

African Americans in Harrisonburg

Transcript 5a: Interview with Mrs. Helen Irvin Wells
Date and Place of Interview: 18 July 1978; Harrisonburg, Virginia
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Tape 1, Side 1

[Side 1 begins in progress]

HW: So we reported that. All our names and why we were at this birthday party.
IR: I wonder, if we called them...we could call them. If we called them on the
telephone, see I can call for nothing. I have a line over at school. I can
call anywhere.
HW: Let me write them first and see what they say. They may send me something right
back. Copy from what they have up there.
IR: Even if they have a xerox machine, they could get it xeroxed and send it back,
if nothing else. Just make a xerox copy of it and send it back.
HW: So we often remarked there would be no more Irvins, no more Wells, no more
Atkins. [Unintelligible].
CH: So there's five generations.
HW: Five generations. He's a Weaver.
CH: This grandfather, now this is your mother's father? Your mother's
father. And you have brothers?
HW: [Unintelligible]
CH: [Unintelligible]
IR: At this point you're the same as me[?], because I have two brothers, and one
brother [unintelligible]. Well you've met Carolyn.
(Tape cuts off briefly)
IR: Any other hobbies?
HW: Well, I like flowers, reading. That's ok, and I like books.
CH: You like books?
IR: That's a good habit Mrs. Wells. You're with two librarians. That's an excellent
habit! (Laughs)
HW: I like stamps.
IR: Are you a stamp collector?
HW: In a way.
IR: I like the way she says that, "In a way!"
HW: I collect small stamps. A little bit at a time. I never collected a plate or
anything like that. The blocks or anything like that.
IR: Got any old ones?
HW: Um-hum. Want to see them?
IR: How far back do they go?!
HW: I got everything around here, close by now. I found these two [unintelligible].
CH: May I get it for you Miss Wells?
HW: There's a little boy next door who's trying to collect stamps, and I've been

helping him. Yes, somebody wants to see you. [She opens the book] I think most of these are foreign. Do you know anything about stamps?

CH: No ma'am! Not one thing!

HW: Do you?

IR: Not one thing.

HW: These are labeled Belgium.

IR: Is this an old stamp? John [unintelligible] picture stamp, 1930.

CH: Looks like a post stamp.

HW: These are Argentina. These are some that if you don't find them yourself then you have to buy them. See, you have a book, and there's a page for a stamp blue book. I have them right here.

CH: Mrs. Wells, did you have someone write you, and you got these through actual postage, or did you buy them?

HW: I bought them from a company in New York. You tell them what you don't have and what you want and then they let you...here it is. It has all the stamps from the first stamp he ever had up to the present one, and you have hinges that you put them in, a stamp hinge.

IR: Oh, I see.

HW: Oh, when I get in there, they hunt for me and can't find me.

CH: You could just get into that.

HW: Why certainly.

CH: What kind of books do you like to read, Mrs. Wells?

HW: I like fiction and all kinds of books. I read mystery. Last week I was reading something about William Cullen Bryant. I hadn't read anything about him for years! And you know the one that I like the best? Thanatopsis.

CH: Do you?

IR: It's a beautiful story.

HW: Where is this book, stamp and stores. I do one thing, and then, see, I go back and do something else. That little book is history, too. You can buy it and learn about the history.

IR: This is interesting. I have never seen this. I know my son is a stamp collector, and he's got his stamp book, and he's been doing it for the last three years, but I've never seen this book. Now this is nice.

HW: That came out in December, I think.

IR: Because this has got a lot of historical information, too. It would be a good history book.

HW: It is.

IR: Get's kids to read their history while they're dealing with [unintelligible]. Mrs. Wells, what was your husband's name?

HW: Percy Wells.

IR: Percy? And what did Mr. Wells do?

HW: He was an electrician, and maintenance man. He had lots of jobs.

IR: What year did you get married?

HW: 1921. September 21, 1921.

IR: How many years has Mr. Wells been gone?

HW: Eleven years.

IR: Were you married long [?]?

HW: [Unintelligible]

IR: What church do you belong to?

HW: John Wesley.

IR: You are at John Wesley [church], right?

HW: Yes.

IR: Her big day is going to be coming up here. Pretty soon, isn't it? The church going to be [relocated].

HW: Oh, yes [unintelligible].

IR: I went by there the other day. It looked like it was coming right along.

CH: Mrs. Wells, does anybody have the history written of your church?

HW: Well, I have a little bit written of the church.

CH: Do you think the people within the church would be interested in having maybe an oral history of the church to keep in their library?

HW: I don't know. We kept it just as an anniversary came around. Now I have a history of the church just when it was 75 years old. It is now 113.

CH: Is there anybody who knows that first 75 years worth around here?

HW: Well we can go back and get the ministers who came up to a certain time as to where the parsonage was and where the church was. The historical society has a lady in there that used to, whose grandmother used to [unintelligible] and made a little sketch of it. I'll show it to you, of our church, that when they came for our church just to look at, they wanted to [unintelligible].

IR: You're going to take most of the things with you to the new church, aren't you? Windows, and are you going to take the pulpit with you?

HW: Oh yeah.

IR: [Unintelligible] so the new church will be of nicer historical value[?]. If you have the church records, do you suppose the church would mind saving a copy? Ask somebody if they would mind. Since you all have the copy of those, all we would do is make a copy of them, and then we would put them in what we call the cage at James Madison University. It wouldn't be something that would go out on the general shelves, or anything like that. But it would be a historical item, and they would go into the cage, which is the spot upstairs where we keep valuable materials. Materials that can't be replaced, that kind of thing.

HW: That would be nice if they knew the church wasn't going to move it.

IR: And it would be nice to have somebody to hold onto that, just in case. There's always the possibility that the records that you have might get lost, or stolen, or burned, or something like that. And it wouldn't be something that people would just go in and take or anything like that. It would be locked away upstairs in the cage just as historical items.

HW: Now you see, Asbury [church] down on South Main used our church first. It was their church and then we bought it from Asbury, and Asbury moved across the street to another place. Asbury's had three churches. Then they moved from the place across the street on Town Square to the present place. And that's why Mrs. Catherine and some of the others were very anxious to see our church when we opened it that January, because her grandfather had preached over that pulpit.

IR: Mrs. Catherine is my next door neighbor who is 88 years old, and she and her sister Mrs. Boice[?] go back for forever in the lower Valley. Grandparents, great-grandparents, great-great-grandparents.

HW: It was named Andrew Chapel then when they owned it, and then when we bought it we named it John Wesley. Strange that we have three churches here all in the Methodist name The old ones like Otterbein. Mr. Otterbein was a Methodist minister and Mr. Wesley left him in the Valley and he went to Florida to do missionary work and left Mr. Otterbine here in this Valley to take care of the rest of the Methodists he collected. Mr. Otterbein could speak German

[unintelligible] and when Mr. Wesley came back to visit, Mr. Otterbein had changed it [the church name] to United Brethren. So that's where we got United Brethren. It's just a branch, but it really was Methodist.

IR: Now our secretary, Mrs. Garber, was just telling me that they were originally United Brethren, and within the last few years, it's now back to being a Methodist.

HW: They were Methodist first. He had gotten all the people in the Valley, then I'm going to Florida to get some more people rounded up. And he came back to Otterbine. So that's why that church up there is named Otterbein. Otterbein United Methodist Church, John Wesley, and Asbury. Mr. Asbury rode through the Valley on one horse. Francis Asbury. He came along at the same time that John Wesley did.

IR: And he simply rode through the Valley on a horse collecting people?

HW: No, preaching. He rode on horseback. Horseback preachers, they rode from town to town.

IR: And so they named a church there for him?

CH: Was that the church that he did his ministry? Did he actually preach in that church?

