Citation for this collection:

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Interview with Mr. Bill Frank, Spring 1974 by H205 students, on Black History in Delaware.

[The first five minutes of the interview are unintelligible due to tape interference. The transcript begins in mid-interview below.]

A This is why this was so important, is because this was put out by . . . was published by the University of Delaware Press, and it's put out by a group called the Service Citizens of Delaware, which was sponsored by Pierre S. DuPont and it was part of his recognition of the school system in Delaware. You'll find if you read about Pierre S. DuPont, he went to the legislature in the '20s and asked him to build a new school. Those were the days of segregation. And he asked them to build a new school for everybody and they refused because it meant they'd have to build schools for blacks. And so he said, "Well, O.K. I'll build a new school for every black school district that you build." And then he got the legislature to appropriate money for the white schools. But this was the great renaissance and this book gives you the [inaudible] details about attendance records. But it does give you the picture of black education in the [inaudible]. . . . I'm sure the university has got this [inaudible] . . .

Q The public library has got it, I think. I looked at it there.

A Well, the Board of Education . . . the Board of Education in 1969 published a story of the History of Education in Delaware in which they discuss education in general and then have a little bit about migrant labor . . . they also have Negro education on page 71. Has a picture of William C. Jason, who was one of the pioneers in education. And this discusses Negro education beginning with the Howard High School in 1969. I'm sure the university has got this. It's called the History of Education. Now, coming back to this fellow Dr. Hancock. He and several other people have done a great deal of studies of the blacks, particularly in the Reconstruction times. And that's when the story really begins, because prior to that there was practically no education. Somewhere I read about the Quakers in Wilmington had education of the [inaudible] . . . Friends School many years ago, this was in the '20s. I'm sure they had a number of blacks in the Friends School . . . that is, free blacks who lived in Wilmington. Who they were, I don't know, [inaudible] . . . whatever it was, it wasn't too significant. But black education, public education, begins with the Reconstruction. And this fellow Hancock has written a number of articles and also you'll find in the John Munroe . . . Dr. Munroe has written an essay which is a cardinal essay on black history in Delaware in the South Atlantic Quarterly, 1957. And as Hancock says, it's a good starting point for research. And there is a later article . . . there's an article by Harold Livzy [sp] on "Delaware Negroes, 1965-1950," which is a University of Delaware essay, and I think that's been published in the Delaware History Magazine of the Historical Society. And then there's a gal named Amy McMilton Miller [sp] has written an article on "The Franchising of the Delaware Negroes in the Late Nineteenth Century," '63, and that's been published in Delaware History. Now, one of the interesting books is a book
called "The History of the Colored People," written by Henry C. Conrad. But how you go about illustrating all this . . . and I'm sure the university library has this. I would imagine they have a tremendous amount of stuff in the racks at the university. Practically everything that has been written or [inaudible] . . . But how you go about illustrating it, I don't know. That is the history of it. Of course there's also the more modern times, coming up in the later days. But these . . . now this Reconstruction by Hancock was published in a book . . . let's see the title of it . . . called Reconstruction in the Border States, and it was published by Johns Hopkins University and edited by a fellow named Richard Curry, C-u-r-r-y. And Hancock also says in this letter to me that he's writing an article on the Freedman's Bureau, which would also include black education because the Freedman's Bureau was [inaudible] . . . But how you're gonna illustrate this I don't . . . I haven't the faintest idea. There isn't that much stuff around. There's not [inaudible] . . . unless there might be . . . Delaware State College. Delaware State College goes back to about 1891 . . . yeah, 1891, and you'd get pictures of that. Old pictures of Howard High School, I don't know where you'd get them. The schools . . . I don't know anything about . . . I don't know about you say you saw some in the National Archives [inaudible] . . .

