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Iron Hill School Oral History Project

Interview with: James Knott
Date of Interview: April 22, 2003
Interviewer: Roberta Perkins
Transcriber: Marcia Adams

Also present: Laura Mackie Lee, Museum Director, Iron Hill Museum of Natural History

Roberta: This is Roberta Perkins and today's date is April 22, 2003 and I am interviewing Mr. James Knott and we are here at the Iron Hill Natural History Museum and this is the interview for the Iron Hill School Restoration Project. At this time I would like to thank Mr. Knott for his time. Thank you.

Mr. Knott: Your welcome.

Roberta: Mr. Knott if I can start off by I asking you your full name and when and where you were born.

Mr. Knott: My full name is James Knott, I was born April 5th, 1930 in Washington D.C.

Roberta: How did you come to live in Delaware.

Mr. Knott: We lived in Maryland, Washington was just the place where we went for the hospital but I was immediately back in the country in Maryland. My grandparents raised me because my mother died when I was about 2 or 3 years old. So my grandparents moved to Delaware because we had relatives up here and they were seeking better employment and a better life style so we wound up in Hockessin.

Roberta: Do you have any siblings?

Mr. Knott: I have 1 son.

Roberta: Brothers or sisters?

Mr. Knott: No. I was raised with my aunt and uncle but we come up as brothers and sisters. I was about, I guess, 8 or 9 before I realized that my mother was

my grandmother. It was always Mom, then in later years they started telling me things.

Roberta: What were the names of your grandparents?

Mr. Knott: Nora Knott and Blain Knott.

Roberta: What was Nora's maiden name?

Mr. Knott: Libers.

Roberta: L-i-b-e-r-s?

Mr. Knott: L-i-b-e-r-s. Libers.

Roberta: What was it like? So you spent your growing up years in Hockessin?

Mr. Knott: Yes.

Roberta: What was it like for you growing up in Hockessin? What are some of your earliest memories?

Mr. Knott: Hockessin was a great place to grow up in. The more I look back at it, in this day and time, the more I appreciate it. We were poor but we didn't realize we were poor because of the conditions of the community. I had great parents and there was great parents around us. I come up in the era when everyone was your parent. Whoever's yard you played in that was the one that disciplined you, whatever way they felt disciplining you. We come up in an area where it was nothing for somebody to – we used the punishment method. They wouldn't hesitate to beat you. Anywhere. It didn't have to be at your home.

Roberta: And when you got home your parents knew it, right?

Mr. Knott: Yes. I had the closest friend and his mother would, when we messed up we would and when she whipped us she would see my mother. She would call my mother Knottsie and she would say, "Knottsie I beat those boys today" and she would say, "well they must have done something" and that was it. I loved those people. Today some of those ladies are still going to the church. They are elderly ladies now and I highly respect them. I never let a Sunday go by that I don't go by and give them a hug or a kiss because they are very, very dear to me. Because of them I never went to jail. I love them and I always try to recognize them.

- Roberta: Those were very different times weren't they.
- Mr. Knott: Yes it was good times. You could leave your door open – it was good times. Like I say you didn't have anything like you have now. It was a good community to grow up in.
- Roberta: Where you lived, where is it in relation to what people know as Hockessin today? You take, what is it, 141, 48, 41 goes into the center of the town of Hockessin after you go over the railroad tracks and its kind of before you start going up the hill a little bit to Pennsylvania. So where was your family then?
- Mr. Knott: Where we lived at – when we first came to Delaware we lived down Mill Creek Road probably about a mile from the section you are talking of where the fire hall and all is.
- Roberta: Right.
- Mr. Knott: But in 1941 – 1940 I think I am right – we moved up into Hockessin.
- Roberta: Town proper?
- Mr. Knott: Hockessin. You can stand on my porch and you can see, in fact you still can from where my mother's house is, Hockessin is right there. We were maybe a sixteenth of a mile from the fire hall and the stores. We were right there. In fact we were the last house that you got to before you caught the bus. You didn't have a lot of concrete in those days, you had mud so they would wear their old shoes till they got to my mother's porch, take their shoes off and put on their dress shoes and get on the bus and go to town. So on Saturday morning you would see shoes lined up on the porch.
- Roberta: Really? Very interesting.
- Mr. Knott: Because they had to cross the fields and things. So we were the last house.
- Roberta: Now so that I can picture it a little bit where is it in relation to the library, there is the old library building in town there.
- Mr. Knott: Ok the old library building is, if you want to call them 'country blocks,' is a block up. That's on Valley Road. I'm on Mill Creek Road. If you

know where the fire company is now you come down Mill Creek Road and cross the railroad tracks. You're thinking the railroad track is on 41 if you come just past the fire hall there is a road to your left. That's Mill Creek Road.

Laura: Is that also called Old Lancaster Pike?

Mr. Knott: No, Old Lancaster Pike is 41. It runs parallel with the new Lancaster Pike. But I'm on Mill Creek. It comes down and you will find Chippy Chapel Church and you'll find 107 School. That's all along Mill Creek Road.

Laura: Grant Avenue is back there.

Mr. Knott: Grant Avenue is right by the church, it runs across. Mill Creek Road starts at Old Lancaster Pike and goes all the way down and comes back around to Lancaster Pike by Bissell Hospital. It makes a 'u-ee.'

Roberta: How long did you go to the Hockessin school? When did you start?

Mr. Knott: I started in 1937. I was in the 2nd grade when I came to Delaware. I did my 1st grade when I was in Maryland school, in was in Allantown. Allantown, Silver Springs, all that's right in the same corner. So it was there. I remember it – a 2 room school. My aunts, they went into the 2nd room, I was in the 1st room. I think, but don't quote me too close on this one, but I think there was 6 grades in that school. The first 3 was in one room, Miss Green's and the 2nd three was in the 2nd room with Miss Carr. I remember those names and then I looked over the years with conversations you remember them anyway. My aunts and uncles in our conversations about Miss Carr and Miss Green. Then we came to Delaware in '37. We lived with my uncle, my Uncle John. We lived on Limestone Road until my father got the house down on Mill Creek Road where they were renting and then they moved up to where presently we are now and then they bought that home.

