

MOORESTOWN HISTORICAL SOCIETY
ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Early Experiences of a Moorestownian

GERTRUDE WILLIAMS

Interviewed

by

Margaret Jackson

on

March 14, 1977

WILLIAMS

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INTERVIEWER: Margaret Jackson

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J. This is Margaret Jackson on March 14, 1977 with Gertrude Williams of Moorestown, talking about some of her early experiences.

W. You want my age?

I was a rather odd child, I think, filled with curiosity. I was born here and my father had come from New York to take care or supervise the making of apple jelly in a factory that was situated across the street from the present old Moorestown, East Moorestown station. I remember a lot of things about that factory because he (worked) at one end of the town and we lived at the other end and we had to carry his lunch to him in a tin bucket every day. I didn't like that very much.

J. You had to carry it to your father? yes?

W. My father, yes. I didn't like that very much. I can remember going to school very well because my first day

day ended up with a punishment. A boy who passed our house every morning was rather mischevious, I know now, because he took me by the hand one day when I was only four years old and took me to the public school. I can remember the teacher's name - I think it was Twitchell - but I'm not sure now in these later years. She asked me questions that I knew. What my name was, where I lived, how old I was, and if I wanted to come to school, and - so she let me stay and told me when I went back home for lunch to find out from my mother the date of my birthday. When I reached home, my mother had scoured the neighborhood looking for me and when I got in she said, "Well you will go to bed". I said, "I can't because that lady told me to come back after lunch and tell her when my birthday was". I guess my mother was rather glad that I was going to go somewhere, so I went back. And she put me in the first grade. It didn't take me long to catch up to those who'd been in the first grade almost the whole year. And from the first grade I went to the second. I finished the eighth grade before I was 12, and was to go on to high school.

The little school that I had enjoyed so much was on the corner of Second Street and Church at that time and I thought it was the best place in the world for anybody to come to after they had their breakfast. When I entered high school I found out that many Negro children had been going to school there, but they did not finish. I didn't know why until my mother explained that "You're going to high school and you're going to finish". So I ended up being the first colored graduate from the Moorestown High School.

It was lots of fun going to high school because the boys were the only ones that were in anything that was active and I knew I could outrun many boys in our street (laughter), jump higher than a lot of them, play baseball much

better than they did. So my mother gave me a name of being a tomboy.

In the summertime it was a very good time for me. I can remember picking strawberries across the railroad track on the little farm owned by a man named Murphy. We picked strawberries until we thought we had picked enough for Mr. Murphy and then we would pick some and hide them in the ditch and get 'em after dark. They were our pay although he did give us a few cents for each quart of berries that we had brought to him.

Summertime also was one of the best times of the year because we lived near the railroad track and we used to walk down the railroad track to Lenola where everything was growing. My mother and father had friends down there, the Halls, who had a big farm in the area where the Moorestown Mall is built now. They used to let us go out into the farm area and pick wild strawberries, and blackberries, and once in a while we would probably ~~pick~~^{take} some of the peaches that we were ~~told~~^{told} ~~not~~^{not} to pick. There were lots of apples. A farmer, named George Brown, had owned nearly all of that land at that time and he was too busy keeping his men working to follow us. So we had the run of a very large farm and a very fruitful one.

Well, when I was about 12 or so, somewhere in that neighborhood, Dr. Thorne had discovered a spot on my lung and that meant that some of my activities had to be curtailed. My mother was frightened, but I didn't know it until much later. Between trips to a man at the Burlington County Hospital and the milk that I got from Mrs. Strawbridge's farm brought me through about as healthy, I think, as anybody had ever been.

Mrs. Strawbridge's man who milked the cows used to love to have me come down there because he would draw the milk from the udder of the cows in a big mug for me to drink, and I drank it. We didn't have a refrigerator at that time and so it didn't bother me. It was milk and it was very good.

J.. I know what that is because I grew up on a farm and we had this fresh milk right into a tin cup and then drank it.

