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Interview with Mr. Clarence A. Fulmer, Retired principal of Wilmington High School and community leader, December 14, 1966, by John H. Gauger.

Q This interview is with Mr. Clarence A. Fulmer, retired principal of Wilmington High School and community leader. The interview was conducted on December 14 by John H. Gauger. Mr. Fulmer, how did you first become interested in the field of education?

A Oh, I don't know. Back in the back country where I came from, why it is quite a prestige job to be a school teacher.

Q Where are you from originally?

A From Bucks County, Pennsylvania. I guess my accent betrays me.

Q Uh huh. And so you wanted to from an early age become a teacher?

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

Q Why did you first come to Wilmington?

A Well, of course I came to Wilmington after having had quite a bit of experience, so that . . . I had originally taught elementary . . . a rural school, one-room school, for two years and then in what was called a grammar school, the upper four grades of elementary for two years, before I went to college. Then after I came out of college, why 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 social studies after I went to graduate school.

Q Then you came to Wilmington as a . . .

A As a teacher of social studies.

Q Teacher of social studies.

A 1925.

Q And later became a dean of boys . . .

A 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 principal, 1935.

Q Who were some of the early teachers you remember from when you first came to Wilmington?

A 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 ad-

mired and loved by most of her pupils. I remember a Miss Remo in mathematics who taught for several years after I came there, and then for some more years, Miss Nora Stewart, a kindly old lady who taught mathematics. I remember a Miss Palmer who was famed for her teaching of English and Mr. Comfort who was . . . 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 and quite a few who came in about the same time. The school was growing . . . became a very large school, and by 1935 it 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.

Q Did you have double sessions or . . .

A We had double sessions for three years when I was dean of boys and this meant a rather long school day from 7:30 to usually about 5:00 or 5:30 every day.

Q You were there for both sessions, then.

A The administration, unfortunately, was there for both sessions.

Q Was the school fairly well equipped when you first came?

A 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 all small--Claymont and Alexis I was a very small high school then . . . and New Castle, then called New Castle High School, are the only ones I recall as being in existence at that time. A couple of years after . . . '35 . . . why Conrad opened I think in '37, and then gradually opened and took our suburban population away from us.

Q Um hmm. I see, people came from the suburbs right into Wilmington.

A Oh, yes. From all over the area.

Q Now, you've been very active in professional associations, also. President of the Philadelphia Suburban Principals Association and so on.

A I try to keep up with the professional organizations and I guess it was in '39 I was president of the Delaware State Education Association. I forget dates. And soon after, I guess, [inaudible] . . . president of the Philadelphia Suburban Principals Association which really included the three-state area around Philadelphia rather than Philadelphia itself, New Jersey, Pennsylvania and northern Delaware. It was the only organization then of its kind. There was no similar Delaware association. So if you wanted to join a professional principals association, you had to join the Philadelphia one.

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

A There are a few who've kept up.

Q [Inaudible].

A Yes. In fact, I kept up my membership until I retired. And several others have attended regularly. I think Mrs. [sounds like "Benfellow"], for example, the principal of Alexis I. DuPont has attended regularly, and perhaps the Claymont people may have. Then later on, I was one of the 25 national principals who was elected to National Headmasters and that's an association of independent schoolmen and public school principals and later on I became treasurer for many years and then became president of that organization, I think the only Delawarean ever 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.

Q You've been on quite a number of evaluating teams I guess then.

A Oh, yes. I've forgotten how many, probably 20. Usually one a year. And I chaired most of the committees I was on. This is quite an experience. I was usually sent to other cities. So I was in Baltimore and Washington and Rochester and Pittsburgh, Philadelphia. I could see the comparison of city schools, and this was what I particularly liked about it, because there's no better way of finding out what's being done than being on an evaluating committee.

Q The real value of going on one of those is to learn yourself, actually.

A To see how they're doing things and exchange ideas with the members of your own committee and with the staff of the school you're visiting.

Q Um hmm. That really makes it worthwhile. Now, you've also been very active with the Y.M.C.A.

A Yes.

Q Do you think this has been one of your first loves?

A 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 Y.M.C.A., but this became the Y.M.C.A. movement in colleges. So when I came to Wilmington, it was the first place where I had a chance to work in actual Y.M.C.A. because they didn't have any where I lived, or even in college where I taught. So I then worked my way up through committees and then was on the board of directors and then some ten years ago became president and served for seven years. I've also been active . . .

