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## Iron Hill School Oral History Project

### Interview with Ronald Earl

Date of Interview: July 23, 2008

Interviewer: Roberta Perkins

**Roberta:** Thank you so much for being willing to share your story with me. Would you give me a little about when you were born? Were you born in Iron Hill? Your siblings? Your parents? Do you want to start with your parents' names first.

**Ronny:** I was born in Elkton, Maryland but I was raised up in Iron Hill. My parents, my father's name was Howard Earl. My mother's name was Millicent. My brothers and sisters we had something like five girls and six boys. We lost a sister; she was at the age of thirteen years old.

**Roberta:** What was your mother's maiden name?

**Ronny:** Her maiden name was Smith.

**Roberta:** Ok, ok. Did you want to give their names?

**Ronny:** There is Howard Earl, Jr., Stanley Earl, Robert Earl and Joan Court then there's I and the sister that is deceased, she was Jackie Earl, Judy Stevenson now, Valerie Earl, then there's Wayne Earl Linda Earl and Wyatt Earl.

**Roberta:** Are any of those folks still in the area? Would they be interested in sharing?

**Ronny:** Yeah. Robert, I was talking to him and he would like to share his story too.

**Roberta:** Who was the teacher you had?

**Ronny:** Minnie Ryder was her name.

Roberta: Ok, what was your memory? Let's start with her.

**Ronny:** She was a nice lady. Well, matter of fact she was a relative of ours. My mother's grandmother and her mother were sisters so she was a relative to the family.

Roberta: Ok, ok. Now did you have her the whole time you went to Iron Hill?

**Ronny:** Yes.

Roberta: And what grades did you go to Iron Hill?

**Ronny:** I went from grades one to four.

Roberta: Do you remember what year?

**Ronny:** Yeah, I started school in '53 I believe it was and I came from there and they bussed us to Middletown in '57.

Roberta: Ok, ok. I'm going to ask you about that later on. I want a kind of picture from you what the difference was. What was typical day like for you going to school? Did you walk to school?

**Ronny:** No we had transportation. Matter of fact we had a little bus that only held about ten people I guess it was. It was a little tour bus it was you know and from where we lived the school was about a mile and a half.

Roberta: Who was the driver?

**Ronny:** The driver was Ed Williams. He was an elderly person.

Roberta: Was he a regular?

**Ronny:** He lived in Glasgow. Was it Glasgow? Yeah, I think it was Glasgow.

Roberta: Now did the school?

**Ronny:** There was another lady too, Marian Williams. She lived in Glasgow also.

Roberta: Were they related?

**Ronny:** Yes, they were related. Brother and sister I believe. But she was the one, but she was a little bit longer with us than Ed was.

Roberta: Do you know how they came to be bus drivers?

**Ronny:** No, I don't. I was only a little kid.

Roberta: Did Iron Hill hire them or did the school?

**Ronny:** I really don't know. She drove a bus for a long time you know. Matter of fact in my elementary years and then when we were bussed to Middletown she drove the bus at that time too. But Ed Brown, he started out when I was in first or second grade, he started out as the bus driver then she picked it up.

Roberta: What and then I think I'll ask you some questions off of it. Give me a picture of what it was like for you, your school day.

**Ronny:** Oh, it was nice. I enjoyed being out there, you know what I mean. It was mostly everybody that was going to the school was related you know what I mean. We had a few people that weren't related come in but they didn't last long. They always moved somewhere else. But it was nice it was a great experience you know. We got to know each other very well like sisters and brothers, it was real nice. I enjoyed it.

Roberta: What was, as a teacher, what kind of work did Ms. Ryder give you? Did she give you books?

**Ronny:** Books, yes. Well she started out, she trained us first for reading and stuff of that nature. She was pretty good in that. She knew how to work with children and then we had books and I think we started using books in third grade you know. But she would start us our reading from the black board. She would write the words on the black board and then we'd start reading. I'll never forget she took a piece of paper

and half it like that and put the paper under the word like that so we would stay in line with the paper.

Roberta: Ok, she would have the pencil then under the word? A marker?

**Ronny:** She would have a piece of paper, like a marker. Like this marker here and she would have it we would read like that and then come back to the next sentence.

