

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

WITH

CYNTHIA OATES

August 2, 2013

Capitol Heights, MD

INTERVIEWED BY STEVE WARRICK

HARPERS FERRY NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR



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ABSTRACT

Cynthia Oates 1953-1955 Virginia Union 1957

Cynthia Oates attended Storer when the school closed; her mother was a Storer graduate. Oates taught in Wilmington Delaware, 30 years, where she still resides.

Persons mentioned: Mr. Knapp, Mabel Bell (Elliot), Dean Johnson, Mrs. McKinney, Mrs. Bird, Mrs. Ash, Dr. Terrell , Mrs. Jackson, Agnes Jackson, Mr. Mathis, Mrs. Brown, Guygan Hunter, June Thomas, Agnes Jackson, Mary Taylor, Mary Young, Dot Young, and Mr. Rathbone.

Steve Warwick: This is Steve Warrick, and today I'll be interviewing Mrs. Cynthia Oates for the Harpers Ferry Storer College oral history project. We are here at the Mather Training Center, which, of course, is part of, used to be Storer College. And this recording is HAFEHO-Oates.1.2013. Today's date is August 3, 2013, and Mrs. Oates, could you tell me where did you originally grow up?

[00:00:42.06] Cynthia Oates: I grew up in Wilmington, Delaware, born and raised.

SW: Born and raised?

CO: Uh huh.

SW: And when were you born?

[00:00:50.05] CO: January 17, 1936.

SW: And have you lived a large part of your life in Wilmington?

[00:01:00.22] CO: Yes.

SW: Where did you live outside of that?

[00:01:05.11] CO: Oh, my. It was my first teaching job, Colonial Beach, Virginia, which was my first teaching job, and I was there for a year. And then I moved back to Delaware and started teaching in the Wilmington public school system.

SW: And what was your age when you first attended Storer College?

[00:01:29.15] CO: I was seventeen.

SW: And what were the years that you attended?

[00:01:36.11] CO: I attended September 1953 to June 1955.

SW: So you were here when Storer College closed.

CO: Right. Yes.

SW: About how many students were here? Do you remember how many students were still at the college at that point?

[00:02:02.26] CO: I would say it was about two hundred, and that includes those that were on campus and those that commuted.

SW: And what did you do when the college closed?

[00:02:15.08] CO: I attended Virginia Union University in Richmond.

SW: Did you wind up with a diploma from Virginia Union?

[00:02:25.16] CO: Yes, I ended up with a BS degree.

SW: Okay. And what made you want to go to college?

[00:02:35.17] CO: Well, my parents always pushed education. It was always very important. My mother graduated from Storer. She started here in Normal School, and she was here for two years in college, and then she dropped out to get married. But in I think it was '45 or '46, she came back to get her degree, and her senior year, I came back and lived with her here.

SW: What kind of experience was that?

[00:03:14.03] CO: Oh, that was really different. I went to Grand View Elementary School. Mr. Knapp was the principal. It was a four-room school. You had, I think it was two grades in each classroom. So, that was very interesting, and that was very different from my experience.

SW: Yes, because Remington would have been much larger.

CO: Yes, yeah.

SW: Was it a big adjustment you had to make?

[00:03:51.14] CO: I don't remember it being such a big adjustment. The students were very friendly to me. I really enjoyed it, I guess, because it was different and it was something new for me.

SW: And what was our mother's name?

[00:04:11.13] CO: Mabel Bell when she was here in Normal School, and then when she returned, she was Mabel Elliott.

SW: Was it something instilled in you from your mother then to come?

[00:04:29.22] CO: Well, you know, by me being exposed to Storer, living here for a year, we lived right off campus because, at that time, Storer owned two houses right at the back here, and there was another couple that lived in the house with their son, and their last names were Allen, and we shared the home together.

[00:04:57.04] But we came upon the campus, and, you know, did the activities. The students knew us, and I loved it here. I really did. So, when I got ready to go to college, that was one of the things I wanted to do was come back here to go to school.

SW: And when you decided to come here, did you know what major you wanted to—

[00:05:19.29] CO: Yeah, I knew I wanted to go into education. My mother was a teacher. She got her degree from here as an educator, and that's what I always wanted to do.

SW: And you mentioned earlier that you started teaching after that. Did you have any difficulty finding employment after you received your degree?

[00:05:45.01] CO: No, I was very lucky. My first year, I got an appointment at Colonial Beach, Virginia, and I taught there for one year. Then I was able to get employment in the Wilmington public schools. So, I moved back home. And that's where my mother was teaching also.

SW: Oh, okay. And how long were you at Wilmington public schools?

[00:06:11.26] CO: I was in the Wilmington public school until 1978, and that's when we had desegregation in our schools. And then our schools were split up, the whole Wilmington area, and it was split up into four districts, four school districts. So, I went to teach in one of those.

