

Transcript of OH-00221

Benjamin Lawrence Key

Interviewed by
May Green and Susan Shaffer

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Typographic Note

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

Subjects

African American teachers
Civilian Conservation Corps (U.S.)
Education
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Segregation in education

Tags

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Pomonkey school

Transcript

May Green [M]: Good Morning this is May Green, Tommy Albritton, and Susan Shaffer on Tuesday May the 5th, 1981 interviewing Mr. Benjamin Key at his home in Pomonkey concerning his education at Pomonkey School. Good morning Mr. Key. When were you born?

Benjamin Lawrence Key [B]: March the 12th, 1916.

M: And where were you born?

B: Pomonkey, Maryland.

M: And who were your parents?

B: My parents was Charles S. Key, my father, and Adelle F. Brookes. That's her maiden name Brookes.

M: Okay could you tell us what your earliest memories of school were?

B: Well my earliest, the very earliest remembrance that I have of school the first day I went we did not go to a school. They had us in a church annex because the church was right beside the school, close to the school. There was always a close cooperation between Pomonkey school and Pomonkey church. A lot of the kids went their first day in the annex of the church. Then they eventually—whenever it was crowded in the school they'd send part of them over to the annex. So the first day I went, I went in the church annex. But I just remember the first day. I don't remember any other days there. Just that I went there the first day.

M: What was the name of the church?

B: Metropolitan, ME.

M: Who were your teachers?

B: Well the first teacher that I remember was a Ms. Howard. I remember she was very nice. One of the fondest remembrances of her I have she smelled real good. When she leaned over to pet you, you know, she always had some very nice perfume on and I was always crazy about perfume and I always remember Ms. Howard.

M: Okay and what did the building look like?

B: Well the first school building that I remember was a three story school. It had the basement and it had the ground floor and the third floor. They were very large rooms. I'd say they were about—I think those rooms were about 60 by 60. They were very large rooms because we had on the first floor—we weren't using the basement when I first went there. We used the second, the

ground floor, we had in one room we had the first second and third grade. In the next room across the hall we had the fourth, fifth, sixth, and seventh grades. So they had to be kind of a large classroom because the class was kind of small. On the second floor we had, my first recollection, they had the high school up on the second floor. They had the first year and second year in one room and then they had a divider between this big room where there's usually two rooms and they had the third and fourth year on the other side. So they had two classes in each room on the second floor.

Susan Shaffer [S]: Where was this building located?

B: The building was located right in Pomonkey where we are now. We are right in Pomonkey the main part. I always thought it was the main part because the school is right over—you see the school down the road?

S: Yes.

B: Well we were right up to your right. You've probably seen her. You turn to the right there the road go to your right. We were right up there both a quarter of a mile. That's where the school was and what was. We had a big playground all at the school.

M: What was the name of the school?

B: Pomonkey Elementary and High School they were combined.

M: And do you recall any of the students?

B: The students I recall a lot of them in my class. We had some girls. One named Florence [and] Dyson, Mary Smith, Arlene Bland, Ruth Thomas, Amelia Thomas, Russel Dyson, Earnest [Hempley]. Oh I could name a whole lot of them.

M: Are most of them living now?

B: Well quite a few of them are living now. Some of the boys have died since then. I don't remember any girls died.

M: How did you get to school?

B: Well I walked approximately for two miles.

M: Two miles?

B: Two miles each way.

M: What was a normal day like?

B: Well the normal day was—of course my father worked. He worked at it used to be a Naval Powder Factory at Indian Head. When I first remember him he was working there then because he went to work there in 1901. He used to get up at 6:30 in the morning and go to work because he was about five or six miles from work. About six miles I'd say from work. So he always liked to leave home at 6:30 to get to work on time. You know they didn't never like to be late. They [had to never liked] to be late going to work. So we got in the habit—the children got in the habit of getting up when he got, when they got up, we all got up together because our house was kind of small. It was only four rooms and we'd get up when Daddy got up and Momma got up. Time Daddy finished eating in the morning we were ready to eat we'd eat. Then we'd get ready to go to school. We'd leave home about eight o'clock to get to school by nine. Then we stayed from nine until 3:30. Then we was out to go back home. We got back home about the time we got home. He got off at four, we got off at 3:30. By the time we walked home, he would drive home, we'd get home about the same time. So we walked in the rain. Whether it was raining, hailing, or snowing we still had to walk if you wanted to get to school. Sometimes snow would be half way up to your knees but we still walked to school. If it was raining we went to school.

M: In your elementary what were some of the things that you learned? And what were some of the supplies like books?

B: Well in our school I thought the supplies were...[would] use substantial or very good supplies until after I grew older. Then I realized that we didn't have such very good supplies. In the black schools in that days, especially in Charles County the way I understand it, we used hand me downs from the white schools and so forth. When I was going to school the supplies seemed very good you know what I mean until after I grew up and then I realized that we didn't get the best. We always were getting the seconds.

M: What was some of the materials that you used?

B: Well the main things that we used were just reading, writing, arithmetic, English. I thought—I always thought our school was very good. I hear a lot of complaints but I know that I learned a lot when I went to school. I could have learned more if I had the initiative to learn more but I didn't think. I was like a lot of kids today. Didn't think it was necessary to learn everything that we had in the schools. My elementary classes seemed very easy to me. My teachers I remember when I was in the seventh grade asked me one time to leave the other boys alone because when class time came I had my work and they never had theirs. She asked me to let them alone because really elementary lessons were very easy to me. I didn't do much studying but I could get that lesson because it was easy.

