

TRANSCRIPT - VALINDA LITTLEFIELD INTERVIEW 2

Interviewee: VALINDA LITTLEFIELD, Director of African American Studies Program, University of South Carolina

Interviewer: RAMON JACKSON

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RAMON JACKSON: Could you tell us a little bit about the state of public and private black education before the shift in the constitution of 1895?

VALINDA LITTLEFIELD: There's an 1868 constitution where you have African Americans for the first time being able to put education at the forefront of the state's obligations. You have people like Joseph Rainey in Georgetown, people like Robert Smalls who are pushing for educational access, universal education – it should be free and open to everybody. So that's what you have starting with the 1868 constitution. So starting from 1868 to 1895 what you see are African Americans building schools, raising money to pay teachers. You also have them pushing the state to provide funding and the state does provide funding. And the local counties providing some funding for school. I don't want you to think of it as a grand scale schooling system because it's not. What you have at this particular time are a lot of private schools – Claflin, Avery – and so when you're thinking about this private/public they're really intertwined. There are not a lot of public schools so African Americans are for the most part going to private schools. And these are schools churches provide, African Americans themselves provide. And in some cases the state may put in some money – they may pay for the teachers.

RJ: How concerned were the delegates about freedmen in rural areas like we're studying?

VL: They're extremely concerned about it. For the first time you get people interested in everybody having access to public education, before that it's the planters' sons and daughters getting some education. Whites didn't get a lot if any – so this is the first time you have a group of people interested in everybody having access to education.

RJ: Where did they stand on the subject of mixed schools?

VL: Mixed schools – you had some who would have said they should be mixed and others who said nope, they didn't want it, they preferred black teachers, they preferred their children being taught by black teachers, preferred schools not being mixed. On the other hand you had white people who preferred black children being taught by white teachers because they thought white teachers would teach them the best way to be in life, shall we say.

RJ: Go a little further.

VL: What I'm saying is their proper role in life, their status in life, which is to serve, which would be the farming, the service jobs, domestic work and so they felt white teachers would be better able to convince blacks of that role. They didn't feel that black teachers would try to convince their students of that – black teachers would convince them to think much larger than that.

RJ: There was a general understanding that schools were sites of socialization. Can you tell us more about that? How would this process take place in the classroom during this early period?

VL: Well, when you're looking at the early period, when you think of socialization, you have teachers who have been trained somewhere else – Hampton, Avery Institute was one of those places. And if you were trained at Avery you did not need to take a county exam, which teachers took every year in order to get a teaching job. So if you went to Avery Institute you did not have to do that – the status of Avery – you would come out with what you needed to teach. South Carolina State later on, you would get – that's where lowcountry teachers – Claflin, Benedict – again, these are private schools except for South Carolina State – you're talking about private schools where most of them would have gotten their training.

RJ: Now these county exams – what level of education did a teacher have to have to pass them, and how far ahead of their students did the teachers have to be?

VL: It varies. Some teachers were a day ahead of their students. Some of them started at 14, 15, 16 years of age – some a little older, but a lot of them started at 14, 15, 16 – especially your very bright teachers, and they would go on and get more training later in life. But when you think about the kind of training they would have had, most of them had very good basic training – reading, writing, geography, arithmetic. And depending on the time period, those were the topics they would have been tested in. And depending on your score, that's what your certificate rate was. If it was – I think the grading was one, two or three and at first I thought that meant you could teach first, second or third grade, but it didn't mean that. If you had one it was the highest. But anywhere from 95 – 100 and you were a one, and you were the best.

Later on you might have an alcohol intolerance, trying to teach people about alcohol – the ills, whatever of alcohol. So it depended on the time. But certainly reading, writing, geography and arithmetic. Penmanship as well would have been one they would have been tested on. But they would have had a very good knowledge of those subjects.

RJ: To what extent would they have had to well-versed in the Bible.

VL: Oh definitely – that’s the other things about rural schools. In order to be hired during this time period in many places you would have needed a letter from your minister validating that you were a person of character, you could be trusted, you didn’t have any alcohol problems, any other problems that society deemed at the time – you didn’t go out gambling, running around with men. Those were characteristics they were not looking for, to teach kids. So therefore your minister had to sign a letter saying that you were of fit character to be a teacher. So you had to have a very good relationship – you had to be very involved in your church.

