

MEMORIES OF NEW BERN

WALLACE M. BOOKER

INTERVIEW 904.2

This is Dorothy Richardson representing Memories of New Bern Committee. My number is 900. I am continuing an interview with Mr. Wallace M. Booker, interview number 904.2. This interview is being conducted on September 2, 1992. We are at 413 Bern Street, New Bern, North Carolina.

Dorothy Richardson: Mr. Booker, in our last interview, you said you came to New Bern in 1938 which means you've been here 54 years. So, you have seen many, many changes. When you first came to New Bern, could you tell me about your first school that you were in and your staff? You were a teacher in the beginning.

Mr. Booker: That's right. My initial employment in New Bern was the West Street School. Of course the West Street School was both the elementary and high school. I worked in the high school department located in the small building there on West Street next to the two-story building. Of course both of them were destroyed by fire in the early sixties. I taught mathematics, algebra, general math, citizenship, and general science.

DR: That was quite a curriculum. Do you remember how many students were in each class or how many you were allowed to have in each class?

Mr. Booker: At that time, I don't recall that there was a strict limitation on class size as we have now, but I would judge our classes ran in the neighborhood of 30 to 35 people.

DR: In one class?

Mr. Booker: Yes, in one class. Now of course remember, this was the high school department and we had individual classes. I believe

we had about five periods a day of about a hour each. The pupils moved from one class to another.

DR: What was the school day? How many hours?

Mr. Booker: Eight-thirty until about three or three-thirty was the normal school day. Now we had a situation there in which cafeterias had not been developed in New Bern and we had something that was new to me; what we called a short session whenever it rained. Children would go home for lunch each day since there were no eating facilities at the school. But in inclement weather like that, they weren't required to return, so it's what we called a short day.

DR: I remember that. What about bus students? Did you have many bus students bused in?

Mr. Booker: No, we did not have many bus students. There was a bus coming from the James City area and I believe one coming from the Pleasant Hill area. That was the extent of the buses. The rest of the children came from New Bern. Beyond the James City area, I think there was a county school that way. And down Highway 17, which is the Rocky Run area, there was a school down there.

DR: So, you didn't have but two bus routes?

Mr. Booker: No, we didn't have but two bus routes as I recall right now.

DR: What were teachers required to do? Now I think of bus duty, but what were some of the other things you were called on to do as a teacher?

Mr. Booker: As a teacher, the duties were somewhat different

to a slight extent to what they are today. We did not have all the extra curricular activities that the schools are involved in now, but there were what you might call curricular activities because we had recess duty as far as the elementary children were concerned. Of course, high school did not have a recess. Then we had a home visitation program. A teacher was suppose to visit the homes of her homeroom pupils, and of course in elementary school, everybody was her homeroom because she kept them all day. It was self-contained class and they kept them all day. That was a big item, this home visitation.

DR: When did you do that, Mr. Booker?

Mr. Booker: After school. You did that in the evening.

DR: So, if your parents worked, how did you visit?

Mr. Booker: Well, that's why it was done after school. You see, they're home in the evening.

DR: On your on free time?

Mr. Booker: There's no such thing as free time! But yes, seriously, it was on the teacher's own time. They did it after school, evenings, nights, and weekends. Now as I just indicated, we didn't have a whole lot of bus pupils. Our students came from New Bern which is a rather compact area. At that time, the size of New Bern was a walking distance for everybody.

DR: How were you accepted when you would visit in the homes with the parents?

Mr. Booker: Generally, well. Teachers were somewhat like ministers; lived in a different world. So, there were occasions where

you might find an agitated parent or something like that, but those situations were rare. You had no fear of not being well received.

DR: Did you feel by and large the parents were really concerned about their children during that time?

Mr. Booker: Yes, parents were concerned about their children and their making good. Parents were not always in position to give a whole lot of help to the children. Those who could do it, did, and those who could not offer much help, were receptive to anything you could do. Of course the visits dealt with more than just academic things. If a teacher saw a need for clothing, shoes, and things like that, which could make it possible for the children to attend regularly, the teacher was instrumental in getting those things or putting the parent in contact where those things could be obtain. So on a whole, a teacher's visit was quite welcome in that there were no problems.