W. Drank it right there. People say, "How could you do it?" I say, "I didn't know anything else."

J. Right. Right.

W. It was milk.

Wintertime had its fun, too. We skated on that little creek that goes through Lenola now, but it also was a much larger area that we called Long Crossing where Main Street curves into the Marne Highway. The farmer who owned that place had many cows and so he banked the water up that fell there when they built the railroad and had his cows go out there to drink in the summertime. He also made money selling the ice that was frozen at that place. My mother knew that it was a dangerous place, but all the kids on our street knew that it was one of the best skating places in town. And they used to go up there every Saturday in the winter and skate. Well my mother had told my sister and me to never go up there because it was dangerous. I found it out the hard way, because we went up there one Saturday because most of the kids on the street were going and we would be alone on our street if we didn't go. So we went up there. The boys skated around, some of them were very good skaters, and after a while they tired of just the skating and they

began to tease the girls. And that was something I couldn't take. They called us fraidy-cats. So I started. I went out and told them I wasn't a fraidy-cat. I had seen what the boys were doing. To me they were just skating. But I got out and this bellowing ice frightened me and so, to be able to reach the other side of the pond, I struck out and cut the ice and I went under. Everybody was frightened. My sister was dancing and screaming and crying on the bank. But I had on a big coat buttoned only at the neck. The boys laid down on the hard ice and wiggled out and caught my coat and pulled me in.

J. That's frightening.

W. I guess I was pretty frightened when I got to some solid ice, but we skated. I skated up and down the solid ice until my underwear was dry. The girls took off my dress and the boys skated and held it up like a balloon or something. (laughs)

J. Yes, I can see it.

W. Until it was dry and then we went down to a house that was not very far from the pond and dried enough to come home and face my mother. But we, everybody, had promised to never speak of the incident. It would have stayed with me, I guess for life, if we hadn't had something else to take its place.

The boys were building a boat that summer and so they wouldn't let any girls come down to the Lenola creek to see the boat until it was finished. But we were invited down there to see the launching. And it was quite a day. We went down and watched them work on it and they had learned sailors' terms for this and for that and it was a great event. But, when the boy who was the helper pushed it out into the stream it sank. That was pretty rough.

We laughed at them but it didn't come out much like we would like to have had it come out, because one day my mother and my sister and I were sitting reading, looking at the comics, when a boy that lived near us came over and sat down on the steps to see the comics too. My sister, I think, said something about the boat.

"When are you going to build another boat?", I think that was what she was teasing him about. Then added, "But don't make it such a problem keeping it a secret cause it'll go down just like the other one did." Well that was more than the boy could take so he said, "Well that was no better, in fact that was better for the boat to go down than Gertie to go down like she did up there at Long Crossing". My mother dropped her paper and said, "What's that?" (laughter) Well, the secret was out. And next she said, "Madame, we'll talk about it tomorrow".

J. That's marvelous.

W. My mother did housework and she knew I liked to read but there wasn't enough money to buy magazines and books for me so she brought home every discarded magazine and book that she found as she worked around. I met Miss Hollingshead, Mabel Hollingshead, in some way. I don't remember how I came in contact with her, but she found out that I liked to read and she invited me to come up to the Friends Library to, she said, "Just straighten some books^u once in a while". Well, there was never a big pile of books so I would sit on the floor of the library and put the books in and when I'd come to one I really wanted to see the inside of, I'd take it out and the next thing I would know would be when she was closing the library and she would say, "Gertrude, we're going home now". So I read many, many books in that way and was acquainted with them in the high school long before I reached the grade in high school to read them. All my life I kept in touch with Miss Hollingshead. She showed me many places around Moorestown that I did not know existed and was a part of the history

of Moorestown. And when she finally had to stop driving her little Ford -- What was it called? little cars that Ford made. She called the car Jacob.

J. Model T? Not a Model T was it?

W. Model T. When she was not able to drive Jacob, in fact he had to be retired, by that time I was teaching and had gotten a car of my own, so I was able to take her to many places. And when she passed I missed her a lot, because she knew more than I did about so many, many of these things.

