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Pauline A. Young

[0:00:00]

Interviewer: This is Yetta Chaiken interviewing Pauline A. Young, for the special collection

library at the University of Delaware. Pauline where were you born?

Ms. Young: I was born up in Massachusetts, in the subway to where Boston ... west Medford,

Massachusetts.

Interviewer: And when did you come to Wilmington?

Ms. Young: But I've been here ever since I was two years old.

Interviewer: What was Wilmington like, the Black community of Wilmington like when you

arrived?

Ms. Young: Of course I don't remember that. No, my mother was widowed and she came

here with four children. And she started teaching at Howard High School where I grew up and where I had to behave since she is in the same building, you

know.

Interviewer: But you weren't – you weren't – when you are little you weren't going to Howard

High School?

Ms. Young: Oh, when I started, Howard High School had all the grades, kindergarten through

the 12th. So it was a complete, you know, a college preparatory high school,

everything.

Interviewer: And was it the only school for Blacks in Wilmington?

Ms. Young: By law, it was. And we had busing. Our children had to come from out-lying

districts near Wilmington as far down as Dover. And if you live below Dover, they had to remain and stay with friends or relatives or whatever. But it was busing. They had to force busing and there's no complaint against it from the

populous.

Interviewer: What was life like for you as a little girl?

Ms. Young: Well, we had a nice intimate family. I always say trying to be humorous that I

had three parents: my mother, my aunt and my grandmother, they were all

widows. I didn't achieve widowhood.

And so, we were there struggling, Wilmington was tough then. And it did just

soften up a little in recent years.

Interviewer: What do you mean tough?

Ms. Young: Racially, racially.

Interviewer: Are you saying that Blacks did not have an opportunity job wise?

Ms. Young: That's right. Well, that's very well-known, very well-known.

Interviewer: And there were Jim Crow laws in effect?

Ms. Young: Oh, yes. Theatres, restaurants and so forth, the places where there was just

open American association was the public library and the railroad station. My aunt was an author, she was a widow of Paul Laurence Dunbar, we knew through her aunt and through my mother too. Many were prominent speakers.

And at Howard High School the early principal there who was Edwina B. Kruse, always trying to inspire children with speakers with all the school occasions. Hotels were closed. So our house is really a wayside inn because there were friends and we enjoyed it and they enjoyed it.

But we wouldn't have so much company and of course us kids we enjoyed having company. We wouldn't have had so much company if the hotels, and of course they were not motels as I grew up, if they had existed.

Our family life was very small because — well, my parents, my three parents were busy. And they have to keep an eye on us. And so, we were just grew up there together. Most children who we know who are friends came to us; we didn't even go very many places.

We used to go to the Opera House I remember as a kid. My mother used to take us there.

Interviewer: Is that the Grand Opera House?

Ms. Young: Same Grand Opera House. On Saturdays. I think it was a rest for her from

teaching all the week and she just sits up there with us. Until one day, the ticket taker, I remember that I was just a little tike, said that they could admit her but not these children. But she is very fair. So of course she was embarrassed and, I mean, for us. We turned around and never came back. So I've never had a good

spot in my heart for the Opera House, never, ever since.

Interviewer: Were Blacks not admitted to the gallery to the upstairs or...?

Ms. Young: Oh, we'd just been going, I don't know where we sat. But this girl, the ticket seller -

wasn't admitting us at all.

Interviewer: So you were denied entrance ...?

Ms. Young: Yeah. That's the same thing that happened at Saint Andrew's church. We had a

very cute little church, Saint Matthew's Protestant Episcopal church on Shipley Street, between the 12th and 13th, pretty little church. Look like split level

affair, you know, pebble dash and nice. Well, anyway, the diocese sold it.

So my mother sent us to Saint Andrews, that wasn't far, at 8th and Shipley. We lived at 10th and French or 9th and French. And we'd been going there for

two or three Sundays.

[0:05:00]

And all of a sudden, one of the ushers, asked us, just the children. She sent us all up there together. I think she got a rest room as to that way too. Asked us to go upstairs in the balcony and we haven't thought anything about it or anything, we just take our life as it came along. But we did have sense enough

just to turn around and come out.

