

Interviewee: Betty Madison

Interviewer: Unknown

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Interviewer: And can you just state your name. This is how we will start off.

Betty Madison: My name is- now my name is Betty Madison.

Interviewer: And what was your maiden name?

Madison: Hill.

Interviewer: Ms. Betty Hill. Okay, and what years did you go to the Old Lake Hall school?

Madison: I believe it was in '42.

Interviewer: 1942. So, you were in employment?

Madison: No, that's the year I start over here 42...down through I believe it was '47.

Interviewer: Oh, so you were there for a few years...for about five years.

Madison: Something like that.

Interviewer: Okay...and did you have the same teacher the whole time you were there?

Madison: That I did.

Interviewer: What was his or her name?

Madison: Her name was Miss Wansa, but I can't remember her first name, but I know the last was Wansa and at that time she was living on Dawn street...and her husband, he used um deliver wood. He use to, you know, sell wood.

Interviewer: And where did you live, at the time?

Madison: I lived out there in Lake Hall...

Interviewer: In Lake Hall?

Madison: At that time they called it the County Club. We living on a farm.

Interviewer: And how many kids were in the schoolhouse with you at the time? Where at they there called you there, what was the approximate number? (Please check this line)

Madison: ...It could've been...it could've been, 'cause we had quite a bit of children went to Lake Hall. It could've been 80 or 100. It could've been because Mrs. Wanasa did four setting of

teaching. She did first and second and third and fourth, because she worked it alone. Before Mrs. Wansa, with my other sisters and brothers, there were two teachers that was signed to Lake Hall.

Interviewer: Oh really.

Madison: And then one teacher would work on one side of the classroom and the other would work on, you know, the other side.

Interviewer: So, they went from first to fourth grade, is that how they set the school up and how many grades did it cover?

Madison: Well when I was there, remember, she would- it was first, second, third, and fourth and she had a few in the fifth grade, because as we start umm getting on in school higher in grade, that's when we all left and went to Lake McBride school...and what she use to do, she would put the first and second grade on one side of the classroom. She would put the first in the back of the classroom and the second up ahead of them and it was just the opposite with the third and the fourth. Later, she had the fifth grade, she would do them on that little stage plank, you know. She would go around and give us the basic, which you know then, it was reading...and more reading and math.

Interviewer: Reading and arithmetic?

Madison: That's right, exactly. That's the word, arithmetic... and we did a lot of cursive writing, you know when you get that little-ummm.

Interviewer: So, those are the three r's right? Reading, writing, and arithmetic.

Madison: That's right. You know them well, too. Yes, and when we got to school, in the morning, we used to you know, do the pledge of alliances to the flag. Once we got into the classroom, we would do the lord's prayer then we would gather buckets and we would go to the Lake Hall lake and get the water that we would need for the day, you know, to preparing our meals, the lunch rather and then umm-

Interviewer: Wait a minute, so you would go to the lake to get the...that's how you would get food for your lunch. You go down to the lake-

Madison: To get water...Get water to cook the food and we also had to gather wood. So, she would send the boys, you know, according to their age and how mature they were together, you know, some wood to start that fire and the heater and in the stove to cook with, cause there was one by them, you know.

Interviewer: So, what would, what would yall cook there? Where would the food come from?

Madison: I can't- Someone used to drop off food and supplies. I think, I think it was monthly and it would bring dried beans and stuff like that. I never had no meats. If it were meat, it had to be dried meats, but I don't remember meat. I recall we having, you know, a lot of beans back in those days.

Interviewer: So, would the school, would the school provide food for y'all or y'all were not responsible for bring your own lunch?

Madison: No, we don't have to bring no food. They brought a lot of dry beans and peas and things and we would come back and you know, prepared it and go and sit down and do our lesson because back in those days kids don't do interruption. They would listen to the teacher, work more, obedient, you know, whatever...and when we got outside, that's when we could horse around and play and during my time there, we don't remember, you know, children be fighting and carry on like that, I don't ever recall any of that. It was just always like that.

