



Lewis Brown
Interviewed by Janet Hardin, Cooper
Brady, and Cori Nealy

HARDIN: What is your name?

BROWN: Lewis Brown

HARDIN: When did you go to Ambler?

BROWN: Started in the fifth grade—fall of 1941. I specify fall because at this time they had summer sessions as well as fall sessions.

HARDIN: Did they go year-round?

BROWN: No. They went in the summer time—from laying-by time, they called it, till harvest time. I think it was a month or so.

HARDIN: How long were they off then?

BROWN: I think they started back in October or November something like that. I'm not sure about the time, but it was two sessions.

HARDIN: Who were some of the principals or teachers you remember?

BROWN: There were two teachers. Miss Betty—in the little room. She taught the 1st through 4th grade. Miss Betty Hendricks. The first year I was here Mr. Waco Holliday taught—he was the principal. The second year was Mrs. Jessie Clemments.

HARDIN: So she came, then, in 1942?

BROWN: I believe so. And the seventh year—the seventh grade—it was Mr. Roper. I don't remember his first name.

HARDIN: Who did you have for a teacher in fifth grade?

BROWN: In the fifth grade I had Mr. Holliday.

HARDIN: So he did the upper grades?

BROWN: That's right.

HARDIN: How many grades were here then?

BROWN: Seven

HARDIN: Do you remember any funny memories you might have?

BROWN: The first year I went we had wells out front and the pump didn't work. So we carried water—the boys had to do that. We carried water from Mr. E.B. Smith's. He lived in the house over on the top of the hill across the way.

HARDIN: Which one?

BROWN: Let's see—the house over on top of the hill—over this way. I don't know if it's still there or not. I don't know who lives there now. Mr. Smith—he's dead now.

HARDIN: What kind of heat did you have?

BROWN: I don't think we had a pot-bellied stove. It was an old wood stove. The boys had to build a fire during the wintertime. We had outdoor privies, of course.

HARDIN: Where were they located?

BROWN: Down at the edge of the woods behind the school—the boys on the right and the girls on the left. They were 100 yards apart, I guess.

(At this point Cooper and Cori enter the room and join the interview. Cooper has a list of questions with him.)

HARDIN: He was telling me about having to carry water one day.

BROWN: It was more than one day! It was several days. It was an old hand pump. The old school was a little farther out the road than this one, I believe.

HARDIN: I don't know about that. Where was that?

BROWN: It was on a little knoll. The first little knoll after you turn off this road here, but they've changed the landscape. It was about 50 or 100 yards farther out. Out in this area Prue Jones had a big barn.

HARDIN: I think we've heard a story about that barn! So, was the old school out in that area where those woods are? That's where our nature trail is now. We thought we had seen some remains.

BROWN: That was it. The playground that we had (such as it was) was out on the other side of the school.

HARDIN: Like the far side?

BROWN: Right.

HARDIN: What did you have on your playground—just a field?

BROWN: We had just a field with two bases. We played ball. It was a form of baseball, but there were only two bases—home base and another base.

HARDIN: What did the girls do? Did they play with you?

BROWN: Yes.

HARDIN: All right! Go girls! They were probably the meanest ones out there.

BROWN: The best hitters!

COOPER: How did you feel when you first got here?

BROWN: I guess I was a little afraid. Apprehensive is the word, I guess. We had just moved to this community, and I guess I was a little afraid to start.

COOPER: Did anyone you know go there?

BROWN: Just my brother was all.

HARDIN: Did you make some really good friends?

BROWN: Yes, oh yes.

HARDIN: Who were some of those?

BROWN: Garland Nealy was about the best one. He lives in Texas right now. He was a lawyer. He worked for S&S Cafeteria for a while. I saw him—we had our 50th high school anniversary year before last—and he came to it. That's the first time I'd seen him since a long time.

HARDIN: Was there another friend?

BROWN: That was who I thought of mostly because there were only six in our class, I believe.

CORI: We have almost eighteen in our class.

BROWN: Is that right?

HARDIN: They just had two classes.

BROWN: That's right—two rooms in the whole school.

COOPER: Did you actually have a favorite teacher?

BROWN: Yes. Mrs. Clements, my sixth grade teacher.

COOPER: We don't have sixth grade.

CORI: We just have fifth grade now.

BROWN: We had up through the seventh grade.

BROWN: Mrs. Clements—she was one of my favorites because I have a dictionary at home somewhere (I couldn't find it.) well...she gave it to me as a gift for making straight As. That was the only year I made straight As. It's somewhere around the house—and some old report cards—but I couldn't find them.

