

NORTH TEXAS STATE UNIVERSITY
ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION
NUMBER
685

Interview with
WILLIAM HILL
October 13, 1986

Place of Interview: Sherman, Texas
Interviewer: Donna Kumler
Terms of Use: Closed for five years
from date of interview
Approved: *Donna Kumler*
(Signature)
Date: October 13, 1986

COPYRIGHT



1986

THE BOARD OF REGENTS OF NORTH TEXAS STATE
UNIVERSITY IN THE CITY OF DENTON

All rights reserved. No part of this work may be reproduced or transmitted in any form by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying and recording or by any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the Coordinator of the Oral History Collection or the University Archivist, North Texas State University, Denton, Texas 76203.

Oral History Collection

William Hill

Interviewer: Donna Kumler

Date of Interview: October 13, 1986

Place of Interview: Sherman, Texas

Mrs. Kumler: This is Donna Kumler, and I am interviewing Mr. William Hill on October 13, 1986.

Mr. Hill, if you will, will you describe for me a little bit about when and where you were born and your family's name and so on?

Mr. Hill: I was born in Sherman, Texas, on March 11, 1915. My parents were successful farmers. My mother entered Barber-Scotia Seminary in North Carolina at the age of thirteen. She was the youngest student there, and she graduated, being the youngest student to graduate from Barber-Scotia Seminary in Concord, North Carolina. My father was very successful.

At an early age they moved to Texas. My mother was very young. Of course, they had one or two children when they came to Texas. One died later. My father was a big trader--buying farms. He'd work the land for a while, and then he bought another farm. So he had a lot of acreage, and he was considered to be one of the leading citizens of Grayson County.

He was instrumental in educating five or six of his

children. One brother died in college when he was about twenty; he had contracted appendicitis, and they ruptured on him. He was in his second year at Wiley College in Marshall, Texas. At one time, there were five of us teaching--four sisters and myself.

Kumler: I'll bet you had stories to tell (chuckle).

Hill: Oh, we had many, many, many. Our teaching experience... mine has been very successful, I think, and at the same time it was very interesting because I like children. I like to be with them. I hear teachers complaining about, "Oh, I could just do such-and-such things to such-and-such child." But I think if you reason with them, children are just children like they were when we came along; so all that's necessary sometimes is a kind word. I found in teaching there are so many children, both black and white, that are suffering for love; there was no love in the home and no love given to them, so they try to seek it through their teachers. Many of their parents did not feed them. I noticed, when I went to Dillingham to work, that there were students who would just hang around you sometimes and tell you their problems, and you would be ashamed for them for the things that they told you.

All in all, I think it was a pretty successful teaching career. I went to Tuskegee University in Tuskegee, Alabama. I did three years college work and returned home and started

teaching at a very early age. Of course, I got my degree by attending summer school, and I received my A.B. degree from Huston-Tillotson College in Austin, Texas. I received a master's from Texas Southern University in Houston, Texas. I attended Teacher's College in New York City three summers, working above the master's degree. I spent one year at the University of Colorado in Boulder and one summer at the University of Texas at Austin. At one time I contemplated on a doctor's degree, but during the early years, there was so much...I don't know if it was malice or what, but you weren't able to advance. It dawned on me that why would I spend money going all the time to get a degree if there would be no advancement for me.

Kumler: Within the school system.

Hill: Within the school system. My mother was very aged, and we had to take care of her. When there was advanced positions, they always got them from out of town and people who were not nearly as qualified as some of us were that were here. We weren't given the opportunity. I think that's one of the fallacies that was in the Sherman system, and I think it's still in the Sherman system, that they don't recognize talent when they see it. They were interested in...I don't know...my mother used to say that certain people didn't have any sense, and the next thing you know, they'd be maybe a principal or something; and the teachers had to carry all the

work for them, which, I thought, was very bad. But I enjoyed my work in Sherman, and I retired in 1978.

Kumler: What did you teach?

Hill: During my span of teaching--forty-two years--I taught everything.

Kumler: Everything (chuckle).

Hill: When I first started, I think I must have been teaching about seventh or eighth grade. I taught English for a while, math for a while, spelling. You name it, and I taught it. Then in later years, I taught a beginning course in Spanish and civics and government. I taught in the Sherman high school for about five summers--in civics and government. Mrs. Case asked me to teach because she said I was well-qualified, and we got along nicely.

