

Interview of Ethelene McCabe Allen by Barbara C. Allen
Session five, May 22, 2006 (Monday)

BA: This is the second session on May 22nd, recording. We interrupted the first session because Ms. Allen's grandson's second wife called to talk for awhile. When we were last talking, you were discussing your reasons for getting the GED at 45 and you had said something about working at the sewing plant.

EA: I didn't want to do that again. I didn't want to do production work again, so I went – I had a friend whose daughter worked at Johnston Community College. She kept after me about going back and getting my GED.

BA: Who was that friend?

EA: Rachel Coats. Her daughter Teresa was the one worked at Johnston Community College, in the office.

BA: You sewed dresses for Rachel, sometimes.

EA: Yes, I did sewing for her. I did - I sewed for a lot of people at home when I was not employed someplace else. I earned my spending money that way, cause I was a good seamstress and people liked my work. I could earn money and do them a favor at the same time. Just for a few neighbors and friends. Anyway, she - she suggested it several times. I really didn't care for doing it at first. But then I got to thinking about it, so. A few events happened in my life that I thought that would probably be a good thing to go ahead and get my GED. And too, with what had been happening, I wanted to have a greater circle of friends and acquaintances and social life, other than in my just little local church community. I thought, well now going to – taking classes at Johnston Community College to finish my high school – get my high school diploma. That would be a good outlet, a good way to reach new friends, meet new friends, nice people. I decided to go. They wanted to administer a pre-test and so, the pre-test said that I didn't need any classes. I wouldn't have to go to school, that I already had it, could go ahead and take the GED test. This was the pre-test, now. I was weaker in math than anything else, cause I couldn't remember the algebra. I couldn't do that. I couldn't remember how to do it. It had changed since I was in school. So I was scheduled then to take the GED test. The counselor administered the test and she called me back in to talk with me about my score. She encouraged me to take college classes.

BA: What was your score, do you remember?

EA: It was very high. I had made more than a – I think more than a hundred points higher than I needed to, to even get my diploma.

BA: That counselor was the girl you'd known in high school?

EA: Yeah. She had gone back and got her degree.

BA: What was her name?

EA: Should I give her name?

BA: Well, you don't have to.

EA: Well, I'll just say she was Eunice. Her first name was Eunice. But she encouraged me to go take college courses. My oldest daughter was in college at that time and I thought "Me in college?" It sounded unthinkable. I was just going for a high school diploma. My goal was to meet new people and so, I hadn't done that. I just went and took the test and scored high. Automatically they handed me my diploma and I could've been in some graduation program. But I said, "I hadn't do anything to do it, I've had it all the time. There's no point in my going through a graduation ceremony, getting my high school diploma." The more I thought about it, I thought, well my goal was to take classes over here and meet new people. I can take some college courses. I don't have to continue taking it if I don't want to. I really didn't know how college worked. I didn't know that if you decided to drop out, that you got an F [laughs]. I'd never had an F in my life, so when I got into that I knew I had to complete it. I took history, which I thought would be very easy and [pause] art. No, wait a minute, music. I took music, music appreciation and history, which were supposed to be two fairly easy courses. I thought anybody can learn history and anybody can – art appreciation, I mean music appreciation they said was you just listen to music and it was really easy to do, simple thing to do. When I went to class the first day he said, "You have heard this, but it's not going to be like that!" [laugh] So I had to really dig to learn that music. I stayed in their lab over there in the college a lot, listening to music and playing Mozart and different ones. You had to be able to recognize a piece of music and what time period it was from. It was very complex. You had to know what an octave was and all these things. I didn't think I would have to learn all that.

BA: It can be tough.

EA: It **was** tough.

BA: What was the professor's name, do you remember?

EA: I cannot remember his name right now.

BA: That's okay.

EA: But he seemed very – well, I thought he would just be into classical music and nothing else would suit him, but he was in a bluegrass band. That surprised me. He loved bluegrass music. He was a very interesting professor. [pause] Then I took history and there was a very old woman from – a teach - a professor from East Carolina that came and taught that. She could give some tests that were out of this world! So I had a tough time in history and music.

BA: What kind of history was it? Was it US or?

EA: World.

