

Interview

with

LUTHER HARBERT MOORE

October 16, 2003

by Malinda Maynor

Transcribed by Sharon Caughill

The Southern Oral History Program  
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

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START OF TAPE 1, SIDE

LUTHER HARBERT MOORE  
October 16, 2003

MALINDA MAYNOR: This is tape number 10.16.03-LHM. The interviewer is Malinda Maynor. We're in Prospect United Methodist Church in Pembroke, near Pembroke, North Carolina, on Thursday, October 16, 2003 with Mr. Luther Harbert Moore. So Mr. Moore we'll start. If you could describe for me after you got out of the Navy and returned home, what do you remember about Prospect at that time? Describe for us Prospect in the 1940s and 1950s. What was the community like?

LUTHER MOORE: Well, it was quite different from what it is today which most places are, but there were a few homes. Most of the people that lived in the community were homesteaders. They owned their own land, and they were able to retain that land during the Depression. Very few Indian people in our area lost their land in the 30s. The school was a wooden structure. We had a new brick until 1952, a new brick structure. Our church was a wooden one room church building. It was made out of wood also. The biggest occupation there was in this area was farming. Some people had as much as a one-horse farm, some two, and on up to maybe eight, along there somewhere. That meant it took eight mules to work it.

MM: So several hundred acres?

HM: Yeah, well they figured twenty-five acres was a pretty good load from one mule. I think we had about four mules at our house, three to four.

MM: What was family life like?

HM: Well, we had no electricity until 1939. The war came along and all the community hadn't received electricity. The war came along and they didn't get electricity

until after the war, right above us up there about where Mr. Jones lives. They didn't have any electricity at the time we did. When I was in school we got our lights from Adelco that furnished the lights, and at home we had lamps. We had fire places. We had no kind of restroom facilities until after the war. What else would you like to ask me?

MM: Was it a prosperous community compared to the surrounding areas?

HM: We think so. There wasn't a lot of money around, but most of the people produced what they ate and didn't have to buy a lot of groceries like we do today. I'm the oldest one of eleven. You can imagine what it was like with eleven hands going in the biscuit pan in the morning.

MM: Tell me about, as you were a minute ago, the relationship between the church, and the school, and the community, landwise but also how did people feel about the two institutions? What was sort of the focus of the community at that time?

HM: Our church was established about 1875 or 6, somewhere in the neighborhood of that, and the school about the same year, I think it was, the school was established. The church was a one room building. It had about fifteen hundred square feet. In 46 we began to decide to build a new church building.

The school, I don't remember how many teachers we had, but we didn't have an assistant principal. We just had a principal. Our science equipment was such that I don't think that I ever looked in a microscope during my high school. We had one that had three lenses on it and two of them were broke down, and they was afraid they'd tear up the third one so, therefore, we didn't get to look at it very much. I don't remember ever looking in one. It was a wooden building. We had a heater in each room. We had to tote coal in to heat it, and if you didn't get next to the heater you'd almost stay cold all day.



On a good cold day the heater never did get the room warm. It had no insulation in the walls, no underpinning so it was quite different from what it is today.

MM: It was challenging to get an education.

HM: It was. It was. Pembroke was about the only place they could go without they went away from here you know. Cousin Adolph came back during the 40s from service, and he wanted to further his education. He wound up at Boston University because they didn't accept Indians. They didn't accept non-whites at that time in our institutions, our state supported schools.

Something else that might be interesting. The tobacco warehouse where we sold tobacco. There were six rest rooms. There were three for the white, Indian, and black women, and three for the black, Indian, white men. So that meant that they had to have six instead of like it is today to have one or two.

MM: Where did you sell tobacco?

HM: Lumberton.

MM: Okay. So as a farmer then you were in a mostly Indian area.

HM: Right.

MM: I think people outside of here don't really know that. They don't know necessarily that Prospect is an Indian only community, but talk a little bit about moving sort of in between your Indian community and a non-Indian community or where there weren't as many Indians.