Roberta: Did you find that was helpful?

**Ronny:** Very helpful, it was very helpful. Since my eyes have started getting a little bit bad, I could do it now. Just stay on line.

Roberta: What other activities? Ok, you say you had reading, did she have like geography? Did you do math?

**Ronny:** We did a little bit of arithmetic. It was she took her time with us. When we went to Middletown we started to pick up (hands clap) a little bit.

Roberta: Is Middletown a stronger memory for you than Iron Hill?

**Ronny:** They're about the same. If you've been brought up and then you go up into another area you know it takes time for you to get used to it you know. All of it was fun. All of it was fun.

Roberta: That's good. What programs did she have, extra-curricular activities going on besides your required school work? You know sometimes like for the holidays, did you all do something?

**Ronny:** Well we would have like you know in the spring we would have May Day or something like that. May Day was like a play day and what she would do is with the other school that was in town at the time they would come up to us one year and the following year we would go there. It was a little one room school down there too. So we would do various activities, play ball and little games.

Roberta: Field day, was it something called field day?

**Ronny:** Something like a field day. We called it, they called it May Day and some people called it play day and some people called it field day. We had a good time at that.

Roberta: Do you have any particular thing that you remembered that you wanted to share?

**Ronny:** We used to do a lot of square dancing out there too you know. That was like an activity period. We did lots of square dancing.

Roberta: Did she teach you to square dance?

**Ronny:** She taught us to square dance and I think it was on a Thursday or Friday, every other week we'd have Bible study and we'd go down to the Congo's house. The Congo's house was one of those things, it was an area of the school, it was about a mile away from the school and we'd go down there and I'd never forget the lady's name it was Miss Dorothy who was the teacher of Bible studies, third and fourth grade.

Roberta: Why the Congo's house?

**Ronny:** I guess it was much bigger. It was like a little farm you know. It was a much bigger home for the school kids to go and have Bible study.

Roberta: How did you enjoy that?

**Ronny:** Oh I loved that, I liked that. It was something that was interesting and we found it was something to do you know.

Roberta: What do you remember about the Congos?

**Ronny:** Ahhh, the times roll by.

Roberta: I understand they were big farmers.

**Ronny:** They were big farmers, yes they were, big farmers.

Roberta: They had students there. They had children that went to the school there?

**Ronny:** Yes. In my grade it was Emily, Emily Congo and she had a brother that was a couple grades ahead of us you know. His name was Paul Congo. Now my older brothers, Sam and Bob they had some Congos' that went to school with them too.

Roberta: Sam was the one you said **[inaudible]**

**Ronny:** See when they went there it was six grades.

Roberta: Then down to four.

**Ronny:** Yes, down to four. They could tell you more about how it was when they were growing up. They had to go through a period of carrying water in and stuff like that to drink and they had a potbellied wood stove and they used that. See I didn't have none of that.

Roberta: You were in the modern time.

**Ronny:** Right, we were right in the modern time. I think my uncle, he went there too. His teacher's name was Miss Ryder and Miss Ryder didn't come at that time, she came on after my Uncle Ollie had, you know.

Roberta: Ok, because I think there was a Mr. Gray, Robert Gray had Miss Ryder. He talked about it.

**Ronny:** Miss Ryder too. Yeah, ok.

Roberta: So when you were there was there a water fountain?

**Ronny:** We had a little water fountain. I came on a visit and I do remember the water that they used to have in a jug and they asked the kids to get the water and they put it on top of various notches and stuff like that you know. They had this water jug and they put it on top of this cooler like there.

Roberta: What was the lighting like, do you remember?

**Ronny:** The lighting, we had electricity.

Roberta: And your lunches?

**Ronny:** Yeah we had lunches. I don't know how great it was and everybody had the same lunch period.

Roberta: So at that time did you bring your own lunch?

**Ronny:** Yeah, it was in a bag, we had bag lunches. Our own lunches.

Roberta: Did you have extra recreation at lunch time?

**Ronny:** Yes, we just played ball, kick ball, baseball, stuff like that. They had swings. I see now they still have the swings out there.

Roberta: Did you play ball with other schools?

**Ronny:** Well?

Roberta: I'm trying to remember that you only went up to the fourth grade.