HARDIN: We don't have too many pictures of the old school. We have one in the conference room and I found one in an old newspaper but that's about it.

BROWN: Well, I don't have any so you've got more than I've got.

COOPER: Have you ever been embarrassed?

BROWN: Well, I got in trouble a few times. I don't know about embarrassed. I don't remember.

HARDIN: What sort of things got you in trouble back then?

BROWN: My mouth.

HARDIN: Same thing as today! Right, kids?

BROWN: I can remember one instance where—I don't think I was saying it—but this girl went in and told on me for saying bad words. I had to stay in after school for that, but that's the only one I remember.

CORI: What did you like best about Ambler?

BROWN: I don't know....We walked to school. We lived about two miles away at that time. We had no buses. We had to walk to school, but I guess friends...have a good time. On the way home from school—that was our playtime. I guess that's the part I liked. I don't remember too much about the actual school—what we did in school as far as studies are concerned.

CORI: Did you have English?

BROWN: I'm sure we did. But, I don't remember too much about that. I remember the English—don't get me wrong—I just don't remember the teaching part.

HARDIN: Must have been painless! Must have been good teaching.

BROWN: It was! It had to be!

COOPER: Did you have a favorite subject like science or math?

BROWN: Well, reading was my favorite subject. It had to be. To be honest, I hated math all the way through this school and all the way through high school.

COOPER: I hate it, too.

BROWN: But do you know what I majored in when I went to college? Engineering, which is nothing but math! So I didn't like the subject of math in school, but when I went to college I had to take it and I loved it after that—after you get used to it.

COOPER: They say when you learn how to do it it's not bad.

CORI: Like riding a bike. When you're learning you fall over, but when you can do it, it's fun.

HARDIN: Do you think anything you learned here at Ambler influenced what you did later in life?

BROWN: I think it was good—don't get me wrong—but I think, later in life, I went through the Navy—spent a few years in the Navy. Then I came out and went to Clemson for four years. Got a “double E” degree down there.

HARDIN: What degree?

BROWN: Double E—Electrical Engineering.

COOPER: Did you have any funny experiences—that made everyone laugh—or something like that?

BROWN: You mean when I was in school?

COOPER: Yes.

BROWN: I don't remember. It's been a long time ago. I'm sure I did because we were always laughing and cutting up, you know. But as far as...

CORI: Did you have Activities—like Art or Music?

BROWN: No. We had two recesses—one for lunch and about 10 minutes in the morning—early in the day and 15 or 30 minutes for lunch. That was about it. We had to bring our own lunch. We didn't have a lunchroom either.

CORI: You ate outside?

BROWN: Sometimes if the weather was good, we'd eat outside. If the weather was like it is today, we'd just stay inside. That was back in the old days. We didn't have modern conveniences. We had outdoor bathrooms—the whole bit.

CORI: If you brought --- did you cook it on a fire?

BROWN: No. We brought sandwiches. People didn't bring things to cook. It was all ready-made. Sandwiches or that kind of stuff.

CORI: Was there electricity?

BROWN: There was electricity. It wasn't like you have today. It was a bulb. Have you seen the ones on the end of a ...

CORI: That hangs from the ceiling.

BROWN: Yes. We had that. We had electricity, but we heated with...

HARDIN: They heated with a wood stove.

BROWN: Yes. We heated with a wood stove, and the boys were responsible for keeping the wood there and I guess the men of the community brought the wood in.

HARDIN: Yes, how did the wood get there!

BROWN: The wood was there. All I know is we had to come early when it was our time to build a fire. We had to come early when it was our turn to build a fire so it would be warm for the rest of the kids when they got there.

CORI: About how long do you think that they had school?

HARDIN: You mean, how long was the school day?

BROWN: As far as I remember we started pretty early in the morning. I'd say 8 or 9:00. It was 3 or 4 in the afternoon...it was 4 or 5:00 before I got home.

CORI: So it was about the same?

BROWN: Yes, it was about the same.

HARDIN: It was slightly longer, but not much.

COOPER: What did you most like about Ambler?

BROWN: Well, I liked it because it was something to do.

CORI: Did you have school on the weekends back then?

BROWN: No, just five days—Monday through Friday.

HARDIN: You said, "It was something to do." That's interesting because the kids today have so much to do that it's hard to work everything in. I think they would be interested in hearing what it was like back then to be a kid.

BROWN: In this school—in this community—in this school, most of the kids when they went home they had either cows to milk or had farm chores to do. We done a lot of farming. In fact that was the biggest thing in the community.

