Office of Oral History at the South Caroliniana Library

Tom Crosby Oral History Collection
Lugene Gist Oral History Interview

Interviewee
Gist, Lugene, 1915-

Interviewer
Crosby, Tom, 1940-

Date
January 6, 2007

Location
Santuck, South Carolina

ID Number
CROS 002

Use Restrictions
©University of South Carolina. The transcript and audio are provided for individual Research Purposes Only; for all other uses, including publication, reproduction, and quotation beyond fair use, permission must be obtained in writing from: The South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina, 910 Sumter Street, Columbia, SC 29208.

Scope and Background Note
In this oral history interview, Lugene Gist discusses her educational experiences attending Greenbrier School and night school at Poplar Grove School (both in Union County), her father and other local men’s physical efforts to build schools in the area, walking to school and May Day games played with her classmates, and recalling the names of some other local schools in Union County including Puppy Town (Tinker Creek), Oak Grove, and Red Point. Lugene Gist was born May 4, 1915 in Carlisle, South Carolina (Union County). Tom Crosby interviewed Lugene Gist in Santuck, South Carolina, on January 6, 2007. Interview covers Gist's education at the Greenbrier School(Town of Whitmire, S.C.) in the early 1920s and Poplar Grove School during the 1930s.
Tom Crosby: Today is January 6, 2007. I’m in Santuck, South Carolina and the next person that we will be recording is, what is your name?

Lugene Gist: Lugene Gist.

TC: Lugene Gist and do you mind telling me your birth date?

LG: My birth date is May 4, 1915.

TC: Okay, May 4, 1915. And were you born in the community of Santuck?

LG: I was born in Carlisle Township.

TC: Carlisle, I see, and this is in Union County, right?

LG: Yeah, all of it is Union County and my father moved up here in Santuck they called it, up here that’s where your school is, in Santuck. But he moved in Santuck in the year 1928.

TC: He moved to Santuck in 1928?

LG: Yes.

TC: I see. Now do you recall if certain persons in the community, I recall one of them was Clayton Jeter was and Joe Walker and Mr. Thomas, they were carpenters.

LG: That’s right.

TC: Did they help to build?

LG: Build the school, yeah, they did. Some of them put in, I mean as far as I know, the carpenters, Joe Walker had children to go to school with me and all, you know, but as far as I know, he put in the highest amount of free work.

TC: Who was this?

LG: Mr. Joe Walker.

TC: Joe Walker?

LG: Joe Walker because they say Joe Walker put in more free time and was the men that helped.
TC: Build the school?

LG: Right. In all, I mean you know, lots of men helped do work out there, which my father helped build things. He could read blueprints.

TC: So he helped too?

LG: My father did and he could read blueprints.

TC: Now you say he could read blueprints?

LG: Yeah, he could read blueprints. Him and old man Adam (sounds like: Curenton) and Rob Thomas, that’s Tom Thomas, they were the only three that knew how to read blueprints.

TC: I see. Do you know how far your father went in school?

LG: No, I don’t know that because he didn’t tell us how far. You know, back there then when they was going to school if you made it to I believe he said ninth grade the AME’s would send you to Allen University to college. He must have went as high as seventh grade because he said he lacked two years from getting his whatever kind of paper they give, you know, they issue to get that paper to go to Allen University.

TC: I see. So at that time your father was a member of the AME church?

LG: Oh yeah, he was an AME (unintelligible). Jeter chapel was his church. He was over there all his life. Us moved up here but he went back home every Sunday, every Sunday. Daddy, let’s go to Santuck church today. No, I’m going down home.

TC: I see and if he had gone one or two more years or something like that he could have gone to Allen University?

LG: Allen University. He supported his oldest sister now finished.

TC: Now in terms of the building of Poplar Grove School I think you said to me earlier that, at that time you said that there was a contractor involved in the building of the school. What was the name of that contractor?

LG: I don’t know his name but he was sent here to do this work in Union County by Mr. Rosenwald.

TC: Rosenwald, okay, I see. Did you ever see him?

LG: I see this contractor. Yeah, I saw him.

TC: You saw him?

LG: Yes sir. Us lived up there where Roscoe Epps lived. Us walked out there to the place when they were sawing the logs they make to build the school. We went out there when they laid the foundation to see how they dig out the trench and everything. I remember once we carried Daddy lunch.

