African Americans in Harrisonburg

Transcript 6a: Interview with Mrs. Roberta Morgan Webb
Date and Place of Interview: 20 July 1978; Virginia Mennonite Nursing Home, Harrisonburg, Virginia
Interviewer: Vicki Bemisderfer
Transcriber: Theresa Staropoli, Burruss Intern in Carrier Library Special Collections, 28 April 1993

Tape 1, side 1
(Side 1 begins in progress)

VB: Can you tell me anything about where you went to grammar school? You want to tell me something about that?

RW: Yes indeed. Where I went, well, my education started in Raleigh. That's one thing. I was living with my grandparents. I never remember, now this doesn't sound very complementary to my parents, but I never remember living with my mother and father. Mom was a traveling nurse for Miss Mattie[?], who had a sick baby. She worked for her. And the baby couldn't live in Raleigh. They had to be on the road at some of the sea shore places. And Miss Mattie, from what I understand, she felt that she died as well as her baby, if Ma didn't stay right by her side. Well, they paid her well, and she [Miss Mattie] saw to it that we were cared for, and she told Ma that Nancy, my grandma, and Madison, my Granddad, "If you're not able to take care of those children you just come with us." Nobody did. We didn't suffer for anything. We went to school, and when we finally went north, there were three of us children, my mother had five children but she only raised the three of us, and I was the only girl. An older brother and a younger brother. Well, we went north, and it so happened that in the north I was taken to live with a Baptist minister and his wife that had just wanted a child then, and they fell in love with me. And when they found out what I wanted to do, why they just stood at my back, and that's how I got my education.

VB: Do you remember, did you go to grammar school here in Harrisonburg?

RW: No, no. I taught school here for many years, but I didn't go to school here. I came here to live a couple of years after I graduated from Hampton. Oh, let's see, I graduated in 1909, and I came to Elkton...I taught one year down at school. That's right, I taught one year and some of my chums come up this way so everybody likes to be with their chums[?], so I came up here. I'm the only one that's left and that's many, many years ago, but I keep in touch with them. But I liked it here, and my grandparents were getting older and finally dropped away. Grandma and grandpap both passed away. And Ma had been visiting me, she's always kind of kept in touch with me, and so did Middleditches[?], those white people from back there. And they, of course, were always back of me, ever since I was 11 years old. They just loved me, and when they found out what I wanted to do, they were able, not only able, but <u>willing</u> to do what my parents would do. Isn't that lovely?

VB: That was. It was really great. When you were in grammar school, what type of school was it? Do you remember was it a one room school?

RW: No indeed. I was in New Jersey. We had gone to Pennsylvania, and Miss Middleditches, with whom I lived, they were going to move to nearer New York for their business. Mr. Middleditches was a minister, but his family business was in Brooklyn. The other folks were getting older and he felt like he wanted to be near it to hold on to the family business. They were printers. Dickerson Middleditch Printing Company[?]. So they moved to Westfield, New Jersey. That's near it, about 19 miles out of New York, so that he could commute back and forth. And I cried to go with him, and Miss Middleditch had told me my first knowledge of babies, and one thing, we were very close, and she was fond of me. Well she knew my background, she knew my mother and Auntie Em and all them, and she was very fond of me. And she just treated me like I was her daughter. Well, when she was expecting Peggy, the baby, why she told me all about this baby and I couldn't miss it hard enough. Just so anxious to see this baby, and he described her, how they wanted her to look, and sure enough, here she comes, little curly hair and blue eyes! Well anyhow, little happy family, and it's only the hand of the good Lord because my parents were anxious and willing, but they didn't have wherewithal[?]. But they gave me the will and the courage, and these people, the Middleditches, the name I bet you never heard of, didn't you? Well anyhow, not only Mr. and Mrs. Middleditch, but both the Armstrong[?] and the Middleditches, just host people to love me.[?] That's the hand of the Lord. And when you have such as that, what you going to do but praise the Lord, in every act. In every thought.

VB: That's right. Do you remember any games or stories that you used to play when you were small?

RW: What?

VB: Games, in school? Stories, you were telling some of those.

RW: Games. Yes, yes. Oh, jump rope and Hidey-hoo, of course.

VB: What was Hidey-hoo?

