

**The Lemon Street Schools Oral History Collection
Marietta City Schools System, 2019-2021
Anthony Coleman interview
Conducted by James Newberry
February 3, 2020**

Complete Transcript

Interviewer: All right. This is James Newberry, and I'm here with Mr. Anthony Coleman on Monday, February 3rd, 2020 at the Kennesaw State University Center. I want to thank you for coming by and meeting with me. And just to ask on the recording if you agree to this interview.

Coleman: Yes, I do.

Interviewer: Thank you so much. So, could you please tell me your full name?

Coleman: My name is Anthony Calvin Coleman.

Interviewer: And what's your birth date?

Coleman: 11-11-57.

Interviewer: Okay. And where did you grow up?

Coleman: I grew up here in Marietta and Cobb County, born and raised here, and was born at Kennestone Hospital.

Interviewer: What were your parents' names?

Coleman: My parents name? My father name was Robert Coleman and my mother's name was Juanita Coleman.

Interviewer: What did they do for a living?

Coleman: My father, he worked at Ford Motor Company when I was a small kid. Yeah. And my mother worked at Lockheed Martin.

Interviewer: What did she do at Lockheed?

Coleman: I'm not sure what her title was. Like I said, I was probably a small kid. I can't remember actually what she'd done at Lockheed back then.

Interviewer: What was life like in your community when you were growing up?

Coleman: Growing up as a kid, the community was real close. We had what you call community moms. When kids would act up or something, everybody's parents

knew each other and they didn't have a problem with them disciplining their kid basically back then. If we got out of line, oh yeah, they would definitely discipline us.

Interviewer: So, it was close knit.

Coleman: Yeah, it was close knit. Oh yeah.

Interviewer: Can you tell me a little bit about your early education?

Coleman: I attended the Lemon Street Elementary School during segregation. I remember how the teachers were very caring and loving and passionate about teaching and about learning just in general, basically. And that spoke volumes to me that these teachers would spend the time with you. It was just a passion. When you passionate about something, you love it and you love what you do and you love the kids and instilling in them the value of learning, basically.

Interviewer: Can you describe Lemon Street Elementary when you were a student? What did it look like? What do you remember of the layout?

Coleman: Basically, what I see now is I used to walk down the sidewalk, walking into the front entrance of the building. To my left, the principal's office, it was right there on my left. Teacher's classroom to the right. Actually, once you passed the principal's office, the first left, the first door on the left, there was a teacher's lounge. Next to that teacher's lounge was my first grade teacher, Ms. Edison, basically.

Interviewer: Do you remember Ms. Edison's first name?

Coleman: No, I can't remember what her first name is.

Interviewer: So, she was your first grade teacher.

Coleman: She was my first grade teacher.

Interviewer: Was first grade the first year you went there or did you have anything before first grade?

Coleman: No. No, no.

Interviewer: Okay. Can you tell me about sort of an average day at school? And you can... Any year you were there, but what was the average day like, starting from leaving the house?

Coleman: The average day started out going to your classroom, and the first thing we'd do in the morning is called roll call. That's the first thing they done was roll call, and you would answer roll call, here or absent. Second thing was laying out the

classroom assignment for the day. And when she laid out the classroom assignments, she started by putting it on the board, notes back then. You didn't have all day to get the information off the board because it was going to be erased. And if you were not, what we call... The word I'm looking for is persistent in getting that information out, you better get it from one of your buddies or one of the girls that writes a little bit faster than you, basically, pretty much.

Interviewer: And where did you eat lunch in the building?

Coleman: As you pass Ms. Edison's classroom, you, you go down probably about a few more feet to your right. That was the cafeteria, the lunch where everybody congregated.

Interviewer: Did you bring your lunch or was there lunch made there?

Coleman: There was lunch made there.

Interviewer: Okay. Do you remember what was served?

Coleman: It was healthy. Sometimes it was green beans, cream potatoes, rolls and a meat protein and milk.

Interviewer: Did you eat by grade level? You see in schools today where the first graders eat and then the second graders. Do you recall that at all?

Coleman: Oh yeah. Yeah.

Interviewer: Sorted by grade level?

Coleman: Yeah. Everybody would eat at the same time. Yeah, basically.

Interviewer: Was there recreation, playground, recess type schedule in the day?

Coleman: Yeah, absolutely. There were swings, basketball goals, jump rope. They had certain activities that we done, exercises and stuff, outside.

Interviewer: Okay. How did you get to school?

Coleman: I walked to school.

Interviewer: Okay. Do you remember about how far it was?

Coleman: Probably took me maybe 10 minutes to get to school.

Interviewer: Did you walk with a group of kids or on your own?

Coleman: I walked on my own.

Interviewer: Okay. What subjects do you remember learning at Lemon Street Elementary?

