In this oral history interview, Mattie Savage discusses her educational experiences in Union, South Carolina, attending Beaty Bridge Elementary School, a Rosenwald School, walking four miles to school, recess games, raising money to fund an additional month of the teacher's salary, a school field trip to Columbia, South Carolina and touring Allen University. Mattie Savage was born to Margie and Marty Sims in 1922. Tom Crosby interviewed Mattie Savage at her residence in Union, South Carolina, on June 14, 2007. Interview covers Savage's education at Beaty Bridge Elementary School in the early 1930s.
Tom Crosby: Today is June 14, 2007 and I’m at the home of Mrs. Mattie Savage, Mattie (Sims) Savage. We are in the county of Union, South Carolina in the community referred to as Santuck, S-A-N-T-U-C-K, which is about five to six miles from another community in southern Union County known as Carlisle, C-A-R-L-I-S-L-E. I’m at her residence. What is your date of birth please?

Mattie Savage: My date of birth is 1922.

TC: Nineteen twenty-two?

MS: April 9th.

TC: April 9th 1922, okay. Now what’s the name of your parents?

MS: My mother was Margie (unintelligible) Sims. My father Marty Sims.

TC: Marty Sims. Now what was the name of your elementary school?

MS: My elementary school, the name was Beaty Bridge.

TC: The name was Beaty Bridge. Now were you the only person in your particular class or did they have other persons in your that class.

MS: We had lots of children in the same classroom.

TC: There was one teacher?

MS: One teacher.

TC: And how many rooms were in that school?

MS: Just one room for teaching and another small room was a cloak room and also had a stage.

TC: In one of the rooms?

MS: In the (unintelligible) room. (unintelligible).

TC: Right. Now did you have a lunchroom?

MS: No, we didn’t.

TC: Did you have food at the school or did you have to take the food from home.

MS: After so long people would bring food and another lady, cooked at her house.
TC: So there was a house not too far away?
MS: Not too far from the school.
TC: And the lady cooked the food there at her house?
MS: At her house.
TC: And somebody would go get it?
MS: Yes.
TC: I see. Now you most likely got water from that house too or did they have a well?
MS: The school didn’t have a well.
TC: The children would go get the water?
MS: Get the water, yeah. And also if the parents didn’t bring the wood we would also go get the wood for the heater (unintelligible).
TC: So mostly the boys went and got the wood or sometimes the girls and boys?
MS: Sometimes the girls and boys.
TC: When you got to school was the heater already working, did you already have heat or sometimes, depends?
MS: Depends because sometimes we had to start the fire. It was cold a lot of times and we did have heat.
TC: I see. So sometimes the children would start the fire or the teacher, or most of the time you got there?
MS: Well, the teacher would be there when the children would get there.
TC: The fire wouldn’t burn too well sometimes?
MS: That’s right, wouldn’t start too well sometimes.
TC: Do you remember what they called the wood that started the fire?
MS: It was dry wood.
TC: Dry wood and the type of wood that started the fire?
MS: Fat lighting.
TC: Fat lighting. And often times they would shorten it and just say lighter.
MS: Yeah, lighter.
TC: Yeah, but really it was the same light wood, l-i-g-h-t-w-o-o-d. And then sometimes they would call it fat lighting?
MS: Yeah, it comes from the pines.
TC: Yeah, old pine trees.
MS: Old pines.
TC: That had rotted. I think it was the center or the heart of the tree or the log.
MS: Yeah.

TC: Did they also use cedar or just pine all the time? I see. Okay, now you had were some other persons at your grade level like when you were in the first grade or third grade let’s say; were you the only person in the third grade or did you have some other persons?

MS: We had some others. The first grade book was Baby Ray.

TC: The name of the book was Baby Ray?

MS: Baby Ray, yeah, but it’d have two sections. First grade then like pre-primer and then half way through a little higher but still in first grade but in the same book, and later on the children had better books.

TC: Was it Dick and Jane?

MS: Dick and Jane.

TC: But at one point you remember they had a thicker book?

MS: Thicker book when I was there.

TC: And a number of the pages were missing.

MS: (unintelligible).

TC: And I guess that was people in the first grade?

MS: First just started school about seven years old. We walked to school. We had to walk about four miles.

TC: And you say that often times when the students started to school they were about seven rather than six?

MS: They were seven and sometimes eight.

TC: I haven’t thought about that.

MS: Yeah.

TC: And I suspect sometimes the parents may have forgotten, not necessarily had forgotten the birthday but realized that school had already started or something like that sometimes and the kids might be a little late actually starting school when they were seven, may have been a little more than seven.

MS: Most of the time about seven years old.

TC: But most of the time.

MS: Most of the time about seven years old.

TC: And you walked about four miles each way?

MS: Each way.

