

Jacksonville Public Education:
Special Challenges, 1925-1975

By

Mike Balser

History 442G

Spring 1995

Dr. Jackson

Once there was an Alabama public school system that was not under direction by the citizens of the district. A strange series of challenges and relationships set this Jacksonville district apart from other Alabama school districts. The state legislature established Jacksonville as a separate school district in 1898, presumably giving the district some degree of autonomy. However, it had to struggle with a legacy of being in a state-run system that used the town as a "laboratory" for student teachers.

What special challenges are required of a "growth-stunted" school system? There are two challenges of note in Jacksonville public school system history: race relations and the system's relationship with the Jacksonville State University.

I. University Relations

The 1882-83 session of the Alabama State Legislature provided for the establishment of colleges responsible for training teachers. One of these was Jacksonville State Normal School, which years later evolved into the Jacksonville State University. Educators nicknamed Normal Schools as "laboratory" schools since the faculty assigned student teachers to positions at the elementary or high school.¹ As provided in the

¹Mr. Leonard Messer, interview by author, Tape recording, Jacksonville, Alabama, 13 February 1995. Mr. Messer is the Superintendent of the Jacksonville City Board of Education.

establishing act, the Normal School conducted a preparatory or training school to be attended by the children of the town.²

The Mayor and City Council directed a merger of the city school system and the State Training School for the use of the State Board of Education. All the Board monies received from taxation, levies, the county and state Boards were to be given to the State Normal School. These combined funds would be used for maintenance and operations.

On March 1, 1929 the City of Jacksonville sold their school system to the Alabama State Normal School for \$60,000. The deed transfer went to the Alabama State Board of Education.³ Jacksonville deposited proceeds from the sale in the First National Bank of Anniston under a "School Trust Fund." The Jacksonville City School System merged with the Training and High School Departments of the Alabama State Normal School.

How would this new relationship work? The city maintained a school board and provided a president for the city Board of Education. The Board's superintendent was the president of the State Normal (teaching) school, a relationship that would continue until the 1970's. The City Board of Education was purely advisory in capacity.⁴ The president of the Normal School was

²Effie White Sawyer, The First Hundred Years: The History of Jacksonville State University, 1883-1983. (Jacksonville, Alabama: Centennial Committee, Jacksonville State University, 1983): 15.

³Messer, taped interview.

⁴Messer, Taped interview.

to be superintendent of the public schools.⁵ Four college presidents served the Jacksonville school system from 1929 to present: Clarence Daugette, Houston Cole, Ernest Stone, Theron Montgomery, and Harold McGee.

Since 1929, all fiscal and physical Jacksonville City School System assets belong to JSU. The university is very generous; they provide the school system buildings to the city at no charge. Dr. Daugette offered his college basketball court and other facilities to the school for use.⁶ Who owns the buildings? JSU owns the land, and therefore, by Alabama law, everything on it. JSU rents out the football stadium to the school district. The Jacksonville Board buys their electric power from JSU, who owns a power substation.

The people of Jacksonville resented the state of Alabama teaching local children. Since the City Board was only advisory, they did not have power over their children's education. Education of our children was a city matter, and the state had no business here! Jacksonville disliked university ownership and operation of the school system.⁷

⁵Ann B. Smith, Research Proposal: History of the Training School of the Normal School, Teacher's College, State College, and University at Jacksonville, Alabama. March 1988: provided on 13 February 1995 by Superintendent, Jacksonville City Board of Education. Draft of proposal by JSU graduate student for study of the Training School.

⁶Jacksonville City Board of Education "Minutes," 25 January 1925. In multiple volumes, on public record at the Jacksonville City Board of Education, Jacksonville, Alabama. From 1 March 1925 till present. Hereafter, "Minutes."

⁷Messer, taped interview.

The Progressive Education Association began in 1932. A social fear was that progressivism, with its accent on social problems, led to a heightened sensitivity and sympathy with communist ideals. Progressive advocates placed Peabody University graduates at the State Normal School, who were well versed in the "education by doing" philosophy. Parents feared that the children of Jacksonville would receive an education of "experience" instead of a rigid curriculum.

One identified (and highly respected) professor was Dr. Reuben Self, a Peabody graduate. In 1928 he became principal of the junior high school, but administrators returned him to the college, as his views of curriculum were not the same as college administration.⁸ Mr. Messer, the present Jacksonville City Board of Education superintendent, "infer(s) from Dr. Self's relegation to non-laboratory school duties that this community [(Jacksonville)] and JSU or its Normal School would not receive progressive education."

