

**2012.3.171**  
**NARVIE HARRIS**

*Recording opens with black-and-white montage of photographic images from DeKalb County's past (buildings, people, exhibits, etc.), accompanied by final movement of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony. Scene changes to close-up of presenter, Sue Ellen Owens, who is identified by on-screen text as "Exec. Dir., DeKalb Historical Society."*

SUELLEN OWENS: Eighteen twenty-two to 1997. DeKalb County is celebrating 175 years of history, celebrating the excellence of communities, the spirit that has made this a progressive county for its 175 years of history. We look at all elements of our history as we celebrate the heritage that makes us the people that we are. We like to look at the communities, the cities as they formed along the railroads. We're looking at the industries, such as quarrying and mills, the dairy industry—all the things that combine to make DeKalb County the place that we love to live and work.

An important part of the history of DeKalb County is our black African-American communities. We have a number of communities in our county that have over a hundred years of history: Scottdale Mills, Lynwood Park, Shermantown, the city of Decatur. These are the communities that have been vital to the progression and the development of our community. Public education is an important facet of who we are as a community, how we educate our children. Today I have the privilege of talking with Narvie Harris, an educator from the DeKalb County School System. She's a retired coordinator of instruction for DeKalb County schools, and she came to DeKalb County in 1944. Another thing about Mrs. Harris that I'm very proud of is that she served for a number of years on the DeKalb County Historical Society Board of Directors, and one of the honors that she has is having been the first African American to serve on the DeKalb Historical Society board. Mrs. Harris is here today to share with us her years of experience and knowledge of the community that is DeKalb County from the perspective of being an educator. [*Turns to Mrs. Harris, who is off-camera.*] Thanks for being here and letting us know what the school system has been like through the years of your working there. [*Mrs. Harris's face appears on the screen; then camera goes back to Ms. Owens, then back again to Mrs. Harris. Screenshots continue to alternate as the women speak.*] You came in 1944.

MRS. HARRIS: Right

MS. OWNES: And where did you come from? Where were you born?

MRS. HARRIS: I was born in Wrightsville, Georgia, Johnson County. But all of my life has been spent in Atlanta, Georgia, where I was educated in the public schools and also the

college and university. I came here out of Atlanta University in the first class where supervisors were trained in Georgia. The scholarship encompassed six of us at Atlanta University and nine at the University of Georgia. This was before 1954 [the year of the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision by the U.S. Supreme Court].

As a part of the training at Atlanta University we interned for nine weeks in DeKalb County. The supervisor who was here that I interned under decided to go back home. I was interviewed by Mr. Rainey, [DeKalb County schools] superintendent at that time, and I was chosen as the Jeanes Supervisor for DeKalb County schools in 1944.

MS. OWENS: Can you explain to us what is a Jeanes supervisor?

MRS. HARRIS: Jeanes supervisors were black men and women who served the schools in the South to improve education for black boys and girls. Miss Anna T. Jeanes, a white philanthropist, provided the funds for the improvement of education. Our first Jeanes supervisor was Ms. Virginia Randolph in Henrico County, Virginia, who at first most of her dealings in working with the schools were more or less arts and crafts sort of a things. And we were trained, of course, with gearing what we were doing our efforts toward more instruction. Georgia has been happy to have men and women. DeKalb County had the privilege of having six Jeanes supervisors. The first Jeanes supervisor was employed in DeKalb in 1923, a person named Clyde Adams--I never had the privilege of meeting her—followed by five others before my coming on the scene in 1944.

MS. OWENS: So how long was the period of time that Jeanes supervisors were part of the school system?

MRS. HARRIS: From '23 to '69, when we desegregated, and I took the position as a supervisor in the DeKalb County School System. No longer was I just dealing with schools for blacks but schools, period.

MS. OWENS: How was it that you came to choose teaching as your career?

MRS. HARRIS: I think I was a born teacher. I could wake up at 3:00 in the morning right now and go to teaching. If you really want to know, ask my daughter. I took her to school each day; we had school. My grandbaby said, "If you ride with Grams, she's gonna have school." And I just believe in teaching. If you do nothing, let's just look at the beautiful flowers, look at the trees. I have more time to look than I used to have. But I now say to him and to my daughter, instead of just pacing around, look at the beautiful world the Lord has given us.

MS. OWENS: How long were you in the teaching profession?

MRS. HARRIS: Forty-three years. I taught four years; I served here in DeKalb for thirty-nine consecutive years.

MS. OWENS: Wow.

MRS. HARRIS: And I'm still teaching.

MS. OWENS: Tell me a little bit about what DeKalb was like when you came in 1944.

MRS. HARRIS: DeKalb was very, very rural--few paved roads, none in any black community. I found seventeen--sixteen shacks, and there was one building in the Druid Hill[s] area, Mt. Moriah's [sic; actual name Mt. Moriah], across from Briarcliff High School is now [since then demolished in 2018]. The school [Mt. Moriah] has since burned down. They were almost unfit for human habitation. And one of the things I say when I appear at the [DeKalb] Historical Society, and I was asked to talk about before 1954, I said, "We had schools where you could study botany through the floor, astronomy through the ceiling, and you could just stand and know which way the wind was blowing." But we worked hard to improve instruction.