DR: You didn't just visit children who were having problems, you visited every home?

Mr. Booker: Everybody, yES. You're suppose to visit every home at least once a year.

DR: Mr. Booker, as you remember it, we hear so much now about single parent homes, did you run into that very often?

Mr. Booker: Yes, they existed, but I don't believe they were as prevalent as they are now.

DR: If they were though, usually there was a grandparent.

Mr. Booker: Right. You have this nuclear family in which you had other members of the family. If there was a single parent, usually

that single parent did not maintain the household of her own. She lived with her parents, so you have several generations there together.

DR: That made for real security.

Mr. Booker: More than you have now.

DR: That sort of leads to what kinds of problems did you see at school? We read so much about problems in the schools now. How did you handle them? Like truancy, how did you handle truancy?

Mr. Booker: These home visitations were effective in handling that, and we found that absenteeism was caused by factors other than a kid playing truant. Now if there was something like a carnival coming into town, kids might hang out to go help set up the carnival or something like that. If it was a pretty day, kids might go out fishing or swimming in the season. Then we had a situation in which there were we had a couple of pool rooms around that we had to go get the boys out of them occasionally.

DR: Who did that, Mr. Booker?

Mr. Booker: The Principal. You see the teachers didn't have the opportunity to do anything like that during the daytime, but the teacher could relate those things to the parent. Otherwise, the parent would not know that Johnny didn't come to school today.

DR: Do you feel that parents really had more control then over their children?

Mr. Booker: Oh, definitely. Yes, parents definitely had more control, and they had more respect from their children than they do these days. The days that we are talking about, I'll use this term,

pre-TV days. A lot of things that children are exposed to now, They had no knowledge of things like that, so they had nothing to lead them to that. We didn't have drugs. We didn't have alcohol.

DR: You had none of those problems?

Mr. Booker: No. Those things were some things that have come about, I would, say since the war.

DR: Since World War II?

Mr. Booker: Yes, since World War II, and I imagine each succeeding conflict has left us with new problems and more problems. That's what it appears to be because the problems seem to be multiplied. We had fewer children to deal with, it's true, but their problems were not as intense. Children in those days had a greater respect for authority than children do now. Now I don't know whether this is a negative effect from TV or not, but possibly it is because they see so much on that is undesirable and they adopt so many of these things.

DR: You know, these children back then, especially after the Depression, their parents had to work and they were not there, and yet, they still stayed within limits.

Mr. Booker: Right. They had less and they were better.

DR: I agree. When you were in high school setting, do you remember, was corporal punishment outlawed or was that used?

Mr. Booker: It was not used. We just sought different ways of handling problems. I think the philosophy of dealing with adolescence does not condone corporal punishment. It's not effective with an adolescent as it is with a pre-adolescent child, and so other means

were used. Now we had what we called a detention, which was after school time, remaining after school. And we had work details in which you would have to clean up inside and outside the building and so forth.

And as a last resort, we used suspension.

DR: And it meant something then.

Mr. Booker: Yes.

DR: Did you have a public health nurse that visited the schools then?

Mr. Booker: Yes, we had a nurse. Ordinarily, I hope I have this right, but I recall a nurse coming to school once per year to administer typhoid shots. Other than that, we didn't have a regular health program as such coming from the health department.

DR: The teachers had to screen for vision.

Mr. Booker: Yes, teachers screened for vision and dental defects.

Of course the teachers did the weighing and so forth like that because you had to have a health chart which went along with the cumulative records which these things are recorded. Inoculations, the necessary ones, were taken care of by the first grade teacher who would go to the courthouse, I think, I don't know whether it was the courthouse or the health department to get the records.

DR: Health department.

Mr. Booker: Health department, to get the records when we're trying to make certain that underage children were not slipped into school. As far as an organized health program coming from the outside, no.

DR: I didn't know how far back that went. I remember my mother had a public health nurse visit and tell her that I was undernourished. I was so skinny.

