

**MSS 587, Iron Hill Museum oral history recordings and transcripts, Special Collections, University of Delaware Library, Newark, Delaware.**

**Special Collections Department, University of Delaware Library / Newark,  
Delaware 19717-5267 / Phone: 302-831-2229 / Fax: 302-831-6003 / URL:  
<http://www.lib.udel.edu/ud/spec/>**

### **Terms Governing Use and Reproduction**

Use of materials from this collection beyond the exceptions provided for in the Fair Use and Educational Use clauses of the U.S. Copyright Law may violate federal law.

Permission to publish or reproduce is required from the copyright holder. Please contact Special Collections Department, University of Delaware Library,  
<http://www.lib.udel.edu/cgi-bin/askspec.cgi>

## Iron Hill School Oral History Project

Interview with: Reverend Allen Oliver Smith, Jr.  
Date of Interview: October 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2003  
Interviewer: Roberta Perkins  
Transcriber: Marcia Adams

Roberta: This is Roberta Perkins, today's date is Friday, October 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2003 and I am interviewing the Reverend Allen Oliver Smith, Jr. We are here at the Iron Hill Natural History Museum and I am interviewing Rev. Smith as part of the Iron Hill Restoration Project and from this project we seek to obtain experiences of former students at the Iron Hill School and at this time Rev. Smith I want to thank you so very much for your time. I am going to first start off with a few questions about growing up in the Iron Hill community. If you could state your full name and date and place of birth.

Rev. Smith: My full name is The Reverend Allen Oliver Smith Junior and I was born in Iron Hill, Delaware, on May the 20<sup>th</sup>, 1931. I lived in a little house, now its called Smith Way Road.

Roberta: Smith Way?

Rev. Smith: Smith Way Road now it's called. Smith Way Road.

Roberta: Now how far is that from here?

Rev. Smith: It's approximately about 2 ½ maybe 3 miles.

Roberta: Who were your parents?

Rev. Smith: My parents name – my mother was Estella B. Hopkins Smith and my father's name was Allen Oliver Smith, Senior.

Roberta: Would you spell your mother's name for me, her first name?

Rev. Smith: E-s-t-e-l-l-a.

Roberta: Okay and her middle name was -

Rev. Smith: Hopkins.

Roberta: H-o-p-k-i-n-s? And her last name was -

Rev. Smith: Smith now which is her married name – well her middle name was Bertha and her last name was Hopkins before she got married.

Roberta: Did you have brothers and sisters?

Rev. Smith: Yes, I had 4 sisters and 1 brother. My oldest sister, they are all deceased now, my oldest sister was named Dorothy, next to her was my other sister named Margie (Marjorie) and another sister was Mildred and I had a brother after her, his name was Ernest and my younger sister was named Daisy.

Roberta: Did you always live in Iron Hill?

Rev. Smith: Most of all my life except the years I was in the service.

Roberta: Okay, I am going to ask you about your service experience later on if you don't mind. Could you describe a little bit what your house was like?

Rev. Smith: It was a small little house you know back there coming from a poor family we just had to live the best way we could back then. It was a nice home – it wasn't all that modern but it was a nice home.

Roberta: What do you remember – do you remember any particular thing about your childhood growing up in Iron Hill?

Rev. Smith: It was great. It was beautiful, I had a beautiful childhood life. We was surrounded by our relatives. Most of our relatives lived in that same area that I lived in and I had cousins to play with. It was really fun. I really had fun coming up living in Iron Hill.

Roberta: Can you tell me just in your neighborhood, what games did you play?

Rev. Smith: Well we played baseball, we played marbles and hopscotch. The girls used to jump rope and we had, probably nobody knows this game we used to get old tires and we used to bat them up and down the road, take sticks and we would hit them and they would roll down the highway you know and we would call that fun. Then we used to make little two wheeled carts. It had two wheels on it and it had an axle and it had a pole

that would come on and they would have a little steering wheel and we used to pretend like we was driving cars.

Roberta: Were these bicycle tires? Car tires?

Rev. Smith: No they were regular car tires we would bat up and down the highway.

Roberta: Car tires were much thinner then.

Rev. Smith: Oh yes.

Roberta: Did they have spokes in them?

Rev. Smith: No.

Roberta: How did people in the community, when you were growing up, communicate? How did people keep up with what was going on in the community? Outside of the community?

Rev. Smith: Well most of the time we would go tell if something happened in the community would be by word of mouth. Back then we didn't have no telephones. In my house we didn't have no telephone. Like in school we would communicate and also at the church. We would get the latest news of what was going on in our community.

Roberta: Did your family own your house?

Rev. Smith: Yes they owned the house.

Roberta: Do you know were they the first purchasers in the family of that house?

Rev. Smith: Yes.

Roberta: Do you know what it cost?

Rev. Smith: No actually I don't. No.

Roberta: You told me what the young people did for entertainment and fun, what about the adults? What did the adults do, do you remember?

Rev. Smith: Well they would have social gatherings. Like at churches they had social affairs and sometimes you would go visit each other, house to house. They used to have house parties. I guess nobody knows about them.

Roberta: Do you want to tell me about them?

Rev. Smith: Well they used to have house parties and we would come together and socialize with one another. Most of the times when we had house parties

would be on a Saturday night you know, or a Friday night when people didn't have to go to work the next day.

Roberta: Everybody brought something?

Rev. Smith: Well yes. Back there in those days I'm going to tell the truth they used to have alcoholic beverage you know. I have always been a Christian. I have been out there in the world the same as anybody else you know.

Roberta: Were any of these beverages homemade?

Rev. Smith: Oh yes. Homemade beer, homemade wine.

Roberta: What did you use to make the wine with?

Rev. Smith: They used to use dandelion. Make dandelion wine and bread wine and fruit wine and like that.

Roberta: I remember I had a great aunt who made dandelion wine and that is why I asked. What were important celebrations in the community?

Rev. Smith: Well the greatest would be like holidays like Fourth of July, or Memorial Day, Easter and Christmas.

Roberta: Were any of them more important than the others? Did the community celebrate one more than the other?

Rev. Smith: I think Christmas was really a day that we used to celebrate because we would go from house to house visiting friends and relatives. I think Christmas was one of the greatest holidays that we celebrated back there.

Roberta: Weekends and school nights as a young person, how late were you allowed to stay out?

Rev. Smith: Well, I would say maybe about 9:30 or 10 o'clock back then we didn't have nothing to stay out for. We didn't have no television and most all I had was just a radio you.

Roberta: Did it make any difference if it was a holiday or a weekend the time

Rev. Smith: Our parents was very strict you know they wanted us in the house at a certain time and if we wasn't we would pay the consequence.

Roberta: Do you want to elaborate on the consequence.