[00:06:45.04] And then after that, it was split up into thirteen districts. That was interesting.

SW: I can imagine. And so did you then spend your entire professional career with the public school system there?

[00:07:03.17] CO: Yes. I retired from what was then called Red Clay School District, and I taught for thirty years all together.

SW: Okay, and you mentioned they desegregated in 1978. And, of course, you were at Storer after the historic Brown decision.

CO: Right.

SW: I guess being in a couple of different situations like that, what are your thoughts on some of that, when Storer closed?

[00:07:40.02] CO: It was kind of hard to go to another school because Storer was one of those places where everybody knew everybody. It was like one big family, and we were

all very close, got along very well. Everybody knew everybody, and there was a closeness with the instructors, with the people who were—even, you know, the custodians of the grounds.

[00:08:14.04] So, it was a very close relationship, and, of course, when I went away to Virginia Union, it wasn't like that because Virginia Union was a much larger school. So, it was a big adjustment for me.

SW: And were there other students that went to Virginia Union that were in your class?

[00:08:38.22] CO: There were two other girls that left here and went to Virginia Union with me at the same time.

SW: Did you stay in touch with them?

[00:08:49.29] CO: We did for a while, and then you know how over a period of time, you lose track, yeah.

SW: And when you first came to Storer, do you recall any of the procedures you had to follow in order to gain admission?

[00:09:08.21] CO: No, I was just looking at some of the questions that you had. [laughs] I never had to deal with how much books cost, how much the tuition was. I never had to deal with any of that. My mother handled all of that.

SW: Okay. And you mentioned the number of students here when you graduated. Of course, what were the number of students here in '55?

[00:09:42.01] CO: It was a small number. I don't think it was more than two hundred students. It was a small number of students. But that was a very, very sad day, very sad, because we all knew we probably would never see each other again, and that's the way it turned out, yeah.

SW: Have any of them come back for the reunion?

[00:10:11.01] CO: Very few in my class. Very few have come back. I used to come back with my mother because she used to come back almost every year for the reunion, and a lot of her classmates were coming back at that time. So, I did come back with her several times, and I was able to bring one year my daughter, and I was able to bring my grandson with me one year, which they enjoyed immensely.

[00:10:37.03] But then I started kind of not coming on a regular basis.

SW: What was that last day like then?

[00:10:53.01] CO: Oh, it was the saddest day in the world. It really was. I mean, people were crying all over the place [laughs] because nobody wanted to leave. Nobody wanted to leave Storer. If there had been a way for them to save the school, I think all of us would have come back.

SW: So that was, cars were lined up to move out?

[00:11:19.11] CO: Oh, yeah, yeah.

SW: Did you tour the campus one last time or anything like that?

[00:11:27.17] CO: No, I don't think I did that, yeah. I think right after graduation, you just got in your cars and left, yeah.

SW: And how about discipline at the college? Do you recall much in terms of discipline for academics, anything like that?

[00:11:58.20] CO: Oh, yeah. Well, they expected you to do well. They did not expect you to just [clears throat] be flunking out of a lot of classes. No, they expected you to do well. I had excellent instructors, and they, it was a high expectation for every student in whatever class you were in.

SW: And did that help motivate yourself and the other students?

[00:12:27.16] CO: Oh, yeah. If you wanted to stay here, it did. [laughs] Yeah.

SW: And do you recall any problems that were on campus when you were here?

[00:12:40.02] CO: Not really. You know, at the time, when you come in as a freshman and you've never been away from home before, I came from a strict home. So, the strictness here was just what I'd been used to doing [laughs] with adults telling me what to do, when to do it, and how to do it. So, it wasn't a hard transition for me at all.

SW: And you mentioned that you had lived off campus with the other family. Were other students off campus as well?

[00:13:19.21] CO: Yeah, there were some students that did live off campus.

SW: Did they live in Harpers Ferry?

[00:13:26.12] CO: Now, some of the students that I'm talking about also had, you know, families off campus like in Harpers Ferry, Bolivar, Charles Town. So, they commuted up here to Storer.

SW: Okay. And so it wasn't required then that you had to live on campus.

[00:13:47.05] CO: No, you didn't have to live on campus.

SW: And what about your favorite subject? You became a teacher, but did you have a favorite subject and why?

[00:13:58.05] CO: Well, I really liked literature and music. I think those were my two very favorite, yeah.

SW: And do you recall who the instructors were?

[00:14:17.26] CO: No. [laughs] It's too long for me to remember now.

SW: Were there certain courses that you were required to take?

[00:14:28.17] CO: Oh, yeah. You had to have English, math, what we call social studies, but they don't call it that now, history. We didn't have to take a foreign language. If you took a foreign language in high school, you weren't required to take it here.

SW: Did they have a foreign language instructor here though?

