

Kansas Historical Society
Oral History Project
Brown v Board of Education

(This lady was hard to hear and understand, plus a noise in the tape)

Interview being conducted with Annie Gibson on May 17, 1995

Int There were two elementary schools here, for blacks and then Scotch Branch High School.

AG St. Paul and Spring Hill, elementary. Scotch Branch was high school and elementary together, but then after that it changed.

Int When did it change?

AG I've forgotten the year.

Int Did the high school go through the 12th grade?

AG It was the 10th when I went to school.

Int Then you got your diploma.

AG Yes.

Int Did you go to the same building?

AG The one I went to burned down and they built the other one.

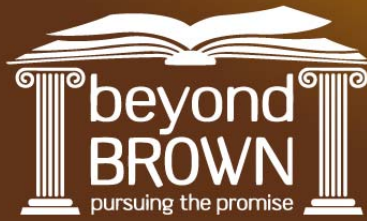
Int Who was it that asked you to sign the petition?

AG Reverend DeLany.

Int Before he asked you to sign the petition, were you aware of what was going on in trying to better the schools or was it a surprise to you when he asked you to sign?

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AG No, we weren't surprised. We wanted the same thing for the colored as the whites. We try to get equal. They say they are going to give us equal, but they never gave us equal, they never gave us nothing. So, that's why we signed the petition, we couldn't get no answer from the superintendent.

Int How many children did you have that were involved?

AG Four.

Int Do you remember how old they were when all this started?

AG It was in 1949. A decision was handed down in 1964.

Int You mentioned that you didn't have buses when you were a child? How far did you have to walk to school?

AG About two miles, I guess. My children never rode the bus. After they got buses, we were too close, so my children never rode the bus.

Int Do you remember when they got the buses?

AG I can't remember the year. It was after they handed down the decision. They built the cafeteria, gym, after the decision

Int Before that you didn't have a cafeteria?

AG No, they didn't have no lunch.

Int You didn't have lunch?

AG No, after the decision. When they built the cafeteria, I was the first hired to cook. After that they wouldn't let me work anymore.

Int Why was that?

AG Because I signed this petition. I know they wouldn't let me work at the school anymore until they hand down the decision in 1964.

Int So, what did you do to make a living?

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AG I can't tell you how we did. We had a farm. After I signed the petition and they asked if they would take the name off and then we could stay on the place, but I didn't take my name off because I signed for better schools for my children. If I had taken my name off, I guess they wouldn't have what we have now. So, I didn't take my name off the petition. At that time they made us move. My husband was farming. After we moved, I couldn't send them to school.

Int Where did you move?

AG Right here. This was my mother's place.

Int What kind of farming did your husband do? Did he raise cotton?

AG Cotton, corn, chickens, everything. We had to get rid of all that because we didn't have another farm. We were renting the farm. Tenant farmer. We were making a good living at this farm. We had to move and we had no other farm to go on.

Int How many acres were you farming, do you remember?

AG I can't remember.

Int The landlord was white?

AG Yes. And my husband had been on that place ever since he was born

Int So, his family had been tenant farmers?

AG A long time.

Int How did your husband make a living?

AG He rented another little farm but he didn't make nothing out of it, because you couldn't get fertilizer unless you paid for it.

Int You couldn't get credit?

AG You couldn't get credit. I was working at a motel. After I signed the petition, they fired me from there. I couldn't work no where. It must have been a year or two years we didn't have nothing, we couldn't work no where. Couldn't get credit. Had no work to do. If we hadn't had a little money, I don't know how we would have made it. I went down to Summerton motel and was working there, but the boss then fired us. He couldn't run his motel

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because they wouldn't let him have any water. The truck stopped. They pressured him, he had to let us go. We went to Charleston and we were there about three days for the trial.

Int Did you testify or did you just watch the trial?

AG No, they didn't let us in, but we had to be there because we were in the petition. We didn't see anything.

Int You mentioned about the schools. They really didn't have desks, you just had chairs?

AG The higher schools might have had desks, but I know my children didn't have no desks, they had chairs.

Int How could they do their work? How could they write? Did they use their lap?

