

STAFFORD COUNTY ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW OF T. BENTON GAYLE

By MARGARET MOCK

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T. BENTON GAYLE

My name is Margaret Mock and I'm interviewing Mr. T. Benton Gayle at the home of his brother at 102 Sussex Street in Argyle Heights, Fredericksburg, Virginia, on Thursday evening, November the sixth, 1986. This interview is being conducted for the Stafford County Oral History Project.

Q: Alright, Mr. Gayle, please give me your full name and what does the T. stand for?

A: Thomas.

Q: Thomas?

A: Thomas Benton Gayle. And I was the third one with that name. My grandfather was born in 1840 and was

in the Confederate Army in Virginia and later in the Ninth Virginia Cavalry and then went into the... Command after he had trouble with one of his eyes. His was the first and my father was the second and I'm the third. So I use the T. Benton Gayle so as not to confuse us with my father who was living, of course, up to the time I was 47 years of age, Thomas Benton Gayle, and this grandfather of mine was named after a very prominent senator-United States senator from Missouri, who has some close connection with Staunton, some relation, but I don't remember just what it was.

Q: Well, when were you born, Mr. Gayle?

A: I was born on the 20th of December, 1899.

Q: 1899. Right before the turn of the century. And where were you born?

A: I was born on Altoona Farm which is just west of Fredericksburg in that section called Altoona section of that Woodmont, I believe they called it. Just the other side--the farm on which I was born was Altoona--was where the Oak Hill Cemetery and all that shopping center (Greenbriar). That's where I was born.

Q: Did you grow up there:

A: No, no. No, I was born there at the date I gave you and then one of my sisters, the next one in the family, was born there, also. And then my father, at that time, was managing that farm and some other farms that belonged to Captain M.B. Rowe who lived at Brompton--the college professor now lives.

Q: Oh, yeah. M.B. Rowe--R-O-W-E?

A: Yes, Captain. Who was a first cousin of my father's. And he was working for him at that time.

Q: I see--so he was managing the farm and they lived there on the farm and you were born there?

A: Had a beautiful home there and I regretted it very much the group represented by the people out there now--what was the name of that ... Silver.

Q: Oh, he's the one who bought that property?

A: Carl Silver. He bought that property. And I was so hoping that they would save that house because it was a French house--French construction and had something most houses here didn't have then--French windows all the way from the floor to the ceiling on the first floor, you know. And it was a beautiful house. And it could've been saved, but they destroyed it.

Q: They tore it down?

A: Tore it down.

Q: To build the new Hampton Inn shop there now.

A: I don't see why they couldn't find some place for it.

Q: Yeah, I agree with you. Well, were you the oldest in the family being the first?

A: The first one.

Q: The first--and you had how many other brothers and sisters?

A: I'm the oldest of eight. Four boys and four girls.

Q: How about that? How far back did your family go in, say, the Fredericksburg area?

A: Well, my father was born and raised, as was my grandfather and his father, in Spotsylvania County. My mother was raised in King George County, right on the line, between King George and Stafford County.

Q: So where did your family live? You say you were not there in Altoona too long--just--

A: Well, my father first left the farm and went to work at the Newport News ship building plant. And then, like so many at that age in that period, young men, just as when I was coming along, most of the young men wanted in some way to get connected with aviation. At that time, it was railroads. My father wanted to get into the railroad business. So he left here and went to Grafton with his famil and at that time we had--my mother and father had four children and they moved to Grafton, West Virginia, where he went to work for the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad and soon became an

engineer on the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad. And we stayed there until 19th of December, 1911- really you might say 1912 because we just moved down to the farm just about Christmas of 1911. And lived in King George County.

Q: So you moved to King George County?

A: Yeah, where all of us--rest of the family was born there.

Q: I see. So you would say--was that right on the line between Stafford and King George?

A: The line between King George and Stafford. The upper part of Muddy Creek, we called it. Which was the line between the two counties. Ran through our farm and ended on our farm as a spring.

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Q: Oh, I see. So you really did live right on the line, didn't you?

A: Both Counties.

Q: Right there--both counties.

A: I think it had something to do with the fact that I was appointed as superintendent--I was familiar to some extent with both counties and knew people in both counties.

Q: And at the time you were appointed superintendent, the two school systems were together, weren't they--Stafford and King George?

A: No, they weren't. They had been at an earlier age been together, but they were separated at that particular time and they put them back together and they stayed together as the divisions, school divisions, the two counties for the forty years that I was superintendent of schools.

Q: Oh, so you were superintendent for forty years?

A: Forty years.

Q: During that time, it was both counties, Stafford and King George together?

A: Yes.

Q: I see.

A: My appointment became effective on July the 1st, '25, and I retired June 30th, '65.

Q: Oh, really? June 30th, 1965, and you had 40 years?

A: Yes.

Q: You said a little bit about the kind of work that your family did. Your father was first in farming and then he went into railroads and then he came back

A: Back to the farm after my grandfather--my mother's father--died. My uncle, my mother's brother, Mr. John Lee Pratt, who was ... recognized as one of the big industrial men of this century.

Q: That was your mother's brother? So your mother was a Pratt?

A: Yes. And he came out to West Virginia and talked my father into leaving the railroad and coming back and taking over the farm.

Q: So your father took over the farm that her family had had? So most of your growing years then were on that farm?

A: Yeah.

Q: From 1911 on. Okay. What kind of farming did your father do there? Dairy farming?

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A: No, a general farm. We had beef cattle and some dairy cattle and we used to sell in the early days of the Fredericksburg Farmers Creamery, we used to run the milk from the dairy cattle through a separator and sold cream to Fredericksburg.

Q: Is that right?

A: The Farmers Creamery. And he raised corn, wheat and the general crops. Of course, at that time, very important, was eggs.

Q: What about yourself? Did you work on the farm?

A: Oh, yes.

Q: What were some of your duties on the farm?

A: Everything that came along. I... almost ... and when I moved to the farm twelve years old, I had no idea about milking a cow, but I soon learned and had all that to do and did everything that had to be done on the farm.

Q: Is that right?

A: Yeah. We learned to do almost every task that was that of the farmer's.

Q: You and all your brothers and sisters and everybody worked together on the farm?

A: Yes, as they grew up, yes.