When the desegregation part came about, Mr. John Hibbert asked me if I would come to Dillingham because he said that I was the only teacher that they wanted. So I went, and I thoroughly enjoyed it. They treated me lovely.

Kumler: He was an easy man to work under.

Hill: He was an easy man to work with. He was one of the nicest persons I've ever worked with, and I thoroughly enjoyed it. All in all, I'll say it was a pretty successful career.

Kumler: It sounds like it. I think anybody that stays in anything forty-two years has to claim a certain amount of success (chuckle).

Hill: I think so, too.

Kumler: Especially if you can teach for forty-two years.

Hill: Yes, indeed.

Kumler: So you did not graduate, then, from Fred Douglass School here.

Hill: Yes, I did.

Kumler: You did graduate. In what year was that?

Hill: In 1932. I graduated here, and during those years was when the Depression and things was on. I went to Tuskegee and stayed for two years, but I did three years college work. Of course, when I came back the superintendent said I was too young to hire because I looked like one of the children. They wouldn't hire me. Finally, we had a friend in Van Alstyne who was on the school board the following year, and she sent for me to come to Van Alstyne. I went down there, and they hired me for the year. The next March, Mrs. Graham, who was on the school board, sent for me to come to Sherman, that she had a position here that I could fill and she wanted me to have it. So I came to Sherman in March and talked to the school board, and I was hired for the following year.

Kumler: What year was that?

Hill: That was in 1937. Of course, I taught continuously except for the time that I was in service in 1942 and part of 1943. I was stationed at the Army Post Office in San Francisco,

California, and that's as far as I got.

Kumler: I wonder if I could get your impression on what you remember about being a black person growing up in Sherman in those years.

Hill: Back in those years, it was delightful to be a black person in Sherman.

Kumler: This is prior to 1930?

Hill: Prior to 1930. You didn't get much for your work and everything, but the black people were essentially happy. Those that had employment seemed...they were more thrifty than later generations, I think, because they put it to good use. They had a lot of pride, and they wanted to develop themselves, try to develop their homes and surroundings as far as they could with the type of work that they had and the amount of money that they received for it. You could work all day, you know, and you didn't get very much. I know when I first started teaching, the salary, I believe, was \$55 or \$60. I've forgotten. They kept 5 percent as a saving and wouldn't give it to you until school was out. Of course, teachers retirement was 5 percent. Then I paid \$10 for board, so that was 20 percent of it gone right there. It was very little, but, however, I hear people say, "Oh, you could buy so much more with it then than you could now," which is true; but people are making a better salary, and as times change and improvements are made throughout the

communities and the states and the local and federal government, I think it's necessary for them to pay more. To survive in this world, you have to have a good job to do it. I think that causes many people today to put forth an extra effort in going to school and trying to secure for themselves a better education.

Kumler: You mentioned pride. Do you remember specific things that were done in the black community or specific leaders who did things to try to instill pride, or was this just a general characteristic?

Hill: We had a very influential doctor--Dr. A.M. Prince--who spent a lot of his extra time with the church in trying to help them to secure better things as far as their homes were concerned and as far as their general livelihood. We had two or three doctors, and they were all instrumental in trying to see that people coming along there might be interested in better education, might be interested in better things for themselves, better homes. I think, all in all, it was quite an advantageous thing.

Kumler: Do you recall interracial committees, or was this something that was just within the black community?

Hill: This was just in the black community. Interracial committees, as I remember, came into effect in the 1960s. During that time, of course, it was when people began desegregating and so forth. I know people that, you know, used to just

speaking to you and going on would now stop and talk to you, and they would invite you into their homes and things, which they hadn't done before. But there was no sort of committees like that. We had a committee that was formed from a group of Austin College teachers and community people, and at one time I invited them to come to Dallas. I stay in Dallas quite a bit; my sister lived in Dallas. I invited them to come down and meet with the interracial group there.

Kumler: Now this was in the sixties.

Hill: Yes. So they came to Dallas. We had the interracial committee to come to her house, and they spent the entire afternoon discussing how they were doing things in Dallas, what was the best thing to do. They in turn brought this back into our own community, which, I think, was a tremendous advantage.

Kumler: This is something that Mr. and Mrs. Bate told me about. Apparently, they met in their home on occasion.

Hill: Well, I'll tell you, we met...I've forgotten how many...it was about twenty-five or something like that maybe. Just like if they were going to meet twice this month, I might invite them to my home for a meeting, and maybe one of the Austin College professors would invite them to their home. We went all the way around the neighborhood, so we got to meet at everybody's house.

