

LUM 181A

INTERVIEWER: Lew Barton

INTERVIEWEE: Earl Barton

April 25, 1974

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I: This is April 25, 1974. I'm Lew Barton recording for the University of Florida's History Department's Oral History Program. This afternoon we're near Magnolia School again, and with me is a young gentleman I want to talk with just a little while. What is your name, Sir?

B: Earl Barton.

I: Would you tell us a little something about yourself, Earl?

B: Well, there's not much to tell.

I: There's always a lot to tell.

B: Well.

I: How about your family? Do you want to tell us something about your family?

B: Well, I don't have much family.

I: Are you a happy care-free bachelor right now?

B: Right.

I: How do you like that state...

B: It's...

I: ...that state of life?

B: It's fair.

I: Yes. It has its advantages and disadvantages, doesn't it?

B: Right.

I: What do you do, what do you do every day?

B: I'm a concrete sub-contractor.

I: You pour concrete. You mix and pour concrete floors and this sort of thing?

B: Right. Yes, driveways, patios.

I: Do you live here near Magnolia?

B: Yes, I do.

I: What do you think of the political situation right now? Watergate and all the rest of it?

B: That's something else.

I: Where are you working at right now?

B: Federal.

I: Are you the boss of that outfit?

B: Yes, kind of.

I: The Saddle Tree area where you live here in Robeson County is a pretty live wire community, isn't it Earl?

B: Yes, it is.

I: I've noticed within recent weeks, well, recent months, that many of these rural areas have their own fire departments. Are you connected with the one here?

B: Yes, I am.

I: How long have you had a fire department?

B: Almost two years.

I: Has it done a lot of good do you think?

B: Yes, it has.

I: Are you one of the fireman?

B: Yes, I am.

I: Are they all volunteer firemen?

B: Yes, they are.

I: About how often do you have a fire?

B: Well, it depends on the season. During fall we have more fires than winter than any other time.

I: There's a lot of brush sage and that sort of thing in this area. Do you have many forest fires?

B: Yes, we do. We have more of that than any other type fire.

I: That's about the hardest kind of fire to extinguish, isn't it?

B: It is. It's a lot of hard work getting one out.

I: Do you have any trouble organizing the people in a community project like this which is purely voluntary?

B: Well, it takes time. But it's not a whole lot of trouble. Everybody's pretty willing to put half in.

I: Do you, wonder how much money you've got invested in your fire department.

B: Oh, I'd say eighty thousand dollars.

I: How do you raise this kind of money, Earl, in a small rural community like this?

B: Well, we have cook-outs, sell plates _____, this type of thing to raise money. We had an auction.

I: Well, that's certainly commendable. Do you know whose idea it was to get your fire department started?

B: Yes, it was our chief, Harold Bell.

I: Harold Bell who lives near here, doesn't he?

B: Right.

I: Do you have regular meetings to brief you on what you should do in

case of fire and that sort of thing?

B: Yes, we have a meeting every Tuesday night, and we also have a training program.

I: Do the people attend these meetings pretty regularly?

B: Yes, we have about twenty-five active.

I: You're right here near the Magnolia School. Is this the biggest, this used to be the biggest predominantly Indian school, wasn't it?

B: Yes, it was. It still is I think.

I: Do you think it's still considered a predominantly Indian school?

B: I think so, yes.

I: Who is your principal over there right now?

B: John Brooks.

I: John Brooks, while he's replaced, he replaced Mr. Frank Epps several years ago?

B: He replaced Robert Hunt.

I: Oh, yes. He replaced Robert Hunt who replaced...

B: Mr. Epps.

I: He replaced Mr. Epps. Mr., didn't Mr. Epps pass away some time ago?

B: Yes, about two weeks ago.

I: How do people in this community feel about Mr. Epps in his passing, Earl?

B: Well, it's been pretty sad for most of the community.

I: I talked to his widow today and she seemed very sad about the whole thing. But ___ ___ do you consider him to be or to have been one of our foremost leaders?

B: I do, I sure do.

I: I don't think I've ever heard anything ill said about him in my life, have you?

B: No, I couldn't say I have.

I: Seems that most everybody liked him. Did you ever have any personal dealings with him at all?

B: Yes, I have. He's the one who gave us the ^{land}~~money~~ for the park station.

I: He was always trying to help somebody, wasn't he?

B: Right.

I: And I'm sure the community will miss him. What do you see for the future of this community? Do you think it's going to grow and develop?

B: Yes, it looks good. I'm pretty sure.

I: Right near here you've got a, I noticed that you have a good-sized trailer park and a lot of trailers and that sort of things, and the community is pretty thickly settled through here, isn't it?

B: Yes, it is. We have a little housing project right behind this trailer park, about twelve houses.