Q [Inaudible]

A Well, let me put it this way. They had a school in Wilmington, it was at 4th and West. And of course the Quakers were philosophically against slavery. They were always against slavery. And they opened this school, which was a Friends School, and in every sense of the word it was a parochial school, I mean it was a Quaker school. But I read somewhere, there is a history called Friends in Wilmington, I read somewhere that they had a few blacks in the school. This would be . . . let's say . . . the early part of the 19th century. But you gotta understand that the Quakers despite their philosophy, official philosophy, were like many other white groups. They may have talked a great philosophy and a great freedom and all that, but I doubt that they all practiced it or not, because they were very economic minded. And when you got economic minded, then you began to look at slavery as a different . . . in a different light. But they weren't all philanthropists like Thomas Glad, who was part of the underground railroad. And they were courageous, but I don't think all the Quakers in Wilmington agreed with them at all. If you rocked the boat, you know . . . too much of [inaudible]. It took a lot of guts to be an abolitionist [inaudible]. They weren't too popular. People didn't believe in slavery, but they weren't willing to put their life and safety on the line. To be an abolitionist before the Civil War in many areas was like being a communist—bad. And, well, I just don't . . . there is a fellow named Warner Mifflin down in Camden, Delaware who was an outstanding abolitionist, but it took a lot of courage to be an abolitionist in Wilmington. But what [sounds like "Dobbs"] was doing was absolutely legal. [inaudible] . . . he was interfering with private property. These slaves would come up from Eastern Shore Maryland, most of them did, and let's say they were led by Harriet Tubman and she would bring them up at night and take them over to his house and he'd keep them or hide 'em out. And the law said they were
private property. And then he'd get 'em up to Chester, West Chester, and then on up in Pennsylvania, and eventually maybe some into Canada and some up into New York state. He was arrested and tried and lost everything he had. Everything was taken away from him, because he was [inaudible]. When he died, when [inaudible] died, he lived at Third and Shipley, when he died, why the blacks in Wilmington refused to allow his body to be taken in a hearse up to the [inaudible] burial grounds. They carried his coffin on their shoulders. But he was most unpopular and [inaudible] . . . . You hear all sorts of strange things about education. I'm sure that there was a great deal of education in the black churches.

Q [Inaudible]

A Oh, yeah, there were black churches. We had . . . the earliest black church in Wilmington would be Ezion, that's spelled E-z-i-o-n, it used to be at 9th and French, now they've moved. And then there was another A.U.M.P. [?] Church, and that's moved. And until then some blacks were allowed into white churches, particularly Methodist churches, but they had to sit upstairs in the balcony, in the gallery. And then there was a well-known [inaudible] . . . who started here. But no matter how broadminded, you might say, or liberal-minded whites were in those days, they still held to the color line. "If you come to my church, you gotta go upstairs." It took an awful lot of courage for a man to actually implement his beliefs in total equality.

Q There were a lot of people that appeared to be, but . . .

