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CLARENCE A. FULMER
RETIRED PRINCIPAL OF WILMINGTON HIGH SCHOOL
AND
COMMUNITY LEADER

Interviewed by:
John H. Gauger
December 16, 1966

Transcribed by:
Marie E. McNulty

CLARENCE A. FULMER

Born in Bucks County, Pennsylvania

Wilmington High School in 1925 as teacher of social studies

Wilmington High School Dean of Boys in 1932

Principal, Wilmington High School, 1935-1965

Retired in June, 1966

President, Philadelphia Suburban Principals Association

President, National Secondary School Principals Association

President, National Vocational Education Association

President, Delaware State Education Association

President, Director, YMCA

Vice-president of Recreation, Promotion and Service

Vice-chairman of Budget Committee for United Community Fund

Chairman of first two United Community Fund campaigns

Delivered thousands of speeches

President, Wilmington Kiwanis Club

Co-chairman of Greater Wilmington Bi-racial committee

Board of Greater Wilmington Development Council

Member, Governor's Committee for a state correction program

Member, Delaware Citizen's Crime Commission

AWARDS

1. Central Atlantic Council of National Council of YMCA's presented award for Distinguished Service to Youth, April 24, 1955
2. Marvel Cup by State Chamber of Commerce for outstanding service to the community "above and beyond the call of duty," January 28, 1960
3. American Educators' Medal from the Freedoms Foundation, November 14, 1962 (only twelve medals awarded annually).
4. 1964 Award for Brotherhood and Good Citizenship of the Delaware Region, National Conference of Christians and Jews

CLARENCE A. FULMER

This interview is with Mr. Clarence A. Fulmer, retired principal of Wilmington High School and community leader. The interview was conducted on December 14, 1966, by John H. Gauger.

Interviewer: Mr. Fulmer, how did you first become interested in the field of education?

Mr. Fulmer: Oh, I don't know. Back in the back country where I came from it was quite a prestige job to be a school teacher.

Interviewer: Where are you from originally?

Mr. Fulmer: From Bucks County, Pennsylvania. I guess my accent betrays me.

Interviewer: Uh huh. So you wanted to from an early age?

Mr. Fulmer: Yes, because there wasn't so much to do out in the country, and to escape from the drudgery of farming I thought school teaching was a pretty nice occupation.

Interviewer: Why did you first come to Wilmington?

Mr. Fulmer: Well, of course, I came to Wilmington after having had quite a bit of experience. I originally taught elementary rural school, one-room school for two years, and then I went to what was called the grammar school, the upper four grades of elementary for two years, before I went to college. After I came out of college, I went to Collegeville, Pennsylvania, as vice-principal and teacher of science and social studies.

My major in college was biology, and I changed to soc studies after I went to graduate school.

Interviewer: Then you came to Wilmington as a----

Mr. Fulmer: As a teacher of social studies, in 1925.

Interviewer: You later became the dean of boys----

Mr. Fulmer: After eight years of teaching, I think it was, I became dean of boys; and after being dean of boys for three years, I became a principal, in 1925.

Interviewer: Who are some of the early teachers that you remember from when you first came to Wilmington?

Mr. Fulmer: When I first came there, we had a number of so-called old timers who had a great reputation and who were on the verge of retiring. I remember a Miss Patton, a teacher of mathematics who liked boys but didn't like girls and made it very tough for girls in her classes but was admired and loved by most of her pupils. I remember a Miss Raymo in mathematics who taught for several years after I came there; and for some more years a Miss Nora Stewart, a kindly old lady who taught mathematics. I remember a Miss Palmer who was famed for teaching English; a Mr. Comfort who taught biology and kept on teaching for many years; Mr. Snyder who became head of the Science Department later on at P. S. duPont High School was then teaching physics; and a number of old timers like that. Quite a few came in about the same time the school was growing very large, it became a very large school. By 1935 it had reached a population of 3,800. It then split, of course, into P. S. duPont High School and Wilmington High School in 1935, about evenly.

