

**Interview with Mrs. Jessie Palmer Moore**

Date: June 20, 2001

Interviewed by Tracy Caradine

**TC:** My name is Tracy Caradine, the Director of Library Services at Jarvis Christian College. Today's date is Wednesday, June 20, 2001. My interviewee for today is Mrs. Jessie Palmer Moore.

Okay, Mrs. Moore, to start, can you tell me a little bit about yourself, where you are from and how you came to this community?

**JPM:** Yes, I came to this community because I got married to a fellow from here and I moved over to Hawkins in this house where I am now. That was in '49. I am from central Texas, and that is near Corsicana, Texas. I was from a little town which we called Teague, Texas, a very, very small town.

**TC:** Did you have any children?

**JPM:** Yes, I had two girls. They both are grown. They both teach. One teaches in Hawkins now, and the oldest one teaches in Houston.

**TC:** When you moved to this area in this house here, was the community black or white, or was it a mixed community?

**JPM:** It was separate, it was black in this area where I am, and the whites were towards town. Believe it or not, right across there, across that road out there, there was one white family. My children couldn't understand it. They had two buses, and they were separate. So I'll say the black children rode one bus, and then another driver had to go over there, right in the front of us, and pick up the white children.

Though we passed the white school—I don't know if you have ever seen the old white school, you would have if I would have told you another direction—and we had to pass the white school to get cross the tracks to our school.

**TC:** And yet there were two buses?

**JPM:** Two buses at that time. That is before we integrated. They both were nice, and everything like that.

**TC:** Did your children associate with the white family across the road? Did they play with their children?

**JPM:** No, because I think those kids was larger than my children, but we were on friendly terms, the adults were.

**TC:** During the time period of 1955 to maybe 1975, which is the time period that we are focusing on, you were a teacher?

**JPM:** Yes.

**TC:** Can you tell me at which schools did you teach?

**JPM:** When I began teaching here, it was across the tracks to the Hawkins Colored High School. When I came here, we had a new gym. This building where we had all twelve grades was not brick, but they bricked it up, and it really did look nice on the outside. Our principal is the kind of person it had to look good and outside. And as I told you, at that time Hawkins had oil money, so they really, you know, fixed our building up too. We all had our janitors, you know, and everything, and kept things in a nice way.

**TC:** What was the student population at the Hawkins Colored High School?

**JPM:** I really hadn't thought about that, but it had to be somewhere between 200 and 250, maybe, because our population as far as children is concerned is around 800 now together. I hadn't thought about it really, but it is about like that.

**TC:** I understand that Hawkins Colored High School, the name changed a couple of times. Can you kind of give me some information about how that name change came about?

**JPM:** Yes. In another community in Hawkins, at their school the scholastics began to fall off, so these two school districts got together and asked them to merge with our school. That is where we got this Fouke-Hawkins, that community is northwest from here between five and ten miles.

**TC:** When Fouke and Hawkins merged to form the Fouke-Hawkins High School, did anything change as far as the type of equipment and upkeep of the building? Did everything basically remain the same?

**JPM:** I really think it did, because we got the things, and the school board, I guess that is who it was, or the state, one, promised them some things like -they told them say now, we would keep all the teachers at that particular time, you know, so that is what they did.

**TC:** They kept all of the teachers.

**JPM:** From Fouke.

**TC:** Were all of the teachers at this high school, the Fouke-Hawkins High School, were they all black?

**JPM:** Yes, both of these communities were black.

**TC:** So the teachers were black as well as the students?

**JPM:** That's right.

**TC:** When you began teaching, what was your salary like at the black high school?

**JPM:** You are talking about Hawkins?

**TC:** Yes.

**JPM:** The salary then was pretty good, and why I'm saying that, I came from Freestone County, and my salary wasn't so good. Then, I guess it was seventy-five dollars a month. But when I came over here and they had all this oil and everything, and I think it had gotten where if you had

gone to school a certain length of time and your tenure, they used both of those things to determine your salary, how many years you had been teaching and then how many years you had gone to school.