HM: Well, this is the only place that I've ever lived permanently. I've lived in some non-Indian situations where I never did get fully adjusted to it because I had never eaten a white restaurant or had my hair cut at a white barber shop. I still have never had

my hair cut in a white barber shop except when I was in the service. That's the only time I ever got my hair cut. I imagine it was quite different. We had Indian schools, nothing but Indian students. There was a white young man that lived in our community about a mile from where I lived, and he would catch our bus and ride to Philadelphus which was a white school. That was his transportation, I've been told. I never seen him get on the bus but that was the word.

MM: I guess this is the right time probably to talk about what the school committee was. It's an Indian only community and only Indian school. Tell us about how the school was run and what the school committee did.

HM: Well, you had a local committee that was appointed by the Robeson County Board of Education, and it consisted of five people that lived in the school district. My dad was chairman of the school committee in 32 when I started to school, and he remained chairman until about 1943 or 44. I don't know how long he'd been on before I started. I went on the school committee in 58, and I remained on the school committee and the advisory council until 1973, and I went on the school board until 1978. So the school committee's responsibility was to help operate the school.

They had a privileged ( ) teachers. Teachers didn't have a contract. They had no tenure back then. They only had one year at a time. It was hard to tell a teacher why you wouldn't take them back. You just didn't take them back. I know of one particular case when I was on there that if a teacher left off and somebody said, "What about so-and-so?" I said, "Well, she just wasn't recommended." That was it. The principal recommended and the board voted. They could vote them up or down. The school could make it good, but they needed to be recommended by the principal.

MM: Was it Indian only teachers?

HM: Indian teachers and Indian students.

MM: What about who could attend the school?

HM: Indian students.

MM: Did the school committee play a part in deciding that?

HM: We never did deal with it while I was on there. I don't know how it operated before. We didn't deal with that. See, this community I understand that our Prospect school today being a K through eight probably had the highest percentage of Indian students of any school in the county. It's ninety some per cent. I don't know exactly. I think it's about ninety-two, maybe even higher than ninety-two. It may be as high as ninety-six or seven. We just don't have people that live in the community. There's no black people, and what few white people live in the community are interracial marriage pretty well.

MM: What were the grades when you were attending Prospect School? What grades were there?

HM: One through eleven.

MM: One through eleven in that one building?

HM: Um-hum.

MM: Okay.

HM: We had two buildings. We actually had three when I started. One of them burned down after I got out of it. One building you went in it from the first to the third grade. The next building you went from the fourth through the seventh, and the next one eight through eleven. We had three different buildings.



MM: Did you see the same people at school that you saw at church?

HM: Mostly. There'd only be four or five cars on the school ground. You see, teachers would pool rides back then. Didn't have many cars on the school ground, and the same way with church. There wouldn't be many cars at church either. People would walk or come in different ways.

MM: Where did the teaches live who taught here?

HM: Several of them lived in the immediate community, and most of the rest of them came out of the Pembroke area, the surrounding areas of Pembroke.

MM: How were you appointed to the school committee? How did that happen.

HM: You're appointed by the Board of Education. I don't know who recommended me, but I just got on there in 1958. You had to go to the clerk of courts office to be sworn in. I don't know how I got on, but I got on.

MM: Who were the other people that served with you on the school committee in those first years?

HM: When I went on there was Mr. Will Goins, Mr. J. D. Harris, Mr. Brewer, I don't remember his first name, and Mr. Neal Lowry. I was the boy in the crowd. All of them were old enough to be my dad.

MM: Have you ever wondered how you got on there?

HM: I never spent much time thinking about it. Really I should have tried to find out, but somebody recommended me.

MM: Did your dad have a large influence in your life?

HM: Yes, he did. I had a good dad. Smart to work. He was a good carpenter. He was a good mechanic. He was a good farmer. He was a good brick mason, and he was a leader in the church and the school.

MM: Was he ever a teacher in the school?

HM: No, he never did teach.

MM: Part of the school committee?

HM: Pardon?

MM: Part of the school committee though?

HM: Yeah. He never did teach. He didn't get married until he was about thirty-seven years old, and then there was eleven children so that's a big crowd.

MM: Yes. He had gray haired children.

HM: Yeah. We're all eleven, and we're all senior citizens.

MM: Oh my gosh. Talk a little bit about the relations between the school committee and the county board. Were they smooth, or difficult, or what kinds of issues you discussed?

