J. LAWRENCE COOK

"JLC at the step recording piano at Aeolian in New York City - early June 1968"

An Autobiography of the Early Years
Part 2 of 2
1911 -1919

Transcribed from his comments taped in 1972
Edited and annotated by his son

Jean Lawrence Cook M.D.

Note: Mike Meddings of Staffordshire UK, who produced a series of Jelly Roll Morton roll transcriptions in the 1970-80's, was recently contacted by J. Lawrence Cook's son Dr. Jean Lawrence Cook, M.D. (retired). Dr. Cook was impressed by Mike's comprehensive website showcasing his father and other music luminaries (found at http://www.doctorjazz.freeserve.co.uk), and asked Mike to phone him at his residence in France. After a long conversation, Dr. Cook told Mike about his eldest niece, Dr. Lisa Fagg, who also lives in England and that he should contact her also. After doing so Mike was invited to visit Lisa and her husband Steve, for a Saturday lunch and get-together.

In the meantime, Mike was offered Dr. Jean Cook's reminiscences of his father in document format, transcribed from tape-recorded comments by his father. Mike was also shown private family photos never before seen by the public - some of which will be reproduced in this serial. While some parts of this biography are quite similar to the ground-breaking JLC biography published in the 1973 AMICA bulletins, the Billings' only had the audio tapes to write the transcription - with incorrect phonetic spellings and geographical assumptions. Dr. Cook has embellished these early transcriptions with corrections, facts and references to back up this article. Dr. Cook happily gives his permission for AMICA to print this work.

- Karl Ellison

JACOB LINCOLN COOK - MY FATHER
(continued)

SNOW HILL

Geraldine and I (joined by Lucille when she was old enough) walked two and a half miles every day from Happy Hollow into town to attend CPS, the colored public school. It was never clear to me whether CPS actually stood for "Columbia Public School" or for "Colored Public School."

In 1911, the superintendent of the Columbia public schools required Professor Johnson, our principal, to collect a fee of one dollar a month for children attending CPS who lived outside the city limits in places like Happy Hollow.

Grandpa could not afford to keep three of us in CPS with this added expense, so he decided to send me to a free school in Happy Hollow even though its academic reputation was poor. Once again, Aunt Gertie came to my rescue.

Aunt Gertie wrote to her brother, my Uncle Charles, who (like Uncle Herman, the mason) had graduated from Tuskegee Institute in Alabama. Uncle Charles had learned the tailoring trade there and was teaching at Snow Hill Institute in Alabama. He was also the school's bandmaster.[16] Aunt Gertie and Uncle Charles arranged for me to go to Snow Hill as a boarding student, working my way through. In addition to following the academic curriculum, I was to work for the school and also learn the tailoring trade. I would have the opportunity to learn an instrument and play it in the school band.

By the time I arrived at Snow Hill the school year had begun, and Uncle Charles's tailoring class was filled. I had to choose a different trade to learn and I selected carpentry.

Uncle Charles told me the band needed a second clarinetist and gave me an instrument and a self-instruction book. With the help of the first clarinetist it was not too many months before I qualified to attend rehearsals, and in time to play in the band. I felt inspired once to write a little piece for solo clarinet, the beginning of my creative efforts in music, at the age of twelve.

Traveling to Snow Hill, Alabama, from Columbia, Tennessee

The train to Snow Hill originated in Chicago, and we called it a "double-header" because it was pulled by two huge steam engines in tandem. When the train arrived in Evansville, Indiana, the conductor came through pointing at the Negroes saying, "you go back there...you go back there." From Evansville the train, now observing southern Jim-Crow law, went to Nashville, and it is there I was put on for the trip to Snow Hill, Alabama.[17] On the way we stopped at Birmingham, Montgomery, and Anniston. The train actually passed the Anniston station, stopped, and then backed into it. The next stop was Selma, thirty miles from the stop at the village of Snow Hill.

An oxcart from Snow Hill Institute met each of the two trains that stopped at the village of Snow Hill, Alabama, daily. That is how I was transported with my trunk to the school, about five miles from the train station.

The Village of Snow Hill, Alabama

The center of the town had two general stores, which sold everything the local residents needed. The post office was in a store across the street from the railroad station. I well remember a cotton gin which I liked to watch operate whenever I was in the town. I can still remember the piled up bales of cotton.

The Sheriff was the law to Snow Hill's few hundred residents. Snow Hill Institute, five miles away, was actually larger in area than the village.

Getting Along Financially at Snow Hill

No one in my family was affluent. Uncle Herman in Chicago and Uncle Lamar in Pittsburgh would send me a little money when they could, and so would my dear sister Amelia, who was only 17 years old when I began at Snow Hill. Amelia and I kept in touch by mail regularly, and she always found a dime to wrap in tissue paper and slip into the envelope. I don't remember that she ever failed. I kept her up to date on such important things as how much I weighed. I will never forget how proud I was to write her that I had reached 100 pounds.

Each month, after my work had earned enough money to cover tuition, I could draw scrip, which was negotiable at the campus commissary.

Businesses and charitable organizations used to send the school barrels and boxes of clothing and shoes. A student could submit a request for these items to the treasurer's office. Unfortunately the clothing we got this way, especially the shoes, seldom fit.

Living Conditions at Snow Hill

We had no doctors and no hospital facilities, but we did have a graduate of Tuskegee Institute who had first aid training and some rudimentary diagnostic skills. He wore a uniform similar to the one male students wore, and we called him "Major." The nearest physician (white) was ten miles away.