M: Did the first school you attend help you to prepare for Pomonkey High School?

B: Yes it did but like I said when I got to high school I really wasn't prepared because I didn't study like I should have. When I got to high school I thought I could do just like I'd been doing

in elementary school then I found out I couldn't do it. One subject in particular I tried to get when I was in the second year of high school and I never got it. That was geometry because I hadn't prepared myself for it. I didn't get to begin it. By the time that I thought that I could pick it up any time that I wanted to then when I wanted to pick it up I couldn't do it. The school on a whole was very good. I thought at Pomonkey we had very good teachers in that day but we just didn't—I just didn't use all the facilities that we had.

M: What years did you attend Pomonkey?

B: What years? Well I went to Pomonkey from [20, 19]—I started in 22 until 29. Then I went in 29 I went the first year of high school. I finished the first year of high school. I started the second year. Then I dropped out in the second year for a year and then I went back and started in the second year again and then dropped out again and stayed out. I never finished the second year.

M: Why didn't you?

B: Well because I was getting to be a big boy and that time my mother and father had 10 children. I was the third oldest son. I had one sister older than I. My Daddy in particular he—I don't think now you know looking back—I don't think that he was too anxious for his boys to finish high school. I think he thought that we might as well you know go to work. I remember that I quit and I got a job. This first time that I quit I walked out of school. The teacher told me—we were in the basement at that time by the way in the high school. They'd finished the basement and we were having classes in the basement. I had a very good teacher by the name of Ms. [Enola V. Paget]. She's still living and she lives in Baltimore. I asked her could I be excused. You know how you get—I don't know whether you know or not but you know when you get—I guess I was about 15 you know you get to think you're very smart you know. I asked if I could be excused for something. She said no sit down and study. When she turned her back—of course the room was about you know various [kind of about] like these two rooms. Well when she turned her back I just got up and eased out and she didn't see me. I went and seen about this job that I was thinking about. The lady hired me and I didn't go back for a long time. I don't think I went back that year. Didn't go back to school. My father he thought it was kind of funny that I had gone and got a job. He thought it was alright. My mother didn't like it too much but he liked it a lot.

M: What was—what did you work in?

B: I worked at a florist down the road here. It used to be [Beautol's] Florist. Still [Beautol's] Florist. I went down there and went to work.

M: What is the first memory you have of Pomonkey?

B: First memories I have of Pomonkey? Well like I say when I first remembered—well I knew about Pomonkey all the time. Because in those days when you were—I'd say when I was about four or five why mother used to send us to the store. You know you had to go to the store. That was about a miles from my house. They didn't baby children like they do now. You had to go to the store if they wanted something from the store you had to go. See all the rest of the children be going to school and Daddy decided he want a pack of cigarettes or something he'd say, "Ben run up to the store and get me a pack of cigarettes and get it back before I get ready to go to work." See sometimes he used to work on the evening shift you know. I remember one time in particular I hadn't started school and he told me if I went to the store which was about a mile and a half and got him a pack of cigarettes and get back before he got ready to go to work he'd buy me a suit of clothes. It was real cold and I walked all the way up the road to get them cigarettes. When I got to the store my hands were so cold the man in the store asked me what was the matter. I was crying, I told him my hands were cold. He got water and put them in, let them get warm, then he dried them off and then he gave me a pair of gloves to put on. That's one of my first remembrances of getting out from home.

M: Could you tell me do you remember when the school was built, Pomonkey?

B: Not the—the high school's built somewhere I think around like 22. 20 or 22. 1920 or 22 I think because I talked to this lady the other day and she didn't know but she said she was—when she finished high school she started at Pomonkey they only had three years of high school then. She finished those three years then she went to Washington. But that school was built between 20 and 25. High school, they had a high school. Of course the elementary school—they had a little elementary school in Pomonkey that was there when my father went to school.

M: There was?

B: I went to the little elementary school too when—you know when they use the church, the little elementary school, and the new school. When they got over crowded just expand into you know one of the other. And the old elementary school hasn't been long burned down. They used it for a dormitory in the late years for usually as a men's dormitory to go to high school, yeah. The teachers stayed in there and students stayed in there from all parts of the county. To go to high school. Then we had a dormitory for the ladies and plus that's what I'm saying. They used the old school for the men and the boy students. They used the new dormitory for the girls and the teachers. We had that dormitory there until about oh I'd say about 30—almost until 1940 they still had that dormitory with teacher staying there and the students staying there. They had a lady that'd take care of the dormitory. The principal of the school, which happened to be a lady, she'd taken care that she was the headmistress at the dormitory and the principal. She was completely in charge of the whole situation.

M: What was her name?

B: The first one that I remember was a Ms. Henson. The second one was like I'm saying Ms. [Paget]. She was one of the finest teachers I think we ever had in Charles County because she just had that takeover of you know ways about her. She just ran everything real good. She had the first—I think she had the first buses in this county. I'm not sure but I know we had a—first bus that I remember was when I was in the sixth grade. That had to be let's see 22. That was around 28. We had buses then. She was the manager or provider, whatever you. I think she bought this bus and had students driving. She had students drive this bus and so forth whatever she wanted. I don't think they was really running a school route at the time but they used this bus for like the kids do now going to basketball and different things. That's what we used it for. Whatever the school wanted to do with it we had this bus.

M: How much did it cost for a student to board you know?

B: At the school? I think it was somewhere in the neighborhood of about eight dollars a month. You would get your food and lodging for eight dollars a month. Children used to come from different counties like St. Mary's County and St. Mary's and Charles. All of these surrounding counties. Some of them from Prince George and different places stayed there.

