

SOHP Series: Listening for a Change  
Davidson College Interviews - Mooresville

TAPE LOG - FRANK FIELDS

Interviewee: Dr. Frank Fields

Interviewer: Amanda Covington

Date: 4 March 1999

Location: Mooresville, N.C.

Tape No.: (cassette 1 of 1)  
(approximately 30 minutes)

Notes: Dr. Fields and I met at the Mooresville Graded  
School District Administrative

Building, located on Main Street in Mooresville, North Carolina. I thanked Dr. Fields for being patient with my tardiness - I had become lost on my way back from a trip to South Carolina and was late for the interview. My worry and dismay about being late are very apparent in my tenseness and the brevity of the interview.

Dr. Fields was an excellent source of factual information about the district's handling of school desegregation in Mooresville. He had done some research IN school board minutes for me and read some of the highlights of this information to me during the interview. Dr. Fields is a Mooresville native; his children all attended public school in Mooresville and several were students during the time of public school desegregation. Dr. Fields also served on the Mooresville School Board, but did not until after the time of desegregation. His experiences growing up in Mooresville and his research of school board meeting minutes were extremely valuable to this project, even though the interview was relatively short.

Note: There were some places in the first few minutes of this interview that experienced some "spots" of no sound. Little information was lost due to this problem, though.

## LOG

[Cassette 1 of 1, Side A]

Question about being a Mooresville native. Dr. Fields grew up in Mooresville and attended Mooresville Graded School District. Explains that legislation set up tax aid that supported Mooresville Graded School District. Talks about the school system setup: elementary to 7th grade were housed together, then the other grades were housed in the high school, which is not in the same location as today. The high school (built in 1905) was located where Mitchell Community College is located today.

Question about children attending school in Mooresville. Dr. Fields' children all attended school in Mooresville, graduated, and went to college and graduate school.

Question about Dunbar school (African American school) and its location. The school was located near the railroad junction, and Dr. Fields indicates that he has research on the school and is willing to share that information at this time. Research includes school board minutes during the time of desegregation.

On June 4th, 1965 the board of education made a motion to submit the revised plan for desegregation in Mooresville to comply with Title 6 of the Civil Rights Act. Copies were to be submitted to Raleigh and the Department of Health Education and Welfare in Washington. On March 7, 1966, the board approved an "assurance of compliance" to HEW 441-B. Dr. Fields described these motions and the time: "as you see, this is where we were completely complying with this law". The board minutes continue: on May 27, 1968, the motion was carried for the student assignments for the 1968-69 school year. All 10-12th grade students would attend the Sr. High School, and 7th-9th grades at the Jr. High, all 5th and 6th at Dunbar, and grades 1st-3rd at Park View Elementary, as those students were already attending Park View. This was complete integration for the Mooresville Graded School District.

On March 6, 1972 several members of the African-American community came with a petition to the Mooresville School Board to change the name of the Dunbar School to the N.F. Woods Elementary school, in honor of the principal of the school for 35 years, Mr. Woods. This was also a corroboration of Negro History Week.

A brief history of the Woods school was included by Dr. Field. The first "negro school" was constructed in the early 1900's near the railroad junction in Mooresville. It was a two-story, four-room structure which later had a two-room addition. It was used for 38 years and the Dunbar school was constructed in 1941 on West McClelland Avenue in Mooresville. It received additions in 1957, '59, and '64 to house a cafeteria and six additional classrooms for the high school needs. N.F. Woods was the principal of the school for 35 years. In 1968 Dunbar was a Union school, offering grades 1-12. In the fall of 1968, with full-scale integration, it served as an elementary school housing both grades 5 and 6. It was around this time that the name was changed to N.F. Woods Elementary School, an action taken by the school board at the request of members of the African-American community. Woods now houses a technical school which has received a great deal of recognition in recent years; it offers programs in nursing, television, brick masonry, and other.

Dr. Fields notes how he had children in school during the time of desegregation:

"There were no actions of violence or so on, nobody, you know, got excited, they just blended right into one and it has worked out very, very successfully and we have black principals, we have black assistant principals, we have blacks in the administrative, we have blacks in our faculty, and everything really functions very well".

Question about worries of the problems in Charlotte with desegregation surfacing in Mooresville. Dr. Fields notes that there was not a great deal of worry because of the distance from Mooresville to Charlotte; the relationship was not as close as it is today. Notes that they did see the actions going on in Alabama during this time, but the small community that Mooresville was just didn't have many problems. He describes integration as "very successful move".

Question about a feeling of "general acceptance" of the desegregation law. Dr. Fields states that it was federal law, and the school board wanted to "try to do right by all". Discusses the positive relationship between blacks and whites in Mooresville.

Question about how many students would have integrated the white schools. He remarks that the percentage of African-

American students has always been around 20%. He mentions that there were no "redneck actions" during this time and that a sense of open-mindedness exists within the town, noting that members of the white community attend the NAACP banquet. He emphasizes the importance of academic excellence in the Mooresville Graded School District, and that this extends to all races. He talks about how many minority students from Mooresville have attended great institutions. Also notes presence of Asians and Hispanics in the district today. When discussing academic excellence for all students: "and it does pay off - don't ever tell us that a minority cannot become highly educated because they can and, so, you know, everything works out".

Question about serving on the school board. Dr. Fields served on the school board in 1973; he is employed with ICI Chemical Corporation. Talks about coming onto the school board during the time his children were in school for specific reasons. Dr. Fields talked about the uniqueness of the school district at this point:

"We have, and I am going to be honest with you, have received a lot of national recognition for our academic excellence and which we do strive for, and we are, as I say, a unique school system in that our forefathers, in 1905, got this legislation that whereby we could tax and keep the school, you know, run by the community and so on".

I made a comment about going to a city district similar to Mooresville and the issue of consolidation of districts in North Carolina; Dr. Fields mentions the possibility of consolidation and the politics of it. He notes that these efforts have not been successful academically or financially.

End of Interview