

AL 93

Interviewee: R. L. Johns

Interviewer: Jeff Charbonnet

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C: This is Jeff Charbonnet, and I am interviewing Roe Lyell Johns, a professor of education at the University of Florida. Dr. Johns, would you please tell me about your work with the Citizens Committee on Education?

J: I was a fiscal consultant to the Citizens Committee on Education, which was formulated and made its studies in 1946-1947 and made its report in 1947. Dr. [Edgar LeRoy] Morphet [professor of education] also worked with me on that study. On that report we recommended, among many other things, that each county in the state would be required to have a vote to consolidate all school districts in the county into one district. We also recommended a great deal of other financial equalizations at the state levels, such as the Foundation Program and so on. Then I was called upon by the Citizens Committee to lobby for their report before the [Florida] senate. Dr. Morphet lobbied before the [Florida] House [of Representatives], but I had more friendly relationships with senators than Dr. Morphet did. He was a very vigorous individual, and sometimes he could be caustic in his arguments for education, which is quite the policy that some of the senators have followed. I was a new person in the state. I had been in Alabama. Actually, I had been in the army.

C: You came here at the end of the war [World War II]?

J: I came here at the end of the war, within about six months after I got back from the army. I was overseas for two years. Incidentally, I was supposed to be in a non-combat unit because I am blind in one eye, but I came out of the war with three battle scars from a D-Day landing in southern France. That is the army for you! I thought you might be interested in that background.

I have had some very interesting experiences. To come back to the thing that you are interested in, we were having great difficulty in getting [state] Senator [William A.] Shands from Gainesville to support the Foundation Program. He was on the finance committee in senate. LeRoy Collins, who later became governor [1955-1961], was also on that committee.

C: Senator Collins was the sponsor of the bill in senate, is that right?

J: Well, yes. But now, Shands was planning to run for governor, and LeRoy Collins was planning to run for governor, and they were just like that in that committee. Get one to agree, and the other would agree. Senator Shands was very much opposed to the Foundation Program, while I was advocating it very much. He was very, very much [opposed to it]. Everything I would say, he

would come out against it.

Finally, after about three hours of argument, the chairman of the committee suggested that we have a little recess. When we had that recess, I went over to Senator Shands and said, "Senator, my wife appreciates the help you gave her on serving the dinner and cleaning up the dishes at the Laymen's League Supper at the Episcopal Church the other night." He looked at me and said, "Dr. Johns, is Mrs. Johns your wife?" She is an Episcopalian, you know, and I said yes. That is all I said. We went back to the committee meeting, and Senator Shands voted for everything for the Foundation Program. It is little things like that that will sometimes turn a person's vote. In politics, what you may think are trivial may be very important.

Then we got the legislature [on our side]. The legislature was working on it, but in this we included capital outlay for buildings, and Governor [Millard F.] Caldwell was opposed to that. He just cut in and said, "I am going to veto any provision in that for capital outlay." Then Colin English, who was the state superintendent [of public instruction] at that time and Ken [S. Kendrick] Guernsey, who was the chairman of the Citizens Committee, . . .

C: From Jacksonville.

J: Yes. [Guernsey was a member of the Board of Control. Ed.] He and English asked me to go to the governor with them and explain it and argue with him. I went to Governor Caldwell and gave him the reasons for it, he said, "Dr. Johns, it is very unsound for the state to put up money for buildings and then allow the counties to own them. That is just unsound economics." Well, I said, "Governor, the state puts up money to build bridges in the county and to build roads, and for all intents and purposes, the county owns them in the same way that it owns the school buildings." He scratched his head a little bit, and then he said, "Well, Dr. Johns, you recommended in this report that every county have a vote on consolidating the districts of each county into one. Some of those counties will vote against this consolidation, as you know. Many of them will. Then you have a program here to equalize educational opportunity in the state. I do not see why it is good policy to equalize at the state level and then de-equalize at the local level. I have noticed you have made several studies in the counties of the state, and you found that the districts varied widely in their revenue, so the educational opportunities differed among the various districts in the state because of that difference.

"I will tell you what I will do. I will go along with you on capital outlay if you will change your recommendation to the legislature that it consolidate the districts. Why did you not recommend that the legislature itself consolidate all those districts into one?"

"Well," I said, "we were afraid that might seem undemocratic." Then he asked, "Is it democratic to de-equalize education at the local level and then equalize it at the state level?" I said, "No, Governor, it is not." That is when he said, "I want to make a proposition to you. If you will change your recommendation to the legislature that the legislature itself consolidate all those districts into one and do it by the vote of the legislature rather than by local referendums, I will go along with the capital outlay." I turned to Guernsey, who was in charge of that, and asked if that was okay, and he shook his head yes. I turned to Colin English, because he had a say in it. Then I reached over, and the governor and I shook hands on it. That is the way the districts were consolidated.

C: That is an interesting story.

J: That is the way it actually happened, by the political trade.

C: Political give and take.

J: It was a political trade. The governor did not want to provide the state capital outlay money, and he wanted to equalize at the local level. Governor Caldwell was very wise on that. He was an extremely wise governor. Caldwell was an excellent governor, and he then supported the Foundation Program all the way through. I have very high regard for him.

C: Let ask you a question about your work with the Citizens Committee. When you arrived, the committee's work was already under way, was it not?

J: It was underway. Dr. Morphet was an employee of the [Florida] Department of Education. I had established a reputation in Alabama for drawing their Foundation Program. I got it through the legislature, and I was doing some consulting work for other states. I did that before I went into the army in 1943, so I had established a reputation. Dr. Morphet knew he needed some outside source to come in and work with the Citizens Committee, someone who was knowledgeable, so he went to Kendrick Guernsey and Colin English asked them to ask me to come down here and serve as a consultant to the committee.