TC: And did you leave home pretty early?

MS: We had a path cut through.

TC: Through the woods?
MS: Uh-huh.

TC: I see. Now how many teachers were at your school?
MS: Just one.

TC: Just one.
MS: And she taught seven grades.

TC: First through the seventh grade?
MS: Uh-huh.

TC: So about how long would she let’s say be involved in teaching a particular grade? Like she would teach the first grade for a while and then she would teach the second grade?
MS: She did all that.

TC: In one day?
MS: We didn’t have a lot of books like children’s got now.

TC: So do you think that she would spend like maybe ten or fifteen minutes with one grade and then maybe move to another grade?
MS: Yes and we had now when I got to second grade I had reading, spelling, and arithmetic.

TC: Those were the subjects that she taught?
MS: That’s right.

TC: Do you remember the names of any of the other books that you studied in school?
MS: The third grade she taught English.

TC: Third grade you had English?
MS: Uh-huh. In fourth grade we had.

TC: Geography or history or social studies?
MS: Yeah. We had English, geography in the afternoon. We’d have a session in the morning before recess and then we’d have a, we’d have two sessions in the morning.

TC: I see. So you had two times of teaching you’re talking about in the morning and then she’d come back to that same group of people two times in the afternoon?
MS: Yeah.

TC: I see. So when she had finished with your group let’s say and moved to another group, what did you do during the time she was working with another group?
MS: We had to study.

TC: You had to be studying something?
MS: You had to be quiet.

TC: You had to be quiet?
MS: You had to be quiet or get a whipping.
(Laughter)

TC: Or she would beat you?
MS: Oh, yeah, she had a switch.
TC: A switch?
MS: She’d switch you. You had to be quiet and didn’t make noise like I see children do now. You’d have to be quiet.
TC: And I guess she’d give you something to be studying.
MS: Yeah.
TC: I don’t guess you remember anything right now in particular that you may have been doing? I guess you probably would be doing some math problems let’s say when she was working with another group and then maybe sometimes you’d be studying words.
MS: Like English sometimes you had to make a sentence.
TC: With the words?
MS: With the words.
TC: Yeah, I remember that.
MS: Yeah, we had to make correct sentences.
TC: I remember something like this with I was in the fifth or sixth grade. Mrs. Kathleen Eison was my fifth and sixth grade teacher and I remember the word artificial. Yeah, I remember the word artificial and she had some flowers on her desk and they were I guess they were something like silk; they weren’t real flowers. And I remember making a sentence about “those are artificial flowers”.
MS: I remember we had to spell some words. I couldn’t spell umbrella and chimney. I was in third grade and I couldn’t spell umbrella and chimney. I couldn’t get them words together for nothing in the world. I got a whipping and I bet you I learned it after I got that whipping.
TC: She gave you a whipping because you couldn’t?
MS: Yes and you had to learn it.
TC: But she actually gave you some licks because you couldn’t spell those words?
MS: Yes.
TC: That’s amazing.
MS: Somebody said put it up under your pillow.
TC: Put it under your pillow? The pillow didn’t help?
(Laughter)
MS: I believe it did. Put it under your pillow and look at it sometimes.
TC: Now you always studied those words at home. Do you think because you studied those words at home, do you think that the fear of getting a whipping helped you to really pay attention and study those words?

MS: (unintelligible).

TC: I see. Now do you remember any little games that you may have played in school?

MS: We didn’t have any games like. We had ballgames.

TC: Baseball games?

MS: Baseball games.

TC: When you had recess you played baseball and how about jumping the rope? You know what I’m talking about?

MS: Yeah.

TC: You didn’t do much of that?

MS: Much of that, no.

TC: Rope jumping. How about, I’m trying to recall, I think mostly boys played marbles.

MS: Used to play marbles and jumping jacks.

TC: Jumping jacks.

MS: Jumping jacks, yeah, and jumping rope with the smaller children.

TC: I’m asking any of the grade levels, things that you did, not necessarily just first and second grade but all of them. Someone was telling me about drawing something like squares on the ground.

MS: Yeah, jumping jacks.

TC: But I think, that also could have been another game but I think also drawing the squares and you move from one square to another. Wasn’t there a game where you jump on one foot?

MS: Yeah, hopscotch.

TC: That’s what hopscotch is?

MS: Yeah, that’s what you call hopscotch.

TC: You jump on one foot, right, and you hold a foot?

MS: Yeah, and if you get touched you’re out.

TC: Oh, really, if one foot touches the other?

MS: Yeah.

TC: The other foot you’re out? That’s what they call hopscotch?

MS: Yeah.

TC: I think I remember hearing. I don’t remember doing that myself.
MS:  Yeah, I remember that and then we had a ring of students, a saucer.

TC:  Sitting in a ring, circle?