J. Was she a librarian herself?

W. She was a librarian there, yes.

J. Can you remember some of the books that you particularly liked?

W. Elsie Dinsmore. (laughs) That was one of them. And then I think that's where I got acquainted with Uncle Tom's Cabin. I remember the Dinsmore books because there was a lot of them. (laughs)

J. Yes, a series of them. (laughs) Right.

W. I'm trying to think. Something else you said you wanted me to repeat. Did I tell you about going to school? Is that on the tape? Going off to school with this boy?

J. Yes. Yes.

W. Oh, that's right.

J. Well, what was the most important thing about school? Was it the reading or was it the social life or the sports? In lower school?

- W. In lower school, the most important thing was the reading and the games out on the playground which made me interested in sports. I always wanted to be on the teams but at that time there were no girls on the teams, only the boys. *Cause I could outrun any boy, I could play baseball and hit farther than any of them and I was disgusted at times, seeing girls get up there trying to hit balls and swinging way out of line.
- J. Do you remember when you went ice skating, did you go at night? Did you have bonfires and roast marshmallows and do things like that?
- W. No, no, no. Roast marshmallows. We would've eaten them we wouldn't have roasted them. (laughs)
- J. Did you go fishing? Did you fish?
- W. I did not like fishing, no. I didn't like fishing. I always had dogs. A minister at the Baptist Church had two big, black - I don't know what you would call them - he used to call them mastiffs. But they were really very intelligent dogs. You could hitch them up to a wagon. I can remember riding in an express wagon (laughs) with the two dogs hitched up.
- J. Oh, they must have been enormous!
- W. They were. And that was a lot of fun. I've always had a dog, ever since I can remember.
- J. Mostly for companionship or protection or both?
- W. Well, my mother had them when I was small and she had to put a fence around the place where we lived because they knew I would wander out and these dogs were for my protection. They'd grab me by the dress and pull me back in

(laughs) or bark and let her know that I had managed the gate and gotten out.

- J. What kind of sports were going on in the back yard? I mean, did the boys play horseshoes mostly, or basketball, or what did they do for entertainment in the afternoons and evenings?
- W. In the afternoons they'd have races. That would be right on the street. They'd play baseball, in fact after my parents bought down in Locust Street, the people next door to us was an Irish family that did not farm the land that ran out to the street. Their house was set back and there the boys used to have baseball teams. They kept it up for many years down there on that field. They didn't sell anything, drinks or anything, they just came there and teams came from places like Pennsauken, Merchantville. Then they could walk right on up the railroad to the field because it was not very far from the railroad. Football was not a game that was enjoyed much. And there weren't many young men that stayed around 'cause they had married and had to take care of families, but they would have Harvest Homes.
- J. What is that?
- W.. Well, in the fall on some field they would put up a tent maybe some times, carry their food there, and cook it. Maybe they sold hot dogs and things. That was done for the churches to bring in revenue for the churches. That was always considered a nice, pleasant way to spend the fall days because they were getting colder and colder.
- J. This was something you would like to in October and November? Did you have any apple butter making or anything like that? Did you stir big kettles of apple butter? And do things like that?
- W. No, my mother, the women did. And then we'd meet together

and make jelly and things like that.

J. Did they have outdoor fires and great big kettles?

W. No, they didn't. No, I don't remember that.

J. No.

W. But my parents raised pigs and that was a big time. When the pigs were killed several families would come together and kill their pigs at the same time. I don't know why, but they would. And they would have a big meal. But, of course, when they would kill the pigs it was always in the fall and I would be in school.

J. But, how did you take care of the meat then?

W. Ah, they salted the meat. Or some few of them, especially this family that lived down in Lenola, they smoked it. They would smoke hams-

J. Did you have a smoke house to do it in or over an outdoor fire, or what?

W. No, they did it in the small house that they'd have out there sometimes. But they didn't all do that because most of the men who could do that were employed on farms where the farmer wanted it, too. There were farmers who really needed that meat. They had pigs, too. And the meat was cured.