- Rev. Smith: Well at the old home place we used to have a beechnut tree and my parents would go out there and break a limb off that beechnut tree and give you a switch.
- Roberta: A reminder?
- Rev. Smith: Yes, a reminder.
- Roberta: Do you know August Quarterly? Wilmington's religious ceremony?
- Rev. Smith: Yes I am familiar with that. When I left this school and went to Howard High, I left here and then I went to Howard High and I got well acquainted with August Quarterly in Wilmington at that time.
- Roberta: But living here in Iron Hill
- Rev. Smith: I can't recall but I believe that we did go there from when I was here in Iron Hill.
- Roberta: How important was the church in your community?
- Rev. Smith: Very important. Very important. It was the hub of the community, the church was the hub of the community.
- Roberta: Other than services, what went on in the church or as an extension of the church in the community?
- Rev. Smith: Most of the time they would help the families that needed help and they would sort of what we would call outreach ministry today. They would go out a long time ago and help people, bringing them food or whatever they said they had need of. Clothes, if we had some clothes that they could wear we let them have it you know. It was a whole lot better then than it is in today's community I believe.
- Roberta: Do you think this experience in the church when you were growing up influenced your life?
- Rev. Smith: It did. It really did because now I am an ordained minister in the church. It did. It helped me a lot.
- Roberta: At what point in your life did you decide you wanted to go into the ministry?
- Rev. Smith: Well it was late in life. I was out there a long time but I came to the Lord and received the baptism of the Holy Spirit I'd say in the year 1980. 1980.

- Roberta: When you were young, what jobs were available?
- Rev. Smith: Well right across from where I lived there was a Finnish family who was chicken farmers and I worked during the summer months helping on the chicken farm. I was gathering eggs and cleaning out the chicken coops and all that and cutting grass. Then we used to pick tomatoes and different farm work. Thin corn out and the harvesting of wheat. Mostly farm related work.
- Roberta: How long did you do that? Do you remember?
- Rev. Smith: Well I remember doing that till I was 12 so that when I got old enough I went into high school I still worked on the farms but after I went into another field of occupation.
- Roberta: Was that your first job?
- Rev. Smith: I would say that it was my first job.
- Roberta: What was the pay like, how did you get paid?
- Rev. Smith: Well it wasn't much, maybe a couple of dollars a day, something like that, maybe more, maybe less.
- Roberta: Now how long did you work? Was it Monday through Friday?
- Rev. Smith: Well I would say Monday through Friday, you know because they never allowed us work on Sunday. We usually worked Saturdays too.
- Roberta: How old were you?
- Rev. Smith: I would say about maybe 11 – 8. From 11 to about I'd say about 10 something like that. Around that age.
- Roberta: And you did this until you were about –
- Rev. Smith: Well I did it until I went to high school and after I went to high school I did work on a farm on a Saturday until I graduated from high school.
- Roberta: What were your experiences with the various employers? How were you treated?
- Rev. Smith: Well this lady – as I told you she was Finnish and she was very kind. She was very kind. She was very considerate, I liked her. Her name was Klaselo I can't pronounce it now; I can't spell it now. She was Finnish. She was a nice lady to work for.

Roberta: Do you remember what race relations were like growing up?

Rev. Smith: Well I had some fair white friends when I was growing up, the family that lived up here which is now Otts Chapel Road named McCormicks and they were very good friends of mine. In fact they had a white school right here on the corner of Otts Chapel and Baltimore Pike. They converted it into a house and we had run-ins. I want to be fair we had run-ins but we got along together. We got along good together with the white people. We did.

Roberta: In education or housing or in any situation that you can remember what were some of your experiences with discrimination or do you remember even having those experiences?

Rev. Smith: Well first of all I would say that after I finished this school I had to catch a train to go into Wilmington when there was a school within a five mile radius of where I lived at, at Newark High and I couldn't go there. I had to catch a train to go into Wilmington to go to Howard High School and I was a little bitter about that. I thought why can't I go to school closer to my home. After I got off the train I would have to walk about 14 blocks to Howard High School but I was blessed in one way because my father he worked for the Pennsylvania Railroad at that time and I got free transportation by train.

Roberta: What was your day like going to Howard High to complete your education and by that I mean what time did you have to –

Rev. Smith: Well I would have to get up early. We would have to get up around 6 o'clock. I believe my train left from a little place they called Iron Hill Station about 7:30 the train would come and it would take us about maybe 20 to 25 minutes to go from Iron Hill to Wilmington. So it was about 8 o'clock when I got to the station, it was an Amtrak station now, it used to be the Pennsylvania Railroad Station and I used to walk from there from Front Street to 14<sup>th</sup> and Poplar in Wilmington to get to Howard High.

Roberta: That's a long walk.

Rev. Smith: Yes. It was.

Roberta: As you got older do you remember like if you had to go to a restaurant or to a hotel, did you have problems? Would you care to share an experience?

Rev. Smith: Well I never had a really experience but I was just kind of angry when some of my white friends they would go in the front door and I would have to go in the back door. There never really was any confrontation.

Roberta: Did you understand what that was all about?

Rev. Smith: Oh yes.

Roberta: Did you participate in efforts to dispel discrimination? Did you ever involve yourself in protests?

Rev. Smith: No I really didn't. I should have but I didn't.

Roberta: Some of the experiences that you had with discrimination or segregation, how did you handle them?

Rev. Smith: I handled them very well. When I went in the service we were discriminated when I went in the service but I overcome it you know. I thank God that I could overcome it. In fact when I finished basic training I went to Alaska and I was the first black person in that outfit when I was in Alaska. First one. I integrated that whole company.

Roberta: What was the outfit?

Rev. Smith: It was the 274<sup>th</sup> Airborne.

Roberta: Was this Army?

Rev. Smith: Army, yes.

Roberta: What was that experience like for you?

Rev. Smith: Well we had some nice guys. Most of the guys were from California and Chicago. They was together. They wasn't integrated like that and they just took me in as a brother you know.

Roberta: You didn't have a problem?

Rev. Smith: No I didn't have no problem.

Roberta: How long did you serve in the military?

Rev. Smith: Two years.

Roberta: What did you do when you got out?

- Rev. Smith: Well after I got out I went to work for the city of Newark. I worked for the city of Newark for 38 years.
- Roberta: In what capacity?
- Rev. Smith: I was what you call it now, I'm going to put it in technical terms, I was a sanitation engineer. In fact I was a garbage man but I drove a truck.
- Roberta: Did you have any family members before you that were in the military?
- Rev. Smith: I had a brother. My brother was in the service. He was in the Navy during World War II. I was in there during the Korean conflict.
- Roberta: How long was he in the Navy?
- Rev. Smith: He was in the Navy 3 years, maybe more.
- Roberta: When you were in the service where did you sign up? Was it Newark?
- Rev. Smith: I was drafted in Wilmington. I left from Wilmington.
- Roberta: What was the treatment like there? What was the procedure?
- Rev. Smith: Oh well it was pretty rough there you know to pass that physical examination because at that time I was worried about – everybody thought I wasn't going to go in the service because of my size, I was just a little skinny person and they all said, you ain't got nothing to worry about, you're not going to pass, you're too little to go in the service – it didn't work that way.
- Roberta: Did you just make the weight requirement?
- Rev. Smith: Well I think I did because I just made it.
- Roberta: What was it like in basic training camp?
- Rev. Smith: It was rough. I took heavy infantry training which was 16 weeks. We did everything that the Army required us to do. It was pretty rough. I had 16 weeks of infantry training.
- Roberta: Did you find you got smaller or did you get bigger?
- Rev. Smith: Well I stayed the same size. No I came out, when I got discharged I weighed about 140 pounds. I never put on weight until the later years when I went into the ministry then I really picked up weight then.
- Roberta: What were your duties after you went through your training?