Roberta: Now this is in Hockessin?

Mr. Knott: This is in Hockessin, Mill Creek Road. I still have an aunt that lives on the family property now.

Roberta: Is Hockessin 107?

- Mr. Knott: Yes.
- Roberta: What was it like for you going there? You went from 2nd grade all the way to 6th?
- Mr. Knott: Yes. Right.
- Roberta: What was your teacher, what was your first teacher?
- Mr. Knott: It was the only teacher. Constance Bojohn, my Lord I am falling apart. Her sister taught here.
- Roberta: You're doing fine
- Mr. Knott: Miss Bojohn, Constance Bojohn and I am trying to think of the one that was here.
- Laura: Marian?
- Mr. Knott: Marian Bojohn. Yes. Two sisters. They lived on Clayton Street. My teachers drove big Packards. I will never forget that.
- Roberta: That was a hefty car.
- Mr. Knott: I never will forget her because she drove big Packards. I remember that so well because we had big snows and sometimes she would be late getting there because you didn't have your snowplows and all that you have nowadays and of course she had to come by my mother's house and my mom would look out the window and say, "get your clothes on son there goes the teacher." They might get there ten or ten-thirty sometimes but you went to school.
- Roberta: That's really interesting. So she was your teacher from 2nd to 6th grade?
- Mr. Knott: The entire time. There was 6 rows of benches like that one. Six rows of benches – 1st grade, right here when you come in, 2nd grade, 3rd grade, 4th grade, 5th grade and 6th grade. She taught everything.
- Roberta: How many students, on an average?
- Mr. Knott: I would say roughly, thirty-ish.
- Roberta: Were there more students in the 1st and 2nd grades than in the 6th?
- Mr. Knott: If I remember correctly it almost balanced out because we were constantly coming and going until they got integrated. I was gone by that time. So I

still went to the segregated school until after the 6th grade and then you went to Howard High School.

Roberta: So how was that getting to Howard for you? How did you get to Howard School?

Mr. Knott: By bus. We rode the public bus. There used to be a bus called the Short Line and we rode that and then the state subsidized (they got tickets or something). I know we had a book of tickets and we rode that and for a period of time a gentleman by the name of Mr. Edward Peterson, everybody called him Pete. Am I talking too fast for you?

Laura: No.

Mr. Knott: I'm sorry.

Laura: We have it on tape anyway.

Mr. Knott: Mr. Pete Peterson and he ran a bus for awhile. He was a community man. He was always, when you look back at it, he was always doing something for the community. He ran a bus, he was the ice man, sold ice. He ran this bus. When we have our school reunions I am the designated emcee for the youth and one of my fun things was to tell the people about the bus. I'll say it today we had the only orange school bus in the history. All school buses are yellow. Ours was a bright orange. I never will forget it as long as I live. It was an old Studebaker bus Mr. Pete had and he would take us to school. Of course he had a family and he had to work but he furnished this bus, drop us off at school and then he would come back and he would pick us up. Sometimes he would be late but he would pick us up and anybody that had to go to town would jump on that bus and ride it free. He was that type of guy. Drove the buses just for the school. Everybody in New Castle County went to Howard School. That was traveling back in that time. But they talk about busing now, but we had to ride a bus.

Roberta: Was that a bit of a culture shock going from 107 and going into Wilmington and going to the school, was the school itself, because there was - it was so much bigger?

Mr. Knotts: Oh Howard High School was like New York City to me. You have to visualize, we went to this little country school, you knew everybody, Everybody because we all lived in the community so you knew everybody and the teacher controlled everything by a bell. A big old bell. That bell controlled everything, recess, gym, anything – that bell signaled it. Now we go to Howard School, this huge – I never will forget this school. This huge school with this big white columns and I see this school and I say, oh my Lord. I didn't know nobody other than a few little people so it was a transition but it didn't really affect us because the teachers were strong disciplinarians so you got to know everybody and you behaved yourself. So it wasn't a thing of, I'm lost. It was a good school. I liked Howard School there were things that I had never envisioned learning. We had shops, the gymnasium was huge. It was as big as our school, the gymnasium was with basketball courts and I had never seen anything like this. When school opened in Hockessin the only thing we got would be maybe a dodgeball and we had a couple of swings and some see-saws and that was it. When the dodgeball blew up you didn't get any more. We had to make our stuff but at Howard they had all this stuff so it was a big transition and wonderful.

Roberta: So in going back to Hockessin now for physical education was recess it or was there a special time set aside for physical activities?

Mr. Knotts: Oh no recess wasn't it. We would have various other activities. It would depend on the teacher. Some days we would go out and we would have, I guess in this day and time you would call them organized activities. She would have us playing ball or we would do various things like play various games but she controlled that. Recess was our time. We played whatever we wanted to play. The boys played baseball or whatever during that time and the girls they would play on the swings or what have you. Because at that time girls weren't as active in sports as they are in this day and time, so that was a boys game. Miss Bojohn was a GREAT teacher and by that I say that whatever she taught you to the day, I know. She

made sure. If you didn't get it you may hold back you might not go to this row this year. She might hold you back here but whatever she taught you, you knew it so well. I remember the books we read. *Bob and Judy* had two dogs – Nip and Tuck. Never forget that and every kid who goes to Hockessin school remembers that. She taught you very well. She taught music. She was everything. We had a piano. She played it and she had a little tune horn and then we would put on plays and we had to make the stage – things that go on the stage, the fireplace and all. We made all that. She would bring in huge pieces of cardboard and we would sit down during certain times of day and we would paint the red bricks on it and make the angels and then when it was time for the play we would run a wire across and she would put sheets on it and that was our stage curtain and we had our plays. Oh yes it was a great school when you look back at it. Granted in this day and time it wouldn't be feasible but at that time ...

