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The Lemon Street Schools Oral History Collection
Marietta City Schools System, 2019-2021
Jennie Gresham interview
Conducted by James Newberry
February 10, 2020

Complete Transcript

Interviewer: All right. This is James Newberry and I'm here with Miss. Jennie Gresham on Monday, February 10, 2020 at her home on Montgomery Street in Marietta, Georgia and Miss. Gresham, I appreciate you sitting down with me. Do you agree to this interview?

Gresham: Yes.

Interviewer: Wonderful. Could you tell me your full name?

Gresham: Jennie Lee Hill Gresham.

Interviewer: And what's your birthdate?

Gresham: January 31, 1933.

Interviewer: What were your parents' names?

Gresham: My father was Clarence E. Hill. My mother was [Gerry 00:00:38] Lee Freemond-Hill.

Interviewer: And what did they do for a living?

Gresham: My father drove an 18-wheeler for Frank G. North Chemical Company that was on White Circle at that time and it later moved to Old 41, right there at the corner of Old 41 and going into Bells Ferry.

Interviewer: I see, and your mother?

Gresham: My mother was a keeper. She worked for Sears Roebuck as a cleaner. She worked for Marietta City Schools as a janitor, at some of the schools and then she just did home ... Well, she did work in the home. Cleaning people's homes and one time she worked at a place where they made fried apple pies, right off of, well, it's right off of Reynold Street. I can't think of the name of the people that she did it for, but the lady had a place in her basement where she fried apple pies and sweet potato pies. And she worked there.

Interviewer: Okay.

Gresham: And she just did home work.

Interviewer: How many siblings did you have?

Gresham: I don't have any siblings.

Interviewer: An only child?

Gresham: I'm an only child.

Interviewer: What was it like being an only child? Did you get a lot of attention?

Gresham: Well, I got attention, but I don't think I got any more because I spent a lot of time with my cousins. I would go down to their house and be around them a lot until I went to school, and then I didn't have that contact with them. But, no. My parents were just normal parents that was back in those days and in those days parents weren't like the loving kind. They loved you, but they weren't the kind that was giving you hugs and kisses and all of this sort of thing.

Interviewer: How did your parents show love?

Gresham: Well, I felt like they took time out to get me to school, they gave me a good meal. They dressed me. They saw that I had what I needed and they took me to church with them and places. They didn't just put me aside and forget about me. They included me in family activities.

Interviewer: I see, and where did you attend church?

Gresham: I attended church at Liberty Hill Missionary Baptist Church on 2nd and 4th Sundays. That was my mother's church. And then I went with my father to his church, which was Noonday Baptist Church on 1st and 3rd Sundays.

Interviewer: Did they ever go to church together? Or did they go to their separate churches twice a month? How did that work?

Gresham: Well, they went to their separate churches. I remember my daddy was a superintendent of Sunday schools, so he went to his church. But, there were activities that went on at my mother's church that he came there and visited. Now he was a deacon at his church, so he spent a lot of time there, but activities that we had, he would visit and activities that they had, my momma would visit. For example, they would have homecoming. They would spread dinner on the ground, so my mother prepared him a box with all of the food for him to take to his church. But then we had it at my church, she prepared a box and we took it to our church.

Interviewer: Do you consider your mother's church your church?

Gresham: Yes, it is.

Interviewer: Okay, and where did you grow up? Where was your childhood home?

Gresham: My childhood home was on Canton Highway. Like angling from where Wheeler is. Wheeler's a lumber company is. It was across the street and it was down behind the Ward's home. JC Ward and I can't think of her name right off hand, but they had a house and we would go down behind them and back out in the field there was a little home that they had. A little house. And we lived in that house until it burned when I guess about 1941. One January cold rainy Friday night, my daddy was trying to start a fire with wet wood and everything and he had some type of incinerator or something to start the fire with, and thought the fire was down and poured some more on it and went up in a blaze. After that, we moved to North Coal Street down here. It was a double tenant house. And then after we left there, we moved right there on Montgomery Street, right where, it's a brick house there now. Miss. Dorothy Barn, ah, not Barn, but Dorothy ... What is Dorothy's last name? I can't think of her last name off hand, but Dorothy lives right down there now at the spot. I could almost walk to the spot where the house was. We lived there until I finished college and we bought a little plot of land right before you get to the bank. The Bolton's lived up there in the big white house, and we built a little house down here. We lived there until urban renewal came through and Marietta said they were going to come up Coal Street there, and they were going to come straight across and they were going to make that road straight and connect with this part because there was a division.

Interviewer: I see.

Gresham: You see, you come down and then you'd have to make a turn and go this way and then right back. They said they were going to make it where it would just come straight across. Didn't happen. You've got that deep curve right there by the bank now. But our property backed up to the New Way Laundry, which is that Douglas, it's called Douglas something. Building, is out there now. What is it? Some type of, what do they? They house people there I guess that are in problems.

Interviewer: Like a halfway house?

Gresham: Halfway house, something like that. It's Douglas and something health department. It's still up there right now and our property went right up to the back of that fence.

Interviewer: And you said "our property," so this is you and your mother and father?

Gresham: Uh-huh (affirmative).

Interviewer: And even through college did you live there or did you live in Atlanta when you were in college?

Gresham: No. When I went to college I stayed on campus.

Interviewer: Okay.

Gresham: I stayed there, but when I come home, I came to Montgomery Street right down there.

Interviewer: With your parents?

Gresham: Uh-huh (affirmative).

Interviewer: And you said they lived behind the Bolton's. Are the Bolton's a white family?

Gresham: We were beside them.

Interviewer: Okay.

Gresham: They were a white family. This is the car parkway. The Bolton's had a house right here. This was Coal Street right here. We had a house right here. This was our house. Next to us was Miss Parker. Across the street, Cameron and his family, then the Blackmans, Brenda Blackman. And then Miss Octavie Carter lived there and it was another house here, Miss Alma Lockhardt lived up there a while, but then somebody else. And then when you got down to the street in here, I was telling you, it would go back across this way. That's Montgomery. And this house right here was where Louis Reed and then the McAfee's moved into that house. Then there was Gertrude Williams lived next. Then Lottie Devon lived next and Addie Hammond. And up here was Miss Shaw. That took you all the way to a laundry and the laundry was all the way back here and they came all the way out to this and our property went all the ... If their fence was here, our property went all the way back to right there. And their property went all the way back to their fence. This was the Bolton's right here and the Lindley's had a big house right up here.