AG After the decision, then they gave them desks and things, but when we signed the petition we didn't have no desks. That's why we signed the petition. If they had had desks, I know the petition wouldn't have been signed. There were 21 of us who signed.

Int What about the books and all that, did they have many books?

AG Yes, they had books, but they were secondhand books.

Int Did the black schools get the books that were old from the white schools?

AG Some of them. I'm almost 84 and I can't remember all these things that happened. Every time they write anything, they write about Topeka, Kansas, and they never write about South Carolina. You would think Clarenton County would have had something good. We are now trying to build _____ center in remembrance. We were the first ones, but they never give us credit for the first, they always give us credit for the last. But we did start it, right here in Clarenton County.

Int It's the way it got filed with the Supreme Court. Alphabetically, Briggs comes before Brown, besides it being the first case.

I wanted to ask a few questions about yourself. You were born here?

AG Yes.

Int And your family? Your people are from here?

AG All my parents.

Int How far back can you trace your family?

AG We were trying to get a family tree but we never got it. We have family reunions. At that time people did sit down and talk about family.

Int You didn't write it down, you just heard it?

AG We did some research work and found our family, a lot of them. I know my great-grandfather a little.

Int Where did he come from?

AG I don't know. My grandmother she came from _____.

Int Is part of your family white?

AG Some are white and some are black. My grandfather on my mother's side, his father was a white man. My mother was a Hilton and some of her Hilton people is white people, and my daddy is a _____ and some of his people. I don't know much about them.

Int What about the Indian side? Do you know anything about that?

AG I don't know anything about that.

Int Did your family farm pretty much all the way back?

AG Yes, both of them.

Int What about formal education? You said you went to high school. Did your parents go to high school?

AG Yes, my daddy used to teach. Then he was a barber.

Int Did anybody in your family go to college?

AG My uncle was a teacher, they all went to school.

Int Did they go to college in the South or did they have to go to the North?

AG I don't remember.

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Int What do you remember about going to school as a child? Is there anything that sticks out in your memory about what it was like, songs or plays that you were in?

AG I was in the plays and I used to sing in school. We had prayers to open class. Then some children would read Scripture. I was active.

Int What was our favorite subject, do you remember?

AG English, I liked English.

Int When you were in school, in history, did you learn about famous black Americans, like Booker T. Washington?

AG Yes.

Int Did you want to go to college?

AG Yes.

Int What did you do when you graduated?

AG I stayed at my parents and worked on the farm. My mother used to run a restaurant, a cafeteria, like a diner. My daddy was a farmer. My parents did good. They helped me out when we had to leave the farm.

Int How long has this house been in your family?

AG Ever since 1948.

Int Do you have any siblings that are still living?

AG I have three sisters alive. They aren't here, I'm the only one.

Int Are you the oldest?

AG I'm the third from the last.

Int You must have longevity in your family, then. How many of your brothers and sisters went to college?

AG One, but she didn't finish.

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Int Why didn't you go to be a teacher?

AG I don't know what she was going to be, she just stayed two years.

Int When did you get married?

AG In 1935.

Int Is your husband still living?

AG _____

Int How many of your children went to college?

AG One. My daughter was ready, but after we had to move, if I had sent them to college, we wouldn't had nothing to live on, so she couldn't go to college. But they all went away and they all finished up there and got good jobs. One of my sons is in the service.

Int They don't want to come back here?

AG They aren't talking about it yet. One of my sons retires soon. He is thinking about coming back. His family don't want to come.

Int Is his family from the North?

AG No, all of them here.

Int Your brothers and sisters, did they stay around here or did they leave?

AG All left except me and my sister who died. All the other ones went away. I'm the only one able to get around.

Int After the decision, what happened here as far as the public schools? Did they integrate?

AG They seemed to integrate, but we don't have no whites as it is, only two or so.

Int Right now in the high school? Where do they go?

AG A lot of them went to _____ High. They had their own private school.

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Int You mean the people are moving out or just not many children here?

AG Children here but _____. They have their private school.

Int Do you think things are better than they were?

AG It's better, I would say it's better. _____

Int What about the churches? Are they integrated?

AG They are still pretty separate.

Int What about things like restaurants and hotels?