Interviewer: Did you have double sessions?

Mr. Fulmer: We had double sessions for three years when I was dean of boys; and this meant a rather long school day, from 7:30 until usually about 5 or 5:30 every day.

Interviewer: You were there for both sessions, then?

Mr. Fulmer: The administration, unfortunately, was there for both sessions.(chuckle)

Interviewer: Was the school fairly well equipped when you first came?

Mr. Fulmer: Comparatively, yes. It was a famous school. It was the only large high school in Delaware, of course, at that time, and drew from most of the area north of the canal. I believe there were only about three other schools in existence, and they were small, Claymont, Alexis I--that was a very small high school then--and New Castle, then called New Castle High School. They were the only ones that I recall were in existence at that time. A couple of years after 35, Concord opened, I think in '37, and gradually other schools opened and took our suburban population away from us.

Interviewer: Uh, huh. Actually people came from the suburbs right into Wilmington?

Mr. Fulmer: Oh, yes, from all over the area.

Interviewer: You have been very active in professional associations also, president of the Philadelphia Suburban Principals Association and so on.

Mr. Fulmer: I try to keep up with the professional organizations. I guess it was in '39 I was president of the Delaware State Education Association. I forget dates. And it was soon

after, I guess, that I was president of the Philadelphia Suburban Principals Association which really included the three-state area around Philadelphia rather than Philadelphia itself, it's Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and northern Delaware. It was the only organization, then, of its kind. There was no similar Delaware organization, so if you wanted to join the professional principals organization you had to join the Philadelphia one.

Interviewer: They don't take in Delaware people now, do they?

Mr. Fulmer: There are a few who have kept up, yes. In fact, I kept up my membership until I retired, and several others have attended regularly. I think a Mrs. Benthough, for example, the principal of Alexis I. duPont has attended regularly, and perhaps the Claymont people have.

Then later on I was one of the 25 national principals who was elected to National Headmasters. That's an association of independent school men and public school principals. And later on, I became treasurer for many years, and then president of that organization. I think that I was the only Delawarean ever to be president of the Headmasters' Association. And just a couple of years ago, I became president of the Middle States Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools.

Interviewer: You've been on quite a number of evaluating teams, I guess, then?

Mr. Fulmer: Oh yes, I forgotten how many--probably 20. Usually one a year, and I've chaired most of the committees I was on. This is quite an experience as I was usually sent to other cities, and so I was in Baltimore, and Washington, and Rochester,

and Pittsburgh, and Philadelphia. I could see the comparison of city schools, and this was what I particularly liked about it because there is no better way of finding out what's being done than being on an evaluating committee.

Interviewer: I guess the real value of going on one of those is to----

Mr. Fulmer: To see how they are doing things and exchange ideas with members of your own committee and with the staff of the school you are visiting.

Interviewer: That's what really makes it worthwhile. Now, you also have been very active with the YMCA.

Mr. Fulmer: Yes.

Interviewer: I guess it has been one of your first loves?

Mr. Fulmer: As soon as I came here, I became a sponsor of a junior Hi-Y club. I'd been active in college in--it was then called the Student Christian Movement rather than the YMCA, but this became the YMCA movement in colleges, and so when I came to Wilmington, it was the first place where I had a chance to work in actual YMCA because they didn't have any where I lived, or even in Collegeville where I taught. I then worked my way up through committees and was on the Board of Directors, and then some ten years ago became president and served for seven years.

Interviewer: What kind of program did they have when you first came here? Mostly in the high school?

Mr. Fulmer: Mostly Hi-Y and Junior Hi-Y for youth and, of course, the regular Y program for adults and families. In '28 they built the present central YMCA; before that, it was

down on the site of the Nemours Building. In '28 the present building was completed. I also became active in the area, and finally in the national movement. I was on the national Public Affairs and later on the World Affairs committees, they called it, probably for the last 20 years. At the present, I am on the national council of the YMCAs' and on the nominating committee of that organization for the coming year. I also serve as chairman of the executive committee of the Central Atlantic area of the YMCA of the present time. So, I'm pretty well tangled up----

Interviewer: You're still very busy even if you are now retired.