HM: I would say smooth. There was one time that I was chairperson of that committee. I don't remember what year it was, they changed a couple of our members and the superintendent told me that we couldn't employ the principal. He met with us, or he talked with us. So we got word that they were wanting to get rid of our principal, Mr. Danford Dial.

We had a meeting at the school that Saturday night, on a Saturday night, and we got together. We had some community people with us and the school committee. We decided to get an appointment to go down and talk with the superintendent on Monday



morning. That was in April of that year. So I got the appointment, and we went down and talked with him and told him that we felt for the best interest of the school and the community that Mr. Dial remain where he was at. He polled each on of the other members. There was five of us. He polled each one of them to be sure that I was telling the truth, and he says, "Well, you go back and you tell Mr. Dial to come on and sign this contract." That's when they had a one-year contract. So we came on back by the school and gave him the good news. That's the only time I that I ever remember us having any difficulty.

MM: And disagreement. Why did the school board not want to keep him?

HM: I don't have anything to prove what I'm going to say, but I think it was because of his aggressiveness in the school system. If you knew Mr. Dial, he wanted his school to be the best school. A couple of examples.

A man that worked for the school system told me when they built the high school building across the street over there that he brought a truck load of used furniture there, and said Mr. Dial met him on the yard and said, "You're not putting that in my school." He carried it back and got a truck load of new furniture.

The other fellow told me he brought books on a pickup. Mr. Dial went out and got to thumbing through them, they were used books, and they were used at white schools. This was prior to integration. He told him, he said, "You wait until I come back." He went in. He got in touch with somebody, and they told him to send the truck back with the books on it. He went back and got new books. We felt like that was part of the reason that they had wanted to, but that was the only time they ever suggested it.

One of the members, the new members that was appointed that year, told me that he couldn't support Mr. Dial at that time, at the time that he went on, but after he stayed on a little while he agreed. He was real big supporter of him.

MM: About what year was that?

HM: It was sometime between 60 and 70 I believe, somewhere in the 60s.

MM: How much authority did you feel like the school committee had?

HM: Well, they had enough authority to employ their instructors even down the janitor if they wanted to and kind of helped set some directions for the school to go. Back then there were more teachers probably than there were possessions. Our school had a pretty good reputation of not having a lot of discipline problems with students, and people liked to go to Prospect. The still do today. Some of them think, "If I can get to Prospect I'll be all right."

MM: Why do you think you didn't have as many discipline problems?

HM: Well, maybe it's a community thing that they didn't have a lot of discipline problems.

MM: I think I know probably what you mean by a community thing, but if someone was listening to this that wasn't from here how would you try to explain it to them?

HM: We didn't have a lot of people moving into the community. Mostly the teachers would teach the parents or some of the same children that they taught later. I know my parents always told me if I got a whipping at school I'd get one when I got home. Well, I was fortunate. I never did get one. I don't say I didn't deserve one, but I never did get one. I got one lick in the second grade. I was looking at the lady's ( )

Sunday. I came to the cemetery here, and I thought about it. She's buried right behind us here, 1933 I guess it was.

MM: So you had the same people that taught here, were from here, went to church here, and the students were—?

HM: Um-hum. I think that had it's affect.

MM: Will you described for us the advisory council and what the difference between the school committee and the advisory council was?

HM: Well, the advisory council was just what it says, advice only. The school committee actually had more power than the advisory council. The advisory council could recommend. It was a pretty strong position to be in if you could keep all of them together, you know, which we were very fortunate. I don't remember us having any real splits or any kind of problems between advisory council or the school committee's members. We worked pretty good together. I think we all had the same thing in mind that we wanted the best school that we could have for the sake of our children. It worked out pretty good.

MM: What encouraged the change over? Who decided that it was going to become an advisory council?

HM: I'll have to think. I'm not sure about that, but I think they had to do that from an administrative standpoint. The Board of Education ( ) period. We had districts prior to that. We still have school districts. I don't remember the ins and outs of that, but they had to do away with the school committee, or they said they did.



MM: They said they did. Why do you think that? Maybe they really didn't have to?

HM: We'll have to believe that they did. We have to believe it.

MM: If you were putting yourself in that position what would the logic be for you for changing the system?

HM: Well, each school used to operate independently pretty well as far as the employees especially. But now the board hires them and they can send teachers where they please anywhere in the system. But when the local school committee was hiring they were just hiring for their individual schools.