J. It's hard to remember what we did before refrigerators, isn't it?

W. It is.

J. And freezers. What we really did with the meat then.

- W. I know we didn't have any refrigerator for a long time. But my mother used to put the food up, I mean, can the fruit or make it into jellies, jams, pickles.
- J. Did you have a garden yourself?
- W. Yes, we always had a garden.
- J. What did you grow, beans and peas and the regular things?
- W. The regular things. I had never seen - what was that thing that grows down South - until more Negroes from the South came up. You know, the're long things that come to a point like that. Ch, I can't think what they are called. I don't like them.
- J. I don't think I know what it is. But did you have any kind of storage cellar where you put your apples and potatoes and sweet potatoes and things like that?
- W.. Yes, we did but a lot of them didn't. I guess most of them did, I didn't go into these people's cellars. But we did put potatoes in certain areas, sometimes sweet potatoes. We didn't store apples, but my mother raised turkeys and she always had to have this gobbler which ran us around the yard. (laughs) Did you ever see 'em, those gobblers? They're mean.
- J. Yes, I grew up on a farm.
- W. You did?
- J. Yes.
- W. Yes, that old gobbler, old Tom she called him, he had a name.
- J. Well, you had turkeys not only at Thanksgiving then, but you had them at other times of the year, too?

- W. Yes, at other times she would have them.
- J. And chickens probably, too.
- W. Chickens, yes. Pigs.
- J. You didn't keep cows, you got your milk from the Straw-bridge Farm, right?
- W. Yes.
- J. That means that somebody had to go and collect it everyday?
- W. We did keep a cow for a while afterwards. I don't know whether it was before or afterwards. But my brother was supposed to take the cow down the road, down Church road. A man had a big area there, a meadow, and several people brought their cows there to graze. So the boys had to take the cow down and fasten it. Each boy had a place where his cow grazed or they would decide where they were going to graze. And I can remember, at one time, all these boys who brought their cows down there had chains, except my brother. And he was disgusted because he didn't. My mother said, "This rope is strong enough for the cow". So one day he came back home with a chain and my mother asked he where he got it and he said he found it on the road. So she said, "Well, it must have been some of those boys lost it, so you give it to him tomorrow when you take the cow down", Well, he didn't want to do it. So he took the cow down but he didn't take the chain and when he came back with the cow he said the boy wasn't there or something. My mother said, "Well then you take the chain right back and lay it on the road, if the boy lost it he'll be looking for it." (laughs)
- J. (laughs) Oh, my.
- W. I could see afterwards that she meant that if he kept that

chain he was stealing it, practically, so he had to take it back and put it on the road. (laughs)

J. Did you grow cantaloupes, melons of various kinds, were those popular?

W. No cantaloupes or melons.

J. No cantaloupes.

W. I guess it was the soil that wasn't good.

J. That's interesting that you didn't store apples. That means that you made the apples up into sauce or you were able to get them all winter?

W. My mother made applesauce a lot. But the reason Moores-town stopped growing the apples close to the town was because the apples, I guess, must have been cheaper somewhere else because they closed that factory.

(end of side)

W. I found out later that my mother was anxious, because I liked music, to see that I learned to play the piano or organ. She succeeded in getting an old organ that you have to pump with your feet and then she had to find a music teacher. A family, a white family, that lived on Church St. had a daughter who could play very well. So my mother offered to do the laundry work for that family and, if she would teach me to play the piano or the organ. When I learned to play, I learned rather quickly. I can remember my mother saying that I could play for the Methodist church whenever they needed me. I was so short and small that I, half the time, could not sit on the bench and pump the organ. (laughs) I can remember sometimes some of the men would pump the organ while I played for the choir. When I was in grade school, I used to get so sleepy that I'd fall asleep

while the choir was working. (laughs)

J. You were working hard.

W. Yes, and the lady that lived down the street from me and cooked at the Coles Hotel, that's the old hotel that's

J. Yes.

W. used to wake me up. Not gently but so I'd be wide awake. But I enjoyed playing for them, but sometimes they stopped and discussed the music and things and it was just too much. I'd fall asleep everytime. That used to amuse me because it made Mrs. Muse, who was a friend of mother's, it used to make her so provoked with me. (laughs)

