It was Strauss but extended.

J: Extended right well into, deep into the reservation.

M: Right extended. And they were nice houses.

J: And did the Navy keep them there?

M: No but the Navy bought them and they had to rent from the Navy if they were gonna stay. And you see most of them worked for the government there. And of course you see after they started with this powder business and testing these guns then after one of the shells went through the house down there—

J: The Swann house?

M: Yes.

J: Did you see it afterwards by any chance? Or was this long before.

M: Oh yeah because see I knew it had been remodeled and repaired.

J: Where was it located? Can you tell me where it was?

M: On this road.

J: On Strauss Avenue?

M: On Strauss—do you know where the NOS is? I mean the what's the school they have there?

J: EOD school?

M: EOD school. You know you pass the EOD school and you go just about a half a mile and that's where this house was right there.

J: Oh yea right on Strauss Avenue extended.

M: Yeah on Strauss Avenue extended.

J: Yeah I've seen a couple pictures of that. Shells went right through the house.

M: Yeah that's right.

J: Do you remember any guns being fired down there while you were teaching?

M: Oh yeah it would shake everything.

J: How did you live with that sort of thing?

M: I would become—you'd just become accustomed to it. You'd just become—

J: Until 1921 it was much worse. They were firing big guns there.

M: Yeah that's what they tell me.

J: Then they went over to Dahlgren with this action, this responsibility. Well now tell me this. What were the big differences between the kids here and poor little kids down in Nanjemoy?

M: Well they had a big difference because you see they had and it's just like the teachers are talking about now and what they're saying. The kids up here have more experience you see. You could talk about things up here those kids knew about because—

J: I mean they were more worldly.

M: Yeah they were near Washington. They had so many relatives who lived in Washington. They visited in Washington. Their parents took them sightseeing.

J: And we're talking about a black group?

M: Yeah I'm talking about no white group.

J: Okay.

M: And the parents took them sightseeing. The parents took them to New York. They took them to Philadelphia. Well they had been so many places.

J: They knew the world was big.

M: Yes. They'd know what and you know when they—they could talk about things that most children had no idea about. Because you would have—like you were having their reading lesson and there were words you had to really develop with them in order so they'd get the concept of what that word meant. Well up here that was just altogether different.

J: How did that effect your life as a teacher?

M: Well now I'll tell you the absolute truth. It made it much more enjoyable. Now then here was a place I could cover so much more material and in depth.

J: Yeah more rewarding in other ways.

M: Yes, yes and in depth than I did at the other place.

J: Did you ever wish you could bring some of those youngsters up here into this environment?

M: Yes I often wished that we had had the money that I could have taken them sight-seeing trips into Washington and places like that. But I felt that if I had had the money that I could have done that it would've made a big difference with my teaching.

J: What about the raw IQ quotient between your Nanjemoy group and the group up here year for year? Do you think—this is a tough question now. It's a toughie. What do you think?

M: You see back there in those days they didn't have the test.

J: And what is IQ really? In other words I guess what I'm saying was that those little kids down in Nanjemoy if they had had at least a generation of experience to draw on you think they could have handled the caliber of work?

M: Oh sure. Oh yes.

J: But it has to go back at least a generation doesn't it? The parents have to provide the base.

M: That's right. That's right.

J: And that's where they were at a horrible disadvantage.

M: And you see when the parents didn't have it the children didn't get the experience either. But see up here where at Indian Head you found that you had a family that lived in—well this particular family I'm talking about the Johnson family. The mother was from Washington had gone to school in Washington and the father had gone in Virginia. Alright so you see this made a difference. Then the next family were the [Poole's]. She was from Washington he was from

Virginia. They had relatives in Washington who taught school there you see. Now this is the kind of people that you have that were working here at Indian Head. Then you take the Harris's. Now the Harris's were from Virginia. And they were from Virginia and Mr. Harris was [an alert] person because he was one of our trustees. And he had a very good job there at Indian Head. And you take—then he had one—he had two girls and a boy. No because the two girls finished Bowie. No and the boy finished Bowie and then he had another son who finished Hampton Institute. So you see they were—and take the Johnson family. The one girl finished Bowie and the other girl finished Howard University. So you see the caliber of people who were moved in there from other places you see. It made a lot of difference.

J: Yeah so it's a whole new world. And what about this? The influence on the family of the father's working environment? A lot of these fathers were working everyday with professional people, technicians from other parts of the country who had had experiences all over the world. Did you find that these fathers brought back into the house with them some part of the daily work place experience?

M: In a certain sense yes but one thing about the people who lived in that area who had moved from other places in that Swan Court. They had contact before they even came there with educators, with people in politics.

J: One reason they ended up here possibly. They knew what was going on.

M: Yes you see they all had experiences with people like they were going to work with out there at Indian Head see and this really made a difference. Now there was one man like Mr. [Poole]. I thought he was—you would have thought he was a college professor and he only had a high school education.

J: But a learned man?

M: Yes [inaudible phrase].

J: Did you find that the black community here on the base was every bit up to the caliber of your community in Pennsylvania?

M: Oh yes.

J: Maybe a cut above even?

M: Yes, yes, yes.

J: Wow that's so this was a much more stimulating world for you to be in.

M: Oh yeah it certainly was. Well and it'd help me to learn too. Because you know when you get out of college and the children that you have to do your practice teaching are the professor's children you know. Those people who were living around that area of that college and mostly of our professor's children. So these are the children that you do. You see back in those days you didn't actually go out into a school in the community to do your practice teaching. See you didn't do that then.

J: Well how beneficial was this?

M: See so one thing about you got techniques. You got techniques but then you see you had the different children there to do it. You see now then the colleges when you get ready to do your practice teaching they send you out to that particular—to a school that will accept you know practice teachers. And you work—now I know since the—boy what you want? What you want?

Unidentified Voice [U]: [Inaudible phrase].

M: Oh you are well I'll be through in a minute and I'm going to take you out.

U: Huh?

M: Go back and lay down and I'm going to take you out. Go back and lie down and I'm gonna take you out. Look at television until I take you out. I'm gonna take you out. Go back and I'll take you out.

J: We're almost done.

M: Did that get on there?

J: It's alright. It's okay. Now that's nothing. Let's see I had another question. When you were at Indian Head on the reservation teaching how much jurisdiction did the county school system have over your teaching there? Were you still reporting to Mr. Parks?

M: Yes.

J: So this was a Charles County school in effect—

M: On government reservation.

J: On a federal reservation. How did they do that? I'm surprised.

M: I don't know and the white schools were the same way. They had two buildings for the elementary right on the post. And then you see they had the Indian Head that high school they tore down there. That was on Indian Head property. And you see for all those kids on the—well you see there were so many houses. There were so many people who lived on the post.

J: When you were living on the post—

M: But you see that didn't help but these children down here in Swan Court they had to pass by that high school there and go all the way up and come up here to Pomonkey.