Interviewer: Why do you think it was so different back then? Why do you think there's so much more discipline and obedience and...um why do you think that today, you have people complain about kids being disobedient and disruptive toward the teachers, not really show much respect. Why do you think your clients have the respectful for the teachers?

Madison: Well, doing those days that all we knew was knowing how to respect our elders, whoever was in charge, you know. We had to always, you know, be obedient...and if we did not they had the right to tan our (nodding and shaking head) backside and then when they got our parents that was another, another tanning you would get. Yeah so, you know, all that you went there to do was what you were told.

Interviewer: Well if you remember what time did y'all get to school in the morning and what time did y'all leave?

Madison: Three o'clock...

Interviewer: What time did y'all get there?

Madison: Eight o'clock and I remember it used to be very cold because it was just like in your own home, you know. You wake up in the morning fore you could go to school, you had to start, you know, a fire to get, get things going at your own home and then go put out to the cattle so, you know, they could be taken care. Then, we would go to school and then when we got to school then we had to basically the same thing at school.

Interviewer: You had to start the fire?

Madison: That's right...but sir, it may have been a hardship, but it seemed like it was just a good life. You know full of fun and enjoyment.

Interviewer: So, you really, you really enjoy going to school there?

Madison: Oh yes, I loved it. Let me tell you something. My husband will tell you when he met me all I talked about was Lake Hall and the farm...(laughing) and my home and I came back, relocated back home, back here and I went back to my old church, which is out in Lake Hall, Mount Pleasant Primitive Baptist...and we had a little store out there not too far from our school and that was the Martin's that use to own the store and he use to was a nice white man. We used to go and knock at the back door. Sometimes he would walk to the back door and find out what we wanted and sometimes he would just come with a handful of goodies.

Interviewer: Oh really?

Madison: And basically, that what we wanted and back at then time a penny had a lot of value. Even a nickel and a dime because when you spent a penny you was able to get two things. So, that's why I say a penny had value. Today, it don't have any.

Interviewer: I don't even think you can buy one thing for a penny any more.

Madison: Well, we used to get, you know, like two items like two pops of, two cookies. That's basically what we able to get with the penny. If you spent a nickel, well you got more, you know. So, things were...and also we had another store we use to go to called Mr. Jones and that was a little further coming back towards town. We use to call that area ummm-

Interviewer: Did he use to do the same thang and give you stuff?

Madison: Well when we went to him, we went to grind our mills and, you know, take mill and make cornmeal, take the corn and make cornmeal and how many grits out of it, you know, and umm basically back in those days, what we basically had to buy was flour and they...we, they rationed sugar. We use to get sugar (Mr. Madison: It was during the war)... Yeah, you would have stamps and that's the only way you would get sugar. You had to take and use your stamps and basically when we went to get the sugar, that's when we would really need the sugar. You know, we would run out at that time because believe it or not sugar then was really sugar. It was something sweet where you really don't have to use as much as you use today.

Interviewer: So it's like the fresh sugar right from the cane or is that what kind of, what kind of...

Madison: It was pure white sugar, but I don't know actually how it was umm processed cause I know we use to go to...we use to have our own sugar cane where we used to go in and do it in a mill. You know grind it and the mules would go round and squeeze the juice out of it. Then we would cook it and mix syrup and all that kind of stuff.

Interviewer: Did you ever yourself take the cane and break in half and suck on?

Madison: Oh yes.

Interviewer: I do that too.

Madison: Still do.

Interviewer: That's pretty good ain't it?

Madison: When we go to mule day, we still do that.

Interviewer: I've done it out at a...have you ever been out at the Stephen Foster Memorial Park over in Lake City? You can do the same thing there. They will let you do that there. Break the sugar cane in half and suck in it. Its pretty good stuff. Well, getting back to the school though, was there ever, did you feel when you were there that you were disadvantaged because of your race that you- because of the school, did you feel that the white kids are going to better schools and, you know, with better books and getting a better education in then you were or did you feel this was this was as good, you know, as what the white kids are getting themselves or did you even think about that?

