

**Kennesaw State University
Department of History and Philosophy
Summer Hill Oral History Project**

Interviewed with: Joe N. Weems, Sr.
Interviewed by: Melissa Massey
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(Tape 1, Side A.)

M.M: This is Melissa Massey interviewing Joe N. Weems at 10:30 on March 31st, 2003
at his home on Jones Street. Can you state your name for me?

J.W: My name is Joe Weems.

M.M: When and where were you born?

J.W: I was born in Bartow county, (unintelligible), Georgia.

M.M: And did you have any siblings growing up?

J.W: Oh yes I had five sisters and four brothers.

M.M: And what were their names?

J.W: Well there will be eleven in all, I said nine, but it's eleven. (Unintelligible),
William Weems, and Ruby, (Ora?), Mary, Jewel, Clifford, Lucy, Viola, Jeanette,
myself, and Loyd, I think that's eleven (unintelligible).

M.M: Okay, and what did your family do for a living, what did your parents do?

J.W: Well in the beginning we lived on a farm, and we did sharecropping, then we
moved to (unintelligible) Calhoun, Georgia in 1942. I was still a young lad

myself; we went to school there. My mother and sisters, they worked in different homes during that time.

M.M: Now how did you, when did you come to live in Summer Hill and how did you come to live here?

J.W: Well, after finishing school then (unintelligible) Calhoun, at that time I finished in ninth grade and they only went to the ninth grade in Calhoun, but I wanted to further my education. I came to Cartersville and went through the eleventh grade at Summer Hill. So I came to Cartersville in 1946, graduated in 1948, tenth and eleventh grade at Summer Hill, and after finishing Summer Hill I wanted to go to school, and my father died when I was six years old, and my mother never did marry anymore, and after finishing the eleventh grade at Summer Hill I wanted to go to school and wanted to go to college. There was no way my mother could help me, and I didn't have the funds to go, and the principal at that time, principal (J. S. Morgan, Sr. ?) found out that there was a work study program at Tuskegee so four or five of us boys left Summer Hill in the summer of 1948, went to Tuskegee went for what we called the five year plan, so I could get an education. So I worked there and graduated in 1953. This year here is my fiftieth anniversary graduating from Tuskegee; the class reunion is next week.

M.M: Now when you came to Summer Hill in 1946, where did you live?

J.W: I lived with my brother, my oldest brother, Will Weems. After school he found me a job or two, and I worked after school (unintelligible).

M.M: Now can you describe the house that you lived in for me?

J.W: Let me see, can I remember back. It was a two bedroom and at that time he had two children, and they were younger, three or four years old, or five. I stayed there with his wife and two children, and had a dining room and a kitchen; I think that was about the size of it, I can't remember too well.

M.M: Now what was the outside like, the yard?

J.W: Oh, well the front yard with no grass, but we had a front yard. It was a small place; I think the house was on Walked Street in Cartersville, that's where we stayed during that time.

M.M: Now what was your relationship with your neighbors like?

J.W: Oh, my neighbors, we were real friendly. We were good neighbors together, because on each side one of the neighbors that was living on the other side of us was one of my classmates, she was in the same grade I was in. On the other side of me was a young couple and they sand, and I liked to sing so we all got together and formed a group, and we just had a wonderful time; I liked both neighbors on each side.

M.M: And so they visited regularly?

J.W: Yes, we did.

M.M: Now what was your role in the household, you were a student at the time when you moved here, but did you have a certain role?

J.W: Well I was suppose to kind of clean up after I got back from school in the afternoon, maybe wash the dishes or something like that, make up my own bed but that was about it.

M.M: That was it, okay did you share dinner with the family, did you all sit down at one time?

J.W: Yes, we would sit down and eat dinner at times, but most of the time my brother was still at work, and his wife was at work so we rarely seldom would sit down and ate together.

M.M: Now where did your brother work?

J.W: He worked at the (unintelligible) hotel at the time in Cartersville, (unintelligible) hotel, he was the, what do you call it, yeah he work at the (unintelligible) hotel, I can't think of the name of his job.

M.M: Now did you ever sit down for Sunday dinner together, was that a special time?

J.W: Oh yeah, we sat down at Sunday dinner and eat together.