Interviewer: These are two white families. Are these all black families?

Gresham: All of these are black families.

Interviewer: What was your relationship with the Bolton's and the Lindley's? The white families?

Gresham: She was very nice. As a matter of fact, they sold us this property right here because there used to be a pasture right out here and I remember when I was going to high school, there was a cow in that pasture. It was two old sisters that lived there because I think the husband died and they were nice as they could be. They didn't bother us and when my daddy got sick, they could sit up here on their porch and they would see my daddy come in and sit down here on this outside picnic table my momma had. She told my momma watch him because

he's coming in and before he come in the house that he sits down to rest. But they didn't bother us at all. We got along very well and the Lindley's didn't bother us either. They did laundry. Dry cleaning and laundry.

Interviewer: Can you point to specific examples of racism you experienced at that time in the community? Was that a part of your childhood? Was it something you were conscious of? Can you talk a little bit about that?

Gresham: Well, I knew that we did not associate, so to speak, with white children because there were none in our area. There was totally black because you see, all behind us was that Johnson Street and Mulberry Street and it was totally black. There were no children for us. Now when we went down what we call Beacon Hill, it's still there, all the way down there from the parkway, all the way down to Lemon Street, there were nothing but white families. But when we went to school going down through that, they didn't bother us. They didn't say anything to us. One lady had a crab apple tree in her yard, and of course we go through there and the crab apple on the ground, we'd get one or two, but they didn't say anything to us and nobody bothered us.

Interviewer: Would you walk in groups or on your own to school?

Gresham: Well, basically when I leave going to school, I might be by myself going down through there. We weren't afraid.

Interviewer: Did you ever walk in the square?

Gresham: When I would go to music, I would go down 1st Avenue, go up, there's North Forest then go up Forest Avenue. I would walk through the white community. Nobody bothered us. It was shady and we walked all the way up to Cherokee Street and then go around the square and go down to Reynold's Street where I went to music. When I come back from music I would come back up Reynold's Street, go up that little street there where Wendy's is to where Sears Roebuck was. Right there where the lighting place is because my mother worked there and my point was to get back there by 6:00 so I could ride home with my daddy when he went to pick my momma up from work.

Interviewer: I see. Where did your parents do their grocery shopping, their clothes shopping and things like that?

Gresham: My mother shopped at Florence's. She had a charge account there. You know anything about charge accounts?

Interviewer: That you could charge it and pay later?

Gresham: Uh-huh (affirmative).

Interviewer: And where was Florence's?

Gresham: Florence was right there on the square. Right next to the [inaudible 00:15:14]. They changed it now, but when you used to go to Florence's, you'd go in and there would be a little area that would go in off of the sidewalk like this. And then this would be the door to go into the store. But they had plates here for display. She went there. I remember one lady there was Miss Gable. She was a very nice lady because when I went to go to college, my mother bought me clothes there, and so you found person who said something about buying all these clothes and Miss Gable spoke up and said, "She's going to school." My momma was able to buy and then I was able to go up and pick out my stuff and charge on my momma's account.

Interviewer: Do you need to answer? That's fine.

Gresham: Oh, I hate to do this.

Digital recording from phone: Call from Carol Compte.

Gresham: Hello? Hello? Have a blessed day. I shouldn't have answered because I don't even know who it was. Then we shopped at Coggin's Shoe Store. Coggin's was over there where the First National Bank used to be on the corner and just below where Eddie's Trick Shop is. Miss Cain worked in there and they had where you would go, you think you put in and it made a picture of it to see the shoe size. That's where we shopped there and we also had an account there. Now later, Coggin's moved to the other side of the square. I can't remember what's on that corner. It's some little antique shop. Let's see, Marietta Pizza place is right there. Go right across the street, it's another building in there and then Coggin's was right next to that one.

Interviewer: Let me ask you about Florence because you mentioned someone saying, "Why are they buying all these clothes?"

Gresham: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Interviewer: What do you mean by that? What was said?

Gresham: I think because of the quality of clothes that my mother was buying for me to go to school with and she bought me nice clothes in there. I might not have got a lot, but then she didn't buy maybe one of the cheapest clothes in there, but Florence's wasn't cheap anyway. But I think that the fact was that I got four or five pieces, probably they thought that was too many for you to have.

Interviewer: Who complained?

Gresham: I can't remember who the clerk was, but the lady said, "Well, she's going away to school." And so her momma's going to do this. And we never had a problem paying her bill. She always paid her bill and kept it up.

Interviewer: What I'm assuming is that they thought that was a lot of nice clothes for a black woman to buy.

Gresham: That's the idea you get.

Interviewer: Okay. I want to start moving into the school years. You first attended schools, Liberty Hill and Noonday?

Gresham: Yeah. I went to Liberty Hill and Noonday church schools.

Interviewer: Tell me about those.

Gresham: Well, can remember going to Liberty Hill, it was a one room schoolhouse that sat on the church property and so you got all seven grades in the one room. One teacher. The older teacher sometimes helped with the smaller children. But all of your classes were there, so I must have went there a year and then I remember going to Noonday because my daddy worked over there and his sister lived right in there. It was more convenient for me to stay with them sometimes and get back and forth where we could walk up across the fields to the school. It too was a one room school with one teacher and all the children helped with that. And then after our house burned down out there, and we moved to the city, then that's when I started to Lemon Street Elementary School and I guess I was about third grade.

Interviewer: You did first and second out at Liberty Hill and Noonday.

Gresham: Somewhere in that area.

Interviewer: Do you remember the teacher's names?

Gresham: At Liberty Hill I remember having a lady named Miss Beatrice Dodd. And she used to go back there on Lemon Street and she ran a café on Lawrence Street for a while. Then I had a lady named Miss Crawford one year out there and up at Noonday, it was Miss Robinson. I can't think of Miss Robinson's first name, but they were the Robinson family that lived on Reynold Street.

Interviewer: What type of materials did you have to study with?

Gresham: I don't remember that. Just a board maybe? And talking. I don't even remember books or anything of that sort.