- Rev. Smith: I worked out of the Communications Department. I was a wire man. In fact I was a switchboard operator, telephone switchboard operator. That was my main occupation while I was in the service.
- Roberta: Did you see combat duty?
- Rev. Smith: No. I was blessed.
- Roberta: So did you stay stateside?
- Rev. Smith: Well they used to call it Alaska when I was there but now when I was there I was in Alaska.
- Roberta: Let me kind of take us back to the community a little bit and politics. What things do you remember about voting and political campaigns in Iron Hill?
- Rev. Smith: They used to use the school house for some of the campaigns. They would come and hold rallies here at the school. Pretty near every election year they would come around, for instance the county they who was running for a particular office of the state.
- Roberta: Where you still here when you became of voting age?
- Rev. Smith: In Iron Hill? Yes.
- Roberta: Did any one ever try to pay you?
- Rev. Smith: Oh yes. They would try to buy your vote.
- Roberta: What were some of the tactics they used?
- Rev. Smith: Well maybe they would give you five dollars or something like that and they would try to buy your vote.
- Roberta: Who were some of the prominent politicians during your time? Do you remember?
- Rev. Smith: The only one, he's dead and gone now, was the name of – he worked out of one of these courts in Wilmington – his name was George Berlin. He was the motivator. He knew everybody that lived in Iron Hill and the Glasgow area. There was a Polary too. Wayne Polary. Yes, I think his name was Wayne. He held some kind of office, political office, but I don't know what.

- Roberta: Were the politicians ever effective or responsive to the requests or needs of the Iron Hill residents?
- Rev. Smith: I would say yes and no. Some of the issues they would promise and never came to fulfillment. Some of them did and some of them didn't.
- Roberta: How do you think life has changed, you know, you, your Iron Hill community?
- Rev. Smith: Oh it's changed a lot. Where all these houses are surrounded in the area it was nothing but fields and woods. The population has really grown, it's a whole lot different. I was just saying the other day a lot of the fields that we used to hunt rabbits and quail and pheasant, they had built houses now.
- Roberta: Do you think you could find some of the trails and pathways that you used to go to school?
- Rev. Smith: The path that we used to use to go to school they had built houses now. What's that road called now? It ain't Ironside, because right down here is Whitaker, it's the next road down that they had built all these houses. That's the way – we used to come out what we call now Smith Way Road and we would cut through the woods and come out where Iron Hill Church is that's St. Daniel's Church which is on Whitaker Road then we would go up a path or a driveway to where my grandmother used to live and then we would cut across the woods right over here and come to the school that way.
- Roberta: How extensive was your family in Iron Hill? How many family members?
- Rev. Smith: Oh most all my family members lived in Iron Hill.
- Roberta: Grandparents?
- Rev. Smith: Yes.
- Roberta: Cousins?
- Rev. Smith: Yes. I call it a family place.
- Roberta: What advice would you give young people today?

Rev. Smith: I would tell most of the kids now to stay in school, get all the education you can and get to know the Lord, the main purpose is to get to know the Lord and accept Him as their personal Savior.

Roberta: This is the end of Tape 1, side A.

Begin Tape 1, Side B

Roberta: April Veness, Professor of the geography class is going to ask Rev. Smith a few questions.

April Veness: I would like to follow up on some of the questions that Roberta asked. you like here in the Iron Hill area. One of the things that came up when you first mentioned the Smith Way Road I immediately wondered if that Smith name is any relation to you?

Rev. Smith: Yes, they named it after my father.

April Veness: They did name it after your father. And how did they manage to come up with that name?

Rev. Smith: Well he was the first black family that lived on that road so they voted that they were going to name that road after my family.

April Veness: And you said a lot of your family was in this area.

Rev. Smith: Oh yes.

April Veness: Did you own a lot of land?

Rev. Smith: Well, considerable, yes we did.

April Veness: Any feel for how many acres that might have been?

Rev. Smith: Well I wouldn't be afraid to say that at one time my father probably owned about 14 acres of ground.

April Veness: And you were farming that land?

Rev. Smith: Well we farmed it, yes.

April Veness: I think I heard you say you were working on a farm, picked tomatoes, thinned corn. Were those on the family fields?

Rev. Smith: No we did that for non pay. When I went out to work I went out to different farms.

April Veness: Okay and were those farms within walking distance?

Rev. Smith: Some would be in walking distance and some wouldn't.

April Veness: Were they typically the farms of white land owners rather than blacks?

Rev. Smith: Well some of them were and some of them were not because we had a prominent family in our black family, the Williams family where Glasgow High is now. They were one of the biggest farmers around in the state of Delaware at that time.

April Veness: And they would hire on

Rev. Smith: Oh they would hire us for like harvesting the wheat or the corn or like that. In fact Mrs. Williams, she had a stand in Wilmington on King Street.

April Veness: Who did the harvesting on your family's land?

Rev. Smith: Well we did it.

April Veness: So you basically, I'm trying to think of the child here you said that you started when you were around 8 or 9 years old so when you finished school would you be expected –

Rev. Smith: Oh well we had chores to do when we came home. In the winter time we had to cut wood or we had to feed the pigs or like that. We had a lot of chores around the house to do, we was busy.

April Veness: And when you went off to work on somebody else's property –

Rev. Smith: Well sometimes my father would do it you know.

April Veness: So you would go as a group?

Rev. Smith: Yes.

April Veness: I am kind of curious, I know that it has changed today, a lot of times today when young children earn some money it's their pocket money, but where did your money go?

Rev. Smith: Well I had good parents. The money that I made they let me keep, yes I had good parents about that, they wouldn't take nothing from me.

April Veness: What did you spend it on?

Rev. Smith: Well when you're a kid – candy and stuff like that. There wasn't much to spend it on because there was no place to go. Maybe go to a movie once in a while.

April Veness: And the closest movie theater was –

Rev. Smith: At Elkton because it was segregated at the time we used to have just a little area up in the back but we couldn't go to Newark.

April Veness: But they had a theater in Newark.

Rev. Smith: Oh yes they had one called State Theater on Main Street.

April Veness: That was a famous one.

Rev. Smith: Oh yes.

April Veness: That's interesting. Well since you brought up Newark, let me ask you another question. You worked in Newark, I think you said 38 years? Did you move to Newark?

Rev. Smith: No I stayed around the area, I stayed around the Glasgow and Iron Hill area and after my second wife, after my first wife died, I married again and that's why I moved into Wilmington.

April Veness: So your family stayed in the Iron Hill area? Are they still here?

Rev. Smith: Oh yes. I have a daughter that just built a new home on the old home place on Smith Way Road.

April Veness: Is she still holding a lot of land there?

Rev. Smith: Well they done sold some of the land.

April Veness: That was going to get me to another question. When did a lot of these parcels of land owned by the black families, African-American families, get sold off?

Rev. Smith: Well mostly back there you know, to be truthful with you, the black families lost a lot of ground by not paying the taxes. That was the main thing that happened that the black families lost ground because they didn't pay their taxes and then the whites would come in and check it out whose land wasn't paying their taxes and then they would pay the taxes and eventually they would take the land.

April Veness: You would get evicted.

