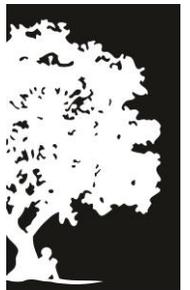


**African American Oral History Project
Old City Hall**

Denham Springs, Louisiana

Interviewer: Sarah Colombo, Head of Adult Services, Livingston Parish Library

Interviewee: Arthur Perkins, Denham Springs, Louisiana



Livingston Parish
L I B R A R Y

S.C. Today is Wednesday December 18th, 2013 this is the start of an interview with Arthur Perkins at Old City Hall, were at 115 Mattie Street, Denham Springs Louisiana My name is Sarah Colombo and I will be the interviewer. I am the Head of the Adult Services for the Livingston Parish Library, and were going to talk to Mr. Perkins about his knowledge of African Americans and the education system in the parish, and also about his personal family history. So just go ahead and introduce yourself.

A.P. My name is Arthur Perkins Sr. I was born and raised in Denham Springs Louisiana. I was born according to my mother on what is called the rainy place, and the rainy place is on, by Pete's highway.

S.C. Why's it called the rainy place?

A.P. It was owned by the Rainey's

S.C. Oh, OK, and what, when where you born?

A.P. Say again?

S.C. When were you born?

A.P. I was born February 24th, 1935. I don't remember living on the Rainey place. What I do remember was living on the Hutchinson place on Centerville Street. We lived there. My father was raised in the house, along with a son that they had name Cooper Hutchinson. My father worked for the saw mill which was next door to the Hutchinson place.

S.C. And where did you, did you grow up on Hutchinson place, or did you move other places?

A.P. I grew up, well I was fairly young when we left the Hutchinson place, but I remember being there, and I remember walking from there to the grocery store which was on Range Ave. The Allen sisters, and I remember walking to Robert's United Methodist Church which was on River Rd. right east of the Denham Springs cemetery. But what I do remember by walking those roads at the time, we would off times be ducked at by young white boys who were driving cars. There weren't that many cars so when we got back home we would tell Mr. Howard Hutchinson what had happened. We would describe the car, whether it was a black car, white car, and we would describe the driver and that car and driver never ducked at us again once we reported it to Mr. Hutchinson.

S.C. What does that mean 'Ducked at you?'

A.P. Tried to hit you, tried to hit you and we had to jump in the ditch to keep from being hit.

S.C. So your parents, where were your parents born?

A.P. My mother was born in Deerford, Louisiana which is in the Zachary area. It may not be called Deerford now but that's what they called it at the time when she was there, and they moved here. I'm not sure where my father, well my father was born and raised here also because the Hutchinson's raised him.

S.C. What was your father's name?

A.P. My father's name was Joe Ivy Perkins.

S.C. And your mother?

A.P. Elma Jackson Perkins Scott

S.C. What were, do you know their birthdays?

A.P. Their birthdays, my mother's birthday was July 4th 1915 hers is easy to remember because of the July 4th holiday. My father was born July 20...My father was born February, I'm sorry, December 22nd, 1914.

S.C. O.k.

A.P. And he was born in Livingston Parish.

S.C. In the Denham Springs, on that same property?

A.P. I'm not sure about that site, but the records show that it was in Livingston Parish.

S.C. And did you have any siblings?

A.P. I have two sisters, Owena McRaig is in Saginaw Michigan, and Helen Washington in is Los Angeles California. And they both came here and we had thanksgiving together.

S.C. Oh, nice

A.P. We used to rotate to each other house for Christmas, we would go to Saginaw one Christmas, and the next Christmas we would go to los Angeles, and the next Christmas we would be here at my house. When we would go to Saginaw it was naturally December, the snow and ice was everywhere and we would drive and we were lucky we got in, and we were lucky we got out. We decided that we weren't going to do, go there for Christmas anymore that we would go there on the 4th of July, and we would have Christmas on the 4th of July in Saginaw. We would light the Christmas tree, and we would sing Christmas carols we would exchange gift. We would do everything that we would do at Christmas time. I guess the neighbors thought that we had lost it, but we did have the news media to come out and to take pictures and run articles in the newspaper.

S.C. Oh how nice. What are your sister's birthdays?

A.P. My Owena was born, Owena was born April 25th 1932, and Helen was born on January 20th, 1934. And I was born as I had said earlier February 24th 1935.

