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: Robert Grinnage
Date of Interview: April 22, 2003
Interviewer: Roberta Perkins
Transcriber: Marcia Adams

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

Roberta: This is Roberta Perkins, today’s date is Tuesday, April 22, 2003, and I am interviewing Mr. Robert Grinnage, he is a former student of the old Iron Hill School and we are here at the Iron Hill School which currently houses the Iron Hill Natural History Museum and I am interviewing Mr. Grinnage as part of the Oral History Project. Information from this interview will be valuable in interpretation of the restored school. At this time I’d like to thank Mr. Grinnage for his time and sharing with the project his memories and experiences at the school.

Mr. Grinnage: I am honored to be able to do it.

Roberta: Well I am honored to talk with you, believe me. Let me start with, if you would please state your full name and your date and place of birth for us.

Mr. Grinnage: My name is Robert L. Grinnage, that’s Leo Grinnage. I was born in Iron Hill Delaware, January 22, 1919.

Roberta: Who were your parents? Can you give me their names?

Mr. Grinnage: My mother’s name was Ida M. Grinnage and my father’s name was Oldham, Edgar Oldham Grinnage.

Roberta: Is that Olden?

Mr. Grinnage: O-l-d-h-a-m.

Roberta: What was your mother’s maiden name?

Mr. Grinnage: Her maiden name was Price.

Roberta: Brothers and sisters?
Mr. Grinnage: I had nine brothers and sisters and I was next to the youngest, and I am the lone survivor.

Roberta: Would you care to give us their names?

Mr. Grinnage: Yes. I’ll give you the oldest was Ralph, then there was Catherine, Donald, Frances, Carrie, Oldham, Nora, Mae and Marion.

Roberta: Was Mae spelled M-a-y or M-a-e?

Mr. Grinnage: Marion?

Roberta: Mae. You said you had a sister named Mae.

Mr. Grinnage: No

Roberta: Okay, I misunderstood you.

Mr. Grinnage: Marion, it was Carrie, Nora.

Roberta: Did you always live in Iron Hill?

Mr. Grinnage: Yes, we lived in Iron Hill until the war, right after the war. That was 1945, or ‘46 when World War II ended.

Roberta: Why did you move?

Mr. Grinnage: Well, one of the things, my parents had died and I had been living with my sister and she had moved and she didn’t have room for me when I came out of the Army so I roomed until June (from March ‘til July I think it was) then I married. I married Gertrude Waples from Rehoboth.

Roberta: What do you remember about growing up in Iron Hill?

Mr. Grinnage: Just about everything that I can remember and the older I got, I get, rather, the more I do remember. I remember how we’d get up and what we had to do. We had a small farm about a mile from here and it’s right across from the toll gates on 95. That was our farm, it had about ten acres there and as the boys got older and the older ones moved away – married – we had to do all the chores and work around that farm.

Roberta: What kind of farm was it?

Mr. Grinnage: It was just a regular farm, no particular status like dairy or nothing like that. We had two horses, two cows, three pigs and chickens and things like that.

Roberta: Did you grow vegetables?
Mr. Grinnage: Yes, we grew vegetables and them sometimes we would sell them and particularly around – my father was a strawberry addict. He would have a strawberry patch, as we called it and we had to tend that and he wanted to see it weed-free all the time, because you take one year, one year you plant this Spring it won’t come on until the next year and all during that time you had to keep it worked. So then after my Sister Nora got old enough to drive we would take these strawberries and take them into Newark and go house to house and sell them. Three quarts for 30 cents or 25 cents and the money that we had left over they would let us have.

Roberta: What did you do with the money?

Mr. Grinnage: Well it wouldn’t be much but buy some school things or things like that, but it only lasted a little while – strawberries, and then we did have blackberries but they didn’t sell as well as the strawberries.

Roberta: Did you have any fruit trees?

Mr. Grinnage: Yes, we had fruit trees but they weren’t enough to sell. I think before my time they had had an orchard there but as the trees grew they would disease or die or something like that.

Roberta: Where did you play and meet other children?

Mr. Grinnage: Well right near us, the nearest house I would say would be about 5 or 600 yards away from us and they didn’t have children there only in the summertime. These children would visit this older family from Boston or somewhere and we would play with them. But we would walk sometime over on the other side of Iron Hill to the Smiths or the Websters or somebody and sometimes right across from the school here the Biddles lived and we probably visited them. There were several families that lived around, it was not like it is now. But they were scattered, things like that. The play that we had were fishing and sun fishing in Baptist Creek and up into the pits – we’d fish in there and get little sunfish.

Roberta: What was the name of the creek again?

Mr. Grinnage: Baptist. Baptist Church Creek. That’s what we called it. It ran off of Welsh Tract Road that bridge there was Baptist Church Bridge, and
everything and we’d go down there and you could just sit up on the bridge and fish and see the fish bite.

Roberta: Is that creek still there?
Mr. Grinnage: Oh yes.
Roberta: Okay, I’m not familiar with the area.
Mr. Grinnage: No, it’s still there, all of it.
Roberta: When you were younger how did people in the community communicate? How did they learn about what was going on, news, gossip?
Mr. Grinnage: Well they didn’t have telephones. I think Congos were the first ones that had telephone but they could only call their work people or something like that because other people didn’t have a telephone. So they’d wait until they see each other and they’d tell and people used to walk quite a bit around here. Now Miss Smith that lived right across here in the woods she was the grandmother of the Websters and the Smiths and they had paths going all the way through here and everyplace all the way around to the other side way over near Otts Chapel Road and that’s the way they would go and if something would happen they would tell someone else and the next thing you knew everybody knew it.

Roberta: So the area you were talking about was the path over to Miss Smiths was behind the school? You went behind the school?
Mr. Grinnage: Yes, right through the woods here, I think the house is, I think they are still living in there its about maybe 500 yards, or a little more, right across-right back over in there.
Roberta: Was it as much woods then as it is now? Or more?
Mr. Grinnage: Oh yes. Well it’s just about the same except some of these things have grown up. Now down right over here on the side of where our ball diamond was, that has grown up. Now that was open. It wasn’t tilled or anything like that but it wasn’t trees or anything. But over in here it was woods all the time. And paths would go through there and every place.

Roberta: Did your family rent or buy?
Mr. Grinnage: No, they owned. They owned that farm.
Roberta: How did they purchase it, do you remember or talk about how it was purchased?

Mr. Grinnage: Well I understand, some of it. I understand that somebody else had tried to get it at the same time that they were getting it and they told how much trouble – I never did understand how much they paid for it but they would have a little trouble paying the mortgage and things like that. Then after a while my father got a job at the railroad, at the railroad shops. Then they had a steady income so they lived a little better and with all us kids coming around and like that. Of course as far as eating we always raised our own vegetables and meat, things like that.

Roberta: You said that you moved away after you came back from being in the service so the farm had been sold then?

Mr. Grinnage: Yes. I can’t remember exactly when he sold but Mother died in 1935 so my father sold the place. He gave us all the furniture and everything and he bought another place in Belvedere so we went over on the other side of Iron Hill and rented a place, my three sisters. I rented a place. We stayed there for maybe a couple of years and then there was a house sitting right across here, was the Taylor’s house.

Roberta: Ok this was right in front of the school? Along, what is this, Baltimore Pike?

Mr. Grinnage: The entrance to their lane ran right against this property. The house sits right there, so my sister was renting that and I stayed with her so that’s where I was drafted from there. I went in the Army and stayed for three years.

Roberta: What year was that? Do you know?

Mr. Grinnage: Yes, it was 1945 ... 1943 I went into the service and she had married and divorced or broke up one and she was living in just like a room and didn’t have any room for me when I came out of the service so I was renting in Wilmington and I met my future wife at that time before I went in the service and right after we came out, in the course of six months or less we got married.
Roberta: And then you lived in Wilmington?

Mr. Grinnage: No, we moved down here, down on Pleasant Valley Road, they called it Pleasant Valley Trailer Park now but there was a house in there, Mr. Guy, and we rented from them for about a year. Then after my oldest brother died we went to live with his wife which was my wife’s aunt. We stayed there for a year and then we moved to Millside and when they built Dunleith we bought in Dunleith and that was 1951.

Roberta: Let me kind of step back a little bit. What do you remember about entertainment and fun?

Mr. Grinnage: Actually we would look forward to holidays. Like picnics and down at the Glasgow Church, St. Thomas Church which was our home church they had a playground and it didn’t have anything mostly but swings and something and we could meet the other kids around and we looked forward to that. And then they had the Sunday School picnics in the summer and we’d go to them. Here we played baseball and dodgeball.

Roberta: Was there anything special about the Sunday school picnics that you remember?

Mr. Grinnage: Not really.

Roberta: Ok.

Mr. Grinnage: It was just that we could get together and we’d be away.

Roberta: Which celebrations were important? Important to you, important as far as the community? Were there any ones that were more important than the others?

Mr. Grinnage: Such as Christmas?

Roberta: Yes, that was an important celebration.

Mr. Grinnage: Now that was our biggest thing. Then they had another here at the school they called the Field Day.

Roberta: Yes, I wanted to talk to you about that.

Mr. Grinnage: That Field Day was really something to look forward to. Years ago they used to have parades and everything and the kids would be all out of step marching of course with a band. They were something to look forward to
and then they would, for such a small school we had a good dodgeball team. See they would pit you against another school and you would play and now you would beat that school, you went to another one, I mean another school would come in and we used to really hold our own because, and it was a mixed one and we had some kind of big guys because see what would happen, they’d be only about 15, 16 and they were through the school and too young to go to work so they would repeat the sixth grade and those guys could almost palm the dodgeball and they could hit people and get them out.

Roberta: What kind of boundaries were set? Because if you were out here you’ve got the woods and the road and how did they contain the ball? I’m asking because when I was in school we played dodgeball in the gym, we didn’t play it outside.

Mr. Grinnage: Oh, well we had right down near the road was a dodgeball ring and they would just play there and if the ball got away from somebody they would have to run and get it and they’d keep going and they would play, because we’d be like crackin’ we didn’t have any time, they would just play until we got everybody out. We couldn’t like what we call ‘chase.’ You could always throw three times at one person and then you would have to throw someplace else. Now like if I was the last one in and they threw three balls at me and didn’t hit me well the game was over. And baseball, home plate was right up here to the right and if you knocked the ball across the road, you were out.

Roberta: What if somebody caught the ball? Was that part of the rules too?

Mr. Grinnage: Yes, the other rules were almost the same as baseball is now.

Roberta: What I meant was with dodgeball. That was one of the rules when I was playing.

Mr. Grinnage: If you were a dodger you couldn’t touch the ball. Anytime that ball touched you, even your foot or your hand or anything like that, you were out of course. When you first started you’d have maybe six or seven kids in there and they were all bumping into each other and you couldn’t get
out so when it got down to about two, now if I remember it was one of the Websters, Eddie Webster. He was real good. He was little and he was so agile and he was hard to get out. There was a couple of the girls, Gladys Williams, she was kind of strong for a girl, and she could pick that ball and somehow fling it and it would hit those kids on the head and the ball would fly way up in the air, like that.

Laura: Were you out when you hit the ball over the road in baseball?

Mr. Grinnage: Just like the song says, you're over the fence you're out. That's because when it went across the road you had to go out there and that was just one of the rules. Most of the kids, see, they wouldn't be able to hit it over. But these guys, or boys, that came back and were repeating, lot of times they were a little stronger and they would knock the ball across the road.

Laura: Were you allowed over there? Wasn't there an apple orchard over there?

Mr. Grinnage: Yes. There used to be an apple orchard and a thorn hedge there and the ball would lodge up there in that hedge and you had to go in there and hunt and get it and that's were the rules, if it went over the road you were out.

Roberta: What was the purpose of Field Day?

Mr. Grinnage: Just to bring these schools all together. Just to participate in relays and dodgeball was just one of the things we did. We didn't have any of the relays or the 100 yard dash. They had it a couple of times but I don't think we did very well in that. All the schools in New Castle County would come. Then once a year they would have the State Field Day. They would go to Dover for that. If I can remember we went to Dover a couple of times but I don't remember participating in it. But when we went to New Castle - Newark – I'm trying to think of some place else, Middletown, I think I was in the dodgeball team.

Roberta: Did all the schools participate in the State Field Day?

Mr. Grinnage: Yes. All the schools, Hockessin, Christiana, (Christine it was then), Glasgow, Mount Pleasant, Kirkwood, all of them and each one of them
were numbered. I think Christine is 111 and we’re 112 and it goes on like that.