Mr. Fulmer: I'm also on the Walnut Street Board, to sort of keep the two groups some cohesion among the work. Tonight I had a meeting with them on the problem of admitting women to membership in the YMCA which seems to be demanded in the Walnut Street area. (chuckle)

Interviewer: So you're still quite busy?

Mr. Fulmer: Yes, very much so.

Interviewer: What are some of the other things in the community that you have been interested in?

Mr. Fulmer: Well, I don't want to appear to be at all a braggart of any kind, but it seems that practically every new idea or movement in the city why I've had some connection with it for the last 20 years. For example, I was the first chairman of the Community Fund. It was a small operation at first; of course, became a big one by this time. I was also the first president of the Welfare Council of Delaware which became the Community Services Council and now has quite a staff. One of

the things I am working on now, I'm one of the founders of the Girls' Club of Wilmington which seems to be strange, but I felt the girls were underprivileged in as far as the (garbled) were concerned, and the boys had more than the girls, so I worked with a group to establish a girls' club which now has a couple of branches in the city.

Interviewer: So people have tended to turn to you for leadership----

Mr. Fulmer: At the present moment, I am very much concerned with the urban redevelopment, and I am on the exec committee of the Greater Wilmington Development Council and chair their housing committee and also chair a committee called "How are we doing?" which is an evaluation committee of the work of the GWDC in the neighborhoods that they are trying to raise the standards of.

Interviewer: Do you think they are doing well?

Mr. Fulmer: Well, we are just starting this evaluation. It is very difficult to determine progress in human terms, and we are just starting with six committees to try to pull together some facts to see where we are progressing and where we are slipping and what more can be done. The GWDC is financing three communities apart from the federal funds with private funds; and we hope to make these three communities more or less model communities, but that is only a hope. It is an experiment which is being watched a great deal by other cities because more of these projects are federally financed, or state financed, or city financed. This is privately financed. So at present, there are numerous meetings in connection with that particular activity.

Interviewer: In all these civic groups that you have been in over the years, have you found a great interest among the duPonts?

Mr. Fulmer: Surprisingly so. Not as a corporate interest, but as individuals. For example, Henry B. duPont, who is now the chairman of the GWDC, Greater Wilmington Development Council, who after retiring as a vicepresident of the corporation, is, I believe, working as hard, or harder, on this project as a volunteer than he ever worked before. It's just taken his whole interest. He works day and night on some of these projects. So I found as individuals that the duPont executives and members of the duPont family, most of them have been very much interested in the welfare of the community. Such a man as W. W. Laird, no one knows just all that he has done in connection with financing of various enterprising individuals for their betterment. He's just typical, I think, of the duPont family interest in the community.

Interviewer: Who have been some of the other interested individuals over the years that you think of, other leaders in the city?

Mr. Fulmer: This is a passing scene.

Interviewer: I guess you've seen many?

Mr. Fulmer: I've seen many over the years. I think of John B. Jessup, formerly the president and chairman of the Bank of Delaware, as being one of the citizens in Wilmington who has been very instrumental in a number of different enterprises, behind the scene sometimes. Well, there are so many, I wouldn't want to name names and leave anybody's off because they are----

Interviewer: That's right.

Mr. Fulmer: One thing I have noticed in many of these enterprises, you see the same people time and time again in various roles.

Interviewer: That's really the type of thing I was asking you. I didn't mean to ask you to make a list because that is difficult to do that.

Mr. Fulmer: Yes, yes.

Interviewer: But would you say on a whole that it mostly has been the duPont executives?

Mr. Fulmer: No, not necessarily.

Interviewer: Other people been interested too?

Mr. Fulmer: Yes. Other people interested, and there is a wide range of interest. It depends what the activity is that will attract different people. For instance, Ralph Gotshall, president of Atlas, now chairman of the board of Atlas, was widely interested in public education through the years. Also in the racial problem. And these are just individuals or corporate heads or vice presidents of the duPont Company or heads of other organizations or banks or so on. I find the Wilmington bankers surprisingly interested in the community. I guess its part of their business, but they really take a vital interest in community affairs.