Kumler: In those years prior to 1930, do you recall a library that was established just for black people on Kerr Street?

Hill: Yes.

Kumler: Do you recall anything about those facilities?

Hill: I was very young then because I don't remember. I've often heard people say there was only a few books, if any-- maybe one or two of a kind--and it seems to me that this was established by the city of Sherman. Most of the books were old, outdated books. Somebody had gotten tired of them and gave them to them, which was of no earthly benefit to anybody.

Kumler: That's what I'm trying to establish. I can't put my finger on a record or a document or anything that proves that that library existed.

Hill: A lady told me in later years...a very prominent person in the city; her husband was a judge. Of course, he had died several years ago. I would work for her occasionally on weekends. She asked me one day, after she had gotten sick, if I didn't want his old law books to carry to the school or to carry them home to study with them, and they were back in the 1800s. I told her, "I appreciate the offer, but that would just be junk that I'd be carrying. I think you'd do well just to keep them." I didn't have any use for them. That's the way they got a lot of their books. People would give old things that they were through with, and they'd tell them, "You take this to the library." Of course, much of it never got to the library. It was thrown away because it wasn't really worth carrying.

Kumler: Do you remember a librarian or anyone who worked there?

Hill: No. "Peachy" [Mrs. Bate] might have remembered, but I don't remember.

Kumler: So essentially, then, your impression of the relations between black people and white people prior to 1930 in Sherman were pretty even.

Hill: Yes.

Kumler: You don't recall any negative incidents? Do you recall anything about the Klan?

Hill: Nothing. Perhaps a freshman incident. I was about to be a freshman or something in 1930. All I remember was the many cars that came into the city from the Fred Douglass School where I was attending, and all the various streets were full of people. Of course, my mother was always a lady who kept up with things, so she called the school and told them to send me home and told me not to go through town that day.

Kumler: And this was 1930?

Hill: Yes, this was in May of 1930--to send me on home because she didn't want me out or to be involved with anything. So school was dismissed early that day, and we could see from the upstairs room that was my classroom...you could see the papers burning, the smoke and the blaze coming over, and people were busy just going. Later, after I'd gotten home that night--I suppose it must have been ten or eleven o'clock--

someone knocked on our door, and it was the principal of the school, his wife, and one of the doctor's wives.

Kumler: Who was the principal of the school?

Hill: His name was Pearson--F.R. Pearson. He and his wife came. Then another car came, so we had several people...we lived out near the Old Settlers Park, which was on the edge of town. They came and they were just frightened--scared to death. We could look out several blocks away to the highway going into Denison, and we could see some colored people with sacks and things going down the road. These people were just scared to death, and the papers and things...you could see the fire and everything, even into the night. Some of these people that came...some of their younger children... men went back to protect their homes with water hoses and various things because they was afraid they might burn. They spent the night.

The next day when the state troopers began to arrive, why, things began to settle again. This was on a Friday, and, of course, it was Monday before school was convened again, and that gave people time to kind of get settled.

Kumler: So did the school go back into session on Monday morning as usual?

Hill: Yes.

Kumler: Were there troops or anything there?

Hill: No. After the weekend...I tell you, the town was put under

martial law, and you had to be off the streets at a certain time. I think that might have lasted maybe a week or ten days, if that long.

Kumler: Did you know, or did your family know, individuals...I think there was a Dr. Goodson, who was also a physician. Did you know him?

Hill: Yes, I knew him very well. He maintained an office in the building that burned. In later years, after that, he reestablished himself in somebody's former residence on E Street, right across from the Fred Douglass School. Of course, the dentist, Dr. R.L. Stennet, was in this same building, and he and Dr. Goodson moved there on E Street and started their office in a little single-unit building.

Kumler: So they stayed after the incident?

Hill: Yes. After a person gets a certain age, it's pretty hard to pull up stakes and leave. So they were at the age, I guess, that they thought they needed to stay, and they did. Both of them were getting to be a little up in age. They felt, I guess, that all they had was in Sherman, so why leave it.

Kumler: Do you recall Dr. Goodson?

Hill: Oh, yes.

Kumler: Did he remain, or did he leave?

Hill: Dr. Goodson stayed until he passed. No, he didn't...I believe he stayed...I guess he stayed until he passed. His

wife moved to California, but I believe that was after he passed.

Kumler: So these professionals, then, several of them, just reestablished their offices in other areas of town.

