

John Lawton

Interview of John Lawton by Dr. Alvin Jackson. April 5, 1994. John Lawton is the former vocational agriculture teacher and principal at the Willow Hill School. Topics covered include former teachers at the Willow Hill School, Klan activity in Bulloch County, educational politics, and Mr. Lawton's life. Throughout the interview, Dr. Jackson is abbreviated as AJ, and Mr. Lawton is abbreviated as JL.

Alvin Jackson: Today is April 5, 1994. We're in Atlanta, GA, at the home of Mr. and Mrs. John W. Lawton. Mr. Lawton is a former principal of the Willow Hill School of Bulloch County, and Mrs. Lawton is a former teacher at the Willow Hill School. In fact, the Lawton's administration exists during the time of my tenure at the Willow Hill School. Today, I want to ask Mr. Lawton some of his recollections about Willow Hill, some of his recollections about desegregation and integration, and also some memories of his early life and his background. Mr. Lawton, my first question is, what year did you first come to Willow Hill?

John Lawton: I believe, Alvin, it was in 1940, at the, at the Christmas break in 19..., in 1940.

AJ: Ok.

JL: Mr. Martin was the voag teacher there from July until December and he left to go back to Arkansas, his home state, to work and it created a vacancy, and I was at the time working at Polk's Academy, or Polk's Junior High School, and another community school. And, I was transferred to Willow Hill, at the time that he left, as voag teacher.

AJ: Ok. When you came to the Willow Hill School, who was the principal at that time?

JL: I believe Mrs. [Donavis?] was the principal. She was a lady from [unclear], Massachusetts, who was there, and earlier there, they had built a school there, elevated to a Junior High School. I believe Mrs. Donavis[?] was the principal.

AJ: Ok. You said that prior to coming to Willow Hill, you was at Polk's Academy. Who was the principal at Polk's Academy?

JL: Well, ah, Mr. Pope was the first year I worked there. I started working in Bulloch County in 1938. In the summer of 1938, the year I finished college. And at the second year, I believe that, they, I was made principal '39, the '39-'40 year. And I was there for a, a half year when Mr. Martin, who was the princ... I mean, who was the vocational teacher, left to go to Arkansas, and I was transferred out to Willow Hill.

AJ: Ok. Now, then. So what happened to the school after you left? Who, who, became principal?

JL: I'm not sure whether Mrs. Bryant assumed the responsibility or not. I think Mrs. Bryant, the junior Mrs. Bryant, she was formerly a Jeanes supervisor in Bulloch County, but at the time of the transfer, Mrs. Maynell Dixon, was the Jeanes supervisor and Mrs. Bryant was working with one of my teachers at Polk's Academy.

AJ: Now, why would Mrs. Bryant leave the roll as a Jeanes supervisor and then become a teacher?

JL: Well, if Mrs. Dempsey was our school, she had been principal of the Laboratory School at Savannah State College, and was better prepared and was younger and more, more qualified, much more qualified. Mrs. Bryant had served for a number of years as...

AJ: Did she accept that change...

JL: Graciously. Yes.

AJ: Graciously? Ok. And so she left as Jeanes supervisor, and then became a teacher?

JL: Yes.

AJ: At Polk's Academy?

JL: Yes.

AJ: Is that her first school she taught at, after leaving Jeanes supervisor?

JL: Yes.

AJ: Ok.

JL: First and only.

AJ: And only. And then she became principal at Polk's Academy?

JL: After I left.

AJ: After you left.

JL: [Unclear]

AJ: What year did Polk's Academy close, do you know?

JL: It closed at the time that, the building, they start building schools for blacks in Bulloch County, in 19..., after the Supreme Court ruling. They decided to build schools, about that time, when they saw the decision coming. They decided to build schools for blacks. Prior to that time, they had done almost nothing for blacks in Bulloch County.

AJ: Ok, so that's kind of when the consolidation movement came in

JL: Right, right.

AJ: And, so that new Willow Hill was built around '54, '53, '54. So is that around the time that Polk's Academy would have closed?

JL: That's the, that's the time, yeah.

AJ: Now, what...

JL: And all of those students were bussed into Willow Hill.

AJ: Ok. Now what happened to Mrs. Bryant after that? Did she retire, or go to another school?

JL: She retired.

AJ: She retired.

JL: And later, the school was, was built. An elementary school in Statesboro was built and named in her honor. And I later became principal of Julia P. Bryant School after I left Willow Hill School.

AJ: Ok. [mumbling in background] Alright. Now let me ask you this, and, and, we kind of was a sidetrack with Mrs. Bryant cause I was trying to get a little bit more information on her too. Do you know any of her people? Julia P. Bryant's people.

JL: Yes. I know her daughter. She's passed now. Her daughter was a classmate of mine, in elementary, high school, and college. But she's passed now. She has a daughter, who lives here in Atlanta. Andrea Jackson. She had [unclear]. They live, oh, about two or three blocks from here.

AJ: Ok. Now, who has Mrs. Bryant's papers and archival information?

JL: I'm not sure if anyone has.

AJ: You think that was lost?

JL: I think so.

AJ: Ok. She just had the one daughter?

JL: Yes, just one daughter.

AJ: Ok. And she was an Armstrong before she married?

JL: I....I'm not sure.

AJ: Ok.

JL: I'm not sure.

AJ: Ok. Now you said...

JL: I knew her, oh, I was quite a kid when they were, when she was Jeanes supervisor. And her husband, Clarence Bryant, was a member of my church.

AJ: Ok.

JL: Course, as I said, her daughter and I grew up together. We were classmates.

AJ: Ok. Now where are you originally from?

JL: Statesboro.

AJ: Oh, you were born in Statesboro?

JL: Born in, in Sylvania, but moved to Statesboro about age one or two, something like that.

AJ: Ok, so you were really a Bulloch County native, then?

JL: Yeah.

AJ: Ok, so you went to school at...

JL: William James High School. It was, Statesboro High, an industrial school at the time.

AJ: Ok.

Unidentified Woman (UW): Pardon me, Alvin,

AJ: Yes, ma'am

UW: You take care and tell all the Statesboro crowd I said hello.

AJ: I hope you make it back so we can have an interview here.

UW: Yeah. Well...

AJ: Smelling so good. Lord, have mercy. Always smelling good.

UW: [laughter] Ok, well, take care now.

AJ: Alright. Good to see you.

UW: [Unclear]

AJ: So I didn't realize you had gone to William James. When you were going to, when you went to school at William James, you were aware of Willow Hill at that point?

JL: Well. It was just a one teacher, two teacher school at that time.

AJ: But you had never gone up to visit while you were a student at William James, anyways. [muffled, unclear]

JL: Yeah, I had, I had, I-I knew it was a small school. There were two or three, maybe, less than a half a dozen schools in the county for blacks. Willow Hill was one of the schools where they actually had a building. Polk's Academy is one. They had Blue Sand Ridge, and believe a school out at Register. Around in that area. But, most of the education for blacks were held in large [lodge] halls and churches. One teacher schools. Teachers were shuttled out to these communities. That's about the extent of black education, education for blacks in Bulloch County. Other than in the city, in the town of Statesboro.

AJ: Ok. Now what year did you graduate from William, Statesboro High?

JL: 1933.

AJ: So you graduated in '33?

JL: Yes.

AJ: Then you went to college at...

JL: Savannah State College.

AJ: Ok, and...

JL: It was Georgia State College at the time.

AJ: Ok. Now who was the principal at William James when you graduated?

JL: William James, the person who the school was later named after.

