Interview with
Estelle Adams
July 5, 2014

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Interviewer: Tiffany Smith
Terms of Use: Open
Approved: Estelle Mitchell Adams
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Ms. Smith: This is Tiffany Smith with the University of North Texas Oral History Program. Today is Saturday, July 7, 2014, and I am in Dallas, Texas, with Estelle Adams at her home. Estelle, thank you so much for having us and for talking with us today. Now, could you start by telling me your full name and when you were born.

Ms. Adams: My full name is Estelle Mitchell Adams. I was born August 21, 1927.

Ms. Smith: Okay. Where were you born?

Ms. Adams: I was born in Robertson County, Wheelock, Texas.

Ms. Smith: Okay. Could you tell us a little bit about your family and your early life in Wheelock?
Adams: My family and my early life in Wheelock? I was born and raised on a farm. This farm came from my grandmother and grandfather, Samuel Mitchell and Lucy Mitchell. I think the farm is around 110 or 115 years old. My father inherited his share of the land. He built a home and cultivated this land with my mother, Amanda Dunn Mitchell.

I have six siblings: four brothers and two sisters. We were born Baptist. My grandfather was a little Baptist preacher. We are still on the same farm. The farm house is still there. It's over 100 years old.

I went to school there in Wheelock, [Texas], from the first grade to the seventh grade, [which was] as far as the school would go. Then we had to go to Bryan, Texas, or Hearne, Texas, to attend high school. I started school when I was six years old. I walked three miles going [to school] and three miles coming [back]. We were never late getting to school. We always were on time. I remember so well my first year walking three miles; that was a distance for a kid [of] six years old.

Smith: Yes.
Adams: My sister, and brother, and another girl friend would always [carry me part of the way]. I would always give out and I'd start whining, "I'm tired. I'm tired." So they would put me on their backs and carry me a while until I could rest, and then I would have to get down and go to walking again. I remember that real well.

I was very successful coming through that country school. I enjoyed it; we had a lot of good things that were going on in the country school. My first grade teacher was Jewel Epperson. Her mother was a principal. Her name was Estella Epperson. I thought well of her because my name was Estelle and she was Estella Epperson, but her daughter was my first grade teacher. She was very, very good. She had very good penmanship. I always wanted to write like her and I did everything I could to write just like Miss Epperson. She was a single woman at that time. She also was a music teacher, so I started taking piano lessons from her. I grew to love music because of my first grade teacher. I was very happy to be a part of the school.

When I think back, I was always wanting to be with the debate team. I [also] wanted to be with the math team. This was in [college], the [Prairie View
A&M University] Interscholastic League. [Editor's note: Officials at the University of Texas-Austin created the University Interscholastic League (UIL) in 1913 to provide extracurricular opportunities for the state's high school students, but the UIL coordinated with white schools only. Prairie View A&M University created a separate program for African American schools in 1923. The two programs integrated in 1970.] My mother always had books with poems in them. We always had to learn poems every month. So when holidays would come up we could be on the program. We would have our poems ready to be on the program. I was always ready whenever we had a program at school to be on the program, because I had my poem ready. My mother played a big role in this because she made all of us learn poems.

I always wanted to [learn how to] play the piano. I did very well. My first piano recital was when I was in the sixth grade in the Interscholastic League. I asked my teacher to let me go and compete with the other children that would be on this program. She said, "You're going to have to memorize your piece that you're going to play." I [selected] a piece that I liked very [much] and the title of this piece was
“Chopsticks” [laughs softly]. I memorized “Chopsticks.” I went to the Interscholastic League and I won first place. There were about seven kids there competing, but I tell you, when I got through hearing them—the sixth person to come forward to play—when I got through listening to them I said, “I know I can beat them.” I took the prize, first place, and I went to the state [competition]. I won second place. I was very happy.

With the debate team, there was a boy there named of Joe Walker. He was very good in debating. I was in the sixth grade and he was in the seventh grade, but I suppose I was so good that the teacher let me come with the seventh grade and debate. I was able to be his [partner] in debating. We would always make it to the state [competition]. We would always end up in second place. We were very happy and we had a good time. That was, I guess, supposed to be my last year there in the seventh grade.

I left Wheelock School and I went to Bryan, Texas. That’s in Brazos County. I lived with my cousin. She was an old schoolteacher and her son and daughter were old schoolteachers. Her name was Mable Littleton. She was from Atlanta, Georgia. Also, she
was my grandmother’s niece. I lived with them from the eighth grade until I finished high school.

I finished high school in 1945 and I was very, very happy. Of course, I told my mother and father that I wanted to go to the Bishop College. Bishop College was located in Marshall, Texas. I wanted to go to Bishop College because that’s the only college I really knew, Bishop College and Prairie View [A&M] College. My grandmother and our church supported Bishop College and of course my aunt, my daddy’s sister, Bessie Mitchell, went to Bishop College and [graduated]. She was a music major, too, but when she finished she did not stay in Texas. She went to Oklahoma and worked.

I chose Bishop College. I was very [excited] to go there because I was wanting to learn, learn, learn and move forward [in life, making many meaningful contributions to society]. When I got to Bishop College I met all these fine, brainy children from all over Texas. Some were from overseas. One person was from Panama, Dr. Hedley Lennon. He is a medical doctor now and I am expecting him to come and visit with me in the next few weeks. We’ve always had a good relationship.
When I got to Bishop I majored in elementary education; I minored in history and I also had a minor in music, piano. I could not really do a good job in my minor in music because you had to [spend many hours] practicing. Then, I was [majoring] in elementary education and I had to do a lot of reading and going to the library and also [studying] history. When I got to my junior year in college I had to level off and leave piano alone if I wanted to make good grades in my major and minor. So I stopped taking piano lessons. My piano teacher was Eunice Chambers. She's passed away now. She was an excellent [teacher].

When I came out of college I was fortunate. My first job was teaching in Hearne, Texas. I taught the fifth grade. But let me back up to my practice teaching before I came out of Bishop.

I did my practice teaching in Pittsburg, Texas, for six weeks. We had to do our practice teaching, [which was also called student teaching]. My major professor was Frances Wallace. I did my practice [teaching under her supervision].

[End of Track 1. Begin Track 2]
Adams: --teaching under Dr. Christine Benton Cash. She was teaching graduate courses at Bishop, and when I was assigned to go to school to do my practice teaching my college professors sent me to her. I had to go with her.

I wondered, "Why send me to Dr. Cash?" She was tough. I didn’t know anything about it, but I would hear from the graduate students how tough she was. I didn’t want to go. "Why would she send me there?" She sent me and I had to live in the home with Dr. Christine Cash.

