In this oral history interview, Joseph Brown discusses his educational experiences in Anderson County, South Carolina. Brown attended Oak Grove Elementary, Anderson County Training School, and Allen University, where he majored in elementary and physical education. Brown taught elementary school at Reeder Point School before becoming principal at Hopkins Elementary (Richland County, South Carolina) and I.E. Johnson High School (Laurinburg, North Carolina). Joseph Brown was born on May 24, 1933, in Pendleton, South Carolina. A state representative, Brown has been the longest-serving African American legislator in the state since Reconstruction. Tom Crosby interviewed Joseph Brown at the House of Prayer in Columbia, South Carolina, on March 20, 2007. Interview covers Brown's education at the Oak Grove (grades 1-3 in the town of Williamston, S.C.) and Pendleton Elementary Schools (grades 4-8 in Pendleton, S.C.) in the early 1940s and at Anderson County Training School from 1948 to 1952.
Tom Crosby Oral History Collection

Joseph Brown Oral History Interview

Interviewee: Joseph Brown  CROS# 017
Interviewer: Dr. Tom Crosby  December 3, 2007

Tom Crosby: Today is December 3, 2007 and I’m in the presence of Senator, excuse me, Representative Joseph Brown and we are in Columbia, South Carolina at the residence of the House of Prayer. So Representative Brown, where were you born?

Joseph Brown: I was born in Pendleton, South Carolina in Anderson County.

TC: And your date of birth, sir?

JB: Date of birth is May 24, 1933.

TC: Now what was your elementary school?

JB: My elementary school was Oak Grove, O-A-K, Oak Grove Elementary School where I attended for the first three years and then I later moved to Pendleton Elementary School, which was on the campus of Anderson County Training School. And I finished my elementary school there in Pendleton at Anderson County Training School.

TC: I see. Now Oak Grove, do you know whether or not it was a Rosenwald School?

JB: No, I don’t know. It was a little one-room school building that had four or five grades in it and was out in the rural community of Pendleton, but it only went through about third grade. And so living pretty close to the elementary school I attended there my first three years. We didn’t have kindergarten or preschool or nothing like that at that particular time. Then I finished third grade I went on over to Pendleton Elementary School, which is on Anderson County Training High School Campus.

TC: I see so do you know why Oak Grove went only through the third grade?

JB: It was one of those early building schools that was built out in the rural community and it just didn’t go any further.

TC: I see and it was one room?
JB: It was one room.

TC: And the teacher taught all the grades?

JB: The teacher taught three grades.

TC: And it was a one-room teacher?

JB: It was a one-room building.

TC: One teacher?

JB: Just one teacher there that taught three grades, you know, just a one-room building.

TC: Now how was it heated?

JB: It was heated by a big old Joe stove and we would go out and get logs to put in and coal to put in the heater.

TC: Excuse me, did you say Joe stove?

JB: We used to.

TC: You said it was heated by a big Joe?

JB: Yeah, a big old stove, big stove we called big Joe back then.

TC: Oh, yeah? Was that J-O-E?

JB: J-O-E.

TC: I never heard that expression.

JB: Well, that’s what we called that big old stove setting out in the middle of the floor, to heat it and, of course, the students went out and got wood and all for the heater. I’m not sure who started the fire in the morning but I know we went out during the day and picked up wood.

TC: Really? I guess mostly the boys gathered the wood?

JB: Mostly the boys gathered the wood, right. In fact, I was out in New Orleans in 1964 and they still had some old stoves out there in the classrooms just like the old stoves that I attended back in the ‘40s.
TC: Really? Now do you remember some of the games that were played?

JB: Well, I remember some of the games that were played during my high school years. During my elementary school years I don’t remember it because we had no contact with none of the games at all.

TC: Maybe like at recess time maybe they played baseball.

JB: Well, yes, we had short recesses and they used to have some baseball games out there at that particular time but not a whole lot because it was a small school and when I moved over to Pendleton they hosted a lot of different activities going on during the daytime, during the lunch hour such as softball and basketball, outdoor basketball court, and we used to have many games playing on an outdoor dirt court.

TC: Now in Pendleton that’s where you had Anderson County Training School?

JB: That’s where Anderson County Training School is located or was located.

TC: And it went from fourth through the?

JB: Fourth through the eleventh grade up until the late ‘40s and then they added the twelfth grade on and then it went fourth through twelfth and I graduated in 1952. I graduated at twelfth grade level.

TC: I see.