AJ: Ok, so you knew him then?

JL: Yes, sir, knew him. His daughter was a classmate of mine, Juanita James.

AJ: Ok. Is she still living?

JL: Yes. She's, she's still living.

AJ: Where does she live?

JL: She lives in Tallahassee, Florida.

AJ: Ok. And, would she have his archival information?

JL: I'm pretty sure she would, know something about it. I don't know what...

AJ: Ok, and what is her name.

JL: Her name is Juanita... she was a Green, and then she was, I can't think of her last name, but I can get that for you.

AJ: Ok.

JL: Johnson. Juanita Johnson.

AJ: Ok. Now was there a school at Brooklet when you were coming along?

JL: Yes, there was a school at Brooklet.

AJ: Edward Johnson? Is that the school?

JL: Well, it wasn't named Edward Johnson. It was a two, three teacher school. Edward Johnson was one of the school that was built at the same time

Together: That Willow Hill was built.

AJ: Ok.

JL: They built the school at Willow Hill, Brooklet, one at Register, and...

AJ: Was New Hope, was that one of the schools?

JL: Yeah, it was, yeah, at Register, that was the school.

AJ: Ok. Alright. Ok. So, then you graduated from Savannah State, and you majored in vocational agriculture.

JL: Yes.

AJ: And then you came back, and your first teaching job was at Polk's Academy.

JL: Yes.

AJ: And then you got a call to Willow Hill.

JL: Yes.

AJ: Ok. Wh-who were the teachers at Willow Hill when you arrived? Was Mrs. Dona[unclear] was the [unclear], but who were the other teachers that you remember?

JL: [unclear]. It was quite a number of years ago, I don't remember all of them. But I know Arthur [unclear] was the [unclear]. [Unclear] was a person, I believe Arthur was from Ohio. He was there. Another lady from Pennsylvania was there. [Unclear] had gone out to all of the colleges around the country and had recruited and done an excellent job of recruiting people with degrees.

AJ: Was this the first group of college degreed teachers?

JL: Yes.

AJ: Ok.

JL: Basically.

AJ: And this was around the '39, '40, was that first group that had college degrees?

JL: Yeah.

AJ: Prior to that time, they didn't have college degrees.

JL: Yeah.

AJ: Ok, now. Who was the principal before Mrs. Donavis [?] came? Do you know who that was?

JL: I believe that Mrs. Ruth Hall was the principal.

AJ: [JL muffled in background] Ok she was the principal. Ok, now [unclear] Ruth had actually went back and got a degree. She didn't have it at first. Is that your understanding of...

JL: A lot of teachers in the county, who started teaching when they were high school graduates, continued they education during the summers. And many of them obtained their degrees through summer study.

AJ: Ok. So, then Mrs. Donavis [?] came and after Mrs. Donavis [?] do you know who the principal then? Who was that? When did Mr. Hughes come in?

JL: Mr. Hughes came later down the line. His, his, he was there after, he was there just before I was elevated to principalship. In fact I succeeded him as principal.

AJ: Ok. What about...

JL: I was teaching for him. I was a teacher. And, that was during the time they were building the new school. And, but before, after Mrs. Donavis [?], I can recall some of the principals who taught there. George Fuller was principal for at least one year. I think James Wells was principal for there. I...I...

AJ: What about Mr. Campbell?

JL: Campbell was the ag teacher. Campbell and I finished school the same year, 1938. And he went to Willow Hill as Ag. teacher, I went to Polk's Academy as Ag. teacher and Edward Borkin went to Brooklet as Ag. teacher. They took on three additional agriculture teachers in the county that year. All three of us were recent graduates of Savannah State College.

AJ: Ok. All classmates?

JL: All classmates. Fact, I did my student teaching at William James High School, and I taught an adult class at Willow Hill during my student teaching.

AJ: An adult class at Willow Hill?

JL: Yes. [unclear]

AJ: Ok. And do you remember what year that was?

JL: That was in 1938. In the Spring of 1938. Prior to graduation.

AJ: Do you remember who some of the adult students that you had when you were...

JL: Adult farmers?

AJ: Yes.

JL: All farmers.

AJ: Do you remember any of the names, in particular?

JL: All of them. George, John Green. Garfield Hall. Cleve Hall. [unclear] Cardell Wiggins. Jesse Holloways. Troy Polk. All of the farmers around the area. This was an adult farm [unclear]

AJ: Now, my grandfather didn't come to that class, did he?

JL: Yes he did.

AJ: Saul Lee.

JL: Saul Lee. Yeah.

AJ: They all came, then.

JL: All of them.

AJ: So you were teaching them farming techniques.

JL: Yeah, well, it was adult farm class. It...

AJ: Was it at night, or...

JL: At night.

AJ: It was at night. Ok.

JL: Yeah. And we met, I believe it was once a week. [muffled]

AJ: How did they receive you?

JL: Very well. Very well.

AJ: Ok. And so, so mostly all of the farmers in the area come and looking for new techniques, in terms of how to farm...

JL: Well, it had been...they had, they had had a evening school there for years because the [unclear] teacher from Statesboro had been teaching, adult evening school at various schools in the county. He had one at Willow Hill. One at New Sand Ridge. I believe he had another evening school...and down around Nevells, I'm not sure. But, but, I'm sure of the one at Willow Hill. And New Sand Ridge. Because when I was doing my apprenticeship teaching, that's the one that Willow Hill was the one that I taught.

AJ: Do you know who that person was that had the class before you did it at Willow Hill, the voag, the vocational ag teacher?

JL: The vocational ag teacher was M.M. Martin.

AJ: Mr. Martin...

JL: [Overlapping] Martin was, yes. M.M. Martin was voag teacher. He, he, he came to Statesboro the year after I finished high school. As voag teacher. He remained there until after I finished college.

AJ: Where did he come from?

JL: Arkansas.

AJ: Ok. He came from Arkansas.

JL: Yeah. [muffled, unclear] His school was Tuskegee, but his home was Arkansas.

AJ: Oh, he had gone to Tuskegee. Ok. Does he have children?

JL: No. There are no children. His wife, he's, he's passed now. His wife is in Madison, Georgia.

AJ: Is her memory good?

JL: Oh yes. She would, she, she, she, I don't think would know too much of the history. She later came there as Jeanes supervisor.

AJ: But she wasn't there at the time he was there?

JL: At that time. No.

AJ: Ok, she was working someplace else?

JL: Yeah.

AJ: Ok. Good. Alright then, so...

JL: See when he left, when he left Bulloch County, he left William James a, for some reason or another. There was two systems. A city system and a county school system. At the time. And he was working in the city school system. And, for some reason after the, after we were, well I think basically is, they wanted to, he and the superintendent maybe, didn't get along too well. [muffled] The new school superintendent in Statesboro, the Statesboro city schools, and for some reason or another, he and Martin, didn't...

AJ: Get along too well.

JL: Hit it off too well. And he, he, he decided to leave. And it, and, and, take the job at Willow Hill. So they got another voag teacher at Statesboro. And he took the job at Willow Hill, only for the three months. September, October, November, December. Four months. And, that's when he decided to leave and go back to Arkansas, take a job in Arkansas. He later returned to Bulloch County as a county agent. [unclear] county agent in Bulloch County.

AJ: Now, I'm gonna jump around a little bit. The concept of the county agent, do you know when that started in Bulloch County for blacks?

JL: He was the first.

AJ: He was the first county agent?

JL: He was the first county agent. [unclear]

AJ: And, the county agent directly answers to?