[As it] turned out she was just like a mother to me. When I got there she said, "Estelle, tell me about yourself." I told her I was from the country and gave her my history. She said, "Okay, I’m going to let you do your student teaching with the fifth graders. Now, what I want to know [is] can you cook?" I said, "Yes, I can." She said, "Well, I want you to get up in the morning, [prepare breakfast for me, my husband], and you. Then we’ll have to be at school at 7:00." [Dr. Cash] was the principal and the superintendent. This was a private school in [Pittsburg, Texas], the country. I would get up in the morning and [prepare]
the breakfast. We would eat, clean up the kitchen, and go across the street to the school.

Finally she found out that I could drive a car. She said, "You can drive?" I said, "Yes, I can, but I don’t have a license." She said, "That’s all right, you won’t need a license here. Just ensure that you don’t have a wreck." I ended up as her chauffeur [laughter]. I enjoyed that. Of course, I had so many days that I had to do my student teaching, then some days I would travel with her because she was always speaking, [lecturing], and teaching.

I really got to be her pet and I’ll never forget Christine Benton Cash because she taught me everything about [being] a teacher: how [you] should teach, what [you] should teach, [and how to handle discipline. There were several skills she taught me. For example, she taught me how to develop a] teacher’s register. She taught me how to do the principal’s report. Then she also taught me how to do the superintendent’s report because she was also a superintendent.

I learned [many beneficial skills under her guidance that prepared me for] first year of teaching. My principal’s [name was] Mr. Benny Murray. They would
always pull out the young teachers and tell them how to do the register. Three of us new [were] coming in. He pulled us out and told us, "Now, we're going to work on the register. I'll show you how to do a register." I didn't say a word because I knew how to do the register. He went on through with the process and told us how to do it. The first six weeks we had to turn the registers in for our report. I had a perfect score. Nothing was wrong with my report.

He said, "Estelle, who helped you with your register? You didn't make not one mistake. Who helped you?" I said, "I did it myself." "You did this yourself?," [he asked]. "Yes, I did. I know how to do a register." Then I told him about Mrs. Christine Cash.

My second year I had to leave that school because the ADA [average daily attendance; enrollment] went down. The last teachers hired would be the teachers to [be released]. There was a vacancy in the Wheelock school where I grew up and finished. I went and applied and the trustee gave me that job as [the] sixth grade teacher. I never did like [teaching] the fifth and sixth grade children. I never did like
[teaching] those children but I had to take them because I needed the job.

I stayed in Wheelock for two years. I didn’t like that because I had to be there at 7:00 a.m., I had to make fires and help the other teachers make fires. We had to see that the room was swept before we left. We had to be sure that the boys would go out and get the wood that was cut for the school [and] have it there so when we came in the next morning we had wood to make the fire. I got tired of making fires so I applied for a job in Bryan, Texas, and I got on as a teacher in Bryan, Texas.

I told the superintendent, “I hope that you will let me teach the seventh or eighth grade.” I said, “I like [those] grades. They are just good students. I like to work with the seventh and eighth grade.” He said, “But you’re so young. Those kids are almost larger than you are.” I said, “Give me a chance. I want to work with the seventh grade.” He said, “Well, I tell you, we’re going to give you the seventh grade.” At that time you taught language arts, social studies, science, all of that. I started teaching the seventh grade and I taught the seventh grade and eighth grade until I retired.
I worked thirty-seven years as a middle school teacher. I ended up in middle school and I enjoyed it. My daughter, Deri, [who also became a teacher], when she started teaching she didn’t like middle school and elementary school. She wanted high school. She’s an English major. She worked with middle school [one year]. She liked [teaching] high school. When she had children to go to school and finish, Miya and Sherard, her twin children, they like [teaching] high school. I don’t know why we didn’t go back to the elementary school. It has always been middle school and high school.

I liked middle school because those children are making a change. I like to see them change and see them grow, what they’re thinking about and what they’re doing, and I just love my children. I’d always tell the principal--sometimes he would come in and we’d sit down and talk. He would always say, “Ms. Adams, I tell you, if I had fifty teachers like you I would never worry.” I just enjoyed it until I retired from middle school.

I taught history. I love Texas history. Children love to hear me talk, but in the meantime I was very strict. The children would tell them, “Don’t go to
Mrs. Adams's room because she's tough. She's tough."
I would tell them when they'd get in there. I said, "I'm tough, but you've got to study." I had a little slogan I had all my children to learn when they would come in. I said, "I want all of you to remember this: 'The more you read, the more you know; the less you read, the less you know.'" Everybody had to know that the next day when they came back to my room. That worked very well.

There was one boy, Donald Epps, I believe that was his name. I'll never forget him. I was just talking about the Alamo, and the Texas flag, and the bells, and this and that. He was just sitting there looking. I said, "Donald, are you listening?" "Yes, ma'am." I said, "But you look like you are not listening." He said, "You know why? I'm so tired of you talking about the dead people. I don't like it when you talk about dead people." [Laughs softly] I said, "Donald, this is history. We have to talk about the past. This is history. You have to know about who helped build this country and the outstanding people, and you're going to be one of them too, and when you have passed away, they're going to talk about you,
too." He was such an interesting kid. I will never forget him.

Did you know, about three months ago this kid passed away. I belong to Good Street Baptist Church, and I have two students in the church in there that I taught when I came to Dallas in 1961. They came to me and told me that Donald had passed away.

I really enjoyed my teaching from the time I started teaching up until now. I did do some substitute work, but I stopped and I started out in another direction, community service, and I also give a lot of service back to Wheelock, Texas--

[End of Track 2. Begin Track 3]

Adams: --where I was born and raised. I’ve done a lot of service there because my parents always told me, “Whenever you get where you’re going, never forget where you came from. Go back and give as much service as you can to help continue to build that community, because you’re in the country and they need all the help that they can get.” So I always go back and help. That’s what I’ve been doing for years.
I go back to church there. They have church gatherings which are called homecomings. I [help] raise money for the upkeep of the church. I also developed family reunions, the Mitchell’s family reunion. That’s a big event that we always have, on the nineteenth of June. That is a big day. We have our family reunion and we raise all the money that we can with the families [to assist the church. The reunion ends on a Sunday].

That Sunday we go to church and worship there with the members of the church and we leave our donation. We always try to raise at least $1,000 to leave the church. That will help the church pay for their utilities because there are not a lot of people there. Because all the people during the war [World War II] moved away, and only the homeowners are still there now that’s carrying the church. Now, today, it’s not but four members at the church. With the pastor and his wife, that’s six. So, you know, they are really hurting because they are old too. I do what I can to provide and help my people. I love going back.

One of these days I hope that I can find some funds to help restore it. The church is in need of being restored, jacking it up and putting concrete
beams under it and moving the old planks and whatever that’s under there. I would love to find some money. I’m working on that now to see if I can help this church. Anything else?

Smith: That’s great. Now let me take you back a little bit. You and your family still own the land that your grandparents bought?

Adams: Right.

Smith: Can you tell me how your grandparents came to purchase this land? Were they from Wheelock?