I agreed to come, but I had no more than gotten here when I found that Dr. Morphet had also schemed to get me appointed as a professor at the University of Florida. They did not have a Department of Educational Administration here at that time. The University of Florida was entirely a male school. So they called me down to do two things, one, to serve as a consultant to the Citizens Committee, and, two, to serve as a professor at the University of Florida.

Then they asked me what it would take for me to come. Well, we were paid lower salaries in Alabama. I think I was getting about \$4,800 at that time. I

said I would come down here for \$6,500 and perform that double mission. I was not teaching at the University for a while while I was working with the Citizens Committee.

C: It sure was an awfully high salary for a university professor in Florida at that time.

J: It was the highest salary that was paid at the University at that time. [University of Florida President John J.] Tigert said, "We cannot pay that high a salary upon our scale." Well, Colin English said, "I will pay \$600 of it, and he will serve as a consultant to the state Department of Education." They continued to pay me that \$600 a year until I retired. They wanted to raise it, but I never let them raise it because the University would deduct it from my University salary.

Anyway, then I started in working with them intensively when it came to the development of that plan. We made local studies. First they wanted to me to go out and see what was necessary in the counties. We made a study in a number of counties.

C: Did you have a staff to help you with that?

J: Well, we had secretaries, and we had staff from the state Department of Education. I even had someone from the University of Florida--Dr. [Joseph McElroy] Leps was on the staff [in the College of Education] here. I also had some staff help, and I had plenty of secretarial help and clerical help. In fact, we even used some students that were here. Anyway, I had very pleasant associations with them. They came out with an extremely statesmanlike report.

After we got it through the legislature, from time to time I have served as consultant to the state Department of Education on various matters and studies. For instance, I worked with them on developing the formula for transportation, [which included an] index of the extra cost of education due to sparsity and various things of that nature.

As far as Alachua County is concerned, my influence on Alachua County has been on a statewide basis. We did write the studies here. I participated in the studies of the consolidation of schools. Then we required that before any state money was spent on school buildings it had to be spent on projects that were approved by the state Department of Education on the basis of a survey. And I was in charge of those surveys.

Here is an interesting thing. Colin English was afraid that this would politically affect him. He did not want them to make the surveys because the county's work would be controversial, so I agreed to make the surveys and direct the surveys in all the counties so it would not put the heat on Colin English. He was

later planning to run for governor. So I directed the survey here in Alachua County and recommended the consolidation of schools, which caused a great deal of fussing. For instance, Waldo wanted to have a high school, and Archer wanted to have a high school. We recommended the consolidation of these schools [in 1947], and that just created [a firestorm of protest]. I remember the people in Waldo said, "We are going to have 10,000 people down here in Waldo in a few years, and here you are taking the schools from us."

C: I would like to ask you some specific questions about the surveys and about the consolidation battle, because I think that was pretty important in Alachua County. But before we get to that, could we go back to the Citizens Committee for just a minute? In the report "Education and the Future of Florida," the Citizens Committee report, there were some definite problems that were identified regarding the local organization of schools that you mentioned. Can you remember if any of those were relevant to Alachua County in particular, just from your recollections of living here, like overlapping of responsibilities, and school officials not working together because of working at cross-purposes or lack of clear responsibility in the system?

J: I just do not remember any particular application in Alachua County. Do you have a copy of that report, "Education in the Future of Florida"?

C: Yes, I have checked it out from the library.

J: That is the Citizens Committee report.

C: Yes, I have read that.

J: Well, the reason I asked is I have a copy of it here if you did not have it. I wanted to be sure that you had a copy of it.

C: Yes, that is very important.

J: That is a very important report.

C: Yes. Do you remember the school board members that were here at the time? Dr. Hussey?

J: Yes, I remember Dr. Hussey.

C: Could you tell me something about him?

J: No, I have no particular recollection of him.

C: He was a dentist from Gainesville.

J: He was a dentist. I mean, if a board member was particularly noisy or combative, I would have remembered him, but I do not remember him as being any more than just another board member. Was Howard Bishop superintendent?

C: Howard Bishop was superintendent at that time.

J: Then I started teaching at the University of Florida, and Howard Bishop took courses with me.

C: You directed his thesis.

J: Yes. Then I conducted conferences for years with the superintendents. We would have these conferences regularly, so many each semester. A great many of the superintendents, some of whom were not even college graduates in the state in 1947, wanted to continue their educations, to do advanced work. So I had graduate courses for them. They would come in for a conference, and then they would write papers, studies, and so on for me. Eventually they discovered a notion of the sophistication of the superintendent's [duties and responsibilities]. Dr. Morphet, of course, assisted me with these superintendent conferences, and Dr. Leps with others.

Then, when we had developed the Foundation Program, we had to sell that to the superintendents to get them behind it before it was passed in legislature. Well, we had gotten an agreement on capital outlay, and Dr. Morphet was explaining capital outlay to the superintendents. He kept using the word "capital outlay." He spent about an hour explaining the technical phases of it and so one, how it was allocated and various things. Then he asked if anybody had any questions or remarks about this. I am not going to give the name of the superintendent, but one of the superintendents got up and said, "Dr. Morphet, that is all very good, this capital outlay that you have been talking about. But is there any money that we are going to get for school buildings?" [Laughter.] He did not know that capital outlay meant school buildings.

C: So you trained a whole generation of Florida superintendents all at once.

J: Yes, I trained a whole generation of them. A number of them got doctorate degrees. Floyd Christian was down in Pinellas County, and he later became a state superintendent [of public instruction]. I had him write for his master's thesis an evaluation of the school board policies of Pinellas County. It was a very good master's thesis on school board policies in Pinellas.