The Progressive Education Association entrenched itself in nation-wide education groups. Most of the influential members of the PEA were also fluid in directing National Education Association goals.⁹ The Jacksonville district has a long association with these organizations. In 1926, the new high school principal, Mr. Milner, asked the Board to pay his NEA dues. In 1942,

⁸Smith, 7.

⁹C. A. Bowers, The Progressive Educator and the Depression. (New York: Random House, 1969): 10.

the board paid \$17.00 per white teacher for Alabama Education Association/ NEA dues.

One example in particular shows the differences in direction the City Board took from the Normal School. In August 1935 the parents of a west side cotton mill (Profile Mill Village) approached the board. The distance from the mill grounds to school was too far, and their children needed education. The superintendent, Dr. Daugette, could establish a school with forty-five percent funding appropriated from federal aid and fifty-five percent from the city's "School Trust Fund."

The Board president, Mr. Greenleaf, refused to address the issue. Since the state bought the school system and relieved the city of its public school duties, the state should supply the need of Profile Mill Village.

Mayor Stephens and Dr. Daugette garnered support against Greenleaf. The citizens elect members of the Board of Education, and in Daugette's judgement, should be submissive to the Mayor and the City Council.¹⁰ The Board passed a Resolution about the fund usage in September 1935. It was "to be held intact until such time as the city and its Board of Education shall resume their normal duty as required by the laws of Alabama." They refused to build further school property.

In 1938 the city terminated their trust agreement with First National Bank. Jacksonville needed money for municipal waterworks; they had to supplement the federal Public Works

¹⁰"Minutes," 30 August 1935.

Administration.¹¹ By liquidating their monetary resources (should they ever get back public school responsibility) they jeopardized possible future responsibility.

In 1942, the city Board of Education (overwatched by the College trustees) applied to the Federal Works Agency for maintenance and operations funds under the Defense Public Works Program. The FWA offered \$5,750 for 1942; the funds are for the "current school year for carrying on community life substantially expanded by the national defense program."¹²

Eventually federal appropriations for public schools eased some Jacksonville and Alabama state financial burdens. The National Defense Education Act provided monies for building construction. In 1962, Congress appropriated money for federally impacted students (children of active duty military, stationed at Fort McClellan but attending school in Jacksonville) without federal "strings."

In 1967 the State Board of Education gave the School District Board of Trustees permission to run the Jacksonville City Schools. In the 1970's and 80's, some university resolutions explored the question of bowing out altogether from Jacksonville School system affair involvement. No final resolution was ever drafted. "Vestiges of the Training School

¹¹"Minutes," 3 November 1938.

¹²Federal Works Administration, Washington, D.C., docket Number Ala. 1-M-16, 5 January 1942.

remained, until in the words of former JSU president Dr. Theron Montgomery, it finally 'slipped away' in the 1970's."¹³

II. Race Relations

Jacksonville's education segregation policies have a long history. Since 1925 (the beginning of recorded school history), distinction between the races affected Jacksonville elementary and high school pupils, teachers and institutions.

Alabamians strongly presented the case for segregating schools this century. Alabamian "county seat elites resented New Deal inroads on their power which rested on the control of local government...new federal programs skirted county and state agencies."¹⁴ Running black schools meant keeping black records. By publicizing an austere black educational environment, Jacksonville blacks gained a new voice; their medical and economic needs gained a new forum.

The Jacksonville City Board of Education used a schoolhouse on the east side of town, in a neighborhood called Eastwood. Blacks centralized their community in Eastwood. The Jacksonville City Board of Education approached Franklin Delano Roosevelt's Works Projects Administration to build it. Today the same building stands near Gardner Drive and George Street, next to a

¹³Smith, 2.

¹⁴Irwin Klibaner, Conscience of a Troubled South: the Southern Conference Educational Fund, 1946-1966 (New York: Carlson Pub., 1989), 5.

public use baseball field. It is presently a children's day care facility.

The State Teacher's College took responsibility, by contract, for the city's education system in 1929. They took responsibility for the Negro school as well. Though the STC held responsibility for the maintenance of the building, they did not use it for teacher training.¹⁵ The STC trained teachers to teach at white schools; "even a cursory examination of primers and elementary school textbooks will show a consistent white, middle class bias."¹⁶

Black teachers in Jacksonville bore an incredibly heavy burden. Professional associations such as the Alabama Education Association and National Education Association (for which membership in the AEA was a prerequisite) were only open to white teachers.¹⁷ The pay rate for black teachers was below their white peers. White elected primary school teachers served for nine months at a \$730.00 yearly salary. The principal at the Colored School, Professor Taylor, taught for \$600.00. His only assistant, a niece, received \$400.00.¹⁸ He taught 160 enrolled

¹⁵Smith, 2. Particular quote from interview with JSU former president Theron Montgomery.