MS:  Yeah, circle, one would get inside the circle.

TC:  And do what?

MS:  And inside (unintelligible) we were trying to (unintelligible). Then the one (unintelligible) then they’re put in there.

TC:  Oh, in the saucer?

MS:  In the saucer.

TC:  I see. So was that girls?

MS:  Girls and boys.

TC:  Girls and boys? Little Sallie Walker was sitting in a saucer? What’s the other part now?

MS:  Little Sallie Walker was sitting in the saucer crying to some young man.

TC:  That must have been the older fifth and sixth grade people. Okay, now I’ve heard about the cake walk.

MS:  That’s when we’d have a program. Like you would have a program and have something like a party. We’d have a cake walk and sell hot dogs and things like that. That’s when we would raise money for to build our steps. The school steps had wooden steps.

TC:  They had rotted?

MS:  They had rotted and they had (unintelligible) and we decided to have a little party and sell hot dogs and have a cake walk. Somebody made a cake and you’d walk around in a circle. Whoever had a hand on the stick.

TC:  Won the cake?

MS:  Won the cake. When it hit if you got your hand on that stick you won.

TC:  I see. Now this cake walk was that during the day when you were selling your hot dogs and so forth, during the day or was hat at night?

MS:  It was at night.

TC:  The cake walk was at night? Your school didn’t have electricity?

MS:  No.

TC:  So what did they….?

MS:  Lamps.

TC:  Lamps?

MS:  Yeah, we’d bring lights and lamps and things.

TC:  From home?