Rev. Smith: Yes you'd lose the land you know.

April Veness: About what was the time frame when this was happening?

Rev. Smith: I would say about in the late '50's or '60's something like this. Maybe the '70's.

April Veness: So it was not during the depression.

Rev. Smith: No

April Veness: Then I need to ask in terms of – if the families couldn't pay the taxes on the land, what do you think was happening? Why couldn't these families – you talk about different work - was it the agriculture - the railroad?

Rev. Smith: Most of it, after you got a certain age they would leave Iron Hill and go someplace else. They weren't concerned about their father's ground, or their uncle's ground.

April Veness: So the younger generation moved away and left the parents

Rev. Smith: And eventually they died out.

April Veness: So what happened here is that the aging parents who stayed on these farms could no longer come up with the cash to pay for it, and the children who moved off to different places?

Rev. Smith: They wasn't concerned.

April Veness: So now this is interesting because it suggests that there wasn't a really strong attachment to this land and wanting to preserve it.

Rev. Smith: Right.

April Veness: Any feeling as to why that would have been the case?

Rev. Smith: No I really don't.

April Veness: So in the late 1950's and the '60's a lot of these larger land holdings from these older families were being lost due to taxes.

Rev. Smith: Due to taxes, yes.

April Veness: It is interesting when you talked about the jobs you had, I was here for another interview where he worked for the railroad, his father worked for the railroad.

Rev. Smith: My father did too.

April Veness: Your father, this is two men that I have now heard talk about the railroad was this an important place for the community here to get jobs, the men?

Rev. Smith: Well I believe the railroad was the only, what you would call, the only job, the railroad and farms – farming and the railroad was eventually paying more than the farmers would pay so they would go to the railroad.

April Veness: And the railroad company had no problem hiring you?

Rev. Smith: No, most of them was used as trackmen, they wouldn't hold no big positions like foremans or operators. They were common laborers you know.

April Veness: Then this would have been one of the jobs of your father's generation.

Rev. Smith: Yes.

April Veness: They worked on the farm but it brought cash into the family.

Rev. Smith: Right.

April Veness: It is interesting that they gave you the free transportation into Wilmington. Did the father's generation have to fight for that privilege?

Rev. Smith: No because as long as he was employed by the company railroad, the children that was going to school was eligible for free transportation.

April Veness: That worked out really well.

Rev. Smith: Yes it did.

April Veness: The other jobs that you talked about besides agriculture and the railroad which are very tied here you talked about the military service, did a lot of the men from this area join up?

Rev. Smith: Well most of the young men was drafted. There probably was some that enlisted but most of them was drafted. In fact myself, I was drafted.

April Veness: That's interesting. You were drafted because of the Korean? Did you find, there has been a lot written about the military and how it affected the progress of African-American population. Did you find that for you it opened up doorways when you came back – the fact that you served in the military?

Rev. Smith: Well it opened up some doorways and some it didn't.

April Veness: Can you elaborate a little?

Rev. Smith: Well there were still some jobs that we were qualified to have and yet we were denied.

April Veness: What kind of jobs?

Rev. Smith: I was classified as a wireman and a switchboard operator and I couldn't get a job with the telephone company back then.

April Veness: This would have been in the 1960's?

Rev. Smith: Well I went in the service in '51 and I came out in '53.

April Veness: Ok so when you returned you had this training in the military and nobody would hire you.

Rev. Smith: No.

April Veness: Is that about the time that you looked for a job in Newark?

Rev. Smith: Yes.

April Veness: In terms of the types of jobs that you could get, now I happen to know that they have their own electrical division, they wouldn't have hired you for a higher job than that?

Rev. Smith: We had one of our employees, he went over into the electrical department of Newark and they treated him so bad that he was scared. He came back into our department.

April Veness: And was your department primarily African-American men?

Rev. Smith: Primarily.

April Veness: Was the pay different?

Rev. Smith: Oh sure a trash collector wouldn't get as much as an electrician.

April Veness: So the fact that they wouldn't hire you in for the job that you were qualified to do you were always stuck with lower wages.

Rev. Smith: Yes.

April Veness: Did that tend to – I'm assuming that it was kind of discouraging.

Rev. Smith: It was. It was.

April Veness: Were you married at that time?

Rev. Smith: Yes.

April Veness: Were there any children?

Rev. Smith: I had 4 children.

April Veness: How would you describe for them what their opportunities would be.

Rev. Smith: I always told them there would be a change coming and eventually it came. You can't let that discourage you. You might say I am talking too much about religion but I am strictly a God- fearing man and I love God and I love the work that I am doing in the ministry. You've got to have a loving heart sometimes to overcome problems. I know a lot problems if I didn't have the Lord on my side I don't know where I would be. I thank God that I accept him as my personal Savior and things has been a whole lot better.

April Veness: How did you train for the ministry if you were working?

Rev. Smith: Well I was called into the ministry. You have to be called in order to really be successful in the ministry. I was called and my former pastor who is dead and gone now, his name was Rev. John Brown, he told me that God had a calling on my life and I prayed about it and God opened up the doors and that's how I am in the ministry today. I went to a theological school and I graduated with a Bachelor of Theology.

April Veness: Where was the school?

Rev. Smith: In Bolden Seminar, in Wilmington.

April Veness: What years was this?

Rev. Smith: I believe I graduated in that school in '88 or '89. I have my diploma at home.

April Veness: So this was really at the time you were still working for Newark?

Rev. Smith: Oh yes, I worked, I never retired from the City of Newark until 1993.

April Veness: And you have a church? Your church is located where?

Rev. Smith: I am a retired minister now. I am a retired pastor. I belong to the United Methodist Episcopal Church and I was assigned, well I pastored 3 churches. My first church was in Philadelphia, a church called Friendship UAME Church, then I came back and pastored my little church out here on Whitaker Road which is St. Daniel's. Then I left St. Daniel's and went into a church in Avondale called Galilee UAME Church and I retired from that in the year of 2002 I retired.

April Veness: And so my last question Rev. Smith is when you worked in Newark what were the ties between Iron Hill African -American community and the African- American community that lived there in Newark right in the center of Newark?

Rev. Smith: We were together you know. I had a lot of friends that lived in Newark and I think we got along good together, both communities in Newark and in Iron Hill.

April Veness: Were they relatives?

Rev. Smith: Yes, in fact the last teacher that was here was my cousin, Minnie Ryder. She was my cousin.

April Veness: And she went here?

Rev. Smith: She taught school here. She was the last teacher that taught school here.

April Veness: And she lived here?

Rev. Smith: No, she lived in Newark.

April Veness: So she drove down from Newark. So there were some pretty interesting ties. I assume that the Newark students also had to catch the train to go into Wilmington.

Rev. Smith: No, they had a bus. They went by bus.

April Veness: Who provided the bus?

Rev. Smith: I think the state of Delaware did.

April Veness: So if you happened to live in Newark you caught the bus.

Rev. Smith: Right, if you lived outside of Newark you had to get your own transportation.

April Veness: If you had not had your father working for the railroad and had the free transportation in, what would have happened?

Rev. Smith: I don't know, it was by the grace of God that it worked out that way. I don't know what would have happened. I would probably would have went to Newark school I think they went until the 8<sup>th</sup> grade. I probably would have to went there and then transferred into Howard High in Wilmington.

