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Mr. Albert Adams

[0:00:00]

Interviewer: An interview with Albert Adams, Superintendent of Lake Forest School District, a graduate of the University of Delaware, a class of 1936, a longtime Delawarean, and the son of an educator.

Could you tell us something about your father and his career, Mr. Adams?

Mr. Adams: My father was James O. Adams. He was business manager and secretary of the State Board of Education from 1920 to 1948. And during that time I practically grew up in the educational circles of the State of Delaware. I've seen the one-room school gradually disappear as they were consolidated into the various school districts in the state.

Delaware at that time consisted of various school districts; some were under the direct control of the State Board of Education and others, I think there were 13 of them, became special districts. The special districts practically controlled themselves whereas the state schools as I said were under the control of the State Board of Education and the state superintendent who was at that time Dr. Harry V. Holloway.

At that time, naturally the state was under the doctrine of separate but supposedly equal schools for the Black race and the White race. The special districts controlled the Black schools in their area, whereas the numbered Black schools or other than in the special districts were under the control of the State Board of the – or the State Department of Public Instruction. This existed until around 1955 when desegregation was actively started.

Before 1952, monies were provided by the state legislature to the various school districts. In accordance with the budgets the each district would submit to the governor. Following the submission of this budget, an interview would be held between the head of the school and the governor to go over the budget. Under such system, naturally those that had the greatest influence with the legislature oftentimes got the most money.

Around that about 1952, the present unit system was devised which was a fair distribution of monies for the education in Delaware. Under the unit system money was appropriated by the state legislature according to

the number of boys and girls who were actually present in each school. Twenty-five consisted of a unit in the elementary schools and 20 in the secondary schools. Later on, vocational units were started which consisted of 15 boys and girls in vocational classes.

I remember one time when I was principal at John M. Clayton School which was a school for the boys and girls in the Dagsboro-Frankford area, I submitted a budget and had to go before Governor Bacon, and we made that very well. But long about this time, Senator Dickerson was a senator from Laurel. And I remember one time when he was also the chairman of the finance committee of the legislature, various school districts would come up and ask for our various appropriations, and Senator Dickerson in his squeaky voice would say, "Oh, Laurel doesn't have that. Laurel didn't have that."

Finally, some of the members of the committee got tired of hearing this and they said, "Okay, let's have Laurel next." And Laurel came out very well that year. And after Laurel's budget had been approved, the other school districts came in and the very first thing Senator Dickerson said when another school came in after Laurel had been satisfied was "Laurel didn't ask for that."

After the beginning of the unit system, this scrounging for funds practically ceased because each school district would know what it would be entitled to. The state legislature would have to set the amount that would be given for a unit. If I remember it correctly it started around \$600 a unit. In this present time this last budget bill calls for \$1,920 per unit of student.

Sometime in between and – we also – we're able to get through an equalization formula in which the poorer districts would be able to get more funds in accordance with what they could raise than the richer districts could do.

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Thus at the present time we have three main divisions: Division I funds which account for the salaries of all professional employees; Division II which is determined by the unit system and are the funds used for operating expenses; and Division III funds which are the equalization funds which enable a school district to provide many more fringe benefits than they could if they didn't have them.

In addition to the state funds provided, each district may, if it so desires, raise local funds after approval by the taxpayers in the district through a referendum. This has developed in later years. At one time, all funds for the operation of schools came from the state legislature. However, with the passage of legislation which enabled the various districts to raise local funds has enabled some districts to far exceed the others in the amount of educational facilities they could give the boys and girls. This in turn led to the development of the equalization formula which I spoke about just a minute ago.

However, even with the equalization funds there's a great variance in the ability of the various districts in Delaware. For instance, Alexis I. and Alfred I. du Pont which exist in the areas of the greatest wealth can for a dollar of taxation bring in a lot more money than can, say, Woodbridge or Lake Forest which exist in the poorer area.

The school system under the equal but separate situation that we had before in the late 1950s seemed to work very well. However, the Black students did not get the education that White students did. For instance, although there were various districts in each county, the boys and girls in the White schools could have a high school in Harrington; could have one in Bridgeville, one at Seaford, one at Laurel, Delmar, Georgetown, Lewes, Millsboro, Frankford-Dagsboro area, as far as Sussex County was concerned, whereas the Black students had one high school which was the high school located in Georgetown and all students, all Black students in grades 9 through 12 would have to go to Georgetown for their high school education.