Hill: Yes. Dr. Goodson had a brother that owned and operated a drugstore in one of the buildings. He never did try to do anything else after that. It seems to me that very, very shortly after that, he moved to Muskogee, Oklahoma, where he established himself again, and he remained there until he died.

Kumler: Did you recall...there was a tailor there. I believe most of these businesses were located in or near the Andrews Building.

Hill: Yes, they were.

Kumler: Can you recall about how big that area was there, and exactly where it was located?

Hill: The businesses in that area covered almost a block. They had the restaurant, they had the tailor shop, and upstairs they had the motion picture, the medical doctor, dentist... I think there was another office up there. Downstairs was the drugstore and two or three other little things. I believe it was a Masonic hall, or maybe it was the Knights of Pythias lodge hall. They had all these down there right together. However, when the riot was, Mr. Goodson had bought a building further down on Mulberry, where our train station

was formerly (trains stopped there). That was where he established his business. It was a bigger building and certainly was a nice place. He had one fellow that worked for him that looked like a white man. He was a mulatto man, and when the riot was, he opened up and then went in...I think he got the money out, and he came on out and walked around through the crowd. They didn't recognize him as being a Negro. But he never did try to rebuild.

Kumler: So after that particular time, even though some of these professionals reestablished offices, for all practical purposes the business district was gone.

Hill: It was gone.

Kumler: And it never has been reestablished.

Hill: No.

Kumler: Let me see if I can take you back here for just a minute. I know you couldn't have been very old, do you recall maybe family members discussing the Ku Klux Klan here in Sherman prior to that time?

Hill: We used to go to town sometimes. My sister over there would drive the car, and sometimes the Ku Klux Klan would have a parade. They would have it uptown and march through the Old Settlers Park in front of where we lived. Many times we'd get in the car and drive up to where we could see them. Certain white people that were in this Ku Klux Klan you could recognize by their build, you know, such as the banker and

the big important people in the city. We would sit in the car, and I often heard my mother and sisters and others say, "Well, there goes Mr. So-and-so, and there's Mr. So-and-so. Look who's in there. There's So-and-so." It was just like a show, you know. Yes, they had parades and things, and we used to go to them.

Kumler: Do you recall being fearful? Was it more than just a show? Did you think that they really meant business?

Hill: No, we weren't afraid, and it seems to me it was more like a...I think the purpose was to try to frighten some of the people, but they never did do anything to them.

Kumler: That's interesting. Do you remember...even I don't recall the year, but I read this in a book called The Tragedy of Lynching. Dr. Arthur Raper had done a study on towns where lynchings had occurred, and he said that when the Grayson Hotel was built in Sherman and up until the month of February, 1930, they had always employed young black boys as bellboys, and they released them all at once. From that time on, they just employed white boys. Do you recall anything about that?

Hill: I remember the hotel. I knew a lot of people who worked there at the time, but I don't recall them turning any out.

Kumler: He said that that was a significant cause of unrest within the community, and I am really trying to decide if that's true or not.

Hill: I know they still had maids and things--black maids--but I

don't know about the bellboys.

Kumler: So you don't recall, then, people that you might term "race-baiters" or anything like that--people here in the community that just tried to vent hatred on the black community?

Hill: No, I don't recall that.

Kumler: Apparently, that's not a characteristic of this area.

Hill: I don't think it was. Either there was a lot of deceit or something, but they never had anything like that.

Kumler: That's interesting.

Hill: I know the people that we used to say was in the Ku Klux Klan parade would just treat you so nice when they'd see you, so you knew they certainly put on a lot of deceit with you.

Kumler: I wonder if we can jump back to 1930 here. Did you recall knowing George Hughes, the man who was lynched?

Hill: No.

Kumler: Apparently, he was not from this area at all.

Hill: I don't know. I've heard he was from someplace near Honey Grove or Paris--down in that section.

Kumler: Did you happen to know the lady that he supposedly attacked? Did you know her family or anything about them?

Hill: No.

Kumler: It's interesting to me that both of these individuals were completely not from this area, and yet the mob and all...

Hill: **That's** right. This account that I was telling you about, that this fellow had in the paper, I had forgotten that. He said that this Hughes fellow had worked for these people on the farm, and when he went for his money, Mrs. Hughes told him that her husband had gone to town, and she couldn't pay him until he came back. When he went back he wasn't there, so he went in and raped her. I had forgotten that, if I had ever known it.

Kumler: That's mentioned by Dr. Raper in The Tragedy of Lynching. That's a pretty common interpretation. That's always been a thing of interest to me, though, that the local area, both black and white communities, suffered terribly because of what happened.