Coleman: Oh, we'd done the spelling bee, you know? That was poppy. That was competition. You had so many words that you had to spell, you get those assignments, you carry them home. You study them and go over them, and then you had to come back and she would give you spelling tests in the morning. Either you would get... Depending on how well you done, either you would be given... What was it? How they used to grade them? 100, 90, 95, 85, 80. I remember, though... I remember 75, 70s, 60s.

Interviewer: So, what kind of student were you?

Coleman: I think I'd done pretty good in spelling. I think I was probably about a B. Probably about a B, yeah.

Interviewer: Tell me about your teacher, Harvey Maxwell.

Coleman: Oh, Mr. Maxwell. He was an extraordinary man, loved education, loved history, very disciplinary. Yeah, discipline. Believed in discipline.

Interviewer: What kind of discipline? How would he discipline you?

Coleman: Well, I mean, he would correct you verbally, but if you didn't comply, he would get a paddle. Yeah, yeah.

Interviewer: And that would happen in class?

Coleman: Yeah. That would happen in class. Oh yeah. That would happen in class.

Interviewer: Can you tell me about Jeannie Carter, your teacher?

Coleman: Ms. Carter was a math teacher. Oh yeah. She was great. She loved teaching. I never seen a woman that loved what she'd done and love the kids.

Interviewer: How many kids in each class? Do you remember?

Coleman: Back then? I can't remember exactly how many kids, whether it was 25 or 30. It had to be somewhere in there, maybe. Yeah.

Interviewer: Do you remember any other teachers or administrators at the school when you were there?

Coleman: Yeah, I remember Ms. Saddler, Janie Saddler. Yeah, Ms. Saddler. Ms. Jeannie Gresham, who I spoke to the other day. Ms. Gresham. Jackie Willis or Jackie Walden-Willis, that was her name that taught down there. Yeah.

Interviewer: What was the quality of the education?

Coleman: It was high. It was high expectation. Yeah, high expectation. It was... Oh yeah. Basically.

Interviewer: Tell me about the relationship between the teachers there and parents of the students. Was there a lot of communication between them?

Coleman: Oh yeah. Oh yeah. Oh yeah. Yeah, all my teachers talk to my parents. Talked to them about how well I was doing, what I needed to be doing, the areas that I might be lacking in that I needed to work hard on, basically. My parents went to PTA meetings. Yeah.

Interviewer: Okay. So, it was mostly at PTA meetings or did they ever speak over the phone or in person?

Coleman: In person, yeah. Yeah, yeah. And Mr. Maxwell came to the house. Oh yeah, he came to the house. Oh yeah, I remember that. Yeah.

Interviewer: On a regular basis or one time?

Coleman: On a regular basis. He wanted my mother to know what I was doing in school, what I needed to work on, basically.

Interviewer: Okay.

Coleman: You know, and say, "He can do the work," basically.

Interviewer: Okay. Can you tell me where you attended middle school?

Coleman: Marietta Junior High over on Aviation. Marietta Middle.

Interviewer: Okay, and what about high school?

Coleman: High school, I attended North Cobb. Yeah.

Interviewer: Okay. What are your memories of integration? I know you were still fairly young, but where were you in your education when that came about?

Coleman: Talking about when blacks and whites started going to school?

Interviewer: Right, right.

Coleman: That had to be in the 1970s, I'm thinking, because the last graduating class was '67 of Lemon Street High School. And then I can't remember when the Civil Rights Bill Act was put in. I think it was 1968 when blacks and whites started going to school, I think. I can't remember.

Interviewer: Do you remember about how... I mean, do you remember your first interaction with white students?

Coleman: Yeah. That's when the... Yeah, that had to be 1960... I want to say '69. Yeah, it was in elementary, I'm thinking. Yeah. Yeah. It was in elementary.

Interviewer: How did it go? I mean, what do you remember of being in class with white kids as opposed to all black kids?

Coleman: It was okay. I think kids being small and kids... You really didn't see much of a difference, I guess. Being young at a young age, I didn't think about were we used to going to school with white kids because we all went to... I went to an all-black elementary school. It wasn't until that integration came in that blacks and whites started going to school, basically. As a young child, you didn't know nothing about segregate. I didn't know nothing about segregated, why it was segregated. All I know is just a white kid was here to go to school and to learn. We're just children.

Interviewer: So, did you ever have any bad experience going to school after integration when white and black kids were together? Did you ever run into any problems or unhappy moment?

Coleman: Oh yeah. There were fights or something like that. That's what you mean? Oh yeah. Yeah. Some of that occurred. Oh yeah. Yeah, absolutely. Yeah, basically.

Interviewer: Were you involved in any?

Coleman: I think maybe in middle school. Yeah. I don't remember down at the Lemon Street Elementary, basically, pretty much.