Roberta: Did the girls play on the same teams as the boys? Or did they have separate teams?

Mr. Grinnage: Well with us they had to have mixed because we didn’t have enough of one.

Roberta: So some schools had separate teams?

Mr. Grinnage: Right.

Roberta: Staying out late at night. How late were you allowed to stay out?

Mr. Grinnage: When we went any place it was so far, we’d be with our parents anyhow so we went home when they went home. When we were going to school, see I started Howard I think in ’30, ’31 and by the time we got home and did the chores and done some studying there was nothing else to do. We didn’t have television. We had a windup Victrola and we’d do our homework and about 8 o’clock we would go to bed and like that.

Roberta: Do you remember any of the musicians? Any of the records?

Mr. Grinnage: Yes. This one particular one, I had already started Howard, was Cab Calloway’s “Minnie the Moocher.” I’m getting one mixed up, Honky Tonk. There was a trumpet player named Farrall. We used to exchange records. He had more than me, like that, and for those windups, I was trying to think of that Honeysuckle Rose, but I can’t remember what it was about.

Roberta: I can’t remember but I know what you are talking about.

Mr. Grinnage: Christopher Columbus by Jimmy Lunford. That was around that era when Louie Armstrong was starting around here good. That was in the early ‘30’s.

Roberta: Did you ever attend August Quarterly?

Mr. Grinnage: Oh yes.

Roberta: What was that like?

Mr. Grinnage: Well, see we were kids and we looked forward to it. We had a brother that lived at 7th and Walnut. My sister-in-law ran that Garrett Settlement right
there. We would go up there in the morning and stay all day and we would go up in through the crowds and we always had to visit the relatives there and I had another sister that lived on Poplar Street at the time and it was quite a day. My mother, she didn’t go for it, she would go there and stay around one of the kids house but she never went up in the crowds.

Roberta: You mentioned Garrett Settlement? What was that?

Mr. Grinnage: It was just like a peoples settlement is now. They called it the Garrett Settlement and I think it was Dr. Stubbs, because see I was so young I didn’t really know the people that sponsored it but I know he had a lot to do with it and my sister-in-law, that was Anna, after she left here, they moved up there and she had this kindergarten in Garrett Settlement and she kept for, oh, I don’t know how long, many years. I know when I came home from the service, they were living on Lombard Street where she started the first private care center for kids. A whole bunch of kids still remember her. Incidentally, they have a mural at 10th and Spruce with her and Miss Redding and all those first ones who done things in Wilmington. If I’d of thought of it I would have taken some pictures of it and brought it to you and let you see it..

Roberta: You said 10th and Spruce?

Mr. Grinnage: That’s where the murals are. Garrett Settlement was at 7th and Walnut. They had a little playground in there and the kids would come in and they had a couple of swings and a sliding board.

Roberta: That’s really interesting.

Mr. Grinnage: Yes, it really was.

Roberta: What about religion? How important was the church in your community?

Mr. Grinnage: Well, my father was really, how do I want to put it. He was quite religious I would say. There were certain things, from their way of thinking they didn’t do certain things. Like on Sunday we couldn’t do any work and certain games we couldn’t play. Checkers we couldn’t play, cards you couldn’t play. We could play horseshoes and I can’t remember about dominoes. But to play ball, we had that sponge ball when we use to play
here, we could play but that professional hardball, that was out. You
couldn’t do anything like that on Sundays. When the roads were well
enough that you could go to church. We had to either go to Sunday school
or go to church. If we went to Sunday school we didn’t have to go to
church. So we would go to Sunday school and come out of Sunday school
and get with our cousins who lived right across from the thing and we’d
stay all around, talking and walking around until church was out then
when Pop got out of church we’d come on home.

Roberta: Now you said, “if roads were well enough,” does that mean that the roads
could be so muddy that you couldn’t go anywhere?

Mr. Grinnage: Yes, you couldn’t get a car out. You couldn’t get a car out some of those
roads. Now we named this, I think they call it Whitaker Road. We called
it Cooney Avenue.

Roberta: Do you know how to spell that?

Mr. Grinnage: It’s C-o-o-n-e-y

Roberta: Two o’s? Avenue.

Mr. Grinnage: Yes. I don’t know whether everybody called it that because there was a
family over here that were (I don’t want to say they were nuts) but it was a
family that didn’t go along like everybody else and their name was
McCoons and I think we nicknamed it that.

Roberta: Do you know how that McCoons is spelled?

Mr. Grinnage: Yes. M-c-c-o-o-n-s. That road, in the Spring, you couldn’t get a car out.
You couldn’t get a car up that way and then Welsh Tract Road would be
the same way. In the Spring, with the thaw, the car would just mire.

Roberta: Do you remember when they paved them? Were you still here?

Mr. Grinnage: I was around. I don’t remember when they paved this because it was one
of the last ones. But there was one year when they said all roads in
Delaware would be paved and that was around then. Right across here it
was only a 6’ or 9’ road. When you met a car you had to get off and the
same way with Otts Chapel Road, you had to get off on the dirt which ever
way you were going. The car on the right had the right-of-way. That’s the way it was.

End of tape 1, side A
Begin tape 1, side B

Roberta: Mr. Grinnage, what about church and the religion, did it influence your life?

Mr. Grinnage: Yes, it really did. Where my mother wasn’t as religious as my father but there was certain things that you just didn’t do. Like I told you before we had to attend church when we could go, either Sunday school or church. Those things that they wouldn’t allow us to do on Sunday, when I become of age and the very first few times that I did it, it would do something to me. I mean you know you would feel it and I remember the first time we played cards. We had learned to play pinochle and the very first time I played cards on Sunday I can remember how it made me feel. I don’t know whether you would say I was ashamed of myself or just that’s just the way I felt any how and other things. By that time my mother was dead I turned 17, 18 like that.

Roberta: How did you parents decide what things you could do on Sunday and what things you could not do? Like you could play horseshoes, but you couldn’t play...

Mr. Grinnage: Checkers.

Roberta: Yes.

Mr. Grinnage: If you would remember they were born in the 19th century, about 18 something. Things that were handed down to them, that’s what they would instill in us. So many things were old wives tales of course, or like that, and they believed in them and there was no changing them. That’s the way they wanted you to do. My mother said a lot of times, as long as you are my youngin’ (that’s what they said) as long as you’re my youngin’ you’ll do what I say.
Roberta: Were there any other experiences with church and religion that I might not have asked you that you want to ...

Mr. Grinnage: Well down to Glasgow they always had Children’s Day Easter Services. Very seldom had Christmas because they probably couldn’t get out a lot of times. Easter services, each one of you had a piece we called it and you would have to get up and say it and then I think when Nora got about, she started taking music lessons and she started playing for Children’s Day and then a cousin would play for Easter. Now they were just young teenagers, 17 I guess, like that, 16 and I remember having to go buy a new suit and get new shoes so you could be up on stage.

Roberta: Let me ask you about jobs in the community for African-Americans when you were young. What jobs were there in the community?

Mr. Grinnage: That was really a hard thing. Now a few of them got on the railroad and they’d work on the railroad during the good weather. When the freeze came they would lay them off. They would have nothing to do. Most of the people worked on these farms around here and then in the late ’29, those Finns, Finnish people from Finland, they came around and started poultry farms. There was one right down the road here, Leighten’s, maybe the other one will come back to me. Then up right across from our place was a man named Fagerlund.

Roberta: Can you spell that?

Mr. Grinnage: F-a-g-e-r-l-u-n-d. That one my brother worked for and in the summertime I did a little bit of work for them. But of course time was hard and you didn’t have nothing else to do, they wouldn’t pay you much but you had to make do. During the summer I’d go over there and they’d paid me $2.00 a day. Five days a week so I got $10.00 and it was pretty much I thought.

Roberta: When you said the summer, do you remember the year?

Mr. Grinnage: Oh it must have been, I was still in high school, I’d say about ’35. I think my mother had died and I could be out there when I’d go from house to house gathering eggs or something I could look and see my sisters and them sitting on the porch and I would be wanting to come home.
Roberta: Do you remember the first job you had? What that was?

Mr. Grinnage: If I can remember, I was nothing but 10 or 11 years old. There was a farmer named Maloney that had this big farm up on Chestnut Hill Road and we could see the farm house from where I...and he came down and asked one of my brothers could he come help him pick up potatoes and I asked him could I go and he said yes so my mother let me go. And I made $1.50 picking up potatoes.

Roberta: Do you remember what you did with that?

Mr. Grinnage: Yes, and I can remember it so well. I thought there would be enough to buy one of those little express wagons. They weren’t that American Flyer but Acme used to sell them. Acme or A & P used to sell them. I remember I gave my mother the money and she put the rest to it and got us an express wagon and I think they would run around $3.50 or $4.00 around that time. If I can remember that was my very first job.

Roberta: As you got older and you got other jobs what experiences do you remember with the employers? What kind of pay did you get, how did they treat you?

Mr. Grinnage: The pay was real small. Then I went one time – this Hushbek that lived down on Welsh Tract Road, down right across from the Baptist Church. He was some kind of supervisor on the road and they were building a road and it was during the Easter holidays and I went down there and asked him could he give me a job and he let me work on the road. I think I worked something like about 5 days during the Easter holidays. I can’t remember how much I made but that was working for this contractor and I don’t know and I think back now over it, it seemed like the people liked me, would play with me. I don’t know if it was because we used to call it “fusty” instead of “feisty” it was fusty. They said I was fusty and it seemed like those white men, they would like me and they would tease me or play with me or something like that. I got along with them quite well to tell you the truth. There was a contractor around here, that was the first year I came out of high school, in ’36 and during that summer I worked on
the road. They were putting Wrangle Hill Road, the road ran from 40 over to 13 (Wrangle Hill and over across that way.) I worked one day in the ‘puddle’ you got 5 cents more in the ‘puddle.’ So when I saw him I told him, I said when I got paid that you didn’t pay me for that day that I worked in the ‘puddle’. He said well how much do I owe you, or something to that effect, and I told him 5 cents an hour. I was making 35 cents an hour and in the ‘puddle’ you get 40 cents. Whenever he seen me after that he said did you ever get your 5 cents? Like that, he would tease me and laugh at it and then go on.

Roberta: Now when you said ‘puddle’ do you mean an actual puddle, like water?

Mr. Grinnage: Oh no, that was cement from the creed board that the cement went down, see you had to level it off and some how or another shovel it around to keep it from honeycombing on the edges and like that and they called that the ‘puddle,’ so you got 5 cents more.

Roberta: What were race relations like when you were growing up?

Mr. Grinnage: Well to tell you the truth, thinking about it, it didn’t actually bother us so much because we had all our own and we stayed with our own. Now only thing it was you can remember little incidents. We went up Newark and those college kids sometimes would do things and say things that would hurt your feelings. I remember walking in this store to get this ice cream and there was three of them sitting down there and they sang “Bye Bye Blackbird.” Just like that. I was just a little kid, 10-12 years old but you can hurt somebody’s feelings if you’re 5 years old if you say the wrong thing to them like that and of course we couldn’t do anything. I did remember that. Other than that we had some friends. Now the Hushbeks, they had a son and we played with him and my father’s boss up to the railroad shops was named Downes and they had two boys, Earl and Harry. We played all together all the time with them. Once in a while you might get a little lump, like that, a disagreement, but mostly all it was just like that. We were nice friends.

Roberta: Hushbek, could you spell that?
Mr. Grinnage: H-u-s-h-b-e-k. He lived on Welsh Tract Road across from the Baptist Church.

Roberta: After that incident in Newark did you ever go back and when you went back how did you feel? Were you expecting to meet that kind of ...

Mr. Grinnage: Yes. Once that was ingrained in you, you kind of always looked for it or something like that. Evidently nothing else like that came up because we’d still go back every once in a while. Now some of these things coming back to me I hadn’t thought about as I talk about it, and I’m not lying to you, I just tell you the way it was.

Roberta: I believe you.

Mr. Grinnage: I remember we had gone, this place right across from the school here had an orchard and they had a bean field. A big bean field so we went down and picked these beans, a penny a pound and we had made some extra money and we went in Newark to buy – we needed some sneakers. Well sneakers then you could buy for $1.50, $1.00 some of them. There was a certain kind that boys wore and a certain kind that girls wore. The ones that I saw wasn’t in my size so this saleslady said all you have to do is take and do like this. She pulled some paper off and stuck it up in the toe, and gave it to me, this white saleslady. When we came home my mother jumped all over, she wanted to go back up to Newark but they’d have to get their car and take her and everything else like that because they took advantage of us. I remember just teeny little things like that. But all, just like I said we didn’t have to come in contact with them.