BA: Was it Western Civ or world?

EA: [pause] I'm not even sure now which it was.

BA: But it wasn't US.

EA: But she went back to prehistoric times [laughs] and we – what are some of those periods?

[Barbara sighs]

EA: Mesozoic or, I can't even remember the names of them now. [laughter] All those periods.

BA: Neolithic, Paleolithic.

EA: All those.

BA: Well, that's where you have to start.

EA: Yeah, we started in that.

BA: You remember her name?

EA: But that was not in our book and so, I really didn't take notes on that because I thought, well she's just making an introduction here. I didn't know how to take notes the first time. I just took notes on whatever was in our book. So when she gave that test, I think most people in there failed it, so she did curve the grades and I made a good grade on it, after she curved the grades. I learned how to – how she did tests, so from then on - and I made an A on the course. I made an A on the music appreciation.

BA: You remember her name, the history teacher?

EA: No. I should, but I don't.

BA: She was from East Carolina.

EA: Yes.

BA: Okay.

EA: I know there was one teacher that I took. I remember several of the teachers. Dr. Roberts [pause] lots of them.

BA: We can come back to that.

EA: I won't talk about it.

BA: Let's go back to your earlier school days.

EA: But that's the reason I went to school. I took three years and I decided to go on and take the college courses. I wasn't sure that was what I should've been doing but I did pray about it. I like to pray about things. I prayed that – I said, "God I don't know what I'm supposed to do here, but you help me make a decent grade, a B would be a decent grade in college." I made all As in high school, but I would say a B would be alright in college. If I could just make maybe two Bs or an A and a B, that I would take that as a sign to continue and if I made a C or D, then I would quit, figure it's not for me. So I made an A on each course, so I took that as a sign I should go on.

BA: And you did finish the associate's degree.

EA: I finish – I got the – I took almost three years to, well 2 ½ anyway to complete a two year college transfer program. I took about everything that you could get in that, except French. I did not take French. I didn't feel like I could handle that. I had Latin.

BA: Oh, you could have done French pretty easily.

EA: I didn't want to do it. But I had met all the requirements for a college transfer program. I especially enjoyed biology and environmental biology. I had not cared too much for science while I was in high school or the lower grades. It was interesting. I learned a lot, but I was really interested in it when I was taking it – biology in college courses, because it was so relevant then. It seemed irrelevant to me when I was in the lower grades, but at this time in life it seemed relevant. I needed to know it.

BA: At that time you'd already gotten interested in the environment and protecting it and the birds and so forth.

EA: Yes. I had learned a lot about birds, promoting the bluebirds, the comeback of the bluebirds. I was into that a lot. Life sciences

BA: And you had a good environmental biology teacher didn't you?

EA: Yes, I did.

BA: Don Stephenson?

EA: Don Stephenson had worked in Alaska as – oh what do you call – oh on the pipeline, putting in. Then he had worked all over – studying the impact of these things.

BA: Did you make As in everything?

EA: Yes, I wound up making – I graduated with highest honors. I did purchase my graduation outfit and participated in that because I felt like I had done something to earn that. I felt good about that. Again - I was number two in that group – my graduating group. There was one woman who was going on to be a teacher, I believe, not sure what she wanted to do, but she was planning to go on to college and finish her four-year degree and possibly a master's degree. She made the top grades. She made just a little higher than I did, average, so I was number two in the class. We were the ones that wore the special band that said "highest honors."

BA: You did make new friends, didn't you?

EA: Yes, I made a lot of good friends over there. There was a Graham Ballard that was going to school and he was planning to go on and be a preacher, go into the ministry. He was the husband of the Mrs. Ballard that taught English at South Johnston High school. And she taught my daughter Barbara [interjections here by Barbara]

BA: When you went to school as a younger child, did you take the bus all the time?

EA: Yes.

BA: How did that work, what did you think of taking the bus?

EA: Well, there was no other option. I didn't even consider any other option. That was the way it was done. Children in the country met that bus. The bus took them to school.

BA: You, Maverene and Cecil and then later James all went on the same bus. You walked from home to the bus stop. Where was the bus stop?

[long pause]

EA: Well, in front of our house part of the time.