HW: I don't think he did. There's a store building right across from Asbury. You'll notice there's a plaque on it that says, "This is where Asbury had its first meeting hall," or conference or something like that. It's right across from the Methodist church, in the stone house[?]. Mr. Grattan has his insurance office there. [Unintelligible] and the Mennonites [unintelligible].

IR: Well, I guess you folks know each other well enough that I can move on and leave you here to chat a little bit, if that's alright.

HW: You can stay if you want to. Look at those chairs back there behind the big one. I had them out but I have to move my bedroom, have to move some things over there and make way for my husband was sick. Look at those.

IR: [Unintelligible]. This is very popular again. The old [unintelligible]. If it has spindles on it, people automatically love it.

CH: It's in. It's in. Mrs. Wells, while you're sitting there, relaxing there, I want you to think back two or three years, ok? And tell me some of the things that you did when you were a little girl. When you got up on a Saturday morning, as a child, what did you normally have to do? Did you have specific chores that your mother gave you to do, and then after you finished them could you go out and play? What were the kinds of things that you had to do?

HW: My sister was the one who could do the washing because she didn't like to iron, and I would do the ironing. Then on alternate days we made bread twice a week. One day was my evening to make the bread, and then it was her turn to make the bread. [Unintelligible] My mother was a dressmaker and she did lots of the things, but of course when there was work to be done, she left it to us to do the housekeeping. Strange how children now hate to do things like that. Show somebody to make up bread from scratch.

CH: Miss Wells, do you recall your recipe? I can not make good bread, and if you could tell me that recipe, I surely would appreciate it.

HW: [Unintelligible] sometimes I buy the package and just add yeast.

CH: That's not good bread. I like that good kind that you make. That good old kind! Can you recall your recipe?

HW: To start the bread you put the yeast and so much flour into what you call a sponge [unintelligible].

CH: How do you start it?

HW: You put the yeast, and flour and water, and then sometimes, the people who made the very best bread used water that came off of potatoes. Potato water. And then you start the sponge.

IR: Oh, you mean after they were done. Raise and work flour into the [unintelligible]. You said it looked like a sponge, Mrs. Wells?

HW: Yes. The first time it rises, it was kind of spongy. It not work out, if you put too much water, you could run out whatever you had. They made buckwheat cakes the same way. They started at night and then all they'd have to add was buckwheat flour in the morning. [unintelligible].

CH: Is it your recipe? Is it the same one that you use?

HW: It's almost heavier.

CH: I've never heard of buckwheat flour. Is it something you'd buy now Mrs. Wells?

HW: I know where you buy it now. Old people wouldn't eat at all if they had to go back and use this here food. I was telling a lady the other day, I sent her a recipe for what they call gospel cake, scripture cake. She's going to use it in her women's work, the scripture cake.

CH: Well I must be a harlot, Mrs. Wells. You have to tell me how to make the scripture cake, too.

HW: Oh, you'd like to know?

CH: I surely would. I never heard of a scripture cake and I love to eat sweets, so you have to tell me how to make a scripture cake! Now that you'll just have to tell me.

HW: Well alright then. It's really for a group of women who are having like a fair or a meeting or something, because you start out by saying one cup of Job, and then it gives the scripture that you find the ingredients. You've got to read the scripture to find out what one cup is, and then you go ahead and say the one cup of Genesis, the first clause. Another cup of Genesis, the second clause. And the first clause was figs, and the second clause was raisins. And that was an old cookbook. It wasn't just something they came out with. And they laughed about it! They wouldn't believe that I wrote it, so now they copied it all out and they know it, so they carry [unintelligible].

IR: That sounds like something a school teacher does in this day and age to get the kids to read their books.

CH: To read their books. It really does.

HW: You add a small dash of Romans. And you've got to read Romans to find out what a small dash was. And then the lady said, "And do what Solomon did to make boys good." You read proverbs, such and such chapter, and he beat them!

End of tape 1, side 1

Transcript 5b: Interview with Mrs. Helen Wells, 18 July 1978; Harrisonburg, Virginia

Tape 1, side 2

(Side 2 is blank for the first five minutes of the tape. The interview then begins in progress)

- HW: All of them. See now that scripture cake. [Sounds as if a paper is being unfolded] Read it.
- IR: Ok. Scripture cake is one of the catching accompaniments of the church fair. What do they mean by "catching"?
- HW: You know, something to get their attention.
- IR: Oh, ok. This is the recipe common we used. Take one cup of Judges 5:25, last clause, and the answer is butter. Two cups of Jeremiah 6:20, sugar. Six Job 39:14, eggs. A little Genesis 19:26, salt. Mark 16:1, to taste. That's spice. A large spoonful of I Samuel 14:25, which is honey. One cup of Genesis 24:20, which is water. One and one-half cups of prepared I Kings 4:22, last clause, which is flour. A word prepared presentably refers to the baking powder, which should be sift with the flour. Two cups of I Samuel 30:12, first clause, which is raisins. Two cups of the same verse, second clause, figs, and one cup of Numbers 17:8, which is almonds. Follow Solomon's advice for making good boys, Proverbs 23:14, first clause, and you will have a good cake. Of course, the raisins and the figs are chopped.
- CH: Mrs. Wells, you told me that your sister did the washing. Did your sister wash in the old wash pots?
- HW: I was thinking we used to use those real heavy things and a water pot in the yard, but then we had a washing machine [unintelligible]. One of those real old time ones.
- CH: Did she ever wash with a tin toe[?]?
- HW: Yes, and she washed with a rubber. You know, what you wash with.
- CH: Oh! What kind of games did you all play, Mrs. Wells? Can you recall? In the afternoon when you went outside to play, did you play ring games?
- HW: Yes. Sometimes.
- CH: Can you remember what you played?
- HW: We usually would sit quietly and sew. We wanted to learn to sew. And we would get material so we could have all kinds of things, like things for dolls. Didn't have very many dolls, but we needed clothes for these things we called dolls.
- IR: Were they homemade dolls?
- HW: Yes.
- IR: How did you make them?
- HW: Well I remember we made some out of corn, you know, shuck them up and put them in the kettle[?]. And I also have memories[?], my momma taught us how to plat those and make hats. Rip the corns out of it..
- CH: You would take a plat and make a little hat? Would you have to put several plats together?
- HW: Oh yeah.
- CH: What would your hat look like when you finished it? Was it a big wide...
- HW: It was a braid, you see. Braided. You take three pieces of it, of the corn

shuck.

CH: Did the hat fit down on your head, or it fit right...

HW: Oh yes. We made a big hat out of corn.

CH: Did you make little things like that out of any other leaves?

HW: Yes, we made baskets out of honeysuckle. I remember her teaching us how to make baskets out of honeysuckle. [Unintelligible], then you let it dry [unintelligible].

CH: Mrs. Wells, do you think you could remember how to do it now?

HW: I don't know whether I could or not. I was telling somebody the other day, we have so much honeysuckles. I've never seen so much honeysuckle in my life in my hedge right around here. And everybody has it. So I told the lady next door, I said, "Now these older people, they would throw this honeysuckle away and we would get them out from the garbage man." I said, "They'd strip it, and then let it dry, and then they'd make baskets out of it." I said, "We [unintelligible]."

CH: How long could you use your basket?

HW: I guess it could be used more than Spring[?]. The baha [material], it never got really stiff like weed would.

CH: Were they big, little?

HW: You know how kids get tired of things. We'd have them awhile. Some of them would be lopsided.

CH: What other kinds of little things did you all make like that? What can you remember.

HW: I don't remember making too many things myself because, as I told you, I like to read. I started reading the [unintelligible] books, and all those books. I had a friend that worked somewhere, and whenever they threw a book away, he'd bring it and give it to me. Eight or nine of those old books. Now my sister didn't particularly like to read. She liked to jump and play ball with the boys. I didn't play with the boys[?]. They called us down for Saturday morning to play, but we couldn't play over there because my father was getting ready to come home and they'd say, "Helen, your father just left the Baptist church corner." And that made me run.

