

UNIFIED COMMITTEE FOR AFRO-AMERICAN CONTRIBUTIONS
Oral History Documentation Project

GEORGE T. GRYMES

May 27, 1997

Interviewed by Brenda Coates

Location unknown

Transcribed by DWH Office Services on April 23, 2002

Logged by Tania Jordon on July 26, 2006

Original format is two cassette tapes

1 hour, 46 minutes, 46 seconds

Audio CD 1 of 2 (Tape 1)

Track 01

- 0:00 Born in King George County in Eastern Virginia on a 37 acre farm. Lived in DC for one year before joining Army. Moved to St. Mary's in 1947 because of job on Base – did not like it here. Wife is also from Virginia.
- 2:52 Since 1970 has lived on Rt. 235 1000 ft north of Route 489, 21077 Three Notch Rd.
- 3:39 Lived in Carver Heights when arrived; did foundation and all masonry work for current home (it was a packaged home).

Track 02

- 4:39 What were times like as child – they were good times. He was a nature boy, lived one mile from the river. Father worked at Dahlgren Naval Proving Grounds and mother did day work,
- 5:50 Earliest memory: At age 2 Mr. Pith (a neighbor) had a dog that scared him. Remembers when father added on to the 2 bedroom house.
- 7:08 In the early days, family walked 4 miles to attend Little Ark Baptist Church. Father rode bicycle 5 miles to work; later bought A & T model Fords
- 8:03 Mother took trips to DC: went to Dahlgren to catch steamboat that took all day to get to Navy yard in DC; sometimes catch boat across Potomac River to a train that left from Post Creek.

Track 03

9:05 Family was involved in church but not community activities. Everyone got along; there were no race relations problems.

10:16 Things were better then than now because everyone helped raise the children

10:58 Health & Illness: family stayed healthy- grew own meats & vegetables; there are chemicals in food now. Very seldom had colds; doctors made house calls. Sister Frances had typhoid fever and nearly died, went to doctor on the base who quarantined them and sister Ruth had to stay home from work,

Track 04

13:56 Families took care of seniors; there were no nursing homes, parents died at home.

14:27 Blacks got their news from battery radios. There were special shows like the Inner Sanctum. Squeaking Doors and Amos & Andy

15:30 As a child played horse and made up own games and made own toys.

15:67 Got along well with brothers & sisters (oldest sister who was rough). Cousins lived nearby.

16:49 Chores included cutting wood (one incident at age 7); feeding animals (had a one-horse wagon); washing clothes on scrubbing board. Always tried to help parents.

Track 05

18:20 He was a mother's boy, mother would whip the girls not out of anger, but to correct them. She corrected him when he did things she told them not to do. Younger brother told everything (incident of the pancakes).

20:30 Parents prepared him for life the best they could. Mother taught him the Bible and how to pray. A form of discipline was to tell the child the devil would get them if they did something bad.

Track 06

22:25 Attended Little Ark Elementary School until 7th grade: Read books like *Humpty Dumpty* and *Baby Ray*. Best and worst teachers were Martha Standish & Ms. Parker who hollered and yelled at them. There were no local black or white high schools or buses. Closest school was 30 miles away in Fredericksburg; mother had a friend in DC where he could have gone to school, but father didn't want him to go away from home. His higher education was self-taught and by correspondence courses.

24:57 He was in his 30's when attended First Baptist Seminary in DC for 4 years.

26:00 Little Ark was different/more advanced than St. Mary's schools (at that same time)

27:10 Correspondence courses were for brickwork, reading blueprints and the like.

Track 07

28:11 Dreamt of becoming somebody with a job: Studied music since age 12; played in 325th Army Band (music instructor was a warrant officer and concert pianist).

29:45 As teenager parents didn't approve him to go many places; after got old enough to drive went 30 miles to Fredericksburg to see cowboy movies. Attended revivals at churches and Sunday school picnics.

31:40 Courting

Track 08

32:26 First went out on his own; followed contractor (Jefferson Dye) to Hagerstown to build road between Hagerstown and Frederick.