J: Oh so we're talking about the new Lackey High School right on Strauss—on the green?

M: See no I'm talking about do you know that [inaudible]. I guess you heard them talking about that white building that was the high school for white children there.

J: What did they call it? What was Leary?

M: Indian Head High School.

J: There was a school called Leary. L-E-A-R-Y.

M: Oh I don't know about that.

J: Before Lackey. Before Lackey.

M: [Leary].

J: It may have been—what was the name of the white elementary school on the base?

M: Indian Head Elementary. [Most of the school] Indian Head Elementary.

J: And that was on roughly on Strauss Avenue.

M: That was right on the base there.

J: Through where the main gate is now?

M: Yeah.

J: Onto the reservation?

M: Over on the right hand side. But that was for the white children. And this one little school down here. And then when they got ready for high school these children down here on Swan Point they had to come to Pomonkey.

J: Who furnished the transportation for that?

M: Well the government—I mean the Board of Education. But you see the transportation they wouldn't let the buses come down on the post to pick up these children. They had to walk from—all these little black children—had to walk all the way up there to where. I don't know whether

you remember where old Eli's store used to be? Do you remember where that is because there's houses there now?

J: Yes. Okay was this the store that the [Weiner's] owned at one time or the Schwartz's?

M: I don't know.

J: Let's see who was in there after Eli's left. Anyway we have a picture.

M: Yeah well anyhow these they had to walk from there up to there and catch the bus. Now that's how far the bus would come right there.

J: How far was it a mile and a half or so?

M: Oh more than that. More than that. Now on rainy days some of the mothers would bring their children up there. And see now down there they had cars and of course the mothers could drive too you know and they'd see that those kids get transported up there.

J: What percentage of the families on Swan's Court had their own cars in the 30's mid 30's? Half of them or so?

M: Every family down there.

J: Really?

M: I don't know but one family—let me see—I don't know but one family that didn't have a car. And her nephew that stayed with her had a car but she didn't have a car. Well everybody down there had cars.

J: When did you get your first car?

M: 19—while I was teaching at Indian Head when I got my first car.

J: Were you married then?

M: No, no I didn't marry until 19—we got married in 1945. No I got my first car when I taught at Indian Head. Because see you didn't have a way to get to town. You could go by boat you know but when I needed to go to meetings and I'd always have to pay somebody to come down. And everybody hated to come down in Neck because you had to stop at the watch box, give all this information, and they'd give you a pass to come down where I lived to pick me up to take me to any meetings. And that was a nuisance.

J: How far was it from this watch box to the school?

M: Oh that was a good two or three miles.

J: Okay so if you walked it was the better part of an hour?

M: Yeah.

J: And those little kids had to walk way out there through the main gate? Past the Longhorn.

M: Yeah they had to come up through the main gate.

J: Past the old Wright store.

M: Now and right past the Wright store on the next corners where they used to go and catch the bus.

J: Alright now you got me.

M: Yeah under Wright's store.

J: Even I know that. I've looked at three thousand photographs of it.

M: Yeah.

J: So this was a pleasant part of your teaching career at Indian Head?

M: Yeah and they used to walk up there to catch the bus.

J: Now what facilities on the reservation were available to you and your students? I'm thinking of libraries, cafeterias, recreation. Nothing?

M: Nothing.

J: Nothing okay.

M: Not anything.

J: And here you all were tax payers.

M: Not anything. Not anything no. Now we had—now the PTA did a lot of—of course in all the schools the PTA was a big factor in you getting supplies because see that board of education wasn't buying any supplies then and your PTA raised money for your supplies and all.

J: Did you ever feel that the school people in La Plata sort of neglected you way over here? Felt that somehow you would be taken care of?

M: Yeah I don't think they thought it was gonna be taken care of but they just thought, "Gee I hate to go over to Indian Head." And you know we had a lot of visitors to come in the county and visit schools but they didn't get to my school. Because they said, "Oh my goodness you got to stop at that watch box." That watch box was a big [inaudible].

J: It really was a watch box.

M: Yeah used to have to stop there and give all your information and fill out these things and sign it and then they'd give you your pass to come back. Then you had to go back in there and they wanted to know where you were going and what you were gonna do. Everybody just hated to do that. And you know one thing about it. [Everybody stubborn to admit] said, "You ought to be glad you're at Indian Head because you miss all these visits from the state and every place else coming around." Because I said, "I don't know the way I hear them say that the ideas that they bring—what they're doing visiting your schools and all." I said, "I ought to have the opportunity to have the same thing." I said, "They need to come see what I'm doing." I said because then after the meeting then after they would come down here to visit then we would have a meeting and all was talking about went in such and such a classroom, they did this, and they did that. I said, "Down there they don't know what I'm doing."

J: Were you able to be a bit more progressive in your teaching techniques here at Indian Head?

M: Yeah in a—

J: Did you try to be?

M: Yeah because it was a whole lot of things that I did at Indian Head that I couldn't go that fast at Oak Grove.

J: Yeah. These kids were up to about anything you wanted to throw at them?

M: Oh yes practically anything that you wanted and they were good kids.

J: Did you have the same control over them with their order and discipline?

M: Oh yeah. Yes they were very very—

J: Good parental support?

M: Yes. This was an excellent area for anyone to teach. Excellent area.

J: Okay and you were here ten years?

M: Yes and one of the things that they did, they liked—and we used to do this too especially we'd have different programs with the children at school. And of course this is what—parents like to see the ability of their children—

J: Right. What sort of programs were the most popular?

M: Now one of the things that we used to do we'd have a cultural arts program. Wherein we'd take the children's work and then dramatize many of the things that they were doing. If we were talking about geography the thing that they would do they would have...certain ones would have certain sections of the country and costumes would be made for that particular state which you were studying. And we used to do a lot of that for a PTA meeting see so parents could see exactly what they were doing and what they were talking about.

J: Would you say Mary looking back now that the—your black students here at Indian Head were getting every bit as good an education as white students elsewhere in the county?

M: Yes.

J: This is interesting. I believe it. They were exposed to so much that was broadening and inspiring.

M: Yes. And then you see here's what I tell you—

J: Where did some of these kids end up? How far did some of them go in the world? Do you remember a few that you had that really went—

M: Alright I told you the two Johnson girls. One is retired. The girl that graduated from Howard University she has—I think she's a GS-13 in the government. 13 or 14 in the government or something like that. And that's the Johnson family. Come back here to the Poole's. My [inaudible]—you've probably—Golden Evans. Have you heard of him?

J: Yes. I don't know him I've never met him.

M: Yeah well he married the Poole girl. It wasn't the girls that lived—that I taught down there at Indian Head. And she worked at Indian Head but all her brothers went to Washington. They have very good jobs. And then the Harris's. I told you about them. He educated all of his children.

J: How many did he have?

M: He had four. The two girls graduated from Bowie—no two boys, two girls and one by graduated from Bowie then he had one that graduated from Hampton and he was a mortician down in Norfolk. Had his own business.