The same was true in Kent County where each of the local communities would have its own White high school. The Black high school was located in Dover. And in New Castle County, the same thing existed with the high school being located in Wilmington.

Around 1954 and '55, desegregation became an issue. There was a great deal of oppositionists, naturally would be expected throughout the state. However, it did not affect the New Castle Schools as much as it did in Kent and Sussex Schools because most of the Black population in the school districts existed in Kent and Sussex County.

As I said, there's a great deal of opposition and almost bloodshed when schools were forced to integrate. A man named Bryant Bowles came to Delaware from Florida and for \$5 or \$10 they had a gold certificate or a silver certification or a dollar or some other kind of certificate organized a group known as National Association for the Advancement of White

People to go against the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.

There were great many people in Sussex County who joined Bryant Bowles' organization and did everything possible to keep the Black out of the White schools. The New Castle County people to a great extent did not realize the seriousness of the situation, as I said, because much fewer people in those schools that had to be integrated. I would say the average in Kent and Sussex County in the present day is 25% Black wherein Newark, for instance, there may be 1% of the total population would be Black.

Although there was a great deal of opposition and a great deal of difficulty, integration did take effect and the present time all the schools in Delaware are completely integrated.

[0:09:57]

However, the court ruling that has just come out means that there must be more integration in New Castle County that has existed in the past because actually what has happen the student population in Wilmington has gone from maybe 50-50 to practically 90% Black. Whereas the suburban areas still have only 1% or 2% Black in their school districts. And the court order that just came through has called for a one school district in most of New Castle County to have a student population of 10% to 35% Black throughout the area.

Whereas New Castle county has had a fight to survivors as a result of school integration, Kent and Sussex county had not had this because there are no place to flee to. And the people live in the communities and on the forums and attend the schools in their area.

This has resulted and as I said, there were of anywhere from 15% to 25% Black in all of the schools. However, they have been accepted there is really no question anymore on whether the person is Black or White as far as school is concern.

The athletic teams and all of the social functions have been integrated. And we've had very few problems in the past few years because of raise. Although, we're accused by the EEOC and NACP of discrimination in all faces such as not the fact.

We are accused by NACP and the EEOC of discrimination in punishment but the recent statistics that came across my desk has shown that there

have been more White boys and more White girls punished during the past school year than there have been Black boys and Black girls. In fact the proportion is greater than the 25% that exist in actual population. I would say that in the last year as far as suspension is concern, say, 50 has been White boys has been suspended in comparison to five Black. And maybe 30 White girls in comparison to maybe 10 or 12 Black, which does not bar out the claims of the NACP and the EEOC.

All of us have heard in the past claims of discipline problems in the schools and reaction in the schools, this is actually not so as far as Kent and Sussex is concerned. We do have discipline problems of course. Any schools have discipline problems and when I was a student in Delaware high school back in the 1928 and '30, we had discipline problems. We have students as to the present time who do not want to go to school. We had students in those days that didn't want to go to school.

The main difference we have at the present time while we had back in the '28s and the '30s is that if you didn't want to go to school in those days, you dropped out, where the present time the schools have to take care of all the boys and girls by law until their 21. And the people themselves urged the students to stay in school. Therefore, we have a greater number of students remaining in schools at the present time than we had in the past.

In order to take care of these, we have developed various vocational courses and various easy courses as you might say but this is necessary. As long as the student stays in school, he must be given something to do. We hear that the students cannot read and write and this to a great extent is true.

However, back in 1928 and '30, all of those students have finished usually academic or scientific students, very few vocational and few general students. Today we have students who finished their 18 years of age and have finished 12 years at school; some of them can't read and write. But we still have the same proportion to those at the academic courses and the scientific courses that are accomplished students as shown that has by the way they go into college.

Those that cannot read and write are those who have stayed in school, have been forced by their parents to stay in school, have been forced by the community to stay in school and have no desires to stay in school at all but stay there.

And, you know, when employers call us for recommendations, in fact they don't call us for recommendations. A student who has maybe given a certificate of attendance at high school or has finished high school with a very basic score, goes and says he has graduated from high school. The employers never bother to call the school to find out how many days he attended and how many he were absent. Whether they accomplished the purposes of the school or they did not. They take the reward for it that they're high school graduates and then actually found they can't read or they can't write the way they should or they can't spell the way they should.