Interviewer: Would your parents have bought you a notebook or something like that to use?

Gresham: I don't think so. I don't remember having a book back or anything like that.

Interviewer: Was the building ... How was it heated in the winter?

Gresham: With a big pot belly stove. You had the big stoves where they'd have to put wood in it or something like that.

Interviewer: And what were the facilities like? The bathroom facilities?

Gresham: Outhouses. You have outhouses that the church had and at Liberty Hill, the church sat right here and the school was right here. And the outhouse was back out there. I think more of them may have been on this side over on at the church, over on this side.

Interviewer: What curriculum did the teacher's follow at these schools?

Gresham: In those days I knew nothing about a curriculum. I think all that we were working on was reading, writing, arithmetic as they called it.

Interviewer: Three "R's."

Gresham: The three "R's."

Interviewer: And were those teachers professionals?

Gresham: I'm not sure that they had, what degree they had. I'm thinking that they had some college training. But, I don't think they might have been certified back in those days.

Interviewer: I know you came into town and continued, for other students who stayed out there, how many grades would they complete?

Gresham: I go back and think. My cousins went to school, I guess I want to say that out of the group of them that I went with, I'm not sure. In my family, I'm the first one to graduate from high school. In my daddy's family or my mama's family.

Interviewer: And that includes all your cousins?

Gresham: That includes all of my cousins. I'm the first one to finish high school. I'm the first one that went and finished college.

Interviewer: How did your family feel about you and your education?

Gresham: You know, we were poor, but it didn't dawn on me when if time came, like I just went on and applied, assuming my daddy was going to come up with the money. So I applied and got accepted, and they had a payment plan. So every month or so, my daddy would come down to go to the business office and he'd pay all my tuition.

Interviewer: So, it was sort of as needed. If he had the money together, he'd pay for it, and he did.

Gresham: Uh-huh (affirmative). I imagined that at a certain time you had so many weeks or months to pay before the semester was over. When that semester was over, then you worked on the next semester.

Interviewer: Do you remember that your parents, even though they hadn't finished high school, did they tell you "you will" or you kind of said you just did it?

Gresham: No, it was me.

Interviewer: Okay.

Gresham: I remember coming up saying, I will never do what my mama did. I had my own self drive, I had an inner drive that pushed me to want to be a little bit better than what they were. I realized that I would not be able to work in people's homes like my mama did. I'll tell you why, because one summer this lady asked Mama if I could work for her, come out and clean up and whatever and just go through her house. I went out there, rode my bicycle, out there to work. Well, I had a pattern, go in, clean up the kitchen, go on in, do the bathrooms and the bedrooms and everything. Come on around and do that, and then get her living room, and then the porches. One morning I went and her sister was visiting from Atlanta. And she said, "Jenny, if you'll go in, Lucille and I are going to sit here and have coffee and blah, blah, blah. If you'll go ahead and do the rest of the house when you finished, we will have the kitchen clean." Well, I went on and did every other chore that I had to do and finished up, and got back in here, and she said, "Now, you can do the kitchen." I said, "Oh no I can't because you told me you and your sister was going to do that kitchen." I didn't go back. She didn't tell me, but she told my mama. And I realized, then, that I would not be able to do that because once you tell me something, you got to follow through on it.

Interviewer: You couldn't sort of be at their mercy in that situation?

Gresham: Uh-uh (negative).

Interviewer: We're kind of jumping ahead, but since you're talking about your career, I do want to ask, did you consider anything other than teaching?

Gresham: When I was growing up, I was going to always be a beautician. I love to do hair, but somehow or the other, when I got into college, all of that sort of changed. I wanted to do psychology, and you had to get approved by the Dean to take the class, because I was interested in reading people. I do it today. He didn't feel that I was ready for it. So, then I went on and didn't take psychology, but I went on and went into social studies. And so I took those classes, and when I came out of school, I had a degree, an A-B degree, and I taught high school for about a year and a half.

Interviewer: Where was that?

Gresham: I first got a job in Commerce, Georgia. I went there in January and I stayed till the end of the year. The next year I went to Toccoa and taught one year. Every time I would go away from home, the invitation to teach here came after I was already in school somewhere else.

Interviewer: I see.

Gresham: So that next year I said I'm not going anywhere. I'm going to sit here and wait on them to call me, and I got that call. Professor M.J. Woods, who was also my high school principal, called me to come work.

Interviewer: So, you didn't miss a year of teaching?

Gresham: I only missed... didn't teach from September 1953, let me see, I finished in June of '53, so September '53 until January of '54, that's the only time I missed.

Interviewer: Just the Fall.

Gresham: Uh-huh (affirmative).

Interviewer: Let's go back, because we're going to come back to that, but I want to talk about your first years of third grade at Lemon Street Elementary. Tell me about entering school there.

Gresham: Well I just went to school. We had double seats and they were... Excuse me one second.

Interviewer: Sure.

Digital recording from phone: Call from Scott Lewis

Gresham: I thought this was him. "Hello, Mr. Scott. Okay, look, I'm in a conference right now, but I look for you at 12 o'clock. Oh my goodness. Okay. Okay, well let me know if there's anything I can do. Okay. Bye bye." That's a friend and he's 90 years old.

Interviewer: Was that Lewis Scott?

Gresham: Yes.

Interviewer: I've been trying to get in touch with him.

Gresham: Oh.

Interviewer: I thought it said Scott Lewis on the phone, but he was a teacher.

Gresham: Yes.

Interviewer: I want to do an interview with him, so maybe you can put in a good word for me.

Gresham: Okay.

Interviewer: Because I've called him a couple times, but he wasn't at home.

Gresham: Well, Lewis will tell you now that, at 90, he said his memory isn't as good, but I can put you in touch with him. He was just telling me that he lost a niece, so he's not going to play bridge today.

Interviewer: I see.

Gresham: Excuse me, now where was I?

Interviewer: First years at Lemon Street Elementary, you were describing the desks.

Gresham: They were, it was a double, it was long seats, two people sat on them. They had ink wells, you know what an ink well is?