¹⁶Steven E. Deutsch, "Disadvantages of Culturally Deprived Children," in Integration and Education, David W. Biggs, ed., (Chicago: Rand McNally Co., 1959), 31.

¹⁷Alabama Education Association. n.p., pamphlet, revised February 1, 1964. Guidelines and rules, AEA.

¹⁸"Minutes," 5 May 1925.

students (average daily attendance, 104) while twelve white teachers taught 200.

Deference to white peers was mandatory. In a 1926 board meeting, the school board president, Dr. Currier raised "the Taylor question." The school board voted on a yearly contract renewal, and Professor Taylor was due. Taylor recently spoke to a white teacher using the "tone" of an equal. Ninety-six black and white residents sent to the Board a petition asking for Taylor's reelection; Currier deferred, looking for a reason to let Taylor's contract expire.¹⁹

Dr. Currier petitioned for a Colored School teacher change. Making a surprise inspection, the Board of Education found the colored school "badly equipped, in poor condition," not something that Taylor had the means to change.²⁰ Though the Board split in a rehiring vote, they released Taylor from his contract.

The Board replaced Professor Taylor and his neice, for the same salary, with "colored teachers Lawson and Sharp."²¹ The Board of Education left them, like their predecessors, on their own. References to the Negro school in the Board's Minutes are conspicuously absent. A note such as "the Colored School teachers were reported to be on time for the opening of their school" in the Board Minutes was not flattering. "Professor Larson the colored school principal brought his problems before

¹⁹"Minutes," 20 April 1926.

²⁰"Minutes," 4 May 1926.

²¹"Minutes," 5 July 1926.

the school board" is another entry, the tone of which is as if Larson were all alone in educating children. The school board deferred, deflected, or ignored the needs of the school.²²

"Colored school sent brooms" is an entry showing the magnanimity felt by the Board for giving Negroes supplies, an absent entry not present in Minutes about the white school.

What is the Negro School curriculum? Nationally, progressive education, "education by doing" was taking hold of American educators. For blacks, "education by doing" meant relegation to vocational-technical schools much like the premise of Tuskegee Institute. In the North, "progressive education with its permissive emphasis upon learning by doing has been rejected by most public schools in programs adapted to the needs of the culturally deprived child."²³ Conversely, the South felt a need to train the negro in vocational skills. "Does one view the introduction of industrial education as an attempt to provide a new and relevant form of educational experience, or as an attempt to ensure a stream of properly trained workers for the lower slots in the occupational hierarchy?"²⁴ 3-302

In 1952, the State Survey Commission of the State Department of Education recommended a consolidation of the Jacksonville Negro School grades 9-12 with the Calhoun Training School in

²²"Minutes," 14 September 1927, 11 September 1928, and 4 October 1927.

²³Deutsch, 26.

²⁴Education in American History. ed. Michael B. Katz. (New York: Praeger Pub., 1973): 302.

Hobson City (Between Anniston and Oxford, Alabama, in the same county). The Jacksonville Board of Education felt that the Negro school did not have enough students for state accreditation. A consolidation would affect 27 students in those four grades.²⁵ The Board agreed with the recommendation to teach negroes vocational instruction. The county would pay tuition and transport.

Jacksonville Mayor Ryan and the Board of Education Superintendent Ernest Stone held a meeting with the Negro community in October 1954. Given a choice, the Eastwood blacks overwhelmingly voted not to consolidate with Hobson city but to retain their high school program in Jacksonville. Pressured by the black vote the Board determined to reject the state's Survey and press for high school accreditation.²⁶

Eight months later the Negro High School received full accreditation. Jacksonville citizens praised the Board of Education, lauding their goodwill toward all races. The Colored School had 22 pupils per teacher; in the white elementary school there were 31 students per teacher and 28 high school students per teacher. The Hobson City consolidation died an agonizing death. In elation, Negroes requested a name for the Colored School to give it a renewed identity. The Board agreed to change the name to Eastwood High School.²⁷

²⁵"Minutes," 30 August 1954.

²⁶"Minutes," 25 October 1954.

²⁷"Minutes," 21 July 1955.

Legal integration and desegregation began. In February 1965 the President, Jacksonville City Board of Education signed Health, Education and Welfare Form 441. This gave Jacksonville citizens assurance of compliance with regulations under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

Pockets of deep resentment flared²⁸ against the Civil Rights Act. Federal judges took action against Governor George B. Wallace and the State Board of Education in Civic Action Number 604-E, 13 July 1964. They gave a warning: Alabama, don't interfere with legal integration. Five months later the federal government infused funds into the public school system, with the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965.