Adams: No. My grandparents came from Panthersville, Georgia—Atlanta, Georgia, and Decatur, Georgia, in that area. My grandfather and grandmother, [Sam and Lucy Mitchell], from what I heard my parents, [Elijah and Amanda Mitchell], and other relatives tell, [my grandfather] was not satisfied in Georgia. He heard about Texas and Oklahoma. So he decided that he would gather up his children and leave [Georgia and move to Texas or Oklahoma].

Smith: Okay.

Adams: So from what I understand, they left. They left in a covered wagon. I think that it was six or seven children that he had, and when they made it to the Mississippi River, they had to cross. They put the
wagon and all the children on this ferry and they crossed the Mississippi River. They were really trying to go to Oklahoma, but they veered away and ended up in Texas. When he got to Texas, they ended up in Bryan, Texas, in Brazos County.

Smith: Okay.

Adams: He was on a plantation but the name of the plantation, I'm not sure of. He stayed there on the plantation with his family. They farmed. In the meantime, he was looking for some land to purchase. Where he got the money from, I don't know. They told him about Wheelock, Texas, in Roberts County. Brazos County had blackland, which was rich. Sandy land is poor land. He chose to take the poor land because he didn't have the money to buy the rich land. That's why he ended up in Wheelock, Texas, in Robertson County.

He came and purchased 256 acres of land. When he purchased this land I suppose they built a home there, and he cultivated this land with those children. He had a peach orchard. He farmed and raised vegetables. That's what he would sell. He had a horse, mules, and a wagon. On weekends my father said that they would gather up these vegetables, put them in the wagon, and they would go to Hearne, Texas, which was nine
miles from where they lived, sell these goods, saved the money, and kept paying [for the land]. Within three years, he had paid the land off. I'm trying to find out how much this land was, so I'm going back to the court house and seeing if I can find how much did he pay for this land--because he paid for this land in three years.

Smith: Yes.

Adams: He was very successful, hardworking with all the children. After that he got sick with heart trouble and he went to a specialist in Marlin, Texas, and they worked on him off and on until he passed away.

That left my grandmother, [Lucy Mitchell], and five children. The other five children had married and gone on. The five [remaining] children were my father, Elijah Mitchell; his brother, Norman Mitchell; his sister, Ethel; another sister, Celestine; and another brother, Sam Jr. We called him Sam, but he was Samuel, Jr. Those were the five children that were left.

He [raised] a lot of cotton and he had been successful enough to put two rent houses on this place. He had two families living on this place helping to cultivate and raise cotton, corn, [and]
sorghum, which was used for making syrup, ribbon cane that made syrup.

My grandmother, [Lucy], could not read and write. Lucy made those children go to school and learn how to read and write. They would be her interpreter. She finished paying for this land after my grandfather, [Sam], passed. That's why today we still own all of [the land]. All of my cousins are still there. They own [their share of the] 256 acres of land. I know they still own it because there are no [other] owners in there, only the Mitchells.

My grandfather told his children that the reason he left Georgia [was] he didn't see any growth. He wanted them to be in an environment of learning and growth. That's why he chose to leave from there.

When he left--my grandmother left a lot of relatives back there, but my grandfather was a slave child so we are still looking for his relatives, because when his mother and father were sold as slaves, the person that purchased his father carried him on to Mississippi. My grandfather, Samuel Mitchell, stayed in the vicinity of Atlanta, Georgia, and he went to the Mitchells' Plantation, he, his mother, [and his brother, Oscar].
His mother died when he was twelve years old on this plantation. The two boys stayed there, I suppose, until they were grown. They married and they ended up in Atlanta, Georgia, and this brother died at a young age. Therefore, my grandfather married twice—his first wife, and then his second wife was Lucy. He married her and came to Texas.

[End of Track 3. Begin Track 4]

Adams: As of today we have not been able to find out his father, where [in Mississippi] he landed. We knew that [his mother] passed away. So we are still trying to locate his father—what happened to him. His name? I didn’t get [his name] because I was late collecting this information. That’s why I don’t really know too much about him, but I do know that the family was always concerned about his side of the family because he had no relatives, but my grandmother had plenty of relatives. Does that answer your question?

Smith: Yes, ma’am. That’s interesting.

Now, when were you first aware of race?

Adams: When I was first aware of race? I guess I would say when I went to school, because where I lived,
Wheelock, Texas--I knew about race when I went to school, because there was a white school and a black school. I knew about that. I always heard my mother and father say, "You're segregated but you're still equal. The Bible says you were born equal. You treat everybody right. Don't mistreat anyone; don't pick at anyone." They were telling us this as children. "Don't pick at anyone, white or black."

Now, where we lived, obviously on the left side was the Mitchells' land, then on the right side was the whites' land. They were the McCulloughs and the Mosses, those were our neighbors. About three miles away there were the Killough's and about six miles away there were the Mitchells, now these were white. Of course, there were two or three plantations. The Dunn plantation and the Seals' plantation. Mostly on these plantations were blacks and Mexicans. Now on the Dunn plantation, they had quite a few whites, too, that lived on their plantation.

But we were taught that you do not mistreat anyone. You treat everybody alike. We knew that we had white neighbors. We knew that the blacks were on this side and the whites were on this side. They knew
it too and we never, never had a fight. We always got along like a family. That’s when I was a child.

Whatever happened to the McCulloughs and the Mosses that were our next-door neighbors, my mother and father would give support. Whatever happened to the Mitchells and the Dunns, they would come and give support. Up until this day, today, those heirs are still there. The third generation of McCulloughs and the Mosses are still there. I go and visit them. I had lunch with them the day before yesterday. We’re still like a family.

We would go and visit their churches if we wanted to. We were welcome. They would come and visit our churches. They were welcome. Whatever happened to one family, it was everybody’s. When one got sick everybody was there to give support.

I never heard of anyone saying that they tried to lynch a black or fight the blacks. There was one family that moved in there from a plantation that was kind of on the racist side. That family finally moved away. During those days, when I was going to school, they had a white bus to carry the white children to school, and of course we walked because they didn’t furnish us with a bus. These kids were on that bus,
and when they would pass by us they would throw rocks out of the bus and the bus driver found out who was throwing the rocks. It was these kids that had moved in there.

My father went to the superintendent and reported this. They immediately pulled them out and put them in line: "We don't have this here. We get along here. If you throw another rock at those children you will not ride that bus anymore." So that stopped that family from doing that. From then on we never had any trouble, never to this day. We are all still friendly and happy.

Smith: Good. Now am I correct in thinking that after you worked at the Wheelock County School you went to George Washington Carver [School]?

Adams: George Washington Carver in Bryan, Texas [from September 1952 to September 1961].

Smith: In Bryan, Texas, and you were there for [ten] years?

Adams: I worked there [for ten years].