S.C. And are there, their maiden names are Perkins too?

A.P. Their maiden names were Perkins. Helen married John Washington, and Owena married Marvin McRaig. John was from Alabama, and Marvin was from up sixteen, closer to Greensburg.

S.C. Do you know how your family ended up moving to Denham Springs? Your parents?

A.P. I'm not sure why they moved from Deerford to Denham Springs I'm just not sure.

S.C. They met in Deerford and then moved here together? Or did they meet here?

A.P. They moved here and my father met my mother here.

S.C. Your mother's family moved here and then...

A.P. Right.

S.C. So can you talk a little bit about your school history in the parish first as a student?

A.P. I attended what was formerly called West Livingston High School. I began my education at age five. The principle which was Mrs. Lockhart told my mother that since my two sisters were in school that she may as well send me as well. She sent me and I was a little bit young so I cried a lot. I don't know why I cried my sisters were there, but it was just different and it took me a while to adjust. But anyway I attended that school and that school was located on Florida Blvd. Right where McDonalds is now on Florida. That

school remained there until the late forties or the early fifties. When it was moved to Rodeo Dr. Rodeo Dr. is now called Martin Luther King Jr. Dr. That property it is now used as a recreation center, but that property was bought by the people in the neighborhood. It was donated to the school board with the stipulation that it would be used to educate the black children, and when it ceased to educate black children then it would revert back to those who had donated it. That school as I remember it was a, the building was a renewal building, and it had three rooms. Two rooms were connected and there was a petition. You could open it up if you had plays or a movie or something that you wanted to show then it would be a large room. The other room was sometimes used as a kitchen before we started using it as a classroom.

S.C. And that was just for elementary School or was that all grades?

A.P. That was Elementary and we, the school started taking on High School kids. Before it started taking on High School kids our students who finished seventh or eighth grade would go to either McKinley in Baton Rouge or Capital in Baton Rouge to finish their education. Sometimes the students would stay with relatives and then come home on weekend, and sometimes they would commute daily. Either by a greyhound bus, or by someone else who was old enough to drive and took them to school. But the first graduating class was in 1953. Just prior to that class each year we would add on a grade in the High School. Till we finally reached twelfth grade.

S.C. O.k.

A.P. And the first class was 1953. I was in the second class which was 1954. My sister Owena who had dropped out of school and came back to finish, finished in the first class and I was in the second class.

S.C. And at that point you was at the property were the Ellen Lockhart center is now?

A.P. That's the site of the school and it's remained there until integration, and in 1969 the High School left because it was integrated to other schools. In 1970 the elementary left and then the school was closed. At that time I was demoted to a teacher, I had taught mathematics at that school. I started teaching in 1958 and I became assistant principle and taught math. The principle retired and I became the principle two years before the school closed. So I was demoted and I had been asked by another principle would I teach math at his school? His was an elementary school, and my answer was yes I will teach math at your school. I have a family to feed. However I really feel like the school board should give me a job as principle, and so I was set to teach and that summer just before school opened we had held court. I remember the Judge was Judge West it was a district court. It was held in Baton Rouge and I remember the judge, the lawyer for us and I say us because all of the black principles that were three more and the teachers as well were formed into that lawsuit because some teachers were not placed as well. Our lawyer would say 'the Simpson case sets the precedent for this lawsuit, and they asked the attorney for the school board did he know about Simpson and he said he did not know about Simpson. So the Judge West ruled that if you're good enough to teach in a black school, then you're good enough to teach in any school and your good enough to be a principle at any school if you're a principle in a black school. Therefore you have to give them their jobs back. So at the very last minute the superintendent called me and asked