**TC:** Do you think that the salary of the teachers at the white school were the same as the salaries for the teachers at the black school?

**JPM:** You know what, I really think when they said, “How long have you been teaching” and “How long you’ve been to school,” because when we integrated, most of the black teachers had their master’s degree, but all whites didn’t. So I think we did. Because I asked the principal one time about my salary. She said, “I don’t know,” she said, “because you get more than we do,” and said, “as long as I’ve been working, I have not received my salary. My husband gets it.” **[Laughter]**

**TC:** Why do you think at that particular time more black teachers had their master’s degrees than white teachers?

**JPM:** One reason, the principal encouraged us to go to school. The next reason, some of us liked to go to school. I guess that was our vacation in the summer time.

**TC:** Prior to integration, how did you all receive the textbooks and materials and supplies that you needed at the all-black school?

**JPM:** We made out a requisition of what we needed and the number of children we would have the next year in our room, you know, and we would give that to the principal, and he would strike out what he wanted to, and he would come by the room and tell us, you know. But he really took care of that, you know, and if you could prove to him that you needed certain things that you had on your requisition and you could use it, well, you got it.

**TC:** Were there ever any times that you all had to do without maybe because of funds that you were not receiving?

**JPM:** Not at this time.

**TC:** Did you all receive just as much funding as the white school received?

**JPM:** Well, they had more classes, different classes than we had. Something like we had basketball, they had football. We had choirs, and they had band. Little later, we got a band. That is before we integrated. We had nice uniforms and instruments too.

**TC:** Was there ever a time when textbooks were passed to the black school from the white high school after being used?

**JPM:** Yes, but one of the things is that they didn’t requisition and get their books like we did. I really think sometimes they got some of our books. **[Laughter]**

**TC:** So you think that went both ways—they got some of yours, and you got some of theirs?

**JPM:** Yes.

**TC:** You stated previously that some of the courses there were offered at the black school were different from those offered at the white high school before integration. You spoke of the sports programs and the band. What type of academic classes did you have at the black high school?

**JPM:** In the black high school, we had agriculture. In the white school, they had shop. My understanding is that the agriculture teachers could teach shop and agriculture, but the shop teacher could only teach shop, and they had the shop.

**TC:** Why do you think that agriculture was offered at the black high school and not at the white high school?

**JPM:** I don't know why it wasn't in the white, but this was a farming area. Our principal saw the need for his students was that that was what they really needed. So they know how to better their way of living in the community.

**TC:** Do you think that those types of classes were geared towards keeping the students in this area, or were they encouraged to move out of the area and try other professions?

**JPM:** Our principal didn't encourage the students to move out. He encouraged them to go to school. Most of the kids had to go to school somewhere, sometime, if just a semester, because he would go around to the parents and talk to them and tell them what they needed to know, and then he knew quite a few of the black colleges and their presidents and things nearby, and he would go and talk with them too.

**TC:** So the principal was sort of a recruiter?

**JPM:** Very much so. Very much so, in both schools.

**TC:** How active were the parents in the PTA and the day-to-day activities at the black school?

**JPM:** Very good, because, as I'm saying, the principal was just like that. We had a good PTA, and we had homeroom people that the parents, and even the grandparents, when we'd have school in February, open house, and if the parents didn't have transportation, and when I first came here, we all didn't have transportation, then the principal would send some of the bus drivers to pick up these people. We'd have a dinner for them you know, and stay, and when they got ready to come home, they could come home.

**TC:** What type of relationship existed between the black church and the black school?

**JPM:** Well, it was good. [unclear], that principal, you know, we were to go to church, one church. His preference was Baptist, because he was a Baptist. He didn't encourage it like that, but he didn't encourage talking about one denomination against the other one. But really, he wanted his teachers to encourage the students. This was before all this other came up, you know, that we wouldn't, and encouraged our children too, to go to church. Like when they leave on Friday evenings, the teachers would line them up, and that was the last thing we said. If the children came to your church, you knew that. If some of them didn't, you'd say, "Well, I'll see you Monday, and you'll tell me about it," you know.

