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School Hill Audio File 00012

School Hill Oral History Collection  
Tour, May 20, 2017, Part II  
William Alvin Hall, With Freeman Williams  
Interviewed by: Christina Holubinka  
Transcribed by: David Cardillo

[00:00]

Ms. Holubinka: Just watch this hill. It gets a little “hilly” over here.

Mr. Hall: If I remember correctly there used to be a sidewalk that ran from that door, ran up through here around to the entrance going to the inside.

Ms. Holubinka: Oh really?

Mr. Hall: Yes.

Ms. Holubinka: Just watch your step.

Mr. Hall: And that the (unintelligible **00:23**) of the bathroom, this should be the...

Ms. Holubinka: Yeah, it’s locked though. I wonder if they’d let us in, though. Let’s see. They’ll let us in. Thank you.

Ms. Olney-Zide: Oh, sure.

Ms. Holubinka: Thank you.

Mr. Hall: I’ll let you go since you’ve got the camera.

(Sounds of other interview **00:57-01:04.**)

Mr. Hall: This area here was basically the boiler room, and there used to be a little walk over here to the door and let you out. Mr. Johnny Bows (phonetic **01:13**) used, the janitor, and he used to have a desk that he had right here. Over here, he kept his wheelbarrow and other shovels that he used to clean the furnace out. And it was just a small area here, and the boiler took up most of the space in here, and that’s where he loaded the coal into the boiler, and then he had to shovel it out, put it in the wheelbarrow, and then he had a platform he put down to roll it out the door and dump it in a pile. And then when he wanted to stoke the boiler or add coal to the furnace, you have to wheel the wheelbarrow over here, feed it into the furnace, and then take the ashes out and go through it, so he had a pretty much...

Ms. Holubinka: He had a big job.

Mr. Hall: Yeah. What a job.

Ms. Holubinka: He was doing all the mowing outside too, right?

Mr. Hall: Yes, and he did the mowing outside also.

Ms. Holubinka: Oh my gosh.

Unknown Person (off screen): The custodian, the janitors, did everything.

Ms. Holubinka: Do you know what ever happened to him?

Mr. Hall: Mr. Johnny lived to be a ripe age, and he passed away about ten years or so ago. When I think that he had very good memories of being here and working for the state, gave him a pretty good pension, and he had a fairly good life.

Ms. Holubinka: Yeah, we have to walk a little bit. There we go. I've been told that the George Wilson Center is now haunted by the boiler man.

Mr. Hall: No, no, I don't think so. This was never a haunted area.

Ms. Holubinka: Okay.

Mr. Hall: One of the things that we, as we were boy scouts, they used to give us a lot of beans.

Ms. Holubinka: A lot of beans?

Mr. Hall: So we put the beans over here in the corner, and when we were... They were used for making soup, and we would get those beans and peas that were dried that come in the burlap bags, and we would grab them and put a handful in our pocket. After scout meetings when we got outside, we'd get our, and we'd have wars throwing them.

Ms. Holubinka: Bean wars?

Mr. Hall: Bean wars, yes, indeed.

Ms. Holubinka: That's funny.

Mr. Hall: Yes.

Ms. Holubinka: And was this always...

Mr. Hall: This was always a brick wall.

Ms. Holubinka: This was always a brick wall.

Mr. Hall: It was always a brick wall.

Ms. Holubinka: Okay.

Mr. Hall: With a little, narrow space for us to walk through with everybody sitting at the tables.

Ms. Holubinka: Very cool.

Mr. Hall: Now, one of the biggest things about the boiler room was, nowadays you can't touch a child, but when we got outside, and Tom and Jerry got into a fight, they came down into the boiler room. Mr. Morgan had a paddle about that long with a handle, and he would put you across the chair and you got a paddling.

Ms. Holubinka: Oh, no.

Mr. Hall: So you may get three whacks for being out there fighting. That was part of the disciplinarian.

Ms. Holubinka: Oh, man.

Mr. Hall: Or you get unruly or act up in class. Boys knew, basically, they were going to the boiler room. Now, the conduct of people, students, and now, is, "We didn't have the violence," because Mr. Morgan would take care of it with his paddle. Now, you can't touch the kids, so... Some psychologist went to college and they thought there was a better way through study. But they never, never studied what happened to the students that really got paddled.

Ms. Holubinka: That got the paddle.