Interviewer: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Gresham: Okay. So we had inkwells and they were, the seats were screwed into the floor. We had big potbelly stoves, and basically that's about all, we had recess. We had a playground outside. The bathrooms were outside. You saw the picture of the school, so it's the school's right here. Then, my classroom was on the backside, is third grade, and so it was a building and went down this way. Playground was right here, the bathroom was here. The girls on this side, the boys on this side. They would come in and have, the janitors would come down early and try to make a fire and keep warm. Many times we were cold, and we all hug around the heater.

Interviewer: So, this is that original wooden building?

Gresham: Yes. The one that we were talking about.

Interviewer: Right. It had sort of, on the front, like a tower?

Gresham: Yes.

Interviewer: What was at the top of that, do you know?

Gresham: Nothing. We never went... Upstairs was the fourth grade classroom up there, and I never went up there. I just imagined it was sort of like an attic or something up there. We never got up in that area.

Interviewer: How many grades total?

Gresham: Four. Because, let's see, we had the first grade, the first grade sat right here, and then the second grade was down the hall right here. And then the third grade was right here, and the steps was right here. And there was another room down here, because you may have had more than one first grade. And then upstairs, I remember being upstairs for the fourth grade, and maybe a class across the hall there.

Interviewer: So, four classrooms on the first floor?

Gresham: I think so.

Interviewer: And two on the second floor?

Gresham: No, it had to be, I would think... I'm thinking that maybe that must've been at least three or four upstairs.

Interviewer: Okay.

Gresham: I'm not, I can't, I remember going to the fourth grade over here. I'm thinking first and second grade was downstairs, and third and fourth grades were upstairs.

Interviewer: I see. And you were there for two years, third and fourth?

Gresham: Uh-huh (affirmative). Before we went across the street.

Interviewer: Right. Who were your teachers there at the elementary school?

Gresham: Boy, I can't remember right now. Miss Butter something. I can't remember right off hand.

Interviewer: What about the principal?

Gresham: The principal was Mr. Woods, M.J. Woods.

Interviewer: Was he principal of both the elementary and the high school?

Gresham: Uh-huh (affirmative).

Interviewer: So, he oversaw the whole thing?

Gresham: Uh-huh (affirmative).

Interviewer: Okay. What can you tell me about him in those years? What do you remember of his personality?

Gresham: He was just soft spoken. He was soft spoken, but he was firm in what you had to do. We called him tip toe.

Interviewer: Why is that?

Gresham: Because he walked so softly, and they used to call him Little Willie. That was one of the things that sometimes the boys would say, Little Willie, because he was very short and everything. But we had Mr. Woods as our principal all the way, from the time I can remember all the way till we got to, till I finished high school.

Interviewer: So, what condition was the building in?

Gresham: It was just an old wooden building. I don't remember like a crack here or anything like that, but it was old and it was wooden. Everything in it was wood, and it was cold. When it got cold, it was cold because it was hard to heat with just those potbelly stoves.

Interviewer: What did you wear to school?

Gresham: I can remember when, I guess I was third grade, and we walked to school, we didn't have buses. We would buy, you wear a dress, and there was a wool, what'd they call it, a jogging suit now they didn't call it, [inaudible 00:36:34] or something, they called it. But then you'd have pants, wool pants that would come all the way up to your waist, and then you had the coat that went with that, that matched it, and the hat.

Interviewer: You'd be bundled up.

Gresham: And you'd bundle up.

Interviewer: In the winter.

Gresham: In the winter. I'd walk from right here, on Montgomery Street, all the way across, go down the hill, and make that left turn on Lemon Street, and be at the school shortly.

Interviewer: How would you compare the education you were getting there versus the one you were getting at the church schools?

Gresham: Well, I think it was probably a little bit more organized then, and you probably got a little bit more individual help because, you see, the teacher only had the one grade. But wherein, at the church school, that one teacher had all seven grades. You may not have had any more children, but you had different levels.

Interviewer: All in the same class.

Gresham: All in the same class.

Interviewer: What about the materials you used at Lemon Street?

Gresham: Well, we had, I can remember we had some type of books. They weren't the best because, my best recollection of books that we got was that we got books passed down to us from the white schools. Pages were missing, pages torn out or whatever, no backs or whatever. We got the hand me downs and they got the new books.

Interviewer: I would imagine that was hard, especially on the teachers, with pages missing.

Gresham: They went on and just like nothing, they knew that that was what they had to deal with. So they made the best of it.

Interviewer: Did you take your lunch to school or did you eat there in the cafeteria or a lunch room?

Gresham: We didn't have a lunch room in that old building that you saw with the tower. There was no lunch over there, you went across the street, you went over here and you ate in this cafeteria.

Interviewer: Did students in different grades eat at different times?

Gresham: Yes.

Interviewer: Okay. So can you talk about any additional subjects you learned at the Lemon Street school beyond reading and writing and arithmetic?

Gresham: I remember we had a geography class. Yes, a geography class. I never will forget this. In fourth grade, we were reading out of the geography book... you could read until you missed a word. Everybody wants to just read. And I got to the word, and I said "is land", I broke it up. It was island. I will never forget that. And that was the end of reading because somebody else got a chance to read. But we just had the, I think came into a little geography classes or history classes then.

Interviewer: How broad was the geography? I mean was it United States? Was it farther?

Gresham: I don't think we got into anything specific, just whatever was in the book. We read it. Try to get an understanding because back in those days more emphasis was put on understanding what you were reading. So those were more like, it was geography or history, but your main point was not what was in there, it was reading.

Interviewer: I see. What kind of a student were you, in general, the grades you made?

Gresham: I was a pretty good student, and I don't talk about this, and you can cut that off for a minute.

Interviewer: You want me to turn it off?

Gresham: Turn it off. I'm going to tell your story.

Interviewer: Okay. All right. So continuing on, you finished fourth grade at the elementary school and then where did you go for fifth grade?

Gresham: Cross the street. Right here.

Interviewer: So, you're talking about the high school?

Gresham: In the high school building.

