

Interviewee: Mrs. Mose Allison

Interviewer: William Tribble

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WT: This is William Tribble. Today is July 17, 1980. We are interview Mrs. Mose Allison. Mrs. Allison has been a resident of Tippo for several years. Mrs. Allison can you tell me something about your teaching in the early schools of Tippo, Mississippi?

MA: Well I came to Tippo. My whole life has been determined by a typographical error. I came to Tippo to teach because when this job was offered the salary was listed as higher than the other schools. I took it for that reason. When the contract was signed, it turned out that that was a typographical error. Had it not been for that I would have never come to the delta. It is ironical to me that my whole life has been determined by a typographical error.

WT: What was the amount of salary that you were suppose to get?

MA: One-hundred and fifty, but actually it was only one hundred dollars a month, which was good then.

WT: What year was this?

MA: It was 1926. I had graduated from MSCW. It was MSCW then. I was only 20. I came down here. I came on the railroad and got off at Greenwood. The superintendent here was F. O. Martin. He met me at the railroad. The first thing he said was "you look like a little ol' kid, you hadn't 21 years old?" I said, "I will be 21 in December before the year is out." So at that time, there was a high school here. That was in 1926 (coming to Tippo) Just previous before my coming to Tippo this high school hadn't been here long. It was a high school then. Before that, the schools in the county had been small neighborhood kind schools. There was a small school up in Tandy, which is where the Chris house is now. There was another small school up in Needmore, up where Needmore Cemetery is now. There was a church and a small school there. There is another small school up in Disdo where Canagra Fish Farm is now. These

usually served just the white children who lived in this area. Now, at Needmore where my husband's parents lived they went to this little school. They went in a little buggy. The teacher stayed with Papa Allison, John Allison. His two younger children went to Needmore school in the buggy with the teacher, who was Stewart Clark's sister, Mrs. Burnet. She drove the buggy with the children to school up in Needmore. Water got up and the roads were bad here. This was hard to get to these low places. There wasn't too much educational advantage there, and since Tippo was kind of a central area here, they decided the high school. The high school had been here several years when I got here in 1926.

WT: The school here too was 1-12?

MA: I came to teach English and history, although I ended up teaching about everything else. I remember teaching one pupil here who was older than I was and was really smart, but he hadn't been to school half the time because the roads had been really bad and hadn't been able to get to school half the time. I taught several children who were about as old as I was. Different grades too and different subjects besides. The high school here only lasted a few years. Then they had the school in Charleston. The high school in Tippo was sent to Charleston, from the 9, 10, 11, and 12 graders. We still had through 8th grade here for about a while. I had one child, and then I came back and taught in the lower grades for awhile.

WT: You married while you were down here in Tippo?

MA: Yes. I came in December, and I married in February. Little Jeanie was born the next November. After he was born, Mose's stepmother kept him. I taught back in the lower school for two or three years. Then I didn't teach for a number of years. Then all the grades were sent to Charleston. The 7th and 8th grade I taught.

WT: What subjects did you teach while you were at Tippo schools?

MA: I taught mostly English and history, but I always a reading, geography. The first year I came down here I taught a class in Latin.

WT: How did you go about teaching you students? What method did you use to teach your students history lets say?

MA: Well, of course we just had textbooks, and not too many directions and things. I had taken educational courses at MSCW that you would take if you were suppose to take if you were going to teach school. I had done a year of private teaching there. I always am terribly interested myself in English and history. I had had excellent teachers in English and history in high school at Booneville where I grew up. So, I intended to teach the same way that I had been taught because it had fired my imagination and meant so much to me. I decided to do the same thing to my children. When the doing method of education came out when you let children do as they want to and what they prefer to do, I never went along with it. I knew what good for me and worked for me should work well for my students. I had students tell me afterwards that they learned more from me than from anybody else. When they were talking about teaching children sentences instead of phonetics and things that kind, I paid no attention to it. I went right straight on teaching sounds of letters and phonetic of that kind that I had been taught. Later on, I was justified. At that time I was not, I was sort of a rebel.

WT: Can you tell me of any student that you have had that has become famous in the world?

MA: Well, of course, one of the ones that is best known is my own son, but I never taught my own son. I did teach Tony, I taught Tony in the 7th and 8th grade here. Some of the students I had were the Murphy children. They were smart children and all done well. Some of them made school teachers and principles and have done well. One of the smartest children that I have ever taught was Ana Heart's nephew. His name is David. He is with a law office in Clarksdale, Sullivan I think.

WT: Did you ever have any problems with disciplining you students?

MA: Well, not much because I never let them get started. I believed that you could not teach children unless you could get their attention and make them listen. So, I never had much disciple problems. I had been known to hold off and spat when it was most needed.

WT: In other words you believe in spat?

MA: yes, it was absolutely necessary when I did it. I have done it in the past.

WT: What advice would you give the schoolteachers today about discipline?