M.M: Did you have any special foods for Sunday dinner?

J.W: No nothing special, just some of our regular food that we would eat, chicken, greens, things like that. We didn't have nothing really special but regular food.

M.M: Now what about holidays, how were the holidays celebrated?

J.W: Well holidays, well a lot of times during holidays I wasn't too far from (unintelligible) I would go back home, go back to Calhoun and celebrate there, and go to a ball game or something like that.

M.M: What was your first job?

J.W: My first job, I use to wash dishes at the café, that was my first job when I was in, that's when I was in high school.

M.M: Was the café here?

J.W: No it was in Calhoun.

M.M: Okay.

J.W: My first job here in Cartersville was, I had an office I use to clean up in the afternoon here in Cartersville, clean up his office and bring him coal and all that stuff, then go to his house and bring him coal and clean up his house also.

M.M: Now what did most people do here in Summer Hill for a living?

J.W: Most, some worked in factories, a lot of them worked in homes.

M.M: Now can you describe the neighborhood of Summer Hill for me?

J.W: Okay. Summer Hill at the time, there was a lot of old houses, because we have now the new ones, but (unintelligible) tore down all the old house where we are here and other places and tore them down, and sold them back to the people who wanted to buy them. The old people who owned their home, they had first choice of buying their home back, so it was, that was about it.

M.M: Now growing up here in Summer Hill, you didn't grow up here, but when you came here for high school were you known by any nicknames around the community?

J.W: No. You say was I ever named a nickname, no.

M.M: No.

J.W: They always called me Joe; I never did have a nickname.

M.M: Okay, well what did you do for fun in Summer Hill?

J.W: I played basketball, that's during the time in Summer Hill, I played basketball on the Summer Hill basketball team, and I sung in the school choir at Summer Hill, and ran track, and played softball, that was about all we had to do at that time. Of course the last year at Summer Hill I started playing football, my last year there

got a chance to play on the football team, I think we played two games, because that was our first year starting out, and the game actually wasn't games, they were practice games, and we played schools out of Marietta. They came and we played them as a practice game in the afternoon by us being our first year. In Marietta they had been playing football, nine or ten years, we wanted somebody to play against, and so they came up with their practice team, and we practiced against them.

M.M: Now where did you have your games?

J.W: First year, it was a place in the recreation park there, down in the south end of town. It was recreation department, and we played our games down there.

M.M: Okay. Where were the favorite hangouts in the neighborhood?

J.W: During that time they had café, it was B & H café, down here on the corner of Bartow and Carters Street, a lot of the young students hang out there, (unintelligible) meeting place, and we had other places, but that was the main place in came. Everybody would come to B & H café, and they had a juke box in there, of course you could buy food and all that, it was just a hang out place for all the teenagers and stuff.

M.M: And the name of the café again was?

J.W: B & H.

M.M: B & H, okay.

J.W: Beasley and Harris. So they just use their initial, B & H café.

M.M: Were there any particular customs or celebrations that the Summer Hill residents observed?

J.W: Well we observed Thanksgiving, we observed Christmas, and Easter, during that time that was about the special times.

M.M: Now how has the area changed economically?

J.W: Well it has changed quiet a bit since they (unintelligible). All the new houses, and people not working in factories, and people in their own homes, and own cars, its just a different...Summer Hill has really changed, the streets was paved, during that time, if I'm not mistaken when I first came here the streets weren't paved (unintelligible) Summer Hill. The streets are paved, the side walks, (unintelligible). It was another café too, I forgot it's name, use to be across the street over there, I can't think of the name of it, and the children and we use to hang up there too.

M.M: Now what is your fondest memory of Summer Hill?

J.W: Well one of my fondest memory of Summer Hill, when we went to basketball tournament we beat Marietta in 1947, no 1948, we won the basketball tournament in Marietta, and I was on that team, I was a senior at the time, that's one of my fondest memory, to beat Marietta, because that was one school we was always rival schools with. Nine times out of ten they always beat us, very seldom we got a chance to beat them, so that was one of the times we won the tournament in Marietta and beat Marietta, what's the name of the school, I can't think of the name of the school now, Lemon Street, I believe, Lemon Street High School was the name of the school in Marietta.