Smith: Okay. What was that like?

Adams: It was a segregated school, of course. It was very good. We had I think around sixty teachers. We had a principal; we didn’t have assistant principals during those days. We went from the first grade to the
seventh grade and I taught the seventh grade. Math, history, science, whatever, the teacher had to teach it, all but music and physical education. We had a music teacher and a physical education teacher. But we had to teach all of [the major] subjects. We had to do a good job.

Before I left they were talking about integration, getting us ready for integration. So our principal said, "We’ve got to be ready because it’s going to be a change. We don’t know when it’s going to be, but it’s going to be a change. Nothing remains the same." His name was Colquit Yancey. He said, "Now, what we’ve got to do--all of you that have not been back to school and you that do not have a master’s degree, we all need to get out and get our master’s degree." That was in 1957 [pause], or it might have been 1956.

We all decided that we would go to Prairie View, which was about--I don’t know the mileage, but it was about an hour-and-a-half drive from Bryan, Texas, to Prairie View. We carpooled and started working on our master’s [degrees], and we would go in the summertime. I received my master’s in 1961. I had completed my master’s in elementary education and minored in
special education. I taught that seventh grade history two years because then they started giving us our major field to work in, so they put me straight into history because that was my major, Texas history.

I was very successful in Bryan, Texas. George Washington Carver [Elementary], the school, is still there now. After I left from there I came to Dallas, [Texas].

Smith: Okay. Now while you were at—let me clarify one thing. What was for you guys the push to get a master’s? Change was coming, but how would a master’s help?

Adams: Well, we knew that the change was coming and you had to be prepared. We knew that just with a bachelor’s degree, it would not be enough with the change [which would force us to compete against white teachers for jobs].

Smith: Okay.

Adams: You’ve got to be on top of it. So, we decided that we would just all chip in and get with the change. That’s the only way we could do it, to go back to school and get a master’s degree. Get as much as you could get in your major and your minor to help you be ready for the change, because you didn’t know how it was going
to change. So we all decided we would go back and we all got our master’s degree.

It was a lot of schooling every day. We drove from Bryan to Prairie View every day. We were there. Classes started at 7:00 in the morning. We were there [from] 7:00 a.m. [until noon].

[End of Track 4. Begin Track 5]

Adams: Classes would be out a noon. We would get out at noon, and we would [drive] back home [to Bryan, Texas].

What we did was, which was excellent: we didn’t have a library to study from because we’d just left the college campus. We couldn’t check those books out because there were so many people using them. You had to go to the library and study. We went to the librarian at Texas A&M University. Prairie View is a sister school to Texas A&M because it’s a state school. Prairie View is a state school; Texas A&M is a state school, so they gave us permission to come and study in the library there at Texas A&M, which was to our advantage. Fantastic!

So that’s how we really made it, with Texas A&M’s library, because in the afternoon we’d get home and
feed our children and settle down, we would always—most of the time—my mother-in-law would keep my children and we would go to the library about 2:00 or 3:00 in the afternoon. We’d stay there and study. Then we’d come back home and fix our dinner and feed the children, put them back to bed. Then we’d go back and study again. Get back in bed and be ready to go again the next morning.

It was a beautiful experience because Texas A&M was so good to us. It was not integrated, but they were good to let us come and study in their library. I guess because Prairie View was a state school. We went there and studied so we didn’t have any problems.

Smith: So you were married by this time?

Adams: Yes. I got married in 1951.

Smith: Okay, and where did you meet your husband?

Adams: I met my husband—I knew my husband [from Wheelock]. My husband is Chester Woodland Adams. He came from a very good family, an educated family; they were full of music and morticians.

Smith: Music and morticians. [Laughs]

Adams: I knew him, but he was two grades ahead of me because his grandmother was a teacher and she carried him to school with her when he was a little kid. He was two
grades ahead of us, so that meant that he finished
two years before I did. He finished at sixteen and
they sent him to Philadelphia, [Pennsylvania], to go
to Lincoln University, which was an all-boys school.
I finished in 1945 and he finished in 1943.

I knew his family and his mother, [Thelma Keatts
Adams], was a great musician. His grandmother--they
all taught music. When I went to college, I came back,
I knew he was in Philadelphia because I knew his
sister and brother and they would talk. I said, “Where
is Chester?” They said, “He’s gone.” At that time the
war broke. I think it was the Korean War. They pulled
him out of Lincoln University and sent him to war. He
went to Korea, and I think he stayed two years there.
Then he came back to Lincoln. He was studying to be
a dentist. He wanted to be a dentist.

He came back and stayed there until his junior
year, ran out of money and didn’t have any money. He
had a job but it wasn’t enough to support him, and
this was a private school. He decided that he would
come home and work that year and then go back to
Lincoln. He did come home. That’s the same year I came
home.

Smith: What year was that?
Adams: That was 1949. [Editor’s note: In 1949, Mr. Adams most likely would have been drafted to participate in the post-World War II occupation of Japan.]

Smith: Okay.

Adams: I [had] just finished college. I came home and started teaching and we had a football game in Hearne, [Texas], where I was teaching. He and another boy, Dr. William Hammond, came to Hearne for this football game. I was there at the hot dog stand getting me a hot dog. I looked up and I saw those boys. William Hammond was my classmate. He was also at Lincoln with Chester.

I said, "What are you all doing here?" He said, "What are you doing here?" Of course, we talked and shared our whereabouts. I told them that I would be home, that I’m working here. Chester told me that he didn’t have any money so he came home and got a job working at Texas A&M as a custodian cleaning buildings. William Hammond went back to Lincoln because his father was a doctor there in Bryan, Texas, Dr. Hammond. He had the money to go back to continue his study, but Chester had to go to work.

Then we started seeing each other. There was nothing to go to but basketball games and football
games. We just started talking and fell in love and we got married.

He started going to Prairie View to continue his studies, to try to finish. We got married. Then we had [two] children. That stopped it. He didn’t have a decent job. He started working at American Laundry and Dry Cleaning. That was a better job than the custodial service at Texas A&M. We were hoping that that would generate enough money for him to go back to Prairie View, but that didn’t do it. Then with my little salary, that didn’t do it with children.

We decided that we would come to Dallas. We knew that TWU [Texas Woman’s University] was there and we knew that there was integration. He could come and go to school there, because integration had already moved in and the blacks were going to TWU [and the University of North Texas, then called North Texas State University].

When we got here [in 1961], they had just started hiring blacks to work in the post office. Most of the blacks that we knew were getting on at the post office. [Chester] said, “I’m going to get on at the post office. I’m going to take the test and get on at
the post office and that'll be a good job for me to get started. Then I can get back to school." He did.

He took the test. The first test he took he made a 72. One boy had already gotten on. He said, "Chester, you took that test. You made a 72? You didn't study?" He said, "What? I didn't have anything to study." "You're supposed to go on down to the post office and pick up the material and study that test. You did wonderful, but you need to go back and take it because the higher your score, the faster you will get on." The test came back up in six months.