JB: Before that time all of the schools in the state of South Carolina only had eleventh grades.

TC: Right. Now if we may go back to Oak Grove for a moment, do you recall any kind of teaching strategies that the teachers used in the class with the students?

JB: No, in fact, I don’t recall any strategies they used, I just know that the teacher would teach one section for a while and give them study time and then she’d go to the next grade level, teach that grade level, and she tried to really teach all the basic subjects. On certain days of the week she taught English, certain days she taught math, and subjects like that but nothing accelerated or advanced programs that we dreamed of back in that time.

TC: But she really emphasized the basics?

JB: She emphasized the basics. That was really it and that was about what we got was basics.
TC: Yeah. Did she sometimes use other students in a particular grade to assist the students in that particular grade?

JB: Not to my knowledge.

TC: Maybe some students in third grade may have helped first or second grade, anything like that?
JB: Not to my knowledge. There was no tutoring of students at all at that particular time. I do not remember any tutoring going on by students at all.

TC: How would you describe her caring for the students?

JB: I would say that she was extraordinary, that she really was concerned about the growth and the progress of the students. I thought she worked extra hard to prepare for the students and I thought it was a great learning environment taking place under her administration and under her supervision. I thought that we all advanced very, very well and I thought that we were not up on grade level but back in those days I thought we were considered to be average to above average.

TC: I see. When you say that you were not on grade level, what do you mean by that?

JB: Well, what I mean is that back in that particular time, today we have different scores, different tests and all to determine the grade level of students and such. Back then we did not have any tests. The teacher made up tests but no real standardized tests to use in order to determine the grade level or progress for the students.

TC: The teacher determined that?

JB: The teacher determined that.

TC: I see. But she was teacher and principal I guess?

JB: Yes, she was teacher and principal and everything else. Nobody else had any authority or jurisdiction over this particular teacher at all.

TC: Was there any food or you had to bring food from home or sometimes maybe apples or oranges or things like that were available?

JB: We used to be on the Red Cross approved program. Certain days we had apples and certain days we had bananas and just basically fruit kind of food. We didn’t have a dining room or any cooking facilities there in this one little building but we did have food delivered to the school, not any wholesome food or any full meals or things like that. It was just some cold food that was delivered.

TC: Now this cold food consisted primarily of fruit?
**JB:** Fruit, it was later on before we got any peanut butter or cookies or all this kind of stuff. But during this particular time the only thing we had was maybe a box of apples delivered to the school.

**TC:** And you think that was provided by the American Red Cross?

**JB:** I’m not certain for sure who it was provided by. They brought it. It could have been provided by the superintendent’s office. I don’t know.

**TC:** But the American Red Cross brought it to school?

**JB:** No, I’m not sure whether the American Red Cross brought anything at all to the school to my knowledge but I just thought it was provided by somebody like that. It could have been out of the school district office or the food service division or something of that particular nature. I didn’t know anything about a superintendent of school at that particular time, didn’t know anything at all about it. They could have had an office uptown. I’m sure the teacher had to be reporting to somebody somewhere but I was not knowledgeable of that. When you’re on a second or third grade level you didn’t have any interest.

**TC:** At that time.

**JB:** At that time.

**TC:** Now when you go to Pendleton, Anderson County Training School.

**JB:** That’s Pendleton.

**TC:** Pendleton?

**JB:** Pendleton, South Carolina, right.

**TC:** P-E-N-D-L-E-T-O-N?

**JB:** That’s correct, Pendleton.

**TC:** Okay now how would you describe the kinds of experiences that you had at Pendleton, Anderson County Training School?

**JB:** When I first started to Anderson County Training School.

**TC:** Excuse me, and remember that it started, had grades rather, four through eleven and then eventually twelve.
JB: That’s true. I started and I had to walk to school. I would walk about four miles to school everyday. Yes, we had a team that walked, came by in the morning, my cousin would pick us all up and we walked all the way to school and walked all the way back home. That’s what we did. And, of course, at that particular school we did have a lunchroom as such. I remember eating lunch and I remember participating in activities at school and we had more of a school program than what we had at Oak Grove.

TC: Now was this a brick building or wood building?

JB: It was a wood structure, a wood structure, all wood, you know, including the shop building and everything else. It was all wood. The library was a log cabin library, a small library but it was made of a log cabin.

TC: How did that come about, do you know, why was the log cabin there, or you’re not sure?

JB: I’m not sure. It was there when I went there and it’s still there today.