Integration would not occur in Jacksonville just because the U.S. Supreme Court said it would. There were "formidable obstacles in the path of school integration. Perhaps the most subtle was the fact that school districts were based upon the neighborhood principle."²⁹ The City Board of Education enumerated policies of the city's "Freedom of Choice" method for school attendance, in which no child could be denied the right to attend the school of his choice.³⁰ The Board drafted a resolution resolving to act fairly to all citizens of Jacksonville at all times:³¹

²⁸Messer, Tape recording, 13 February 1995.

²⁹Klibaner, 102.

³⁰"Minutes," 8 March 1967.

³¹"Minutes," 27 April 1965.

Whereas, both the elementary schools and the high schools have been located and constructed so as to serve neighborhood areas in the city of Jacksonville, and where the majority of the pupils resided at the time the schools were built; and whereas it is now the consensus of this Board of Education that a "Freedom of Choice" method of attending the schools now be made available to all the pupils of all the parents in all grades (parents making the choice for their children).³²

The Board placed specific provisos in the Resolution. There would be no overcrowding. Preference would be given students in closest proximity to the school they requested. They provided no bus transportation. Of best news to the black community, teaching assignments were desegregated.

After School Year 1967-68, Eastwood School closed grades 7-12 and moved their students across town into the white high school to consolidate black and white students. After School Year 1968-69 grades 1-6 moved to Jacksonville Elementary School.³³

The last surviving racial "issue" was the integration of black faculty. The principal of Eastwood was Mr. Johnnie Brown. The board offered him principalship of the High School when the white principal retired but he declined. He took over as assistant principal and served in that capacity until 1979 when he retired.³⁴ There are community questions as to why this prominent black did not take the principalship. Theories

³²Resolution, Jacksonville, Alabama, City Board of Education, Monday, 17 May 1965. Ernest Stone, Superintendent and Secretary. Harry Dempsey Jr., President.

³³"Minutes," 15 May 1968.

³⁴Messer, Taped Interview.

include: it was too soon after integration; what if something when wrong, and the principal was by accident, black; and so on.

Today race relations in the Jacksonville school district are a model for Alabama. As with most biases, adults perpetuate racism. The Superintendent of the Jacksonville City Board of Education said, "one must not mistake an interracial disagreement to be a racial problem."³⁵ Kids will be kids.

Jacksonville State University legally retains all rights to public school system property and relationships discussed in this paper. No other arrangements have been made.

The public school system in Jacksonville meets daily challenges of defining its roles in community. Perhaps one day, a normal relationship will exist between townsfolk, the university, and the school. It will be a relationship devoid of dependence and legal contracts. It will be founded on a "normalizing" of relations, something very new to Jacksonville. Though not for lack of trying.

³⁵Messer, Taped interview.

SOURCES CONSULTED

- Alabama Education Association. n.p., pamphlet, revised 1 February 1964. Guidelines and rules.
- Federal Works Administration, Docket Number Alabama 1-M-16, dtd 5 January 1942. On file at the Jacksonville City Board of Education.
- Jacksonville City Board of Education "Minutes." In multiple volumes, on public record at the Jacksonville City Board of Education, Jacksonville, Alabama. From 1 March 1925 until present.
- Jacksonville City Board of Education "Resolution." Monday, 17 May 1965. Compliance with Civil Rights Act of 1964. Signed Ernest Stone, Superintendent, Harry Dempsey Jr., President.
- Messer, Leonard, interview by Mike Balser, 13 February 1995, Tape recording, Jacksonville City Board of Education, Jacksonville, Alabama.
- Bowers, C. A. The Progressive Educator and the Depression. New York: Random House, 1969.
- Katz, Michael B., ed. Education in American History. New York: Praeger Pub., 1973.
- Klibaner, Irwin. Conscience of a Troubled South: the Southern Conference Educational Fund, 1946-1966. New York: Carlson Pub., 1989.
- Sawyer, Effie White. The First Hundred Years: The History of Jacksonville State University, 1883-1983. Jacksonville, Alabama: Jacksonville State University Centennial Committee, 1983.
- Deutsch, Stephen B. "Disadvantages of Culturally Deprived Children." Integration and Education, David W. Biggs, ed. Chicago: Rand McNally Co., 1959.
- Smith, Ann B. "Research Proposal: History of the Training School of the Normal School, Teacher's College, State College, and University at Jacksonville, Alabama." March 1988. On file at Jacksonville City Board of Education, Jacksonville, Alabama.