MA: Well I think that in the first place, the children have to respect you. You cannot go in with the idea of being buddy buddy with your children. It will not work. They have to respect you as someone who is smarter than they are, and that you have something to offer them to teach. Furthermore, you cannot teach if you do not have the attention of the pupil. So, discipline is absolutely necessary.

WT: Mrs. Allison, what supplies did you have while you taught school?

MA: Well, I just had mostly what the textbooks were and sometimes I was attracted to things myself and I added. For instance, I donated these little books. I have always been an advent reader. I had one student one time in the fifth grade name Burt Woods. He lived up in the South Carolina, and was killed a few years ago when people bound him or something. But anyways, he was little boy, and I had him the fifth grade once. He was so good that for the first time I quit surreptitiously adding on my fingers. I had to learn to add a column's figures and do it in my head because Burt could do that. So I had to not let the kid get ahead of me.

WT: Did you use newspapers?

MA: Yes. I didn't use newspapers at first when I was teaching high school because this was pretty isolated. We only had one telephone. It was in the store. Of course we just had gravel roads which water often got on. I learned to drive through water and every kind of road around. After I came back and later on, I use *Weekly Readers*. That was one of my favorite things I used in the grammar school. I think I was one of the first people here to use the *Weekly Readers*. Now they all use them.

WT: Can you tell us why water was a problem of getting over the roads?

MA: Of course you know they had school bus drivers. I remember when I first came here Jim and Henry Allison were bus drivers. Often times, the school buses would break down and mire up and water would be on the roads. The kids couldn't get to school a lot of the times. That tended to be the problem on the roads going to Greenwood and even around Tippo sometimes. Tippo itself never got underwater, several times water had us cut off from everywhere else.

WT: Is that because of the rivers?

MA: It happened because of the heavy rains and rivers. They built the levies here. Occasionally we still have the last few years. At that time it was a problem because kids couldn't get to school.

WT: What year did you stop teaching school?

MA: Well, the last time I taught was from '54 to '57. I always remember that date because I remember saving all the money I made, which wasn't much and spending it all on Mediterranean cruise. Dr. Robinson from the University of Mississippi said it was equal to a four-year education any time. I learned more than I'd ever know in my life.

WT: You said the children had school buses to come to school on they were brawling wagons?

MA: Well, none of them were brawling wagons. They all had some sort of bus. Weld and Hampton Lake the kids came from over around Rabbit Ridge and Hampton Lake. Over there they had little a little jeep that brought them over here where they would catch the regular school bus.

WT: Where did the students eat lunch?

MA: Well, at first there was no lunch room. They had to bring their lunch.

WT: Could you tell us some of the times that they would bring to lunch?

MA: They mainly brought sandwiches. I remember that. I was surprised at some of the kinds of sandwiches that kids brought.

WT: What are the kinds of sandwiches that kids brought?

MA: Well one of the ones of them was an onion sandwich. I had never heard of an onion sandwich before. A lot of the children brought sausage and biscuits. That was one of the main items because they didn't always have bread, which we called light bread. There is a big argument ____ in the paper recently about which kind of bread was light bread. Well we called all store bought bread light bread. The kids often, more than anything, brought sausage and biscuit. Sometimes I heard some of the kids say they bore whole in the biscuit and put butter down in it and pour sorghum molasses down in it, and they would bring that sometimes. It was mostly biscuits and sausage and things of that kind cause you didn't always get light bread. Sometimes the bread trucks were cut off or didn't run. So, sausage and biscuit, I would say, was one of their favorite lunch things. The last time I was in school from '54- '57. It was a lunchroom here. It was a good one.

WT: How many months during the year?

MA: eight

WT: Could you tell us how long a date you attended school?

MA: We usually started at eight and got out at three.

WT: Can you describe the earliest school building that you taught school in, in Tippo?

MA: The school at Tippo was just a framed building. It was just recently torn down. It was torn away not very long ago. It was just a plain frame building, but it was large. It had two bathrooms in it. It was entirely adequate.

WT: Could you tell us how many rooms this building had?

MA: It had 4 big rooms and an auditorium and two bathrooms.

WT: What did you do in the auditorium?

MA: When I first came out there we had chapel every morning in it. We had what we called a few minute chapel in the auditorium. Of course we had all kinds of programs in it— Thanksgiving, Christmas, and Halloween for all the things like that. After the high school was sent away, we often used it like a music building and cake walks. It was a music house when they tore it away.

WT: The chapel that you had every morning was it added to your school day?

MA: Oh yes. I definitely think that it did. I had it myself in high school, and I think it worked real well here. I think we had different ways in charge of chapel programs. They worked with each other. It wasn't very long, but you got every body in the whole school combined. I think it was very rewarding.

WT: What type heating and cooling system did you have?

MA: We had butane gas I suppose.

WT: Did you have air condition?

MA: Oh, heavens no. We never had air conditioning until they made lines later on. I just wasn't in school.

WT: Did you have any type of playground equipment?

MA: Yes, we had swings and a flying _____.

WT: I was told yesterday that Payne's school had a real good basketball team. Did the Tipppo School have any sports activities?

