

JACKSONVILLE STATE UNIVERSITY

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JACKSONVILLE, ALABAMA 36265-9982

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

TELEPHONE: (205) 782-5632

Gift and Release Agreement:

We Mrs. Gertrude Jordan and Leah Highfield
(Interviewee) (Interviewer)

Do hereby grant permission to Jacksonville State University to copy the tape of the interview conducted at Tate's Chapel Community (Mrs. Jordan's House) on the date(s) of Sept. 9, 1995 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.

Gertrude S. Jordan
(Interviewee's signature)

Date 9-9-95
~~9-9-95~~

P.O. Box 21
(Address)

Centre, AL 35960
927-5143
(Telephone)

Leah Highfield
(Interviewer's signature)

Date 9-9-95
~~9-9-95~~

Rt. 3 Box 391
(Address)

Piedmont, AL 36272
447-9819
(Telephone)

Interviewee Background Information

Name: Gertrude Jordan
Address: P.O. Box 21 Centre, AL 35960
Phone Number(s): 927-5143
Approximate age or date of birth: Jan. 26 1911
Mother's name: Hyanchan Williams Davis (Swedish)
Father's name: James ~~James~~ Martin Davis (Irish)
Places lived and when: Cherokee Co. (Centre) 1911
Detroit '29 for three months back to Centre.

Education: JSU 2yr degree went back to JSU teaching certificate

Religion: Baptist
Business, political and social memberships (past and present):
Silver Sister ADK / Ass. for Retired Person / Literary Club /
Retired teachers Association
Present occupation: /
Former occupation(s): Teacher / Sunday School Teacher.

Special skills: Crochet
Major Accomplishments: _____

Local events in which you have participated: PTA, Boguaw Centreal
Celebration of Cherokee County

State and/or regional events in which you have participated: _____
ADK Representative

National events in which you have participated: NA

International events in which you have participated: NA

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:
Times-Journal "Age hasn't slowed this woman down"
Cherokee Co. Post "In honor of Miss Gertrude" 8 May 1995
Cherokee Co. Pos "An apple a day never kept Ms. Gertrude away 20 May 1991
Individuals you recommend who might be candidates for an oral
history interview: NA

Additional information: NA

History of Education
from Mrs. Gertrude
Jordan's Point of View

by

Leah Highfield

Alabama History
Dr. Harvey Jackson
21 November 1995

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Chronological Sheet of National Events

1920	Women's Suffrage
1926	Robert Goddard ignites first liquid fueled rocket
1929	Stock Market crash
1930's	Great Depression Rise of Adolf Hitler in Germany
1939	Beginning of World War II
1943	Penicillin discovered
1945	Nuclear bombs explode over Hiroshima and Nagasaki to end World War II
1947	Korean War
1960's	Space race between U.S. and Russia
1961	Vietnam War begins
1963	Civil Rights March Washington Assassination of President Kennedy
1975	Vietnam War ends
1970's and 80's	Feminist demonstrate throughout the Western World

Chronological Sheet of Mrs. Gertrude's Life

1910	Born
1928	Graduated Cherokee County High School
1928-29	Jacksonville State
1929	Detroit
1930	Came back to Cherokee County got two-year diploma, started teaching at Tom Jordan School
1962	Husband passed away, got teaching degree
1975	Retired
1990	Stopped substituting

Prepared Questions

1. When were you born? In what county?
2. What was school like when you were younger?
3. Where did you attend college?
4. Where was your first teaching job?
5. Did you teach anywhere other than Cherokee County?
6. How did desegregation affect schools in Cherokee County?
7. How were schools in Cherokee County affected by World War II.
8. Over the years, how did the teaching profession change?
9. Would you say childrens' behavior has gotten worse or better or remained the same?
10. When and why did you retire from the teaching profession?

History of Education from
Mrs. Gertrude Jordan's
Point of View

Education has changed in many ways over the years. One room schools are now elementary, junior high and high schools, buildings provide a better environment for students to learn in and materials are fairly easy to come by. Mrs. Gertrude Jordan has experienced and endured all of these changes in education as a student and teacher in Cherokee County, Alabama.

Gertrude Davis was born in Cherokee County, Alabama in 1910. At the age of seven, Gertrude went to school for the first time.