CH: At the Baptist church corner? That was the corner where the church was? Oh! Your Dad didn't want you to play ball?

HW: I mean, girls play ball? You couldn't be out there in the boys field with boys playing ball!

CH: What were you playing? Softball, baseball?

HW: Baseball.

CH: Really!

IR: So you had to be at home when Dad was coming?

HW: Well certain! But I would play baseball.

CH: So what other kind of games did they like for you to play? What kind could you play?

HW: Oh, hide-and-seek, you know, like that. All those kind of games.

CH: Do you remember what your calls were for hide-and-seek? I will say now, "I spy, stick `em in the eye." Do you remember what yours was?

HW: "Here I come, ready no-ready."

CH: "Ready no-ready." And you'd run and look for the person?

HW: That's right.

CH: What about things like ring-around-the-rosies? Did you play that?

HW: Yes we did. Ring-around-the-rosies, too.

CH: Did you use the same words that we use? We did, "Ring around the rosies, a pocket full of posies. A tissue, a tissue, we all fall down." Were those yours?

HW: Posies.

CH: But you don't remember them?

HW: And then we [unintelligible], you know. I don't know where we learned that, but we sang "Henry Cracked Corn and I Don't Care," "One foot up and One Foot Down."

IR: Which thing[?] ?

HW: "Jimmy cracked corn and I don't care." "One foot out and one foot down, all he did was fly around," and hit part of you and turn around. Then we played "London Bridge Falling Down."

IR: Now that I remembered, but the "Jimmy Crack Corn?" How did you play that?

HW: I think we lined up and then we had partners, you know, and your partner was the one to sing "Jimmy crack corn and I don't care." He'd twirl around and dance with you, and the next person. Something like Virginia Reel. Grandma's got that.

IR: And what was the tune? What did it sound like?

HW: I think it sounded like Jimmy crack corn.

IR: And what was that other line that you just said?

HW: "I don't care?" (She sings the tune) "Jimmy crack corn, and I don't care. Jimmy crack corn and I don't care. Jimmy crack corn and I don't care...my masters gone away."

IR: That's it, ok.

CH: You played this in party kinds of situations where you had people? What did kids do when they had parties then?

HW: We didn't have parties.

IR: Did you neck[?] ?

CH: Did you play "spin-the-bottle?"

HW: Oh yes. I did a little naughtiness.

CH: How did you all play spin the bottle? You know, we thought we coined that game when we were children!

HW: I know they sit in a ring. Stand in the middle with the bottle and you turn it around, and the one that it's pointing to is the one you have kiss.

CH: Well you selected someone to be in the center, right?

HW: Yes.

CH: Somebody had to be in, right? And they could spin. What about "Post office?"

HW: Yes, I played post office, too.

CH: How did you play that?

HW: [Unintelligible]. There's some kissing in it too, isn't there?

CH: (Laughs) Yes ma'am. There is some kissing in it, too.

IR: What did your daddy think about your playing kissing games?

HW: Oh, well he would be home then. We would go back to school or we had a school party, church party. Most of the time we had parties that we used at the church. I remember now at Easter time we said that now that children don't carry eggs we carried eggs to church. On a Monday after each day, we had eggs, and I remember the boys were busy opening the top of the egg and putting something in it to make the egg very hard so that they could do what you call "cooking[?]." You know, they go from egg to egg, show you the egg and then they'd come down on them. Somebody was talking about it not so long ago. And if you broke the egg then you had to give it to him. So somebody came home

with a bag full of eggs, some body didn't have any at all. But the boys used to carry five or six eggs when they went.

CH: Mrs. Wells, this is all new to me, now. The children all each took eggs to the party.

HW: Yes.

IR: Hard boiled eggs?

HW: Hard boiled eggs.

CH: Oh, I see. And you would get in a circle or something and hold it?

HW: Yeah, and he'd say, "I want to cluck with you." Well now if you knew he had an egg, well everybody didn't know whether he did. Now I'm not sure, but I think they poured something like plaster-of-paris inside that.

IR: And he tried to break the egg?

HW: Sure.

IR: With his hand? Were you holding it?

HW: No, your egg. See, you'd take your egg.

CH: You'd take your egg and try to break his with their egg! Oh, I see. And then your egg broke. You had to give them that egg.

HW: That's right. Yeah.

CH: So that was your Easter egg hunt now fashion[?].

HW: And of course the [unintelligible] would always put eggs around different places in the basement and everything. John Wesley done that. And he'd use church time to tell you now you can go hunt. He'd always want to have that.

CH: You went to John Wesley as a child? For Easter did your mother make you and your sister...you had one sister?

HW: Two sisters.

CH: Two sisters. Did she make you new clothes for Easter?

HW: Yes she did, but hardly ever, because I'd tell the children at school, "I'm going to have a new dress, and Judy's going to have a pink one, or a yellow one," or whatever they were, but you know my mother had other things to do and other peoples came first, and I would have to grab my same dress. I'd have to press it and wear it and somebody would say to me, "Oh, I thought you were going to have a new dress for Easter!" [Unintelligible] And then lots of times she would be sewing at night, you know. But as I said, she would make us children go [unintelligible]. That's when I started sewing for myself. My mother was away one day, and I decided this material was nice. [Unintelligible] and when she came home, I had to stop. I showed it to her. She took it. [Unintelligible] Then she showed me how to make the sleeve, how to make a belt and from then on I made my own things.

IR: How old were you? Do you remember?

HW: I was about 14 years old.

CH: Did your sister learn to sew as fast? She was too busy playing ball.

HW: Yeah, she needs a teaching. She still does.

CH: But she did learn how. What about your brothers? Did she make their clothes too?

HW: Yes indeed. You know, we didn't buy any store bought clothes then. There were very few to be bought, to tell you the truth. She made pants and shirts too. Let me show you something else. I got her cookbook upstairs, and she wrote in the back of it sometimes when she didn't have to keep somebody's measurement.

[Tape is briefly cut off]

HW: February 15. January 10. She got her egg thing that she...she kept eggs for sale so she could have spending money. And these were the people that she was

sewing for.

IR: Look at this. Look at the prices.

HW: Isn't that something?

IR: \$.50. \$.25. Here's one - \$1.90, they must have had quite a something made up.

HW: Quite a dress, perhaps.

CH: Where did she get material from? Could she just go downtown Harrisonburg and just buy it?

HW: Yes, uh-huh.

CH: What about things like socks, and bow-ties, and ribbons and things like that?

HW: I think she bought those at the store.

CH: She bought those. Mrs. Wells, did she make the long-underwear for you?

HW: No, I remember washing them though. I'd be thinking [unintelligible]. But I have got some drawers that she made. You know, for ladies to give it to them. Ladies little split drawers?

CH: No ma'am. I did not.

HW: (laughs) I have to find them. You know, they had them and you went in one leg and down the other, but you had a bag around here, and then when you went to the bathroom you'd have to take them all off.

CH: Take them all off. Maybe we need to go back to that. (Laughs)

HW: I'll show you some of those things. There's a lady at the college, Dr. Rowe, and so I was saving some of those things for her and I haven't had a chance yet to get it for hers. She's gonna do a showcase of mine, and I also have an old nightgown like they used to have. The long, white ones. I don't know why, like I said, [unintelligible].

CH: Did your mother have a big fireplace in your home as a child?

HW: No.

CH: She did her cooking on a wood stove?

HW: Yes.

CH: What was Christmas like, Mrs. Wells?