J: He's got to be doing well.

M: Yeah and now come around here, oh the Washington's lived there. Now she has one boy, Bernard who finished Pomonkey High School and went to Maryland State in over on the Eastern Shore. Eastern Shore Maryland State. And when he finished that then he went to Baltimore and he got a job in the bank. And then he went from there to Montgomery County in the government. Then they shifted him. He works for IBM. Then they shifted him out west and he stayed out there I think eight years. Now they moved him here he's in Connecticut now. They moved him here in Connecticut. And he is in charge of a department there and I think he's got about 22 people under him.

J: One of your kids? Wow.

M: Yes. That's Bernard. Then his sister she graduated from Maryland University and she has another boy who finished school. He just—this is a younger boy who just finished the school here and he's a job, he's with IBM. And see those kids all—now here's the two Queen boys that I taught. The one boy worked at Indian Head. He's retired now. I'm trying to go up the line and pick out the ones that are still living what they're doing. All of them have very good jobs. It made a difference because you see your context makes a big difference of how far you go in these areas.

J: And another big thing, and you know this, is self—confidence.

M: Yeah.

J: If you've been raised in a family where people have pride and they are comfortable and they rub shoulders with other people who have achieved things it rubs off.

M: It makes a difference. And you know you've got to be and if you're in a family that's got a lot of push to it that makes a difference too. Got a little push to what you and makes you feel like you can do as well as anybody else if you want to.

J: Now on Swan Court how many of these black families were not from Charles County? You mentioned at least three with Virginia connections. Would you say maybe half of them?

M: Wait a minute now I can.... Now no...now there was one family that I told you the nephew had a car but she didn't have a car. The husband was dead the nephew worked. That's how she lived there. But I think she was—because she didn't have any children coming to school. That one particular family she didn't have children coming to school but she was from the county. And there was another Neal family down there. They were originally from the county too because we found out later that they were relations to us. And now they were from Charles County. No the Harris's weren't.

J: Well in your opinion—

M: Now and you know Queen's, Queen's the people with whom I boarded with.

J: That's a Charles County name. Queen's that's right. Way back.

M: That's a Charles County name. Queen was a Charles and the Swann's.

J: That too.

M: Now I had only one child came out with the Swann's and that was a grandson. That's Charles County. And I had the [Gutrick's]. That's Charles County. That was Charles County.

J: Yeah that's right. What did Indian Head mean to the Charles County black community down through the years? Self-respect, work?

M: Work. I think one thing it really meant as far as the family's concerned and I don't know maybe they kind of felt that way to me but here I am with a job and you see I was going home for my holidays. Seeing all of these men from the mills and factories with no work. And here at Indian Head where I taught they got their paycheck every Friday. They didn't even know what the war was all about.

J: Did you ever run into this resentment between the Indian Head part of the county and the rest of the county over this matter?

M: No. I think probably had I had—if I had had an opportunity where I got to the other parts of the county often other than just at a meeting or going to church it would be something different. I would know more about that. You see but there was a difference in how they treated because had it not been they would've still had this down there where if you worked in the government you could live down there instead of tearing all these houses down. You see all of those nice houses out on the green. They all—well they sold a lot of them you know.

J: It existed. Were they moved then?

M: Yeah and if you wanted to you could move them. You know you're responsible for moving them so that made a big difference.

J: So looking back at it now do you think that life in the Indian Head area was more pleasant for colored families than elsewhere in the county.

M: I'm not too sure whether it was more pleasant than it would be for any place else in the county except you had an opportunity to go to work close to your work and earn your livelihood with no difficulty. Wherein you have people coming from other places yes but long distances and there was no place in the Indian Head area unless you got down Glymont area where people had rooms where you could board. Many of them went in for that you boarded the people who came

from other parts of the county. They didn't have no way to get back and forth every day. You see?

J: So you were married in 1945. Where were you teaching that year?

M: In 1945 I was at Bel Alton.

J: When did you go over there?

M: 19—let me see. When did I go over there? Yeah I must have been there like 41 because Mr. Neal went in the service. I had met him then and he went in the surface. He came back out of service we were married in 45. We were married in 45 and at that time see I was in Bel Alton then. That was during the war. That was when things were really coming. Everything was rationed. Gasoline, everything else, you couldn't get where you wanted to go because of the gas shortage. And you had to have your stamps for this and your stamps for the other.

J: That's the watch gate and more huh?

M: Yeah and then you left that and you went and you got down this particular area.

J: Who made the decision to transfer you to Bel Alton?

M: Mr. Parks.

J: Mr. Parks.

M: Yes they had difficulty now you see you had the Bel Alton High School and the elementary were on the same grounds.

J: In that same building?

M: No, no, no on the same grounds. Here's the high school here. Here's the elementary school here. The principal of the high school was also principal of the elementary school you see. The principal of the high school was also principal of the elementary school.

J: When did that high school open at Bel Alton? Before you got there?

M: Yeah oh yeah it was open before I went there but not too long before because when they were trying to build the school they were trying to buy the property. That was when—see I don't know how the white people did but I know how our folks did that if you were gonna build a school you had to get out there and raise money and buy the land see. And this is what we did because I was teaching at Indian Head when we used to go down to that Elementary school there at Bel Alton and have these meetings. When Mr. Parks used to have these meetings and we were raising and

for every school in the county to help rase money to buy this piece of land to build a high school. Because see there was no high school down there. There was no high school in Bel Alton.

J: The county did not buy this land for you?

M: No the county didn't buy that land where the high school is. And every school and I'll never forget all the schools in the county had some kind of activity—

J: Black or white?

M: All the black schools.

J: Okay the whites didn't have their hand in this at all?

M: Oh no, oh no. This was a black high school that they wanted in this side of the county. Because the people over down in that side of the county their—it was something like Nanjemoy. If they didn't have a way to send their children to Pomonkey to board in a dormitory they didn't get an education see. So you see the kids on that side of the county where Bel Alton was it meant that those—you'd be surprised that when they built the high school how so many of those children on that side came to high school but look how old they were. Because see there was no high school over there and a lot of the parents were tenant farmers.

J: So for the first time they were able to get to high school?

M: Yeah.

J: How old were some of them? 19? 20?

M: Oh yes. Already that should've been coming out.

J: But willing to start at that age.

M: Willing to start at that age.

J: That's remarkable.

M: Willing to start.

J: I have interviewed Charles Jones Woodland one of the first black school bus drivers and he had the route from Rock Point to Pomonkey. Two hours each way.

M: And then you see—

J: 1930, 31, 32 do you know him?

M: No I don't know him.

J: He was only 16 years old.

M: Well and then I remember [Desloges] Butler. I remember when the Pomonkey school raised had all the schools in the county raised money to buy a bus themselves for the school. And then once a year they used to have this big chicken dinner and everything and all the schools had to contribute and they bought a bus.