[00:15:01.07] CO: You know, I really don't—yes, they did. Yes, they do because I remember [Elbert] Norton said that he was in a French class. So, I guess they did.

SW: Do you recall what may be the most difficult class you had to take?

[00:15:20.01] CO: Chemistry. [laughs] Without a doubt.

SW: And who was the instructor? Do you recall the instructor of that class?

[00:15:30.03] CO: What was her name? We were just talking about her today. I can't think of her name right now. Miss Frances, yeah. She was hard.

SW: What made her class hard?

[00:15:46.29] CO: She demanded the best. She gave out the best, and she expected you to do your best, yeah.

SW: Now, while it was a difficult class, did you learn a lot in that class?

[00:16:01.12] CO: Yeah. [laughs] I think I learned more than I thought I was going to learn, yeah.

SW: And with that said, who would the student body think was one of the more difficult instructors or courses on campus?

[00:16:24.27] CO: Well, I know she was. And Dean Johnson ran a very tight ship in his classroom. Mrs. McKinney, she taught literature. She was very good. She was hard, but that was what I liked. So, I tried to do as best I could in that.

SW: And Dean Johnson, what course?

[00:16:59.22] CO: He was in the sciences. So, I didn't have too many classes with him.

SW: And also during this time, with a high level of achievement that was bestowed here, was there a high drop-out rate, or do you recall dropouts during that time?

[00:17:21.21] CO: You know, I did not realize that some students did not return until I guess maybe a couple of years ago when we were sitting up talking about some students, and we were saying, "Well, but you know, she only went here one year and didn't come back. She went to another college" or "He went to another college."

[00:17:43.21] So, a lot of—there were quite a few that did that, yeah.

SW: And when you were here, did you have a dorm parent?

[00:17:59.13] CO: Well, she was the dorm mother, I guess you would call her, yeah. Our first year was Mrs. Bird, and she had been here for centuries. [laughs] Then the next year, it was a Mrs. Ash. That was the dorm mother.

SW: And those were the two that you recall?

[00:18:27.10] CO: Uh huh.

SW: And what was their role here?

[00:18:31.28] CO: Well, they were to make sure that you followed the roles in the dormitory and that you kept curfew, kept your room clean because they came and checked your rooms at that time. They don't do that with students now. Too bad. [laughs]

[00:18:48.12] But, you know, they came and checked, made sure that you were making up your bed, your room was clean, made sure that you were following the rules of the dormitory.

SW: About how many instructors were on campus when you were here?

[00:19:13.19] CO: That's a tough question because many of them, I didn't have any contact with. So, I would just be pulling something off the top of my head.

SW: And were there also a division with male and female? Were there more male instructors or female instructors?

[00:19:39.22] CO: I think there were more male instructors at that time.

SW: And how about, were there white instructors?

[00:19:49.27] CO: Oh, yeah. I think that was about even.

SW: Really?

CO: Yeah.

SW: Okay. And do you recall who some of them were?

CO: No. You're getting me at an age where the memory is not so good now.
[laughs]

SW: And who was the president of the college when you attended?

[00:20:15.03] CO: Let me see. Dr. Terrell. Dr. Terrell was president.

SW: And did you get to know him at all?

[00:20:31.21] CO: Yeah, you know, he came on campus. He went down into the PX and came down and talked to the students. He would see you on campus. He was a very nice person, he and his wife.

SW: And how about the women's dean and the men's dean? Do you recall who they were?

[00:20:53.02] CO: I don't think we had them.

SW: Okay. At that time?

CO: Yeah.

SW: And you mentioned the custodian staff. How about other staff around campus?

[00:21:03.13] CO: Well, the people in the cafeteria—not cafeteria, but—it wasn't the cafeteria then. It was called the dining room where we ate. Mrs. Jackson was the head of it, and she was just wonderful to everybody. Everybody loved her. And her daughters were going to college here. In fact, one was in my class, yeah. But it was wonderful. It really was.

SW: And where was the dining room?

[00:21:37.16] CO: It was down in the basement of Brackett Hall, which was the girls' dormitory.

SW: And so is that the dorm where you were?

[00:21:46.20] CO: Yeah, all the girls other than Cook. We also had Cook Dormitory, and those were where the girls had home economics. That's where they lived.

SW: Okay. So, they had maybe different studio set-ups there in the dorm as well so they could take their classes?

[00:22:10.00] CO: Yeah.

SW: And were there any classroom situations?

[00:22:13.20] CO: Yes. Over in Cook, but not in Brackett.

SW: So, it made it pretty easy, I guess, to go to dinner then.

[00:22:24.25] CO: Oh, yeah. Just go right straight down the steps. You didn't even have to go out in the cold weather.

SW: And was this a coed dining room?

CO: Oh, yeah. It was a coed school. We did everything together.