MM: So it became a system that the board controlled more than the individual schools controlled?

HM: Right. See the way the board could control it before when you had the school committee, the school committee got too far out of line and not doing what the board thought they should do, they could replace the board.

MM: Replace the school committee?

HM: Yeah.

MM: Are there examples that you can think of of that happening?

HM: Well, we had a couple of new members to come on ours one year, and we thought that maybe that was the reason, to replace the principal as I said earlier. You can't prove it.

MM: So when the supreme court made the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision in 1954 that ordered the integration of the schools, did that decision have any impact on Robeson County?

HM: Oh yeah. Yeah. You just had to do it, which we didn't do it until about 70. Was it 1970? Seventy-one, somewhere they closed the district lines and everybody that lived in that district had to go to the school that they were assigned to go to in the district. That was a long time after the Brown decision wasn't it?

MM: Um-hum. So it didn't necessarily have an immediate effect.

HM: Not immediate.

MM: Can you go back to say about 1960 or so, the early 1960s, and talk about what were some of the feelings that people were having about integration. Did Indians want it to happen or not want it to happen?

HM: No, we didn't want it to happen. There's pretty strong feelings especially in this community. It had been all Indian, and they just felt like that it should remain that way. I guess it was a traditional thing to some degree. Now back in the 60s there was a few black families that lived in our school district, but they were still not coming to our school until the 70s. The early 70s they started coming to our schools when they closed the lines.

MM: Henry Ward Oxendine told me something about the Freedom of Choice option in the 60s. Could you talk about that, and if you know anything about who was making that decision how that system operated.

HM: Well, the best I remember that the Freedom of Choice was that it was really not a freedom of choice. It was a choice to go before the board and get permission to cross the line. I think that's the way they did it, so you couldn't just arbitrarily say I'm going to send my child to a school in another district. You had to get permission to do it, and that school had to have room for the child when it got there which made good sense.

MM: Did you have to get permission before, or could you just send your child?

HM: You had to get permission before you sent them.

MM: I'm sorry. I mean before the Freedom of Choice idea came about, say in the 50s.

HM: We didn't have a lot of problems back then in the 50s. You just had to depend on the school bus or walk to school. There was not much students driving to school. In fact, when I was in high school I don't remember a single student that drove a car to school. If they wanted to go to Pembroke they had to afford their own way to go there. We had a few situations where that happened, but they had to furnish their own transportation.

MM: So that in the 1960s then more people started wanting to go?

HM: Cross the line.

MM: Cross the lines.

HM: Yeah.

MM: Why?

HM: Well, you know, a lot of it was in their mind I guess. They thought another school was better. Maybe the curriculum was broader and they would send their children there. But you can't blame nobody for wanting the very best for their child.

MM: So the Freedom of Choice option then was a way to kind of regulate that desire that people had.

HM: Um-hum.

MM: Okay. Did that have big impact on Prospect? Were a lot of people trying to leave or come in?



HM: No, no. It didn't affect us that much. We still have some students that come. Their parents bring them. You go over to that school in the morning about between seven thirty and eight o'clock, traffic's backed up.

MM: What do you think motivated you to get involved with education, public education?

HM: I think I inherited it. My grandfather was in it for a long time. He was in school work and church work for about fifty years, I guess.

MM: Talk about who your grandfather was and what he did for this community.

HM: My grandfather was W. L. Moore. He came from Columbus County which joins Robeson on the eastern side. I don't remember what level of education he had, but he had enough to teach school. I think he had a four year degree when he came up here. A man that I interviewed one Sunday remembered when grandpa came here. He came in this community a walking, selling bibles. That was before he got married. He married a lady from Union Chapel, Oxendine, and they had five children. Three of them taught school. One of the girls died as a teenager. My dad never did teach school. He was involved in the school, but he never did teach.

MM: So when you say you inherited it, it was part of your—?

HM: Well, I think a lot of things you inherit, your blood lines, you know. People's occupation like yours. Education. I have one brother and two sisters that taught school. I have a brother still teaching school. I always encouraged him to go on and get his doctorate. Several years ago he called me one night and said he'd got it in education. He got an ED, which I was proud he did.