Mr. Booker: We had I think, a Mrs. Beatrice Dudley from James City was the nurse who served West Street school at the time. She was the one that created quite a turmoil when they saw her because they knew she was going to give them a shot.

DR: When you left teaching, when and where did you become a principal?

Mr. Booker: I became a principal in 1951 when they opened J. T. Barber school. I left West Street and went to J. T. Barber.

DR: What grades were at J. T. Barber?

Mr. Booker: When they were in the building program at the time, they built seven rooms at J. T. Barber. Then they built New Bern High School. Then when that was completed they came back and completed J. T. Barber. Now when they built the seven rooms at J. T. Barber, I had grades seven and eighth there which came from West Street School. When they completed J. T. Barber, the seventh and eighth grades returned to West Street, and I brought grades nine through twelve over to J. T. Barber, and there they remained.

DR: So, you became a high school principal then?

Mr. Booker: Yes. From a high school teacher, to an elementary school principal, back to high school principal. That's the way it proceeded.

DR: I remember that when J. T. Barber was being constructed,

didn't they have septic tanks originally?

Mr. Booker: Yes because there were no sewer lines in that area.

DR: But it was only a short distance from the city hook-up, wasn't it?

Mr. Booker: I don't know where the city stopped. I believe, I'm not certain, but I think it was probably as far as Washington Street which is a couple blocks from it. The first thing, they ran the water line in there because when they were constructing J. T. Barber school, those first seven rooms, they didn't have any water out there. They had dug a well that they used to get water for the construction and they did run the water line on down Beaufort Street. That's not Beaufort Street, Clark Avenue. That's where the water line came down and J. T. Barber got its water there. But at the same time, there was no sewer line and so they had the septic tanks in the back there where the athletic field is located now. Then when they built the sewer line, they came in on Clark Avenue and went down Beaufort Street and they had to build a lift station there at the corner of Clark Avenue to handle the transport of the sewage.

DR: I remember that many in the black community appeared before the Board of Alderman at that time and requested water and the sewer line be extended. I remember that. How long did you stay there, Mr. Booker?

Mr. Booker: I stayed there through December of 1962. The principal at West Street School died in November of 1962, and so I stayed there until the Christmas holidays began in December. Then

when they opened January of '63, I transferred to West Street. Of course West Street was eventually renamed in honor of that principal there, F. R. Danyus. So, they decided to name the school for Mr. Danyus.

DR: Did you have strong athletic programs in your schools?

Mr. Booker: Which school are you referring to?

DR: In the grammar schools?

Mr. Booker: No, we didn't. The reason I asked which school, because there is a difference in the athletic program. We had at West Street High School, football program and we had basketball. Of course we played basketball outdoors in the backyard. Then when we went to J. T. Barber, the gymnasium was constructed. We had a football program, and we had a gym, so we had a basketball program where both boys and girls played basketball. We had an exceptionally good football coach, so that J. T. Barber won the state 4-A championship one year. I don't recall the exact year. That's how good the program was. Of course we held our own at basketball but no championships. Then the girl's basketball program faded out; but anyway, we had the facilities there for basketball.

DR: In elementary school, I remember we used to have once a year what was called field days. We'd go to Kafer Park. Did you ever have those field days? You got ribbons for racing, in elementary school, and high jumping.

Mr. Booker: It seems to me like I do remember something like that because I remember wrapping a May pole or something like that.

DR: Yes. Maybe it was the May Day program.

Mr. Booker: Yes, May Day program. Yes, they did have that in elementary school, but I was never involved with any of that.

DR: Did your schools, prior to integration, have parent-teacher association?

Mr. Booker: Oh yes, we did. In fact that's how we got a lot of our financial support. Because we needed money badly. We were not getting the money from the system as such, so we had to provide our own resources. So, they had parent-teacher association, which met once a month. And of course the strength of that varied from year to year depending on who the president of the association was. That was the key person.

DR: In your experience as a principal, did you ever have to handle, one of the things that I imagine a principal has a terrible time with, a teacher that you felt you couldn't use? And how was it handled?

