

JACKSONVILLE STATE UNIVERSITY

700 PELHAM ROAD N.

JACKSONVILLE, ALABAMA 36265-9982

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

TELEPHONE: (205) 782-5632

**Gift and Release Agreement:**

We Drew Collier and Charlie Hallman  
(Interviewee) (Interviewer)

Do hereby grant permission to Jacksonville State University to copy the tape of the interview conducted at Cleveland Al. on the date(s) of 10/28/95 for the oral history collection being compiled at Jacksonville State University.

This collection will be maintained by Jacksonville State University for research into the history of Northeast Alabama and the South. We further grant researchers permission to quote from the interview on this tape.

Drew Collier  
(Interviewee's signature)

Date 10/28/95

17173 St Hwy 160 Cleveland Al. 35049  
(Address)

274-7824  
(Telephone)

Charlie Hallman  
(Interviewer's signature)

Date 10/28/95

8980 State Hwy 132 Altoona Al 35955  
(Address)

2-589-6094

435-5038  
(Telephone)

**Interviewee Background Information**

Name: Drew Collier  
Address: 17173 8+ Hwy 160 Cleveland Al, 35049  
Phone Number(s): 224-7824  
Approximate age or date of birth: 4/5/14  
Mother's name: Ola (Huggins) Collier  
Father's name: Charles Wesley Collier  
Places lived and when: 1-4 years Brown Co. Al. 5-8 years Texas and Oklahoma 9-present Ala

Education: attended Altama High School, Jacksonville State Univ. <sup>English</sup> B.S. in Ed. M.S. in counseling M.S. in School administration →

Religion: Baptist

Business, political and social memberships (past and present):  
Alabama Education Ass. National Education Ass. Al. Ass. of School Principals, Democratic Party

Present occupation: Retired

Former occupation(s): Public school teacher, Public school administrator, Highway contractor

Special skills: carpenter, cattle farmer

Major Accomplishments: High school principal, Assistant Supt. of Ed in Blount County, associate administrator of Tenn. Valley Educational Center

Local events in which you have participated: \_\_\_\_\_

State and/or regional events in which you have participated: pres. of AEA district 8 1958

National events in which you have participated: \_\_\_\_\_

International events in which you have participated: \_\_\_\_\_

Natural born U.S. citizen? Yes/No

Naturalized Citizen: Yes/No Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Country from which you emigrated: \_\_\_\_\_

Documents, photographs, and artifacts which are in your possession: \_\_\_\_\_

Individuals you recommend who might be candidates for an oral history interview: \_\_\_\_\_

Additional information: \_\_\_\_\_

Oral History Interview  
with  
Drew Collier

by

Charles Hallman

Alabama History  
9:15 MWF  
Dr. Harvey Jackson  
November 12, 1995

Chronological Order of Events in Interviewee's Life

- 1914---Mr. Collier is born.
- 1918---Mr. Collier's family moves to Texas
- 1922---His family moves back from Texas.
- 1929---The Great Depression hits, Mr. Collier is 15.
- 1932---Mr. Collier graduated from high school.
- 1933---Mr. Collier begins college at Jacksonville State  
Teachers College.
- 1934---Mr. Collier begins teaching in a 2-room school house  
in Blount County.
- 1938---Mr. Collier begins teaching at Cleveland School.
- 1943---Mr. Collier becomes football coach at Cleveland  
remaining in that position for 4 years.
- 1953---Mr. Collier becomes Principal of Cleveland High  
School.
- 1965---Mr. Collier becomes Assistant Superintendent of  
Education in Blount County.
- 1968---The Blount County School System is given the order  
that they must integrate.
- 1976---Mr. Collier retires as Principal of Appalachian High  
School.