So that was a long time, just in recent years when I could think of Saint Andrews with any kindness and that is when they had Larry Carlson as rector

. But, you know, it leaves a little scars.

Interviewer: Were most Black children in the City of Wilmington able to go to school? Did they

go to school?

Ms. Young: Oh, yes, they went to school but with a good principal and good faculty, very

good faculty. And they were interested. So they were working against segregation all along, boosting the children. Making them feel like they're Americans. And if children – they would even go to – there's some boy who didn't appear in school enough without happen too much, one of our – two or three of our teachers go to his house and knock on the door and come on, come

on now. So they were interested all the way through.

Interviewer: So the Black community was very close?

Ms. Young: Yes.

Interviewer: How...

Ms. Young: It was small. It wasn't only on the east side. There was segments on the west

side as well and there still are. We used to call the children who lived over the hill because it was hill from east side, French Street where I live out to DuPont and

Claymont and those streets. What else?

Interviewer: What – in terms of job opportunities, you went to college, was it very usual

for Black children to go to college?

Ms. Young: Yes. Of course it's always a struggle, Mrs. Kruse knew quite a few people who

would help kids. And the main thing was just inspire them enough. And we inspired quite a few and of course the school was small then. The graduating

classes was just – in my class there were just nine.

Interviewer: When did you graduate?

Ms. Young: [Laughter]

Interviewer: And this is Howard High School that we're talking about?

Ms. Young: Howard High School, yes, uh huh.

Interviewer: And so, nine graduates?

Ms. Young: In my class.

Interviewer: And there were many more children who didn't graduate...

Ms. Young: Oh, I don't know there weren't that many...

Interviewer: ...who went to high school?

Ms. Young: The Negro population wasn't quite – it wasn't too large back then but a good

percentage who went.

Interviewer: And then when you finished, where did you go to college?

Ms. Young: The University of Pennsylvania. Now, I would have gone to University of

Delaware. It was closer. It would have been, you know, much less expensive. But they weren't admitting Negroes there. So I worked hard going up to the University of Pennsylvania. I did win a scholarship that helped me to really finish.

I commuted. I was running for trains all the time, on this end and the

Philadelphia end.

While I was in college I ushered at the Playhouse which I enjoyed very much, so I was even running from train but if the train was late, I had to skip dinner and go right up into the Playhouse and enjoy myself.

Interviewer: Did the Playhouse admit Black people?

Ms. Young: Just in the gallery, second balcony.

Interviewer: Is that where you ushered?

Ms. Young: No, no, oh, they didn't have ushers up there.

Interviewer: And so, you usher...

Ms. Young: I think they must have had a guard or someone up there. But at least it was

integrated up in the gallery because see the seats were cheaper and lots of

whites went up there.

And of course my friends, my family, they didn't go – or my mother and aunt could go because they were, you know, I had a cousin, come up there, they

won't know and they went to a lot of shows.

Interviewer: So you enjoyed the theatre?

Ms. Young: Oh, yes. I danced and kicked, when I finished college I decided I was going onto

stage. I went on the stage there was a show opened; this was a long time ago. It

was called "Running Wild." But I had a little bit of money with me. I just

graduated from Penn.

And NAACP had a conference in Newark, of course I had grown up to the NAACP too. So from there I said, this is awful close. So when I was there I visited some friends. They said such and such person is having tryouts for a show down, so I said, I'll go. So I – I was down there for two weeks when my money run out because you don't get paid for rehearsals. So I just called my mother or wrote to her I said, please send me some money, you know, that sort of thing.

I had a telegram two – almost two minutes later from my aunt, come home,

your mother popping mad. So that ended my stage career.

Interviewer: Your stage career. Have you ever been sorry?

Ms. Young: Oh, I'd been too busy. I been going ever since, look at this.

Interviewer: What kind of job did you get when you finished college?

Ms. Young: Teaching. I taught a year down in Newport News, I liked that very much.

[0:10:01]

And I had a very fine principal but these were the days of segregation, very clearly defined bitter segregation. And they were having an election, you know. So I was teaching history then, American history. So I got into that but, you know, it's registering so forth and so on.