**Ronny:** It was like play day.

Roberta: What about when you talked about playing out on the playground at lunch time, were the activities pretty much free for all you could do pretty much what you wanted at that time?

**Ronny:** Yeah, most of the time we liked to play. There was about four or five of us and we'd get out there and play baseball and maybe other kids they'd be on the monkey bars or whatever they call it. And some of them would be on the swings, but most of the time we'd be playing ball you know and wrestling.

Roberta: Were there any incidents? You know events that something might happen? You always have something in your childhood memories.

**Ronny:** I remember when I was in the first grade and the person in the second grade they would usually get out a class earlier than the third and fourth grade. So while we were in first grade, second grade, people were out there playing, you know school



class had ended, we were playing around me and a cousin of mine and I broke my leg. We were wrestling and I broke my leg and I remember that plain as day and it was a painful thing. I stayed out for something like six weeks you know. So it was a terrible **[inaudible]**.

Roberta: I'll bet it was. Did Miss Ryder send homework, did you still have school work when you were out?

**Ronny:** Yeah, she came to the house every now and then and keep me up on my work. She lived in Newark. I think she passed away about ten years ago.

Roberta: That would have been interesting I think to talk with her.

**Ronny:** Yes it would.

Roberta: Do you remember whether or not outside the regular classroom whether students were taught various things like cooking, art, ballet, anything like that?

**Ronny:** I didn't have any of that.

Roberta: Ok, ok.

**Ronny:** She taught us most of the basics.

Roberta: Did she have a problem with discipline?

**Ronny:** Well, you know not really. Every now and then somebody would get out and she would correct them, but other than that we were pretty good.

Roberta: She didn't have to inflict any special punishment on anything?

**Ronny:** Well she might keep somebody in from going outside for recess and stuff like that and I remember she would have inspection when we first came to school you know. She'd inspect our finger nails, behind our ears and make sure **[inaudible]**. And I remember that the boys couldn't get their pants' cuffs wet. You shouldn't

have been out in the grass because of the dew and stuff and get your cuffs wet. She would make us stay in.

**Roberta:** That reminds me of, I think this is Miss Ryder, do you remember somebody had said that when somebody came, there was some kind of visitor at the school and Miss Ryder would make people lie down on the floor? Did that ever happen?

**Ronny:** That never happened with me.

**Roberta:** It might have been something special then.

**Ronny:** It never happened to me. Now I know that the superintendent would come every now and then. Miss Barnes was her name. She was the superintendent and she would come and I guess she would see, check on us, see how the kids are being treated. What we were being taught.

**Roberta:** Did Miss Ryder know when she would be coming?

**Ronny:** Yes, she knew.

**Roberta:** What kind of a person did she seem like to you?

**Ronny:** Miss Barnes? She was a nice lady, nice and we were like a little fearful of her because they told us we you know **[inaudible]** cause she had the power to put you in reform school and stuff like that you know. I guess that was the fear they put in us in case we got out of place. She was a nice lady.

**Roberta:** Making sure you were on your best behavior.

**Ronny:** Right, right.

**Roberta:** What about, did the school or was the school used for any special after school activities, do you remember?

**Ronny:** There were little dances and stuff like that. Not all the time but we had to get permission from the board, School Board.

- Roberta: What about, let me go back to people coming in like the teachers. Did a nurse come in? Did a doctor?
- Ronny:** A nurse came in and they would give us needles and there was a dentist that come in and he would check your teeth, stuff like that.
- Roberta: Can you remember their names?
- Ronny:** I can't remember their names. As a child they came in with needles and stuff like that you get fear **[inaudible]**.
- Roberta: What about living in the Iron Hill community itself? What was it like? What did you do after school during the school year?
- Ronny:** Well most of the time what we did, we didn't have parks and things like we have today you know. What we did mostly was fish, swimming and we bowled and we played baseball.
- Roberta: Did you have contests? Did you compete with one another for things?
- Ronny:** No, not really. I think when we would have May Day or a play day or something like that, that was more like a prepared thing. Other than that no.
- Roberta: What about in the summer time? Did you have more time to fish, swim and did you have time chores? That sort of thing?
- Ronny:** It was fun time, really. It was in the country, brought up in the country you know. In the city we didn't have much things to play with. We would rig up something to play with something like that you know. Like tires and pirates and stuff like that.
- Roberta: What would you do with the tires?
- Ronny:** You would roll them or bat them.
- Roberta: Oh, with your hands.