[0:15:01]

This is normal. Back in the older days when a student graduate from high school and the employer usually would call the school to check on him and find out just how he did in the school and how his attendance was and whether the school can recommend them for a position. This is not done any more.

The requirements for graduation at school have changed over the years. When I graduated from high school, we had to have 16 credits. Four of which were English, three were social studies, two are math and I don't remember the others but it made up to 16 credits. Today you must have 18 credits to graduate from school.

We still have the requirements of three credits in English. I think it's one in social studies and probably one in math and the rest of them can be any course that's approved by the school State Department. And these courses consist of such thing as horticulture, animal raising, other various types of agriculture, art, music, physical education. And some of the courses are manual training, manual arts, industrial arts, metal working, beauty culture, family living. Some science courses are still required such as general science course. We still give biology. We still give chemistry. We still give physics but those are only given to the advanced students and not to those who finished school with the bare 18 credits.

We have didn't come to the point where we give credits for other school work on the job employment. And if they're successful in that where they can be given credit, so many credits to graduate for the work they do outside. We can give credit for those who have taken the extension to work in other approved institution.

We do have one advantage that we didn't have in the past that the student who has nearly finished high school can enter to college and can

do one of two things. They can take part time work in college and take the one or two courses they need in the senior year to finish. Or if agreements can be made between the college and the school, they can enter the freshmen year of college and in the successful completion of freshmen year, will give them the added credits that needed for the high school graduation.

As I mentioned earlier in the '20s and '30s there's a great deal of consolidation to the school districts of Delaware, you know, there were small one room school that practically disappeared. And the students went to the larger communities nearby.

All during the '50s and the '60s there was a great deal of discussion among educational leaders for further consolidation. And the various plans were device but not of them came about until around 1969 when the Education Advancement Act was passed by a legislature, which consolidated the school districts in Delaware into 23 districts plus three vocational districts.

There was so many inequality in this plan and in accordance with the size of the district. This was done partly to a PZ, people who live in the various areas and others for our financial reasons. For instance in Sussex County, the area that was formally the large ball of our school district, the Subway Hill School District, the John M. Clayton School District, the Millsboro School District and the Georgetown School District and the Gambier School District became the Indian River School District. And the area of Milton, Rehoboth and Luis became the Cape Henlopen School District.

Delmar because it had contacts with Camargo County *[phonetic]* **[0:18:59]**, Smyrna was allowed to remain a small school district in the southern part of the state. Laurel with 2,100 students became a separate district. Seaford became a separate district but had larger students. And Woodbridge and Greenwood or I'm sorry. Bridgeville and Greenwood became the Woodbridge School District.

In Kent County Frederica, Felton and Harrington became the Lake Forest District with approximately 3,500 students. Milford with 3,500 students remained a single district but it did consolidate with Houston and Ellendale and Lincoln. Caesar Rodney became a single district but it took in the smaller districts around it. The Capital District took in Little Creek and Hartly and the same throughout the state.

[0:19:59]

In New Castle County because they had the greater student population, a lot of the districts remain as they were in previous. North was a district. Appoquinimink was a former Odessa in middle town districts. In Mount Pleasant, Claymont remained the same. Wilmington remained the same.

New Castle went together with the De La Warr District and became the New Castle Gunning Bedford District. In all as I said, there were 23 districts start of resulting from the consolidation.

There has been talk in the present that this would be either further consolidated into maybe just three county districts which may come to past especially after the court decision in New Castle County.

Throughout the years, whether we were smaller one room schools or the small especial districts, small state board units consolidate district such we had at present time, finances have been achieved of the school administrator.

Delaware is unique and that most of the school funds have come from the state legislature. 80% of the funds that we get to run our schools are state funds. Approximately 16% or 17% come from local taxes and the remainder comes from the federal government.

We're therefore; dependent upon the amount of the legislature will give us. As I mentioned earlier in the past we depend on the ability of the school district or the school superintendent to go before the joint finance committee of the governor and plea this cost. Later it became as the result of the unit system and dependent upon the number of boys and girls we had in a school district. Even with the unit system, we had to fight that the legislature would give us the amount per unit that was necessary to operate the schools. And as in most cases in government, their funds have not cape up with the inflation.

We barely survived at the present day on the amount that is allocated to us to run the operation of the school system, especially when utilities have gone up the way have in the past. And with the cost of textbooks, and papers, and pencils and everything else going sky high, it is extremely hard for us to operate a school on the budget we're given.