**TC:** The relationship between the church and the school was a supportive relationship? The church supported activities at the school?

**JPM:** Yes, very much so.

**TC:** Was the idea of integration welcomed at the black high school? Did the teachers welcome this new idea of integration?

**JPM:** That is hard to really say because you hear so much, you know, and it is not always from the people that was trying to work this out, you know. So sometimes some people would say, "I do want my children to go where they would get the best education." They didn't realize that we had the same textbooks. Most of the black teachers had their master's degree in their field that they were working in too, you know. But you know how something new, people get excited over it, you know, even though later on they may not be so happy.

What the leaders did in this area, including the superintendent, they tried to keep it as nice as possible, I believe.

**TC:** When they said, that "Okay, we are going to integrate the schools here," the teachers at the black high school, were they given the opportunity to move over to the new integrated high school?

**JPM:** We had the opportunity to move over to the white school, but we really didn't want to go into the white school. They had just built us a new school, which was named Southside. When this building was being built, the first-grade teacher and the second-grade teacher, and I was the second-grade teacher, we had an opportunity to go to Tyler and check on the elementary classrooms to see the equipment that they had and what they needed. We had a chance to come back and tell the principal and the superintendent how we wanted our classrooms, you know.

Certain things we didn't have, like the lavatory, you know, we didn't have that then, and, you know, and so many things, and the water wasn't inside like the later schools were, you know. So they did fix those four rooms, we call them cubicles, I believe, something like that, like we wanted them. There was the first, second, third, and fourth grade in a group, and then, I guess, at that time we had one principal for the whole school. Then there was another one that I think that was for fifth, sixth, seventh, and eighth, I guess, and then the high school.

**TC:** Did all of the teachers at the black school move over to the new integrated?

**JPM:** Yes, the superintendent said this: all the teachers in both schools would be hired for one year. But we had too many teachers for the number of children in each one of the schools. Somebody would be let out for next year. So we all were hired that first year of integration.

**TC:** So everybody did move over; however, did things change that second year?

**JPM:** Yes, quite a few teachers were let out, both black and white.

**TC:** Were the same number of blacks let go as the number of whites?

**JPM:** I don't really know, because people would say different reasons why a teacher was let out, so you know how that is the rumor.

**TC:** Yes, ma'am.

**JPM:** But we were informed that some of us were going to be let out.

**TC:** Was that transition a difficult transition, moving from the all-black school to now teaching at an integrated school? Was it a difficult transition for you personally?

**JPM:** Not really with me, but what they did, they gave the students a choice, wrote letters to the parents and told them they could go to the white school if they wanted to for that year. You had your choice. We had quite a few black kids that went from that year to the white school.

**TC:** And the next year, it was mandatory?

**JPM:** This is it.

**TC:** That was it. But for you, personally, the transition was a smooth one?

**JPM:** I don't know what to say, because when we went to the white school, their elementary school wasn't as nice as ours, because ours was new. What happened is all white teachers in the elementary school had classrooms, and we were what you want to call "floating teachers." That was the one thing that I didn't like, but I learned to adjust myself. We didn't have a choice of a subject matter. They gave us what their teachers didn't want, I guess. But the teachers got along in the elementary school.

**TC:** So most of the black teachers were floating teachers?

**JPM:** In the elementary.

**TC:** How did the white teachers feel about sharing their classroom space with the black teachers?

**JPM:** I really think they felt all right, but some of us didn't feel so good, and why we didn't, they didn't keep their part of the room nice, and we did, you know, when we were over there, and everything. When they would have to come out so that, like the second-grade teacher, and when her time was up, and it was my time to go in, they gave me spelling and reading and art, something like that. Well, see, there was math and English, and at that particular time, not just our school, but it seemed that the black people felt we couldn't teach English, just not Hawkins. That was just the thing that was said at that particular time. It is different now.

**TC:** In general, how were the black teachers treated by the white teachers? What type of relationship existed between the two races?