A [Inaudible] . . . you'll find it today. You'll find people today who believe in desegregation in schools, and even in neighborhoods, but "Better have it somewhere else, not in my neighborhood." You have your busing situation is a [inaudible] right now. I'm sure that they had Sunday schools. There were two black churches here, the Ezion and then there was another A.U.M.P. church which would be the early part of the 19th century. I'm sure they had Sunday school, and maybe occasionally a white minister would come in a patronizing way and teach them . . . I'm sure they taught one another. But they had black clergymen. And there were a few blacks in the Friends School. But prior to the Civil War, I don't think there was too much in the education. Now, we've seen that after Reconstruction, when the blacks were now struggling to vote, you'll have a tough time on that. There's evidence, for example, that blacks were sold in slavery in Delaware after the Civil War. There's also some evidence that black schools were burned and the teachers driven away in the southern part of Delaware. But the Freedman's Bureau is the bureau that was headed by this fellow Howard, General Howard, which began developing schools. And then for a while, I think this is the 100th anniversary when . . . they handed out money sparingly and you don't find . . . you find that around 1874 when blacks were actually taxed for their schools. And what they got was really a pittance. Now, for example, it says here in Delaware we had a Delaware Association for the Improvement of Education of the Colored People--this is in cooperation with the Freedman's Bureau. In 1866 only seven schools, Negro schools . . . that's a year after the war, in 1866 only seven Negro schools . . . I mean even the Quaker and other philanthropic auspices were in operation in the state. Where they were, I don't know. In 1867, a group of Wilmington busi-
nessmen and philanthropists, mainly Quakers, organized a new society to aid the Negroes' [inaudible] for education. Then they got help. It says here they got help from outside the state, even from England and private citizens. And then an agreement was worked out whereby the colored people provided land and erected the school building. But you see there's evidence in 1867 and 1868 in which liberal teachers were driven away from schools and schoolhouses burned. And in 1875, just 100 years ago, there were 28 schools outside of Wilmington. Six in Wilmington were controlled by the city Board of Education. By 1875, that's a hundred years ago, the General Assembly at last permitted Negroes to be taxed for educational purposes and that [inaudible] . . . In 1881, the legislature of Delaware appropriated $2400.00 for colored schools. Delaware State College was organized in 1891 with federal aid. That was a school . . . that was happening around that time. They began to see the handwriting on the wall, I believe, and they started to get the separate but equal [inaudible] . . . Now, I don't know when the Plessy vs. Ferguson opinion came down between 1897 . . . when they said they had to have separate but equal. But about this time, 1891 . . . and I think when they established that . . . gave Dover the federal aid, it probably was chiefly for agriculture. It wasn't a bad idea, because a black family in those days who had a piece of land was far more independent from the guy who worked for somebody up here in Wilmington. Because if you had a piece of land then you suffered the same breaks and got the same breaks that the next guy got as far as the weather was concerned. The same bugs, if you had a farm and had potatoes, the same bugs that ate his potato plant ate mine, see. But a piece of land was a very . . . owning a piece of land was a very, very important things. But this book, I'm sure the University of Delaware library has it. It's called The Reconstruction of the Border States, edited by Richard Curry, C-u-r-r-y.

All right, to get to the things that the Historical Society publishes called Delaware History, they've had . . . they must have four or five articles on Reconstruction [inaudible] . . . If you go beyond . . . before the Civil War, you're not going to get very much. Unless you have . . . unless there's something that we have not seen [inaudible] . . . They had--I don't know how many blacks they had in Delaware during the war, maybe 1200, 1400.

Q2 There was a man in Wilmington having . . . he had a one-room [inaudible] which he bought [inaudible] . . .

A [Inaudible] . . . I've read that, but I don't know . . . where did you come across that, do you know? He was a Methodist or something?

Q2 I think so. [Inaudible] . . .

A There were an awful lot of private schools in Wilmington.

Q2 [Inaudible] . . .

A Oh, here it is. [Inaudible - sounds like John something] and his school. Here it is, here. He was a schoolmaster during the Revolution. He also had a job as a bell man, he'd go around ringing the bells. And he [inaudible] by this woman named Miss Montgomery. He was here during the Civil War. During the Revolutionary War it says he had his school at the foot of Quaker Hill, that'd be about 4th and Tatnall.
Q2 Where I read, it was at 3rd and [inaudible].
A Might be. Well, his daughter had a school, and it says here on the north­east corner of Second Street . . . well, if he had any blacks, they were certainly . . . see, there were blacks in Wilmington many years ago who were well-to-do, they had property and had some status, and I think they were sort of accepted. But I don't think there's any . . . it may be true, yes, but at the foot of Quaker Hill [inaudible] commenced teaching [inaudible] . . . there was a market house and this at the corner of 3rd and King was [inaudible] his room. Well, whatever it was, I don't think that was too significant.

Q2 [Inaudible] . . . and then they started taking turns teaching.
A Who, the blacks? [Inaudible] . . .

[There follows several minutes of inaudible conversation due to heavy background interference.]