J. Maybe she'd never pumped an organ, didn't know how much work it was. It's a lot of work, I know. I've done that.

W. No, she didn't know what it was.

J. Well, did you carry your music studies on further?

W. Yes, later, when I began to teach in Moorestown, I took lessons from Carl Geiten who composed much of the present day music that choirs use now. But he was offered a job in New York City so he left Philadelphia and I gave up my music lessons for a while. Later I took pipe organ lessons from the leader of the Episcopal Church, a colored Episcopal Church in Philadelphia. He was also one of the few Negroes who belonged to the American Guild of Organists and he was very good. And I finally became the organist again for the church, a church in Merchantville, and in our own church. We had a very fine organ given to us by a church in Philadelphia that was buying a new organ. I loved this old organ, the first pipe organ that they bought,

because it had beautiful sounds. Mr. Adler had told me about the inside of organs and this was an old organ that you could walk in and walk around in it. The organ is still in the back of the Methodist Church, the AME Church now, but the people didn't realize that those wooden pipes that were on the organ were worth more than the new electric organ that they bought. So they bought an electric organ and I told them about the lead pipes that were in there and asked them what they did with them. But they didn't know they were worth anything.

J. What a loss.

W. So they kept them, just left them in there and built this new organ, an electric organ. I thought "How foolish". The other organ was just like an old violin would have been.

J. That's right. It isn't there anymore, at all?

W. It is.

J. It's still there?

W. It's there but by the time I got a chance to look in there they had boarded^{up} a good bit of this just for the beauty of it. They didn't use it and they didn't take those lead pipes out either.

J. So they are still there? Really?

W. They're still there. That's what I think. Nobody knew about anybody taking them out. But the pipes that they thought were not speaking pipes. See it's a beautiful organ, so all these decorative pipes are out front. But I feel that there is something in the back of that organ that's worth much more.

- J. Yes the shiningness and newness is more appealing to many people.
- W. Yes, yes.
- J. That's very interesting. Have you ever given lessons, organ lessons, to anyone?
- W. No, I never could give organ lessons. Oh, I did give piano lessons in Merchantville, because there they needed somebody who liked music. The young man I gave organ^(piano) lessons to, I think he's the Assistant Superintendent of Schools in Camden. And he sings in the Catholic Church there.
- J. Did you have good experiences in church when you were growing up? Did you appreciate what you were getting in Sunday School and Church and the other services?
- W. Well, no I didn't. (laughs)
- J. Did the family sit together when you were growing up or did children sit at the back and - make trouble?
- W. We sat at the back mostly, but you didn't make any trouble. (laughs)
- J. No trouble. We did, when I was growing up. We sat at the back and made trouble. But, you went to Sunday School probably?
- W. Oh, yes. We went regularly to Sunday School and - I taught after a while - after I finished high school and I was in a position to teach in Sunday School. We had picnics but I didn't care much for picnics because we didn't do anything, we just went and ate dinner.

- J. There was nothing challenging there.
- W. Oh no, I had to be moving. (laughs)
- J. Right. Did you have a young people's service in the evening like Christian Endeavor or something like that? Epworth League?
- W. No, we did not. But the older people used to go to church in the evening.
- J. Eight o'clock service on Sunday. Did you have mid-week prayer meeting when you were growing up? some type of mid-week service?
- W. They did, but we didn't attend. My mother was a Baptist and she worked very hard to get the Baptist Church started. I can remember when she used to have my brother take coal from our cellar up to the Baptist Church so they could have meetings.
- J. Then you grew up in a family that was church-oriented and that was working hard for the development of the church.
- W. Yes.
- J. Do you remember any particular ministers that were memorable? Any outstanding people who came to your church that really inspired you?
- W. Well, there was an old man, I think his name was Diggs. I don't know that he inspired me but he used to say the funniest things. (laughs)
- J. (laughs) That's a help. He's amusing, that's something.