RJ: Tell us about the shift in ideology surrounding education in 1895 – what led to this change and what was the aftermath of the Republican convention.

VL: When you think of the ideology and the shift from about 1895 what’s happening here is Jim Crow is cementing. You’ve had this push for access to education from a lot of people and now you’re getting Jim Crow to settle in and people are looking at education – and when I say people I mean those in power – those in power are looking how do we... we can’t take total access away from the people, African Americans, it is what they expect and they’re not going back. And so you have all these things playing out by the time you get to 1895 or early 1900s. What you see is, before you had teachers who were paid according to numbers of students, black teachers - pretty even pay between black teachers and white teachers because it was based on the numbers of students they taught.

After 1895 that’s when you begin seeing shifts where the pay gap increases tremendously. Doesn’t matter if you have a masters degree, doesn’t matter what your qualities are, if you are an African American teacher you are paid less. And those are the kinds of shifts you start seeing after 1895.

RJ: Did the number of young women decrease as a result?

VL: No. It didn't decrease – in fact I would argue it increases. This is a profession, it's a professional job, one of the few professions black women can aspire to. And so therefore you have lots of women going into school training to be teachers. And it is for many of them a calling, this is a mission. This is part of educating the race, part of uplifting the race, and so they value education and so do their students.

RJ: To what extent at this point were poor whites and African Americans educated generally – let's say about 1910?

VL: I can't give you a statistic but – maybe I can. What you're looking at by 1910 – If you look at the census rate before 1910 you're going to see a high illiteracy rate. You're going to see that gap basically closed by 1910, 1915, between whites and African Americans. Now part of that is also due to poor whites not valuing education and I see that over and over again when I'm reading arguments about why we need compulsory education in SC or Georgia or any other Southern state. And one of the things – I can't remember the South Carolinian who made the comment – he said if you think that not building enough schools and keeping access down for African Americans will keep them from going to school you're crazy – it's not happening. It is happening with white kids. And we're going to lose the battle if our white kids are not educated. So basically compulsory education in SC was about getting white kids to go to school. Black kids were going whether there was 60 or 70 or 80 in a room, they were going. It didn't matter how old they were. They may go in shifts, sister go one day, brother go another day and they come back and teach each other, but they were going to school in droves – they wanted to learn to read and write. And so those are the kinds of dynamics that are going on right up to 1910, 1915, 1920.

RJ: Talk about the connection between politics and education during this period. Were there other reasons why white politicians encouraged literacy among poor whites?

VL: Well, there's always this race issue. Even if you are poor and you are white, and I may not relate to you as well if I'm a white planter or a white leader, it still means you're white and there's privileges that come with just being white. Therefore you can't let your group fall behind the group that you're saying is inferior to you. Just doesn't work. So that's very much playing into that.

RJ: What impact did disfranchisement have on African Americans' ability to control the type of education they received during this period?

VL: Well, again, private schools. When you're looking at the states not providing a lot of money, the counties not providing a lot of money for African American schools, again they fall back on those private schools. You have to get support – it may be from a Northern philanthropist or it may be someone local who just supports you. That does happen occasionally. Pawley's Island – you have the Episcopal Church providing funding. Miss Ruby's school. But the bottom line is that a private school is a private school so you don't have to totally adhere to the state's rules and regulations. You can teach Latin, you can teach algebra, geometry – you're not regulated by the state. And so many of those teachers received very good training in those areas because they were in private schools that were not regulated by the state. That doesn't make it easy, that doesn't make it right but in some cases it worked to their advantage.

RJ: At the same time Booker T. Washington was advocating industrial training but you say they are still teaching those other courses.

VL: They are still teaching them, yes.

RJ: How did they pull that off without having their funding cut?

VL: You're a rural school and no one is coming to visit you that you don't see long before they get there. I'll give you an example of a school in North Carolina that I found some records of. The school received money for industrial education so the girls had ironing boards, washtubs, all of those things. And they did wash their own clothes, the males' clothes – there's a gender problem here – and they did iron. But it wasn't a class. Yes, ironing boards and everything is there and when company's coming you pull them out. So when company's gone you go back to your Latin, your Greek, your plays, your theater. You don't do it. But they know how to wash and iron. It's not something you need to be trained to do. But they put on a show. And many schools did that. Occasionally they get caught. I have a document where a guy comes up and surprises them and they are - Latin and Greek – and he is ticked because he's been giving money for industrial education and he's just found out they're not doing that. And he's basically threatening to cut off their funding. So occasionally they did get caught but for the most part they didn't.