- C: The two other school board members at that time were [Dr.] J. A. [Jesse Albert] Goode from Alachua and Earl Gay from Hawthorne.
- J: I remember the names of all of them, but I do not particularly remember the personalities. I did not have enough dealings with them. One dealing that I had with them directly was in making the survey on capital outlay on the buildings here in the county. I reported to the board and discussed it with them, and then I would be off in another county. I worked on state programs, and Alachua County only pertained to certain ones.
- C: During the Citizens Committee studies, was there a local committee within the community that was formed to study the schools? Do you remember anything about that?
- J: Well, there may have been in certain counties, but it was a state committee. I do not recall any in particular, although some of the superintendents undoubtedly did engage some committees, mostly after the board passed the program. Then they called them in to explain the program to them and what was going on, primarily with buildings and the consolidation of the schools. Some of the people were very indignant.

Here was the thing in the state. Many of these school district trustees considered themselves very influential. Then when you consolidated, those trustees of all these districts in the state lost their positions of influence, you see, and they were very angry over losing their jobs. They had had a good deal of control.

For instance, what these district trustees were doing concerned differences in tax-paying ability. They were governing those local districts, approving teachers and principals. They would fire principals. As a matter of fact, Dr. Leps, a very able man, a very capable professor here, was fired as a principal in Polk County by one of these trustees. There were some very able, aggressive principals, and the trustees were just as likely to fire them. There was some sort of mediocrity to hold them indefinitely.

- C: So you think a lot of their resistance to consolidation was that they were going to lose their positions of influence?
- J: Oh, yes. But consolidating those districts happened so fast in the legislature they did not have time to organize against it. I had a disagreement with Governor Caldwell one day, and the legislature passed the thing the next day or two.
- C: And it was over.

J: It was over.

C: They were not trustees anymore.

J: They were not trustees anymore. The districts were consolidated. They tried various attempts to negate that, to go back [to the old way]. Some of them did, but they could not get anywhere with it because the school people were glad to get rid of them because they were being harassed by those trustees.

You get the sort of thing that is going on over here in Keystone Heights with these folks. Did you see that in the paper? A little group of people will come in and harass a principal and teachers and get them fired. They cannot do it over there because the board is not going to let them get away with it. The only thing they can do is just harass them. But under the trustee system, they, that local group, would have had the power to fire the principal and the teachers.

C: Just arbitrarily? The trustees had that kind of influence?

J: Yes. They had not only influence, but power.

C: Well, that was one of the great evils of the school systems that the Citizens Committee pointed out. Did the trustees have any redeeming value at all? One of the indictments of the Citizens Committee was that the trustees continued the inequality, they made budgeting difficult in the counties, they made countywide building programs impossible. Why did that system last so long?

J: Well, it lasted long because there is a great deal of tradition in America of localism, local self government. We have states' rights on the national basis, and then we have local self government--let the local people run it. We have all that junk that is being dished out now by [President Ronald] Reagan in order to escape any federal responsibility. Someone said last night that Reagan does love America but hates its government. Well, they would love Florida but hate its state government or the county government. That wanted to run it. There is an egotism.

One of the strongest drives of both men and women--I think it would go for women, too--is the desire for power. What are the main drives of the human race? Well, I think the [principal] desire [is] for power. Another is money, which gives you power. The reason for [desiring] money is power. The Bible says the root of all evil is money. Well, a good deal of that is because it gives you power. That is the reason why they were so reluctant to give up those things.

Now, in the Florida legislature, at that time, there was a higher percentage of college graduates, who are knowledgeable people, in the legislature than in the

general population of the state.

Government was never meant to be mediocre. That the government should follow [public opinion] frequently, to say the majority is always right [is ridiculous, because] usually the majority is wrong on new things. It is the minority that advocates new things, as [U.S. Senator] Gary Hart [of Colorado] has said. It is the minority that pushes innovation, not the great majority. If we waited for the mediocrity, the average beliefs of every person to prevail in government, our government would never have amounted to much. George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, James Monroe, John Adams--all of them were way above that.

C: They certainly were not the common man.

J: They were not the common man. Our great contributions are not made by mediocrity but by leadership, by people with a philosophy and the ability to foresee what the common good of society is. That sounds undemocratic, but it is not. Democracy based on a consensus of ignorance is a very inefficient form of government. Even in Russia--we talk about communism--there is not a consensus. Believe me, I have been in Russia. I have studied the school system, too. They do not have an average, uneducated president running things there in Russia, nor do they in China or any other government that is succeeding anywhere in the world.

That is the reason why we need a school system that will develop, and the higher you can develop the average consensus, the average man, the higher the leaders can go. You cannot have an elite school system where there are just a few educated few elites and then expect [them to effectively run the country], because they cannot get the political support. We do go on a popular vote, and you cannot get the political support [from uneducated people]. The leadership, the educated elite, can function only as we move the masses--the Negroes, the Hispanics, the crippled people, the people of low IQ as well as the people of high IQ.

That is what the Citizens Committee Report director [advocated, and] that is what Governor [Mario] Cuomo [of New York] spoke about at the Democratic national convention. He is a strong supporter of education. As a matter of fact, New York state was the first state in the nation that ever developed a foundation program, an equalization program, and other states modeled [their programs] after that.

It is interesting [to note that] my major professor, Paul Mort, wrote his dissertation on the equalization of educational opportunity in New York state, which was proposed in legislature at that time, way back in the early 1920s. Al Smith was

governor of New York state at that time. They were trying to improve the school system in New York state, and there were various proposals to do it. Among proposals was the Stray-Ingerhart-Mart Proposal. Mart had really designed it; Stray and Ingerhart were not so much technicians as they were promoters, speakers, and pushers. Now, Mart was a technician--he is more like I am in that--and a politician in the sense that he will go out and work for legislatures and so on.