So some of the officials came in, you know, observing teachers, new teachers particularly. So I noticed his face was getting red, but I didn't give a damn. So, you know, so I went on. So after he left my principal came down laughing, he said, he don't think you're in the right place, he didn't think you're going to fit down here. Now, Delaware and Virginia, now, what's the difference?

Interviewer: They had the same kind of racial laws?

Ms. Young: Well, we didn't have laws like that but voting, this is voting there are certain

children to vote. I mean, they had their parents to vote and register and that

sort of thing.

Interviewer: Very early, you were involved in voter registration?

Ms. Young: Well, yes, I didn't call it—we didn't call it then. I just wanted to go down and

vote, you know, I'm just talking to the kids. I didn't know anything about Newport

News

Interviewer: And so, at that time you came back to Wilmington?

Ms. Young: No, I went to Tuskegee. I went further south.

Interviewer: What did...

Ms. Young: I was on the press staff down there. And I edited – helped edit that

magazine...

Interviewer: What was the name of the magazine?

Ms. Young: Tuskegee Student. It had been started I supposed it's still going because that

was a long time ago. I conducted book review columns and had a lot of press

releases to write and enjoyed that too.

Interviewer: And how long did you stay at Tuskegee?

Ms. Young: Just two years, that's a little much too South for me.

Interviewer: Why did you think it was too far south? What were the traditions like?

Ms. Young: The way schools tend to be accommodating. Is, you know, people didn't

apologize well, the Klan gave a little parade down there, trying to frighten people

about something.

So a bunch of us, two or three of us from the North, we thought we're from the North, we went out on the road and just laughed at them. And I don't think the Tuskegee administration appreciated that. But I thought they should have got mad at the Klan, not at us. Anyway, I stayed two years. It was good

experience.

Interviewer: And then you came back to Wilmington?

Ms. Young: Yes.

Interviewer: And...

Ms. Young: Never been able to get away. I got away once. The Board of Education was not

giving us sabbatical leave, so I said, I'm just going to take off. So I went out to California at Los Angeles, I took the exam here as a librarian, not as

a teacher then.

And I went out there but this side is worse than ours. But I had a fine time, I

stayed with a friend, I had a fine time out there

Interviewer: When you...

Ms. Young: And I worked at the University out there too, at the library school.

Interviewer: In California?

Ms. Young: Yeah. University of Southern California, I was a proctor; I had a fine time there. I

couldn't make any money.

Interviewer: So you had to come back to Wilmington?

Ms. Young: I had to come back to Wilmington. Still wasn't making much money.

Interviewer: What did you teach in Wilmington?

Ms. Young: I taught - I guess my specialty was history. I began teaching Latin and ancient

history, some American history, I couldn't teach English. I didn't see why the kids didn't know what a sentence was when they got to high school. I couldn't understand it. I couldn't do much good there.

Interviewer: And so, you taught for 10 years as a teacher? And...

Ms. Young: Uh huh. And as a librarian for 20 years.

Interviewer: And then did you find the children eager to learn? Were

they anxious to gather knowledge as to – and this is at

Howard High School?

Ms. Young: Yes.

Interviewer: And was it a high school then or was it all grades?

Ms. Young: It was all grades when I was attending school. But when I began teaching school

there, it was just a junior high and senior high and elementary schools had opened, Bancroft and Stubbs and those. And then the population had grown and the birth rate had grown, migration hadn't, you know, it had boosted, you

know, the attendance.

So they are just normal children, there were good ones who wanted to learn

some who didn't.

Interviewer: Why did you changed from teaching into library – library work?

Ms. Young: I got tired of teaching, I couldn't do what I wanted to do, you know, you can't

get along, with administrators too long, and the administration and the Board of Education wasn't giving enough to help the Library, it just mess all the – I'm

about to use some French again.

So then the member of the Board of Education gave us his private library. He is Dr. Henry Clay Stevens, he just gave it to us and I was teaching summer school that year, trying to pay for a car. And I had kids of all ages, all grades, I

didn't know what to do with them.

[0:15:00]

So I got these books together and I read about them. Not that much about library except that I had always gone to the public library because it was just two blocks away. So I knew a lot about book arrangements.