Mr. Booker: There were rare occasions even before and after integration. It was just a matter of having conferences pointing out what the principal, which was myself, considered as weaknesses and trying to help. This has been my philosophy, "I have got you. It's to my advantage to help you become good rather than get rid of you and try someone else, unknown". But there have been rare occasions which I didn't succeed for both black and white teachers. So at the end of the year, you just inform the individual that you have to make a change. That's part of the job.

DR: Mr. Booker, when did tenure come in? I was wondering about that.

Mr. Booker: I don't know the year. I think it was somewhere in the late sixties, but I'm not very clear on it.

DR: Was it after integration?

Mr. Booker: I think it was before.

DR: Principals have tenure.

Mr. Booker: Teachers have tenure. But now when it began, I don't know.

DR: If you had a teacher that you felt was not performing, did you have to take that to the Superintendent's office before you could make a decision?

Mr. Booker: Yes. The Principal would not make a decision as such, but the Principal would make his recommendation to the Superintendent and the Superintendent would relate that to the Board of Education, and this was action for the Board to take. See, the Board employs the teacher, so the Board is the one who has to say...

DR: You're terminated.

Mr. Booker: Yes, right. So, it's based on the recommendation of the Principal. The Principal is there. He knows what's going on. The Superintendent doesn't know anymore than he's told, and the Board members don't know anymore than what they're told. And so it falls on the Principal as the supervisor of the whole thing.

DR: Little domain.

Mr. Booker: Yes. To keep everything working right, and if it doesn't work right, to do what's necessary to get it to do right. Of course if the principal doesn't do that, he's failed his duty.

DR: And he has a battle.

Mr. Booker: Right.

DR: Did you hold weekly meetings with your teachers to bring out things that needed to be discussed and that they needed to discuss?

Mr. Booker: We had meetings. They were never so cut and dried that every week we're going to have a meeting. We had meetings when it was necessary. Normally, the Superintendent would have meetings with all of the principals and all of the staff, and if there are things that evolved there in that meeting, you would come back and have a teachers meeting with your teachers. But now on the other hand, if in your school you've got something going on that's necessary for a meeting, it may be weekly, it may be bi-weekly, or you might meet two or three times a month for a meeting. It depends of the need. You didn't meet just to follow a schedule.

DR: In high school, did teachers feel free to send students to your office to be reprimanded?

Mr. Booker: You tried to avoid that. Some of them would make nuisance of themselves.

DR: That's the teachers not the students?

Mr. Booker: Yes, the teachers passing the buck. It's the teacher's responsibility to discipline her classroom. That's not the Principal's job. It depends on the strength of the teacher. There are some teachers who are strong individuals and they can handle anything that comes forth. And that's what you encourage in your staff.

Take care of your problems because if you bring them to me, it's not

your problem anymore, it's my problem. And so then you have nothing to say about what my solution is.

DR: So, you don't pass the buck.

Mr. Booker: No, you don't pass the buck. Of course if you pass the buck to the Principal, it stops there. The Principal has got to take care of it.

DR: We hear so much now about child abuse. I remember in my situation it was in elementary, the Principal was so reluctant to anger parents, this was before the law was passed, that he discouraged any reporting of any abuse that a teacher would observe. Did ya'll ever have cases that you felt you had to report? Do you remember any in your tenure over the years?

Mr. Booker: I can remember only one case. I don't know just what that situation was. I think this was a parent whose husband was in the military and there were two children; a little boy and a little girl, and the little boy really showed all sorts of bruises and knocks and so forth. The teacher finally reported it. After that was reported, that parent moved on away from here. I don't know what happened, but we never had that child anymore.

DR: I do recall this one Principal was so afraid of stirring up that he was reluctant to let a teacher report abuse.

Mr. Booker: That's illegal now.

DR: It's illegal now, but when it did become legal, believe me, I pushed that...

Mr. Booker: Yes.

DR: How long did you stay in as principal before you became Assistant Superintendent? How many years did you have?

