

Unified Committee for Afro-American Contributions
Oral History Documentation Project

JOHN GRAHAM LANCASTER

Interviewed by Brenda Coates
December 10, 1996
At his home in Lexington Park Maryland
Logged by Tania Jordon on January 13, 2008
A verbatim transcript is available
Original format is two cassette tapes
1 hour, 53 minutes, 36 seconds

CD 1 of 2 (Tape 1, side 2)

Track 01

0:00 Introduction

0:23 Born in Prince Edward County Virginia, 1918. Went to College in 1934 and stayed in County until 1955. Moved to Richmond for one year and then to St. Mary's County in 1957. Worked for University of Maryland for 17years. Lives in 8th District in Lexington Park.

2:00 Lived on a 125 acre farm in Prince Edward County. Father was a county agriculture agent. Took over job after father retired. They owned and operated a farm. Mother was a housewife.

3:30 Earliest memory was looking out of window and watching siblings light firecrackers at Christmas time.

4:20 Most of family food came from farm. They raised tobacco, corn and livestock. Father would buy sugar, coffee and fish.

Track 02

5:25 Belong to First Baptist in Farmville.

5:40 Only took trips around county. He went to a 4H trip in Hampton when he was nine years old.

6:18 Father was involved at church deacon board, NAACP, Beneficial Society.

7:00 Times were always the same in and out of depression.

Track 03

8:04 Medical offices for white patients and separate office for black patients. Went to a black dentist.

10:00 There was a Southside Community Hospital that opened around 1928.

10:55 No home remedies.

11:45 Senior citizen stayed with younger relatives until they died.

Track 04

11:58 News came from county newspapers. Blacks newspapers and Negro Society. Council of 49. Seven members per county to improve blacks plight in the county.

Track 05

17:51 Blacks made up approximately 66% of the counties population right after the civil war. They did well until reconstruction. Around 1930 farmers were not able to get credit

20:38 Games: Play jacks, hopscotch, softball, horseshoes, hide and seek.

21:13 Chores: Hauled water and wood, feed chickens and hogs, milk cows and cleaned house.

21:38 Got along well with brothers and sisters.

21:50 Loved to read.

22:45 Parents treated him well. The encourage education and prepared him well for life.

Track 06

24:42 Went to Oak Hill Elementary School and Robert R. Morton High School in Prince Edward County. Oak Hill was a two room community school. That serviced about 40 to 50 kids within a few miles. Subjects were reading, English and geography. Secondary school ended at 7th grade.

Before high school was started, the teacher would allow students who graduated from 7th grade to come back and continue education without superintendent's knowledge. There were no public high schools in the county for blacks. There were training schools that did not teach regular curriculum.

CD 1 of 2 (Tape 1, side 2)

Track 07

30:50 A little more on curriculum

31:12 Dreamed of becoming a lawyer or speaker as a child.

Track 08

35:32 Parents only approved of him attending Sunday school and 4H Club.

38:00 Was not able to court until he went to college.

Track 09

38:56 After college he moved back home and took over his father's job. Worked for three years (@ \$125 per month) then got married (1943) and moved to town.

41:55 Family received \$7 per month allotment because brother went in the service when father needed him. Money was used to pay sisters college tuition. All his siblings went to college.

Track 10

44:05 Meet wife at Hampton College. Wife was from North Carolina. Was married in Newport News Virginia. They were married for 15 years. 1st wife died. He meet 2nd wife Albertine through brother in-law. They were married in 1971 in St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York. Son was best man and Albertine's niece was maid of honor. Honeymooned in Chicago for a week.

Track 11

50:36 Attends First Baptist Missionary in Lexington Park. Chairman of Board for two years, superintendent of Sunday school for 8 years. Also

worked with interdenominational organization that started Cedar Lane Senior Apartments.

CD 2 of 2 (Tape 2, side 1)

Track 01

0:00 Worked with other churches whenever he could. Represented the church on the Cedar Lane Board.

3:15 Member of Jolly Gents Sportsman Club, Minority Alliance and Lions Club.

4:00 Feels life in St. Mary's County has wonderful possibilities.

Track 02

4:29 Changes from the 1950's to 1996 is the increase of population. Black's population has decrease from 20% to 12%. Employment opportunities and housing has increase. There is less obvious discrimination. The quality of life has increased in general. There needs to be improvement in extracurricular activities.

7:55 Teenagers are same except for their environmental exposure. There were no drugs, TV and internet. Teenagers today don't have chores that take up most of their time.

Track 03

9:53 Race Relations – Tremendous improvement with an integrated society.

12:57 City vs. County – More services available in city.

Track 04

16:08 Difference between people in different sections of the county. Northern versus Southern end of the county appeared to teach each others as if they were foreigners. Southerner were generally protestants and northerners were Catholic.

Track 05

20:26 **Biggest change in county is the growth in population. A presence of naval base has effected growth and economy of area.**

24:34 **County contribution: Used opportunities for the betterment of county. Was first black chairman of the youth commission. Helped with the development of senior housing.**

Track 06

26:18 **Awards – 15 to 20 community services awards.**

27:27 **Most Valuable thing in lifetime – family and God. Planned to live life day-by-day and to take advantage of whatever resented itself.**

30:36 **Life in St. Mary's county: County Extension Agent – tobacco farmers were not willing to accept help. Race relations within the Agency and in 4-H.**

Track 07

33:25 **4-H Club and integrating the Boys Clubs. Suspected that the leaders of the Clubs wanted to resign before allowing Blacks to join. Prejudice within the Clubs.**

Track 08

41:17 **Became chairman of housing authority in 1978. Served on school board for a few years. Became a county commissioner after second attempt. Became the swing vote on the board. He was a County Commissioner for two terms.**

CD 2 of 2 (Tape 2, side 2)

Track 09

45:00 **More about policy during his term as commissioner. Running for public office. Accomplishments.**

Track 10

51:46 **Biographical information**