**JPM:** I really think it was pretty good. We had this elementary principal, and sometimes I think, well, his wife talked to him. Anything that she saw that wasn't going to help us or them, the next day you could tell it. Because the principal would make a change, and it was helpful, you know.

**TC:** At the integrated high school, was the principal black or white?

**JPM:** White.

**TC:** He was white. What type of relationship did he form with the new black teachers that he was over now?

**JPM:** You know, I think it was pretty good, because I really didn't hear any complaints, only thing, they were like we were, they didn't have a choice of what subject matter they wanted to teach, but how we were treated, I think we were all treated all right.

**TC:** Do you think that you were able to go to him with any problems or concerns and he would listen to them and try to do things?

**JPM:** Yes, I surely do, and I surely did. They liked to tease me, because I was really going. And then they would ask me about certain things like we were having the lunches, you know, and some students could eat free, and some partially free, and some didn't have to pay, and things like that.

It so happened that the principal came in the lounge one day and asked "Who would take this in the elementary school?" Didn't anybody really say anything, but finally somebody is going to have to say something, you know, and I said, because I thought one of the black teachers would say something because she had taken care of the lunch report, and really I was looking for Ms. Murdock to do it, but she didn't say anything.

I said, "Well, if nobody's going to take it, and that is the period I'm not having a class, I'll take it." I said, "I've never done it before, but I'll take it." Of course, they said yes, and it went on smoothly and everything, you know.

**TC:** After integration, you had black students being taught by white teachers, and white students being taught by black teachers. Were those classes equally mixed? Were the students equally mixed in each class, or did they try to put more white students in the white teachers' classes and more black students in the black teachers' classes?

**JPM:** I don't think we did. We didn't have a lot of students, and we really needed the school board, I guess, that we were doing what we were supposed to do, because we didn't want to lose anything else, either side, you know.

I tell you, our superintendent, and the white and black high school principals worked closely together, I really think.

**TC:** Do you feel that the white teachers gave the black students in their classes an equal amount of attention? Did they teach the black students just as they treated the white students?

**JPM:** I think they treated each one equally, but there were some things like, sometimes I got the idea that if a teacher was out when she should have been in her room and something goes wrong, most of the time she always said some black kid started it. And she would listen to the student. First thing, stay in her room, and the next thing is to find out for herself. But that wasn't so bad, in a sense, and everything.

**TC:** When things like that happened, and students needed to be disciplined, were the black and white students disciplined in the same manner?

**JPM:** Yes.

**TC:** By the teacher?

**JPM:** We took them to the principal. I really think he—this elementary principal, was not partial. Because sometimes a bus driver could get a kid almost at home, and if he cut up, and these were blacks, I am talking about, drivers, he would bring that kid back to the school and stay there until

the principal chastised him, then he would take him on back home. And that worked out pretty good.

**TC:** Were the black students recognized for high academic achievement in the integrated school?

**JPM:** I say yes and no, because I just remember one incident that I thought a black kid should have been valedictorian, I thought, but he was not, but he was recognized. But it might have been hard for them to do that on account of the community. But finally, these teachers started to, just that kid that was good, he's just good.

**TC:** No matter what color?

**JPM:** What color. We'd have quite a few of those kids in here that did quite well, and they accepted it, and they had high school teachers that really worked with them. The librarian was real good, and she was from Grand Saleen [phonetic]; now, you all probably never heard anybody say anything about Grand Saleen, but this lady was, and she was really nice. We had an English teacher, she just did all she could to help the kids.

**TC:** All of the students, black and white?

**JPM:** Yes, all the students.

**TC:** As a black teacher in the integrated school, was it difficult to gain the respect of the white students?

**JPM:** I don't think with any of us, really. We really didn't. Because I tell you what, black teachers, I think, have a little bit more patience than white kids, and there could be a reason for that, you know. We have always had such a hard time. We want our children not to be better than anybody else, want them to do well, and want them to know that someone really — this may not be teaching to let a kid know that somebody loves you. Well, the black kids didn't care what color you was. He would help and let that person know he is a human being —

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**JPM:** —the theory and all. Used to [unclear]. Sometimes to me that is a difference.