- W. Yes. His name was Diggs. I think that, see I was at Hampton for at least four years and finishing up there, so I really wasn't in contact with what was going on with the churches at home.
- J. Do you feel there was anything special about the way the funerals were conducted, or the weddings were conducted or any of these special occasions that would be interesting to talk about? Do you have any special customs that you want to mention? Did you have long engagements, big weddings, did you have things like we used to call "Shivarees", you know? Did you ever have anything like that?
- W. No.
- J. Or confetti or anything of that kind?
- W. No. I did have an amusing thing that happened to me the first year I taught. I taught in Virginia and I remember that I had some little boys there that reminded me of myself.
- J. (laughs)
- W. On Saturday they'd always have something planned. And so, on one Saturday they invited me to go out with them in this boat. The people who lived in that little village, of course it was segregated absolutely, these people caught shad early in, say January, the shad began to run. The fathers would take the elder boys and they'd go shad fishing. Well, these two younger boys, they wanted to go fishing too, but they were too small to be much use to the fathers. So they invited me to go fishing with them and I went that Saturday because I wanted to be doing something too. It was right down my alley. So when we were out they were catching fish, I didn't catch any, and the one

of them said to the other, "Come on it's your turn now" and the other one said, "No, I just finished you haven't been there, you haven't been doing it long enough." I wondered what they were talking about. So finally one of them said, "Well, you better get going on that now, you better get going on that" and I looked around to see what this boy was doing and he was bailing the water out of the boat. (laughs) And that's what they'd been doing all of the time we were supposedly ~~to be~~ fishing. The water was coming in. I said, "Well, put me back on the shore first and then -"(laughs).

J. (laughs) Right.

W. I never will forget those little boys. They were having a good time though but

J. Bailing water! That's really something. Did you make cheese and do churning and things like that when you were growing up?

W. My mother churned, yes. She made butter.

J. We used to do that. Made your own bread probably too? Wonderful homemade bread.

W. Yes, oh yes.

J. Cottage cheese, my mother used to make that a lot. How did you get your water? Was there a water system in Moorestown at the time when you were growing up?

W. Not down where we were. Every~~o~~by down there had a pump.

J. You had your own well, did you?

W. Yes. Had a well.

- J. Did you have a cistern, too, where you drained water and used it for uses like watering the garden or something like that?
- W. I know my mother had a rain barrel. What she used the water for I don't know, but I know she always kept that rain barrel outside. I think it was for washing hair sometimes I heard her say
- J. You could, yes. It was soft, good for washing hair.
- And kerosene lamps, the trimming and the washing and all that - remember that?
- W. Oh yes. Those kerosene lamps.
- J. were a real nuisance.
- W. That was my job to clean the globes
- J. Trimming the wicks, filling them,
- W. The wicks, yes and filling them.
- J. Yes. Did you have any kind of water heating system then or did you have to heat the water on the stove?
- W. Had to heat it on the stove.
- J. Or in a big container in the stove sometimes. And carrying wood and coal, I imagine everybody did his share of that?
- W. Um huh.
- J. Wood stove or coal. Do you remember about childhood illnesses like measles or mumps or anything like that?

- W. That was the odd thing. I never had any of them, only mumps. I had the mumps on one side of the face once but I was much older then.
- J. That's marvelous.
- W. My sister, she wasn't as strong as I was and she had some sort of trouble, the trouble was in the kidneys. But at that time I think they knew very little about the kidneys. She eventually had to go to a hospital and they removed a large stone from her kidneys, but she didn't live much longer after that.
- J. Do you remember sledding, did you go sledding or hitch your sled on behind a wagon or something like that and ride around town?
- W. No, we didn't hang onto wagons but there were hills. Take the one that's up there on
- J. Mt. Laurel?
- W. goes down off of Main Street near where, let me see. Dr.- It was across the street, the hill is still there -
- J. Stokes?
- W. Stokes. We used to go down there. You could go almost out to Mt. Laurel and then the flexible flyer sled, it was invented about that time. The man, I forget what his name was, that made it.
- J. Allen?
- W. Allen thats right, Sam Allen. That was quite a sport. And there was a hill farther down near Church Road, too, Church

Street where you could go down. Of course, after the highway came there, there was no more of that.