BA: Well, okay. I'm trying to get you to tell these stories about going to the bus.

EA: Back there in Wayne County we lived way down a path. We could've gone two different ways to meet the bus. We could've walked down the path to the mailbox to that dirt road, but I don't know why we didn't. It might've been because there was no house up there. We chose to walk or our parents told us to or whatever. We chose to walk across a field, across a railroad track and – to a neighbor's house. I think their last name was Rose. I almost believe the old man was Herman Rose, that - I remember the girl's

name. It's popped in my mind. She was a little older than I was. Elma Dare Rose. She had a limp because they had swept the bullet into the fireplace one time and it went off and shot her in the leg, ankle or foot or something. She limped because of that. In the winter time then when it was cold or rainy we could run over there across the railroad track and go in their house and wait for the bus in their house, where they had a fire and it was warm. Or we could wait on the porch or in the yard in the - when it was a nice day we could wait in the yard for the bus and get on with Elma Dare. Maverene did get bitten by their dog one time. They had an old dog that was ill-natured and decided to run up behind Maverene when we were running to the bus. It ran up behind her and bit her on the back of the leg. Of course they had to kill the dog and test it for rabies, but it didn't have rabies. It was just an ill-natured old dog. Ever since then Maverene was scared of dogs. She was terrified of dogs.

BA: Was that the same place where Cecil tried to get you to cross the tracks while the train was going?

EA: No, no, Cecil didn't do that. We were running to the bus one time, running across the field, and the train was coming, so we had to wait for the train. So the bus driver had seen us coming, well, maybe they knew we were coming, so they had to wait, cause they knew the train was coming and we were probably behind it. So they waited and waited and waited for us until the train had passed. It was a long freight train. Some of the kids on the bus said "next time you crawl under that train and come on." Of course we knew better than to do that, but they were just being smart.

BA: They liked to tease. You were worried, though, weren't you, that you would miss the bus and not get to school.

EA: Well, we were anxious that they might drive off and leave us.

BA: What was it like on the school bus? Did older kids bully younger ones?

EA: Yes, they did. They've always done that. I do remember beating up on one boy with my lunchbox one time because he was picking at us. Then when I was - I think I was in high school, when one local boy was mistreating a neighbor girl, who had braids. She had two braids, one on each side of her head. He grabbed her braids and was pulling her head down and probably tearing her hair out on the bus. Mean little old boy, anyway. I punched him a few times, grabbed his arms and made him turn her loose. I remember being afraid I'd be called in the office for fighting on the school bus, but - I was anxious. I spent one anxious day that day, but nothing was said about it. I was never called in. I had to defend her. I would not stand by and see somebody mistreated like that. Somebody had to go to her defense. And nobody else - they just watched, so I got into it. And I hit him a few times to get his attention and then grabbed his wrists. He was younger than I was, but he was mean little old boy.

BA: I think Maverene remembered you defending her. There were some bigger boys.

EA: I probably did. I don't remember. I probably did, because I'm one that will not stand by and watch injustice go on without getting into it [laughs]. Even when Barbara was little, going to school, I would see a – the bigger children picking on a little one going down the sidewalk and I would stop and tell them that I was going to report them to the office if they didn't leave that child alone. I didn't even know who they were. I wouldn't have known how to report them, but it scared them and they left him alone.

BA: I remember you defending me once too.

EA: When the little boy was trying to run you over with his bicycle, had you backed up on the tree roots, when I went to pick you up. I told him I would tell the principal and I would tell his mother and see that he was punished, if he ever did that again. I didn't know who his mother was and I didn't report it to the principal, but it scared him and he left you alone.

BA: It did scare him. He never bothered me again and he was the one who would walk around the playground arm in arm with two or three other boys and knock over little girls and sometimes little boys. Just run right over them and knock them over. I tried to keep an eye out for him and stay away from him generally but I didn't see him ride up on his bike that day. But he didn't bother me again. Okay, do you recall paying attention back then to which children lived in town and which lived in the country and what their parents did? Was there any differentiation among children, depending on where they lived and what their parents did for a living?

EA: Not really. Most of the rural children, though, were - seemed to be poorer and more disadvantaged than the ones who lived in town. You could – you knew who the ones from the better-off homes were. They seemed to have more status than the average children.