RJ: Where did black parents stand on this issue?

VL: Well when you think of industrial vs classical we tend to make it that it's one or the other – it's never one or the other. African Americans were very practical and they saw the good shall I say in learning and in having both an industrial education and a classical education. And they didn't see the two as competing against each other. Some of them did but for the most part they didn't – they saw it as a holistic education – you learn how to clean a house or set a table along with the algebra and geography and Latin. That was just part of your education – at some point you were going to maintain a house – those were the things you needed to

know how to do. At some point if you were a rural person, male, you were going to become a farmer, so you needed to know how to manage livestock, how to shoe a horse – those are practical things – how to grow a garden. But it didn't mean they didn't need to learn the other things as well.

RJ: What were some of the difficult choices that black parents had to make with regard to education – specifically black boys or teenagers.

VL: You get a mixed bag there and for me that is based on economics. If you are a middle-class black family more than likely the males have gone on to high school and college. If you were at a lower socio-economic level your son would not gotten access to those kind...myou would have pushed your daughter, however, to go on to become a teacher or a nurse later on. But that was mainly for her protection – to give her some say-so in her life. Would she actually have to have a husband? Maybe not. But she would have to support herself. So therefore it was a form of protection, it was a form of keeping you out of the kitchen, out of the house of white males. You know, the males of the house, whether the father or the son, and you being subjected to being raped. And so it was protection in many, many ways for the girls, but it was also to give them an education so they could be self-sufficient.

RJ: In general, how long was the school term in 1910.

VL: It varied. It could be three months, it could be 2, it could be 5 and 6 months. It depended on the rural area, it depended on the teachers, their longevity, how long they had been there, their relationship to the community. A lot of times when you look at schools that added months onto their terms, it's because the parents were paying for it, it's because the PTAs [Parent Teacher Association] that the teachers formed with the parents are paying for the extra things that make the term last longer – and they are convincing the county or the state that, yes, our kids

will go to school for 6 months as opposed to 2 months, because the argument is that they're not going to go to school that long.

You asked the question about how hard was it for parents to get access for their kids, especially boys. But when you think of girls in rural areas – you're not going to have lots of high schools available for African Americans – they're going to be located in your urban areas. So if you're talking about Hobcaw Barony then you're talking about Georgetown – that's where your high school will be located. If you're talking about Columbia, South Carolina it's going to be Booker T. Washington high school. So all those other counties – those other black areas – feed into those one and two high schools. Rarely do you find two high schools close to each other – just doesn't happen.

RJ: Let's discuss Strawberry Schoolhouse – when was it built?

VL: Somewhere around 1910, closed 1950. So you have a nice long run of a rural school that fed into - the students who went to Strawberry school would have been from Friendfield, what is it? Alderley, and Strawberry, so you would have the students feeding into those areas so that's not unusual. [Repeats] – So you would have Strawberry, Friendfield, Alderley, feeding into Strawberry school. That was not unusual – that was the norm, having all these communities feeding into one school.

RJ: How progressive do you think it was that Baruch built this school on his property in 1910 – was he ahead of the curve?

VL: I would probably say being from the North and having lived in the North for a very long time and his idea about taking care of the people who worked for him on his plantation - that was part of who he was. Progressive? You could call it progressive because he didn't have to do it. So yes. My thought is was there somebody pushing him? Maybe Belle, maybe the African American community. You

don't know. But I can speculate that there were lots of factors pushing Bernard Baruch but yes I would also argue that it was progressive for him to do that.

RJ: So after Strawberry where would you go to continue your education?

VL: Strawberry would have gone through fourth or fifth grade – we know some people finished fifth grade. That happened often – rural schools would add a grade after a teacher became knowledgeable about another grade or another teacher came in. That's not unusual. But it only went to fifth grade and therefore if you wanted access to sixth to about eleventh, which is what it was during this time – then you would have had to go to Georgetown, which means you would have taken a boat. There's no bridge during that earlier period. So you're taking a boat to Georgetown or you're finding a place to stay in Georgetown, which is what happened to Minnie Kennedy.