Mealtime at Snow Hill

The meals at Snow Hill certainly left something to be desired, and they were badly served. The kitchen personnel filled our individual plates as they rang the bell to summon us. Hearing it, we quickly organized ourselves into a formation and marched to the dormitory dining hall, boys in one group, girls in another. By the time we arrived, our plates of food were cold.

Breakfast was usually a slice of congealed grits, a blob of solidified gravy and a piece of cornbread. The other meals were equally appetizing.

There were chickens around, and one of the places they would lay their eggs was under the carpentry shop. The shop building was on pillars, leaving a crawl space, which the chickens liked to use. We carpentry apprentices would hear a hen cackle, announcing a new egg, and scramble among the pillars to find her. We had two ways of cooking the eggs. In warm weather we would use the glue warmer as a double boiler, and in cold weather we used the pot-bellied stove which heated the shop. Our method was to wrap the egg in water-soaked newspaper and place it in the receptacle for the hot falling embers.

Saturday night was bean night for the male boarding students. Whoever had money would buy dried beans and sugar from the commissary. We would soak the beans, then cook them with the sugar and proceed to have a feast. If we ate too much, as we often did, we would run around the dormitory building to settle the beans.

Oxcarts

I learned to drive an oxcart. The ox wore a heavy wooden yoke on its neck, with a line attached to one side of it. The ox was stroked gently with the line to get him moving, and a tug backward would stop him. To make him turn right you called out "gee" and to make him turn left you called "haw."

My First Year at Snow Hill (1911-1912)

During the school year at Snow Hill I met my first centenarian. He claimed to be 104 years old. He may have been born in Africa, though I do not recall his making that clear. He did teach us to mimic some spoken phrases and a song, which he said were African. If he was born in America and was as old as he said, he had lived the first 58 years of his life as a slave. A real tragedy. And if he had been carried off to American slavery from Africa, that may have been even more difficult to bear than growing up never having experienced freedom.

My First Summer Vacation at Snow Hill (1912)

Grandpa could not afford to send me a train ticket to come home to Columbia for my first summer vacation, so I worked in the carpentry shop all summer. Among other chores, I was called upon to use my new carpentry skills to make a coffin for the child of destitute parents. I was proud of my work when I finished it. In my spare time I would borrow keys to the band instrument room. By the end of the summer I had tried out all the different instruments, including the drums. I did miss the violin lessons Uncle Charles gave me during the school year.

My Second Year at Snow Hill (1912-1913)

(Ed. Note: There are no comments about this school year, or about returning to Columbia for summer vacation).

My Third Year at Snow Hill (1913-1914)

During this year we had two concerts which I remember very well: one was a song recital by the great Patty Brown and the other a violin concert by the grandson of Frederick Douglass.

Home Again from Snow Hill (Summer 1914)

It was almost dark when I arrived in Columbia on the L&N train from Snow Hill, via Selma and Mobile.[18] There were no Negro hacks waiting at the Columbia station, so I approached the white driver of a one-seat buggy. He told me that he would take me if there were no white people who wanted a drive into town. Fortunately for me there were none and he agreed to take me to Happy Hollow for a quarter.

There was a light here and there on the road we took, but when I got out of the buggy and turned up the path to our house, the darkness was complete. There was no answer to my knock on our front door, so I knocked on the Peppers' door. Again no answer. Deciding that Grandpa must have gone to see Miss Mary and that Lucille and Geraldine must be there too, I walked more than two miles to Miss Mary's home, near my old school CPS, and sure enough they were there.

To this day I do not know whether Miss Mary and Grandpa were already secretly married. After the letter from Miss Mary to "my dear husband" which Mrs. Alexander, Geraldine, Lucille and I had seen (without Grandpa's knowledge) what was I to think? Why did it have to be a secret? I just do not know. (Editor's note: Job Childs Lawrence died 11 July 1919. His death certificate was signed "Mary Lawrence, wife."

Mrs. Alexander's Death

I was at Snow Hill when Mrs. Alexander died. Grandpa wrote to me about it, so I was not surprised at her absence when I returned to Happy Hollow.

Grandpa wrote that one evening when he returned home late from the canning factory, he ate dinner and lay down to rest. He was drifting off to sleep when he heard Mrs. Alexander call out "Lawrence! I'm dying." Grandpa hurried into her room, but she was already gone.

Thinking about Mrs. Alexander, and death and dying, I had trouble sleeping. I stared out of the window into the night, and I realized I was happy to be back home.

I Lose My Bangs

We had a pleasant surprise the next day, in the form of a visit from Aunt Gertie. She quickly made it clear that she did not approve of my new hairstyle. Following a Snow Hill fad, my hair was brushed forward and clipped in front to make bangs. Aunt Gertie wasted little time cutting my hair short and removing the bangs.

I Use My Newly-Learned Carpentry Skills

Looking around on my first day home I noticed that the wooden steps to the porch had rotted badly, and that the coop in which we kept young chicks was falling over. I told Grandpa that if he could buy the lumber for the chicken coop and the steps I could repair them. Grandpa bought the lumber, and in a few days I had finished the job. Grandpa was very proud of me and my carpentry skill.

Summer Experiences (1914)

On my second day home from Snow Hill, I asked permission to visit Robert Brown, who had been a classmate at CPS. When I reached his house, I found that Robert's father, Josiah, was dying. He had been operated on by a local physician, a white man who was very kind to all of his patients of either race. Unfortunately I believe his competence did not match his kindness. Not long after Robert's father died, it became clear that the doctor was mentally ill. He ended up as a demented street performer in front of the post office.