He went down and got the material and he studied for the test. He made a 92 and he got on during the Christmas holidays as a substitute and he did so well that at the end of January--they told him that's when the substitutes would leave--they said, "Chester, we're going to keep you on because you've done such a beautiful job and we need you." He stayed on and he retired from the post office thirty-seven years later. He stayed there. He never did go back to school. So we made this our home. We moved into this house in 1963.

Smith: 1963?
Adams: 1963. We moved into this home with two little children and we've been here ever since.

Smith: Okay.

Adams: Of course, he passed away seven years ago. He passed away on March 2, 2007.

Smith: I'm sorry.

Adams: Yes. We had a beautiful life. He was a very smart man, well-read. Of course, in our years of raising a family we did the best we could. I think that we were very successful because we had two children, a boy and a girl. My boy, Chester Woodland Adams, Jr. was a very smart boy. He had a massive heart attack and passed away thirty-two years ago. He was thirty-two years old when he passed.

Smith: I'm sorry.

Adams: He always wanted to be a mortician because my husband's uncle, his brother, his cousin, they were all morticians. He wanted to be a mortician. We guided him into education. He took that. "I don't like education. I'm not going to do that." That's Chester Jr. [We said], "Well, Chester, you need that degree because you don't know how successful you're going to be as a mortician." He took that. He said, "I think I'll go to Prairie View--"
Adams: "--and I’ll get my master’s as a counselor. I might do well in counseling." So he went to Prairie View, he received his master’s in counseling and guidance. He worked one year at Wilmer Hutchins [High School, in Dallas] as a counselor. He came back. He said, "Mama, I can’t stand those children. I am going to mortuary school." So Chester, [Sr.] said, "Well, get started and go on, because that’s your calling."

He had just completed his courses. He had gotten his certification and he had just married. [He was] married for three months. He was a bookkeeper. At that time they had what you call a Cedar’s [?] program here in Dallas. It was downtown right off of Elm Street. That was where his office was. He was a bookkeeper for Cedar [?].

He also worked at Lott’s Funeral Home with the embalming and all that kind of thing. On weekends or whenever they had funerals he always directed the funerals because they liked him very much. He did a lot to build that funeral home because of his personality. He had personality-plus.
He also decided, "One of these days I’m going to be a rich man." So he decided that he would do income taxes. When that time [of year] came he would do income taxes. He was [also] a notary. We would always warn him, "Chester you’re doing too much. Take it easy." But he was just active and going.

One good thing--you know, to lose a child at thirty-two years old, and he’s been a very successful young man. No problems, nothing. All at once, he had gone that day for a funeral in Tyler, Texas. He came back and he called me, "Mama, we had a big funeral." He’d always call and tell me about those things because he knew I didn’t like that mortuary [business]. I said, "Chester, you’ve got to get up in the morning and go to work. You need to go to bed and get you some rest." I said, "It’s 11:00." He did. At 1:00 a.m. the phone rang. That was his wife, he’d been married three months: "Meet us at Parkland. Chester just had a heart attack." That was it.

The good that he did--it was beautiful, because when we had his funeral, the wake--he was an Alpha [Phi Alpha]; he liked that fraternity. When we had the wake there was no room in the place for his wake, there were so many people young and old. He was a
lover of old people. All old people that were living around here, he would always go sit with them and talk. Everybody loved him. At his funeral, our church holds over 1,000 people, and it was packed.

I just wondered. You're so hurt you just wonder, "Why? Why? Why?" The second Sunday--the first Sunday I didn't go to church, the second Sunday I went. My pastor said, "Come into the office. I want to talk to you." Before that Sunday, my principal--I was teaching then at Ewell D. Walker Middle School. Dr. [E.D.] Walker was the assistant superintendent here. He's the one that hired me from Bryan, [Texas].

My principal was named Mr. Quass [?]. He was from Yoakum, Texas. He came into the room and I don't know how I was looking. The children were busy and he walked into the room. He stood there and he said, "Ms. Adams, come here just a minute." So I came to the door where he was. He said, "Ms. Adams, you've got to get some counseling." He said, "You're really under a lot and I see it. You need counseling." I said, "Where do I go to get it?" I said, "I'm praying every day. I don't know what to do." He said, "Talk to your pastor. You need some counseling." I said, "Okay. I will."
So that Sunday when I went to church the pastor told me, "Before you leave come by my office. I want to talk to you." I did. He said, "Ms. Adams, let me tell you one thing. You are under stress. But remember this, of all the funerals that I have preached and gone through with, this was one that really got me. This boy came here when he was nine years old in this church, and I don’t ever remember a Sunday that he was at this church that he didn’t come into the office and say 'Hello, Reverend Clark.' He loved old people.” He said, "You be thankful that this boy was a Christian boy. He died in the church. I’ve never seen a young person’s service so beautiful as his service. We’re going to keep praying for you and you’re going to be all right. Remember, Chester was a fine kid.”

Then of course, Deri, [my daughter], had twins. The kids were three years old when he died. Well, we made it through that. Of course my husband had a light heart attack during that period of time but he pulled out of that so we made it. Now we have twins, a boy and a girl. Miya is here in Dallas. She’s in administration here in Dallas. Sherard, her twin brother, is in Houston, Texas. He’s teaching at Jack Yates High School, eleventh grade math and special
education. He also is an assistant coach at Jack Yates High School. Now he’s studying to take the principal’s examination.

They both have master’s degrees in administration and supervision. So he’s going to take the test, I suppose, this summer to try to move up in administration. He said that he might want to be a principal but he’s not sure because he likes coaching. So I don’t know.

Smith: We’ll see.

Adams: We’ll see.

Smith: So, during the time that you’re teaching, just to go back a little bit, the Brown v. Board decision was passed.

Adams: Right.

Smith: You must have felt something about that being involved in education. What did you think about that?

Adams: I thought it was great! Many, many of my co-workers were afraid. They didn’t know how they were going to fare because we knew that we would be transferred. You wouldn’t stay in the same school. They were going to transfer you to different schools, and they didn’t know how it would come out. But I didn’t worry about
it because I grew up with white people. I knew the boundaries. I didn’t worry about it.

So when we got started into integration, of course, we had to have workshops. We had a lot of workshops; very good workshops. Getting the teachers ready to meet the parents and meet the children. Getting you prepared to teach those children, white or black, anybody. You’ve got to teach them. They had courses, too, that were going on that you could take to help you improve and be ready. I didn’t take it because I didn’t feel like I needed the program because I just didn’t have that animosity in my heart. I never had it. I didn’t go. So when we had our workshops, the first workshop that we had was [led by] Mr. Quass. When I transferred from that school I went to his school, which was Ewell D. Walker Middle School.