Q: What about your mother? Did she do any of the farm work?

A: Oh, no. She took care of the house. She had her hands full.

Q: With eight children?

A: At that time that she moved down here, they had four and other four came along. No, actually, she had five. There were five born because one of my brothers was born in West Virginia and brought down here as a baby.

Q: Oh, is that right? Did you have tractors of any sort or did you use animals-farm animals, horses, and mules?

A: Horses--horses--horses and mules.

Q: Horses and mules? To do the plowing?

A: No tractors at first.

Q: No tractors?

A: Except tractors would come around occasionally when the time came to have your wheat thrashed or something like that. Someone in the community as a general thing had a something to thrash the wheat with, called a thrashing machine. And my daddy would come around with a tractor sometime.

Q: What would you do--would you pay them a certain fee for doing that?

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A: Yeah.

Q: A certain amount?

A: Yes, you would pay them so much a bushel of wheat. And we raised oats, and rye, and wheat and corn was an important thing then and my father had to work hard and everyone of us boys worked on as we came along. As we got old enough to do anything, we were put to work.

Q: You were just the right age when you all moved out here being twelve years old.

A: Yes. I soon learned how to milk and how to ride horses. I remember the first year that I was on the farm and I was just over twelve years old, my father had some boy--local boy driving the team to the binder, cutting--called it a binder because you cut the wheat and tied it up in a bundle--called a binder because it bound the ends of the-

Q: Bound it up.

A: Into sheaths and ... and the boy didn't drive as my father thought he should so the boy quit and my father put me up in the saddle and I started driving the horses.

Q: You learned on the job, huh? How about that?

A: I was twelve years old.

Q: Well, what about schooling? Did you go to some sort of public school?

A: I had, being the oldest--I think I was in the--about the fifth or sixth grade when we came down here--twelve years old, somewhere like that. And we started to go to school--a little two-room school near the Bethel Church, called the--still called--there's still a Bethel Church there, it was called Bethel School. That same year, some time before that, well, I think we went to school the rest of that year, January until school closed and then started to attend the school in

the fall. The school caught afire and burned down. And back in those days, they didn't do a thing in the world about it. And they-- my father had to employ somebody, a tutor, to come in and teach us at home.

And we had one or two of the neighborhood children also joined in our school in our home. And they didn't bother to build a school or do anything about it for the whole year. It was September 1913 before they even built a new school there in that section.

Q: And all that time in between, you just had private tutoring at home?

A: Yes. And most of the children in that area didn't have that chance.

Q: Didn't have any schooling at all? Yeah. Well, Bethel was a pretty good distance from your farm. How did you get to school?

A: Walked to school. It was about a mile and a little over--a mile and a quarter.

Q: It's just that far out--I didn't realize that the King George line was that close. Just beyond Bethel Church?

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A: Yes--just below the Bethel Church. ...the First run that you come to on that road, going down through 218 is the division between the two counties and at that time, the property was on both sides of the road--both sides of the run--Muddy Run was part of that farm.

Q: oh, really? So the farm was on both sides?

A: Oh, yes. The majority of the farm was in Stafford County, although the home was in King George County.

Q: And the school was in Stafford County?

A: Yes.

Q: Did you have to pay any sort of special fee to get in?

A: No. No one ever thought of such a thing at that time.

Q: And you were just closest to that school and went to the closest school.

A: Closest school.

Q: Then when they finally rebuilt the school, where was it?

A: At White Oak.

Q: White Oak.

A: That building is still there.

Q: Still there? White Oak School?

A: White Oak Elementary School. While I was superintendent, we had it brick veneered, put in toilets, all the heating system and a little auditorium. And now it's used for some of the educational programs of the County.

Q: I went there for a meeting, but I didn't know how far back the school went. About 1913.

A: ... started school there in September 1913.

Q: Well, how did you get up there--that was a little farther wasn't it?

A: Well, we drove. We had a little sorry and drove a horse to the surry--all of us riding in that. Whenever they didn't have to have the horse for use on the farm. We had four to six horses on the farm always, but they was very busy at certain times, so sometimes we had to walk.

Q: They were using the horses?

A: For 2-1/2 miles.

Q: Uh-huh.

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A: We didn't think much of it. Those children walked 21-2 miles in three-quarters of an hour.

Q: What years of schooling did you have there? Would that be like your 7th grade on up through high school?

A: They went up to what was supposed to have been the first year of high school. And then I went on up

to Fredericksburg to high school there because there was no high school in Stafford County then. There wasn't one in King George either.

Q: You had to get to Fredericksburg to go to high school?

A: To go to high school. And Fredericksburg didn't have a high school building.

Q: Oh, they didn't?

A: No. The first year that I went to high school, it was in the old building that still belongs, I reckon, to Mr.--the man who owns the Fredericksburg Hardware Company--Mr. Stoner--and he had a display there of every sort of antique that there ever was in this area, but that's where we went to school--in that old building.

Q: Oh, old Stoner Store?

A: Old Stoner Store. Went to school there. And then the last two years that I went to high school, we were down at what was the Frederick Hotel, down below where the old post office was, right down there.

Q: Right down there.

A: Didn't have a sign of any playground at all. Just an old--

Q: Was it a hotel then and they were just using part of it for a school?

A: Well, yes, it was a rooming house of some kind.

Q: How many people were in your graduating class?

A: 19--it was the class of 1919.

Q: Oh, really? Class of 1919. And there were 19 of you.

A: Yeah.

Q: I suppose you have some kind of reunion at one time or another?

A: Yeah. We had 50th year reunion and it was very interesting. Three of our teachers were there.

Q: Oh, really?

A: And of those 19 students, there was something like 15 or 16 of them were there.

Q: oh, really? For the 50th reunion.
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A: For the 50th reunion.

Q: Well, isn't that wonderful? That would have been in 1969, I guess. You were class of 1919?

A: Yes.

Q: And fifty years later would be 1969. Well, that's interesting. I would have thought maybe you went to what is the Maury School. But Maury School wasn't built then.

A: No, it wasn't built. I was superintendent when that was built.

Q: Oh, really? So that school isn't quite as old as I thought it was. Maybe we'll say a little bit more about those days of your growing up. -anything about your friends or about particular teachers that you remember or any incidents at school?