JL: Well, it's a United States extension service, cooperative extension service. And the county agents, there is one in every county

[Unclear, overlapping conversation]

JL: I don't know if [unclear] like, the, whatever the act of Congress decreed that service. But they had always been white county agent there. But, they were, in many of the counties, where they had a large population of black farmers, they were working to get both a white and a black, black county agent in the county. And Bulloch County did qualify because we had a number of land owners, of black landowners in Bulloch County.

AJ: Ok. Do you know who was the county agent after Mr. Martin? Was there another one?

JL: Ah...yeah. I believe...I'm not sure, but I think maybe it was Jackie Lee's husband. [unclear]

AJ: Sarah Lee's husband?

JL: Sarah Lee's daughter's husband. I think he was county agent for a time but later on after they started integrating schools, they started integrating that service and...And they were eliminating the dual county agents.

AJ: Ok. Alright, going back to Willow Hill, and we were talking about Mr. Cooper, and you said Cooper was from, you believe...

JL: He was one of the teachers, yes.

AJ: [overlapping JL] Ok, do, do you know what he taught?

JL: I'm not sure. He taught maybe math or science or something.

AJ: Ok, but Mrs. Dempsey had recruited people?

JL: Yeah. She had recruited all of the teachers.

AJ: Ok. So she, part of her job was to go around and bring teachers for Bulloch County?

JL: It was [unclear] The Jeanes supervisor was, in essence, the superintendent of the black schools. It was her responsibility to recruit and place teachers. And to qualify teachers. And to see what...

AJ: Ok. Was Ms. Ramble there at the time?

JL: Yes. Mrs. Ramble was there, as home economics teacher.

AJ: Ok.

JL: She was there while I was there.

AJ: Is she still living?

JL: I'm not sure. I don't, I don't know. I'm not sure.

AJ: And you don't know, don't know where to look for her?

JL: [muffled]

AJ: You know where she came from?

JL: Not really, I don't.

AJ: She was a college graduate, though?

JL: Yes. She was in school with me. She was there.

AJ: She went to Savannah State?

JL: Yeah. She and her husband, both.

AJ: Ok. Did he teach at Willow Hill too?

JL: No.

AJ: He never taught at Willow Hill? Ok. Alright, was Mrs. Dickens there? Do you know that name?

JL: Ah, I think so, but I'm not sure.

AJ: Ok. Any other names? What did Mrs., did Mrs. Eevermore ever, was there? At what point was she there? Was she there at the old or new school? Do you know? Do you remember?

JL: Mrs. Eever was there at the, at the old school, I believe. But I'm sure she was there at the new school.

AJ: I know she was at the new school. I remember her. But I don't know when she first came in.

JL: I think...Mrs. Eever, I think she taught at Portal. They had a two teacher school at Portal.

AJ: Was that Scarborough school?

JL: Scarborough. Yeah. And, she taught there before coming to Willow Hill. And, I'm not sure whether she was, can't remember whether she was there before the new school was built or not.

AJ: Ok. Alright, so, do you know anything about, how many different Willow Hills do you remember, which, in terms of buildings?

JL: Two.

AJ: Ok, now, we not talking about the brick buildings. Talking about the wooden structures. How many of those you remember?

JL: Two.

AJ: Ok, now tell me about those two...

JL: Well, they, they, they, the one that was, there was an old two teacher school building, two classroom building. And then they built the, I guess they call it the Rosemore school.

AJ: Right.

JL: It was a four teacher room, with collapsible place for an auditorium [muffled, unclear]. And, when I came there during 194..1, '40, '41. That summer, we tore down the old building, the old classroom building and built a vocational building. It was a two room building. One for home economics, classroom for vocational agriculture. A shop and [canning plant] combination. We did this with the help of the community. Some funds were created through some project. It was associated with, with the, with the, the, I think from the government, federal government. But, I employed, recruited, and trained a lot of the young men in the community who did the actual carpentry work in building the vocational building. But it was a two classroom, and combination canning plant and shop, and so forth, vocational shop.

AJ: Ok, so you completely tore down all of the building that was there?

JL: No, no, no. Just, just that one old structure there.

AJ: So there were two structures at the time? And you tore down that oldest structure.

JL: Oldest structure. We used that lumber to, all that was usable to...

AJ: To build a home economics..

JL: A vocational building.

AJ: A vocational building.

JL: We called it. It was called a vocational building because it housed vocational home economics and vocational agriculture.

AJ: Ok. Alright, now, the, that building that they called the Rosenwald Building, where, I think it's in that picture with all the children...

JL: Yes. That's right.

AJ: Was that building already there when you came? Or was...

JL: Yeah, that was already there.

AJ: Ok, and so the new building, which is part of the house that my grandmother got when her house burned down in '51, it got [unclear]

JL: That one, they, they got, they got the vocational building.

AJ: That's part of the vocational building.

JL: That was the vocational building.

AJ: Ok. Alright, so that's the one that they built?

JL: That's the one that I built.

AJ: Ok. And some of that was from Rosenwald funds?

JL: No. None of that was Rosenwald funds. That the funds that came for that, that building, the, the labor part was through some project that the government had at that time where you could pick, bring in the young men in, in, in employment. Minimal kinda wages they had, but you pay for coming, for working. Purvis [unclear] was in that group. George Jones was in that group. I believe, Purvis, George Jones, one of the lead boys, I can't, I, I...

AJ: Is that, you mean, mean, Mr. Joe Reed's people?

JL: Joe Reed's people.

AJ: E.R. Holmes, is that who you're talking about?

JL: Not ER. ER was a student later on. But, ER was not, at least, either...

AJ: [unclear]

JL: Joe Reed's brother...

AJ: Punk?

JL: Punk. We called him Punk. I believe Punk was in that group...

AJ: Mr. Johnny [unclear] people in there? [muffled, unclear]

JL: I don't remember whether the, the only, George would have been the one. Not, not George, James would have been the one...

AJ: [unclear, overlapping with JL]

JL: If he had. James Green would have been the one to be in it, if he was there. I, but, if all that...

AJ: [unclear, overlapping JL] Purvis would, would be somebody to ask about that?

JL: Purvis would, Purvis would, perhaps tell you all of the students who were in there, who helped build that school. Purvis would probably remember that.

AJ: Ok. You don't know about the Rosenwald aspect, that was already there...

JL: That was there when I got there, yeah. They had just completed that building. Recently.

AJ: You don't know what year that was done?

JL: It was done, I'd, around '30, '37 or 8 or 9, something in there. '37, '37 or '38. Cause we finished school in '38 and it was built then.

AJ: Ok. Alright. And, you don't know what year the building you tore down was built?

JL: I would say a close estimate would be in 1940. The summer of 1940. I went there in the, I believe I went there in the end of '39, school year '39, '40. And, it would have been built in 1940. It was built the first year I was there.

AJ: Ok. What kind of person was Mrs. Donavis [?]? What are your recollections?

JL: Very nice person.

AJ: Good leader?

JL: Well trained. Good leader.

AJ: Strong?

JL: Yeah. Strong, very strong person, personality.

AJ: Had good control of the school?

JL: Yes.

AJ: Was she well received in the community?

JL: Very well received. She had been the first female principal of a school in that area, and, and, you know prior to that time, mostly schools, mm, multiple teacher schools were headed by men. But, she came in as a woman and, and, and did an excellent job.

AJ: Now it's interesting. Most of the Jeanes supervisors were women, but yet most of the early, a lot of the early principals were men. So there was compartmentalization of roles, it seems.

JL: Yeah.