I won't forget this: when I was dating my--now my late husband, we were going home one day down Marietta Street, and I saw a box out there. I said, "Get that box." He jumped out, and he got the box. But it was a fish box, and boy, the odor! Teachers were happy when I drove up with that old 1939 Plymouth. You had to get used cars then--this was during the war--retread tires, etc. You could get--whatever you could get to improve instruction and make it more livable and comfortable, I did. I mentioned the buildings; there were outdoor toilets. I've had people to interview [me], and I said "outdoor toilets," and people say they don't know what I'm talking about. One young man said he didn't even understand when I said we brought bag lunches, and I said "sack lunches." And he said, "Well, why you didn't eat in the cafeteria?" And I said, "You're very young. We didn't eat in it because we didn't have any."

When I came to DeKalb, I found children [inaudible--sounds like "raising hems"?]. That became a concern of mine. There was not a school in the seventeen, of which twelve were in churches. We would tear down on Friday and come in Monday morning and [inaudible] make a school again. Some of the community the parents would sometimes bring hot soup or some toast or what have you for the children to have a meal. We had undereducated ministers at that time in our churches; some of them met once a month, some met twice a month. I found that when I started teaching in 1939. They didn't help much; they did what they could. But if you're undereducated, there's not much you could do; but they were what we had.

Among the concerns with me was running water, housing, etc. The public health nurse, the county home demonstration agent--the three of us made a team. From that we developed a plan for improvement. We started with water. Through the help of [first name inaudible] Hudson, who used to be right here in Atlanta, near the Chamber of Commerce, assisted us; Mr. Spillman [Spelman?], who was with the executive secretary of the Atlanta TB [tuberculosis]

Association; there was a black woman, who was Mrs. Lucy Cherry, who worked with us; and through that means—we're talking about integration, desegregation—from North Clarendon down Cedar Street—we had to get money for [water] meters for all. All were poor; the whites were poor, and the blacks. But they saved their money, and through some way we got enough money to get meters. And we organized a health council. And it was through this council that we worked together, and our first major project was to get water at then-Avondale Colored Elementary and High School, of which Mr. William Hatton—the late Mr. Hatton—was the principal. That was our first [inaudible, as Ms. Owens breaks in].

MS. OWENS: Where was that located?

MRS. HARRIS: Scottdale

MS. OWENS: Scottdale?

MRS. HARRIS: Scottdale. It's now Hamilton High and Robert Shaw. They divided schools when they built us a new one.

MS. OWENS: What were the occupations of the fathers and mothers of these children who went—that you were teaching?

MRS. HARRIS: Very low positions. In the Scottdale area many blacks worked at Scottdale Mill. In Lithonia they worked at the Davidson quarry and in Redan. They had not heard of OSHA [Occupational Safety and Health Administration, established in 1971], I'm sure. They had a high incidence of tuberculosis in that particular area. And then a lot of them worked at Mathis Dairy, which was to the south [Rainbow Drive, south DeKalb County]. I recall I passed just the other day when we had to move a school, Doraville, to build General Motors.

MS. OWENS: Wow

MRS. HARRIS: Off Buford Highway. I remember that. That was a one-teacher school.

MS. OWENS: So I'm trying to kind of keep up with this. When you came, there were, what would you say, how many schools—available schools, in the literal sense—for blacks?

MRS. HARRIS: Seventeen

MS. OWENS: Seventeen

MRS. HARRIS: Twelve in churches; only one built for a school, Mt. Moriah. It was a two-room brick structure. They had central heat, they had a kitchen. That teacher who worked there was supported by the white residents of Druid Hills. They supplemented their pay. Some of the—they were even paid more than the rest of the teachers. They did have the support. We had difficulty, however, getting a person to go in any one-teacher school. No one--I don't think I would have taught in a one-teacher—I would have been too lonesome. I would have to have

me an adult to talk [to]. But Druid Hills supported the teacher at Mt. Moriah. And I do have pictures—

MS. OWENS: How many students do you think she had?

MRS. HARRIS: Hm?

MS. OWENS: How many students would she have been attempting to teach?

MRS. HARRIS: Oh, she had grades one through seven. She would have, like, sometimes fifty or sixty students. And they can teach fifty or sixty students. What they did is what we now call the “non-graded” and some of the other terms in education. But you also find that children can teach children. They can become tutors. They’re in the same room, they hear the discussion, and they picked up.

MS. OWENS: Was there—in today’s society we always tout the parental involvement. Was there parental involvement [inaudible]?

MRS. HARRIS: Very much so. Among the other things which we did as a part of our task, in an effort to do some adult education, I organized in 1945 in Cox Funeral Home, where my office was, a PTA council. So it was through the PTA council that I got a lot of adult education over to the parents. Another thing that we did at that time—many of the blacks were not voters, so when students reached eighteen, social studies teacher actually brought them to the courthouse to register. By registering the students, then the parents became registered voters. So we worked with them directly and indirectly through the PTA council.

We had baby contests. I remember Mrs. Peters from the Tucker school area—we had a little one-teacher school there. We raised enough money to offer two scholarships. When I came to DeKalb in ’44, not one black student would go beyond high school. We [all Georgia public high schools] only went to the eleventh grade. Later, of course, you know, the state added on the twelfth grade. And we were very proud of a young man [one of the scholarship recipients]. Now—well, he was—he has a very beautiful band. I went to a dance one night, and they were playing. I looked up, I said, “You have my boys and girls.” The young lady [the other scholarship recipient] decided after a year or two to get married and become a mother. She still lives in Stone Mountain, Georgia, married to a minister, who was a student in the school system.

MS. OWENS: So she got the—one of the first scholarships?

MRS. HARRIS: Yes

MS. OWENS: And then went on to higher education?

MRS. HARRIS: And both of them went on to Moreh—to Morris Brown College.

MS. OWENS: That’s interesting.