Interviewer: Okay. So they had grades five—

Gresham: Five, six, seven, and I believe eighth grade was in the library. Maybe eighth grade was over here with, no, by the time we got to eighth grade, you were doing the divisions of classes. Seventh grade stops over here, so eighth grade classes were over here. This is where, in the libraries, where we did our science class. The guy came out and taught Zoology that year because they didn't have a real science program. But by the time we were eighth grade, you're changing classes. The homeroom was over, the home economics was our homeroom class, and then we'd go here for our English, the next class here for our math, and the room on the end down here by the steps would be our science, I mean our social studies class. Miss E.M. Billups was my social studies teacher. Miss Tilly Simpson was my math teacher. Miss M.J. Fred taught me English, and Annie Pearl Jordan taught me home economics. Another teacher I had for, Annie Pearl didn't stay there that many years, then Banks. I can't think of her first name, she was a Holmes. Mr. Holmes used to run the funeral home. His daughter taught home ec. a year or so, and she was my home economics teacher.

Interviewer: So you're gesturing towards this diagram you drew. Can you, as best you can, talking about coming in through the front door, since this is an audio recording, can you describe to me the layout of the building? I know you've done it, but just sort of walk us through it, describing what's right in front of you as you walk in. What's on the left and right?

Gresham: Okay. When you walk in the front door, it was a double front door, and when you walk in straight across the hall was the library. But if you went to your right, when you walked in, you would pass the teacher's lounge, in the corner would be English class. Go down the hall, next door was the math class. Right around a little curve would be the water fountain on the left. But then on the right would be the home economic class, and then the next class would be your social studies class, and then down the steps to go down to the basement, and come

under, for the girl's bathroom and the home economics cooking room. However, when you come in the front door, if you made a left, the first place would be the office, the principal's office. Next door to the principal's office was the seventh grade classroom. Next door going down the hall was the cafeteria, then there's a water fountain on a curve. And then, back down the other, that little hallway, was the sixth grade classroom, fifth grade classroom. And at that would be the steps to go downstairs, come back under, for the boy's bathroom, and the home economics other shop. And then on the complete backside was the gymnasium, the stage where we did our plays. It also had the basketball goals in there, so you played basketball in there also.

Interviewer: What was in that central area outside?

Gresham: Nothing. That was just an empty space out there. And it was, I think maybe there might've been—. And I think maybe there might've been the cement bench out there. But we didn't have time to spend out there. It was just a empty space in there. Empty square.

Interviewer: And I know that when you were at the elementary school across the street, you used the cafeteria in the high school.

Gresham: Yes.

Interviewer: Did you use the gym for anything?

Gresham: Yes, we would come across once a week. The elementary school would walk across, come down the side of the building and come in this door right here, to get to the gym. We had the stage there. And of course, all of the chairs would be seated. Now we used the gym for plays. At one time the elementary did a play. Every class had a play near the end of the school. And then later, it got to the place where we did operettas. And instead of each class, we'd get somebody from every class and do an operetta. So, we always use the gym. And it would be packed. Because all the parents would be walking down and coming down to sit. And so the gym would be packed from the front to the back.

Interviewer: Who directed those plays and operettas?

Gresham: The teachers.

Interviewer: And for operetta, that's a lot of singing. So would students from different grades have to do tryouts?

Gresham: No. The teacher that was doing music, she would teach them the music. I remember that when we did those operettas, I did the speaking parts with a lady named Gwendolyn Glover. She and I. And we could borrow the children for a few minutes and we'd bring them in and we'd go over their parts. And we taught them to speak. And sometimes we would put them in the classroom, get

a little time to be with them. And we would go over their parts and we'd tell them how to do it and what they were supposed to do, and how the gestures and everything that they were supposed to use. And then we'd put it all together.

Interviewer: And were you an upper level student then when you were doing that with the younger students? Or were you a teacher?

Gresham: I was a teacher.

Interviewer: So, you were helping with the speech, the elocution. Okay. So you went from fifth grade through eleven grade in that building, that brick building. And what other extracurricular activities were you involved in at that time? Anything?

Gresham: Well, we had Mayday and of course we did little activities out there. Wasn't as organized as it is today. I used to go down and, and shoot basketball because I wanted to play basketball. But my mom would not allow me. She was very strict and she did not allow me to travel and go places with them. But I'd go down there and play around with them and shoot and everything in the afternoon. But I couldn't be a member of the team and things, because my mom won't let me go any place.

Interviewer: I see. She just didn't want you going too far from her?

Gresham: No, you couldn't go too far. She just didn't have that trust, that as a girl, you were going to do the right thing.

Interviewer: Elaborate on that.

Gresham: They were always afraid that you were going to be out there fooling around with little boys. And doing what the birds and the bees do. And she felt like if she kept me tight and close, I didn't get that opportunity to be flirty and doing things that would lead to a life that I would have to quit school or wouldn't be able to finish.

Interviewer: Did you know students who had to quit school for that reason?

Gresham: Yes, I do. We had, let's see when I was in eighth grade, there was one girl finished that had quit. One girl got married and had babies. Another girl, she quit by the time she was in our tenth grade class. She didn't finish with us. We included her as a part of our class, but she didn't finish because she dropped out and had babies. So we had lots of girls that dropped out of school and had babies, because back in those days there was no homeschooling. It has come to the point now, a lot of times, that you have girls who got pregnant that they had homeschool and they went right on. But that didn't happen back in our days. You got pregnant and you left.

Interviewer: How was it viewed by teachers, faculty, parents, when that happened?

Gresham: It was just one of those things. They had them and you didn't come back to school. You stayed at home and raised your child.

Interviewer: I see. Now my understanding is that there were, beyond the local community, there were students coming from other areas to Lemon Street. Did you know students from other parts of the county?

Gresham: At that time, Cobb County had no high schools for black children. So we got children from Astell, they called it, "Down the Caroline." [? 50:00] Some student came from Acworth, and a lot of the places maybe out in the area around Quiet Circle [?] back in that area. Maybe some areas of Liberty Hill area. The county bused those children into Marietta. So those students caught a bus, school bus. And they put them off at Marietta every day and picked them up, because the county had no provision for them at that time.

Interviewer: Did you notice any differences between the kids here who lived in the city and the kids from the more rural areas?

Gresham: I didn't notice any difference. They came in and they just fitted right on in.

Interviewer: You talked about class differences. Did you ever observe that among your fellow students? Differences in the amount of money their parents made, that kind of thing?

Gresham: I don't think I noticed the difference. It was like you knew these people had a job, but they didn't dress so much different from those of us who were poor. Some of them might've had a few more pennies to spend than we had. But the children didn't make any differences. It's just that our parents didn't socialize, you see. Your parents over here and you in my class, but my parents don't have any socializing with your parents because they are in a different social group, so to speak.