Her parents bought a house in Georgetown and the grandmother lived with the kids so they were able to go to Howard, which was an elementary and a high school. That was very true for most black schools – to have an elementary and a high school.

RJ: How was education different at Strawberry as opposed to Howard?

VL: Well Howard would certainly have been your advanced courses. At Strawberry you would have gotten the basics – reading, writing, arithmetic, geography. Several people have talked about their love of geography thanks to the teachers at Strawberry School and their ability to make geography come alive and for them to be able to know where things were – names of rivers and things like that. The adults have very fond memories of learning those kinds of things. So they would have gotten a very good basic education and then Howard would have provided the high school education, making it possible for Minnie Kennedy, for

example, to go to South Carolina State to get her teaching certificate and to get a BS degree.

RJ: When we talked to Bob McClary he talked about the difficult choices his parent had to make regarding which children would get an education.

VL: Yeah, that's a very difficult decision and black parents still make those decisions and other parents as well. But during this particular time period, it's rural, you live off the land, and it's intense labor no matter how you cut it, it's intense labor. And so you need children working on the farm, even if you're working for someone else. Whether it's tobacco or cotton or whatever, all hands on deck. And if you have a large family to feed, you have to make some hard decisions about – I can't send everybody to school – I'd love to but I can't. Somebody needs to work. And Mr. McClary had a very interesting situation that he talked about – some days he couldn't go to school because he had to babysit, had to take care of the children – both parents are out working and somebody has to take care of the children. And so he missed a lot of school days. He had to take care of his siblings and he resented it. But it's a very tough choice. The parents had no choice – you can't leave those kids at home by themselves. And so the brother would go sometimes and they would alternate. But that's not unusual either. In oral interviews a lot of adults talk about trading off – the older sister would go to school – the older brother would go for a few days and come back and you'd be working the fields or watching the child and they'd come back and teach you what they learned in school. That was another reason why you'd have first, second, third grade. When I say first, second, third grade I mean you could have gone to school for the first term as a first-grader. Then you had second first grade, then third first grade, and sometimes you didn't get out of first grade for three years. And that sometimes was because of all those other factors keeping kids out of school. Making sure they were up to par by the time you got to second grade – they had learned the basics of first grade in order to be

promoted to second grade. But it did mean sometimes you stayed in first grade two or three years. That was not unusual at all.

RJ: An interesting thing we've found in the census is that Daisy Kennedy didn't learn to read until the 1930s. Can you talk about how sometimes children became teachers in their families? Was that commonplace?

VL: It could be – it could be commonplace for somebody in the community to become a teacher. I'll give you... and then we'll get back to her not learning to read until the 30s. Minnie Kennedy became the reader for all those other areas that fed into Strawberry, so people would walk for miles to have Minnie read their letter. Minnie early on loved schooling and she spent a lot of time learning so therefore she was one of the brightest and people came to her to decipher, to learn what a contract meant – so she became that person. Sometimes something as simple as reading a newspaper to someone or passing news. There was usually one kid but sometimes several but at least one kid in the community who was far enough along to do that and became the scholar of the community, and Minnie became the scholar in her area.

RJ: Were there dangers for these young people? Was it dangerous to learn to read?

VL: I wouldn't say it was dangerous. It was a burden because people are expecting you to read their letters and you may not want to read their letters. You may want to play you may want to do other things but it could be a burden depending on the personality, depending on the person. Most of them were not taught so see that as a burden, they were not socialized to see that as a burden. They were socialized to see this is my skill, this is something I've been gifted with because

I've been privileged to go to school to learn this things and I am going to share it and therefore they didn't see it as a burden, for the most part.

RJ: What impact did the early education at Strawberry Schoolhouse have on Minnie Kennedy? How did it change her perspective about where she lived and the people she lived around?

VL: As far as an education, the basic education Minnie got on Strawberry, what it did for as far as impacting her life was made it available for her to go to Howard, to get more education. Had that school not been there then by the time she got to Howard she would have been further behind. That happens kids thirteen fourteen years old in first and second grade, that wasn't unusual either. Eighty year old people in first and second grade wasn't usual if they wanted to learn to read and write and teachers accommodated that but it would have meant for Minnie that some things would've been delayed.

