

Unified Committee for Afro-American Contributions
Oral History Documentation Project

George Purnell Frederick, Sr.

Interviewed by Richard Portee
November 16, 1996
at his office (county administrator's office in the Governmental Center
Logged by Bob Lewis on June 23, 2006
A verbatim transcript is available
Original format is one cassette tape
48 minutes, 26 seconds

Audio CD 1 of 1

Track 01

- 0:00 Personal information: George Purnell Fredericks, Sr.; PO Box 106, Abell, MD 20616; 301-769-3406. Born in Clements, MD on 8/25/22
- 0:55 Pulled out of school in 8th grade because father was ill: He was attending Banneker and sister was boarding at Pomonkey High School in Charles Co. He was self-taught
- 2:29 Retired from St. Mary's Public Schools as supervisor of custodial services
- 2:45 Wife: Rita Elizabeth Fredericks
- 3:09 Mother's people: Grandfather was born on slave farm, was 8 when freed in St. Mary's Co. (maybe Charles) no information about grandmother. Mother was Lena and father was John H. Fredericks

Track 02

- 4:45 Has 12 children and 3 adopted children
- 5:23 Times were tight when a child -Glad to get a penny; Worked several jobs, farmed, contracted small jobs and did construction also was waterman.
- 6:15 Family ate seafood and animals from the farm. Raised garden; Times were much worse then because you couldn't make much money.
- 7:10 As a child when working on farm was glad to get \$.10. Earliest memory begins at about age 4
- 7:46 Had a very good relationship with sibling

- 8:11 Attended St. Aloysius Church in Leonardtown then St. Joseph's in Loveville.
- 8:25 Transportation: walked to Church, once in a while father took them in the buggy.
- 8:50 Trips as a child: going down to the water to crab
- 9:19 How family dealt with health and illness: made some sort of tea. Family went to Dr. Greenwell

Track 03

- 10:10 On Sundays would get a little free time and visited cousins
- 10:50 Chores included getting water, chop wood, milk cow
- 11:20 Discipline issue
- 12:09 Family was not educated, did the best they could for him.
- 12:23 Walked to school: ¼ mile for first 3 years, then 1 mile for the remainder. Classroom at Loveville School, grades 3 through 7, was in one room; Brent Thompson was his teacher. Gives a lot of credit to 1st teacher, Devora Somerville. Favorite subject was English, Math was least favorite.
- 14:42 Dreamt of becoming a teacher, a teacher use to board with them.

Track 04

- 15:12 Parents didn't let him court as teenager, started going out at 15 to ballgames; he and friends walked up & down the swamps.
- 16:00 First went out on own at 19; stayed with family a year after getting married until went in service
- 17:10 Service: Was a vehicle mechanic in service; did extra work to make money
- 18:12 Kinds of jobs: after service worked on water, farmed, contractor for small jobs. Used to catch rides to work or walk.
- 19:00 Wasn't educated and took whatever job he could. Thought he was making a big salary when started on Base at \$.87 ½ per hour.
- 19:54 Worked his way up on contractor job to become foreman

Track 05

20:30 Wedding: Met wife at school field day. They were married on 1/1/41 and had a short honeymoon. He went back to work the next day.

21:49 Relationship with family has been pretty good. At point where health was not good, the family (12 children & 35 grandchildren built him a pre-package garage.

23:17 Religion plays a great part in his life and is a Eucharistic minister at Holy Angels Catholic Church in Avenue.

Track 06

24:08 Community activities: President of Milestown Elementary School PTA- instrumental in getting another elementary school built. He use to help with Bingo at the Holy Angels

26:06 Life in general is tougher now. Until a few years ago he didn't even lock his house.

27:00 Quality of life is better now: Anyone who wants to work no matter their education can find something to do.

27:25 People are different now, especially the youngsters – the changes are bad for the country; parents and the laws are to blame. Spanking a child is not abuse

Track 07

28:54 Race relations: Now you can go into any public place. Things have slipped in last few years; can't put finger on why.

30:10 Segregation: When eating out, couldn't get a sandwich at some places.

30:44 Never experienced run-ins with hate groups. Never jump into the middle of a hate incident,

32:27 Living in county vs. city

33:10 Difference between outsiders and countians; outsiders would greet you quicker.

33:51 Interact with anybody, as long as they treat him fairly

Track 08

34:15 Traveled to Carolinas, GA, FL especially because of electric co-op.

34:45 On SMECO board for 19 years. Joe Lee Somerville was the first Black on Co-op

35:45 Many changes in county, many improvements because of Base expansion.

36:27 Contributions to county: Hung first fire extinguishers in jail and Court House – didn't get paid for it. He is not really involved in politics.

37:54 Awards and recognitions through school board and Knights of St. Johns.

Track 09

38:16 What is something you could not have done without: He answered; a little bit of experience

39:41 Has not done everything he wanted; wanted more recreation and travel.

40:19 If he could go back he would get a better education.

40:50 Biggest changes in county in his lifetime: Integration of schools

41:00 Life in county for parents was tough but not as bad as some. Father farmed, did contract work on county roads and work for other farmers. Mother was homemaker and maybe did some babysitting for white neighbors.

Track 10

42:44 Blacks would get their news of a death when someone got on a horse and rode around telling people.

43:29 Doesn't remember family getting a local newspaper. No TVs or radio stations; had battery radio after marriage, got mostly VA stations

44:27 Family use to get the Afro newspaper (thinks it was from New York).

45:46 Thank you and final comments: when in school, he used to travel county singing in chorus with Devora Corbin Somerville. School bus got stuck in a grave in Mechanicsville. His mother had bought him a suit with long pants for the chorus.