HW: Well, with six children it was just...people would say they had so many things. I remember the day we would get the bag of oranges and the candy in what you call a "Nipnada Mix" [?] or something like that. She would make in the shape of a sock. Candy and [unintelligible].

IR: It was a big thing back then to get an orange, wasn't it? And today's kids think, "Orange?"

CH: Did you have a Christmas tree?

HW: Oh yes. We had a Christmas [tree] and we made the trimmings. Cut up all the papers and made chains, popcorn.

IR: Did you use candles on it or...

HW: No. [Unintelligible].

IR: Did you have any lights on it at all? Then you didn't have very much electricity, what did you use?

CH: When you went to bed at night and Santa Claus came, did he put any other decorations on your tree? Your tree was just like it? What about cooking? Did your mother cook up a bunch of stuff?

HW: Yes.

CH: Do you recall some of the kinds of things that she made?

HW: Oh yes. We would always have a big crock [?] of ginger cookies. [unintelligible]. Then my father liked [unintelligible]. Somebody else in the family [unintelligible].

CH: Did you have an icebox to keep those [unintelligible]. Food that was left?

HW: Yes, I do believe we did.
CH: Would you all have to go for the ice as children?
HW: Yes, and I remember later on my father got it and a man would come to the door and you'd tell him how much you want and he'd get it. And not so long ago I came across a pair of those, whatcha call them, ice tongs that you put on the ice.
IR: Could I get a drink of water Mrs. Wells? You just sit still, I'll rush right in the kitchen.
HW: No, you don't want to go!
[Tape is briefly paused]
IR: She was married, what, 18...
HW: 1897.
CH: What was her last name?
IR: Irvin.
CH: In 1897.
IR: 1897, and then Harry Nelson?
HW: That's right.
IR: March 1, 1906, and then William Mark born April 30, 1908.
HW: That's the baby.
IR: So she used her cookbook?
HW: She's got everything in there. Got about selling eggs in there, how much they sold eggs for.
IR: She kept her reference in the back. Boy, she didn't waste anything, did they?
HW: And look at that silver[?] that were in that cookbook.
CH: There's a three-leaf clover. (Laughs) Or is it a four-leaf?
HW: It had been four. It's just three now. That's what you put in your buffet, on your buffets, plenty of times.
IR: The copyright date on this is 1894.
CH: This is your mother's handwriting?
HW: Yes.
CH: What age person was she when she died, Mrs. Wells? Do you remember?
HW: She was 60 years old. She died in 1930.
CH: She died here? Is she buried here too?
IR: Mrs. Wells, going back to the church, did you play kissing games at church?
HW: Oh yes. They played kissing games at church.
CH: Well where did you all have these parties?
HW: In the basement of the church.
IR: You did?
CH: Oh, yeah! The adults were all upstairs!
HW: Well they were around somewhere. Like I was telling somebody the other day, I said, "We used to have parties, and we walked to the girl's house, and we'd be having a good time, singing songs around the piano. We'd play and sing, and when you sat back there in the kitchen, if you weren't back there to get something then it was my mother. They were there too. They had their party in the kitchen. They had a good time and we had a good time, but [unintelligible]. Boys were there too. He would walk with the boys, but they would walk by themselves too.
CH: Mrs. Wells, your mother was an educated woman. How far did she go through school? Do you remember?
HW: Remember Union Hartson[?] in Richmond. She graduated from Hartson College. It was a girl college like Union [Virginia Union Theological Seminary], the boy's

college in Richmond.

CH: Do you remember the year she graduated?

HW: I don't know.

CH: What about your grandparents. Do you remember your grandparents?

HW: They didn't play with children like they do now [unintelligible]. I don't remember how we knew they were grandparents. We just knew that they were. Didn't get to see them.

CH: Do you ever recall hearing your parents talk about it. Did you know both your parents well? Did both your mother and father live long enough for you to know both of them?

HW: Slightly. Not real well.

CH: Do you ever recall hearing them say things about them?

HW: Oh yeah.

CH: What about stories that they might have told? Did your mom have a story that she used to tell you all that maybe her mother told her or her father told her?

HW: No, I can't remember any.

CH: I'm collecting old ghost stories. They're my favorites. Ghost stories. Do you remember hearing any of those as a little girl? Surely the Shenandoah Valley must have had a favorite ghost!

HW: We had an old man who was supposed to be part Indian who everybody was frightened about.

Tape cuts off

End tape 1, side 2

African Americans in Harrisonburg

Transcript 5c: Interview with Mrs. Helen Wells

Date and Place of Interview: 18 July 1978; Harrisonburg, Virginia

Interviewers: Inez Ramsey, JMU Faculty; Carolyn Hobson

Transcriber: Theresa Staropoli, Burruss Intern in Carrier Library Special Collections, 20 April 1993

Tape 2, side 1

- CH: Mrs. Wells, tell me how you got about in Harrisonburg? Did you use mostly horse and buggies? As a little girl do you remember mostly horse and buggies?
- HW: Well a few people had horse and buggies. My father did. My father had a horse but he bought it to use for a dray. He did not have a surry or a phaeton, as you call it.
- CH: What was that?
- HW: A phaeton.
- IR: Oh, is that how you say that, a phaeton? I've often wondered. I've read it in books.
- HW: You know, open with two seats in the back. The man got in front.
- IR: That must have been luxurious.
- CH: I tell you! Then you used to walk mostly where you went? You walked to church? Sunday was a big thing, huh?
- HW: Oh sure! We walked to the John Wesley just two or three blocks from here to Liberty Street. But my parents [unintelligible].
- CH: Sunday was a great big thing. Did you have Sunday school?
- HW: Oh yes.
- CH: Did the children sit with their parents in church then, or did they do what we do now and go off into the corners?
- HW: Well, I believe we'd sit with our parents for special occasions, but in those days most of the time the men sat on one side and the ladies sat on the other.
- IR: Where would the children sit?
- HW: We would sit with a parent. Either one or the other side[?].
- IR: You didn't have a special place upstairs where they made you sit?
- HW: We have a gallery in our church though. There's nothing up there [unintelligible] a lot of trashy books and things have been put up there from time to time. I still have a little summer school book.
- IR: You still have a little Sunday school book?
- HW: Yeah [unintelligible - Mrs. Wells walks away from the recorder].
- IR: I wonder what kind of trashy books they've got thrown up in the gallery. Do you mean there are books up in the top of the church now?
- HW: Mostly books that have no backs on them, things like that. [Reads from the book] John Wesley Sunday School, July the 26th, 1894.
- CH: Did every child have that Mrs. Wells?
- HW: The older children had [them], you know, if you could read. Well, the little children didn't have any. And there's no music with it, you see, and people would start it.