RJ: Did the education she received change her ideas as a person?

VL: I don't think the education changed Minnie that much. I think Minnie was always like that. Minnie is a special person, Minnie saw thing people couldn't see. Minnie saw inequities early on as a child that her sisters and siblings did not see and her parents did not see. So Minnie was the type to much against those inequities early on, so Minnie would have been, what I call, a high achiever. That's just who she was and she would've been pushing against the grain. Many kids did that but Minnie was one that comes to mind when you think of someone from Hobcaw.

RJ: Tell us a little bit about the teachers from Strawberry Schoolhouse. Who are the ones we know of, and could you provide us with a brief bio and some information?

VL: We know of at least three. We are still working on that to come up with documents and then some others were doing interviews and trying to figure out a little more about these women. We know there was an Ether Besalu. Many of the former students we interviewed, like Mr. McClary, certainly talked about Ms. Ether Besalu. The three teachers were all married. We often think about teachers not being married that often crops up that you can't be married and teach. That is not true in rural areas. For rural schools many of the times you are looking at a very limited amount of teachers who would want to be out in the woods. Therefore crops[?] like today wanted to go urban.

Marriage was not a problem. You could be married and teach but you could not be pregnant and teach. You had to stop when you started showing then you came back but you can certainly teach and be married. So Mrs. Besalu was married. We also know of Mrs. Joe Jackson who also taught at Strawberry. She was married to a gentleman from Georgetown and he was the first black postal carrier in Georgetown, so we know a little bit about them. We know a little bit about Mrs. Abraham Wright her husband was also a minister at Friendfield Church. Pretty much what we know is what the students have told us about these particular teachers. Mr. McClary told us that Mrs. Besalu is the reason why he continued on in school. She constantly said "You have potential don't quit school, keep going do as much as you can." She valued – all of them valued education." They very much pushed their students to do bigger and better things, like most teachers try to do.

RJ: So there seems to be some emphasis on teaching more than what's in the book.

VL: Yes, when you think of teachers, especially African American teachers in that time period, their ideology of teaching is teaching the whole child and if it encompass – lets say if the telephone comes into being and you are in a rural area you know have a party line during this particular time period. Party line, which

more than one person has access to the phone of the houses. Therefore teachers took on the job to teaching how to answer the phone, not to eavesdrop when someone else is talking, which you know you could do. Those types of things that they taught – hygiene, cleanliness, it wasn't just about teaching reading, writing and arithmetic. How you were to conduct yourself as a young man, how you were to conduct yourself as a young women, how you were to dress, walk talk, eat. What were your manner because they taught you manners

I'm not saying you didn't get taught manners at home, some kids did, many kids did get manners at home. But whatever you didn't get at home teachers provided it. So the were continued of the home in many ways. If there were let's say an illness, tuberculosis. Let's say there was a hookworm, Rockefeller in the early 1900's has hookworm, clinics trying to figure out who has hookworm disease, because we are talking about the south with 40% of it's population, at that time being infected by hookworms. So you're talking about a rural population being infected by hookworm. Teachers were very instrumental in educating parents, educating students, about hookworm infestation, where it came from how you get it, how you prevent it.

They were also the first to be very active on building out houses, rural out houses. There was a program funded, partly by the state, but most from northern philanthropists like Rockefeller. Helping people build out houses, that was the teacher's responsibility, and so when you think of teaching you have to think of it as this multitask, all encompassing profession, that's exactly what it is. It shifts, it changes over time. In the early beginning it would've been getting schools built so the children had access to school. Later on it may just shift to the curriculum that's looking at more of what you are teaching. There is some of that but the priority shifts sometimes. Once you get the number of schools you shift to how do I get the school supplies, how do I get the curriculum change, how do I get the teachers to get more education, is it a summer workshop, is it sending them to Hampton, is it sending them to New York Teachers College, is it working with teachers to go

somewhere else for training. So it may shift but nevertheless teachers are always invited to things. Is it forming a parent teacher association?

RJ: Many of the students shared regulations of field trips of different places off site. Can you share some of those experiences of how they may have impacted the child?