TC: About how old were you at that time?

LG: I was about fourteen years old when they started that work.

TC: About fourteen years old?

LG: Yeah. I was sixteen at the time but we didn’t have school one year and I remember when I was seventeen the year that school started.
TC: So one year you didn’t go to school?
LG: One year we didn’t have school in Santuck that year. They didn’t have school at old after that school burnt down. The first two years we had it.

TC: Excuse me. You’re saying that a school got burned down?
LG: Old Poplar Grove, the old little wood building got burned down.

TC: It did? Where was it located? Do you recall?
LG: Right behind, there’s little houses on this side of the road when you’re going on Tinker Creek Road they call it, this road over there. That first house right on the road there, a little old white house, it was right over behind there on that little knoll.

TC: So you’re saying that there was another school before the one that I went to?
LG: Yeah, yeah. It was a little three-room building. Poplar Grove School was a threeroom building down on that tract.

TC: Did you attend that school or not?
LG: That’s the school we went in until it burned down and when it burned down they rented.

TC: A three-room house?
LG: Whoever they could get, a little three-room house frame. I told them I can’t think of that little old man’s name who was the little old principal but he was from Columbia. But he taught school, him and Miss Kathleen Eison and Miss Nina Mills taught in that little three-room house down there where Annie Ruth Epps and them stay now, was a little three-room house down there. We went there two years I know and then some woman wanted to rent that or something. They didn’t work the land around there back then, you know, the farmers didn’t work that land. They worked it that year, them two years we were down there, but they moved from there up to behind Miss Ella Jennings’ place up on that hill there. She had a little three-room house. She issued it to the county and let us go to school there. Us walked from up yonder where Roscoe stay over to where that school, they made us a three-room school over there right below (unintelligible).

TC: So that was several more miles that you walked?
LG: It was about three and a half miles for us to go through that way, because if us went all the way around this road we’d be so tired.

TC: Now to build Poplar Grove, of course, money was needed.
LG: Yeah.

TC: What kinds of ways did persons help to get money to build the school?
LG: Well, I don’t know whether it was kind of like it is now, you issue, the state put dollar per dollar to them or what but I remember they had the value, what they did had the value what the state would give and the amount of money you would pay the teacher for this year that they didn’t have school. That was all involved in it.

TC: Did they have things like box suppers that raised money?
LG: Really they did. They had box suppers. They had (sounds like: gibidy pots) and things like that.

TC: (unintelligible)?

LG: Yeah, old man Charlie Gilliam was a barbecue cooker and he cooked hash, have a hash (unintelligible) at the ballgame.

TC: So those were the kinds of things, some of the kinds of things that they did to raise money?

LG: They did to raise the money.

TC: Do you recall whether the white people of the community cooperated with them?

LG: I think they did. They put, you know, buy stuff from them and issue them so much and all like that.

TC: You don’t know whether they had any activities themselves among the white people?

LG: No, I don’t know whether they had any of that or not but they would always come to the Gilliam, I believe, barbecue. It was either sixty dollars, you know, money was money then.

TC: I see. So they had a barbecue?

LG: They had a big barbecue.

TC: The white people did?

LG: No, colored people did.

TC: How did they go about building the school?

LG: They got men together and they got the logs. All the renters and landowners give logs, so many logs, and they put them up there in a pile and a man moved his sawmill there and sawed, they call that the rough lumber, you know, they had rough lumber.

TC: They just smoothed it out?

LG: Yeah, the rough lumber tallied with the lumber the state give, trying to balance the deal. I remember my daddy said they lacked three. If they had three more trees they would have had every piece of the, you know, the framing for that building.

TC: For the building, I see. Now you went there after it was built, of course. You went to Poplar Grove, the last building, you went there, right?

LG: No, I never did work out there.

TC: You never did attend Poplar Grove?

LG: Oh, no, nothing but night school. I did attend night school there, never day school.

TC: So do you recall about the year, a year that you went there to night school at Poplar Grove?

LG: Four and a half years.

TC: About four and a half years?

LG: Uh-huh.
TC: I see. You don’t remember what date? Do you remember what some of those years were or you don’t remember?

LG: Well, I’d say it was about, the first year I attended night school out there it was in ’37.

TC: Thirty-seven?

LG: Uh-huh, the year of ’37.

TC: Do you remember some of the teachers?