### Chronological Order of Events 1920-1970

- 1919--Prohibition is passed, alcohol is now illegal.
- 1929--The Great Depression hits and America's economy is destroyed.
- 1932--Franklin D. Roosevelt is elected President.
- 1933--Franklin D. Roosevelt takes the Presidential office and visits Montgomery.
- 1937--Prohibition is repealed, alcohol is legal again.
- 1941--World War II begins.
- 1944--UAB was founded as a medical school.
- 1945--World War II comes to an end.
- 1948--The President is Truman, he enacts his plan he calls the Fair Deal.
- 1953--Birmingham passes ordinance to let whites and blacks play baseball and football together.
- 1954--Brown v. Board of Education, it called for desegregation
- 1955--Rosa Parks, a black lady, refuses to give up her seat to whites, she is arrested.
- 1955-56-Montgomery Bus Boycott by blacks
- 1963--Children's Crusade is held in Birmingham by black demonstrators. Police Chief Bull Conner turns fire hoses and dogs on them.
- 1963--Birmingham and Huntsville schools integrate.
- 1965--Selma to Montgomery March is held.
- 1966--Lurleen Wallace, first woman governor, is elected.
- 1968--Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. is assassinated on the balcony of a Memphis hotel.
- 1969--United States lands man on the Moon.

## Interview Questions

1. Mr. Collier what is your date of birth?
2. What was your early child hood like?
3. What did you think of Alabama as compared to your previous home?
4. Were the people here different?
5. What was your family life like during your childhood and teen years?
6. You were fifteen when the Great Depression hit. What effect did it have on your family?
7. How did it effect your community?
8. You attended college during this time. How were you able to afford this?
9. What was college life like during this time?
10. You obtained a degree in education, what was public education like when you first began teaching? What were some problems?
11. Do you think any of these problems still exist?
12. Was any progress made during these years in education?
13. During the years you were Assistant Superintendent of Education integration was implemented. What were your feelings about integration?
14. What was your role in integration?
15. How did you deal with the opposition to this?
16. Much talk about education reform has occurred for the last several years. How do you evaluate Gov. James' reform that is being implemented this school year?
17. The general public in Alabama seems to believe education is failing. What is your opinion?

## Tape

### Table of Contents

1. Mr. Collier's Early Childhood
2. Trip Home From Texas
3. Difference In Clothes And Attitudes
4. Family Life Before The Great Depression
5. Federal Land Bank Saves The Farm
6. Depression Prices
7. Health Decline During Depression
8. Roosevelt's Aid Program
9. Made Their Own Baseball
10. A Chance to Attend Jacksonville
11. Dr. Daugeette's Chauffeur
12. Mr. Collier's First School
13. Mr. Collier Becomes a Principal
14. Mr. Collier Becomes Assistant Superintendent
15. Schools Become Integrated
16. Opposition to Integration
17. Education Today Compared to Education of the Past
18. Discipline in Schools
19. Secrets of Good Behavior

## Oral History Project

Mr. Drew Collier is the most respected man I know. He can say more with a glance than most can say in a hour. When Mr. Collier enters a room there seems to be an aura around him that demands respect. He is kind, polite, and soft spoken, never loud or mean. That is what makes him so special. People work all their lives to receive the respect that just comes natural to him. Mr. Collier has never, in my presence, raised his voice in anger or made a derogatory comment toward someone else, it is as if he is above that. He is the kind of man that people would bend over backwards to keep from disappointing. Mr. Collier worked all his life to try to make other's lives better. It seems that making others happy is what makes him happiest.

Mr. Collier was born in a log cabin in Etowah County on April 5, 1914. When he was four, his family moved to Texas so his father could work in the oil fields. Life was hard in the oil fields. All the houses were tents and the weather was unpredictable and harsh. When wind storms came, families would have to hold the center pole of their tents to keep them from falling down(Tape, October 28, 1995).

In 1918, when Mr. Collier was eight, his family came back to Alabama. His father tried to farm but failed and became a sawmiller. Things were different in Alabama than in Texas. In Texas boys wore short pants that buttoned below the knee. All of the boys in Alabama wore overalls.



The boys made fun of him, but he said "one of the things I learned in Texas was to fight my way through, whatever it took. You either died young or fought well."(Tape, October 28, 1995). After a few scuffles he earned their respect and became friends. Times were good and money good, but that would soon come to a screeching halt.

Although most people think of the Great Depression as a sudden event that was triggered by the stock market crash of November 1929, it was actually a gradual collapse (Rogers, Ward, Atkins and Flynt.465). To Mr. Collier's family it seemed that it all happened suddenly. Before the crash Mr. Collier's father was earning up to \$300 a week as a building contractor. After the depression hit, there were no materials for new houses so his father had to start farming. Mr. Collier (Tape, October 28, 1995), said his father felt lucky, however, that he at least had the farm on which to grow food.