MM: This is sort of related maybe in some ways, but as you were coming up you seemed to have such a conviction, and people like Mr. Danford, too, had this conviction that Indians could and should attain equality with whites in education. Can you talk a little bit about what convinced you at that time that that should be the case?

HM: Well, I've always felt that we were as good as anybody else. Going through the school minutes, I did a right good bit of that, I seen that the Indians—I knew it from self experience—were being left out to some degree. The white schools in the Robeson County unit were worth a lot more than the Indiana schools per student. I just felt like that maybe we could make a difference, and we did make a difference. Even when Mr. Swett became superintendent he didn't have to go to school to get prepared. He was already prepared. The door just hadn't been opened. The door being shut. I was on the School Board when that happened. In fact I tried to get them to open it up for people to put in applications, but there was not enough of the board that wanted to approve that, and we went ahead and honored Mr. Swett that morning. I don't remember who made the motion, but I seconded it. Somebody said after we got out they said, "Hey, you was wanting to open it up." I said, "Yes, but then when I seen I was beat on it I did the next best thing." Me and Mr. Swett always had a good relationship. I never went to him for something that I didn't receive it, and I tried to be very careful what I asked him for. I knew he had limitations too.

Good case in point. Between 1950 and 52 there were four Indian High Schools Pembroke, Magnolia, Fairgrove, and Prospect. I likely forget the one that I'm closest to. We didn't have a gym prior to then, and three of the Indian high schools got ( ) concrete floors to play basketball on in the gym. But all the white high schools got hardwood

floors. Our school had 1,140 students I think it was. About the same year Orrum had about 750, and Orrum got a gym seven to eight hundred square feet, and Prospect got one forty nine hundred square feet.

MM: And Orrum was a white school?

HM: Yeah. Yeah, Orrum was a white school, and Prospect was an Indian school. This has not been but a little over fifty years ago, so that was wrong. That was wrong, and if it hadn't of been for the commissioners we might have never got ours extended. The year Bobby Dean was elected in the general election of 72 the commissioners met at Prospect School the next morning. Herman Dial and Bobby Dean Locklear were the only two Indian members out of seven, but they decided—I think they had seven. I don't remember whether they had had seven or five back then, but anyway we were not in the majority. They met at the school that morning. They decided they'd give the Board of Education until the first Monday in December to let them know whether they would renovate our gym, and the next spring they did, 73. That meant a lot to us to get a hardwood floor to play on plus a lot more bleacher room. The school has probably made that up several times in gate receipts coming to see the ball games.

MM: That was something Mr. Thompson talked about, too, how the county commissioners could influence the school board to do things.

HM: Well, I did have, I don't remember what I did with it, but I had a letter where the commissioners wrote the school board and gave them a deadline which was the first meeting in December of 73, no 72, to let them know what they would do. And I also got a copy of the Board of Education's letter of response that they would remedy the



situation, and they did, too. They tore the front of it up and backed them on out and get some good gate receipts.

MM: Let's talk a little bit about voting in the 1960s, the kind of political organization that you put together here in Prospect to run candidates for elections and things like that.

HM: In 1953, four, somewhere along there, under the leadership of mostly Mr. Lester Bullard we decided that we wanted a district judge or a quarters court district judge. Back then the judge had to live in the district where he was serving. We ran uncle Early Bullard. We formed a club, the United Club of Prospect. There's only two or three of us still living that were in that club, but the purpose of it was mostly politics. We started meeting in the school, and the school found out what we were about, and we couldn't meet there anymore so we started in the church over here. The church found out what we were about. We couldn't meet there any more. So a neighbor that had land joining the school land donated us a piece of land to build a clubhouse on. That's where we got our clubhouse down in the corner down here next to the church land. See at that time this land that the church is sitting on today belonged to the school, and we bought it from them when they moved across the street. I don't remember the year. It was sometime in the 50s we bought the land from the school.

Uncle Early was elected. He served four years, and he stepped down. Lacy Maynor ran and was elected. He was uncle Early's assistant. Then the state legislature I guess it was, they changed the districts and made Robeson County a district. Now district judges can live anywhere as long as they live in the county.