me where did I want to go. I told him it did not matter I would do my job no matter where I went. So I was assigned to Albany High School. Melvin Brown was assigned to Springfield High School and Leroy Travis was assigned to Denham Springs Jr. High. They kept the former principals on, and called them Supervising Principals. That went for a year, but it did not work very well because I can only answer for what happened in Albany. Parents were accustomed to going to that principal if they had a problem, so if a child got in trouble and got suspended instead of them coming to me they would go to him. He would rule my rule but he would tell them that the child needs to be in school. In other words it would give fuel to the fire, and make it a little bit more difficult to maintain the posture that I had. Then it would go to the central office, and of course the central office would call and I would explain what happened and it was always upheld, the decision I had made. However it made it difficult to operate with two factions on the same campus. So after one year they removed the supervising principals from the school site and put them at the central office. And gave them other duties to do there. But that's the way that worked for a while. I would attend everything that happened at the school. If there was a basketball game I would be in attendance, if there was a football game I would be in attendance. No matter what happened I would be there, and I devoted so much time to it until I neglected my duties as a reserve officer in the Army Reserve. After a period of time they discharged me from the reserve core, because I had put my mandatory time in. I had to put in eight years and I had put in ten years, so I was discharged. When things leveled out at school I decided that putting ten years in would, is half of what it takes to retire that I need to go back and put in ten more. So I contacted the reserves and all of the office slots were taken, so they said we will take you as an

enlisted person. And the highest enlisted person rank they offered me was E6 which was sergeant, and the thing about the military is no matter you served when you retire, you retire at the highest rank that you held. So after time I had been promoted to major before I was discharged. I accepted the E6 slot and I went back in, and I operated as a sergeant. In the meantime I was in touch with the National Guard, Louisiana National Guard. I explained that I was, I explained my situation in a letter, and I got a letter back from the [??] general saying that we will accept you as a major, and we will assign you to the 204 area support group at Jackson barracks. So I accepted that assignment and I reported there, but I remember being there and I spent five years there and this was weekend duty. But all the enlisted people there that were any number of blacks that were assigned to the 204 area support group, they looked at me as if I was a plant. That I was sent there to spy on someone. To see what they were doing, whether or not they were using drugs or whatever they were doing that may be illegal. They did not think that I was assigned as everybody else was assigned to a particular job. Bu8t before I left there they realized that, you know, I was there to do a job, I was not there to spy on anyone. But I really enjoyed the duties with the National Guard because it gave me a chance to travel, and to meet other people, and to see other sights. Probably the most important sight was when I was sent to train, we sent the whole unit to train with the Seattle Unit. Which was an area support group as well. They had gone on what is called a reforgery, a reforgery is where a unit from here will go overseas and receive the units that are coming from here landing there to take care of them. Supply all of their needs and then send them on into Germany, and then wherever they needed to go. But we trained there for three of four years during the summer. I remember going in August because school had just opened, and I would

have to leave school for a couple of weeks and go there and train. That went well as far as the school is concerned. They operated and we were all set to go to with teachers were their slots, the assistant principle would take over when I would leave. I remember Seattle in August was very, very cold to me. There was a little mist of rain every day, it didn't rain hard it wasn't hard enough for me to put on a rain coat or anything, but that was that mist every day and they call it rain. But I remember us buying all of the long flannel underwear and all of the sweatshirts that we could find. I don't remember getting warm until I came back here and, cause here it must have been in the nineties in August. But we would train and then finally we got the call to go to Holland, which was an experience for me. We went there and we actually performed the duties of a regular army unit to receive the units, give them whatever they needed in terms of housing, in terms of showers, in terms of food, and whatever they needed we took care of and then we sent them off into Germany of wherever they needed to go. We worked long hours there. I was a logistics officer, I was in charge of logistics. We worked twelve hours, and then we would be off twelve. Well I would work twelve hours, and if I knew a unit was coming in even though I was off I would go and take a nap and I would come back to make sure that the job was being taken care of, because if something failed to happen, if something does not happen as it's supposed to happen then you're going to be criticized and not only the person who was there on duty, but the person his superior may be criticized as well, and I didn't want anything negative in my folder. So I would go back and I would make sure that everything was taken care of. There were some who got a chance to go into Paris because you could travel from where we were, you could get an Amtrak train and you could go into Paris on Twenty-four hour pass. See the sights in Paris and then come back