Like me, Robert was interested in music, and he had persuaded his parents to arrange piano lessons for him. He learned quickly and soon became able to play the hymns in our little church, on the same old reed organ that Grandma used to play. Inspired by Robert, I worked hard at the piano all summer until I was able to match his hymn-playing.

A Chance to Enroll at Haines Institute

Reverend Collier, who had replaced Grandpa as pastor of Mt. Tabor, arranged for my friend Robert Brown to go to a boarding school in Augusta, Georgia. This was a school founded by Lucy C. Laney, the great Negro educator. It was called Haines Normal and Industrial Institute.[19] Despite the word "industrial," the emphasis was actually on academics. The grades offered began with kindergarten and went through the equivalent of two years of college. I wanted Reverend Collier to arrange for me to go to Haines as well. I had always craved an academic education, but my success as a repairer of stairs and constructor of chicken coops made Grandpa think that manual training might be the preferred route for me. I worked hard to change his mind, and finally I did.

The Haines Normal and Industrial Institute
Augusta, Georgia
Picture courtesy of Millie Gaddini

My Arrival at Haines (Fall 1914)

The train ride to Haines in Augusta, Georgia, was longer than the trip to Alabama and Snow Hill. In Augusta, a fairly large southern city, our trunks were not delivered to the school by oxcart but by a horse-drawn railway express truck.

I arrived with the clarinet, which I had been able to procure, with Uncle Charles's help, from the band at Snow Hill. I was thrilled on arriving at Haines. Robert showed me around and introduced me to students and teachers. The boys were dressed in military uniforms and the girls wore white blouses and blue skirts. There was military training and a military hierarchy among the students. I progressed to corporal, then sergeant, and finally became official bugler for my company.

Grandpa had made arrangements to pay five dollars a month in cash toward my tuition. I would earn the remainder, and my room and board, by cleaning the classrooms and the chapel in McGregor Hall. On Saturdays all the boys, including me, used rakes and brooms to scour the campus grounds. In exchange for the additional chore of looking after the music conservatory building, I had the privilege of taking piano lessons. The three members of the music department were very helpful to me.

After classes, and after cleaning the classrooms, the chapel, and the small conservatory, I spent every free moment practicing on one of the pianos.

Life at Haines Normal and Industrial Institute

How much better meals were at Haines than they had been at Snow Hill! Mrs. Kendrick, an excellent cook, managed the kitchen. There were two dining rooms; the tables had white table cloths and were neatly set. Instead of arriving at the table to find each plate already served, with food that had turned cold, hot serving dishes were brought to the table. A teacher or an older student sat at the head of each table to help serve and to keep order. When a serving dish became empty it could be replenished on request.

If we got hungry between meals we had a variety of resources. Some students received boxes of food from home by railway express. This was usually divided among friends in the same dormitory. Or if we had the money we could buy candy or snacks from one of the four nearby stores. A favorite snack was something we called sog. This was a five-cent loaf of bread, the smaller size, split down the middle and soaked with five cents' worth of molasses or condensed milk. Delicious!

Unlike Snow Hill, we had modern plumbing. The girls were the lucky ones, since they had running hot water and central heating in their dormitory. The boys' dormitories, there were two of them, were converted frame houses located off campus. There was one tub, in the larger of the two houses, which had to serve all of the male students. We heated bath water on one of the coal-burning stoves. The real problem was, who's next for the tub? Somehow we handled the situation without too much difficulty.

I usually had pocket money, received from Uncle Herman, Grandpa, Uncle Lamar or my sister Amelia. Furthermore, I was able to earn a little change by taking pictures of students with the second-hand box camera for which I had paid one dollar in Columbia. The picture money was spent as I wanted, but the money orders from Grandpa and my uncles went toward paying the five-dollar monthly cash part of my tuition. I was always in arrears.

Vacation in the Summer of 1915

At the end of the 1914-1915 school year I returned to Columbia for the summer. I was glad to be home. Grandpa was working at the Columbia Canning Company. I returned to cleaning the bank and offices for Grandpa. Realizing that I wasn't earning any money for myself Grandpa got me a job at the canning factory, working in the shipping department for three dollars a week. His wages were nine dollars a week. Grandpa and I rode to work together on the back of our thin horse, Harry. We would hitch him to a post in the factory yard and feed him and give him water during the working day. We worked from 8am to 6pm on weekdays, but only until 1pm on Saturday...payday!

Grandpa's job was to supervise the preparation and cooking of tomatoes or sweet potatoes, depending on the season. The tomatoes were washed, then steamed until the skins loosened and could be removed by a team of Negro women who earned five cents for each bucketful peeled. The actual canning was done mechanically, after which Grandpa took over and lowered the racks of cans into steam vats to be sterilized. A similar procedure was used for canning sweet potatoes, with Grandpa overseeing the whole operation. Grandpa always looked forward to the sweet potato season, because it usually required overtime work, and he could earn some extra money.

After just a few weeks of work in the canning factory, I got a job as a porter at a variety store with better pay, four dollars a week. We were four porters, and the head porter earned seven dollars a week. We worked ten hours on weekdays, five and a half hours on Saturday, and ten hours every fourth Sunday. Even while holding this job still I took care of the office cleaning for Grandpa in the evening after supper.

Our large garden provided all the vegetables that we could use. We always had plenty of chickens, for meat and for egg-production. We bought other meat from the one butcher shop in Happy Hollow, who was conveniently open on Sunday morning when I went to get the Sunday Nashville Banner. Grandpa would give me the meat order, telling me, "Son, don't forget to remind him that you are Job Lawrence's grandson so you will get a better cut."