Mr. Hall: They say it's abusive. Abusive. Hey, I can't tell you how many times I got paddled in my eight years here. **[05:02]**

Ms. Holubinka: You turned out pretty good.

Mr. Hall: Yeah. I don't have a criminal record.

Ms. Holubinka: That's good. Very cool. Do you think we covered everything?

Mr. Hall: I think so. Pretty much everything that I can think about.

Ms. Holubinka: Do you have a favorite memory in the dining room?

Mr. Hall: No, no, no. We just... Everybody knew pretty much where you were going to sit. We ate as fast as we could so we could head up the steps and get outside and play.

Ms. Holubinka: Go outside.

Mr. Hall: And then when the whistle blew, we'd line up and go back to classrooms.

Ms. Holubinka: And you said... What were the classes again? It was reading...

Mr. Hall: First and second...

Ms. Holubinka: No, but it was reading, writing, arithmetic?

Mr. Hall: We had reading, writing, and arithmetic were basically the subjects.

Ms. Holubinka: Okay.

Mr. Hall: We had art, which was an art teacher that came from the elementary school. I believe it was Central Elementary School or something like that came.

Ms. Holubinka: Oh, okay.

Mr. Hall: And then we had music teacher that came like once a week.

Ms. Holubinka: Okay.

Mr. Hall: And we had music for like an hour.

Ms. Holubinka: Very cool. Freeman, do you want to share any stories, any favorite stories from when this was a school?

Mr. Williams: Oh, you know what? I didn't have the pleasure of going to it when it was a school.

Ms. Holubinka: No?

Mr. Williams: No, I missed it.

Ms. Holubinka: Oh.

Mr. Williams I missed it. It was probably that first group of students that went to school instead of coming here; we went to Medill on Kirkwood Highway.

Ms. Holubinka: Okay.

Mr. Williams And another group went to Central Middle. And that is no longer in existence.

Ms. Holubinka: Gotcha.

Mr. Williams Actually, it's Grahm Hall. Where Grahm Hall is located was both Central Elementary and Central Junior High School.

Ms. Holubinka: Okay. Grahm Hall, University of Delaware.

Mr. Williams Yes, with the University of Delaware, on Academy Street. So, I didn't have the pleasure, but I heard so many great stories about, you know, people like Alvin and others who had the opportunity to go here, and the unique community and opportunities that people had who went to school here. A lot of lasting bonds. But, I did have the next best thing. The School Hill experience that we all were exposed to, especially in the summer, with all the activities that were held during the summer, during the summer months. And this whole area was just, just bustling with activity and entertainment and events, both athletic events, arts and crafts, just a lot of opportunities. And there were just always, there were just large numbers of people up here at School Hill. We'd always say on the school (unintelligible **07:50**), we'd affectionately call it the school (unintelligible **07:52**). And there were just so many events that were going on and there were the younger kids, and the middle-aged, and then the older kids. And there was a, Alvin would probably agree with me, almost like a rite of passage. If you wanted to participate on an athletic team, first of all, you had to be really, really good. And there was a lot of competition, and so, as a younger person, you were on the sidelines, you were waiting your turn, but you were really salivating because you wanted to participate, and by the time you got in the game, you were really good because you had practice and participated against people who were really talented. Because one of the things that the people in the School Hill area has was an abundance of talent. And there was a real fierce competitive spirit, and I think it really bodes well for why so many people from this area were successful in life. Because you learned how to compete. You learned how to goal-set. You learned how to focus. And you learned how to deal with defeat, pick yourself up, refocus, get back in the game, so to speak, and to be successful. And if you look at the wide range of people who grew up in this area, there's so many people who were successful in a variety of venues and I just think there was no... It's really easy to understand why. It was that very nurturing, competitive, special community that we grew up in. And you also, you also had people who would come

back if, for example, people went off in the service or went off to college, they would come back, and they would share their experiences. And so there really was a small but effective village that was successful. And people were generally happy for others when they were successful. There was a lot of just bridge-building and support, and as I said before, I don't think that underlies why there were a lot of successful people who grew up in this environment.

**[10:02]**

Ms. Holubinka: Mr. Hall, where do you live now?

Mr. Hall: I live in Eagle Glenn in New Castle, which is right off of 273.

Ms. Holubinka: Okay.