April Veness: So having that railroad pass made all the difference.

Rev. Smith: Oh it made all the difference in the world, yes, it was a blessing.

April Veness: Did your sisters use it as well?

Rev. Smith: All the family members that went to the school they used it, up to Howard High they used it.

April Veness: And the last thing, when you got on the train did you have to sit somewhere by yourself?

Rev. Smith: No, we would sit together it wouldn't be no difference, I would sit with white people or whatever you know there wasn't no special cars that we had to ride in. We could ride in any car we wanted.

April Veness: So there were quite a number of them as young students that came from this area whose families were connected to the railroad that got the passes.

Rev. Smith: Yes.

April Veness: I think that was kind of what I was going for here.

Roberta: This is Roberta Perkins and I am going to continue interviewing Rev. Smith about his experiences in school. Rev. Smith, these questions, I am probably going to jump around a little bit, any school, when you were in Iron Hill School, what years did you go?

Rev. Smith: I started in the year of 1937.

Roberta: And you went until?

Rev. Smith: 1943 which was the 6<sup>th</sup> grade. Six years.

Roberta: What was that experience like for you?

Rev. Smith: It was a wonderful experience. I loved this school, I loved it so much that when I left this school and went to Howard High, the days that we would have off, some days in Wilmington we would have days off, and this school would be still having school and I would come back to this school and the teachers there would even ask me to stand and tell my experience at Howard High and I loved that. I loved this school. I did. In fact when I became an adult I served on the trustee board here. I was elected president of the PTA here.

Roberta: When you talked about coming back when Howard was closed but Iron Hill School was open, what did you do?

- Rev. Smith: I was a mentor with the children and kids you know. I just had a good time. Miss Body used to let me tell my experience at Howard High and I thought that was great you know and some of the little kids, they looked up to me as a role model you know and I felt real good about that you know.
- Roberta: Other than sharing your experiences at Howard High School with the students were there other things that you did when you came back?
- Rev. Smith: Well like I said I just had a good time just to be setting back in the old school that I graduated at back in the '40's.
- Roberta: How old were you when you were on the Board here?
- Rev. Smith: I was about 19 or maybe 20.
- Roberta: Were you one of the youngest ones?
- Rev. Smith: Probably were. I probably was one of the youngest.
- Roberta: That's certainly impressive. So what were your duties, what did you do as a Board member?
- Rev. Smith: Oh we would see different things what was on the agenda for the school, different projects that we could put into practice and it was nice. Things that the school could stand in need of if we could help them out in that area we would do it. In fact we would have dances like maybe twice a month for the children and I would mostly be the chaperone. I would be in charge and we would have a nice time. We would charge about 25 or maybe 30 cents for them to come in and they had a good time. It was very good for the community too I believe.
- Roberta: Did the parents participate too in these dances?
- Rev. Smith: Well they would provide the food, like hot dogs and stuff like that, potato chips and stuff like that.
- Roberta: You said you were 19 or 20 you know when you became a board member, how long were you in that position before you went into the service?
- Rev. Smith: Well I would say maybe a couple of years.
- Roberta: When you finished with the military, did you come back and become involved?

- Rev. Smith: No I didn't. After I came out of the service I didn't get involved. No.
- Roberta: During the 6 years you were in school how many teachers did you have?
- Rev. Smith: One teacher.
- Roberta: One teacher and what was the teacher's name?
- Rev. Smith: My teacher's name was Meeta S. Body.
- Roberta: What were the hours that you went to school?
- Rev. Smith: As far as I know I believe our first class was 9 o'clock and we would get out about 3; 9 to 3
- Roberta: As a first grade student what was that experience like for you? If you had Miss Body from 1<sup>st</sup> grade all the way through to the 6<sup>th</sup> so what was your experience like?
- Rev. Smith: In fact when I first started in the 1<sup>st</sup> grade, being the youngest in the family they always called me a mommy's boy and I didn't feel right without having my mother. After I got into school I was weaned off of being a mommy's boy and I always liked school.
- Roberta: In 1<sup>st</sup> grade how old were you?
- Rev. Smith: I was 6 years old.
- Roberta: That was a little tough leaving home. As you progressed and from what I understand a lot of times as the students progressed from the 1<sup>st</sup> grade to the 6<sup>th</sup> grade they became more involved in helping the other students.
- Rev. Smith: Yes we did. The older students would help the younger students.
- Roberta: What was the school day like? You can pick any of the years.
- Rev. Smith: Well as best I can recall our school day would start at 9 o'clock. We would have devotions which would consist of singing a song, doing a scripture and a prayer and Pledge of Allegiance to the flag. Four things that we would do before our classes would start. Normally Miss Body, our teacher, would start with the 1<sup>st</sup> grade, right along in here the 1<sup>st</sup> grade would be and she would give them assignments what lessons they would gonna do, mostly the 1<sup>st</sup> grade all you would give was reading, writing and arithmetic or math they call it now. Then she would move over into the 2<sup>nd</sup> grade which would be on the left, it would be the 2<sup>nd</sup> grade and maybe

she would give them their assignments and then over there she would move to the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade and they would do their assignments too. It continued right up until the 6<sup>th</sup> grade. As best as I can recall from the 4<sup>th</sup> until the 6<sup>th</sup> grade we would have more subjects than what the lower grades would have. We would have like history, English, geography, music and art. Then on Fridays, Fridays would be one of the best days to in the school because we used to have a club and we would meet. We had a president, vice president and secretary and we the treasurer would come and bank our little money every Friday after the business session we would have entertainment session which would consist of children that had talent. Some had talent and some didn't. Some could sing, some could recite poems and some could dance. Whatever your talent was you would exercise it on that Friday. We used to have our studies during the morning hours and during the rest of Friday would be taken up with our club and our entertainment period. It was nice.

Roberta: What was your talent?

Rev. Smith: Well I was a person that could recite a long poem. Any time the teacher had a long poem for me to do she always picked me. My memory was good. I could memorize a poem, any long poem I could recite it. I still can do it sometimes.

Roberta: Do you remember any?

Rev. Smith: Yes. 'Listen my children and you shall hear the midnight ride of Paul Revere. On the 16<sup>th</sup> of April in '75 hardly a man is now alive. I remember that famous day and year as he said to his country folk if the British strike by land or sea I'll hang a light aloft in the church.' I can't remember it all but I could remember a lot of long poems. 'I am American, my father belonged to the Sons of the Revolution, my mother to the Colonial Dames, one of my ancestors pitched tea overboard in the Boston harbor, another stood his ground with war' and I could go on and on with a poem. If I sat down and really got into it I could do the same

thing today. My wife tells me that you can remember poems when you went to school and I still can do it.

Roberta: Did you always recite a poem?

Rev. Smith: Well most of the time and I liked a little action too. I could act a little bit too you know.

Roberta: One of the activities that I understand was pretty popular at Iron Hill was Field Day.

Rev. Smith: Oh yes, that's when three schools would come together. It would be Christiana, Glasgow and Iron Hill. It would be the first Friday in May. That would be the date.

End of Tape 1, side B

Begin Tape 2, side A.