A Well, there's one great, great gal, Edwina Kruse, K-r-u-s-e. Now, she was a tremendous force in the Howard High School. Howard High School used to be at 12th and Orange. It opened in 1869. And I never knew why Howard High School didn't do something about it when they [inaudible] . . . And I was in Howard High School recently, the present Howard High School, and I saw a picture of her. And she . . . you could do an awful lot of research on her. She came from the West Indies, and Kruse School was later named after her [inaudible] . . . And she was a tremendous force in education. I'm saying education outside the church. You see, the church was a great haven for the blacks. It represented everything for them, it was a social gathering place, meeting place . . . it was a place for the children to have education there, and it was a social area. But Miss Kruse certainly outside of that, in the public schools, Howard High School, was a great force. I've never read too much about her. Now what you do on her is you go to the public library and look in the biographical data, you'll find more about her. There might be some old photographs, I don't remember. But I know there's a picture at Howard High School. But how far back the Howard High School photographs were, I don't know. There may be a source there, and also a source at the Delaware State College. The Delaware State College started . . . a man named Jason . . . Dr. Jason Lewis . . . [inaudible] . . . I mean it was nothing more than a glorified . . . in the beginning, I doubt if it was more than a glorified grammar school. Howard High School had its ups and downs and then in the 1940's it went down and down and became a [inaudible] high school, and then lost its accreditation, and then Dr. [sounds like Hollams], Jerome Hollams was brought here and he got more money from the legislature. But the legislature we'll say that [inaudible] . . . but they also saw the handwriting on the wall. I'm sure that you'll find that all the improvements in black schools prior to '55, '54, was done consciously or unconsciously to offset desegregation. I think that stopped. I think the Henry School, the William Henry School in Dover must have been built before 1954. Then there are the University of Delaware decisions about where they allowed--first they allowed blacks into the graduate school and then they allowed blacks into the university itself. And that was a suit of Lewis Redding and [inaudible] in the Court of Chancellors.
Q [Inaudible]

A If you haven't got any one of these books, you see, you call me and then I'll loan 'em to you. Upon writing in blood that you're gonna give 'em back to me. But just see if they do have it first, huh? Do they have a Xerox down there? O.K. See if they have that, and also on this Reconstruction. And look for the Delaware History, that's the publication of the University of Delaware, and it has a bibliography . . .

[End of side one of tape.]

. . . but it should be three or four articles there about . . . the whole education is wrapped up entirely during the Reconstruction time. Of course, now, the dramatic thing is the current state of things--are you going to come up to current things?

Q Um hmm.

A They get very dramatic, even though a lot of people . . . they're controversial . . . is the Wilmington Board of Education system. But now we have a black man who is president of the Wilmington board. We have a black superintendent of schools, and they of course . . . that's up in contemporary times. The president is [inaudible] . . . You'll have to check up . . . I don't know how long a program . . . how long is this gonna be? You're actually going to show this to people?

Q Yeah. We're thinking about doing an hour.

A An hour, O.K. Well, in modern times . . . which is not very modern, I'm talking about the '50s on up . . . you'll find downstate some remnants of old black grade schools. You can always recognize them. They're one-story, gray-shingled schools. Now, I think there's some pictures in [inaudible] . . . they have some pictures here of schools . . . there they are. There's the agricultural school. Every once in a while I've seen a little gray school, but they were one-story [inaudible] schools, they were--all looked the same. These were the black schools. Because the legislature wasn't about to appropriate any money for black schools. So DuPont built them himself.

Q2 Why did he build them?

A To get . . . he wanted them to build new schools. But he had these studies made. He knew they needed new schools; they were just old one-room dilapidated schools. But they weren't about to . . . he wanted them to build schools, period, for everybody. Now, remember now, we were in the segregation era. He wasn't fighting that at all. But they weren't about to build schools for blacks, 'cause that was considered a frill. But what he said was, "O.K., I'll build schools for all the black school districts and get that off your back. Now you can go ahead and build white schools with a clear conscience." So this is . . . that's why he built them. But he wasn't getting into the segregation business at all. He was letting that alone, he didn't dare touch that. Because the Constitution said that schools shall be separate . . . the State Constitution says schools shall be separate and equal . . . but equal. But they were never equal.
Q: Were they equal after he built the schools?