Gift and Release Agreement

We Leonard Messer and MICHAEL A. BALSER
Interviewee (print) Interviewer (print)

do hereby give and grant to Dr. Suzanne Marshall, Assistant Professor of History, Jacksonville State University, all literary and property rights, title, and interest which we may possess to the audio or video recording(s) and transcript(s) of the interview(s) conducted at

on the date(s) of 13 February 1995

for the oral history collection being compiled by Dr. Marshall.

Leonard Messer

Interviewee's signature

Address 1450 9th ST NE
J'ville AL 36265-1821
Phone 435-9038

Date 13 Feb 95

Michael A. Balser

Interviewer's signature

Address 1613 DAVIS ST SE
JACKSONVILLE AL 36265
Phone 435 7179

Date 13 Feb 1995

J'ville BOE, 482-5682

Questions for Mr. Messer. The paper topic is "Jacksonville Post-Depression Public Education: Special Challenges, 1932-1992."

When were the schools built?

What is the history of the high school?

Was Kitty Stone always named Kitty Stone?

Where is the documentation/ deeds?

Have both always been under J'ville Board of Education?

When was the BOE established?

To what extent was Jacksonville caught up in Progressive Education of the late 1930's?

How did J'ville respond to the call for educational reform (based on practical life experiences)?

Was the Progressive Education Association active here?

National Education Assn?

American Federation of Teachers' unions?

Were there socialist leanings in the area? Were teachers enticed? Did people join? Was there a McCarthyish/ Red Scare backlash?

When did integration of races become an issue in J'ville?

Where did black children go before then? What were schools like before/ after? Did schools become overburdened? Any special concerns from your perspective? Reaction of the white community?

Were there any unique challenges to J'ville history of education?

Anything specific to the southern way of education? Special challenges?

Do you know of any specific dates of occurrences in BOE history I may use, cross checking those dates with the Anniston Star or Jacksonville newspapers?

What other sources are in the area I can use for this research?

Does the BOE have a documentation storage facility? Who else is very knowledgeable on this subject?

Are there any issues you feel I should address in this time frame examined?

TRANSCRIPT

Oral History Interview
February 13, 1995

Interviewee: Mr. Leonard Messer
Superintendent, Jacksonville Board of Education

Interviewer: CPT Mike Balser
HY 442 Graduate Student

B: This is an oral history interview held with Mr. Leonard Messer, the Superintendent of the Jacksonville Board of Education. The date is 13 February 1995. It's in relation to a paper topic which is Jacksonville Post-Depression Public Education, Special Challenges from 1932-1992. Sir, thank you for taking this time. You've had a chance to look at the questions first; I'd like to ask were the schools built in a time frame close to each other - when were they built?

M: The present buildings, the oldest buildings, the Kitty Stone gymnasium, was built in 1923. The last building built, the building we're currently in, was 1977. Now from that it runs the gamut. The high school main classroom building was built between the years of '46 to '48. And then from '51 - '55 we had additional classroom space built at the high school plus additional space at Kitty Stone. And then from roughly '65 till 1968 we had additions to junior high school and a gymnasium at the high school, and then from '68 until about '77, we had the pods at Kitty Stone constructed, 6 identical pods. Each one designed to hold one complete grade. And outside of some minor renovations, that's been the extent of the buildings in Jacksonville.

B: Would there be a record, for instance at the county courthouse, or at Jacksonville City Hall, building permits, anything like that?

M: I don't know. Part of the difficulty is going to be when you trace back the Jacksonville City system, of course as most people are aware, the city sold the city system to the State Board of Education in 1929; money exchanged hands. Now JSU at then that time, the State Teachers College, was given authority to operate the schools. And so from 1929 until present, all physical assets and fiscal assets, both physical and fiscal belonged to JSU. In the late '60's, I think about '67, when JSU became a university, the Board of Trustees was given the authority to run the Jacksonville City Schools. In the mean time, you've had a board of education, operative since, well, the best I can tell, the early '30's that has functioned. More so advisory. After the early '70's, the local school board then took a more active role in the operation of the schools. As a matter of fact, at one time prior to that, the president of the university also served