BA: How did you determine they had more status?

EA: I don't know. I don't recall. They probably dressed nicer and took nicer lunches, had more confidence in - went on all the trips. Did - participated in everything that cost a little money where others couldn't participate in.

BA: What cost money to participate in?

EA: Well, they had a little store at Four Oaks School. They had a little store that you could go to and buy things, but the poorer ones didn't have the money to go buy things.

BA: Those things were probably pencils, erasers.

EA: Course I had money to buy something like that once in awhile, not a lot of it, but when I needed a composition book and didn't have it or didn't go to the store to buy it, I could buy it there, or erasers or whatever. Daddy made sure we had what we needed and

had to have for our school supplies. But there were some children who didn't have it. There were some who dressed fairly poorly.

BA: What else required money besides the school store?

EA: Well, the trips that they took. They would take trips sometimes. In high school some of them went to Washington DC one time and stayed overnight. Of course I didn't go. I wouldn't even ask Daddy for money for that because I knew he didn't have much, so I wouldn't even ask him for it. I said nothing about it. I just accepted the fact that I couldn't to.

BA: What other kinds of trips besides Washington DC were there?

EA: I don't know. Sometimes class picnics, even – the class picnic, you paid money to go to that. I think maybe they furnished food. Maybe we went to Holt Lake and you had to pay an admission to get in. I remember going there.

BA: So you did go on a trip like that.

EA: I went there. I don't remember how we went – class parties and things. We had those. You paid money to participate in those. There were lots of little things that you needed money for and some of them didn't have it.

BA: Sometimes you would have money for those, sometimes you didn't and sometimes you didn't want to ask.

EA: If it was very very important most time I could get the money. If it wasn't – sometimes Daddy just didn't have the money for it. Other times, especially in late spring, cause crop money had been spent and we were just barely living.

BA: Late spring is often when you would have end of the year parties, isn't it, and the dances, the major dances, if you had dances back then.

EA: Sometimes Daddy borrowed money to live on until he sold his crop. You could do that then.

BA: Who did he borrow money from?

EA: I don't know if he got some from the bank. I know one time when we moved up here to Smithfield and he needed money, he went back to his former landlord in Wayne County. He went to him and he loaned him the money. I don't know if he had to sign a paper or what. I don't think he did. He just knew daddy would pay it back and he loaned him the money.

BA: He couldn't have asked the current landlord in Smithfield?

EA: Probably not. I don't think – I don't think he asked him for money. He just – I think he was a tightwad.

BA: Who was the one in Smithfield, the landlord?

EA: Actually there were two, because we stayed one year at one place and one year at another place. We moved after the first year

BA: Do you remember their names?

EA: A Turner and a Whitley. Turner the first year – he was the real tightwad.

BA: Do you remember his full name?

EA: No. I can't remember his first name.

BA: That's okay.

EA: I remember his son was Lemay Turner. He had a lot of land all over places. He sold [condominums?]. He was a rich man if he's still living today he's a rich man.

BA: The other one was a Whitley. Second one. Let's – I want to ask you about the landlords later, but I think your voice is getting tired and I want to ask you a little bit more about the schooling. Your brothers and sisters. Now Cecil didn't finish high school, did he?

EA: No, he failed grades. As I said, he'd failed first grade because of the accident and didn't go – mama wouldn't send him to school when he claimed he had a headache. Lots of times he'd play off sick like that. "My stomach hurts, oh my stomach hurts!" and she'd let him stay home and he wouldn't go to school. He failed another grade somewhere. I was one grade behind him when I was in the 8th and he was in the 9th and he failed the 9th grade, so he could not take the humiliation of being in the same class with his three-year-younger sister, so he quit school. He was – well, I was fourteen in the ninth grade. He was – he was seventeen.

BA: Yeah, he should have already been in the grade getting ready to graduate.

EA: So, he quit school.

BA: After he quit school, what did he go to do?

EA: Well, he joined up a magazine crew instead of helping us with the farming that summer. He joined up with some magazine crew and went all over Georgia and everywhere, selling magazines.

BA: Did he tell you anything about what that was like?