Roberta: This is Roberta Perkins this is tape 2 side 1 the Iron Hill School Restoration Oral History Project and I am interviewing Rev. Allen Smith, Jr. Rev. Smith let me ask you a little bit about the teacher, Miss Body. How did she get to school?

Rev. Smith: She drove. She drove from Wilmington.

Roberta: She lived in Wilmington?

Rev. Smith: Yes.

Roberta: And during the whole time you were a student she taught you?

Rev. Smith: Yes.

Roberta: This lady was African-American? As far as you know all of the teachers that were in the school were African-Americans teachers?

Rev. Smith: Yes.

Roberta: How far from school were you? How did you get to school?

Rev. Smith: I walked.

Roberta: How far was that?

Rev. Smith: I would say probably 3 miles, maybe more maybe less.

Roberta: How difficult was it in the winter?

Rev. Smith: It was very difficult in the winter. Some days we would have to close down because of snow you know. But it was difficult and cold walking too.

Roberta: The school closed?

Rev. Smith: No most of the time school probably would be open. It would take like a big snow that would close it. But cold weather – many times we had to sit in the school with coats on. They used to have an old potbellied stove. After you bank a coal fire during the night it takes a lot to get that stove back up to the proper temperature. There would be some days that it was so cold sometimes we would leave the school and go over to a house right across from here and the lady that lived there would let us get warm.

Roberta: Till the school warmed up?

Rev. Smith: Yes.

Roberta: Where was the stove?

Rev. Smith: The stove set about where that TV is there, it had a what we called a pot belly but it had a great big round casing around it, around the stove, in case it got real hot we wouldn't nobody fall against it you know. It had this protection around it.

Roberta: Can you describe where the teacher's desk, what was in the front.

Rev. Smith: The teacher's desk was about see where that cabinet is over there on the left, it would be there and there used to be a teacher, she used to have a closet not too far from her desk and the piano used to be right over where that cabinet is right there. That's where the piano used to be.

Roberta: What was lighting like?

Rev. Smith: We had, I think it was round, round electric lights, round globes on the electric lights. I can remember George Washington's picture would be there and Abraham Lincoln's picture would be over here.

Roberta: What was in the back?

Rev. Smith: It would be what we called blackboards where we would go and do our work on the blackboards.

- Roberta: Was that the only place where blackboards were?
- Rev. Smith: Well blackboards along here too.
- Roberta: What did you do for lunches? Did you bring your lunch?
- Rev. Smith: Yes we brought our lunch and then as best as I can recall we used to have the government surplus. They used to deliver food like beans and rice and canned goods like peaches and pears and stuff like that. The upper class, like the young ladies that were about like 10 or 12, they would prepare hot lunches like soup or rice or something like that. They would do the cooking and the little kitchen used to be right back in there.
- Roberta: To the right of where the stove was?
- Rev. Smith: Yes where the older girls would prepare some hot lunches for us.
- Roberta: Now can you tell me why the government –
- Rev. Smith: I don't know why. It started and then it stopped. I guess it was the government surplus stuff they had surplus and they would give it to the school you know.
- Roberta: Now was that during the whole 6 years you were here?
- Rev. Smith: No that probably started in my later years here, late 5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> grade to be sure.
- Roberta: And it had stopped before you finished here?
- Rev. Smith: It stopped right after I finished.
- Roberta: Did the school have a library?
- Rev. Smith: There used to be right back here somewhere – it wasn't what you would call a big library, no. It had books in it but I wouldn't classify it as a library.
- Roberta: Were they the text books or were they some
- Rev. Smith: Well some of them were textbooks and some of them were just other books you know.
- Roberta: What were the conditions of the textbooks that you used?
- Rev. Smith: I think they had 2 or 3 different grades – poor, fair or good. Most of ours were fair. Some of them had been well used.

- Roberta: Do you remember during the time that you were at Iron Hill that you ever got new books?
- Rev. Smith: I can remember, yes, we had new books but it was not that often.
- Roberta: What did you use for your classwork? Like paper? Pens? Pencils?
- Rev. Smith: Paper, yes.
- Roberta: What was that like for you? You enjoyed school, did you enjoy doing the classwork?
- Rev. Smith: Yes I did.
- Roberta: Was there something that was a favorite?
- Rev. Smith: I used to work with clay. I used to work with clay a lot too. I used to make different pottery like bowls and vases and animals I used to make. I liked that too, working with clay.
- Roberta: Did you keep any of that work?
- Rev. Smith: I had one that won a prize and I don't know what happened to it and it was left in the school and I guess eventually somebody must have thrown it away.
- Roberta: When students would go either in or out for recreation or even just coming in at the beginning of the school, do you remember whether there was a formation, whether the girls came in first?
- Rev. Smith: Well we used to line up out there on the steps and some would be on the right and some would be on the left and we came in that way.
- Roberta: Recreation. What kind of activities?
- Rev. Smith: Well there was baseball we had, we had dodgeball, jumping rope. There was quite a few activities we had we played out there on the playground.
- Roberta: Was there a Maypole or anything like that?
- Rev. Smith: No.
- Roberta: When you were here, I know a couple of the other people that I interviewed talked about cups and bowls that had their names on it, did you have that?
- Rev. Smith: I'm quite sure, yes.
- Roberta: What was the drinking water situation like?

- Rev. Smith: Well we used to have to carry water from a spring down maybe I'd say about a quarter of a mile. There used to be a spring down where the old iron pits was at and we'd go down there and the used to be a spring down there where we would carry our water from the spring back up here.
- Roberta: Then you would put it in
- Rev. Smith: Buckets. When we wanted a drink we would go in there and get water out of there we called it a cloak room back there.
- Roberta: So that was every day?
- Rev. Smith: Yes we had to get fresh water most every day.
- Roberta: So if there was water left over at the end of the day ...
- Rev. Smith: Well there would probably be some but not enough.
- Roberta: Did they use that water for cooking?
- Rev. Smith: Yes we used that water for cooking.
- Roberta: To what degree were the parents involved?
- Rev. Smith: They would come on special days like the last day of school they would come and special days like we would have a Christmas program and they would come and show their support on those special days.
- Roberta: What about supplies for the school? Did they make sure that books, paper, that kind of thing were supplied?
- Rev. Smith: Most of the time that we would have that, I'm sot sure on this but, I would say that I think that the state helped to supply some of these items that we needed. I'm not sure but some of us had to buy our own paper and stuff.
- Roberta: You never had to buy your own books?
- Rev. Smith: No.
- Roberta: Maintaining the school and keeping the school clean, was there one person that was responsible for it?
- Rev. Smith: Most of the time the older boys and the older girls would be janitors and clean it you know. It would be our responsibility to have the school in pretty good shape.
- Roberta: Do you have any experiences from, like if something was broken, did somebody have to come and fix it?

Rev. Smith: We had some trustees that would come in and if they saw something was broken they would go ahead and fix it.

Roberta: Was there a required way that you had to dress?

Rev. Smith: We had to dress decent, not like the kids are nowadays. Most of the time we came to school dressed with clean pants and shirts and girls with dresses. There wasn't too much of overalls back in them days. We had dress pants, dress clothes.

Roberta: And you had to pass an inspection with the teacher?