VL: One of the things field trips do, even today, is to give you a sense of what's out there. It's hard to explain to a rural child in the middle of the state what an ocean looks like if they have never seen the state, if they have never seen the ocean. So a field trip can certainly take care of that. It's understanding the world in a much larger context, is what a field trip offers students. Seeing other people, seeing other places, seeing other landscapes, seeing the geography of a place change but also just broadening their horizons understanding that buildings don't look alike, people don't sound alike in the other parts of the community that you grew up in or you could go right across the border and someone can sound totally different from you. They eat different food, rice here but maybe grits somewhere else. It's their broadening of their understanding of the world allowing them to know that the world is bigger than that little community they grew up in and helping them understand how it's connected.

RJ: One of the specific sights Robert McClary mentioned was about a visit to Brookgreen Gardens. What might a visit to Brookgreen Garden in 1940 have had taught children from Hobcaw?

VL: Well it certainly would have taught them about another group of people in similar situations, they both are plantations. So it would have taught them about another area basically in your backyard that you might not have had the chance to see any other way, other than to Brookgreen, and seeing another northern

philanthropist and seeing what they did in that particular area. You have Baruch to understand him, and Belle, then you have the Huntingtons so you have a whole new group of people. Again it's making that connection to northern philanthropists, to the kinds of things they were doing to Brookgreen. Similar but different to what was happening at Hobcaw.

RJ: Earlier we talked about the state providing funding for black education before 1895. To what extent was the state involved in, say 1920, and tell us who would've funded supplies for students at Strawberry Schoolhouse.

VL: Supplies could've come from Bernard Baruch, he certainly had the funding and ability to do that. Sometimes teachers themselves provided supplies, that was not unusual. I don't know the arrangement as far as chalk and those things for Strawberry. Whether Bernard Baruch just paid for everything we don't know that. I haven't had the opportunity to interview any former teachers, the ones we talked about are long gone. So we really don't know and the interviews with Minnie as a child, that wouldn't have been something she was privy to, that kind of information, as to who was providing it.

RJ: Is there anything you can remember about the teachers specifically?

VL: Not a lot about the teacher specifically but let's talk a little bit about the day students remembering.

RJ: Another reason why I asked about Brookgreen was because I was thinking about the art work, the sculptures, and culture exposures

VL: Also at Brook Green that's a whole another culture exposure. The art work the sculptures, all of those things Mrs. Huntington was very much apart of. So

the students would've gotten a whole new appreciation for art, another way of looking at art from topiary, to iron and metal. Another interesting aspect they would've gained from that field trip - when you think about Strawberry School itself and the day of the child. In one of the interviews, with Mr. McClary, talked about getting up in the morning and going to one of the homes taking care of the dog kennels, cleaning it out, those kinds of things - and I'll try thinking of the name of the family. So that would've been before school. Then he would've gone to school and we would have had his reading, writing, and arithmetic and he took his lunch, a biscuit.

We're not talking about people having their lunch provided, that's not happening at this particular school. Rural schools, rarely did that happen during this time period you took your lunch. Maybe leftovers, it may be a biscuit, bagged meat or ham biscuit, chicken. You took your lunch whatever it was. So therefore, he took his lunch, he remembers taking his lunch in a pale and water. Many times students shared dippers for water. That was a big thing with teachers trying to get the hygiene issues of your own individual glass and sometimes bringing a mason jar but you bringing that to school with you and that was your particular instrument of drinking. For a very long time they shared a dipper and they did fine. We like to think it was unhealthy and I'm sure it was but they survived, its called swapping germs and you just grow immune to them.

So that's Mr. McClary and that's the beginning of his school day, then he's in school then he has lunch, then school in the afternoon, when school is out he goes back and picks up where he left off. All this money he has be given is given to his dad. He doesn't get paid for this, the money goes to the dad. Another culture thing we don't think about during this time period. Often times children worked but they didn't get the money to do what they wanted to do. It went to the family, or the male a lot of times in the household. This would be an average school day for this particular kid and for many other kids. Walking, it wasn't around the corner to get to Strawberry School for most kids they walked many miles. McClary said almost thirty

miles a day that's what he did. They walked everywhere. There weren't cars you didn't have access to a horse and those type of things, you walked. I often think about early morning, certainly when he's going to feed the dogs, it's still probably dark out, to clean the dog's kennel, it's dark out and there are no street lights. You're just putting one foot ahead and there are animals.