MRS. HARRIS: But we now have students who have a doctorate. I had a phone call this last week from one. This young lady, Linda Vaughn, she is now Dr. Linda Vaughn. She is assistant Superintendent of Instruction in east Illinois. Another one I had a card from the other day, he—Luther Strickland, from the Scottsdale area. It took him several years, but he made it. He's an accomplished musician, and he's a tenor soloist. He has two sons in the area of music. One of the last acts I performed [before retirement], June 30, 1983, is I wrote a letter of recommendation for him a position; and he's still working in Ellis, Texas, at the university. So our schools have come a long ways. Each year when they have reunions, I am invited to, you know, go back. And I don't remember all the names, which surprises them; they don't know I never taught them. I was in and out the building. But I feel very good about the students, because I know from whence they came: very, very poor, impoverished backgrounds. Superintendent [Jim] Cherry used to get on us all the time about living in DeKalb. I would have been happy to live [there]. But I say to him, "I have a daughter. And, Mr. Cherry, there's no running water." Even though I was born in Wrightsville, Georgia, I didn't live there. We came to Atlanta [inaudible]. And he [Mr. Cherry] did say to us, "I would not want you in any unfit"—well, that just wasn't anywhere. My husband worked and retired from the VA Hospital, so DeKalb would've been fine for us. But where would it be? At least we had a good roof over our house—you know, some of the amenities, which everybody wanted to enjoy. But conditions were very poor [for people of color in DeKalb County]. But through many efforts—through the PTA council, through the Home Demonstration Club, and with the public health nurse--we brought many changes, which we are very proud of.

MS. OWENS: What was the curriculum for the students early on, as Jeanes supervisor? You mentioned some of the arts and crafts kinds of things, but what--?

MRS. HARRIS: All right, there was an absence of a countywide curriculum for all students. Among the things that we did through study groups, through in-service training, we wrote curriculum guides—very, very limited. There was no testing program, there was no—there just wasn't an organized program, period. I had the privilege of working under six superintendents. The first was Mr. Rainey, followed by—shooting a blank, can't call his name now—[Later she remembers the name as Henry Nelson]--then followed by Jim Cherry. Jim Cherry wrought many things in organizing the school system and building the school system in which we live on today as a foundation. And others, of course, you know, progressed up to now Dr. Hallford. We—all of these things we took a little at the time. There was no transportation for black boys and girls to any school. I had a conference with each superintendent every Monday morning up—you know, through Jim Cherry. And then I asked, and we worked out a thing,

where he gave, like, the board of education, like twenty cents a day, if you could find somebody with a car to bring you to the school. Well, let's take people like County Line [School]. County Line is closer to the county seat of Henry County than it is to the [DeKalb County] courthouse. And you can see that's really a problem, having literally to hitchhike. Our children could not participate in afterschool activities because they had no way to get home; they were limited. We eventually organized our own football teams, our own basketball teams, etc. And these are things that really hurt in '69 when black children were literally lifted out of their schools to go into other schools. They had already chosen cheerleaders for the year. They had—they felt an absence. One day the late Dr. Bouie and I were leaving the building, and we saw a young man in the Scottdale area, walking down the street with his head down. So we asked him, said, "What's the matter?"

He said, "I don't feel good."

"What's the matter? What's wrong over here at Druid Hills High School?"

He said, "They never call on me."

It's taking a person, putting them in your house, and ignoring them. And one of the worst things you can do is be ignored, to be tolerated. They had lost their school, they had lost their teachers, and there was a lot of ill feeling. But that's the way it was. Mm-hm.

MS. OWENS: In terms of supplies and books and so forth for the schools that you've talked about, what—where did you--

MRS. HARRIS: When I came, we were receiving—I received in Atlanta Public Schools hand-me-down, ragged books, out of date. I've had books, long before we could go to Grady, from Grady High School, Boys' High School, Brown High School. And I make a joke out of it. When they finally desegregated the administrators' workshop that they held every summer in DeKalb County, the first year we invited to come, they accoladed [sic] the three of us who were one group—Rosemary [last name inaudible; could be Colposky], music supervisor, and Billy Gober, P.E., and I was Jones [sic] [means "Jeanes"] supervisor. So they said, "You know, y'all are just wonderful." They kept telling us how great we were.

So I said, "I have a story I shouldn't tell, but I'm going to tell it." A lot of times my daughters [sic] say I ought to keep my mouth shut, but it just comes over me. We had a C. L. Harper, who was the first principal of Washington High School, which opened in 1924. DeKalb School System had an associate superintendent C. L. Harper. He died in his sleep in Sopchoppy, Florida—I always didn't believe that was a place, but he said it was [laughs]. Well, our Mr. Harper said to us, as he rode over the state—he never owned a car—but then the state Director of Negro Education, Mr. R. L. Cousins, he says, "I go over the state of Georgia, and I

look at schools for white, and I look at schools for blacks.” He says, “Some of the white schools are just as poor.” There were a lot of them here in the county. I didn’t get in them, but I passed them. He said, “We want, as a group, better schools. My desire has always been better schools for every child, for everyone, because together, when we are informed, instead of a lot of misunderstanding, there is understanding. People understand. They don’t stand off and wonder about you, you wonder about me, and I wonder about you.” And I still say this to the politicians--if y’all want to shoot me today, it’s OK--if politicians would get out of it—I call them the “divide-and-conquerers.” He going down the road doing whatever he want to do, and we’re looking up one day, and we’re in some mess, because of politicians.