RW: You go stand by a tree or stump or whatever, and you close your eyes, while the rest of the game goes and hides. And you count to 10 or 20 or whatever, and count it loud, and I used to say something. So and so and so, or "Here I come." I can't think what we used to say, but something used to say. Anyhow, you say that out loud enough so that the group would hear you. And everybody's scamping around and hiding and it's up to you to find them. That was a lot of fun.

VB: Hidey-hoo.

RW: Hidey-hoo. I always enjoyed that.

VB: What else did you play?

RW: Jump rope, of course. I don't remember anything else. Must have been something else. I don't remember anything, but I do remember that one game we always enjoyed.

VB: What about any stories or tall tales? Do you remember any ghost stories or anything you used to...

RW: I don't recall, but I must have. I don't recall a thing about it. I imagine there must have been. I'm trying to think of some. We didn't call them stories, we called them tales, but I can't think of any now.

VB: Maybe you can think of some next time!

RW: Maybe so. If I think of it I'll write it down.

VB: Alright. Going back to when you were in grammar school, about how many children

were in your classrooms at the time? Were there 20? 30?

RW: This was in Jersey. Oh, there weren't too many, and I don't remember that they were crowded. I do remember this, that I always loved to study, and turning over a new page was just like digging into a gold mine. Which it was. See, I loved to study, and all children don't take to books like I did, so I studied and they didn't!

VB: You succeeded.

RW: Not only that, but I had led my class, and last year, the last year in high school, I received a gold medal for scholarship, and of course my folks were just so proud of it! And I'm proud of it myself!

VB: Well it's something to be proud of.

RW: (Laughs) Because, you know, when people get interested in you, and want to help you to get where you...and you have an object in view, you're not just dilly-dallying and wasting time, but you're working hard and you have a goal to reach. And it seems to me that ever since I knew anything, I wanted to teach. And Grandma says, "What in the world do you think you can do with anybody's sassy child?" I said, "Well Grandma, I'll teach him how not to be sassy!" (Laughs)

VB: What were your favorite subjects when you went to school?

RW: Anything but math! (Laughs)

VB: Didn't like math?

RW: No I didn't. And Mr. Middleditches, oh my, he would say, "Bertie doesn't like math because she doesn't like to use her noodle." Oh, my. Any other social studies, I was right up on. I liked them very...well to say, I made my mark, but math was my lowest mark because I did not enjoy it.

VB: What was the typical school day like when you were in school? Did you start off reading the Bible or the Lord's Prayer or whatever?

RW: Yes, we had devotions. Never any question about that. And when they began talking about taking prayers out of the school, I said, "What the world are we coming to?" What a way to start a class. That brings everybody to order. It's the proper thing to do.

VB: What about the teachers? How did they discipline their classes?

RW: See that lady standing there? Our school is named for her, Lucy Simms.

VB: Lucy Simms. Did you go to the school?

RW: She and I taught in the same school, and of course she was lots older than I was, but she and I were the greatest of friends. She's a Hampton graduate. One of the early Hampton...well, not the first, but I tell you, you've read of Booker T. Washington, I'm sure. Well she was a classmate of his! (Laughs)

VB: Mrs. Simms was?

RW: Yeah. Oh, I've heard that class name [unintelligible]. There was so many members of that class who really were outstanding. Miss Lucy was one of them, and we honored her here in town, oh years ago...

VB: Well, tell me a little something about Lucy Simms. I'm not too familiar but I've heard a lot about her.

RW: Well she was a wonderful person in that she didn't let age...nobody knew how old she was, we only knew that she was a fine Christian woman and a useful person in the community. And if there were any questions about anything, we always sought her advice. Not that she pushed herself on anybody, but all of us had that much confidence in her, and her experience meant something to her. Her age meant something. She never would tell you how old she was, no! Of course nobody questioned that! But we knew that she had experiences, and those

experiences she could impart to us, who are [unintelligible], younger, and we could profit by it, and we did.

VB: Did she teach at the Effinger School?

RW: Yes indeed.

VB: She was principal there.

RW: Oh, for awhile, but she was one to follow. Not to lead, not especially. Now she was a grand leader, but she'd rather follow. She was one of that kind. And when you thought of her, you thought of somebody that had something to give. I've always thanked the Lord that I was one of her acquaintances.