Rev. Smith: Well our fingernails had to be clean and all that. Our teacher was very disciplined and I thank God for her.

Roberta: What were some of the things that the teacher brought to the class herself, beyond or in addition to your reading, your writing, your geography. Did she bring any arts that she exposed the students to?

Rev. Smith: What you are saying – did she bring any extra activities? Yes she did. She would really help most every time students, after you go slow and are learning she would help you in any area that you wasn't up to par in and she was a very nice lady. She was a very nice lady, Miss Body was.

Roberta: She gave everybody some extra attention?

Rev. Smith: Yes.

Roberta: Students that were a little shy or maybe needed that extra help did they benefit from that?

Rev. Smith: I think they did. I know I did because I was very shy when I first came to school and I know she helped me out in that area you know. Everybody said as a minister they thought I couldn't stand and preach the Word before people but I have done it for the last 20 years.

Roberta: Do you think that experience ...

Rev. Smith: Yes, that helped me out.

Roberta: When it came to tests in order to show how well you learned your lessons and those type of things, how frequently did you have tests? What kinds of tests

Rev. Smith: We used to have a standard test that was sent out by the state that required each, in each category, like in math and English and geography and history and it would be about almost the end of the school year and you would have to pass that test in order to be promoted to the next level. It all pertained to the studies that was given at the school. It was very nice and sometimes it would take us a half a day to do that test. It would be a long because we had to do so much and then we would take a break and then we would go back. It takes about maybe 3 to 4 hours to cover that whole test that was required of every student. I think it was from around from the 4<sup>th</sup> to the 6<sup>th</sup> grade. I think the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> grade didn't have none.

Roberta: Did you have quizzes all during the year?

Rev. Smith: Some times we would have quizzes yes. Sometimes we had homework, take home work to do at night and bring back to the school.

Roberta: Did the state send an inspector to the school?

Rev. Smith: We had, as far as I can recall, they used to have what you would call a superintendent or something that would come and interview us and ask the teacher how well her school was going, different questions you know, and he would talk to us on different matters pertaining to our school work and all that.

Roberta: You said they would talk to you – as students?

Rev. Smith: Well they would ask us different things that we had already studied in our school and see if we had learned anything.

Roberta: Did that make you nervous?

Rev. Smith: Sometimes it would make us nervous and sometimes it wouldn't. If we knew it, we knew it. If we didn't, we didn't.

Roberta: The superintendent, was it a male or a female, do you remember?

Rev. Smith: They could either be male or female. I know some was male and some was female. I remember one man, his name was Mr. Harris. I can remember him. Most of them or all of them were white.

Roberta: What was he like? Do you remember?

Rev. Smith: Mr. Harris, he was a nice guy. He was a good man I would say.

- Roberta: So you didn't have to repeat any of the grades?
- Rev. Smith: No I didn't. Thank God I didn't, no.
- Roberta: Were there any other special visitors to the school during the time you were there?
- Rev. Smith: I think there was. There used to be. I'm am not for sure now but there used to be a health teacher and she would come and supervise and teach us more about hygiene.
- Roberta: What about first aid? Who administered first aid at the school?
- Rev. Smith: Well the teacher.
- Roberta: She was qualified?
- Rev. Smith: Yes.
- Roberta: She had to be qualified by the state?
- Rev. Smith: I don't know, I don't think she did.
- Roberta: Do you remember any of the names of your classmates?
- Rev. Smith: Most of them have passed away. I know one of them still lives and her name is Dorothy. She was an Earl but now she is a Grinnage and another one is Patricia Grinnage but she is a Harmon now. She was in my class. Well a couple more that was in my class have passed away now. I think there is only 3 of them that I can remember that is still living that was in my class.
- Roberta: Do you ever see them or talk to them?
- Rev. Smith: Oh yes. In fact, Dorothy, she was an Earl but now she is a Grinnage, me and her we are cousins and I see her quite often. I see Patsy Harmon too, quite often.
- Roberta: Are they all still in this area?
- Rev. Smith: Yes. I don't know their address but they are still in this area, in Glasgow, Iron Hill area.
- Roberta: What about the outside of the school, do you remember what that looked like? What color it was?
- Rev. Smith: Well most of the playground area is right where our cars are parked out there and on this side over there we used to play over there in that area and

mostly all around the school we would play. We would have areas to play in.

Roberta: What was the wooded area like? Do you remember when you were here?

Rev. Smith: It's about the same. Where the woods are it's about the same.

Roberta: Was the driveway about the same?

Rev. Smith: About the same, yes.

Roberta: It didn't go around the school area?

Rev. Smith: No.

Roberta: What can you tell about the railroad that was nearby? You said when you went to Howard ...

Rev. Smith: Well the railroad I'd say was about 4 miles from where I lived at, from where the old home place was at. That station where I caught the train was where my father used to have a, where his working area was in that area and that's where we would catch the train. There was maybe about only 2 trains stopped there during the day. The train that we caught going to school and the train that we caught coming back at night. That was about the only trains that would stop there.

Roberta: From here – see I am not familiar with this area, how far is it?

Rev. Smith: From here it's a good at least maybe 8 or 9 miles I would say.

Roberta: Was it in Newark?

Rev. Smith: It's a place called Iron Hill, Maryland. That's where we caught the train. There is an Iron Hill, Delaware and there is an Iron Hill, Maryland.

Roberta: So that Iron Hill, Maryland is not that far from here?

Rev. Smith: No it's not that far.

Roberta: While I am thinking of something do you have anything that you want to add that I might not have asked you?

Rev. Smith: Well this may sound funny but I can remember, I don't know what grade I was in but, I'd say maybe I was 5<sup>th</sup> grade cause I was maybe about 11 years old at that time and I can remember Miss Body had a car I think it was a Pontiac, I think it was, maybe in the late 30's and I remember one recess I wanted to show off to the rest of the kids out there on the

playground, I said, “watch this, I’m going to be Superman, I am going here and lift up Miss Body’s car.” So I went and I started to lift up and doing like that and I knew I couldn’t lift the car but I was trying to look good in front of the kids out there on the playground. I kept bouncing the car like that and she looked out the door and she said, “Oliver” she used to call me Oliver, she said, “Oliver I want you to step in here inside here for a few minutes I want to talk to you” and she said, “if I ever catch you again going out there and shaking my car I am going to give you a frailing of your life” and she said, “you are going to be restricted from having any recesses for the next week.” So I had to set in here for a whole week while all the kids were out there playing and having fun because I had tried to show off. I never forgot that. I wanted to show off no more in school.

Roberta: Did they tease you about it?

Rev. Smith: Oh you know how kids were. They teased me pretty near every day about it, “hey, you got caught didn’t you?” I said, “yes I got caught.” I will never forget that. But she was a nice teacher. Very firm, very disciplined, a very good teacher. That’s probably only the last thing I wanted to say. If you have any more questions –

Roberta: I think I am tapped out but I think Miss Veness, if you are ok.

Rev. Smith: I am all right

Roberta: I am going to turn this over to her again.

April Veness: You are probably going to be exhausted when this is all over.

Rev. Smith: I’m all right.

April Veness: This is kind of a switching of gears. You started off talking about your family and my mind was sort of traveling, you said that, it sounds as if you came back from the Korean War and got married after?