AJ: Ok. So you, what year did you become principal at Willow Hill?

JL: I...became principal, I, I think Alvin, I became principal in 19... '54, '55, somewhere in that area, but I'm, I'm not sure. The first year...

AJ: [overlapping, unclear]

JL: No. Well, I, I, was principal the last half of the school year at the old building. Mr. Hughes left during the middle of the term to go back to his home as principal of the school there. It was a much larger school and a better position. And he was returning home.

AJ: Where was his home?

JL: Oh, it was Hartwell, Georgia. And, and he left in the middle of the term and there was regulation that, that, regulation at that time that voag teachers would not serve in dual capacities as principals and teachers. But, superintendent and their board, local board of trustees asked if I would serve as principal for the remainder of the year. Of, and of course I did, but it was kind of in violation of the established policy. Having the voag teacher serve as both as teacher and as principal because voag teaching was at that time employed the year round. And they had additional community hours beyond the time at school. So, but I did serve for that, for the remainder of that term before the, while the new school was being built.

AJ: Now, did that old school have running water?

JL: No.

AJ: It didn't. Did it have indoor...

JL: It had, it had running water in the voag department. JL: Because that's where the canning plant was. But in the other part it didn't have.

AJ: What about bathrooms? Did it have indoor bathrooms?

JL: No bathrooms.

AJ: [overlapping] There were no indoor bathrooms?

JL: No indoor bathrooms.

AJ: So the first indoor bathroom was in the...

JL: New building.

AJ: The brick building?

JL: Brick building.

AJ: Ok. Did it have a telephone in the old building?

JL: No.

AJ: There was no telephone in the building? In the old building.

JL: No, no.

AJ: Ok. So, communications just by mail or driving to town?

JL: Yeah.

AJ: Ok. Did you ever, when you was at the old building, did they have fields day at Willow Hill at any point? You remember having those?

JL: Yeah, we had fields day every year at, in the county. Where they, a group would come together, all of the one and two teacher schools around in the neighborhood would come together and have a fields day every year. That was something that was created some time ago. It was, they held those here.

AJ: Ok. When, I guess they, I found one picture at Willow Hill, I don't know what year it was taken, where they had an event in front of the building where they had a piano out on the ground, had the girls dressed in little...I mean it was like having a, some kind of a performance or play...

JL: It was a beautiful...[recording skips] yeah beautiful thing.

AJ: Right in front of the building.

JL: Yeah. They would all have, all of the schools participating, would have activities and it was a very nice thing for all of the schools. Yeah. They had, not only that, they had running, track things, and then fun kinda track things, where you carry an egg with a spoon or something like that, run so far. And then, I believe in hoop skirts and so forth like that. It was a lot a fun things.

AJ: Play at the maypole, and other kinds.

JL: Maypole always. And it was always held around the kinda first of May, something like a May Day. Schools have a May Day program.

AJ: Ok. When I was talking to you and the [unclear] was asking you something about when the Klans came to Willow Hill, and I know everybody gives varying accounts of that. Did you tell me, as far as you can remember, what you remember about that event?

JL: Oh, that. Yeah. It was prior to, well, blacks had just recently been given the privilege to vote in primaries. A long time in the state of Georgia, there were white primaries. And only whites voted in the primaries. Primaries were tantamount to elections. If you won the primary, you should be winning the general election. And we were denied that fact, when Ellis Arnold was governor, I believe it was King, or someone in Columbus, or Albany, who filed a suit to outlaw the white primary, Democratic white primary. Most of the blacks were Republicans who could vote in the general election. Voted Republican in the general election. But, the Democratic party was basically white, and it was a white primary. Called it the party primary. And, it was a way of denying blacks an opportunity to vote. But after Governor

Arnold had said that unless you told the legislature, unless you do away with the white primary, he was going to do it through executive decree. And it happened that blacks could vote. So blacks were then beginning to get registered to vote. So, many of us were working with the churches, with the churches and communities to encourage our people to register to vote. And we also at this night, was just prior to one of the elections. A primary election. And they, the Klan's idea was to intimidate the blacks to keep them away from the polls. So while we were having one of the farm classes, Martin was there, R.J. Martin. He was serving as county agent. And I was voag teacher at the time. And the Klan drove through the campus, blowing their horns, parading around with the lights on. But it was a scare tactic to intimidate. But it really intimidated no one.

AJ: Do you remember how many cars, approximately, came?

JL: Well, we went in the building. We didn't go out to look. But I would judge maybe 30.

AJ: Now, do you know who the Klans were? Was it ever talked about who they possibly were?

JL: Oh yeah, it was talked. It, you know, we had ideas who they were, some of them.

AJ: Who were some of the people it was felt?

JL: The one of them was one of the persons who ran the little store down at Hopeulikit. And they generally met in that area. But all in that...

AJ: John Paul Ellison, is that...

JL: John Paul Ellison, and so forth.

AJ: Probably his brother, Lenny...

JL: Yeah, all of those.

AJ: Were the Nessmith's involved?

JL: I'm, I'm not sure. I didn't follow down at the time, to try to get them, you know, who they were, identified. We were about that time but, I think, subsequent to that incident, we had gone up to Summit, Raymont Summit, which is...

AJ: Near Twin City.

JL: Near Twin City. And were coming back through Portal one night, and they were parading in Portal.

AJ: The Klan?

JL: The Klan. And we stopped and looked at them.

AJ: They had they hoods on and all?

JL: Yeah. So we came on home and, but...

AJ: About what year was that?

JL: It was about that, in that...

AJ: In the '40s?

JL: [overlapping] Yeah, in the '40s.

AJ: Happened around '46 I think it was.

JL: Yeah, yeah.

AJ: Ok, so, you remember with their hoods? Were they burning crosses or...

J: Yeah they were burning a cross.

AJ: In Portal.

JL: In Portal. Yes.

AJ: Ok. And these were all, again, tactics, to intimidate, perhaps?

JL: Well, they did. They, during that time, in '46, which was right after the war, they took one black young fella, there, and beat him up unmercifully one night. His, his, it was the son-in-law of, oh, I can't think of the name of the person now. But he was living, his, he was living up in Portal area, up that way.

AJ: Were they Haggins?

JL: No, not Haggins.

AJ: It wasn't Haggins.

JL: No, it wasn't Haggins. It was, oh, Scott.

AJ: Scott?

JL: Scott.

AJ: Ok.

JL: It was Scott's son-in-law, Purvis or some of them might could tell you, who he was. But it was Scott's son-in-law. And he had some words with some white person, maybe in Metter, or around Metter, Candler County, someplace. And they wanted to beat him up to make an example, and they did that night.

AJ: And this happened in Portal?

JL: No, it wasn't in the city of Portal, it was in that community up there, above Portal [unclear] up above that area. He was living in the rural area.

AJ: So they beat him?

JL: Yeah, beat him [unclear].

AJ: Do you know of any other incidents of Klan activity in Bulloch County? That you heard about?

JL: When I was quite a boy, coming up, in early years, the Klan was active during the, they would parade downtown in Statesboro. But, it was intimidating. You know what the Klan was. They were intimidating.

AJ: Ok, so, did you ever hear of anyone putting a coffin on Cutting-man Hall's porch? Did you ever hear of that stuff?

JL: If, if it did, they threw it on there that same night, I think. They went by there and threw it the same night they went through the school ground. I think that, I think they did that. Bulloch County toy coffin, or something like that. Yeah. I think that, that happened. But man, always at the meeting where we were.

AJ: What do you think was the target? With that coffin? Was he somehow...

