

ORAL HISTORY RELEASE FORM

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Special Restrictions: *None*

ORAL HISTORY DATA SHEET (to be turned in with tapes & transcript) 98-8

INTERVIEWEE: *Shirley Eanes*

ADDRESS: *Rt. 1, Box 275 HH
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DATE OF INTERVIEW: *April 15, 1998*

PLACE OF INTERVIEW: *Longwood College Library*

INTERVIEWER/S: *Loretta Parham and Veronica Myers*

TOPICS COVERED:

Closing of the schools in Prince Edward County

NUMBER OF TAPES: *1*

I- interviewer

SE- Shirley Eanes

I: 1998, Mrs. Shirley Eanes interview for civil rights class, Mrs. Susan Bagby, teacher.
Mrs. Eanes, please tell us your full name.

SE: My full name (is) Shirley Davidson Eanes, the Davidson being, um, my maiden name.

I: If you wouldn't mind telling us, when were you born?

SE: Too long ago! (Laughter) December 3, 1952.

I: Where were you born?

SE: Prince Edward County.

I: Do you have any siblings?

SE: I have three brothers that I was raised with.

I: And what impact did the strike have on you and on your siblings?

SE: Hmm... You have all day? (Laughter) Ok, it had a tremendous impact, um, I'm not quite sure where to begin with that, with that question.

I: Anywhere you like, yeah.

SE: Excuse me?

I: Anywhere you like.

SE: Anywhere?

I: What you remember the most.

SE: Ok. Well the impact, I think, was strongest on myself and my older sibling, my oldest brother, because we were the oldest and we were impacted more, uh, because, um, schools closed in, uh, fifty-four, when, uh, we were supposed to start school. Ok. Uh. Well he would have started a year behind me, but, um, so, in actuality I missed four years, and he missed three. Then the second brother missed two, and the first brother began school when the schools reopened in 1963 as three schools. So, uh, it impacted us in the beginning, uh, we were robbed, I would say, um, four to three to two years of, uh, the beginning of our education. Of public education. Or formal education. Um. We were robbed basically of the basics of formal training, in our educational lives. So,

therefore, I think, um, academic process, or academic progress in some areas, particularly in my life, uh, could have been better, had I started school when I was supposed to, uh, particularly in the math and science areas. Um. As a teenager, it impacted my life because I was, um, I always had to play catch-up in some area or another. Um, particularly in math. And then as an adult, um, I didn't realize this until I had taken the class. How it had impacted my self-esteem was really basically bothered by it. Um, because they were younger and, um, further on in my life as an adult, uh, I always never quite felt, um, how can I put it, up to standard with others. Not realizing that it was because of being robbed in the early years. Never knowing what it was until I took the honors class, um, during my college years. Uh. Taking that honors class was an eye-opener for me. It was a healing process for me. Uh. But the school closing was a great impact on my life.

I: What occupations of your parents?

SE: My mother has just retired, and, uh, she worked thirty-one years at, uh, in a factory. My father retired, uh, let's see, five-six years ago. I think he worked 40 years. At a company called Buffalo Shook.

I: In Lynchburg?

SE: No, that's here in Farmville.

I: In Farmville.

SE: Um-hum. Now I don't know what the name of the place is now. It may not be Buffalo Shook and Company, now. It may be something else.

I: Ok. I've heard of it.

SE: Um-hum. It's a woodcutting. I think it used to be a logging and woodcutting. I think that's what they still do now. It's changed hands several times. So I'm not real sure. I think. But they've been laborers. Neither one of them are skilled at any particular thing.

I: Did your decision to become a teacher have anything to do with this situation, with the closing of the school?

SE: Um. Not directly. My decision to become a teacher. How can I put this? There was always an ingrained part of me that is a teacher, ok? Um. But my decision to become a teacher was basically because I enjoy working with children. I realize, um, that the county that I'm in....uh... There wasn't much else that I wanted to pursue. So, the decision to become a teacher was basically a circumstantial decision. Ok? More than being based upon the school closing. Um. I've always dabbled in some way or another in teaching. I've always worked with children in one way or another. Uh. Informally teaching, so...

I: Ok. Do you know Reverend Griffith?

SE: Not personally. I met Reverend Griffith several time. Uh. In church and on the street. But I did not have a personal relationship with him. I went to school with his children.

I: What were his children like?

SE: Uh...(Laughter) They were very quiet. Very mannerable. Very thoughtful children. And I don't mean thoughtful in the things that they did for others, but just very, intricate type people. Very intristic people. Um. I never found, uh, them to be extremely outgoing. I guess they were very quiet children. I took French with, um, their daughter {Coquise?} I think it was French. We had a class together. Because I took an accelerated class or two when I was in high school so because {Coquise?} was in a higher grade. Um. And I always admired them. I really did. I admired them because of the way that they handled themselves. They were very diplomatic in, in the way they handled themselves in school. They were diplomatic in any particular situations that went on in school that were negative. They always seemed to be, there behind the scenes, but never actually in there punching, you know what I'm saying? Very diplomatic young people.