Another thing that has affected the schools drastically in the past few years has been of negotiations. At one time the Delaware State Education Association was run by the school administrator. Primarily because the

chief of school officer of the district was the only one had time to carry out the functions of an Education Association.

Around about 1940 or '45, with the employment of an executive secretary has begun to change because the executive secretary carries out the functions that the chief school officer done earlier. And as a result, classroom teachers became offices and many times president to the association.

With the growing militancy of teachers, the classroom teacher took over the DSCA. And in the very past few years, all administrators have been thrown out of that organization. With allowing of negotiations through state legislative act, the teachers have demanded more and more and as a result, each year we in the administration have come further and further apart from the teachers associations. Their wage has been driven into the educational system which was at one time as a concerted effort by teacher's administrators to secure the education of the boys and girls.

Teachers naturally have been under paid throughout the years and the only way they found that they could get more money was to negotiate and threaten strike and in some cases strike in order to achieve their ends. However, this has left an unpleasant taste in the minds of the boards of education and those who have to confront them in their demands at a negotiating type.

Interviewer: With the prospect of higher cost, higher sale raise and fewer students, what do you see in the next couple of years before your retirement? You have mentioned that you will be retiring.

[0:25:00]

Mr. Adams: In the late '60s and early '70s the student population continues to decline in Delaware. However, in the last two years it has been a declining trend in the number of boys and girls that are attending our schools. This has calls problems especially in New Castle County where the greater amount of population exist.

In our own Lake Forest District, we have not had the decline in population that has evident throughout the state. In fact last year, we had 10 more students than we did the year previously. However, this year we may expect a drop in elementary enrollment but it appears in the present time that this will tend to stop an increase in elementary enrollment will take a place in the future. However, this does provide a question to all the school administrators in Delaware since we're on the

unit system. We are granted a teacher per unit. And if we have more teachers, beginning in September, then we have student units. Those teachers must be paid from local funds and many districts cannot afford to do it. And this has resulted in especially in New Castle County. That at the end of the school year, many teachers are laid off by the various school districts until it can be accurately ascertained what the student enrollment is going to be in the past year.

Also because the drop in enrollment throughout the country there has been a widespread claims that there are excess teachers. We are not funding this so in Sussex County, in fact we cannot find teachers that we need, especially in some subject fields.

At the present time, we have two vacancies in guidance. We have vacancy in Math. We have two vacancies in junior high science that we're unable to fill at the present time.

Elementary teacher are more available. And we feel that it would be no problem in filling the elementary classrooms. However, specialized teachers such industrial arts, home economics, art are still scares. And even though, with the claimed excess in the teachers throughout the country, we are not finding this so here.

The other problem we have in Delaware schools is the continued claim by the NAACP and the EEOC that's Office of the Equal Opportunity that we are discriminating against women in Blacks. And in fact we are threatened with court suits because of this fact. This actually is not so. Most school district, in fact all of the school districts in Delaware that I know do not discriminate.

In Lake Forest, we send out when we have a vacancy, we send out as many as 60 notices to all predominantly Black schools that we know. We send it to news papers that they go to primarily to the Black public. We cannot get applicants to fill our positions from Black people. Of all that we send out, the colleges did not even bother to reply.

We have made distant efforts in the past four or five years to get qualified Black instructors. We cannot get anyone to apply for our jobs. We have been accused as discrimination against women. One of the things that we found that has happened and the EEOC inspector has come to the schools, have gone through our records of those that were interviewed for jobs and claim to anyone that was not hard was discriminated I guess. And in many cases the people that are listed as

claim that they were discriminated against did not even know their names are being used by the EEOC.

Interviewer: This must be your most difficult modern problem of the administration?

Mr. Adams: I have to say that it probably is. I mean, we have all kinds of federal laws and mandates handed down from Washington that causes us a great deal of concern. And the equally employment opportunity is one of the greatest things we have. No matter how we try, we cannot meet the desires of those in the federal bureaucracy who want us to see that we hire so many Blacks, so many women, so many certain names, Spanish or whatever you want to call them. It's almost impossible because those people are not applying for the jobs.

Along with this we have been hit in the face in that past year with the so called flat title mind which is the women's right conditions.

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Now, this is real laughable in some cases. Under the women's right, the girls must be treated exactly the same as boys. We can no longer have separate physical education classes. All the boys must be allowed to take home economics. All the girls must be allowed to take industrial arts or metal working. We have done this at Lake Forest for several years. We have had mix classes in home economics and mix classes in industrial arts in the junior high school. But it even gone so far as to state in some cases that we cannot have a father-son banquet and we cannot have a mothers-daughter banquet because we're discriminating one against the other if we do such things.