Interviewer: And do something about it?

Mr. Fulmer: And try to do something about it.

I was always interested in the racial problems, and at present I chair the Bi-Racial Committee of Greater Wilmington;

and that's a cross section of the white and the colored community, meeting informally and socially, discussing across the table some of the problems that have arisen, and very freely and frankly trying to keep communications. This involves the president of corporations, and the president of banks, and professional people and so on on the white side and the colored leaders who may not have equal status, but in their own categories have high status in the community. And we meet often if necessary, and seldom if there is no particular problem.

Interviewer: Do you find educators as a whole get involved in the community other than, of course, the education?

Mr. Fulmer: Not as much as I think they should.

Interviewer: Should with the talents that are available.

Mr. Fulmer: Because I was criticized annually by my superiors for taking too much time out of school, but I felt that the entire city was really a part of the educational process, so that in the end, why I think they granted that perhaps I did more out of school than perhaps I did by working in school all the time. But I think perhaps some administrators stick to their desks and the routine of administration a bit more than they need to. They need to know how to delegate responsibility and not be afraid that it is going to be carried out by whoever they delegated it to.

Interviewer: Over the years, you have given thousands of speeches.

Mr. Fulmer: I never counted them.

Interviewer: I guess not, but what were some of your favorite topics?

Mr. Fulmer: Well, generally, they were something about current, national, and world problems. That's before the days of the radio-TV commentators. Why, sometimes I spoke two-three times a day on various current topics.

Interviewer: Carrying on your social studies type of interests?

Mr. Fulmer: Yes. The need for that is largely gone, and it is only occasionally that I speak on current topics, perhaps about one speech every two or three weeks at some service club, or church group, or women's organization.

Interviewer: I imagine you sometimes talked on the various----

Mr. Fulmer: On various phases----

Interviewer: Phases of----

Mr. Fulmer: Yes, depending on what the group is and what the interests are, and of course, quite often on some educational topic.

Interviewer: You have also been involved with the Kiwansis.

Mr. Fulmer: Yes, I felt that that particular social fellowship was necessary. It's a sort of balance to other professional activities, and I have enjoyed the association through the years. I joined in '35, and became president in '44; and I am still an active member of the organization. I was there this noon.

Interviewer: Oh.

Mr. Fulmer: I am now also a member of the Kiwansis Foundation, which is trying to set up a fund particularly to help the extension of the Girl's Club of Wilmington. That is our present project. We are taking over a church that has been abandoned, and with the help of the Community Fund and some of the Girls'

Clubs allotments plus our own, and hopefully some other gift from Foundations to run a center for girls in the Prices Run area, the upper east side.

Another interest that I have had, and still have, is in the question of delinquency and crime and punishment. I served on the Governor's Committee on the Correction Institutions for a period of three years. That is the committee that proposed the new criminal codes which has been adopted, but not fully implemented because of lack of funds and lack of personnel. And I am also one of the founders of the Delaware's Citizens Crime Commission which meets regularly and is a citizens group trying to be sort of watchdogs of cause of corruption in the city and state in connection with the city officers, state officers, and police and so on. Gambling and the connection with politicians and the police force has been one of our particular sources of interest, and we have a one-man staff that keeps us informed of what's happening; and if it is something that is very flagrant behind the scenes, we move in on it.

Interviewer: This isn't exactly a police review board, but it's something along that line?

Mr. Fulmer: It is something along that line. We have the full cooperation of the state police and the city police at the present time. We didn't always have this, but at the present time we do. We don't review their acts, but we try to back them up, particularly to keep them out of politics or any connection with outside influences. That's a quite interesting phase of community betterment, but at present is one of America's great problems.

Interviewer: Have you been involved with the Family Courts?

Mr. Fulmer: Only through a connection with individuals in the schools.

Interviewer: But not the setting up?