CORI: Did you live on a farm?

BROWN: Oh yeah. I still do.

CORI: I live on a farm, but that's not what we do.

BROWN: Well, that's me, too. We don't do much farming—we've got two horses, but...

HARDIN: What did you do for fun?

BROWN: Climb Tater Hill. Well, we played a lot of ball. Even on the weekends! You know, back then the families visited a lot. I had some cousins from Easley

who came up and we'd play ball, you know, that type of thing. There was no TV. We didn't watch TV. We had a radio—my dad had a radio. He would let us listen when he was listening. But when he wasn't listening, we didn't listen to the radio. We worked on a farm. What we did for fun—maybe on Saturday night we'd go to a movie or something like that in town.

HARDIN: Did you get to go to movies very often?

BROWN: No. Maybe 2 or 3 times a year.

COOPER: What age were you when they came out with any kind of system—like Gameboy?

BROWN: I remember the first TV program I saw. Probably that was in high school. It was the World Series of 1948 or 49—somewhere along in there. It was a drug store in Pickens—this was in Pickens—Dr. Young's drug store. He was the only man in town that had a TV at that time as I remember. And he had it set up in his drugstore and everyone stood around and watched in the street. He had it in the window. Out in the street—we stood in the street and watched all the baseball games. I think it was the baseball series of '48 or '49—somewhere along in there. And that's the first time I ever remember seeing TV.

HARDIN: That sounds real exciting.

BROWN: Well, the whole town was there.

CORI: Did you ever ride horses for fun?

BROWN: We had mules back then and we didn't ride them for fun!

HARDIN: A mule's not fun!

BROWN: No, they were for work—for plowing. But, we'd ride them. No, we had sleds. We had a trail built out in the pasture down the hill. We'd slide down the hills. And we had some games—card games like Monopoly. I don't think they had Monopoly back then, but we had card games—board games like that.

CORI: So your hill—you went down it on a sled?

BROWN: Um-huh.

HARDIN: We used to slide down on cardboard. We'd get a big cardboard box and go down in it.

COOPER: That's awesome.

HARDIN: You mentioned about the boys keeping the fire going. Were there other jobs the students did back then?

BROWN: Well, the water. Bringing the water to school and keeping the fire. Yes, we did. Once or twice a year, we'd oil the floor. I don't know what kind of oil it was, but we didn't have linoleum on the floor. It was a wood floor, and they would put oil of some sort on it. We'd do that. That was done after school hours—usually during the weekend or something we'd come back. Actually, we'd do the erasers and wash the board and this type of thing.

COOPER: Did you have 8th grade and 9th grade and high school?

BROWN: I went through high school. We didn't have middle school back then. I went through high school. We went from elementary school—grammar school we called it back then—to high school. Then everything was at the high school. We had the 8th through the 12th at high. And four years of college.

HARDIN: You didn't have kindergarten either.

BROWN: No we didn't have kindergarten either. Kids started in the first grade back then.

HARDIN: How did World War II affect school? Did it affect it in any way?

BROWN: I remember when World War II started, but I don't remember it affecting the school. We kept going. It didn't stop us from going. Everybody was talking about it, of course. The "Powers" and so forth, but as far as affecting it...Back in World War II there was the rationing. It affected the families but it didn't affect as far as the school was concerned. It might have affected the moon shiners in the area because they couldn't get sugar.

CORI: Did you go hunting in the woods?

BROWN: I used to go walking here down through these woods and through the woods to my house and we had a path down here through the woods and across highway 8. I forget what the name of it was then. We'd walk through the woods.

COOPER: Did you have chocolate?

BROWN: Chocolate? Oh yes. There's always been chocolate. Hershey bars. Yeah, we had Hershey bars, too. We used to make our hot chocolate out of cocoa and sugar.

COOPER: That was a lot harder than those packets.

CORI: We put hot milk in it.

BROWN: There you go!

CORI: Were there such things as bikes or scooters back then?

BROWN: No. See you guys got lucky. We enjoyed ourselves. The way I feel it doesn't take all the games you play on TV. You can make your fun most any time you want to—anything you want to do.

NOTE: After the interview ended, Mr. Brown and I talked a little more and I told him what I knew about the Ambler family, which wasn't much at that time. We talked about the Ambler house that belonged to Haskell Cox and that Ambler had been a slave owner. He said that there was a small graveyard on his property that was probably a slave graveyard—just rocks for markers. His property borders on Mr. Cox's property and was probably part of the Ambler property years ago. He gave me permission to take pictures of it.