Roberta: What about as you got older, in education and in housing do you remember any incidences of discrimination that you experienced?

Mr. Grinnage: Not in housing. You just couldn’t get it because when I said I wouldn’t get married until I found a house, that I wasn’t going to live with anybody. So I found this house down here with no electric and water but my wife had come from Rehoboth and they had lived like that so it wasn’t nothing new to her so we did marry and stay there for a year. Then when we went to Wilmington we stayed with my sister-in-law for about a year and then
we moved in one of those housing projects. That was Millside and we stayed there and then they built Dunleith and we signed up for that and that was ’51. I never tried to buy or anything else around any other place so I didn’t run into housing discrimination.

Roberta: So moving closer to Wilmington you were exposed more to Wilmington’s atmosphere than you were out here. What was that like for you? Did you interact in the city of Wilmington much? You know did you go in and have to do business, or play, or a job?

Mr. Grinnage: Well actually you see by me going to school in Wilmington for 5 years we’d walk to the station and that was one thing that I didn’t realize, of course we left so early in the morning we wouldn’t see the buses but if we got out of school early and caught the early train home we’d see the school buses carrying all the white kids and we would walk. I thought about that but by me going to school up there and we’d have to wait on the train so I’d get all around Wilmington. I’d have an hour and a half mostly every day before I caught the train so I began to know Wilmington pretty well so when I went up there to live it wasn’t strange to me.

Roberta: So was there anything like for you eating in a restaurant? Or were the restaurants black-owned?

Mr. Grinnage: They had some but very seldom we ever went. We didn’t have the money to go to restaurants. We didn’t eat out. Even people, like if we’d go down to the Williamses and they’d have dinner they’d ask us but our parents had told us they just have enough for their kids see we got your food here so you just wait till you come home. If they did that it was the same thing. When we’d eat they wouldn’t eat. Some times maybe they’d take like if you had an ice cream or something like that but that’s the way they would figure – that you just had enough for your family. As far as restaurants I can’t remember ever going to a restaurant.

Roberta: Do you remember ever participating in any resistance to discrimination?

Mr. Grinnage: No, not other than just getting mad and walking out. This one incident, we were going downstate and I stopped in one of these like Gino’s or
whatever and it was rather crowded but I was standing there with my little 10 year old girl and she said, “Daddy why won’t they wait on us?” And that really tore you up. Actually it wasn’t me but we were down Rehoboth, cause that’s where my wife was from and we was on the Boardwalk and the kids wanted to get on the playground and they wouldn’t allow them on there. My wife was telling me, see her father was well known around there. And that was another thing – those people, if they knew you, they’d treat you just like one of them but if they didn’t know you man you were less than that stuff on your shoe. She said they told her father I know them little kids wanted a ride so they put them on that thing and let them ride and nobody said nothing. See that’s the way I see now how ignorant people were at that time when they come up. They thought, they had education, and they could think but I can’t understand they could be so ignorant that one person was so much different from another person. Or this person didn’t bleed when you stuck a pin in him. Of course I’ve gotten off what we were talking about.

Roberta: No that’s quite all right because you are going to remember some things that I won’t even think to ask you.

Mr. Grinnage: Ok then.

Roberta: Absolutely. Did you as time went on, say like in the 60’s they started to have demonstrations and protests and that kind of thing, did you ever participate in them?

Mr. Grinnage: No I didn’t and to be honest sitting here I didn’t see any need for it. King said non-violence and the people don’t understand. I have been through a war and I knew that you fought to get what you wanted and I said that just doesn’t work and I just don’t believe and I was really surprised when it turned around and then it came back like it did. Because the United States is known for violence just like what happened two weeks ago, see they just go in and take what they want. When I was in the service, especially after I got overseas they would take your mail and censor your mail that would come home so I was writing to my sister-in-law Anna and telling
her about this place in Oran, Africa. They had a Red Cross, a little dinky room where we went and you looked through a hole and you would see this big room in there with all the other guys sitting over there reading magazines and everything, got a big window to go to and I was telling her about it. I said I didn’t want to come over here but I said they brought me and then I’m fighting for something like that to preserve that way of life. One of the officers called me in and jumped all over me and said that’s why you’re here, you’re changing it and they cut all that out. They used to cut it out at first and then they started using that black and they blackened it out. Because if you wrote on both sides of the paper they cut it out it didn’t make sense what you were saying on the other side of the paper. But that’s the way they would talk to you. There was a lot of discrimination in the army. Terrible lot of it.

Roberta: Where did you sign up? Did you sign up or were you drafted?

Mr. Grinnage: I was drafted.

Roberta: Where did you have to go?

Mr. Grinnage: Actually I had got a job in Deemers Steel, the president or owner was named Booth and he was on the draft board so one day the orders were coming in so much they were working at night and they needed somebody to work this cubla furnace and they put me on at night and I asked him could he get me deferred so he got me 2 deferments. I was supposed to go in ’41 but I didn’t go till ’43. I tried again. He said I got you the 2 but you gotta go. So then I went to Middletown ‘cause they keep you right on just after so many months you’ll get another letter and I was living right over here then with my sister. Then we had to go to Middletown and catch the train and went to Trenton, Fort Dix, wherever it is. From thereon that’s where I was sworn in.

Laura: That’s where my son was sworn in too, at Fort Dix, New Jersey.

Mr. Grinnage: Yes.

Roberta: What was the procedure then? After you got there what transpired? What happened before and after you were sworn in?
Mr. Grinnage: Well actually if I remember, its been quite a while. They take you all in and call your names and you’re lined up in the back and then they swear you in. Then you’re assigned, after all those needles and shots and everything then you’re assigned to a certain barracks and we stayed in there for 4 or 5 days. During that time they get you out and they drill you and everything and there was snow up there 6 and 7 inches deep and we was out there in the snow till it got packed down. Then we got on a train. They wouldn’t tell you where you were going and we got on a train and kept going west down through West Virginia and that way going west and we ended up in California. In the horse cavalry. When the train pulled in there, of course you had to wait for them to tell you when to get off and everything and I said I smell horses. A guy said horses? How do you know? I said man I’ve been around horses all my life. That’s horse manure. So when we got off it was. We were down in what they called the 10th Cavalry. They grouped us together and we walked up to a brand new outfit that was just built. It didn’t have the roads then and they called it the 28th Cavalry 339 California. We trained on those horses for a year or more. They decided – see we were training to go to Burma and they were moving so fast so the terrain was just ideal for horses over there so then they done away with the horse cavalry and put us in engineers, labor groups of course, and we went over Oran, Africa and stayed over there for a few days and went up the Mediterranean to Naples, like that. Then we followed the 5th Army. But then they changed us from, after we built the prison yard, I think that was over in Africa before we left, then they changed us again and put us in a trucking outfit and I drove trucks all the time that I was overseas.

Roberta: Did you ever hear of the Red Ball Express?

Mr. Grinnage: Yes. But we just heard about it you know.

Roberta: You didn’t participate?

Mr. Grinnage: No. That was over in Germany someplace. We followed the 5th Army right up the ... I always said I wanted to go back to Italy. I wanted to see
that Bay of Naples again. The water. The water looked like you put ink in water. It was so blue. You know when you get way out in the ocean the water’s blue but this was just a deep blue. I can hardly describe in Naples, in Naples Bay. When we got over there the people, they were really friendly. You can soon pick up a lot that you can make each other understand each other and if you say a few words to people they always talk like I’m talking right now in Italian and you don’t know a word they are saying because every word I think you hear you got to transcribe, or you know.

Roberta: Did you ever get a chance to get back over there?

Mr. Grinnage: No. No I thought I was but I found out there is enough right in here. We just came back from Florida week before last on one of those bus trips. We go someplace every year for the last 7 or 8 years with either the church group or I went with the Peoples Settlement this time. We went down to Orlando and stayed for a week

Roberta: You know I’ve never been to Florida yet.

Mr. Grinnage: Well I wanted to go because it was last March and I remember how it impressed me when we were over in the Philippines 2 or 3 days before Christmas we were swimming out in the Pacific you know, by that time of the year and I wanted to see it in Florida. We got down to Florida and I had this, I took what I got on now and it wasn’t too warm. Then on a Monday and Tuesday night it started warming up and Wednesday, Thursday and Friday it was real good. It was cold down there.

End of tape 1, side B.

Begin tape 2, side A.

Roberta: Mr. Grinnage, when you were registered to vote, do you remember when that was and did you have any obstacles? Was there anything that kept you from registering and/or voting?
Mr. Grinnage: No there wasn’t. The only thing that I remember and I didn’t like about it they were using paper ballots and they had someone to come around and get you. You didn’t have to go to the polls. They picked you up and take you to the polls. Then they would give you this marked ballot. Well at school they had told us about this and tell you how degrading it was and you was to let somebody else vote for you the way you were and around here just about everybody was a Republican. When I was taught about Roosevelt, I think my father was still alive in that time, and they jumped all over me and told me what the Democrats did for us and how bad they were and everything. So what they did, when I went down to Glasgow, they used to have to vote there, I took this ballot, they had them all standing there, I took this ballot and put it in my pocket and got my own ballot and voted for who I wanted and came out. So far as hindering us or anything like that, it wasn’t. Then something else that pertains to this. They used to have political meetings and they’d have it here. We as kids used to love to come with my father ‘cause he would bring us. They give you those pins with Aft Landon I think was one of the first ones I remember, and Hoover with their pins, like that, then when it was all over they would give you ice cream and we stayed through all that thing. The guys would get up and talk about the things – what Abraham Lincoln had done. They were all Republicans see, we’d know them. Some of them were farmers and lived all around in here and get up and tell you what the Republicans had done. We didn’t pay much attention to it but after we got older we could see that it was just a whole bunch of junk that they were telling you and use your own mind. Of course the schools, there was one class we had and they would tell you things and make you think even though I was only about 14 or 15 years old they would make you think about things and you understood them then more so than just follow behind because my father was a Republican, I got to vote Republican. About more of the voting too. You know there was a time they paid you for your vote.
Robertta: That was going to be one of my questions.

Mr. Grinnage: Ok. Now let me tell you we thought it was a great thing until like I’m saying when we went to school and I think it might have been Mr. Porter or one of those teachers that told you about selling your vote or having somebody buy your vote. They’d only give you $5.00 but they would come and get you and if they’d come get you they would hand you that ballot and you’d go in and when you come back out they would give you $5.00. Now as I got older I saw how what that was you wasn’t doing nothing but selling your vote. Well I didn’t sell mine. I took the $5.00 and I voted the way I wanted to, like that. Downstate I remember my mother-in-law said how much did you get for voting and I said, we were in Wilmington then, and I said we don’t get nothing. She said well we got $15.00 and she thought it was a great thing but see she was much older than us and that’s the way my parents did. They had these drivers and they would go around and get somebody and there was one particular person that unless they didn’t give them $10.00 they wouldn’t come.

Robertta: Now for you, when you were offered that money do you remember what year or years that was?

Mr. Grinnage: It had to be, I came out of high school in ’36 so it must have been the ’40 election it’s usually on the even numbers isn’t it.

Robertta: So this was before you went in to the military? Yes, because Roosevelt was coming in. Yes, I’m quite sure who it was. It must have been around in the ‘40’s.

Robertta: Did any of that happen after you came out of the military?

Mr. Grinnage: No. Then I was up in Wilmington then and I just thought it was what it was.

Robertta: Do you remember any of the political leaders, who were some of the political leaders when you were young?

Mr. Grinnage: Well there was one family, one man, that bought our home place eventually named Berlin. His name was George Berlin and he was some kind of representative down in Dover. Then the other ones, Mr. Harvey
Lee. Harvey Lee lived down Welsh Tract Road. Now those are only the ones I can really remember. They would have other ones come in. They would have 4 or 5 speakers that would speak when we would come to those political meetings.

Roberta: Now were these white people?

Mr. Grinnage: Oh yes. White. All white.

Roberta: Were there any, um, I guess even from a child or young man before you went into the military, were there any prominent African-American or Black political leaders that you remember?

Mr. Grinnage: Not around here. No. I don’t remember anybody that stood out.

Roberta: So it sounds like the teachers when you were in Iron Hill School played a big part in educating you how to think politically and to listen to what was being said and then make up your own mind, is that how that worked?