I: It won't be long now before people will go to the polls to vote again. Do you find any excitement about voting and what people are going to do in the community now?

B: Yes, it's all exciting I think.

I: Do you think the Indian people are voting more freely now than they used to?

B: Yes, I'm sure they are.

I: Are they still registering them that you know of?

B: Well, registering is over.

I: Oh, the registration books are closed it's so near to election time.

Do you know what day our election comes on? I've, my memory is kind of poor there. I never fail to find out because somebody will be sure to remind me when the time comes so I never miss voting. Do you know the exact date it will be on?

B: Yes, it comes May the seventh.

I: On May the seventh. Wonder what we're going to be voting on this time. We're going to have to get new county commissioners, you think?

B: Yes, the congressman, the sheriff.

I: Who do you think is running for sheriff this time.

B: We have four. We have Malcolm McCloud. He's white. We have Jack West, is white. And we have Campbell. He's white. Then we have one Indian, Tom Blanks.

I: Tom Blanks, is he the one who is head of the Lumbee Regional Development Association? Is this the same Tom Blanks?

B: Yes, it is.

I: How do people feel about him?

B: They feel pretty good I think. He stands a good chance I hope.

I: Of course, this will be a county-wide vote, won't it?

B: Right.

I: Sheriff Malcolm G. McCloud has been in office a long time. I don't know just how many years, do you?

B: Yes, sir. Twenty-four.

I: He's been in office in Robeson County as Robeson County Sheriff for twenty-four years?

B: Right.

I: I wonder how the people feel about him, Earl?

B: Well, it's time to make a change and retire him. I guess.

I: Do you think that people feel this way?

B: I'm pretty sure they do.

I: Wonder how he's managed to stay in office this long.

B: Apparently he's been a fairly good sheriff. Apparently he has or he wouldn't be there that long for the people to think so.

I: Right. He's certainly been there a long time and you have to sort of admire success, don't you?

B: Right.

I: Do you know him personally?

B: Yes and no. He wouldn't know me, but I'd know him. I've had a little dealings with him a lot.

I: Do you think this is the way it is with a good many of the people in Robeson County?

B: Right.

I: They know him by reputation even if they don't know him personally?

B: That's right.

I: Do you think he's thought of as a fair man?

B: I'd think so.

I: Well, we can talk about it because this tape won't be played by anybody until after the election. So it'll be interesting to see how it all comes out. With these three people running anything could happen at this point, couldn't they?

B: Right.

I: I hear the Robeson County Board of Elections got a new chairman of the Robeson County Board of Elections who wasn't an Indian this time, but who was still a Republican. Does that surprize you?

B: No.

I: Do you think this is an indication that people want to change no matter what, and they are changing things?

B: That's right.

I: For instance, in your work with people every day you meet a lot of people who are not professional politicians, they're not speakers. They're just, like myself, ordinary everyday people. Do they talk about them among themselves much about politics?

B: Yes, this time that's more talked about than anything else right now, I think.

I: Of course, you've, have you lived in Robeson County all your life?

B: Yes, I have.

I: Can you, do you think this is a change from the attitude in the past?

B: Yes, it's a big change.

I: Do you think people are more interested in politics than they ever were before?

B: Right, they are.

I: Do you think the Indian people see politics as one of the ways of helping themselves or improving things for themselves?

B: Yes, they do.

I: And do you think this is a strong feeling, Earl?

B: Yes, I'm pretty sure it is.

I: Can you see a lot of difference in the attitude now than it was just a few years ago, say let's say, let's pick out a particular time.

Say, ten or fifteen years ago?

B: Yes, a great deal.

I: I remember that Sheriff McCloud, for example, was sheriff on the night, on that magic night of January 18, 1958. Do you remember what happened that night?

B: Yes.

I: What happened, Earl?

B: It was the, I don't know, it was the Klu Klux rally at Maxton, I think it was.

I: The one that didn't get off?

B: Right, the one that didn't get a good start.

I: You weren't over there that night were you?

B: No, I was close by.

I: Did you talk to some of the people who were going?

B: Yes, I talked to a lot that was going.

I: Were the people very angry back then?

B: Yes, they were.

I: I've heard a lot of reports and read a lot of reports about that incident which was such, which attracted so much attention in newspapers, in radio, in T.V. and so on. But I've heard different reports. Now, for example, I've reports in the, in Life magazine, in Time magazine, in Grit, in the New York Times, in Newsweek magazine, and everybody gave a little bit different account of it. What, what did they tell you happened, Earl? What did you hear about it? Can you remember any-

thing about it?

B: Well, the exciting thing I remember it was it must have been a little Vietnam.

I: It must have been what?

B: A little Vietnam.