1915-1916 School Year at Haines Institute

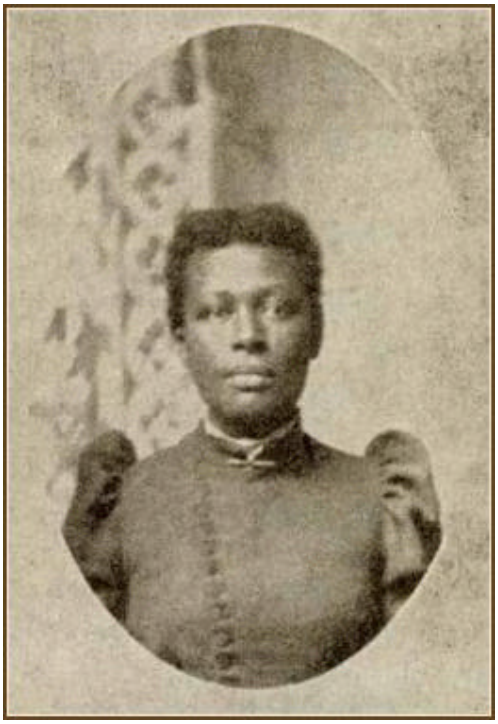
After allowing for my train fare, there was not much left of my summer savings for buying clothes. I was lucky though, and found two suits on sale, one for seven dollars and one for five. Grandpa had accepted that I should follow an academic track at Haines, but only after some persuasion on my part. At the end of this vacation, pleased that I was doing well at Haines, he took me himself to Mr. Wolf s clothing store and got me all the other things I needed. He even

bought me an umbrella.

Those were days when knickerbockers and caps were popular with teenagers. I saw a gray checkered cap with a long bill that I could not resist, and I had just enough money left to buy it. When Robert Brown saw it, he asked his parents for one just like it. We happily returned to Haines together, caps and all. I was assigned to the "small" dormitory in a room with three other students. They were my friend Robert Brown from Columbia, Robert Pearson, and Fletcher Green, whom we called "Fess."

During the summer, someone had donated a broken-down keyboard player (Pianola) to the school's music department. Wow! I could touch this any time I wanted. I could not repair it, however, because I had neither the tools, the parts or the know-how.

One day I picked up a copy of a now-defunct magazine called "Etude" which was read in those days by music teachers and performers alike. Thumbing through its pages, my eyes fell upon an advertisement for a machine used to perforate rolls by hand that invited the reader to "make your own piano rolls." I tore out the page and saved it for so long that it began to turn yellow. My ambition was to purchase one of these hand-perforators one day and use it to make rolls of my compositions. I planned to submit the rolls to publishers along with my manuscripts.



"Young 'Lucy Craft Laney' – Educator"


"Lucy Laney in later years"

The great Miss Lucy Laney, founder of Haines Institute, was dedicated to the advancement of her people through education. She was among those Negroes who disagreed with Booker T. Washington's view that since we were "destined" in this country to do manual labor our skills should be developed along those lines. Miss Laney continued to require the students to decline Latin nouns and conjugate Latin verbs, and algebra and the classics were stressed.

Every morning right after breakfast, both the boys and girls did drill exercises. On a signal we marched into chapel for a brief service. There was singing, prayer, and then a short talk by Miss Laney.

My First Trip North (Summer 1916)

Many of the students at Haines, and even some teachers, took summer jobs in the North. Northern companies, farms and resort hotels often recruited summer help from Negro schools in the South.

Although the United States was not yet a belligerent in World War I, defense industries in the North opened work opportunities for us that had never before been available to Negroes. This was the period when Negroes began to migrate in great numbers to northern cities, and it is the year I crossed the Mason-Dixon Line for the first time, to take a summer job as bellboy at Mt. Everett Inn in South Egremont, Massachusetts. The town had about a thousand residents, and a shopping center consisting of one general store and a drugstore.

I had some trouble at the start of my trip, because local Whites resented so many of "their niggers" going up North. The police held our train at the station for at least two hours while they searched every part of it for Professor Tutt, our math teacher who had organized this particular summer exodus. They didn't find him, and I personally suspect he was hiding in the coal bin.

When we arrived in Washington, DC it was a new and pleasant experience to change trains and be told that we could sit anywhere we wanted, and even eat in the dining car. I had brought food with me, but still I went and had a bowl of soup, just for the thrill of it. When we arrived at Pennsylvania Station in New York City I was so excited that I got temporarily separated from Earl Adams, my traveling companion and the person who had arranged the job for me. He had also made reservations for a room on Seventh Avenue between West 135th and 136th Streets. It was in the apartment of a lady named Mrs. Spearman. He had stayed there the previous summer when he brought another student for the bellboy job I was to take this year. That young man did not like the job, so this year it was offered to me. Our two nights' lodging and food expenses in New York were paid in advance by the owner of the inn in South Egremont.

In the New York City of those days, the area in which Negroes could rent apartments was limited, extending north from 125th Street to 140th Street, bordered on the east by Third Avenue and on the west by Eighth Avenue. We had no other options for housing outside this "nigger heaven" (as we sometimes called it) so the rents were grossly inflated.

We arrived in Great Barrington, Massachusetts, nearest town to the hamlet of South Egremont, around 8 o'clock in the morning and had breakfast there. We reached South Egremont on an aging trolley car, which made the round trip from Great Barrington once an hour.