Mr. Booker: From Principalship to Assistant Superintendent? I became Principal in 1951, and I think I moved into the Superintendent's office in 1974. That's twenty-three years. That doesn't seem right. Yes, that's right. Because I went down to the central office in 1974. No, not 1974. Let's see. I stayed down there six years and left in '81. So, '51 to '75. That's still twenty some years.

DR: Now your Superintendents are appointed by the school board, right?

Mr. Booker: Yes.

DR: And you were appointed. Were there any other black Superintendents when you became an Assistant Superintendent? Any other appointees when you became Assistant Superintendent?

Mr. Booker: No. This is the way that worked. When I came here, Mr. H. B. Smith, was the Superintendent.

DR: Tall, skinny.

Mr. Booker: Yes, tall and skinny. He lived on National Avenue. When he retired, Mr. MacDonald became Superintendent. Mr. Smith did not have an assistant. Mr. MacDonald for a number of years did not have an assistant, and I think he got Jim Allen as assistant to him, to help him. Then Jim Allen left. Will Pittman had been out at New Bern High. I think Will Pittman left here and went to Sanford. And then when Jim Allen left, Mr. MacDonald brought in Will Pittman to

help him to serve as his assistant. Then when Mr. MacDonald retired, Will Pittman moved into Mr. MacDonald's office, and he brought in; we had man who, I can't even think of his name right now; anyway, he had been a secondary supervisor here and he retired, and they brought him out of retirement to serve as his assistant. You see, this job is growing all the time, year by year. And so he decided that he would come in out of retirement and work with him. But he just wanted to be there one year, and so when that year was up, he stepped aside and Mr. Pittman brought me here as the assistant then.

DR: What were your duties?

Mr. Booker: I was a general instructional supervisor, you'd say. I did recruiting. I made sure the system was staffed. I sought and interviewed and made recommendations for the employment of teachers and other personnel.

DR: That would include supervisors?

Mr. Booker: Teachers in general, yes. Not the maintenance or cafeteria people. I didn't have anything to do with that. But the professional staff. And so that was a full time job there because you always need somebody. And of course I maintained the files for personnel, you know, applicants.

DR: You kept those and keep their accreditation up to date?

Mr. Booker: Yes. And received applications so when need came, I would be the one to select and interview and call in people like that.

DR: Did you place them in different schools?

Mr. Booker: Yes.

DR: That was your job?

Mr. Booker: Yes. If you needed a teacher over there, I would be told about it and I would look for the person with the qualifications to fill that position. If over here you need somebody else, I'd do that. See, I had all the applications, so I knew who was available, or who had applied.

DR: You were sitting on top of that?

Mr. Booker: Right.

DR: That was a job!

Mr. Booker: Like I said, this whole job grew year by year. Think of how it was.

DR: You and Mr. Pittman?

Mr. Booker: Yes. Think of how it was. Mr. MacDonald had a little office up there on Hancock Street in the Bell building. Mr. Pittman's was over here on New Street. And think of what they got down here now. And look at the number of cars out there each day. It's a whole lot of people.

DR: The children's cars.

Mr. Booker: No, I'm talking about the administrative office down on Trent Road.

DR: And your secretarial staff.

Mr. Booker: Yes, your secretarial staff. Whereas Mr. MacDonald had one secretary. You got half a dozen secretaries.

DR: And your supervisors.

Mr. Booker: Yes, your supervisors. You've got elementary supervisors, secondary supervisors.

DR: Reading supervisors and class supervisors.

Mr. Booker: Yes, and physics supervisors. So, it's a terrific staff now.

DR: There was something I wanted to ask you. Having gone to Richmond, Virginia schools, and then you came to North Carolina, were we very far behind in educational standards in New Bern?

Mr. Booker: No, I don't think so. I think from my exposure and my observation, the professional staff was equal at both places. The thing that I found different was materials provided here.

DR: There was more money?

Mr. Booker: Yes. The shocking thing, when I went to school, we always got our books. When I came to New Bern, children had to pay in order to get books. They had book fees. You had to buy books, or actually they were renting the books. But you had to pay a book fee before you issued a child a book.