A: Oh, no. There were a lot of factors involved. I remember a talk with Dr. [sounds like "Harlan"], he was a tremendous man, he came here from Cornell. He was the head of American at Cornell and he later became ambassador of Sweden. When he got through he went to a school in Alabama . . . no, in Virginia. But now he had a big shot on the stock market and all that. But he used to go to these black high schools and give the principals hell because they were not demanding for these schools to measure up. They were sending them [inaudible] . . . And I was there the first time when they were reinstated . . . when they were accredited, so that a graduation diploma from Delaware State College meant something. Prior to that it didn't mean a thing, it wasn't accredited. But it never meant anything. No, this is a black, this is a white. Delaware was a southern state with a little bit of northern exposure. Delaware just was never equal. If you were a kid living in Claymont, let's say, and you wanted to go to high school, first of all, you were considered uppity, why did you want to go to high school? [Inaudible] to go to high school. And then you had to travel by bus sometimes a hell of a long way before you reached a high school. When you came to Howard High School, the next high school was somewhere near Dover. You had to travel a hell of a lot, and it was a [inaudible], tiresome thing. You never were equal. Psychologically they were never equal, materially they always got the last of everything. They were never equal. And then when some black students wanted to go to the University of Delaware, the university objected to it. They said let them go to Delaware State College. So then they proved that Delaware State College was not equal and they proved it by the lack of a library, the lack of a curricula, the lack of teachers, professors, the lack of degrees among the teachers, it just wasn't equal at all. Then when desegregation did come . . . desegregation came, why then they kept pouring money into Delaware State College in order to build up. I don't know what the status is now. I think . . . I've been told that it's a problem among black students at the University of Delaware because there's . . . I don't want to degrade anybody . . . stealing [inaudible] . . .

Q: Well, this problem was going on [inaudible] . . . and like most places where I used to go [inaudible] . . .

A: But you find . . . I can understand the feeling of differences, you know, I can understand that. But do you find a real discrimination from the white students themselves?

Q: [Inaudible]

A: How about fraternities, are they open?

Q: Well . . . right now blacks aren't really looking to the fraternities . . . like blacks more or less they have their own fraternity [inaudible] . . .

A: Black fraternity, I see.

Q: And they're trying now to get that together and they should have it together in about two years.

A: How about faculty? Are you having much of a hard time with the faculty?
Faculty you'd think they would, but I've been told there is.

Q  Yes.

A  A lot of it's objective. I think every white person is basically a racist. I know, you say you're not, but I think every white person is a racist. He feels a gut feeling about somebody of a different color. And he still has a ... Proteants still have a feeling about Catholics and why trust Jews and [inaudible] and all that. I mean, they just feel that way. It depends on how you control it, how you overcome it, how you rationalize it, and that. And then of course the blacks are in a bind. They want actually an integrated community, and then when they don't get it, or get [inaudible], then they go and have their own groups. This is natural, the natural [inaudible] of people. I would say that right now we're in a ... I thought we'd get farther along than we have, but we haven't gotten farther along. We haven't gotten farther along because blacks just don't trust us, even now. They say, "Well, we're not gonna get our real rights, what's coming to us," so they withdraw to their own groups, which is very natural. But I don't know what the situation in Delaware State College is, it might be a little more free, see. Have you ever been down to Delaware State College?

Q  I go down there once in a while.

A  How's the atmosphere there?

Q  I think it's something like ... almost half and half down there.

A  Half and half [inaudible], huh?

Q  Almost.

A  But predominantly a black school, though, isn't it? Black oriented.

Q  Yeah. It's [inaudible], you know, it's no [inaudible] than nothing, really. Like at one point the university was trying to get Delaware State because, you know, [inaudible] ... a university. But students down there don't want it that way.