Q What kind of program did they have when you first came here? Mostly in the high school [inaudible]?

A It was mostly the Hi-Y and Junior Hi-Y for youth and of course a regular "Y" program for adults and families. In '28 they built the present central Y.M.C.A. Before that it was down on the site of the

Nemours Building. And in '28 the present building was completed. I also became active in the area and finally in the national movement, and was on the National Public Affairs and then on the World Affairs Committee as they called it, probably for the last twenty years. And at the present time I'm on the National Council of the Y.M.C.A.; I'm on the Nominating Committee of that organization for the coming year. I also serve as a chairman of the Executive Committee of the Central Atlantic Area of the Y.M.C.A. at the present time. So I'm pretty well tangled up.

Q You're still very busy even though you are now retired.

A I'm also on the Walnut Street board to sort of keep the two groups in some cohesion among their work. Tonight I have a meeting with them on the problem of admitting women to membership in the Y.M.C.A., for which they seem to be demanding in the Walnut Street area.

Q So you're still quite busy.

A Yes, very much so.

Q What are some of the other things in the community that you've been interested in?

A 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, I've had some connection with it for the last 20 years or so. For example, I was the first chairman of the Community Fund. That 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. And one of the things I'm 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 as far as activities were concerned and the boys had more than the girls, so I worked with a group to establish a girls club. It's now establishing a couple of branches.

Q So people have tended to turn to you for leadership in the . . .

A At the present moment I'm very much concerned with the Urban Redevelopment and I'm 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 G.W.C. and the neighborhoods that they're trying to raise the standards of.

Q Do you think they are doing well?

A Well, they're just starting this evaluation; it's very difficult to determine progress in human terms. And we're just starting with six subcommittees to try to pull together some facts to see where we are progressing and where we're slipping and what more can be done. The G.W.D.C. 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's only a hope. It's an experiment

that is being watched a great deal by other cities because most of these projects are federally financed and state financed and city financed. This is privately financed. So at present I'm in numerous meetings in connection with that particular activity.

Q In all these civic groups that you've been over the years, have you found a great interest among the DuPonts?

A Surprisingly so . . . not as a corporate interest but as individuals. For example, Henry B. DuPont who is now the chairman of the G.W.D.C., Greater Wilmington Development Council, who after retiring as a vice president of the corporation is I believe working as hard or harder on this project as a volunteer than he ever worked before. And it's just taken his whole interest . . . works day and night on some of these projects. So I found that as individuals 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 all that he has done in connection with various . . . financing various enterprising individuals for their betterment. He's just typical, I think, of the DuPont family interest in the community.

Q Who have been some of the other interested individuals over the years that you think of, other leaders in the city . . .

A Of course, this is a passing scene . . .

Q I guess you've seen many over the years.

A I've seen many over the years. I think of John B. Jessup, formerly the president/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's so many, I just wouldn't want to . . . name names and leave others out, because . . .

Q Yeah, that's right.

A One thing I've noticed in many of these enterprises. You see the same people time and time again in various roles.

Q That's really the type of thing I was asking you. I didn't mean to ask you to make a list, 'cause that would be difficult to do that. Would you say on a whole it's mostly been the DuPonts . . . executives of the board, or other people have been interested, too?

A Yes. Other people interested. And there's a wide range of interests. It would depend what the activity is . . . it'll attract different people. For instance, Ralph Gottshall, president of Atlas, now chairman of the board of Atlas, was [inaudible] interested in public education through the years, also in the racial problem. Now these are just individuals of . . . corporate heads or a vice president of the DuPont Company or heads of other organizations or banks and so on. I find the Wilmington bankers surprisingly interested in the community. I guess it's a part of their business, but they really take a vital

interest in many community affairs.

Q And do something about it.

A And try to do something about it, yes. I was interested in the racial problems and presently chair the Bi-Racial Committee of Greater Wilmington. And that's a cross-section of the white and 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 communication, and this involves the presidents of corporations and the presidents of banks and professional people and so on on the white side and the colored leaders who may not have equal status but who in their own categories have high status in the community. And we meet often if necessary and seldom if there is no particular problem.