M: What about the teachers?

B: Where did they get the teachers?

M: Yeah where did they get the teachers?

B: The teachers came from all over. We had them as far away as Missouri.

M: Were they all black?

B: Yeah they were all black in that day. Not really black but they were all colored. They called them colored.

M: Yeah.

B: Some of them was quite fair. I remember the teachers after I got a good size because I was always interested in the ladies. They were all [look like to me] they were all very nice looking.

M: What kind of condition, you know, was that part of the school? The elementary part.

B: Well for that day I think it was in very good condition. We had like I said we had this big room. We had this big room, we had a big stove in there. Some of the kids would get to school early in the morning and get the fire hot and so forth and so on. We'd sweep it and clean it. We've done as children done everything like we have now that janitors—you all have what do you call them?

M: Custodians.

B: Custodians. Well the kids done all that work. The larger boys would cut wood and if it wasn't enough they'd buy wood. Then if they didn't—if they ran out of wood you'd go in the woods and get some wood. Cut it up and get the fire hot and so forth and so on. The children really—the children in that day and time the children and the teachers actually ran the school.

S: Was there a PTA?

B: I really don't think PTA started until later years I'd say around in the 30's something like that. I don't remember any PTA's until around 30. Could have been before that but way back there then we didn't have PTA's. The contact that the teacher and the children more or less the teacher would go home with the child. See the teacher used to live here in the county or sometimes they would board in different people's houses and they would go home with the children and stay all night and come back with them the next morning. I remember one time my teacher went home with me and all the way home I was trying to get her to say that I was the best student in the class because I wanted to tell Mama that you know. She said, "There ain't no way that I can say that you're the best student I have in this class. You can talk all you want but I'm not going to say that." And she didn't say that.

M: Did Pomonkey have certified teachers?

B: Certified? What you mean? Teachers that graduated from college?

M: Yeah.

B: Yes all of them. All that I can remember they had certified teachers.

M: So they—[did all] of them have their training from college?

B: You looking from a college. At that time a lot of them went to a normal school. But now out to the college that I'm more familiar with was Bowie. Now they call it Bowie State College. It used to be Bowie State Normal School. You could go to—you could finish high school and then go to Bowie for two years and then you were certified to teach elementary school at least. Now the high school teachers I don't know whether they had to finish a regular four year college or not.

M: What courses of study?

B: Did we take in high school or elementary school?

M: Well first the elementary.

B: Well I think we had arithmetic, geography, history, English, and reading and writing. Penmanship we used to call it. When you went to school did you all ever have penmanship where you—I used to like that because that was more like playing. I didn't take it very serious. I think it should've been taken serious but I didn't. Penmanship.

M: Okay then what about in the high school?

B: Well in high school the first year we had algebra, literature, biology, civics, and that's all I can remember right now.

M: And you took all of those classes?

B: Mhm.

M: How did you do in those classes?

B: Done very good. I like I said the first year was very easy. I liked—that's what got me into reading. The first story that I can remember reading that left an imprint on me was a, in literature, that was *Treasure Island*, I think we had. *Treasure Island* and then we had *Silas Marner*. *Marner*, did you ever read *Silas Marner*? Well that literature class was what started me to read. Especially *Treasure Island*. I had never paid much attention to reading. I thought at first that I was just reading for the teacher's satisfaction but after reading *Treasure Island* and *Silas Marner* I got interested in reading. I've been reading ever since.

S: Who was the teacher that interested you in reading?

B: I can't remember the teacher's name that we had in the first year that started us on literature, got us reading. It could have been Ms. [Paget]. I remember Ms. [Paget] one time in class—you know like you change classes in that there. I think you all change classes now, go from one room to another. Another fellow was—we were sitting in the class waiting for the teacher to come in I think it was Ms. [Paget]. He was saying [Doc] [inaudible]. I think he had got it out of this story. Did you ever read *Treasure Island*? You remember when that Long John Silver used to always [inaudible phrase]? Well this fellow in the class was hollering [inaudible phrase]. We were supposed to be studying but you know how children are. He just kept [inaudible phrase] and I didn't even know what he was talking about. Just while he was saying [inaudible phrase] the teacher came in and she said, "Poole will you cut that out about [inaudible] in here? You can [inaudible] if you want. You know what that means?" He didn't say anything. She said, "That means to quit and you can quit right now and get right out of this classroom if you want."

M: How many students attended Pomonkey while you was there?

B: What you mean in each class?

S: Overall in the high school.

B: Well back—well now when my sister graduated from high school she only had six in her class. Classes were very small at that time. We didn't have too many. My particular class I would say that we were by the time we reached high school we probably had about 20. I'd say like that. The classes were very small. Especially the high school until after we got the buses running and the dormitory going. Then I'd say the classes probably got up to around 30 or something like that. To my best recollection.

M: What year did you say buses you know was—

B: Well I say we had buses around 1928 but well they were operating in the county. I don't think the county started operating buses until sometime in the 30's it seemed like to me.

M: How far did they come?

B: How far did the buses run? Well the buses ran just all over Charles County I believe like they do now.

M: No I mean well for the students to go to Pomonkey.

B: That's what I'm saying. They ran over Charles County. Course they had certain territories but Pomonkey at that time was the only first black high school it seemed like to me. Then we got Bel Alton. Of course natural then you wouldn't have to go in the area of Bel Alton to get them but the other places you had to get them.

M: How many buses was for Pomonkey? How many buses did Pomonkey have?