So I set these children to work doing this and that, arranged them very nicely, just in the room. So my principal said, that's fine, that's fine to put you in

charge. So I thought nothing of it. My thoughts was not library wise. Then the supervisor of the library came over one day and said – he encouraged me and said, why didn't you go to library school and get a degree, I said, no, I've got a Masters Degree, I don't need another one because at that time Columbia has just given – I think all of them just gave Masters in the Library Science.

So anyway, I went. And I found that I liked it. So I went. Now, that was hard work because I did it in summers.

Interviewer: And then you stayed at the Howard Library for...

Ms. Young: 20 years.

Interviewer: ...20 years?

Ms. Young: Uh huh. So I know all about Howard High School.

Interviewer: And you helped build the Black library at the Howard High?

Ms. Young: Yeah. I helped the public library because I collected so much stuff; they use

to call me down to find out something about Black history or the Negro and so

forth. And I'd steer them around.

Interviewer: When did you become interested collecting material to write a history of the

Blacks in Delaware?

Ms. Young: Well, I'd always collected, you see. And then as a librarian, we always have a

vertical file for pertinent subjects and all subjects that we have. But I collected and my mom used to say, you're always picking up little pieces of paper anyway, you know. Even if I have to write letters or anything and I thought I

could write.

So it was just a habit that grew on me. That's why I told you I had so much when I came out here, I had to buy a filing cabinet, no, I did that before I came out here. It was full, it overflowed. And when I came back from Jamaica, I looked at it

and said, this is horrible.

So I just bought more cabinets. So this is the museum itself. Since the Historical Society really wanted it, they wanted to take the whole cabinet out. But I had so many inquiries from students like you from the University. I've had them come from Wellesley they just come from everywhere. I had a request from Florida for some information about the teacher who's from Florida, they thought I had thought here all that stuff, not a penny in it either.

Interviewer: But you enjoyed doing it?

Ms. Young: No, but I do it. Yes, I enjoyed it.

Interviewer: You wrote a history of...

Ms. Young: Negro in Delaware.

Interviewer: ... Negro in Delaware. Was that the first time?

Ms. Young: Up till 1940 – up to 1947, see that's a long time. That should be, you know...

Interviewer: Did you begin at the beginning of when Blacks first came to Delaware?

Ms. Young: No, I just made a study - education, church, politics that sort of thing as it is then, I

make references but I didn't try to make it from 1619 all the way up. I didn't try

that.

That has been done sporadically. Hancock has done quite a bit of that, Jim Newton, down at the University. He and Hancock are writing book together, I

don't think it's out yet. But they've been working on it some time.

Interviewer: But you are the first one who put information together?

Ms. Young: I don't know. My aunt had done studies. She's done study a really political

mostly. But that was published in magazines, the Messenger, New York magazine and Opportunity Magazine; she had done quite a few studies but

not a sustained history. So that assumed to be done.

Interviewer: Yes.

Ms. Young: Is that what you're going to do?

Interviewer: No. One of the things I wanted to know was is there anything that you learned

from this narrative sort of study of the Blacks in Delaware.

Ms. Young: It was very depressing. When we go into statistics, how much land that didn't

owned, how they had lost land to sort of land and the mistreatment that is going on through – I will show you something if you – so – but it was good to have and it has been used a lot. I've got copies made to university; Yale University has made quite a few copies. It's about 30 or 40 pages, I've

forgotten...

Interviewer: Do you think in helping motivate people to get into the civil

movement?

Ms. Young: Oh, no. It's too dull.

[Laughter]

Well, the civil rights movement just starts from activism, you know, voting, segregation, yes, that's what that – and that's what the NAACP was founded for and it got this spurt in the '60s. There's so many of present-day Blacks think that it just started in the '60s that the NAACP was started in 1909.

[0:20:04]

Interviewer: What's been your affiliation with the NAACP?

Ms. Young: Everything, everything. We started a small chapter.

Interviewer: In Wilmington?

Ms. Young: In Wilmington.

Interviewer: Or wanted to...

Ms. Young: No, I'm talking about our Wilmington chapter. It started in 1909 after the

horrible I y n c h i n g and riots in Springfield, Illinois, Lincoln's home incidentally of course. But – oh, yes, I've been with it. I've been the secretary. Everything I can think of membership, chairman, during campaigns. The press...