I: Was your family supportive of the strike?

SE: No. Not that I can remember. I don't remember my parents being very much one way or the other. My parents were very hard-working, particularly my father at that time because my mother wasn't working. And, I think that his main concern at the particular time was to make a living. To provide for four kids and a wife. um. At that particular time I doubt that he was making a dollar an hour. So, uh, I think education was, um, important to them. But I don't think it was the most prevalent thing. I think that they thought that it was going to eventually be over. You know, we're gonna wake up tomorrow and this thing's gonna be over. We're gonna wake up tomorrow, this thing's gonna be over. Next year thing thing's gonna be over. You know, just kept going that way. Um. My mother taught us at home. So, uh, we I guess we were the first home school in Prince Edward County maybe. I don't know.

I: How do you feel about the role of Longwood in the closing of Prince Edward County?

SE: Ok. Could we cut that out for a minute? Cause I have a question?

Um, my understanding is that the um the school at Hiner was, um, come on the scene after the schools were closed. So, now my feeling about that, if that school was produced solely for children of white professors so that they could continue their education...then, I would say that was a purely racist movement. Ok? Uh, regardless of whether it was instigated by Longwood staff, or administrators, or just people in the community. Any

time you, uh, pursue to have education for a certain set of people and not all the people, then that's a racist movement. So that there in itself for me, um is a negative.

I: Have the children that you teach been educated about the history of Prince Edward County?

SE: No they have not.

I: Do you think that there will be any moves made within the next couple of years to get any curriculum like this class into the public schools of Prince Edward?

SE: If I stay in Prince Edward County Public Schools I hope to. I really do. I have, this year in the social studies class that I teach, I teach fifth grade, during Black History, I began to bring in some of the instances of, um, segregated education. Because we were doing, uh, some Black history. Um. This is my first year at Prince Edward County, so I I didn't know, I wasn't very comfortable on how much I could bring into the classroom. But every opportunity that I get I mention to my students that they are very, very fortunate to have the type of education that was closed to us, and in, in mentioning that, then I bring in the history of Prince Edward County. I haven't taught it personally, but I do mention it. I guess you could say it's like a mini-lesson. Uh, to be, uh, brought in with the regular curriculum that I do, that I do teach.

I: Do you think if, you could get curriculum about Prince Edward County into the school system, do you think that you'd have support of the School Board, to have that taught?

SE: I'm not sure. I'd think this would be a long process. I'm not sure. And when I say that if I stay at Prince Edward County, um, I would like to, move toward that. I'm not saying that would be any short-term goal. Um. We would have to feel that out and take it day by day, or year by year. And just see what happens with it. Uh. We have a new superintendent. She's very interested in the history of Prince Edward County. Um. I'd think if that's broached with her, I'd think she'd look at it. I think she'd look at the possibilities. I don't know that it has been. But it's certainly something that needs to be broached. Because our children in Prince Edward County know nothing of their history. Our fifth graders, our fourth graders, sixth, seventh, eighth graders. I don't know what's been taught in the high school. I'm sure that some things are mentioned, during Black History Month. But it's just Black History Month. History is history; it shouldn't be just taught once a month.

[different interviewer]

[SE-you have your voice? I- (clears throat) It's alright]

I: Along those same lines. This is such a big story, and, um, Prince Edward was the only place that closed it's schools. Why do you think it's not publicized? we didn't really learn much in our history classes, and then here, in Prince Edward, it's not even taught regularly. Why, why do you think that is? I mean, you hear about Martin Luther King,

and boycotts, and I think that this story is right along the same lines. It's just as big. Like why isn't it told?

SE: I think, it's a power thing. I think that, um, the powers that be in Prince Edward County, then, and even now, uh...I think it's their choice to either publicize or not. I think that the leadership among black people in this county, is very poor, and, I think that black, a lot of black people who were reared in this county, not the people who had come into this county, but were reared in this county...Many of them have always been led. And, they're not about to put jobs on the line, family on line, lives on the line, to forge ahead and say, ok. Let's get Prince Edward county in the news. Let's make some stink. The only time anything makes the media, makes a magazine article, or is publicized is if it's dirty. It's got to have a little, a certain amount of stink to it. And then it's recognized. But, this county has tried to keep things clean. Uh, low keyed. Uh, so that we look good. And I don't think anyone's willing to rock that boat.

I: Do you think that, it, do you think the schools would ever close again? If someone were willing to rock the boat, and say our school needs to be told, and just shake things up a little bit, enough so that the people in this community, who are still here from when it all happened; their grandchildren, do you think that things could ever get bad enough so that the schools would close again this time?