within that twenty-four hours and be ready for duty the next day, but I was never able to do that. I remember asking my superior for a pass and said "what is my chances" he said my chances is slim, and none. So that meant forget it, so I, even though I was that close I did not get a chance to go into Paris. But in working at Albany High School we had a vacancy at the English department and I remember hiring a teacher that was from New York, which was a strange thing cause the way were used to interviewing in hiring somebody from out of state. Buy anyway I interviewed her mostly by telephone and then finally in person. She said that she would take the job and I found out later that her husband was taken courses at LSU and they wanted to be closer, so therefore she was looking for a job closer to LSU. That's the reason they moved from New York here. Not to take a job at Albany High School, but because of him in school. Well anyway in hiring her I found out that she had taught France, so she had connections in France. And we formed a group were we would invite students from France here one year, and then the next year we would go to France. The unique thing about it was that we would stay in the homes of the France people. They would stay in the homes of the Louisiana people and this way you get a chance to see what the culture is like. Rather than stay in a hotel. There are things you are going to miss like, what is it like at breakfast, what is it like for the evening meal, what's taken place. Well it was strange but I found that they served one thing at a time. For example if you. If you had an evening meal they may bring old something like a salad, there was always wine in the table always. I really didn't, at the first meal I really didn't know whether there was anything else to come, so I tried to be full up on the bread, and the salad. I found out after we finished the salad that we would move the salad bowl. Then they would bring say a chicken or the turkey or the steak or

whatever, and out it on and I tell you boy we would eat that, and then they bring some peas, they may bring something else, and then last they may bring a dessert, But it was one thing at a time. Not everything on the table at one time. I thought that, that was a little bit strange. But what really interested me was that there was nothing else taking place except that was family time. It was a time for them to discuss if some of the children were having a problem they would talk about it at the table. There was nobody reading a newspaper, nobody reading a magazine, nobody, the TV was off. I mean it was strictly family time, and I thought that that was unique because sometimes at my house I may be sitting one place, my wife may be somewhere else and the kids may be eating somewhere else. It is not that all of us dining together, but that's the way that they did it. Then that gave me a chance to get into Paris because by going there we landed in Paris, and not only did we live in the homes, I lived in the home of the principle. He was married to the assistant principle, and they had over there the principle and the assistant principle are given house to live in. so we lived in one of the houses, and the house was close to the campus so we got a chance to go into the schools and see how they operated. Pretty much like us except I noticed the kids when they took a break they would go in a hall and they would smoke. So I asked the principle, I said 'you're allowing them to smoke on campus?' he said 'were they smoking in the classroom?' I said 'no' in other words if they weren't smoking in the classroom then there's no problem. I said 'o.k. 'but that was odd because here we don't allow smoking on the campus at all, and up there it's accepted. It was a learning situation, and I don't know if they still, do mean that I doubt it because that teacher has moved on, and is no longer at the school.

S.C. Are you still in touch with them?

A.P. For a while I was, but then I lost my, I have not been in touch for a while.

S.C. I want to talk a little bit about your time in the National Guard, what year did you enlist?

A.P. Umm With the National Guard the schools integrated in '70 I went back to the reserves, it had to be early, maybe the late '70's when I spent five years in New Orleans, and then I was sent to Camp Beauregard and spent five years there.

S.C. That was when you re-enlisted?

A.P. That was when I, when I re-enlisted I was assigned to a unit in Baton Rouge in the reserves.

S.C. What about when you originally enlisted? The first ten years?

A.P. The first ten years what happened was I was in ROTC as Southern University, and in graduating I graduated with a, with a rank of Second Lieutenant, and I was, that was, I finished high school in 1954, and I finished college in three years. I finished at 1957 and got my commission in 1957 as a Second Lieutenant. I've start teaching at west Livingston, and then I got the assignment that I needed to report to fort lee Virginia, and go to officer training. They have a school that even though you're an officer. Then you have to go to partial school if you're the quartermaster or if your infantry, whatever your specialty is you have to go to a school in you, you have to finish that school. If you fail to finish it, if you flunk out, then you were sent back home and then your subject would be enlisted as a private. So I was assigned to Fort Lee Virginia and that was in, like in November of 1958 umm of '57, 1957. I had to do six months. I finished the school and did the six months and then I was sent back. Then after you come back you have to do eight years in the reserves. So I came back and started teaching and then I joined a unit,

joined the 951st quartermaster off in Baton Rouge which was a segregated outfit. My duties were training officer, to make sure that all of the training was being taken care of, the instructors for the classes were assigned, and that they had to be there to teach, and if they were not there then you were responsible. Either you taught the class, or you got somebody else to teach the class. After being there for a while, the unit integrated and we had an all-black unit, and an all-white unit and they put the two together, and they called it the three fifty third. They didn't call it the nine fifty first or whatever unit they were. The new unit was a, had a new number assigned to it. So that worked fine. So finally I was pretty much promoted out of there, because the highest rank there the company commander was a captain so when you get promoted young, then you need to look for another slot, another assignment somewhere. But just about that time is when we integrated the school and then I was discharged, so I had put in ten years and I had the rank of major. So that's when I separated from, so I went in there in 1958, so this was like '68 when I left there.