Interviewer: I see. Do you remember the high school being called Perkinson High School?

Gresham: Yes. When I was eleventh grade. No, I was tenth grade. When I was tenth grade, it was Perkinson High School. In the spring of 1948, May of 1948, the class of 1948 graduated Perkinson High School. That spring, we ordered rings for the class of '49, so that they would be there when you finished in '49. And we ordered everything there. I'm almost thinking, I don't know where my invitations are, and if I could put my finger on my class ring, I could show you what I'm talking about. My class ring, even though I finished in 1949 and they said Lemon Street High School is where I graduated from. If you get my class ring, on one side is a P and a H because when we ordered those class rings in '48 it was Perkinson High School.

Gresham: So, you see my eight, ninth, tenth grade was Perkinson High School. My eleventh grade was Lemon Street.

Interviewer: How did you feel about the name change?

Gresham: It didn't bother me.

Interviewer: It didn't really mean one thing or the other.

Gresham: It was just, we went back and they said Lemon Street High School. Then we just fell right on in.

Interviewer: Yeah, but Perkinson was a white school board member. Who made the choice to change it?

Gresham: I don't know. We weren't told.

Interviewer: Okay. One thing that's interesting there is, you talked about ninth, tenth, eleventh or eighth, ninth and tenth, what were those grades from fifth to eighth? What did you call the school you were going to, even though it was the same building?

Gresham: Lemon Street.

Interviewer: Did you just call it Lemon Street High?

Gresham: We just went to Lemon Street Elementary School.

Interviewer: Even up through the seventh grade. You were in the high school building.

Gresham: You were in the high school building, but you were elementary school.

Interviewer: I see. Okay. And no junior or middle school?

Gresham: No.

Interviewer: So it was just elementary to high, okay. So you were talking a little bit about the ring. You went through the eleventh grade year and you graduated after the eleventh grade. But there were some changes made. There was a twelfth grade added about that time, right?

Gresham: Yeah. In 1949, September of 1949, it changed. Georgia had no graduation classes in 1950. Because they added twelfth grade. So they stood still. So you go from a class in '49 and your next class is in '51.

Interviewer: So, this is the group right behind you. And they were thinking they'll be done after the 11th grade, but then they got to go another year.

Gresham: But then they had to go another year.

Interviewer: Okay. But how did people react?

Gresham: They accepted it and went on.

Interviewer: Okay. So you graduated in the eleventh grade year. What do you remember of the graduating ceremony? Where was that held?

Gresham: In this gym.

Interviewer: Who spoke? What was the ceremony like?

Gresham: See if I had that paper, I could give you a program.

Gresham: I don't think it's in here. I think it's in the thing that I let that gentleman have. I had the programs and everything that we had. I don't have it here. It's in that thing that I let him see.

Gresham: The valedictorian spoke, the salutatorian. They had the speeches and I think we had maybe one or two of us had a little speech that they had written out for us. And even though we were not honored, we did our little speech. And the glee club sang. Oh, I don't have it, but I had a program.

Interviewer: I think there was some programs in there, but they were for plays, I think.

Gresham: Yeah. We have a play. And you had a play we did the Dolittle family. These are the biographies here. This is a copy of our diploma, baccalaureate service.

Interviewer: Okay.

Interviewer: May 22nd, 1949 on a Sunday. I see you have hymns being sung. You have hymns, religious hymns being sung.

Gresham: Let me, let me get that copy, so I can see.

Interviewer: Here you are Jenny Lee Hill, honor student. There was a panel discussion on good citizenship. The Aim of Education, which included you and George Beavers, Susie Evans, Francis James, Victoria Slades and Laverne Woods.

Gresham: Okay. So you see, I didn't have to tell you. But you look on there and you see who salutatorian is.

Interviewer: Right.

Gresham: And you'd see the valedictorian. But then the panel discussion were the honors students.

Interviewer: I see.

Gresham: And then your valedictorian spoke and your salutatorian spoke. And so you see our flower and our colors. And I told you it was blue and white. And our motto, enter to learn and learn to serve.

Interviewer: So, at that time where was the athletic fields? The outdoor athletic fields.

Gresham: Right there where the building is now. Where the alternative school is.

Interviewer: Right next door.

Gresham: If you walked out this door right here, that was the athletic field right there.

Interviewer: So, the high school faced the elementary school straight on, across Lemon Street. When did they move the football field over to the Turner Chapel parking lot? Or what is now the Turner Chapel parking lot.

Gresham: They moved it... I was already back here working because when I started working here, it was still in that same area. It was in that same area. I can't remember exactly when they moved it. It would had to been after '55 or '56.

Gresham: This right here was taken on the football field.

Interviewer: I see.

Gresham: The football field was right out there and this was the back part of it. It's a branch behind here.

Interviewer: And that's the class photo.

Gresham: And this is my class photo.

Interviewer: Your class was about 22?

Interviewer: Okay. So let's move on to,

Gresham: It says 23.

Interviewer: 23 there.

Interviewer: Let's move on to college. So how did you choose Clark College?

Gresham: I don't know. I think one of the teachers came and it was young. And I think that's when, my thing went there. Because I had thought about going to Savannah State. And we took a trip to Savannah State and those mosquitoes were so bad that I said, "No way." And I think my next contact was with the

teacher that had been the Clark. And I somehow or another, I don't know, it just fell into place.

Interviewer: How is it different living down in Atlanta? I know you were on campus, but living in Atlanta as opposed to Marietta.

Gresham: We were in rental home, a home. Fred Marsh rented these homes down here. And we didn't have a bathtub. We didn't have running hot water. He had made the bathroom, out of a closet and just stuck a commode in there. So when I went to Clark, you got your own room, you closing your door. There's a bathroom, a shower, sink, hot water, cold water. And then you have central heat. So everything was different. We didn't have to have a stove anymore to heat the house.

Interviewer: It was nicer.

Gresham: Yes, it was much nicer.

Interviewer: And where were the other students from?

Gresham: Many of our students came from New Orleans. I had one of my friends came from Rome, two of my friends came from Rome. I had one of the girls came from Milledgeville, Barnesville and the areas around.