Smith: In Dallas?

Adams: In Dallas, Texas. I must say that Dr. Walker was an outstanding assistant superintendent and a Christian. Dr. Walker could sing; I think he was a baritone or tenor. I believe he was a tenor. He also taught a Sunday school class. I would enjoy it when I would run across him when I would go down to the
administration building. I always would stop by because he hired me.

Smith: And what school was this?

Adams: This was at--

[End of Track 6. Begin Track 7]

Adams: --N.W. Harllee School.

Smith: Okay.

Adams: No! That was the second school. He hired me at M.B. Lamar Elementary School.

Smith: Okay.

Adams: My first school in Dallas was M.B. Lamar. [Then] N.W. Harllee, John B. Hood, and then Ewell D. Walker, and then Franklin Middle School right off of Central.

Smith: Okay.

Adams: I retired at Franklin.

Smith: All right.

Adams: They moved us--they closed Ewell D. Walker because it was open-[concept] and it was a dangerous school for the children. They closed that school and sent us to Franklin [Middle] School, and that's where I retired.

Smith: Okay.
Adams: When we had this workshop—we were ready to go to work now. Integration set in. We had the workshop and they had every teacher, I think it was about eighty of us, you had to get up and tell what you like, what you don’t like, whatever, what you think about it. So we did. I was the last one to speak.

I let everybody talk. I just listen to them. I just wanted to hear what they had to say. [Laughing] Mr. Quass said to me, “Ms. Adams, you’re just about the last one. We’re saving the last for”—whatever that saying was.

Smith: Best for last.

Adams: Best for last! I got up. I told them who I was and where I came from, which colleges I had been through. I told them I didn’t have any [harsh] feelings against anybody. I don’t know why we would have this discussion because we’re all children of God, one nation, and all we have to do is learn to get along with each other. I had no feelings. I can work with anybody. I love everybody. I don’t ever want to be caught with a bad feeling about any person, and I’m ready to go to work. Did you know they clapped? [Laughter] It just didn’t bother me. I feel like today I can get along with anybody.
Smith: How did the other teachers feel about it?

Adams: Most of them, after the workshop was over, everybody felt comfortable. We just came in as a team and we worked together. We were all happy. No bad feelings. We just got along. We didn’t have any problems. In all of these schools that I went to--they really integrated when we got to N.W. Harllee. That’s when they started moving us around. Then when I got to C.F. Carr [Elementary] School, that was the big shift then. I guess they were seeing how well we got along over here, then they started shifting us around.

But the funniest thing about it is they said that they were picking the good teachers for the white schools and the bad teachers for the black schools. They asked me and I said, “No, I’m not going to even entertain that [possibility]. I don’t believe that. They’re just moving us around in our field, to be sure you’re in your right field and you’re going to be able to handle what you’re teaching.”

Smith: The other teachers thought they were moving them--

Adams: Yes. The other teachers thought that. Some of them did. They really did. I told them, “No, I’m not going to entertain that because I don’t believe it. They’ve got to be sure that we are in our major and minor
field. Therefore, I'm not going to entertain this. Wherever they send me, I'm going to work because I've got to work."

Smith: How did the parents respond to it?

Adams: The parents were very happy. They were very happy. Most black parents were very happy because it was a step forward for their children. A better way of life, up-to-date textbooks, the curriculum was geared to nothing but learning, and they were just very happy.

The whites felt the same--because I had white students, I had Spanish students, I had black students. I didn't have any problems. I've never had a problem with the parents. We've always gotten along.

When I started out doing my student teaching, the first thing Dr. Cash told me was, "You know your students the first day of school. You get the parents name, the telephone number, the addresses. The next two weeks you go out and visit those homes so that the parents will know you and you will know the parents." I did that until it was almost time for me to retire. I always kept a book with my children's parents' names, wherever they were staying I knew where they were. If they would act up I said, "Okay. I will see you tomorrow. I'll be there." "Oh, no!" I
said, "Oh, yeah. I'll be there." They knew I was coming.

Of course, you know the parents always cooperated when they saw the teacher was interested. "This teacher is trying to help me with my bad kid." I didn't have any problems. Never! Always, because I would go and visit and then sometimes I would ask the parents, "Come up and visit. Just come and sit in the classroom and listen to these kids. You need to come and see what's going on." You've got to invite them to come in, too.

Then when you're going to have birthday parties or Halloween parties or whatever, give them that responsibility to do something for the children, have your little parties. Make that available for the parents. Let them know that you care. You're teaching them, you want them to learn and you're successful. I didn't have any problems, but I started out good.

[Laughter]

Smith: How did the kids take integration?

Adams: Oh, listen, some of the children were happy. Most of them were happy, most of them. You could tell those that were not really happy because they would cluster up. They would go here, they'd go there, especially
on the playground with their friends. That's how you really tell how they're getting along, out there on that playground.

That's the first thing they told us, to watch them when they're playing, [watch] how they conduct themselves on the playground. Of course, all the teachers had to be out there watching the kids on the playground too until they finally stopped that. Then the physical education teachers had that responsibility.

We would go out and you could tell when they were unhappy because they'd be in a cluster here and a cluster there, the whites here, the blacks here, and the Spanish [sic] here. All right now, when they would get in a fight, this is really interesting to see what they're going through and how they're thinking. If he's white, you're Spanish, and I'm black--you get in a fight. When they get in a fight you're going to have a little gang that's going to help you. If he's white, these blacks and Mexicans will team up and get him. If he's Spanish, the whites and the blacks would team up and get him. That's the way these kids would do. You have to be smart enough
to talk to them, stop them, keep them out of those things.

In the seventh and eighth grade those kids—you know, they’re big boys and girls. They would really fight. They’d fist-fight, really fist-fight. Of course, the principals, assistant principals, and the basketball coaches would be very good with them. They would take charge and stop them and that worked. You would have fights sometimes on the buses, because they all rode the buses, but most of the time they handled it real well.

It’s a different day now. When I was teaching we had a handle on these kids but now the kids are loose. I don’t know how it’s doing now, but when we were coming on, up until I came out in 1987, when I retired, we had a handle on it. We kept good order and peace with these children. It’s a little different now.

Smith: Yes, over time.

Adams: Yes.

Smith: Definitely. Now, was Dallas the first large city that you lived in?

Adams: Dallas was the first large city that I lived in.
Smith: What were your feelings about it when you first came to Dallas?

Adams: My feelings were because of my mother and father. They really didn’t want me to move from Bryan to here because it was from a little town to a city. They were always [saying], “I hate to see you go and you’re carrying the children there.” Deri was eight [-years old]--

[End of Track 7. Begin Track 8]

Adams: --and [my son, the late] Chester [W. Adams, Jr.,] was nine. “Carrying those children to the big city and [exposing them to] all those bad children.” They just built up a picture that made me think that I may not be able to make it with the children. I said, “Well, I’ve got to go because my husband has to have a decent job. He’s not making any money here and you know teachers are not getting any money. So I’ve got to move and I’ve got a job. I’m going.”