B: Well I can't remember too much about the bussing business because when the buses started I'd stopped going to school. So I didn't you know keep that in mind too well what the buses were doing. I'd see them go by. I know when my oldest daughter started going to school let's see she was born in 1936 and that would make her start about 42. They didn't have busses then for the local children. Now if you lived within two miles you still had to walk to school but they did have buses running from say Indian Head, and Pisgah, and Marbury, Ripley, and all around like that but the local children still was walking in 42. They didn't pick them up for a long time. All of my children walked to school the whole time. Except the last one. That was Dianne. She didn't walk. She didn't walk to school because she was born in this house here and it [inaudible] 53. But my other kids I brought them here. I brought four children here when I moved here in 45. Of course they didn't have far to walk. The buses was running then but they always walked. I didn't have but one child who rode the bus.

M: When you spoke about boarders you know like students and teachers why did they?

B: Why did they board at the school? Because that was before the bus time. Parents used to bring them to the dormitory just like you do now at the college. You know you had to get them there and get them back. Some of them used to come in the horse and buggies and stayed at the dormitory.

M: What about while school was out in the afternoon? Did the teachers—were they still in charge of the students?

B: Well way back there when we first started there yes they used to march us down the road sometimes. Keep you on the side of the road. The teachers was in charge [inaudible phrase] until you got home. You had to do what they said to or else get a whooping or get one at school or get one when you get home for not doing what she said.

S: How about the boarding students? Were they under the control of the teachers?

B: They were under the control of the teachers. She had control of them. She didn't allow no boys in there where the girls was and all that kind of thing.

M: What kind of discipline did Pomonkey have?

B: Well when I was small the discipline was very good considering because we had some large boys there. We never had really much discipline problem because the teachers would—we always had a man teacher around and he done the whooping of the big boys you know. So we didn't have much of a discipline problem.

M: What was a normal school day like? High school day.

B: It was very interesting. You went to exchange class. We always had—I don't think in high school you only had but one recess and that was lunch time. But in the elementary schools we used to have three recesses. One at around 10:30 in the morning, then we'd have lunch, then we'd have one at 2:30.

M: Did you have prayer in school? In elementary as well as high?

B: Yes we said prayers.

M: Around what time?

B: They had we said prayers every morning and then we had assembly every Friday.

S: What was assembly?

B: Well all the whole as I remember we had assembly with the high school students. We'd all go up to this on the second floor and they'd open up the divider in there and everybody all the

children would sit in there and then we'd have assembly. I think we used to have some kind of speaking or singing or something all like that and talking and so forth. It was a very big thing. Our Pomonkey was a very big thing in that time. I remember our supervisor. We had a supervisor named J. C. Parks. The school is named after him now. He'd always get up and tell us what a great advantage we had over all the students in the county because we had this high school. He made those speeches so much that I still remember them.

M: What were some of the school rules?

B: Like meaning what? What you mean?

M: Like dress code and smoking.

B: Well we didn't have a dress code but you weren't allowed to smoke.

M: What about skipping?

B: Well I think they used to sometime during the time that I went to school they were supposed to have had a truant officer but I don't think it was very rigidly enforced about going to school. If you stayed home you were just home. You come back you tell them I don't know [whether] [they asked you] why you weren't there.

M: What about fights? Was there a lot of fights at Pomonkey?

B: Well only at recess and the boys were wanting to fight we'd go down to the woods to fight. We always made it our business to get away from the teachers so they wouldn't know nothing about it. We had plenty of fights. You could fight all you wanted going to school and coming. You had to fight to get home from school. Boys would walking down the road they'd draw a line across the road and dare you to walk across it. If you walked across—you know you had to go across because you had to go home. So when you stepped across the line you was gonna fight. Then they would match the boys up to fight. I don't think they do that now. We used to match them up. We'd take one and go to his side and say, "Now y'all are the same size. Y'all go ahead and fight. See which one of y'all [win]." Boys were pretty bad in those days. Pretty bad I remember one time my father sent my oldest brother to a man's house. The man lived back in the woods there over there. After—I don't know what he told him to go over there and get. Frank said when he went and boy he went home with the boy you know and the boy walk along talking with him real nice until they got way back in the woods. He would say must have had some stones piled up in there waiting for him. He just got them stones and run him out of the woods. And Frank came home and told Daddy the boy wouldn't let him get to the house. Dad said well when tomorrow come you better get to the house. So I think Frank was [begging to run the] boy out of the woods next time. So it was one of them things you had to defend for yourself. You didn't have no protection like you do now because Dad see he didn't have time to come up the

road and stop the boys from fighting. We had to stop them ourselves. Course he didn't like that nobody bothered his girls. If they came home and told him somebody was bothering them he'd get upset but he never got upset about the boys. He said if the boys no bigger than you and no older then you're supposed to handle the situation yourself any way you see fit. So that's what it was. Kind of pioneer days. Was no running to the teacher crying about somebody's fighting you or something. I remember fighting all the way to school one time. But I didn't have to do it but I just like I said I was kind of [mannish] you know and I got into it myself then I had to get out of it myself.

M: What sort of text books did you have? What type of text book?

B: Well we had like I say we had a—what type do you mean how were they made?

M: Well what you know what brand you know was there a main brand of text book?

B: Oh I don't remember the rand but they were good books you know in good condition. I don't remember the brand or who made them.

S: You feel that they were good?

B: Yeah I feel that they were good books.

S: How about a library?

B: Yeah we had a library. After we you know in high school yeah we had a library. Had a library built in the school. It was very small. It was big enough that we held classes in there one year when it got crowded. I think we had the fourth and fifth grade in there one year.