Well, there was a committee in the New York legislature that worked and worked for days and days on developing a plan for improving the school financing system of New York state, and they could not agree on anything. Al Smith was a very positive sort of person. He got those committees together; he said, "I am putting you on this committee. I will bring in food and water, but I am going to keep the door locked, and you people are going to stay here until you agree on a plan, a proposal for the legislature." And he did that. He locked them up until way after midnight, and they agreed on Mart's plan. That is the way of the plan of equalization of educational opportunities [was passed in New York].

C: Okay. When the school plant survey [was taken] in 1947, in Alachua County we had J. Pope Baird, James Campbell [professor of education], Dr. Leps, Dr. Morphet, and you all on that committee. Were you a team that did most of the surveys throughout the state, or did the team change?

J: That team traveled, especially Pope Baird, Dr. Leps, and sometimes Dr. Morphet. Dr. Morphet went to the University of California in 1949.

C: To Berkeley?

J: Yes. He became a professor at the University of California in 1949, so he did not stay here very long to participate in those things.

There was a coldness between Dr. Morphet and Colin English. Morphet did not want him to run for governor. He thought he was trying to capitalize on the Foundation Program in order to hurt the Foundation Program, so there was a cool relationship between Morphet and Colin English, something like the relationship between Andrew Young [mayor of Atlanta, GA] and Jesse Jackson [religious and political activist]. Young was afraid Jackson would hurt the campaign to defeat [President Ronald] Reagan. It was a matter of policy.

By the way, I was a visiting lecturer out at the University of California in the summer of 1949. I started to lecture at a number of institutions. After work here in Florida, I was offered professorship after professorship. I went [to Auburn University] as a young doctoral graduate, twenty-seven years of age. Then the president [of Auburn University] found out that I knew something about

finance. We were in the Depression then, and the state was not paying the money to fund the budget. The president of Auburn asked the dean to loan me to him as an assistant to go down and lobby the legislature for the money for the schools, and I worked down there lobbying. That is where I had my first experience in lobbying.

C: In the Alabama legislature?

J: The Alabama legislature. The president of Auburn was L. M. Duncan, who was quite a politician himself, and he coached me on how to lobby. He told me, "Now, Dr. Johns, you are brilliant, and you are smart, but do not let a legislator think that you think that you are smarter than he is. Do not ever do that. You must treat them very respectfully. Any question he asks you--it does not make a difference how stupid--or any comments, take them very thoughtfully and so on. You will find some times when a legislator will oppose you, and he will fight you and you will have to fight him. But fight with one hand open always. When you sign a lease, chances are you will be the first one to reach over and shake his hand." I found that to be true working the legislature.

Later, when that was done and we had some success there, the [Alabama] state superintendent of education wanted me as assistant state superintendent in charge of administration in Montgomery. I went on a year's leave of absence from Auburn. I wanted to quit, but they would not let me quit at Auburn. They gave me a leave of absence, but I told them that I was taking the job.

So I worked with the state superintendent getting all the legislation through Alabama legislature and developing their foundations program and equalization program there.

Then I encountered an avid legislator who would oppose bills I would bring up. He would say, "Dr. Johns, I am going to oppose you on this particular bill. I promised my constituents back home that I was going to vote this way on the thing, and I cannot go along with you on this." I said, "Well, I could not ask you to. You have to keep your word with them. I would not ask you to go back on your promises at all." Then he said, "I will tell you what I will do, Dr. Johns. The next time you have a bill that you want to pass through the legislature, just bring it to me, and I will introduce it and push it through."

Well, that is the sort of thing that you got to know working with legislators. You cannot go up there and browbeat them. You have to work very carefully with them. Frequently, the legislators are tied up with commitments they have made locally, with various things against taxes or against this or against that, and you have to respect that. You cannot label them as "enemies of education." You want to assume that everybody is a friend of education. If there is anybody who

does that, if he even hints at it, is a very poor politician.

I had experience there working with and getting things through the legislature, and that gave me my real opportunity to put my training at Columbia University to work. Then at Florida I had the same opportunity. After I came here, I started doing consulting work. I have done consulting for more than half the states in the nation, including the northern states. I have done consulting in New York state, Ohio, and various other states.

They did not offer professorships at the time. During the Depression, you could not get a job. You did not get a salary. One time during the Depression, I went the whole year without a salary and was later paid off in script. That was when I went down to Montgomery to work with the assistant state superintendent of education. Auburn had not paid me. They later paid me in script, but I had to discount that script. Then it came to where you could not get a job. Then after I got to the University of Florida, I had five different jobs offered to me. I have been offered a job at Columbia University Teachers College. They got mad because I turned them down. Then much later, when I was fifty-five years of age, Stanford University offered me a job.

C: They were trying to lure you away.

J: They were trying to lure me away from Florida. When I came here, I was forty-six. I was born in December 1900, practically 1901. Well, I asked them if they knew how old I was. Usually universities do not want to hire older professors. They said, Yes, we know exactly how old you are. You are fifty-five years of age. But we want to buy you and your reputation. You just name your salary." I did not want to pick up and move my family at that time. My children were in college and so on, and I liked it here in Florida. New York University tried to get me to come several times, as did Chicago University, Peabody, so on. After you get established in the field, you get just a plethora, an avalanche of offers. But I remember times back there when we were not getting paid. Nobody was hiring anybody. It was hard to get a job.

C: Even for the top people?

J: Yes.

C: Going back to the 1947 survey, can you remember what the conditions were in Alachua County when you went and visited the school plants?