A: Well, I think we were very fortunate in having some very good teachers. We had a Miss Mary and Miss Fannie Lee. Their brother was a doctor in that area down there. And then we had a Miss Ryland--Florence Ryland who later taught in the John Marshall High School in Richmond. And then we had a Miss Wilson who was an excellent teacher. We had some very good teachers.

And the first year of high school, well--it really wasn't high school, but they were teaching us--trying to teach us what was in the course for the first year of high school when we went up to Fredericksburg. It only took me three years to finish... I didn't actually graduate from high school because at that time, they required 16 units and I had the units, but I didn't have geometry. And so, I was admitted to Virginia Tech with the understanding that I would take the course in geometry which I hadn't had in high school.

Q: So you did that at Virginia Tech?

A: Yes, yes.

Q: And you eventually graduated from Virginia Tech?

A: Yes, in '23.

Q: 1923. What was your field? What were you studying there?

A: I was studying vocational agriculture. And it was a very wise--I can't say it was wise because I didn't have any idea I would do that and become superintendent of schools, but it was the only course that was being taught anywhere that I knew of. I don't believe anywhere in Virginia or anywhere else where you could get school administration and work on budgets and preparing records for the school and all that because that was part of the training for the vocational agriculture teacher.

Q: It was?

A: And right at that time, they were the best of that group, including myself, had had courses that no one else had had. And as they had raised the requirements for the superintendent of schools and we met the requirements because we had

(A: continued)

those educational courses. And for awhile, well, we had two or three--at least three I remember three very well--who, became the state superintendent of public instruction who were from that same course only they were teachers when I was up there. They were teaching the course. And then after that, there was another half a dozen or more state superintendents of public instruction were graduates of the same course. We just happened to have that training that wasn't available anywhere else.

Q: Yeah--you were training to be agricultural teachers?

A: Yes, but in doing that we had educational subjects. And we were very fortunate. I always felt that I was very fortunate to have had the opportunity just trained at that particular time.

Q: Uh-huh. Yes, you were fortunate. You were fortunate enough in being able to go to a university like that. Your father must have been doing very well on the farm to be able to send you down to a university.

A: Well, he was making a living, of course, but this part of it I don't know how many people really understand it. When I got ready to go into VPI, I wrote off myself and had them send me a catalog and all that sort of thing and I made application for it and then I told my mother and father that I wanted to go to Virginia Tech. And my mother and father both said, "Well, we'd certainly love for you to go. There's just no way in the world we can help you. It's all we can do to raise and support the family." My father said he was doing everything he possibly could. There wasn't anything else he could do. But to encourage me when he thought I was probably going to stay there on the farm, he had given me six calves--male calves. And I had a cousin, my father's first cousin, was Captain M.B. Rowe who lived at Brompton and that now is the home of the president of the Mary Washington College, and he was my father's first cousin and when I was going to high school in Fredericksburg, some time in the early fall and the late spring, I rode horseback and muleback to school from where we lived--seven miles out in the country. But during the rest of the months, I stayed at Brompton at my cousin's and worked in the dairy. I had to go to the dairy by five o'clock in the morning and work in the dairy and then go to school for the day and go back and work in the dairy. And Captain M.B. Rowe gave me my board, this first cousin of my father, splendid man. I thought a great deal of him, right next to my father, he was. And he paid me, it sounds like nothing now, but it was very important, he gave me \$2 a week for the work I did in the dairy. And I worked in the dairy. I knew what I was doing.

Q: This was in Farmers Creamery?

A: No, no. The dairy--it was a dairy farm there.

Q: No--it was a dairy farm so you worked on the farm--on the farm. I see.

A: At five o'clock in the morning.

Q: Until you had to go to school.

A: Yes.

Q: What did you do with that money?

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A: Going back to the old question about where the money came from, from the farmer with all those children, well, those six head of cattle when I got ready to go to VPI, Captain Rowe, my cousin and my father's first cousin, they had a butcher shop in Fredericksburg and so he agreed to give me \$300-- give me \$300--\$50 per head for each of those six head of cattle. By that time they were getting to be steers and large enough to slaughter. He bought them with the understanding they could stay on the farm until November or something like that when he wanted them. And he gave me the \$300 and I went up to VPI and that money lasted me until February. February of 1920, that was... --February I was out of money entirely and I had to either quit school or find something to do. The only thing I knew was some farm work so I went over to the dairy at Blacksburg--VPI had a big dairy herd there and applied for a job milking in that dairy. That was all I knew because that's how I had gotten through high school. And so they gave me a job working there and paid me 20 cents an hour. But by being in there at five o'clock and working until eight, and then going to school until four, and getting back there by four o'clock, just almost four, I'd get back there just a few minutes after four and work until six. I could put in five hours a day at 20 cents an hour was \$1 a day. Well--I found I had to go in the military, which I liked military, I wanted to stay in the corps, but I got out of it and I got out of it and went to work in a dairy. Again, I had to be out and be there by five o'clock in the morning. ...cold country up there at Blacksburg at times. And I had to walk some--oh, I'd say four miles from where I was boarding--I found a place to board and there was a Mrs. Kirby, I believe the name was, who had a boarding house there for \$20 a month. That's all--three meals a day... good meals, good food, good woman. And for \$20 a month. And that left me \$10 for all other

expenses. And I lived there for the rest of that year. It just so happened that my contact up there,
Professor Hunt, who was the head of the Animal Husbandry Department at Blacksburg and he, I suppose, took
kind of a liking to me or something, anyway, after that one year, then he gave me a job doing what
they called advanced registry testing . Back in those days, there were dairy farms all over the country
and there were three doctors up near Roanoke, one at Salem--do you know any of these areas?

Q: Just slightly--I know where you're talking about.

A: One at Salem--do you know where Hollins College is? One there at the College and one who lived right across the road from there, but a good mile from the two schools and
I went to those three places every month and run tests--the cattle--the amount of milk that they
were giving and the percentage of butter fat as it was and how much food they were given. You
had to work all that out through the farmers so the dairy farmer so knew what he was doing. And that
was the job and I made enough on that the next year, in fact, the next three years, to stay in
school and do that work and I did it on Saturdays and Sundays. We had classes in those days on Saturdays.
And I would miss the classes, but the people--the professors who had me knew I was doing work
that I had to do. So If I missed anything important, they would keep a record of it and give it to me
when I came back Monday so that I could make it up. And I got along. I never made as good a grade as I
might have if I hadn't worked like that. Five o'clock in the morning.