Mr. Harper also said to us, “Black people are smarter than white people.” Well, of course, you know, everybody got red-eyed, and their skin started turning crimson red. But I continued. He said, “Black children go to school two to three months out of the year to learn what it take white people nine months to learn.” So I say to them, the principals, I said, “You know, they come over to Robert Shaw one or two at a time to be with Narvie’s principals.” They were mine. I guess I bought them. And they run in there and tell us something, I said, “So we were smarter than y’all, because it took y’all three weeks to learn them. And we learned them in two or three minutes.” So they got a chuckle. So after [inaudible phrase] another one.

When I went to graduate school--having to use all the old books with no covers, out-of-date copyrights—I figured out I was smarter, I said, because when I took Graduate Records [Graduate Record Exam, GRE], I didn’t take it but one time, including when I went to Georgia State. So I told them I must have been smarter than them, too, because I had old books; and somehow or another I made it. You know, it’s a song, “I Made It.” So those were some of the experience in early years that we had to overcome.

Another thing I found when I came, my children were raising [sounds like “hymns” or “hems”--could be “hens”?] in the school. Well, that bothered me. We had the DeKalb County Teachers’ Association, and we’d have different programs and raise—everything you got, you had to raise money; nobody was giving you anything. One time we had a superintendent to meet with us, and the teachers expressed to him a desire to get pencils and tablets to get just supplies—construction paper and paste. He said, “If you’ll raise the money, the board will match it.” We raised some money, about a hundred or two hundred dollars. When I took it to the purchasing agent for the DeKalb School System, a Mr. Garland Purdue [spelling—could be Perdue?], he told me he didn’t have time; he had to get supplies to the white schools. And nobody seemed to have any feelings when they’d say it, you know—you just go. So he sends me to Montag [school and office supply company]. And I get down to Montag; they say, “We will



only sell to one person, the purchasing agent.” So I come back here because I go this hundred-and-something dollars. First National Bank used to be right across the street from where the building we were in, not the new courthouse now; and I put it in the bank.

One day Mr. Nelson—the name finally comes—Henry Nelson, superintendent [of DeKalb County Schools], sent for me and said he wanted me to appear before the grand jury. In there was his secretary, Violet Perdue [Purdue?], members of the grand jury, and myself; and they pursued questions as you are. And I went through the story.

“So what did you do with the money?”

I said, “I put it in the bank.”

“Whose name is it [in]?”

“Narvie Harris, DeKalb County School System.”

“I want you to go over there tomorrow and get it out and give it to Henry. Henry, we want you to get [it] in the colored schools. We’re going to give you one week into the schools.”

Well, I get a call at home one morning. I said, “Well, I’m going to be fired.” So I came out. I didn’t sit down.

He [Henry?] said, “You know what I want you to do?”

I said, “No.”

“I want you to get the supplies.”

I said, “You mean you want me to go to the warehouse, pull out sheets of paper, cut [sic] out pencils, etc.?”

He said, “Yeah, but the grand jury told me to get [inaudible] a week.”

I said, “But you know I’m a lady, I have an old car—broken the springs in it, runs over the bad roads I have to travel.” And I told him, “I heard them tell you that you get them in there, and you have Mr. Purdue [spelling?] [sic].”

And he said, “All right.”

I’ve never carried a pencil to a school. I never took a book.

Later years, Mrs. Freeman, who was the elementary director, and I were talking; and I was saying how I just wished we could get a new textbook. I wanted my children to see a new, clean book. So the first series that I was given the opportunity was reading, Macmillan. The next one I recommended was social studies, which was geography. And from that we started getting, you know, new books and supplies. The road was rugged. But I didn’t know it was rugged. It was just another day’s work.

MS. OWENS: The children benefited in the long run.

MRS. HARRIS: They benefited. And that was why I was here. That's why our teachers were here. As we recommended teachers, we were trying to get a teacher who could do more than reading, writing, and arithmetic, who could do some art, some music, some physical education, some of those kind of things to enrich the curriculum.

MS. OWENS: So really through the years you've seen those historic changes that took place in the DeKalb County schools from 1944 and then from 1954 and then into the '60s, '70s, and—

MRS. HARRIS: In 1954, the day of the Supreme Court decision, we were breaking ground at what became Victoria Simmons School. Mr. Hatton and I were leaving the building. His school's the only one that had a telephone. The phone rang. He went back to answer the phone and said, "No, sir, he's not here."

"This is the press. The Supreme Court has declared segregated schools, you know, against the law. We want a comment from Jim Cherry."

Well, there was no phone in this field where this building was placed. The next morning—another change that's been in the form of government in DeKalb; at that time we had one-man rule. And there's a book, I bought it from the Historical Society, *Mr. DeKalb*, and that was Scott Candler. Scott Candler was running for reelection. Two of the places--he spoke at what is now Victoria Simmons--he promised paved streets. The next morning we were on the Dave Garroway [*Today Show* host] show when they appeared [sic]. Mr. Cherry was very angry. He said if you—any blacks make an attempt to desegregate the schools, it'll be at your own risk. It was just a threatening sort of a thing. He was just upset. Scott Candler got up, and he promised some cement. So the first two places that we had paved in front of a building was in Stone Mountain on Fourth Street and the Scottdale area on Cedar Street—a very thin coat, but it was some pavement. I have driven my car and spun around, pulled my galoshes off, to get to a school on a rainy—it was that bad.

Teachers used to be surprised; and they said, "But you're here and it's raining."

And I said, "You got here. If you can get here, I can, too."

And I did. I never made a--absent because of the weather. I don't even do it in my life today. If I've got somewhere to go, I go. One day my mother said—she was keeping my daughter that night, "But it's raining!" And she was sweet and beautiful.