MA: Yes, we did. We always had basketball. . I remember the first year I came we use have where they had competitions, field day we use to call it. I remember going to several at Payne's, and our basketball team would play. We use to be in competition with them on field day. If I remember well Payne's usually won.

WT: Do you remember approximately how many teachers were teaching in the schools when you were teaching at Tipppo?

MA: Well, every teacher taught two grades at first. Of course when I first came I was teaching high school. The superintendent, who was Eckle Mark for awhile, and later on it was W. W. Jewel, he was an excellent schoolman. He had been down in Charleston, but had come down here. He is the one that I taught under, and I had a lot of respect for. He usually taught the science and the math. We took care of the other- reading, spelling, history and what else there was. I remember Ethmore teaching reading and spelling too. It must have been no more than 10 teachers even when we had a high school. I don't think it was that many.

WT: Could you give me an estimate of how many students attended the Tipppo school when you first came to Tipppo?

MA: When I first came, it would have to be a rough estimate. Each classroom had around twenty-five to thirty children in a classroom. It must not have been more than 100. First, in the high school, when we had the grammar school there wasn't a great deal of difference b/c we still had the four grades. Each room had 25 – 30.

WT: I notice this is a farming area here in Tippo. Was there any allowances made for the students getting out and working on the farm during the school year?

MA: I do not think that we had that where they go a little while and then go out a little while. I think we had regular school terms. I could be wrong about that, but I don't remember it. Some of the children didn't start in till later, and they were always a little disadvantaged. Some of them wouldn't start in till October or sometimes November. I don't ever remember any of them getting out in the spring.

WT: Well, most of the students that went to Tippo, would you call them average students?

MA: Yes, I think they were average. Most of the time they were a little above average. There are just about 4 or 5 families here now, but at that time there weren't but two or three families here. Most by and large, the children were above and beyond. Of course we had others come in and out there were sometimes below average. When I was teaching, of course you always get a child somewhere that cannot learn but so far- you know, a retarded child. The way I always did mine in my room, and every time I usually had one in a grade. I would hold them two years. I would do what I could for two years, and after that I would send them on. They usually held two years, and after that they were big enough to be out.

WT: Did you have any students that could not speak English?

MA: No, I had some little Mexicans one-year. Of course we had only white children, of course. I remember these little Mexicans came here in the fall of one year. I think they lived in Disdo as migrant workers. I was a little startled when a little dark hand would go up in class. About that time, I remember a survey came out saying would you be willing to teach in a

school if you had black children. I remember it saying that if it wasn't over a ¼ of the class I would be glad to teach it.

WT: Do you remember anything about the black schools in this area?

MA: Yes, I can. I always thought it was simply awful. Right down here below Tippon going towards Swan Lake, Bessie Vance, who is still living here as a retired schoolteacher had one room full of about 50 black children. She taught everything. Any grade they came up with she was teaching. I always thought it was awful because up here we were struggling to have enough children to get state aid. You had to have so many to be able to do it. We were struggling to have that and do that. Here we were with all these little black children, who couldn't go up here. It was almost terrible to have between 50- 100 down there in one room, when we couldn't even keep enough kids to keep state aid.

WT: can you name some of the black schools in this area?

MA: The only one I know is the one close to Tippon. I guess it was Tippon School, of course, later on they got rid of it. It was right at first.

WT: The way you were paid, did the county pay you or did you get some state funds?

MA: Yes, well I know the first year I was here and especially during the depression it was really bad because you didn't get very much. You would have to take it in script. It wouldn't come through and you would have to take it in scripts. I remember one time I had charged a small bill at Fountains in Greenville, which was the ultra store of the delta at that time and that the check of my certificate didn't come in on time, and I got a threatening note or bill from Fountains in Greenville.

WT: In closing, is there some story you would like to relate to us or some advice you would like to give to teachers teaching in the public schools today?

MA: The only advice I would say is to reiterate what I said at the beginning. You must have children's respect. They have to respect you and then they will love you. You cannot do anything without discipline. Furthermore, do not pay attention to everything you read in the papers. Do it what you find out and what has work well for you. You use it to work on somebody else. That is what I have practiced all the time, and it has proven true.

WT: What is the most memorable experience while you were teaching school? Well probably this child that I told you was a nephew. I am trying to think of his name, David? He was an unusually smart child that you never forget. This child stopped me from counting on my fingers. Also, we use to give IQ test. Ever once in awhile I would get a child that would be three or four years above his grade. This child was ahead. I had this child in the 5th grade and he was 9th grade on the IQ. I just gave him books, books, books, and he read overly. I just think something like that is a thrill to you. Then this other child that I taught in the eight grade was so very bright. He was way above his age too. It is the same thing. When I found someone that is an advent learner like that then I would specially reveal it. I think it is worth a lot of bad things when there are one or two that are so bright and so easy to learn. The people that are like that are usually worried about children besides. I am lucky here that we did have children above normal to teach.

WT: Mrs. Allison, thank you for relating some of the things that you did while you were in the public schools of the past.