Life at Mt. Everett Inn

Aside from Earl Adams, there were two other cooks on the staff, which also included a farmer who raised corn, lettuce, string beans, tomatoes and other vegetables for the kitchen. There were two maids and two waitresses. The maids were Swedish Protestants and the waitresses were Irish Catholics, and once in a while there would be a little religious war between them. Usually only verbal weapons were used, but sometimes bandages were needed.

To complete the personnel there were two Negroes who took care of the laundry, a man and a woman. The man was an artist at ironing men's white shirts with their stiff collars, and he always worked in a Chinese laundry when the season was over for the inn.

Like many such establishments at the time, Mt. Everett Inn's brochure declared 'No Hebrews Allowed." The notion that a Negro would even dare ask for accommodations never crossed the minds of the proprietors, or for that matter did it ever cross mine.

The inn bought meat from a wagon, which came by three times a week. The vendor had a handbell, which he rang at frequent intervals as be drove his horse-drawn vehicle down the country roads. We kept our own fowl and laying hens, and there were enough hunters around to supply us with game.

The food at Mt. Everett Inn was excellent. We ate the same food the guests were served and sometimes the boss's wife even joined us. Her husband was in the real estate business, so she did most of the supervision of the inn.

We had an icehouse where blocks of ice, cut from a nearby lake in the winter, were stored. It kept well, and we had some left over at the end of the summer.

Although this was during prohibition, there was always a supply of liquor, beer and wine on hand to be purchased under the table. It was all kept hidden in the boss's private office, next door to the bellboy's little room. Only the boss, his wife and I had access to the office, so only we three could sell the beverages. There was an inspector who came around from time to time, and after he had been given a drink he would always give us a clean slate.

A Memorable Encounter

The inn was small and I was the only bellhop. I had a buzzer in the office, my station when I was on duty, and one in my room next door. Once when I was off duty the buzzer rang in my room. I forget why the guests, two women, called. It was only after they had left the inn that I found out that they were Helen Keller and her companion. I hadn't even known who Helen Keller was, or that the pleasant woman I served was deaf and blind, until they had left the inn.

A Slave For the Fourth of July

A local minister, who also doubled as the fire chief of the village, was the organizer of the annual Fourth of July parade. The summer I was there he made the mistake of asking my friend, Earl Adams (who happened to be very dark-skinned) to take part, dressed to represent a slave driving a horsedrawn wagon at the head of the parade. Earl was indignant. The minister could not understand why!

World War Patriotism

We were not yet in the war, but everywhere there were expressions of patriotism in posters, speeches, newspapers, magazines, sermons and songs. One popular song, however, expressed isolationist sentiment and was titled "I didn't raise my son to be a soldier." After we entered the war the lyrics were changed and the title became "I didn't raise my Ford to be a jitney."

My first composition effort had been for solo clarinet. My second was worked out on a piano in the modest ballroom of Mt. Everett Inn. In the spirit of the time it was a patriotic song titled "You'd better hang up your flag!" I paid for a small printing of the manuscript, and by the time the war ended I had sold almost all of them.

Back to Haines from South Egremont

Earl Adams and I started the trip together, but I stopped in New York City while he went on to a town in New Jersey to visit a girlfriend. I wanted to do some shopping in New York and once again experience the thrill of walking the streets of the big city. At that time I had no idea whether I would ever return to it. I was able to get a room again at Mrs. Spearman's apartment, but I had to share it with a man who worked nights. There was only one small bed in the room. We had our separate bedding, he used the bed during the day and I took over at night. After exploring the city, I was off on my return trip to Augusta, Georgia. There was no segregation from New York City, but on arriving in Washington, DC it was the duty of the conductors to inspect each car to make sure there was no northern Negro who made the mistake of sitting in one of the "white" cars. Being a southerner, I was accustomed to the standard system of

segregated travel in the cars available to us, right behind the smoky, coal-burning engine, and I did not have to be warned to move.

Finally I arrived back at Haines. It was good to be back at school, and it was satisfying to tell about my stay up north, with appropriate exaggerations.

The War Touches Haines Institute

On 6 April 1917 the United States entered the war against Germany. Our chemistry teacher volunteered for service in the Army and he eventually rose to be a captain. This was possible only because he was so fair-skinned that he could "pass" in a white unit.

Our English teacher volunteered for the speeded-up officers' training program. He too was fair enough to "pass". We students had benefited from this, since he was able to use the Augusta Public Library from which Negroes were barred and could borrow books for us to use. I remember that once he brought a book to show us which was entitled "The Negro, A Beast." The author had filled this thick red book with Biblical quotations, taken out of context of course, to prove his point.

Our physics teacher was drafted and he died in Europe. One young teacher, Johnny Walker, was sent overseas just days after he was married. He was killed and I well remember the sad group of students and teachers who met the train carrying his coffin, to accompany it to the Dugas Funeral Parlor.

From Augusta To Chicago

Early in 1917 I wrote to ask my Uncle Herman and his wife, living in Chicago, about the possibility of boarding and lodging with them during the summer, in order to earn money for the next school year. Their home was at 6223 Loomis Boulevard, in an area newly opened to Negro tenants and homebuyers. They offered me a room rent-free for the summer.

Grandpa, now in waning health, could not afford to give me the fare from Augusta, Georgia to Chicago. Consequently, when the other boarding students left the campus, I was one of the few who remained behind, and I had to find a way to finance my trip to Chicago.