S.C. And 1958 is when you began teaching at West Livingston?

A.P. I began teaching 1957, I graduated in the summer of 1957. That summer I got a job at the West Livingston to teach math.

S.C. And what year did you become Vice Principle? Or assistant principle?

A.P. I had taught about five years, and then I became assistant principle along with my teaching duties.

S.C. Who was the Principle?

A.P. The principle was Ms. Ellen Louise Mack Lockhart. Who is the, one of the buildings is named after her now. They call it the Ellen Lockhart Center.

S.C. She was the principle when you were in school to right?

A.P. She was the principle when I was in school, and she was also my Sunday school teacher. She belonged to Roberts United Methodist church, and I did also. She was also the superintendent of the Sunday school. But she ran a very, very, stern hand. Everybody that went to school there, was such the same thing and not only did she disciple you for what you did, or failed to do at school but in the community if you did something that was not right, then you were going to be punished for it. if you were caught with a cigarette in young hand, and if you were caught with beer, or if you were caught with doing something that you had no business then you had to answer, and if you went to a school function you had to home, you left that function. If you fell to go to your house, then you could be punished for going elsewhere. So if you wanted to walk a girl home, then your best bet would be to go and step on your steps, and then go and walk the girl home. Otherwise, once you hit your steps then you were no longer under the school rules, you're under you parents rules so then you would be free to do whatever you wanted to do. As long as it was not anything that was considered outrageous like smoking or drinking or something of that nature. But everything revolved around the school. The school, the home, and the church, were they all worked together. When I say worked together the school would not assign a ball game, or play a ball game on a Wednesday night, if that was a night for Bible study, or there was something going on at the school we respected each other that way. The churches would not do anything contrary to what the school was doing, and the parents both the respected the schools and the schools and

the church. The three were pretty close together, and it was difficult for students to do anything that was not right when those three were working together. Because all the people in the community could correct you as well as the teachers and the church people.

S.C. Were you involved in any extracurricular activities when you were in school?

A.P. I played basketball the entire time we, the high school we did not have a gymnasium, the gymnasium was built the year after I left, so we had a dirt court. We put the basketball goals up and we had to learn the game. Now the principal's step son was named William Lockhart, and he was principal of Chamber Ville High School. Chamber Ville was known for outstanding athletes, played basketball well, boys and girls. So Mr. Lockhart would come out in the evenings sometimes and teach how to play the game, how to dribble, how to shoot, and that kind of things. So it was a plus that, that relationship existed between Mrs. Lockhart and her son, because he would help us and then I guess in some manner maybe she would help them. But that was a good relationship there, and then we would play games, we would start playing we would play against each other.

S.C. And what was the school like, especially I'm interested in the Rosenwald School. You said it was three rooms, what about the heat and the condition of the school?

A.P. We had a wood heater, and there was no such thing as air and we had no fans. We would raise the windows for air to come in. we would although there were only three rooms, there would be more than one grade in a room. For example whoever was teaching first grade may have had the first, second, and third grade in that room. And in another room they would have three more grade, and then another room had two or three grades. The only advantage that I can think of was that if I was in fourth grade, and there was a fifth

and sixth grade class in there, and if they were having social studies if you listened you could probably learn from them. Not that you were going to retain it but at least you would have heard it before. Then when it's your time, then it may not be as difficult if you paid attention to catch it when it was your time to be taught.

S.C. What about materials, what kind of materials did you have?

A.P. We had text books, text books and writing paper and pencil is about what we had. Now our textbooks were hand me down text books from the whiter school. If the books had gotten a little bit used, and a little bit ragged, then some of the pages torn out, then they would get new books and we would get what they had. And the same thing with the desks. Sometimes the desks that would have carved names, And initials, and that kind of thing. So that's, that's what we got, we got the supplies were perhaps not wanted at the other schools.

S.C. And so you said you graduated in 1954?

A.P. 1954.

S.C. And you went to Southern University?

A.P. I went to Southern University

S.C. And were you the first person in your family to go to college, or did other people?