The federal mandates and the federal rules and regulations that handed down into the schools have caused great deal of hardship. And if they weren't so serious they would actually be laughable. This tile mind may have a reverse effect in the time because what will happen whereas we've had girls softball team which were for the girls, in fact we've had in athletics in the past few years, for boys we've had football, we've had soccer, boys basketball, wrestling, baseball and track. But at the same time we've furnish girl's teams in field hockey, girls basketball, swimming, tennis, track and softball.

Now, that we've had this title mind thing come about, it means that if a boy wants to go out for a girl's softball team, he has the right to the same as a girl has every right to go out for the boys soccer team or the football team for that matter. And what will happen will be that in the end the

girls work will be wipe off in the face because the boys are better players than the girls that will take over the softball team. And the boys that can't make as far as the basketball team will go out for the girl's basketball team and they are in most cases better basketball players than the girls so there will be no longer a girl's basketball team. And the boys will go out for the girl's tennis teams and there will be no girl's tennis left.

So actually what the people that started the title mind try to do is to get increase girls participation are going to find the girls were knocked out because they're not able to compete in most cases with the boys who will go out for their own team.

My life has been practically in the field of education in the start in the state and in the start of this. My father was the business manger and as a result I got to know all the superintendents in the state and all the supervisors, bus contractors and whatnot.

After graduating from the University of Delaware, I started teaching at Bridgeville High School as a science teacher. I was there for three years and I went to Laurel. I done till 1941 when I went for the National Guard and the Army for five years. Following the war we returned to Laurel, I thought for two years and I went as principal at John M. Clayton School at Dagsboro-Frankford. I stayed as principal at the John M. Clayton School from 1948 to 1960, in which time I was named superintendent at the Harrington Especial District in Harrington.

And the consolidation of Harrington fell in the federal record and in Lake Forest, I was named superintendent of the Lake Forest District, the position I presently hold until my retirement in June of 1977. During this time, my wife who's a former of Christine Pal of Wyoming and I have raised eight sons and one daughter. My daughter at the present time will be a junior at Indian River High School next year, transferring from the Lake Forest High School.

During this time my allocation at the Delaware National Guard. I enlisted in Delaware National Guard in November of 1934 at the rank of private in New Castle and retired in April of 1975 at the rank of Major General. During the past few years I've been the assistant Adjutant General for the State of Delaware and for that I commanded the 261st brigade during the Wilmington Riots of 1968.

Interviewer: Were they real riots?

Mr. Adams: They were real riots in the area known as the Valley in Wilmington, there were buildings burning, there's supposedly shooting and various other things. Governor Terry called the guard out on an afternoon and all five battalions at that time the Delaware Guard rushed to Wilmington.

Our battalion, we got there in the evening we found that one battalion was able to and the separate units were able to control the situation and the other battalions were sent home either that evening or early next morning.

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The Guard as a battalion remained in Wilmington for two days. And then after covered darkness we evacuated the city. However, the patrols of the National Guard have been continued throughout the streets of Wilmington from that time in April until Governor Peterson's inauguration in January the next year.

Interviewer: Was that patrols, do you feel really necessary at that point for that length of time?

Mr. Adams: I personally don't feel that the patrols were necessary for that length of time. I do think that patrols were necessary immediately following the few days of riots we had in April until things calm down. But after that I believe that the state police and the local police could handle the situation without the presence of the National Guard. In fact the Guard was also called out in November I believe it was 1968 and we maintained a troop of 30 men in the Dover Armor every night from sun down until sunset upon Governor Terry's command.

They were trained when they would come in for a riot duty and then sleep down for the night. No time during the period of November of '68 until the inauguration in early 1969 where these men ever used in any type of riot duty.

Today is the 20th day of July 1976. It's a beautiful day here in Bethany Beach. I have given some of my comments on education in the State of Delaware for the past 40 years, 28 of which I have been a school superintendent. I have enjoyed the work. I have enjoyed working with the boys and girls as has been brought out partly in this conversation. I've seen great many changes in the structure of the school system. The aims of the school system, financing the school system and the overall value of the school system.

And it has been a pleasant experience for me. I don't think if I had to do my life over again, I would choose anything else it would be a professional education...

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