I was permitted to stay in one of the dormitories, but how was I to eat? Mrs. Kendrick, our excellent cook, had closed the kitchen and left on her vacation. The kindergarten teacher had a father who owned a horse drawn moving wagon so I went to his home in the hope of getting a job as a moving helper. He had no need for an additional helper, but he made some inquiries for me and was successful in getting me a job as a carpenter's helper on a construction site. I discovered very quickly that I was expected to be more a "water boy" than a carpenter's helper, and I could not swallow the racist attitudes of my supervisors. I did not return to that job after the first day, and instead went up and down Augusta's main street in search of a job as bellboy, waiter or dishwasher, but without success. The next day, near the railroad station, I noticed a sign in the window of a little hotel. It read: "Waiter Wanted!!"

Waiter Wanted!!

I went in and talked with the black headwaiter. I got the job, and he briefed me on the technique of playing "nigger" to the satisfaction of the guests (all white, of course), who were mainly traveling businessmen.

Next morning, with the beautiful thought of going to Chicago in my mind, I came to work at the little hotel. I swallowed the insulting and derogatory remarks made by the customers about Negroes for several days. I needed the money, after all.

But one morning a group of white businessmen came in for breakfast, and sat at one of my tables. They ordered cornflakes. I went to the pantry and called out the order, but the kitchen was out of brand-name Cornflakes and gave me Post Toasties instead. While I was serving these three guests, putting on my subservient attitude, one of them barked at me: "Nigger, can't you read? We ordered Corn Flakes, not Post Toasties." I knew better than to show my reaction to this remark openly, risking anything from a beating to a lynching. I went straight to the head waiter and said in a loud voice: "I've been insulted by these 'crackers'. Get somebody else to wait on them." I meant for the "crackers" at my table to overhear me. The headwaiter survived a near heart attack and told me that if I wanted to keep my job I had to remember I was in the South. I said "yes sir" and decided to "play nigger" just long enough to earn train fare to Columbia, Tennessee. I thought that once there I might be able to borrow enough money from the bank I had cleaned for Grandpa to continue on to Chicago.

I went to Union Railway Station in Augusta to find out the exact fare to Columbia. The clerk finally told me the fare, after trying to discourage me from going north. I quit my job as a waiter as soon as I had earned enough to get to Columbia with a few dollars to spare. Once there, I was successful in borrowing the balance of my fare to Chicago from the bank.

At Uncle Herman's home I bought and prepared my own food during the week, but I had Sunday dinner with the family. I also had access to their piano for practice, and could come and go as I pleased. I shall always remember their hospitality.

Jobs in Chicago

My first job was as a car washer on the midnight shift in a garage. I was fired on the third night. I think my co-workers believed I did not fit in (they were right), and they gave a bad report about me.

My second job was unloading cars at the International Harvester Company. At the same time, I held another job working a few hours in the evening as a waiter.

I tried for a better job in a large drugstore as a photographer's helper and was refused because of my color.

Registering for the Draft

After we entered the war, the age to register for the draft was lowered from twenty-one to eighteen. So, on 14 July 1917 when I became eighteen, I registered in Chicago. Although I was intent upon returning to Haines to complete my education, I had the specter of being inducted lurking in the background. Furthermore, my Uncle Herman told me he thought the possibility of being called up was great enough so that it would be a waste of time and money to go back to Haines and he suggested that I try to enter the Student Army Training Corps at Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee. This program would avoid my being drafted, allow me to continue school, and prepare me to be a non-commissioned officer when I was eventually put on active duty.

Student Army Training Corps

I applied for admission to Fisk, making it clear that I wanted to qualify for the SATC in the hope that I could continue my education in uniform and delay being called for active service. My application was accepted, and I left Chicago headed for Nashville instead of Augusta.

Fisk University and the SATC

I arrived in Nashville in the evening and spent my first night there at the colored YMCA. Next day I found my way to the University, but I was unable to register until the following morning. SATC candidates were not given space in the regular dormitory, and there was no room for me in the Army quarters. I did spend the night there, however, sleeping on the floor with blankets given me by the recruits.

At registration the following morning, all went smoothly and I was assigned to classes. When I arrived at the place to be sworn into the Army, the commanding officer told me that he had just received a telegram from Washington informing him that the colored quota for the SATC was filled. Now I found myself out of school and out of the Army too. The next thing to do was to try to return to Haines in Augusta, Georgia. I had just enough money to go to my home in Columbia, stay there a few nights, and return to Haines with the financial help of Grandpa.

My Final Years at Haines 1917-1919

During the academic year 1917-1918 I periodically received notices from the draft board in Chicago inviting me to show up for induction into the Army. I replied that I could not report unless they provided for my transportation, since I did not have enough money for the train fare. I did this on advice from the draft board in Augusta. I received no reply from Chicago, but I did receive official postcards, warning me that I risked imprisonment if I did not report to them. My replies were always the same; "send me a ticket and I will be there." Each time I received a card, I would go to the local draft board in Augusta, and their advice would always be the same, "Tell those folks up North to send you a ticket."


"Edith Louise Bascomb"

Before my final school year began in 1918, a group of us, moved by patriotic fervor, went to the local Army recruiting headquarters on an impulse and volunteered! We were sent to Atlanta where we were put up in a cheap boarding house used to sleep Negro recruits before induction. We were provided with meal tickets entitling us to eat at a nearby Negro restaurant. Eventually we were supposed to be sent to an Army camp not far from Atlanta. Each day when we reported to headquarters for instructions, we would be sent back to our temporary quarters for another night. Finally one morning we were told why our processing had been delayed. Washington had notified the officer in charge that the colored volunteer quota for this section of the country had been filled, but he was trying to get us taken anyway. He was not successful (fortunately), so we were sent back to Augusta, where I found a new girl student on the campus named Edith Louise Bascomb.