"It was raining this morning, and you didn't tell me, 'Don't go to work.'" So I left for there, and I went to PTA or wherever I was supposed to go.

We were able to start adding teachers. I remember the first teacher in athletics and physical education, Mr. William Turner--it was around 1955--was hired. He became the model

for the others when we added other social studies teachers. We had three high schools. Two were combination—Linwood Park High and Elementary. I told you first Avondale Colored Elementary and High. We separated them in [inaudible—could be 1955 or 1959; unclear] where we now have Robert Shaw and Hamilton High. And by the way, Hamilton High was named for a principal I've never met, Maud Hamilton. I understand she lived here in Decatur, and years later they named the school in her memory. And in some of the pictures I have, I do have a picture of her that someone gave to me. Bruce Street Elementary and High School—that's in Lithonia—and you find most of the things down there because of the quarry built from rocks, so we had a rock-built—of course, the one now is, you know, brick.

In 1955 we had done a study. We also had a bond issue—'54 or '55. We opened on a Sunday in October eleven schools, which included the five—we went from seventeen in shacks and churches—and they were shacks, too, large hulls—to six centers, because it was too much transportation. Even though the number of high school students was very small, a lot of it was due to transportation—lack of transportation. So we ended up separating the elementary and high school at Hamilton and making Hamilton High and Robert Shaw. Robert Shaw School was named for Mr. Robert Shaw, a resident of the Scottdale area. I've heard two versions: he either gave the land, or the board bought it. I'm not sure which is true. And Mr. Cherry was on closed-circuit television, and he spoke to all of the eleven centers on that Sunday. It was a big day. We made the paper, and you know we were happy. But that meant I had to do some in-service.

Reporters have written, and I didn't say it that way, but often we couldn't find children in the classroom. We had self-contained rooms, you know, little restrooms, and water fountains. They would be in the restroom; it was fascinating to flush the toilet. It was fascinating! It was also fascinating to have the [electric] lighting. I was able to get all the free consultants I could. I used Georgia Power. They came out and did an in-service to tell us about the use of fluorescent [inaudible] lights and how to have the light—to have children where they sit and where the teachers sit. We had no money for in-service, so every opportunity I had I used Atlanta University extensively, because it didn't cost us any money. Well, before we went in with the white administrators, Mr. Cherry, with my request, provided funds for me to go over to talk to Dr. Clement, president of Atlanta University. And from there he recommended Dr.—all of a sudden, I keep going blank—but anyway, he came out and did us a workshop. We went into New Math. We were able—Mr. Cherry, through the board, hired us a person. We were still separate and unequal. And it was through this way that we used--many book companies would send you consultants at no cost. Rosemary Colposky [spelling?]- she was Rosemary Bowman later—she was hired. We used her—she was from Silver Burdett--whatever services we could

get without cost. And it was as good as any you could buy. This is how we got a lot of in-service done.

The board of education again—they had workshops at Druid Hills High School, which we could not attend. So then I talked to Mr. Cherry, and he provided funds for teachers to go to Atlanta University. Through Dr. Hollingsworth, who was the first—who did the planning for the junior college [DeKalb Junior College, later Georgia Perimeter College, and currently satellite campuses of Georgia State University] and was the first president—we sent one teacher to Syracuse University to study special education. The first special class we had was the EMR—the [“educable”] “mentally retarded.” There was a teacher taught at Robert Shaw, Mrs. Stovall. We had teachers going a lot. Georgia also had—and that we could not attend--school at the Board of Regents. My late sister has a master’s degree in textiles from Teachers’ College, Columbia University. She went every summer till she received hers. Through the Georgia Teaching and Education Association plans were on foot [sic] that we were going to ask—some teachers were going to ask—to go to Europe or Asia, you know, anywhere—the state’s going to pay for it—through the fund which was made up of the Jeanes Fund, the Rosewarren—although we have a group now known as the Rosew—no, not Rosew—Southern Education Foundation. It didn’t cost me a dime to get my master’s degree. I lived on a campus. We traveled to many places like Tuskegee, South Carolina, [inaudible—sounds like “Parker History”] Schools. We went to Augusta, Georgia, to study the schools. So we had on-hand observation. They invited in to our classes in-service supervisors who came and shared their education experiences with us.

And I said I stayed nine weeks out here on Atlanta Avenue with the Clark family. They’ve blocked the street off now for some reason. So I came out here one Sunday to go to the Methodist Church, and it wasn’t there anymore; I had to find it. I understand they—well, I know they’re down on South Hairston now. It’s just been many changes. Housing—you had shanties. We did a lot of social work. I have driven from Atlanta, Georgia, with mattresses and box springs on the top of my car. We worked with Mrs. Clark, Department of Family and Children Service, who helped us a lot. One day one of the ladies, over-ambitious, from the County Line area, went to a furniture store here in Decatur and told them that—a nurse—I told them to sell her a Beautyrest [mattress] set. Well, they sent for me and sent for this nurse, too. And I said, “Well, I don’t even sleep on a Beautyrest. [*Laughs*] I just sleep on a mattress.” We later dropped her. Another one did bartering. A lady in Stone Mountain, they ran a farm for somebody, I don’t know. She had peaches, but she didn’t have pears. So the nurse and I bought pears, took her pears; and she gave us peaches. There was a lot of things that you did