Madison: I didn't even think about it, sir...didn't even think about it because whatever we were getting... was, it was...it was something valuable to us you know and it was depreciated because you didn't know anything about it so when you had opportunity to get it you just felt good to know that you were learning things and able to do more and your parents would be proud of you and you knowing how they would look at you as a little smarter, a little bright child, you know, because believe it or not, my mother and her sisters and brothers went to Lake Hall.

Interviewer: Oh really?

Madison: Yeah, they also went to Lake Hall school. Now, what her mother did not go. Her mother never went to school. My grandmother, all she started doing was making eggs. It's amazing how they could identify that she need certain things for with a signature on at and they hold it up and look at it and say, "Yes, this is Jenny Gallatin (check for last name) signature."

Interviewer: Well, did they ever make any yearbooks or anything for Lake Hall. Any annuals or did the school ever have any annuals or yearbooks?

Madison: If they did, I don't remember and I don't think so but back in those days sir, I remember we basically made our only things to play with-play on because like we kind of made a basketball court, you know, a ring, a wire ring.

Interviewer: So, yall had to make your own stuff to play on?

Madison: Yes and jumping spring ball. We would lay a board across a big rock and one would be on one end and the other would be on the other one. Sometimes we would use something like a... to make a seesaw. Well when we went outside, you know, then we played a lot of games like little Sally Ann sitting in the sand and it just was fun.

Interviewer: Well, did yall have textbook, yall had textbooks correct for your school. Were the textbooks really old and are they, did they seem really old to you or where they did they seem fine?

Madison: No, and I can tell you based on what I...I brought this to my husband on many occasions, my first books that I went to school with they were little open page books and they was named Allison Jerry, you know, and I liked it. I got to the place well and even have to read I could...(laughing) and then later on, they gave us a textbook called Dick and Jane and it was mostly with, you know, with umm the mother and father in it, you know, how they were rising their children. We never seen any with black people in it. It was always, you know, yeah, yeah.

Interviewer: Did yall have a math book or anything like that or just, just reading books?

Madison: Umm the math book was, you know, like the little simple math like one in one and, you know, something like that and the little reading, writing book was a little open page, I think it was white, and you would trace the writing, so we could learn how to write.

Interviewer: So, did you feel that your, did you feel that your teacher was a real good teacher you really respected Mrs. Wansa?

Madison: That's right, that's right.

Interviewer: She kept pretty good order in the classroom?

Madison: That she did.

Interviewer: Where there any kids at all that acted up while you were there or were yall pretty much good kids?

Madison: I think we were good kids' sir. We all were good kids. We never took another kids' pencil or paper or something and sometimes if we got to school before the teacher, we couldn't go in and start to fire on the stove. We already had to wood there but something about basically, we all would try to get there about the same time.

Interviewer: Did yall have your own little desk or how was the classroom setup?

Madison: Yes, we did have our own little...you probably seen how those type of desks'...where we would sit to...where they be nailed down to the floor and you had, you could push your little book under there.

Interviewer: Yeah with the little-

Madison: Yeah.

Interviewer: We had those, too. So, you have you own desk and your own chair, so you don't have to share with anybody. When that would come to that. So, you don't have to crowd two people into the desk, did they?

Madison: No, because the desk wasn't that big no way. Things back then weren't nearly like they are today. You know whatever, they I did, did improve, they improved it with a little bit more space or room, you know.

Interviewer: What would they do, what would, what would... well she was teaching one half of the classroom, what would the other half of the classroom be doing? If she was teaching the first and second graders, what would the third and fourth graders be doing?

Madison: She would already line out writing-

Interviewer: So, you would be doing it in silence?

Madison: Yeah, you would be sitting there doing writing or you would be reading so when she comes to you talk to you about what you read about, but you could be able to tell her something about that story.

Interviewer: So-

Madison: Then you would have to read to her also.