as school superintendent. And much of the teaching staff of JSU would be assigned at the high school or the grammar school, we were called "laboratory schools." I've got a document you can take with you. It lists the lease and the agreements of the lease and so forth. It's a lot of fascinating reading. But I would like to say that presently, trying to ascertain who owns the buildings, we do know that JSU owns all the land. We know that some of the buildings were built with JSU funds. Some built with state funds, some built with local funds, but the point is moot since by Alabama law, he who owns the land owns the improvements thereon, unless someone can move them off. Presently, we're engaged in a project to either rebuild or renovate the present high school campus and that's one of the flies in the ointment; in that before we can get a bond issue we've got to show clear ownership of the land or have clear use of it for an indefinite period. At the same time, I know that JSU is expanding their programs. They have made some indication over the last 4 or 5 years that they will be absorbing more of the high school campus. For example, the home economics building, which was built in '53. It was built straight off of a Better Homes and Gardens plan set. JSU is going to reclaim that. The building that contains the boilers, for the heating plant at the high school, JSU will at some point, reclaim. I was given notice last year by Dr. McGee that because of JSU's moving to a Division 1 standing, we may lose our privileges with the stadium. We do rent the stadium, currently, but we may lose all opportunities to use that stadium. And again that presents us with a problem. But the bottom line is there is a convoluted, hazy mixture of history with the city schools. And, of course, that has had some political ramifications. We've had local political entities and leaders that use that as a wedge to divide the city. We have others that use that as a honey to attract, you know; any other system in the state would give their right arm to be associated with the university. But, because of that relationship, it's a problem. And whatever we do in the future will be colored by that relationship with JSU.

B: So not only does JSU have title, because it's their land, but by JSU having influence, so the state could come by and also say this is ours as well. And the state could come in and take it back.

M: They could do that because the deed went to the State Board of Education, originally. Now what I don't want to do with JSU is get into a turf war. Although, should either one of us have our backs pressed against a wall if we can't work this out in a gentlemanly type manner then of course, we'll have to let the legal eagles take care of it. And at that point, we don't know what might happen. I do want to emphasize though, in my tenure here, I've been superintendent here since '93 and acting since '92, and I've been very pleased with the cooperation of JSU with our programs, our students, our teachers. Of course we always

want to enhance those, but we've always had a good relationship. And JSU has offered opportunities. But again, with JSU's growing programs and our growing programs, somewhere the growing pains are going to collide and something will have to give.

B: Sir, who would be the point of contact at JSU in regards to grounds issues. For instance, if some maintenance needed to be done and you were to take that to the University. Who would you contact?

M: Well normally, at one time the university performed the maintenance. We went through Jim McArthur for building and plant facilities. But again over the years, various services have been pulled back, you know for many reasons. For one, the city wanted to take a more active role. Funding cutbacks at the university. Presently, the university does no maintenance on our facilities. They have not done any active maintenance for over 15 years, or longer. On the other hand, they're always there in an advisory capacity. And they're always there in an emergency capacity. For example, we had a transformer blow up 2 years ago and within a day it was replaced, up going, and of course, all they charged us was their exact cost to have that transformer replaced. We buy our power through JSU. But as far as routine maintenance, we don't get anything from JSU.

B: So, you do have an association, though right now, not very tight with buildings and grounds; maintenance. And then beyond that, maybe vice president for...

M: George Miller, vice president of business affairs, may have most of the information. Back in '88 JSU prepared a document. I saw the document, I don't have a copy, showing the services the university provided for the city schools and there approximate cost equivalent. And it added up to a sizable sum. Of course one thing that still continues is our power. We buy it from JSU who has their own sub-station. And so we pay about 60 to 65% of the going rate of a business in this area plus we pay no demand charge which in commercial installments can run as much as 100% of your power consumption. Of course, the down side is, we have to pay for the maintenance of our poles and transformers and lines. But again, we found that we save money in that relationship.

B: Tracking back through history, I know history in the United States, in general terms has gone through a lot of progressive, social, one could venture to say Communists, if you didn't want to get beat up, changes, and I was wondering if you had any insights in regards to, for instance, progressive education in the 1930's.

M: I checked back, a cursory look at what I could find and the only indication I could find was a professor that came to JSU for

the normal school in the '30's, Dr. Self, who had a progressive outlook. I understand, because of that, he was relegated to non-laboratory school duties at that time. So I infer from that that this community and JSU or it's normal school could not receive progressive education.

B: Very conservative

M: Yes. Although, let me hasten though to say, that Dr. Self retired in the last decade at JSU and was well known for his ability, his competence, a very find professor. Back in those early days progressivism I think labeled his style. I see no other reference or record although there could be but I'm not knowledgeable of that.

B: There was a trend for educational reform. We started at the end of the 1800's to move toward a curriculum in the US and if you wanted to graduate you had to follow the specific kind of curriculum but as we moved along, life experiences became an issue. What could society teach you that you didn't necessarily have to learn in school. Today's reaction, of course, would be the vocational/technical school. But there was a movement with the progressive era to make life experiences viable as a schooling option. Do you know if that took place here?

M: I have no knowledge. Plus or minus.

B: Do you know if the Progressive Education Association was active here?

M: That I don't know.