IR: It's got no music, it's got all chords.
CH: Somebody started the tune off for you?
HW: Oh sure, yeah.
CH: Kind of what they call common meter now? Somebody started the tune and you just joined in?
HW: Yes you remember. When you first learned "Yes, Jesus Loves Me," you just sang and you didn't have any music to it, and then the next time you came back you knew that tune, and so she'd start and you'd just go ahead and sing.
IR: Did you have a piano or anything like that at that time?
HW: No, we had organs. We had the reed organs.
CH: What kind was this?
HW: Reed, you know, reed pump.
CH: The kind you pump? Was Christmas a very big thing in your church?
HW: We had a Christmas tree. I think some persons put some presents under there for their friends, you know. And in later years they stopped having the Christmas tree.
CH: Did children, when you were a child, go carolling?
HW: Yes.
CH: They did. Did people give you cookies and things like that as you went?
HW: That's right.
CH: Did you do it just in your neighborhood?
HW: Just in the neighborhood.
CH: What were some of your favorite Christmas carols Mrs. Wells? Do you remember?
HW: "Oh Little Town of Bethlehem," "Away in a Manger," "It Came Upon A Midnight Clear."
CH: You did this Christmas Eve?
HW: Yes.
CH: And then you were in the house by dark?
HW: By dark and we used to end it by singing, "We Wish You A Merry Christmas."
IR: Did they give you something?
HW: Cakes and cookies or something like that.
CH: How long did you celebrate Christmas? Did you go through old Christmas as well? You just celebrated Christmas Day? When did you take your tree down?
HW: We usually took it down just before New Year's Day.
IR: Did you ever hear of such a thing as shooting off guns [in the back yard] on New Year's Eve? Did anybody ever do this to celebrate?
HW: Was it dynamite?
IR: Shooting off guns.
HW: Somebody had some dynamite caps on one New Year's Eve, but since that time I don't think we've paid too much attention at all. There would just be booming noise in this neighborhood, and these neighbors [unintelligible] on the side of the street. [Unintelligible].
IR: So they blew dynamite back over here!
HW: They didn't buy firecrackers because they couldn't get hold of them but they got a hold of this dynamite. You see they put the dynamite in and nobody in there you see[?].
CH: Did your dad have a garden, Mrs. Wells?
HW: Oh yes. What would we have done without the garden?
CH: You remember working in the garden?
HW: Oh yes. I remember we'd pride ourselves if we had peas. Some of my sisters had green beans. We prided ourselves on keeping the weeds all out. You weren't a

very good gardener if you let all the weeds get in there.

CH: Did your mother can her vegetables to keep them or dry them out?

HW: She dried some and canned some.

CH: What did you dry and how?

HW: Corn, apples, green beans.

CH: How did you dry them?

HW: Well, we cooked the corn, then cut it off, and then she'd spread a sheet on our front porch roof upstairs. Then the corn was cut off and the apples were cut out and spread out[?] and they went on the roof.

CH: Will it keep that way?

HW: Oh sure.

CH: How long will it keep?

HW: Pretty long. Green beans will too.

CH: After they dried out then what would you put them in? Jars?

HW: Oh yes. You put them in stone crocks.

IR: I've often heard about dried apples.

HW: Oh yes. That's what you call snitzes. You ever eaten snitzes? Dumplings, you know, with the dried apples in them?

CH: How do you make them Mrs. Wells?

HW: I don't know. I'd have to look in my cookbook! I know they made them. It's German.

IR: Snitzes? No, I never heard snitzes at all. Did you used to make snitzes when you were young?

HW: We didn't make them much because my mother didn't particularly like them. She liked the dumpling though. She made the dried apples and she put them in the dough. Very much like pie dough.

CH: You put the dried apples in the dough?

HW: That's right. Then you'd roll it out like a jelly roll.

CH: Oh, and just roll them up in the roll? What, with spices and stuff?

HW: Oh yes. Nutmeg, cinnamon.

CH: And then you just slice it.

HW: Sure, and if you really wanted to be real smart, you'd pour the cream all over it. Now she didn't particularly like dumpling. A lot of people made that dough and then dropped the dough in water. [Unintelligible].

CH: And she canned?

HW: Yes, mad pickles, preserves. You know my father only made \$7.50 a week. He had six children.

CH: What kind of work did he do?

HW: He took care of a place over on East Market Street. This man had a shoe store, therefore doing the janitorial work at the store on Main Street then he came to the house[?]. Then there were some other jobs. We had a tanner here, and a number of our people worked at tanning. It's down where the parking deck is now.

IR: I remember seeing that, the tanner. What did they do at the tannery?

HW: Tanned the hides in some way. They'd bring the hides here, put them in these big vats or something to get them tanned for leather. I've never seen the raw hide of a cow that had to get tanned or something. [Unintelligible].

IR: You were just about self sufficient, obviously.

HW: We had to buy milk. We'd walk over down there. The house is still standing up here where we used to buy some milk.

IR: Where was that, on East Market Street?

HW: No, it's up here on Rock Street.
CH: And you walked daily for milk?
HW: Not everyday. I'd go and get some from my neighbors sometimes. My neighbor next door had a cow.
CH: Do you always remember your mother having an ice box, Mrs. Wells?
HW: I remember the ice and then I remember that we had a cellar and I used to keep some blocks of ice in the cellar sometimes. You know, just wrapped them in brown paper or something. If you needed a piece you went down, took the ice pick and chipped off some. We wrapped it up.
CH: Tell me something else. What did you do, did you have a big 4th of July picnic and celebration kind of thing? Do you remember going on picnics as a little girl? Maybe church picnics.
HW: I remember church picnics.
CH: What would you do?
HW: Well, they'd have songs to sing, and we would go in what they called a wagon with 24 seats. And 24 people could ride and maybe more than that. Sometimes we went as far as Bridgewater. [unintelligible]. We had a picnic.
CH: In a big flat-bed wagon?
HW: No it had seats in it, like a bus. It was open on both sides and driven by horses. We put the horses, two sets of horses or something. But they called it a 24 seat taxi wagon.
CH: Mrs. Wells, when you got a cold when you were a little girl, what did your mother do for you? Did she have any old home remedies? Things that were handed down from her grandmother?
HW: She used castor oil now and then.
CH: Castor oil is a barium[?]. What about to grease your chest in? Did she maybe use something special for that?
HW: I think she used something called camphorated oil. You know that?
CH: That's what they rubbed John Brown's baby with!
IR: Do you remember when I was talking to you where you were telling me about making apple butter? You used to have the socials where you made apple butter?
HW: Oh yes. The men would come and at night would bring [the apples]. The ladies would peel the apples, and they'd wash them and give them to them to peel. Then the next morning somebody would come out and start a fire in the big kettle, and they would start the water and cook the apples in them. And they cooked it in sugar. Then they had a long wooden paddle that they used to stir it with. And if they were very smart they would say, "once around the sides and twice through the middle." When they got tired of stirring, then somebody else would take the same place. You didn't do a very good job if you let it scorch. Nobody would want it you know. You got to keep stirring until you could take it off. Put it in crocks, stone crocks. We used about a gallon size, or two gallon, and they would seal it over with something. I don't remember the sealing, but they put the big papers on top and tie it.
IR: When did you eat it?
HW: Oh we tasted it a lot. We saved out some, and that's what was going on in one of those crocks[?].
CH: What else did they put in it? They peeled the apples and cooked them down real good. How did they get it as brown as it is?
HW: That just comes from cooking.
CH: Oh. Just cook it down?
HW: And then they used a copper kettle. I don't know whether that had anything to

do with it. Nobody made apple butter without a copper kettle. [unintelligible] and scrub it out real good.

CH: Did they put sugar or anything else in?

HW: Sugar.

CH: Sugar and the apples, and that's all?

HW: That's all.

CH: And just cooked that down?

HW: Cooked it all up.

CH: What's "around the sides and twice through the middle?" Did they have a little tune that went with it?

HW: Yeah. They made a tune and everybody could sing the words.

CH: Mrs. Wells, did you play "I-lost-my-pocket-handkerchief" as a little girl?

HW: That's from outside?.

CH: (Sings the song) "I lost my pocket handkerchief out yesterday, there was a rain and dirty then I threw it away." And you'd drop it behind somebody.

HW: I don't remember singing that. I don't know what we sang.

CH: But you remember playing something like that?

HW: Yes I remember playing something like that, sure.

CH: What about a game called "Red Rover?"

HW: Well we didn't play that too much because we were afraid to break somebody's windows. That's the one where you put the ball on this side and throw it over the roof?

CH: Might be, Mrs. Wells. I don't know darling.

IR: Vicki was talking about that, where you...one on one side of the house, one on the other and you threw the ball over the house?

HW: That's right. You caught it and you ran around the next side[?] to see if could tag somebody.

CH: Oh! We didn't know how that went. And you called that "Red Rover?"