Chester was going to start working in the cleaners because that’s what he was doing in Bryan, Texas. “We’ve just got to move, Momma and Papa. I just can’t stay here with this. You’ve got to have a better
way of life." "Oh, but you have to be sure that the children aren’t playing with these children." They just really didn’t want us to go, but we came on anyhow.

Smith: Did you like Dallas once you were here?

Adams: Yes, I liked Dallas.

Smith: Yes.

Adams: Yes, but I had a brother and a sister living here.

Smith: Oh, okay.

Adams: So, I had visited Dallas several times. That made it very easy for me to like it, because I had been here before. A friend of mine who was a principal in Houston, he had just gotten on; he tried to lure us to come to Houston. I didn’t like Houston because they always say in Houston it’s raining there all the time and it’s storming. It just rains all the time in Houston. I always heard that, but I never visited Houston so I never did really like it. I knew that Dallas was fine because my brother, [Marion Mitchell], and sister, [Vera Phillips], were here.

Smith: So you had some family here already.

Adams: Yes.
Smith: Definitely. I know you’ve kept up with the history of Wheelock. As a native, how do you feel about its portrayal?

Adams: The way I feel about Wheelock? I think Wheelock is the greatest city in Texas and in the United States. It’s a beautiful [town]. It’s a little country town. Now, Wheelock is building back up because the war broke it up because all those families left and went to war and they had to close down all the plantations because all those boys had left. The families moved away. That just broke Wheelock up and the people that owned the grocery stores—we had D.B. Love’s drugstore, we had Oren Melton’s grocery store, we had a shop that made anything. [Whatever] broke down or anything, this man could fix it. We had a nice little post office. It was a nice little town.

After the war, I’d say in the past twenty years, Wheelock is coming back alive because a lot of that plantation land they sold to people that wanted to come into the community and live. Of course, Mr. Killough owned most of the land around there and he sold a lot of his acreage. Fifteen acres is what he was selling and the people really came and bought that land up. And, of course, the old families that lived
there like the Mosses, all those, their children are coming back and building houses in Wheelock, so Wheelock is going real good.

So the U.S. [Postal Service] came in and built us a brick post office. That's the only thing that's there now. That little old post office is still standing, historical. We have a new post office, a brick post office. That's the only thing we have in Wheelock. But Wheelock is still there and we have a [white] Methodist Church and a [white] Baptist Church and we have plenty of people attending both services. We have [a black Baptist Church,] a fire station. They built the fire station. The old white school is still there. They use that for community gatherings if anyone wants to use it. Then they built another community center, and it is really nice. You can go have your birthday parties there, you can have weddings; it's just really nice. You need to come and see Wheelock sometime.

Smith: I should.

Adams: Yes, you need to see Wheelock.

Smith: Now you are writing about Wheelock, right?

Adams: Yes. I'm writing.

Smith: You're doing research.
Adams: I’m doing research on the Wheelock colored school. I’m doing research on that. Now I have not really completed the history of the black cemetery. Our cemetery is all in one block, the whites on this side [gestures] and the blacks on this side [gestures] and the Spanish on this side [gestures]. We all have always buried together. We keep up our sides. We have our own organizations, but the Spanish people left and they integrated with the whites. They pay their membership dues [for upkeep of the cemetery] to the whites because it’s not a lot of them buried there.

With the black people, we have 132 families buried into that cemetery. We have cemetery meetings all the time, twice a year. We just got through raffling off a quilt that one of the members of the community gave us, a quilt. We just raffled that off last week, which was June 28, and I think we raised over $2,000 with the raffle.

Smith: Wow.

Adams: That was a great thing for us, and we keep our cemetery clean. We have it cut once a month, and if it needs it before [then], we have that cut. That’s the cemetery; I have just about completed writing the history of the cemetery.
I also wrote about our churches. We had two Baptist churches there, we had one African Methodist [Episcopal], and we had one Church of God in Christ. All of them closed down but one, and that's New Hope Baptist Church. That's my church. So that church is still there. It has four members, the pastor and his wife. That's what's there now. I'm hoping I can find some funds to kind of remodel the church. I'm hoping it'll stay there another 100 years. I've done that [research].

We also had a bell that was there. The bell is over 200 years old from what they told me. It was down and I asked for help. Of course the Mitchell family had a family reunion and we raised money through the family reunion and friends and the community. It cost a little bit more than $3,000 to put [the bell] back up. So I did that and I wrote about the bell.

I'm in the process now of trying to write about my mother and father, [Elijah and Amanda Mitchell]. I did write a book about the Mitchell family, [my grandparents] Sam and Lucy Mitchell. It's mostly about their history, what I had gathered from the children, my aunties and uncles and a few relatives. I got that put together. It's more like an address
book because I’ve got their names and their addresses and telephone numbers. All of that is in that book.

So if I can, with the help of my dear friend—I hope that we can put this book together and have a nice little book about the Mitchell family. She is helping me trace Sam and Lucy Mitchell from Georgia, and she’s got a whole lot of good things. Her name is Shirley Sloat. I want to be sure I pronounce it correctly. That’s my dear friend. We’re in water aerobics together. It’s an exercise class and she has encouraged me so much to keep going: “You’re writing good, you’re doing good, keep going.” She has been really helping me. Then her dear friend, Mr. Ed Millis, he’s fantastic. They’re all right by my side urging me on. I’ve gotten a new start and I feel better, so I’m going to keep going.

Smith: Good. Having worked in education for so many years, when you think about the word “segregation” today in regards to education or just [to the] general population, what does that mean to you?

Adams: [Thinking that Smith asked for feelings about “education”] It means great. It means we’ll have a great country. Education, Christianity—you can’t get
around it. Education is the key thing. We should try
to educate all our people in this world.

[End of Track 8. Begin Track 9]

Adams: It'd be a better world. The more you know, the more
you grow. That's what we're all about now. All these
technicians, all these good things that they have
going now, all these brains just working. I like to
hear and see that. This is what's making America so
strong and great because they're moving forward.
They're thinking, not about today, they're thinking
fifty to 100 years from now. That's great. So they
have geared this education, this system, to that.

That's how we got to the moon too, because of
great minds. We are doing a great thing by integration
and working together and building America. That's
what it's all about. Cooperation, no hate, jealousy,
all of that cannot work together, you've got to be on
the same accord working for a better world. Each time
we meet, we meet for the good and it's going to be a
success. America is a great country. I like it. I like
it.
I have never liked to fly, but my friends live in Panama--they were born and raised there--and I have been there four times visiting them, but they come over here every year. This Dr. [Hedley] Lennon, I met him in 1945 at Bishop College. His church sent him over here to go to school here at Bishop College and that's where I met them. There were some more girls that were there too. One of them is still alive, Ursula Yearwood. She's still alive in Panama and whenever I go I always go and visit her.