- Ronny:** With our hands and stuff like that. We did a lot of fishing and stuff. We went to a creek and went fishing and swimming and stuff like that.
- Roberta: Did you catch a lot of fish?
- Ronny:** Oh we caught our share. Yeah we ate them. Mostly like Blue Gills and a few Catfish, eels and stuff like that.
- Roberta: How was the water?
- Ronny:** It was plain, crystal clear. Matter of fact you could see the fish in the water.
- Roberta: So did you take the fish home? Did you all clean them?
- Ronny:** Yeah. We cleaned them. They didn't eat it. It was a kid's thing. We'd go pick berries and there was a huckleberry patch and whatever fruit that was there, apples, pears, strawberries and stuff like that you know. It was in the summer months that all the fruits would be plentiful you know. We found it enjoying.
- Roberta: What were some of the other families that you interacted with in the Iron Hill area? The reason that I ask is I remember talking to a couple of the Smiths.
- Ronny:** We was all family. We was all family.
- Roberta: She talked about the fruit trees that you had.
- Ronny:** Like I say, we was all family. Everybody in Iron Hill was related you know. It was all family. The Smith's when they came they was the start of it. Smiths, Earls, Websters, Chandlers, they all originated from the Smith family.
- Roberta: Ok. Oh alright. So a lot of the population, the African American population, **[inaudible]** started with the Smith family?
- Ronny:** Yes.
- Roberta: Were the Smiths the first? Did people kind of settle in it, do you know what I mean? Do you know anything about that?

**Ronny:** I don't know anything about that.

Roberta: This is the end of tape one, side one.

This is Roberta Perkins and I am continuing the interview with Mr. Ronny Earl. This is tape two, side one.

Roberta: You were talking a little bit about the **[inaudible]** and stuff like that.

**Ronny:** I know where they

Roberta: When you were a young person in Iron Hill, how have things changed from when you were a student to now, you know?

**Ronny:** You look at things a little bit different then when you were a child. Things are different. I don't know. There's been a big change but as a child you look at things differently than when you are an adult you know.

Roberta: From your experiences, are there some things that you'd like to you know if you had an opportunity to share with some of the young people today, you know. There's some things you'd like to share you know and say? Things you've seen and experiences.

**Ronny:** The memory's still there you know. Like some people would say it was the good old days. Life was a little bit different than what it is now. I see kids now being different than it was when we were growing up. I guess they change. When we were coming up we didn't have parks to go to too play ball or stuff like that. We used to play our ball and stuff in a cow pasture and stuff like that you know. It was all fine, it was all fine.

Roberta: That sounds like a really good memory. That's good.

**Ronny:** Yeah, it was all fun. Too much going on now. Like I said I would like to go in and just look around. I guess I could say a little more after I get all the **[inaudible]** and really remember things you know. Certain land marks that are still there.

Roberta: If you want to still do that please call me. Because I have found that people that is a good way for people to remember.

**Ronny:** Yeah, right.

Roberta: People start walking.

**Ronny:** Yeah, right. Looking into places. We used to walk in the woods out back and our grandmother, she used to live right there, we could go to her house and stuff like that.

Roberta: Now is that the lady called Granny Smith?

**Ronny:** Yeah, Granny Smith, she used to live there. Now Miss Ryder's mother and Granny Smith were sisters. Quite a big family.

Roberta: Well I would enjoy that, doing that kind of thing.

**Ronny:** Yeah, a walking tour. **[inaudible]**

Roberta: That would be good. In the meantime, I'll give him a call. So I can contact him through family?

**Ronny:** Yeah or call me

Roberta: Well, I certainly do appreciate your time.

**Ronny:** Well, **[inaudible]** like I said things are old and fuzzy right now.

Roberta: A lot of people it works well when you have someone else **[inaudible]**. That'll be the next interview. Mr. Earl thank you very much. This is Roberta Perkins and this concludes the interview with Mr. Ronny Earl.