JL: Man, always was, always a substantial citizen. He was a landowner. He was chairman of the trustee board of the school, He was a highly respected person in the community. In fact, most of the people in that area were very highly respected. Most were landowners. And it was, it was, they had enjoyed a better kind of life than most of the sharecropping places away from there.

AJ: So the Willow Hill community was one of the better communities in the county?

JL: Absolutely. And one of the better communities in the state. They, students from Willow Hill, who went on to William James School, and other schools, we had a higher percentage of students on our roll than any other feeder schools in the county. And a large amount of it was attributed to, I think, a kind of educational program that we had at Willow Hill at the time. And we had that kind of program because of the interest of the citizens who lived in that community. And it was a historical kind of thing. And, for me, when I went there as a principal, when I took over as principal at Willow Hill, my primary responsibility, as I saw it was to create a kind of climate or atmosphere in which teachers could really encourage and motivate children to learn. To create an atmosphere for learning. And at that time, whites didn't, weren't interested in black education at all. And if blacks weren't interested in it, you didn't have it. And that's one of the things, I think the great thing that we really lost when schools were integrated because that part was just completely lost.

AJ: That's a good point.

[Tape switches sides]

AJ: April 5, 1994, continuing the interview with Mr. John W. Lawton. And as I was saying, I really believe that we did lose a lot, we lost a lot of the economic system, we lost a lot of the creative, you know, leadership, those kinds of things. So..

JL: When we, when the schools were integrated, one of the other things I think that I was instrumental in doing as principal at the new Willow Hill Elementary School, was to alleviate some of the fears that some of our teachers might have had about teaching white children. I wanted them, and I worked very hard at it, for them to be secure and comfortable in teaching whoever they were teaching. And that they could teach, and they did teach. And that the time was coming when they would be called upon to teach. And I wanted them to be comfortable again. And I wanted them to make sure that the remaining time that we were segregated would be a time of preparation for them a time for getting ready to meet whatever circumstances they wanted to, they might encounter in teaching. And they did. When I left there, I felt that any of the teachers on the faculty at Willow Hill, would be better than any of the teachers at any of the white schools in that county. And I really think that they were. They later went on and they made their marks in the white schools.

AJ: Well, I think that the Willow Hill story is a great story and that's why I'm putting a lot of energy into trying to collect information, to tell it because I think its a part of American history. That we need to know a lot about. That school has been there for a long time and, you know, if we don't record the information now, it'll be lost. And people won't know about the history of Willow Hill. I understand now they are trying to close it and that's one of the things I'm going to look at, you know, when we go down to Bulloch County, just to see where that is. Certainly, we're working hard on trying to create a Willow Hill Foundation and also to create an alumni association so that even if the school does close that there will always some memories or something that where people can come back because I think the school and the Willow Hill Community, a lot of the people are gone now, so we got to take up the slack and preserve their memory. And that's kind of where I'm taking it [unclear]

JL: And the land that the school was built on, I think it was complete exploitation there in trying to, paying what the land value was really worth. Troy Polk sold them that land for \$100 an acre. And he coerced them into it. Well, didn't coerce him in to, but they talked about moving the school some other place. He finagled around and they wanted it in the community, wanted to retain the school in the community and they did. But, they were paying, when white schools were building, five and six times as much per acre for land as they paid Troy Polk for that land. He sold that land to them for \$100 an acre.

AJ: I didn't know. That's a piece of information I didn't know about. Ok now, let me just move a little bit away. Tell me a little bit about your mother and father, were they teachers, or...

JL: No. I was the only, I'm the only...

[phone rings, tape is paused]

AJ: So you were saying that you were the first one in your family to go to college?

JL: Yes.

AJ: Oh. What an accomplishment. What did your dad do?

JL: My father was, and my mother were separated when I was a kid, a very kid. I have no recollection of him at all. There were four of us, four kids. I was the younger one. And shortly after I was born, they

were separated and I have little to no recollection, no recollection of my father. I've seen him several times but, no, no, established relationship.

AJ: Ok. What was your mother's maiden name?

JL: Coney.

AJ: Coney. So they're not related to any people in Bulloch County?

JL: No, Screven County. We came from Screven County.

AJ: Ok. Alright. And so, then, just settled in Bulloch, when you went to school there. Your sister, do you have any brothers and sisters alive?

JL: I have one brother alive. He's in New Jersey. My older brother is dead and my sister is dead. My people moved through New Jersey about the time that I was finishing high school. So I went to college at Savannah State and really, worked during the summers, and never really rejoined my family, but they all moved to New Jersey. And...

AJ: [overlapping] How did you meet Mrs. Lawton?

JL: I was in the Army during World War Two, she is, I met her there. Well I had met her earlier, before the[unclear]. I was down there, visiting a friend, I had a girlfriend, I saw that I didn't remember her, she remembered me. We met in Columbus during World War Two.

AJ: Columbus, Georgia?

JL: Yeah. I went to serve in the army, you know, and, during World War Two and that's, I met her, and that's when we got married. During the time I was in the war.

AJ: Ok. And was she a school teacher at the time?

JL: No, she was in college. She finished college in 1944 and we got married in 1944.

AJ: She went to Fort Valley?

JL: Yes. Fort Valley State College.

AJ: Ok. And, then, when did she first teach at Willow Hill? Did she come when you came with...

JL: I got out of the army in 1946. And she came to, came with me then in '46, so about '46, '47, something like that.

AJ: Now. So, you originally had been in Bulloch County teaching, so they called you to the army from your teaching career?

JL: Yeah. Really, I had left Bulloch County. A superintendent of schools, which was W.E. McKelvin, refused to give me a raise. I knew what the white voag teachers were making. And he refused to give me

a raise. I think my salary at that time was like \$125 a month. And I was asking for at least \$150 a month. This was in 1942 or 3, '43. And he refused to give me a raise, yet he raised, would give the white voag teachers a raise every year. And Mr. P. Stone, who was the director of extension service for black county agents in the state of Georgia, offered me a job as county agent in Madison County, in Madison, Georgia. So I accepted the job, the superintendent threatened me, said that if I quit the job as voag teacher in Bulloch County they were going to send me to the army. I was on a deferred status because agriculture was a necessity, a kind of a, one of the deferred positions, I was deferred from the army for about a couple years because of my position. And I felt that being in a similar position as a county agent, whose more directly related to farming, that I would also have that deferred status. But it didn't happen that way. When I went to Madison County, I mean or to Morgan County, which is Madison, Georgia, to serve as county agent, when I got my first check, I got my induction papers in the army with my first check. So I actually stayed on there for the next month, because I had to go for examination and come back for induction. But it was a chance that I was willing to take, and did take and don't regret ever taking it at all. I was drafted in the army that December. I went there in September and I was drafted in the army in December.

AJ: Ok. Were there any other Bulloch Countians went with you? Were these a Bulloch County group you went with?

JL: No, no. Went with the Morgan County group, from Madison.

AJ: Ok. Was this something that the superintendent initiated you think? Or?

JL: I'm sure, oh I'm sure he told them that the boy, the boy had deferred me, the draft boy had deferred me all this time and they, you could see the unfairness because if you deferred as a voag teacher you certainly out to be deferred as a extension service agent.

AJ: Absolutely. Ok now, who came to, were you specifically at Willow Hill when you left to go to Madison or were you...

JL: Willow Hill.

AJ: You were still at Willow Hill, ok. Who came as ag teacher at Willow Hill after you?

JL: I think maybe Mr. Frambrell did.