Interviewer: Umm to you was Lake Hall, what we are trying to do for Lake Hall school, we're trying to get it moved here to preserve it and so it will be on display, so if you, so kids' today, you know, future generations with, you know, white kids and black kids to come here and see what schoolhouse use to look. Which I mean, these one-room schoolhouses are really, you know, the ones that left in these good conditions they call them the very few and I think it isn't it up to me it's an important thing to preserve it should be what school used to be like. From you, from your experiences that you went to that school, do you think it is important, do you think it is important thing to preserve this-

Madison: Absolutely, sir.

Interviewer: Why do you think so?

Madison: Because today I know children are people just like, you know, we are, but we don't never know how we can reach them and I feel like if it be something that we can preserve and, and they come in to see it can get them, their brains to thinking about how, what we all that we tolerate and maybe this would put a more insight on their life that there more struggles to strive to because more is offered to them today than then was offered to us and back in that time we tried, gave all out, all we had to get what they was offering us and maybe today they could think about if it wasn't their mother, someone in their family must be really, you know, know that education was important and you need it and maybe to wake up them be a wake-up call to them and they would, you know, focus on more, you know, doing things like that instead of just wasting their life with the pants drop down below, you know, and because see back at those time we didn't have even nicer clothing, but what we had, we made it nice and with the school looking good in it. Now, you take most young people now they have it but they want to go to school looking like a scarecrow and I think if our young girls would look at the boys as this a disrespect to me, here your underwear showing and all that maybe it would, no offense to you sir, but that's basically who are wearing these are the young men and some of the girls would-

Interviewer: Oh, I see it and I agree.

Madison: And some of the girls wearing teeny, little clothes you know what I'm saying because there's some people just those, just feel like this is it but that's not what it's all about because if you can come and I feel that the schools should put more the limitation of pressure on what they wear to school cause you imagine me sitting up there you can practically see all, how can and you know it's easy for these things to happen. So, let them come like we used to. Things use to down to our knees or whatever and I just feel like it hope, I hope they could see themselves like we see them today and they call us old fogies, but we was able to have common sense in those days and also got what education was offered to us.

Interviewer: So, sorta like in and your opinion, they have, you know, kids today have a lot and they don't really even take advantage of what the lot have. They have shown so little as shown by this little, you know, this little schoolhouse where they jammed hundred kids into, but yall went every day and you try to learn as much as you could and maybe if they can see this, they'll be like, "Golly, they had to live, they went to school in these conditions, you know, we should start taking advantage of what we have."

Madison: And now you hear them hollering about the schools overcrowded or the classroom overcrowded. That's basically what you hear. Hell, we was overcrowded too, but even being overcrowded, we never took that as a... as it was a pain. We figured this kid needed what we needed. So we all tried to, you know, accommodate each other so that you know you can benefit for what you came there for.

Interviewer: Do you think that most of the other students who went to Lake Hall, that are still around probably have about the same opinion of the school as you do? They really look back at it fondly.

Madison: Yes, sir, because sometimes when we come together, we do reminisce about, you know, and we reason why because we know here so much what going on with the children today

in school, and we say, “Lord, the days when we were goin’,” and what they called abuse. Well, if they were seen abuse now, well to me that was abuse what we went through, but they didn't take it as abuse, you know, and today they take little anything and want to use it as, you know, abusing and that's and we do talk about it and I do feel that when we came along and what we got it was valuable to us because even today, everybody that I came along with I don't think any of us ever been in jail, being in any trouble, you know.

Interviewer: Well today, the average school year today is about nine months. Yeah, yeah so everybody just going off of the three months off for summer. When you went to school, when you went to Lake Hall school, did they ever take time off for the harvest the crop or did yall go to school for like, you know, August through May? Like how long was the time period, that yall were in school?

Madison: I believe it was August through May. We never really had to stay to take care, the most- we never stayed out of school to take care of the farm because during, you know, it was so much sunlight in the evening when you got out of school and it's the same in the morning for you went to school and most of what we have to take care was the cows, you know, and the hogs. We had to make sure they had the.. whatever it took to feed them before we went and go tie the cows out and water them when we came back in the afternoon and gather wood, you know, for whatever they need it in our home and our father and your mother them, they worked in the...on the farm, you know, taking care and back in those days if you had more than someone else, they would come over and you work together. You would help one another out and it's the same when you gather up your potatoes and your peanuts, you would pay some on to them. It was more like sharing and, you know, helping one another. So, they don't pull us out of school back then.