J: Well, the buildings were pretty run down. I think that since that time, practically every building in this county has been replaced. Some of them have been remodeled into something else, like Kirby Smith and over there at [A. Quinn]

Jones and so on. But as far as I can recall, all of the buildings needed to be replaced.

C: So many of them were built in the 1920s, and during the 1930s there was no money to do any work.

J: Yes. And that high school building, old Gainesville High School, [located on West University Avenue, did not have any equipment for scientific laboratories or libraries, so they were minimal. The heating systems were antiquated, and so on. That was generally the situation in Florida. Now, there were some buildings that were built by WPA, but most of those were additions. Now, this building, the P. K. Yonge building over here [presently Norman Hall], was built by WPA. The question always arises whether it belongs to Alachua County or the University of Florida.

C: Sidney Lanier and J. J. Finley [elementary] schools, I think, were WPA projects.

J: Yes, there were a few, but just a few like that. Yes, I remember Sidney Lanier was one. The buildings that were built by WPA were poorly placed in the state. Sidney Lanier is inadequately located at the present time, as far as a school.

C: They just did not do the necessary detailed planning.

J: No. They made no surveys.

C: Did they just tend to build where they had property?

J: One of the guidelines to build sometimes was where the local districts had money. The districts issued the bonds; they were district bonds. Even to this day, all the districts in each county are consolidated into one district called District One, and they issue district bonds. Not county bonds, but district bonds.

C: Right. The legislature could not completely do away with the district because that was in the constitution.

J: They could not do that. The teachers in the state struck over salaries. I think that was in [Florida Governor Reubin] Askew administration.

C: [That strike was in] 1968, [during Claude Kirk's administration].

J: Right. That was very poor political strategy. Prior to that time, the money was being allocated on a teacher-unit basis rather than a pupil basis. In my consulting work, I recommend either one, whichever is more politically acceptable. [The difference in the weighting:] teacher-unit weighted or pupil

weighted. You have to have weighting because different types of programs cost different amounts. You have to consider pupil/teacher ratio, exceptional children, vocation education, and so on.

Well, the legislature got mad and changed it. We had also set up in it a minimum salary schedule, because the salaries had been so low. But the legislature said, "We do not appropriate money for teachers. We appropriate it for students," so they changed it to a pupil unit. That was sort of rebuke to the teachers. As far as I was concerned, it made no difference whether it was teacher weighted, pupil weighted, or instruction weighted.

Now, there is an important matter here. We had to get those weights in originally for the instruction unit so that if the district had a program for exceptional education, and that unit was weighted, they had to actually provide the program before they got that unit. The same was true for vocational education. Of course, programs for exceptional education, vocational education, and certain other things are weighted differently.

In Florida, they are weighted a little bit differently for a difference in the cost of living. But it could be quite equitable. It is not equitable just to appropriate the money on a flat per-pupil basis. You also have to take into consideration the differences in local tax-paying ability that you have within a particular system. If you did not, then the Board of Education would put on the cheapest programs instead of an expensive program. But if you weight the pupils, you make it possible for them to put on an expensive program for crippled children and that sort of thing.

[A good example is] the crippled Kennedy boy. He lost a leg to cancer, and he spoke at the convention. Of course, the [U.S.] Supreme Court has now declared that you have to provide for these exceptional pupils. It gives them a chance to have an education. It is under civil rights. But before then, we could not get the boards of education to do that sort of thing because it cost more money.

C: Back in the 1940s, at the time of the Minimum Foundations law, what was the curriculum like in the schools?

J: Well, it was limited. There was very little printed. Many of the larger, urban counties in south Florida did not have any program as far as education of the handicapped. I doubt if there was in Alachua County.

C: I do not think there was.

J: Most counties did not have any. The vocational programs were limited, and there was very limited science. For instance, my daughter is now teaching over

in Pensacola; she is teaching calculus in high school. Now, there was not a single high school in Florida that taught calculus back in 1946-1947. The courses were academically oriented, of course. They were pretty much like . . .

C: Like a classical curriculum?

J: Well, for instance, I was the superintendent of schools in [Bloomfield,] Missouri, a town of 3,000 inhabitants. That was just after I graduated from undergraduate school, and I was twenty-three years of age.

I started teaching when I was seventeen. I taught to save money, and I would go to school in the summer. During the winter, I worked in St. Louis in a factory to make money, and then I went to college. I waited tables, mowed lawns, and served as a janitor of a Catholic church to keep myself in school, and I got myself through college. I received no help from home. My parents were not able to help. We had two girls, too. Any help we received had to go to the girls. I took some time off and spent a year as principal of a little five-teacher school in the Ozark mountains.

So when I graduated college, I had had some experience, you see. I applied for the superintendent of schools position in this town, and they offered me the job. I became the youngest superintendent in the state of Missouri for the size of the schools that I had.

We had no vocational education in this school, and science was extremely limited. We taught four years of English, four years of history, fours of Latin. No modern languages. We had a little science and one course in physics, but it was limited, and the equipment was very limited. But that was a typical course [of study]: academic English, history, and math. Now, we did teach math. We taught first-term algebra and second-term algebra, and then geometry. Sometimes we offered trigonometry. We were teaching maybe three years of math. That was pretty much what high schools were like when I went to Missouri.

To give you a notion of what that sort of a program did, the entering freshman class, the ninth graders, numbered thirty students, and by the time they graduated, there were eight. They were eliminated by that sort of curriculum. They could not take the Latin, they could not take part of the math. I remember we had girls crying because they could not solve the problems, and I helped them. I coached some of the girls in the class so they would not flunk that. Then they could not translate Caesar. Well, I happened to have the ability to do any of those tricks. Others could, too. But generally, if you had any statistics on those who entered in the ninth grade and those who completed high school, they would be very interesting. I know from my own experience that less than a

third of those that entered the ninth grade finished the twelfth grade.