I: Yes. Of course, I wasn't there that night the reason being that my vision is so poor and the people were afraid, ~~and~~ the people I talked to were afraid I would be trampled and that sort of thing. But I was in touch with the situation because I was listening in on the radio, and there was a reporter from this, from the town near here. Lumberton, WTSV, and he was in a ditch and he was describing what was going on. But it was certainly very exciting, wasn't it?

B: Yes, I was listening on the radio, too.

I: Do you think we had as many as a thousand people there that night?

B: I'm pretty sure there was I'd think.

I: Do you think our people had the Klansmen out-numbered?

B: I'm sure they did.

I: Wonder if the Klansmen were armed. Did you hear anybody say they were armed, that they had, that they wore pistols and that sort of thing?

B: I'm sure they did, yes.

I: Have you heard anybody say that any of the Klansmen fired back?

B: No, I haven't.

I: I know at that time Malcolm G. McCloud was still sheriff of Robeson County, and of course, you can hear all kinds of stories and descriptions

of what happened. But somebody reported that they heard Sheriff McCloud, who came to the scene, oh, I don't know how much later, but everything was probably about over when he got there, don't you think?

B: It probably was.

I: But I've heard reports and read reports that Sheriff McCloud said, "Come on folks. Let's all go home. If we get home right now we'll be in time to watch Gunsmoke." Did you hear that?

B: No, I never heard it that way.

I: Yes. I read that somewhere, and I have many newspaper clippings. But I don't remember right off-hand who reported that. But at first there were so many things written about that thing that it would be impossible to remember it all. I guess what was written about that would fill several books, don't you think?

B: Right, I'm sure it would.

I: How do you think people felt about James E. Cole of Marion, South Carolina, who was Grand Wizard at that time?

B: Not good.

I: You know our people have, it's been sort of our people that they're very hard to organize and to get together, and so I guess we have something to thank James Cole for, and that is that he organized us, really, didn't he?

B: That's right. He did.

I: Well, he got most of our people together. But they were all together against him. But it was a form of getting them together, wasn't it?

B: Right.

I: And do you think our people began to take more interest in themselves following that?

B: Yes, they have.

I: We had been a, it seems to me we'd been an easy-going people who took everything lying down and never complained much for a long, long time. This incident made everybody so mad that they sort of came out of their shells. That's my own personal opinion, but what about yours?

B: Well, mine's about the same. People have started getting that, and they're still getting that.

I: Do you think this is going to lead to something good for our people in the way of advancement and that sort of thing?

B: Yes, it will.

I: How do you, I want to ask you a personal question, but don't answer it if you don't want to, how do you feel about interracial dating? Do you think that hurt us with other races, what happened at Maxton during the routing of the Klan and all?

B: That's a good question.

I: Well, don't answer it if you don't want to. Have you ever thought about it?

B: I've never really thought about it. But to me it helped us in a lot of ways, in that way.

I: Do you think our people began to respect themselves more, and that other people began to respect them more, too?

B: Right, yes.

I: We had a lot of troubles, for example, during the period 1864 to 1874 when Henry Barry Lowry was on the rampage, so to speak, and his

gang. How do you think our people feel about Henry Barry Lowry? Do they see him as a hero or as just an outlaw or what?

B: I'd think a hero.

I: Do most, do you think most of the people you come into contact with feel this way about him?

B: I'd think so, yes.

I: Of course, our views of Henry Barry Lowry are naturally very different from the views of ^{the} other groups. You wouldn't know about the way they feel, other groups, other ethnic groups feel about him, would you?

B: No, but I have a pretty good idea.

I: Earl, did I ask you what you thought about interracial dating?

B: Yes, you did.

I: What did you tell? Oh, I remember that that's a good question.

B: Yes.

I: Well, do you think our people, let me ask you this, do you think our people feel better about it now than they did in the past?

B: Yes, I'm sure they do.

I: Do you think it's better accepted in the county, in this county, than it was a few years ago?

B: Right, it is.

I: Well, how do people feel about integration? You see, I want to get down to earth in the people you run into on the street and that you work with. We want to know how they feel about all sorts of things, and sometimes so-called educated leaders and that sort of thing, go ahead and they try to put some idea across. And the people don't like it, and

they don't bother to find out what the people want, and then they're in trouble. So, I'm not a politician, and I can, I'm just a plain old newspaper reporter and interviewer. So I like to get down where the people are and talk to the people themselves and see how the people feel about things, because after all in a democracy like this what counts is how the people feel and how the people vote, where the people spend their money and that sort of thing, don't you think that's true?

B: That's true, yes.

I: But do you think the common, the so-called, there's no such thing as a common person, but the so-called common, ordinary everyday people, and I put myself in the grass-roots people. I put myself in that category because I love, you know, those are the people I love. I love everybody, but I have a special feeling and a special love for those people like this, because I came up the hard way myself. But do you think these, these people