Q: Yeah.

A: Until eight and then to get to classes sometimes by 8:30 I had to be at the first class. But what was good about that was whenever it was possible, they would arrange it so
I didn't have to have a class first period in the morning so I had time to get my breakfast and get to classes and change my clothes
because you smell just like a cow. I had to take a bath every morning whether I wanted to or not. And
anyway, after I got to doing this testing part, I not only made a whole lot more than 20 cents an hour,

but I had good experiences and learned a whole lot about a lot of things and, and got to know something about the dairy business. And not only that, but I had the sympathy of the, I suppose that's what you'd call it, the interests at least, of the teachers who tried to help me instead of expecting something-

Q: Impossible--

A: And then on one occasion, I was in a mathematics classes with a German named Guggenheim and he was having algebra or something like that and I went to sleep in the class. And he said, "Shhhh, everybody be quiet. If not, you might awaken Mr. Gayle. And of course, that waked me up. That's the way... 'Shhhh, everybody be quiet.'"

Q: You must have been awfully tired working those kind of hours.

A: Yeah, I was--

Q: In reality, you just worked your way through college.

A: Well, I worked my way all the way through college. Now, it was the only thing to do back in those days. Now a student can go ahead and borrow money from-

Q: The bank.

A: Banks and all. There wasn't anything like that. But the state has one--it was possible to borrow \$100 a year--all of the state schools, a student could borrow \$100 a year at 4% interest and pay it back after he graduates. And so that was \$100 each year. That helped me.

Q: Yes, pay your tuition.

A: And then during the summers I worked. The second year that I was at VPI, the-- Professor Hunt called me one summer after I had gone home and gone back to work on the farm and called me and said that VPI was getting ready to send out some of its cattle from the dairy and the beef cattle, a section also, all over to fairs all in Virginia and then to the Richmond Fair and then to the Raleigh, North Carolina Fair and end up at the Eastern Area Fair in Atlanta, Georgia. And so I got all ready and went on up there, starting getting everything ready, and one of the boys that was working with me was a VPI boy by the name Jordan. I mention him because he kept on working, too. And afterwards--after I--oh, I'd been out of school for a long time and had been superintendent of

schools a long time, in 1956, I didn't know what had happened to Jordan. So I was in charge of this thing and I--and he was one of the boys who was working with me and then they had three men who had been in the First World War and the government was beginning its first attempts to do this vocational type of thing to help some of those fellows who had been in the war and wounded or something like that not too much and wanted to find some employment. Well, they weren't any good at all, they wouldn't do anything, so we had, Jordan and I. had to do nearly all the work. Well, anyway, before I'm getting ahead of my story, in '58 I found out that I had diabetes. Well, it never was real bad, but it was bad enough

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(A: continued)

something had to be done about it. So I went to Richmond. Somebody recommended that I go to see Dr. Jordan in Richmond. I didn't know this boy that I had--he and I had been on this trip all over these fairs with a herd of cattle. I didn't know he was the Jordan and I went down to Richmond to see Dr. Jordan--they recommend I see him, walked in there and there he was, this Jordan that I knew... so he took a lot of interest in me and helped me I'm sure a whole lot. And he's still living as far as I know of. Just got recently--a bulletin--it's a great big thing that they--from VPI--all of the people who are still living who graduates of VPI. Or went to VPI. And I looked up Jordan and it still had his name. So he was living, at least, when they started printing that magazine. And he's about my age.

Q: Well, you had a real interesting experience in getting through your college years.

A: And I got through.

Q: You got through. And then you came back to Stafford, King George. You graduated in 1923?

A: No, I came back and went down in Westmoreland County where I taught agriculture--two years down there.

Q: Taught agriculture for two years.

A: And then--a part of the requirements at that time to be a superintendent, you--had to have at least two years of teaching experience. So I made out my application and I had two years of teaching.

Did you make application to the school board like it is now?

No, no. I was appointed by the State Board of Education, at that time.

Q: Oh, State Board of Education.

A: Local school board couldn't do anything about it at all. They could make a recommendation or something like that, but they didn't even know that I was going to be appointed until it came out in the paper.

Q: Oh, really?

A: State board--I was appointed by the State Board of Education.

Q: Uh-huh. And that was for the Stafford-King George School Division?

A: Stafford-King George School Division.

Q: 1925. Have you ever been married?

A: Yeah, I've been married twice.

Q: Oh, is that right?

A: To two of the most... two of the prettiest wives.

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Q: Is that right?

A: Just as sweet and pretty as they could be.

Q: Did you have any children? By either wife?

A: One--one son.

Q: One son? He--

A: My first was Miss Jeanette Hutt from down Montross.

Q: Hutton? H-U-T-T--

A: No, just H-U-T-T.

Q: H-U-T-T--Hutt.

A: And there's a very prominent family down there.

Q: Down where, Montross?

A: Montross. That's in Westmoreland County. That's the capital over there at Westmoreland. That's where the courthouse is. Center of the county government.

Q: And that was your first wife.

A: She was my wife and we were married for 35 years.

Q: Is that right?

A: She was the mother of my only son. And we had two grandchildren. One of them lives in--both of them work in Richmond--one of them lives in Richmond and the other one lives in Powhatan County. And what else was I going to tell you?

Q: Maybe about your second wife? Your first wife--you were married for 35 years.

A: Yes, well, then she had--I knew when I married her that she wasn't going to be living a long time. She had had rheumatic fever when she was a child and her mother advised me when she and I began to look seriously at each other, that--she thought I should talk to Dr. Adams(?). He was a doctor in town at Montross there--a little town and I went to see him and she felt it would be a good idea for me to talk to him about that and I went to see him and talked with him about it. He said, "Oh, Jeanette will make you a good wife. Don't worry about it. She'll be able to bear your children and she'll be a good housekeeper--just runs in the family. And a good cook. Nobody can cook as good as her mother." Nobody could cook any better than her mother did. And, "You're bound to get along all right. But since she won't live a full life, she'll die young." And I said, "Well, doctor, what do you mean by that now? When? How long do you think she would live?" And he said, "Oh, she'll probably live until the late fifties or early sixties." Well,... that was in '26 and I was married in the '27--I don't know how he could've hit it any better on the head--any better, anyway, but just to show you how foolish people are when they're real young, I was 26 years old, and he said she would probably live to be in her late fifties or early sixties,

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(A: continued) I thought, "My goodness," talking to myself, "That's long

enough for people to live anyway." Well, my goodness, it just came around so fast, didn't know what to do. First thing I know, why she was getting worse and worse and died in '63.