SW: And what was it like? You mentioned a little bit about keeping the dorm rooms. What was life like living in the dorm?

[00:22:53.05] CO: Well, for me, it wasn't too difficult. I'm an only child. So, I was always expected to clean my room and make sure it was straight and always helped around the house. So, it wasn't that much of a difficult thing for me.

SW: And how about friendships? Did you form a lot of friendships in the dorm?

[00:23:14.04] CO: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. I did, yeah. Everybody was very friendly.

SW: Did you get a chance to pick roommates? Were roommates assigned?

[00:23:29.15] CO: My first year, my roommate was assigned to me, but if you wanted to move into another dorm, they didn't ever seem to be—I mean, another room, there was never a problem with doing that.

SW: Do you recall your roommate's name?

[00:23:53.12] CO: Yeah, my first roommate's name was Agnes Jackson.

SW: And how long did you room with her?

[00:24:00.27] CO: We only room together for one semester, and then she moved out with another person. So, after that, I had the room to myself, great. [laughs]

SW: For the rest of your—

CO: Yeah.

SW: Oh, no, kidding.

CO: Yeah.

SW: Well, that is nice.

[00:24:19.19] CO: Because the dorms really weren't overcrowded because we didn't have that many students. So, there were quite a few that were able to room by themselves, or they could choose who they wanted as their roommates.

SW: And about how many students did the dorms house? Say, your dorm, for instance?

[00:24:43.11] CO: I would say while we were there about fifty, yeah, and it was a big dormitory.

SW: And were there school organizations that you participated in?

[00:25:06.14] CO: Basically, I did choir. That was my biggest thing that I participated in, was in the choir. Oh, and basketball.

SW: Oh, okay. How was the basketball team?

[00:25:24.21] CO: Ah, we were okay. [laughs] Not like the girls' basketball teams of today.

SW: Yeah. Did you get to travel to different schools then to—

[00:25:36.20] CO: Basically the girls didn't. The boys did. The boys traveled a lot, but we didn't travel that much. We would play up in Charles Town.

SW: And with the choir, do you recall who was the choir instructor?

[00:25:56.09] CO: Mr. Mathis, my freshman year, and my second year there was Mrs. Brown.

SW: Do you remember any performances?

[00:26:11.12] CO: Oh, yeah. We used to travel quite a bit. We did quite a few performances.

SW: Where would you go?

[00:26:18.15] CO: Ooh, there you got me. I can remember us going to Washington, and I can't think of any other places, but I know we did because we did travel to other places.

SW: What type of music would you be performing?

[00:26:41.27] CO: Oh, all kinds, all kinds of music, yeah. We did classical. We did spirituals, contemporary music. So, it was a wide variety.

SW: And were you involved in the glee club at all then or just choir?

[00:27:04.02] CO: No, it was just choir.

SW: And how about fraternities or sororities?

[00:27:10.20] CO: We didn't have any. Yeah, we didn't have any fraternities, no sororities on the campus.

SW: And none at all, none off campus.

[00:27:20.28] CO: No, unh unh.

SW: Why do you think that was?

[00:27:24.26] CO: I really don't know, but I can't ever remember even when my mother was here if there were fraternities or sororities on this campus.

SW: What types of social events were held at the college for students?

[00:27:49.25] CO: Well, we had dances, and sometimes after supper, we would go down to where we ate, and they would have music, games down in the recreation for us down there.

SW: And how about plays. Did they perform plays?

[00:28:14.04] CO: No, we didn't, unh unh. Now, of course, we had the PX.

SW: And what was the PX?

[00:28:20.17] CO: The PX was where you could go and buy your sodas or ice cream or snacks and just sit around and talk and just socialize.

SW: A lot of students would be in there?

[00:28:34.15] CO: Yeah.

SW: So, if you walked in, you would always see somebody?

[00:28:38.12] CO: Uh huh.

SW: And how about transportation? What types of transportation was available here?

[00:28:46.11] CO: None, just like now. If you didn't have a car, you had a problem. Yeah. So, it was very important for you to have access to a car, yeah. Because, I mean, even getting down to the train station because they didn't have taxis, you know? And they still don't, yeah. Transportation's horrible.

SW: And they have a large hill.

CO: Yeah.

SW: That you have to climb.

CO: Oh, yeah. [laughs]

SW: So, people would pair up then? Maybe somebody would have a car?

[00:29:22.00] CO: Yeah. Now the girls couldn't have cars. The guys could have cars. But we would have to get permission to go in someone's car. Say, you wanted to go to Charles Town to, you know, buy some food or to the post office or what have you. You always had to have permission to do that.

SW: And is that true for any time you left campus or would it just be for going in a car?

[00:29:50.24] CO: Well, no, every time you left campus you had to sign off and get permission. They always knew where you were going.

SW: And was that true for males?