My first trip there I thought it was really fascinating. They looked like they were on the same key that America was, building, building. Panama is a compact country, very beautiful. It reminds me of San Francisco. That's the way Panama looks like to me. When I first went there I had a chance and went to the president's palace and I met the president there. I just had a good time.

I found that, of course, America has an [Army] base over there and I had a chance to go to that base. It's controlled by the United States. Of course, they gave that back. It was the Canal Zone. The United States gave that back to Panama. I hate that they did that. I felt that they should have held on to it
because they own it, so keep it, but they gave it back to the Panamanians.

I had a chance to visit the schools and the superintendent's office. I went all over that place. I think I stayed there about a month. I enjoyed it. They looked like they were on the same key that we're on. A lot of Americans are there too. It's just a beautiful place and I think that's why America and the Panamanians are still together because they're working together. Looks like they're building the education there. Beautiful, it's beautiful. That's the only foreign country that I've gone to visit, and I like Panama because they are trying to improve like we are. They're doing it just like we're doing it.

Smith: Now this is the fiftieth anniversary of the Civil Rights Act this year.

Adams: Right.

Smith: Everybody is talking about it.

Adams: Yes.

Smith: So what do you think about the Civil Rights Act today?

Adams: The Civil Rights Act today. Nothing is perfect but they're working on it. I like the way they're trying to correct the things that happened. You can't correct it all but you can work on it until you get it
corrected. I like the relationship that they have--the races trying to work together, trying to have peace and harmony. I like that because when you have peace and harmony you can always grow. You can always find a better way and it’s going to be a better way and you can move forward to higher ground. The civil rights [movement] today, I think it’s been doing really well. This is my thinking about it. I’ve been watching this [coverage of the events that led to the 1964 Civil Rights Act] every night on CNN. Have you been watching it?

Smith: Yes.

Adams: I’ve been watching it on CNN. I don’t think that they should play this like they’re doing. That’s their idea and this is mine, I don’t think that you should just keep grinding and grinding and showing the bad, the bad, the bad. See, that makes a lot of people that can’t handle this, makes them mad, and that’s why they just keep a little fight going, a little fussing going all the time. I don’t think that they should just continue to show this. I think that they should show the good side and what we can do to do better. We can do better. We’re going to do better. We’re doing better.
I don't think that they should continue to show the whites putting the water on them and the dogs [as the police did in Birmingham in 1963], that fighting going on. That looks like to me it's stirring up stuff. I don't like that stirring up. I like to move on quietly. Correct whatever has happened if it can be corrected and just move on quietly and get along. We're in here together. We're not going any place. We're going to be right here in America so we just need to continue to build and have a good, good America.

Smith: Is there anything I haven't asked you about that you would like to talk about?

Adams: The only thing that I can say is that I do appreciate you all finding me through Shirley, my friend. I like this. I'm real impressed with the work that you're doing and just keep going, because we need all of this history. We need everything that you can gather because so much of our history--I'm saying "our," I'm talking about the blacks--is lost. I don't know what has happened. Nobody was writing or thinking about it but so much of it is lost and I really got into it when I found out that this school--it's called
Wheelock Colored School--that we can’t find the records of this school existing.

I’ve been to Franklin, the county seat where all the school records would be. I spent last week in and out of there and we did not find that black school. Of course, the people that are working there now are younger; the oldest person I found there was seventy-six, and they didn’t know anything about it because they just moved into the community. When I wrote about the school, Shirley really brought it to my attention to continue and I did, but just like I told the superintendent, I said, “I don’t know how they missed that school or what happened to the material or the records of that school.”

I’m a product of that school. I [taught there two years, from 1950 to 1952]. I know the school was there and I knew when the school closed. I knew about all the integration. I was born and raised there. My father went to that school, too, so I don’t know what happened to the records. As of now they have not been able to find the records of that school. I believe the records are there, but they’re just not in order where we can put our hands on it.
They worked very well with me and promised me that they were going to continue to give me support to find the records of this school, because I would like to see those records because I do know quite a few people that were very successful, most all of them are gone on, that came out of that school. We had good lawyers and doctors; plenty of teachers came out of that Wheelock Colored School, so I’m anxious to see what we can find on that--

[End of Track 9. Begin Track 10]

Adams: --school, and I’m going to continue until I can’t find anything.

Smith: Or until you find it all.

Adams: Or until I find it all! [Laughter]

Smith: Wonderful. It has been a real honor talking to you about this today. Thank you so much for sharing your memories and your thoughts with us and the Oral History Program. We will stay in touch with you and hopefully we will hear about your success in your research. Thank you so much.

Adams: Thank you so very much for coming and drilling me with what you do. [Soft laughter] Drilling me on my past
--I just don't know if I told you enough about it, because I just love to think about it and it's so wonderful knowing both of you. I hope that everything you do will be very successful. To show my appreciation to you, I fixed you all a lunch.

Smith: Oh!

Adams: I want you to have some lunch before you go with my dear friends I have invited to come.

Smith: Okay, well thank you so much.

Adams: You're welcome.

[End of interview]

[Postscript: Special thanks to Shirley Sloat and Ed for coming and supporting me.

--Estelle Adams]
APPENDIX
Estelle, in her home, with interviewer Tiffany Smith

Dinner with Shirley Sloat, unknown, Ed Millis, and Tiffany (left to right)
Estelle, Tiffany, and Shirley (left to right)

Estelle, Shirley, and Ed (left to right)
Estelle and Shirley
Estelle and family, April 2005: granddaughter, Miya Hooper; husband, Chester Adams; Estelle (center); daughter, Deri Adams Hooper; and grandson, Sherard Hooper (left to right)
Wheelock Colored School, 1934
The students of Wheelock School from left to right, starting from the bottom row.

First Row: Malicah Dunn, Wilson Smith, Archie Lee Walker, _____, Napolitan Payne, J.D. Dunn, Edward Taylor, ___ Dunn, M.D. Sheppard, Emmitt Johnson, ___ Dunn, Marion Mitchell, Elijah Mitchell, Dewitt Curry


Fourth Row: Dennis Gooden, Marjorie Walker, Bennie Williams, Rosie Mae Chambers, Hazel Gooden, Elmira Chambers, _____, Ned Walker, Ernest Walker, ___ Taylor, _____, Lucile Curry, Mary Walker, ____

Fifth Row: R L. Gooden, Carrie Brown, ___ Smith, Ethel Robinson, Wilma Walker, ___ Curry, _____, Vera Mitchell, Flossie Dunn, Lola Smith

Last Row: Ida Mae Lyons, Teacher: Jewell Epperson, Principal: Stella Epperson

*_____: names that can't be remembered