TC: It’s still there today?

JB: Yes, they demolished all the other buildings on the campus but they left that historical log cabin there intact and they left the old agricultural shop building intact. Those are the only two buildings on that particular campus right now. Now it’s being used as a community center, however, the log cabin is in very dire need of renovation and all. When I was president of the alumni association, national alumni association of ACTS then, of course, I had committees I appointed.

TC: ACTS is Anderson County Training School?

JB: That’s correct and, of course, I appointed some different people to serve on the building committee to restructure that library. It was a very small log cabin library. I mean the whole library itself was no more than maybe twenty by ten or twenty feet by fifteen.

TC: In my reading I have come across information about log cabin libraries and there was a guy who gave money to establish libraries for black schools. I think he was from Edgefield County I think. I’ll have to look at that again.

JB: Look at that again.

TC: That log cabin that you’re talking about could have been one of those libraries that he established.
JB: It could have easily been one because it was the only log cabin building on the campus. In the fourth grade through the twelfth grade there must have been about five hundred students or four hundred students.

TC: I’ll see if I can Xerox some material for you about that. Now you said the shop building is still there?

JB: The shop building is still there.

TC: And it’s being used for?

JB: For a community center, right. The school district simply gave that building to the community to use for community purposes. It was the best looking building left there after they tore the school down, one of the last buildings that was built on that campus.

TC: I see. Do you have to pay taxes or not, do you know, on that property?

JB: Do we have to pay taxes? No, wouldn’t pay any taxes because it’s a community center building now and its tax exempt and with the school there it was tax exempt and so therefore would not be eligible like all the schools in Richland County and the state of South Carolina. They are all tax exempt at this particular time.

TC: So that property belongs, do you have a foundation for that property?

JB: Yes, we have a Pendleton Community Center, Inc.

TC: Okay, so in terms of the teachers at Anderson County Training School, how would you describe the teaching that went on at that school?

JB: Well, the teaching that went on at that school I would describe would be very, very good. In fact, my fifth grade teacher was extremely mean I thought and wouldn’t give you a chance to even breathe. My sixth grade teacher was very strict as well and my seventh grade teacher was strict. I mean they were much stricter then than they are today in school. My eighth and my ninth grade teachers were good teachers. In fact, I had a crop of real good teachers throughout my high school and elementary school career. I never had, to my knowledge, any real weak teachers. They were all very, very well prepared and well trained and very, very knowledgeable and could handle the curriculum and held the academics very, very well. I respect the education that I received from them. I came out an honors student really. I thought it was very, very good. However, we had limited amount of subjects in the school. Just like say in mathematics we only had general math and had algebra. That’s all that we really had. As far as geometry, trigonometry and calculus and subjects like that, I didn’t know anything at all about those until after I came to college and when I worked in the public schools in Richland County before I even came in contact with any calculus and trig and stuff like that. Didn’t know what it was when I was in high school so we were just taught basically the basic subjects.
For all the schools it was very hard for you to have a very broad curriculum because you didn’t have the staff and didn’t have the students. You didn’t have five or six different sections of English or math or science or social studies. All the grades just pretty well had just one section.

**TC:** Well, I’m sure you probably had general science.

**JB:** We had general science and we had social studies. We had science and we had mathematics.

**TC:** You didn’t have a course that was labeled biology?

**JB:** I don’t recall a course being labeled as biology. I don’t recall. However, we should have because we had French I and French II so I would certainly think. I’m just a little bit absentminded right now.

**TC:** And maybe not everybody took biology or chemistry.

**JB:** No, no, they did not in fact, a few people but the whole thing about it I don’t remember even having a lab for biology or science or chemistry or physics lab at all in the school. The school itself did not have, the high school only had one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, seven rooms in it, the whole high school, classrooms that is and, of course, had a shop building, did not have a gymnasium. You know, didn’t have any of those extracurricular, did have an auditorium, a place to have chapel, that’s all.

**TC:** Now you had a basketball team?

**JB:** We had a basketball team and the basketball team played on an outdoor court, is what we had.

**TC:** I just found that out about my first high school. There were two buildings at my high school, Sims, but when I got in high school they were not playing outdoors. I just started this work last summer and I interviewed someone and that’s when I found out that back in the ‘20s I guess, or early ‘30s, they played outdoors.

**JB:** Well, we played outdoors up until 1953. I graduated in ’52 and we played outdoors. They built a new school, which is Riverside School with a gymnasium in 1954 and moved in it in ’55.