Mr. Grinnage: Well not in these schools here. Because see we were still too young, I think we were 11 or 12 years old when we graduated see. But when I got to Howard and we go in there – I don’t think they called it political science. I was trying to think of what it was and every once in a while they would get into the voting. I think it was Mr. Mailer – he was a coach. That was one of the teachers. He would bring up the politics or something like that and tell you how to vote your thoughts and to think about what you are doing because even then you didn’t have much to say but you thought these things anyway.

Roberta: Was that helpful to you?

Mr. Grinnage: Yes, I think it was. I really do, I think it made me think about how one vote ... I never did really understand electoral vote, even now. I always think that they ought to have just a popular vote. Just like Bush wouldn’t have got in there if they took that. Well anyhow that’s the way I always thought.

Roberta: Were you ever in business for yourself?
Mr. Grinnage: No. Only thing I did, I tried to sell once. I sold ladies garments. It was an outfit that I got and I would sell undies and bras and stockings. That’s about all. It didn’t pan out well.

Roberta: Were there other Black businesses when you were growing up, either out here or even after you got into Wilmington that you remember?

Mr. Grinnage: Well around here there wasn’t hardly any. They would have laundry or something like that they would do for a private family, or something like that, but in Wilmington of course they would have these little stores or little something like that. I remember this guy had a little shoeshine place that was right across from my sister-in-law, my brothers on 7th Street. I had forgotten all about until maybe 20 or 30 years later. We were talking one time and he asked me did I remember him having a shoeshine place across. I did. I remember seeing it and everything.

Roberta: Do you remember the name? Did it have a name?

Mr. Grinnage: His name was Bob Turner. One of the Turners. Actually later he was ... have you ever heard of the Gray House of the VFW in Wilmington?

Roberta: No.

Mr. Grinnage: Over at South Bridge we have a VFW. They bought an old house and its gray and everybody nicknamed it the Gray House. I remember that’s when he was running it. I became a member and I held offices. I never took Commander but I was Senior Vice and Junior Vice and the Quartermaster and then I ran the whole Club for 2 or 3 years. It was quite a challenge and an experience too. People understand how when they get a few drinks in them how they change and things like that. So after we went out, because we had mostly older people and we found out if you kept those ‘70’s, and even ‘80 records on the machines, or have that kind of music you wouldn’t get those young people. They’d come in and listen and turn around and walk right out. They’re the ones that can’t hold their drinks.
Robert: Mr. Grinnage you have lived through most of the 20th century and you have viewed it from your experiences as an African-American and how do you think life has changed for you and your community?

Mr. Grinnage: I believe it has changed. I would say 99 degrees. There is so much more that we can do. Now, like I told you that we went to Florida. Now when we got down there in that hotel, they had suites. It was just as luxurious as those ones in these casinos. That was just everyday living. In there I guess if you were used to it it didn’t make no difference to you. In their kitchen they had your dishes, your pots and pans and your iron and ironing board and microwave and anything what you had in your house. It all was just laid out so well. Now a few years ago none of us ever saw anything like that unless we were a chauffeur or a maid and the chauffeur saw it when he carried the bags in and he wouldn’t have seen it no more. Now that’s one of the things I like about it. I noticed some hidden things but you can now get a job and make decent kind of money and you can also borrow money. It was a time when you couldn’t even get anything. We tried to get money together to buy our home place. I think my father sold it for something like twelve or thirteen hundred dollars. I know it wasn’t over fifteen hundred. When we tried to get it they wanted ten thousand dollars an acre and it was a hundred thousand dollars they wanted for that thing. Of course we couldn’t borrow that kind of money or anything.

Robert: How did that make you feel going into this hotel and it was this – so luxurious and it was something you know, when you grow up as a child it was reserved for white people, kings-queens kind of thing. How did that make you feel?

Mr. Grinnage: Well -

Robert: How did that make you feel being able to do that now?

Mr. Grinnage: Well actually when you give it some thought that’s the way it would make you feel that you were living the way that you were supposed to live. It was the way I thought – don’t take nothing away from another person but let you live on the same level or whatever you have could be like that.
Just like most people like a car, well if he likes a car and he can afford it then he should have his house too. Something like that. If you give me a job I will exceed in my job enough to be able to have these things for myself. You don’t have to give it to me just make a plan for your equal. That’s the way I looked at it. And another thing. Every year we go down there someplace and we were in, last year, we went in to Knoxville, through Birmingham, Atlanta, if thats how I’m getting it right, and went on to Ponchatrain in New Orleans. Those people that you meet – I just love to hear that southern drawl that they get. All of them don’t do it. I love to hear that and they were so nice to you. So nice you couldn’t believe all this you’ve heard about these people how nice they would be. We were in this restaurant, cause they stopped at rest stops every three hours or so. We was in this restaurant and this waitress was waiting on us and I told her I said (she wanted to know where we were from) and I told her and where we were going. I had my camera on and I said can I take your picture? She said, “wait till I put my lipstick on.” She called her other buddy and I got her picture and everything else like that. That’s just the way they acted with you and I was so surprised at how nice they were to you. They tell me that in some off way place they still act that way but of course I hope I never have to go in there. That is really something. At the same time we flew out to Las Vegas and was in the Rio Suites. Now I just read in National Geographic, or whatever it was, had a display on Las Vegas and they were calling it one of the ritziest places, luxurious places from off the strip. See ‘cause when we went out there the kids gave it to us actually for our 50th anniversary. We flew out there and we stayed 4 or 5 days out there and this hotel and how nice they treat you and everything. Wonderful to be able to live like that and that’s the way those people always lived. Can’t you see Rhett Butler and them, they were always dressed up and everything. That’s the way they always lived I guess.

Roberta: How would you care to be remembered?

Mr. Grinnage: I don’t know. I never even thought.
Roberta: Well we can come back to it. If you can think about it or I can just kind of be quiet for a minute and you can think about it.

Mr. Grinnage: Well I can say this. I always tried to make people like me, ‘cause I like people. I like people. I always tried to be what I called ‘nice’ so that people would like me or think about me even if it was something that I had said or something like that and that’s one of the things that I would like to be remembered as, or for.

Roberta: I don’t think you’ll have any problem with that. For the young people of today, what advice would you have? You know, would you give them?

Mr. Grinnage: Well a whole lot of them I would tell them first thing they need to discipline and they should have a year or so in the Army, or in the service and that would teach them. As it is now, my grandsons, I noticed them, we wanted things but we didn’t get them and then the other kids didn’t have it. We’d come down here and these kids didn’t have no more than we did. Later when we got older one of the Biddles said that we were big shots. My father had a car and we had things and we had the first radio and all kinds of things like that. I don’t think Congos had better than us, up from us. That’s just the way it goes anyhow. Those kids I try to make them understand that they can’t get everything what you want at one time and nobody wants to give it you. You got to earn it and get your ownself. That’s what I’ve tried to tell them. Oh, and while I’m thinking of it I remember, we had 2 daughters and the oldest daughter started going to – when school was integrated. She’d want this and want that and I said, “Jackie, you can’t have them things.” I said when I was going to school when my Pop made $5.00 these other people probably didn’t make but $2.00, $3.00 or maybe they made $5.00. I said now you are sitting over here and I’m out here working and making $4.00 or $5.00 an hour and I said them people were making $20.00 and $25.00 an hour and their kids can get anything they want. I tried to show her about at the same time my wife worked and she did domestics I guess you’d call it and Mullens was open then and later she’d hear me say this, she’d be a little softer with her
because Wilmington’s Dry she wouldn’t buy that kid nothing from Wilmington’s Dry. She bought her stuff from Mullens and places like that. So Jackie would be going to school and she would be dressed up and looking good in things what came from Mullens rather than from Wilmington Dry and that’s what I tried to tell them. Try to earn things and you will appreciate it a whole lot more than somebody giving it to you. But I don’t know whether it works or not because I remember when I was 16 and people were telling me it would go right in this ear and right out the other.

Roberta: So it’s life experiences is what’s going to probably finally mould.

Mr. Grinnage: And then I remember one time, I think my daughter (because we adopted one) this older one and then 10 years later we had one of our own and they say she is so much like me in everything. One time when I think she was around 12 or 13 she asked about something and I was talking to her and she says, “Daddy, how do you know that? How do you know that?” I said I know it from experience. I said, I lived it. I know what goes on and what everything else like that and of course what I told her was true. But she just wanted to know, how did you know that.

Roberta: Mr. Grinnage when did you attend Iron Hill School?

Mr. Grinnage: If I can remember the dates it had to be around ’25, 1925 to ’30. Because I started Howard in ’31, in September of ’31 I started Howard High School. So evidently it was 1930.

Roberta: What time did you have to be at the school? What were the school hours?

Mr. Grinnage: This was 9 o’clock. They had devotions at 9 o’clock; 10:30 they had 15 minutes recess; 12 o’clock you had lunch; 2:30 you had another 15 minute recess and you got out at 4.

Roberta: And you walked to school? How long did it take you?

Mr. Grinnage: It would take us about a half hour or a little less because it’s only about a mile and cutting through the paths.

Roberta: Did the other students walk also?
Robert: And the teachers – did they live in the community? Did they live outside of the community?

Mr. Grinnage: Well mostly the teachers would board with a family. Congos boarded the teachers and the Williamses. They had more room. One time I think they stayed at our house for a little while and then they would walk from wherever they boarded to school.

Robert: How long did a teacher stay?

Mr. Grinnage: Well now actually some of them – I can’t remember exactly when Anna Grinnage, her name was Anna Rivers then, started here. I know she taught my two sisters and a brother so – I know that they dedicated this school in ’25 or ’26 and she had been here 2 or 3 years then. So I imagine Anna came here in ’22, ’23.

Robert: Now when you said when they dedicated the school that she had already been teaching.

Mr. Grinnage: Right. This was a new school see. DuPonts came through in ’25 and built these schools and this was dedication day. Now Anna came here from Pocomoke. Her home was in Spartansburg, South Carolina. She left Pocomoke, I think Pocomoke was her first teaching job and then she came here. I know she must have stayed here 4 or 5 years. That’s when she married my brother.

Robert: Which brother?

Mr. Grinnage: Donald. It seemed so funny, we would have to call her Mrs. Grinnage. She was one of these strict disciplinarians, she would use a ruler or a yardstick or a stick on you.

Robert: Was that the only punishment that students experienced?

Mr. Grinnage: Well they’d have to stand up in the corner sometimes like that. When recess came they would make you stay in. That was some of it.

Robert: Now what if a student did well? What kind of rewards were there?
Mr. Grinnage: Well if I can remember – I hardly can remember anything but I do know they had attendance records and I remember I missed one day. Eddie Webster got the prize for perfect attendance. As far as achievement, I don’t remember.

Roberta: Was there a recitation bench? Like when you went to recite your lesson or numbers did you have to go up in front of the room or to a bench?

Mr. Grinnage: Sometimes. Sometimes you would just go in the front of your class. But most times you stood, you had to stand, you stood right near your desk. They had like in the mornings, they would have Anna, I mean Mrs. Grinnage, she had each persons said a verse from the Bible and you had to learn one of those, like that.

Roberta: Were all of the teachers African-American.

Mr. Grinnage: Yes. Yes. I think after Anna came it was a lady named Mrs. Good.

Laura: Nanny Good.

Mr. Grinnage: Nanny Good. I don’t think she stayed too long. Then there was a teacher named – I get this mixed up. Miss McGowan.

Laura: Pearl McGowan?

Mr. Grinnage: Pearl McGowan. She married Ephrim Williams. That was a cousin of course. She stopped teaching and then Miss Wicks came. She was from Wilmington. She would commute. Then one day some how or another she got the school bus to pick her up and she’d get off.

End of Tape 2, side A

Begin Tape 2, side B

Roberta: You were explaining that Miss Wicks got the school bus to pick her up.

Mr. Grinnage: Yes. There used to be a school bus that came right down Baltimore Pike I don’t know where it went after it got down the road. It seems as though she would catch it in Newark and she would ride out here with it, cause she had no other transportation to get out here and I think she must have
stayed 2 or 3 years. Then I graduated and Miss Body, I think her name is Miss Meeda Body. She lived on Howland Street in Wilmington and she drove.

Laura: I know where that is. Howland Street?

Roberta: H-o-w-l-a-n-d Street?