AG You can go anywhere, eat anywhere. There's no place integrated [segregated?].

(tape turned)

AG You go in the back. They had water fountains, a black one and a white one. Everything was separated.

Int And restrooms were that way also?

AG Yes, but now, it is changed.

Int I noticed, I ate at the Summerton Diner and it was all white.

AG Blacks go in there, too.

Int I saw them working.

(tape shut off)

AG But other places, like _____.

Int Do you think that's because it is so small?

AG Small or people are scared or what. We had all these stores, but the black people stopped going in the stores, so they had to close them down; that's why the stores closed up, because the black people didn't go in them.

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- Int So, they just boycotted them that way?
- AG Yes, they just didn't go in. We don't have a grocery store uptown. The only grocery store we have is Piggly-Wiggly.
- Int Because everything else closed up?
- AG They have little things, antique store, but it's not like it used to be. They had two drug stores and True Value.
- Int How many businesses are black owned here? Do you know?
- AG No. A few blacks.
- Int What about integration, was there anything that was black owned?
- AG My mother had a business, and my daddy had a business, and other people had business.
- Int Like undertakers?
- AG Yes. Black people had businesses.
- Int When you needed to shop for clothes and things before integration, where would you go? Would you go up to Columbia? Or what you go to Sumter?[Summerton?]
- AG We used to shop right here in Summerton. We could get credit too before integration come in, but after sign petition, they stop everything.
- Int How did you get around? Did you have a car?
- AG Some had cars, but we never owned one. Wagon, people go in wagons most of the time. My daddy never owned a car but he had a horse and buggy. Anywhere we went we went in horse and buggy. He had a special buggy and a special horse.
- Int What about public transportation: Say you wanted to go to Charleston, would you have to take the train?
- AG The bus. Or you could get somebody to carry you. A lot of people had cars. Lot of black people had cars. Then you go to white people and they'll take

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you, if you asked, they would. Not too many blacks owned cars. My husband never had a car.

Int You don't have a car now?

AG I never had a car. My granddaughter has a car.

Int Summerton is about 100 years old, the town?

AG Yes, they had a centennial, over 100.

Int Do you know why it was founded, or how it got to be founded?

AG No, they told me but I can't remember.

Int I was just curious why there was a town here. What church do you go to? Which denomination are you?

AG AME.

Int Were you pretty active in that and clubs and all that?

AG Yes.

Int Was there ever a colored women's club here? Or is this too small?

AG We got quite a few national, international councils, something like that.

Int You had that here?

AG Yes. So, we had _____ extension, that=s a club we have here. I'm a member of that.

Int What kinds of things did you do? Is it mainly a social club?

AG Little social things. Just mainly to get together and do things. Visit the sick and trips.

Int Was there any overlap between that and the schools? Did you do anything to help the schools?

AG Yes, we volunteered at the school sometimes.

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- Int Would you ever try to help raise money for the schools?
- AG No, but we gave these camps, like boys camp, we would give them help.
- Int Like scholarships?
- AG It wasn't quite scholarship, but we would help them go to camp. These boys . . . and they were put on probation or something . . . we went out there and helped them.
- Int Did the black schools have a PTA or anything like that?
- AG Yes.
- Int Were you involved in that at all?
- AG Yes, when I had children going to school.
- Int When you were involved, what kinds of things did you do?
- AG Just help organize things. I used to help at school every year, but I'm getting too old.
- Int You look young.
- AG I have a birthday coming up next month. I'll be 84 years old.
- Int Congratulations, that's quite an accomplishment.
- AG I've forgotten things way back yonder. I can remember things back, better than I can remember things that happened in 1990.
- Int You were born in 1911?
- AG Yes, and I'm still going. I have a meeting on Saturday, I have a meeting tonight, a meeting for tomorrow.
- Int That's why your young.
- AG I'm very active in my church.
- Int Do you still sing?

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AG Yes, I'm in the choir. I teach Sunday school. President of missionaries. I'm a steward in the church, and I'm a leader.

Int How big is your church, how many members?

AG About 700 members. It's a big church.

Int I've seen a picture of it; it's a big church.

AG It's the oldest church in _____, I think. It's a historical church.

(tape ended)

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