**TC:** Okay, so the first black high school in Anderson County was the Anderson County Training School?

**JB:** No, that wasn’t the first black high school in Anderson County because see Hillman was in Anderson County. However, Anderson is a large place. They had Reed Street High School and Reed Street High School used to enter games with Sims High School.
Sims came to Reed Street in 1949. Sims came in and beat Reed Street in 1949. They had to declare the streets that evening because of the danger for anyone to be walking the streets and all.

TC: Really? Because they lost that game?

JB: Because they lost that game. See Anderson was not a losing school. Reed Street was not a losing school and it was a school in Anderson, South Carolina.

TC: If you are not aware, Sims High, by the way, was my high school in Union, South Carolina and it started a winning streak in 1946.

JB: Right.

TC: And that winning streak did not end until 1954. Carver High School beat them and so 1949, of course, was during that time period.

JB: Winning streak and they came in there and lost the game and, of course, Reed Street the name of the high school in Anderson had not lost a game and they played Sims and Sims won the game that night.

TC: Do you know how many years they had not lost a game, Reed Street that is?

JB: Reed Street had a winning record of about ten or twelve games. But that was the first high school in Anderson. Pendleton is fourteen miles west of Anderson and, of course, it happened to be in Anderson County. But the real Anderson where you had Anderson and you had (unintelligible), in Anderson County, other (unintelligible) they had schools.

TC: They built a new school that replaced Anderson County Training School.

JB: That’s correct.

TC: And this new school was in nineteen fifty what?

JB: Four.

TC: Fifty-four, they named it?

JB: Riverside High School.

TC: Okay, that’s interesting that they gave it a new name.

JB: They gave it a new name completely. I don’t know yet today why they dropped Anderson County. I don’t know why yet they named it Riverside. I don’t know whether
they named it after some great educational leader that had been in Anderson County Training School and had been an outstanding leader in Tillman, South Carolina. I don’t know why it was named Riverside. I haven’t yet found out why they named that school Riverside High School.

**TC:** It could be because many of the black high schools were referred to as being training schools, had the name training associated, had the word training associated with the school. That originated in the early ‘20s I think it was because they needed teachers, black teachers badly and they started building black high schools and I think the objective was to also to have I guess one or two courses, I have to do more research on this, to send the people out to teach after they finished high school because a number of persons did teach after high school I understand.

**JB:** A number of persons did teach after high school. However, at my particular high school, Anderson County Training School, everybody there had a degree as far as I was concerned. Everybody because we even took on student teachers from Allen and Benedict College that were seniors at the college and came out in the field to do their practice work and, of course, they have to come under a certified teacher in order to do their practice work. So I would certainly think right now, I could be absolutely wrong, but I would think all the teachers from about 1944 would have finished college when I went to school there.

**TC:** Okay and you’re referring to Anderson County Training School?

**JB:** Anderson County Training School, yes. Forty-four would have given me about eight or nine years in the school because the first three years I was at Oak Grove School.

**TC:** Right. Now so did you play sports at Riverside?

**JB:** I did. No, I played sports at Anderson County Training School. See I graduated from Anderson County Training School two years before they built Riverside.

**TC:** I see.

**JB:** Played on a dirt court, basketball and I played football and, of course, we were so good until we got to play in 1951 in Clemson stadium. At that particular time Clemson had just a bowl, had no seats above the ground, and we were in a playoff and the playoff game was done at Clemson University, which was Clemson College at that time.

**TC:** What was the name of your opponent’s school?
JB: I don’t remember the name of the opponent’s school. I don’t remember the name of the opponent’s school but they had all the little towns around there had schools. Like Seneca at Blue Ridge High School and Easley had a school and Liberty had Liberty Red Devils and all around like that. Anderson had Reed Street at that particular time but they had just built when that happened West Side School, (unintelligible) and they dropped the name of Reed School when they built West Side and it went to West Side High School. And later on they built a new West Side High School out on West Side Road but for some reason it has never carried any outstanding educators except before it was named Reed that was named after an outstanding citizen in Anderson. But they moved to West Side and they changed the name to West Side and its still West Side today.

TC: So Reed was a black person?

JB: Reed was a black person, right.

TC: Okay, so after finishing Anderson County Training School then you came to, went to college?

JB: I came to Allen University.

TC: And what was your major there?