Interviewer: So, middle school.

Coleman: Yeah, middle school.

Interviewer: Okay. I mean, was it arguments or just fights? I mean, were there people calling names? How did that...

Coleman: Just probably arguments moreso where we may didn't it not agree on something or whatever, basically, and it ended up in a confrontation. Yeah.

Interviewer: So, when you graduated from high school, what were your goals for the future?

Coleman: I thought I was going to end up going in the military. Ended up getting a job working for Cobb County government, working in... Back then, they called it data processing, and I was a computer operator for Cobb County government, basically. And I worked for the County from 19... I think it was 1979 up until 1992.

Interviewer: Okay. So, was that your sort of early career was working there? [crosstalk 00:15:22]

Coleman: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Yeah. Working. Mm-hmm (affirmative). Oh yeah. Yeah.

Interviewer: And in '92 then what did you move on to do after that?

Coleman: Oh, I worked a little bit in retail. I kind of went from various jobs and done some retail like at Rich's back then. Back then, you didn't have [inaudible 00:15:45]. you had Rich's Shopping Center and things like that, basically.

Interviewer: And you continued to live in Marietta at this time?

Coleman: Lived in Marietta. Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Interviewer: Well, what took you into politics, into public life?

Coleman: Oh, wow. I was a community activist, heavily involved in the community, working with community leaders and NAACP to address issues and concerns of much need in our community. And I really didn't have any interest in it. I was approached by actually Hugh Grogan's former wife and another lady named Julian Thomas, and they asked me what I think about running. And at that time, I told him I really wasn't interested in it. I said, "I'm heavily involved in my church doing discipleship training, teaching and community outreach and so forth." And I said, "[inaudible 00:16:45], I really ain't interested in that." And they said, "Well, think about it." I said, "Well, I tell you when I'm going to do. Better than that, I'll pray about it." And after giving it some thought, I went back to him. I said, "I want to do something to make a difference in the community." And after coming up against the city about Lawrence Street back then, because before this renovation took back in 1990s, I find that article where the city was neglecting the community centers in the black community. And I rose up at the time. I think back then, it was former mayor Dana Easton was the councilman. He was a white councilman in Ward 5, Dana. Phillip Goldstein was there, Alan Hiron. Floyd Northcutt, which was the councilman for Ward 4 where Mr. Dodd lives now, it's in Ward 5, but early on back in the '70s, my mother and them were in Ward 4 on Tara Road. [redistricting map inaudible 00:00:17:48]. They will not in Ward 5. I met with Joe Mack Wilson and council members and told them that, "I love flowers, but Mr. Joe Mack, flowers are not more important than children," and that our kids should not have to recreate in these dilapidated conditions at the centers you [provide pride inaudible 00:18:07]. So, after challenging the city back then, they found some way to get some funds to do some innovations there, basically. So, I look at the past history and look at what we've actually done there and I was glad to be on the city council when we done all these renovations to all these parks and facilities that we have in the city now.

Interviewer: Okay. And so that was a big motivation for you.

Coleman: Oh yeah.

Interviewer: And then carried through your time on the council?

Coleman: Absolutely.

Interviewer: Okay. Can you tell me how long you served on the city council?

Coleman: I served four consecutive terms. Actually, I would say 14 and a half years. I didn't finish my last term out of my last term that I was elected, basically.

Interviewer: Okay.

Coleman: I thought I had it on one of those papers. I think I did. What was it? I was elected to the city council in 2001 and then again in 2005. Yeah.

Interviewer: For a four-year term.

Coleman: Four-year terms, yeah.

Interviewer: Okay.

Coleman: Basically.

Interviewer: So, I wanted to sort of ask about the Lemon Street school from, I don't know, the late '80s and '90s. It was serving both as a local library for- [crosstalk 00:19:37].

Coleman: Right. Hattie Wilson Library.

Interviewer: And as well as the sort of informal community center.

Coleman: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Interviewer: What sort of events took place there? What has been your relationship to that space?

Coleman: Community meetings. A lot of children that lived in public housing came down to read, went down and volunteered to read to kids. Done several black history programs down there at the library to share with kids about black history, the importance of black history, and who some of these community leaders were in the community that they didn't know, may not knew.

Interviewer: What have you wanted to see for that building over the years? I mean, I assume you wanted to see it preserved. Did you have any hopes? I mean, back before there was a plan in place, what did you hope would be the outcome for that building?