VB: Was she born a slave on the [unintelligible] plantation?

RW: I can't say that. I suppose she was. That's what I tell you, she would never tell us her age. And experiences she had, didn't tell us a thing. But I don't know if she was foolish about anything, but if you knew Miss Lucy, then you just accepted her as she was. [Unintelligible].

VB: Do you remember anything about the school on Tin Cup Alley?

RW: No, but I imagine they [unintelligible]. I imagine that was the school on Effinger Street. Effinger Street school, I imagine. Before we had the beautiful Simms school on top of the hill there. And that Tin Cup Alley school is close to the one I taught at. Of course I did substitute for the present Simms school once in awhile, but you know, when I got married, according to the law then, that excluded me from the school system. They didn't allow married women to teach.

VB: Do you remember anything about Earl Johnson?

RW: Only slightly.

VB: Wasn't he an Olympic runner or something?

RW: Yes he was. I forget now, only slightly, he was in Pittsburgh when I came to know his foster parents. It seems to me that they attended the same church, but he was quite an athlete or something, I can't remember. Runner.

VB: Some type of Olympic runner. I didn't know too much about him either, but during this class we'd studied something about him.

[Tape is briefly cut off]

RW: Grandma and grandpap. It was a happy time. We couldn't afford a tree. Our folks were too poor. Couldn't afford a tree, but I, grandma and grandpap...Ma lived in the north, and my Daddy lived with Aunt Jean[?], his sister. Families stick together, when we come together and love one another each day. And as I remember, at Christmas time, instead of a tree, each child had a chair. You already let the world know what you wanted, and the world, at that time, was grandma and grandpap, and we would relay the message to the folks who were going to spend the money and get these things. Each child would have a chair, I remember, and you'd go early Christmas morning, out on a cold day because you couldn't hardly sleep the night before, thinking about it all night. Hope to get. And early Christmas morning you'd wake up, and under your chair. And one of the first Christmases I remember, the things that I got that I wanted was a school bag for my books. It was a kind with a pouch that you throw across your shoulder, and you had books on either skinny in each pouch [unintelligible]. That was the main thing I always wanted. I remember I got that for Christmas. And each child would get a cigarette[?]. That is so critical now, but it wasn't then. If it was, it was too expensive for poor people to buy, and at Christmas time we got an orange and an apple, and a hand-full of hard candy. That was at our chair, each chair.

VB: Did you think Santa Claus brought that?

RW: Oh yes. Old Santie. Old Santie brought that. And all this is your grandma and grandpap. We loved one another and I was crazy about them, but dad and Ma, but my father had a trade. He mended umbrellas. Umbrellas, parasols and all that, but as I look back, it seems to me that he didn't put enough energy to work up the trade, because everybody was carrying a parasol or umbrella at those times. But Ma, Miss Mattie felt like she and the baby both would die, as I told you. [Unintelligible] Always sent plenty of food home, and Nance, she called my grandma Nance and my grandfather Madison, and had plenty of food for the children. I remember her, Ma coming to town, and that made me feel good toward her, instead of, "Oh, you keep Ma away from her all the time. [What Miss Mattie felt]" No, Ma's there helping you with your baby, and in exchange for that, she's helping her to feed us. It was a good feeling. I only distinct[?] the feeling, that smooth, friendly feeling that grew up in many towards your people, white people, was started back there with my grandparents. Knowing how times were tight and hard for people and their children, and that's another thing grandma always said, "If you feed a child, he won't steal." Give a child enough of what you have to eat. Let him have a plate and you won't have any trouble with him being dishonest. I found that to be true. Oh well! (Laughs)

VB: You're doing fine. I'm really enjoying this. Oh dear.

[Tape is briefly cut off]

RW: ...never learned to read and write [unintelligible] would have taught her, but she'd rather go out and ride the horses. Imagine! But she had long, kind of flowing hair. That's another thing. She couldn't tell us where she came from, but she wasn't pure negro, because she had lovely hair, but as a young girl she had this long, flowing hair. And what she delighted in doing was [unintelligible] try to teach her to teach her to read and write, but she couldn't sit still long enough, she'd rather be riding up and down the manger with horses. [Unintelligible].