AJ: Mr. who?

JL: Frambrell. Maybe he did.

AJ: Rambel or Frambrell?

JL: Frambrell.

AJ: Fra- there was a Frambrell there?

JL: Or Ramble. Or whatever, what's, what's his name?

AJ: Mrs. Rambo.

JL: Well, I don't...

AJ: She had a husband.

JL: Yeah, he, he might have come. I'm not sure.

AJ: Shelly? Was his name Shelly Rambo?

JL: Yeah, yeah. I don't know whether he was in there, or whether he, I'm not sure who followed me there.

AJ: But you went to the army?

JL: I went to the army.

AJ: Ok. And then you were in there...

JL: And later, later while I was in the army, I know Mr. Robinson came there as voag teacher. He was there during the time I was in the army, I'm sure. But I think there might have been someone who came between him and me. Yeah, I'm just not sure.

AJ: Ok. Now when you came out of the army, you came right back to Bulloch County, yeah?

JL: Yeah, yeah.

AJ: Ok. And then as that capacity, you came back to Willow Hill?

JL: No, not immediately. But, you see, when I came out of the army, really, I was kind of inclined to go in business. Not in education anymore. I had seen throughout the little economy, and kind of wanted some of the money that was being made in, during the war, and I wanted to go in business. So I, I tried to obtain a license to operate a whisky store. During the time I was in the army, whisky stores, I think they had seventeen in the county. But none were black owned. And I felt that there was enough blacks in the county to support a black liquor store. And I tried to get a license and I couldn't get one.

AJ: They wouldn't give you one?

JL: I continually got the run around. And when the Baptist and the Methodist preachers got together and said, "Let's dry up the county", Hezzie Groves, Dr. Van Buren, Man Hall, and all of us went there and said "Let's dry it up." So we dried it up.

AJ: [laughter] You know what year that was?

JL: We dried it up.

AJ: You know about what year that was?

JL: That was, I don't remember what year that was, but that's pretty easy information to obtain.

AJ: Was H.K. Groves, was H.H. Riggs in that too?

JL: Well, Riggs was in there too, but, but, Groves was, Groves, Van Buren, and Hall, and a lot of the deacons around in the community at the churches were, were very vocal in it. Now we did have a few blacks, black preachers, who were kind of with the...

AJ: Wanted to keep the alcohol in the county?

JL: Wanted to keep the alcohol

AJ: Do you remember who they were?

JL: Well, I, one of them I think was Hill but I'm not sure. I don't want to name nobody. They were those who would kind of go by and get a little taste on Monday morning. But a lot of the other people who were, they, they, I understand, I don't have any facts on this, but I understand that the wholesale liquor dealers put \$30,000 in the county to keep it wet. And it was supposed to be with a match in from the local people, but I know the local people were giving away whisky, and money, and everything to try and get people to go out and...

AJ: Support keeping it wet?

JL: Support keeping it wet. And I was on the dry side and mine was real personal because this was an economic kind of thing with me and I saw it as being detrimental to our people, to the economy. Black people will keep buying whisky from white stores when the whites themselves who were in power wouldn't give you a license to operate a store. So, it became an obsession with me. To dry it up.

AJ: Ok so, then after that, you then went back into education?

JL: Yeah, I, there was a vacancy that occurred down at Brooklet. Mrs. Merritt, who was there. Mr. Merritt was ag teacher and his wife was the principal and for some reason they had a family squabble and she left and went back to Fort Valley, where she was from, in the middle of the year. And the superintendent asked me to go down there, would I take the job as principal. So I went down there and finished out the year as principal of the school at Brooklet. And then the following year, they wanted me back, to come as the ag teacher back at Willow Hill, so I went back there as ag teacher.

AJ: Ok. And then from ag teacher, you went into principalship at Willow Hill?

JL: Yeah. Right.

AJ: Now tell me a little bit about the superintendents that you dealt with. About their personalities and all. You called a name before, and I've not heard you call Pal Warner, [unclear]

JL: Well, Pal Warner was the superintendent when I was hired. He hired me. He hired all of us. He was the, he was strictly a politician, not a top notch politician, just a good ol' boy politician. Do whatever the whites wanted him to do. Did only for blacks what the blacks forced him to do. And he was, he was

superintendent for a number of years with getting a challenge occasionally from one of the other people in the county. I believe Woodruff ran against him, unsuccessfully, once or twice. But the person who defeated him, was McKelvin. He was, I understand, he was from the Brooklet community. I understand he was a doctor, but maybe never passed the medical board or whatever it was. But he was superintendent. And he was the superintendent at the time, who refused to give me a raise. He's the one that, when I left the system, he was school superintendent at that time. Later on, when I came back, I can't remember his name to save my life, but another fella was superintendent.

AJ: Wasn't Wynn was it?

JL: Wynn. Wynn was superintendent, yeah. And he was a little more, a little more liberal and a little more, a little more on the education meaningful side than...

AJ: Than [unclear] politician. He had a relationship with Cousin Elle Cone or something like that [unclear]

JL: Yeah. He owned a farm. He owned a farm that they lived on. Elle Cone. The Cone's lived on his farm. Yeah.

AJ: Ok. So, they never had their own place or anything?

JL: No. He, he, they laid up off that place. But at that time, they were living on his place. They later bought a place adjacent to, not very far from that, Cone's Lake. Above Cone's Lake. But, at this time, they were living at [unclear].

AJ: Did he have any influence with Pal Warner, in terms of education of blacks?

JL: Yeah, he had, he would, he was on the board of trustees, [unclear] Cone was. And he had, I think, some influence but all of that was minimal in terms of what the people actually deserved and what they got. Their asking was small. And the giving was even smaller than the asking. They, they, but, I believe, the people at Willow Hill would get more than the people in the other communities. Because, because they were a little more, more secure, they were a little more independent. They could afford to go down and say "We want this". Where in sharecroppers and other communities, living on people's land, could be quieted by the landowners and so forth.

AJ: Ok. Now, Mrs. Julia Pearl Bryant was Jeanes supervisor for a long time. Do you know where she went to college? I might have asked this [unclear].

JL: She, she, all of the people who, who were teaching later at the time, they, they, worked during the summers, they went to school during the summers and finished school. Most of them, yeah. She finished school at Savannah State. Most, Savannah State was the school where most of them attended because it was nearer. A lot of, some of them attended Fort Valley State, later on, after Fort Valley became a four year college. And some attended Albany State College.

AJ: Ok. Somebody told me that Mary McLeod [unclear] came to Bulloch County. Did you ever [unclear]

JL: Never knew that.

AJ: I'd heard that she'd come during the '30s, was a friend, went out to, what was that school, the Free Chapel School. Somebody in my interview told me that it was one of Cousin R.L. Lee's children, said that when she was a small child, Cousin M.O. Lee was the school teacher and Mary McLeod [unknown] came and she told me that story, and I had never heard it verified by anybody else and I just wondered.

JL: I never, never knew it. If so it was, not to my recollection. But I can tell you one thing about the school in Statesboro, William James High School. It was called Statesboro High and Industrial School when I was there. Later, after William James died and all, the, it was getting confused with Statesboro High School, the white school, so they wanted to change so they considered then changing it in honor of William James, who was the principal and founder of the school, for years. But he was a Morehouse man and he was quite a strong person. He went around through the country and solicited money for the school. He had a boarding school there. And at the time, there were not that many high schools around in the area so people from neighboring counties would come to Statesboro to high school there. And boy, he had dormitory, boy's dormitory, and a girl's dormitory, but he was through, actually going out and soliciting contributions and so forth. They're the ones that built that school. It didn't come from the county funds. Some of it might have, but most of that money came from solicited money through William James's effort.