J: About what year was this now?

M: Now I got to look that up. Now they bought a bus because they had a lady principal at Pomonkey High School and that [Desloges] Butler drove the bus. And he had to go around and pick up the kids and bring them up there to the school. And the school paid for the bus. I'll never forget because I was at Indian Head then and we used to have to raise money and help them to pay for the buses. That's how they got their first—the first bus they had the school bought it. No the county didn't transport them.

J: When you went to Bel Alton Mary what position did you assume there?

M: Well when I went to Bel Alton I was just a teacher. There were three of us. They had—well one of the things they had a lot of problems at Bel Alton. Of course they had this fellow who was from Baltimore who was the first principal, Sinclair Swan, who was the first principal of Bel Alton. But he was a dynamite person.

J: Not one of the local Swann's?

M: No. No and he was a West Indian. His wife was also an elementary teacher. So you see he was in the high school and she was down in the elementary school and they had three teachers down there. And then of course he was over the elementary as well as the high school. But they had a lot of conflict there for a couple of years.

J: What caused that?

M: I really don't know and I didn't get the ins and outs of everything but I know the elementary—the three elementary teachers did not get along.

J: Who were they? I know one of them.

M: One was Sinclair Swan's wife. And the one was a [Spry] a Mr. [Spry] from the Eastern Shore. And who was that third person down there with him?

J: Lena Dyson?

M: No she wasn't there then. No she wasn't there then but I can't think of the third person who was down there with them at that time because they had so much. Seems like they had a lot of parent teacher conflict, see. You know how it was at that time the parents could run to the Board of Education with everything to Mr. Gwynn and it seems like it was just so that Mr. Gwynn told Mr. Parks that he'd have to do something with them because there was just too much confusion down there. So what they decided they had Mr. Huffington to come. And he came and visited both the schools. And what he suggested to Mr. Parks he said, "Change everybody in the elementary school." And he said, "Get three teachers down there that you know that will get along with you."

J: He meant get rid of these three or get them into some other position.

M: Yeah well those got transferred yeah. And he said, "Get three down there that you know are good teachers but also they can get along with high school faculty. They would be able to get along with the principal. They would also be able to get along with the parents."

J: Who were your high school teachers at that time when you arrived?

M: Now when I got in there [now] and we weren't too close either you know. You didn't mingle too much with the high school. Now Mr. Johnson, he's not dead. Mr. Garrett was there. And see the principal of the high school also had to teach. So Mr. Swan was the principal but he also taught music see. Isn't that funny? He had to teach; he taught music. And they had a home economics teacher was there. And they shifted this girl from Baltimore and she was at Pomonkey and they shifted her down there in the high school, home economics.

J: And what was her name?

M: Mildred Curtis. She was in the high school. I'm trying to think who had math because they shifted somebody from someplace else. Oh they did a lot of shifting that year.

J: Did it work?

M: They just shifted and some of these people over here in Pomonkey I know when they shifted some of the Pomonkey High School teachers down there because she was one of them. And the parents all—it was really something I'll tell you.

J: So it upset more than just one school?

M: Yes, yes because the parents didn't want these shifted down there. And so they said only shift people that you know gonna be able to get along. And they're going to have to get along with the parents and the teachers with other teachers and the principal also.

J: So Huffington was right? Did it work?

M: So that's what they did. They shifted everybody so he came over. I'll never forget when he came down to Indian Head and he talked with me. Well one of the things that I knew that year I didn't have but 19 children at Indian Head. Because you see the children were graduating and going on to high school. They weren't having children—babies down there to replenish the school.

J: So the baby boomers were gone.

M: Right and that particular year I didn't have but 19 children.

J: Was that an easy year for you? A good year?

M: Yeah well there were a whole lot of things that we did with a smaller group of children. And so he came to talk with me and he said that Mr. Gwynn wanted to talk with me too. And I thought well Mr. Gwynn doesn't even talk with no black teachers. And so he told me what happened down there—

J: Did you have to go to him or did he come to you?

M: No he didn't come to me and I didn't go to him because I told Mr. Parks what do I need to talk with him for? I'd never even seen the man after—the only time you ever saw him was when you went to the office to pick up your checks. You had to go to the office to pick up your check and that's the only time you'd see.

J: Did all teachers have to go into La Plata to get their checks?

M: No if you're the principal of the school. And see if you're a one room school you're the principal too. So you went to get the checks.

J: Yeah you were it.

M: So if you were one room and if you were two room school the—

[Tape Interruption]

J: Now we are back talking to Mary Burgess Neal at her home near Bryans Road in the western part of the county. This is December 9th and this is tape number two. The first tape was done here in this same place on November 2nd. And we're going to this afternoon get into some of the details of the things that we simply didn't get around to before. Now Mrs. Neal is showing me a department of education certificate.

M: These are the kinds of certificates that we received when we came to teach. Now—

J: What's the date on that?

M: This is August the 1st, 1928.

J: That goes back.

M: Now this I had run off to put a copy of this in our book that we've got on the one and two teacher schools. But now the colored teachers all had blue certificates.

J: Color coded would you believe that.

M: Yes certificates were color coded because you see what this says here. And that's to teach in colored schools.

J: Oh yeah Department of Education State of Maryland elementary school teacher certificate of the first grade. And under it it says valid to teach in colored schools. And here's your maiden name and this is to certify that Mary Ellen Burgess and it is dated August 1, 1928 at the city of Baltimore by the state. Signed by the State Superintendent of Schools. And what was his name?

M: Let me see.

J: I can't really make out his signature. Cook?

M: Cook. Yeah.

J: Cook. How long did it take you to get this certificate and what evidence did you have to show before they would issue one?

M: The only evidence that you had to show back there when I came into the county then was that you had a diploma from that particular and a certificate from the college saying that you were qualified to teach in an elementary school. And of course they wrote back to the college and got this information that qualified you to get a certificate.

J: Did you ever get the feeling in those early years that it made any difference up here in Baltimore as to where you got your teaching training?

M: No.

J: Okay all they needed to see was a certificate from an accredited normal teachers college?

M: That's right. A normal teachers college. No but it didn't make any difference. Yeah this was Cook and he was the State Superintendent when I came in the county.

J: Did you meet Mr. Huffington too?

M: He was—you know I met Mr. Huffington.

J: So did Bertha.

M: Because see he was the State Supervisor of colored schools. He had nothing but colored schools.

J: Was he a white or a black man?

M: White. And he had the colored schools of the whole state of Maryland.

J: Do you recall what percentage of the children in public schools in this state were black when you started?

M: No.

J: Tough. Down here in Southern Maryland what do you think the percentage was?

M: I don't think I could even guess at that.

J: Do you know what the population break down was?

M: No.

J: About 50/50?

M: Being from Pennsylvania and my first time in a southern state where you had this kind of organization you had no means of communication back in those days you see because there wasn't a telephone and where I taught I could count the number of people who had cars down there that you could get any place. So you really weren't in communication with anybody to—

J: And they started you out in one of the most desolate primitive areas of all of Southern Maryland.