HW: I think that's what you called it, or "Annie Over."

IR: "Annie Over?" That's what they said. Oh, we had a great disagreement over how you played "Red Rover." We played it. You had the sidewalk and you'd stand in the grass on the other side, and somebody would be in the middle saying "Red rover, red rover, blue can come over." And so if they had blue on could go across. But if you didn't have blue on, we'd try to get across without getting tagged. And then somebody said the way they played "Red rover, red rover," I remember playing a game that called it that. It's where you had two teams and you linked arms and somebody ran and tried to break through your arms. My grandmother didn't like for me to play that. It ruined my clothes! And we had great disagreements about what we called "Red rover, red rover."
[unintelligible]

CH: We were trying to find out what "Red rover" really is all about. You all had egg hunts, just the children?

HW: Yes, just the children. There were very few places that we could go. There were no movies at that time and then when we got older we could go to the one where we paid a nickel.

CH: What was that like? Was it a talkie or a silent movie?

HW: Talkie?

CH: It was a silent movie!

IR: Do you remember the first movie you ever saw?

HW: I believe it was a western, I'm not sure. But we liked it because we would just go for a nickel.

IR: Where was the movie?
HW: Down on Main Street.
IR: Do you remember what year around that would have been? How old were you, do you think, when you first saw it?
HW: [Unintelligible] Like I said, we didn't get to go to many of those things. And then we liked to go to the fairs. Daddy would take us to the fair and the horse show. And if you went to the horse show, he'd take one or two of us with him. A couple of boys and one of the girls. And then you couldn't go to the circus when it came. He couldn't afford to take us all, so I remember my sister had gone off to the horse show, and it was my time then to go to the circus. And we got a couple of blocks and my sister was just crying and moaning. She wanted to go to [unintelligible]. Now she knew she'd been to that one over there [unintelligible]. He couldn't walk all the way back home then me and the other boy, Robert, we had to take her too. We always played around and toyed her about that.
IR: What was the circus like?
HW: Oh, they didn't have as quite as many rings as they do now, but they had the animals and acrobats and things like that, and we could have some popcorn. And you know where one of them was? Newman Avenue, as you go towards Ott Street.
IR: Oh, all right. It was up by our house then.
HW: Yeah, in that section.
CH: Did the circus come on a train?
HW: Yes. And then we would go see them unload if we were good. That meant you had to go to bed real early and sleep because they began to unload early. And they'd always bring out the animals first so they could be fed. Elephants and things like that. That would give us a chance to see a lot of the animals without going to the circus ground.
IR: That sounds like that would be more fun than going to the circus itself to see them unload it.
HW: See them unload it. And then the boys would follow them clear on up to the circus ground to see them pitch the tent. How they worked to put the pegs in the ground and which tent was for the animals and which ones they put the seats in for people to see the rings. My, my. Circus day, oh that was something.
IR: Did they have any other holidays or anything like that in Harrisonburg where they'd have a big to do or anything like that downtown?
HW: No, I don't think so.
IR: The only thing I can think of now is the poultry festival.
CH: What holidays were you out of school for, Mrs. Wells?
HW: Oh, Christmas and Easter. I don't remember any others.
CH: Were your vacations as long as the children have now?
HW: No, I don't believe we went to school quite as early in September. I remember the middle of September, and then some schools just taught about 5 months in those days, or 6 months, and they weren't all nine month schools.
CH: Why was that? Because of the weather or farming?
HW: I think some parts of the country was farming. They needed the children home from school.
CH: Did you all have little sayings that children have now when school was out? "School is out, school is out, No more teachers dirty looks."
HW: No. We didn't say things like that about our teacher.
CH: Did you have the same teacher from first grade through what, say third?

HW: For about to third grade. Miss Lucy was my teacher.
CH: What kind of person was she?
HW: She was an angel. She was engaged to be married and she had to come home to look after her mother. Eventually the young man tired of waiting so she didn't marry him and she never married. She sang on the church choir, taught Sunday school, and she grew celery for her pocket money. She found how to peel the dirt up so that the large one would be all green and at a certain time you had to pull the dirt up around the trenches[?].
CH: She was not paid then as a school teacher?
HW: Oh yeah. But she had a home of her own that she did this on the side for. And then she liked roses, different kinds of roses. We'd bring her a slip of this and a slip of that. I have a orange blossom bush in my backyard that she brought when I first married and came here. [unintelligible].
CH: I'd like to see that, Mrs. Wells, before I leave.
HW: It isn't blooming now, it just has buds. These pretty little white blossoms are on there.
CH: What kind of discipline did she enforce? If a student was bad in her class, what did she do?
HW: Well, she attended to them all right.
CH: There in the classroom?
HW: In the coat room. And another thing, when the superintendent would come, he'd say, "I can't understand how these children always look so nice and pressed, with everybody's collars in place," but she kept in her drawer a comb, a brush, wash rag, and soap, and when your hair wasn't combed, she combed it for you.
IR: Did she paddle?
HW: Oh did she! But one thing, she didn't even have to paddle because she had such good discipline and that she knew everybody's mother. Wasn't any use in us going home telling what had happened in school, because when we got there, you'd get another one.
CH: What did she use to paddle?
HW: Oh, she used switches. She had different kinds of switches that she'd use.
IR: Oh, she used a switch?
HW: Yes she did.
IR: And she switched your bottom?
CH: Did the boys make the fire for her in the classroom in school?
HW: Not in her school. Back then they had big stoves and a man to care for them. Big high stoves.
IR: How many rooms did the Effinger Street school have when you were there?
HW: We had four at that time.
IR: It had four. Did it start out as a one room school house?
HW: No, I think they built it with four rooms. I think the one room school was down on Wolfe Street but I don't remember that.
IR: Ok, so it was four rooms. Now was Miss Lucy Simms the only teacher there, or were there other teachers there?
HW: Oh yes, there were other teachers there. Her brother taught school too. Ulysses G. Wilson. Her mother had been married twice. Her name was Simms and his name was Wilson
CH: Is his family [unintelligible]?
HW: There is nobody here now. He had two boys and a girl.
CH: Mrs. Simms had no family then other than her mother.

HW: I think she had a brother in Washington. [Unintelligible]
CH: Are any of them alive that you're speaking of, Mrs. Wells? Any of her relatives?
HW: I don't think so.
CH: How old was she when she passed? Do you know?
HW: Oh, I think Miss Lucy [unintelligible] in age, you know.
CH: So how long has she been dead?
HW: She died in 1932, I think.
IR: The inscription in Lucy Simms school says 56 years of service.
HW: That she taught.
IR: Did she retire before she passed on?
HW: No, I think she was going to teach school the next fall, then she died in the summer.
IR: So she really almost taught school her entire life.
HW: Here you go, darling. Here's the course of our park[?].
IR: She died in the line of duty. Bless her. All those children.
CH: Mrs. Wells, did you all take your teacher an apple everyday? Was that something we just hear about, the children of today?
HW: Well if we had apples at home and we thought Miss Lucy would want one, sure she'd want one.
CH: Miss Lucy was loved by everyone of her children.
HW: I don't know anyone who didn't like her, no.
CH: Did you have little tests in school like they do now? What about spelling bees? Well we heard one the other day that was a new one for us. Have you ever heard of something called a cipher down? That's your spelling bee for the best math wizard in the class. How was your spelling bee? Did you have spelling bees?
HW: Oh yes, We'd spell and spell down to the last man, leave one person on the floor.
CH: Each child had a word to spell?
HW: Well they called the words, you know. If you couldn't spell it, you sat down.
CH: And then the next one got that same word again?
HW: That's right.
CH: Oh, I see. Was it a big to do?
HW: Oh yes. Everybody had to stay. She wouldn't let anybody step down. Anybody saying, "Well now I don't want to spell. I don't spell well enough." She said, "You spell." You went up. And of course, if you couldn't spell well, you were about the first or second one down. So it made people want to study words, forcing them. She knew, we knew what she was going to have, and then we'd have to study them. The whole word you knew how to spell [unintelligible].
IR: Where did she get her words?
HW: She had spelling books. The readers and things that we used to read.
IR: My teacher used to use the daily newspaper.
HW: DID she?
IR: She'd use the daily newspaper, and take words out of the daily newspaper. Oh, it was hard. Especially when she started asking things like Stubenville[?]. This is funny. This is Miss Simms brother. I notice he says, "Mrs. Atkins first with voice strong...
HW: That's my aunt.
IR: Oh, really? "The leader of responds in song. Then comes Miss Simms, her alto mate. Much needed, but is often late." What does he mean?
HW: Because sometimes she would come in late. She used to be downstairs in the