you would say was not instructional; but if you weren't able to see that children had food in their stomachs and had clothing on their back, you can't teach a child that's hungry. And if a child is not properly dressed, he feels insecure, he has a low self-esteem, and you don't get very far with him. So when I worked as a Jeanes supervisor, it was no different from what I was doing that you would find they were doing in other places. And in this book here [*Reaches for book.*], which is the Jeanes Program for Georgia Schools [*Jeanes Supervision in Georgia Schools*], it gives a background history of what Jeanes supervisors in Georgia were doing at that time. They would do some of the same things as we met in our organization and talked. [*Holds up book for camera.*] This is really the second edition, unfortunately. There were six of us at AU; two of us remained out of the six our entire experience as supervisors in the same county. She [The other of the two?] went to sleep one night and didn't wake up, but we thought enough to ask her sister about the copy [of the first edition?]. She had thrown it away. So this [second edition] had to be rewritten. I can tell you now, we're in here thirteen times. There's also a chronology of Jeanes supervisors--again, where I got the name Clyde Adams, who was the first Jeanes supervisor in DeKalb. [*Sets book down and retrieves another one.*] We also have a national organization, and this is *The Jeanes Story*. If you read the two books—and I think you have one or two up there at the office [DeKalb History Center]—this is good, but it's not nearly as detailed and informative as what we did in Georgia. We lost pictures—there are pictures in here from DeKalb. We had a student supervisor from Atlanta University that trained under me. Some of those pictures I no longer have, but the few did, you know, make the book.

MS. OWENS: How did the "housing-project concept" [*makes air quotes*] affect DeKalb and its schools from your perspective?

MRS. HARRIS: We had no HUD money. The first were these apartments down here in Decatur. I don't even know now—well, they do have them now in Lithonia, I remember going to [inaudible]. One of the first ones that was really done, which were houses, was Lincoln Jones, who lives in the County Line area. We used to call him the mayor down there. If you want to know or do anything, you go by Mr. Jones. Ms. Wright was also a bus driver, retired several years ago. He built a—what they call Lincoln Homes in County Line. This was during the period when Manuel Maloof was our commissioner, and I have pictures of that. They built some very lovely homes. I owned property down there. Well, my husband informed me to begin with, "I am not moving out there in the dark." He's a city boy; he was born in Atlanta. In later years I sold it; but most of the teachers, the principal, and myself owned lots, you know, down in the County Line area. This was the beginning for, I would say, massive production of homes and cutting of streets. Of course, they have them now in Lithonia and some of the other

areas. But the first ones I knew about were right here in Decatur, which was not under my supervision; but we worked together.

MS. OWENS: And you've talked a little bit about '54; and, as we move into the '60s and early '70s, when lawsuits and so forth were really causing major changes.

MRS. HARRIS: Right

MS. OWENS: As you think about that, and I was teaching in DeKalb County schools at that time actually—

MRS. HARRIS: I didn't know you were a teacher.

MS. OWENS: Yeah, I taught—as a matter of fact, I taught at Tilson Elementary for a short period of time, '69 and '70.

MRS. HARRIS: I supervised Tilson at one time.

MS. OWENS: So from your perspective, what was the atmosphere, and how did DeKalb handle it generally, the integration?

MRS. HARRIS: Desegregation?

MS. OWENS: Desegregation

MRS. HARRIS: I never use "integration."

MS. OWENS: You do not? Why is that?

MRS. HARRIS: My reason is integration to me is a two-way street. We were desegregated.

MS. OWENS: That's a good point.

MRS. HARRIS: All the schools for blacks were closed. We had a counselor at Hamilton High to do a survey of the area, and he found out they were busing children right past Hamilton High [to desegregate formerly all-white schools]. The principal went to Mr. Cherry and so informed him. Again, he was inflamed. He just wasn't going to have it. See Mr. B. E. Williams, who was over transportation. It didn't happen. They still went to Druid Hills High School. It was a long time. I was looking through a lot of papers the other day, cleaning up and throwing them out. There was a lot of anguish on both sides. There were talks back and forth. This was during the time when Charlie Davidson was chairman of the board, and it was just a lot of-- again, this misunderstanding I'm talking about. Because people are people regardless of race, color, or creed. They did close the schools. And they made a transportation—who would go where. One of the articles I read, the morning they opened school at Lynwood Park, the students went to their building; and they were told they were being bused to Cross Keys. It was horrible. I understand the police were called. It was just terrible. Our kids felt, and the parents felt—and we don't have these real educated parents we have in DeKalb now. "Where do we

go?" "What do we do?" There was a [council? PTA?] president at Bruce Street, Mrs. Mattie Abbott--you probably know him [sic] or of him [sic]; they have a street named for him [sic]. ["Him" may referred to Mrs. Abbott's husband? Or Mr. Bruce?] Very prominent with the NAACP. Very angry. She lived in Chicago. She had different thoughts than we have here in the South. She was more or less singled out for a lot of things, but very outspoken—she didn't care. She told me one day she took children over to the health department in Lithonia, and they told them to go in the back door; and she told them, "The days of back door are over." She said she and Mr. Abbott sat up all night with two shotguns in the house, waiting on the Klan or somebody to come; but they never came. But she said, "If you come, I'm going to blow your brains out." She told me this out of her mouth. So there was a lot of unrest, confusion—"Why are they doing this to us?" They get over to the other schools. It was left almost to each principal to pull the rule he wanted. Many parents would go and sit a long time. They [the school administration] would not talk to them. If they did, they talked down to them like they were not adults. You don't have to have education to be treated as an adult. You're an adult; you're not a child. And the Scriptures say, "When I was a child, I acted as a child. Now I'm an adult," you know, "and act like a man." It simmered until really the group organized with—what was his name?—Mills, the attorney. [Ms. Owens makes an inaudible comment.] And, of course, you know, they had to make a lot of decisions. And you know the long history of how long it went on. It turned out all right.