I continued to receive terse and threatening notices from the draft board in Chicago. When I took the last notice to the draft board in Augusta, in the late fall of 1918, the man in charge said "Don’t those folks up North know the war is about to end and draft boards all over the country are shutting down?" He added, "Just ignore that notice and forget about it. Don’t even bother to write them."

By this time Edith and I had gotten to know each other well. Her parents lived in Birmingham, Alabama. Her father, like mine, was a Presbyterian minister. She had been born in New Market, Tennessee, in fact, where he pastored briefly. Edith and I were married in 1922.

REFERENCES AND NOTES

Acronyms

TCHS - Tennessee County History Series
UPD58 - United Presbyterian Directory 1958
EUJLC - Eulogy for Jacob Lincoln Cook
WWPM - Who's Who in Presbyterian Missions
HFUPC - History of First United Presbyterian Church, Athens, TN
HJLCS - History of J. L. Cook High School, Athens, TN
BIGSLL - Balm in Gilead by Sara Lawrence Lightfoot
HHLORIG - Herman H. Lawrence, "Origins of the Lawrence Family"
PCUSADH - Presbyterian Church USA Department of History

FootNotes

16. From BIGSLL (Page 117) "Charles [Lawrence II] had learned to play the horn from his father. Charles, Sr., a handsome, light-skinned man who was a 'great trumpeter.' The first time his mother, Letitia Harris, noticed Charles Lawrence, Sr., he was at a school party, playing the trumpet. After dinner, Charles, who was the school's bandmaster, entertained everyone with a wonderful assortment of show tunes, Negro spirituals, and jazz and classical selections. This restrained and dignified young man came alive in his music. He could make the horn do anything, from smooth syrupy blues to baroque intricacy. The guests were appreciative - especially the woman from Boston who had come south to teach English and 'domestic sciences' to the country children. Charles, who had been at Snow Hill for only a year, teaching music (he also played the violin) and tailoring and coaching athletics, noticed the attractive northern teacher and they soon began a proper courtship. By the end of the school term, Charles and Letitia were married. A couple of months later they left the South and traveled back to Boston to find work and start a family. For Charles, Boston was a strange and forbidding place, for Letitia, it was home."

17. He would have been about 12 years old at this time. The original tape does not suggest that an adult accompanied him on the train ride from Nashville, Tennessee to Snow Hill, Alabama.

18. Note that in describing the first trip to Snow Hill he boards the train in Nashville. On this trip from Snow Hill he apparently took the train(s) all the way from Snow Hill, Alabama to Columbia, Tennessee. At this time he would be about 15 years old.

19. PCUSDAH about Haines Institute: Founded in Augusta, Georgia in 1886 by Lucy Craft Laney, daughter of the Reverend David Laney, co-organizer of the Presbytery of Knox in 1867. He had been ordained a Presbyterian minister by the Hopewell Presbytery of the Southern Church but withdrew later and was received by the Old School Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, USA, in 1868. During the slave period, Lucy's mother, Louise, belonged to the Campbell family. When she married she was permitted to live with her family in their own

home.

Lucy was taught to read and write by Miss Campbell, her master's sister, who chose her books and in 1869 made it possible for her to enroll at Atlanta University at the age of fifteen. Lucy was one of the four students comprising the first graduating class of Atlanta University in 1873. Her teaching career began in a public elementary school in Savannah, Georgia, where she rose to the principalship of that school. When her health began to fail, she went back to Augusta hoping that the climate would be more suitable. When she grew stronger, however, she returned to her work in Savannah, but not until she had promised the Reverend W. J. White, pastor of the Harmony Baptist Church, that she would return to begin a school for Negro youth. In the meantime, Dr. Richard H. Allen, who knew her parents and who at that time was corresponding secretary of the Board of Missions for Freedmen, convinced her of the need for a day nursery for the daughters of black working mothers. Miss Laney liked the proposal, and moved back to Augusta at the end of the school term in Savannah. On 6 January 1886, she rented the lecture room in the basement of the Christ Presbyterian Church on Cummings and Telfair Streets and began a small school. She had envisioned a school for girls only but on that first rainy morning, three girls and two boys came to the school and Miss Laney enrolled them all.

Within two months her quarters were overflowing. She went to J. F. Davidson, an attorney who owned a large, vacant, two-story building on Calhoun Street and asked to rent the building. He was astonished and told her that the pupils would not go to school in it since it was reputed to be a haunted house. Miss Laney insisted and the lawyer replied, "Alright, I'll let you have it to use; all you have to do is pay the taxes. But I tell you, they will not follow you in it." Miss Laney converted the building into a home and dormitory and turned an old barn on the lot into schoolrooms. By means of ropes and pulleys the separate compartments could be converted into an assembly room for devotional exercises and concerts. Seventy-five pupils enrolled the first year, and by the end of the second 234 had enrolled. Miss Laney supplemented her personal savings with donations and paid the teachers who came to help her after the first one or two years.

The school was clearly growing, and Miss Laney was persuaded to appeal to the General Assembly in behalf of the school. The General Assembly convened in Minneapolis that spring of 1886. Despite the fact that she only had daycoach fare one way, she went to Minneapolis. Exhausted from the harrowing trip by way of a Jim Crow coach and spiritually hurt by the jealousy encountered over the possible influence her speech might wield at the expense of other phases of the work, she fell asleep in the Assembly Hall. Aroused by hearing her name called, she stood and, in sincere and simple eloquence, addressed the Assembly in the interest of "my people," asking only for return trip fare back to Augusta. This was the extent of financial aid which she gained from the experience.