33:40 Sources of entertainment in Hagerstown: Beer gardens

34:00 At 19 years worked for Jefferson Dye to build the runway at Dahlgren. Worked with chains & buckets to unload barges. Wages were \$1+ an hour (considered good at the time)

Track 09

35:52 Went to army at age 24, stayed for 4 years.

36:24 Most of working history was in cement with contractors in Maryland: Worked for Vinton's (in Silver Springs) before and after army; worked in Cheltenham putting up communication poles; worked at Dahlgren before coming to St. Mary's

37:51 After basic training, put in band playing French horn. In school Mrs. Lillian Dent had taught him to play piano and read music. Played piano at army chapel on Sundays.

39:18 Walked to work at Dahlgren, other times contractors sent trucks to pick up workers.

Track 10

39:49 Father taught him to do cement work

40:20 What it meant to work – able to take care of himself and parents.

41:05 Marriage: Met wife again at age 28; she did day work at Dahlgren. Married are moved to work in St. Mary's. Big wedding at Little Ark, no honeymoon.

43:49 Family life has been alright: There is a lot of give and take: Married for almost 50 years.

Track 11

45:10 Religion has played the greatest part in his life: attends First Baptist Church/ First Missionary Baptist Church next to Carver School.

45:47 Was assistant pastor; ordained after attending Seminary in 1956; plays music for the choir. No Baptist church when he arrived, Methodist churches in Piney Point, Valley Lee, and St. Mark's in Scotland: Zion, originally called Zion-Fallow, was on Hermanville Rd. The white Baptist Church changed its name to Lexington Park Baptist Church because mail kept getting mixed up.

48:01 Ivie Moore who lived on St. George's Rd. in Valley Lee and worked at the USO was instrumental in starting the church – services used to be held in people's homes.

The pastor from Little Ark came to start the church.

49:15 Rev Chambers came here from Georgia (to work on Base) long before he did. He was a Presbyterian but attended St. Mark's Church.

50:23 Stepped down as trustee and deacon when started preaching.

Track 12

50:38 Plays music at Catholic churches (St. Peter's & Immaculate Heart) also.

51:40 Calling and preparations for religious career started way before starting seminary in 1956.

Audio CD 2 of 2 (Tape 2)

Track 01

- 0:00 Active in the community/ county: Retired Civil Service Worker, AFGF, president of Carver Heights PTA, Human Relations Commission, Civil Rights Committee
- 1:05 Helped integrate lunch places etc: Equal Accommodation Bill: Won case against Pennies in Leonardtown (man wanted to hit him in the head with a pool stick):
- 1:51 Life is a whole lot better than when he first came here. Use to have white/ colored water fountains on Base
- 2:50 In 1947 King George was further advanced than St. Mary's. Segregation was in Fredericksburg but in King George they could get on a bus and sit wherever they wanted (not like Rosa Parks)
- 3:55 Stationed at Aberdeen while in Army
- 4:33 In St. Mary's if he wanted something to eat he had to go to window; in King George he could go into the building to buy it. St. Mary's was a step backwards

Track 02

- 5:00 School system in Virginia was more advanced. There use to be a barracks (men use to stay there when they came up here to work) between Carver and the Health Dept. were kids use to be taught because there was not enough room at Jarboesville school. Lettie Dent was superintendent of schools at the time
- 8:00 Virginia was law abiding state; In St. Mary the rednecks were trying to get around the laws, that is why they were taken to court.
- 8:40 Questioned Virginia decision to close schools – that was in Prince Edward County where Lancaster was from.

Track 03

- 8:50 Besides segregation and schools, what other differences were there? People in St. Mary's were selfish, considered them 'foreigners' and wouldn't let them have property to build on. The Whites who came in were the ones who help change the county.
- 10:01 Most of all the organizations he was in were made up of non-countians.
- 10:20 Stephen Young wanted things to go forward: Jim Forrest and other Blacks were afraid for their jobs (worked for county or state). Fear for their livelihood made them accept

things as they were - Mr. Talbert and others from outside who worked for federal government could see the situation and make the changes needed.