MS:  From home, yeah.
TC: So about how many lamps, these were kerosene lamps?
MS: Yeah.
TC: How many kerosene lamps do you think you had?
MS: I don’t know.
TC: You can’t remember?
MS: I don’t remember now.
TC: But they would ask children to bring them?
MS: Bring them, yeah, bring the lamps from home.
TC: I see.
MS: It wouldn’t be, you know, late.
TC: So it would not be too dark?
MS: Too dark, yeah.
TC: I see so when it got to be quite dark at night the program would be over?
MS: When it was real dark.
TC: Yeah, I guess the reason for that, the people would need some light to see how to walk back home?
MS: They had a light with them.
TC: I said they needed it to be somewhat light, not very dark.
MS: Yeah, not very dark, that’s right, that’s right.
TC: The parents came pretty good and other people in the community?
MS: Yeah and we also had pin the tail on the donkey. Do you remember?
TC: I remember that and you would be blindfolded, right?
MS: Blindfolded.
TC: And you’d be given something like a piece of cloth or a string or something like that and they would put you in the general area of where the donkey was on the wall I guess, had been drawn on the wall or something like that and you are to try to place it on the tail of the donkey, in the spot where the tail is supposed to be on the donkey. And that’s called pinning the tail on the donkey?
MS: Yeah. We had a lot of fun. We didn’t have no music but we had fun.
TC: You didn’t have a piano?
MS: No, after we got up in higher grades the lady that I told you didn’t live far from school. She had an organ at her house.
TC: This was a black lady?
MS: Yes and she used to bring it down for our concert. She would play the organ.
TC: Now you sure it’s an organ, a pretty large instrument?
MS: Yes, she’d put it on a wagon and bring it. I see.
TC: *(unintelligible)* would bring it?
MS: Yes.
TC: What was the name of that lady? Do you remember?
MS: Yeah, she was Louise Tucker.
MS: She would bring her parents *(unintelligible)* Nancy Tucker and she was one of the oldest girls, I guess, had gone to that school.
TC: But she could play the organ?
MS: She could play the organ.
TC: Now how many different teachers did you have when you were at Beaty Bridge School? You had more than one, right?
MS: Yes, I had.
TC: Do you remember their names?
MS: First grade I had Reverend, the first teacher I went to, Flonnie Gleen *(sounds like)*.
TC: Flonnie Gleen, first grade?
MS: The next grade *(unintelligible)*. The next year I went I think the first grade was Reverend Martin. Then I got to the second grade. Second grade they changed and that was Gamble.
TC: Gamble?
MS: Things changed.
TC: I see. So you remember two or three different teachers?
MS: Yeah.
TC: I read an article about Beaty Bridge and it indicated that, I’ve forgotten the name of the teacher but she had taken the students up to Asheville as a trip. I’ve forgotten her name.
MS: She was named Mary Lee. I think she had married. She first was Mary Lee Robinson.
TC: That’s right, the name was Robinson.
MS: Her first name was Brooks and she married a Robinson.
TC: So you remember that?
MS: Yeah. I remember Miss Brooks.
TC: So you went on the trip up to Asheville?
MS: No, *(unintelligible)*. And also *(unintelligible)*.
TC: What places did you see in Columbia?
MS: We went to Allen University.
TC: Benedict?
MS: I can’t think Benedict but I know about Allen.
TC: Did you go to let’s say the State House?
MS: Yeah.
TC: You went inside? Did you go inside?
MS: Another place I don’t remember.
TC: It’s been some time, yeah.
MS: But I remember them places because that was her home from Columbia.
TC: Yeah. What comments do you say with reference to the teachers that you had? In general how would you describe them at Beaty Bridge?
MS: We had good teachers. We had men and women. One was Miss (unintelligible). She was down (unintelligible).
TC: Now you had to behave.
MS: Oh, yes, (unintelligible). You better be quiet.
TC: You had to behave but at the same time I’m pretty sure or would you say they really cared about the kids?
MS: Oh, yes. All of them they showed the children love.
TC: Yeah and they often were in contact with the parents pretty much too, weren’t they, and that parents came to the school to see how the children are doing and they came to the programs and things of that nature, yeah.
MS: I didn’t tell you about we also raised twenty-five dollars and paid another month at our school. They paid the teachers twenty-five or (unintelligible) dollars. Anyway I believe it was fifty dollars and so with that twenty-five and so we had started another month of school because there wasn’t but three months.
TC: So by raising that twenty-five dollars you got a total of four months?
MS: Yeah.
TC: Rather than three?
MS: Three months instead of two.
TC: And that was because you raised additional money?
MS: Yeah.
TC: You raised twenty-five dollars?
MS: That was for Miss Robinson.
TC: I see. What kinds of things you did to raise that money?
MS: We sold candy. Preachers come by selling candy and sent a box of candy.
TC: That you sold to your parents and your friends and people in the communities?
MS: Yeah.
TC: Now jibbity pots, now what were they? That was a food, you put things together like what?
MS: From the hog.
TC: From the hog?
MS: Yeah, they called it the jibbity pot.
TC: And what parts of the hog you would put to make the jibbity pot, do you remember?
MS: Head, feet, ears and all the meat.
TC: Kidneys?
MS: Yeah, all like that, (unintelligible).
TC: I see and in this particular incident you say you remember they went to the packing house and that’s a place where cows and hogs are killed and you get the parts that you mentioned here. And I guess that the families when they killed the hogs they also made the jibbity pot too?
MS: No, they made sausage and (unintelligible) meat.
TC: But that was for the home but not for the school?
MS: That’s right.
TC: Okay. Well, you have told me a lot of interesting things that I never knew about, some of them I did. And at this point we’ll conclude by my asking you do you have any additional comments you’d like to make or things that you may have forgotten to mention since we have been talking here?
MS: I just know that we had some good teachers at that time. (unintelligible) and taught from first to seventh grade. That’s all how far I went to seventh. And like I said, I’m eighty-five years old and can write my name and so forth after I left, but now (unintelligible).
TC: And be able to write your name and write whatever you wish to write. It all goes back to Beaty, Beaty Bridge.
MS: Beaty Bridge.
TC: Yeah.
MS: And that’s all the school I had.
TC: And I know the amount of money that the Rosenwald Fund, I have seen should I say, the amount of money that the Rosenwald Fund gave to help build Beaty Bridge but I don’t recall exactly now how much it was. And the black people had to provide some money and I don’t recall and the whites provided some money too. That was part of the requirement to help build those schools. Well, if you don’t have any additional comments to make, there is one more that I would like to mention and that pertains to, you know, our parents, your parents, my parents. I’m sure they wanted you to go to school as far as you could and to do as well as you could in school too. So they had great desires for us.
MS: We didn’t have too many books like children now. I guess we would have learned more if we’d had more books.

TC: That’s true and also if you had more time in school, going to school.

MS: That’s right.

TC: Because some of those schools only went maybe two to three months out of the year, had to go to the field and work. So time would be, your teaching, learning process was interrupted because you had to stop school.

MS: I’ll tell you this. (sounds like: knocked) cotton stalks, get up real early and (unintelligible) cotton stalks, you know, the sticks, cotton stalks in time to go to school. We didn’t have much time to get to school because we had to run to try to make it to school on time and it took in at nine o’clock. It took in at nine o’clock.

TC: School started at nine?

MS: It started at nine. And older boys started fires.

TC: So you actually had to work before going to school?

MS: Before going to school and then come home from school.

TC: More work?

MS: More work and then get your lessons.

TC: And at home, you didn’t have electricity, did you?

MS: No.

TC: So you had to try and study before it got too dark or if you did study, you couldn’t see too well because you were using those kerosene lamps, yeah.

MS: I was married before we got.

TC: Electricity?

MS: Uh-huh.

TC: Yeah. Life hasn’t been easy for us and just think what it was like for our grandparents and great grandparents. So we’re blessed to have gotten what we have gotten. Again, thank you very much. I appreciate your time.

End of interview