JB: My major at that particular time was physics and physical education. However, after being there for about two and a half years Mr. Paul [R.] Webber was out on the bench one day, his name was Paul Webber, Mr. Webber, I think that’s his first name, taught at Allen University and he saw me coming up the walkway and he called me over and he said Brown, says come here. So I went over there and sat down with him and he said in your particular area we have people around here looking for jobs everyday because there were such few jobs in the high schools that were open it was really hard to get a job. He said I would change my major to elementary education and physical education. So I changed my major to elementary education and I’m glad Mr. Webber did what he did because once I finished college I never was out of a job at all, period.

TC: Now in Eastover there was a school named Webber High School.

JB: Webber High School, Webber Elementary School.

TC: Was it named after him or not?

JB: No, this was after Dr. Paul Webber down at South Carolina State University, was named after the Webber family down there at Eastover.
TC: So at Allen you majored in elementary education?

JB: And physical education.

TC: I see. Now how would you describe your experiences at Allen in terms of preparing you for the future?

JB: Allen University is a real good school. They prepared me I think to meet the challenge, even though I worked as a fulltime employee. I went out and I worked everyday during the lunch hour and I went back in the afternoon and I worked about five o’clock in the afternoon up until around midnight and I still came out with a good education from Allen University.

TC: May I interrupt you? When you came to Allen as a student, had you been in the service?

JB: No, I came on a football scholarship really and, of course, I met with Coach Lawson and Coach Lawson talked to me about it and everything was fine. Just as I was going out I realized the fact that I did not have any support. (unintelligible) football (unintelligible) and with me being a farmer’s boy (unintelligible) and not having any wealthy (unintelligible) then I realized I didn’t have anything. So what I did I stayed out for a couple of days and I went to work, went to work at the Elk’s Club.

TC: So you were only eighteen or nineteen then?

JB: That’s exactly true. I was just turning eighteen. I went to work and I worked everyday and every night while I was in school and I slept a good bit of time in class. I slept a good bit of class time in class but I could still sleep in class and still pass the examinations along with other top level students and nobody could understand.

TC: So the teacher understood, several of them at least?

JB: Well, several of them understood but at the same time I had a way of sleeping they didn’t know I was asleep.

TC: What do you mean?

JB: I would kind of sit up straight and sleep and I had these girlfriends in there to help with my lessons and all this kind of stuff.

TC: Would your eyes be closed or you don’t recall?
JB: My eyes would be closed because the girls knew I was sleeping and they’ll be touching me and touching me. The teachers never did point me out in class.

TC: I can visualize really sleeping and your eyes not necessarily closed.

JB: But I was asleep because I’d be so (unintelligible) out really because I don’t know what the class, but what I did then I started (unintelligible) the ball, you know, football scholarship (unintelligible) full scholarship because you know I started doing that early morning and then I’d go to class and I’d stay in class till about eleven thirty or eleven o’clock and then I’d go to the Elk’s Club and I’d serve the lunch meal and leave there at two o’clock for a two thirty class and come back and go to class at two till five. And then I’d leave there and go right back to the Elk’s Club and work at night. I did that the whole four years I was in college.

TC: That Elk’s Club is on Hampton?

JB: On Hampton Street.

TC: You only had about two or three blocks to walk.

JB: I had about four blocks.

TC: Four.

JB: Four good blocks.

TC: So they were very cooperative in letting you off for your schedule you might say? They worked around your schedule?

JB: Well, you mean the Elk’s Club?

TC: The Elk’s Club.

JB: No, no, they didn’t work around my schedule. I just kind of got my schedule arranged so that I could work because I knew I would have to be there the lunch hour and I knew I had to be there for the dinner hour and so therefore I arranged to take my classes between eight o’clock and eleven o’clock. I arranged somehow to get back in at two o’clock or two thirty and get my classes that way.

TC: They were cooperative you might say or understanding?

JB: Yes, the school was very cooperative.
TC: No, I’m talking about the Elk’s Club.

JB: No, in fact, that never was a problem. If I had to be away for some kind of class activity they would understand and there would not be any pressure on me.

TC: That’s what I’m saying.

JB: Yeah, that’s right, they were very, very cooperative, very willing and very helpful.

TC: So after graduating from Allen, what was your first job?

JB: My first job, I had two good jobs offered to me. One as a teacher in the lower Richland community, an elementary teacher and the other one was a physical education teacher and coach up at Fairfield High School, it was Fairfield High School then.

TC: In the Winnsboro area?