M: Yes.

J: What was the name of the school again?

M: Oak Grove.

J: Oak Grove. Way over there in the Nanjemoy area.

M: Way down in Nanjemoy.

J: Not far from Riverside. East of Riverside?

M: That's right. I had children came from down Riverside up to Oak Grove School.

J: And you were south of Chicamuxen?

M: Oh yes.

J: And you were north of Tayloes Neck Road?

M: That's right.

J: So we have zeroed in on the geographic location.

M: Yes.

J: And there were Linton's down there and Wheeler's and Hancock's. White families.

M: No I knew the black families of Hancock's. See I knew them because they had children coming to school. See so I knew them. But you had no way of contacting them. I don't think I—the only white people that I saw my first year down there were the people at the Post Office. The Posey's.

J: What post office now was this?

M: The Nanjemoy Post Office. They had a store and a post office. And they're the only ones that I'd seen. And I'd heard the children talk about Linton because some of their relatives worked for Linton. Some of their relatives worked for Linton but I had never seen them. I'd never seen them.

J: Both of the Linton's had been teachers in of course white schools for years.

M: Were they? Well see I—

J: They had a teaching background.

M: I had not seen them. The whole two years I was there I didn't see the Linton's. And the only white people that I remember seeing—I did see another man. He used to haul the mail from there to La Plata. You had to take the mail to La Plata. And I saw him one time because I was—it was on a Saturday and I was coming from the post office and he had been up to take his mail and the—I always took some of the children with me to the post office since it was such a long ways to walk. And the boy told me he said, "That's Mr.—" I forget his name. That he is the one who hauls the mail. And a lot of times when people want to get to La Plata on business they'd catch the mail man and ride with the mail man to La Plata. Transact their business and he'd have to wait till the train came in with the mail and came down that area.

J: How long an automobile ride was it from your school to La Plata?

M: From the school to La Plata [every bit] 15 miles.

J: And that would've taken how long?

M: [Inaudible] and he had this little slow moving truck that he had to go. And this was all day because he'd leave in the morning and pick up the mail along these different routes going into there and see he stayed until the train came with the mail and had to go to the post office and be sorted and then come back down and deliver the mail to the various little post offices. And most of the post offices down in that area they were in stores. Stores had the post offices.

J: Not enough mail business to really warrant a separate building.

M: Well it wasn't that much I don't think it was that much. Because every little community had a post office.

J: Were you a little surprised Mary in the beginning to notice so many black people in this community and so few white? Had you expected this at all?

M: No. No because if you did not have any personal connection with somebody in Maryland to explain how they went to school then we didn't know about that. I didn't even know about that in Pennsylvania. But when I was in college I knew this: That if you were going to teach if you wanted a job teaching and you were gonna teach you had to contact these states that had segregated schools. This much I knew before I came.

J: So you were really locked into—

M: Yes so I knew that I was going to have nothing but colored children as they called them.

J: So your chances of getting a teaching job in Pennsylvania were relatively slim at that time?

M: Yes because see you had all white teachers. But your student body was mixed.

J: So in effect there was a segregation wasn't there?

M: Oh yes.

J: De facto segregation.

M: Yes, yes it certainly was.

J: They faced up to it down here. I mean they had it all out and they dealt with it and it may be irrational but—unfair but rational way but you could understand it.

M: But you see this made a difference you know. And you never thought about that until after you got in a situation when you had all black children, black supervisor, and everything that you

had any dealing with at all was black. See you never saw the superintendent until you went to the office up there in La Plata.

J: And what was his name at this time?

M: Mr. Gwynn.

J: He was superintendent for ages.

M: When I came.

J: And when Bertha came too seven or eight years later.

M: Yeah Mr. Gwynn. And see that and he was the Superintendent of Schools. Well I saw the Superintendent of Schools in Pennsylvania too and he was white. But I had not seen a black supervisor till I came down and my supervisor was Mr. Parks who was a black man. Of course when I went back and I was telling them about the superintendent was white but the supervisor was black. Of course I had them spellbound telling them about things down here. That was really something to them. And you know when I'd go home for the holidays [couldn't those kids] my friends would collect there at the house you know to listen to what—

J: Really?

M: To listen about what I was telling about down there.

J: Bertha Key tells the same story going home to Ohio and telling those people what her experiences had been here.

M: And you know that was really something to behold. That was really something—that was oh. And someone took a picture for me of the class I had and I took it home and I let them see that class of all black children and you know they were looking and said, "Golly they do not [even many light] black people down there." And that picture went from one place to the other all over our little town looking at that picture. Now one of the things that you found out this there were some a number of people who had come moved in that in our areas in our little town from Florida, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Virginia. They come to coal mines and the mills.

J: You home town in Pennsylvania?

M: Yes. Of course you see that wasn't anything new to them. But it was new to their children see. And my father had never been or didn't know anything about segregated school. You know and he said, "And all the teachers in the elementary?" I said, "All the teachers Daddy are colored." I said, "All the teachers down there and we only teach colored children." And he'd sit up and just be amazed at what I was telling too. Oh I held him spellbound.

J: What did your father really think of it? Did he consider it an acceptable condition or did he find it offensive?

M: I'm not too sure he did because the whole thing about what happened with him was I got a job teaching making money after my education I was able to get a job that paid me a salary. I couldn't get it at home. Now this is the way—and this is the way a number of people who belonged to the black church looked at it too. And I don't think they even realized that I couldn't get a job at home until I told them I had written to all of these superintendents in the different counties in Pennsylvania and I didn't get a job. And I don't think they realized that until I came back home and was telling them what happened and showed them the picture. And used to talk about it. I know one time when I came it was in the summer I came home and they were having a convention and they asked me would I be on the program. I forget what the theme was then and this is one of the things that I talked on at our church. And you should have seen them. Everybody was just like that. Just like this.

J: Isn't that something. So I gather that the fact that you had come down here and were teaching in a 100 percent segregated community did not rob you of any respect or prestige with the people you had known back then? As far as they were concerned you were a teacher period. You were earning money. You were on the payroll.

M: That's right.

J: And that's all that they were concerned about?

M: That it was something that I got in another state that I couldn't even get in the state where I was born.

J: So that made you look pretty good. You were willing to go away from home too at that age and started a life.

M: Yes. And you see and then after they began this integration idea when you even our county here in Maryland was far above integration than Pennsylvania. Because Pennsylvania didn't even get started until well after Maryland had integrated.

J: Is that right?

M: We and even our county in our county had integrated before Pennsylvania even started. And so this made a difference. And you know how they started? They started that since they were gonna integrate they took all the real light teachers and put them in the schools. Now that's their first step in integration. And you see here and I was telling them about how we did it here and they were all long time after Maryland. Even after our county before they integrated. And see my mother after they started then she had contacted some people. She was a person who liked to work at politics and so she wrote me a letter and sent me this name and address to contact. And

she said, "I talked with him." And said, "Now you contact him and she said because I think the board was gonna meet such and such a day." And I didn't have but a couple weeks. And she said then, "And get your application. Ask for an application to teach." But I thought this now. I came here—

J: In Pennsylvania?