Q: Is that right? 1963?

A: Well, then I had a cousin that I hadn't seen since she went to Mary Baldwin--this little cousin of mine. A third cousin--a Pollard. One of the Pollard family from down in King and Queen County--a good family of people. And she lived in West Virginia--Clarksburg, West Virginia. We had lived in Grafton, West Virginia, and she lived 22 miles from there and I'd known her when she was just a little baby, almost. She was six years younger than I. But still, when I was twelve, practically twelve when we moved down here, then she was six and I knew her because we'd get together--the families would get together every now and then. So after my little wife had been gone--Jeanette had been gone about nine months, I went one Sunday, I went down to my mother's and there was Lillian down there visiting my mother. And I almost fell in love with her at sight.

Q: Is that right? And then you were married the second time.

A: Married the second time.

Q: To your third cousin, yeah.

A: We were together for 20 years.

Q: Yeah. You've been very fortunate to have... the beginning when you had two good wives. Together all that time.

A: Well, these are not real good pictures, but if I could put my hand on them, I'd just like to show them to you. They were both(?) in church.

Q: What was the church that you grew up in?

A: Yes, Fletchers Chapel.

Q: Fletchers Chapel? And that's in King George, isn't it?

A: Yes, they're down in King George--just a little way down there, uh-huh. Some of these things are so wonderful, they just break you up.

Q: okay, we might go back and talk a little bit more about the community when you were growing up-- like when you're twelve through high school years.

A: There's my little girl, Jeanette, right there by that old...

Q: Was that in New York?

A: No, it was in--what do you call it in Washington?

Q: Oh, it's in Washington.

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A: I forget what the thing's called. A restaurant we used to go to up there quite often. That's a couple of friends of ours--they're both dead ... and that was the last picture, you know, just before she died. ...

Q: Is that right? She was one of the hostesses for historic Fredericksburg it looks like. Garden tours.

They'd have dances on Saturday night in King George and you'd go down there?

A: Uh-huh, things like that.

Q: What about medical facilities? What did you do if you needed a doctor?

A: Well, we didn't get sick much, but there was a doctor Lee, who was a brother to those two teachers that I mentioned, that we had in White Oak. He lived in the community. And doctors, you called them and pretty soon you'd see them. Pretty soon they make \$3 a call.

Q: They'd call--did you have a telephone?

A: Yes, most of the time I had a telephone.

Q: Is that right? So you could call up the doctor in case you need him to come out and see you?

A: Yes, you'd call him and he'd come on right out there.

Q: What about electricity? Was your house wired for electricity?

A: No, no, my father had what they called carbide lights. Gas light. You'd buy the carbide in a container about that long and about that big around and put ... in the ground--put the thing in the ground. And you had--we had lights.

Q: Oh, you had lights that way.

A: But it was a good 20--well, it was almost in Roosevelt's time in the '30's before we had electricity down there.

Q: Is that right? Probably the rural electrification.

A: Yeah, that's it.

Q: So you don't have any idea who might have had the first telephone down in that area, do you? Or maybe in Stafford County...

A: My uncle was Dr. Frank Pratt--Frank C. Pratt.

Q: Was he brother to John Lee?

A: Yes.

Q: They were brothers?

A: They were brothers. My mother was--

Q: Their sister?

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A: They were brothers and sister. When he first graduated from the Medical College of Virginia, he lived at this farmhouse right over here... after his father died. And practiced medicine down there in the county before he moved in to Fredericksburg. And then there was a Doctor Minor down in King George County.

Q: Okay, we were talking about doctors. What about dentists? Did you see a dentist when you were growing up or--?

A: Not very much. We'd go now and then.

Q: Did you have to come into Fredericksburg for that?

A: Yes.

Q: Now, this is going back again to talking about your birth. Was there a hospital in Fredericksburg where you were born or were you born at home?

A: No, all eight of us, my mother never went to the hospital for single on of the eight. They were all born at home.

Q: All born at home.

A: The doctor, he'd come there.

Q: Come out there, yeah.

A: Of course, back in those days, there were midwives that did a lot of that sort of thing.

Q: That's true.

A: But she never had..., she had a doctor, so--

Q: What about paved roads? Now 218--when you lived on 218, was that a paved road? When you were growing up?

A: No, indeedy. There wasn't nothing in the world but just a dirt road.

Q: Dirt road.

A: It was a dirt road when I was first superintendent of schools.

Q: Oh, really?

A: There wasn't a piece of macadam or tar road in both counties.

Q: Oh, is that right?

A: When I first started there. In King George, there were 22 separate schools, mostly one-room schools. And in King--in Stafford County, there were 44--twice as many and the majority of those were one-room schools. There in Stafford, they had, I think, two four-room schools, and two three-room schools and there were four or five two-room schools, and the rest of them one- room schools.

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Q: When you first started as superintendent?

A: And when I--I had to go about the job of consolidating them, you know. And they... gave me the devil about that sometimes.

Q: People didn't like it when you closed down the old school?

A: No, no, they liked it--just carried it too far now. I think they'd get better schools if they hadn't made them so big.

Q: Yeah, I think you're right there. Size has a lot to do with problems a school has.

A: Yes, it is true.

Q: Yeah.

A: As I said when I was appointed superintendent, there were 44 schools in Stafford County; when I retired there were 13.

Q: Oh, my goodness. Sure

A: All of them--of course, there were schools like White Oak that had four rooms.

Q: Now, did they have separate schools for black children?

A: Oh, yes, separate schools for black children up until '62, I think was the first time we had-

Q: Well, were you the superintendent for the black schools as well as the white schools?

A: Oh, yes.

Q: You had them all.