Roberta: Your supply of books – did that school have a library?

Mr. Knotts: No. I may be wrong but I don't remember ever receiving a new book. Our books was transferred from the white school. We were segregated and at that time there was a lot of Italians around Hockessin because mushrooms were great then and they were the dominant mushroom growers, they bought that over from Italy I think. But anyway there was Anthonys and Buglianos and all these Italian names so when I got my book in the back where you wrote your name, when we opened it up there would be Anthonys and all. What they would do is they would get them new books and the better of the old books we would get. So it was nothing to look in there and see our friend's names in the book because we played together.

Roberta: I was going to ask you if you interacted in any way.

Mr. Knott: Very much so. I can not, although things were segregated, but in Hockessin I can not say that I ever faced segregation and knew about it. We played together, we fought together and granted everybody lived in basically their section but there was White living among us at times. I

can't say although I knew it but you didn't know it. It's a funny thing to say but there was never a real open prejudice thing. It just wasn't. Like I say we fought together and we played baseball, whatever. We swam together in the creeks. It was just a together thing. As kids we worked together in the fields. It wasn't open like later years when it became real known. Like down through the South its stronger but in Hockessin I can not actually say that I faced it although it was there. It was like a snake in the corner it didn't bite anybody although he was over there in that corner.

Laura: A lot of those kids were children of immigrants too right?

Mr. Knott: Yes, the older ones, they spoke Italian very fluently. Some of them could hardly speak English but then the kids come along, naturally they spoke English.

Roberta: Do you ever remember someone coming as an inspector or a superintendent, coming by? What was that like? What was the persons name?

Mr. Knott: That's what I'm trying to think of her name. Tall, tall, I remember her, a tall White lady. We may see her 2 or 3 times a year. We didn't see her that much. I almost had her name. But we didn't see her that much. Sometimes she would come in and spend a couple hours of course that would be a special day when we knew she was coming. Miss Bojohn would have various things for us to do on that day. She was the Superintendent. I can't think of that lady's name. I really can't.

Roberta: Now did she come to the White schools as well? Was that just part of the system?

Mr. Knott: I think we were into the district. We were in her rounds. I'm not quite sure how much time she spent at the White schools but I am quite sure it was more than what she spent at ours.

Roberta: What was her purpose for coming?

Mr. Knott: I think at the time, like I say, they didn't tell kids much then but I think at the time she was the Superintendent so she was more or less like Miss Bojohn's boss. And she would go to the schools, that was her

responsibility so I think she would make appearances there to make sure things was going all right and the roof hadn't fell in or something like that.

Laura: So did you get the impression that maybe when she was there you were expected to be on your best behavior?

Mr. Knott: I'm quite sure. If you wanted to live you better be.

Laura: Now Mr. Grinnage remembered too and they would have – the first one you definitely wouldn't have seen, that was a Miss Holly but he remembered one and I guess he was here until '30 unless she was employed by them for a long time. She was a Miss Barnes. He said she was brilliant.

Mr. Knott: Miss Barnes.

Laura: She was heavy set he said.

Mr. Knott: I said she was tall but she was a good sized lady. Miss Barnes, that sounds more like it. Miss Barnes.

Roberta: I was wondering if it was one of the two that he mentioned.

Laura: He liked her better than the first one.

Mr. Knott: She's the only one I remember. We didn't have any contact with her. We just saw her standing over there in the corner or something. I can't remember any strong contract with her.

Roberta: So she had an area then I guess.

Mr. Knott: I would think. I don't know if this was in her realm or not. I really don't know. I'm quite sure the one up on the hill, the Hockessin school, was in hers. She might have been over all New Castle, there wasn't that many schools at that time.

Laura: Yes she did.

Mr. Knott: I bet she was in the New Castle district. I'm just guessing on that one.

Roberta: What was your school day like? How was it structured there from coming in the morning till the end of the day?

Mr. Knott: We usually arrived at school a little early of course and when the teacher arrived she would go in and get herself ready and she occasionally, she may come and ring the bell but most of the time she would grab a kid and

have her ring the bell. That was nine o'clock. You would line up and you'd go in school and you went to your desk. Then she would tell each grade what to do. Open your books and do such-and-such. She would spend time with each grade and in the meantime while she was with the 2nd grade the other grades had work to do and that was her day. Usually in the afternoon we would have more or less like I guess you would say a community activity like music, or we may go outside and do something depending on the weather but most of the time you were in your own grade area. You had the blackboard and you would go up and do your lesson and things like that. You had a complete day.

Roberta: How was food handled? How was lunch handled?

Mr. Knott: You brought your own. If you ate. Occasionally during the cold weather, sometimes Miss Bojohn would put on a pot of beans or something and share that with the kids or you brought your own. Some of the kids had quite a distance to walk. I was very fortunate. I was right there. I don't know how good that was because when my Mom saw the teacher go by so I didn't get a chance to loaf too much but I only had a couple of minutes. We had kids walked – I remember the Taylor family very well. They walked from Mt. Cuba which was – you know where Mt. Cuba is?

Roberta: I have a general idea, I know it's a good little hike.

Mr. Knott: So that would give them, I'm going to give it a good – I'm going to give it an easy 3 or 4 miles. Back in that time we had very, very bitter winters. I mean snow, we had snow like this years ago and we walked in the ruts in the road and they would come to school and most of the time they would get there late and (that shouldn't go on the tape). Sometimes they would be strung out but they would come to school and as they come in they would go over there. They would be cold. We had a stove. No we didn't have that stove. We had like a big heater in the room. That's what we had. We didn't have a pot-bellied stove.

Roberta: How large a black community was it in Mt. Cuba?