B: Presently, if the NEA?

M: NEA's very active. Well, it's active by default. We have our local education association that is affiliated with the Alabama education association. Now, to be a member of the Alabama education association, you must also affiliate with the National Education Association. Many of our teachers don't agree with the stance of the NEA on many topics but to receive the benefits, primarily liability insurance, and some life insurance policies, they have to be a member of AEA and NEA. Now the local education association is very active. They are very supportive, they do raise issues, but we do get along well with that particular organization, administratively we get along well with it.

B: Have you heard of the American Federation of Teachers?

M: Yes.

B: And is that still active, to your knowledge?

M: It's not active in this area.

B: There was a great push for certain unions to be taken over by communist post-progressive and of course that led into the Red Scare and McCarthyism and look, now they're in our schools. But to your knowledge, of that sort here in Jacksonville, you

M: The only thing, I've been with the school since 1970 and in the early-mid seventies there was a push to (quote) unionize. It failed here as it did in the other systems in the state to bring in some sort of union structure. It may have been with the AFT, I don't recall, but it was beyond the AEA, but then again it failed miserably.

B: Was that the government pushing it down; was it Alabama government?

M: No, it was just a movement. Whether it was grass roots, I don't know. But it was, as a matter of fact, one of the few times that the superintendents in Alabama have joined forces in a wholehearted effort to defeat a particular issue. I think the only time I understand since then there's been a wholehearted issue like that has been on school finance and school reform, in the last 2 or 3 years.

B: If you were associated with the city school systems since 1970, and even if you didn't personally live through it, I imagine that your experience and your exposure to racial issues in the school system must be great. Can you tell me your first recollection, for instance when were black children integrated?

M: I was a student at JSU from '66 to '70 and early in 1970 my wife and I lived in an apartment over near the Eastwood community. and integration had begun already. In that particular year there was an attempted knife, a knife incident on one of the trade school buses, between black students and white students. Living on the edge of the black community, I became painfully aware of the problems in the schools. The following year, the late 60's and on, our schools have been fully integrated. The old Eastwood School has been shut down ever since I've been in Jacksonville. It's currently used as a day care center; JSU owns the property. We have had, racially, our ups and downs, but I daresay the Jacksonville City Schools is probably head and shoulders above most area schools because of our relationship with the fort, our relationship with the university, and many social issues that some systems are just not handling, we crossed 15 years ago. We still have pockets of racial issues, but by and large most of our disagreements between black students and white students generate over non-racial issues. Because you have an interracial disagreement, its assumed its a racial problem. In reality its an issue problem and we've pretty good relationships with the races at this time.

B: The Eastwood School is where the black children went before integration?

M: Yes.

B: Do you know whereabouts on campus it is?

M: Its over behind the Roebuck manor housing facility near Brownwood. The baseball fields are used primarily by the black community its open to anyone but because of the proximity to the black community its still used by them. The day care uses the facility itself. JSU has maintained the buildings and takes care of the facilities and the management of the buildings.

B: Do you remember a crossroads maybe or an intersection that would help?

M: Yes. Go down South Church until you reach the Roebuck manor housing project, that's sort of behind the old

B: I think it's Gardner, right behind the cemetery

M: Turn left on Gardner and its about half a mile up Gardner on the right.

B: Since schools were integrated, or at least in Jacksonville had the appearance of being integrated by the time you came, do you know how the school system reacted to having picked up additional children they hadn't planned for - was there an overburden on Jacksonville School System when they integrated?

M: I'm not aware of one. I know the Jacksonville system was also involved in buildings program at that time to house many students: fort growth, city growth, and the integration of the black students. But again I'm not aware of any problems that began with the city system.

B: Reaction of the white community?

M: Mixed.

B: To integration?

M: Mixed. Again, speaking from my experience, on a scale of one to ten, ten being the best possible cooperation, I'd say most issues hover around seven to eight. There are individuals and pockets of deep resentment. By and large, most people have accepted the integration - there really hasn't been a problem. One issue was the involvement of the existing black school faculty into the high school. The principal of Eastwood was a Mr. Johnnie Brown. He was offered principalship of the high

school, but declined, for whatever the reason, and took over as the assistant principal, and served in that capacity until 1979 at which time he retired. He was a dedicated educator, along with many of the teachers that came from Eastwood; some are still teaching with us. It's been my experience the majority of these teachers are darned good teachers.

B: And have the years of experience to back it up.

M: Yes.

B: Speaking specifically to the Southern way in United States education are there any specific challenges that you feel should be addressed on a paper on Southern education?