The Great Depression was different from any earlier hard times. Never before had so many Americans suffered so much (Tyack, Lowe, and Harsot 7). For many men, being unemployed was a new experience, a source of deep shame. People were used to working hard and had been taught that if you work hard you will have a good life. The Depression shot holes in that idea, which was very hard to accept for many people(Robinson, 84). The unemployment rate zoomed from 3.2% to 24.9% from 1929 through 1932 (Tyack, Lowe, and Harsot 13).

Mr. Collier (Tape, October 28, 1995) said that people didn't worry about what they ate, as long as it was filling you were alright. He said "we never felt sorry for ourselves because everyone was in the same boat (Tape, October 28, 1995)." The Federal Land Bank in Ashville saved many family farms by letting farmers pay one-fourth of their cash crop at harvest. Mr. Collier said they lost everything and would have lost the farm if it had not been for the bank (Tape, October 28, 1995).

There were families in the valley where he lived that could not afford to go to the doctor. He told of one woman, the mother of three girls, whom they used to take food, who died from Pellagra because she had no nutritious food and could not afford to go to the doctor after she got sick. He explained that this was typical of the health of people during the depression (Tape, October 28, 1995).

In 1932 Mr. Collier graduated from Altoona High School. The following year his former principal sent for him to come see him. It seemed that Dr. Daugeite from Jacksonville State Teachers College had sent him a scholarship for a deserving young man. Mr. Collier told him, "You don't have to look any farther, if I have to walk I'll get there." When he got to Jacksonville, Dr. Daugeite had made arrangements for a house for him and three other boys to live in while they were in college. Mr. Collier became acquainted with Dr. Daugeite and Dr. Daugeite asked him if he could drive a car. Mr. Collie answered, "ah-yea,

I've been driving since I was six years old (Tape, October 28, 1995)." With that remark Dr. Daugette told him he needed him to "drive him around." Mr. Collier agreed and became his chauffeur during the time he was attending college.

After nine months Mr. Collier got a job in a two-room school house. He and his Grandmother taught there. He taught fourth through ninth grades and she taught first through third grades. There was a pot-bellied stove in the corner and half-log benches on which they sat. He explained that teaching was difficult because the children started at different times, one might start the first day of school and another might start a month later (Tape, October 28, 1995)." The children had it rough also. Mr. Collier said, "One morning I went to the well to get water and I noticed one of my favorite little sixth-grade boys coming across the playground. It had rained the night before, then turned very cold, and ice had spewed out of the ground and was about two inches thick. This little boy was kicking ice every step, barefooted, and never lost the smile on his face (Tape, October 28, 1995).

In 1938 Mr. Collier became a teacher at Cleveland High School. He became the coach there in 1943 and coached for four years. Then, in 1953, he became Principal at Cleveland. He said that he had the most enjoyable part of his life while being the Principal. It was not a job, but like a big family. He looked forward each day to the

children coming in. In 1965 Mr. Collier also became the Assistant Superintendent of Education (Tape, October 28, 1995).

In 1965 the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 was passed. There were funds allocated to schools according to the number of children enrolled that came from poor families (Tyack, Lowe, and Harsot). The Superintendent called a Principal's Meeting and said the ESEA Program had been available to them, but that he had not mentioned it to them because he did not know what to do about it. The Superintendent was a good man, he could make the dollar stretch, but he was not good with words or writing. The county was eligible for this aid provided they could write a program that would merit them getting the money. Mr. Collier realized that if the program was going to be written he would have to write it, and he did. He completed the program in three weeks. They received approval from Washington for the program, thus, Mr. Collier became the coordinator of the program for his school system, which meant becoming Assistant Superintendent. He served in that position while still serving as Principal at Cleveland High School (Tape, October 28, 1995).

He continued serving in both positions four years. Then a law passed that would not allow an individual to be paid by both the State and the Federal Government. He had to choose which position he wanted to keep. He chose the job of Assistant Superintendent (Tape, October 28, 1995).