- J. Was it taboo when you were growing up, in your family to play cards, and drink and dance and do things like this? Some people were that church-oriented that they didn't do those things, I know.
- W. There was no restriction on dancing, in fact, there was a hall built by the Negroes. They built it, built the hall because they wanted to have a lodge room of their own. They had dances there a lot and little orchestras, maybe only a violin sometimes, or later a record player. But that was quite popular. There were groups of young men that would get together, we called them barbershop quartets, that used to go around. In fact, several of them sang on the early radio.
- J. I was wondering if there was any hunting. The boys you knew, did the boys go out hunting squirrels and possums and things like that?
- W. Yes, they did. Yes, they did. That was the thing that the boys lived for.
- J. Really? That was very important, yes?
- W. Very important.
- J. Round Mt. Laurel, or there were woods all around here, of course, weren't there?
- W. Woods all around here.
- J. Did you spend your holidays like Christmas and New Years and
- W. With your family. One family would have the Christmas dinner

and they all went to that one.

J. Did everybody take something or did the woman of the house do all the cooking?

W. My mother used to do all the cooking if she was going to have them there.

J. That's what I was afraid of

W. We didn't have a lot of relatives here.

J. But you had the traditional things of turkey, cranberry sauce, all that sort of thing.

W. That's right. That's right.

J. Well, do you remember when you were going to school, whether there was much of playing tricks on the teacher, playing tricks on each other and so forth? That kind of thing?

W. No, they didn't do much of that because the teachers that we had knew that the Negro children (see we didn't have any colored teachers until, Oh, I don't know what grade I in when I got my first colored teacher) knew that a lot of time had to be made up if we were to be a success and be able to earn a living, and so they didn't take any foolishness from the students. They just told them, "If you're not going to get this there's no point in my keep worrying with you and make¹ you worry about it because there's so many other students here who need this help, and we're only here about five hours a day and we've just got to do it." And then besides, we had some colored teachers that didn't hold back their hands when you were in a situation where you had to ^{be} shut up or, something had to happen.

J. There was corporal punishment?

W. There was. (laughs)

J. Did they use a ruler or a strap or what?

W. Well, some teachers used rulers and straps but the teacher that was here when I came, soon after I came here to teach, slapped you, just boxed your ears, which I thought was wrong. (laughs) But she told that it was very foolish of me to let a boy talk to me like he was doing. Just shut him up with my hand. Well, I could never do that 'cause I could never hit anybody. I'll never ^{forget} that first colored teacher that we had introduced me to Hampton. She realized that I had capabilities and she made it clear that if I didn't prepare to do my part for my race, that I would be really be letting Hampton down, and she wanted me to go to Hampton. So I went to the school that she had gone to. I can remember meeting Booker T. Washington at Hampton. I had to work, in fact, no student ever left Hampton because he didn't have enough money to pay their way.

J. That's marvelous.

W. You used to work and they found jobs for you in the summertime. And when you get short of money they would provide jobs for you in the school. So I used to work in the dining room. Booker T. Washington was slated to come there as a speaker and I didn't want to miss one word that he would say.

J. No.

W. The day that he was to speak the dining room had been crowded, and we had a lot of people who were coming late and I was hurrying to clear my table off and get down there so I could get at least inside the gym where he was to speak. And on the way down I passed a man walking along the road and he said, "Why are you hurrying so?". I said, "Oh, I want to get down to that gym because Booker T. Washington is going to speak there and I've never even seen him and

I certainly don't want to miss a word he says." He said, "Oh, I guess you'll be in time." So he, I walked along, he hustled a little bit and when we got down to the gym the front doors of the gym were just packed with people waiting to get in. And he said, "I've been down to this gym before, how about walking around to the back here," he said, "there's a door at the back that we could go in." I went around with him and he, he opened the door, and I walked in and after I walked in I could see there were some seats on the side of the stage in the gym, and I saw the people. In two, three seconds I saw the people that were in the gym standing up and clapping and clapping. I looked and I thought, "They can't be clapping for me." (laughs) And it was Booker T Washington that had followed me in.

