

AFRICAN AMERICANS IN HARRISONBURG

Transcript 2A: Interview with Mrs. Peggy Curry.

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Tape 1, Side 1

[Side one begins with the interview already in progress]

PC: Annette Davies[?], she was one of my favorite teachers. At that time, there were two grades in a room. She had fourth and fifth grade. And Miss Ruth Hollins[?] had the second grade. Miss Jeannie Francis[?] had the first grade. There wasn't any kindergarten at that time, and W.N.P Harrison[?] was our principal.

EH: W.N.P. Is he still living there?

PC: No, he just died about a year ago.

EH: At recess, do you remember some of the games you used to play?

PC: Oh, jump rope, jack rocks.

EH: Jack rocks?

PC: Yeah, jacks. We just called it jack rocks. Yeah, same difference applies, just some of the jacks were metal, and they have metal ones now too.

EH: Had a little orange ball.

PC: Yeah, and now they use a ball that's like a Super Ball. We just had a little rubber ball.

EH: It bounces a little higher.

PC: Yeah. And we played tag, we played baseball...

EH: Kick ball.

PC: No.

EH: No kick ball?

PC: I don't think so. I don't remember any kick ball. But we played dodge ball and volleyball, and what's that thing you play with the birdie?

EH: Badminton.

PC: Yeah, that.

EH: Did you have your P.E. teacher here who were your instructors?

PC: Our P.E. teacher at that time was also the shop instructor for the boys, [unintelligible] manual training, that's what we called it then.

EH: Ok, you started Simms when you were in the fourth grade. When did Simms close? What grade were you in?

PC: I was out of school.

EH: Oh you were out of school at Simms? How long ago did the school close?

PC: Let's see. [unintelligible] Well, it closed when integration began.

EH: In the '60s?

PC: Yeah, I expect. At that time they only allowed kids from the county and all came to Simms.

EH: So you attended Effinger Street School also then?

PC: Yeah, from the first to the third grade.

EH: How was that? Can you remember some of the times back then?

PC: It was ok, I guess. I mean it was going to school, if you can say going to school

is fine.

EH: Right. But at Effinger, was it any difference from Lucy Simms?

PC: Well Simms was bigger, more modern...

EH: Was Effinger one of those one room classrooms?

PC: No, we had separate classrooms, and a cafeteria upstairs, and had a large play area.

EH: And you played some of the same games? I can imagine.

PC: Yeah, and the food was prepared like any school, like it is now. The Home Ec. teachers usually had charge of preparing the lunches.

EH: And you brought your little change to pay for your lunch?

PC: Yeah.

EH: But you could also bring lunch from home, too, right?

PC: Oh yeah [unintelligible]. And they had free lunches for underprivileged or underweight children.

EH: Underweight? Wow, they don't have that no more. Hey do you remember playing a game called Red Rover?

PC: Yeah.

EH: Tell me about it.

PC: I don't remember too much, really. It's like...

EH: Ok, the kids play it in the water at the pool.

PC: "Red rover, red rover, let somebody come over." And then you try to tag them before they get back to...

EH: Right, and in the water a kid will get in the middle, and he'll jump in, and the kid whoever's in the middle has to go for one of the kids. And when he goes for one of them, everybody else goes.

PC: It's something to the effect of, it's based on the same thing as Grab the Bacon. You ever hear of that?

EH: No.

PC: That's where you put an object in the middle between the two teams, and then you give each team player a number. And when you call their number, both people with this number on the opposite teams run for this object, and whoever grabs it and gets it back to their team before the other person tags them, you get a point. So it's something like that.

EH: Do you remember any old recipes that your Mom might have made while you were coming up?

PC: No. My mom, incidently my mom was a cook at Madison for sixteen years.

EH: So I know she left some old recipes.

PC: No, she did most of her cooking at Madison (laughing). I was gonna show it to you but I couldn't find it this morning, I've got a book, a manual from Madison College from 1934.

EH: It had your mom in it?

PC: Uh-huh. It had all the old teachers like Dr. Samuel Duke. [unintelligible].

EH: But no, no, that's alright. On the telephone you talked about an old newspaper, you couldn't never find it.

PC: This was the program when they closed Simms. Like I said, when integration began, when it was really in effect, when they allowed the kids to go to the county schools, then they closed Simms because there was no longer any use for it. So they used it as a school for retarded children.

EH: That's what it is now too, right?

PC: Yeah, but a lot of them are incorporated back in the school system too. But then, see, all the children from the county came to Simms before integration, from the county. From Elkton, from McGaheysville.

EH: Oh, all the black kids from this county? Simms wasn't like...

PC: Simms was the only black school, you know, like in this area. They came from

Bridgewater, they came from Grottoes, they came from Elkton, they came from...

EH: Just blacks. How were they transported from these places?

PC: Buses. Or private families, however you get it. For awhile you had to bring them yourself.

EH: Who funded a bus?

PC: The county. It was a county bus. When I was nine, I graduated in `47, and I was married in `49, so when my children started school, there was a man in Keezletown who was appointed by the county who had a jeep with three seats, and he was appointed by the county to take the children back and forth to school from Keezletown, the black children.

EH: It was much different living in Petersburg when I was growing up, because there was one black high school, I guess, no, no, I'm sorry, I guess it was the same. One black high school and one white high school.

PC: Yeah well see, that's the thing you don't understand too, is that Simms was elementary and high school.

EH: That school, every grade?

PC: Right up here. Every grade from the first to the eleventh. Well I graduated in eleventh, they incorporated the twelfth grade after, after my graduation.