Hill: Lots of people came from Oklahoma. Cars were just coming in droves from Oklahoma. I guess they were hungry for something to do, and they came in to join in. You know, people like a disturbance. Some do, anyhow. Of course, I think that with nothing to do in a small town, they just thought they would stir up something.

Kumler: Well, true. Apparently, this had been in the paper for about five days, and that was time enough for everyone to get here and get involved, I guess.

Hill: Yes, indeed.

Kumler: Do you recall general feelings within the black community in Sherman after that 1930 incident?

Hill: Well, I was quite young then, but most of them seemed to have thought this was not the Sherman people that was doing this. They seemed to have thought it was people from other communities--Oklahoma and various communities within Texas --and they said it was a very few Sherman people. So I don't think they hold malice towards them.

Kumler: Do you recall anything that the white community here did to help those who had lost their homes and businesses and so on?

Hill: I don't think they did anything.

Kumler: I'm not aware of anything.

Hill: No, they didn't do anything.

Kumler: I realize, of course, that the people who did have insurance ...it was of no effect.

Hill: I think the insurance didn't pay them. You know, this Andrews Building...my niece, in later years, married Mr. Andrews's grandson, so, of course, we knew Mr. Andrews very well. I heard her say several times that they got no money for it.

Kumler: What was his name?

Hill: George Andrews.

Kumler: Was he a fairly well-known individual here?

Hill: He was very well-known. He was one of the pillars, we might say, of the little town of Bells. He came into Sherman with ...he was a very influential citizen, and everybody thought well of him.

Kumler: Did he have a business?

Hill: No, he just built this building and rented it out or leased

it out. Of course, he stayed on the farm. They had something over a thousand acres out there. He stayed out and sort of acted as a boss for his workers at the farm. Sometimes he would carry the cotton to the gin and various things like that.

Kumler: So he lived for several years after this incident?

Hill: Yes. He was killed.

Kumler: He was killed here in Sherman?

Hill: He was killed out in Bells. It seems that one of the fellows that worked out on the farm had a little argument with him. When Mr. Andrews came back from town that night or late that afternoon, he killed him.

Kumler: That very day of the incident?

Hill: Yes, I think it was.

Kumler: Was this a black man that worked for him?

Hill: Yes.

Kumler: That's interesting. That would be a lot for the family to have to contend with at one time.

Well, let me just see if I can get your opinion on something. I am interested in efforts to reestablish black businesses in a significant number here [blank space on tape].

Hill: I don't know...there has been...in fact, I had a letter from a lady in Dallas stating that there was a very fine young dentist just out of college, and she wondered if it would be wise if he could come to Sherman and establish an

office for a part of the week. He has an office in Dallas, **and he** could leave it. But I didn't deem it was wise for a **young** fellow to come and spend all that effort for a part of **the** week. These people, I guess, that have teeth problems have their dentists already. It would be, it seems to me, a hardship on him. I've had one or two others that said they'd like to come and establish various things, but it seems to have been just talk.

Kumler: There seems, even in 1986--fifty-six years later--that this particular incident in 1930 is still very, very much a factor in trying to attract professionals.

Hill: Yes.

Kumler: Do you recall...you mentioned that Dr. Goodson and these individuals were very old at the time that the 1930 incident occurred. So when they died, there were no further black physicians or dentists here, as you recall?

Hill: No. When they died, that put it to an end. Dr. Prince had a son, and I believe that when he came back he went into undertaking. He had one son who was a doctor--a very fine doctor--and he moved to Corpus Christi. He didn't want to come back here. Of course, Dr. Goodson did not have any children, so there was no one to pick up after he had passed.

Kumler: Evidently, it was then very difficult to attract individuals here because of what had happened in those years.

Hill: It takes a lot of money to establish a doctor's office and

various things, but it seems that the ones we have now are **always crowded**. But that's quite a chance to take in a **place where** people are sort of fearful.

Kumler: So you think, then, that that fear is still, to a certain degree, very much here.

Hill: I think it is still here more or less, but they are trying to forget it.

Kumler: It's maybe more in the minds of the people who lived through the incident than the more recent ones.

Hill: I don't think in the last few years...the people coming along could care less. They don't care.

Kumler: I wonder if there's anything else that you would like to mention on anything about the black experience in Sherman.

Hill: I don't know if there's anything in particular. It seems like we've covered most of it.

Kumler: Thank you.