Mr. Knott: Now I think to my knowledge, I think the Taylors and the Folks, and they was all family but the Folks and the Taylors were the only ones that came from that area. Most of us were probably a mile or a mile and a half radius. The Johnson family in Brackenville and Hockessin.

Laura: I remember Johnsons. Johnson's Market.

Mr. Knott: Right.

Roberta: Oh yes.

Laura: On the corner. I grew up on Lancaster Pike.

Mr. Knott: Oh, did you?

Laura: The other end, almost to Hercules Road. The farm house there.

Mr. Knott: That farm house there? Is that the one that is going up for auction?

Laura: They tore it down.

Mr. Knott: That last one where the little graveyard and all is. They are having an auction there.

Laura: That's the Mundys. Yes.

Mr. Knott: Sorry.

Roberta: No, that's quite all right.

End of Tape 1 side A.

Begin Tape 1 side B.

Laura: At the beginning of the day was there a prayer, was there a devotion time, anything like that?

Mr. Knott: I remember we pledged allegiance to the flag. I do not remember a prayer. I know we always pledged allegiance to the flag hung on the wall. I think we may have said the Lord's Prayer.

Laura: But it wasn't a major part of your day?

Mr. Knott: No. That was something to do and get it out of the way and get into your lessons.

Roberta: What community events were held at the school?

Mr. Knott: Well now we're going back in the '40's. There wasn't a whole lot of community events. A PTA Meeting, things like that was affiliated with the school. Most of your community activities to my knowledge was at the church which was next door. At that time the church was your central

...

Roberta: That's right.

Mr. Knott: Most of the stuff that went on to my knowledge was at the church. At the church they had what you called a hall at the building next door so there wasn't much activity at the school to my knowledge.

Roberta: Was that a very important part of your family's life?

Mr. Knott: What's that?

Roberta: Being involved with the church?

Mr. Knott: Yes. My mother was very, very religious. When she wasn't home she was at the church. In fact before her death she was the "Mother of the Church." She had been there longer – for so many years. I was always a member of Chippy Chapel. I used to be a member of the church in Belvedere named Simpson because when I married my wife she belonged to Simpson so I was there until I left and went back to Chippy.

Roberta: What does that mean the "Mother of the Church?"

Mr. Knott: Mother of the Church is usually you were the oldest member and you are the person that they honor. Right now there is a lady, she is 96 years old, Miss Eliza Peterson. After Mama passed, Miss Eliza was nominated. You know the oldest member, you would go there and we would just cherish you. So we always had what you would call the Mother of the Church.

Roberta: That's always good to honor that.

Mr. Knott: Yes, the years of service to the Lord. Faithful.

Roberta: At the school were there any celebrations that stood out that the school did, whether they be holidays or just particular school activities?

Laura: You mentioned a Christmas play.

Mr. Knott: That was one of the biggest things we had would be getting ready for the Christmas play and the parents and things would come. We would start probably in November because you had to make all the stuff and paint all the stuff and practice. Of course a certain portion of the day went for the practice of the Christmas play and different ones were selected for various parts. It was a fun time. That was a fun time. To do that – to perform in front off your parents. Back in that time there wasn't a lot of opportunities to do things in front of your parents. So this was a great time we looked forward to with mom and pop and put on this great play. You might get to be Jesus or an angel, put homemade uniforms on. By the time the play started half of it would fall off.

Laura: I think you told the story about the Christmas play, I think it was you about somebody got stuck in the chimney or something.

Mr. Knott: We had a Christmas play and the boy that was the Santa Claus, his name was Dobson. We used to call him Bubby Dobson. His job would be – we had a ladder there. This was all behind the curtain, you didn't see it and of course he was going to come down the chimney. Well he got up on the ladder with his sack and in some kind of way Bubby lost his balance. Off the ladder he came, course he hit the curtain, down come the curtain. He just disrupted the whole thing and we had to put it all back together. The Christmas play was fun. One thing it got us out of a lot of school work. 'Cause if you got on that part that she would assign to make the stuff, half a day of school you were just painting and stuff like that. You would paint everything with water based paint. It was water color we called it at that time. Like I say we made everything.

Roberta: Were you involved in doing the props? Did you have a part in the play?

Mr. Knott: Most everyone did because she would use the boys for doing certain things and then certain things the girls would do so practically everyone in that school was involved in one way or another in putting on this play. You might not, because she couldn't use but so many acting people, but you was involved somewhere. Yes you were. In some way she involved

all of us in certain things. She was a great teacher. Some of the things I see now I think could have been a little different but that's what the times were. I'll never forget her. And I'll never forget the one here, Miss Marian, she was a nice lady too. Nice lady.

Roberta: How was the inside of the school set up? It seems like a lot of the schools were pretty much set up the same. Say the way you are sitting here now, your back is to the door can you describe the way the Hockessin school was set up?

Mr. Knott: If this was Hockessin school (let me stand up). I would say right here would be the front door. This large room is where we were and that corner was the girls bathroom and over in that corner was the boys bathroom. This corner was going to the boiler room. Miss Bojohn mostly set her desk to the back of the room. Most of the time. Periodically she would change, but most of the time back there where she could watch us but we couldn't see her. It was lined up, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 rows. There were the blackboards and over here were blackboards. Over here was a huge, electricity wasn't great then so you had windows there and windows here.

Roberta: So you had windows on two sides. Ok.

Mr. Knott: So we had plenty of light. All the back sides were windows and this side was windows and all wood floors like this. All brick school. This school wasn't brick but our school until today it's a community center. Beautiful place. It was a nice school. Outside we had a set of swings which consisted of 4 swings and some see-saws and that was it. We made a ball diamond. In the back there was a big field in the back so we fellows had a ball diamond back there so whoever had a ball on us, if not we would make a ball. We could make a ball, we would take stockings and all. We made a ball and made our bat. We took a broom handle and we made that. We made everything. We kept ourselves busy cause if you were standing around she might make you come in so we tried to stay busy.

Roberta: Did you ever play dodgeball?