MS. OWENS: Who would you say provided leadership from the school system and from the community during those years? Does anybody come to mind?

MRS. HARRIS, *shaking her head*: I can't think of any single person, other than this committee that was organized under Mills. And they met—one evening they had a meeting. And I remember Mr. Harper saying, "I know Ed Bouie will be here tonight with a lot of parents." Nobody went. They didn't feel they were welcome. They weren't really sure what to do. There was a lot of confusion.

MS. OWENS: I think what you shared today is a facet of the history that a lot of people probably are not aware of, and that is that one segment of the schools were totally closed; and children were literally removed from their communities to go to another place.

MRS. HARRIS: Right. They used Robert Shaw for special education. I don't know—I've been retired fourteen years. Hamilton High during this time—1966—Mr. Hatton passed. They really didn't use the building for much of anything. They moved Mr. Flagg [spelling?] from Bruce Street. And I think it's terrible—I think he was paid a salary; he didn't do a doggone thing. They took Mr. Coleman and set him up at Lynwood Park; he didn't do anything. We did have a preschool program there, but he wasn't over it; he was just there.

At one time we only had one black principal in the DeKalb County school system--that was during the time when we started with this desegregating the administrators' workshop—and that was Mr. Davis. He held his own. He was offered a job working with buses. He said, "I didn't go to school to operate buses." And he wouldn't take it. He applied in several places for jobs, and he [inaudible phrase—sounds like "He always sought to deliver" or "He always saw to (inaudible)"]. [Mrs. Harris makes a disgusted facial expression and accompanying sound.] Mr. Cherry was sent a [request for?] letter of recommendation so he would know. He had three offers to be superintendent. But they [Mr. Cherry?] ended up keeping him [Mr. Davis]. He was the first principal at Terry Mill, and at that time there was only one black principal out of the whole school system.

MS. OWENS: Wow

MRS. HARRIS: Mr. Bouie was moved—well, not—first into Central Office. We had three areas in there: the South, the Central, and the North. Bill Pimmington [spelling? Plimpton?] was the South area superintendent, so Mr. Bouie—well, they interviewed four of us. I got a call at home one night: "Want you to interview for a position." What position? There's no job description. How much are they going to pay? How much is it? They don't know. So I had to walk through—I went to Bill Pimmington [spelling?] at the South area, then I went to Bill Strange [spelling? Could be "Strain" or "Strane"?] at the Central area, and I went to Dr. Holtzclaw [spelling?] at the North. There was nothing set up. But I smelled a dead rat. They weren't interviewing anybody for that job but black folks. And I picked up a little bit—I might have been precocious [sic] in my thinking—to kind of keep them in their place. Anything that would take me from instruction, I didn't want it if [even] they had offered me then a superintendent. I love teaching. I like hands-on with children and with teachers. I like to see them grow, I like to see them challenged, I like to see change. When it ended up, I was finally asked—there was Eugene Thompson, who was later a superintendent—assistant superintendent; and there was Jessie Dixon; and there was—who was the third person? Somebody else; I've forgotten who it was. Thompson, Jessie Dixon, Bouie, and myself. So they asked me, "If you had to select one"—and I said, "Well, any one of us could do it"—whatever this is you're going to do. Nobody ever said what you had to do. And I said, "I wouldn't want a cat that I don't know whether you're going to get out or in"; and I told them no. Anyway, they said, "If you had to choose one." And I said, "Well, get Mr. Bouie." And he was our first assistant area director in the South area of the county. That's when that started, and [inaudible—could be "Atlanta" or "that"?] started.

MS. OWENS: And he's recently been honored.



MRS. HARRIS: Yes, honored. They named a school—the theme school—down off Panola Road. Beautiful school. I was there for the dedication. It's a part of the scholarship party that's coming up next week that's given in honor of Mr. Bouie and dedicated to the work that he did.

MS. OWENS: And creating, as I understand it, a scholarship fund in his memory.

MRS. HARRIS: Right

MS. OWENS: And is that for one student a year, or [inaudible]?

MRS. HARRIS: She's not sure, because it depends on how much money they get. As you know, when you're in a field that's not been treaded, you don't know.

MS. OWENS: Right

MRS. HARRIS: But I'm sure whatever funds are raised at this affair on the 28<sup>th</sup> of this month over at the Holiday Inn, it will go for aiding boys and girls, period--not white, not black—period—to go to school.

MS. OWENS: Well, as we summarize this look at the school system, from probably a perspective that a lot of people don't have—and I've certainly learned several things today, what would you—as we're summarizing, what would you talk about in terms of the successes of DeKalb County schools?

MRS. HARRIS: In terms of what?