Mr. Hall: But to bounce off of friendliness... One of the things about the guys that graduated from here in the eighth grade... A lot of them went to the military. When they came back to the military, they were like big brothers. They taught us young guys and teenagers skills, and they told us about adventures, of things about being away from home, that we would have never gotten. The guys had gone to college came back and said, "This is the way we tackle in football. This is the way we play baseball. This is where we go. This is how we travel. This is how we act." So, if you take a guy like Chuck Roy... Chuck was, he was like a mentor to all the young people. And many days I would be walking up Cleveland Avenue and Chuck would be sitting on the porch, and I could go over and sit with Chuck, and Chuck would tell me things that I never knew about, never heard about, because he had gone to the military, he had been away from home, and he would tell us, you know, tell me about what was going on. And then there was a guy called James Nixon (phonetic **11:24**). And why did they call him Billy Nixon? I was his mascot, and he show (unintelligible **11:32**). I was able to go because he took me to practice at the Y in Wilmington every day because I could ride the bus free at my age. And I was there practicing, punching, and able to get experience from an older guy.

Ms. Holubinka: That's really cool.

Mr. Hall: And these are the things that a good community really made you know, really helped us.

Mr. Williams: And Alvin's being really modest. I mean, he was also a role model for a lot of people like me because you just watched the way he carried himself. He carried himself... He was always a gentleman. He always knew how to conduct himself at all times. In addition to that, we also know that he was extremely talented and competitive in athletic activities because as a young

person, you, you know, again, sometimes sports has a disproportionate level of interest, and so you always like to compare yourself or look up to people who were successful, and Alvin was both successful athletically and he was also, more importantly, a real, a real gentleman and a real man in every sense. And that was the advantage that we had. That there were lots of people in this community who took on the role, either knowingly or not, to really mentor others who were younger. And it also became almost like a chain reaction where each generation took it upon themselves to train the next generation in terms of whether it was, you know, athletics, whether it was carrying yourself the right way in the community, and also preparing yourself for college or a career after high school. And so, as I said earlier, I don't think it's a secret why there was a large number of people in this community who were successful. I think it happened the old-fashioned way. People worked real hard. There was a support system in place. And lots of people... There were lots of people you had available to model and emulate and more importantly, people really wanted other people to be successful. And they went out of their way to find ways to make sure that happened.

Ms. Holubinka: Very cool.

Mr. Hall: This thing that we never discussed was, it was what we call a Newark connection. So, from everybody that went to this school had a connection with people and friends and like Freeman said, I played on the softball team with him even though I was much older than he was when he was going to college, you know. So here I am a guy out working, but there was still that Newark connection that we had.

Mr. Williams And that adds a great example because that whole legacy and model just continued, and people were really able to, to really learn a lot from other people by having conversation, watching how they were doing things. And the other great thing about it is, people in the community, if they saw you making a mistake, if you were making a bad decision and heading in the wrong direction, there were a number of people who would, were more than willing to take you off to the side and really talk to you and give you some advice. [15:02] In some instances, advice that maybe you didn't want to hear, but you needed to hear. And they were doing it not to be critical, or to try to put you in a negative situation; actually, it was the opposite. They really wanted you to be successful and they wanted to make sure that if they saw you heading down the wrong path that they would pull together an intervention to help you. And that was just huge.

Ms. Holubinka: Thank you guys so much for all of your amazing stuff...

Mr. Williams Okay, good, good, good.



Ms. Holubinka: And it was so nice to meet you.

Mr. Williams This guy was the best. He was the best.

Mr. Hall: No, no, he was good, too. He was good, too. He got into the right field, and he was the kind of guy that you would want to see come from around the Newark area.

Ms. Holubinka: Yeah.

Mr. Hall: Yeah, he (unintelligible **15:54**).

Ms. Holubinka: Very cool. We should be good.

Mr. Williams Thanks.

Ms. Holubinka: Thank you.

Mr. Williams I think we still have some people in there talking.

Ms. Holubinka: Actually, I think they went upstairs.

Mr. Williams Okay. Good. This was, like, really good.

Ms. Holubinka: Yeah, it was great to...

Mr. Williams Al, it was so nice of you to come.

Mr. Hall: Yeah.

Ms. Holubinka: Chris, are you good in there?

Mr. Kelly: Yeah.

Ms. Holubinka: Okay, cool. All right. Is there anybody still upstairs?

Mr. Williams No, I think, I think everybody's gone.

Mr. Hall: I think everybody's about ready to depart.

(Cross-talk **16:20**).

Mr. Williams As they say, it's a wrap.

Ms. Holubinka: It's a wrap. Cut.

**[End 16:24]**