JB: It was the Winnsboro area and so which one was I going to take, I said well, since I have a job here at the Elk’s Club I’m going to stay down here where I can go to work in the daytime and still come up here at night and work. If I had a job involved with athletics till late at night then I couldn’t do but one thing. So I took the teaching job in Lower Richland at Reeder Point School. Reeder Point School does not operate but two months that I was there. In October 1956 they opened up new (unintelligible) Elementary School, which is right next to Babylon Church now, and then I was transferred up to (unintelligible) Elementary School and I taught up there until after Christmas. And after Christmas I was promoted to principal of the school.

TC: After how many years?
JB: After the first year.

TC: First year?

JB: First year, I hadn’t taught one full year and I was promoted to principal.

TC: After one year you were promoted to principal?

JB: They had about twelve teachers there at that particular time and I was promoted to principal.

TC: That’s quite an achievement.
JB: It was.

TC: What do you attribute that to, becoming a principal that early?

JB: What I contribute it to? Not so much of my scholarly achievements, what I attribute to it mostly is by being cooperative and worked hard. When I say that, I was working with a principal there and, of course, other teachers would leave and go home at three or three thirty in the afternoon and at five o’clock in the afternoon I was still there locking every door, locked in the building doing my work at school and the principal took notice. Before the end of that first year they transferred him out to Webber High School. He had been at Webber High School before coming to Eastover in a teaching position but they transferred him back there as principal. When they transferred him back there as principal then he recommended that I become principal of (unintelligible) School. I didn’t even know anything, A from Z about principalship really. He said you can learn and I didn’t know how the people were going to accept me being the newest thing there and becoming a principal. But this is what happened. I became principal of (unintelligible) School in 1957.

TC: So how long were you there?

JB: I was there for three years. In 1959 there was a principal over at Hopkins High School lost his job because of (unintelligible) and so the superintendent told me he said, Brown, why don’t you go over to Hopkins. It will be a real opportunity for you as a young man to grow if you go to Hopkins. Hopkins is a Union school and had grades one through twelve.

TC: Union school, that’s what he meant by Union school, grades one through twelve?

JB: Grades one through twelve, that’s right, Union school and I’d be elementary school principal. And so they sent me over there and they had about eleven hundred students in the school. It will be a challenge for you, go over there and try it. Said if you can’t make it over there I’ll try to bring you back out to (unintelligible).

TC: So you were principal of all those grades, one through twelve? They didn’t have assistant principal?

JB: I was a supervisory principal of grades one through six and administrative principal of grades seven through twelve. I was principal there and I became a supervisory principal and I didn’t have named assistant principal but I soon got an acting assistant principal there at Hopkins. I remained there as principal until 1964; I remained principal of Hopkins High School.

TC: So you would have meetings, of course, with the elementary teachers?
JB: Right.

TC: But then at some other times you would have meetings with high school teachers?

JB: Right, I was supervisory elementary principal (unintelligible) elementary meetings. Certain things I’d be called in but we had a principal of (unintelligible) Elementary School but I was considered supervisory principal (unintelligible) administration.

TC: I see, one through twelve.

JB: Right, one through twelve.

TC: That was challenging?

JB: That was challenging. I stayed there until 1964 when I went over to Hopkins.

TC: You were there for how many years?

JB: Five years.

TC: Five years?

JB: Five years.

TC: Over one through twelve?

JB: One through twelve. I went over to Hopkins I began making all of these changes and stuff, (unintelligible), where to park our cars. They were parked everywhere. I designated parking areas, stuff like that. So in 1964 I had a friend who was a jewelry salesman and a (unintelligible) salesman came and talked to me and said you know, I’d like to see you go to Laurinburg, North Carolina. He said my daddy-in-law is going to retire and you’d make a good principal up there. He said you ought to think about it. So I thought about it and I made an application to Laurinburg and went up there to be interviewed and there was a unanimous vote from all the board members to come be the principal at the IE Johnson High School. His daddy-in-law had been there for fifty-eight years as principal of IE Johnson High School.

TC: Fifty-eight years?

JB: Fifty-eight years and I went in and I succeeded him as principal, IE Johnson grades one through twelve as well.
TC: So how long were you there?

JB: I was there for exactly one year. I was there one year. During that year I had offer to go up to a school district near Greensboro, North Carolina. What actually happened was a delegation of people come to see me about every weekend and they talked to me about coming back to Hopkins. I said, well, I told y’all if I came up here I would finish the obligation of the contract that I agreed to and so I’ll be ready to come back at the end of the year. They kept coming up there and one Sunday they came up and said well, now you say you’re ready to come back to Hopkins, what is it going to take for you to come back to Hopkins. (unintelligible) North Carolina was advancing so much faster than South Carolina in every way. And so I said well, I’ll tell you what they did. They gave me five thousand dollars more to come.