A: And I tried--I really tried to make them as good as I could. I had some good colored teachers. Good black teachers. Some of them were good people; some of them were just like they are now- -you can't put much dependence in them.

Q: That's true of all people, isn't it?

A: Yeah, but still a higher percentage in the blacks than it is in the whites. I know that much.

Q: Well, let's see. We were talking about paved roads. Do you have any idea when 218 was paved? You say it was a dirt road when you were superintendent. Wonder when it was paved?

A: Well, 19--I've forgotten what year it was--about '26 or '27--somewhere along there when Byrd became governor of Virginia. He was in favor of what they call the

"pay-as-you-go system" and they did away with all the--county road systems that they had and the Board of Supervisors in each county that operated the road system up until that time--until Byrd went in. And then Byrd changed that and they put in the tax on gasoline and immediately about that time, they began to improve
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(A: continued)
the roads. After Byrd became governor of Virginia. And then after that, he went to congress and his son was in the Virginia Assembly, and then he went after his father died, he--before his father died, he went to Congress. He was a United States Senator. But anyway, just mentioning the fact that Byrd was sort of the father of our good road system. And he was against the bond issue. He wanted to pay-as- you-go, as he called it. Which he was entirely right. And the roads improved very rapidly after that.

Q: After Byrd, I see. Okay, what about the post office? Did you have a post office near your home down there or--?

A: Yes. Do you ever read Mr. Goolrick's articles in the Free-Lance?

Q: Yeah.

A: Ever hear of Passapatanzy?

Q: Uh-buh.

A: Well, that's where my home was.

Q: That was your post office?

A: That was the post office--Passapatanzy. I remember on one occasion when I was at VPI, a whole bunch of us having a bull session or something like that, somebody asked me they had never heard of Passapatanzy. They knew my post office was Passapatanzy, they said, "Well, where is Passapatanzy?" I said, "It's down in King George County." "Well," they said, "how big is it?" And I said, "Well, it has two churches and two banks," and somebody said, "Oh, well, that's a pretty big place, isn't it?" Talking about a bank on each side of the road. Said, "That's a pretty big place, isn't it?"

Q: ... on the side of the road. But there was a post office there.

A: Oh, yeah.

Q: Did you have to go there to get your mail or did they bring the mail down to your house?

A: No, no, no, they left it right at, didn't take it to the house, but it was on a rural--everybody had a mailbox out on the road. For a long time, there was a man by the name of Bumbrey who delivered all the rural mail. His family now owns the Bumbrey taxis of Fredericksburg.

Q: One man did all that?

Yeah. And started out with a horse and wagon--sort of a spring wagon--used to call it a small wagon, you know,... 'cause it had springs in them. It was easier to ride in. But it wasn't about the twenties, just before the twenties, '16 or '17, they began to get cars.

Q: Oh, is that right? You know who had the first car in that area?

A: I think it was a fellow named Wesley Sullivan.
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Q: Wesley Sullivan?

A: Uh-huh. Was the first man to have--

Q: A Model T?

A: No, a Shelton.

Q: Shelton?

A: Wesley Shelton.

Q: Wesley Shelton.

A: Model T Ford, yeah. And the first car I had was a Model T Ford.

Q: Is that right? What year was that that you got a car?

A: It was after I got my job teaching agriculture. I had to have a car to get around and visit the boys all over the county down there in Westmoreland. And I borrowed \$475 from my grandmother, stepgrandmother, and bought it brand new Model T Ford. For \$475.

Q: Is that right? How about that?

A: And I paid her back, too, in a very short time.

Q: Did you ever take any trips anywhere other than moving out to West Virginia? Did you ever do any other sort of traveling? Did your father ever take you anywhere as a young boy?

A: Not much. We had--he had a relative in St. Louis, Missouri, and I remember we took a trip out there one time.

Q: Oh, did you?

A: And that was about all. And he was an engineer on the railroad, he could get a pass, take us ... so we'd take some trips like that, you know. And come back to Fredericksburg to visit in the summer, you know, ... a pass on the railroad.

Q: So that was a nice advantage of working on the railroad, wasn't it?

A: Uh-huh.

Q: The traveling.

A: And I had two or three little things here that I used in this thing that you might want to use.

Q: Okay, alright. What were they talking about there?

A: Well, let me see, where I took it up here. Oh, I didn't tell you this, I don't think, well, I'll tell you this much, anyway,--at graduation, I graduated from VPI on June 8 in 1923 with a B.S. degree in Agricultural Education. And I accepted one of two positions offered me; the one I accepted was Agriculture

(A: continued)

Instructor in Westmoreland County and I taught at Montross and Oak Grove High School. Later, I attended the graduate school at the University of Virginia. For four years, I went on every Monday afternoon and evening to the University of Virginia working on my Master's degree in

Education. As did almost every superintendent of schools in the state. As few of us had anything above a B.A. or B.S. degree at that time. And then I served here. I found both King George and Stafford County very poor financially--there was practically nothing in the school budget and considerable debt for those days. At the beginning of the new school term, there was not enough to offer eight periods of school term. This was a result of very low property assessments and very low tax rates. And now I've told you all I just told you-

Q: Do you have any idea how many--what your salary was when you started out as superintendent? As a teacher?

A: When I started out?

Q: As a teacher.

A: As a teacher, I was getting \$1800 a year.

Q: \$1800 a year?

A: And that was good pay in those days.

Q: Good money, yeah.

A: In 1923. And in '24, after the first year there, I think they gave me \$2000, an increase of \$200. And then when I was appointed superintendent of schools, my salary was \$2505 a year. And that was in 1925. And in 1926, when I was reappointed, my salary was increased to \$2700 a year. But, then the Depression came along. And all the salaries across the board were cut 10%. So when you take \$270--10% of the \$2700--it took me back to where I was getting less than I was the first four years. You were just glad to have a job back in that time.

Q: That's right.

A: And nobody got any increase during all that time. People now think you've got to have an increase every year, you know. I was superintendent of schools for ten years before I ever got an increase. It stayed the same thing for ten years. Until the war started.

Q: Because the economy was just so poor.

A: Yes.

Q: At that time.

A: And I stayed here ... of one-room schools were in existence that first year I was superintendent of schools.

Q: ... Stewart Jones wrote that dissertation on Stafford County Schools.

A: Yes.