EH: So there was only eleven grades?

PC: But you had to have almost the same amount of years as you do now.

EH: How were the work programs, were they any different from now? I guess they would be since...

PC: Well, they were stepped up because you only had eleven grades but you had to have everything in there. So many years of Home Ec., so many years of Physical Ed., so many years of English, Science, History.

EH: Do you remember any old stories about anything, you know how stories kids used to tell.

PC: I especially wanted you to know about what happened at May Days, that they don't have anymore. They have them at Madison now.

EH: Please tell me.

PC: I know they have them out there because...

EH: May Days, I don't...

PC: Yeah, on the first of May, or soon after, we had a program. Say we wrapped the May pole, and they did May dances, just a little game, dances. And they wrapped the May pole, you know what a May pole is?

EH: No.

PC: It's a pole, much like a flag pole, but maybe not as high, no, not near as high. But it's a pole like that and it has streamers, paper streamers. So many children are going to wrap the May pole. It's like braiding it: some go under, some go over. They finish this wrap, you braid it like.

EH: So this is like one of your old customs. This is a holiday custom.

PC: I just like to call it May Day cause that's what it was. And after that was done, they had a program of some kind, where the children would do like a light operetta, or a story told with music, something like that, you know, a little dancing. And then they'd have physical events like broad jumping and pole vaulting.

EH: I think at Madison it's called Spring Fever now.

PC: Oh, see when my mother worked back there they called it May Day, and they crowned the May Queen.

EH: I think they cut out that.

PC: They'd crown the May Queen, and we were out of school all that day, that's why I liked it!(laughing)

EH: So all the kids from Simms went over to Madison for that.

PC: No, this was a, we had a [unintelligible], we had to sing. That was this thing that I wanted you to know, that we did have that at Simms when I was at school,

but my children don't. They only had it a few times for my children, they played out and just called it just play day, when they just had the physical ed. aspect to it, they didn't have the dances anymore. We used to also have a spring operetta. Every year the elementary grades would have an operetta. Where you would have to pick the costumes, and they'd do a story in music, a story symphony[?]. Like Mr. McGregor's Garden, I remember especially.

EH: Mr. McGregor, who was Mr. McGregor?

PC: Oh, that's one of the stories that you...

EH: Oh, you remember Mr. McGregor?

PC: Gosh, yeah I remember.

EH: Tell me about him.

PC: Oh come on!

EH: Come on!

PC: It was just a story about a grumpy old man who had a garden, and he didn't want the rabbits to get in the garden. There were children dressed up, there was Peter Rabbit and his three sisters, and each child was in costume. Somebody was Peter Rabbit, and somebody was, three other girls were the three sisters, and the mother and the father rabbit. And they had the vegetables in the garden, the kids were dressed like vegetables in the garden. It was fun.

EH: I remember when I was coming up, we did something like that but it was just a play, and I was a tomato. I remember that because I have pictures today. Hey do you remember any old remedies such as, for sore throats?

PC: My mother used to give us three or four drops of coal oil, you know what coal oil is? Kerosene, three or four drops of kerosene on a spoonful of sugar.

EH: For colds? How about for sore throats? Do you remember anything for sore throats?

PC: No, my mother used to make log wood[?] peroxide and that's the nastiest.

EH: Peroxide, oh just gargle it. How about anything like cuts? I know my mom tell me, like on my arm I have a little cut here, and it heals up into a scar, she tells me to put baking grease on it.

PC: I know one time I cut my [unintelligible], somebody told me to put salt on it.

EH: The salt will burn it.

PC: It does.

EH: But does it do any kind of healing?

PC: Possibly.

EH: Maybe I can talk to this lady here, she...

(Interview is interrupted when someone comes to the door. Interview resumes in progress)

PC: So that's how I knew about...

EH: The basketball team. They played schools like who?

PC: It was in, like a district. They played Staunton, they played I think Williamsburg, and I think they might have played Maggie Walker[?], at one time.

EH: So they did their little traveling!

PC: Yeah, and that was using his parents' van cause they'd go on the trip.

(Interview is interrupted again by a third person)

EH: Do you remember anything you might have did for Easter, Christmas?

PC: At school we always made baskets and paper eggs, the usual stuff like they do now. In high school we didn't.

EH: But nothing you did back then that you might remember that was kind of special to you, that they don't do now?

PC: No. Except I remember one thing that the kids don't do now, and we did, was play in the streets in the evening. We played games in the street and played baseball in the afternoon. They don't do that now, they're too busy watching TV. We didn't have a pool to go to, so we couldn't go to the pool.

EH: See, yeah, that pool wasn't built until 1956, I think.

PC: Yeah, we didn't have a pool, we [unintelligible] during the year. Went to

Bridgewater, swam in the river. Not many black kids at that time could swim, either, cause they didn't have the opportunity to.

EH: Do you remember anything about Zenda, the black community?

PC: No. I knew somebody from Derrick[?] that came from there, but I don't know if they [unintelligible].

EH: Where is it now? Where is it located? I know the name is not the same.

PC: No, you know where the Mauzy crossing is coming towards Harrisonburg, from [Rte.] 11, north of Harrisonburg?

EH: No. So it was an all black community, right? Free blacks?

PC: Yeah, that's what I understand. That was before me.

EH: Right, I know. But you might have heard something...

PC: Like I said, I knew [unintelligible]. They said her family lived there. But I didn't know.

EH: I figured you might know somebody, or you parents might have told you something about it. Well, ok.

End of Interview