[00:30:01.01] CO: No, not for the males.

SW: Just for the females.

[00:30:03.18] CO: Yes, just for the females.

SW: Do you recall any field trips then that you went on?

[00:30:11.26] CO: No, no field trips.

SW: And how about services at the Free Will Baptist Church?

[00:30:19.13] CO: That was just every Sunday, and that was required. You had to go to church every Sunday, yeah.

SW: Do you recall who the pastor was when you were there?

[00:30:30.21] CO: No, I don't. And I don't think there was a regular pastor. I don't think there was.

SW: So they would have pastors coming in, depending on the week or the month, what have you?

CO: Uh huh.

SW: How about the service itself? Do you recall that it was a large service or was it mainly—

[00:31:00.17] CO: Well, it was a regular Baptist service. Yeah, it was a regular Baptist service.

SW: Mostly for students, faculty.

[00:31:13.14] CO: The students, yeah, uh huh. And sometimes you would have community people to come in and participate, but basically it was for the students.

SW: Do you recall any special events that took place?

[00:31:30.26] CO: No.

SW: And what about John Brown Days? Were they holding John Brown Days?

[00:31:37.15] CO: Oh, no, not around here. [laughs] That was a no-no. One of our instructors pointed out to us one time, he said, "Look around Bolivar and Harpers Ferry and Charles Town and see if you see anything named for John Brown." Nothing.

SW: And do you remember any notable guest lecturers or folks that came in?

[00:32:11.12] CO: No, I don't.

SW: What did you do in your spare time?

[00:32:19.13] CO: [laughs] Now that's a good question. Well, mostly we just sat out on the campus and talked, and we would play tennis.

SW: Where was the tennis court?

[00:32:37.21] CO: Right in front of this building, right there by the gate. You see an indentation? That's where the tennis court was.

SW: Okay. And we're in the Mather Building right now.

CO: Yeah.

SW: On Harpers Ferry campus. And so how many tennis courts were there?

[00:32:59.28] CO: Only one, only one, yeah.

SW: Were people lined up to play?

CO: Not too many people played tennis.

SW: Oh, really?

CO: Yeah, not too many people played. But this was where I learned how to play tennis.

SW: Was that just going out for fun?

[00:33:16.17] CO: Yeah, just going out and playing, yeah.

SW: Who helped you learn how to play tennis?

[00:33:21.05] CO: I would say Elbert Norton was the main one. Yeah, he played all the time.

SW: And were there others that played quite a bit?

[00:33:31.04] CO: Oh, yeah.

SW: Every day or on weekends?

[00:33:35.13] CO: Well, you know, just whenever you'd feel like going out there to play. It wasn't organized. You just went out to play.

SW: And did you go take any trips during your free time?

[00:33:50.00] CO: No.

SW: Into town, other towns.

[00:33:51.23] CO: Oh, yeah. We would go into Charles Town, you know, but other than that, no.

SW: And how about some of the other—did you ever get to Martinsburg or Shepherdstown?

CO: No.

SW: So, Charles Town was the main destination.

[00:34:09.17] CO: That was the main destination for us, yeah.

SW: And what did you do there?

[00:34:13.20] CO: Well, you would go shopping. There wasn't too much you could do because it was very segregated during that time. So, there were a lot of stores you couldn't even go into, and you definitely could not go into a restaurant at that time.

SW: And so there were no restaurants in Charles Town?

[00:34:34.05] CO: Oh, no, unh unh. No. Not unless you went into a black-owned place.

SW: Were there any there?

[00:34:45.21] CO: Yeah, there were some. There were some. I wasn't aware of many of them, yeah, because, you know, we were so restricted on this campus that we really didn't get to know the town of Charles Town, yeah.

SW: Did you go see any movies?

[00:35:11.19] CO: Yeah. You know, they used to show movies here on campus on the weekends, I think on Saturdays, Saturday nights. I don't think it was every Saturday night, but they did show some movies, yeah.

SW: Was that through the school or a student organization?

[00:35:30.27] CO: No, it was through the school.

SW: And how about Sunday afternoons? What would you do on Sunday afternoons?

[00:35:38.23] CO: Oh, boring, boring, boring. [laughs] Nothing you could really do because you had to get dressed up, and you had to go to church. And other than that, you know, just walking up and down the campus and sitting out on the campus and talking. That was about it, very little activity.

SW: And do you remember what month, during the years when you first started here, do you remember when they held graduation?

[00:36:19.12] CO: June, the early part of June.

SW: Early June.

CO: Uh huh.

SW: Did you go to the graduation?

[00:36:28.03] CO: I went to the last one. I didn't go to my freshman year graduation. I didn't go to that one. But the second year, because the school was closing. So, it was a big day, yeah.

SW: And that's what you were mentioning earlier then. Was that the last day on campus then?