Mr. Knott: Yes, that was mostly organized by the teacher. We played dodgeball because we would play sometime without it but then the fellows would try to get the ball and knock the girls down so the teacher would be out there to control us. We played dodgeball and the girls played hopscotch. Of course back in that time marbles was very, very popular. We'd shoot marbles. All those games now have just about disappeared. People didn't have the computer games so you had to make everything. You would make slingshots. We would make our bows and arrows. Everything we did, we made. I built my first bicycle. Built it.

Roberta: No kidding?

Mr. Knott: I can remember my first bicycle. My father came home one Sunday morning and told me, he said, "I bought you a bicycle." Whew! That's like telling me he bought me a car. A bicycle! I said, "where is it?" And he told me where it was. It was up on the corner. There was a corner house up there. A White family. The Hallorans. I don't know if you remember them or not.

Laura: I know the Hallorans.

Mr. Knott: Hallorans and Gormleys. Well John Franks had this bicycle and my father bought it, two or three dollars he paid for it. He told me to go up there and get it and I ran all the way up there and I got this bicycle. The bicycle was just a frame, two wheels and handlebars. There was no seat, no fenders and no chain. Now what do you do with a bicycle with no chain? I come down the road pushing this bicycle just as happy as anybody, I was just the happiest body you had ever seen but I built that bicycle. I remember that first day. The Petersons, they had a lot of bicycles down there so I pushed it all the way down to his house and we made a chain for it and every time I would get almost home the chain would break so I would turn around and go back again. I was so engrossed with this bicycle. Well I had chores to do at home. We had chickens, pigs, we had all that stuff. My chores are not being done and I'm building this bicycle. So when I finally got home about 3 or 4 o'clock that evening my mother come out of

the house. “Where have you been all day?” I said, “Mama I was putting together my bicycle.” She said, “put it up, foolin’ all day on that devilish bicycle and you don’t have your chores done!” She took the bicycle away from me the first day. It was great. You had to be inventive. Parents didn’t have the money. When they fed you they were doing a good job. There just wasn’t no money. My father was very handy because he always had chickens and a garden and we were never hungry. We always had plenty to eat. He was a very, very good provider. He didn’t have much education but he was very smart. Very handy. He practically built that house that we bought. It was small, but it was good like that. If I had paid attention I might be a smarter man than what I am now. I was so lazy I wouldn’t.

Roberta: I understand your memories of Iron Hill and the Field Days, tell me a little bit about those.

Mr. Knott: May Days. We used to call them May Days. We would come down here, there wasn’t no activity bus or anything like that and we would have to get the parents, those who had cars, would bring us down here before they went to work in the morning and drop us off. Like I say that was quite a trip back in that time and we used to stay here all day and they would come back after work and pick us up and take us back home, whoever it was that had the cars. We would stay here all day which was a good time. I remember they would have a pole with the ribbons and we ran around that and we played relay games. At that time you had Coke bottles, with a case of Cokes and they would, however many bottles were in a case, they would have a case up there and one down here and there would be sticks in it. You’d run up and put your sticks in then I had to run up and take them back. It was a game they played and whoever got done first, whatever team got done first won. Then we played baseball, softball or whatever and there was a lot of games we played. It was a wonderful day for us.

- Roberta: Now when you came were there other schools besides you and the Iron Hill students?
- Mr. Knott: To my knowledge there was just the 2 of us here. I can't remember any more schools. It was just the 2 of us here. This was our sister school. This is where we came.
- Roberta: Were you involved in state competitions?
- Mr. Knott: No.
- Roberta: So your involvement with Field Day was just participating with your sister school?
- Mr. Knott: Yes. I never heard anything about state competitions all through when we went to Howard School. They had a football team, basketball. They had all that. They more or less were integrated with other schools. At that time they played other schools. Most of the schools they played were Black schools. But when I went to Hockessin schools, no.
- Roberta: How was it that Hockessin and Iron Hill were sister schools?
- Mr. Knott: Number one, the teachers were sisters. I think that played a major part and whatever else I guess was arranged probably by Miss Carr. Back in that time they didn't tell the students a whole lot. You just got on the bus or whatever. There wasn't a whole lot of knowledge of what was going on.
- Roberta: I can remember that well in elementary school. You just sort of did things.
- Mr. Knott: You just did. The teacher told you to do it and you did it. No questions.
- Roberta: Exactly. Programs were just done. Exactly.
- Mr. Knott: You weren't allowed to ask a lot of questions. Parents didn't share stuff.
- Roberta: For you – what about politics? When you got old enough, you know, to understand what was going on with politics in your community like elections and voting, what do you remember?
- Mr. Knott: We laughed about this. I remember during election year the local politician, and our biggest local politician was a guy named Elmer Taylor, we called him Dolly Taylor. He lived up on top here across from the White school. He was a big heavy-set man. If you wanted a job you

would go see him and he would send you. He was affiliated with what they call the Levy Court now its called the County Sewage, and he would send you down there to get a job. My cousin and I we laughed about that now but the politicians at that time, they ... I would honestly say they bought their votes. By that I mean they would – there was a lot of marked ballots in that time. While you had a lot of people that weren't highly educated and as I look back at the Black community they more or less listened to what the White community told them. She's good for you, don't worry about her, she's going to be all right. I don't know of any Blacks that were running at that time. There may have been some in the city but in the country there wasn't. What they would do – there used to be a little liquor store, beer garden, they called it then, right there on the corner. It's still there on Limestone Road and Valley Road. They used to call it Tim's years ago. I think they changed the name now. What they would do from 7 to 9, free beer and stuff like that and you would get the marked ballot and you went in and signed. I wasn't involved, I was a kid. You just signed your name and I can remember so well different ones would say, who did you vote for? They didn't know. They didn't know. They just signed. If you didn't go out there they would give them a half a pint of liquor because it costs 50 cents at the time. But they bought their votes. At the time most of the Black people weren't involved. I know a couple of them were involved in politics. During the Second World War I know Mr. Jake Johnson he was what they called an air raid warden at the time. He would come around and we had a drill and make you get in your house and all that and we used to think, being ignorant of what was going on, we used to thinking it was crazy. Here come that old man being a nuisance. But that was part of the system at the time. That was the only thing we dealt with on politics. They bought their votes. Yes they did. They bought their votes and I can remember if you worked on the County, if the Republicans was in and you was working there, if the Republicans lost and you know, the Democrats come in you'd lose your job. I learned,

somebody had told me, I didn't work there that long anyway but someone told me to – they used to have a thing – I was neutral. I wasn't a Republican or a Democrat and that way I sort of stayed on. But that's the way things were. They honestly, to my knowledge, they honestly bought their votes with a simple half pint of liquor or two dollars.