Interviewer: Did you ever talk about your experiences growing up? How were they different? How are they the same?

Gresham: We just didn't. I think all of us just took it in stride and it wasn't discussion. We just took what we got for the better and made the best of it and went on.

Interviewer: And so I know that you completed, you got your undergraduate degree at Clark and then how soon did you get your master's degree and where was that?

Gresham: I got my masters. I finished Clark in '53 of June. I imagine about eight years because I taught and went to school. So I took a lot of evening classes or summer, went during the summer. We mostly went in the summer. Georgia had no provision for us to go to school. So, they paid the difference between whatever the tuition was. You got a reimbursement. So I went there and I think I finished... I must've gotten my masters somewhere around 1960. Actually, I don't think I went there to get a Master's. I think by the time my advisor said something to me, she said, "What are you going to do? You got 60 something hours." More than enough for my masters. So we looked at what I had had, and what I needed. I took the one or two classes and came out, I think it was '60, '61.

Interviewer: So, you were teaching here and driving down. Okay. And what is your Master's in?

Gresham: I got a Master's degree in Elementary Education, but I also had enough credits that the State granted me a Master's in Social Studies as well.

Interviewer: Oh wow. So how much did that increase your salary?

Gresham: A little. Not a lot, because when I first started working, \$200 a month was all you got. If you were in the small areas, which were poor counties, you didn't get any supplement. Marietta supplemented your salary maybe, what was it, 15% of the \$200. So, you didn't get a lot. Now I believe by the time I went to get my masters, it had come up a little bit. So your masters may have given you, you may have gotten \$1,000 more for that. Then they came up with the six year program and if you got the six year program, then you'd get another supplement of maybe \$1,000. I took a couple of classes on the six year program that they had and then I said it like this, I've got a family and a merit. It's not worth the \$1,000 a year for me to leave my family every day or two to go to school. So, I took one or two classes and dropped out of that program.

Interviewer: The six year?

Gresham: Uh-huh.

Interviewer: Where were you doing or where did you start the six year?

Gresham: I started it at Atlanta University.

Interviewer: Okay. So let's talk about the first school you came to here in Marietta. I know you taught at Commerce and elsewhere, but where did you start here back in Marietta?

Gresham: Lemon Street, first grade.

Interviewer: Okay, where was that classroom in the building?

Gresham: They gave me, on the front side of what's down there now. They gave me a classroom, maybe down the hall, I can't remember exactly which classroom it was. It got crowded. First grade, we got crowded. So then they took me out of the classroom and put me down here in the teachers' lounge. They set up me a classroom in the teachers' lounge.

Interviewer: Was that near the front door?

Gresham: Uh-huh. When you walked in, when you walk in the front door, the principal's office was right here. You know where the principal's office was right here?

Interviewer: Mm-hmm (affirmative). I've been in this one so I'm a little more familiar.

Gresham: Okay, so when you walked in the front door, the principal's office was right here. Right behind the principal's office, you go down the hall here and you make a left turn, and the first door right here was the teachers' lounge.

Interviewer: Okay.

Gresham: They set up me a classroom out here in this area and I taught first grade in there.

Interviewer: How many students?

Gresham: I must've had 12 or more.

Interviewer: Was there another first grade teacher?

Gresham: Yeah, there was at least two or three more first grade teachers.

Interviewer: You remember any of their names?

Gresham: Mrs. Edwards was the main first grade teacher. We had two Mrs. Edwards. I think little Mrs. Edwards, we called her big Mrs. Edwards because one was tall, I think she taught first grade. I think the other Mrs. Edwards taught second grade. Oh god, I see the lady's face right now and she had a first grade over here. Can't think of her name right offhand. The cafeteria sits right here and there's a door and then there was a classroom right there. You got a classroom down here on the end across from the cafeteria. Then you had another classroom, I believe, before you got to the teachers' lounge. That was first and then across from the office was the second grade classroom.

Interviewer: So, when did you get your own classroom?

Gresham: Somewhere later that year. When they gave me a classroom, I think after the annex was probably built, they sent me all the way down the hallway to almost where you go out the back door to the annex, and I had a classroom right there on the left hand side.

Interviewer: So that first year you were there, the annex was built?

Gresham: I'm not sure the annex was built the first year I was there. It may have been, I can't remember it being built.

Interviewer: Okay. That was, what was the first year you were there, do you recall?

Gresham: The first year I was there I came in '55. '55, '56.

Interviewer: Okay. So you started with first grade, what other grades did you teach?

Gresham: I taught sixth grade and then I taught fifth grade at Lemon Street.

Interviewer: There in that brick building?

Gresham: I taught sixth grade in the annex. I remember teaching fifth and sixth grade across the street in that wooden building.

Interviewer: What wooden building?

Gresham: The old high school.

Interviewer: Okay.

Gresham: I taught sixth grade over there, had to be two years, because I had a classroom over here and I had a classroom over here. That might've been when they were building the annex.

Interviewer: Okay.

Gresham: Maybe I was over there, reason I didn't see the construction. I taught sixth grade over there. Then when they finished, then we went back across the street to the annex.

Interviewer: So what is this wooden building you're talking about?

Gresham: The main building that we was, the one I just showed you, this one.

Interviewer: Is that not a brick one?

Gresham: Yeah, it was brick but inside it was wooden.

Interviewer: Oh, okay.

Gresham: So much wood I call it the wooden building.

Interviewer: Okay, so you went over there.

Gresham: I went over there and they had done some remodeling here because I remember having in probably about '61, I had a classroom right in here. One here I taught right here in sixth grade.

Interviewer: So you were moving around a lot.

Gresham: Uh-huh. Moved around.

Interviewer: You're teaching there, you're teaching different grades up and through the 1960s. Let me check my time real quick, make sure we're doing okay. What did you know about local efforts at that time to integrate the schools?

Gresham: We didn't have any ... I didn't hear ... Well, let's go back. I think maybe '64 or '65, somewhere in there, they started talking integration. They moved Ann Mack, was one of the teachers at Lemon Street, and they sent her ... Where'd they send her, to Hickory Hills or West Side One, one of those schools. Then later I remember they moved Lois Phillips and they sent her to Pine Forest. They took ... What was her name?