LG: Oh yeah.

TC: Remember their names?

LG: Well, at that time it was.

TC: Maybe Miss Kathleen Eison?

LG: No, she didn’t teach night school now. Night school was taught by teachers they called it.

TC: You’re trying to remember the names of some of the people. Was it Professor Bogan?

LG: He didn’t teach night school but the teachers was there one of them was, she was kind of younger lady, she taught there, Miss Ruth McKissick and Miss Blackwell, she was a teacher.

TC: Lizzie Blackwell?

LG: I guess.

TC: Did her husband deliver groceries to stores?

LG: I don’t know but I remember she was a Blackwell, Miss Blackwell. There was an earlier, our earlier teachers taught night school there. I can’t recall the man what.

TC: Excuse me. How many nights per week did you go to school, night school?

LG: We went two.

TC: Two nights a week?

LG: Yeah, on Tuesday and Thursday.

TC: I guess you had to be there around six or seven o’clock.

LG: Yeah, around six thirty. If you didn’t you was late.

TC: You were late? And I guess that you would end around eight o’clock.

LG: By eight or nine, wouldn’t hold no longer. They called themselves went overtime if they keep them there till nine, you know. But sometimes they’d get in a discussion and it’d be close to nine. Now the free time we’d get away but I guess they was paying them according to the hours they’d be there.
TC: They’d take the free time away? You wouldn’t have a break? But if things really started going you wouldn’t stop.

LG: We wouldn’t have no break. We wouldn’t take no break. They’d teach an hour and then you’d take a break and then they’d go back, but we wouldn’t take no break. TC: So you really liked it?

LG: I loved it. So many people, so many young people then, which I hadn’t been long ( ). But so many young people they didn’t know how to spell nothing. Oh, I thought it was so bad.

TC: Now at one point in the development of education in South Carolina there was a period of time in which they taught people just to write their name. Do you remember anything like that?

LG: No, I don’t remember that.

TC: Were they doing that when they were in night school, teaching people how to write their name?

LG: Those that didn’t know.

TC: They did?

LG: How to count.

TC: So they taught some of them how to write their name?

LG: Write their name.

TC: And how to add and subtract, things like that?

LG: That’s what they did.

TC: I see. Now in terms of the structure of Poplar Grove like the size of the rooms and how the rooms were arranged and so forth, do you remember Mrs. Eison taught fifth and sixth grade in one of them and then the principal he taught in that room adjacent to hers. Do you recall what was between those two rooms?

LG: It was a wall where you roll back and this room was wide open and this room they would roll back that way.

TC: And they called it folding doors.

LG: Yeah.

TC: They were folding doors.

LG: Folding doors.

TC: They’d push half back to one side of the two rooms and the other half of the door back to the other side.

LG: That’s right.

TC: And do you remember what was at the end of one of those rooms?

LG: They called it an office.
TC: There was an elevated area. It was a raised area of the floor.
LG: The stage.
TC: The stage.
VC: Us been up on that stage many a day.
TC: There was a stage, uh-huh.
VC: It was in the principal’s room. (Laughter)
TC: It was in the principal’s room, you’re right, and when I was in that room in the seventh grade Reverend Sanders was my principal.
VC: Well see, he was a (unintelligible) employees, and he was a Thomas, but I don’t know exactly what that boy was named but he was a young man but he was married then. I don’t know what become of him but he taught there for one year I think (unintelligible). I don’t know what that boy’s name.
TC: Now what kinds of activities went on when you would pull those doors back, you know, what kinds of activities during the year?
VC: Well, they always called that auditorium and I remember a couple of times we give entertainments there, different things.
TC: Things like quartets?
VC: Yeah, singers would come and sing. One time we had some kind of program because we had a few, the sixth and seventh grade girls had some kind of activity in there.
TC: Do you remember they used to have Christmas programs, do you remember?
VC: Yeah.
TC: Easter?
VC: Un-huh, they had that.
TC: And at the end of the year?
VC: They had what they called school closing, what did they call it?
TC: School closing.
VC: Uh-huh, school closing entertainment.
TC: Right. I think like when I was there maybe the first and second grade would be one night during the week and then the next you’d have like a third and fourth and maybe fifth and sixth and seventh the last night. So they called those activities school closings, which was around sometime the middle or latter part of May.
VC: May.
TC: That’s true.
VC: Month of May.
TC: Now you know having the auditorium after you fold the doors back, they also referred to schools were referred to as being community schools because the community could use them, like we talked about quartet singing. And then I remember magicians.