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Q: She's probably got that in there, hasn't she?

A: Yes, I think she has.

Q: Probably got a lot of that information from you.

A: The first bus was operated in this school system after I became superintendent of schools in Stafford County. In King George County, they hadn't started the operation of one bus on 1924 and 1925.

Q: I wonder how many buses they have now.

A: Oh, I think I heard just recently that Stafford has 60--60 some buses. And here's something that was right funny--the first meeting that I attended after being appointed the superintendent of schools, there was a little school for blacks called "Little Ark's School". And after this meeting, they had a speaker from Gloucester County as I recall. And he introduced me as the new--a colored man, you know, as the new deficient superintendent of schools.

Q: Deficient?

A: And I don't believe that it would have been possible to have termed it more appropriately than he did at that time. Because I certainly felt deficient. Speaking of roads, just now, our cement--I remember back in those days when the roads were terrible and how often I became stuck in the mud on the roads of both King George and Stafford Counties. On one occasion, I had my mother with me and I started through a road from Sealston to our home over on 218 and right in front of the

Garner(?) home, it--my car became stuck in the mud and I couldn't get it out to save my life. And my mother had to walk from there to our home, some four or five miles. And then send my brother back with a team of horses to pull me out of the hole in which I was stuck.

Some years ago, we had conferences in both King George and Stafford Counties. On One Saturday, we would have the conference in Stafford and the next Saturday, we would have it in King George. And we had educational consultants from the different colleges in the state. We would have someone from the University of Virginia one Saturday, someone from Madison College the next Saturday, someone from William and Mary the following Saturday. And the next Saturday, someone from Farmville. In fact, with the help of these people, we made the meetings very interesting and our teachers attended willingly and there was little complain about it. And I wonder today, how many teachers would be willing to stay all day on Saturday, sometimes traveling 25 or more miles, for one of these conference Also, I wanted to tell you about the little story that I read one time in Reader's Digest and I assume that I should be able to tell it now. There was a boy of nine, he had a tomcat. There was quite a cat in the neighborhood and he couldn't keep the cat home. And it traveled all about the back fences, the alleys, and everywhere in the whole area. And finally, the man was telling about how he took the cat to the veterinary and had her--had the cat altered. And someone asked him, "What did you do with the cat then?" And he said, "I made him a consultant." While I was attending these meetings each Saturday, with the different consultant each time, I kept thinking about that story and kept thinking about it and finally, toward the last, I just couldn't hold it in any longer. And I had to tell it to a teacher and whichever consultant happened to be there at that time, and they seemed to enjoy it.

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Q: I think that's still appropriate today.

A: I'll tell you this a good one here, too. This story's a little more color, too. one February, one of our teachers resigned her position in the high school. And I learned that Miss Radolinsky, who was from King George County, was graduating from Mary Washington College in February and was available. So I got in

touch with her at Mary Washington College and made arrangements to pick her up and take her to the school, so she could have the conference with the principal.

When we reached the school, the principal was in the auditorium. So I went to the auditorium with this girl by my side. Just as I was getting ready to introduce her and tell the principal that I had this young lady to take over the position that had been vacated, a little boy ran up and grabbed Mr. Smith by the coat-tail and said, "Mr. Smith, Mr. Smith," and Mr. Smith said, "Run along, son, can't you see I'm busy?" But the boy wouldn't be put off. So the boy said, "Mr. Smith, Mr. Smith," and Mr. Smith said, "Run along, son," but he wouldn't go. "You know what those boys did on the bus yesterday? They took out their little worms and showed them to the girls." I think I was partly more embarrassed than anyone else, standing there with this young teacher that I was trying to introduce. But now it seems right funny to me.

Here's another right good story. This really is good. I expect a lot of school people have had such an experience, but this is something. During the war, this same Mr. Smith went into the service as a major. And the teacher, one of the best teachers, was called Miss Dick. Name was... and she was a fine person and she took over as principal of the school when he went in the army, into the navy. But it was a lot of responsibility and she would call me early in the morning almost every day with some problem that had come up. She always wanted to see you right away and I had a lot of trips to her school--many, many times it was not necessary at all, but she'd call me and say she had to see me so I went down there. On this one occasion, she called me and said, "Mr. Gayle, I just got... this morning," so I went down there as soon as I could and she took me in the office, unlocked the desk, and got out of the desk some drawings that she had taken from one of the boys the day before. Well, they were the kind of pictures you'd call pornography, I suppose. They were just pictures of male and female figures and she was quite incensed about it. She said, "I just can't have that boy in school. He'll have to be expelled." I said, "Miss..., you can't just expel a boy from school for doing something like that. It's perfectly natural for him to do that sort of thing. I've done the same type of thing myself. Nearly everybody had done some such thing as that. And not only that, but they are pretty good pictures." Well, she was shocked almost to death, but we never heard any more after that.

Another time, just before the second World War, I'd received reports--about

a boy in one of the high schools (high and elementary schools were combined)--who was giving his teacher so much trouble that she just couldn't manage him

and had him in the principal's office a number of times. It may have been-- I don't remember just who the teacher was--but anyway, I--...continue to get these reports and I went to the school and the class was in the basement of one of the old elementary schools and it had a door from the outside as well as the door in the hall in the basement. So I went through the outside door and there was a seat near the back of the room. I took the seat and no one knew I'd come in except the teacher who was finishing reading the children. I had not been there more than a minute or two when she said something to this boy sitting in front of me. Probably she did that on purpose. And he answered her with some curse words and vulgarity that was just terrible. Without thinking, I just reached over, right over the desk in front of me where he was seated, and

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(A: continued)

smacked him on one side of his face and then the other side. And I smack pretty hard. Everything in the room was just as quiet as a mouse. Nobody said a word and went on with the class, but I began to think what a fool I made of myself and I believe it was the first time, the only time in the forty years that I was superintendent of schools, that I felt as I did. I was so nervous that my hands trembled on the desk. I had a hard time just holding them there. Just thinking about the newspapers, all the fuss they would make about a case such as that. Well, the war came on and on one occasion I was going to the school to a board meeting. And just out of Fredericksburg, there was a boy with a soldier suit on, standing with his duffel bag and I looked him over before I got to him, and decided I could give him a ride. I stopped and picked him up and we started going down the road. He said, "Mr. Gayle, you don't remember me, do you?" And I said, "Well, I looked you over pretty good before I picked you up and you looked familiar to me, but I can't recall your name." He said, "I'm the Cox boy that you smacked at King George that day. And that was the best thing that ever happened to me." Well, that made me feel pretty good. When he first spoke up, I thought I was in for a bad one.