VB: Nausy[?], who was Nausy?

RW: Nausy was her mistress, the lady that owned her[?] and she loved her dearly. And you know, they made this comment, "Grandma, what was her color?" They made this sacred promise that whoever died first, the other would hold her hand. "Grandma, did you hold old Nausy's hand? Certainly I did." (Laughs)

[Tape cuts off briefly]

RW: Ugliness, hate, for those folks who mistreated my folks. I don't have that feeling at all and you can see why, because there was that mutual love and respect between the slave and his owner. And that, I always say, that is one of the reasons why I fell in love with Middleditches, and here I am with you. It's meant a lot. It has meant a lot to me, and [unintelligible] they're human beings, no matter what the color of the skin is.

[Tape cuts off]

End of tape 1, side 1

African Americans in Harrisonburg

Transcript 6b: Interview with Mrs. Roberta Morgan Webb
Date and Place of Interview: 20 July 1978; Virginia Mennonite Nursing Home, Harrisonburg, Virginia
Interviewer: Vicki Bemisderfer
Transcriber: Barbara Padgett, Special Collections Student Assistant, 20 October, 1993

Tape 1, side 2
(Side 2 begins in progress)

RW: (unintelligible) Oh shucks, now where, have you seen my glasses any, over there behind my, there they are because I can't, there no need in my trying to see...they didn't have them. Have you been here since I was in Woodstock?
VB: You had just come back from Woodstock last Tuesday. Came back on Monday. Have you been since then?
RW: No, oh no. (Laughs)
VB: I didn't have time to...
RW: Tales, home remedies, dances, didn't believe in them. (Laughs)
VB: Now you said you didn't believe in the dances.
RW: My folks, my grandparents, didn't believe in dancing because we didn't have. Now I remember, when I was little, I remember my Uncle Madison, my mother's youngest brother. He was often gay and jolly and liked a good time and very kind. Folks...He was my mother's youngest brother and he liked to dance and he liked to frolic around. I always knew that Grandma especially, Grandpap didn't have much to say, but Grandma was a talker. She set the stage for the home, her morals, her thoughts of right and wrong and all that. She set the moral tone of the home, for which I give eternal thanks. You know, growing up with that kind of discipline really does something to a person, did to me. I never have regretted it. Even though she was entirely unlettered, she didn't know A from B, she didn't care, but these other things she did care about and those are the things that count after all.
VB: That's right.
RW: I'm not going to talk anymore. (Laughs) I'll let you do the talking.
VB: Did you want to tell me anything about teaching experiences when you were teaching in school?
RW: Yeah, teaching experiences [unintelligible] John, I showed you a picture. Back up, back up. He's the small one standing there. He's smaller ...but he was a stern disciplinarian. He always said that I was the disciplinarian. I always...school, but I never had, I was always positive. I knew what I wanted to do and I knew what I wanted put onward. The picture[?] take confidence enough in me to cooperate in that sense and that's three fourths of the battle in teaching school because I found out that it's lots pleasanter and lots easier and the work goes on a lot smoother if you have the backing of the folks back home. When you have that backing each day comes down to what you're trying to go over. You're not there just to make some money. If you need money, well that's not the time. I want to teach your child to

read and to understand what he's reading. I want him to be able to write a decent letter because after all that's the main thing he'll be taught a time to do when he gets...well anyhow. (Laughs) I'm not going to talk anymore.

VB: Did you teach both black and white children?

RW: No, no, only Negro children. I attended a mixed school in Pennsylvania and New Jersey when we moved north...and I attended mixed schools...all the people say that they're not going...oh! the children would drop out, you know, the Negro children? They drop out...My folks, I told you about the Middleditch family, how they encouraged me every way and that helped me a great deal so that I had no idea of stopping until I prepared myself for some special way[?]. I'm not going to talk any more.

VB: What about, did you think of any tall tales?

RW: No, I didn't. I'm just going to list, just that list before. I don't think of any and when I looked over there I said I...no I don't remember a thing.

VB: What about home remedies? What did you take for your (unintelligible)?

RW: What did I hate to take more than castor oil with a lot of sugar in it.