Interviewer: How long have you worked with this – with the NAACP?

Ms. Young: Since I was about 12 years old. I've been a delegate to the conventions of course.

I've been a campaign – I've been out to Milwaukee trying to help our

membership drive and Baltimore too. So I've grown up with it.

Interviewer: Do you think...

Ms. Young: And it's all volunteer work. That's why we had to – we don't have money. Now, if

you just give us a nice a big grant or something, that would be a big help.

Interviewer: Do you think that it's been able to inspire people to work for civil rights?

Has it...

Ms. Young: Oh, yes.

Interviewer: ...has the organization help unite the Black people?

Ms. Young: We don't need that much uniting. We need just to have, you know, rights and

privileges to go places. NAACP is one, you know, Mr. Redding our lawyer to open up the University of Delaware to Negro students. And of course the same thing

with the Brown decision with the Supreme Court. Redding has been our

champion.

And you see I'm inclined to be – not inclined I am disagreeable. He had been his fort in courts, you know, that's expensive stuff. He hasn't charge us for anything, we just paid *[inaudible]* [0:21:50] just we don't have the money. He has gone to Philadelphia and I remember us coming down from one of these appeals in the, you know, the local court circuit court I guess, I suppose it's, I

don't know.

And on the elevator where the white lawyers from here whose wage was being paid by the state. And Louis who was being our champion paying his own way up there to get down the best way he could, you know, or the best way as far as the branch could help. You see those things can get under your skin and

make you disagreeable.

Interviewer: Do you believe the Blacks and whites can ever live in peace here? Do you think

there a day will come?

Ms. Young: In Delaware?

Interviewer: Yes.

Ms. Young: Oh, yes, certainly. If adults just leave their children alone. And don't ingrain

all their prejudices in them because kids are enjoying all these furorabout busing they're enjoying that. And they like busing, you know, they don't have to be at home, they're out. Annoying the bus driver **so**, there are no punishment.

Interviewer: Did – what affiliation have you ever had with Howard University? I read that

you were going to leave some of your paper to Howard University.

Ms. Young: Yes. The Dunbar correspondence and a lot of other Dunbar data.

Interviewer: What is the Dunbar correspondence?

Ms. Young: Between my aunt and Paul Laurence Dunbar. There she is, there he is. And they –

there was a mail order romance at first. He had read some of her works and wrote to her. And they started the correspondence two or three years before they

meet.

And the letters are beautiful. I'll show them to you. The paper has stood up well. Ink has stood up well. Ohio University wants them. Not the university. It's the Historical Society of Ohio. I don't think it's connected with the university. Because Dunbar was born in Dayton and they have a great deal of material out there about them. The house is a museum. There was a school named for him of course. They want that. And they helped me do a great deal but then they ... I released the letters to them for microfilming, with the stipulation that the students could use them, you know, scholars.

Then they began selling them. So I didn't like that. So I had a lot of — I just discovered that accidentally but we had a legal tussle all over that but I haven't won yet.

So I'm not going to send these to them. I'll give them to Howard University. The Morland Spingarn Collection is a museum of everything Negro or Black, USA as well as Africa and they have a beautiful building and they have a curator that is marvelous ...

Interviewer: Is there a difference – well, religion, has that played a very important part of your

life?

Ms. Young: My life? Not after Saint Andrews, you know.

Interviewer: Not after Saint Andrews.

[0:25:06]

Ms. Young: No, my brother goes to church. He's fine.

Interviewer: And do you think – do you think that many Black people have had religion play

an important part of their life? Is that ...

Ms. Young: Oh, yes. Well, the Black church is really – oh, it's invaluable. It kept slaves and

everybody from just committing mass suicide because, you know, the treatment was horrible. And at least they had someone even if it was an unlettered slave to talk to them like them – make 'em feel like people. Church

has really held us together.

And after emancipation of course the same thing is a place for Negroes to go, they were poor, they had nothing. I don't really know that a slave owner got recompense; it's the laws of their slaves. But what about slave, what'd he get?

Misery.

So the church has been marvelous, historically. Now, we get such a big fancy church as I think, you know, just like an American now, getting away from

the basics.