Roberta: Do you remember when that stopped?

Mr. Knott: I can't give you years but I remember what happened was, I think one of the main things involved was education. I, when I say "I," I'm talking about the people. I more or less got exposed to what was going on through radio, the TV's because see we had none, a lot of people didn't even have radios back in that time. The first radio we had was a battery radio so that's what we had and learning, reading for yourself and getting an education is what I think broke up all that stuff. I know I never had no marked ballot.

Laura: But you remember as a kid.

Mr. Knott: I remember hearing about it and seeing them but I wasn't involved in it because I was too young. I guess I was over 21 before I started voting because at the time we didn't really get involved in politics. If you were lucky enough to work on Election Day you could get a hundred bucks and that was like the end of the world. You would get your car and you would haul people to the polls. That was a big thing if you were lucky enough to get in. That was about it as far as politics until the later years when we all got to voting independently for ourselves. Years ago if your daddy was a Republican, you were a Republican. But now the household changed – you're a Republican and she's a Democrat and I'm just nothing, you know.

Roberta: Going back to your comment about a lot of families didn't have radios, how did people get news? How did you communicate and find out what was going on within the community and even outside, whether it would be outside the immediate community or ...

Mr. Knott: Word of mouth. A lot of times by the time it got to you it was so distorted but you believed it anyway. Like I said, radio you heard the news, I remember so well when the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor. I remember that. We had a radio and we heard it on the news. We had a big radio, biggest thing in it was the battery and then the battery would get weak and mom would tell you don't turn the radio on, save it for certain programs she wanted to hear. I remember almost the first family that had TV. That was a big thing. You only had a couple stations and they only came on two hours a day and when the fights came on everybody wanted to go to that particular house. They'd be looking in the window at it you know. That was the way they learned. Through conversations I know my mother and them used to. They worked for these families so they would hear what was going on through the families but the families told them what they wanted them to know. So once again it was distorted. That's one of the things I think that held back education so long. A lot of the older people, the Black people, worked for these families and the families would tell them well he doesn't have no education and we're going to have a job here for him but now your kids went to college but I didn't have to go to college. Oh, he's got a job here as long as he wants one so Mr. So-and-so said you got a job so don't worry about it. If you got a high school education, you had an education. Some went but college was for most people a very, very distant dream. The money just wasn't there and education wasn't a predominant thing in the household because when the parents don't have it a lot of them don't really push it. It's get yourself a job and most of the jobs were menial jobs but it was a job. There was a lot of education going around in the cities but in the country there wasn't a whole lot of education pushing among the Black community.

Laura: Is there anything else you remember from Field Day that you didn't relate? You know, it was just the 2 schools probably.

Mr. Knott: It was 2 schools and like I say we had, on that day we had hot dogs and things. It was a great day because, don't forget at that time recreation in

the community was very limited. There just wasn't nothing to do. If your mother allowed you to go out and play we would centralize in one area and create a baseball game or we would go swimming in the nearest creek. We'd make our own swimming hole. We'd dam it up so it would get deeper and that was basically our activity. We'd ride our bicycle, if you had one and then on weekends the community would have baseball games and that was a big thing to go to the ball game. They had a Black team and they had several Black games around. Hockessin, and Newark had one, Kennett Square, Wilmington, Buttonwood, they all had. They had a schedule they would play. I had a very, very dear friend who, he's passed now, but he's in the Baseball Hall of Fame, Judy Johnson. He and I were very, very dear friends. I used to carry him to Cooperstown for 17, 18 years. We would go to Cooperstown every year and other places he had to go for Black charity. When his wife passed my wife and I took care of Judy up until he had to go into a nursing home. He only lived a quarter of a mile from us. He lived in Marshalltown and we were right there in Belvedere. So we made sure he had his meals every day and stuff like that because he was by himself after his wife passed. His daughter was living in Detroit at the time so we were more or less like his guardians. He was a great man tho'. Great man. I just wish God had saw fit to give us more Judy Johnsons but he didn't make but one.

Laura: The baseballs teams, did they have names or did they just go by whatever community they were from?

Mr. Knott: Yes, they had ..

Laura: I know Iron Hill had a team.

Mr. Knott: Yes, and Hockessin was called the Hockessin Hornets.

Roberta: Did Belvedere have one?

Mr. Knott: Belvedere had one. Belvedere had a good team. These guys played ball serious. They played ball! Sometimes some of them would show up and they had been out Saturday night but they'd get themselves together.

Roberta: I remember my grandmothers talked very fondly of going to ball games.

Mr. Knott: Yes, Newark had a team, Buttonwood. They had teams all around. They would load up in the cars and go play ball and that was a great thing.

Laura: Now in terms of the Field Day activities do you remember this as more of just a fun activity or did you actually compete with the other schools?

Mr. Knott: To my knowledge it was here and we more or less competed against this school. That was it to my knowledge. It was organized and that was it. Then sometimes before the day was over the teams would just be mixed up. You know a little bit of this and a little bit of that team. It was a fun day, you didn't care. There was no whole lot of hard core beliefs about we are better than you. It was a fun day. I can't ever remember going through the fact that this 'better than you thing' that they have now. We just didn't have that. Our teacher didn't allow that. It wasn't ingrained in us. We were just playing.