M: In Pennsylvania.

J: Pennsylvania community oh. So your mother was hoping to help you get in up there.

M: She thought I—oh yes. But I thought this that I was born and raised in Pennsylvania and my folks paid taxes in Pennsylvania. But yet still I couldn't even get a school. I couldn't even get a school in Pennsylvania to teach. Now here's Maryland who'd given me an opportunity to teach for all these years now. I came here in 29 and look here this was up in the 1960's. Now I should leave all these years see and then go back home and get started. And I thought no. I thought about that and I thought I'm not going to do that.

J: How many years did you have invested here when this opportunity?

M: Let's see—well look here 29 and this was in 60—no this was 62.

J: Oh so you had a lot invested. A whole career.

M: See I had too many years see. And they had been taking out retirement too then I'm gonna start all over. I said no. So anyhow she didn't—oh she thought that was terrible. She had an opportunity—

J: Did she come down here to visit you?

M: Yes.

J: What was her reaction to the society?

M: Well I'll tell you the absolute truth she's a very withdrawn person and she doesn't—my mother never mixed too well.

J: Is she gone now?

M: Yes. But when she came down here see—

J: In what year.

M: I was—now where was I teaching when she came down here? I was teaching at Indian Head then. I had left down there and I was up here at Indian Head when she came and I guess I had been up here oh but two, five, six, seven. I think I must have been here about seven years before she came.

J: So maybe about 1937, 38.

M: Yeah [inaudible] before she came to visit. And you see when I first came I told them where I was. You know and distances see we had street cars to ride at home and trains and streetcars and buses. When you got down here you had no transportation to get anywhere. Well it seemed like I was just going for miles and miles and of course I told her that I got off the train in La Plata. And it seemed like I was and he took me to find the boarding place. I was about 50 miles from the train station which Nanjemoy is not 50 miles from La Plata but it seemed like that to me. And I said and all—

J: At least 20. At least 20.

M: Yeah that's right. And I told them that I had never seen so many trees in all my life. And coming down that road it wasn't built up. It wasn't nothing but forest all the way.

J: And up close to the edge of the road.

M: Yes, yes, I saw trees.

J: No street lights?

M: They didn't know what I was talking about and they got down here. So anyhow and when I said I was gonna teach down here anymore my father when he wrote these letters always said, "Well I just think let the child." "I think she ought to come home." And he said, "No we struggled too hard for her education she gonna stay there." So when she came down to visit I wasn't at Oak Grove then but I took her to the school where I first started. To the building because people had bought that and had renovated and moved in there. And I took here and we kept going. We went up turned down off the main highway onto this road and turned another one and back up in the woods. And I said, "This is where I—the first school I had."

J: And that was off of Route 6 not too far from Riverside?

M: Yes and then I took her to the school where I—my second year there where they built a new two room school right on Route 6. Down near Riverside.

J: Is that building still standing?

M: No, no it's not. So I took her down there so she could see that and she didn't say anything till we got back up to the place where I was boarding. She said, "If I had known that this is really where you were oh you would have come home."

J: I'll bet she meant it.

M: And she said, "I had no idea." She said, "Your daddy kept saying I just hope that she'll stay there." Because every letter I wrote every week and it was so pitiful from the letters that I write about down here.

J: And you were lonely too.

M: Yes because see you weren't near—you had no transportation. And there was a girl who was from Newport News, Virginia and she taught at Jacksontown. Well I had no way of seeing her. I just have to see her at the meeting when we were at the meeting.

J: Did some of the Jackson's go to your school?

M: No I didn't have any Jackson's, The Jackson's went to Jacksontown and [Coby's] Choice and Mount Hope. Those little three schools where they were. But down in my area wasn't any Jackson's. So that's just the way it was. And when I when I moved to Indian Head—

J: Do you know why—I would like to ask you a question Mary about the black society in which you found yourself at this first school. Looking back now what do you think that the average number of years were that the parents of your children had attended school? Did you ever have a feel for that? Were there some who had never gone to school by any chance?

M: No. I had some who had not been about fourth grade. Who had not been above fourth grade. I had some that I did not know could not read until I was away from there and they used to have this program where they would teach reading in the various churches.

J: To adults?

M: To adults. Adults reading program. When I found out that a teacher who was teaching reading at this particular church where I was told me about some of the parents that he had and they were some of the parents of the children that I had. And I did not know that they were in the reading program. Because I went to church and I hear them read the Bible. But you know what the teacher told me and said, "Yes but you know what they were doing? The part of the Bible that they read they had memorized."

J: Ah so they recognized the words or combinations?

M: Yes they were just reading along.

J: I see not literate but able to pick up the message.

M: Yes they'd memorized it.

J: Isn't that interesting.

M: And she said, "I imagine they'd had someone to read that over to them until they got it." And they'd pick up if it was the right chapter and the right verse. And would just go and the eyes moving so I just thought yes they could read. I was just surprised.

J: Was there some reluctance on their part to admit in public their inability to read.

M: I don't know. They may not have needed to admit it because they were so skillful at reading the Bible until—Because you know in Pennsylvania everybody read you know and this was knew to me that somebody could not read. It'd never dawned on me. See it never dawned on me that that person couldn't read. And I was awaiting there.

J: How many years of school did your mother and father have?

M: My mother finished the eighth grade. She didn't go to high school. And my father finished the sixth grade.

J: But both could have gone?

M: Yeah well—

J: To public high schools?

M: But see their parents couldn't afford to send them because there was not a high school in that community where they lived. Now they would have—now there wasn't a high school in the community where I lived but I went back and forth on streetcar.

J: So your parents would've gone to high school before 1900 right?

M: Oh yes.

J: Quite a while before it.

M: Oh yes, yes, yes.

J: That's understandable. Have you ever had any regrets about your initial teaching experience having taken place at this particular school and in this neighborhood. What did it do for you as a young teacher? What were the rewards?

M: No because I feel that I learned so much by being in that particular situation. Being a little greenhorn come out who was gonna set the world on fire and when I got there to teach I thought I was gonna teach like I did when I did my practice teaching. You know you see—

J: What were the big differences?

M: And the differences was that I found out this and I found out from my mother that I would write her letters that the children couldn't learn. And every letter I wrote I was telling her about these children can't learn. And course now as far as elementary school was concerned I was thinking about me in an elementary situation at home. Me in a practice teaching situation in college. And then getting way down here.

J: They almost did not prepare you for this.

M: No you see and I was just so shocked, And what I was trying to do so this girl that I told you taught in Jacksontown she was from Newport News, Virginia. She had taught before in Virginia. So when we came back and she had the people that she boarded with had a car so they brought her down to spend the weekend with me. And brought her down Friday evening and came back on Sunday to pick her up.