TC: To North Carolina?

JB: To North Carolina and for me to come back to South Carolina, North Carolina is growing and continuing to have salary increases, it’ll take you to give me five thousand to come back plus a thousand dollars moving expenses. That’s what it’s going to take, I said yes sir, that’s what it’s going to take. That was eleven thousand dollars over a one year period since I left Hopkins. I left Hopkins making six thousand dollars a year and I went back.

TC: That six thousand was what year?

JB: This was in 1964, ’63-’64.

TC: Principal, six thousand dollars?

JB: Six thousand dollars. Went to North Carolina and made eleven thousand dollars and I came back to Hopkins after one year. I came back at seventeen thousand.

TC: So that’s going from six thousand in one year to seventeen?

JB: Seventeen, that’s right. I didn’t believe my own eyes or ears.

TC: Now the persons that were interested in you coming back to Hopkins, they were trustees, superintendents?

JB: No, they were just local citizens out in the community because I had worked, you know, and they felt like the other principal just did not have it and they wanted me back here (unintelligible) you know, and they wanted me back so they brought me back.

TC: Congratulations.
**JB:** Yes sir and so I was the head of Richland school district 1. That was district 5 at that particular time but I was head of school district 1. Two years later school district 1 merged, school district 5 merged with school district 1. They found out my salary was much higher than the principal’s salary and they froze my salary so district 1 could catch up is what actually happened. But I still earned a good salary because I stayed there for twenty years when I came back in 1965 and I got to be nine through twelve [9-12 grade] principal.

**TC:** And you were there for twenty years?

**JB:** Nine through twelve until 1971. In ’71 I became the junior high school principal because what had happened, Hopkins and Lower Richland came together. They decided to take the two high schools and make one out of it. And so they made Lower Richland grades ten through twelve and they made Hopkins grades eight and nine. So I was the principal then for the next fourteen years of grades eight and nine.

**TC:** By the way, Hopkins High School was a Rosenwald school? I have an article about it.

**JB:** Hopkins High School was a Rosenwald school but it was a little school up the street. Hopkins High School never was a Rosenwald school. Hopkins Elementary School was a Rosenwald school because they didn’t open up Hopkins High School until 1955. They opened it in 1955.

**TC:** Maybe it was known as Hopkins Elementary.

**JB:** They called it high school then but it was an elementary school. What they had, they had Hopkins Elementary School and Hopkins High School located down the street from the high school today that’s located up here. They built a new high school down here. They moved the high school then from here over to here. It may be still showing Hopkins High School as a Rosenwald school.

**TC:** I see. So the initial school was a Rosenwald school.

**JB:** Right, was a Rosenwald school. But the second high school was when they came up with building school separate.

*Track 2*

**TC:** Being principal at these various high schools. Eventually you became a political man.
JB: I did. I did and I got political interests when I was high school principal. I had the chance to run the campaign for Julius Murray, a county council person. I won service and so I got interested in politics and I got interested also in the fact that I could represent people from my particular community legally and then a voice of commission when they needed representation and so that’s the reason I decided to run.

TC: So when was your first election?

JB: My first election was 1985-86.

TC: Now did you say that you were completing the term of someone else?

JB: Yes. In fact, in 1986 when I was actually elected because I completed the unexpired term of Senator Kay Patterson.

TC: And then you were reelected a number of times?

JB: I was reelected a number of times. I served twenty-one years so I was reelected ten different times. I was reelected ten times. I was elected once and then ten more times.

TC: Now do you have any particular achievement that you are most fond of at this time?

JB: Well, I have many. I have many that I’m fond of out of the district I represented. I have many that I’m fond of in the House of Representatives. Out in my particular district I went beyond the call of duty to get many things done for the community. I took on responsibilities that county people and city council generally take on such as filling in, training, and resurfacing roads and cleaning streets (unintelligible) in the city of Columbia. (unintelligible) city sewer run to all those houses that had septic tanks in their yards where they had raw sewage running out of their septic tanks down the road. And I also (unintelligible) in order to pay for plumber’s fees for all these poor residents. That is what I’m most proud of is because I helped so many people.