AJ: Ok. Now, Mr. Polk, do you know where he went to school? Aaron Polk?

JL: Aaron Polk?

AJ: He was a college grad?

JL: He was not a college graduate.

AJ: He was not?

JL: No, he was not a college graduate. I don't know where Aaron Polk went to school. He was, he was a little older than most of those others and his last year that I worked with him, he was principal of the school. They named the school for him, Polk's Academy. He had done the same thing, built that school through solicitations and rallies and so forth to be held in the black communities to raise money and funds and that kind of thing. He was a very strong person. His son finished Savannah State College, and was principal of a school, Sylvania High School, Sylvania.

AJ: Oh yeah, I've heard of his name, Toussaint Polk. Ok. So he went to Savannah State.

JL: Yeah. So he was Aaron Polk's son. But I don't that, I don't know where, where he went to school.

AJ: Ok, now he had a daughter named Maddie Sue Lee too. I believe.

JL: Yeah.

AJ: Now she was at Willow Hill at one time, I heard. Did you know that? That was prior to, that was in the '20s, I heard.

JL: I didn't. Yeah. Yeah.

AJ: Ok. Now what about. Had you ever heard of anybody called Professor Ryans? I heard that name so much.

JL: I've heard that name but it seems to me that that was [unclear] at Willow Hill.

AJ: He was at Willow Hill, but I can't seem to get on his trail anywhere.

JL: Yeah, yeah.

AJ: So you don't know anything about his trail?

JL: No. No.

AJ: It was Professor Ryans [Rhymes?}. And there was a Professor Kemp. They were both at Willow Hill in the early, they were around the time that my grandmother and them were in school. Essie Powell. They were their teachers.

JL: Yeah. Yeah.

AJ: Georgianna Riggs, the daughter of Isaac Riggs, was the first teacher at Willow Hill, I'd found that out. Her mother, she had a daughter named Good-Saint, who was also a teacher in Bulloch County. I guess her real name was Lola. Her mother was the first teacher at Willow Hill. And then this gentlemen H.W.B. Smith had a brother named George Smith, was the third teacher at Willow Hill.

JL: Is that so? I didn't know that.

AJ: Yeah, he had a brother and I have a list of who the second teacher was. Now somebody wrote a history of the Willow Hill School, on one of these old, I guess, kind of like a large notebook about that size. You might have seen it. I was trying to know if you know who put that together. Did you have any idea about that? And from what I can gather, it was done either by Mrs. Eva Moore or Cuttingrooff Hall but people are fuzzy. I've narrowed it down to one of those two. And they, that's how we know the year it started. Cause in this they wrote that it had started in 1874 on Dan Riggs's place, in a turpentine shanty. Daniel Riggs married into the Parrish family, these Moses Parrish people and the Donaldson's the Parrish's and the Riggs's all married into the same group. This is the same family that Herbert Riggs came out of. I didn't even realize we were related to the Riggs, through my grandfather until I actually started doing this research. So it really goes back, you know, with a lot of these Willow Hill people. The Riggs's the Parrish's, the Donaldson's, those are really the main families that pushed that. Now did you know very much about H.W.B. Smith and his wife Amanda?

JL: Yeah. Yeah. We were all church members.

AJ: Now, Amanda Smith is a Donaldson. She's through the Donaldson line. That's cutting around Ruth Hall's sister. But, their grandmother was Dora Donaldson, who was my great grandfather, Benjamin Donaldson's sister. And so, I just late after that, realized I was related to them. But, Mr. Smith came

from, I think, Tattnall County. And he was born a long time ago. Now, I think he was a Tuskegee Man. Was he?

JL: I don't know where he, where he went to school. When I was in high school, when I first started high school, he was the industrial arts teacher.

AJ: At Statesboro?

JL: Yeah. And she was teaching home economics or some, some classes when I was a kid. Then later on, they, he was replaced with I believe the first voag teacher was Alonzo Fields.

AJ: At William James?

JL: At William James. And then after him, Blatantly. He was the principal, I mean he was the voag teacher when I, later on after Fields. Fields, both have taught me. [unclear] Smith, Alonzo Fields, and [unclear].

AJ: Who, who, living now, would be the most knowledgeable person, on early Bulloch County education? That you would know about?

JL: Al, I just, I don't have the foggiest notion, now. I'm just thinking about who were there and who's still living. So many have died.

AJ: Oh, ok. Really. I wish I could have gotten H.W.B. Smith. Mr. Fred Puggett probably would have been a good person. Nancy Powell would have been an excellent person. She knew so much. What, do you know the earliest black school in Bulloch County, I mean, from what you know, did you know anything about the first, do you know when William James was started? Do you know what year? Do you know where blacks went to school before William James? Or was there any?

JL: It was, it was the, when I was a kid, and that was quite a while ago, I'm 78 years old now. The school was there.

AJ: Willow Hill was there? I mean, William James was there?

JL: William James was there. It wasn't William James.

AJ: It was Statesboro.

JL: It was Statesboro High Industrial School. But before I went to school there, I went to school, to a private school, Blanshaw, Mrs. Viola Blanshaw had a little private school.

AJ: In Statesboro?

JL: Yeah. They had several little private schools around, community private schools around at that time.

AJ: Mrs. Blanshaw. Do you know any other private schools?

JL: I'm sure they had them. They had them but I don't know where they were. But, but, then after our first or second grade, and third maybe, then we started going to William James School. All of us, our whole family. All of us children went to Mrs. Blanshaw [unclear].

AJ: So a lot of the blacks in the county just weren't educated so long ago. They, some of them went to church schools, but...

JL: And, those who, you know, if you finished, at that time they, you know, 9th grade was the highest you could go even in Statesboro. And when people finished 9th grade, they would get a job. Go out teaching at the one teacher schools, out in the community. But later on, they got the high school and after high school, they would still go out and teach and go to summer school and continue toward the degree until they got their degrees.

AJ: Do you know anything about the school that they had at Guyton?

JL: Yeah, they had a school at Guyton. A school at Guyton and my, my cousin was the principal of the school at Guyton, Reverend J. W. H. Thomas.

AJ: That was your cousin?

JL: Yeah. That's my, his grandmother, his mother and my grandmother are sisters. Yeah.

AJ: Oh. He was the principal, he just to administer at at Johnson Grove church.

JL: He was at Johnson Grove, and he was at Tabernacle in Statesboro.

AJ: Ok. Now that was your cousin? I didn't realize that. And he was principal up there?

JL: He was principal at the school at Guyton. Yeah. He's the one who built that school down there.

AJ: He's the one who started that school? At Guyton? Ok. Cause that was, a lot of folk from Bulloch County used to go to Guyton for education. There was another academy somewhere near Savannah. Do you know the name of that academy. I think Cousin Amanda Smith went to that academy. And I was trying to remember what the name of that one...

JL: Near Savannah?

AJ: I think it was another academy. There was Guyton, and then there was another. I know...

JL: Well, you had one in Burke County. Bogg's Academy. It's still, it's still there. And, you had Selvin Institute in Brunswick. You had, one in Cordele, you had a lot of private schools around, because the cities just weren't, just didn't have the schools. It started out as private schools. In Augusta, you had...

AJ: Payne was there, but I know it wasn't an academy.

JL: Before Payne there, it was another, oh the other school there.

AJ: Braswell.

JL: Yeah.

AJ: Was it Braswell?