VB: Was that for about anything, the castor oil?

RW: Springtime, springtime...castor oil...she'd be standing up on it now and you dare not twitch. Well, Grammie said you had to take it, you just took it.

VB: What was it good for?

RW: Keep you cleaned out. It'll clean out your system.

VB: And it did it every spring? They made you take it.

RW: Every Spring. Every spring. I think about it now. (Laughs) But I'm so glad, we didn't have any more trouble. Didn't have any more trouble. We didn't have any trouble then, but that was the time to take it. Grandpap was great for fixing it and seeing that you took it. Oh my you make me think (laughs) of the only thing I had forgotten all about but oh pleasant memories because while I was able to, with the help of the good Lord and these friends, I was able to do what I wanted to do. Yet those days that Grandma and Grandpap stand out was, oh my, everything, high morals, decency, poor but clean, you know morally and physically. Keep clean. Every Saturday night give me that pillow and it wasn't turn on the water ...but you had to go down to the next block and draw the water, with a bucket, a little bucket and go back home ...hear it. (Laughs)

VB: It must have did some good. Did you ever have your family history traced? Do you remember?

RW: No. I only remember that my grandmother was a slave on the Lan Rogers[?] plantation. She only remembers. She remembered her sister. Myrtle? Myrtle, I think her name was Myrtle.

VB: Myrtle?

RW: Myrtle, I think, but she didn't remember her family. But she did remember. I remember her brother, Uncle Thomas? Oh my...and he married and lived out six miles out in the country and he often came to visit the farm when...she was about ten, about ten. He was almost coal black and my grandmother was coal black, but she had the prettiest hair. It was beautiful hair. (Laughs) But anyhow, she was...to this day she is my ideal. Lord, entirely unlettered, but the Lord must have instilled in her religious views. She had high ideals and those ideals she

imparted to her children and certainly to her grandchildren. I was one of them. I was the one that has done more public work than any of the rest of them. I did have Uncle Richie[?], my mother's youngest brother was a minister of sorts. The reason I say of sorts, he wasn't a seminarian, but he used the Bible to...see he knew the Bible and it was important and the best part is...slaves. He had a few children, three boys and a girl. Their mother died and he was married, lives, well I can't think of the name...Isn't that funny how some relatives...Uncle Harry[?] was my mother's brother and he was, you know, they were more or less responsible, more responsible for our food as we lived in their house. They were more responsible for our food and clothing and everything than my mother, who was always gone with Miss Mattie and her sick child. My daddy, who stayed with Uncle Dave, you know, but our dad took care of us and we loved our daddy, we loved our daddy. That family of togetherness, I would not be. Did I tell you really she used to make gingerbread?

VB: Gingerbread? No, tell me about it.

RW: She used to make gingerbread and Aunt Jean[?] coming meant we were going to have gingerbread. That's something a poor child eat corncake and, oh, biscuits now and then, well it was a treat.

VB: Did you get to help her make them?

RW: No, no.

VB: She made them and you...

RW: She make before we came and if we would see Aunt Jean[?] coming that's what we'd look for.

VB: Look for the Gingerbread.

RW: You make me think of (laughs), oh my, things I had forgotten about, my my, my.

VB: What about your children? What are they doing?

RW: Oh, now of course, I have got Nancy. She was home for a week...at their home every once in awhile. She's pretty good. She's pretty good. She talks well and eats well, but her limbs are awfully weak. I wasn't able to help Frank and he was with Mama and we wouldn't Frank try to hold her because it was too much for her. I'm blessed in that Frank looks after her. I didn't warn you, I went down as I told you, down there where Frank kept coming, kept coming. I went down to talk to Father and mother about Frank coming to see Nancy. I figured Nancy was old enough to have company and all, but I wanted Frank to know what he was getting into so he wouldn't get too deep in all that. Oh, Father says, 'Don't you know people love one another, mother dear, and just let them alone. They'll make it. They'll make it sure enough.'...It just added years to my life to see how diligent, how patient night or day that old Frank would come...helpful and kind and it added years to my life...If I'd kept her at home, well I couldn't have kept her. They wouldn't allowed me to keep her because I couldn't take care of her. Neighbors and friends come in, because that's not like having somebody in the house to take care of.