End of Tape 1, side B.

Begin Tape 2, side A.

Mr. Knott: I don't think we had hamburger. It wasn't that much - it was simple foods.

Roberta: But it was probably more food than you had during your regular lunch for class at school?

Mr. Knott: It was a different food.

Roberta: Right.

Mr. Knott: In lunch class you know most of the time you had peanut butter and jelly sandwiches or something like that but this was different food. Hot dogs.

Roberta: Special occasion.

Mr. Knott: It was a fun food.

Roberta: Who supplied it? Was that something that came from the parents?

- Mr. Knott: I think the parents sort of pitched in. Once again they didn't tell you about this. Your mom might put something in an envelope and say, "give this to the teacher."
- Roberta: I remember that so well.
- Mr. Knott: So I didn't know what was in the envelope and I just gave it to the teacher. I would imagine each student would have to contribute something, maybe a dollar or something. I don't know. They didn't really tell you what they were doing.
- Laura: Were there any other games in particular that you remember? You mentioned a relay, the girls played hopscotch, dodgeball, stickball.
- Mr. Knott: Like I say, we shot marbles. Then the boys, we played baseball. We played football but that wasn't a strong game for us. We mostly played baseball, it was the big thing back at that time. We didn't play any basketball in Hockessin. I didn't see a basketball court till I went to Howard High School. I never saw one. We didn't have one in Hockessin at that time.
- Roberta: Now you mentioned in Field Day there was like this May Pole? With the ribbons? Now was there a ceremony around it? I remember that when I was in elementary school.
- Laura: What was the point to that?
- Roberta: I remembered that when I was in elementary school but it never made sense to me.
- Mr. Knott: You had this song – here you go 'round the mulberry bush' -
- Roberta: There was some kind of little ditty like that.
- Mr. Knott: Early in the morning. Then I think when it was stopped you had to be at a certain point or something then you got eliminated I can't really - my wife – if I had a phone I'd call her.
- Roberta: Something like musical chairs.
- Mr. Knott: I think it was something like that. It was right out here somewhere. In fact the first time I came down here, two or three years ago there was something in the paper and I said I'm going to go down and see what it's

like. We left church one day and come down here. I don't know if I met you or who -

Laura: It was me.

Mr. Knott: And I told my wife I remember this stuff we were the only two here that day because the school, they didn't come I looked for a bunch of people to be down here that's why I come, I said I would see somebody but no one showed up that day but my wife and I.

Laura: A few people came after you but we didn't have a real good turn out.

Mr. Knott: Then last year I think I was here. Was it last year I talked to a group of people out here?

Laura: I think so.

Mr. Knott: It was a lot of little girls.

Laura: It was the Girl Scouts. Yes.

Mr. Knott: There was 2 or 3 teachers with them. In fact I was telling someone the other day about coming here and I said you know the fascinating thing of me talking to the students and all is teachers. There were ladies upper 20's and lower 30's in the area and they were really fascinated with me telling them of the times because I guess they had maybe heard about it but they hadn't talked to any one that was really in to it. It's difficult for people to believe that one teacher could teach six grades and everything else. Everything. It's amazing. She had to have a good program. For one thing she disciplined. She told you to sit in that seat and you sit there. Not like nowadays. I remember so well she had like a mark or a scar on her lip and I remember so well we used to laugh at it, us kids. She had a little tuning fork and she would try to get us in tune. "This is the tune," and she would blow out the little thing and we would try to go off on out to that flat thing. But like I say at that school everything was controlled by that, in fact I got one of those bells now.

Laura: I've have one here that I got ...

Roberta: Was it like that?

Mr. Knott: Yes, that was it. Ours was a little bigger than that. The one I got at home is bigger than that.

Roberta: Is that right.

Mr. Knott: Whoever bought the bell out she would say, “don’t you ring that bell.” Because we didn’t want to go to school you know. Don’t you ring that bell. I have a big one at home.

Roberta: Do you have that bell because of the school memory?

Mr. Knott: No. I had surgery a few years ago and a very, very close friend of the family, in fact she calls us her parents, just as a joke to my wife, she bought me this bell because during when I was home recuperating I was in the chair. From the chair to the bed so the bell was for me to ring for my wife to come.

Laura: So your wife said, “Don’t you ring that bell.”

Mr. Knott: “Don’t you ring that bell I want to hear your footsteps on the floor.”

Laura: Now your wife went to Ab Jones, right?

Mr. Knott: Yes. She went to Absolom Jones School. In fact, she had to tell you this but she lived directly across from the school and she said she never got a chance to go any place because when school let out her mother would be standing on the porch like this and she said all the other kids would walk off with their boyfriends and she said she never got to do that. She had to go straight home. Her grandmother raised her too.

Roberta: So that’s where she’s from, Belvedere?

Mr. Knott: She’s from Belvedere. She was raised up in Belvedere. I think she may have been born in Philly but she was raised up in Belvedere all her life.

Roberta: What was her name?

Mr. Knott: Her maiden name is Covington.

Roberta: Covington?

Mr. Knott: Are you from down in Belvedere?

Roberta: No. I know a Miss Evelyn Smith, from Belvedere.

Mr. Knott: Yes, she went to school with my wife.

Roberta: Ok.

Mr. Knott: We call her Smitty. I remember her brothers. In fact I saw her yesterday and waved to her. Very nice person.

Mr. Knott: Oh yes. I really, really liked Evelyn. I've always liked her.

Roberta: She's got a little spark. I was over there the other day. I was taking some tickets over to her because I found out through my father, Robert Perkins is my father, that she likes line dancing. So we got to talking about that.

Mr. Knott: Yes, Smitty does that.

Roberta: You know I've been always wanting to learn that.