**TC:** Was it difficult for a black teacher to discipline a white child?

**JPM:** No, because we had two black teachers didn't have any trouble at all. Cause I took mine to the office, and it wasn't any special reason, but that is just what I did. But I knew two of the black teachers, they didn't really care what color the kid was if it's wrong.

Then we had black teachers that wanted to help white kids that needed it. This might be too far, but I was taking a course on dyslexia, if you have heard of it. This seventh-grade teacher, I think it was a seventh-grade teacher, was a friend of mine, and I needed some kids to teach at home one at a time to go to Dallas in the class. So this friend of mine said she had one student that she wished I would take. This was a white kid.

So when I made contact with the mother, she told me, she knew something was wrong with her son, but she didn't know. And she said, she wished somebody would help him, because he had been retained one year. She said if he was retained again, he would drop out of school.

**TC:** This is a white?

**JPM:** This is a white parent. I told her, “Why, I’m going to do this for free because that’s what I had to do,” and all. She would go with me to Dallas at the time they would ask. They tried to find out whether it was on the father’s side or the mother’s side, or see if they would get together on the children. This kid didn’t like going to the library. He didn’t like reading, period, because he didn’t read well. That was what that was all about, you know. She really stuck with it, and he did too. He came to my house and sat over there where you were in that chair. He sat on this end, I sat on the other end, you know, and talk. He didn’t like but one teacher, and that is this teacher that told me about him, and she was a strict teacher. She didn’t care what color you were.

**TC:** Was she black?

**JPM:** Yes, very much so. **[Laughter]** But it worked out so nice.

I want to tell you, most of the kids that I tutored here in my house after school were white. And I just begged these black kids that I knew needed help, to come over. Cause I was going to bring them home from school, then maybe take them home if they couldn't come and get them, but I think we really had pretty good relationship.

**TC:** Do you feel that anything was taken away from the white school after integration in an effort to keep maybe luxuries from the black students? Was there anything that they stopped doing after integration that they were doing prior to integration? Maybe any sports activities or special programs that they had?

**JPM:** No, because we didn’t have football for the black school at this time, but the whites did. We had basketball. Well, when we integrated, the black kids started to playing football, and the coaches coached it, and the first time that Hawkins really won anything, they had a black boy that was responsible for it. Everybody was happy, no special person, everybody, was happy that year, because Hawkins was winning, and they didn’t say no black person won it or nothing. Tony carried that ball. I don’t know if he had ever had a football in his hand or not.

The only thing we didn’t have when we integrated, because they didn’t have it either, was chorus, singing. We had a choir all the time, even when we had band.

So that was one thing that didn’t affect us.

There was something else I was about to say that happened. Our kids played in their band, went on [unclear] talk about it, you know. But the kids, they got along pretty good. There were some problems, but not any that you would really worry about.

**TC:** After integration, did the black and the white students socialize together, maybe outside of the school?

**JPM:** Yes, they would, but you know, the parents didn’t like it very well, but the kids would, actually.

**TC:** Did they socialize at sporting events, maybe football games and basketball games?

**JPM:** They might be few in number, but some of them did.

**TC:** In the cafeteria at school?

**JPM:** Few in number, sometimes, but they did.

**TC:** Did the black parents continue to be active in the PTA after integration?

**JPM:** Yes, because seemed like to me, the white PTA wasn't as interested in the students as the blacks were. They might not have had to be. But we knew we needed to help our children, you know, and things like that. We didn't have as many activities to carry out, or things like that. But the school really was—we didn't have cars like they did, so our superintendent would let us carry our kids to certain activities on the school bus. Of course when we integrated, that stopped. But the buses would bring the kids to school, black and white, and the parents would have to pick them up at eleven or twelve o'clock at night, both.