VB: She was crippled?

RW: She's epileptic. That's from my side of the house, as I told you, my one of my mother's brother, Uncle Harry[?],...the smartest child they had...and they had, oh, I don't know how many children. Six girls, and all the girls were older than the boys and then they was not too smart, but they oldest one. All the girls were older than the boys (laughs)

that's why, this is all to tell the difference. That's why Grandpap (laughs) when all the girls are on the end, Sister Martha,...and all the rest of them down there, well they were older than the boys and that meant that they did most of the farm work. Farm work then you just had to dig, dig, dig. You didn't have the machine that they have now. Well anyhow, everything went well as long as the girls were satisfied to dig, dig, dig, but the times changed as they grew older. They reached their teens and reached weddings and all. The boys would naturally have to (laughs) go chasing after them. That's why there's the trouble today. The smart one, the oldest one, I heard my grandfather told us many a time. Sister Martha, Margaret was her name, but she was the oldest one and Uncle Frank seemed to have gotten on the good side of Grandpap and he didn't have any trouble courting sister Martha and marrying her without any trouble...Aunt Em was next to sister Martha, the next oldest and that meant that Grandpap would soon lose her. He didn't see how in the world he could run the farm without Aunt Em...(laughs)...oh dear me...Grandpap shot at, shot at the, I'm trying to think of the other man's name...in a long time...and I didn't know it until I was married (unintelligible).

VB: He didn't want to lose Aunt Em, huh?

RW: No, he really didn't. Sister Martha had married and gone and Uncle Frank well I'm afraid he played wise. He was on the good side of Grandpap when he started courting...and so he won her and had his farm and everything all planned and everything so there was no objection...He didn't seem to mind my mother, but none of them was quite as good on the farm as Aunt Em, you see. She had a hard time getting away because the day he shot at her and that scared her and scared Grandma and everybody else. Oh, I've heard them tell of...before my time almost this happened, but I've heard them tell it so much it's just so real to me, you know. All the folks met up town next Saturday, they'd heard about it, all the country folks up town almost eat him up. (Laughs) Almost had to...and then they almost eat him up...shoot at his daughter for such a legitimate cause, course he didn't see it that way at all, but he should have, he should have. I didn't hear him, Aunt Em, Mol[?], and Lady[?], I didn't hear him objecting to any of the rest of them...The idea was that Aunt Em was his best help on the farm and you can see why he could have placed...You make me go back a long way (laughs).

VB: So when you were teaching in school, do you see a big difference in the teaching when you were teaching in school than what is been taught today?

RW: Yes, I haven't kept up because I haven't been in it, but I've observed ...over many a year, but these are the times that I appreciate... (unintelligible) But it seems to me and maybe you would sympathize with me, I feel, I felt when I was observing teaching after I had resigned and married, everything...I felt that I was a little nearer to my people than the teachers were at that time. Now I may be wrong, but I felt that way. Well times have changed. People ideas have changed. You do this and I do that. You want it this way and I want this way and that's that. One thing we have to accept changes. Sometimes we see it and sometimes we don't. Sometimes its for our good and sometimes not so good. We can only hope and pray for the best...

[Tape is briefly cut off] Stop everything, don't do one thing when the Lord, what was her words, 'When the Lord's work is carried on, everybody

else be still.' She sat in her rocking chair and come up with...She'd take the baby on, baby brother on her knee. She'd tell nearest her to be quiet and the rest of us was on the floor...thunder and lightning no matter what, she would, where's was Ma? She was up with Miss Mattie, gone somewhere with Miss Mattie...I think. I believe Miss Mattie would have died if Mama hadn't come home right as I...I don't know how, I don't know how, I don't think I can remember, you know, way back when I was, every since I can remember as a child with Grandma and Grandpap, where was Ma? She was with Miss Mattie, anyway...but praise the Lord, we weren't neglected, you see, Grandma and Grandpap took care of us... blessing. No matter what...did a wonderful thing...and I appreciated it but without that foundation that Grandma and Grandpap raised, all of their acts of works would have meant nothing.

VB: How old were you when you went to live with Middleditches?

RW: Eleven.

VB: Eleven.