Q: I love that--I love that story. The classroom teacher now--I wish our superintendent today could do that. Come in our classroom and smack a few around.

A: It was just getting to that time that--getting to the point where you couldn't take any more. I just didn't get taken up on it.

Q: That was a good way to handle that boy. And like he said, that was probably the best thing that ever happened to him.

A: Yeah, he said that himself. Another thing that happened, I always thought was right funny was soon after I married. I was married to Jeanette Hutt from Montross on the 20th of October in '27 and we took a very short honeymoon because I had to be back from King George for the fair. So when I came back, I stopped there with my bride and we went into the old fairgrounds, and they were judging the exhibits and Jeanette went around with me. We went to where they were judging the exhibits and Miss Kate Owens(?) was there with the judge and she was in charge of things and we went in behind the ropes where the judge and she were. And she, thinking Jeanette was one of the children, grabbed her by the shoulder and shook her real hard and said, "I told you children to stay out of here. Now, get out of here." Well, we soon straightened it out, but Miss Kate was so upset by it that she gave my bride a rug that she had won first prize on at the fair and we kept that rug for many, many years.

Another one which my wife came into it. One of the very first things I had to work on was the schools of both counties, and that meant the closing of some-a number of one-room schools, and some of the two-room schools and adding on to different central schools, to take care of these children. So much developed-a real high school and a consolidated system of elementary education. This involved the operation of school buses. It was almost unbelievable today how much opposition there was to children riding those school buses. Let me say, right here, that the busing of children from racial integration and busing across district lines and so on, is nothing compared to the furor that was raised back in those days. You tried to get to the people on these matters. I went all over the county to the different schools where the consolidation was going to affect the community and tried to explain it to the people. On one occasion, I was at one of the schools explaining about some changes in the grades that

(A: continued)

would be taught in that school and we would close the school in which we were meeting. ...near by and other such plans to get the consolidation going. And that night, I had my first wife, Jeanette, with me and she was sitting in the back and the people didn't know who she was.

Very few of them knew who she was. And I was up there and trying to explain the plans for the

consolidation and advantages of it and some woman who was sitting next to my wife turned to her and said,

"Wouldn't you like to choke him?", and my wife said, "Sometimes, I certainly do."

Another time during the time I was superintendent of schools from July 1st, '25, to June the 3rd, '65, there was very little vandalism in the schools. Now and then, someone would break into the school, do a little bit of damage and... something but not very much. As far as this

drug problem was concerned, I never heard of such a thing the whole time I was superintendent.

Occasionally it would be brought to MY attention that some of the high school boys at a football game or some dances or something of the sort, were having a bottle of whiskey with them at school. But that was to be

expected and parents in most cases kept it around and used it themselves and it didn't cause any great

amount of worry. We had very little trouble. But one case that we had amused me in a way because it was

such a logical thing for the kids to do. Right after the second World War, the government had available

to these schools, all kinds of surplus materials that cost the county practically nothing.

And after

you had these materials for three years, you could sell them for whatever they would bring. And I, on

several occasions, made money for the school by taking some of these surplus items and on one occasion I

remember I brought a great big 8,000 gallon tank that was surplus for a couple hundred dollars from

the government and sold it for several thousand dollars. Another time, in Stafford County, we bought a

surplus government building for \$3,000 and after keeping it for a while, we sold it for \$40,000. The story

I was going to tell, though, concerns King George County and, on this occasion, they had piles, mounds

almost, mounds of beautiful brass plate. So we went down there and got a truckload and brought it up to

King George because we were getting ready to build a fence around the lower part of the high school. We used these brass posts to put a chain link fence where we needed it. And all around the back of the school and particular on the side. Well, they stayed there very nicely for a while. Then one Monday morning when we got to school, the wires were all stretched out around there and all the posts were gone. I guess it was quite logical that some folks had taken those brass posts because they were quite valuable and if we had them up to the present time, they would be almost as valuable as gold. Another incident, you want to hear all these foolish things?

Q: What?

A: I said, another incident I was going to read about--I said you want me to tell all this stuff?

Q: Well, what we would like to have is a copy of that report, so we could put that with this one that we're doing for you so you see if you can find me a copy of that. Could you do that?

A: I don't where I'm--I won't find it, so just look, hunting out this stack.

Q: I'd like for you to do that because I would like to have a copy of that because it would be better probably for us to put that in with this one and not have to

(Q: continued)
transcribe it all out again. But they're interesting. Those are interesting tales about your days as superintendent.

A: Another incident, I'll read this to you ... won't keep you up too late.

Q: Yeah.

A: It's from quarter, ten minutes to nine. Another incident was concerning the Commonwealth Attorney and he was a very conscientious man and what happened was that we had a boy in school who had committed some petty larceny or something of that sort, and we wanted to try and get the boy straightened out. So went down to the courthouse and saw this Commonwealth Attorney and suggested that we have the sheriff go up and pick him up and bring him back to court. Bring him to court and let him get in a good "talking to" and perhaps we could do

the boy some good. Well, the Commonwealth Attorney was a very conscientious sort of fellow and said, "We can't do that--the law says that you have to have a warrant issued for the boy and the sheriff has to go up and serve the warrant on him and bring him down to court just as anyone else." So I said, "That is not what I wanted to do. I don't want to put anything on the boy's record. He's not such a bad boy. He just needs to be straightened out." The Commonwealth Attorney said, "That is the law.", and I said, "The hell with the law." Well, he jumped up about three feet out of his chair and said, "You said the hell with the law?" Well, it flashed through my mind right then that what the Free Lance-Star would have... the next day when he reported under the superintendent of schools made a statement such as that and said, "The hell with the law." So I retracted right away. I said, "I never said such a thing in my life. Let the law take its course." Well, that has been told quite a number of times and several of my legal friends enjoyed it.

Q: Oh, yeah. Superintendents today still have to worry about what the Free Lance Star is going to write in the newspaper.