12:29 Differences between areas of county: Down county people didn't associate with others in county. Couldn't go to Robinson Barnes and think of taking one of the women.

Track 04

13:51 Catholicism controlled the county – people depended on the white priest who did everything for them 'like a father.' When other churches came in, people realized they had to do things for themselves.

15:33 The whole the Catholic Churches had on Blacks, kept them back.

15:58 Went to church festivals (St Francis Hall) and was surprised to see young children & old men out there dancing at night: Where he came from and church he was raised in, this did not happen.

Track 05

18:05 The people coming from the South were the gambling type of folks; (Georgis Kings): Tried to have worship service in Community Bldg and these people would be outside in the street shooting craps.

19:11 Different types of people who came in: The religious type and the worldly type (who gambled and didn't go to any church) and the people who lived here who did nothing to improve conditions.

19:51 Some locals resented him and his kind for trying to change things.

20:37 St. Mary's Association met at the hall in Leonardtown alley/ Stephen Young

21:18 There was a difference between locals and newcomers – locals didn't see that anything needed to be done (both black and white)

22:03 He interacted well with people – he loved people. Played the piano at St. Luke's in Scotland, Mt. Zion in St. Inigoes and Bethesda in Valley Lee. Belonged to Retired Civil Service group that meets the 3rd Friday of the month at Breton Bay (he is the chaplain).

Track 06

23:42 Biggest changes in the county are being able to go into any restaurant and for women to be able to try on clothes. Changes happened when the Human Relations Commission set down with the people from the Rue's Roost, Duke's and the like and showed them how they were losing money by segregating.

25:07 Feelings about the Base and new growth: Spoke to Senator Dyson about contractors who hire sub-contractor who carry the money outside the county. There is no speaking up about conditions.

26:44 People here are not trained to do the work (engineers) - schools did not prepare students for the growth on the Base. There are other jobs on the base besides engineers; tried to get Larval a job with contractor

Track 07

27:25 Even went down to CPD to get contractors to hire locally. Have merchants get behind contractors to hire locally.

29:40 Trading Post is doing a lot of work and labor cleaning contractor like Pop Charlie.

30:19 Sub-contractors

31:06 Direction county is heading in – rural vs. urban: County is really building up. Look at housing developments back in the woods. Base is growing; people from New Jersey and Crystal City are coming down to St. Mary's because of Base.

Track 08

33:40 One industry county: Steuarts in Piney Point wanted to bring in industry but Paul Bailey and Joe Wilder put a stop to it and had Blacks working with them to have it stopped.

35:00 These men (plus Dorsey, Sam Bailey etc.) were looking out for themselves, they did not want these industries to bring in their own lawyers.

35:47 There are no Blacks in the tax office

36:10 In the 50 years he has been here, very little has changed a far as county run things are concerned.

Track 09

36:43 He has contributed to St. Mary's by trying to change conditions. He used to be a go-getter. When Dr. King died, the Captain on Base knew he was a member of NAACP and wanted to know if the people who were burning DC were going to come down to burn Lexington Park.

38:25 Got so NAACP wasn't doing anything they were in there just for the name: Undercurrents are still there.

39:49 Most valuable things - education to build houses. Another thing was that he had a good supervisor named Tom Rabbit, who allowed him time to go to the seminary and different meetings etc.

41:35 Awards

Track 10

42:02 Has not done everything he wants to do – wants to make improvements in St. Mary's. Keeps an open mind: Would not go back and change anything in his life.

44:06 Works with mostly whites at Breton Bay (name of group was mentioned on other tape): Roberts Rules of Order – Old business vs. unfinished business,

Track 11

45:18 Final words – What hurts him is so many young people in jail

47:45 Teaches Sunday school and young people how to read (methods of teaching reading).

49:18 There are suitcase teachers who are just there for the money and there are teachers who want students to learn.