As a kid that is your day though, that's your life, that's your surroundings. And the building of a fire, someone has to build a fire, someone has to get the wood for the stove, they had a wood stove, somebody had to get the wood, probably the older boys got the wood but then again someone cleaned out that stove again probably the older boys. This would've been the task they were assigned and cleaning the chalkboard those kinds of thing, sweeping the school out. Teachers also did some of those things but sometimes the students were apart of that cycle as well. So you worked for your education in many ways.

RJ: Lets talk about recess, what types of activities did students participate at Strawberry Schoolhouse?

VL: The dangerous ones, the ones we would now consider dangerous. Putting a board on a rock and seesawing, those were some of the fun things, climbing trees, putting an old tire connected to a rope from a tree and swinging on that, hop scotch, jumping rope, those were some of the games they certainly played in rural schools and certainly would've played at Strawberry as well. Just running around in rings, hide and go seek, those kinds of fun games but again you are talking about very rural areas you're hiding in the woods there's snakes there's spiders there are all sorts of things with you while you were hiding.

But fun things they enjoyed it. Making mud pies, we often don't think about that, kids would never make mud pies now I can't imagine, no, they just wouldn't do those things.

RJ: Now some students wouldn't return to school after recess or maybe they wouldn't show up at all. Can you talk about truancy and why there was such great concern over children just not showing up or not returning?

VL: Some would not return because some had to go to work. You may go to class in the morning but you knew you had to go home and work in the afternoon or you may not show in the morning 'cause you had to work in the morning and showed in the afternoon. So there were always those things. When I think of truancy we often just think of kids just playing hooky, they just don't want to go to school, for the most part it's not like that. Now you are going to have some who just don't want to go to school they would rather do anything else but go to school. They would go fishing or anything, hunting anything other than going to school. But for the most part when I think of truancy it is about them having to work and not being able to go.

RJ: Who would've been responsible for monitoring whether if student were in class at Strawberry School?

VL: That would have been the teacher's job, she would have known if students were there or not and a lot of times teachers went to your house and said "your child wasn't in class today, why wasn't you child in class today?" that could have happened. Belle Baruch later on also played a role in that if she saw kids out and they should have been in school, then she marched them to school. Like I said there are always those who really didn't want to go, but she marched them to school again stressed how important it was for them to get an education.

So it's a combination but for the most part till later on, unless they hired a truancy person later on, it just didn't happen. It was the teacher's job to keep up with who was in school, who wasn't, and she kept her role and also to go to the families and find out why that child wasn't in school. Teachers did that it was part of

their job to go to those rural homes and say “Johnny wasn’t in school today why?” or “Sarah wasn’t in school today.” And a lot of times they were out working, they couldn’t be in school, but it was her job to find out why.

RJ: Mrs. Kennedy went to South Carolina State College to learn to teach. Can you talk about how her education experience prior to that lead her to choose this path and also discuss her career jeopardy after leaving Strawberry Schoolhouse?

VL: She left Strawberry went to Howard graduated with honors from Howard. She talked a little bit about that. Minnie was dark skinned and the principle - and if my memory serves me correctly - and a few of the other teachers didn’t want her to be graduating with honors they wanted it to go to someone with lighter skin. And a parent stepping in, Minnie parents didn’t step in, but someone’s parent stepped in and said “no, this isn’t right she deserves it,” and she did get it she got her honors she graduated with honors. Then she got accepted at South Carolina State. Baruch had promised to pay for any of her father’s children’s education, if they went on to get higher education, he would pay for it. Minnie went to South Carolina State to become a teacher, that’s what she wanted to become at the time and that’s what her livelihood was from then on. She remained a teacher. Minnie tells a story of Baruch not living up to what he promised her in the beginning. She promised the father, William, and the father was a little timid he wasn’t the type to ask and as I said Minnie was special. Minnie wrote a letter to Baruch saying you promised my father you would pay for my schooling and here’s how much it cost so, pay up and so he did, not really telling the dad that he needed to tame his daughter a little bit, but he he paid for Minnie’s college for South Carolina State and then she moved to New York. She taught in Georgetown for a little while she said the pay wasn’t good, again Minnie was special not willing to settle for anything. The pay was not good and so she went to New York. Again she hit some obstacles because she was southern,

southern accent, southern taught, the New Yorkers didn't think a southern girl should be teaching students without additional education, which she got.