Mr. Fulmer: No, I've not been connected with any of the setting up of the courts. I've been in close touch with the judges. I know them personally. I've often discussed cases with them, both rising out of Wilmington High School and other cases just on a friendly basis, but I have had no official connection with the courts.

Interviewer: Do you think they are worth while, the Family Courts?

Mr. Fulmer: Oh, yes.

Interviewer: There has been so much controversy in recent years about----

Mr. Fulmer: They are flooded with too many cases and again lack of probationary staff that's large and efficient enough to really cover the waterfront for all the cases that they have. One of the problems of the courts is that the rising number of cases clutter up the books and being more or less routine and often time without enough background research done to how to handle these cases. It cannot be done without more personnel, through both the state system and the city system.

Interviewer: Of course, that's the purpose to help the person. Give individual attention----

Mr. Fulmer: The end idea is rehabilitation rather than punishment.

Interviewer: Right.

Mr. Fulmer: This was rather a hard idea to get across to people of Delaware years ago, but it is being more or less accepted at the present time.

Interviewer: You have also been co-chairman of the Greater Wilmington Bi-Racial Commission?

Mr. Fulmer: At present, the chairman of it. The co-chairmanship didn't work so well, because neither one of us knew exactly who was going to do what. So when we reorganized, why I became the chairman and Maurice Moyer, who was my co-chairman, is the vice-chairman. This is an arrangement made with common consent. Long before this happened, I chaired the first statewide interracial committee which was sponsored by the DSEA back before the days of the Supreme Court decision. The committee was quite active. It involved a lot of people; I think about 75 were on the committee from the entire state. We would meet at Dover, and we were making a lot of progress informally and behind the scenes on this problem when the Supreme Court decision was made and feelings ran hot; and everybody got scared, and we practically broke up because nobody came. For a while there was no committee sponsored by DSEA; and later on, it was set up again, although I was no longer chairman. But I was greatly interested in the problem for many years back.

Interviewer: Do you think they might have accomplished almost as much without the Supreme Court decision?

Mr. Fulmer: Well, we were making progress. Whether we could have gotten as far and done it as fast as this would remain a question. But we were on a firmer basis for a while then than we were for a number of years after.

Interviewer: Was integration accomplished with relative ease in Wilmington schools, or did you find problems?

Mr. Fulmer: With relative ease. Of course there are problems, there are problems of adjustment in any change of system; but we never had a major incident in the Wilmington schools, a group incident. Individual incidents happen right along, but that's just part of school life, but there have been no group incidents. The NAACP used Wilmington High School as an example of a school that was getting along on a friendly basis without any problems. Of course, we had the complete cooperation of the Negro organizations in the city in trying to establish this feeling of friendship which, I think, we accomplished pretty much in the city schools. Of course, after the system works through, from the elementary schools on through, I think this will be easier, but to start at the senior high school level was a bit difficult, because they had all been segregated, then came together. But that phase is now over, and I foresee no real difficulties for the time being, although there may be some in High School when there is a change in a majority group. In probably five years there will be a Negro majority in both Wilmington High and P. S. duPont High. Whether this will be gracefully accepted by the whites remains a problem. In some schools this has been a period of tension; in other schools it has happened gradually and without any tension.

Interviewer: I imagine they have been used to this problem in the junior highs also?

Mr. Fulmer: Yes, but it should be easier. It should be easier. At Wilmington High School this year, the student council president

this year is a Negro who was elected on his merits. The school is still about the ratio of, the senior high school is about 65-35, white against colored; so he was chosen strictly on his merit. And this type of thing, if this persists, there will be no problem. I don't believe there will be a problem unless outside organizations will try to meddle in to cause some disturbance. But otherwise, I think Wilmington has solved its racial problems peacefully.

Interviewer: Is this true of the city also because you have been involved in the bi-racial committee for the city?

Mr. Fulmer: Yes, because this involves greater Wilmington, and there are a couple of trouble spots right now in the county. Some of them appeared in the newspapers recently. I wouldn't like to comment further on them because they are current.