Mr. Grinnage: She drove for years and she stayed several years and when our schools closed and like we’d have Easter holidays I would come down here and be in the class with them and sometimes she’d have me recite because when we went to Howard we were still in grammar school. We had recitations, like the *Song of Life* all those poems like that, Longfellow and that. We’d remember and have to recite those.

Roberta: What was the school day like? How was it structured? You know you had devotional ...

Mr. Grinnage: You mean for here?

Roberta: Right.

Mr. Grinnage: Well it seems if I can remember right, after devotions she would start over with the first grades and you had something to do from the other day and you would be there in your class, so she would get them started and then she’d go right on through the grades. There wasn’t very many first or second graders so it didn’t take her long and then she would get over to us and while she was giving us our assignment to do and they were really a lot on arithmetic and while we were doing that, she’d go back to the others ones and keep going like that till she had it all done. Like multiplications, you would do the blackboards. They’d have you go up there and they would give each one 5 or 6 you know, like that. Then they would see who gets done first, you know make a little contest out of it.

Roberta: How many students?

Mr. Grinnage: Well altogether I don’t think there ever was over 20. There would maybe be about five 6th graders and so on. One time the class was a little even smaller. Then the Earls moved and then all of them came and there was 4
or 5 of them but they were in different grades. That swelled the population up.

Roberta: The grades were 1 to 6?

Mr. Grinnage: 1 to 6.

Roberta: Do you remember ever there being an inspector or superintendent coming to the schools? What did they do?

Mr. Grinnage: Yes. There was a lady called Miss Holly, older – of course when we were young like that any body 20 was old. Miss Holly would come. She had a nasal tone. Those days she would stare, stare you down, look you right in the eye and of course us being not used to her, you’d get kind of nervous and we would have to recite and that day the teacher would make – we always stood along the desk and faced that way and then you had to face this way, just a little bit- that would throw you all off and everything and make you sound dumber that what you were. She was pretty strict she seemed to be.

Laura: You probably don’t know but she was probably sent by the State?

Mr. Grinnage: Yes she was. The State sent her.

Laura: Was she a white woman?

Mr. Grinnage: Yes, a little short white woman with a, I can remember this nasal sound, like that.

Laura: I think I have a new character. That’s amazing that you remember her because I found some of that stuff in the records. I didn’t know if they showed up once a year or if you would even remember.

Mr. Grinnage: Yes, I remember. There was another one named Barnes. She was a heavy set lady. We liked her better. Seemed like she was pleasant. This other lady she never had no smiles or nothing.

Laura: So you think they came a few times a year?

Mr. Grinnage: If I can remember, it was maybe twice or maybe one would come one time and one would come the other, but I remember Mrs. Barnes, or I mean the other lady quite often.
Roberta: Books. Were there enough books for every student or did you have to share?

Mr. Grinnage: Yes, we had enough books but they would be old. Now I’ve heard some of them say they had the ones from other classes but I got to think about that. I don’t remember seeing these other names but they’d be hand-me-downs from maybe 4 or 5 years ahead. Like I might get one of my brother’s books. See like that and of course by that time it would be getting a little dog-eared. That’s the way it would be.

Roberta: Where you did your class work? Did you have paper? Slates?

Mr. Grinnage: No, we had paper. Most of us had notebooks. When we were doing the class assignments right there they would give the paper. They would pass it out.

Roberta: The teacher?

Mr. Grinnage: Yes. The teacher would pass out and you had to have your own pencils. They had pencils but that was for the teachers. We would use the paper or the blackboard a lot too.

Roberta: Did the teacher ever have one of the students be like her assistant?

Mr. Grinnage: Yes, a lot of times and especially with a little one. They would have like a study period, sometimes, and it wouldn’t last long and then 2 of you could get together if you weren’t too big and sit in the seat together and work on the project. That’s what I got my worst whipping over. The same thing. Me and Eddie Webster got a little rowdy and one pushed the other one out and everything and I think that day Anna had a toothache.

Laura: The teacher?

Mr. Grinnage: Yes. I had seen the older boys when she had hit at them they grabbed the switch, see and I tried to get it from her and I broke it. She went and got her ‘big thing’ and started beating on me.

Laura: By ‘big thing’ did she have a paddle?

Mr. Grinnage: With that pointer. She started beating on me. I’m not bragging about it but nobody put their hands on me when I was kid but my mother and father and I started fighting her. Of course the more I fought her the more
she did me and I had welts all over me and bleeding. She went home, her legs were all scarred, scratched all up and everything. My brother came home with that Ford and we used to have a drain there and that Ford hit that drain and he come in there and was going to jump on me for – I was a little kid – 10 or 11 years old – for what I’d done to his wife. I remember my Mom telling him, she said don’t you lay a hand on him. She said if he needs to be punished I’ll do it. So they went for a long while and wouldn’t speak and didn’t come around and anything like that.

Laura: The Rivers?
Mr. Grinnage: Well she was a Grinnage then. She was married to my brother by that time.

Roberta: So how did you handle that going back to school the next day?
Mr. Grinnage: Well she sent me home and I had to stay home for a couple days I think it was and when I came back and I had to apologize. The first time I came in I think I wouldn’t apologize and they made me apologize and I came back in and nothing never came of it no more. As we grew older I’d go to her house every day and be around her all the time and nothing was ever said about it but it has always been there. It was abuse.

Roberta: Did the school have a library?
Mr. Grinnage: No. I don’t know if that closet is still over there or not. They had some extra things in there, books in there but that was for like for the class.

Laura: You don’t remember like any shelves back in that corner?
Mr. Grinnage: No. There was a bulletin board right here. That one was a blackboard and then the blackboard went up there. Seems to me there was another blackboard across there.

Laura: Yes, that’s what somebody else said.

Mr. Grinnage: That stove there was inside of a big round shell. You didn’t see it. I think it was made like that but it wasn’t in the open like that.

Roberta: So you didn’t have extra books other than class books, math book, English, geography?

Mr. Grinnage: No. That’s all we had, geography, history.
Roberta: There were no like story books or anything?

Mr. Grinnage: We had a reading book. What we called a reading book and I remember one of the first ones we had was *The Little Red Hen* and all things like that. As far as library there was nothing. It seemed so different when I went to Howard and had that big library there. Of course they had to show you how to use it and find things.

Roberta: I bet it was different. For lunch – how did you have lunch? Did you bring it to school?

Mr. Grinnage: You brought it to school. You’d bring your lunch in a little bag and if you didn’t have a bag you had it wrapped up in something. Once in a while they would have soup for the class. They would have vegetable soup. I don’t know where the trustee gave her the money or whether she put it up or what. But each one of us had a bowl and a tin cup and they would make vegetable soup every once in a while. It wasn’t all the time. We had that hot lunch.

Roberta: Would the teacher make it?

Mr. Grinnage: Some of the older girls would make it.

Roberta: Now these bowls and cups, did they stay in the school?

Mr. Grinnage: Yes. They stayed there.

Roberta: Did they have your name on it?

Mr. Grinnage: Now the cups would have your name on it. The bowls I don’t think did if I remember correctly. The cups were tin and they’d have your name on each one and they hung back there in that pump room.

Roberta: Did you have drinking water?

Mr. Grinnage: No. There was a well back there with a pump in it but you never could drink it. The water wasn’t fit to drink.

Roberta: What did you do for drinking water?

Mr. Grinnage: Over here at the Taylors, they had a well and we could get water from there and down over in here about 3 or 400 yards there was a spring. The older boys would go down there with a bucket and bring it on up.

Laura: Does that stream still work?
Mr. Grinnage: Yes it was there the last time I was down there, last year or so ago.

Roberta: What about pranks in the classroom? I’m sure students played pranks on one another and did the boys play more pranks than the girls?

Mr. Grinnage: Yes it would be more the boys doing more things like that. Sometimes there was a thumb tack on the seat, like that. Just little teeny pranks like that. We had slingshots. We had to make our own tools you know. You’d take a slingshot you’d get pretty good at it. Well anyhow, Abraham Lincoln was hanging up there. It didn’t have a glass on it. George Washington was over here someplace. He had glass on his. One day I came in and I took my slingshot and hit Abraham Lincoln right in the eye. Later the teacher said some bad boy has put Abraham Lincoln’s eye out and nobody every told.

Laura: Nobody ever knew it was you.

Mr. Grinnage: No.

Roberta: Desks then had ink wells. Did that motivate kind of - some mischief?

Mr. Grinnage: Well no not much. But they had those pens that would stick the paper and tear the paper if you weren’t careful and then flys would get in there and they’d come out and fly and you could see little marks on the ceiling where he flew up and touched the ceiling. Fly marks.

Roberta: So they had covers on them?

Mr. Grinnage: Yes they had a cover on them but sometimes they would leave them off. These seats over here were so little. When they were over here see they were stationary and later they made them that you could move, but these were stationary. They just had the little teeny ones and you’d get over there and there were the big ones and the chairs set back so they were big enough then.

Roberta: Were they stationary because they were for the little kids? The younger kids?

Mr. Grinnage: No, the whole thing. Then I was away and I came back and I saw they had moved them. I think they had the other kind like the other schools had. They were just moved back and forth.
Laura: You remember them being attached to the floor first?
Mr. Grinnage: Yes, they were attached to the floor. I noticed it was a new floor because those screw marks would have been in there.
Laura: There’s still a few, like here’s one right here.
Mr. Grinnage: That’s the way they were. Yes.
Laura: And that matches that chair.
Mr. Grinnage: Yes, that’s one of them. That’s it. That’s been a long while ago.
Laura: Now when you came back to visit this school you noticed that the desks moved around then?
Mr. Grinnage: Well it was near the end that they had been moved. I think Miss Ryder came and I think that’s when they changed. Minnie Ryder from over in Newark. She taught here through till integration.
Roberta: What about lighting in the school, what was that like?
Mr. Grinnage: Well they had lamps and the lamps would be on a hanger. They had them strategically placed, so they said. I think there was one in that corner, one in that corner and one about in the center and back like that. If they had a function that night they had all of them lit of course. I know I couldn’t see nothing now but at that time when you’re a kid it seemed pretty light.
Anna had been through these schools - what they had culture. That’s the only word I could say. She had girls doing these dances, ballets. She had a stage. Had the trustees build trestles and made a stage right up there and when they’d have programs she’d have you up on that stage. She’d have sheets across here to pull a curtain and everything else like that.
Laura: I think you had a story about the Butterfly Dance?
Mr. Grinnage: Oh yes, I never told you about the Butterfly Dance. The Congos, they had got this young man, he was a young man from somewhere and he had the mentality of about a five year old. He was big like Lil Abner in the paper. So Anna came up here with this Butterfly Dance and all the little girls they were flittin’ and flittin’ and going to the end of the stage and like that so Oscar would do it. Now he was as big as I am now and he was so clumsy.
and he would be doing it too and it was really funny to see Oscar doing the Butterfly Dance. He was from the Congos.

Laura: They took in a lot of kids.

Mr. Grinnage: Yes they did. They’d take in people. I think he was one and then there was – now I don’t know whether they took these people I am getting ready to name or they just boarded there and they would help them on the farm and they would work out. There was a guy named Jack Fauntroy and one named Frank Green. Now Frank Green’s people were over in Elkton but he lived out there at Congos. They had a large family, 2 boys and about 6 girls of course the guys were after those girls. They liked them. They were attractive women. I don’t know whether they came around like that and just stayed or however. Of course, you didn’t know. Now that I’ve gotten older or a little before, they had a name what we used to call fast.

Laura: What?

Mr. Grinnage: Fast.

Roberta: F-a-s-t. Fast.

Mr. Grinnage: But they were no different from anybody else. The only thing they didn’t hide as much. They’d be out in the open today and like I say they were attractive women. Guys would be coming all the way around. This racetrack - they had horses down here at Glasgow, a lot of them worked the racetracks that came from Virginia and places. I think the Smoots that live around here now – I think that’s where they came from. That’s how new people would come in here. Of course this doesn’t have anything to do with it but I ran into a lady that came from Georgia and I said how come you ever stopped in Delaware. I was in the army with guys who never heard tell of the state, let alone – they said that’s the place right outside of Detroit? There is a city named Delaware, Ohio I guess and they never heard of Delaware. I guess I was up on it a little bit more. Some people don’t hear much of it like up in the New England states up there. But I know it is a state. That was all part of growing up around here.
Roberta: What about going in and out of the school? Did the girls go separately? Did they go to the same door? A different door?