Coleman: That that building would be saved and preserved for future generations, and people coming from all around the country or the state to visit that building and that it kind of be like a landmark, a tourism site for people to come to, to view the history of the Lemon Street school. One of the things for me was to be able to go to a Lemon Street football game on Friday night. It was just so much excitement and adrenaline. You're getting ready to go to the football game with your friends and you could just hear the band playing. They were just phenomenal. You just couldn't wait to get down and to the game and get in all that excitement. I think about Leo Stubbs who was the band director and those that were older than me that played in the band, how Leo Stubbs drilled them and drilled them in excellence in the band. And when you played in band, you wanted to be the best. Yeah, you wanted to be the best.

Interviewer: So good football team and good band.

Coleman: Oh yeah.

Interviewer: And the football field, as I understand it, is now the parking lot behind the Turner Chapel?

Coleman: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Yeah.

Interviewer: They're sort of down in that lower land area. [crosstalk 00:22:12].

Coleman: Land. Yeah, that's where the football field was.

Interviewer: Okay. Where would you walk down? You said you grew up on Montgomery Street. How far of a walk was that?

Coleman: I would walk down Montgomery Street to Cole Street to Lemon Street to Rigsby Street.

Interviewer: Okay. And I mean, was it many members of the community walking down to the football stadium?

Coleman: Oh yeah. Oh yeah. Oh yeah. Yeah. People knew shortcuts to get to the football field.

Interviewer: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Coleman: Yeah. Back over by Roosevelt Circle and Macintosh. Yeah. There were little cut through ways to get to the football game.

Interviewer: Could you walk right in or were there certain entry points?

Coleman: There were certain entry points, yeah.

Interviewer: Okay. Did you have to pay?

Coleman: Yeah, you had to pay. You couldn't just come in and try to slip in. Oh yeah.

Interviewer: What kind of concessions food did they have available?

Coleman: Yeah, they had hot dogs, hamburgers, popcorn, peanuts, Coca-Cola's. They had it all, corn dogs. Oh yeah. Yeah, I remember that.

Interviewer: So, were those... Those athletes and band members, did kids in the community sort of look up to them? What was the relationship there?

Coleman: Oh yeah. Yeah, they were role models. Yeah. Oh yeah. Yeah, a lot of kids. They were role models.

Interviewer: So, you talk about wanting to preserve the Lemon Street Elementary School as a landmark, as a place where people... Not even just Marietta or Cobb County or Georgia, but elsewhere come into. Why- [crosstalk 00:23:47]

Coleman: That's what I said in my interview, that I wanted people all over the country, all over the world to know the history of the Lemon Street School.

Interviewer: And if I may ask, why do you feel it matters so much?

Coleman: I just think people need to be informed and educated about history, the importance of history and how important it is to preserve history, basically, and that it's invaluable.

Interviewer: And going beyond the exhibit we're working on, how do you think... In the building itself, how do you think there are other ways to spread this history to help young people know more about it?

Coleman: Workshops, seminars, educate, social media, CNN, world news, basically.

Interviewer: So, who else do you think we should interview?

Coleman: I've got a list of names that I left at home that I need to send to you, basically.

Interviewer: That would be great.

Coleman: Basically.

Interviewer: Is there anything else you'd like to share, Mr. Coleman?

Coleman: No. I'm just glad that you took the time out to interview me today, and just excited. I talked to the young man that's in my city council seat now and just trying to mentor him and get him acclimated and settled down and say, "Hey,

you got to work with these people up here. You got to build relationships. You can't get nothing done if you're not working together. It takes teamwork." And I said, "Sometimes politics can be confrontational. You're not going to always agree on everything," basically. I said, "But if they can meet you in the middle of the road and you can get something accomplished for the good of the people that you represent, because it's not about you." My mentor told me, Mrs. Friedman's husband, he says, "Anthony..." He said, "Always put the people before politics." He said, "Because if you do that, you're going to go a long way and you're going to do a lot of good things for the city of Marietta," basically, and I never forgot that.

Interviewer: Well, thank you so much.

Coleman: Yeah.

Interviewer: It's nice to interview someone who attended Lemon Street Elementary. I really appreciate it.

Coleman: Yeah, thank you. Yeah.

Interviewer: All right. Mr. Coleman, tell me about the effort to get the historical marker on the Lemon Street property.

Coleman: I was instrumental in pushing that effort when I was on the city council to have a historic marker down at the Lemon Street school on that property. I actually went to the city manager and asked him if we had money available for historic preservation and could we get a marker placed on that property. And at that time, he said we could. And also, I was responsible for the historic marker that Zion Baptist Church has at the Old Zion Museum. Those two markers, I was responsible for pushing the effort to get those done on both of those properties.

Interviewer: And if you recall, what did you want the historical marker at Lemon Street to say? What about the school but also the community?

Coleman: I can't remember, per se, what the wording is on it, but I do have a copy of it. And so now I'm going to provide you with that, what it says on the marker.

Interviewer: Okay.

Coleman: Basically.

Interviewer: Thank you.

Coleman: You're welcome.