A.P. No my oldest sister went and then she, well my middle sister was the first, because the oldest sister had problems, and was late finishing. So my middle sister was the first in our family to go. I remember I would help her with a math, but en I was in high school I was able to help her with the math bit the college. But she finished and she became an

elementary teacher. My old sister finished High School ahead of me, and then she went to, even though she was married she went to college. Her husband was in Michigan, and she would be here and when she finished and she went to Michigan and she became a teacher. Then she became a supervisor and when she retired then she ran for school board member, and she became a school board member. But she's completely retired now.

S.C. What were your parents occupations?

A.P. My father worked at the saw mill. He worked at the McCarroll saw mill which was next door to the Hutchinson property, and that's where the Junior High School is now on Hatchel Lane. That was the saw mill sight. My father worked there and drove a truck there. Later he, the person that he was raised with Mr. Cooper Hutchinson was employed at what we called the Standard Oil. It was a Exxon, and that's what Exxon was called the Standard Oil. So Mr. Cooper was employed there, and he got daddy a job there so daddy worked at Exxon I'm not sure what his job was there, but at the time that was the best job that anybody who did not have a trade could get, salary wise. It's probably better than some of those who did have a trade. It's just like today, Exxon is one of the higher paid employers in the area. My mother worked domestic work, she worked for Mr. Joe Jackson and his wife was name Helen Jackson, they had that building there and they had a hardware store, and he was into the hardware business and she was into antiques. But anyway my mother worked at their house, and cooked and cleaned for them. That was what she did and my mother and father separated and divorced before I left the Hutchinson place. And my mother raised us.

S.C. Did she re-marry?

A.P. She re-married long after we had finished school she re-married, she married Bernard Scott who died before she did.

S.C. And when, are both of you deceased?

A.P. Both of them are deceased.

S.C. When did they die?

A.P. My father died July 26th, 1984 and my mother died July 9th, 1996. She was born July 4th and she died July 9th and shortly after her birthday in '96.

S.C. So she was Eighty-two?

A.P. Eighty-two or Eighty three.

S.C. Where are they buried?

A.P. They are buried in Plain View Cemetery, which is where, Plain View is north of Denham Springs if you're going to, up to McDonald's on 16, take a left, and you go around you know where Leflore's is, or do you?

S.C. Mhmm

A.P. O.k. just before you get there on the right hand side is should be Plain View Road, and there's a cemetery three or four acres that the church owns, and that's where the cemetery is.

S.C. What church?

A.P. Hmm?

S.C. What church?

A.P. Robert's United Methodist Church owns it, but it's pretty much a cemetery for the blacks in Denham Springs. At one time Robert's was the only church and it bought that property. Then other churches splintered off from there, the Baptist churches, the Holy churches, so Robert's still maintained the title and in charge of the cemetery.

S.C. So since you and your sister's all went to college I'm assuming you were pretty heavily encouraged by your mother go to the university?

A.P. Heavily encouraged and also by some of the teachers at the school would encourage you to go to college and, especially if you were good in a particular subject, like I was in math, and my sister was in English, and my wife was in English.

S.C. Where there particular people in the community who were kind of help us to as examples? Who had been, who had gone to college?

A.P. The biggest example I had was William Lockhart at Cheneyville, I always looked at him because most of the people that I saw locally were females, and here was a male who was principle of the school, and doing an outstanding job. So I kind of used him as someone that I probably wanted to be like.

S.C. So what year did you become the principle⁴ at Albany?

A.P. At Albany I became principle in 1970.

S.C. And that was the first year the schools were integrated?

A.P. That was the first year the elementary was, because the high school had done the year before, and I was left with the elementary at West Livingston. I had one through eighth grade, and before we integrated I had one through twelve, so nine through twelfth was

taken in '69 and then the rest of the school was take in 1970. And either I had to go and teach math at a school, or either I was going to have my job back as principle. Well just before school opened in 1970, the judge gave his ruling and the headlines in the morning Advocate was Judge Spanks the Livingston Parish School Board. So when I would go to the central office, I would walk in and they would say the school board got spanked today, and I would say 'well yes, they did' but anyway we were assigned and the assignment be, court was held just prior to the opening of school. So I never had a chance to meet any of my faculty at Albany. Until the first day of school, which was the children didn't come, but the faculty came. I remember calling the roll in faculty meeting, and I didn't know if it was a Ms. or Mrs. or Mr. I would call a name and the names were not names I was familiar with, because it was heavily Hungarian area. Some of the names I couldn't even pronounce them. So that was and experience right there you know. You call a name and then hear somebody raised their hand and that's normally I meet with the teachers one on one you know even to hire then or to talk about what their needs might be and that kind of thing, during the summer. I didn't have that opportunity all at once that was the, here's the staff use your faculty, and you got to meet them, and then make the assignments, and that kind of thing. It worked but it was strange.