M: What type of clubs or did Pomonkey have clubs?

B: Well I think after you got in high school they had clubs but not in elementary.

M: What kind of clubs did Pomonkey have?

B: Clubs?

M: Mhm.

B: I can't remember. I remember them having some clubs but I can't remember particulars about it. I don't really know but I think that the clubs they had was...I don't really remember but it had something to do with like voting or something like that. It was how you take a vote you know well [inaudible]. How do you take—you know how you run a court don't you?

M: Mhm yes.

B: I think it was something like that but I don't remember exactly how it was now and what it was all about.

M: What were yearbooks? Did you all have a yearbook?

B: Not when I went to school.

M: What was some of the popular dances and songs that was out when you was in school?

B: Well one of the first popular song that I remember was "Sleep Time Down South" by Louis Armstrong and "I'll Be Glad When You're Dead You Rascal You." That was one first record. My sister went to Washington and bought that record and I remember that. And the dances were two step waltz, waltz. In later years was the jitterbugs.

M: What was the dress? What type of dress?

B: Just like we do now. It weren't much different than when I come along. The girls—way back there the girls a lot little girlies wear high top shoes and boys used to wear high top shoes. You didn't wear high top shoes to school?

M: No sir.

B: Well I hear one of my sisters say—she was about five years younger than me—she said that she wore high top shoes to school. Daddy bought her high top shoes and she didn't want to wear them but she had to wear them. I remember a boy quitting school because his father bought—he said that he asked his father to get him a pair of shoes to wear to school and his father bought him a pair of high tops. You know there was high top work shoes, men's work shoes. I remember that boy saying he didn't want no [clodhopper]. Used to call them [clodhopper]. Said, "Daddy bought me a pair of [clodhoppers] last night and I'm not gonna wear them things to school." I think he quit school because he didn't want them [clodhoppers].

M: Did you have a gym at your school?

B: No we didn't have a gym but we had a playground. Most of they played back there then was dodgeball. In the later years I think they started playing volleyball. But the main attraction then was dodgeball. You know what dodgeball is?

M: Mhm.

B: That's what they played. And boys played baseball.

S: Did they really have a sports program at Pomonkey?

B: Not, not for different school but at your particular school you always had something to do at recess like playing dodgeball. Remember we used to have—[obviously] you remember, I don't guess you remember, but we used to have what you call field day. Do you remember him talking about the field day? All the schools now when I remember all the schools used to come to Pomonkey and compete on field day. We used to have it in April. That was the big day. They played dodgeball, and they had broad jump, and the eight what is it the 880 yards?

M: 880.

B: 880. Yeah. Relays and all of that. Then they used to go after they left here in Charles County we used to compete go to Bowie and compete. We had relays and stuff like that. Broad jump, chinning see how many times you could chin, pull yourself up on the bar. I won a couple medals. I won a bronze. I don't think I ever did get up to a silver.

M: What did you win the bronze in?

B: I think it was for running. Running and jump. You had to run, you had to jump so far broad jump so far and you had to run and you had to chin. You had to do all three of them together to get the bronze medal.

M: What sort of—let's see did you play other types of sports? Was that, you know, that was on—

B: That was all we played. We didn't have football or basketball when I went to school.

S: Did they have a music program? Were you taught any instruments?

B: Well they were taught, not instruments, we were taught you were taught music. We had music. We had a music teacher but I think in music was mostly you know you'd sing or something like that. They didn't play—I don't think we played any instruments.

M: What was the school song?

B: School song? Was the Negro National Anthem I think would be. You ever heard of the Negro National Anthem?

M: Yeah.

B: How did that go?

M: Lift every voice and sing.

B: Right. I think that was our school song. Back in those days they were very conscious about being black. Anything that was that the blacks done to uplift you was always brought to your attention. [Less] like a lot of—I hear a lot of people, children now, students say they don't know

nothing, didn't know anything about you know they didn't have any black leaders to uplift them. When I went to school we had plenty. They was always telling us about what the blacks had done.

S: So you had more black history than maybe many of the kids in school now?

B: Right. We had plenty of black history about Frederick Douglas and Booker T. Washington and what's the Tubman woman's name?

M: Harriet Tubman.

B: Harriet Tubman and all of that. That's why I can't understand why a lot of time now these children say they don't nothing about what the blacks done.

M: Mind if I take a break for a second?

B: Yeah go ahead.

[Tape Interruption].

M: Well um did you have black history in school?

B: Yeah we had black history. In fact we had I think we had—only thing that we were really lacking, the part that I missed out on, they didn't learn us any skills about making a living. You know what I mean like working. They didn't, we didn't have the word I'm trying to think about they have in schools now when you go talk to somebody about what you want to do?

M: Counselor?

B: Counselor. We didn't have counsel on going out and making a living. What you should do or say when you go out. You know I remember when I went in the CC camp I didn't have any counsel on what to tell them that I could do. I just went in there and simply said that I had done farm work, worked on a farm. That kind of worked against me. That works against you when you don't have some kind of special skill. That's the only fault I found with our school. They didn't teach us nothing about going out in the world to make a living. We didn't have any much vocation. That's something that we really needed. We didn't have vocation. If we had had vocation we would have been more advanced. Because when I was I think after I stopped going to school I didn't know what an apprentice was. That's one that hurt me a lot. Because I was working for a man down here in Marshall Hall and he had some sons about my age you know. I worked for him one summer and I went back the next summer and asked him where was his son that was about my age and he said his son was an apprentice at the navy yard. I couldn't figure out I had to ask him two or three times what an apprentice was. He said, "You know what an apprentice is." I said, "No I don't know what an apprentice is." He said, "He's an apprentice