CO: Yeah, it was.

SW: And how about, talk a little bit more about the buildings. Do you recall how the buildings were heated?

[00:37:12.01] CO: They were heated through—what do you call? [laughs]

SW: Radiators?

[00:37:20.10] CO: Radiators, yeah.

SW: So, they had a boiler in each building.

[00:37:26.12] CO: Yeah. And they were pretty comfortable. They were pretty comfortable during the winter. We weren't cold.

SW: How about during hot weather? What was the dorm like?

[00:37:38.09] CO: You opened up the windows [laughs] to get cool.

SW: Because no air conditioning.

[00:37:45.25] CO: No air conditioning at that time. And then, too, you know, in the wintertime, we would buy sodas or milk or juice and put them outside the window, and that's how they were kept because it was cold.

SW: Did you have a small refrigerator in the room at all?

[00:38:04.01] CO: No. You know, they didn't have those then. [laughs]

SW: And how about cooking? Were you able to cook in the room?

[00:38:11.28] CO: You weren't supposed to. Some people had little hotplates, but you weren't supposed to do that. I did not do that.

SW: Okay.

CO: [laughs]

SW: But some did.

CO: Some did.

SW: Now, was it the custodian that you were speaking about earlier that maintained the boilers as well or were there others?

[00:38:35.20] CO: Yeah. And you know, I can only remember one person that took care of the grounds and everything. His name was Johnny. I can't remember anyone else doing that.

SW: And you saw him doing it.

[00:38:50.24] CO: Yeah, all the time. He used to live right down the hill.

SW: He lived on campus as well?

[00:38:57.27] CO: Down the hill.

SW: And do you recall his last name at all?

[00:39:03.17] CO: I don't. That was all I knew, yeah.

SW: And how about what did you like best about the campus?

[00:39:18.19] CO: I liked the serenity of the school. I like where it's located. It's pretty quiet, but it's something that I don't think you can put your hand on it, but you never felt threatened or frightened. It was always very calm, peaceful, yeah.

SW: Was there anything you didn't care for about the campus?

[00:39:59.24] CO: Not really. I think some of the rules of us not being able to go into town or, you know, something like that, you know, as a teenager, but other than that, it was not bad, yeah.

SW: Did you have a favorite spot on campus that you liked to go to?

[00:40:23.04] CO: Just sitting right out there in front on the benches. And that's where just about everybody congregated was out that on the front on the benches.

SW: And at that time, were there a lot of trees on campus as well?

[00:40:37.28] CO: Oh, yeah, lined with trees, a lot of trees.

SW: And how about—you said you played basketball. Did you play in the gymnasium?

[00:40:51.15] CO: Yeah.

SW: What was the gymnasium like?

[00:40:54.03] CO: That was a barn. [laughs] It was a real barn and it had baskets on each end.

SW: Was it a large barn?

[00:41:06.19] CO: I wouldn't say it was a large barn, but you could play a basketball game in it, yeah.

SW: Did it have a basketball floor?

[00:41:19.20] CO: Yeah. Yeah, it did.

SW: Bleachers?

[00:41:25.04] CO: No, it didn't have bleachers.

SW: Would people come to watch?

[00:41:34.20] CO: Yeah. But you would have to stand up around the wall and watch, yeah. [laughs]

SW: Did a lot of people come to the games?

[00:41:47.13] CO: Not too many, not too many. But we would have some people from Charles Town that come and watch the games.

SW: And this was mostly the men's' team? Or both?

[00:41:58.21] CO: Well, both. Men and girls, yeah.

SW: Who did well? The men's or the women's team?

[00:42:07.20] CO: Oh, the men, of course. They had more experience, and they were going out more, and, you know, playing more. So, they did very well.

SW: Do you recall if there were any big sports rivalries with other schools?

[00:42:28.24] CO: No. Most of the time, our games were played up at Page-Jackson High School in Charles Town.

SW: And that was a bigger gym.

[00:42:43.15] CO: Yeah, and a better facility.

SW: With bleachers.

CO: Yes. [laughs]

SW: And how about some other buildings on campus. Could you describe the library that was here on campus?

[00:42:56.28] CO: It was very small, two floors. I would not consider it a very well-stocked library because I was used to a big library at home that had just volumes and volumes of books. But, of course, we weren't able to have that in that small space.

SW: Were you able to study in the library?

[00:43:33.03] CO: Oh, yeah, uh huh. Yeah, you could go in there and study.

SW: Did you study by yourself or with others?

[00:43:42.12] CO: With others, yeah. And either we did it in each other's rooms or we went into the library.

SW: Did you have specific study groups that you met with for different subjects?

[00:43:59.14] CO: No, I just think we—because most of us took the same courses. So, we would just get together and study.

SW: Do you recall some of the folks that you studied with?