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

A Not as much as I think they should.

Q They should, yes. [Inaudible] . . . their problem.

A I was criticized annually by my superiors of 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 I think they granted that perhaps I did more out of school than perhaps by working in school all the time. But I think perhaps some administrators stick to their desks and the routines of their administration a bit more than they need to. They need to know how to delegate responsibility and not be afraid that it's going to be carried out by whomever they delegate it to.

Q Over the year you have given thousands of speeches.

A I never counted them.

Q I guess not . . . but what were some of your favorite topics?

A Well, generally they're something about current national and world problems. That's before the days of the radio-T.V. commentators, why, sometimes I spoke two and three times a day on various current topics.

Q Carrying on your social studies type of interview.

A Yes. But the need for that is gradually gone . . . it's only occasionally that I speak on current topics . . . perhaps about one speech every two or three weeks, some service club or church group or women's organization.

Q I imagine you sometimes talk on the various . . .

A Talk on various phases, yes . . . depending what the group is and what the interests are, of course, quite often on some educational topic.

Q You've also been involved with the Kiwanis?

A Yes, I felt that that particular social fellowship was necessary as a sort of balance to professional activities. And I've enjoyed the association through the years. I joined in '35 and became president in '44, and I'm still active . . . an active member of the organization. I was there this noon. I'm now also a member of the Kiwanis Foundation, which is trying to set up a fund particularly to help the extension of the Girls Club of Wilmington, at the present . . . it's our present project. We're taking over a church that has been abandoned and with the help of the Community Fund and some of . . . and some of the Girls Club allotments and plus our own and hopefully some other gifts from foundations to run a center for girls in the Prices Run area on the upper east side.

Another interest that I've 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, and that is the committee that proposed the new Criminal Codes which have been adopted--they're not fully implemented because of lack of funds and lack of personal. And I also am one of the founders of the Wilmington Citizens Crime Commission--the Delaware Citizens Crime Commission, rather, which meets regularly and is a citizens group trying to be sort of watchdogs of possible corruption in the city and state connected with city offices and police and so on, gambling and the connection with politicians or police forces [inaudible] in particular. [Inaudible] . . . and we have a one-man staff that keeps us informed what's happening, and if it is something that is very flagrant behind the scenes, why we move in on it.

Q This is not exactly a police review board, but it's something along that line?

A 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 that, 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 with any connection with outside influences. And that's a quite interesting phase of community betterment but at present one of Americans great problems.

Q Have you been involved with the Family Courts?

A Only through the connection with individuals of the schools.

Q But I mean, not the setting up the Family Court, that sort of thing?

A No, I was not connected with the setting up of the court. I've been in close touch with the judges and know them personally and often discuss cases with them, both arising out of Wilmington High School and other cases, just on a friendly basis. But I've had no official connection with the courts.

Q Do you think they are worthwhile? Do the Family Courts . . .

A Oh, yes.

Q There's been much controversy in recent years about . . .

A They're flooded with too many cases and again lack a 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 a rising number of cases clutter up the books and they think it's more or less routine and oftentimes there is not enough background research done to handle these cases. It cannot be done without more personnel . . . it's through both the state system and the city system.

Q Of course, that's the purpose, to help the person get individual attention and . . .

A The end idea is rehabilitation rather than punishment. This was rather a hard idea to get across to the people of Delaware years ago. But it's been more or less accepted at the present time.

Q C.K. You have also been co-chairman of the Greater Wilmington Bi-Racial Commission.

A At present the chairman of it.

Q Oh, you are chairman.

A Yes. 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, Reverent Maurice Moyer, who was my co-chairman, is a vice-chairman. And this an arrangement made with a common consent. Long before this happened, I chaired the first statewide interracial committee which was sponsored by the D.S.E.A., 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, and we'd meet at Dover and make a lot of progress informally and behind the scenes. In this problem, when the Supreme Court decision was made and feelings ran hot and everybody got scared and the committee practically broke up because nobody came. And for a while there was no committee sponsored by D.S.E.A., 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.

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

A 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 than they were for a number of years after.

Q Was integration accomplished with relative ease in Wilmington, in the Wilmington Schools, or did you find . . .