Interviewer: Jeannie Carter?

Gresham: Jeannie Carter, they sent her over to another school.

Interviewer: I think she went to Hickory Hills.

Gresham: Hickory Hills. Amanda Weams, they sent her to Westside.

Interviewer: How did they choose them?

Gresham: That I don't know. Mrs. Swain was working, what was Mrs. Swain. She was the counselor at the high school I believe at that time. I think she kind of worked a lot with them in Lemon Street. I never will know how they chose the people to move. I don't know whether they got permission, talking to the principal's, to move people or whatever. I probably was one of the last ones to be moved.

Interviewer: Were there conversations with those teachers who were leaving? Did they, what sort of feelings did they express about leaving and going to a white school?

Gresham: They accepted it and went on because that was the job. That's how I felt about it.

Interviewer: Did they have a choice?

Gresham: I don't think they had a choice. This is what we're doing and this is your assignment. And whatever your assignment was, that's where you went.

Interviewer: As this effort sort of picked up and the teachers were going to other schools, what was your expectation for the Lemon Street schools? Did you think they were going to continue on, did you think you'd eventually have to leave to go somewhere else?

Gresham: I don't think that was even a discussion. I think it was just, this is where you are, this is what it is, and you didn't think anything about it. I might've thought, oh they moved her and she's over, and this is that school and that school. Like I

said, I was not moved until '67 and I remember Mrs. Edna Lee saying to me, they sent me to Park Street to teach fifth grade. Woody Woodruff was the principal that year, he came in new. She said, well, it was hard for me to get you but I finally got you. It was like she was saying, the principal's didn't want to let you go. Because at Lemon Street, when I was in the annex, very strict. I could leave my class, and at that time, take a group of children to the health center and sit with them while they're there and my class did what they were supposed to do. The principal might walk by just to check on them, but they went on with their work. Whatever assignment they had, and they didn't have any discipline problems out of them while I was gone.

Gresham: I thought maybe because of your strength and what you could offer them, they didn't want to lose you for the help that you were giving them.

Interviewer: I see. So how did you learn that you would be going to Park Street?

Gresham: I did summer school during the summers and we did summer school at Park Street. That particular day, Mrs. Lee was there and Woody came in and he opened his mouth and said, "I'm glad to have you on my staff for next year." And that's how it leaked out before they told me officially that I was going.

Interviewer: How'd you feel?

Gresham: It was okay with me. It didn't bother me.

Interviewer: Did anything change about your salary or anything like that?

Gresham: No. Nothing changed about your salary.

Interviewer: Who was Edna Lee?

Gresham: Edna Lee was the counselor at the Marietta High School.

Interviewer: Was she black or white?

Gresham: She was white.

Interviewer: Okay, so you had communication with her about these changes, is what you're saying?

Gresham: Only that one time when I was doing summer school at Park Street and she was over it. That's when we got air conditioned. They put the window air conditioner over at Park Street because we were using that building for teaching summer school. Of course, Mrs. Lee ran the summer school program, and I got a little closer to her because I worked summer school every year.

Interviewer: Were your interactions with some of these white teachers good, bad, in between?

Gresham: I felt like I had it good. They accepted me and I didn't have any problems. I felt like I was just one when I went in to Park Street. Mrs. Mitchell, I can't think of the little lady, it was the girl that taught fifth grade with me, Ann Horne. Ann and I, were just bonded. I didn't have any problem because there was seventh and eighth grade also downstairs at Park Street. So Mr. Bass, Mrs. Crawford, it was just like, hello. How are you? We went on. I didn't have any problems.

Interviewer: What percentage of students at Park were black?

Gresham: I would feel that maybe they didn't have a lot of black students there. They had some. There was one guy that stuck out when my mind came, because at that time you had the students coming in from other countries. I never will forget him, he came into fifth grade with a lack of ... [inaudible 01:24:11]. His name was Othos Valdez and I read a big article about him in the Marietta paper here. I found him, he's in Florida, sort of in the mysterial [? 01:24:33] field. Of course, he's told me that he was going to come see me when he came to see one of his friends, and I haven't seen him yet. I ran into his note not too long ago and I said, I need to call that young man. Because he and I, it was so funny back then. He'd say, me so and so. Me so and so. And I said, okay, I'm going to break you from this. I said, every time you say me I'm going to tap you on the shoulder, and he said ah. Then that's how I taught him the difference because me and I.

Interviewer: So you were teaching him English?

Gresham: I taught him everything in fifth grade.

Interviewer: I see.

Gresham: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Interviewer: Well I'm moving towards the end so I think we can finish.

Gresham: Okay.

Interviewer: Is that okay?

Gresham: Yeah, that clocks a little bit fast. I got somewhere I got to be at 1:00.

Interviewer: Okay. All right, we have about eight minutes more on this. How long did you teach at Park Street?

Gresham: I was only there one year. I got pregnant and I had my baby, had my little girl in November of '69. When I left there, Mr. Kemp, Henry Kemp was principal, superintendent. He said the first available job will be yours. In December of '69,

Rosemary Strickland was teaching third grade at Park Street, I mean at Pine Forest, and her husband got transferred and I got her job. Then I stayed at Pine Forest until I retired in 1988.

Interviewer: So, overall, how do you think that the school system handled the integration process?

Gresham: I felt like it went pretty smoothly.

Interviewer: Okay. For the schools on Lemon Street, I know that some of them closed fairly quickly after the schools were integrated, what was your feeling about those schools closing? And the high school actually being demolished.

Gresham: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Well my thing was, I think I was able to just accept it as change and go right on. Thinking that most of these things will be for the better. You take it and go on with it, just like that.

Interviewer: What do you think is the legacy of those schools? Those segregated schools on Lemon Street?

Gresham: I think you'll find that most people would tell you that they feel that they got a different type of teaching. I think the way the discipline for children was different and I think they felt sometimes that the black teachers were a little bit more interested in their growth, from what I can hear from some. Then you know, as time goes on and the changes come, everything smooths out.

Interviewer: Is there anything else you'd like to add?

Gresham: No, I don't know of anything. I'm just answering your questions to the best of my ability.

Interviewer: Well, I appreciate it very much Mrs. Gresham and we'll go ahead and conclude there.

Gresham: Okay.