Getting back to the present time, if you cut out vocational education, cut out special education, cut out remedial work, and that sort of thing and go to a strict academic curriculum, you are going to do the same thing. You repeat the dropout pattern instead of getting that improvement. The development of curriculum is based entirely on those who are academically gifted. So I believe that children should be given a chance to go to school, to go through high school, no matter their level of ability. You can give them some type of education that would be useful to them: vocational education, job training, citizenship, art, music, and various things that would enrich their lives.

C: Meet the needs of the individuals.

J: Meet the needs of that individual. Now, you may have a certain curriculum that would be college preparatory. I have no objection to that, provided that was not the only curriculum offered. The only thing we had when I [was the principal of this] high school was a college preparatory curriculum. That is all I had. But I did put in vocational education, business education, and some other things to change the curriculum of the school. I made quite a few changes that way. After being there three years, in 1926 my school was rated the best school in the state of Missouri for adjusting the needs of the curriculum to the needs of the students, for my size of school. I had also introduced extra-curricular activities. I put in band, music, and art. I coached the football team and the basketball team. We had both boys and girls basketball.

Then the students came to school; they did not quit school. I had students come to school wearing mustaches; students twenty-four and twenty-five years of age came back to high school and completed high school because of these various types of programs.

The board of education was a very conservative board in an old southern town. Bloomfield, Missouri was very conservative. Well, they thought that I had ruined the curriculum because I had taken the emphasis [on classics] away. I had cut out two years of Latin; instead of having four years of Latin, I required two years. [That was necessary] in order to have teachers for these other things. At the end of the third year, they were not going to rehire me. I would have been fired, but the board let the word out to me. So I resigned and went to Columbia to do graduate work. But that shows the sort of a thing that you get into if you change the curriculum.

C: What was the reaction here in Florida when the curriculum changed?

J: Well, you get that reaction now. They think that the schools [are offering] a "soft

curriculum" and that the only way to improve the quality and excellence in education is to increase the academic standing.

C: The "back to basics" movement.

J: Back to basics and that sort of thing. Much of that is stupid. Some of it is good. I would offer all sorts of things--calculus, computer science, etc.--but I would not require everybody to take the same curriculum. People's needs are different. I would have a variety of curriculums opportunities to offer to let people choose from.

Some people tend to think that the only people that amount to anything are those with high IQs. [People with a] low IQ are often completely ignored.

That reminds me a little bit of my son. I was very upset at the jaybirds getting in the house and then getting into the bird feeder. They were eating figs and so on, and I was throwing rocks at them. Well, one of my boys said, "Daddy, the jaybirds are people, too. Why be so hard on them?" Well, that is the way with these people with lower intelligence. The handicapped, those who do not have an abstract mathematical intelligence, are people, too. I am afraid that some of emphasis on this so-called "excellence in education" ignores that sort of thing. I would say it is excellence in education if you can teach a seventy-IQ student to become self-supporting and a respectable member of the community and a good citizen. That is excellence in education just the same as teaching person with a high IQ--125 IQ--to be a nuclear engineer. In fact, a nuclear engineer may do more harm than [someone with] a seventy IQ. [laughter]

C: That is true. Well, it strikes me as so curious that in a rural state like Florida, or even Missouri, with your experience there, that the people would not appreciate vocational agriculture, business education, or those kinds of expansions in the curriculum. You would think that they would welcome those kinds of changes. Many of them did, obviously, because they flocked back into your school.

J: Yes, many did, but others were purely academics. This school had been a private academy before the Civil War. It was in the southern part of Missouri, and the southern part of Missouri was pro-Confederate. There were Negroes living out in the country around there, and they were growing cotton around close to Bloomfield, in Stoddard County in southern Missouri. Those Negroes could come to town and trade, but it was against the law for any Negro to be in Bloomfield after sundown. There were no liberals in my school; none lived in the town. They would not let any Negro live in the town. Negroes were allowed to come to town and trade in the daytime, but they could not stay in town after sundown.

Now, that is the sort of narrow-mindedness that existed in southern Missouri--and

that existed in other places--with respect to Negroes. It was an aristocratic [society]; there were many aristocrats that lived in Bloomfield in the big plantations and the big, old, colonial-type houses, and they were the dominating element. They are the ones that got on the board of education. They were afraid that I was destroying the academic excellence of the school by taking care of these other needs. They cut student activities, too. They said I was getting the children's minds off the books. We had organized various student clubs. We had an English club and a debate club--we had a high school debating society--and various things. The children had a lot of things to do, you see, and they stayed in school.

C: Let us talk about Howard Bishop for a minute. He got into big trouble politically trying to implement that school consolidation program that the 1947 report advocated. What kind of man was he?

J: A very able man, very able man.

C: He grew up here in the county.

J: Yes. He came from an old, established family here. The Bishop family is, I think, one of the oldest families here in Alachua County. And he was very able.

C: Was he a politically shrewd person, do you think?

J: Well, I do not know. I would say that he aggressively worked for what he thought was right.

C: He spoke his mind?

J: Yes, he spoke his mind. I would say he was more concerned with his principles and doing right than he was with his political future. Politics did not mean surrendering a principle to him. He would stick to his principles, whether it was politically sound or not. That is Howard Bishop.

C: For his re-election campaign as superintendent in 1948, the small communities in the county like Archer and Waldo organized together against him. Do you remember Lynn Hardy, his opponent that year?

J: No, I do not remember him.

C: Well, he ran on the anticonsolidation ticket, but Bishop was able to defeat him that year. You were saying that Waldo was arguing that they were going to have a huge population increase and should keep their school.