VC: Yeah, what kind of magicians they pretend like they were pulling a rabbit out their hat. (Laughter)

TC: Right, all of those kinds of things, yes. It was an interesting experience. Now you know there have been about twelve of those schools what are called Rosenwald schools in Union County and so any school that got money from this man named Julius Rosenwald, any school that got monies from his fund is referred to as being a Rosenwald school. I have information that indicate that there were about twelve Rosenwald schools in Union County through the years, but there aren’t any Rosenwald schools still existing physically now.

LG: That’s right.

TC: Other than there’s a part or a portion of Poplar Grove that is still existing and Robert Gilliam, people usually call him Pap Gilliam, he’s living in that part of it. There were five rooms, as I said. Four of them were torn down and they left this one room, which was my third and fourth grade classroom. Miss Grace Davis was the teacher. That was my teacher.

LG: Now she taught night school.

TC: Did she?

LG: Yes, she did.

TC: Grace Davis taught night school. So of all the twelve Rosenwald schools that originally existed in Union County, they’re all gone except a portion of that one, which is Poplar Grove that is standing today that Mr. Gilliam lives in. Now Miss Laura Whitley, I think you mentioned her earlier.

LG: She had a lot of meetings there. She was a county.

TC: County agent.

LG: Yeah.

TC: She was the black or the Negro county agent.

LG: Right.

TC: And she had activities such as?

LG: We had meetings and get together on what we would have. She was going to take us off on a trip, field trip or something like that, we would have our meetings.

TC: So do you remember one of the field trips that you went on?

LG: Well, I say the last one I attended with her, I didn’t get to go to Denmark, that’s what I’m telling you, down there where Mrs. Bethune built that college down there.

TC: In Mayesville.
LG: In Mayesville. She was from Mayesville. She was at Disney World, a little town, what you call it?

TC: Oh, you mean where she eventually built a college?

LG: A little college.

TC: That was in Florida.

LG: Yeah.

TC: Daytona, Florida.

LG: Daytona.

TC: Daytona, Florida and the name of the school that she helped to establish down there was Cookman College.

LG: That’s right. She established that Cookman College, established that Cookman School at that particular time then she built a little college for people that were smart enough that wanted to go to college. They said it didn’t hold but, there were seventeen seats in that little school.

TC: When it started?

LG: Yeah. And in that little school it was for, people helped her decorate it. It was just a little log cabin.

TC: I see, when she started it. Mrs. Whitley, Laura Whitley, having activities at Poplar Grove and that most likely was in the auditorium I suspect.

LG: Yeah, yeah.

TC: Did she, what kinds of, do you remember something that you did with her that she talked about, activities? Did she talk about canning?

LG: Yeah, she learned us how to can meats and all such stuff as that. You know, people were kind of dedicated on canning the fruits, you know, but they canned vegetables and things like that and meats, even showed us how to can chicken.

TC: Chicken?

LG: Yes sir, I’d can chicken in these glass jars and can your hog meat up and seal it in new jars and new tops and things and seal it and it was just perfect when you took it down.

TC: Did she have a stove? She didn’t cook any of the chicken there, she just talked about it?

LG: She would talk about it and you know they had a kitchen out there. Whenever she was going to show us how to do things like that, they’d open. I guess old man TomGilliam was the man had the key I reckon for the school and the little kitchen. She’d open the kitchen where the stove was and show us how to make different kinds of candy, how to make different kinds of, different kinds of fruit you could make different things out of them.
TC: I see. So they would heat that stove up?

LG: Yeah.

TC: And boil the water and so forth right there?

LG: Everything on that stove.

TC: So it really was a community school.

LG: Yes, it was.

TC: A lot of things went on there.

LG: That’s right.

TC: Well, I have really learned a lot. I attended that school but some of the things you have talked about I did not know that actually went on there, like showing you how to can and so forth. I remember she came when I was in the fifth or sixth grade and maybe the entire auditorium was used, I don’t know, it could have been just Mrs. Kathleen Eison’s room, and I remember she taught us how to make things I think I remember now. Mrs. Eison told us the day before Mrs. Whitley came to ask our mothers for stockings, stockings that you wear to church.