A With relative ease. And of course there were problems . . . there are problems of adjustment in any change of system. But they never had a major incident in the Wilmington Schools . . . in fact . . . that is a group incident, because individual incidents happened right along. But that's just a part of school life. But there were no group incidents and the N.A.A.C.P. 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 organization of the city in trying to establish this feeling of friendship, which I think we accomplished pretty much in the city schools. And of course after the system worked through from the elementary schools on through, I think this would be easier, but to start at the senior high school level was a bit difficult, because they had all been segregated and 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's a change in a majority group. And probably in five years there'll be a Negro majority in both Wilmington High and P. S. DuPont High. And whether this will be gracefully accepted by the whites remains a problem. In some schools this [inaudible] . . . a period of tension, other schools, why it has happened gradually and without any tension.

Q I imagine they've been used to this in part of the junior highs, though, also.

A Yes, so it should be easier. It should be easier. At Wilmington High School this year there is a student council president who is a Negro who was elected on his merits, although his school is still about the ratio . . . the senior high school is about 65 to 35 white against colored, so he was chosen strictly on his merits. And this type of thing would . . . if this persists, there'll be no problem. I don't believe there'd be a problem unless outside organizations would try to meddle in to cause some disturbance. But otherwise I think that Wilmington solved its racial problems peacefully.

Q Would you say this is true of the city, also? You've been involved in the Bi-Racial Committee for the city.

A Yes, because this involves Greater Wilmington and there are a couple of trouble spots right now in the county. Some of it appeared in the newspapers lately and I wouldn't like to comment further on them because they're current.

Q Well, what have been some of your real accomplishments, do you think, in this Bi-Racial Committee?

A We don't know. We take no credit.

Q It's hard to tell.

A Yes. We take no credit as having accomplished anything. You see, we're just a dialogue group--we don't have an action group.

Q I see.

A We just try to keep friendly channels of communication open among the leaders of the two races, and this I think we have done without any . . . without ever any real friction or anger at any of our meetings. We discuss some rather serious problems and then other organizations would take our suggestions because in this group are members of many organizations, and then they would take back some of these suggestions and be carried out by other organizations. One of the organizations that . . . one committee that was set up by the Y.M.C.A. has done very much of the . . . it's the Industrial Committee of the Walnut Street Y.M.C.A. This includes all of your leading personnel people of the big companies, plus some Negro leaders, and they work with the problem of employment. And they've been working on that now for eight or nine years. I think it's nine . . . this I believe is the tenth year of its existence and when that committee started its work, I was then president of the Y.M.C.A. and was therefore an ex-officio member of the committee. There was a lot of discrimination in employment. At the present time, I would say 90% of that discrimination has been removed. It still persists in some small businesses. But right now one of the big problems is the employment of the Negro, particularly Negro teenagers at the post-high school age. And that problem is being worked on now by several different groups among them still the Industrial Committee of the Walnut Street Y. It now has two staff members working on the problem. We feel probably employment is a first thing--full employment--which would mean more income which would mean better housing which would mean more satisfaction and therefore lack of agitation or trouble as far as the racial problem is concerned.

Q It's a key area to work in.

A Yes. It will remain a key area because while you can have legal integration, social integration is a long-time process and will be accomplished only gradually. Economic integration is almost completed and those who are able to take jobs of a higher status, why a Negro has a better chance a white man with equal education at the present time, because all the companies are trying to put on Negroes to balance their work forces on the 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 all coming up, they saw the doors opening. But some of the whites thought this was competition and the doors were closing for them. This may be a cause of friction . . . competition for jobs in case there's any relaxation in the full employment. This would be a serious problem in case this arises again. [Inaudible] . . . which I've expressed time and again that we're small enough, cohesive enough and have enough leadership in the state and particularly the 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 a 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's 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 a 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 in 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 setup, rather than having a separate central city and many suburban communities organized. This would be particularly valuable in education, in policing, and in development of church and so on.

By the way, another interest I've had is the Ecumenical movement and right now I'm chairing a committee which is equally composed of Protestants and Roman Catholics planning a four-day conference on Man and the Inner City with a 50-50 division of leadership of 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 worked . . . leaders in all these problem areas. This I think is a great forward step for churches to recognize they have 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. And I've had the feeling that if there's 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'll be always new ones, but I think that they can be solved and are being solved, as well as in most other places in the entire world.

[END OF INTERVIEW]