basement or something like that. He just put that in. She wasn't always late!
IR: She was late to practice, huh? Oh, a brother can say it. Nobody else could.
CH: She was a member of John Wesley?
HW: Yes, that's right.
IR: So she goes down in history for being late for choir practice! (Laughs)
HW: (Laughs)
IR: Bless her heart!
CH: How did that church originate? You told me that John Wesley himself got these people together?
HW: No, I think Victor Asbury came through here riding. I have a picture somewhere of Asbury or some of those who may have arrived on horseback. Sometimes whoever I give some of those things have a little message [unintelligible] and I knew they would be thrown out in the trash. See, he came from the United Brethren Church, too. So I'd always be kidding him, "Oh, see I know more about that than you do because I'm a methodist, you were an English stop beam[?]. [Unintelligible]

Tape cuts off

End of tape 2, side 1

African Americans in Harrisonburg

Transcript 5d: Interview with Mrs. Helen Wells

Date and Place of Interview: 18 July 1978; Harrisonburg, Virginia

Interviewers: Inez Ramsey, JMU Faculty; Carolyn Hobson

Transcriber: Theresa Staropoli, Burruss Intern in Carrier Library Special Collections, 21 April 1993

Tape 2, side 2

(Interview begins in progress)

CH: Where did the congregation come from? Their first church meeting was where?

HW: Let's see. I'm gonna have to go get that little book.

CH: Mrs. Wells, I don't want you to run all over your house! That's cute. I can imagine, that's cute.

HW: I'm making this, pictures and things for a scrap book for our church. The methodist women.

CH: Who was the first minister?

HW: "From all available historical data it has been asserted that the congregation now known as John Wesley Methodist Church of Harrisonburg, Virginia was instituted in the home of Daniel Mariah Brown[?]." That was the house on the corner of Rock and Liberty Street. Right down here. "Daniel and Mariah Brown, on the corner of Liberty and Rock Streets, in October 1864. At this place, meeting was held until a lot was purchased on Westwood Street from Wilson Peters[?], a colored man, upon which they erected the frame building now known as Omar Lodge. Afterwards, the congregation moved onto West Market Street. It was compelled to return to their present church as was bought from the AME church south, then called Andrew's Chapel. The Reverend I.E. Canter[?], father of the Reverend H.M. Canter[?] and Dr. Noland Canter[?], both of this city, was pastor of the Andrew's Methodist Episcopal Church South, 1874-1875, whose congregation worshipped in the very building now occupied by John Wesley congregation. From 1875-1888 John Wesley took over the present building. Two pastors served in the old records. Reverend S.S. Russell[?], 1875-1877; Reverend G.W. Eggleston[?], 1877-1880, the first service being held January 11, 1880. This was conducted by the pastor the Reverend Robert E. Robinson, a charter member of the Washington Conference. The church was renamed John Wesley and dedicated by Bishop H.C. Andrews in 1881." And then we have the charter members and there was only one family that has anybody who was a charter member and that's the Toliver[?] family. Mrs. Toliver's mother, Mary Harris[?]. Her grandmother was named Mary Harris.

IR: And she was a charter member of the church? How did they get the money together to buy the church, do you know?

HW: I guess they used their dues, their little two cents worth and nickels worth to buy. They really gave their money and their lives and their spirits and whatever they had. But people don't do that now. We have too many other things to do. But you know, the money just doesn't come.

IR: I wonder if they had church socials or anything like that to make money?

HW: I think they did. They had lawn parties.
IR: Did you ever go to a lawn party when you were a kid? Everybody always talks about lawn parties...
CH: I never heard of them! What were they?
HW: Well, they always happened in the summertime when people could put some tables out on their front yard and people could bring things and people going about and you could ride by and walk by and people could buy something. And you told them before hand you were having a lawn party, and the persons who made the best ice creams, and there was no commercial ice cream in those days, made it all. And so you'd freeze it all the time.
IR: Until you'd make ice cream right there?
HW: Unless you carried it and made some and this person won't need to bring a freezer. [Unintelligible]. And then you had to have somebody who stayed there and used the dipper and give you five cents worth or ten cents worth, then you go on and buy some cake.
CH: Just a dollar and you were full!
IR: What did you drink?
HW: Lemonade. Nobody knew anything about Kool-aid back then.
CH: So ever since you can remember as a little girl, John Wesley was where it is now?
HW: That's right.
CH: Your parents were both members of...
HW: That's right. They were both members of the church.
CH: Did they have positions in the church?
HW: Yes, my father was a class leader, my mother superintendent of Sunday school at that time, and then she also was a teacher. And then my Aunt sang on the choir while my mom was superintendent.
IR: What did you do in Sunday school?
HW: Well, we had classes and we studied the Bible. By the time [unintelligible] we had to know all about the Be-attitudes, the shortest Psalm in the Bible, the longest one. The Ten Commandments, the Be-attitudes, the golden rule.
IR: Did you have to memorize Bible verses and things like that?
HW: Yes. Perhaps some teacher would give us some stories about Jonah, Moses, the wilderness and all those things.
IR: Do you remember how they told of those stories? Did they tell them, or did they read them?
HW: They would read them from the Bible and tell us. We didn't have too much literature back then. We had the Bible.
IR: So they'd read to you, those beautiful stories? Excuse me, I didn't mean to interrupt you.
HW: This is a picture of the parsonage. It's right there where the police station is now.
IR: Where the police station is? On South Liberty?
HW: Um-hum. See the church is up the street, so the parsonage is up the street. That's the church, if you at say 1975[?]. I mean when the church was 75 years old.
CH: Is the John Wesley that is there now, is that the original structure?
HW: (She nods)
CH: Mrs. Wells, did your mother have a favorite hymn, your mother and father have a favorite hymn that they used to sing often to you?
HW: My father and I sang "Am I a Soldier of the Cross." Sing that. We knew all the

words to that.

IR: What was G.A. Newman like? I've heard so much about him. He was a superintendent...

HW: HE was a superintendent. He was a lay reader in our church. They called him a lay preacher. If the minister was absent he'd take over.

IR: Wasn't he a teacher, G.A. Newman? He taught over at Effinger Street school, didn't he? What was he like?

HW: He was tall, a very straight man, a nice person. His daughter still plays for our church, and she has been praying[?] for 25 years. [Unintelligible] family coming. She has one daughter who's ill.

CH: Mrs. Wells, did you ever teach at Effinger?

HW: No, I just substituted out in the county. I just liked to substitute.

CH: Mrs. Simms was teaching where when she died?

HW: Effinger.

CH: She was at Effinger? But the Simms school, is that named in her memory?

HW: Yes.

CH: That was done after she died?

HW: That's right. See she taught at Effinger and we named the new school Lucy Simms.

IR: What was a day like at school? What did you do?

HW: We would always go in at nine and there were no lunches. Everybody went home for lunch, unless you lived too far to walk. Then you could bring something in your lunch box. But we all could walk from Effinger Street to our house. Nobody carried any lunch to school.