MS. OWENS: The successes of DeKalb County—

MRS. HARRIS: Some of the successes? I'm very pleased, as I was making up my mind three years before I retired, to think of the schools we have. Every school in DeKalb County is a member of the Southern Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools, which is an achievement. DeKalb school system was the first system to give teachers the opportunity to vote for Social Security as soon as Congress passed the bill. Our curriculum. We've built schools cheaper than others. We've had people from all over the country to visit DeKalb County to look at our schools. I think of the success of the many bond issues we have. People in DeKalb love schools, and they're willing to pay for it. And they pay for them. Many people have moved to DeKalb because of the school system. I look at the businesses. I look at the Chamber of Commerce. I look at how we've grown in the Historical Society. I was sent to the historical society by Dr. Dennis to see if it was worthwhile for children to have field trips. I came to stay thirty minutes, and I stayed the whole afternoon. As you see, I love to talk. And I love to talk history. From that I got a call one day from Hugh Howell. Would I consent to be a member of the Historical Society? It was 1981, and I told you I was on there 1996. I look at all the highways. I look at the businesses in DeKalb now. Atlanta used to call DeKalb—people called

DeKalb the “bedroom of Atlanta.” People used to say, “You work way out there?” I’m not way out anywhere. You know, you’ve got good roads. I remember when Memorial Drive was my fastest way to get home if I went to Lithonia or to Stone Mountain. We have just grown. I look at the colleges and universities—there’s Emory and Columbia Theological Seminary. I look at Agnes Scott College, and I remember the first black girl that graduated. I knew her and her family. Mary Gay—[*laughs*] not Mary Gay from the Historical Society, but she did finish at Agnes Scott College. [NOTE: This is an error. The first black graduate was Edna Patricia Lowe Smith, class of 1971. The first black student, whom Mrs. Harris is likely referring to, was Gay Johnson McDougall, who enrolled in 1965 and left for Bennington College in 1967. In 2010 she was awarded an honorary degree from Agnes Scott College. The Center for Global Diversity and Inclusion was named in her honor.] I can remember when the study was done for the junior college [originally DeKalb Junior College, then Georgia Perimeter College, then acquired and made a branch of Georgia State University], the technical school [originally DeKalb Technical School, then Piedmont Technical College]. Housing and apartments, as you’ve mentioned--all of the kind of industry that we now have. I pass places—I look at Toco Hill; I remember when it was the woods. I look at some of the other places. And if I had thought then that it would be the change today—but, you know, most of the time hindsight is better than foresight sometimes. I was proud to be a part of DeKalb County. It’s one of the greatest counties. And if you want to really get my dandruff [sic] up, say something negative about DeKalb. It’s the greatest place in the world to me. And I know it’s going to continue to grow. It has to continue, because people in DeKalb, they love DeKalb. And they’re willing to work, to volunteer—they’re willing to do whatever it takes to make this a greater county; and to me it’s the greatest, even though I live in Fulton [*laughs*].

MS. OWENS: Well, you’re to be commended for all you’ve done through the years and continuing as an active retiree and teacher, programs, and things that you’ve done.

MRS. HARRIS: I enjoy it. I really do, I enjoy it. I see children now. They call, they drop me notes. This is really one: Last year, as you know, I served as the state president of Georgia Retired Teachers’ Association. And I had attended the national convention of the National Retired Teachers’ Association in Minneapolis, Minnesota. When I came home, I just had a pile of mail. Well, there was one real thick envelope. I left it last—somebody wanted me to buy something, or somebody wanted me to give them something. And these same [inaudible—sounds like “exhibits”] that I have in my living room, I just picked them up. I finally opened the letter. My daughter and her husband and family were on their way to the Atlanta airport to take his brother, who was going back to Kansas City. This was a shock of my life. This young man

[who was the subject of the letter] lived in the Scottdale area—the Lee family, very prominent people out there. His mother was one of our PTA presidents. He passed in October the year before, and I spoke at his funeral. This is hard to believe. He left me five thousand dollars. I've told everybody this. I didn't know Leon had—I mean—he had any money. He worked for thirty-five years for one of the camera companies, and he was in and out of Atlanta with exhibits and displays and would call and wear me out at night—he was lonesome, you know, just talking. I couldn't believe it. I was afraid to even answer. I thought it was, you know, a hoax; but it was true. So one of the students in DeKalb, who was educated in DeKalb, he later attended Clark College, where I graduated, left me five thousand dollars.

I never dreamed the girl that--Linda [middle name inaudible] Vaughn, superintendent now in east Illinois--called me two weeks ago. You talking about, as a lady lived in Decatur said, "po'," not poor. I've seen Linda take one cookie and divide it three ways. She worked her way through Paine College. And [inaudible] she has her master's. So I received a letter from her major professor to tell me that she would become Dr. Linda [inaudible] Vaughn on such-and-such a date about three years ago. When I look at from whence they have come, they had all the reasons in the world to be a nobody, to become discouraged, to "I'm going to give up. I go home, it's dismal; and I go to school" [inaudible]. After we got the [inaudible], of course, it was different. And then desegregation came, so we were thrown in another bit of turmoil. But through it all, I'm proud of the children, those who went ahead. I went in Bouie School. Four people [adults, former students] that were students in the school system said, "Do you remember me?" They're always asking me that. They still call me Jordan. I say, "You've been knowing me a hundred years. I've been married forty-something years." But it gives me a feeling that it has not been in vain. What we have done, the sacrifices teachers have made—I could never make it public—I've helped to buy children clothes so they could look nice to go to sing or whatever they had to do. And you couldn't publicize [inaudible] because you'd have to give to all of them, and [inaudible] very personal. I think DeKalb has had its greatest growth through the years. I think we have learned to love one another as human beings, as people, not black people, not white people, I think, not Indians, or what have you. We are people.

MS. OWENS: Well, Mrs. Harris has left a legacy through these students who have come back and given back to our community. Linking to the past gives us perspective on the present and the future, and for that we can be grateful as we look at the future of our children in education and the history of DeKalb County schools. Thank you for being here today.

MRS. HARRIS: Thanks for inviting me. It's been my pleasure.

*[Background music begins playing over video of Ms. Owens and Mrs. Harris. They are shown talking for several seconds. Video ends, but music continues as credits appear on the screen.]*

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