Mr. Grinnage: Well actually when they would line up - when the class was dismissed and you would go to recess or to lunch you all just went out. Usually you went in the bathroom and then you would go on out. But when you came back in the girls would line up one side and the boys lined the other. They had a bell. She would come out and ring the bell for us when the hour was up and you would come back in like that. We would be having so much fun we would hate to hear that bell. Like I say she was a strict disciplinarian. Anna was anyhow.

Roberta: Was it difficult for the students to kind of calm down and get back to class after ..

Mr. Grinnage: It didn’t seem to looking back on it. It didn’t seem to take them long to get right back in. It always seemed like to me from 2:15 to 2:30 recess was so long before 4 o’clock. It was a long day, really.

Roberta: Where did the books come from? Supplied? Did the parents have to pay for them?

Mr. Grinnage: No the Board of Education supplied them. They supplied them but I don’t think they gave them new ones every year, something like that. Then I think they would put in a requisition for the books and things.

Roberta: Were the parents involved in the school in any way?

Mr. Grinnage: Well some of them were and it’s just like anything else, they just didn’t attend. They would have Board meetings or something and the trustees would come but they would have trustees and they would make the rules and some how or another they would hire janitors. Usually the janitor stayed all the time. She would be in here in the early mornings, usually somebody close. Mrs. Smith used to do it. See she would come over here early and start the fire so it would be warm in here. As warm as it could get with this one stove up on that corner.

Roberta: In what other ways were parents involved in the school, was that it primarily?
Mr. Grinnage: That’s it primarily. They attend some kind of, like when they had a little session or a program they would attend it. But just so far as going out and doing other things they didn’t. Just trustees as we called them.

Laura: You said trustees were parents?

Mr. Grinnage: Yes, they were parents.

Laura: Somebody else said something about, it probably wasn’t you, about the playground. That maybe they sold candy to buy playground equipment?

Mr. Grinnage: Yes, the kids would. We students would sell candy and get a ball or a bat. Most of the times we had an old paddle or fence or old stick like that for a baseball. I remember we sold candy and got a see-saw or a teeter-totter and then they had swings out there. I don't remember even having a swing. There was an oak tree out there and we had a rope on it of course and would swing on it. I think I was telling you before, this old pine out there that pine looked like to me it was that big when I was going to school because now when you come back everything is so small and that thing must be one of them pines that grows slow. Like the cypress. I found out that the cypress only grows about a quarter of an inch every 7 years. So that tree must be like that.

Roberta: Was there a required way of dressing?

Mr. Grinnage: No. We dressed in – it wasn’t overalls. We didn’t dress in overalls. We would have regular sneakers or shoes and things like that. Anna would make you tip your hat. All the boys would tip their hat to her. If you had on a hat when she came up there you tipped your hat and to wear a hat inside, like here? Oh man that was terrible! You see guys now going into movies sitting up there with a hat on. I don’t see them in church with it but every place else with the hat on. It just bugs me.

Laura: Yes, me too. I had to yell at my own son. He did not understand why he had to remove the hat.

Mr. Grinnage: Very seldom I wear a hat now but if I do I still, even from then I still touch my cap when I meet somebody I know. That was from Anna and her culture. She sang contralto’s higher than, what I can’t think of peoples
names. I can think of all this and can’t think of the name, Marian Anderson. Marian Anderson hers wasn’t contralto was it?

Roberta: I think it was.

Mr. Grinnage: Well Anna had a voice a little higher so maybe it was soprano. She sang like that. We didn’t think nothing of it. It sounded like howling. She’s our sister-in-law, she would come up home and we always said she put on airs. Now she couldn’t drink out of a, we had mayonnaise glasses, or jelly glasses. She wouldn’t drink out of the jelly glass, she had to have, they had Sunday china you know and that’s the kind of glassware she would have to drink out of, something like that. She had a phobia, of course at that time we didn’t know, but I know what a phobia – am I taking up too much of your time? She was afraid of cats and we always had cats around. The older brothers would come around and one of them threw a cat on her. She fainted. Fainted, banged her head. Of course they never did it any more. See they though she was puttin’ on, pretending, but she was actually afraid of the cat.

Roberta: That’s too bad.

End of Tape 2, side B.
Continuation of interview with Robert Grinnage.

Tape 3, Side A

This is Roberta Perkins, today is Saturday, September the 20th, 2003 and I am interviewing Mr. Robert Grinnage here at the Iron Hill Museum in Newark Delaware. This interview is to resume an interview with Mr. Grinnage that began April 24th, 2003. The previous interview was about his memories growing up in the community of Iron Hill and attending the Iron Hill School which was then known as P.S. 112C. Also attending today is April Veness, Professor of Geography at the University of Delaware and Mike Oates, he is teaching environmental videography and with them are their students who will be participating in a service of our new program.

Roberta: Mr. Grinnage, the last time we met you shared information with about growing up in Iron Hill and attending Iron Hill School and the last question I asked you then was about school attire and whether there was a required dress code and you spoke about your feelings on wearing hats and the teacher who taught you etiquette. Now what I would like to ask at this time is have you had any thoughts about what we discussed in our last conversation before we continue the interview?

Mr. Grinnage: Well yes, I thought about some of the things and if my memory serves me right I think we covered the dress codes and etiquette that this particular teacher taught us. She was a strict disciplinarian I think you would call it, and it still goes over for me now. Young men around that you see wear things on their head or if they’d go in a building with their head, I can’t get used to it I mean it is not acceptable to me, of course I can’t do anything about it.

Roberta: That was just part of the way that

Mr. Grinnage: That was the way we were brought up.

Roberta: What I am going to do at this point is ask you if you would, Mr. Grinnage, if you would describe, based on where you are sitting with your back to
the front door, if you would describe the appearance of the classroom as
you remember it. Do you want to give me a year that you will be talking
about?

Mr. Grinnage: Yes. I can’t remember exactly how everything was when I was in we
called it the primer. Well I would say maybe from about the 3\textsuperscript{rd} or 4\textsuperscript{th}
grade my memory seems to serve me pretty well. As we would come to
school in the mornings, especially if it was good weather, we would
assemble out on the steps and then just about 2 or 3 minutes to 9 they
would ring a bell and we would line up to come in to our seats. Well it
started with the primer. Over here they had them little seats. The first 2
rows I think it was maybe had about – they started about where the
gentleman is and went all the way to the end which is where the coat
room.

Roberta: Ok, so that’s on the right side of the room?

Mr. Grinnage: That’s on the right side just as I am sitting. About 2 rows of those. That
was the primer, the 1\textsuperscript{st}, the 2\textsuperscript{nd} then the 3\textsuperscript{rd}. Now the 4\textsuperscript{th} and the 5\textsuperscript{th}, the
seats were larger to accommodate the bigger people. So all the way over,
next to the windows, that’s on the left side – that was the 6\textsuperscript{th} grade. Of
course from 6\textsuperscript{th} grade this is where I graduated and left and went to
Howard. The teacher’s desk was sitting right in the center of the room
with a blackboard across there and another one down here. I think over on
that end there was a bulletin board.

Roberta: On the left side in the back?

Mr. Grinnage: Yes, and see there was a small blackboard right there and of course all that
right there that was where the light came in, that was the windows, all over
the whole side. So the teacher would start in the morning after devotions
and roll call and all and she would start with the 1\textsuperscript{st} grade and give them
something to do at the same time we were supposed to be getting our work
together then she would go from one class to the other. Sometimes she
would go back. When she was in or around the 4\textsuperscript{th} or 5\textsuperscript{th} grade at that time
she had some of the 6\textsuperscript{th} grade students that were good would help the
lower grades. Since I said I didn’t remember, but I do remember there used to be a girl that used to help me. I’d always get a P and D or a D and a P mixed up. They had those little squares that when you wrote you were in like what you would call little pads that you made words out of and I’d always get those mixed up. A D and a P something like that. I remember how she used to help me and she had a little nervous twitch so she would jerk and get around but nevertheless she told me. Then when the teacher got over there with the bigger kids they went right straight through. They had like I can’t remember exactly how the order it went but they would have math or reading and the writing and everything like that. Then at 10:15 they would have a recess, you would get a 15 minute break, cause school had taken in at 9 so then everybody would go outside and then in 15 minutes she would ring again and you would all line up and file back in like that and go on in your class then till noon. Then at noon you had an hour and most of them lived so far away that they wouldn’t go home so we brought lunches or things like that and sometimes in the winter they would have some soup or something warm for us or like that. The teachers themselves or the PTA would give them money that they would do it but I think right across here was the Biddles they lived over there, was a house over there of course they would go home for lunch and right on the corner of the lot here was another house. That was the Websters lived there and of course they would go home. Back over in there, of course you can’t see it

Roberta: This is behind the school? You’re talking about behind the school?

Mr. Grinnage: Yes, there was a Mrs. Smith lived over there. Well she was Granny to everybody well she practically was to all the people. A lot of them married newcomers and they were all relatives and they would go home. The rest of us, we would stay here if you wanted to go home, but then the ball game would start, that was our biggest thing. That and dodgeball. The ball diamond was to the left of here where the property joins this lot over there and we played baseball until 1 o’clock or dodgeball. Then she
would ring again and we’d come on in and I think we’d have lessons again up until 2:30 - 2:15. Then we would have another recess and then you would come in again and stay until 4 and of course and then they went their various ways home. They came from all different directions and there were paths that you could leave here and wouldn’t be on a road no more than 5 minutes walking that you would be cutting across somebody’s fields or a woods or something like that. Now the Congos, they are the parents of the ones that have the undertaker establishment in Wilmington they lived down the road on the other side of Stewart’s corner.

Roberta: Stewart’s Corner?

Mr. Grinnage: Yes, that’s that cross roads. Yes that would be the first cross roads down here. They lived down in there and that was their farm. They had right straight walking but all of us we would cut through the woods and paths and things and go all the way over to Otts Chapel.

Roberta: Otts Chapel?

Mr. Grinnage: Otts Chapel Road to Smiths and the Websters lived over that way. Well see they would cut across and the people would make provisions for them. Now there was one farmer named Mr. John Taylor had a bad horse. Well everybody talked about a stud horse and they would leave a gate open in their fence that you could go through and you would come all the way out to what they now call Smith’s Way. You could walk all the way through the woods and cut off cause if you had gone around that way it would probably would be about 10 miles you would go what would only be about a mile cutting off.

Roberta: Ok, I was going to ask you how far Otts Chapel was.

Mr. Grinnage: Then there was one time, they didn’t stay if I remember, long, some people lived over on Muddy Lane. Now Muddy Lane, I think it’s on the other side of the Mason Dixon Line down there. But somehow or another they came to this school for a little while. That’s the way we did it. Every day, 5 days a week. They had actually things for you to do, I mean for the grown people to do because right in this area there was some people and
my father’s and mother’s generation they had hardly any school. They didn’t have school. They had some of the cousins or somebody else that knew or stuff like that would teach them to read and write but they could read and write their name and things like that but they didn’t have the really education to sit down like this. I think we had night school here because there was one particular family, I think they had 9 or 10 boys and none of them had been to school so when they started here some of them were running from 6 to 13 or 12 or 13. And they were 15 or 16 and they were big people and they were in school with us for a little while.

Roberta: Now this was at night? Or did they go during the day?

Mr. Grinnage: Well they did have a night school class. That was for the real older ones but the other ones what were around 15 like that they came to school for a little while.

Roberta: Let me go back and ask you a question about in the school in your lessons, the girl who helped you with your P’s and D’s I think it was

Mr. Grinnage: Yes

Roberta: Do you remember what her name was?

Mr. Grinnage: Yes, her name was Florence Taylor and actually that was their home place over here, right here and they moved to Wilmington and they started renting the place out.

Roberta: Did you go to Iron Hill for how many years, from the 1st grade to 6th or

Mr. Grinnage: From the 1st to the 6th, I think it was from say ’25. I started at Howard in ’31 and they started at 7th grade in Howard.

Roberta: I wanted to ask you if you would tell me about that experience for you. What was it like and then I’ll come back to some of the other questions that I have. What was it like for you leaving Iron Hill and going to Howard School?

Mr. Grinnage: Well for me as much as it could be at that age, in Wilmington, because my brothers lived up there we would go and visit them and sometimes stay overnight but when I went to school and saw Howard and saw this classroom with 30 kids, 30 kids in one room. They had 7A, no it was 7B
when you went in 7B 1, 7B 2, 7B 3. They had 3 grades I mean 3 classrooms of 7th graders coming in because we came from Claymont, some from Middletown, New Castle, Newark and Belvedere, Marshallton. Everybody went to Howard. I just couldn’t get over it, that many kids and the classrooms were large. I think 7B 3 was Miss. Spencer. A lady named Miss. Spencer taught it and the room was as big as this school and there was all these kids in there and it was a little hard for me to adjust being a country boy I guess I didn’t look exactly like them or something but afterwards I was a fair student.