J. (laughs) Isn't that wonderful. That's a wonderful story.

W. I'll never, never forget it!

J. Oh, you wouldn't.

W. Well, I said, "Here I walked down to the gym with him (laughs) and out on the stage with him".

J. Yes, right. Did you sit on the stage then? Were there seats right on the stage?

W. There were some seats, chairs had been brought up and put around on the sides.

J. Sides. What a thrill!

W. It was a thrill. Never forget that!

J. Never forget that. Well how did you get down there? Did you go by bus or

W. To Hampton?

J. Yes, when you were transported there.

W. Let's see. My mother and father took me to Philadelphia to get a train, but the train was only to go as far as Baltimore. And when we went through Maryland that was my first time of meeting "Jim Crow" - old Jim Crow.

J. Oh, that's right.

W. You got on the coach and then you had to walk through to practically, almost to the engine back. And there the sandwich man had his stuff spread over the seats. He was making the sandwiches and anything that was trash was in the back there. But, I was just observing it when I realized that ^{was what} I'd been reading about Jim Crow.

J. Did you have to stand?

W. No, you sat down if you found a seat. If you didn't find a seat, that was the only coach that carried Negroes. And that was in Maryland, then.

J. That was why.

W. And when you got to Baltimore, you got off the train and went right to the boat. The boat ran from Baltimore to Old Point in Virginia. I can remember once, when I was coming back the same way, when this white man got on the train in Virginia. They had a barber on the boat, no he got on the boat in Virginia, coming back. And they had a barbershop on this boat. This white man came into the barbershop and he yelled at the barber, he said, "I haven't got much time. I just finished my breakfast". You couldn't buy meals, no Negro could eat on the boat, and he yelled at the barber

and he said, "I want my hair cut" and he said, "I've only got a short time", and he said, "come on", and he said, "here tote my bags down there to the barbershop." So the Negro barber had on a white coat, he had just stepped outside and he looked at the man and he said, "Tote your bags?" He said, "I don't tote anybody's bags". I don't recall what the expression was, the white man made, and the Negro said, "You'd better watch your tongue 'cause you're traveling in the wrong direction to use that kind of language to my kind of people." Which showed me that there was some spunk in some of them down there. They resented it. And so I went on in. But you could not buy a meal, in fact, one fellow, a waiter came through to serve somebody on the boat and I told him that I had left New Jersey and I hadn't had anything to eat and I would certainly appreciate a cup of coffee and a sandwich. And he said, "Well, I'm sorry, but you can't go in the dining room". So he said, "But I'll bring you some." And later on he came with a newspaper. He hadn't even been able to put it in paper or a paper bag.

You get off at Old Point and then you took a trolley up to the school, trolley, no buses, trolley. And I can remember that trolley. I got on the trolley but I was just going up to Hampton. But my grandmother died while I was at Hampton and so I had to come home. And they sent a matron, who was white at that time, down to Old Point with me. She had to ride down and see that I got on the boat at Old Point. And when she got on, I got on behind her. Then when she sat down, I went up and sat down by her. And I could see her begin to fidget and twist and after a while she said, "Geritude, you can't sit up here because there's a law down here that you have to go to the back." And so I had to pick up my luggage and go to the back. Well, these were instances that I realize now. There were different white people. There were some white people on this side and some on that side and

they were just like other people. They weren't doing anything only following the customs, which is a bad idea.

J. Yes, I've never lived in an area where that prevailed so I've never experienced it. That's really troubling. I didn't know that.

W. Well, in many it's been continued and it is still continued in some places. I really feel that I have experienced things that have made me what I am. I mean, if I hadn't had these experiences I wouldn't have been able to make

(end of tape)

END OF INTERVIEW