The elementary school was behind the First Baptist Church. It had grades one through seven. A young person once asked me if I walked to school and I told them 'no, I ran' because where the truck stops are now used to have the biggest pine trees that you've ever seen and it was dark through there. I could just imagine bears coming out and chasing me.¹

Ms. Gertude's daily trips to school were just over two miles each way.² As the years passed, Ms. Gertrude's education continued.

I graduated from Cherokee County High School in 1928.³

Even after her high school days were over, Ms. Gertrude was not ready to stop learning.

After I graduated from high school, I went to Jacksonville State (then known as Jacksonville Normal School) for one year. Then in May, right after school was out I married Haskal Jordan.⁴

Ms. Gertrude's college education was halted for a few months because she and her new husband decided to go to Detroit.

After I married we (her husband and she) went to Detroit. He got a job working at the Ford factory. Detroit seemed so big. I was afraid of it at first but then I saw all the new things I had only heard of back home. I saw an escalator for the first time there!⁵

Mrs. Gertrude and her husband stayed in Detroit a few months, then her father-in-law had a stroke. Mrs. Gertrude and her husband came back to Cherokee County because Mr. Jordan had to help his mother work their farm. Upon her return to Cherokee County, Mrs. Gertrude went back to college and got a two-year diploma. By this time (1930's), the normal schools had evolved into teacher's colleges.⁶

After she had gotten her two-year diploma, a great opportunity arose for Mrs. Gertrude.

There was a little two-teacher school up where I lived and both teachers did not want to come back. So Uncle Tom (Jordan) asked if I wanted to teach and I said 'Yes, I do!'.⁷

The school in which Mrs. Gertrude began her teaching career housed grades one through eight. There were up to one hundred students with only two teachers.⁸

The other teacher, Uncle Tom, and myself met one day to see who would teach what grades. Uncle Tom asked if I would like to have grades five through eight. When he did, I saw the other teacher look down like she really wanted those grades so I told him I'd take grades one through four.⁹

Mrs. Gertrude taught many children with very little supplies to help her.

The first year I taught, we only had one reader. I read that reader every day. The children did not say they were bored reading the same thing over and over but I knew they were. I told Uncle Tom about the one reader and the next year he had

gotten the library to give us four new readers.¹⁰

Ms. Gertrude enjoyed her years at Jordan school and has many fond memories of the time. She recalled a time that she and her class went down to the creek that was located behind the school and it was frozen over.

Some of the boys begged us to go across it with them. The other teacher looked at me and I looked at her. The children told us that they would hold our hands if we would just walk across the creek. We played and played with those kids on that ice. We had a lot of good times.¹¹

World War II began in 1939.¹² The war affected everyone in the country including the people in Cherokee County, Alabama. The schools were also affected. Mrs. Gertrude recalled how she and her class had to give up their class room and move to the basement because the men in the army had to use the school for their barracks. According to Mrs. Gertrude, in the winter, it was so cold in the basement of the school that the children had to pull their desks close to one another for the extra heat.

On May 17, 1954, the U. S. Supreme Court unanimously ruled in five cases, collectively known as Brown v. Board of Education, that "separate educational facilities are

inherently unequal" and that segregation deprived the plaintiffs of equal protection of the laws.¹³ Southern states enacted many new laws to prohibit or postpone integration. Public-placement laws, freedom of choice amendments, the closing of public schools, state interposition and mob violence are just a few examples of how Southern states tried to postpone integration.¹⁴ Desegregation went rather smoothly in Cherokee County. Mrs. Gertrude could not recall any time during the transition in which there was real problem.

Of course some people opposed the idea, but everyone accepted it and went on trying to make the best of it.¹⁵

Cherokee County Elementary School (Centre Elementary School) had been in use several years before desegregation was enacted. During the years before and after desegregation, supplies were still hard to come by for Mrs. Gertrude and the other teachers. Mrs. Gertrude recalled a time in which book shelves were placed in the hall way of the schools. If a teacher needed a book to teach out of, they could go into the hall and teach from it and return it to the shelf at the end of the day.