M: They would deal with more just general reform. I'm afraid in the South there's an idea among the public if they have a job doing well paying the bills and they think "Well I came through the educational system. I'm happy therefore it should suffice for my kids. Not realizing that most of the jobs their kids will hold have not been invented yet and many of the jobs they're planning on holding will be obsolete. It's to educate the populous. More so the working class, the non-degree class, those who don't see the change on the horizon for job requirements and minimum employment requirements, in, say the next ten, fifteen, twenty years.

B: To that end and for the community JSU has a Center for Non-Traditional and Evening Studies. Would that benefit what you're speaking of...do you guys have any interface with that?

M: We have some...again the difficulty...those who need to be exposed to those programs don't come.

B: Do you offer literacy programs to the community?

M: We have an adult basic education program. We offer, at no expense to the individuals, preparation for the GED examination. We hold classes two nights a week, 6:30 to 8:30 and have at any given time 30 to 50 people enrolled.

B: That's a good reaction. Is there an attempt made when they come in for the GED to try to make sure that that educational emphasis is transferred over to their children?

M: Yes there is...

B: To give them the emotional burden that you're here...

M: Also we have in the system a Chapter 1 program designed for those financially and socio economically deprived students, and we do involve the parents in that program. We have the parents

must come in the schools; once or twice a year we have activities for them, trying to educate the parents along with the child, realizing that it takes the whole family being educated to make a difference.

B: In regards to the history of the school system and the Board of Education, what I'd like to do is be able to cross-check with the Anniston Star or the Jacksonville News any specific dates that may be of import to the system. Do you have any dates for me, anything I can reference, any sources I can...

M: I can make available to you all the minutes we have on file here for the Board of Education. Of course, they can't leave here but you're welcome to study them at your hearts content. We'll make them available for you. In terms of dates, historically, of course in 1929, the merger of the city schools with the university; the 1977 dates when the city school board was elected as opposed to being appointed. At that time, there were only two other systems, city systems, in the state that had elected board members. The rest were all appointed. A representative in the state legislature, whose wife used to teach in Jacksonville High School, whose contract was not renewed, then began a move to have an elected board. Of course that took a state-wide referendum because of the Alabama Constitution. As of that we have an elected board now, for better or for worse. That 1977 year would be pivotal, particularly in the Anniston Star articles and that on the elected board. Another issue, and I word this carefully; my predecessor and the current Board of Education then from 1988 to 1992 had some stormy times. Particularly in '91 and '92 the Star was replete with articles about disagreements in the City Board of Education. That culminated in, eventually my predecessor did resign and took a position at Auburn University. I've still got predominantly the same board we had then. It still has many of the same ideas and concepts. This all revolves back into what I mentioned earlier about the relationship between the University, the City schools, and the city of Jacksonville. The city of Jacksonville, not the present administration, the previous administrations resented the university ownership and operation of the schools. The end result was the Jacksonville city schools was an orphan child. If we went to the university after 1967, they'd say, "oh, you're a city school." If we went to the city they'd say, "oh, you're a university laboratory school." So we got bounced back and forth to the tune that the latest financial statement of 127 city systems, the Jacksonville system is funded in terms of funds per ADA, per average daily attendance, we're number 117 out of 126 in funds available. Yet we maintain standardized test scores, some of the highest in Alabama, highest in the area, and well above the national average. Yet we're one of the poorest totally funded schools. Another factor is the local support. The Jacksonville City Schools runs about 100th in local support for education. This was not planned; it's historical. Back in the

70's this system received in excess of half a million dollars per year in impact aid from the federal government for the military dependents who came to school here. That money was virtually unearmarked. When the schools grew at that time, local contributions did not increase, but federal monies increased. Because the funds were there, it negated the need (or the apparent need) for the city to fund the local schools. Since then, we've dropped down to where we net about fifty thousand dollars a year in federal impact aid. That may be gone totally next year. Local funds have only picked up from zero to 86,000 dollars a year. The city funds Public Ed 1.7% of their budget. They fund Recreation about 5% of their budget. We're way at the bottom of the heap. But again the present city administration is cooperative and we're looking towards improvement in those financial relationships.

B: Sir that concludes the questions we have prepared. Is there anything, any other vein that you feel I should approach? I'll approach the University of course; newspaper references, the articles you'll make available to me through the Board of Education. Anywhere else you think I should check?

M: I don't know of any other area. We do have some retired teachers, who were here when I came, who are still living, who may be a possible source. I'd be glad to give you their names and numbers to contact them.

B: If I could I'd like to do that. Sir, we appreciate your time, and the effort and the graciousness you've given to us. This concludes the interview with Leonard Messer. Total interview time, 25 minutes, 13 February 1995.