EA: Oh yeah, he talked about it. He came back with pictures of girls he'd met. Course I don't know if it was true or not. He might have just found the pictures somewhere; I don't know [laughs]. He did come back and help farm again, though, after that year. I think it was not all that much fun as he thought it would be. They would drop them off somewhere and they would have to sell magazines. The company got more out of it than they did. But they did put them up at motels and feed them. He enjoyed the – getting out and seeing places and traveling. It was educational for him. But he stayed home the next year and helped farm. He was actually thinking about renting a place of his own, but he got married at 19. He was 19 years old and he married a 19-year-old girl. They moved to Raleigh. I don't remember what he was doing then, but he worked in Raleigh. I can't even remember what he did.

BA: That was Clara, wasn't it, that he married and they had two sets of twins.

EA: No, just one. Kenneth and Lawrence were one year apart.

BA: I was thinking they were twins.

EA: They were one year apart.

BA: Sorry.

EA: Like Ransom and Patricia. They were about the same age. Then they waited a few years and had twin girls.

BA: Sandra and Sheila.

EA: Eleven months later they had a little boy.

BA: Carson.

EA: Their last one was Carson. Her dad was Carson Edge.

BA: So her last name was Edge.

EA: Yes. Carson Edge was her daddy.

BA: What kind of – you had a lot - did you have a lot of friends in school?

EA: Well, acquaintances, but close friends - I only had two really close friends. There was some that were with us part of the time.

BA: Tell me about your two close friends.

EA: The two close friends lived right on the road that I did. They were close neighbors, so I could see them all the time, visit one another in the homes. There was a Geraldine Johnson and a Beatrice Johnson, so we palled around together.

BA: What did their parents do?

EA: Farmed.

BA: Were they tenant farmers or did they own their own farms?

EA: I believe they were tenant farmers. Yeah, they were. They were tenant farmers. Now Beatrice Johnson's **granddaddy** had – he owned a lot of land. He might have been tending – I believe he was tending his granddaddy's – his daddy's land.

BA: Her father was tending his father's land.

EA: Yes, but as his tenant. Then they moved away from there. They tended this little land near me. They moved somewhere up Elevation Road after that. His dad sold that little piece of land to my husband's brother, William.

BA: Okay. Did those two girls finish high school, your friends?

EA: Oh yes. They finished high school.

BA: Did they go on to study further?

EA: No. They couldn't. One of them had a strange dad. He was a primitive Baptist. He made the statement one time that he would not change his clock because - from standard time to daylight savings. He said he was not messing with God's time. God had set that clock and he was not going to mess with it. I thought, whoo boy, he doesn't understand God, does he, or time.

BA: I guess your daddy didn't have any problem changing -

EA: No. He knew God didn't invent the clock and set it and we had to keep it that way [laughs]. This man when she – the night she graduated, he told her to pack her things and leave. He had raised her to graduate high school and he was through with his obligation. She could leave. She was on her own. She had no place to go, no job, no nothing, had just graduated. So that's what she got for her graduation night. She had to pack up and go move to her sister's. Her sister took her in. She had an older sister that did highest honors. She was a very bright girl. Ruth, I believe was her name. She was a very bright girl. Geraldine did alright. She didn't make the highest grades, but she made good grades. She and Beatrice both. They both made good grades. Not quite as high as I did, but that was alright too. They made good grades. They were intelligent young women

BA: What did her sister do?

EA: I don't know what she did. She made highest honors. In fact, I believe she was voted – I don't know if she was homecoming queen or something one time. She was voted something in her high school years.

BA: Your friend then, did she get a job and go to work? Did she get married?

EA: Oh yeah, she had to get a job and go to work. I don't remember what she did. I really lost touch with her then. When she left home I lost touch with her.

BA: Was her mother still alive when she had to leave?

EA: Yeah, but she had to do whatever the daddy said. He was a tyrant. He was a ruler of the home and what he said went. He was a strange man. But Beatrice's folks were just ordinary people. Not educated, but ordinary people.

BA: Those were your two closest friends.

EA: And then the others in the class were acquaintances. There was a Jean Moore down the road and a Shirley Mays that were a year behind me but we would get together at recess, when we had outdoors at school and tell jokes and laugh and have fun. There were others that I associated with, girls.