Mrs. Gertrude has been involved in making education in Cherokee County better for children in any possible way. Centre Elementary School Parent-Teacher Association was

organized in 1928. Mrs. Gertrude was President of the association in the early years.¹⁶

Mrs. Gertrude taught for forty five years before having to retire.¹⁷ After she had retired from teaching, Mrs. Gertrude still could not seem to stop. After she retired from teaching, Mrs. Gertrude began substituting. She substituted regularly in schools in Cherokee County until the age of eighty when she was forced to stop because of deteriorating eyesight.¹⁸

When asked about children's' behavioral patterns throughout her years of teaching, Mrs. Gertrude is a very optimistic person.

Children are the same today as they were when I started teaching. Every child just wants to^{be} loved and payed attention to.¹⁹

Mrs. Gertrude still gives love and attention to children. Though she may no longer teach in schools, Mrs. Gertrude continues to teach a Sunday-school class for young children at the First Baptist Church of Centre, Alabama.

Materials, buildings, funding and so forth may have changed in education throughout the years, but the need for loving, caring teachers and administrators has not. Mrs. Gertrude was and is one of those teachers. Her influence on education in Cherokee County is still powerfully felt.

Notes

- ¹ Interview. Mrs. Gertrude Jordan. Sept. 9, 1995.
- ² Hoskins, Mary Lee. "In Honor of Ms. Gertrude." The Cherokee Post. Vol XI. No. 19. 8 May 1995: 1-2
- ³ Interview. Mrs. Gertrude Jordan. Sept. 9, 1995.
- ⁴ Interview. Mrs. Gertrude Jordan. Sept. 9, 1995.
- ⁵ Newman, Joseph W. "Teachers". Encyclopedia of Southern Culture. University of North Carolina Press: Chapel Hill, 1989.
- ⁶ Interview. Mrs. Gertrude Jordan. Sept. 9, 1995.
- ⁷ Hoskins, Mary Lee. "An apple a day never kept Mrs. Gertrude away". The Cherokee Post. Vol. VII No. 20. May 1991: 1-2
- ⁸ Interview. Mrs. Gertrude Jordan. Sept. 9, 1995.
- ⁹ Interview. Mrs. Gertrude Jordan. Sept. 9, 1995.
- ¹⁰ Interview. Mrs. Gertrude Jordan. Sept. 9, 1995.
- ¹¹ Lewis, Richard and Susan. The Power of Art. Harcourt Brace College Publishers: Fort Worth, 1995.
- ¹² Synnott, Marcia G. "Desegregation". Encyclopedia of Southern Culture. University of North Carolina Press: Chapel Hill, 1989.
- ¹³ Synnott, Marcia G. "Desegregation". Encyclopedia of Southern Culture. University of North Carolina Press: Chapel Hill, 1989.
- ¹⁴ Interview. Mrs. Gertrude Jordan. Sept.9, 1995.
- ¹⁵ Stewart, Mrs. Frank Ross. The History of Education in Cherokee County, Alabama Vol. One. Stewart University Press: Centre, AL,1981.

¹⁶Hoskins, Mary Lee. "In Honor of Mrs. Gertrude". The Cherokee Post. Vol. XI. No. 19. 8 May 1995: 1-2.

¹⁷Cornelison, LaRue. "Age Hasn't slowed this woman down". The Times Journal. 3 Sept. 1990: B-2.

¹⁸Interview. Mrs. Gertrude Jordan. Sept. 9, 1995.

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- Cornelison, LaRue. "Age hasn't slowed this woman down". The Times Journal. 3 Sept. 1990: B-2.
- Hoskins, Mary Lee. "An apple a day never kept Mrs. Gertrude away." The Cherokee Post. Vol VII. No. 20. 20 May 1991: 12.
- Hoskins, Mary Lee. "In honor of Ms. Gertrude". The Cherokee Post. Vol XI. No. 19. 8 May 1995: 1-2.
- Lewis, Richard and Susan. The Power of Art. Harcourt Brace College Publishers; Fort Worth, Texas, 1995.
- Newman, Joseph W. "Teachers". Encyclopedia of Southern Culture. University of North Carolina Press; Chapel Hill, 1989.
- Stewart, Mrs. Frank Ross. The History of Education in Cherokee County, Alabama Vol. One. Stewart University Press: Centre, AL, 1981.
- Synnott, Marcia G. "Desegregation". Encyclopedia of Southern Culture. University of North Carolina Press; Chapel Hill, 1989.
- Tape. "Interview with Mrs. Gertrude Jordan". Sept.9, 1995.