J: Yes.

C: That does seem a little ludicrous.

J: I can remember it particularly, because it was in that report. We went up there, and a delegation of citizens said, "In a few years we are going to have 10,000 people down here."

C: A lot of them argued about the transportation, as well. They said that it would be dangerous for their children to be out on the roads being bused to these new schools and things like that. Was the community just fighting and scratching in an attempt to keep its school with these arguments?

J: Yes, they were concerned about that. They just wanted to keep their schools. You will find that true any place in the United States. You will find that there is resistance practically everywhere. There was resistance for doing away with the one-teacher school.

C: Is it distrust of outsiders? Did they think that they should be allowed to run their own school their own way?

J: Well, they think it lowers property values if you take the school out. And they might lose certain authority that they had. Power is what they want, and they would lose certain powers. That is why there is always opposition to consolidation.

You will find that actually more resistance to consolidation in the North than in the South. For instance, you check where the small school districts are. [You will find they are] mostly in the Midwest. Nebraska still has a great many districts. The South has more of the county units because they consolidated these unnecessary schools. There are far more unnecessary schools operating in the North, generally, than they are in the South. And there is more resistance to consolidation in the North.

C: Do you think there is just a more entrenched feeling of localism there or tradition?

J: Yes, there is more localism. In the South, the county is very important. There is more of that influence over in England. In England, the county government is very important, and the political power structure of the South was built more upon England than anything else; it is more like English tradition and culture.

We have records of my own family in Guilford County, North Carolina in 1750. They fought in the American Revolution and received grants of land in Guilford County, North Carolina. But the land was poor and very hilly. Then they found

out they could get good land in Missouri. That was before it became a part of the [United] States; it was still owned by Louisiana. My ancestors migrated to Missouri to get good land on the Missouri River; they did that in 1798. They became one of the pioneer families of Missouri. They brought slaves with them. A lot of those Missourians, in southern Missouri particularly, came from the South. They rode across Kentucky, Tennessee, and the Carolinas, and moved there to get land. And they carried those same traditions with them.

There was less opposition to consolidation in the southern part of Missouri than in the northern part of Missouri. I know that. They did away with the unnecessary one-teacher schools in the South. They are still operating them in the North, states such as Nebraska and the Dakotas. They are rapidly being eliminated, though, but they were the last to do so. The next thing that happened was they consolidated high schools, the small high school where they had them. They find it difficult to consolidate now. You can find that difficulty in the South as well as the North. But you can consolidate elementary schools easily.

C: Do you remember the bond issue in Alachua County and all the problems that were centered around that?

J: No, I do not remember much about it. I was involved in a number of counties where they were having bond issues for building, and I do not remember one county much more than the other. I could probably tell you as much about Escambia County as I could this county.

C: So you were not involved in all of those activities here?

J: Nothing, no.

C: Do you remember the Citizens Committee here that was formed in the early 1950s with Chester Yates? They were studying the [county's educational] problems, and they also recommended a bond issue. I read in the newspaper that you were an advisor to the school organization committee, and James Richardson was the chairman of that. Do you remember that?

J: I remember it, but not much about it, because I served on a number of committees like that over the state.

C: Were they all fairly similar?

J: Yes, they were. They served a good purpose.

C: Do you think they helped crystallize public opinion favorably for funding the

schools?

J: Oh, yes. I think that citizens' participation is very important, so we needed to get citizen participation. That is a problem that arises with consolidation. The only way you can get that, pretty much, is to form these committees.

C: Do you have a book on that subject?

J: Yes, there is one here, but I do not see it. I cannot place my hands on it. It is somewhere, I know. They have that at the state Department of Education. [It contains information on] certain changes and profiles of Florida school districts. I did not have anything to do with it. You can find the copies in the library, I think. I will let you keep that, if you are interested. There might be some things in it that you would be interested in.

C: Yes, I am sure. I know this one will be very interesting.

J: And there are other profiles; there are more of them. There were several publications on that.

We called together the representatives from the state education associations, local school systems, and state departments of educations of fourteen southern and border states. It said [that Florida had] one-quarter of the nation's children to educate, one-sixth of the nation's wealth (tax-paying ability), and one-eighth of the nation's school income. We had one-sixth of the wealth, but only one-eighth of the income, according to an index of tax-paying ability. We called them together for a week's conference in Daytona. Morphet served as executive secretary of the conference, and I as assistant executive secretary for a good many years, until 1949. We called them together first in 1939, when we met at Daytona Beach. We decided ways to develop and improve education in the South. The conferences met for two weeks. From then on, we met one week each year in Daytona the first of June, just after school was out. We worked to promote the development of education throughout the South.

After Morphet went to California, I became executive secretary of that conference. It continued to operate even after 1970, and I continued as chairman of that Southern States Work Conference until I retired in 1971. Then Truman Pearce took over as chairman. It just recently had its last meeting; they decided it had served its purpose and usefulness. But that conference lasted forty years. Southern people have a tendency to work together. We published bulletins on various subjects, but this was sort of an overall bulletin that was published shortly after World War II, when I was still in the army. I was on the executive committee.

You may look at the index to gather the types of things we were interested in:

Some Problems of the Southern Region, Educational Resources, Responsibility of Educational Agencies for Meeting the Challenge, Meeting the Needs Through Better Educational Planning, Building Curriculum to Meet the Challenge, Meeting the Special Education Needs, Utilizing Appropriate Instructional Procedures and Producing and Utilizing Better Instructional Material, Individualizing Education, Equipping Teachers to Meet the Challenge, Organizing Education to Meet the Challenge Responsibility of Education, and things like that. By the way, Howard Bishop attended some of these meetings of the Southern States Work Conference. [We also discussed] the whole government of education and financing education.