DR: How did you handle that, Mr. Booker, the children who really could not afford books?

Mr. Booker: We didn't handle it. They just did without.

DR: Oh no. Really?

Mr. Booker: Right. We did not handle it. Now, that child had to show you a receipt that he had paid his book fee to his homeroom teacher before you'd issue him, say an Algebra book or an History book or whatever class you were teaching. If he did not do that, he did

not get a book. He had to depend on his friends to use their books.

Now I believe, I'm not certain about this, I believe some children who were on welfare were able to get books through the welfare. I'm not positive, but I think that's right. But if you didn't have the credentials showing that you had paid the fee, you did not get a book, which was a different thing from what I had been exposed to. You got your books. The city paid for it. Of course we had many special teachers. We had a writing teacher. We had music teachers. We didn't have any physical ed teachers as I recall. We even had shop in elementary school. That's when we called it manual art. Even the girls in elementary school had home economics after a fashion. In Virginia, the cities and counties are separate. For example, the taxing authority here you have what looks like a double taxation. You got city and county together, but up there the city is independent of the county, and so the school system is completely independent. So, I think it depended on what city you're in as for the wealth. Now, Richmond, Norfolk, Roanoke, Lynchburg, those larger places would probably have better equipped and financed schools than some of the county systems. I think that's the difference. Of course not having been associated with any other than Richmond, oh yes there was because I worked in a county out in the mountains for a year. You can imagine Appalachia!

DR: Real poverty.

Mr. Booker: Real poverty. Of course that was a very small area, small populated area, so naturally it would be different.

DR: You were very young then?

Mr. Booker: Yes, I was just out of school.

DR: Idealistic.

Mr. Booker: Twenty-two or something like that.

DR: Going to change the world.

Mr. Booker: Right.

DR: I wanted to ask you, was there such a thing as summer school?

Mr. Booker: We had summer school at J. T. Barber when I was principal over there. But I think the only course we offered in summer school was English because you had to pass the English in order to move ahead in the grades because you couldn't take but one English course at a time. But now this is something else. Economics played a great part.

DR: There was a fee.

Mr. Booker: You had to pay a fee, and we had to get enough people to get enough money to pay a teacher because if we didn't, we wouldn't have a summer school. Of course, we averaged twenty or so. Just enough for one teacher, that's all.

DR: Prior to integration at West Street, was there any such thing as making up?

Mr. Booker: No. We didn't have any.

DR: There was something else. Do you remember whether there were any programs for special ed students?

Mr. Booker: Yes. We had a special ed program. We started out with one class at West Street and I think we did work up to two classes

at one time. Now this is what we call the Educable Mentally Retarded. These are the people.

DR: Who did the screening and the testing? Would someone come in and screen these children?

Mr. Booker: The elementary supervisor conducted the test for them so he could decide who should be assigned to those classes. Now we had under the ESEA..

DR: Elementary Secondary Education Act?

Mr. Booker: Yes, that act, which you might call somewhat as a special ed thing because it was designed for people who were behind as shown by general testing results. And of course we had special teachers for them and they went regularly. Maybe, I don't think everyday, but anyway, for short periods of time.

DR: Remedial reading?

Mr. Booker: Yes, Remedial reading and math, yes. Those types of things. The special ed other than that, we never had what we call the TMR, the trainable mentally retarded. We didn't go down that far. Of course right now I think the law says you have to take care of all the children regardless. I wasn't involved with any of that.

DR: That was a real challenge in the school. The emotionally disturbed.

Mr. Booker: Yes. I wonder what they expect the schools to do with some of these people. I remember I went to James City school one day and I looked at one of their buses. They had taken out the front seat, one or two front seats of this particular bus, and built

a sort of crib there for somebody who was that badly handicapped. But what can you do? But on the other hand, it's wonderful that we're trying to do something with these people.

DR: All these children and for those parents.

Mr. Booker: Right.

DR: It really is. I remember when I started out, there was terrible shame connected with having a child like that.

Mr. Booker: You kept them hidden.