CH: How long did you have for lunch?

HW: One hour. And then we'd go back to school.

IR: How did you start your day in the morning?

HW: Jump out of bed and get breakfast. Do whatever had to be done. The boys had to bring in wood before they went to school. Then we'd go off to school.

CH: When you got there in the morning did you say the pledge to the flag?

HW: That's right. We'd have what you call an assembly when all the classes would be together. And then we'd have scripture, say a prayer, and maybe told about something. Something that had to be done at school or somebody's bad behavior. Something like that.

CH: Did you have bells, the regular ringing bells?

HW: Yes we had some of those. That's about all we had.

IR: Did you have one teacher all day long?

HW: Yes.

CH: She taught you everything?

HW: Yes.

CH: What time of day did you get out of school?

HW: Well around about 3 o'clock, or 4 or something like that. Most of the schools closed at four. Most stayed open until four.

IR: So you came at nine in the morning and you were there until four?

HW: Had to get all them classes in. When I was over at [unintelligible] they would tell me that you weren't supposed to leave there, but I remember one time we had a third grader or a fourth grader, one of those third graders doing something over here. Something worth while [unintelligible]. And I remember one day I closed before the time, and that was the day the superintendent came to visit me. And he found the school closed so I got a note the next day saying that he came to visit me.

IR: What subjects did you study when you were in school? What subjects did they teach you?

HW: English, mathematics, history, geometry, spelling, writing, drawing.

IR: Drawing was extra, so if you wanted to have drawing you had to go longer?

CH: Did you do any kind of physical activity, like our children have physical education now?

HW: Oh yes.

CH: What about music? Did you have music?

HW: Oh yes, we'd sing songs.

CH: What kinds of songs did you learn Mrs. Wells?

HW: Oh, "Star Spangled Banner," "America," patriotic hymns.

IR: Did you have fun at school? Or was it just all hard work?

HW: It was pretty much hard work. How busy I was, working all day long.

CH: What did your desk look like?

HW: My desk?

CH: Yes. Did you have the little individual little desk with the top that came up?

HW: That's right.

CH: And your little books sat down in there? Had an ink well on it? Did you ever get your plat in the ink well?

HW: No.

CH: Did the boys really do that?

HW: Well I can't remember [unintelligible].

CH: In the back of your seat, your little seat, was the front of the next persons desk?

HW: Your seat turned up.

CH: Right. And that was back up against the front of the next persons desk.

IR: Oh, I know what you mean.

CH: Full wrought iron, they had the wrought iron legs, too.

IR: Did you have recess at all?

HW: I don't think so.

IR: You mean you didn't have breaks during the day?

HW: I don't remember. Oh, we had what you call recess.

IR: What did you do at recess?

HW: Oh, we'd go outside then and play.

IR: What kind of things did you do on the playground?

HW: We had swings, and then later on I think at Effinger they put a basketball, you know, just a pole and a basket. And they didn't mark it off, but the kids played anyway.

CH: Now when you say a basket, Mrs. Wells, do you mean just that? A basket? You know, like peaches?

HW: A board. And then they'd hang the basket on there.

CH: Was it a wire basket rim like we have now?

HW: Yeah. And then they'd get in spouts[?] and the teachers would have to settle it out. They would set rules and it didn't go by rules, you know. Just played.

CH: You had that in addition to your lunch hour?

HW: Yes, we'd have lunch hour, too, and we'd have recess.

CH: You had recess and lunch?

IR: Did you have recess in the morning and recess in the afternoon or did you just have one?

HW: I think we had two.

IR: One in the morning and one in the afternoon. Like your coffee break.

HW: That's right. And they were supposed to go to the little out buildings at that time too.

IR: Yeah we wondered about the bathroom facilities back then. What did you do?

CH: You had one for boys and one for girls?

HW: That's right.

CH: Got cold out there, didn't it Mrs. Wells?

HW: Yes I guess it did. We were used to that because it was the same kind they had at home.

IR: So you had the outdoor?

HW: They put sewage up there [unintelligible].

CH: What did you do at night if you had to go to the bathroom, Mrs. Wells?

HW: Well you had slop jars. Remember those? Some people had some pretty china ones, and some people had some that were made out of galvanized, and some people just had their tin buckets.

IR: I don't remember that. Carolyn was telling me about that.

CH: My grandmother used to call that a "Peggy." Did you ever hear it called a "Peggy?" The name for the slop jar, a "Peggy?"

HW: Some of those were beautiful. They stood this high (according to interview notes, approximately 2 1/2 feet tall) and they had a top you put on it.

CH: It's ceramic.

HW: And some had the chamber. You remember the chamber, don't you? You'd push it under the bed. They were pretty.

CH: The chamber was the one with the handle on it and the top?

HW: Yes. That's right.

CH: And you just put the little top down on it. Shaped very much like a bucket, and it had a handle, and you put a top on it.

HW: Then you see, then you had the bowl and the pitcher. You remember that. The bowl made out of china and a pitcher about so high? I still got a picture of that.

IR: Oh, you do?

CH: That was your wash bowl?

HW: Yes. We poured water in it whether there was ice in it or not. If you didn't want to come to the kitchen.

IR: I'll bet the house got cold at night.

CH: Did your mother make quilts?

HW: Oh yes.

CH: Did she do it by herself, or were there other people who helped her?

HW: Oh, she had other people come in and help her.

IR: Did you ever go to a quilting bee? They used to talk about the ladies having quilting bees.

HW: They might have had them. That's part of their recreation. My mother was too busy to do that. She made whatever she made by herself. She was a busy woman. She saved scraps from people's materials, from skirts or what-have-you.

CH: Did she have a big frame or something that she made it on?

HW: Some people did. They'd bring that. And then they'd carry it, you know, with those two folds. My next door neighbor has one here. They're Mennonites. Still making them.

IR: Oh, they're still making the old ones.

CH: Is that the stretcher frame that looks something like the old frame you used to put curtains on?

HW: Um-hum.

CH: I didn't know they made that.

HW: And then they made rugs, too. Hook rugs. They'd cut out the old materials out of coats, or skirts, like that, and you had a needle that you could thread and hook through the burlap. Save the burlap sacks. Draw your design on that, flowers or whatever you wanted. I made several of them. I usually give them away for Christmas. [Unintelligible]. Now I had a big frame here about four years ago and I gave it to my next door neighbor because I knew I wasn't going to hook no more. So yesterday, Martha was over here, and she brought me something that she said. "What's Dean doing?" I said, her brother, she said, "He's hooking a rug." He's 14. "Hooking a rug?" She said, "Yes, he wants to hook a rug."

IR: That would be a marvelous thing to do with high school kids. Young people are fascinated by the old craze. They really are. And show them how to hook rugs and that kind of thing. We could use somebody like Mrs. Wells!

CH: Mrs. Wells, have you ever heard of bobbing lace? People making lace with the little wooden bobbars?

HW: Yes. that's tatting.

CH: Oh, is that what they call it? Now I saw that. I saw two ladies do that. they had a loom, and it sat in their laps about so high, and it had a big wood, a big padded roll.

HW: This was a little bittie shuttle which was no longer than my finger. And you go in and out and it makes real small lace, little rings. People use it on babies dresses and delicate pillow cases and things like that.

CH: That was something, she called it bobbing lace, and she had all these little spools, little bobbing-like things. Long slender wood things that hung down, and they hold four of them in this hand and they twist them and take a pin and put it in a certain point, and they twist this. Bobbing lace. They were from Puerto Rico so that might be it. The lace came out beautiful. It was simply beautiful. It was the prettiest thing I had ever seen. I just wondered if that was something that was their doing or something that had been around.

End of tape 2, side 2

End of Interview