There is a tendency of the people in the South to work together and cooperate. Now, there is in New England, too. The New England states have regional meetings, too, on certain matters--the New England Association. But we operated through that to help education in our own states.

Here is what we found. You could not move one state in the South very far unless you were moving other states, too. We got the legislatures to compare expenditures and budgets, and we had to move the whole South in order to move an individual state. And all southern people knew that. They would come, and all the states were working together to try to improve education in it. Well, the legislatures would ask, "How much would it cost to do that?"

Just to show what it was at one time, before we started the Southern States Work Conference, in 1933 I told you I went to the [Alabama] legislature as the assistant state superintendent of education and lobbied for improving the educational program through better financing, better organization, and so on. I was appearing before a committee of the legislature--and this actually happened--and arguing for improving the financing of education in Alabama, and I fought it out. As for pupil expenditures, Alabama was the lowest of any state in the Union except Georgia; Georgia was at the bottom. There was a legislator that had been chewing tobacco (or snuff, I do not know which), and there was a big brass spittoon there, and after I said that, he reached over and spit a big spurt of tobacco into that spittoon. Then he said, "Dr. Johns, will you please tell me why it is that education costs more per pupil in Alabama than it does in Georgia? If Alabama is not on the bottom, why isn't it?" Now, that was the sort of a sentiment we had to improving education in the depth of the Depression.

At that time, if you will recall, 25 percent of the population was unemployed. There was no friendship to education in a Depression locality. The biggest help we had was from Roosevelt's program. We put a lot of the teachers on WPA; WPA paid their salaries, and they came and worked in the schools. They did the same thing in Florida--they were on WPA. Those were very difficult times. The Roosevelt program had various other programs that helped education, that

helped students. That was when the federal government first began to take any real interest in education, under the Roosevelt administration.

C: Can we talk for a minute about the Negro school system? How did it work? It seems like it functioned completely separate of the whole system of trustees and things like that. Who appointed Negro school teachers in Florida?

J: Well, they were appointed either by the local district trustees or by the county board of education.

C: In the same manner as the white teachers?

J: Certainly, they were. They were appointed that way. Now, they may have had some local Negro citizens committees. I am not sure of that, I do not recall, but Florida may have had some districts. You see, the Negroes were not voting much. There was very little encouragement of them to vote. They may have had some Negro citizens committees, although I do know about that. I never did encounter one.

C: No, I have never seen any.

[End side A1]

J: If they had them, I did not know about it. What has helped the Negro school some is called the Gene Supervisor.

C: That was a philanthropic organization.

J: Yes. They got help through that. I doubt if the board of education paid for a supervisor out of public funds for the Negro schools. They did for whites.

C: So the Negro system tended to lag for that reason.

J: Well, it lagged for every known reason.

C: Well, they had a shorter term.

J: They did not have any equipment, and the buildings were very poor.

C: Salaries were lower.

C: I was in a Negro school in west Florida where they did not have any floors; there was dirt on the floor. For heat, there was a fire in the middle of it and a hole in the roof, just like a tent. That was a Negro school in west Florida. Actually, it

was just a shell.

Here is something else. It is not generally known or remembered, but in Alabama rural counties, the boards of education would not build any schools for Negroes. There were no public funds used for the building of Negro schools. What they did, usually, was use a church that the Negroes built themselves. Most of the rural schools in Alabama, when I went there in 1927, were conducted in churches. You talk about mixing church and state! They were taught in the churches. The boards of education told the Negroes, "Now, we can pay the teachers, but you have to build a building." Of course, what they did was get together and build a church, then maybe expand it a little bit. But in most of the rural counties in the state in the 1920s, most of the schools for Negroes were conducted in churches. They talk now about violating church and state by saying a prayer in public schools. Well, they held school in a church. Talk about having religious meetings in the public schools! And I am sure in Alachua County they had the same thing, that there were rural schools here in Alachua County in 1946 and 1947 that were taught in churches.

- C: Well, 1947 would have been the time of your first survey. It seems like there were far more Negro schools than white schools, but the Negro schools were the one-teacher schools, and the whites had improved their schools to the point that they were more centralized, the larger-unit schools.
- J: You might go to Starke [Bradford County schools] and find out whether any of those schools were taught in churches rather than in public school buildings. I will bet you some of them were. I know they were in 1926 and 1927, because that was common in Florida. We made the survey, and a great many of the Negro schools in the country were taught in the Negro churches. The boards of education would not build a building for them. They thought that was enough for them if they paid the teacher's salary.
- C: The Negroes had to provide the building themselves, so they used the church.
- J: Yes. They may have built some themselves, but it was easier to utilize a building that was already built. Now, they may have built an addition to the church, or something like that. It was easy to do that. The Negroes were very poor. You can understand how the whites themselves were poor to us, but the Negroes were of very low economic standing.
- C: Minimum Foundations definitely helped the Negro schools a great deal. It seems like as far as the proportion of help that they received from the position they were in in the early 1940s, they were improved as much as or more than the white schools were.

J: Yes. I expect on a percentage basis, they were improved more than the white schools. Then teaching became a very attractive occupation in the Negro schools, so many Negroes went to institutions of higher learning to train themselves to be teachers.

C: There were not very many other professions that were open to Negroes.

J: That is right. Well, even yet to this date, education has been very attractive--government employment in general--for Negroes, as well as law enforcement. They are after government employment. Any kind of government employment is a relief to them.

C: Dr. Johns, to continue my study on Alachua County, are there any people that you can think of that I should go talk with?

J: Well, have you talked with Mary Earl Meyers?

C: No, I have not.

J: Let me just give her a ring if I can.