M.M: Now what was the name of your basketball team?

J.W: We were the Summer Hill Blue Devils, uh huh, Summer Hill Blue Devils.

M.M: Now besides going to the B & H café, did you ever go to any movies or go anywhere else for parts of Cartersville?

J.W: Yes, we went to the movies, there was some good movies, (unintelligible) Grand theatre, which is still Grand theatre still here, but they don't show movies there. I am sure you probably seen it, it's down town (unintelligible). We went to the movies, and I am trying to think of other things...that was about it.

M.M: Now was there anywhere you felt you couldn't go?

J.W: Well as far as recreation, well yes I think of their swimming pool, we couldn't go to the swimming pool, because it was segregated, and you know places we had to go to swim, we had to go to the creeks or somewhere, that's where we had to go when doing the swimming, because we couldn't go to the swimming pool.

M.M: Now who were the prominent or recognized members of the Summer Hill community, while you lived here?

J.W: Brother J.S. Morgan, Sr, he was principal for Summer Hill, and J. F. Anderson, and a Mrs. Morgan, and I can't think of any...

M.M: Do you recall any areas that were considered whites only or blacks only besides the swimming pool?

J.W: Well downtown recreation departments was segregated, the restaurants downtown was segregated, and that's about it.

M.M: Were there any signs that explicitly said?

J.W: Oh yes.

M.M: There was?

J.W: Yes, there were signs colored and white, colored only or white only. You go to the Grand theatre you have the same place you are suppose to sit, you couldn't just go in and sit anywhere, and the balcony was colored only, because it said here is where you had to sit, went to the theatre.

M.M: Now tell me about the role of the church in the Summer Hill community.

J.W: The role of the church was one of the leading things in the community. Church was, children go to church, they went to Sunday school, and went to church, and they (unintelligible) we played, maybe had some type of team that we would play on, we did recreation together at the church, so we didn't play against each other, but well I said different churches, but I meant each other, we would play and sing choir in the church, and of these things as well. You'd meet a lot of your friends, if you didn't meet them at church, then you met them at school, but during the summertime, most of the time you would see them at church, on Wednesday night maybe Bible study and different things.

M.M: Now what church did you attend?

J.W: I attended St. Luca (unintelligible) Church; it's the one here on the corner, over here on the corner now, Jones street right there, 130 Jones Street.

M.M: Now what type of music was played at church?

J.W: Well gospel music was played, and then on, I guess you call it risen and blues, R & B on the radio, and we keep it with that on the radio, and I can't... Some of the popular singers back then during that time, well I can't think of who they are, but they had a lot of popular songs, just like it is today, but as of now I can't think of none of those popular artists that was back there doing that time.

M.M: Now what types of things were preached about in church?

J.W: Well the things that we would preach about, living, and have faith in God, and young people especially, truthful, and stay out of trouble, train the child the way you should bring them up, and when you get old (unintelligible), and those are just some of things that we were taught in Sunday school, and maybe the preacher would preach about the same things.

M.M: Now did your church take any political stances?

J.W: Not that I know of, not during that time, not that I know of.

M.M: Okay, now did the church go through any changes in attendance while you were there?

J.W: Yes, and no, but yes I believe they did, because I was, I went to Sunday school there and sung in the choir, but after I came back here, after I went in the service, came back to Summer Hill in 1958.

M.M: When did you go into the service?

J.W: I went in the service in '53, went up there to (Tuskegee/spelling?). We took ROTC, in (Tuskegee?) and went in as a second lieutenant and stayed in there five years and came back here, Summer Hill in 1958 that's when I came back and taught school here at Summer Hill.

M.M: Now can you describe the Summer Hill school in general, what grades were taught?

J.W: Well when I first came back here in 1958, I majored in physical education in Carters, I taught physical education, and there was two part of the school on the top of the hill, up there where they got the old gym now, and grades one through

seven I believe, seven or eight (unintelligible) elementary school and primary, and then when I came back they had built the other part of the school at the bottom of the hill where the high school went through twelfth grade then, nine through twelve, and I taught P.E. the first two or three years then after that I was a basketball coach at Summer Hill for two years, and assistant football coach, track coach, and assistant baseball coach, and there is quiet a number of things. We had four children, and children at that time would bus then, because Summer Hill was the only high school in the county where blacks could go to, so we had the children coming in from Kingston, coming in from (unintelligible), Emerson, all over the, if you wanted to go to high school you had to come to Summer Hill. It was all over the county, and they would bus then here to high school.