Interviewer: What have been some of your real accomplishments, do you think, in this bi-racial committee?

Mr. Fulmer: We don't know. We take no credit.

Interviewer: It's hard to tell?

Mr. Fulmer: Yes. No, we take no credit as having accomplished anything. We are just a dialogue group; we are not an action group. We just try to keep a friendly channel of communication open among the leaders of the two races, and this I think we have done without any real friction or anger at any of our meetings. We discuss somebody's serious problems, and then other organizations would take our suggestions because in this group are the members of many organizations, then they would take back some of these suggestions and be carried out by other organizations. One of the organizations that--one com-

mittee set up with the YMCA has done very much is the Industrial Committee of the Walnut Street YMCA. This includes all of your leading personnel people of the big companies, plus some negro leaders, and they worked the problems of employment, and they have been working on that now for 8-9 years. I believe this is the tenth year of its existence, and when that committee started its work--I was then president of the YMCA and was an ex officio member of the committee--there was a lot of discrimination in employment. At the present time, I would say that 90 percent of that discrimination has been removed. It still persists in some small businesses. But right now one of the big problems in the employment of Negroes is particularly Negro teenagers, the post high school age. That problem is being worked on right now by several different groups. I am still a member of the Industrial Committee of the Walnut Street Y, which now has two staff members working on the problem. We feel probably employment is the first thing, full employment, which would mean more income, which would mean better housing, which would mean more satisfaction and therefore a lack of agitation or trouble as far as the racial problem is concerned.

Interviewer: It is a key area to work in?

Mr. Fulmer: Yes, it will remain a key area, because while you can legalize integration, social integration is a long time process and will be accomplished only gradually. The economic integration is almost completed, and those who are able to take the jobs of higher status, why a Negro has a better chance than a white man of equal education at the pre-

sent time, because all the companies are trying to put on Negroes to balance their work forces at higher levels. And I might say, too, that the Negro community is getting more motivation. In high school, I have found that perhaps Negroes in high school are more motivated than some of the remaining whites in center city, because they were coming up, they saw the doors opening. Of course, some of the whites felt that this was competition, and that doors were closing for them. This may be a cause of friction when competition for jobs in case there is any relaxation in the full employment. This will be a serious problem in case this arises again.

Well, I've, which I have expressed time and again, that we are small enough, cohesive enough, have enough leadership in this state, and particularly northern New Castle area, with all of our people coming in from all over the United States to be executives and research people and so on with the companies, that we have enough leadership there to make Delaware really almost a paradise, comparatively speaking, as far as practically all of the human problems are concerned. I know of no other state or area that has an equal chance of solving the problems. There is a great concentration of talent in the state and in the suburban part of the city. One thing that I think must happen will be much closer cooperation between the suburbs and the city, and I'm quite certain that the new county council will have that much in mind when they organize and begin their work. Much more so than was possible before. But I can foresee the time that the only solution for the general problems of the community will be a metropolitan

political center, rather than having a seperate central city and many suburban communities organized. This will be particularly valuable in education, in policing, in the development of church, and so on.

By the way, another interest I have had is the ecumenical movement, and right now I am chairing a committee which is equally composed of protestants and Roman Catholics planning a 4-day conference on Man and the Inner City with a 50-50 division of leadership, the Roman Catholic diocese, and the Protestant Council of Churches studying the common problems of the inner city of Wilmington for three evenings and a whole day on Saturday, the first week in March, bringing here from all over the United States people who were leaders in these various problem areas. This, I think, is a great forward step, the churches to recognize their common problems and instead of competing, working together; also the larger parish idea of the suburban churches relating to the city churches and sharing leadership. These, I think, are great forward steps on another front.

I have had the feeling that if there is a need shown to the people of Delaware, that in time they will recognize it and will take care of it, financially and otherwise. I have great faith in the ability of the people of Delaware to solve their problems. There will be always new ones, but I think they can be solved and are being solved, as well as most any other place in the entire world.

END OF INTERVIEW