Mr. Knott: Yes, yes she does it. Robert Perkins is your father? Did you have an aunt named Mary Perkins?

Roberta: Marian? Aunt Marian?

Mr. Knott: No, Mary. Her name was Mary Perkins from Newark.

Roberta: No.

Mr. Knott: Ok, I went to school with a Mary Perkins.

Roberta: I don't know if it's any relation or not.

Mr. Knott: Now I think Smitty's husband's, I think his name is Perkins, isn't it?

Roberta: Yes. Same person.

Mr. Knott: Now are you related to him?

Roberta: That's my father.

Mr. Knott: Perk's your father?

Roberta: That's my father.

Mr. Knott: Oh Lord.

Roberta: That's my father.

Mr. Knott: Yes he is now. Now you ring a bell. Yes he is your father. I can see it. Very nice guy. Jazz man.

Roberta: Oh yes, anything.

Mr. Knott: Well really her maiden name was Hayward but everybody called her Betty Covington because her grandmother was named Covington. But her real name was Elizabeth Hayward. But you say Hayward – its like in my church if you say to half the people James Knott they won't know who you are talking about – you tell them Sonny Knott – everybody knows me

as Sonny. In fact sometimes on the program they will say we are going to have such-and-such done by our Brother James Knott, you see people looking around like who is this?

Laura: That's James.

Mr. Knott: Oh God, its Sonny. Ask Smitty if she knows me and my wife.

Roberta I will. I'll be seeing them Saturday.

Mr. Knott: In fact we only live right down the street from them. Do you know where Glen Berne Estates is?

Roberta: Vaguely.

Mr. Knott: Probably if you – do you come through Stanton when you go to Smitty's house?

Roberta: I come 95 and I get off at the ...

Mr. Knott: Newport.

Roberta: Newport exit and come around.

Mr. Knott: There's an old brick home right on the edge of Belvedere right there. That's called Glen Berne Estates. We live right in there.

Laura: Is there a Kiamensi Road.

Mr. Knott: Right off Kiamensi Road, right. Just as you start up the hill by Delcastle, right there. I've been there 30 some years. The undertaker will find me easy, I'll be right there.

Laura: I would love to have asked some other questions but we are focusing on the Iron Hill School right now and we had talked about some point we might go back and broaden this to include a lot of the other schools. But our first task that we have to get to is learn as much we can about this school. The restoration. We have talked about a lot of different things including somebody should write a book about these schools and these people.

Roberta: The stories. Really nice stories.

Laura: So you'll probably be back.

Mr. Knott: You know it's a shame.

Roberta: So we will probably will be calling you back.

Mr. Knott: Anytime. I'm retired and I will make myself available to you in any way I can help you out I will gladly do it. It's a shame that this sort of thing isn't done way back when the people were living.

Laura: Right.

Mr. Knott: I look at my church now. There is so much history. The church is over 100 years old. There is so much history there but the people are dying off.

Laura: Has anyone ever done a history of Chippy Chapel?

Mr. Knott: Yes there have been histories done but they should be repetitious because when you ask me something right now, when I get home I say, "Oh, man..." so you've got all these 'oh man's' that should be on paper. I remember when I was taking Judy to Cooperstown and all the old players would get together in this room, nobody would be in there but the ballplayers and their families and they would be just chewin' the fat, you know, when they played ball – remember we played, we was in Pittsburgh, it was on Saturday afternoon – and these guys remember like it was last week, and these are old guys who hardly know what today is. But when you say 'baseball' and I used to sit down and listen to them and I said all this should be canned. It's just valuable knowledge way back when teams were segregated. Didn't have lights on the fields and all that. Judy played with the first lights that they had by generator. These are amazing things to know.

Roberta: It is. It's not something that I think about but when I am told, it makes sense.

Mr. Knott: And how they rode the busses and couldn't get nothing in the restaurants and ride all night on the bus and get off and go play a double header because they loved the game and said by the time they get paid the man had run off with their money and all that kind of stuff. It's funny to hear. But anytime I could help, you let me know.

Laura: Have you been out to that new little museum exhibit at -

Mr. Knott: In the stadium?

Laura: At the stadium.

- Mr. Knott: The next time you go there, now that statue that they did of Judy is the best statue that I have seen done. That thing out front of the stadium I hate it.
- Roberta: Which stadium is this now?
- Mr. Knott: The Blue Rocks. That statue out front is supposed to be Judy and I literally hate it. When they unveiled that statue Loretta was there, that's Judy's daughter, and she knew how I felt about Judy and she told me. She said when they unveil this I'm going to tell you right now you are not going to like it so prepare yourself. And when I saw that statue I said I don't believe it. Judy was a small, fine featured man. That thing looks like a coal miner. It's horrible looking. But the statue inside is very nice. With a little boy. Have you seen it?
- Laura: No. I know they just built a Sports Hall of Fame Museum.
- Mr. Knott: Go. It's very nicely done and when you walk up to the statue there is a little boy there talking to Judy and Judy is talking to the little boy.
- Laura: Doesn't it talk to you or something?
- Mr. Knott: Yes. There is a motion detector will pick you up and you hear this voice come on and it tells a brief story. I was blessed to be the one they picked to do the narration.
- Laura: Really.
- Mr. Knott: Yes. Because of my relationship with Judy. They did it at the studio down in Newport and it's a recording that plays. As soon as you walk up it plays.
- Roberta: What an honor.
- Mr. Knott: Yes it was great for me to do that, to do it for him and I enjoyed it. The little boy is a nephew of ours so it turned out good.
- Roberta: Mr. Knott I am going to stop our formal recording right now but I want to thank you so much for this information, it's been very valuable. It will be very valuable. We will be calling you back again.
- Mr. Knott: I am at your disposal any time doing something with the history. You call me and I will make an adjustment.

Roberta: Ok, thank you.

Mr. Knott: It is an honor for me.

Roberta: Thank you.