machinist." And I still didn't know what he was talking about. So I had to figure all these things out yourself so I kind of blame my schooling for that. I don't whether I should blame the school. Somebody should have told me about these things. Then after I went and got old and I went to work in Indian Head then I found out that I was very naive in doing things. I didn't know anything about anything. That was the one disadvantage of going to Pomonkey. We didn't have any vocation. We didn't know nothing about sheet metal work. We didn't know anything about carpentry or anything. We were more or less turned out without knowing anything. No more than what you pick up around home about work. That was the only disadvantage to going to school in Pomonkey. I always thought that if I'd have been sent to a better school, you know, I would have been better equipped. Pomonkey didn't teach anything but reading and writing. That's all. Just like the girls. Now in the later years they had started taking home economics and stuff like that. But in the time that I was going of course it was very early. At the white school at Indian Head I noticed boys of my age were going.... At Indian Head they were going down and they were going in as sheet metal helpers and electrician helpers and all that kind of stuff because they had some of the stuff in the schools see. Same thing with the girls. The white girls at Indian Head went down there as stenographers and secretaries and all that stuff because they had it in the schools. But we didn't have any like in other words we were just at a disadvantage.

S: It sounds as though you were over educated.

B: We were over educated.

S: In one area.

B: That's right. But we didn't get nothing that was gonna really unless you was going on to school you know. It would've been all right if you had been going on to college. Most those who were just going to work that was kind of bad. Put you to a great disadvantage and it takes a long time to overcome it but we are gradually overcoming it now I think.

M: At Pomonkey did you have a cafeteria?

B: No not when I went. No cafeteria. Only food you had to eat was what you brought from home.

S: What about the boarding students?

B: Well they had food. They eat at the dormitory but we didn't. Children commuting didn't have any. Had a little store down on the side of the road and then you could go down buy a soda and a bun if you had the money. I didn't have no money to hardly [laughing].

M: Who owned the store?

B: A lady called Ms. Aunt Nancy Miles. That's what I always called her. Aunt Nancy she had this little store but half the time they wouldn't let us go off the school grounds to go over there. You know back in those days it looked like everybody was [inaudible]. If you had the money you couldn't go to store and they didn't have nothing to serve you at the school.

M: What did you do during lunch time?

B: Well we'd just eat your biscuits. I always had two biscuits. That was all. Jelly and sometimes and egg. Some children used to bring an egg sandwich. if you could find an egg. When you got ready to go to school go out in the hen house and see if the hen has laid one. You grab it and cook it. Put it in your bag and carry it to school.

M: What about—did you all have like a little short recess during lunchtime?

B: Yeah we had half an hours lunch time.

M: What did the teachers do during that time?

B: Well they most I think the teachers always came out with the children. You know kind of supervise. Always a teacher I would think because then the whole crowd would be fighting. Teacher had to come out there. Teachers always came out. The children were very fond of the teachers. Teachers was very good then. They used to come out and like I say you know stop you from getting into mischief. They stay right with the children at all times.

M: What was your best subject in school?

B: Reading. I liked English better than I did any subject.

M: What was your worst?

B: Well I didn't really have any worst, arithmetic was I guess—math you call it now—was about my worst thing. Like I said if I'd applied myself math wasn't hard. But I'll tell you a little joke about math you know. I went to CC camp. You heard of that didn't you?

S: That's the Civilian's Conservation—

B: Right and they had teachers to come in and help teach a class at the camp. I was down at Indian Head by the way. One night we was having class and was a teacher from down in Pisgah. I knew her you know because she went to school at Pomonkey. She asked somebody to come up to the board to work a long division problem and I just knew that I knew how to do long division. You know in my mind because I'd had it when I went to school and I could do it. So she asked for somebody to come up and I held up my hand. She said, "Alright come on up." So I went up to the blackboard. When I got up there I didn't know nothing about no long division. I

didn't know how to start and I was shamed to turn around. I just stayed right there and looked at that problem and I couldn't even do nothing. Since then I've gotten long division very easy because I do it a lot of times. I don't know what happened. I think it must have been after I come out of school you know I hadn't even thought about it anymore. Then when I got up there I didn't even know how to start the problem. You ever had anything that happened like that.

S: Complete blank.

B: Complete blank and complete embarrassment.

S: How many years did you work for the CCC?

B: I didn't stay but 15 months.

S: 15 months.

B: That's all we were supposed to stay were 15 months.

S: What project did you work on?

B: Forestry mostly. We cut—and I was thinking about it last night in bed. We at Indian Head and what do you call it down there now?

[S]: Naval Ordnance Station.

B: Naval Ordnance Station but you know in 1933 we went down there that place was nothing but forest. That's all. They didn't even have back forest cut through the factory. That's what we done. We cut fire breaks all through that factory so in case of fire the whole place wouldn't burn down and cleaned it up. We cleaned it up. Cut all the underbrush and all that kind of stuff. Built roads, done everything. I really enjoyed it. I could have stayed longer. The man said he was looking for me to stay longer but I left because see you know when you're young you go strictly by the rules. When I signed up they said you weren't supposed to be in there but 15 months. So when the 15 months was up naturally I wasn't thinking about getting an extension of time. I just knew my time was up so I just went on and was discharged with the rest of them. I understand that a lot of them stayed longer. Some of them stayed in there three or four years. That was a good education for me in the CC camp. Because we met people from all over the country and you know different men from everywhere. Listening to them talk it really educated me.

S: I'll bet the young people don't know why there was a CC camp. Do you want to tell them?