JL: No.

AJ: It wasn't Braswell. Ok.

JL: No, no. But in Augusta, in place [unclear]. In Savannah, it was Beach Cower. Cower High School it was called. Later they moved the beach next to it.

AJ: Was, was my father, Ezekiel Jackson, in any of your vocational ag classes?

JL: Yeah. I, I believe, wait a minute now, I believe that he, he, might have been one of those that helped build the school.

AJ: Ok. So, I'll ask him. Ok.

JL: He might have been one in that group. You know I told you Purvis and all. He might have, I think he was in that group.

AJ: I found...

JL: I think he was.

AJ: I found a notebook one time, that came from Willow Hill, I think it was a class that you had in agriculture. And I remember seeing my dad's name, Ezekiel Jackson, Fallon McFadda, and some other names, I can't remember what they were, in this book. Something associated with you. I don't, little red notebook.

JL: I believe, I believe he was in that group. Yeah, he was in that group who helped build that school. Ask him and give him my good regards.

AJ: I'll ask him. I'll do that, in fact I'll probably give him a call.

JL: I always thought a lot of him.

AJ: Do you remember my mother?

JL: Yeah, sure I do.

AJ: She got burned.

JL: Yeah.

AJ: Were you at Willow Hill at that time? Or were you away? It was in '51.

JL: I was away at the time.

AJ: Ok. And, you know my grandmother of course. In fact, y'all helped us out a lot when our house burned down. In fact, I remember you were hunting, when our house burned down, and you had a gun, and I remember that real good. I was small. That was in '56. And you came around and my aunt, Hazel, at the time, was crying and you was trying to console her. And the house was just burning. And y'all helped us out a lot. I remember that very well. A lot of that incident. Well, I didn't want to take up all your time, but at least I kind of wanted to get some information. I got to go check out of the hotel. Very helpful. It gives me a perspective.

JL: It's nice I got a chance, you know, to chat with you. Which I appreciate so much. And. But you asked me a question, and I wish I could refer you to someone now. That you could really count on. And as you said, you talked with [unclear].

AJ: She gave me some leads and we going to be talking again.

JL: [distant from recording device, words low and unclear] working the state. And...

AJ: Trying to get information on the Rosenwalds. I'm going to see, the county should have a lot of that but they may be very touchy about their files.

JL: Well, you got free information from me. I'm glad to give it up.

AJ: I want to look at those files on black education in Bulloch County.

JL: Well, if I wanted to do it, I would just open it up. Ask to look at the files. Its history. And not put the barrier there that you want to get about the blacks. Just want to know the history.

AJ: Of Willow Hill. Exactly.

JL: They might be more favorable towards letting you open the files up for you just to look at the history of education in Willow Hill. No need to know [unclear] centered around the blacks.

AJ: Right. I'm going to do that. In fact, I'm going to...

JL: But they should have, I mean, should be somewhere about, and you might really could find something in the state department of education files. If you had, if the guy was still living now, R.L. Cousins, who was director, at his time, director of Negro education in the state, who could talk to you. He could tell you everything you wanted to know about it.

AJ: He was knowledgeable, huh?

JL: Everything you wanted to know about it. But he's passed now.

AJ: How long has he been deceased?

JL: He's been deceased about 20 years now. And [unclear] we went to, a large contingent of us went to his funeral when he passed. He was, he was really a giant. He was a giant. He kept black people informed, black principals of schools knew more, really, about what was going on in the education of

this state than a lot of white superintendents did. He kept us informed. He was the kind of guy who would tell you everything, about what the scheming was, what everybody was saying, all the clouding that was going on, how to get around it, how to get the real core of questions and that kind of thing. He was just a gem. R.L. Cousins. He was really great.

AJ: Cousins. Well I'm going to, the Southern Education Foundation has a library of information. There may be, like I said I'm looking for a specific...

JL: Guy, who's over the Southern Education Foundation, is a good guy. He would, Mac Miller, he's on the Board of Regents in the state of Georgia.

AJ: He's still here in Atlanta?

JL: Yeah.

AJ: And he's over the Southern Education...

JL: Yeah, the Southern Education Foundation. And he would, he might be able to help a lot, education wise. Yeah. Mac Millen (Miller?)

AJ: Yeah, that's another good name to know. So, what are you doing now for yourself?

JL: Oh nothing. I'm, I've been retired now for ten years. Play a little golf. And I get involved in a whole lot of other activities, telephone call I got was from the [unclear] Federal Savings Association. I've been on the Board of Directors there, well, for years. And I now am a [unclear] member, now that I've got too old to be an active member. Past the age of 70, they make you a [unclear] member. And I'm on the Board of Directors for the United Methodist Children's Home. I'm Vice-President of the Atlanta Metro Lions Club and I'll be President in June, or I'll become President in June. I'm, was quite active in the church, I've kind of pulled out, away from that, trying to give young people the opportunity. I was Lay Leader in my church, also chaired the Pastor Parrish Relations Committee. I'm not as active, not active in a fraternity [unclear]. I'm a member of Atlanta Senior Golfers. We got a [unclear] club, still a social club. [low, unclear]. [unclear] County Club, which is a social club. Just kind of, just getting along, doing the best as I can. Enough connections to kind of keep myself active and well off.

AJ: What about your memoirs?

JL: Let them go. I let them go. You know, I was, at one time, at one time I was working in my church, pretty active in my church, I was elected Lay Leader of the Georgia Conference of the United Methodist Church when we had the central jurisdiction. We had two conferences. We had a North Georgia Conference, and South Georgia Conference. I was Statesboro, so the South Georgia Conference. When Bishop Boyne was, was, Bishop, Residing Bishop of the Central, in the Central Jurisdiction, he had, he saw the need to bring these two conferences together into one Conference. And he did. So they didn't like the majority of the ministers and the laymen weren't too happy with the Lay Leader in the North Georgia Conference and it was, same was true in the South Georgia Conference, so they elected me as their Lay Leader. And I was going to move, work in the church, but the church, I started to move, well

after I moved up to Lay Leader, I was active for a couple of years but then I had to give it up because I was moving up in the professional association as well. I was later elected President of the state Teacher's Association and I just couldn't do both, so I went with the education kind of thing. And it was through my affiliation with the state Education Association, I became actually exposed to a lot of activity going on in the country because I got involved in the American Teacher's Association, the National Education Association, and later on we merged those two. And it was prior to that merger, however, that they, people in national education saw me and offered me this job with the National Education Association of Southeast [unclear]. That's why I left Statesboro and come to Atlanta. I think when you were over at...

AJ: Alabama?

JL: Alabama, I was with the National Education Association then. Yeah, yeah.

AJ: Well that's wonderful. I know you've always been actively involved and I can honestly say that I'm, I've certainly always respected you and you had a big influence on me, and a lot of times, you know, we were rural kids, and you know, the kind of exposure you could bring to us. You never even realized yourself the impact that it has and I often remember, I remember one time you was teaching the sixth grade class, and I was in the first or second grade, I was in Mrs. Martin's class and you called me up to the class to spell "Wednesday" and "Thanksgiving". And I came up there and spelled that and you gave me a nickel because it was this large class and they didn't remember how to spell it because they didn't capitalize. And I said "Captital T, H".

JL: I remember that.

AJ: I always remember that. Just that little thing like that, for a little guy from a farm, you know, just means so much. And to see, see this is why the issue of a role model is so important. As a role model, we see you as a principal, we see your wife as a teacher, we saw black teachers, just that alone say "It can be done." Because you see it [tape ends].