SE: Things got bad in the past, to close the schools because of race. Ok? One race pitted against the other. One race more in particular than the other, ok? In 1955, 1954-55, was a black-white issue. White being we don't want to go to school with you. You, you're black. You're not good enough to go to school with us. Um. We'll live in your neighborhood, we'll talk to you, but you can't go to school with us. 1963, when schools reopened, they reopened with a reassurance of governmental tactics. ok. Political, here we are. Um. A young president wanted to look good. Ok? And possibly feeling good about what he was doing. Taking this thing to the Supreme Court, reopening it, and saying, ok, Prince Edward County is the only system in, in the United States that's got it's doors closed to black children, even in the deepest part of the segregated south, black children go to school. We can't let this happen. So we opened up our schools. They opened the schools. 1970, in the Seventies, we see a resurgence again of, um, black-white problems. Black power, ok? And in the Eighties we see, uh, somewhat of a decline of black power, white power. We see a mixing, more of a mixing. In the Nineties you see more of a mixing. Ok? In the Nineties you see multicultural diversity, more than just black-white issue. ok. In our public schools now we have more of a cultural diversity- not just black-white issues. And in saying all that, I said that to say this; because of cultural diversity, because the county has become so culturally diverse, I don't see the schools could ever close under the same circumstances.

I: Do you feel that any healing has taken place in Prince Edward? A lot of our speakers are persons who were in the county, who were involved in the strike; Their families lost their jobs, a lot of them had to move away, and they don't feel that they'll ever get over what happened. They don't feel that they'll have any sense of healing at all. That they'll

always be angry when it's mentioned, when the situation is spoken about. Do you think that there has been any healing in Prince Edward, that you've seen?

SE: In order for healing to take place in any situation, there has to be closure. This situation has never had closure. In a death, in order to get over the death, you have to have a funeral. There's never been a funeral of Prince Edward County Schools being closed. Healing will only come when there's closure to this entire situation.

(laughter)

I: Do you think that the buy-back of the R.R. Moton School will help to start the healing, the closure? Maybe? No?

SE: NO. I just think that's another step in the process. If...if the citizens of Prince Edward County could some way have formal, or have had formal apologies; not just black, not just black, but black and white, because there were whites who did not, who were unfairly treated, too. There were poor whites who had to sacrifice every penny they had, because they wanted their children to go to school, and not test until they had spent lots of money, and some of them are still recovering, to send their children to the foundation school. So in, in, in that sort the public schools to them were closed, but not fairly justified, to them also. Uh. So, and I'm not even sure that a public apology, or written apology, persons paid back their tax money, um, my parents paid taxes every single year, part of your tax money goes to your public schools in your county. None of this was reimbursed. There were, there has never been any retribution to the situation. Um, So, no, I don't think, uh the reopening of R.R. Moton, or what is it? —the buy back—the buying of the museum. I think the museum is a good thing to have, I really do. I think it's a good thing to have. Um. I think it'll keep history alive.

I: [Definitely ?] is there anything you would like to share with the people about what happened in Prince Edward County? Just information, or why do you think this story is important to share?

SE: I think the story's important to share. In 1998, it's important to share because so many young people black, first of all, need to know their roots. Ok? White, need to know what has happened, that they cannot live in a segregated world and think that everything's ok. U, I think that it needs to be shared. Even on a national (inaudible) so that people will realize that, uh, even though the small place like this, for what may seem like a small segment of time in history, ok, um, is very important, to let us know how racial injustice, racial prejudices, can rip people apart. A lot of people in this country have not recovered from the school closing. Um, a lot of the children who are grandchildren of the parents I went to school with, have not recovered. Because, uh, they have no dream. They have no vision. They, it's almost like things were cut off, in 1963 when the schools reopened, and that was it. You know. Now I, that may be attributed to some of that, because this is a small county. But there's an underlying oppression in this county, and I think that it's still from the days of the schools being closed. However, I

think that we've made tremendous leaps and bounds; tremendous leaps and bounds. But, uh, we have a long way to go.

I: what has made you stay in this county?

SE: I'm married. I raised two children here. I'm committed to my marriage. I'm committed to my husband. He has had no desire basically to leave here. Not until the recent years. Um. Yes, I would have moved. I would still move.

I: How would you say Prince Edward's changed in the last thirty-four years?

SE: I've seen culture diversity. Not on a large scale, but I've seen it. Not that it's black-white anymore. But there's still areas in our surrounding areas where you go and it's just black-white. We're culturally diverse here. And whenever you see cultural diversity, you see growth. Ok. Because certain things don't become an issue anymore. You can't you don't just concentrate on one or two things now, you have to concentrate on a multiple of things. Um...Before I saw cultural diversity, I still saw separation. Ok. And even as a parent, bringing my children up in the public schools, I had to fight for the little bits of steps of progress in their educational process. I had to constantly, stay on top of things. Um. I've seen racial diversion in job equity. There are many, many talented black people in this area, but they don't have the top quality jobs that they should have. So they leave. Many of them leave. For instance, my brothers. I have three brothers who are in, um, management levels in, on their jobs. I have a brother who works for, um, Bell Atlantic. He is a CEO in his division. And I have another brother who is, um, he does inventory, he's an inventory specialist, and he's a manager in his position. But they had to leave the company. This would not have happened if they'd stayed here. A lot of that is because there's no industry here. But the industry that is here, many times, whites are brought in from other areas and given level, management level positions. So...

I: Well thank you very much!

SE: You're welcome! Did I give you enough?

END OF TAPE