S.C. And what year did you retire?

A.P. I retired in '98. I remember that I thought, I meant I was there twenty-eight years, and when I walked on campus the first day there where some who said one was a bus driver, I give him three weeks before they run him off, and that three weeks turned into twenty years.

S.C. Did you experience a lot of resistance or tension or anything?

A.P. There was resistance, there was people who just didn't want to accept it. Some of the students were rebellious. Of course they did not stay long if they didn't, you know if they didn't follow the rules, and the rules were evenly enforced across the student body. But some of had to do with long hair, the dress code was enforced, and that was a, that was a problem.

S.C. Oh, because it was the seventies.

A.P. Yeah

S.C. O.k.

A.P. That's right. I remember that we would paddle the boys, but we, and corporal punishment was outlawed, but if somebody agreed to it, a parents agreed to it then it was acceptable. Instead of being sent home you could, you could use the paddle. So we were paddling the boys, and here come a white girl into my office and said "your prejudice" and I said "I don't think so" she said "yeah your prejudice, you paddle the boys but you won't paddle the girls" I said "ok let's work on that" so in talking to the faculty we decided that we would offer the girls a choice, they could be paddled or they could go home. We had some female teachers who said "yeah I'll do it, I'll help you with that" And then the assistant principle at the time was a female, so we agreed that we would offer the girls a chance to either take the paddling by a female, or either go home. But the rule was that you had to have a certified person, like another teacher to witness, so there wouldn't be just one person, there would be a paddler who would be a teacher, and there would be another teacher to witness just in case somebody said you did something that you didn't. That worked well, now whether or not it's still going on I don't know, but I had to prove

that I wasn't prejudiced. (Laughing) And I think the same one who came in and challenged me, was probably the first one to get the whipping. (Laughter). I would like to tell you about a couple experiences as a worker.

S.C. Yeah

A.P. I umm, my first job was, outside of what we did as a family, we during the summer we would pick beans, and we would pick strawberries as a family, and then whatever money that was got my mother took it and that was to buy grocery, and to buy clothes. But I got a job at Benton Bros. Benton Bros was next door to us now. I was about seventh or eighth grade, and my job was to clean up early in the morning to sweep the store. I would come and sweep the store, then I would go to school. Then on evenings I would come up and I would help deliver furniture During the summer I would work the entire summer, that was a thing that really helped me and my family a lot because whatever money I made I gave it to my mother, and I helped to take care of the house. Then I later worked at what is called an oar factory O-A-R or whatever, they made boat oars. They had a, the first sight and I didn't work it here was across the street and it had a big pond where they had the logs , then they moved it down on Florida Blvd. just as you leave out of Denham Springs on the right hand side. Anyway I learned how to ride a truck, I wasn't riding at all but when I would watch the older people as we delivered furniture how they would shift, and how they would hold, or stay in the road. So one day they asked me to go and take something somewhere, and I went by my house and blew the horn and my mother came to the door. She almost fainted when there was nobody in the truck except me she didn't know that I was driving. But anyway...

S.C. Did you have a license?

A.P. No

S.C. You didn't have...

A.P. Nope

(Laughter)

A.P. They, I never had a problem because I didn't speed or anything. But then later on I got licensed. After I learned how to drive, I was driving then we consolidated the schools. We had a black school in Walker, we had one up sixteen, and we had one around Maurepas we had them scattered. Then we consolidated and made two schools. We made a west Livingston, and we made an east Livingston, the east Livingston is out around Albany, between Albany and Springfield. Well when we did that then we had to put them on busses, and we, Mrs. Lockhart's Husband was elderly and he bought a bus, and he tried to drive it but he didn't do very well. So I was about in the eleventh grade, and he hired me to drive the school bus. My route was to go all the way to Livingston and pick up and then come back through to walker and carbon, and pick up and drop the kids here. Well that went well plus the first stop in Livingston there was a teacher their Mrs. Bridget, and she rode the bus, and all of them were stern disciplinarians so she rode the bus and I never had a problem because she would get on it from the first stop, and she would be the last one to get off. So they were under supervision the whole time. And this is where I met my wife, she's from walker. She was one of the kids who got on the bus, and some mornings her mother had a big nice rosebush, and she would cut a rose and when she got on the bus she would give me her rose. And say good morning so now I see

where, and I say to her she was planting seeds, and then finally I produced matrimony between the two of us. Anyway we had been married fifty-five years I believe.