Interviewer: Well, was your dad a farmer?

Madison: My grandparents.

Interviewer: You're grandparents were farmers.

Madison: Yes, I don't know what my grandfather- my father...I'm sure his folks were-I know-my grandmother's side and her folks, they all was, you know, farmers.

Interviewer: What did your father do?

Madison: My father...I wonder what did my daddy do...I know he use to help out on the farm when him and my-when he married my mother, but it looked to me, he had a job over in town.

Interviewer: Oh really?

Madison: I can't recall what kind of work he did when he worked it over in town.

Interviewer: Did your mother also help out on the farm or is that what she did?

Madison: That's all she, yes. She use to do washing and ironing too.

Interviewer: So, she did have extra money? By doing the washing and ironing, did she have enough time to do that?

Madison: Well, they back in those times, they-we had some white people that lived out on the Thomasville highway and you would go and do the washing and ironing and it it wasn't like

extra money that was the money...cause see whatever you raised on your farm, you would go to town and...

Interviewer: Sell it off.

Madison: That's right and back in those days we didn't never give them a price. It's whatever they took and they offered us.

Interviewer: Well, they- could you give me the names of any other people you know that went to Lake Hall with you that you think would be willing to, to talk with me about it?

Madison: I know quite a few people and if it's alright with you let me ask them okay and then I'll call you.

Interviewer: You have my number still?

Madison: I hope I still have it.

Interviewer: I can give it to you.

Madison: Okay and I'll call you and tell you they would like to meet you.

Interviewer: That would be great.

Madison: Yeah, because...we just like to be careful about those things.

Interviewer: Well, I don't think I'll have any other questions to ask you. Thank you. That's...

Madison: Well, I hope I was hopeful because when I left Lake Hall school, I went to McBride school because McBride school was more, offered a little bit more because we didn't have to go gather water from, you know, the lakes and the wells. They had a pump right on the ground. So, you know that was better. Well, thank you and-

Interviewer: That's interesting insight. It's not what I was expecting, but I was expecting for, for more of a, more of a negative look at school, but it's refreshing that you really, you know, you cherished your, just the opportunity to have an education and I think-

Madison: Is that what did you mean when you say for me to feel that...have something against cause the whites had things one way and-

Interviewer: That's what I was- it's an opinion that I was gonna- that my original idea was that most people feel a little bitter about it, but you didn't.

Madison: Well, I'm not playing on a show just sir. No sir, because the whites we knew, they respected us and we respected them-

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Madison:...all we knew was they were white and they looked at us as black and if we had anything to sell, they didn't mind buying it from us and if they had little chores that need to be done, they didn't mind having you in their home to do it and if and when we went to school, we did have to walk many miles to school, but back in those days, the white children did have buses, but it never took a fade, you know, to us about those things because we thought that's the way life was supposed to be and I may sound pretty dumb and stupid, but when you don't know any

better, you know, those things don't bother you and even today you do know better, I don't feel that those should bother you today because I may could not have minded long with you, but that don't mean I won't get mine later on because the same God I believe in, he takes care of all of us because he said, "He created the world", you follow what I'm saying. So, he don't intend for all of us to be blessed that- we all are blessed, but we all won't have it plentiful as other would have it. So, because he wants us to learn how to share and be loving toward one another, so he would allow you to have one thing and me have something else, just to see how another we would handle it, cause if you remember they had a king, but they wasn't satisfied. They were still crying and wanted a king then when they got one, God had warned them what would happen to them if they got one. He would take their wife and their children. They had King Jesus. The greatest ruler, but they don't want that. Instead, they crucified my savior and if you believe in him, he shall save you too.

Interviewer: Yes ma'am... Well, thank you very much.

Madison: I think you, too. Bless you...



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