Some of the commissioners were in favor of aiding the school in Augusta, but the men in charge of the freedmen's schools objected and the available money went to the general program. The Board of Missions for Freedmen did, however, pledge its moral support and commissioned Miss Laney without pay.

Miss Laney’s trip to the General Assembly, though discouraging at first, began to bear fruit in 1889. She made staunch friends while in Minneapolis. One of these friends was Mrs. F. E. H. Haines of Detroit, Michigan, secretary of the Women’s Executive Committee of Home Missions. Her influence was a strong factor in favor of the school, and the Board of Missions took the school under its care in 1889. In addition, tourists staying at the Bon Air Hotel in Augusta were told about the school, and a Mrs. Marshall visited Miss Laney and gave money to purchase a site for the school. Later her daughter gave $10,000 to erect Marshall Hall on the lot between Philip and Robert streets facing Gwinett Street. Marshall was a four-story, brick structure with classrooms on the first floor, and girls’ dormitory facilities on the upper floors. The school was named the Haines Industrial Academy in memory of Mrs. F. E. H. Haines.

The school’s growth was phenomenal. By 1901 it had an enrollment of 5l2 pupils under the instruction of a staff of fourteen. When McGregor Hall was erected in 1906, the enrollment had reached 703.

During the long struggle to get the school properly housed, the academic program was not neglected. The word "industrial" in the name was misleading, since the school was, at all times, typically academic or classical.

In the Fall of 1913 when JLC entered Haines it was a thriving institution offering kindergarten through college preparatory courses and a "normal course" for teacher training. In May of 1932, the General Council of the General Assembly classified Haines as a day school since 409 of its 446 pupils were day students. With few exceptions, the deadline for closing all day schools was set for 1 June 1933. An arrangement was made however which continued the school until after Miss Laney’s death. The school was closed in 1952.

Miscellaneous Photos (Robin: scattered at the end of the article??)

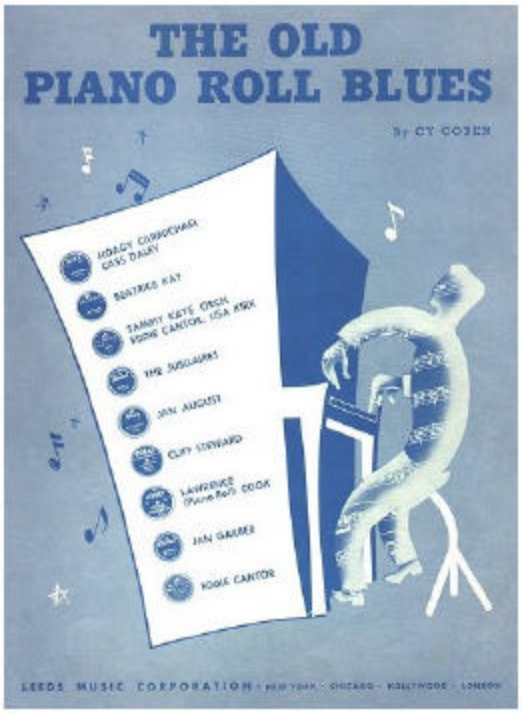
“The top of J.L.C.’s Letterhead”

57 Esplanade, Mount Vernon, NY
Photograph courtesy of Jeff Alterman - 12 January 2001

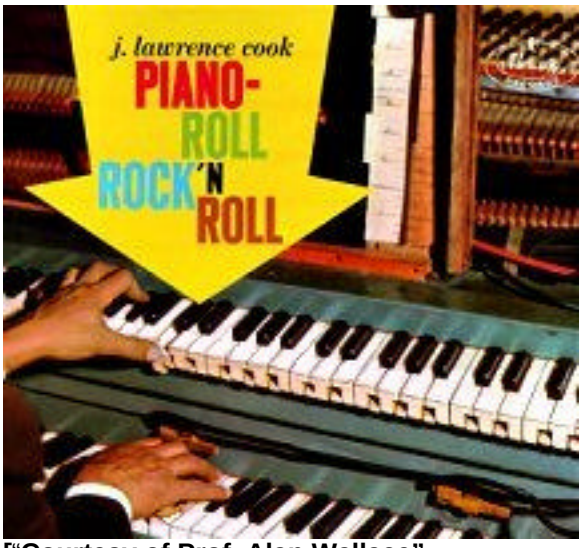
"Dr. Lisa A. Fagg - J. L. C.'s Granddaughter

“Lisa and Grandpa J.L.C.”

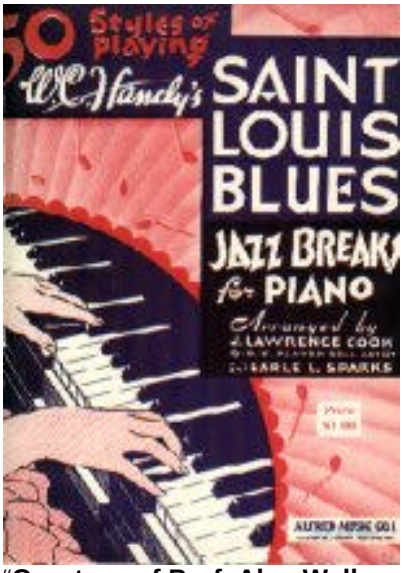
"Index Plate belonging to J. L. Cook"



“Courtesy of Bill Edwards.”



[“Courtesy of Prof. Alan Wallace”



“**Courtesy of Prof. Alan Wallace**”