Roberta: Were the teachers aware of students who were from a school like Iron Hill and maybe they were a little shy?

Mr. Grinnage: Right. And looking back on it and I had thought about it. Now for us we were taught manners. We always said “Yes ma’am and no ma’am” but it wasn’t “yes ma’am and no ma’am” it was “yassum and noam.” That’s No ma’am and yes ma’am and I said it to her. I saw Miss. Spencer and I think I remember turning her head and telling me “yes ma’am” instead of “yassum” just like that. Things like that because they knew that we were a little different and everything but it was so many of us that you just didn’t stand out at least I didn’t think we stood out but the nevertheless in your mind you thought about it and what you wore you know.

Roberta: Did it take you long to get comfortable?

Mr. Grinnage: No. No it didn’t and I knew some of the kids by being up here in the summer, I mean by being up there in the summer so it didn’t take us long for us to really get into it.

Roberta: So the teachers didn’t necessarily, or you can correct me, didn’t necessarily do anything that would make you initially feel comfortable with coming to a larger school?

Mr. Grinnage: Not that I can remember. They just accepted us just as we were.

Roberta: Okay. But it helped I guess if you had people that you knew.

Mr. Grinnage: Yes that helped.
Roberta: All right, let me go back to Iron Hill. Do you remember tests that you had to take? Do you remember if there were tests?

Mr. Grinnage: Yes. The biggest thing was spelling. Spelling and arithmetic it was then. You’d have to test and it seemed like history with me it was the easiest one all I had to do was just read it and then I could remember it. The only thing I couldn’t remember was dates. But the history was just like when you read a story. To me it would just stick right with you. They stressed multiplication tables. Everyday, I think it was some time in the morning, earlier in the morning, those 5th and 6th graders or they would some how or another pull each one and they would go to the board and the teacher would give them one like 6 or 7 tables and they would write them down and whoever got them done quickest with no mistakes, you know like that. If I remember the spelling we would go in the back of the room and stand at the back of the room and as you missed you had to come and sit down and it was who would be up last.

Roberta: Now was that every week or once a month?

Mr. Grinnage: No that would seem to be – it was quite often, I’m afraid to say how often but it was quite often. I do know this math, I mean arithmetic – it was every day that we would have to do that.

Roberta: To keep you sharp, huh?

Mr. Grinnage: Yes

Roberta: I know one of the big things at Iron Hill is Field Day.

Mr. Grinnage: Yes

Roberta: Okay, do you want to talk to us about that a little bit? Let me ask you specifically, do you remember what the purpose of Field Day was?

Mr. Grinnage: Yes, it was competition. All of the schools in New Castle County would meet at one particular place which would be like - one year I remember New Castle, then they had it in Newark and Marshallton or Hockessin or something like that and all these schools in this New Castle County would come together and compete with relays and races and high jump and dodgeball. Dodgeball was the biggest thing. Every school seemed to have
this dodgeball ring and as it was some people in any kind of sport was better than the others you know and it made it rather competitive. That was one day in May I think it was because school was always closed early in June so they always done this in May. Then later in the year and I think it was before the school stopped they had it at Dover and that was the state one. A little school like this, we’d go down there they would just eat us up. We had a good basketball, I keep calling it that – dodgeball, we were pretty good with it – the feature competitors you would move up so to speak when they had it. So when we went to Dover we didn’t stand a chance with them.

Roberta: Did the schools compete with black and white schools?

Mr. Grinnage: No, the only time we saw a white student was going by on the school bus. Then of course down on Stewart’s Corner was a school and some of the guys that lived up here, one particular family, the Laytons, they were Finnish people that had started these poultry farms around here and another family up there named Franks they walked down past here but those two schools would never come together.

Roberta: Did you interact with the white children?

Mr. Grinnage: Well if you were around with them, yes, to some extent. Not too much around here because I lived up on Welsh Tract Road and down near the Baptist Church or down near 896 where it comes on to Welsh Tract Road. There were families down there that we would go down there and play with. I had a cousin that lived down there. And then there was a white family, the Downses and Archie Peal was a builder and they had 2 or 3 boys and we always played together. From the time we were say 10 or 15 up until we went through high school and like that. Archie Peal was from Michigan, not to reflect on your parents or anything because that’s gone now I hope. We had figured Archie Peal being from Michigan that they were tolerant of that. I guess that’s the right word, because that’s the way they treated you. Of course the Downses I don’t know where they came from, the were always there. They had two boys, Harry and Earl, one was
a redhead, and we played together all the time. Sometimes we’d get in a little fight or something like that but all in all that’s what we did. Now that I mentioned it I remember over up further on 896 where it goes up Chestnut Hill it was just like it is coming across Welsh Tract Bridge (Baptist Creek Bridge). There was another bridge up there and there was another family, there was 2 or 3 families lived in a house like what the mills built. Now I don’t know whether it did or not but they were just like us. Didn’t have no money and nothing like that, and personally I found out that if people come from that kind of background they are not tolerant of another person and I don’t know if it is because they don’t know or what but we couldn’t get along with them. Now if they happened to come down that way there would be some friction or something like that but other than that we got along good with kids. Down around in here there was no – if I remember – there was no white families lived here except when we were getting older, then the Laytons and the Franks up there and of course we didn’t come in contact with them until later. I started working for them on one of them poultry farms with the Laytons and their 2 sons and we were kind of close as far as friends and like that. They were Finnish people, from Finland, and that was the time when Finland was fighting Russia back in the ‘30’s. Early ‘30’s or ‘35 or something like that, ‘37.

Roberta: Do you know how far back your family goes?

Mr. Grinnage: Not really but I know it goes back quite a ways. Now I can just remember my grandfather on my father’s side and he was a tall, light-skinned man and wore his hair real long hanging down his back. He was supposed to be some relation to these Lenape Indians. I can’t remember his first wife. He had a second wife and I can remember her too. She was supposed to have been a school teacher. She taught school. Now that went back - I know my mother and them were born before the turn of the century. So I might be safe say around 200 years ago if I go back like that. See by me being 80 and I was less than 20 when my mother died of course and she
was only 55 but see there’s another 35 years on there so that’s about as far as I can know that we go back.

Roberta: What was your great-grandfather, what was his name?

Mr. Grinnage: That was my grandfather.

Roberta: Your grandfather.

Mr. Grinnage: His name was

Roberta: We’ll come back to that.

Mr. Grinnage: Right off hand it slipped.

Roberta: That’s fine, if it comes back let me know.

Mr. Grinnage: His name was John. John Grinnage.

Roberta: What about your grandmother? Do you remember her name?

Mr. Grinnage: No I don’t remember that. I know the 2nd wife her name was Elizabeth.

Roberta: Do you remember what her maiden name was?

Mr. Grinnage: No.

Roberta: Do you remember what kind of people they were or do you just remember visually?

Mr. Grinnage: Yes, just remember seeing him like that in church and Sunday school and like that. Of course she lived several years later but she was elderly then. Like she would be around to picnics that we would have down to Glasgow like socials, or I would see her in church. She used to teach 1st grade in Sunday school and I can just remember her with her long dress and everything like that.

Roberta: Okay. Was church a big part of your life?

Mr. Grinnage: Yes it was and my family was quite religious, my father more so. As it was when the weather got good and the roads – because you see the roads were not paved you couldn’t get out. That’s the way to get down to Glasgow. That was our home church and when the weather got good we either went to Sunday school or church that Sunday. Now one or the other we had to do and the rest of the week, well we just went to school. My father insisted on that and that’s what we would do and we would look forward to it because we hadn’t done anything but come here to school all
week so we would get to see our cousins and our other friends that all
came to Sunday school ‘cause they did— was going through the same thing
we did.

Roberta: When you said about the weather - so there were times when you couldn’t get ...

Mr. Grinnage: Oh yes. In the Spring of the year. Now Welsh Tract Road going out to
896 from where we lived, a car, you couldn’t get through there. You just
couldn’t get out with a car. So we had a wagon, we always had a couple
of horses and we would hook the horse up and go out that way or
something like that. To go to Glasgow was a little further and even if we
got out of our road – Pleasant Valley Road - now this was usually good
but then when you got off of 40 to go back into Glasgow, our church, it
was another dirt road and see Spring thaw you would get stuck and
everything else like that you couldn’t go.

End of Tape 3, Side A,

Begin Tape 3, Side B.

Roberta: Did you want to continue?

Mr. Grinnage: Well that was just about all I’d gone through by going to Glasgow to the
church. We would have Sunday school, of course it was a big deal. After
I was 13, or 14, I would attend Howard they put us from the Juniors up
into the Intermediate they called it class because we were a little bored.
They had all the discussions, Biblical passages and they would start things
like that and we could join right in with it and the more that you would
talk the further they would move you up and we got a kick out of that,
being part of something like that. Being so young.

Roberta: What was your day Sunday after church like? What did you do after
church?
Mr. Grinnage: Well usually on Sundays some of the cousins or friends would come up to our house and we would have games or such like that and then they would fix us some kind of refreshments like a certain time of year they always had root beer. My father used to like to make root beer but other times they would just make something like lemonade or some kind of sandwiches. It would be on home made bread and everything else like that and everybody liked it. There was so many things that my father, the way they did, things you couldn’t do on Sundays. Some of the things. Now you didn’t do any kind of work unless you just had to have it done on Sundays like playing ball. We’d have those sponge balls or tennis ball or something like that and we’d play ball. But you played hard ball – that was out. No dominoes, no checkers, no cards and no dancing on Sundays. We always had one of those wind up victrolas, you could play it but you couldn’t dance. You could listen to it and that was some of the things that they would go through and they stuck to it. Yup. We respected them and we wouldn’t do it anyway. So when we got a little older and the brothers and all had married and they would come home for Christmas. Well this Christmas Eve we always had a lot of fun they would have wine and root beer and all those things that went with it and after we got old enough to do things like we wanted to play cards but see Sundays was out. Christmas Eve was on a Sunday and Christmas was on a Monday and I remember my father said later, “you know if I had been you two I would have set that clock up.” That’s what he would have said because we couldn’t play cards on Sunday but I do remember that.

Roberta: So after Sunday and after the holidays you went back to school.

Mr. Grinnage: Yes.

Roberta: Do you remember the names of some of your classmates?

Mr. Grinnage: From here?

Roberta: From Iron Hill.
Mr. Grinnage: Oh yes, yes. Now I have to think. Now the Biddles had a large family of course they would all be in school at the same time. Now when I first started school I was a little guy.

Roberta: How old were you?

Mr. Grinnage: I was about 6 or 7. I think around 6. There was a girl she was older than us, of course when you are that size a 14 year old looks big to you. Her name was Laura. Laura Biddle. Now they lived over here in this house at the time I believe, because they moved around. They were tenant farmers mostly. I remember her and she left. Well she had all her sisters. She had one named Sarah, Anna, the twins, Madeline and Caroline, Alice and Nancy and Hilda. See that was that one family and then there was the William’s that lived down here where the Glasgow High School is now. That was their farm. That was the William’s. Now they had three. There was Gladys, Mike, Marshall and Matt and then Kenneth came. I think Kenneth came just before I left he was the younger one. Then of course all the Congos from I can remember back as far as one named Charlotte. There was Charlotte, Rose, and then their children had children so they would be coming too. Howard Congo lived on Welsh Tract Road, had that farm up on the hill across from ??? the name probably wouldn’t matter to you. It was out near Otts Chapel Road. I can’t think of the name of the road that goes through here. I believe Whitaker is the next one down that goes back. He lived over there and he had 3 sons so altogether I guess it must have been about maybe 15 or 20 kids going here all the time. I can remember and there’s hardly any of them left now that went when I was going. I think the teacher was Miss Wicks. Miss Wicks lived in Wilmington and she would catch the bus to come down here. She had it so that we could go on to Howard. Fortunately my father worked on the railroad and they got us passes so we would walk to the station, the Newark station and catch a train and go to Wilmington and walk from that station to 13th and Poplar and go to school, for 5 years. The kids up there, once they knew it, they said you guys must really want to go to school.
After I got in to 11th and 12th grade they couldn’t keep me home. I went to school one time with chickenpox. I had the chickenpox and Mr. Flemings said, he was the homeroom teacher he said do you have chickenpox and I said “no sir” but it was showing and one of them was up in my eyebrow. So I know I gave some of those kids chickenpox.