DR: They were hidden. And that was one of the hardest things I ever did to learn to use the words "Your child is mentally retarded".

But until they can face the fact, and of course they get angry, but once they get angry and work through it, then...

Mr. Booker: They see you are not making fun or finding fault, you're trying to help them, and that makes a difference.

DR: Because they have to accept that.

Mr. Booker: Right. That's the first step.

DR: That's the first step. But thank goodness they are no longer shut away and that they are helped and they can learn.

Mr. Booker: Yes. It's nice to see the people bringing these people out and getting the exposure to the world as such rather than cooped up in a house.

DR: Yes. And taking care of their own needs. I think it's great.

Mr. Booker: It is.

DR: Let me think of something else. Can you think of anything else?

Mr. Booker: No. I believe we covered very well the whole thing.

DR: Mr. Booker, at West Street High School, were there scholarships available for good students?

Mr. Booker: There were a few. The Alumni Association, some of them, were active at that time. There were scholarships provided by sororities, fraternities, and then there are some scholarships provided by the colleges and so forth.

DR: Did you have guidance counselors?

Mr. Booker: No, we didn't have guidance counselors. That's a weakness there. That guidance counselors are able to search out these things and expose the children to it. Now, they have guidance counselors now; they are terribly overworked however because there are too few of them. But it makes a whole lot of difference. But there are scholarships; academic scholarships, athletic scholarships.

DR: Do you remember any outstanding students that you had from West Street that went on to fulfill their promise?

Mr. Booker: Yes, there are quite a number I can think of.

DR: Before integration.

Mr. Booker: Yes. Alexander Gardner who is teaching at North Carolina State; there's Gossie Hudson, who is teaching at Morgan State University; there is Robert Mann, I think he's in the insurance business in Detroit. They're so scattered all around. We got a lot of people that we are proud of what we did for them with the limited resources we had. There are any number of people.

DR: What about women?

Mr. Booker: Yes. I'm thinking about Minnie Baker Bremby, I believe it is. She's somewhere in the Norfolk area. I don't know exactly what she's doing at the present time. There are so many it's hard to pinpoint them right now. But yes, there are a number who have achieved.

DR: You had some athletes who went on.

Mr. Booker: Yes. Bobby Mann played with the Detroit Lions at one time. Kelly Henderson, and of course there were others that came out of J. T. Barber; like: Walter Bellamy and Pete Martin and Julian Martin. Those were in football and basketball. Those people excelled in those sports.

DR: From New Bern?

Mr. Booker: Yes, J. T. Barber and West Street. That's where they got their start. We've had some very successful teachers who have worked well with students and they have achieved.

DR: I know we did. Because back then, women, that was the only field that really they could, one of the few fields besides nursing, that a woman could go in and achieve a professional status.

Mr. Booker: Yes, that's true.

DR: We've come along way.

Mr. Booker: That's right.

DR: It's been a good time for you, hasn't it Mr. Booker? I think you feel real good about what you've accomplished.

Mr. Booker: Well, I feel this way, sometime I wonder how much did I accomplished, what role I played in getting other people to

achieve. I think that's my bigger role because when I say people has done this, that, and the other, I don't feel that I can take the credit for it.

DR: But you pointed them in that way.

Mr. Booker: Yes, I tried that way. I saw a fellow yesterday that I understand his son is working some at Duke University who is from J. T. Barber, and something in the administration. I don't know just what it is off hand. But people like that who do things like that, make you feel pretty good.

DR: Oh yes. I had a friend the other day, one of my friends here that has come back, she taught in Michigan, and she had a young guy write her a letter a few weeks ago to thank her.

Mr. Booker: That's wonderful.

DR: And she was just on cloud 9!

Mr. Booker: I know she was.

DR: Because you do have a part. All teachers have touched. You can look back at the ones that touched your lives and you touched so many lives. Anything else that you can think of? Did you buy or rent text books - now, you made that clear!

Mr. Booker: Yes.

DR: We talked about detention hall. The fund raising. Oh, did West Street have a Junior-Senior banquet and dance?

Mr. Booker: Yes.