LG: Yeah, silk stockings to make that flower.

TC: Make a flower, yeah, I remember that. That’s one of the things that I remember, the only thing I remember.

LG: Miss Whitley showed y’all.

TC: Oh, she also taught us how to make shade for a light, the one bulb light that often was in the ceiling of the room to go over the light, a lamp shade.

LG: But you remember that. (Laughter)

TC: Yeah. Well, this has really been a great experience. It’s been enjoyable to talk to you and I’ve gotten a lot of information out of it and I’m sure people that might use this as part of research, they will find it interesting like I do. So I really thank you for your time.

LG: I appreciate trying to tell you because now Mae Ruth Jennings kept it in remembrance. I tried to get her. She lost her sister. I haven’t seen her since she came back. Mary Ruth Jennings lives out here in the big house right on the corner, now she knew a lot. I mean she’s old enough she also can remember but she said she didn’t know nothing about that.

TC: Oh yeah? That’s what she told you?

LG: Uh-huh, but you know your niece told you about the lady being in the wheelchair. That’s the way she got around. To get around fast in the house and all like that she had a wheelchair and she might not want you to see her get around in there or something like that. She told Coreen, I don’t know nothing about that.
TC: Now you are aware of some other schools that existed around in Union County too, right, in the Carlisle, Santuck area?
LG: Yeah.
TC: Do you remember the names of some of them?
LG: Well, you see, I went to I don’t know whether it was just Jeter Chapel School. I don’t know what name it was but it was right there at Jeter Chapel Church.
TC: Behind the church?
LG: Right at the church and I don’t know whether they give it that name or.
TC: Or some other name?
LG: Some said they thought it was the Will Tucker School but he didn’t own that land there but he was the next big white man that lived in that community and some said it was named after him, but I don’t know what Jeter Chapel School was named.
TC: Excuse me. Didn’t you also say that there was a school down here on Tinker Creek Road?
LG: Tinker Creek, yeah, Puppy Town.
TC: Puppy Town, that’s what they called it, Puppy Town? That’s an interesting name, Puppy Town.
LG: (Laughter) Puppy Town, yeah.
TC: How many rooms, you remember?
LG: That was a one-room school. That’s what it was.
TC: Any other name of a school that you remember?
LG: Well, I know you heard about Greenbrier School now. The first day I went to school in my life I went to Greenbrier School.
TC: Okay and that’s still in the Santuck area?
LG: Yeah, all that is in Santuck area.
TC: Greenbrier?
LG: Greenbrier.
TC: I see. And how many teachers were there?
LG: Greenbrier was one.
TC: One teacher?
LG: One room, one big old room and they had a big heater on one end of it.
TC: I see. Do you remember the name of any other school?
LG: Now I didn’t go to, you know, but I went going to school there but I went to play ball down there in Tucker Town. It was called Oak Grove and that was called Little Old Grove by Tucker Town. I don’t know what the name it was, you know.
TC: Excuse me. There’s one in Carlisle that’s Oak Grove and then they had another one down there on Tucker Town Road that was called Little Oak Grove?

LG: Little Oak Grove.

TC: I see.

LG: Because the last teacher I know teach down there was my sister-in-law Jeanette. Jeanette taught school down there.

TC: I see. Now excuse me. Now down in Maple, no Red Point.

LG: Yeah. I don’t know what the name of that school.

TC: That’s not far from Carlisle, Santuck area. It was called Red Point.

LG: Red Point?

TC: Red Point School, yeah.

LG: I went there, you know, just on occasion. We down there.

TC: To play ball?

LG: No, it was a picnic, you know, field day.

TC: One last thing, do you remember what used to be called May Day?

LG: Yeah, they would have that too but they don’t have that now.

TC: And what kinds of things did they do at May Day?

LG: I remember they wrapped that pole. (Laughter) You might not know. You’re so young but when we was coming up they’d wrap that pole and let’s see now and they had, look to me like they had a board and they had all the different states or something on that board but I can’t remember where.

TC: I see. You probably had to pick out the name of the states.

LG: And tell.

TC: Something about that state.

LG: Something about that state.

TC: I see. Okay, well again, it’s really been enjoyable.

LG: I enjoyed talking to you too because I love the things you remember come along.

TC: That were still existing, right.

LG: But I remember doing them things.

End of interview