J: What distance was there between where you were and where she was.

M: Oh that was about eight miles.

J: About eight miles.

M: And so she had—and I was telling her what I was. I said, "These children can't learn."

J: Was she your age roughly?

M: No she was a little older than I was because she had taught in Gloucester, Virginia I think three years see. And this was her fourth year teaching and it was my first. So when I was telling her well she said, "Well tell me what you—" I was telling her about math.

J: Where did she go to school Hampton?

M: No she went to Petersburg. Petersburg.

J: Oh oh okay. Normal state.

M: Yeah and so she said, "Tell me what you're doing." And I went off talking starting with arithmetic. Look she went [inaudible] and next thing she said [Laughs] and just started laughing. And I couldn't imagine why she was laughing at me because I was serious and said, "Do you know what your problem is?" I said, "No." I said, "What my problem is? Do you know?" She

said, "Yes." She said, "There's no way you can teach addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division all at one time."

J: Not here?

M: I said, "What? You can't teach multiplication, addition, subtraction, multiplication all of those." "You can't [inaudible] in one lesson?" I went, "Yeah." And she said, "One thing about it with your reading you're taking too much in reading." She said, "Now some of those children in your class the way I'm hearing it would not complete a story but you got to work on the words too. You work on the skills." Well I said, "I did." "Yeah, but," she said, "If you work on a particular skill that you have introduced today you don't introduce it and do everything you need to do with it that he is gonna be doing maybe the next two or three months with that particular skill." And I sit there and thought about her and she said, "Now let me tell you what I do." And she told me what she did in her class. I said, "My goodness I'll never get through that book." She said, "You might not. You're teaching children."

J: Yeah. And you find out she was right?

M: "You might not." And I thought about that. And after I thought about that then I thought look I need to back up and do these kinds of things. Let me back up and this is what I did. And I found out that teaching was easy. I wanted to throw up teaching. I really did want to throw it up.

J: So your measure was in a direct relationship to what you had learned before in Pennsylvania and what your practice teaching emphasis had been on and it didn't work here at that time.

M: Yeah at that particular time it didn't.

J: And here you were having to—

M: Now when I went to Indian Head it was different.

J: Okay let's get into that. Did you ever find out why Mr. Parks brought you up to Indian Head? To comparatively God's country?

M: No, now here's what he told me. Of course he observed—he was the one who had to come observe me then we had this Mr. Huffington came to—

J: Did he come down here too?

M: He came down and way in that back woods that little school back there yes indeed he came. He got to every black school in the state of Maryland you can bet your boots he was gonna get to you. And he never missed and he had high school too. So when he came I had—he came at a

time when I was having reading. And you know you start with your first grade with your reading and see that you have to have your work all planned for these other people until you get to them.

J: What year was this then your first?

M: My first year.

J: Your very first year?

M: My very first year. The second year he came to visit the school's out on the road and I had primary grades.

J: This is in the newer building?

M: Yes they had just built this building. But you know what they did. They tore down an old school. Old white school and brought the material down and built our school.

J: Just like the books huh?

M: Built our school down there in Nanjemoy. But it was out on the road and it was a two room school because see I had 60 children my first year. 60. So anyhow—

J: Was that a surprise in itself? What did teachers in those days consider a good number that they could handle?

M: Well see in a one room school now there were some people in one room schools her in the county that had 30 children. But I had 60. And see when you had 60 that's a two teacher school, see. Two teacher school.

J: And you had them all.

M: I had—that's what I walked in there on.

J: Eight grades? Or there were seven.

M: 60. All eight grades—all seven grades. When you're eight grade you went to high school. You went to high school but you had the seventh grade.

J: And you were able to keep order?

M: Oh yes I didn't have any problem at all. Those were the nicest children. I had no—and the boys there were. Boy I'm telling you larger than I was. Like you, like you. And I had children in first grade who were like eight years old. Eight and nine years old because you see they worked. The parents worked and they stayed home and watched the children or else you see when it came

to tobacco cutting why they were out there cutting tobacco. See when I first started the elementary schools started in October although the high school started September but the elementary started in October. Give those kids a chance to get out there and work in the fields.

J: How long was the school year or black children elementary school?

M: October to May when I first started. And I remember when we were asking for more salary Mr. Gwynn said yes you will be getting more salary because instead of eight month school you will be having nine. So that will be your raise.

J: What year did they go to nine months?

M: I was in Bel Alton. No, no, no I was at Indian Head. Now my first two years because I was there were eight months but when I got to Indian Head that's when we went to nine months. See that's when we went to nine months because the high schools started in September and the high school teachers were always here before we were. They were always anxious to see these elementary teachers what they looked like because the high school folks had been there a month before we were.

J: Mary do you recall whether or not many adults from the Nanjemoy area worked at Indian Head?

M: Not when I was down there.

J: They just had no way of getting there I suppose.

M: No, no. Now I'll tell you what they did the man with whom I boarded had worked at Indian Head but see what he did they had like people up in this area rented rooms to folks who lived out of this area. Now he would come up here on Sunday nights on horseback and he'd work at Indian Head during the day. Then on Friday's he'd go home. And then Saturday's he'd work on his farm. They'd come and go back and forth. That's what he did because he boarded here [inaudible] with Simmons's.

J: Okay that was a long ride too that must have been a good 15 miles from Nanjemoy up here.

M: Oh yes on horseback, see.

J: Yeah about a good three to four hour.

M: Now see [Bus's] father worked at Indian Head too. And I know that they lived in Chicamuxen but he'd come up and go across the bridge down here to that. His father was the first man to retire from Indian Head.

J: Is that right? What was his name?

M: John Francis Neal.

J: John Francis Neal. What year did he retire?

M: Oh I don't even know. When I came here in—now I didn't know him in 29. When I came here I was at Indian Head. When I was at Indian Head his father was retired then. So he had started back there way back then. Yeah because he—I've often heard them talk about that, about his retirement. He was retired when I met that family he was retired.

J: I suppose your husband himself has walked across the bridge, across Mattawoman.

M: Yeah I don't know whether he has or not but he used to take the horse to meet his father. Because there was some bridge down there in the Marbury you could go where they—men would walk across that bridge to Indian Head.

J: That's right.

M: Bring their horses up there and tie them then they said the boys would have to bring the horses back and then meet them up there in the evening. So it really made a difference. They had horses but they didn't have a car, didn't have a car. So it did make a—and it was really a learning experience, you know, for me. One of the girls—well two of the girls that used to come to my house to hear. "Mary's home, Mary's home," and this was a treat to them to hear about this down in here.

J: Back in Pennsylvania?

M: Yeah back there in Pennsylvania when I'd go home.

J: Did you go back home summers for a few years?

M: Oh yes.

J: And did you work? Did you get a job?