DR: You did have those?

Mr. Booker: Yes. No banquet. We didn't have a banquet. We

had a dance, a prom. I'm trying to think. I know we used the, what do you call it? Up at Craven Terrace they had a...

DR: Administrative building?

Mr. Booker: Yes. That large room there. We use that for a prom.

DR: Did you have a live band?

Mr. Booker: Oh yes, we had a live band. They didn't have disc jockey's in those days playing records. We had a live band. I believe we used the center up at Cedar Street, up there at Cedar and Bern for the prom, and decorating that. Of course after they built J. T. Barber and the gym, then you had your own gym right there able to decorate.

DR: Where would you have your graduation services?

Mr. Booker: At West Street, we had it in the auditorium at one time. And of course as the school expanded, we had to take the auditorium and make classrooms out of that, and so we had it in churches.

We had a Baccalaureate Service down here at St. Peter's church, and then we had graduation service up at St. John's Church up on South Front Street. I'm trying to think where else we had graduation.

DR: Did you bring speakers in, Mr. Booker?

Mr. Booker: Yes, we had speakers. In the early years, we did have speakers.

DR: Did you bring in local people or did you bring in people from outside?

Mr. Booker: We used the people from outside. The local people for the Baccalaureate in which you used the local minister, but we would have maybe people from colleges to come in and people from the

State Department of Public Instruction, to come in for Commencement addresses.

DR: How did they work that at the State? Did they have separate black and white administrations?

Mr. Booker: Yes, you did have that. You had black supervisors and black department head.

DR: I just thought about that.

Mr. Booker: Of course since Governor Jim Martin came in, I believe practically all of that was phased out because they were not Republican.

Now of course in the later years, we used students for speakers at graduation.

DR: Which is effective.

Mr. Booker: Yes, because after all, nobody listens too much at graduation anyway.

DR: You know I saw a tape, my great niece, Ernie Richardson's daughter, graduated and she was Valedictorian this past year at New Bern High School, and they had done a tape. I was so impressed with young speakers that spoke. I was so impressed with their ideas and their feelings and how they were expressed and it was a moving ceremony. You know, it was gay and fun, but they handled it so well.

Mr. Booker: One other thing we didn't touch on that might be interesting. Our senior classes went on trips years ago.

DR: Field trips.

Mr. Booker: Yes. Of course the most ambitious trips I guess were out of state. I don't believe they ever went to New York, but

I do recall them going to Washington for maybe a two day trip or something like that. And so that was a great part of that.

DR: How did they get the money?

Mr. Booker: Oh, they raised that. They got their own money.

DR: Did you have many? I always worry about the ones that couldn't go.

Mr. Booker: That is something that is a fact of life. Everybody can't do everything. It's hard, but everybody couldn't go. Just like I see these children coming to Tryon Palace on these trips, I know some of them are left behind. But that's the highlight of a child's school career because on those trips some of them saw things they would never see again, had never seen before. So, it makes a difference in their lives.

DR: Did those children write up reports? Was there anything outstanding that you remember that they remember, those young people?

Mr. Booker: Not to the extent of writing articles. I recall it was just ordinary. It was a learning experience I'm sure, but nothing in that way made any record of. And they usually used a couple of buses or maybe more. I'm not sure.

DR: And the fellowship.

Mr. Booker: Yes. I went on one, I believe, and that was enough. We went to Washington. I remember them going to the Senate. Clyde Huey was the Senator at the time. I believe he was. I remember that.

DR: I don't think I'll ever forget Lincoln Memorial. The way the lights were on his face in his statue.

Mr. Booker: The Lincoln Memorial, yes.

DR: The lighting, I think, more than anything else at night stayed with me. Well Mr. Booker, this has been fascinating. It's so good to go back and remember and think how far we've come.

Mr. Booker: It's been a long ways, yes.

DR: A lot to be thankful for.

Mr. Booker: That's true.

DR: And a lot that we need to do.

Mr. Booker: I'm so thankful I'm not involved with it now because we're dealing with a whole different population now than what we did then.

END OF INTERVIEW