B: No I don't know—well things looked right during the depression why they started the Civilian Conservation Corps because there wasn't any work. They started that program to help out for the family really for what it was. For young men 18 or 19 were going to camp and they paid you 30

dollars a month plus your clothes and food and everything. You only got like if you went and you'd get five. You'd get five a month and the 25 went home to help your family. Because everybody was in such bad shape that was big money in those days. The highest you could make in there was 45 dollars a month. You had to be a sergeant or something to get that.

M: Do you think students were more interested in academic studies than they are today?

B: Well what do you mean academic? That's what kind of—

M: Education.

B: That's just education is it? Well that's all we had was academics or whatever you called it. What did you call it?

M: Academics.

B: Academics.

M: Do you think they were more interested then than they are today? Think kids like my age are more interested in schooling and stuff than y'all were?

B: I think children back when I went sometimes I seem to think that these children now are more interested in school because more of them seem to go to school. [Inaudible] more children graduate from high school now than used to. A lot of times when a child got around a girl got about 15 or 16 she always was out of school and a boy the same way. When he got about 16 he was gone and working or doing something. So children today go to school longer but it's the simple reason why they go to school longer I think is because when you take if you got two or three kids you know you always talk about to them what they gonna do when they finish high school. When a child starts out he's got it in his mind that he's gonna finish high school. So that's and some of them, now most of them now talks college to the children. That's why the children don't think or don't figure they finished until they finished college. Because it's talked to them about college all the time. But when we went to school it wasn't talked to you about. Not even finishing high school. They didn't say what you gonna do after you finish high school. They just send you to school for a while and you just automatically come out. Now your parents say well after you finish college you do this and so. You'll be equipped for a job. Just that no they didn't talk high school and college to you back then. That's why I think the children today go to school longer. Because I know some children—not trying to pass off a reflection on them or anything—but I know some children that live next door to me. I think they've been on welfare all their lives. Since I've been living here I think they've been on welfare. But you know in this particular family they had a large family of children and every one of them I believe almost all them that I know finished high school. I see some of the boys now and they still go to school better than children used to years ago when they were taking care of [stuff]. They still go to school and all of

them seem to finish high school. I think it's because it's a general run of things now to finish high school. I think I would've went to college if I'd had somebody that said I want you to go to college. I was interested in going. I used to tell my mother after I got about his age, about 15 you know, that I was going down to Hampton Institute. Mama didn't have no way of taking me down but I just talked to her a lot you know. I said, "Mama I want to go to Hampton." She didn't even hardly talk to me about it I guess. [Inaudible phrase] I don't have [inaudible] you know Hampton but I was interested in going for the experience. Just you know to get away and see what was going on. That's why I went in the CC camp because I wanted to get away and see what was going on in the world. It was very disappointing to me because when I got in there they sent me out to Fort Meade. We stayed out there about a while and they got us up early one morning. Everybody was moving out you know. Something like the army, pack your bags and get out [inaudible] in line here and marched us down to the train station. I thought I said now I'm going to get a good train ride. They put me on, put us on a train and didn't know where we was going. The train moved on out from Annapolis Junction up here, something they called it. All the boys were saying, "I wonder where we going, where are we going?" Nobody knew where we was going. So they kept moving down and then they shipped us on a side ship you know and after a while I looked—I figured we was coming south. I looked and we was over here in White Plains. You know where you see the train track in White Plains and I said, "Oh yeah I know where you're going now." They said, "Well where are we going?" I said, "I think we're going down to Indian Head. Ain't nowhere else for you to go because this road—this is a government because the government has a railroad that runs from Indian Head to White Plains. They go up and get freights you know." And they said they still didn't know nothing about Indian Head. So I said, "Well I know where it is." They shipped me right back home.

S: You didn't get to see much of the world did you?

B: Didn't get to see much of the world. Got a little short ride on a little dinghy down at the track and put us in switch down at Indian Head and got us off and marked us off back up there at [dipping bag]. But it was a lot of fun though. We had a good time up there.

M: How did Pomonkey fit in with the community? The school.

B: Well Pomonkey was the community. Pomonkey school was the community. Everything was Pomonkey High School.

M: Did Pomonkey have a PTA?

B: Yes in later years. Not in the early years.

M: Do you know some of the members of the PTA?

B: Like the—

M: President, secretary?

B: Well I was the treasurer at one time of the PTA since I've been grown myself. You're talking about when I went to school. We didn't have PTA when I went to school.

M: Did they have anything similar to PTA?

B: Well I guess the only like I said the only meetings that I can remember you know the school would be always the center of attraction in the community. They'd always have concerts at the school. They'd have plays at the school. They'd have dances at the school. They'd have dinners and things like that. That was the contact. Like I was saying first the teachers visit the children's parents. They nice with them and all like that. Some weekends with them and that's where there's the contact. Your teacher would send a note home by you to your mother if you weren't doing properly in school and so forth and so on.

M: How did you feel about attending a segregated school?

B: Well I felt very good about it because I didn't know anything else. Attending a segregated school, that's all they had was segregated schools. They had you know we used to call them white schools and colored schools. White children used to go down—white children used to walk past Pomonkey and go down the road here about a half a mile to school. Then we'd walk about a half mile past their school up here to this school.

M: Was there any problems with that?