Roberta: One other before I stop you I know one other question I wanted to ask you. Do you know what the general population was, the African-American population was at the time you were in school in Iron Hill? Do you have an idea?

Mr. Grinnage: No.

Roberta: You had mentioned Field Day as one of the events. Now Field Day was it like a State event, was that by the Board of Education?

Mr. Grinnage: The Board of Education was a New Castle County Field Day. Then after that they would have the State one. There wasn’t as many of us up this way that would go to it because it was always in Dover and it was such a way that the travel and all. They would have here socials what they would call or like for Easter or Christmas they would have an exercise. The teacher would give you parts in a play and you act out a pageant, something to do with Christmas or something like that and other than that after they stopped teaching the older students to read and write that was about all that went on.

Roberta: I think we may have talked about this earlier but I am going to ask you, a baseball team. Was there a baseball team? Did you play?

Mr. Grinnage: Not here. It was just the kids. The oldest ones sometimes like I said the kids would come back to school because they were too young to go out on their own so even then they were only about 13 or 14.

Roberta: The outside of the school, do you remember kind of what that looked like? Do you remember what color it was?

Mr. Grinnage: Well it was pretty much the same. If I remember correctly this color of the brown that it is trimmed in, it was more of a subdued color. I believe it was sort of a grayish color I believe. It seems to me that this color isn’t
the right color. I do have a picture of it. The first time I came down here to one of the meetings here as it was it was trimmed in gray. But now that I am thinking back it looked like to me like some kind of this was a shingle, a brown shingle, you know. It seemed like to me it was a shingle but I won’t say for sure.

Roberta: What about the driveway? There was a driveway, did it go like all around the school?

Mr. Grinnage: No, actually it didn’t have a driveway, that pavement that went on down and what a lot of people would do, cause it wasn’t wide enough for a car for both wheels to be on they would put one wheel on the cement part and come up. The trustees had posts put down there so you couldn’t do it. Then you came in pretty much where the entrance is now but it wasn’t nothing, you just drove right along. Then later after I left here I see they put something in here because I think Miss Body, she had a car, and she might have got stuck so they used fill-in that she could run on. I think over here to the left and west of the house was a big mound where they had dug that ore and it was oh maybe it was 30 or 40 feet and it was rubble and rocks and things like that and I think that’s what they put in there for her to drive on.

Roberta: So there was more in the front there was just a little short driveway that you remember.

Mr. Grinnage: Right. That’s it just a short driveway.

Roberta: Was there a pump room here or did you use water from that pump room?

Mr. Grinnage: No never used the water. The pump room was right in there.

Roberta: Ok so to the right in the back.

Mr. Grinnage: And that door leads to outside. It will come into the pump room. It was always locked. You never could use that water so we used the water from Taylor’s house or the spring. Mostly the spring. There was a spring about 200 or 300 yards down there in the woods. Certain times of the year theirs would start drying up or they didn’t want you using it because they had their own families and the stock and everything.
Roberta: How close did the woods come?
Mr. Grinnage: Where it is now except this what is grown up in here right close about 25 foot over there I guess. That was part of a man’s garden because there was a house over there and they had a little garden there and of course if wouldn’t be those grown up weeds then it ran all the way down there and maybe altogether it was about an acre and a half or two acres down in there. We would walk along the side of it and then hit that path and go over to Granny’s house and then up through and over on Whitaker Way what we called Cooney Avenue. I think we just gave it that name.

Roberta: In school, did you have homework?
Mr. Grinnage: Yes, but very little homework that we would do. If I can remember they seemed to do it mostly in school.

Roberta: I think you said earlier when you were describing the school day I am going to ask you, did you have Scripture?
Mr. Grinnage: Yes, if I can remember I don’t remember exactly where it was – after attendance or before but each person had a Biblical – something to say like what was the shortest verse in the Bible. “Jesus wept.” Well we tried not to say what any other kid had said so whoever got to that one first they always used that. We had the Pledge of Allegiance to the flag and the prayer, then I think we would sit and then she would call each one to give a Biblical verse, like that.

Roberta: So could you choose your own verse?
Mr. Grinnage: Yes you could choose your own verse and she read a verse. She would always read a verse in the Bible. That was another thing, when they had this devotion in the morning she read this Scripture then I don’t think it was an everyday thing when you did these Bible verses but certain times that she would do that. Now this is that one particular teacher that I remember, that was Anna Grinnage. That’s what she would do. She was the one that came from Spartensburg.

Roberta: This is in Virginia?
Mr. Grinnage: No, South Carolina. Then I think she was transferred from Pocomoke to here and I think she came with the new school. When the new school opened I think she was there. Then the next year I think I started.

Roberta: Was there a piano in the school?

Mr. Grinnage: Oh yes. We always had a piano and a victrola.

Roberta: Where were they situated?

Mr. Grinnage: Actually I’m afraid to say where the piano was. Anna played. She knew music and she had this piano but I can’t remember where it was. When we have our exercises, our Christmas things she would play all those Christmas carols and we would sing. It seemed like it was necessary for her to sing *Joy to the World* and *O Holy Night* and things like that.

Roberta: Okay, so she got a lot of enjoyment out of it?

Mr. Grinnage: She had quite a bit of culture with her. I think she was I don’t know whether it was a soprano or a contralto that she sang. At the time we didn’t care for that kind of thing. We didn’t like it. She always sang *His Eye is on the Sparrow* with that kind of voice that’s the way she sang and I guess she was good and even when she went into Wilmington she would sing.

Roberta: With this teacher being very accomplished did she teach things other than piano like dance? Ballet?

Mr. Grinnage: Yes. I think I told you one time that she had with this ballet and they called it the Butterfly Dance. Now every little girl would do the Butterfly Dance, so she had that. Then she would have us speaking parts. She would have these plays that we would be dramatizing, you know, in her way. She had a lot of culture I called it

Roberta: It sounds like she was quite an interesting person. What months were school?

Mr. Grinnage: Oh, we started September to early June. I think it was the first week in June.

Roberta: Do you remember the old building?
Mr. Grinnage: I can just remember it as it was sitting there because it was still here when this school opened. They used it one time as a social hall but it didn’t last long. Then I think Miss Sadie Money or Rodney Roy or somebody bought it. They bought it and they transferred it down there right off of 40 and they put it back together and it was built into a house.

Roberta: I think there was an advertisement for it. Was that it? In the paper?

Mr. Grinnage: I don’t know how it came about that they happened to get it but that’s what they did.

Roberta: So you said it was Sadie Money?

Mr. Grinnage: Yes, Rodney Money was one of her sons.

Roberta: What do you remember about the old schoolhouse?

Mr. Grinnage: It was a building that looked just like these, just like these buildings in here. Let me find one of them old ones.

Roberta: We are looking at

Mr. Grinnage: Something like that. That’s the way it looked. If I can remember now that goes back.

Roberta: It was a small building?

Mr. Grinnage: Oh yes. It was really small.

Roberta: He was making reference to Brad Skelcher’s African-American Education publication.

Mr. Grinnage: I remember going there to a social before they dismantled it and took it down but I was quite young then and they put it back together then just as much as it was only thing was they put partitions in it to make rooms. Then later I think they built the kitchen on it so that gave them a little bit more room. They had it painted white and trimmed in green. It looked

Roberta: It’s still there?

Mr. Grinnage: Oh no, no. It stayed there until I’d say about in the ‘60’s. Well into the ‘60’s because I got married in ’46. Yes I’d say early ‘60’s.

Roberta: So did it just get torn down?
Mr. Grinnage: It became so in disrepair. I think they moved West and I think the older people died off and they moved away and it just kept going down so then they tore it down.

Roberta: I see in here in the Museum there is an Iron Hill Railroad sign, do you know anything about the Iron Hill Railroad?

Mr. Grinnage: Over here it was the Pennsylvania that went through, see the next stop after Newark was Iron Hill. Iron Hill sits a little bit of it is in Maryland and a little bit of it’s in Delaware but they had a station over at the Iron Hill. It’s about 3 or 4 miles up from Elkton and about 2 miles down from Newark right on the Pennsylvania Amtrak line now. That was one of the local stops and that’s probably where that sign came from. Like I was saying earlier there was a family what lived over there. In fact there was 2 families that lived over there that used to come here to this school but they did have a way to walk. Just like I say they did could cut across until 8 Mile Creek would be dammed say about too.

Roberta: So when you talked about going from here to the Newark train station to go into Wilmington, how far of a walk was that?

Mr. Grinnage: Well it was 2 miles. Two miles. Now you see we lived up – you know where the tollgates are now for 95, where you pay your tolls - about 300 yards, maybe 500 yards over this way was our farm and that’s where the Welsh Tract Road runs right along there and we lived maybe 200 yards up from Welsh Tract Road and that was our farm. We would walk from there down to 896 which is a mile. Then there would be another mile from 896 to the station. Well what we would do, we would get out there in the mornings early enough to catch some of those guys going to the mill, they worked and they were white guys and they would stop and pick us up.

The Sweatmans

Roberta: How do you spell that – the Sweatmans.

Mr. Grinnage: S w e a t

Roberta: Pretty much like what it sounds?
Mr. Grinnage: They had a garage and everything around there and they had several sons. They had a mechanic, garage and everything. Right down this road on the other side of Cooch’s Bridge. I think it’s 4 that comes through here. It was down there where they had, last time I, they used to have all those trucks parked in there that hauled those cars away. Now that was Sweatman’s Garage. They would be going to the mill. Evidently they went in late and they would stop and pick us up but some mornings they didn’t go. Now we had to leave home in time enough so we could get that train at 7:35 and that train would come in there at 7:35 and it would take 20 minutes to get to Wilmington then we would walk from there up to

Roberta: So how did you know that they didn’t go to the mill sometimes?

Mr. Grinnage: We didn’t know.

Roberta: You just got up at your regular time?

Mr. Grinnage: Right, and we left. Now the mornings they picked us up we’d get up to the station maybe a half hour sooner but if they didn’t, see we would just about make it by the time we would leave home.

Roberta: Do you remember anything about corn shucking? Was there a corn shucking event?

Mr. Grinnage: Well they used to have things mostly like at church where they would have a corn husking and that went out pretty much even when I was a kid. I was never entered in it but if they had kept it up I probably would have done it. What they would do is give each man, or contestant, 10 or 12 ears of corn I guess and they would time them and he would husk his corn. Now, if you came out first they would have a duck or a chicken or they would have a prize, something like that for you. I do remember when one of my brothers won one. I don’t know where it was but he won one and we brought the duck home or the chicken or whatever it was and it had gotten loose and we were chasing it all around because you see it was a new place and they wouldn’t stay around where the other ones stayed. Once a chicken gets used to it (if you are not a country person) once a chicken gets used to where he lives he’ll go back there all the time.
Roberta: Was the corn husking here in the school or just in the community somewhere?

Mr. Grinnage: It was usually in the community.

Roberta: Okay.

Mr. Grinnage: This particular one that I can remember was with the church. Now down at the Glasgow church the old hall is still there. They said it was the main church one time and they would always have these socials in there and that’s what they’d do. They would go around and get the corn from some farmer and it would just be nothing but the ears and what they would do, they would line them up and them guys would husk them.

Roberta: Okay. So it was a nice social event. Actually it sounds like it was fun. It sort of sounds like the crab picking derby down in Crisfield, Maryland.

Mr. Grinnage: Yes, that what is was and then usually when that was over and this was getting around 10 o’clock – 9:30 or 10 o’clock people had to go home they would have somebody auction everything else off. They used to sell peanuts and bananas and things like that. You could get 5 or 6 bananas for a nickel or a glass or a big bunch of peanuts or whatever they had. They auctioneer just like a tobacco man used to do. They would take us to those things and we would have to come early ‘cause we were getting up so early the next day.

Roberta: Mr. Grinnage, for today I am going to stop the interview here.

Mr. Grinnage: Okay.

Roberta: I know that Professor Veness has some questions and she will probably E-mail them to me and we will continue it with whatever her questions are and I think it will kind of round out the information alot. Thank you so very much for allowing us to come out yet again and we will probably call you again.

Mr. Grinnage: Well I think it is a pleasure and I am glad you are able to do something like this.

Roberta: We really appreciate it. Okay this is the end of the interview tape 3 side 2 I believe it is. This ends the interview.