[00:44:12.00] CO: Oh, sure, yeah. Do you want their names?

SW: Sure.

[00:44:17.13] CO: [laughs] Let me see. Guygan Hunter and June Thomas and Agnes Jackson, Mary Taylor. Mary and Dot Young were two that lived off campus. Their families lived in Charles Town, but they would come on campus. And there was a room in the dormitory that they could come in and spend the day in. So, if they had breaks in classes, they could go to this room and study and read or what have you, you know.

SW: So it's sort of like a commuter lounge.

[00:45:03.03] CO: Yeah.

SW: And how about some of the other buildings? Do you remember Anthony Hall?

CO: Yes.

SW: Could you describe what it was like?

[00:45:16.14] CO: Well, Anthony Hall was mostly administration downstairs, and upstairs, you had your classrooms. They had some classrooms down here, and you had an auditorium upstairs. It was a nice-sized auditorium.

[00:45:37.29] Yeah, we did used to give, come to think of it, we did used to have activities, give plays and have singing and all that, yeah.

SW: In the Anthony Hall auditorium.

[00:45:54.23] CO: Yeah.

SW: And how about the president's house? Do you recall that?

[00:46:02.05] CO: Oh, yeah, that was a nice house. It broke my heart to see them tear that house down.

SW: What do you remember about it?

[00:46:10.28] CO: It was big. It had a lot of land around it. It was two stories. But it was a very nice house, a very nice house. I could never understand why they tore that house down. It was right on the corner, right across from the church.

SW: Okay. What did it look like when you were here? Color? Do you recall the color it was?

[00:46:46.17] CO: No, I don't, unh unh.

SW: And how about the Lockwood House? Do you recall the Lockwood House?

[00:46:55.25] CO: Is that down?

CO: No, I don't. In fact, we just drove past there yesterday, and I never noticed it before. But I think when we were here, I think it was in disarray, and I think now they have remodeled it. So it stands out.

SW: How about the Brackett House?

[00:47:24.26] CO: Nope, the same thing.

SW: The Morrell House?

[00:47:30.10] CO: The same thing.

SW: And how about the, since you went to the church service, how about the interior of the Baptist Church? What was it like?

[00:47:41.03] CO: You mean, here at Curtis Memorial? The same. It has not changed. It looks the same. Now, they've done a lot of renovation down in the basement part, but the upstairs, the worshipping room is the same.

SW: And while you were here, since they were getting ready to close here, did you see any improvements on different buildings while you were here?

[00:48:08.01] CO: No.

SW: So, most of that work was probably done...

CO: Yeah. Did you know we used to have a water tower here?

SW: No. I haven't heard that yet. Where was the water tower?

[00:48:22.28] CO: It was right behind this building on the road behind this building. It was right there, a great big water tower. And we used to have terrific winters here, really cold, a lot of snow, beautiful. And one year, it was so cold. I don't know what happened, but it was icicles all over that water tower, and it fell.

SW: It fell.

[00:48:57.06] CO: Yeah. [laughs]

SW: And that was the last of it.

CO: That was the end of the water tower, yeah.

SW: Did it do any damage when it fell?

[00:49:04.29] CO: I don't think so.

SW: That's interesting.

CO: I think that happened like in the forties when I was back here with my mother. I think that's when that happened.

SW: So, no one was hurt, and it didn't do any damage. So, that's a good thing with that. Did it supply water to the school?

[00:49:36.11] CO: You know, I don't know what it was for. I really don't, but it was a big water tower. [laughs] So, you'd have to ask somebody about that.

SW: I'll have to ask some other folks about that. I sure will. How about the location of the chapel on campus here? Do you recall where that was?

[00:50:01.04] CO: That was the memorial. That's the only place where we had worship was there.

SW: Now you mentioned going into CharlesTown and a little bit in Harpers Ferry. Did you do much in Harpers Ferry?

[00:50:18.04] CO: No.

SW: Shop or anything?

CO: No, it was very prejudiced, and so we really did not have much of a relationship with the people in Harpers Ferry at all.

SW: So, those same segregation policies were in place with a number of the stores or restaurants that they were here.

[00:50:43.08] CO: Yeah.

SW: And so were a lot of those then off limits to the students here?

[00:50:50.17] CO: We just didn't go to—I mean, you know where you could go and where you couldn't go. So, you didn't bother. Now, there was a drugstore right across from the Episcopal Church on the main highway, Mr. Rathbone. Isn't that strange, I could remember his name. But he and his wife were very nice, always treated the students very well.

SW: And so students were able to go to the drugstore?

[00:51:28.06] CO: Oh, yeah, uh huh.

SW: And that was one of the few places that you could go.

[00:51:32.20] CO: Yeah.

SW: And how about, did the townspeople ever interfere with the college?

[00:51:39.13] CO: No.