B: With what? No. Well the children used to meet in the road and fight one another. White fighting colored but not very much. Because it wasn't that many. You didn't meet that many you know. You didn't see them. We had a pretty good—it was always right here in Pomonkey it was always a good relationship with the races because one thing we didn't hardly know one another. We still don't. You know what I mean. We still don't know one another so we get along fine if you don't know somebody you've got to get along fine. I mean if you never see them. Only time you'd see them was once you'd see them at the store. The grownups always seemed to get along when I was a boy. They'd all be at the store sitting up there talking. That was about the only gathering place they had that they both met. They'd sit there and talk. They got along alright. Sometimes they'd get in a little fight but it was nothing serious.

M: Do you think you'd rather have been in an integrated school?

B: Well not necessarily being in an integrated school because I always like myself alright. I was very satisfied with for the integration but like I'm talking about only thing that—I hate to say this but separate but equal would have been alright with me. As long as I had the equal part I wasn't too much bothered by the integrating.

M: What was the community—

B: I think that Pomonkey actually lost by integration in one sense of the way. Because before we had integration we had everything at Pomonkey was definitely you'll identify with Pomonkey school as black. But now we're not identifying with anything in particular. We're just going. You know we go to Lackey and we go everywhere but nothing is black no more. But one time when you went to Pomonkey you know you're going where it was going to be black.

S: You feel as though the children have lost some of their heritage?

B: That's what I think. They've lost their heritage because Pomonkey one time it was—we don't have anything. The only thing we have left at Pomonkey now is the church and we got an Indian preacher now. He don't consider himself being black I don't think. So we actually lost by integrating. I don't think a lot of people really don't understand about this integration. The government we have here really don't tell the people what they're trying to do. Why they had the integration is not because they wanted to integrate so much but it's because the government is just not gonna spend all this money for separate schools or something. That's the problem. But they don't ever get up and tell the people what we're really doing. They say, "We want to integrate." But they don't want to integrate so bad but they're just not going to spend all this money. See I read a story not long ago about the school situation back during reconstruction days when they first started this not integration but this education. It was a black man that was sent as a delegate the way this story—well they said it was fiction based on actual facts. It was a black delegate from down here to now Richmond during reconstruction. He was after you come back from the war. He come back to his plantation where he was and the plantation was all shot and everything. The white people had gone and got nothing but the blacks there. Well basically when the union soldiers was occupying the south you know they told them said, "We gonna have to have a delegation. We're going to get this thing formed. We're going to send some black delegation to Richmond to do such and such and you have to make the laws." Well they didn't know about making the laws. Anyhow they sent this man. When he got there he didn't have any education but he was still had a good mind. So he in doing this convention one thing he would like to see them do was have free education for everybody. That's how this free education come up. He said he wanted to see free education. So it worked up to this point that he wanted to build a school and have blacks and whites on this plantation where he was. So he went ahead with it. He went and talked with this white man. Of course the white man was calling him nigger and all that. But they got along alright and they got together. They went on this plantation and they set up schools and they bought the plantation see. Cut it up in 20 acre plots and the whites bought some and the blacks bought some. Then they had the school built. They were sending black and white was going to school. They were getting along fine. Well then the whites didn't like it because they were organized. They said they didn't want to see them like that so that's why we got back to this Jim Crow business. They said we're not going to have this down here in Virginia, blacks and whites going to school. So they went back then and said, "Now we can get Ulysses

Grant," I think, "elected. Grant say he'll pull the union troops out of the south and that will let us come back with this rule again that we won't have no integration." That's where this stuff started right down here in Virginia. Then they got the Ku Klux Klan— they already had a local group of Ku Klux Klan—they actually got Grant in there and got the union troops out of there. They went down there and broke up this place where this man had all these blacks and whites going to school together. They got him in there but now the point I'm trying to get at like a lot of people talk about the Ku Klux Klan but I'm talking about the government. Getting back to the government. The government has never told the people really what the Ku Klux Klan is doing. Ku Klux Klan is not only hindering black people, they are hindering poor white people and black. Them's the people that they hurt. They were really stopping democracy from working. See what this country is supposed to be built on is democracy. What the Klan's is doing is just hindering democracy. See after this man had this big plantation that broke up with whites and blacks living there. Had this big school and the black children and the white children was going to school. Well the Klan's coming in and beat up the white people and told them that they wasn't going to have them there like that and they beat up the blacks. They murdered up the whole bunch of them and that broke it up. It's been like that ever since. The Klan now right in—we got Klan here in Maryland. But really what they're doing they're stopping democracy from working but the people don't understand what they're doing. They just think they're fighting the blacks and they're doing this and they're doing [all] but they're just stopping the government. The government won't get up there and say look we want this stuff cut out because we want a democracy here. That's what the whole thing's all about. Far as I can see stopping democracy. The government does it all the time. They don't get up and say we're not going to have—we can't afford to run a dual school system. They have these black and white people out here fussing and [inaudible] one another about integration and bussing. They fighting and the government is the one that's doing it. They all say, "Well we're not going to handle more separate schools. We got all of y'all that are going to school together because we got to pay for it and we can't afford to pay for one going to school here and one going to school there." Then the people would say, "Well I either have to send my child to public school or put him in a private school." That would stop all the fighting and fuss about bussing and [inaudible] and [inaudible]. People never know what's going on because see it's just a few of us that run the government. They won't get up and say what they're really doing. Right?

M: Right.

S: Well Mr. Key thank you so very much. It's really been a lot—

B: Okay well you all come down my line talking about having to be I wasn't feeling so good today anyhow. I didn't feel good yesterday. I have a heart problem and I got kind of sick Sunday night and I'm just kind of recuperating. But if I was feeling good I could really do some talking because that's my specialty is talking.

S: Well we may come back and get you to talking again someday.

B: Okay I will talk—

[End of Tape].