**TC:** Did the relationship between the black church and the school change after integration?

**JPM:** No.

**TC:** What do you consider the greatest accomplishment of integration?

**JPM:** That is really hard to tell, because we were getting equipment, things like, if we knew to get them, you know, and all like that. We had good teachers, the principal worked hard, day and night, to bring his school up, you know. We were able to get books, you know, eventually. At some time, I think maybe before I was out there, sometimes they didn't have many books. But a whole lot of it was sometimes people didn't know how to go about how to go about and get it, you know, things like that, and talk to the principal, and things like that.

But I really think that Hawkins worked pretty hard with this integration. Sometimes the kids would have a little problem, and some of them had to get off the bus, something like that. But we just really didn't have any hard, hard. We might talk about it at home, things like that. Sometimes we'd think, you know, maybe, the courts were a little partial, saying, "Well, when black kids do it, they always have to go into the classroom, and they just shake the white kid's hand and go on," you know, but I don't think it was a serious thing.

**TC:** How did integration affect the community? Did it bring the community closer, or how was the relationship between the blacks and the whites affected after integration?

**JPM:** Hawkins, when I came here, was a peculiar community. At home, we went to the back door, and it was just a lot of things at my home that didn't happen when I came over here. Thing like, people said, "Mr." and "Mrs.", then, but really, they always, in fact, my husband has some real good, wealthy white friends to the extent that one of the fellows that was part of the state fair.

We have a lake we call Little Sandy Lake. This was the club lake going northwest from here. My husband used to go out there and work like helping them fish, and things like that. He was one of the persons that promoted a day for blacks at the state fair. That was on a Monday. That was the day that, I guess was the two best black college teams would play at the fair. There was Prairie View and some college out in Louisiana, I can't remember what it was. They might be still doing it now, but I can remember that Prairie View hadn't been winning very much.

I am trying to say there are things that people tried to help each other with, you know, and things like that. I can remember this fellow took my husband in the parade at the fair.

Not only that, the people that worked up there at the lake, you know, did a lot of things that helped Hawkins and all, you know, and helped the people too.

**TC:** All races in the town?

**JPM:** Yes.

**TC:** Just to move back just a little bit, my final two questions have to deal with the old colored high school, the Fouke-Hawkins High School. What became of those buildings after integration?

**JPM:** They were just there. Finally, I don't really know what happened to this building, but I heard somewhere that Jarvis had bought the building or something, but it just went to waste, we didn't use it anymore as far as a school is concerned. But we hated that so badly because we kept ours.

I'll tell you what happened once. This is another superintendent. He asked me to promote a program in the elementary school. He asked other people too, but they didn't want to do that. I told him if he'd help me, I'd try to, but anyway, I said, "But I have to go and see what it is all about. I have to go somewhere." He was from Henderson. He said ok. He got several of us, and we went to Henderson. Then he said Dallas and Fort Worth had this program called the Hawthorne program. We went. There were about twelve of us. Ms. McCalla was one. I asked if he would take her too.

We went around. This Mr. Mason, which was the superintendent then, he was so amazed in Fort Worth that this black school, and we was in an area that wasn't keeping things nice, and all. But this school and the campus was spotless.

When we went in there, we were going in there to see this program. He asked the principal, "How in the world did he do it," you know. Whatever they said I don't know. But when we came back, every year we'd go to school, our room would look just like they did when we left. Wasn't clean, wasn't swept up. But at the black school, everything was—that's what the custodians did in the summer, you know. Mr. Mason, said we going to get these things cleaned up, and things like that.

So I said, I think we each had something to help the other one. Because he really straightened that up. He said, [unclear]. The paper wasn't all over the campus and things, and the floors in there were polished and everything, you know, and quiet in the halls. Mr. Mason was really, really interested in that.

We had some people, I'm sure we had some felt differently, you know, but I think as a whole that we had some kids that turned out to be valedictorian and all that, and some that they didn't, we thought they should.

**TC:** Well, that sounds natural.

**JPM:** We just really had no terrible thing.

**TC:** Ms. Moore, it was a pleasure, and I really enjoy talking with you.

**JPM:** Well, I enjoyed it. I didn't know what I was going to say and what I was going to do, or what you all was going to say and do, but I am glad you came, both of you.

**[End of interview]**