RW: [unintelligible] and I told my mother I didn't want to go to white school. 'Well you got to go somewhere.' (Laughs)

VB: So you went to the colored school till you were eleven and then you started.

RW: We moved north. The work and the food were mixed...down south they were segregated...I can see Miss Jamie[?] now, my first white teacher and I actually...[unintelligible] and this poor little negro girl (laughs). One thing I didn't...and I dare not disobey her. Whatever she says was law and final.

VB: Did you mind changing schools?

RW: Evidently not.

VB: You did just as well when it was integrated as when...

RW: [unintelligible] I was the only negro in the school because the other negro children...those were two colored families they had no...textbooks maybe I told you this. That the children, they took their children to Chester[?] and met the children there on Sunday night, be there every day until Friday night. Well now I didn't have any aunts and uncles in Chester[?] so what was I to do?...I didn't want to go to white school. Well you've got to go somewhere.

VB: She made you go and you liked it?

RW: She says I had to go somewhere...I knew when she said that, that was the end. I had to do it. I remember the Middleditches and they altogether loved us, altogether loved us. They made me feel, Miss Middle-she'd would stop her work and take me to school. [unintelligible]

VB: Do you know the name of the school?

RW: It was called the Ridley Park Public School.

VB: Ridley Park. Did you graduate in twelth grade, ma'am?

RW: No, no, I didn't because we didn't stay there hardly, oh, two or three years, hardly three years. Mr. Middleditch was a minister, but he was a farmer. Maybe I told you this, he was originally from Brooklyn, New York, and Mr. Middleditch was a Baptist minister...was a Baptist minister, but his folks the Livingston Middleditch Printing Company. Didn't I tell you about this? Well anyhow, the family business that the old folks had brought from the old country. They brought, you know, they brought their business back...in this country, but they were one of the many who did that. Their business was printing, the Livingston Middleditch Printing Company and they settled in Brooklyn until Miss

Middleditch had...Uncle Bill[?] was getting too old to look after the business and it seemed like anyhow, my Mr. Middleditch was the next in line to take charge of the business even though he was a minister. So then what did we have to do, but what did Middleditch have to do but move to New York or near New York, near enough so that he could come in back and forth to look after the family business. That is why we moved from Ridley Park and he gave up his church. You know, a regular pastor he can stop preaching, but he didn't have a regular church because he wanted to step to save the family business, which you didn't blame him. I didn't blame him, he was good a Christian in my mind.

VB: Where did you graduate? What school?

RW: We moved. We didn't go to New York. We went to Westfield, New Jersey, and there's where I graduated and I'm going back there (laughs).

VB: What was the name of the school?

RW: Westfield High School.

VB: Westfield High School.

RW: Yeah, and from there I went to Hampton (laughs).

VB: You went to Hampton?

RW: 1906 and graduated in 1909 and Middleditches saw to it that all my expenses and everything, Ma wasn't, she wasn't asked to do one thing. The only thing I was asked to do was behave myself and (laughs).

VB: You did that.

[Tape briefly cut off.]

RW: Thankful that the Lord opened the way for me and that He always provided some, and here you are, somebody or somebodies to give me a word of encouragement along the way [unintelligible]. God bless you. I hope I have meant twice as much to you as your coming to me has meant to me.

VB: You have.

RW: You know, on my next birthday I'll be ninety. I'll be ninety...but I'm so thankful. I eat, sleep, and get about. We as a, when I say we I mean my Negro people, we learn industry and thrift though hard and harsh many times. But we learned a lesson, we might not have learned otherwise and white man learned that some Negroes just like some white people make it and some don't. Those who put forth the effort are more apt to make their, reach their goals than the fella that doesn't put forth any effort. That's the thing and that's the, well take for instance building, you know, [?] and I built our cottage on the homestead so we had the idea that we wanted to have an ideal place. We wanted, she's a home Ec teacher, she wanted to have an ideal place to demonstrate her work and other things. Having those ideas about her work, about our work, we put forth the effort we would not have put forth otherwise. So that we did know it ourselves and has unity, was prosperous...oh my. Life is what you make it.

VB: That's true. It is.

[Tape briefly cut off.]

RW: There's something I was thinking about. I don't know what it was, my daughter comes here to see me now [unintelligible]...