M: Some summers I worked. I used to work in New York but I never worked around—one summer I worked in Pittsburgh but I worked in New York. Well in fact I went to New York to work I made more money in New York than I got teaching school.

J: In what period of time? Three months? In the summer.

M: And see I just worked in the summer. Wherein I was getting 65 dollars a month here I worked up in New York and I was getting 80 dollars a month. So it made a—and more you'd be surprised the most of them my mother never encouraged me to go Atlantic City. A lot of the girls

used to go to Atlantic City and work at the hotels and they made good money there but she always had a hesitancy.

J: Kind of a fast life—

M: Yeah but see she had her nieces were in New York. And they had—and I used to get a job. They used to talk to their employer about their cousin was coming just for the summer and wanted some work and I'd get it. That's where I got the job.

J: Well what year did you report Indian Head for the first year?

M: Let's see 29-30, 30-31. I went to Indian Head in 32 and I stayed there 10 years.

J: 10 years. What was that building like when you first saw it inside and out?

M: Well it looked like a bungalow with a front porch. And when you went in as you went in the front entrance you had your big classroom. Then you went back and there was another room in the back of that.

J: Had this ever been a library this building?

M: I was getting ready to tell you this was a in the back was this big library room with all these shelves around it with all the books.

J: I just saw a picture of it today.

M: You did?

J: It's no longer there it's gone.

M: No that's right.

J: It was demolished. A bungalow is right.

M: A front porch.

J: Big why even a front porch.

M: Front porch.

J: Yeah. So that's where the school was.

M: That's where our school was.

J: And that was deep into the reservation. It wasn't in the town so to speak.

M: No it was in Swan Court. See this is what I was trying to tell—

J: Swan Court okay.

M: That's what you called it, Swan Court.

J: How far was it from what they call the valley where they very early tested the guns, which was way down on the point. Where was it?

M: Oh yeah that was a different direction. Yeah because we were right on the Potomac River.

J: You were on the Potomac.

M: Yes. We came right down.

J: Could you see the river?

M: Oh yes, yes, yes.

J: I see okay so that is carried in the history files as Indian Head's first public library.

M: Is that right?

J: Yeah but in a way it was and it was a government building wasn't it?

M: Yeah it was a government building. That's right it was a government building because all the books that were there had really been used. All of them that were there. They had all of these shelves and the shelves were full of old books. And I often wondered what happened to those old books? Because they would be really worth something.

J: Was the building comfortable?

M: Very comfortable.

J: Well—maintained [and neat]?

M: It's well structured.

J: It looks like it's properly designed.

M: Well structured. We had a big pot belly stove in the middle of the floor. And in the other room we didn't have any heat so we didn't use that heat—didn't use that room in the winter time it was too cold. And in the back in that room that's where you had your sink and your water.

J: Was the back of the room away from the river or the room nearest the river?

M: No, no our classroom faced the river and this was right in the back of it. [Inaudible phrase] distance our classroom here and right attached right where this [window] is that's where this library was.

J: Okay and how many rooms altogether in this building? Just the two?

M: Just the two.

J: Okay were there inside bathroom facilities?

M: No. Outside. Very well constructed outside lavatories.

J: Did you find that the government did things well compared to what you had been accustomed to?

M: Oh well my goodness so much better than where I had been because see as they told me now back there you know you had trustees of schools. It was you contacted your trustee for what you wanted in your school.

J: Did they play a much more important role in there now—

M: Yes oh my goodness they were important. And they contacted the board of education the trustees.

J: Okay that was your major communication link with the community and the Board of Ed?

M: Right that was right. When we got to Indian Head it was altogether different. It was like a new life [begin there].

J: Who brought you over here?

M: Mr.—no. Mr. Parks wrote me a letter and told me how to get to Indian Head.

J: Had you ever been here before this?

M: I had never been to Indian Head. The two years that I was down there I didn't get to—all I ever heard was the man with whom I boarded would talk about when he worked at Indian Head.

J: What had he done at Indian Head do you remember? Did he ever tell you?

M: I really don't know. Back there in those days that's when they were making powder you see.

J: Yeah it was a manufacturing plant.

M: Yeah and you see it was more or less they were manufacturing this powder and what he was telling you how you worked from the beginning to the end where you had to examine the grains that came from certain departments, this department and all. And they were really made the powder that they used in the second World War.

J: That's true.

M: That's where they made it—made it there. So that really made a difference.

J: So anyway somebody drove you over?

M: Yeah but we did when we came we didn't have meetings prior to the—you didn't have a staff meeting or faculty meeting like you do now. Teachers have to come early maybe for a whole week and a new teacher you have to take in work [inaudible phrase] supervisor. You work with the new teacher and you had material to hand them of what they were expected to do and all the different subjects.

J: Where were these meetings? Where did they take place?

M: Well see now those meetings those meetings then were in the schools. See you had all these high schools with these big meeting rooms and your auditorium and things like that. So he wrote you a letter of where your—gave me the name of the lady to contact for the board and I would be—school was gonna open such and such a time and you'd be expected to be at the school at such and such a time. And see that's all you did. You came from home right on to your boarding place so you'd be ready to go to school on Monday morning.

J: Who did you board with?

M: I boarded with a family of people with the name of Queen's at Indian Head.

J: Okay now this was a black family?

M: Yes this was a—

J: And they lived right on the Navy reservation?

M: Yes, yes and worked.

J: On what street?

M: Swan Court.

J: Swan Court. Was that a semicircular type?

M: Yes. Yes that's right. And when I came there were two other teachers who were coming to the county. One was coming to Chicamuxen and the other one was going to La Plata to that school where Bertha used to teach.

J: Now were these black teachers too?

M: Yes.

J: Where were they coming from?

M: Pittsburgh. All of us were coming from Pennsylvania. And Minnie Heal. There was a peculiar thing. Ms. [Rector] taught down here. She was from Pittsburgh well her boyfriend had a car. And another boy who came he had a car. And so he brought all of our Pennsylvania kids down here coming to Charles County. And they brought me. We had our directions and they brought me onto Indian Head. And I found my boarding place and they left me out there. And then these boys took these others and dropped them off there.

J: When did Minnie get here?

M: Oh Minnie was here before me.

J: Oh was she?

M: Yes before me.

J: We've got to get her down here.

M: Yeah she was here before I was. So then I got the—and see I hadn't even seen inside the school. I didn't even know what it was. But this was on a Sunday I got there. I got there Sunday afternoon to this house and then Monday morning I got up early and went to—and walked to. I walked to school.

J: How far away was it from the house.

M: Oh it was like walking from here maybe right to the corner. Where the light is.

J: A half a mile.

M: I didn't have far to walk.

J: How was the house that you were living in? Were you pleased with it?

M: Oh yeah, yeah. All those houses over there were very nice.

J: Comfortable? Well built? Good heating system?

M: Yes. You see—

J: Basement?

M: No basement.

[End of Transcript]