M.M: Now you were a physical education teacher, was that your favorite subject to teach?

J.W: Yes, I enjoyed P.E., I enjoyed physical ed, because I was an active person, I liked to play different sports and that's why I majored in that, when I went in school. Well when I went in school I thought it was, I thought it was easy, I won't say easy subjects, some of them wasn't as hard, but once I got there and found out that physical education was not an easy subject, because you have to take all the biology's, starting with biology, kinesiology, all the biology you had to take and all the other subjects, because see I didn't know that, I guess I thought P.E., or guess we would just play sports and doing nothing. Well we played sports, but they all (unintelligible), because when I came out of physical education at Tuskegee, could've gone into pre-med, because we had all those subjects, because

I know one or two of my friends did go into pre-med, because they had all those biology's and all those other things, but I managed to get through it, but I know when, I know I did, if I'd have known that, I might ought to switch to something else, but I (unintelligible) stay then, so when people tell you they have physical education, well I guess you know its not an easy subject, no its not easy at all.

M.M: Not at all, now who were your favorite teachers?

J.W: At the time, well Mrs. B. E. Morgan, she was my favorite teacher.

M.M: What did she teach?

J.W: She was a high school teacher, and she taught English, and she taught Latin.

English and Latin, I believe is what she taught, I know she taught Latin, and she was school chorus director, she taught music and all that.

M.M: Now you were in the choir, you were on the track team, you played football, you played basketball, were there any other clubs or organizations that you were involved in?

J.W: No at that time I think that was just about it.

M.M: That kept you busy I'm sure.

J.W: Yeah, it kept me busy.

M.M: Now what did you do after school?

J.W: (unintelligible) went to high school, I went to school if that's what you mean.

Well after high school like I said I came, I got a job and went to work during the summer. The first summer I went back home, but I still worked, went back home and worked in that café and worked there all day. Then the next summer, the last summer, I stayed here in Cartersville, because I wanted to go to school as I said,

and I had to get my tuition money, I think it was about three or four hundred dollars for the first quarter, they was on the quarter system, and I had to have that much money to get in, so I came back and stayed here in Cartersville that summer, believe it or not I worked up on the dam, the dam that they have here. It was (unintelligible), that was when they was in (unintelligible) session in 19..., summer of, yeah summer of '48, I worked out there on the dam, they were building the dam, so I think they completed the dam in '51 or somewhere in there. When I came back here, it was completed, but I worked on the dam and got my money to go to school the fall semester at (tuskeegee?).

M.M: Now did you give your students a lot of homework?

J.W: Not a lot, I gave them homework, but not a lot of homework, because sometimes you give them too much they would say I'm (unintelligible), they didn't have time to do it, and sometimes they didn't have no help to do it, so I tried to do a lot of work in the classroom and then give them some work at home that they could do, that I think they could do.

M.M: Now when you were a student at Summer Hill were you given a lot of homework, do you remember?

J.W: Not too much, no.

M.M: Now other than basketball was Summer Hill known for any other particular sports?

J.W: Now basketball, during that time, basketball was it, during my time, but after I left, after I went to (tueskeegee) and left, I understand the football team, they had a really good football team the next year or two, they won a couple of

championships (unintelligible), in the region championships I think they did, but I was gone at the time, but during my time basketball was it. We had a tournament here at Summer Hill, basketball tournaments at Summer Hill during that time...

(End of Tape One, Side A. Begin Tape One, Side B.)