SW: Everyone just stayed separate.

[00:51:42.01] CO: Yeah, everybody just stayed in their own place. And, of course, you have to remember now at that time, Harpers Ferry was not built up as it is now, you know, with the shops and the stores and so forth. So, it was very desolate down there, yeah.

SW: And how about during this time, what were students' relationships like with some of the white instructors?

[00:52:13.04] CO: Oh, very good. I thought they were very good. I never heard of anyone having a problem.

SW: Even during the height of—

[00:52:21.12] CO: Yeah, because I think people who came here to teach, that's what they came here for, to teach. And it did not matter to them what color you were. That was what they came here to do.

SW: And do you recall if any of those teachers had trouble in town?

[00:52:39.26] CO: I don't know. If they did, I wouldn't know.

SW: And how did students feel about the issues that were going on in the nation?

[00:52:52.19] CO: You know, at that time, we didn't even talk about it. We really didn't even—I can't ever remember having a discussion on segregation or anything like that. I never remember any classroom discussion on that.

SW: And how about outside the classroom then in terms of current events or news? Was there TV on campus or radio?

[00:53:26.24] CO: No, radios, but not any TV.

SW: So, people mostly—radios in dorm rooms?

CO: Yeah.

SW: Okay. And how about, what do you remember most about the college?

[00:53:54.21] CO: What really stands out is just how friendly everybody was. I mean, I guess you can't really understand this, but it was like a big family. People looked after you, took care of you, were concerned about you, and that was teachers and dorm mothers [laughs] and all the other students, yeah.

[00:54:27.07] And do you know, for the life of me, to tell you the truth, I can't even remember arguments. Isn't that strange? I cannot remember anyone having an argument. I'm not saying that it didn't happen. I'm just saying I don't remember.

SW: That's rare.

[00:54:49.09] CO: Yeah.

SW: That's good. And with these memories about the college, how would you say that Storer College, the education you received while you were here, how did it influence your life?

[00:55:06.09] CO: I was very lucky because the high school that I went to was also segregated, but we had well-educated teachers, and even at that time, our teachers were college graduates. Many had masters, and many had doctorates, and these were our high school teachers. So, excellent.

[00:55:42.24] And then I came here, and it was the same thing. So, they expected to give you the best. All you had to do was take it.

SW: And how has that applied in your real life, in your classroom experience?

[00:56:02.21] CO: I try to do the same thing. There were no excuses. There was no such thing as "Oh, the poor baby. She doesn't have a father in the home. "Oh, the poor baby didn't have breakfast this morning" So, they can't do their homework. They can't learn. They don't have a good learning environment."

[00:56:32.21] Nobody had those kind of excuses. Those excuses have just popped up, and it's an excuse not to teach because, to me, if you're a teacher, you take a child wherever he or she comes to you. If they can't read at all, it's your job to teach them. If they're only on the third grade level, then you should be putting them to the fourth grade level.

[00:57:11.06] But I used to hear people saying, "Oh, he doesn't know his alphabet."

“Yeah. [laughs] So, what are you going to do about it, if he doesn't know his alphabet? It's not excuse for you not to teach the alphabet.”

And see, that's how I came up. That was my experience with my teachers. They didn't care what level you came in on. That's where they started with you, and you kept on going.

SW: It sounds like a good way to go.

CO: Yeah.

SW: And how about the—what do you think about the Park Service and what they've done here to the campus?

[00:57:59.19] CO: I think they've done a really beautiful job in keeping up the campus because it really could have just gone by the wayside. If they had not stepped in, I hate to think of what would have happened to these hallowed grounds. So, they have really diligently tried to keep the soul of the school.

SW: And with them doing that and the reunions that take place, do you think it's prompted people to keep coming back?

[00:58:45.23] CO: Oh, yeah, yeah. They love coming—you know what? I don't know how many times I've walked around there and looked at those pictures. You come back every year and you do it. And you see something new every time you come back.

SW: So, you keep getting memories.

[00:59:05.07] CO: Yeah.

SW: And it's that important to you and your fellow students?

CO: Oh, yeah. Very much. Very much so. Of keeping the history. Of being able to come back and seeing and talking about, and remembering. It's really important.

SW: And is there anything else you'd like to add to this interview, anything that we may have missed?

[00:59:39.01] CO: No, I think you've covered it very well, and I think the Park Service really should be congratulated on—because they consciously, consciously tried to keep the spirit of the school alive when they could have just come in here and everything could have been wiped out, and that's what you see happening in so many different places, that the history is just wiped out. But that's not what they did, and I want to thank them for it. Thank you. [laughs]

SW: And I want to thank you for helping us out today, participating in the interview, sitting down, and telling me about your days here at Storer College. So, thank you.

[01:00:33.21] CO: And thank you.

SW: Okay.

[01:00:37.10] [End of File]