In 1968, Blount County Schools were still segregated. There were six white schools and one black school in the county. In the fall of 1968 the Office of Education brought suit against the county to force integration. The county received notice that they were due in court in Washington. Mr. Collier had reservations about Mr. Blackwood going because he was not as quick on the draw as Mr. Collier thought he was. Mr. Collier was afraid that Mr. Blackwood might get flustered or angry and embarrass himself as well as the county. The Superintendent's father was very ill so Mr. Collier told him because of his father's illness, he would go in his place. This pleased Mr. Blackwood and Mr. Collier equally. Mr. Collier, the Chairman of the Board of Education, and the Board of Education lawyer went to Washington, D.C.. Representative Tom Bevill met them at the airport and showed them to their hotel. He told Mr. Collier that they were going to put him on the stand first and would really work him over (Tape, October 28, 1995). This made Mr. Collier mad because there was no way they could fail to be guilty. Mr. Collier had friends in other counties around him that had already gone through this and they had been put on the quota system in which black students had to be bussed in to raise the percentage of blacks in the schools to the percentage of blacks in the population. Mr. Collier thought it was unnecessary for the black students to be bussed across the county. When Mr. Collier and his associates went to the court room, the

Judge asked Mr. Collier if he would like to have a negotiating conference and talk man to man. He explained that it would be like court but that he would ask the questions. This pleased Mr. Collier very much and he agreed. When the negotiations opened, Mr. Collier told the Judge that they were going to integrate but that he wanted three things. First, he wanted the meetings in writing, the Judge agreed. Second, he wanted the black children to go to the schools nearest their home. The Judge said that sounded reasonable and agreed. Third, Mr. Collier wanted the black teachers from the school to be put in the schools where the black students attended. The judge said he would do it, and Mr. Collier was on his way back to Alabama (Tape, October 28, 1995).

When Mr. Collier got back to Blount County, there was much opposition to integration. "Differences in attitudes toward race alienated friends, divided families, and split churches" (Rogers, Ward, Atkins, and Flynt). In Blount County there were two groups of opposition to integration. One was the Ku Klux Klan. They were to hold a march the Sunday after the news was released that the county school system had been integrated. They did not advertise it until the Saturday before the march was to take place. So few people showed up that it embarrassed them. They were not heard from again in Blount County. The second group was the White Citizens Council. One night five men came to Mr. Collier's house and called him outside. They wanted to know

if he would join the White Citizens Council. He told them, "Gentlemen, we've been friends, some of us for 30 years, and I'm going to tell you something. Not only will I not join your council, but I'll oppose you till my last breath if I have to. I want you to understand that" (Tape, October 28, 1995). They got back in their car and a White Citizens Council was never formed in Blount County. That is the kind of affect Mr. Collier has on people, if a person crosses him, they know they are probably on the wrong side.

Integration was not such a problem in Blount County, but in other parts of the state it was a cause of great unrest. There were riots in Birmingham when their schools were integrated. Martin Luther King, Jr. wrote, "The tragedy of Alabama was not the evil people who did dreadful acts of violence, but good people who did nothing" (Rogers, Ward, Atkins, and Flynt, 546). The people of Alabama as a whole were not a cruel people. They had grown up in a society that was determined to keep the races separated. Many Alabama politicians used race as a cause of fear to get votes. They linked integration to everything from sin to Communism (Rogers, Ward, Atkins, and Flynt, 546).

Mr. Collier continued to serve as Assistant Superintendent until 1973 when Superintendent Blackwood retired. He then served as Principal of Appalachian High School until 1976 at which time he retired to his family farm.

He retired early, at the age of 62, thinking he might have at least a "few years" to enjoy himself. Today at the age of 81, he is still very active on the farm. His "few years" turned out to be many and his wonderful health and superior attitude about life seem to insure many, many years yet to come.



## Bibliography

Collier, Drew. Personal Interview Tape. 28 Oct. 1995.

Robinson, John L. Living Hard: Southern Americans in the Great Depression. University Press of America, Inc., 1981.

Rogers, Ward, Atkins and Flynt. Alabama: History of a Deep South State. University of Alabama Press, 1994.

Tyack, Lowe, Harsot. Public Schools in Hard Times. Harvard University Press, 1984.