BA: What happened to Gladys Hatcher? What did she do after graduating high school?

EA: She went to college. She eventually married. She, I think went to Virginia and is a librarian or was a librarian in Virginia. I don't remember if it was Richmond or where, but somewhere in Virginia.

BA: Do you get in touch with your high school classmates these days?

EA: No, only the ones – we do have a class reunion and they extend an invitation to me. They said I was one of them up until - you know, through most of the high school, so they felt like I should go too. They wanted to see me there, too. I really appreciated that, because. I did tell them – we had to tell what we'd done – told them I had gone on to get my GED and high school equivalency diploma, then took college courses and I did get an associate degree and then took some other courses, some business courses.

BA: You took business courses?

EA: Yes, I did take some business courses, a few.

BA: While you were taking the college equivalency -

EA: I took accounting. I took an accounting course at Johnston Community College.

BA: I didn't remember that.

EA: I did real well on that but I didn't want to go into accounting. I thought, I made a mistake now and then and I could really upset somebody's bank account or whatever. But then I thought about it. I thought, well those people who made average grades and didn't make as good a grade as I did, that means they made more mistakes than I did. They were the ones that were going to get the jobs in accounting [laugh]. That was where I could understand when somebody messed up my figures [laugh] or some of my accounts [laugh]. They're the ones who got the jobs, the ones – they made just average grades, Bs or whatever.

BA: When you were in school, you would have worked on the farm, too. Was there any work that you would have done off the farm while you were in school?

EA: No. First job I had off the farm was the sewing job. I loved to sew. I made my own - some of my own clothes. I took home ec, but I made some of my own clothes that I wore to school. They had nice feed sacks back then with prints on them. I made some that looked nice enough to wear to school. Then when – I didn't attend a junior-senior prom as a junior or senior. I dropped out of school as a junior before I attended that, but I was a marshal. So I attended the prom. I guess it was tenth grade, because the tenth graders were picked as marshals. You had to sort of prove yourself. The ones who made the highest grades were picked as the marshals. So I was a marshal for the junior-senior banquets and graduations and whatever. Any programs in the school that went on in the auditorium and I had to have a dress for that. I made my own one time for that, but then I bought one for the, I think for the graduation, their graduation and some of the things that went on in the high school auditorium. We had to seat people.

BA: I was going to ask you about the home ec class. You didn't mention that when I asked you about what classes you took, but I know you've talked about taking home ec before and the things you learned there. Did you learn new things that Grandma hadn't already taught you?

EA: Well we learned a lot of things. You studied cooking and sewing. We had to crochet a square and knit a square. We had to learn the process of doing those things. We actually made garments and I took it in ninth and tenth grade.

BA: Two years of home ec.

EA: I made some nice garments while we were in home ec.

BA: Was that required to take it two years?

[pause]

EA: I don't know if girls were required to take it then, but most girls did take it - at that time. I think it was changed to- not home living, something else, when my children were going to school. I don't know. Patricia might have taken home ec.

BA: I think Patricia took it one year. I didn't take it.

EA: Family living or something like that.

BA: It was called home ec when I was in high school and I did not want to take that.

EA: I know Kevin took something.

BA: Kevin took it

EA: It was family living or something like that and they cooked. He learned some cooking skills. I was cooking something one time and he would say, "This is not the Mary Ann Lee way" [laughs]. He wanted to do it the way she did it.

BA: Well he took it - back then the boys figured out it was a good way to meet girls. There would be a few boys in a big class of girls.

EA: And too I told him he needed to learn it because he would be going off to college and he needed to do things on his own and not depend on anybody else to do it.

BA: He took it with a group of his male friends.

EA: They saw it as being cool. And it was. And he actually sewed a pair of shorts - made himself a pair of shorts. They were decent to wear. He wore them. They were easy to make back then, though, the way they made them with the elastic waist. Made similar to a girl's shorts.

BA: Kevin never took a shop class, did he? I don't think he did.

EA: I don't believe he did.

BA: We'll ask him later. That's his oral history.