Interviewer: How do you feel about young people today?

Ms. Young: They would be fine if the parents would leave them alone.

Interviewer: You think – you think that the values are the same as previous times when

you were teaching? When you were involved in school system? Have you seen

it changed?

Ms. Young: Well, no, they are too rich, now see, salaries and wages have gone up. So and the

parents give their children so much that they had – the value have just changed. Television has lowered values, you know, domestically in the family. So that's a big difference. Then even the parents will **[inaudible] [0:26:44]** ... be so rich running around, going out and spending money and taking vacations, forgetting the children. The children are young, they're full of energy, they've got to be

active.

But – then when the parents do interfere these parents in the busing or the anti-

busing groups, they're the ones. They need mowing down.

Interviewer: When you...

Ms. Young: And I'm for peace, that's why I joined the Peace Corps.

Interviewer: Yes. Tell us about your experience in the Peace Corps? When you retired from

the Wilmington public school system you joined the peace core, why did you

do that?

Ms. Young: Well, I haven't thought about that but the Peace Corps they're just young,

Kennedy had just started it. And Negros were not volunteering because see

that's free service.

So they wrote to the NAACP, so they need us. Peace Corps go to the national NAACP, asked them if they would asked the branches, you know, to

stimulate interest.

So they picked on me. So I talk around and talk to kids, they just laughed at me. What Miss. Young? Go there free? This government wants us to go there free? I said, yes, yes, that'd be a marvelous experienceoh, and I'd talk and talk — so I just I talked myself into it. So I went. I didn't get one, not one

volunteer.

Interviewer: Where did you go and tell us about your experience?

Ms. Young: Well, I had applied my applications were made for Africa, just any part — any part of Africa, I would love to go into. But they are so long and of course with the Peace Corps, it's the country that invites you, let's the Peace Corps know

what kind of work they want and how many, what fields and so forth.

So it looked like nobody wanted a librarian in Africa or didn't want me, I don't know which it was. So I got a little irritated, I said, here I'm offering my

service and nobody wants me.

So finally Peace Corps from Washington wrote and asked me if I want to go to Jamaica? I said, no, that's too close but I'll go. So we had two months of training, nice group of 48 of us too, from all over the country, even a little girl from Hawaii. We had plumbers, carpenters, masons, nurses, everything

you can think of and four librarians.

Now, they had – they knew library science in Jamaica but they just wanted enough of them. And their pay was so small, they couldn't, you know, entice

enough people to take it up.

So they had about 80,000 books that were un-catalogued that was our job, that's why they needed so many of us, four of us. But I liked it very much. People were lovely. It was awfully hot at first. I didn't think I could take it. But

two or three weeks, I got a accustomed to it.

Interviewer: Has that changed your attitude about other countries of the world?

Ms. Young: Oh, no. I've always liked them. I've been to Europe two or three times. I've been

to Egypt; I did get to that much of Africa.

[0:30:04]

I found people lovely. I was there; I haven't given any of my personal dates. So will – you can judge from this. I was there in 1936 in Berlin when Jesse Owens came over. And I – that's where I met him. I was going over there; There were three of us. I went over with two principles; they had money because when I came back I owed them more money than anything. I was, you know, just teaching. But they weren't interested in going out to the Olympics, to the Olympic village.

So I went on out, I liked that. I could talk to people over on the train. And they talked and so many of them knew English, you know.

Interviewer: You're talking about the Germans...

Ms. Young: The Germans.

Interviewer: ...who knew English and that you could travel freely in Germany without things

segregated?

Ms. Young: Oh, yes, Hitler was on his good behavior. I don't know, did he ever have – I don't

think he ever had segregation, he just barred Jews, just to – when he wanted to get them out of the way. But anyway, I went out there asked them about

where is – I saw a colored fellow - where is Jessie?

So of course I didn't even mean to hurt his feelings because he's an athlete too, right over here, so we all got together. Then there a crowd came around. And I had seen Jesse just a day before from our hotel. When he arrived, they took him

in an open car and the crowd was just following and yelling, "Jesse. Jesse" ...

[0:31:32] End of Audio

Revision History

February 2017: Revisions were made to this transcript to correct important names and key words.