A  See, in my time, they were going to close down Delaware State College. And some of the blacks said O.K., other blacks said no, "We want a college with our own culture." And so they brought that to [sounds like "Harlan"]. He came in and began to build the school up to what he called the other day -- I was talking to him the other day -- he said it was a respectable school of higher learning. But I imagine the feeling there is different than it is at the University of Delaware. I don't know how ... I'd say it's natural. That's the way it is. I'd like to see ... how many blacks at the university, have any idea?

Q  Oh ... 300 ... [inaudible].

[Several inaudible sentences from both interviewer and Mr. Frank follow.]

A  I remember going to a meeting down there where they used to still ask you if you were colored. And specifically they were matching people up in the dormitories.
Q Yeah, they still do. [Inaudible]... when I first came here... I came here two years ago, and I had to put my picture [inaudible]... I had to put down what race I was in and what...

A Your race? I thought that went [inaudible]... I never even thought about that.

Q [Inaudible]... none of us room with a white person.

A But even that's no solution. I mean, even if they're living together... some of the greatest examples of racism you'll find in America, there's no... anyway, I think that black history is the greatest new thing, and I think this particular project is super, because education was so fundamental to the emergence of the black from serfdom. That's not [inaudible]... but that's the way it is. It's never been put together. Right now we have all this raw material, see. And if you people can dig that out, I think it'd be a terrific contribution. There's a great deal now going on. Tremendous amount going on. People like Dr. Jackson, who is now Superintendent of Schools, he used to be [inaudible] of Bancroft, and what's happened there, particularly people in Howard High School, particularly if you interview some old [inaudible] who went to Howard High School. But you've got a lot of Uncle Toms... an awful lot of Uncle Toms who [inaudible]..

Q2 Do you think that Delaware has [inaudible]... .

A I found that blacks were... not raising enough hell by [inaudible]. There is one black I know on the Advisory Council of Prisons who voted in favor of capital punishment. And the reason he did it was that it was a deterrent. Well, that's a bunch of crap. [Inaudible]... If you had a referendum today, you'd have an overwhelming... in favor of capital punishment.

Q [Inaudible]

A Here in Delaware? Well, most of them are black. Well, we don't have a death row, really. [Inaudible]... but they don't have death row. That is they're not put where they are in other prisons. We have about... right now at the prison, let's say there are maybe five who have been condemned to be hanged, and I would say most of them are black. I've seen three hangings in my time, and they were all black.

Q [Inaudible]

A They'd hang 'em on Friday... [inaudible]... I read a story the other day about a hanging I saw years back and after they hanged the poor fellow, they let the people come in and watch him dangle there. [Inaudible].

Q2 Well, who are you going to deter if you don't approve of capital punishment? [Inaudible]... I mean, I'm against capital punishment, but I think it's sort of ridiculous to have someone [inaudible]...

A [Inaudible]... like the whipping post. Now, the whipping was always behind closed... they had it somewhere else. If you're going to deter it, [inaudible]... have it up here at Rodney Square, you know. And they used to have... whippings used to be public, and it didn't deter anybody.
Delaware abolished capital punishment, then they put it back in 1962. And who was the first guy who committed a murder? It was a cop, a white cop, in the park, he went and killed his wife. But [inaudible] he was tried for manslaughter. But it doesn't deter anybody. But I think the great mission here is to show ... not to show [inaudible] because I don't think ... I think the quality of education given blacks in this state is not as good as it could be. Now, I think that's a fault, not only of the state, I think it's a fault of the people, a fault of the parents. I don't think the parents are demanding enough accountability from the [inaudible]. And then you have the kids who want to be helped. And education is ... it's the only [inaudible] ... When I was a kid and lived in Wilmington, I lived in a crowded school section, and there was a rule that everyone that every family went to college, come hell or high water. They couldn't afford everybody, but one had to go to college to get out from the bondage of storekeeping. ... so I think that where I lived on Front Street between [inaudible] ... we had a doctor and a pair of lawyers and two doctors and psychologists ... but one out of every house had to go to school. That meant a lot of sacrifice. I think it's a tremendous thing to do.

[END OF TAPE AND INTERVIEW]