Rev. Smith: No, I got married in September, no December, actually I was married when I was in the service. I went in the service in September and I came back in December on a furlough and got married.

April Veness: What year was that?

Rev. Smith: I got married in the year of 1951.

April Veness: I was curious, your wife, your first wife, was she from around here?

Rev. Smith: No, she from Maryland, a little place called Cedar Hill, Maryland.

April Veness: Is that a long way from here?

Rev. Smith: I would say at least maybe 25 miles from here.

April Veness: How did you meet her?

Rev. Smith: Through church activities. I met her one summer when she came to live with my aunt. I used to visit with my aunt quite often and that's how I came to know my first wife.

April Veness: So then you went off to the service and you came back and your children were born then, I'm guessing

Rev. Smith: I had one born before I left to go into the service and then I had another. My first wife got pregnant on the first furlough I had and the rest of them I had after I came out of the service.

April Veness: And when you came back from the service, did you live with your mother and father?

Rev. Smith: No.

April Veness: Where did you live?

Rev. Smith: I lived in a trailer next to my old home place.

April Veness: Did the trailer have a kitchen? It was completely equipped then?

Rev. Smith: It was fully equipped.

April Veness: How many years were you there with your family?

Rev. Smith: I was there about maybe 5 or 6 years. Then I moved into the home place after my oldest sister moved and built a home of her own I moved into my home place.

April Veness: Your parents were still living?

Rev. Smith: No, my mother died in '45 and my father, he remarried and he lived up the hill from where the old home place was.

April Veness: So the old home place that you are referring to is also very much the home that your children knew.

Rev. Smith: Yes.

April Veness: And the 4 children, where did they go to school?

Rev. Smith: I am quite sure that my 2 oldest girls went here for a while.

April Veness: I was wondering about that, was it still open?

Rev. Smith: I believe it was but I know my youngest daughter and my son they was integrated and they went to – was it Glasgow or Christiana? I'm quite sure my daughters went to this school.

April Veness: They must have been some of the last students to go here.

Rev. Smith: Yes they were some of the last students.

April Veness: Is your daughter still in this area? Do you think she would be keen to talk to us about it?

Rev. Smith: She might, yes. Both of them are still in this area.

End of Tape 2, Side A, side B is blank.

Begin Tape 3, Side A.

Roberta: This is tape 3 side 1 and continuing with April Veness interviewing Rev. Smith.

April Veness: So your oldest daughters were born, the first one was born before 1951.

Rev. Smith: One was born in 1950, one was born in '51 and my youngest daughter born in '52 (they are stair steps) and I have a son born in '58.

April Veness: The last child is the son. We were thinking that the 2 girls born in '50 and '51

Rev. Smith: They have went here.

April Veness: Let me follow up on that. We'll get to the phone calls. While I am thinking about your children and where they went, what did they go on to do?

Rev. Smith: One of my daughters is in the ministry. She is a pastor, in fact she just opened up a church down here on 273 in the Comfort Inn for a while, till she gets a building. The rest of them, one of my daughters she worked for Stewart Pharmaceutical but she has lupus and she is on retirement at this

time from that job and I have my oldest daughter she is working at a retirement home up there on Paper Mill Road – not Paper Mill Road – up there in Newark somewhere.

April Veness: Then the other thing that caught my attention, this was interesting, your wife, you indicated your first wife died. What did she die of?

Rev. Smith: She had a tumor.

April Veness: Was she able to get any kind of medical attention?

Rev. Smith: Yes, in fact she had 2 operations, they took a piece of it out but it was too much. She had waited too long.

April Veness: Well I guess partly what I was thinking here was I was wondering where your family and the other families went to see a doctor. Was there a local doctor?

Rev. Smith: Most went to a doctor in Elkton, Maryland.

April Veness: Was he an African-American doctor?

Rev. Smith: Yes.

April Veness: What was his name?

Rev. Smith: James L. Johnson.

April Veness: James L. Johnson and he had a practice

Rev. Smith: Yes in Elkton, Maryland.

April Veness: So you had to go over there. Would he has been one of the few doctors

Rev. Smith: Yes, during that time.

April Veness: And when you went shopping, you talked about buying candy, how far did you have to walk to go get candy?

Rev. Smith: The nearest store I would say is, well to tell you the truth there was no stores around Iron Hill, no there wasn't. I can remember the nearest store would be in Newark you know. That's where we did most of our grocery shopping. Everything was in Newark.

April Veness: How did you get there?

Rev. Smith: We had a car.

April Veness: So by the 19 – what year did your family purchase a car?

Rev. Smith: My father had a car when I was back in the service.

April Veness: So you were able to get around.

Rev. Smith: Yes we was able to get around.

April Veness: You said you had a church right near here.

Rev. Smith: Yes.

April Veness: Were most of the families in your congregation right here?

Rev. Smith: Right here.

April Veness: They never moved away?

Rev. Smith: No they was right here.

April Veness: Is there still quite a large African-American population here?

Rev. Smith: Not now.

April Veness: Are most of the people in your congregation at that point older people?

Rev. Smith: There are a long of younger people coming up now over there in St. Daniel's Church.

April Veness: Where are they living?

Rev. Smith: They are living in different areas. Some are living in Newark, Glasgow but they always come back to their home church.

April Veness: So they are driving in.

Rev. Smith: Yes.

April Veness: That's interesting. Is there a real sense of spirit amongst that group?

Rev. Smith: Yes it is.

April Veness: Well that was kind of the clarifications that I wanted to get at. How about the 2 of you? Students?

Student: I just want to know more about your being in Alaska, the first black person in Alaska. What was that like?

Rev. Smith: Well it was a great experience. As you know Alaska is the Land of the Midnight Sun, and it was very strange to see at 12 o'clock at night you would see the sun shine bright as it is at 12 o'clock in the daytime. The winters were cold, I had seen anywheres from 45 to maybe 60 below 0. It's a different type of climate. It is a dry cold it is not a wet cold. I have seen what you would call ice fog. Instead of being regular fog it would be ice fog. Most of the time when you was out there on guard duty there

would be 2 people assigned to the same post because we had to check each others face to see if we were getting frostbitten. We didn't have only about 3 months of actual summer weather. Around the middle of August it would tend be cold and it would run into the winter months.

Student: When did Newark High School become integrated?

Rev. Smith: It must have been in the '50's. My daughters they went to Christiana and Glasgow.

Student: Were there any problems because of the all white high school and all the other kids were being shuttled out?

Rev. Smith: I don't think there were. As the years have progressed it has become – segregation has become a thing of the past. I believe. They had white friends and everything, in fact my son married a white woman. His first wife was a white woman. I believe that it had brought the races closer together than they were before.

Student: When you were in the military, was that segregated?

Rev. Smith: It was and about 3 months after I finished basic training I was sent to an all white unit in Alaska and I was the first black person that integrated that company.

Student: Did you get a lot of trouble from the white soldiers?

Rev. Smith: No, it was strange because most of those young men were from the western states like California, Illinois and some was from Pennsylvania and they was used to the integrated thing.

Roberta: Rev. Smith I want to thank you at this time for spending so much time with us and giving us much valuable and much valued information, thank you. This concludes the interview, this is tape 3, side 1.

End of Tape 3, side A