She ended up being one of the founders for one of the first head start programs in New York and went on to being an excellent educator and with lots of awards after award, until she came back to take care of her mom then moved back to Georgetown permanently. But she had a very rich educational experience she was a Rosie the Riveter, she was a civil rights activist, very active women and loved education, loved educating students. That love must of grown up in Strawberry and Howard and followed her throughout her career because she absolutely loved kids. When you talked to her and she talked about children her eyes would just twinkle. There were no kids who couldn't learn, they were all worth working with and you just felt that was so important to her was teaching kids.

RJ: Did Bernard Baruch pay for any of her other siblings to receive an education?

VL: No, she said none of her other siblings wanted to further their education. Her sister wanted to get married and Minnie was pissed about that. She wanted more for them but they had other desires, getting a higher education wasn't a part of what they wanted it to be. So they didn't. Minnie was it, she was the only one.

RJ: Talk a little bit more about Bernard and Belle Baruch's approach to black education. How similar or different were they from others whites during this period? Can you speak on what their legacy should be thought of?

VL: I think their legacy should be that they were part of a group of whites who did provide basic access to education. That is who they were. They built the school for practical purposes, for as far as we know they provided funding for the school. We don't know if, whether they paid the teachers or if the teachers were

paid some other way, we don't know that but, if the teachers - I suspect Bernard Baruch paid some money for the teachers, the parents may have paid some but I suspect Bernard paid some. So in that sense they were part of a small group of whites who were very supportive in providing education for black kids.

RJ: I guess I have one more question about the daily life in Strawberry School. House Have you heard any stories from former students about history being taught, and if so how might those narratives had shape a person like Minnie Kennedy.

VL: -- I am drawing a blank. I don't remember Minnie talking about History. I would have to go back to look at that.

RJ: Ok, maybe speak to it more generally.

VL: Well more generally they would have certainly gotten more South Carolina history, they certainly would have gotten some world history, they would have gotten Civil War of course, War of Independence. They certainly would have gotten those kind of historical knowledge taught to them. Other than that I can't really speak on what other kind of history they would have gotten 'cause for Minnie she was a part of history, the civil right movement and those kinds of things. So it being taught - she's a part of it she wouldn't have gotten that at Strawberry. But what other kind of history, I don't know. But that's an excellent question I'll have to do some digging now.

BETSY NEWMAN: I didn't quite understand if Strawberry was a private school or not?

VL: No, for the most part Strawberry was a private school, it was Bernard Baruch's. We don't know of the county may have later on provided some funding by

the late 40's or 50's. Especially when you are thinking of the barns campaigned to keep desegregation from happening. A lot of rural schools got some fundings. But other than that--

RJ: Many of them were absorbed into the county system.

VL: But this one was not absorbed into the county system.

BN: Did you already say that?

VL: No. I did not.

RJ: Ok we can talk about that. That's why I asked many questions about private education. I figured it was private but that's a good point. Are you familiar with any stories or do you have knowledge of any involvement of Georgetown teachers and the teacher salary campaign. Were they politicized in anyway?

VL: I'm trying to think if they politicized the Georgetown teachers. I don't remember any at the time.

BN: Ok let's just stick with the first question. Just so we are clear was Strawberry Schoolhouse public, private, or some combination of the two?

VL: Strawberry would have been private. This would have been the school Baruch built on his plantation and would've supported. Public schooling many times for rural schools doesn't come into play until much much later. And we haven't found any evidence of it coming to play any earlier. If it came into play it would have been in the 40's and it closed out in 1950. So it would have been in the 40's when you're talking about the governor and the barns and the desegregation attempt from

keeping it from happening - funding more black schools in South Carolina. Therefore you wouldn't have state money floating into a school on private property it just wouldn't have happened. Occasionally you may have had to maybe pay for a teacher but again that's much later. We're talking 40's so it would have been for a short period of time. We don't have any record of that, we haven't found any records showing that.

RJ: Do you have any knowledge of state agents visiting Strawberry Schoolhouse to kind of monitor what was taking place?

VL: Nope, none whatsoever..

END OF INTERVIEW