I remember registering. We had to Wakulla which is about five miles north of here. That's where the registrar lived, and I carried five people up there one Saturday to get them registered. They were about sixty years of age. We cut our Prospect community up in districts, little sub-districts, where the members of the club were responsible to see that the people got to the polls. That was probably the most intense job that's ever been done here I expect. We got the people to the poles.

END OF TAPE ONE, SIDE A

BEGINNING OF TAPE ONE, SIDE B

MM: Okay. Go ahead. I'm sorry.

HM: I remember one lady, she was an elderly lady, and only had one son. And her son was not a member, he didn't live in this immediate community at that time. But he was going to carry his mama to vote. She told him no. She had promised to go with me. That was how loyal people were. If they promised you, they'd do it. It's not quite that much today as it was back then.

MM: Who were some of the other people that were in the club?

HM: Well, you had Lacy and Robert Collins, Mike Bullard, Jim Dial, Herman Dial, James Moore, James A. Jones, myself, Mr. J. D. Harris, Mr. Lester Bullard, Mr. Spurgeon Bullard, Mr. Wayne Locklear, Mr. Abner Locklear, Mr. Nash Locklear. Let's see. Who else did we have? I know we had some more. [LONG PAUSE.] Mr. Timothy Clark. That's about as many as I can think of right off. Mr. Nash Locklear.

MM: So you ran two judges successfully.

HM: No, we just ran one that time.

MM: Oh, okay. So Mr. Early Bullard.

HM: He was running against the incumbent which was white. The man lived in Maxton. I don't remember, I believe the name was Dutch Hollen. I'm not sure about that, but that was one of the first elective offices that we won.

MM: Was there any sense at the time that people had tried to keep Indians from voting?

HM: No, we were very fortunate. The man that run the polls was Mr. Dan McArthur. He was the registrar, and he worked with us. He didn't try to do anything that I seen or that I even heard about to keep Indians from voting. Not ( ). They just had a little place there, and you went in. I think we voted in the gin house. They vote in the school now. That's where they vote, over here at the school. But back then I think it was the gin house where we voted, the office.

MM: What's a gin house?

HM: That's where they gin cotton.

MM: Oh, cotton gin house. Okay.

HM: Yeah, cotton gin house.

MM: Let's see.

HM: Cotton gin. That's what they called them. Cotton gin. They still call them that, I guess.

MM: What about blacks voting at the time?

HM: I don't know whether the blacks were voting much or not, but the Indians really turned out.

MM: Did the club continue working that way into the 60s?



HM: Yeah. The recreation center really was born, was begun in the club down there. Mr. Lester headed that up, him and Mr. Robert Collins.

MM: Describe that for us?

HM: Okay. That was before Indians could play golf on the white golf courses, before the could go to the recreation places, like lakes and places like that. He said we would have a place that our people could go. That's where it got its name, recreation center. He sold memberships, three hundred dollars a year for several years. I was a member. I was one of the initial members of it, and I guess they still have that marker over there, don't they, with the names on it of the members?

MM: I'm not sure.

HM: They used to have a marker. When you go in there by the dam, the beginning of the dam, with the names of the original members on it, and my name was on there. But it was a rough swamp. There used to be an old grist mill there a long time ago, a corn mill, but I don't remember that either. There's an old pond there, I think, and that's what they made the pond out of today. The lake they call it. So it actually started. They looked at a place over by St. Pauls, and then they decided that they couldn't do nothing with it. They got the Terry Sanford Drive over there. Terry Sanford was governor at that time, and Mr. Lester had just about an open door to his office. He got him to pave that road running from the road that goes across the river up to the recreation center.

MM: Now that land had been Pembroke Farms land, is that right?

HM: Yeah, part of the Red Banks estate.

MM: Who owned it? Did you all buy it, or did you lease it?

HM: I think the government owned it. I believe the government owned that land at that time. I don't remember how the working relationship was but the government, I think, owned it. They had what they called "the settlement areas." Are you familiar with that? Where they sent two students, one in home economics and one in agriculture. Mr. Abner Locklear was agriculture. He went to Ohio State, and the war come on got him, and he had to go and help them win the war, but he went back to Ohio State and finished.

MM: Hum. Let me see here. I think we—.

END OF TAPE TWO, SIDE B

END OF INTERVIEW

TRANSCRIBED NOVEMBER, 2003 BY SHARON CAUGHILL