EA: I don't believe he did. But he was in the math competition there. Math competition group. Team. A math team, I'd guess you'd call it.

BA: When did they start inviting you to the high school reunions? Was it from the very first one?

EA: I don't know. They didn't have them a long time ago, but they invited me to one or two that I couldn't attend because I had to work and couldn't get off. Finally, I was

probably close to sixty years old before I ever went. I might have been in my fifties and I finally attended one. Then it was a few years before I went again. The last two they had I went to both of them. I was in my sixties at that time.

BA: Did you – when you were in school – did you socialize with children whose parents lived in town? Whose parents were teachers or store owners or things like that?

EA: Well now, over at Smithfield, I did. In the 8th grade there was Ella Ann Lee, who is an accomplished pianist now. She's – they were very wealthy people. She never lacked for anything. Very high status people. But she was a down to earth person. She liked me. She would go home for lunch and I would eat at the school house, but when she came back from lunch she'd see me out and we'd talk some. But now we didn't never go home with each other. We didn't develop a close relationship. [pause] I might – my home would not have been the kind I would have wanted to invite her to, because I knew hers was fabulous, with everything that anybody could have in it.

BA: What did her parents do? I don't know that family. I haven't heard of them.

EA: He owned a lumber mill. What was his name?

BA: Some kind of Lee who owned a lumber mill.

EA: She married a banker. The girl – their daughter got one of those scholarships at UNC that you had competed for but she got it.

BA: You mean the Morehead?

EA: Morehead scholar, yeah.

BA: I see the squirrel out there – you're pointing to a squirrel. You're worried about him getting the birds' food aren't you?

EA: No he can't jump that far. He got scared. He's jumped back up to the tree limb.

BA: Maverene graduated from high school didn't she?

EA: Oh yes.

BA: Was she a good student?

EA: She occasionally made honor roll, but she made a few Cs. I don't know if she ever made Ds, but she made a few Cs. She was maybe a slightly above average student, but she wasn't as quick to grasp things as I was.

BA: Well, we'll ask her about that too, later.

[laughter]

EA: Well, she would admit that. James was very smart, but I don't think he applied himself like I did. I think he made honor roll once in a while, but he didn't apply himself like I did. I had that notion that I had to be tops or else. I could not fail at anything. I had to do good. I had to do my best and I had to do good and look good.

BA: Why did you feel that way?

EA: I don't know. It's just that I had that sense of [pause] I don't know – accomplishment. I wanted to accomplish something. I wanted to be the best. I didn't want to be low class, if you want to put it that way. I don't know, I just didn't like - I wanted to be an achiever.

BA: James finished high school too, didn't he?

EA: Oh yes, he finished high school and he had it tough finishing because daddy died and he had to farm to earn the living for him and mama until he graduated high school.

BA: That must have been real tough.

EA: He did have it tough and he had to stay out of school a few times to set tobacco or something like that. He couldn't do it in the afternoon. He had it tough, but he did it. Now he's one that's determined, too, to do things.

BA: Do you remember the length of the school year changing over the time of years you were in school or was it always the same?

EA: I know I started to school on my birthday and that would have been September 10th. I was six years old the day I started to school and my birthday is September 10th. It did get earlier as the time went on. It - sometimes I think it was September 1st and I believe it finally did get to where it started in August, late August and sometimes we hadn't finished barning tobacco. We had to stay out of school to finish barning tobacco, as well as pick cotton. Once in a while we would stay out of school to work in the pack house grading the tobacco, but at that time we could – we could go to school most of the time and come home and work in the pack house – grade tobacco to get it ready for market. We would stay up late at night, barely have time to do homework. Sometimes, really, not get a chance to do all my homework like we should. That's where my grades, in the lower grades, a lot of time would suffer the first month of school. But then pick up later.

BA: Did the teachers ever treat children differently according to whether they lived in town or in the country or whether

EA: I don't think so.

Interview of Ethelene McCabe Allen by Barbara C. Allen
Session five, May 22, 2006 (Monday)

BA: Their parents were tenant farmers or

EA: I couldn't tell that if they did. I couldn't tell that if they did. If they did, I never noticed it.

BA: Okay. Well, let's stop there and give you a rest.

End of session five.