S.C. Wow. What's your wife's name?

A.P. Nora, Nora. And her maiden name was Johnson, and she's from Walker. She still goes to the church. Which is a Baptist church. And I go to Methodist. And all the kids went with me to get Sunday school until they got to be adults. And then they were, could go wherever that wanted to, but that time we raised the funds.

S.C. Umm what year were you married?

A.P. I was married in 1958. Went in the military at fifty-seven, shortly thereafter we were married.

S.C. And that was after you had graduated from college?

A.P. I graduated from college, and had done my law brief time and I wasted (person enter; says hellos

S.C. Yeah office women. How many children do you have?

A.P. We have four. We have three boys and one girl.

S.C. What are their names and birthdays?

A.P. The oldest is Arthur Jr. and he was born April 1960, and then there's Michael, Michael was born April 2nd in 1961. And then there's Jeffery, there's Jeffery who was born January 11th 1963. And there's Tonya the only girl, born October 26th 1968. And we raised a grandchild named Bianca. She was born June 3rd 1989. All of them are here except the oldest boy who is in Atlanta. His occupation is an electrical engineer.

S.C. Wow, umm, I guess I want to talk a little bit about you growing up in Denham Springs with your family, where there any particular family traditions or anything like that that you can remember?

A.P. We always celebrated together, Thanksgiving and Christmas. And then there were certain dishes were real popular that my mother always prepared. One was what is called a Deep dish, which is a dig deep, it's a salad. There was also something called pig in a blanket that was real popular with us. We always had it, pig in a blanket was raking a steak, cutting it into strips, and taking bacon and cutting it into three pieces per slice, putting in the steak and wrapping it and taking a tooth pick and putting it in there to hold it together, and then she would cook it. That was always something we looked forward to. There was another dish called Ambrose, and Ambrose was, and I have recipes I may have to type them out for you to give them to you for each one of these things. So you know you can have it but the Ambrose was like a coconut, pineapple, and oranges, and the coconut was put on top white, and then cherries that were pitted and put on top of it, beautiful dish and I always enjoyed eating it. We also had what is called cracklin cornbread, and that you don't see now but we had it. There was something called monkey bread, and I have a recipe for it as well. These are kind of things that we did to look forward to, and I mention pig in blanket didn't I?

S.C. Mhhmm and that was your whole, you extended family would all come together for the holidays.

A.P. We would always come together for the holidays. If we didn't do it for, most of the time it was for Christmas, but now we have already done it for thanksgiving and I doubt it if we can get them together for Christmas. Because there was most of them out of state.

S.C. Well before we wrap up is there anything else that you wanted to share in particular.

A.P. I think we have covered everything, I mentioned the meddling of students?

S.C. Uh uh

A.P. The young whites at the time I didn't mention though that the segregation was really tough back when I was growing up, and it was something that was pretty much accepted and I may have mentioned that, if I was walking on the streets I think I mentioned that, yeah I told you that, and if I was on Range Ave. I walked on each side of the street and the middle. If whites were taking up the sidewalk then I would get out and walk in the street until the whites passed and then I would get back on the sidewalk. But through all of this I remember catholic nuns would pass, and they would wave, and they would smile, and they were very very friendly. It was almost like seeing an angel here on earth.

S.C. Well so you know were doing this as part of this oral history project for Denham Springs I'm wondering if there's anything in particular that you want to pass along about the way you've seen Denham Springs change in the community.

A.P. There a major difference in daylight and dark between when I was growing up and the way it is now, there's so much being built. Younger people probably not believe some of the things that I see it happen in the past, but it's completely a new day and I love Denham Springs and there's nowhere else, although I have been almost all over the world there's no other place I want to live.

S.C. O.k. well thank you so much for your time. This is the end of the interview on Wednesday, December 18th, 2013 with Arthur Perkins.

