In this oral history interview Tom Crosby discusses his time spent with the Beckham family and their significant influence on him educationally and career-wise. Dr. Tom Crosby was born on May 10, 1940 in Blair, Fairfield County, South Carolina. He is a retired educator. Tom Crosby interviewed by Andrea L'Hommedieu at the Office of Oral History on October 18, 2011.
Andrea L’Hommedieu: This is an interview at the South Caroliniana Library on October 18, 2011. This is Andrea L’Hommedieu and I’m doing a second follow-up interview with Dr. Tom Crosby as part of his bigger collection of oral histories. And, Tom, last time we talked we decided to follow-up and add a few more details, especially you felt, growing up there was a white family in town who you made connections with and who influenced you in some ways.

Tom Crosby: Right, yes, I met this family. The name of the family was, the last name was Beckham, B-E-C-K-H-A-M. And the mother was named Susie and she had two sons and one was name Edward. He was a designer in New York City, a designer of clothing; I think men and women I believe. And the other son he lived in Union, South Carolina, actually in a community known as Santuck, which can be spelled two ways, S-A-N-T-U-C and S-A-N-T-U-C. So the other son was named Reese and he was a railroad agent.

AL: Were the sons older than you?

TC: They were older, yeah, they were older, so both of them are deceased as well as their mother. And then there was another lady related to them that lived with them. Her name was Bessie Bailey. And so I started interacting with this family when I was about seven or eight years old. The older son, which was Edward, he lived in New York as I said before, but the younger one, Reese, he lived with his mother, of course, until he got married. So when I was about seven or eight years old he would be out I guess on dates and his mother would be there out in this rural area by herself. So they wanted someone to be with her at night until he would come home and sometimes it would be very late and so forth. Also, I did work around the house outside, you know, the shrubbery and she had a garden, a large garden, and also flowers around the house and had a rose garden that was a formal rose garden. I guess that’s the term. It was a formal rose garden with many different colors of roses. So I guess that’s where I really started paying attention to insects and other things that would be in ground as I would be cultivating I guess the roses.

AL: So you worked on the roses, you helped out?

TC: I helped out getting the grass out and things like that, cutting the dead roses and things of that nature. And I remember she told me that every spring you would cut the
roses, like in January or February, and she told me that they would produce new growth and produce blossoms, so that’s part of my introduction to plant life and biology you might say. Oh, and she said the more you keep the dead roses cut, the more new roses would come and that’s true. Also, as I would work, cultivate the roses, getting the grass out and so forth, I would see immature stages of insects as well as the adult insects. So I would wonder, you know, what would they eat in the winter, what do they eat at any time, and where do they live in the winter. Things like that it really, even though I was young it fascinated me, you know, to see the different colors of the insects in the ground as well as crawling on the ground, and butterflies, you know, coming to the roses and bees and things like that. So that I’m sure had an impact on my becoming interested in plants and animals.

And also at night when there would be programs on TV, I think they were one of the first in that community back in the early ’50s, somewhere like that, to get a TV and so when there would be programs that would come on TV such as the New York Philharmonic I guess or Philadelphia, you know, those symphonies and so I would sit there and observe them, listen. Also, I remember the Ed Sullivan Show would come on, Jack Benny and so forth. And I think there was a black lady that came on. I’m not sure that I ever saw Marion Anderson, I’m not sure, but I remember seeing, what’s her name, Lena Horne, yeah, and Sammy Davis, Jr. and maybe Harry Belafonte, I’m not sure. So the reason I mentioned that is that introduced me to those classical kinds of things, you know.

AL: Right.

TC: So that contributed to my growing up and being aware of these kinds of things. And then I had music appreciation in the eighth grade at my school, which is kind of unusual in the southern states at that time for black schools. And so when I got to Allen University and had music appreciation course and listening to all those classical selections and composers, it wasn’t a bore to me because I had already been introduced to it. So my point with reference to mentioning that and also mentioning this family, that was part of my growth and I need to give them credit, recognition to part of my development in life.

AL: And you said that you kept in touch with them later, right?

TC: I kept in touch with them so when I finished high school they gave me money to, some money to attend Allen and until I finished whenever they would see me or at Christmastime and knowing that the semester starts in the fall, they would give me some money. And so I got some finance to help pay tuition and things like that and to have some money to spend. And so, you know, that family, you know, had a great impact on my growth and I just wanted to give them recognition and honor them for it. And I guess one thing, I was in graduate school out at Indiana University and the mother passed. As I said, her name was Susie Beckham, so she passed and I wasn’t able to get flowers, some type of floral arrangement, you know, to the— AL: Funeral home?

TC: Funeral home, yeah, and it has always given me, I’ve always thought about it because she was very good to me. So, for example, I had to walk to school until I got in the seventh, sixth grade I think it was. I had to walk maybe like four miles to school so
once she bought me these very expensive, it was good material, wool slacks. Yeah, I remember brown, I think there was a gray like, yeah. But it was very good material and there was a store in Union that had good things in it, good quality material, and I’m pretty sure it came from that store but they were very warm.

**AL:** Yeah?

**TC:** Yeah.

**AL:** Can you tell me how the connection was made between this white family and you?

**TC:** Yeah, well, my parents actually lived on the property for part of our life and so after we moved away I still made contact with that family and so that’s how I got involved.

**AL:** And you would, did they what, ask your parents could you come over and help them out and they could pay you something?

**TC:** They did, they asked me if I could come over. The son asked me, the youngest son asked my parents if I could come over and stay with his mom, you know, at night until he would come home and sometimes I would stay almost all night, yeah. And so that’s how I got involved. We were actually living on their property.

**AL:** And were you farming that property?

**TC:** My dad was farming until I got to be about, I guess, ten or eleven years old and then that discontinued. And then we got a house, our own land, you might say, yeah, as time went on.

**AL:** So you moved on for your parents to own something themselves rather than farming off someone else’s land?

**TC:** Right, yeah, that’s true. But while I was there I gained a lot from that interaction with that family. And also the lady that I mentioned, her name was Bessie Bailey. I think she taught at some point and so she I remember when I was in ninth grade or somewhere like that I had some problems in algebra to do and she would help me and other times too she would help me with the math part, yeah. So I just wanted to add that to the—**AL:** The oral history?

**TC:** The oral history, my oral history about me you might say, because I got a lot from interacting with that family and they helped me in a number of ways. Did you have any additional questions, maybe something that I haven’t mentioned that you think might be?

**AL:** I think I asked the couple that I did have and I think we’re good.

**TC:** Okay.

**AL:** Alright, thank you so much.

**TC:** Okay, thanks.

End of interview