

UNIFIED COMMITTEE FOR AFRO-AMERICAN CONTRIBUTIONS

Great Mills High School Oral History Project

HAROLD HERNDON

December 19, 2003

Interviewed by Merideth Taylor

at his business, Compliance Corporation, in Lexington Park Maryland

Transcribed by DWH Office Services on March 10, 2004

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Original format is one cassette tape

1 hour, 2 minutes, 32 seconds

Audio CD 1 of 1

Track 01

0:00 Introduction

02:10 Harold Herndon came to St. Mary's County in 1960. He was a band teacher at George Washington Carver. During desegregation, George Washington Carver became a middle school. At that time all of Carver's high school students went to Great Mills High School. During this period Mr. Herndon was the band teacher for Great Mills and instrumental instructor at Carver for one year.

Track 02

05:40 The children in the band mixed well. He was not able to give them all the time he wanted due to the time constraints between the two schools. He also taught Jazz Band. He never sensed any tension between the students.

08:20 Most of the class leadership roles were held by Caucasian students.

Track 03

10:34 As a result of the desegregation process there was a difference in the control of discipline. There was a pride at Carver School because of their exceptional performance. The school received substandard materials yet competed against segregated schools that received better materials and equipment.

Track 04

15:27 As a teacher he received a certain amount of respect. He never had to justify his

actions when he called the students parents. There was more order in the schools then there is now. There was cooperation between the parents and the teachers.

Track 05

19:15 At Carver School there instruments were of low quality and had to be repaired. They received very little financial assistance from the school board.

Track 06

23:58 Materials and instruments in comparison to white schools. The band room at Carver School was the stage of the school.

27:40 The parents and the students raised money to buy GWC band uniforms. Mr. John Lancaster was instrumental with the fund raising projects.

Track 07

29:15 He taught Jazz Band at George Washington Carver School and Great Mills High School. He visited other elementary schools and helped students to learn to play musical instruments.

30:30 The original band teacher at GMHS had retired and the school board never offered him the position. They hired another teacher. Mr. Herndon stayed at GWC and became an assistant principle. He still taught band while he was an administrator. He worked at most of the elementary schools at the southern end of the county.

Track 08

33:28 Carver School became only elementary and older students and their teachers moved to Spring Ridge and Great Mills. Spring Ridge was built in the late 1960's or the early 1970's. He transitioned to Spring Ridge where he was a full time administrator. He was transferred from Spring Ridge to Leonardtown High School.

36:50 He received personal satisfaction from helping students as an administrator. He initially did not want to be an assist principle.

Track 09

38:23 He applied for a principle position at Esperanza Middle School. The person hired was less qualified then he was. He was not hired and "got the run around" about why he was not hired. He had no choice when he was transferred to Leonardtown High School. The only African American Principles were the ones who there when the schools were desegregated. The remained in there positions until the

left or were retired. When he applied for the position at Esperanza there were no African American administrators.

42:10 He retired in 1979. He took a leave of absence and never returned to St. Mary's County Public School System.

Track 10

42:19 He didn't think there was a lot of concern about losing jobs. They were more concerned about what schools they were going to be transferred to; types of classes they were going to teach; and involvement with student activities.

Track 11

47:16 When the schools were desegregated, the labs, and materials were better. People had to learn to get along together. Some people developed life long friends. However, it may have been the beginning of the decline in discipline in the school system. His prospective is that black teachers may have been a little reluctant to discipline white students. He says that the white teachers may have felt the same way.

Track 12

51:50 Some students may have lied to their parents in order to get away with unacceptable behavior. As assistant principal, he had to deal with discipline issues—tells story of one girl and her father.

54:49 Some students took advantage of the fact that they had been disciplined by a black administrator. People had to ask themselves-how do I fit in in this new scheme of things.

Track 13

56:36 Problems with discipline were minimal in the 1960s. He had no real problems across ethnic lines. Segregation went pretty smoothly at Great Mills High School. He does recall that there were some fights and bomb threats, and the involvement of the local NAACP in school affairs.

1:00:05 The schools in St. Mary's County did not desegregated right after Brown vs. Board of Education because they were not forced to. That was the status quo. He thinks the Navy Base had something to do with the change. The based became an important part of the economy.