I did so many other things but if you want to talk about some of the things I did in the legislature because I was very successful in getting new bills passed and the one I’m most proud of is a comprehensive health bill that I got passed. This health bill I got passed would allow the students that were diabetics and asthmatic patients to carry their supplies in the school with them and be able to have in their possession. For instance, a diabetic patient when they would carry diabetic medicine in the school with him and could check his blood sugar throughout the day and if he needed to have more insulin (unintelligible) he had a chance to get that insulin into his bloodstream. If he was running low blood sugar he had a chance to simply get food or something to drink in order to raise that sugar and could be a normal student because a student with high blood
sugar you act kind of funny, I mean low blood sugar, and you put him outside you’re doing him more harm than good because if you put him outside he may get lost or there would be some reaction or something with the medicine. The same with asthmatic patients and you’ve got so many kids that are asthmatics and maybe you’ve got (unintelligible) to use if necessary because he could be having an attack on a school bus. That’s one I’m most proud of.

I got many other bills passed. I was elected chairman of the legislative black caucus five years after I was elected to the House, which was a remarkable thing, and I served throughout, I finished up Senator Felix’s term and then I served my own term as chairman and I was chairman for a long time. And then as soon as I finished serving as chairman for the black caucus and decided to stay on but I got a chance to become chairman of the Medical and Military, Public and Municipal Affairs Committee, was the first African American there to serve as chairman of a major public committee in the South Carolina House of Representatives.

TC: Congratulations.

JB: Two years later I got a chance to serve in the Southern Legislative Council as chairman of Health and Public Safety as their chairman. And so I served as two chairs at the same time there. Before my term there was not a black male that served as chairman of a major standing committee in the Southern Legislative Council and I served two terms there as chair. That’s just some of the highlights of activities there.

TC: You’ve been very active and obtained a tremendous amount.

JB: Yes.

TC: Now there are several black colleges in your district, Allen, Benedict.

JB: I did not have any black college in my district. I was interested in all black colleges across the state of South Carolina but my actual house district did not have any black colleges. The house district on the other side of Farrow Road, Farrow Road is out here, Benedict is right here and Allen is right here so I was that far but at the same time I simply represented Allen University in many, many functions and I recognize the president and other outstanding things. I fought hard for Allen University in allotting scholarship money and stuff to get them added because they are a private institution and the lottery was not at first designed for private institutions at all. It was for state institutions. But I said here’s a private university that cannot afford and yet you’re going to support the lottery so therefore we were able to get an amount from the lottery for Allen University and Benedict College.

TC: And that also included Columbia College, right?
JB: Columbia College, right.

TC: And I guess Lutheran.

JB: Lutheran Seminary.

TC: And all the private schools.

JB: Yes, indeed.

TC: Both black and white.

JB: Yes, couldn’t do one without the other.

TC: Right.

JB: Needed support on the other side so it wasn’t the fact that I did but it’s the fact that we did.

TC: You were part of the process.

JB: I was part of the process.

TC: And the city council provided the funds for Allen and Columbia College, right?

JB: Chappelle Memorial Auditorium, it was the city of Columbia that put a million dollars in the pot, allocated for the building and renovations of Chappelle Memorial Auditorium.

TC: And I’m sure you informally commented to certain persons.

JB: I gave them, you know, I said the city council owes me something because I am someone who brought in more people to the city of Columbia than any other single individual. In fact, I annexed all these different areas in Columbia really and truly and so much so that the city invited me to the city planner for the city of Columbia. I have an interest remaining in the House of Representatives.

TC: I see. Well, Senator Brown, it has been an honor and a pleasure to have had discussions with you this afternoon.

JB: It’s been my pleasure.
TC: Congratulations for all the contributions you have made for the betterment of Columbia and South Carolina.

JB: Well, I feel like I’ve made life a whole lot better for young black African American students, you know, high school, public schools, because of the strong interest of mine, therefore I think I’ve made a difference.

TC: And I congratulate you for it. Thanks again, sir.

JB: Thank you very much. It’s been a delightful pleasure.

TC: Thank you. Okay, we will have an addition here. You have told me something that is very important and I think researchers should know about it. So what was the last comment that you were making?

JB: The last comment that I was making that I served the House of Representatives for twenty-one years and the closest person to serve there is seventeen years, which makes me the longest serving black legislator that’s ever served in South Carolina House of Representatives since Reconstruction.

TC: That’s quite an achievement, as of December 3, 2007. This is a major achievement.

JB: Thank you very much.

TC: Thank you sir.

End of interview