...we were on the five year plan you work during the day and you go to school at night, but see now you take three subjects from six to nine, you take three subjects and that was (unintelligible), because as you know we had to take English 101, 102, and 103, that would be three semester, and taking social studies, and I taking math or whatever the subject was, take three subjects and then it take, you was a freshman for two years, you would take half of a semester, next year take the other half of that quarter. In your sophomore year you was able to still work, but you would go to school during the day and go to work like in the afternoon, during four of five hours all during the day you had your classes scheduled where you had three or four hours, and you could go to your job and work, and then the third year I went to school completely all day long, and you work at night, like clean up the class rooms at night or doing those things, and then the senior year, it was about the same thing, took ROTC, graduated second leutenant, and I just enjoyed it, we had a lot of students there on what they called the five year plan, because you could go to school and if you didn't have money you could work your way through, of course I am sure some students are working there way

through school there, but not that way, because they could go to school and get part time job, and still go to school. Students are doing that now, because they have to go to school now and work at McDonalds and still go to school during the day, didn't have to go on now five-year plan. This was back in the '40s and if you wanted to go to school, you had to find a way to go to school, and I didn't want to go in the service, because after I got there and stayed there about two months, they called me into going in service, and by taking that notice to the Commander of the ROTC, I took and gave to him, said you don't have to worry about that, we will take care of it. By taking ROTC, I didn't have to go and serve, that was during the Korean War, didn't have to go in serve by taking ROTC, but if I hadn't been taking ROTC I'd have to go in to serve, drafted and then serve, but I did go after I finished (tuskegee) as the second lieutenant, we had to go in and stay three years, that was mandatory, three years, then if you wanted to stay longer you could've, but you had to stay three years.

M.M: Where were you based?

J.W: When I first went in service I was based in...first I was suppose to go to (unintelligible), Louisiana Air Force base down there, and during that June I got a telegram, orders from the President of the United States at that time, telling me not to report to where I was suppose to go, because during that summer the Korean War was over, conflict was over, so I stayed home all the summer, tried to get a job and found it hard to get a job, because I did get two or three jobs, the reason they didn't want to hire me, because I told them I had to go in and serve, (unintelligible) serve, but when I didn't know, they wanted people permanent, so I

finally found a job and worked a couple months. I went in, in October, instead of June, went to (unintelligible...), went there and stayed three weeks, then from there I went to San Francisco, California in Parks Air Force base, stayed there for six months. After I finished in that training, they asked you where you want to go, southeast, southwest, north, so I didn't want to come back to the south, I wanted to go maybe southwest, or east coast and never did put any over seas duties, I didn't want to go over seas, so when I got my..., when the orders came back I was headed straight to Japan, Tokyo, north of Japan and stayed there three years, and (unintelligible) Air Force base in Tokyo, Japan, that's where I stayed for three years, and got out in '56 or '57 and went to Montgomery, Alabama, I can't remember the Air Force base in Montgomery, but that's where I got out of the service in Montgomery, Alabama.

M.M: And then you came back here in '58 and began teaching?

J.W: Well I came, I tried to get over here, I couldn't get over here, during the time they didn't need a teacher. I started teaching school in (unintelligible) in Lexington, Georgia that's on the other side of Athens, I stayed down there a year, then after staying there a year I wrote two or three different schools trying to get on, and get on, so (unintelligible) principal, Ian Carter, because his (unintelligible) died, but he never did have no openings you know so he finally got an opening, and he wrote me a letter, he told me to come in for an interview. I came in, he had the job in the field physical education, the job was in the field that I wanted, that's when I came in '58 and started teaching physical education in the Summer Hill high school.

M.M: Now do you feel that you received an equal education to that of white students?

J.W: Ask your question again.

M.M: Do you feel that you received an equal education as white students?

J.W: No I don't, no I didn't, because we never did...at Summer Hill, when I was in Summer Hill we never did get any new books, we got the hand me downs. Carter high school got the new books, we got the hand me downs from (unintelligible). As long as I was there we never got any new books we got the hand me downs, what they didn't want they gave to us, they got the new books, we got the old books. They said separate but equal, it never was equal. I am not just talking about in Summer Hill, I am talking about the whole state of Georgia, and other places, but they said separate but equal, but it wasn't equal. It was separate, but not equal.

M.M: Now what was your family's reaction to the segregation in Bartow county?

J.W: Well, they was concerned for family, like I said, they (unintelligible) in the school was segregated, they didn't have the opportunity to try and speak against it and all that. That's the way things were going, things going, so they just went along with the program.

M.M: Now what was your relationship to white families before desegregation?

J.W: Well, it was okay, because I said, you know, there was certain places you couldn't go, certain things you shouldn't do, and certain things (unintelligible). You knew that so a lot of times (unintelligible) cause problems, cause trouble so the few white families I knew they was okay.

M.M: Now do you think there is a place for an all black school in today's society?

J.W: No, I don't think so. You mean...if it was like it was before separate but equal, but if they going, I still don't think it should be just all black for a program now, it should be open to everybody, that's the way I look at it.

M.M: Now when did your family get its first television, car, and telephone?

J.W: My family (unintelligible), I came when my first television and first car, I got it when I came back here in '58, because I was married at the time then, I came back, during my time in service my family never did get a car or TV, but my family when I came back to Cartersville, I was married, we got a TV, and I bought a car and all that, after I got out of the service I had bought that.

M.M: Now tell me about the years of the Civil Rights movement, did you ever become involved?

J.W: Locally yes, but I never did go out of town, here in Cartersville, so many years I participated in meetings, and participated in some celebrations they had and all of that.

M.M: Do you remember any particular events during the Civil Rights movement that you participated in, like sit-ins...?

J.W: I remember those, but I never participated, I remember when we had the ones in Atlanta, ones in Carolina, ones in Texas, when they had the schools segregated in schools there, and Arkansas, and a lot of that was on TV during the time, I think a lot of things in Atlanta, all that was on TV, and (unintelligible) Mississippi, and Alabama, and people (unintelligible) students in Alabama, then one in the University of Georgia when they let the girl and the boy in, then they had riots going on down in the University of Georgia, (unintelligible) all of (unintelligible)

start the progress for the black people, we let the (unintelligible) their flag business, the flag I think it was in 1956 they didn't vote, they changed it, now (unintelligible) we want to vote, all of this is just to keep segregation, keep people angry, keep bringing up things that happened way before my time, and your time, the (unintelligible) going and just living this world and forget about things that try to press us down and keep us back, I mean segregation is still going on but in a different way. It's in a different way today.

M.M: Now how did you feel when you heard about the time like Martin Luther King, and Malcolm X, and all the different approaches to Civil Rights, what was your reaction?

J.W: Well my reaction was like I just got through saying I didn't think it was right, because they was trying to help, they was trying to help the black race, and they know we wasn't treated equally, and they know that somebody had to take stand, somebody had to be a leader and so yes I was behind the movement one-hundred percent.

M.M: Now how did global events such as the Great Depression, World War II, Civil Rights, Vietnam affect the community of Summer Hill?

J.W: Well we had a lot of fellows that went in service, from Summer Hill or Cartersville, and some soldiers during the war, some of them got killed from Cartersville, and that affected the community, because some of the boys that went to Summer Hill, and brothers, friends, and I am trying to think if any of my friends, well none of my friends got killed, but I know some kin folks and relatives that know of people, I knew some of the people that was involved that

got killed in the war, but I wouldn't say my friends or my buddies, but I knew of them.

M.M: Now how long did you teach at Summer Hill?

J.W: I started in '58, I taught to (unintelligible) about ten years.

M.M: Now you said that it wasn't separate but equal, but with the 1954 Brown vs Board overturning the separate but equal, did you ever see a change when you started teaching in the quality of books or anything else?

J.W: Yes, when I started teaching there was a change in '58, we had change. When I came back they, to Summer Hill in '58, they were getting new books, there wasn't a lot of hand me downs then, they were getting new books at Summer Hill instead of the hand me downs, that's when I came back and started teaching.

M.M: Now who is the person who most positively influenced your life?

J.W: One person who influenced my life.

M.M: Who are your heroes, it can be more than one?

J.W: I can still go back to my principal Morgan Sr., he use to talk to the students, when I was a student, he talked to all of us, I just didn't want to be, I just wanted to go to school, that was my ambition, I didn't want to work at the filling stations, I didn't want to ride on the back of a trash truck picking up trash, I didn't want to be digging ditches all my life, I wanted to go to school, and came over that way to go to school, and that's where I went, because I probably would have ended up in service if I hadn't been in school, because being in school taking ROTC, I didn't go into service until I finished college.

M.M: So you would say education completely shaped your life?

J.W: Oh yes, it really did, education really shaped my life.

(Abrupt end of Interview.)